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CIVIL SERVICES ACHIEVERS' POINT

A ONE STOP SOLUTION FOR UPSC/APSC/SSC & BANKING

THE ASSAM TRIBUNE ANALYSIS

DATE - 7TH APRIL 2021

For Preliminary and Mains examination

As per new Pattern of APSC

(Also useful for UPSC and other State level government examinations)

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Justice NV Ramana to be next CJI

- Senior-most Supreme Court judge Justice Nuthalapati Venkata Ramana was on Tuesday appointed as the next Chief Justice of India.
- According to a notification issued by the government, Justice Ramana would take over as the 48th CJI on April 24 after incumbent CJI SA Bobde demits office a day before.
- Justice Ramana would retire on August 26, 2022.
- “In exercise of the powers conferred by clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution of India, the President is pleased to appoint Shri Justice Nuthalapati Venkata Ramana, Judge of the Supreme Court, to be the Chief Justice of India with effect from 24th April, 2021,” the notification read.
- As per convention, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, PK Mishra, and Secretary (Justice) in the Law Ministry, Barun Mitra, handed over the warrant of appointment signed by the President to Justice Ramana this morning, sources said.
- Justice Bobde had recently recommended Justice Ramana as his successor in keeping with convention and norms of seniority.
- The CJI’s recommendation to the Union government had come on a day when the Supreme Court had made public its decision to dismiss a complaint of Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister YS Jagan Mohan Reddy against Justice Ramana after giving the matter “due consideration”.
- As per norms, a written communication from the incumbent Chief Justice is sent a month before his retirement.
- Born on August 27, 1957 in Ponnavaaram village of Andhra Pradesh’s Krishna district, Justice Ramana was enrolled as an advocate on February 10, 1983.
- He was appointed as a permanent judge of the Andhra Pradesh High Court on June 27, 2000 and functioned as acting Chief Justice of the Andhra Pradesh High Court from March 10, 2013 to May 20, 2013.
- Justice Ramana was elevated as the Chief Justice of Delhi High Court on September 2, 2013 and was appointed as a judge of the Supreme Court on February 17, 2014.
- Justice Ramana has dealt with several high-profile cases in the apex court.
- A five-judge constitution bench headed by Justice Ramana had in March last year declined to refer to a larger seven-judge bench a batch of pleas challenging the constitutional validity of the Centre’s decision to abrogate provisions of Article 370.
- He was part of a five-judge constitution bench which had in November 2019 held that office of the CJI is a public authority under the Right to Information Act.

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- In the November 2019 verdict, the top court had also said that “judicial independence has to be kept in mind” while disclosing information in “public interest”.
- In an another important verdict, Justice Ramana-led bench had in January last year held that freedom of speech and conducting business on the internet are protected under the Constitution. – PTI

Jaishankar conveys India's viewpoint to Russia

- With a focus on preparations for the annual India-Russia summit, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov on Tuesday held wide-ranging talks during which New Delhi shared its viewpoint on the Indo-Pacific.
- Addressing a joint press event after his talks with Jaishankar, Lavrov dismissed suggestions of any future military alliance between Russia and China.
- “By the way, we have heard speculation about pro-military alliances not only with respect to Russia and China relations, we have also heard about such alliances allegedly being promoted such as Middle East-NATO, Asia-NATO. Today we exchanged views on this and our Indian friends have the same position as we. We believe that this is counter productive,” he said in Russian.
- “We are interested in inclusive cooperation that is for something, not against somebody,” Lavrov asserted.
- Defence cooperation as well as weapons manufacturing was also discussed during the talks, he said.
- At the joint presser after the talks, Jaishankar said the discussions were warm, comprehensive and productive. “We talked about long-standing partnership in nuclear, space and defence sectors,” he said.
- He said the discussions also covered the rapidly expanding energy cooperation as well as views were exchanged on regional and global matters.
- Pointing out that he shared, with Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, India's approach on Afghanistan, Jaishankar said that for India, what happens in Afghanistan, impacts its security directly.
- “I shared our approach that a durable peace there (Afghanistan) would require harmonising interests of all, both within and around that country,” he said. Jaishankar said a political solution should mean an independent, sovereign, united and democratic Afghanistan.
- “I shared our viewpoint on the Indo-Pacific. As our Prime Minister pointed out at the Shangri-La Dialogue some years ago, contemporary challenges require countries to work together in new and different ways,” he said. – PTI

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FM calls for greater coordination among BRICS nations

- India today pitched for greater coordination among BRICS nations on the issue of the 16th general review of quotas of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to give more say to developing countries.
- As per an IMF resolution, the 16th general review of quotas should be concluded by December 15, 2023.
- Any adjustment in quota shares would be expected to result in increase in the voting rights of emerging countries in line with their relative positions in the world economy.
- It would likely result in an increase in the share of emerging markets and developing countries as a whole, while protecting the voice and representation of the poorest members.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while chairing the BRICS Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting, emphasised the need for the five-nation grouping to respond to the COVID-19 crisis through policy support and enhanced international coordination.
- Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) are members of the grouping.
- As the 2021 BRICS Chair, India's approach is focused on strengthening intra-BRICS cooperation based on continuity, consolidation and consensus, the Finance Ministry said in a statement.
- "This was the first meeting of the BRICS Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors under India Chairship in 2021.
- "BRICS Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors discussed financial cooperation agenda set by India for 2021 – Global economic outlook and response to COVID-19 pandemic; New Development Bank (NDB) activities; social infrastructure financing and use of digital technologies; cooperation on customs-related issues; IMF reforms; fintech for SMEs and financial inclusion," it said.
- On the BRICS priorities and agenda for 2021, Sitharaman said efforts should be made towards delivering outcomes that reflect the needs and aspirations of the group in particular and emerging markets and developing economies in general.
- She also stressed thematic priorities for the New Development Bank for discussion during 2021 and the issue of membership expansion.
- On the COVID-19 pandemic, the Finance Minister said the world's largest vaccination drive is under way in India and it has supplied 64.5 million vaccine doses to 84 countries.
- Speaking on the importance of social infrastructure and use of digital technologies, Sitharaman underscored the merit in engaging with private sector and exploring the innovative financing models. – PTI

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IMF projects Indian economy to grow at historic 12.5% in FY22

- India's economy is projected to grow at the historically high level of 12.5 per cent this fiscal year, but the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) Chief Economist Gita Gopinath cautioned that the current wave of the pandemic "is quite concerning."
- The growth projection was raised on the basis of "evidence we were getting in the last couple of months in terms of the normalisation of economic activity," she said at the release of the World Economic Outlook (WEO) report today in Washington.
- "These numbers precede the current wave of the virus, which is quite concerning," she added.
- With the unprecedented growth rate projection of 12.5 per cent not seen in modern times, India also regains its status as the world's fastest growing economy, according to the WEO.
- Malhar Nabar, the Division Chief in IMF's Research Department, said, "The current forecast that we have already takes a fairly conservative view on the sequential growth for the Indian economy for this year. "But it's true that with this very worrying uptick in (COVID-19) cases that poses very severe downside risks to the growth outlook for the economy," he added.
- The WEO projected India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth to moderate to 6.9 per cent in next fiscal year, while still retaining the top growth rate spot.
- Any elation over the historically high rate is, however, moderated by the fact of India's negative growth rate of 8 per cent during 2020-21.
- The growth rate projection for 2021-22 is 1 per cent higher than the 11.5 per cent projection made by the IMF in January and 5.1 per cent more than the 7.4 per cent in April last year.
- The previous highest GDP growth rate in modern times for India was recorded in 2010 at 10.3 per cent, and the records before that were 9.8 per cent set in 2007 and 9.6 in 1988, according to IMF data.
- The IMF growth rate projection for India is nearly in line with the 12.6 per cent from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) last month.
- Gopinath struck a note of optimism for the world economy, which was projected by the IMF to grow by 6 per cent this year, an increase of 0.5 per cent from the January figure.
- She wrote in a foreword to the WEO, "Even with high uncertainty about the path of the pandemic, a way out of this health and economic crisis is increasingly visible.
- "Adaptation to pandemic life has enabled the global economy to do well despite subdued overall mobility, leading to a stronger-than-anticipated rebound, on average, across regions," she added.

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- However, she also warned, “A high degree of uncertainty surrounds these projections, with many possible downside and upside risks. Much still depends on the race between the virus and vaccines. Greater progress with vaccinations can uplift the forecast, while new virus variants that evade vaccines can lead to a sharp downgrade.”
- India’s projected growth rate is 4.1 per cent higher than that for China, which ranks next with 8.4 per cent.
- But China was the only major economy to have a positive growth last year of 2.3 per cent, while the rest of the world was in the red. The global economy shrank by 3.3 per cent last year. – IANS

India to cut Saudi oil purchases by one-third

- Indian refiners will buy less oil from Saudi Arabia next month as they snap up supplies outside of the Middle East as part of diversification drive amid weakening domestic fuel demand on the resurgence of COVID-19.
- State-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC) and three other refiners have sought just 65 per cent of the monthly average of about 15 million barrels from Saudi Arabia in May, three sources with knowledge of the matter said.
- The move follows tensions between India and Saudi Arabia over the Kingdom’s hawkish stance on boosting production to cool prices.
- With Saudi Arabia ignoring its pleas to lift output curbs, the Indian government last month asked state refiners to look for sources outside of the Middle East.
- Sources said IOC and other state refiners are looking to buy more oil from the spot or current market rather than rely on term or fixed quantity contracts with Saudi and other OPEC nations.
- They have in recent weeks bought newer crudes from geographies ranging from Guyana to Norway as part of that effort.
- Besides, the US is also being tapped for increased buying, they said, adding, IOC has floated a spot tender seeking crude from West Africa, the US and Canada.
- Crude oil imports from OPEC countries decreased to 74.4 per cent of total imports during April 2020 to February 2021 as compared to 79.6 per cent in the same period of the previous year.
- India, which imports 85 per cent of its oil needs, in February saw record petrol and diesel prices, putting an extra burden on the pandemic-hit economy.
- Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan repeatedly called for OPEC and its allies, known as OPEC+, to pump more crude to stop prices from rising too high. But Saudi Arabia did not yield to his

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demands and instead asked New Delhi to use cheaper oil it had bought and stored when oil prices had plummeted a year back.

- Oil purchases from Saudi dropped in January and February this year while US imports more than doubled, they said, adding, the US overtook Saudi as India's second-largest supplier in February.
- Iraq continues to be the top supplier.
- Sources said lower supplies sought in May are also linked to economic recovery weakening due to localised lockdowns being imposed to curb the spread of coronavirus. – PTI

EDITORIALS

The pathogen called gender discrimination

- In the raging global war against Covid-19, perhaps, the only saving grace for women is that men, especially older men, are twice as likely to suffer Covid-19 fatalities compared to us women. The IFR (Infection Fatality Ratio) was found to be 4.6% for women, compared to 11.6% among the aged men.
- A Spanish study in June 2020 showed that the gap increases as we age and the epidemiologists had speculated that the female immune system is better at spotting pathogens early and fighting them off.
- The question we have before us is far larger on how to develop and nurture our immune system in the broadest possible sense to fight the evils of crimes against women.
- We are ranked 108th in the gender gap index in 2020, a measure by the World Economic Forum, which measures gender equality, that shows improvement down the years, as we ranked 113 in 2011.
- However, we do have a long way to go on other aspects too, such as associated health and education parameters. Gender discrimination is a virulent pathogen and its pursuance continues to put it in centre stage and is being addressed with a slew of progressive powerful initiatives.
- Looking back at our own history, Assamese women have played an important role since time immemorial. During the Ahom times, they occupied important positions in the Ahom courts, the *kunwaris* (princesses) were even given separate estates to rule.

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- In fact during the reign of Siba Singha (1714-1744), his royal insignia and umbrella were given to Phuleshwari Kunwari, Ambika Kunwari and Anadari Kunwari. Many in fact featured on coins, attesting to their importance.
- Besides, as the Aryans entered Assam, they realized that obscurantist practices such as *sati*, child marriage, etc., were absent and the Assamese women were far better off in many ways here. The composite Assamese culture had a rich tapestry of women centric beliefs many of which endure till today.
- Kamakhya Devi, revered by all, represents the power of the Mother Goddess enshrined in one of the oldest Shakti Peeths of the country, at Kamakhya, Nilachal Hill. As a result, the theme of the sacred allied with women highlighted the pre-eminent role played in society. Srimangala, queen of Harjaravarman, Naynadevi, queen of Sthithavarman, among others, have been likened parallel to goddesses. It is this spirit we need to recapture in our present times.
- The pathogen of gender discrimination has been pervasive not just here, but across the world and our first line of defence, in fact our first vaccine, is education. This has to be a sustained all-pervasive campaign across all ages, gender and classes to highlight the role of the girl child, be it 18-year-old freedom fighter Kanaklata Barua, who was martyred during our Freedom Movement, or the legendary social activist Kiran Bala Bora or sprinter Hima Das who has made India proud, among many others.
- The LFPR (Labour Force Participation Rate) of women has to be boosted while its underlying factors are social, which are changing at best sluggishly. One estimate suggests if we increase our women's participation in the workforce significantly, we could add 700+ billion US dollars to the GDP. Equal participation would push up our GDP by 27% encouraging active participation through economic and social as well as communication incentives.
- Needless to say, the Covid times have seen a near doubling of domestic violence, the 'Shadow Pandemic' as the UN calls it. The lockdown incapacitated women, as they remained confined unable to move to safer areas in the event of spousal violence.
- There is of course a key factor which is rampant in combating the spectre of not only domestic violence, but sexual violence in general as well. The victims are concerned regarding ostracism, managing economically if they walk out of an abusive relationship, etc.
- There is a huge lacuna in terms of awareness of their rights and laws specific to them, whereas the Vishakha guidelines focusing on harassment at the workplace have to be enforced continually in a sustained manner.
- We would have an effective dose only if we work in a concerted, holistic manner on this. In this case, there is a strong need to create sustained awareness campaigns and with the recent trend towards purpose-driven communication, brands too could come forward and build equity by

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spreading this message and popularize these. We of course need to strengthen and put strong processes and monitor the same so that the actual cases could be addressed in a phased manner.

- The third broad issue is women's health and the recent epidemic has fuelled the need for health and wellness consciousness amongst all of the 7.6 billion of us, not just women. Considering the dimension of health, mental health mostly does not get the attention it needs, and the pre-existing gender gap in mental health has noticeably widened.
- A lot of frontline workers have been suffering from depression with resultant psychosomatic illnesses. Much have been written about women's physical health but their mental health is an area of huge concern. We simply owe it to ourselves to prioritize it in the utmost possible way.
- The solutions here too encompass awareness and rapid action to address these issues. More support groups, more online health helplines, learning to embrace uncertainty, fixed times for exercise/yoga, etc., are necessary.
- Yet again this vaccine needs to be largely formulated and administered by us to ourselves and thereby generate awareness. There are many ways here, lying in our own traditions of Ayurveda, to build our mental and physical immunity.
- We need to step up and practice it; it is not a weakness to reach out and ask for help. We are faced with visible and invisible pathogens. We need to build up our inner strength with our antibodies spruced up to tackle these as best as we can.
- Men should realize we share this planet and our lives. Only if we work in unison would we be able to truly celebrate life on a fragile planet and achieve happiness for all as well as for our future generations. Modern humans (*Homo sapiens*) have walked the earth only for 50,000 years.
- This is a tiny fraction of time for our 4.5 billion-year-old planet. We have been nearly 50 billions, each gender, so far; 108 billions of mankind have lived so far, we need mankind to survive and thrive for many years to come.
- We need to live in total synergy for this to happen and these booster vaccine shots will definitely create antibodies to fight the antigens of society.

The healthcare crisis we don't see

- Today is World Health Day, and we can expect discussions to be largely focused on the second wave of the SARS-Cov-2 pandemic that has hit the world. When fighting a war, all thinking and resources are naturally focused on the immediate target. But how well we do in wartime is a factor of how well we work and prepare in peacetime.
- Sooner rather than later, the nation must come to terms with the simple fact that our health sector is in a crisis that is far deeper than is visible. The poor suffer because they don't get healthcare.

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The rich also suffer because they may get more than they can take; aggressive intervention and huge bills don't necessarily mean that the sick are taken care of.

- Between the two, the system is becoming heartless, a place where expertise even if it's available will fail to deliver because it is disconnected from humaneness. Here are two stories known personally to one of the writers here, coming from in and around Thiruvananthapuram, the capital of Kerala.
- From his ICU bed, a 75-year-old man screamed at his daughter, unhappy about the state he was put in. His arms and legs were tied to the bed with canvas restraints. She heard her father shout at the nurse; she had never expected this behaviour from him.
- Some 100 kilometres away, a housemaid lay ill and alone on a straw mat in a village hut. She could not walk; she had to crawl. On the other side of the mat was a chamber pot into which she had to urinate and defecate. Her granddaughter, on her way back from school, would come and clean up. Her sons and daughters would not come. They had quarrelled about the division of her tiny piece of land.
- Both patients had received healthcare in the past. Precise diagnosis had been arrived at and treatment did indeed sustain them for a year or two. Now in a state of incurable illness, one was delirious in hospital and tied up while the other was lying alone in utter helplessness.
- Both are cases in Kerala, a State with "significantly higher healthcare spending per capita than all other States, driven by higher-than-average government spending as well as out-of-pocket spending, which has borne dividends in the handling of the Nipah outbreak as well as in keeping mortality from Covid-19 relatively low despite unfavourable demographics", as an RBI study of State Finances put it in October 2020.
- Higher spending on healthcare, especially in the public sector is desirable but it must be accompanied by approaches that promote welfare of the sick, not push them out or put them in an assembly line of the infirm and the suffering.
- For example, in India, only about 2% of the needy have access to pain relief. A draconian law passed in 1985 made three generations of doctors unfamiliar with medicines like oral morphine, and the medical curriculum till 2019 did not include pain management. The essential medicines, though inexpensive, are inaccessible to patients in most hospitals.
- India grows poppy, produces opium and exports it to the rest of the world. Morphine is extracted from opium. When a major operation, a fracture or cancer causes severe pain, morphine (or one of its derivatives) is essential for relief; no substitute exists in the world for medicines of that class.
- The scientific world today recognizes the principle of balance, which brings in enough restrictions to limit their non-medical or inappropriate use, while at the same time ensuring the access of morphine for pain relief.

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- The necessary modification of the relevant law was made by the Parliament in 2014. However, the relevant rules which were published in 2015 have errors that need correction, and 29 States and six Union Territories have to implement them individually.
- Thankfully, though slowly, many positive things are happening. Students who joined medical colleges from 2019 onwards have pain management and most aspects of palliative care built into their curriculum.
- A growing number of States are implementing the amended law. The Government of India's National Health Policy of 2017 "recognizes the growing need for palliative and rehabilitative care for all geriatric illnesses and advocates the continuity of care across all levels".
- Currently, healthcare providers all over the country are being trained in palliative care. The national-level trainers have already been trained and as they spread education, palliative care will be integrated with primary healthcare up to a point all over the country.
- In the future, perhaps, patients will hopefully get more compassionate and necessary medical attention from healthcare providers in their homes and not be only dependent on intermittent visits from family. This will demand the encasing of healthcare with ideas of service that alone can offer care with quality and compassion, within the reach of the vast majority.
- We will need primary care to be pushed up and then work for the integration of palliative care into primary care. But this will be grossly inadequate without tertiary health care institutions including medical colleges following suit.
- Secondly, there is something for all of us to do. Healthcare will never be complete till the community around the person and family are engaged. The disintegration of the extended family, and migration of young men and urbanization, have all caused a social change resulting in the isolation of nuclear families during an illness.
- This needs to be alleviated by the participation of the community. To paraphrase a sentence from Dr Vikram Patel: "Healthcare is too important to be left to professionals alone."
- The theme for World Health Day, the 7th of April, 2021, is "Building a fairer, healthier world." If that is to make any sense to us, people should get the right kind of healthcare. And that means healthcare should not only focus on curing diseases but should also prioritize relief from suffering.

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