

The Hindu

Front Page

Cabinet approves mega 5G auction (Page no 1)

(GS Paper 3, Science and Tech)

The Union Cabinet has approved the auction of airwaves capable of offering fifth generation, or 5G, telecom services, including ultra high-speed Internet, and gave its nod for setting up of captive 5G networks by big tech firms.

The auction of over 72 GHz of the spectrum will be held by July-end, said an official statement detailing the decision taken by the Union Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at its meeting.

The spectrum auction will start on July 26, 2022. Sources said that the Cabinet has approved 5G auctions at reserve prices recommended by the sector regulator, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).

TRAI had earlier recommended about a 39% reduction in the reserve or floor price for the sale of 5G spectrum for mobile services.

Party leaders, veterans say Army morale may be harmed (Page no 1)

(GS Paper 3, Defence)

The 'Agnipath' scheme has drawn flak from various political parties and some veterans. A large number of aspirants to the armed forces blocked roads and railway tracks in different parts of Bihar in protest against the new scheme.

Earlier, responding to a media query, Union Minister and former Army chief General V.K. Singh said he was not involved in formulating the scheme and that he did not know much about it.

Targeting the Central government, opposition claimed that "When India faces threats on two fronts, the uncalled for 'Agnipath' scheme reduces the operational effectiveness of our armed forces.

The BJP govt. must stop compromising the dignity, traditions, valour & discipline of our forces." Instead of raising a professional Army, Modi govt. proposes 'soldiers on contract' to save pension money! Training contract soldiers with no other prospects after 3-5 years but to serve private militias! Scrap this anti national scheme."

Editorial Page

A ground plan for India's COVID-19 response (Page no 8)

(GS Paper 3, Health)

India's daily new COVID-19 cases have crossed the 8,000-mark for the first time after more than 100 days. However, the cases (moderate to severe) and COVID-19 related hospital admissions continue to be low.

The spike in infections has raised some worries about the start of the fourth national COVID-19 wave in India. Epidemiologically speaking, an immediate major national wave in India is improbable.

Part of the reason is that the Omicron (B.1.1.529) variant is the only globally circulating variant of concern, as of now. The Omicron sublineage BA.2, which caused the third national wave in India, continues to be the dominant variant in the country.

Though two new Omicron sub-lineages, BA.4 and BA.5, have been detected globally and reported from India as well, their share is minuscule.

Finally, there is no evidence that the BA.4 and BA.5 sub-lineages can cause a major nationwide surge in settings already exposed to BA.2 sub-lineage.

Clearly, while the concerns about another national wave are unfounded, the ongoing surge demands for a fresh approach to the COVID-19 pandemic response in India.

In Sri Lankan crisis, a window of economic opportunity (Page no 8)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

In a recent interview with an Indian TV channel, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, touched upon a less-emphasised yet significant aspect of India-Sri Lanka relations — the commonality between Sri Lanka and the southern parts of India.

This was not the first time that he has talked of forging closer ties between his country and south India. The sub-regional context During his second term as Prime Minister, Mr. Wickremesinghe while delivering a lecture in Chennai, in August 2003, called for the development of the south India-Sri Lanka sub-region as a single market that would provide more opportunities for the economic growth of both countries.

In 2016, addressing the South Asian Diaspora Convention in Singapore, he highlighted the fact that the five Indian southern States, with a total population of 250 million, had a combined gross state domestic product of nearly \$450 billion.

With the addition of Sri Lanka's \$80 billion GDP, the sub-region would have a \$500 billion economy, having an aggregate population of around 270 million.

In the southeast Asian country, he had even referred to the tri-nation economic convergence, encompassing Singapore too. Mr. Wickremesinghe's latest observations should be viewed in the context of his idea of sub-regional integration.

The present economic crisis in Sri Lanka has pushed it closer to India for immediate relief. For the last few months, the Indian media's regular coverage of the crisis has led to better understanding and even created a sense of empathy in India about the plight of the neighbouring country.

India, as part of its 'Neighbourhood First' policy, has extended support to the people of Sri Lanka in the form of aid (close to \$3.5 billion) to help secure Sri Lanka's food, health and energy security by supplying it essential items such as

food, medicines, fuel and kerosene.

OPED

A poverty trend in search of an explanation (Page no 9)

(GS Paper 3, Indian Economy)

A noticeable absence in the blitzkrieg of information on the economy periodically unleashed by the Union government over the past few years has been estimates of poverty.

A measure of the progress made with respect to the reduction of poverty in India is crucial to an assessment of the state of the economy of India, known to harbour the world's largest number of poor people.

The last official estimate of poverty that is comparable over time, undertaken by the Planning Commission, is for the year 2011-12.

The reason behind this state of affairs is that we have not had a household consumption expenditure survey for a subsequent year, such a survey being the ideal basis for poverty estimation.

A consumption expenditure survey was conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) for 2017-18, but was rejected by the government as defective.

Whether this decision was taken upon the advice of independent experts is not known, but a leaked version of the report showed that real consumption expenditure had fallen since 2011-12.

At the time, a leading commentator on the economy had poured cold water on this possibility, stating that a decline in consumption is not possible when income (GDP) has grown.

The Union government's rejection of the report for 2017-18 has meant that we have not been able to say anything about the trend in poverty over a whole decade.

Explainer

The fragile state of nuclear disarmament (Page no 10)

(GS Paper 3, Defence)

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) released its yearbook a few days back highlighting some worrying trends of the past year in international security.

The expected rise of the global nuclear arsenal was the chief cause of concern among SIPRI experts. The comprehensive report claims that while absolute numbers of nuclear arsenal have reduced, they are expected to grow over the next decade.

During 2012-2021, military spending as a percentage of gross domestic product has largely been stable. If anything, the average worldwide trend has been slightly downward.

Russia leads the charge in absolute numbers of nuclear inventory (5977 against the U.S.'s 5428), however it is the U.S. that has the largest number of deployed warheads (1744 against Russia's 1588).

The U.K. has 225 nuclear weapons in its inventory, while France has 290, China has 350, India has 160, Pakistan has 165. Israel is estimated to have 90 and North Korea 20.

It is concerning, to say the least, to see how global discourse has created a sense of fear around China's military modernization and their upward trend in nuclear weapons development while the thousands of nuclear weapons held by the U.S. don't seem to attract a similar level of attention.

The controversy around the Northern Ireland Protocol (Page no 10)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

The Boris Johnson administration has come up with a new legislation, the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill, which would enable the U.K. to override provisions of the Brexit deal that concern trading arrangements in Northern Ireland — the Northern Ireland Protocol (NIP).

The European Union (EU) has said that the proposed law violates international law and has threatened to take legal action against the U.K. if it goes ahead with the legislation.

Northern Ireland is the only part of the U.K. that shares a land border with the EU, as the Republic of Ireland (or Ireland)

is an EU member-state. As long as the U.K. was part of the EU, things were fine. But, with Brexit, the U.K. exited the EU's customs union.

This created a problem whose solution needed two seemingly contradictory outcomes: preserving the sanctity of the EU's single market, as well as that of the U.K.'s domestic market.

The NIP's solution was to avoid a customs check at the actual customs border — on the island of Ireland, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland — as this would have violated the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and risked instability in a region with a volatile past.

It instead shifted the customs border to that between Northern Ireland and Britain, effectively at the former's ports. As per the NIP, goods flowing into Northern Ireland would be checked at this 'sea border' before entering the island, and Northern Ireland would continue to follow EU rules in product standards.

News

Doval attends meeting hosted by China (Page no 12)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

National Security Adviser (NSA) Ajit Doval attended a virtual BRICS meeting hosted by Chinese NSA Yang Jiechi on Wednesday, aimed at strengthening "political and security cooperation" within the five-nation grouping of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

Mr. Doval called for cooperation on terrorism "without reservations", and preventing the use of Information & Communication Technology (ICT) by terrorists during the meeting.

He also emphasised the "need for urgent reform of the multilateral system", and the importance of resilient supply chains.

Significantly, the NSA's meeting was one of two multilateral events attended by India and China on a day that marked two years since the Galwan clashes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

New Delhi also hosted a border security conference of SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) countries, that includes officials from China, Russia, Pakistan and Central Asian countries.

Myanmar unlikely to be part of ASEAN-India meeting (Page no 12)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

The Foreign Minister of Myanmar is unlikely to be part of the 24th ASEAN-India Ministerial here on Thursday. Myanmar's representation at the meeting was in focus as India had been under pressure to avoid inclusion of Myanmar in the high-level meeting.

The other factor behind Myanmar's absence is the souring ASEAN-Myanmar ties that were affected beginning with the February 1, 2021 coup that overthrew the Aung San Suu Kyi government in Myanmar.

The Hindu had earlier reported that India was unlikely to invite Myanmar Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin. The Ministry of External Affairs last week announced that the participation of Myanmar in the ASEAN India Senior Officials' Meeting will follow the "ASEAN consensus".

The non-participation of Wunna Maung Lwin in Thursday's meet is being interpreted as India accommodating international concern over the junta in Myanmar, which has refused to enter into a negotiation with the protesters demanding restoration of democracy.

In comparison, the Foreign Minister Wunna Maung Lwin had participated in the BIMSTEC summit in a virtual format earlier. That participation had drawn criticism from the United States.

Agniveers to get priority in CAPF recruitment (Page no 12)

(GS Paper 3, Defence)

Youth recruited in the armed forces under the short-term 'Agnipath' scheme will get priority in recruitment to the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) and Assam Rifles, the Union Home Ministry announced.

A senior Ministry official said the details were being worked out, but ‘Agniveers’ would be given priority when they completed the four years of military service.

Union Home Minister said that the Ministry had taken steps to fill vacancies in mission mode in accordance with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s instructions to recruit 10 lakh personnel in a year and a half.

However, according to the latest Home Ministry data, there has been an over 80% decline in the number of CAPF personnel — constables, sub-inspectors and assistant commandants (ACs) — recruited in the past four years.

The 10-lakh-strong CAPF is one of the largest employment generation agencies under the Home Ministry.

According to the 2021 Data of Police Organisations report, in 2020, only 10,184 CAPF posts were filled, while vacancies stood at 1.29 lakh.

In 2017, as many as 58,396 personnel were recruited against vacancies of 77,153. In 2018 and 2019, the number of such recruits stood at 30,098 and 14,541, respectively.

World

Egypt, Israel step in to boost gas supply to EU (Page no 15)

(GS Paper 2, International Relation)

Egypt, Israel and the European Union signed a deal to increase liquified natural gas sales to EU countries, who aim to reduce their dependence on supplies from Russia as the war in Ukraine drags on.

The deal will see Israel send more gas via Egypt, which has facilities to liquefy it for export by sea. Diversifying sources

Ms. Von der Leyen, who visited Israel earlier this week, said the agreement was part of Europe’s efforts to diversify energy sources away from Russia and import hydrocarbons from “other trustworthy suppliers.”

She named Israel and Egypt who have emerged as gas exporters in recent years following major offshore discoveries.

Under the deal, the EU will help Egypt and Israel increase their gas production and exploration in their territorial waters. It was not immediately clear how much gas the EU will import from either country.

Business

5G will drive ‘significant’ advancements: analysts (Page no 16)

(GS Paper 3, Economy)

The much-awaited 5G spectrum auction will bring significant advancements for the industry and consumers, according to market watchers. However, some said the base price for spectrum remained an issue for bidders who were expecting much lower rates.

The auction and steps outlined for bidding would open up newer avenues for deeper penetration, access and rich user experience. The Centre had also announced an auction of the millimetre-waveband, which would not only help unlock the ‘true’ potential of 5G but would also help strategically manage costs for the operators.

‘Much-awaited auction’ “The roads are now clear for 5G auctions. This is probably one of the most awaited spectrum auctions, which will bring significant advancements for the industry and the consumers.

Another aspect which would spur ‘a good auction’ was that operators would have the flexibility to surrender the spectrum after 10 years without any liabilities, he pointed out.

The wide availability of spectrum across all bands was encouraging, as potential bidders could opt for spectrum bands and quantum as per their strategy.