

Indian Express

Govt. and Politics

Emergency a black spot on vibrant history of India's democracy: PM Modi (Page no. 5) (GS Paper 2, International Relations)

Describing Emergency rule in 1975 as a “black spot” on the vibrant history of India’s democracy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that democracy was trampled and suppressed 47 years ago but the people of India responded to it in a democratic way.

Addressing the Indian community in Germany, the Prime Minister said, “Today is June 26 which is also known as the day when India’s democracy, which is in the DNA of every Indian, was trampled and suppressed 47 years ago. Emergency is a black spot on the vibrant history of India’s democracy.”

“The people of India responded to all the conspiracies to crush democracy in a democratic way. We Indians take pride in our democracy wherever we are,” he said.

“Today, we can proudly say that India is the mother of democracy... The diversity of culture, food, clothes, music and traditions makes our democracy vibrant. India has shown that democracy can deliver and has delivered.”

Editorial Page

A lesson from Maharashtra (Page no. 8)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

The political crisis in Maharashtra has brought focus back on the anti-defection law. By all accounts, the law has failed to shore up the stability of elected governments.

Not only have many governments fallen due to defections in recent times, but the defectors have not suffered any cautionary consequences.

There are many ways to thwart provisions of the law: the Speaker can sit on the defection pleas for the term of the assembly; the beneficiary party can facilitate accretion of defectors through money and investigative agencies to hit the magic two-thirds threshold.

The voters don’t seem to care about punishing the defectors either – 11 out of the 14 defectors who stood for re-election in the 2019 Karnataka bypolls won on the BJP ticket.

Some have thus argued that the way forward is to amend the anti-defection law to fill these lacunae by mandating time-bound decisions by the Speaker and disqualifying defectors from standing for the next election as well.

These proposed amendments like the original law want to consolidate power without necessarily putting in the requisite politics.

They may thus help consolidate the leadership’s intra-party power but the underlying aversion to ongoing politics leaves them vulnerable to bigger external powers.

First, it should be obvious that the practice of politics is too wide for any institutional process to fully capture. Politicians are adept at subverting institutional processes for their own ends and there are many possibilities for payoff for defectors outside of elected office alone.

Moreover, politics has a rich history of exercise of power by proxy and the disqualified representative may simply choose to have a family member stand in their stead.

It thus seems unlikely that these amendments can plug the gap in any substantive manner, especially if the defections have been engineered by the threat of investigative agencies.

Balancing on Bricks (Page no. 8)

(GS Paper 2, International Relations)

The most remarkable thing about the BRICS summit last week was that its five members managed to negotiate their way through the meeting in a way that sent no ripples of surprise through the post-February 24 world.

This was the 14th summit of the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa grouping set up in 2009. It was hosted by China this year and was its opportunity to showcase multi-lateralism, Beijing’s big foreign policy slogan, and to hit out once again at US “hegemony”.

Aside from the members, China had invited 13 nations from across continents, signalling its desire to expand the group. Getting Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend despite the tensions owing to China’s military incursions in Ladakh was a bonus.

For India, BRICS was always about its commitment to building non-western alliances, but this time it was, more, an international balancing act. Ditto for Brazil.

It voted for the UN Security Council resolution “deploring” the invasion of Ukraine and the General Assembly resolution condemning Russia, but President Jair Bolsonaro went to Moscow on a “solidarity trip” a week before the invasion and has insisted his country stands for “peace”.

South Africa too has been walking the neutrality tightrope on Ukraine. As for Russia, the summit gave President Vladimir Putin his first multilateral outing since February 24.

The joint statement was able to find common ground on the invasion of Ukraine by asserting the sanctity of sovereignty and territorial integrity and the need to find a peaceful solution.

Idea Page

West steps back, India shows way (Page no. 9)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

At a time of distressing furore on social media and the streets against the near-total bans on abortion in the West, India’s generous stance on the termination of pregnancy is a comforting sanctum.

Coupled with the moratorium on commercial surrogacy and the proposal to equalise men’s and women’s ages at marriage, India is positioned securely in the highest echelons of countries that safeguard reproductive autonomy.

India’s constitutional ethos commits to the protection of personal liberty through Article 21. Abortion or termination of pregnancy is a woman’s prerogative.

While women are exclusively fated to withstand child-bearing – purely on account of their biological predisposition — sociocultural constructs also subject them to a disproportionate share of child-rearing.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy (Amendment) Act, 2021, is a step in the right direction. It ensures that expectant mothers exercise self-determination in welcoming new life to their homes.

Under the aegis of the Act, abortions may be performed up to 24 gestational weeks on grounds of risk to the mother’s life, mental anguish, rape, incest, contraception failure or the diagnosis of foetal abnormalities.

The Act navigates the 20 weeks challenge posed by the MTP Act, 1971 and is a nod to advances in the field of health and reproductive science.

It is a liberal achievement over countries where abortions are disallowed since conception, even in the most traumatising of circumstances of sexual abuse or incest.

Avoiding a GST exit (Page no. 9)

GS Paper 3 (Economy)

India’s goods and services tax (GST) will be five years old on July 1. The GST Council, comprising minister representatives from all states and union territories, will be meeting over the next few days. There will likely be celebrations, commiserations and contestations.

Three significant issues — the breakdown of trust and cooperative federalism between states and the Union government, the expiry of the revenue guarantee that protected states’ revenues and the recent Supreme Court’s judgment highlighting that the GST Council’s recommendations are not binding on the states — form the backdrop to this Council meeting.

Maharashtra, the highest contributor to GST revenues (20 per cent) may not be represented in today’s meeting because its government is on the verge of collapse, aided in part by the BJP governments of the Union, Gujarat and Assam. Surely, these egregious political developments in Maharashtra will play in the minds of the non-BJP representatives in the GST Council meeting from Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Delhi, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Punjab, Jharkhand and Orissa, that together contribute 36 per cent of overall GST revenues.

Explained

Why sanctions are flagging (Page no. 12)

(GS Paper 2, International Relations)

Since February 23, the day before Russia invaded Ukraine, the European Union’s Council has adopted six rounds of sanctions to “impose clear economic and political costs” on the government of President Vladimir Putin, and to “cripple the Kremlin’s ability to finance the war”.

Western governments, including the United States and United Kingdom, have cut off major Russian banks from SWIFT, the interbank messaging system to enable cross-border payments.

They have frozen some \$315 billion out of the \$550 billion of the Central Bank of the Russian Federation's (CBR) foreign exchange reserves held in currencies and gold within their jurisdictions, as on January 1.

On April 6, the White House issued a statement that the "most impactful, coordinated and wide-ranging economic restrictions in history" would cause Russia's GDP to "contract up to 15 per cent this year, wiping out the last 15 years of economic gains".

Who are the G7, whose Summit in Germany India has been invited to? (Page no. 12)

(GS Paper 2, International Relations)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in Germany to attend the Group of Seven (G7) Summit at Schloss Elmau, a century-old retreat in a nature reserve in the Bavarian Alps.

The Prime Minister is expected to speak in two sessions that include Environment, Energy, Climate, Food Security, Health, Gender Equality, and Democracy, the Ministry of External Affairs said earlier this week. He will also hold bilateral meetings with leaders of some of the participating countries.

The G7 is an informal forum of leading industrialised nations, which include Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Representatives of the European Union are always present at the annual meeting of the heads of state and government of the G7. Germany holds the presidency of the G7 in 2022.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has invited India, along with Argentina, Indonesia, Senegal, and South Africa to the 2022 Summit as partner countries. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, will take part virtually on June 27, the G7 presidency has announced.