



VEDHIK

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FOREWORD

We, at Team Vedhik is happy to introduce a new initiative - “Vedhik - Daily News Analysis (DNA)_The Hindu” compilations to help you with UPSC Civil Services Examination preparation. We believe this initiative - “Vedhik - Daily News Analysis (DNA)_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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‘South China Sea Code of Conduct should align with international law’

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

India hopes that the ongoing negotiations on the Code of Conduct for the South China Sea will be fully consistent with international law, in particular, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), and should not prejudice the legitimate rights and interests of nations that are not party to these discussions, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Wednesday.

“We are concerned about complicating actions that have eroded trust and confidence, and undermined peace and stability in the region...We believe that regional security initiatives must be consultative and development-oriented, to reflect the larg-



Looking ahead: Rajnath Singh during the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus, in Siem Reap, Cambodia on Wednesday. PTI

er consensus,” Mr. Singh said addressing the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) Defence Ministers Plus meeting in Cambodia.

India calls for a free, open and inclusive order in the Indo-Pacific, based upon respect for sovereignty and territorial inte-

grity of all nations, peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue and adherence to international rules and laws, Mr. Singh said. Stating that the gravest threat requiring urgent and resolute intervention by international community is transnational and cross-border terrorism,

Mr. Singh said ‘indifference’ can no longer be a response, as terrorism has found victims globally.

Increased strife

“Terrorist groups have created inter-linkages across continents backed by new-age technologies to transfer money and recruit supporters. The transformation of cyber-crimes into organised cyber-attacks point to the increasing use of new technologies, by both, State and non-State actors,” he said.

We are meeting at a time when the world is seeing increasing strife amplified by disruptive politics, Mr. Singh said, adding that a peaceful Indo-Pacific, with ASEAN at its centre, it becomes vital more than ever for the security and prosperity of the world.

India, GCC to start discussions on free trade pact today

India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) will announce the beginning of negotiations for a free trade agreement on Thursday. The pact aims at promoting two-way commerce and investments between the regions, an official said. GCC is a union of six countries in the Gulf region – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain. Bilateral trade had increased to \$154.73 billion in 2021-22, from \$87.4 billion in 2020-21, as per Commerce Ministry data. PTI

Trade talks with India not conditional on illegal migration: U.K.

This contradicts Home Secretary Suella Braverman's comments about the Migration and Mobility Partnership signed by Modi and Johnson

Sriram Lakshman

LONDON

Finalising a trade deal with India is not contingent on New Delhi taking back Indians who are in the U.K. illegally, the British government said on Wednesday.

“On the separate issue of migration and returns, we’ve made huge progress on that issue, particularly after the agreement made between Prime Minister [Narendra] Modi and [U.K.] Prime Minister [Boris] Johnson in May last year, and cooperation on that continues as well. But they’re distinct issues,” a spokesperson for U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak told the foreign press at a Wednesday afternoon briefing.

The spokesperson was responding to a question on whether the U.K. government was making a trade deal with India conditional on India taking back “significant” numbers of illegal migrants. Their comments contradict what Home Secretary



On the separate issue of migration and returns, we’ve made huge progress, particularly after the agreement made between Modi and Johnson in May last year, and cooperation on that continues

SPOKESPERSON FOR RISHI SUNAK

Suella Braverman had said about the Migration and Mobility Partnership, i.e., the protocol signed by Mr. Modi and Mr. Johnson in May 2021, in October to *Spectator*, when she was in the same role in the Liz Truss administration.

No change in strategy

Ms. Braverman had said the protocol had not worked very well and that she had some reservations on aspects of the U.K.-India ‘Free Trade Agreement’ (FTA), i.e., on the question of visa flexibility for students and entrepreneurs,

because Indians were the largest group of visa overstayers in the U.K.

Ms. Braverman’s remarks had contributed to the talks failing to conclude by a Deepavali deadline. The Indian High Commission in London had reacted by saying it had acted on all cases of overstaying referred to it by the U.K.’s Home Office.

Days later, Ms. Braverman had walked back some of her comments by saying that the U.K. and India were “eager” to secure a deal. Mr. Modi and U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak have also expressed their commitment to concluding a deal, after Mr. Sunak assumed office at the end of October.

There was no change in the U.K. government’s negotiating strategy after Mr. Sunak took charge, his spokesperson said on Wednesday, in the context of both the U.K.-India trade talks and Britain’s negotiations to accede to the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership).

Space, not time

Equal tenure security for CEC and ECs will boost panel's independence

The ongoing hearing before a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India on the need to have a neutral mechanism for appointment of Election Commissioners raises important questions on the election body's functional independence. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has generally enjoyed a high reputation for holding free and fair polls since the dawn of the Republic, although not immune to charges of favouring the ruling party. However, given the Court's vocal concern about the ECI's independence, the relevant question now is whether the Commissioners should be appointed on the recommendation of an independent body. Article 324(2) envisages a parliamentary law for the purpose, but no law has been enacted so far. The Government is pushing back strongly against the Court's apparent inclination to devise an independent mechanism, possibly a selection committee that includes the Chief Justice of India. The perceived legislative vacuum could provide an occasion for the Court to frame a process on its own – something the Government, quite rightly, wants to avoid. There is no doubt an independent body doing the selection will enhance the ECI's independence, but the Court will have to decide if it wants to spell out its composition or leave it to Parliament.

Justice K.M. Joseph, heading the Bench, has noted that Chief Election Commissioners (CEC) in the past had fairly long tenures, unlike in recent times. However, it should be remembered that since 1993, the ECI has become a multi-member body, comprising a CEC (chairman) and two Election Commissioners (EC). The current convention is to appoint ECs, and elevate them as CEC on the basis of seniority. In effect, it is the appointment process for ECs that requires scrutiny as it is here that there is scope for personal whim to play a role. The CEC has a six-year tenure, but should demit office on attaining 65. The Court has questioned the practice of appointing CECs close to that age so that they have only a brief tenure. However, it may be argued that even Chief Justices have brief tenures, but that does not undermine their independence. The Government has contended that a member's whole tenure in the ECI should be considered, and not merely the duration as CEC. The real difference is security of tenure that could come from operational freedom and space. While Supreme Court judges have security of tenure – they can be removed only by impeachment by Parliament – only the CEC enjoys the same status. The ECs can be removed on the CEC's recommendation. There is a good case for extending the same tenure security to the ECs too, regardless of what kind of appointment process is in place.

Election Commissioner shouldn't be 'yes-man': SC

EC should be a person who would not shirk from even taking on the PM, says Justice K.M. Joseph; court gives the government 24 hours to produce the file of appointment of Arun Goel to the post

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said the country needed Election Commissioners (ECs) who would not shirk from even taking on the Prime Minister if required, and not just "weak-kneed" yes-men.

"Suppose the Election Commissioner is asked to take on none less than the Prime Minister... we are just giving an example... And the Election Commissioner is so weak-kneed that he does not get around doing it. Will it not be a case of complete breakdown of the system?" Justice K.M. Joseph, heading a Constitution Bench, asked the government.

The court said an Election Commissioner should

Revamp mode

A Constitution Bench hearing a series of petitions seeking functional independence for ECs, is examining various aspects:

- Appointment of CEC and ECs by a Collegium of PM, CJI and Leader of the Opposition

- Equal protection to CEC and ECs and common procedure of removal

- Rule-making power to Election Commission like Supreme Court, Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha

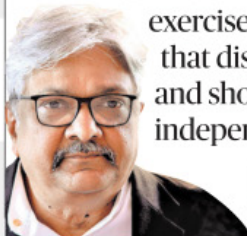
- Independent secretariat, budget for the commission



Independence is not an unruly horse ...

Independence also partakes in playing by the rules of the game. In areas where he [EC] has discretion, he should exercise

that discretion and show independence



**JUSTICE
K.M. JOSEPH**

be one who could take a stand even risking his life, and not a docile "yes-man" whom the government knew would do its bidding.

"You appoint a 'yes-man'... Any government for that matter... Somebo-

dy carefully picks him... He is like-minded. You share an affinity of thought and philosophy... He will do whatever is your bidding, and you know it. You assure him security [of tenure]... Well, on the face of

it, everything is fine and hunky-dory... But what is the quality required which may be found lacking... the most important quality which is at the core of our debate here – That is, whether the man is really independent!" Justice Joseph addressed Attorney General R. Venkataramani, who is leading the government side.

The court gave the government 24 hours to produce the file of appointment of former IAS officer Arun Goel as Election Commissioner. "If you are in the clear and there is no hanky-panky, there is nothing to fear... You have any problem producing his file?" Justice Joseph asked Mr. Venkataramani.

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Election Commissioner shouldn't be 'yes-man'

The court repeatedly asked the government how it had appointed Mr. Goel as Election Commissioner when an application questioning the prolonged vacancy was already pending before the Constitution Bench.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan, for the petitioner, said Mr. Goel took voluntary retirement that day and was appointed Election Commissioner on Saturday and took charge on Monday. The appointment immediately followed the Constitution Bench hearing on Thursday on the need for a “neutral and independent mechanism” for appointment of ECs.

“How did you make this appointment two days back? Show us the mechanism you followed,” Justice Ajay Rastogi asked the government.

Justice Joseph clarified that the court was not sitting in judgment of the appointment. “We just want to see how you got it done,” the judge said.

India is losing its cherished right to know

The most vital mandate of the Central Information Commission, the apex body under India's transparency regime, is to decide whether certain information sought by a citizen ought to be disclosed or not. Its primary duty is to decide the disclosure or the non-disclosure of information. But the commission has seemingly relinquished this primary duty in cases of larger public importance.

Citizens can file applications under the Right to Information Act with any public body and are guaranteed a reply from the public information officer of that public body within 30 days. In case of a no reply or dissatisfaction with the response, the citizen can file an appeal at the departmental level and then a second and final appeal with the Information Commission. Each State has its own State Information Commission to deal with second appeals concerning State bodies.

At the centre, it is the Central Information Commission (CIC). Until the 2019 amendment to the RTI Act, Information Commissioners (ICs) appointed to the CIC were equal in status to the Chief Election Commissioner, and that of a Supreme Court judge. They had a five-year fixed term and terms of service. After the amendments of 2019, the Centre gave itself powers to change and decide these terms whenever it wished, thereby striking at the independence of the commission and those who man it.

From transparency to hurdles

The CIC was a functioning institution until four years ago. It had passed orders seeking transparency in many cases of public importance – from boldly pronouncing that political parties were under the RTI Act's ambit, and hence accountable to the public, to ordering disclosure of the current Prime Minister's education qualifications and the Reserve Bank of India's list of willful defaulters of loans. The commission acted as a strong proponent of transparency in public life.

Now, the CIC has become more like a walking dead institution, where records will show that not



Saurav Das

is an independent investigative journalist and a transparency activist

The possibility that the very institution mandated to guard India's transparency regime could also be responsible for its own downfall is cause for concern

a single order for disclosure has been forthcoming in matters of public importance. The present set of Information Commissioners have together adopted a new jurisprudence that has created additional hurdles in a citizen's quest for accountability.

Cases at the CIC come up for a hearing roughly after a two year wait. If the matter is not already infructuous or lost its significance, one can look forward to the commission deciding one's case. But in matters of public importance, such as cases seeking disclosure of files related to the national lockdown during COVID-19, or the case seeking disclosure of data pertaining to phone tapping orders passed by the Home Ministry, the Commission has adopted a new way of delegating its mandate – to decide cases – to the Ministry before it (the very same party that stands accused of prohibiting transparency). In most cases, the Ministries reiterate their earlier stand of non-disclosure, most often under vague grounds of national interest.

More worryingly, after these public authorities pass fresh orders, which are usually a reiteration of their earlier stand against disclosure, the CIC refuses to accept any further challenge to such orders, therefore, refusing to do its duty of deciding the cases. One of the cardinal rules of natural justice is that no one should be a judge in their own cause. However, the commission now allows, or rather wants, the very Ministry that stands accused of violating the RTI Act to act as the judge in their own cause and decide whether a disclosure is necessary.

A similar situation arose when the CIC refused to hear the Internet Freedom Foundation's challenge to the fresh non-disclosure order passed by the Home Ministry in the phone tapping case. The organisation had the resources to challenge this before the Delhi High Court and enforce their right to a fair hearing before the Commission. But many do not, in a country where a small percentage of the populace has the access and the resources to justice redress. And it is not as though the Information Commissioners were not made aware of this problem with their

orders. They were. Hence, the need to strongly protest such conduct on their part which continues.

Fairly simple to handle

More recent examples from CIC cases do not instill confidence about where India's information regime is headed. In a case seeking disclosure of documents relating to the making of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Amendment Act, 2019, the commission has resorted to keeping the matter pending for final order for more than three months now, something which is unheard of. Unlike court cases, RTI matters do not involve complex legal arguments and are fairly simple to adjudicate. In another case related to disclosure of non-performing assets and top defaulters of a co-operative bank, the matter was listed out-of-turn to issue a "stay" order against the Bank's First Appellate Authority's order for disclosure. A stay order is unheard of and there is no provision in the RTI Act for the same.

One cannot help but ask whether actions or inactions such as these are meant to deliberately frustrate citizens who dare to seek answers from the powers that be, and reduce the efficiency of the RTI Act. The effects are already being felt. It is getting more difficult, if not impossible, to extract any information of importance under the present dispensation. Bureaucrats reject RTIs with glee with no fear of facing penal provisions outlined in Section 20 of the RTI Act, knowing fully well that they have a free hand under the Information Commissioners.

To even think of the possibility of the very institution mandated to guard India's transparency regime to be responsible for its downfall should set alarm bells ringing as far as civil society and citizens who care and dare to question are concerned. Dark clouds surround India's transparency regime. Citizens have to mount intense pressure on authorities to act and appoint commissioners of integrity. Lawyers have to help willing citizens take matters to court and seek justice. If there is a failure to do so, India will lose its cherished right to know.

Move to change 'cumbersome' procedure for inclusion on ST list is put on hold

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

The Union government has put on hold a proposal to change the procedure for adding new communities as Scheduled Tribes (STs) which has been in the pipeline for more than eight years. Instead, it will continue with the existing longer procedure, senior government officials said.

According to a government task force, the present procedure "defeats the Constitutional agenda for affirmative action and inclusion" and is "cumbersome" and "time-consuming". However, government officials, justifying the decision, told *The Hindu* that it was followed for decades and was scientific and most practical.

The proposal to change the procedure was based on the recommendations of the Task Force on Scheduling of Tribes constituted in February 2014, headed by the then Tribal Affairs Secretary, Hrusikesh Panda.

It noted that as many as 40 communities had been excluded from the ST list

The proposal to change the procedure was based on a task force recommendation

or were facing delays in inclusion due to the current procedure and criteria, and recommended their immediate inclusion.

The task force's report, with suggestions to change the procedure and the criteria for adding new communities as STs, has been with the government since May 2014.

In the Lok Sabha in March 2017, when asked if the proposal had been put on hold, the then Tribal Affairs Minister, Jual Oram, replied that the proposal had been sent to the States and Union Territories, and that only a few States were yet to respond. The government repeated this reply in the Rajya Sabha in December 2017.

Now, senior government officials told *The Hindu* that the proposal has been put on hold for the time being, meaning that the existing procedure

would be followed in the meantime. "This is a norm which has been followed for decades and is quite scientific and most practical," an official said.

Exclusionary procedure

In its report, the Panda committee had explained that there were multiple obstacles unnecessarily preventing at least 40 communities from being listed as ST. For instance, several tribes pronounced or spelt their community's name in different ways; some communities were split when new States were created, leaving them as ST in one State and not in the other; and some tribespeople were forcibly taken as indentured labour to other States where they were left out of the ST list.

"The Panda committee had gone into some detail about whether there is spelling change, whether there is any phonetic variation, which of the tribes could be considered because they are slightly similar in sound and all that," Tribal Affairs Secretary Anil Kumar Jha said.

"Later, it was consi-

dered that we have to follow procedure. And it has to go to the RGI [Registrar-General of India]."

Current procedure

Under the current procedure, each proposal for the inclusion of a community as an ST has to originate from the relevant State government, and is sent to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, which sends it to the office of the RGI.

Once approved by the office of the RGI, it is sent to the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and only after its approval it is sent to the Cabinet.

The task force had said that when the modalities were being framed in 1996, the Ministry of Home Affairs had said that "the office of the RGI should merely be required to provide information available with it", as it not only lacked sufficient anthropologists and sociologists "but also because no build-up of the data bank on tribes/castes based on the ethnographic study/surveys has been possible for long, limiting its ability of to do justice to this task."

Fixing India's malnutrition problem

The Global Hunger Index (GHI) 2022 has brought more unwelcome news for India, as far as its global ranking on a vital indicator of human development is concerned. India ranked 107 out of 121 countries. The Government of India attempted to discredit the index immediately in its attempt to deny the findings of the report, even going so far as to term it a conspiracy against India.

The GHI is an important indicator of nutrition, particularly among children, as it looks at stunting, wasting and mortality among children, and at calorific deficiency across the population. And this is by no means an international conspiracy – India's National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) from 2019-21 reported that in children below the age of five years, 35.5% were stunted, 19.3% showed wasting, and 32.1% were underweight.

Government schemes are not delivering

Experts have suggested several approaches to address the problem of chronic malnutrition, many of which feature in the centrally-sponsored schemes that already exist. However, gaps remain in how they are funded and implemented, in what one might call the plumbing of these schemes.

For instance, the Government of India implements the Saksham Anganwadi and Prime Minister's Overarching Scheme for Holistic Nutrition (POSHAN) 2.0 scheme (which now includes the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) scheme), which seeks to work with adolescent girls, pregnant women, nursing mothers and children below three. However, the budget for this scheme for FY2022-23 was ₹20,263 crore, which is less than 1% more than the actual spend in FY2020-21 – an increase of less than 1% over two years.

The other flagship scheme of the Government of India is the PM POSHAN, or Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman, known previously as the Mid-Day Meal scheme (National Programme of Mid-Day Meal in Schools). The budget for FY2022-23 at ₹10,233.75 crore was 21% lower than the expenditure in FY2020-21. Even if we accept that 2020-21 was an exceptional year (due to the COVID-19 pandemic), it is clear that the budgets being allocated are nowhere near the scale of the funds that are required to improve nutrition in the country.



Suvojit Chattopadhyay

works on governance and public sector reform projects in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa

An Accountability Initiative budget brief reports that per capita costs of the Supplementary Nutrition Programme (one of the largest components of this scheme) has not increased since 2017 and remains grossly underfunded, catering to only 41% of the funds required. The budget brief also mentions that over 50% Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) posts were vacant in Jharkhand, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, and Rajasthan, pointing to severe manpower constraints in successfully implementing the scheme of such importance. And while PM POSHAN (or MDM) is widely recognised as a revolutionary scheme that improved access to education for children nationwide, it is often embroiled in controversies around what should be included in the mid-day meals that are provided at schools. Social audits that are meant to allow for community oversight of the quality of services provided in schools are not carried out routinely.

To summarise, not only are key nutrition schemes underfunded, but it is also the case that the funds available are not being spent effectively. Fixing these schemes is the obvious answer to addressing India's multi-dimensional nutrition challenge.

Cash transfers and the factor of reliance

Cash transfers seem to be a favoured solution for several social sector interventions in India today, and this includes the health and nutrition sectors. Much is made of the JAM trinity (Jan Dhan bank accounts, Aadhaar, Mobile). Equally appealing is the characteristic of cash transfers as a mechanism that yields rich political dividends. Riding on the digital infrastructure available in India, it is said that targeting the right beneficiaries (i.e., pregnant women and families with children under the age of five) is possible. Cash also has the advantage of expanding choice at the household level, as they make decisions on what to put on their plates.

But evidence of the impact of cash transfer on child nutrition in India is limited so far. Evidence from elsewhere too suggests primarily that while cash transfers improve household food security, they do not necessarily translate into improved child nutrition outcomes.

The effect of cash transfers is also limited in a context where food prices are volatile and inflation depletes the value of cash. Equally, there

are social factors such as 'son preference', which sadly continues to be prevalent in India and can influence household-level decisions when responding to the nutrition needs of sons and daughters. This calls for a comprehensive social education programme – cash alone cannot solve this. Further, a study of the Mamata scheme in Odisha that targeted pregnant and lactating women, showed that there were persistent socio-economic discrepancies in the receipt of cash transfers, especially in comparison to entitlements received through the Public Distribution System (PDS). Thus, cash may be part of the solution, but on its own, it is no panacea.

Back to the basics

Malnutrition has been India's scourge for several years now. Political battles over malnutrition are not going to help; nor is continuing to think in silos. It is clear that malnutrition persists due to depressed economic conditions in large parts of the country, the poor state of agriculture in India, persistent levels of unsafe sanitation practices, etc.

Cash transfers have a role to play here, especially in regions experiencing acute distress, where household purchasing power is very depressed. Cash transfers can also be used to incentivise behavioural change in terms of seeking greater institutional support. Food rations through PDS and special supplements for the target group of pregnant and lactating mothers, and infants and young children, are essential.

Persistently under-funded and poorly implemented public programmes (such as the erstwhile ICDS and MDM schemes) must take a large share of the blame for India's malnutrition problem. But getting these schemes right requires greater involvement of local government and local community groups in the design and delivery of tailored nutrition interventions. A comprehensive programme targeting adolescent girls is required if the inter-generational nature of malnutrition is to be tackled.

The need of the hour is to make addressing child malnutrition the top priority of the government machinery, and all year around. A month-long POSHAN Utsav may be good optics, but is no substitute for painstaking everyday work.

Not only are key nutrition schemes underfunded but even what is available is not being spent effectively

Time to ease norms

Masks must remain mandatory only for the vulnerable, in health-care settings

As the third winter begins in India after the COVID-19 pandemic began in January 2020, fresh daily infections of the novel coronavirus – there was a small spike in July and August – have been dipping since the third wave peaked in late January 2022. Daily new cases nationally dropped below the 1,000-mark after November first week, and below 500 in the last four days. While the case decline may not be a true reflection of the actual level of infection in the population, given the low level of testing across the country, the test positivity rate and the number of hospitalisations due to moderate to severe COVID-19 disease are at a low level – a far cry from the peak of the second wave in 2021. COVID-19 deaths too have been very low, with many States not reporting any for days together; Kerala has been reporting some backlog deaths on certain days but nil fresh deaths on many days. Nationally, the case fatality rate was 1.19% as of November 22. The situation in India is vastly different from what it is like in a few other countries where the daily infections are witnessing a sharp spike. Even the extremely high transmissible Omicron sub-lineages and recombinant lineages have only caused a small spike in fresh cases but no concomitant increase in hospitalisations or deaths in India.

Given the very low number of cases and hospitalisations, the situation in India is no longer cause for concern. Even with most businesses and educational institutions back to functioning as in the pre-pandemic days and large gatherings being seen even in poorly ventilated places with almost no voluntary mask wearing, there has been no spike in cases since the peak of the third wave. This makes a strong case to ease any mandatory COVID-appropriate behaviour, masks included. A week ago, India made mask wearing optional for air passengers precisely because of the improved ground situation. It is only in hospitals and health-care settings that mask wearing should remain mandatory. The low level of infection notwithstanding, it is advisable that the vulnerable population including the elderly and those with comorbidities at least wear a mask to reduce the risk of infection. Long COVID is real and poses a risk even to otherwise healthy people. The virus is evolving, and the emerging variants of concern will, by default, be even more highly transmissible. Their lethality cannot be predicted as transmission happens prior to disease onset and so the selection pressure is for higher transmission and not disease severity.

Centre sends experts to 3 cities to contain measles infection

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday set up high-level teams to tackle the measles outbreak in Ranchi, Ahmedabad and Malappuram.

The three teams will assist the respective State Health Departments in instituting public health measures and facilitate operationalisation of requisite control and containment measures.

Senior Regional Directors of the Regional Offices of Health and Family Welfare of Jharkhand, Gujarat and Kerala will coordinate with the respective teams regarding their visits.

The Central team to Ranchi in Jharkhand comprises experts from the National Centre for Disease Control and Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in Delhi. The team to Ahmedabad in Gujarat has experts from the city's Regional Office of Health and Family Welfare, Port Health Organisation, Mumbai and Kalawati Saran Children's Hospital in

Delhi. The team to Malappuram in Kerala will have experts from the Regional Health Office, Thiruvananthapuram; Jawaharlal Institute of Postgraduate Medical Education and Research (JIPMER), Puducherry; and Lady Hardinge Medical College, New Delhi, the Union Health Ministry said.

All the teams will have three members each.

The teams will also undertake field visits to investigate the outbreak. They are also expected to coordinate with the States for ensuring active case search in the area and with Virus Research and Diagnostic Laboratories for testing of the identified cases. Measles vaccination falls under the Universal Immunisation Programme. India has a target of eliminating the viral disease by 2023. Mumbai had reported cases on measles and the Centre had already sent a team earlier. Eleven children have died of the highly infectious disease in Mumbai.

'India cotton exports may miss forecast on high prices'

Export enquiries weak as Indian cotton is more expensive by 10 cents a pound compared with world cotton prices, says Rakesh Rathi, former president of Indian Cotton Association, Bathinda

M. Soundariya Preetha
COIMBATORE

Cotton exports this year may fall short of the 40 lakh bales estimated recently by the Committee on Cotton Production and Consumption, traders said.

According to Rakesh Rathi, former president of the Indian Cotton Association (ICA), Bathinda, export enquiries are poor as Indian cotton is still about 10 cents a pound more expensive when compared with world cotton prices.

"We started this season with very poor opening stock," Mr. Rathi said. "Arrivals are not picking up as expected and domestic

Fluffed up prices

CAI expects exports between October 2022 and September 2023 to be about 30 lakh bales



- Cotton arrivals in Nov., which usually surpass 1.5 lakh bales/day, currently at 1.15 - 1.3 lakh bales/day
- Farmers had sold raw cotton in the range of ₹10,000 - ₹15,000/100 kg last season
- Farmers are waiting for the prices to improve from the ₹9,000 per 100 kg range

mills are gradually increasing capacity utilisation."

Cotton arrivals in November usually surpass 1.5 lakh bales a day. At present, it is at 1.15 lakh to 1.3 lakh bales per day. In several areas, sowing and harvesting have been delayed.

Further, farmers were waiting for prices to improve, he said.

President of Cotton Association of India (CAI) Atul S. Ganatra said farmers had sold raw cotton in the range of ₹10,000 to ₹15,000 per 100 kg in the

last season while prices were currently in the range of ₹9,000 per 100 kg.

'ICE futures lower'

"Prices are down 35% already," Mr. Ganatra said. "So farmers are not selling. But, there are no signs that prices would improve. The ICE futures prices [for ginned cotton] are ₹50,000 a candy (356 kg) for March delivery whereas Indian cotton prices are ₹66,000 a candy now."

CAI expects exports this season (Oct. 2022 to Sept. 2023) to be about 30 lakh bales. Since October 1, only 50,000 bales have been shipped compared with 7 lakh bales in the year-ago period, Mr. Ganatra added.

India growth to slow to 5.9% in 2023, says Goldman Sachs

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI

India's economic growth is expected to slow to 5.9% in 2023, from 6.9% in 2022, Goldman Sachs said in its India 2023 outlook report.

"Growth will likely be a tale of two halves, with a slower first half as the reopening boost fades, and monetary tightening weighs on domestic demand. In the second half, growth is likely to re-accelerate as global growth recovers, drag from net ex-

Goldman expects a 25 bps repo rate cut in Q4 2023 if inflation dips to 5.3% as per its forecast

ports diminishes and investment cycle picks up," Goldman Sachs said. Retail inflation is likely to dip to 6.1% in 2023 from 6.8% in 2022 as 'active government intervention' would cap food inflation, it added.

"Core goods inflation has peaked but upside

risks to services inflation are likely to keep core inflation sticky around 6%," Goldman Sachs said. It said the Reserve Bank would likely raise the repo rate to 6.75% by February 2023.

"We bake in a 25 bps repo rate cut in Q4 2023 if inflation pans out as per our forecasts to reach 5.3% y-o-y by Q4," it further said.

It noted that the current account deficit would stay wide given the export drag from a global slowdown, adding service exports would offer some cushion.

Sufficient stocks of wheat and rice available: Centre

Food Secretary says curbs on exports have helped to bring down the prices of wheat and flour; more stocks of the grain available for domestic consumption and public distribution system

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Regulation of wheat and *atta* exports has helped control their prices, the Union Food and Public Distribution Ministry said here on Wednesday. Food and Public Distribution Secretary Sanjeev Chopra told presspersons that the increase in the prices came down from 15% to 5% after the regulation.

Mr. Chopra said the Centre decided to stop open market sales when wheat prices were going up. "Now, more stock is available for domestic consumption and public distribution system. As a result, the prices, compared to the prices in May 2022, have come down about 7%. If MSP [minimum support price] is factored in, the increase will be about 5%," he said adding that an inter-ministerial committee met on a weekly basis to



Domestic need: The government has procured around 277.37 lakh tonnes so far under the kharif marketing season. FILE PHOTO

monitor the situation.

Asked if the Centre would lift the ban on export, he said the primary concern of the government was food security of the country. Adequate stocks were available due to the measures taken by the Centre. "This is not a steep rise," he said.

Mr. Chopra said that even after meeting additional allocation for the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana, the Na-

tional Food Security Act and other welfare schemes, the country had sufficient stocks of wheat and rice under the central pool over and above the buffer norms. "As on November 15, a quantity of 201 lakh tonnes of wheat and 140 lakh tonnes of rice is available in the central pool," he said.

The Secretary added that procurement of paddy in the kharif marketing season (KMS) of 2022-23 had

started and around 277.37 lakh tonnes (185.93 lakh tonnes of rice) had been procured up to November, 21, which was higher than the procurement during the same period last year. He said 18.51 lakh farmers had benefited as ₹54,559.85 crore had been paid to them directly into their accounts.

"It is expected that procurement of paddy in KMS 2022-23 across the country will remain normal. The rainfall this year has been fairly good in the country and the production of paddy is expected to remain normal," he said. The Centre was expecting to procure 775.73 lakh tonnes of paddy (521 lakh tonnes of rice) in this season.

On the reduction in wheat procurement during the last rabi season, he said it was due to an increase in market price and demand-supply mismatch on account of the geopolitical situation.

ISRO to launch Oceansat-3, 8 nano satellites on Saturday

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) will launch Earth Observation Satellite-06 (EOS-06) and eight nano satellites on November 26. The Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV-C54) will launch the satellites at 11.56 a.m. from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota. The EOS-06 is a third-generation satellite in the Oceansat series. The ISRO said that the PSLV-C54 will launch EOS-06 and the eight nano satellites into two different Sun-synchronous polar orbits.

More risk to rules-based order from non-traditional threats, says Navy Chief

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

While the possibility of conventional inter-state conflict cannot be ruled out, there is an increased risk to the rules-based order, which is emanating from disputes of jurisdiction, undermining of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), piracy and armed robbery, illegal human migration, drugs and arms trafficking, and Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, Navy chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar said on Wednesday.

He was speaking about the security environment in general, and maritime security in particular, at the three-day Indo-Pacific regional dialogue being organised by the Navy and the National Maritime



Admiral R. Hari Kumar

Foundation (NMF). Maritime terrorism and proliferation of advanced technologies have the security matrix complicated, Admiral Kumar said. “Inevitably, given its increased centrality in global affairs, the region has witnessed increased presence of maritime security forces from a multitude of nations – regional and extra-regional. It is amply clear that a prosperous Indo-Pacific hinges on a peaceful mari-

time domain,” he said.

“We want a democratic Indo-Pacific free from coercion,” said Pankaj Saran, Member, National Security Advisory Board and former Deputy National Security Adviser, while reiterating that the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) remained the central pillar of India’s Act East and Indo-Pacific policy. This is not a strategic construct or geography directed against anyone, he added.

Delivering the keynote address, Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt said India was well prepared to address threats in the current and emerging maritime domain.

He emphasised the need to build other aspects of India’s maritime capability, in addition to bolstering military capabilities.

Home Ministry takes up Kuki-Chins' entry in Mizoram with MEA

Vijaita Singh

NEW DELHI

More than 270 members of the Kuki-Chin community from Bangladesh who entered Mizoram on November 20 are being referred to as “officially displaced persons” in State government records, as India does not have a law on refugees.

A senior Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) official told *The Hindu* that the issue was being discussed with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).

According to the MHA, foreign nationals who enter the country without valid travel documents are treated as illegal immigrants. A senior government official said the group, including 25 infants

and 60 women, approached a Border Security Force (BSF) patrol base on the Bangladesh-Mizoram border in the early hours of November 20 and were allowed to cross over. “They were allowed to enter India on humanitarian grounds,” the official said.

The Christian community from Bangladesh’s Chittagong Hill Tracts shares close ethnic ties with people in Mizoram. The Mizoram government has approved the setting up of temporary shelters for the community, who sought refuge in India following an action by the Bangladesh Rapid Action Battalion against some insurgents belonging to the group.

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Home Ministry takes up Kuki-Chin refugee issue

Another official said they are expecting more such refugees in the coming days.

The first official said that four schools have been turned into shelters for the refugees following the State government's order that none of them will be deported or returned.

The refugees will be housed on the same lines as the shelter given to over 40,000 refugees from Myanmar who have entered Mizoram since a military coup in the neighbouring country in February 2021.

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.