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CIVIL SERVICES ACHIEVERS' POINT

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

THE HINDU

EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

DATE – 5th July, 2021

For Preliminary and Mains examination

(Also useful for APSC and other government examinations)

CSAP

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Leadership through knowledge...

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EDITORIALS

The problem now with the military synergy plan (GS 2 - Security)

Context

- It is indisputable that the Indian military continues to work in silos, like all governmental agencies in India, and a need was rightly felt and directions issued by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to bring about jointness, leaving the task to the first Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) of India.
- It is also indisputable that the **aim is to bring about a synergy in operations while economising through the elimination of duplication and wasteful practices or processes**. At the outset, it also needs to be clearly stated that, contrary to the recent media reports, debates and some opinions, the Indian Air Force (IAF) is not playing 'dog in the manger' and resisting the formation of theatre/functional commands.
- The doctrine and philosophy of the IAF, it is keen to **bring in the requisite reforms to improve the war fighting capabilities of the Indian military as a whole while also economising**.

Nuances of air power

- The statement that the IAF wants to fight its own private war thus comes from people who do not understand the nuances and capabilities of air power and lack the expertise in its effective utilisation.
- In the current formulation of theatres, the objections from the IAF have essentially been due to air power being seen as an adjunct to the two surface forces, the Indian Army and the Indian Navy, and being divided into penny packets which would seriously degrade the effectiveness of air operations in any future conflict or contingency.
- It is better that such objections and dissenting opinions come out now before the structure is formalised than once it is set in stone and the use of air power is found to be sub-optimal under the military ethos of "an order is an order".
- We must remember that in war there is no prize for the runner-up. The nation would then end up paying a heavy price, with the Air Force carrying the burden and blame for the failures.

Political objectives

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- If war is the continuation of politics by other means, then it is essential to first define the political objectives flowing into a national security strategy before any effective use of force can be truly contemplated.
- The failures of the mightiest militaries in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and even our own Indian misadventure in Sri Lanka bear testimony to the **lack of clear political objectives and appropriate military strategies**.
- It is, therefore, unfortunate that even after over seven decades after Independence, **India still does not have a clearly articulated national security strategy**. Only such a strategy can define the types of contingencies the military is expected to address, leading to appropriate military strategies, doctrines and required capabilities. That would define the structures required for the conduct of synergised operations with the requisite communications and training requirements.
- Concurrently, such an intellectual exercise would identify duplication, wasteful resources and practices. This is what the CDS should have been pursuing before first freezing the structure and then trying to glue the pieces together or hammer square pegs in round holes.
- As argued elsewhere earlier, such an exercise may well result in identifying air power as the lead element, particularly since the Indian political aim, even in the foreseeable future, is unlikely to be occupation of new territories.
- A large, manpower-intensive army with unusable armour formations would then also come into focus.
- Even the proposed air defence command conflicts with the domain commands in seamless employment of air power. It is due to the absence of such an intellectual exercise that the IAF does not wish to see its limited resources frittered away in fighting frontal defensive battles by a land force commander with little expertise in employment of air power.
- The Army fails to realise that offensive air power is best not seen, busy keeping the enemy air force pinned down elsewhere while giving own surface forces the freedom to manoeuvre and operate with impunity, as shown in 1971.

The Army-Air Force silo

- Historically, the Indian Army has always kept the IAF out of the information loop and demonstrated a penchant to 'go it alone'. The charge that the IAF joined the party late during Kargil (1999) is also totally baseless and shows a lack of knowledge of events and a failure to learn from historical facts.
- Recorded facts and a dispassionate view would clearly show that the IAF began conducting reconnaissance missions on May 10 as soon as the Indian Army just made a request for attack helicopters, without sharing full information.

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- It is also surprising that a request for photo-reconnaissance of the entire area was not made to first gather essential intelligence on what the Army was facing, before launching foot patrols which were mostly ambushed with unnecessary casualties, instead of asking for armed helicopters.
- This despite the IAF pointing out the unsuitability of armed helicopters at these altitudes and their vulnerability.
- **The use of offensive air power close to the Line of Control also required that the political leadership be kept informed due to possibilities of escalation**, something that the Army was unwilling to do. Even the Chief of Army Staff (CoAS) initially threatened to go it alone on his return from his visit abroad. As for silos, the CoAS himself admitted later that information was not shared even between the Director General of Military Operation (DGMO) and the Director General of Military Intelligence (DGMI) within Army headquarters, much less with the IAF.
- All this was despite the fact that the Defence Programme post-1962 was based on the assumption that **China posed the major threat** and that the IAF be made capable of assuming some of the Army's deterrence capability.

Echoes from Kargil

- Seen in this light, the Chinese incursion into Eastern Ladakh last year is reminiscent of Kargil. While the response has been swift, it is evident that a clear intent to use combat air power, as against 1962, has significantly contributed in deterring China.
- However, such intent and a joint strategy would have been forcefully signalled by the presence of air force representatives in the ongoing negotiations to restore status quo ante. The continuing build-up of the infrastructure for the Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) in Tibet further emphasises the **need for an air-land strategy, with air power as the lead element to deter or defeat the Chinese designs at coercion**.

Address the structural gaps

- Finally, theatre or any lower structure requires an institutionalised higher defence organisation, which has been sadly missing since the Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC) became defunct in the 1950s, leading to little regular dialogue between the political and military leadership, except in crises resulting in knee-jerk responses.
- This led to a remark from a scholar-warrior that, "it is ironic that the Cabinet has an Accommodation Committee but not a Defence Committee". In the current proposal, it appears that the CDS, as the

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permanent chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee (CoSC), would also exercise operational control of the theatre/functional commands, a move that is unlikely to be palatable to the politico-bureaucratic leadership and which has, perhaps, called for further deliberations.

- Prudence demands that instead of ramming down such structures without adequate deliberations and discussions with all stakeholders, we first evolve appropriate military strategies in a nuclear backdrop in concert with the political objectives.
- Thereafter, **joint planning and training for all foreseen contingencies, with war-gaming**, would automatically indicate the required structures with suitable command, control and communications.



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Mixed bag (GS 3 - Economy)

Context

- **India's merchandise exports** reached an all-time quarterly high of **\$95 billion in the three months** ended June, providing welcome cheer on the economic front.
- That the record was notched up during a quarter when the second wave of the pandemic hit its peak, and amid varying degrees of lockdowns, is all the more noteworthy.
- Exports last month surged 47% from June 2020 to \$32.5 billion. Even discounting the fact that the year-earlier period provided an anomalous base as the economy had just begun reopening from a protracted nationwide lockdown, growth in shipments was still a robust 30% when compared with the pre-pandemic June of 2019.
- Propelling the surge from the 2019 levels were non-rice cereals, which quadrupled; **iron ore, which more than doubled**; and **organic and inorganic chemicals that rose 62%**.
- **Engineering goods exports had the biggest jump in dollar terms**, adding \$2.73 billion in value, or 42% over June 2019, as the rising vaccination coverage and economic recovery in key developed markets including the EU and the U.S. bolstered demand.
- Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal was enthused enough by the export performance to posit that shipments of goods to overseas markets could touch the \$400 billion mark this fiscal, a figure which, if achieved, would represent an annual record.
- Trade data, however, reveals that a significant driver of the export growth has been the runaway rally in commodity prices that have benefited from the accelerated reopening of major economies, as well as an increased appetite for raw materials and grains in China.
- On the other hand, the crucial job-generating export sectors including **readymade garments, leather and leather products and tea all posted double-digit declines** from June 2019 levels, reflecting the deeper structural problems that dog each one of them.
- If the tea industry has been facing a long-term downtrend exacerbated by inadequate product variety, lack of marketing-savvy and sharp competition from rivals including Sri Lanka and Kenya, the leather

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goods segment has been put on the ropes by a combination of short-sighted policy measures, WTO-mandated withdrawal of export incentives and a pandemic-induced slowdown in orders.

- For a segment that provides large-scale employment, the recent imposition of an import duty on a key raw material has thrown the sector's very viability into question.
- With the Government dragging its feet on notifying the **rates applicable under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Export Products (RoDTEP) scheme**, exporters are still unsure of how to price their products while bidding for orders.
- A container shortage and heightened congestion have also sent freight rates out of Indian ports soaring. Policymakers need to look beyond headline numbers and expedite action to restore the health of every constituent sector if economically enduring long-term growth in exports is to be ensured.



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The heavy footprint of a light rail (GS 3 – Environment and Ecology)

Context

- A light rail is a **symbol of modernity that would surely appeal to the vanity of a society's establishment**. What is less evident though is the cost at which it could come. These are not just the upfront costs of installing one but also the hidden environmental impact, which can vary enormously according to geography and the project's spread.
- A **light rail project has found favour with the Government of Kerala**. It's unique selling proposition, apparently, is that it will reduce very substantially the travel time between the two extremities of the State, namely the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram in the south and the town of Kasargod in its north.
- So far, the project has mostly **drawn criticism from environmental groups but there are also economic considerations that must be brought to the table when judging its desirability**.
- It may seem odd to say this as the economy is embedded in nature and we cannot ignore environmental cost. However, there are instances when the environmental impact of alternative projects is the same but the economic returns vary significantly and vice versa.

Environmental costs

- What are the environmental costs of yet another rail line in Kerala? The land here is of an undulated topography combined with an often rocky surface that is prone to crumbling when dislodged.
- **Excessive quarrying and construction have already left it vulnerable to torrential rain, as seen in the devastating landslides** recorded across the State in recent years.
- Therefore, the first thought that comes to mind when contemplating another railway, light though it may be, is **how it will impact the stability of the earth's surface along its course**.
- So far, we have only considered the consequences of the land use at stake. However, **natural capital comprises not only the earth's surface, and the services it renders to us, but also the ecosystem as a whole**.
- It has been pointed out that a part of the land that has been earmarked for acquisition for the project are wetlands, including paddy fields. This should concern us.

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- Paddy is the staple food of Malayalees. Its production in Kerala has been in decline for over half a century. Part of this is explained by economic factors but some part of it is due to the lack of an assured water supply.
- A **double whammy of building over paddy fields and shrinking water bodies threatens food security.**
- There is a recognisable pattern to the development strategy of the present government in Kerala. Two years ago, it had dismissed protests by the villagers of Keezhattur in Kannur District against a highway project that would destroy their paddy fields.
- It now has a chance to listen to citizens' concerns on the plan to install a light railway across the State, the consequences of which will be far more widespread.

Taking into account alternatives

- It is not anyone's case that the government **should not develop transportation.** The point is that it should take into account all alternatives.
- **Kerala already has a railway line** that is two-laned for the most part. There is an **international airport in every urban conurbation.** It is well connected by road, with one of the higher road densities among States.
- But of the highest promise are the **possibilities of transportation over water.** There is at present an ongoing project for transportation through inland waterways.
- Finally, nothing prevents the government from developing a seaborne ferry service connecting Thiruvananthapuram with Kasargod, and all the ports in between. This would leave the land untouched.
- There is an irony in the pitch for a light rail by a Communist government. In the 1950s, when it was believed that land reforms would deliver the land to them, the peasants hopefully sang "we will (one day) harvest all the fields".
- Now, by their actions, the ruling class seems to be saying to the workers who installed them in power "we shall (one day) kill all the fields". Spoken in Malayalam, the statements rhyme.

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