

The Indian Express

Front Page

Modi listening, Xi: Cold War mentality, bloc confrontation must be abandoned (Page no. 3) (GS Paper 2, International Relations)

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin listening, Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday said the world “must abandon Cold War mentality” and “bloc confrontation” — and “oppose unilateral sanctions and abuse of sanctions”.

Xi’s references to the Cold War and blocs at the annual summit of the five-nation group appeared to target NATO and the Quad, of which India is a part. And, his mention of sanctions seemed to have been aimed at the US and European curbs targeting Russia following the invasion of Ukraine.

Putin also raised the issue of sanctions but Modi steered clear of any specific references and spoke about “governance of the global economy” in the context of the pandemic.

Even though the scale of the epidemic has reduced globally...many of its ill effects are still visible in the global economy. We, the BRICS member countries, have had a very similar view of the governance of the global economy. And so our mutual cooperation can make a useful contribution to post-Covid global recovery.

Consumption basket expanded, revamped consumer expenditure survey begins July 1 (Page no. 3) (GS Paper 3, Economy)

The government will launch fieldwork for the new Consumer Expenditure Survey, with the revamp including features such as three visits by an enumerator to a household to seek more detailed information on their consumption basket. The basket itself has been expanded in the new round. The largest category of ‘miscellaneous’ items has been segregated for detailed collection of data on consumption of those items, along with inclusion of items which have seen higher consumption trends in recent times.

Also, detailed questions for seeking inputs on welfare subsidies such as food grains are learnt to have been included.

About 1,700 investigators are likely to be engaged in the revamped consumer expenditure survey, as against 800-900 earlier, people aware of the development.

The three visits to a household to collect data on consumption expenditure will entail seeking information on daily use items, regular items and consumer durables and will help draw poverty estimates after a decade-long gap.

The survey will cover around 1.2 lakh households in rural areas and around 84,000 households in urban areas.

The Consumer Expenditure Survey (CES) is usually conducted at quinquennial (every five years) intervals and the last survey was conducted in the 68th round (July 2011 to June 2012).

The government had, however, junked the 2017-18 findings of the consumer expenditure survey citing “quality issues”. Studies based on leaked survey findings had pointed to a rise in poverty levels in 2017-18.

The new survey will be conducted till June next year and the results are then likely to come in by October next year.

Editorial Page

How to train Karmyogi (Page no. 10) (GS Paper 2, Governance)

Recently, the Government of India’s Mission Karmayogi programme to build civil service capacity received a \$47 million boost from the World Bank. Prime Minister Narendra Modi championed capacity building in 2004 when, as the chief minister of Gujarat, he launched the “chintan shivir” to discuss policies with his ministers and bureaucrats.

Before 1985, capacity building of the higher civil services primarily involved two-year induction training. For the lower civil services there were no trainings.

In 1985, the then government recognised that a two-year induction training was insufficient for senior officers. IAS officers were mandated to attend a week-long training annually, and periodic four-week trainings to allow reflection and learnings.

In the early 2000s, the government launched a year-long professional programme in public policy at IIM-Bangalore followed by programmes in IIM Ahmedabad, MDI Gurgaon and TERI University.

The government further strengthened the mid-career training for IAS officers by introducing Phases III, IV and V programmes at three different points of their career, in addition to Phases I and II (induction training).

The rationale was that while the induction programmes equipped IAS officers to be good field officers, they needed different competencies at more senior levels.

Today, given our growth ambition, a massive scale-up in capacity-building is needed both at the political and bureaucratic levels.

As democracies mature, elected representatives will play a more proactive role in policy making. It is, therefore, imperative that representatives are able to understand the nuances of policy making.

Idea Page

The fertiliser pinch (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

No country has as much area under farming as India. At 169.3 million hectares (mh) in 2019, its land used for crop cultivation was higher than that of the US (160.4 mh), China (135.7 mh), Russia (123.4 mh) or Brazil (63.5 mh).

With its perennial Himalayan rivers and average annual rainfall of nearly 1,200 mm – against Russia’s 475 mm, China’s 650 mm and the US’s 750 mm – India has no dearth of land, water and sunshine to sustain vibrant agriculture. Which it has for 3,000 years and more.

But there’s one resource in which the country is short and heavily import-dependent — mineral fertilisers. In 2021-22, India imported 10.16 million tonnes (mt) of urea, 5.86 mt of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP) and 2.91 mt of muriate of potash (MOP). In value terms, imports of all fertilisers touched an all-time high of \$12.77 billion last fiscal.

That figure, however, presents an incomplete picture. In 2021-22, India also produced 25.07 mt of urea, 4.22 mt of DAP, 8.33 mt of complex fertilisers (containing nitrogen-N, phosphorus-P, potassium-K and sulphur-S in different ratios) and 5.33 mt of single super phosphate (SSP). The intermediates or raw materials for the manufacture of these fertilisers were substantially imported.

Preparing soil for the future (Page no. 11)

(GS Paper 3, Environmental pollution and degradation)

Food security is one of the core indicators of economic development. The modernisation of agriculture has brought huge dividends in terms of ensuring food security to large swathes of people, apart from improving crop production.

A key element of sustainable food production is healthy soil because nearly 95 per cent of global food production depends on soil. The current status of soil health is worrisome.

Soil degradation on an unprecedented scale is a significant challenge to sustainable food production. About one-third of the earth’s soils is already degraded and alarmingly, about 90 per cent could be degraded by 2050 if no corrective action is taken.

While soil degradation is believed to be occurring in 145 million hectares in India, it is estimated that 96.40 million hectares — about 30 per cent of the total geographical area — is affected by land degradation.

Globally, the biophysical status of 5,670 million hectares of land is declining, of which 1,660 million hectares (29 per cent) is attributed to human-induced land degradation, according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation’s ‘State of Land, Soil and Water’ report.

The time has come for collective global action involving governments and civil society to reverse this alarming trend. Apart from natural causes, a variety of human activities lead to soil degradation.

With the threat to food security looming large globally, compounded by the attendant hazard of serious damage to the environment, the need of the hour is to adopt innovative policies and agro-ecological practices that create healthy and sustainable food production systems.

Explained

Goa’s Sao Joao festival, and why revellers jump into wells and ponds (Page no. 13)

(GS Paper 1, Art and Culture)

In Goa, Catholics celebrate all the feasts of the Roman Catholic Church, which include the feast of St John the Baptist on June 24 (John the Baptist because he had baptised Jesus Christ on the river Jordan).

Traditionally, there are spirited Sao Joao festivities in the villages of Cortalim in South Goa and Harmal, Baga, Siolim and Terekhol in North Goa. However, over the years, pool parties and private Sao Joao parties in Goa have been a “complete package of merriment and joy” for tourists, according to the Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC).

In the 2004 edition of her book Feasts, Festivals and Observances of Goa, author and historian Maria de Lourdes Bravo da Costa Rodrigues wrote: “The youngsters in Goa celebrate this occasion with revelry and perform daredevil feats, by jumping into overflowing wells or rivulets.

The boys are found merrily jumping into the water to commemorate the leap of joy, which St John is said to have taken in the womb of his mother St Elizabeth when virgin Mary visited her.”

What FPIs’ market exit means (Page no. 13)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

Sustained capital outflows from the capital market have unnerved the stock markets and led to a weakening of the rupee amid rising inflation across the globe.

With the US Federal Reserve set to hike rates further, outflows are likely to continue, putting pressure on the Indian currency.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), which own around 19.5% of the market capitalisation, have pulled out Rs 42,000 crore in June so far, taking the total outflows to Rs 260,000 crore (\$33 billion) since October 2021.

The FPI sell-off is being attributed to the tightening of monetary policy by the US Fed which has been on a rate hiking spree to control inflation. Other central banks, including in Britain and the Eurozone, are following suit.

Relatively high valuations in India, rising bond yields in the US, an appreciating dollar and concerns regarding the possibility of a recession in the US triggered by aggressive tightening are factors behind FPIs’ pullout.

What is Odisha’s Mo Bus, recipient of the UN’s prestigious public service award? (Page no. 13)

(Miscellaneous)

Mo Bus, the bus service of Odisha’s Capital Region Urban Transport (CRUT) authority, has been recognised by the United Nations as one of 10 global recipients of its annual Public Service Awards for 2022, it was reported on Wednesday (June 22).

The public transport service has been recognised for its role in “promoting gender-responsive public services to achieve the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals).

Among the other winners of this year’s awards, announced by Liu Zhenmin, United Nations Under Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs during a virtual event to commemorate the United Nations Public Service Day (celebrated on June 22), were public service initiatives from Thailand, Brazil, Canada, Ireland, Panama, the Philippines, Poland, Saudi Arabia, and Ukraine.

The UN recognition said the “problem” was that “bus services in the city of Bhubaneswar needed improvement”, as a result of which “the majority of people used private vehicles, two-wheelers and auto-rickshaw to commute instead of taking public transportation”.

Economy

Mandatory e-way bills for gold set to be on GST Council table (Page no. 15)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

In a measure that will help curtail revenue loss from tax evasion on gold and precious stones under the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, the GST Council will discuss a proposal to implement a mandatory e-way bill system for intra-state movement of such high-value items with a minimum threshold of Rs 2 lakh.

A ministerial panel, headed by Kerala’s Finance Minister KN Balagopal, has made the recommendation and also suggested mandatory e-invoicing for B2B transactions by all taxpayers supplying gold/precious stones and having annual aggregate turnover above Rs 20 crore.

The GoM has suggested that states should be allowed to decide the modalities about the imposition of the e-way bill for intra-state movement of gold and precious stones within their states.

It has also suggested that the GST Network, in consultation with NIC, will work out the modalities and timelines for implementation of e-invoicing for gold/precious stones.

There will be a minimum threshold of Rs 2 Lakh, and the states can decide any amount including or above this amount as minimum threshold for generations of e-way bill for intra-state movement of gold/precious stones in their state.