

## ● POLITY

## ● ECONOMICS

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## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## FROM TWEETS TO TENSION: HOW A SOCIAL MEDIA STORM STRAINED INDIA-MALDIVES TIES

### Timeline of Events:

- January 2024: During Prime Minister Modi's visit to Lakshadweep, some of the Maldivian officials made derogatory remarks on Twitter. This sparked outrage in India, leading to calls for boycotting Maldivian tourism and protests against the Maldivian government.
- Immediate Actions: The Maldivian government quickly distanced itself from the tweets, suspending both officials and criticizing their remarks. They emphasized the importance of responsible expression and maintaining amicable relations with India.

### India-Maldives Relations: A Brief Account

#### Historical Ties:

#### Geographical Proximity:

- India and the Maldives are geographically close neighbors, located in the Indian Ocean region. The proximity has contributed to shared historical, cultural, and economic linkages.

#### Diplomatic Recognition:

- India was one of the first countries to recognize the Maldives' independence in 1965. Since then, diplomatic relations between the two countries have evolved positively.

#### Economic Cooperation:

#### Trade and Commerce:

- Economic cooperation forms a vital aspect of bilateral relations. India is one of the significant trading partners for the Maldives.
- Trade includes a range of goods and services, reflecting the economic interdependence between the two nations.

#### Development Assistance:

- India has been actively involved in providing developmental assistance to the Maldives. This assistance encompasses infrastructure projects, healthcare, education, and capacity building.

#### Defense and Security:

#### Maritime Security:

- Given their geographical proximity and shared maritime interests, India and the Maldives collaborate on maritime security initiatives.
- Both countries engage in coordinated efforts to address concerns such as piracy and ensure the safety of sea lanes in the Indian Ocean.

#### Defense Cooperation:

- India and the Maldives maintain defense cooperation, including joint exercises, training programs, and the exchange of

defense-related information.

#### People-to-People Ties:

#### Cultural and Educational Exchanges:

- Cultural and educational ties between India and the Maldives have been fostered through exchange programs, scholarships, and cultural events.
- These exchanges contribute to a deeper understanding of each other's cultures and strengthen people-to-people bonds.

#### Diplomatic Engagement:

#### High-Level Visits:

- High-level visits between leaders of both countries have been frequent, fostering diplomatic dialogue and cooperation.
- These visits contribute to the strategic partnership and help address shared challenges.

#### Regional and International Forums:

- India and the Maldives collaborate in regional and international forums, advocating for common interests, including climate change, maritime security, and sustainable development.

#### Climate Change and Environmental Cooperation:

#### Vulnerability to Climate Change:

- Both nations face vulnerabilities due to climate change, including rising sea levels. This shared concern has led to joint efforts in advocating for climate action on the global stage.

#### Renewable Energy Initiatives:

- India has supported the Maldives in its efforts to adopt renewable energy solutions, addressing environmental challenges and promoting sustainable development.



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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

# GM CROPS WILL MAKE EDIBLE OIL CHEAPER: GOVT

**CONTEXT:** The Supreme Court, focused on India's welfare, weighs government's argument favoring genetically modified crops for affordable edible oil and reduced foreign dependence.

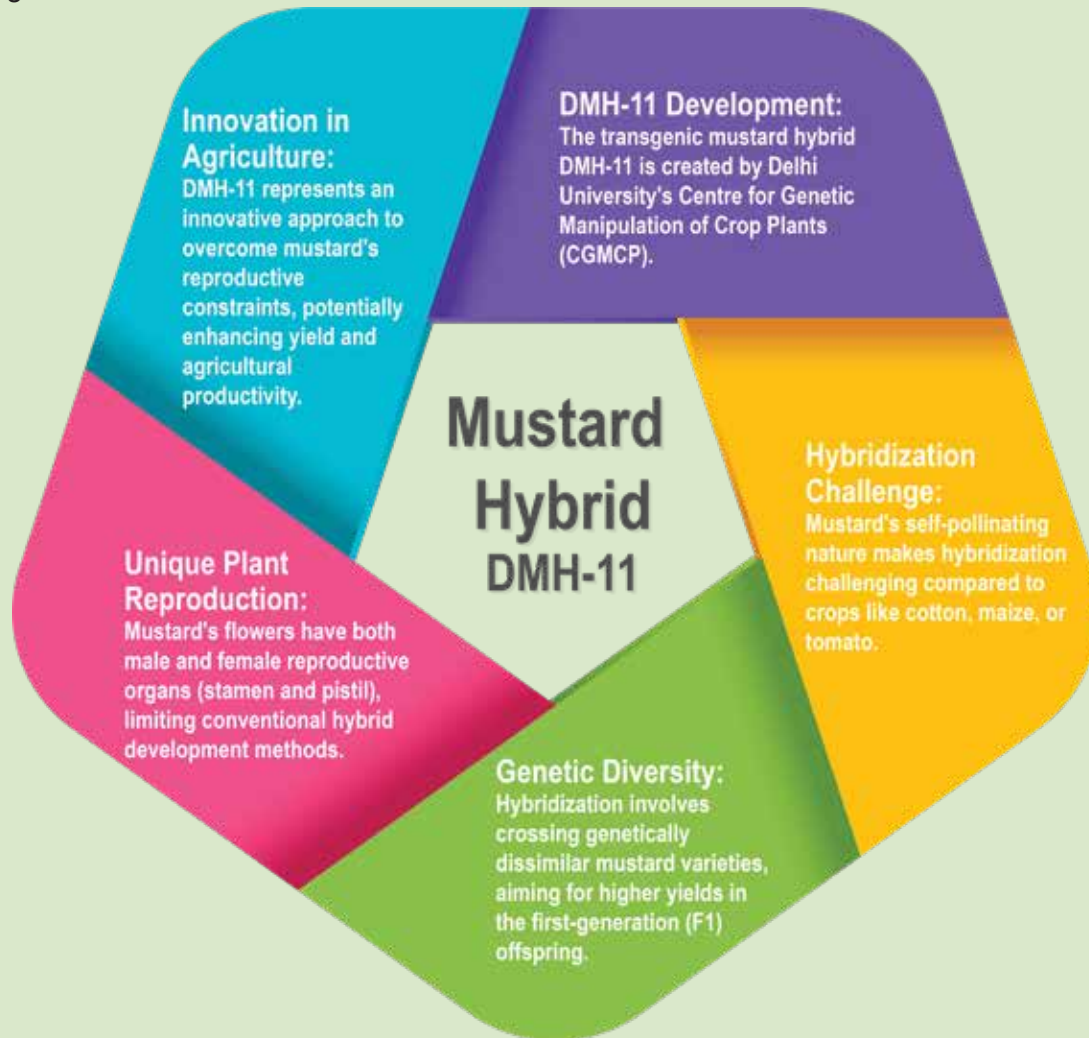
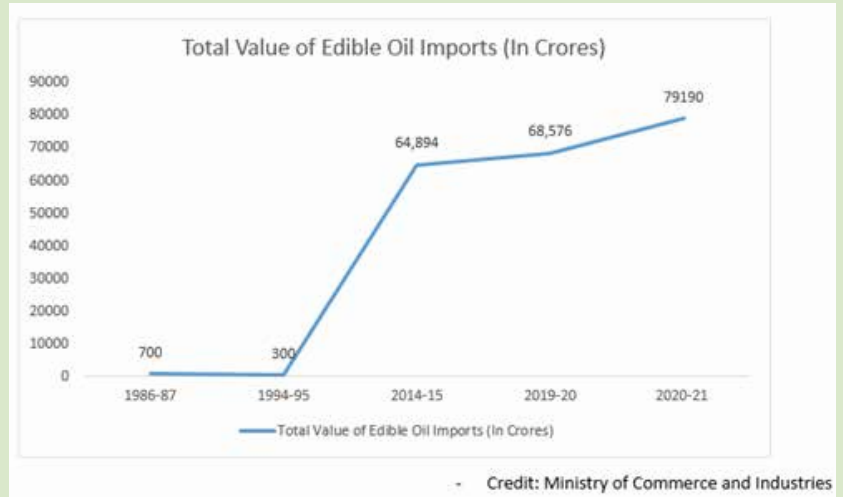
**HIGHLIGHTS:** Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, representing the Indian government in the Supreme Court, stated that GM mustard, a widely used edible oil in India, aims to reduce dependence on imports, making edible oil more affordable. He attributed public interest litigation against GM mustard to interests opposing India's food security goals. The court emphasized a focus on national interests.

### Increasing Demand

- **Edible Oil Demand in India:** India's edible oil demand was 24.6 million tonnes (2020-21), with only 11.1 million tonnes domestically available.
- **High Dependency on Imports:** In 2020-21, 54% of edible oil demand was met through imports, costing around ₹1,15,000 crore.
- **Government Emphasizes Right to Food:** Amid environmental concerns about GM crops, the government emphasizes people's right to access affordable daily food.
- **Defense of GM Crop Testing:** Officials argue that open field testing of GM crops is controlled, limited to specific sites, and follows statutory guidelines.

- **Benefits of GM Mustard Variant:** Defense includes increased yield (25-30%) of DMH-11, addressing economic losses from weeds and herbicide costs in India.

Advocate Prashant Bhushan argued against GM mustard, citing flaws in the regulatory system and potential risks to India's diverse mustard varieties. In response, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta defended GM mustard, highlighting the significant imports of GM canola and soybean oil, emphasizing their global prevalence and the need for India to enhance food security.

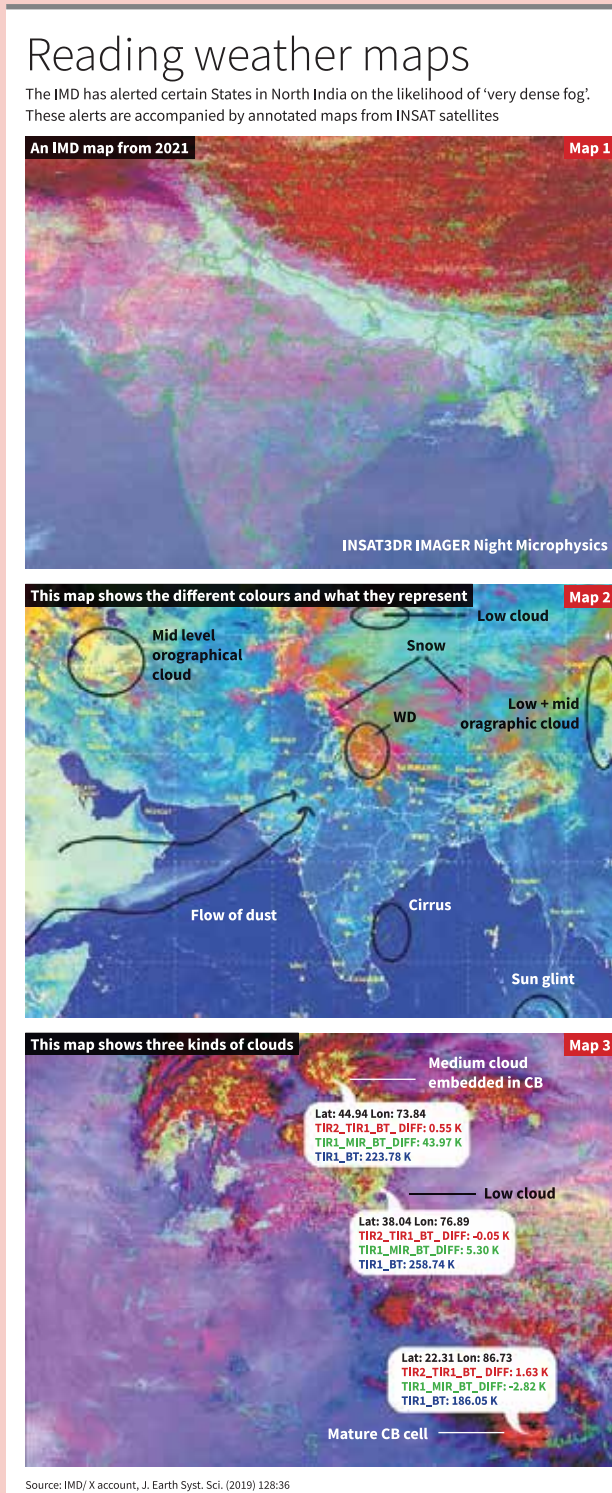


SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

# HOW SATELLITES TRACK THE WEATHER?

**CONTEXT:** North India, including Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Haryana, Delhi, and Punjab, faces persistent heavy fog, impacting visibility, as per IMD warnings.

**BACKGROUND:** The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issued warnings for "very dense fog" in Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, and Madhya Pradesh. The alerts, shared on the social media platform X, were accompanied by satellite maps, particularly from INSAT 3D and INSAT 3DR, illustrating the extent of fog with annotations by the IMD.



## How does one read the maps? What do the colours represent?

- Map Clue: 'Night Microphysics': A 2021 map includes a clue, 'Night Microphysics,' leading to insights from an IMD paper.
- INSAT 3D Satellite Imaging: INSAT 3D satellite uses RGB imaging based on solar reflectance and brightness temperature for map colorization.
- Factors Affecting Color: Solar reflectance (at 0.5, 1.6, and 10.8 micrometres) and brightness temperature influence RGB colors in INSAT 3D data.
- Wavelength Detection: Detectors on the satellite track radiation at different wavelengths, determining green, red, and blue colors in images.
- Color Determination Process: The INSAT 3D computer calculates color based on signals' strengths at specific wavelengths, creating detailed and informative images.

## How does the satellite track snow?

A new color scheme for satellite imagery has been developed, serving key applications such as analyzing cloud types, identifying convection and thunderstorm stages, locating snow areas, and detecting fires. The scheme utilizes variations in solar reflectance, particularly in the shortwave infrared, with the red component weakening when tracking snow due to its strong absorption of radiation at 1.6 micrometers.

## How are the colours determined?

- 'Night Microphysics' in Satellite Data: Night microphysics involves determining two colors based on the strength difference between specific thermal infrared signals.
- Color Determination Process: Red color is based on the difference between 12 and 10 micrometre signals; green depends on 10.8 and 3.9 micrometre signals.
- Cloud Identification in Maps: Maps, like map 3, use color variations to identify different cloud types, such as mature cumulonimbus cells and lower clouds.
- Weather Analysis through Data Combination: Combining day and night microphysics data helps atmospheric scientists analyze moisture droplets, temperature differences, and track weather events.
- Thunderstorm Prediction: Authors propose using INSAT 3D data to predict thunderstorms 1-3 hours in advance by analyzing signals of multiple wavelengths.

## How do the satellites collect weather data?

INSAT 3D and INSAT 3DR satellites employ radiometers to measure spectral properties of radiation by interacting with matter, gauging temperature or electrical activity. Additionally, they feature atmospheric sounders, which measure temperature, humidity, and study water vapor at different heights from the ground. Scientists utilize the combined data from these instruments to gain insights into diverse atmospheric characteristics.

## What weather satellites does India have?

- Evolution of Meteorological Satellites: INSAT 3DR's radiometer is an upgraded version of earlier Very High-Resolution Radiometers (VHRR) used in Kalpana 1 and INSAT 3A.

- **Technological Advancements:** INSAT 3DR features improved spatial resolution, spectral channels, and functionality compared to its predecessors in India's meteorological satellite program.
- **Progressive Enhancements:** Each satellite, including Kalpana 1, INSAT 3A, 3D, and 3DR, represents a progressively better-equipped version in India's weather monitoring technology.
- **Satellite Specifications:** INSAT 3DR, launched in 2016, has a launch mass of 2,211 kg, upgraded VHR, sounder, data-relay transponder, and search-and-rescue transponder.
- **Future Launch:** In February 2024, ISRO plans to launch INSAT 3DS, the next meteorological satellite, featuring advancements and improvements over its predecessor.

## ECONOMICS

# INDIA SEEING FASTEST AIR TRAFFIC GROWTH IN THE WORLD: MAILLARD

**CONTEXT:** Airbus President notes India's pivotal role in global aviation, anticipating fastest annual traffic growth for the next two decades.

**BACKGROUND:** Airbus predicts that India will lead global aviation growth over the next 20 years, with an annual traffic growth of 6.2%, compared to the world average of 3.6%. The forecast anticipates the need for 2,840 aircraft in India during this period. Despite rapid expansion, India's per capita air travel remains significantly lower than China's. Airbus also announced a joint venture with Air India for a pilot training unit with 10 simulators to train 5,000 pilots by 2030.



**India's domestic air passenger traffic to touch 300 million by 2030: Civil Aviation Minister**

- **Ambitious Growth Projection:** India's domestic air passenger traffic aims for 300 million by 2030, nearly doubling from 153 million in 2023.
- **Market Expansion Goals:** Despite growth, India's aviation market is under-penetrated globally, targeting a rise from 3-4% to 10-15% by 2030.
- **Facilitative Approach:** The focus is on creating capacities, removing bottlenecks, and simplifying procedures, aiming to support a \$20 trillion economy by 2047.

- **Infrastructure Development:** Significant progress highlighted, with the addition or modernization of 75 airports, waterdromes, and heliports in the last decade.
- **Fleet Expansion:** India, a major aircraft purchaser globally, plans to increase its fleet from 700 to over 2,000 in the next decade.

## YEAR END REVIEW 2023 FOR MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION

- 60 New RCS routes commenced in 2023; 154 New RCS Routes awarded under UDAN; 12 new RCS routes commenced in North East
- More than 91 lakh passengers availed the facility of Digi Yatra, Over 35 lakh users downloaded the app
- 3 more Greenfield airports operationalized
- 456 more posts of Air Traffic Controllers Created
- 34 DGCA-approved FTOs operating at 55 bases till Nov 2023
- DGCA issued an all-time high, 1562 Commercial Pilot Licenses
- About 9 thousand remote pilot certificates issued through Digital Sky Platform
- India's domestic air passenger traffic touches record high

## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

# MOTIVATED LITIGATION

**CONTEXT:** The Supreme Court of India has ordered a stay on an Allahabad High Court order for inspecting the Shahi Idgah mosque of Mathura. Petitioners in Allahabad High Court allege that there was a pre-existing temple in the mosque's premises.

### MAJOR POINTS:

1. **THE PLACES OF WORSHIP ACT:** The main argument against these lawsuits is that they violate the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. This Act prohibits the conversion of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947, essentially aiming to prevent further religious conflicts related to disputed sites.

### WHAT IS THE PLACES OF WORSHIP ACT?

The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, is legislation enacted by the Indian Parliament to freeze the religious character of all places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947, the day of India's independence. This essentially means that any place of worship, regardless of its historical ownership or claims, cannot be legally converted into another religion's place of worship.

### WHY WAS IT FORMULATED?

The Act was formulated in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition in Ayodhya in 1992, a highly contentious event that triggered widespread communal violence and highlighted the potential for religious disputes over places of worship to destabilize the nation.

**THE ACT AIMED TO ACHIEVE SEVERAL OBJECTIVES:**

**Prevent future religious conflicts:** By freezing the status quo, the Act sought to discourage legal or extra-legal attempts to change the religious character of any place of worship.

**Promote religious harmony:** The Act aimed to reassure different religious communities that their **places of worship would be protected and that their religious sentiments would be respected.**

**Uphold secularism:** The Act was seen as a crucial step in upholding the principle of secularism enshrined in the Indian Constitution, which guarantees equal rights to all religions.

**CONSEQUENCES:****a) Legal:**

- **Reduced litigation:** The Act has significantly reduced the number of legal disputes over places of worship.
- **Challenges:** The Act is not without its critics. Some argue that it unfairly favors the status quo and prevents historical injustices from being rectified. The recent legal challenges to the Shahi Idgah Mosque in Mathura and the Gyanvapi Mosque in Varanasi highlight these ongoing critiques.
- **Uncertainty:** Some legal ambiguities remain within the Act, particularly regarding its applicability to pre-1947 disputes and its limitations on judicial intervention.

**b) Political:**

- **Religious appeasement:** Critics accuse the Act of being politically motivated and catering to Hindu sentiments. The BJP government's recent statements hinting at possible amendments to the Act further fuel these concerns.
- **Communal tensions:** While the Act has largely succeeded in preventing large-scale religious conflicts, the issue of disputed places of worship remains a sensitive topic and can be easily exploited for political gains, potentially exacerbating communal tensions.

**c) Other impacts:**

- **Social harmony:** The Act has contributed to a relative sense of peace and stability in India's diverse religious landscape.
- **Historical amnesia:** Some argue that the Act risks obscuring historical complexities and potentially suppressing certain narratives.
- **Debate on secularism:** The Act has sparked ongoing debates about the nature and practice of secularism in India, with implications for the country's future socio-political trajectory.

Overall, the Places of Worship Act remains a contested piece of legislation, with its impact ranging from promoting religious harmony to generating legal ambiguities and fuelling political controversies. Understanding its complex history, objectives, and potential consequences is crucial for navigating the sensitive landscape of religious disputes in India.

**2. LEGAL STRATEGIES:** The legal strategy employed by Hindu groups in both cases of Ram Janma Bhoomi and Gyanvapi Mosque cases are criticised by some groups. They argue that the appointment of commissions to inspect the mosques and gather evidence appears to be a way to circumvent the Act and potentially alter the religious character of the sites.

**Legal Strategies of Hindu Groups in Ram Janmabhoomi and Gyanvapi Mosque Cases**

The legal strategies employed by Hindu groups in both the Ram Janmabhoomi and Gyanvapi Mosque cases share some commonalities but also have distinct features:

**Similarities:**

**Historical claims:** Both cases rely heavily on historical narratives claiming that the disputed sites were originally Hindu temples demolished by Muslim rulers to build mosques. The Ram Janmabhoomi case claimed the Babri Masjid was built on Lord Rama's birthplace, while the Gyanvapi case contends the mosque stands on the ruins of the Kashi Vishwanath temple.

**Archaeological evidence:** In both cases, Hindu groups have pushed for archaeological surveys and excavations to gather evidence supporting their claims about the existence of earlier Hindu structures. The Ram Janmabhoomi case involved extensive excavations in the 1990s, and the Gyanvapi case recently gained court approval for a similar survey.

**Judicial intervention:** Both cases involve seeking judicial intervention to gain control of the disputed sites. In the Ram Janmabhoomi case, this culminated in the 2019 Supreme Court verdict awarding the land to Hindus for temple construction. The Gyanvapi case currently challenges the mosque's status and seeks its conversion into a temple.

**Differences:**

**Constitutional arguments:** The Ram Janmabhoomi case also heavily relied on arguments around constitutional rights and principles like equality and non-discrimination. Hindu groups argued that the demolition of the Babri Masjid violated their fundamental rights and challenged the Places of Worship Act as discriminatory against Hindus. This angle is less prominent in the Gyanvapi case.

**Use of legal precedents:** The Gyanvapi case draws inspiration from the Ram Janmabhoomi verdict, citing it as a legal precedent for awarding disputed sites to Hindus based on historical claims. This strategy is specific to the Gyanvapi case and not applicable to the Ayodhya dispute.

**Nature of legal challenges:** The Ram Janmabhoomi case involved multiple lawsuits over ownership and control of the site, culminating in a final verdict by the Supreme Court. The Gyanvapi case currently involves contesting the mosque's maintainability under the Places of Worship Act and seeking permission for a survey, making it an ongoing legal battle.

**3. THE 1968 COMPROMISE:** In Mathura, a compromise was reached between the Hindu and Muslim parties in 1968, dividing the disputed land. The current lawsuits challenge this agreement, raising concerns about the stability of such settlements.

**The 1968 Compromise in Mathura and its Challenges**

The 1968 agreement in Mathura between the **Sri Krishna Janmasthan Seva Sansthan (a Hindu temple management) and the Shahi Idgah Trust (representing the mosque)** holds significance in understanding the ongoing legal dispute surrounding the Shahi Idgah Mosque. The details and the challenges it faces are as follows

**Details of the 1968 Compromise:**

- The disputed land, about 13.77 acres, was divided:

- Approximately 13.37 acres went to the Shahi Idgah Trust to maintain the mosque.
- 0.40 acres were allocated to the temple management for the construction of a new temple adjacent to the mosque.
- The boundaries were redrawn, creating a clear separation between the two places of worship.
- The Idgah agreed to remove certain temporary structures from the land.
- Both parties agreed to respect each other's religious activities and maintain peace.

#### Challenges to the 1968 Compromise:

**Validity:** Some Hindu groups contend that the agreement was unfair and signed under duress, questioning its legal validity.

**Maintainability:** Recent lawsuits filed by Hindu groups challenge the agreement's maintainability under the Places of Worship Act, 1991. They argue that the Act bars such compromises and seek the return of the entire land to the temple management.

**Stability:** These challenges raise concerns about the stability of similar agreements reached in the past to resolve religious disputes. If the 1968 compromise can be challenged, it sets a precedent for reopening other settlements, potentially jeopardizing interfaith harmony.

**Social tensions:** The ongoing legal battle and challenges to the compromise can stoke religious tensions and create a sense of uncertainty within the local community.

**Potential consequences of challenging the compromise:**

**Legal complexities:** If the courts accept the challenges, it could lead to a lengthy and complex legal battle with no easy resolution.

**Religious disharmony:** Challenging the agreement could reignite animosity between Hindu and Muslim communities, disrupting interfaith peace and harmony.

**Political manipulation:** The issue might be exploited for political gains, further exacerbating social tensions and posing a risk to national security.

#### CONCLUSION: A CROSSROADS OF FAITH AND LAW

The ongoing dispute surrounding the Shahi Idgah Mosque in Mathura highlights a complex intersection of faith, law, and historical memory in contemporary India. While the Places of Worship Act seeks to maintain religious harmony by freezing the status quo of places of worship, the legal challenges mounted against the 1968 compromise and the appointment of a commission raise concerns about potential circumvention and the unsettling of settled agreements.

Navigating this sensitive landscape demands a nuanced approach. Understanding the historical context, legal arguments, and potential social consequences of these disputes is crucial for finding solutions that respect both religious sentiments and the rule of law. Upholding the Places of Worship Act and engaging in interfaith dialogue remain vital steps in ensuring peace and harmony in a nation where diverse faiths coexist. Ultimately, the path forward lies not in revisiting past wrongs but in building bridges of understanding and respect for shared spaces in a pluralistic society.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

# CRAFTING A NEW PHASE IN INDIA-U.K. DEFENCE TIES

**CONTEXT:** After a 22-year hiatus, Defense Minister Rajnath Singh's visit to the UK signifies a renewed focus on defense cooperation between the two nations. This comes at a crucial time when China's growing naval power threatens both India and the UK's vital shipping lanes.

#### OPPORTUNITIES FOR INDIA:

**Electric Propulsion Technology:** The UK, a leader in this field, can help bridge the technological gap between Indian and Chinese warships. Electric propulsion offers quieter operation, enhanced power generation, and a competitive edge for India's future surface fleet.

**Joint Projects and Training:** The "India-UK electric propulsion capability partnership" marks a concrete step towards joint development and knowledge transfer. Initial trials on landing platforms and next-generation destroyers are promising advancements.

**Deeper Defense Ties:** Beyond technology, the visit signifies closer military exercises, potential industrial collaboration, and increased British naval presence in the Indian Ocean region. This bolsters India's maritime security and strategic partnership with a key ally.

#### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

**Legacy Issues:** Balancing relations with Pakistan remains a hurdle for the UK, causing occasional friction with India.

**Internal Issues:** Tensions around Sikh separatism can further complicate the relationship.

#### OVERALL SIGNIFICANCE FOR INDIA:

**Strategic Advantage:** Partnering with the UK provides India with crucial technological advancements, enhanced naval deterrence against China, and a powerful ally in the Indian Ocean.

**Modernization and Self-Reliance:** Access to electric propulsion technology fosters India's path towards developing its own advanced warships, reducing dependence on foreign imports.

**Global Standing:** Deeper defense ties with the UK elevate India's international standing and project a stronger maritime presence in the region.

#### INDIA - A GEOSTRATEGIC PILLAR FOR THE UK IN THE INDO PACIFIC

India's rising importance stems from shared challenges with the UK, like China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific. The UK's advanced technology (electric propulsion) can help modernize India's navy, closing the gap with China. Their partnership benefits not just defense, but also trade, science, and shared democratic values. The UK, reorienting towards the East, sees India as a key regional partner. Closer defense ties, with UK deployments and joint exercises, strengthen regional security. Challenges remain: the UK's historical ties with Pakistan and sensitive internal issues in India require careful handling. Despite these hurdles, the strategic convergence and mutual benefits point towards a strong, multifaceted India-UK partnership crucial for shaping a stable

Indo-Pacific. By overcoming challenges and leveraging strengths, both can play a vital role in this emerging region.

#### CONCLUSION:

Rajnath Singh's visit to the UK after a 22-year hiatus marks a pivotal turning point in India-UK defense ties. Beyond the immediate gains of technology transfer and strategic alignment against China, it signifies a reenergized partnership with immense potential for the future. This renewed commitment, forged in the fires of shared threats and common values, lays the groundwork for a multifaceted collaboration that can not only safeguard the Indo-Pacific but also usher in a new era of prosperity and stability for both nations. By overcoming historical baggage and nurturing mutual trust, India and the UK can solidify their alliance and emerge as formidable pillars of a rules-based order in the rising sun of the East. Rajnath Singh's visit, then, is not just a milestone, but a launchpad for a future where the intertwined destinies of these two ancient nations stand to shape the course of the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

Reassurance to Allies: The exercise reassures European allies bordering Russia, particularly those like Poland and the Baltic states, that NATO stands firmly behind their defence in case of a threat.

#### CONCLUSION:

NATO's Steadfast Defender-2024, its largest exercise since the Cold War, showcases a resolute alliance preparing for a potentially harsh European reality. This strategic shift, focused on deterring adversaries like Russia, aims to secure peace through readiness. It marks a turning point in European security architecture and paves the way for a more responsive NATO in an uncertain future.

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## CHINA WIDENS TRADE HIGHWAY IN SOUTH AMERICA WITH NEW MEGA PORT PROJECT

**CONTEXT:** The new \$3.5 billion Chancay mega-port in Peru, majority-owned by China, marks a significant shift in South American trade dynamics and presents both opportunities and challenges for the region.

#### CHINA'S CHANCAY MEGA PORT - A GAME-CHANGER FOR SOUTH AMERICA'S TRADE LANDSCAPE

The rise of the Chancay mega port in Peru signifies a significant shift in South America's trade landscape, with China taking center stage

#### Opportunities:

**Boosts trade and development:** Chancay offers a direct gateway to Asia, reducing shipping time and costs for South American exports like copper, soy, and corn. This could incentivize production and regional development, particularly in resource-rich areas like Brazil's Acre state.

**Creates infrastructure and jobs:** The port's construction and operation generate local jobs and could attract further investment in logistics, processing, and industrial hubs.

**Strengthens Chinese-South American ties:** Chancay symbolizes China's growing economic influence in the region, potentially leading to deeper partnerships and investments in areas beyond trade.

#### Challenges:

**U.S. and European concerns:** China's expanding footprint raises concerns about its political and economic influence, potentially creating new dependencies for South American nations.

**Logistical hurdles:** Smoothly connecting Chancay to production centers in Brazil and elsewhere requires infrastructure upgrades and streamlined border procedures.

**Equity and environmental concerns:** Local communities need to be involved in decision-making and benefit from the port's development, while environmental and social impacts must be carefully managed.

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## NATO TO HOLD BIGGEST DRILL SINCE COLD WAR TO COMBAT FLARE-UP WITH 'NEAR-PEER' RIVAL

**CONTEXT:** NATO's largest exercise since the Cold War prepares for "near-peer" conflict in Europe amidst escalating tensions with Russia.

#### WHAT IS THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS EXERCISE?

**Scale and Timing:** This is NATO's largest exercise since the Cold War, involving 90,000 troops, diverse military assets, and stretching for months. This scale signifies a heightened level of preparedness and commitment to rapid response capabilities in the face of potential conflict.

**Focus on "Near-Peer" adversary:** The exercise explicitly prepares for a conflict with a powerful adversary, likely referring to Russia. This marks a shift from previous exercises often focused on smaller threats and underscores the seriousness of the current security situation in Europe.

**Testing new regional defence plans:** Steadfast Defender-2024 is the first major test of NATO's newly developed regional defence plans. These plans detail specific responses to potential Russian attacks in different areas, reflecting a more tailored and strategic approach to European defence.

**Demonstrating Force and Deterrence:** The exercise sends a strong message to Russia about NATO's collective defence capabilities and its swift mobilization potential. This serves as a deterrent and showcases NATO's resolve to protect its eastern flank.

**Historical Context:** The scale of the exercise surpasses even Cold War-era drills, highlighting the gravity of the current situation and the potential for a significant military confrontation in Europe.

**Additional factors to consider:**

**Global context:** The global economic slowdown and potential recession could affect trade volumes and temper China's investment appetite.

**Domestic politics:** Political instability in some South American countries could disrupt trade agreements and infrastructure projects.

**Alternative partnerships:** The U.S. and EU, while acknowledging China's economic might, are offering initiatives focused on technological collaboration and other non-trade areas to maintain their presence in the region.

**CHANCAY PORT: A CROSSROADS FOR INDIA IN SOUTH AMERICA**

China's Chancay mega-port throws open a strategic crossroads for India in South America, presenting a mix of enticing opportunities and daunting challenges. While not a direct threat to existing trade routes, Chancay could be a springboard for diversifying India's reach and countering China's growing influence in the region.

**Opportunities for India:**

**Diversifying Trade Routes:** Chancay's Asian focus could incentivize India to explore alternative routes through South America to reach African and European markets. This could potentially reduce reliance on traditional routes and improve efficiency, particularly for resource-rich regions like Africa.

**Infrastructure Collaboration:** India's expertise in port development and infrastructure projects aligns perfectly with South American nations looking to connect production centers to Chancay. Joint ventures in constructing logistics hubs and upgrading transport corridors could be lucrative for Indian companies.

**Strengthening South American Ties:** India's strong cultural and diplomatic connections with South American countries can be leveraged to build robust partnerships. This could counter China's economic weight and create a more balanced geopolitical landscape in the region.

**CHALLENGES FOR INDIA:**

**Intensified Competition:** Chancay could exacerbate competition for resources and markets, making it difficult for India to carve out a significant space. China's economic muscle and established presence in South America pose a formidable challenge.

**Limited Trade Volume:** India's current trade volume with South America pales in comparison to China's, making it harder to fully exploit the opportunities Chancay presents. Building robust trade agreements and promoting Indian exports will be crucial.

**Logistical Hurdles:** Similar to Brazil, India would need to overcome infrastructure bottlenecks and streamline border procedures to seamlessly utilize Chancay as a trade gateway. Upgrading road and rail networks will be essential for efficient transport.

**BEYOND OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES:**

**India's approach to South America must consider several additional factors:**

"Look East" Policy: Aligning South American engagement with the "Look East" policy's focus on Asia

could unlock strategic synergies and create a more cohesive approach towards global trade diversification.

**Interoceanic Highway:** This ambitious intercontinental project, connecting Pacific and Atlantic coasts, presents further opportunities for infrastructure collaboration and trade facilitation.

**Political and Economic Stability:** Building long-term partnerships and securing favorable trade agreements will depend on the political and economic stability of South American countries.

**CONCLUSION:**

The Chancay mega-port is a pivotal moment for India in South America. By proactively addressing challenges, forging strong partnerships, and leveraging its comparative advantages, India can turn this crossroads into a springboard for diversifying trade routes, strengthening regional ties, and establishing a more balanced geopolitical presence in the region. It's a window of opportunity not to be missed.

**ECONOMICS****INDIA TO LOG FIRMER-THAN-EXPECTED GROWTH IN FY24, ASSERT RBI OFFICIALS**

**CONTEXT:** A shift from consumption to investment, led by government capital spending, underpinning growth momentum, write the officials led by Deputy Governor Patra in a bulletin article; aim should be to secure 7% real GDP growth in FY25, they add

**Impact:**

- The Indian economy is expected to outperform in 2023-24, driven by a shift from consumption to investment.
- The government's focus on infrastructure spending is starting to crowd in private investment.
- Headline inflation rose slightly in December to 5.7%, but core inflation moderated to 3.8%, its lowest level in more than four years.
- The central bank expects inflation to align with its target by the second quarter of 2024 and to remain anchored there.
- The central bank also wants to see financial institutions strengthen their balance sheets and improve asset quality.

**CONCLUSION:** Overall, the outlook for the Indian economy is positive, but the central bank wants to see inflation under control and financial institutions healthy.



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## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## MEDIA TRANSFORMATION IN INDIA: CHALLENGES, ACCOUNTABILITY, AND THE CALL FOR RESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM

### The Rise of a Chaotic Media Landscape:

- Post-1991 liberalization witnessed an explosion of media offerings, driven by economic growth, deregulation, and the internet.
- This rapid expansion, however, led to a decline in quality and a shift towards sensationalism.
- "Breaking news" culture and the search for villains dominate, particularly in television news, with little regard for accuracy or public service.

### Media's Trial by Fire and the Erosion of Standards:

- The media often acts as judge, jury, and executioner, subjecting individuals to trial by media before due process.
- Social media fuels this fire with unverified "facts" and viral opinions, bypassing editorial scrutiny.
- Print media, though traditionally more analytical, also suffers from the pressure to rush stories and the blurring of lines between fact and speculation.

### Consequences of a Failing Watchdog:

- The media's obsession with the trivial distracts from holding the powerful accountable, leaving the public uninformed and unable to address real issues.
- This failure to fulfill its duty as a watchdog weakens our democracy and allows the government to operate without proper scrutiny.

### Restoring the Fourth Estate's Lost Honor:

- A free press is vital for informed citizenry and government accountability.

### Solutions proposed include:

- Encouraging a culture of fact-checking and accuracy.
- Improving journalistic training and professional standards.
- Diversifying newsrooms and presenting multiple perspectives.
- Fostering an open dialogue between media and consumers.
- Limiting control of media by single entities and promoting independent press.
- Establishing a single oversight body for media companies.

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



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