

## Current Affairs: 25.04.2022

### INDIA-EU TIES

Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacted with Ursula Von der Leyen, President of the European Commission.

#### About:

Prime Minister thanked the EC President for consenting to deliver the inaugural address at the Raisina Dialogue this year. They reviewed the progress in the India-EU Strategic Partnership, including the forthcoming re-commencement of negotiations on a Free Trade Agreement and Investment Agreement. It was agreed to institute a high-level Trade & Technology Commission to provide political-level oversight of all aspects of the India-EU relationship, and to ensure coordination between different areas of cooperation.

### KURIL ISLANDS

On April 22, Japan's Diplomatic Bluebook for 2022 described the Kuril Islands (which Japan calls the Northern Territories and Russia as the South Kurils) as being under Russia's "illegal occupation".

#### About:

This is the first time in about two decades that Japan has used this phrase to describe the dispute over the Kuril Islands. Japan had been using softer language since 2003, saying that the dispute over the islands was the greatest concern in Russia-Japan bilateral ties.

#### What are the Kuril Islands/ Northern Territories?

These are a set of four islands situated between the Sea of Okhotsk and the Pacific Ocean near the north of Japan's northernmost prefecture, Hokkaido. Both Moscow and Tokyo claim sovereignty over them though the islands have been under Russian control since the end of World War II. The Soviet Union had seized the islands at the end of World War II and by 1949 had expelled its Japanese residents. Tokyo claims that the disputed islands have been part of Japan since the early 19th century.

#### What lies behind the dispute?

According to Tokyo, Japan's sovereignty over the islands is confirmed by several treaties like the Shimoda Treaty of 1855, the 1875 Treaty for the exchange of Sakhalin for the Kuril Islands (Treaty of St. Petersburg), and the Portsmouth Treaty of 1905 signed after the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 which Japan had won. Russia, on the other hand, claims the Yalta Agreement (1945) and the Potsdam Declaration (1945) as proof of its sovereignty and argues that the San Francisco Treaty of 1951 is legal evidence that Japan had acknowledged Russian sovereignty over the islands.

### GOVERNOR'S POWER IN APPOINTING VICE-CHANCELLORS

The Tamil Nadu Assembly passed two Bills that seek to transfer the Governor's power in appointing Vice-Chancellors of 13 state universities to the state government, currently led by the DMK.

#### About:

Chief Minister MK Stalin said the Bills were required as the Governor was disregarding the state government's opinion on the appointments of VCs, an argument also made by states such as Maharashtra and West Bengal in the past.

In December 2021, the Maharashtra Assembly passed a Bill amending the Maharashtra Public Universities Act, 2016.

In 2019, the West Bengal government, led by the Trinamool Congress, took away the Governor's authority in appointing VCs to state universities. It has also hinted at removing the Governor as the Chancellor of the universities. In West Bengal, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, the elected governments have repeatedly accused the Governors of acting at the behest of the Centre on various subjects, including education. Education comes under the Concurrent List, but entry 66 of the Union List — "coordination and determination of standards in institutions for higher education or research and scientific and technical institutions" — gives the Centre substantial authority over higher education.

## SELF-AMPLIFYING mRNA VACCINE

A self-amplifying mRNA vaccine — one in which the delivered RNA multiplies inside the body — has shown promising results against Covid-19 in ongoing phase 1/2/3 trials.

### About:

The vaccine, ARCT-154, has been developed by Arcturus Therapeutics Holdings, based in San Diego, California, and its trials are in progress in Vietnam. An mRNA vaccine, such as those from Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna, use messenger RNA that encodes the spike protein of the coronavirus.

In other words, the mRNA directs the cell to produce copies of the spike protein, so that the immune system will recognise the spike if and when actual infection takes place, and mount a response. A self-amplifying mRNA vaccine is an improvement on the traditional RNA platform. It encodes four extra proteins in addition to the vaccine antigen, and these enable amplification of the original strand of RNA once inside the cell. The basic advantage is that it requires a smaller dose.

## NAGCHALA AIRPORT

The Ministry of Civil Aviation and Govt. of Himachal Pradesh today signed MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) for development of a Green Field Airport in Nagchala, Mandi District of Himachal Pradesh

### About:

The new greenfield airport at Nagchala, Mandi is being developed under the Greenfield Airport Policy of MoCA and a Joint Venture Company between State Government of Himachal Pradesh and Airport Authority of India has been formed. There are 3 airports i.e. Shimla, Kullu, & Kangra and 5 heliports i.e. Kangnidhar, Shimla, Rampur, Baddi, and SASE (Manali) in Himachal Pradesh that are developed or being developed which would give a massive boost to tourism industry of the state once completed.

## CENTRAL MINE PLANNING AND DESIGN INSTITUTE LIMITED (CMPDIL)

Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Limited (CMPDIL) to Continue as Subsidiary of Coal India Limited.

### About:

Recently unconfirmed reports have appeared in a section of the Media that the Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Limited (CMPDIL) is being merged with Mineral Exploration Corporation Limited. (MECL). In this regard, the Ministry of Coal has clarified that CMPDIL is a subsidiary of Coal India Limited (CIL) that provides exploration and consultancy services primarily to the coal sector. Keeping in view the scope for its business expansion in other minerals, the Government has plans for its strengthening, for which it is being considered to merge MECL into CMPDIL. MECL has domain expertise in non-coal mineral exploration and consultancy. Therefore, such merger and creation of one integrated exploration and consultancy organization with requisite expertise for coal and non-coal sector would result in growth and value addition. At the same time, CMPDIL will continue to be a subsidiary of Coal India Limited.

## DEFENCE ACQUISITION PROCEDURE 2020

Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP) 2020 has been amended based on the approvals accorded by Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) in respect of the following:

### About:

Going forward all modernisation requirements of the Defence Services and Indian Coast Guard are to be indigenously sourced irrespective of the nature of procurement. Import of defence equipment/sourcing from Foreign Industry of capital acquisitions should only be an exception and undertaken with specific approval of DAC/Raksha Mantri.

Requirement of Integrity Pact Bank Guarantee (IPBG) has been dispensed with. Instead, Earnest Money Deposit (EMD) will be taken as a bid security for all acquisition cases with Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) cost more than Rs 100 crore. The procurement process under iDEX procedure of DAP 2020 has been simplified. With this simplification, time taken from grant of AoN to signing of contract will be reduced to 22 weeks.