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VEDHIK

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FOREWORD

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

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

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

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'Udaan' gives girls wings to a better future in rural Rajasthan

It gives dropouts access to schooling through scholarship schemes

MOHAMMED IQBAL
ALWAR

But for a government scholarship scheme, 16-year-old Nisha Verma, who dreams of becoming a college professor, would have dropped out of school and been married by now. Her parents were not interested in spending money on her education.

A resident of Alai village in Alwar district's Rajgarh tehsil, Nisha availed of the pre-matric scholarship to complete her secondary education with the help of Udaan, a women's empowerment programme. Her father, a goat herder, told her that he would get her married if she failed in her class. Nisha took tuitions using the scholarship money and is at present studying in Class XI at Gyandeeep School near her village.

"The Udaan team's guidance has helped me cross many hur-

dles; I love teaching and I want to make sure that girls don't quit their education," said Nisha, while recounting her struggle to continue education in adverse circumstances.

Safety net

For many more girls like Nisha in the rural areas, the possibility of dropping out of schools in-

creased due to poverty during the pandemic.

Monika, a Class X student from Noor Nagar village in Kishangarh Bas tehsil, was asked by her family to stop going to school and instead be at her in-law's place after her early marriage. The scholarship provided a safety net as Monika's teachers convinced her parents to allow her to study with the help of the bur-

sary amount. Despite difficult financial conditions, Monika's parents have since delayed her *gauna* (consummation of marriage at the marital home) and agreed to support her studies. Activists who made multiple visits to her house also sensitised the family about the dangers of early pregnancy.

"They broke several myths, including how the chances of giving birth to a baby boy decline as the age of a woman increases," Monika said.

The Udaan project, launched by the Rajasthan government in collaboration with a development consulting group 'IPE Global', has made attempts to keep girls in schools through their enrolment at the secondary level while ensuring that the eligible ones among them get their scholarships. While generating awareness about scholarship



Crossing hurdles: Nisha, a Class XI student of Alai village, wants to make sure that girls don't quit their education. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

schemes, the programme has also mobilised rural communities to support girls' education and facilitate their attendance in school without a break.

Navendu Sharma, the District Scholarship Mitra in Alwar of IPE Global, told *The Hindu* that the government's scholarships were available to the girls belonging to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled

Tribes, Other Backward Classes and minority communities. Daughters of labourers holding Shramik cards were also eligible to receive scholarships and other facilities, he said.

"Our project has strengthened the scholarship delivery system, partly through IT-enabled services, and brought girls back to secondary schools through sus-

tained efforts," Mr. Sharma said.

The social mobilisation strategies include a continuous dialogue with Panchayati Raj institutions to identify dropouts and counselling the parents and students as well.

Beyond breaking barriers

Under-graduate student, Aarti, said the glitches in the scholarship dispensing system could not be independently fixed by the rural communities. An e-mitra camp organised as part of Udaan helped her receive the bursary amount in her bank account. "In our patriarchal milieu, spending my own money on math tuition, new clothes, books and slippers was life-changing," she said.

The programme has not only mitigated social barriers to girls' education in Alwar and other districts such as Dholpur, Dausa, Karauli and Tonk, but has also made interventions for behavioural change. Wherever need-

ed, it has also provided essential adolescent sexual and reproductive health education to the girls.

IPE Global's Project Director for Udaan, Ashish Mukherjee, said the scholarships and educational guidance has helped several rural families, often constrained by finances, to support their children's education.

"The financial relief they get allows them to use the family income for other essential requirements such as nutritious food and medicines," he said.

"When girls are left behind, it impacts future generations, perpetuates poverty and patriarchal control, curtails women's participation in the workforce and increases gender imbalance," Mr. Mukherjee said.

Education through scholarships and access to healthcare would lead to women's empowerment and increase their active engagement in the society, he added.

Sri Lanka to set up special North-East fund

After meeting TNA leaders, Gotabaya agrees to look into concerns of land grab, disappearances

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

The Sri Lankan government will set up a 'North-East Development Fund' to increase investments in the war-affected areas, while probing cases of enforced disappearances and land grabs that remain chief concerns of the Tamil people 13 years after the war ended.

The announcement came on Friday, after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa met a delegation of the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the largest grouping of parliamentarians representing districts in the north and east. It was Mr. Rajapaksa's first meeting with the country's Tamil political leadership since his election to office in November 2019. The meeting took place for over two hours at the Presidential Secretariat, with Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa, his older brother and Irrigation Minis-



Addressing concerns: Gotabaya Rajapaksa with the delegation of the TNA in Colombo on Friday. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ter Chamal Rajapaksa, also present. The TNA has been demanding that the government deliver the long-pending political solution to Sri Lanka's national question, through a new constitutional settlement. The demand was the thrust of TNA leader and veteran Tamil politician R. Sampanthan's letter to President Rajapaksa ahead of the meeting, twice postponed before it was held on Friday.

But the government sought to postpone the discussion on the political solution, as an experts' committee report on constitutional proposals is expected to be made public within two months' time, according to TNA spokesman and Jaffna legislator M.A. Sumanthiran.

The President meanwhile agreed to focus on four key areas, including possibly releasing long-term detainees

under the country's draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act – which the government recently amended but critics want repealed – and suspects held without being charged; ending the incessant land grabs in the north and east by different state agencies to allegedly change the demographics of the region; inquiring into cases of enforced disappearances and establishing a special development fund for the north and east, he said.

Demanding truth

Families of disappeared persons, mainly women, have been protesting for years now, demanding the truth about their loved ones who went missing, or surrendered to the military during the civil war years or soon after. Mr. Gotabaya, who was Secretary to the Ministry of Defence during those years, has denied there were en-

forced disappearances then.

At Friday's discussion, the President told the TNA that his government was working on "a number of issues", including the release of suspects held in long-term detention, and those who have not been charged or prosecuted, the launch of "a truth-finding" mechanism, the amendment of the PTA and resolving "issues related to missing persons", a statement from his office said.

President Gotabaya has in the past emphasised development over devolution, as the most important need for the war-affected areas. The initiative to set up a development fund exclusively for the war-affected areas comes nearly three years after his election, amid widespread joblessness, indebtedness, and poverty in the region that the pandemic and Sri Lanka's current economic crisis have only aggravated.

Peace in border areas key to normal ties, India tells China

Wang Yi holds talks with Jaishankar and Doval, but signs no joint agreement

SUHASINI HAIDAR
ANANTH KRISHNAN
NEW DELHI/ HONG KONG

There can be no normality in India-China ties unless the troops amassed at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) are withdrawn, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar told Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Delhi on Friday during talks that ended without any joint statement or agreement on the way forward.

Mr. Wang, who arrived in Delhi on Thursday and met National Security Adviser Ajit Doval for an hour on Friday morning, held three-hour talks with Mr. Jaishankar before leaving for Kath-



Candid move: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi in New Delhi on Friday. ■ REUTERS

mandu. Mr. Jaishankar told the media that their meeting had a “broad and substantive agenda” and the talks were “open and candid”.

He said he had “conveyed our national sentiment” on

the border issue and that “frictions and tensions that arise from China’s deployments since April 2020 cannot be reconciled with a normal relationship between two neighbours.”

“If you ask me, is our relationship normal today, my answer to you is no it is not, and it cannot be normal if the situation in the border areas is abnormal,” Mr. Jaishankar replied to a question from *The Hindu*, referring to the LAC in eastern Ladakh, where around 1,00,000 Indian and Chinese soldiers remain deployed in forward areas after the People’s Liberation Army’s transgressions.

“Surely, the presence of a large number of troops there, in contravention of agreements, is abnormal,” he said.

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Peace in border areas key to normal ties: India

While 15 rounds of commander-level talks and eight rounds of a special Working Mechanism on Consultation and Coordination (WMCC) for border affairs yielded “considerable progress”, several friction areas remained, Mr. Jaishankar noted, but didn’t mention specifics, or if India had spoken of the need to return to the “status quo ante” as of April 2020.

China’s Foreign Ministry said Mr. Wang put forward a “three-point approach” in his talks with Mr. Doval, saying both sides needed to view ties with a “long-term vision”, see each other’s development as an opportunity, and cooperate on multi-lateral issues.

On the second point, he proposed reviving the “China-India plus” initiative for joint projects in South Asia, an outcome of the Wuhan meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in 2018. He highlighted that China did not seek a “unipolar Asia” and “respects India’s traditional role in the region”.

Beijing quoted Mr. Wang as saying both sides “should put the border issue in its proper place in bilateral relations and not allow the

boundary issue to define or affect the overall development of the bilateral relationship”, an apparent point of difference between the two sides. India has stressed that the focus was on the border, and relations had been “disturbed by Chinese actions since April 2020”.

Sources said Mr. Wang invited Mr. Doval to visit China for talks of Special Representatives on the boundary question, but the latter said he could visit only “after immediate issues are resolved successfully”.

Ukraine issue

Mr. Jaishankar said the two sides discussed Ukraine and their approaches with “a common element” that both agreed on the need for an immediate ceasefire and return to diplomacy. His remarks suggested that the two positions weren’t entirely aligned. One point of difference has been China’s explicit blaming of the U.S. and NATO for the crisis. On Afghanistan, where Mr. Wang visited on Thursday, Mr. Jaishankar said China had not invited India to its conference on foreign ministers of neighbouring countries of Afghanistan to be hosted by Beijing.

India's complex position on Islamophobia

India's assertion criticising the OIC Resolution on Islamophobia was valid, but could have made a reference to Indian Muslims



VIVEK KATJU

Last week, the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) adopted a consensus Resolution declaring March 15 annually as the 'International Day to Combat Islamophobia'. Introducing the draft document on behalf of its main sponsor, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Permanent Representative of Pakistan to the UN, Munir Akram, said that the OIC had "extensively" discussed the proposal with interested delegations for a year and the same process continued once a draft text was introduced in February this year. There is little doubt that India and the European Union (EU), which had major difficulties with the very basis of the proposal, would have discussed it with the OIC, but obviously could not persuade it to their viewpoints.

Concessions by OIC

Islamophobia connotes fear of and prejudice, discrimination and hate speech against Islam. Muslims worldwide complain about negative stereotyping of their faith which has got exacerbated since the al Qaeda's 9/11 terrorist attacks and other instances of terrorist violence undertaken by Islamist groups. They assert that these acts are not in keeping with Islam.

They also emphasise, as Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan did during his address to the UNGA in 2019, that "...that there is no such thing as radical Islam (and) there are radical fringes in every society". Mr. Khan also regretted that "suicide attacks are equated with Islam" and the marginalisation of Muslims in European countries. He admitted, though, that the Western world does not "look at religion the way that we do".

It is obvious that the OIC made many concessions till the last moment in order to achieve consensus. It stuck to its desire to get a resolution on combating Islamophobia, but in the process, had to place it in within the framework of previous resolutions of a general nature which seek to promote tolerance and religious freedoms and combat discrimination and violence flowing from a variety of reasons. In the Resolution's operative part, the OIC had to agree to a call for a dialogue for peace based on "respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs". And significantly, while submitting the Resolution, the OIC had to withdraw its call for "high-visibility events" by member states, for curbing Islamophobia. It now only wants the observation of March 15 in "an appropriate manner".

India's stand

Immediately after the Resolution's adoption, India's Permanent Representative T.S. Tirumurti exercised his right to explain India's stand. His statement criticising the Resolution has attracted media at-



REUTERS

attention. The fact that by not breaking the consensus India, at least formally, accepted the Resolution, has become somewhat obscured. India's basic contention was encapsulated in these words "It is time that we acknowledged the prevalence of religiophobia, rather than single out just one". This was an entirely valid assertion. So was the contention that 'phobias' are just not against Abrahamic faiths but also against non-Abrahamic religions. Discriminatory, prejudicial and violent acts have taken place, as mentioned by Mr. Tirumurti, against Hindus, Sikhs and Buddhists. Non-Abrahamic faiths, though, perhaps do not evoke the same degree of fear and negativity worldwide but especially in the West as does Islam.

Mr. Tirumurti also mentioned India's historical track record of giving refuge to the prosecuted members of different faiths. He specifically mentioned Zoroastrians, Jews and Buddhists. The reference to Buddhists was a not-so-subtle one to the Dalai Lama and his followers. While all this was fine, what was absent from Mr. Tirumurti's intervention was any reference to Indian Muslims. This

would not go without notice, especially as the Indian Muslim community is the second or third largest in the world.

Mr. Tirumurti did "condemn" Islamophobia along with all other religiophobia, but at that point he could have specifically added that India cannot but be concerned with Islamophobia because Muslims form a substantial part of the country's plural society. Such a reference would have been appropriate for two other reasons too: one, the complaint that despite India's desire, the word "pluralism" does not find any mention in the Resolution; and, two, that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of India's polity and society and the path of progress he aspires to lies in "sabka saath, sabka vikas, sabka vishwas and sabka prayas". That necessarily includes Indian Muslims as the ruling dispensation itself stresses to ward off allegations of anti-minorities bias. And a reference to Indian Muslims would not have detracted from Mr. Tirumurti's basic warning that a focus on a single religion may lead to divisiveness when it is imperative that the UN is not divided into "religious camps". India's views in international fora have to be promoted with finesse and grace.

Like India, the EU's opposition to the Resolution stemmed from "singling out a particular confession", but its philosophical underpinnings were different. The EU placed its focus on individual rights and freedoms and not on protection of religions per se. Thus, its emphasis was on the rights of non-believers. The gulf

between the EU and the OIC on the ambit of the freedom of expression is long standing and will not be easily bridged for, as Mr. Khan noted, the West does not see religion as "we do". The EU's views on an individual's right to change religion may also not coincide with the view of traditional Islam which does not accept apostasy.

China's position

The politics surrounding the Resolution was best illustrated by the late entry of China as among its sponsors. China's abysmal record of treatment of its Muslims, especially the Uighurs, is well known. Yet, the OIC has always adopted a soft approach towards China. It has essentially overlooked the persecution of its Muslim minorities, particularly of the Uighurs who have been 're-educated' in large camps. Thus, China's approach to the Resolution was brazen. Perhaps as a quid pro quo, the OIC once again gave China a free pass during its Foreign Minister's meeting in Islamabad on March 22-23; the Chinese mistreatment of its Muslims does not find any mention in the Islamabad declaration. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi was invited as a special guest at this meeting. In this context it is useful to recall Pakistan's great opposition to the UAE inviting the then External Affairs Minister the late Sushma Swaraj in 2019 as guest of honour to the Abu Dhabi OIC Foreign Minister's meeting.

Vivek Katju is a retired Indian Foreign Service officer

Online voting for NRIs under consideration, says Kiren Rijiju

‘Linking Aadhaar with electoral rolls in the works, EVMs should not be doubted’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Government of India was exploring the possibility of allowing online voting for non-resident Indians (NRIs) as well as considering linking Aadhaar with the electoral rolls to check fraudulent voting, Law Minister Kiren Rijiju said in the Lok Sabha on Friday.

Mr. Rijiju also told the House that no questions should be raised about the electronic voting machines (EVMs) and asserted that India’s election system was recognised as “one of the best” in the world.

During the Question Hour, the Minister was responding to a supplementary question posed by Congress member from Kerala K. Muraliedharan about *Pravasi Indians* or NRIs being given voting rights.

“Sir, this is a very positive suggestion. And I have told the Election Commission that we will make provisions. Give us proper suggestions on how we will allow our pe-



Allaying concerns: Union Minister for Law and Justice Kiren Rijiju speaking in the Lok Sabha on Friday. ■PTI

ople who are staying outside to be given an opportunity to vote. We are also thinking how online voting system can be encouraged or done,” Mr. Rijiju stated.

Talking about steps to prevent fraudulent voting and discrepancy in electoral rolls, he observed, “Linking Aadhaar with the electoral roll is one of the ways. As of now, linking Aadhaar with electoral rolls is voluntary. Our aim is to ensure ‘one nation, one electoral roll’ to ensure a clean voting process”.

When Congress member Manish Tewari asked wheth-

er the source code of the EVMs remained with the manufacturing company or passed on to the Election Commission, the Minister compared it with the process of judicial appointments.

“The judges are appointed by the government, but once they are appointed, they become independent. No one should question the EVMs and there should not be any inference too,” he said.

Mr. Tewari insisted on getting a specific reply to a specific question. Speaker Om Birla intervened to say that

the Indian democracy and its electoral process were highly praised the world over.

Voting right issue

The House also witnessed an argument between the Minister and Janata Dal (United) president Rajiv Ranjan Singh.

Answering a question, the Minister said every elector had the right to vote in elections and those in prisons were also encouraged to vote; but there cannot be compulsory voting.

Reacting to this, Mr. Singh said the Minister should be a little more ‘sensitive’ while replying. “When a person is sent in judicial custody, his fundamental rights are seized and voting is a fundamental right,” he explained.

Mr. Rijiju responded, stating that all citizens were equal for the government and, as Law Minister, he cannot say undertrials do not have the voting right. People contest and win elections from jail, he added.

New Criminal Procedure Bill to be tabled

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Union government will table the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill, 2022, in Parliament next week, Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Arjun Ram Meghwal informed Rajya Sabha on Friday.

Other than this, the Upper House will also take up Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Amendment) Bill, 2022 (with respect to the State of Jharkhand), the Constitution (Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) Orders (Second Amendment) Bill, 2022, (with respect to State of Uttar Pradesh), the Delhi Municipal Corporation (Amendment) Bill, 2022 and the Indian Antarctica Bill, 2022, Mr. Meghwal told the House.

SC allows UPSC aspirants with disabilities to apply for IPS

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday allowed people with disabilities who have cleared the civil services written examinations time till April 1 to provisionally apply to the Union Public Services Commission (UPSC) for selection to the Indian Police Service

(IPS), Indian Railways Protection Force Service (IRPFS) and the Delhi, Daman & Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep Police Service (DANIPS).

A Bench led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar directed the Secretary-General of the

UPSC to receive applications either physically or by courier till 4 p.m. on April 1.

Exclusion challenged

The apex court said the applications would be considered based on the verdict of a petition filed by an NGO, National Platform for the Rights of the Disabled,

that has challenged a government notification excluding people with disabilities from these services.

The court clarified that the ongoing selection process in the civil services would continue uninterrupted.

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SC relief for civil service aspirants with disabilities

The interview stage in the selection process starts from April 5.

The hearing began with the Centre, represented by both Attorney-General K.K. Venugopal and Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, seeking two weeks' time to file a reply to the NGO's petition.

However, senior advocate Arvind Datar, for the NGO, apprised the Bench that many candidates with disabilities, who had cleared the written exams, were unable to submit their preferences among the various branches of the services because of the March 24 deadline.

Mr. Datar said these candidates should be given more time to indicate their preferences, possibly a

week or two more.

Speaking for the government, Mr. Venugopal agreed to accommodate the request, saying the candidates could apply physically and their applications could be kept separately till the court took a final decision in the NGO's case.

The court found the government's stand "most reasonable" and also agreed to Mr. Datar's request to add an alternative to handing over the applications physically. The senior lawyer said it would be difficult for people with disabilities from remote areas to travel to Delhi to submit their applications by April 1.

This led the court to add the option of sending the applications via courier.

UGC draft rules make entrance test must for PhD admissions

Doctoral candidates would be required to take up 3 courses

R. SUJATHA
CHENNAI

Candidates who wish to pursue PhD from the next academic year may have to qualify in an entrance exam conducted either by the university or the National Eligibility Test. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has drafted new regulations which make the test mandatory for all candidates, including those joining PhD after undergraduation and postgraduation.

The regulations are likely to be implemented by April, said P. Duraisamy, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Madras and a member of the committee that had drafted the regulations. The draft has been uploaded for comments.

The draft had also dropped the award of M.Phil degree, a year-long pro-

gramme. Universities in the State might not be able to offer M.Phil degree once the UGC implemented the new regulations, Mr. Duraisamy said.

Last year, Tamil Nadu Higher Education Minister K. Ponmudi had announced that universities would continue to offer M.Phil degree citing representation from college teachers.

Amendments dropped

The draft regulations for PhD admission have, however, offered relief while dropping two amendments made in 2016 and 2018. Candidates whose M.Phil dissertation has been evaluated and are recommended for the degree will be admitted provisionally to the PhD programme even if they have not completed their viva-voce or final defence.

Candidates who pursue the four-year undergraduate course with no arrears and a CGPA of 7.5 and above can directly be admitted to PhD. The regulations permit two additional years to women to complete their course work

Also, 60% of admission to PhD would be for candidates who have qualified in the NET and 40% would be provided for non-NET takers. However, based on vacancies in both these segments, candidates from the other segment may be admitted.

“PhD candidates would have to take up three courses – research methodology; one on the subject concerned and a topic on which their research would be based. Those who have already studied M.Phil need not study the three courses,” Mr. Duraisamy said.

Heartening milestone

Beyond stopgap measures such as enabling rupee-rouble trade, India must expedite FTAs

The Centre's announcement that India's merchandise exports have already surpassed the target set for this fiscal year, with overseas shipments crossing a record \$400 billion mark by March 21, brings much-needed cheer to an economy still struggling to recover from the bruising impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The export rebound, coming on the back of last fiscal's pandemic-induced slump in global demand, is particularly heartening as the key value-added sectors of engineering goods and apparel and garments have done well this year. Engineering goods, in particular, have registered almost 50% year-on-year growth, while ready-made garments logged a more than 30% increase, in the April-February period, as per provisional data from the Commerce Ministry. However, in terms of the sheer scale of increase, petroleum products were the standout performer as the global surge in oil prices lifted the dollar value of overseas shipments of goods produced at India's refineries by 150% over the first 11 months of the fiscal. The fact that the export growth has been achieved against the backdrop of persistent logistical challenges, including container shortages and port congestion that have pushed up freight rates, is laudable and reflects the concerted effort made by the government in coordination with industry and the country's overseas missions. Interestingly, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal made a pointed reference to the role played by India's embassies and envoys in exploring new opportunities for Indian products, and if the current momentum in exports is to be sustained in the coming years, the diplomatic corps will need to enlarge their role in trade promotion.

Still, the cheer of attaining the milestone needs to be tempered by the acknowledgment that multiple challenges persist on the trade front. Imports have outpaced exports this year, almost doubling the trade deficit in the April-February period to more than \$175 billion. The gap is wider than the pre-pandemic year of 2019-2020 as well and points to the pressing need to step up the pace of export growth if the deficit is to be shrunk meaningfully. While global inflation in commodity prices certainly contributed to enlarging the value of both exports and imports, the fact that project goods were the only item of import, among the 30 broad categories listed by the Ministry that contracted over the 11-month period, is also cause for disquiet. The lack of overseas purchases of capital goods for new projects is a clear indicator that private Indian businesses are still wary of making fresh investments given the lack of momentum in personal consumption. With the war in Ukraine and sanctions on Russia now posing fresh problems for exporters seeking to ship goods to not only these countries but other markets in Europe as well, policymakers must go beyond stopgap measures such as enabling rupee-rouble trade and expedite ongoing negotiations on the raft of free trade agreements so as to at least help lower some of the tariff walls.

India said to restrict sugar exports to 8 million tonnes

Govt. wants to ensure ample supply during festive season

REUTERS
MUMBAI

India plans to restrict sugar exports for the first time in six years to prevent a surge in domestic prices and could cap this season's exports at 8 million tonnes, government and industry sources told Reuters.

An announcement could come early next month, they said. "Sugar output is going to be a record high, but stocks are depleting fast because of exports. Uncontrolled exports could create scarcity and local prices could spike during festive season," said a senior government official with knowledge of the matter who



asked not to be identified.

Two of three sources said the government has planned a cap of 8 million while one official said the government is also exploring the option of a levy on exports to discourage overseas sales.

India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry did not immediately respond to a re-

quest for comment.

A cap of 8 million tonnes for the marketing year to end-September could result in a de facto ban for exports from May as dealers say mills have already contracted to export 7 million tonnes so far. Based on March deals for about 1 million tonnes of exports, they estimate mills could sign contracts for another 1 million tonnes in April after global white sugar prices jumped to a 5-year high on Thursday.

Lower output in top producer Brazil and firm oil prices which encourage mills to produce more sugarcane-based ethanol have spurred global price gains.



Tit for tat: Moscow plans to ask 'unfriendly countries' to pay for their energy imports in roubles. ■REUTERS

Russia's Gazprom said to seek gas payments in euros from GAIL

GAIL imports 2.5 MT of LNG annually

REUTERS
NEW DELHI

Gazprom has asked GAIL (India) to pay for gas imports in euros instead of dollars, two sources said, as the Russian energy giant seeks to wean itself away from the U.S. currency.

European countries and the U.S. have imposed heavy sanctions on Russia since Moscow sent troops into Ukraine on February 24. GAIL has a long-term gas import deal with Gazprom Marketing & Trading Singapore to annually buy 2.5 million tonnes (MT) of liquefied natural gas (LNG) and has been settling trade with Gazprom in dollars. GAIL, which imports and distributes gas, also operates India's largest gas pipeline network.

Last week, Gazprom wrote to GAIL requesting that the company settle payments for gas purchases in euros instead of dollars, the sources familiar with the matter said, adding the state-run Indian firm is still examining the request.

"GAIL doesn't see any problem in settling payment in euros as European countries are paying for their im-

ports in euros," said one of the sources.

The sources said that sanctions might not hit payments in euros because GAIL's contract is with a Singapore unit of Gazprom.

Gazprom and GAIL did not respond to Reuters' e-mails seeking comment.

Western sanctions have dealt a crippling blow to Russia's economy, but the European Union, which relies on Russian oil and gas, has stopped short of placing curbs on energy imports and continues to pay in euros. President Vladimir Putin said that Russia, the world's largest gas producer, will soon require "unfriendly" countries to pay for fuel in roubles.

India, however, has not banned Russian oil and gas imports, unlike several Western countries.

In fact, Indian companies are snapping up Russian oil as it is available at a deep discount after some companies and countries shunned purchases from Moscow.

The sources said so far Gazprom is supplying the volumes committed to under its contract with GAIL.

Oppn. calls for law to regulate cryptocurrency

In Lok Sabha, Congress says govt. is sending mixed signals on virtual digital assets and seeks clarity

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

In the Lok Sabha, while debating the Finance Bill, Opposition members on Friday stressed the need for a legal framework to regulate virtual digital assets such as cryptocurrencies that can be misused to finance terror and narcotics smuggling.

Opening the debate, Congress member Gaurav Gogoi said the government was sending mixed signals on virtual digital assets and demanded clarity.

"I expect the policy to come out sooner than later... crypto is a risk at the moment," Mr. Gogoi said, noting that virtual digital assets should not become a preferred route for money laun-

dering, drug smuggling or crime.

Supriya Sule of the NCP demanded a ban on crypto, saying various committees had suggested so and questioned the imposition of 30% tax on capital gain out of virtual digital assets when there was no legislation on them (digital assets).

Danish Ali of the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) also asked the government to clarify its position on cryptocurrency.

Fuel price rise

The rise in prices of fuel was another issue that was taken up by the Opposition members.

"For one month, they could keep the prices stable. What has changed now-



Holding to account: Opposition parties also took up the issue of fuel price rise during the Budget session on Friday. ■PTI

?...Just because [five State Assembly] elections are over. That's how you repay the people who put you back to power," Mr. Gogoi said.

"Jingoism is the only antidote that this government is offering to the poor whether

there is record unemployment, whether there is high inequality, and when there is inflation. People are expected to really put all their faith in the leader [the Prime Minister]," the Congress MP said.

Trinamool Congress member Aparupa Poddar said the government talked about increasing the GDP which meant prices of Gas, Diesel and Petrol and sought to know the quantum of black money reduced because of demonetisation.

Appreciating the Finance Minister for presenting a "well-balanced" Finance Bill, N.K. Premchandran (RSP) said it was right time for the review of Goods and Services Tax (GST) given the complexities involved.

Earlier, during Zero Hour, members from the Congress, DMK, NCP, Left, Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi and the IUML walked out of the House to register their protest over the fuel price hike.

RBI sets geo-tagging rules for payment touch points

‘Will help deepen digital payments’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Friday released a framework for geo-tagging of payment system touch points, issuing instructions to bank and non bank payment system operators to maintain and submit to it the geographical locations of their touch points on a regular basis.

Stressing that it was focused on deepening digital payments, the RBI said it was committed to helping ensure inclusive access to all citizens at a time when the payments ecosystem in India had witnessed rapid developments with a bouquet of payment systems, plat-

forms, products and services available for consumers.

‘Robust infrastructure’

“To achieve this objective, it is imperative that robust payment acceptance infrastructure is available and accessible across the length and breadth of the country. Geo-tagging of payment system touch points will enable proper monitoring of availability of payment acceptance infrastructure like Points of Sale (PoS) terminals, Quick Response (QR) codes.

“In turn, such monitoring will support policy intervention to optimise distribution of payment infrastructure,” the RBI said.



Top honour: Ram Nath Kovind receiving the Guard of Honour at the presentation of the President's Colour. ■PTI

INS Valsura awarded President's Colour

Special postal cover released

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

President Ram Nath Kovind on Friday presented the President's Colour to INS Valsura, the Navy's premier technological training establishment.

The President's Colour is bestowed on a military unit in recognition of the exceptional service rendered to the nation, both in peace and in war.

'Nishan Adhikari' Lt. Arun Singh Sambyal received the President's Colour on behalf of the unit in an impressive parade, the Navy said. A special postal cover was also released to commemorate the occasion. "The award ceremony commenced with insertion of Drum Toli for Pile-of-Drums ceremony. It traces its history back to a time when soldiers on field used to arrange their drums in a pile to form an altar," the defence spokesperson said on social media.

INS Valsura trains officers and men on operation and maintenance of sophisticated and technologically advanced equipment on board warships.

The Navy was the first Indian armed force to be awarded the President's Colour by Dr Rajendra Prasad

on May 27, 1951. INS Valsura, started on 30 acres of land as a torpedo school in 1942 under the British, has today grown into one of the foremost technological training institutions of the country spread over 600 acres.

In line with the Navy's futuristic road map to power its warships, including the proposed Indigenous Aircraft Carrier-II with electric propulsion, in 2018 a medium voltage laboratory was set up by Siemens, Germany, at INS Valsura to familiarise and train naval engineers in the nuances of medium voltage power generation, protection and distribution.

Contemporary training

The Navy stated that INS Valsura imparted quality training on contemporary and niche technologies through progressive augmentation of training infrastructure.

"Setting up of Artificial Intelligence, big data and medium voltage labs in the recent years exemplify its quest for technological excellence in contemporary technology also in training officers and sailors."

Overall, the establishment conducts more than 262 courses a year.

General Studies Paper I	
A	History of Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of art forms, literature and architecture from ancient to modern times;
B	Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-significant events, personalities, issues;
C	Freedom struggle-its various stages and important contributors / contributions from different parts of the country;
D	Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country;
E	History of the world will include events from 18 th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, re-drawing of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization,
F	Political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.-their forms and effect on the society
G	Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India;
H	Effects of globalization on Indian society;
I	Role of women and women's organization;
J	Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism
K	Salient features of world's physical geography;
L	Geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes;
M	Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc.
N	Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian subcontinent);
O	Factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India);
P	Population and associated issues;
Q	Urbanization, their problems and their remedies
General Studies Paper II	
A	India and its neighbourhood- relations;
B	Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate;
C	Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests;
D	Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
E	Indian Constitution, historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure;
F	Comparison of the Indian Constitutional scheme with other countries;
G	Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
H	Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these;
I	Structure, organization and functioning of the executive and the judiciary, Ministries and Departments;

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

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