

Not neutral, India on the side of peace, says Modi in Ukraine

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday held a discussion at Ukrainian capital Kyiv.

During a recent meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, India expressed its commitment to supporting peace in Ukraine. Modi emphasized India's stance on peace and respect for sovereignty, stating that India is ready to play an active role in resolving the conflict. The visit, significant as the first by an Indian Prime Minister to Ukraine since its independence in

1991, resulted in four agreements covering humanitarian aid, agricultural cooperation, cultural exchange, and drug regulation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Kyiv, following his trip to Moscow, was seen as an effort to balance India's stance on the Russia-Ukraine war. Since Russia's invasion in February 2022, India has maintained a neutral position, abstaining from UN resolutions critical of Russia and ignoring Western sanctions. While Modi's visit was notable as the first by an Indian Prime Minister since Ukraine's independence, it did not significantly advance India's involvement in resolving the conflict.

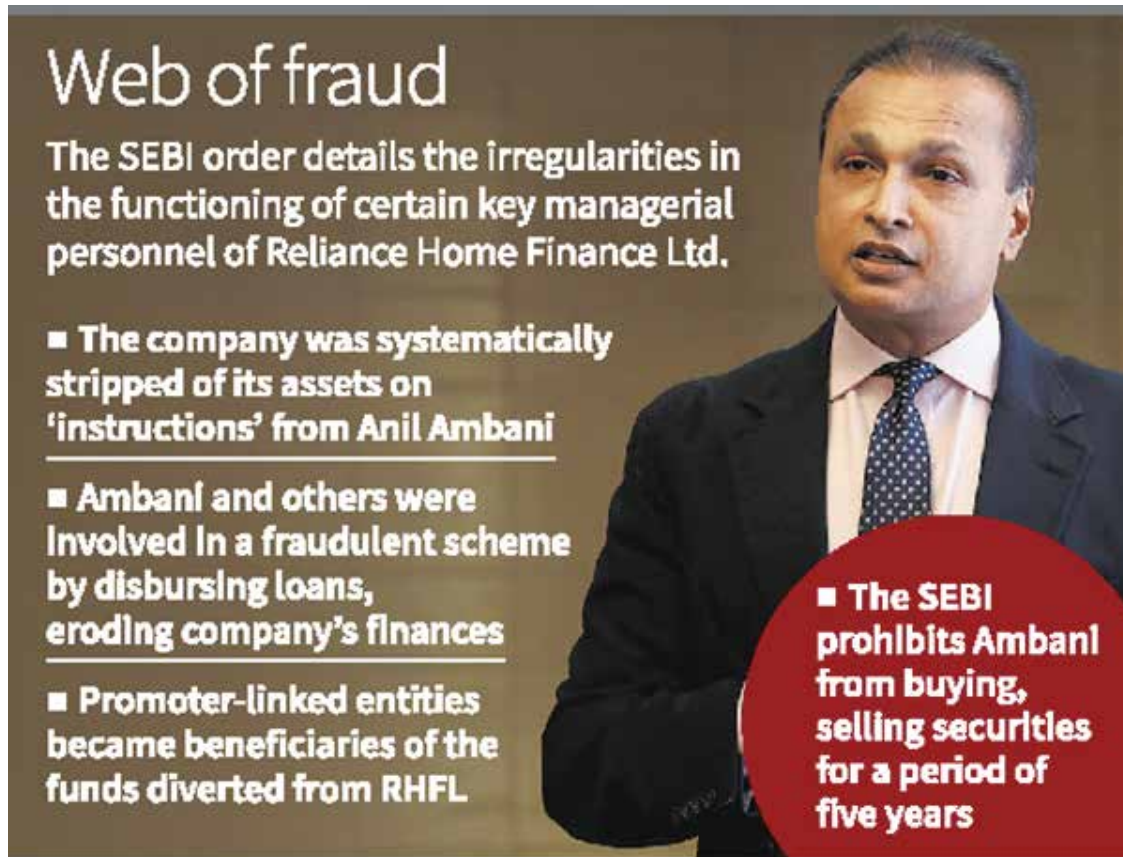
Zelenskyy, while acknowledging India's potential influence on the Russian economy, highlighted concerns about India's ongoing purchase of Russian oil and goods. The discussions were described as open and constructive, with Ukraine seeking continued Indian involvement in peace efforts. Modi's visit included symbolic gestures, such as honouring children affected by the conflict and attending a multimedia exhibition. The bilateral talks, initially scheduled for 30 minutes, extended to two and a half hours, reflecting the depth of the discussions.

During the visit, Modi and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy discussed the war and visited a memorial for children killed in the conflict. They signed agreements on cooperation in various sectors but did not address major issues like strategic partnerships or infrastructure supplies that Ukraine had requested. The visit was seen as symbolic rather than a substantive shift in India's policy, which has largely involved passing messages rather than engaging directly in peace efforts. Modi's visit did not signal a significant change in India's approach to the conflict or its role in global peace initiatives.

WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

Anil Ambani and 24 others banned by SEBI; fined ₹624 cr.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT



The Securities & Exchange Board of India (SEBI) has imposed a five-year ban on Reliance ADA Group chairman Anil Ambani and 24 others from accessing the securities market due to their involvement in diverting funds from Reliance Home Finance Ltd. (RHFL). Ambani is also barred from holding any director or key managerial position in listed companies during this period. SEBI's order includes a ₹ 25 Cr penalty on Ambani and similar fines for 21 other entities involved. RHFL's key managerial personnel Amit Bapna, Ravindra Sudhalkar, and Pinkesh R. Shah face higher fines of ₹27 Cr, ₹ 26 Cr., and ₹ 21

Cr respectively. A total penalty of approximately ₹ 624 Cr has been levied. SEBI's investigation found that funds were misused through loans, eroding the company's finances and benefiting promoter-linked entities.

The annual accusation of board exam mark inflation

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

In India, school boards are frequently accused of inflating marks in classes 10 and 12, as evidenced by high pass percentages. In 2023, pass percentages were 85 % for class 10 and 82 % for class 12, with a significant portion of students scoring above 60 %. This phenomenon, along with mark compression, undermines the education system's credibility and hampers students' preparedness for higher education and employment. The demand for entrance exams is partly driven by these concerns.

Variations across Boards

There is considerable variation in the percentage of students scoring above 60 % across different boards, with lower proportions in states like Assam, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh compared to the national average. This variation raises questions about the consistency of mark inflation practices among boards. However, without a standard scale for comparison, it's challenging to measure relative performance across boards.

Universal Issue of Mark Inflation

Mark or grade inflation is a global issue. National standardized tests, like NEET and JEE, used for higher education admissions, are not ideal for comparing board exam standards as they focus on elimination rather than curriculum-based evaluation. The National Achievement Survey (NAS) by NCERT offers

some standardized data but lacks the ability to assess mark inflation effectively.

Need for Standardized Assessment Systems

To address issues of mark inflation and compression, a transparent and standardized assessment system is crucial. This includes automating question paper setting, publishing detailed guidelines, and codifying the examination process. Partial automation of answer script evaluation and providing students with access to their scripts can improve transparency and accuracy.

Enhancing Transparency

Transparency in the examination process involves publishing detailed procedures for question paper setting, answer book handling, and evaluation. Boards should make minutes of examiner meetings public, and results should be available in both raw and standardized formats. Standardized scores can help compare student performance across boards and years.

Conclusion

The perception of mark inflation and compression in school board examinations is supported by evidence. Implementing transparency, accountability, and standardized assessments can enhance the credibility of the examination system and address concerns about mark inflation.

The road to 2047 for Indian agriculture

AGRICULTURE RELATED MATTERS

India aims to become a developed nation by its centennial year in 2047, requiring a six fold increase in per capita Gross National Income (GNI). Achieving this goal necessitates a comprehensive development strategy, particularly in agriculture. Sustainable practices like precision farming, genetically modified crops, and advanced irrigation systems are crucial. The Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana (PMKSY) has covered 78 lakh hectares with a ₹93,068 Cr. allocation for 2021-26 to enhance water-use efficiency through micro-irrigation.

Current Agricultural Initiatives and Challenges

India's agricultural sector faces significant issues, including climate change, land degradation, and market access. The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY), introduced in 2016, offers financial assistance for crop losses with 49.5 Cr. farmers enrolled and claims over ₹1.45 lakh Cr. The Electronic National Agriculture Market (eNAM) integrates 1,361 mandis, benefiting 1.76 million farmers and recording ₹2.88 lakh Cr. in trade, improving market access and price realization.

Economic Imbalance and Growth Trends

Despite agriculture employing nearly 46 % of the workforce, it contributes only about 18% to GDP, revealing a stark imbalance. Agricultural GDP growth lags at 3.3 % compared to the overall GDP growth of 6.1 % since 1991-92. The Modi administration saw agricultural growth at 3.6 % against an overall GDP growth of 5.9 %. The projected 7.6 % overall GDP growth for 2023-24 is promising, but agricultural GDP growth of just 0.7 % is concerning.

Population Growth and Food Demand

India's population is expected to reach 1.5 billion by 2030 and 1.59 billion by 2040. Food demand is projected to grow by 2.85 % annually due to a 0.85 % population growth rate. Although real per capita income increased by 41 % from 2011-12 to 2021-22, future expenditure elasticity is expected to be lower, impacting food demand growth for various commodities differently.

Government Initiatives and Support

Key initiatives include:

- Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN): Provides ₹6,000 annually to farmers in three

instalments, benefiting over 11.8 Cr. farmers.

- Soil Health Card (SHC) Scheme: Distributes cards to optimize soil nutrient use, with over 23 Cr. SHCs issued.
- International Year of Millets 2023: Promotes nutritious coarse grains.
- Agriculture Infrastructure Fund: With ₹1 lakh Cr. allocated, it supports post-harvest management infrastructure, creating over 5.8 lakh jobs and improving farmer incomes by 20 %-25 %.
- SVAMITVA Initiative: Generates property cards for rural land, with over 1.6 Cr. issued as of September 2023.

Strategic Planning for 2047

Looking ahead to 2047, projections estimate the demand for food grains will range from 402 million tonnes to 437 million tonnes, with production potentially exceeding demand by 10 % -13 % under a Business-As-Usual (BAU) scenario. Investments in agricultural research, infrastructure, and policy support are critical. The 2024-25 Budget allocates ₹ 20 lakh Cr. for agricultural credit and introduces the Agriculture Accelerator Fund to promote innovation and growth.

Conclusion

To achieve its 2047 development goals, India must embrace sustainable agricultural practices, leverage technological advancements, and implement strategic initiatives. This approach will enhance farmer incomes, meet food demands, and drive inclusive, sustainable development.

Bangladesh unrest hits engineering exports: EEP

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India's engineering goods exports to Bangladesh fell by 9 % in the first four months of the year, primarily due to unrest in Bangladesh that disrupted supply chains and led to revenue losses. Overall, engineering goods exports from India increased by 4.2 % to nearly \$37 billion between April and July, but this growth was hindered by a 31.6 % drop in iron and steel exports.

While 13 of the top 25 export markets for Indian engineering goods showed decreased demand, including major buyers like Italy, Korea, Nepal, and Bangladesh, there were notable increases in exports to the UAE (up 44 %) and Saudi Arabia (up 33 %). Combined, these countries imported \$4.4 billion worth of Indian engineering goods, second only to the U.S., which imported \$6.1 billion, reflecting a 7.2 % increase from the previous year. The unrest in Bangladesh had a significant impact on its import activities, affecting Indian exporters along with those from other countries.

Pacific leaders discuss rising seas, 'great' power rivalries

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Pacific island leaders will gather in Nuku'alofa, Tonga, for the Pacific Islands Forum, focusing on climate change, geopolitical tensions, and recent unrest in New Caledonia. This summit follows a volcanic eruption and tsunami that devastated Tonga in 2022. The forum's 18 members face economic challenges and increased U.S.-China rivalry, but climate change is the primary concern, with low-lying nations like Tuvalu at severe risk from rising sea levels.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will attend to emphasize the urgency of climate action. Australia, aiming to co-host the 2026 COP-31 climate conference, needs to demonstrate genuine commitment to reducing emissions. Baron Waqa, the new forum leader, has urged the U.S. and China to avoid escalating their rivalry in the Pacific. Fijian Prime Minister Sitiveni Rabuka has highlighted the complex interplay of geopolitical and climate crises facing the region.

Cauvery body seeks Centre's nod to conduct environment assessment

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE



Karnataka's Cauvery Neeravari Nigam Limited (CNNL) has sought approval from the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change for the Mekedatu balancing reservoir-cum-drinking water project. CNNL argues that the Ministry has had sufficient time to process the approval for the project's Environmental Impact Assessment and Environment Management Plan, which has been pending for nearly six years.

Tamil Nadu opposes the project, citing past legal disputes and concerns over water distribution. Karnataka officials, including Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy

Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, argue that the project would ultimately benefit Tamil Nadu as well. Tamil Nadu's government previously filed for contempt of court against central and Karnataka authorities for moving ahead with the project despite legal restrictions. The Union Ministry's decision, if made, will be published on its website.

'Not all insults can be ruled as offences under SC/ST law'

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The Supreme Court ruled that not every insult or intimidatory comment towards a Scheduled Caste (SC) or Scheduled Tribe (ST) individual qualifies as an offense under the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989.

In the case of Shajan Skaria, editor of the YouTube channel Marunadan Malayali, who was granted anticipatory bail, the Court clarified that for an offense under this Act, the insult must be specifically targeted at the victim because of their SC/ST status. The Court found that Skaria's comments did not seem to be directed solely due to the victim's SC/ST identity.

Justice Pardiwala explained that the Act applies when the humiliation is directly linked to the caste identity of the victim, not merely when the victim happens to belong to an SC/ST community. The judgment emphasized that for the Act to be invoked, the discriminatory intent must be clearly tied to the victim's caste status.



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'Space sector contributed ₹20,000 Cr. to India's GDP over the last decade'

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT



India's space sector has significantly impacted the economy, contributing about \$24 billion (₹20,000 crore) to the Gross Domestic Product over the last decade and supporting 96,000 jobs. The sector has had a multiplier effect of \$2.54 on the Indian economy and is 2.5 times more productive than the broader industrial workforce. These findings, presented by Steve Bochinger from Novaspace, were part of a study commissioned by the Indian Space Research

Organisation (ISRO) to assess the sector's socio-economic impact from 2014 to 2023.

The study, conducted by econONE and Novaspace, involved interviews with 56 organizations and was presented during the National Space Day celebrations, marking the first anniversary of Chandrayaan-3's successful landing.

Regarding future space research collaborations, ISRO Chairman S. Somanath and Minister of State for Space Jitendra Singh indicated that while India is open to collaborating with China if necessary, there is currently no need for such engagement. They emphasized a focus on indigenous development for future missions, including Chandrayaan-4, which aims to collect lunar soil samples. China's Chang'e 6 mission, which recently returned samples from the moon's far side, had invited global scientists to study these samples.

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