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DAJLY NEWS
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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EXPLAINER

The shift from Jakarta to Nusantara

Why is Indonesia changing its capital city? Is it the first country to move its metropolis?

ANANTH KRISHNAN

The story so far: On January 18, Indonesia's Parliament approved a bill to relocate the country's capital from Jakarta to a new city to be built on the island of Borneo, named as Nusantara. The decision followed growing concerns about the long-term sustainability of Jakarta. The move to the forested province of East Kalimantan in Borneo has, however, triggered its own concerns about the environmental impact there as the massive project now kicks off.

What is the problem with Jakarta? In August 2019, President Joko Widodo first announced that the capital would be shifted from Jakarta, on the island of Java, which has served as the national capital since Indonesia's independence, to a new city to be built in East Kalimantan on the island of Borneo, some 2,000 km northeast of Jakarta across the Java Sea. As visitors to Jakarta would attest, the teeming city has suffered from a range of urban problems from overcrowding to pollution and possibly one of the world's most congested roads. One major concern about its long-term future was tied to the fact that the city,



This handout shows a computer-generated design of Indonesia's future presidential palace in East Kalimantan. It was released by Nyoman Nuarta on January 18, 2022. *AFP*

home to around 10 million people, stands on a swamp on the island of Java and has been slowly sinking. Studies have forecast that the entire city could sink by 2050, while flooding is a recurring problem.

What does the latest bill do? The bill has now given the green light to Mr. Widodo's long-discussed move and

outlined a plan to shift the capital in five stages. Planning Minister Suharso Monoarfa told Parliament the first stage, to be completed by 2024, will focus on basic infrastructure such as new roads to provide access to the site. The last stage will be finished in 2045. The project is estimated to cost more than \$30 billion. A broader goal, President Widodo has said,

was to bring greater economic activity to Kalimantan and reduce the dependence on Jakarta as well as the island of Java, which is at the centre of economic activity as well as national politics. Government offices will all be moved to Nusantara. If the current capital is suffering from pollution and flooding among other problems, environmental groups have, however, expressed concerns that the new project may end up bringing those problems to Kalimantan, a region known for its forests and biodiversity.

Why has it been named Nusantara? The name literally means "archipelago", but also has a historical context referring to the entire region, including Indonesia and its neighbours in Southeast Asia. The Planning Minister said Nusantara "is a unity concept that accommodates all of our diversity, whether in race, language, or ethnicity" and the hope was for the new capital to be reflective of that aspiration. The name Nusantara dates back to Majapahit, a Hindu empire that was based in Java and ruled from the late 13th to the early 15th centuries. At its peak, its reach or influence extended beyond today's Indonesia to much of Southeast

Asia, including Brunei and parts of Thailand and the Philippines. While the official explanation is that this connotes diversity, there has been some head-scratching as to why President Widodo, who chose the name from a list of 80 suggestions, finally decided on one that refers not only to Indonesia but to the entire region.

Have other countries recently shifted capitals? States have shifted capitals for a multitude of reasons throughout history, from reasons to do with the weather and the military to pride projects and just politics. Kazakhstan and Myanmar offer two recent examples.

In 1997, Kazakhstan shifted its capital from Almaty to Astana, like many new capitals, a planned city. Then Astana was itself renamed in 2019 to Nur-Sultan, in homage to long-term former President Nursultan Nazarbayev (currently facing the ire of protesters amid the recent unrest).

Myanmar in 2005 shifted its capital from Yangon to another planned city, Naypyidaw. Strategic reasons were cited as one possible explanation for the military regime's decision.

THE GIST

■ On January 18, Indonesia's Parliament approved a bill to relocate the country's capital from Jakarta to a new city to be built on the island of Borneo, named as Nusantara.

■ Jakarta suffers from a range of urban problems such as overcrowding and pollution. One major concern about its long-term future was tied to the fact that the city stands on a swamp on the island of Java and has been slowly sinking.

■ Nusantara literally means "archipelago", but also has a historical context referring to the entire region, including Indonesia and the rest of Southeast Asia.

Yemen's tragedy

Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE must rein in proxies and work towards rebuilding Yemen

The Saudi-led coalition, in which the UAE was a part, started bombing Yemen in 2015, hoping to swiftly dislodge the Houthi rebels from Sana'a and reinstate the government of Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi in the capital. Almost seven years later, the Iran-backed Houthis, who were holed up in northern Yemen and began counter-attacks with missiles and drones into Saudi Arabia, have expanded the war all the way to the Gulf coast of the UAE. Monday's drone attacks on Abu Dhabi by the Houthis, in which two Indians and a Pakistani were killed, were a message to the Emiratis on what they are capable of. It may not be a coincidence that the attacks were carried out at a time when the UAE-backed forces have been making slow gains in Yemen's conflict against the Houthis. But the UAE's involvement in Yemen has had many turns. It quit the Saudi-led coalition in 2020 as the war had hit a stalemate. Since then, the Emiratis have provided tactical support to the Southern Transitional Council, a separatist body in southern Yemen that drove the Saudi-backed forces loyal to President Hadi out of Aden. The dynamics changed again when the Houthis began pushing into territories outside their stronghold, especially Marib; if they take Marib, they would be a step ahead to push into the south. Faced with the prospects of further Houthi territorial gains, UAE-backed forces such as Giants Brigades (a militia from the south) have joined hands with the government. Then came the Abu Dhabi attacks.

These could escalate the conflict. The immediate response from the Saudi-led coalition has been to carry out a massive air strike on the partly destroyed Sana'a. The UAE has also vowed retaliation. A Houthi strike to scare away the Emiratis from Yemen could trigger the opposite reaction from Abu Dhabi, which now has powerful proxies in the south. The cycle of violence spells tragic news for Yemen's 30 million people for whom the country has been turned into what UNICEF has called "a living hell". Yemen, one of the poorest countries in the Arab world, is facing a three-way crisis – thousands have been killed in the conflict, many more abandoned or suffering by the collapse of the government and social services; and mass hunger. The first step to address this tragedy is to end the fighting. But, unfortunately, the parties in the conflict and their regional backers are keen on escalating the conflict further rather than finding a solution. If the fighting over the last seven years holds any lesson, it is that there can be no military solution to Yemen's problems. To dial down tensions, there have to be talks, not only between the rebels, separatists and the government but also between their backers – Iran, the UAE and Saudi Arabia. If these regional powers agree to rein in their proxies and work towards rebuilding Yemen, that would also help them restore stability and security in the Arabian peninsula.

U.S. warns Russia on invading Ukraine

Any incursion would be met with a 'severe' response from the U.S. and its allies, says White House

SRIRAM LAKSHMAN

The White House clarified U.S. President Joe Biden's opposition to Russian aggression on Ukraine after Mr. Biden appeared to suggest during a press conference that a small incursion by Russia would be tolerated. In a statement released after the press conference, White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki said that any incursion would be met with a "severe" response from the U.S. and its allies.

"President Biden has been clear with the Russian President: If any Russian military forces move across the Ukrainian border, that's a renewed invasion, and it will be met with a swift, severe, and united response from the United States and our Allies," Ms. Psaki said. She added that paramilitary and cyber attacks by Russia would also be met with reciprocal action.

Tensions between the West and Moscow have soared as Russia has massed an estimated 100,000 troops along Ukraine's borders.

Earlier on Wednesday, Mr. Biden had told reporters during a press conference to mark his first anniversary in office that the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), a military alliance of the West, was united in its opposition to the idea of Russia in-



Tactical readiness: Ukrainian Armed Forces during a military exercise in the Kherson region on Wednesday. • REUTERS

vading Ukraine, but qualified it to say the response would depend on the size of the incursion.

"It's one thing if it's a minor incursion, and then we [NATO allies] end up having a fight about what to do and not do, etc.," Mr. Biden said. "But if they actually do what they're capable of doing... it is going to be a disaster for Russia, if they further invade Ukraine and that our allies and partners are ready to impose severe cost and significant harm on Russia and the Russian economy," he said.

Mr. Biden said he had conveyed to Mr. Putin (the two held a telephone call in December) that he would fortify NATO's eastern flank if Russia went into Ukraine. He also said Russia would pre-

vail in the long run over Ukraine, if it invaded the country, but there would be a heavy cost. He said economic sanctions would involve a ban on transactions in dollar denominated assets.

Stop expansion

In a draft security agreement Moscow sent to Western countries in December, it had proposed that NATO not expand to include Ukraine. Another Russian demand was that NATO not deploy weapons or forces in countries that became NATO members after May 1997.

Asked later during the press interaction if he had effectively given Mr. Putin "permission" to make a small incursion into Ukraine, Mr. Biden said, "...It's very im-

portant that we keep everyone in NATO on the same page. And that's what I'm spending a lot of time doing." There are differences within NATO on what countries are willing to do depending on what scenario plays out, Mr. Biden said. In terms of calibrating a response, he cited the example of cyber ops being countered with similar tactics.

Mr. Biden said the economic sanctions on Russia would have "devastating" consequences on it but would also have a negative impact on the U.S. and European countries and so the allies would have to be on the same page about a response to any Russian incursion.

Asked if he has made a determination that Mr. Putin

has decided to invade Ukraine, Mr. Biden said Mr. Putin has not yet, he believed, made the decision and that he is calculating the short and long-term consequences for Russia.

On Wednesday, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov reiterated the Russian position that it is not planning to invade Ukraine, according to a report in the Associated Press. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Kiev on Wednesday, will meet with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, on Friday in Geneva, in an attempt to reduce tensions, which remain high, after rounds of inconclusive talks between the two countries and European allies of the U.S.

U.S. warship's South China Sea passage sparks row

PLA says forces deployed to drive it away

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

BEIJING

A U.S. warship sailed through the South China Sea on Thursday, sparking a warning from China's military as tensions between the superpowers remain high.

The American Navy said the *USS Benfold* "asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the vicinity of the Paracel Islands, consistent with international law".

The Southern Theatre Command of the People's Liberation Army said the U.S. ship had "illegally" entered what Beijing regards as its waters.

The PLA "organised naval and air forces to engage in tracking and monitoring as well as to warn and drive (the destroyer) away," its statement added.

China claims almost all of the South China Sea, through which trillions of dollars in trade passes an-



USS Benfold during its voyage in the South China Sea. ■ REUTERS

nually, with competing claims from Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Beijing has ignored a 2016 ruling by The Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration that its historical claim is without basis.

Led by the United States, multiple Western navies conduct "freedom of navigation operations", known in military circles as FONOPs, to assert the idea that the South China Sea is an international waterway.

LETTER & SPIRIT

The question of OBC reservation in local bodies

The apex court's latest order makes it mandatory that the principles laid down by the Supreme Court must be followed across the country

THE GIST

■ The apex court's latest order in *Rahul Ramesh Wagh v. State of Maharashtra & Ors.* makes it mandatory that the principles laid down by the Supreme Court for providing reservation to OBCs in local bodies shall be followed across the country.

■ A five-judge Constitution Bench in the *K. Krishnamurthy (Dr.) v. Union of India (2010)* judgment said that barriers to political participation are not the same as barriers to education and employment. Though reservation to local bodies is permissible, the top court declared that the same is subject to three conditions: 1) to set up a dedicated Commission to conduct empirical inquiry into the nature of the backwardness in local bodies; 2) to specify the proportion of reservation required to be provided local body-wise 3) such reservation shall not exceed aggregate of 50% of the total seats reserved for SCs/STs/OBCs taken together.

■ Maharashtra had constituted a Commission to ascertain the backwardness of OBCs in June 2021. But without waiting for an empirical report, an ordinance was promulgated to amend the Maharashtra Zilla Parishads Act, Panchayat Samitis Act and the Maharashtra Village Panchayat Act so as to conduct local body elections with OBC reservation. This was struck down by the Supreme court.

ABHILASH M.R.

Reservation to Other Backward Classes (OBCs) in local body elections sans empirical base can no more be sustainable in law and the apex court's latest order in *Rahul Ramesh Wagh v. State of Maharashtra & Ors.* makes it mandatory that the principles laid down by the Supreme Court for providing reservation to OBCs in local bodies shall be scrupulously followed across the country. The latest order arises out of the challenge made to the ordinance promulgated on the teeth of the Supreme Court judgments by the Governor of Maharashtra to conduct the local body elections by providing 27% reservation to OBCs.

The Constitution Bench decision

The present political quandary harks back to the five-judge Constitution Bench decision in *K. Krishnamurthy (Dr.) v. Union of India (2010)* wherein the Supreme Court had interpreted Article 243D(6) and Article 243T(6), which permit reservation by enactment of law for backward classes in panchayat and municipal bodies respectively, to hold that barriers to political participation are not the same as that of the barriers that limit access to education and employment. However, for creating a level playing field, reservation may be desirable as mandated by the aforementioned Articles which provide a separate constitutional basis for reservation, as distinct from what are conceived under Article 15 (4) and Article 16 (4) which form the basis for reservation in education and employment. Though reservation to local bodies is permissible, the top court declared that the same is subject to empirical finding of backwardness in relation to local bodies as fulfilled through the three tests as follows:

"1) To set up a dedicated Commission to conduct contemporaneous rigorous empirical inquiry into the nature and implications of the backwardness qua local bodies, within the State; 2) To specify the proportion of reservation required to be provisioned local body-wise in light of recommendations of the Commission, so as not to fall foul of overbreadth; 3) and in any case such reservation shall not exceed aggregate of 50% of the total seats reserved in favour of SCs/STs/OBCs taken together." The 50% ceiling specifically relied on the ratio of the historic *Indra Sawhney* judgment (1992).



Vikas Krishnarao Gawli v. State of Maharashtra & Ors. (2021)

The Indian political class usually displays apathy to the law declared by the courts as contrary to the enacted law. The 2010 judgment was not acted upon and the constitutionality of the enacted reservation was challenged. This resulted in the 2021 judgment of a three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court. In the above case, the Supreme Court read down the provision of the Maharashtra Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samitis Act, 1961, which mandated for 27% reservation to OBCs in local bodies.

The court observed that the reservation for OBCs was just a "statutory dispensation to be provided by the State legislations" and is different from the "constitutional" provisions which mandate reservation to the Scheduled Castes and Tribes (SC/ST). While insisting on the triple test, the court observed that the reservation in favour of OBCs in the concerned local bodies can be notified to the extent that it does not exceed 50% of the total seats reserved in favour of SCs/STs/OBCs taken together. The Supreme Court quashed notifications issued by the Maharashtra Election Commission, which provided more than 50% reservation to OBCs and SC/STs in some local bodies. However, the political decision was to take

the usual route of ordinance to overcome an adverse judicial decision.

The wingless ordinance

Maharashtra had constituted a Commission to ascertain the backwardness of OBCs in June 2021. But without waiting for an empirical report, as mandated by the court, an ordinance was promulgated to amend the Maharashtra Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samitis Act and the Maharashtra Village Panchayat Act so as to conduct local body elections while ensuring OBC reservation. Though the ordinance was portrayed to be in compliance with the order of the apex court without breaching the 50% ceiling as mandated by the triple test, other parameters had been transgressed. The ordinance failed to take off, as it was challenged before the Bombay High Court; but the election process was not stalled, citing which the petitioner reached the Supreme Court by filing appeal by special leave and the election process qua the reserved seats was stayed. The OBC reservation and notification for the local body election in Madhya Pradesh also were deemed to fall foul of the apex court, on challenge.

The Supreme Court directed the re-notification of the reserved seats as

belonging to general category in both the States on the basis of which the election process may proceed.

Legislative resolve and the judicial response

Surprisingly, on December 23, the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly passed a resolution to keep the local body elections without OBC reservation at abeyance. Taking a political cue from Madhya Pradesh, the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly also passed a resolution to stall the local body elections in the wake of the judicial interference.

Interestingly, the last order of the apex court records that "in case, the State or Union Territory is not in a position to fulfil the triple test requirement and the election to any of its local body cannot be postponed beyond the statutory period, the (State) Election Commission (concerned) ought to notify proportionate seats as open category seats, and proceed with the elections of the local bodies."

Had the governments stuck to the law as mandated by Article 141 of the Constitution, this quandary wouldn't have arisen. Rule of law is not just a set of letters, but it has to be followed in spirit.

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Focus on rights made India weak, says PM

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the focus on talking about, and fighting for, rights in the 75 years since Independence had kept the country “weak” and the next 25 years would be dedicated to hard work, sacrifice and “*tapasya*” or penance.

Mr. Modi was virtually addressing the launch of the Brahma Kumaris’ year-long programme of events as part of the government’s celebration of 75 years of Independence, *Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav*.

He said it should be acknowledged that the evil of ignoring duties had become part of the national life. “In the last 75 years, we only kept talking about rights, fighting for rights and wasting time. The talk of rights to some extent, for some time, may be right in a particular circumstance, but forgetting one’s duties completely has played a huge role in keeping India weak.”

CONTINUED ON ► PAGE 8

SC upholds OBC quota in NEET admissions

The apex court held it was the Centre’s prerogative to provide reservation in All India Quota (AIQ) seats. Granting reservation in the AIQ seats was a policy decision of the government, though subject to the contours of judicial review. similar to every reservation policy; .

Justice Chandrachud said the power of the government to provide reservations under Article 15 (4) and (5) of the Constitution is not an “exception” to Article 15 (1), which enshrines the mandate that “the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth or any of them”.

The court held that the power of the government to craft reservation for the OBC amplified the principle of “substantive equality” manifested through Article 15 (1).

Parliament support

The Parliament had backed the cause by enacting the Central Educational Institutions (Reservation in Admission) Act 2006 to enable 15% reservation for Scheduled Castes, 7.5% for the Sche-

duled Tribes, and 27% for the OBC category. The Constitution Bench in *Ashoka Kumar Thakur v. Union of India* had also upheld the constitutional validity of 27% reservation for the OBC category provided under the 2006 Act.

“Though the Act of 2006 would not be applicable to the seats earmarked for AIQ in State-run institutions since it would not fall within the definition of a Central educational institution under the Act, the Union, in view of Article 15(5), has the power to provide reservations for OBCs in the AIQ seats. It is not tenable for the States to provide reservation in the AIQ seats since these seats have been ‘surrendered’ to the Centre,” Justice Chandrachud noted.

The judgment was based on petitions filed by doctors in August 2021 against a July 29, 2021, notification issued by the Directorate General of Health Services of the Ministry of Health implementing 27% and 10% reservation for OBC and Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), respectively, while filling up 15% undergraduate and 50% postgraduate AIQ seats under NEET.


SC upholds OBC quota in NEET

‘Open exam only ensures formal equality, does not end ingrained inequalities’

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday upheld the constitutional validity of reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBC) candidates in the All India Quota seats for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) for undergraduate and postgraduate medical and dental courses, noting that “reservation is not at odds with merit” in open competitive examinations.

“If open examinations present equality of opportunity to candidates to compete, reservations ensure that the opportunities are distributed in such a way that backward classes are equally able to benefit from such opportunities which typically evade them because of structural barriers. This is the only manner in which merit can be a democratising force that equalises inherited disadvantages and privileges. Otherwise claims of individual merit are nothing but tools of obscuring inheritances that underlie achievements,” a Bench of Justices D.Y. Chandrachud and A.S. Bopanna observed in a 106-page judgment.

 **Merit cannot be reduced to narrow definitions of performance in an open competitive examination which only provides formal equality of opportunity... High scores in an exam are not a proxy for merit. Merit should be socially contextualised and reconceptualised as an instrument that advances social goods like equality. In such a context, reservation is not at odds with merit**

SUPREME COURT



The court said an open competitive exam only ensures formal equality and does not end widespread ingrained inequalities in the availability of, and access to, educational facilities to certain classes of people, including the OBC.

Multiple privileges

The privileges that accrue to forward classes are not limited to having access to quality schooling and access to tutorials and coaching centres to prepare for a competitive examination but also includes their social networks and cultural capital (communication skills, accent, books or academic accomplishments) that they inherit from their family, Justice Chandrachud

said. The cultural capital ensures that a child from the forward classes is trained unconsciously by the familial environment to take up higher education or high posts commensurate with their family’s standing. This works to the disadvantage of individuals from social backward classes who are first-generation learners and come from communities whose traditional occupations do not result in the transmission of necessary skills required to perform well in open examination.

Thus, merit is not solely of one’s own making.

“The rhetoric surrounding merit obscures the way in which family, schooling, fortune and a gift of talents

that the society currently values aids in one’s advancement. Thus, the exclusionary standard of merit serves to denigrate the dignity of those who face barriers in their advancement which are not of their own making,” Justice Chandrachud explained.

‘Not the best gauge’

The court said the “idea of merit” based on scores in an exam requires “deeper scrutiny”.

“While examinations are a necessary and convenient method of distributing educational opportunities, marks may not always be the best gauge of individual merit. If a high-scoring candidate does not use their talent to perform good actions, it would be difficult to call them meritorious merely because they scored high marks,” Justice Chandrachud reasoned.

The fortitude and resilience required to uplift oneself from conditions of deprivation are equally reflective of individual calibre and merit, the court said.

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Drop the IAS cadre rules amendments

States are right in perceiving the planned amendments to Rule 6(1) to be an infringement of their rights



K. ASHOK VARDHAN SHETTY & V. RAMANI

It was Sardar Patel who had championed the creation of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS) as “All India Services” (AIS) whose members would be recruited and appointed by the Centre and allotted to various States, and who could serve both under the State and the Centre. He considered the AIS essential to knit the administrative framework of a vast and diverse country into an integrated whole and to provide a connecting link between implementation at the field level and policymaking at the top. Speaking to the Constituent Assembly on October 10, 1949, Patel said, “The Union will go, you will not have a united India if you have not a good All India Service which has the independence to speak out its mind, which has a sense of security...”

Healthy conventions earlier

AIS officers are made available for central deputation through a consultative process involving the Centre, the States and the officers concerned. In the past, certain healthy conventions were generally followed. No officer was sent on central deputation against his/her

own will. Every year, the States would prepare an “offer list” of officers who had opted for central deputation without arbitrarily withholding any names. The Centre would choose officers only from among those “on offer” from the States. The States would relieve the officers picked up by the Centre at the earliest.

When politics intruded

Unfortunately, both the Centre and the States have at times flouted these healthy conventions for political considerations. In July 2001, the Centre unilaterally “placed at its disposal” the services of three IPS officers of Tamil Nadu cadre. In December 2020, the Centre did the same in respect of three IPS officers of West Bengal cadre. In May 2021, the Centre unilaterally issued orders for the central deputation of the Chief Secretary of West Bengal just before his last day in service. In all these cases, the States concerned refused to relieve the officers.

Some States used to vindictively withhold the names of some of the officers who had opted for central deputation or delay their relief after they were picked up by the Centre. An egregious example was that of a senior IPS officer who was not allowed to join the Central Bureau of Investigation despite earlier clearance and was suspended by the Government of Tamil Nadu in May 2014 when she relieved herself from the State pursuant to the Centre’s direction.

The Central Government has



GETTY IMAGES

proposed four amendments to Rule 6(1) of the IAS (Cadre) Rules, 1954 dealing with deputation, and has sought the views of State governments before January 25, 2022. The existing Rule 6(1) states that a cadre officer may be deputed to the Central Government (or to another State or a PSU) only with the concurrence of the State Government concerned. However, it has a proviso which states that in case of any disagreement, the matter shall be decided by the Central Government.

Two of the four proposed amendments are disconcerting.

One is a new proviso making it mandatory for the State government to provide a certain fixed number of IAS officers for central deputation every year. The proposed amendment more or less compels a State government to offer IAS officers for central deputation even when these officers themselves may not wish to go on central deputation. Poor working conditions in junior-level posts, an opaque and arbitrary system of empanelment for senior-level posts, and lack of security of tenure at all levels are the real rea-

sons for the shortage of IAS officers, which the Centre should address. With the Government of India itself enthusiastically promoting lateral entry to posts in the Centre and providing an increased share of central deputation posts to the central services, there is no need to push unwilling IAS officers on central deputation.

The other is a proviso that requires the State government to release such officers whose services may be sought by the Central Government *in specific situations*. Based on experiences of the recent past, State governments have a justified apprehension that this proviso may be misused for political considerations. What if the Centre unilaterally places at its disposal the services of the Chief Secretary, Principal Secretary to the Chief Minister and other key officers of a State ruled by a rival party or deposes them to other States?

Long-term damage

States are right in perceiving the proposed amendments as a serious infringement of their rights to deploy IAS officers as they deem best, especially when the cutting edge of policy implementation is mostly at the State level. The contemplated changes have grave implications for the independence, security and morale of IAS officers. If States begin to doubt the loyalty of IAS officers, they are likely to reduce the number of IAS cadre posts and also their annual intake of IAS officers. They may prefer officers of the State Civil

Services to handle as many posts as possible. In course of time, the IAS will lose its sheen, and the best and the brightest candidates will no longer opt for the IAS as a career. Short-sighted decisions can do long-term damage to the polity.

Think cooperative federalism

In the words of jurist Nani Palkhivala, “A national consensus should clearly remind the Centre that it has not inherited the Viceroy’s mantle of paramountcy... The Centre would have no moral authority to govern unless it displays a sense of constitutional morality, particularly a sense of justice and fairness towards the States”. In *S.R. Bommai vs Union of India* (1994), the Supreme Court held that “States have an independent constitutional existence and they have as important a role to play in the political, social, educational and cultural life of the people as the Union. They are neither satellites nor agents of the Centre”.

We hope that the Centre will heed Sardar Patel’s sage advice and drop the proposed amendments. In a federal setup, it is inevitable that differences and disputes would arise between the Centre and the States. But all such quarrels should be resolved in the spirit of cooperative federalism and keeping the larger national interest in mind.

K. Ashok Vardhan Shetty is a former IAS officer of the Tamil Nadu cadre. V. Ramani is a former IAS officer of the Maharashtra cadre

Fall in deputations to Centre in 2021

Only 10% mid-level IAS officers were posted with Union govt., DoPT figures say

VIJAITA SINGH
NEW DELHI

Only 10% mid-level IAS officers were posted with the Union government in 2021, a sharp fall from 19% in 2014. The decrease in central deputation of IAS officers becomes even more stark as the total pool of such officers at this level expanded from 621 in 2014 to 1130 in 2021, an increase of around 80%.

According to data available with the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), the number of central deputation reserve of IAS officers has gone down from 309 in 2011 to 223.

A senior government official said on Thursday that DoPT's proposal to amend Rule 6 (deputation of cadre officers) of the Indian Administrative Service (Cadre) Rules 1954 was necessitated as the number of officers available under Central Dep-

utation is not sufficient to meet the requirement of Government of India (GoI).

Four amendments

The Hindu reported on January 19 that four amendments are proposed that will enable the Union government to seek the services of an Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS) and Indian Forest Service (IFoS) officer posted in a State even without the State government's consent. The Centre can depute the officer if the State does not decide on time.

The official stated that the existing rules did not have specific provisions to cater to situations when services of an All India Service (AIS) officer may be warranted in the Centre to meet specific situations such as a major disaster or national security. "Similarly, services of an AIS

officer with a specific domain expertise may be required for any important time-bound flagship programme or project. The extant Cadre Rules do not have specific provisions to cater to such situations, which have now been proposed through these amendments," the official explained.

AIS officers are recruited by the Union Government and their services are placed under various State Cadres, and it is incumbent upon the members of service to serve both under the State and the Centre, said the official.

The total strength of any cadre is calculated by including central deputation reserve (CDR), which is around 40% of the sanctioned posts.

CDR obligations

"However, a trend of decreasing representation of IAS officers up to joint-secre-

tary level has been noticed as most of the States are not meeting their CDR obligations and the number of officers sponsored by the States to serve the Union government are much less than the reserve," said the official.

The CDR utilisation has gone down from 25% in 2011 to 18% presently.

"In spite of increase of IAS officers at Deputy Secretary/Director level in IAS from 621 in 2014 to 1130 in 2021, the number of such officers on central deputation has gone down from 117 to 114 during the period," said the official.

The official asserted that the requirement from the States is only to sponsor adequate number of officers to be posted with the Centre. "The actual number of officers to be deputed here is to be decided only in consultation with the State government," the official said.

Should the government loosen its purse strings?

PARLEY

As inflation is driven by supply-side factors, tax policy can be used to cushion its impact

With the Union Budget 10 days away, many economic observers are now focused on what support the Centre can offer the economy, which is still struggling to recover from the pandemic. Some analysts believe that the government must keep its spending in check to prevent price rise from getting out of control. Retail inflation is hovering close to 6%, while the wholesale inflation rate is in double digits. Other analysts, however, believe that the current rise in prices is a temporary phenomenon, and that the government must ignore the fiscal deficit and ramp up spending to support the ailing economy. In a conversation moderated by Prashanth Perumal J., N.R. Bhanumurthy and Himanshu discuss the way forward. Edited excerpts:

What is your view on the current trend in price inflation?

N.R. Bhanumurthy: First of all, when it comes to retail inflation, the latest reading says it is somewhere close to 5.6%. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has already predicted that it will remain below 6% by the end of March. However, many of us believe there are some upside risks when it comes to inflation and inflation expectations. This is for a couple of reasons. One, international oil prices have gone up to \$87 per barrel this week. We also see that inflation pressure is building up across the world, especially in countries where there was a large fiscal stimulus. So, there could be the risk of transmission of international inflation to the domestic economy. But at the same time, one needs to really understand what drives this inflation. At least in the Indian context, supply-side constraints play a major role and this needs a different policy prescription. And I'm very sure that the RBI has many instruments to contain this inflation pressure. For the past three quarters, the RBI has been hitting bull's eye when it comes to inflation forecasts, so I think when it says that retail inflation will be less than 6%, it's likely to come true. With regard to Wholesale Price Index (WPI), I've been a little wary of this reading. You cannot have wholesale market prices

and retail market prices diverging for a very long time. We generally expect the transmission between the wholesale market and the retail market to not be more than one or two months. But what we see now is a very prolonged divergence. We need to look at a little more in detail in terms of the coverage and commodities and all those things. We need to focus more on Consumer Price Index (CPI) and less on wholesale prices.

Himanshu: We have to be very cautious in not just looking at inflation numbers in aggregate, but also what is driving inflation. I think that most of the inflation is basically driven by supply. Also, it is not driven as much by domestic factors as it is by international factors. But domestic factors have added to the problem. The most obvious factor is that taxes on petroleum goods and services have increased. So, domestic factors have contributed to inflation, but the inflation is predominantly driven by the supply side. But I would also be a bit hesitant in saying that there is only a little that can be done using fiscal policy.

Second, I think the gap between WPI and CPI is quite a big one and it has been so for a long time. Some of the inflation in wholesale prices will be passed on to consumer prices, so inflation is a cause of concern not just for fiscal policy or monetary policy, but also for the overall health of the economy because inflation is going to impinge on the basic economics of households.

How do you see the role of fiscal policy in supporting the economy in a high-inflation environment?

N.R. Bhanumurthy: With regard to the fiscal policy, the current year is turning out to be a very good year in terms of tax revenues. If you look at the last Budget, the government was focused on the medium-term perspective, while leaving short-term issues to the central bank. So, I don't see how it is going to be good fiscal policy if growth is going to be affected by fiscal prudence. I would recommend that we not worry about the fiscal deficit at this point of time be-



SHRUTI KUMAR YADAV

ty nets continue. Right now, the government has fiscal room and will want to focus on the social sector as well as medium-term growth prospects. Ultimately, the biggest stimulus would be any measure that provides more employment opportunities. Economic recovery has to be on a more sustainable basis rather than in the form of short-term spikes in growth.

Himanshu: I think it should spend more. If there's any time that the government should be spending more, it is now. One has to go beyond this obsession with managing the fiscal framework. If fiscal prudence leads to growth slowing down, I don't think that is something sustainable. The reason I say this is because there are enough of the government's own economic indicators that show that there is excess capacity in the economy. Aggregate consumption, which is a big part of GDP, is slowing down and has been for quite some time now. I think at this point of time the focus should be on reviving the economy and that is best done using fiscal policies.

The government will have to open its purse, not just in terms of improving the incomes of people in cases where it can directly do so, such as using social security schemes, but also by increasing the transfers to States. We are actually getting into a situation where the public debt to GDP ratio is going to increase because if growth is going to slow down, it would basically mean that government revenues will also slow down. So, I don't see how it is going to be good fiscal policy if growth is going to be affected by fiscal prudence. I would recommend that we not worry about the fiscal deficit at this point of time be-

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HIMANSHU

cause once growth picks up, then a lot of the fiscal issues can be taken care of. But if the economic engines are not firing up, you are getting into a vicious cycle, and then I don't think any kind of fiscal management, either in the short or in the medium term, is going to be sustainable. So, I think we need the government to play the important role of reviving the economy.

How would you answer people who talk about the risk of stagflation?

N.R. Bhanumurthy: I think they are being alarmist for a simple reason. We, at least in India, have a consensus that the right inflation number which is relevant for the household is the retail inflation number. The WPI is a very segmented indicator that doesn't include services and other things. So, let's be clear that if we are to look at one number to gauge inflation, it is CPI inflation. And the CPI inflation is well within the RBI's targeted range of 2% to 6%. When it comes to the faltering Index of Industrial Production (IIP) numbers, it should be noted that the IIP covers a very small component of the industry. The IIP is a very crude leading indicator. So, I don't think we need to make a judgment based on IIP numbers. My own assessment is that we are

nowhere near stagflation. In fact, for the next financial year, my own prediction for GDP growth is somewhere close to 6.5%-7%. And if we look at exports, there is a very substantial rise in exports, so the recovery seems to be very, very sharp. If we can continue with the kind of fiscal framework that was adopted in the last Budget, I think we should be looking at close to 7% GDP growth for the next year. And as we already discussed, the inflation pressure is definitely there. It may be somewhere close to 6%. So, I would not really support the argument that we are anywhere close to stagflation.

Himanshu: Stagflation may be too strong a word, but I think there are certainly pressure points. Inflation and low growth persisting for a long time is something that I don't think we can rule out completely. Where I disagree with Bhanu is with his optimism as far as growth prospects are concerned. At least when it comes to the economic numbers that I can see, it's not something that is going to be very easy to deal with. A lot of the inflation right now is still coming from the supply side. But if the economy does bounce back once the pandemic is over, it's not going to lead to the softening of inflation; it may actually aggravate the inflation situation.

Second, as far as the growth numbers are concerned, again, I'm not so optimistic. I'm not going to make a prediction on the growth numbers for next year because in this crisis situation, most of these numbers are affected by the base chosen to calculate these numbers. I think it will be some time before we come back to a normal situation. Unless we are back in a normal situation, I think all these numbers don't have much meaning; they are just bouncing up and down. In the broadest sense, the threat of high inflation and low growth persisting for at least some time is real. A lot depends on how the government responds to the situation, both in terms of reviving demand in the economy, but also in terms of managing inflation. These are issues for which we still have no conclusive answers.

Is there something the Budget can do in terms of structural reforms to address inflation?

driven by the supply side?

N.R. Bhanumurthy: I'm not really sure whether fiscal policy can directly address inflation driven by supply-side factors, except maybe by reviving growth. But to go back to an earlier point, if we look at the advance estimates of GDP, they suggest that the investment rate is somewhere close to 36%, which is very close to the investment rate during the high growth period that we saw in the last decade. This is one of the major indicators for me when I say we are going to see 7% GDP growth.

Himanshu: There's not much that the government can do. But what it certainly can do is protect demand, the economy, the middle class, and particularly the poor and the vulnerable from the impact of high inflation. That, I think, is the role of the government. Taxation of petroleum products, for instance, is something that is part of fiscal policy. So, that is something that the government can influence. When it comes to fertilizer prices, which are rising very fast, the government can increase its contribution and thus reduce the prices that the farmers are paying. Remember, the cost of inflation is not just a direct cost, it can also be passed on indirectly to other prices and this can have a very debilitating impact on the economy. The industry, such as the automobile sector, can start passing on its high input cost to the retail sector, that is to consumers. That's where I think the government can actually step in and cushion the impact that high inflation has on industry as well as on consumers by lowering direct and indirect taxes. That's something that will have an impact on what happens overall to the demand side and to the revival of the economy. So, I don't think that the government's hands are completely tied; it certainly has a role to play. The government should be looking at the long-term picture rather than the short-term picture of generating revenues by taxing more. It should rather allow people to have a larger disposable income so that consumption in the economy increases. And one way to do it, other than through income transfers, is to reduce taxes on goods and services that are witnessing high inflation.



N.R. Bhanumurthy is Vice Chancellor of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar School of Economics University



Himanshu is Associate Professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University



Scan the QR code to listen to the full interview online

Extended range BrahMos tested

Launch conducted by BrahMos Aerospace in coordination with DRDO teams

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

The supersonic cruise missile BrahMos with increased indigenous content and improved performance was successfully flight-tested from the Integrated Test Range, Chandipur off the coast of Odisha, on Thursday morning.

“The missile was equipped with the advanced indigenous technologies and followed a modified optimal trajectory for enhanced efficiency and improved performance. The missile with the modified control system has been fine tuned to achieve an enhanced capability,” a statement from the Defence Research and Development



Lift off: The BrahMos supersonic missile was successfully test-fired from Integrated Test Range in Chandipur. ■PTI

Organisation (DRDO) said.

The highly-maneuvrable missile cruised at supersonic speed for its maximum range and all mission objectives were met, it noted.

The launch was conduct-

ed by Brahmos Aerospace in close coordination with DRDO teams. The flight test was monitored by all the sensors of the range instrumentation, including telemetry, radar and the electro-

optical tracking systems deployed across the eastern coast and the down range ships, the statement said.

Earlier this month, an extended range ship to ship variant was flight-tested from indigenous guided stealth missile destroyer *INS Visakhapatnam*.

BrahMos Aerospace has been continuously upgrading the BrahMos to increase its effectiveness and lethality against sea and land targets, the statement said.

The missile is capable of being launched from land, sea, sub-sea and air against surface and sea-based targets and has been long inducted by the Indian armed forces.

Environment Ministry plan to rank States draws ire

It doesn't intend to hasten green clearances: officials

JACOB KOSHY
NEW DELHI

A proposal by the Union Environment Ministry to “rank” and “incentivise” States on how quickly they could give environmental clearances to proposed infrastructure projects has drawn fire from environmentalists on the grounds that it contravenes basic principles of environmental regulation.

A note to States by the Union Environment Ministry on January 17 spells out seven criteria to rate State Environmental Impact Assessment Agencies (SEIAA) on “transparency, efficiency and accountability”. On a scale of seven, a SEIAA, for instance, gets two marks for granting a clearance in less than 80 days, one mark for within 105 days and no marks for more. If less than 10% of the projects for scrutiny prompted a site visit by committee members, to examine ground conditions, a SEIAA would get one mark. More than 20%, on the other hand, would be a demerit or zero marks. SEIAA with a score of seven or more would be rated ‘five star.’

‘Violative proposal’

The Legal Initiative for Forest on Environment (LIFE), a prominent environment organisation, described the proposal as “violative” of the Environment (Protection) Act. “A perusal of the criteria reveals that greater weightage is given for projects where due diligence is less....SEIAA members should sit in the confines of conference rooms and take decisions and earn high marks.... The process ensures that the aim will be to clear projects at the shortest possible time.



Projects have to receive approval from the Environment Ministry if forest land is used for construction. • FILE PHOTO

The task of the SEIAA is undertake a ‘detailed scrutiny’ whereas this notification makes them rubber stamp authorities,” a statement noted.

Ministry officials told *The Hindu* that the ranking criteria was not intended to accelerate the speed with which clearances were accorded but to encourage the SEIAA to take quicker decisions on approving or rejecting a project, and adhere to timelines already specified by the provisions of the Act. “This system isn’t to reduce the time taken to decide on a project. If a SEIAA demands clarification, the time taken to respond won’t be deducted,” Leena Nandan, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, told *The Hindu*, “But SEIAA have been told earlier too that whatever clarifications they need must be compiled rather than repeatedly demanding them.”

Sujit Bajpayee, Joint Secretary, Environment Ministry, wrote in responses to *The Hindu*’s queries that the SEIAA “had complete freedom” to complete all the necessary due diligence “without worrying about the time line” and that States would not be negatively marked for not meeting ranking criteria.

All proposed infrastruc-

ture projects above a certain size with a potential to significantly alter the natural environment must be first approved by an SEIAA, that consists of State officers and independent experts. Projects that are even bigger or involve forest land – called category A -- must be cleared by a committee of experts constituted by the Centre. SEIAA projects are category B and relatively smaller though they make up the bulk of projects that are presented for approval. ‘B’ category projects include the bulk of building and construction, small mining, and small industry projects and are considered to be ‘less polluting.’

Online process

The project appraisal process is an online process where aspirant companies must upload documents on a portal called Parivesh.

Kanchi Kohli, an expert on environment law and governance matters noted that the rating system “seriously limited SEIAA members from exercising their scientific, legal and administrative knowledge.” By stressing “quick and efficient clearance” the process undermined scientific rigour in the decision making process.

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.