

Current Affairs of the Day

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Govt. to set up National Recruitment Agency

- The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the creation of a National Recruitment Agency (NRA) for conducting a Common Eligibility Test (CET) for various government jobs.
- About 2.5 crore to 3 crore candidates applied for the 1.25 lakh Group B and C jobs advertised by three agencies every year, with separate schedules and fees.
- Three of the over 20 Central government recruitment agencies would be brought under the NRA.

Single exam

The National Recruitment Agency (NRA) will conduct a Common Eligibility Test (CET) for recruitment to government jobs

- The NRA will initially conduct the CET for three sectors – Railway Recruitment Board, Staff Selection Commission and Institute of Banking Personnel Selection
- It will be held separately for three levels – graduate, 12th pass and 10th pass – for the non-technical posts of the three agencies
- Examination will be conducted online twice a year in 12 languages and will be based on a common curriculum

▪ Scores will be valid for a three-year period. Students can write the test multiple times and their best score will be taken into account

▪ According to the DoPT Secretary, there are 1.25 lakh vacancies every year in Group B and C for non-gazetted officers, and about 2.5 crore people apply every year for examinations to fill these vacancies



Key Points:

- The preliminary test for the Railway Recruitment Board, the Staff Selection Commission and the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection would be conducted by the NRA, after which the candidates can use the scores to apply to the individual agencies for the next round. Gradually, all Central government recruitment agencies would be brought under the NRA.
- A common eligibility test would enable these candidates to appear once and apply to any or all of these recruitment agencies for the higher level of examination.
- The exam would be held online in 12 languages to begin with, and centres would be set up in every district to increase access.



- The CET score of the candidate shall be valid for a period of three years from the date of declaration of the result. The best of the valid scores shall be deemed to be the current score of the candidate.
- There shall be no restriction on the number of attempts to be taken by a candidate to appear in the CET subject to the upper age limit.
- Candidates from the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes would be given a relaxation in the age limit as per the government's policy.
- The government sanctioned ₹1,517.57 crore for the NRA for a period of three years.
- The CET would be held separately for three levels — graduate, 12th pass and 10th pass — for the non-technical posts of the three agencies.
- Based on the screening done at the CET score level, final selection for recruitment shall be made through separate specialised Tiers (II, III etc) of examinations, which shall be conducted by the respective recruitment agencies. The curriculum for this test would be common as would be the standard.
- Candidates would have the facility of registering on a common portal and give a choice of centres. Based on availability, they would be allotted centres. The ultimate aim is to reach a stage wherein candidates can schedule their own tests at centres of their choice.

'Lockdown hit 9.2 lakh women in need of abortion services'

Key findings:

- A staggering 90% or 9.2 lakh women in India estimated to require abortion services could not access them between January and June because of the stringent COVID-19 lockdown.
- They are among the 13 lakh women who couldn't get any kind of sexual and reproductive health services, many of whom were impeded because of domestic abuse, according to a report launched by Marie Stopes International on Wednesday.



- The inability to access sexual and reproductive health services in India could lead to as many as 10 lakh unsafe abortions, 6.5 lakh unintended pregnancies and 2,600 maternal deaths in the country.
- India accounts for 75% of the total disruption in family planning and safe abortion care services across 36 countries served by Marie Stopes International because of the lockdown, said the report.
- The study also showed that there were 73,500 fewer adolescents across 36 countries who accessed reproductive health services, though their overall proportion at 15% of total clients remained consistent.
- The MSI report warned that as the lockdown-related restrictions are eased “the need for sexual and reproductive health services will only increase especially for safe abortion and post abortion care as there is likely to be an increase in need for second trimester abortions following the lockdown”.
- The survey also showed that one in 10 women surveyed in India reported needing domestic abuse services during the pandemic and a fifth of respondents seeking an abortion service reported not being able to attend a face to face appointment for fear of leaving their home due to domestic abuse.
- The survey recorded responses of 1,000 women aged 16-50 in India on their experiences and awareness of sexual and reproductive healthcare before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Over 80% of students depend on mobiles for learning: NCERT

- The survey was conducted by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), using a sample of 18,188 students from Classes 8-12 from Kendriya Vidyalayas, Navodaya Vidyalaya Samitis and schools affiliated to the Central Board of Secondary Education.
- More than 16,000 parents, teachers and principals also took part.

Key findings:

- School education in the time of COVID-19 is heavily dependent on mobile phones, with 80-90% of older students in Central government schools saying they use mobiles rather than laptops to access digital schooling during the pandemic, according to an official sample survey.



- Almost 30% said absent or intermittent electricity connections hindered their learning, and half the students said they did not even have access to their textbooks.
- In KVs, 84% of students used mobiles, while 19% used laptops for learning, similar to the ratio in CBSE schools.
- In the Navodaya Vidyalayas, which are meant for gifted students from rural areas, less than 10% of learners used laptops, while 88% were dependent on mobile phones. Less than 6% used TV or radio.
- Of course, the situation is likely to be far grimmer at state-funded schools and the poorer private schools where the majority of students study. Only four States have completed mapping of the devices available to students — smartphone, basic mobile, radio, TV, personal or community computer — according to the Students' Learning Enhancement Guidelines released by the Education Ministry on Wednesday.
- The Centre directed States to develop detailed plans to reach every child and ensure continuous learning for the whole academic session, indicating that universal school reopening may not be on the cards in the immediate future.

India offers vaccine to Bangladesh on priority

- Bangladesh will receive COVID-19 vaccine from India on a priority basis, a top diplomat of Dhaka said on Wednesday.
- Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh Masud Bin Momen raised some of the contentious issues, such as the recent spurt in border killings and condition of the detained Tablighi Jamaat members from the country, with the visiting Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla in Dhaka and the two sides agreed on an early meeting of the India-Bangladesh Consultative Committee.

Issues discussed:

- The COVID-19 related discussion between the two sides comes weeks after the Bangladesh Medical Research Council (BMRC) allowed China to carry out the Phase III human trial of the anti-COVID-19 vaccine produced by China's Sinovac Biotech Ltd. China had also sent a medical team to assess the pandemic preparation of Bangladesh during the first week of June.



- During the talks, Mr. Bin Momen raised the issue of increase in the killings of Bangladesh nationals along the border by India's BSF.
- Ms. Hasina raised the issue of Rohingya refugees in the Chittagong hills and urged India's support for "early and safe repatriation" of the 1.2 million Rohingya citizens of Myanmar.
- Bangladesh has asked India to use its non-permanent membership at the UN Security Council during 2021 to increase pressure on Myanmar for the repatriation of the Rohingya refugees.
- Mr. Momen had said last week that like China, India too should provide tariff-free facility for exports from Bangladesh.
- The visit by Mr. Shringla is being viewed as extraordinary because of the pandemic scenario and has been interpreted as India's attempt to prevent growing Chinese influence in Bangladesh.

Teesta project:

- The Sheikh Hasina government has recently reached an agreement with China over building of a \$1 billion irrigation project at the Teesta which will benefit the country's farmers in the Rangpur region during the lean seasons.
- Construction of the project will effectively neutralise the Teesta water negotiations with India. Over the last few months, allegations were levelled against Ms. Hasina's government about slow pace for sanctioning projects that are supported by India.

UAE connects first Arab nuclear plant to power grid

- The oil-rich United Arab Emirates announced on Wednesday that it has connected its **Barakah nuclear power plant** to the national grid in a new first for the Arab world.
- The milestone follows the successful start-up of the plant's first reactor at the end of last month and launches the UAE on the road to meeting 25% of its electricity needs from nuclear power.
- The plant on the Gulf coast west of Abu Dhabi had been due to go online in late 2017 but faced delays that officials attributed to safety and regulatory requirements.



- The UAE has substantial oil and gas reserves, but with a power-hungry population of 10 million, it has made huge investments in developing clean alternatives, including solar energy.
- Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter, has said it plans to build up to 16 nuclear reactors, but the project has yet to materialise.
- Barakah was built by a consortium led by the Korea Electric Power Corporation at a cost of some \$24.4 billion.

Centre relaxes norms for PFC, REC to lend to discoms

- To provide liquidity to the power sector, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs on Wednesday approved a one-time relaxation to Power Finance Corporation and Rural Electrification Corporation for extending loans to distribution companies (discoms) above the limits of working capital cap of 25% of last year's revenues.

Details:

- "Currently, the power sector is facing problems... due to COVID-19, the consumption of electricity has fallen... and bills are not being paid on time. State discoms are facing issues, so to help them PFC and REC have been allowed to give loans above the limit more the 25% working capital limit," Union Minister Prakash Javdekar said in a briefing.
- The government said the one-time relaxation will help provide liquidity to the power sector and ensure payments by States to discoms. An official statement noted that the outbreak of COVID-19 and the consequent lockdown had exacerbated liquidity problems for the power sector.
- "Revenues of power distribution companies have nosedived as people are unable to pay for the electricity consumed while power supplies... have been maintained," it said, adding that the energy consumption has decreased substantially.
- Power sector liquidity is not expected to improve in the short term, as economic activity and power demand will take some time to pick up. There is, thus, an immediate need to infuse liquidity in the sector for continued power supply, it added.