

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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Assam to settle border row with Meghalaya

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
GUWAHATI

Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma on Tuesday said a roadmap had been prepared for resolving the 50-year-old boundary dispute with Meghalaya. "Our efforts to resolve the border row have started bearing fruits as six of the 12 areas of

difference[s] have been identified," he tweeted on Tuesday.

"A roadmap has been prepared based on the recommendations of three Regional Committees with representatives from both the States. We've reached this stage after several rounds of CM-level talks," he said.

India extends \$500-mn credit to Sri Lanka for fuel imports

Move part of \$1.5 bn facility, follows recent \$900 mn relief

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

India on Tuesday extended a \$500-million Line of Credit (LOC) to Sri Lanka for urgent fuel imports, just days after providing \$900 million relief to the island nation, which is facing one of its worst economic downturns.

"External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar extended this critical support in his letter addressed to the Foreign Minister of Sri Lanka Prof. G.L. Peiris," the Indian High Commission in Colombo said in a statement on the emergency assistance Sri Lanka had sought to tide over its dollar crunch leading



to a shortage of essentials, including fuel, medicines, and certain food supplies. The announcement followed a virtual meeting between Dr. Jaishankar and Sri Lanka's Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa on Saturday, when they reviewed a \$1.5 billion credit facility to help

Sri Lanka augment its fast-depleting foreign reserves, crucial to importing essentials food items, medicines, and fuel. Of the \$1.5 billion, a sum of \$500 million was extended on Tuesday for fuel imports, the Indian mission said in its statement.

"These measures are in line with India's commitment to... contribute to Sri Lanka's economic growth and impart greater momentum to bilateral economic and commercial partnership." The balance is expected soon, Colombo-based official sources said, pointing to a total \$2.4 billion assistance from New Delhi.

Will do whatever it takes to keep MDP in power, says Nasheed

‘Abdulla Yameen’s campaign against India is making our people very uneasy’

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

Mohamed Nasheed, Parliamentary Speaker and former President of the Maldives, on Tuesday vowed to do “whatever it takes” to ensure that the ruling Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP), which he leads, remains in power.

“I think it is getting more and more crucial that the MDP remains in government. There is a lot of bad blood, especially with President [Abdulla] Yameen, and his campaign and narrative against India that is making our people very uneasy,” Mr. Nasheed told *The Hindu* in Colombo, during his visit to address Sri Lanka’s National Youth Parliament.

‘India out’ campaign

He was referring to the ongoing ‘India out’ campaign in the Maldives that has acquired more momentum, with former President Yameen backing it, after the Maldivian Supreme Court recently overturned his conviction in a money laundering case. Mr. Yameen, who was in office from 2013 to



Mohamed Nasheed

2018, is widely perceived as an ally of China.

On Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi’s recent visit to the island nation, Mr. Nasheed said: “I have always had the view that you cannot play one country against the other.” It is important for Male “to be good and honest with its friend”, he said. “India is our neighbour and the first port of call in everything. I don’t think that Indian assistance in the Maldives needs to be shadowed with something else,” he said.

Speaking of the economic challenge facing the Maldives, following the impact of the pandemic, Mr. Nasheed said:

“We have to repay some \$500 million outstanding debt this year,” while pointing to climate vulnerable countries’ specific predicament of servicing debt incurred on infrastructure assets, at the same time ensuring assets are not stranded due to climate-related calamities.

Poll strategy

While underscoring “the need to” keep the MDP in power, “to ensure that democracy continues”, Mr. Nasheed did not rule out running for the top office himself, something he has indicated earlier too. Asked if he had decided to contest the Maldives’s presidential elections due next year, he said: “Well, you know, there is always the thought of running, it doesn’t change.”

Mr. Nasheed, who has also been pushing the idea of a parliamentary system of governance in place of the current presidential rule, observed that the current system makes it impossible for any political party to secure over 50% of the vote

and win an election, without courting smaller political entities, some of them espousing “extremist” religious views. “And they have a disproportionate amount of power when we are in government,” he said.

Mr. Nasheed’s party colleague President Solih, he said, appreciates the challenges facing the Maldives and the solutions being put forward by him, but remained non-committal on who the final candidate might be. “I can’t see both of us contesting each other. I don’t think he would, either.” It could be either of the leaders, or neither, he indicated, adding he will do “whatever it takes” to keep their party in power.

The “most important thing”, he reiterated, was that the MDP remains in power. “It is very important that we have another term, because of democracy. That is paramount for me,” said the leader, who, in May, was targeted in an explosion outside his residence in what police called “an act of terror”.

Preventing genocide

It is imperative that international legal protections against genocide are incorporated in domestic legislation



PRIYA PILLAI

In the last few weeks, incendiary speeches by Yati Narsinghanand at a religious assembly have reignited discussion regarding hate speech, and the limits of the law. The speeches made include calls for the genocide of Muslims in India and can be seen as part of an ongoing pattern of targeting minorities. In discussions regarding the applicable law, a fundamental point must not be missed - the international legal obligations that are incumbent upon India, by virtue of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide of 1948, which India has signed and ratified.

Objective of the Convention

Raphael Lemkin is credited with the use of the term 'genocide' and campaigned relentlessly for it to become an international treaty. In 1946, Cuba, India and Panama co-sponsored General Assembly Resolution 96(I), which affirmed genocide as a 'crime under international law'. As a result of this resolution, a convention on the prohibition of genocide was drafted, which was passed by the General Assembly in 1948 and came into effect in 1951, with more than 150 states party to the convention presently. The Genocide Convention has as its objective the prevention of genocide as well as the punishment of the crime. Legal obligations on states that are party to the convention include the obligation not to commit genocide, to prevent genocide, and to punish genocide (Article I), to enact legislation to give effect to the provisions of the convention (Article V); to provide for effective penalties for those found guilty of criminal conduct (Article V); and the obligation to try those charged with genocide in a competent tribunal (Article VI).

It is no small irony that India was an early and key sponsor of the General Assembly resolution condemning genocide and confirming its status as an international crime. However, since signing the Genocide Convention and ratifying it, to date India has not enacted any legislation in accordance with Article VI of the Genocide Convention. At the outset, India is in violation of its international obligation to criminalise genocide within its domestic law per Articles V, VI and VII, and to take all means to ensure the prevention of genocide.

An examination of Indian domestic law shows that there are no comparable provi-

sions for the prosecution of any mass crimes, least of all genocide. Indian Penal Code provisions relating to rioting, unlawful assembly and 'promoting enmity between different groups' do not embody the basic elements of the crime of genocide, which is against a collectivity or a group, with the specific intent to cause its destruction. These also do not pertain to another key aspect of the Genocide Convention - that of prevention, and creating the conditions in which such hate speech and other associated acts are not allowed to flourish, which may facilitate the commission of genocide.

Significant legal development

It is also worth noting a significant and recent international legal development relating to the Genocide Convention. The Gambia has initiated proceedings before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) against Myanmar on the basis of the Convention. While the case is still in the early stages, it is noteworthy for a key point - that the court seems to have, in its first ruling, taken note of a key argument of The Gambia - that the Genocide Convention embodies such a key concern that even a state that may not be specially affected can still raise a legal claim on the basis of being part of the community of states. This is a significant legal development and will have implications for the future. The ICJ, relying on a previous case of *Belgium v. Senegal*, stated, "It follows that any State party to the Genocide Convention, and not only a specially affected State, may invoke the responsibility of another State party with a view to ascertaining the alleged failure to comply with its obligations erga omnes partes, and to bring that failure to an end."

The ICJ previously addressed the question of violation of the Genocide Convention in the Case Concerning the Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (*Bosnia and Herzegovina v. Serbia and Montenegro*). In its final judgment in 2007 the court found a failure to prevent genocide by Serbia. The breaches of the Genocide Convention related to the obligations to prevent and the lack of cooperation, but not for the commission of genocide.

In the overall analysis, it is more imperative than ever that international legal protections against genocide are incorporated in domestic legislation. Furthermore, the fact that India has international legal obligations under the Genocide Convention which it is not adhering to must be rectified.

Priya Pillai is an international lawyer, who previously worked at the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, The Hague

Escalation of the 'forgotten war' in Yemen

The fight over Marib, which is outside Houthi control, will decide the outcome of the conflict



TALMIZ AHMAD

The new year began badly for Yemen. On January 2, the Houthis hijacked a UAE-flagged ship, *Rwabee*, in the Red Sea, alleging that it was carrying military cargo. Seven of its eleven crewmen are Indians. The Saudis retaliated with massive bombardment of Sanaa airport and then diverted a ship carrying fuel to Yemen to its own port. The Houthis have refused to release the vessel despite a United Nations Security Council resolution and have criticised the United Nations for siding with "murderers who violate international laws".

The two-year fighting to take the energy-rich province of Marib has intensified. The Houthis are just 20 km from the provincial capital, but now face freshly deployed crack troops mobilised by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) - the 'Giants Brigade' that is rapidly moving north after taking Shabwa province.

The war in Yemen will complete seven years in March. As 2021 ended, nearly 3,50,000 Yemenis had died, with 60% dying because of being denied food, clean water and healthcare. Seventy-five per cent of Yemen now lives below the poverty line.

After the Arab Spring

After President Ali Abdullah Saleh, in place since 1978, stepped down in the wake of the Arab Spring uprisings in 2012, he was allowed to retain his ill-gotten wealth and stay on in the country. From the outset, he worked to undermine his successor, Abd Rabbo Mansour Hadi. Seeing the weak government in Sanaa, the Houthis, representing the disgruntled Zaydi/Shia community which had been marginalised in political and economic spheres by Mr. Saleh (under Saudi pressure), seized the opportunity to assert their claims for inclusion in national governance. The militants of the movement, Ansarullah, descended on the capital and, in January 2015, forced the Hadi government to seek exile in Riyadh.

Large sections of the Yemeni armed forces loyal to Mr. Saleh now



AP/PTI

joined the Houthis to take control of the country. This raised serious concerns in Saudi Arabia - though the Zaydis had few doctrinal or political ties with Iran, the kingdom viewed them as surrogates of the Islamic Republic on the basis of their sectarian affiliation. Saudi Arabia commenced a bombing campaign on Yemen on March 26, 2015. In 2015-21, there were about 25,000 Saudi air attacks on Yemen, with the Houthis retaliating with about 4,000 missile and drone attacks. During the fighting, Iran-Houthi ties have strengthened, with substantial military supplies sustaining the Houthi war effort.

Geopolitical competitions

After seven years of fighting, the conflict has now mutated into a fierce regional competition for geopolitical advantage. While Hodeidah port is under Houthi control, it is blockaded by the Saudi navy, while its Yemeni partners are ranged outside the city. Again, while Taiz is with the Houthis, forces from Al-Islah, the kingdom's Islamist partners, are in the west of the province. In the south, the UAE-supported separatist entity, Southern Transition Council (STC), controls Aden and much of the southern territory.

The UAE and Saudi Arabia are now engaged in a major territorial re-ordering of Yemen. The former is seeking unchallenged influence over the strategically valuable Bab al-Mandeb strait. At its narrowest, this strait is just about 30 km wide; it links Asia with Africa and, through the Suez Canal, with Europe. Ten percent of global trade traverses these waters annually. By 2050, the value of this trade is expected to grow from \$880 billion to \$4.7 trillion, while the GDP

of the littoral states is expected to go from \$1.8 trillion to \$6.1 trillion.

The UAE has now taken control of littoral ports and islands on both sides of the Red Sea - in Eritrea, Puntland and Somaliland - besides Aden and Mocha in Yemen. While initially the UAE had sought to establish a military presence in the region, its priority now is to develop the ports to make the region a major commercial hub. However, it retains its objective of protecting the area from militants and flow of weaponry, and maintains a military presence at Perim Island, at the mouth of Bab al-Mandeb, and Socotra Island, off the Yemeni coast in the Gulf of Aden. The UAE is also partnering with Israel in this area to neutralise any effort by Iran to intervene in these waters through its Houthi allies.

The Saudi geopolitical interest is at the other end of Yemeni territory - the Al-Mahra province that abuts Oman's entire southern border and also has a 560-km coastline on the Arabian Sea. This province has so far been cut off from the conflict.

The kingdom has been expanding its presence in this province since 2017 by taking control of Nishtun port, the Ghaydah airport, and two border crossings with Oman. The Saudi interest is to construct an oil pipeline from its Eastern Province to Nishtun port on the Arabian Sea, thus bypassing the Strait of Hormuz where Iran has a dominant presence. The Saudis have been pushing this proposal since the 1980s, but made no headway earlier as they insisted on placing their own security forces at a 4-km buffer zone along the pipeline. Taking advantage of the ongoing conflict, the kingdom is preparing for a long-term military presence in

this province.

The fight over Marib, the last province in north Yemen outside Houthi control, will decide the outcome of this seven-year conflict. The city now has two million people and provides 90% of the country's oil and gas. With the Giants Brigade moving to the front, there could be some heavy civilian casualties. The Houthis have sought to deter the UAE-supported forces in Marib with drone attacks on Monday on an oil facility in Abu Dhabi and the airport. They have also condemned UAE efforts to control the shipping lanes in the Red and Arabian Seas to serve U.S. and British interests, and have threatened further attacks on Abu Dhabi.

The Houthi game plan

Victory in this conflict will give the Houthis the financial resources to consolidate their rule over the north of Yemen, possibly resurrecting the former North Yemen that had existed before unification with the south in 1990. North Yemen then had a Zaydi majority and had been ruled by Zaydi imams for a millennium, until the republican revolution of 1962. As of now, the Houthi game plan seems to be to consolidate itself in the north, put in place a functioning administration with Marib's resources, and then seek international recognition and humanitarian assistance.

Here, Saudi and UAE interests are likely to diverge. The UAE may find the de facto partition of Yemen acceptable as it would retain its control over the southern ports and the Bab al-Mandeb strait, and manage the south through the STC it has sponsored. But Houthi control of the north will not be acceptable to the kingdom as it will view this as an Iranian proxy planting itself along its porous 1,400-km border. To add to Saudi concerns, a former Lebanese general has also predicted that, after taking Marib, the Houthis could cross the border to "liberate" the former Yemeni provinces that are now part of the kingdom. Thus, continued fighting in Yemen is the most likely prospect for the country. And, with limited interest in the conflict in the international community, this will remain a "forgotten war".

Talmiz Ahmad is the former ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Oman and the UAE, and had earlier served as Charge d'Affaires in North Yemen

EXPLAINER

The Houthi attack on the United Arab Emirates

Who are the Houthis? What is the underlying conflict threatening regional stability?

STANLY JOHN

The story so far: A suspected drone attack on Monday in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), caused multiple explosions in which three people were killed –two Indians and one Pakistani. The Shia Houthi rebels of Yemen, who have been controlling the northern parts of the country, including the capital Sana'a, for almost seven years, have claimed responsibility for the attack. While the UAE hasn't confirmed the Houthi claims, its officials said to the media that the explosions were caused by a suspected drone attack. On Tuesday, the Saudi-led coalition that is fighting the Houthis in Yemen, launched air strikes on Sana'a.

Who are the Houthis?

The roots of the Houthi movement can be traced to "Believing Youth" (Muntada al-Shahab-al-Mu'min), a Zaydi revivalist group founded by Hussein al-Houthi and his father, Badr al-Din al-Houthi, in the early 1990s. Badr al-Din was an influential Zaydi cleric in northern Yemen. Inspired by the Iranian revolution of 1979 and the rise of Hezbollah in southern Lebanon in the 1980s, Badr al-Din and his sons started building vast social and religious networks among the Zaydis of Yemen, who make up roughly one-third of the Sunni-majority country's population. The Zaydis are named after Zayd Bin Ali, the great grandson of Imam Ali, Prophet Mohammed's cousin and son-in-law who Shias, Sunnis and Zaydis revere. Zayd Bin Ali had led a revolt against the Umayyad Caliphate in the eighth century. He was killed, but his martyrdom led to the rise of the Zaydi sect. While the Zaydis are seen part of the Shia branch of Islam, both in terms of theology and practice, they are different from the 'Twelver' Shias of Iran, Iraq and Lebanon.

For centuries, the Zaydis were a powerful sect within Yemen. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918, the Zaydis would establish a monarchy (the Mutawakkilite Kingdom) in the country. But their dominance would come to an end in 1962 when the Egypt-backed republicans overthrew the monarchy. When Badr al-Din al-Houthi and his son Hussein launched the Believing Youth, the plan was to reorganise the Zaydi minority. But when the movement turned political and started attacking the

"corrupt" regime of Ali Abdullah Saleh and his support for the U.S.'s war on terror, it became a thorn on Saleh's side. They called themselves Ansar Allah (Partisans of God), mobilised tribesmen in the north against the Government and chanted "Death to America". In 2004, Saleh's government issued an arrest warrant against Hussein al-Houthi. He resisted the arrest, starting an insurgency. In September, the Government troops attacked the rebels and killed Hussein. Since then, the Government launched multiple military campaigns in Sa'dah, the Zaydi stronghold, to end the resistance, which was locally called the Houthi movement, after their "martyred" leader. But it only strengthened the Houthis, who, by 2010, when a ceasefire was reached, had captured Sa'dah from the Government troops.

What led to the Houthis' rise?

When protests broke out in Yemen in 2011 as part of the Arab Spring protests that felled Tunisian and Egyptian dictators, the Houthis, now confident from their military victories and the support they enjoyed in Sa'dah, backed the agitation. President Saleh, a Zaydi who was in power for 33 years, resigned in November, handing the reins to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi, a Saudi-backed Sunni. Yemen, under the tutelage of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, started a national dialogue to resolve internal differences. The Houthis were part of the dialogue. But they fell out with the transitional Government of Mr. Hadi, claiming that the proposed federal solution, which sought to divide the Zaydi-dominated north into two land-locked provinces, was intended to weaken the movement. They soon got back to insurgency. Saleh, who was sidelined by the interim government and its backers, joined hands with his former rivals and launched a joint military operation. By January 2015, the Houthi-Saleh alliance had captured Sana'a and much of northern Yemen, including the vital Red Sea coast. (Later the Houthis turned against Saleh and killed him in December 2017).

Why did Saudi Arabia attack Yemen?

The rapid rise of the Houthis in Yemen set off alarm bells in Riyadh which saw them as Iranian proxies. Saudi Arabia, under the new, young Defence Minister, Mohammed Bin Salman, started a military campaign in



March 2015, hoping for a quick victory against the Houthis. But the Houthis had dug in, refusing to leave despite Saudi Arabia's aerial blitzkrieg. With no effective allies on the ground and no way-out plan, the Saudi-led campaign went on with no tangible result. In the past six years, the Houthis have launched multiple attacks on Saudi cities from northern Yemen in retaliation for Saudi air strikes. In 2019, the Houthis claimed the attack on two Saudi oil installations that knocked out, briefly, half of the kingdom's oil output (the Houthi claim was disputed by experts and governments, who said the attack was too sophisticated for the rebels to carry out. The U.S. has blamed Iran).

The Houthis have established a Government in the north. The Supreme Political Council, headed by its President, Mahdi al-Mashat, is the executive branch of their rule. Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, Hussein's brother, leads the movement. There are serious allegations against both the Saudis and the Houthis in the war.

While the Saudi bombings caused a large number of civilian deaths, the Houthis were accused, by rights groups and Governments, of preventing aid, deploying forces in densely populated areas and using excessive force against civilians and peaceful protesters.

Why did the Houthis target the UAE?

This is not the first time the Houthis attacked the UAE. In 2018, when the UAE-backed forces were making advances in Yemen, the Houthis claimed attacks against the Emirates. Since then, the UAE pulled out its troops from Yemen and offered tactical support to the Southern Transitional Council, a group of rebels based in Aden, that was also fighting the Saudi-backed Government forces of President Hadi. During this period, the Houthis stayed focussed entirely on Saudi Arabia and Saudi-backed forces inside Yemen. But in recent months, Giants Brigades, a militia group largely made up of Southern Yemenis (backed by the UAE) and the Joint Forces (the militia led by a nephew of the slain former President Saleh) turned their guns against the Houthis. They inflicted major damages on the Houthis in Shabwah on the Arabian coast and have, with Government troops, pushed into the Houthi territories in al-Bayda and Marib. By flying armed drones undetected all the way from northern Yemen to the Gulf coast, either across Saudi Arabia or through the Gulf of Oman, and carrying out attacks on Abu Dhabi, the second most populous city in the tiny UAE, the Houthis appear to have sent a clear message to the Emiratis – stay out of Yemen or face more attacks.

Air strikes: In this satellite image provided by Planet Labs PBC, smoke rises over an Abu Dhabi National Oil Co. fuel depot which was attacked by drones in the Mussafah neighbourhood of Abu Dhabi, UAE on Monday, January 17, 2022.

AP

Drone attacks 'unacceptable', says India

Embassy working to bring back bodies of two Indians who were killed in explosion at UAE oil firm

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Terming the drone attacks by Houthi rebels in Abu Dhabi that left two Indians dead and two others injured, as "unacceptable", India on Tuesday expressed solidarity with the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

In a telephone conversation, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan exchanged condolences over the attacks that led to fuel tank explosions at the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) facilities in the Emirati capital on Monday, in which three ADNOC employees – two Indians and one Pakistani – were killed and six others injured. The Ministry of External Affairs said Mr. Jaishankar had condemned the attack and "emphasised that in this day



Site targeted: A view of the Musaffah industrial district in Abu Dhabi where a drone attack led to the explosion of petrol tanks near the storage facility of oil giant ADNOC. • AFP

and age, such an attack on innocent civilians was completely unacceptable and against all civilised norms".

The conversation came on a day the Saudi and UAE-led coalition bombed the Yemeni capital Sana'a in reprisals for the drone attacks for which Houthis claimed res-

ponsibility, killing at least 11 people, according to local reports, even as tensions in the Gulf region threatened to rise. However, the strikes weren't referred to in the readouts issued by India or UAE.

Indian Embassy officials said they were coordinating

with local authorities to complete formalities needed to send the bodies of the two Indians back as early as Wednesday, while the two Indians injured in the attacks have been discharged after medical treatment. The Embassy said it had established the identity of the two de-

ceased Indian nationals but did not disclose their names.

"[I] conveyed our strong solidarity with UAE in face of such unacceptable acts," wrote Mr. Jaishankar in a tweet. "Our Embassy is working with UAE authorities to provide the fullest support to families of the deceased," he added.

A statement issued by the UAE Foreign Ministry said Mr. Jaishankar had "expressed India's strong condemnation and denunciation of the terrorist attack by the terrorist Houthi militia on civil areas and facilities in the UAE."

Mr. Zayed spoke to Mr. Jaishankar amidst a number of telephone calls with his counterparts in the region, a day after the UAE Foreign Ministry had called on the international community to "condemn and completely reject these terrorist acts".

'Germany may consider halting Nord Stream 2'

Scholz faces heat amid Ukraine row

REUTERS
BERLIN

Germany is ready to discuss halting the Nord Stream 2 pipeline should Russia attack Ukraine, Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Tuesday, responding to increasing domestic and international pressure amid a Russian military build-up on Ukraine's borders.

"It is clear that there will be a high price to pay and that everything will have to be discussed should there

be a military intervention in Ukraine," Mr. Scholz told reporters, responding to a question on Nord Stream 2 after meeting NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

Mr. Stoltenberg said he had invited NATO allies and Russia to a series of meetings at the NATO-Russia Council to discuss ways to improve the security situation, after a first round of talks was held last week in Brussels.

Saudi Arabia hits back at Houthi rebels after UAE drone attack

14 persons dead in strike on Sana'a; the coalition also intercepted eight drones

REUTERS
ADEN

An air strike killed about 14 persons in a building in the Yemeni capital of Sana'a, residents said on Tuesday, during strikes across the city launched by the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Houthi group.

The alliance' strikes on Houthi-held Sana'a followed an attack claimed by the Iran-aligned Houthis on Monday on coalition partner the United Arab Emirates, in Abu Dhabi, in which three persons were killed.

The coalition also said it intercepted eight drones launched toward Saudi Arabia on Monday.

Early on Tuesday, the coalition said it had begun airstrikes against strongholds and camps in Sana'a belong-



Mangled remains: Yemenis on Tuesday inspecting the damage following an attack by the Saudi-led coalition, in Sana'a. ■ AFP

ing to the Houthi group, Saudi state media said.

Deadliest since 2019

The strikes appeared to be the deadliest since 2019 on Sana'a.

The strike that killed about 14 persons, according to initial estimates, was on the home of a former mili-

tary official. It killed him, his wife, his 25-year-old son, other family members and some unidentified people, a medical source and residents told *Reuters*.

Coalition strikes around the city had killed a total of about 20 people, the Deputy Foreign Minister for the Houthi administration,

which holds much of northern Yemen, said on Twitter.

Houthi-run *Al Masirah TV* said strikes had damaged houses, killed at least a dozen people and wounded about a dozen.

'Right to respond'

The UAE has armed and trained Yemeni forces that recently joined fighting against the Houthis in Yemen's energy-producing regions of Shabwa and Marib.

Monday's Houthi-claimed attack on two sites in the UAE set off explosions in fuel trucks, killed three persons, including two Indians and a Pakistani, and ignited ablaze near Abu Dhabi airport.

In response, the UAE said it reserved the right to respond to "terrorist attacks and criminal escalation".

Marital rape, gender-neutral laws come up at NCW meet

Discussion held to review criminal law from women's perspective

JAGRITI CHANDRA
NEW DELHI

At a consultation organised by the National Commission for Women on amendments to criminal law on Tuesday, there was unanimity among speakers that marital rape should be criminalised. The meeting also discussed rising instances of cybercrime against women and the need for gender-neutral rape laws.

The NCW is expected to have another round of dis-

cussion on this issue, following which it will send the recommendations to the Ministry of Home Affairs, which is looking at a review of the criminal laws, including the Indian Penal Code, 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872. The meeting comes at a time the Delhi High Court is hearing multiple petitions on making marital rape an offence and the Centre has sought more time to present its stand.

The petitions have sought striking down the exception to Section 375 of the IPC, which says forcible sexual intercourse or sexual acts by a man with his own wife, the

wife not being 18 years, is not rape. "There was agreement among all present that marital rape exemption cannot continue. There was one voice that raised concerns about evidence gathering," said a person present at the meeting who did not want to be identified.

'Strict burden of proof'

Geeta Luthra, senior advocate in the Supreme Court, who made the point on the need for evidence for punishing marital rape, told *The Hindu*, "No one is talking against women's autonomy or privacy or that marital rape should not be an offence. But there should be a

The focus has to be on violence and not morality

VED KUMARI
Vice-Chancellor, National Law University

better investigative process and a strict burden of proof so that it doesn't happen that someone is miffed and makes a marital rape allegation."

The meeting also discussed the interpretation of consent. "We have said there should be a broader understanding of when consent stands vitiated. Anything obtained with fraud or force where force means fear of injury to body, mind and reputation is considered in cases

of extortion and we are demanding that the same standard should be applied to consent in sexual offences as well. The focus has to be on violence and not morality," said Ved Kumari, Vice-Chancellor, National Law University, Odisha.

On the issue of age of marriage being raised for women to 21 years to make it equal to that of men, most speakers agreed that 18 years should be the age of marriage for both men and women.

The meeting also discussed the need for gender-neutral anti-rape laws which the civil society has demanded to recognise same-sex assaults among gay, lesbian

and bisexual people as well as sexual crimes against transgender persons.

"There was a lot of emphasis on cyber-crimes against women as well as making revenge porn and online stalking punishable," Pinky Anand, senior advocate, Supreme Court, said.

Several women's rights activists, however, were unhappy because they were not invited for the discussions.

While there were 13 speakers, only one was an activist and remaining were lawyers apart from a representative each from the National Law School of India University, Bangalore, and the National Law University, Odisha.



Normal routine: As the fear of COVID-19 eludes rural Adilabad, Anganwadi centres are functioning normally with tribal children carrying home their share of the meal given at Shambhu Mathadiguda in Adilabad district on March 19, 2020. • FILE PHOTO

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Schools without freedom

If they had some autonomy, many village schools would have found local conditions now good enough to allow children to study

THE GIST

■ Craving for a modest amount of autonomy unites principals and teachers from across our vast network of schools. For those serving in government-run schools, there is no provision in the rule book for freedom on any count that matters. In private schools, there are additional players such as school owners and managers. While decentralisation is routinely favoured, it has not touched the core aspects of education as a system.

■ With the spread of the virus, cities were affected more than rural areas but all schools, urban and rural, have stayed closed since March. If village schools had some autonomy, many would have found local conditions good enough to allow children to come for their meals and spend some time studying.

■ Not all learning has to occur in the classroom. Village teachers can bring great energy into their pedagogy by encouraging children to spend time outdoors for assigned observation. Observation and reflection are good for promoting numeracy and literacy.

KRISHNA KUMAR

The World Bank's Global Education Director Jaime Saavedra recently stated that there is no justification to keep schools closed due to the pandemic. He also stated that there is no science in waiting for all children to get vaccinated before re-opening schools. In India due to the extended lockdown, the learning poverty is expected to increase from 55% to 70% due to learning loss and more out-of-school children. In this piece dated August 14, 2020, Krishna Kumar talks about how a de-centralised approach to the functioning of schools during the pandemic would have generated less learning poverty.

If a house needs repairs, and the repairs are delayed for a long time, the house develops a force to haunt its inhabitants during adversity. This analogy applies to the state of children's education. Decisions pertaining to it are dependent on structures designed to overlook local factors. These structures were forged to ensure total compliance, no matter how vast the system became and how diverse remained the demands served by it. Decentralisation was routinely favoured, but it did not touch the core aspects of education as a system.

Craving for a modest amount of autonomy unites principals and teachers from across the sharply divided segments of our vast network of schools. For those serving in government-run schools, there is no provision in the rule book for freedom on any count that matters. Since British days, the bureaucracy views school functionaries with the deepest suspicion, both in their capacities and integrity. No matter how senior you are, your job is to silently follow the orders and circulars issued by the directorate and the examination board.

In private schools, you notice additional players who keep principals and teachers under a fat thumb. For school owners and managers, the professional knowledge and experience of the principal and the teachers count for little. Management committees and parents generally support the regimented approach of directorates and Boards. Endorsement of school-based capacity-building has been in fashion, but the reality has taken the opposite direction. All major processes that affect life at school have stayed firmly under centralised exercise of authority, and exam boards have tightened their grip further.

COVID-19 chaos

Now arrives the novel coronavirus pandemic. The virus has spread across the country, but its impact in different regions is uneven. The metro cities have been affected far more than others, but it is now reported to be spreading in many district towns. No specific data are publicly available on villages. India has over six lakh villages. No single

picture can cover their diverse geography and economics. Health standards and facilities differ, and so does the impact of COVID-19. Why the virus has not affected the rural hinterland as much as it has affected cities is far from clear. Many experts think that the uneven spread is merely a matter of poor reporting from villages. They smile if you tell them that many Panchayats are actively guarding their territories. It is not surprising that the awareness and resilience demonstrated by many villages is largely ignored in the media. It is an example of the general bias that pervades urban perception in all spheres of life.

No separate consideration of village needs seems possible in the current crisis. That is why all schools, urban and rural, have stayed closed since the last week of March. Cooked mid-day meals served to children at school have been replaced in many States by the distribution of grain and money to their children. If village schools had some autonomy, many would have found local conditions good enough to allow children to come for their meals and spend some time studying. Decisions regarding the daily time span and class size might have been taken in accordance with distancing norms by schools' heads and teachers.

Learning outdoors

Not all learning has to occur in the classroom. Ideologues of minimalism are arguing that foundational literacy and numeracy are what we need to focus on in order to improve quality. A new coinage is 'learning loss' which supposedly occurred in April and May due to the lockdown. Online teaching was mooted to compensate for this loss. Smartphones and laptops are new, but the idea that children's basic educational needs are literacy and numeracy is certainly quite obsolete. Child psychology has generated sufficient evidence to say that in its formative stages the human mind needs opportunities to observe natural phenomenon, represent it in different forms and analyse it. Village schools are in a far better position to do so than city schools.

The monsoon creates great opportunities for noticing, recording and examining nature. Egrets and other large birds tread at leisurely paces in wet paddy fields, looking for food. They are a joy to watch and sketch in their different postures. Ants come out of their subterranean homes when the rainwater floods them. Butterflies migrate in this season. These are just examples; there are a hundred things to observe in plants and trees.

Village teachers can bring great energy into their pedagogy by encouraging children to spend time outdoors for assigned observation. If some children have acquired a smartphone to receive online instruction, they can visually record what

they notice. Observation and reflection are good for promoting numeracy and literacy too. In fact, mathematics is learnt best when you are excited about something and find it worth counting. The same is true of writing and reading.

But we live in a time when learning outcomes are pre-defined and their attainment needs to be clerically proved, with tests. The search for technical fixes is not new, nor is the cult of controlling teachers and children. The hope that communications technology can improve pedagogic quality sustained interest in the radio, then in television and the Internet. I can recall some wonderful colleagues who dedicated their lives to educational technology. One was Dr. Vijaya Mulay who never tired of reminding officials that the real success of technology comes when it motivates and enables people to solve their own problems. For her, the danger of educational technology leading to centralised decision-making was as great as the attraction that it would bring life into the classrooms. The idea of cracking a general whip on our vast school population during a pandemic would have horrified her. The daily images of hapless children peering into a tiny screen are distressing indeed. Some of the poorer States are toying with a software that will tell the teacher what to do next for improving a child's performance on a test. Ideas like that appeal to officials and others who have been led to believe that our core problem has to do with teachers.

Curiously enough, technology enthusiasts have seldom spoken about the absence of basic learning equipment in our schools. Something as small and simple as a magnifying glass is alien to our primary schools. Aren't these also a part of educational technology? Great expenditure is made on purchasing technology for schools, but it does not cover binoculars or microscopes. There is a way to make sense of this. If watching egrets in a paddy field is not worth the time it will take, why should schools have binoculars? An experience that might expand or deepen a child's interest and understanding does not count as learning whereas the ability to crack a test item does. All this fits in the larger picture, but it signifies a colossal loss of national imagination and talent.

The system has failed to retain the momentum and gains that accrued to it from modest reforms because autonomy and professional competence were denied to teachers. If our schools fail to nurture a free, thoughtful mind among the young, one reason is that schools themselves have no freedom. And if pandemic compulsions guide broader decisions, teachers' bondage will get worse.

Krishna Kumar is former Director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training.

Newborn dies of malnutrition in Kerala

Woman travels 2 days to reach hospital

ABDUL LATHEEF NAHA
MALAPPURAM

A newborn belonging to a Cholanaikkan couple living in the deep forest of Nilambur in Kerala died apparently of malnutrition on Sunday. The mother is in a critical condition at Government District Hospital, Nilambur. Asha, wife of Kethan from the Kuppumala tribal settlement in the forest in the Karulai range, said she had not got any treatment or nutrition support from the authorities, including the Integrated Tribal Development Project (ITDP) and the Health Department, since she conceived.

After Asha developed pain on Saturday morning, she left her home in the jungle and began to walk towards a hospital many km away. On seeing an elephant herd on the way, she took

shelter behind a large rock in the river and spent the night there. She resumed her journey on Sunday and reached Sayivila by afternoon. From there, with the help of a few men, Asha was carried to Government District Hospital at Nilambur.

Asha had been enervated when she reached the hospital by 5 p.m. Although she gave birth around 7 p.m., the newborn's condition was critical. The baby was soon shifted to hospital in Manjeri. But it died on the way.

ITDP officials said they had strengthened their surveillance of the tribal families living in the forests of Nilambur, especially in the wake of the recent infant deaths in Attappady. However, the ITDP district officer could not be reached for his comments.

Inflation conundrum

High price rise trends could continue in 2022, compounding the challenge for policy makers

While North Block mandarins seek to conjure up policy levers in the upcoming Budget to spur India's fragmented economic recovery along, the latest official data suggest industrial output is stuttering with a meagre 1.4% growth in November. More worryingly, inflation is re-emerging as a threat – retail prices surged to a five-month high of 5.6% in December from 4.9% in November. While urban India continued to record a higher incidence of price rise at over 5.8%, inflation faced by rural consumers was at 5.36% – the steepest pace since July 2021. A dozen States clocked higher inflation than the headline 5.6% level, with half of them recording well over India's stated inflation tolerance threshold of 6%, led by Haryana and Tamil Nadu with an over 6.6% print. While the CPI cooled month on month by about 0.35%, this was offset by low base effects that pushed up inflation in food and beverages, and higher clothing and footwear prices. The deferral of a higher GST on textiles, and softening food and vegetable prices this month, may help rein in some of these pressures, but there are other headwinds. Fuel prices moderated after excise duty cuts in November, but this may not sustain for long as average prices for India's crude oil basket are now at around \$84. For now, retail fuel prices have remained static, but this may have more to do with the unstated tendency of not effecting such hikes in the poll season. By Monday, yields on government bonds had hit a two-year high which could upset the fiscal math over time.

Inflation in wholesale prices offered little comfort in December even as it came off a record high of 14.2% in November to touch 13.6%, staying above double digits for the ninth successive month. Economists believe that the persistent gap between wholesale and retail inflation, now at eight percentage points, does not augur well for price stability ahead. Producers coping with high commodity prices and input costs will have to find ways to pass them on to consumers, feeding into retail inflation and squeezing household budgets further. For industry, inflation is as critical an obstacle to higher consumption and growth impulses as the new virus mutations and the third wave – which by itself is expected to further stoke retail prices. Consistently high inflation, as witnessed since the pandemic onset, constitutes not just a tax on the poor and the middle classes, but is also a potentially permanent wrecking ball for future spending capacity (and growth) amid a damaged job market. The Government, through its statement of intent in the Budget, and the RBI, which has noted that the waning of inflation spiralling across geographies may 'take longer' than expected and will review its monetary policy stance next month, need to communicate their inflation game plan to soothe expectations.

The SilverLine project is anti-development

It poses a threat to Kerala's ecological security, and could end up as a white elephant



PULAPRE BALAKRISHNAN

Six months after I first proposed in these pages that the Kerala government review its SilverLine rail project, critical voices have only grown in strength. The Chief Minister, however, has publicly affirmed his intention to proceed with it nevertheless, alleging that its opponents are against 'development'. This response is no different from that of the Narendra Modi government when its economic policies are queried, and which nurtures its own vanity project, a superfast train between Mumbai and Ahmedabad. The stance is hardly credible though.

Concerned voices

Dissenters on the SilverLine project include ecologists, engineers, lawyers and activists to reckon with. Madhav Gadgil, E. Sreedharan, Prashant Bhushan and Medha Patkar are perhaps the best known among them but the list also has on it concerned citizens, who all want the best for their country. It also includes the Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad, which is significant, as the body is perceived as a fellow-traveller of the Left parties now in power. Recently, Mr. Sreedharan, perhaps India's most

famous railway engineer, has described the proposed project as an invitation to environmental disaster, mainly through flooding. He had also expressed surprise that the Government has not yet made public the detailed project report, a standard practice, which brings transparency to large-scale public infrastructure projects. (Since then the Kerala government has hurriedly uploaded a related document on a restricted site). Professor Gadgil, India's pre-eminent ecologist, has spoken of SilverLine being against the interests of the people of the State, on grounds of the ecological damage it is likely to cause. Based on his unmatched knowledge of Kerala's topography, he has both explained how this could happen and pointed to the experience with the railways elsewhere in India, suggesting that the prediction is not mere speculation.

A distant government

The response of the Pinarayi Vijayan government to calls to reason on SilverLine has been disappointing. By stonewalling the concern expressed by citizens, a government shows itself to be distant and authoritarian. The dissenters are, after all, equal stakeholders in Kerala as anyone else, with the moral right to be heard on a matter with a bearing upon the ecological future of the State. In a democracy, the government must be guided by public opinion rather than attempting to manufacture consent on its schemes, as



Kerala's present government is doing. There are several instances of the state in India changing its mind when public opinion is arrayed against some grand project of its, but one stands out. In the 1970s, Indira Gandhi, a charismatic and strong leader, responding to a long-drawn agitation against a hydel project in Palakkad district, declared that the Silent Valley threatened by it will be protected. It took a little longer for the project proposal to be dropped altogether, but it finally was.

A high cost

While it is the threat to ecological security from it that has been flagged by our scientists and engineers, there is also the concern that the SilverLine project may end up as a white elephant. It is always difficult to figure out how much people are willing to pay for a new service to be publicly provided, in this case faster transportation. Even if a survey were to be conducted, the truthfulness of the stated willingness to pay would remain moot, undermining the reliability of the numbers in any project report. It is perhaps for this reason that light rail projects in many parts of the world have end-

ed up making a loss. Even if break-even does materialise, the rate of return could end up being lower than anticipated. This often happens due to the cost overrun observed in such projects. A reason for this is that rather than padding costs, governments, determined to have their high visibility, technological marvels, manage to somehow ensure that the project cost is pitched unreasonably low.

In the case of SilverLine, it has been hinted that the cost of the complementary infrastructure, such as underpasses, may not have been incorporated, and that they may be substantial. It is for this reason that independent external scrutiny of the detailed project report is essential. Global accountability giants have in the past proved to be unreliable as a source of disinterested advice when high fees are at stake, but we are fortunate that there is available in India financial expertise of the highest class. It is hoped that advice from this source is sought, with the Kerala government having shown a surprising dependence on international management consultancy firms for advice in the past. With a public sector that still receives budgetary support, a State already strapped with high per capita public debt cannot afford to be saddled with another white elephant. Yet, financial viability cannot be taken as the sole criterion in investment planning. There is no universally accepted method for imputing a monetary value to the environmental threat posed by a

project with so great a geographic reach as SilverLine, spanning as it will do the entire length of the State. It is essential that our judgment be deployed in this case.

What Kerala does need

When a proposed project meets pushback, its purveyors often respond with the challenge "So, what is the alternative?" In the present case, though, this would only beg a deeper question, which is whether Kerala needs another railway line at all. As the two extremities of the State are already connected by road and rail, a light rail built at an astronomical cost is hardly necessary, even when it promises to save some travel time. The State already has the highest road density in the country. It is odd, then, that the Government sees a second railway as the priority for the State today.

On the other hand, there are several projects deserving of public investment. Among them would be the transition to a steady power supply based on green energy, the provision of safe drinking water and urban sewerage, and building infrastructure for the scientific disposal of waste. These projects would address our most pressing needs today, yield high social returns and contain progressive environmental degradation in the State. They are the 'alternative'.

Pulapre Balakrishnan teaches at Ashoka University. The views expressed are personal

Oil rises past 7-year high on supply fears

Brent jumps to highest level since October 2014; analysts see shortfalls pushing prices to \$100 a barrel

REUTERS
SINGAPORE

Oil prices rose more than \$1 on Tuesday to a more than seven-year high on worries about possible supply disruptions after Yemen's Houthi group attacked the United Arab Emirates, escalating hostilities between the Iran-aligned group and a Saudi Arabian-led coalition.

The "new geopolitical tension added to ongoing signs of tightness across the market," ANZ Research analyst said in a note.

Brent crude futures rose \$1.37, or 1.6%, to \$87.85 a barrel by 0738 GMT.

The benchmark climbed to its highest level since October 2014 on Tuesday.

After launching drone and missile strikes which set off explosions in fuel trucks and killed three people, the



Tight times: Some producers are struggling to pump at their allowed capacities due to underinvestment, outages. ■ REUTERS

Houthi movement warned it could target more facilities, while the UAE said it reserved the right to "respond to these terrorist attacks".

UAE oil firm ADNOC said it had activated business continuity plans to ensure uninterrupted supply of products

to its local and international customers after an incident at its Mussafah fuel depot.

Analysts said oil prices also were being supported by colder winter temperatures in the northern hemisphere which were driving up demand for heating fuels.

"Analyst forecasts expect demand to outstrip supply this year as the world opens up from 2 years of lockdowns and resumes a more normal trajectory for demand," said Ash Glover at CMC Markets.

The tight supply-demand balance is unlikely to ease, analysts said.

Some producers within the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) are struggling to pump at their allowed capacities, due to underinvestment and outages, under an agreement with Russia and allies, known as OPEC+, to add 4,00,000 barrels per day each month.

"That should continue to be supportive for oil and increase talk of triple figure prices," said OANDA analyst Craig Erlam.

Rising sea levels prompt Indonesia to relocate capital

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
JAKARTA

Indonesia's parliament on Tuesday passed a law approving the relocation of its capital from slowly sinking Jakarta to a site 2,000 kilometres away on the jungle-clad Borneo island that will be named "Nusantara".

The House of Representatives vote provides the legal framework for the move, which was first tipped by President Joko Widodo in April 2019, citing rising sea levels and severe congestion on densely populated Java island.

Home to more than 30 million people in its greater



An illustration of Indonesia's future presidential palace in jungle-clad island of Borneo.

metro area, Jakarta has long been plagued by serious infrastructure problems and flooding exacerbated by climate change.

The new capital will cover about 56,180 hectares in East Kalimantan province on the Indonesian part of Borneo.

Early plans for the new capital depict a utopian design aimed at creating an environmentally friendly "smart" city, but few details have been confirmed.

Environmentalists critics of the capital's move have warned it could damage ecosystems in the region.

Budget details have not yet been revealed in a presidential decree, though previous reports have pegged the project's costs at \$33 billion.

EXPLAINER

The controversy over the proposed steel plant in Odisha

Why are protests resuming again over the same land? Why are villagers opposing this move?

SATYASUNDAR BARIK

The story so far: On January 14, Odisha's Jagatsinghpur district administration used 12 platoons of armed police personnel to facilitate demolition of betel vineyards so that all 3,000 acres of land can be cleared for the establishment of a mega steel project proposed by Jindal Steel Works (JSW) Group near the port town of Paradip. Residents of Dhinkia village – the epicentre of the anti-steel plant movement – have opposed the demolition bid. Lathi-wielding police personnel tried to disperse agitating villagers. It led to a violent clash leaving 30 villagers and three police personnel injured. The visuals served as a flashback to villagers resisting land acquisition for another steel project proposed by South Korean steel major POSCO at the same place a decade-and-a-half ago. That POSCO project was shelved.

Why is the location contested?

On June 22, 2005, the Odisha government signed a memorandum of understanding with POSCO India Limited – a wholly owned subsidiary of South Korean steel major POSCO – for setting up of a 12 million tonne per annum capacity steel plant near Paradip at an estimated cost of

₹52,000 crore. The project was to come up on about 4004 acres of land in the three gram panchayats of Dhinkia, Nuagon and Gadakuja in Jagatsinghpur district. The project was then dubbed as India's single largest foreign direct investment.

Villagers, however, opposed the land acquisition bid saying they had a sustainable livelihood source in the shape of lucrative betel leaf farming, fishing and paddy cultivation. They asserted the industrial project would destroy their livelihoods. Although POSCO trimmed down its land requirement and revisited its project components, the resistance to land acquisition continued. Land acquisition moved at a slow pace with the Government managing to acquire some 2,700 acres of land and felled 1,70,000 trees. When POSCO could not get a captive iron ore mine for their steel project in Sundargarh district and the subsequent auction route of allocating mines closed doors for securing automatic control over a mine, the company decided to withdraw in 2017. The acquired land was brought under a "land bank" scheme launched by Odisha to provide encumbrance-free land to industries.

The State government decided to provide 2,900 acres of land to the JSW



Women of the Dhinkia village are seen at their village meeting. • BISWARANJAN ROUT

Group for setting up a 10 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) steel plant in Jagatsinghpur district in 2017. The project was revised again. The JSW Group came up with a proposal to set up 13.2 mtpa capacity steel plant at an estimated investment of around ₹55,000 crore on the land acquired previously for the stillborn POSCO unit. Apart from the steel project, a 900 MW captive power plant and a 10 mtpa cement grinding and mixing unit were part of the project.

Why have protests resumed?

The State government believed that there would be no resistance since Dhinkia

village had been excluded from the project while inhabitants of the rest of the affected villages had been taken on board.

A total 2950.31 acres of land, (2677.80 acres of forest land, 272.51 acres non-forest and 2.26 acres private land) is currently required for the JSW project. Only 45.56 acres of forestland that comes under jurisdiction of Dhinkia is to be now acquired for the project. Residents of Dhinkia said they cannot let go of the betel vineyards even though they are on Government land. Out of 625 betel vineyards enumerated for demolitions on Government land, 400 have been demolished. They also fear that pollution caused by the steel plant would adversely impact their agricultural activities in the future. Villagers have resolved not to let go of their lands.

Activist Prafulla Samantara alleged that the proposed project does not even have a valid environmental clearance without which they cannot start any construction activities. The company is still awaiting environment clearance, which led to criticism that the State government was pushing ahead with the project without regulatory approval. The Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) report prepared by the company has got several shortcomings even though the company

had "manufactured" hundreds of consent papers in the names of locals in its favour, Mr. Samantara claimed. Human rights activists expressed concerns stating that brutal police force was being used to suppress the voices of the people. Many Dhinkia villagers are facing criminal cases due to their 15-year-long resistance against the steel plant.

Jagatsinghpur Superintendent of Police Akhileshwar Singh refuted all charges and said that a small group of people, backed by activists, were creating trouble by spreading a false narrative. JSW has declared a rehabilitation package that it claims is better than the declared Government policy. The company has also announced jobs for locals. Dhinkia villagers see little benefits in such proposals. Protesting villagers were, however, getting impatient as the Jagatsinghpur district administration started constructing a boundary wall for the steel project. Once it is constructed, villagers cannot access the land they are using for their livelihood. A fact-finding team comprising human rights activists recommended that the village *gramsabha* must be allowed to deliberate, discuss, and decide about any project, including the creation of new revenue villages, and demarcating territories for the same.

THE GIST

- The JSW Group is establishing a mega steel project near the port town of Paradip, Odisha. They came up with a proposal to set up a 13.2 mtpa capacity steel plant at an estimated investment of around ₹55,000 crore. A total 2950.31 acres of land is required for the project.
- This same area of land was earlier signed off to POSCO India Limited for setting up a 12 mtpa capacity steel plant at an estimated cost of ₹52,000 crore. The project had to be shelved due to local protests.
- Villagers are opposing the land acquisition saying they have a sustainable livelihood source in the shape of lucrative betel leaf farming, fishing and paddy cultivation.

Cartoonist Narayan Debnath passes away

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

KOLKATA

Narayan Debnath, legendary cartoonist, noted illustrator and litterateur, passed away in Kolkata on Tuesday. He was 96 and was undergoing treatment in a private hospital for the past few weeks.

Mr. Debnath was the creator of some of immortal cartoon characters for Bengali readers such as Bantul the Great, Handa Bhonda and Nonte Fonte that have inspired not only children but generations of Bengalis.

His comic strips have attained a cult following for nearly six decades. He was honoured with the Sahitya



Narayan Debnath

Akademi award in 2013 and the Padma Shri in 2021.

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee condoled the demise of the cartoonist. “His passing away is certainly an immeasurable loss to the world of literary creativity and comics,” she said.

General Studies Paper I	
A	History of Indian culture will cover the salient aspects of art forms, literature and architecture from ancient to modern times;
B	Modern Indian history from about the middle of the eighteenth century until the present-significant events, personalities, issues;
C	Freedom struggle-its various stages and important contributors / contributions from different parts of the country;
D	Post-independence consolidation and reorganization within the country;
E	History of the world will include events from 18 th century such as industrial revolution, world wars, re-drawing of national boundaries, colonization, decolonization,
F	Political philosophies like communism, capitalism, socialism etc.-their forms and effect on the society
G	Salient features of Indian Society, Diversity of India;
H	Effects of globalization on Indian society;
I	Role of women and women's organization;
J	Social empowerment, communalism, regionalism & secularism
K	Salient features of world's physical geography;
L	Geographical features and their location- changes in critical geographical features (including water bodies and ice-caps) and in flora and fauna and the effects of such changes;
M	Important Geophysical phenomena such as earthquakes, Tsunami, Volcanic activity, cyclone etc.
N	Distribution of key natural resources across the world (including South Asia and the Indian subcontinent);
O	Factors responsible for the location of primary, secondary, and tertiary sector industries in various parts of the world (including India);
P	Population and associated issues;
Q	Urbanization, their problems and their remedies
General Studies Paper II	
A	India and its neighbourhood- relations;
B	Important International institutions, agencies and fora- their structure, mandate;
C	Effect of policies and politics of developed and developing countries on India's interests;
D	Bilateral, regional and global groupings and agreements involving India and/or affecting India's interests.
E	Indian Constitution, historical underpinnings, evolution, features, amendments, significant provisions and basic structure;
F	Comparison of the Indian Constitutional scheme with other countries;
G	Functions and responsibilities of the Union and the States, issues and challenges pertaining to the federal structure, devolution of powers and finances up to local levels and challenges therein; Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
H	Parliament and State Legislatures - structure, functioning, conduct of business, powers & privileges and issues arising out of these;
I	Structure, organization and functioning of the executive and the judiciary, Ministries and Departments;

J	Separation of powers between various organs dispute redressal mechanisms and institutions;
K	Appointment to various Constitutional posts, powers, functions and responsibilities of various Constitutional bodies;
L	Statutory, regulatory and various quasi-judicial bodies;
M	Mechanisms, laws, institutions and bodies constituted for the protection and betterment of these vulnerable sections;
N	Salient features of the Representation of People's Act;
O	Important aspects of governance, transparency and accountability, e-governance- applications, models, successes, limitations, and potential;
P	Citizens charters, transparency & accountability and institutional and other measures;
Q	Issues relating to poverty and hunger,
R	Welfare schemes for vulnerable sections of the population by the Centre and States, Performance of these schemes;
S	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to education and human resources;
T	Issues relating to development and management of social sector / services relating to health
General Studies Paper III	
A	Indian Economy and issues relating to planning, mobilization of resources, growth, development and employment;
B	Effects of liberalization on the economy, changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth;
C	Inclusive growth and issues arising from it;
D	Infrastructure Energy, Ports, Roads, Airports, Railways etc. Government budgeting;
E	Land reforms in India
F	Major crops, cropping patterns in various parts of the country, different types of irrigation and irrigation systems;
G	Storage, transport and marketing of agricultural produce and issues and related constraints;
H	e-technology in the aid of farmers; Technology Missions; Economics of Animal-Rearing.
I	Issues of buffer stocks and food security, Public Distribution System- objectives, functioning, limitations, revamping;
J	Food processing and related industries in India – scope and significance, location, upstream and downstream requirements, supply chain management;
K	Issues related to direct and indirect farm subsidies and minimum support prices
L	Awareness in the fields of IT, Space, Computers, robotics, nano-technology, bio-technology;
M	Indigenization of technology and developing new technology;
N	Developments and their applications and effects in everyday life;
O	Issues relating to intellectual property rights
P	Conservation, environmental pollution and degradation, environmental impact assessment
Q	Disaster and disaster management
R	Challenges to internal security through communication networks, role of media and social networking sites in internal security challenges, basics of cyber security;
S	Money-laundering and its prevention;

T	Various forces and their mandate;
U	Security challenges and their management in border areas;
V	Linkages of organized crime with terrorism;
W	Role of external state and non-state actors in creating challenges to internal security;
X	Linkages between development and spread of extremism.
General Studies Paper IV	
A	Ethics and Human Interface: Essence, determinants and consequences of Ethics in human actions;
B	Dimensions of ethics;
C	Ethics in private and public relationships. Human Values - lessons from the lives and teachings of great leaders, reformers and administrators;
D	Role of family, society and educational institutions in inculcating values.
E	Attitude: Content, structure, function; its influence and relation with thought and behaviour;
F	Moral and political attitudes;
G	Social influence and persuasion.
H	Aptitude and foundational values for Civil Service , integrity, impartiality and non-partisanship, objectivity, dedication to public service, empathy, tolerance and compassion towards the weaker sections.
I	Emotional intelligence-concepts, and their utilities and application in administration and governance.
J	Contributions of moral thinkers and philosophers from India and world.
K	Public/Civil service values and Ethics in Public administration: Status and problems;
L	Ethical concerns and dilemmas in government and private institutions;
M	Laws, rules, regulations and conscience as
N	sources of ethical guidance;
O	Accountability and ethical governance; strengthening of ethical and moral values in governance; ethical issues in international relations and funding;
P	Corporate governance.
Q	Probity in Governance: Concept of public service;
R	Philosophical basis of governance and probity;
S	Information sharing and transparency in government, Right to Information, Codes of Ethics, Codes of Conduct, Citizen's Charters, Work culture, Quality of service delivery, Utilization of public funds, challenges of corruption.
T	Case Studies on above issues.