

The Indian Express

Front Page

Govt raises upper age to 23 for this year after protests (Page no. 1)

(GS Paper 3, Defence)

With key NDA ally JD(U) leading calls for an immediate review of Agnipath, the new short-term recruitment policy for the Armed Forces, after violent protests seeking a rollback erupted in several states, the Centre announced a two-year relaxation in the upper age limit for the scheme this year since there was no recruitment in the services during the last two years.

The Defence Ministry said that it would allow those who were 21 years old in 2020, when recruitments were stalled, to be eligible — only for this year.

Under the original scheme announced, only aspirants between 17-and-a-half years and 21 years of age are eligible for recruitment.

The Defence Ministry said that “the upper age limit for the recruitment process for Agnipath scheme for 2022 is increased to 23 years.

Govt. and Politics

India-ASEAN conclave: Foreign ministers agree on unified response to global issues (Page no. 6)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

As External Affairs minister S Jaishankar flagged the “geopolitical headwinds” triggered by the Ukraine crisis and its knock-on effects on food, energy security, prices of fertilisers and commodities as well as logistics and supply chains, foreign ministers of India and ASEAN countries agreed to uphold multilateralism in jointly responding to the regional and global challenges.

With Myanmar not participating in the India-ASEAN foreign ministers’ meeting, the joint statement issued after the meeting did not mention the situation in the country.

In a statement obliquely referring to China’s assertiveness in the region, the statement said that they reaffirmed the commitment to multilateralism founded on the principles of the international law, including the Charter of the United Nations, the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and other relevant UN treaties and conventions, maintain an open and inclusive regional cooperation framework, support ASEAN Centrality in the evolving rules-based regional architecture, uphold multilateralism in jointly responding to regional and global challenges.

Express network

Israel looking forward to promote I2U2 initiative, says envoy (Page no. 8)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Israel is looking forward to promote the new I2U2 initiative, a new grouping of India, Israel, USA and UAE for international development cooperation. In the grouping’s name, ‘I2’ stands for India and Israel, whereas ‘U2’ stands for USA and the UAE.

The fact that the two close strategic partners of Israel — US and India — chose to become a part of this cooperation, of this new initiative, tells you the significance of this initiative.

As part of the I2U2 initiative, US President Joe Biden will hold a virtual summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Israel Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan during his visit to West Asia from July 13 to 16.

Responding to a query about “I2U2”, Shlein said, “MASHAV is of course very interested in this initiative as the entire government of Israel is. This is a great achievement which tells you the geopolitical changes that happen in the region.

Explained

2 years after Galwan clash, where India-China relations stand today (Page no. 9)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Two years after the Galwan clash in the Ladakh heights, in which 20 Indian soldiers were killed, and which plunged India-China relations to their lowest in decades, the two sides are normalising relations in many respects, with the Indian side displaying a pragmatism far ahead of the “lal aankh” rhetoric.

Even though New Delhi has not yet succeeded in getting the Chinese to vacate some parts of eastern Ladakh on India’s side of the Line of Actual Control or ensuring a return to status quo ante (as the situation existed in April 2020), bilateral trade has soared and it is now at its highest, first quarter data show.

Further, India’s trade with China in the calendar year 2021 was \$125 billion, higher than in the previous year, and higher than pre-pandemic, pre-Ladakh standoff levels.

Imports from China reached \$97.5 billion, while exports crossed \$20 billion for the first time. All this after India put in place restrictions on Chinese participation in the Indian economy, and banned several Chinese apps popular in India, and added more to the list subsequently.

Tencent, the Chinese tech-entertainment giant, recently bought a stake in Flipkart, even while several apps linked to it such as Tik Tok remain banned in India.

The ‘Northern Ireland Protocol’ :UK bill and legal proceedings by EU (Page no. 9) (GS Paper 2, International Relation)

The European Commission has launched two new legal proceedings against Britain and re-opened another, after the latter proposed a legislation which seeks to get it out of some of its Brexit obligations.

Britain’s government claims the the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill is only meant to maintain “stable social and political conditions in Northern Ireland.”

European Commission Vice President Maros Sefcovic, who is the European Union’s (EU) Brexit Commissioner, said in a news conference that there was no justification for unilaterally changing an international agreement.

The new legislation, yet to be tabled in Parliament, seeks to reduce customs checks and paperwork for trade between Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) and Northern Ireland (which together with Great Britain forms the United Kingdom).

Britain’s Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said the changes it will introduce are “relatively trivial”. However, these changes violate a key part of the painfully negotiated 2019 Brexit deal – the Northern Ireland Protocol.

Fed rate hike & Implications (Page no. 9) (GS Paper 3, Economy)

Experts say that the aggressive Fed rate hike of 75 basis points is likely to push the Reserve Bank of India for more rate hikes in the coming two or three quarters, and thereby will have a direct bearing on GDP growth and market movement. Economists, who had been expecting an additional rate hike of 75-100 basis points over the next three quarters in India, now say the RBI could go for additional rate hike of up to 125 basis points this fiscal, taking the overall rate hike to over 200 basis points.

That may not only impact overall demand in the economy and GDP growth, but will also lead to a correction in the market on account of outflow of funds by foreign portfolio investors and downward revision in earning projections of listed entities as a result of higher cost of funds and input cost.

The day after the Fed announced its rate hike by 75 basis points, the Sensex had fallen 2% to close at an over 12-month low of 51,495.

According to provisional data released by exchanges, FPIs sold equity holdings worth Rs 3,257 crore and in June they have sold holdings worth Rs 31,500 crore putting pressure on domestic equities. Domestic institutional investors have invested a net of Rs 24,225 crore in the same period.

Black Death: 7 centuries on, new light on plague origins (Page no. 9) (GS Paper 2, Health)

One of the deadliest epidemics in the history of humankind – exactly originate? It is a question that has plagued historians for centuries. A group of scholars from different disciplines have now attempted to solve this much-debated mystery.

In a study published in the journal Science on June 15, researchers have claimed that the disease originated in modern day northern Kyrgyzstan around 1338-1339 – nearly 7-8 years before it ravaged large parts of the world.

The term Black Death refers to the bubonic plague that spread across Western Asia, Northern Africa, Middle East and Europe in 1346-53.

Most scholars agree that the Black Death, which killed millions, was caused by bacterium Yersinia pestis and was spread by fleas that were carried by rodent hosts.

The microorganism *Y. pestis* spread to human populations, who at some point transmitted it to others either through the vector of a human flea or directly through the respiratory system.

Contemporaries who wrote about the epidemic, often described the buboes (hard, inflamed lymph nodes) as the distinguishing clinical feature.

Editorial Page

In the shadow of sanctions (Page no. 10)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian's three-day visit to India, last week, was the first ministerial-level visit from Iran since Ebrahim Raisi assumed the Iranian presidency in August last year.

In keeping with the "Asia-oriented" foreign policy of the Raisi government, Abdollahian has visited Moscow and Beijing. President Raisi visited Russia in January this year.

The sanctions imposed by the US on Iran after Tehran withdrew from the nuclear deal in 2018 may have virtually destroyed India-Iran trade, especially India's energy imports from Iran, but the geopolitical logic underpinning relations between the two countries remains firm.

The "Tehran Declaration" signed during former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's visit to Iran affirmed the shared vision of the two countries for an "equitable, pluralistic and co-operative international order".

It recognised then Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's vision of a "dialogue among civilisations" as a paradigm of international relations based on principles of tolerance, pluralism and respect for diversity.

Two decades later, as India strengthens new partnerships within its regional vision centred on the Indo-Pacific, and Iran deepens relations with China and Russia, both countries remain driven by the goals of advancing their standing at the regional and global level.

Both are keen to project themselves as independent strategic actors determined to play a role in shaping a new multipolar order in their shared Eurasian neighbourhood and also at the global level.

Prelude to 5G (Page no. 10)

(GS Paper 3, Science and Tech)

On Wednesday, the Union cabinet took the first steps towards rolling out 5G services, approving the auction of spectrum. The auction, which will include spectrum across multiple frequency bands, is slated to commence on July 26.

The government has eased some of the constraints that had emerged as irritants in the past — a fair amount of spectrum has been put up for the auction, usage charge has been dropped, and payment terms have been eased. However, some issues warrant closer attention.

For one, the reserve price of spectrum has been retained by the government, despite demands from the telecom operators to review it.

Telcos have, in the past, made the case for around 90 per cent reduction in the reserve price. However, in line with the recommendations of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI), which were also accepted by the Digital Communications Commission (DCC), the reduction in the reserve price has been of a much lower magnitude, around 35-40 per cent.

Thus, considering the high reserve price for the 700 MHz band, there is a possibility that this band may remain unsold this time as well. As per some estimates, industry is likely to fork out around Rs 1.1 lakh crore in these auctions. This will imply that the debt burden of the already over indebted telcos will increase further.

The Idea Page

Justice more complete (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 2, Governance)

In a judgment delivered last month, the Supreme Court, in *Manoj & others v. State of MP*, embarked on a significant attempt to reform the administration of the death penalty.

Though the constitutional validity of the punishment was not an issue in this case, the judgment by Justices U U Lalit, Ravindra Bhat, and Bela Trivedi will occupy a prominent place in India's criminal justice jurisprudence for its reflections on the state of the death penalty in the country and its attempt to fix a broken sentencing system.

However, achieving meaningful compliance across all levels of the judiciary will be a significant challenge and so will translating these procedural reforms into substantive fairness in determining punishment.

There has long been a judicial crisis in death penalty sentencing on account of unprincipled sentencing, arbitrariness and worrying levels of subjectivity.

The crisis has been acknowledged by the Supreme Court, the Law Commission of India, research scholars and civil society groups.

At the heart of this concern is the fact that death penalty sentencing has been, by and large, crime-centric. This approach has flown in the face of the requirements imposed on sentencing judges by the Supreme Court in *Bachan Singh* (1980). In essence, the ruling of the five-judge bench in this case laid down a framework to be followed by judges who have to choose between life imprisonment and death sentence.

This framework made it binding for the sentencing judges to take into account factors relating to both the crime and accused and assign them appropriate weight. Judges couldn't decide to impose the death penalty only on the basis of the crime.

The background of the accused, the personal circumstances, mental health and age were considerations a sentencing judge had to account for.

Judges were required to weigh "mitigating" and "aggravating" factors to ascertain if a case was fit for the death sentence and also determine if the option of life imprisonment was "unquestionably foreclosed".