



PIB, THE HINDU Newspaper and Editorial Current Affairs

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1. **Policy moots all-India entrance tests for UG courses in public colleges:**

Why in news?

Admission to undergraduate courses in all government-funded universities and colleges will soon be through all-India entrance tests, if the draft National Education Policy is approved.

New Policy:

- Private institutions will also be strongly encouraged to make use of the common admission tests, which would be available from 2020.
- Both aptitude and subject knowledge-based tests would be offered.
- The system seems to have some similarities to the SAT, a **standardised aptitude test** widely used for admissions to colleges and universities in the United States. The SAT, however, is used as a criterion alongside school grades.

National Testing Agency:

- In India, the common entrance test has largely been the domain of aspirants to professional or post-graduate courses, but that is already changing.
- The new National Testing Agency (NTA) has already conducted premier professional entrance tests JEE, NEET, and CMAT this year.
- Later this month, the NTA will also conduct admission tests for applicants to more than 170 Delhi University (DU) courses, including 12 undergraduate programmes.
- Admission to all undergraduate programmes of public HEIs [Higher Education Institutions] will be through a process of assessment through the NTA," says the draft policy.
- This seems to indicate that the NTA assessment may replace Class 12 marks as the criteria for admission to these state funded institutions.
- This will help to eliminate the intensity, stressfulness, and wasted time of the Grade 12 examination season faced by students every year as well as by so many higher educational institutions and employers," it adds.

Offer flexibility:

- The NTA testing system would offer flexibility. From 2020 onwards, [the NTA] will administer aptitude tests and tests in specific subjects that can be taken on multiple occasions during the year in order to reduce the intense and unnecessary pressures of the university entrance examinations system,” adds the draft.
- The NTA tests will aim to assess essential concepts, knowledge, and higher order skills from the national common curriculum for the purpose of aiding colleges and universities in their admissions decisions.
- Private institutions could set their own criteria, but most educational institutions and many employers will be encouraged to use these NTA tests.
- The draft projects the NTA establishing test centres across the country, offering tests in multiple language.

2. **Al-Qaeda anoints new chief for India wing:**

Why in news?

Global terror outfit Al-Qaeda has announced a new chief for its India wing, the Ansar Ghazwat-ul-Hind (AGH), two weeks after its top ‘commander’ Zakir Musa was killed in an encounter in Pulwama’s Tral.

New appointments:

- Hameed Lelhari alias Haroon Abbas will replace Musa and Ghazi Ibrahim Khalid will be his deputy, Abu Ubaidah Hafizahullah, a spokesman of the group made these claims in an 11-minute video released on the outfit’s official media handle al-Hurr on the occasion of Eid.
- AGH chief Musa was killed in an operation on May 23 in Pulwama’s Tral. He had replaced slain militant ‘commander’ Burhan Wani in 2016, but quit the Hizb ul Mujahideen. His name first appeared in an Arabic publication close to al-Qaeda in May 2017.
- The police suggested that the new chief Lelhari, 30, comes from a poor background, unlike Musa, and is a resident of Pulwama’s Lelhar area. Police records suggest Lelhari, after dropping out of school, took up small-time jobs as a labourer, cook and mason “to meet ends”.
- However, his name did not figure in the list of top ten wanted militants compiled by the Union Home Ministry recently.
- Hours after the declaration on the new AGH chief, Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) spokesman Usama Mahmood, in another audio clipping, praised Musa in a bid to show global militants’ sympathy for him. This audio clipping was released by the outfit’s as-Sahab media group

Saddened, mourning:

- Every militant in Afghanistan is saddened and mourning the killing of Musa...

may Kashmir have many more Zakir Musas. Also, Muslims in Kashmir and other Muslims should take ahead the mission of Zakir Musa, Burhan Wani and Afzal Guru,” the spokesman said in the message released online.

- Al-Qaeda social media platforms have also released a video on militant Faisal Ishfaq Bhatt, erstwhile resident of Srinagar and apparently in Afghanistan currently. Jihad in Kashmir is no different than jihad in Afghanistan.
- The Al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent is counselling Afghan Taliban and also many jihadi s in Kashmir.
- Mujahideen and leaders of the AQIS are eager to meet their brethren in Kashmir.
- They will launch attacks on Army and Police,” the speaker, identified as Bhatt, says.

3. **Pakistan sends congratulatory letters:**

Why in news?

Days after the formation of the National Democratic Alliance government, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to congratulate him on his victory, while Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has written a letter to his Indian counterpart Minister for External Affairs S. Jaishankar, congratulating him on his appointment as well, sources in Delhi and Islamabad confirmed.

Letter of cooperation:

- The letters follow a phone call from Mr. Khan to Mr. Modi, as well as an exchange of tweets between the two leaders after the election results.
- The letters, which New Delhi hasn't yet responded to, conveyed official greetings as well as a hope that India-Pakistan bilateral ties will improve in the future. They were handed over to the Indian High Commission in Islamabad earlier this week.
- According to Pakistani diplomatic sources, the letters sought peace and stability in South Asia with the peaceful resolution of all outstanding issues, including the Jammu and Kashmir dispute,” as well as “collective endeavours” for regional peace and prosperity, a possible reference to a SAARC summit, which Pakistan is keen to organise, but India has refused to attend.
- The past few weeks have seen tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad rise over the tit-for-tat surveillance and harassment of their guests at 'Iftar' functions in each other's capital.
- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) issued a public protest against Pakistani police officials who intimidated guests at the Indian High Commission's Iftar event at a hotel in Islamabad on June 1, and the Pakistan Foreign Ministry wrote two letters protesting similar actions by Indian security agencies against guests to the Pakistan National Day function on March 23 as well as the Iftar event at the Pakistan High Commission on May 28.

Overcoming irritants:

- Despite the bitterness on the ground, however, the leaders of both the countries have kept up a steady set of exchanges over the period.
- Mr. Modi wrote a letter to Mr. Khan ahead of the Pakistan National Day, saying it was “time for the people of the subcontinent to work together for a democratic, peaceful, progressive and prosperous region, in an atmosphere free of terror and violence.
- Mr. Khan welcomed the letter, calling for dialogue between the two countries. After the BJP’s win, Mr. Khan telephoned Mr. Modi to congratulate him.
- The conversation, which reportedly lasted about 15 minutes according to one source, included the need to improve bilateral ties, India’s “**neighbourhood first policy**” and a desire to “**fight poverty jointly.**” Both leaders have also exchanged public messages over twitter.
- In addition, former Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj and the Pakistan Foreign Minister met for a short “exchange of pleasantries” at the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) Foreign Ministers’ meet in Bishkek in May, when Pakistan made an exception to the ban on flights to and from India to allow Ms. Swaraj’s flight to travel through Pakistani airspace.

4. **Dissenting view not part of final order:**

Why in news?

The Election Commission has issued a formal directive, ruling that dissenting opinion in the Model Code of Conduct violation cases will not be included in the final order. Only the majority or unanimous decision will be communicated to the parties. The written order dated June 4 follows the EC’s decision on May 21, rejecting Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa’s demand that minority view be reflected in the final order.

Lavasa’s plea:

- The issue had come up before the full bench after Mr. Lavasa objected to his dissenting opinion not being included in the orders.
- Mr. Lavasa had given dissenting views in at least five matters pertaining to speeches by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP president Amit Shah during the campaigning for the Lok Sabha election.

5. **Private agencies to handle PR work for Railways:**

Why in news?

In a major shift, the Railway Ministry has decided to hand over core public relations

activities to private agencies with more focus on social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter.

Promotion of Image:

- The largest employer of the Union Government will now hire professionals to devise communication strategies to promote the image of the Railways and also in the management of passenger feedback and public grievances.
- In the existing system, Public Relations in the railways is managed by a CPRO at the zonal level who is supported by Senior Public Relations Officers, Public Relations Inspectors and supporting staff at the headquarters and divisional level.
- In a note to General Managers of zonal railways and production units, the Railway Board approved hiring of agencies to lend professional expertise to the Public Relations department in disseminating various initiatives of the railways, management of customer feedback/passenger grievances received through various social media platforms, sources in the Southern Railway said on Friday.

Communication strategy:

- One of the primary tasks of the PR agencies would be to formulate a result-oriented, comprehensive communication strategy on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Quora, YouTube, LinkedIn and Medium and other platforms that would be decided from time to time by the competent authority.
- Based on the content provided by the respective Chief Public Relations Officers, the private agencies would create promotional material such as creative crisp texts, images, GIFs, infographics and animations etc. in accordance with the social media guidelines.
- The sources said the private agencies chosen by the Zonal Railways through open bidding process would analyse newspapers/magazines, websites and television channels as regards news relating to the Railways.
- A dedicated team of qualified analysts would be deployed to work in back-end offices to assist CPROs in identifying issues/themes and "identifying influencers who are active in media." The team would comprise a team leader, social media manager, content analyst, content writers, video editors among others.
- The outsourced work would include online storage and management of data and content and make them available to railway officials when required.

6. RBI revises stressed asset resolution norms:

Why in news?

After the Supreme Court struck down the **controversial February 12, 2018 circular** of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on stressed asset resolution, the banking regulator released revised set of norms which are substantially less stringent from the previous one.

New Norms:

- In particular, neither there is a mandate to start resolution which results in higher provisioning if there is a single day default nor a mandate for initiating insolvency proceeding if resolution plan is not implemented for large accounts within a time frame.
- However, the RBI has sought to nudge banks towards the insolvency courts by introducing a disincentive in the form of additional provisions for delayed resolution.
- At the same time, the central bank said it would issue directions to banks for initiation of insolvency proceedings against borrowers for specific defaults 'so that the momentum towards effective resolution remains uncompromised.
- The new circular asked lenders to undertake a prima facie review of the borrower account within 30 days from a default, which is termed as review period.
- During this review period, lenders may decide on the resolution strategy, including the nature of the resolution plan (RP), the approach for implementation of the RP etc.

Legal proceedings:

- The lenders may also choose to initiate legal proceedings for insolvency or recovery," the circular, which comes into effect immediately, said.
- If the RP is to be implemented, lenders have been asked to enter into an inter-creditor agreement (ICA), within the review period, to provide for ground rules for finalisation and implementation of the RP.
- The ICA shall provide that any decision agreed by lenders representing 75% by value of total outstanding credit facilities (fund-based as well as non-fund based) and 60% of lenders by number shall be binding upon all the lenders, the circular said.
- The RP will have to implemented within 180 days from the end of review period, RBI said
- The review period shall commence not later than the date of the this circular for loans above Rs. 2000 crore; January 1 ,2020 for loans above Rs. 1,500 crore to Rs. 2,000 crore.
- For loans less than Rs. 1,500 crore, the reference date would be announced later.

Disincentive for non-compliance:

- There is a disincentive for banks if they delay implementing a viable resolution plan. In case the plan is not implemented within **180 days from the end of review period**, banks have to make additional provision of 20% and another 15% if the plan is not implemented within 365 days from the start of the review period.
- The additional provisions would be reversed if resolution is pursued under **Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC)**
- Half of the additional provisions could be reversed on filing of insolvency

application and the remaining additional provisions may be reversed once case is admitted for insolvency proceedings.

- Incentives to reverse 50% of these provisions upon reference under IBC will incentivise lenders to refer such stressed cases to IBC for faster resolution.
- The overall framework is positive and will continue to incentivise banks for accelerated resolution of stressed assets.
- Debt recast tools like corporate debt restructuring scheme and strategic debt restructuring scheme are withdrawn. Apart from banks, these new norms are also applicable for non-banking financial companies, small finance banks and other financial institutions.

7. **SEBI, MCA sign pact for more data scrutiny:**

Why in news?

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to facilitate seamless sharing of data and information for carrying out scrutiny, inspection, investigation and prosecution.

Backdrop of frauds:

- This assumes significance as the MCA has the database of all registered firms while SEBI only regulates listed entities that may have unlisted subsidiaries, with the MCA having access to all the data of such unlisted entities.
- The MoU comes in the wake of increasing need for surveillance in the context of corporate frauds affecting important sectors of the economy.
- As the private sector plays an increasingly vital role in economic growth, the need for a robust corporate governance mechanism becomes the need of the hour.
- Incidentally, there is already a protocol of sharing of data between the capital markets regulator Ministry and, in many cases, the regulator has also sent its orders against various entities to the MCA for further action.
- According to the SEBI statement, the MoU will facilitate the sharing of data and information between the regulator and the MCA on an automatic and regular basis, while enabling sharing of specific information such as details of suspended companies, delisted firms, shareholding pattern from the SEBI and financial statements filed with the Registrar by corporates, returns of allotment of shares and audit reports relating to corporates.
- The MoU will ensure that both the MCA and the SEBI have seamless linkage for regulatory purposes and in addition to regular exchange of data, the two will also exchange with each other, on request, any available information for scrutiny, inspection, investigation and prosecution.
- A Data Exchange Steering Group will meet periodically to review the data exchange status.

8. **Space station will be open to tourists from next year:**

Why in news?

U.S. space agency NASA said that it would open up the International Space Station to business ventures including space tourism with stays priced at \$35,000 a night as it seeks to financially disengage from the orbiting research lab.

commercial opportunities:

- NASA is opening the International Space Station to commercial opportunities and marketing these opportunities as we've never done before," NASA chief financial officer Jeff DeWit said.
- There will be up to two short private astronaut missions per year, said Robyn Gatens, deputy director of the ISS.
- The missions will be for stays of up to 30 days. As many as a dozen private astronauts could visit the ISS per year, NASA said.
- These travellers would be ferried to the orbiter exclusively by the two companies currently developing transport vehicles for NASA: SpaceX, with its Crew Dragon capsule, and Boeing, which is building one called Starliner.
- These companies would choose the clients and bill for the trip to the ISS, which will be the most expensive part of the adventure: around \$58 million for a round trip ticket.
- That is the average rate the companies will bill NASA for taking the space adventurers up to the ISS.

Food and life support:

- The tourists will have to pay NASA for their stay in space, for food, water and use of the life support system on the orbiter.
- That will run about \$35,000 per night per astronaut, said Mr. DeWit.
- The space station does not belong to NASA. It was built along with Russia starting in 1998, and other countries participate in the mission and send up astronauts.
- But the U.S. has paid for and controls most of the modules that make up the orbiter.
- The new space tourists to the ISS will not be the first: U.S. businessman Dennis Tito had that honour in 2001. He paid Russia around \$20 million for the trip.

9. **1 million new cases of STIs detected daily globally:**

Why in news?

Every day, more than 1 million new cases of curable sexually transmitted infections

(STIs) are detected in people aged 15-49 years, according to latest data released by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Serious Concerns:

- This amounts to more than 376 million new cases annually of four infections **chlamydia, gonorrhoea, trichomoniasis and syphilis**.
- Said Dr. Peter Salama, Executive Director, Universal Health Coverage and the Life-Course at WHO, "We are seeing a concerning lack of progress in stopping the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STI) worldwide.
- This is a wake-up call for a concerted effort to ensure everyone, everywhere, can access the services they need to prevent and treat these debilitating diseases.
- Published online by the bulletin of the WHO, the research shows that, among men and women aged 15-49 years, there are 127 million new cases of chlamydia in 2016; 87 million cases of gonorrhoea; 6.3 million cases of syphilis; and 156 million cases of trichomoniasis.
- These STIs have a profound impact on the health of adults and children worldwide. If untreated, they can lead to serious and chronic health effects that include neurological and cardiovascular disease, infertility, ectopic pregnancy, stillbirths, and increased risk of HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus). They are also associated with significant levels of stigma and domestic violence.
- Syphilis alone caused an estimated 200,000 stillbirths and newborn deaths in 2016, making it one of the leading causes of infant mortality globally.

Limitations of the study:

- The WHO, however, admits, that the study has its limitations.
- First, limited prevalence data was available, despite an eight-year time window for data inclusion.
- The source studies included people in different age groups and used a range of diagnostic tests, so adjustment factors were applied to standardise measures across studies.
- Third, owing to the absence of empirical studies, incidence estimates were derived from the relationship between prevalence and duration of infection, and data on the average duration of infection for each of the four infections are also limited.

Persistent and endemic health threat worldwide:

- Warning that STIs remain a persistent and endemic health threat worldwide, the WHO noted that, since the last published data for 2012, there has been no substantive decline in either the rates of new or existing infections.
- On average, approximately 1 in 25 people globally have at least one of these STIs, according to the latest figures, with some experiencing multiple infections at the same time.
- Timely and affordable testing and treatment are crucial for reducing the burden of STIs globally, alongside efforts to encourage people who are sexually active to

get screened for STIs.

- The WHO further recommends that pregnant women should be systematically screened for syphilis as well as HIV. All bacterial STIs can be treated and cured with widely available medication.
- However, recent shortages in the global supply of benzathine penicillin has made it more difficult to treat syphilis.

