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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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EXPLAINER

The outrage over the new 'National Emblem'

What are the various allegations raised against the revised sculpture atop the new Parliament House?

THE GIST

- The first look at the national emblem atop the New Parliament House disappointed many with its alleged inaccuracies in depiction. The Congress Party has called it a "deviation" from the original.

- Four Asiatic lions are part of the national emblem with three lions being visible to the naked eye and the fourth one always hidden from general view. They are taken from the Sarnath Lion Capital of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka. The seven feet tall sculpture represented courage, power and pride.

- The lions in the latest replica many alleged, looked "too aggressive", which amounted to tampering with the original in a hurry to meet the deadline of the Central Vista Project.

ZIYA US SALAM

The story so far: Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently gave the nation a first glimpse of the national emblem atop the new Parliament House coming up as part of the Central Vista Project. The first look at the new 6.5 metre bronze emblem designed by Sunil Deore and Romiel Moses disappointed many with its alleged inaccuracies in depiction. The Opposition, cutting across party ranks, found the lions on the new 9,500 kg emblem 'angry', with their fangs visible, as opposed to the grace and glory of the original. Others found them a distortion of the actual emblem. The Congress Party has called it a "deviation" from the original. The new emblem is placed at the top of the Central Foyer of the new Parliament building which the government estimates will be ready in time for the winter session this year.

What is the history behind the national emblem?

Four Asiatic lions are part of the national emblem with three lions being visible to the naked eye and the fourth one always hidden from general view. They are taken from the Sarnath Lion Capital of the Mauryan emperor Ashoka. The seven feet tall sculpture made of polished sandstone represented courage, power and pride. Built in 250 BC to commemorate the first sermon of Gautama Buddha, where he is said to have shared the Four Noble Truths of life, it was mounted on a base of a frieze of smaller sculptures, including a horse (under fire in the new replica for its tail supposedly resembling that of a dog), a lion, a bull and an elephant moving in a clockwise direction. The four animals are said to be guardians of the four directions – north, south, east and west. They are separated by a wheel, representing the Dharmachakra of Buddhism, on all four sides. Each chakra or wheel has 24 spokes. The chakra was later adopted as part of the national flag. This abacus was mounted on an inverted lotus which is a symbol of Buddhism. Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsang has left a detailed account of Ashoka's lion pillar in his writings.

The pillar was part of Ashoka's plan to

spread Buddha's teachings. After the large-scale massacre in the Battle of Kalinga, Ashoka was shaken and embraced Buddhism with its emphasis on ahimsa. He decided to propagate his principles throughout his empire through the Major and Minor Edicts.

Why did the Constituent Assembly embrace the Sarnath pillar as the national emblem?

As India won independence, the Constituent Assembly decided on the Sarnath pillar as the national emblem. It was felt that the pillar epitomised the power, courage and confidence of the free nation. The emblem depicts a two-dimensional sculpture with the words Satyameva Jayate (truth alone triumphs) written below it, taken from the Mundaka Upanishad, written in Devanagari script.

On January 26, 1950, the Lion Capital of Ashoka at Sarnath officially became the national emblem of India. The emblem represents the seal of the Republic of India. Five students of renowned artist Nandalal Bose created the emblem. Among them were Jagdish Mittal, Kripal Singh Shekhawat, Gauri Bhanja and Dinanath Bhargava who was a young man in his 20s then. He was advised by Bose to visit the Kolkata zoo to observe the lions closely so as to get the exact expression of the majestic animal. He is said to have travelled 200 kilometres to observe the lions from close quarters. Incidentally, Bhargava has also designed the first 30 pages of the Constitution.

What is the controversy behind the latest replica?

The latest replica by Deore and Moses has a steel pillar support of 6,500 kgs. The lions, many alleged, looked "too aggressive", which amounted to tampering with the original in a hurry to meet the deadline of the Central Vista Project. "The concept sketch and process of casting the national emblem on the roof of the new Parliament building have gone through eight stages of preparation, from clay modelling and computer graphics to bronze casting and polishing," the PMO responded in a statement to emphasise the thoroughness of



On January 26, 1950, the Lion Capital of Ashoka officially became the national emblem of India. The pillar epitomised the power, courage and confidence of the free nation

the process.

However, it failed to douse criticism. The All India Congress Committee General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "To completely change the character and nature of the lions on Ashoka's pillar at Sarnath is nothing but a brazen insult to national symbol". The Rashtriya Janata Dal tweeted from the official party handle that, "The original emblem has a mild expression, but those built during Amrit Kaal show a man-eater's tendency to consume everything in the country." Jawhar Sircar, Trinamool Congress MP, questioned the entire process, asking, "We seek to know the details of the process of selecting the artist, the brief given and the cost of the work. Has this

contributed in raising the original estimated cost of ₹975 crore to the currently estimated cost of ₹1,200 crore? Did the proposal to install this sculpture receive sanction from the Delhi Urban Art Commission, and the Heritage Conservation Committee, mandated by the Supreme Court order of Jan 6, 2021 regarding the New Parliament Building?"

The designers countered the criticism about the lions looking aggressive by insisting that it was a matter of perspective, and claimed that the new emblem is a huge structure meant to be appreciated from a distance. The original structure was 1.6 metre tall whereas the new depiction is 6.5 metre high. Also, the original Lion Capital was at the ground level while the latest depiction is at a height of 33 metre from the ground.

The BJP rubbished the allegations as a "conspiracy" targeting Mr. Modi. Despite widespread criticism and objections, the new emblem is set to be a permanent part of the New Parliament House later this year.

A thorough revision: The newly inaugurated 'National Emblem' atop the New Parliament building.

AFP

Tunnel vision that is endangering India's history

The planned revision to Section 20 of the 'Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains' Act is ruinous



NACHIKET CHANCHANI

Close on the heels of the unveiling of a bronze statue of the national emblem atop the new Parliament house building, the Government has tersely announced that a Bill will be introduced in the monsoon session to modify a law dealing with ancient monuments. According to media reports, the Bill will "provide more teeth to the Archaeological Survey of India". This move will align the Bill with the new bronze statue, which has a more aggressive expression than an ancient Ashokan sculpture from Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh) from which its form is derived. Progressive militarisation of tangible heritage and state agencies are endangering India's history and dismantling public institutions.

Consider a current law. Section 20 of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (AMASR) Act of 1958, last amended in 2010, prohibits construction within a 100 metre radius of all Archaeological Survey of India (ASI)-protected monuments and regulates activities within another 300 metre radius. The new Bill proposes to revise this section. Henceforth, expert committees will decide on the extent of the prohibited and regulated areas around each monument and activities permitted herein.

The ASI protects around 3,700 archaeological sites and ancient monuments. Taken together, they mark milestones in India's history: the emergence of well-planned ci-

ties, the rise of empires inspired by egalitarian ideals, the development and dispersion of Buddhism along trade routes, the flourishing of temple cultures, the establishment of Sultanate polities, creative and competitive encounters among and between the Mughals and the Rajputs, the ascendancy of the British Raj, and a largely non-violent movement that overthrew colonial rule.

The larger connections

Historically, each monument was integrally connected to the landscape around it. Here are a few examples. Rock-cut sanctuaries from Barabar (Bihar) to Ajanta (Maharashtra) and from Masrur (Himachal Pradesh) to Guntupalli (Andhra Pradesh) were physically connected to outcrops and canyons. Pattadakal's temples (Karnataka) were symbolically linked to the Malaprabha river that flowed past them. Viramgam's Munsar Talav (Gujarat) was the centrepiece of a landscape consisting of interlocking ponds, sluice gates, decanting wells, irrigation canals, and farmlands. Lucknow's *imambaras* were tied to markets, palaces, processional roads, and gardens.

In time, some of these connections weakened. After 1857, colonial authorities reorganised cities by widening streets and demolishing dwellings around certain majestic older buildings so that they could properly survey the populace. In their effort to reposition architectural fragments of India's past as Britain's patrimony, colonial administrators placed select buildings on cushions of emerald grass. On occasion, they also dismantled and removed edifices and sculptural ensembles that they felt were inconsistent with the forms and functions of buildings that



SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

most interested them.

Over the past 75 years, grounds around ASI-protected sites have served diverse needs. In Delhi, the grounds of the Purana Quila and other iconic buildings quickly transformed into campsites for tens of thousands of individuals arriving from newly-formed Pakistan. As these refugees resettled in various neighbourhoods and cities, these grounds emerged as public spaces for exercise, prayer meetings, protests, and more. With the progressive transformation of the capital into a concrete jungle, the green edges around Delhi's protected monuments became havens for migratory birds, small mammals, and host of reptiles and amphibians.

Endangering the commons

Rezoning land around ASI-protected monuments into industrial, commercial, or even residential plots will thus deprive human and animal communities of much-needed commons. Moreover, permitting construction work risks weakening the foundations of centuries-old edifices. The chances of inadvertent damage are also higher. A hastily grounded electric pole might hit a monument's finial, leading it to fall to the ground. Sacks of cement stacked against a frescoed wall can irreversibly abrade its surface. As is well known, many monuments in India are already threatened by anthro-

pogenic forces. Domestic waste and greywater regularly seep into the subterranean sixth-century sanctuary at Jogeshwari in Mumbai. Air and water pollution continue to turn the white marble of the Taj Mahal yellow and green, and so on.

Erasure, some preservation

For a well-trained historian, the earth around an archaeological site or ancient monument is like a text. If construction machines disturb it, then artefacts long buried in layers of soil risk being broken and their contexts destroyed. This makes the task of undertaking new research more difficult – like reading a book whose pages have been chaotically torn out. In recent years, the Government has built new highways, metro-rail systems, and industrial parks without methodical archaeological impact assessments. These projects have led to the shattering of an untold number of historical artefacts and the casual collection of many others. We cannot afford to lose more of our tangible heritage.

Now is the time to learn from painstaking efforts to preserve our composite tangible heritage and the ecosystems that they are ensconced in. Conservation architect Ritish Nanda's team at Humayun's Tomb in Delhi has conserved a dazzling edifice and provided meaningful employment to an entire *basti*.

In Bhubaneswar, the Odisha government has formulated a scheme to protect a cluster of ancient temples, tanks, and ponds to nurture a sense of regional identity, restore habitats, and bring in visitors in a methodical way. At the ancient city of Nagaur, Rajasthan, local artisans and multidisciplinary teams led by conservation architect Minakshi Jain have worked

together to conserve a citadel, reopen ancient gates, plant trees, and promote a lively bazaar outside its main entrance, ultimately giving a new lease of life to a medieval complex and strengthening social fabrics.

Questions to be asked

Thus, with the monsoon session having begun, our parliamentarians must ask basic questions: Who will determine the make-up of committees empowered to decide land use around each protected monument? What criteria will these committees use? How will different points of view be accommodated and what mechanisms will be present for redress? It is also unclear whether the new Bill will empower the ASI. Various laws and statutory bodies, such as the National Monuments Authority (under the Ministry of Culture), are already in place to help the ASI to fulfil its mandate. Is it possible that the proposed amendment to the AMASR will hasten the ASI's transformation into a constabulary of a past that exists only in name?

Now is also the time to ask for new, well-planned archaeological excavations to be undertaken at Sarnath and beyond, new partnerships to be formed with academic institutions committed to the rigorous study of India's past, and new accessible articulations of why studying history is important today. Such efforts – and not new laws with more teeth nor giant bronzes of menacing lions placed atop buildings – will safeguard and promote our heritage in the years to come.

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A new legislation that mirrors the old

The New Drugs, Medical Devices and Cosmetics Bill is antiquated and needs to be revised



DINESH THAKUR
& PRASHANT REDDY T.

The Union Health Ministry recently published a new draft Bill to replace the antiquated Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. While we salute the Ministry for recognising the need for a new legislation, there is much to disagree with the new Bill. To begin with, although the Ministry has described it as being consistent with the government's move to review obsolete pre-Independence legislation, most of it is a copy of the old law. There is nothing new in this Bill regarding drug regulation. And the Bill does nothing to address burning issues thrown up over the last decade since the Ranbaxy scandal.

Regulatory theory

The original Act was enacted when the Indian pharmaceutical industry was in its infancy. At the time, the guiding theory of this law was based on testing manufactured drugs purchased by drug inspectors from the open market. If a drug failed quality testing, the manufacturer could be jailed. This was not the most efficient system of regulation because it depended entirely on luck or fate - only if a drug inspector picked a certain drug on a certain day and it failed testing would the manufacturer face legal action. Much of the world has shifted to a more rigorous system of regulation centered around the compliance of manufacturing units with good manufacturing practices (GMPs). In theory, a drug manufactured in compliance with GMPs is subject to so many checks that it is unlikely that it would fail quality tests once shipped to the market.

In 1988, India incorporated a system of GMPs via rules framed by the government rather than Parliament. But even then, the government did not make GMPs the centrepiece of its regulatory strategy. In the U.S., the regulator's focus is in ensuring that manufacturing units comply with GMPs. American law presumes that any drug that is manufactured in a facility that fails to comply with GMPs



G.N. RAO

is 'adulterated'. Given this focus on GMP compliance, U.S. law mandates the publication of reports of inspections conducted by its drug inspectors. Indian law, on the other hand, contains no such criminal penalties for pharmaceutical companies failing to comply with GMPs. At the most, licences may be cancelled, but since inspection reports are never published, citizens have no idea if drug inspectors are conducting GMP compliance-related inspections. There is ample evidence to suggest that such inspections are not carried out. The Bill does nothing to change this system. In fact, it does not mention the phrase GMP even once.

The federalism question

The one issue that has come up in every review of the drug regulatory system since 1947 has been the uneven enforcement of the Drugs and Cosmetics Act across India. This is because, unlike the U.S. which has a single federal agency tasked with enforcing drug regulation across the country, India has 37 agencies for the same job: one in each State and Union Territory along with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), which is under the control of the Union Health Ministry. State drug controllers are expected to license drug manufacturing and also conduct enforcement actions such as sampling, testing and prosecution for substandard drugs. The CDSCO's role is limited to regulating imports and to deciding whether new drugs have adequate clinical evidence before they can be sold. Over the years, even the CDSCO has started drawing samples for testing and prosecuting erring manufacturers. In addition, the Health Ministry is in charge of

laying down rules and regulations and banning drugs which do not have supporting clinical evidence.

A problem with this setup is that States such as Himachal Pradesh, which account for a bulk of pharmaceutical manufacturing on account of a tax holiday, do a poor job in enforcing the Drugs and Cosmetics Act. This is not just because of poor state capacity; the fear of scaring away investments by the pharmaceutical industry likely plays a key role in the State's decision to not enforce the law. Since India is a single market, drugs manufactured in Himachal Pradesh are sold across the country and even States with relatively more competent drug regulators, such as Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Gujarat, can do little to stop the flood of these substandard drugs. It is only the drug controller in Himachal Pradesh who can cancel manufacturing licences of facilities located in that State. This is the reason that the Mashelkar Committee in 2003 had recommended centralising drug licensing with the central regulator. The present Bill is silent on the issue. And since the Ministry never released a white paper explaining its position, we don't why this issue was never tackled.

Democratise regulation

Drug regulation by its very nature vests vast discretionary powers in unelected bureaucrats to take decisions such as approving a new drug or a new manufacturing facility, both of which can have huge implications for public health and profits of the pharmaceutical industry. These decisions are often based on scientific data, inspections, reports, etc. In such circumstances, the only safeguard to ensure bureaucratic accountability is

transparency. As citizens, we should not be required to run after the regulator begging for information under the Right to Information Act, 2005. Rather, the law should be written in a way to guarantee proactive disclosure of all crucial documentation related to regulatory decisions. If a new drug is being approved, the regulator should be required to disclose all the data, including clinical trial data. Every time a drug is tested in a government laboratory, the test report should be published on a publicly accessible database. Each inspection for GMP compliance should conclude with an inspection report accessible to the general public. This is the only way to ensure accountability and build public confidence in the regulator. The new law is silent on this critical issue of transparency because it is structured largely on the basis of the original colonial-era legislation. The government must consider rewriting this law in a way that guarantees transparency by design.

Modern regulation delegates an incredible amount of power to unelected bureaucrats and technocrats. From a perspective of efficiency, such delegation is required, but from the perspective of accountability, it leads to a democratic deficit. This is why a modern regulatory system should be designed in a manner that guarantees citizens a right to participate in decision making. Making information available to citizens is only the first step in this process. The next step is to create legal pathways, such as public hearings or citizen's petitions which will enable citizens to participate in the regulatory process and register their objections. For example, every drug approval process should be accompanied by a public hearing to allow doctors and ordinary citizens to question regulators and explain their rationale for approving the new drug. The proposed legislation does not make accommodation for public participation.

Since the present reform process is still in the early days, nobody will fault the Health Minister for junking this draft Bill and appointing a new committee of external experts to draft a Bill reflecting the democratic character of an India celebrating its 75th year of independence.

Dinesh Thakur was the whistleblower in the Ranbaxy case; Prashant Reddy T. is a lawyer

No inner-party democracy

Unlike their counterparts in the U.K., MPs in India have no autonomy to question and challenge their party leadership



SHOURYA DASGUPTA

The ousting of Boris Johnson as leader of the British Conservative Party is the latest in a series of coups periodically mounted by the party's MPs to get rid of a leader who has become an electoral or political liability. The template is well known by now: it begins with loud grumbles from backbench MPs, moves on to a swell of Cabinet resignations by ministers with an eye on the leadership, and finally culminates in serving and hitherto loyal Cabinet members politely telling the Prime Minister that the time has come to fall on one's sword. The entire process has been more or less accurately summarised by a former Conservative leader, William Hague, who described his party as an "absolute monarchy tempered by regicide". In the less felicitous words of Mr. Johnson himself, "When the herd moves, it moves."

Stumbling blocks

What is instructive about this whole process, however, is how much power ordinary MPs have over the Prime Minister. A Prime Minister has to be able to maintain the confidence of his own backbenchers at all times or risk political oblivion. It does not matter that he may have led his party to a historic mandate, as Mr. Johnson did, reminding us in his resignation speech that he delivered the largest majority for the party since 1987. If there is a sense that the leader is no longer acceptable to the country, then a well-oiled machine springs into action to protect the party's electoral gains by providing fresh leadership.

Contrast this, however, with India, where the Prime Minister exercises absolute authority over party MPs, whose ability to even diverge slightly from the official government line on routine policy matters is almost non-existent. The Prime Minister's power is strengthened by India's unique anti-defection set-up, where recalcitrant MPs who do not manage to carry two-thirds of their colleagues with them (an astronomical number in real terms at the national level) can always be disqualified. In effect, MPs do not enjoy any autonomy at all to question and challenge their party leadership. This reduces them to cheerleaders and mouthpieces for whoever happens to lead their party at that time. Neither is it anyone's case that Prime Ministers or Chief Ministers at the State level are chosen by legislators – the choice is inva-

riably made by a party high command, and then submitted to MPs/MLAs to be rubber stamped.

Our Westminster system allows voters to be heard once every five years. The underlying assumption is that, in the interim, their voice is articulated through their representatives. It is time for India to seriously consider empowering its elected representatives, to ensure accountability for party leadership. MPs in the U.K. are able to act boldly because they do not owe their nomination to the party leader, but are selected by the local constituency party. In India, however, it is the party leadership that decides candidates, with an informal consultation with the local party. Neither do MPs in the U.K. stand a risk of disqualification if they speak out against the leader, a threat perpetuated in India through the anti-defection law. These factors are the biggest stumbling blocks towards ensuring inner-party democracy in India.

The need for an exception

How then do we go about changing this? A workable model can be borrowed from the U.K. where individual Conservative MPs



write to the 1922 Committee (which comprises backbench MPs, and looks out for their interests) expressing that they have "no confidence" in their leader. If a numerical or percentage threshold (15% of the party's MPs in the U.K.) is breached, an automatic leadership vote is triggered, with the party leader forced to seek a fresh mandate from the parliamentary party. Of course, the only way such a model would work is if an exception is made to the anti-defection law, which is at present wholly without nuance and susceptible to gross misuse by party leaders hoping to cling on to power.

This is, of course, at best an interim arrangement. In the long run, the Westminster model dictates that control over candidates must shift from central party leaders to local party members. But until that happens, the marginal gains from such an arrangement would go a long way towards empowering both MPs and their constituents.

Shourya Dasgupta is an advocate practising in New Delhi

‘GST: Punjab, Goa may see most stress’

Revenues from indirect tax have missed expectations for both Centre and States, says NIPFP paper

VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI

With the five-year assured compensation for States under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime having ended last month, Punjab, Goa and Chhattisgarh are likely to face the most revenue stress, a new working paper by the National Institute of Public Finance and Policy (NIPFP) posits.

The ‘Revenue Assessment of GST in India’ by NIPFP associate professor Sacchidananda Mukherjee noted that revenue collections from GST had fallen short of expectations for both the Centre and the States, but that the former had made up for this by raising non-shareable taxes and levying cesses on commodities such as petroleum products.



Uncertain times: ‘In the absence of revenue compensation, some States may face a revenue shock.’ ■ B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

“Our analysis shows that for majority of States the share of State GST collection [with GST compensation receipts] in Gross State Domestic Product [GSDP] do not show much increase during 2017-21 as compared to the

share of revenue that is subsumed into the GST in GSDP during 2015-17,” Mr. Mukherjee concluded.

Comparison of trends

Comparing revenue trends prior to GST’s implementa-

tion from July 2017 with those since then, Mr. Mukherjee found that the share of GST revenues fell for Madhya Pradesh under the new tax regime, while Punjab recorded the largest increase in the share of revenues, followed by Maharashtra. The revenue compensation assured to States to join the GST framework had helped them cope with shortfalls.

“In absence of revenue compensation, States may face revenue shock and it will impact State finances differently for different States. States where dependence on GST compensation (as measured by the share of GST compensation in SGST collection) as well as the share of SGST in own tax revenue are higher [e.g., Goa, Punjab and Chhattisgarh], they may

face relatively higher revenue stress than other States,” Mr. Mukherjee pointed out.

‘Cesses cushion Centre’

“In the face of shortfall in GST collection, the Union government raised ‘non-shareable taxes’ and ‘cesses on commodities’ on excisable goods under the Union Excise Duty [UED] which helped to mitigate the revenue shortfall. Three petroleum products [petrol, diesel, aviation turbine fuel], natural gas, crude petroleum and tobacco attract UED in the GST regime,” Mr. Mukherjee noted.

He recommended that States protect their consumption base to bolster GST revenues, along with broader efforts to ease compliance and rein in evaders.

All States agreed to GST changes on food items: Finance Minister

Move was critical to curb tax leakages, she says terming it a 'much-needed one'

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirjala Sitharaman said on Tuesday that the decision to levy the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on unbranded, pre-packed and pre-labelled food products was critical to curb tax leakage and was not taken by "one member" of the GST Council alone as all States had agreed to the move.

The Minister emphasised that all food items, including wheat, pulses, rice, maize, curd and lassi, would be exempt from the GST when sold loose, while noting that a lot of misconceptions had been spread about the council decision to "reconsider the approach" for imposing GST on these food items.

Not the first time

Ms. Sitharaman said this was not the first time they were being taxed and the States were collecting significant revenues from foodgrains in the pre-GST regime. "Punjab alone collected more than ₹2,000 crore on foodgrains



To tax or not: Only packed food items attract the GST. There is no tax when sold loose. ■ GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

by way of purchase tax. Uttar Pradesh collected ₹700 crore," Ms. Sitharaman wrote in a series of tweets to explain the rationale for the tax changes that came into effect on Monday.

"Taking this into account, when GST was rolled out, a GST rate of 5% was made applicable on branded cereals, pulses, flour. Later this was amended to tax only such items which were sold under registered brand or brand on which enforceable right was not forgone by supplier," she said, adding that this move led to "rampant misuse" by reputed manufacturers and

brand owners and there was a marked drop in revenues over time.

To curb misuse, officials in the GST Fitment Committee, which comprises representatives from several States, including Rajasthan, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, ruled by non-BJP parties, had recommended changes, Ms. Sitharaman said.

"Further, the GoM (Group of Ministers) that recommended these changes was composed of members from West Bengal, Rajasthan, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, Goa and Bihar and was headed by the Chief Minister of Karnataka.

It carefully considered this proposal, taking into account the tax leakage," the Finance Minister wrote.

'Complete consensus'

"All States, including non-BJP States (Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Kerala) agreed with the decision. This decision of the GST Council is yet again by consensus," she said.

"To conclude: this decision was a much-needed one to curb tax leakage. It was considered at various levels including by officers, the Group of Ministers, and was finally recommended by the GST Council with the complete consensus of all members," Ms. Sitharaman said.

Suppliers and industry associations who were paying taxes on branded goods had written to the government to impose GST uniformly on all packaged commodities to stop such misuse, the Minister said, adding that even States had observed rampant evasion in tax.

CAG flags lack of spectrum price review for captive users

‘DoT also yet to finalise spectrum-assignment policy’

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) has pulled up the Telecom Department for not finalising policy on spectrum assignment for captive uses and flagged the absence of spectrum price review for captive users administratively.

In its report titled ‘Management of spectrum assigned on the administrative basis to government departments/agencies,’ the CAG asked the Department of Telecom (DoT) to review the spectrum pricing mechanism for captive users to incentivise ministries, departments and agencies, and for maintaining spectrum-man-



agement discipline.

“They may consider differential pricing, depending on the features and usage of various spectrum bands,” the CAG said in a report tabled in Parliament.

It noted that despite receiving a legal opinion (in July 2021) on its own reference, regarding the method

for allotment of spectrum for captive uses, including government departments, DoT had not finalised the policy for allotment and assignment of spectrum for captive uses/other commercial services with the approval of the Digital Communications Commission (DCC).

The DCC is the apex body for telecom policy formulation.

“The DoT had also not reviewed the pricing of spectrum assigned for captive users administratively, on formulae basis since 2012, though a committee had recommended for a periodical review of the pricing policy in 2013,” the CAG said in the report tabled on Monday.

RBI helps rupee to steady after 7 sessions of lows

‘That rupee will dip further is a given’

REUTERS

MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank intervened in the currency market on Tuesday to help the rupee steady after the unit weakened to 80.05 per dollar, notching a record intraday low for a seventh session. A recovery in equities also favoured the rupee.

Like most Asian currencies, the rupee has been falling in recent months as risk aversion has risen on expectations of the U.S. Federal Reserve raising rates aggressively to curb high inflation and prompting investors to flee riskier assets.

The U.S. dollar too hovered just above a one-week low versus major peers as markets reduced the odds of a percentage-point Federal



Reserve rate increase this month. The rupee recovered to end at 79.92 per dollar compared with its close of 79.98 on Monday.

“The rupee is going to weaken further, that is a given,” said a senior trader at a private bank, speaking on condition of anonymity. “But how soon and how much will depend on the RBI,” the trader added.

SKM fumes over MSP panel, not to send its representatives

It says that the committee has people directly associated with BJP and RSS

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) has rejected on Tuesday the Centre's invitation to join the committee, headed by former Union Agriculture Secretary Sanjay Agrawal, on the minimum support price (MSP) and other issues in the farming sector. The Centre had left three positions vacant for SKM nominees on the panel, which was announced on Monday.

The SKM said in a release that there is no scope to discuss the MSP law on the agenda of a committee which is full of government representatives and its loyalists. "All the apprehensions of the SKM about this committee turned out to be true. SKM cannot have any association with such anti-farmer committee," the umbrella organisation said.

SKM leaders Hannan Molah, Darshan Pal, Joginder Singh Ugrahan, Yudhveer



Activists of Bharatiya Kisan Union protesting in Jaipur during the farmers' agitation in February 2021. ■PTI

Singh and Yogendra Yadav said in the statement that they have decided not to nominate SKM representatives to the committee. They said there is no rationale for sending representatives of the SKM to such an anti-farmer and meaningless committee.

Earlier, in an email sent to the Agriculture Secretary on March 24, the SKM had asked the government to specify the terms of reference of the committee. It

had also sought the names of organisations, individuals and office-bearers who will be included in the committee. "The government did not respond to these questions. Yet the Agriculture Minister kept making statements that the formation of the committee was stalled due to non-receipt of the names of the representatives from the SKM," the leaders said.

It said the chairman of the committee is Mr. Agarwal,

who as Agriculture Secretary drafted all three anti-farmer laws. "He is accompanied by Ramesh Chand, a member of NITI Aayog, who was the main advocate of these three laws. As experts, it is the economists who have been against giving legal status to the MSP," they said. The five farmer leaders are loyalists of the Centre who advocated the three farm laws, the SKM said. "All these people are either directly associated with BJP-RSS or support their policy." They said the notification is silent about making a law on MSP. "That is, this question will not be placed before the committee. Some items have been put in the agenda on which the government committee is already established. In the name of reforms in agricultural marketing, an item has been inserted through which the government can try to bring back three black laws," SKM leaders alleged.

China steps up LAC air drills as talks stall

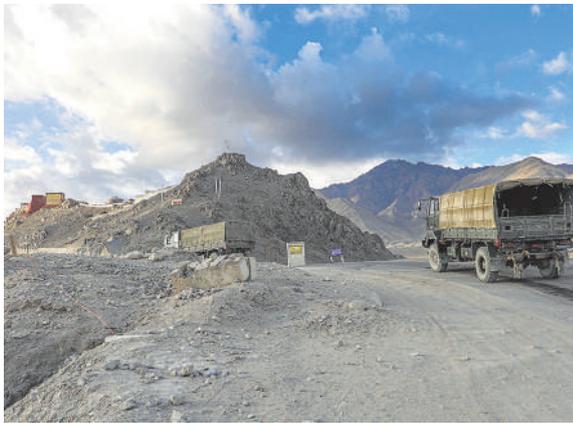
The 16th round of talks between military commanders ended without an agreement to disengage

ANANTH KRISHNAN
BEIJING

China on Tuesday defended its stepped-up military activity near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) as “normal”, amid concerns from India on Chinese aircraft flying close to the contested areas even as border talks remain in a stalemate.

“I want to stress that China always conducts normal activities in the border areas in accordance with relevant agreements signed between China and India,” Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said, in response to questions about the Chinese People’s Liberation Army’s (PLA) air drills in late June and early July in border areas.

After Chinese aircraft flew close to contested areas along the LAC, India scrambled aircraft in response and also raised the matter with the Chinese



Supply lines: The road towards the Line of Actual Control with China from Leh. •PTI

side, according to reports.

Mr. Zhao did not comment on the air drills, but said Sunday’s talks saw both sides “agree to maintain the security and stability on the ground in the Western Sector” and “stay in close contact and maintain dialogue through military and diplomatic chan-

nels and work out a mutually acceptable resolution of the remaining issues at the earliest”.

‘Reluctant to discuss’

The 16th round of talks between military commanders ended without a breakthrough or agreement to disengage at Patrolling

Point 15 in Hot Springs.

China has also been reluctant to even discuss the two other remaining disputes at Demchok and Depsang, while India has made clear its stand of full disengagement from all the friction areas.

In a reflection of Beijing’s priorities, on Monday, the official PLA Daily did not mention the talks but carried a report on its front page on air force drills being undertaken by the Western Theatre Command, which is responsible for the India border, in an unspecified high-altitude border area. The aim, the report said, was to increase combat efficiency.

Separately, the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* reported on Tuesday that the PLA had carried out tests of its new rocket launch system with precision strike capability,

the PCL191 system, at high-altitude areas with the aim of deploying them along the India border.

Artillery brigade

“The system was being used by an artillery brigade in the Western Theatre Command’s Xinjiang military district in April last year, according to the official PLA Daily,” the report said. “The brigade was deployed to an area 5,200 metres (17,000 feet) above sea level in the Himalayas, near the border with India,” it said.

The aim was to show that “the PCL191 brigade could be deployed anywhere in the country, from the coast to the Himalayas, and take on challenges like the border dispute with India, or even a Taiwan contingency”, military commentator Song Zhongping told the *Post*.

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.