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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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Can India re-imagine South Asia?

PARLEY

If New Delhi does not take the lead, the region cannot respond to various crises collectively

After weeks of protests, Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa stepped down this month, but that is not the only big political non-electoral change in the neighbourhood in 2021-22. Just a month ago, it was Pakistan; a year ago, it was Nepal. Power changed hands through more coercive means in Myanmar and Afghanistan. Their politics have yet to settle down. How should India react to these changes? Is there a common strain running across the region in these developments? Shyam Saran and Srinath Raghavan discuss these questions and more with Suhasini Haidar. Edited excerpts:

Are these changes in the neighbourhood because of similar political cultures? Or due to the economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the global downturn and Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

Shyam Saran: A bit of both, but I would place more emphasis on a much more challenging external environment which all of us are confronting. The COVID-19 pandemic of two years has not only caused economic disruptions, but also social disruptions. More recently, there's the impact of the crisis in Europe. We are today a globalised, interconnected world, and South Asia is not an exception. And in some cases, several challenges have come together to create a kind of perfect storm. A certain brittleness of the politics of some countries has made the whole effort to cope with these kinds of external challenges much more difficult.

Srinath Raghavan: Political brittleness, along with democratic backsliding, an erosion of democratic norms and procedures are all to blame. There has been an attempt by executives in various neighbouring countries to assert their control over other agencies within the state to sort of devolve power more towards the centre away from federal sort of arrangements, and so on. All this has meant that the style of politics that now seems to prevail across the region is

a form of authoritarian populism. And you overlay this change across the region over the past few years with the economic crisis, which is an important one. In fact, I would say that the only parallel that I can think of in recent history is the 1970s. Then we had a similar kind of global economic shock triggered by the oil embargoes which hurt practically every South Asian country, including India. When you put these together – a democratic backsliding, a turn towards authoritarian populism, an economic crisis – what you find is that there are very similar kinds of protests and forms of popular mobilisation taking place across the region. So, there's something to be said about the sort of pan-South Asian quality to what we are seeing now, though the specifics of the political economy of each country differs.

It also seems there has been no collective response to these challenges. Has South Asia failed in collectively responding to so many similar crises?

SS: This is an old challenge – how to fashion a cooperative, collaborative regional response to the common challenges that South Asia faces. The only country which can actually take the lead in order to formulate collaborative responses and mobilise that kind of regionalism is India. But there is an absence of both the awareness and the willingness to play that role here. India appears to have given up on SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), and focuses more on BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation). We have seen sub-regional cooperation under, say, the BBIN, i.e. the Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal forum, but it is partial. As far as the regional response is concerned, I'm afraid that simply does not exist. Even the limited kind of consultative process that we used to have before is missing. This is a failure. Because if India does not take the lead, it will not happen. We are now working much more at the bilateral level.



A vandalised portrait of former Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa outside President Gotabaya Rajapaksa's office in Colombo. •AP

SR: There's a wider deficit as well. Compared to, say, two decades ago, what is also striking is the level to which even civil society traction across the region has considerably dipped. There was never a time when you could say that there was a consultation type of civil society interaction which was very strong. But we are at a curious juncture where neither high politics nor civil society interaction seems to be going on. But popular movements and mobilisations do seem to be learning a little bit from each other. For instance, the current protests in Sri Lanka clearly have taken a lesson or two out of what happened in the farmers' protests in India.

The pandemic has caused doubts about the Chinese system, about Chinese abilities. On the other hand, China has started a new South Asian outreach, delivered vaccines when India couldn't. How has India fared in terms of its pushback to China in the neighbourhood?

SS: China has far more resources to deploy than India does. But over the last several months, Chinese preoccupation with its own challenges – in particular, what is happening with this zero-COVID policy, the economic disruptions and political stirrings – is growing. It is also preoccupied with the consequences and anticipated consequences of the Ukraine war... whether it had made a wrong bet in aligning itself much more closely with Russia. So, the attention being given to not just South Asia but also other parts of

If there is a deficit of democracy in India and if policies are followed which instigate communalism, it would become difficult to run any kind of foreign policy.

SHYAM SARAN

the world is less. Also, in South Asia itself, there is a certain new wariness about the China connection. It may be unfair to hold China responsible for the economic crisis in Sri Lanka, or to say that China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) or CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) has not been a game changer. But there is a certain wariness about China, and there is a certain opening for India to emerge as a security provider, as an economic support to the countries which are in the middle of the crisis.

SR: China is certainly in a tight spot. Apart from everything else, it seems the Ukraine crisis will mean everything to the west of Russia is unlikely to be part of any kind of BRI connectivity. But that creates an incentive for the Chinese to double down on other parts of the BRI.

And the U.S., given recent outreaches in the Maldives, Nepal, Bangladesh? Do you see the U.S. in South Asia today as a force multiplier for India's efforts or as a rival to both China and India?

SR: It is a good thing that the U.S. is helping some of these smaller South Asian countries get on their feet and

be able to resist Chinese blandishments. At the same time, I wouldn't assume the U.S. has too many interests at stake in South Asia. I wouldn't put too much emphasis on what the U.S. is doing. Inasmuch as it dovetails with India's interests and plans in the region, it's something New Delhi will welcome. But a lot has to be done by India. That's where the action should lie.

SS: I would be somewhat more nuanced in that respect. Look at, for example, the effort put in by the U.S. to get this \$500 million MCC (Millennium Challenge Corporation) deal through with Nepal. This seems to indicate that certainly on the periphery of China, the U.S. is interested in maintaining and even expanding its spread, and perhaps in consultation or association with India. There is certainly an interest in the maritime part of South Asia, whether it is Sri Lanka or the Maldives. I see an interest on the part of the Pakistan army and the Pakistani elite in keeping the relationship with the U.S., and there is a certain sense of discomfort with too much dependence on China.

There have been concerns about the authoritarian moves in India. Is this trend going to make it that much more difficult for India to be a South Asian leader? Or is India fitting into the South Asian landscape where there are so many other authoritarian leaders?

SS: I don't think it should be our ambition to become a part of that kind of a landscape in South Asia. We have always been able to aspire to a leadership position precisely because we have been a vibrant democracy. We have been able to demonstrate our ability to handle the incredible plurality and diversity in this country [with] vibrant political institutions, which are so important in order to anchor the democratic spirit. Any setback to that is going to make any aspiration for regional and global leadership harder. If there is a deficit of democracy in India and if policies are followed which instigate communalism and a lack of social cohesion in the country, then it would become very difficult to run any kind of foreign policy. It is very important that you should not let domestic political

compulsions begin to influence your external policies, which should be based on a much more sober calculation of our national interest.

SR: Whether countries in the region are looking to India for leadership or not depends on the quality of India's growth and economic prosperity. At this point of time, India's economic position clearly is in no shape to enable it to play a serious leadership role in the region. We need to recognise that the ethnic landscape of South Asia does not follow its political boundaries. We may assume that there are some things that we do in India which are purely aimed at the domestic audience, but it will have a knock-on impact in terms of how our neighbours perceive it, how they react to it. If religious majoritarianism under the name of electoral campaigns is given free license in India, you can be almost sure that it will have negative consequences.

What does India need to do to re-imagine its region as a whole?

SR: There is a broader shift in the way that we think, for instance, on climate change, and the fact is that the destiny of South Asia hangs or falls together. Like the question about ethnicity, these are not things that can be segregated by international boundaries. We have to take a broader view of what kinds of severe challenges the region faces beyond political compulsions of the here and now. We need a much deeper engagement beyond government, at the level of civil society, even at very localised levels between India and its neighbours, because only then will you be able to act in ways that are meaningful to the people of the region as a whole.

SS: I do not think that the current approach of marginalising SAARC and giving priority to BIMSTEC is a good idea. I'm not saying BIMSTEC should not be pursued, or BBIN has not achieved some objectives, but these cannot be a substitute for a South Asian regional cooperative forum. The idea should be, how do we work out policies, which then present India as the preferred partner for our region, and India becomes an engine of growth for South Asia.



Shyam Saran is a former Foreign Secretary. His new book *How China Sees India and the World* will be published later this month



Srinath Raghavan is a historian and teaches at Ashoka University, Sonapat



Scan the QR code to listen to the full interview online

Nasheed to help ‘coordinate’ Sri Lanka’s foreign aid efforts

Ranil ropes in Maldivian friend; Indian banks’ help sought

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has appointed Maldivian Parliamentary Speaker and former President Mohamed Nasheed as the “coordinator” for securing foreign aid to Sri Lanka that is facing an unprecedented economic crisis.

Mr. Wickremesinghe on Thursday held a closed-door meeting with his long-time friend Mr. Nasheed who is visiting Colombo, and discussed Sri Lanka’s dire economic situation, while exploring possible sources of relief. “During the discussions, the former President of Maldives generously offered to assist Sri Lanka in securing relief for the country from foreign nations. The Prime Minister accepted the former President’s offer and appointed him to coordinate the relief efforts,” Mr. Wickremesinghe’s office said in a statement.

Mr. Nasheed – who has spent many of his years in exile in Sri Lanka – has

maintained close links with Sri Lankan leaders across political parties. Observing



Mohamed Nasheed

that the situation in Sri Lanka is “extremely serious”, he told *The Hindu* in Colombo: “We must all do whatever we can in times of need for our neighbour and cousin. I will do everything I can to assist the people of Sri Lanka.”

Mr. Nasheed, known for his wide international appeal as an advocate of democracy and human rights, will reach out to international partners and regional leaders on Sri Lanka’s behalf, to secure immediate assistance.

Sri Lanka’s foreign reserves have depleted rapidly in the last few months, leaving the government desperate for dollars to import essentials, including food, fuel, and medicines. According to political sources in Colombo, Mr. Wickremesinghe is counting on the QUAD grouping – the U.S., India, Japan, and Australia – to lead the foreign aid consortium that he mooted soon after his sudden appointment on May 12, amid political tumult in Sri Lanka.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Mr. Nasheed made a specific appeal to Indian banks and the Indian business community to “make themselves available” for Sri Lanka. “My plea to the generous people of India, especially entrepreneurs and businesspeople, is please make yourselves available for financing and debt restructuring to support Sri Lanka.”

Financial institutions must “underwrite” Sri Lanka’s future, Mr. Nasheed said, adding Indian entrepreneurs and banks “are very well placed” to do so.

Further, Mr. Nasheed observed that Maldivians “will never forget” the help extended by Sri Lanka and its leaders throughout the years. “If I have a single penny, I will make sure Sri Lankans have it,” he said.

Mr. Nasheed has closely followed and weighed in on developments in Sri Lanka in recent weeks. Following violent attacks that spilled over to the streets of Colombo and elsewhere on May 9, he said in a tweet: “Oh my dearest Lanka, please don’t go there. Please come back.”

On Mr. Wickremesinghe’s appointment, Mr. Nasheed tweeted again, saying: “I wish Sri Lanka’s new PM the very best of luck. Throughout my political life, I’ve always listened to Ranil’s advice & it has never been found wanting. Sri Lanka is in trouble, but I’ve no doubt the PM will do his best to bring back prosperity.”

'BRICS must press for aid to tackle climate crisis'

Jaishankar speaks about Ukraine crisis

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

Union External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday shed light on the commodities shock that the Ukraine crisis has unleashed and sought support for the developing world.

Addressing the BRICS foreign ministers-level meeting, Mr. Jaishankar sought "credible commitment of resources" by the developed economies in mitigating the threat of climate crisis. "Knock-on effects of the Ukraine conflict have led to sharp increases in the costs of energy, food and commodities. This must be mitigated for the sake of the developing world," said Mr. Jaishankar in his speech.

The senior Minister's comment highlighted the disruption that the commodities market is dealing with since the beginning of the war in Ukraine from February 24. The BRICS event was attended by the Foreign Ministers of China, South Africa, Brazil and Russia.

 **We need resilient and reliable supply chains, economic decentralisation**

S. JAISHANKAR
Minister of External Affairs

India has been faced with a steep increase in the prices of wheat, cotton, cooking gas, metals.

The increase in the commodities prices have been compared to the commodities shock in the 1970s.

The Ukraine crisis has also created trouble for the metal market which in turn is expected to hit the sustainable energy ambition of the world. The war's impact on aluminium, nickel and zinc prices are casting a shadow on the renewable technologies.

He hinted at the requirement of greater western responsibility in the domain of renewables, saying, "Together, we should press for credible commitment of resources by developed nations for climate action and climate justice."

Modi to fly to Japan for Quad Summit next week

PM will hold talks with Biden, other world leaders

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will travel to Tokyo for his second in-person Quad Summit on Tuesday, and hold bilateral talks with U.S. President Joseph Biden, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Australian PM Scott Morrison, the Ministry of External Affairs

(MEA) announced.

During his visit to Japan, which begins on May 23, Mr. Modi will address a business summit and meet with members of the Indian community in Tokyo, while the Quad summit and bilateral meetings will be held on May 24.

“The forthcoming Quad Summit provides an opportunity for the Leaders to exchange views about developments in the Indo-Pacific region and contemporary global issues of mutual interest,” the MEA said in a statement.



Narendra Modi

The Quad Summit is expected to take stock of the Russian war in Ukraine, and the impact of three months of Western sanctions. India is the only the member of the Quad that has not joined

sanctions against Russia, nor has it directly criticised Russia for its invasion of Ukraine.

India has also increased its intake of Russian oil, buying more oil in March and April, an estimated 40 million barrels more than it had in all of 2021, while the other Quad members, members of the G-7 and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have pledged to end their imports from Russia in time.

More recently, the issue of India's ban on wheat exports have been taken up by the

U.S. and the G-7, which has appealed to India to reconsider.

“The Leaders will review progress of Quad initiatives and Working Groups, identify new areas of cooperation and provide strategic guidance and vision for future collaboration,” said the statement.

The Quad summit in Tokyo, scheduled next week, will also review progress on the working groups formed a year ago on vaccine distribution, critical technologies, cybersecurity, space, climate

change, and other issues.

The MEA spokesperson said that while it was true that the project has not yet taken off, other vaccines have been distributed by Quad countries individually so far, and it remains to be seen whether the upcoming Quad summit will see a “review” of the vaccine initiative given the logjam.

The Ministry of External Affairs also said that during bilateral talks with Mr. Biden, Mr. Modi is expected to discuss the India-U.S. Strategic Partnership.

'China failed to change Tibetan people's minds'

Dalai Lama meets U.S. envoy on Tibet

ANANTH KRISHNAN
HONG KONG

China's Communist Party has failed in its efforts to change the minds of Tibetan people, the Dalai Lama said on Thursday.

Meeting with the visiting U.S. Special Coordinator on Tibet Uzra Zeya – on a rare high-level visit from Washington to Dharamsala – the exiled Tibetan spiritual leader praised the democratic freedoms in the U.S. and in India.

China, he said, had “completely failed” in trying to change Tibetans' minds. “Meanwhile, China's thinking [is] also changing rapidly, Socialism and Marxism have gone,” he said.

The meeting discussed preservation of Tibetan culture and its importance for the world, said Penpa Tsering, Sikyong of the Central Tibetan Administration in Dharamsala.

China has slammed the visit as “interference” in its internal affairs.

“The 14th Dalai Lama is a political exile disguised as a religious person and engages in anti-China separatist activities and attempts to split Tibet from China,” Chinese Foreign Ministry spo-



Dalai Lama

kesperson Zhao Lijian said in Beijing.

“Tibet is a part of China and Tibetan religious affairs are China's internal affairs. The U.S. appointment of a Special Coordinator for Tibetan Issues is an interference in China's internal affairs. China is firmly opposed to it and has never recognised it.”

He said the U.S. “should take earnest actions to abide by its commitment that Tibet is a part of China and not supporting Tibetan independence.” “It should not provide any support for separatist activities by the anti-China Dalai clique,” he said, adding that “China will continue to take measures defend its sovereignty, territorial integrity and development interests.”

By the book

Reservations should serve a development purpose and not be a weapon of divisiveness

The Supreme Court has allowed Madhya Pradesh to implement 14% reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) and notify the elections for nearly 23,263 local bodies within two weeks. The Court had on May 10 ordered the State to proceed with the elections without OBC quotas. The Court has since then reassured itself that the State has met the 'triple test' criteria it had established in 2010 for OBC reservation in local bodies – a commission that undertook contemporaneous empirical inquiry into the nature and implications of the backwardness in the context of local bodies, break-up of the reservation local body-wise, and adherence to the 50% ceiling on quotas. Madhya Pradesh had already provided for reservation for women besides Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and its proposed quota for OBCs is 14%, to keep the aggregate within the 50% ceiling. The State has convinced the Court that it had indeed met the triple test, but the validity and accuracy of the commission report remain open to further judicial scrutiny. The Madhya Pradesh government and the Bharatiya Janata Party have welcomed the order which they publicise as their success; the Opposition Congress has said OBCs deserve 27% reservation, and blames the BJP government for its failure to impress upon the Court, on the quantum.

Madhya Pradesh and Odisha are also facing judicial scrutiny of their plans for OBC reservation in local bodies, and this remains a controversial question on which the law is still evolving and public opinion is fractious. The Court has held that the criteria for reservation in job and education, which is social and educational backwardness, need not be applied for reservation in local bodies. Backwardness to be established for political reservation can be of a different nature, it had held. OBCs collectively form more than half the population of India and many communities want to be included in the category. The politics of the country is largely litigated among this segment, and suggestions and demands are raised on a regular basis. There is demand for removing the 50% ceiling on quotas, a caste-based census that the Centre is opposing but clamour for which is growing, and reservation in the private sector. While quotas have proven to be an effective instrument of empowerment and justice, competitive politics around them often leads to a paralysis of politics and governance. Making the reservation regime fair, objective, and empirical is a major governance challenge, and the Court's attempts in that direction is welcome. Political parties and governments must act in tandem with the judiciary so that reservation programmes do not turn divisive but serve a development purpose.

Supreme Court to hear pleas challenging EWS quota in July

Validity of ₹8 lakh criterion as the annual income limit had come into question

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said that it will begin hearing in July this year, a series of petitions challenging the criteria fixed by the Central government to identify Economically Weaker Sections [EWS] of the society to grant 10% reservation in education and jobs.

A Bench led by Justice D. Y. Chandrachud has primarily raised the question on the government's decision to fix ₹8 lakh as the annual income limit to identify the EWS category. The validity of the ₹8 lakh criterion had come into question while seeking EWS reservation in National Eligibility cum Entrance Test



(NEET) admissions.

Senior advocate Arvind Datar, for the petitioners, submitted that the NEET-PG (post graduate) examination for the 2022-23 batches was due soon. "We will keep it as soon as the court reopens. We will give a date," Justice Chandrachud said. On Janu-

ary 17, 2019, the government had released an official memorandum [OM] informing that families earning a gross annual income below ₹8 lakh would be identified as EWS for the benefit of reservation.

The OM was issued just three days before the Constitution (One Hundred and Third) Amendment Act, which introduced the EWS quota, came into force on January 14, 2019. The court had even wondered whether the ₹8 lakh threshold was "largely based" on the criterion to identify the creamy layer in the Other Backward Class quota. An expert committee headed by former Finance Secretary Ajay Bhush-

an Pandey, formed by the government to review the ₹8 lakh limit, had in its report maintained that the financial threshold was not a "mechanical adoption" of the OBC creamy layer cut-off.

"The review committee seems to be just trying to justify the ₹8 lakh limit post facto. They have done their best to justify the ₹8 lakh limit," Justice Chandrachud had remarked.

The Centre had defended the annual income limit. Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, for the government, had asked in court whether anybody with "common sense" would think ₹8 lakh was an "irrational" income limit for determining EWS.

Bridging the health policy to execution chasm

India's States need to act quickly in setting up a public health and management cadre for a healthier society



CHANDRAKANT LAHARIYA

In April this year, the Union government released a guidance document on the setting up of a 'public health and management cadre' (PHMC) as well as revised editions of the Indian Public Health Standards (IPHS) – for ensuring quality health care in government facilities. For a country where politicians take pride in inaugurating super-specialty hospitals and where the health focus has traditionally been on medical care or attention on treating the sick, these two developments to strengthen public health services are welcome.

A background, the fallout

The 'public health and management cadre' is a follow up of the recommendations made in India's National Health Policy 2017. At present, most Indian States (with exceptions such as Tamil Nadu and Odisha) have a teaching cadre (of medical college faculty members) and a specialist cadre of doctors involved in clinical services. This structure does not provide similar career progression opportunities for professionals trained in public health. It is one of the reasons for limited interest by health-care professionals to opt for public health as a career choice.

The outcome has been costly for society: a perennial shortage of trained public health workforce. The proposed public health cadre and the health management cadre have the potential to address some of these challenges. With the release of guidance documents, the States have been advised to formulate an action plan, identify the cadre strengths, and fill up the vacant posts in the next six months to a year.

The revised version of the IPHS once again underscores the continued relevance of improved quality of health services through public health facilities. This is the second revision in the IPHS, which

were first released in 2007 and then revised in 2012. The regular need for a revision in the IPHS is a recognition of the fact that to be meaningful, quality improvement has to be an ongoing process. The development of the IPHS itself was a major step. Nearly two decades ago, in many countries including India, there was limited attention on ensuring quality. Increasing access to health services and improving the quality of care were perceived as a sequential process: first focus on increasing access and then a thought may be given to ensuring quality (which rarely happened).

Role and relevance

The voices for having public health services and workforce in India have always been few and feeble. Understandably, the need for a public health cadre and services in India rarely got any policy attention. Arguably, the reason was that even among policymakers, there was limited understanding on the roles and the functions of public health specialists and the relevance of such cadres, especially at the district and sub-district levels. At best, epidemiologists were equated with public health specialists, failing to recognise that the latter is a much broader and inclusive group of specialists. However, the last decade and a half was eventful. The initial threat of avian flu in 2005-06, the Swine flu pandemic of 2009-10; five more public health emergencies of international concern between years 2009-19; the increasing risks and regular emergence and re-emergence of new viruses and diseases (Zika, Ebola, Crimean-Congo Hemorrhagic fever, Nipah viruses, etc.) in animals and humans, resulted in increased attention on public health. In 2017, India's National Health Policy 2017 proposed the formation of a public health cadre and enacting a National Public Health Act. Yet, progress on these fronts was slow as usual.

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the status quo. For months together, everyone was looking for professionals trained in public health and who had field experience; they were simply far and few. It became clear that 'epi-



demic' and 'pandemic' required specialised skills in a broad range of subjects such as epidemiology, biostatistics, health management and disease modelling, to list a few. In the absence of trained public health professionals at the policy and decision making levels, India's pandemic response ended up becoming bureaucrat steered and clinician led. Every struggle in the pandemic response was a reminder that a clinician, no matter how skilled in the art of treating a patient, or a bureaucrat, no matter how experienced in administration, could not fulfil the role of the epidemiologists and public health specialists, who are specially trained to make a decision when there is limited information about a pathogen and its behaviour.

A continuing role in care

A public health workforce has a role even beyond epidemics and pandemics. A trained public health workforce ensures that people receive holistic health care, of preventive and promotive services (largely in the domain of public health) as well as curative and diagnostic services (as part of medical care). A country or health system that has a shortage of a public health workforce and infrastructure is likely to drift towards a medicalised care system. In 2022, there is greater clarity on the role of the public health workforce, which is a remarkable starting point. However, the delay in policy decisions on a public health cadre is also a reflection of a long and tortuous journey of policy making in India. These two new cadres have come up late but the focus now has to be on accelerated implementation.

The revised IPHS is an important development but not an end itself. In the 15 years since the first release of the IPHS, only a small proportion – around 15% to 20% – of government health-care facili-

ties meets these standards. This raises a legitimate question on whether development (and revision) of such quality standards is ritualistic practice or whether these are considered seriously for policy formulation, programmatic interventions and for corrective measures. If the pace of achieving IPHS is any criteria, there is a need for more accelerated interventions. Opportunities such as a revision of the IPHS should also be used for an independent assessment on how the IPHS has improved the quality of health services.

Imperfect implementation

Drafting of well-articulated and sometimes near perfect policy documents, even though in a delayed manner, is a skill which Indian policymakers have mastered well. However, the implementation of most such policies leaves a lot to be desired. The IPHS implementation in the last 15 years is one such example. It is difficult to predict the outcome of the PHMC guidance document; however, the past can guide the process.

The effective part of implementation is interplay: policy formulation, financial allocation, and the availability of a trained workforce. In this case, policy has been formulated. Then, though the Government's spending on health in India is low and has increased only marginally in the last two decades; however, in the last two years, there have been a few additional – small but assured – sources of funding for public health services have become available. The Fifteenth Finance Commission grant for the five-year period of 2021-26 and the Pradhan Mantri Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission (PM-ABHIM) allocations are available for strengthening public health services and could be used as catalytic funding – which should be used in the interim – as States embark upon implementing the PHMC and a revised IPHS.

The third aspect of effective implementation, the availability of trained workforce, is the most critical. Even the most well-designed policies with sufficient financial allocation may falter because of the lack of a trained workforce. As States develop plans for setting up

the PHMC, all potential challenges in securing a trained workforce should be identified and actions initiated.

Helping States

One, the level of interest among States in implementing the public health and management cadres needs to be explored and a centre of excellence in every State should be designated to guide this process. States which are likely to show reluctance need to be nudged through appropriate incentives. Two, the idea of mapping and an analysis of human resources for public health and then scaling up of recruitment are logical. However, it needs to be ensured that in an overzealous attempt to achieve numbers, the quality of training of the required workforce is not compromised. Setting up these two new cadres should be used as an opportunity to improve and standardise the quality of training in public health institutions. Three, it would take a few years before the PHMC becomes fully functional in the States. However, the implementation process needs to be started in the next few months to avoid the risk of it becoming a low priority. Four, the success of the PHMC would be dependent upon the availability and the equitable distribution of health staff for all other categories at government health facilities. Therefore, as new cadres are being set, efforts need to be made to fill vacancies of health staff in all other positions as well.

Three years before the COVID-19 pandemic had started, the Indian government had committed, through NHP 2017, to achieve the goal of universal health coverage – which envisages access to a broad range (preventive, promotive, curative, diagnostic, rehabilitative) health-care services which meet certain quality standards, at a cost which people can afford. The public health and management cadres and the revised IPHS can help India to make progress towards the NHP goal. To ensure that, State governments need to act urgently and immediately.

Dr. Chandrakant Lahariya is a physician, public policy and health systems specialist and an epidemiologist, based in New Delhi

SC says Centre, States have equal powers to make GST-related laws

It confirms Gujarat HC ruling that govt. can't levy IGST on ocean freight imports

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday, in a judgment championing the importance of “cooperative federalism” for the well-being of democracy, held that Union and State legislatures have “equal, simultaneous and unique powers” to make laws on Goods and Services Tax (GST) and the recommendations of the GST Council are not binding on them.

The apex court's decision came while confirming a Gujarat High Court ruling that the Centre cannot levy Integrated Goods and Services Tax (IGST) on ocean freight from Indian importers.

“The recommendations of the GST Council are the product of a collaborative dialogue involving the Union and the States. They are recommendatory in nature... The recommendations only have a persuasive value. To regard them as binding would disrupt fiscal federalism when both the Union

and the States are conferred equal power to legislate on GST,” a Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud held.

The court emphasised that Article 246A (which gives the States power to make laws with respect to GST) of the Constitution treat the Union and the States as “equal units”. “It confers a simultaneous power (on Union and States) for enacting laws on GST... Article 279A, in constituting the GST Council, envisions that neither the Centre nor the States are actually dependent on the other,” Justice Chandrachud interpreted.

What next?

FOR BUSINESSES

- Goods importers get some relief as they are no longer liable to pay GST on ocean freight charges; could seek refunds for past payments

reiterates the spirit in which the GST Council is functioning



- “All but one decision of the Council has been reached by consensus so far”

FOR THE CENTRE AND STATES

- Finance Ministry believes SC order only

- The Council may be summoned soon to discuss SC verdict's implications

 An administrative body created by the Constitution cannot have an overriding right on the legislature

TARUN BAJAJ, Revenue Secretary

 The Centre had been arbitrarily imposing its decisions on States... We hope the verdict would pave the way for States to protect their rights

K.N. BALAGOPAL, Kerala Finance Minister

He said the Centre and States were “autonomous, independent and even competing units” while making GST laws. “The federal system is a means to accommodate the needs of a pluralistic society in a democratic manner... Democracy and federalism are inter-dependent. Federalism would only be stable in a well functioning democracy. The constituent units of a federal polity checks the exercise of powers of one another to prevent one group from exercising dominant power;” it noted.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 10

‘Centre, States have powers to make laws’

The judgment said that though the Centre may have a larger share of power in certain instances to prevent chaos and provide security, the States still wielded power.

“India is a multi-party system. It is possible that the party in power in the Centre may or may not be in power in other States... Even if the States have been given lesser power [in certain situations], they can still resist the mandates of the Union by using different forms of political contestations permitted by the Constitution... It is not imperative that one of the federal units [Centre or the States] must always possess a higher share of power over the other units,” the court stated.

“The federal system is a means to accommodate the needs of a frugalistic society... Democracy and federalism are interdependent to each other. Federalism would only be stable in a well functioning democracy. Additionally, the constituent units of a federal polity checks the exercise of powers of one another to prevent one group from exercising dominant power,” the court stated.

In the GST Council, the

States and the Centre have to function in a “harmonious” manner. The discussions in the GST Council cut across party lines and impacted federalism and democracy as a whole. But harmony, necessary for the well-being of the nation, and its fiscal security could be achieved not just by collaboration but also “contestations” between the Centre and the States.

Contesting discussions between the Centre and the States could also further the cause of federalism and democracy, the Bench reasoned.

After all, the court said, “Indian federalism is a dialogue between cooperative and un-cooperative federalism where the federal units are at liberty to use different means of persuasion, ranging from collaboration to contestation”.

The judgment also resolved a prolonged battle the government has been raging against companies to implement its IGST on ocean freight on reverse charge basis.

The issue had gained significance following news reports of fresh tax queries raised on ocean freight even as the dispute was pending in the top court.

SC verdict will not alter the GST regime: FinMin

Kerala, Tamil Nadu Finance Ministers hail apex court ruling for safeguarding States' rights, stressing cooperative federalism

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court verdict does not entail any changes 'in any way' to the functioning of the GST regime and the institutional mechanism for its operation, the Finance Ministry asserted on Thursday, even as some States welcomed the decision for clearly enunciating and safeguarding their rights.

Terming the GST Council 'the finest example of collaborative and cooperative federalism', the Finance Ministry said that the apex court had 'only elaborated' on its functional mechanism in its observations.

"This judgment does not in any way lay down anything new in so far as the GST institutional mechanism is concerned, does not have any bearing on the way GST

has been functioning in India, nor lays down anything fundamentally different to the existing framework of GST," it noted, seeking to quell anxiety about the future of the indirect tax system introduced in July 2017.

The Council was a collaborative institutional mechanism, and the Centre and States follow its recommendations that are arrived at with consensus, the ministry said, stressing that there had been only 'a solitary instance' where a decision required voting.

"Even in this case, the dissenting States implemented the decision of GST Council," the ministry said in a statement, adding that it would review the 153-page judgment in detail. "In all other instances, which run into more than a thousand, the



No change: Judgment does not lay down anything new on the GST's institutional mechanism, says Ministry. ■ NAGARA GOPAL

decisions have been taken with consensus," it added.

'Persuasive for primary' Stressing that the apex court had only elaborated upon the constitutional scheme for GST, it said the court had observed that the Council's

recommendations had persuasive value for primary legislation, but its recommendations were binding for subordinate legislation such as issue of notification, framing of rules, prescribing rates and taxes.

Kerala Finance Minister

K.N. Balagopal hailed the SC ruling for upholding the relevance of cooperative federalism and said it would have a far-reaching impact on the country's tax structure and Centre-State relations.

'Arbitrarily imposing' "Ever since the GST regime came into being, the Centre had been arbitrarily imposing its decisions on the States, affecting their revenue and forcing them to impose treasury restrictions," he said in Thiruvananthapuram, expressing the hope that this would pave the way for States to be able to protect their rights and ensure financial stability.

Tamil Nadu Finance Minister Palanivel Thiaga Rajan said in Madurai that the verdict safeguarded States' rights by stating that the re-

commendations of the GST Council were not binding on the Centre and the State.

"The Council was a only a recommendatory body and cannot supersede the State's rights and power for enacting the laws with regard to GST," he pointed out. The State too had powers to enact laws. The Council could only make recommendations and the decision was not binding on the Centre and the State.

Tax experts were tentative about the implications of the verdict. "This would have far-reaching implications on various other matters where the States are not in agreement with the decisions of the GST Council, especially in light of the compensation period coming to an end in June," said Mahesh Jaising, partner at Deloitte India.

Pockets of hope, linking nature and humanity

It is important to increase the number of biosphere reserves in South Asia to ward off a doomsday ecological scenario



ERIC FALT

Biodiversity is the living fabric of our planet. It underpins human well-being in the present and in the future, and its rapid decline threatens nature and people alike.

According to the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services released in 2019 by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, the main global drivers of biodiversity loss are climate change, invasive species, over-exploitation of natural resources, pollution and urbanisation.

The earth is under strain

Because of our collective excesses, the ecological carrying capacity of planet earth has largely been exceeded. This trend needs to be redressed, with cleaner air, high quality drinking water, and enough food and healthy habitats to ensure that ecosystem services continue to benefit humanity without critically affecting nature's balance. Whether we look at nature from an environmental, from a cultural or even from a religious point of view, it is our responsibility and clearly in our inter-

est to respect the environment.

In fact, the possibilities exist, and all is not lost. In the last 50 years or so, much has been accomplished for the protection of nature, including the establishment of conservation areas, and a number of international conventions have been signed and ratified.

Biosphere reserves are key

One of the best mechanisms that has been created is the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, created in 1971 by UNESCO. Biosphere reserves are places where humans live in harmony with nature, and where there is an effective combination of sustainable development and nature conservation. They represent pockets of hope and proof that we are not inexorably headed towards a doomsday ecological scenario, provided we take appropriate action.

In South Asia, over 30 biosphere reserves have been established. The first one was the Huru Biosphere Reserve in Sri Lanka, which was designated in 1977 and comprises 25,500 hectares within the tropical dry evergreen forest.

In India, the first biosphere reserve was designated by UNESCO in 2000 within the blue mountains of the Nilgiris. It stretches across the States of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. The network has gone from strength to strength, and it now counts 12 sites, with Panna, in the State of Madhya Pradesh, as the latest inscription in 2020.



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

We need many more biosphere reserves and pockets of hope, and the region offers countless options.

Diverse systems

South Asia has a very diverse set of ecosystems. To begin with, Bhutan, India and Nepal combined have thousands of glaciers, surrounded by lakes and alpine ecosystems.

The Khangchendzonga Biosphere Reserve, established in 2018, is a good model. It includes some of the highest ecosystems in the world, with elevations up to 8,586 metres. The reserve is home to orchids and rare plant species. At the same time, more than 35,000 people live there. Their main economic activities are crop production, animal husbandry, fishing, dairy products and poultry farming.

Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka all have extensive coastlines, with coral reefs and mangrove forests. These areas are exposed to extreme weather events (storms, floods, droughts), and sea-level rise.

The Maldives are recognised as the lowest-lying country in the

world, with a mere elevation of 1.5 metres above the high tide mark. Together with UNESCO, the archipelago has embarked on a plan to establish pilot sites for the conservation and restoration of coastal ecosystems, and to enhance the population's knowledge on climate change adaptation. Separately, three biosphere reserves have already been created in the Maldives.

Run on science-based plans

UNESCO Biosphere Reserves have all developed science-based management plans, where local solutions for sustainable human living and nature conservation are being tested and best practices applied. Issues of concern include biodiversity, clean energy, climate, environmental education, and water and waste management, supported by scientific research and monitoring. The aim is to detect changes and find solutions to increase climate resilience.

All biosphere reserves are internationally recognised sites on land, at the coast, or in the oceans. Governments alone decide which areas to nominate. Before approval by UNESCO, the sites are externally examined. If approved, they will be managed based on an agreed plan, reinforced by routine checks to ensure credibility, but all remain under the sovereignty of their national government.

Some of the countries in South Asia do not yet have any or enough biosphere reserves. In most if not all cases, the political will is cer-

tainly there but there is a lack of know-how and financial resources. Of course, more financial support from richer nations and from the private sector would be desirable for establishing biosphere reserves in these countries.

The priority countries

Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal are on the priority list of UNESCO, because they do not yet have any biosphere reserves. Their governments are already working on their first nomination files. Our organisation also believes that it would be important to increase the number of biosphere reserves in India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

The point is that if these pockets of hope can expand, with at least one biosphere reserve per country, and with more and larger sites covering the terrestrial surface, including coastal areas with their offshore islands, it will give the realisation to millions of people that a better future is truly possible, one where we can truly live in harmony with nature.

On May 22 and on the occasion of the International Day of Biological Diversity, let us do what is right. Now is the time to act for biodiversity.

Eric Falt is the Director of the UNESCO New Delhi Office, which covers Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka. UNESCO is a member of Team UN in India, together helping deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals

EXPLAINER

Understanding India's ethanol blending policy

Why does the government want to increase the percentage of ethyl alcohol in petrol? From where does India source its ethanol?

JACOB P KOSHY

THE GIST

■ 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 of introducing 20% ethanol is expected to take effect from April 1, 2023.

■ A NITI Ayog Committee report of June 2021 lays out a comprehensive picture of ethanol blending, the challenges and a roadmap.

■ Car makers have said that with modifications in engines (hardware and tuning), the loss in efficiency due to blended fuel can be reduced. To compensate the consumers for a drop in efficiency from ethanol blended fuels, tax incentives on E20 fuel may be considered.

The story so far: 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 of introducing 20% ethanol is expected to take effect from April 1, 2023.

What is the history of ethanol-blending in India?

Since two decades, India has been moving towards putting in place an ecosystem to have more ethanol blended into petrol for use vehicles, particularly two and four wheelers. Government records suggest about 75% of India's 220 million vehicles are two wheelers and 12% four wheelers. Ethanol, or ethyl alcohol, is a hydrocarbon that when burnt can generate heat and power engines.

A report by the IEEFA says that for India to meet its target of 20% ethanol blended in petrol by 2025, it will need to bring in 30,000 additional sq km of land to come under maize cultivation.

However, it takes much more ethanol to power a vehicle's engine than petrol. It also leaves residual by-products that can corrode and damage the vehicle which is why, while vehicles can be run on ethanol, they need to be tuned accordingly so that they don't compromise on efficiency and usability. On the other hand, the gains are potentially significant as ethanol can be sourced from sugarcane, molasses, maize, which given India's agricultural base, can substantially reduce India's dependence on petroleum.

Since 2001, India has tested the feasibility of ethanol-blended petrol whereby 5% ethanol blended petrol (95% petrol-5% ethanol) was supplied to retail outlets. In 2002, India launched the Ethanol Blended Petrol (EBP) Programme and began selling 5% ethanol blended petrol in nine States and four Union Territories that was extended to

twenty States and four UTs in 2006. Until 2013-14, however, the percentage of blending never crossed 1.5%.

In 2015, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways notified that E5 [blending 5% ethanol with 95% gasoline] petrol and the rubber and plastic components used in gasoline vehicles produced since 2008 be compatible with the E10 fuel. In 2019, the Ministry notified the E10 fuel [blending 10% ethanol with 90% gasoline]. The rubber and plastic components used in petrol vehicles are currently compatible with E10 fuel. Financial incentives for distilleries coupled with policy support has seen average blending touch 5%. Standards for E20, E85 and even E100 fuel have already been laid. This includes standards for ethanol blended diesel. Since 2020, India has been announcing its intent to achieve 10% blending by the end of 2022 and 20% blending by 2030. The Centre has also targeted 5% blending of biodiesel with diesel by 2030.

What does switching to E20 entail?

A NITI Ayog Committee report of June 2021 lays out a comprehensive picture of ethanol blending, the challenges and a roadmap. India's net import of petroleum was 185 million tons at a cost of \$55 billion in 2020-21. Most of the petroleum is used by vehicles and therefore a successful 20% ethanol blending programme could save the country \$4 billion per annum, or about ₹30,000 crore. To achieve such savings, the committee estimates an ethanol demand of 1,016 crore litres based on expected growth in vehicle population. Because electric vehicles are also likely to increase, this should partially offset demand for ethanol leading to a requirement of 722-921 crore litres in 2025.

This however is an "optimistic" projection as the NITI report itself notes. India's current ethanol production capacity consists of 426 crore litres from molasses-based distilleries, and 258 crore litres from grain-based distilleries. This is expected to increase to 760 crore litres and 740 crore litres respectively and would suffice to produce 1016 crore litres of ethanol required for EBP

and 334 crore litres for other uses. This will require six million tonnes of sugar and 16.5 million tonnes of grains per annum in ESY 2025.

How does this affect engines?

When using E20, there is an estimated loss of 6-7% fuel efficiency for four wheelers which are originally designed for E0 and calibrated for E10, 3-4% for two wheelers designed for E0 and calibrated for E10 and 1-2% for four wheelers designed for E10 and calibrated for E20. Car makers have said that with modifications in engines (hardware and tuning), the loss in efficiency due to blended fuel can be reduced. To compensate the consumers for a drop in efficiency from ethanol blended fuels, tax incentives on E10 and E20 fuel may be considered. The test vehicles worked well in several test-situations, the report noted.

What is the international experience?

Flex Fuel Engine technology (FFE), or vehicles that run entirely on ethanol, are popular in Brazil and comprise nearly 80% of the total number of new vehicles sold in 2019. The cost of flex fuel vehicles (four-wheelers) could cost about ₹17,000 to ₹25,000 more than the current generation of vehicles.

The two-wheeled flex fuel vehicles would be costlier by ₹5,000 to ₹12,000 compared to regular petrol vehicles. The global production of fuel ethanol touched 110 billion litres in 2019, or about an average growth of 4% year per year during the last decade. The U.S. and Brazil make up 92 billion litres, or 84% of the global share, followed by European Union (EU), China, India, Canada and Thailand.

The prices of ethanol produced in India are higher compared to U.S. and Brazil, because of the minimum support prices that the government provides.

What are the environmental costs of ethanol blending?

Because ethanol burns more completely than petrol, it avoids emissions such as carbon monoxide. However, tests conducted in India have shown that there is no



reduction in nitrous oxides, one of the major environmental pollutants. A report by the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA) says that for India to meet its target of 20% ethanol blended in petrol by the year 2025, it will need to bring in 30,000 additional sq km of land to come under maize cultivation. Half that land can be used more efficiently to produce clean electricity from solar energy, they contend.

For India, sugarcane is the cheapest source of ethanol. On average, a ton of sugarcane can produce 100 kg of sugar and 70 litres of ethanol but that would mean 1,600 to 2,000 litres of water to produce 1 kg of sugar, implying that a litre of ethanol from sugar requires about 2,860 litres of water.

Malik's conviction may end separatist politics

Mirwaiz remains under house arrest

PEERZADA ASHIQ
SRINAGAR

The conviction and likely imprisonment of banned Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) chief Yasin Malik, 56, in a terror funding case, will not only keep him off-the-scene but also completes the dislodgement of the main faces of the separatist spectrum in the Kashmir Valley.

The past 30 years of Kashmir's separatist politics was dominated by three names: Tehreek-e-Hurriyat chairman Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and JKLF chief Yasin Malik.

Hard-liner Mr. Geelani died in 2021 at the age of 91 and his parent organisation Jamaat-e-Islami was banned in 2019 and is in a complete disarray.

Similarly, the Mirwaiz has been kept out-of-scene too since the BJP-led Central government put an end to J&K's special constitutional position in August 2019. The Mirwaiz remains under

house arrest at his residence in Srinagar's Nigeen area and is even barred from his religious obligations as Valley's chief priest.

The Mirwaiz, a moderate face who advocates dialogue on Kashmir, has mostly worked with Mr. Geelani and Mr. Malik to spearhead agitational politics to push for a resolution to the Kashmir problem in the past. With both Mr. Geelani and Mr. Malik out of the scene now, the ability of the Mir-

NEWS ANALYSIS

waiz, even if released, to galvanise street support has been enervated completely.

With Mr. Malik, who advocated complete independence of J&K, arrested, his organisation banned and pro-Pakistan Mr. Geelani dead, this brings an end to the 29-year-old politics of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, a joint amalgam set up in 2003, to provide a political face to the armed rebellion in Kashmir.

Yasin Malik convicted for terror funding

STAFF REPORTER
NEW DELHI

Days after Kashmiri separatist leader Yasin Malik of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) pleaded guilty to the charges framed against him, a Special NIA (National Investigation Agency) court in Delhi convicted him in a terror-funding case on Thursday.

Special NIA judge Praveen Singh of the Patiala House Court complex posted for May 25 arguments on the quantum of sentencing. "I find that accused Yasin Malik has voluntarily and after due legal consultation, meaning thereby, after fully knowing the consequences of his plea, has pleaded guilty to the charges framed against him. His plea is accordingly accepted," he said.

After the framing of charges in March, he refused legal aid and did not contest the charges. The court-appointed *amicus curiae* Advocate Akhand Pratap Singh had tried to convince him to go to trial.

On Thursday, Mr. Singh said the court had now directed the NIA to file a report on Malik's finances, including his assets. The court directed Mr. Malik to file an income affidavit, which the court will take into consideration before deciding on the compensation he is liable to pay, Mr. Singh told *The Hindu*.



CONTINUED
ON PAGE 10

Yasin Malik convicted for terror funding

The court said that it was convicting Mr. Malik of offences under Sections 120-B (criminal conspiracy), 121 (waging or trying to wage war against the Government of India), and 121-A (conspiracy to commit offence under Section 121) of the Indian Penal Code, Sections 13 (punishment for unlawful activities) and 15 (committing terrorist act) of the UAPA read with Section 120-B of the IPC, and Sections 17 (directly or indirectly raising funds for terrorist act), 18 (conspiracy to commit terrorist act), 20 (being member of a terrorist organisation), 38 (offence relating to membership of terrorist organisation), and 39 (offence relating to support to terrorist organisation) of the UAPA.

The court had discharged three accused – Kamran Yusuf, Javed Ahmad Bhatt and Syedah Aasiya Firdous Andrabi. It framed charges against all the other accused, including Hafeez Muhammad Saeed, Shabbir Ahmed Shah, Farooq Ahmad Dar (alias Bitta Karate), Hizbul Mujahideen chief Salahuddin, Rashid Engineer, Zahoor Ahmad Shah Watali, Shahid-ul-Islam, Altaf Ahmad Shah.

While framing the charges, the court had observed, “The statements of witnesses and documentary evidence has connected almost all the accused with each other and to a common object of secession, to the commonality of means they were to use, their close association to terrorist/ terrorist

organisations under the guiding hand and funding of Pakistani establishment”.

The court also said that the accused were part of an “orchestra conspiracy”, where all accused were playing their own instruments, but on the same stage under the directions of a conductor, who in this case was “sitting across the border in the form of Pakistani agencies such as ISI etc.”

Special judge Singh had added, “Each of the conspirators knowing every other conspirator was playing his own role as per the directions of the conductor in order to create a symphony of bloodshed, violence, mayhem and destruction with the ultimate object of secession of J&K from UOI.”

The NIA chargesheet said that Mr. Malik, along with SAS Geelani and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, had formed Joint Resistance Leadership and started issuing directions for the masses to hold different forms of protests and disruptive activities.

“Accused Yasin Malik had played a key role in orchestrating the protests and demonstrations. During the period from 06.08.2016 to 16.08.2016, the protests were very violent and 89 cases of stone-pelting and other unlawful activities were registered during this period,” the NIA had said in its chargesheet. Incriminating documents in the form of communication on letterheads of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Toiba were also recovered from Malik, it said.

Pangong bridge construction is in 'occupied territory': Centre

Current bridge is the main one; smaller one was to support its construction

SUHASINI HAIDAR
DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

India is closely monitoring the construction of a bridge by China on the Pangong Tso (lake) in eastern Ladakh, which is in "occupied territory", the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday. Sources in the security establishment stated that a broad bridge was currently under construction, connecting both sides of the lake, which would significantly cut down time for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to move troops and armoured vehicles, while a smaller bridge built early this year was intended to support construction of the main one.

Official sources said the construction of the main bridge had just commenced and the small bridge, of which satellite images had come out in January, was not a "permanent bridge" but a



Still waters: The bridge will help to cut down time significantly for the movement of PLA troops. ■ AP

bailey bridge to support the construction of the main one. "The smaller bridge for which construction started in October 2021 and went on till January this year, recommenced in March and was completed by April. It is a support bridge to support the construction of a bigger and broader one. The height of the earlier one is so low that patrol boats can't pass under it," a source in the security establishment said on condition of anonymity.

"This is a pattern they follow in other places as well. So, it cannot be called a second bridge."

Responding to questions on this at the weekly press interaction, External Affairs spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said, "We have seen media reports on a new bridge or expansion of old ones. This is a military issue so I can't discuss implications. But India has always believed this area is occupied territory. We continue to

monitor such developments." On the current status of construction, the source cited above said that construction material were dumped last month and the work on the main bridge had just commenced. "Latest satellite images show piers, construction material and cranes on the site now."

Stating that it doesn't make sense to have two bridges at the same location, the source noted that the main bridge was much higher and broader that would allow the PLA to move troops as well as armoured vehicles. As reported earlier, the bridge connecting the north and south banks of Pangong Tso would significantly bring down the time for the PLA to move troops and equipment between the two sectors.

Earlier, the PLA had to take a roundabout crossing the Rudok county, but now the bridge would provide a direct axis.

Mediating between TTP and Pakistan, say Taliban

Pak. terror group puts forth demands

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

PESHAWAR

Afghanistan's Taliban government has confirmed that it is playing the role of a mediator in the ongoing talks between the Pakistan government and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan during which the dreaded militant group has demanded the release of 30 key commanders detained by Pakistani authorities.

Spokesman for Islamic state of Afghanistan Zabihullah Mujahid confirmed that the Afghan government was playing the role of mediator between Islamabad

and the Pakistani Taliban.

“Talks were held in Kabul between the government of Pakistan and the Taliban Movement of Pakistan with the mediation of the Islamic Emirate,” the spokesman tweeted on Wednesday, adding that a temporary ceasefire was also agreed upon.

Prisoner release

The TTP delegates had handed over a list of 30 key commanders to the Pakistani government to which Islamabad gave a positive response and assured to seriously consider the names.

Nagaland set to curb illegal tax collection

The State shuts all police check gates

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Nagaland Government ordered on Thursday that all “police check gates”, except those at the inter-State boundaries, shall be shut to “curb illegal collection of money from the vehicles on roads”.

Several armed groups, including the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) [NSCN-IM], one of the main groups with which the Government of India is engaged in peace talks, collect taxes from traders and vehicles. Last year, the Confederation of Nagaland Chamber of Commerce and Industry (CNCCI) had asked the government

to clarify if it feels the collection of taxes by armed groups is illegal. It said that the business community has had to pay taxes to at least 10 armed groups and “end up paying 12-13 times taxes while their counterparts pay only the GST”.

The order comes a day after Nagaland Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio met Home Minister Amit Shah in Delhi, where he demanded the early conclusion of Naga peace talks. Nagaland Deputy Chief Minister Y. Patton, who is with the Bharatiya Janata Party, has in recent meetings demanded President’s Rule for the State if the Naga peace agreement is not signed soon.

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.