Front Page

10 lakh persons to get govt. Jobs in 18 months, announces Modi (Page no. 1)
(GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that his government would be recruiting 10 lakh personnel within the next 18 months, "in a mission mode", a major drive after recruitment to government jobs was derailed following the COVID-19 pandemic.

The status of Human Resources in all departments and ministries and instructed that recruitment of 10 lakh people be done by the government in mission mode in the next 1.5 years.

The announcement came on a day when Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and the three Service Chiefs announced the 'Agnipath' scheme of recruiting youth between the ages of 17.5 and 21 for a four-year stint in the armed forces with a provision of voluntary retention after this period, based on merit.

Unemployment has emerged as one of the major challenges before the Modi government after two years of the pandemic and its attendant economic woes.

Editorial

The 'C' factor in the Russia-Ukraine war (Page no. 6)
(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Well into the second 100 days of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the world is awash with speculation about reasons for the so-called failure of the Russian armed forces to deal a decisive blow against a much smaller Ukrainian army.

This may appear to be a one-sided viewpoint, but Russia is yet to achieve what can be termed as a decisive victory in any sector of the current conflict.

Analysing Russia's response Several reasons have been adduced by experts in the West for the lacklustre performance of the Russian army.

Frequently mentioned are: lack of motivation and the poor morale of the Russian forces sent to Ukraine, many of whom were conscripts who had little desire to participate in a bloody conflict; absence of trust between the higher and the middle/ lower rungs of the Russian armed forces, leading to a hiatus at the operational level.

Russian weaponry being outdated and ineffective to fight an informationalised war under modern conditions, such as the one that Ukraine was waging at present with generous help from the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and western powers.

Admittedly, Russian commanders have also proved inept in devising plans and taking appropriate decisions in battlefield conditions against a determined enemy.

Viewed against the perspective when the conflict started, that Ukraine would capitulate within a matter of weeks, all this has contributed to a feeling in the West that Russia's armed forces are overrated, and that the threat they pose to the democratic West is greatly exaggerated.

End the war (Page no. 6)
(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

The battle for Severodonetsk, the easternmost part of the Donbas where the Ukrainian forces still have defensive positions, has entered the final phase with Russian troops destroying all bridges over the Donets river linking the city with its sister city, Lysychansk.

The Russians now have more than 80% control of the industrial city, with the remaining Ukrainian troops trapped without supplies.

If Russia takes control of Severodonetsk and Lysychansk, the entire Luhansk Oblast will be in its hands, allowing it to march towards Kramatorsk, the last industrial city in the Donbas still with Ukraine.

In recent weeks, Ukrainian troops have taken heavy losses with Russian forces blasting their way into Severodonetsk using artillery fire.

Officials in Kyiv have said that up to 200 Ukrainian soldiers are being killed every day and troops are running out of shells and ammunition.

While these public statements have been in part to push western allies to ramp up weapons supplies, they also draw a bleak picture of the situation in the east.

Despite their brave resistance in the north and northeast, which forced Russia to retreat from around Kyiv and Kharkiv, the Ukrainians never stood a chance to push the Russians back in the Donbas.

Malnutrition in India is a worry in a modern scenario (Page no. 6)
(GS Paper 2, Governance)
Good nutrition has the power to empower the present and future generations. India's greatest national treasure is its people — especially women and children — but even after 75 years of independence, a majority of them do not get the required diet to meet their nutritional needs.

A child's nutritional status is directly linked to their mother. Poor nutrition among pregnant women affects the nutritional status of the child and has a greater chance to affect future generations.

Undernourished children are at risk of under-performing in studies and have limited job prospects. This vicious cycle restrains the development of the country, whose workforce, affected mentally and physically, has reduced work capacity. While there has been some progress in tackling malnutrition among children and women over the past decade, the improvement has been modest at best.

This is despite declining rates of poverty, increased self-sufficiency in food production, and the implementation of a range of government programmes.

The National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5) has shown marginal improvement in different nutrition indicators, indicating that the pace of progress is slow. Children in several States are more undernourished now than they were five years ago.

OPED

The way to end child marriage (Page no. 7)
(GS Paper 2, Governance)
Since child marriage is rampant in India, will increasing the age of marriage of women solve this issue? The increase in age of marriage is claimed to bring substantive benefits at the individual and societal levels.

Data from the recently released National Family Health Survey-5 (NFHS-5), 2019-2021, enables us to examine the facts. Several empirical studies from South Asia establish a significant association between early marriage and adverse health and educational outcomes of women and their children.

Specifically, studies associate early marriage of women with early pregnancy, lower likelihood of accessing ante-natal care, higher risks of maternal morbidity and mortality, poor nutritional status of women and poor nutritional and educational outcomes of children.

These studies seem to provide a rather compelling case for increasing the age of marriage of women from 18 to 21 years, as a delayed marriage might offer significant public health dividends.

But, a closer reading of the evidence shows that the association between child marriage and adverse health outcomes does not emerge in a vacuum.

Rather, it is abetted by structural factors, including social norms, poverty, and women's education. It is because of social norms in many regions and cultures that parents begin preparations for a girl's marriage once she has reached menarche.

Equally, a large proportion of child marriages take place primarily because of poverty and the burden of the huge costs of dowry associated with delayed marriages.

These factors curtail a girl's opportunities to continue her education. And, in turn, the lack of educational opportunities plays an important role in facilitating child marriage.

Explainer

Can the new Google chatbot be sentient? (Page no. 8)
(GS Paper 3, Science and Tech)
Blake Lemoine, a U.S. military veteran, identifies himself as a priest, an ex-convict and an Artificial Intelligence (AI) researcher. He was engaged by Google to test for bias/hate speech in the Language Model for Dialogue Applications (LaMDA), Google's nextGen conversational agent.

He was sent away on paid leave after claiming that the updated software is now sentient. He claims that the neural network with deep learning capacity has the consciousness of a child of seven or eight years old.

He argues that consent from the software must be obtained before experiments are run on it. Google and many tech experts have dismissed the claim. However, this episode, which came on the heels of Google firing Timnit Gebru over her warnings on their unethical AI, has caused ripples in social media.

However, Facebook's facial recognition software which identifies faces in the photos we post, the voice recognition

software that translates commands we bark at Alexa and the Google Translate app are all examples of AI tech already around us.

Inspired by the mathematician Alan Turing's answer to the question 'Can a machine think?', AI tech today aims to satisfy the Turing test to qualify as 'intelligent'.

Turing was the designer and builder of the world's first computer, ENIGMA, which was used to break the German codes during the Second World War.

To test if a machine 'thinks', Turing devised a practical solution. Place a computer in a closed room and a human in another. If an interrogator interacting with the machine and the human cannot discriminate between them, then Turing said that the computer should be construed as 'intelligent'.

A closer look at the Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2022 (Page no. 8)
(GS Paper 3, Science and Tech)

According to the 2022 Reuters Institute Digital News Report, trust in news is falling in nearly half the countries surveyed, with significant proportions of the public, especially younger age groups, beginning to turn away from news.

Further, news consumption is increasingly happeningvia social media platforms such as TikTok rather than traditional media.

This study, an annual one commissioned by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, tracks how news is consumed in different countries.

This year's report, the eleventh overall, is based on a survey conducted by YouGuv, a British market research and data analytics firm, in January/February 2022 through online questionnaires.

It covers 46 markets in six continents. Since it is based on online questionnaires, the findings are not necessarily nationally representative, especially for countries with lower internet penetration.

For India, the data is more representative of younger English speakers and not the national population as such.

News

Centre clears Agnipath scheme (Page no. 10)
(GS Paper 3, Defence)

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh announced the 'Agnipath' scheme for recruitment of youth in the armed forces for four years. The process of recruitment will commence in 90 days with a planned intake of 46,000 young men and women this year.

This will be the only form of recruitment of soldiers into the three defence services from now. Mr. Singh said the scheme was aimed at strengthening national security and for providing an opportunity to the youth to serve in the armed forces.

Recruits under the scheme will be known as 'Agniveers'. After completing the four-year service, they can apply for regular employment in the armed forces.

They may be given priority over others for various jobs in other government departments. The move is expected to decrease the average age profile of armed forces personnel from the current 32 to 24-26 years over a period of time, Lieutenant-General Anil Puri, Additional Secretary, Department of Military Affairs, said.

Enrolment to all three services will be through a centralised online system, with special rallies and campus interviews at recognised technical institutes such as the Industrial Training Institutes, and the National Skills Qualifications Framework, Lt. Gen. Puri said.

Recruitment will be carried out on an "All India All Class" basis with the eligibility age ranging from 17.5 to 21, with medical and physical fitness standards in accordance with existing norms.

Unemployment has decreased, says latest labour force survey (Page no. 11)
(GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

The unemployment rate saw a decrease of 0.6% and fell to 4.2% in 2020-21, compared with 4.8% in 2019-20, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for 2020-21 released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

This means that only 4.2% of adults who looked for jobs could not get any work in rural and urban areas of the country in 2020-21.

Rural areas recorded an unemployment rate of 3.3% and urban areas 6.7%. The National Statistical Office (NSO) uses "rotational panel sampling design" in urban areas to assess the labour force participation rate (LFPR), worker population ratio (WPR) and the unemployment rate, and visits select households in urban areas four times.

There was, however, no revisit for the rural samples. The sample size for the first visit during July 2020- June 2021 in rural and urban areas was 12,800 first-stage sampling units (FSU) in 7,024 villages and 5,776 urban frame survey blocks.