

17th December

The spectre of deportation

- The compilation of NRC has sparked off a debate around the repercussions that it may lead to, especially when it is with respect to India's relationship with Bangladesh.
- Background: National register of citizens was prepared in 1951 and consists of the names of Indian citizens of Assam. Lately NRC published the final draft of citizens that kept 40.07 lakh people out of its preview (deemed as illegal migrants).
- Any policy that has the possibility of affecting India Bangladesh relationship, must be made keeping in mind some of the elements.
- It is important to keep in mind that Bangladesh has illegal migrants from India too.
- Bangladesh is reported to be one of the fundamental sources of remittances to india.
- Although the ruling establishment maintains that the task of NRC is being overseen by the supreme court of India and is an administrative task and that the PM has maintained the stance that none of those excluded from the NRC will be deported, it is unlikely that Dhaka would be giving in to mainstreaming those who are deported. Dhaka's silence on the issue leads us to believe on this argument.
- 2014 was ushered with PM's policy of 'Neighbourhood First' but the reality is far from what was enshrined 5 years ago.
- Nepal has shifted its allegiance towards china after the Nepal blockade of 2015.
- Doklam and the withdrawal of subsidies on from cooking gas in 2013 has strained bilateral ties with Bhutan. It has also stepped out of BangladeshBhutanIndiaNepal (BBIN) motor vehicles agreement.
- The India -China power play has also played its role in affecting India's relationship with Sri Lank and Maldives.
- Of all the neighbours, Bangladesh has been the most reliable ally of India. It has been cooperating with India on the border front as has been asserted by the BSF personnel.
- On the security front, it has cooperated in India's crackdown on insurgents.
- It is India's largest trading partner in South Asia as the yearly bilateral trade is set to cross the \$9 billion mark.
- Bangladesh has facilitated connectivity across north east by allowing the use of Chittagong and Mongla ports.
- Nevertheless, the Teesta dispute, border killings and issues of non-tariff barriers are still block roads.
- India must keep in mind that elections are due in Bangladesh at the end of this month and
 the policy on NRC which is threatening the equilibrium between the two countries will be
 major factor to be considered during the poll campaigns.

Widening Gulf

- The growing disunity among the countries of the GCC is reminded by Qatar's decision to abstain from GCC summit in December in Riyadh.
- Qatar is being blockaded by three GCC; Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain.
- But obvious, this blockade has generated tensions among other members of the GCC.
- Saudi Arabia is offended by Oman's and Kuwait's abstinence from joining the embargo. Moreover, the latter was trying to mediate between the two rival camps.



- Not denying the fact that this blockade has made Qatar more assertive and independent in its foreign policies, but the feud has diminished any hopes for the integration of the region (which was the reason for its formulation, to achieve solidarity among the members based on their common political and cultural identity).
- The bloc, which once talked about a common Gulf currency and robust connectivity projects is on a path via which the pre-laid goals cannot be achieved.

The Indian Express:

A duty to curb intolerance

- Recently, the movie Kedarnath was met with resistance and sparked off a controversy of "hurting the religious sentiments of public".
- There were demands for banning its screening so much so that a PIL was filed as well.
 However, the Uttarakhand High Court observed that those who do not like the movie need not watch it.
- What needs to be kept in mind is the fact that public is comprised of all sorts if human beings. The nature of any article (in this case a movie) cannot be judged based on the effect it produces on fanatics.
- Also, banning the exhibition of a movie violates the fundamental right of a person under Article 19(1)(a) of the constitution, (the freedom of speech and expression) and Article 19(1)(g), (the right to carry out on trade and business). Such a stand reeks of intolerance.
- Yes, fundamental rights aren't absolute, but the limitations must be reasonable and not discretionary and established with the due process of law.
- the UN Declaration on Elimination of all Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief (adopted on November 25, 1981) talks about the perils of intolerance.
- Intolerance is a violation of human rights and its practice puts our democracy at grave risk.

18th December

Hot air at Katowice

- At the 24th meeting of the COP 24 to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, yet again, the major concerns of the poorest and the developing nations were diluted.
- The 1.5 Degree Report given by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has mentioned that the earth is close to a climate catastrophe. Nevertheless, countries like the US, Saudi Arabia and Russia have failed to acknowledge this report as an evidence-based reason to cause an alarm
- The were some progress on the process by which the Paris Agreement 2015 would be implemented.
- The summit aims to establish guidelines for a profound and transparent framework to audit and report actions taken in a systematic manner.
- On similar lines, transparency, adaptation and mitigation all form an equally important part of any such strategy to combat challenges to climate change.



- One primary hurdle in this process is the fact that there is a cash crunch when it comes to funding the developing and poor nations. More so, the details on capacity building and funding has been postponed. (Article 9 ignored)
- Finance as aspect to be considered was not taken until the Africa Group of Nations forced it upon the discussions by boycotting the session.
- International civil societies expressed disappointment over the disregard of equity.
- Not only America, but countries like Australia, Switzerland, Japan, the European Union, did not disagree when "equity" was wiped from the text; in fact, they consented.
- Corporates are equally responsible for drafting of the text.
- The need of the hour is to treat climate change and environment as an integral part of development. If we treat climate changes is treated as something marginal to the GDP growth, Climate change will stress out our development fabric and our lives.

Making every citizen an auditor

- "A good auditor is a good listener" said President Ram Nath Kovind. Only then can an audit
 get the space that is needed to become an integral part of the formal audit process and be a
 part of the democratic roots.
- Social audit maps people's participation in the planning, execution and monitoring of public programmes.
- They were first made mandatory by law in the year 2005 Under the MGNREGA.
- The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj recently conducted a study and reported the following findings that needs to be addressed with respect to social auditing.
- The governing bodies of most SAUs (Social Audit Units) are not independent nor do they
 have enough personnel to cover all the panchayats once a year.
- The grievance redressal mechanism is flawed. According to the reports only 14% of the grievances have been redressed.
- Last year, the Supreme Court mandated social audits under the National Food Security Act (NFSA) to be conducted using the machinery that facilitates the social audits of MGNREGA. However, lack of funds proved to be a roadblock here.
- The need for social auditing's smooth functioning, it is important for the SAUs to have an independent governing body and adequate staff.
- A real time management information system should keep a check on the calendar, the audits to be undertaken and the one already under taken.
- The reports of each of these audits must be publicly available. Also, the role of mentors is crucial as the process expands into newer programs.

19th December

Bolstering Paris

- The UN climate conference at Katowice, Poland, has come up with a rule book for further implementation of the Paris Agreement. It reflects the importance people across the world are assigning to avert climate related calamities.
- However, the measure, does not adequately address the need to make GHG emissions cut.



- It is a long road ahead before we can embark on that set parameter for carbon emissions as pegged by the scientists.
- It also been proposed that to cap the rising global temperature over the pre-industrial levels at 1.5 degrees, a total of 45% reduction in emissions over 2010 levels must be made by 2030.
- This can be a big challenge before all big economies of the world including India (which is among the top 5 carbon emitting countries of the world).
- What can India do?
- India needs to scale up its solar and wind power in line with its set goal of achieving 175 GW
 of renewable energy by the year 2022, eventually reducing its dependence on nonrenewable sources of energy.
- Policies must be formulated with respect to taxing luxury emissions and the money must be used to give poor access to energy.
- Building on funds for initiatives like green climate funds.
- India must strive to bring sectors like energy production, agriculture under environment friendly techniques.
- A clean India will help meet emission commitments and help the nation breathe.

Fatal Fires

- The fire that engulfed the Andheri Hospital of the Employees State Insurance Corporation killed 8 people and serves as a crude reminder of the fact that fire safety gets low priority in the country.
- It is ironic as the ESIC is an organisation that protects the labour sector and is expected to set standards
- The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers does provide specific norms for hospitals which include requirements like alarms, sprinkler systems, smoke barrier enclosures etc.
- The state must ensure that such regulations are complied with proper enforcement agencies and laws.
- Certification of facilities via third party audit must be made compulsory to avoid any conflict with any official agencies.
- The institution must be made accountable towards the public.
- At a larger level the government must also work in harmony, shedding all their differences.

Restoring the balance

- Maldivian President Mohamed Solih's visit to India brought a tumultuous phase in the bilateral relationship.
- The previous president, Mr. Yameen had steered the country close to china and silenced its oppositions, Mr. Solih's victory can be seen as democracy strengthening force in the island country.
- Mr. Modi also made it clear that India wants to "see a stable, democratic, prosperous and peaceful Republic of Maldives".
- The Maldivian president has called India their closest friend and "reaffirmed his government's 'India¬First' Policy". India on her part announced Financial assistance for



- Maldives. Both have also agreed to ensure to guard each other's security interest in mind as they seek consolidation of the cooperation in the Indian ocean region and in surveillance.
- Under the previous regime, Maldives had close ties with china and had welcomed Chinese
 money for infrastructural projects like the China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, which
 connects Malé's eastern edge to the western corner of the island of Hulhulé.
- Presently the scenario is such that Maldives owe some \$1.3 billion, or a quarter of the island nation's gross domestic product to China and faced with this, Indian support esp for budgets has become crucial.
- Nevertheless, the change in the government doesn't mean that China is wiped out from nation's economic engagements and Male has made it clear. But the logic of geography states that India's role will be critical in determining the trajectory of political developments in the Maldives.
- India should not be deterred by temporary setbacks and must view things from a larger perspective (not just Chinacentric). New Delhi must play a fundamental role in strengthening the democratic fabric of Maldives and can then expect good returns in its foreign policy.

20th December

A river running dry

- The major aim of the clean ganga project has been to set up sewage treatment plants, cleaning river banks and so on. What has been left out in this is the fact that the river does not have an adequate flow of water.
- The present trend that has been continuing for some time now is the mushrooming of several hydropower projects around the source of the river.
- What is problematic here is that the entire basin falls in the seismic zone (4-5) and is terribly prone to landslides and land subsidence.
- Such projects have led to a loss of agriculture, drying of the river bed and landslips. The
 dumping of muck during construction of water projects e.g. the one during the construction
 of the Alaknanda hydropower project caused destruction downstream in Srinagar in the
 2013 floods.
- Since the water is diverted into tunnels, river beds dry up and causes stress to the aquatic life.
- What is bizarre is the fact that even after all this electricity generation isn't as per the intended capacity.
- The reason being, too much silt during monsoon and less flow during winters. Plus, the glaciers are retreating which will add to the silt in the rivers. And since this is something natural, it can not be remedied and is prone to more problems in the future.
- Though a lot many government committees and reports have warned the government of the
 dangers of such anthropogenic activities in these areas, the government isn't very keen to
 brush aside development for environment.
- What has been the result of such developments and hydropower projects that only 80km of 2500km long river remains in the uninterrupted flow.



- India's parliamentary democracy is dependent on the idea of individuality and their freedom to make their own choices sans any restrictions.
- Of late, this cult has been ruthlessly trampled on. The recent case of activist Guatam Navalakha's arrest on the pretext of invoking sedition in the whole Bima-koregaon case exemplifies it.
- The argument of the attorney general on behalf of the Indian state in the Adhaar case in 2017 was "individuals cannot have an absolute right over their bodies and that such an idea was a myth."
- The authority that the state has been vested with gives it the power to turn every state actor into an anti-state' is decided by the discretion of the state.
- Nehru opined that ideas need to be fought with ideas and not with coercion on part of the state.
- States claim to have the best of the perceptions when it comes to goodness of their subjects.
 They implement laws formulated via consensus but then such a consensus is subjective and prone to changes.
- The concept of the modern state and contractual theory that helps citizens enter a state has
 helped us human think that it is the state that the standards of human nature are issued by
 the state and in doing so it gets an eminent position, may be close to god. State becomes the
 bearer of the idea of nation and takes it upon itself the task of protecting it from the
 violators.
- The founding fathers of our constitution and the father of the nation both assert that nation or the society is not superior to the individual.
- A democratic state isn't just about the citizens electing lawmakers, it encompasses the idea
 where they also have the freedom and liberty to disobey laws which violate they idea of
 dignity and goodness.

21st December

Against the mandate for inclusion

- Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2018 has once again let down the transgender community. The bill has been drafted and passed in utmost haste with no real understanding or sensitivity towards gender identity.
- The bill started with an outright offensive definition of a transgender though that has been rectified now and has been more inclusive.
- But what was lost here is the fact that people's self-identified gender expression has been lost in the bill.
- Coming to the proposals made forwards by the bill, setting up of
 a District Screening Committee for certification of a transgender person has been brought
 up. This process is in direct violation of the Supreme Court's directions in National Legal
 Services Authority v. Union of India (or NALSA), 2014.
- The bill is silent on the employment opportunities via reservations. More so, it has criminalised begging by the transgenders which is often the last resort that they adopt.
- The bill has brutally negated the lived realities of the community along with violating Article 14 (equality before the law) and Article 21 (right to life and personal liberty) of the constitution.



- The bill has also failed to outline a scheme for protecting transgenders who might be a victim of sexual violence, the reason being, the IPC recognises rape strictly in terms of man and woman as perpetrator and victim respectively.
- The has been no recognition of civil rights for the transgenders in the bill.
- If the bill is made to continue in its present form, it is bound to push the community into oblivion and fail to secure any constitutional right to them
- What is needed is a more robust and all-inclusive bill for the community with antidiscriminatory for them.

It is not bottom up

- India has made remarkable progress in the Ease of doing business index and has reached the 77th position.
- The vision of the prime minister has been monumental in this regard and so has been the role played by the higher bureaucracy which has been deeply committed to them.
- For instance, it was the DIPP that started a system of ranking states which led to intense healthy completion among them. It also gave a list of some 340 parameters of reform.
- In the ease of doing business, what is of utmost importance is the perception that states offer about their business environment. Hence, the govt's decision to rank states has been correct.
- However, in a recent study by the by IIM Lucknow, Jaipuria Institute of Management and Lucknow Management Association it has been brought to notice that despite enabling policies of the government there were certain roadblocks. On parameters like getting a No Objection Certificate from the pollution control board or transparency in dealing, the ambience continues to be complex and mundane.
- Despite the provisions of a single window clearance, there persists a tendency to raise unnecessary issues and force the entrepreneur to visit the concerned government office.
- The ease of doing business is determined not only by the ease of entry and exit but what is integral is how easy is the regulatory environment faced by the investor.
- The reforms in such a scenario has been opposed by officers do not belong to the higher civil service. They are more of the generalists and could be the specialists at the middle or the lower rungs of the government departments.
- The mindset needs an overhaul, and this can be brought only via rigorous training and reforms and enforcement of rules. It is not the higher civil service which is creating obstacles but officialdom at the cutting edge



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