



VEDHIK
IAS ACADEMY
The New Learning Mantra

BRICS

VEDHIK

DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

19 - MAY - 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

- News - Jaishankar to attend BRICS meeting GSP 02 B
- News - U.S. official meets Tibetan delegates GSP 02 C
- News - Delimitation fallout needs no political forecasting GSP 02 E
- News - SC allows OBC quota for M.P. local body poll GSP 02 E
- Editorials - The confusion over the status of the Assam NRC GSP 02 E
- News - NHRC flags pollution effect on human rights GSP 02 L
- News - 'Rate increases need to be frontloaded GSP 03 A
- News - Debroy flags data on consumption spending GSP 03 A
- News - Ethanol blend in petrol to be raised to 20% in 3 years GSP 03 D
- News - Scientists standardise breeding techniques of barbs GSP 03 L
- Editorials - India's vulnerability to drought GSP 03 P
- News - ₹138 cr. to upgrade IB's counter-terrorism grid GSP 03 V

Jaishankar to attend BRICS meeting

It is the first meet of BRICS Foreign Ministers since Russia's invasion of Ukraine

ANANTH KRISHNAN
HONG KONG

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will on Thursday join his counterparts from China, Russia, Brazil and South Africa in a virtual meeting of the BRICS Foreign Ministers, coming ahead of the leaders' summit expected next month.

The leaders' summit this year will also be held virtually, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi joining China's Xi Jinping and Russia's Vladimir Putin. This will be the first BRICS leaders' gathering since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with the grouping emerging as a valuable platform for an isolated Russia that is facing crippling sanctions from the West.

China has broadly backed Russia's stand on Ukraine. It has blamed NATO for the crisis, and called for the "legitimate security concerns" of all countries to be respected – a position that BRICS is



S. Jaishankar

likely to endorse. Mr. Xi will host the summit next month as China is the chair of BRICS for this year. The summit, as well as Thursday's meeting to be chaired by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, will include other emerging countries as part of the "BRICS Plus" mechanism, aimed at growing the footprint of the five-member grouping. Argentina has confirmed it will attend both meetings.

China's Foreign Ministry

spokesperson Wang Wenbin said on Wednesday that the Foreign Ministers' virtual meeting on Thursday will see the five countries take part in a "BRICS Plus dialogue" and send a message of solidarity on giving developing countries a greater say in global governance.

The "BRICS Plus" mechanism is seen as a way for the five countries to broaden their outreach with other developing countries, although the group is unlikely to include new members. The BRICS-backed New Development Bank has, however, already inducted new members, with Bangladesh and the UAE joining last year, and Egypt and Uruguay set to join the financial institution.

Sanctions against Russia

Russia is hoping that its cooperation with BRICS countries can help reduce some of the pressures it is

facing under Western sanctions, which none of the BRICS countries have supported.

Speaking at the BRICS Finance Ministers meeting last month, Russian Finance Minister Anton Siluanov called for the use of national currencies for BRICS countries, integration of payment systems, their own financial messaging system, and the creation of a BRICS rating agency.

But beyond statements of support, the BRICS countries may, however, only be able to offer limited assistance to Russia on circumventing sanctions. Even Chinese financial institutions, for instance, have largely been adhering to Western sanctions fearing the repercussions of being targeted for violating them. The BRICS New Development Bank announced in March that it had suspended all projects in Russia.



U.S. Special Coordinator Uzra Zeya being welcomed by Tibetans in Dharamshala. ■SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

U.S. official meets Tibetan delegates

Zeya is expected to call on Dalai Lama

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

U.S. Special Coordinator on Tibet Uzra Zeya met with the *Sikyong* or leader of the self-styled Central Tibetan Administration (CTA), Penpa Tsering, and other officials and representatives of the Tibetan community on a public visit to Dharamshala by a U.S. official for the first time in three years on Wednesday. Facilitated by New Delhi, the visit is seen as a strong message from the Modi government to China, which protests what it calls “meddling” in Tibet.

In the past few years, while Tibetan officials and the Dalai Lama had visited Washington, no senior U.S. official has visited the Himalachal town where the “government-in-exile” is based. In 2017, a U.S. Congressional delegation led by former Speaker Nancy Pelosi had visited Dharamshala, as did U.S. Ambassador Kenneth Juster in 2018 and U.S. Ambassador on religious free-

dom Sam Brownback in 2019.

During a visit to Delhi, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken had met representatives of the CTA and the Dalai Lama in 2021. At the time, China had issued a stern statement against the meeting, calling “any form of contact between the U.S. side and the Dalai clique” a violation of previous American commitments on a “One China” policy.

Ms. Zeya is expected to meet with the Dalai Lama on Thursday.

Ms. Zeya is holding meetings pertaining to her other role as U.S. Undersecretary of State for Civilian Security, Democracy and Human Rights. In Delhi on Tuesday, she met with Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar, launching a plan for India to lead a “cohort” on electoral integrity as a part of President Biden’s “Democracy Summit” this year.

(With inputs from Damini Nath)

Delimitation fallout needs no political forecasting

Electoral sinew to one set of States while depleting representative muscle to another will fuel north-south India tensions



GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI

There was a time, not all that long ago, when English speakers in the south of India routinely referred to our north as 'Upper India'. This sense of the north's upper-ness included, somewhere in its folds, a sense of the north having the upper hand in the affairs of the nation, of being bigger, more populous and, therefore, the more dominant of the two. Being 'upper' also encased within its meaning the fact of the nation's capital, Calcutta and later Delhi, being 'up' there, with Simla as the nation's summer capital 'up above the world so high like a diamond in the sky'.

The political summit

The Imperial Legislative Council, with its Central Legislative Assembly as the Lower House and the Council of State as the Upper House, being located in Delhi pushed that upperness further up. Seeing persons of the eminence of Muhammad Habibullah, A. Rangaswami Iyengar, S. Srinivasa Iyengar, Omandur Ramaswami Reddiar, Arcot Ramasamy Mudaliar, Tanguturi Prakasam, Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, T.S. Avinashilingam Chettiar, V.V. Giri, S. Satyamurti, N.G. Ranga, C.N. Muthuranga Mudaliar, T.S.S. Rajan, K. Santhanam, M.C. Rajah, the Raja of Bobbili and N. Sivaraj 'move' diligently to Delhi by up-bound trains, for legislative sessions, could not but reinforce the perceived image of India's north as India's political summit. Later, the Constituent Assembly with N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, Alladi Krishnaswami Iyer, Rajaji, Jerome D' Souza, K. Kamaraj, C. Subramaniam, V.I. Munuswamy Pillai, in it,

and some remarkable south Indian women – Ammu Swaminathan, G. Durgabai, Annie Mascarene, Dakshayani Velayudham – and successive Lok Sabhas and the Rajya Sabha drawing Members of Parliament of the stature of A.K. Gopalan, T. Nagi Reddy, C.N. Annadurai, P. Sundarayya, Panampilly Govinda Menon, C.H. Mohammed Koya, M. Ruthnaswamy, K.T.K. Thangamani and Era Sezhiyan, going to Delhi, by air rather than by rail, of course, continued the 'India's north as India's peak' image. Needless to say, that 'peak' was scaled in terms of outstanding legislative performance by these men and women.

Congress and Left symmetry

The Indian National Congress, however, it needs to be noted, was from the very start, aware of the need for India's regions to be seen as equal, bereft of any asymmetry. Its very third session after Bombay (1885) and Calcutta (1886) was held in Madras (1887, and many times later), followed by several Congress sessions of note taking place in the south – Amaravati/Amraoti (1897), Coconada (1923), Belgaum (1924), and the seminal one, at Avadi (Madras) in 1955, attended by Yugoslavia's President Marshal Josip Broz Tito, where the party adopted 'a socialistic pattern of society' as its avowed objective.

The All India Kisan Sabha, the peasant wing of the Communist Party of India, likewise, which had first met in a 'founder-conference' in Lucknow in 1936, met at its fifth session in 1940 in Palasa, Srikakulam, then in Madras Presidency and now in Andhra, under the chairmanship of Rahul Sankrityayan. It has, since, met very pointedly in southern venues as much as in northern.

These considered arrangements embody the opening Article 1 of our Constitution: India, that is Bharat.

That phrase makes India, Bharat and Bharat, India – one belong-



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

ing to and in fact, being the other.

But the question needs to be asked, today: What makes India, 'India', or Bharat, Bharat? And why, today?

Impact of delimitation

Because four years from now, India's electoral democracy will stand on an existential crossroads. A delimitation of the constituencies that will elect Members of the Lok Sabha, following the population figures returned by the next decennial Census, is to take place in 2026.

A good thing! We cannot have, should not have, the same number of Members of Parliament – 543 – representing a vastly increased population in the Lok Sabha. Mathematically speaking, the higher the number of people per constituency, the lower the impact each voter has on parliamentary representation – clearly an undesirable situation. The Constitution of India recognised this and provided for a periodic, Census-linked re-arrangement of constituencies to make their representation in Parliament tenable. More people should mean more MPs. Simple, sound logic. But simple, sound politics also? No.

A population-based marking out or re-arrangement of constituencies, as envisaged in Article 82 of the Constitution, will have the effect of giving more MPs to the States and Union Territories that have let their numbers grow, and will give markedly less MPs to those that have held their num-

bers in some check. Realising the anomaly that a delimitation based on Census data would cause, a delimitation freeze was put in position by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi through the 42nd Amendment of the Constitution in 1976. This was extended by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee through the 84th Amendment. It is this extension that is to end in 2026, placing us at a crossroads.

What the data show

What is the way forward?

Considering the Census data for 2011, almost half (48.6%) of our population (of approximately 1.38 billion) is contributed by the States of Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Bihar, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. According to the projections made by the Technical Group formed by National Commission on Population, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for 2011-36, Uttar Pradesh's share in India's population would see an increase by 1.74 percentage points (from 15.30% in 1971 to a projected 17.03% in 2026), Bihar's by 1.59 percentage points (from 7.69% in 1971 to projected 9.28% in 2026) and Rajasthan's by 1.17 percentage points (from 4.70% in 1971 to projected 5.87% in 2026).

Tamil Nadu's share in India's population would see a decline by 2.08 percentage points (from 7.52% in 1971 to projected 5.44% in 2026), undivided Andhra's by 1.46 percentage points (from 7.94% in 1971 to a projected 6.48% in 2026), and Kerala's by 1.36 percentage points (from 3.89% in 1971 to a projected 2.54% in 2026). Interestingly, West Bengal's will also decline by 1.03 percentage points (from 8.08% in 1971 to a projected 7.05% in 2026).

Re-arranging and standardising the number of people per constituency through the scheduled delimitation exercise will inevitably lead to a reduced representation for States that have managed to stabilise their populations, and to

a higher representation for States that have not stabilised their populations.

It needs no political forecasting to see that emotions will be strained by a delimitation exercise that adds electoral sinew to one set of States, while depleting representative muscle to another. The upperness syndrome, which has now become a thing of the past, should not come back in the guise of delimitation. We cannot afford a tension on the north-south front in addition to those we already have.

There are alternatives

There are two alternatives before us: one, we go in for another freeze, this time not for any specific period but for until all States have achieved population stabilisation. Two, we request demographic and statistical experts to devise a mathematical model along the lines of the 'Cambridge Compromise' based on a mathematically equitable "formula" for the apportionment of the seats of the European Parliament between the member-states. That formula cannot be applied to our situation as such but needs to be studied so as to customise it for our needs.

Given the complications of the Indian demographic scene, and the distorting shadow that Census data may cast on the delimitation process, I would say the first option is the more persuasive one. The population-stabilising States of India that is Bharat, which include all the southern States, must continue to enrich our legislative and parliamentary processes as they have been doing since the time of the Imperial Legislative Council, with no penalties having to be paid for their sense of responsibility. We need to limit population, not representation.

Gopalkrishna Gandhi is a former administrator, diplomat and Governor. The article has statistical inputs from the Population Foundation of India

SC allows OBC quota for M.P. local body polls

The application asserted that these crucial facts had not been placed before the court prior to the order.

The court noted in its order: “To reassure ourselves, we have gone through the two reports submitted by the dedicated commission concerning the determination of reservation to be provided for Other Backward Classes in local bodies in the State of Madhya Pradesh. The second report focuses on the local body wise reservation for the other backward classes by keeping in mind the maximum reservation limit of 50% enunciated by this court. We may not be understood to have expressed any final opinion either way on the validity or correctness of this report and if some challenge is set up against this report, that may have to be considered on its own merits in accordance with law.”

The court permitted the Madhya Pradesh State Election Commission to notify the programme for the local bodies keeping in mind the delimitation notification already issued as on date, that is, till Wednesday, and the report submitted by the Backward Classes Commission.

It directed the Election Commission of India (EC) to ensure that the election pro-

gramme was issued for local bodies where the polls are already overdue without further loss of time and keeping in mind the feasibility of conducting elections.

Collapse of law

The court said it would be open to the EC to later on modulate the schedule, as and when occasion arises. “We permit the State of Madhya Pradesh to notify the reservation pattern local body wise to be adhered to by the State Election Commission within one week. The State Election Commission shall notify the election programme in respect of the concerned local bodies thereafter within one week,” the court ordered.

On May 10, the court had noted that years of delay in conducting elections to over 23,000 local bodies in Madhya Pradesh “borders on the breakdown of the rule of law”.

It had declared that State Election Commissions across the country could not skip their Constitutional obligation to conduct polls to local bodies every five years.

The Bench had laid down that the EC could not reel out grounds like ongoing delimitation or the formation of new wards to delay elections where it was due.

EXPLAINER

The confusion over the status of the Assam NRC

Why are the members of the Foreigners Tribunals and the State Coordinator of the National Register of Citizens at loggerheads?

THE GIST

■ A member of one of Assam's Foreigners' Tribunals has written to Hitesh Dev Sarma, the State Coordinator of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), asking him to stop interfering in the lawful functioning of the tribunals. This letter was in response to Mr. Sarma's April 18 letter to all the FT members not to treat the NRC as "final".

■ The complete NRC draft was published on August 31, 2019. This draft excluded 19.06-lakh out of the 3.3 crore people who had applied for inclusion.

■ In 2021, Mr. Sarma submitted an affidavit at the Gauhati High Court, referring to the August 2019 NRC as a "supplementary list" and not the "final NRC" and sought a re-verification. An FT member, choosing to be anonymous, insisted that the NRC published in accordance with relevant clauses of the Citizenship Rules of 2003, was final.

RAHUL KARMAKAR

The story so far: A member of one of Assam's functional 100 Foreigners' Tribunals (FTs) had on May 10 written to Hitesh Dev Sarma, the State Coordinator of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), asking him to stop interfering in the lawful functioning of the tribunals. This letter was in response to Mr. Sarma's April 18 letter to all the FT members not to treat the NRC as "final" while judging the nationality of a person suspected to be a non-citizen.

What is the NRC and when did it start?

The NRC was born out of independent India's first census in 1951, entailing the transfer of data from the Census slips. All States were mandated to compile an NRC but it was done only in Assam. The intention behind such an exercise in Assam was to prepare a village-based inventory of residents in view of the resistance from the State – then undivided – to house post-Partition refugees. The fear of the indigenous people of being outnumbered by "illegal immigrants" during and after the 1971 Bangladesh War led to the Assam Agitation from 1979 to 1985. The demand for updating the 1951 NRC to eject foreigners from Assam was raised during the agitation.

The agitation ended with the signing of the Assam Accord in August 1985. The accord prescribed March 24, 1971, the eve of the Bangladesh War, as the cut-off date for detecting, detaining and deporting foreigners. This date was incorporated in the NRC updating exercise that began in 2014 under the supervision of the Supreme Court. People listed in the 1951 NRC and their descendants had a comparatively smooth inclusion in the complete NRC draft published on August 31, 2019. This draft excluded 19.06-lakh out of the 3.3 crore people who had applied for inclusion.

What was the trigger of the debate over its status?

In 2021, Mr. Sarma submitted an affidavit at the Gauhati High Court, referring to the August 2019 NRC as a "supplementary list" and not the "final NRC" and sought a re-verification. In September that year, an FT

member in southern Assam's Karimganj district declared a doubtful migrant as Indian while observing that members of his family figured in the August 2019 list referred to as the "final NRC". The list was also being referred to as final at various fora. On April 18, Mr. Sarma wrote to the FTs asking them not to depend on the NRC to adjudicate cases of citizenship. "It has been observed that while disposing of FT cases, various documents relating to NRC are being called from the District Registrar of Citizens Registration (Deputy Commissioner) and the State Coordinator, NRC, Assam. In this regard, I am to inform you that the Final NRC is yet to be published by the Registrar General of Citizens Registration," he wrote. He also said that the NRC was erroneous due to wrong data entry and faulty process adopted in the updating exercise, as mentioned in the interlocutory application he had submitted before the Supreme Court, which is yet to hear the matter.

An FT member, choosing to be anonymous, insisted in his reply to Mr. Sarma on May 10 that the NRC published in accordance with relevant clauses of the Citizenship Rules of 2003, was final. The member also cited the official website where the NRC is mentioned as final and an August 2019 press communique by his predecessor, Prateek Hajela, "clearly mentioning" that the NRC was final. "The State Coordinator cannot propagate his wrong understanding of law, rules, notifications and orders of the Supreme Court about the finality of NRC... he should withdraw his letter and stop interfering in the lawful functioning of the Foreigners' Tribunals which is beyond your jurisdiction and limits of power," the FT member said. Judges, advocates and bureaucrats with judicial experience are appointed as members of the quasi-judicial body under the Foreigners' Tribunal Act, 1941, and Foreigners Tribunal Order, 1964.

What, then, is the status of the NRC?

According to the State Coordinator, only the office of the Registrar General of India has the authority to publish the final NRC and a notification in this regard is yet to be issued. But the FT members, instead of looking at cases of people declared foreigners



independently of the NRC, have been passing judgments by viewing the NRC as final, he said adding that Mr. Hajela's statement was "misleading". NRC officials also pointed out that the updating exercise still has some stages to go.

The next stage is the issuance of a rejection slip to each of the 19.06 lakh people excluded from the draft NRC. After receiving such a slip with an explanation of why he or she has been left out of the NRC, a person would have to approach the FT concerned within 120 days with documents to prove his or her citizenship. The FT would then adjudge the person as a "citizen" or "foreigner" for inclusion or rejection in the NRC.

What is the stand of the Assam government on the NRC?

The BJP-led Assam government has stuck to its stand that the NRC was erroneous. They have said that at least 20% of the enlisted names in districts bordering Bangladesh and 10% in the remaining districts need re-verification. The government has not accepted the list as final and has decided to approach the Supreme Court for a "corrected" NRC. The government, however, has decided to push for unfreezing the biometrics of 21 lakh people, collected during the updating exercise, to enable them to get Aadhaar cards, which can be locked again if a person is eventually marked as a non-citizen.

Proof of paper: A woman along with her baby wait to submit her National Register of Citizens (NRC) form in the Morigaon district of Assam on August 13, 2018. **FILE PHOTO**

NHRC flags pollution effect on human rights

In advisory, it urges Centre and States to take action

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Wednesday said it had issued an advisory to the Centre and State governments on preventing, minimising and mitigating the impact of environmental pollution and degradation on human rights.

The NHRC said that despite “having one of the world’s best statutory and policy framework for environment protection”, India was facing a serious problem of pollution and ecological degradation preventing the enjoyment of basic human rights. NHRC Secretary-General Devendra Kumar Singh has written to the Secretaries of the Union Ministries and departments, State Chief Secretaries and Registrars of the High Courts to

 **Governments should make efforts to ensure effective and expeditious punishment of polluters**

NHRC

implement the recommendations and send action-taken reports within three months.

The advisory focuses on the punishment of polluters; prevention and mitigation of vehicular pollution; and transparent processing of approvals and clearances under environmental laws.

“The Union and State governments should make efforts to ensure effective and expeditious punishment of polluters and violators of environmental laws. These efforts should include strengthening of Pollution Control Boards (PCBs) and other regulatory authorities,” the

NHRC said. The commission said PCBs should create separate investigation and prosecution wings, as well as carry out regular training sessions for staff. It also recommended that “High Courts should establish Special Environmental Courts and ensure speedy trial of the cases involving violation of environmental laws”.

The advisory was drafted in consultation with domain experts, it said. During a meeting of the NHRC core advisory group on environment, climate change and human rights on March 23, NHRC Chairperson Justice Arun Kumar Mishra (retired) had “expressed serious concern over the degrading environment, and said that despite rules and laws, the ground situation was not improving”, the statement read.

'Rate increases need to be frontloaded'

MPC's Varma sees need for more than 100 bps rate increases 'very soon', minutes of MPC meet show

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
MUMBAI

'Several storms hitting together', resulting in inflation risks that had become more pronounced and persistent, prompted the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) to meet off-cycle and effect a course correction, the minutes of the May 2-4 meeting released on Wednesday show.

"As several storms hit together, our monetary policy response should be seen as an important step to steady the ship," Governor Shaktikanta Das said at the meeting, where the MPC decided to raise the policy repo rate by 40 basis points (bps). "Waiting for one month till the June MPC would mean losing that much time while war related inflationary pres-



Time to act: With inflation risks more pronounced, persistent, there was an 'acute need' to raise rates. ■SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

ures accentuated. Further, it may necessitate a much stronger action in the June MPC which is avoidable," Mr. Das had noted, explaining the urgency to act.

Emphasising that the MPC's monetary policy ac-

tions were aimed at lowering inflation and anchoring inflation expectations, he said the decisions would help "strengthen the medium-term growth prospects of the economy and protect the purchasing power of the

weaker sections of society".

"Just as we had remained steadfastly vigilant and responded to fragilities in growth caused by the pandemic... this time around also we will remain equally resolute and committed to bringing back inflation closer to the target through all possible instruments at our disposal," Mr. Das stressed.

'Catching up to do'

Jayanth R. Varma, an external member of the MPC, who has consistently articulated views at divergence with the rest of the six-member panel, remarked that the MPC was "now at liberty to consider the rate increase that it could have done in April itself in the absence of the February forward guidance".

Observing that inflation

risks had become more pronounced both in magnitude and persistence since April, even as the growth shock appeared to be less severe than he had feared initially, Mr. Varma said, "the need for monetary tightening has become much more acute. Moreover, there is a lot of catching up to do".

"It appears to me that more than 100 basis points of rate increases needs to be carried out very soon. My preference therefore is for a 50 basis points increase in the repo rate," Mr. Varma said, opining that it would be simpler and clearer to move the rate in multiples of 25 bps than to opt for a 40 bps rate increase as the majority had advocated. However, he opted not to dissent and voted in line with the rest.

Debroy flags data on consumption spending

‘Survey this year in all probability’

VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI

In the first official signal that the government is looking at resuming the Consumption Expenditure Surveys by the National Statistical Office, the Prime Minister’s Economic Advisory Council chief Bibek Debroy said on Wednesday the Survey would be carried out this year ‘in all probability’.

Stressing that India might never have comprehensive data to measure income inequality, Mr. Debroy said it was unfortunate there had been no official data on consumption expenditure since 2011-12, as it made it impossible to assess poverty levels in the absence of such data and the lack of a clearly articulated poverty line.

Usually conducted every five years, the Consumption

Expenditure Survey was last done in 2017-18 but its findings were held back, citing data quality concerns.

On a report by the Institute of Competitiveness on the State of Inequality in India, Mr. Debroy said: “Off-hand... the Gini coefficient in terms of consumption expenditure would probably be at 0.35 or something like that for urban areas today, and rural would be a little bit lower”. The coefficient helps measure income distribution – a score of zero indicating perfect equality in income levels, and one indicating absolute inequality.

“What data are we using? How are we measuring poverty? ... in India, we have never had comprehensive data, and we will never have data on measuring income inequality,” he noted.

Ethanol blend in petrol to be raised to 20% in 3 years

Cabinet advances deadline for fuel firms by 5 years via amendment to National Policy on Biofuels, 2018

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved amendments to the National Policy on Biofuels, 2018, to advance the date by which fuel companies have to increase the percentage of ethanol in petrol to 20%, from 2030 to 2025. The policy to introduce 20% ethanol in petrol will take effect from April 1, 2023.

A statement from the government said the new policy would allow more feed stock for producing biofuel and foster the development of indigenous technologies.

A 2021 report by the NITI Aayog said that “immense



The green route: A NITI Aayog report says ethanol-blended petrol will cut emissions and the dependence on imports. ■PTI

benefits” could accrue to the country by 20% ethanol blending by 2025, such as saving ₹30,000 crore of foreign exchange per year, in-

creased energy security, lowered carbon emissions, better air quality, self-reliance, better use of damaged foodgrains, increased

farmers’ incomes and investment opportunities.

India achieved 9.45% ethanol blending as on March 13, 2022, according to the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas. The Centre projects that this will reach 10% by the end of financial year 2022. The government first announced its plans of advancing the 20% blending target in December 2020.

Impact on vehicles

A 10% blending of petrol does not require major changes to engines but a 20% blend could require some changes and may even drive up the prices of vehicles.

A greater percentage of blending could also mean more land being diverted for water-intensive crops such as sugar cane, which the government currently subsidises.

The NITI Aayog projects an ethanol demand of 10.16 billion litres by 2025. The current ethanol production capacity in India of 4.26 billion litres derives from molasses-based distilleries, and 2.58 billion litres from grain-based distilleries. This is expected to expand to 7.6 billion litres and 7.4 billion litres respectively, and will require six million tonnes of sugar and 16.5 million tonnes of grains per annum by 2025.

Scientists standardise breeding techniques of barbs

Breeders for the Kuruva Paral project were collected from Idamalayar and Bhoothathankettu

K.A. MARTIN
KOCHI

A team of scientists at the Kerala University of Fisheries and Ocean Studies (Kufos) has standardised the techniques for artificial breeding of Olive barbs (Kuruva Paral) and Filament barb (Kalakkodiyam), and have developed brood stocks for Highfin barb (Kooral) and Carnatic carp (Pachilavetti).

These freshwater species of barbs and carp used to be found widely in the Idamalayar Dam, Bhoothathankettu, and the Kol fields of Thrissur district.

Habitat changes

However, indiscriminate fishing and changes in habitat conditions have brought these species, especially Kuruva Paral, to the brink of extinction.



Indiscriminate fishing and habitat changes have led fish such as *Kuruva Paral* to the brink of extinction. •SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

tion. The conservation measures being taken up by Kufos are supported under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-India High Range Landscape project that also aims to help trained aquaculturists among Adivasis to take up

farming of these freshwater species, said Kufos Vice-Chancellor Dr. K. Riji John.

The project, even though launched in January 2020, was delayed by a year due to the pandemic.

The brood stocks for Kooral and Pachilavetti have

been stored at the freshwater aquaculture facility at Kufos, said Dr. A. Anwar Ali, lead investigator of the project. The process of artificial breeding of Pachilavetti is expected to be completed during the upcoming rainy season, while that of Kooral is expected to be completed during this winter, added Dr. Ali, who is also an assistant professor at the fisheries management department at Kufos.

The university has also set up a hatchery at Idamalayar with the support of the UNDP. In a recent development, Kufos distributed materials for creating artificial fish tanks as well as fingerlings of Kuruva Paral to Adivasi families in Kuttampuzha panchayat, nestled close to the Western Ghats. The

breeders for the Kuruva Paral project were collected from Idamalayar dam and Bhoothathankettu. Eleven Adivasi members from the panchayat have been trained at the university for taking up aquaculture.

25,000 fingerlings

Ranching of Kuruva Paral fingerlings from breeding by Kufos have been taken up in Bhoothathankettu and Idamalayar reservoir. Dr. Ali said that a total of 25,000 fingerlings had been deposited at these places.

A documentary on the fish species diversity, fishing practices, and the extension activities carried out under the project is under preparation in association with C-DIT and the UNDP, Kufos sources added.

EXPLAINER

India's vulnerability to drought

What does the recent Drought in Numbers report tell us? How is the United Nations planning to combat the effects of such dry spells?

PRIVALI PRAKASH

The story so far: A United Nations report has revealed that many parts of India fall under the list of regions that are vulnerable to drought globally. The report also stated that India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reduced by 2 to 5% between 1998 and 2017 due to severe droughts in the country. Globally, droughts in the same period caused economic losses of approximately \$124 billion.

These and other global findings centred on drought were collated in the Drought in Numbers, 2022 report presented by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD).

What is the Drought in Numbers report?

The Drought in Numbers report is a collection of data on the effects of droughts on our ecosystem and how they can be mitigated through efficient planning for the future. The report also helps inform negotiations surrounding key decisions by the UNCCD's 197 member parties at the 15th Conference of Parties (COP15), currently underway in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Drought, land restoration, and related aspects such as land rights, gender equality and youth



FILE PHOTO

empowerment are among the top considerations at COP15.

The number and duration of droughts around the world has increased by an alarming 29% since 2000.

UNCCD Executive Secretary Ibrahim Thiaw said that there has been "an upward trajectory in the duration of droughts and the severity of impacts, not only affecting human societies but also the ecological systems upon which the survival of all life depends, including that of our own species,".

What is COP15?

UNCCD's COP15 focuses on desertification, land degradation, and drought, with the theme for the conference being "Land. Life. Legacy: From scarcity to prosperity." The

conference has brought together government representatives, private sector members, and civil society stakeholders to ensure that land continues to benefit present and future generations.

What does the report entail?

According to World Bank estimates, drought conditions can force up to 216 million people to migrate by 2050. Other factors at play along with drought could be water scarcity, declining crop productivity, rise in sea levels, and overpopulation.

Weather, climate and water hazards have accounted for 50% of all disasters and 45% of all reported deaths since 1970, the World Meteorological Organisation data has revealed. Nine in

ten of these deaths have occurred in developing countries.

Between 2020 and 2022, 23 countries have faced drought emergencies. These are Afghanistan, Angola, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Chile, Ethiopia, Iraq, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Lesotho, Mali, Mauritania, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Niger, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, Pakistan, the U.S., and Zambia. According to the report, climate change alone will cause 129 countries to experience an increase in drought exposure in the next few decades.

More than a billion people around the world were affected by drought in 2000-19, making it the second-worst disaster after flooding. Africa was the worst hit, with 134 droughts, of which 70 occurred in East Africa. The World Health Organization has noted that globally, approximately 55 million people are directly affected by droughts annually, making it the most serious hazard to livestock and crops in almost every part of the world.

The impact of drought is, however, not uniform across genders. Research shows that women and girls in emerging and developing countries suffer more in terms of education levels, nutrition, health, sanitation, and safety as a result of droughts.

The burden of water collection also

disproportionately falls on women (72%) and girls (9%). The report notes that they may spend up to 40% of their caloric intake fetching water.

In 2022, over 2.3 billion people are facing water stress. Almost 160 million children are exposed to severe and prolonged droughts.

What are the environmental aspects?

According to the report, if predictions are correct and global warming reaches 3°C by 2100, drought losses could be five times higher than today's levels. The largest increase in drought losses is projected in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic regions of Europe.

Australia's megadrought in 2019-2020 contributed to "megafires" resulting in one of the most extensive losses of habitat for threatened species. About three billion animals were killed or displaced in the Australian wildfires. On a related note, 84% of all terrestrial ecosystems are threatened by changing and intensifying wildfires.

According to a 2017 report by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the percentage of plants affected by drought has more than doubled in the last 40 years. Around 12 million hectares of land are lost each year due to drought and desertification.

THE GIST

■ The Drought in Numbers report is a collection of data on the effects of droughts on our ecosystem and how they can be mitigated through efficient planning for the future.

■ The report has revealed that many parts of India fall under the list of regions that are vulnerable to drought globally. It also stated that India's GDP reduced by 2 to 5% between 1998 and 2017 due to severe droughts in the country.

■ According to a 2017 report by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the percentage of plants affected by drought has more than doubled in the last 40 years.

₹138 cr. to upgrade IB's counter-terrorism grid

Move comes months after Amit Shah reviewed the functioning of the multi-agency centre

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry has sanctioned ₹138.48 crore to the Intelligence Bureau (IB) for a “technical upgrade”, a senior government official said. The funds are meant to upgrade the multi-agency centre (MAC), a common counter-terrorism grid under the IB conceptualised in 2001 after the Kargil war.

The money was sanctioned months after Union Home Minister Amit Shah reviewed the functioning of the MAC with State Director-General of Police (DGP), the IB, the Army and other security agencies in a pan-India meeting in January stressing on the “need for better coordination and syn-



The Ministry stresses better coordination to counter security challenges.

ergy among the Central and State security agencies in countering the ever-changing counter terrorism and security challenges”.

Ashok Prasad, former Special Secretary, MHA said that the idea behind the MAC was to create an institutional

memory on terrorism and act as a platform to analyse the information on terror-related activities. The former IB officer said that the first software for MAC was designed in-house.

An official said the MAC had the main server in Delhi which is linked to the subsidiary multi-agency centre (SMAC) under the Subsidiary Intelligence Bureau (SIBs) in all States, which further disseminates information to the intelligence branch or wing of the respective State police forces.

Plans are now afoot to link it to the district office of the Superintendent of Police which has been pending for more than a decade now.

“Intelligence agencies do

not have investigating powers, it can only be done by the local police. If MAC is linked to the district SP's office, relevant information on terror can be fed in the system leading to the expansion of terror database,” Mr. Prasad said.

Common pool

An official explained that MAC collated information from multiple agencies and put it in a common pool for the users to access the relevant information.

“Not every one can access the information. If an agency has found a suspicious number, it can run a search on the MAC platform and if the number is already stored in the database, the agency will

be directed to the official concerned. The agency will then have to contact the official to get more details on the particular number,” the official said.

As many as 28 organisations including the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), armed forces and State police are part of the platform and various security agencies share real time intelligence inputs on MAC. There are around 400 secured sites connected with the MAC headquarters.

A parliamentary standing committee report in 2020 had observed that the contribution made over the years by State agencies is lower in the overall inputs that have been received at MAC.

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.