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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

27 - 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.

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Flood of pilgrims swamps Char Dham

Devotees are thronging Uttarakhand with the annual pilgrimage to the four Himalayan abodes of Hindu deities resuming on a full scale after two years of COVID-19 curbs. **Namita Singh** reports that the State administration is finding crowd management an uphill task, but the tourism industry has received a much-needed boost

On a cool afternoon in May, vehicles are lined up bumper to bumper as far as the eye can see on the Rishikesh-Kedarnath highway in Phata, a small town in Uttarakhand's Rudrapur district.

The convoy of vehicles is ferrying thousands of devotees who have descended on the hill State for the Char Dham Yatra — an annual pilgrimage to four Hindu shrines: Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath — which has resumed on a full scale this year after being a low-key affair for the last two years owing to COVID-19 restrictions.

The pilgrimage, considered one of the most sacred by followers of Hinduism, is a journey to the abodes of four deities: Yamunotri (goddess Yamuna) and Gangotri (goddess Ganga) in Uttarakhand district; Kedarnath (Lord Shiva) in Rudrapur district; and Badrinath (Lord Vishnu) in Chamoli district.

Nestled in the foothills of the Himalayas, the shrines are situated in the Garhwal region of the State, which is revered as 'Dev Bhumi' or the land of gods. All devout Hindus aspire to visit the four shrines at least once in their lifetime as they believe the yatra helps them attain 'moksha' or salvation. They believe the arduous trek tests their faith and paves the way for an inward journey towards spiritual awakening.

"Going to Badrinath is like visiting Baikhunth [the abode of Lord Vishnu]. All our wishes get fulfilled. Seeing Badrinath and Kedarnath gives strength to our body and mind. After COVID, I have learnt one lesson: there is no point in accumulating wealth. Everyone should fulfil their desires at the earliest," says Sushma Dhahale, 52, who has arrived for the pilgrimage with her elderly parents from Nagpur in Maharashtra.

Seventy-four-year-old Subhash Chandra Patel, who is part of a group of 110 pilgrims from Satna in Madhya Pradesh, says, "Undertaking the yatra has been a family ritual since the time of my ancestors. We are here to rid ourselves of sins and seek blessings. Lord Shiva fulfils all our wishes," he says.

A devotee attains peace of mind on completing the pilgrimage, says Pankaj Shukla, a priest at the Kedarnath temple. "This journey cleanses the soul of a person and takes him towards higher consciousness. In this way, the soul is freed from the cycle of birth and death."

The pilgrimage also offers visitors panoramic views of the valley and the snow-capped mountains. Rishi Bhardwaj, 26, from Raipur in Chhattisgarh remarks that "there is no place like this in India... It is purely heaven on earth."

Ravindra Kumar, who runs Maruti Tour and Travels in Haridwar, says the pilgrimage draws people from all walks of life, but a large number of them are over 40 years and come from rural areas of the country. "They are the real pilgrims with true devotion. Generally, pilgrims come in groups but we receive individual bookings too," he says.

Of late, there has been a noticeable rise in the number of youth arriving for the pilgrimage. However, Ajendra May, the president of the Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee, has termed them tourists. "They are not pilgrims. Religious fervour is mostly missing in the youth. We are seeing an influx of YouTubers and vloggers who come to boost their subscriber base and business interests. Usually, they don't care about the sanctity of these holy places. Recently, a YouTuber visited Kedarnath with his dog and offended many pilgrims. We are trying to put a check on videography around the shrines."

Heavy rush stalls traffic
Rishikesh is the starting point of the pilgrimage, which involves travel on foot and by pony, bus, car and helicopter across 1,200 km of hilly terrain. The train of pilgrims in Phata is heading to Gaurikund, where the 18-km trek to Kedarnath begins. However, the slow-moving traffic has halted their progress.

"Traffic jams have become a common sight in the State since the opening of the doors of Gangotri and Yamunotri on May 3, and Kedarnath and Badrinath on May 6 and 8, respectively. The State administration is finding crowd management an uphill task amid complaints by pilgrims about overpriced amenities and inadequate medical facilities. The influx of pilgrims has also resulted in rising air pollution and growing piles of garbage that environmentalists say could hurt the State's fragile ecology. However, tour operators and hoteliers are heaving a sigh of relief after reeling under losses during the pandemic."

Noticing the uptick in tourists, the State government on May 15 made registration for the pilgrimage mandatory and announced that pilgrims who fail to register themselves will not be allowed to proceed beyond Rishikesh.

Prabodh Kumar Ghildiyal, Deputy Superintendent of Police, Rudrapur, says, "We were forced to put a cap on the number of visitors. Pilgrims are facing many problems as they have made bookings for their stay and travel, but



Spiritual quest: Hundreds of pilgrims await their turn to pay obeisance and seek blessings at Kedarnath temple, the abode of Lord Shiva, in Uttarakhand's Rudrapur district. • NAMITA SINGH

their registration slots are on different dates. So they are losing out on money. Seeing their faith and devotion, it is difficult to ask them to turn back," he says.

According to government figures, 10.26 lakh pilgrims have visited the four shrines and over 21 lakh have registered for the Char Dham Yatra as of May 25. Kedarnath is the preferred destination of 6.97 lakh pilgrims followed by Badrinath (6.60 lakh), Gangotri (4.12 lakh) and Yamunotri (3.52 lakh).

In 2019, the four shrines received over 32 lakh pilgrims before COVID-19 restrictions caused the numbers to drop to 3.21 lakh in 2020 and 5.09 lakh in 2021," says Jaspal Chauhan, regional tour operator, Dehradun.

Chaos at ticket counters
Chaos reigns at the inter-State bus terminal (ISBT) in Rishikesh with thousands of devotees desperate to visit Kedarnath. However, the Uttarakhand Transport Corporation is providing tickets only to Badrinath as slots for Kedarnath are booked till June 2.

Twenty-two-year-old Aman Rawat, who works at the registration centre at the ISBT, says, "Since there was no daily cap on visitors earlier, a large number of pilgrims have already reached the four shrines. Crowd management there is a challenge as the facilities in place are not sufficient to cater to this influx."

Vinod, 28, a resident of Orcha in Madhya Pradesh who is undertaking the pilgrimage with his friend Shiv Pratap, says they completed their registration for Kedarnath on May 16 and Badrinath on May 19. "We want to go to Kedarnath first, but we have received tickets only to Badrinath. Authorities are behaving rudely with us when we ask questions."

Harshit Jain, 26, from Jalgaon in Maharashtra, wears a dejected look as he sits near the ticket window at the ISBT. "We have been trying to visit Kedarnath for the past several years, but our plans were thwarted by COVID-19. We wanted to visit Badrinath and Kedarnath but no slot is available for Kedarnath."

Unable to control the surge in pilgrims, the State administration on May 19 closed offline registration till May 27. Shalendra Singh Negi, Sub-Divisional Magistrate of Rishikesh and nodal officer for the yatra, says registration can be done using the Tourist Care Uttarakhand app. "Pilgrims can register online and secure slots for their journey. We have vehicles to ferry pilgrims to their desired shrines. We are facilitating the accommodation of people stuck in Rishikesh at dharamshalas and schools."

In Gupkashi, located 14 km away from Phata, a crowd of pilgrims has queued up amid heavy rain outside the Garhwal Mandal Vikas Nigam offline booking centre for helicopter services to Kedarnath. Despite waiting for over

eight hours, Narendra Sawaliya, from Rajkot in Gujarat, and his family have not been able to lay their hands on a ticket. "They get a list of VIPs every day and allot tickets to them. There are no tickets for common people," he says.

Harish Shah, coordinator for helicopter services at Gupkashi, says only 250 seats are available and 180 of them are booked online. "So that leaves only 80 seats for offline booking and out of them 20 to 25 are reserved under the VIP quota," he explains.

Filip for tourism industry
Hoteliers like Sandeep Negi, owner of Hotel New Ganga Putra in Sitapur, who saw hard times during the pandemic are happy to see the return of tourists. "The huge footfall this year assures us of recovery of losses suffered over the past two years. Perhaps there will be no question of survival for us this season."

Kishan Singh Panwar, who runs Char Dham hotel and restaurant in Tilwara, Rudrapur, says he couldn't pay the instalments on his loan but now sees some hope. Kuldeep Singh, owner of Mohini Hotel in Gaucha, Karnapur, says, "Everything seems perfect now. A major population of the State depends on the pilgrimage for livelihood."

Mukesh Kumar, who offers pony rides at Sonprayag, says he had to work as a daily wage labourer during the pandemic. "The money I earned was not enough to buy two meals a day. Without the Char Dham Yatra, people can't survive in these hills." Prashant Maithani, who runs the Voyage on Himalayas travel agency in Tapovan, Rishikesh, says, "We are now fully booked till June-end."

However, there is deep resentment among hoteliers in Sonprayag and Gupkashi as unregistered pilgrims cannot proceed beyond Rishikesh. Ramesh Chauhan, who runs Shree Krishna Pa-

lace hotel in Badkot, says, "We have enough accommodation in the upper hills. How will we make earnings during this peak tourist season if the government stops people at Rishikesh?"

Paying a heavy price
Sushma Dhahale, who arrived from Maharashtra with her elderly parents, planned to visit Kedarnath on May 15, but received the slot for a later date. She is unhappy about having to wait out the remaining days in Rishikesh, where food and accommodation are overpriced. "The money saved up for the yatra is being spent here," she says.

Brijesh Sati, spokesperson of the Char Dham Teerth Purohit Hak Kookdhari Mahapanchayat, a body representing priests, expressed his displeasure at devotees being overcharged for basic services. "The government has failed to manage crowds. It is also difficult to make digital transactions due to poor network connectivity in the area."

At Yamunotri, a prepaid counter for pony rides was opened after several tourists complained of being overcharged by private operators. Ankit Gairola, 36, president of the market association in Sonprayag, says the administration is not making sufficient arrangements in the area. "There is shortage of electricity and water, and people are defecating in the open as there are no toilets. Due to poor telecom signals, pilgrims are unable to contact their agents and seek help from the State administration. There is only one hospital in Sonprayag and the facilities are so inadequate that doctors are forced to sleep on the ground," he says.

Manoj Rawat, a Congress leader and former MLA from Kedarnath, has accused the government of ruining the yatra's reputation. "No BJP Minister has travelled on foot to Kedarnath. There

are no toilets from Gaurikund to Kedarnath. Pilgrims wait in three-km-long lines for six to seven hours for darshan but there is no facility to provide them with shelter from the rain. They are falling ill because of this mismanagement."

However, Manoj Semwal, Food Security Officer of Rudrapur, refuted these allegations. "We took a tour of Kedarnath and there were no complaints of overpriced and poor quality food. The prices are a bit high due to the cost of transporting goods to a higher altitude. We found no substantial fraud."

Spate of deaths
As many as 74 pilgrims have died en route to the four shrines situated at high altitudes, ranging between 10,000 ft and 12,000 ft, since the start of the yatra on May 3, according to the State Health Department data as of May 25.

Thirty-seven pilgrims have died on their way to Kedarnath, 20 en route to Yamunotri, 13 to Badrinath and four to Gangotri. A majority of those who died were above 60 years and had heart ailments and comorbidities. Ganesh Mehulkar, a pilgrim from Jalna in Maharashtra, says, "A man died before my eyes due to cardiac arrest and no medical help could be provided to him."

Pilgrims trekking to Yamunotri and Kedarnath shrines have complained of facing difficulties in receiving timely medical care. Ram Sharan Agarwal, 69, from Jhansi in Uttar Pradesh, says, "There are many elderly people like me who are on this journey. When pilgrims reach Lincholi, on the trek to Kedarnath, they suffer from breathlessness due to the high altitude and decreasing oxygen levels. Owing to the heavy rush, not everyone is able to gain access to oxygen cylinders at the medical centres."

Sandeep Gusain, a 32-year-old YouTuber, expressed his disappointment at the medical facilities. "Following the floods in 2013, the hospital at Kedarnath was damaged and is still under construction. The existing hospital does not have room for even 100 people."

Sukhdeo Krishna Mahajan, 65, from Surat in Gujarat, says there are accidents on the crowded trekking path because of the movement of ponies. "Due to frequent rains, the path is slippery and this has led to mishaps. I have seen several women pilgrims get injured, but medical treatment is available only after three or four hours of trekking."

Dr. Bharat Sharma at Sigma Hospital in Kedarnath says about 500 pilgrims suffering from cold and fever arrive every day. "They don't get acclimatised to the weather while coming by helicopter." According to Dr. K.S. Chauhan, Chief Medical Officer (CMO), Uttarakhand district, pilgrims who do not clear medical screening are being sent back. Dr. B.K. Shukla, CMO of Rudrapur, says

700 to 1,000 pilgrims are being screened daily. "Every two km, we have set up medical relief posts. There are two hospitals in Kedarnath, one in Sonprayag and 12 medical centres along the trekking route. While two pilgrims with head injuries were airlifted to the AIIMS in Rishikesh, 19 pilgrims who fell ill were airlifted to Phata for medical care." Director General of Health Dr. Shaaji Bhatt has advised pilgrims against travelling if they are not medically fit.

On May 24, pilgrims were asked to halt their journey as a precautionary measure after the region received fresh snowfall and heavy rain. Helicopter services to Kedarnath were also suspended. However, with the weather improving the next morning, pilgrims waiting in Sonprayag and Gaurikund were allowed to proceed to the four temples.

Environmental concerns
The influx of tourists has left environmentalists worried as pilgrims have littered the trekking route with garbage, posing a threat to the State's rivers.

Ravi Chopra, former chairman of the Supreme Court-appointed High Powered Committee to oversee the Char Dham road-widening project, says, "The movement of diesel-powered buses and taxis is releasing large amounts of black soot, which causes rapid melting of glaciers. Helicopters are also emitting black carbon. Apart from this, pilgrims are leaving behind a large amount of trash, particularly in Joshimath and Gupkashi. Our natural resources are being badly affected by this anthropogenic pressure. The foothill needs to be monitored to protect the ecology of this Himalayan terrain."

Eminent geologist Navin Juyal says since the Char Dham Yatra is a major source of employment, environmental concerns take a back seat. "People are not so conscious about the environment in Uttarakhand. They are just happy that the yatra has resumed and pilgrims are thronging the shrines. They only see the short-term gain. But this terrain can't accommodate such crowds. The sustainability factor should always be kept in mind while making policies."

Grappling with the rush of pilgrims, Uttarakhand Director General of Police Ashok Kumar was recently seen in a video reminding pilgrims that the Char Dham Yatra would continue till October. "I appeal to people to not make plans in a hurry," he says in the video.

However, pilgrims aren't willing to turn back. Godri Girpad, a 69-year-old farmer from Maharashtra, says, "I won't return without the darshan of Badrinath and Kedarnath. Sab dev baar-baar, ek baar Badri-Kedar (One may visit other gods several times, but one receives more blessings by visiting Badrinath and Kedarnath just once)."

THE HOLY PATH

ON A BUDGET

- The average expenses incurred per person while going on the pilgrimage
- ₹40,000-₹50,000: rate charged by travel agencies to visit all four shrines from the starting point Rishikesh
- ₹20,000-₹25,000: cost of trip to all four shrines using govt. facilities and bus services

RIDES TO KEDARNATH

- Helicopter (Round trip from three helipads): ₹7,750
- Gupkashi: ₹7,750
- Phata: ₹4,720
- Sers: ₹4,680

STARTING POINT: GAURIKUND

- Pony: ₹2,500
- Onward journey: ₹2,500
- Return journey: ₹1,700
- Palanquin: ₹4,550
- Round trip: ₹7,950

It is considered auspicious to undertake the yatra in a clockwise manner. So pilgrims first travel from Rishikesh to Yamunotri (216 km), proceed to Gangotri (221 km), then Kedarnath (220 km), reach Badrinath (218 km), and return to Rishikesh (293 km)

Where tortoise conservation is devotion

Over 400 tortoises are in the pond of a Bhagavathi temple in Kerala's Kasaragod

C.P. SAJIT
KASARAGOD

While World Tortoise Day was recently observed to emphasise the need to protect turtles and tortoises and their disappearing habitats, a temple in Kerala's Kasaragod has been protecting and conserving various tortoise species for several centuries.

Devotees of Thoroth Addukath Bhagavathi Temple at Molothumkavu believe that offering rice (*nivedya chor*) to tortoises will redeem them of their sins and cure their skin-related ailments.

The tortoises are protected and conserved in the naturally formed pond spread over two acres of temple land.

The pond is about 100 metres from the temple and



Tortoises eating the rice kept on the steps of the temple pond at Thoroth Addukath Bhagavathi Temple in Kerala.

has a structure (*mandapam*) in the middle for feeding tortoises. A bridge connects the temple to the *mandapam* and there are steps into the pond. There is a sculpture of Kurmavatara, considered second of the ten incarnations of Lord Mahavishnu, on the

mandapam.

"We have no count but there may be more than 400 tortoises in the pond. There are many different species, some of them are endangered," says A. Gangadharan, a temple staff.

The temple is several cen-

turies old and it is believed that the custom of offering prayers to the tortoises is as old as the temple.

Tortoises emerge from the depth of the pool and eat the rice offering kept on the steps of the *mandapam* at the sound of a clap. Mr. Gangadharan says devotees across the country and even abroad reach here to pray and feed the tortoises.

The tortoises are an attraction not only for the devotees but also for researchers and officials of the Forest department, who come to study the various species here.

Considered sacred, the temple authorities and local people act as guardians of the tortoises, some of which are believed to be over 100 years old.

India will support democracy, stability in Sri Lanka, says PM

Modi says govt. is undertaking programmes to assist Tamils in the island nation

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
CHENNAI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday that India will continue to stand with the people of Sri Lanka and support democracy, stability and economic recovery in the neighbouring country.

Noting Sri Lanka was passing through difficult times, Mr. Modi, who was in Chennai to inaugurate and lay the foundation stone for several schemes involving an investment of over ₹31,000 crore, said, "As a close friend and neighbour, India is providing all possible support to Sri Lanka. This includes financial support, fuel, food, medicine and other essential items." India had also spoken strongly in international fora on the cause of giving economic support to Sri Lanka, the Prime Minister said.

Seeking to connect with the people of Tamil Nadu, who share close bonds with the ethnic Tamils in the island nation, Mr. Modi recalled his visit to Jaffna some years ago. "I can never for-



Warm welcome: Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin greet each other at a public function in Chennai on Thursday. ■ R. RAGU

get my visit to Jaffna I was the first Indian PM to visit Jaffna. The Government of India is undertaking numerous projects to assist the Tamil people in Sri Lanka," Mr. Modi said in the presence of Chief Minister M.K. Stalin.

While he did not react to Mr. Stalin's statement (who spoke earlier) that "this was the right time to retrieve Katchatheevu [an island given by India to Sri Lanka de-

cares ago], Mr. Modi said many Indian organisations and individuals had sent assistance to Sri Lanka.

The Prime Minister, who sought to counter the perception that the Centre had not taken adequate steps to give the Tamil language its due, devoted a significant part of his speech hailing the Dravidian language.

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'India will support democracy in Sri Lanka'

"The Tamil language is eternal and the Tamil culture is global. From Chennai to Canada, from Madurai to Malaysia, from Namakkal to New York, from Salem to South Africa, the occasions of Pongal and Puthandu are marked with great fervour," Mr. Modi said and recalled how Union Minister of State L. Murugan, who was on the dais, had walked down the red carpet in Cannes in traditional Tamil attire.

The Government of India was fully committed to further popularising Tamil language and culture, Mr. Modi said and recalled that the new campus of the Central Institute of Classical Tamil inaugurated in Chennai in January had been fully funded by the Union government. A 'Subramania Bharati Chair' on Tamil Studies at Banaras Hindu University was recently announced, he said.

"The National Education Policy gives special importance to promoting Indian

languages. Due to the National Education Policy, technical and medical courses can be done in local languages. Youngsters from Tamil Nadu will benefit from this," Mr. Modi contended.

Focused on quality

Elaborating on the projects he unveiled, Mr. Modi said that the Government of India was fully focused on building infrastructure that is top quality and sustainable.

His government has also gone beyond what was conventionally called infrastructure, he said, and added that till a few years ago, infrastructure referred to roads, power and water.

"Today we are working to expand India's gas pipeline network. Work is happening on i-ways," he said.

Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi was present.

The Prime Minister left for New Delhi on Thursday night.

Reimagining Australia

Mr. Albanese's decisions in the next three years will have far-reaching consequences

After nine years in the opposition, the Australian Labor Party, under the leadership of Anthony Albanese, is back in power. When 74.6% votes were counted, it won 75 seats in the 151-member House of Representatives; the conservative Liberal National Coalition secured 57 seats. More than a victory for Labor, which is still one seat short of absolute majority, this election will be remembered for the rout of the conservatives, who had 77 seats in the outgoing Assembly. The polls also saw a sizeable section of the Australian electorate voting for the Greens and independents, who campaigned on the planks of better environmental standards and anti-corruption policies. In an election where inflation and climate policy dominated the agenda, Scott Morrison, the conservative leader, failed to understand the public pulse. Even when the annual inflation number hit 5.1%, a 20-year high, the Morrison government took comfort in the argument that the unemployment rate was low. Mr. Morrison was also criticised for his inaction on climate challenges even after Australia witnessed repeated bushfires. His government's handling of the COVID-19 crisis, with stringent lockdowns, and inaction over allegations of rape and sexual assault within Parliament and even within the Cabinet also triggered widespread public resentment.

Mr. Albanese, on the other side, tapped into this anger by running a carefully crafted campaign. On climate, an issue which 29% of the voters identified as the most important one, Labor made a slew of promises. It vowed to raise the share of renewable energy to 82% of the grid by 2030. Mr. Albanese is planning to reduce emissions by 43% this decade. He has also promised to index the minimum wage to inflation. Another key promise is to call a constitutional vote to set up a representative body to advise Parliament on legislation affecting indigenous peoples. Running a successful electoral campaign is hard, but heading a government that meets the campaign promise is harder. Besides tackling inflation and coming up with an ambitious plan to address the climate challenge, the Prime Minister faces a huge foreign policy challenge too. Mr. Morrison had given up Australia's traditional middle path on China and joined an American-British alliance (AUKUS), specifically targeting Beijing's influence in the Indo-Pacific. Mr. Albanese will have to decide whether he should follow the path laid out by his predecessor and take on the China challenge head on or take Australia back to the old school pragmatism and coexistence. The decisions he makes – domestic and foreign – over three years would reshape Australia's position in the Indo-Pacific region.

Security in friendship

The Quad can help reshape economic alliances and regional security architecture

The recent summit meeting of the leaders of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, could not have come at a more critical juncture in world politics. Between Russia's invasion of Ukraine that has destabilised accepted norms on respecting territorial sovereignty; its knock-on effects on commodity and input prices, fuelling inflationary pressures and impacting global supply chains; and the lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that spotlighted deficiencies in public health infrastructure, the leaders of India, the United States, Australia and Japan are likely to have had a full and multidimensional policy agenda in Tokyo. For the leaders the obvious, if not always explicitly stated theme linking several global issues is the China factor and the unique strategic challenges that that country poses to the rules-based international order. While U.S. President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida were blunt in their condemnation of Russia's belligerence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and newly elected Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese avoided any direct reference to Moscow, as indeed did the summit's joint statement. On China, however, the four nations were on the same page, and the Quad joint statement called for continued cooperation towards maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific; championing adherence to international law as reflected in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and in maintaining freedom of navigation and overflight; and meeting challenges to the maritime rules-based order, including in the East and South China Seas.

The Quad leaders affirmed the Dialogue's two core messages. First, they will continue to strongly oppose coercive, provocative, and unilateral actions by Beijing that seek to change the status quo and heighten tensions across the region, including through manoeuvres such as the militarisation of disputed territories, the dangerous use of coast guard vessels and maritime militia, and clandestine attempts to disrupt other nations' offshore resource exploitation activities. To this end, military coordination between the Dialogue members will continue to provide strategic depth to the mission, including notably the annual Malabar exercise. The second message seeks to leverage Dialogue member resources in vaccine delivery, climate action, supply chain resilience, disaster response, cyber security infrastructure, and economic cooperation. Even though Beijing may consider the Quad to be an "Asian NATO", the Dialogue can be about much more than a strategic pushback on China's hegemonic intentions. At a time when the liberal consensus on globalisation has anyway run its course and across the Indo-Pacific, there is, post-pandemic, a strong appetite for deepening regional cooperation for trade and investment. In this context, the Quad is in pole position to shape economic alliances and regional security architecture towards a new world order based on national interest and realpolitik.

Blinken outlines policy to counter China

U.S. aims at leveraging bloc opposed to Russia's Ukraine invasion into broader coalition against Beijing

ASSOCIATED PRESS
WASHINGTON

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Thursday the Biden administration aims to lead the international bloc opposed to Russia's invasion of Ukraine into a broader coalition to counter what it sees as a more serious, long-term threat to global order from China.

In a speech outlining the administration's China policy, Mr. Blinken laid out a three-pillar approach to competing with Beijing in a race to define the 21st century's economic and military balance.

While the U.S. sees Russia and Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine as the most acute and immediate threat to international stability, Mr. Blinken said the administration believes China poses a greater danger.

'Threat to global order'

"Even as President Putin's war continues, we will remain focused on the most serious long-term challenge to the international order – and that is the one posed by the People's Republic of China," Mr. Blinken said.

"China is the only country with both the intent to resh-



Goal setting: Antony Blinken speaking about U.S. policy towards China in Washington. ■AFP

ape the international order – and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to do it," he said. "Beijing's vision would move us away from the universal values that have sustained so much of the world's progress over the past 75 years."

Thus, Mr. Blinken laid out principles for the administration to marshal its resources, friends and allies to push back on increasing Chinese assertiveness around the world. Although he made clear that the U.S. does not seek to change China's political system. "This is not about forcing countries to choose, it's about giving

them a choice," he said.

However, he also acknowledged that the U.S. has limited ability to directly influence China's ambitions and will instead focus on shaping the strategic environment around China.

"We can't rely on Beijing to change its trajectory," Mr. Blinken said in the speech, delivered at George Washington University. "So we will shape the strategic environment around Beijing to advance our vision for an open and inclusive international system."

The speech followed President Joe Biden's just-concluded visits to South Korea and Japan. Mr. Biden raised

eyebrows during that trip when he said that the U.S. would act militarily to help Taiwan defend itself in the event of an invasion by China.

Position on Taiwan

The administration scrambled to insist that Mr. Biden was not changing American policy, and Mr. Blinken restated that the U.S. has not changed its position. Mr. Blinken said Washington still holds to its "One China" policy, which recognises Beijing but allows for unofficial links with and arms sales to Taipei.

"Our approach has been consistent across decades

and administrations. The United States remains committed to our 'One China' policy. We oppose any unilateral changes to the status quo from either side," he said, adding that "we do not support Taiwan independence."

Mr. Blinken said that while U.S. policy on Taiwan has remained consistent, China's had become increasingly belligerent.

He made the case that the global response to Mr. Putin's invasion of Ukraine can serve as a template for dealing with China's efforts to mold a new and unpredictable world order to replace the rules and institutions that have guided relations between states since the end of Second World War.

China, Mr. Blinken said, has benefited greatly from that international order but is now trying to subvert it under the leadership of President Xi Jinping and the Chinese Communist Party.

Mr. Blinken also decried the rise in anti-Chinese and anti-Asian hate crimes in the U.S., saying Chinese Americans and other Asian Americans have the same claim to the U.S. as any other immigrants or their descendants.

India, Japan to work together to help Sri Lanka during crisis

Modi, Kishida met on May 24 on the sidelines of the Quad

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

India and Japan have agreed to work together on assisting crisis-hit Sri Lanka, the Japanese government said, following a recent meeting between Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Fumio Kishida in Tokyo.

Mr. Modi and Mr. Kishida met on May 24 on the sidelines of the Quad summit and held bilateral talks on “close cooperation” to promote efforts to realise a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’, in addition to collaboration in spheres including defence, clean energy, and investment.

Following the meeting, Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs said the leaders “discussed the situation in Sri Lanka and confirmed that they will cooperate with each other in light of the current economic crisis and deterioration of the humanitarian situation in the country.” Further, they “shared the view to work together to develop Indo-Pacific Economic Framework into an inclusive framework that will bring substantive benefits to the region,” according to a statement.

Ministry of External Affairs made no specific mention of Sri Lanka. “The two leaders exchanged views on recent global and regional developments. They noted the convergences in their respective approaches to the Indo-Pacific and reaffirmed



PM Narendra Modi with his Japanese counterpart Fumio Kishida. ■PTI

their commitment towards a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region,” read its May 24 statement.

For over half a century, Japan has been one of Sri Lanka’s top donors and development partners, although its grants and investments have received much less attention compared to those from China or India.

Japan’s announcement of collaborating with India to help Sri Lanka, assumes significance, coming shortly after Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe’s proposal that Quad members – the United States, India, Japan, and Australia – to take the lead in setting up a foreign aid consortium to assist Sri Lanka that is reeling under the worst economic crisis since Independence. India has extended about \$3.5 billion assistance since January, by way of loan deferments and credit lines for essential imports.

Japan’s initiative also comes despite Colombo scrapping two major infrastructure projects with Japa-

nese involvement. In September 2020, Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa ordered the termination of a \$1.5-billion Japanese-funded light rail project, on that basis that it was not a “cost-effective solution”. In early 2021, Sri Lanka ejected Japan and India out of a trilateral project to jointly develop a container terminal at the strategically located Colombo Port, causing considerable diplomatic tensions. India’s Adani Group was subsequently roped in to develop another terminal at the same port.

Meanwhile, addressing the ‘International conference on the future of Asia’ organised by Nikkei virtually, Mr. Gotabaya said Sri Lanka “urgently requires” assistance of friends in the international community “to ensure that our immediate

needs in terms of the importation of essential medicines, food supplies, and fuel are met.” Japan “remains one of Sri Lanka’s key development partners”, the Sri Lankan President said, expressing hope that ongoing negotiations on “bridging funds” from Japan would soon conclude.

Much blood has been spilled, must move on: L-G

He expresses concern over rising pollution, frequent jams

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

After taking over as the 22nd Lieutenant-Governor of Delhi on Thursday, Vinai Kumar Saxena, in his address to the media, asked people to put the incidents of violence behind them and spread the message of love and unity.

Many riots and disturbances have taken place in Delhi in the recent past, he said, adding that people should forget past episodes of violence and show the world their love for the country.

"I want to say apas mein lade aur khuun bhi bahaya hai bahut par, jo kuch bhi hua hai, achha hai use bhula do (We clashed and spilled much blood; however, it is better to let go of whatever has happened)," Mr. Saxena said.

He added, "Anything can be achieved if people are united".

Delhi witnessed communal clashes last month following a 'Shobha Yatra' to celebrate Hanuman Jayanti being taken out in Jahangirpuri. Earlier in February 2020, over 50 people were



The new L-G being greeted by CM Arvind Kejriwal after Thursday's oath ceremony ■

SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

killed in communal riots in north-west Delhi.

'Local Guardian'

"Having taken the oath, I want to tell every citizen of Delhi that I will not be their 'Lieutenant-Governor', instead I will be their 'local guardian.' I will always be on the streets of Delhi to work for the betterment of the city," the L-G said.

Mr. Saxena also said he would strive to bring the Centre and the Delhi government on the same page to make the Capital a "city of joy".

He also expressed con-

cern over the rising levels of pollution and frequent traffic jams in the city.

"It is a harsh reality that Delhi is considered one of the most polluted cities in the world. With the support of the Delhi government, the Centre and with the cooperation of each one of you, we will work to get rid of traffic jams and rid Delhi of pollution, be it air pollution, water pollution or noise pollution," the L-G added.

'Will work together'

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal said his government would work together with the new L-G as it had done with his predecessor Anil Baijal. "I assure him full cooperation of the government. We will do a lot of good work together with Saxena saheb as we did with Anil Baijal-ji," Mr. Kejriwal said.

Mr. Saxena, who was the chairperson of Khadi and Village Industries Commission, was appointed the Delhi L-G on May 23.

His predecessor Anil Baijal resigned as L-G on May 18 citing "personal reasons".

(With PTI inputs)

Who wields the power to pardon?

PARLEY

The Perarivalan judgment heeds federalism, but is there a danger of arbitrariness in remission?

The Governor's powers of pardon or remission under Article 161 of the Constitution have been in the spotlight with the Supreme Court judgment ordering the release of A.G. Perarivalan, one of the seven convicts in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. In 2018, the then Tamil Nadu cabinet had recommended to the Governor that all the seven convicts be released. The Raj Bhavan sat on the recommendation before forwarding it the President for advice. This month, the Supreme Court ruled that a Governor is bound by the State government's advice in matters relating to commutation/remission of sentences under Article 161. The Court invoked its extraordinary power under Article 142 in ordering the release of Perarivalan, who had already spent over 30 years in prison. This has raised questions about the limits, if any, to a State government's recommendation to the Governor to pardon or remit. In a discussion moderated by Krishnadas Rajagopal, P. Wilson and Kaleeswaram Raj discuss questions arising from the case, including those relating to the Office of the Governor, judicial delays and the Perarivalan judgment's value as a precedent. Edited excerpts:

The Supreme Court judgment has been hailed as a victory for federalism and State autonomy by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister. Will this line of reasoning not spur the tendency to endorse any arbitrary decision with respect to remission or pardon by a State cabinet in the future, even when it is vitiated by political or other considerations?

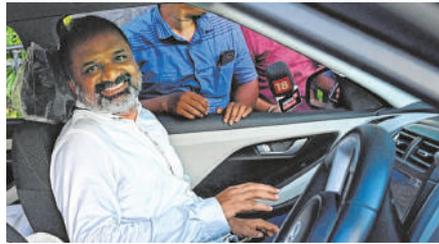
P. Wilson: You are talking as if Governors always act reasonably. We have seen that Governors have become agents of the party at the Centre. We have seen State governments formed by non-BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) parties facing difficulties with Governors who are obstructing the implementation of welfare measures by the popularly elected State governments. Governors are sitting on Bills passed by State legislatures without performing their duties under the Constitu-

tion. The decision of a State cabinet is binding on the Governor, according to the Constitution. The Supreme Court judgment in the Perarivalan case is a reiteration of that principle. The cabinet represents the people. So, people control the decisions. If the people do not like the cabinet's decisions, they will vote the government out. The cabinet's decisions are subject to judicial scrutiny. There is no danger of arbitrariness. In the present case, the apex court has approved the State cabinet's decision to remit Perarivalan's sentence by saying that the Governor should have acted on it. There can be no allegation of legal perversity in this case.

Kaleeswaram Raj: The verdict has underlined the imperative of federalism in the context of gubernatorial amnesty. Article 161 is more about the Governor's duty, rather than power. It is in no way inferior to the President's role under Article 72, nor is it replaced by the latter. The Governor is generally bound by the cabinet decision. This does not, however, mean that even an arbitrary decision by the cabinet, vitiated by non-application of mind or extraneous considerations, would bind the Governor. This position is well-settled. The device of judicial review is the most effective check against such aberrations. The present judgment does not alter this position of law. It rests on its own peculiar facts, and there is no room for apprehension.

The court invoked Article 142 and directed Perarivalan to be released. This, ideally, should have been an order the Governor should have issued. Would it have been proper and desirable for the court to remit the matter to the Governor? Can Article 142 be stretched to this extent?

PW: Not at all. The Governor had not done his duty under the Constitution. All authorities are bound by the decisions of the apex court. Gone are the days when we used to say the court cannot issue directions to Governors or even the President. Nobody is above the law. The



Governor was given enough time, opportunity and warnings by the court. The Governor was blatantly disregarding the court's observations. In such circumstances, the court is empowered under Article 142 to do complete justice. The judiciary is the final arbiter of the Constitution. If the Governor does not do his job, the court can pass appropriate orders.

KR: The invocation of Article 142 is justified in the peculiar facts of the case, which are almost unique. The delay on the part of the Governor in accepting the State cabinet decision was enormous. It impacted the liberty of a person who was legally and constitutionally entitled to be released. The case was fought for decades. The Centre contributed to the delay by invoking its usual litigation strategies. The court might have been conscious of this procedural injustice meted out to Perarivalan and felt the only way to undo it was to invoke Article 142 and release the prisoner. A further remittance to the Governor would have prolonged the litigation, which had already crossed all imaginable limits.

In the past, given the instances where gubernatorial offices were used by the Centre for political purposes, many have questioned even the need for the office of the Governor. Do you feel that the admonition against the Governor in this case should persuade us to rethink the requirement to have nominated Governors?

PW: Certainly. See the Constituent Assembly debates on the manner of appointment of Governors. The makers of the Constitution never thought of giving Governors powers

The judiciary is the final arbiter of the Constitution. If the Governor does not do his job, the court can pass appropriate orders.

P. WILSON

similar to those of elected representatives. Hence the post is a nominated one and not an elected one. It is dangerous when one man sits over the decisions of 234 elected representatives as it amounts to removing the basis of democracy. The powers of nomination should be re-considered.

KR: Many people think so. I am reminded of the opinion of Prof. R. Venkata Rao of Andhra University who hinted that the Governor's post is "useless when inert and dangerous when active". Ironically, in the Perarivalan episode, even the inertness of the Governor proved to be dangerous. Yet, I do not share the view that misuse of a position per se is a reason for abolishing it. There are many duties which the Governor must carry out in a federal system. The Justice Sarkaria Commission wanted the Governor to act as "a friend, philosopher and guide" to the Council of Ministers. It wanted the Governor to be a "detached figure and not too intimately connected with the local politics of the State". The point is to ensure that the Governor acts within the constitutional framework. Abolition of the post could create more problems than those it intends to resolve.

In recent times, the Supreme Court has been criticised for its lethargy in deciding important cases, especially cases with political overtones. Cases on demonetisation, abrogation of the special status for Jammu

and Kashmir, validity of electoral bonds, etc., are some instances in which the court deferred adjudication and invited criticism. Do you think that the Perarivalan judgment marks a welcome change in the approach of the court?

PW: Generally, these criticisms are unwarranted and made by people who do not know how hard the institution is working. Do you know that India has one of the lowest judge-to-population ratios in the world? The Union government is not appointing High Court and tribunal judges on time despite Supreme Court recommendations. During COVID-19, our country's judiciary heard and disposed of an incredible number of cases. It functioned better than the judiciary in other countries. If not for the court's orders, oxygen supply to the States would not have been equitable during the second wave. I see a court that is greatly sensitive towards violation of human rights. A person was kept in jail despite the state's decision to release him. This is definitely a case that warranted the court's interference.

KR: The court is not static. It is an ever-changing institution depending on multiple factors like the individuals who run it and the overall constitutional climate. There have been some good judicial interventions in recent times from the Supreme Court. It rejected the stand of the Centre in important cases like the Pegasus issue and the sedition law. It may not be an ideal Supreme Court. Yet, it is a Supreme Court of possibilities.

What exactly is the value of the Perarivalan judgment in terms of setting a precedent?

PW: First, the judgment holds that the duty of the Governor is to abide by the recommendations of the State cabinet while performing his functions, including the power to remit, suspend or commute sentences under Article 161. Second, an important finding is that the Governor need not have sent the matter to the President. Third, it is the duty of Governors to exercise their powers on time. Fourth, the judgment recognises the power of the state in matters of remission, commutation,

etc. Fifth, the verdict upholds the human rights of prisoners.

KR: The judgment is precise and clear. It runs into a mere 29 pages. It resembles the Brexit verdict of the U.K. Supreme Court that interfered with Boris Johnson's decision to prorogue Parliament. Brevity is a universal virtue for constitutional analysis. The judgment shows a great amount of judicial discipline by adhering to the established principles of law. Yet, the court invoked Article 142 to do "complete justice". The jurisprudential value of the judgment lies in the idea of "complete justice" applied in the given facts and circumstances. This is something unprecedented.

What are the lessons for our justice system from the Perarivalan case?

PW: Justice delayed is justice denied. Each organ of governance has to work towards the preservation and promotion of human rights. We cannot accuse courts of delay without giving them the necessary infrastructure. The Chief Justice of a High Court, during an informal interaction during a visit by my Parliamentary Committee on Law and Justice, mentioned the judicial vacancies in various High Courts. He asked whether we would allow Parliament to function on only 50% strength without conducting elections. Then, why are High Courts left to function with 50% strength? If you give the judiciary the infrastructure, it will work faster. We need to have Regional Benches of the Supreme Court to reduce the workload. Increase the retirement age of judges to 70. If these changes are made, I can assure you of the results.

KR: The judgment has multiple dimensions. It shows the importance of pursuit of the cause by litigants, their lawyers, the court and the media. It was a hard-won battle. At the end of the day, the judgment upheld the individual's freedom and dignity, the basic promises of the Constitution. It is a judgment on fundamental rights, though it does not explicitly say so. It emancipates the individual(s) from the clutches of the mighty state while using the very apparatus of the state. That is its beauty and strength.



P. Wilson
is a senior advocate and a DMK MP in the Rajya Sabha



Kaleeswaram Raj
is a Supreme Court advocate



Scan the QR code to listen to the full interview online

App-based attendance hits rural workers

Made mandatory for MGNREGS from May 16; with many having no phone, women are the worst hit

SOBHANA K. NAIR
NEW DELHI

The Union government has made capturing of attendance through its app, National Mobile Monitoring System, compulsory at worksites where 20 or more workers are employed under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). The decision comes despite many problems, including patchy Internet connectivity in rural areas and little or no technical support.

The Rural Development Ministry had started the exercise on a pilot basis on May 21 last year. Initially, the utilisation of application was to be voluntary, but from May 16 this year, it has been made mandatory.

The Ministry's directive claims that the app, which requires two time-stamped and geotagged photographs of the workers in a day, encourages transparency and increases citizen oversight.

Women employees, espe-



The app users complain that they face technical glitches and there is minimal support available. ■ FILE PHOTO

cially the supervisors or “work mates”, have faced the biggest setback from the move.

Women drop out

In a majority of cases, the employees' families are averse to giving phones to women, especially smartphones. Hence, many women have dropped out.

“We had mobilised close

to 15,000 women to work at these sites but the mandatory capturing of attendance through the app has led to their exclusion from the process. A majority of them do not have phones and they have to depend on their husbands or other men in their families. So essentially, we are on the reverse gear,” Nikhil Shenoy, associated with the Rajasthan Asangathit

Mazdoor Union, said.

In the past one year, the Union government has resolved some critical issues. Under the MGNREG Act, the workers can do time-bound or task-based work. The initial guidelines required uploading of geotagged and time-stamped photographs of the workers around 11 a.m. and another one after 2 p.m.

For task-based work, the workers had to stay back after 2 p.m. even if they had completed their work in order to take the photograph to be eligible for the wages. This requirement has now been suitably amended.

Technical glitches

There are other pitfalls that remain, primarily relating to technical glitches and minimal technical support. Additional Chief Secretary of Rural Development L.K. Atheer explained the issue.

“The app certainly brings transparency and that is appreciated. However, the speed of the application and

the strength of the server create troubles. Today, from Belgaum, we received complaints that the workers were not able to upload the attendance which makes them anxious because the wages are directly connected to attendance,” he said.

The supervisors of the worksites are expected to have a smartphone with Internet connection. According to officials from various States, there have been complaints from the mates that they are not given added incentives to pay for the smartphones or Internet connections.

There is minimal technical support. “Nobody at the village or even at the block level has any clear solution to offer, in case the app doesn't work or fails to upload a photograph. When we ask for help, the only thing they tell us to delete and reload the app,” Karthik who works in the Ajmer-Bhilwara area with the MNREGA workers said.

Sighting the finishing line in measles-rubella elimination

There are special reasons why measles-rubella elimination can be achieved together by July-August 2023



T. JACOB JOHN & PRIYA ABRAHAM

Many would remember the school-based campaigns of measles-rubella (MR) vaccination of children from 5 to 15 years, conducted in all States, in 2017. Success was good in a few States, but not in others. School managements, teachers, children themselves and parents were not informed of the basis of this new programme, which was a deviation from the past. There were some unanswered questions: why was it up to 15 years while the Universal (childhood) Immunisation Programme (UIP) covers only those up to five years? Why administer the rubella vaccine that was not in the UIP list in 2017? Why should children who have had one dose of the measles vaccine get another dose? Why are schools instead of health-care centres used for vaccination?

Hurdle of poor information

The Government decided to eliminate measles and rubella from India by the year 2020 – having missed the earlier set target of 2015. So, in 2017 there was an urgency to accelerate efforts. The basic plan was to create a very high level of vaccination-induced immunity against both diseases, by inoculating MR vaccine. To cover immunity gaps after one dose of measles

vaccine, a second dose was necessary. For epidemiological reasons (explained later), rubella vaccination had to cover children up to 15 years. School registration and attendance are high in all States and as a programme, it was easy to seize the opportunity to vaccinate children in schools. We knew that the MR vaccine was safe from any serious adverse event following vaccination/immunisation (AEFI); hence a school-based vaccination programme was very convenient for all. These were all excellent reasons, but due to a lack of information given to the public there was much anxiety –and even antipathy towards – in many places, about the programme, in the minds of parents and school authorities.

The COVID-19 pandemic stole two years from the programme. So the MR elimination target was reset to 2023. Today, we are at the threshold of a new gargantuan project. We shall begin at the beginning and explain the details for all concerned to be well informed.

The basics

MR elimination is defined as zero transmission of measles and rubella viruses, evidenced by zero clinical disease, sustained over three years. The two arms of intervention are vaccination and surveillance. Surveillance helps identify places where either virus is still in transmission, so that vaccination can be pinpointed there to stop further spread. Two doses of the MR vaccine covering at least 95% children below five years – the first dose between nine and 11 months and second dose ideally in



the second year of life – should suffice. The disease is basically fever plus a red rash on the skin. A fever-rash combination has several causes and a throat swab, urine and/or blood sample are collected and tested in the laboratory for identifying measles or rubella.

District as nerve centre

The ideal population-cum-administrative unit for efficiently implementing all activities towards MR elimination is the district; the whole country reaches the finishing line when all 773 districts achieve success. Clinical and laboratory surveillance and vaccination have to be sustained, as either virus, especially measles virus, could be imported from outside; that should be immediately detected and interrupted.

Every district has excellent infrastructure to manage the UIP. If the administration, under the active leadership of the District Magistrate or District Collector, activates the Task Force mechanism overseeing the UIP that is managed by the District Immunisation Officer, the MR elimination target can be reached within six to nine months from start. All districts in a

State can be galvanised by the State Government, and all States can be supported by the Immunisation Division of the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Long-term impact

Why should measles be eliminated? In the pre-vaccination era, while polio paralysed about 1% of all children before the age of five, measles actually killed 1% of all under-five children. During measles outbreaks, the case-fatality rate was about 10%-15%. Children who recovered would have lost weight as well as the steady momentum of cognitive development and scholastic performance. Measles affects the immune system rendering the child vulnerable to other infectious diseases, leading to high mortality over the next two to three years. Indeed, there has been much discussion among experts whether measles should have been targeted first for global eradication instead of polio.

Why should rubella be eliminated? The rubella virus is a slower transmitter and the risk of rubella is extended from childhood through adolescence into the reproductive age range. In most individuals, rubella infection is either without symptoms, or with a short fever and a skin rash that is less pronounced than that of measles. Unfortunately, if a pregnant woman gets infected, the virus has a tendency to cross the placenta and damage the developing fetus's eyes, brain, heart and other tissues. Affected babies are born with severe birth defects such as cataracts, deafness, heart defects and developmental delay – this is

'congenital rubella syndrome' (CRS). Fortunately, CRS is preventable with vaccination if given prior to pregnancy. So, in the 1970 school-based vaccination campaign, 15 years was chosen to create immunity in girls for assured future protection, and in boys to prevent community spread.

There are special reasons why MR elimination could be achieved together. The MR vaccine is a combined product, targeting two diseases in one shot. Fever and rash surveillance covers both diseases. Measles elimination is of very high priority; piggy-backing rubella elimination is opportunistic.

We are in May 2022, with 19 months available to achieve the target. In spite of the pandemic, nationally, the UIP has maintained about 85% MR second dose coverage below five years. Thus, we are in a take-off position to reach the finishing line by July-August 2023, still leaving four to five months of buffer time to patch up any "last minute" shortfalls and challenges.

This project design is awaiting final approval by the Government of India. Using the cooperation of parents, health-care personnel at all levels, opinion leaders, influencers, the media, non-governmental organisations such as the Rotary and Lions, all can and must play a role in making this district-by-district programme a story of success.

Dr. T. Jacob John is Co-Chair of the India Expert Advisory Group on MR elimination (IEAG MR). Dr. Priya Abraham is Director, National Institute of Virology, Pune and Member, IEAG MR

Lean diabetes is reality that needs further examination, says study

Patients with low BMI have unique metabolic profile

RAMYA KANNAN
CHENNAI

Diabetics who have a low body mass index (BMI) have a unique metabolic profile compared with other groups of diabetics, and could be a distinct entity warranting further investigation, a recent article in *Diabetes Care*

has argued.

The study looked at the metabolic factors in subjects who were recruited at the Christian Medical College (CMC), Vellore, against control groups comprising individuals with Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes, and similar BMI subjects without diabetes.

It was conducted with the Global Diabetes Institute, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, U.S.

“Diabetes among indivi-

duals with low BMI has been recognised for over 60 years as an entity in low and middle income countries (LMIC), and classified as malnutrition-related diabetes mellitus, by the WHO,” says Nihal Thomas, co-author, and head of the Department of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism, CMC, Vellore. The need to establish low BMI (or lean) diabetes (LD) as a distinct form of diabetes, and thereby seek attention

for it, arose because the WHO withdrew this category in 1999 due to lack of substantial evidence, he adds.

People with this form of diabetes have a history of malnutrition *in utero* and continue to have a low BMI into adulthood.

The thrifty phenotype theory in diabetes posits that the phenotype (or the observable physical characteristics of an organism, which basically includes the genes,

and the impact on them by environmental factors) adapts in the womb to poor nutrition.

When nutrition improves after birth, this thrifty phenotype becomes disadvantageous to the individual, explains Riddhi Dasgupta, a co-author and endocrinologist.

Meredith Hawkins from the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, New York, further explains: “In individuals

whose nutritional status improves after birth, it is likely they might seem thin by Western standards, but, in reality, because of the programming *in utero*, they have actually accumulated more fat than planned for by the gene, leading to the ‘thin-fat’ phenomenon. However, LD individuals never catch up with nutritional requirements, continuing to remain nutritionally challenged as adults, so the thrifty gene

never comes into play. It is estimated that there are about 80 million people across the world living with this condition, but since it does not manifest in other than LMIC countries, there is very little research on the subject,” she adds.

The results of the study demonstrate that the cardinal feature of LD is a defect in insulin secretion capacity versus insulin resistance, as was previously suggested.

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.