

VEDHIK
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ANALYSIS

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FOREWORD

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






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

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

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Jallikattu banned in Vellore, nearby districts in T.N. ahead of Pongal

Teams deployed in Jallikattu hotspots; move follows surge in COVID-19 cases

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT VELLORE

With a steep rise in the daily cases of COVID-19, the district administration in Vellore, Tiruvannamalai, Ranipet and Tirupattur, have banned the conduct of Jallikattu events, ahead of Pongal festival, as part of safety measures. A large group of Jallikattu enthusiasts gheraoed the Vellore Collectorate a few days ago, seeking permission from Collector P. Kumaravel Pandian, to organise the event during the festival.

As the daily cases touched 295 in Vellore on Sunday, the administration has banned

the event by directing revenue officials and police to prevent any such activities, especially in remote villages of the district.

"During the pandemic, such large public events are automatically banned. Special health and police teams were formed to check any violations on COVID-19 norms," Ranipet Collector D. Bhaskara Pandian told *The Hindu*.

Team deployed

Special revenue and police teams were also deployed in Jallikattu hotspots like Arani, Polur, Chengam, Cheyyar

and Vandavasi to prevent the conduct of the event in remote villages, especially along Jawadhu Hills in Tiruvannamalai during the festival. After meeting with the event organisers, the revenue divisional officers (RDOs) also got a written undertaking from the organisers in these areas that they will not hold such events due to the pandemic.

Shops at crowded towns in the Ranipet district, including Arcot, Walajah, Arakkonam, Ranipet town and Sholingur, are allowed to operate with adequate social distancing.

On an average, a 20-30 feet distance between each shop in these markets, with social distancing circles at



Ban on conduct: As the daily cases touched 295 in Vellore on Sunday, the administration cancelled Jallikattu and directed revenue officials and police to prevent the holding of the event, especially in remote villages of the district. •C.

VENKATACHALAPATHY

the shopfront, have been planned. Mobile health and police teams will be patrolling these congested spots. Currently, 3,750 beds in hos-

pitals are available with seven COVID-19 care centres, covering all seven taluks in the district.

The neighboring district

of Tiruvannamalai, the largest among the four, had a series of meetings with traders and small businessmen on relocating the existing market to the outskirts of the temple town.

Accordingly, the common market for flowers and vegetables will start functioning from two playgrounds from Monday, with one opposite to the Municipal office and another near the Gandhi Nagar Bypass Road in the town. Tiruvannamalai Collector B. Murugesu inspected these temporary markets, which will accommodate 340 shops, including 150 flower shops.

"Basic amenities like water, toilets, bus services and public addressing systems,

were provided in these markets. From Monday (January 10), devotees will be allowed to visit Arunchalaeswarar temple, only after showing two doses of vaccination certificate," said Tiruvannamalai SP A. Pavan Kumar Reddy.

Meanwhile, the complete lockdown in all the four districts on Sunday was peaceful. Around 2,750 police personnel were deployed for enforcing restrictions. Each barricaded checkpoints had a team of four policemen in these districts. Only emergency services and competitive examinations, with valid documents, were allowed. Essential services like milk, food delivery by online portals, parcels from hotels and pharmacies were allowed to

operate. A total of 253 patrolling teams were involved in ensuring zero violation on lockdown restrictions in Vellore.

"Travellers, except for medical services, were asked to return at six border checkpoints in the districts. Drones were also roped in to ensure 100% compliance," said Vellore SP S. Rajesh Kannan.

Helplines for issues related to COVID-19, including availability of beds, were also introduced in Tirupattur and Ranipet. The helpline numbers for Ranipet are 04172-27388; 04172-273166; 9489668833; 9443093916 and the ones for Tirupattur are 04179-222111; 04179-220020; 04179-226666; 04179-229008; 04179-1077.

Western disturbance brings more showers to the Capital

Air quality improves to 'satisfactory' category

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

The Capital continued to receive showers on Sunday under the influence of an intense western disturbance, bringing 5.4 mm of rainfall during the day.

The overcast conditions kept the maximum temperature in the city at 15 degrees Celsius, which is four degrees below normal. The minimum temperature settled at 13.8 degrees Celsius, which is seven degrees warmer than normal.

The IMD has forecast clear skies on Monday and a gradual fall in the minimum temperature. The forecast reads "mainly clear sky with moderate fog in the morning. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be around 17 and nine degrees respectively".

On Saturday, the Capital recorded its highest rainfall in a day for January in 22 years. The region has been



Biting cold: People warming up near a fire on a cold Sunday afternoon in the city. ■SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

under the influence of two back-to-back western disturbances that have been active since January 5.

The air quality was in the "satisfactory" category with an average 24-hour AQI of 69. The AQI bulletin and forecast by the Ministry of Earth Sciences, Govt. of India, said good rainfall activity, relatively stronger winds and reduced vehicular emissions led to significant improvement in air quality.

Former RBI Governor Urjit Patel joins Beijing-based AIIB

Will be Vice-President at Beijing-based multilateral bank

ANANTH KRISHNAN
HONG KONG

Former Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Urjit Patel has been appointed vice-president of the Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).

Mr. Patel will serve a three-year term as one of the multilateral development bank's five vice-presidents, and will take the place of former Gujarat Chief Secretary D.J. Pandian who had been, as Vice-President, leading the AIIB's investment operations and all sovereign and non-sovereign lending in South and South-east Asia.

Mr. Patel had resigned as RBI Governor in December 2018 in a surprise decision, citing "personal reasons" after serving for two years.

The AIIB, launched in Beijing in 2015, has approved more loans for India



Urjit Patel

than any other member of the bank. China is its biggest shareholder and India is the second-largest. The U.S. and Japan are not among its 104 members.

The AIIB has funded 28 projects in India amounting to \$6.7 billion. In an interview with *The Hindu* last year, Mr. Pandian, the outgoing Vice-President, had said the bank had "a very strong pipeline of projects" with regard to India and had transi-

tioned away from mostly co-financing projects with the World Bank or the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Initially, 70-80% of the projects were co-financed but now that share of projects is standalone.

It has recently emphasised green projects and supporting public health initiatives during the COVID-19 pandemic, besides infrastructure. In October, India applied for loans from the AIIB and ADB to procure 667 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines with the ADB expected to lend \$1.5 billion and the AIIB around \$500 million, under the ADB's Asia Pacific Vaccine Access Facility (APVAX) initiative.

Last year, the AIIB also approved a \$356.67 million loan to the Indian government to support the expansion of the Chennai metro rail system.

Devas can seize only 50% of Air India's assets, says Canada court

It quashes order permitting seizure of funds belonging to Airports Authority of India

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

In partial relief for India, a court in Canada has said that investors of Devas Multimedia can seize only 50% of Air India's assets held by the International Air Transport Association (IATA). It also quashed the order permitting seizure of funds belonging to the Airports Authority of India (AAI).

Earlier, in two separate orders on November 24 and December 21, Devas shareholders had received permission from the Quebec Superior Court to seize assets of the AAI and Air India held by the IATA in connection with the two arbitration awards it won for wrongful cancellation of its deal with ISRO's arm, Antrix, in 2011. Subsequently, Devas shareholders moved to freeze \$30 million belonging to the two entities, including \$17.3 million of ticketing fees collected on behalf of Air India.

Both Air India and the AAI then moved the court seeking quashing of its orders.

On January 8, the Quebec



Devas Multimedia Private Limited office at 'Prema Gardenia' complex in Bangalore in 2011. ■ V. SREENIVASA MURTHY

Superior Court rejected Air India's plea for quashing, but amended its earlier order and reduced seizure amounts to 50% of the funds held by the IATA retrospectively and prospectively. The relief came after Air India argued that its operation would be put in jeopardy especially given the global interruptions to the airline industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the court granted the AAI its motion to quash the November 24 or-

der after it said that it was an entity of the Indian state, enjoyed state immunity and that navigational charges and aerodrome charges collected by the IATA on behalf of the AAI were related to sovereign functions and not commercial functions. Queries sent to the Ministry of Civil Aviation and Air India on the future course of action remained unanswered till the time of going to print.

"Without going into detail into the extensive factual allegations aiming to establish

India's wrongful and abusive conduct towards Plaintiffs, the many actions, direct or indirect, of India within its country's boundaries to attack, inter alia, the Treaty Awards and to prevent their execution by Plaintiffs is simply mind-boggling to say the very least," the court observed. The setback for Air India comes weeks before it is to be handed over to Tata Sons as part of the airline's privatisation, though the new buyers enjoy indemnity from past legal claims.

The three Devas shareholders (Devas Mauritius Ltd., Devas Employees Mauritius Private Limited and Telcom Devas Mauritius Limited), who moved the Canada court, won two international arbitration awards for wrongful termination of its deal with Antrix – \$563.5 million from the International Chamber of Commerce in September 2015 and \$111 million from the Permanent Court of Arbitration in October, 2020. Shareholders are seeking to enforce the latter one.

Russia to stand firm on Ukraine in talks with U.S.

Kremlin disappointed with signals coming from NATO, EU

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
GENEVA

Russia ruled out on Sunday any concession at talks with the United States on soaring tensions over Ukraine, as Moscow, facing strong pressure to pull back troops, seeks a wide-ranging new security arrangement with the West.

Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov told Russian news agencies ahead of his talks in Geneva the Kremlin was "disappointed" with signals coming from Washington and from Brussels, where NATO and the European Union are based.

The high-level discussions kick off a week of diplomacy in which Russia will meet with NATO and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as the United States tries to assure European allies they will not be sidelined.

The Kremlin is insisting NATO must never grant membership to ex-Soviet Ukraine, which is pushing to join.

The United States, to be represented by Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman, agreed to talks even though it made plain that many of Moscow's proposals are non-starters.

Originally scheduled to start on Monday, Ms. Sher-



Sergei Ryabkov

man is now due to have a working dinner with Mr. Ryabkov on Sunday evening, a State Department spokesperson said.

"We will not agree to any concession. That is completely excluded," Mr. Ryabkov said before departing. "We are disappointed with the signals coming in the last few days from Washington but also from Brussels."

Putin-Biden meet

Russian President Vladimir Putin met his U.S. counterpart Joe Biden in Geneva in June and agreed on regular "stability" talks between Ms. Sherman and Mr. Ryabkov.

In two phone calls to Mr. Putin, Mr. Biden has warned of severe consequences if Russia invades Ukraine.

A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, warned that Washington would also send more troops to eastern NATO

members such as Poland and the Baltic states if Russia invaded Ukraine.

Europeans have showed solidarity, with European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell visiting the frontline in Ukraine.

"Whatever the solution, Europe has to be involved," European Union Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said.

"It is very likely that we will encounter the reticence of our U.S. and NATO colleagues to really perceive what we need," Mr. Ryabkov said on Sunday.

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg, meeting Foreign Ministers of the alliance on Friday, said there remained real risks of a Russian invasion.

But John Herbst, a former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, described the Russian troop build-up as a "gigantic bluff" by Mr. Putin to seek a negotiated agreement.

A Bill that could alter the mediation landscape

A spin-off from the Mediation Bill is its potential to help relieve some of the pressure on law enforcement agencies



R.K. VIJ

The Chief Justice of India (CJI), N.V. Ramana, while speaking at the India-Singapore Mediation Summit in July 2021 (<https://bit.ly/3F972Kt>) had said that mediation should be made mandatory as a first step in dispute resolution and that a law should be framed in this regard. The context was the huge pendency of cases in India. In his speech called "Mediation for everyone: Realizing mediation's potential in India", he emphasised the point that a movement needs to be launched to popularise mediation as it was a cheaper and faster dispute resolution mechanism. Months later in December 2021, the CJI, while addressing the Curtain Raiser and Stakeholders' Conclave of International Arbitration and Mediation Centre (IAMC) at the Hyderabad International Convention Centre, Hyderabad, said that courts should be the last resort for dispute resolution; therefore, one should explore the options of alternate dispute resolution.

Expressed in these laws

In India, though mediation finds legitimacy in some specific laws such as the Code of Civil Procedure, 1908, the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, the Companies Act, 2013, the Commercial Courts Act, 2015, and the Consumer Protection Act, 2019, there is no

standalone legislation as yet. The Tamil Nadu Mediation and Conciliation Centre, an initiative of the Madras High Court and India's first court-annexed facility with a mediation centre in every district, which was inaugurated in 2005 has significantly reduced the pendency of referred cases.

Bill scope

The Mediation Bill, 2021 (<https://bit.ly/3qZwEV8>), introduced in Parliament in December 2021, seeks to 'promote mediation (including online), and provide for enforcement of settlement agreements resulting from mediation'. In case of civil or commercial disputes, a person must try to settle the dispute by mediation before approaching a court or tribunal. Disputes not fit for mediation *inter alia* include those relating to prosecution for criminal offences, disputes involving allegation of serious and specific fraud, fabrication of documents, forgery, impersonation and coercion. However, there are certain provisions in the Bill which may help in improving the law and order situation in a locality and/or encourage compounding of criminal offences.

First, Section 7 of the Bill says that courts will be competent to refer any dispute to mediation relating to compoundable offences or matrimonial offences connected with or arising out of civil proceedings between the parties. Second, Section 44 of the Bill provides for 'any dispute likely to affect peace, harmony and tranquillity amongst the residents or families of any area or locality', to be settled through community me-



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

diation. Any settlement so arrived at, however, shall not be enforceable as a judgment or decree of a civil court. Third, the provisions of the Act shall not have overriding effect, *inter alia*, on the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizen Act, 2007 and the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013.

It implies that if any dispute (as referred above) is resolved through mediation, it may lead to a compounding of criminal offence arising out of that civil or commercial dispute. Similarly, if any local dispute has the potential to create a law and order situation, and result in the registration of a criminal case or cases, those could be avoided through community mediation. It is true that many serious offences are the outcome of minor disputes which are either not tackled properly or left unattended.

Therefore, though the proposed law primarily intends to resolve civil and commercial disputes through mediation, it has ample scope to relieve some of the pressure on law enforcement agencies. The law to prevent the sexual harassment of women at the workplace has probably been kept out of its scope so that an internal or local complaint commit-

tee is able to take up conciliation and close the case locally without involving a third party and detailed procedure. The law on the maintenance and the welfare of parents and senior citizens has also been kept out of its scope as offences under it are cognisable offences.

Section 320 in the Code Of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) provides for the compounding of certain criminal offences which shall have the effect of acquittal of the accused. There are about 43 criminal offences, from body offences to property offences, which can be compounded by the victim, and about 13 offences (of comparatively greater gravity) which can be compounded with the permission of the court. Here, the policy of the law is to promote friendliness between the parties so that peace between them is restored. A case may be compounded any time before the sentence is pronounced.

Court's view

The Supreme Court of India has held that if there is composition of an offence during investigation, the parties can either approach the court or the police. The police, on verification of the truth, genuineness and voluntariness of the composition, may record the statement of the victim and recommend to the Magistrate to accept the negative final report. The Magistrate after giving notice to the complainant can make an appropriate decision in the matter accepting the composition. In other cases, appropriate orders may be passed by the court, and leave granted to compound the offence. Thus, under both conditions, if a

dispute is resolved amicably, including through mediation, it may result in its compounding under the CrPC. The number of offences which can be compounded may also be increased – particularly property offences. Keeping in view the recommendations of the Law Commission in its 243rd report, Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, relating to cruelty by the husband or his relatives, can also be made compoundable. It may have far-reaching consequences in resolving matrimonial disputes.

The background

It is undisputed that many civil or commercial disputes are given the colour of a criminal offence and reported to the police so that they get resolved under the fear of arrest. Many criminal offences are a result of the fact that civil or commercial disputes could not be resolved amicably and in time. The police at times take minor cases lightly or reduce the seriousness of crime by converting a cognisable offence into a non-cognisable one. Some of these cases may become aggravated with time and assume serious consequences. Therefore, the proposed law of mediation, that has the mechanism of not only preventing the breakdown of law and order through community intervention but also the competence to smoothen the route to compounding of certain criminal offences, may ultimately relieve some of the pressure on the police also.

R.K. Vij is a former Special Director General of Police of Chhattisgarh. The views expressed are personal

Control rather than privacy

The Joint Committee report on the Personal Data Protection Bill has raised more questions than it has solved



JAIVEER SHERGILL

In India, where the personal data of citizens are at the mercy of companies and government and where is no privacy law, the *Puttaswamy* judgment and the Justice B.N. Srikrishna committee report that led to the Personal Data Protection Bill of 2019 came as a ray of hope. But the Joint Committee report on the Bill has failed to provide a robust draft legislation ensuring the privacy of citizens. Instead, it has carved out an architecture for a surveillance state.

Infallibility of state

Under the Constitution, fundamental rights are enforced against the state and its instrumentalities and not against private bodies. The *Puttaswamy* judgment held that the right to privacy is a fundamental right. However, the report has divided the digital world into two domains – government and private – and is based on the presumption that the question of right to privacy emerges only where operations and activities of private entities are concerned. Clause 12 of the Bill provides exemptions for the government and government agencies and Clause 35 exempts government agencies from the entire Act itself. Clause 12, which says personal data can be processed without consent for the performance of any function of the state, is an umbrella clause that does not specify which ministries or departments will be covered. Further, the Bill says, “harm includes any observation or surveillance that is not reasonably expected by the data principal”. This means if you install any software in your computer and the software violates the principle of privacy and data get leaked, the complaint of the data principal will not be legally tenable as the defence will be that ‘once you have installed the software, you should have reasonably expected this level of surveillance’. The government can use these provisions as a means of control and surveillance.

If private entities can be given a transition time to comply with the Act, why should the same not be extended to government entities? Why should they be given blanket exemption instead? The Committee has failed to provide formidable firewalls to protect the privacy of individuals and has also carved out a mechanism for government control over personal data. The provisions are ultra vires of the judgment on privacy.

For compliance with the provisions of the Act, a data protection authority (DPA) has to be appointed. The Bill elaborates on the functions and duties of the DPA. It is doubtful whether a single authority will be able to discharge so many functions in an efficient manner. The terms and conditions of appointment of the DPA also raise concerns. Unlike the Justice Srikrishna committee report which provided for a judicial overlook in the appointments of the DPA, the Bill entrusts the executive with the appointments. Although the report expanded the committee, the power to appoint the panelists vests with the Central government. While ensuring the protection of citizens’ fundamental right, it is necessary that the authority entrusted with the responsibility should work independently. Clause 86 says, “Authority should be bound by the directions of the Central Government under all cases and not just on questions of policy”. This makes the DPA duty-bound to follow the orders of the government. This weakens its independence and gives the government excessive control. Further, the appointment of the authority violates the principle of federalism. There is internal data flow and the States are key stakeholders in the process. Even if the proposed central authority issues directions to allow processing of data on the grounds of ‘public order’, it is important to note that ‘public order’ is an entry in the State List. If the pith and substance of the legislation are related to the State, then it has to be monitored by the State Data Protection Authority.

Economic cost of non-personal data

One of the objectives of the Bill is to promote the digital economy. But by including non-personal data within the ambit of the Bill, the Joint Committee has put a huge compliance burden on the economy. This will hit the MSME sector and small businesses harder as technical processes involving data-sharing are very expensive. The government-constituted panel headed by S. Gopalakrishnan also opposed the idea of including non-personal data in the Bill. Mandatory data localisation, it is estimated, will squeeze the economy by 0.7-1.7%. This may also invite similar measures by other sovereign countries which will hamper smooth cross-border flow of data.

The report has raised more questions than it has solved. In its present avatar, the Bill is more about surveillance and control than privacy. At the time of passage of the Bill, loopholes must be plugged so that India can have a robust data protection law.

Jaiveer Shergill is a Supreme Court lawyer and National Spokesperson, the Indian National Congress

Unchanged

After much loss of time, SC allows EWS quota income norm to stay for this year

It is a matter of considerable relief that the Supreme Court has allowed the commencement of counselling for post-graduate medical admissions under the all-India quota at a time when the long delay has caused a shortage of junior residents in the midst of an ongoing public health crisis. The Court's decision to uphold the 27% quota for OBCs, with reasons to be adduced later, has also helped the cause of giving a push to the admission process, which was put on hold months ago. It is somewhat disappointing that despite several hearings and the deployment of an expert committee, the controversial criteria for the 10% Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) remain unchanged for admission for 2021-22. As early as October 25, the Union government offered to put on hold the admission process during the pendency of the challenge to the introduction of the OBC and EWS quotas by a July 29, 2021 notification. A month later, it informed the Court that it wanted to revisit the criteria for EWS. It was in response to the Court's questions about the rationale of keeping the annual income criterion for the EWS quota at ₹8 lakh, the same income ceiling for those belonging to the OBC category to be eligible for reservation benefits. The time taken by the committee to reconsider the criteria and submit a report seems to have been in vain, as it has returned a recommendation that the existing norms be retained for the current year's admissions.

The Bench, taking into account the fact that the admission process cannot be further delayed, has chosen to allow the admission to proceed based on the norms spelt out in the July notification. However, the validity of the expert panel's recommendations will be decided when the Court takes up the matter in March. It makes one wonder why the Government postponed the counselling and took more than a month to get a panel to revisit the criteria, if it was ultimately going to press for the current year's admission to be allowed without any change. The Court, on its part, felt compelled to defer to the Government on this point, considering the urgency of the situation, as the alternative was staying the EWS quota for this year's admission. Its original point – that there cannot be a common income limit for those coming from a background of social and educational backwardness and those who are members of privileged classes, but with inadequate economic means – still stands. The outcome is that this year's batch may suffer from 'over-inclusion' if the norms are revised downwards from next year onwards. While the norms for EWS quota may get tweaked over time, the question whether there ought to be any reservation for the advanced classes solely on the ground that they have insufficient means is still before the Constitution Bench. An early decision will be most welcome.

Centre yet to notify rules of Citizenship Amendment Act

January 9 was the last day of the third extended deadline

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) did not notify the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 rules till Sunday, the third extended deadline after the Act was passed. January 9 was the last day of an extension it sought from the two parliamentary committees in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha to frame the rules.

It was not imminently clear if the Ministry had sought more time from the committee on subordinate legislation in the two Houses of Parliament to notify rules that will govern the CAA. Without rules, the Act cannot be implemented. Earlier, it had sought time till April 9, 2021 and then July 9, 2021 from the committees to notify the rules which are to be published in the Gazette of India.

The MHA did not respond if an extension has been sought from the committees.

On November 30 last, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai informed the Lok Sabha: "The persons covered under the CAA may apply for citizenship after the rules are notified under the CAA."

Earlier on August 4, the



Protest against CAA and NRC at Shaheen Bagh in 2020.

■ SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Minister had informed the Rajya Sabha that, "Eligible person covered by this Amendment Act may submit applications for grant of citizenship after appropriate rules are notified by the Central government."

As per the Manual on Parliamentary Work, in case the ministries/departments are not able to frame the rules within the prescribed period of six months after legislation is passed, "they should seek extension of time from the committee stating reasons" which cannot be more than for a period of three months at a time.

The CAA was passed by Parliament on December 11, 2019 and the Act was notified within 24 hours on December 12. In January 2020, the Ministry notified that the

Act will come into force from January 10, 2020.

The CAA provides citizenship on the basis of religion to six undocumented non-Muslim communities from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh who entered India on or before December 31, 2014. It exempts the members of the six communities from any criminal case under the Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Passport Act, 1920. The two Acts specify punishment for entering the country illegally and staying here on expired visas and permits.

83 killed

As many as 83 persons were killed in protests and riots from December 2019-March 2020 in Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Meghalaya and Delhi after the CAA was passed.

There are apprehensions that the CAA, followed by a country-wide compilation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), will benefit non-Muslims excluded from the proposed citizens' register, while excluded Muslims will have to prove their citizenship. The government has informed Parliament that "till now it has not taken any decision to prepare the NRC at national level."

Govt. issues revised plans of universal accessibility

Focus shifts to more holistic approach

DAMINI NATH
NEW DELHI

The Central Public Works Department (CPWD) released the Harmonised Guidelines and Standards for Universal Accessibility in India 2021 through its website in December 2021. However, an official associated with the project said a few minor tweaks were pending. The guidelines are a revision of the Harmonised Guidelines and Space Standards for Barrier-Free Built Environment for Persons with Disabilities and Elderly Persons released by the CPWD, under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) in February 2016.

Drafted by a team of the Indian Institute of Technology-Roorkee and the National Institute of Urban Affairs of the MoHUA, the revised guidelines aim to give a holistic approach.

“Earlier, the guidelines were for creating a barrier-free environment, but now we are focusing on universal accessibility,” Prof. Gaurav Raheja, principal investigator and consultant of the project, told *The Hindu*.

The guidelines say ramps are extremely crucial for providing an accessible mobility option, but it is equally important to understand that ramps have to adhere to given guidelines. The guide-



Construction of a universally accessible ramp in progress at a school in Kerala.

lines provide the gradient and length of ramps – for example, for a length of six metres, the gradient should be 1:12. The minimum clear width of a ramp should be 1,200 mm, the guidelines say.

The guidelines are not just for persons with disabilities (PwD), but for those involved in planning projects, from the construction of government buildings to master-planning cities, Prof. Raheja said.

While making public buildings and transport fully accessible for wheelchair users is covered in the guidelines, other users who may experience temporary problems have also been considered. For instance, a parent pushing a child's pram while carrying groceries or other bags, and women wearing saris.

Growth concerns

NSO forecast has not factored in the impact of the ongoing Omicron-induced surge in cases

The National Statistical Office's first advance estimates for economic output in the current financial year is an optimistic forecast that flags some positive trends as well as areas of concern that have the potential to derail the growth momentum. The NSO has projected real GDP for the 12 months ending March 2022 at ₹147.54 lakh-crore, a 9.2% expansion from the provisional estimate of ₹135.13 lakh-crore for the last fiscal year, when the full fury of the COVID-19 pandemic had caused output to contract by 7.3%. At that pace, India's economy would regain its pre-eminence as the world's fastest growing major economy. A key pillar of this growth assumption is the upbeat outlook for net tax receipts on products, which the NSO sees expanding by a robust 16.2%, after shrinking by 18.4% in the preceding period. Gross Value Added, which aggregates output in the various sectors of the economy, is projected to grow by 8.6% year-on-year on the back of a continued healthy showing by the farm sector and a heartening double digit (12.5%) rebound in manufacturing. However, when compared with the pre-pandemic FY2020's GVA, the projected output of ₹135.2 lakh-crore is barely ₹2.5 lakh-crore, or 1.9%, higher, clearly pointing to the fact that the economy has a fair distance to travel before it can regain the growth momentum that is crucially required to create more jobs and help narrow the widening income inequality.

Tellingly, the NSO's forecast, which relies on varied data spanning the first six to eight months of the current fiscal, has not factored in the impact of the ongoing Omicron-induced surge in COVID-19 cases. After all, it is anyone's guess as to how much of a blow the current wave may deal to already fragile supply chains, consumption demand and contact-intensive services. In fact, private final consumption expenditure, which two years ago accounted for close to 60% of GDP, is still struggling to recover from the crushing compression it suffered in the first full year of the pandemic, when it shrank 9.1%. While the NSO posits consumer spending to grow by 6.9% this fiscal, the assumed figure is still a sizeable 2.9% shy of the FY2020 level. Equally significantly, the omnibus services category that spans trade, hotels, transport, communication and broadcasting and makes up a fifth of the GVA is estimated to post a mere 11.9% expansion after shrinking by 18.2% last fiscal. As a result, even without factoring in the impact of a third wave, this vital services sector would still be lagging behind its pre-pandemic output by 8.5%. With the Union Budget barely a few weeks away, policymakers have a clear choice to make: introduce consumption and investment supportive measures, even if it means loosening the fiscal purse strings, or risk seeing the growth momentum faltering for want of a fair wind.

EXPLAINER

The Light Combat Aircraft programme

What is the LCA development project? What other fighter jet aircraft programmes are being envisaged?

DINAKAR PERI

The story so far: According to the Chief Managing Director of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), R Madhavan, HAL expects to deliver all Final Operational Clearance (FOC) variant aircraft to the Indian Air Force (IAF) in 2022 pending some systems from Israel, while the LCA-MK1A is expected to take flight in June this year. There is another 20 to 24 months of testing after which deliveries would begin with manufacturing activities going parallel to the testing.

The Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas was conceptualised in the year 1984. Since the first flight of the LCA technology demonstrator in January 2001, the indigenous single engine 4.5 generation multi-role fighter jet christened as 'Tejas' by then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in May 2003, has come a long way both in terms of the maturity of the platform as well as the overall aircraft development programme despite repeated delays and cost overruns. In all, 23 LCA aircraft of various configurations are on order so far.

What is the status of the LCA programme?

Two decades since the first flight, in February 2021, the Defence Ministry signed a ₹48,000 crore deal with HAL to supply 83 LCA-MK1A to the IAF. This includes 73 LCA Tejas Mk1A fighter aircraft and 10 LCA Mk-1 trainer aircraft at the cost of ₹45,696 crore along with design and development of infrastructure sanctions worth ₹1,202 crore.

The MK1A will have over 40 modifications over the MK1 variant including some major ones like a new Electronic Warfare system, Advanced Electronically Scanning Array (AESA) radar, Beyond Visual Range (BVR) missiles and network warfare system including Software Defined Radio (SDR).

LCA achieved Initial Operation Clearance (IOC) in December 2013 and FOC in February 2019. The IAF had earlier signed two contracts with HAL, for 20 IOC configuration aircraft including four IOC trainers on March 31, 2006 and for 20 FOC configuration aircraft including four FOC trainers on December 23, 2010. Both the deliveries have been delayed due to delays in the certification process.

The first IOC fighter aircraft was delivered in 2016 and the first LCA squadron No. 45 "Flying Daggers" in the IAF was formed in July 2016 with two aircraft. The first squadron is now complete and the second



LCA squadron No. 18 'Flying Bullets' was operationalised in May 2020.

What is the cost of the LCA development programme?

The Government had originally sanctioned ₹2,188 crore for Full Scale Engineering Development (FSED) – Phase-I programme to design and develop two Technology Demonstrators (TDs), and ₹5,777.56 crore for FSED – Phase-II Programme.

The objectives of Phase-II are fabrication of three Prototype Vehicles (PVs), establishment of production facility at HAL for production of eight aircraft per year and manufacturing and delivery of eight Limited Series Production (LSP) aircraft.

On the overall project cost, the Government informed Parliament in March 2020 that a total of ₹11,096 crore has been spent till date on the indigenous LCA and the Kaveri jet engine (now shelved) development programmes. Of the total amount, ₹9,063.96 crore was spent on LCA and ₹2,032 crore on the Kaveri Engine.

What is the way forward?

As per the contract, HAL has to deliver the first three MK1A aircraft to IAF in 2024 followed by 16 aircraft per year for the next five years, according to the Defence Ministry. To ramp up production, HAL has already set up two additional assembly lines which are operational. Some back end activities are also being finished at the moment, according to HAL.

The indigenous content in LCA is currently about 52% and HAL said it is looking at ways to increase it to 65%.

In addition, the LCA-MK2, a larger aircraft with a more capable engine is expected to roll out by year end or early 2023 following which it would take a year for its first flight. The LCA-MK2 brings significant capability enhancement to the LCA programme featuring new technologies, ability to carry heavy stand off weapons like Scalp, Crystal Maze and Spice-2000. It can also carry significantly higher payload, 6,500kg compared to 3,500kg by the LCA.

An ambitious fifth generation fighter aircraft Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), and a new Twin Engine Deck Based Fighter (TEDBF) to operate from the Navy's aircraft carriers are being developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA).

The AMCA is envisaged as a 25 tonne aircraft with internal carriage of 1,500kg of payload and 5,500kg external payload with 6,500kg of internal fuel with the roll out planned in 2024 and first flight planned in 2025, according to ADA officials.

The TEDBF is being designed based on lessons learnt from the Naval LCA programme and the first flight is planned in 2026. In addition to supplying to the IAF, HAL is aggressively pitching its helicopters and Tejas to countries in South East Asia and West Asia and LCA is in the contest in Malaysia. Stating that the price is competitive, Mr. Madhavan had earlier stated that each LCA MK1A jet would cost ₹309 crore.

To the skies: Final Operational Clearance version of LCA Tejas Mk-1 which the Indian Air Force added to its armoury in 2020.

FILE PHOTO

THE GIST

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■ Two decades since the first flight, in February 2021, the Defence Ministry signed a ₹48,000 crore deal with HAL to supply 83 LCA-MK1A to the IAF. LCA achieved Initial Operation Clearance (IOC) in December 2013 and Final Operational Clearance (FOC) in February 2019. The IAF had earlier signed two contracts with HAL, for 20 IOC configuration aircraft in 2006 and for 20 FOC configuration aircraft in 2010. Both the deliveries have been delayed due to delays in the certification process.

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