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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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An opportunity to repolish India-Nepal ties

Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's India visit should be used as a chance to recast power and trade links



SUJEEV SHAKYA

The visit of Nepal's Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba to India, beginning April 1 – four years after a Nepali leader visited New Delhi – is significant. It is the first bilateral visit abroad for Mr. Deuba who leads an election government; local elections are to take place on May 13 and federal elections are slated later in the year. In April 2018, Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli had a lacklustre-feel good visit to India, with little achievement worth talking about.

Mr. Deuba assumed office in July 2021, his fifth time as Prime Minister, leading a fragile coalition that has not been able to make Parliament function. The Nepal Parliament has been dysfunctional since July 2020 after cracks within the former Communist alliance developed in December 2019. The novel coronavirus pandemic has been a face-saving event for political forces.

Nepal's relations with India, that plummeted to a historic low after the Indian blockade in Sep-

tember 2015, have yet to recover as Nepalis do not see relations with India improving any time soon. India's refusal to accept demonetised bills with the Nepal Rastra Bank worth just INR₹7 crore and the unknown fate of the report submitted by the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) have not helped in securing it a better image in Nepal. The fact that passengers boarding flights from Nepal to India are still subjected to a pre-boarding security check even over 20 years after the hijack of an Indian Airlines aircraft, determines the perception of trust of India in Nepal. This is despite thousands of Nepalis serving in the Indian Army and Nepali villages expressing grief whenever violence escalates in India as many lose their lives defending a country that is not their own.

Complicated geopolitics

Geopolitics is a complicated challenge for Nepal, whose geography requires it to make best use of its position between China and India. The last couple of months are an example of how complicated it can get. When the Nepalese Parliament ratified a U.S.\$500 million grant assistance-Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) pact, there were street protests and big-time social media campaigns supported by China. However, India's



FILE PHOTO/V. SUDERSHAN

silence and the offer of other routes for power transmission as an alternative to the MCC confused everyone: was India for or against the MCC grant to Nepal? With relations between India and the United States further complicated by the China factor and India abstaining on the Russia vote in the United Nations even as Nepal voted in favour of it, the problems have continued to mount.

The recent visit by the Chinese Foreign Minister, Wang Yi, to Nepal has resulted in a situation that everyone in Nepal is trying to decipher. Analysts also suggest that Mr. Wang did assure his Indian counterpart that Nepal should work out its internal equations with India and that China would stay out. But in reality, the Chinese engagement has been very deep as seen in the anti-MCC campaign. U.S. grant and investment activities are seeing a revival post the MCC ratification and India does not want to see other powers active in Nepal.

With Mr. Deuba leading a fragile coalition, there are not many issues he may want to accomplish, but he should be able to push some of the key pending ones.

The main priorities

First, the power trade agreement needs to be such that India can build trust in Nepal. Despite more renewable energy projects (solar) coming up in India, hydropower is the only source that can manage peak demand in India. For India, buying power from Nepal would mean managing peak demand and also saving the billions of dollars of investments which would have to be invested in building new power plants, many of which would cause pollution.

Second, while trade and transit arrangements go through the usual extensions, it is time to undertake a complete rethink as the sales of goods and payments moves through electronic platforms – this can provide many new opportunities for businesses on both sides of the border.

Third, the Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPPA) signed between India and Nepal needs more attention from the Nepali side. A commitment from Mr. Deuba on implementing this would attract more foreign investments from Indian investors. The private sector

in Nepal, especially the cartels in the garb of trade associations, are fighting tooth and nail against foreign investments. So, it will be important for Mr. Deuba to deliver a message that Nepal welcomes Indian investments and that he is willing to fight the domestic cartels knowing well that it may dent a bit of funding for his party for elections.

A new Nepal now

Finally, it is for Mr. Deuba to provide the confidence that Nepal is keen to work with India while at the same time making it clear that it cannot take on India's pressure to ignore China or the U.S. In the context of Nepalis currently living in 180 countries, India must note that it is a new Nepal it has to deal with from now.

Perhaps there is hope that the situation can improve – in the appointment of Dr. Shankar Sharma, a seasoned economist, who was also Nepal's Ambassador to the U.S., as Nepal's Ambassador to India. He was responsible for recalibrating Nepal's relations with the U.S. Perhaps we can hope that India will engage with him more deeply without the usual condescending attitude. Perhaps, an open moment has arrived.

Sujeev Shakya is the author of 'Unleashing Nepal' and 'Unleashing The Vajra'

Step by step

The agreement to resolve six disputed points along Assam-Meghalaya border is a model one

Tuesday's agreement between Assam and Meghalaya to end their boundary dispute in six of the 12 areas, where discord persisted, is a welcome first step. The agreement signed by Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his Meghalaya counterpart Conrad Sangma, in the presence of Home Minister Amit Shah, also sets the stage to resolve differences in the remaining six areas. Based on a draft resolution of January 29 between the two States, the agreement covers Tarabari, Gizang, Hahim, Boklapara, Khanapara-Pilangkata and Ratacherra under the Kamrup, Kamrup (Metro) and Cachar districts of Assam and the West Khasi Hills, Ri-Bhoi and East Jaintia Hills districts of Meghalaya. By adopting a give-and-take approach, the two States have demonstrated that knotty boundary issues can be resolved – in this case, partially to begin with – if there is a will to arrive at an agreement. Of the disputed territory – a little over 36 square kilometres – the two States will get a near equal share, enshrining the sharing principle that might serve as a template to resolve other boundary disputes in the northeast. Assam, the mother State from which other States were carved out in the northeast, currently has boundary disputes with Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. As the Home Minister underscored in Delhi, the spirit shown by Mr. Sarma and Mr. Sangma should be used in other disputes as well. People living in the six disputed areas should be allowed to choose where they want to live. While Mr. Sarma has blamed the Congress for allowing the dispute between Assam and Meghalaya to fester, Nandita Das, Congress MLA from the Boko seat, alleged that in three of the six “resolved sectors”, there was no give and take. The agreement requires delineation and demarcation by the Survey of India as well as parliamentary approval.

One can only hope that the right lessons will be drawn by Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland from Tuesday's accord to understand the other's point of view and come to agreements. In July 2021, five policemen and a civilian from Assam were shot dead in violent clashes with their Mizo counterparts at a disputed point between Assam and Mizoram. The clash came right after a meeting that Mr. Shah had had with the Chief Ministers of northeast States to resolve boundary disputes. It is imperative that Assam and the other States locked in dispute use goodwill and the good offices of the Centre. Rather than entrusting security to paramilitary forces, one confidence-building measure could be to deploy State police without arms wherever possible. It would be a signal that all States are committed to resolving their disputes peacefully. For the moment, Tuesday's agreement is a moment to savour.

Cohesion, co-operation

India must assuage apprehensions of power imbalances among members of BIMSTEC

The adoption of the Charter at the Fifth Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) summit promises to re-energise the 25-year-old grouping at a time of growing global uncertainties. The Charter is expected to help impart a more connected vision to the seven-member organisation. The Charter, and India's decision to lead the 'security pillar' out of the seven designated pillars of the revived BIMSTEC, has given India's regional aspirations a new orientation, away from the stalemated SAARC that has been unable to meet since November 2014. The new opportunity is also accompanied by its own set of problems. These inherent challenges were reflected in the time taken to finalise the Charter – one of the key factors was the Rohingya crisis that has weakened bilateral Bangladesh-Myanmar ties, with Dhaka seeking full repatriation of the refugees and Naypyidaw disinclined to respond positively to international pleas. Unlike SAARC, which is burdened by India-Pakistan hostilities, BIMSTEC is relatively free of sharp bilateral disagreements and promises to provide India with a co-operative sphere of its own. Given the complexity of domestic and geopolitical factors, this sphere will require sustained bilateral and group-level discussions to prevent problems such as the Rohingya crisis from becoming impediments to the smooth delivery of economic and security outcomes. India too will have to ensure equally sustained political engagement with partners such as Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh to prevent any domestic political spillover from affecting bilateral and group-level working relationships.

With his call for a BIMSTEC Free Trade Agreement, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has outlined India's vision to bolster trade connectivity in the grouping. An FTA spanning the maritime resource-rich members such as Myanmar and Sri Lanka could bring dramatic gains for all members. A 'coastal shipping ecosystem' and an interconnected electricity grid, in addition to the adopted Master Plan for Transport Connectivity, have the potential to boost intraregional trade and economic ties. Having walked away from mega trade blocs such as the China-led RCEP, New Delhi's willingness to explore an FTA within the framework of a near-home regional grouping may provide greater accommodation for multi-party interests. The security- and trade-related lessons from the troubled SAARC and SAFTA experiences also ought to serve BIMSTEC well in the long run. Ultimately though, for the revived grouping to realise its trade and economic potential, India will have to take a leadership role in assuaging any apprehensions among the smaller members of intragroup power imbalances and strive to facilitate greater cross-border connectivity and flow of investments by lowering barriers to the movement of people and goods.

China, Pakistan, Afghanistan agree to boost three-way ties

Wang Yi calls for extending CPEC to Afghanistan

ANANTH KRISHNAN
HONG KONG

China on Thursday said it would deepen three-way cooperation with Afghanistan and Pakistan as the Foreign Ministers of the three countries met in eastern China.

“Under the current circumstances, China, Afghanistan and Pakistan should restart the trilateral cooperation mechanism and advance cooperation in the three areas of politics, development and security based on the principles of mutual respect, equal-footed consultation and mutual benefit,” Foreign Minister Wang Yi said following talks with Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Acting Foreign Minister of Taliban government Amir Khan Muttaqi.

China on Wednesday and Thursday hosted the third summit of Foreign Ministers from Afghanistan’s neighbouring countries, including China, Russia, Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, part of a new dialogue mechanism championed by Beijing and Islamabad.

India has not been invited



Wang Yi with Shah Mahmood Qureshi pose in Tunxi, Anhui Province on Wednesday. ■ AP

to the three meetings.

In a letter to the summit, hosted in eastern Anhui province, China’s President Xi Jinping pledged to back Afghanistan’s development, saying China was “committed to supporting its pursuit of peace, stability and development” with the country coming “to a critical point of transition from chaos to order.”

The Ministers of China, Afghanistan and Pakistan met separately on the sidelines of the conference, and underlined their close ties. Shortly before the Taliban’s return to power in August last year, China and Pakistan decided to align their Afghanistan strategies and follow a joint approach. Both countries have since sought

closer relations with the Taliban government.

Mr. Wang said the three sides should “jointly advance Belt and Road cooperation and extend the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor to Afghanistan, and help Afghanistan participate in regional connectivity.”

The Foreign Ministers of the seven neighbouring countries, in a joint statement, issued a thinly-veiled criticism of the United States, saying they “urged countries mainly responsible for the current predicament in Afghanistan to earnestly fulfil commitments on the economic recovery and future development of Afghanistan.” They also expressed “deep concern” over the worsening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

Agreeing to hold their fourth summit next year in Tashkent, they also launched a new mechanism for regular consultations among their special representatives for Afghanistan and the setting up of working groups for political and diplomatic issues, economic and humanitarian matters, and security.

EXPLAINER

The rise of the rouble amid the Ukraine invasion

How did the Russian currency bounce back so quickly after sanctions? Will it continue with its upward trend?

PRASHANTH PERUMAL

The story so far: The Russian rouble has staged an impressive recovery after it lost about half of its value in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The currency has recovered almost all of the losses it incurred following the invasion and has thus, surprised many who had predicted a further fall in its value.

What kind of sanctions were imposed in Russia?

Sanctions were imposed on the Russian economy by Western governments right after Russia invaded Ukraine in late February. These sanctions included cutting off many Russian banks from the SWIFT payments signalling system and also freezing the Russian central bank's foreign reserves held abroad.

Many western companies including oil majors such as British Petroleum and Shell also pulled out of Russia amid pressure from Western governments. Sanctions basically made it harder for Russian businesses to sell their goods abroad and also made it harder for ordinary Russians to purchase goods from abroad.

The freezing of the Bank of Russia's forex reserves held abroad also made it harder for the Russian central bank to use its foreign reserves to prop up the value of the Russian currency. Naturally, the rouble experienced a sharp hit right after these sanctions, thus leading many to believe that the Russian economy had been brought to its knees.

Surprisingly, however, the Russian currency has staged a remarkable recovery in the last three weeks. It took about 81 roubles to purchase a US dollar one day before Russian forces invaded Ukraine on February 24. A couple of weeks later, it took 151 roubles to purchase a US dollar, marking the rouble's low since the beginning of the war. This week, thanks to a significant rally from the lows of early March, it takes about 83 Russian roubles to buy a US dollar. The rouble has, thus, recovered pretty much all of the losses that it incurred in the aftermath of the war.

What's driving the rouble's sharp recovery?

It should first be noted that the price or



exchange value of any currency is determined by the supply and demand for the currency. When Western governments imposed sanctions, it made it harder for dollars to flow into Russia, either in the form of investments or by the purchase of Russian goods. Sanctions on the Russian central bank also made sure that the Bank of Russia could not flood the currency market with US dollars to prop up the value of the rouble.

The demand for foreign goods and assets, however, remained stable and when combined with a drop in the inflow of dollars, it caused the value of the rouble to fall precipitously in the initial weeks of the war and the ensuing economic sanctions. The Russian central bank, it seems, was able to counter this negative trend in the forex market that had caused the rouble's value to plunge against the US dollar. It managed to do this primarily through capital controls that aim to increase demand for roubles and reduce the demand for dollars. For example, the Bank of Russia ordered Russian energy exporters, who still had access to US dollars, thanks to exceptions in Western sanctions to

Russian energy exports, to use 80% of their foreign holdings to purchase roubles. It has also ordered Russian brokers to not allow foreigners to sell their assets in Russia; this is to prevent the outflow of capital which would further depreciate the rouble as investors sell their roubles to purchase dollars.

The Russian central bank's decision to raise its benchmark interest rate to 20% could have also helped draw some foreign investment that propped up the exchange value of the rouble.

Lastly, peace talks between Russia and Ukraine have also perhaps helped in the rouble's recovery to some extent by raising hopes of a return to economic normalcy. Some analysts, however, see the bounce-back of the rouble as a temporary rally in what could be a far deeper correction over the long-run.

What lies ahead?

The remarkable recovery of the rouble should not be taken as a sign that the Russian economy is hale and hearty. Capital

controls imposed by the Russian central bank, including the use of dollars earned by selling Russia's huge energy reserves to prop up the rouble, may help in shoring up the rouble but this respite for the rouble may be temporary. It should be noted that capital controls affect the free flow of capital and could have serious implications for Russia's future economic growth since investors are generally wary of investing in economies that do not allow the free exit of capital. It should also be remembered that the Russian economy is poorer due to the exit of foreign businesses and the boycott of the Russian economy by the West.

Further, there are limits to how long the Russian state can prop up the value of the rouble against the US dollar, even with the help of various capital controls. A significant drop in crude oil prices or a European boycott of Russian energy, for instance, could significantly reduce the flow of dollars into Russia and thus, the ability of the Russian central bank to prop up the rouble.

TOWARDS RECOVERY: The rouble has recovered despite the various sanctions imposed on Russia, including the freezing of the Russian central bank's foreign reserves held abroad.

GETTY IMAGES

Jaishankar sees a 'campaign' against India

'EU nations still buying oil from Russia'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Criticising what he called a “campaign” against India for buying Russian oil at discounts in the past few weeks, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday said the European countries remained the biggest buyers of oil and gas from Russia despite announcements that they would cut down.

Speaking at an event organised by the Indian Council for World Affairs, where he held a discussion with visiting U.K. Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, Mr. Jaishankar said it was “natural for countries to go out in the market and look for good deals” when oil prices go



S. Jaishankar

up, as they had since the war began in Ukraine and sanctions were placed on Russia.

Ms. Truss responded that it would take European countries some time to end their dependence on “cheap” Russian energy, but that Europe had already made drastic cuts to its energy import plans from Moscow.

U.S. Deputy NSA warns India of ‘consequences’

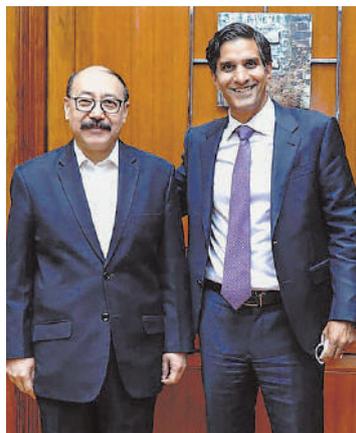
Daleep Singh cautions against trade deals with Russia

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

There will be “consequences” for any country, including India, that conducts local currency transactions through Russia’s central bank or constructs a payment mechanism that subverts or circumvents the United States’ sanctions against Russia, American Deputy National Security Adviser for International Economics Daleep Singh said in New Delhi on Thursday, hours before Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov landed.

Mr. Lavrov is due to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Friday, and is expected to brief them on the war in Ukraine, peace talks, keeping defence supplies running and alternative payment mechanisms in the face of Western sanctions.

In a first for the U.S. administration, Mr. Singh also publicly stated that India must not expect that Russia, as a “junior partner” of China, would assist India if there were more incursions along the Line of Actual Control.



Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla with U.S. Deputy National Security Adviser Daleep Singh. ■PTI

“I come here in a spirit of friendship to explain the mechanisms of our sanctions, the importance of joining us, to express a shared resolve and to advance shared interests. And yes, there are consequences to countries that actively attempt to circumvent or backfill the sanctions,” Mr. Singh told journalists between his official meetings.

‘Don’t prop up rouble’

“We are very keen for all countries, especially our allies and partners, not to create mechanisms that

prop up the [Russian] rouble, and those that attempt to undermine the dollar-based financial system,” he stated in reply to a question from *The Hindu*.

Bank officials’ meeting

This week, officials of the Bank of Russia, the country’s central bank, met Reserve Bank of India officials to discuss alternative payment mechanisms and routing through banks that are immune to international sanctions. Mr. Jaishankar told Parliament that a special inter-ministerial group led by the Finance Ministry had been tasked with resolving the payment issues for import and export with Russia caused by the sanctions.

Asked how India’s ties with Russia could affect its partnership with the U.S. in the Quad, Mr. Singh said there was a “shared recognition in the Quad that China is a strategic threat to a free open and secure Indo-Pacific”.

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JAISHANKAR SEES A CAMPAIGN
AGAINST INDIA ► PAGE 13

U.S. Deputy NSA warns India of ‘consequences’

“Russia is going to be the junior partner in this relationship with China. And the more leverage that China gains over Russia, the less favourable that is for India, I don’t think anyone would believe that if China once again breached the Line of Actual Control, that Russia will come running to India’s defence,” he observed.

Mr. Singh declined to comment on what the “consequences” he referred to were, and whether the U.S. would consider India’s purchase of the S-400 missile system from Russia, which has used a “rupee-rouble” alternate payment mechanism thus far, as eligible for the new sanctions as well as previous sanctions under the CAATSA (Countering

America’s Adversaries Through Sanctions Act).

He would rather keep those discussions with the government “private”, he added.

While Mr. Singh’s message was put more plainly, his words mirror comments by European Union and German officials in Delhi this week, who said that India must not take “economic advantage” of western sanctions, nor seek to dilute them during the war.

According to news agency *Reuters*, Indian oil refiners have bought more than 13 million barrels of Russian oil since the Ukraine war began on February 24, a steep rise from last year, when India bought 16 million barrels of Russian oil in all of 2021.

This is a criminal attack on privacy

The Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill 2022 erodes the privacy of those convicted of crime and the ordinary citizen



APAR GUPTA & ABHINAV SEKHRI

Springing a surprise, the Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, Ajay Mishra Teni, on Monday introduced the Criminal Procedure (Identification) Bill 2022. The Bill was neither put up for pre-legislative consultation nor indicated in the session's legislative agenda in Parliament. Seemingly technical, it is a legislative proposal that undermines the privacy of not only persons convicted of crime but also every ordinary Indian citizen as it proposes replacing a law that is over a 100 years old.

What needs scrutiny

Let us first understand why it is being introduced, and what it intends to achieve. The Bill aims to replace the Identification of Prisoners Act 1920 that has been in need of amendment for several decades. Back in the 1980s, the Law Commission of India (in its 87th Report) and the Supreme Court of India in a judgment titled *State of U.P. vs Ram Babu Misra* had nearly simultaneously suggested the need to amend the statute. The criticism and the need for amendment was predominantly in respect of the limited definition of 'measurements' as under that Act. It seems that this is one of the primary issues that the proposed legislation is designed to resolve.

In this regard, it might be unexceptional, being an expression of long-held views within the legal establishment. However, the devil is in the details, with three expansions in the power of state surveillance (in the name of criminal reforms) that merit further scrutiny.

First, the definition of measurements is not restricted to taking measurements, but also their "analysis", when the definition now states "iris and retina scan, physical, biological samples and

their analysis, behavio[u]ral attributes including signatures...." This definition is nebulous and vague. It goes beyond the scope of a law which is only designed for taking measurements and could result in indirectly conferring legislative backing for techniques which may involve the collection of data from other sources. For instance, using facial recognition technology where measurements of persons as under this law are compared with samples taken from the general public.

At present there are extensive facial recognition technology programmes for "smart policing" that are deployed all across the country. For instance, the Delhi police use facial recognition technology originally acquired for identification of missing children in 2018 to also screen for "habitual offenders". Similarly, the Tamil Nadu police deploy facial recognition systems which are integrated with State- and national-level databases including CCTV footage. Such experimental technologies cause mass surveillance and are prone to bias, impacting the fundamental rights of the most vulnerable in India.

Data capture and 'choice'

The second area of the expansion of surveillance concerns from whom such "measurements" can be gathered. The existing law permits data capture by police and prison officers either from persons convicted or persons arrested for commission of offences punishable with a minimum of one year's imprisonment. Parallel powers are granted to judges, who can order any person to give measurements where it is in aid of investigation. While the judicial power is left undisturbed, it is the powers of the police and prison officials that are being widened. The law removes the existing – albeit minimal – limitation on persons whose measurements could be taken. It is poised to be expanded to all persons who are placed under arrest in a case. This is a truly breathtaking spectrum, including petty crime such as violating a prohibi-

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO



tory order for not wearing a mask, jaywalking or a traffic violation.

Here, the proposed Bill also contains muddled language stating that a person, "may not be obliged to allow taking of his biological samples". This, on its surface, offers a choice to a person to refuse. However the words "may not be obliged" may also be read to offer discretion onto a police officer to confer such a choice. In any instance the exercise of such "choice" is presumed in law, it may not be truly voluntary, given the absence of wider accountability reforms in which existing policing practices are coercive.

Even if these objections are disregarded, the "choice", if any, is limited only to, "biological samples" from the wider data points captured within what constitutes, "measurements". For instance, "iris and retina scan" is mentioned separately to, "biological samples", and hence a person arrested under any crime or preventive detention law if desired by the police will be required to scan their eyes.

Storage of data

The third area of concern is the database of the "measurements" which are gathered. The National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) shall for a period of 75 years from the date of collection maintain a digital record, "in the interest of prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of any offence". As pointed out by Prof. Aparna Chandra (an associate professor of law) on Twitter, "How will these records be used for preventing crime except through surveillance?" This becomes clear when the provision permits the NCRB to, "share and disseminate such records with any law enforcement agency, in such manner as

may be prescribed".

It is important to consider that the NCRB already operates a centralised database, namely the Crime and Criminal Tracking Network & Systems (CCTNS), without any clear legislative framework. The interaction between the proposed law and CCTNS is not clearly defined though likely, given the powers conferred under for digital records go to the same government department.

The existence of such legislative power with a technical framework may permit multiple mirror copies and parallel databases of the "measurements" being stored with law enforcement, beyond a State Police department which will be prosecuting the crime and the NCRB which will store all records centrally. For instance, in response to a Standing Committee of Parliament on police modernisation, Rajasthan has stated that it maintains a 'RajCop Application' that integrates with "analytics capabilities in real-time with multiple data sources (inter-department and intra-department)". Similarly, Punjab has said that the "PAIS (Punjab Artificial Intelligence System) App uses machine learning, deep learning, visual search, and face recognition for the identification of criminals to assist police personnel. This app helps in storing and carrying information about criminals". Hence, multiple copies of "measurements" will be used by State government policing departments for various purposes and with experimental technologies. This also takes away the illusory benefit of deletion which occurs on acquittal and will suffer from weak enforcement due to the absence of a data protection law.

In sum, once a person enters their "measurements" within the system, they stay there for life given the average life expectancy in India which hovers around 70 years is less than the retention period. The end result is a sprawling database in which innocent persons are treated as persons of interest for most of their natural lives.

While the impact on persons

with privilege may be minimal, the masses – many of whom lack social and economic power in Indian society – may face harsher law enforcement. This becomes clear from the primary research-based article, "Settled Habits, New Tricks", by Ameya Bokil, Nikita Sonavane and Srujana Bej from the Criminal Justice and Police Accountability Project (the other writers include Avaneendra Khare and Vaishali Janarthanan). They pointed to the caste bias against the Pardhi Adivasi community which was at one time designated as a criminal tribe. In this context they state, "In reality since these databases are fed by the police's centuries-long caste-based system of preventive surveillance and predictive policing (which has already determined who is a criminal and what crimes habitual criminals commit repeatedly), there is no possibility of objectivity or lack of caste bias. The CCTNS only adds a technological veneer to a caste-based policing model..." It is foreseeable that if the proposed ambit of "measurements" is expanded and then put in a database, it will likely also target the Pardhis.

Onus is on government

Injuries to privacy are not mere academic debates and cause real, physical and mental consequences for people. To protect individual autonomy and fulfil our constitutional promises, the Supreme Court of India pronounced the Justice K.S. Puttaswamy judgment, reaffirming its status as a fundamental right. The responsibility to protect it falls to each organ of the government, including the legislature and the union executive. For India to fulfil its claims of being a constitutional democracy, rather than a mere electoral democracy, it will have to be better rather than regressing even from the Identification of Prisoners Act passed by a colonial regime.

Apar Gupta is a lawyer and the Executive Director of the Internet Freedom Foundation. Abhinav Sekhri is an advocate practising in Delhi

Court strikes down T.N. Vanniyar quota

The verdict spotlights the push for a caste survey in the State to assess backwardness.

Reservation in Tamil Nadu comprises 69% under a 1994 Act protected under the Ninth Schedule of the Constitution. Of the 69%, backward classes, including Christians and Muslims, get 30%; MBCs get 20%; Scheduled Castes 18%; and Scheduled Tribes 1%.

The court said there was no assessment or analysis done prior to the 2021 Act to back the claim that the Vanniyakula Kshatriyas were relatively more backward than the other MBCs and DNCs.

The court underscored that “while caste can be the starting point for internal reservation, it is incumbent on the State government to justify the reasonableness of the decision [to provide quota to a particular community] and demonstrate that caste is not the sole basis”.

“Equal laws would have to be applied to all in the same situation, and there should be no discrimination between one person and another ... The classification should never be arbitrary, artificial or evasive,” the court held.

Justice Rao, who wrote the verdict, observed that the entire basis for the 2021 Act was a letter from Justice Thanikachalam recommending the certain percentage of internal reservation for the Vanniyakula Kshatri-

ya community. The court said the State government had erred by ignoring the apprehensions of other members of the Commission about the “absence of updated caste-based data”. They had warned that internal reservations could not be “fruitfully made” without the latest caste-based statistics.

The Supreme Court held the 2021 Act was “*ultra vires*” the Constitution. It however refrained from making any comments on the merits of the 1994 Act, which provides 69% reservation in the State even as the ceiling limit on quota is 50%.

Though the court held the 2021 Act and its percentages of reservation unconstitutional, it upheld the legislative competence of the State to enact a law sub-classifying and apportioning percentages within identified backward classes.

“There is no bar to the sub-classification among backward classes,” Justice Rao observed. The court further found that the 2021 Act was only an ancillary legislation to the 1994 Act and was not in conflict with the latter.

Placing of the 1994 Act in the Ninth Schedule cannot also operate as a “hurdle” for the State legislature to enact a legislation on matters ancillary to the 1994 Act, the Supreme Court held.

Rajya Sabha bids farewell to 72 MPs

PM exhorts retiring members to write about their experiences in Parliament

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha bid farewell to 72 members retiring between March and July this year, bringing in critical changes in the political arithmetic of the Upper House by the time it meets next for the monsoon session in July.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, quoting phrases used in Bangla and Gujarati for goodbye which translates into “come again”, said he would also say the same to the retiring members – “Come again”.

Mr. Modi also exhorted the retiring members to write about their experiences in Parliament to build an institutional memory. “Sometimes, experiences are more useful than academic knowledge. Experiences help us in solving problems, and the mistakes of the new are minimised,” the PM said in the Rajya Sabha.

Whatever the members learnt within the House should be taken beyond the four walls of Parliament, he



Up close: Retiring members of the Rajya Sabha during a photo session with Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Thursday. ■PTI

said. “The House naturally has a sense of loss when MPs with so much experience leave. Let us resolve that whatever we have learned from the retiring MPs should be carried forward for the progress of the nation. We will say to the retiring members – ‘come again’,” he said.

Out of the 72 retiring members, 65 were elected from 19 States and seven are nominated members. The retirees’ list includes 13 members from the Congress, including senior leaders A.K. Antony, P. Chidam-

baram, Ambika Soni, Anand Sharma and Jairam Ramesh.

Valuable pool

Opening the farewell addresses, Rajya Sabha Chairman M. Venkaiah Naidu said it was not often that such a valuable pool of members retired in one go.

“Twenty-seven members, accounting for 38% of the retiring members, would have served two terms or more,” he said. He pointed out that Mr. Antony and Ms. Soni have served five terms each, three members have had

four terms, six have had three terms, and another 15 members would be retiring after two terms each.

“The 72 retiring members have a total experience of 143 terms in Rajya Sabha. Of them, 17 members were in the Lok Sabha earlier for a total of 38 terms. In effect, the House loses a total parliamentary experience of 181 terms in both the Houses,” Mr. Naidu said.

The retirees also include four Ministers – Nirmala Sitharaman, Piyush Goyal, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and Ramachandra Prasad Singh – all of whom are expected to return.

The farewell address, which went on for more than four hours, saw many members recounting their journey to the House from humble backgrounds. It also had its light moments.

Telangana Rashtra Samithi MP Dharmapuri Srinivas delivered his maiden speech in the House on the day meant for his retirement address.

Core sector output rises 5.8%

Economists cite low base effect; output shrank 5.3% from January's level

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India's core sector output grew at the fastest pace in four months at 5.8% in February, with six of eight sectors registering growth. Crude oil and fertiliser production fell 2.2% and 1.4% year-on-year, respectively.

Economists attributed February's numbers largely to the base effect, as output had contracted 3.3% in February 2021. In fact, the overall index of eight core industries released on Thursday revealed a 5.3% contraction from the level in January, with all sectors shrinking month-on-month. Output grew 4% in January.

Cement, for instance, grew 5% compared with February 2021, but output was 4.4% lower than in January



Slippery path: The core sector performance hints at February IIP likely having risen less than 2.5%, says Nayar. ■REUTERS

2022. Similarly, refinery products' output was up 8.8%, but 7.3% lower than the preceding month.

Steel production grew for the second month in a row after contracting in December, rising 5.7% in February. Electricity generation grew

4%, while natural gas and coal output grew 12.5% and 6.6%, respectively.

The continued contraction in crude oil and fertilisers, and sharp moderation in cement output growth cast a sobering note, said ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar,

who estimated the index of industrial production (IIP) to have risen less than 2.5% in February. The core sectors account for about 40% of IIP.

'Long way to go'

Economists at India Ratings and Research Sunil K. Sinha and Paras Jasrai observed that production of crude oil, refinery products and fertilisers were still below their pre-pandemic levels.

"Production of other core segments are also just above the pre-COVID level... there is still a long way to go so far as revival of core sectors' output is concerned and the disruption to global supply chains may further impinge on the availability of key raw materials like natural gas and coal in the domestic market," they said.

External debt rose \$11.5 bn to \$614.9 bn at end Dec.

‘Commercial borrowings largest part’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

India’s external debt rose by \$11.5 billion to \$614.9 billion in the three months ended December 2021, the Finance Ministry said on Thursday.

The external debt to GDP ratio fell marginally to 20% at the end of December, from 20.3% at the end of September 2021.

According to India’s Quarterly External Debt Report for the quarter ended December 2021, the country’s external debt was placed at \$614.9 billion, recording an increase of \$11.5 billion over its level at the end of September 2021. “India’s external debt continues to be sustainable and prudently managed,” it said.

Valuation gain due to the

 **Debt service increased to 4.9% of current receipts at end-December from 4.7% at end-September**

appreciation of the U.S. dollar vis-a-vis major currencies such as Euro, Yen and Special Drawing Rights (SDRs) was placed at \$1.7 billion. Commercial borrowings remained the largest component of external debt, with a share of 36.8%, followed by non-resident deposits (23.1%) and short-term trade credit. Also, debt service (principal repayments plus interest payments) increased to 4.9% of current receipts at end-December 2021 from 4.7% at end-September 2021.

Fiscal deficit reached 82.7% of target in Feb.

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI

The Centre's fiscal deficit at the end of February stood at 82.7% of the full-year Budget target, mainly on account of higher expenditure, according to government data.

In the previous financial year, the fiscal deficit, or the gap between the expenditure and revenue, was 76% of the Revised Estimate (RE) of 2020-21. In actual terms, the deficit stood at ₹13,16,595 crore at the end of February this year, as per the data released by the Controller General of Accounts. The government expects the fiscal deficit to be at 6.9% of the GDP, or ₹15.91 lakh crore, in the financial year ending March 31, 2022.

Trade gap widens Q3 current account deficit to \$23 billion

FDI slumps to \$5.1 bn, portfolio investments log net outflow

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

India's current account deficit (CAD) widened sharply to \$23 billion, or 2.7% of GDP, in the quarter ended December, from \$9.9 billion (1.3% of GDP) in the preceding three-month period, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said on Thursday. The CAD was \$2.2 billion (0.3% of GDP) in the year-earlier quarter, the data showed.

"The widening of CAD in Q3 was mainly on account of higher trade deficit," the RBI said. Net services receipts rose both sequentially and year-on-year (y-o-y), on the back of robust performance of net exports of computer and business services.

 **CAD may widen to \$90-95 bn if the FY23 Indian crude basket clocks \$105**

ADITI NAYAR
Chief Economist, ICRA

"We expect CAD to recede somewhat in Q4 FY2022, to around \$17-21 billion, with the third wave [of COVID-19 infections] temporarily curtailing certain imports," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist at rating agency ICRA.

She pointed out that if ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia pushed up the average price of the "Indian crude oil basket in FY23 to about \$105/barrel, then the CAD is projected to widen to \$90-95 billion".

Private transfer receipts, mainly representing remittances by Indians employed overseas, rose 13.1% from a year earlier to \$23.4 billion.

Net outgo from the primary income account, mainly reflecting net overseas investment income payments, increased sequentially as well as on a y-o-y basis.

Net foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows shrank to \$5.1 billion, from \$17.4 billion in the year-earlier quarter.

Portfolio investment recorded net outflow of \$5.8 billion as against an inflow of \$21.2 billion in Q3 FY22.

Net external commercial borrowings to India recorded outflow of \$0.2 billion compared with \$1.6 billion.

Areas under AFSPA regime reduced: Shah

‘Security situation has improved in three States’

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has considerably reduced the “disturbed areas” under the Armed Forces (Special) Powers Act (AFSPA) in Assam, Manipur and Nagaland, Home Minister Amit Shah announced on Thursday.

The order, effective from April 1, would be applicable for six months.

“Reduction in areas under AFSPA is a result of the improved security situation



Nagass staging a protest seeking AFSPA repeal . ■ FILE PHOTO

and fast-tracked development... and several agreements to end insurgency by PM @narendramodi government,” Mr. Shah tweeted.

A Ministry official said, “areas under the AFSPA have been considerably re-

duced in these three States; it has not been completely removed.”

The Ministry constituted a committee on December 26 last to study if the AFSPA could be withdrawn from some areas in Nagaland af-

ter outrage against a botched Army ambush that led to the killing of 13 civilians at Oting in Mon district on December 4.

In the State, the AFSPA was being removed from the jurisdiction of 15 police stations in seven districts but would remain active in 57 police stations in 13 districts. The decision was taken based on the committee’s recommendation.

In Assam, the AFSPA was being removed completely from 23 districts and one district would be covered partially under it.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

Areas under AFSPA regime reduced: Shah

In Manipur, 15 police station areas in six districts of Manipur would be excluded from the disturbed area notification but the law would remain effective in 82 police stations in 16 districts..

In Arunachal Pradesh, the status quo remained—the AFSPA would remain in force in two police stations of Namsai and Mahadevpur and three districts of Tirap, Changlang, Langding.

Detailed discussion

On March 7, Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla wrote to the Chief Secretaries of Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam and Manipur seeking their views on the need to continue the disturbed areas declaration in the wake of the improved security situation.

Mr. Shah held a detailed discussion with the Chief Ministers of Assam, Manipur and Nagaland earlier this month. Mr. Bhalla held a videoconference with the Chief Secretaries of Manipur and Assam on March 22 after which the proposal of reduction in the disturbed areas in the two States was approved by the Home Minister.

Welcoming the decision, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said, “With the partial withdra-

wal, all the lower [western], central and northern districts of Assam are now free from the AFSPA. The Army has already withdrawn its camps from various areas. Although the Army will not be deployed for counter-insurgency, it will be active in intelligence-gathering and other activities.”

The law first came into effect in 1958 to deal with the uprising in the Naga Hills, followed by the insurgency in Assam.

It gives unbridled power to the armed forces and the Central Armed Police Forces deployed in “disturbed areas” to kill anyone acting in contravention of law, arrest and search any premises without a warrant and protection from prosecution and legal suits without the Central government’s sanction.

Currently, the Union Home Ministry issues periodic “disturbed area” notification to extend the AFSPA only for Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh, where it is applicable in the districts of Tirap, Changlang, Longding and areas falling under Namsai and Mahadevpur police stations bordering Assam.

The notification for Manipur and Assam is issued by the State governments.

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