

The Indian Express

Front Page

No rollback Agnipath aspirants must pledge they weren't among protestors (Page no. 3)

(GS Paper 3, Defence)

The military leadership ruled out the rollback of the Agnipath scheme, even as thousands of aspirants continue to protest across the country, and many Opposition parties also lent their support to the protesters, asking the government to rethink or rollback the new policy.

As the protests didn't let up for the fifth day, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh met with the service chiefs for the second time in two days. Army Chief General Manoj Pande, Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar and Air Force Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari met Singh.

A few hours after their meeting, Lt Gen Anil Puri, Additional Secretary, Department of Military Affairs (DMA), headed a press conference, along with the topmost officers for personnel in each service.

Terms and conditions released by the Army Sunday, and a detailed document issued by the Air Force earlier mentioned that "Agniveers would form a distinct rank" in the Indian Army and the Air Force, "different from any other existing rank."

To encourage and recognize dynamism of youth, a distinctive insignia will be worn by Agniveers on their uniform during their engagement period. Compared to the 90 days of annual leave that troops get in the existing system, Agniveers will be eligible for only 30 days in a year. Also, they won't be allowed to leave the services before four years.

Textbook revision slashes portion in history on Islamic rulers of India (Page no. 3)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

The content on Islamic rulers has suffered deep cuts in sweeping changes made to textbooks by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) under its latest "rationalisation" exercise, internal records show.

The ruling establishment's view that Indian history glorifies invaders and Mughals at the cost of others has now found a strong echo where it probably matters the most — school textbooks.

The content on Islamic rulers has suffered deep cuts in sweeping changes made to textbooks by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) under its latest "rationalisation" exercise, internal records show.

The Indian Express scrutinised nine current history textbooks for Classes 6 to 12 and matched the content with tables circulated within the NCERT on the proposed changes.

It found that most of the changes related to Muslim rulers have been made in one textbook: several pages on the Delhi Sultanate, ruled by many dynasties including the Mamluks, Tughlaqs, Khaljis and Lodis, and the Mughal empire have been removed from the Class 7 history textbook 'Our Past – II'.

The official rationale given by the NCERT — the government body that decides on curriculum and textbooks — for the latest textbook revision exercise is to reduce curriculum load to help students make a "speedy recovery" from learning setbacks suffered during the pandemic.

Express Network

Look forward taking ties to new domains, says Jaishankar (Page no. 9)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said India is looking forward to working on new areas of cooperation with Bangladesh, which include artificial intelligence, cyber security, start-ups and fintech.

Jaishankar, who held a bilateral meeting with visiting Foreign minister of Bangladesh, A K Abdul Momen, said, "We now look forward to working with you to take our ties to new domains – Artificial Intelligence, cyber security, startups, fintech."

The seventh round of the India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) was held in New Delhi. A joint statement said the two ministers expressed satisfaction that despite challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Both countries have worked closer than ever before in every sector, from security and border management to mutually beneficial trade and investment flows, as well as enhanced bilateral and sub-regional multimodal connectivity, greater power and energy cooperation, developmental assistance and capacity building exchanges, cultural and closer people-to-people ties.

Editorial Page

The Inflation Tightrope (Page no. 10) (GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

The Indian economy has been hit by inflationary shocks of late. The inflation target of the Reserve Bank of India is 4 per cent, with a band of 2 per cent on either side.

However, the RBI did precious little to try and lower the inflation rate given that it was at or above the upper threshold of 6 per cent since the beginning of this year.

Only after inflation hit 7 per cent did it raise the repo rate. So how will this episode pan out?

The fact that some part of inflation is coming from abroad is an added complication. There has also been a steady outflow of foreign funds from the stock market.

This could cause the rupee to depreciate, in turn, raising the prices of imported goods (for example petroleum products), thereby adding to the inflationary woes. The RBI has raised the cost of borrowing (by 90 basis points so far), with a promise of more to come.

The central government has cut fuel taxes with alacrity, and has banned the export of certain items. Knee jerk reaction galore. But do our policymakers have enough arrows in their quiver?

Supply shocks pose a problem for the authorities. If output is stabilised using macroeconomic policies, prices will rise even more. On the other hand, if they stabilise prices, output (and employment) will fall.

It is argued by mainstream economists that discretion in policy making is used by politicians for their narrow partisan ends. Inflation targeting is rules-based.

Monetary authorities raise interest rates if inflation is above the preferred target, and vice versa. Actually, interest rates should rise more than inflation so the “real” interest rates rise, causing a compression in demand (and a fall in economic activity), which in turn will reduce inflation.

Idea Page

An oil palm plan for home (Page no. 11) (GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

Ashok Gulati and Ritika Juneja write: It could help reduce import bill. But policymakers will need to develop a long-term vision, handhold small cultivators.

The World Trade Organisation’s (WTO) 12th Ministerial Conference in Geneva, that concluded last week, struggled to find satisfactory answers to some of the complex questions pertaining to global trade.

These questions relate to waiving the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) regime on vaccines during public health emergencies such as the Covid pandemic, loosening the rules on public stockholding for food security purposes, reducing/eliminating subsidies on fisheries, resolving contentious issues in e-commerce and reforming the WTO.

It is worth noting that the ministerial conference is the top decision-making body of the agency whose basic goal is to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible, based on some agreed-upon rules.

As far as agriculture, trade and food security are concerned, the challenge is to figure out the most appropriate trading rules in dire situations like pandemics, wars, social/political disruptions or natural disasters.

Many countries become inward-looking in such times and impose outright export bans citing domestic food security needs.

Recent examples include Russia’s export ban on wheat and sunflower oil, Ukraine’s ban on exports of food staples, Indonesia’s ban on palm oil exports (it was lifted last month), Argentina’s ban on beef exports, Turkey, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan’s ban on a variety of grain products, and India’s wheat export ban.

Sudden actions such as these exacerbate the pressure on global trade leading to a spike in the prices of these commodities, threatening the food security of net food-importing countries.

An act of accommodation (Page no. 11) (GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

Poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal once said “jamhuriyat ek tarz e hakoomat hai ki jis main bandon ko gina kartey hain, toulah nahi kartey” (In a democracy, people are counted and not weighed).

While on the face of it, those with the majority have the right to rule the country, experience shows that this doesn’t always guarantee stability and a sense of inclusion.

For example, in the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system that we have adopted, a winning candidate generally secures a maximum of 25-30 per cent of the total votes polled and the rest of the votes get divided among different candidates. That means 70 per cent in that constituency are against the winning candidate. Even if the winning candidate gets 51 per cent votes, the rest 49 per cent will find themselves out of the decision-making system and thus contribute to instability. While scrutinising the recommendations of the Jammu and Kashmir Delimitation Commission headed by Justice (retd) Ranjana Desai, using the lens based on the above argument, one can conclude that the Commission has done well to ensure that all communities in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir will have a share in the assembly. A sense of empowerment, which was limited to a few families in Srinagar and confined to a few regions, can now be distributed equally and horizontally.

Explained

What West Seti power project can mean for India-Nepal ties (Page no. 14)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

India will be taking over an ambitious hydropower project in Nepal — West Seti — nearly four years after China withdrew from it, ending a six-year engagement between 2012 and 2018.

India's National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC) has already begun preliminary engagement of the site in far-western Nepal following Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Lumbini on May 16 in fact, the groundwork and informal discussion seem to have begun much earlier when Nepal Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba visited India in April. During a local bodies election campaign in early May, Deuba had declared that since India was Nepal's power market and it had a policy of not buying power from China-executed projects, West Seti would be given to India.

Four days prior to the Lumbini visit, the NHPC's intent in writing had reached the headquarters of the Investment board headed by the Prime Minister. The board is likely to clear it soon and formally ask the NHPC to handle the project.

The CWE Investment Corporation, a subsidiary of China Three Gorges Corporation, had informed the Nepal Government in August 2018 that it would not be able to execute the 750-MW West Seti Hydropower Project it had undertaken on the ground that it was "financially unfeasible and its resettlement and rehabilitation costs were too high".