



VEDHIK
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The New Learning Mantra



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VEDHIK

DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

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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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A necessary signal

COP27 must underscore that securing the world's future gets costlier with time

The 27th session of the Conference of Parties (COP) is underway at Egypt's sea-side city of Sharm el-Sheikh where, over two weeks, heads of government, diplomats, business heads, activists, journalists, and lobbyists will converge. The attempt is to inch ahead on a global rehaul of energy consumption to improve earth's chances against catastrophic climate change. While every COP ends with a hard-bargain document, the essential principle remains constant: how to ensure that all countries contribute to paying for what it takes to avoid the consequences of global warming without compromising on economic development, while accounting for their historical responsibility in exacerbating the crisis. There are several countries, especially island nations, that stand to lose the most from global warming without having a role in causing it. Given that COP agreements are non-binding on the signatory member-states, and volte-faces not unusual – such as the United States unilaterally exiting the agreement only to join again – these meetings also serve as a forum for public posturing. Countries announce their commitment to lofty environmental goals but do little to execute the often-stringent measures that these entail because they potentially involve political blowback. However, COPs do serve as an effective nudge. Even a decade ago, the link between global warming and climate change had sizeable critics; now, no country challenges fundamental science. A fossil fuel-free future is the direction that the world is moving towards.

It is thus appropriate that COP27 is viewed as the so-called 'implementation CoP', to borrow a term from Sameh Shoukry, Egyptian Foreign Minister and President, COP27. Shifting from fossil fuels to renewable sources is expensive and the large developing countries (India, China, Brazil, South Africa) while committing to a carbon-free future also underline their right to rely on fossil fuels in the interim. While there is agreement that developed countries foot the bill, the bulk of the wrangling is over determining how the bill is paid. The 'implementation COP', India has said, must set out a transparent payment system and spell out how countries already reeling under climate disasters can be compensated. This will also mean greater transparency from recipient nations on how these investments measurably improve a transition away from polluting sources. Unlike Glasgow 2021, when 'net zero' or commitments to be carbon neutral were the flavour of the season, implementation COPs are unlikely to result in ambitious breakthroughs. Often, however, it is the unspoken and the subterranean that get the job done. COP27 must send the message, loud and clear, that be it war or peace, poverty or plenty, securing the world's future comes at a price that only gets costlier every passing day.



The logo, theme and website were unveiled on Tuesday. PTI

Modi unveils logo, theme, site of G-20 presidency

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India's upcoming presidency of the G-20 grouping is a matter of pride and a great opportunity for the country in its 75th year of Independence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Tuesday.

Mr. Modi made the remarks after unveiling the logo, theme and website of India's G-20 presidency during an online event.

India will assume the presidency of the powerful grouping from the current chair Indonesia on December 1. The G-20, or Group of 20, is an intergovernmental forum of major developed and developing economies.

In his remarks, Mr. Modi delved into India's development journey, and said all governments and people contributed in their own way in taking India forward after the Independence.

He also said that India could show the world that the scope of conflict could come to an end when democracy became a culture.

U.S., Belgium to question India on CAA, minority rights, hate speech at HRC

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Treatment of journalists and human rights defenders, the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) and custodial torture are expected to dominate the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of India at the Human Rights Council in Geneva that will take place on Thursday.

In “Advance Questions” submitted to the council, Belgium has called the CAA “anti-minority”, and asked India if the law would be repealed. Similar concerns have been raised by the United States, which has highlighted “hate speech”, “internet shut downs” and the issue of hijab in Karnataka.

“Will the government of India review and repeal anti-minority laws such as the CAA and anti-conversion laws which target religious minorities, and introduce measures and legislation to

The Universal Periodic Review will be conducted on the basis of the national report provided by India

prevent and respond to communal and targeted religious violence?” Belgium asked.

The country further asked about the steps that the Government of India will take to ensure that “human rights defenders, journalists and civil society organisations can exercise their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly, free from threats, harassment, intimidation and attacks”.

Till Tuesday, the U.S., the U.K., Belgium, Spain, Panama, Canada, Germany, Liechtenstein and Slovenia have submitted “Advance Questions” for the Indian-centric session on Thursday. The U.S. has also asked the Government of

India about how the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), the National Security Act, Public Safety Act and Sections 124A, 499, and 500 of the IPC comply with India’s international human rights obligations and commitments. The UPR will be conducted on the basis of the national report provided by India, information provided by independent human rights experts and groups, and international human rights groups.

In the report submitted in August, India informed the Council that laws were consistently enforced to ensure protection of the minority communities.

The national position on the issue of human rights gives an indication of the line that India is expected to take during the upcoming deliberation which has drawn curiosity because of the negative observations that several human rights organisations have submitted to the world body.

India ready to help ‘de-risk’ Ukraine situation, Jaishankar tells Russia

External Affairs Minister does not make any specific offer to mediate during his talks with his counterpart in Moscow, but calls for dialogue and diplomacy between the two warring nations; he says Russia is India’s steady and time-tested partner

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Russia is India’s “steady and time-tested partner”, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, defending the 20-fold increase in India’s oil imports from the country this year, said after meetings with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Deputy Minister and Trade Minister Denis Manturov in Moscow on Tuesday.

Laying out India’s position on the Ukraine crisis, which Mr. Lavrov said Russia had “highly appreciated”, Mr. Jaishankar repeated Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s words that “this is not an era of war”, and called for dialogue and diplomacy between Moscow and Kiev.



Strong bonds: S. Jaishankar and Sergey Lavrov after a meeting in Moscow. TWITTER/@DRSJAISHANKAR

However, while Mr. Jaishankar said India was ready to support any initiative to “de-risk” the situation in Ukraine and promote global stability, he did not make any specific offer to mediate in Russia-Ukraine talks.

“Any objective evaluation of our relationship over many decades would confirm that it has actually served both our countries very, very well...,” Mr. Jaishankar said at a press conference after talks with Mr. Lavrov, in response to a

question about pressure from Western countries to reduce oil imports and join a price-cap coalition announced by G-7 countries.

“As the world’s third largest consumer of oil and gas, a consumer where the levels of income are not very high, it is our fundamental obligation to ensure that the Indian consumer has the best possible access on the most advantageous terms to international markets. And in that respect, quite honestly, we have seen that the India-Russia relationship has worked to our advantage,” Mr. Jaishankar added, but pointed out that the Global South (developing and underdeveloped countries) had “felt the pain quite acutely” of the food and energy issues arising from the Ukraine conflict.

Referring to U.S. and European sanctions on Russia, Mr. Lavrov said he had briefed Mr. Jaishankar on “military operations” in Ukraine. “We discussed the situation that has developed around the attempts of the Western colleagues, under the pretext of Ukrainian events, to strengthen their dominant role in world affairs and prevent the democratisation of international relations,” Mr. Lavrov said.

Both Foreign Ministers also noted the “significant growth” in India-Russia bilateral trade this year to about \$17 billion, committing to a goal of reaching \$30 billion by 2025, and agreed to strengthen cooperation on joint military exports, as well as in the areas of oil exploration, nuclear energy and space.

Oil slips on recession fears, COVID in China

REUTERS

SINGAPORE

Oil prices slipped on Tuesday as recession concerns and worsening COVID-19 outbreaks in China sparked fears of lower fuel demand, outweighing supply worries.

Brent crude fell 23 cents, or 0.2%, to \$97.69 a barrel by 0726 GMT.

The benchmark hit its highest since August on Monday amid reports that leaders in China, the world's top crude importer, were weighing an exit



from strict COVID-19 curbs.

“I think the rolling lockdowns continue to push back the reopening narrative negatively for oil prices,” said Stephen Innes, managing partner at SPI Asset Management.

UN chief slams companies engaging in 'toxic cover-up'

Firms cannot claim to be net zero if they invest in fossil fuels or cause deforestation, says a COP-27 report; Guterres asks stakeholders to update net zero pledges in a year to comply with UN norms

Agence France-Presse
SHARM EL-SHEIKH

The UN's chief called on Tuesday for an end to a "toxic cover-up" by companies as a sweeping report said they cannot claim to be net zero if they invest in new fossil fuels, cause deforestation or offset emissions instead of reducing them.

Antonio Guterres said businesses as well as cities and regions should update their voluntary net zero pledges within a year to comply with the recommendations by UN experts, as he trained his sights on fossil fuel firms and "their financial enablers".

"Using bogus 'net-zero' pledges to cover up massive fossil fuel expansion is reprehensible. It is rank deception," he said at the launch of the report at the



New breakthrough: Israel and Jordan signed an MOU to move ahead with a water-for-energy deal on Tuesday. REUTERS

COP-27 conference in Egypt. "This toxic cover-up could push our world over the climate cliff. The sham must end."

The UN expert panel, convened after the UN climate talks last year, set its sights on drawing a "red line" around greenwashing in net zero targets from companies, cities and regions.

A huge surge in decarbonisation pledges in recent months means that around 90% of the global economy is now covered by some sort of promise of carbon neutrality, according to Net Zero Tracker.

"It's very easy to make an announcement that you are going to be net zero by 2050. But you have to walk the talk and what we've

seen is that there is not enough action," said Catherine McKenna, Canada's former Environment and Climate Change Minister, who led the panel.

The report lists a slew of recommendations, including calling on governments to begin putting in place binding regulations.

UAE-Egypt deal

Meanwhile, the UAE and Egypt agreed to develop one of the world's largest wind farms in a deal struck on the sidelines of summit.

The 10 GW onshore wind project in Egypt will produce 47,790 GWh of clean energy annually once it is completed, the UAE's state news agency said. It will offset 23.8 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions - equivalent to around 9% of Egypt's current CO2 output.

Content moderation through co-regulation

Social media platforms regularly manage user content on their website. They remove, prioritise or suspend user accounts that violate the terms and conditions of their platforms. When a user's post is taken down or their account is suspended, they can challenge such a decision. Similarly, when users see harmful/illegal content online, they can flag the issue with the platform. Some platforms have complaint redressal mechanisms for addressing user grievances. For instance, Facebook set up the Oversight Board, an independent body, which scrutinises its 'content moderation' practices.

The online ecosystem today

It was voluntary for platforms to establish a grievance redressal mechanism through their terms of service until the government introduced the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. These mandate platforms to establish a grievance redressal mechanism to resolve user complaints within fixed timelines. Recently, the government amended these Rules and established Grievance Appellate Committees (GACs). Comprising government appointees, GACs will now sit in appeals over the platforms' grievance redressal decisions. This signifies the government's tightening control of online speech, much like Section 69A of the IT Act. The IT Act was passed in 2000 and Section 69A was introduced in 2008 when social media barely existed.

In today's online environment, however, the existing government control on online speech is unsustainable. Social media now has millions of users. Platforms have democratised public participation, and shape public discourse. As such, large platforms have a substantial bearing on core democratic freedoms. Further, with the increasing reach of the Internet, its potential harms have



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also increased. There is more illegal and harmful content online today. Disinformation campaigns on social media during COVID-19 and hate speech against the Rohingya in Myanmar are recent examples. With increased stakes in free speech and with increasing online risks, a modern intermediary law must re-imagine the role of governments.

A modern intermediary law

Under such a law, government orders to remove content must not only be necessary and proportionate, but must also comply with due process. The recent European Union (EU) Digital Services Act (DSA) is a good reference point. The DSA regulates intermediary liability in the EU. It requires government take-down orders to be proportionate and reasoned. The DSA also gives intermediaries an opportunity to challenge the government's decision to block content and defend themselves. These processes will strongly secure free speech of online users.

Most importantly, an intermediary law must devolve crucial social media content moderation decisions at the platform level. Platforms must have the responsibility to regulate content under broad government guidelines. Instituting such a co-regulatory framework will serve three functions. First, platforms will retain reasonable autonomy over their terms of service. Co-regulation will give them the flexibility to define the evolving standards of harmful content, thereby obviating the need for strict government mandates. This will promote free speech online because government oversight incentivises platforms to engage in private censorship. Private censorship creates a chilling effect on user speech. In turn, it also scuttles online innovation, which is the backbone of the digital economy.

Second, co-regulation aligns government and platform interests. Online platforms

themselves seek to promote platform speech and security so that their users have a free and safe experience. For instance, during the pandemic, platforms took varied measures to tackle disinformation. Incentivising platforms to act as Good Samaritans will build healthy online environments.

Third, instituting co-regulatory mechanisms allows the state to outsource content regulation to platforms, which are better equipped to tackle modern content moderation challenges.

The modality of a co-regulatory model for content moderation must be mullied over. It is important that co-regulation, while maintaining platform autonomy, also makes platforms accountable for their content moderation decisions. Platforms as content moderators have substantial control over the free speech rights of users. Whenever platforms remove content, or redress user grievance, their decisions must follow due process and be proportionate. They must adopt processes such as notice, hearing and reasoned orders while addressing user grievances.

But due process is not enough. Social media content moderation tools are not limited to the removal or suspension of posts. Platforms often use tools for de-prioritisation of content to reduce the visibility of such content. Users are unaware of and unable to challenge such actions as they take place through platform algorithms that are often confidential. Platform accountability can be increased through algorithmic transparency.

An intermediary law should take the baton brought forward by the 2021 Rules. The GACs must be done away with because they concentrate censorship powers in the hands of government. A Digital India Act is expected to be the successor law to the IT Act. This is a perfect opportunity for the government to adopt a co-regulatory model of speech regulation of online speech.

Should the age of consent be changed for adolescents?

Why are consensual and non-exploitative sexual acts also coming under the radar of the POCSO Act and IPC? What are the ground realities? What have the courts observed?

Sudipta Datta

The story so far:

On November 4, the Dharwad Bench of the Karnataka High Court, while dismissing a case filed under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, said the Law Commission of India would have to rethink the age criteria, to take into consideration the ground realities. The aspect of consent by a girl of 16 years, but who is below 18 years, would have to be considered, it said, if it is indeed an offence under the Indian Penal Code and/or the POCSO Act.

What are the terms of the POCSO Act?

Under the POCSO Act, 2012, and under several provisions of the IPC, whoever commits a penetrative sexual assault on a child – anyone below 18 years of age –

can be “imprisoned for a term which is not less than seven years but which may extend to imprisonment for life, and shall also be liable to [a] fine.” Even if the girl is 16 years old, she is considered a “child” under the POCSO Act and hence her consent does not matter, and any sexual intercourse is treated as rape, thus opening it up to stringent punishment. There have been several instances in the past few years when the courts have quashed criminal proceedings of rape and kidnapping, after being convinced that the law was being misused to suit one or the other party. Often, the offender had been booked under Section 366 of the IPC, Section 6 of the POCSO Act and Section 9 of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

Is the law being misused?

In its order, and several other courts have

passed similar judgments too, the Karnataka High Court said the effect of such criminal prosecution of a minor girl or boy is causing severe distress to all concerned, including the families. Sometimes, disgruntled parents file a case to foil a relationship between two adolescents. In 2019, a study, *Why Girls Run Away To Marry - Adolescent Realities and Socio-Legal Responses in India*, published by Partners for Law in Development, made a case for the age of consent to be lower than the age of marriage to decriminalise sex among older adolescents to protect them from the misuse of law, sometimes by parents who want to control who their daughters or sons want to marry. The study noted that in many cases, a couple elopes fearing opposition from parents resulting in a situation where families file a case with the police, who then book the boy

for rape under the POCSO Act and abduction with the intent to marry under IPC or the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

In 2021, in the *Vijaylaxmi vs State Rep* case, the Madras High Court, while dismissing a POCSO case, said the definition of ‘child’ under Section 2(d) of the POCSO Act can be redefined as 16 instead of 18. The court suggested that the age difference in consensual relationships should not be more than five years. This, it said, will ensure that a girl of an impressionable age is not taken advantage of by “a person who is much older.”

What needs to be done?

With the courts and rights activists seeking amendment to the age of consent criteria, the ball lies in the government’s court to look into the issue. In the meantime, adolescents have to be made aware of the stringent provisions of the Act and also the IPC.

Even as activists are calling for a tweak to the POCSO Act, and raising awareness about its terms, a parliamentary committee is looking into the Prohibition of Child Marriage (Amendment) Bill, 2021 which seeks to increase the minimum age of marriage for women to 21 years. Rights activists feel instead of helping the community, raising the age may force vulnerable women to remain under the yoke of family and social pressures.

THE GIST

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Adolescents have to be made aware of the stringent provisions of the Act and also the IPC.

Kerala HC offers interim relief to Vice-Chancellors

Court restrains Governor Arif Mohammed Khan from passing any order on show-cause notices issued to V-Cs of eight universities till it decides on their writ petitions challenging the notice

The Hindu Bureau

KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Tuesday restrained Governor Arif Mohammed Khan, in his capacity as Chancellor of universities, from passing final orders on the show-cause notices he issued to Vice-Chancellors of eight universities, until the court takes a call on the writ petitions filed by the latter seeking to quash the notices.

Mr. Khan had issued the notices to the Vice-Chancellors citing violation of University Grants Commission (UGC) norms in their appointment.

Justice Devan Ramachandran passed the interim order when the petitions by the

Governor versus V-Cs

A look at how the legal tussle between the Kerala Governor and Vice-Chancellors of nine universities evolved



Arif Mohammed Khan, Kerala Governor

- Oct. 21: Supreme Court sets aside appointment of V-C of Abdul Kalam Technological University
- Oct. 23: Governor demands resignation of nine V-Cs, citing the verdict
- Oct. 24: Governor issues show-cause notices to those who refuse to resign
- Oct. 25: They can continue till Governor takes decision on show-cause notice, says Kerala HC
- Since Oct 31: Eight of them challenge the notice
- Nov. 8: Kerala HC restrains Governor

Vice-Chancellors came up for hearing.

The show-cause notice asked them why their appointments should not be declared *void ab initio* in view of a recent Supreme Court judgment. While annulling the appointment of

Rajashree M.S. as the Vice-Chancellor of APJ Abdul Kalam Technological University, the Supreme Court had held that the appointment was made on the recommendations of a search committee that had not been constituted as per

the UGC regulations.

When the petitions came up for hearing, Jaju Babu, senior counsel for the Chancellor, submitted that the Vice-Chancellors had already given their explanation to the Chancellor in response to the notices. He also sought three days' time to file an affidavit in the case. Counsel also submitted that the Chancellor was not able to file the affidavit as he was out of town and had returned recently.

When the petitions came last week, the court had extended till November 7 the time granted to the Vice-Chancellors of the eight universities to reply to the show-cause.

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HC offers interim relief to Vice-Chancellors

The Chancellor had fixed November 3 and 4 as deadline for replying to the notices.

The petitioners contended that they were issued show-cause notices as they had not responded to a letter written by the Chancellor asking them to resign. Since the High Court had already quashed the communication, the Chancellor should not have relied on it and issued show-cause notices. Besides, the Chancellor, being a statutory officer, was not legally competent to take a decision on whether the appointment of the Vice-Chancellors was void or not. The show-cause notice had been issued because of the misconception of the law laid down by the Supreme Court, the petitioners said.

Banks pricing risks poorly in rush to get deposits, lend more: SBI's Ghosh

Risk premia over and above core funding cost are not fairly acknowledging inherent credit risk, according to a report by bank's group chief economic adviser; notes that deposit growth at lenders is lagging behind decade-high credit expansion

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Amidst liquidity tightening and a decadal high credit growth of more than 18% and deposit growth falling way behind, State Bank of India's group chief economic adviser Soumya Kanti Ghosh has warned that banks are not adequately pricing their risks on both their asset and liabilities sides.

Liquidity crunch is primarily because the Reserve Bank has been sucking out funds from the system as it fights to tame inflation which has been

Urging caution in banking

Economist at India's largest lender flags asset, liability risks

■ Liquidity crunch primarily due to RBI sucking out funds in its fight to tame inflation

■ Short tenor working capital loans for less than 1 year being given at lower than 6%

■ On the other hand, 10- and 15-year loans are being priced at less than 7%

■ Average core funding cost about 6.2%, reverse repo rate at 5.65% spurring rate war for deposits



much above the upper bound of its band of 2-4% for the last 10 months. This has prompted the RBI to frontload its inflation fight by increasing the policy

rates by 190 basis points to pre-pandemic levels since the war in Ukraine began.

The average net durable liquidity injected into the banking system in April

was ₹8.3 lakh crore, which is nearly three times the current ₹3 lakh crore. Atop this, the government has spent a large part of its cash balances in the Deepavali week, and as a result the net LAF (liquidity adjustment facility) in the system, which was hitherto negative, has improved of late. Bonus payments by the government and private sector also helped.

According to a report by Mr. Ghosh, what is still intriguing, however, is that even as the banking system is witnessing net LAF deficit, risk premia over and above core funding cost are not fairly acknowledg-

ing the inherent credit risk.

Pricing range

For example, short tenor working capital loans for less than one year are given at lower than 6% and are linked to one-month/three-month T-bill rates, while 10- and 15-year loans are being priced at less than 7%.

The average core funding cost of the banking system is at about 6.2% now, while the reverse repo rate is at 5.65%. No wonder, banks are currently engaged in a fierce war to raise deposits, with rates being offered up to 7.75% in select maturities.

Rate hikes unlikely to impact asset quality of home loans, says ICRA

Press Trust of India

MUMBAI

The ongoing rate hikes are unlikely to impact repayments by home loan borrowers despite an increase in monthly instalments, a rating agency said.

Mortgage lenders have limited headroom to extend the loan tenures given the fact that the prime home-loan segment already has long tenures, and a further extension in loan tenures will lead to overall tenures extending beyond the working life of the borrower, ICRA said.

As a result, equated monthly instalments (EMIs) will go up by 12-21% for prime home loans, while the same will go up by 8-13% in the case of the affordable home-loan segment, its sector head for financial sector ratings Manushree Saggar said.

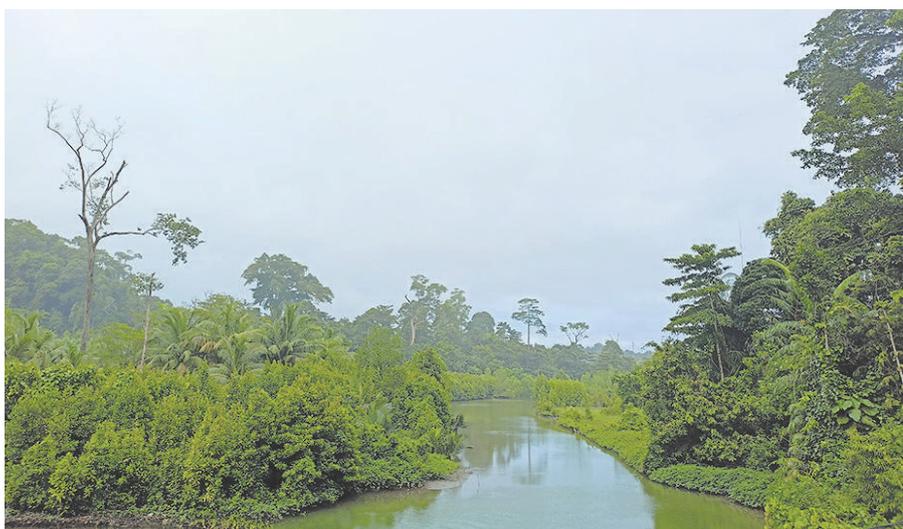
'Limited headroom'

"While there is an expectation of a further increase in interest rates, lenders have limited headroom to increase loan tenures; thus, EMIs would have to be revised upwards," she said.

"However, this is unlikely to impact the HFCs asset-quality indicators significantly," she added.

It can be noted the Reserve Bank has raised rates by 1.90% since May in response to the runaway inflation, which has been transmitted into rates paid by home-loan borrowers.

Nicobar project gets assent for diversion of 130 sq. km of forest



Facing the axe: More than eight lakh trees will have to be cut for the project, as per a government estimate. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Pankaj Sekhsaria

MUMBAI

The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has granted an in-principle (Stage 1) clearance for the diversion of 130.75 sq. km of forest on Great Nicobar Island for the mega ₹72,000-crore project that includes a transshipment port, an airport, a power plant and a greenfield township. The

project implementation agency is the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO).

The area is nearly 15% of the thickly forested Great Nicobar Island that is spread over 900 sq. km. This will be one of the largest single such forest diversions in recent times.

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Assent for diversion of 130 sq. km of forest

It is nearly a quarter of all the forest land diverted in the past three years across the country (554 sq. km as per information provided in the Lok Sabha in July) and 65% of the 203 sq. km of forest land diverted in the three year period 2015-18.

The Ministry's own estimates suggest that 8.5 lakh trees will have to be cut in Great Nicobar for this project. This is doubly significant because these are primary evergreen tropical forests with high biological diversity and also high endemism; Ministry documents themselves state that the island has among the best preserved tropical forests in the world, is home to nearly 650 species of flora and 330 species of fauna, including endemic species such as the Nicobar shrew, the Nicobar long-tailed macaque, the Great Nicobar crested serpent eagle, the Nicobar paradise flycatcher and the Nicobar megapode, among many others.

Compensatory afforestation

A letter confirming the clearance was issued on October 27 by the Ministry's forest conservation division. Signed by Suneet Bhardwaj, Assistant Inspector General of Forests, the letter states that the permission has been granted following a "careful examination" of the island administration's request for the same dated October 7, 2020 and "on basis of the recommendations of the Forest Advisory Committee (FAC) and its acceptance by the competent authority in the Ministry".

A key condition for the clearance is the submission of a detailed scheme for compensatory afforestation, which is to be done on "non-notified forest land" in Haryana. It also states that an amount of ₹3,672 crore needs to be earmarked for the environment management plan (EMP) for the construction and operation phase of the project. The final environment impact assessment (EIA) report of the project that was prepared in March 2022 and accepted by the Ministry's Expert Appraisal Committee (EAC) had calculated the cost of this compensatory afforestation to be ₹970 crores.

Interestingly, the final EIA report mentioned that the compensatory afforestation over 260 sq km (twice the diversion area) will be carried out in Madhya Pradesh and even carries a letter of the Andaman and Nicobar Forest Department certifying that the Government of Madhya Pradesh has submitted the details for the same. There is no clarity on how the switch was made to Haryana and what process, if any, was followed for the same.

Though the permission letter mentions the "recommendations of the FAC", no details or minutes are available on the Ministry's website of the FAC meetings where these decisions were taken.

Communications (and reminders) seeking details sent to the official email addresses of all the members of the FAC that granted the forest clearance also did not evoke any response. A Right to Information (RTI) application filed in October seeking the details of the compensatory afforestation scheme in Madhya Pradesh was in fact rejected under Section 8.1(a) of the RTI Act that cites security, strategic, scientific or economic interests of the state.

Haryana stands out for having one of the highest rates of diversion of its own forest land even though the forest cover in the State is minimal. The State diverted nearly 80 sq. km of its forest between 2014-15 and 2016-17, the highest for any State in the country for that period.

The State was also chastised in May for unwise use of compensatory afforestation funds, too much focus on plantations and failure to raise the forest area, by Ashok Khemka, steering committee member of Haryana's Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPFA).

"It is not clear," says Debi Goenka, executive trustee of Conservation Act Trust, "how ANIIDCO, the project proponent, will compensate for the loss of these virgin tropical forests teeming with endemic and endangered species with artificial tree plantations in the faraway State of Haryana."

"It is also apparent," he continues, "that it will be almost impossible to get 130 sq. km of forest land in Haryana that are contiguous and undisturbed."

He points to a number of other legal issues in this in-principle forest clearance. These include the neglect of multiple clauses of the Forest Conservation Rules and Guidelines in the de-reservation process and also the violation of a Supreme Court order of November 13, 2000 (reiterated on February 9, 2004) which ordered no further "de-reservation of forests/sanctuaries/national parks".

(Pankaj Sekhsaria has been researching issues of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for over two decades. He has authored five books on the islands)

CSIR-NGRI to install early warning system against floods, rockslides, and avalanches in Himalayan States

SPECIAL

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The National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research has begun field studies to put in place an early-warning system in the Himalayan States against major and sudden floods, rockslides, landslips, glacier lake bursts and avalanches and to prevent Chamoli kind of disasters in future.

“Right now, we are able

to detect the major events through geophysical and seismological observations, but are yet to demonstrate the minimum threshold or the maximum distance from which we can give an early warning of natural disasters, which are 10 times less intense than what happened at Chamoli, with the help of various instruments. Our scientists are working on those systems,” NGRI Director V.M. Tiwari said.

The scientists in the institute have identified a few locations in the higher reaches of Uttarakhand for



Water gushing down from the Chufalgad river after a cloudburst in Chamoli in 2019.

“densification” of seismometers and river gauges to take the total number to 100 from 60. The objective is to closely monitor the

river flows in specific areas along the catchment to detect any sudden rise in water levels or flooding threshold that can lead to a hazard. “A 5 cm of rainfall or a glacier melt may not be hazardous, but if there is a heavy rockfall or sudden lake burst, there could be massive flooding. What is the minimal level of time required and distance from which an early warning can be given will be assessed after discussions with the various stakeholders,” Mr. Tiwari said in an exclusive interaction.

Scientists have decided

to take cognisance of the vibrations or “noise” recorded by the seismometers, which need not be due to earthquakes but can also be because of vehicular traffic, animal movement, rain, river flows and so on.

These instruments are crucial for the safety of large infrastructure projects and hydroelectric power plants in this region. Currently, scientists are able to detect and assess a sudden flow 30-40 km away since the seismic wave is faster than the flow, and hence, the ad-

vance warning comes at least half an hour before.

The NGRI has started utilising Machine Learning to detect these observations faster than the normal approach because time becomes crucial during a warning, he said.

“We are working on cost-effective measures. Although our instruments can withstand minus-20 degrees Celsius, they need fuel cells when there is no sunlight. We are going to start in a modest manner in Uttarakhand and parts of Arunachal Pradesh,” Mr. Tiwari said.

'No consensus' is derailing counter-terror diplomacy

India's decision to host the special session of the United Nations Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee (UNSC-CTC) last month – held in Mumbai and New Delhi, it focused on new and emerging technologies – is one of a number of events planned by the Government to give its counter-terror diplomacy a greater push. Later this month, New Delhi will host the third edition of the "No Money For Terror" (NMF-T) conference that will look at tackling future modes of terror financing. And in December, when India takes over the United Nations Security Council Presidency for the last time before its two-year term in the Council ends, India will chair a special briefing on the "Global Counter Terrorism Architecture", looking at the challenges ahead.

While the focus is on the future of the fight against terrorism, it is important to look at some of the challenges that already exist, especially when the world's attention is consumed by the war in Europe, dealing with the aftermath of COVID-19, and global economic recession.

GWOT – built on an unequal campaign

The first challenge is that the "Global War On Terrorism" (GWOT), as it was conceived by a post-9/11 United States is over with the last chapter written last year, as the United States negotiated with the Taliban, and then withdrew from Afghanistan. GWOT itself was built on an unequal campaign – when India had asked for similar help to deal with the IC-814 hijacking (December 1999) less than two years prior to the 9/11 attacks (with evidence now clear that those who the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government was forced to release were all terrorists who went on to help with planning, funding or providing safe havens to the al-Qaeda leadership), its pleas fell on deaf ears in the U.S., the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and of course, Pakistan, all of whom were hit by the same terrorists in later years.

Even after GWOT was launched, Pakistan's role as the U.S.'s ally, and China's "iron friend" ensured that the UNSC designations of those who threatened India the most, including Masood Azhar and Hafiz Saeed, never mentioned their role in attacks in India. The maximum India received in terms of global cooperation was actually from economic strictures that the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)'s grey list placed on Pakistan – Pakistan was cleared from this in October – indicating that the global appetite to punish Pakistan for terrorism has petered out.



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The hard reality, especially for India, is that the future of counter terrorism cooperation is going to be less cooperative, with counter-terror regimes rendered toothless

In addition, the weak international reaction to the Taliban's takeover of Kabul, and its persecution of women and minorities in the country, demonstrate rising fatigue levels in dealing with "another country's problems". The hard reality for India is that the future of counter-terrorism cooperation is going to be less cooperative, and counter-terror regimes such as the UNSC Resolutions 1267, 1373, etc. rendered outdated and toothless.

A blur over definition, new technologies

Next, the growing global polarisation over the Russia-Ukraine war is not only shifting the focus from terrorism but is also blurring the lines on what constitutes terrorism. The CTC meeting in Delhi, for example, was disrupted over Russia's claims that the U.K. helped Ukraine launch drone attacks on Russia's naval fleet in Sevastopol. The question remains: if drone attacks by Yemeni Houthis on the UAE and Saudi Arabia's oil infrastructure were condemned as terrorist attacks, why was the line drawn for drone attacks on Russian ships in a port used for loading grain, or a bridge bombing that put so many civilian lives at risk? On the other hand, how will Russia square up the possible recruitment of the former Afghan republic's National Army Commando Corps into its war in Ukraine? Would not these commandos who once fought Taliban terrorists, now qualify as terrorists themselves?

Away from the battlefield, the polarisation has rendered the body tasked with global peace, paralysed: as the UNSC is unable to pass any meaningful resolutions that are not vetoed by Russia or western members, and China has been able to block as many as five terror designations requested by India and the U.S.

Perhaps the biggest opportunity lost due to the UNSC's other preoccupations has been the need to move forward on India's proposal, of 1996, of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT). While each conference, including the CTC meeting in Delhi, makes passing the CCIT a goal, very little progress has been made on the actual issues such as the definition of terrorism, concerns over human rights law conflicts, and the old debate on 'freedom fighter vs terrorist'. Despite several changes in the draft made by India in 2016, consensus for the convention is still elusive.

The next challenge comes from emerging technologies and the weaponisation of a number of different mechanisms for terrorism purposes. Drones are already being used to deliver funds, drugs, weapons, ammunition and even

improvised explosive devices. After the COVID-19 pandemic, worries have grown about the use of biowarfare, and Gain-of-Function (GoF) research to mutate viruses and vectors which could be released into targeted populations. In a future that is already here, the use of artificial intelligence (AI) systems and robotic soldiers makes it even easier to perpetrate mass attacks while maintaining anonymity. Terror financing uses bitcoins and cryptocurrency, and terror communications use social media, the dark web and even gaming centres.

The drivers of strife

Unless there is global consensus on regulating the use of these emergent technologies by all responsible states, it will be hard to distinguish their use from those by designated terror entities, or state-sponsored terrorism. Pakistan, Iran and North Korea are the most obvious examples of countries where the establishment has supported terrorist groups carrying out cross-border strikes, drone attacks and cyberwarfare. But what does one make of drone strikes by North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries in Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia, where civilians have been killed, or Chinese government-run hackers who disable urban electric grids?

Nor are there any globally accepted norms on how and in what measure one is to respond to those attacks: whether it is the U.S.'s flattening of Afghanistan post-9/11, Pakistan's aerial strikes on its own populations in Swat and Balochistan, India's crossing of the UN-monitored Line of Control after the Uri attack (September 2016) and missile strikes on Pakistani territory (Balakot, in February 2019) after the Pulwama suicide bombing (February 2019), or Israel's relentless bombardment of buildings in Gaza in retaliation for rocket attacks. Without some consensus on what constitutes terror, no war on terrorism can be truly global.

The truth is global inequity, food and energy shortages, climate change and pandemics are going to be the next big drivers of strife and violence in the world, where global stakeholders are at present distracted by territorial disputes and narrow political differences. Terrorist acts of the future will grow more and more lethal, will need fewer people to carry out, and with their sponsors having more and more anonymity. India, as host of these counter-terrorism events, and of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the next G-20, must stop fighting the "last war" on terrorism, and steer the global narrative towards preparing for the next ones.

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 war, re-drawal 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 India 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 provision 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 & privilege and issues arising out of these;

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.