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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

26 - APRIL - 2022

FOREWORD

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

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

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

CONTENTS

- Editorials -The quarrel over Kuril Islands GSP 01 L
- News - No limits to Russia-China ties, says EU chief amid Ukraine war Part I GSP 02 C
- News - No limits to Russia-China ties, says EU chief amid Ukraine war Part II GSP 02 C
- Editorials -A docket full of unresolved constitutional cases GSP 02 E
- News - 16 YouTube channels blocked in India on Centre's orders GSP 02 E
- News - CJI mulls listing of pleas on removal of J&K special status Part I GSP 02 E
- News - CJI mulls listing of pleas on removal of J&K special status Part II GSP 02 E
- Editorials - Data, interrupted GSP 03 A
- Editorials -The goal of an energy-secure South Asia GSP 03 D
- Editorials -India 3rd highest military spender GSP 03 M
- News - Navy to review security scenario GSP 03 T

EXPLAINER

The quarrel over Kuril Islands

What are the different claims Russia and Japan assert over the disputed islands? Why has the issue resurfaced again?

UMA PURUSHOTHAMAN

The story so far: The Russian invasion of Ukraine seems to have brought to the forefront some other disputes that Russia has with the West's allies. On April 22, Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook for 2022 described the Kuril Islands (which Japan calls the Northern Territories and Russia as the South Kurils) as being under Russia's "illegal occupation". This is the first time in about two decades that Japan has used this phrase to describe the dispute over the Kuril Islands. Japan had been using softer language since 2003, saying that the dispute over the islands was the greatest concern in Russia-Japan bilateral ties.

What are the Kuril Islands/ Northern Territories?

These are a set of four islands situated between the Sea of Okhotsk and the Pacific Ocean near the north of Japan's northernmost prefecture, Hokkaido. Both Moscow and Tokyo claim sovereignty over them though the islands have been under Russian control since the end of World War II. The Soviet Union had seized the islands at the end of World War II and by 1949 had expelled its Japanese residents. Tokyo claims that the disputed islands have been part of Japan since the early 19th century.

What lies behind the dispute?

According to Tokyo, Japan's sovereignty over the islands is confirmed by several treaties like the Shimoda Treaty of 1855, the 1875 Treaty for the exchange of Sakhalin for the Kuril Islands (Treaty of St. Petersburg), and the Portsmouth Treaty of 1905 signed after the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 which Japan had won. Russia, on the other hand, claims the Yalta Agreement (1945) and the Potsdam Declaration (1945) as proof of its sovereignty and argues that the San Francisco Treaty of 1951 is legal evidence

that Japan had acknowledged Russian sovereignty over the islands. Under Article 2 of the treaty, Japan had "renounced all right, title and claim to the Kuril Islands."

Japan has probably been spurred by its fears of a Russia-China alliance as Japan itself has territorial disputes and an uneasy history with China

However, Japan argues that the San Francisco Treaty cannot be used here as the Soviet Union never signed the peace treaty. Japan also refuses to concede that the four disputed islands were in fact part of the Kuril chain. In fact, Japan and Russia are technically still at war because they have not signed a peace treaty after World War II. In 1956, during Japanese Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama's visit to the Soviet Union, it was suggested that two of the four islands would be returned to Japan once a peace treaty was signed. However, persisting differences prevented the signing of a peace treaty though the two countries signed the Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration, which restored diplomatic relations between the two nations. The Soviet Union later hardened its position, even refusing to recognise that a territorial dispute existed with Japan. It was only in 1991 during Mikhail Gorbachev's visit to Japan that the USSR recognised that the islands were the subject of a territorial dispute.

Have there been attempts at resolution?

Since 1991, there have been many attempts to resolve the dispute and sign a peace treaty. The most recent attempt was under Prime Minister Shinzo Abe when joint economic development of the disputed islands was explored. In fact, both countries had agreed to have bilateral negotiations based on the 1956 Japan-Soviet Joint

Declaration. Russia was even willing to give back two islands, the Shikotan Island and the Habomai islets, to Japan after the conclusion of a peace treaty as per the 1956 declaration. Japan's attempt to improve ties with Russia was driven by its need to diversify its basket of buyers and bring in foreign investments. But nationalist sentiments on both sides prevented resolution of the dispute.

What next?

Soon after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Japan made its unhappiness with Russia clear with its Foreign Minister Hideki Uyama, saying that Russia had "occupied" the southern part of the Kuril Islands, thereby violating international law.

Japan has been among the most steadfast of Western allies in denouncing Russian aggression and punishing it with sanctions. The April 22 statement in its Diplomatic Bluebook will further damage relations between the two countries. Japan has probably been spurred by its fears of a Russia-China alliance as Japan itself has territorial disputes and an uneasy history with China.

Secondly, Japan might have felt that this is a good opportunity to further isolate Russia and paint it as a "habitual offender" of international law.

Finally, Tokyo might have been prompted to take this position as it feels that the invasion of Ukraine proves that getting back the Kuril Islands is a lost cause.

Japan's policy shift on the Kuril Islands will only embitter bilateral relations with Russia while advancing the possibility of its two neighbours, China and Russia, coming together against it.

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The Kuril Islands kerfuffle between Russia and Japan

Post Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Japan has elevated its claim over the Kuril Islands which is currently under the control of Russia. On April 22, Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook for 2022 described the Kuril Islands as being under Russia's "illegal occupation."



HISTORY OF THE KURIL DISPUTE

- **1855:** The **Treaty of Shimoda** gives southern Kurils to Japan and rest of the island chain to Russia. Sakhalin Island to be under joint administration
- **1875:** The **Treaty of St. Petersburg** cedes all Kurils to Japan in exchange for Russian jurisdiction over Sakhalin
- **1905:** After Russia's defeat in the **Russo-Japanese War**, Japan gains control of southern Sakhalin
- **1945:** The Soviet Union occupies the entire Kuril chain and southern Sakhalin after declaring war on Japan during the final days of **World War II**
- **1951:** Japan renounces claim to Kurils in the **Treaty of San Francisco**, signed between Japan and the Allied powers. The Soviet Union does not sign, and Japan later claims that the four southern islands are not part of the Kuril chain
- **1956:** The **Soviet-Japanese Joint Declaration** restores diplomatic ties between the two countries. The Soviet Union agrees to cede islands of Shikotan and Habomai to Japan after signing of formal peace treaty. Japan claims territorial rights to all four southern islands, so no agreement is signed

Sources: Stratfor, wire agencies

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THE GIST

■ A set of four islands situated between the Sea of Okhotsk and the Pacific Ocean near the north of Japan's northernmost prefecture, Hokkaido are under dispute as both Moscow and Tokyo claim sovereignty over them. But they have been under Russian control since the end of World War II.

■ In 1956, it was suggested that two of the four islands be returned to Japan once a peace treaty was signed. However, persisting differences prevented the signing of a peace treaty though the two countries signed the Japan-Soviet Joint Declaration, which restored diplomatic relations.

■ Soon after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Japan's Foreign Minister stated that Russia had "occupied" the southern part of the Kuril Islands, thereby violating international law. Additionally, Japan's recent Diplomatic Bluebook for 2022 described the Kuril Islands as being under Russia's "illegal occupation".

No limits to Russia-China ties, says EU chief amid Ukraine war

Ursula von der Leyen seeks 'diplomatic solution' to Ukraine crisis

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

The friendship between Russia and China has “no limits”, President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen said here on Monday.

Addressing the inaugural session at the annual Raisina Dialogue, which was attended by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, she condemned the Russian aggression in Ukraine but also supported the need to find a “diplomatic solution” to the crisis.

“They (Russia and China) have declared that the friendship between them



Common concerns: PM Narendra Modi with European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in Delhi. ■PTI

has ‘no limits’; that there are ‘no forbidden areas of cooperation; this was in February this year. And then, the invasion of Ukraine followed.

What can we expect from the ‘new international relations’ that both have called for,” asked Ms. von der Leyen, who described the

current relation between Russia and China as an “un-restrained pact”.

The top diplomat of the European Commission recollected her recent visit to Ukraine, where she witnessed the ravages of the conflict and expressed Europe’s collective determination to ensure “strategic failure” of Russia in Ukraine. She clarified that imposing sanctions on Russia is not a “standalone solution”.

Ms. von der Leyen highlighted the common links such as democracy and the rule of law that bound European states and India.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 10

No limits to Russia-China ties, says EU chief

“They [sanctions] are embedded in a broader strategy that has diplomatic and security elements. And this is why we have designed the sanctions in a way to sustain them over a longer period of time. Because this gives us leverage to achieve a diplomatic solution that will bring lasting peace,” she said.

Indicating Russia’s strong ties with China, Ms. von der Leyen argued that the violence in Ukraine is generating ripples in the Indo-Pacific region. “China is a negotiating partner, an economic competitor and a systemic rival. We will continue to cooperate on tackling common challenges, and we will protect our essential in-

terests and promote our values,” said Ms. von der Leyen who earlier in the day met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and held a discussion with External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar. The visiting top official of the European Commission paid tributes to the democratic tradition of India and said that the “world watches with admiration” whenever India holds the general elections every five years.

The top representative of the European Commission said both India and the European Union share common interests in maintaining “safe trading routes, in seamless supply chains, and in a free and open Indo-Pacific.”



FROM THE ARCHIVES

A docket full of unresolved constitutional cases

These involve crucial questions about state power, accountability and impunity, and cannot be left hanging by the courts

THE GIST

GAUTAM BHATIA

■ A Constitution is entirely ineffective if a rights-violating status quo is allowed to exist and perpetuate for months, or even years, before it is finally resolved.

■ Some of such cases include the constitutional challenge to the Presidential Orders of August 5, 2019, that effectively diluted Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, and bifurcated the State of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories and the electoral bond scheme.

■ Judicial evasion of this kind is damaging for the accountability of the judiciary itself. The responsibility for constituting benches and scheduling cases especially cases that are due to be heard by larger Benches rests solely with the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

N.V. Ramana, the Chief Justice of India, stated that he would discuss with other judges and consider listing, after summer vacations, the petitions challenging the abrogation of Article 370 which stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its special status. In this article dated December 7, 2021, Gautam Bhatia outlines how the Court has left a host of highly significant constitutional cases long-pending and why hearing them is important for the accountability of the judiciary.

During the framing of the Indian Constitution, it was proposed that any petition alleging a breach of fundamental rights by the state ought to be judicially decided within one month. While the proposal did not, ultimately, find its way into the text of the Constitution, it nonetheless articulated something of great importance: between the individual and the state, there exists a substantial asymmetry of power. While the violation of rights – whether through executive or legislative action – is relatively costless for the state, it is the individual, or individuals, who pay the price, and who must then run from pillar to post to vindicate their constitutionally guaranteed rights. Consequently, a Constitution is entirely ineffective if a rights-violating status quo is allowed to exist and perpetuate for months, or even years, before it is finally resolved (and often, by the time resolution comes, it is too late in the day for it to have any practical significance).

Blow to accountability

This point, of course, is not limited to the violation of rights, but extends to all significant constitutional questions that arise in the course of controversial state action. Issues around the federal structure, elections, and many others, all involve questions of power and accountability, and the longer that courts take to resolve such cases, the more we move from a realm of accountability to a realm of impunity.

In this context, as 2021 draws to a close, a look at the Supreme Court of India's docket reveals a host of highly significant constitutional cases that were long-pending when the year began, and are now simply a year older without any sign of resolution around the corner. All these cases involve crucial questions about state power, accountability, and impunity. Consequently, the longer they are left hanging without a decision, the greater the damage that is inflicted upon our constitutional democracy's commitment to the rule of law.

Kashmir, electoral bonds

What are some of these cases? First, there is the constitutional challenge to the Presidential Orders of August 5, 2019, that effectively diluted Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, and bifurcated the State of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories, controlled by the Centre. There is a widespread tendency to view the Kashmir

question as having been “settled” after the events of August 5, 2019, with it now being a political impossibility to return to the pre-2019 status quo.

Regrettably, this tendency seems to have gripped the Court as well in how assiduously it has avoided hearing and deciding the case. But politics aside, the case raises certain fundamental questions about constitutional power and accountability.

First, it raises the question of whether the Centre can take advantage of an Article 356 situation in a State – a time when no elected government and Assembly is in existence – to make permanent and irreversible alterations in the very structure of the State itself. The answer will have important ramifications not just for Jammu and Kashmir but for the entire federal structure: India has a long history of the abuse of Article 356 to “get rid of” inconvenient State governments, and a further expansion of the power already enjoyed by the Centre will skew an already tilted federal scheme even further.

Second, the case also raises the question of whether, under the Constitution, the Union Legislature has the authority not simply to alter State boundaries (a power granted to it by Article 3 of the Constitution), but degrade a State into a Union Territory (something that has never been done before August 5, 2019). If it turned out that the Union Legislature does have this power, it would essentially mean that India's federal structure is entirely at the mercy of Parliament: Parliament could then, constitutionally, convert India from a union of States to a union of Union Territories, if it so wanted. Needless to say, this – as well – would signal a hugely significant shift in power to the Centre.

As long as both these questions remain undecided, however, the acts of August 5, 2019 remain presumptively legal, with the prospect that they may well be repeated in other parts of India. For this reason, the Supreme Court's now two-and-a-half-year delay in hearing and answering these questions is unconscionable.

Another long-pending case is the constitutional challenge to the electoral bonds scheme, that has now crossed four years. The electoral bonds scheme authorises limitless, anonymous corporate donations to political parties, making election funding both entirely opaque to the people, as well as being structurally biased towards the party that is in power at the Centre. In numerous central and State election cycles in the last four years, thousands of crores of rupees have been spent in anonymous political donations, thus impacting not only the integrity of the election process but also the constitutional right of citizens to an informed vote. However, other than two interim orders, the Supreme Court has refused to accord a full hearing to the constitutional challenge. In a few months' time, it will be one full five-year cycle of central and State elections, with the case still awaiting a hearing: another black mark on the Court's record.

It is important to note that in both these cases, the Supreme Court's inaction is not neutral, but rather, favours the beneficiaries of the status quo. In other words, by not deciding, the Court is in effect deciding – in favour of one party – but without a reasoned judgment that justifies its stance.

Other key cases

This is also true for a number of other cases pending before the Court. For example, as far back as 2013, the Gauhati High Court held that the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) was not established under any statutory authority. This verdict was immediately stayed when it was appealed to the Supreme Court, but in the intervening years, it has never been heard. Thus, the CBI continues to function – often controversially – despite a judgment by a constitutional court that has found its very existence to be illegal.

More recently, constitutional challenges to the Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), filed in the immediate aftermath of the legislation's enactment, remain unheard, as do the challenges to the much-criticised Section 43(D)(5) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, which makes the grant of bail effectively impossible, and is responsible for the years-long incarceration of several people. The challenge to Section 43(D)(5) is perhaps the case that most directly affects civil rights, as the section continues to be applied on a regular basis (most notoriously, in recent times, the Bhima Koregaon case). And cases of this kind are legion.

It wounds the judiciary

Apart from benefiting the party that profits from the status quo – which, as we have seen, is invariably the state – judicial evasion of this kind is also damaging for the accountability of the judiciary itself. Once a court decides a case, its reasoning – which must, by definition be public – can be publicly scrutinised and, if need be, critiqued. In the absence of a decision, however, while the Court's inaction plays a significant role on the ground as does its action, there is no judgment – and no reasoning – that the public can engage with. For obvious reasons, this too has a serious impact on the rule of law.

It must be acknowledged that the responsibility for constituting benches and scheduling cases especially cases that are due to be heard by larger Benches rests solely with the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

While the three previous CJIs have been criticised for excessive deference to the executive, the current CJI has been on record stressing the importance of the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary. One way of demonstrating that in action might be to hear – and decide – the important constitutional cases pending before the Court.

Gautam Bhatia is a Delhi-based lawyer

16 YouTube channels blocked in India on Centre's orders

They are accused of spreading false, unverified information

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry has got 16 YouTube news channels, six of them from Pakistan, blocked on charges of spreading false and unverified information to create panic, incite communal disharmony and disturb public order in the country.

The action has been taken using emergency powers under the IT Rules. These channels had a cumulative

viewership of over 68 crore. A Facebook account has also been blocked.

“It was observed that these channels were used to spread fake news over social media on matters related to national security, India's foreign relations, communal harmony in the country, and public order. None of the digital news publishers had furnished information to the Ministry as required under Rule 18 of the IT Rules, 2021,” the Ministry said.

As alleged, the content published by some of the India-based YouTube channels referred to a community as terrorists, and incited hatred among the members of various religious communities.

The Ministry said, “Examples include false claims related to announcement of a pan-India lockdown due to COVID-19, thereby threatening the migrant workers, and fabricated claims alleging threats to certain religious communities, etc.”

CJI mulls listing of pleas on removal of J&K special status

‘This is a five-judge Bench case... Let me ask other judges’

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana on Monday said he would discuss with other judges and consider listing, after summer vacations, the petitions challenging the abrogation of special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370, which stripped the people of their special privileges.

“Let me see after the vacations... This is a five-judge Bench case... Let me also ask other judges,” the CJI said, addressing a group of senior advocates, including P. Chidambaram, Kapil Sibal and Shekhar Naphade.

Summer holidays begin from May 23 and the court



National Conference members at a recent protest in Jammu over the removal of special status of J&K. ■PTI

reopens on July 11. Chief Justice Ramana retires on August 26.

The senior advocates, in an oral mentioning before the CJI, said the Article 370

case had been pending in the Supreme Court for more than two years even as a separate challenge has been filed against the Centre’s decision to appoint a Delimitation Commission to redraw Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir.

“Let the case be listed immediately after the vacations,” Mr. Chidambaram urged the court.

The case has not come up after a five-judge Bench led by Justice Ramana (as he was then), in an order in March 2020, refused to refer the petitions to a larger Bench.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 10

CJI mulls listing of pleas on J&K special status

Since then, one of the judges on that Bench, Justice R. Subhash Reddy, has retired.

The petitions have challenged the Presidential Order of August 5, 2019 which blunted Article 370. The Article had accorded special rights and privileges to the people of Jammu and Kashmir since 1954 in accordance with the Instrument of Accession.

The various petitions, including ones by advocate M.L. Sharma and the National Conference (NC) party, have challenged the Centre's "unilateral" move to impose curfew and unravel the unique federal structure of India by dividing J&K "without taking consent from the people".

A separate petition by detained politician Shah Faesal and Shehla Rashid Shora, among others, have contended that the August 5 Order and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act of 2019 were arbitrary. They had also challenged the proclamation of President's Rule in the State in December 2018. The petitions said what happened to Jammu and Kashmir "goes to the heart of Indian federalism".

"National integration is best served by a pluralistic federal model. Under this model, one size need not always fit all," the petition filed by the NC said.

The petitions said the Presidential Order of August 5 substituted the concurrence of the Governor of the State government to change the very character of a federal unit. They said the Presidential Order took cover of a temporary situation, meant to hold the field until the return of the elected government, to accomplish a fundamental, permanent and irreversible alteration of the status of J&K without the concurrence, consultation or recommendation of the people of that State, acting through their elected representatives.

The government has countered that the Presidential Order of August 5 has become 'fait accompli'.

The government urged the court to not entertain any "separatist" arguments during the hearing of petitions challenging the August 5 order and the subsequent reorganisation of the State of J&K into two Union Territories.

Data, interrupted

Reviving the official household spending survey is only a first step

India's official statistical machinery is gearing up to relaunch the All-India Household Consumer Expenditure Survey, traditionally undertaken quinquennially, from July 2022. If it fructifies, the result may be known towards the latter half of 2024, provided the Government permits the release. The last such Survey (2017-18), did not get such a sanction – its results reportedly indicated the first fall in monthly per-capita spending by households since 1972-73, with rural households facing a sharper decline compared to 2011-12. The Statistics Ministry had flagged 'discrepancies', 'data quality issues' and 'divergences' between estimated consumption levels and the actual output of goods and services. While it had sought to scuttle suggestions that unflattering data were being obfuscated, a better course of action would have been to release the data with caveats. It could have argued, for instance, that the numbers, at best, reflect the short-term impact of the 'bold structural reforms' carried out in the year preceding the Survey, to 'formalise' the economy – demonetisation and the GST. A fresh survey could then have been commissioned later for a clearer picture. This is what the UPA had done in 2011-12 to measure employment and consumer spending levels afresh, after the 2009-10 Surveys were affected by the global financial crisis and a severe drought that hit rural incomes.

The Government had promised to examine the 'feasibility' of a fresh Consumer Spending Survey, over 2020-21 and 2021-22, after 'incorporating all data quality refinements' mooted by a panel. One hopes the exact 'refinements' are spelt out upfront in the upcoming Survey. Of equal import is providing data comparable with past numbers, while factoring in changes in consumption patterns; and it may still not be too late to release the previous Survey's findings to help assess longer term trends. The absence of official data on such a critical aspect of the economy – used to estimate poverty levels, rebase GDP, and to make private investment decisions – for over a decade, is damaging to India. Being a free-market and transparent democracy distinguished India from the likes of China where official data are read with a pinch of salt. The Government's actions, including the delayed release of critical jobs data, have dulled that perception. If anything, such Surveys need to be conducted more frequently for more effective policy actions informed by ground realities, no matter how unpleasant they may be. Now, imperfect proxies are deployed to gauge the economy, surmises made about the extinction of extreme poverty, and outlays are tom-tommed without evidence on outcomes. The NSO must be empowered to collect and disseminate more data points, without fear of insinuations about its abilities, or a looming axe on its regular Surveys.

The goal of an energy-secure South Asia

While universal coverage can catalyse the region's economic growth, energy trade must be linked to peace building



SYED MUNIR KHASRU

South Asia has almost a fourth of the global population living on 5% of the world's land-mass. Electricity generation in South Asia has risen exponentially, from 340 terawatt hours (TWh) in 1990 to 1,500 TWh in 2015. Bangladesh has achieved 100% electrification recently while Bhutan, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka accomplished this in 2019. For India and Afghanistan, the figures are 94.4% and 97.7%, respectively, while for Pakistan it is 73.91%. Bhutan has the cheapest electricity price in South Asia (U.S.\$0.036 per kilowatt hour, or kWh) while India has the highest (U.S.\$0.08 per kWh.) The Bangladesh government has significantly revamped power production resulting in power demands from 4,942 kWh in 2009 to 25,514 MW as of 2022. India is trying to make a transition to renewable energy to provide for 40% of total consumption, while Pakistan is still struggling to reduce power shortage negatively impacting its economy.

The electricity policies of South Asian countries aim at providing electricity to every household. The objective is to supply reliable and quality electricity in an efficient manner, at reasonable rates and to protect consumer interests. The issues these address include generation, transmission, distribution, rural electrification, research and development, environmental issues, energy conservation and human resource training.

Geographical differences between these countries call for a different approach depending on resources. While India relies heavily

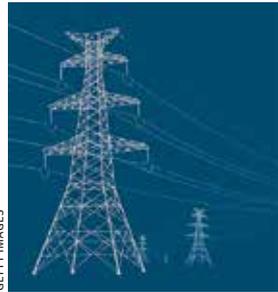
on coal, accounting for nearly 55% of its electricity production, 99.9% of Nepal's energy comes from hydropower, 75% of Bangladesh's power production relies on natural gas, and Sri Lanka leans on oil, spending as much as 6% of its GDP on importing oil.

Electrification, growth, SDGs

Given that a 0.46% increase in energy consumption leads to a 1% increase in GDP per capita, electrification not only helps in improving lifestyle but also adds to the aggregate economy by improving the nation's GDP. For middle-income countries, the generation of power plays an essential role in the economic growth of the country. More electricity leads to increased investment and economic activities within and outside the country, which is a more feasible option as opposed to other forms of investments such as foreign direct investment.

The South Asian nations have greatly benefited from widening electricity coverage across industries and households. For example, 50.3% of Bangladesh's GDP comes from industrial and agricultural sectors which cannot function efficiently without electricity. Nepal's GDP growth of an average of 7.3% since the earthquake in 2015 is due to rapid urbanisation aided by increased consumption of electricity. On the other hand, Pakistan suffered a drop in industrialisation of textiles by 9.22%, wiping off U.S.\$12.4 billion from the industry in 2014 due to power shortages. India leads South Asia in adapting to renewable power, with its annual demand for power increasing by 6%.

Solar power-driven electrification in rural Bangladesh is a huge step towards Sustainable Development Goal 7 (which is "Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all") by 2030 and engaging more than 1,00,000 female solar entre-



GETTY IMAGES

preneurs in Sustainable Development Goal 5 (which is "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls"). India's pledge to move 40% of total energy produced to renewable energy is also a big step. Access to electricity improves infrastructure i.e., SDG 9 (which is "build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation"). Energy access helps online education through affordable Internet (SDG 4, or "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"), more people are employed (SDG 1: "no poverty"), and are able to access tech-based health solutions (SDG 3, or "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages").

Green growth, green energy

South Asian leaders are increasingly focused on efficient, innovative and advanced methods of energy production for 100% electrification. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his 'net zero by 2070' pledge at COP26 in Glasgow asserted India's target to increase the capacity of renewable energy from 450GW to 500GW by 2030. South Asia has vast renewable energy resources – hydropower, solar, wind, geothermal and biomass – which can be harnessed for domestic use as well as regional power trade. The first-ever Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) bene-

fits such as poverty reduction, energy efficiency and improved quality of life were realised when there was India-Bhutan hydro trade in 2010.

The region is moving towards green growth and energy as India hosts the International Solar Alliance. In Bangladesh, rural places that are unreachable with traditional grid-based electricity have 45% of their power needs met through a rooftop solar panel programme which is emulated in other parts of the world. This is an important step in achieving Bangladesh's nationally determined contributions target of 10% renewable energy of total power production.

Regional energy trade

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) prepared the regional energy cooperation framework in 2014, but its implementation is questionable. However, there are a number of bilateral and multilateral energy trade agreements such as the India-Nepal petroleum pipeline deal, the India-Bhutan hydroelectric joint venture, the Myanmar-Bangladesh-India gas pipeline, the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) sub-regional framework for energy cooperation, and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, rumoured to be extended to Bangladesh.

'South Asia's regional geopolitics is determined by the conflation of identity, politics, and international borders. Transnational energy projects would thus engage with multiple social and ideational issues' which is a major limitation for peaceful energy trade. If energy trade is linked and perceived through the lens of conflict resolution and peace building, then a regional security approach with a broader group of stakeholders could help smoothen the energy trade process. The current partici-

pation in cross-border projects has been restricted to respective tasks, among Bhutan and India or Nepal and India. It is only now that power-sharing projects among the three nations, Nepal, India, and Bangladesh, have been deemed conceivable.

India exports 1,200MW of electricity to Bangladesh, sufficient for almost 25% of the daily energy demand, with a significant amount from the Kokrajhar power plant in Assam worth U.S.\$470 million. Bhutan exports 70% of its own hydropowered electricity to India worth almost U.S.\$100 million. Nepal on the other hand, not only sells its surplus hydroelectricity to India but also exported fossil fuel to India worth U.S.\$1.2 billion.

What is needed

South Asia is reinforcing its transmission and distribution frameworks to cater to growing energy demand not only through the expansion of power grids but also by boosting green energy such as solar power or hydroelectricity. Going forward, resilient energy frameworks are what are needed such as better building-design practices, climate-proof infrastructure, a flexible monetary framework, and an integrated resource plan that supports renewable energy innovation. Government alone cannot be the provider of reliable and secure energy frameworks, and private sector investment is crucial. In 2022, private financing accounted for 44% of household power in Bangladesh, 48.5% in India, and 53% in Pakistan. Public-private partnership can be a harbinger in meeting the energy transition challenges for the world's most populous region.

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India 3rd highest military spender

Nation's spending rose to \$76.6 billion

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

World military spending continued to grow in 2021, reaching a record \$2.1 trillion despite the economic fallout of the pandemic, according to new data on global military spending published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). The five largest spenders in 2021 were the U.S., China, India, the U.K. and Russia, together accounting for 62% of expenditure. The U.S. and China alone accounted for 52%.

“India’s military spending of \$76.6 billion ranked third highest in the world. This was up by 0.9% from 2020 and by 33% from 2012. Amid ongoing tensions and border disputes with China and Pakistan that occasionally spill over into armed clashes, India has prioritised the modernisation of its armed forces and self-reliance in arms production,” the report said.

Stating that military spending in Asia and Oceania totalled \$586 billion in 2021, the report noted that spending in the region was 3.5% higher than in 2020, continuing an uninterrupted upward trend dating back to at least 1989. “The increase in 2021 was primarily due to growth in Chinese and Indian military spending. Together, the two countries accounted for



Despite COVID, the world's military spending reached a record \$2.1 trillion in 2021.

63% of total military expenditure in the region in 2021,” it observed.

“Even amid the economic fallout of the COVID-19, world military spending hit record levels,” the report said quoting Diego Lopes da Silva, Senior Researcher with SIPRI’s Military Expenditure and Arms Production (MEAP) programme.

Russia increased its military expenditure by 2.9% in 2021, to \$65.9 billion, at a time when “it was building up its forces along the Ukrainian border,” the report pointed out.

On Ukraine, the report remarked that as it had strengthened its defences against Russia, its military spending “has risen by 72% since the annexation of Crimea in 2014”.

Spending fell in 2021, to \$5.9 billion, but still accounted for 3.2% of the country’s GDP, it added.

Navy to review security scenario

All Operational and Area Commanders are participating in a four-day conference

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The first edition of the biannual Naval Commanders Conference began on Monday where the top brass will dwell upon dynamics of the “geostrategic situation in the backdrop of security scenario in the neighbourhood as well as changes emerging due to ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict”.

All Operational and Area Commanders of the Navy are participating in the four-day conference to review major operational, material, logistics, human resource development, training and administrative activities.

“The Conference will focus on addressing the contemporary security paradigms while seeking ways to enhance combat capability of the Navy and make operations more effective and efficient. A detailed review of the performance of weapons and sensors, readiness of Naval platforms, ongoing Naval projects – with focus on ways to enhance indigenisation through ‘Make in India’ – will be undertaken by the



Charting a course: The meeting will seek ways to enhance the combat capability of the Navy. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Commanders,” Navy Spokesperson Cdr. Vivek Madhwal said in a statement. The Conference would also dwell upon dynamics of the geostrategic situation of the region against the backdrop of recent international developments.

The chiefs of the Army and the Air Force will also interact with the Naval Commanders and will also discuss avenues of augmenting tri-service synergy and readiness, the Navy said. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will address the conference and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar is also expected

to address and interact with the Naval Commanders.

Weapon trials

Officials said that the Navy recently carried out weapon engagement and missile firing drills on the western seaboard. The multiple ordnance on target missions included participation of 15 warships and submarines and a large number of maritime patrol aircraft, integral helicopters, fighter aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles, an official said.

The missile firings undertaken in mid-April were focused on validating combat

worthiness of various weapon systems deployed on the frontline units, which included the Veer Class, Talwar Class and Brahmaputra Class warships carrying out anti-air engagements against high-speed sea-skimming air targets in tactical scenarios.

In another engagement, the Brahmaputra class ship sank a decommissioned naval warship. An underwater launched missile successfully hit its target at maximum range, proving the lethality and versatility of the Indian submarines, the official said.

The Navy is closely monitoring the war in Ukraine, given its dependence for spares and supplies on Russia and Ukraine. The Navy’s operational tasking and engagements have gone up significantly in the past few years in tune with the global focus on the Indo-Pacific. During the pandemic in the past two years, Indian Navy ships have undertaken multiple COVID-related outreach missions to provide food and medical aid to littoral nations in the Indian Ocean Region and beyond.

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.