

# **The Hindu**

## **Front Page**

### **In Bali meeting with Wang, Jaishankar raises LAC issues (Page no: 1) (GS Paper 2, International Relations)**

Three months after they met in New Delhi, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Chinese Foreign Minister and State Councillor Wang Yi held talks on the sidelines of the G-20 Foreign Ministers' meeting in Bali.

While the talks that lasted an hour appeared to be cordial, New Delhi and Beijing crossed swords over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's birthday greetings to the Dalai Lama, and Enforcement Directorate (ED) searches at the offices of the Chinese company Vivo in India.

Mr. Jaishankar said the meeting was his first engagement after reaching the Indonesian resort city, where the G-20 summit will be held in November, and that the two sides discussed resolving the border stand-off that began in April 2020.

EAM called for an early resolution of all the outstanding issues along the LAC in Eastern Ladakh. Recalling the disengagement achieved in some friction areas, EAM reiterated the need to sustain the momentum to complete disengagement from all the remaining areas to restore peace and tranquillity in the border areas.

The Chinese readout made no mention of the LAC crisis, instead emphasising Mr. Wang's remarks calling on both sides to "strengthen coordination and cooperation and jointly promote more democratic international relations and a fairer international order". He said both sides had "maintained communication and exchanges" and "effectively managed differences".

The last Senior Commanders' meeting on March 11 had been unable to make much forward movement, though previous rounds have seen the disengagement of Indian Army and People's Liberation Army (PLA) troops at Pangong North and Galwan and Gogra post at PP17-A, after the PLA transgressions and killings at Galwan that took place in the summer of 2020. Disengagement at Hot Springs point or PP15, as well as Depsang and Demchok areas occupied by the Chinese side, still remains to be resolved, according to officials.

## **States**

### **POCSO applies to Muslim girls who attain puberty (Page no: 8) (GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)**

The Delhi High Court has rejected the assertion that a minor Muslim girl who has attained the age of puberty, would fall out of the ambit of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

Justice Jasmeet Singh made this observation while rejecting the plea of a man, who is facing charges of rape along with provisions of the POCSO Act for allegedly having a "physical relationship" with a minor girl after their engagement.

The petitioner, Mr. Imran, contended that as the victim, a Muslim girl aged 16 years and 5 months on the date of the alleged incident — January 01, 2022, was a major under the Muslim Personal Law on account of having attained puberty, POCSO was not applicable. Mr. Imran sought to quash the FIR registered in January this year.

The judge, however, rejected his plea observing that, "POCSO is an Act for the protection of children below 18 years of age from sexual abuse and exploitation".

"The Act is aimed to secure the children and ensure they are not abused and their childhood and youth is protected against exploitation," Justice Singh reminded.

As per the FIR, Mr. Imran visited the house of the girl with a request to be married to her. The parents of the girl agreed on the condition that the marriage takes place when the victim clears her Class XII.

The FIR stated that the parents of the victim gave ₹1 lakh in cash, silver chain, watch, mobile, gold ring, clothes, etc. to Mr. Imran at the time of their engagement. Subsequently, the father also sold his house and took a loan, to give Mr. Imran another ₹10 lakh.

The FIR stated that after the engagement, Mr. Imran established physical relationship with the victim on January 01, 2022. Subsequently, he refused to marry the victim and abused her as well as her parents.

## **Editorial**

### **Ending the Ukraine war in an imperfect world (Page no: 10) (GS Paper 2, International Relations)**

The **war in Ukraine** has been underway for over four months. What began as a European conflict has had global repercussions. Of course, Ukraine and its people have borne the maximum brunt. More than five million Ukrainians have left the country and over eight million are internally displaced.

Rising casualties and large-scale destruction have set back the country by decades. Recent estimates for rebuilding the destroyed cities and infrastructure are as high as \$750 billion.

During 2020-21, most economies that could afford to, provided generous financial support to its citizens in the form of direct payments and subsidised food to tide over the economic hardships caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supply chains suffered disruptions, aggravated by politics. Economic recovery has generated demand, creating inflationary pressures.

Today, inflation rates are rising across the world and in the largest economies have reached levels not seen since the early 1980s. As these countries tighten money supply, fears of recession loom large. The war in Ukraine has aggravated the situation for the poorer countries by creating food and fertilizer shortages.

The sharp surge in energy prices threatens the prospects of economic recovery. Prospects of collective global action to deal with these challenges appear remote, given growing tensions among major powers.

It is a fact that Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022 in gross violation of the United Nations Charter and international law; it is equally true that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is not an innocent bystander.

In 2022, Russia is the guilty one but NATO's folly was to forget that the cost of its expansion goes up as it gets closer to the Russian border. Its strategic error was in concluding that Russia was in terminal decline and adopting an 'open door' policy.

By 2005, 11 former East European and Baltic states had joined NATO. Addressing the Munich Security Conference in 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin described NATO's decision of moving eastwards and deploying forces closer to Russian borders, "a serious provocation".

### **A community and a health issue of concern (Page no: 10)**

#### **(GS Paper 2, Governance)**

During the recent celebration of Pride month (June) globally and in India, we witnessed an incredible social media presence filled with striking images and stories.

It would not have been amiss to also pause and reflect momentarily on the state of mental health of LGBTQIA++ communities in India. The reflection would undoubtedly have been a sobering one.

Despite the reading down of Section 377, the National Legal Services Authority (NALSA) judgment as also successive progressive movements, India's class, caste and regionally diverse LGBTQIA++ communities remain at risk of life-long mental illnesses and challenges. This can take the form of severe mental illness or transient and long standing dysfunctional harmful behaviours.

This is caused by life-long dissonance, deep-rooted stigma, discrimination and often abuse, that the community experiences. It often leads to extreme distress and poor self-worth, resulting in self-hate and suffering.

The community is often fearful and has such deeply internalised stigma that it is challenging to even articulate what it feels like — forget about seeking help.

While the mental health needs of the LGBTQIA++ communities are not different from others, their identities, social contexts and the discrimination give them stressors that impact their mental health, relentlessly, from a young age.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are rarely discussed in our social, educational or familial environments, and if ever done, these discussions are stigmatising. Society marginalises LGBTQIA++ people throughout life, no matter how accomplished they may be. This is payment extracted by a heteronormative society that demands assimilation .

In such an environment, it is hard to come out to yourself; forget the others. Even within the LGBTQIA++ communities, the lines are easily fractured by caste, class, and, more recently, by religious affiliation. It is difficult to find friends and family who understand what the person feels.

### **Just fine (Page no: 10)**

#### **(GS Paper 3, Environment)**

The Union Environment Ministry, tasked with safeguarding India's forests and its environmental assets, proposes to amend sections of key environmental legislation and make them less threatening to potential violators.

India has eight cornerstone pieces of legislation that define a regulatory framework to ensure that natural resources are not wantonly exploited, acts of pollution are apprehended and there is a mechanism to punish and deter violators.

Under provisions in the existing legislation, violators are punishable with imprisonment up to five years or with a fine up to one lakh rupees, or with both.

Were violations to continue, there is an additional fine of up to ₹5,000 for every day during which such failure or contravention continues after the conviction.

There is also a provision for jail terms to extend to seven years. Under the new amendments proposed, the Ministry says it wants to weed out “fear of imprisonment for simple violations”, and therefore have such violations invite only monetary fines.

However, serious environmental crimes that cause grave injury or death would invite imprisonment under the Indian Penal Code. These penalties would be decided by an ‘adjudication officer’ and transferred to an ‘Environment Protection Fund’.

Moreover, the quantum of potential fines has been raised from beyond the one lakh rupees to as much as five crore rupees. These proposals are not yet law and have been placed in the public domain for feedback.

The question of whether the threat of imprisonment acts as a deterrent has a long history with both proponents and opponents.

The proposed amendments do not cover the destruction of forests and wildlife, which make up a substantial fraction of environmental crime, and would continue to invite existing penal provisions.

Research on environmental crime in the United States and Europe suggests that fining is the most common mode of punishment. India has a long history of corporate violations as well as a woefully slow redress system.

## **Explainer**

### **The proposal for an Indian Specific norm for assessing vehicular safety in collision (Page no: 12) (GS Paper 3, Environment)**

On June 24, Union Minister for Road, Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari approved a Draft GSR (general statutory rules) Notification seeking comments on a proposal to introduce the Bharat New Car Assessment Program (Bharat-NCAP).

It would accord vehicles a star rating based on their performance in crash tests. They are intended to increase the export-worthiness of vehicles and competition on safety parameters among manufacturers, as well as instil consumer confidence in their safety.

“Bharat NCAP will prove to be a critical instrument in making our automobile industry Aatmanirbhar with the mission of making India the Number 1 automobile hub in the world,” he tweeted.

New Car Assessment Programs (NCAPs) provide globally reliable information about the crash safety of a vehicle based on certain common criteria and procedures.

This then helps vehicles acquire a foothold in international markets. They are separate from country-specific motor standards in the sense that the latter restricts itself to assessing the vehicle’s roadworthiness and not necessarily how it would ensure safety in a collision. However, a zero rating in an NCAP cannot prevent a car from being sold in any geography.

Global NCAP is a standardised platform establishing cooperation and coordination among NCAPs internationally whereas regional NCAPs take into account specific local conditions.

A car may have attained a good rating elsewhere but it might not be the case in another geography because of potentially separate manufacturing origins and quality. The nature of the domestic markets also matter — consumers may prefer a car with reduced safety specifications for there is greater insistence on affordability.

The voluntary Bharat NCAP would assign vehicles between one and five stars on parameters such as Adult Occupant Protection (AOP), Child Occupant Protection (COP) and Safety Assist Technologies (SAT).

It would study frontal impact, side impact and the possibility of a door opening after a crash. The potential impact is studied with the help of dummies, of pre-specified measurements, placed inside the vehicle.

The car is crashed into an aluminium deformable barrier impersonating an opposing force of the same magnitude — a crash-like situation, with a 40% overlap.

## **News**

### **‘12-13% NPAs in loans given to street vendors’ (Page no: 14) (GS Paper 3, Economy)**

Non-performing assets (NPA) accounted for “12-13%” of the loans disbursed to street vendors under the Prime Minister’s Street Vendors AtmaNirbhar Nidhi (PM-Svanidhi) scheme, Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Hardeep Puri.

The scheme, which was launched on July 2, 2020, has so far disbursed loans of ₹10,000 each to 30.23 lakh street vendors, of which 11.63 lakh loans have been repaid, according to the official PM-Svanidhi website.

After repayment of the first loan, the vendors are eligible for a second loan of ₹20,000 and then a third loan of ₹50,000. A total of 4.35 lakh of the ₹20,000 loans have been sanctioned, of which 417 have been repaid. Fifty-six loans of ₹50,000 have been disbursed, while none of them have been repaid yet.

At a press conference, Mr. Puri launched the Svanidhi Mahotsav, a series of cultural events for street vendors and the public under Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav to be rolled out in 75 cities.

Asked about the NPAs under the scheme, Mr. Puri said they were “12-13%”, which was not worrying for him. “The NPAs are manageable,” he said.

### **Centre to promote dragon fruit cultivation (Page no: 14)**

#### **(GS Paper 3, Environment)**

Following the footsteps of the Gujarat and Haryana Governments, the Centre has decided to promote the cultivation of dragon fruit, known as a “super fruit” for its health benefits.

The Centre feels that considering the cost effectiveness and global demand for the fruit due to its nutritional values, its cultivation can be expanded in India. At present, this exotic fruit is cultivated in 3,000 hectares; the plan is to increase cultivation to 50,000 hectares in five years.

The Gujarat Government recently renamed dragon fruit as *kamlam* (lotus) and announced an incentive for farmers who cultivate it. The Haryana Government also provides a grant for farmers who are ready to plant this exotic fruit variety. The fruit is considered good for diabetic patients, low in calories and high in nutrients like iron, calcium, potassium and zinc.

Addressing a national conclave on the fruit here on Thursday, Union Agriculture Secretary Manoj Ahuja said the demand for the fruit is high in domestic and global markets because of its nutritional values.

“Fifty thousand hectares in five years is an achievable target. The demand for the fruit will remain. Prices for farmers will also be good. The benefit is that this fruit can be cultivated in degraded and rainfed land. He added that the Centre will assist States in providing good quality planting materials to farmers.

Talking to *The Hindu* on the sidelines of the conclave, he said the Centre can also provide specific target-based help to States and farmers under the Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH).

“Processing infrastructure can also be developed with the help of the Food Processing Ministry. Its cultivation will be beneficial for farmers and consumers. It is a win-win situation for all,” he added.

### **NEP will develop skilled and confident youth, says PM (Page no: 15)**

#### **(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the National Education Policy (NEP) focused on making children skilled according to their talents and choices.

After inaugurating a three-day Akhil Bhartiya Shiksha Samagam on implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) in Varanasi, which is being attended by over 300 academic, administrative and institutional leaders, the Prime Minister said the educational system should not only prepare degree holder youth, but also ensure that all the human resources necessary for the country’s progress were available.

Our youth should be skilled, confident, practical and calculative, education policy is preparing the ground for this, adding that there was a need for the institutions to work on the future requirements of the talented young generation.

He said the youth was taking initiatives in areas like the space technology, new opportunities were opening up for girls and women. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the country was today one of the fastest growing economies in the world and it was the third largest start-up ecosystem in the world.

Stating that the new policy, which was introduced after a gap of 30 years, would be instrumental in realising innumerable possibilities,

The education system created by the Britishers was never part of the Indian ethos...the basic premise of the NEP is to take education out of narrow thinking and connect it with the modern ideas of the 21st century.

The Prime Minister said the Indian ethos of education was multi-sectoral and the same approach was required in a new system with modern processes. Highlighting the importance of research work, he asked for a “lab-to-land” attitude and also asked the institutions to value practical experience and fieldwork.

## **Business**

### **RBI measures will help spur overseas fund inflows: Seth (Page no: 18)**

**(GS Paper 3, Economy)**

Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth said the measures taken by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) would increase inflows of overseas funds and help strengthen the rupee against the U.S. dollar.

The RBI had raised the overseas borrowing limits for companies and liberalised norms for foreign investments in government bonds as it announced a slew of measures to boost foreign exchange inflows.

Mr. Seth said RBI's measures, including on External Commercial Borrowings (ECB), were transitory and for shorter duration, and would help boost foreign currency flows into the country.

The RBI had increased the ECB limit under the automatic route from \$750 million or its equivalent per financial year to \$1.5 billion and eased norms for foreign portfolio investments in the debt market. Mr. Seth also expressed hope that the global challenges would subside in the short term.

The central bank had said that all capital flows barring portfolio investments remained stable and an adequate level of reserves provided a buffer against external shocks.

As part of the changes, the cap on the interest rate that lenders can offer on foreign deposits by NRIs has been removed. The relaxation will be in force till October.

Since the war in Ukraine broke out in late February, RBI has dipped into its foreign exchange reserves to shield the rupee from steep depreciation. Since February 25, the headline foreign exchange reserves have declined by \$40.94 billion.