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SECURITY ISSUES ON TABLE AS PM MEETS BHUTAN KING



Bilateral cooperation: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the King of Bhutan, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, in Delhi. ANI
King Jigme Khesar Namgyel and Narendra Modi discuss 'entire gamut' of ties and progress in boundary talks between China and Bhutan, particularly about Doklam, says Foreign Secretary

India and Bhutan remain in "close coordination" over all security matters, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra said on Tuesday. He indicated that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck discussed the latest situation along the India-Bhutan border as well as the progress in boundary talks between China and Bhutan, particularly above the Doklam trijunction point, during a meeting in Delhi.

Responding to a number of questions about the possibility of a boundary deal between China and Bhutan that could negatively impact India's strategic interests in the region, Mr. Kwatra told presspersons that the two leaders had discussed the "entire gamut" of bilateral cooperation and issues of national and regional interests, and that the two countries share an "exemplary" relationship of "trust, goodwill and mutual understanding".

However, Mr. Kwatra declined to comment on any specific details of the conversation between Mr. Modi and the Bhutanese King relating to the latest developments between Thimphu and Beijing, or to a statement by Bhutan's Prime Minister Lotay Tshering that a demarcation line could be drawn on disput-

ed areas to Bhutan's north with China within the next couple of rounds of border talks.

'Shared interests'

"India and Bhutan remain in close touch and close coordination relating to our shared national interests including security interests," Mr. Kwatra said at a briefing after the meeting. He said that India had noted comments made by Mr. Tshering in an interview last week, adding that New Delhi has reiterated its position that any questions over the trijunction between India, China and Bhutan would be resolved "trilaterally".

The Bhutanese King met with Mr. Modi on Tuesday morning for talks. Modi discusses security issues with Bhutan King. This was followed by lunch at the Prime Minister's residence. "We had a warm and productive meeting. Deeply value our close friendship and the vision of successive Druk Gyalpos (Bhutanese Kings) in guiding India-Bhutan relations to new heights," the PM tweeted after the meeting.

Reform, development focus

Mr. Kwatra said that while strategic issues were discussed, the focus of the talks was on bilateral ties and, the Bhutanese King's "Transformation Initiatives and Reforms Process", and India's support for Bhutan's development plans, including the 13th Five Year Plan that starts from next year. Bhutan is set to graduate from the list of Least Developed Countries in 2023, and its 21st century Economic Roadmap aims to turn the Himalayan kingdom into a developed country with a per-capita income of \$12,000 in the next 10 years. India has also agreed to extend Bhutan a third additional standby credit facility.

According to the Foreign Secretary, the leaders discussed India's financial support for reforms and institutional capacity building, infrastructure and connectivity projects, energy cooperation including hydropower and solar energy projects, as well as space cooperation including the recent launch of the India-Bhutan satellite.

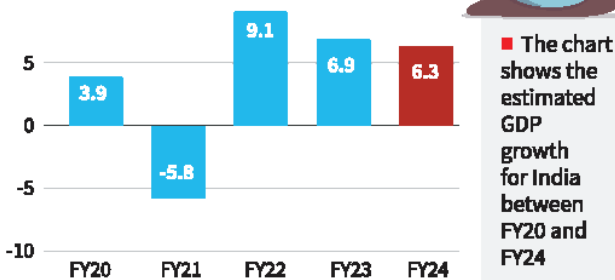
On hydropower, the government has agreed to a long pending demand from Thimphu to increase the power tariffs for the Chhukha hydro-electric project, which began operations with India's help in 1986. India has also agreed to discuss buying power from the Basochhu hydel project that was built in 2008. Mr. Kwatra added that the two sides would try to expedite the negotiations on the reservoir-based 2,500 MW Sankosh hydel project that has been stuck for decades over environmental and cost concerns.

Responding to a question about the dwindling number of Bhutanese students opting to study in India, Mr. Kwatra said that Bhutanese citizens continue to receive "national treatment" in India, on par with Indian citizens, but both countries were looking for new ways to build on the partnership.

WORLD BANK LOWERS INDIA'S GROWTH FORECAST TO 6.3%

A slowdown in growth

The World Bank has revised down India's growth projection for FY24 to 6.3% from 6.6% estimated a few months ago citing rising borrowing costs and current global economic situation



The World Bank has forecast a 6.3% economic growth rate for India in the current fiscal year, which ends March 31, 2024, a downgrade of 0.7 percentage points since its October forecast. The primary reasons for this are high borrowing costs and slower income growth causing weaker consumption, as well as the government tightening fiscal expenditure, the World Bank said in its South Asia Economic Focus: Expanding Opportunities: Toward Inclusive Growth report, released ahead of next week's Spring Meetings in Washington DC.

While India fared better than the rest of the South Asian region, two major concerns were the female labour participation rate, which had dropped to below 20%, and the informal sector neither becoming more productive nor shrinking, according to the study's lead economist. The Indian economy is expected to grow at 6.4% in FY 2024-2025, an upgrade of 0.3 percentage points from the previous forecast. The South Asia region as a whole is expected to grow at 5.6% this calendar year.

"In general, the situation in India is better than in many of the other countries in South Asia," World Bank Chief Economist for South Asia Hans Timmer told reporters at a virtual briefing on Tuesday. "And especially the situation in the financial sector is healthier than many of the other countries," he said, adding that banks were "in good shape" and had improved after the pandemic. However, the female labour participation rate and the size, and (low) productivity of the informal

sector were concerns, he said.

"So there is still a huge structural agenda in India to make growth more inclusive to increase participation," he said, adding that private investment from abroad needed to be increased, especially in the services sector.

The services sector — and then the construction sector — were the fastest growing industries in India, according to the World Bank. Investment growth remained strong and business confidence was high in India, the report said.

"The government has done a lot to improve social protection, but that is by itself not enough. Ultimately, it is about increasing more opportunities in the labour market and there's still a long way to go," Mr. Timmer said.

The outlook for India's neighbours Sri Lanka and Pakistan was bleaker.

The World Bank forecast for Sri Lanka this calendar year was -4.3% (i.e., a contraction) and for Pakistan was 0.4% for the year ending June 30, 2023.

The political uncertainty in Pakistan made making decisive reforms harder, Mr. Timmer said, adding that it was important to have wide buy-in for the "reform process".

Islamabad is negotiating the release of a \$1.1 billion tranche of a larger \$6.5 billion bailout package with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which has been delayed. Sri Lanka, which faced economic collapse last year, negotiated a \$3 billion loan from the IMF at the end of March and is hoping to secure further financing from international institutions. "Hopefully, Sri Lanka can turn the corner now as an IMF program has been put in place."

'INVENTED NAMES' WILL NOT ALTER REALITY OF ARUNACHAL, SAYS INDIA

India on Tuesday rejected China's renaming of several places in Arunachal Pradesh, saying "invented names" will not affect the status of Indian sovereignty over the region. The official response came a day after China issued a list of 11 places it will "standardise" in Arunachal Pradesh.

"This is not the first time China has made such an attempt. We reject this outright. Arunachal Pradesh is, has been, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India. Attempts to assign invented names will not alter this reality," official spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said. This is the third time that China has attempted to rename parts of Arunachal Pradesh. In 2017, China's Ministry of Civil Aviation issued a similar list of six places, and in 2021, released a list of 15 renamed places it sought to rename.

The matter has also drawn attention of the Congress, which has accused Prime Minister Modi of giving a "clean chit to China in June 2020" after the Galwan clashes.

"Almost three years later, Chinese forces continue to deny our patrols

access to the strategic Depsang Plains to which we previously had unimpeded access. And now the Chinese are attempting to undermine the status quo in Arunachal Pradesh," said AICC communications chief Jairam Ramesh.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge has also criticised PM Modi saying, "The country is suffering because of the clean chit that PM Modi gave the Chinese after Galwan."

"20,000 sq km land China has snatched, changing names of places — Prime Minister is silent. After all why so scared?" said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi.

Monday's announcement of 'renaming' of 11 places in Arunachal in China came even as India is hosting the King of Bhutan, which has announced that China has not occupied any of its territory with Prime Minister Lotay Tshering saying, "there is no intrusion". The comments from PM Tshering indicated that Bhutan is giving priority to the Chinese position on the border issue, which last flared up during the 2018 Doklam crisis.

INVENTED NAMES

China's 'renaming' of areas in Arunachal Pradesh is a new low in ties with India

India has summarily rejected China's attempt to lay claim over areas of Arunachal Pradesh after it issued new official names for them. In a fresh attempt on Sunday, the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs said it would "standardise" 11 place names in what China calls "South Tibet or Zangnan", an area consistently controlled by India. The names, in Mandarin, Tibetan and Pinyin (English transliteration), with latitude and longitude markings that pertain to points in Arunachal, including one close to capital Itanagar, leave little doubt that China's list, the third such since 2017, is a deliberate affront to India's territorial sovereignty. The Ministry of External Affairs statement, that "invented names" will not alter the reality that Arunachal Pradesh is an integral part of India, mirrors what India had said in 2021 when China "renamed" 15 places; in 2017, there were six names. It would be a mistake, given the timing, to assume that the Chinese decision is a repetition of its previous attempts. The move in 2017 was seen as retaliation after the Dalai Lama's visit to Tawang. In 2021, the move followed China's new "Land and State Border Law", that virtually authorised the government to reclaim territories claimed by China, and was seen as a way to reassert its claim over the State as a whole.

There could be many factors behind the latest move: China's reaction

after the Indian Army rebuffed a PLA attempt to take over a post at Yangtse in the Tawang sector of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in December 2022, an angry response to New Delhi's decision to hold a G-20 engagement group meeting on Innovation technology in Itanagar which the Chinese embassy had boycotted, or an indication of more serious designs ahead. Above all, it reflects the nadir in ties and the lack of meaningful dialogue for three years since the amassing of Chinese troops at the LAC in 2020 and transgressions that have led to scuffles, including the deadly encounter at Galwan. While many rounds of talks have ensued, and there has been disengagement at some standoff points, political relations have not been resumed, although there have been some meetings between Foreign and Defence Ministers, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke briefly with Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G-20 summit in Indonesia last year. It is necessary, in light of China's latest act of belligerence, that the government shows more clarity on the nature of its conversations thus far. Until the government probes the reasons behind China's moves and the motivation for its persistent aggressions, it will be hard to prepare for a future course of action, even as it counters China's false narrative and a renaming of areas that are firmly within India's boundaries.

SUMMER RESOLUTION

Heatwave forecasts must be taken as seriously as monsoon warnings

It is not exactly surprising when the India Meteorological Department (IMD) says that the summer months will be searingly hot. Last week, it proclaimed that most parts of the country are expected to experience above normal maximum temperatures during the "hot weather season" (March-May), barring parts of peninsular and northwest India, which would see normal or even below normal 'maximum' temperatures. This does not mean that northwest India, which sees temperatures well over 45°C, will be comfortable. 'Above normal heatwave days, characterised by temperatures 4°-5°C above what is usual for that time in a region, are likely to occur over most parts of central, eastern and northwest India during the hot weather season,' its forecast notes. A seasonal outlook issued by the IMD in March, on probable summer temperatures, too was on similar lines. However, what has changed in the last month is a greater

certainty of an El Niño, or a warming of sea surface temperatures in the Equatorial Central Pacific, that is strongly associated with reduced rains over northwest India. Many El Niño years also see reduced monsoon rainfall during June to September and are often associated with drought-like conditions. The IMD's official outlook says that 'neutral' (neither El Niño, or its converse, a cooling La Niña) conditions are persisting in the Pacific. The World Meteorological Organization's outlook says that the chances of El Niño developing gradually increase from 15% in April-June, to 35% in May-July, and rise to around 55% during June-August. Later this month, the IMD is expected to announce its first forecast for the monsoon and this will hinge on the El Niño-La Niña development.

The purpose of forecasts is to give lead time to States to prepare. The

National Disaster Management Authority has been issuing guidelines to States on preparing Heat Action Plans since 2016. Many States have prepared documents that detail measures and methods to deal with heat-related contingencies, that, as reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change warn, are only poised to get worse. But, many of these recommendations are only on paper. An analysis by researchers at the Centre for Policy Research of

such heat action plans found that most of them are not made to capture local context. For instance, only dangers from unusually high temperatures are evaluated and almost none from humidity and warm nights. Several plans are under-funded and lack legal backing. Heat wave forecasts should be taken as seriously as monsoon forecasts, and the Centre as well as State governments must play a more coordinated role in implementing these plans.

GERMANY MAY OFFER SALE OF ADVANCED SUBMARINES TO INDIA

Germany is expected to present a proposal to India for the sale of advanced conventional submarines through the government-to-government route, it is learnt. The Navy, which is staring at a dwindling sub-surface fleet, is looking to procure six advanced diesel-electric submarines under Project-751 estimated to cost over ₹45,000 crore.

"A proposal for submarines through the G-to-G route is being prepared and would be presented to the Government of India soon," a diplomatic source said. A visit by German Defence Minister to India in the next few months is in the works, sources said, during which the proposal could be formally presented. The issue also came up for discussion during the visit of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in February.

In January 2020, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) shortlisted

Mazgaon Docks Ltd. (MDL) and Larsen & Toubro (L&T) as the Indian partners for the P-75 deal, the first to be processed under the strategic partnership model of the procurement procedure.

The five foreign original equipment manufacturers (OEM) are Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering (South Korea), Naval Group (France), Navantia (Spain), Rosoboronexport (Russia) and Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems (TKMS, Germany).

The Request For Proposal (RFP) was originally issued in July 2021 to MDL and L&T with 12 weeks to respond and has since been extended several times. The project ran into rough weather over a specification that the submarine on offer should have an operational Air Independent Propulsion module with an endurance of two weeks.

FINLAND JOINS NATO BLOC; RUSSIA SAYS MOVE WILL ESCALATE UKRAINE CONFLICT

Finland formally joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation on Tuesday, roughly doubling the length of the border that the alliance shares with Russia and bolsters its eastern flank as the war in Ukraine grinds on with no resolution in sight.

Finnish Foreign Minister Pekka Haavisto completed the accession process by handing over an official document to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, welcoming Finland to its ranks, noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin had cited opposing NATO expansion as one justification for his invasion. "He is getting exactly the opposite...Finland today, and soon also Sweden will become a full-fledged member of the alliance."

The Kremlin said Russia would be forced to take "counter-measures" to Finland's accession. Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said the move raised the prospect of the conflict in Ukraine escalating further.

Russia said it would strengthen its military capacity in its western and north-western regions in response to the move.

The event marks the end of an era of military non-alignment for Finland that began after the country repelled an invasion attempt by the Soviet Union during the Second World War and opted to try to maintain friendly relations with Russia.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said the NATO expansion was an "encroachment on our security and on Russia's national interests". Moscow would watch closely for any NATO military deployments in Finland, he said.

Mr. Blinken said: "I'm tempted to say this is maybe the one thing we can thank Mr Putin for. Because he once again here precipitated something he claims to want to prevent."



Expanding tribe: (from left) Pekka Haavisto, Jens Stoltenberg and Antony Blinken during in Brussels on Tuesday.AFP

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg welcomes Finland to the alliance's ranks; he says Russian President Vladimir Putin, who cited the NATO expansion as one justification for the Ukraine invasion, is getting 'exactly the opposite'

GOODS EXPORTS LIKELY HIT A NINE-MONTH HIGH IN MARCH

March bounce

Goods exports may have crossed \$40 bn last month, the highest figure since June, Goyal's initial estimate for FY23 indicates



■ Barring upward revisions, March's imputed figure pegged at about \$41 bn, 6.7% lower than March 2022's \$44.6 bn

■ Exports were \$42.4 bn in June 2022; averaged \$35.6 bn over next 8 months

■ Curbs on export of iron ore, wheat, rice, petroleum hurt total by at least \$20 bn: Goyal

Commerce Minister pegs initial estimate of FY23 goods exports at about \$447 billion, imputing outbound shipments likely exceeded \$40 billion last month; Goyal says curbs crimped exports

India's goods exports may have hit a 9-month high to cross \$40 billion in March, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal indicated on Tuesday, while pegging initial estimates of goods exports in 2022-2023 at about \$447 billion.

Total goods exports in the first 11 months of the fiscal year ended March 31 are currently estimated at \$405.94 billion, 7.55% higher than the year-earlier period. Therefore, barring any upward revisions to the earlier months' export numbers, the value of last month's exports imputed from the \$447 billion figure is about \$41 billion, about 6.7% lower than March 2022's \$44.6 billion.

The last time goods exports were higher than March's implied figure was in June, when shipments totaled \$42.4 billion. Exports averaged \$35.6 billion over the eight months through February 2023.

Asserting that restrictions on several exports such as iron ore, wheat, rice and petroleum had hurt goods exports by at least \$20 billion, Mr. Goyal said: "Therefore, on the goods side, our growth will be about 6%. It's not as if goods exports have not grown, it has grown from \$422 billion to \$447 billion at last count. Final numbers are still awaited."

ADB CUTS INDIA FY24 GROWTH TO 6.4%, FLAGS SLOWING INVESTMENT



The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has slashed its growth projection for India for 2023-2024 sharply, from 7.2% estimated earlier, to 6.4%, attributing the cut to the global economic slowdown, tight monetary conditions, and persistently elevated oil prices.

While domestic consumption demand is likely to stay healthy, private investment growth is likely to be lower this year due to high lending rates and

moderating optimism on business conditions, the Bank cautioned. The Bank has pegged India's real GDP growth in 2022-23 at 6.8% in its Asian Development Outlook released on Tuesday, and said growth will inch back up to 6.7% in 2024-25.

The ongoing recovery in China and healthy domestic demand in India will be the main growth support pillars for the entire region through this year and next, the ADB noted.

India's rising clout

Between 2015 and 2019, India's contribution to GDP growth in Developing Asia was 22% while China's contribution was 53%, ADB estimates suggest.

"The People's Republic of China still accounts for about half of the region's growth, but its contribution will decline," it said.

India's contribution to developing Asia's growth is expected to rise to 27% by 2024-25 from an estimated 25% in 2023-24, with China's impact slipping from 51% this year to 46% by 2024-25.

"This rapid growth [for India] reflects healthy domestic consumption, which will be further boosted by the tax cuts and exemptions in February's Union Budget. Because of the more limited role of exports in the economy, India will be less affected by the slowdown in advanced economies," the lender predicted.

"South Asia will remain the best-performing sub-region this year, driven by robust growth in India which should register high growth both this year and next year," Abdul Abiad, director of ADB's macroeconomic research division said at a briefing.

While private investment is expected to falter this year, public consumption this year is "likely to grow only slowly, as central government expenditure shifts toward investment," ADB said.

"Improving States' financial management is necessary to increase needed public investment," it stressed, adding that growth will be buoyed again in 2024-25 "by private consumption and investment as the global economy improves".

ON TWITTER'S OPEN-SOURCE PROMISE

The story so far:

Elon Musk has partly delivered on his promise of making Twitter's algorithm open source. On April 1, the micro-blogging site's recommendation code was made public. Developers can now modify and make improvements to the code. Mr. Musk's long-awaited decision has brought him both boos and cheers from different corners of the developer community.

What does Twitter's algorithm do?

At the heart of Twitter's business model is the recommendation algorithm. It is a set of rules that enables the platform to deliver content based on users' interests and preferences. It is with the help of this system that advertisers promote their brands. Content flows into a user's timeline through two channels. One pipeline channels content posted by people that the user follows and the other is filled with posts flowing from accounts that could potentially interest the user.

The latter timeline, called 'For You', acts as a predictive tool to suggest feeds that a user may be interested in. It helps the micro-blogging site find answers to questions like — what is the probability a user will engage with another user in the future, what communities on Twitter might a user be interested in and what tweets are trending within them. Answers to such questions help the platform recommend relevant content.

How does the algorithm work?

Twitter's recommendation algorithm runs on a three-step process. First, it fetches tweets from multiple recommendation sources. The platform calls this process 'candidate sourcing'. After sourcing these tweets, a machine learning model ranks them. After ranking, tweets are filtered to remove those that a user may have blocked, or has already seen.

At the sourcing stage, the algorithm mixes tweets that eventually flow into a user's 'For You' timeline. To mix, it picks 'candidates' from people a user follows, and from those they do not. It calls these two sources as 'in-network'



Why has the richest man in the world made the recommendation algorithm of Twitter open to the public? How has the open-source community reacted to Elon Musk's reveal of the source-code? How does the micro-blogging site's algorithm function?

and 'out-network', and together they make up 50/50 of the mix. Twitter says that for each request it attempts to extract the top 1,500 tweets from a pool of hundreds of millions. The in-network part is quite easy to build as information is picked in real-time from people a user follows. But out-network sourcing is trickier as the platform must pick content from candidates the user does not follow.

To do this, Twitter uses what it calls social graph and embedded spaces. The former creates a stream of candidates based on what content

followers of a user engage with. And the latter matches the profile of a user with a cluster that exhibits similar interests and preferences as the user. Once this is done, using a 48M parameter neural network that is continuously trained on tweet engagement, the platform starts ranking feeds.

What has been the reaction?

After Twitter open sourced its recommendation algorithm, many people flocked to GitHub to view the code. Some see this reveal as “a step in the right direction for the future of humanity.” Others note that the code does not reveal much about how it is used by the platform. They also highlight that important bits of information have been left out. For instance, the absence of information on the data it uses to build these pipelines prevents one from having a complete picture of the platform’s recommendation system. A report by Fortune, citing a former Twitter executive, points out that open sourcing any algorithm requires its training set to be open sourced as well. And that is impossible for Twitter to do. “Every effort in open-sourcing the algorithm without the data is completely dishonest,” the executive said.

WHAT WAS DISCUSSED AT THE UN WATER CONFERENCE?

What did the report titled ‘Water for Sustainable Development 2018 – 2028’ recommend? What is the most common cause for groundwater over-abstraction?

The United Nations 2023 Water Conference held on March 22-24 was the first such meeting in 46 years. In a recent report entitled ‘Water for Sustainable Development 2018 – 2028’, the UN recognised the urgent need for action given that we are not on track to meet the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) for water — “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”.

What is the water conference?

The water sector is prone to fragmentation because water problems tend to be local. If a particular lake is polluted or a particular area is often flooded, it needs local solutions. Therefore, there is an inherent problem in mobilising globally for local problems. The last UN Water Conference, held in 1977, was groundbreaking as it resulted in the first global ‘Action Plan’ recognising that “all peoples, whatever their stage of development and social and economic conditions, have the right to have access to drinking water in quantities and of a quality equal to their basic needs.”

This declaration led to several decades of global funding and concerted effort to lower the population without access to safe drinking water.

What are the current challenges?

Extending services to underserved populations is relatively uncontroversial: it comes down to finding the money to pay for it. This is already occurring in India through programmes such as the Swachh Bharat Mission and the Jal Jeevan Mission. However, the challenge is that improving access to water and sanitation no longer translates directly to sustained access to water and sanitation. For example, many drinking water projects have failed because they drew too much groundwater or the water sources were contaminated, leaving communities again with no access to water.

Groundwater over-abstraction is mostly driven by agricultural pumping. The only way to solve this problem in heavily irrigated places like Punjab is to pump less. This would need a policy change which requires many agencies and ministries to cooperate. As such, the water problem is no longer about access to water. The remaining SDG targets pertain to sustainable agriculture, industry, and natural ecosystems. These targets are harder as they need, among other things, tough political choices and a stronger democracy.

What are the key commitments?

This year’s conference resulted in 713 voluntary commitments by philanthropic donors, governments, corporations, and NGOs. This included a \$50-billion commitment from India to improve rural drinking water services under the Jal Jeevan Mission. On the technology front, apart from specific innovations in wastewater treatment, there were several proposals for incubation platforms focusing on water management.

There are already many solutions for knowledge-sharing and thus, we need to accelerate cross-learning. A notable tool here was the W12+ Blueprint, a UNESCO platform hosting city profiles and case studies of programs, technologies, policies that addresses common water security

Why did Musk open the source code?

Mr. Musk is no philanthropist. He is gradually building Twitter as a place for privileged users who can pay for verification tick marks and get additional features, including a higher ranking in the feeds. Additionally, he is making these changes at a time when he has fired most of the company’s technical staff.

Social media platforms need experienced developers to keep building new features and deploying them successfully. So, perhaps, Mr. Musk thinks opening the source code to external developers could potentially solve the human resource bottleneck. But it will be a tough road as Mr. Musk has damaged Twitter’s reputation in the open-source community. As Will Norris, Twitter’s former open-source lead told ZDNet, “They’ve lost all credibility as a serious engineering organisation, I don’t care how much you call yourself “hardcore.” Open-source communities are built on relationships and trust, and now Twitter has neither with these groups. They’ve lost any ability to participate meaningfully in those communities.”

challenges. An effort called ‘Making Rights Real’ offered to help marginalised communities and women understand how to exercise their rights. Similarly, the ‘Water for Women Fund’ offered mechanisms for more effective and sustainable water, sanitation, and hygiene outcomes for women. However, whether these commitments will become binding through the COP process, only time will tell.

Lokpal closes 68% graft complaints against officers without action: report
Around 68% corruption complaints against public functionaries that landed with the Lokpal of India were “disposed of” without any action in the past four years. Only three complaints were fully investigated, according to information provided by the Lokpal’s office to a parliamentary panel.

Nearly 90% complaints were not “in the prescribed format”. The Lokpal of India, the country’s first anti-corruption body instituted four years ago to investigate complaints against public functionaries, including the Prime Minister, submitted to a parliamentary panel that “it has not prosecuted even a single person accused of graft till date.”

According to data provided by the Lokpal office to a parliamentary panel on the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), since 2019-20, the anti-corruption body received 8,703 complaints, out of which 5,981 complaints were disposed of.

As many as 6,775 complaints were rejected for not being in the correct format. The office said that only three complaints were fully investigated, and 36 complaints were at a preliminary stage. In 2022-23, as many as 2,760 complaints were received, out of which only 242 were in the prescribed format. On January 5, the Lokpal of India issued an order that henceforth, complaints received by the office of the Lokpal of India that were not in the prescribed form would not be entertained at any level.

The report said: “The Committee infers from the data provided by Lokpal that a large number of complaints are being disposed of on the ground that the complaint is not in the prescribed format. Lokpal has submitted to the Committee that it has not prosecuted even a single person accused of graft till date.”

Though the Act was passed in 2013, the country’s first Lokpal, Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghosh, was appointed on March 19, 2019, along with eight other members. Justice Ghosh moved out of office in May 2022 after attaining 70 years of age and since then, Pradip Kumar Mohanty has been acting as the Chairperson of Lokpal.

The Lokpal was allocated a budget of ₹197 crore in 2022-23 and till January 31, it incurred an expenditure of ₹152 crore. For the current fiscal, it has been allotted ₹92 crore.

The panel, headed by BJP member Sushil Kumar Modi, said the Lokpal was set up to strengthen the legal and institutional mechanisms to deal with corruption in public life, “however, the performance of Lokpal seems to be far from satisfactory”.

It said the Lokpal was established in an effort to promote clean and responsive governance and therefore, the Lokpal should act as an enabler.

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ONDC WILL HELP DEMOCRATISE E-COMMERCE, SAYS NILEKANI



Nandan Nilekani

Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) is the next big thing and it will lead to democratisation of e-commerce in India, said Nandan Nilekani, the founding chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI).

Speaking at an event on Tuesday, he said, "We are going to democratise e-commerce in India and e-comm won't be limited to few players. Everyone including kirana stores, grocery retailers, and restaurants should participate in the digital marketplace on an open platform." What the country required was an architecture that all including millions of small vendors would be able to participate in, Mr. Nilekani emphasised.

On the pace of embracing digitisation, Mr. Nilekani said, the country has achieved financial inclusion in 7 to 8 years instead of taking 45 years, and that this was possible because it used Aadhar KYC to open bank accounts.

The technocrat also said since independence the country had some eight million PoS (point of sale) machines. "But in the last three years, we've seen 50 million QR codes being deployed. This is an example of how interoperability can turbocharge payment in India," he summed up.



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