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VEDHIK
DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS
03 - JUNE 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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India-Pakistan ties and the mirror of 2019

There are sound reasons why New Delhi must shift course from the belligerence it once profited from



SUSHANT SINGH

An official delegation from Pakistan was in New Delhi on Monday to hold talks with its Indian counterparts under the aegis of the Indus Water Treaty. In March, the Indians had gone to Islamabad to attend the previous meeting. Starting from February, India has been sending through Pakistan consignments of wheat, via the World Food Programme, to the Taliban-run Afghanistan.

Evidently, channels of communication between the two governments are working and open hostility has subsided, if not vanished completely. In his speeches, Prime Minister Narendra Modi no longer targets Pakistan as an enemy country or invokes it to target politicians of Opposition parties, a regular feature till a few years ago. This is not because of a sudden change of heart or out of great love for Pakistan. The change has been driven by realist considerations that surfaced during the Ladakh border crisis on the Line of Actual Control with China in the summer of 2020.

China forced the hand

The border crisis in Ladakh raised the spectre of a collusive military threat between China and Pakistan. As various military leaders have since stated, such a challenge cannot be effectively dealt with by the military alone and would need all the instruments of the state – diplomatic, economic, informational, and military – to act in concert. To prevent such a situation, India's National Security Adviser Ajit Doval opened backchannel talks with Pakistan, using the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as an interlocutor.

This was confirmed by the UAE's Ambassador to the United States, as the Indian and Pakistan armies agreed to a reiteration of the ceasefire on the Line of Con-

trol (LoC) in Kashmir in February 2021.

It was a U-turn for the Modi government, after the dilution of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019, and the number of ceasefire violations along the LoC had reached a record high in 2020. In line with Home Minister Amit Shah's statement in Parliament vowing to wrest back Pakistan-occupied Kashmir – and Aksai Chin from China – every other politician from the Bharatiya Janata Party politician was threatening Pakistan. By then, the Indian Army was boasting of its firepower on the LoC.

It thus came as a surprise that Mr. Doval had agreed in his backchannel talks with the Pakistan Army to undertake certain actions in Kashmir as part of a mutually agreed road map. Reports emanating from Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa made it clear that two actions by India were a precondition for any further steps by Pakistan: restoration of statehood to Jammu and Kashmir; and an announcement of no demographic change in the Kashmir Valley.

As the backchannel talks dragged on, the Indian side expressed its political inability to initiate these actions. With Imran Khan (now former Prime Minister) refusing to move ahead, it created a stalemate. By then, limited disengagement had occurred with the Chinese forces in Ladakh, thus stabilising the situation along the LAC to some extent. India gave assurances to Pakistan when the threat of escalation with China became very high in late 2020 following the Indian Army's occupation of certain heights in the Kailash range in Ladakh. Pakistan had then not shown any inclination to mobilise its forces to the LoC, which would have created a nightmare scenario for the Indian security establishment. Even if there was no further progress in bilateral ties, the Indians were happy with this new status quo with Pakistan while the border crisis with China was alive. This bought them time to further consolidate the changes in Kashmir undertaken in



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

August 2019.

Kashmir suffers

The delimitation of Assembly constituencies in Kashmir has been completed. The fresh making of an electoral map disadvantages Kashmiris, and new Assembly elections seem but a matter of time. That would bring closer the BJP's dream of installing a Hindu Chief Minister in India's only Muslim-majority region, an attempt made earlier after the sacking of Mehbooba Mufti as Chief Minister. If these efforts are successful, the statehood to Jammu and Kashmir could also be restored.

However, despite a harsh security-centric approach by the administration, violence in the region has gone up in the past year or so. All the resources of the Indian state have now been devoted towards a successful conduct of the Amarnath Yatra, with a record participation this year, even as the same administration bans Friday prayers at the iconic Jamia Masjid in Srinagar using the flimsiest of excuses. Congregational prayers were disallowed at the historic mosque last Friday after the sentencing of Kashmiri separatist leader Yasin Malik. His sentencing also earned a strong statement of condemnation from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) that was rejected by India's Foreign Ministry. Things have changed drastically from February 2019, when the then External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj was invited as the "guest of honour" by the OIC.

Islamabad's rhetoric helps the Modi government make its case domestically that the crisis in Kashmir is solely of Pakistan's

making. While Pakistan's use of violence by sending weapons and militants has been a major factor, exploiting it to overlook the political grievances of Kashmiris thwarts a lasting solution. The idea that Kashmiris have no agency of their own and are instruments in the hands of the Pakistan military defies both history and common sense.

No environment in Pakistan

The recent change of government in Pakistan, including Imran Khan's removal, is seen as a positive in New Delhi. The official Indian establishment has had close ties with both the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz and the Pakistan Peoples Party that are now part of the government. There are Indian businessmen who have acted as interlocutors with the Sharif brothers on behalf of the Modi government. Mr. Modi had himself made a sudden stopover at the Sharif household in December 2015 to attend a family wedding, and subsequently allowed Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) officials to visit Pathankot airbase for terror attack investigation.

Officials on both sides argue that there are some low-hanging fruits which can be plucked the moment a political go-ahead is given. These include a deal on the Sir Creek dispute, an agreement for revival of bilateral trade, return of High Commissioners to the missions in Delhi and Islamabad, and build-up of diplomatic missions to their full strength. Demilitarisation of the Siachen glacier is still seen to be off the table as the Indian proposal is believed to be unacceptable to the Pakistan Army.

The environment in Pakistan is, however, not conducive for any such move. Imran Khan is garnering big crowds in his support and has put the Shehbaz Sharif government and Pakistan Army under pressure. With the economy in doldrums, there is little room for manoeuvre with the new government. Even an announcement of talks with India, without New Delhi conceding anything on Kashmir, will provide further ammunition to Imran Khan. The current

moment, where New Delhi and Islamabad seem willing to move forward but are restrained by Pakistan's domestic politics, somewhat mirrors the lawyers' protest against General Musharraf in 2008 which derailed the Manmohan-Musharraf talks after they had nearly agreed on a road map.

New environment

A window of opportunity would possibly open in Pakistan after the next elections, which are scheduled next year but could be held earlier. By then, the Pakistan Army would have a new army chief, as Gen. Bajwa's three-year extension comes to an end in November. Gen. Bajwa's successor may look at things differently. By then, if Jammu and Kashmir has a new State government after elections and the border crisis with Beijing is resolved, the ground would have completely shifted in India. As Mr. Modi goes for another re-election in 2024 with little to show on the economy front, a totally different dynamics on Pakistan would be at play in India.

Following the Balakot airstrike (2019), Pakistan was at the forefront of Mr. Modi's election campaign in 2019. In a recent book chapter, Mr. Doval has written that Balakot "blew away the myth of Pakistan's nuclear blackmail". For the next strike on Pakistan, "domain and level will not be limiting factors", he wrote.

Mr. Doval does not mention it but last time, India lost a fighter aircraft, had its pilot in Pakistani captivity, shot down its own helicopter killing seven men, had another near-miss friendly fire accident over Rajasthan, and the two nuclear-armed countries threatened to shoot missiles at each other. That was in 2019. A reckless act in the future may have even more dire consequences. Unless that is what India desires, the Modi government must shift course from the belligerence it has displayed and profited from earlier in favour of proper diplomatic and political engagement with Pakistan.

Sushant Singh is Senior Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research

India sends senior diplomats to Kabul for talks with Taliban

Taliban urge India to reopen its Embassy

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

India has sent a multi-member team of senior diplomats to Afghanistan for the first time since the Indian Embassy in Kabul was evacuated in August 2021 following the arrival of the Taliban at the Afghan capital.

During discussions with the Indian delegation held on Thursday, the Taliban urged India to reopen its Embassy in Kabul, Suhail

Shaheen, chief of the Taliban's political office told *The Hindu*.

The Indian team is being led by J.P. Singh, Joint Secretary, Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran division of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). "Post 15th of August, 2021, in the light of the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, it was decided to bring back all India-based personnel. However, local staff continued to function and ensure proper maintenance and upkeep of our premises there. Our local staff have also been helping in the de-



Officials with children at a school renovated with Indian help in Kabul. •PTI

livery of humanitarian assistance," the MEA's official spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said.

Mr. Bagchi, however, said the visit did not

amount to granting diplomatic recognition to the Taliban regime in Kabul.

A delegation of Indian diplomats on Thursday visited the Indira Gandhi Children's Hospital in Kabul, which has distributed India-made COVID-19 vaccines in the recent past.

The MEA said that more foodgrains and medical shipments will be sent to Afghanistan in the coming months. It was also announced that India has sent one million doses of COVID-19 vaccines to Iran for distribution among Afghan refugees staying in Iran.

The team also visited the Habibia High School, which was renovated with assistance from the Government of India, and the Chimtala Electricity Sub-station, which was built by the Power Grid Corporation of India for electricity supply to Kabul.

These initiatives were undertaken during the two decades of non-Taliban rule in Kabul that began in 2001 and ended with the flight of President Ashraf Ghani from Kabul last August.

The Indian team included a woman official, which is being interpreted as a subtle reminder to the Taliban to ensure equitable treatment for women in Afghanistan.

EXPLAINER

China's growing footprint in the Pacific Islands

Why is China interested in the Pacific Island countries? What does China's inroads into the Pacific portend for regional geopolitics?

ANAND V.

The story so far: Wang Yi, the Foreign Minister of China, is currently on an eight-day visit to ten Pacific Island Countries (PICs), and has co-hosted with Fiji the Second China-Pacific Island Countries Foreign Ministers Meeting on May 30, 2022. During the meeting, China's effort to push through a comprehensive framework deal, the draft of which was leaked earlier, failed to gain consensus among the PICs. Though this has raised regional concerns about China's growing footprint in the Pacific islands, it has also been seen as a demonstration of China's limitations in the region.

What is the strategic significance of the PICs?

The Pacific Island Countries are a cluster of 14 states which are located largely in the tropical zone of the Pacific Ocean between Asia, Australia and the Americas. They include Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Republic of Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM), Nauru, Niue, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The islands are divided on the basis of physical and human geography into three distinct parts – Micronesia, Melanesia and Polynesia. The islands are very small in land area, and are spread wide across the vast equatorial swathe of the Pacific ocean. As a result, though they are some of the smallest and least populated states, they have some of the largest Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) in the world. Large EEZs translate into huge economic potential due to the possibility of utilising the wealth of fisheries, energy, minerals and other marine resources present in such zones. Hence, they prefer to be identified as Big Ocean States, rather than Small Island States. In fact, Kiribati and FSM, both PICs, having EEZs larger than that of India. Moreover, these countries have played an important role in major power rivalry as springboards for power projection and laboratories for developing and demonstrating strategic capabilities. The major powers of the colonial era competed with each other to gain control over these strategic territories. The Pacific islands also acted as one of the major theatres of conflict during the Second World War – between

imperial Japan and the U.S. Due to the remoteness of these islands from the Soviet Union and major population centres of the world, some of the major nuclear weapon test sites of the U.S., the U.K. and France were located here. In addition, the 14 PICs, bound together by shared economic and security concerns, account for as many number of votes in the United Nations, and act as a potential vote bank for major powers to mobilise international opinion.

What does China seek to achieve from the PICs and how?

China does not have any particular historical linkages to the PICs unlike the Western powers. Therefore, its interest in the PICs is of relatively recent origin, and is linked to China's rise in the past few decades. The PICs lie in the natural line of expansion of China's maritime interest and naval power. They are located beyond China's 'First Island Chain', which represents the country's first threshold of maritime expansion. The PICs are located geographically in what is referred to by China as its 'Far Seas', the control of which will make China an effective Blue Water capable Navy – an essential prerequisite for becoming a superpower. At a time when the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has emerged as a major force in the Indo-Pacific vis-à-vis China, the need to influence the PICs has become an even more pressing matter for China.

The PICs are located geographically in what is referred to by China as its "Far Seas", the control of which will make China an effective Blue Water capable Navy

Apart from the vast marine richness of the PICs, the Taiwan factor plays a major role in China's Pacific calculus. China, which considers Taiwan to be a breakaway territory, is preparing for what seems like an inevitable military invasion. In this context, it becomes important to break Western domination of island chains of the Pacific which could impede reunification. Wooing the PICs away from the West and Taiwan will therefore make the goal of Taiwan's reunification easier for China. It has to be noted here that a zero-sum game has been underway in the past few decades in the

Pacific between China and Taiwan in terms of gaining diplomatic recognition. China has been successful in getting diplomatic recognition from 10 out of the 14 PICs through its economic largesse. Only four PICs – Tuvalu, Palau, Marshall Islands and Nauru, currently recognise Taiwan.

What are the implications of China's latest move?

China has increasingly started talking about security cooperation in addition to its economic diplomacy towards the PICs. In April 2022, China signed a controversial security deal with the Solomon Islands, which raised regional concerns. Prior to the current visit of Wang Yi, two draft documents prepared by the Chinese side were leaked, and gained the attention of regional leaders in the Pacific as well as the larger international community. One of the documents is the "China-Pacific Island Countries (PICs) Common Development Vision", and the other is "China-Pacific Islands Five-Year Action Plan on Common Development (2022-2026)". The vision gives a broad proposal about co-operation in the political, security, economic and strategic areas, whereas the action plan outlines the more specific details of co-operation in the identified areas. The secrecy surrounding the draft, and the haste with which it was discussed with the governments of the PICs during the meeting sent worrying signals across the Pacific.

The PICs as a collective did not agree to China's extensive and ambitious proposals, and therefore China failed to get a consensus on the deal. In fact, the Prime Minister of FSM had sent a letter to all the PIC governments prior to the meeting, to consider China's proposals with caution, as they could have negative implications for the sovereignty and unity of PICs and may drag them into major power conflicts in the future. Some have argued that China has acted too boldly and has therefore met with such a debacle. China might have also miscalculated the regional reaction, perhaps led by a monolithic understanding of the PICs after seeing Solomon Islands' positive response earlier this year. However, China can always come back with improvised plan which is more acceptable and use it to further pursue its final objectives incrementally. Moreover, this debacle does



not stop China from pursuing bilateral deals of similar nature.

The intensification of China's diplomacy towards the Pacific Islands have made the powers who have traditionally controlled the regional dynamics like the U.S. and Australia more cautious. The U.S. has started revisiting its diplomatic priority for the region ever since the China-Solomon Islands deal. The role played by the U.S. in mobilising opposition against China's proposed deal could not be ruled out as FSM is the only country which recognises China and at the same time is part of the Compact of Free Association with the U.S.. Australia, in the meanwhile, has sent its new Foreign Secretary Penny Wong to the islands for revitalising ties, with promises of due priority and assistance to the PICs.

Wang may leave the Pacific humbled at the end of his visit, but with more insights; the Western powers may have been relieved, but may have turned more vigilant; and the PICs may have become more united than ever before.

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Heated discussions: The Secretary-General of the Pacific Islands Forum Henry Puna holds a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Suva, Fiji on May 29. •AFP

THE GIST

■ During a meeting with the 14 Pacific Island Countries, China's effort to push through a comprehensive framework deal, the draft of which was leaked earlier, failed to gain consensus among the PICs.

■ The Pacific Island Countries are a cluster of 14 states which are located largely in the tropical zone of the Pacific Ocean. These countries have played an important role in major power rivalry as springboards for power projection and laboratories for developing and demonstrating strategic capabilities.

■ The PICs lie in the natural line of expansion of China's maritime interest. At a time when the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has emerged as a major force in the Indo-Pacific vis-à-vis China, the need to influence the PICs becomes even more pressing for China.

India, Israel seek links on futuristic defence tech

Broad consensus between both the countries on fortifying strategic ties, says Rajnath Singh

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his visiting Israeli counterpart Benny Gantz on Thursday discussed partnerships within the government-to-government framework, military training, and technological cooperation with a focus on Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) and defensive capabilities.

A Letter of Intent on enhancing cooperation in the field of futuristic defence technologies was also exchanged between the two Ministers, a Defence Ministry statement said.

The Ministers also discussed a cooperation agree-



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with Israeli counterpart Benny Gantz in New Delhi on Thursday. ■ SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

ment signed between the Indian Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Israel's Directorate for Defence R&D. The Ministers declared their in-

tervention to further develop defence cooperation in a manner that harnesses Israel's "technological advance and operational experience", together with

India's "extraordinary development and production capabilities", the statement said. "Cooperation between the countries would be in line with Prime Minister Modi's 'Make in India' vision."

Meeting with PM

Before the bilateral meeting, Mr. Gantz paid homage at the National War Memorial and reviewed a Guard of Honour on the lawns of Vigyan Bhavan. Mr. Gantz also met Mr. Modi and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval.

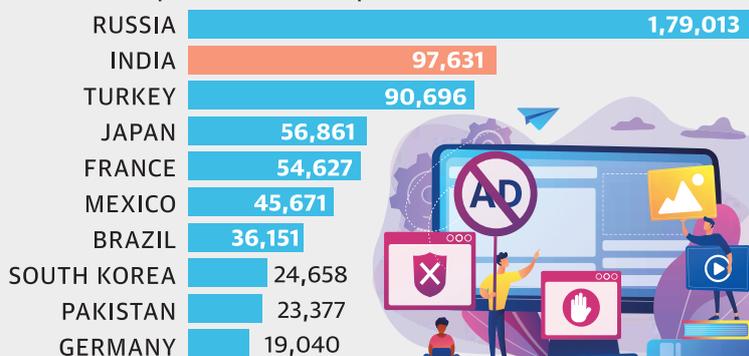
"Discussed key issues pertaining to defence cooperation and global and regional scenarios during the bilateral meeting. We place great

value on our strategic partnership with Israel," Mr. Singh said on Twitter after the meeting. "There is a broad consensus between both the countries on further strengthening the bilateral strategic and defence cooperation."

The two countries are close to finalising a bilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA).

Mr. Gantz is accompanied by his Chief of Staff Maayan Israeli, Military Secretary Brig. Gen. Yaki Dolf, Director of the Policy and POL-MIL Bureau Dror Shalom and Head of the International Defence Cooperation Directorate Yair Kulas.

Take-down requests | A look at the top 10 countries that submitted the highest number of content removal requests to online platforms as of October 2021



Panel to hear appeals on social media posts

Draft comes amid Centre's stand-off with platforms over content moderation

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA
NEW DELHI

The government has proposed a new panel that will have the power to overturn the decisions related to content moderation and take-down reached by social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, following appeals by users.

As per the draft of the proposed amendments to the IT Rules, 2021, the Centre will constitute one or more “grievance appellate

committees” to deal with appeals by users against the decision of the grievance officer appointed by the social media intermediary.

The draft was put up on the website of the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), seeking comments and suggestions of stakeholders till June 22, 2022. However, it was not reflecting on the website from Thursday afternoon. While a senior government official confirmed that the proposed draft had not been withdrawn and may be a “technical glitch”, the draft was not available on the Ministry’s website till the time of going to press.

Panel to hear appeals on social media posts

The proposal comes on the back of multiple stand-offs between the government and the social media platforms over content moderation and take-down. Last year, for example, Twitter had blocked several accounts posting messages in support of the farmers' agitation following government orders. The U.S.-headquartered firm later said it had only "withheld a portion of the accounts" identified by the MeitY within India, and was also served with a non-compliance notice following restoration of content that it believed was consistent with Indian law.

The amendments state that any person aggrieved by an order of the grievance

officer appointed by a social media network may appeal to the grievance appellate committee within 30 days of receipt of communication from grievance officer.

"The Grievance Appellate Committee shall deal with such appeal expeditiously and shall make an endeavour to dispose of the appeal finally within 30 calendar days from the date of receipt of the appeal," it states.

It further adds that, "Every order passed by the Grievance Appellate Committee shall be complied with by the intermediary concerned".

The committee will consist of a chairperson and other members appointed by the Central government.

A critical juncture

Distilling inflation's impact on GST revenues is vital before reforms are put on hold

On Tuesday, the Centre said it has released States' outstanding GST compensation dues of almost ₹87,000 crore. The move marks a shift in stance as just a month earlier, the Finance Ministry had signalled that States' dues worth over ₹78,000 crore, pending for the last four months of 2021-22, will be released 'as and when' adequate GST compensation cess collections accrue. By May 31, the Centre said there was about ₹25,000 crore in the GST compensation fund and forked out the balance from its own coffers to be adjusted from future GST cess levies on sin goods, such as cars. The stated intent for this changed strategy makes eminent sense – to help States manage their resources and ensure spending, particularly of the capital variety to pump-prime the economy, happens smoothly through 2022-23. States have been anxious about revenue inflows once the five-year GST compensation window expires this month. The gesture to remit dues without waiting for cess accruals will also help cool the temperature of the Centre-States' fiscal parleys, that flared up afresh after some tangential remarks from the apex court on the nature of the GST Council's recommendations.

For consumers, this could mean a further extension in the levy of GST compensation cess beyond March 2026 – by when borrowings made over the past two years to bridge shortfalls in cess collections, were to be repaid. The other important implication is that over April and May, the gap between revenues and the assured level promised to States under the GST compensation compact has narrowed to less than ₹5,000 crore a month, from over ₹19,600 crore averaged in the previous four months. The record GST collection of over ₹1.67 lakh crore in April helped, no doubt, and although May revenues have fallen 15.9% to ₹1.41 lakh crore, sustaining this two-month average could ease fiscal worries for both the Centre and the States. The Government, which had termed April revenues (for transactions in March) a reflection of a 'faster' recovery, suggested that the financial year end boosted those inflows, seeking to explain the dip in May. The elephant in the room remains ignored – high inflation, which the Government hinted could compel a pause in an impending rejig of the GST rate structure, has been a key factor for rising GST revenues (over ₹1.12 lakh crore for 11 months). Once that is acknowledged and the level of economic activity assessed minus inflation effects, the GST Council can take a more nuanced call on the next steps to reform the still-young tax system and sustain revenues. This must begin by assessing whether the GST rate restructuring should be deferred because of fears of higher inflation, or reoriented to lower inflation while broadening the tax net and easing compliance.

Trade deficit widened to a record \$23.33 bn last month

Exports rose 15.5%, imports surged 56.1% to stay above \$60 bn for a third month

VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI

India's merchandise trade deficit widened to a record \$23.33 billion in May, as exports grew 15.5% to \$37.3 billion while imports jumped 56.1% to \$60.62 billion, preliminary data from the Commerce and Industry Ministry show. The previous highest monthly trade deficit was November's \$22.91 billion.

Goods exports shrank 7.2% from April's \$40.19 billion, resulting in the trade deficit for the first two months of 2022-23 widening to \$41.73 billion. The figure for April-May 2021 was \$21.82 billion.

While petroleum exports, which surged 52.7% from



Inflation impact: 'Imports will stay high in absolute terms as commodity prices see a renewed uptick.' ■ K. K. MUSTAFAH

May 2021, electronics (41.5%) and readymade textile garments (22.9%), led the export growth, the overall growth rate almost halved to an 8.1% pace once petroleum exports were excluded. May's 15.5% pace was also

the slowest in 15 months.

This is the third month in a row that merchandise imports have crossed \$60 billion, thanks to elevated commodity and oil prices amid the festering Russia-Ukraine conflict. Gold imports shot

up almost ninefold year-on-year to cross \$5.8 billion.

'Growth to moderate'

"With base effects catching up, the pace of growth of goods exports and then later, imports, is likely to moderate, while remaining high in absolute terms as commodity prices are seeing a renewed uptick," said ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar. "We believe the merchandise trade deficit will print between \$20 billion to \$25 billion for most months of 2022-23," she added.

Petroleum imports almost doubled to \$18.1 billion while coal imports more than doubled from May 2021 levels to \$5.33 billion.

Liquid mirror telescope in Devasthal sees first light

Once trained using AI tools, the telescope can help track transients such as supernovae, space debris and meteorites

SHUBASHREE DESIKAN
CHENNAI

The four-metre International Liquid Mirror Telescope (ILMT) saw the first light recently, gazing out from its vantage on Devasthal, a hill in Uttarakhand, into the deep sky.

The telescope, staring at the sky overhead, will make sky surveys possible and obtain images that can help observe transient phenomena such as supernovae and record the presence of space debris or meteorites – basically, watch the skies.

The telescope has been

built by a collaboration of scientists from Canada, Belgium and India. It is located at an altitude of 2,450 metres on the Devasthal Observatory campus of the Aryabhata Research Institute of Observational Sciences (ARIES) in Nainital district, an autonomous institute under the Department of Science and Technology, Government of India.

A large pool of mercury placed in a vessel is spun around so fast that it curves into a parabolic shape. Since mercury is reflective, this shape helps in focusing the



The primary mirror of the International Liquid Mirror Telescope at Devasthal.

reflected light. A thin sheet of mylar protects the mercury from the wind.

“It was thrilling to see the formation of the primary mirror. Nearly 50 litres of mercury, weighing close to 700 kilograms, is spun hard to form a paraboloid mirror of just 4 mm thickness and a diameter of about 4 metres,” says Kuntal Misra, Project Investigator at ARIES. She has worked in this project since January 2020.

First image

The first image made by the telescope consisted of several stars and a galaxy, NGC 4274, which is 45 million light years away.

The telescope, having a primary mirror that is liquid, cannot be turned and pointed in any direction. It “stares” at the zenith and watches the sky as the earth rotates, thereby giving a view of different objects.

This property can be used to scan and survey the sky, observe transients and moving objects such as meteorites.

It will work in tandem with the existing 3.6-metre Devasthal Optical Telescope.

Once it starts making observations, the telescope will collect gigabytes of data,

which will need to be analysed using artificial intelligence and machine learning (AI and ML) tools.

“In a night’s observation, it will make thousands of images which cannot be analysed by just looking at them. We will need to develop and train AI and ML tools to do this,” says Dipankar Banerjee, Director of the ARIES Observatory.

With the monsoon expected soon in the area, the real observations may start only in October, after the rains, according to Dr. Banerjee.

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.