



VEDHIK

DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

18 - FEBRUARY 2022

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.



CONTENTS

- Editorials - In times of war, the yuan as a reference currency for interim oil trade GSP 02 C
 - Editorials - Essentially flawed GSP 02 E
 - Editorials - The curious case of sealed cover jurisprudence GSP 02 E
 - Editorials - Treating values of individual freedom as trifles GSP 02 E
 - Editorials - Towards inclusive education GSP 02 S
 - News - Fed hikes rates, to battle inflation GSP 03 A
 - News - Jet fuel price raised by over 18% GSP 03 A
 - News - AP HC ruling on renewables' PPAs to lift investor confidence GSP 03 D
 - News - Clean energy must use the battery of a circular economy GSP 03 D
- 

India extends \$1 billion credit to Sri Lanka

Neighbourhood first, says Jaishankar

MEERA SRINIVASAN
VIKAS DHOOT
NEW DELHI/COLOMBO

India on Thursday extended a \$1 billion credit facility to Sri Lanka to assist the island nation through its worst foreign exchange crisis and enable it to procure food, medicines and other essential items.

An agreement to this effect was signed between the State Bank of India and the government of Sri Lanka on

Thursday, during a visit of the country's Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa to New Delhi. "Neighbourhood first. India stands with Sri Lanka," External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar tweeted.

Mr. Rajapaksa met Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday to discuss Indian assistance amid Sri Lanka's extraordinary economic crisis.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

India extends \$1 billion credit to Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is facing its worst financial crisis, and had declared an emergency in August last in the face of a crippling foreign exchange crunch. The nation is still facing significant fuel and gas shortages, and high inflation in essential goods as well as food items. The situation has triggered a series of protests by the political Opposition and citizens' groups, who blame the Rajapaksa government for the crisis.

In a televised address to the nation on Wednesday, President Gotabaya Rajapaksa vowed to work with the International Monetary Fund to resolve the fiscal imbroglio.

Sri Lanka is due to repay foreign debt totalling nearly \$7 billion this year, amid a persisting shortage of dollars to import food, medicines and other essentials. It has already sought China's help to restructure its loans that amount to 10% of its total foreign debt. Much of Sri Lanka's external borrowings are through sovereign bonds in the international money market.

During Mr. Basil Rajapak-



Sri Lanka Minister Basil Rajapaksa with Ministers S. Jaishankar and Nirmala Sitharaman during signing of the agreement. ■ PTI

sa's talks with the Indian side, New Delhi and Colombo agreed to set up a "framework for short, medium and long-term economic cooperation" between the two countries aimed at addressing Sri Lanka's present economic challenges, according to a media release.

With this objective, Mr. Basil Rajapaksa, Mr. Jaishankar and Ms. Sitharaman agreed to stay "in regular contact", while a coordinating mechanism was set up to maintain regular dialogue, the Sri Lankan mission said.

EXPLAINER

Russia-Ukraine conflict: ICJ's provisional measures on military operations

Can the International Court of Justice mandate a ruling in the current crisis happening in Eastern Europe?

PUSHKAR ANAND
VARSHA SINGH

The story so far: The ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia has entered its fourth week. It has led to one of the most severe humanitarian crises in Europe since World War II. Russia has sought to justify its “special military operation” as a response to the alleged act of genocide of the Russian speaking people in the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk. Ukraine on February 26 approached the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN), requesting the ICJ among other things, to hold that no acts of genocide defined under the Genocide Convention 1948 and as claimed by Russia have been committed by Ukraine in Donetsk and Luhansk. Additionally, Ukraine also requested the court to indicate certain provisional measures against Russia.

Where does the ICJ's jurisdiction lie?

Article 36(1) of the Statute of the ICJ provides that the ICJ shall have jurisdiction in all matters relating to the UN Charter, or other treaties or conventions in force. The Genocide Convention 1948 under Article IX provides that disputes between states relating to the interpretation, application or fulfilment of the Genocide Convention, as well as those relating to the responsibility of a state for genocide shall be submitted to the ICJ at the request of any of the parties to the dispute. Russia and Ukraine are both parties to the Genocide Convention. The ICJ held that there exists a *prima facie* dispute between Ukraine and Russia over the question of whether the acts of genocide have been committed in Ukraine, and accordingly it has the jurisdiction.

What do the ICJ's powers to indicate provisional measures entail?

The Statute of the International Court of Justice, under Article 41 empowers the ICJ to

indicate provisional measures in any case before it in order to preserve the rights of the parties involved. When the ICJ indicates such provisional measures, the parties to the dispute and the UN Security Council have to be notified. Until 2001, there was uncertainty as to whether the provisional measures indicated by the ICJ were binding. However, in the *LaGrand* (2001) case between Germany and the U.S. relating to the denial of consular access to a German national in the U.S., the ICJ made it clear that provisional measures are binding in character and create international legal obligations. Further, provisional measures may be indicated by the ICJ either on the request of a state party or *proprio motu* i.e., on its own motion. The ICJ has also held in the *Tehran Hostages Case* (1980) that the non-appearance of one of the parties concerned cannot itself be an obstacle to indication of provisional measures. In the present case, the Russian Federation chose not appear in the oral proceedings before the court. Notwithstanding, the ICJ proceeded to decide the case.

Under what conditions can the ICJ's powers be exercised?

The power to indicate provisional measures is subject to certain conditions.

In the *Gambia v. Myanmar* (2020) case dealing with genocide of Rohingyas in Myanmar, the ICJ held that it may exercise the power to indicate provisional measures only if it is satisfied that rights which are being asserted by the party which is requesting provisional measures is “at least plausible”. The ICJ in the present case held that Ukraine indeed has a plausible “right of not being subjected to military operations by the Russian Federation for the purpose of punishing and preventing alleged acts of genocide.” The ICJ expressed doubt regarding the use of unilateral military force against another state for preventing and punishing genocide, as a means under the Genocide Convention 1948. It highlighted that the Genocide Convention provides for other means such as resort to other UN organs under Article VIII, and for peaceful dispute settlement by ICJ under Article IX. It is important to note here that the ICJ at the stage of provisional measures does not

engage in a definitive analysis of whether rights which are claimed by the applicant actually exist. That analysis is for the merits phase.

Second, there must exist a link between the provisional measure which has been requested and the plausible right that is to be preserved by such measure.

Third, there must be “real and imminent risk” of “irreparable prejudice” to the rights claimed before the ICJ. The court observed that the mounting loss of human lives, harm to environment, and the refugee crisis are all instances of irreparable harm and prejudice justifying the indication of provisional measures.

What lies ahead?

The provisional measures indicated by the ICJ are binding, and non-compliance certainly entails the breach of an international legal obligation. However, the ICJ does not have the means or mechanism to secure the enforcement of the judgment itself. Indeed, the UN Charter under Article 94(2) provides that if any state fails to perform obligations pursuant to an ICJ decision, the UN Security Council (UNSC) may take measures necessary to give effect to the judgment. However, the possibility in the present case is bleak given that Russia has veto power in the UNSC.

Additionally, if there is an impasse in the Security Council, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) is empowered under Article 14 of the UN Charter to recommend measures for the peaceful adjustment of any situation “which it deems likely to impair the general welfare or friendly relations among nations.” In *Nicaragua v U.S.* (1984) when the U.S. refused to comply with the ICJ decision, and the Security Council was deadlocked, the UNGA adopted several resolutions deploring the behaviour of the U.S.. Further, the Uniting for Peace Resolution adopted in 1950 by the UNGA in the context of the Korean War, authorises the UNGA to consider any matter which may threaten international peace and security, and to make appropriate recommendations to the members for collective measures, including the use of armed force. The power of the UNGA to “recommend measures for peaceful adjustment” has been affirmed by the ICJ in



several cases including the *Certain Expenses Advisory Opinion* (1962), and *Wall Advisory Opinion* (2004). Russia's non-participation in the oral proceedings has already reflected its disrespect for international law and international institutions. If Russia does not comply with the provisional measures of the ICJ, the reputational harm to its regime will only be compounded. Moreover, non-compliance with provisional measures will legitimise and justify counter-measures against Russia. Interestingly enough, Russia has been kicked out of the Council of Europe with immediate effect on the same day as ICJ's provisional measures were indicated.

Pushkar Anand is Assistant Professor at Faculty of Law, University of Delhi, and Varsha Singh is Doctoral Research Candidate at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

International mandate: Public hearings take place on the request, for the indication of provisional measures, submitted by Ukraine in the International Court of Justice. • GETTY IMAGES

Global developments pose risks to economy: RBI officials

‘Spiralling oil prices, unsettled financial markets are fresh headwinds to recovery’

REUTERS
MUMBAI

India’s macroeconomic fundamentals remain strong but the unfolding global developments pose downside risks in terms of spillover, Reserve Bank of India officials wrote in an article in the bank’s monthly bulletin on Thursday.

“The ongoing geopolitical crisis has heightened the uncertainty clouding the global macroeconomic and financial landscape even as the world economy struggles to recover from the pandemic,” they wrote, adding that the uncertain economic outlook had increased risks to emerging economies.



On edge: A rapid and large withdrawal of fiscal support risks pushing the economy over the cliff, say RBI officials. ■ REUTERS

Even though India was making steady progress on the domestic front, the spiralling oil and gas prices and

unsettled financial market conditions also posed fresh headwinds to the still incomplete global recovery, the ar-

ticle’s authors observed.

Another group of RBI officials said in another article that a rapid and large withdrawal of fiscal support risked pushing the economy over the cliff into a sharp downturn.

‘Razor’s edge’

“Exiting, policy makers have to contend with the razor’s edge trade-off between cliffs and ramps,” they added.

The RBI has continued with an accommodative stance even as inflation has inched up and left the key lending rate unchanged, keeping it at record lows in the last policy announcement made in February.

Indian firms buy more oil from Russia, energy ties may deepen

After IOC, HPCL buys two million barrels of crude

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

India is expected to deepen energy cooperation with Russia as several major Western economies have continued to source Russian energy despite tough U.S. sanctions against Moscow's rulers. An official confirmation in this regard came against the backdrop of reports that after the Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) has bought two million barrels of Russian crude oil as Indian energy majors forge ahead with attempts to secure a part of Russian energy supply.

In response to a question on whether India would opt for Russian energy which is reportedly being offered at a "discount", an informed source said, "We will take it."

The policy decision, it appears, is part of India's plans to ensure energy security as the oil and gas market continues to witness volatility in the backdrop of European developments of the past



Stocking up: Late last week, the IOC bought three million barrels of crude oil for delivery in May. ■AFP

few weeks. The official clarified that the energy cooperation with Russia will require some necessary adjustments in the financial front because of the challenges posed by the American sanctions.

Pragmatic approach

The comments from the senior official indicated the government has adopted a pragmatic approach in this matter and is likely to forge ahead. Already, like the IOC, the HPCL also bought Russian Urals crude via European energy trader Vitol, sources with knowledge of the exchange said. Another similar energy consignment is expected as Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals

Ltd (MRPL) has floated a tender, seeking one million barrels of same kind of crude.

The Indian orders for Russian crude oil are prompted by the fact that the Western sanctions have forced many countries to avoid Russian oil and gas. This has created an opportunity for some of the major energy importers like India who can source Russian crude from the market at special discounts. To capture the opportunity, Indian refiners are floating tenders to buy such discounted oil. The tenders are mostly won by traders, who would have stocked inventories of the lesser-priced Russian oil.

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 12

Indian firms buy more oil from Russia

The sources said IOC, the nation's top oil firm, late last week bought three million barrels of Urals through Vitol for May delivery at a discount of \$20-25 a barrel to dated Brent. HPCL this week made the rare purchase of two million barrels of Urals crude for loading in May, they said.

However, companies that are deeply engaged with the U.S. economy may not be able to purchase Russian crude. This is evident in the case of Reliance Industries Ltd, operator of the world's biggest refining complex, which may avoid purchase of Russian energy as it has a huge exposure in the U.S. and the sanctions against

Russia may hurt its business. Earlier, an official of the Ministry of External Affairs said India was "exploring all possibilities" to ensure energy security.

"We are a major oil importer and we continue to have necessity regarding oil and gas," said Arindam Bagchi, official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs. Russia was not among the top energy suppliers to India in the past, though there were signs in recent years of broadening collaboration. Last year, the ONGC and the IOC signed memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with Russian energy giant Gazprom.

(With inputs from PTI)

‘OIC is guided by agenda of a nation’

India asks it not to back terror groups

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

NEW DELHI

India takes “very serious view” of all attempts that undermine its sovereignty and territorial integrity, an official of the Ministry of External Affairs said here on Thursday. Official Spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said India hopes that Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) will not encourage elements that promote terrorism targeting India.

“The Government of India takes very serious view of such actions which are aimed at subverting and violating our sovereignty and territorial integrity. We do not expect the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to encourage actors and organisations engaged in terrorism and anti-India activities. It’s unfortunate that the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation continues to be guided by a single member’s



India takes very serious view of actions aimed at subverting and violating our sovereignty...

ARINDAM BAGCHI
MEA spokesperson

political agenda,” said Mr. Bagchi.

The comment was an answer to reports that chairman of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, has been invited by OIC to a Foreign Ministers’ meet in Islamabad.

SC had allowed 'sealed covers' in the past

Govt. has often justified the measure citing national security or to safeguard sanctity of ongoing probe

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court's recent expression of aversion to "sealed covers" comes after years of receiving documents and materials in sealed covers from the government.

Sealed covers have been entertained by the court in a range of cases, including ones involving the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Prevention of Money Laundering Act, anticipatory bail and so on.

The court had entertained sealed covers from the government in a flurry of important cases, including in public interest litigation (PIL) petitions challenging the Rafale jets purchase, the Bhima Koregaon case, As-

sam's National Register of Citizens, Board of Control for Cricket in India and the anticipatory bail plea for former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram.

Safeguarding sanctity

"Sealed cover jurisprudence", as the top court calls it, precludes the other party from knowing the content of what the government hands over to the court. The government has often justified this in the name of national security or even as a measure to safeguard the sanctity of an ongoing investigation.

Questions of fair hearing and principles of natural justice have been raised against sealed covers.

However, the govern-



ment's move to submit documents in a sealed cover met with resistance in the Anuradha Bhasin case in January 2020.

The case concerned restrictions imposed on the rights of citizens and the press in Jammu and Kashmir in the name of national security, following the removal

of Article 370. In this case, the apex court said the government had to file an affidavit specifying reasons for claiming the "privilege" if it did not want to give copies of the restrictive orders to the petitioners.

No hesitation

"It is not our forte to answer whether it is better to be free than secure or be secure rather than free. However, we are here only to ensure that citizens are provided all the rights and liberty to the highest extent in a given situation while ensuring security at the same time," an apex court Bench led by Justice N.V. Ramana observed.

However, hardly a year prior to its judgment in the Anuradha Bhasin case, the

Supreme Court had not hesitated to receive a sealed cover allegedly containing materials against Mr. Chidambaram in a money laundering investigation.

The top court had accepted the sealed cover despite noting the strong objections raised by Mr. Chidambaram's side "that the Enforcement Directorate cannot randomly place the documents in the court behind the back of the accused to seek custody of the accused".

The court had depended on records, files, documents and case diary submitted by the police in a sealed cover to uphold the arrests of five activists, including Vara Vara Rao and Sudha Bhardwaj, in the Bhima Koregaon case.

Do Ph.D. after a four-year degree: UGC

Panel seeks stakeholder feedback for proposed course framework in line with the NEP 2020

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has proposed to allow students who have completed a four-year undergraduate (UG) programme, including a research component with a cumulative grade point average of 7.5, to directly enrol in Ph.D. programmes without having to first complete a Master's degree.

The new measure is a part of the Draft University Grants Commission (Minimum Standards and Procedures for Award of Ph.D. Degree) Regulations, 2022, released on Thursday, with the UGC seeking comments and feedback from the stakeholders by March 31.

The commission also released the draft curricular framework and credit system for the four-year pro-



New framework: Several universities plan to implement the four-year programme from 2022-23. ■ V.V. KRISHNAN

gramme, as proposed by the National Education Policy, 2020.

Several prominent Central universities, including the University of Delhi, plan to implement the four-year

programme from the coming academic year 2022-23.

As envisioned by the NEP 2020, the four-year degree will have multiple entry and exit points. Those who complete one year will receive a

certificate (requiring 40 to 44 credits, plus a 10 credit skills enhancement course), two years will earn a diploma (88 credits plus the exit course).

Those who complete three years will earn a Bachelor's degree (120-132 credit hours).

The four-year degree, including either an Honours programme focused on a specific subject, a rigorous research project, or a multidisciplinary programme, will require 160 to 176 credits.

Master's degrees could be earned in one-year or two-year programmes, depending on whether the student has completed a three- or four-year degree.

Each credit is likely to involve 45 hours of work, mostly split between teaching in the classroom and

practical work.

Provisions have been made for internships, seminars, studio sessions, community service and other types of learning methods.

Varied curriculum

The curriculum for the first three semesters of the UG courses will include common courses such as language (both English and regional language), understanding India, environmental science, digital and technological solutions, mathematical and computational thinking and analysis, health and wellness, yoga, sports and fitness, and introductory courses in humanities, natural and social sciences.

After the third semester, students will declare a major and two minors to specialise in.

Unhealthy precedent

India must try and vaccinate all age groups,
but after due process

The Government's decision to begin the COVID-19 immunisation programme for children between 12 and 14 years with Corbevax, a protein subunit vaccine, from March 16, is welcome as a part of India's efforts to extend coverage to the school-going population, but it also raises some concerns. One is the urgency shown to greenlight the vaccination programme for children in this age group without first seeking the approval of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunization (NTAGI), a body whose express mandate is to study various facets of the vaccine before clearing it for the national immunisation programme. Never before has the expert body been completely sidestepped to clear a vaccine for the immunisation programme, and by doing so, has set an unhealthy precedent. Also, the decision to use the new COVID-19 vaccine first on children between 12-14 years without widespread use in adults first could have been avoided. True, protein subunit vaccines are generally considered safe for all age groups, but that cannot be a reason to begin vaccinating young children first. Any serious adverse effects seen once the immunisation programme begins might cause vaccine hesitancy and jeopardise the immunisation programme using other vaccines for children. It is perplexing that Covaxin, which has been used for immunising adults and adolescents between 15 and 18 years and whose safety profile is now known, has been excluded for children in the 12-14 age group.

Earlier, concerns were raised about the absence of efficacy data for Covaxin at the time of approval by the Indian drug regulator and about its inclusion in the immunisation programme from mid-January 2021, which arguably led to vaccine hesitancy in the beginning. No lessons seem to have been learnt. Greenlighting Corbevax for children in the 12-14 age group, even when data on safety, immunogenicity and efficacy have not been made available even as preprint (it is not peer reviewed), is inexplicable in the current situation, which can no longer be described as an emergency. The fourth national seroprevalence survey that was done soon after the deadly second wave peaked revealed that 67.6% of the population above 10 years had antibodies against the virus. The percentage of children in the 12-14 age group who would have been infected during the third wave driven by the extremely infectious Omicron variant might be staggeringly high. If children have been found to be much less likely to suffer from severe disease and death, the high seroprevalence in this age group even before the third wave makes it even harder to fathom the urgency shown by the Government to vaccinate this subset of children. Evidence-based policy making should not be jettisoned even if, or rather especially if, a pandemic is raging.

Cotton textile exports to cross \$15 bn: Texprocil

‘Topped full-year target a month early’

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

COIMBATORE

Cotton textile exports are expected to cross \$15 billion this financial year, the Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council (Texprocil) said in a statement on Thursday.

The Texprocil added that export of cotton textile products – made-ups (including home textiles), fabrics and yarns – reached \$13.95 billion between April 2021 and February 2022, surpassing the target of \$12.5 billion fixed by the government.

Exports have seen a rise in all products in the value chain and across geographies such as Egypt, the U.S., Bangladesh, Vietnam and China. “Exports of cotton textiles have exceeded the target by 102% in 11



months, which is a landmark achievement in the history of cotton textile exports,” it said.

Texprocil chairman Manoj Patodia said pent-up demand, ban on Xinjiang cotton, extension of the RoSCTL scheme for made-ups and garments till March 31, 2024, and coverage of the entire value chain under the RoDTEP scheme had all helped spur growth.

Transmogrifying a behemoth — the Railways

There is a paradox in the current feel-good image makeover — a deafening silence on crucial policy issues



K. BALAKESARI

The Indian Railways has never had it so good. So it would seem going by the images of sleek bullet trains, 'Vande Bharat' express trains, Vistadome coaches and 'airport standard' remodelled stations that usually accompany railway-related news these days, the periodic reports about record-breaking capital investments, historically high originating freight loading, and, thankfully, the historically lower number of accidents. Paradoxically, this feel-good image makeover is also accompanied by a deafening silence on crucial policy issues, especially those that concern the financial health and the future management architecture of the Indian Railways.

Precarious financial health

Despite the recent strictures passed by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (C&AG) for attempting to airbrush the financial statistics of 2019-20 and 2020-21, in order to project that the Indian Railways is in the black, attempts continue to window dress the financial statistics. Thus, in the revised estimates for 2021-22, against a pension outgo of ₹52,500 crore, the appropriation to the pension fund is restricted to ₹49,000 crore. If the full outgo was reflected in the appropriation to the pension fund, the nominal 'surplus' of ₹875 crore would turn into a deficit of ₹2,375 crore, in turn landing the Indian Railways in the red.

Again, in the Budget estimates for 2022-23, under 'freight earnings', an incremental loading of 75 million tonnes is shown to generate an additional revenue of ₹20,000 crore; whereas during the 2021-22 (revised estimates), an incremental loading of 169.06 mil-

lion tonnes generated ₹28,044 crore. The disproportionate increase in earnings vis-à-vis physical loading during 2022-23 (Budget estimates) is not supported by commodity-wise loading figures except for an amount of ₹10,000 crore under 'Miscellaneous Goods Earnings', details of which are not available. This fixation to project the organisation as being financially viable has a background.

A dilemma of identity

The Indian Railways suffers from a dilemma of identity: is it a commercial entity or a government department trying to work on commercial principles? As the only "earning" department/Ministry of the Government of India that fully meets the salary, and (till recently) the pension obligations, of its serving and retired employees out of its own earnings, it has always been an outlier. The pressure to project an image of a public undertaking that is financially viable is, therefore, immense. This explains the tendency to fiddle with financial statistics.

On the other hand, there is the recent trend that the Government is pursuing to invest heavily in projects with long gestation periods — examples are line doubling and new lines and 100% electrification (not all of which are viable) — financed by heavy institutional/market borrowings. This sends a signal that the organisation has switched to a policy of heavy investments toward capacity expansion to be in a ready state to meet future traffic needs. Revenue generation, at least in the short term, will, therefore, lag the working expenses which include repayment of loans/lease charges, that are skyrocketing, with a drastic reduction in internal resource generation.

The Eighth Pay Commission, normally due by around 2025-26, is bound to strain finances further. The Government needs to acknowledge that in the short term, the Indian Railways will have to function as a "spending department". A realistic projection of the



RAJESH N.

financial position will spur concerted action to reverse the trend within a short time frame. Band-aid measures such as tinkering with the financial statistics could result in transforming the Indian Railways into another basket case like the former government-owned airline, Air India. Therefore, the investment policy needs to be spelt out clearly.

'Silo-less' utopia

The absence of a clear policy is evident in another crucial area: changing the management architecture of the Indian Railways. A momentous decision was made by the Union Cabinet in December 2019 to do away with the decades old system of recruiting officers to the eight organised 'Group A' services in the Railways (five technical and three non-technical) through the Combined Engineering Services Examination (CES) and the Civil Services Examination (CSE), respectively, and instead have recruitments to a single service called the Indian Railways Management Service (IRMS). The ostensible reason for this tectonic shift was to curb the scourge of "departmentalism" that was seen to hamper optimum decision making and the smooth working of the Railways.

After a delay of more than two years, the formation of IRMS was officially notified on February 9, 2022, followed by the announcement of a nearly 40% reduction in the 'Group A' cadre strength under the IRMS. More significantly, it was also notified that recruitment would be through the CSE. The purported argument advanced for

this astonishing decision is that, even now, about 70% of the candidates who qualify in the CSE are engineers and, therefore, there is no need to hold a separate examination for the IRMS!

Certain conclusions/consequences follow from these decisions. First, the Indian Railways is content to recruit its managers (remember, not engineers) to manage technical functions from a cohort of engineers who have already decided to pursue a career outside engineering. Second, it is most likely that the recruits will not be among the top rankers in CSE. Third, these "reluctant engineers" may not become available in sufficient numbers, assuming that the Government still considers that candidates with an engineering background are required to manage technical functions within the Indian Railways. Finally, with no 'departmental silos' and a common seniority, it is possible to visualise a situation where a recruit starts his career managing locomotives and rolling stock, then advances through middle management levels managing track, signals and communications, and then at senior management levels, works as financial adviser and human resources manager, ending his illustrious career at the apex level handling policy matters on operations and business development. A truly rolling stone gathering no "departmental moss"!

Privatisation moves

This may appear to be almost bizarre. Yet, there could be a method in this apparent madness. The Indian Railways is poised to migrate to the Public Private Partnership (PPP)/Joint Venture (JV) mode or outright privatisation in its major activities such as train running, asset maintenance, station management, project management and execution, production units and medical services. All relevant domain expertise will reside in the private sector, supported at the lower levels by promotee managers and supervisory techni-

cal cadres. The research and technical training establishments could be spun off as autonomous institutions. The residual Indian Railways will be "managed" at the middle and higher levels by a cadre of free-wheeling managers, essentially functioning as contract administrators.

This perhaps explains the unprecedented reduction in the cadre strength of the IRMS by almost 40% when compared to the cadre strength of the present Group A cadre, i.e., from over 8,000 to about 5,000. In effect, this is the beginning of the end of the Indian Railways as we know it today.

It is tragicomic that a matter that is of seminal importance — a veritable transmogrification of the Railways — should be the subject of second guessing, conjecture and speculation, in the absence of clearly enunciated policy. The situation was succinctly summed up by a young railway engineering aspirant thus: "It appears that Indian Railways do not require engineers."

About a year ago, it was none other than the Prime Minister who vented his frustration on the floor of Parliament over the ubiquitous grip of the generalist in all areas of the public sector. His statement in Hindi was: "*Sab kuchh babu hi karenge? IAS ban gaye matlab woh fertilizer ka karkhana bhi chalayega, IAS ho gaya toh woh hawai jahaz bhi chalayega? Yeh kaun si badi takat bana kay rakh di hai humnay?*" It can be translated as: 'Will bureaucrats do everything? Just because they've become IAS, does it mean they will run fertilizer factories, chemical industries,... if one becomes IAS will he even fly aircraft? What is this humongous force that we've created?'

Which raises the question: what does the Government really want?

K. Balakesari, belonging to the Indian Railway Service of Mechanical Engineers, was Member Staff, Railway Board.
E-mail: balakesari_k@hotmail.com

IAF to employ 'direct tactical planning' for S-400

China too has the system and it remains a potent weapon for the neighbouring country, parliamentary panel told

DINAKAR PERI
NEW DELHI

While China too possesses the S-400 Triumph long-range air defence system, currently being inducted by India, and remains a potent weapon for the neighbour, the Indian Air Force will counter it based on "direct tactical planning", an IAF representative informed the parliamentary standing committee on defence. While China was not directly mentioned in the reply, the country with which India shares a long contentious border has already inducted the S-400.

"As regards S-400, you are right that they have it. But fi-

nally, it remains a potent weapon for them and it will be our tactics how to take them out," an Air Force representative briefed the panel, as per a standing committee report tabled in Parliament on Wednesday.

In the midst of the stand-off in eastern Ladakh across the LAC in April 2020, there were reports that the People's Liberation Army had deployed its S-400 systems.

Last December, India began taking deliveries of the S-400 systems, five regiments of which were contracted from Russia under a \$5.43 billion deal signed in October 2018.



Boosting defence: A view of the new S-400 "Triumph" surface-to-air missile system. ■ REUTERS

The first unit is delivered and in place, two defence sources confirmed, stating that the second unit is scheduled to arrive very soon.

With the threat of the U.S. sanctions under the CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act), the two sides had, back

then, worked out payments through rupee-rouble exchange.

More recently, a range of sanctions imposed on Russia for its offensive in Ukraine has caused concerns on any possible impact on deliveries of spares and platforms contracted and the three Services and the Defence Ministry are making assessments on the extent of impact, if any. The Defence Ministry is also closely watching any impact the sanctions may have on the shipping and cargo movement which could delay deliveries of large systems, one official said.

Russia is committed to ho-

nouring all deliveries as per contract, diplomatic sources said, stating their industry is capable of handling the requirements.

Speaking before the committee, Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar said that concerted efforts had been made by the Indian Air Force to ramp up its capability and to make up for shortfall in fighter squadrons.

Stating that this "pace of acquisition" was not there earlier, Mr. Kumar said that they have acquired 36 Rafale fighter planes, issued order for 83 Light Combat Aircraft and ordered Unmanned Aerial Vehicles.

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.