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NEWS JUICE

Intelligent Compilation from The Hindu, Indian Express & others along with News Background

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What is News Juice?

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1. Not taking sides in UN General Assembly: On India and the Ukraine conflict

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Voting in UNGA over Russia's attack on Ukraine

With a convincing majority of 141 of 193 countries, the UN General Assembly voted on Wednesday for a resolution that deplored in the "strongest terms" Russia's attack on Ukraine and demanded an immediate withdrawal of Russian troops.

The resolution, which was discussed in a rare special emergency session and under the rubric of the "Uniting for Peace" resolution invoked after decades, came as a result of an aborted resolution at the UN Security Council, which Russia, as a permanent member, had vetoed.

Significance of UNGA Resolution

While the UNGA resolution carries little teeth, it does represent a common stand taken by the international public commons, with 96 countries signing up as co-sponsors of the resolution.

Russia rejected the outcome as a political vote that came of severe "pressure" from the U.S. and European countries that were the drivers of the resolution, but it seemed clear that it was isolated on the global stage. Belarus, Eritrea, North Korea and Syria voted against the motion, and 35, including India, abstained.

While the resolution also decried the Russian decision to recognise Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states, representatives of member states made it clear that it was the relentless bombing of Ukrainian cities that they could not turn a blind eye to.

India's abstention to the resolution

India's abstention, not a surprise, disappointed many western countries that have been lobbying for a shift in the Indian position. In the past week, India has abstained from three votes (including two procedural ones) at the UNSC where it is an elected member, one at the UN Human Rights Council, and another at the IAEA on resolutions critical of Russia.

In an explanation of vote (EOV), India's UN representative said that India is calling for dialogue, while officials say that India's abstention has given it room to play a role in diplomacy with Russia and Ukraine. In a sign of some discomfort with Russian actions, the EOV also dropped the earlier references to the "legitimate security interests", and included language on respecting the "territorial sovereignty" of members.

India has also sent humanitarian aid to Ukraine although its vote of abstention indicates the Modi government still has many reasons not to vote against Russia, a strategic and defence partner that has stood by India.

Pressure on India

As the conflict continues, and the global community expresses its disapproval, however, India's desire to remain an "abstentionist" power is being called into question. The Government has also said that it needs to remain on good terms with both sides as its primary focus remains the safe exit of Indians from the conflict zone.

Source: The Hindu

2. Why a no-fly zone is unlikely in Ukraine

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Attack on Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant

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Russia's attack on Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant has renewed calls for NATO to impose a no-fly zone over Ukraine, despite the repeated rejection of the idea by western leaders concerned about triggering a wider war in Europe.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday asked the people of Western Europe to demand that their leaders change course because the shelling of a nuclear power plant in Ukraine threatens the security of the entire continent.

"Immediate closure of the skies over Ukraine is needed," he said. "Take to the streets and say that you want to live, to live on earth without radioactive contamination. Radiation does not know where the Russian border is."

The attack did not, as initially feared, result in radiation release.

But military analysts say there is no chance that the US, Britain and their European allies will impose a no-fly zone because it could easily escalate the war in Ukraine into a nuclear confrontation between NATO and Russia. Here's a more detailed explanation about the situation.

What is a no-fly zone?

A no-fly zone would bar all unauthorized aircraft from flying over Ukraine. Western nations imposed such restrictions over parts of Iraq for more than a decade following the 1991 Gulf War, during the civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1993-95, and during the Libyan civil war in 2011.

Why won't NATO take this step in Ukraine?

In simple terms, because it would risk a direct military conflict with Russia that could escalate into a wider European war with a nuclear-armed superpower.

While the idea may have captured the public imagination, declaring a no-fly zone could force NATO pilots to shoot down Russian aircraft.

But it goes beyond that. In addition to fighter planes, NATO would have to deploy refueling tankers and electronic-surveillance aircraft to support the mission. To protect these relatively slow, high-flying planes, NATO would have to destroy surface-to-air missile batteries in Russia and Belarus, again risking a broader conflict.

What would a no-fly zone achieve?

Ukrainian authorities and people cowering night after night in bomb shelters say a no-fly zone would protect civilians — and now nuclear power stations — from Russian air strikes.

But analysts say it's Russia's ground forces, not aircraft, that are causing most of the damage in Ukraine.

What Ukrainians actually want is a broader intervention like the one that occurred in Libya in 2011, when NATO forces launched attacks on government positions. That's not likely to happen when the opponent is Russia.

What is happening in the skies over Ukraine?

Predictions that Russia would quickly control the skies over Ukraine have not come to fruition.

Military experts are wondering why Russia has chosen to leave most of its fixed-wing combat aircraft on the ground during this massive land offensive. One explanation may be that Russian pilots aren't well trained in supporting large-scale land operations, engagements that require coordination with artillery, helicopters and other assets in a fast-moving environment.



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“I think that maybe they’re a little bit worried that that is a very constrained area. It’s not like the Middle East, where there’s all kinds of space to roam around in the air,” said Robert Latif, a retired US Air Force major general who now teaches at the University of Notre Dame.

“They could very easily stray over borders,” he explained. “With both Ukrainian and Russian air defense systems and Ukrainian, what little they have, and Russian airplanes all flying around — that could be a very confusing. I think maybe they’re a little bit worried about actually being able to pull it off.”

Source: The Indian Express

3. How dangerous was Russia’s nuclear plant strike?

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Issues

Europe’s largest nuclear power plant was hit by Russian shelling early Friday, sparking a fire and raising fears of a disaster that could affect all of central Europe for decades, like the 1986 Chernobyl meltdown.

Situation under control

Concerns faded after Ukrainian authorities announced that the fire had been extinguished, and while there was damage to the reactor compartment, the safety of the unit was not affected.

But even though the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant is of a different design than Chernobyl and is protected from fire, nuclear safety experts and the International Atomic Energy Agency warn that waging war in and around such facilities presents extreme risks.

What are the concerns?

One major concern, raised by Ukraine’s state nuclear regulator, is that if fighting interrupts power supply to the nuclear plant, it would be forced to use less-reliable diesel generators to provide emergency power to operating cooling systems. A failure of those systems could lead to a disaster similar to that of Japan’s Fukushima plant, when a massive earthquake and tsunami in 2011 destroyed cooling systems, triggering meltdowns in three reactors.

The consequence of that, said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, would be widespread and dire.

What could have happened?

The reactor that was hit was offline, but still contains highly radioactive nuclear fuel. Four of the other six reactors have now been taken offline, leaving only one in operation.

The reactors at the plant have thick concrete containment domes, which would have protected them from external fire from tanks and artillery.

Another danger at nuclear facilities are the pools where spent fuel rods are kept to be cooled, which are more vulnerable to shelling and which could cause the release of radioactive material.

Perhaps the biggest issue, however, is the plant’s power supply. The loss of off-site power could force the plant to rely on emergency diesel generators, which are highly unreliable and could fail or run out of fuel, causing a station blackout that would stop the water circulation needed to cool the spent fuel pool.

What concerns remain?

Ukraine is heavily reliant on nuclear energy, with 15 reactors at four stations that provide about half the country’s electricity.

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In the wake of the attack on Zaporizhzhia, U.S. President Joe Biden, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and others called for an immediate end to the fighting there.

Following a conversation with Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, IAEA Director Grossi appealed to all parties to “refrain from actions” that could put Ukraine’s nuclear power plants in danger.

Ukraine is also home to the former Chernobyl nuclear plant, where radioactivity is still leaking, which was taken by Russian forces in the opening of the invasion after a fierce battle with the Ukrainian national guards protecting the decommissioned facility.

In an appeal to the IAEA for help earlier this week, Ukrainian officials said that Chernobyl staff have been held by the Russian military without rotation and are exhausted.

Source: The Indian Express

4. Kavach, the Indian technology that can prevent two trains from colliding

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Disaster Management

Things went as planned. The locomotive carrying Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and another with Railway Board Chairman VK Tripathi raced towards each other on the same track, but thanks to an automatic system applied brakes 200 meters apart, thus avoiding a collision. Kavach, this indigenously developed Automatic Train Protection System showcased on South Central Railway Friday, is earmarked for aggressive rollout on 2,000 km in 2022-23, according to the Budget proposals.

What is Kavach?

It is India’s very own automatic protection system in development since 2012, under the name Train Collision Avoidance System (TCAS), which got rechristened to Kavach or “armour”.

Simply put, it is a set of electronic devices and Radio Frequency Identification devices installed in locomotives, in the signalling system as well the tracks, that talk to each other using ultra high radio frequencies to control the brakes of trains and also alert drivers, all based on the logic programmed into them. One of its features is that by continuously refreshing the movement information of a train, it is able to send out triggers when a loco pilot jumps signal, called Signal Passed at Danger (SPAD), a grave offence in railway operations with respect to safety, and the key to accidents like collision. The devices also continuously relay the signals ahead to the locomotive, making it useful for loco pilots in low visibility, especially during dense fog.

TCAS or Kavach includes the key elements from already existing, and tried and tested systems like the European Train Protection and Warning System, and the indigenous Anti Collision Device. It will also carry features of the high-tech European Train Control System Level-2 in future. The current form of Kavach adheres to the highest level of safety and reliability standard called Safety Integrity Level 4.

What is new?

In the new avatar, India wants to position Kavach as an exportable system, a cheaper alternative to the European systems in vogue across the world. While now Kavach uses Ultra High Frequency, work is on to make it compatible with 4G Long Term Evolution (LTE) technology and make the product for global markets. Work is on to make the system such that it can be compatible with other already installed systems globally. The Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO) in Lucknow along with private vendors are developing the system. India wants more private players to take up the development and subsequent production. Once rolled out, it may be world’s cheapest Automatic Train Protection System with the cost of rollout pegged at around Rs 30 lakh to 50 lakh per kilometer, a fourth of the cost of equivalent systems globally.



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In the next phase, the Kavach system will also be able to recalibrate as per temporary speed restrictions en route, something the system does not yet have.

How far is the rollout?

So far, Kavach has been deployed on over 1,098 km and 65 locomotives in ongoing projects of the South Central Railway. In future it will be implemented on 3000 km of the Delhi-Mumbai and Delhi-Howrah corridors where the tracks and systems are being upgraded to host a top speed of 160 kmph.

In addition to a trial section of 250 km, at present Kavach is under implementation on 1200 km of South Central Railway, on Bidar-Parli Vaiinath-Parbhani and Manmad-Parbhani-Nanded, Secunderabad-Gadwal-Dhone-Guntakal sections.

Further, over 34,000 km on the High Density Network (HDN) and Highly Utilized Network (HUN) of on the Golden Quadrilateral have been included in its sanctioned plans. Four years ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had turned down an ambitious plan of the Railways to roll out ETCS-Level 2 system across its network and had asked the transporter to look for indigenous, cheaper solutions for such future upgrade.

Source: The Indian Express

5. Haryana govt's anti-conversion Bill, its provisions and Opposition's objections

Relevant for GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Polity & Governance

The BJP government in Haryana introduced the Haryana Prevention of Unlawful Conversion of Religious Bill, 2022 in the Vidhan Sabha amid protests by the Opposition Congress on Friday (March 4). Dr. Raghuvir Singh Kadian, a six-time MLA, was suspended after he tore a copy of the Bill on the floor of the House.

What is the government's reasoning for enacting such a legislation?

Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar, last year in August, had said, "Law is enacted to create a deterrent for people when they start doing something wrong. Such incidents [of 'love jihad'] have started taking place in a few places of Haryana. Till the time these were not happening, or when there were only one or two such incidents, there was no requirement of such a law in this regard. But now several incidents of forced religious conversion by way of coercion and allurements have come to light. To prevent such incidents from happening, such laws are required. By way of example, I can say this is why we passed the anti-copying Bill. Laws are required to prevent any of these incidents from increasing in number."

How the state government plans to enact this legislation?

As the first step, the draft of the Bill was approved by the state Cabinet chaired by Khattar in February. Now, the Bill was introduced in the Vidhan Sabha's ongoing Budget session that commenced on March 2. The BJP-JJP coalition in the state has a strength of 50 members in the 90-member Vidhan Sabha. The Bill is all set to be passed. It shall subsequently be sent to the Governor for his final assent. Once the Governor gives his assent, it shall be enacted as law and implemented across the state.

What does this Bill propose?

The Bill seeks to "prohibit religious conversions which are effected through misrepresentation, force, undue influence, coercion, allurement or by any fraudulent means or by marriage or for marriage by making it an offence".

What is the Opposition's objection to the Bill?

Congress MLAs including BB Batra, Dr. Raghuvir Singh Kadian, Geeta Bhukkal, Shamsheer Singh Gogi, Aftab Ahmed and several others raised strong objections, specifically to the reasoning for bringing such a Bill. Several Congress MLAs called the Bill "unconstitutional" and termed it the government's attempt to "create a divide in the society on the basis of religion". The Congress MLAs also asked the government to apprise the

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House as to how many such complaints or criminal cases were registered that formed the basis to bring such a Bill. However, Vidhan Sabha Speaker Gian Chand Gupta said that “certain steps are also to be taken as preventive measures”.

What is the reasoning that the Bill mentions?

According to the draft of the Bill, “The individual right to freedom of conscience and religion cannot be extended to construe a collective right to proselytize; for the right to religious freedom belongs equally to the person converting and the individual sought to be converted. Still, there have been umpteen cases of religious conversions, both mass and individual. Obviously, such incidents have been hotly debated, more so in a multi-religious society, such as ours. The presence of pseudo-social organizations with a hidden agenda to convert the vulnerable sections of other religions. There have been instances when gullible people have been converted by offering allurements or under undue influence. Some have been forced to convert to other religions.”

What is the legal position on such a Bill or such incidents of forceful conversions?

The government says that “in recent past several instances came to the notice that with an agenda to increase strength of their own religion by getting people from other religions converted, people marry persons of other religion by either misrepresentation or concealment of their own religion and after getting married they force such other person to convert to their own religion”.

“Such incidents not only infringe the freedom of religion of the persons so converted but also militate against the secular fabric of our society. The Bill, therefore, seeks to prevent religious conversions which are affected through use of force, under threat, misrepresentation, undue influence, coercion, allurements or by any fraudulent means or by marriage or for marriage by making it an offence. Provide greater punishment for such conversion in respect of the minor, women, Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes”, the statements of objectives and reasons added.

Onus of proof to establish if a forceful conversion took place

The burden of proof, according to the draft Bill, as to whether a conversion was not affected through misrepresentation, use of force, under threat, undue influence, coercion, allurements or by any fraudulent means or by marriage or for marriage for the purpose of carrying out conversion shall be on the accused.

How will a wilful conversion take place?

Every individual converting from one religion to another shall submit to the prescribed authority a declaration that the conversion affected was not through misrepresentation, use of force, under threat, undue influence, coercion, allurements or by any fraudulent means or by marriage or for marriage. The designated authority shall make an inquiry in all such cases. There will also be a provision for declaring such marriages null and void if found to have been solemnised by concealment of religion.

Source: The Indian Express

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