

● POLITY

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

MATHURA MOSQUE: SC STAYS HC DECISION ON INSPECTION PANEL

CONTEXT: Supreme Court has stayed the Allahabad High Court decision to appoint an inspection panel to survey Shahi Idgah Mosque. The case has been listed on January 23 for further hearing.

STORY SO FAR:

- The Supreme Court of India stopped the appointment of a commission to inspect the Shahi Idgah mosque in Mathura.
- The Hindu plaintiffs believe the mosque was built on the birthplace of Lord Krishna and wanted the commission to investigate.
- The court found the Hindu plaintiffs' request for the commission to be vague and lacking specific reasons.
- The Supreme Court allowed the lawsuit filed by the Hindus claiming a temple existed at the mosque site to proceed, but put the decision on the commission on hold.
- The mosque committee argued the lawsuit's validity should be settled before any inspection.
- The court will hear the case again on January 23rd to consider legal issues raised by both sides.

Major Points :

- The dispute centers on the historical and religious significance of the land where the mosque and temple stand.
- The legal process is complex, with both sides appealing and questioning the validity of claims and procedures.
- The Supreme Court's decision to delay the commission appointment leaves the issue unresolved for now.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

IRAN LAUNCHES MISSILE STRIKES ON PAKISTAN TARGETING MILITANTS

CONTEXT: Iran launched attacks on Tuesday inside Pakistan targeting what it described as bases for the militant group Jaish al-Adl. These reports published by state media was later removed without any explanation.

STORY SO FAR:

- Iran launched attacks in Pakistan on Tuesday, targeting bases of the Sunni militant group Jaish al-Adl, according to Iranian state media which strangely removed the reports later without explanation.
- The attack involved missiles and drones, but Pakistan has not yet commented on it.
- Jaish al-Adl operates mainly in Pakistan and has carried out attacks against Iranian security forces across the border.
- The strikes come during heightened tensions in the region, fueled by the ongoing war in Gaza and concerns of wider conflict.
- Iran also launched missile attacks on Monday, targeting a supposed Israeli "spy headquarters" in Iraq and an extremist group in Syria.

SIGNIFICANCE:

- The exact details and motivations behind the attack on Pakistan remain unclear due to conflicting information and lack of Pakistani confirmation.
- The timing of the attack raises concerns about escalating tensions in the region.
- Iran's missile strikes against other targets further highlight the complex and volatile situation in the Middle East.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIA, CHINA TENSIONS CONTINUED THROUGH 2021, 2022, NEW DETAILS REVEAL

CONTEXT: Despite diplomatic talks, India-China tensions simmered through 2021-22, with clashes and attempted incursions along the LAC.

STORY SO FAR:

- India-China tensions persisted along the LAC in 2021-22, with ongoing standoffs, clashes, and Chinese incursions.
- Army gallantry awards for acts like relaying live enemy intel reveal the tense situation.
- Fresh details show clashes in Sikkim and attempts by China to siege Indian posts.
- 2020 saw the first combat fatalities in 45 years and the first use of firearms since 1975.
- Indian Army remains vigilant and actively counters Chinese aggression.
- Despite talks, the situation remains "stable but sensitive"

IMPLICATIONS

The continued tensions between India and China along the LAC have a wide range of potential implications, spanning across various domains:

Strategic:

Regional instability: The tense situation creates an atmosphere of uncertainty and unpredictability in the region, potentially impacting trade, alliances, and military cooperation.

Increased risk of escalation: Any miscalculation or unforeseen event could spark a larger conflict between the two nuclear-armed nations, with devastating consequences.

Shifting geopolitical landscape: The tensions could push India closer to the US and its allies, further straining China's relations with the West.

Economic:

Disruption of trade: Border tensions can disrupt trade and investment flows between India and China, impacting both economies.

Increased defense spending: Both countries might be forced to allocate more resources to their militaries, diverting funds from other important sectors.

Global economic uncertainty: The instability in a crucial region like Asia could have ripple effects on the global economy.

Social:

Nationalistic sentiments: The tensions could fuel nationalistic sentiments within both countries, potentially leading to increased animosity and prejudice towards the other.

Displaced communities: Local communities residing near the LAC might be impacted by border closures and military activities, facing social and economic hardships.

Psychological strain: The prolonged uncertainty and potential for conflict can take a toll on the mental health of people living in the border regions.

Environmental:

Degradation of sensitive ecosystems: Increased military presence and infrastructure development along the LAC could harm fragile mountain ecosystems.

Disruption of migratory patterns: Military activities and border closures could disrupt the migratory patterns of wild animals in the region.

Water security concerns: The tensions could complicate water management and distribution in transboundary rivers, exacerbating existing water scarcity issues.

CONCLUSION

The simmering tensions between India and China along the LAC paint a complex picture with multifaceted implications. While diplomatic efforts strive for resolution, the underlying issues remain, posing a considerable threat to regional stability, economic prosperity, and human well-being. Navigating this volatile landscape requires strategic foresight, diplomatic finesse, and a long-term vision for cooperation. Only through sustained dialogue, mutual respect, and a commitment to peaceful coexistence can India and China transform this shared border from a battlefield of mistrust into a bridge of opportunity for generations to come.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

WHAT IT WILL TAKE TO MAKE SCIENCE COMMUNICATION WORK FOR INDIA

CONTEXT: An unprecedented wave of opportunities crashes upon the shores of Indian science communication, yet it threatens to recede unless tackled with the right tools. We must seize this moment to engage in a crucial dialogue on equipping communicators and shaping a strategic response to ensure science finds its rightful voice in India.

THE GIST

- The pandemic exposed serious lacunae in the reliable communication of scientific information in India – particularly vis-a-vis accurate data reporting, vaccine hesitancy, and prediction of the resurgence of infections
- In 2021, the government set up the CSIR-National Institute of Science Communication and Policy Research (CSIR-NIScPR) by merging two institutions. Nearly all national science funding agencies have science communication divisions, which issue press releases, conduct social media campaigns, and garner support for exhibitions and popular lectures
- Science communication has to be a part of the scientific process itself. This involves building student, scientist, and institutional-level approaches to effectively communicate science in constantly changing social, scientific, and political environments

1. Need for improved science communication in India:

- Importance of science communication highlighted by events like Chandrayaan-3 and COVID-19 pandemic.
- Existing efforts face challenges like inaccurate data,

vaccine hesitancy, and lack of public engagement.

2. Current state of science communication:

- Limited formal training and research in science communication.
- Growing involvement of research organizations, universities, and social enterprises.
- Closure of Vigyan Prasar, a government-funded science communication organization.

3. Proposals for improvement:

- Training and education:
- Expand science communication degree programs at master's and doctoral levels.
- Increase research focus on science communication.
- Integration with scientific process:
- Encourage scientists to communicate their work effectively.
- Build institutional outreach programs and public engagement initiatives.
- Translate research papers to regional languages.

National strategy:

- Establish a professional organization with experts from various fields.
- Develop communication frameworks for addressing national challenges.
- Foster scientific reasoning and public understanding of science across disciplines.

CONCLUSION:

While India has witnessed some commendable advancements in science communication, persistent gaps highlight the urgency for a national conversation on training, practice, and strategy.

related to discrimination and violence.

- The case highlights the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestinians.
- The ICJ's decision, even a provisional one, could have significant implications for the conflict.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE GEOPOLITICS IN THE BANGLADESH ELECTION RESULTS

CONTEXT: Bangladesh held its national elections on January 7, 2024 amidst violence and protests as the polls became embroiled in controversy. The ruling Awami League and allies achieved a resounding victory by getting 225 out of the 300 contested seats.

STORY SO FAR:

In the backdrop of controversy, violence, and protests, Bangladesh held its national elections on January 7, 2024. The ruling Awami League secured a significant victory with 225 out of 300 seats, while the main opposition party, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), boycotted, citing the absence of a neutral caretaker government as a reason. The Awami League has faced similar allegations of electoral manipulation in past elections, drawing international criticism.

Bangladesh, with a growing economy and strategic significance, is a focal point in regional and global geopolitics. India, as a close neighbor, has deep strategic interests, with bilateral trade nearing \$15 billion annually. The stable relationship is crucial for India to balance China's influence in the region. Prime Minister Narendra Modi promptly congratulated Sheikh Hasina, emphasizing the commitment to strengthen the partnership.

The U.S. has been critical of Bangladesh's government for democratic shortcomings and human rights issues. While maintaining ties with Bangladeshi authorities to advance core strategic interests, the U.S. also emphasizes democratic values. The U.S. Department of State expressed intentions to impose visa restrictions on individuals involved in undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh.

CHINESE AND RUSSIAN RESPONSE

China, Bangladesh's top trading partner, views the national elections as an internal matter and congratulates the Awami League on its victory. China, under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has invested over \$10 billion in critical infrastructure projects in Bangladesh, emphasizing the importance of the election's internal nature.

Russia, having strengthened ties with Bangladesh through substantial investments, including the Rooppur nuclear power plant, actively participated in the election dynamics. Moscow congratulated Sheikh Hasina on her victory, and the Russian Ambassador was received at her official residence. Russia has also expressed concern about external attempts, particularly by the U.S. and its allies, to influence Bangladesh's internal political processes. This reflects Russia's strategic interest in the region and its

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

HISTORIC HEARING

CONTEXT: South Africa has filed a case against Israel's ongoing military Campaign in Gaza in International Court of Justice.

STORY SO FAR:

- South Africa filed a case against Israel at the ICJ, accusing it of committing genocide in Gaza.
- Both sides presented their arguments during the preliminary hearing, focusing on whether Israel's actions constitute genocide and whether its Gaza operations are justified.
- South Africa requested provisional measures, including suspending military operations and preventing future genocide.
- Israel denied the accusations and called the case "blood libel," justifying its actions as a response to a terrorist attack.
- Regardless of the ICJ's decision, any provisional order could cast doubt on the legitimacy of Israel's war in Gaza.

Key points:

- Both South Africa and Israel have historical baggage

commitment to collaborating with Bangladesh.

AFTERMATH OF THE ELECTIONS

The aftermath of Bangladesh's 2024 elections has turned into a geopolitical challenge, complicating relations with the U.S. and its allies. The uncertainty about potential actions by these nations raises concerns, particularly in the context of Bangladesh's crucial readymade garment industry, a major source of foreign exchange.

Historically, international warnings, as seen in 2007, have influenced Bangladesh's political landscape. However, it remains unclear whether the United Nations or other international bodies will take significant actions beyond criticism this time.

Internally, Bangladesh faces economic challenges, including surging living costs, soaring energy import prices, diminishing dollar reserves, and a weakening local currency. Recent protests reflect the public's concerns. The International Monetary Fund has highlighted multiple shocks to Bangladesh's economy, exacerbated by supply chain disruptions and inflation due to the Ukraine war. Prime Minister Hasina's government is expected to navigate these challenges, both at home and abroad, requiring a delicate balance between geopolitics and national interests.

WHY WAS TENTH Schedule made?

The Tenth Schedule, also known as the anti-defection law, was created in 1985 to address political instability caused by legislators switching parties. It disqualifies members of Parliament or state legislatures who:

1. Voluntarily leave their party.
2. Vote against their party's instructions.

This aims to protect elected governments from falling due to party defections. Exceptions originally allowed for splits within parties and mergers, but one of these was removed in 2003 to strengthen the law.

In short, the Tenth Schedule was created to curb party defections and promote government stability.

WHAT WERE THE ISSUES INVOLVED?

The issues involved in the recent political developments include challenges related to the disqualification of members under the Tenth Schedule, particularly after the deletion of para 3. Instances have arisen where two-thirds of a legislature party claimed to be the original political party to avoid disqualification, leading to practical defection. Another concern is the merging of more than two-thirds of a State legislature party of a national political party with another party to escape disqualification.

The authority to decide on disqualification rests with the Speaker of the House, raising concerns about neutrality given past instances where Speakers were perceived to favor the ruling dispensation. In specific cases, such as the Rajasthan and Goa examples, members merged with different parties to avoid disqualification. The Supreme Court, in the K. M. Singh versus Speaker of Manipur (2020) case, recommended constitutional amendments to transfer these powers from the Speaker to an independent tribunal headed by judges, aiming to ensure a more impartial and credible process for handling such matters.

WHAT ARE THE REFORMS NEEDED

In Maharashtra, a faction led by Eknath Shinde claimed to be the authentic Shiv Sena in June 2022, moving with a majority of MLAs. The Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray (UBT) faction contested this, asserting their claim as the original party. The Speaker recognized the Eknath Shinde faction as the real Shiv Sena, validating their whip's appointment and refusing to disqualify 40 MLAs from this group. Additionally, the Speaker did not disqualify 14 MLAs from the UBT group due to difficulties in physically serving whip instructions.

Reforms needed in the political system include addressing the lack of inner-party democracy, a major factor contributing to defections. The Supreme Court's three-test formula for recognizing the original political party involves examining aims and objects, adherence to the party constitution reflecting inner-party democracy, and majority in legislative and organizational wings. An authoritative Supreme Court judgment and the establishment of an independent tribunal to decide on member disqualification under the Tenth Schedule could reduce ambiguities. The primary reform suggested is the institutionalization of internal democracy through regular inner-party elections, closely monitored by the Election Commission. The anti-defection

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

UNDERSTANDING 10TH SCHEDULE

CONTEXT: What is the history behind the anti-defection law? How can anti-defection laws be made stronger and impartial?

THE GIST

- The defections of legislators during the 1960s and 70s from their parent parties created political instability in many States, bringing down elected governments. Therefore, to ensure the stability of elected governments, the 52nd constitutional amendment introduced the 'anti-defection' law through the Tenth Schedule in 1985.
- The authority to decide on the disqualification of members is vested in the Speaker of the House.
- The Supreme Court in K. M. Singh versus Speaker of Manipur (2020) recommended that Parliament amend the Constitution to vest these powers in an independent tribunal headed by judges.

STORY SO FAR

In the ongoing political developments in Maharashtra, the Assembly Speaker has made key decisions regarding the recognition and disqualification of members. The Speaker has refused to disqualify 40 MLAs belonging to the Eknath Shinde faction, recognizing it as the authentic Shiv Sena. Additionally, the appointment of a whip by this faction has been deemed valid. Furthermore, 14 MLAs from the Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray (UBT) group were not disqualified, with the Speaker citing technical reasons under the Tenth Schedule for this decision. These decisions indicate the Speaker's stance on the factional dynamics within the Shiv Sena party in Maharashtra.

law, enshrined in the Tenth Schedule, seeks to curb political instability by deterring legislators from switching parties. However, loopholes like merging with other parties and biased decisions by partisan Speakers undermine its effectiveness. To strengthen the law, addressing inner-party democracy, establishing an independent tribunal for disqualification, and institutionalizing internal elections are crucial reforms. By tackling these issues, India can ensure true stability and strengthen the democratic process.

ECONOMICS

TOY MANUFACTURERS' SHIFT FROM CHINA IS NO CHILD'S PLAY AS BOTTLENECKS STAY

CONTEXT: Manufacturers acknowledge that India and other countries cannot match China in efficiency, limiting companies' efforts to shift to lower cost bases and raising the risk of higher toy prices in future if the bulk of production remains in China; infrastructure outside China remains a road-block

STORY SO FAR

Toy manufacturers, including Hasbro and Mattel, are facing challenges in shifting production from China to cheaper centers due to inefficiencies in other countries. While countries like India lack the efficiency, infrastructure, and experience that China has developed over the last 30 years, rising labor costs and supply chain disruptions in China have prompted efforts to diversify production geographically. Despite increased investments in countries like India, Mexico, Vietnam, and Malaysia, the toy industry struggles to shift production away from China. Mainland China still produced 79% of toys sold in the U.S. and Europe as of the first seven months of last year, posing risks of higher toy prices if production remains concentrated in China. The process of diversification is complicated, involving long lead times and challenges in safety, sourcing, and worker treatment. Spiraling Chinese wages contribute to rising toy prices, and the industry faces potential changes in U.S. duties on Chinese toys, which could impact costs for consumers. Despite obstacles, efforts to reduce dependence on China have increased in response to operational risks and supply chain vulnerabilities, particularly highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.



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