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DAILY 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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Assam and Meghalaya ink pact to end border row

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

GUWAHATI/ NEW DELHI

Assam and Meghalaya have partially resolved a 50-year-old border dispute in six of the 12 sectors along their 885-km boundary.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and his Meghalaya counterpart Conrad K. Sangma on Tuesday signed a “historic” agreement for a closure in six disputed sectors that were taken up for resolution in the first phase. The pact was inked in the presence of Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi.

The agreement was based on a draft resolution signed between the two States on January 29.

The six disputed sectors are Tarabari, Gizang, Hahim, Boklapara, Khanapara-Pillangkata and Ratacherra under the Kamrup, Kamrup (Metro) and Cachar districts of Assam and the West Khasi Hills, Ribhoi and East Jaintia Hills districts of Meghalaya.

‘Give-and-take’ policy

The two States had in June 2021 adopted a “give-and-take” policy to start the process of resolving the boundary dispute by constituting three regional committees each.

The draft resolution, prepared on the basis of the recommendations of the regional panels, proposed dividing the disputed 36.79 sq. km land in the six areas of difference between the two States.

While Assam will get 18.51 sq. km of the disputed areas, Meghalaya will get the remaining 18.28 sq.km.

Mr Shah said about 70% of the inter-State boundary has now become dispute-free with the signing of the agreement.

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Assam, Meghalaya ink pact to end border row

“We will resolve the problem in the six other areas in the near future. I congratulate both sides on behalf of (Prime Minister Narendra) Modi and the Government of India,” he said.

Lauding the “political will” of the two Chief Ministers, Mr. Shah said he was confident that the northeast could be free of interstate boundary disputes in the days to come.

Apart from Meghalaya, Assam has boundary disputes with Arunachal Pradesh, Mizoram and Nagaland. All these States, two as Union Territories initially, were carved out of Assam between 1963 and 1972.

Mr. Sarma called the boundary deal historic and thanked Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah for their “guidance in achieving this feat”.

“We hope to resolve the disputes in the remaining six areas soon,” he said.

Mr. Sangma said the

boundary solution was the result of team work by the two State governments. He thanked Mr. Sarma for working together with the Meghalaya government.

Protests in villages

Meanwhile, people in several villages in the disputed sectors protested the boundary agreement.

They claimed they were not given enough opportunities by the regional committees to present their cases. Assam Congress MLA Nandita Das, who represents the Boko Assembly constituency that encompasses three of the six “resolved” disputed sectors, said there was no give-and-take involved. “It was only give and no take on the part of Assam. If we go by the constitutional boundary and the Survey of India map, Meghalaya has been occupying all the disputed sectors,” she said.

EXPLAINER

Myanmar's continued suspension of democracy

When did the coup take place and what followed? Why did the ruling junta invite Russia as a guest of honour for Armed Forces Day?

THE GIST

■ On March 27, Myanmar commemorated its Armed Forces Day with Russia as the guest of honour. Myanmar was one of the few countries which came to Moscow's defence after the invasion of Ukraine as Russia continues to be a major defence exporter to Myanmar.

■ The Myanmar junta continues to conduct operations in different regions of the country to quash dissent voices.

The junta was and continues to be allegedly involved in mass killings, acts of sexual violence, and arbitrary arrests of protesters and other civic society members who refuse to toe the line.

■ India's relationship with Myanmar has been predicated on maintaining a balance in its neighbourhood in order to check China's growing influence. Recently, India urged Myanmar to end violence and implement ASEAN's five-point consensus while continuing to offer military exports to Myanmar.

RISHABH KACHROO

The story so far: On March 27, Myanmar commemorated its Armed Forces Day with a grand parade featuring Russia as the guest of honour. The Armed Forces Day is in honour of the army's rebellion against the Japanese occupation in 1945. The leader of the country's ruling military junta, Senior General Min Aung Hlaing, gave exceptionally inflammatory comments aimed to quell dissidents and protesters. He said that the armed forces would "annihilate" the dissidents who he deemed "supporters of terrorist groups" looking to threaten the peace and security of the country. The country has led intense crackdowns on those resisting junta rule. The General invalidated the identity and agency of those protesting, and by deeming them terrorists, provided the authorities a basis to engage violently.

What is happening on the ground?

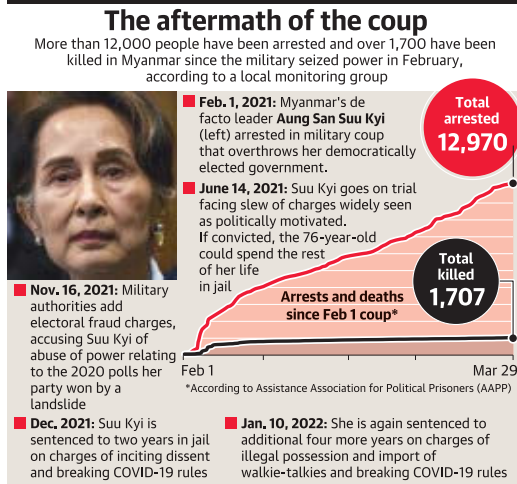
The military continues to conduct operations in different regions of the country to quash dissent voices. The regions under artillery attack, airstrikes, and other physical forms of violent attacks include Sagaing, the Kayah State, the Chin State, and the Kayah State, reminiscent of last year's bloody operations on Armed Forces Day. Myanmar continues its resistance with political opponents of the junta also joining militias. These militias have collaborated with some long-standing ethnic armed groups which have operated in the borderlands of the country.

These States have rarely been centrally controlled. For most part of their history, these have been ruled by local leaders. These States can also serve as a buffer between Myanmar and its bordering nations and thus be a site of constant assaults. The Wa state of the larger Shan State in particular has a remarkably complex history with it being over-run by Mao Zedong's forces during the Chinese Civil War. After about two decades, the region was taken over by the Communist Party of Burma. Deng Xiaoping's tenure saw China making a halt on the assaults and instead focusing on potential trade opportunities. As a result of such historical events, China enjoys a complex relationship with the local factions and the military junta.

What is the Myanmar-Russia relationship?

Myanmar's military junta seized power last year on February 1 and then invited Russia, their "true friend", as a guest of honour for its Armed Forces Day celebrations. Apart from Russia, India and seven other countries sent their representatives to attend the military parade. Keeping the bonhomie alive, Myanmar was one of the very few countries which came to Moscow's defence after the invasion of Ukraine. Russia also continues to be a major defence exporter to Myanmar. Myanmar doesn't like to exclusively depend on one country for its defence needs and its history shows that it likes to cozy up to different seemingly sympathetic countries. Apart from Russia, China is another major player which offers arms to Myanmar. Pakistan, India, Serbia, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Republic of Korea also routinely export defence equipment, and small to medium size arms and ammunition. Myanmar has a tumultuous relationship with China as Beijing is also involved in arming rebel factions and thus, Myanmar wishes to diversify its dependence.

The relationship between Russia and the junta seems to be of cooperation, one which now favours Moscow more than before as it faces sanctions from a host of countries. Myanmar is looking to use their raw materials as currency which works out for them as well as Moscow. The flip side to this story is that as the



Sean Turnell: Australian adviser to Suu Kyi who was arrested five days after the coup and charged with breaching the official secrets law

Win Myint: Myanmar's president ousted and arrested on Feb 1. He was sentenced, in December 2021, to four years in jail on charges of sedition and breaching COVID-19 restrictions

Win Htein: Senior member of Suu Kyi's party sentenced in October to 20 years in prison on charges of high treason

Danny Fenster: U.S. journalist—one of over 100 detained media workers—freed on November 2021 after nearly six months in prison

Sources: AP, Reuters, AAPP Pictures: Getty Images, Twitter © GRAPHIC NEWS

Russian offence continues in Ukraine, it would not have the capacity or the willingness to export its defence equipment to Myanmar.

Myanmar continues to run the Moscow agenda in international fora whenever it can by being sympathetic to Russia's actions and referring to Vladimir Putin as "a visionary leader who had the foresight to quietly build up his military and economic strength". In doing so, they are propagating a strong-man argument and thus trying to solidify their domestic support to sell a similarly constructed imagination of what a nation could be with just the right kind of actions.

How has the junta acted?
The junta's actions in Myanmar have been downright horrific. Hundreds of children were detained since the junta seized

power back in 2021 in a bid to use them as leverage in order to find and arrest their family members and relatives who may be part of dissident groups. The junta was and continues to be allegedly involved in mass killings, acts of sexual violence, and arbitrary arrests of protesters and other civic society members who refuse to toe the line. On February 1, 2021, the junta arrested the country's elected leaders including Aung San Suu Kyi and then president Win Myint. It is reported that close to 4,00,000 people have been internally displaced since the beginning of the coup in 2021.

What led to the coup?
To make sense of the 2021 coup in Myanmar, it is important to look at the chequered history of independent Myanmar. The country has been in a

constant tussle between democracy and military rule. Before the 2021 coup, it had previously witnessed two coups; in 1962 and in 1988. Even during the brief periods of democracy, the junta continued to remain the strongest institution.

Myanmar has seen three Constitutions being drawn up and enacted, the latest of it being a result of the military junta. They gave themselves 25% of the seats in the legislature and thus made it possible that amendments couldn't pass without their support.

The junta gave concessions to the democratic elements and released Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest in 2010 under strict conditions, one of which was that she could never be the President. She was, however, able to circumvent this clause by taking control as 'State Counsellor' with de-facto power residing with her as a customary President's post was taken up by a proxy. What the junta did not realise was how her popularity would surge. The year 2015 saw the National League of Democracy (NLD), led by Suu Kyi, winning 77% of the seats in Parliament.

The reasons for the 2021 coup stem from this growing popularity of Suu Kyi and her party. The junta would have wanted to squash this before democracy made any more inroads into the junta's stronghold on the country.

Who's the coup leader?
Gen. Min Aung Hlaing became Myanmar's military chief in 2011, at a time when the country was transitioning into quasi democracy. When Aung San Suu Kyi's NLD swept the 2015 election, the military accepted the results. But the political peace did not last long. When the NLD swept the 2020 election with a bigger mandate, the Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP), a proxy of the military, alleged election fraud. On February 1, Gen. Min Aung Hlaing carried out the third coup in the country's history.

As a commanding officer, he led several military campaigns against the country's myriad rebels. But his rise to the top echelons of the powerful military was sealed after he led the 2009 offensive against the Myanmar Nationalities Democratic Alliance Army, an insurgents group in the Kokang region, along the border of China's Yunnan province. Within one week, the Myanmar military dislodged thousands of insurgents from the border. The campaign also resulted in thousands of refugees fleeing the border villages to the Chinese side of the border. Within the military, the campaign was hailed as a victory and Gen. Min Aung Hlaing got the attention of Senior General Than Shwe. In August 2010, he was appointed joint chief of staff. And in March 2011, when Gen. Than Shwe, in his mid-70s, retired, he picked Gen. Min Aung Hlaing as his successor.

When the NLD swept the 2020

election, the Army considered the rising popularity of the party and its leader a threat. The Generals made three demands to Ms. Suu Kyi, according to a Reuters report: disband the Election Commission, announce a probe into alleged election fraud and postpone the meeting of Parliament. Ms. Suu Kyi said 'no' to all three. Then came the coup.

What is India's stand?
India's relationship with Myanmar has been predicated on maintaining a balance in its neighbourhood in a bid to keep a check on China's growing influence. In doing so, it has forgone certain democratic ideals and allowed itself to not publicly speak against the events transpiring in Myanmar. It abstained from voting on the United Nations General Assembly's resolution on Myanmar and has constantly refused to actively speak out against the junta. Recently, India urged Myanmar to end violence and implement ASEAN's five-point consensus. It continues to offer military exports to Myanmar.

Different multilateral forums and organisations are trying to get the junta to mend their ways but to little avail. In his recent visit to Myanmar, ASEAN's special envoy, Prak Sokhonn, hinted that the junta leadership gave a positive response towards the possibility of him being able to meet the democratic leadership.

Sri Lanka's Foreign Secretary, Admiral Jayanath Colombage, communicated the idea that they would be looking to engage with Myanmar. As of now, the Sri Lankan President Gotabaya Rajapaksa is hosting the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and other regional leaders from BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) in a hybrid mode.

Recently, the Biden administration, in a bid to put Myanmar under the limelight internationally, ruled that the military junta carried out genocide against the Rohingya minority. It also, along with the U.K. and Canada, implemented sanctions against high-ranking members of the junta. The U.N. Security Council condemned the actions of the junta falling short of terminating the events of 2021 as a "coup". New Zealand suspended political and diplomatic ties with Myanmar back in 2021 but continued to make sure that developmental programmes function seamlessly.

It becomes especially important for the international community to act in ways which while punishing the military junta for its actions and trying to force them into taking corrective measures also doesn't hurt the local population of the country. Blind economic sanctions won't get the job done and would only hurt the already hurting populace, say observers.

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Indian power projects replace Chinese ventures in Sri Lanka

Concerns were raised over projects' proximity to T.N.

MEERA SRINIVASAN
COLOMBO

India will set up hybrid power projects in three islands off Jaffna, effectively replacing the Chinese venture cleared by Colombo last year.

The MoU for the project was among those signed during a meeting between visiting External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar and his Sri Lankan counterpart G.L. Peiris late on Monday.

It is the third Indian energy project coming up in Sri Lanka's north and east, after the recent agreements for National Thermal Power Corporation's solar venture in the eastern Sampur town, and the Adani Group's renewable energy projects in Mannar and Pooneryn in the north.

In January 2021, Sri Lanka's Cabinet decided to award renewable energy projects in Nainativu, Delft or Neduntheevu, and Anailativu islands to Chinese firm Sinosoar-Etechwin.

India was quick to express concern over the Chinese project coming up in the Palk Bay, barely 50 km off Tamil Nadu. India offered to execute the same project with a grant rather than a loan. Unable to pick a side for over a year, Colombo kept the project in suspen-



New avenues: A view of Nainativu, one of the three islands where India will be setting up power project. ■ GETTY IMAGES

sion, apparently putting off China. In a recent press briefing, the Chinese Ambassador in Colombo voiced rare criticism over the projects being interrupted for "unknown reasons", and said it sent out the wrong message to foreign investors.

Meanwhile, India and Sri Lanka have also agreed to set up a Maritime Rescue Coordination Center. The initiative, involving Bharat Electronics and a \$6 million

Indian grant, obtained Cabinet approval last week.

India will also help develop fisheries harbours in Point Pedro, Pesalai and Gurunagar in the Northern Province, and Balapitiya, south of Colombo, apart from supporting schools in the southern Galle district with computer labs, extending a grant for Sri Lanka's Unique Digital Identity project, a statement said.

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Indian power projects replace Chinese ventures

On developments in regard to Sri Lanka's long-pending Tamil question, India has welcomed the recent talks between President Gotabaya Rajapaksa and the Tamil National Alliance (TNA), the largest grouping of legislators elected from the north and east. In a separate statement issued hours after Mr. Jaishankar's meeting with a TNA delegation on Monday, the Indian High Commission said the Tamil leaders briefed the visiting EAM about their meeting with Mr. Rajapaksa on March 25.

"They conveyed that the issues of release of political prisoners, land utilisation, missing persons, 13th Amendment implementation and diaspora investment were discussed in the meeting," it said.

Mr. Jaishankar discussed the same when he called on the President, the statement said, without mentioning the specifics of the discussion. The EAM has so far not publicly commented on the Tamil question or power devolution during this visit, while a tweet after his meeting with the TNA said he "discussed" the realisation of Tamil aspirations for equality, justice, peace, and dignity. During his last visit, he conveyed a strong message to the Sri Lankan leadership that it was in "Sri Lanka's own interest" that the expectations of the Tamil people are fulfilled.

The official statement is-

sued on Monday said Mr. Jaishankar welcomed "the positive developments" regarding the issues on the Government-TNA agenda, adding that he emphasised that the Government of India was "consistently supportive" of the realisation of the aspirations of the Tamils of Sri Lanka.

Fresh assurances

In last week's meeting, the first between the TNA and Mr. Rajapaksa since his election in 2019, the government made fresh assurances to address long-pending Tamil concerns, promising to look into the release of long-detained suspects arrested under Sri Lanka's widely-criticised terrorism law, land grabs by state agencies, enforced disappearances, and development of the north and east. However, the government postponed discussing the TNA's core demand for a political solution through a new constitutional arrangement devolving more powers to the provinces. Mr. Jaishankar encouraged the TNA to pursue those matters that the government has agreed to address, rather than wait only for the new constitutional settlement that may take time, sources said.

He also met Fisheries Minister Douglas Devananda, and discussed the fishermen's conflict and power devolution, the Indian High Commission's statement said.

Bridging the bay in quest of a stronger BIMSTEC

The grouping has potential as a natural platform for development cooperation in a rapidly changing Indo-Pacific region



RAJEEV RANJAN CHATURVEDY

Sri Lanka is gearing up to host the Fifth Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Summit, now in its silver jubilee year (the summit is being held in virtual/hybrid mode on March 30, and Sri Lanka is the current BIMSTEC chair). This special occasion makes it imperative for BIMSTEC leaders to reinforce their commitments and efforts in building the momentum of collaborations in the Bay of Bengal region for the security and development of all.

This summit is expected to build the required momentum of collaborations among the member states – Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand – as there has been commendable teamwork among them and a finalisation of several agreements to enhance regional strategic and economic integration. The unique ecology of BIMSTEC is witnessing enriched political support and commitment from India.

Undoubtedly, BIMSTEC has special significance for India in a

changing mental map of the region. India has made the Bay of Bengal integral to India's 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Act East' policies which can accelerate the process of regional integration. BIMSTEC matters for India and the region.

An area of importance

Finalising the BIMSTEC Charter; BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity; BIMSTEC Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters; BIMSTEC Technology Transfer Facility (TTF); cooperation between diplomatic academies/training institutions; and a template of Memorandum of Association for the future establishment of BIMSTEC centres/entities present signs of optimism as well as the comeback of the Bay of Bengal as a new economic and strategic space.

Further, the economic and strategic significance of the Bay of Bengal is growing rapidly with a re-emergence of the idea of the 'Indo-Pacific' region. This notion assumes that the growing economic, geopolitical and security connections between the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean regions are creating a shared strategic space. The Bay of Bengal is evolving as the centre of the Indo-Pacific region again. The renewed focus has given a new lease of life to the developmental efforts in the region, in particular BIMSTEC.



AFP

As the BIMSTEC process turns 25 years, it is all set to make visible progress through advancing concrete cooperation among the member states. They have invested some fresh energy in the last couple of years to make BIMSTEC a valuable institution for regional integration and collaboration.

A bridge between Asias

BIMSTEC has huge potential as a natural platform for development cooperation in a rapidly changing geopolitical calculus and can leverage its unique position as a pivot in the Indo-Pacific region. There has been tangible progress in BIMSTEC cooperation in several areas that include security, counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, cybersecurity and coastal security, and transport connectivity and tourism, among others.

The growing value of BIMSTEC and its attempt to generate synergy through collective efforts by member states can be understood, for three key reasons. First, there is a greater appreciation of BIMSTEC's potential due to geographi-

cal contiguity, abundant natural and human resources, and rich historical linkages and a cultural heritage for promoting deeper cooperation in the region. Indeed, with a changed narrative and approach, the Bay of Bengal has the potential to become the epicentre of the Indo-Pacific idea – a place where the strategic interests of the major powers of East and South Asia intersect. Political support and strong commitment from all member countries are crucial in making BIMSTEC a dynamic and effective regional organisation.

Need for connectivity

Second, BIMSTEC serves as a bridge between two major high-growth centres of Asia – South and Southeast Asia. Connectivity is essential to develop a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable Bay of Bengal region. Therefore, BIMSTEC needs to address two dimensions of connectivity – one, upgrading and dovetailing national connectivity into a regional road map; and two, development of both hard and soft infrastructures.

The BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity will provide the necessary boost to connectivity. There is growing involvement of educational institutions, industries and business chambers through various forums and conclaves which are helping to enhance cooperation in the areas of education, trade and investments,

information technology and communication among others. Resisting the temptation to make lofty promises, the BIMSTEC leaders have focused on priority areas through a concrete action plan on time.

India's role

Third, the BIMSTEC Secretariat coordinates, monitors and facilitates the implementation of BIMSTEC activities and programmes. The leaders must agree to strengthen the institutional capacity of the BIMSTEC Secretariat. Approval of a charter for BIMSTEC during the summit will further augment its visibility and stature in international fora. Likewise, India has implemented its promise to set up a Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies (CBS) at Nalanda University, Bihar for research on art, culture and other subjects related to the Bay of Bengal. The quest for economic growth and the development of the BIMSTEC region can be achieved with single-minded focus and cooperation among the member countries. In this endeavour, India has a key role in accelerating regional cooperation under the BIMSTEC framework and in making it vibrant, stronger and result-oriented.

Rajeev Ranjan Chaturvedy is Associate Professor and Coordinator of the Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies at Nalanda University, Bihar

India seeks closer BIMSTEC partnership

Members should create supply and value chains to prevent 'external shocks': Jaishankar in Colombo

KALLOL BHATTACHERJEE
NEW DELHI

The world is passing through one of the most difficult phases in recent history as the war in Ukraine has erupted even before the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar said on Tuesday in Colombo.

Addressing the ministerial of the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), he urged closer cooperation and connectivity among the members. The BIMSTEC summit scheduled for Wednesday has drawn global attention because of participation from Myanmar which was isolated internationally following the



S. Jaishankar at the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation meeting in Colombo ■ AP

military takeover in February 2021.

Mr. Jaishankar said members should create supply and value chains to prevent "external shocks" because of the unpredictable situation in the world.

"Under these circumstances, as we shore up our domestic capacities, we also need to broaden and deepen cooperation under BIMSTEC. We need more working together in many more areas; we need more effec-

tive and fast-paced cooperation. We need to intensify and build on what we have achieved in the last 25 years," Mr. Jaishankar said.

'Landmark achievement'

The meeting was held a day before the leaders' meeting when the BIMSTEC Charter will be adopted. BIMSTEC was initiated in 1997 but its overall coherence suffered in recent years because of the differences between Bangladesh and Myanmar over the Rohingya issue that erupted in 2017.

Apart from the Charter, the leaders of the grouping are also expected to adopt the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity.

Mr. Jaishankar referred to

the Charter as a "landmark achievement".

"But we must not rest on the achievement and instead move on to next steps that can be taken to further strengthen BIMSTEC. I am confident that we will identify priority institution building tasks and areas of cooperation, and task our senior officials to work with the Secretary General for their realisation," said Mr. Jaishankar.

BIMSTEC has India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar and Thailand as its members. The Charter and the BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity is expected to boost trade among the members.

Ahead of Lavrov's arrival, U.S. to send Deputy NSA to India

Daleep Singh to hold meetings on Thursday; Russian Foreign Minister on Friday

SUHASINI HAIDAR
NEW DELHI

Just ahead of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to India this week, the Biden administration is sending its chief strategist on sanctions against Russia for the war in Ukraine, Deputy National Security Adviser Daleep Singh. Mr. Singh is due to be in Delhi for meetings on Thursday, while Mr. Lavrov will hold meetings with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and other officials on Friday, after arriving from Beijing where he is attending a conference on Afghanistan.

The U.S. Deputy NSA's visit also coincides with that of British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, who will hold meetings at South Block and address a think tank event jointly with Mr. Jaishankar on Thursday, and comes amidst a flurry of visits by a number of countries, including China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, keen to discuss India's stand on the Ukraine crisis.

In particular, Mr. Singh is visiting Delhi one week after U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland visited for meetings about the Ukraine crisis, and ahead of India-U.S. "2+2" Foreign and Defence Ministerial consultations that will

Destination India | Against the backdrop of the Ukraine war, India has seen a flurry of visits by foreign dignitaries

LAST WEEK

MAR. 19: Japan Prime Minister Fumio Kishida
MAR. 20: Austrian Foreign Minister Alexander Schallenberg
MAR. 21: Australian PM Scott Morrison (Virtual)
MAR. 22: U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland
MAR. 23: Greece FM Nikos Dendias
MAR. 24: Oman FM Sayyid Badr bin Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi
MAR. 25: China FM Wang Yi

THIS WEEK

MAR. 28: EU Special Envoy for Indo-Pacific Gabriele Visentin
MAR. 30: Mexico FM Marcelo Ebrard and German Foreign and Security Policy Advisor Jens Plotner
MAR. 31: U.K. Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and U.S. Deputy NSA Daleep Singh
APRIL 1: Russian FM Sergey Lavrov
APRIL 2: Nepal PM Sher Bahadur Deuba



SERGEY LAVROV



DALEEP SINGH

take place in Washington in mid-April.

Timing of visit

When asked whether the Deputy NSA's visit, which has not yet been announced, had been timed so as to preempt discussions with Mr. Lavrov, an official said Mr. Singh's travel plans had been "made before reports about the Russian Foreign Minister had appeared".

On Monday, the European Union's special envoy on Indo-Pacific, Gabriele Visentin, held talks with the Ministry of External Affairs, and

apart from discussing the EU's "strategic compass", spoke about the European call for support for its joint stand against Russia.

Japan and Australia have made public comments about Russia, and indicated clearly that they hoped to change India's position at the UN, where it abstained on Ukraine resolutions, and is now working on payment options to mitigate the impact of Western sanctions against Russia on Indian trade and energy purchases.

Ahead of Lavrov, U.S. Deputy NSA to arrive

However, it is clear that the number of visitors to the Ministry of External Affairs and the National Security Council in the past month is unprecedented.

As *The Hindu* had reported earlier this week, Mr. Lavrov's visit to Delhi is expected to brief the government on Russia's action in Ukraine, the peace talks, and will also focus on the Russian offer of discounted oil for India, something the government is said to be considering strongly.

In addition, a team from Russia's Central Bank is in India this week to discuss payment mechanisms using Indian and Russian banks, and Rupee-Rouble transactions to avoid the growing number of sanctions placed by the European Union, the United States, and partners, adding up to more than 40 countries in all.

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and apart from discussing the EU's "strategic compass", spoke about the European call for support for its joint stand against Russia.

When asked about Mr. Lavrov's impending visit, and discussions in Delhi on how to strengthen alternative payment mechanisms for trade between India and Russia,

Mr. Visentin told *The Hindu* that the EU was "not pleased" with India's abstention votes while the EU cannot tell New Delhi what to do, it "[would] not welcome any act, which would help Russia to circumvent the U.S., its partners and the EU's sanctions regime."

Mr. Singh, who was recently appointed U.S. President Joe Biden's Deputy National Security Adviser for international economics, has been tasked with formulating and implementing the U.S. sanctions against Russia, and is expected to reinforce that message delivered by the EU and U.K. officials.

Moscow insists on payment in rouble

G7 Ministers call it ‘unacceptable’

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE
MOSCOW

Russia reiterated on Tuesday that it will only be accepting payment for gas deliveries to the EU in rouble after G7 Ministers called this arrangement “unacceptable”.

“Nobody will supply gas for free. This is just impossible. And it can only be paid for in roubles,” Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

“Companies must understand the completely changed environment that has arisen in the conditions of the economic war waged against Russia,” he said.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said last week that Moscow will now only accept roubles as payment for natural gas deliveries to “unfriendly” countries, which include the European Union.

Western countries have piled crippling sanctions on Moscow since it moved

troops into Ukraine, with the United States banning the import of Russia oil and gas among other measures. However, the European Union – which received around 40% of its gas supplies from Russia in 2021 – has retained deliveries from Moscow.

Speaking on behalf of the G7 energy ministers, Germany’s Robert Habeck said Monday that Russia’s request was a “unilateral and clear breach of the existing agreements”.

He said payments in roubles were “unacceptable”, and called upon energy companies not to comply with Putin’s demand.

On Thursday, the Russian government, its central bank and energy giant Gazprom are expected to present Putin with a system that will allow gas payment to be conducted in roubles.

“There is nothing better than Russian gas, all the other options are worse. That is the reality,” Mr. Peskov said.

Call for OBC quota rings louder in RS

Courts are striking down State reservation policies, says DMK's P. Wilson

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha members from the DMK and the BJP unusually made common cause on Tuesday to demand that the government bring in a law to break the constitutional deadlock in the enforcement of OBC reservations in local body elections. The Supreme Court in a recent judgment held that OBC reservations in local body elections could be implemented only when empirical data is available and only when a dedicated commission approves it.

Speaking on the subject, DMK member P. Wilson said the government should either release the data that was collected as part of the 2011 Socio Economic and Caste Census (SECC) or bring in a law that mandates "reservations for OBCs in local body



Unlikley allies: Members from the DMK and BJP unusually made common cause regarding the issue. ■ FILE PHOTO

elections based upon the empirical data collected by States under Article 342 A(3) and uphold social justice at the local body level."

He pointed out that the constitutional reservations for OBCs in local body elections were brought in the year 1992. However, even 28 years later, "we are yet to implement the OBC reserva-

tions fully", he said.

"In 2011, at an expense of ₹4,893 crore, a caste census was initiated. The SECC raw caste data was collected by the Union government in 2015 and the Cabinet Committee chaired by the Prime Minister decided to screen the raw caste data through an expert committee under the NITI Aayog to find out

any infirmities. Yet, till today, the said committee is not allowed to function," Mr. Wilson said.

The BJP government has announced that it will file a review petition to allow political reservation of OBCs but so far it has not been done.

Lack of political will

"On the one hand, the Constitution provides for OBC reservations but on the other hand, the Union government doesn't have the political will to release the caste census data and thus empirical data cannot be obtained by the States. Without such empirical data, the courts are striking down State reservation policies," Mr. Wilson said.

Earlier, BJP MP Sushil Modi too raised the same issue expressing concern about the situation.

ICRA cuts FY23 growth forecast to 7.2% on Ukraine war, oil costs

Agency sees impact on demand as high fuel, commodity prices squeeze incomes

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI

Credit rating agency ICRA has cut its India GDP growth forecast for 2022-23 to 7.2%, from 8%, citing elevated commodity prices and supply chain challenges arising from the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the impact on demand as higher prices of fuels and edible oils squeeze household incomes.

The agency expects growth this fiscal to be 8.5%, lower than the official advance estimate of 8.9%, it said in a note on Tuesday. Protracted geopolitical tensions, the renewed lockdowns in parts of China and high commodity prices pose



Revenge spending: Consumption of contact-intensive services could constrain demand for goods, says Nayar. ■PTI

downside risks to the growth outlook, ICRA warned, with firms facing compressed margins that could hurt the growth of gross value added (GVA) in the economy.

“Moreover, the K-shaped

recovery appears likely to continue with the formal sector gaining market share in the coming year,” said ICRA chief economist Aditi Nayar, adding that higher prices of fuels and items

such as edible oils were likely to compress disposable incomes in the mid- to lower-income segments, constraining the demand revival.

While the extension of free foodgrains under Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Ann Yojana (PMGKAY) until September 2022 may offer some respite to the food budgets of vulnerable households, Ms. Nayar said ‘behaviour normalisation’ in the mid- to upper-income segments could drive consumption of contact-intensive services that were avoided so far during the pandemic. This, she said, could further constrain the demand for goods in the coming year.

IL&FS sells headquarters to Brookfield for ₹1,080 cr.

Uday Kotak's tenure to end on April 2

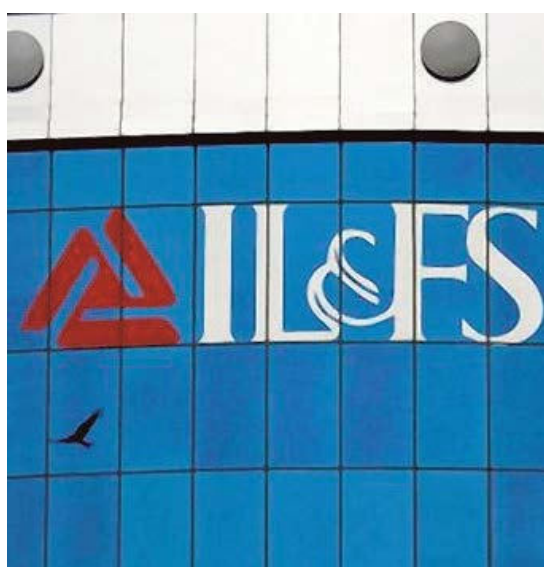
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

MUMBAI

The iconic IL&FS headquarters has been sold to Brookfield Asset Management for ₹1,080 crore, the board of the scam-hit conglomerate said on Tuesday.

“Letter of Intent has been signed and NCLT filing has taken place,” C.S. Rajan, MD, IL&FS, disclosed at a press conference. The building, completed in the '90s, is owned by group company TIFC. It will change hands during the course of FY23, he said.

“For me, in many ways, IL&FS is symbolised by this outstanding construction which is among the first buildings in the Bandra Kurla Complex,” said non-executive chairman Uday Kotak.



The property had been “sold at ₹29,000 per sq. ft”.

For a while, IL&FS will use some space in this 4.5 lakh sq. ft building to help continue with the debt resolution process. Mr. Kotak said his term as non-executive chairman would end on April 2. The Ministry of Corporate Affairs named current MD Mr. Rajan as chairman and managing director for six months from April 3.

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.