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# BIMSTEC



Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical & Economic Cooperation



Bangladesh



Sri Lanka



India



Nepal



Bhutan



Thailand



Myanmar

**VEDHIK**  
DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

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## **FOREWORD**

We, at Team Vedhik is happy to introduce a new initiative - "Daily Current Affairs\_The Hindu" compilations to help you with UPSC Civil Services Examination preparation. We believe this initiative - "Daily Current Affairs\_The Hindu" would help students, especially beginners save time and streamline their preparations with regard to Current Affairs. A content page and an Appendix has been added segregating and mapping the content to the syllabus.

It is an appreciable efforts by Vedhik IAS Academy helping aspirants of UPSC Civil Services Examinations. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Babu Sebastian, former VC - MG University in extending all support to this endeavour. Finally I also extend my thanks to thank Ms. Shilpa Sasidharan and Mr. Shahul Hameed for their assistance in the preparing the compilations.

We welcome your valuable comments so that further improvement may be made in the forthcoming material. We look forward to feedback, comments and suggestions on how to improve and add value for students. Every care has been taken to avoid typing errors and if any reader comes across any such error, the authors shall feel obliged if they are informed at their Email ID.

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# More nations express outrage; India flays OIC

UAE, Bahrain, Oman, Indonesia, Maldives, Pak. lodge protest

**KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE**  
NEW DELHI

India on Monday hit out at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) over its statement condemning the derogatory comments made by two BJP leaders on Prophet Muhammed and Islam, even as more nations, including India's crucial Gulf partner, the UAE, security partners Oman and Jordan, Pakistan and the Maldives, came out strongly against the remarks.

Arindam Bagchi, spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs, said the OIC's comments were "misleading and mischievous".

Criticising the comments by Nupur Sharma and Navin Kumar Jindal, who were suspended by the BJP amid international opprobrium, the UAE urged India to foster "mutual coexistence".

In the strongly worded response to the OIC, Mr. Bagchi said the bloc should stop its "communal approach". "It is regrettable that the OIC Secretariat has yet again chosen to make motivated, misleading and mischievous



**Upping the ante:** People staging a protest demanding the arrest of Nupur Sharma in Mumbai. ■ EMMANUAL YOGINI

comments. This only exposes its divisive agenda being pursued at the behest of vested interests," he said.

Earlier, the OIC "strongly condemned" the derogatory remarks and connected them with other internal developments in India. "These abuses come in the context of the escalation of hatred and abuse of Islam in India and in the context of the systematic practices against Muslims and restrictions on them," it said.

**DELAYED RESPONSE** ▶ PAGE 6

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# More nations express outrage; India flays OIC

The official spokesperson's strongest response was reserved for the Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif, who had urged the world to "severely reprimand India" and take note of the offensive comments. "Our love for the Holy Prophet (PBUH) is supreme. All Muslims can sacrifice their life for the Love & Respect of their Holy Prophet (PBUH)," Mr. Sharif said on Sunday.

Mr. Bagchi said, "The absurdity of a serial violator of minority rights commenting on the treatment of minorities in another nation is not lost on anyone. The world has been witness to the systemic persecution of minorities."

## **UAE's remarks**

The remarks from the UAE is an important turn in the controversy as the country has recently concluded a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with India and is a crucial aviation and investment destination for the

country. "The Ministry underscored the need to respect religious symbols and not violate them, as well as confront hate speech and violence," a comment from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the UAE said.

While Saudi Arabia, Iran, Qatar, and Kuwait criticised the derogatory remarks on Sunday, Bahrain, Pakistan, the UAE, Jordan, Oman and the Maldives issued condemnations on Monday. The Taliban of Afghanistan too expressed condemnation.

Ms. Sharma and Mr. Jindal were stripped of their responsibilities by the BJP once Qatar and Kuwait became the first countries to protest against the offensive remarks about the Prophet.

Indonesia too has condemned the comments. "This message has been conveyed to the Indian Ambassador in Jakarta," said the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia in an announcement.

# A 'silver' moment to propel a Bay of Bengal dream

After 25 years, BIMSTEC can do much better as a grouping, addressing shortcomings in trade and connectivity



RAJIV BHATIA

June 6 marked the completion of 25 years since the 1997 Bangkok Declaration launched a modest grouping (of Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand), with the acronym, BIST-EC. Three countries (Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar) joined it later to make it the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). This unique set of five countries from South Asia and two from South-east Asia are parents to an institution with an unwieldy name but lofty ambitions. It is the parents' responsibility that the 25-year-old offspring, now a full adult, begins taking strides to achieve the goals set before it.

## Past trajectory

At the grouping's birth, the world was different; it was stamped by America's 'unipolar moment'. India and Thailand joined hands to start an experiment of infusing a part of South Asia with the economic and institutional dynamism that defined the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). But BIMSTEC found the burdens of South Asia too heavy to carry, and so it grew slowly.

Now in the third decade of the 21st century, the strategic contestation between the United States and China defines the region's geo-politics and geo-economics, creat-

ing new tensions and opportunities. The grouping has succeeded in rejuvenating itself. Since its Kathmandu summit in 2018, it is viewed as an instrument of regional cooperation and integration, not just of sub-regional cooperation. It is good going so far, but the challenging tasks begin now.

Experts maintain that if BIMSTEC is truly committed to its stated goals, it must recreate the spirit of working in unison, displayed at the historic Leaders' Retreat in October 2016 (and their interaction with the BRICS leadership on the same day). The far-reaching decisions taken, in Goa, paved the way for the institution's reform that took shape at the Kathmandu summit. The Colombo summit in March 2022 put its stamp of approval on it. A determined push at the highest political level made it happen. That is the key lesson from the past.

## Key achievements

BIMSTEC has several achievements to its credit. It has crafted a new Charter for itself, spelling out the grouping's vision, functions of its constituent parts, and has secured a legal personality. It has prioritised the sectors of cooperation, reducing them from the unwieldy 14 to the more manageable seven, with each member-state serving as the lead country for the assigned sector. It has, finally, taken measures to strengthen the Secretariat, although some members are yet to extend adequate personnel support to it. Above all, its success lies in its survival through the turns and twists of internal tensions. The BIMSTEC region witnessed the influx of over a



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

million Rohingya refugees into Bangladesh, the result of oppression by the Myanmar military; the coup in Myanmar that led to its virtual boycott by a large segment of the international community; and the grave political and economic crisis afflicting Sri Lanka.

Unlike the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, post-2014, BIMSTEC has continued to hold its summits and meetings of Foreign Ministers. Unlike the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) which held only one summit since its establishment in 1997, BIMSTEC has succeeded in holding five summits so far; it has now resolved to hold regular summits once in two years.

The grouping has also registered progress in combating terrorism, forging security cooperation, and creating mechanisms and practices for the better management of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. A whole basket of memoranda of understanding, agreements and legal instruments provide the foundation for developing functional cooperation in select areas such as agriculture, trade, sustainable development and connectivity. Institutions such as an Energy

Centre and the Centre on Weather and Climate are in place to push sectoral cooperation forward.

## The faultlines

However, a fair balance sheet must factor in the shortfalls and the gaps between ambition and action. A major failure relates to the continuing inability to produce a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (FTA) 18 years after the signing of the Framework Agreement. Official sources concede that of the seven agreements needed to operationalise the FTA, only two are "ready" – a disappointing record. What is worse is that the highest political leaders, in their summit declarations, continue to "direct" ministers and officials to expedite action, but, alas, with little impact. Heads of state and government need to assert their authority or abandon the FTA as an unachievable goal.

The other disappointment is connectivity – in infrastructure (roads, railways, air, river, and coastal shipping links), energy, the digital and financial domain, and institutions that bring people closer together for trade, tourism and cultural exchanges. Only limited progress has been achieved so far, despite the adoption of the Master Plan for Connectivity supported by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Much of the connectivity established recently is the outcome of bilateral initiatives taken by India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan to strengthen transport links. Mega-projects aimed to improve connectivity between India and Myanmar (and Thailand) have been delayed inordinately.

For greater regional connectivi-

ty, more financial resources are needed. The movement towards establishing the BIMSTEC Development Fund is minimal. The grouping has talked about the Blue Economy but is yet to begin any work on it. Business chambers and corporate leaders are yet to be engaged fully with the activities of BIMSTEC. This leaves the grouping largely in the hands of officials and experts. The involvement of the 'Third Space' needs to be expanded significantly.

## And, prospects

An objective evaluation may award an A- to BIMSTEC@25, with the remark that it must do better. An exciting destiny awaits it as it works to realise the vision of the Bay of Bengal Community (BOBC). In this Indo-Pacific century, the BOBC has the potential to play a pivotal role, deepening linkages between South Asia and Southeast Asia. It should accelerate the region's economic development by collaborating with the newly minted Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). New synergy should be created between BIMSTEC and the IPEF.

Finally, while all member-states are equal, three have a special responsibility: Bangladesh as the host of the BIMSTEC Secretariat; Thailand as the representative of Southeast Asia; and India as the largest state in South Asia. This trio must be the engine to pull the BIMSTEC train with imagination and determination.

Rajiv Bhatia is Distinguished Fellow, Gateway House and a former Indian Ambassador to Myanmar

# Bail denied for student booked for tweets

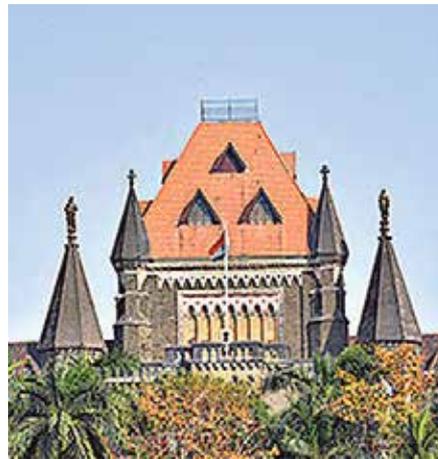
## Fundamental rights not absolute: HC

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**

MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Monday refused to grant bail to a student seeking to quash five first information reports (FIRs) filed against him in different parts of Maharashtra for tweeting objectionable content against Nationalist Congress Party chief Sharad Pawar.

A Division Bench of Justices S.S. Shinde and M.N. Jadhav was hearing a criminal petition filed by Nikhil Bhamre, 22, seeking to quash FIRs registered under Sections 153 A (promoting enmity between different groups on ground of religion, race, place of birth, language and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony), 500 (punishment for defamation), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of peace), 506 (punishment



Nikhil Bhamre was arrested for tweeting objectionable content against Sharad Pawar. ■ VIVEK BENDRE

for criminal intimidation), 505 (statements conducting public mischief) and 501 (printing or engraving matter known to be defamatory) of the Indian Penal Code.

The court said, “There has to be some responsibility. Every citizen has fundamental rights. But these are subject to restrictions. Fundamental rights are not absolute.”

# Jamiat moves SC to dismiss plea against Places of Worship Act

The Muslim body wants to intervene in the petition against the 1991 Act

LEGAL CORRESPONDENT  
NEW DELHI

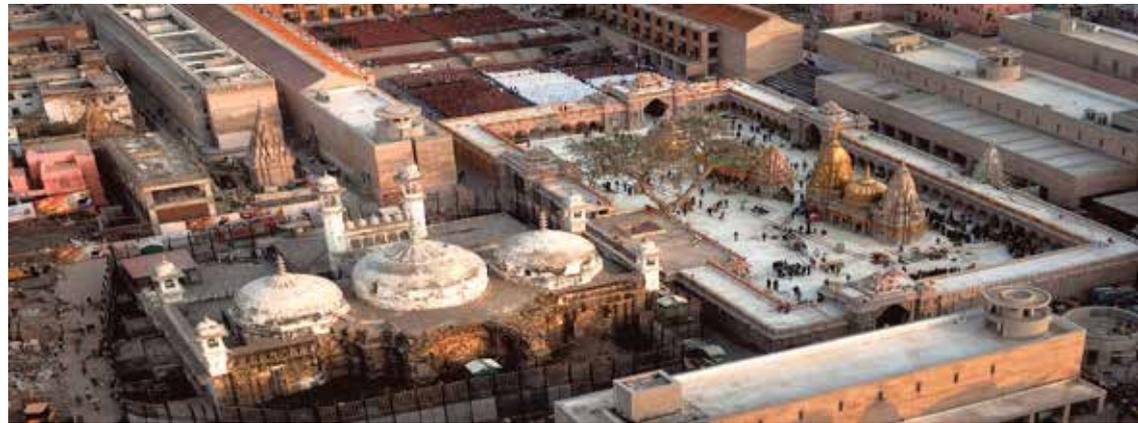
Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind has moved the Supreme Court seeking the dismissal of a petition which challenges the validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, a law which prohibits the conversion of any religious place.

The Muslim body wants to intervene in the petition against the 1991 Act, filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay.

## ‘Floodgates of litigation’

The Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind argued that if the petition was entertained, it would open floodgates of litigation against “countless mosques in the country”.

“There is a list of numerous mosques which is doing



**Side by side:** An aerial view of the Gyanvapi mosque, left, and the Kashi Viswanath temple on the banks of the Ganga in Varanasi. ■ AP

the rounds on social media, alleging that the said mosques were built allegedly by destroying Hindu places of worship... the religious divide from which the country is recovering in the aftermath of the Ayodhya dispute will only be widened,” the application said.

Last year, the court asked for the government’s response to Mr. Upadhyay’s petition, which challenged the provisions in the Act which froze the religious character of a place of worship as it had existed on August 15, 1947.

Mr. Upadhyay had found

the cut-off date “arbitrary and irrational”, preventing Hindus, Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs from approaching courts to “re-claim” their places of worship which were “invaded” and “encroached” upon by “fundamentalist barbaric invaders”.

# Policies can change in public interest: SC

‘Personal interest holds less value’

**LEGAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

The government can change its policies, toppling prior agreements with private parties, provided the policy change is in public interest and guided by reason, the Supreme Court has held in a judgment.

The recent judgment authored by Justice B.R. Gavai said that “in the case of conflict between public interest and personal interest, public interest should prevail... a change in policy by the Government can have an overriding effect over private treaties between the government and a private party, if the same was in the general public interest and provided such change in policy was guided by reason”.

The case concerned the recovery of an additional 64.7% in payment from persons allotted plots by the Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority (YEIDA). The additional money was meant to pay farmers whose lands were acquired for the development project. It was considered as a “no-litigation incentive” for the farmers.

## **YEIDA project stalled**

The farmers, whose lands were acquired by the YEIDA, had started an unrest when they found that their compatriots whose lands were acquired by the New Okhla Industrial Authority for a similar project were paid 64.7% additional compensation.

The farmers’ unrest eventually stalled the YEIDA project as vast stretches of land could not be developed. The allottees had approached YEIDA for a solution to the problem.

YEIDA turned to the Uttar Pradesh government, and subsequently, a high-level committee led by the State Minister of Prisons, Rajendra Chaudhary, was formed to find a solution.

The committee had recommended the collection of the additional amount of 64.7% from the plot allottees to pay the farmers.

However, at this point, the allottees, who said they had already paid for the plots, approached the High Court, which held that the change in policy to pay the additional amount was “arbitrary”.

YEIDA appealed to the apex court. Setting aside the High Court decision, Justice Gavai observed that the Chaudhary Committee had found a solution when “there was a hanging sword of the entire acquisition being declared unlawful”.

The Chaudhary Committee had done a wide range of deliberations with stakeholders, including allottees, farmers and YEIDA. The policy decision was made after taking into consideration all relevant factors.

“It is a settled position of law that in case of a conflict between public interest and personal interest, public interest will outweigh the personal interest,” the Supreme Court held.

EXPLAINER

# The debates around the Surrogacy Act

What are the various provisions under the Act which dictate who can commission a surrogacy? Are the laws too restrictive?

RAMYA KANNAN

**The story so far:** Petitioners in the Delhi High Court questioned why marital status, age, or gender were the criteria for being allowed to commission or not commission surrogacy in India. The female petitioner said that she already had a child but the trauma of the first childbirth experience and her need to juggle work with child care persuaded her that surrogacy would be a better option for the second child. But under the provisions of the Surrogacy Act, she was denied a chance at commissioning surrogacy.

As per the Surrogacy Act that kicked in from January this year, a married couple can opt for surrogacy only on medical grounds. The law defines a couple as a married Indian "man and woman" and also prescribes an age-criteria with the woman being in the age group of 23 to 50 years and the man between 26 to 55 years. Additionally, the couple should not have a child of their own. Though the law allows single women to resort to surrogacy, she should either be a widow or a divorcee, between the age of 35 to 45 years. Single men are however, not eligible.

## What is the Surrogacy Act?

The Surrogacy (Regulation) Bill was introduced in Parliament in November 2016, and passed in the Winter session of Parliament in 2021.

The Act sought to regulate the surrogacy part of a rather flourishing infertility industry in the country. Defining 'surrogacy' as a practice where a woman undertakes to give birth to a child for another couple and agrees to hand over the child to them after birth, it allows 'altruistic surrogacy' – wherein only the medical expenses and insurance coverage is provided by the couple to the surrogate mother during pregnancy. No other monetary consideration will be permitted.

## Why is there a need for a Surrogacy Act in India?

India has emerged as a hub for infertility

treatment, attracting people from the world over with its state of the art technology and competitive prices to treat infertility. Soon enough, due to prevailing socio-economic inequities, underprivileged women found an option to 'rent their wombs' and thereby make money to take care of their expenses – often to facilitate a marriage, enable children to get an education, or to provide for hospitalisation or surgery for someone in the family.

Once information of the availability of such wombs got out, the demand also picked up. Unscrupulous middle men inveigled themselves into the scene and exploitation of these women began. Several instances began to emerge where women, in often desperate straits, started lodging police complaints after they did not receive the promised sum.

## India has emerged as a hub for infertility treatment, attracting people from the world over with its state of the art technology and competitive prices to treat infertility

Other issues also began to crop up. For instance, in 2008 a Japanese couple began the process with a surrogate mother in Gujarat, but before the child was born they split with both of them refusing to take the child. In 2012, an Australian couple commissioned a surrogate mother, and arbitrarily chose one of the twins that were born.

The time therefore, was ripe for proper regulation.

## Who all are allowed to make use of the services of a surrogate mother?

Any couple that has 'proven infertility' are candidates. The 'intending couple' as the Act calls them, will be eligible if they have a 'certificate of essentiality' and a 'certificate of eligibility' issued by the appropriate authority. The former will be issued if the couple fulfils three conditions: One, a certificate of infertility of one or both from a district medical board; Two, an order of



parentage and custody of the surrogate child passed by a Magistrate's court; Thirdly, insurance cover for the surrogate mother.

An eligibility certificate mandates that the couple fulfil the following conditions: They should be Indian citizens who have been married for at least five years; the female must be between 23 to 50 years and the male, 26 to 55 years; they cannot have any surviving children (biological, adopted or surrogate); However, this would not include a 'child who is mentally or physically challenged or suffers from life threatening disorder or fatal illness.'

## Who can become a surrogate mother?

Only a close relative of the couple can be a surrogate mother, one who is able to provide a medical fitness certificate. She should have been married, with a child of her own, and must be between 25 and 35 years, but can be a surrogate mother only once.

## What are the controversies behind the Act?

Even at the Bill stage, while there was a general murmur of appreciation, and some strident approval from infertility experts, there was some apprehension about the too

restrictive regulations. For instance, it does not allow single women, or men, or gay couples to go in for surrogacy. Representations from these groups emerged even as Health Minister J.P. Nadda introduced the Bill in the House.

Others, primarily those involved in organ transplantation, pointed out how despite a similar, stringent law – the Transplantation of Human Organs Act – organ commerce continues to thrive in the country. Brokers continue to operate, though with less temerity and more covertly, sometimes with hospital authorities, to pull wool over the eyes of the appropriate authority and law enforcement officials. Clearly the issue will have to be handled with a stern visage, even as sensitivities of people are factored in.

## What lies ahead?

These apprehensions and perceived hitches due to the exclusionary criteria, have already come to the forefront in the short period that the Act has been operational. A path of litigation is possibly the course ahead, and if a critical mass builds up, amendments might have to be resorted to in order to resolve the grievances and ensure access for all categories of parents.

## THE GIST

■ As per the Surrogacy Act, a married couple can opt for surrogacy only on medical grounds. It also prescribes an age-criteria for both the man and woman. Though the law allows single women to resort to surrogacy, she has to be either a widow or a divorcee. Single men are not eligible.

■ Only a close relative of the couple can be a surrogate mother. She should have been married, with a child of her own. She can only be a surrogate mother once.

■ Even at the Bill stage, there was some apprehension about the too restrictive regulations. For instance, it does not allow single (never been married) women, or men, or gay couples to go in for surrogacy.

# PM urges bank chiefs to make loan process easier

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday urged bank chiefs to make it easier for people to get loans through the new Jan Samarth portal, a repository of a dozen credit-linked government schemes.

At the launch of the Iconic Week celebrations of the Finance and Corporate Affairs Ministries, he said it was imperative to focus on making

Indian banks and the rupee an integral part of global trade and supply chains.

He said the new portal would make life easier for farmers, students and entrepreneurs as they could assess which scheme worked best for them, on that platform instead of visiting various websites.

Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said as of now, 12 cre-

dit schemes that granted credit from banks were on the portal, to ensure that citizens need not answer the same questions whenever they applied for schemes.

Mr. Modi said the Ministry had charted a great journey in recent years by “taking the right decisions at the right time”. The PM released a special series of ₹1, ₹2, ₹5, ₹10 and ₹20 coins with the logo “Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav”,

which he said would “persistently remind people of the goals of the Amrit Kaal and inspire them to contribute to the country’s development”.

He said people’s participation had increased and the poorest of the poor had been empowered in the past eight years, following several unique steps taken by the government.

**CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 10**

## PM urges bank chiefs to make loan process easier

“We included more than half of the country’s population, which was deprived of the formal system and was excluded from the country’s development, on mission mode. Such a great work of financial inclusion has not happened anywhere in the world in such a short time. And most of all, we got to see a new courage among the people of the country to make their dreams come true,” Mr. Modi said.

“After seven decades of independence, this huge transformation is a reflection of the Centre’s persistent people-centric good governance efforts. There was a time when all poli-



Narendra Modi releasing coins. ■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

cies and decisions were government-centric, and it was the people’s responsibility to reach the government to avail the schemes that were launched,” he noted.

# ‘Policy certainty, transparency critical for asset monetisation’

CEA says regulatory framework needs to remain consistent and predictable

**VIKAS DHOOT**  
NEW DELHI

Chief Economic Advisor (CEA) V. Anantha Nageswaran on Monday said policy stability and transparency were critical to ensuring the success of the government’s asset monetisation effort. He separately flagged the hurdles to making a switch away from fossil fuels and highlighted the constraints, both fiscal and in terms of supply of raw materials like metals and minerals, to meeting this key global challenge.

While the National Infrastructure Pipeline envisages creating physical infrastructure to support economic growth of 7% and above, Mr.



**Global watchdog:** A global regulator is needed if all nations are to progress to net-zero emissions. ■ SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Nageswaran said asset monetisation was not just about garnering revenues for the government but also ensuring the economic efficiency of these assets by returning them to productive use.

Noting that regulatory consistency, clarity and predictability and a certain sense of stability in the regulatory framework were very important, the CEA said these had “been somewhat

variable in the past”.

“So that gives an element of uncertainty for investors and even the government. Policy stability, consistency and transparency... is what would make a very big difference between a success and a not so successful programme,” he added.

The CEA also emphasised the need for greater investments in metals and minerals for renewable energy technologies.

“We have to have an international regulator to be able to ensure that they are available to all countries if we want all countries to progress to net-zero emissions... at the same time,” he added.

# Strategic missile Agni-4 successfully test-fired

## All operational parameters validated

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

India on Monday successfully tested the Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile (IRBM) Agni-4, which met all parameters.

### Training launch

“A successful training launch of an Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile, Agni-4, was carried out at approximately 1930 hours on June 06, 2022 from APJ Abdul Kalam Island, Odisha,” a Defence Ministry statement said.

The successful test was part of routine user training launches carried out under

the aegis of the Strategic Forces Command, it stated.

### Range of 3,500 km

The missile, one of many in the Agni series of strategic missiles, has a range of over 3,500 km.

The statement from the Defence Ministry said that the launch validated all operational parameters and as also the reliability of the system.

The Defence Ministry further added, “The successful test of the Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile reaffirms India’s policy of having a ‘Credible Minimum Deterrence’ Capability.”

# ₹76,390-cr. defence projects get nod

The proposals include manufacture of Dornier aircraft and Su-30 MKI engines by HAL

**SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT**  
NEW DELHI

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Monday accorded preliminary approval, the Acceptance of Necessity (AoN), for capital acquisition proposals of the armed forces amounting to ₹76,390 crore.

“This will provide substantial boost to the Indian defence industry and reduce foreign spending significantly,” a Defence Ministry statement said.

“For the Army, the DAC

 This [Acceptance of Necessity] will provide substantial boost to the Indian Defence Industry and reduce foreign spending significantly  
**DEFENCE MINISTRY**



accorded fresh AoNs for procurement of rough terrain fork lift trucks, bridge-laying tanks, wheeled armoured fighting vehicles with anti-tank guided missiles and weapon-locating radars through domestic sources

with emphasis on indigenous design and development,” it said.

For the Navy, the AoN was accorded for the procurement of next-generation corvettes (NGCs) at an estimated cost of approximately

₹36,000 crore.

“These NGCs will be versatile platforms for variety of roles viz. surveillance missions, escort operations, deterrence, surface action group operations, search & attack and coastal defence,” the Ministry said.

These NGCs would be constructed based on the Navy’s new in-house design using the latest technology in shipbuilding and would contribute to further the government’s SAGAR (Security and Growth for all in the Region) initiative, it noted.

The DAC also accorded

AoNs for the manufacture of Dornier aircraft and Su-30 MKI aero-engines by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. focused on enhancing indigenisation, particularly in indigenising aero-engine material.

A Digital Coast Guard project under “Buy (Indian) category” has also been approved by the DAC. Under this project, a secure pan-India network for digitising various surface and aviation operations, logistics, finance and human resources processes in the Coast Guard will be established, the statement added.

EXPLAINER

# The provisions of the withdrawn draft on social media regulations

What were the proposed changes to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021?

SAPTAPARNO GHOSH

**The story so far:** On June 2, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) put out a draft proposal, seeking comments from the general public on a set of proposed amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The draft document was however withdrawn the same day. It had proposed measures to strengthen the oversight mechanism for regulating content on social media platforms. The draft stated that the measures dealt with “new and emerging issues” and addresses identified “gaps” in the legislation so as to make the internet more open, safe, trusted and accountable to its users. The MeitY reposted the draft amendments on its website, inviting comments from stakeholders in the next 30 days, the same day this article went to press.

**What is the law?**

Broadly, the IT Rules (2021) mandate social media platforms to exercise greater diligence with respect to the content on their platforms. They are required to establish a grievance redressal mechanism, and remove unlawful and unfitting content within stipulated time frames.

The grievance officer of the platform’s redressal mechanism is responsible for

receiving and resolving complaints of the users. She/he is expected to acknowledge receipt of the complaint within 24 hours and dispose the same in an appropriate manner within 15 days. Content portraying an individual in full or partial nudity, in a sexual act or impersonating some other individual in the act (using morphed photos) are required to be removed within 24 hours of receiving the complaint. Its access and spread by any other means on the platform should also be disabled. Other than this, the privacy policies of the social media platforms must ensure that users are educated about not circulating copyrighted material and anything that can be construed as defamatory, racially or ethnically objectionable, paedophilic, threatening the unity, integrity, defence, security or sovereignty of India or friendly relations with foreign states, or violative of any contemporary law.

**What changes were proposed in the withdrawn draft?**

The draft proposed an additional level of oversight, namely, the ‘Grievance Appellate Committee’, functioning over and above the intermediary’s grievance redressal officer. Broadly, in case a user is not satisfied with the resolution provided by the intermediary, she/he can appeal against the decision at the appellate rather than going directly to court. However, this did not take away the



user’s right to appeal in any other court. The draft stipulated that all orders of this appellate must be complied with. The suggested question on ‘oversight’ stemmed from the fact that the appellate was to be constituted by the Central Govt – empowered to appoint the Chairperson and other members.

Digital advocacy group, Internet Freedom Foundation (IFF) said that “worryingly, this would have made the government the arbiter of permissible speech on the internet and incentivised social media platforms to suppress any speech that may not be palatable to the government.” Additionally, the draft put forth the obligation that all social media intermediaries resolve all complaints within 72 hours of reporting. Intermediaries are known to invest sizeable time in thoroughly scrutinising and determining the content and user accounts they are called to censor. For

example, Twitter took two-three days to censor former U.S. President Donald Trump’s account following a close review of his tweets and their context, particularly in light of the January 6 violence at the White House, the previous year. The shortened timelines therefore invited fears of a hastier approach to get things done. “Such a short-time line would have created the possibility of disposal of grievances without application of mind and led to arbitrary restriction on speech,” the IFF states.

What needs to be remembered is that all social media platforms deal with a sizeable user base and an even more massive content flow. For example, between March 25 and April 26 this year, Twitter acted against a total of 1,494 URLs for violating varied community standards. In addition, it processed 108 grievances seeking account suspensions and overturned 52 account suspensions during the mentioned period. Even if a minuscule fraction of these people were to approach the appellate, both the microblogging platform and the committee could be potentially burdened. Not to forget, the data is for a month-long period and for a single entity, and such occurrences are recurrent and could only multiply the case count. Further, a sub-clause suggested the appellate dispose such cases within thirty days furthering the probability for hasty decisions.

**Have there been any legal challenges?**

Both Bombay and Madras High Courts stayed the imposition of sub-clauses 1 and 3 of Rule 9 of the legislative guidelines in August and September of the previous year, respectively. The two sub-clauses dealt with the ‘Code of Ethics’ for online publishers dealing with news and current affairs content and/or curated content. The sub-clauses had stated that the entities subscribe to a three-tier mechanism in dealing with grievances (relevant to their platform) so as to adhere to their code. This entails self-regulation by the publishers (level I), by self-regulating bodies of the publishers (level II) and finally, an oversight mechanism by the Central Govt (level III).

When argued at the Bombay High Court in August 2021, Additional Solicitor General Anil Singh mentioned that 97% publishers of news and current affairs had not challenged the 2021 Rules and thus the provisions are accepted and implemented. The Bombay High Court however ruled, “People would be starved of the liberty of thought and feel suffocated to exercise their right of freedom of speech and expression, if they are made to live in present times of content regulation on the internet with the Code of Ethics hanging over their head as the Sword of Damocles.” The Supreme Court will now hear this matter on July 19.

## THE GIST

■ On June 2, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology put out a draft proposal, seeking comments from the general public on a set of proposed amendments to the IT Rules, 2021. The draft document was however withdrawn the same day with a revised version expected to be made available this week.

■ The draft proposed a ‘Grievance Appellate Committee’, functioning over and above the intermediary’s grievance redressal officer. Broadly, in case a user is not satisfied with the resolution provided by the intermediary, she/he can appeal against the decision at the appellate.

■ The draft also put forth the obligation that all social media intermediaries resolve all complaints within 72 hours of reporting.

# Union govt. seeks fresh comments on draft IT rules

Ministry of Electronics and IT reposts the draft amendments, with detailed reasoning, on its website

YUTHIKA BHARGAVA  
NEW DELHI

Following an uproar over the proposed amendments to the Information Technology (IT) Rules, the government on Monday said that the recommendations placed the interests of “Digital Indians” first, and sought to ensure that the constitutional rights of citizens were not contravened by “big-tech platforms”.

The Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) on Monday reposted the draft amendments on its website, inviting comments from stakeholders in the next 30 days. The move comes within a week

of the draft being pulled off the website following an uproar over the proposal that seeks to set up a new panel, whose members will be chosen by the government, with powers to overturn content moderation decisions taken by social media platforms.

While no significant changes have been made, the Ministry has now added its detailed reasoning for the amendments.

Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar tweeted: “Putting Interests of Digital Nagriks [citizens] First. New amended IT (Intermediary) Rules

are out for public consultation – more effective grievance addressal and ensuring constitutional rights of the citizens are respected.”

The note uploaded along with the draft amendments says the amended IT rules seek to provide additional avenues for grievance redressal, apart from the courts, and “also ensure that the Constitutional rights of Indian citizens are not contravened by any Big-tech Platform by ensuring new accountability standards for SSIMs [significant social media intermediaries]”.

These will not impact early stage or growth stage In-

dian companies or startups, it added.

“The goals of these rules are to ensure an Open, Safe & Trusted and Accountable Internet for all Indian Internet Users and Digital Nagriks,” the government said, adding that the existing rules have succeeded in creating a new sense of accountability among intermediaries to their users.

However, as the digital ecosystem and connected Internet users in India expand, so do the challenges and problems faced by them, as well as some of the infirmities and gaps that exist in the current rule vis-a-

vis Big Tech platforms, it said. “Therefore, new amendments have been proposed to the IT Rules 2021, to address these challenges and gaps...A formal public consultation meeting will be arranged by mid-June, and the details will be notified soon,” it added.

The broad principles that underpin these amended rules, it said, include that all online intermediaries providing services in India shall never contravene the Indian Constitution, Laws and Rules; follow them in letter and spirit; and “unlawful and harmful information violative of their own terms and

conditions shall be quickly removed when reported by users, while also providing the users a reasonable opportunity to respond in case of significant social media platforms”.

It further added that while the IT Rules, 2021, provide for a robust grievance redressal mechanism, there have been many instances in which the grievance officers of intermediaries either did not address the grievances satisfactorily and/or fairly. “In such a scenario, the need for an appellate forum has been proposed to protect the rights and interests of users,” the MeitY said.

### 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 <sup>th</sup> 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.
<b>General Studies Paper IV</b>	
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.