

● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY



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ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

CENTRE SLASHES LPG PRICES

CONTEXT: The Union Cabinet reduced the price of a 14.2 kg domestic LPG cylinder by ₹ 200 effective from August 30. The beneficiaries covered under Prime Minister’s Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) will continue to get a further subsidy of ₹200 per cylinder in their bank accounts. In Delhi for instance, the decision will bring down the cost of a 14.2 kg cylinder from the existing ₹1,103 per cylinder to a more affordable ₹903 per cylinder. For PMUY households therefore, the effective price in Delhi after this reduction will be ₹703 per cylinder.

The Cabinet also approved 75 lakh additional Ujjwala connections. The number of beneficiaries under the scheme will rise to 10.35 crore. There are more than 31 crore domestic LPG consumers in the country, including 9.6 crore Ujjwala beneficiaries.

ECONOMICE AND DEVELOPMENT

MSME AT THE CORE OF G 20 SUMMIT

CONTEXT: G-20 nations, representing 80 % of the world economy’s output, three-quarters of trade flows and three-fifths of the population.

The G-20 nations agreed to take joint actions to reaffirm the world’s faith in cross-border commerce and investment flows as a route to prosperity and growth for all. The government counted five concrete and action-oriented deliverables, including a dialogue on global standards to bridge regulatory divergences across countries and a compendium on best practices for mutual recognition of qualifications for professional services such as medicine, law and nursing.

A generic framework to map global value chains, essentially to identify the weakest links and mitigate any shocks like those seen during the pandemic, is a good idea that may prove tricky to execute.

The ‘Jaipur Call for Action to enhance Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises’ (MSMEs’) access to information’ calls for digitalisation of trade documents to ease flow of goods and services.

The International Trade Centre, WTO and UNCTAD, which operate the Global Trade Helpdesk, have been urged to work with G-20 members to upgrade their data portal for businesses and bridge the “information asymmetry”.

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

RAIL TRACK THROUGH GIBBON SANCTUARY

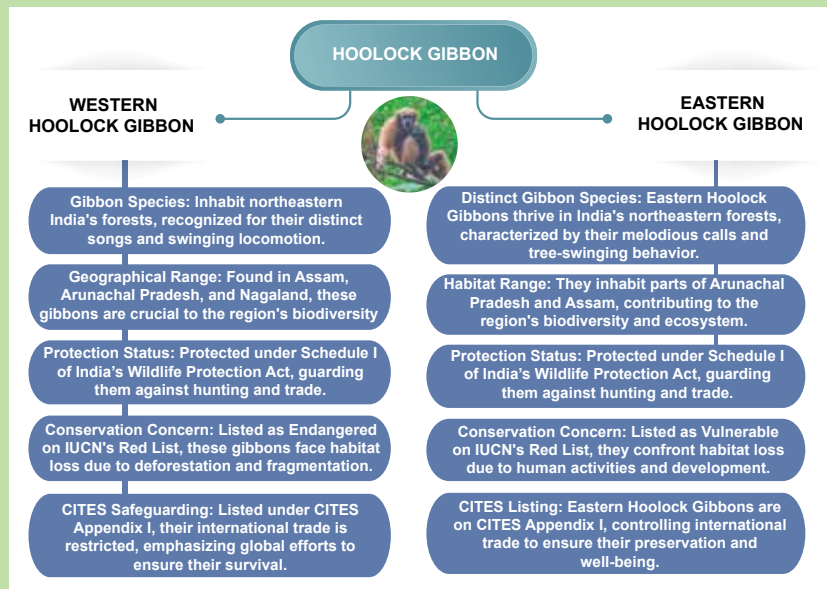
CONTEXT: Primatologists propose relocating railway track in Assam’s gibbon sanctuary to aid wildlife movement, inspired by WII’s canopy bridge design.

BACKGROUND: Scientists in India propose shifting a rail track within Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary for hoolock gibbons, inspired by a canopy bridge concept. The study, led by Rohit Ravindra, suggests minimizing habitat disruption in the 21 sq. km sanctuary that houses 125 endangered hoolock gibbons, combating their habitat loss and fragmentation.

HIGHLIGHTS: Hollongapar Gibbon Sanctuary, home to India’s only ape, the hoolock gibbon, faces habitat loss and isolation due to a rail track. The sanctuary’s 21 sq. km area lacks connectivity with surrounding forests, causing genetic isolation among gibbon families. Scientists recommend an artificial canopy bridge to aid their survival.

HOOLOCK GIBBON

- **Gibbon Species:** Hoolock gibbons are lesser apes found in Asia, known for their distinctive calls and swinging locomotion.
- **Habitat:** They inhabit tropical and subtropical forests, often dwelling in treetops and displaying brachiation, or tree-swinging movement.
- **Distinctive Features:** Hoolocks have white eyebrows, long arms, and a unique vocal repertoire used for territorial communication.
- **Diet:** Their diet includes fruits, leaves, and insects, contributing to forest ecosystem health through seed dispersal.



INTERNAL SECURITY

INDIA LODGES 'STRONG PROTEST' WITH CHINA OVER NEW MAP

CONTEXT: India on Tuesday lodged a "strong protest" with China over the publication of a new map released by the Chinese government, showing all of Arunachal Pradesh, Aksai Chin, and other parts of Indian territory within its borders. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson in a statement, responding to media queries. The spokesperson said that India has lodged "a strong protest through diplomatic channels" with the Chinese side on the so-called 2023 "standard map" that was released by the Chinese Ministry of Natural Resources.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

PRAGYAN CONFIRMS SULPHUR NEAR SOUTH POLE OF MOON; SEARCH ON FOR HYDROGEN

CONTEXT: Chandrayaan-3's rover Pragyan detects lunar surface Sulphur near South Pole through LIBS instrument, continuing search for hydrogen.

BACKGROUND: Chandrayaan-3's rover employs LIBS to analyze lunar surface composition, confirms Sulphur presence; search for Hydrogen ongoing. Technique uses laser pulses to generate plasma, revealing elements. Cabinet lauds mission, declares August 23 as National Space Day, symbolizing India's global progress.

Significance of Discovery

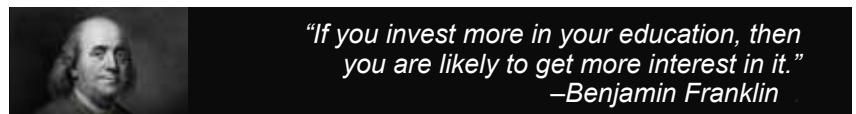
- **Geological Insight:** Sulphur discovery offers clues about the moon's volcanic past, revealing its geological history and processes.
- **Lunar Activity:** Presence of Sulphur hints at past or ongoing volcanic activity, reshaping our understanding of the moon's dynamics.
- **Planetary Evolution:** Studying Sulphur aids in unraveling the moon's evolution and relationship with other celestial bodies in the solar system.
- **Resource Potential:** Sulphur could be a valuable resource for future lunar missions, serving as fuel or material for construction.
- **Astrobiological Implications:** Sulphur's role in supporting potential microbial life prompts reevaluation of the moon's habitability and its interaction with organic compounds.

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ARMED FORCES TO ACQUIRE DRONES

CONTEXT: The Army has signed contracts for the procurement of 130 tethered drones and 19 tank-driving simulators under Emergency Procurement (EP) and they will be delivered in 12 months to enhance the overall operational preparedness, especially in in high-altitude areas.

The Indian Army had concluded a series of contracts with Indian start-ups for small drones for surveillance and load-carrying. The Noida-based start-up Raphe mPhibr Pvt. Ltd. got two separate orders from the Army, for 48 mR-20 logistics drones which can carry cargo of up to 20 kg in high-altitude areas for the infantry and 100 quadcopter drones for the Armoured Corps. The Mumbai-based ideaForge won a repeat contract last year from the Army to supply 200 of its Switch Vertical Take Off and Landing (VTOL) mini-Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV). The Army had earlier contracted drones that can hit targets with 5-10 kg explosives from Bengaluru-based firm NewSpace.



ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

MONSOON WOES MAY LIFT FOOD PRICES

CONTEXT: In August so far, rainfall is 32% below the long period average (LPA) for the month, dragging the southwest monsoon's overall tally to 8% below its long-term average.

Weak rainfall with wide spatial and temporal variations over the monsoon season, could hit crop output and rural incomes while spurring food prices higher. As kharif sowing activity is expected to be over by the end of August, the sowing of these crops is unlikely to improve drastically. A drop in yield due to irregular monsoon and a lower acreage can lead to a demand-supply mismatch, further increasing inflationary pressures in the food basket. A rise in food inflation could further destabilise the feeble rural demand recovery.

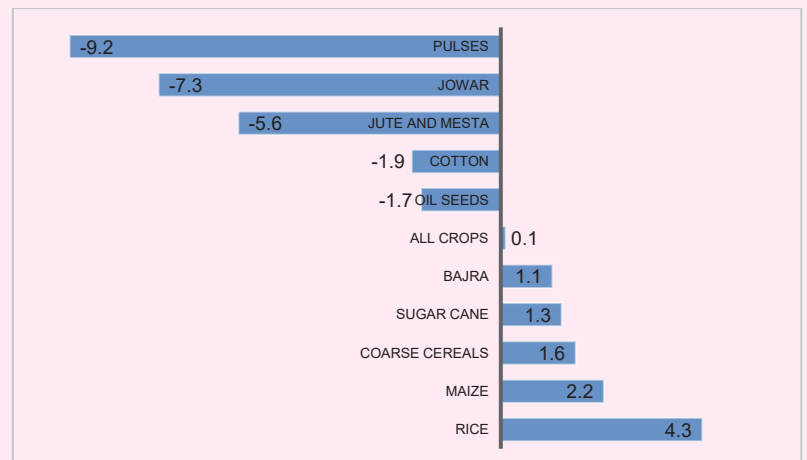


FIGURE: Column chart representation of the acreage of crops on an Year on Year (Y-o-Y) basis. (Source: Union Ministry for Food and Consumer Affairs)

GEOGRAPHY

CYCLONE FREQUENCY MAY RISE OVER INDIAN COAST FROM THE WARMING OF PACIFIC: STUDY

Introduction :

- Cyclones are rapid inward air circulation around a low-pressure area. The air circulates in an anticlockwise direction in the Northern hemisphere and clockwise in the Southern hemisphere.
- Cyclones are usually accompanied by violent storms and bad weather.
- The word Cyclone is derived from the Greek word Cyclones meaning the coils of a snake. It was coined by Henry Peddington because the tropical storms in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea appear like coiled serpents of the sea.

Classification

- There are two types of cyclones:
 - Tropical cyclones; and
 - Extra Tropical cyclones (also called Temperate cyclones or middle latitude cyclones or Frontal cyclones or Wave Cyclones).

Equatorial Cyclones on the Rise:

Cyclones that start near the Equator have been less frequent recently.

A new study suggests they might become more common due to a combination of global warming and a natural event called the Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO). Tropical cyclones originating near the Equator, like Cyclone Okchi in 2017, have been less active.

From 1981-2010, there were 43% fewer such cyclones compared to 1951-1980.

Pacific Decadal Oscillation (PDO):

The PDO is a natural cycle that repeats every 20-30 years. It affects the temperature of the Pacific Ocean, with a warmer

phase in the Western Pacific and cooler in the Eastern Pacific.

PDO's Impact on Cyclones:

Warm PDO phases mean fewer equatorial cyclones. Cold PDO phases could lead to more cyclones due to warmer waters near the Equator.

El Nino and La Nina:

El Nino and La Nina are parts of the PDO cycle. El Nino, warmer Pacific waters, often leads to less rainfall in India.

La Nina, cooler Pacific waters, can bring excessive rainfall.

Global Warming Influence:

Global warming adds to the equation, making waters warmer. Warmer waters provide more energy for cyclones to form and intensify.

Current Situation:

The PDO entered a cooler phase in 2019. This could mean more cyclones originating near the Equator in the coming months.

Implications:

More equatorial cyclones might bring increased rainfall and severe weather.

An El Nino is currently developing, affecting rainfall patterns in parts of India.

In simple terms, researchers believe that tropical cyclones starting near the Equator might become more common due to a mix of global warming and a natural ocean cycle called the Pacific Decadal Oscillation. This could mean more intense weather patterns and potential impacts on rainfall and climate in certain regions, like India.

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POLITY & GOVERNANCE **GIG WORKER'S BILL**

CONTEXT: The Rajasthan government introduced the Rajasthan Platform-Based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Bill, 2023, with the aim of ensuring social security for gig workers.

ISSUE: The definitions of a gig worker and aggregator in the Bill has been drawn largely on the Code on Social Security, 2020. In 2022, leading platforms in India scored zero in the Fairwork India ratings.

Gig worker: A person who works on a contractual basis outside of traditional employer-employee relationships and earns from such activities at a given rate of payment performs work or participates in a work arrangement.

Aggregator: Digital intermediary, including any entity that coordinates with one or more aggregators for providing the services.

California Labour Code: An independent contractor is free from control by the company in terms of performance of work, in deciding working hours, etc. All the benefits meted out to a full employee of the company should be extended to the contractual labour when work performance, working hours, etc. are decided by the company.

Section 230(3)(b) of the U.K. Employment Rights Act, 1996: The U.K. Supreme Court, 2021 ruled that Uber drivers must be treated as workers, and not as self-employed.

CHALLENGE: The limited ability to integrate existing labour laws into its ambit would insulate aggregators from complying with the mandates of the labour laws.

SOLUTION: Australia and New Zealand amended the vocabulary 'employer' to 'a 'Person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU)' and 'employee' to a 'worker in their workplace'. The responsibility is upon the PCBU to ensure the health and safety of the worker while at the workplace or anywhere else while working.

ISSUE: The Bill has proposed for constituting a Gig Workers' Welfare Board to create a database of Gig workers to store the details of all the workers onboarded or registered. Such a database maintained by the board does not withstand 'the duration or time of engagement with app-based platforms'.

CHALLENGE: The mandatory registration valid for 'perpetuity' can enable the aggregators to take punitive actions against individuals employed with multiple aggregators and come out with mechanisms that impair the opportunity choices before the gig worker.

ISSUE: The Bill aims to guarantee social security to platform-based gig workers by constituting a representative welfare board and creating a welfare fund. It brings in eight aggregators or primary employers-based services under its ambit.

CHALLENGE: Neither defines categorically what constitutes social security nor specifies welfare measure that can broadly be construed as social security and leaves this crucial aspect to the discretion of the welfare board, to 'formulate and notify schemes for social security of registered platform-based gig workers and take such measures as it may deem fit for administering such schemes'.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

DISSECTING PAKISTAN'S CYPHER SAGA

In Pakistan, politics is often influenced by conspiracy theories due to its history of coups, coalitions, and turmoil.

A special court is investigating cases against former Prime Minister Imran Khan and his ministers under the Official Secrets Act (OSA).

Key Incident:

Former Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Imran Khan were charged under OSA for retaining a diplomatic cable sent by the Pakistani Ambassador to the U.S. in 2022.

They were accused of using the cable to claim a "foreign conspiracy" behind a no-confidence vote against Khan.

Details of the Cable:

The contents of the cable were released by a U.S. website, which revealed concerns about Khan's visit to Russia during the Ukraine crisis.

The U.S. expressed disapproval of Khan's Russia visit and suggested that his fate depended on the no-confidence vote's outcome.

Impact and Political Context:

The no-confidence vote was successful, causing a shift in Pakistan's policy towards Russia and Ukraine.

The Pakistani military, opposing Khan's stance, emphasized its role and importance.

Subsequent Developments:

A coalition government led by Shehbaz Sharif took over after Khan's government.

Contacts between Pakistan and the U.S. increased, including discussions on military agreements and diplomatic engagement.

Message to the Subcontinent:

The U.S. reaction to Khan's situation contrasts with its approach to Bangladesh's election-related matters.

This suggests the U.S. may be influencing Pakistan's political landscape differently.

Takeaway:

The case involving Khan and the diplomatic cable has wide-ranging implications for Pakistani politics, military influence, and international relationships, particularly in South Asia.

In simpler terms, the article discusses how a diplomatic cable involving Imran Khan led to conspiracy theories in Pakistani politics. This incident affected Pakistan's relations with the U.S., its policies, and raised questions about foreign influence in the region.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

GUJARAT HIKES OBC QUOTA IN LOCAL BODIES FROM 10% TO 27%

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court had mandated that reservation to OBCs had to be accorded on the basis of their population. The Govt. of Gujrat had set up a commission headed by former Gujrat High Court judge K.S. Jhaveri to study and report on the matter. The local body election was postponed pending the submission of the report by the commission.

Gujarat's BJP government increased OBC reservation from 10% to 27% in panchayat and urban local body elections, aligning with the Justice Jhaveri Commission's advice. This move is expected to facilitate postponed local polls, following the Supreme Court's directive to base OBC reservation on population.

However, regions under the PESA Act, with significant tribal populations, will maintain 10% OBC reservation. Existing SC/ST quotas and the 50% reservation cap remain. The decision allows elections in 7,000 village panchayats, two district panchayats, and 70 municipalities.

The opposition Congress party is now demanding a caste census to determine the exact population of each caste group.

The **PESA Act** of 1996 extends local self-governance (Panchayati Raj) provisions to tribal Scheduled Areas in nine Indian states (Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Rajasthan), empowering traditional practices, autonomy, and socio-economic development while preserving local customs.

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



POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

THE ELECTION COMMISSION — AUTONOMY IN THE CROSS-HAIRS

BACKGROUND: The Supreme Court of India decided on March 2 that the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (EC) should be appointed by the President based on a committee's advice.

This committee would consist of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

This change was seen as an important step to improve the Election Commission's status and fairness.

Government's Response:

The government introduced a Bill in the Rajya Sabha on August 10 that could overturn this decision.

The Bill aims to replace the CJI with a Union Cabinet Minister in the committee that advises the President on these appointments.

Government's Motivation:

The government wants more influence in appointing top election officials, potentially increasing its control over the institution.

Governments, especially ones with more power, often try to make institutions more compliant to their goals.

Historical Context:

The process of appointing election officials has been debated for a long time, starting from the discussions during the formation of the Constitution.

Various committees and leaders have suggested changes, including a more diverse committee to ensure fairness.

The current government's Bill, however, changes the committee in a way that could strengthen its control.

Changing Positions:

Opposition parties, including the BJP when they were not in power, suggested more representative committees to reduce the ruling party's influence.

However, the current Bill contradicts the BJP's previous stance, showing a shift in their approach.

Impact:

The conflict between the government and the judiciary over appointment procedures could weaken the Election Commission's independence.

In essence, the government wants to change the committee that appoints top election officials, potentially increasing its control, but this move has raised concerns about the Election Commission's autonomy and fairness.

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR BIFURCATION: AN INTEGRATION WITHOUT INTEGRITY

CONTEXT: Presently, a 5 Judge Constitutional bench of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud is deliberating a series of petitions that contest the revocation of special status from the former state of Jammu and Kashmir.

Pivotal distinction between Constituent Assembly and Legislative assembly

There is this profound distinction between the Constituent Assembly's power to create and authorise governance versus the Legislative Assembly's governance authority. It underscores that these roles aren't interchangeable.

Judicial Scrutiny of Power Transfer from elected Government to President's Rule

On June 20, 2018, under Article 92 of the Constitution of J&K, the State was placed under Governor's Rule after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) withdrew support to its alliance partnership with the PDP. Six months later, in December 2018, Governor's Rule got converted into President's Rule (Article 356 of the Indian Constitution).

Critics argue that it implies that all the powers of the Government of the State are now vested in the Governor under the superintendence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Given conditions of severe democratic deficit, the government wrote up an order scrapping Article 370, sent it to itself for "concurrence", and had it signed by the President.

The petitions challenge an executive order issued by the Ministry of Law and Justice that supersedes the 1954 Order and voids

Article 370. It questions the legality and moral legitimacy of such an order, positing the uniqueness of passing orders to amend a constitution.

The petitions also challenge the interpretation of Article 370 (3) which equates the Legislative Assembly of the J & K state to the Constituent Assembly as mandated by the Historical context and the legislative intent behind the clauses.

CONSTITUENT POWER AND DEMOCRATIC CONSENT

The core of the matter is the principle of democratic consent which tends to give legitimacy to Constitutional changes. The idea of the petitions is based on this issue of perceived lack of the democratic consent behind the government's actions.

Divergence in Terms: Integrity vs. Integration

The article draws parallels to Salman Rushdie's parody of "integrity," which resonates with the preservation of a nation's essence. It underscores the ethical conflict in redefining constitutional terms. The multifaceted implications of the Jammu and Kashmir bifurcation, raises questions about the path to national unity and the integrity of democratic ideals.

In the context of Jammu and Kashmir's bifurcation, the parody of 'integrity' by Salman Rushdie takes on significance. The government emphasizes unity ('integrity') but critics say it resembles forced 'integration,' possibly neglecting the region's diversity. This contrast highlights the ethical complexities of maintaining a unified nation while preserving individual identities.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

WHEN WILL YOU RESTORE J&K STATEHOOD, ASKS CJI

CONTEXT: The Chief Justice of India, D.Y. Chandrachud, has allowed leeway for the Centre to claim that it converted Jammu and Kashmir into a Union Territory for a temporary period to ensure national security, but urged the government to provide a time frame for its return to a full-fledged State.

The Centre affirmed that Jammu and Kashmir's Union Territory status isn't permanent and stated it would make a positive statement regarding the issue. Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta clarified that Ladakh would remain a Union Territory, and elections there would conclude in September.

The court's chief justice proposed the concept of a temporary Union Territory status due to national security concerns. He requested the government to specify a time frame for Jammu and Kashmir's reversion to Statehood.

The crux of the matter revolves around the question whether according to the Constitution, Do Parliament of India have authority to change a state into a Union territory? The court also discussed the source of Parliament's power to transform States into Union Territories, particularly focusing on Jammu and Kashmir's unique case of violence and cross-border terrorism.

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