

NEWSPAPER HIGHLIGHT

The details of the recently released draft environment impact assessment (EIA) report for the mega development project in the Great Nicobar Island have raised serious questions related to submission of incorrect or incomplete information, scientific inaccuracy and failure to follow appropriate procedure. The matter is related to the NITI Aayog - piloted ₹72,000 crore integrated project in Great Nicobar that includes construction of a mega port, an airport complex, a township spread over 130 sq. km of pristine forest and a solar and gas based power plant. Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Ltd. (ANIIDCO) is the project proponent.

The United Nations deplored the military takeover in Burkina Faso and called for the immediate release of President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré and other top officials. The UN human rights office said it was crucial to preserve democratic space in the West African nation.

India expressed "deep sympathy" to the tsunami-hit Kingdom of Tonga in the Pacific Ocean and extended an immediate relief assistance of \$200,000 to deal with the disaster that was triggered by the explosion of a massive underwater volcano. "India has firmly stood by Tonga during times of crisis and devastation caused by natural disasters, as during Cyclone Gita in 2018. Disaster Risk Reduction and Management is an important pillar of India's Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative (IPOI) announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in November 2019.

The Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) will send another reminder to States to respond to its proposal to amend the Indian Administrative Service (Cadre) Rules, 1954, with which Indian Administrative Service (IAS), Indian Police Service (IPS) and Indian Forest Service (IFoS) officers could be deputed to the Union government and Ministries without necessarily taking the State government's nod. So far, 16 States have responded. Seven States — Haryana, Manipur, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat and Arunachal Pradesh have given their consent to the proposal. Five States — Odisha, Meghalaya, Jharkhand, Rajasthan and West Bengal — have responded to the DoPT, opposing the amendments.

RECOGNITION/DERECOGNITION OF POLITICAL PARTIES

1.A petition has been filed in the Supreme Court seeking a direction to the Election Commission of India (ECI) to seize the election symbol or de-register a political party that promises or distributes "irrational freebies" from public funds before elections. It said there should be a total ban on such populist measures to gain undue political favours from the voters as they violate the Constitution and the ECI should take suitable deterrent measures.

2.Need for: **The plea urged the court to declare that the promise of irrational freebies from public funds before elections unduly influences the voters, disturbs the level playing field and vitiates the purity of the poll process.** This unethical practice is just like giving bribes to the electorate at the cost of the exchequer to stay in power and must be avoided to preserve democratic principles and practices.

3.Registration of political parties: Registration of Political parties is governed by the provisions of Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. A party seeking registration under the said Section with the Election Commission has to submit an application to the Commission within a period of 30 days following the date of its formation as per guidelines prescribed by the Election Commission of India in exercise of the powers conferred by Article 324 of the Commission of India and Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.

4.Benefits: If a party is recognised as a 'State Party', it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it in the State in which it is so recognised, and if a party is recognised as a 'National Party' it is entitled for exclusive allotment of its reserved symbol to the candidates set up by it throughout India.

5. **Recognised 'State' and 'National' parties need only one proposer for filing the nomination and are also entitled for two sets of electoral rolls free of cost at the time of revision of rolls and their candidates get one copy of electoral roll free of cost during General Elections.** They also get broadcast/telecast facilities over Akashvani/Doordarshan during general elections. The travel expenses of star campaigners are not to be accounted for in the election expense accounts of candidates of their party.

UKRAINE CRISIS

1.Amid the rising tensions over Russia's military buildup around Ukraine, NATO allies have put forces on standby and sent ships and fighter jets to bolster Europe's eastern defences. What is the conflict all about-**Tensions between Ukraine and Russia, both former Soviet states, escalated in late 2013 over a landmark political and trade deal with the European Union.** After the pro-Russian then-President, Viktor Yanukovich, suspended the talks, weeks of protests in Kiev erupted into violence.

2.Then, in March 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, an autonomous peninsula in southern Ukraine with strong Russian loyalties, on the pretext that it was defending its interests and those of Russian-speaking citizens. Shortly afterwards, pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions declared their independence from Kiev, prompting months of heavy fighting. Despite Kiev and Moscow signing a peace deal in Minsk in 2015, brokered by France and Germany, there have been repeated ceasefire violations.

3.Latest developments: The United States, NATO and Ukrainian officials have been making statements for nearly two weeks, referring to what they say are unusual Russian troop movements in the proximity of Ukraine. Russia has stationed more than 1,00,000 troops at its border with aspiring NATO member Ukraine.

4.Demands by Russia-**Russia stated that only if NATO withdraws their forces from all countries in Europe that joined the alliance after May 1997, would they de-escalate the military build-up.** This would effectively mean that NATO cannot operate in any of the Baltic nations that border Russia

The Supreme Court sought responses from the Union government and the Election Commission of India (ECI) on the continued 'tamasha' of political parties promising or distributing 'irrational freebies' using public funds. A Bench of Chief Justice of India N.V. Ramana, Justices A.S. Bopanna and Hima Kohli issued notice to the Centre and the EC on a plea filed by advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay, represented by senior advocate Vikas Singh, to issue stringent guidelines to deregister errant political parties and seize their election symbols.

The Supreme Court declined to pass an interim order directing the government to extend the validity of licences of NGOs under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) which expired on September 30 last year, instead opting to pronounce its judgment first in a pending case challenging the very constitutionality of the amendments to the law on the flow of foreign funds into India.

The Supreme Court urged the Union government to consult stakeholders and domain experts for ways to upgrade, better facilitate access and transparency in vaccination of disabled people, pregnant women and nursing mothers.

U.S. President Joe Biden declared "total" unity among Western powers on Monday after crisis talks with European leaders on deterring Russia from an attack against Ukraine, while the Pentagon said 8,500 U.S. troops were put on standby for possible deployment to boost NATO.

Russia added jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny and a number of his allies to a list of "terrorists and extremists", as authorities further clamp down on the opposition.

U.K.'s Cairn Energy said it has complied with all rules of the retro tax repeal law to now become eligible for about ₹7,900 crore refund of taxes that were collected from it to enforce a retrospective tax demand.

The upcoming Union Budget for 2022-23 should include higher allocations for the rural employment guarantee programme, a new plan to generate urban jobs and fresh cuts in fuel taxes, to revive flagging consumption demand in the economy, credit rating agency Crisil said. Households' consumption,

(Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania), central European states such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech republic, and Balkan states such as Croatia and Slovenia. Russia also wants NATO to drop plans of any further 'enlargement', which means committing to not accepting Ukraine and Georgia as members. Another demand is that NATO must not hold drills in eastern Europe, Ukraine and Georgia without prior approval from Russia.

5.About North Atlantic Treaty Organization: It is an intergovernmental military alliance. Established by Washington treaty. Treaty that was signed on 4 April 1949. Headquarters — Brussels, Belgium. Headquarters of Allied Command Operations — Mons, Belgium.

MINSK AGREEMENTS

1.Minsk I: Ukraine and the Russian-backed separatists agreed a 12-point ceasefire deal in the capital of Belarus in September 2014. Its provisions included prisoner exchanges, deliveries of humanitarian aid and the withdrawal of heavy weapons.

2.The agreement quickly broke down, with violations by both sides. Minsk II: In 2015, an open conflict was averted after the 'Minsk II' peace agreement was signed, under the mediation of France and Germany. It was designed to end the fighting in the rebel regions and hand over the border to Ukraine's national troops.

FOOD FORTIFICATION

1.The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India's (FSSAI's) Food Fortification Resource Centre (FFRC) has reported that over 70% of India's population consumes less than half the daily recommended dietary allowance of micronutrients. These deficiencies are prevalent not only in women and children from rural areas but also affect population groups in urban India.

2.Key to Addressing Nutrition Gap: With a section of the populace having limited access to nutritious food, fortification is key in addressing the nutrition gap. In a bid to directly address anaemia and micronutrient deficiency in the country, the Centre recently approved a pilot scheme on "Fortification of Rice & its Distribution under Public Distribution System". The government's food fortification initiative is already taking shape with several states, including Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Telangana, Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh, starting the distribution of fortified rice under the pilot programme.

3.Fortifying staple foods and condiments with key micronutrients is an effective way of addressing deficiencies. Timely adoption of food fortification in social and nutrition security programmes as a part of the fortification initiative will play a crucial role in addressing undernutrition in India.

4.Need for Rice fortification: The country has high levels of malnutrition among women and children. According to the Food Ministry, every second woman in the country is anaemic and every third child is stunted. India ranks 94 out of 107 countries and is in the 'serious hunger' category on the Global Hunger Index (GHI). Malnutrition and lack of essential nutrients in poor women and poor children poses major obstacles in their development.

5.Food fortification is defined as the practice of adding vitamins and minerals to commonly consumed foods during processing to increase their nutritional value. It is a proven, safe and cost-effective strategy for improving diets and for the prevention and control of micronutrient deficiencies.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

1.Experts have expressed "serious concerns over the slow pace of reforms in the criminal justice system to ensure speedy justice". Current concerns/challenges: The delay in disposal of cases was leading to human rights violations of the under-trials and convicts. Despite the Supreme Court's directions on police reforms, there had been hardly any changes on the ground. Court orders convicting a person are also taking years to implement.

2.Suggested Reforms: Special laws and fast-track courts could replace certain offences under the Indian Penal Code in order to reduce the piling up of cases at every police station. Digitisation of documents would help in speeding up investigations and trials.

3.The construction of new offences and reworking of the existing classification of offences must be guided by the principles of criminal jurisprudence which have substantially altered in the

which was already slowing down before the COVID19 pandemic, remains in the red and 'would not even have sighted' 201819 levels by the end of this financial year, thanks to high inflation and income losses amid the pandemic, Crisil noted in a report titled 'Undoing the Consumption Shock'.

Gems and jewellery exports rose by 71% during April-December 2021 to \$28.9 billion from \$16.9 billion in the same period of the previous year, the Commerce Ministry said.

past four decades. The classification of offences must be done in a manner conducive to management of crimes in the future. The discretion of judges in deciding the quantum and nature of sentence differently for crimes of the same nature should be based on principles of judicial precedent.

4. Committee For Reform In Criminal Law: The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has constituted a national level committee for reform in criminal law. The committee has been constituted under Ranbir Singh and several other members. The committee would be gathering opinions online by consulting with experts and collating material for their report to the government.