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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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The role of the 'China Test' in India's grand strategy

If principal contradictions must determine strategic priorities, New Delhi should decide what its principal contradiction is. The concept of a principal contradiction – one that poses the most intense challenge to an individual/organisation, and has the power to shape its future choices and consequent outcomes – is a useful method of optimising and prioritising strategic decision-making. Whether or not Indian policymakers articulate it as such, China is contemporary India's principal strategic contradiction. Every other challenge, be it Pakistan, internal insurgencies, and difficulties in relations with its neighbours, fall in the category of secondary contradictions.

If so, I would argue that major decisions in New Delhi's strategic decision matrix should pass the China test, which amounts to asking and answering a rather straightforward question: "does x or y decision/development/relationship help deal with the China challenge, or not?" Decision-makers must then view the decision/development/relationship in the light of this answer. It is not that secondary contradictions are not important or that they do not add to the primary contradiction. A perspicacious 'China test' can help prioritise strategic decision making in the longer run, at least as an analytical tool with potential policy utility.

From an operational point of view, the 'China test' consists of three distinct elements. First, an assessment of how a certain Indian decision or a specific regional development squares with Chinese regional strategy or interests. Second, an assessment of whether India's decision or a certain regional development would require India to make modifications at the level of secondary contradictions. And third, an assessment of whether this would require any major policy changes internally. Let me highlight the utility of the 'China test' using a few examples.

India-U.S. relations

New Delhi has had a complicated relationship with Washington which is increasingly getting normalised and interests-driven. Despite its withdrawal from the region, Washington is seeking to re-engage southern Asia (Pakistan, South Asia in general, the Indo-Pacific, and perhaps even the Taliban). It appears that one of the lessons New Delhi learnt from the standoff with China along the Line of Actual Control in 2020 was that it was perhaps a consequence of India's growing proximity to the U.S. If so, should New Delhi temper its relations with the U.S.,



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It is a rather straightforward one – smart balancing China in Southern Asia and beyond must form a key element in India's grand strategic planning and decision making

particularly in the Indo-Pacific, in the hope that this will keep Beijing's aggression at bay? Or, should India continue the strategic partnership with the U.S. irrespective of what China thinks about it?

What would a 'China test' of India-U.S. relations suggest? Given that Beijing seeks to dominate the region, it is clearly not in its interest to see an American reengagement of the region or growing India-U.S. proximity. If so, the lack of/lukewarm India-U.S. strategic engagement in the region is precisely what would help Beijing's long-term objectives. A China test would suggest that New Delhi should not give into the short-term temptation of not being on the wrong side of China given its long-term implications. While the fears of such a relationship irking China may not be entirely unjustified, they invariably play into the Chinese strategy of boxing India in the region.

Does the China test require India to pacify its relationship with Pakistan? Let us ask ourselves the question: "does making (relative) peace with Pakistan help India better deal with China?" The answer, in my opinion, is a resounding yes. Imagine this. For China, the best-case scenario is an India vigorously preoccupied with Pakistan which ensures that India is not focused on the growing threat from China, thereby providing Beijing with the opportunity to displace traditional Indian primacy in South Asia. So, for India, a course-correction on Pakistan, even if it is only post facto, is a strategically sensible one.

Let me put that somewhat differently. What India should actively seek is not a balance of power in South Asia with Pakistan but balancing Chinese power in Southern Asia. Hence, India's objective in South Asia should be to seek a pacification of conflicts with Pakistan, so that it can focus on China. Similarly, India need not oppose the American engagement of Pakistan for the same reason – it helps prevent Pakistan from going into the China camp completely. A Pakistan engaged with the U.S. and the West is better for India than a Pakistan shunned by the U.S. and the West.

The Russia connection

India-Russia relations in the wake of the Ukraine war are among the most debated bilateral relationships in the world today. Let us apply the China test to examine the logic behind India-Russia relations in the face of western pressure on India to decouple from Moscow. "Does continuing its relationship with Moscow help New Delhi better deal with the China

challenge?"

The answer may not be a straightforward one, but the China test does provide an answer. The U.S. and its allies would like India to stop engaging with Moscow and condemn its aggression against Ukraine – which India has refused to do so far. In return, there is an offer greater accommodation of Indian interests including perhaps diplomatic and political support against Chinese aggression. There is also the growing proximity between Moscow and Beijing which reduces the robustness of India-Russia relations. So, does the China test require New Delhi to continue to engage with Moscow against all these odds? While I am personally convinced that India-Russia relations are on the wane, there is a strong rationale for New Delhi to continue its relationship with Moscow – which is China.

Consider this. If indeed New Delhi was to completely break away from Russia (as India's U.S. and western partners have asked India to), what would be the likely consequences of such a decision? Such a decision is most likely to play into China's hands. For one, in the absence of an India-Russia relationship, the extent of Sino-Russian cooperation is likely to strengthen, and India will be cut out of the continental space to its north and west. Second, New Delhi continues to get discounted energy, cheaper defence equipment (even if some of it has to be retrofitted with more sophisticated technology from elsewhere), support at the United Nations Security Council, and Moscow has been understanding of New Delhi's 'political sensitivities' more than its western partners. If India decides to break away from Russia, many of these could come to a grinding halt, and the natural beneficiary of such an eventuality will, undoubtedly, be China. This could also push Moscow towards Pakistan with or without some nudging from Beijing.

It is also important to note that Moscow is not keen to have China dominate the strategic space around it and has been keen to balance the growing influence of China in Central Asia with partners such as New Delhi. New Delhi's turn away from Moscow will ensure that China gets a free hand in Central Asia too. In one sense, therefore, the China piece best explains the enigma called India-Russia relations.

For New Delhi, the message from the China test is a rather straightforward one – smart balancing China in Southern Asia and beyond must form a key element in India's grand strategic planning and decision making.

India urged to adopt ASEAN consensus on Myanmar

Suhasini Haidar

BALI

India and other countries should “respect” and follow the ASEAN’s policy on Myanmar rather than taking a “different” path, Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi says.

In comments to *The Hindu* about India’s decision to engage the Myanmar military government that came to power in February 2021 after deposing the elected National Unity Government and jailing thousands of leaders, including Aung San Suu Kyi, Ms. Marsudi said that it could make efforts of the 10-member Association of South East Asian Nations towards democracy “less effective”.

Instead, she urged India and other countries to follow the ASEAN “five point consensus”.

CONTINUED ON

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India urged to adopt ASEAN consensus

The plan calls for an immediate end to violence in the country; dialogue among all parties; the appointment of a special envoy; humanitarian assistance by ASEAN; and the special envoy's visit to Myanmar to meet with all parties.

"Our message to ASEAN partners is, please support the ASEAN efforts – because if you do differently, then that will not help us be effective and to help Myanmar out of this political crisis," Ms. Marsudi told *The Hindu* when asked about India's policy of direct engagement with the military rulers.

'Support five point consensus'

"We repeat again and again, please respect ASEAN, please support the five point consensus," Ms. Marsudi added, saying that she had last discussed the issue with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. Earlier in the year, ASEAN members and the U.S. had also conveyed their concerns to New Delhi and Colombo about their invitation to the Myanmar Foreign Minister for the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) virtual summit in March.

In late November, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra had visited Nay Pyi Taw, and in a departure from the past, did not meet with members of the deposed political parties. Nor did an official release refer to the ASEAN consensus, which previous releases from the Ministry of External Affairs had mentioned. Government officials have maintained that India's ties with Myanmar are important given that they share a porous border with incursions by militants, and need to engage the military leadership as regional rivals like China do.

Leading the global south

India and Indonesia are expected to strengthen their engagement in the next year given that India has now assumed the presidency of the G-20, where Indonesia is a member of the "troika" as the immediate past president. Indonesia has just assumed chairmanship of the ASEAN grouping as well.

Cultural diplomacy a bid to restore tradition, says Jaishankar

The Hindu Bureau

LUCKNOW

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Sunday said the cultural diplomacy of the Modi government was centred on “restoring our rich traditions for the benefit of the world” and a truly democratic and pluralistic world order must see a full expression of India’s heritage, abroad as much as at home.

Mr. Jaishankar, who is on a two-day tour of Varanasi, was addressing an event as part of *Kashi Tamil Sangamam* on ‘Contribution of temples to society and nation building’. He said temples were keepers of culture and history along with being centres of knowledge and promoters of arts and crafts.

“The cultural diplomacy of the Modi government is focussed on creating, rebuilding and restoring our rich traditions for the benefit of the entire world. This is *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (The World is One Family),” he said.

‘Key venue’

The External Affairs Minister said Varanasi would be hosting the G-20 Development Ministers’ meeting. “Kashi is one of the important venues for the G-20 meetings. And one of them, the Development Ministers’ meeting that I will chair, will be held here,” he said, addressing students and faculty at the Banaras Hindu University.

Mr. Jaishankar was speaking at the university on ‘India as a rising power in the changing global world order’.

'India needs policies which focus on job-rich growth and equality to move forward'

International Labour Organisation Director-General asks member countries to channel collective efforts to achieve social justice, decent work for all

INTERVIEW

Gilbert F. Hounbo

A. M. Jigeesh

In his concluding remarks at the 17th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting (APRM) of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in Singapore on Friday, ILO Director-General and former Prime Minister of Togo, Gilbert F. Hounbo, said he looked forward to continuing the consultations towards the development of the Global Coalition for Social Justice. He asked the member countries to ensure greater policy coherence among multilateral, regional and national stakeholders, and to channel the collective efforts and resources to achieve social justice and decent work for all. Developing institutional frameworks to support transitions towards formal

ity and decent work, to strengthen the foundations for social and employment protection and resilience, and to revitalise productivity growth and skills are also important according to him. In an exclusive interaction at the sidelines of the event, Mr. Hounbo said India should focus on job-rich growth and equality to address the crisis created by COVID-19 pandemic and other issues such as the Ukraine situation. Excerpts:

What do you think is the major outcome of this APRM?

We have to consider the most pressing issues in the region. The region needs to work more on the ratifications of the ILO standards and to implement them. There are several countries in the region where workers are facing problems. People are disappearing, people are being jailed. We need to find a better way to balance the



need for economic growth and respect for minimum right and protection for workers. This has come up in this meeting. With this, of course, the underlining issue of social dialogue was also taken up, along with issues of migrant workers from receiving and sending countries was discussed.

The participants were focused on deepening the debate on those issues and sharing their experiences so that countries can look forward to implement the suggestions of this meeting. The region is fast growing economically. But, frankly, I feel that the social

side is really lagging behind. This has a negative and direct impact on inequality.

There were two recent ILO reports flagging the problem of decrease in wages and the impact of inflation. What are your policy prescriptions for the member countries to face these multiple crises?

Obviously, the policies have to be adopted by each country according to its conditions. I am very careful not to give an impression of a top-down approach. Investment in job-rich and employment-rich sectors is the way forward.

Similarly, inflation is a big concern for all of us. We need price stability. Central banks are tightening the monetary space. When we are making these monetary restrictions, we have to look at the impact of these restrictions on the job market. We have to

make sure that such decisions should help control inflation but they do not worsen the precarious situation.

The situation in Ukraine was another major point for discussion. What are your views?

The whole globe is already suffering from Ukraine situation. Our first point would always be calling for cessation of hostilities and that everybody should be around the table for negotiations. My first call would be to stop the war and try to find an acceptable solution.

Secondly, Ukraine situation, coupled with other crises, is causing inflation and energy crisis. Those who are paying the price for this are those who have nothing to do with this crisis. Those who are left behind, particularly because of the inflation, are low paid citizens. They are forced to spend a big amount of the proportion

of their salaries for basic needs. I am very worried about fertilizer situation and the risk of food security. More than that, the whole danger is that the multiple crises, including the war in Ukraine, push much more people below the poverty line.

India, too, suffered due to this pandemic. How do you see the situation in India?

Countries such as India are recovering from the pandemic. As a G-20 country, India is very well-placed to move forward. By focusing on job-rich growth and equality, India can move forward further.

I am very worried about the consequences of COVID-19 in India. If the recovery is stalled because of inflation and other reasons, I am worried that it might increase inequality in a country such as India. India needs policies focusing on job-rich growth and equality.

High-level U.S. envoys to visit China in an attempt to repair ties

Agence France-Press

WASHINGTON

The U.S. government is sending its first high-level delegation to China since a pledge made last month by Chinese leader Xi Jinping and U.S. President Joe Biden to repair frayed relations.

Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Daniel Kritenbrink will join National Security Council Senior Director for China and Taiwan Laura Rosenberger on the December 11-14 trip.

The two will visit China, South Korea and Japan.

In China, Mr. Kritenbrink will follow up on Mr. Biden's meeting in Bali last month with Mr. Xi in which the pair pledged "to conti-

The meeting will also lay the groundwork for U.S. Secretary of State Blinken's visit to China in 2023

nue responsibly managing the competition between our two countries and to explore potential areas of cooperation", the State Department said.

Mr. Kritenbrink will also prepare for Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to China in early 2023.

In their Bali meeting, the two leaders discussed issues, including Taiwan's future, U.S. restrictions on Chinese high-tech imports and China's moves to expand its influence around the world.

Bill seeks EC role in parties' internal polling

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress MP Manish Tewari has introduced a private member's Bill in the Lok Sabha seeking the Election Commission to be made responsible for regulating and monitoring the internal operations of political parties in the country.

Calling the internal functioning of most political parties "opaque and ossified", the Bill seeks to

provide the EC with the necessary wherewithal to regulate the internal functioning of all political parties registered with it and to withdraw their recognition as national or State parties if they fail to comply with the directions of the Commission.

The Bill, named 'Constitution (Amendment) Act, 2022', also seeks to insulate the appointment process of Election Commissioners and mandates that

they should not be eligible for post-retirement jobs.

The proposed legislation seeks insertion of a new Article, 328 (A), to empower the EC to regulate, monitor and supervise the elections in registered political parties in accordance with their respective constitutions until a model internal code is prescribed by the EC. "It shall be incumbent upon all registered political parties to incorporate the model

election code into their respective constitutions after its formulation by the Election Commission," the Bill says.

It seeks appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner and Commissioners to be appointed by a panel of the Prime Minister, Home Minister, Leader of the Opposition or floor leaders in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha, Chief Justice of India and two senior-most judges of the SC.

What are the existing laws on religious conversions?

Which all States have passed legislations against forceful conversions? Have these laws been challenged on the grounds of being 'unconstitutional'?

Diksha Munjal

The story so far:

On December 5, a Bench led by Justice M.R. Shah said acts of charity or good work to help a community or the poor should not cloak an intention to religiously convert them as payback.

Do States have laws on conversions?

In post-independent India, Odisha became the first State to enact a law restricting religious conversions, which later became a model framework for other States. Odisha's 1967 Act provides that no person shall directly or indirectly convert any person from one religious faith to another by force, inducement or any fraudulent means. Later, Madhya Pradesh brought in the Madhya Pradesh Dharma Swatantraya Adhiniyam (1968).

This Act added a provision distinct from the Odisha law, requiring whoever converted any person, to intimate the District Magistrate that such a conversion had taken place. Failure to do so would attract punishment and fines. Subsequent Acts in other States over the past two decades see identical provisions.

These laws also provide for greater punishment for forceful conversion of persons from Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribe communities, minors and women. A recent paper in the *Economic and Political Weekly* highlighted how administrations often said that such provisions were in the best interest of these groups, painting them as "naive" and prone to be misled.

More than ten Indian States have passed laws prohibiting certain means of religious conversions – Arunachal Pradesh (1978), Gujarat (2003),

Chhattisgarh (2000 and 2006), Rajasthan (2006 and 2008), Himachal Pradesh (2006 and 2019), and Tamil Nadu (a law was enacted in 2002, but repealed in 2004), Jharkhand (2017), Uttarakhand (2018), Uttar Pradesh (2021), and Haryana (2022). The Karnataka Assembly also passed an anti-conversion Bill amid stiff opposition. Since 2017, multiple BJP-ruled States enacted or revised their anti-conversion laws, restricting religious conversions on the additional ground of marriage, supposedly to curb what has been described as "love jihad". For instance, the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021, says that a marriage would be declared "null and void" if the conversion is solely for that purpose, and those wishing to change their religion after marriage need to apply to the District Magistrate. Madhya Pradesh also passed a

new law in 2021 – the Madhya Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act (MPFRA), which the State's Home Minister Narottam Mishra described as having the strictest provisions compared to other laws. While other States prescribe that an individual must inform a District Magistrate 30 days prior to an intended conversion, the MPFRA increases this to 60 days, and makes it mandatory for both the individual and the priest facilitating the conversion.

Have these laws been challenged?

The Himachal Pradesh High Court in 2012 struck down certain provisions of the State's 2006 law restricting conversions, holding them "unconstitutional". The Court said that the individual converting their faith also enjoyed their right to privacy and the provision to give a month's prior notice to the District Magistrate violated this right. In 2021, the Gujarat High Court stayed some provisions of the Gujarat Freedom Of Religion Act, 2003, which the State amended in 2021 to add the grounds of marriage to prohibit conversions. This year, the Madhya Pradesh High Court also held certain provisions of the MPFRA unconstitutional. In November last year, the Allahabad High Court allowed several interfaith couples to register their marriages despite not having sought the DM's approval.

THE GIST

In post-independent India, Odisha became the first State to enact a law restricting religious conversions, which later became a model framework for other States.

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The Himachal Pradesh High Court said that the individual converting their faith enjoyed their right to privacy.

On amending the cooperative societies Act

What are the various changes in the the Multi-State Cooperative Societies (Amendment) Bill, 2022? Will it undermine the authority of the States? Why are Opposition parties rallying against the Bill? What are the concerns regarding the functioning of cooperatives in the country?

EXPLAINER

Diksha Munjal

The story so far:

The Bill to amend the Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act, 2002, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 7. Opposition parliamentarians alleged that the Bill's provisions encroached upon the rights of State governments, demanding that it be referred to a Standing Committee.

What are multi-State cooperatives?

According to the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), cooperatives are people-centred enterprises jointly owned and democratically controlled by and for their members to realise common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations. Multi-State cooperatives are societies that have operations in more than one State – for instance, a farmer-producers organisation which procures grains from farmers from multiple States. The board of directors are from all the States these collectives operate in and control all the finances and administration. There are close to 1,500 MSCSs registered in India with the highest number being in Maharashtra.

What are the issues with the cooperative sector?

The independent and autonomous character of cooperative societies was to be crucial in their functioning. However, H.S. Shylendra, professor at the Institute of Rural Management, Anand (IRMA) points out in a 2021 paper that the inclusion of cooperatives in the planning process as development instruments made the sector an avenue for dispensing patronage to the supporters of ruling political parties. Moreover, the policy of State governments to contribute to the share capital of the cooperatives enabled governments, “in the name of public interest” to directly intervene in the working of cooperatives which are legally autonomous. Notably, the potency of cooperatives as an apparatus of



Collective strength: An Amul dairy processing unit in Gujarat. VIJAY SONEJI

political control can be seen in States such as Maharashtra, Kerala, Gujarat, parts of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal. Besides, MSCSs were formed to ease the operation of collectives throughout the country. On the contrary, IRMA researcher Indranil De points out that in spite of their potential, MSCSs are facing issues regarding trust, which is the very basis of cooperation. This has brought MSCSs under multiple controls from the Centre. Monitoring is one of the important institutional functions in a collective organisation but if monitored from much above, it takes a top-down approach as opposed to a grassroots one. In 1991, the Choudhary Brahm Perkash Committee of the planning commission made far-reaching recommendations to reorganise multi-State cooperatives but researchers point out how the Act has not been modified as per the report.

What does the Bill seek to change?

To plug the “loopholes” in the MSCS Act,

the Centre introduced a Bill seeking to amend the 2002 law for more “transparency” and “ease of doing business”. The amendments have been introduced to improve governance, reform the electoral process, strengthen monitoring mechanisms and enhance transparency and accountability. The Bill also seeks to improve the composition of the board and ensure financial discipline, besides enabling the raising of funds in multi-State cooperative societies.

The Bill provides for the creation of a central Co-operative Election Authority to supervise the electoral functions of the MSCSs. The Authority will have a chairperson, vice-chairperson, and up to three members appointed by the Centre. Objecting these amendments, Congress MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said in Parliament that the Bill may lead to “the concentration of power of the Centre”, which could impact the “autonomy” of MSCSs and create potential for “misuse”. Notably, the constitutional domain of States in regulat-

ing cooperative societies was upheld by the Supreme Court last year when it struck down a part of the 97th Constitution Amendment.

It also envisages the creation of a Co-operative Rehabilitation, Reconstruction and Development Fund for the revival of sick multi-State co-operatives societies. This fund shall be financed by existing profitable multi-State co-operative societies which will have to deposit either ₹1 crore or 1% of the net profit into the Fund. Congress MP Manish Tewari pointed out that this would put an additional burden on MSCSs.

In order to make the governance of multi-State cooperative societies more democratic, the Bill has provisions for appointing a Cooperative Information Officer and a Cooperative Ombudsman. To promote equity and facilitate inclusiveness, provisions relating to the representation of women and Scheduled Caste/Tribe members on the boards of multi-State cooperative societies have also been included.

THE GIST

▼ The Bill to amend the Multi-State Cooperative Societies (MSCS) Act, 2002, was introduced in the Lok Sabha on December 7.

▼ Multi-State cooperatives are societies that have operations in more than one State – for instance, a farmer-producers organisation which procures grains from farmers of multiple States.

▼ The amendments have been introduced to improve governance, reform the electoral process, strengthen monitoring mechanisms and enhance transparency and accountability. The Bill also seeks to improve the composition of the board and ensure financial discipline, besides enabling the raising of funds in multi-State cooperative societies.

Consumers worried about income, but less so about economy

Over 50% continue to be pessimistic about the general economic situation in India: RBI survey

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

The share of urban consumers who were pessimistic about the Indian economy continued to decline in November 2022 as COVID-19 cases continued to decrease. The pace of decline in pessimistic levels also sharply improved. For instance, between January and May this year, the share of respondents pessimistic about the general economic situation declined from 66% to 63% – a 3%-point decrease. But between July and November, the share decreased from 63% to 55% – an 8%-point decrease. But over half the respondents (55%) continued to be pessimistic about the general economic situation. In the last three years (since November 2019), the share of pessimistic respondents has remained higher than 50%. The observations are based on the Reserve Bank of India's consumer confidence survey conducted across 19 major cities. The latest round of the survey was conducted between November 2 and 11, 2022, covering 6,089 responses.

Chart 1 shows the share of respondents who said the general economic situation worsened compared to a year ago and the share who said their employment scenario will worsen in the next one year. Chart 2 shows the share of respondents who said their income levels worsened compared to a year ago and the share who said their income levels will worsen in the next one year. Chart 3 shows the share of respondents who said their non-essential spending decreased and will decrease and those who said essential spending decreased and will decrease.

Chart 4 shows the share of respondents who said that price levels increased compared to a year ago and will increase in the next one year. Chart 5 shows the share of respondents who said their employment scenario worsened compared to a year ago and will worsen in the next one year.

Put together, given the sharp decline in pessimism about income levels between July and November. But with the decline in pessimism about the general economic situation, the confidence in the economy may also take a hit in the coming months or may not improve at a quicker pace as before.

The share of respondents who said that price levels increased also reached a peak (95%) in November 2022, as shown in Chart 4.

The share of respondents who said their non-essential spending decreased continued to decline with 44% saying so in November 2022. The share of those who said essential spending decreased also continued to decline to 4%, as shown in Chart 5. Non-essential spending includes expenses on consumer durables, motor vehicles, gold and jewelry, expenses on hotels and restaurants. Essential spending includes expenses on food, housing, fuel and electricity, essential clothing, education, medical amenities, transportation.

So, consumers are spending more freely despite saying that the price levels have gone up, probably as their incomes improved this year. However, if the decline in pessimism about income levels continues to be sluggish, their spending behaviour may change sharply going forward.

Measuring confidence in the economy

The graphs are based on the on the RBI's consumer confidence survey conducted across 19 major cities. The latest round of the survey was conducted between November 2 and 11, 2022, covering 6,089 responses

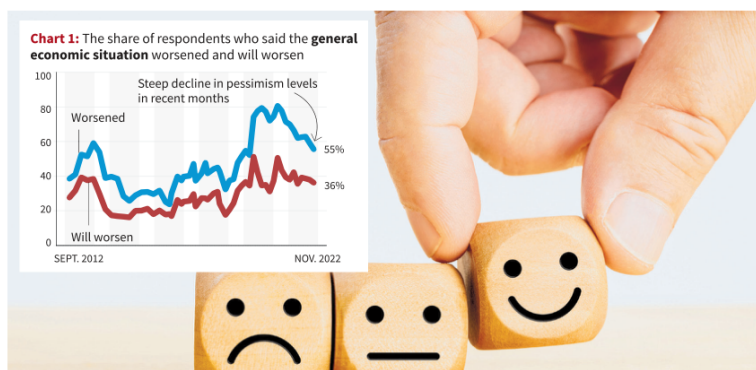


Chart 1: The share of respondents who said the general economic situation worsened and will worsen

Worsened
Will worsen
SEPT. 2012
NOV. 2022
55%
36%

Chart 2: The share of respondents who said their employment scenario worsened compared to a year ago and will worsen in the next one year



Chart 4: The share of respondents who said that price levels increased compared to a year ago and will increase in the next one year

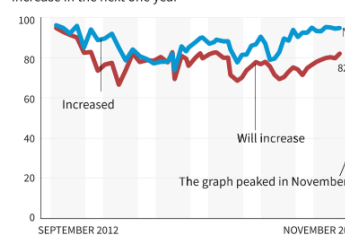


Chart 3: The share of respondents who said their income levels worsened compared to a year ago and will worsen in the next one year

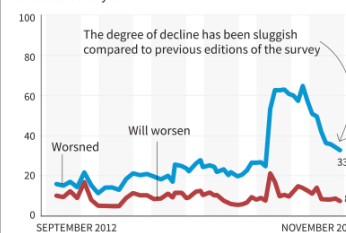
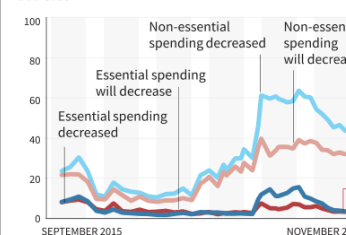


Chart 5: The share of respondents who said non-essential spending decreased and will decrease and those who said essential spending decreased and will decrease



A rise in the average wholesale price of wheat this year

22 The percentage by which the average wholesale price of wheat rose across India to ₹2,721 per quintal in November from ₹2,228 per quintal in January this year. Wheat production has declined from 109.59 million tonnes in 2020-21 to 106.84 million tonnes in 2021-22 due to heat wave in March and April, according to agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar. PTI

Crypto regulation a key focus area as G-20 finance talks begin tomorrow

Nearly 40 meetings have been planned across the country to 'add significant value to the global economic discourse'; Nirmala Sitharaman and Shaktikanta Das to steer the overall Finance Track

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A coordinated approach to regulating crypto assets, managing debt vulnerabilities and reorienting global financial institutions have been identified as critical focus areas of the Finance Track agenda for India's G-20 Presidency, which will kick off with the first meeting of G-20 finance and central bank deputies in Bengaluru on Tuesday.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das will steer the overall Finance Track during India's G-20 Presidency, with the first meeting of Finance Ministers and central bank Governors of member countries also scheduled to be held in the Karnataka capital from February 23 to 25.

Nearly 40 meetings have been planned under the Finance Track all over



Money matters: Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman with RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, in this file photo.

the country, with various working groups and four Minister-level meetings that "will endeavour to add significant value to the global economic discourse", officials said.

Combined effort

A globally coordinated approach to unbacked crypto assets, advancing the international taxation agenda, managing global debt vul-

nerabilities, advancing financial inclusion and productivity gains, financing for climate action and sustainable development goals, and financing "cities of tomorrow" are some of the key issues identified for focussed discussions during these G-20 meetings.

This week's parleys will be co-chaired by Ajay Seth, Secretary, Department of Economic Affairs, and Mi-

chael D. Patra, Deputy Governor of the RBI. Their counterparts from G-20 member countries, and from several other countries and international organisations invited by India, will participate in the two-day meeting.

"The Finance Ministry, after extended consultations, has curated a robust agenda which will ultimately feed into the G-20 leaders' declaration when Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosts the summit next year. We have imbibed the PM Modi's idea in his address at the Bali G-20 summit that 'the need today is that benefits of development are universal and all-inclusive' in the G-20 Finance Track agenda," Mr. Seth said on Sunday.

"We are hopeful the Finance Track will lead to sustainable and inclusive growth for all and bring more resilience to the global economy," he said.

INBRIEF



Modi opens Phase 1 of Mopa International Airport in Goa

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday inaugurated the first phase of the greenfield international airport at Mopa in north Goa. He said the airport would be named Manohar International Airport after former Goa Chief Minister Manohar Parrikar. He targeted the previous governments, saying they had adopted a vote bank approach for decades instead of finding what people needed in terms of public amenities. The Mopa airport is the second international airport in Goa, which is operated as a city enclave from the naval air station *INS Hansa*. PTI



GETTY IMAGES

What is end-to-end encryption and why are tech companies focusing on it?

Even though law enforcement agencies insist on encryption schemes which could enable 'lawful access by design', the move by messaging apps and technology giants to use end-to-end encryption to secure user data seems to be only getting stronger

Nabeel Ahmed

The story so far:

Apple, on Wednesday, announced it will be increasing the number of data points protected by end-to-end encryption on iCloud from 14 to 23 categories. The company claimed that with end-to-end encryption, user data will be protected even in case data is breached in the cloud. Similarly, Elon Musk, in November, said that he wanted Twitter DMs to be encrypted. He also shared that he is in contact with Moxie Marlinspike, creator of Signal who was willing to help out with encrypting Twitter DMs. However, government agencies are not happy with the development. The FBI in a statement to AP said that while it remains a strong advocate of encryption, it is deeply concerned with the threat that end-to-end encryption and user-only access pose. The agency insisted they hinder its ability to protect Americans from cyber-attacks, violence against children, and terrorism.

What is end-to-end encryption?

End-to-end encryption is a communication process that encrypts data being shared between two devices. It prevents third parties like cloud service providers, internet service providers (ISPs) and cybercriminals from accessing data while it is being transferred. The process of end-to-end encryption uses an algorithm that transforms standard text into an unreadable format. This format can only be unscrambled and read by those with the decryption keys, which are only stored on endpoints and not with

any third parties including companies providing the service. End-to-end encryption has long been used when transferring business documents, financial details, legal proceedings, and personal conversations. It can also be used to control users' authorisation when accessing stored data, which seems to be what Apple intends to do.

Where is it used?

End-to-end encryption is used to secure communications. Some of the popular instant-messaging apps that use it are Signal, WhatsApp, iMessage, and Google messages. However, instant messaging is not the only place where user data is protected using end-to-end encryption. It is also used to secure passwords, protect stored data and safeguard data on cloud storage.

Why are tech companies using it?

Apple, on its blog, cited data breach research, "The Rising Threat to Consumer Data in the Cloud", stating that the total number of data breaches more than tripled between 2013 and 2021. The company shared that data of 1.1 billion personal records were exposed in 2021 alone and that it is trying to address this rising threat by implementing end-to-end encryption. Apple also said that it believes the extra layer of protection would be valuable to targets of hacking attacks launched by well-funded groups. Mr. Musk has also publicly talked about his desire to improve Twitter's direct messages. Mr. Musk told employees that the company would encrypt DMs and work to add encrypted video and voice calling between users, according to a

report from *The Verge*.

The focus on end-to-end encryption seems to stem from the company's desire to position itself as a provider of secure data storage and transfer services. End-to-end encryption is also seen as a technology that secures users' data from snooping by government agencies, making it a sought-after feature by activists, journalists, and political opponents.

What does it mean for users?

End-to-end encryption ensures that user data is protected from unwarranted parties including service providers, cloud storage providers, and companies that handle encrypted data.

Apple on its support page shared that end-to-end encrypted data can only be decrypted by trusted devices where users are signed with their Apple ID. No one else can access this data and it remains secure even in the case of a data breach in the cloud storage.

The data can only be accessed with access to the device passcode, password, recovery contact, or recovery key. The technology also makes it harder for service providers to share user information from their services with authorities.

However, end-to-end encryption does not protect metadata, which includes information like when a file was created, the date when a message is sent and the endpoints between which data was shared.

Why are government agencies unhappy with it?

The FBI in a statement expressed

displeasure at the idea of increasing use of end-to-end encryption by technology companies. It said that while it remains a strong advocate of encryption schemes that give "lawful access by design", that would enable tech companies "served with a legal order" to decrypt data, it "continues to be deeply concerned with the threat end-to-end and user-only-access encryption pose", it said in a statement to the *Associated Press*.

Attempts by government agencies across the globe, in the past, to access encrypted data hosted and stored by tech companies have met with strong resistance.

In 2019, the U. S., the U. K., and Australia planned to pressure Facebook to create a backdoor into its encrypted messaging apps. The aim was to allow governments to access the contents of private communications according to a report by *The Guardian*.

Australia, in 2018, passed laws that would force tech companies and service providers to build capabilities allowing law enforcement secret access to messages on platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook.

The legislation, according to government agencies was necessary to prevent "terrorists" and other serious criminals from hiding from the law, according to a report by *Al Jazeera*.

While cryptographers and cybersecurity experts argue that attempts by law enforcement to weaken encryption with backdoors are ill-advised and could compromise the reliability of the internet, the move by tech companies to use end-to-end encryption to secure more user data seems to be getting stronger.

WASHINGTON

NASA's Orion capsule splashes down in Pacific after lunar mission



AFP

▲ NASA's Orion space capsule splashed down safely in the Pacific on Sunday, completing the Artemis-1 mission — a more than 25-day journey around the moon. After hurtling through the earth's atmosphere at a speed of 40,000 kmph, the uncrewed capsule floated down to the water with the help of three parachutes. AFP

'Clean Ganga' changes course to conservation, tourism, livelihood

Tourism Ministry to prepare comprehensive plan for developing tourism circuits along the Ganga in line with *Arth Ganga*, organic farming and cultural activities; exhibitions and fairs have been planned in 75 towns along the main stem of the river

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Marking a shift in emphasis, the Union government's flagship *Namami Gange* programme, conceived to improve the sanitation levels in the Ganga, is now geared towards conservation, tourism and providing livelihoods.

At a meeting on December 8 of the top body tasked with coordinating *Namami Ganga* activities and chaired by Union Jal Shakti Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, the thrust of decisions focused on having the Tourism Ministry develop a "comprehensive plan" for developing tourism circuits along the Ganga in line with *Arth Ganga*, organic farming and cultural activities.

Arth Ganga, or harnessing economic potential from the Ganga, follows from a directive by Prime



Myriad objectives: Since 2014, when the cleaning of the Ganga was launched as a marquee government programme, close to ₹30,000 crore had been sanctioned for various projects. PTI

Minister Narendra Modi in December 2019, after chairing a similar meeting of the Ganga taskforce.

Proceedings of the meeting suggest that along with developing "tourism circuits", the Ministry was planning exhibitions and fairs in 75 towns along the

main stem of the river; the Agriculture Ministry was taking steps to build organic farming and natural farming corridors; the Urban Affairs Ministry was focused on mapping drains and solid waste management, and the Environment Ministry was scaling

up afforestation and conservation efforts to protect the Gangetic river dolphin.

Asok Kumar, Director, National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG), said in a statement that in the past six months, several workshops and visits were organised for farmers who

were being "nudged and sensitised" to shift to "natural farming".

In States, the focus would be expeditiously completing projects and every Ganga district was expected to develop a scientific plan and health card for at least 10 wetlands and adopt policies for reuse of treated water and other by-products.

Since 2014, when the cleaning of the Ganga was launched as a marquee government programme, close to ₹30,000 crore had been sanctioned for various projects, including building and improving sewers and river rejuvenation activities.

Updated estimates from the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) suggest that of 408 projects sanctioned under the programme, 228 have been completed, 132 are "in progress", and the rest in various stages of tendering.

Arunachal yields a potentially new songbird

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Six birdwatchers trekked to a peak in Arunachal Pradesh's Changlang district in search of the rare and elusive grey-bellied wren babbler. They recorded a potentially new species of songbird they named after the Lisu, the local community.

The team comprising Praveen J. from Kerala, Subramanian Sankar from Tamil Nadu, Dipu Karuthedathu and Hemraj Duraiswami, and their local guides Yolisa Yobin and Rahul Baruah, had explored the Mugafi peak in Changlang district in March. Their findings were published by *Indian BIRDS*, a peer-reviewed journal of South Asian ornithology.



Six birdwatchers 'found' the Lisu wren babbler after scaling Mugafi peak in search of the elusive grey-bellied wren babbler.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The grey-bellied wren babbler is mostly found in Myanmar with some birds occurring in adjoining China and Thailand. There has been only one previous report of this bird from India when two specimens were collected from Mugafi close to the Myanmar border in 1988.

One of these specimens

is kept at the Smithsonian Museum in the United States.

Mugafi is 40 km from Vijaynagar, the remotest circle headquarters in Arunachal Pradesh. A 157 km road from nearest town Miao, much of it through the Namdapha Tiger Reserve, is yet to be completed.

"All the birds we found had a sweet song similar to that of the Naga wren babbler and quite unlike the trilling song of the grey-bellied wren babbler," Mr. Praveen said.

The team managed to take some photos and videos of the bird and recorded its songs over their two-day trek almost marred by incessant rainfall.

They came back and analysed the skins of other wren babblers in many museums, including one at as well as photographs from other sites. They tried to match their sounds with the existing recordings of the grey-bellied wren babbler.

"As the name indicates, the belly of grey-bellied wren babbler is grey. But all the photos we got

showed birds with a whitish belly. The single Smithsonian specimen from these mountains also had a whitish belly," Mr. Karuthedathu said.

When all the information was put together, the birdwatchers realised they have probably documented a new bird for science – at least a new subspecies, but more likely a new species.

The plumage in conjunction with the songs do not match with any known species, they found.

Establishing and naming a species or subspecies scientifically requires genetic material from these birds to be compared against other wren babbler species. But the team named the bird Lisu wren babbler.

Enforcement agencies stepping up action against pro-Khalistan forces

Devesh K. Pandey
NEW DELHI

A coordinated crackdown on pro-Khalistan elements within and outside the country has started yielding results for the law enforcement organisations, with the National Investigation Agency (NIA) succeeding in making two key arrests this month. About two dozen accused and suspects currently operating from overseas are under the scanner.

The latest arrest made by the NIA is that of alleged terrorist Bikramjit Singh, who was wanted in con-

nection with the September 2019 Tarn Taran bomb blast in Punjab. He was extradited from Vienna in Austria. Two persons were killed in a powerful explosion in a vacant plot on the outskirts of Pandori Gola village in Tarn Taran, leaving two dead and one injured. The three had been digging a pit to retrieve an explosive consignment when the bomb went off.

A day after the arrest, the Sarhali police station in Tarn Taran was targeted using a rocket-propelled grenade late on Friday night. Over the past one year, six such attacks have

The agencies have zeroed in on several suspects and accused in Europe, Canada and the U.S.

been carried out at the police and Army establishments in the State, said an official.

Harpreet Singh, who carried a ₹10-lakh reward for his alleged role in the Ludhiana court blast about a year ago, was arrested by the NIA after he landed at the Indira Gandhi International Airport from Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia on De-

cember 1. “Persistent attempts are being made by pro-Khalistani banned outfits to foment trouble in Punjab. Huge funds have been channelled from abroad. There is *prima facie* evidence that in the garb of music videos, also being advertised on a popular video sharing platform, violence is being promoted,” the official said.

The agencies have zeroed in on several suspects and accused in Europe, Canada and the United States, many among whom run large criminal syndicates in Punjab.

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-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 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