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CONTENTS



HISTORY-ART AND CULTURE08 - 17

PAKISTAN NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS IN DELHI: UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAHORE RESOLUTION
GI TAG GRANTED TO MAJULI MASKS OF ASSAM: EXPLORING THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS ANCIENT ART FORM
HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: TRACING THE ROOTS OF MARCH 8 CELEBRATIONS
THE ORIGINS OF EASTER SYMBOLS
THE INAUGURAL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN GANDHI AND TAGORE: AN EVOLVING FRIENDSHIP AMID DISAGREEMENTS
THE EVOLUTION OF THE OSCARS: FROM INCEPTION TO GLOBAL PHENOMENON
NANA JAGANNATH SHANKARSETH: THE RENOWNED SOCIAL REFORMER AND PHILANTHROPIST
SHAHEED DIWAS: BHAGAT SINGH'S STAND AGAINST A MERCY PLEA
THE HOLI FESTIVAL
AE WATAN MERE WATAN: THE STORY OF USHA MEHTA AND CONGRESS RADIO



GEOGRAPHY18 - 21

PANCHESHWAR MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT (PMP)
AGALEGA ATOLL (MAURITIUS)
SEAMOUNTS
CAVUM CLOUDS
ANTHROPOCENE EPOCH
ASTRONOMICAL GRAND CYCLES
GHOST PARTICLES
BARBERTON GREENSTONE BELT
'SHIVA' AND 'SHAKTI,' EARLIEST BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE MILKY WAY
MAGNETIC FOSSILS



POLITY AND GOVERNANCE22 - 43

ARVIND KEJRIWAL'S ARREST: CAN A CHIEF MINISTER CONTINUE TO SERVE WHILE JAILED?"
E-EVIDENCE, NEW CRIMINAL LAW, ITS IMPLEMENTATION
INDIA'S BURGEONING DEATH PENALTY CRISIS
INDIA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM
ELECTORAL BONDS, ALL DETAILS HANDED OVER TO EC: SBI CHAIRMAN ON CROSS-VOTING IN RAJYA SABHA ELECTIONS
SC ENDS IMMUNITY FOR LEGISLATORS TAKING BRIBES
SC TO HEAR PLEA TO INCLUDE CJI ON EC SELECTION PANEL
THE LONG ROAD TO REFORMING INDIA'S POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM
UTTARAKHAND BILL ON UNIFORM CIVIL CODE GETS PRESIDENT'S NOD VULNERABLE TO CRITICISM
WHY THE SUPREME COURT HAS STAYED GOVT'S 'FACT CHECK UNIT' FOR NOW
WRONG MESSAGING



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS44 - 65

A RESPITE

DECLINE IN INDIA'S ARMS IMPORTS: SIPRI

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN INDIA'S PALESTINE POLICY

IS NATO MEMBERSHIP IN THE CARDS FOR UKRAINE?

ANTI-PIRACY ACT HAS BEEN A GREAT ENABLER, SAYS NAVY CHIEF

MOSCOW CONCERT HALL ATTACK

"PRACHANDA WINS THIRD VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN 15 MONTHS AS NEPAL PM"

PAK. PARLIAMENT SWEARS IN NEW MEMBERS AMID PROTESTS BY PTI

SEIZURE OF CARGO BY INDIA IS UNJUSTIFIED, SAYS PAKISTAN

RAJNATH INAUGURATES NEW NAVY HEADQUARTERS

SENSING THREAT FROM CHINA, INDIA JOINS THE RACE TO MINE SEA PATCH

THE IMPACT OF NATO EXPANSION

SHAHBAZ SHARIF BECOMES THE PAKISTAN PM FOR THE SECOND TIME

THE UK AND AUSTRALIA SIGNED A \$3 BILLION DEAL TO BOLSTER AUSTRALIA'S NUCLEAR SUBMARINE PROGRAM.

UNEASY NEIGHBORS: AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN THROUGH THE AGES

WITH BHUTAN'S GELEPHU PROJECT IN MIND, INDIA TO DOUBLE ASSISTANCE TO

₹10,000 CRORE FOR NEXT 5 YEARS

WTO 13TH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE: TEPID TRADE-OFFS:



INTERNAL SECURITY66 - 71

INDIAN NAVY COMMISSIONS INS JATAYU

ECONOMICS OF FORCED LABOUR

SC STAYED NOTIFICATION ESTABLISHING THE PIB FACT CHECKING UNIT

ARMY RAISES FIRST UNIT TO OPERATE APACHE ATTACK HELICOPTERS

HC ACQUITS DU EX-PROFESSOR, 5 OTHERS IN 'MAOIST LINK' CASE

MARATHON OPERATIONS IN THE GULF OF ADEN



ECONOMICS....72- 93

GROWTH ESTIMATE FOR CURRENT FISCAL RAISED TO 7.6%

EMPLOYMENT SCENARIO GRIM

INDIA'S RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

STATE OF POVERTY IN INDIA

INDIA EYES \$100BN IN INVESTMENT

GERMAN GDP FORECAST

BLOOMBERG TO ADD INDIAN BONDS TO EM INDEXES

CENTRE TWEAKS PM SURYA GHAR MUFT BIJLI YOJANA

INDIA RANKED 136 IN GLOBAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX: UNDP



ECOLOGY 94 - 107

LOSS AND DAMAGE BOARD

MELANOCHLAMYS DROUPADI: FRESH HEAD-SHIELD SEA SLUG

INTERNATIONAL BIG CAT ALLIANCE (IBCA)

GREENING INDIA'S WASTELANDS WITH AGROFORESTRY

(GROW) REPORT AND PORTAL

STATUS OF LEOPARDS IN INDIA

INDIA'S FIRST DOLPHIN RESEARCH CENTRE

GLOBAL METHANE TRACKER 2024

BIODIVERSITY BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION

WORLD AIR QUALITY REPORT 2023

STATE OF GLOBAL CLIMATE REPORT 2023

GREEN CLIMATE FUND PROJECT

CONTENTS



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY108 - 121

BHARAT SEMICONDUCTOR RESEARCH CENTRE (BSRC)

OBELISKS

SANGAM: DIGITAL TWIN INITIATIVE

WOMEN EXPORTERS IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY (WEIDE) FUND

INDIA'S SECOND SPACEPORT

GENE THERAPY FOR HAEMOPHILIA A

E-KISAN UPAJ NIDHI

METHANESAT

NITI FOR STATES' PLATFORM

INDIA'S FIRST AI TEACHER "IRIS"

YAOUNDE DECLARATION

INS TUSHIL

REVAMPED PHARMACEUTICALS TECHNOLOGY UPGRADATION ASSISTANCE SCHEME

PB-SHABD

INTERNET IN REMOTE TRIBAL VILLAGES (VSAT)

PUSHPAK REUSABLE LAUNCH VEHICLE (RLV)

TATA CUMMINS OPENS HYDROGEN ENGINE FACILITY



CSAT122- 125

HCF & LCM



ETHICS126 - 129

ETHICS



TOPICS OF THE MONTH130 - 141

GOOD FENCES MAKES GOOD NEIGHBOURS

A WOMAN WITHOUT EDUCATION IS LIKE A BANYAN TREE WITHOUT ROOTS OR LEAVES:
UNVEILING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION

- DR. Alexander Jacob IPS

FORESTS ARE THE BEST-CASE STUDIES FOR ECONOMIC EXCELLENCE

- DR. Babu Sebastian

INSPIRATION FOR CREATIVITY SPRINGS FROM THE EFFORT TO LOOK FOR THE MAGICAL
IN THE MUNDANE

-DR. G. Prasanna Kumar IAS



MODEL QUESTION PAPER - MCQ142 - 147

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A collection of historical artifacts is arranged on a surface. On the left is a brown leather canteen with a metal cap. In the background, a sword with a dark hilt and a scabbard lies horizontally. Below the sword is a rolled-up scroll in reddish-brown leather. The foreground features an old, detailed map with a grid. Scattered on the map are several pieces of jewelry: a gold chain, a silver ring with a dark stone, and a small key.

HISTORY- ARTS AND CULTURE



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AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS
ANCIENT ART FORM**

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY:
TRACING THE ROOTS OF MARCH 8
CELEBRATIONS**

THE ORIGINS OF EASTER SYMBOLS

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GANDHI AND TAGORE: AN EVOLVING
FRIENDSHIP AMID DISAGREEMENTS**

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USHA MEHTA AND CONGRESS RADIO**



PAKISTAN NATIONAL DAY CELEBRATIONS IN DELHI: UNDERSTANDING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAHORE RESOLUTION

A new government in Pakistan is looking to engage with India in a “low-key and low-risk” manner, leading to the decision to celebrate Pakistan National Day in New Delhi after a four-year hiatus due to the Covid-19 pandemic and strained diplomatic relations.



The Lahore Resolution's adoption marked a pivotal moment in South Asian history, shaping Pakistan's identity and its relationship with India. Its observance in New Delhi reflects ongoing diplomatic engagements between the two nations.

The Lahore Resolution of 1940

The Lahore Resolution, adopted during the All-India Muslim League's general session in Lahore from March 22 to March 24, 1940, called for an independent state for India's Muslims. While the term 'Pakistan' was not explicitly mentioned, Pakistan commemorates this event as its National Day.

Significance and Controversies

The resolution's wording regarding “Independent States” and regions where Muslims were in a majority led to debates about whether it advocated for one or two separate nations. Despite controversies, Pakistan views it as the foundational moment for its creation.

Observance in New Delhi

Pakistan National Day is typically celebrated at the Pakistan embassy complex in New Delhi around March 23. The event includes the playing of national anthems, speeches by diplomats, and the presence of foreign dignitaries and Indian officials.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Lahore Resolution: A Call for a Separate Muslim State

The Lahore Resolution, passed by the All-India Muslim League in Lahore during March 1940, marked a turning point in Indian history. It called for the creation of independent states for Muslim-majority areas in British India.

Key Points:

- Demand for a Separate State: Though the word “Pakistan” isn't mentioned, the resolution proposed carving out geographically unified regions with Muslim majorities (North-Western and Eastern zones) into independent states.
- Internal Disagreement: While the resolution gained traction, prominent Indian Muslims like Abul Kalam Azad favored a united India.

Resolution Details:

- The document emphasized creating autonomous and sovereign states in Muslim-majority areas.
- It also demanded safeguards for Muslim minorities in other parts of India.

Lead-up to the Resolution:

- Prior to the 1930s, Muslims primarily sought better representation within a united India.
- The 1935 Government of India Act granting separate electorates was a step in that direction.
- The resolution came shortly after the deadly Khaksar tragedy, where British forces fired on a Muslim independence group in Lahore. This event likely influenced the growing Muslim separatist sentiment

GI TAG GRANTED TO MAJULI MASKS OF ASSAM: EXPLORING THE HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS ANCIENT ART FORM

Majuli masks, a traditional art form from Assam, have recently received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag from the Indian government. This recognition highlights the unique history and cultural importance of these masks, which have been crafted in Assam's sattras (monasteries) since the 16th century.



Historical Context

The tradition of making Majuli masks dates back to the 16th century, originating in the sattras of Majuli, the largest river island globally and a hub of Assam's neo-Vaishnavite tradition. These masks hold significance in depicting characters from bhaonas, theatrical performances with devotional messages under the neo-Vaishnavite tradition.

Significance of the GI Tag

The GI tag acknowledges the distinctive qualities and origins of Majuli masks, serving as a trademark that protects their authenticity and heritage. It also opens up opportunities for wider exposure and commercial growth of this centuries-old art form.

Craftsmanship and Materials

Majuli masks are meticulously crafted using materials like



bamboo, clay, dung, cloth, cotton, and wood, reflecting the rich natural resources available in the riverine surroundings of Majuli. They vary in size and complexity, from masks covering just the face (mukh mukha) to those enveloping the entire head and body of performers (cho mukha).

Role of Sattras in Preserving the Art

Sattras, established as centers of religious, social, and cultural reform by Srimanta Sankardev and his disciples, play a crucial role in preserving traditional arts like mask-making. These institutions, including Samaguri Sattrra, Natun Samaguri Sattrra, Bihimpur Sattrra, and Alengi Narasimha Sattrra, have been instrumental in nurturing and sustaining the mask-making tradition.

Contemporary Adaptations

In recent years, efforts have been made to modernize the use of Majuli masks beyond their traditional context in bhaonas. Initiatives include incorporating masks into cultural events, exhibitions, and even international platforms like the British Museum. This modernization aims to make the art form economically viable for artists while preserving its traditional essence.

The GI tag for Majuli masks not only celebrates their historical roots and cultural significance but also paves the way for their continued preservation and evolution in the contemporary world.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

What is a GI Tag?

Imagine a special label that guarantees a product's authenticity and unique qualities come from a specific place. That's a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in a nutshell. It's a sign or name linked to a particular geographical location, like a region, town, or country.

Ensuring Quality and Originality

GI tags prevent anyone outside the designated area from using the famous product name. This protects consumers and producers alike. Consumers get genuine products with the expected quality, while producers benefit from the reputation built around the GI-protected name. Think of it as a shield against imitations!

GI Registration: Safeguarding for a Decade

A GI tag is like a legal shield for ten years. The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, oversees the registration process in India.

International Recognition: Agreements and Laws

GI tags are not just a local concept. The World Trade Organization (WTO) Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) ensures international recognition and protection for these tags. Additionally, the Paris Convention reinforces the importance of safeguarding geographical indications as intellectual property.

HISTORICAL ORIGINS OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY: TRACING THE ROOTS OF MARCH 8 CELEBRATIONS

Early Initiatives in the United States

International Women's Day (IWD) traces its origins back to the early 20th century when the Socialist Party of America designated February 28, 1909, as National Woman's Day. This commemoration honored the 1908 garment workers' strike in New York, where women protested against harsh working conditions. Subsequently, the last Sunday of February became a symbolic day for women's rights activism.



First Wave of Feminism

The early 19th century witnessed the emergence of the First Wave of Feminism, marked by campaigns for women's suffrage, fair wages, and fundamental rights. Pioneers like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott in the United States advocated for gender equality, laying the groundwork for future feminist movements.

International Advocacy for Women's Rights

The idea of an International Women's Day was proposed by

Clara Zetkin, a prominent socialist feminist from Germany, during the 1910 International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen. Zetkin envisioned a unified global celebration to press for women's demands, including the right to work, vote, receive education, and combat discrimination.

March 8 as a Global Benchmark

Russian women's protests on February 23, 1913 (Julian calendar) against World War I and food shortages catalyzed the adoption of March 8 (Gregorian calendar) as the universal date for International Women's Day. These protests, notably in 1917, contributed to significant social and political changes, including women gaining the right to vote in Russia.

Contemporary Significance

Over the decades, International Women's Day has evolved into a symbol of women's achievements and ongoing struggles for gender equality worldwide. Recognized by the United Nations since 1975, March 8 serves as a platform to honor women's contributions and advocate for their rights in various spheres of life.

Continued Advocacy and Commemoration

The proclamation of March as 'Women's History Month' by the Barack Obama administration in 2011 further underscores the enduring significance of International Women's Day. It remains a pivotal moment to reflect on women's progress, address existing challenges, and work towards a more equitable society for all genders.



THE ORIGINS OF EASTER SYMBOLS

Easter Sunday is a significant day of celebration for Christians worldwide, marking the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion on Good Friday. Various traditions and symbols have become associated with Easter over time, reflecting both religious and cultural influences.



Historical Significance of Decorative Eggs

The tradition of decorating eggs during Easter has ancient roots, possibly dating back to the 13th century. Eggs, symbolizing fertility and new life, became a part of Easter

celebrations. Originally, eggs were decorated using natural dyes like beetroot, and flower petals were sometimes added for decoration.

Evolution of Chocolate Eggs

Chocolate eggs, now a staple of Easter celebrations, have a more recent history. Chocolate was introduced to Europe in the 17th century from Central and South America. By the 20th century, chocolate had become more accessible and affordable, leading to the tradition of chocolate eggs during Easter.

Easter Bunny and its Origins

The Easter Bunny, often associated with the delivery of Easter eggs, has origins traced back to Germany. The concept of the Easter Bunny laying brightly colored eggs for children to find on Easter Sunday spread to the United States with German immigrants in the early 18th century. In England, Queen Victoria's participation in egg hunts as a child further popularized this tradition.

Symbolism of Rabbits and Spring

Rabbits are symbolic of fertility and the arrival of Spring, aligning with Easter's themes of new life and rebirth. The association of rabbits with Easter iconography, including painted eggs, reflects these deeper connections to nature and seasonal renew

THE INAUGURAL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN GANDHI AND TAGORE: AN EVOLVING FRIENDSHIP AMID DISAGREEMENTS

In March 6, 1915, Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore first crossed paths, marking the commencement of a friendship that persisted until Tagore's passing in 1941. This significant event is annually celebrated in Santiniketan on March 10.



The Impact of Gandhi's Visit

Shortly after Gandhi's return from South Africa, he spent nearly a month in Santiniketan, leaving a lasting impression on Tagore's educational institution. To honor this encounter, Santiniketan observes 'Gandhi Punyaha Din' on March 10,

symbolizing Gandhi's teachings on self-reliance.

Contextual Background of the Meeting

At the time of their first meeting, Tagore had already gained global recognition, having received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. On the other hand, Gandhi was on the path to becoming the revered leader he would eventually be. Despite their differing trajectories, both figures were aware of each other's work through mutual acquaintances and publications.

Blossoming Friendship and Intellectual Debates

Following their initial encounter, Gandhi and Tagore developed a close friendship, engaging in intellectual debates on various subjects. Their discussions often revolved around fundamental philosophical questions, leading to debates on political, social, and economic matters.

Respecting Differences and Finding Common Ground

Despite their disagreements, Gandhi and Tagore maintained deep respect for each other. Their friendship was characterized by mutual admiration, with Tagore referring to Gandhi as "Mahatma" and Gandhi addressing Tagore as "Gurudev." Their relationship reflected a blend of differing perspectives and shared values, showcasing the richness of intellectual discourse and friendship.

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ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948)

Gandhi, born in Porbandar on October 2, 1869, received his early education in Porbandar before traveling to England for legal studies in 1888. Upon qualifying as a barrister-at-law, he returned to India briefly before heading to South Africa in April 1893. His experiences in South Africa shaped his approach towards India's independence, leading him to advocate for it through Satyagraha.

Rabindranath Tagore

Tagore, born in Calcutta, began writing poetry at a young age. His early life events, including losing his mother in 1873 and his return from England without a degree in 1880, marked significant phases. In 1901, he settled in Santiniketan and embarked on educational experiments. His achievements, such as receiving a D.Litt. Degree from Calcutta University in 1913 and the Nobel Prize for Gitanjali in 1914, highlight his literary and academic contributions.

Philosophy of Gandhi

Gandhi's philosophy, explored across numerous writings, centers on concepts like Satyagraha, truth, nonviolence, and self-suffering. His approach to conflict resolution, emphasizing negotiation, love, and persistence without violence, became instrumental in India's independence movement. Gandhi's views on truth, love, social reform, religion, economics, politics, and God reflect his holistic worldview aimed at individual and societal transformation.

Philosophy of Tagore

Tagore's philosophical insights, found in his extensive literary works, emphasize God as a creative person, love as a unifying force, and human nature's dual aspects – earthly and divine. His ideas on nature, knowledge, sadhana (realization of life), religion of humanity, social philosophy, and education underscore a harmonious integration of individual growth with universal values, ecological awareness, and cultural unity.

Synthesis of Philosophical Ideas

Both Gandhi and Tagore critique modern materialism, advocate spiritual dimensions of life, and emphasize environmental protection. Influenced by diverse cultures and religions, they reinterpret ancient Indian ideals to address contemporary challenges. Their philosophies resonate with the Upanishadic vision of a universal soul, fostering love, compassion, and interconnectedness among all beings and the cosmos.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE OSCARS: FROM INCEPTION TO GLOBAL PHENOMENON

The Genesis of the Academy Awards

Initially conceptualized to promote a positive image of Hollywood amidst scandals, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences was founded in 1927. The first Oscars ceremony in 1927 was a modest affair, lasting only 15 minutes and not broadcast on any mass medium.

Transition to Global Spectacle

The Oscars gained significance when they were first televised in 1953, transforming into an annual spectacle honoring the best in entertainment. This transition marked a shift in how Hollywood's achievements were recognized and celebrated on a global scale.

The Oscars' Prestige and Significance

The Oscars are viewed as the pinnacle of peer recognition in the film industry. Membership in the Academy is limited to film artists involved in theatrically-released motion pictures, and nominations are decided by Academy members across various branches. Winning an Oscar often translates to a

significant career boost and international recognition.

Criticisms and Controversies

Despite its prestige, the Oscars have faced criticisms and controversies over the years. The #OscarsSoWhite movement highlighted issues of racial representation, prompting the Academy to introduce new inclusion standards and unconscious bias training. Additionally, controversies surrounding Oscar campaigns, such as Harvey Weinstein's tactics, have raised questions about the selection process and the perceived objectivity of the awards.

Impact and Influence

Despite criticisms, an Oscar win can elevate not just individual careers but also entire industries, as seen with films like "Parasite," which brought Korean cinema into global focus. The Oscars continue to be watched eagerly worldwide, reflecting both the glamour of Hollywood and ongoing discussions about diversity and inclusion in the film industry.

NANA JAGANNATH SHANKARSETH: THE RENOWNED SOCIAL REFORMER AND PHILANTHROPIST

Nana Jagannath Shankarseth, born on February 10, 1803, and passing away on July 31, 1865, is revered as an eminent social reformer, educationist, and philanthropist. His contributions to Mumbai's development and social fabric have earned him the title of the "architect" of the city.

Contributions to Education and Community Leadership

Shankarseth's commitment to education was unparalleled. He donated family-owned land for educational institutions and championed the cause of educating girls and women. His initiatives led to the establishment of the prestigious

Elphinstone College, reflecting his belief in the transformative power of education.

Legacy in Healthcare and Infrastructure

Shankarseth's influence extended to the healthcare sector. He played a crucial role in the establishment of Grant Medical College, one of the oldest medical institutions in South Asia. Additionally, his contributions to cultural institutions like the Dr Bhau Daji Lad Museum and the construction of temples underscore his multifaceted contributions to society.

Role in the Development of Mumbai's Railway System



Shankarseth's vision extended to infrastructure development, particularly in the realm of railways. His involvement in the early stages of India's railway system, alongside luminaries like Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, contributed significantly to the growth of Mumbai's transportation network.

Recognition and Renaming of Mumbai Central Station

The recent decision by the Maharashtra cabinet to rename

Mumbai Central station after Nana Jagannath Shankarseth reflects a broader effort to honor his legacy and promote Indian heritage. This initiative aligns with the goal of celebrating indigenous heroes and fostering cultural pride, as part of a larger political project.

SHAHEED DIWAS: BHAGAT SINGH'S STAND AGAINST A MERCY PLEA

March 23 marks Shaheed Diwas in India, commemorating the sacrifice of revolutionaries like Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev Thapar, and S Rajguru, who were hanged in 1931 for their resistance against British colonial rule.



Bhagat Singh's Trial and Rejection of Mercy

During Bhagat Singh's trial, his father Kishan wrote a mercy plea to the tribunal, seeking leniency for his son. However, Bhagat Singh vehemently opposed this plea, asserting his

independence and principles. He rebuked his father's plea, emphasizing that political activists should not seek legal reprieve but courageously face the consequences of their actions.

The Letter of Rejection

In a poignant letter to his father, Bhagat Singh expressed his astonishment and disappointment at the mercy plea. He viewed it as a betrayal of their shared ideals and principles. Bhagat Singh firmly believed that sacrificing his life for his principles was more valuable than seeking mercy at the cost of compromising his beliefs.

Legacy of Independence and Sacrifice

Bhagat Singh's unwavering stance against the mercy plea symbolizes the spirit of independence and sacrifice that defines Shaheed Diwas. His courage in the face of adversity continues to inspire generations, reminding us of the immense sacrifices made by freedom fighters in the struggle for India's independence.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Bhagat Singh's Ideology

1. Early Influences and The National College

- Bhagat Singh studied at the National College in Lahore, known for attracting revolutionary youth.
- Influenced by his history teacher, Jayachand Vidyalkar, he learned about revolutionary movements abroad (Italy, Ireland, Russia, China).
- Rejected a marriage proposal and dedicated himself to revolution.

2. Political Activism

- Joined the Hindustan Republican Association (HRA) through a letter from Professor Vidyalkar.
- Worked as a political worker in UP and ran a National School near Aligarh.
- Briefly worked for a socialist newspaper, "Vir Arjun," in Delhi.

3. The Navjawan Bharat Sabha

- A political forum for training and recruiting young revolutionaries.
- Promoted social education, Swadeshi, physical fitness, and an anti-colonial and secular ideology.
- Considered a stepping stone for joining the HRA.
- HRA aimed to overthrow British rule through armed revolution.

4. Avenging Lala Lajpat Rai's Death

- Bhagat Singh and colleagues planned to kill the British superintendent who ordered a police attack on Lala Lajpat Rai's anti-Simon Commission procession.
- Mistakenly killed a subordinate officer and escaped to Calcutta.

5. Bombing the Assembly

- Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt threw bombs in the Central Legislative Assembly to protest repressive bills and the death of Lala Lajpat Rai.
- They did not intend to harm anyone and aimed to create panic.
- Distributed leaflets explaining their actions and ideology.

6. The Defence of Terrorism

- The leaflets rejected violence as a core revolutionary principle.
- Advocated for social revolution based on justice and equality for laborers and peasants.
- Criticized the British Parliament and Indian leaders who collaborated with them.



- Emphasized the importance of revolution for achieving freedom and ending exploitation.

7. Bhagat Singh's Trial and Execution

- Bhagat Singh clarified his views on revolution during the trial.
- Rejected the judge's verdict and death sentence.
- Hunger strike to demand better prison conditions and recognition as political prisoners.
- Despite appeals from Indian leaders, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru, and Sukhdev were hanged on March 23, 1931.

8. Bhagat Singh's Atheism

- His writings, like "Why I am an Atheist," explain his rejection of religious beliefs.
- Influenced by socialist thinkers and critical thinking.
- Believed atheism allowed for a more courageous fight for justice without hope for an afterlife reward.
- Criticized religion for hindering progress and social change.

9. Thoughts on Social Revolution

- Bhagat Singh's socialist ideology was influenced by Marxism and communism.
- Advocated for a social revolution leading to a socialist society.
- Rejected the idea of gradual reform and peaceful transition.
- Envisioned a society with no poverty, social classes, or exploitation.
- Believed in the necessity of violent revolution to overthrow the existing order.

10. The Rejection of Congress Leadership

- Criticized the Congress for its non-violent methods and limited goals.
- Believed the Congress represented the bourgeoisie, not the workers and peasants.
- Advocated for a working-class revolution led by a disciplined and organized communist party.
- Emphasized the importance of educating and mobilizing the masses.

11. Conclusion

- Bhagat Singh's ideology combined revolutionary nationalism, atheism, and socialism.
- He remains a significant figure in India's freedom struggle and continues to inspire movements for social justice.

The Origins of Vaikom Satyagraha

Vaikom, nestled in the princely state of Travancore, witnessed a historic non-violent protest starting on March 30, 1924, marking the onset of temple entry movements across India. This satyagraha, within the broader nationalist movement, highlighted the pressing issues of untouchability and caste-based discrimination.



Contextualizing Early 20th Century Travancore

Travancore, with its entrenched feudal customs and caste-based hierarchy, posed significant challenges to social reform. While progressive measures like free primary education were introduced, caste prejudices and exclusions persisted, particularly regarding temple entry and public spaces.

The Rise of Vaikom Satyagraha

Ezhava leader T K Madhavan's advocacy for temple entry gained momentum post-Gandhi's Non-Cooperation Movement. The Indian National Congress (INC) entering the fray further galvanized the movement, leading to the historic Vaikom satyagraha with Gandhian principles at its core.

The Vaikom Satyagraha Movement

The satyagraha initially focused on opening roads surrounding the Vaikom temple to all, symbolizing the struggle against caste-based restrictions. Despite arrests and opposition, protesters persisted, drawing support from national leaders like Periyar and C Rajagopalachari.

Legacy and Impact

While the satyagraha's ultimate compromise fell short of some expectations, it laid the groundwork for significant reforms. The Temple Entry Proclamation of 1936 marked a crucial victory against caste-based barriers, showcasing the efficacy of civil disobedience as a tool for social change.

Reflections on Vaikom Satyagraha's Centenary

A hundred years later, the Vaikom satyagraha stands as a testament to the resilience and unity forged in the face of entrenched social hierarchies. Its legacy continues to resonate, reminding us of the ongoing struggle against discrimination and the enduring power of non-violent resistance in India's history.



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THE HOLI FESTIVAL

The Holi Festival, nestled in the vibrant array of Indian festivals, is a captivating celebration that epitomizes love and joy through a riot of colors. It provides a delightful opportunity for revelry with loved ones while symbolizing the triumph of good over evil. With deep-rooted traditions in India, Holi is marked by exuberant festivities and a kaleidoscope of hues that showcase its extraordinary vibrancy. The festival is rooted in the tale of the burning of demoness Holika and the protection of Prahlada by Lord Vishnu, narrating a chapter of triumph and the essence of colors in Indian history.



The Essence of Holi Festival in India

Holi, a festival heralding spring and the end of winter, embodies themes of forgiveness and reconciliation, fostering bonds and healing rifts. It commences on the eve of Purnima (full moon day) in the Hindu calendar month of Phalguna, unfolding in two parts: Holika Dahan or Chhoti Holi and Dhuleti, Dhulandi, or Phagwah. Holika Dahan, marked by religious rites around bonfires, signifies the submission of evil to a greater and eternal power.

The Significance of Holika's Burning

Holika Dahan holds auspicious significance in the jubilant festival of Holi. "Holika," the demon king Hiranyakashipu's sister, symbolizes inner evil, while "Dahan" signifies surrender to divine authority. In Indian mythology, Holika met her demise in flames as she attempted to harm Prahlada, a devotee of Lord Vishnu. Thus, annually, people worldwide burn effigies of Holika, representing their internal demons, in sacred fires, signifying purification.

Understanding the Origins of Holi Celebration

Delving into the historical narrative of Holi, as depicted in the Hindu scripture Bhagavata Purana, reveals the tale of Hiranyakashipu, a tyrannical demon king who, granted immense powers, demanded sole worship. However, his son Prahlada remained devoted to Lord Vishnu, defying his father's commands. Enraged, Hiranyakashipu subjected Prahlada to brutal punishments, culminating in Holika, Prahlada's malevolent aunt, luring him onto a pyre. Miraculously, Prahlada survived while Holika perished. At this twilight moment, Vishnu intervened, vanquishing the king, signifying the genesis of Holi's celebration.

Insights into Holi Traditions and Practices

While the essence of Holi remains universal, its observance varies across regions. Central to the festivities is the use of "Gulal" or dry colored powders, embodying the festival's vivid spirit. Watercolors also add to the merriment. The concoction of "Gulal" often involves custom-made blends, transitioning from traditional elements like flowers and plant-based dyes to modern chemical sources. This shift reflects evolving celebratory practices.

Diverse Celebrations Across India

India's diverse landscape mirrors varied Holi celebrations. Originating in Barsana, Uttar Pradesh, Holi boasts regional nuances such as "Lathmar Holi" in Barsana, where women playfully chase men with sticks, and "Khadi Holi" in Uttarakhand's Kumaon region, characterized by folk songs and traditional attire. Punjab's "Holi Mohalla" showcases martial arts, while Odisha's "Dol Jatra" and West Bengal's "Basant Utsav" welcome spring with fervor. These regional flavors add richness to Holi's tapestry of celebrations.

Indulging in Culinary Delights

No Holi celebration is complete without indulging in delectable treats. From Gujiya and Dahi Vada to Kesari Malai Peda and Bhaang-infused delights, the festival's culinary delights amplify joyous gatherings. These traditional dishes not only satiate hunger but also serve as conduits for sharing tales of Holi's vibrancy and camaraderie.

In essence, Holi transcends mere colors; it embodies a tapestry of traditions, narratives, and culinary delights, uniting people in a vibrant celebration of love and togetherness.

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AE WATAN MERE WATAN: THE STORY OF USHA MEHTA AND CONGRESS RADIO

The Context of the Quit India Movement

In 1942, during the fervor of the Quit India Movement, where Mahatma Gandhi's call for freedom echoed across the nation, Usha Mehta and Congress Radio emerged as beacons of resistance against British colonial rule.

Usha Mehta: A Gandhian at Heart

Usha Mehta, embodying Gandhian principles, dedicated herself to the cause of independence at a young age, becoming a pivotal figure in the Quit India Movement.



Setting Up Congress Radio: A Risky Endeavor

Amidst severe restrictions on communication imposed by the British, Usha Mehta and her associates clandestinely established Congress Radio, defying the ban on amateur radio licenses and risking severe repercussions.

Broadcasting the Spirit of Freedom

Congress Radio's broadcasts resonated deeply with Indians, providing vital news, political speeches, and rallying cries for independence, galvanizing the masses during the tumultuous times of the Quit India Movement.

The Triumph and Fall of Congress Radio

Despite evading detection for a considerable period, Congress Radio's operations were eventually uncovered by authorities, leading to the arrest of its operators, including Usha Mehta, marking the end of a remarkable chapter in India's struggle for freedom.

Legacy of Usha Mehta

Usha Mehta's unwavering commitment to the cause of independence, her resilience in the face of adversity, and her enduring Gandhian values continue to inspire generations, earning her accolades such as the Padma Vibhushan and a place in India's nationalist history.



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A vintage, sepia-toned map of the world, likely from the 17th or 18th century, featuring a grid of latitude and longitude lines. The map is partially obscured by a magnifying glass in the upper right and a compass in the lower right. The word "GEOGRAPHY" is printed in large, bold, black letters across the center of the map. The map shows continents like Africa, Europe, and Asia, and oceans like the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific. Various geographical features and names are labeled in Latin and other languages.

GEOGRAPHY



**PANCHESHWAR MULTIPURPOSE
PROJECT (PMP)**

AGALEGA ATOLL (MAURITIUS)

SEAMOUNTS

CAVUM CLOUDS

ANTHROPOCENE EPOCH

ASTRONOMICAL GRAND CYCLES

GHOST PARTICLES

BARBERTON GREENSTONE BELT

'SHIVA' AND 'SHAKTI,' EARLIEST

BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE MILKY

WAY MAGNETIC FOSSILS



PANCHESHWAR MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT (PMP)

CONTEXT: The recent Nepal-India official dialogue **did not address progress on the significant Pancheshwar Multipurpose Project (PMP)**, despite the signing of a long-term power-sharing agreement over a month ago.

The project **remains stalled due to disagreements over benefit sharing**, posing challenges to its initiation.

ABOUT THE PANCHESHWAR MULTIPURPOSE PROJECT (PMP):

It is a joint hydropower **initiative situated on the Mahakali River**, shared by Nepal and India. It is governed by the integrated **Mahakali Treaty signed in 1996**. The project aims to generate approximately **6,480 MW of energy**, with equal division between the two countries, and provide irrigation water for 130,000 hectares of land in Nepal and 240,000 hectares in India.

AGALEGA ATOLL (MAURITIUS)

CONTEXT: The Prime Ministers of India and Mauritius have **jointly inaugurated an airstrip and the St James Jetty on North Agaléga Island** in the Indian Ocean.

ABOUT AGALÉGA

It is an atoll, comprising two islands, North and South Agalega. It is governed by Mauritius and used by India for various purposes. Despite this, it remains under the sovereignty of Mauritius. **A 2015 memorandum of understanding on India-Mauritius military cooperation** envisaged developing the Agaléga islands for an Indian military base.

An atoll is a **ring-shaped coral reef**, island, or series of islets that encircle a lagoon, often found in warm, tropical waters.

SEAMOUNTS

CONTEXT: Researchers aboard the Schmidt Ocean Institute's Falkor research vessel have discovered four massive seamounts off the coast of Peru and Chile. The tallest of these underwater mountains rises over 1.5 miles (2.4 kilometres) from the seafloor, making it three times taller than the world's tallest building.

Detected through gravitational anomalies, these extinct volcanoes create subtle changes in the ocean's surface height.

Seamounts are **underwater mountains** formed through volcanic activity and are recognized as hotspots for marine life. Seamounts differ from Guyots, which are also formed from undersea volcanoes but were once above the surface of the ocean and have since submerged to form flat-topped undersea mountains.

CAVUM CLOUDS



CONTEXT: NASA's Terra satellite recently captured a **cluster of cavum clouds over the Gulf of Mexico off Florida's west coast**.

Cavum clouds are formations in the atmosphere that appear as if a large circle or ellipse has been neatly cut from the clouds, leaving feathery wisps in the middle of the hole. They are a **result of aeroplanes flying through banks of altocumulus clouds**, causing supercooled water droplets to freeze into ice crystals due to adiabatic expansion. The falling ice crystals leave a hole in the cloud layer, with wispy trails of precipitation visible in the centre known as **virga**.

ANTHROPOCENE EPOCH

CONTEXT: The **International Commission on Stratigraphy** rejected the proposal of the Anthropocene epoch after a committee of 18 scientists recently voted against it.

What is an Epoch?

An epoch is a **subdivision of geological time** that represents a distinct interval of time characterized by significant events or developments in Earth's history.

The Anthropocene epoch is a **proposed unit of geologic time** that marks a period during which human activities have had a **significant impact on Earth's climate and ecosystems**. It suggests a new epoch following the Holocene, with the concept coined in 2000 by **Dutch meteorologist Paul Crutzen and American botanist Eugene Stoermer**. The starting point of the Anthropocene is debated, with some proposing the **period after World War II** due to the "Great Acceleration" of human activities.

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ASTRONOMICAL GRAND CYCLES

CONTEXT: The Earth experiences climate fluctuations in a **2.4-million-year cycle**, discovered through geological sedimentary evidence in the deep ocean current. This cycle, known as “astronomical grand cycles,” is linked to the **orbits of Earth and Mars around the Sun**.

EXPLANATION:

The concept of the **Astronomical Grand Cycle (AGC)** suggests that the **gravitational interaction between Earth and Mars cyclically influences deep ocean currents**, leading to recurring patterns every 2.4 million years. This cycle is attributed to the **interference of gravity fields between the two planets**, causing a resonance that affects Earth’s orbit around the Sun.

The mechanism proposed for AGC highlights the **gravitational interplay between Earth and Mars as the primary driver**. Unlike the **Milankovitch cycles**, which are associated with Earth’s interactions with Jupiter and Saturn and coincide with the glacial and interglacial periods on Earth, the AGC specifically pertains to the interaction between Earth and Mars and its impact on deep ocean currents.

GHOST PARTICLES

CONTEXT: Astronomers analysing data from the **IceCube Neutrino Observatory in Antarctica** have **potentially detected the first evidence for astrophysical tau neutrinos**, nicknamed “ghost particles” due to their elusive nature.

- These subatomic particles interact minimally with matter, allowing them to travel vast distances without disturbance, making them valuable for tracing their origins in the universe.
- Astrophysical neutrinos, including tau neutrinos, originate from distant cosmic sources and are challenging to detect.

BARBERTON GREENSTONE BELT

CONTEXT: The oldest evidence of **earthquakes was discovered in 3.3 billion-year-old rocks** from Africa, indicating early plate tectonics.

WHAT IS THE BARBERTON GREENSTONE BELT?

The Barberton Greenstone Belt (similar to New Zealand’s geological features) is a geological formation in **southern Africa** (on the **eastern boundary of the Kaapvaal Craton** in South Africa.) that provides one of the **most extensive** geological records for Earth between **3.2 billion and 3.6 billion** years ago. It consists of ancient rocks and provides **evidence of early Earth conditions**, including signs of seismic activity, early plate tectonics, and potential impact on the evolution of life.

The Barberton Greenstone Belt’s outcrops were added to **UNESCO’s World Heritage Sites** list in 2008 under the name ‘Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains’.

‘SHIVA’ AND ‘SHAKTI,’ EARLIEST BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE MILKY WAY

CONTEXT: Astronomers have discovered **two ancient streams of stars, named Shakti and Shiva**, which are among the **earliest building blocks of the Milky Way galaxy**.

These streams, identified using data from the **European Space Agency’s Gaia telescope**, are believed to have **merged with the Milky Way around 12 billion years ago**.

Each structure contains stars with similar chemical compositions, **formed approximately 12-13 billion years ago and with a mass about 10 million times greater than our sun**.

Gaia, launched in 2013, has been instrumental in **mapping the Milky Way’s three-dimensional structure**, aiding astronomers in detecting structures like Shakti and Shiva. Further studies, including future Gaia surveys, are expected to provide additional insights into the formation and evolution of the Milky Way galaxy.

In Hinduism, the **union between Shiva and Shakti gave rise to the cosmos**. Identifying the Shakti and Shiva structures has helped to bring the **Milky Way’s turbulent earliest stages into focus**.

MAGNETIC FOSSILS

CONTEXT: Scientists from the **CSIR-National Institute of Oceanography, Goa**, have discovered a **50,000-year-old giant magneto fossil in the Bay of Bengal**, making it one of the **youngest magneto fossils found to date**.

Magneto fossils are fossilized **remains of magnetic particles created by magnetotactic bacteria**, which **align themselves along Earth’s magnetic field**.

These bacteria, first described in the 1960s, **create tiny iron-rich crystals of magnetite or greigite, aiding navigation in**

changing oxygen levels.

Using magnetic analyses and electron microscopy, scientists examined a sediment core from the Bay of Bengal, **revealing needle, spindle, bullet, and spearhead-shaped magnetofossils, alongside conventional ones**.

The **sediment’s origin was traced to river discharge**, which **supplied reactive iron**, combining with **organic carbon in low-oxygen conditions** to foster magnetotactic bacteria growth.



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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE





ARVIND KEJRIWAL'S ARREST: CAN A CHIEF MINISTER CONTINUE TO SERVE WHILE JAILED?"

E-EVIDENCE, NEW CRIMINAL LAW, ITS IMPLEMENTATION

INDIA'S BURGEONING DEATH PENALTY CRISIS

INDIA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

ELECTORAL BONDS, ALL DETAILS HANDED OVER TO EC: SBI CHAIRMAN

ON CROSS-VOTING IN RAJYA SABHA ELECTIONS

SC ENDS IMMUNITY FOR LEGISLATORS TAKING BRIBES

SC TO HEAR PLEA TO INCLUDE CJI ON EC SELECTION PANEL

THE LONG ROAD TO REFORMING INDIA'S POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM

UTTARAKHAND BILL ON UNIFORM CIVIL CODE GETS PRESIDENT'S NOD

VULNERABLE TO CRITICISM

WHY THE SUPREME COURT HAS STAYED GOVT'S 'FACT CHECK UNIT' FOR NOW

WRONG MESSAGING



ARVIND KEJRIWAL'S ARREST: CAN A CHIEF MINISTER CONTINUE TO SERVE WHILE JAILED?"

CONTEXT: The Rouse Avenue Courts remanded Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) National Convener Arvind Kejriwal in Enforcement Directorate (ED) custody in connection with an excise policy-linked money laundering case till March 28.



STORY SO FAR: Arvind Kejriwal, Delhi Chief Minister and AAP leader, was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on charges of corruption and money laundering related to the government's excise policy for 2021-22, which was subsequently annulled. This arrest follows allegations that Kejriwal and other AAP leaders conspired with Bharat Rashttra Samithi legislator K. Kavitha for undue benefits in the formulation and execution of the excise policy. The ED's action has been contested by AAP, with claims that it is aimed at curbing Kejriwal's election campaigning and suppressing opposition voices.

LEGAL PROVISIONS REGARDING ARREST OF A SERVING CHIEF MINISTER IN INDIA:

1. No Immunity Under Article 361:

- Presidents and governors are immune from civil and criminal proceedings during their term under Article 361.
- However, this immunity does not extend to prime ministers and chief ministers.

2. Continuation as CM Amidst Arrest:

- Constitutional and legal experts assert that there is no provision preventing a chief minister from continuing in office while under arrest.
- A chief minister loses their position only if they lose the majority in the House, are asked to step down by their party, or resign.

3. Conviction Required for Disqualification:

- Section 8 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, mandates conviction for disqualification from holding public office.
- Arvind Kejriwal, not being convicted, can legally remain in office. However, managing duties from jail presents practical challenges.

4. Practical Challenges of Governing from Prison:

- Leading Cabinet meetings, consulting with colleagues, and approving minutes would be challenging from jail, subject to the jail manual's restrictions.

Court Judgments Regarding Public Office Holders:

- Manoj Narula versus Union of India Case:

- In this case, the Supreme Court emphasized the importance of constitutional morality, good governance, and public trust in holding public office.
- While legal provisions allow a chief minister to remain in office while under arrest, adherence to principles of governance and trust is crucial.

LEGAL MORAL AND POLITICAL ISSUES ARISING OUT OF THE SITUATION

Legal, moral, and political issues arise when a serving chief minister continues to function from jail after being arrested and placed in custody:

1. LEGAL ISSUES:

- Constitutional Rights: Questions may arise about the chief minister's constitutional rights and the extent to which they can exercise their powers while incarcerated.
- Judicial Process: Concerns about the impact of the ongoing legal proceedings on governance and decision-making, especially if the chief minister's attention is divided between legal defense and state affairs.
- Conflict of Interest: Potential conflicts of interest may emerge if the chief minister's actions while in custody are perceived to benefit them personally or their political agenda.

2. MORAL ISSUES:

- Ethical Conduct: The public expects elected officials to uphold high ethical standards, and governing from jail may raise doubts about the chief minister's ability to fulfill this expectation.
- Trust and Integrity: Maintaining public trust and integrity becomes challenging when a chief minister's actions are viewed through the lens of being under arrest and facing legal allegations.

3. POLITICAL ISSUES:

- Perception and Image: The perception of governance and leadership can be significantly impacted when a chief minister operates from jail, potentially affecting public confidence and support.
- Opposition Response: Political opponents may leverage the situation to question the legitimacy and effectiveness of the government, leading to increased political tension and polarization.
- Election Implications: The chief minister's arrest and subsequent actions may have repercussions in upcoming elections, influencing voter sentiment and political dynamics.

CONCLUSION: The arrest of a serving chief minister like Arvind Kejriwal and the potential continuation of their duties from jail raises complex legal, moral, and political issues. While legal provisions may allow for such a scenario, questions about constitutional rights, ethical conduct, and public trust in governance remain paramount. The situation underscores the need for transparent and accountable leadership, adherence to judicial processes, and a robust democratic framework to address challenges arising from such circumstances effectively.



E-EVIDENCE, NEW CRIMINAL LAW, ITS IMPLEMENTATION

CONTEXT: Some changes have been made in the provisions relating to electronic evidence in the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, which is to replace the Indian Evidence Act

BACKGROUND: The new Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) in India aims to streamline handling electronic evidence in court, but potential challenges include increased workload for cyber labs and the need for better preparedness among enforcement agencies.



WHY WAS THE BHARATIYA SAKHYA ADHINIYAM INTRODUCED?

The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) was introduced for several reasons:

- **Modernize the legal framework:** The Indian Evidence Act, 1872, predates the widespread use of electronic devices and communication. The BSA aims to update the legal system to handle modern forms of evidence like emails, digital documents, and online activity.
- **Improve clarity and consistency:** The BSA provides clearer definitions for key terms like “document” and “electronic record,” ensuring a consistent understanding of electronic evidence within the legal system.
- **Streamline admissibility:** The Act outlines specific procedures for admitting and presenting electronic evidence in court, making the process more efficient and reliable.
- **Increase the weight of electronic evidence:** By considering them primary evidence, the BSA elevates the importance of electronic records in legal proceedings, putting them on par with traditional physical evidence.
- **Ensure record integrity:** The Act introduces hashing to verify the authenticity of electronic records and prevent tampering, crucial for maintaining trust in their validity.

Therefore, the BSA aims to adapt the Indian legal system to the digital age by establishing clear guidelines and procedures for handling and utilizing electronic evidence in court. This ensures the effective use of such evidence while maintaining fairness and accuracy within the legal process.

IMPLEMENTING NEW CRIMINAL LAWS IN INDIA:

India's legal landscape is undergoing a significant transformation with the introduction of three new comprehensive criminal laws:

- **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS):** This law replaces the Indian Penal Code (IPC), aiming to modernize and streamline criminal offenses and punishments.
- **Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS):** This law replaces the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), focusing

on reforming investigation procedures, police functioning, and ensuring citizen rights during legal proceedings.

- **Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA):** This law replaces the Indian Evidence Act (IEA) and specifically addresses the handling and admissibility of electronic evidence in court.

These new laws are scheduled to come into effect on July 1, 2024, marking a substantial shift in the country's legal framework. However, it is important to note that Section 106(2) of the BNS, which mandated 10 years imprisonment for unreported fatal accidents, has been temporarily put on hold by the Central government.

FOCUS ON ELECTRONIC EVIDENCE:

The Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) represents a major step towards adapting the legal system to the digital age. It brings several key changes:

- **Clarity and Definition:** The BSA provides clearer definitions for terms like “document” and “electronic record,” ensuring a consistent understanding within the legal system. This includes examples of electronic records like emails, server logs, and digital documents stored on various devices.
- **Primary Evidence:** Unlike the previous act, the BSA recognizes electronic records as primary evidence, giving them the same weight and validity as traditional physical evidence in court.
- **Admissibility:** This act outlines specific procedures for admitting and presenting electronic evidence in court. This includes:
 - **Expert Certification:** Electronic records require a certificate signed by two individuals: one in charge of the device and an expert who verifies the record's integrity using hashing techniques.
 - **Hashing:** This process involves creating a unique digital fingerprint for the electronic record, ensuring its authenticity and preventing alterations.

CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

While the BSA brings significant advancements, it also presents some challenges:

- **Increased workload for cyber labs:** The requirement for expert certification for every electronic record might strain the resources of cyber labs, especially those understaffed or lacking the necessary infrastructure.
- **Need for awareness:** Private entities, such as those using CCTV footage for security purposes, need to be educated about secure practices like encryption to ensure the admissibility of their electronic records as evidence.
- **Transition and preparedness:** Enforcement agencies need to utilize the remaining time before July 1st to ensure they have the resources and infrastructure in place to handle the additional responsibilities arising from the BSA's implementation.

CONCLUSION: The introduction of these new criminal laws marks a significant effort to modernize and adapt India's legal system to the evolving landscape of crime and evidence in the digital age. However, addressing the potential challenges and ensuring a smooth transition are crucial for the successful implementation of these reforms.



INDIA'S BURGEONING DEATH PENALTY CRISIS

CONTEXT: Death penalty sentencing reform initiated by the Supreme Court of India has failed to percolate to trial courts.

BACKGROUND: India faces a crisis with its death penalty. The number of prisoners on death row reached a record high of 561 in 2023, while the Supreme Court acquitted over half of those reviewed, raising concerns about the fairness of sentencing. While a recent initiative seeks to reform death penalty sentencing, the high acquittal rate suggests deeper issues in the legal system, prompting the question of whether broader reforms are necessary to truly address the crisis.

SUPREME COURT VERDICTS ON DEATH PENALTY:

LANDMARK CASES:

- **Bachan Singh vs State of Punjab (1980):** Established the “rarest of rare” doctrine for capital punishment. Key points:
 - o **Strict Criteria:** The death penalty is reserved for the most extreme crimes.
 - o **Individualized Assessment:** Courts must weigh aggravating (severity of crime, motive) and mitigating factors (rehabilitation potential, mental state) for each defendant.
 - o **Proportionality:** The death penalty should only be used when no other punishment is sufficient.
- **Machi Singh vs State of Punjab (1983):** Clarified the “rarest of rare” doctrine. Key points:
 - o **Aggravating Circumstances:** Examples include brutality of the crime, motive, and victim vulnerability.
 - o **Mitigating Circumstances:** Rehabilitation potential, mental health, past record.

Recent Developments (September 2022):

- **Constitutional Bench Referral:** A Supreme Court bench referred questions regarding death penalty sentencing to a larger bench.
- **Key Issue:** Adequate time for collecting and

presenting mitigating evidence during sentencing. This suggests a potential concern that current procedures might not allow for full consideration of factors that could save a defendant from execution.

Additional Information:

- The Supreme Court hasn't affirmed any death penalty in 2023, highlighting a possible shift towards stricter application of the “rarest of rare” principle.
- The death penalty remains a controversial issue in India, with debates on deterrence, retribution, and the possibility of wrongful convictions.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF THE DEATH PENALTY

1. Deterrent Effect:

- Proponents argue capital punishment discourages potential criminals by showcasing the ultimate consequence

2. Retribution (Closure and Justice):

- Supporters believe the death penalty offers a sense of justice and closure for victims' families, reflecting the severity of the crime and holding perpetrators fully accountable.

3. Cost-Effectiveness (Debatable):

- Death penalty proponents argue that executions are cheaper than life imprisonment, considering the long-term costs of housing, feeding, and guarding inmates.
- However, opponents counter that lengthy court appeals and administrative procedures associated with capital punishment can be very expensive. Studies on the relative costs are inconclusive

4. Justice for Egregious Crimes:

- For some, the death penalty represents the only fitting punishment for the most severe crimes, such as mass murder, terrorism, or treason. It reflects the gravity of the offense and upholds societal values.
- This argument hinges on the concept of “just deserts” and proportionality in punishment.

What is Just Deserts and Proportionality in Punishment (in brief):

- **Just Deserts:** The idea that criminals “get what they deserve” for their wrongdoing. They should be punished in proportion to the severity of their crime.
- **Proportionality:** The severity of the punishment should match the seriousness of the crime. A minor offense shouldn't result in a harsh punishment, and a major crime deserves a significant consequence.
- Together, these concepts ensure fairness and avoid situations where someone gets an excessively harsh or lenient punishment.

5. Prevention of Recidivism:

- Executing a convicted criminal ensures they cannot commit further crimes, potentially increasing public safety.
- It's important to note that life imprisonment without parole can achieve the same goal.

6. Respect for the Law:

- Enforcing the death penalty demonstrates the power of the legal system and reinforces the seriousness of violating the law. This argument emphasizes upholding

the rule of law and deterring future crimes.

Global Considerations:

- The death penalty is legal in 56 countries but abolished in 108 (<https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/international>).
- There's a global trend towards abolition, with many countries citing concerns about wrongful convictions, lack of deterrence, and the inherent value of human life.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST DEATH PENALTY

1. Risk of Executing the Innocent:

- **Irreversible Error:** Capital punishment is final. Executing an innocent person is a permanent injustice with no chance of correction.
- **Flawed Justice System:** Wrongful convictions can occur due to mistaken eyewitness identification, faulty forensic science, or prosecutorial misconduct. The death penalty magnifies these errors.
- **DNA Exonerations:** DNA evidence has exonerated hundreds of death row inmates in the US alone, highlighting the risk of irreversible mistakes.



2. Lack of Deterrence:

- **Limited Evidence:** Studies show no conclusive link between the death penalty and lower murder rates.
- **Alternative Explanations:** Decreasing crime rates might be due to factors unrelated to capital punishment, like improved social conditions or better policing.
- **Focus on Rehabilitation:** Resources spent on capital punishment could be used for more effective crime prevention measures.

3. Discriminatory Application:

- **Racial Bias:** Race can influence who receives the death penalty. Minorities are often disproportionately sentenced to death compared to white defendants.
- **Socioeconomic Bias:** Defendants from lower socioeconomic backgrounds may have poorer legal representation, increasing their risk of a death sentence.
- **Arbitrary Application:** The decision to seek the death penalty can be subjective and influenced by factors unrelated to the crime itself.

4. Violation of Human Rights:

- **Right to Life:** The death penalty is the ultimate denial of the fundamental right to life.
- **Cruel and Inhuman Punishment:** Methods of execution can be painful and psychologically distressing, raising ethical concerns.
- **Contravenes International Law:** The death penalty is prohibited under some international human rights treaties.

5. Denial of Rehabilitation:

- **Potential for Change:** Some individuals convicted of crimes have the capacity for reform and rehabilitation.
- **Focus on Restorative Justice:** The justice system should consider opportunities for redemption and restorative justice for offenders.

6. Lack of Closure for Victims' Families:

- **Lingering Trauma:** The death penalty process can be lengthy and emotionally draining for victims' families, keeping the trauma alive.
- **Alternative Paths to Closure:** Support services and restorative justice programs can provide more meaningful closure for families than an execution.

7. Undermines Moral Authority:

- **State-Sanctioned Killing:** The death penalty weakens the state's moral high ground by resorting to the same violence it condemns.
- **Desensitizes to Violence:** Capital punishment can contribute to a culture of violence by normalizing state-sanctioned killing.

8. Effective Alternatives:

- **Life Imprisonment:** Life imprisonment without parole can achieve the goal of incapacitation without the ethical concerns of the death penalty.
- **Focus on Rehabilitation:** Resources can be directed towards programs that promote rehabilitation and reduce recidivism rates.
- **Restorative Justice:** Victims' families can have a voice in the justice process, potentially leading to a more healing outcome.

IS IT SEVERITY OF PUNISHMENT OR CERTAINTY OF PUNISHMENT A CRIME DETERRENT?

Research suggests that certainty of punishment is a more effective deterrent to crime than the severity of punishment

Certainty: When people believe they are more likely to be caught and punished for a crime, they are less likely to commit it in the first place. This is because the potential negative consequences become a stronger deterrent.

Severity: While harsh punishments may seem like a strong deterrent, studies haven't shown a clear link between severity and reduced crime rates. Criminals motivated by factors like desperation or anger might be less likely to consider the long-term consequences.

For Certainty:

- **Increased Awareness:** When law enforcement has a high success rate in solving crimes and apprehending criminals, it sends a message that crime is not tolerated and will be punished.
- **Psychological Impact:** The fear of getting caught, even if the punishment isn't severe, can be a significant deterrent for many potential offenders.

Limitations of Severity:

- **Focus on the Crime:** Criminals may be more focused on the immediate benefits of the crime than the potential punishment, especially if they believe they won't get caught.
- **Diminished Thinking:** Crimes committed in the heat of the moment or under the influence of drugs or alcohol might not involve a lot of rational calculation about consequences.

Additional Considerations:

- **Rehabilitation:** Focusing on rehabilitation programs alongside punishment can create a more effective justice system by reducing recidivism rates.
- **Social Factors:** Addressing underlying social issues like poverty and lack of opportunity can also play a role in preventing crime.

INDIA'S DEATH PENALTY CRISIS:

1. Failures in Sentencing Reform:

- **Data:** 2023 statistics from Project 39A show courts continue to disregard Supreme Court directions in "Manoj vs The State Of Madhya Pradesh" (May 2022) regarding mandatory information about the accused in sentencing.
- **Impact:** 86.96% of death sentences in 2023 lacked the required information, raising concerns about fairness.

2. High Court Reluctance to Confirm Sentences:

- **Trend:** Only one death sentence was confirmed by High Courts in 2023, while the Supreme Court confirmed none.
- **Historical Context:** Death Penalty India Report (2016) found only 4.9% of trial court sentences were confirmed at the appellate level between 2000-2015.
- **Commutations:** The Supreme Court frequently commutes death sentences to life imprisonment, highlighting concerns about the original sentencing.

3. Rising Acquittals by the Supreme Court:

- **Significance:** 2023 saw a significant increase in acquittals of death row prisoners, highlighting potential systemic issues.
- **Causes of Acquittal:** Fabricated evidence, manipulated reports, and tampered forensic evidence were cited in these cases.
- **Systemic Issues Ignored:** While the Court reprimands specific parties in acquittals, broader systemic problems are not addressed.



4. Urgency for Broader Reform:

- **Risk of Error:** The growing number of acquittals exposes the high risk of errors within the criminal justice system.
- **Need for Re-evaluation:** Repeated death row acquittals necessitate a re-evaluation of the death penalty's application in India.

5. Plight of Death Row Prisoners:

- **Psychological Impact:** Constant fear of execution, violence, and dehumanizing conditions in prisons cause lasting psychological harm.
- **Case of Suicide:** A death row prisoner in Yerwada jail tragically committed suicide in 2023 after six years of awaiting confirmation.
- **Ethical Concerns:** Subjecting individuals to dehumanizing punishment and unreliable processes raises ethical questions for society.
- **Prison policies segregate them from essential activities** such as work, education, and leisure, exacerbating their psychological distress.
- **The death row experience leaves lasting psychological ramifications, even after acquittal or commutation.**

6. Ineffectiveness of Current Approach:

- **Supreme Court's Initiative:** Convening a Constitution Bench to address sentencing reform is unlikely to be sufficient.
- **Limited Scope of Reform:** Focusing solely on sentencing reform ignores the wider issues in the entire death penalty process.
- **Project 39A Report:** Data highlights the disconnect between the Court's focus and the true scope of the crisis across various stages of the criminal justice system.

SIGNIFICANCE: A BROKEN SYSTEM IN DESPERATE NEED OF REFORM

India's death penalty crisis exposes a deeply flawed

system in urgent need of comprehensive reform. The high rate of acquittals on death row raises serious concerns about wrongful convictions and the fairness of the sentencing process. Flaws range from disregard for Supreme Court directives to fabricated evidence and a culture of fear and dehumanization for death row inmates.

Focusing solely on sentencing reform through a Constitutional Bench is unlikely to be enough. A broader overhaul is needed to address systemic issues across the entire criminal justice system, including:

- **Strengthening investigation and forensic procedures:** Combating fabricated evidence and ensuring the integrity of the evidence collection process.
- **Improving legal representation:** Guaranteeing access to quality legal aid for all defendants, regardless of socioeconomic background.
- **Enhancing court oversight:** Ensuring courts thoroughly examine all mitigating factors before reaching a death sentence.
- **Exploring alternatives to the death penalty:** Considering life imprisonment without parole as a punishment that protects public safety without the risk of irreversible errors.

CONCLUSION: The death penalty debate goes beyond deterrence and retribution. It's a fundamental question about the state's right to take a life and the fairness of a system riddled with errors. India must confront these complex issues head-on and prioritize a justice system that upholds the rule of law, protects the innocent, and offers a chance for rehabilitation. Only then can India emerge from this crisis with a justice system that truly serves all.

INDIA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

CONTEXT: India's criminal justice system, burdened by backlogs and resource constraints, struggles to deliver swift and fair justice, prompting ongoing reforms to address police practices, judicial delays, and rehabilitation efforts.

justice for all. However, the system faces challenges that raise concerns about fairness, efficiency, and upholding human rights.

MAIN PILLARS:

- **Police (Investigation):** While the police play a crucial role in investigating crimes, there are concerns about:
 - **Overcrowding and resource constraints:** Police stations are often understaffed and lack proper investigative resources, impacting the quality of investigations.
 - **Torture and custodial violence:** There have been allegations of police using torture to extract confessions, leading to unreliable evidence and human rights violations.
 - **False arrests:** Concerns exist about wrongful arrests, particularly targeting marginalized communities.
- **Judiciary (Adjudication):** The judiciary is overburdened with a massive case backlog, leading to delays in trials.
 - **Vacancies in judgeships:** A significant number of vacant judge positions contribute to delays and slow resolution of cases.
 - **Access to legal aid:** Many defendants, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds, struggle to afford proper legal representation, hindering their defense.



BACKGROUND: INDIA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM, CHALLENGES AND REFORMS

India's criminal justice system, a complex interplay between various institutions, strives to uphold the rule of law and deliver



- Prisons (Corrections): Indian prisons are often overcrowded and face issues with:
 - Poor living conditions: Overcrowding can lead to unhygienic conditions and inadequate healthcare facilities.
 - Rehabilitation vs. punishment: The focus might be more on punishment than on rehabilitation programs that could reduce recidivism rates.

LEGAL FRAMEWORK:

- **The Constitution:** The foundation of the system, it guarantees fundamental rights like the right to a fair trial (Article 21) and protection against arbitrary arrest (Article 22).
- **Indian Penal Code (IPC):** Defines crimes and prescribes punishments, but some argue it requires revision to reflect contemporary social realities.
- **Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC):** Establishes legal procedures for investigations, arrests, trials, and appeals. Recent amendments aim to streamline the process and expedite justice delivery.

STAGES OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROCESS:

1. Crime Reporting & Investigation (FIR): An FIR (First Information Report) is filed when a crime is reported. However, under-reporting of crimes, particularly against vulnerable sections of society, remains a concern.
2. Arrest & Detention: Legal safeguards like Article 22 exist to prevent arbitrary arrests. However, concerns persist regarding police exceeding their authority.
3. Charge Sheet & Bail: The police file a charge sheet with the court if sufficient evidence is gathered. The accused might be granted bail depending on the severity of the crime and flight risk.
4. Trial: This stage can be lengthy due to case backlogs. The quality of legal representation can significantly impact the

outcome.

5. Sentencing & Appeals: Sentences are pronounced based on the IPC and other relevant laws. The accused has the right to appeal in higher courts, but appeals can further extend the overall process.

STATISTICS HIGHLIGHTING CHALLENGES:

- National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data (2021):
 - Over 3.6 crore cognizable crimes were reported in India.
 - Conviction rate for crimes against women stands at a concerning 27.8%.
 - Pendency rate in subordinate courts is over 70%.

LOOKING AHEAD: REFORMS AND IMPROVEMENTS

- Police reforms: Improving investigative practices, addressing overcrowding, and sensitizing police forces to human rights are crucial.
- Judicial reforms: Filling vacancies, leveraging technology to expedite processes, and ensuring access to quality legal aid are essential.
- Prison reforms: Focusing on rehabilitation programs alongside punishment and improving prison conditions are necessary.
- Fast-track courts: Dedicated courts for specific crimes can help reduce case backlogs.
- Community policing: Encouraging citizen participation in crime prevention and community safety initiatives can be beneficial.

CONCLUSION:

India's criminal justice system is undergoing reform efforts, but significant challenges remain. By addressing these issues, India can work towards a more efficient, fair, and humane system that upholds the rule of law and delivers timely justice for all.



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ELECTORAL BONDS, ALL DETAILS HANDED OVER TO EC: SBI CHAIRMAN

CONTEXT: The State Bank of India (SBI) informed the Supreme Court of the “complete disclosure” of all the details regarding the purchase and encashment of electoral bonds in its possession to the Election Commission (EC) for publication on its website.

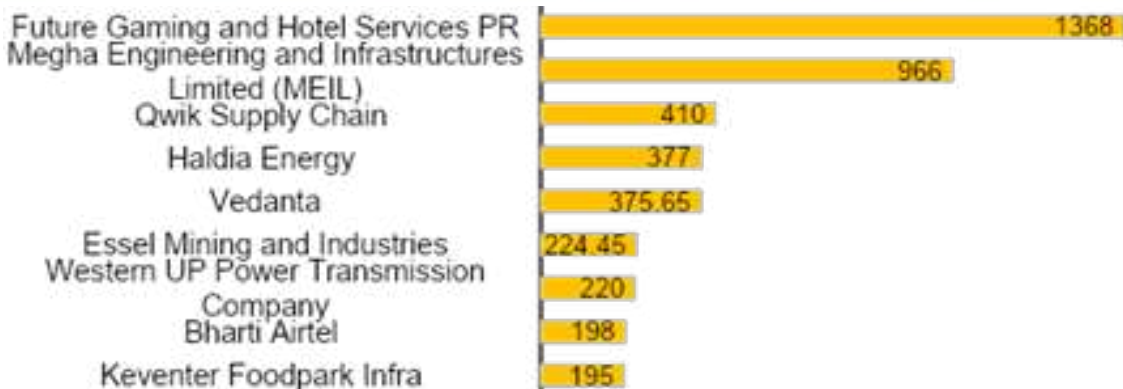


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of top 10 contributors and their respective contributions (₹ Cr.) via Electoral Bonds.

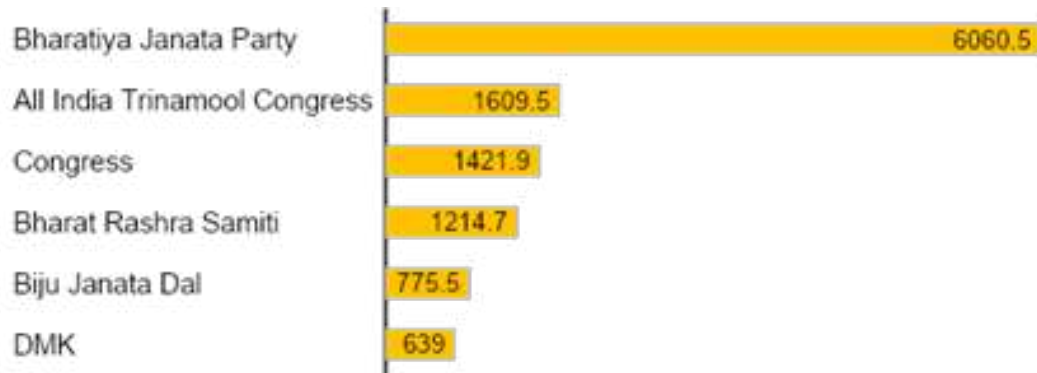


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of benefactors of Electoral Bonds and their receipts contribution (₹ Cr.). (Inset) Pie chart representation of share of funds received by different political parties via Electoral Bond Scheme.

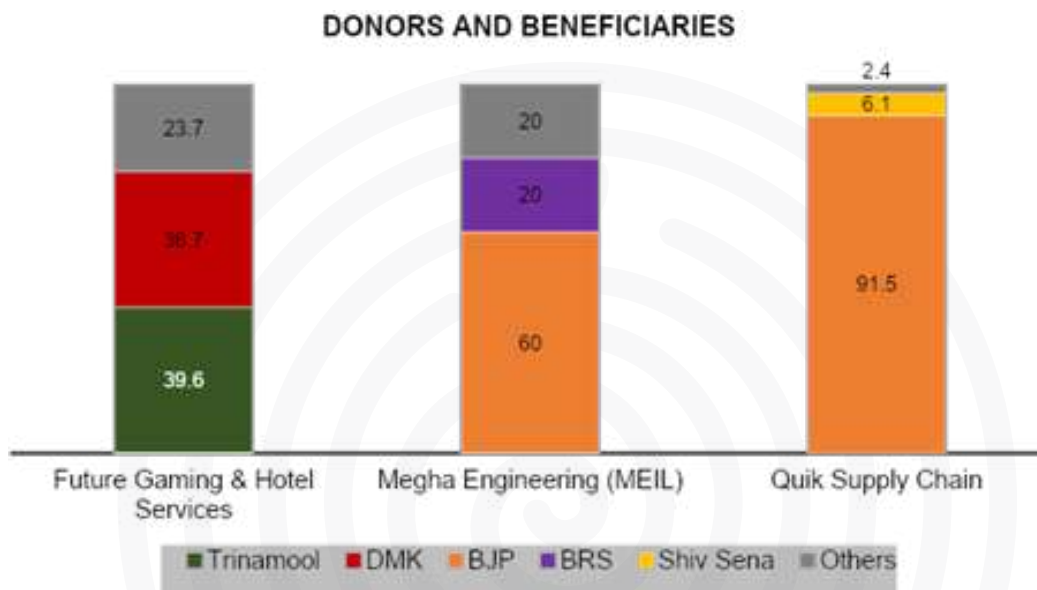


FIGURE: Column chart representation of share of different companies spending on Electoral Bonds Scheme.

BACKGROUND:

- Dinesh Kumar Khara, SBI chairman filed an affidavit stating the information provided to the poll body included details such as purchasers' names, bond denominations, specific bond numbers, parties that encashed the bonds, last four digits of their bank account numbers, and denominations and numbers of bonds encashed.
- However, SBI refrained from disclosure of the complete bank account numbers and KYC details, as making them public may compromise the cyber security of the bank accounts.
- **KYC details**
- The SBI assured the court that the KYC details were not necessary for identifying the parties who received anonymous funding through the bonds.
- On March 18, a five-judge Bench asked the bank to be "candid and fair" and not selective while directing it to make a "complete disclosure" of the data to the poll body.

- The bonds are only redeemable in the designated account of a registered political party.
- A person being an individual can buy bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals.
- A person being an individual can buy bonds, either singly or jointly with other individuals.
- Companies can also buy electoral bonds.

WHAT ARE ELECTORAL BONDS?

Electoral bonds are money instruments like promissory notes, which can be bought by companies and individuals in India from the State Bank of India (SBI) and donated to a political party, which can then encash these bonds.





A BRIEF TIME LINE OF ELECTORAL BOND SCHEME

- **Introduction (2017):** The scheme was introduced in the Union Budget 2017-18 by then Finance Minister Arun Jaitley. The stated aim was to increase transparency in political funding.
- **Functioning (2017-2024):**
 - Electoral Bonds functioned like bearer instruments (similar to promissory notes) with no record of the donor.
 - Indian citizens and companies could purchase them from designated State Bank of India branches.
 - Political parties could redeem these bonds for funds.
- **Challenges (Ongoing):**
 - The anonymity of donors raised concerns about the potential for corruption and undue influence on parties.
 - Questions were raised about shell companies using bonds for anonymous donations.
- **SUPREME COURT RULING (FEBRUARY 15, 2024):** The Supreme Court declared the Electoral Bond scheme unconstitutional. It cited anonymity provisions as violating transparency and fair election principles.
- **Aftermath (February - March 2024):**
 - The Supreme Court directed the State Bank of India to share donor and recipient details with the Election Commission of India (ECI).
 - Accordingly, SBI has given all details to election commission and have given an undertaking of Complete Disclosure as directed by Supreme Court of India.
 - The ECI is currently in the process of publishing this information on their website ECI disclosure of electoral bonds.

ELECTORAL BOND SCHEME OVERVIEW:

- Launched in 2018 to cleanse political funding in India.
- Aims to bring transparency to electoral funding.
- Described as an “electoral reform” in a cashless digital economy.

Amendments Made to the Scheme in 2022:

- Additional 15-day period specified for General Elections to Legislative Assemblies.
- Validity of Electoral Bonds extended to fifteen calendar days from the date of issue.
- Electoral Bonds deposited by eligible Political Parties credited on the same day.

Eligibility Criteria for Receiving Electoral Bonds:

- Political parties registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA, 1951).
- Parties must have secured at least 1% of votes polled in the last General Election to the Lok Sabha or State Legislative Assembly.

Key Features of Electoral Bonds:

- Issued exclusively in Indian Rupees, not purchasable using foreign currency.
- Not eligible for loans or pledges against assets like gold or securities.
- Non-cancellable and non-refundable once purchased.

Process of Purchasing Electoral Bonds:

- Available in denominations of Rs 1,000, Rs 10,000, Rs

1,00,000, Rs 10,00,000, and Rs 1,00,00,000.

- Purchasable digitally (NEFT/RTGS) or via demand draft/cheque.
- Sold at designated State Bank of India (SBI) branches following KYC norms.

Purchasing Period:

- Available for purchase in the first 10 days of January, April, July, and October each year, with additional periods during General Elections.



WHAT WAS THE NEED FOR ELECTORAL BONDS IN INDIA?

1. Transparency and Accountability:

- Electoral bonds aim to enhance transparency and accountability in political funding by enforcing donation amounts exceeding ₹2,000 via the banking system.
- This requirement necessitates the declaration of assets by political parties and enables traceability of funds.
- By introducing a formal banking channel for political donations, the government seeks to mitigate the risk of illegal funds entering the political sphere.

2. Prevention of Illegal Funds:

- The enforcement of donation amounts exceeding ₹2,000 through the banking system helps prevent the creation of illegal funds for future generations.
- It addresses concerns about the use of “black money” in electoral processes, ensuring that funds used for political activities are legitimate and traceable.

3. Investigations and Confiscation of Illegal Funds:

- Investigations conducted by the Election Commission and Income Tax Department have revealed instances of public funds being illicitly diverted and reintroduced into the political sphere.
- Measures such as the introduction of electoral bonds have facilitated proactive measures by authorities to address these issues.
- For example, reports indicated that a substantial sum of ₹1,500 crore was confiscated as a direct outcome of proactive measures implemented by the Election Commission and revenue authorities.

Thus electoral bonds are seen as a mechanism to modernize political funding, promote transparency, curb the influence of illegal funds, and uphold the integrity of electoral processes in India.

LEGAL CHANGES INTRODUCED TO FACILITATE ELECTORAL BONDS

- **Reduced individual contribution limit:** The Finance Act, 2017 lowered the maximum amount an individual can



donate to a political party directly from ₹20,000 to ₹2,000.

- Removed corporate contribution ceiling: An amendment to the Companies Act, 2013 removed the previous limit on corporate donations, which was 7.5% of the company's average net earnings over three years.
- Eliminated detailed reporting: Changes to the Income Tax Act, 1961 eliminated the requirement for companies to report details of individual political donations. Now, companies only need to disclose the total amount spent on purchasing electoral bonds.
- Broadened definition of "foreign" entity: Amendments to the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) expanded the definition of a "foreign" entity, potentially allowing more companies to donate through electoral bonds.

WHY DID SC STRIKE DOWN THE ELECTORAL BONDS SCHEME?

VIOLATION OF THE RIGHT TO INFORMATION:

- The court held that the scheme by permitting anonymous political donations infringed upon the fundamental right to information under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.
- It pointed out that such a right is not only restricted to fulfilling the freedom of speech and expression but plays a key role in furthering participatory democracy by holding the government accountable. Thus, it is not just a means to an end but an end in itself.
- It highlighted that economic inequality leads to differing levels of political engagement because of the deep association between money and politics.
- As a result, there is a legitimate possibility that financial contribution to a political party would lead to quid pro quo arrangements.

NOT PROPORTIONALLY JUSTIFIED TO CURB BLACK MONEY:

- Relying on the proportionality test laid down in its 2017 verdict in the KS Puttaswamy case which upheld the right to privacy, it underscored that the government did not adopt the least restrictive method to achieve its objective.
- As examples of such least restrictive methods, the Chief Justice cited the ₹20,000 cap on anonymous donations and the concept of Electoral Trusts which facilitate the collection of political contributions from donors.
- The court also agreed with the contentions of the petitioners that since the purpose of curbing black money cannot be traced to any of the reasonable restrictions elucidated under Article 19(2), it cannot be said to be a legitimate purpose for restricting the fundamental right to information.

RIGHT TO DONOR PRIVACY DOES NOT EXTEND TO CONTRIBUTIONS MADE:

- The court pointed out that financial contributions to political parties are usually made for two reasons - as an expression of support and two, as a quid pro quo measure.
- However, it underscored that huge political contributions made by corporations and companies should not be treated at par with financial contributions made by another section of the population: a student, a daily wage worker, an artist, or a teacher.
- Thus, the Chief Justice held that the right to privacy of political affiliation does not extend to those contributions, which may be made to influence policies. It only extends to contributions made as a genuine form of political support.

ON CROSS-VOTING IN RAJYA SABHA ELECTIONS

CONTEXT: The issue of cross-voting in Rajya Sabha elections has brought to light concerns about the integrity of the election process, prompting legal and constitutional considerations regarding party discipline and disqualification criteria for members of legislative assemblies.

BACKGROUND: Six Congress MLAs in Himachal Pradesh cross-voted and were disqualified under the Tenth Schedule, not for cross-voting, but for defying the party whip on other occasions, like being absent during the budget passage.

THE GIST

- As per Article 80 of the Constitution, representatives of each State to the Rajya Sabha are elected indirectly by the elected members of their Legislative Assembly.
- In order to rein in MLAs from cross-voting, an amendment to the Representation of the People Act, 1951 was carried out in 2003. Section 59 of the Act was amended to provide that the voting in elections to Rajya Sabha shall be through an open ballot.
- The Election Commission had clarified in July 2017 that the provisions of the Tenth Schedule, with respect to voting against the instruction of the party, will not be applicable for a Rajya Sabha election.



THE STORY SO FAR:

The Rajya Sabha elections in the States of Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Karnataka witnessed cross-voting by MLAs belonging to different parties. This has once again raised concerns about the sanctity of the election process.

HOW ARE RAJYA SABHA ELECTIONS HELD?

Election Process for Rajya Sabha Representatives:

1. **Constitutional Provision:** Article 80 of the Constitution mandates the indirect election of Rajya Sabha representatives by the elected members of their respective Legislative Assembly.
2. **Conditions for Polls:** Rajya Sabha polls are conducted only if the number of candidates exceeds the number of



vacancies in a particular state.

3. **Historical Precedent:** Until 1998, Rajya Sabha elections typically had predetermined outcomes, with candidates nominated by parties being elected unopposed based on their strength in the Assembly.
4. **Incidence of Cross-Voting:** The June 1998 Rajya Sabha elections in Maharashtra witnessed cross-voting, leading to the unexpected loss of a Congress party candidate.
5. **Amendment to Electoral Laws:** In response to cross-voting incidents, an amendment to the Representation of the People Act, 1951, was enacted in 2003, specifically targeting Rajya Sabha elections.
6. **Introduction of Open Ballot System:** Section 59 of the Act was amended to mandate voting in Rajya Sabha elections through an open ballot system.
7. **Party Accountability Measures:** Under the open ballot system, MLAs of political parties must show their ballot papers to their party's authorized agent. Failure to comply or showing the ballot to others results in vote disqualification.
8. **Restrictions on Independent MLAs:** Independent MLAs are prohibited from displaying their ballots to anyone, ensuring party discipline and preventing cross-voting practices.

1. WHAT DOES THE TENTH SCHEDULE STATE?

1. **Introduction and Purpose:** The Tenth Schedule was incorporated into the Constitution through the 52nd constitutional amendment in 1985, aiming to prevent political defections and ensure party discipline.
2. **Definition of Defection:** The Tenth Schedule stipulates that a member of a House of Parliament or State legislature who voluntarily relinquishes their party membership or votes against their party's instructions faces disqualification from the respective House.
3. **Role of Party Whip:** Instructions regarding voting are typically issued by the party whip, and failure to adhere to these instructions can lead to disqualification under the anti-defection law.
4. **Exemption for Rajya Sabha Elections:** Despite its application to other legislative proceedings, the Tenth Schedule does not extend to Rajya Sabha elections, as clarified by the Election Commission in July 2017.
5. **Supreme Court Clarification:** The Election Commission's decision aligns with Supreme Court judgments, emphasizing that the anti-defection provisions do not apply to Rajya Sabha elections.
6. **Absence of Party Whip in Rajya Sabha Polls:** Political parties are barred from issuing whips to their members for Rajya Sabha elections, ensuring that members have the freedom to vote without party instructions.

WHAT HAVE THE COURTS RULED?

Key Supreme Court Decisions:

1. Kuldip Nayar vs. Union of India (2006):

- Upheld the system of open ballot for Rajya Sabha elections, emphasizing transparency to combat corruption.
- Ruled that an elected MLA voting against their party

candidate in Rajya Sabha elections would not face disqualification under the Tenth Schedule.

- Stated that such actions may lead to disciplinary action by the political party, rather than disqualification from the House.

2. Ravi S. Naik and Sanjay Bandekar vs. Union of India (1994):

- Established that voluntarily giving up membership under the Tenth Schedule extends beyond formal resignation from the party.
- Clarified that a member's conduct, both inside and outside the house, could be scrutinized to determine if they have voluntarily given up membership.

3. Disqualification of Congress MLAs in Himachal Pradesh:

- Six Congress MLAs in Himachal Pradesh were disqualified under the Tenth Schedule.
- Disqualification resulted from defying the party whip and being absent during the passage of the Budget in the Assembly.

WHAT CAN BE THE WAY FORWARD?

Implications of Cross-Voting in Rajya Sabha Elections:

1. Importance of Free and Fair Elections:

- The Supreme Court upheld the open ballot system for Rajya Sabha elections to maintain the integrity and purity of the electoral process.
- However, instances of cross-voting have undermined the intended purpose of this procedure, posing a threat to democratic principles.

2. Challenges in Amending Laws:

- Despite the need for amendments to strengthen laws against cross-voting, expecting further legislative changes is unrealistic as ruling parties often benefit from such tactics.

3. Judicial Intervention to Safeguard Democracy:

- The Supreme Court, committed to protecting democracy, may initiate suo moto Public Interest Litigation (PIL) or consider appeals related to disqualifications resulting from cross-voting.
- In reviewing its previous rulings, particularly in cases like the Chandigarh Mayoral election, the court may reinforce its stance against threats to democratic processes.

4. Interpretation of Voluntary Membership:

- Voting against one's party in a Rajya Sabha election could be construed as voluntarily giving up party membership, potentially leading to disqualification under the Tenth Schedule.
- Such interpretations by the court may serve as a deterrent against future instances of cross-voting, preserving the integrity of the electoral system.

CONCLUSION: The issue of cross-voting in Rajya Sabha elections underscores the delicate balance between party discipline and democratic principles. Judicial oversight and clarity on disqualification criteria are essential to safeguarding the integrity of the electoral process and upholding democratic values.



SC ENDS IMMUNITY FOR LEGISLATORS TAKING BRIBES

CONTEXT: A seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court declared that Parliamentary privilege does not cover immunity from criminal prosecution against legislators charged with taking bribes to vote or speak in Parliament or State Legislative Assemblies.

Taking away privilege

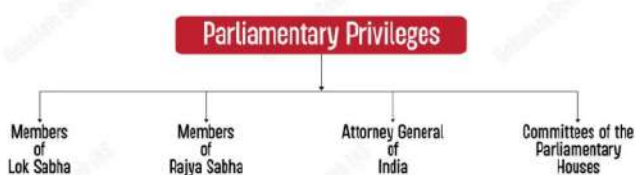
A look at the observations made by the seven-judge Bench of the Supreme Court in its unanimous verdict:



- The JMM bribery case judgment of 1998, granting lawmakers immunity from prosecution for bribery, had wide ramifications on public interest, probity in public life and parliamentary democracy
- A claim of immunity should fulfil the twofold test that it is tethered to the collective functioning of the House and that it is necessary for the discharge of the essential duties of a legislator
- The offence of bribery is complete at the point when the legislator accepts the bribe

BACKGROUND:

- **Overtaken Immunity:** The court reversed a previous ruling of 1998 in **P.V. Narasimha Rao v. State** that shielded lawmakers from prosecution for bribery if it influenced their vote or speech.
- **Bribery is a Crime:** Legislators can now be charged with bribery regardless of their subsequent actions in the House. **“Bribery is not protected by parliamentary privileges,”** the seven-judge Constitution bench led by Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, said in a landmark verdict.
- **Immunity Clarified:** Parliamentary privilege doesn't protect bribery, which undermines democracy.
- **Immunity Exceptions:** Immunity applies only to actions that enhance the House's dignity or free speech/protest rights.



PRIVILEGES IN THE INDIAN CONSTITUTION: KEY POINTS

SOURCE OF AUTHORITY:

- Articles 105 (Parliament) and 194 (State Legislatures) of the Indian Constitution provide the foundation for parliamentary privileges.
- No single comprehensive code governs these privileges. Instead, they are derived from five sources:
 - The Constitution itself (Articles 105 & 194)
 - Parliamentary statutes/laws passed by the Parliament
 - Rules and procedures established by each House (Lok Sabha & Rajya Sabha)
 - Unwritten parliamentary conventions and traditions
 - Judicial interpretations of the Constitution and related laws

TYPES OF PRIVILEGES:

- **Collective Privileges:** These apply to the entire House of Parliament and are essential for its functioning. Examples include:
 - Right to conduct its own business without external interference.
 - Power to punish members or outsiders for contempt of the House.
 - Right to exclude strangers from its proceedings.
- **Individual Privileges:** These safeguard individual members of Parliament and allow them to perform their duties effectively. Examples include:
 - **Freedom of Speech (Articles 105(1) & 194(1)):** Members can express their views freely in Parliament without fear of legal action.
 - **Immunity from Proceedings (Articles 105(2) & 194(2)):** Members cannot be sued or arrested for anything said or voted upon in the House.
 - **Exemption from Jury Service:** Members are not obligated to serve on juries.
- **PURPOSE OF PRIVILEGES:**
 - **Robust Lawmaking:** Free speech allows for open discussion and diverse perspectives, leading to well-considered legislation.
 - **Dignity and Authority:** Privileges uphold the respect and power of Parliament, fostering public trust in the legislative process.
 - **Member Independence:** Protection from lawsuits and intimidation safeguards members' ability to represent their constituents effectively.
- **ADDITIONAL POINTS:**
 - The Supreme Court ruling in the present case of **Sita Soren(2021 Rajya Sabha elections case)** clarified that parliamentary immunity does not extend to bribery.
 - The privileges come with a responsibility to use them appropriately and not for personal gain.

BACKGROUND OF THE BRIBERY & IMMUNITY CASE:

- **1993 Accusation:** Shibu Soren, JMM leader, and his MPs were accused of taking bribes to vote against a no-confidence motion in 1993.
- **1998 P.V. Narasimha Rao Case:** The Supreme Court, by a narrow 3:2 majority, granted immunity to the MPs in the 1998 P.V. Narasimha Rao case. This controversial ruling allowed immunity for bribery if it influenced votes in Parliament.
- **Sita Soren Case (2012):** MLA Sita Soren (JMM) faced bribery charges related to a 2012 Rajya Sabha election vote.
- **Jharkhand HC Refusal (2014):** Soren sought to quash the case citing Article 194(2) immunity, but the Jharkhand High Court denied her plea.
- **Appeal to Supreme Court (2019):** Soren appealed the High Court decision to the Supreme Court.
- **Larger Bench Consideration (2019):** The Supreme Court, recognizing the significance of the 1998 case, referred it to a larger bench due to its narrow margin and public importance.
- **Seven-Judge Bench Established (2023):** CJI



Chandrachud led a five-judge bench in September 2023, identifying key issues from the 1998 case and referring it to a new seven-judge bench for a final ruling. (This final ruling overturned the 1998 decision, as discussed previously).

ANALYTICAL DISCUSSION:

- **SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN THE INTERPRETATION:** The Supreme Court ruling marks a significant shift in the interpretation of parliamentary immunity regarding bribery allegations. By overruling the previous 1998 ruling, the court has clarified that lawmakers cannot claim immunity from prosecution for accepting bribes, irrespective of their subsequent actions in the legislative house. This move is crucial as it reinforces the principle that no one, including legislators, should be above the law.
- **INTEGRITY OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS:** The reasoning that freedom of speech and expression, including voting in the House, does not extend to giving or taking bribes, underscores the need to maintain the integrity of democratic institutions. This reasoning aligns with the broader objective of ensuring that lawmakers act in the interest of the public and not for personal gain.

- **TWO-FOLD TEST:** The court's assertion that immunity can only be claimed by a legislator in two circumstances.
 1. If the actions of a legislator were meant to enhance the dignity and authority of the House and its members as a collective body.
 2. If they were in the exercise of his rights to free speech, protest, and freedom from arrest, among others.
- This two-fold test provides a framework for assessing whether a legislator's actions are protected under parliamentary privilege.
- **ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY:** The court's emphasis on the parallel jurisdiction of criminal courts and legislatures over bribery allegations highlights the need for accountability and transparency in governance. This ensures that individuals cannot evade prosecution by claiming immunity, thus upholding the rule of law.

CONCLUSION: Therefore, the Supreme Court's decision represents a crucial step toward combating corruption and strengthening democratic principles. It underscores the importance of holding lawmakers accountable for their actions and ensuring that they uphold the integrity of the legislative process.

SC TO HEAR PLEA TO INCLUDE CJI ON EC SELECTION PANEL

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court agreed to urgently hear a plea alleging the Centre enjoying "unfair advantage" while filling the two vacancies of Election Commissioners (ECs) in the Election Commission of India (ECI) following the unexpected resignation of Arun Goel ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

to be reinstated on the selection committee for EC appointments, as per a previous Supreme Court judgment in the **Anoop Baranwal case of March 2, 2023**.

- Supreme Court had earlier declined to stay the **THE CEC AND OTHER ECS (APPOINTMENT, CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AND TERM OF OFFICE) ACT, 2023**:
- This development highlights concerns about political interference and the need to ensure the independence of the Election Commission for free and fair elections.

WHAT IS ANOOP BARANWAL VERSUS UNION OF INDIA?

- In March, 2023, a Constitution Bench headed by Justice K.M. Joseph (now retired) ordered the **Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and two ECs to be appointed by the President on the advice tendered by a committee of Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha or the leader of the single largest party in Opposition and the Chief Justice of India (CJI)**.

WHAT WAS THE RESPONSE OF THE GOVERNMENT?

- The Government had enacted **The Chief Election Commission and other Election Commissions (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023** to countermand the judgment.
- **The law had replaced the Chief Justice of India (CJI) with a cabinet minister on the selection committee**, giving the Centre a dominant role in the appointment process.

KEYPOINTS OF THE CEC AND OTHER ECS (APPOINTMENT, CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AND TERM OF OFFICE) ACT, 2023:

- **Replaces Old Law:** This new Act supersedes the Election Commission (Conditions of Service of ECs and Transaction of Business) Act of 1991.
- **Transparent Appointment:** The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) are now appointed by the President based on the

Matter of concern

The NGO's plea before the Supreme Court has asked for these specific interventions



- Stay the implementation of Section 7 of The Chief Election Commission and other Election Commissions (Appointment, Conditions of Service and Term of Office) Act, 2023

- Direct the Union of India to appoint the vacant positions of Election Commissioners, till the pendency of the case in the Supreme Court, in accordance with the Selection Committee laid down by the *Anoop Baranwal vs Union of India* judgment of March 2023

- Bring the CJI back on board the high-profile selection committee headed by the Prime Minister for appointment of ECs

STORY SO FAR:

- The Supreme Court's decision to urgently hear a plea by the NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) regarding the appointment of Election Commissioners in the Election Commission of India (ECI) is significant.
- The ADR argues that the Centre could gain an unfair advantage in filling the vacancies following the resignation of Arun Goel and seeks to put on hold a new law on EC appointments.
- The NGO also wants the Chief Justice of India (CJI)



recommendation of a Selection Committee.

- **High-Level Selection Committee:** The Selection Committee comprises prominent figures: the Prime Minister, a Union Cabinet Minister, and the Leader of the Opposition (or leader of the largest opposition party in the Lok Sabha).
- **Search Committee Assists:** A separate Search Committee, headed by the Union Law Secretary, identifies potential candidates and submits a shortlist to the Selection Committee.
- **Standardized Salaries:** The CEC and ECs will receive salaries equivalent to those of Supreme Court Judges.

THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF APPOINTING INDIA'S ELECTION COMMISSION CHIEFS

- **The Constitution:** Article 324 empowers the President to appoint the CEC and ECs, but allows Parliament to define the selection process through legislation.
- **Unexercised Power:** For decades, Parliament did not create a law, leaving the President dependent on the government's (often Prime Minister's Office) recommendations. This raised concerns about political influence and potential bias.
- **Supreme Court Intervention:** The 2023 case of Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India prompted a landmark judgement. Recognizing the need for a more independent selection process, the Court established a temporary committee.
- **Composition of the Temporary Committee:** This committee comprised the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India. It was tasked with recommending appointments until a permanent law is enacted.
- **New Law:** The recently introduced law on CEC and EC appointments is a response to the Supreme Court's

directive. It aims to bring more transparency and potentially more balanced participation into the selection process.

- **Expected Outcome:** This law is expected to strengthen the Election Commission's autonomy and impartiality, thereby safeguarding the integrity of India's electoral system.
- **Point of Contention:** The new law excludes the Chief Justice of India from the permanent selection committee, and this is currently being challenged in the Supreme Court.
- **Significance of the New Law:** This law marks a significant step towards formalizing the appointment process for the Election Commission through a defined legal framework.

CONCLUSION

- The upcoming Supreme Court hearing regarding the inclusion of the **Chief Justice of India in the Election Commissioner Selection panel** is a crucial development with significant implications for Indian democracy. The Court's decision will determine **the balance between political participation and judicial oversight in safeguarding the Election Commission's independence.**
- If the Court upholds the ADR's plea, it would reinstate the CJI and potentially establish a more impartial selection process as envisioned in the Anoop Baranwal case. Conversely, a decision upholding the new law might raise concerns about the potential for undue political influence. Regardless of the outcome, this case underscores the **ongoing efforts to ensure a robust and independent Election Commission – a cornerstone of free and fair elections in India.**

THE LONG ROAD TO REFORMING INDIA'S POLITICAL PARTY SYSTEM

CONTEXT: With India's general election approaching, there have been numerous defections by politicians, raising questions about the effectiveness of the anti-defection law. Recent rulings in Maharashtra have disqualified some defectors while allowing others to remain in their new parties, creating inconsistencies and highlighting the need for potential reform of the law and political party systems.



BACKGROUND:

- **Anti-defection law:** Introduced in 1985 to curb frequent defections of MLAs from one party to another.
- **Recent defections:** As India approaches general elections, several MLAs have switched parties, raising concerns about the effectiveness of the law.
- **Maharashtra Assembly Speaker's decisions:** The Speaker ruled that defectors within NCP and Shiv Sena were not subject to disqualification despite seemingly violating the law.
- **Splits in NCP and Shiv Sena:** In 2023, both NCP and Shiv Sena witnessed internal conflicts leading to vertical splits within the parties.
- **Speaker's rulings:** The Maharashtra Assembly Speaker, in separate rulings for both parties, did not disqualify any MLAs from either faction. He recognized one faction as the "real" party based on their legislative strength.

KEY POINTS:

Defections on the rise: As elections approach, there have been increased instances of MLAs switching parties across India.

Maharashtra Speaker's rulings: In recent decisions regarding splits within the NCP and Shiv Sena parties, the Speaker:



- Did not disqualify any MLAs from either faction.
- Recognized one faction as the “real” party based on legislative strength.

Controversial aspects of the rulings: Critics argue that these decisions:

- Disregard the requirement to merge with another party to avoid disqualification.
- Contradict the purpose of the anti-defection law, which is to deter defections.

Need for reform: These developments highlight the need for potential reform in two areas:

- **Strengthening inner-party democracy:** Addressing the root causes of defections by ensuring democratic practices within political parties.
- **Revising the anti-defection law:** Potentially reviewing the law to address ambiguities and improve its effectiveness.

Law Commission’s recommendations: The Law Commission of India has proposed amendments to:

- Mandate democratic structures and processes within political parties.
- Grant the Election Commission power to enforce compliance.

Opportunity for change: The Speaker’s involvement in reviewing the law presents a chance to create an anti-defection law that better suits India’s needs.

CONCLUSION: Maharashtra Assembly Speaker’s rulings on defections expose flaws in India’s anti-defection law. Loopholes and lack of inner-party democracy fuel defections. Law Commission’s suggestions for reform offer a chance to strengthen the law and promote democratic practices within political parties. This review process presents a crucial opportunity to improve India’s political system.

UTTARAKHAND BILL ON UNIFORM CIVIL CODE GETS PRESIDENT’S NOD

CONTEXT: Uttarakhand became the first State in Independent India to have a Uniform Civil Code after the President on Wednesday gave assent to the ‘Uniform Civil Code Uttarakhand 2024’ Bill passed by the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly, on March 11.



BACKGROUND: India’s Constitution encourages a UCC for all citizens. Currently, personal laws differ by religion, leading to inequalities. Social reformers have long advocated for a UCC to promote national unity and gender equality. Uttarakhand became the first state in India to pass a UCC bill in 2024. However, legal challenges and concerns from religious communities might delay or modify its implementation, and national adoption remains uncertain.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF UTTARAKHAND’S UNIFORM CIVIL CODE (UCC) BILL

- **Bans discriminatory practices:** The Bill prohibits practices like halala, iddat, and talaq, which are customs in Muslim Personal Law seen as disadvantageous to women.
- **Halala is a practice where a divorced woman must undergo a new marriage and consummation before being able to remarry her former husband.**
- **Iddat is a mandatory waiting period after divorce or widowhood before a woman can remarry.**
- **Talaq** refers to various forms of unilateral divorce by a husband.
- **Promotes gender equality:** The UCC Bill ensures women are given equal rights in property and inheritance matters. This is a significant step considering some religious laws might have provisions that favor male heirs.

- **Legally recognized by the President:** The UCC Uttarakhand 2024 Bill was passed by the Uttarakhand Legislative Assembly and received assent under Article 201 of the Constitution of India. This signifies the official approval of the Bill by the highest authority.

WHAT IS A UNIFORM CIVIL CODE (UCC)?

- **National law for personal matters:** A UCC provides one common law for the entire country across all religious communities in their personal matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and adoption. This means matters like marriage ceremonies, grounds for divorce, division of property, and adoption procedures would follow a uniform set of rules.
- **Directive Principle of State Policy:** The concept of UCC is enshrined in Article 44 of the Constitution’s Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP). Directive Principles are guidelines for the state to promote the welfare of the people. While not legally enforceable, they represent the state’s aspirations for governance.
- **Goal of UCC:** To enforce a uniform legal framework for all citizens, irrespective of their religion. This ideally aims to create a more equal system and remove potential discrimination based on religious personal laws.

BACKGROUND OF UTTARAKHAND UCC

- **National Directive:** Article 44 of the Constitution encourages the implementation of a UCC throughout India. This highlights the vision of a unified legal system across the nation.
- **Religious Diversity and Inequality:** Currently, personal matters are governed by different religious laws, leading to potential inequalities. For instance, Hindu and Muslim inheritance laws might differ in terms of how much daughters inherit compared to sons.
- **Social Reform Movement:** The concept of UCC has been advocated for decades to promote social harmony, gender equality, and national integration. Reformers argue a UCC would remove legal disparities based on religion, creating a more unified society.
- **Political Debate:** The implementation of UCC has been a topic of debate. Proponents see it as progressive and a step towards a secular nation. Opponents are concerned about respecting religious traditions and the potential



disruption it might cause to established community practices.

UTTARAKHAND - A LANDMARK MOVE

- **First State to Pass UCC Bill:** Uttarakhand became the first state in India to pass a UCC bill in 2024. This is a significant step as it sets a precedent for other states to consider similar legislation.
- **Potential for Wider Adoption:** Uttarakhand's move aligns with the constitutional directive and could pave the way for other states to follow suit. If more states adopt UCC, it could build momentum for national implementation.

UNCERTAINTIES REMAIN

- **Exclusion of Tribal Communities:** The Bill excludes tribal communities from its ambit. This has sparked debate about the reasons behind the exclusion and whether it violates the spirit of UCC aiming for a uniform system.
- **Legal Challenges:** The legality of the UCC might be contested in courts, leading to delays or modifications. Opponents might challenge the Bill on various grounds, including infringement on religious rights.
- **Community Concerns:** Some communities within Uttarakhand might have reservations about the impact of UCC on their traditional practices. Public outreach and addressing these concerns might be crucial for smooth implementation.

- **National Implementation:** While Uttarakhand's move is significant, national adoption of UCC remains uncertain. The central government might need to consider various factors and address concerns before pursuing a nationwide UCC.

CONCLUSION

Uttarakhand's Uniform Civil Code (UCC) bill receiving presidential assent marks a historic moment in India. It signifies the first concrete step towards a nationwide UCC envisioned by the Constitution's Directive Principles. The bill's focus on banning discriminatory practices and promoting gender equality aligns with social reform movements and the ideals of a secular nation.

However, the road ahead is not without challenges. The exclusion of tribal communities and potential legal battles highlight the complexities of implementing a UCC that respects diversity while ensuring equal rights. National adoption will likely involve extensive deliberation to address concerns and ensure a smooth transition for all communities.

Uttarakhand's pioneering move has ignited a national conversation about UCC. As the discourse unfolds, it's crucial to weigh the potential benefits of a unified legal system against the need to respect religious traditions and ensure a just and inclusive society for all citizens.

VULNERABLE TO CRITICISM

CONTEXT: The ongoing legal dispute in Tamil Nadu concerning the Enforcement Directorate's investigation into alleged illegal sand mining highlights broader concerns about the agency's credibility and jurisdiction, raising questions about potential bias and encroachment on state powers.

CONTROVERSY:

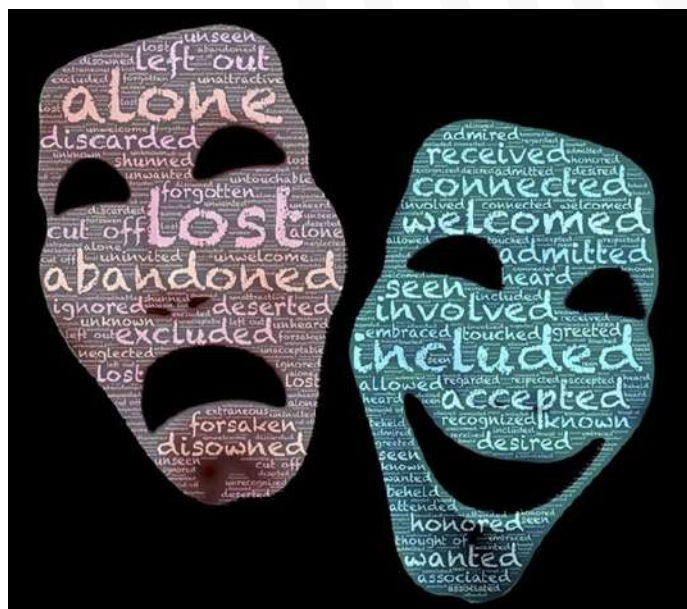
- **Tamil Nadu Objects:** The state government challenged the ED's authority in the Madras High Court.
- **High Court's Stance:** The High Court stayed the summons, questioning if the ED overstepped its bounds.
- **Supreme Court's Ruling:** The Supreme Court overruled the High Court, stating Collectors must cooperate with the ED investigation.

MAJOR ISSUES

1. The Enforcement Directorate's (ED) summoning of Tamil Nadu (TN) Collectors raises doubts due to its low credibility.
2. The ED's investigation into illegal sand mining in Tamil Nadu under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) prompts questions about federal principles.
3. The Supreme Court mandates TN's cooperation with central investigations but questions if assessing mining losses falls within the ED's jurisdiction.
4. The Madras High Court's order to stay ED summonses to Collectors is overturned by the Supreme Court.
5. The Court dismisses the TN government's petitions against ED's actions, citing misconceptions of the law.
6. Despite citing PMLA's Section 50, the Supreme Court overlooks concerns that the ED's probe lacks identification of proceeds of crime.
7. The ED's actions are criticized for resembling a "fishing expedition" rather than a focused investigation, contrary to legal precedents.
8. While cooperation with investigations is essential, the ED's perceived bias and lack of independence draw criticism, especially from opposition-led states.

KEY ISSUES:

- **Federalism:** Concerns about central agency overreach into state matters.



BACKGROUND:

ED Summons TN Collectors Over Sand Mining Investigation

- **Allegations:** Illegal sand mining is a concern in Tamil Nadu, potentially causing financial losses.
- **ED's Role:** The Enforcement Directorate (ED) investigates money laundering related to crimes.
- **Summons Issued:** ED summoned District Collectors in Tamil Nadu to probe potential money laundering linked to sand mining.



- **ED's Credibility:** Questions raised about the agency's motives and potential bias.
- **Money Laundering Investigation:** Unclear if the ED has identified specific evidence of financial crimes.

WHY THE SUPREME COURT HAS STAYED GOVT'S 'FACT CHECK UNIT' FOR NOW

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court of India stayed the operation of new IT Rules allowing a government fact-check unit to identify "fake news", citing concerns over freedom of speech.



STORY SO FAR: A clash over "fake news" control versus free speech has emerged, highlighted by the Indian Supreme Court's pause on new IT Rules empowering a government fact-checking unit. Introduced in April 2023, the rules aimed to identify and flag misleading content related to government activities on social media. Critics argued they violated freedom of speech. The Bombay High Court delivered a split verdict, with the Supreme Court intervening to stay the rules' operation pending a final decision. This issue gains significance ahead of India's elections, with implications for online narrative management and fundamental rights protection.

PIB FACT-CHECK UNIT

Background

- The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) disseminates information about government initiatives.
- The Press Information Bureau (PIB) is one of the offices under MIB.
- Countering misinformation, especially about the government, is crucial.

PIB FACT CHECK UNIT

- Established in November 2019 to tackle fake news related to the Government of India.
- Verifies claims about government policies, regulations, announcements, and measures.
- Provides accurate and reliable information to the public.

Organization

- Headed by a senior officer DG/ADG level officer of the Indian Information Service (IIS).
- Reports to the Principal Director General, PIB, the government's main spokesperson.

FACT-CHECKING MECHANISM

- Users submit queries through WhatsApp, email, or a web portal.
- Queries are categorized based on relevance to the Government of India.
- Only relevant queries are investigated.
- Information is rigorously checked through government sources, technological tools, and verification from

CONCLUSION

ED's actions highlight concerns about federalism, credibility, and clarity in investigations, warranting scrutiny and transparency to address potential biases and uphold the rule of law.

concerned government organizations.

- If information is found to be false or misleading, a "Fact Check" is published on social media platforms.

FACT-CHECKED CONTENT CATEGORIES

- **Fake:** Factually incorrect information related to the government, spread intentionally or unintentionally.
- **Misleading:** Partially true information, presented with selective facts or distortions, to deceive or mislead the recipient.
- **True:** Information found to be factually correct after investigation.

GOVERNMENT FACT-CHECKING UNIT VS. FREE SPEECH: A CLASH OF INTERESTS

THE RULES AND THE FACT CHECK UNIT (FCU):

- **April 2023:** The Indian government amends IT Rules, creating an FCU under the PIB.
- **FCU's Role:** Identify and flag "fake/false/misleading" content about the government on social media.
- **Social Media Platforms:** Mandated to remove flagged content.

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS:

- Media, activists, and individuals (e.g., comedian Kunal Kamra) challenge the IT Rules in the Bombay High Court.
- **CONCERNS:**
 - Violation of Article 19(1)(a) & (g) of the Constitution (freedom of speech and expression).
 - Chilling effect on free discourse due to government fact-checking.
 - FCU becoming the "sole arbiter of truth" for government information.

BOMBAY HIGH COURT SPLIT VERDICT (JANUARY 2024):

- Justice G.S. Patel: Struck down amended rules, citing censorship concerns.
- Justice Neela Gokhale: Upheld the rules, emphasizing combating misinformation.

SUPREME COURT'S INTERVENTION (MARCH 21, 2024):

- **Reason:** Break the High Court tie and maintain the status quo.
- **Decision:** Stayed the operation of amended IT Rules until a final ruling is reached.
 - Justice Patel's strong stance against the rules influenced this decision.

SIGNIFICANCE:

- **Timing:** The case coincides with the upcoming Lok Sabha elections; the government may see the Rules as crucial for managing online narratives.
- **Supreme Court Precedent:** Past actions like staying the farm laws suggest a willingness to protect fundamental rights.

LOOKING AHEAD: FACT CHECK UNIT (FCU) STATUS IN INDIA

- **CURRENT FUNCTIONALITY:** The FCU under the



Press Information Bureau (PIB) will continue its regular operations despite the recent notification granting them extra powers being stayed by the government.

- **SUPREME COURT DECISION:** The Supreme Court's ruling highlights the potential violation of fundamental rights, particularly freedom of speech and expression, by government-controlled fact-checking units.
- **IMPACT ON OTHER STATES:** The Bombay High Court case outcome has implications for the legality of similar FCUs in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Uttarakhand.
- **SIGNIFICANCE:** This legal battle underscores the judiciary's role in protecting democratic principles and

WRONG MESSAGING

CONTEXT: The Central government has notified the rules for the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 (CAA).

The decision to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) of 2019 just before elections has ignited anxieties about political manipulation and its potential to face legal roadblocks.

The CAA's timing, along with its provisions that many perceive as discriminatory, and the political rhetoric surrounding it have fuelled controversy and raised serious questions about its adherence to constitutional principles and equal treatment under the law.



BACKGROUND:

- The CAA was passed to provide Indian citizenship to undocumented immigrants who entered India on or before 31st December 2014.
- The Act was passed for migrants of six different religions such as Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan.
- The Act, which was an amendment to the 1955 Citizenship Act, was first introduced in the parliament in July 2016 and passed in December 2019. Before the CAA, any foreign national seeking Indian citizenship through naturalisation needed to have spent 11 years in India to become eligible.

OBJECTIVE OF CAA

- The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) aims to protect individuals who have sought refuge in India due to religious persecution.
- It offers them a shield against illegal migration proceedings.
- To be eligible for citizenship, applicants must have entered in India on or before December 31, 2014.

WHO INTRODUCED CAA IN INDIA?

The Citizenship (Amendment) Bill, 2019 (CAB) was introduced by the Home Minister, Amit Shah on the floor of the Parliament of India on 9 December 2019 in response to the exclusion of

ensuring transparency in governance.

CONCLUSION: The Supreme Court's decision to stay the operation of the government's fact-checking unit within the new IT Rules reflects a delicate balance between addressing misinformation and upholding freedom of speech. The clash between these interests underscores the complexity of regulating online content, particularly in the context of India's upcoming elections. With the case pending a final ruling, the significance of this issue extends beyond immediate concerns, touching on broader questions of democratic discourse and fundamental rights protection in the digital age.

1.9 million people, predominantly Hindus and Muslims in the National Register of Citizens for Assam.

WHEN WAS THE FIRST CITIZENSHIP ACT AMENDED?

- The legislation to this matter is The Citizenship Act, of 1955, which was revised by the Citizenship Acts of 1986, 1992, 2003, 2005, 2015, and 2019.
- The 1986 amendment restricted citizenship by birth to require that at least one parent had to be a citizen of India.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER CAA?

The Ministry stated on March 12 that the CAA reduces the qualification period for acquiring Indian citizenship from 11 years to five years for the beneficiaries persecuted on religious grounds in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh "without curtailing the freedom and opportunity of Indian Muslims to enjoy their rights.

- The bill amends the Citizenship Act, of 1955 to make people from Hindu, Sikh, Jain Buddhist, Christian, and Parsi faiths who entered India from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan eligible for citizenship.
- In case a person who belongs to the aforementioned faiths, from these three countries, does not have proof of birth of parents, they can apply for Indian citizenship after six years of residence in India.
 - The amended bill applies to people who were "forced or compelled to seek shelter in India due to persecution on the ground of religion..".
 - The bill also aims to shield such people from proceedings of illegal migration
 - It exempts the members of the six communities from any criminal case under the Foreigners Act, of 1946 and the Passport Act, of 1920.
 - The two Acts specify punishment for entering the country illegally and staying here on expired visas and permits.

WHAT IS THE AIM OF THE GOVERNMENT?

- The amendments proposed in the Citizenship Amendment Act 1955 will extend the facility of Indian citizenship to a specific class of persons who are presently facing hardships in acquiring citizenship," the amended bill reads.
- The bill will also enable the govt to cancel the registration of someone's OCI card if they violate the provisions of the citizenship law or any other law.

HOW IS THIS DIFFERENT FROM NRC?

The recently completed National Register of Citizens process in Assam was aimed at weeding out illegal immigrants from citizenship rolls.



- It mandated that a person had to prove that either they or their ancestors were present in Assam on or before March 24, 1971.
- The next day, the war of liberation in Bangladesh began, sending tens of thousands of refugees into India.
- The government has said it will extend the NRC process to the rest of India.
- The NRC process in Assam was not based on religion.
- The CAB, on the other hand, is targeted towards certain faiths.

WHY ARE THERE LARGE-SCALE PROTESTS AGAINST CAB IN ASSAM?

In Assam, many groups feel that the CAB will nullify the 1985 Assam Accord, which fixed March 24, 1971, as the cut-off date for deportation of all illegal immigrants irrespective of religion.

These activists also say that the NRC process was aimed against all illegal immigrants and that the CAB will selectively benefit non-Muslim migrants into Assam.



WHAT DOCUMENTS ARE REQUIRED TO APPLY FOR INDIAN CITIZENSHIP UNDER THE CAA?

– The required documents include passports, birth certificates, educational certificates, identity documents, residency permits, and more, as specified by the MHA.

WHEN DID CAA START IN INDIA?

After receiving assent from the President of India on 12 December 2019, the bill assumed the status of an act. The act came into force on 10 January 2020. The implementation of the CAA began on 20 December 2019, when Union Minister Mansukh Mandaviya gave citizenship certificates to seven refugees from Pakistan.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CAA AND NRC?

CAA provides a pathway to Indian citizenship for certain religious minorities from neighbouring countries, while NRC aims to identify undocumented immigrants residing in India, irrespective of religion.

WHAT IS THE FULL FORM OF NRC?

The National Register of Citizens (NRC) is the register containing names of Indian CITIZENS. The only time that a National Register of Citizens (NRC) was prepared was in 1951 when after the conduct of the Census of 1951, the NRC was prepared by recording particulars of all the persons enumerated during that Census.

WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM CAA?

According to the Ministry of Home Affairs, at least 30,000 “persecuted” minorities such as Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, Sikhs and Christians from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh could benefit from the CAA.

- The 2019 amendment to CAA further relaxed the residence requirement for naturalisation of these migrants from twelve years to just six.
- The Intelligence Bureau report on CAA said that there will be over 30,000 immediate beneficiaries from the act, once the rules of the same are notified.

IN WHICH AREAS CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT IS NOT APPLICABLE IN 2019?

- The amendments on citizenship for illegal migrants will not apply to certain areas. These include the tribal areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, as included in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.
- The bill will also not apply to states that have the inner-line permit regime (Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Mizoram). These exceptions didn't exist in the earlier version.

WHAT IS THE DISADVANTAGE OF CAA?

The drawbacks of CAA and NRC are that CAA worsens bilateral relations with neighboring nations and the NRC is hideous to physically verify the members for those not present on the list. The CAA only applies to Muslim immigrants who entered India unlawfully; it does not apply to Muslim citizens of India.

ASSOCIATED CONCERNS WITH CAA:

1. **Targeting a Particular Community:** There are apprehensions that the CAA, followed by a country-wide compilation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC), will benefit non-Muslims excluded from the proposed citizens' register, while excluded Muslims will have to prove their citizenship.
Issues in the North-East: It contradicts the Assam Accord of 1985, which states that illegal migrants, irrespective of religion, heading in from Bangladesh after 25th March, 1971, would be deported.
There are an estimated 20 million illegal Bangladeshi migrants in Assam and they have inalienably altered the demography of the state, besides putting a severe strain on the state's resources and economy.
2. **Against Fundamental Rights:** Critics argue that it is violative of Article 14 of the Constitution (which guarantees the right to equality and applies to both citizens and foreigners) and the principle of secularism enshrined in the preamble of the Constitution.
3. **Discriminatory in Nature:** India has several other refugees include Tamils from Sri Lanka and Hindu Rohingya from Myanmar. They are not covered under the Act.
4. **Difficulty in Administration:** It will be difficult for the government to differentiate between illegal migrants and those persecuted.
5. **Hampering Bilateral Ties:** The Act throws light on the religious oppression that has happened and is happening in these three countries and thus, may worsen our bilateral ties with them.

IS CAA CHALLENGED IN THE SUPREME COURT?

The Supreme Court on Tuesday (March 19) issued notice to the union government on a batch of applications seeking to stay the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the Citizenship Amendment Rules 2024. Seeking the Union's response, the court posted the matter on April 9, 2024.



WHICH COUNTRIES ARE PART OF THE CAA ACT 2019?

Under the Citizenship Amendment Act or, CAA, “persecuted” religious minorities from Muslim-majority Bangladesh, Pakistan and Afghanistan, who entered India before December 2014, will be allowed to claim Indian citizenship on a fast-track basis.

WHICH STATE IS AGAINST CAA?

With the Centre notifying the rules of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), the controversy over its implementation across states has escalated, with Opposition-ruled states like West Bengal and Kerala saying they won’t implement the law.

WHY IS CAA OPPOSED IN INDIA?

The foremost argument against the law is that the CAA discriminates against Muslims based on religion. “Such religious segregation is without any reasonable differentiation and violates right to quality under Article 14,” the petitioners have said.

IS CAA RIGHT OR WRONG?

The Indian government has time and again reiterated that CAA is a humanitarian gesture aimed at providing relief and support to those who have been marginalised and oppressed. The protections available to Indian Muslims under the Indian Constitution are crucial at understanding the impact of the CAA.

DOES CAA AFFECT INDIAN CITIZENS?

What are the implications of the Act for Muslims who have been living in India? Indian Muslims need not worry as CAA has not made any provision to impact their citizenship and has nothing to do with the present 18 crore Indian Muslims, who have equal rights as their Hindu counterparts or other citizens. This has been stated by the Government of India.

WHAT IS CAA 2024 IN INDIA?

What are the CAA 2024 rules? The rules, in line with the 2019 amendment to The Citizenship Act, 1955, aim to provide citizenship to migrants belonging to Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain, Parsi, or Christian communities who entered India before December 31, 2014, from Pakistan, Afghanistan, or Bangladesh.

CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT (CAA) APPLICATION RULES RELEASED IN MARCH 2024

Background:

- The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) was passed in December 2019.
- The Act aimed to offer a faster path to Indian citizenship for persecuted religious minorities from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh.
- However, the process for applying under the CAA was delayed due to the Union Home Ministry taking extensions for framing the rules.

Recent Developments:

- On March 11, 2024, the central government (Centre) finally notified the rules for the CAA.
- This notification comes just months before the 2024 national elections, fulfilling a pre-election promise made by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Key Points of the Rules:

- The entire application process for Indian citizenship under the CAA will be conducted online.

- This simplifies the process for eligible individuals and potentially expedites application review.

Unresolved Issues

- The CAA itself remains controversial, with critics arguing it discriminates against Muslims.
- The details of online application procedures and eligibility requirements are not provided in the given information.
- When will the online application portal become operational?
- What documents will be required for applications under the CAA?
- How will the government ensure a smooth online application process?

HERE ARE THE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE CITIZENSHIP AMENDMENT ACT RULES.

- Who can apply for citizenship under Section 6B?
- Application for grant of citizenship by registration or naturalisation shall not be entertained unless
 - The person is of Indian origin.
 - The person is married to a citizen of India.
 - The person is a minor child of a person who is a citizen of India.
 - The person’s parents are registered as citizens of India.
 - The person or either of his parents was a citizen of Independent India.
- The person is registered as an Overseas Citizen of India Cardholder.
- Special documents required with the application
- The new rules suggest that those applying for Indian citizenship will have to submit two special documents.
 1. An Indian citizen will have to testify as to the character of the applicant via an affidavit.
 2. The applicant must have adequate knowledge of one of the languages listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.
- The rules said those who can speak, read or write that language will be considered to have adequate knowledge.
- The person should also carry a declaration saying the citizenship of his country shall stand renounced irrevocably in the event of his application being approved.

CONCLUSION

The recent notification of the CAA application rules in March 2024 marks a significant development in a highly controversial legislation. While the online application process offers potential ease for eligible individuals, the CAA itself remains a subject of intense debate. Critics continue to argue that it discriminates against Muslims and violates India’s constitutional principles of equality.

Several questions remain unanswered. The details of the online application process and the specific eligibility requirements need clarification. Additionally, the potential impact of the CAA on India’s social fabric and its relations with neighbouring countries requires careful monitoring.

As the legal challenges to the CAA proceed and the online application portal opens, it will be crucial to ensure a smooth and transparent process that upholds the principles of fairness and equal treatment under the law.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS





A RESPITE

DECLINE IN INDIA'S ARMS IMPORTS: SIPRI

**CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN INDIA'S
PALESTINE POLICY
IS NATO MEMBERSHIP IN THE CARDS FOR
UKRAINE?**

**ANTI-PIRACY ACT HAS BEEN A GREAT
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MOSCOW CONCERT HALL ATTACK

**"PRACHANDA WINS THIRD VOTE OF
CONFIDENCE IN 15 MONTHS AS NEPAL
PM"**

**PAK. PARLIAMENT SWEARS IN NEW
MEMBERS AMID PROTESTS BY PTI**

**SEIZURE OF CARGO BY INDIA IS
UNJUSTIFIED, SAYS PAKISTAN**

**RAJNATH INAUGURATES NEW NAVY
HEADQUARTERS**

**SENSING THREAT FROM CHINA, INDIA
JOINS THE RACE TO MINE SEA PATCH**

THE IMPACT OF NATO EXPANSION

**SHAHBAZ SHARIF BECOMES THE
PAKISTAN PM FOR THE SECOND TIME**

**THE UK AND AUSTRALIA SIGNED A \$3
BILLION DEAL TO BOLSTER AUSTRALIA'S
NUCLEAR SUBMARINE PROGRAM.**

**UNEASY NEIGHBORS: AFGHANISTAN AND
PAKISTAN THROUGH THE AGES**

**WITH BHUTAN'S GELEPHU PROJECT IN
MIND, INDIA TO DOUBLE ASSISTANCE TO
₹10,000 CRORE FOR NEXT 5 YEARS**

**WTO 13TH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE:
TEPID TRADE-OFFS:**



A RESPITE

CONTEXT: Trump gets legal relief as challenges to his candidacy recede

BACKGROUND: Former President Donald Trump's legal battle over alleged election subversion, prolonged by the Supreme Court's consideration of his immunity from federal prosecution, underscores America's deep divisions and the lack of unifying leadership amidst political polarization, potentially shaping the landscape for the 2024 election.



MAJOR POINTS:

- The Supreme Court's decision to hear arguments on Donald Trump's immunity from federal prosecution delays

the legal process, potentially pushing any trial beyond May and into late June.

- Special Counsel Jack Smith's plans for immediate action on Trump's case have been thwarted by the Supreme Court's move to postpone a decision.
- The delay impacts multiple criminal cases against Trump, including four indictments, and complicates the timeline for legal proceedings.
- Additionally, the Supreme Court may overturn a ruling by the Colorado Supreme Court that barred Trump from the presidential ballot based on his alleged role in inciting insurrection.
- The legal battles surrounding Trump expose the deep political divisions in America, leaving voters divided on his capabilities and the risks he poses.
- Democrats and Republicans struggle to present viable alternatives to Trump, potentially positioning him as a frontrunner for the 2024 election.
- The situation reflects a broader malaise in American politics, highlighting the need for visionary leaders capable of uniting the nation under a common political banner.

CONCLUSION: In light of the Supreme Court's decision and the broader implications of Trump's legal battles, his candidacy challenges recede, providing a temporary respite while emphasizing the pressing need for cohesive leadership to address America's deep-seated political divisions.

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DECLINE IN INDIA'S ARMS IMPORTS: SIPRI

CONTEXT: A Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) report reveals a significant decrease in India's arms imports.



From Moscow to Paris

The data for the charts were sourced from the Arms Transfers Database maintained by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)

Chart 1: The chart shows the volume of arms transfers from the five major arms exporters to India in terms of trend-indicator value (TIV)

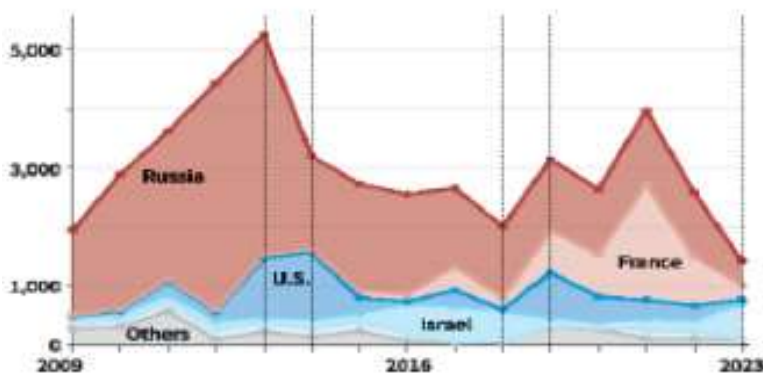


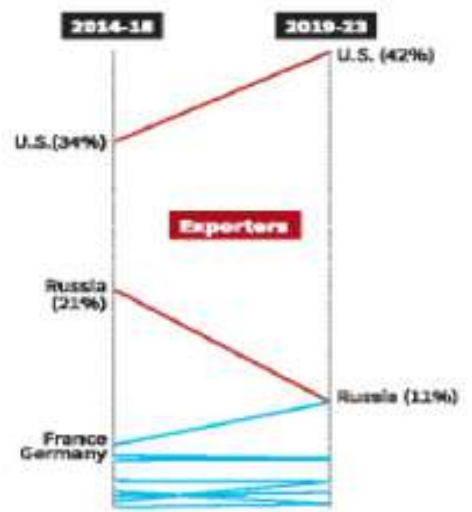
Table 4: The table lists the units of various types of weapons ordered by India in the last 15 years

Seller	Missiles	Engines	Armoured vehicles	Aircraft
Russia	59,821	593	1,005	356
U.S.	4,622	329		136
Israel	1,821			44
France	1,343	342	14	172
S. Africa			640	
Ukraine	360	240		
U.K.	200			57
Germany		240		46
Canada		215		2
S. Korea				

Chart 2: The chart shows the share of top countries in global arms imports in two five-year periods. India climbed one spot to become the world's biggest arms importer, displacing Saudi Arabia



Chart 3: The chart shows the share of top countries in global arms exports in two five-year periods. Russia's share in global arms exports reduced from 21% to 11%



“Intelligence plus character-that is the goal of true education. — Martin Luther King Jr.





BACKGROUND: India's history of border tensions and limited domestic arms production made it reliant on imports, especially from Russia. Recent import dips might signal a shift towards self-sufficiency and diversification of suppliers, but future large acquisitions suggest ongoing military modernization.

WHAT IS STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE (SIPRI)

- It is an independent international institute based in Stockholm, Sweden.
- Founded in 1966 in Stockholm (Sweden), it focuses on researching issues related to conflict, armaments, arms control, and disarmament.
- SIPRI analyses and provides data on global military expenditures, arms trade, and armed conflicts.
- Their research is based on open sources and aims to inform policymakers, researchers, media, and the public.
- SIPRI is recognized as a leading independent voice on global security issues.

INDIA'S ARMS TRADE: KEY POINTS FROM SIPRI REPORT

INDIA'S IMPORTS:

- **Significant Decrease:** India's arms imports decreased by a third (33%) between 2011-2015 and 2016-2020 (SIPRI).
- **Second Highest Importer:** Despite the decrease, **India remains the world's second-largest arms importer, following only Saudi Arabia (SIPRI).**

SHIFTING SUPPLIERS:

- **Russia's Share Drops:** While Russia remains India's largest arms supplier, its share of the market fell significantly from 70% to 49% (SIPRI).
- **Rise of New Suppliers:** France and Israel emerged as the second and third largest suppliers respectively, with a sharp increase in imports from both countries (SIPRI).
- **US Regains Position:** The US regained its position as a major supplier, becoming the fourth largest after a decline in previous years (SIPRI).

INDIA'S EXPORTS:

- **Modest Growth:** India's share of global arms exports increased by over 200% to 0.2% during 2016-2020 (SIPRI).
- **Top Recipients:** Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Mauritius were the primary recipients of Indian military equipment (SIPRI).

HOW MUCH ARMS DOES INDIA EXPORT?

- India has set a target to more than triple its annual defence exports to Rs 35,000 crores by 2024-25. The country's defence exports broke records in the financial year 2022-23, touching nearly Rs 16,000 crore mark, according to the Ministry of Defence

FUTURE TRENDS:

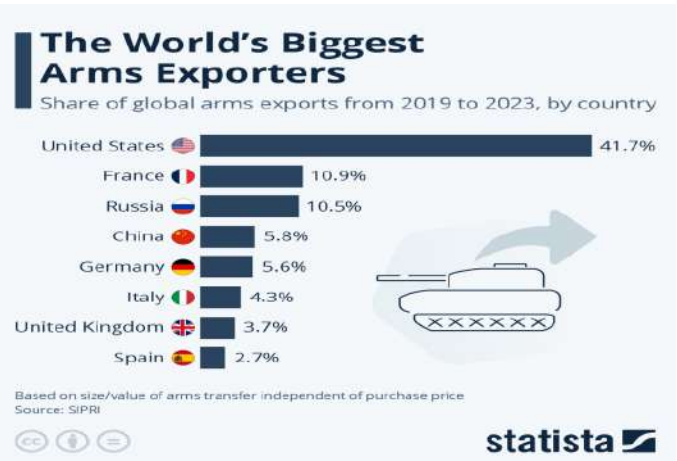
- **Potential Increase:** The report anticipates a rise in India's arms imports in the coming years due to perceived security threats and delays in domestic defense manufacturing (SIPRI).

REASONS FOR IMPORT DECLINE:

- **Government Clarification:** The report clarifies that the decrease is not solely due to the government's push for self-reliance in defense manufacturing (SIPRI)

- **Complex Procurement:** SIPRI identifies India's complex procurement process as a major factor contributing to the import decline (SIPRI).
- **Reduced Reliance on Russia:** The report suggests a deliberate effort by India to diversify its arms suppliers and reduce dependence on Russia (SIPRI).

GLOBAL ARMS TRADE:



- **Top Exporters:** The US, Russia, France, Germany, and China were the top five global arms exporters during 2016-2020 (SIPRI).
- **Stagnant Transfers:** Overall global transfers of major arms remained relatively stable between 2011-2015 and 2016-2020 (SIPRI).
- **Shifting Dynamics:** Increased exports from the US, France, and Germany were offset by declining exports from Russia and China (SIPRI).
- **Russia's Reliance on India:** The significant drop in Russia's exports is largely attributed to the decrease in Indian imports (SIPRI).

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- The report highlights a rise in arms imports by Middle Eastern countries, driven primarily by Saudi Arabia (SIPRI).
- Global spending grew by 19 percent over the decade 2013-22 and has risen every year since 2015.
- The combined arms sales of the top 100 largest arms-producing companies and military services companies totalled \$597 billion in 2022, according to SIPRI.

CONCLUSION

India's arms trade landscape presents a complex picture. While SIPRI reports a significant decrease in imports over the past decade, the country remains the world's second-largest importer. This decrease might be due to a combination of factors, including a push for self-sufficiency, complex procurement processes, and a deliberate effort to diversify suppliers beyond traditional partner Russia.

Despite the import dip, India's ambitions for a robust domestic defense industry and future large acquisitions suggest ongoing military modernization efforts. The rise in global arms spending and India's export targets further highlight the dynamic nature of the global arms trade. SIPRI's report serves as a valuable resource for understanding these trends and their potential implications for regional and global security.



CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN INDIA'S PALESTINE POLICY

CONTEXT: India's historical policy towards Palestine has been evolving, but a permanent fix to the Palestine question should not be lost sight of.



BACKGROUND: India historically supported Palestine while fostering ties with Israel. Recent events, like PM Modi's solidarity with Israel after the Hamas attack and India's UN abstention, suggest a potential shift. Modi's rapport with Netanyahu and admiration for Israel's security model hint at a recalibrated policy. These indicate a re-evaluation of India's stance, signalling a possible paradigm shift in its Israel-Palestine approach.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT (1947-1948):

- India, along with Pakistan and the Arab bloc, opposed the UN resolution to partition Palestine.
- Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru compared settler Zionists to the Muslim League, opposing the partition due to India's own experience with Partition.
- Despite recognizing Israel in 1950, India refrained from establishing full diplomatic relations.

Cold War Era (1950s-1980s):

- India, advocating Third World autonomy, staunchly supported the Palestine cause.

Shift in Policy (1992):

- India established full diplomatic relations with Israel, leading to deepening bilateral ties.
- Despite this, India publicly supported a negotiated solution for a sovereign Palestine state with East Jerusalem as its capital, based on 1967 borders.

Under Prime Minister Modi (2014-Present):

- Modi's visit to Ramallah in February 2018 signalled a further evolution in India's stance.
- Modi was the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel in 2017 and the first to visit Ramallah in 2018.
- India calls for dialogue for a permanent solution but refrains from explicitly addressing issues like Jerusalem's status and borders.
- While not supporting Israel's claim over Jerusalem (India voted against the U.S. decision), India avoids discussing contentious issues while remaining an Israel partner and supporting the two-state solution.

Realpolitik vs. Moral Content:

- India's Palestine policy increasingly reflects pragmatic

considerations over moral imperatives.

- India is neither a strong moral critic like Brazil or South Africa of the way Israel conducts its war in Gaza nor a blatant supporter of Israel's action like U.K. or U.S.A

TWO STATE SOLUTION:

The two-state solution is a proposed resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that envisions the establishment of two separate and independent states for Israelis and Palestinians, respectively, in the region between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

Historical Context: The idea of a two-state solution dates back to the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine in 1947, which proposed dividing the territory into separate Jewish and Arab states. However, this plan was not implemented, leading to decades of conflict.

International Support: The two-state solution has garnered widespread international support from countries and organizations seeking a peaceful resolution to the conflict. The United Nations, European Union, United States, and many other nations endorse this framework.

Borders: The proposed borders for the two states generally follow the pre-1967 armistice lines (the "Green Line"), with adjustments negotiated to accommodate security concerns, demographic realities, and equitable land swaps.

Jerusalem: One of the most contentious issues in the two-state negotiations is the status of Jerusalem. Both Israelis and Palestinians claim Jerusalem as their capital, and finding a mutually acceptable solution regarding the city is a major challenge.

Settlements: Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, considered illegal under international law by most countries, present a significant obstacle to the two-state solution. The expansion of settlements complicates efforts to establish viable Palestinian territories.

Security: A key aspect of any two-state agreement is ensuring the security of both Israel and a future Palestinian state. This includes addressing concerns such as border security, demilitarization, and counterterrorism measures.

Refugees: The issue of Palestinian refugees, including those displaced during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War and their descendants, is another complex aspect of the peace process. Solutions often involve options such as compensation, resettlement, and symbolic recognition of the refugee issue.

Public Opinion: While the two-state solution remains the preferred option among many international actors, public opinion within Israel and Palestine has become more divided. Some Israelis and Palestinians advocate for alternative solutions, such as a single bi-national state or a confederation model.

INDIA'S POST-OCTOBER 7 POSITION AT THE UN:

- India maintains a balanced stance, neither strongly criticizing Israel nor enabling its actions.
- It refrains from moral criticism akin to Brazil or South Africa, yet avoids being a passive observer or supporter like the U.S. or the U.K.

Statements by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA):

- Following Prime Minister Modi's tweet expressing solidarity with Israel, the MEA reaffirmed India's support for "a sovereign, independent viable state of Palestine."



UN VOTING RECORD:

- **November 12, 2023:** India voted for a resolution condemning Israeli settlements in Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan.
- **Two weeks later:** India supported another resolution expressing “deep concern” over Israel’s occupation of Syria’s Golan Heights.
- **December 12:** India backed a resolution calling for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire.
- **December 19:** India voted to favour the Palestinian right to self-determination.

SUPPORT FOR DIPLOMACY AND TWO-STATE SOLUTION:

- India’s voting pattern aligns with supporting a two-state solution, emphasizing the need for an immediate end to violence, dialogue, condemnation of settlements, and backing the Palestinian right to self-determination.
- Unlike the U.S., which claims support for the two-state solution but votes against relevant UN resolutions and refuses to back ceasefire calls, India’s actions reflect a commitment to diplomatic efforts for resolution.

INDIA’S FORMAL POSITION

India’s formal position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the two-state solution can be summarized as follows:

1. **Support for Two-State Solution:** India officially backs the two-state solution, advocating for the peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine as neighbouring states.
2. **Balanced Approach:** India maintains a balanced stance, neither being a strong moral critic of Israel’s actions nor a silent supporter of them, unlike some Western countries like the United States and the United Kingdom.
3. **Voting at the UN:** India’s votes at the United Nations reflect its stance. It has supported resolutions condemning Israeli settlements in occupied Palestinian territories, called for humanitarian ceasefires, and endorsed the Palestinian right to self-determination.
4. **Voice of the Global South:** India aims to represent the perspectives of the Global South, where there is strong criticism of Israel’s actions, particularly concerning the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. This contrasts with the significant support Israel receives from the U.S., which has shielded it from international consequences.
5. **International Reactions:** Countries like South Africa, Brazil, China, and Russia have taken various actions or made statements regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, reflecting the diversity of global opinions on this issue.

Overall, India’s position reflects a commitment to a diplomatic resolution and the promotion of peace in the region while

considering the perspectives of the Global South.

INDIA’S INTERESTS

- India’s support for the Palestinian cause, albeit limited, stems from tangible national interests, particularly in light of Israel’s offensive in Gaza, resulting in a significant humanitarian crisis.
- Despite international condemnation, Israel has largely avoided accountability, benefiting from unwavering support from the United States.
- Strong reactions against Israel’s actions have emerged from countries in the Global South, including South Africa and Brazil, with calls for justice and accountability.
- India, aspiring to lead the Global South, cannot disregard these sentiments and voices, as evidenced by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar’s criticism of Israel’s civilian casualties in Gaza.
- The October 7 attack and subsequent conflict have disrupted the strategic dynamics in the region, impacting India’s plans for cooperation with Arab states, Israel, and the U.S.
- Further Arab-Israeli reconciliation efforts have been stalled, affecting initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).
- Continued conflict and instability in the region pose economic risks for India, including threats to maritime trade routes in the Red Sea.
- The escalation of the Gaza conflict increases the potential for a broader regional conflict involving Iran, Israel, and the U.S., all key partners of India.
- India’s interests align with the restoration of peace and stability in West Asia, emphasizing the need for a permanent resolution to the Palestine question as a cornerstone of its Act West policy.

CONCLUSION: India’s approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict has undergone significant shifts over the years, reflecting a balance between pragmatic considerations and historical support for Palestine. While maintaining formal support for the two-state solution and advocating for peace, India has also deepened ties with Israel, indicating a nuanced and evolving stance. The complexities of the conflict, including issues like settlements, Jerusalem’s status, and refugees, continue to shape India’s diplomatic engagements, as it navigates between regional dynamics and international pressures. Overall, India’s policy reflects a commitment to finding a sustainable and peaceful resolution to the long-standing Israel-Palestine question while considering its own strategic interests and global perspectives.



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IS NATO MEMBERSHIP IN THE CARDS FOR UKRAINE?

CONTEXT: Against the backdrop of escalating tensions in Ukraine, Western powers and NATO grapple with the aftermath of Russian aggression and the uncertain future of Ukraine's NATO membership, while internal political dynamics in the U.S. and EU add further complexity to the situation.

THE GIST

- Western powers joined Ukraine last weekend to mark two years of Russian aggression on its territory, as concerns grow that the conflict could spread into Europe.
- The most immediate concern is the severe depletion in Ukraine's artillery ammunition on the battlefield, which poses a challenge to hold back Russian troops along a 1,500 km frontline.
- While the U.S. has been the largest arms contributor to the war effort, a \$60 billion aid bill to Ukraine has been stalled in Congress.

THE STORY SO FAR

Amidst escalating tensions in Ukraine, Western powers and NATO confront the aftermath of Russian aggression and the uncertain prospect of Ukraine's NATO membership, compounded by internal political dynamics in the U.S. and EU.



WHAT WAS THE REASON FOR THE RUSSIAN INVASION?

1. In 2008, NATO leaders proposed including Georgia and Ukraine in the alliance, sparking opposition from Russian President Vladimir Putin over NATO expansion into former Soviet territories. Putin's objections resulted in military actions, including the invasion of Georgia and the annexation of Crimea in 2014.
2. The recent full-scale war initiated by Moscow against Ukraine in February 2022 highlights the escalating tensions in the region.
3. Kyiv's potential NATO membership would activate Article 5, necessitating collective defense among member states.
4. This holds significant importance for Kyiv, which traded its nuclear arsenal for security guarantees from the U.S. and the U.K.

WHAT IS THE STATUS OF THE WAR NOW?

1. Ukraine faces a critical shortage of artillery ammunition, posing a significant challenge in halting Russian troops along the 1,500 km frontline.
2. Defence Minister Rustem Umerov highlights that the current deficit results in Kyiv firing only about a third of the necessary 6,000 rounds of artillery shells daily, leading to

increased casualties.

3. Western intelligence estimates suggest that Russian land forces have suffered around 200,000 deaths and injuries since the conflict began.
4. Moscow achieved a strategic breakthrough as Ukraine withdrew from the strategic city of Avdiivka due to acute shortages in artillery firepower.
5. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy attributes the withdrawal from Avdiivka to Kyiv's insufficient artillery capabilities, marking a significant victory for Russian forces since the capture of Bakhmut city.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE U.S.'S ROLE SO FAR?

1. The U.S. has been the primary arms supplier to Ukraine's war effort, but a \$60 billion aid bill has faced congressional delay.
2. The Republican-controlled House of Representatives has blocked approval of the financial package, influenced by pressure tactics from former President Donald Trump.
3. Hardline Republican factions advocate for Europe to assume greater responsibility for its security and emphasize equal partnership with the U.S. in security matters.

WHAT ABOUT THE EU?

1. The 27-nation bloc overcame obstacles from Hungary to allocate €5 billion over four years to support the Ukrainian economy.
2. Disputes have arisen among member states regarding additional funding for the €12 billion European Peace Facility (EPF) designated for Ukraine's war effort.
3. Germany advocates for including the value of weapons supplied bilaterally into the EPF contributions, while others are concerned this would reduce the fund's overall volume.
4. Some countries propose using EPF expenditure to bolster the bloc's defense industry, adding complexity to negotiations within the EU.

WHAT IS THE ROAD AHEAD?

1. Ukraine's full NATO membership is not currently under consideration, indicating a lengthy road ahead in the process.
2. NATO aims to address Ukraine's apprehensions by formalizing existing cooperation mechanisms, granting Kyiv the authority to convene emergency meetings and enhance participation.
3. The re-election of President Putin in the election and the potential return of Mr. Trump to power pose significant challenges for Ukraine, complicating its geopolitical predicament.

CONCLUSION: The complex issue of Ukraine's NATO membership amidst Russian aggression sees Western support focused on cooperation enhancement rather than immediate accession. Internal political dynamics and aid delays add uncertainty. Ukraine must balance diplomacy, and military readiness, and seek de-escalation while navigating a challenging geopolitical landscape.



ANTI-PIRACY ACT HAS BEEN A GREAT ENABLER, SAYS NAVY CHIEF

CONTEXT: Indian Navy chief Admiral R. Hari Kumar lauded the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act enacted in 2022 as being a “great enabler”, as the Navy completed 100 days of Operation Sankalp in the Gulf of Aden.



BACKGROUND: India passed the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022 to give domestic legal muscle to fight piracy beyond its waters. This fills a gap as the previous law, the IPC, couldn't be applied in international waters. The Act allows the Navy to board and seize suspicious vessels and prescribes harsh punishments for pirates. This legal framework strengthens India's role in anti-piracy operations like Operation Sankalp.

MAJOR POINTS

WHAT IS INDIA'S LEGAL FRAMEWORK REGARDING MARITIME PIRACY?

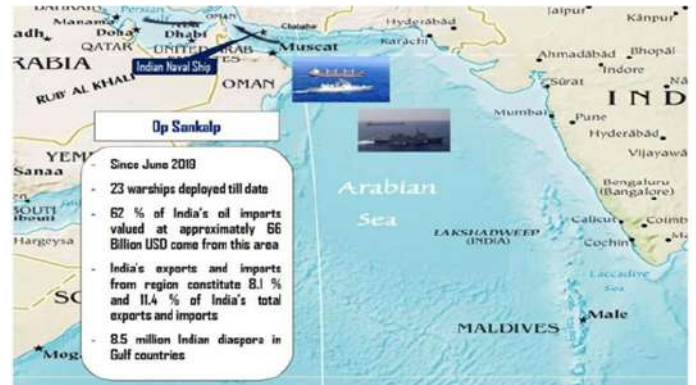
- The Parliament of India enacted the Anti-Maritime Piracy Bill, 2019 to bring the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea into domestic law and enable Indian authorities to take action against piracy on the high seas.
- India's anti-piracy law is called the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, of 2022. It was enacted in 2023.
- This law specifically deals with piracy at sea, not copyright infringement.

WHAT IT FIXES?

- Legal Framework: Before this Act, India lacked a domestic law specifically addressing maritime piracy. This meant relying on international conventions like UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea), which lacked strong enforcement mechanisms within India.

WHY IT WAS ENACTED?

- Invalidity of Indian penal code (IPC) in international waters: The sovereign rights of India extend up to the outer boundary of its territorial waters – 12 nautical miles from the coast. Previously, foreigners prosecuted under the IPC, 1860 for piracy acts performed outside India's territorial waters have been acquitted due to the lack of jurisdiction.
- Protecting Interests: India has a vast coastline and a thriving maritime trade sector. Piracy disrupts trade routes, harms the economy, and threatens the safety of seafarers. The Act strengthens India's ability to protect its maritime interests.
- International Commitment: Enacting the Act demonstrates India's commitment to fulfilling its obligations under UNCLOS for combating piracy.
- Incidence of piracy: A shift in piracy operations from the Gulf of Aden region, off-coast Somalia towards the east and south, which increases their proximity to India's west coast.



HOW IT'S BEING USED?

- **Empowering Authorities:** The Act grants the Indian Navy and Coast Guard clear legal authority to board suspicious ships, arrest pirates, and seize their vessels on the high seas and within India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- **Stronger Prosecution:** The Act defines various piracy offenses and prescribes harsher penalties, including life imprisonment for those convicted. This deters potential pirates and allows for stricter prosecution.

EXAMPLES OF USE:

The Act provides the legal framework for the Indian Navy and Coast Guard to actively engage in suspected pirate activity. This could involve:

- Responding to distress calls from merchant ships under attack.
- Patrolling strategic shipping lanes to deter piracy attempts.
- Apprehending pirates caught in the act and bringing them to justice in Indian courts.
- The Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022, absolutely allows the Indian Navy to conduct anti-piracy operations beyond India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) on the high seas.
- Act Applies to High Seas: The Act itself clarifies this point. Section 2(e) defines “high seas” to include “all waters beyond the jurisdiction of any other State”. This makes it clear the Act applies beyond India's EEZ.
- **INTERNATIONAL LAW:** The Act is designed to give effect to India's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
- UNCLOS grants all states the right to conduct anti-piracy operations on the high seas
- So, the legal framework is in place for the Indian Navy to act against piracy on the high seas.
- This is significant because a large portion of piracy activity occurs in international waters beyond national EEZs.
- **ADDITIONAL POINTS:**
- The Act empowers “authorised personnel” which includes the Indian Navy and Coast Guard to board, seize, and arrest pirates on the high seas.
- This enhanced authority has been cited by the Indian Navy Chief as a “great enabler” for their anti-piracy operations
- The Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, 2022, authorizes the Indian Navy to visit, board, search, and seize suspicious vessels, crafts, fishing boats, or dhows.
- If piracy triggers like skiffs, weapons, or ammunition are found during the inspection, actions are taken to prevent them from carrying out their mission.



SALIENT FEATURES:

- **DEFINES PIRACY:** Act of violence or detention by the crew or passengers of a private vessel or private aircraft on high seas, directed against another vessel or aircraft and/or people or property on board.
- **EXTRA-TERRITORIAL JURISDICTIONS:** Extends the territorial scope of jurisdiction to the international waters - sea beyond the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).
- **PUNISHMENT:**
 - Prescribes punishment for acts of piracy
 - Death / Life imprisonment for acts of piracy, itself causing death or attempts to cause the death of another person.
 - Imprisonment up to 14 years and a fine, imprisonment for life or death for participating in or assisting acts of piracy.
- **EXTRADITABLE OFFENCES:** Allow transfer of the accused to any country for prosecution with which India has signed an extradition treaty.
- **DESIGNATED COURT:** Empowers the Centre, in consultation with the Chief Justice of the concerned High Court to notify any Sessions Courts to be the Designated Courts.

- **PRESUMPTION OF GUILT:** The presumption of guilt will be on the accused if:
 - The accused has arms, explosives and other equipment which were used or intended for use in committing the offence,
 - There is evidence of use of force against the ship's crew or passengers, and
 - There is evidence of the intended use of bombs and arms against the crew, passengers or cargo of a ship.

WHAT IS OPERATION SANKALP?

Operation Sankalp is an ongoing maritime security operation launched by the Indian Navy in June 2019. Its primary goals are:

- **Safeguarding Indian flagged vessels:** The operation ensures the safe passage of Indian merchant ships, particularly through the strategically important Strait of Hormuz in the Gulf region.
- **Combating maritime threats:** This includes deterring piracy, drone attacks, and other potential threats in the region.
- **Promoting regional security:** By maintaining a naval presence, Operation Sankalp contributes to the overall stability and security of the Indian Ocean Region.

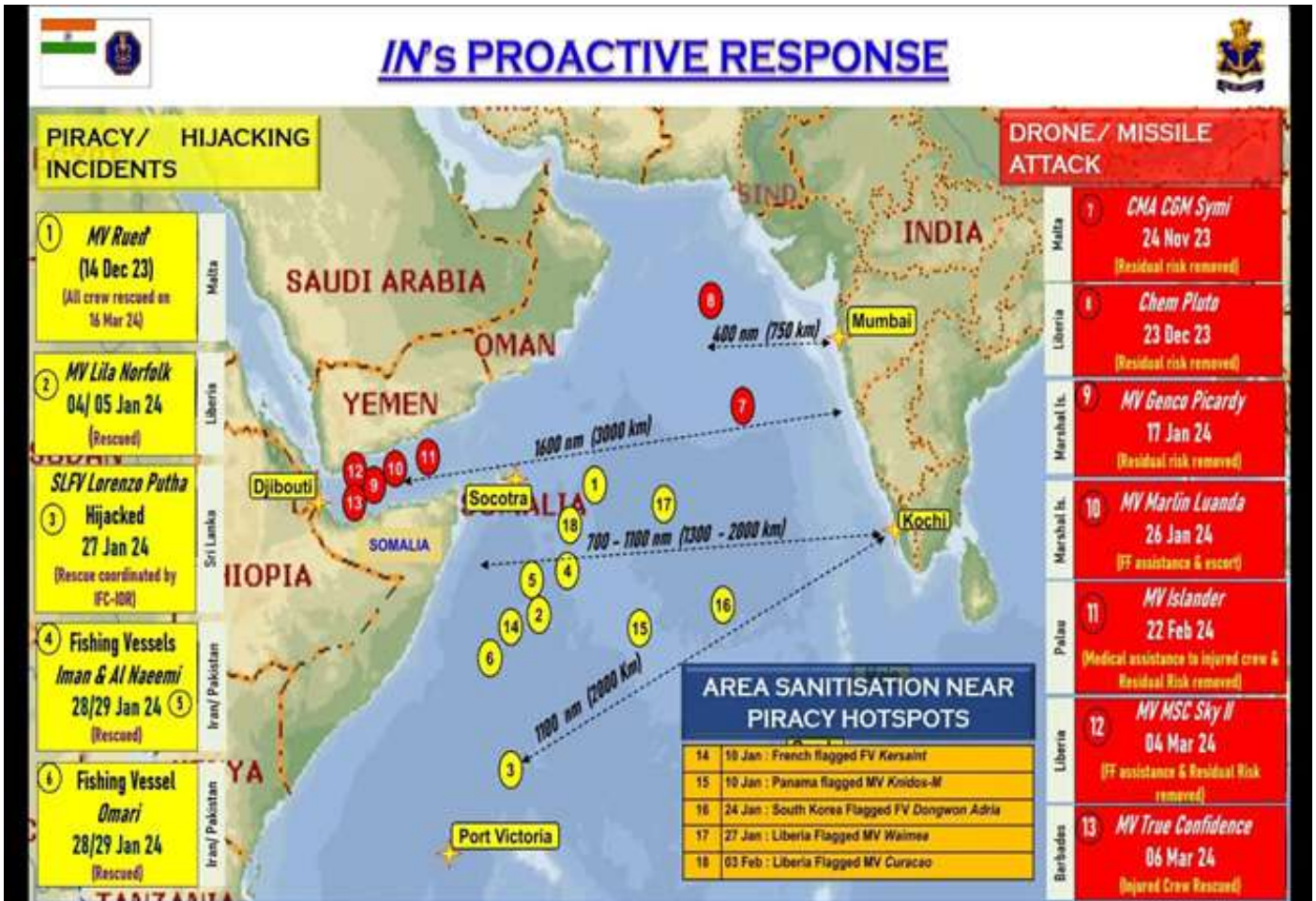


KEY POINTS ABOUT OPERATION SANKALP:

- **Area of operation:** The focus is on the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, crucial for Indian trade routes.
- **Deployment:** Indian warships and potentially maritime patrol aircraft are deployed for the operation.
- **Success:** The operation has been credited with successfully deterring piracy and ensuring the safe

passage of Indian vessels. The recent 100-day milestone of Operation Sankalp showcased its sustained efforts.

- **Significance:** Operation Sankalp highlights India's commitment to maritime security and its growing role as a regional power.



PHASE 2 of OPERATION SANKALP

- Phase 2 Deployment (Mid-December 2023 Onwards):
 - Over 5,000 personnel strategically deployed at sea.
 - Significant utilization of naval assets:
- 450+ ship-days (involving over 21 ships).
 - 900+ flying hours by maritime surveillance aircraft.
 - Objective: Comprehensively address potential threats in the maritime domain.
- Overall Indian Ocean Presence:**
 - Robust naval presence maintained throughout the region.
 - Force composition:
 - 11 submarines in simultaneous operation.
 - More than 35 surface ships deployed.
 - Over 5 aircraft strategically positioned.
 - Focus: Optimal allocation of assets to:
 - Effectively cover areas of interest.
 - Gather crucial information.
 - Outcome: Enhanced maritime domain awareness and transparency.

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

- The operation gained importance after attacks on merchant ships in the Gulf of Oman in June 2019.

- The Maritime Anti-Piracy Act, enacted in 2022, further empowered the Indian Navy to conduct anti-piracy operations in the region.

OVERALL IMPACT:

The Maritime Anti-Piracy Act strengthens India's maritime security posture and sends a strong message to pirates that Indian waters will be fiercely defended. It fosters a safer environment for international trade and protects Indian seafarers.

CONCLUSION:

The enactment of the Maritime Anti-Piracy Act in 2022 has significantly bolstered India's capabilities in combating piracy. This legal framework empowers the Indian Navy to take decisive action against piracy not only within its Exclusive Economic Zone but also on the high seas.

Operation Sankalp exemplifies this enhanced capacity. The successful completion of its second phase demonstrates India's commitment to safeguarding its maritime interests and ensuring the safety of critical shipping lanes. With a robust naval presence and clear legal backing, India is well-positioned to play a leading role in maintaining maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region.

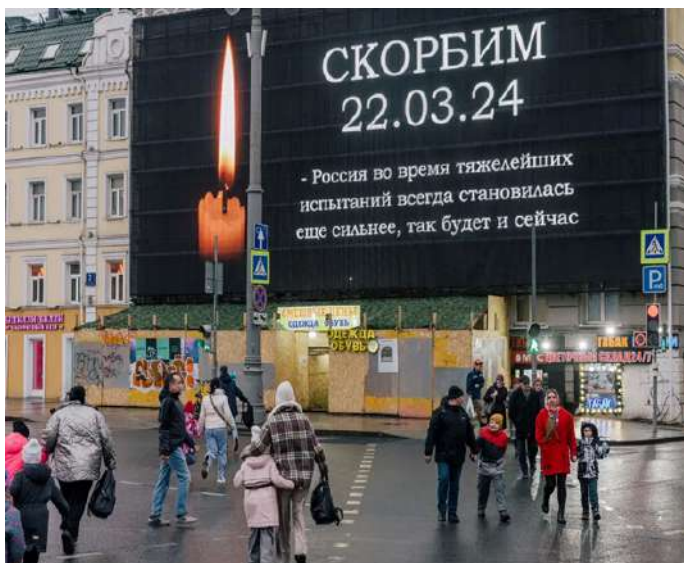


"Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence." - Robert Frost



MOSCOW CONCERT HALL ATTACK

CONTEXT: A few men in camouflage entered into a large concert hall in Moscow and opened fire, killing at least 143 people and setting the venue on fire on Friday.



BACKGROUND: In Moscow, a large concert hall was attacked by men in camouflage, resulting in the deaths of at least 143 people and the venue being set on fire. The attack took place shortly after Russian President Vladimir Putin's landslide victory in the elections, and the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack.

KEY POINTS ABOUT THE MOSCOW ATTACK INCLUDE:

1. **Location and Nature of Attack:** The attack occurred at the Crocus City Hall in Moscow during a performance by

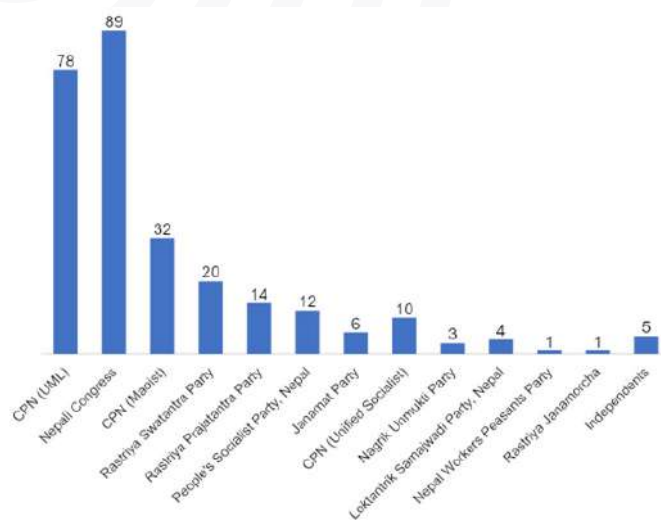
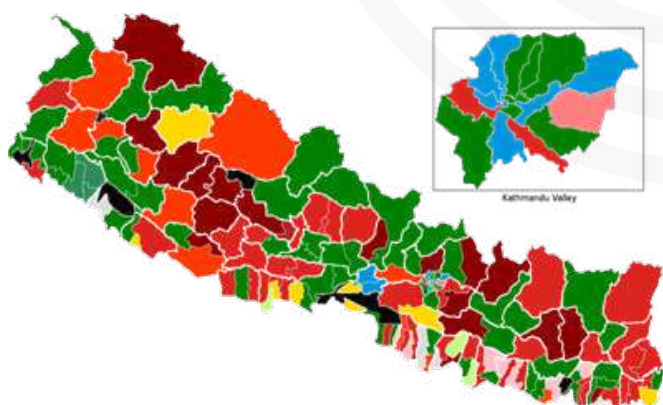
the Russian rock band Picnic. The assailants entered the hall in camouflage and opened fire, causing casualties and setting the venue ablaze.

2. **Casualties and Responsibility:** The attack resulted in the deaths of at least 143 people, according to health authorities. The Islamic State group's branch based in Afghanistan claimed responsibility for the attack via social media, which was later confirmed by US intelligence officials.
3. **Security Measures:** Following the attack, security was heightened at Moscow's airports, railway stations, and subway system. Mass gatherings were cancelled, and theaters and museums were closed for the weekend in Moscow and other regions as a precautionary measure.
4. **Political Reactions:** Some Russian lawmakers accused Ukraine of involvement in the attack, leading to tensions and calls for increased strikes. However, Ukrainian officials denied any involvement, emphasizing a commitment to resolving conflicts through non-terrorist means.
5. **International Responses:** Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi condemned the attack and expressed solidarity with the Russian government and people. Russian President Vladimir Putin suggested a link to Ukraine and announced the detention of four individuals allegedly involved in the attack.

CONCLUSION: The Moscow attack highlighted the ongoing security challenges and geopolitical tensions in the region, prompting swift responses from political leaders and heightened security measures in Russia.

“PRACHANDA WINS THIRD VOTE OF CONFIDENCE IN 15 MONTHS AS NEPAL PM”

CONTEXT: Nepal Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda' won a vote of confidence in Parliament with the support of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and other smaller parties.



STORY SO FAR:

1. Prachanda, Prime Minister of Nepal, secured his position by winning a confidence vote in parliament with 157 votes in favor and 110 against.
2. This marks his third confidence vote since being elected in December 2022.
3. Supporting Prachanda were parties including the Maoist-Centre, UML, Rastriya Swatantra Party, Janata Samajbadi Party, CPN (Unified Socialist), Nagrik Unmukti Party, and Aam Janata Party (Prabhu Shah).

4. Prachanda recently ended his alliance with the Nepali Congress and joined forces with the UML.
5. Despite challenges and shifting alliances, Prachanda has maintained enough support to stay in power.
6. According to constitutional provisions, a prime minister has to take a vote of confidence after an ally withdraws support to the ruling coalition.

CONCLUSION: Prachanda's victory in the confidence vote, supported by the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and other parties, underscores his ability to



navigate political challenges and maintain stability in Nepal's government. His strategic alliances and continued support in

parliament reflect his resilience and determination to lead despite the complexities of coalition politics.

PAK. PARLIAMENT SWEARS IN NEW MEMBERS AMID PROTESTS BY PTI

CONTEXT: Amid allegations of a rigged election, Pakistan's National Assembly swore in newly elected members, marked by protests from allies of jailed former Premier Imran Khan and chants in support of Shehbaz Sharif, expected to form the government, reflecting the contentious political landscape in the country.



- Lawmakers from Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party chanted "Vote-thief!" as Shehbaz Sharif, expected to lead the government, entered parliament with his brother Nawaz Sharif.
- Outgoing National Assembly Speaker Raja Pervez Ashraf conducted the oath ceremony at noon amidst the uproar.
- Chants of "Long Live Sharif!" filled the house as the Sharif brothers signed the register after taking their oaths, with similar accolades extended to Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the Pakistan People's Party chairman.
- The incoming government faces formidable challenges, including a surge in militant attacks, energy shortages, and an ailing economy necessitating another bailout from the International Monetary Fund.
- Lawmakers from PTI affirmed their intent to challenge the alleged election rigging both within and outside parliament, with PTI's current head, Gohar Ali Khan, asserting that the election was indeed rigged.
- PTI has announced nationwide rallies on Saturday, alleging that election results were manipulated in numerous constituencies to prevent their victory, a claim refuted by the Election Commission of Pakistan.

MAIN ISSUES

- Chaos ensued as Pakistan's National Assembly swore in newly elected members amid allegations of a rigged election, with allies of jailed former Premier Imran Khan protesting vigorously.

CONCLUSION: The swearing-in of new members in Pakistan's National Assembly amid protests by PTI underscores the deep-seated political tensions and allegations of election irregularities, signalling a challenging road ahead for the incoming government amidst pressing issues facing the nation.

SEIZURE OF CARGO BY INDIA IS UNJUSTIFIED, SAYS PAKISTAN

CONTEXT: Tensions are rising between India and Pakistan after India seized cargo from China destined for Pakistan, with Pakistan calling the move "unjustified" and accusing India of violating international norms.



BACKGROUND: India seized equipment from China destined for Pakistan, claiming it had military uses. Pakistan denies this, calling it a "commercial lathe machine" and condemning India's actions.

KEY POINTS:

- India seized equipment: Indian customs seized equipment shipped from China to Pakistan, claiming it could be used for military purposes.
- Pakistan denies claim: Pakistan denies this, stating the equipment is a commercial lathe machine for civilian use in the automobile industry.
- Pakistan criticizes India: Pakistan condemns India's actions, calling them "high-handed" and a violation of international norms.
- Pakistan takes legal action: Pakistani private entities are pursuing legal action against the seizure.
- Shipment details: The equipment was shipped on January 9th on a merchant vessel CMA CGM Attila.

CONCLUSION: With both sides entrenched in their positions and legal action underway, the fate of the seized cargo and the broader relationship between India and Pakistan remain uncertain. The potential for escalating tensions and international involvement underscores the need for a diplomatic resolution that addresses the concerns of all parties involved.



RAJNATH INAUGURATES NEW NAVY HEADQUARTERS

CONTEXT: Nausena Bhawan, the newly-constructed Headquarters of the Indian Navy, is located at Delhi Cantt. was officially inaugurated by Raksha Mantri Shri Rajnath Singh on March 15, 2024.



BACKGROUND: Before the inauguration of Nausena Bhawan on March 15, 2024, the Indian Navy lacked a dedicated headquarters in Delhi. Their operations were spread across 13 different locations, making coordination challenging. Nausena Bhawan offers a consolidated, purpose-built facility designed to enhance the Navy's efficiency.

NAUSENA BHAWAN - INDIAN NAVY HEADQUARTERS (KEY POINTS)

- **First Independent Headquarters:** Marks a milestone

for the Navy, consolidating operations previously spread across 13 locations.

- **Design Competition Winner:** The architectural design was chosen through a nationwide competition for optimal functionality and aesthetics.
- **Four-Storey Building with Three Wings:** Construction utilizes innovative methods for efficiency and sustainability.
- **Environmentally Friendly:** Leverages solar power systems and advanced building materials for energy and water conservation.
- **Advanced Technology:**
 - Central heating, ventilation, and air conditioning with advanced oxidation plasma technology for a pleasant indoor environment.
 - Integrated building management system for security and utility monitoring.
- **Green Rating IV:** signifies a commitment to sustainable practices.
- **Three-Tier Security System:** Includes cutting-edge features like automatic underbelly scanning, face recognition cameras, and a power fence.
- **Modern Office Infrastructure:** Extensive IT network with UPS systems supports a paperless work environment.

CONCLUSION: The inauguration of Nausena Bhawan marks a new era for the Indian Navy, fostering improved coordination and efficiency through its centralized and technologically advanced headquarters. This state-of-the-art facility reflects the nation's commitment to maritime security and excellence.

SENSING THREAT FROM CHINA, INDIA JOINS THE RACE TO MINE SEA PATCH

CONTEXT: India applied to the International Seabed Authority (ISBA), Jamaica, for rights to explore two vast tracts in the Indian Ocean seabed that are not part of its jurisdiction.



BACKGROUND: Deep-sea minerals like those in the AN Seamount are sparking a resource grab. While international waters fall under International Sea Bed Authority control, Sri Lanka claims the AN Seamount might be part of its extended continental shelf. India's application to explore there reflects competition with China and Sri Lanka's claim. UN approval hinges on both the ISBA's evaluation and the validity of Sri Lanka's continental shelf extension.

IS THERE AN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION ON SHARING OF DEEP SEA RESOURCES?

There isn't exactly a system for "sharing" the world's oceans. However, a complex web of international laws and regulations governs various activities within them.

UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS): This is the cornerstone of international ocean law. It defines different zones within the ocean and the rights and responsibilities of countries within each zone:

- **Territorial Sea:** Up to 12 nautical miles from a country's coast - full sovereignty over resources and activities.
 - **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):** Up to 200 nautical miles from the coast - countries have exclusive rights to explore, exploit, conserve, and manage resources (living and non-living) within the water column and seabed.
 - **Continental Shelf:** Can extend beyond the 200 nautical miles of the EEZ if a country can scientifically prove a natural extension of their landmass. Rights over resources (living and non-living) on the seabed apply here too.
 - **High Seas (International Waters):** Beyond national jurisdiction. Freedom of navigation, overflight, fishing, scientific research etc. exists, but resources (minerals on the seabed) are managed by the International Seabed Authority (ISBA).
1. **International Seabed Authority (ISBA):** Established by UNCLOS, the ISBA governs exploration and potential future extraction of minerals from the seabed in



international waters (areas beyond national jurisdiction). It issues exploration licenses and future exploitation regulations would be developed under its framework.

- 2. Other International Agreements:** Several treaties and agreements address specific ocean uses, like pollution control (MARPOL Convention), marine biodiversity conservation (Convention on Biological Diversity), and fisheries management (various regional fisheries management organizations).

These frameworks establish a balance between:

- Freedom of the Seas: Ensures open navigation, overflight, and scientific research for all nations in international waters.
- Coastal State Rights: Gives nations control over resources and activities within their territorial sea and EEZ.
- International Cooperation: UNCLOS and the ISBA promote responsible management and potential future benefit-sharing of resources from the international seabed.
- Sharing of Resources: Currently, there's no direct system for sharing resources like fish or minerals from international

waters. However, UNCLOS encourages cooperation on conservation and responsible management of these resources.

AFANASY NIKITIN SEAMOUNT

The AN Seamount, also known as the Afanasy Nikitin Seamount, is an underwater mountain located in the Indian Ocean. Here's a breakdown of its key characteristics:

- Type: Seamount (extinct or dormant underwater volcano)
- Location: Indian Ocean
- Resource Rich: Known to be rich in cobalt, a valuable mineral used in electronics and batteries.
- International Waters: Lies beyond the exclusive economic zones (EEZs) of any nation, placing it under the jurisdiction of the International Seabed Authority (ISBA).
- Claimed Territory: Sri Lanka has made a claim extending their continental shelf beyond the standard limit, potentially encompassing the AN Seamount. The validity of this claim is yet to be decided by the relevant UN commission.
- Exploration Interest: India has applied to the ISBA for exploration rights in the AN Seamount region, likely driven by the potential for mineral resources and strategic competition with China.

THE IMPACT OF NATO EXPANSION

CONTEXT:

- The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a military alliance formed in 1949 by Western nations to counter the Soviet Union and its sphere of influence during the Cold War.
- Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, NATO has expanded eastward, including former Soviet bloc countries in its membership.
- **BACKGROUND:**
- Russia has long viewed NATO expansion as a threat to its security, particularly the inclusion of former Soviet republics on its borders.
- This concern contributed to military actions by Russia in Georgia (2008) and the annexation of Crimea from Ukraine (2014) and also the present Russia-Ukraine war of February 2022 which is still continuing.

ISSUES:

- **Increased Tensions:** Finland and Sweden's historic

decision to join NATO in April 2023, abandoning their long-held neutrality, further strained relations between Russia and the alliance.

- Russia perceives this expansion as encirclement and a potential trigger for Article 5 (collective defense) activation, which could lead to a wider conflict.
- **Deterrence vs. Escalation:** While NATO's increased military presence in eastern Europe deters direct Russian aggression against member states, it also risks escalating tensions with Russia.
- **Ukrainian Ambitions:** Ukraine's aspirations for NATO membership remain unfulfilled due to the ongoing conflict and Russia's objections. Granting membership to Ukraine could be seen as a direct provocation by Russia.
- **Internal Dynamics:** Political considerations within NATO member states can impact the level of support for Ukraine and future actions regarding Russia. Delays in US aid packages highlight these internal divisions.

SHAHBAZ SHARIF BECOMES THE PAKISTAN PM FOR THE SECOND TIME

CONTEXT: Shehbaz Sharif, leader of the Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), secures victory in the National Assembly election, becoming Prime Minister for the second time, pledging to address economic challenges, prioritize anti-terrorism efforts, and maintain cordial relations with neighboring countries, while also raising the Kashmir issue in his victory speech.

MAJOR POINTS:

- Newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif vows to revive Pakistan's debt-trapped economy and combat terrorism.
- He emphasizes maintaining cordial relations with neighbours based on principles of equality.
- Shehbaz expresses gratitude to his elder brother Nawaz Sharif and allies for their trust in him to lead a coalition government.





- Shehbaz secured 201 votes in the National Assembly, defeating his challenger Omar Ayub Khan of the PTI, who received 92 votes.
- Amidst criticism from members of Imran Khan's party, Shehbaz warns about Pakistan's alarming debt crisis.
- Shehbaz pledges to avoid becoming involved in any "great game" and aims to increase diplomatic relations with various nations.
- He highlights the importance of improving ties with neighbouring countries on equal footing.
- Shehbaz raises the Kashmir issue, advocating for a resolution in support of the freedom of Kashmiris and

Palestinians.

CONCLUSION: Shehbaz Sharif's victory as Pakistan's Prime Minister for the second time heralds promises of economic revitalization, counter-terrorism efforts, and balanced foreign relations. His emphasis on addressing Pakistan's debt crisis, maintaining cordial ties with neighbors, and advocating for Kashmiri and Palestinian rights sets the tone for his administration's priorities. As Shehbaz navigates internal challenges and external relations, the path ahead will test his leadership in steering Pakistan toward stability, prosperity, and regional cooperation.

THE UK AND AUSTRALIA SIGNED A \$3 BILLION DEAL TO BOLSTER AUSTRALIA'S NUCLEAR SUBMARINE PROGRAM.

CONTEXT: Australia and the UK signed a \$3 billion deal to strengthen their AUKUS partnership and accelerate the construction of nuclear-powered submarines for Australia's future fleet.



BACKGROUND: The establishment of AUKUS (Australia, United Kingdom, United States) and Australia's desire to acquire nuclear-powered submarines for its future fleet. There are concerns about a more assertive China and a generally more dangerous world, prompting countries to invest in stronger defense capabilities. The AUKUS partnership aims to achieve this through collaboration, with Australia receiving assistance from the UK and US in building and maintaining nuclear submarines.



KEY POINTS AND ANALYSIS OF AUSTRALIA-UK DEAL ON NUCLEAR SUBMARINES:

- \$3 Billion Deal for AUKUS Submarines: Australia and the UK signed a 10-year agreement worth \$3 billion to

support the construction of nuclear-powered submarines for Australia's future fleet. This signifies a significant step forward for the AUKUS partnership, which aims to strengthen security ties between the three nations (Australia, United Kingdom, and United States).

- Boosting UK Manufacturing: The deal will boost production capacity at the Rolls-Royce factory in Derby, UK, for building the nuclear reactors. This suggests a strategic move to develop AUKUS member nations' industrial capabilities within the defense sector.
- Sharing the Burden: Australia's financial contribution ensures the project stays on track and demonstrates their commitment to the AUKUS partnership.
- Necessity in a "Dangerous World": Both UK Defence Minister Grant Shapps and Australian Defence Minister Richard Marles acknowledge the increased global security concerns, particularly regarding China's assertiveness. Nuclear-powered submarines offer greater range, speed, and stealth for underwater operations, enhancing Australia's ability to deter potential threats.
- Focus on "Freedom of Navigation": The submarines are seen as crucial for defending freedom of navigation in strategic waterways, potentially a veiled reference to the South China Sea where China has territorial disputes with several countries.
- AUKUS Collaboration: The Virginia-class submarines will be based on a UK design but equipped with US weaponry. This highlights the collaborative nature of AUKUS, utilizing expertise from all three member nations.
- Advanced Manufacturing Capabilities: The project aims to establish cutting-edge production lines in both the UK and Australia, potentially creating a significant technological advantage within the AUKUS alliance.
- Long-Term Strategic Investment: Australia's acquisition of at least three US nuclear submarines from the 2030s alongside this production deal suggests a long-term commitment to building a robust nuclear submarine capability under the AUKUS framework.

CONCLUSION: This agreement signifies a major step forward for AUKUS, driven by concerns about a more assertive China and a perceived need for a stronger regional defense posture. The deal promotes industrial collaboration, technological advancement, and a long-term strategic vision for the AUKUS partnership.



UNEASY NEIGHBORS: AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN THROUGH THE AGES

CONTEXT: Decades-old tensions along the disputed Durand Line, coupled with the resurgence of the Taliban and activities of militant groups, have strained relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan due to Pakistan's airstrike across the Durand Line.



BACKGROUND : THE GENESIS OF STRAINED RELATIONS

- **Durand Line Dispute:** The core issue lies in the contested Durand Line, established by the British Raj in the 1890s. This border, separating British India from Afghanistan, became the Pakistan-Afghanistan border after Pakistan's independence in 1947. However, the Pashtun tribes residing on both sides of the border have never fully accepted it, leading to ongoing friction.
- **Divided Pashtun Identity:** The Durand Line bisects Pashtun tribal lands, creating a sense of national division among these ethnic groups. This fuels discontent and hinders the development of a unified national identity within both Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- **Legacy of Colonial Era:** The Durand Line serves as a reminder of the colonial era, where regional boundaries were often drawn with little regard for local populations. This historical grievance continues to cast a shadow on contemporary relations.
- **Complexities of Regional Security:** The current tensions are further complicated by the rise and fall of Taliban rule in Afghanistan, along with the presence of militant groups like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). This volatile security situation creates a vicious cycle of mistrust and violence.

MAJOR POINTS

THE RESURGENCE OF THE TALIBAN: A SECURITY LANDSCAPE RESHAPED

- The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan in 2021 significantly impacted regional security. The group's historical ties to terrorism and its complex relationship with Pakistan cast a long shadow.
- While the Taliban claim they've broken ties with al-Qaeda, the international community remains cautious.
- Pakistan previously supported the Taliban regime in the 1990s, but relations have since soured.

The TTP: A Shared Ideology, Separate Entity

- The emergence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) further strained relations. Though separate from the Afghan Taliban, they share a similar ideology and history of insurgency.
- The TTP aims to overthrow the Pakistani government and establish an Islamic state. They have launched numerous



attacks within Pakistan in recent years.

- The breakdown of a ceasefire between Pakistan and the TTP, coupled with increased cross-border attacks, highlights the volatile security situation.
- A ceasefire established in 2020 collapsed in November 2021, leading to a surge in violence.

AIRSTRIKES AND RETALIATION: A CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

- In response to the perceived threat from TTP safe havens in Afghanistan, Pakistan conducted airstrikes in Afghan territory.
- These airstrikes in March 2024 were condemned by the Taliban, raising concerns about civilian casualties and potential escalation.

THE STAKES OF MODERN CONFLICT: A DELICATE BALANCING ACT

Historical Grievances and Fragile Peace

- The current tensions illustrate the complex interplay between historical grievances, terrorism, and the challenges of governing in a region with difficult terrain.
- These factors contribute to the fragility of peace in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Security Concerns and Humanitarian Costs

- The increase in cross-border attacks and retaliatory military actions underscore the delicate security situation.
- While aimed at neutralizing threats, these actions raise concerns about civilian casualties and the worsening humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan.

The Taliban's Response and the Permeable Border

- The Taliban's condemnation of the airstrikes and warnings of consequences highlight the precarious state of bilateral relations.
- Their denial of harbouring TTP militants contrasts with Pakistan's accusations, showcasing the challenges of dealing with non-state actors and the porous nature of the Afghan-Pakistan border.

CONCLUSION: The uneasy relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan seems entrenched, a tangle of historical grievances, unresolved border disputes, and the ever-present threat of terrorism. The recent airstrikes and the Taliban's response demonstrate the fragility of the current situation and the potential for further escalation.

Ultimately, a lasting peace between Afghanistan and Pakistan will depend on a willingness to move beyond historical animosity and forge a new path based on mutual respect, cooperation, and a shared vision for a secure and prosperous future. The stakes are high – not just for these two nations but for the entire region.



WITH BHUTAN'S GELEPHU PROJECT IN MIND, INDIA TO DOUBLE ASSISTANCE TO ₹10,000 CRORE FOR NEXT 5 YEARS

CONTEXT: Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced in Thimphu that India will double its assistance to Bhutan over the next five years, increasing it from ₹5,000 crore from 2019 to 2024 to ₹10,000 crore for the period until 2029.

ed towards Bhutan's economic stimulus package and development projects in various sectors like infrastructure, connectivity, trade, hydropower, and possibly even space exploration based on recent agreements signed between the two countries.



INDIA ANNOUNCES INCREASED SUPPORT FOR BHUTAN



BACKGROUND: India's announcement to boost support for Bhutan to Rs 10,000 crore by 2029 can be seen as a continuation of their strong bilateral relationship.

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT AND AWARD

- **Longstanding Partnership:** India has been Bhutan's biggest development partner since Bhutan started implementing five-year plans for economic development. This announcement signifies India's continued commitment to supporting Bhutan's growth.
- **Previous Support:** Earlier, India provided Rs 5,000 crore to support Bhutan's 12th five-year plan. The new announcement doubles that amount for the 13th plan.
- **Focus on Development:** The increased aid is likely direct-

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Bhutan and was awarded the country's highest honour, the "Order of the Druk Gyalpo".
- This award recognized India's role in supporting Bhutan during the COVID-19 pandemic.



INCREASED DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

- India announced doubling its financial assistance to Bhutan from Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 10,000 crore for the period 2024-2029.
- This signifies India's continued commitment to Bhutan's economic development.

AREAS OF COOPERATION

- Both countries signed agreements to collaborate in various sectors:
 - Energy
 - Food Safety
 - Sports & Research
 - Space Exploration
 - Connectivity (airports, railways, waterways)
 - Trade Infrastructure (integrated check posts)

SUPPORT FOR BHUTAN'S VISIONARY PROJECT

- India specifically mentioned its support for the "Gelephu Mindfulness City" project launched by Bhutan's King.

WHAT IS THE GELEPHU PROJECT?

The Gelephu project in Bhutan is an ambitious plan to develop a new economic hub in the southern part of the country. The city is envisioned as a "Mindfulness City" that will be built with a focus on sustainability and well-being. The project is expected to bring substantial benefits to the entire country, including new jobs, improved infrastructure, and increased foreign investment.

KEY DETAILS OF THE GELEPHU PROJECT:

- **Location:** The city will be located in the Sarpang District, in the southern foothills of the Himalayas.
- **Size:** The project area covers a vast area of 1,000 square kilometers, which is about 2.5% of Bhutan's total land area.
- **Focus:** The city will be designed to promote mindfulness and well-being, with a focus on green spaces, sustainable architecture, and a healthy lifestyle.

- **Economy:** The city is expected to become a major economic center for Bhutan, attracting businesses from all over the world.
- **Infrastructure:** The project includes plans for a new international airport, as well as improved roads and bridges.
- **Investment:** The Bhutanese government is seeking investment from both domestic and international sources to fund the development of the city.

KEY GOALS OF THE GELEPHU PROJECT:

- To create a new economic engine for Bhutan
- To attract foreign investment
- To create jobs for Bhutanese people
- To improve the standard of living in Bhutan
- To promote sustainable development

CHALLENGES

- Some people are concerned that the project will lead to environmental damage or cultural erosion.
- Others are concerned about the potential for corruption or inequality.
- However, the Bhutanese government is committed to developing the project sustainably and responsibly.

CONCLUSION

India's increased aid to Bhutan underscores the enduring strength of their partnership. This financial boost, coupled with collaboration in various sectors like space exploration and infrastructure, positions Bhutan for significant economic development.

The ambitious Gelephu project, with India's backing, holds immense potential to transform Bhutan into a major economic hub while preserving its unique culture and mindful approach to development.

The success of this project will be keenly watched, not only for its impact on Bhutan but also as a model for sustainable and holistic urban development in the region.



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WTO 13TH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE: TEPID TRADE-OFFS:

CONTEXT: The 13th World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference (MC13) took place from February 26 to March 2, 2024 in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

BACKGROUND TO THE WTO 13TH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE (MC13)


The 13th WTO Ministerial Conference, held in Abu Dhabi from February 26 to March 2, 2024, took place amidst a backdrop of several key factors:

- **Stalled Negotiations:** The WTO had faced several years of stalled progress on major trade agreements. Negotiations on issues like agriculture and fisheries remained unresolved, raising concerns about the organization's effectiveness.
- **Geopolitical Tensions:** Rising trade tensions between major economies like the US and China cast a shadow on the conference. Finding common ground amidst these tensions was a significant challenge.
- **Accession Backlog:** Several developing countries were awaiting WTO membership, and there was a growing need to streamline the accession process.
- **Focus on Reform:** There was a growing recognition within the WTO that reforms were needed to address the

organization's outdated rules and adapt to the changing global trade landscape.

THE WTO MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE: KEY POINTS

- **Highest Decision-Making Body:** It's the WTO's central authority, convening every two years.
- **Member Representation:** Representatives from all WTO member countries participate.
- **Setting the Agenda:** The conference defines the WTO's priorities and future negotiations.
- **Trade Discussions & Negotiations:** Trade topics like market access, subsidies, and dispute resolution are addressed.
- **Policy Formulation:** The goal is to create policies that promote global trade and economic cooperation.
- **Trade Rule Agreements:** Negotiations aim to establish common ground on trade rules and regulations for member countries.
- **Outcomes:** Agreements or declarations are reached, guiding member countries' trade policies.
- **Action Plans:** The conference may develop plans to tackle specific trade challenges.

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How the WTO is structured

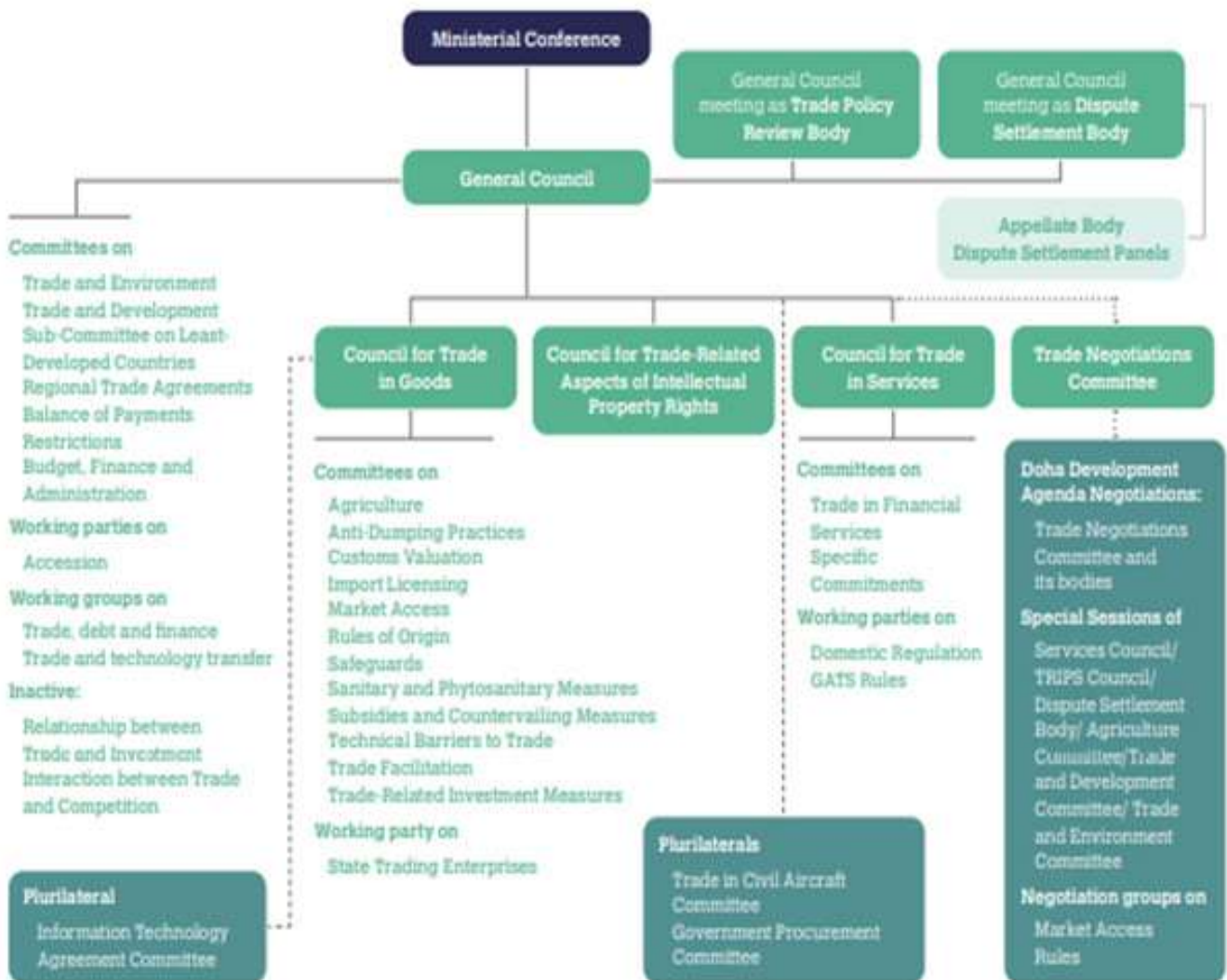
➤ The WTO's top-level decision-making body is the Ministerial Conference, which usually meets every two years.

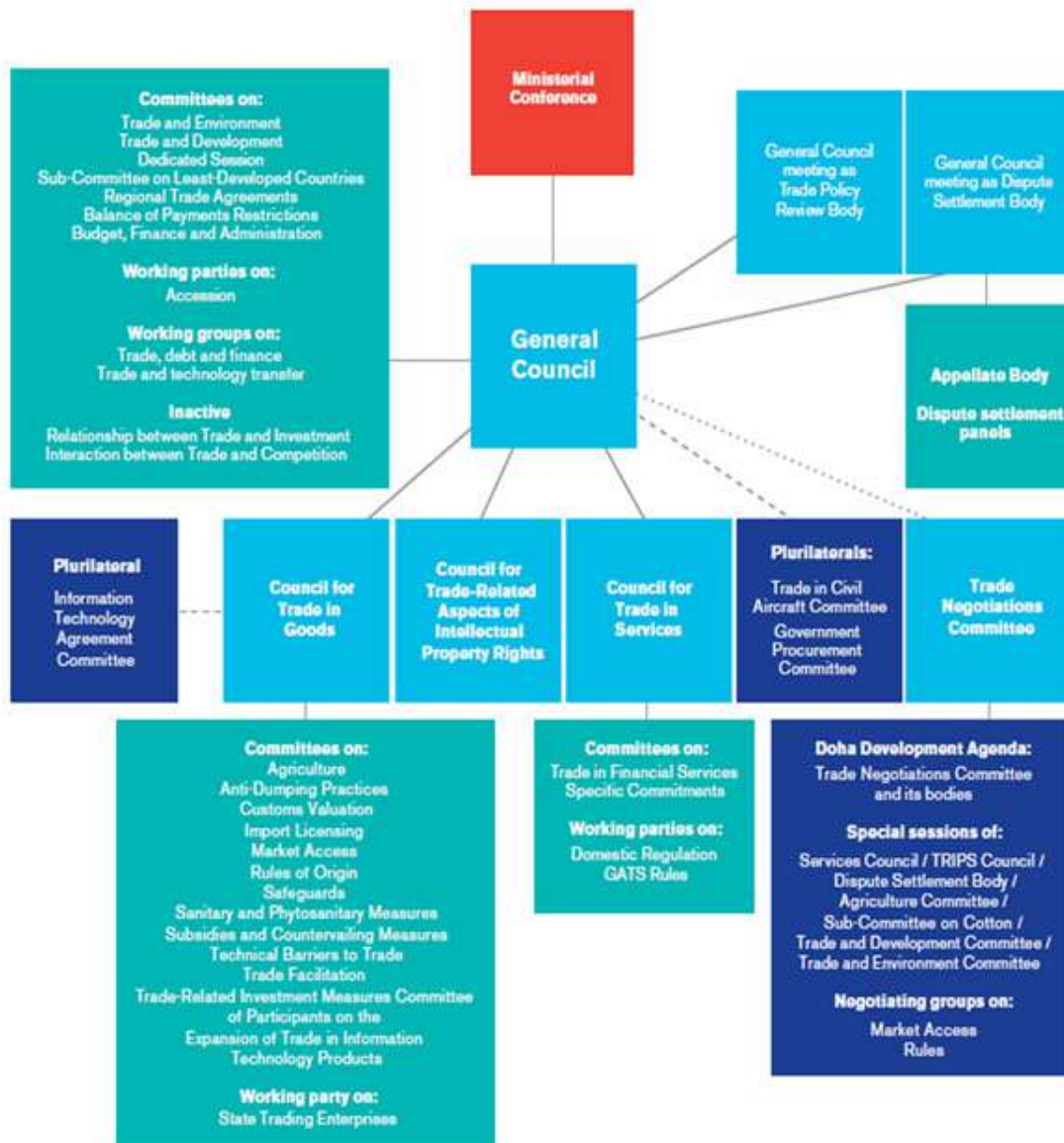
At the next level, the Goods Council, Services Council and Intellectual Property (TRIPS) Council report to the General Council.

Below this is the General Council (normally ambassadors and heads of delegation in Geneva, and sometimes officials sent from members' capitals), which meets several times a year in the Geneva headquarters. The General Council also meets as the Trade Policy Review Body and the Dispute Settlement Body.

Numerous specialized committees, working groups and working parties deal with the individual agreements and other areas such as the environment, development, membership applications and regional trade agreements.

All WTO members may participate in all councils and committees, with the exceptions of the Appellate Body, Dispute Settlement panels and plurilateral committees.





WHAT IS THE STRUCTURE OF WTO?

The World Trade Organization (WTO) functions with a well-defined structure to facilitate global trade discussions and agreements. Here's a breakdown of its key components and how they operate:

HIGHEST AUTHORITY: MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

- Composed of representatives from all WTO member countries.
- Convenes at least every two years and holds the ultimate decision-making power.
- Sets the overall direction for the WTO's work and negotiates trade agreements.

DAY-TO-DAY WORK: GENERAL COUNCIL AND COUNCILS

- The General Council, consisting of all WTO members, supervises the organization's work between Ministerial Conferences.
- It reports to the Ministerial Conference and carries out functions like:
 - Implementing WTO agreements
 - Overseeing dispute settlement
 - Managing the WTO budget
- Beneath the General Council lie various councils dedicated to specific trade areas like agriculture, goods trade, and

services trade. These councils undertake technical work and make recommendations to the General Council.

SECRETARIAT: PROVIDING SUPPORT

- The WTO Secretariat, located in Geneva, Switzerland, provides administrative and technical support to all WTO bodies.
- It doesn't have any decision-making power but plays a crucial role in:
 - Organizing meetings and conferences
 - Preparing reports and analysis on trade issues
 - Providing legal and technical assistance to member countries

DISPUTE SETTLEMENT SYSTEM: RESOLVING CONFLICTS

- A unique feature of the WTO is its independent dispute settlement system.
- If a WTO member believes another member is violating trade agreements, they can file a complaint.
- Panels of experts are established to examine the case and make recommendations.
- These recommendations can be appealed, and ultimately, the WTO's Appellate Body issues binding rulings.

Overall Operation:

- The WTO operates on a consensus-based approach,



- meaning all members need to agree for decisions or agreements to be adopted.
- Negotiations can be complex and lengthy, requiring compromise and accommodation among diverse economies and interests.
- The WTO relies on member countries to implement its agreements and rulings within their national legal systems.
- In essence, the WTO structure facilitates a forum for member countries to discuss trade issues, negotiate agreements, and resolve disputes through a combination of decision-making bodies, technical councils, a supportive secretariat, and a unique dispute settlement system.

EXPECTATIONS OF 13th MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

The 13th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC13) in Abu Dhabi (February 26 - March 2, 2024) carried a weight of expectations due to several factors:

ADDRESSING STALLED NEGOTIATIONS:

- A primary goal was to reignite progress on major trade agreements that had been stuck for years. Issues like agricultural subsidies and intellectual property in fisheries remained unresolved, and finding common ground was crucial.

FINDING CONSENSUS AMIDST TENSIONS:

- Rising trade tensions between major economies like the US and China cast a shadow on the conference. Achieving cooperation and forging agreements amidst these geopolitical strains was a significant challenge.

WELCOMING NEW MEMBERS AND STREAMLINING ACCESS:

- Several developing nations awaited WTO membership, and there was a strong desire to create a more efficient process for their accession.

INITIATING REFORM DISCUSSIONS:

- Recognizing the WTO's outdated rules and the changing face of global trade, there was a growing call for internal reforms. Discussions on how to modernize the organization were anticipated.

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS:

- Concrete Progress on Negotiations: Achieving tangible steps forward, particularly in agriculture and fisheries, was a major hope.
- Dispute Settlement System Reform: Addressing concerns surrounding the dispute settlement system's backlog and potential misuse, and finding solutions for its improvement were key expectations.
- Development Agenda Integration: Effectively integrating developing countries into the global trade system was a priority. Discussions on fair trade practices and special provisions for these nations (S&DT) were anticipated.
- E-commerce Framework Establishment: Establishing clear rules for the rapidly growing e-commerce sector to ensure the WTO's relevance in the digital age was an expectation.

KEY OUTCOMES OF THE WTO'S 13TH MINISTERIAL CONFERENCE

- New Members: The WTO welcomed Comoros and Timor-Leste as its newest members, expanding its reach to 166 countries and 98% of global trade. (Accessions)
- Reform Efforts: Ministers acknowledged ongoing efforts

to improve the efficiency and functionality of WTO bodies and pledged to continue this "reform by doing" process. (Reform of the Deliberative and Negotiating Functions)

- Dispute Settlement System: A renewed commitment was made to achieve a fully functional dispute settlement system by the end of 2024. (At MC13, ministers renewed their commitment...)
- E-commerce Moratorium: The existing moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions was extended until March 2026. (E-Commerce)
- TRIPS Non-Violation and Situation Complaints: A similar extension applies to challenges against intellectual property (IP) measures under the TRIPS Agreement, delaying potential disputes on this front. (TRIPS Non-Violation and Situation Complaints)
- Covid-19 TRIPS Waiver: Negotiations on expanding the scope of special rules for producing Covid-19 treatments and diagnostics were unsuccessful. (Covid COVID-19-related TRIPS Waiver)
- Special and Differential Treatment: Measures were adopted to enhance the use of S&DT provisions for developing countries, particularly in technical barriers to trade and sanitary measures. (Special and Differential Treatment)
- Plurilateral Agreements: Several WTO sub-groups achieved agreements or reported progress in various areas, including Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD). (Plurilateral Agreements and Initiatives)
- Domestic Regulation of Services: New disciplines were agreed upon to streamline and simplify regulations for trade in services. (Domestic Regulation of Services)
- Sustainability Initiatives: Progress was noted in tackling plastic pollution and reforming fossil fuel subsidies through member-led initiatives. (Sustainability-Related Initiatives)
- Fisheries Subsidies: There was positive movement towards the entry into force of the Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies (AFS), with 71 members having ratified it by March 1, 2024. (Fisheries Subsidies)

WHAT CHALLENGES ARE CURRENTLY UNDERMINING THE WTO'S EFFECTIVENESS?

The World Trade Organization (WTO) faces several challenges that hinder its effectiveness in promoting global trade and economic cooperation.

Stalled Negotiations and Doha Round Impasse:

- The Doha Round, launched in 2001 with ambitious goals for trade liberalization, remains unfinished. Disagreements on agricultural subsidies and intellectual property rights continue to be major roadblocks.
- This lack of progress discourages new trade agreements and creates uncertainty for businesses operating internationally.

GEOPOLITICAL TENSIONS AND TRADE WARS:

- Rising tensions between major economies like the US and China create a challenging environment for cooperation. Trade wars and protectionist measures disrupt supply chains and hinder global trade growth.
- The WTO's ability to mediate trade disputes and enforce rulings becomes less effective amidst such geopolitical strains.



RISE OF BILATERAL AND REGIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS (RTAS):

- Many countries are focusing on forming bilateral or regional trade agreements with like-minded partners, bypassing the multilateral framework of the WTO.
- This trend weakens the WTO's role in setting global trade rules and creates a complex web of overlapping regulations for businesses to navigate.

DEVELOPMENT CONCERNS AND SPECIAL AND DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT (S&DT):

- Developing countries often feel their concerns are not adequately addressed in WTO negotiations. The S&DT provisions meant to provide them with special treatment are perceived as inadequate.
- This can create a sense of unfairness and hinder their full integration into the global trading system.

WTO REFORM AND DISPUTE SETTLEMENT SYSTEM ISSUES:

- The WTO's rulebook is considered outdated and struggles to address contemporary trade issues like e-commerce and digital trade. Calls for reform to make the organization more efficient and responsive are growing.
- The dispute settlement system faces criticism for its backlog of cases and the potential for abuse by some members. Finding solutions for a well-functioning system is crucial.

OTHER CHALLENGES:

- Issues like ensuring food security, promoting sustainable trade practices, and addressing climate change require global cooperation that the WTO can potentially facilitate, but its effectiveness in these areas is yet to be fully established.

Overall, the WTO's effectiveness depends on its ability to address these challenges and adapt to the evolving global trade landscape. Multilateral cooperation and a commitment to finding common ground are essential for the WTO to remain a relevant and effective organization.

WHAT ARE INDIA'S MAIN CONCERN AT WTO?

India's main concerns at the WTO can be broadly categorized into a few key areas:

1. MARKET ACCESS AND TARIFFS:

- Developed Country Subsidies: India seeks to curb agricultural subsidies offered by developed countries, which distort global food prices and disadvantage Indian farmers.
- High Tariffs on Key Exports: India faces high tariffs on some of its key exports, such as textiles and IT products, in developed country markets. This hinders Indian competitiveness in the global market.

2. SPECIAL AND DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT (S&DT):

- Efficacy of S&DT Provisions: India feels that existing S&DT provisions, meant to provide developing countries with special treatment in trade agreements, are inadequate.
- India advocates for stronger S&DT measures to ensure a more level playing field for developing countries.

3. FOOD SECURITY AND PUBLIC STOCKHOLDING:

- Right to Maintain Food Security Buffer: India wants the flexibility to maintain buffer stocks of essential food grains without being penalized for exceeding WTO subsidy caps. This ensures food security for its large population.

4. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR):

- Balancing Innovation and Access to Medicines: India seeks to balance strong IPR protection with the need for affordable access to medicines and essential goods.

5. DISPUTE SETTLEMENT SYSTEM:

- Timely Resolutions and Appellate Body Concerns: India is concerned about the backlog of cases in the WTO dispute settlement system and the recent challenges faced by the Appellate Body. It emphasizes the need for a well-functioning system for fair and timely resolution of trade disputes.

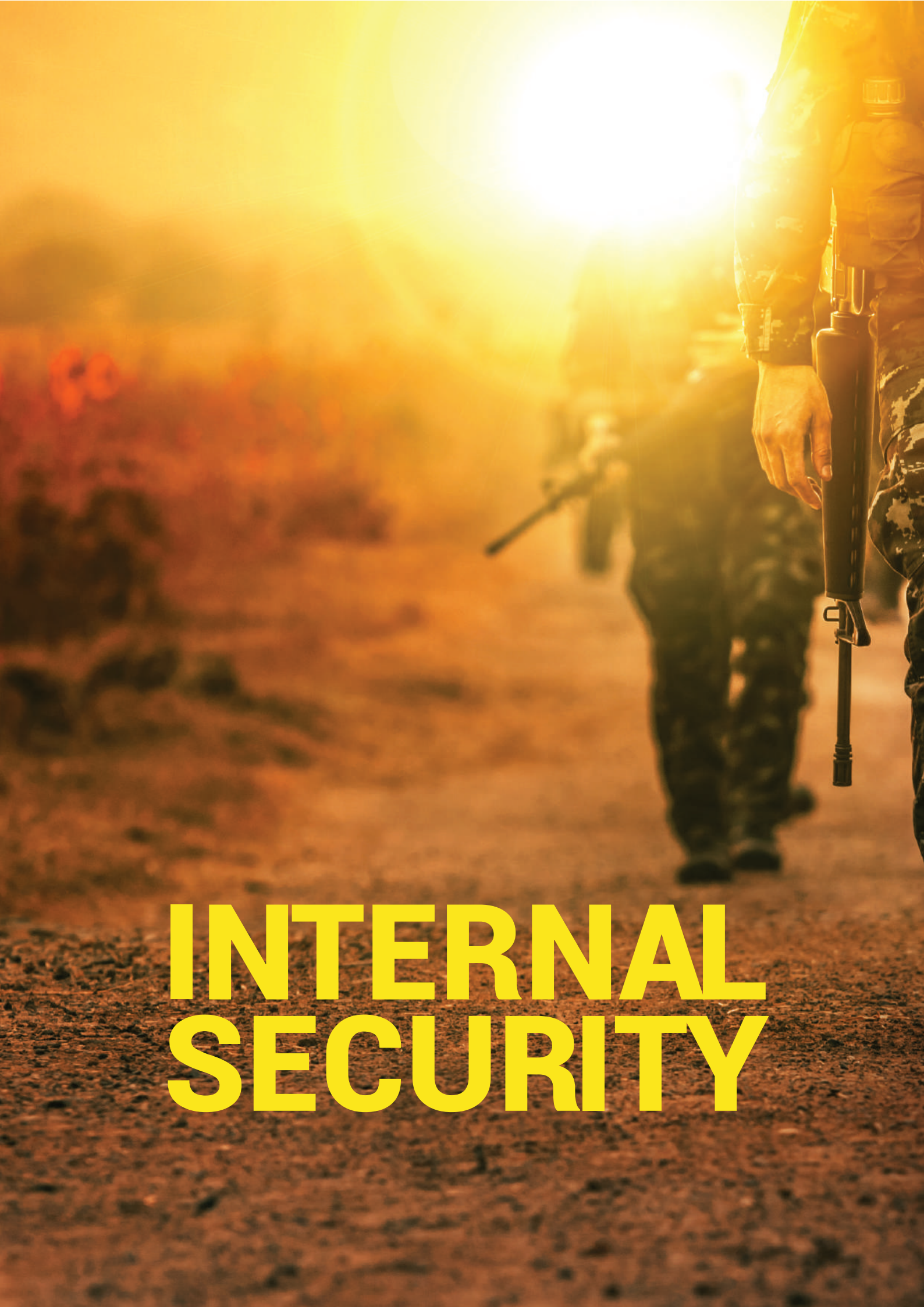
6. EMERGING TRADE ISSUES:

- E-commerce and Data Localization: India wants clear rules for e-commerce to ensure fair competition and protect domestic interests. It also advocates for data localization norms to safeguard citizen privacy.

These are some of the main concerns India raises at the WTO. Negotiating for fair trade practices, protecting its developmental interests, and ensuring a level playing field for its businesses in the global market are at the core of India's engagement with the WTO.

CONCLUSION: The 13th WTO Ministerial Conference concluded with mixed results. While some progress was made on accessions, reform initiatives, and specific areas like services regulations and sustainability, significant challenges remain. The inability to resolve longstanding impasses in agriculture and intellectual property, coupled with the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic and geopolitical tensions, continue to cast a shadow on the WTO's effectiveness.

Looking ahead, the WTO's future hinges on its ability to adapt to a changing global trade landscape. Modernizing its rulebook, addressing concerns over the dispute settlement system, and finding ways to integrate developing countries more effectively are crucial steps. The organization's success will depend on member states' willingness to overcome political differences and work towards a more balanced, inclusive, and resilient multilateral trading system. Only through collective action can the WTO regain its relevance and ensure that trade continues to be a driver of global economic growth and prosperity.



INTERNAL SECURITY



**INDIAN NAVY COMMISSIONS
INS JATAYU**

**ECONOMICS OF FORCED
LABOUR**

**SC STAYED NOTIFICATION
ESTABLISHING THE PIB FACT
CHECKING UNIT**

**ARMY RAISES FIRST UNIT TO
OPERATE APACHE ATTACK
HELICOPTERS**

**HC ACQUITS DU EX-
PROFESSOR, 5 OTHERS IN
'MAOIST LINK' CASE**

**MARATHON OPERATIONS IN
THE GULF OF ADEN**



INDIAN NAVY COMMISSIONS INS JATAYU

The Indian Navy commissioned INS Jatayu at Minicoy Island, its second base in Lakshadweep after INS Dweepakshak in Kavaratti and its first MH-60R multi-role helicopter squadron, INAS 334 'Seahawks,' at Kochi.

The Indian Navy is enhancing its security infrastructure by establishing the INS Jatayu base on Minicoy Island in Lakshadweep. The base will feature radars, jetties, an airfield, and BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles, among other capabilities. This upgrade is part of a broader capability development plan aimed at strengthening India's security presence near critical Sea Lanes of Communication (SLoC). The move is particularly significant in light of China's expanding naval footprint in the Indian Ocean. Additionally, new infrastructure was inaugurated at the Karwar naval base in Karnataka, including piers and residential towers. The enhanced surveillance and missile capabilities at Minicoy will bolster India's ability to respond to threats in the region. The development of Minicoy Island is seen as crucial for fortifying India's presence in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Additionally, new infrastructure was inaugurated at the Karwar naval base in Karnataka.

SIGNIFICANCE

New radar facilities at Minicoy will augment

surveillance and coastal batteries of extended range BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles with a range of around 450 km will give huge flexibility in responding to threats. INS Baaz to the east in Andamans and now, INS Jatayu in the west at Minicoy will serve as the eyes and ears of the Navy. INS Jatayu with its proximity to the busy Nine Degree Channel, the approximately 200-km wide area between Minicoy and Kalpeni / Suheli Par islands of Lakshadweep is situated at the tip of India's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) also serves as a deterrent against any future adversarial presence, making Jatayu a "formidable static aircraft carrier".

PROJECT SEABIRD

The Phase I construction of Karwar base under Project Seabird, which was completed in 2011, was designed to accommodate 10 ships. The Cabinet Committee on Security has since granted approval for Phase IIA of Project Seabird which will see the base expanded for berthing of 32 ships and submarines, along with 23 yard craft and include piers, providing a berthing space of more than 6 km. The centrepiece of Phase IIA works is an iconic Covered Dry Berth, standing at a height of 75 metres, taller than the Qutub Minar in Delhi.

ECONOMICS OF FORCED LABOUR

A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) released in Geneva reported forced labour generates illegal profits worth \$ 36 billion per year. The report titled "Profits and poverty: The economics of forced labour" based on surveys conducted among workers, including Indians in Saudi Arabia and Qatar estimate an increase of 37 % of such illegal profits since 2014, fuelled by both a growth in the number of people forced into labour, as well as higher profits generated from the exploitation of victims. Traffickers and criminals are generating close to \$10,000 per victim, up from \$ 8,269 (adjusted for inflation) a decade ago.

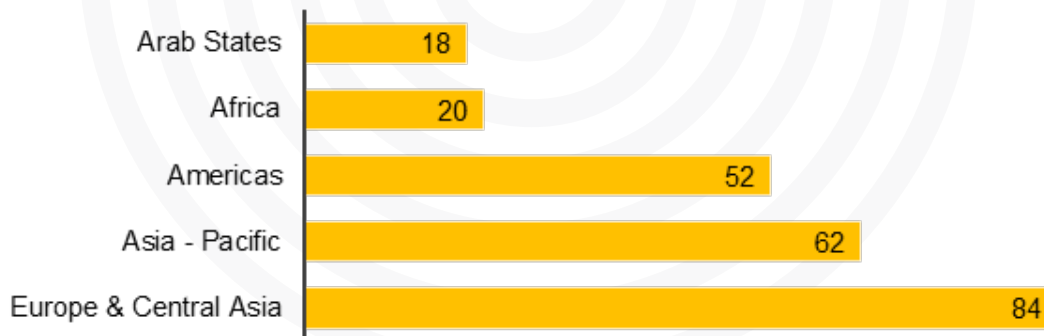


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the region wise total annual illegal profits from forced labour.

The report also said forced commercial sexual exploitation accounts for more than two-thirds (73%) of the total illegal profits, despite accounting for only 27% of the total number of victims in privately imposed labour.

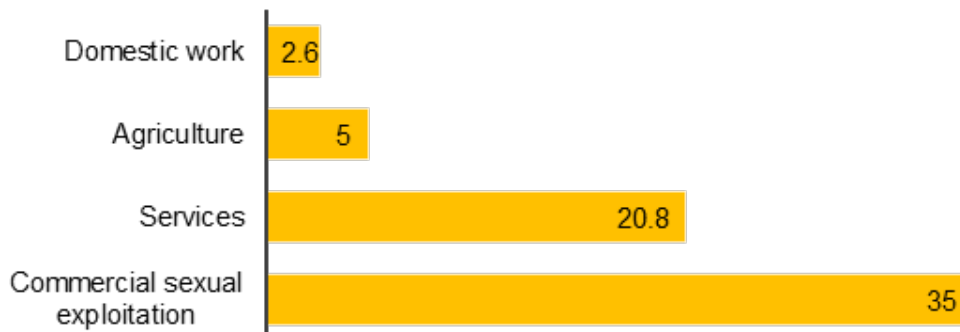


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the sector-wise total annual illegal profits from forced labour.

These illegal profits are the wages that rightfully belong in the pockets of workers but instead remain in the hands of their exploiters, as a result of their coercive practices. Forced labour perpetuates cycles of poverty and exploitation and strikes at the heart of human dignity. There were 27.6 million people engaged in forced labour on any given day in 2021, the report said, meaning 3.5 people for every 1,000 people in the world. Between 2016 and 2021, the number of people in forced labour increased by 2.7 million.



SC STAYED NOTIFICATION ESTABLISHING THE PIB FACT CHECKING UNIT

The Supreme Court stayed a government notification of March 20 establishing the Press Information Bureau's Fact Checking Unit (PIB FCU) to act as a "deterrent" against the creation and dissemination of fake news or misinformation regarding the "business" of the Centre. The Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (EITy) notified the Press Information Bureau's (PIB) Fact Check Unit as the designated body to flag misinformation about Central government departments to social media platforms.

The implementation of the March 20 notification would remain stayed until a third judge of the Bombay High Court took a final call on the validity of provisions of Rule 3(1)(b)(v) of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The notification was issued by the Centre after the third judge found no reason to stay Rule 3 on March 11. The Supreme Court did not comment on the merits or legality of Rule 3(1)(b)(v), saying the impact of the provision on the fundamental rights to free speech and expression would be analysed by the High Court.

The Editors' Guild of India and comedian Kunal Kamra,

among others, have challenged the IT Rules, particularly the provision empowering the Fact Check Unit to determine the accuracy of information related to the Union government. The petitioners argued such rules coercing intermediaries to execute a regime of self-interested censorship of online content relating to the business of the Central government, threatening intermediaries with the loss of their statutory safe harbour should they fail to take down content that the Central government's FCU identifies as fake, false or misleading. Critics argue that this provision could threaten the independence of the free press on the Indian internet. Social media platforms could lose their legal liability protections for user-generated content if they fail to address notified misinformation under the IT Rules, 2021.

The Fact Check Unit, which is run by senior officers of the Indian Information Service under the PIB, has been criticized for disputing news reporting and misrepresenting articles' claims. The Unit's reporting structure links it to the Principal Director General of the PIB, who serves as the Principal Spokesperson of the Government of India.

ARMY RAISES FIRST UNIT TO OPERATE APACHE ATTACK HELICOPTERS



The Indian Army Aviation Corps raised its first unit at Jodhpur to induct the first batch of AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, the second attack helicopters in the Army after the indigenous light combat helicopter (LCH) into its fold.

The 451 Aviation Squadron was formally raised at Jodhpur in the presence of Lt. Gen. A. K. Suri, Director-General of the Army Aviation Corps. India signed a deal with Boeing for six more Apaches for the Army, at a cost of around \$ 800 million, in February 2020. As part of the deal, six pilots and 24 technicians were trained by Boeing in the U.S. The Army Aviation inducted its first dedicated attack helicopter with the LCH and the first squadron, 351 Army Aviation, was moved to Missamari, Assam in the Eastern Sector near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in November 2022.

The Cabinet Committee had in the past given sanction

for the procurement of 39 AH-64 Apache attack helicopters from the U.S., as part of which the IAF inducted 22 Apaches under a deal signed in September 2015. Subsequently, the government decided that future Apache procurements would go to the Army. The Army has been pushing the case for 11 more Apaches, the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) last year ordered a study on the number of armoured helicopters required by the three Services.

The Defence Acquisition Council approved the procurement of 156 LCH at an estimated cost of ₹ 45,000 Cr – 90 for the Army and 66 for the Air Force. There are 10 for the Air Force and five for the Army, currently being inducted, in addition to the 15 limited-series production LCH at a total cost of ₹ 4,264 Cr.



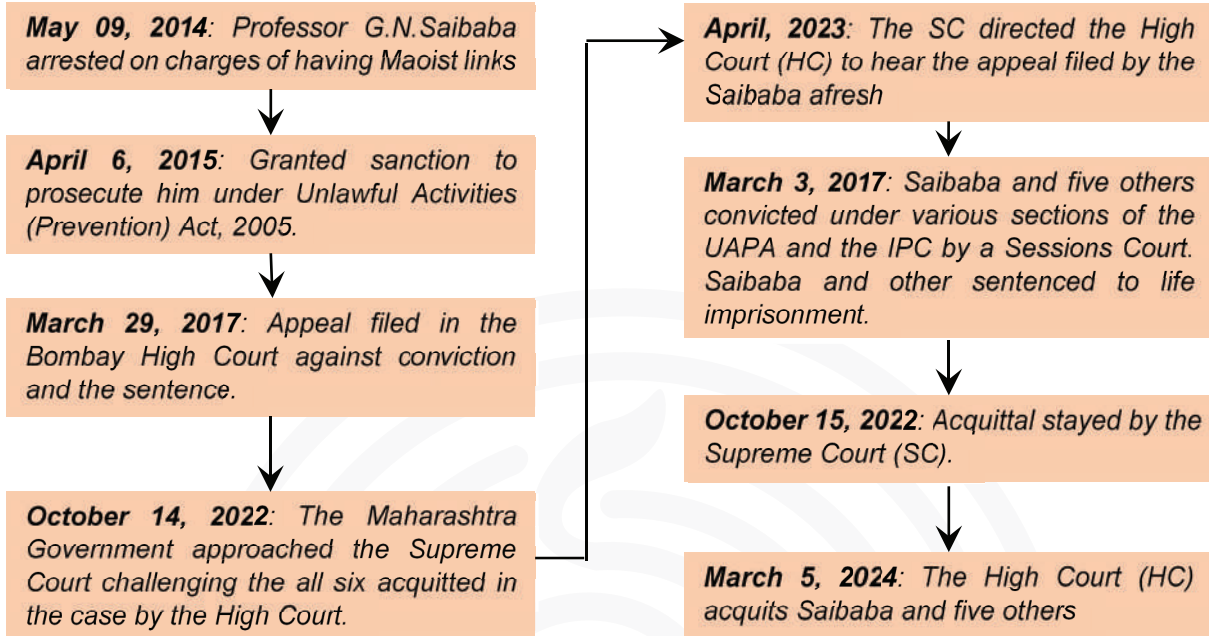
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HC ACQUITS DU EX-PROFESSOR, 5 OTHERS IN 'MAOIST LINK' CASE

The Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court acquitted former Delhi University Professor G.N. Saibaba and five others in a case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act for alleged Maoist links.



BACKGROUND: A joint team of the Maharashtra Police, Andhra Pradesh Police, and the Intelligence Bureau arrested Prof. Saibaba in 2014 related to ties with Maoist organisations. In March 2017, a sessions court in Gadchiroli, Maharashtra convicted Prof. Saibaba and five others accused of indulging in activities amounting to waging war against the country. They were also held guilty of possessing Naxal literature that they planned to circulate among underground Naxalites and the residents of Gadchiroli to provoke the people to resort to

violence. Earlier, a Bombay High Court Bench had acquitted him and the other accused on October 14, 2022. The Supreme Court stayed the verdict and ask for the case to be heard afresh.

SUMMARY: The Maharashtra Government approached the Supreme Court seeking an urgent hearing after a Nagpur Bench of the Bombay High Court set aside the life sentence awarded by, and held the sanction for prosecution under UAPA as “null and void”.

MARATHON OPERATIONS IN THE GULF OF ADEN

The Indian Navy swiftly responded to two instances of missile/drone attacks on merchant vessels - MV True Confidence and MSC Sky II between March 04 and March 06. Later on March 15, the Indian Naval warship, INS Kolkata in a calibrated response in accordance with international laws disabled the ship's steering system and navigational aids, forcing the pirate ship to stop after the pirates shot down the drone.

MV True Confidence and MSC Sky II

On March 4, INS Kolkata responded to a request from the MSC Sky II, which was hit approximately 90 nautical miles south-east of Aden. On March 6, INS Kolkata rescued 21 crew members from the MV True Confidence after it was hit in the Gulf of Aden. The crew of both vessels- MV True Confidence and MSC Sky II, including the injured, were provided medical aid and evacuated to Djibouti. The vessels were escorted to safety, and all crew members, including 13 Indian nationals, are reported safe.

MV Ruen

On March 15, the Navy conducted a 40-hour operation

resulting in the surrender of 35 pirates and freeing of 17 crew members of the Malta-flagged merchant vessel MV Ruen hijacked in December 2023 by Somalian pirates. INS Kolkata undertook “precisely measured actions” while maintaining her position close to the pirate ship and also engaged in forceful negotiations, which resulted in the pirates surrendering and releasing the pirate ship MV Ruen and its original crew present onboard.

The Indian Navy was able to track the movement of the pirate ship MV Ruen, based on the analysis of the surveillance information. INS Kolkata intercepted the ship approximately 260 nm east of Somalia. The anti-piracy operation 1,400 nm (2,600 km) from mainland India was augmented by the deployment of INS Subhadra. An Indian Air Force (IAF) C-17 transport aircraft executed a precision airborne drop of two Combat Rubberised Raiding Craft (CRRC) boats flying 10 hours to an area 2,600 km away from the Indian coast. Additionally, the pirate vessel was kept under surveillance by MQ-9A high-altitude long endurance remotely piloted aircraft and P8I maritime reconnaissance aircraft.

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GERMAN GDP FORECAST

**BLOOMBERG TO ADD INDIAN
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GHAR MUFT BIJLI YOJANA**

**INDIA RANKED 136 IN GLOBAL
HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX:
UNDP**



GROWTH ESTIMATE FOR CURRENT FISCAL RAISED TO 7.6%

Economists have attributed the upgradation of domestic real GDP growth (GDP) projections of the current fiscal to the downward revision to last year's growth numbers, and the stronger investment and net exports, although consumption is

lagging. The average GDP growth for the first three quarters of the year is 8.2 %, implying that the fourth quarter growth would only be at 5.9 %.

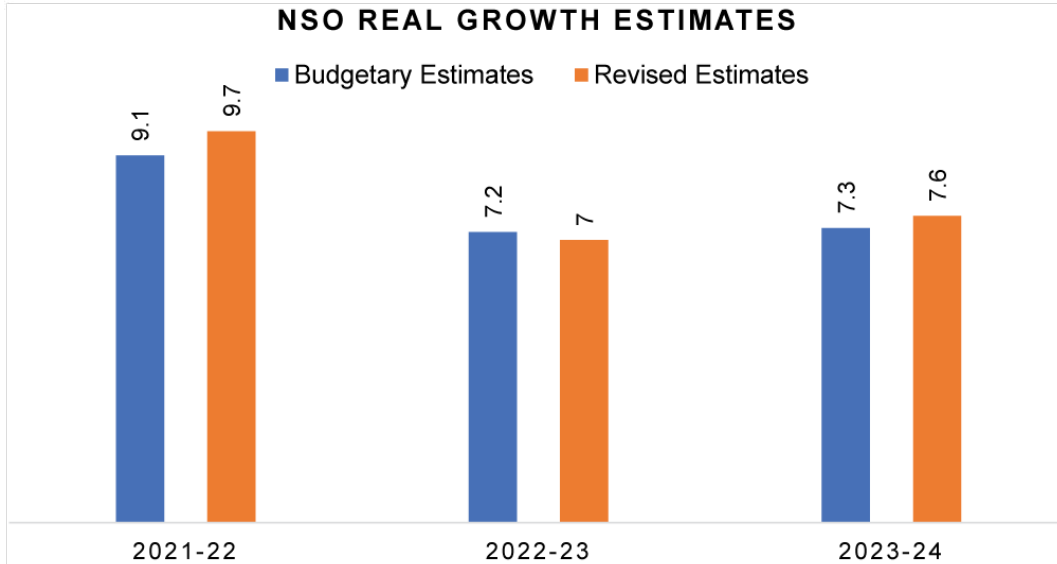


FIGURE: Column chart representation of domestic real GDP growth (GDP) projections. Source: National Statistical Office (NSO).

The National Statistical Office (NSO) projected a real GDP growth rate of 7.8 % - 8 % for the current fiscal, outstripping the 7.6 %, citing the continuing momentum in economic activity in the ongoing final quarter of 2023-24. The Ministry asserted a bright outlook for 2024-25 with this fiscal closing on a positive note of 'strong growth, stable inflation and external account and a progressive employment outlook', despite risks such as "hardening crude oil prices" and "global supply chain bottlenecks to trade".

The retail inflation had extended its stay inside the RBI's tolerance range of 2 % - 6 % for a sixth month with core inflation continuing to ease. Despite price volatility in certain specific food items, headline inflation stayed below 6 % throughout this year except in July and August, adding that spices and cereals had recorded the lowest inflation since August 2022 last month. The inflation outlook was positive, citing the pick-up in the sowing of summer crops, which was

likely to help reduce food prices.

The Ministry cited strengthening of private consumption demand as seen in indicators like "burgeoning air passenger traffic and sale of passenger vehicles, digital payments, improved consumer confidence and expectations of a normal monsoon". The Ministry acknowledged that private consumption demand was backed by 'resilient urban demand' while rural demand remained weak.

The recovery in rural consumption demand is expected to be strengthened by the forecast of a normal monsoon. It also underlined that an increase in household savings would be necessary to finance private sector capital formation. On the external front, the narrowing merchandise trade deficit and the rising net services receipts are expected to result in an improvement in the current account balance in 2023-24. However, in 2024-25, the current account deficit will bear watching," it averred, hinting at the risks to goods exports and possible oil price surges due to the Red Sea crisis and the drought in the Panama Canal.

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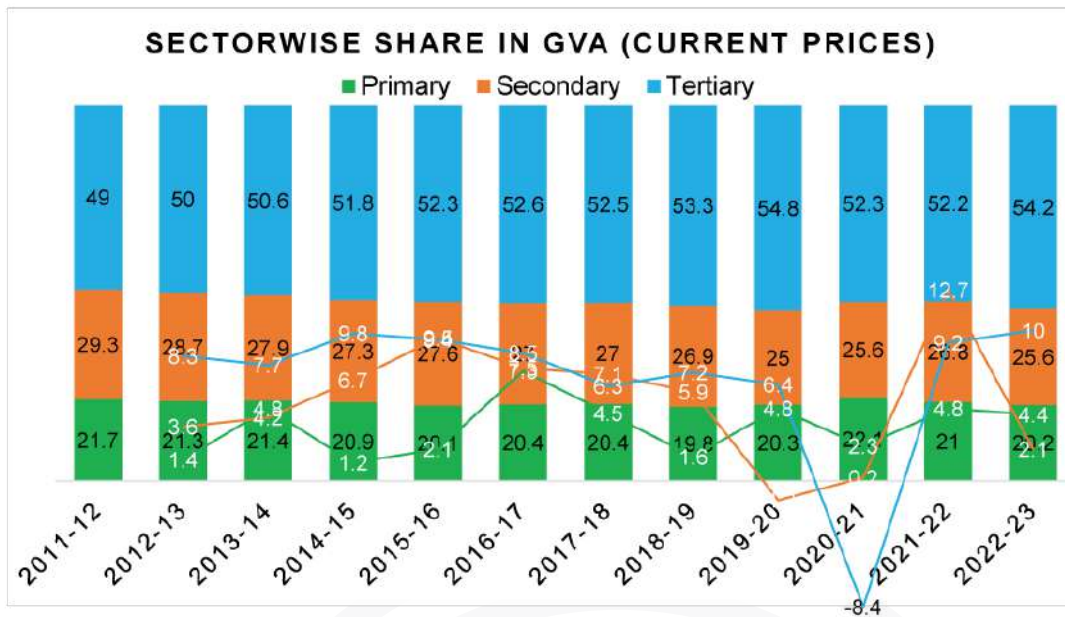


FIGURE: Column chart representation of sector-wise share in Gross Value Added at current prices. Source: National Statistical Office (NSO)

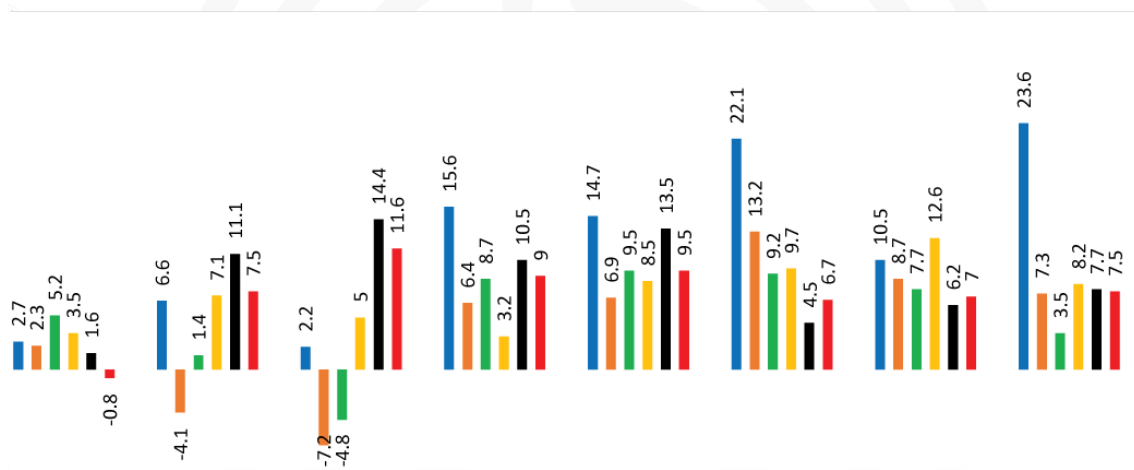


FIGURE: Column chart representation of Quarterly Estimates of GVA at (Constant Prices 2011-12). Source: National Statistical Office (NSO).

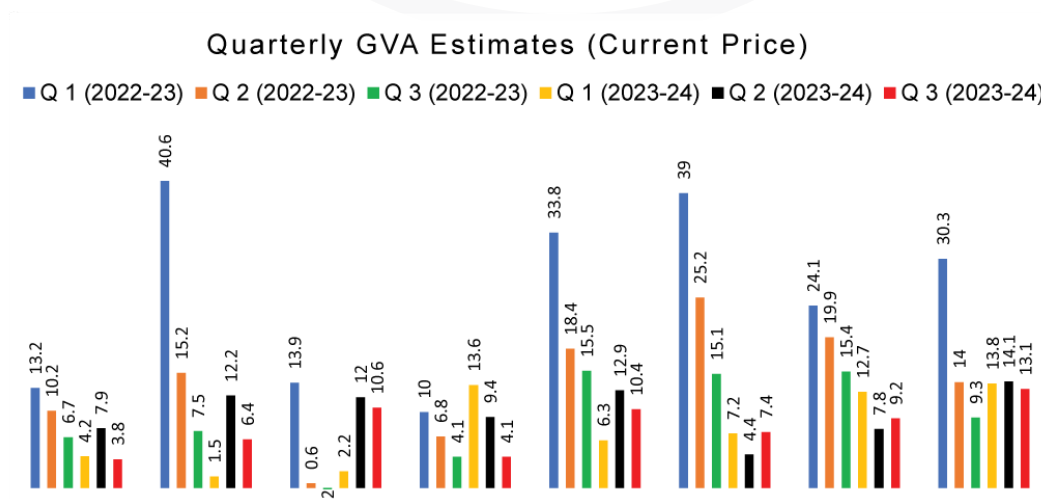


FIGURE: Column chart representation of Quarterly Estimates of GVA at (Current Prices). Source: National Statistical Office (NSO).



CAPITAL EXPENDITURES

The capital expenditures of the Centre sharply contracted from ₹ 80,000 Cr to ₹ 47,600 Cr recording a sharp year-on-year decline by 40.5 %, while the fiscal deficit hit 64 % of the revised estimates for 2023-24 by the end of the month. The Centre is likely to miss its capex and revenue expenditure plans, with just two months to go in the financial year. The capex is expected to undershoot by at least ₹ 50,000 Cr with ₹ 2.3 lakh Cr left to be incurred in February and March to meet the full year target for capex.

Gross tax revenues needed to rise just 6 % over these two months to hit the 2023-24 goal and corporate taxes were likely to surpass last year’s collections. Approximately, 75 % of

the total planned expenditure for the year had been incurred in the first 10 months, so the scope for higher expenditure in the last two months was very high.

INDEX OF INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

The Quick Estimates of Index of Industrial Production (IIP), released on 12th of every month with a six weeks lag and compiled with data received from source agencies, which in turn receive the data from the producing factories/ establishments. For the month of January 2024, the Quick Estimates of Index of Industrial Production (IIP) with base 2011-12 stands at 153.0. The Indices of Industrial Production for the mining, manufacturing and electricity sectors for the month of January 2024 stand at 144.1, 150.1 and 197.1 respectively.

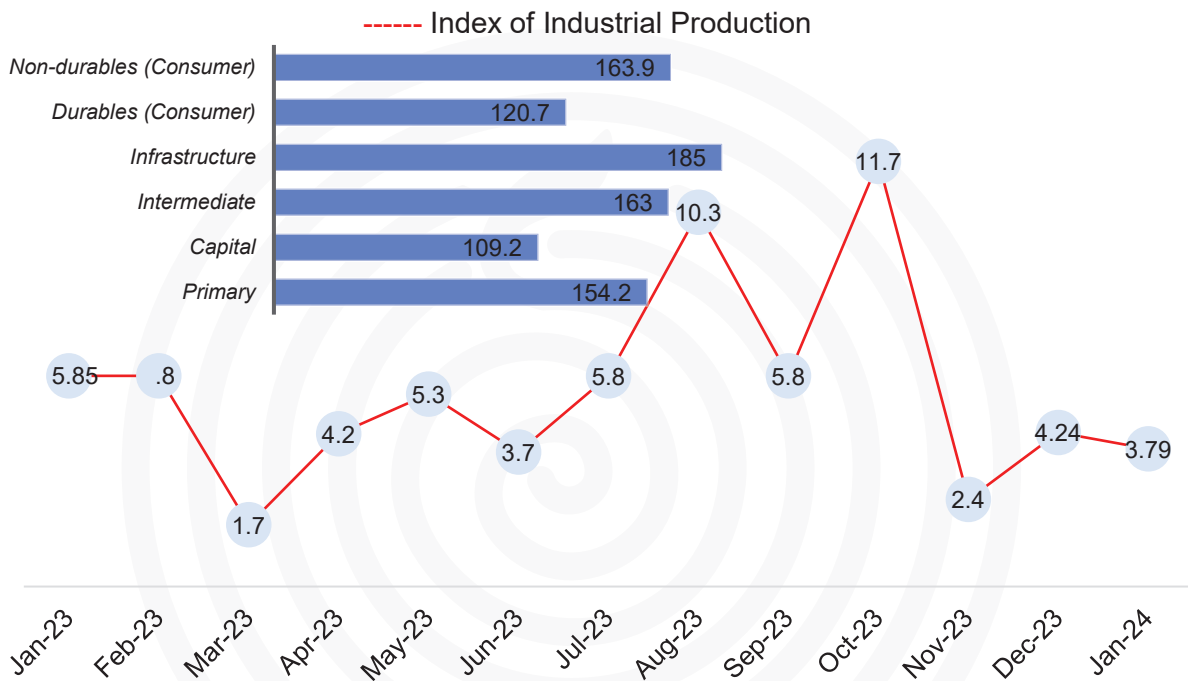


FIGURE: Line chart representation of the Index of Industrial Production growth rates (on Y-o-Y basis in per cent).

CORE SECTOR INDUSTRIES

The combined Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) increased by 6.7 % (provisional) in February 2024 as compared to the Index of February 2023. The production of coal, natural gas, cement, steel, crude oil, electricity and refinery products recorded positive growth in February 2024. The ICI measures

the combined and individual performance of production of eight core industries viz. cement, coal, crude oil, electricity, fertilizers, natural gas, refinery products and steel. The Eight Core Industries comprise 40.27 % of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

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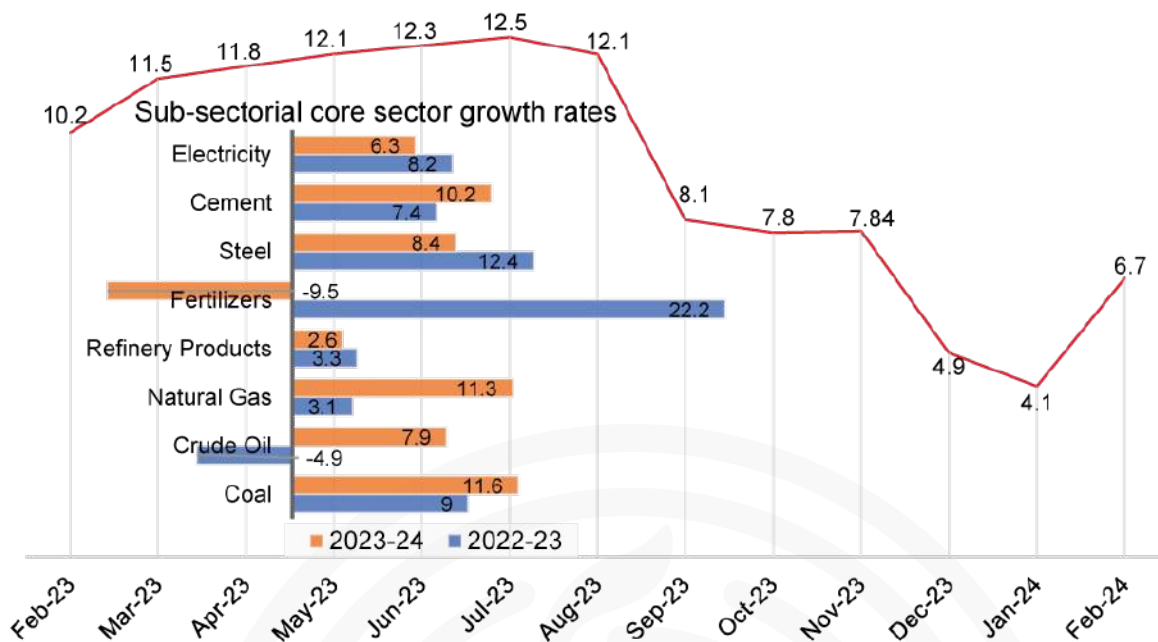


FIGURE: Line chart representation of the core sector growth rates (on Y-o-Y basis in per cent). Inset: Bar chart representation of the sub-sectorial growth rates (on Y-o-Y basis in per cent) of core sector industries for the month of February.

FLASH PMI SIGNALS A SHARP RISE IN OUTPUT

New orders and output levels in India’s manufacturing sector may have hit a 42-month high in March, lifting overall private sector output to an eight-month peak despite a slight moderation in services sector activity.

The Manufacturing sector Flash PMI stood at 59.2 for March from a 56.9 PMI reading in February, while the Services PMI eased from 60.6 last month to 60.3. The Flash PMI scores for an ongoing month are based on responses from about 75 % to 85 % of 800 services and manufacturing players surveyed for the PMI that is available for each month in the first week of the next month.

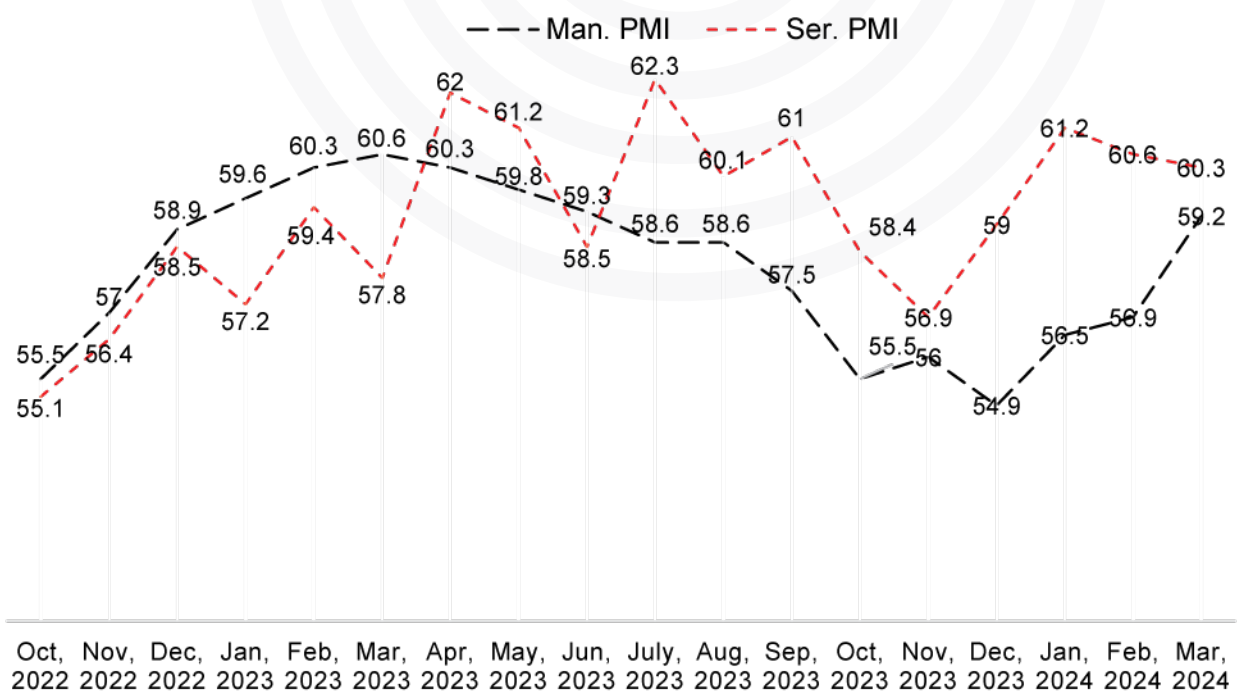


FIGURE: Column chart representation of the monthly S&P Global India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI) and Services Purchasing Managers’ Index (PMI).

New orders accelerated for services producers as well, and overall export orders rose to an almost two-year high as per the Flash PMI report released Thursday. With work backlogs rising particularly for services players, firms reported an increase in hiring activity at the fastest pace in six months.



Input costs rose for both manufacturing and services firms, with the latter reporting higher cost surges--led by prices of commodities like metals and plastic as well as transportation, labour and food costs. However, only manufacturers faced a margin squeeze as services firms were able to raise output prices broadly in tandem with input costs.

TRADE PROFILE OF INDIA

India's overall exports (merchandise and services combined) in February 2024 is estimated to be US \$ 73.55 billion, exhibiting a positive growth of 14.20 % over February 2023. Overall imports in February 2024 are estimated to be US \$ 75.50 billion, exhibiting a positive growth of 10.13 % over February 2023.

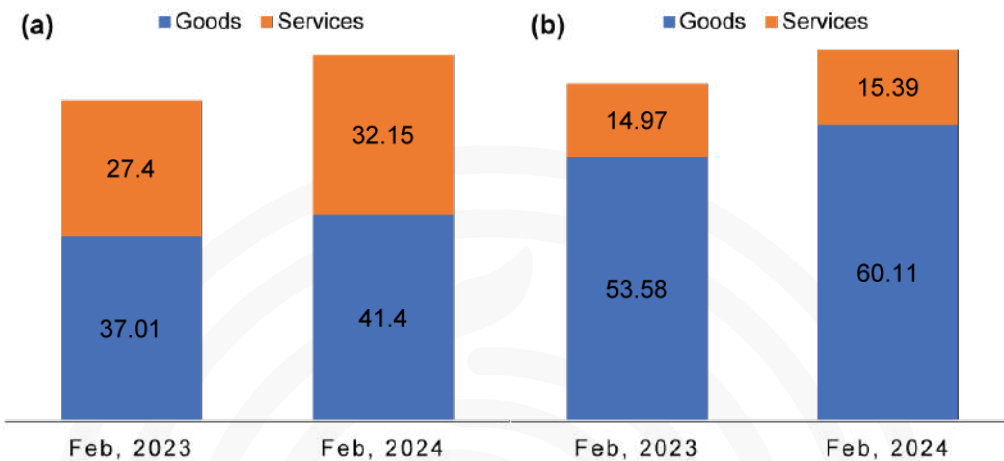


FIGURE: (L) Column chart representation of monthly value of exports of goods and services. (R) Column chart representation of monthly value of imports of goods and services.

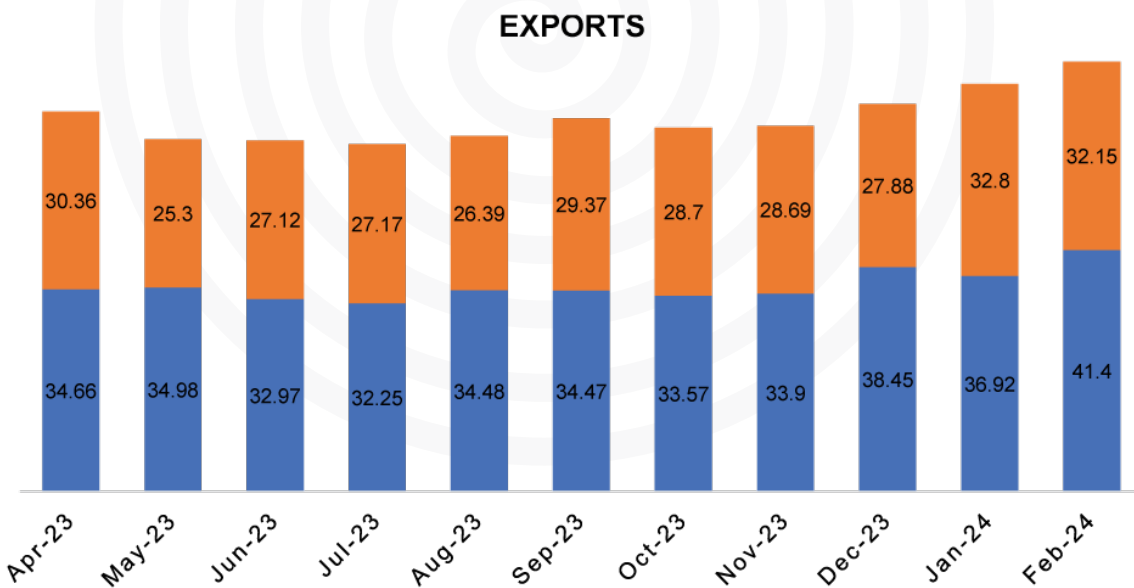


FIGURE: Column chart representation of monthly value of merchandise and services exports.

February marks only the fifth occasion that India's merchandise exports recorded a 11.87 % to hit an 11-month high of US \$ 41.4 billion, while imports surged at a faster pace of 12.2 % to hit \$ 60.11 billion, with a sharp spike in gold imports which hit a four-month peak of \$ 6.15 billion. The rising imports lifted the trade deficit to \$ 18.7 billion from January's 9-month low of 17.5 billion. The export numbers in February have surpassed all our expectations, especially as it has been achieved despite tight monetary conditions in most markets, ongoing conflicts and lower commodity prices. Exuding hope this year's overall exports, including Services trade, may surpass last year's record \$ 776 billion, he said the World Trade Organization (WTO) has recently projected a higher 3.3 % growth in world trade for 2024.

In the first 11 months of the year, goods exports have contracted 3.5 % to \$395 billion, while imports have dropped 5.3 % to \$ 620 billion, narrowing the trade deficit to \$ 225 billion from \$246 billion in the year-earlier period. From trade deficit and current account deficit perspectives, there has been an improvement but rising imports of gold and electronics and the dip in exports of garments must raise a red flag. Low global demand has hurt exports of readymade garments (which is down 11%) and engineering goods, which are down 9.3 % so far this year.

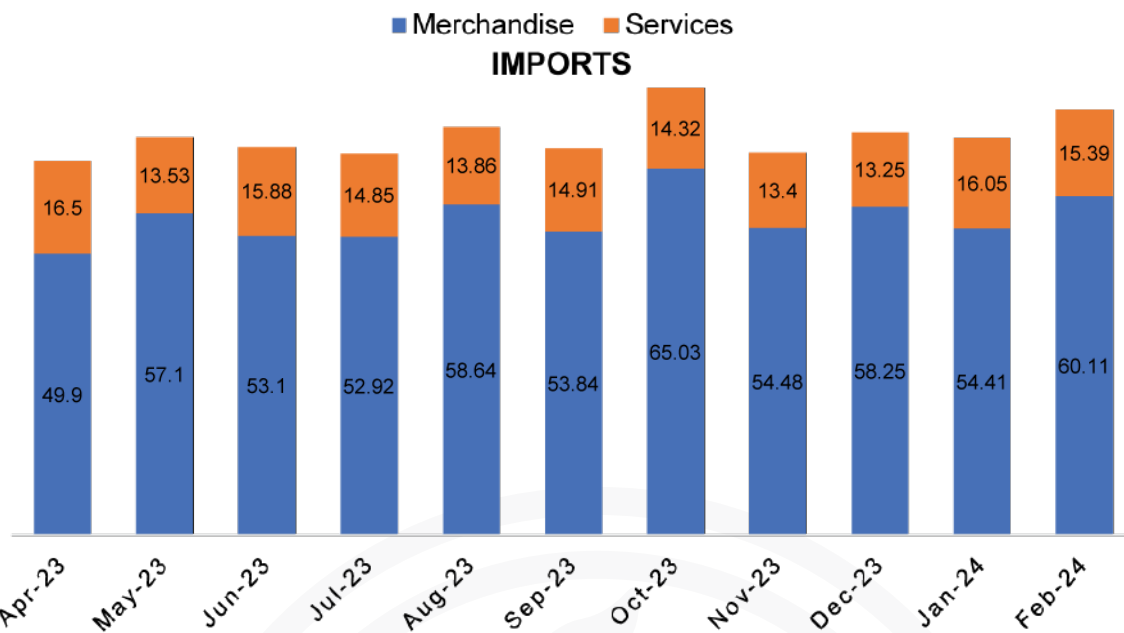


FIGURE: Column chart representation of monthly value of merchandise and services imports

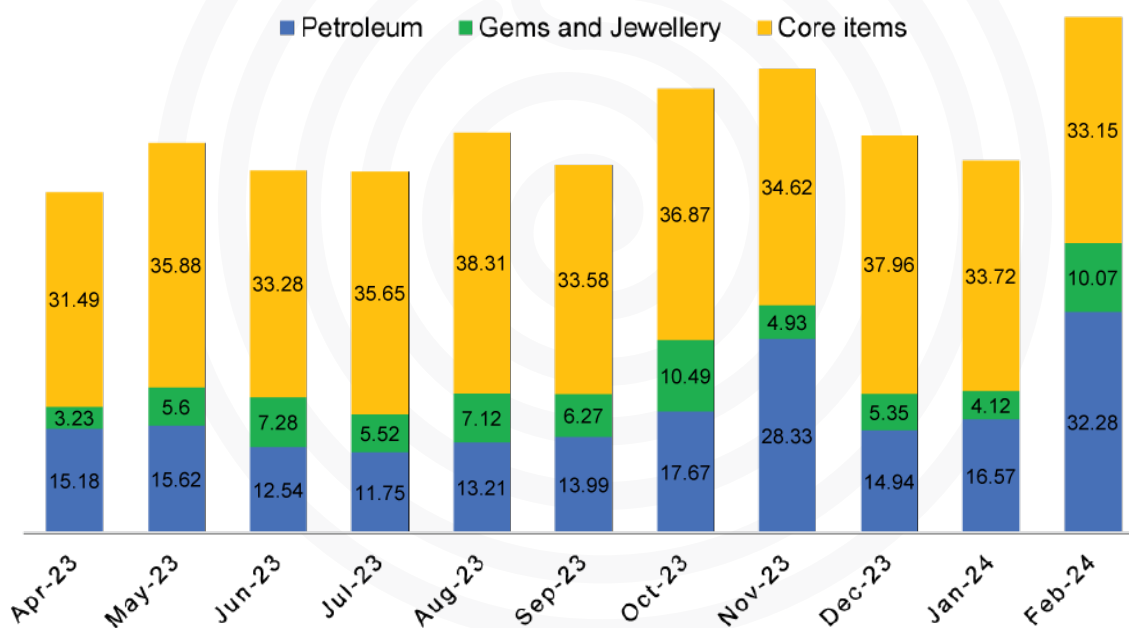


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the import profile of Indian imports. Gems & Jewellery*: Gold, Silver & Pearls, precious & Semi-precious stones.

India's overall exports (merchandise and services combined) in April-February 2023-24* are estimated to be US \$ 709.81 billion, exhibiting a positive growth of 0.83 % over April-February 2022-23. Overall imports in April-February 2023-24* are estimated to be US \$ 782.05 billion, exhibiting a negative growth of (-) 4.64 % over April-February 2022-23.

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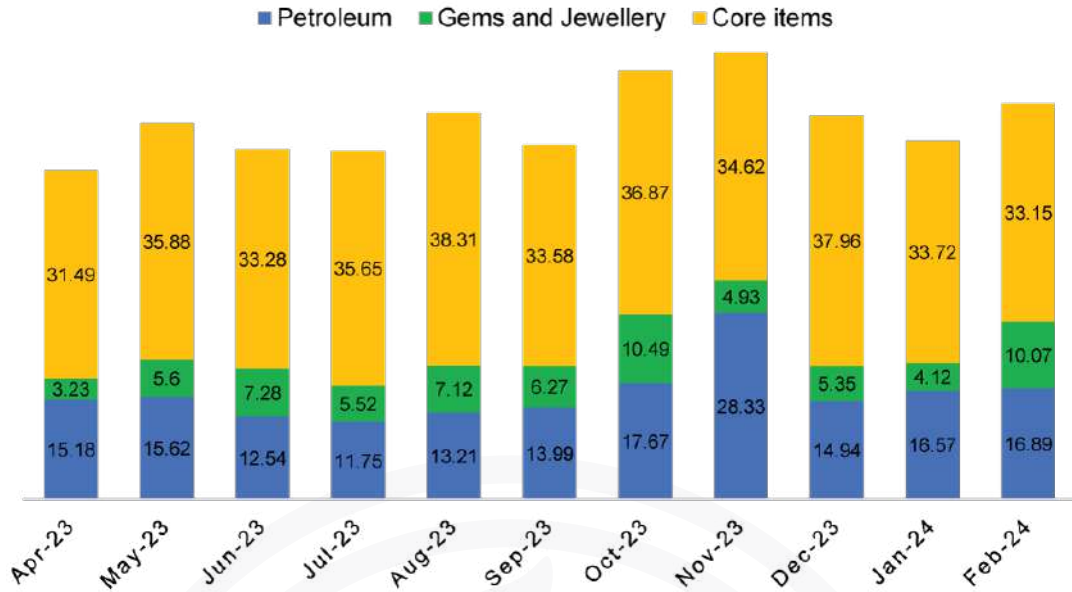


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the import profile of Indian imports. Gems & Jewellery*: Gold, Silver & Pearls, precious & Semi-precious stones.

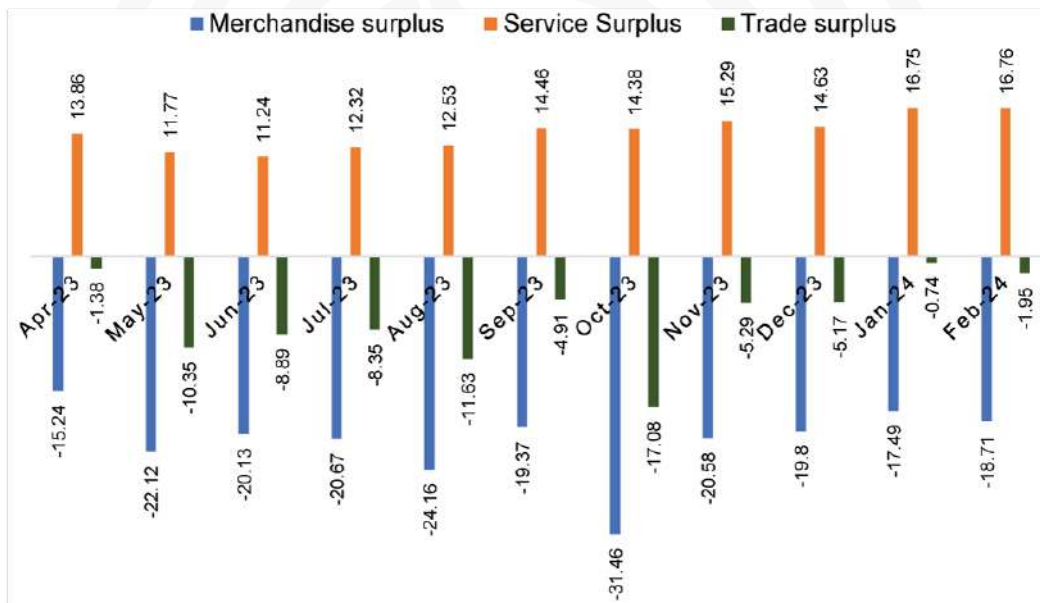


FIGURE: Column chart representation of trade surplus.

India's goods exports jumped 11.9 % in February, marking the healthiest uptick in 20 months. The \$ 41.4 billion tally is the highest in 11 months, and only the third occasion in two years that the \$ 40 billion mark has been breached. It is remarkable that this spurt, significantly higher than the average export tally of \$ 35.4 billion in the first ten months of this year, comes amid persistent concerns about disruptions in the Red Sea and the drought-hit Panama Canal that have throttled vital trading routes and spiked the time and cost of moving consignments.

RETAIL PRICE INFLATION

The repetitive incidence of short amplitude food price pressures has deterred a swifter fall in headline inflation towards the target of 4 %, even as inflation is on the ebb with broad-based softening of core inflation.



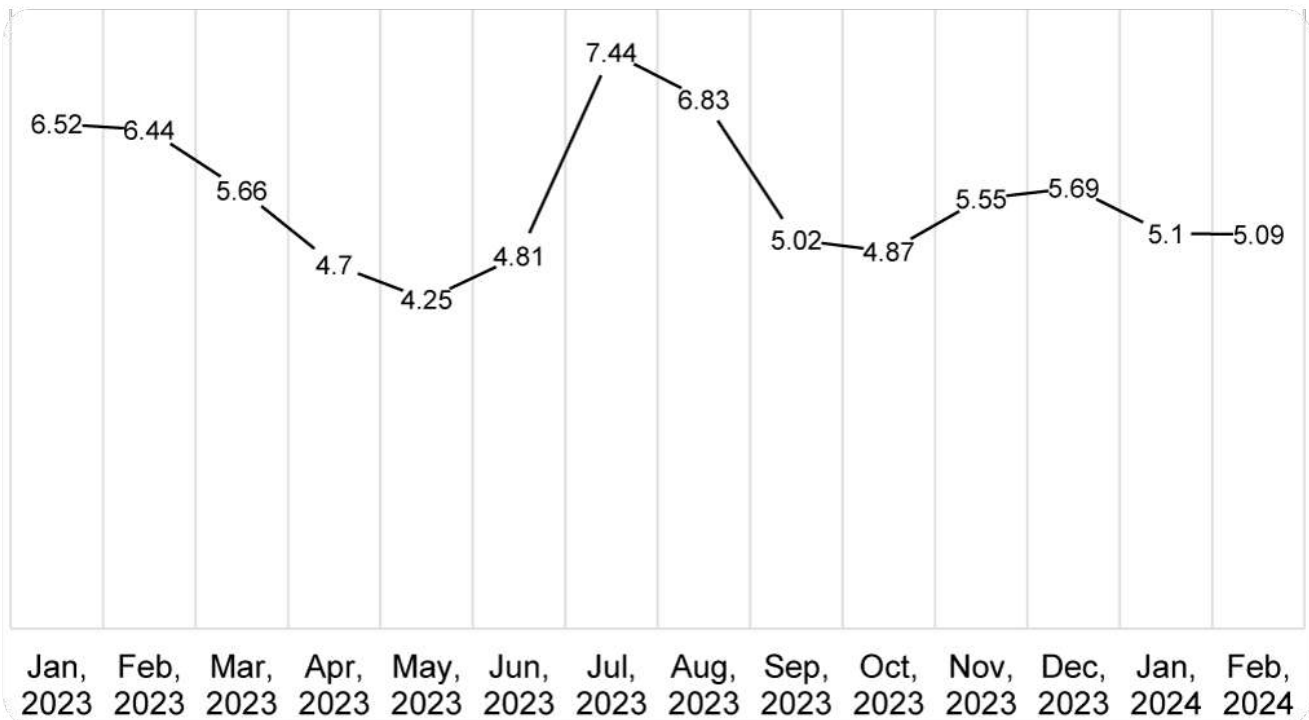


FIGURE: Line chart representation of retail price index-based inflation rates. Inset. Bar chart representation of the of All India Retail Price Indices for food articles and Rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for February, 2024.

Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) accelerated from 9 % in January to 9.2 % for urban residents. Rural India experienced an 8.2 % uptick in February, compared with 7.9 % in the previous month. Retail inflation stayed higher in rural India, unchanged from the 5.34 % recorded in January, while urban inflation eased slightly from 4.9 % to 4.8 % in February. Most economists expect inflation to stay in the 5.1 % - 5.2 % range in March as well.

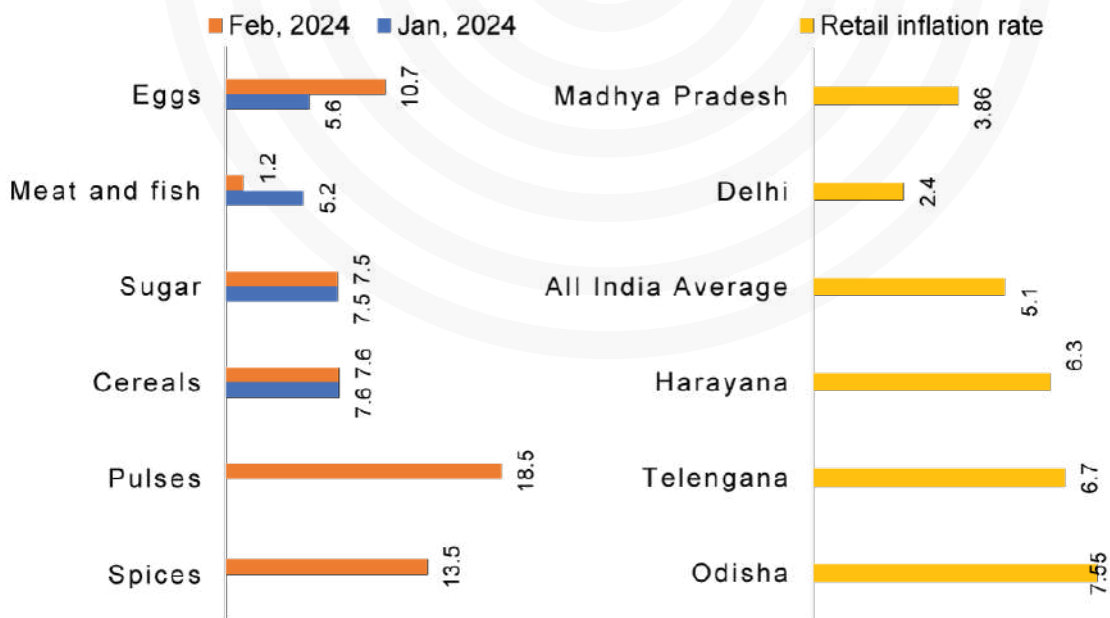
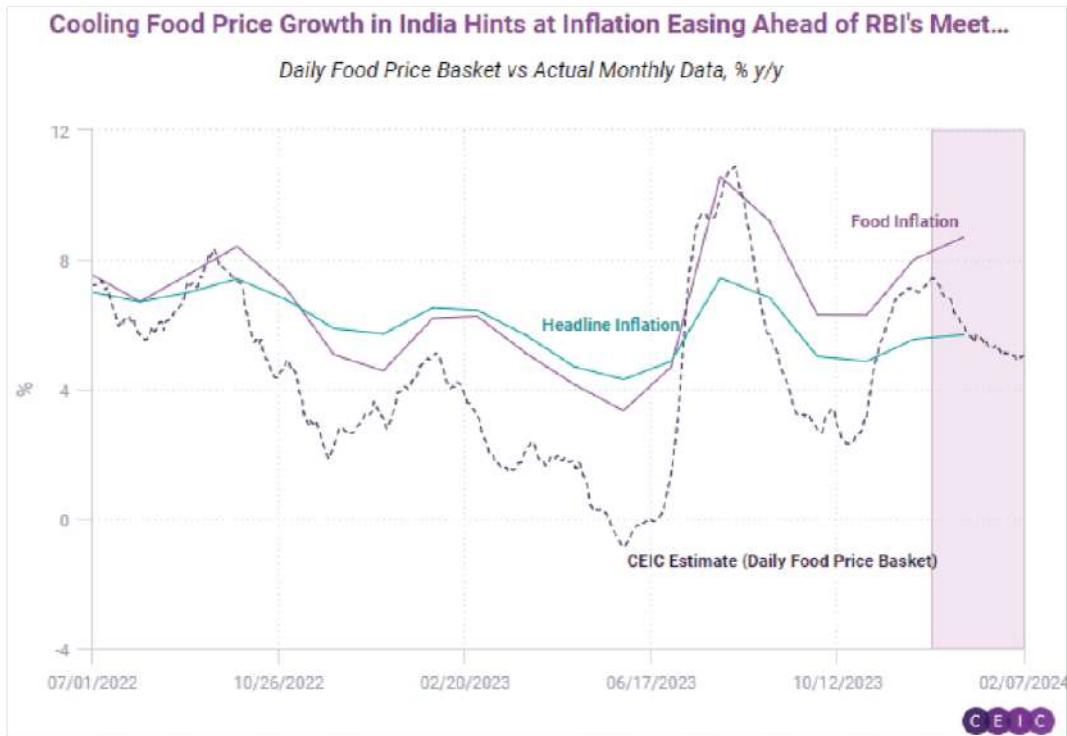


FIGURE: Column chart representation of All India Consumer Price Indices based rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for February, 2024.



The headline Consumer Price Index (CPI) of February remained stable at 5.09 % compared to the previous month, the rate of food price increases measured by the Consumer Food Price Index rose by 36 basis points to 8.66 %. The Reserve Bank of India Deputy Governor Michael Patra highlighted the risks posed by high food inflation to the economy, noting that private consumption, which accounts for 57 % of GDP, is struggling due to elevated food prices, especially in rural areas.

Cereal prices, which hold the largest weightage in the CPI food category, remained high at 7.6%, although slightly lower than the previous month. Meanwhile, vegetable prices, constituting the third-largest category in the food and beverages subgroup of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), recorded a staggering 30.3 % year-on-year inflation rate, marking a significant increase from January. Of particular concern within the vegetable category is the potato-onion-tomato trio, which is widely consumed and accounts for over a third of the category's weight, experiencing the most significant price hikes.

In January, potato prices shifted from nearly a 2% year-on-year decrease to a 12.4% inflation rate. Onion prices rose by 22.1%, and tomato prices increased by almost 400 basis points, reaching a six-month high of 42 %. Currently, the average retail prices of potato, onion, and tomato stand at 21.3%, 41.4%, and 35.2% higher, respectively, compared to the same period last year.

The government's supply side measures, such as the three-month-old ban on onion exports, have not significantly reduced the prices of these politically sensitive food items. The outlook is also concerning, with onion output in the 2023-24 horticulture crop year expected to be more than 15.6 % lower than last year, and potato production projected to have an almost 2 % deficit.

The water storage data from the Central Water Commission indicates that live storage in 150 reservoirs across India as of March 14 is at 40 % of capacity, below both the 10-year average and last year's levels, which could adversely affect summer-sown crops. The southern region is facing a particularly acute storage deficit of 29 % compared to the 10-year average.

Core inflation, excluding food and energy costs, remained below 4 % for the third month in a row. The current bout of inflation is purely food-driven, and will persist in the coming months as onion prices have bounced higher. The average year-on-year inflation in the fourth quarter of 2024 over the 5 % may further postpone RBI to cut interest rates.

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WHOLESALE PRICE INFLATION

Wholesale price inflation eased to a four-month low of 0.2% in February, from January's 0.27%, despite an acceleration in food and primary articles' inflation rates, owing to a sharper year-on-year drop in manufactured products' and fuel and power prices.

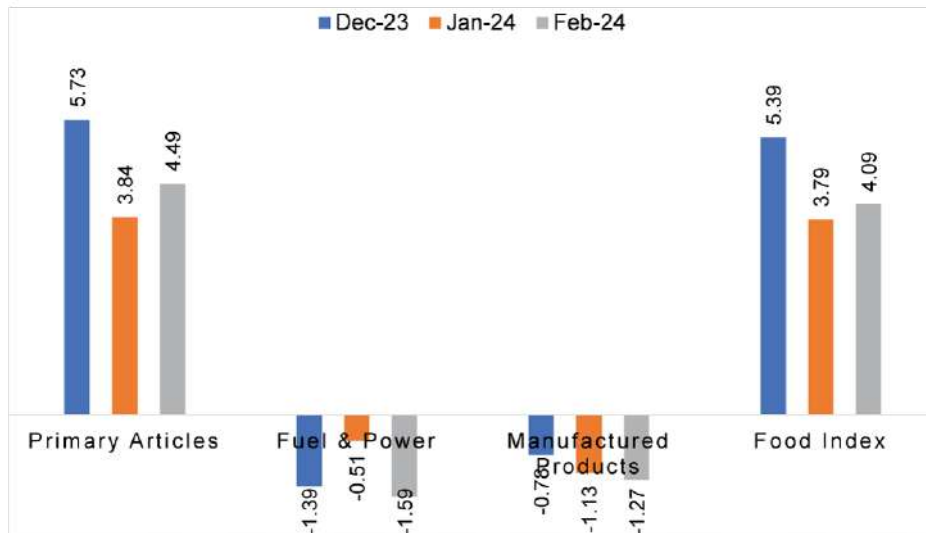


FIGURE: Column chart representation of inflation rate for the last three months of all commodities and WPI components

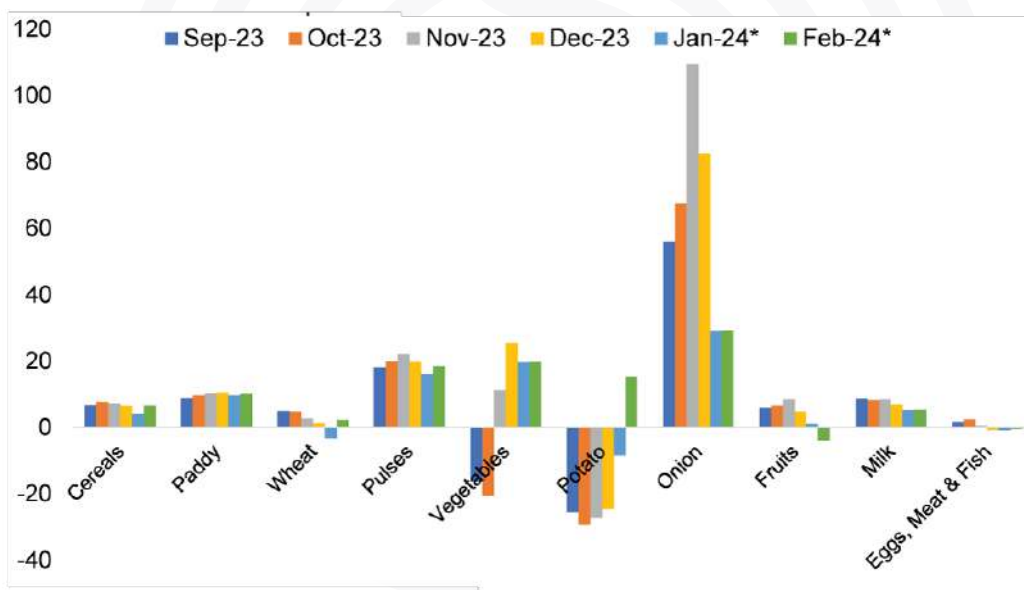


FIGURE: Column chart representation of All India Wholesale Rates of Inflation for food articles (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for February, 2024.

FIGURE: Column chart representation of All India Wholesale Rates of Inflation for food articles (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for February, 2024.

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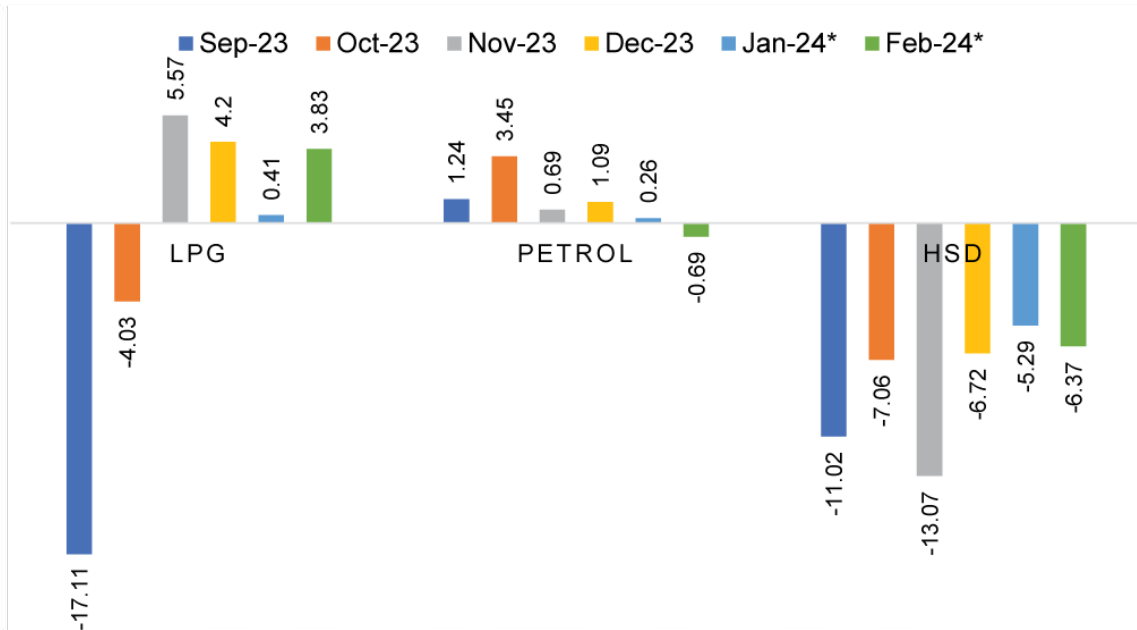


FIGURE: Column chart representation of All India Wholesale Rates of Inflation for fuel and power (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for February, 2024.

The Food Index quickened to 4.1 %, from 3.8 % in January, while primary articles' prices rose 4.5 %. On a sequential basis, the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) was 0.07% higher, with primary articles rising 0.22 % and food up 0.17 %.

Reserve Bank of India (RBI) officials, including Deputy Governor Michael D. Patra, noted in an article in the RBI Bulletin that inflation is declining, with core inflation pulling down headline inflation toward the 4% target. However, repetitive short-term food price pressures have prevented faster declines. Recent Consumer Price Index (CPI) readings show shallow and short-lived easing of vegetable prices, while cereal prices remain strong and meat/fish prices have surged. Despite some food price increases, overall food price pressures have been limited by core disinflation. High-frequency data for March indicates declining cereal prices, increasing pulse prices, and softening edible oil prices. Tomato prices have corrected, while onion and potato prices have surged after recent softening. Fuel prices are also expected to deflate further in March due to a government-mandated reduction in liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) prices. Overall, headline inflation's momentum turned positive in February, offsetting a favourable base effect. The officials emphasized the need for monetary policy to remain cautious, guiding inflation toward the target while supporting economic growth.

GROSS GST RECEIPTS

Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue hit its second-highest level of ₹ 1,78,484 Cr in March, even as the pace of growth in collections slowed to 11.5 %, from February's 12.5 % lifting the tally for 2023-24 by 11.6 % to a little over ₹20.18 lakh Cr.

Gross Good and Services Tax (GST) revenue for March 2024 witnessed the second highest collection ever at ₹1.78 lakh Cr, with a 11.5 % year-on-year growth. This surge was driven by a significant rise in GST collection from domestic transactions at 17.6 %.

GST revenue net of refunds for March 2024 is ₹ 1.65 lakh Cr which is growth of 18.4 % over same period last year. FY 2023-24 marks a milestone with total gross GST collection of Rs. 20.18 lakh Cr exceeding ₹ 20 lakh Cr, a 11.7 % increase compared to the previous year. The average monthly collection for this fiscal year stands at ₹1.68 lakh Cr, surpassing the previous year's average of ₹ 1.5 lakh Cr. GST revenue net of refunds as of March 2024 for the current fiscal year is ₹ 18.01 lakh Cr which is a growth of 13.4 % over same period last year.

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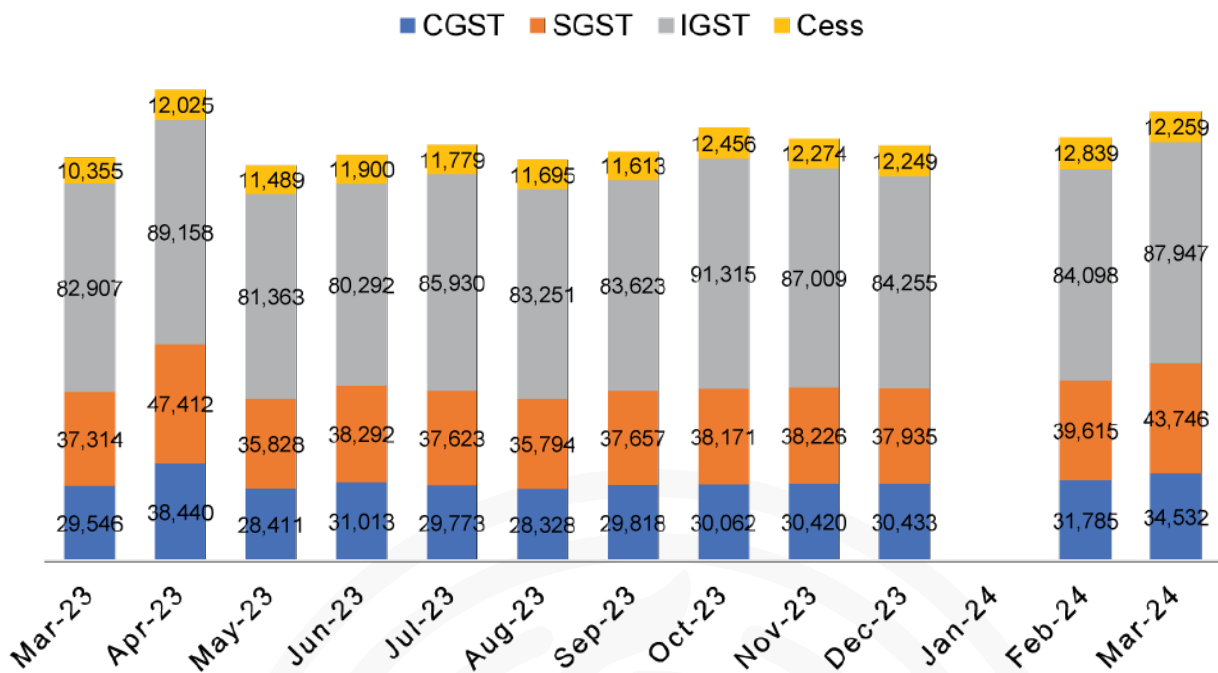


FIGURE: Column chart representation of components of GST receipts (Cr.) (on Y-o-Y basis).

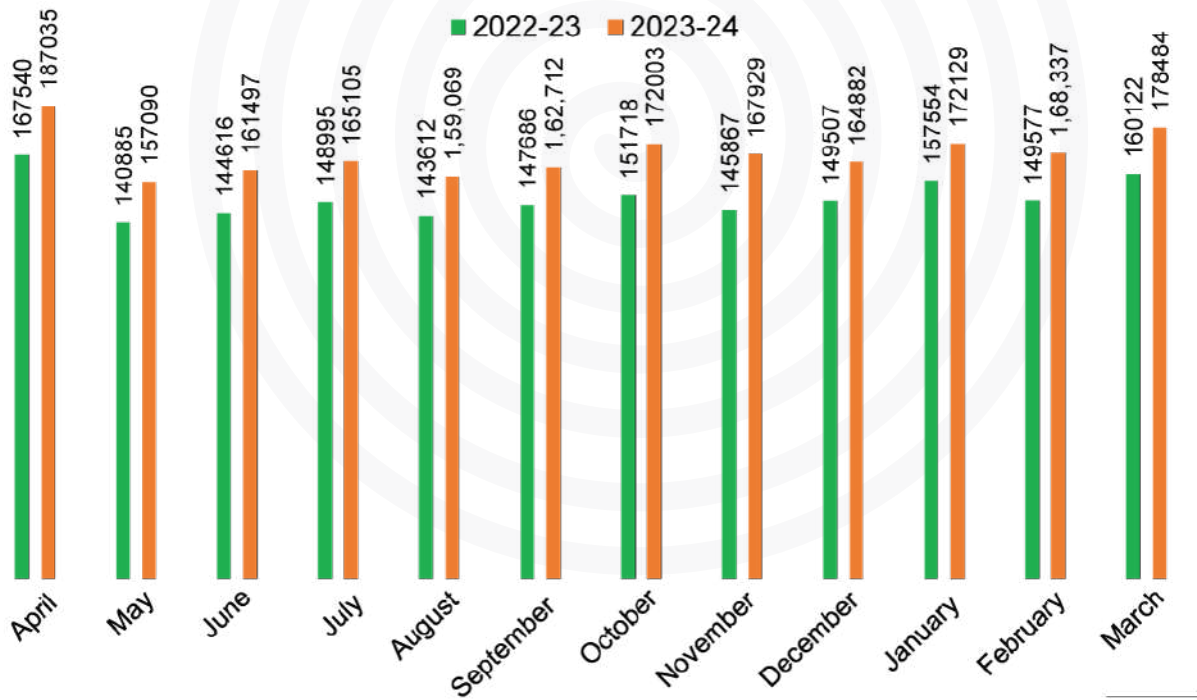
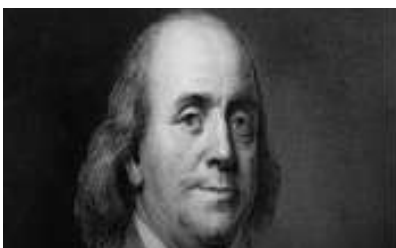


FIGURE: Column chart representation of Goods & Services Tax (GST) receipts (Cr.) (on Y-o-Y basis).



"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."
 –Benjamin Franklin



EMPLOYMENT SCENARIO GRIM

According to the India Employment Report 2024 released by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Institute of Human Development, the unemployment among educated youth in India has almost doubled from 35.2 % in 2000 to 65.7 % in 2022. India's large young workforce is a demographic dividend don't appear to have the skills to deliver – with 75% of youth unable to send emails with attachments, 60% unable to copy and paste files, and 90% unable to put a mathematical formula into a spreadsheet.

Total Labour Force Participation Rate

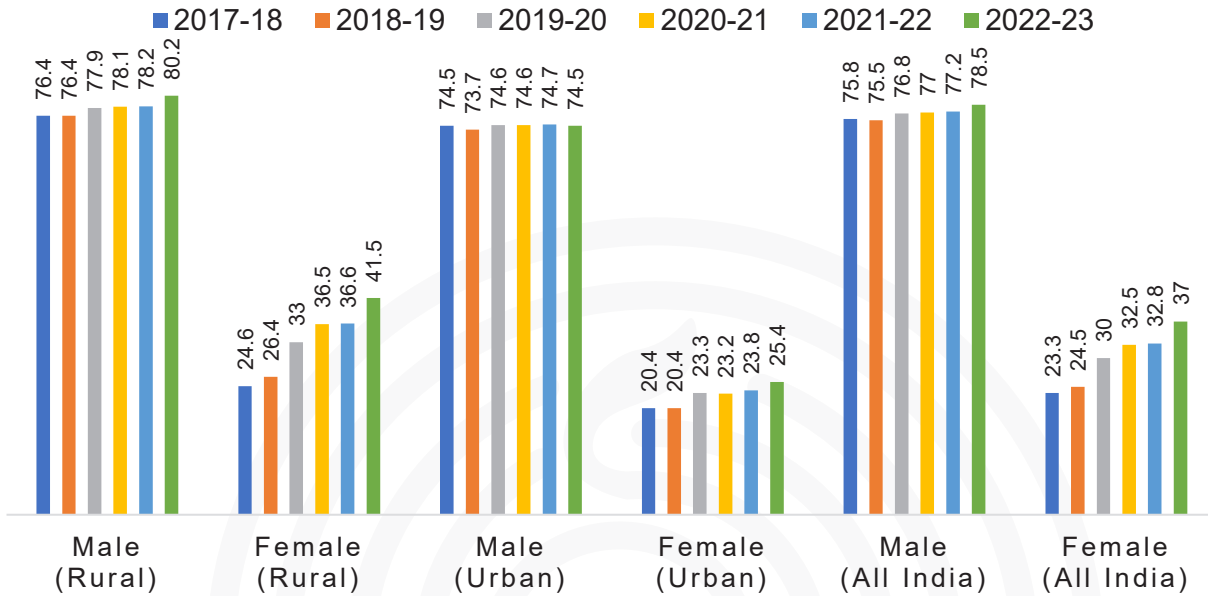


FIGURE: Column chart representation of Total Labour Force Participation Rate in usual status (PS+SS) for persons of age 15 years and above.

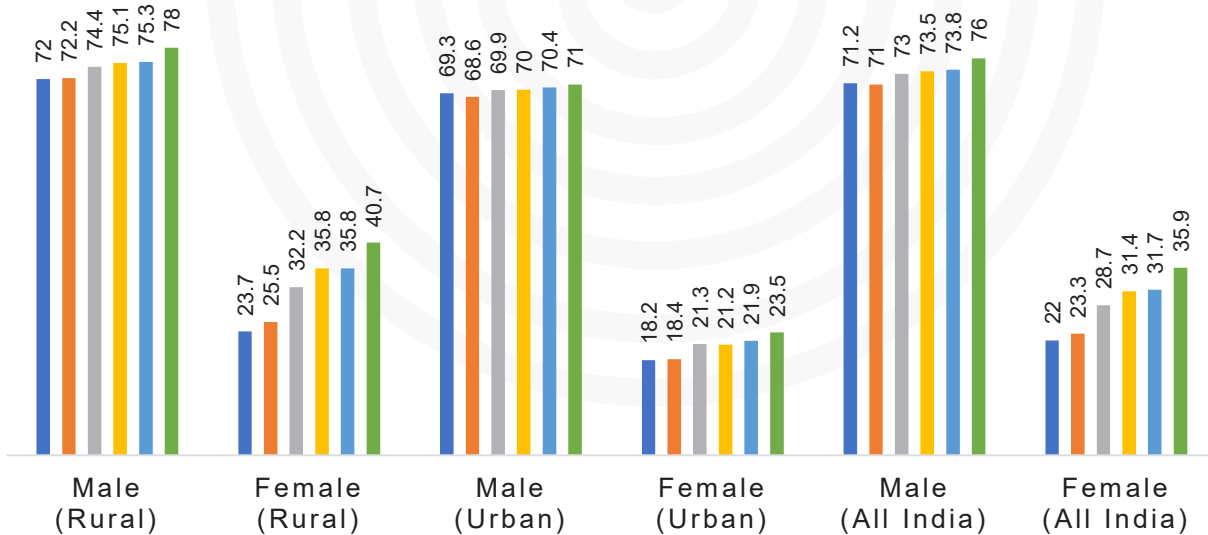
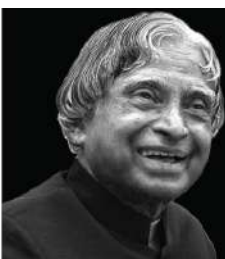


FIGURE: Column chart representation of Worker Population Ratio (WPR) in usual status (PS+SS) for persons of age 15 years and above.



You have to dream before your dreams can come true..

- A. P. J. ABDUL KALAM

Worker Population Ratio (WPR) - (Usual Status)

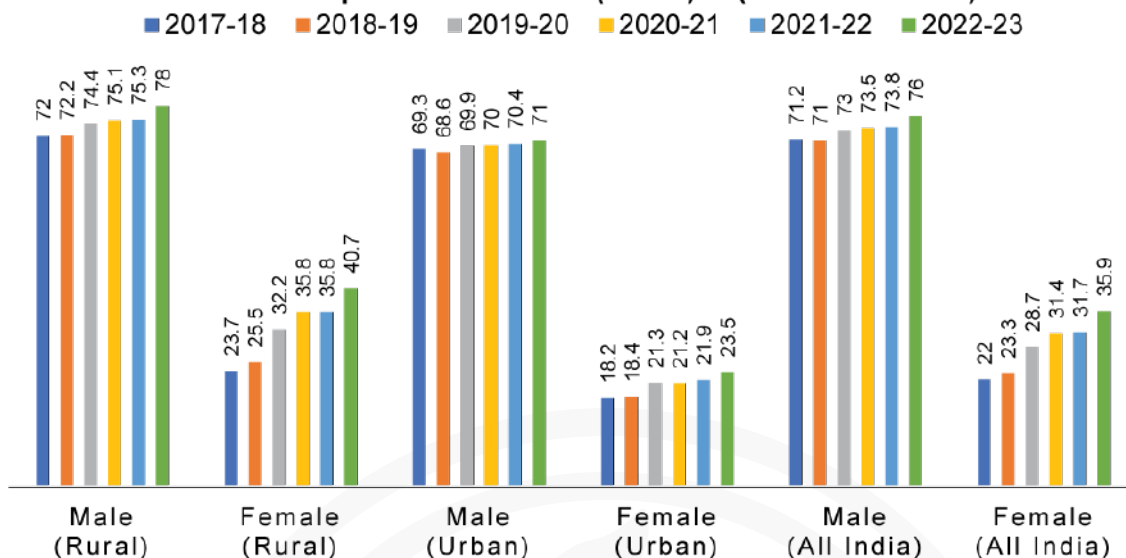


FIGURE: Column chart representation of Worker Population Ratio (WPR) in usual status (PS+SS) for persons of age 15 years and above.

Unemployment Rate (UR) - (Usual Status)

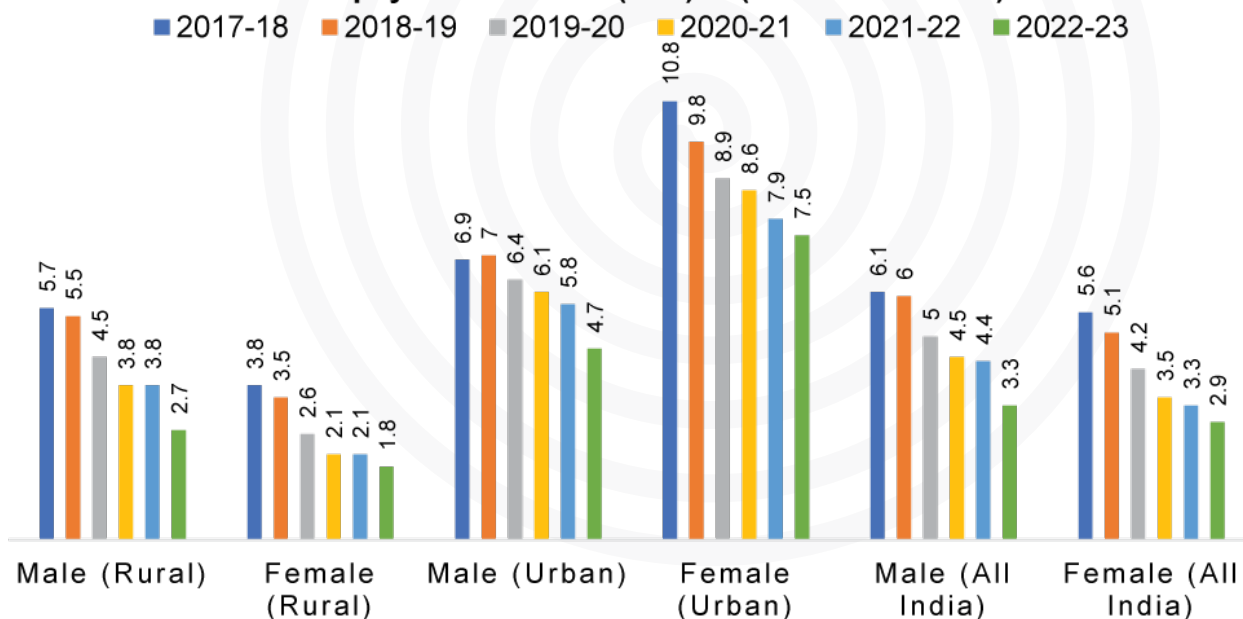


FIGURE: Column chart representation of Unemployment Rate (UR) in usual status (PS+SS) for persons of age 15 years and above.

The growth of the non-farm sectors is insufficient to absorb workers from agriculture, even though non-farm employment grew at a higher rate than farm employment over the different periods prior to 2018. Almost, 90 % of workers remain engaged in informal work, while the share of regular work, which steadily increased after 2000, declined after 2018.

High level of joblessness among educated youths reflects the lack of quality employment opportunities. Many highly educated young people wait in the hopes of securing better employment in the future, unwilling to take on low-paying, insecure jobs that are currently available and would rather.



INDIA'S RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT FUNDING

The Interim Budget, 2024-25 earmarked a corpus of ₹ 1 lakh Cr. to bolster the research and innovation ecosystem within the country, has sparked enthusiasm within the scientific and research communities. India's R&D is witnessing significant growth, with a notable increase in Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD) from ₹ 6,01,968 million in 2010-11 to ₹ 12,73,810 million in 2020-21.

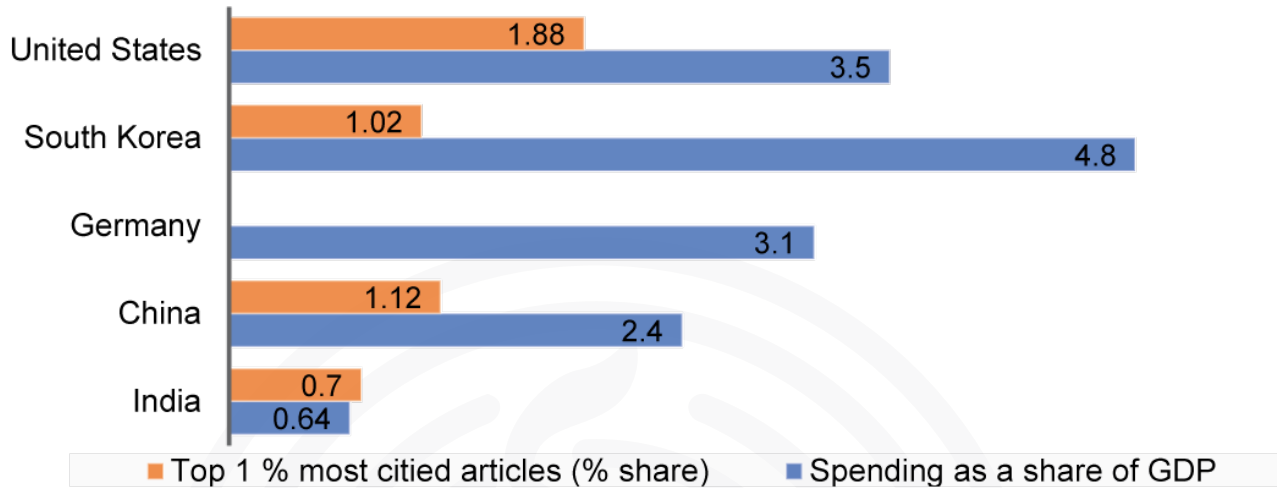


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the research and development investment as a percentage of GDP.

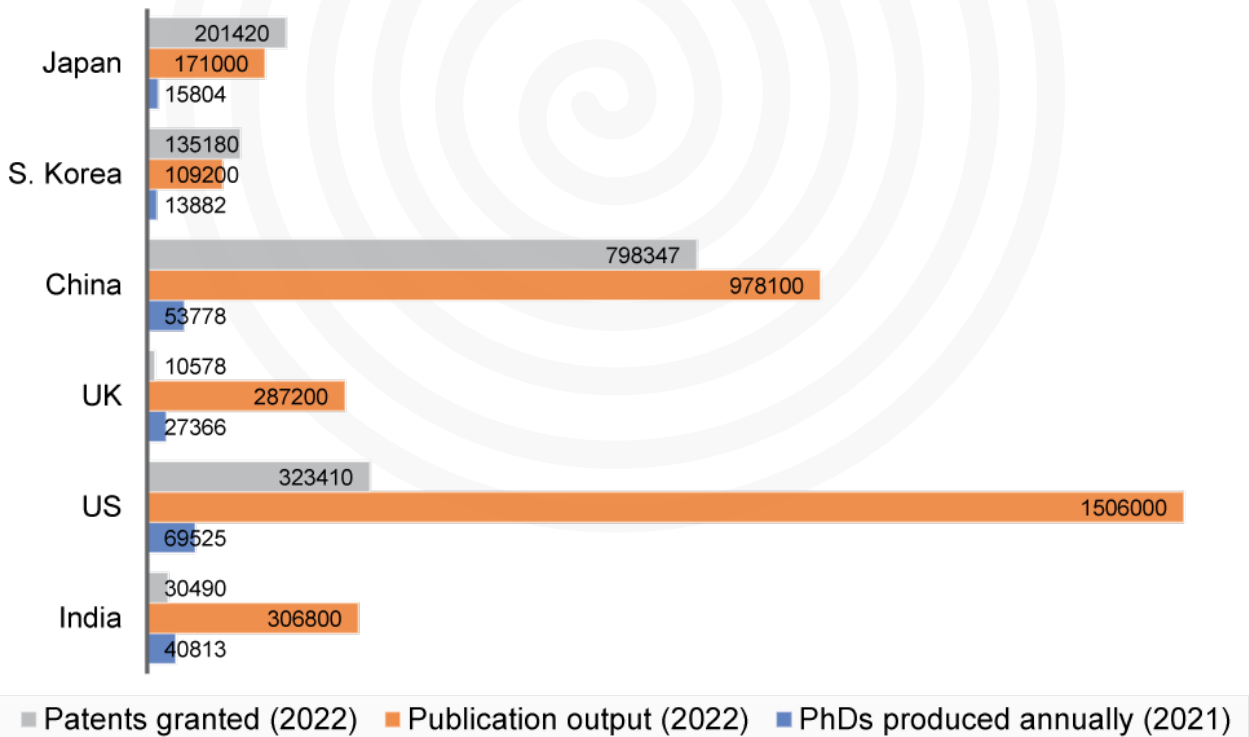


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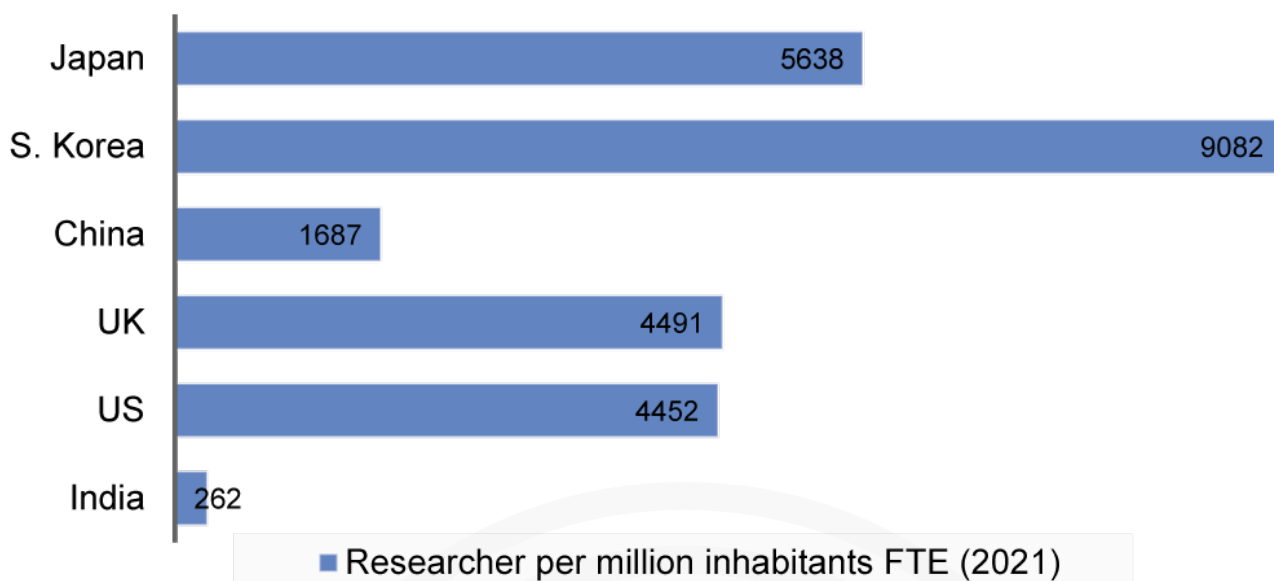


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the Researcher per million inhabitants (FTE) (2021).

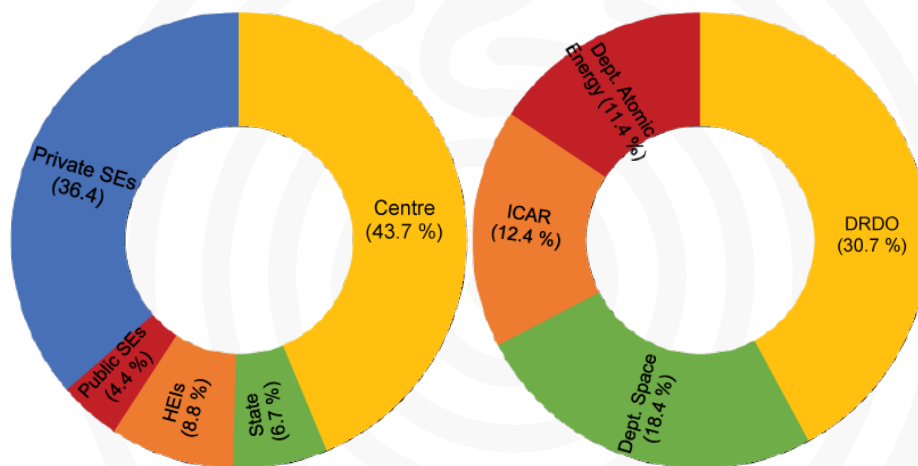


FIGURE: (L) Pie chart representation of the expenditures Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD). (R) Pie chart representation of the expenditures of India's total investment in R&D reached \$ 17.2 billion in 2020-21 by four key scientific agencies under the Department of Science and Technology.

Indian private sector enterprises spent approximately \$ 6.2 billion, representing 37 % of the domestic Gross Expenditure on Research and Development (GERD), in contrast to the global trend, where business enterprises in China, Japan, South Korea, and the U.S. typically contribute over 65 % of Research and Development (R&D).

HEIs play a comparatively minor role in the overall R&D investment, contributing 8.8 % (\$ 1.5 billion). Collaboration between the government, business enterprises and HEIs is essential to maximise the positive impact of science, technology, and innovation on economic growth and technological advancement. India's R&D ecosystem has its advantages in terms of efficiency, but could benefit more from strong private enterprises involvement and stronger industry-academia collaboration, facilitating knowledge transfer and

fostering innovation.

Impact of initiatives

India's technological and manufacturing advancements rely on transforming its research and development (R&D) landscape, which requires both private sector involvement and strengthening academia's research infrastructure. Initiatives like the National Deep Tech Startup Policy (NDTSP) aim to incentivize private sector engagement in R&D. The recently enacted Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF) Act is another step toward catalysing research and innovation. However, challenges such as equitable fund distribution and fostering interdisciplinary collaborations need to be addressed. These efforts are expected to boost R&D spending in India and encourage private sector-led research and innovation, especially in growing industries.



STATE OF POVERTY IN INDIA

NITI Aayog's B.V.R. Subrahmanyam stated that less than 5 % of Indians live below the poverty line, based on the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) 2022-23. He argued that the average consumption expenditure of the bottom 5 % of India's population is equivalent to the poverty line, indicating a poverty rate of 0 to 5 %.

According to the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) programme, 88 million people out of 1.2 billion Indians, roughly equal to 6.7 % of India's population, lived below the poverty line of \$1.25 in 2018 -19.

The Dandekar and Rath Committee (1971) use the per-capita annual income to afford threshold per-capita calorie consumption to estimate the poverty rates. The Committee estimated a per-capita annual income of ₹ 180 /- sufficient to afford consumption of 2250 calories in rural areas. Similarly, the Dandekar and Rath Committee (1971) estimated a per-capita annual income of ₹ 270 /- sufficient to

afford consumption of 2250 calories in urban areas.

The Planning Commission of India constituted the Lakdawala Expert Panel in 1993. The Lakdawala Expert Panel too estimated poverty using the per capita annual incomes to afford threshold per-capita calorie consumption. The Lakdawala Expert Panel (1993) estimated a Real per-capita income CPI (AL) to afford consumption of 2400 calories in rural areas. Similarly, the Lakdawala Expert Panel (1993) estimated a Real per-capita income CPI (U N-ML) + CPI (IW) to afford consumption of 2100 calories in urban areas. The Real per-capita income CPI (AL) refers to inflation adjusted per-capita income based on Consumer Price Index (Agricultural Labourer). The Real per-capita income CPI (U N-ML) + CPI (IW) refers to inflation adjusted per-capita income based on Consumer Price Index (Urban Non-Manual Labourers) and Consumer Price Index (Industrial Worker).

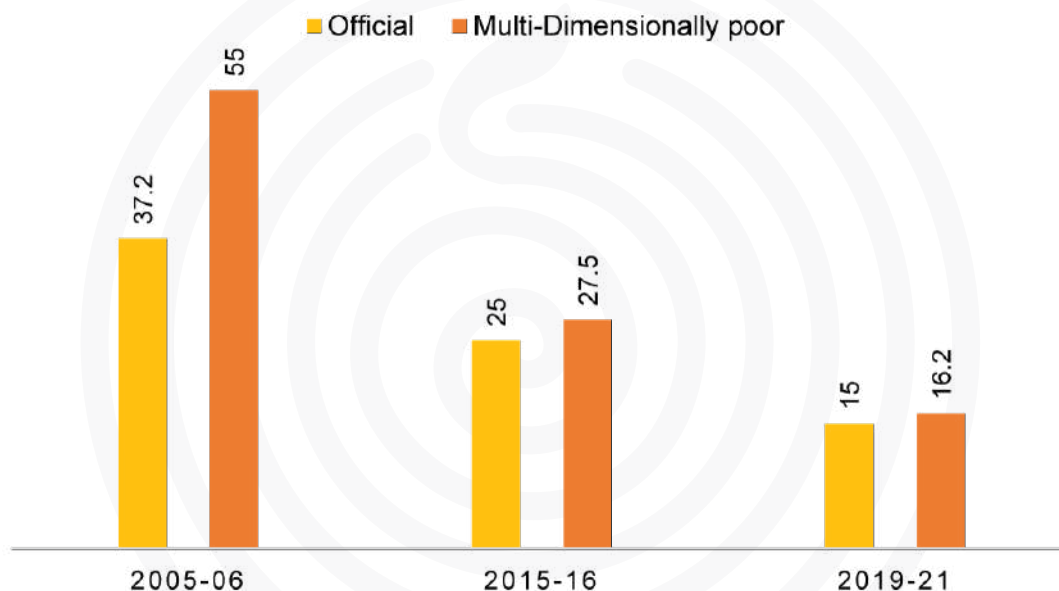


FIGURE: Column chart representation of official poverty estimates and Multidimensional poverty.

The Suresh Tendulkar committee estimated poverty rate using per-capita monthly income to afford threshold per-capita consumption. The Tendulkar committee estimated a per-capita annual income of ₹ 816 / - to afford threshold per-capita consumption in rural areas. Similarly, the Tendulkar committee estimated a per-capita annual income of ₹ 1000/- to afford threshold per-capita consumption* in urban areas. The Rangarajan Committee estimated poverty rate using per-household (5 members) monthly income to afford threshold per-capita consumption. The Rangarajan Committee estimated a per-household (5 members) monthly income of ₹ 4807 /- to afford threshold per-capita consumption in rural areas. Similarly, the Rangarajan Committee estimated

a per-household (5 members) monthly income of ₹ 7035 /- to afford threshold per-capita consumption in urban areas. The Rangarajan Committee estimated an All-India poverty estimate of 38.2 %.

The Tendulkar line adjusted for consumer price inflation and the World Bank's purchasing power poverty line of \$ 2.15 a day, both of which would give you less than 5 % extreme poverty or extreme destitution. Poverty levels in India, according to the Tendulkar poverty line close to ₹ 1,500 in rural areas and ₹ 1,800 in urban areas would be close to 2 % in 2022-23. Applying the World Bank's lower- middle-income line to calculate poverty, we get a poverty level of something like 25 % in rural areas and 11 % in urban areas, which gives you a poverty rate of 21 %.

"Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them."

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE





INDIA EYES \$100BN IN INVESTMENT

India - European Free Trade Association (EFTA) concluded the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), the second full-fledged Free Trade Agreement (FTA) India after India - United Arab Emirates Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). TEPA aims to reduce tariffs, increase market access, and simplify customs procedures. India signed a free trade agreement (FTA) with four European countries – Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland, with a goal of reaching \$100 billion in investments in India and one million jobs within 15 years.

The India - European Free Trade Association (EFTA) includes a chapter on commitments to human rights and sustainable development, effective after ratification by EFTA states, expected by the end of the year.

The FTA includes a “goal” based binding commitment to invest \$ 100 billion in India from EFTA countries, subject to current investment levels pegged at about \$ 10.7 billion, GDP predictions, and the estimated value of TEPA. Chapter 7 of TEPA outlines objectives to increase foreign direct investment from EFTA states into India by \$ 50 billion within 10 years and another \$ 50 billion in the next five years, aiming to generate 1

million jobs in India within 15 years. If these goals are not met within 15 years (with a grace period and negotiations), India can temporarily withdraw some trade concessions.

The Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) marks

European Free Trade Association (EFTA): The European Free Trade Association (EFTA) is an intergovernmental organization founded in 1960 by seven European countries (Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) to promote free trade and economic cooperation among its member states. EFTA operates in parallel with the European Union (EU) and its member states participate in the EU's single market through the European Economic Area (EEA) agreement. EFTA's main activities include negotiating free trade agreements with countries outside the EEA, promoting trade and economic cooperation among its members, and providing a forum for dialogue and cooperation on trade-related issues. EFTA currently has four member states: Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

GERMAN GDP FORECAST DOWNGRADED

Robert Habeck, German Economy Minister slashed the domestic growth forecasts from 1.3 % down to just 0.2 %. The German Central Bank reported the economy of Germany shrinking by 0.3 % in the last quarter of 2023, predicting stress factors to lead to a decline in the first quarter of 2024 with Germany entering a technical recession.

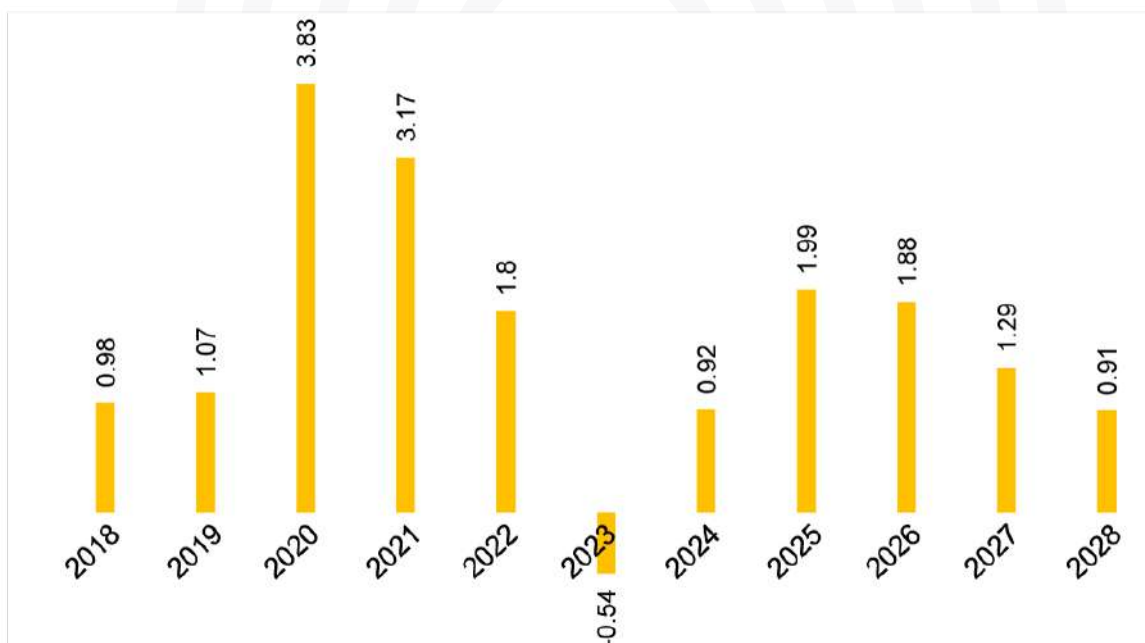


FIGURE: Column chart representation of the growth rate of the real gross domestic product (GDP) from 2018 to 2028

Germany is currently experiencing an economic downturn due to factors such as consumer restraint, high interest rates, price increases, government austerity measures, and a weak global economy. This has led to another winter recession, impacting sectors like manufacturing, trade, and construction the most. The construction sector, particularly the housing market, is in a severe recession, while manufacturing is facing weak incoming orders. Despite these challenges, Germany granted the most work visas to Indians in 2022, with 17,379 approved visas. This was made possible by the revised Skilled Immigration Act, which lowered entry barriers such as

salary limits and German language requirements. Germany is also facing a critical shortage of skilled IT professionals, particularly in software development, and is reforming its immigration policies to address this shortage.

MERCHANDISE TRADING VOLUMES

In the calendar year 2023, India's exports to Germany were worth U.S. \$ 9.7 billion, with organic chemicals (\$ 834 million), apparel (\$ 795 million), and articles of iron and steel (\$ 447 million) being the top exports. India's exports to Germany have hovered around the \$ 8 billion to \$ 9 billion mark in the last five years.



The trade between India and Germany is diverse, with 70 % of the exports are industrial. In CY 2023, India exported \$ 311 million worth of smartphones to Germany.

According to the International Monetary Fund's Economic Outlook, India's projected GDP growth for 2024 is 6.5% (the highest among emerging economies), compared to 0.5% for Germany (the lowest among advanced economies).

BLOOMBERG TO ADD INDIAN BONDS TO EM INDEXES

Bloomberg Index Services would include 34 Indian government bonds eligible for investment via the country's fully accessible route (FAR). from Jan. 31, 2025 in its Emerging Market Local Currency Index phased in over a 10-month period, with the weight of the bonds increasing by increments of 10 % of their full market value every month until October 2025. This move follows discussions that began in 2013 regarding the inclusion of Indian securities in global indexes, which was initially hindered by foreign investment restrictions. However, in April 2020, the Reserve Bank of India introduced FAR, making certain securities eligible for inclusion in global indexes. JPMorgan was the first to announce India's inclusion in its emerging market debt index in September, potentially leading to significant inflows into India. As of January 31, the eligible Indian FAR bonds had a market value of \$ 448 billion.

BACKGROUND: The Indian government began discussing inclusion of its securities in global indexes as far back as 2013, but the move was held back by its curbs on foreign investments in domestic debt. In April 2020, the Reserve Bank of India introduced a clutch of securities free of foreign investment curbs under a "fully accessible route" (FAR), that made them eligible for inclusion in global indexes. JPMorgan was the first to announce India's inclusion in its widely tracked emerging market debt index in September, setting the stage for billions of dollars of inflows into India.

Demand over supply: Greater foreign inflows next year will result in increased demand for Indian government bonds. The Centre is estimated to borrow ₹15.43 lakh Cr. for the FY 2024-25, as the fiscal deficit target could be around 5.5 % of GDP. This dual movement of increased demand for and possibly reduced supply of government bonds could result in the former exceeding the latter by as much as ₹ 90,000 Cr.

CENTRE TWEAKS PM SURYA GHAR MUFT BIJLI YOJANA

The Union Government has revised the subsidy structure for the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana reducing the fiscal support up to 60 % of the installation costs for 1 kW - 3 kW solar systems from the originally envisaged to fully subsidize 1 kW - 3 kW solar systems for one crore households.

SUMMARY: The Union Government has revised the cost structure for the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana. The scheme was announced during the Budget fully subsidising the installation of 1 kW-3 kW solar systems in one crore households via tie-ups with renewable energy service companies. Under the revised guidelines, up to 60 % of the installation costs for 1 kW - 3 kW solar systems from the originally envisaged to fully subsidize 1 kW - 3 kW solar systems for one crore households. Currently a rooftop solar system costs about ₹50,000 per kW. A householder can either pay the balance or take a loan. A 3 kW-hour system can generate up to 300 units a month, depending on available sunshine and for this a

The lack of demand on the domestic and international fronts a major issue. Firms are reducing or postponing investments due to this uncertainty. Consumers are hesitant due to higher inflation. In addition to external factors such as the tensions along the Red Sea trade route, that can impact or even halt their shipments, Germany has also been dealing with a lot of internal strife, such as the unending strikes.

Demand for G-sec (government securities) could now outstrip supply, unusual in domestic G-sec market, where supply has traditionally outstripped demand for G-sec. The natural consequence of the above is lower bond yields. According to Ghosh, the 10-year government bond – which closed at 7.15 % yield on September 25 – could fall to 7 % yield by the end of 2023-24 and affirmatively breach 7 percent next financial year. UBS, meanwhile, has lowered its 2024 forecast for 10-year yield to 6.75 % from 7 %.

From rupee to CAD: Capital inflows should mean a stronger rupee. The US dollar's strength and rising crude oil prices will prove to be headwinds, at least in the short term. In a strong US dollar environment, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will continue to play a crucial role, and may also likely accumulate dollars passively to absorb any heavy flows, given its focus on ensuring a more stable currency on top of internationalisation efforts. Even though the RBI is expected to step in and keep the rupee from appreciating wildly, the external balance will nonetheless improve. The large inflows will likely keep the Balance of Payments "in strong surplus" even though the current account deficit may widen.

Increased scrutiny: A key challenge would be outflows – and the associated financial market volatility – due to non-India developments. As India's G-sec market attracts more global flows, it could also become more dependent on global financial conditions, which could add volatility. Strong institutions-backed, rules-based policy making will become even more critical in such times. One rule that will certainly become more critical is the Finance Ministry's annual fiscal deficit target. The Centre aims to cut it down to 4.5 % of GDP by 2025-26 and the idea – at least to begin with – was to reach 3 %. With more eyes on India's fundamentals, annual fiscal slippages may not be tolerated to the extent they have been until now.

maximum subsidy of up to ₹ 78,000 will be available. A vendor will appraise the site and then install the system along with an inverter and a smart meter that can switch between grid and solar supply. Operation and maintenance costs up to five years will be factored into the cost.

REVISED GUIDELINES: Households will have to pay 40 % of the installation costs for 1 kW - 3 kW solar systems, with a minimum contribution of ₹ 20,000. Consumers can access low-interest, collateral-free loan from 12 Public Sector Banks (PSBs) for installations at 1 % above the prevailing RBI repo rate. Eligibility is limited to houses with suitable roofs and existing grid connections. The scheme allows for net-metering, meaning excess solar power can be fed back into the grid, potentially reducing electricity bills. The subsidy for rooftop solar systems has been doubled, and the scheme aims to generate up to 300 units of free electricity per month for households.



INDIA RANKED 136 IN GLOBAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT INDEX: UNDP

India has moved up a rank on the global Human Development Index (HDI), according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report 'Breaking the gridlock: Reimagining cooperation in a polarised world'.

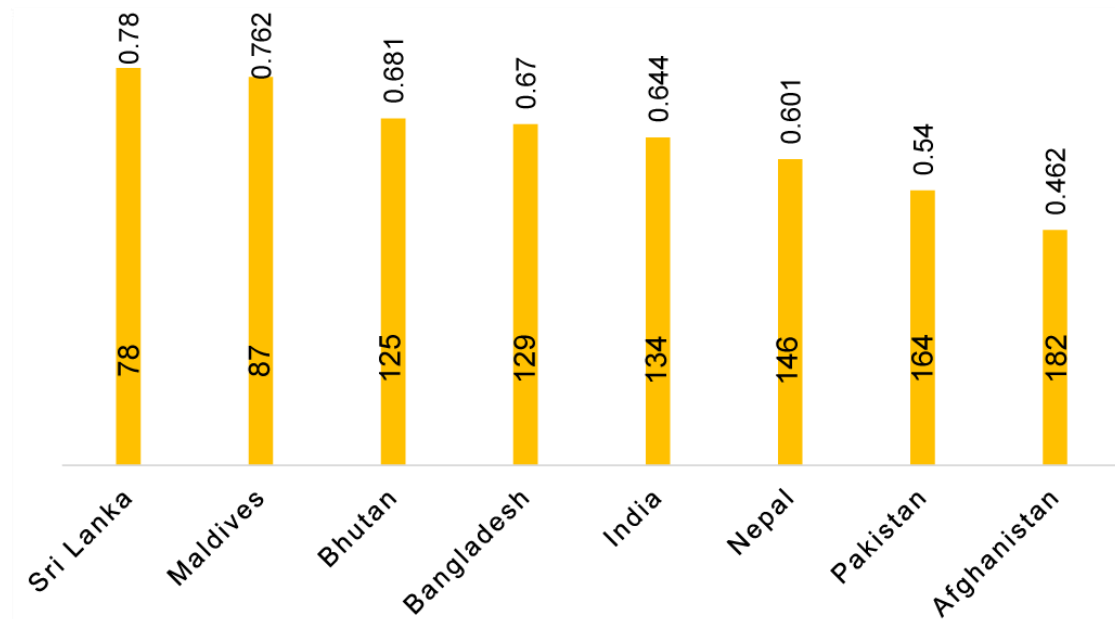


FIGURE: Column chart representation of HDI score of different countries.

India moved one rank up to 134 in 2022. A total of 193 countries were ranked in 2022, and 191 countries in 2021. India's southern neighbour Sri Lanka has been ranked much ahead at 78, while China is ranked 75, both categorised under the High Human Development category. India also ranks below Bhutan, which stands at 125, and Bangladesh, which is in the 129th position. Switzerland has been ranked number one.

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LOSS AND DAMAGE BOARD

**MELANOCHLAMYS DROUPADI:
FRESH HEAD-SHIELD SEA SLUG**

**INTERNATIONAL BIG CAT
ALLIANCE (IBCA)**

**GREENING INDIA'S WASTELANDS
WITH AGROFORESTRY
(GROW) REPORT AND PORTAL**

STATUS OF LEOPARDS IN INDIA

**INDIA'S FIRST DOLPHIN
RESEARCH CENTRE**

**GLOBAL METHANE TRACKER
2024**

**BIODIVERSITY BEYOND
NATIONAL JURISDICTION**

**WORLD AIR QUALITY REPORT
2023**

**STATE OF GLOBAL CLIMATE
REPORT 2023**

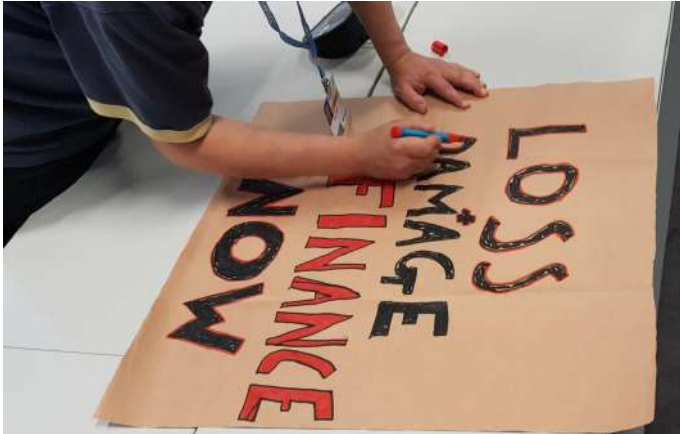
GREEN CLIMATE FUND PROJECT



LOSS AND DAMAGE BOARD

CONTEXT: Delays in appointing board members stall UN “loss and damage” fund, with no funds distributed until 2025.

BACKGROUND: At COP27, an agreement was reached to provide loss and damage funding to climate-vulnerable nations. COP28 then established a fund supervised by a board, tasked with governance, operational guidelines, and funding decisions. However, delays in nominating board members hinder operationalization.



ABOUT THE BOARD

- **COP27:** Agreement on funding for climate change impact in vulnerable nations.
- **COP28:** Formal establishment of fund, overseen by a decision-making board.
- **Board's mandate:** Define strategy, governance, policies, and funding allocation.
- **Composition:** 26 members, 12 from developed, 14 from developing countries.
- **Objective:** Address loss and damage, establish operational guidelines, and allocate funds appropriately.

What is Loss & Damage?

- **Definition of Loss and Damage:** Unavoidable climate change impacts despite mitigation and adaptation efforts,

leading to irreversible consequences globally.

- **Complexity and Inequality:** Climate risks are intensifying, disproportionately affecting vulnerable nations, exacerbating economic and non-economic damages unequally.
- **Limits to Adaptation:** Some ecosystems have reached their adaptive capacity, leading to irreversible losses, especially in low-lying islands facing inundation.
- **Economic and Non-economic Losses:** Losses can be quantified (e.g., infrastructure damage) or non-quantifiable (e.g., cultural heritage loss), both requiring attention.
- **Climate Justice and Equity:** Discussion revolves around the responsibility of compensating poorer nations for loss and damage, highlighting the need for global solidarity and support.
- **Loss and damage fund**
- **COP27 Announcement:** Introduction of Loss and Damage Fund in COP27 aims to address climate-induced disasters' impacts globally.
- **Compensation Principle:** Rich nations compensate poor nations for climate damages caused by industrial growth, such as floods and cyclones.
- **Impact Scope:** Loss and damage encompass economic (infrastructure damage) and non-economic (trauma, biodiversity loss) effects.
- **Administration:** Initially managed by the World Bank, funded by wealthy nations, including the US, UK, EU, and some developing countries.
- **Purpose and Focus:** Fund ensures rescue and rehabilitation of nations facing cascading climate change effects, targeting lives, livelihoods, and cultural heritage.

Sustained political commitment and innovative financing mechanisms such as a windfall tax on oil and gas companies, an international insurance pool, and the Global Shield Scheme are crucial for the operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund (LDF). To uphold climate justice, affluent nations must fulfill their obligation to provide fair and just financial support to vulnerable nations, particularly Small Islands and Least Developing countries.





MELANOCHLAMYS DROUPADI: FRESH HEAD-SHIELD SEA SLUG

CONTEXT: New marine species, head-shield sea slug with ruby red spot, named after Indian President Droupadi Murmu, discovered off West Bengal and Odisha coast.

BACKGROUND: A newly discovered sea slug species, *Melanochlamys Droupadi*, named after Indian President

Droupadi Murmu, features a unique ruby red spot. Found along the West Bengal and Odisha coast, it inhabits wet sandy beaches and was spotted during routine marine species study by ZSI researchers.



About Sea Slugs

- **Marine Gastropods:** Sea slugs are marine gastropod mollusks, lacking shells or having reduced shells, often adorned with vibrant colors.
- **Biodiversity:** Diverse species inhabit oceans worldwide, exhibiting intricate forms, behaviors, and adaptations, including mimicry and toxic defense mechanisms.
- **Feeding Strategies:** Utilize various feeding strategies, from herbivory to carnivory, some specializing in consuming specific prey or algae through unique mechanisms.
- **Reproduction:** Display diverse reproductive methods, including hermaphroditism, external fertilization, and

elaborate courtship rituals, contributing to ecological balance and genetic diversity.

- **Ecological Roles:** Play crucial roles in marine ecosystems, as herbivores, predators, and prey, influencing food webs, nutrient cycling, and ecosystem stability.

Sea slugs play a vital role in marine ecosystems, contributing to biodiversity and offering potential for biomedical research. Their fascinating abilities, from photosynthesis to regenerating body parts, highlight their importance in scientific exploration and environmental conservation efforts. Understanding and protecting these remarkable creatures is essential for the health and balance of our oceans.

INTERNATIONAL BIG CAT ALLIANCE (IBCA)

CONTEXT: Union Cabinet approves establishment of International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) with headquarters in India, allocated Rs. 150 crore over five years.

BACKGROUND: The Prime Minister of India, recognizing India's conservation efforts, called for a Global Leaders Alliance to combat poaching on Global Tiger Day 2019. On April 9, 2023, commemorating 50 years of Project Tiger, he announced the launch of an International Big Cat Alliance to replicate India's successful conservation practices globally.

About International Big Cat Alliance

- **Formation of International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA):** Coalition of 96 big cat range countries, conservation partners, and corporates for centralized conservation

efforts.

- **Objectives:** Mutual cooperation, knowledge sharing, and financial support to arrest big cat population decline and promote conservation agenda.
- **Multipronged Approach:** Focus on capacity building, networking, advocacy, and research to address conservation challenges effectively.
- **Role of Mascots:** Big cats promote sustainable development and environmental resilience, aligning with economic and development policies.
- **Synergy and Collaboration:** IBCA facilitates dissemination of conservation practices, access to funds, and strengthens intergovernmental platforms.

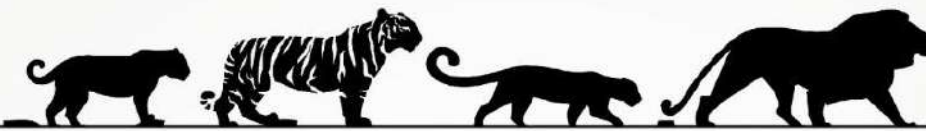


- **Framework:** Emphasizes knowledge sharing, capacity building, and involvement of local communities and youth in conservation efforts.
- **Brand Ambassadors:** Promote big cat conservation awareness, enhancing the alliance's impact across range countries.
- **Climate Leadership:** IBCA fosters collaborative action for green economy projects, ensuring prosperity and ecological sustainability.
- **International Big Cat Alliance Governance**
- **Governance Structure:** IBCA comprises an Assembly of Members, Standing Committee, and a Secretariat headquartered in India, overseen by the ISC.
- **Legal Framework:** Agreement modeled after ISA, ISC to finalize, with a Host Country Agreement akin to ISA, facilitated by the Indian government.
- **Leadership and Appointment:** Ministerial-level Assembly chaired by President, HMEFCC, GoI, with interim DG appointed by MoEFCC until Assembly selects permanent DG.
- **Financial Support:** Initial funding of Rs. 150 crore secured from Indian government for five years, exploring additional contributions from various agencies and institutions.
- **Conservation Impact:** IBCA aims for sustainable use of resources, climate adaptation, and community well-being through big cat conservation and habitat preservation.

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INTERNATIONAL BIG CAT ALLIANCE (IBCA)



TIGER

- IUCN Status: Endangered
- Status of Protection in India: Schedule I Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- CITES: Appendix I
- Natural Location: Steamy forests and wetlands across South Asia
- Ecological Significance: Apex predator, biodiversity indicator



LION

- IUCN Status: Endangered
- Status of Protection in India: Schedule I- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- CITES: Appendix I
- Natural Location: Asiatic lions exclusively inhabit Gir National Park.
- Ecological Significance: Asiatic lions dominate, regulate prey.



LEOPARD

- IUCN Status: Vulnerable
- Status of Protection in India: Schedule I- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- CITES: Appendix I
- Natural Location: Range includes Africa, Asia, and China.
- Ecological Significance: Apex predator, biodiversity indicator



SNOW LEOPARD

- IUCN Status: Vulnerable
- Status of Protection in India: Schedule I- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- CITES: Appendix I
- Natural Location: Himalayan snow leopards thrive, spanning 12 nations
- Ecological Significance: Apex predator, biodiversity indicator



PUMA

- IUCN Status: Least Concern
- Status of Protection in India: Schedule IV- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- CITES: Appendix II
- Natural Location: Panthers adapt, avoid open habitats, recognized subspecies.
- Ecological Significance: Apex predator, biodiversity indicator



JAGUAR

- IUCN Status: Near Threatened
- Status of Protection in India: Schedule IV- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- CITES: Appendix I
- Natural Location: Jaguars inhabit diverse ecosystems, including forests.
- Ecological Significance: Apex predator, biodiversity indicator

CHEETAH



ASIATIC CHEETAH

- IUCN Status: Critically Endangered
- Status of Protection in India: Schedule I- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- CITES: Appendix I
- Natural Location: Present, they survive only in Iran
- Ecological Significance: Apex predator, biodiversity indicator



AFRICAN CHEETAH

- IUCN Status: Vulnerable
- Status of Protection in India: Schedule I- Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972
- CITES: Appendix I
- Natural Location: Cheetahs inhabit various African habitats.
- Ecological Significance: Apex predator, biodiversity indicator





GREENING INDIA'S WASTELANDS WITH AGROFORESTRY (GROW) REPORT AND PORTAL

CONTEXT: Prof Ramesh Chand of NITI Aayog launches GROW report and portal for greening and restoring wastelands with agroforestry.

BACKGROUND: The Greening and Restoration of Wasteland with Agroforestry (GROW) initiative, led by NITI Aayog, launched a report and portal utilizing remote sensing and GIS to assess agroforestry suitability in India. It provides an Agroforestry Suitability Index (ASI) for national prioritization, aiming to utilize underutilized areas for greening and restoration projects, aligning with national commitments.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **GROW Initiative Overview:** Bhuvan portal facilitates access to state and district-level data on agroforestry, covering 8.65% of India's geographical area.
- **National Commitments:** GROW aligns with goals to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030, creating a significant carbon sink.
- **Importance of Agroforestry:** Prof. Ramesh Chand highlights the need for agroforestry to reduce wood

imports, combat climate change, and optimize arable land use.

- **Long-Term Benefits:** Promotion of agroforestry is emphasized for sustainable land use and the utilization of space technology in agriculture.
- **Government Support:** Union Budget prioritizes agroforestry, recognizing its significance in addressing land degradation and resource imbalances.
- **Geospatial Technologies:** GIS tools aid in mapping and prioritizing wastelands for agroforestry interventions, utilizing geospatial technologies effectively.
- **National Agroforestry Policy:** India's policy aims to enhance productivity, profitability, and sustainability through integrated agroecological practices, aligning with global commitments.
- **Alignment with Global Goals:** Agroforestry addresses food, nutrition, energy, and environmental challenges, supporting international agreements like the Paris Agreement and UNCCD.

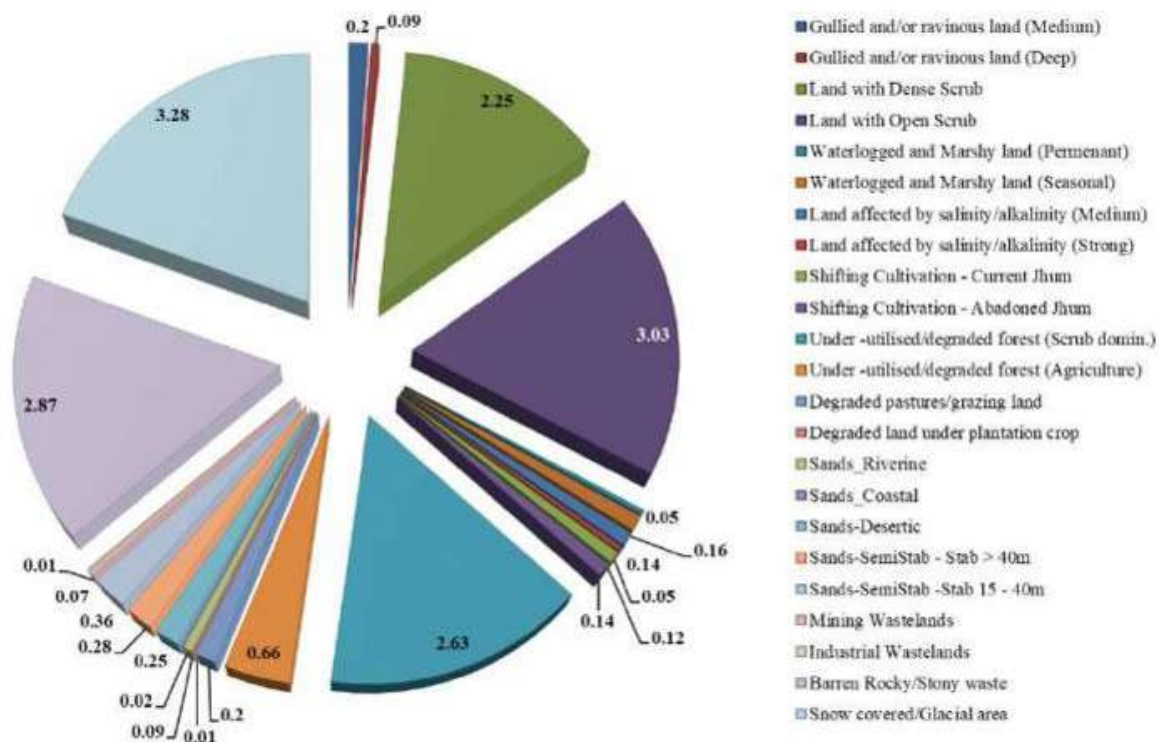


Figure 2. Percentage of area under 23 classes of wastelands

Agroforestry emerges as a sustainable and multifaceted solution to agricultural challenges, offering benefits such as improved soil health, biodiversity conservation, and climate resilience. Its integration of trees with crops or livestock

presents opportunities for increased food security and income generation, while mitigating environmental degradation. Embracing agroforestry practices holds promise for fostering resilient and sustainable agricultural systems worldwide.

"Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them."

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

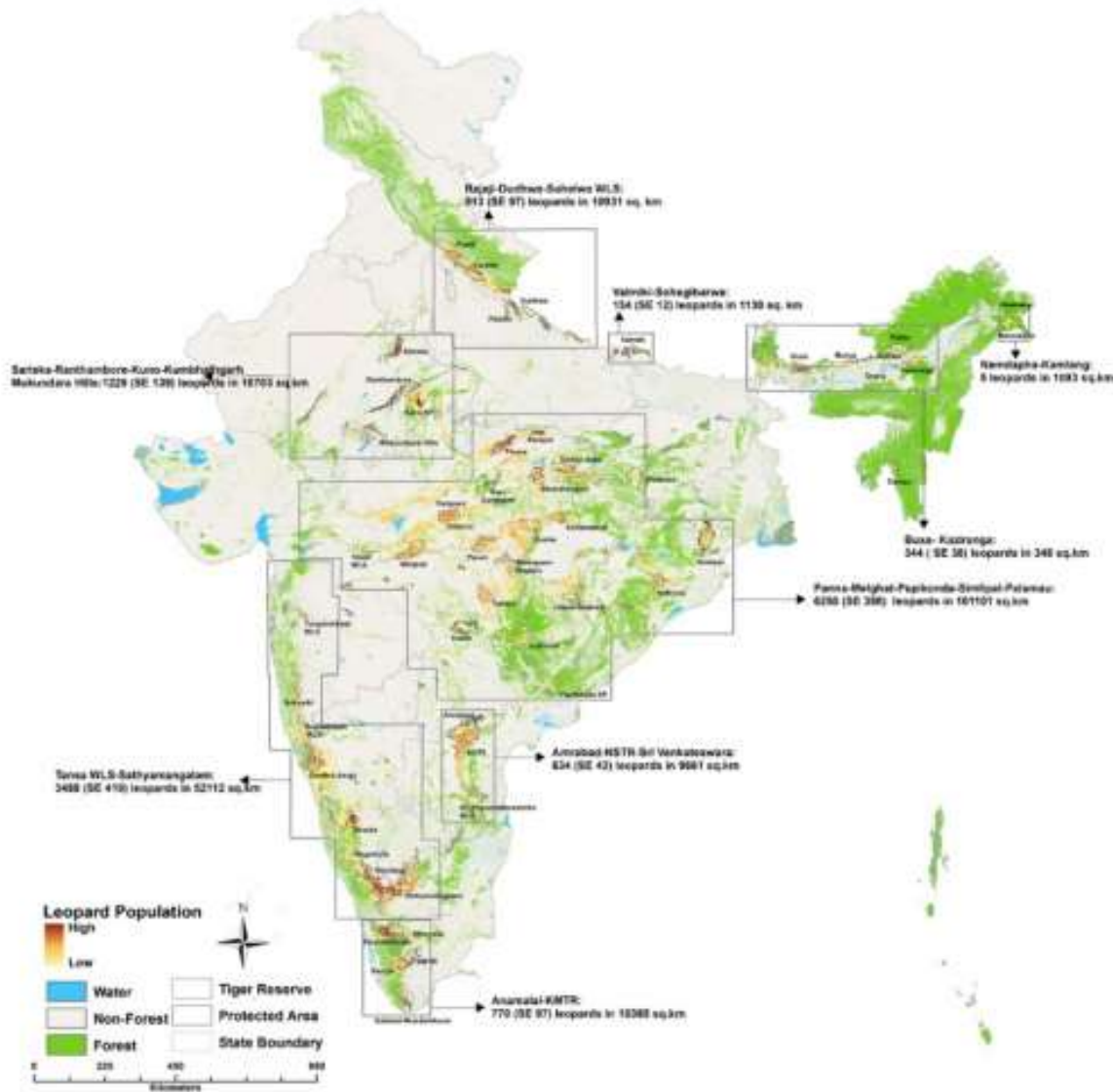


STATUS OF LEOPARDS IN INDIA

CONTEXT: Environment Minister releases report on the Status of Leopards in India in New Delhi on February 29, 2024.

BACKGROUND: The fifth cycle of leopard population estimation in India, conducted by the National Tiger

Conservation Authority and Wildlife Institute of India, focused on forested habitats across 18 tiger states. This quadrennial exercise utilized foot surveys and camera traps, yielding valuable data for conservation efforts.

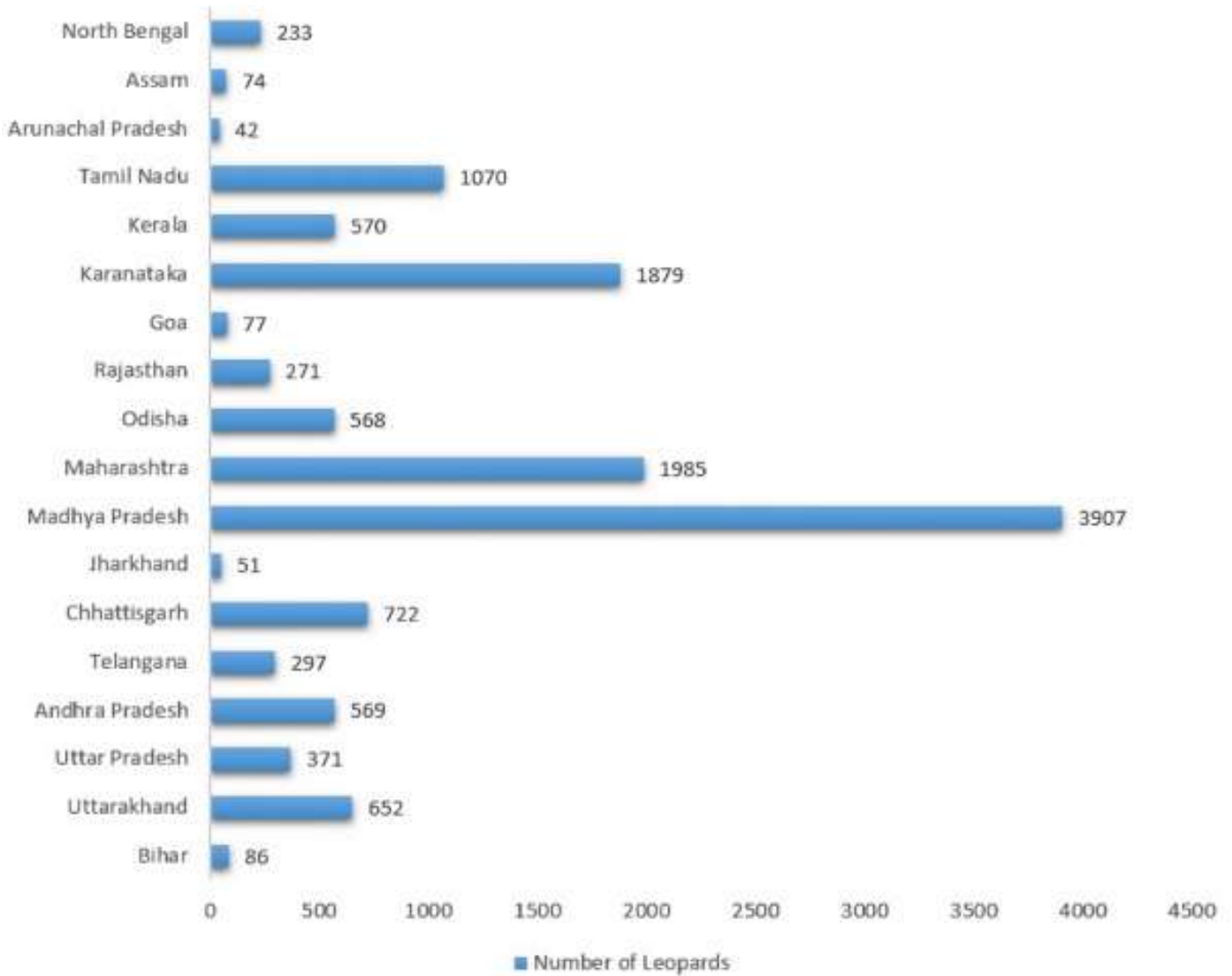


REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- **Leopard Population Estimate:** India's leopard population stands at 13,874 individuals, showing stability compared to 2018, covering 70% of leopard habitat.
- **Regional Population Trends:** Central India shows stable or slight growth, while Shivalik hills and Gangetic plains experience decline in leopard numbers.
- **Growth Rates:** Across sampled areas, there's a 1.08% annual growth; Shivalik hills and Gangetic plains witness a -3.4% decline.
- **Statewise Distribution:** Madhya Pradesh hosts the largest leopard population, followed by Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu.
- **Protected Areas Importance:** Tiger reserves like Nagarajunasagar Srisailam, Panna, and Satpura are key sites for leopard conservation.
- **Survey Methodology:** The fifth cycle survey focused on forested habitats in tiger states, using foot surveys and camera traps.
- **Role of Protected Areas:** Emphasizes the significance of protected areas in leopard conservation, while addressing conservation gaps outside these areas.
- **Human-Wildlife Conflict:** Rising conflicts highlight the need for collaborative efforts involving government, conservation organizations, and communities for habitat protection and conflict mitigation.



Number of Leopards State wise Distribution



The Union Budget of India prioritizes promoting agroforestry and private forestry to address issues like degraded land and imbalanced resources. Utilizing geospatial technologies, India aims to transform wastelands into productive areas, aligning with global commitments for sustainability and agricultural development.

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INDIA'S FIRST DOLPHIN RESEARCH CENTRE

CONTEXT: India establishes National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC), a crucial step in Gangetic dolphin conservation efforts, marking significant milestone.

BACKGROUND: India's first National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC) near the Ganga river in Patna has been inaugurated, despite hurdles regarding construction proximity to the river. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar officially opened the center, marking a significant step in conserving the endangered Gangetic river dolphin.

National Dolphin Research Centre (NDRC)

- **NDRC Establishment:** Located in Patna, Bihar, the NDRC focuses on comprehensive research on Gangetic dolphins' behavior and survival skills.
- **Significant Population:** Bihar hosts approximately half of

India's estimated 3,000 Gangetic dolphins, highlighting the region's importance for conservation.

- **Historical Habitat:** Gangetic dolphins historically inhabit river systems like Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna and Karnaphuli-Sangu in India, Nepal, and Bangladesh.
- **Presence in Ganga River Basin:** Recent studies confirm Gangetic dolphins' presence in mainstream and tributaries like Ghagra, Kosi, Gandak, Chambal, Rupnarayan, and Yamuna.
- **Research Focus:** NDRC aims to investigate various aspects of Gangetic dolphins, including behavior, survival skills, and factors contributing to mortality, enhancing conservation efforts.

Gangetic River Dolphins

IUCN Status:
Endangered

Status of Protection
in India: Schedule I
- Indian Wildlife
(Protection) Act, 1972

CITES: Appendix I

CMS Convention:
Appendix I

Natural Location:
Fresh Water,
(Ganges-Brahmaputra-
Meghna and Karnaphuli
-Sangu) of India, Nepal
and
Bangladesh.

Ecological Significance:
Indicator Species

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GLOBAL METHANE TRACKER 2024

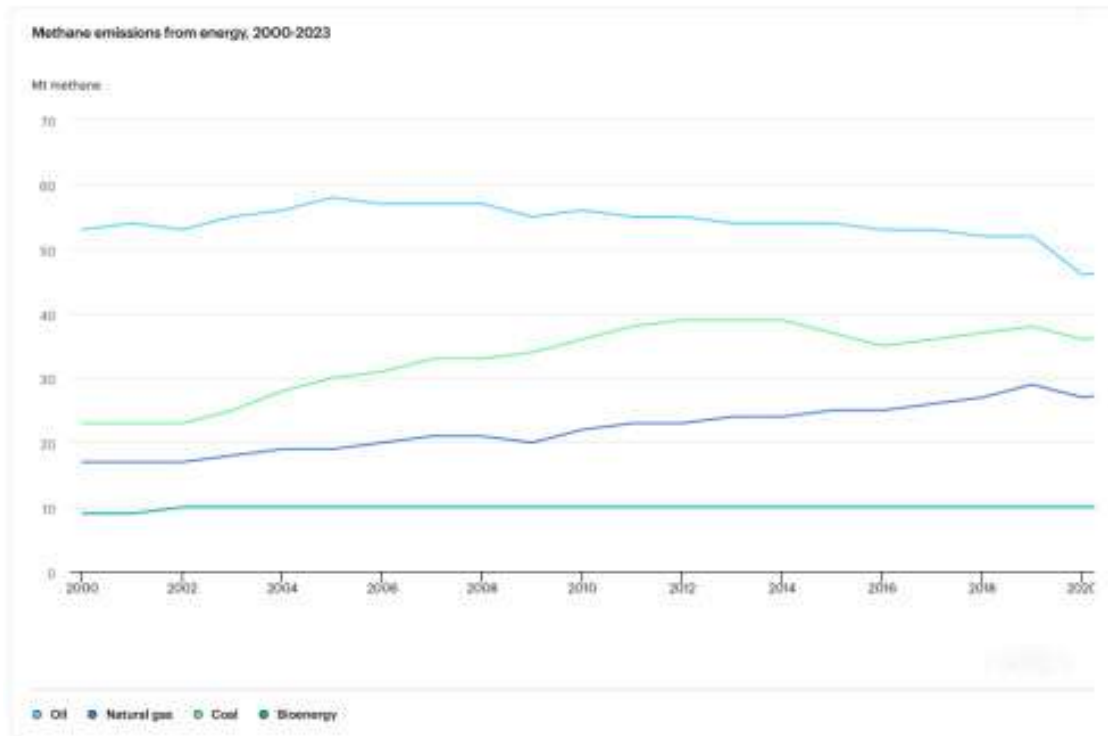
CONTEXT: IEA's Global Methane Tracker 2024 shows 2023 fuel usage methane emissions nearing record high, with slight increase from 2022.

BACKGROUND: The International Energy Agency (IEA) utilizes the Global Energy and Climate Model (GEC) to provide comprehensive energy projections and climate assessments. This model integrates data from various sources and modules to simulate energy market dynamics, emissions, and investment needs. Updated annually, it covers global energy systems up to 2050 across 29 regions, with detailed country-

level modelling in specific sectors.

Report Highlights

Methane emissions from the energy sector, primarily from fossil fuel production and bioenergy, remained near record levels in 2023, totalling approximately 130 million tonnes. While there's marginal decline in methane intensity per unit of fossil fuel production, overall emissions persist at high levels, hindering global climate goals. Despite some progress and commitments, large methane emission events, including major leaks, have increased significantly.



Around 70% of methane emissions from fossil fuels originate from the top 10 emitting countries, totalling approximately 80 million tonnes in 2023. The United States and Russia lead in oil and gas emissions, while China dominates in coal sector emissions. Methane losses from fossil fuel operations globally surpassed Qatar's natural gas production. Countries exhibit wide variations in emissions intensity, with some implementing effective measures to mitigate emissions.

Reducing methane emissions from fossil fuels by 75% by 2030 is crucial to limit global warming to 1.5°C. The energy sector, contributing over a third of human-related methane emissions, offers significant potential for near-term reductions. Deploying existing technologies could avoid around 80 Mt of annual emissions, with targeted measures needed alongside declining fossil fuel demand to achieve deep and sustained reductions.

Achieving a 75% reduction in methane emissions from fossil fuels by 2030 necessitates an estimated spending of USD 170 billion, primarily in the oil, gas, and coal sectors. While fossil fuel companies bear the primary responsibility for financing, attention is needed for financing in low- and middle-income countries, where sources may be limited. External finance targeted at methane reduction remains relatively low.

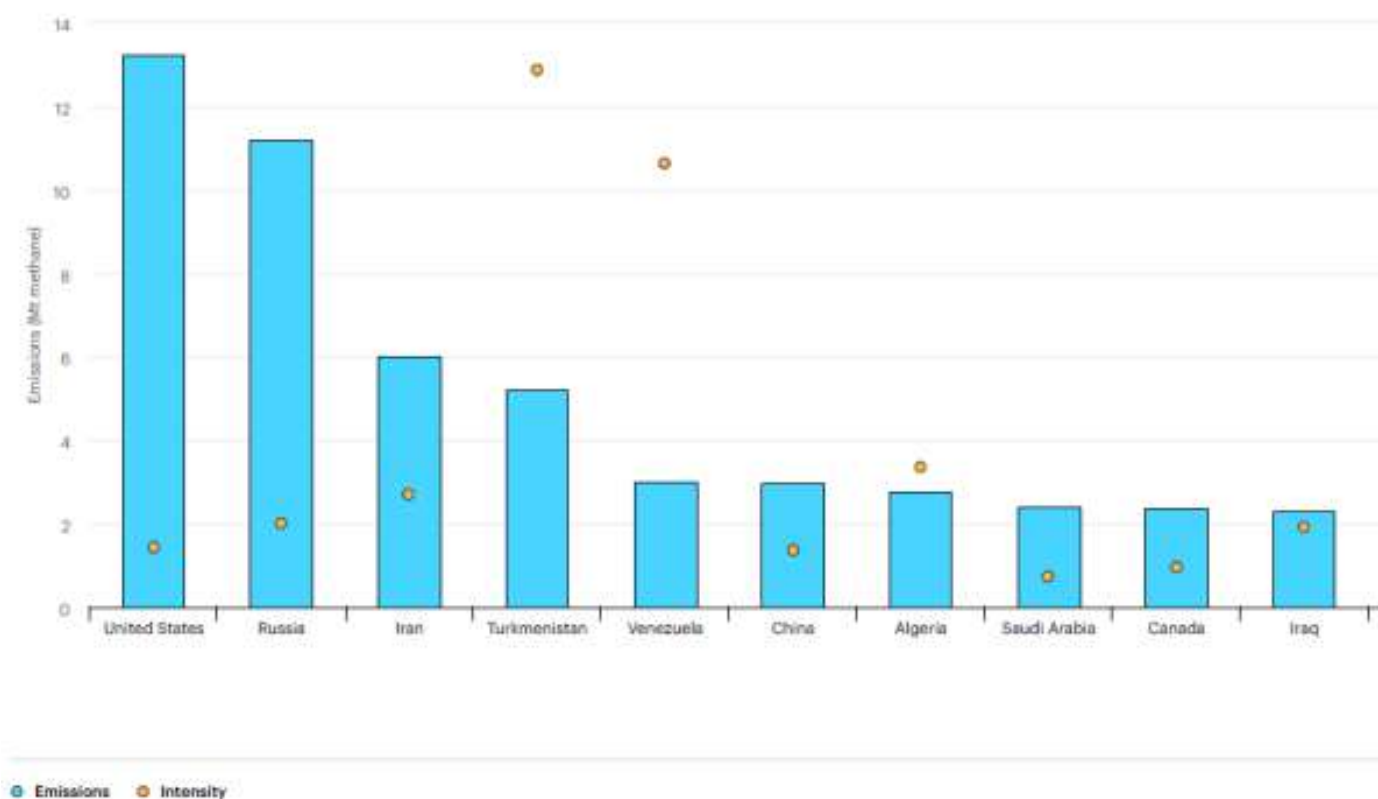
Advancements in tracking methane emissions through satellite imagery and technology tools offer improved transparency for mitigation efforts. Despite progress, global reporting on emissions still relies heavily on estimates rather than measured data, leading to significant discrepancies. Addressing this issue requires systematic and transparent utilization of measured data to tackle methane emissions effectively.

"Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them."

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



Methane emissions from oil and gas production and methane intensity for selected producers, 2023



BIODIVERSITY BEYOND NATIONAL JURISDICTION

CONTEXT: Blue Leaders event in Belgium urges nations to ratify treaty safeguarding high seas from pollution, climate change, and overfishing.

BACKGROUND: The “BBNJ Treaty,” or “Treaty of the High Seas,” aims to conserve and sustainably manage marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction under UNCLOS. Covering nearly half of the Earth’s surface, these areas are largely unregulated and poorly understood, with only 1% currently protected. The treaty seeks to address these gaps through international cooperation and conservation measures.

HIGHLIGHTS

- UN Ocean Conference: Decision made to use the 2025 conference as a platform to bring the BBNJ Treaty into force.
- Participant Countries: Belgium, Cape Verde, Greece, Monaco, Nigeria, Norway, and the United Kingdom engaged in the event.
- Ratification Status: Only Chile and Palau have ratified the treaty, with 88 countries signing it; 60 ratifications needed for enforcement.
- Signing Deadline: Agreement opened for signature on September 20, 2023, closing on September 20, 2025, signifying consent for binding.
- High Seas Definition: Areas beyond 200 nautical miles from coastal exclusive economic zones.
- Treaty Goals: Increase protected areas on high seas and

ensure equitable sharing of profits from marine genetic resources.

- Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs): Mandatory for activities like carbon sequestration and deep-sea mining, ensuring sustainable ocean use.
- India’s Position: India, though not a signatory, supports treaty implementation, as highlighted in the G20 New Delhi Leaders’ Declaration.

Five Regional Seas Conventions currently include Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ) under their geographical coverages: OSPAR Convention, Noumea Convention, CCAMLR Convention, Barcelona Convention, and Lima Convention.

- Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the North-East Atlantic (OSPAR Convention)
- Convention on the Protection of the Natural Resources and Environment in the South Pacific Region (Noumea Convention)
- Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR Convention)
- Convention for the Protection of the Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution (Barcelona Convention)
- Convenio para la Protección del Medio Marino y la Zona Costera del Pacífico Sudeste (Lima Convention)



WORLD AIR QUALITY REPORT 2023

CONTEXT: India ranks as the world's third most polluted country in the World Air Quality Report 2023 by Swiss organization IQAir.

BACKGROUND: The 6th Annual World Air Quality Report unveils alarming findings on global air pollution levels in 2023. Data from over 30,000 monitoring stations in 134 countries was scrutinized, shedding light on the most polluted areas worldwide. IQAir's analysis underscores the urgent need for action to combat this pervasive environmental issue.

HIGHLIGHTS

- WHO Guidelines: Seven countries met WHO's PM2.5 guideline, while 92.5% exceeded it, with Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India among the most polluted.
- Regional Trends: Southeast Asia faced rising PM2.5 levels due to climate conditions and Transboundary haze, while Central & South Asia had the most polluted cities.
- Top Polluted Cities: Begusarai, India, ranked highest globally for pollution, with India hosting four of the most polluted cities.
- US Air Quality: Columbus, Ohio, and Beloit, Wisconsin, were the most polluted US cities, while Las Vegas boasted the cleanest air.
- Canada's Pollution: Canada topped Northern America's pollution chart, with its 13 most polluted cities within its borders.
- Monitoring Challenges: Africa lacks air quality data for a third of its population, while Latin America heavily relies on low-cost sensors.
- Role of Air Quality Data: Availability of air quality data

prompts action, highlighting its crucial role in improving environmental health.

- Call for Action: Frank Hammes emphasizes the importance of air quality data in addressing global air pollution and safeguarding human health.

Report on India

- Pollution Ranking: India ranked third in pollution in 2023, with PM2.5 levels higher than WHO guidelines, following Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- City Pollution: Indian cities dominated the list, with 42 out of 50 most polluted cities worldwide, including New Delhi and Begusarai.
- Delhi's Pollution: Delhi's PM2.5 concentration ranked among the highest globally, highlighting severe air quality issues in the capital.
- International Comparison: Only seven countries met WHO PM2.5 guidelines, emphasizing the global scope of the air pollution crisis.
- Call for Action: Greenpeace stresses the urgent need for local, national, and international efforts to monitor air quality and reduce reliance on combustion.

Anumita Roychowdhury, Executive Director at the Centre for Science and Environment, emphasizes the persistent air quality challenges in Indian cities due to rapid urbanization and motorization. She calls for transformative, multi-sectoral action under the National Clean Air Programme to achieve time-bound pollution reduction. Roychowdhury criticizes the focus on PM10 in the programme, advocating for stronger strategies targeting PM2.5 from combustion sources.

STATE OF GLOBAL CLIMATE REPORT 2023

CONTEXT: WMO's State of the Global Climate report declares 2023 as the hottest year on record, according to recent publication.

BACKGROUND: The State of Global Climate Report 2023, an annual publication by the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), involves contributions from numerous experts and partners, including UN agencies, National Meteorological and Hydrological Services, and global data centers. Collaborators include the World Climate Research Programme, Global Atmosphere Watch, and Copernicus Climate Change Service, providing comprehensive insights into global climate trends and impacts.

Report Highlights

- Record Heat: 2023 marked the hottest year globally, with

temperatures 1.45°C above pre-industrial levels, leading to widespread climate impacts.

- Ten-Year Trend: The decade saw unprecedented warmth, setting new records for various climate indicators, including greenhouse gas levels and ocean heat.
- Ocean Heat Waves: Nearly one third of the global ocean experienced marine heatwaves, impacting ecosystems and food systems, with over 90% affected by year-end.
- Glacier Retreat: Reference glaciers recorded their largest ice loss since 1950, driven by extreme melt in North America and Europe.
- Renewable Energy: Renewable capacity saw significant growth, with a nearly 50% increase from 2022, totalling 510 GW, the highest rate in two decades.

World Meteorological Organisation (WMO)

- Specialized UN Agency: The World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) is a UN agency focused on Earth's atmosphere, climate, and water resources.
- Origins: Originating from the International Meteorological Organization (IMO) in 1873, WMO was established in 1950 to address meteorology and related sciences.
- Headquarters and Membership: WMO is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and boasts a membership of 191 countries globally.
- Governance Structure: Its supreme body, the World Meteorological Congress, sets policy and regulations, with a 36-member Executive Council implementing decisions.
- Executive Council: The Council meets annually to execute policy decisions, ensuring the effective functioning of the organization.
- Secretariat: The administrative hub, led by a secretary-general appointed by the Congress, manages day-to-day operations and coordination within WMO.



GREEN CLIMATE FUND PROJECT

CONTEXT: SIDBI secures Green Climate Fund approval for its inaugural anchored project, Avaana Sustainability Fund (ASF), valued at USD 120 million.

BACKGROUND: The ASF project, spearheaded by Sidbi, aims to support early-stage companies leveraging technology-driven innovation for climate solutions in India. It marks the country's first secured project in years and is poised to significantly contribute to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and resilience enhancement. This initiative aligns with India's nationally determined contributions and is supported by the Green Climate Fund, a pivotal entity under the Paris Agreement facilitating transformative climate action worldwide.

About Green Climate Fund

- Establishment: The Green Climate Fund (GCF) was established in 2010 under the Cancún Agreements to aid developing countries in climate finance.
- Purpose: It serves as a dedicated financing vehicle within the global climate architecture, supporting the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.
- Portfolio Growth: Since 2015, GCF has rapidly expanded its portfolio, funding over 100 projects to address climate change.
- Country-Driven Approach: GCF prioritizes a country-driven approach, allowing developing nations to lead programming and implementation for climate action.
- Resource Allocation: GCF mandates a balanced investment, allocating 50% of resources to both mitigation and adaptation efforts, with a focus on vulnerable countries.
- Scaling Up Efforts: Recognizing the need for heightened efforts, GCF aims to scale up both mitigation and adaptation initiatives.
- Role in Paris Agreement: As a critical component of the Paris Agreement, GCF supports countries in realizing their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) towards climate resilience.

Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI)

- Establishment: Small Industries Development Bank of India (SIDBI) was established under a parliamentary act in 1990.
- Mandate: SIDBI serves as the principal financial institution for promoting, financing, and developing the MSME sector.
- Execution: SIDBI executes its mandate through indirect lending, direct lending, fund of funds, promotion and development, and facilitation roles.
- Indirect Lending: It reaches the MSME sector through banks, NBFCs, and fintechs, leveraging the multiplier effect for broader financing.
- Direct Lending and Initiatives: SIDBI fills credit gaps through innovative lending products, supports startups via the Fund of Funds, and fosters entrepreneurship.



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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



BHARAT SEMICONDUCTOR RESEARCH CENTRE (BSRC)

OBELISKS

SANGAM: DIGITAL TWIN INITIATIVE

WOMEN EXPORTERS IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY (WEIDE) FUND

INDIA'S SECOND SPACEPORT

GENE THERAPY FOR HAEMOPHILIA A

e-KISAN UPAJ NIDHI

METHANESAT

NITI FOR STATES' Platform

INDIA'S FIRST AI TEACHER "IRIS"

YAOUNDE DECLARATION

INS TUSHIL

REVAMPED PHARMACEUTICALS TECHNOLOGY UPGRADATION ASSISTANCE SCHEME

PB-SHABD

INTERNET IN REMOTE TRIBAL VILLAGES (VSAT)

PUSHPAK REUSABLE LAUNCH VEHICLE (RLV)

TATA CUMMINS OPENS HYDROGEN ENGINE FACILITY



BHARAT SEMICONDUCTOR RESEARCH CENTRE (BSRC)

CONTEXT: Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar inaugurates STPI Centres in Thiruvananthapuram & Kochi, announces Bharat Semiconductor Research Centre regional hub at IIST.

BACKGROUND: The Union Minister facilitated an MoU between IBM and C-DAC at the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST) to enhance India's processor design and manufacturing capabilities for High Performance Computing. Additionally, he announced the establishment of a regional centre for the Bharat Semiconductor Research Centre (BSRC) at IIST, aiming to bolster Thiruvananthapuram's startup and tech ecosystem.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Pioneering Innovation:** Semiconductor Research Centre (SRC) in India drives cutting-edge research in semiconductor technology, fostering innovation and technological advancements.
- **National Strategic Importance:** SRC plays a crucial role in India's strategic semiconductor industry development, contributing to national security and technological sovereignty.
- **Talent Development Hub:** It serves as a nucleus for

nurturing skilled professionals in semiconductor engineering, enhancing India's competitiveness in the global technology landscape.

- **Industry Collaboration:** SRC facilitates partnerships between academia, government, and industry, fostering collaborative research initiatives and accelerating technology transfer for commercialization.
- **Economic Growth Catalyst:** Through its research outcomes and collaborations, SRC fuels economic growth by bolstering indigenous semiconductor manufacturing capabilities and attracting foreign investment.

The collaboration between IBM, C-DAC, and the establishment of a regional centre for the Bharat Semiconductor Research Centre (BSRC) at the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology (IIST) signifies a significant step towards bolstering India's semiconductor design and manufacturing capabilities. This initiative, along with the inauguration of new Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) centres, underscores the commitment to fostering innovation and growth in Kerala's electronics, IT sector, and startup ecosystem.

OBELISKS

CONTEXT: Stanford University scientists discover "obelisks," a novel, simple life form bridging gap between viruses and viroids, expanding life spectrum.

BACKGROUND: For nearly seven decades, viruses stood as enigmatic entities straddling the boundary between living and non-living organisms due to their obligate host dependence, parasitism, and small genome sizes. Composed of nucleic acid surrounded by a protein coat, viruses follow a simple life cycle of infecting host cells, replicating, and spreading. This unique biology has long intrigued scientists, shaping our understanding of life itself.

What are Obelisks?

- **Introduction of Obelisks:** Obelisks are novel virus-like entities composed of diverse RNA molecules found in the human body and microbiome.
- **Structural Resemblance:** They exhibit highly symmetrical,

rod-like structures reminiscent of the iconic monuments.

- **Genetic Characteristics:** Obelisks have genetic sequences about 1,000 nucleotides long, with no similarities to known biological agents.
- **Host Identification Challenge:** RNA data analysis couldn't pinpoint which bacteria host obelisks, though *Streptococcus sanguinis* is a potential candidate.
- **Research Implications:** Their discovery raises questions about genome replication, transmission, pathogenicity, evolution, and their impact on human health.
- **Unravelling Mysteries:** Further research is necessary to understand obelisks' ecological significance and their role in human health and disease.
- **Call for Investigation:** Scientists aim to shed light on obelisks' mysteries, emphasizing the need for comprehensive studies to address unanswered questions.

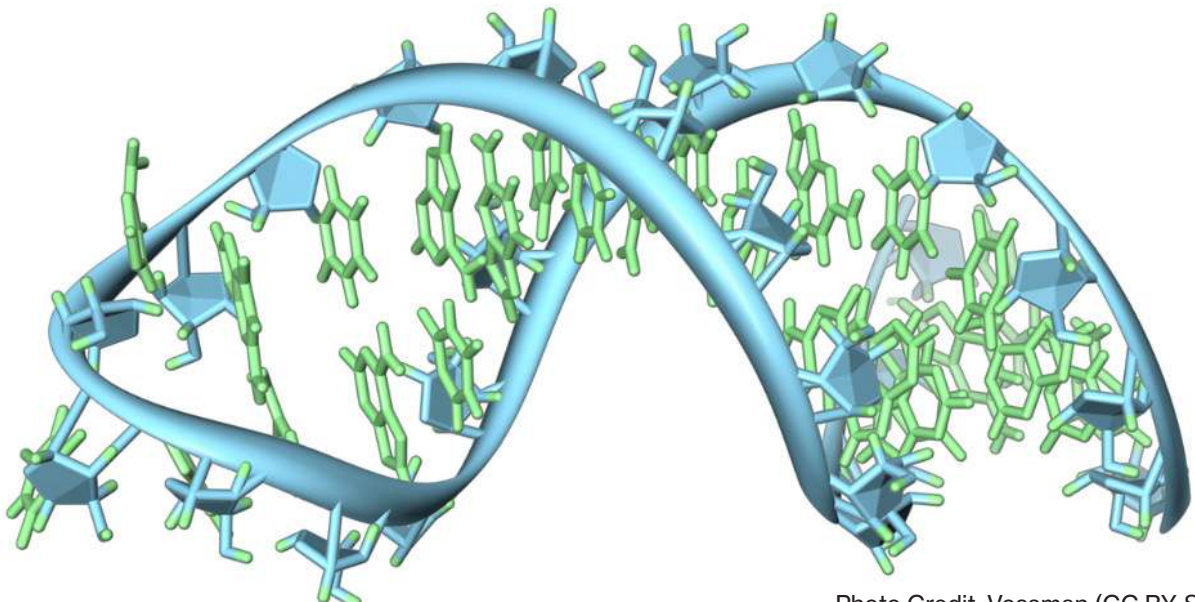


Photo Credit: Vossman (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Aspect	Virus	Viroids
Nature	Infectious agents containing genetic material	Smaller infectious entities lacking proteins
Genetic Material	DNA or RNA	Circular RNA molecules
Protein Coat	Present	Absent
Replication	Requires host cell machinery	Self-replicating, using host enzymes
Host Range	Infect animals, plants, bacteria, and fungi	Primarily infect plants
Diseases	Cause various diseases in animals and plants	Associated with plant diseases
Treatments	Antiviral drugs, vaccines	No specific treatments, mainly preventive

SANGAM: DIGITAL TWIN INITIATIVE

CONTEXT: Sangam: Digital Twin initiative's Bangalore outreach sees leaders discussing technology's role in achieving Vision 2047, Viksit Bharat.

BACKGROUND: The Sangam Digital Twin initiative of India aims to revolutionize infrastructure planning through unified data and collective intelligence. Led by NITI Aayog, the initiative emphasizes collaboration across sectors and leverages AI to anticipate real-world effects. Highlighting forward planning, Secretary Telecom stressed its alignment with the Prime Minister's vision for futuristic infrastructure, aiming to propel India towards development by 2047.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Session Highlights:** Discussions on Digital Twins, Generative AI, Telecom Data, and Virtual Platforms by industry leaders from Meta, Samsung India, FabrikSpace, and AutoVRse.
- **Insights from Nokia Labs:** Focus on creating Digital Twins, while Airshed emphasized infusing environmental data and Airtel India discussed integrating Telecom mobility data.
- **Diverse Use Cases:** Eminent speakers from Cloudworx, India Urban Data Exchange, Nvidia, and Lepton showcased various digital twin use cases and geospatial technology.
- **Industry Panel Discussion:** Industry pioneers like Genesys, Bentley, ESRI, and Airtel explored solutions for infrastructure challenges in an engaging panel discussion.
- **Perspectives from Industry Leaders:** Oracle, Eros, and Microsoft leaders shared their insights on steering Sangam Towards Transformative Success in the telecommunications industry.
- **Continued Innovation:** As the Indian telecommunications

industry evolves, Sangam: Digital Twin initiative remains at the forefront, driving innovative solutions to address evolving sector needs.

SANGAM: DIGITAL TWIN INITIATIVE

- **Introduction of Sangam:** Digital Twin Initiative: DoT launches Sangam, inviting EoIs from industry, academia, startups for leveraging Digital Twin technology in infrastructure development.
- **Digital Twin Technology:** Offers virtual replicas of physical assets for real-time monitoring, simulation, and analysis, facilitating iterative improvements for optimal outcomes.
- **Two-Stage Implementation:** Exploratory phase focuses on creative exploration, while the second stage demonstrates specific use cases to develop a future blueprint for scalability.
- **Technological Advancements:** Initiative aligns with India's progress in communication, computation, sensing, aiming for futuristic infrastructure by 2047.
- **Collaborative Approach:** Sangam integrates 5G, IoT, AI, AR/VR, 6G, and Digital Twin technologies, fostering collaboration among public entities, tech giants, startups, and academia.
- **Unified Platform:** Brings stakeholders together to transform ideas into solutions, bridging the gap between concept and realization for groundbreaking infrastructure development.
- **Holistic Innovation:** Encourages a whole-of-nation approach, emphasizing unified data and collective intelligence to drive innovative infrastructure advancements.



Sangam, India's initiative in smart infrastructure, showcases the nation's leadership in digital innovation, leveraging geospatial advancements. It emphasizes collaborative action to meet societal needs sustainably. By demonstrating practical solutions, it aims to set a model framework and

future blueprint for scalable infrastructure development. The Department of Telecommunications invites stakeholders to join hands in transforming infrastructure planning and design for a better tomorrow.

WOMEN EXPORTERS IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY (WEIDE) FUND

CONTEXT: WTO and ITC introduce USD 50 million Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund, aiding women in international trade.

BACKGROUND: During the 13th Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi, the WTO and ITC unveiled the Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund, allocating \$50 million to support women-led businesses in developing and least-developed nations. The fund aims to facilitate their adoption of digital technologies and enhance their online presence, empowering women entrepreneurs in international trade.



About the Fund

- **Launch of WEIDE Fund:** UAE commits USD 5 million as the first donor to the Women Entrepreneurs and Innovators Development Fund (WEIDE Fund).
- **Event Context:** Launch occurs during the WTO-ITC High-Level Event on Women and Trade, preceding WTO negotiations, hosted by UAE.

- **Fund Applications:** WEIDE Fund opens for applications from women exporters in the second quarter of 2024; application details forthcoming.
 - **SheTrades Summit:** Co-hosted by WTO and ITC, gathering 250+ women entrepreneurs from 60+ countries and global business leaders.
 - **Discussion Focus:** Participants explore solutions for challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and opportunities in green and digital trading systems.
 - **Masterclasses:** Leading experts from ITC, Visa, DHL, Sidley Austin, and WIPO deliver masterclasses on various topics.
 - **ITC Collaborations:** ITC extends collaboration with Dubai Economic Development Corporation for SheTrades MENA Hub and signs MoU with Nigerian Export Promotion Council for SheTrades Hub.
 - **Global Hubs:** With these collaborations, ITC SheTrades Hubs worldwide increase to 17, including two regional Hubs.
 - **Empowering Women:** Events and collaborations aim to empower women entrepreneurs and facilitate their access to global markets.
 - **Strategic Partnerships:** Strengthening partnerships between governments, organizations, and businesses to support women's economic empowerment and trade.
- The launch of the Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund marks a significant step towards empowering women-led businesses in developing nations. With a focus on digital adoption, it aims to enhance their participation and success in international trade.

INDIA'S SECOND SPACEPORT

CONTEXT: PM initiates construction of ISRO's second spaceport in Kulasekarapattinam, Tamil Nadu, enhancing India's satellite launch capabilities, especially for small satellites.

BACKGROUND: The inauguration of the Kulasekarapattinam launch complex marks a strategic move for ISRO, enhancing

payload capacity for small launch vehicles. The ceremony, attended by dignitaries including ISRO Chairman Somanath S. and IN-SPACe Chairman Dr. Pawan Kumar Goenka, celebrated the successful launch of the RH200 Sounding Rocket. Developed by VSSC, this milestone launch signifies India's advancement in space exploration.

Preparation for the RH200 Launch

- **Launch Complex Infrastructure:** ISRO fulfilled launch complex requirements at Kulasai with a comprehensive array of meticulously planned infrastructure facilities.
- **Coordinated Efforts:** VSSC, IPRC, ISRO HQ, IISU, and SDSC-SHAR demonstrated cohesive teamwork in executing the project.
- **Layout and Safety:** RH 200 launch facilities strategically laid out within SSLV facilities, adhering to stringent safety criteria and alignment with IISU coordinates.
- **Launcher Relocation and Testing:** RH 200 launcher and associated systems relocated from SDSC-SHAR, erected, commissioned, and rigorously tested within the new complex.
- **Comprehensive Preparations:** Range-clearance





procedures, safety plans, logistic arrangements, and medical facilities ensured safe and successful RH200 rocket launch.

Kulasekarapattinam emerges as an ideal location for small satellite launches due to its proximity to Antarctica, eliminating the need to fly over land masses. With minimal infrastructure

requirements like a cargo truck and caravans, it offers cost-effective launch capabilities. The Tamil Nadu government's plans to establish Space and Propellants Parks nearby aim to capitalize on this opportunity, fostering a supportive ecosystem for space-related industries.

GENE THERAPY FOR HAEMOPHILIA A

CONTEXT: Union Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh announces India's first human clinical trial of gene therapy for haemophilia A at CMC Vellore.

BACKGROUND: India's first human clinical trial of gene therapy for haemophilia A (FVIII deficiency) was conducted at Christian Medical College (CMC) Vellore. Union Science & Technology Minister Dr. Jitendra Singh announced this during the "National Science Day 2024" event. Supported by the Department of Biotechnology and the Centre for Stem Cell Research, the trials utilized innovative lentiviral vector technology to express FVIII transgene in patients' haematopoietic stem cells.

What is Haemophilia?

Haemophilia, an inherited bleeding disorder, results from low levels of clotting factors in the blood, particularly factor VIII or IX. This deficiency can lead to spontaneous or post-injury bleeding, posing serious health risks. While typically present from birth, haemophilia can rarely develop later in life, often affecting middle-aged or elderly individuals and young postpartum women, with appropriate treatment typically resolving the condition.

Types

There are several different types of haemophilia. The following two are the most common:

- **Haemophilia A (Classic Haemophilia):** This type is caused by a lack or decrease of clotting factor VIII.
- **Haemophilia B (Christmas Disease):** This type is caused by a lack or decrease of clotting factor IX.

Causes

- **Genetic Basis:** Haemophilia arises from mutations in genes responsible for clotting factor proteins, located on the X chromosome.
- **Inheritance Pattern:** Males inherit one X chromosome from their mothers, making them more susceptible to haemophilia.
- **Carrier Status:** Females with one affected X chromosome are carriers and can pass on the mutation to their offspring.
- **Symptoms in Females:** While rare, females can exhibit haemophilia symptoms if both X chromosomes are affected or if one is affected and the other is inactive.
- **Family History:** Although haemophilia often runs in families, some cases occur without prior family history due to spontaneous mutations.

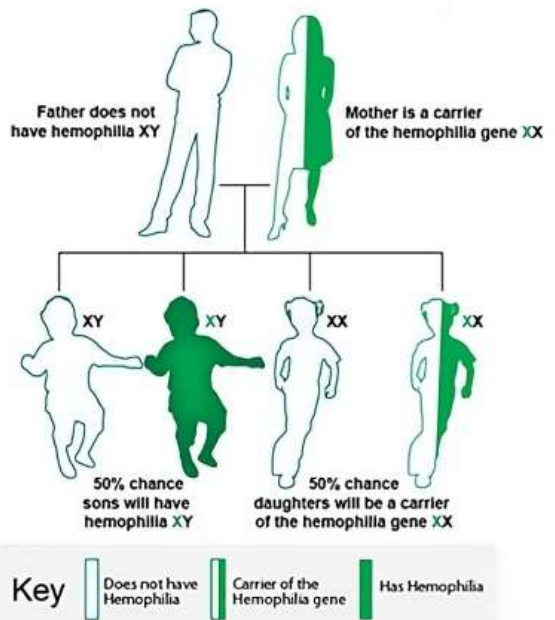


Photo Credit: Centre for Disease control and Prevention

Signs and Symptoms

- **Joint Bleeding:** Common symptom includes bleeding into joints, leading to swelling and pain, particularly in knees, elbows, and ankles.
- **Skin and Soft Tissue Bleeding:** Manifests as bruising on the skin or hematoma formation in muscle and soft tissues.
- **Oral Bleeding:** Haemophilia can cause bleeding of the mouth and gums, often with difficulty in stopping bleeding after dental procedures.
- **Postoperative Bleeding:** Individuals may experience prolonged bleeding after surgical procedures like circumcision or vaccinations.
- **Other Symptoms:** Additional signs include bleeding in the head of infants, blood in urine or stool, and recurrent nosebleeds.

Diagnosis and Treatment

- **Diagnosis:** Newborns with suspected haemophilia are tested for blood clotting factors; about one-third of cases result from new mutations.
- **Blood Tests:** Doctors perform clotting factor tests to identify the type and severity of haemophilia by assessing



blood clotting ability.

- **Treatment:** Haemophilia is managed by replacing missing clotting factors through intravenous infusion of commercial factor concentrates.
- **Self-Administration:** Patients can learn to self-administer factor infusions to control bleeding episodes and prevent

them through regular prophylactic treatment.

- **Specialized Care:** Comprehensive Haemophilia Treatment Centres offer specialized care, education, and support to manage the disorder effectively and promote overall health.

e-KISAN UPAJ NIDHI

CONTEXT: Consumer Affairs Minister launches 'e-Kisan Upaj Nidhi' to facilitate farmers' warehousing logistics and ensure fair prices for produce.

BACKGROUND: The e-Kisan Upaj Nidhi platform, operated by the Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority (WDRA), serves as a digital gateway. Simplifying the process, it allows farmers to store their produce at any registered WDRA warehouse for six months at 7% interest annually. This digital initiative aims to alleviate distress sales by offering farmers accessible post-harvest storage solutions.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **e-Kisan Upaj Nidhi:** Offers farmers a digital platform to store produce in registered WDRA warehouses for up to six months at 7% interest.
- **Distress Sales Prevention:** Implements no collateral policy to prevent distress sales, enhancing post-harvest storage options for farmers.
- **Integration with e-NAM:** Facilitates integration with e-NAM, enabling farmers to access interconnected markets and benefits beyond government MSP.
- **Establishment of WDRA:** WDRA, formed in 2010 under the Warehousing Act, regulates warehouses, promotes negotiability of receipts, and supports warehousing growth.

- **Statutory Authority:** Operates under the Department of Food and Public Distribution, headquartered in New Delhi, overseeing the development and regulation of warehouses.

Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority (WDRA)

- **Establishment and Structure:** WDRA was established under the Warehousing Act, 2007, comprising one Chairperson and two full-time Members.
- **Mission:** WDRA aims to establish a negotiable warehouse receipt system, facilitating trade, finance, and scientific warehousing of goods.
- **Enhancing Finance:** The system enables banks to offer loans against warehouse receipts, improving lending portfolios and liquidity in rural areas.
- **Benefits for Farmers:** Negotiable warehouse receipts help farmers obtain loans from banks, preventing distress sales and post-harvest storage losses.
- **Commodities Coverage:** WDRA covers 136 agricultural commodities and 24 horticultural commodities for issuing negotiable warehouse receipts, along with 9 non-agricultural commodities.

MethaneSAT

CONTEXT: MethaneSAT, launched via SpaceX Falcon9, will track global methane emissions with greater detail and wider coverage than predecessors.

BACKGROUND: MethaneSAT, launched via SpaceX Falcon9, aims to globally track and measure methane emissions. Despite predecessors, this washing-machine-sized satellite offers unprecedented detail and coverage. The need arises from methane's significant role as a potent greenhouse gas, second only to carbon dioxide, contributing 30% to global warming since the Industrial Revolution.

About MethaneSAT

- **Entity and Partners:** MethaneSAT is developed by the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) in collaboration with Harvard University and other institutions.
- **Mission:** It aims to monitor methane emissions from the oil and gas sector by orbiting the Earth 15 times a day.
- **Data Generation:** MethaneSAT will generate vast amounts of data, revealing emission sources, trends, and responsible parties.
- **Data Accessibility:** The collected data will be publicly available in near real-time, enabling stakeholders and regulators to take timely action.
- **Impact:** The initiative seeks to facilitate efforts to reduce methane emissions through informed decision-making and accountability measures.



Features of Methanesat

- **Challenges in Tracking Methane Emissions:** Historically, it has been difficult to accurately track and measure methane emissions due to limitations in satellite



technology.

- **Satellite Limitations:** Existing satellites either provide high-resolution data for specific sites or scan larger areas but miss smaller emission sources.
- **Discrepancy in Reported Emissions:** Discrepancies exist between reported methane emissions by national governments and actual levels, as highlighted by the IEA.
- **Role of MethaneSAT:** MethaneSAT aims to address these limitations by utilizing advanced technology to detect smaller emission sources and fill critical data gaps.
- **Features of MethaneSAT:** Equipped with a high-resolution

infrared sensor and wide-camera view, MethaneSAT can detect differences in methane concentrations and identify both small and large emitters.

The launch of MethaneSAT coincides with a global push for stricter methane management policies. Over 150 countries pledged to reduce methane emissions by 30% by 2030, while 50 companies committed to eliminating emissions and routine flaring. The satellite's data accessibility will ensure transparency, aiding in monitoring and fulfilling methane reduction commitments by governments and corporations.

NITI FOR STATES' Platform

CONTEXT: Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw to launch NITI For States platform, facilitating cross-sectoral knowledge sharing for policy and governance.

BACKGROUND: Minister of Communications, Railways, and Electronics & Information Technology NITI Aayog's 'NITI For States' platform, aiming to serve as a Digital Public

Infrastructure for effective governance. The platform, along with the 'Viksit Bharat Strategy Room', facilitates data-driven decision-making. Offering a comprehensive repository of best practices, policy documents, and datasets across various sectors, it promotes accessibility and ease of use, enhancing policy formulation and governance processes.

NITI FOR STATES
An integrated platform to learn, share, and inspire action towards a **Viksit Bharat**

Click here to explore

The circular diagram includes the following sectors: Skilling, Livelihoods and Labour Welfare; Tourism; Education; Manufacturing; Energy; Urban; Agriculture & Allied; Health & Nutrition; Water & Sanitation; MSME.

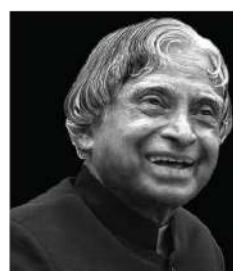
Key Features of the 'NITI for States' platform

- **Extensive Knowledge Base:** Curates best practices, policy documents, datasets, and publications, providing a comprehensive resource for governance.
- **Multilingual Accessibility:** Ensures inclusivity with availability in major Indian languages and foreign languages, catering to diverse user groups.
- **Capacity Building Initiatives:** Offers tailored digital training modules for officials at block, district, and state levels, enhancing skill development in collaboration with relevant institutions.
- **Expert Help Desk:** Provides specialized guidance through partnerships with leading institutions, aiding states and UTs in addressing specific challenges effectively.
- **Data Integration:** Utilizes data from the National Data & Analytics Platform (NDAP) to generate actionable

insights, facilitating data-driven decision-making.

- **Expected Impact:** Aims to accelerate digital transformation, empower frontline functionaries, and foster cooperative federalism, thereby strengthening governance practices across states and UTs.
- **Cornerstone Initiative:** 'NITI for States' platform empowers states and UTs to contribute to India's development vision, reflecting NITI Aayog's commitment to collaborative governance.

The 'Viksit Bharat Strategy Room' inaugurated by NITI Aayog offers an immersive environment for users to visualize data, trends, and policies. It features voice-enabled AI interaction and video conferencing capabilities, aiming to facilitate holistic problem assessment. Collaborative efforts from various government organizations ensure its plug-and-play model for replication at all levels.



You have to dream before your dreams can come true..

- A. P. J. ABDUL KALAM



INDIA'S FIRST AI TEACHER "IRIS"

CONTEXT: Thiruvananthapuram school introduces AI teacher Iris, a humanoid robot developed with Makerlabs Edutech, revolutionizing education in Kerala.

BACKGROUND: KTCT Higher Secondary School in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, pioneers education with the introduction of Iris, the state's first humanoid robot teacher. Developed in collaboration with Makerlabs Edutech, Iris, part of the ATL project, revolutionizes learning by providing personalized voice assistance and interactive experiences, marking a significant advancement in educational technology.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Interactive Learning:** IRIS, equipped with a voice assistant, engages students through personalized interactions and educational content delivery.
- **Mobility and Flexibility:** With a 4-wheel chassis and 5 degrees of freedom, IRIS can move freely, facilitating hands-on learning activities.

- **Learning Enhancement:** Promises to improve learning outcomes and inspire students by integrating AI into traditional teaching methods.
- **Generative AI:** Refers to deep-learning models capable of producing high-quality content like text and images based on training data.
- **AI School Inauguration:** India inaugurated its first AI school in Kerala in August 2023, marking a milestone in educational innovation.

Developed under NITI Aayog's ATL project, Iris, the AI teacher robot, aims to transform education with its innovative features. Powered by an Intel chipset and equipped with a voice assistant, Iris offers personalized learning experiences through its Android app interface. Its mobility and multilingual capabilities mark a significant advancement in educational technology.

YAOUNDE DECLARATION

CONTEXT: Yaoundé Declaration signals milestone in malaria fight as 11 African health ministers commit to ending malaria deaths.

BACKGROUND: African health ministers, global malaria partners, and stakeholders convened in Yaoundé, Cameroon, pledging to end malaria deaths with available tools. Despite global efforts, malaria cases surged in 2022, particularly in Africa, which bears 94% of global cases and 95% of deaths, totalling approximately 580,000 fatalities.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Global Malaria Cases Increase:** Malaria cases worldwide rose from 233 million in 2019 to 249 million in 2022, with Africa experiencing a significant surge.
- **African Malaria Burden:** Africa bears 94% of global malaria cases and 95% of related deaths, indicating a disproportionate burden on the continent.

- **Yaounde Conference Involvement:** Eleven African countries in the Yaounde conference contribute to over 70% of the global malaria burden, highlighting regional significance.
- **Declaration Objectives:** The declaration aims to bolster health infrastructure, expand personnel capacity, and improve program implementation through partnerships.
- **Financial Challenges:** Despite declarations, concrete action faces financial hurdles, with significant funding gaps hindering progress towards the African Union's 2030 malaria control and elimination goals.

The 2023 Africa Malaria Progress Report highlights a shortfall in meeting reduction goals, with only seven member states achieving significant progress. Urgent action and increased funding of \$1.5 billion are needed to sustain basic malaria services, particularly for vector control, to prevent surges in cases and deaths, especially among vulnerable groups.

INS TUSHIL

CONTEXT: India's newest naval asset, INS Tushil, commences sea trials from Russia's Baltiysk naval base in recent developments.

BACKGROUND: The acquisition of the first Krivak-III frigate marks a significant milestone under Project 11356M. Initiated through an Inter-Governmental Agreement with Russia in 2016, India aims to procure four Admiral Grigorovich-class frigates, with two supplied by Russia and two to be constructed domestically.

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Talwar-class Frigates Overview:** These frigates, known as Project 11356, are advanced guided missile vessels designed for stealth and combat versatility.
- **Customized Construction:** Constructed to meet the Indian Navy's specific requirements, they excel in air, surface, and sub-surface warfare scenarios.
- **Stealth Technology:** Incorporates stealth features

to minimize radar and underwater noise signatures, enhancing their survivability and effectiveness in combat.

- **Equipment:** Equipped with a range of Indian and Russian weaponry and systems, including surface-to-surface missiles, sonar, radar, communication suites, and anti-submarine warfare gear.
- **Combat Capabilities:** Designed to engage submarines, surface vessels, and aerial threats, offering robust defense capabilities in various maritime environments.
- **Specifications:** Weighing 3620 tons and measuring 124.8 meters in length, they boast a top speed of 30 knots and a cruising range of 4850 miles.
- **Mission Scope:** Capable of operating independently or as part of a naval formation, these frigates play a vital role in safeguarding maritime interests and protecting national security.



Destroyers

Size

Larger ships, usually over 150 meters

Role

Primarily focused on anti-submarine and air-defence

Armament

Advanced missile systems, long-range guns, and ASW

Stealth Features

Enhanced stealth features for reduced detection

Sensor Capabilities

State-of-the-art sensor systems for comprehensive situational awareness

Crew Size

Larger crew complement, often exceeding 200

Speed

Higher speed, exceeding 30 knots



Frigates

Size

Smaller vessels, typically around 100-150 meters

Role

Versatile, multi-role platforms for various tasks

Armament

Medium-range missiles, torpedoes, and naval guns

Stealth Features

Incorporate stealth technology for reduced radar signature

Speed

Moderate speed, around 25-30 knots

Sensor Capabilities

Advanced sensor suites for surveillance and targeting

Crew Size

Typically, around 150-200 crew members





REVAMPED PHARMACEUTICALS TECHNOLOGY UPGRADATION ASSISTANCE SCHEME

CONTEXT: The Department of Pharmaceuticals unveils the Revamped Pharmaceuticals Technology Upgradation Assistance Scheme, aiming to enhance industry technological capabilities to global standards.

BACKGROUND: The approval of the revised Scheme, following a thorough review by the Steering Committee, aligns with the updated Schedule-M and WHO-GMP standards. Announced by the Department of Pharmaceuticals, Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, the Revamped Pharmaceuticals Technology Upgradation Assistance (RPTUAS) Scheme aims to elevate the technological capabilities of the pharmaceutical industry in India, ensuring compliance with global standards.

About the Scheme

- **Expanded Eligibility:** PTUAS now includes pharmaceutical manufacturing units with turnover <500 crores, beyond MSMEs, fostering inclusivity while prioritizing smaller players.
- **Flexible Financing:** Emphasizes subsidies on a reimbursement basis, offering diverse financing options to enhance scheme adoption and support unit development.
- **Compliance Support:** Aligns with updated standards like Schedule-M and WHO-GMP, supporting various technological upgrades such as HVAC systems and clean

room facilities.

- **Dynamic Incentives:** Offers incentives based on turnover, with a maximum of Rs. 1.00 crore per unit, encouraging investment in eligible activities.
- **State Scheme Integration:** Allows integration with state government schemes, providing additional assistance to units and promoting collaboration for industry advancement.
- **Verification Mechanism:** Implements a robust verification system through a Project Management Agency to ensure transparency, accountability, and efficient resource allocation.
- **Comprehensive Support:** Aims to provide holistic support for technology upgradation, enabling pharmaceutical units to meet evolving standards and enhance competitiveness in the industry.

The Department of Pharmaceuticals is optimistic that the reformed PTUAS Scheme will bolster the pharmaceutical industry's expansion and adherence to international manufacturing norms. This revamped initiative reaffirms the government's dedication to bolstering the pharmaceutical sector, vital for the nation's health and prosperity.

PB-SHABD

CONTEXT: Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting launches PB-SHABD, a news sharing service from Prasar Bharati, and updates News on Air mobile app.

About PB-SHABD

- **PB-SHABD Overview:** Prasar Bharti's initiative provides daily news feeds in various formats to media subscribers, leveraging its extensive reporter network.
- **Comprehensive Coverage:** Brings the latest news from diverse regions across India, serving as a single point source for multimedia news content.
- **Free Offering:** Initially offered at no cost, PB-SHABD caters to smaller newspapers, TV channels, and digital portals seeking quality news content.
- **Multilingual and Multiformat:** Offers news stories in major Indian languages across 50 categories, facilitating customized storytelling for subscribers.
- **Supporting Media Ecosystem:** Aims to support and empower smaller media outlets by providing access to high-quality news content for dissemination to their audiences.

PRASARBHARTI

- **Public Broadcasting:** Prasar Bharti is India's public broadcaster, operating All India Radio and Doordarshan to disseminate news, entertainment, and educational content.
- **Autonomy:** Established as an autonomous body under the Prasar Bharati Act, it functions independently to uphold journalistic integrity and editorial freedom.
- **Multilingual Services:** Provides content in multiple Indian languages, catering to diverse linguistic and cultural preferences across the nation.
- **National Reach:** With a vast network of radio and television stations, Prasar Bharti reaches remote areas, ensuring information access to all citizens.
- **Digital Expansion:** Embracing digital platforms, Prasar Bharti extends its reach globally through websites, mobile apps, and social media, adapting to evolving media landscapes.

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INTERNET IN REMOTE TRIBAL VILLAGES (VSAT)

CONTEXT: Ministry of Tribal Affairs to partner with ISRO for deploying V-SAT stations in 80 tribal villages across four states.

HIGHLIGHTS: The Ministry of Tribal Affairs is proposing collaboration with ISRO to introduce V-SAT stations in approximately 80 tribal villages across Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Maharashtra. This initiative aims to provide Internet services to these underserved areas and was presented during a ministry event focused on brainstorming innovative projects for tribal development.

About V-SAT

- **VSAT Definition:** VSATs are ground stations with dish antennas ranging from 75 cm to 1.2 meters, enabling two-way satellite communication.
- **Communication Functionality:** VSATs facilitate two-way data transmission between remote Earth stations or central hubs, supporting both narrowband and broadband data.

- **Data Handling:** VSATs manage various data types, including narrowband data like credit card transactions and broadband data like satellite Internet access and VoIP.
- **Applications:** VSATs are vital for connectivity in remote areas, on-the-move communication with phased array antennas, and maritime communication.
- **Versatility:** These systems play a crucial role in diverse sectors, offering reliable connectivity for businesses, governments, and organizations operating in remote or mobile environments.

A gap analysis by the Ministry of Tribal Affairs revealed around 18,000 remote tribal villages lacking adequate connectivity. ISRO's V-SAT solutions are proposed to address this, with plans to establish stations in 80 villages across Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, and Maharashtra. This pilot project aims to enhance connectivity and enable e-governance, with potential for scalability to other similar villages nationwide.

PUSHPAK REUSABLE LAUNCH VEHICLE (RLV)

CONTEXT: ISRO conducts successful landing experiment of Pushpak Reusable Launch Vehicle (RLV) in Karnataka, landing precisely on runway from 4.5 km altitude.

BACKGROUND: ISRO conducted its second RLV landing experiment, showcasing autonomous landing capabilities and

executing challenging manoeuvres. The RLV-TD, resembling an aircraft, features a fuselage, nose cap, double delta wings, and twin vertical tails. Previously, in 2016, ISRO tested the RLV Demonstrator, aiming to develop a reusable space vehicle akin to airplanes.



About PUSHPAK

- **RLV LEX-02 Landing Experiment:** ISRO achieved a milestone in reusable launch vehicle (RLV) tech with the successful RLV LEX-02 landing experiment.
- **Autonomous Landing Capability:** RLV-LEX-02 demonstrated autonomous landing capabilities from off-nominal conditions, showcasing advancements in navigation, control, and landing systems.
- **Technological Validation:** The mission validated technologies crucial for high-speed autonomous landings,

- including navigation, control systems, and landing gear.
- **Collaborative Effort:** Accomplished by VSSC, LPSC, and IISU, with collaboration from various agencies like IAF, ADE, and ADRDE, demonstrating teamwork in space exploration.
- **Key Support and Contributions:** Tracking support from ISTRAC, sensor support from SAC and LPSC, navigation hardware from IISU, and metrological support from SDSC-SHAR and URSC contributed to the mission's success.



TATA CUMMINS OPENS HYDROGEN ENGINE FACILITY

CONTEXT: CONTEXT: TCPL opens Jamshedpur factory, producing hydrogen-based internal combustion engines for medium and heavy commercial vehicles.

BACKGROUND: TCPL, a collaboration between Tata Motors Limited and Cummins Inc. USA, established TCPL Green Energy Solutions (TCPL GES) in March 2023. This subsidiary focuses on creating low and zero-emission propulsion technology to combat climate change and enhance air quality by minimizing greenhouse gas emissions.

Hydrogen Internal Combustion Engine

- **Innovative Propulsion:** The Hydrogen Internal Combustion Engine (HICE) utilizes hydrogen as fuel, offering a novel approach to traditional combustion engines.
- **Emission Reduction:** HICE significantly mitigates emissions, emitting only water vapor and minimal pollutants, aligning with sustainability goals and environmental regulations.
- **Efficiency and Power:** Leveraging hydrogen's high energy

density, HICE engines deliver efficient performance, providing ample power for various automotive and industrial applications.

- **Infrastructure Development:** Despite its benefits, HICE adoption faces challenges related to hydrogen infrastructure, including production, storage, distribution, and refueling infrastructure development.
- **Research and Development:** Ongoing research and development efforts aim to enhance HICE technology, addressing efficiency, performance, and infrastructure integration to promote wider adoption.
- **Integration Challenges:** Integrating HICE into existing vehicle platforms and industrial equipment requires modifications to accommodate hydrogen fuel storage and combustion requirements.
- **Future Viability:** With advancements in hydrogen technology and increasing focus on decarbonization, HICE holds promise as a sustainable solution for clean transportation and power generation in the future.

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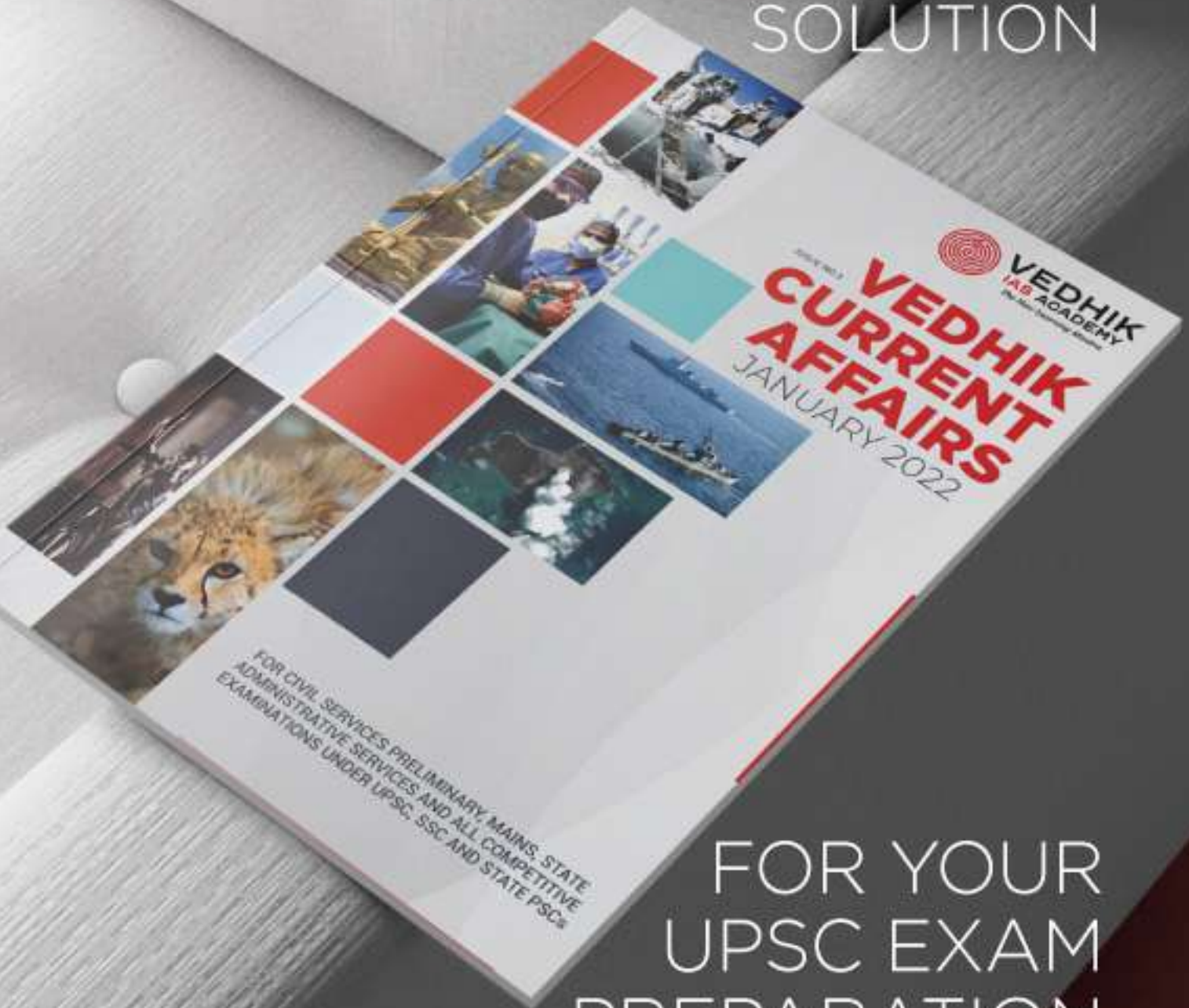
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A close-up photograph of a person's hands clasped together, wearing a dark blue suit jacket. The background is a solid, lighter blue color. The text 'CSAT' is overlaid in the center in a large, white, bold, sans-serif font.

CSAT



HCF & LCM



HCF & LCM

Highest Common Factor (HCF)

The HCF of two numbers is defined as the largest number that can exactly divide both the numbers

Least Common Multiple (LCM)

The LCM of two or more numbers is defined as the smallest number that can be divided by all of the numbers.

HCF and LCM Formula

Consider two numbers a and b. The relationship between HCF and LCM states that the product of a and b is equal to the product of HCF and LCM.

$$\text{LCM} \times \text{HCF} = \text{Product of two numbers}$$

Question: The LCM and HCF of two numbers are 144 and 12 respectively
If one of the numbers is 36, then find the other.

Solution:

Let the number be N

We know that, $\text{LCM} \times \text{HCF} = \text{Product of two numbers}$

$$\text{Therefore, } 144 \times 12 = 36 \times N$$

$$N = (144 \times 12) / 36 = 48$$

Sample Questions

Find the LCM and HCF of 48 and 72

- a. 144 b. 96 c. 216 d. None of these

The LCM and HCF of two numbers are 72 and 12. if one of the numbers is 24, Find the other number?

- a. 24 b. 48 c. 36 d. None

The Product of two numbers is 192. If the HCF of the numbers is 8, Find the LCM.

- a. 16 b. 12 c. 24 d. 48

The LCM and HCF of two numbers are 24 and 168 and the numbers are in the ratio 1: 7. Find the greater of the two numbers?

- a. 168 b. 144 c. 108 d. 72

What will be the product of the numbers if the LCM and HCF are 12 and 18 ?

- a. 216 b. 72 c. 48 d. 36

Answers

- a
c
c
b
a



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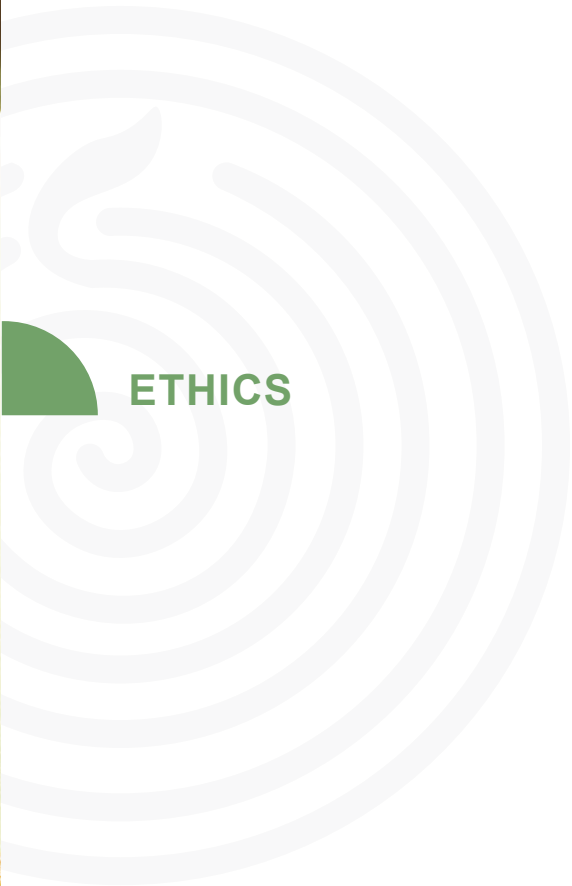
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ETHICS



Attitude is an important component that goes as an input in the development of human being(s). How to build a suitable attitude needed for a public servant?

Attitude plays a central role in shaping an individual's behavior, choices and ultimately his destiny. In a field of public service where the stakes are high and the responsibilities important, developing the right attitude is paramount. Civil servants are entrusted with the welfare of society, and their attitude can greatly affect the efficiency and integrity of their service. This essay explores the important attitudinal elements that a public servant needs and offers strategies for developing that mindset.

Public service is the cornerstone of democratic societies, which embodies the principles of responsibility, transparency and commitment to the common good. Effective public service depends primarily on the attitudes and behavior of those who serve the needs of society. Building on the key elements discussed earlier, this essay delves into the strategies and practices that promote a culture of excellence in the public service and emphasizes the importance of developing an important attitude.

Understanding the Role of Attitude in Public Service:

Before considering how to develop an appropriate attitude in public service, it is crucial to understand the meaning of attitude in this context. . Attitude refers to beliefs, values, perceptions and feelings, all of which influence how one views the duties of a public servant. A positive attitude promotes honesty, empathy, professionalism and commitment to the common good. On the contrary, a negative attitude characterized by cynicism, indifference or self-interest can undermine the trust and efficiency of the public service.

Key Aspect Developing the right attitude in the public service embraces a mentality of continuous improvement. Standing still is not possible in the constantly evolving landscape of management and public administration. Public servants must remain adaptable, open to new ideas and committed to perfecting their skills and approaches to better serve the public.

Lifelong learning: Public servants must view learning as a lifelong endeavor to seek opportunities for professional development and upskilling, during his career. Whether through formal training, workshops, seminars or internships, continuous learning promotes innovation, improves problem-solving skills, and ensures that public servants stay abreast of emerging trends and best practices in their fields.

Innovation and creativity: Creativity of innovation and creativity is a driver of positive change for and essential to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of public services. Civil servants should have the opportunity to think outside the box, try new ideas and seek innovative solutions to complex challenges. Develop a culture that values creativity, fosters employee ownership and pride, and encourages them to contribute their best ideas and efforts to a greater good.

Collaboration and sharing: Collaboration between agencies, departments and sectors is important. to solving multifaceted problems and maximizing the impact of public service initiatives. Officers must actively seek opportunities to collaborate with colleagues, stakeholders and community partners, using collective knowledge and resources to achieve common goals. Information sharing platforms, communities of practice and interagency working groups facilitate collaboration and promote a culture of mutual support and learning.

Key components of public service attitudes:

Integrity: Honesty is the core of public service. Officials must respect honesty, openness and ethical behavior in all their dealings. Integrity builds trust in the public and ensures that decisions and actions are based on principles rather than personal gain.

Empathy: Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. In public administration, empathy enables officials to connect with diverse communities, listen to their concerns and respond effectively to their needs. By putting themselves in the shoes of their servants, public officials can make decisions that promote fairness and inclusion.

Accountability: Public officials are accountable to the people they serve and to the laws and regulations that govern their duties. Accountability means taking responsibility for one's actions, admitting mistakes and correcting them. By holding themselves accountable, public officials build trust and credibility in the eyes of the public.

Professionalism: Professionalism encompasses a number of qualities such as competence, reliability and respect. Civil servants must strive for excellence in their work, constantly striving to improve their skills and knowledge. Professionalism also requires dignified and polite treatment of colleagues, voters and interest groups.

Dedication to the common good: at the core of public service is a commitment to promote the well-being of the whole society. Officials should prioritize the common good over personal interests or party goals. This commitment requires a willingness to make difficult decisions and allocate resources in a way that benefits the greatest number of people.

Strategies for Developing Appropriate Attitudes About Public Service:

Education and Training: Education plays an important role in shaping attitudes. and values. Civil servants must receive extensive training in ethics, communication, conflict resolution and other relevant skills. Ongoing professional development opportunities can further reinforce the importance of a positive attitude in public administration.

Mentoring and role models: Experienced civil servants can serve as mentors and role models for those entering the field. By sharing their knowledge, experiences, and ethical principles, mentors can help nurture the next generation of



leaders with the right attitude toward public service. Observing exemplary behavior in action can inspire others to emulate those qualities.

Exposure to Diverse Perspectives: Public officials must actively seek opportunities to interact with people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Exposure to different perspectives promotes empathy, cultural competence and a deeper understanding of complex social issues. By broadening their horizons, public officials can develop a more inclusive and compassionate attitude toward their employees.

Reflective Practice: Self-reflection is a powerful tool for personal growth and development. Public servants must regularly reflect on their attitudes, beliefs and actions and consider how they align with the values of the public service. Journaling, peer feedback, and guided reflections can help people identify areas for improvement and set goals to develop more appropriate attitudes.

Supportive organizational culture: Organizational culture plays an important role in shaping people's attitudes and behaviors. Public institutions should promote a culture of honesty, responsibility and mutual respect where ethical behavior is valued and rewarded. Policies and procedures must be open and fair and provide public servants with the support and guidance they need to maintain the highest standards of service.

Promotion of Ethical Leadership:

Ethical leadership is fundamental to maintaining public trust in government agencies. Officers in leadership positions have a responsibility to set a positive example, adhere to ethical standards and promote a culture of integrity and accountability throughout their organizations.

Lead by example: Ethical leadership begins by leading by example. Public service leaders must demonstrate honesty, transparency and integrity in their words and actions, and model ethical behavior. By adhering to the highest standards of conduct, leaders inspire trust among their colleagues and constituents and promote a culture of accountability and ethical decision-making.

Ethical Decision-Making Framework:

Public organizations must provide managers and employees with the tools and guidance to resolve ethical dilemmas and make fundamental decisions. Ethical decision-making frameworks such as codes of conduct, decision trees, and case studies help people identify ethical issues, weigh competing interests, and make morally defensible choices. Ethics and leadership training programs and workshops further improve employees' ability to act in ethically challenging situations.

Develop a culture of speaking up: Developing a culture of speaking up is essential to detect abuse, address abuse and promote a work environment of transparency and accountability. Officials should feel empowered to raise concerns about unethical behavior or practices without fear of retaliation.

Whistleblower protections, anonymous reporting channels and clear countermeasures foster a culture where honesty is valued and abuse is dealt with swiftly.

Promoting diversity, equality and inclusion: Diversity, equality and inclusion is not just about morality. They are necessary as well as essential elements of effective public service. Embracing diversity in all its forms enriches decision-making processes, enhances creativity and innovation, and ensures that public services meet the needs of all members of society.

Diversity in recruitment and hiring: Public service organizations should prioritize diversity and inclusion in their recruitment and employment practices, seeking to create a workforce that reflects the demographic diversity of the communities they serve. Implementing proactive recruitment strategies, removing barriers to entry and adopting inclusive recruitment practices will help attract diverse candidates and promote equal opportunities for all.

Inclusive decision-making processes: Inclusive decision-making processes ensure that diverse perspectives are heard, valued and integrated into decision making and service delivery. Officials should include stakeholders from marginalized or underrepresented groups in decision-making processes, solicit their input, and incorporate their feedback into policies, programs, and initiatives. Creating opportunities for meaningful participation and collaboration fosters a sense of ownership and trust in diverse communities.

Cultural Competency Training: Cultural Competency Training provides civil servants with the knowledge, skills and awareness needed to communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. Training programs should include topics such as cultural sensitivity, unconscious bias, and cross-cultural communication so that public officials can navigate diverse cultural contexts with respect and empathy. By promoting cultural competence, public organizations can improve their ability to provide fair and inclusive services to all constituencies.

Conclusion:

Developing an appropriate attitude in the public service requires a concerted effort to promote integrity, empathy, accountability, professionalism and commitment to common well-being. By embracing these important attitudinal components and implementing strategies to develop them, public officials can fulfill their responsibilities with integrity, efficiency, and compassion. By doing so they contribute to the creation of a fairer, more just and prosperous society for all. Cultivating a culture of excellence in the public service requires a multifaceted approach that includes continuous improvement and ethical leadership, and commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion. By adopting lifelong learning, promoting ethical leadership, and promoting diversity in recruitment and decision-making, public organizations can foster the attitudes necessary to fulfill their public service mission. In doing so, they uphold the values of honesty, openness and responsibility, which are characteristics of effective governance and a democratic society.

TOPICS OF THE MONTH





GOOD FENCES MAKES GOOD NEIGHBOURS

A WOMAN WITHOUT EDUCATION IS LIKE A BANYAN TREE WITHOUT ROOTS OR LEAVES: UNVEILING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN'S EDUCATION

- DR. Alexander Jacob IPS

FORESTS ARE THE BEST-CASE STUDIES FOR ECONOMIC EXCELLENCE

-DR. Babu Sebastian

INSPIRATION FOR CREATIVITY SPRINGS FROM THE EFFORT TO LOOK FOR THE MAGICAL IN THE MUNDANE

-DR. G. Prasanna Kumar IAS



GOOD FENCES MAKES GOOD NEIGHBOURS

The proverb, “Good fences make good neighbours,” hangs heavy in the air, a seemingly timeless truth about human interaction. Yet, a closer examination reveals a dusty relic from a bygone era, one etched in the tumultuous backdrop of the early 20th century. Back then, the world map was a canvas of towering walls and crumbling empires. Major Powers, like jealous children, clung to their territories while simultaneously vying for more. The spirit of neighbourly camaraderie, once championed in sacred texts, became a casualty in the brutal game of alliances, national ambitions, and the looming shadow of war.

Fast forward to the 21st century, and the echoes of those imperial struggles still resonate. Traditional land grabs, though still present have morphed into a subtler form of domination: neo-imperialism. Power now dances to the rhythm of financial markets, whispers through energy pipelines, and flexes its muscles in trade deals and diplomatic manoeuvres. The allure of self-interest and strategic gains has fuelled a resurgence of nationalist fervour, pushing aside the ideals of globalization and collective responsibility.

In this transformed landscape, the proverb’s simplistic wisdom appears inadequate. Does a world increasingly interconnected by trade, technology, and migration truly thrive on isolation? Or does genuine neighbourliness demand something more nuanced, something that transcends the stark boundaries of fences?

The proverb, “Good fences make good neighbours,” whispers through the ages, its origins shrouded in a mist of time. Variations dance across history, each reflecting the anxieties and realities of their era. In 1758, Benjamin Franklin, America’s own polymath, penned a cautionary line in “Poor Richard’s Almanack”: “Love your neighbour; yet don’t pull down your hedge.” This seemingly contradictory statement acknowledges a fundamental tension – the desire for peaceful coexistence alongside the need for boundaries. Here, the “hedge” isn’t a towering wall, but a symbolic barrier, a recognition that respect for personal space can coexist with neighbourly affection.

Leaping into 1914, and the world stands on the precipice of the Great War. Robert Frost, in his poignant poem “Mending Wall,” paints a picture of two neighbours’ mending a stone wall. The act, a ritual of sorts, becomes a canvas for deeper questions. The speaker expresses a yearning for connection, questioning the wall’s necessity. Yet, his neighbour clings to its importance, uttering the now-famous line, “Something there is that doesn’t love a wall.” This cryptic statement hints at a primal human desire – a yearning for connection that persists even in the presence of physical barriers.

These two historical fragments set the stage for our exploration. We see a proverb evolve from a pragmatic acceptance of boundaries to a poignant exploration of their psychological impact. They challenge us to consider the complexities of neighbourliness – can fences truly foster good relationships, or do they merely coexist with them?

The proverb’s charm lies in its idyllic vision: good neighbours’ existing peacefully without walls. In this utopia, trust, open communication, and shared responsibility dissolve the need for boundaries, replaced by a spirit of seamless cooperation. However, our world is far from this harmonious

ideal. Centuries of conflict, cultural divides, and resource scarcity have woven a complex tapestry where boundaries, both physical and metaphorical, remain a necessary reality.

The proverb “good fences make good neighbours” holds a kernel of truth. Like individuals who need personal space to thrive, nations require well-defined boundaries to safeguard their independence and resources. These boundaries, however, are not the rigid walls of suspicion and fear.

Healthy boundaries, established through clear communication and respect, are essential. Imagine a vibrant community garden. Plot markers prevent squabbles over prize-winning vegetables, while shared irrigation systems foster cooperation. These boundaries define roles, manage resources, and create a sense of belonging.

But boundaries, like a double-edged sword, can also fuel conflict. When built on prejudice or contested, they isolate communities and exacerbate inequalities. Walls erected from fear create suspicion and distrust, hindering international cooperation on issues like climate change.

The key lies in understanding the distinction between boundaries and walls. Societies, like gardens, are ever-evolving. Boundaries need to be flexible, adapting through communication to accommodate social change. Just as a community garden adjusts plot sizes for growing families, healthy boundaries within and between nations must adapt for a more inclusive and equitable future.

The simplistic solution offered by the proverb crumbles under the weight of a complex world. By understanding the interplay of boundaries, identity, cooperation, and conflict, we can move beyond walls, paving the way for a future where good neighbours’ – individuals and nations alike – can thrive.

Forget picket fences and tidy hedges. The true meaning of “good fences make good neighbours” lies buried deep within the complexities of human interaction. Sociologists peel back the layers, revealing a world shaped by boundaries – not just physical walls, but the invisible lines drawn by social norms, cultural practices, and even the way we see ourselves.

These boundaries are the building blocks of social order. Imagine a bustling community garden – clear plot divisions prevent squabbles over prize-winning tomatoes, while shared irrigation systems foster cooperation. Boundaries define our roles, manage resources, and create a comforting sense of belonging.

But boundaries are a double-edged sword. They forge our identities, shaping who we are by who we aren’t. Neighbourhoods, sports teams, even music genres – these communities thrive on boundaries that solidify “us” versus “them,” reinforcing a powerful sense of shared identity. Think of a vibrant cultural festival – the boundaries create a space for shared celebration, yet each group retains its unique flavour.

However, boundaries can also be a recipe for conflict. When contested or built on prejudice, they splinter communities and exacerbate inequalities. Walls built on fear isolate and marginalize, fostering suspicion and distrust. International cooperation crumbles when boundaries become battle lines.

The truth is, societies are ever-evolving, and so too are the boundaries that define them. What works in a rural village might not translate to a sprawling metropolis. Sociologists understand this fluidity. Boundaries need to be flexible,



adapting through open communication and negotiation to accommodate social shifts. Imagine a community garden that adjusts plot sizes as families grow or shrink.

“Good fences make good neighbours” offers a simplistic solution to a complex world. By delving into the interplay of boundaries, identity, cooperation, and conflict, sociology equips us with a nuanced lens. We can see how these boundaries shape our interactions, paving the way for a future that’s not just peaceful, but inclusive and equitable for all.

The quaint notion of “good fences make good neighbours” takes on new meaning in a globalized world. While boundaries still matter, so does a shared sense of responsibility for our planet. Climate change, resource scarcity, and humanitarian crises all disregard national borders. We need to be not just good neighbours’, but responsible stewards of a shared commons.

Imagine Earth itself as a giant community garden. Clean air and water are our prize-winning vegetables, and unchecked resource use threatens the entire harvest. Global agreements, like fences built on cooperation, can define roles and channel efforts to combat climate change and promote sustainable development. In times of crisis, global solidarity becomes our irrigation system, ensuring support reaches those in need.

The challenges are real – coordination, funding, and ensuring everyone plays fair. But the proverb’s message, reimagined for a global scale, offers a powerful path forward. By working together, respecting shared boundaries, and embracing collective responsibility, we can cultivate a more flourishing future for all.

“Good fences make good neighbours” takes on a new meaning when considering gender equality. Fences, once seen as physical dividers, become metaphors for boundaries in modern relationships.

For women, these boundaries are essential for claiming their autonomy and personal space. Respecting boundaries – physical and metaphorical – is the cornerstone of healthy relationships, workplaces, and social interactions. It ensures mutual respect and affirms a woman’s right to make her own choices.

But boundaries aren’t just about creating space. They can also be tools for dismantling outdated gender roles. Clear boundaries redefine expectations, fostering relationships built on understanding individual differences, not rigid societal norms.

In a world grappling with historic power imbalances, boundaries empower marginalized voices. They allow women to assert their rights, challenge unfair treatment, and demand equality. Boundaries become shields against unwanted advances, a clear line in the sand for consent and respect. Yet, boundaries are a double-edged sword. Misunderstandings can arise, and societal pressures to conform can create tension. The key lies in acknowledging intersectionality – how race, class, and other identities shape experiences. “Good fences” won’t look the same for everyone.

Ultimately, the fight for gender equality hinges on open communication, education, and a commitment to dismantling power imbalances. By embracing healthy boundaries and fostering a culture of respect and consent, we can build bridges, not walls, towards a future where men and women

are truly good neighbours’ – equals, working together for a more just and equitable world.

The proverb “good fences make good neighbours” gets a science makeover. Once seen as rigid dividers, boundaries morph into tools for progress. From high-tech walls to invisible digital fences, science crafts barriers that both protect and connect.

Imagine stronger, more secure physical barriers – walls safeguarding communities, not isolating them. Cyber security creates digital fortresses, shielding our information while fostering online collaboration. Science even carves out “green fences” – protected areas where nature thrives, reminding us we share this planet. And in the face of pandemics, scientific boundaries like quarantine measures become shields that ultimately protect entire communities.

But science also wields a pickaxe, chipping away at the walls that divide us. Global connectivity smashes geographical barriers, fostering collaboration across borders. Information flows freely online, challenging the old gatekeepers of knowledge. Climate change, a problem that ignores borders, compels nations to work together for a sustainable future. Global health crises remind us that healthy neighbours’ make a healthy world, necessitating international cooperation to combat disease.

Science doesn’t just build walls; it builds bridges. By breaking down walls of ignorance and prejudice, science fosters a world where good neighbours’ are defined by shared goals, mutual respect, and a commitment to a brighter future. Together, we can harness scientific advancements to create a world where cooperation, not division, reigns supreme.

Forget “good fences, good neighbours’.” In today’s world, nations are a vibrant tapestry, not isolated patches. India, with its millennia of multicultural mastery, stands as a beacon against rising isolationism.

Our strength lies in diplomacy, the Panchsheel ideals of mutual respect guiding our independent relations. We’ve been a voice of reason, a leader in de-escalation, a testament that fences, not walls, are the key to regional stability. Look at China’s push for dominance – walls won’t win, only diplomacy built on trust.

Walls like the US-Mexico border are rooted in fear-mongering, scapegoating minorities for systemic issues. India, beware of echoing this dangerous ideology. Our history is rich with tolerance, understanding that weakness isn’t the same as respecting difference. Don’t blur the lines between national identity and divisive communalism.

Geopolitics demands a nuanced approach. India’s strength lies in navigating alliances, resolving territorial disputes with dialogue, not walls. It doesn’t mean that we throw caution to winds. Power comes from might that is to be used with caution and restraint. It does not mean total neglect of national security. Operation Sankalp phase 1 and 2 are our willingness to use our military muscle to secure vital sea lanes not only for us but for the entire world. We must be a responsible global citizen, tackling terrorism, climate change, and nuclear threats through cooperation, not isolation.

The world needs India to champion the power of diplomacy, to showcase that good neighbours’ don’t build walls, they build bridges of understanding for a more secure and prosperous future. India’s look east policy which has evolved into Act east policy, Think west policy, SAGAR and



neighbourhood first policy are our actions in this line of thought.

Forget the illusion of security behind fences. We're not frogs in a well; this planet is our shared ocean. Borders create blind spots, turning a fight for "our world" into a desperate scramble. Overexploited resources and pollution mock these imaginary lines. We need a new mindset, a shift from "whose world" to "how can we save it together?"

Fences also stifle progress. Fear paints "the other" as a threat, stifling dissent and collaboration – the very tools needed to tackle climate change, pandemics, and scarcity. Imagine scientific breakthroughs locked away by national borders! Walls breed stagnation; a united world thrives on shared knowledge.

The real danger lies within, in the erosion of trust and unity. "Good fences" might create a polite facade, but suspicion lurks beneath. It's time to dismantle these barriers and embrace Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam: the world is one family. Boundaries, yes, but not walls. We need metaphorical fences built on respect and communication. Here's the path forward: Shared Responsibility: Move from "whose world" to a collaborative approach. International cooperation is key for environmental protection, resource management, and scientific research.

Embracing Differences: Promote cultural exchange and dialogue to break down stereotypes. The richness of humanity lies in its diversity, not uniformity.

Empowering Voices: Encourage dissent and critical thinking. A vibrant democracy thrives on citizen participation, not just the powerful.

The world needs India, a nation of tolerance and multiculturalism, to champion this vision. Let's be a beacon of unity, demonstrating that strong nations are built on collaboration, not walls. By dismantling barriers and embracing our shared humanity, we can build a future that's not just secure, but truly prosperous for all.

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We shall overcome someday
We are not afraid, we are not afraid
We are not afraid today.

Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe
We shall overcome someday.
We'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand
We'll walk hand in hand someday.

Forget "good fences make good neighbours" – that fosters polite indifference, a mask for suspicion. The real threats aren't external; they're the walls we build that stifle dissent, the cornerstone of democracy. Let's tear down these barriers, not with bricks and mortar, but with understanding, a little more love and care with prudence guarding us. It's time to revive the ancient ideal of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – the world is one family. By embracing our differences and working together, we can build a future that's not just secure, but thrives on the collective strength of humanity united.

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A Woman Without Education is Like a Banyan Tree Without Roots or Leaves: Unveiling the Significance of Women's Education

Education is often heralded as the cornerstone of progress, empowerment, and societal transformation. In this essay, we delve deep into the profound metaphor: "A woman without education is like a banyan tree without roots or leaves." This analogy, attributed to Savitribai Phule, encapsulates the essence of women's education and its pivotal role in shaping individuals, communities, and nations. With a comprehensive exploration spanning historical contexts, contemporary challenges, and future aspirations, we unravel the multifaceted significance of educating women.

Historical Context: Pioneers of Women's Education

The journey towards women's education has been fraught with obstacles and milestones. From Savitribai Phule and Jyotirao Phule's pioneering efforts in establishing India's first school for girls to the global advocacy for girls' education led by figures like Malala Yousafzai, historical narratives underscore the transformative impact of education on women's lives. These trailblazers challenged societal norms, advocated for equal opportunities, and laid the groundwork for generations of educated women to thrive.

Empowerment Through Knowledge: The Impact of Education

Education serves as a catalyst for empowerment, enabling women to break free from cycles of poverty, discrimination, and dependency. Through access to quality education, women acquire critical thinking skills, economic independence, and decision-making abilities, thus reshaping familial dynamics, community structures, and societal paradigms. The empowerment derived from education radiates beyond individual realms, fostering inclusive growth, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

Overcoming Barriers: Challenges in Women's Education

Despite progress in women's education, persistent challenges impede equitable access and outcomes. Gender stereotypes, cultural barriers, economic disparities, and

systemic inequalities often hinder girls' education, particularly in marginalized communities and conflict-affected regions. Addressing these barriers requires concerted efforts in policy reforms, infrastructure development, community engagement, and advocacy for gender-responsive education.

Transformative Potential: Women's Education and Global Development

The nexus between women's education and global development is undeniable. Educated women contribute significantly to diverse sectors such as healthcare, economy, governance, and innovation, driving progress and resilience in the face of complex challenges. Investments in girls' education yield substantial returns, creating virtuous cycles of empowerment, prosperity, and social change at local, national, and international levels.

Envisioning the Future: Towards Inclusive and Quality Education for All

The future of women's education hinges on inclusive and quality learning environments that nurture creativity, critical thinking, and lifelong learning. Sustainable development goals prioritize gender equality and education for all, emphasizing the imperative of bridging educational gaps, promoting digital literacy, and fostering holistic approaches to education that empower women as agents of change and progress.

Conclusion: Education as a Beacon of Hope and Progress

In conclusion, the metaphor "A woman without education is like a banyan tree without roots or leaves" resonates profoundly in our quest for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable societies. Women's education is not merely a means to an end but a fundamental human right, a transformative force, and a beacon of hope for a brighter, more inclusive future. As we navigate the complexities of our world, let us reaffirm our commitment to empowering women through education, recognizing their immense potential to catalyze positive change and shape a better world for all.



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FORESTS ARE THE BEST-CASE STUDIES FOR ECONOMIC EXCELLENCE

In a rural village, farmers struggled as their land grew barren. Desperation loomed until a young farmer, Mia, discovered a nearby neglected forest. Instead of logging it for quick profit, she organized sustainable practices, teaching villagers to gather non-timber products like fruits, mushrooms, and medicinal herbs. As the forest flourished, so did the community. Tourists flocked to experience its beauty, creating jobs in ecotourism. Mia's village became a model of economic resilience, proving that forests, when nurtured, could sustain livelihoods beyond expectation. Their tale spread, inspiring others to embrace forests as the epitome of economic excellence and environmental stewardship.

Economic Value of Forests

Forests hold immense economic value beyond mere timber. Take the case of the Amazon rainforest, often dubbed the "lungs of the Earth." Its biodiversity supports pharmaceuticals, while its carbon sequestration mitigates climate change. Indigenous communities rely on forest products for sustenance and income. Moreover, ecotourism flourishes, drawing visitors eager to explore its wonders. A study estimated the Amazon rainforest's annual economic value at \$8.2 trillion, far surpassing the revenue from deforestation. This illustrates the vast potential of forests as economic engines.

Transitioning to Sustainable Forest Management Practices ensures this value endures. By balancing ecological integrity with economic needs, it secures long-term benefits. Sustainable logging techniques like selective harvesting and reforestation maintain forest health while providing livelihoods. Carbon offset programs incentivize conservation. Such practices preserve biodiversity, safeguard water sources, and bolster resilience against climate change. Sustainable Forest Management thus upholds forests' economic significance while ensuring their continued existence for future generations.

Sustainable Forest Management Practices

Sustainable Forest Management (SFM) encompasses strategies that maintain forest health, biodiversity, and productivity while meeting the needs of present and future generations. An exemplary case is found in Finland's boreal forests. Through SFM, Finland balances timber extraction with conservation efforts, ensuring forests remain resilient ecosystems. Selective logging techniques preserve biodiversity hotspots, while strict replanting guidelines replenish harvested areas. The Finnish government also incentivizes private landowners to adopt sustainable practices, fostering a culture of stewardship.

Transitioning to SFM not only safeguards ecosystems but also fuels forest-based industries. By promoting responsible harvesting, SFM ensures a steady supply of raw materials for industries such as paper production, furniture manufacturing, and bioenergy. Additionally, SFM supports eco-tourism initiatives, attracting visitors eager to explore well-managed forests. Forest-Based Industries thus thrive under the umbrella of Sustainable Forest Management, capitalizing on nature's bounty while preserving its vitality for future generations.

Forest-Based Industries

Forest-Based Industries encompass a wide array of sectors that utilize forest resources sustainably to produce goods and services. One inspiring example is the paper

industry in Sweden. Swedish companies have pioneered innovative practices, utilizing sustainably sourced wood fibers to produce high-quality paper products. By investing in efficient production methods and recycling initiatives, they minimize waste and environmental impact while meeting global demand.

The success of Forest-Based Industries not only lies in their economic output but also in their ability to create Employment Opportunities. From forestry and logging to manufacturing and distribution, these industries offer diverse job prospects, supporting rural economies and fostering local development. Moreover, the growth of eco-friendly initiatives like sustainable forestry certification programs creates additional employment in environmental management and conservation. Thus, Forest-Based Industries serve as catalysts for job creation, driving economic prosperity while maintaining a delicate balance with nature.

Employment Opportunities

Employment Opportunities within the forestry sector extend far beyond traditional roles like logging and timber processing. For instance, in Canada's boreal forests, Indigenous communities engage in sustainable forestry practices, creating jobs in forest management, eco-tourism, and cultural preservation. Similarly, in Brazil's Amazon rainforest, conservation organizations employ local communities to monitor and protect biodiversity-rich areas, offering stable incomes while safeguarding precious ecosystems.

As the demand for sustainable practices grows, so do opportunities in green industries. Renewable energy projects, such as biomass and bioenergy production, require skilled workers for operation and maintenance. Additionally, the expansion of forest restoration initiatives creates employment in tree planting and ecosystem restoration efforts.

This emphasis on job creation not only supports local economies but also aligns with the imperative of combating climate change. Forests play a crucial role in carbon sequestration, making sustainable forestry practices vital for mitigating climate change impacts. Thus, Employment Opportunities in forestry contribute to both economic prosperity and environmental sustainability.

Forests and Climate Change Mitigation

In India, forests play a pivotal role in climate change mitigation efforts. The country's diverse forest ecosystems, from the lush Western Ghats to the vast Himalayan forests, sequester significant amounts of carbon dioxide, helping to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions. One remarkable example is the Auroville Forest in Tamil Nadu, where community-led reforestation projects have transformed degraded lands into thriving carbon sinks. Furthermore, India's ambitious afforestation initiatives, such as the Green India Mission, aim to increase forest cover and enhance carbon sequestration capacities.

Forests and Climate Change Mitigation in India demonstrate the power of nature-based solutions in combating global warming. As these forests sequester carbon and regulate local climates, they provide invaluable ecosystem services essential for human well-being and environmental sustainability. The conservation and sustainable management of forests not only contribute to mitigating climate change but also ensure the preservation of vital Forest Ecosystem



Services for present and future generations.

Forest Ecosystem Services

Forest Ecosystem Services in India encompass a myriad of benefits vital for both environmental health and human well-being. The forests of India, ranging from the dense tropical forests of the Western Ghats to the mangrove ecosystems of the Sundarbans, provide essential services such as carbon sequestration, water purification, and biodiversity conservation. For instance, the sacred groves found across India serve as biodiversity hotspots, preserving unique plant and animal species while also regulating local climates and providing spiritual sanctuaries for communities.

Indigenous and local community forest management practices exemplify the symbiotic relationship between people and forests. In regions like the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve, indigenous tribes have long practiced sustainable forest management, maintaining biodiversity while meeting their livelihood needs. This intimate connection with forests underscores the importance of recognizing and empowering indigenous and local communities in forest conservation efforts.

Indigenous and Local Community Forest Management

Indigenous and Local Community Forest Management in India exemplifies centuries-old traditions of harmonious coexistence with nature. In regions like the Bishnoi community in Rajasthan, indigenous practices of conservation and sustainable resource use have preserved precious ecosystems for generations. The Bishnois revere trees like the khejri, protecting them even in times of drought, showcasing their deep-rooted respect for nature.

These communities showcase the efficacy of traditional ecological knowledge in preserving biodiversity and fostering resilience to environmental challenges. Empowering indigenous and local communities in forest management not only ensures the conservation of ecosystems but also promotes social cohesion and cultural continuity.

Forest Certification and Market Initiatives can further support these efforts by providing incentives for sustainable practices and access to premium markets, thus enhancing the economic viability of community-led conservation initiatives.

Forest Certification and Market Initiatives

Forest Certification and Market Initiatives in India offer pathways towards sustainable forest management while creating economic opportunities for communities. For instance, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certification ensures that forest products meet stringent environmental and social standards, enhancing their market value. In regions like the Western Ghats, FSC-certified teak plantations demonstrate how responsible forestry practices can yield premium products while conserving biodiversity and supporting local livelihoods.

By aligning with certification standards and participating in market initiatives, forest-dependent communities can access higher prices for their products, thus improving their economic well-being. Furthermore, these initiatives incentivize the adoption of sustainable practices, contributing to long-term forest conservation efforts.

Economic Challenges and Opportunities in Forest Conservation emerge as stakeholders navigate the delicate balance between economic development and environmental protection. Finding sustainable solutions requires innovative

approaches that prioritize both economic prosperity and ecological integrity.

Economic Challenges and Opportunities in Forest Conservation

In India, Economic Challenges and Opportunities in Forest Conservation are intricately intertwined. The country faces pressures from rapid industrialization, agricultural expansion, and urbanization, leading to deforestation and habitat loss. However, there are opportunities for sustainable development through initiatives like Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) schemes, where communities are compensated for conserving forests and providing vital ecosystem services. For example, the Paniya tribe in Kerala safeguards forested watersheds, ensuring clean water supply to downstream communities. By recognizing the economic value of these services, both communities and governments can work together to protect forests while supporting local livelihoods.

The Link between forest health and human well-being, including air and water quality, underscores the importance of preserving forests. As forests act as natural filters, purifying air and water, their conservation directly benefits human health and quality of life.

Link between forest health and human well-being, including air and water quality

In India, the link between forest health and human well-being, particularly air and water quality, is profound. The Western Ghats, for instance, serve as a vital source of freshwater for millions of people while also harbouring rich biodiversity. The dense forests act as natural air purifiers, absorbing pollutants and releasing oxygen, thus contributing to clean air and mitigating climate change impacts.

For example, the Agasthyamalai Biosphere Reserve in Kerala embodies this symbiotic relationship. Its pristine forests regulate rainfall patterns, ensuring a steady supply of water to nearby communities. Additionally, the lush vegetation filters pollutants from the air, improving air quality and reducing respiratory illnesses.

Recognizing the importance of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) in sustaining forest health and human well-being, modern forest management approaches in India increasingly integrate indigenous practices. By combining scientific expertise with traditional wisdom, these approaches ensure holistic forest management that benefits both ecosystems and communities.

Integration of traditional ecological knowledge in modern forest management approaches

In India, the integration of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) into modern forest management approaches is essential for promoting sustainable practices and preserving biodiversity. For instance, indigenous communities in the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve have long relied on TEK to manage forest resources effectively. Their intimate understanding of local ecosystems guides selective harvesting, forest regeneration, and conservation efforts.

By incorporating TEK into modern forest management plans, India can harness the wisdom accumulated over generations to enhance conservation outcomes and promote community engagement. This approach not only fosters cultural preservation but also strengthens the resilience of forest ecosystems against environmental threats.

Ecotourism opportunities and revenue generation



from forest conservation benefit immensely from the integration of TEK. Indigenous communities can showcase their traditional practices to tourists, offering unique experiences that highlight the value of forest conservation while generating income for local economies. This synergy between TEK and ecotourism exemplifies a sustainable approach to forest management that balances environmental protection with economic development.

Ecotourism opportunities and revenue generation from forest conservation

In India, ecotourism offers a sustainable approach to both conserving forests and generating revenue. Take the Periyar Tiger Reserve in Kerala, where guided tours through lush forests offer visitors the chance to encounter diverse wildlife while supporting conservation efforts. Revenue generated from ecotourism activities funds habitat protection, anti-poaching measures, and community development projects.

This model not only safeguards biodiversity but also provides livelihood opportunities for local communities. By offering homestays, guided treks, and cultural experiences, indigenous communities actively participate in and benefit from ecotourism ventures.

Future Outlook and Innovations in ecotourism hold immense potential for further integrating sustainable

practices. Innovations such as low-impact tourism infrastructure, renewable energy-powered facilities, and digital storytelling initiatives can enhance visitor experiences while minimizing ecological footprints. With continued innovation and collaboration, ecotourism will play a pivotal role in driving forest conservation efforts and fostering socio-economic development in India.

Future Outlook and Innovations

The future outlook for forest conservation in India is promising, with innovative approaches driving sustainability and economic prosperity. For example, initiatives like community-based agroforestry projects in Uttarakhand integrate traditional knowledge with modern techniques to restore degraded lands while providing alternative livelihoods for local communities. Furthermore, advancements in remote sensing technology enable more accurate monitoring of forest health and changes in land use, aiding in targeted conservation efforts.

Innovations such as carbon trading schemes and green financing mechanisms also offer avenues for funding forest conservation projects while incentivizing sustainable practices. Collaborative efforts between government agencies, non-profit organizations, and local communities are essential for implementing these innovative solutions effectively.

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INSPIRATION FOR CREATIVITY SPRINGS FROM THE EFFORT TO LOOK FOR THE MAGICAL IN THE MUNDANE

“Look Deep into Nature, and Then You Will Understand Everything Better.”

- Albert Einstein

Creativity, an elusive driving force behind innovation, artistic expression, and the advancement of humanity, frequently originates in the unlikeliest of sources. It entails the endeavour to peer beyond the commonplace and unearth the extraordinary concealed within the everyday facets of existence.

To understand the idea of finding magic in everyday life, it's important to first recognize what we mean by the word “mundane.” The mundane refers to the ordinary, the everyday things we often don't pay much attention to in our daily lives. It includes our daily routines, common objects, and regular experiences. These seemingly unremarkable aspects of life provide a limitless canvas for creativity and self-expression when viewed with an imaginative perspective.

Artists often find inspiration in the ordinary. For example, Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer created masterful paintings like “Girl with a Pearl Earring” and “The Milkmaid” that celebrated everyday life. These works turned the mundane into art by revealing the extraordinary in simple daily activities and human expressions.

Similarly, poets like William Wordsworth found profound beauty in the natural world and ordinary experiences. His poems often celebrated the tranquillity of rural life and the emotional richness found in ordinary encounters. Wordsworth's famous poem “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” reflects his ability to find the magical in the mundane, as he describes the beauty of a field of daffodils:

“Ten thousand saw I at a glance,

Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.”

While art finds its inspiration in the external world, science, too, draws from the mundane. Scientific discovery often begins with the observation of ordinary phenomena. For instance, Sir Isaac Newton's exploration of gravity began with the simple observation of an apple falling from a tree. Albert Einstein's theory of relativity was rooted in the mundane experience of riding a train and wondering about the consequences of its motion.

These iconic moments in scientific history illustrate how the pursuit of understanding often starts with the recognition of the extraordinary within the everyday. Scientists, like artists, are explorers of the mundane, seeking to unveil the hidden laws and mysteries of the universe by looking beyond the surface of ordinary occurrences.

Creativity indeed extends beyond the realms of arts and sciences, proving to be a valuable asset in problem-solving across various domains. In fact, the ability to find the magic in the mundane can be a catalyst for innovative solutions to practical challenges. When faced with a problem, individuals and organizations that embrace creative thinking often discover ingenious ways to overcome obstacles.

Consider the example of the SpaceX's innovative approach to rocket recovery showcases creativity in problem-solving. They turned the mundane idea of reusing rocket components into a ground-breaking practice, drastically reducing the cost of space travel.

Many companies are creatively addressing environmental concerns through mundane objects like packaging. Innovations in sustainable packaging, such as biodegradable materials and minimalistic designs, are aimed at reducing waste and environmental impact.

The education sector has witnessed a surge in creativity in recent years, especially with the rise of e-learning platforms. Creative approaches to digital education, such as gamification and interactive content, have transformed the mundane process of learning into engaging and effective experiences.

Innovation in the business world also relies on the ability to find the magic in the mundane. Companies that thrive often do so by identifying unmet needs or overlooked opportunities in everyday life. Uber, for example, transformed the mundane act of hailing a taxi into a convenient and efficient experience by leveraging smartphone technology.

Beyond practicality and problem-solving, the mundane holds a special place in the realm of emotions and human connection. The simple acts of daily life, the way we greet a loved one, the comfort of a warm cup of tea, the nostalgia of a childhood toy are the elements that often resonate deeply with people. They are universal experiences that form the foundation of our emotional lives.

Authors, filmmakers, and storytellers understand the power of these everyday experiences to evoke strong emotions in their audiences. In literature, authors like J.K. Rowling took the mundane world of a young boy attending school and infused it with magic in the “Harry Potter” series. Through this blend of the ordinary and the extraordinary, she created a world that resonated with readers of all ages.

In Indian cinema, directors like Satyajit Ray have displayed a remarkable talent for capturing the magic within the mundane. Satyajit Ray, renowned for his work in Bengali cinema, crafted films such as “Pather Panchali” and “Apu Trilogy” that predominantly revolve around the lives of everyday individuals. Within these seemingly ordinary narratives, Ray weaves tales that resonate with profound depth and meaning. Munshi Premchand, the celebrated Indian writer known for drawing inspiration from the mundane, adeptly wove the ordinary aspects of rural Indian life into his literary masterpieces. His stories and novels often depicted the struggles, hopes, and aspirations of common people in a simple yet profound manner.

Finding the magic in the mundane is not solely about recognizing existing beauty or meaning; it also involves the transformative power of perspective. When we actively seek the extraordinary in the ordinary, we are engaging in a mental exercise that alters our perception of the world.

This shift in perspective can have a profound impact on our lives. It encourages mindfulness, the practice of being fully present in the moment and appreciating the richness of each experience. Mindfulness allows us to break free from the cycle of routine and automatic behaviour, opening the door to new insights and discoveries.

Moreover, seeking the magic in the mundane fosters a sense of gratitude. When we take the time to appreciate the simple joys and blessings that surround us, we develop



a deeper appreciation for life itself. Gratitude has been linked to improved mental well-being, increased resilience, and enhanced relationships, all of which contribute to a more fulfilling life.

In the journey of life, it is easy to become accustomed

to the routines and habits that define our daily existence. However, the magic of creativity lies in our ability to break free from the mundane, to see the world with freshness.

"Inspiration exists, but it has to find you working"

- Pablo Picasso

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*"Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great,
some achieve greatness, and others have greatness
thrust upon them."*

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE





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1. With reference to the Finance Commission of India, consider the following statements:

1. Recommending the distribution of taxes between the Union Government and the States.
2. Establishing the principles governing grants-in-aid to the States from the Consolidated Fund of India.
3. Identifying measures to enhance the Consolidated Fund of a State.

Which among the above statement(s) regarding the Finance Commission of India is / are true?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

2. With reference to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC), consider the following statements:

1. The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) are legally binding guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India for the conduct of political parties and candidates during elections to ensure free and fair elections.
2. The Model Code of Conduct (MCC) was enforced on a pan India basis since the General Elections, 1991.

Which among the above statement(s) regarding the Model Code of Conduct is / are true?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

3. With reference to the Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS), consider the following statements:

1. Provides farmers with a simplified credit card to access short-term credit for crop cultivation and allied activities.
2. Supplies agricultural inputs like fertilizers, seeds, insecticides, and implements to farmers.
3. Assist farmers in the marketing of their agricultural produce and provides support in finding better markets, thereby improving farmers' income and reducing dependency on middlemen.

Which among the above statement(s) regarding the Primary Agriculture Credit Societies (PACS) is / are true?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

4. With reference to 'Urban Cooperative Banks' in India, consider the following statements: (UPSC 2021)

1. Urban Cooperative Banks are supervised and regulated by local boards set up by the State Governments.
2. Urban Cooperative Banks can issue equity shares and preference shares.
3. Urban Cooperative Banks were brought under the purview of the Banking Regulation Act, 1949 through an Amendment in 1966.

Which of the statements given above is / are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

5. With reference to the "Unique Land Parcel Identification Number ("ULPIN")", consider the following statements:

1. The Unique Land Parcel Identification Number ("ULPIN") is a 14-digit identification number for every parcel of land in India based on the longitude and latitude coordinates of the land parcel.
2. The SVAMITVA scheme seeks to confer land titles in unmapped and inhabited parts of rural India and to distribute property cards in villages.

Which among the above statement(s) is / are true?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

6. Consider the following statements:

1. Mission LiFE aims to minimise per capita carbon footprint by promoting mindful utilisation instead of wasteful consumption.
2. LeadIT 2.0 was launched at COP 28 that focuses on co-development and transfer of low-carbon technology and financial assistance to emerging economies
3. Green Development Pact includes key ambitions such as doubling of global renewable capacity by 2030.

Which among the above statement(s) is / are true?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

7. Consider the following statements about World Trade Organization Appellate Body

1. The World Trade Organization Appellate Body was constituted in 2008.
2. The World Trade Organization Appellate Body have a standing committee of seven members
3. The reports of the World Trade Organization Appellate Body are non-binding in nature

Which of above statement(s) is/are incorrect?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- b. 1, 2 and 3

8. The National Mineral Exploration Policy (NMEP) 2016 seeks to boost exploration in India by encouraging private-sector involvement. With reference to the National Mineral Exploration Policy (NMEP), 2016, consider the following statements:

1. Auctioning exploration blocks for private sector involvement with profit sharing
2. Creating public geoscientific data
3. Mineral mapping the entire country using low-altitude and close space flights

Which among the above is / are objectives of the National Mineral Exploration Policy (NMEP) 2016?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

9. With reference to the "Overseas Citizen of India (OCI)



program”, consider the following statements:

1. The OCI program offers benefits like a lifelong visa, exemption from reporting to police authorities.
2. Overseas Citizens of India (OCI) holders enjoy parity with Non-Resident Indians (NRIs) in various fields, excluding property acquisition.
3. A former Indian citizen or a descendant is eligible to apply for OCI card.

Which among the above statement(s) regarding the “Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) program” is / are true?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

10. Consider the following statements about International Seabed Authority:

1. The International Seabed Authority (ISA) is an Inter-Governmental Organisation (IGO) that organizes, regulates and control all mineral related activities in the international seabed area beyond the limits of national jurisdiction
2. The International Seabed Authority (ISA) is a treaty-based organization that functions under the aegis of the World Maritime Organisation (WMO)
3. The International Seabed Authority (ISA) enjoys an Observer status in the United Nations Organisation

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

11. With reference to the quantum bit (qubit), consider the following statements:

1. Qubits, short for a quantum bit, is the basic unit of quantum information can exist in a superposition of both 0 and 1 simultaneously.
2. The entanglement and other superposition, enables quantum computers to perform complex calculations much more efficiently than classical computers for certain tasks.
3. Qubits exhibit low sensitivity and may produce accurate results, even as quantum computer size increases.

Which among the above statement(s) regarding the quantum bit (qubit) is / are true?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

12. With reference to the Santiago Network, consider the following statements:

1. The Santiago Network was established at COP 25 in Madrid as part of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM).
2. The Santiago Network was constituted as a collaborative framework to assist developed and developing countries in managing climate-induced loss and damage.

Which among the above statement(s) regarding the Santiago Network is / are true?

- a. 1 only

- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

13. Consider the following statements:

1. The Paris Club is a group of officials from major creditor countries whose role is to find coordinated and sustainable solutions to the payment difficulties experienced by debtor countries.
2. All member States of the Organisation of Economic, Cooperation and Development (OECD) are members of the Paris Club.

Which among the above statement(s) is / are true?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

14. “This refers to a phenomenon wherein countries that are rich in natural resources witness uneven growth across sectors, According to this thesis, when the resource rich countries export their resources to the rest of the world, it causes the exchange rate of their currency to appreciate significantly, this in turn affects other sectors in the country by discouraging their exports while encouraging the import of cheaper alternatives”. Which of the following is explained in the above paragraph

- a. Stagflation
- b. Virtuous Cycle
- c. Dutch Disease
- d. Overheating

15. Consider the following statements about PM- Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan

1. The PM- Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme
2. The PM- Shram Yogi Maan-Dhan is implemented through LIC and Community Service Centres
3. In case of death of the person, spouse is entitled to receive 50% of the Pension

Which of the above statement(s) is / are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 2 and 3 only
- c. 3 only
- d. All of the Above

16. With reference to ‘Loss and damage fund’ often seen in news, consider the following statements.

1. The fund was introduced in United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992 aims to address climate-induced disasters’ impacts globally.
 2. The fund Initially managed by the World Bank.
- Identify the correct statement/s.

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

17. Consider the following statements regarding ‘Sea slugs’ often seen in news.

1. They are hermaphrodites, possessing both male and female reproductive organs.



2. Sea slugs often feed on algae, sponges, and cnidarians, extracting nutrients and toxins.

3. Some species of sea slugs have the ability to incorporate stinging cells from their prey into their own tissues.

How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

A. Only One

B. Only Two

C. All the Three

D. None of the above

18. Which among the following best explains the species 'Melanochlamys Droupadi' often mentioned in news?

A. A type of coral reef

B. A species of tropical fish

C. A variety of sea cucumber

D. A key sea slugs

19. Consider the following statements.

1. Asiatic Lions and Asiatic Cheetahs are categorised as 'Endangered' under IUCN red list.

2. Asiatic Lions and Asiatic Cheetahs are protected under schedule I of Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Act, 2023

3. Asiatic Lions and Asiatic Cheetahs are naturally seen in India.

How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

A. Only One

B. Only Two

C. All the Three

D. None of the above

20. With reference to Status of Leopards in India often seen in news, consider the following statements.

1. Maharashtra constitutes the largest number of Leopards in India.

2. As per the statistics, Leopards in India span across only 5 states in India.

Identify the correct statement/s.

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

21. Where is India's first Dolphin Research Centre located?

A. Odisha

B. Tamil Nadu

C. Maharashtra

D. Bihar

22. With reference to 'Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction' often seen in news, consider the following statements.

1. It aims to conserve and sustainably manage marine biodiversity in areas beyond national jurisdiction under United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.

2. India is a signatory to this treaty.

3. Under this, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) is mandatory for activities like carbon sequestration and deep-sea mining, ensuring sustainable ocean use.

How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

A. Only One

B. Only Two

C. All the Three

D. None of the above

23. Which organization releases the 'State of Global Climate Report 2023' often seen in news?

A. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

B. World Health Organization (WHO)

C. World Meteorological Organization (WMO)

D. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

24. Consider the following statements.

1. Photovoltaic semiconductors convert sunlight into electricity, driving the solar energy industry's growth and facilitating renewable energy adoption for sustainable power generation.

2. Semiconductors enable telecommunications networks by facilitating signal processing and transmission in devices like routers, modems, and cellular base stations.

3. The Internet of Things (IoT) relies on semiconductors to connect and control smart devices and optimization of various processes and environments.

How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

A. Only One

B. Only Two

C. All the Three

D. None of the above

25. With reference to 'Virus and Viroid' sometimes seen in news, consider the following statements.

1. Viroids are complex infectious agents with genetic material enclosed in a protein coat, unlike viruses.

2. Viruses can infect all types of organisms, including animals, plants, and bacteria, whereas viroids infect commonly on plants.

3. Viroids can be treated with vaccines and antiviral drugs, similar to the treatment options available for viruses.

How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

A. Only One

B. Only Two

C. All the Three

D. None of the above

26. ISRO's second spaceport is to be established in which location, frequently mentioned in the news?

A. Vizag, Andhra Pradesh

B. Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh

C. Kulasekarapattinam, Tamil Nadu

D. Thoothukudi, Tamil Nadu

27. Consider the following statements regarding 'Hemophilia A' often seen in news.

1. It is a genetic bleeding disorder caused by a deficiency of clotting factor IX.

2. Symptoms include prolonged bleeding after injury, spontaneous bleeding into joints and muscles, and easy bruising.

Identify the correct statement/s.

A. 1 only

B. 2 only

C. Both 1 and 2

D. Neither 1 nor 2

28. With reference to 'Warehousing Development and Regulatory Authority' often seen in news, consider the following statements.

1. It is a statutory body established under the Warehousing (Development and Regulation) Act, 2007.

2. It facilitates the development of modern warehousing infrastructure and encourages investment in the sector.

3. WDRA accredits warehouses based on infrastructure, storage practices, and compliance with safety standards.

How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?



- A. Only One
- B. Only Two
- C. All the Three
- D. None of the above

29. Consider the following statements regarding 'MethaneSAT' often seen in news.

- 1. It is developed by Indian Space Research Organisation in collaboration with Harvard University and other institutions.
- 2. It aims to monitor methane emissions from the oil and gas sector by orbiting the Earth 15 times a day.


Identify the correct statement/s.

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

30. The Yaoundé Declaration, often in the news, relates to:

- A. Climate change mitigation efforts
- B. Wildlife conservation in Africa
- C. Ending malaria deaths in Africa
- D. Economic development in West Africa

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MARCH 2024**