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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

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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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Myanmar's woes

Silencing Ms. Suu Kyi will not help the junta tighten its control over a rebellious country

The conviction of Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's deposed State Counsellor and pro-democracy leader, in a corruption case, shows nothing but the desperation of the junta to silence her. For the military, which seems determined to destroy the Southeast Asian nation's popular democracy, Ms. Suu Kyi, under house arrest ever since the February 2021 coup, remains the enemy number one. The conviction, in a kangaroo court, was based on the testimony of the former Chief Minister of Yangon who claimed that he had handed over to her \$6,00,000 and gold in return for favours. The prosecution has presented no evidence. She was convicted earlier on five other charges and sentenced to six years in jail. In the corruption case, the court jailed her for five years. The junta has slapped more cases on her, with the clear objective of keeping the 76-year-old leader in prison. Since the coup, it has arrested 10,300 political prisoners, including most of the elected lawmakers of Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy. The forces have also killed at least 1,798 civilians and threatened to "annihilate" all opponents.

Myanmar's military is one of the most stubborn enemies of democracy and basic human freedoms, having ruled for nearly 50 years using brute force. But even in the darkest moments of Myanmar's past, there was popular resistance. And over the past three decades, Ms. Kyi has been the embodiment of that resistance. Between 1989 and 2010, she spent 15 years under house arrest. The military, faced with international isolation and growing domestic anger, agreed to release her and share power with civilians through a quasi-democratic arrangement. They barred her from becoming President and reserved key portfolios, including the Defence Ministry, for the Generals. Still, the 2015 and 2020 elections saw overwhelming public support for her party, and the country witnessed, barring the military crackdown on Rohingya Muslims, relative stability and growing economic opportunities. But the military was worried whether an increasingly popular and powerful Ms. Suu Kyi, after her second consecutive election, would clip its privileges. It was this fear that prompted the Generals to stage another coup. They may have succeeded in reversing Myanmar's limited experiment with democracy, but the coup has also wreaked havoc on the country. The Opposition has taken up arms, pushing the country to the brink of civil war. A nationwide strike has crippled the country's economy. The political opponents of the coup have also formed an alternative unity government. So far, the military has managed to cling on to power through sheer repression. But it is not a sustainable model. Even silencing Ms. Suu Kyi would not help the junta tighten its control over a divided, impoverished, and rebellious country.

India, Bangladesh discuss high-level visits

The two sides highlight trade, commerce and connectivity, affected by different restrictions

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday held talks with his counterpart, A.K. Abdul Momen, in Bangladesh and called on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Dhaka is the first stop in a two-nation neighbourhood visit undertaken by Dr. Jaishankar, along with top Indian diplomats including the Foreign Secretary-designate Vinay Mohan Kwatra. Both the countries have been affected by high energy prices following the crisis in Ukraine and have voted cautiously on various UN platforms vis-a-vis the same.

“[Held] Positive discussions with Bangladesh FM Dr. A.K. Abdul Momen.



Neighbourhood visit: S. Jaishankar with Sheikh Hasina during a meeting in Dhaka, on Thursday. •PTI

Agreed that our close neighbourly partnership is progressing steadily. Our shared endeavour would be to take

it forward... Looking forward to hosting him for the Joint Consultative Commission,” Dr. Jaishankar said af-

ter a round of conversations with his counterpart Dr. Momen.

Dr. Jaishankar conveyed a personal message from PM Modi to Sheikh Hasina. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) of Bangladesh in a statement said that during the talks, the two sides had “emphasised on promoting trade, commerce and connectivity especially in the light of supply chain disruption resulting from COVID-19 restrictions and recent conflict in Ukraine”.

Lifting sanctions

The visit hit media headlines in Dhaka after Mr. Momen informed that he had urged the Indian side to help in lifting the U.S. sanctions im-

posed on the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), which in the past was accused of extrajudicial killings.

The Official Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs Arindam Bagchi declined to get into the details of the alleged exchange involving the sanctions on the RAB with the U.S., saying India may not go public about this if it involved a third country [the United States].

The visit comes months after President Ram Nath Kovind was hosted in Dhaka during the Vijay Divas celebrations last December. It is understood that Ms. Hasina is likely to visit India before the end of summer. Mr. Jaishankar is scheduled to leave for Bhutan on Friday.

Xi's 'Global Security Initiative' looks to counter Quad grouping

This is to 'oppose unilateralism, and say 'no' to group politics'

ANANTH KRISHNAN
HONG KONG

A new Global Security Initiative put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping will look to counter the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quad – the India, U.S., Australia, Japan grouping – according to Chinese officials.

Mr. Xi last week first proposed what he called a Global Security Initiative, speaking at the Boao Forum in China, warning against “hegemonism, power politics and bloc confrontation”.

“China would like to propose a Global Security Initiative, that is, to stay committed to the vision of common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security,” he said, which would “oppose unilateralism, and say no to group politics and bloc confrontation.”

Specifically, he said this would “oppose the wanton use of unilateral sanctions and long-arm jurisdiction”, appearing to refer to Western sanctions.

Further fleshing out what this Global Security Initiative would entail, China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi earlier this week penned an



Xi Jinping

article in the official *People's Daily* outlining key principles of the idea.

He said “some countries” were “eager to engage in exclusive ‘small circles’ and ‘small groups’”, terms Chinese officials have used previously to describe the Quad as well as the AUKUS (Australia-U.K.-U.S.) security pact.

In the article, Mr. Wang said China's proposed security initiative would “oppose” what he called “the destruction of the international order under the banner of so-called ‘rules’ and the dragging of the world under the cloud of the ‘new cold war’”, and would “build an Asian security model of mutual

respect, openness and integration”.

“We firmly oppose the use of the ‘Indo-Pacific’ strategy to divide the region and create a ‘new Cold War’, and the use of military alliances to put together an ‘Asian version of NATO’,” he said.

Mr. Wang had also taken aim at the Quad last month, suggesting during the annual National People's Congress in Beijing that the grouping was equivalent to the “Five Eyes” intelligence alliance involving the Australia, New Zealand, Canada, the U.S. and U.K. and the AUKUS pact, as a key element in what he called U.S. plans to build an “Asian NATO”

The members of the Quad have rejected the notion that it is an Asian NATO or a military alliance, and pointed to its broad-based cooperation, including on vaccines and technology. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said in February “there are interested parties who advance that kind of analogy”. “I would urge you not to slip into that lazy analogy of an Asian-NATO,” he said, pointing out India was not a treaty ally of the U.S.

Biden proposes \$33-bn aid for Ukraine

He wants assets linked to Russian oligarchs in the U.S. seized, proceeds directed towards helping Kyiv

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN
WASHINGTON

In a step to redirect Russian wealth towards the rebuilding of Ukraine, some of whose cities have been decimated by sustained battering from invading Russian forces since the end of February, U.S. President Joe Biden announced he would propose that U.S.-based assets of Russian oligarchs be seized and directed towards Ukraine. Mr. Biden's proposal was announced as part of a larger announcement that he was asking the U.S. Congress to approve an additional \$33 billion dollars in security, humanitarian and economic assistance for Ukraine.

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Strong support: President Joe Biden speaking about the Ukraine war in the White House on Thursday ■ AP

that U.S.-based assets of Russian oligarchs be seized and directed towards Ukraine. Mr. Biden's proposal was announced as part of a larger announcement that he was asking the U.S. Congress to approve an additional \$33 billion dollars in security, humanitarian and economic assistance for Ukraine.

"We're going to seize their yachts or luxury homes and the other ill begotten gains of

Putin's kleptocracy," Mr. Biden said, as he delivered remarks at the White House on Thursday morning.

The President's proposal involves the seizure of U.S.-based assets of sanctioned Russians, connected to a specific activity deemed unlawful. The process, which will involve the U.S. Treasury, State and Justice Departments, will also seek powers to expand the list of assets

potentially available for forfeiture to include property that is used to assist in the evasion of sanctions. Current U.S. law only permits the forfeiture of proceeds from sanction violations not assets used to facilitate this process.

The proposal would also allow seized assets to be deployed towards helping Ukraine. "It's going to ensure that when the oligarchs' assets are sold off, funds can be used directly to remedy the harm Russia caused," Mr. Biden said.

The U.S. Treasury has already sanctioned and blocked Russians' aircraft and vessels worth over \$1 billion, as per a statement from the White House on Thursday.

European Union countries had reported freezing over \$30 billion in assets, including nearly \$7 billion in real estate, helicopters, boats and artwork, accord-

ing to the White House.

Asked last week about the U.S. using frozen assets of the Russian central bank to help rebuild Ukraine, U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen demurred, saying it would probably involve legislative changes. "I am unclear whether or not it would be possible without legislation authorising the use of those assets," Ms. Yellen had said, adding the U.S. would need to "carefully" assess the consequences before undertaking it.

"I wouldn't want to do so lightly and it's something that I think our coalition and partners would need to feel comfortable with and be supportive of," she had said.

Civil liberties groups had informed lawmakers earlier in April that a similar plan, floated in March, could have violated due-process rights granted by the U.S. Constitution since, the *Washington Post* reported.

India's position on sanctions hasn't changed a bit, says MEA

Ahead of PM's European tour, Ministry asserts India's independent policy

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

India's position on sanctions against Russia has not changed "one bit", the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday.

The Ministry made the assertion while speaking about the likelihood of renewed requests from European countries to join the sanctions during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's European tour next week.

In his first foreign visit in 2022, the Prime Minister will visit Germany and Denmark for the Nordic Summit and France from May 2 to 4. He will meet with leaders of at least seven European countries, the MEA said, and while "topical issues" like Ukraine would be discussed, the government expects to see more substantive bilateral subjects on the agenda for talks.

"We have a new Chancellor [Olaf Scholz] there... this

 While India is in touch with both Russia and Ukraine during this period and is ready to assist in any way required, the government hasn't received any particular requests from either side to carry a message or anything like that

ARINDAM BAGCHI MEA spokesperson



will be the first interaction with him," MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said at a briefing on Thursday, adding that the PM's attendance at the second Nordic Summit would give relations with Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden a more "structured format", and the visit to France will make Mr. Modi one of the earliest foreign visitors after President Emanuel Macron's re-election there.

Ahead of the PM's meetings in Berlin, the German Ambassador said that streng-

thening ties between democracies is important in times of "turmoil and crisis", without referring directly to the Ukraine conflict.

The MEA's comments come after a number of European countries have made it clear they intend to keep pushing for India to shift its position on the conflict and on its refusal to join the U.S. and EU's sanctions. In separate interviews to *The Hindu* this week, Foreign Ministers of Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal and Poland had all expressed the hope that New

Delhi would reconsider its refusal to criticise Russia, and even to use PM Modi's relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin to convince him to stop the war. In a sharp response on Wednesday, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said India cannot be a "pale imitation" of others nor does it need the "approval" of others.

To a question from *The Hindu* about whether India plans to play a mediatory role in the conflict during the briefing on Thursday, the spokesperson said that while India is in touch with Russia and Ukraine and is ready to assist in any way required, the government hasn't received "any particular requests from either side to carry a message or anything like that". Mr. Bagchi also said he would be "surprised" if Mr. Modi were to stop in Moscow on his way back from the three-nation tour.

Revisiting death penalty jurisprudence

The top court may have to look at the core question in 'Bachan Singh' – the constitutional validity of the death penalty



KALEESWARAM RAJ

On April 22, a Bench of the Supreme Court of India, led by Justice U.U. Lalit, decided to critically examine the routine and abrupt way in which trial judges often impose the death penalty on convicts. The challenge before the Court in the instant case of *Irfan vs State of Madhya Pradesh* was to identify the mitigating circumstances and to ensure a convict-centric approach so that the imposition of capital punishment becomes rarer, fairer, and principled.

The Court seemed to think that an individualistic approach that examines the social, economic, emotional, and genetic components that constituted the offender rather than the offence, would go a long way in evolving a just and judicious sentencing policy. According to the Court, "a 'one size fit for all' approach while considering mitigating factors during sentencing should end". The Bench indicated the need for mitigation experts to assist trial courts in reaching a correct conclusion on whether one should be sent to the gallows or not.

Recent verdicts as pointers

This is a significant development that can radically alter India's death penalty jurisprudence, by a comprehensive examination of the multi-disciplinary wisdom relating to the crime, the criminal, and the punishment.

An analysis of the possible reasons to avert the death penalty is reflected in a series of recent verdicts such as *Lochan Shrivastava vs State of Chhattisgarh* (2021) and *Bhagchandra vs State of Madhya Pradesh* (2021). These reasons might include socio-economic backwardness, mental health, he-

redity, parenting, socialisation, education, etc.

Needed, a different acumen

According to Section 354(3) in the Code of Criminal Procedure, while imposing the capital punishment, the judge should specify "the special reasons" for doing so. It was in *Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab* (1980) that the Constitution Bench suggested a humane and reformist framework in the matter. It said that the gallows could be resorted to only in the rarest of rare cases, that too when "the alternate option is unquestionably foreclosed". Thus, *Bachan Singh* requires the trial courts not only to examine the gravity of the offence but also the condition and the 'reformability' of the accused. The Court, in *Bachan Singh*, refused to declare the death penalty as unconstitutional. It, nevertheless, tried to reduce the rigour of capital punishment by trying to do away with the indiscriminate use of the penal provisions. It abundantly implied that no person is indubitably 'irreformable'. It had the effect of practically undoing the death penalty provision, if taken in its letter and spirit. The need to have 'unquestionable foreclosure' of 'alternate option' (in the matter of punishment, such as life imprisonment) sets the benchmark for the sentencing court very high and even unattainable. This person-centric approach, for its materialisation, needs a different judicial acumen that recognises the convict in her multitudes.

But the *Bachan Singh* principle was followed more in its breach than in compliance even by the Supreme Court. In *Ravji vs State of Rajasthan* (1995), the Supreme Court said that it is the nature of the crime and not the criminal which is germane for deciding the punishment. This is diametrically opposite to what was laid down in *Bachan Singh*. In *Machhi Singh vs State of Punjab* (1983), the Court indicated that inadequacy of other punishments could justify the death penalty. This too negated



GETTY IMAGES

the humanistic liberalism in *Bachan Singh*. Several other cases also were decided by ignoring the *Bachan Singh* doctrine, as noted by the Supreme Court itself in *Santhosh Kumar Satishbhusan Bariyar vs State of Maharashtra* (2009) and *Rajesh Kumar vs State* (2011). *The Hindu's Frontline* magazine ("A case against the death penalty", issue dated September 7, 2012) had a list of 13 convicts who were directed to be hanged in different reported cases decided by the Supreme Court itself, illegally and erroneously, by discarding the *Bachan Singh* philosophy.

This egregious judicial error will have to be kept in mind while the Court revisits the issues related to mitigating factors and individual-centered sentencing policy in the *Irfan* case. In the process, it may need to consider concrete guidelines for such policy.

Overuse and misuse

But the Indian experience shows that whenever the Court tries to dilute the harshness of penal provisions by a balancing approach, instead of striking down the provision, the instrumentalities of the state (including the police, the prosecution and the court) continue to overuse or misuse the provisions. The judgment of the top court in *Kedar Nath Singh vs State of Bihar* (1962) is a case in point. The Supreme Court endorsed the validity of the sedition law (Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code) with a rider that it could be invoked only when there is an incitement to violence. But the state seldom acts based on interpreta-

tion of the law. Many were booked for the charge of sedition since then for mere words, innocent tweets or harmless jokes. The top court is now seriously considering the need to revisit *Kedar Nath Singh* itself.

It is true that *Bachan Singh* did not, in concrete terms, elaborate on the mitigating factors and the methods to gather them to avert the death penalty. Nor did it explain the issues such as burden of proof and standard of proof in detail. As argued by Anup Surendranath, Neetika Vishwanath, and Preeti Pratishruti Dash in a recent paper, there could be "gaps within *Bachan Singh* itself". The point, however, is that going by the Indian experience, it may not be enough to provide clarity with respect to the mitigative elements in the matter of sentencing or the method of invoking them. Taking empirical lessons from the fate of *Bachan Singh*, the Supreme Court may have to now ask the more fundamental question posed and negated in *Bachan Singh* – the question of the constitutional validity of death penalty. The judiciary needs to learn a lot from history.

The poor are most affected

In India, as elsewhere, the poor, rather than the rich, are sent to the gallows. The numbers of the uneducated and the illiterate sentenced to death outweigh those who are educated and literate. In *Williams vs Taylor* (2000), the U.S. Supreme Court said that failure of the defence lawyer in highlighting the mitigating factors that could lead to avoidance of capital punishment makes the legal assistance ineffective. Therefore, it infringes constitutionally guaranteed rights. In the Indian scenario, the legal assistance received by the poor facing serious charges is far from satisfactory. Lack of proper defence results in conviction. And in the matter of sentencing too, the mitigating factors are either not placed before the trial court or not persuaded adequately to convince the

trial judge to avoid the death penalty. There is a marked contradiction between the Indian legal plutocracy and the marginalised.

Revisiting the case

The Court, in the instant case, will have to evolve a legal device for procurement of a comprehensive report dealing with the socio-economic and hereditary backgrounds of the accused from experts in the fields of social work, psychiatry, psychology, anthropology, etc. Yet, there could be inherent inequality and arbitrariness in applying the principles because of multiple factors such as failure of the judges, incapacity or backwardness of the parties, inadequacy of defence, deficits in the reports of experts, disparity in practical application of the doctrine, etc. As such, there is a possibility for the new juridical device also meeting the unfortunate fate which the *Bachan Singh* verdict faced. Therefore, the true way ahead is not merely to fill up the blanks in *Bachan Singh* by laying down concrete propositions for assessment of mitigating factors, determination of standard of proof, burden of proof etc. The Court may have to revisit *Bachan Singh* itself in so far as it refused to declare the death penalty as violative of the right to life envisaged under Article 21 of the Constitution. Across the world, 108 nations have abolished death penalty in law and 144 countries have done so in law or practice, according to the Amnesty Report of 2021.

In the Indian context, where judgmental error is quite frequent and the quality of adjudication is not ensured, what is required is a judicial abolition of death penalty. For this, the present matter will have to be referred to a larger Bench, with a view to rectify the foundational omission in *Bachan Singh* – of not explicitly declaring capital punishment as unconstitutional.

Kaleswaram Raj is a lawyer at the Supreme Court of India

Meritorious candidates can get general seats: SC

‘They need not get OBC quota benefit’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said that Other Backward Class (OBC) candidates are required to be adjusted against the general category when they prove more meritorious than the last of the general category candidates appointed.

The court said that in such circumstances, the appointments of OBC candidates could not have been considered against the seats available in the reserved category.

The top court said that consequently, after considering their appointments in the general category, the seats meant for the reserved category were required to be filled in from and amongst the other remaining reserved category candidates on merit.

A Bench of Justices M.R. Shah and B.V. Nagarathna relied on various verdicts of the top court including *Indra Sawhney vs Union of India* of 1992, popularly called

Mandal Commission verdict, while dealing with a case of two OBC category candidates for Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd. jobs.

Relying on the verdicts, the top court accepted the arguments of senior advocate Rajeev Dhavan, appearing for a quota candidate, that the reserved category candidates having obtained more marks than the last candidate in general category candidates will have to be adjusted against the general category quota and they were required to be considered in the general category pool, thereby the remaining candidates belonging to the reserved category were required to be appointed against the quota meant for reserved category.

The court said by insertion of two OBC candidates into the general category, two general category candidates already appointed shall have to be expelled and/or shall have to be removed, and it may unsettle the entire selection process.

HCs get 8 weeks to tune up criminal trial system

SC tells them to implement Draft Rules

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday gave High Courts two months to repair inadequacies and inefficiencies in the criminal trial system of their respective States.

A Bench led by Justice L. Nageswara Rao was informed by its *amici curiae*, senior advocates R. Basant and Sidharth Luthra and advocate K. Parameshwar, that while most of the High Courts have responded positively to the Draft Rules of Criminal Practice, 2020 – a set of recommendations prepared by the three lawyers to streamline criminal trial system and make it uniform across the country – there is no information about implementation from seven High Courts. These in-

clude Madras, Gujarat, Bombay and Rajasthan.

On Thursday, the apex court extended the time by eight weeks for these States and High Courts to notify and implement the suggestions.

The Supreme Court had in April 2020 given States and their High Courts six months to incorporate the recommendations in their police manuals and criminal trial processes.

The Draft Rules had gone into the intricacies of investigation and trial, including proposals to employ separate teams of lawyers to help the police during the probe and for the trial; details to be covered while drafting spot *panchnamas* and even corrections in body sketches.

In haste

India could have waited for evidence of benefit of vaccinating all children

The emergency use authorisation (EUA) granted on April 26 to two COVID-19 vaccines – Corbevax for children 5-11 years, and Covaxin for children 6-11 years – is one more instance where the Indian drug regulator has acted in haste. Even if the EUA granted to Covaxin in January 2021 despite no safety and efficacy data of the phase-3 trial is condoned as a desperate measure in ensuring greater vaccine availability, the regulator clearly has no fig leaf to defend the greenlighting of the vaccines for children at this stage. Evidence from across the world after the deadly Delta variant and the extremely transmissible Omicron variant has shown that unlike adults, children in general, and little children in particular, do not suffer from severe disease. The ICMR's fourth seroprevalence survey (June-July 2021) soon after the second wave peaked nationally found that 57.2% of children (6-9 years) and 61.6% of children (10-17 years) were infected by SARS-CoV-2 virus; seroprevalence among adults was 66.7%. Since vaccination of adolescents began only in early January 2022, the antibodies detected in children in mid-2021 were only from infection by the virus. The extremely infectious Omicron variant would have infected an even larger percentage of children. Yet, the number of severe cases and deaths in children 5-11 years has been very low. True, with schools reopening, children could be at greater risk of contracting infection. But with natural infection found to offer protection across age groups, India could have waited for validation of the available evidence on the vaccines for children.

Unlike in January 2021 when approving vaccines for adults as soon as possible was the highest priority, and hence the EUA based on fewer cases and short follow-ups was seen as a necessity, the situation is not the same now, especially in the case of children as young as five. Hence, the regulator's urgency to greenlight vaccines for children under the EUA route is highly questionable. Clinical trial data of Corbevax for children 5-12 years were posted as a preprint, which is yet to be peer-reviewed, on the day approval was granted; trial data of Covaxin for children 2-18 years were posted as a preprint in December 2021. The Health Ministry had already set a precedent last month by clearing Corbevax for children 12-14 years without first seeking the approval of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI), which clears vaccines for the national immunisation programme. With NTAGI clearly against approving vaccines for children, there is every likelihood of the expert body being ignored again. Also, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's message on April 27, a day after the EUA, that every eligible child should be vaccinated at the earliest might prompt the Health Ministry to sidestep the NTAGI once more, thus departing even more from evidence-based policy making.

Antitrust regulator CCI said to raid 2 of Amazon's top sellers

Cloudtail, Appario are accused of violating India's competition laws

REUTERS
NEW DELHI

India's antitrust body conducted raids on Thursday against two top domestic sellers of online retail giant Amazon.com Inc. over accusations of having violated competition laws, two sources with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters.

Indian retailers, a key part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's support base, have long contended that Amazon's platform largely benefits a few big sellers, with the firm engaging in predatory pricing that harms their businesses.

The company says it complies with all Indian laws.



Question of clout: Indian retailers contend that Amazon's platform largely benefits a few big sellers. ■ G. RAMAKRISHNA

The exact nature of the purported violations prompting Thursday's raids was not immediately clear. The two sellers were Cloudtail and Appario, the sources said on condition of ano-

nymity, as the details were not public.

Amazon, which has an indirect equity stake in both, did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Cloudtail, Appario

and the regulator, the Competition Commission of India (CCI), also did not immediately respond to emailed queries.

New Delhi, Bengaluru

One source said the raids, carried out in New Delhi and the tech hub of Bengaluru, related to CCI's investigation ordered in January 2020.

In that case, Amazon and rival Walmart's Flipkart face accusations of anti-competitive practices, such as promoting preferred sellers on websites and giving priority to listings by some sellers.

The firms deny the accusations, and the antitrust investigation continues.

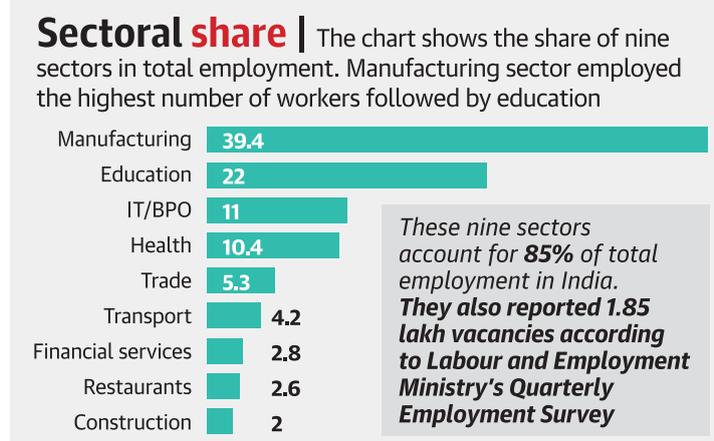
Centre's employment survey finds addition of four lakh jobs

Union Labour Minister says 'rising trend in employment in organised sector'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Over four lakh jobs were created in firms with 10 or more workers in nine selected sectors in October-December 2021, according to the Labour and Employment Ministry's third Quarterly Employment Survey (QES) report released on Thursday.

The Ministry's establishment-based survey, which covered 10,834 units in the third round, found employment had increased from 3.1 crore in July-September 2021 to 3.145 crore in the next quarter. The survey covered manufacturing, construction, trade, transport, education, health, accommoda-



tion and restaurants, IT/BPOs and financial services that accounted for 85% of the employment in units with 10 or more workers, the report said. The survey does not include units that were

established after 2013-14.

The manufacturing sector accounted for 39% of the units, followed by education (22%). Overall 23.55% of the units provided on-the-job training to workers, while

the number was higher for health sector units (34.87%). At the same time, the nine sectors reported 1.85 lakh vacancies, with 81,846 in manufacturing, 47,076 in health and 39,014 in education. The report stated that 86.5% of the vacancies were "in the process of being filled up". About 4% of the vacancies remained due to "non-availability of requisite skilled workers".

Releasing the findings, Labour and Employment Minister Bhupender Yadav said in a tweet that the the third round report of QES had shown "a rising trend in employment in organised sector".

Some States indulging in fuel tax ‘hypocrisy’: Puri

They like to criticise, not help people, says Oil Minister

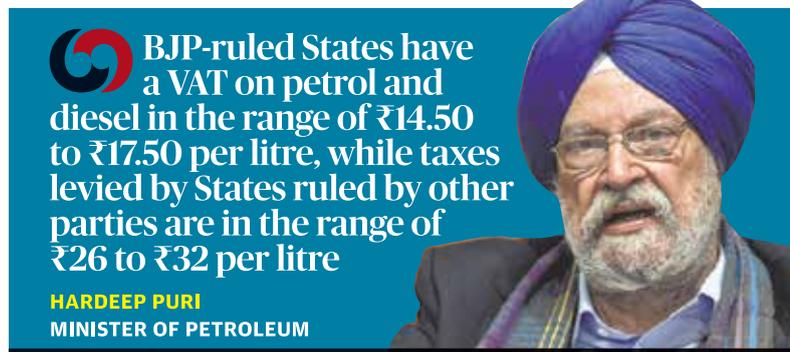
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Puri launched a diatribe against the “hypocrisy” of States ruled by BJP rivals on Thursday, and said petrol would be cheaper if some of them cut taxes on the fuel instead of imported liquor.

The Minister’s comments in a series of social media posts came a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi blamed those States for not cutting fuel taxes to benefit consumers.

Mr. Puri listed out several States’ taxation structure for petroleum products, and argued that the taxes levied by the States ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) were the lowest. “BJP-ruled States have a VAT [value added tax] on petrol and diesel in the range of ₹14.50 to ₹17.50 per litre, while taxes levied by States ruled by other parties are in the range of ₹26 to ₹32 per litre. The difference is clear. Their intent is only to protest and criticise, not extend relief to the people,” he said.



“Ever wondered why air ticket prices haven’t come down? Aviation turbine fuel constitutes about 40% of the cost of airline operations. But West Bengal, Maharashtra & Delhi impose massive 25%+ VAT on ATF while BJP-ruled States U.P. & Nagaland; & UT of J&K charge just 1%,” Mr. Puri noted, adding that the Prime Minister was ensuring affordable air travel to common citizens, but these States were creating “impediments”.

“They manufacture protests against ‘oil prices’ but fleece the people to fill their coffers... The truth hurts, but facts speak for themselves,” the Minister said.

Maharashtra, he said, has collected ₹79,412 crore as fuel taxes since 2018 and is

expected to collect ₹33,000 crore this year.

“Petrol will be cheaper if Opposition-ruled states cut taxes on fuel instead of imported liquor! Maharashtra govt imposes ₹32.15/ltr on petrol & Congress-ruled Rajasthan ₹29.10 but BJP-ruled Uttarakhand levies only ₹14.51 & Uttar Pradesh ₹16.50 Protests cannot challenge facts!” he tweeted.

With regard to Telangana, Mr. Puri said it imposed one of the highest VAT on petrol and diesel, at 35.2% and 27%, respectively.

“State govt has collected ₹56,020 cr as VAT from 2014 to 2021. Projected to mop up ₹13,315 cr in 2021-22. Adds up to a huge ₹69,334 cr. Where has it gone?” the Minister asked.

5G service roll-out likely in Aug.-Sept.

Plans afoot for spectrum auction in June: Minister

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA
NEW DELHI

The government is confident of resolving issues related to high spectrum pricing with the industry, Telecom Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said on Thursday, adding that everything was “more or less” on track for auction of spectrum, including 5G airwaves, by June 2022.

The commercial rollout of 5G services could be expect-



Ashwini Vaishnaw

ed from August-September 2022, the Minister added.

“The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India [TRAI], in its recommendations, has

suggested some changes in prices. The next step is approval of the Digital Communications Commission [DCC] – they will take a call in the next 5-6 days. As per process, a back reference goes to TRAI. In parallel, we have worked out a notice inviting tender,” Mr. Vaishnaw said.

Demand for price cut

He said the main issue was the industry’s demand for a further reduction in spectrum prices, which would be “deliberated in a logical and systematic manner”.

The Minister said that

world over it had been accepted that telecom services were a necessity and a tool for development and the issue of pricing would be looked at with this thinking.

Replying to a query, Mr. Vaishnaw said, “I am confident that this [pricing] issue will be solved... today there is excitement and some stability in the industry after the telecom reforms were announced in September last year. There is a clarity that we need to move forward.”

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5G service roll-out likely in August-September

In its recommendations, the TRAI has suggested cutting prices of airwaves across various bands, including 5G spectrum, by 35-40% from its earlier proposed base price.

However, the Cellular Operators Association of India, whose members include the three private telcos – Bharti Airtel, Reliance Jio and Vo-

dafone Idea, has expressed disappointment, given the industry's demand for a 90% reduction in the prices.

In all, more than 1,00,000 MHz of airwaves have been recommended to be put up for auction. The total spectrum on offer at reserve price is valued at around ₹5 lakh crore for 20 years.

‘Russia-Ukraine conflict shows need of self-reliance’

Navy at the forefront of indigenisation, says Rajnath

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Navy has maintained a high tempo of operations and established a credible and responsive presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) through “mission-based deployments”, thereby reaffirming its position as the “preferred security partner” in the IOR, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Thursday.

On the prevailing security environment in the world, he said the ongoing Russia and Ukraine conflict had once again highlighted that being self-reliant without dependence was a “vital necessity.”

Mr. Singh referred to the fact that of the 41 ships and



Rajnath Singh with senior Navy officials during the Naval Commanders' Conference in New Delhi on Thursday. ■PTI

submarines which were on order, 39 were being built in Indian shipyards. While the Navy had been at the forefront of indigenisation, it was important to leverage the momentum gained thus far, he noted.

“The delivery of the first indigenous aircraft carrier

Vikrant would be another milestone event. I am aware that the ship has successfully completed three sea trials. All-out efforts need to be made so that the ship is delivered and commissioned in the 75th year of Independence,” he said at the Naval Commanders Conference.

Reporting of cyber breaches made mandatory for all firms

Escalation must within 6 hours of detection: MeitY

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In) has made it mandatory for all service providers, intermediaries, data centre providers, corporates as well as government organisations to report cyber incidents within six hours of their detection.

To strengthen India's overall cybersecurity position, the country's nodal cybersecurity agency has also issued additional directions relating to synchronisation of ICT system clocks, maintenance of logs of ICT systems and subscriber/customer registration details by data centres, virtual private ser-

 **CERT-In has identified gaps that cause hindrance in incident analysis**

ver (VPS) providers, VPN service providers and cloud service providers.

“To coordinate response activities as well as emergency measures with respect to cybersecurity incidents, CERT-In calls for information from service providers, intermediaries, data centres and body corporate,” the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) said in a statement.

“During the course of handling cyber incidents and interactions with the constituency, CERT-In has identified certain gaps caus-

ing hindrance in incident analysis,” it added.

It said that to address the identified gaps and facilitate incident response measures, CERT-In had issued directions relating to information security practices, procedure, prevention, response and reporting of cyber incidents. These directions will take effect after 60 days.

“Any service provider, intermediary, data centre, body corporate and government organisation shall mandatorily report cyber incidents... to CERT-In within 6 hours of noticing such incidents or being brought to notice about such incidents,” the directions issued by CERT-In state.

Keen on lifting AFSPA from northeast: Modi

‘Decades-old problem of violence, mistrust being resolved’

RAHUL KARMAKAR
GUWAHATI

In a bid to completely lift the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act of 1958 from the northeast, efforts are on to improve the law-and-order situation in the region, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday.

Addressing a ‘Peace, Unity and Development’ rally in central Assam’s Diphu, he said the AFSPA could be withdrawn partially from Assam, Manipur and Nagaland (from April 1) due to peaceful conditions since 2014. The Bodo Accord opened the doors for permanent peace, he added.

“The AFSPA remained enforced in many States of the northeast for decades. We removed it from many areas due to better administration and the return of peace with incidents of violence dropping by 75% in the past eight years. This is the reason that we first removed AFSPA from Tripura and then Meghalaya,” Mr. Modi said.

Crediting the steady return of peace in the northeast to the collective efforts of the State governments



Reaching out: PM Narendra Modi greeting Bihu dancers after their performance in Dibrugarh, Assam, on Thursday. ■PTI

and the people, he said the Centre was trying to normalise the situation in the remaining areas for the AFSPA to be removed. “We are working at a faster pace in Nagaland and Manipur in this regard,” he said.

‘No more bombs, bullets’

He underscored the Centre’s relentless efforts in helping solve the problem of insurgency in Assam’s Bodo areas and Karbi Anglong, in Tripura and the Bru (Reang) problem of Tripura-Mizoram. He said similar efforts were being made seriously for permanent peace in some other regions. “The country

can now see how the decades-old problem of violence and mistrust is being resolved. People would hear the sound of bombs and sometimes of bullets in the region. Today, we can hear the sounds of clapping,” he said.

Mr. Modi expressed happiness that Assam and Meghalaya were trying to resolve their boundary disputes. He said the efforts of the two States would be a template for resolving inter-State differences elsewhere in the region and provide impetus to the developmental aspirations of the people.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 10

Keen on lifting AFSPA from northeast: Modi

Laying the foundation stone for 2,950 Amrit Sarovar [water conservation] projects across Assam and three regional colleges worth a total of ₹1,650 crore, Mr. Modi claimed difficulties had been reducing and fast-tracked development taking place in the northeast since 2014.

He noted the coincidence of the *Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav* and the 400th anniversary of Lachit Borphukan, the 17th century Ahom general who stopped the Mughals from capturing Assam. “The life of this great son of Assam inspires patriotism and strength across India,” he said.

Cancer hospitals

Later at Dibrugarh, about 300 km east of Diphu, the Prime Minister inaugurated seven advanced cancer hospitals under the Assam Cancer Care Foundation, a collaboration between the Assam government and Tata Trusts. There will be 17 such centres across Assam, strategically located to serve patients from the other northeastern States and neighbouring countries such as Bhutan.

The Prime Minister also laid the foundation of seven other such hospitals. The seven hospitals inaugurated are at Dibrugarh, Barpeta, Tezpur, Jorhat, Lakhimpur, Kokrajhar and Darrang.

‘High incidence’

“Given the high incidence of cancer in the northeast and the cost involved in treatment, we want Assam to become the hub of cancer care in South Asia,” Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

A Tata Trust spokesperson said up to 50,000 cancer patients can get inexpensive treatment when all the 17 hospitals are in operation. The network of such hospitals under the distributed cancer control model has a four-level step down system offering early detection and diagnosis besides treatment.

According to a government study in 2021, the northeast is the “cancer capital” of India with Arunachal Pradesh’s Papum Pare district and Mizoram’s Aizawl district recording the highest incidence of new cases among females and males respectively.

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| H | Effects of globalization on Indian society; |
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| J | Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions; |
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| M | Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections; |
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