

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

A FOSSIL FOUND IN NORTHEASTERN CHINA SUGGESTS THAT MAMMALS MAY HAVE PREYED ON DINOSAURS SEVERAL TIMES THEIR SIZE.

NEWS IN GIST: A new study published in Scientific Reports reveals a fossil discovery at "China's Pompeii" dating back 125 million years to the Cretaceous period. The fossil depicts evidence of a mammal and a dinosaur living together, suggesting that mammals may have preyed on dinosaurs much larger than themselves multiple times in history.

HIGHLIGHTS: A remarkable fossil discovery at "China's Pompeii" reveals a *Repenomamus robustus*, a small mammal the size of a house cat, perched on a *Psittacosaurus lujiatunensis*, a medium-sized dog-sized dinosaur. This finding suggests that mammals not only scavenged but also actively preyed on dinosaurs much larger than themselves, challenging the notion of dinosaurs' complete dominance over Earth.

ECOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

- *Mammalian predation on dinosaurs:* The study provides evidence that mammals were not merely scavengers but were capable predators that targeted and hunted dinosaurs. This challenges the traditional view of dinosaurs as dominant and mammals as subordinate.
- *Ecosystem balance:* The presence of mammalian predators actively hunting dinosaurs indicates a more complex

ecosystem than previously thought. It highlights that the balance of power and ecological interactions between different species in ancient ecosystems might have been more intricate than previously assumed.

- *Mammalian adaptations:* The study sheds light on the predatory capabilities of ancient mammals and their adaptations for hunting larger prey. Understanding such adaptations can provide insights into the evolutionary history of mammals and their ecological roles in the past.
- *Impact on dinosaur dominance narrative:* The discovery challenges the notion that dinosaurs solely ruled the Earth during the Cretaceous period. It emphasizes the importance of considering the ecological interactions between different groups of organisms to form a comprehensive understanding of past ecosystems.
- *Influence on modern ecosystems:* Studying ancient ecological interactions can provide valuable lessons for understanding present-day ecosystems and the potential consequences of predator-prey dynamics on biodiversity and ecosystem stability.

MSF CALLS AGAIN ON J&J TO WITHDRAW OR ABANDON EXTENDED PATENTS ON LIFESAVING TB DRUG AS MAIN PATENT EXPIRES IN INDIA

NEWS IN GIST: Johnson & Johnson's 20-year primary patent on the drug-resistant tuberculosis (DR-TB) drug bedaquiline has expired in many countries, including India. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) urges J&J to publicly declare not enforcing any 'secondary' patents on the drug in high TB burden countries. MSF also calls for withdrawal of pending secondary patent applications and non-legal action against generic manufacturers exporting bedaquiline to/from such countries.

HIGHLIGHTS: Johnson & Johnson's primary patent on the drug-resistant tuberculosis (DR-TB) drug bedaquiline has expired in India, allowing multiple manufacturers to produce and sell generic versions. However, J&J still holds secondary patents in 34 high TB burden countries, potentially delaying access to affordable generics by four years in those nations. Médecins Sans Frontières urges J&J to abandon secondary patent enforcement, ensuring broader access to critical treatment and preventing

higher costs that may hinder access for those in need.

BEDAQUILINE:

- Bedaquiline is a crucial drug for treating drug-resistant tuberculosis (DR-TB) in India.
- It's used to combat multidrug-resistant TB strains, a significant health challenge in the country.
- The Indian government's efforts to increase access to bedaquiline have been commendable.
- Bedaquiline availability in India has improved due to generic versions being produced locally.
- Expanded access to this drug is contributing to better DR-TB management and public health outcomes.

IMPACT ON INDIA:

- **Increased Access to Affordable Treatment:** With the primary

patent expired, multiple generic manufacturers can now produce and sell bedaquiline at lower prices. This increased competition is likely to lead to a reduction in the cost of the drug, making it more accessible to a larger number of patients in India.

- **Improved Treatment Availability:** The availability of generic versions of bedaquiline in the Indian market is expected to improve the overall availability of the drug. This is crucial, as DR-TB is a life-threatening condition, and timely access to effective treatment can significantly improve patients' chances of recovery.
- **Public Health Benefits:** Expanding access to affordable

bedaquiline can have broader public health benefits by reducing the transmission of DR-TB in the community. Effective treatment can lead to better outcomes, preventing the spread of drug-resistant strains and lowering the risk of creating more difficult-to-treat cases in the future.

- **Financial Relief for Patients and Healthcare System:** High treatment costs can place a significant financial burden on patients and their families, as well as on India's healthcare system. The availability of more affordable generic versions can alleviate some of these financial pressures and enable better allocation of resources for other essential healthcare needs.

GEOGRAPHY

MILLIONS HIT BY EXTREME HEAT ON 3 CONTINENTS

- A sustained spell of dangerous heat was impacting the lives of millions of people across three continents – Asia, Europe and North America on Wednesday.
- Greece was battling wildfires that have been exacerbated by scorching weather and temperature records have been broken repeatedly in the United States, Europe and China.
- Experts have said climate change, driven by the burning of fossil fuels, has played a key role in worsening destructive weather like the current extreme temperatures.
- As per the experts, the heat waves across Europe and the globe are not one single phenomenon but several acting at the same time.
- The world is on track for its hottest July since measurements began, as per the European Union's climate observatory. The first 15 days of July have been the warmest 15 days on record.

INTERNATIONAL MOON DAY 2023

- International Moon Day is celebrated on July 20 every year to mark the anniversary of the day when humans first landed on the Moon as part of NASA's Apollo 11 mission.
- Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the Moon in a location that they then named Tranquility Base, on July 20, 1969.
- UN's General Assembly declared it as an international day to be observed in its resolution 76/76 on "International cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space" in 2021.
- Apollo 11's primary objective was to complete the goal set by US President John F Kennedy in 1961 by landing humans on the Moon and bringing them back to Earth.
- The Apollo 11 mission launched from Cape Canaveral (Cape Kennedy at the time) on July 16, 1969, carrying Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins and Buzz Aldrin. Two days later came the famous sentence uttered by Armstrong on the Moon, "one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind."
- After landing using the mission's Eagle module, Armstrong and Aldrin spent about 21 hours on the lunar surface, collecting around 21.5 kilograms of lunar material to bring back to Earth.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

WHAT ARE THE TAKEAWAYS FROM THE NATO SUMMIT?

THE GIST

A standout of the Vilnius Summit was the attendance of Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the anticipation around the possibility of extending NATO membership to Ukraine.

Turkey President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's facilitation of Sweden's membership prompts a desire to mend relations with the U.S.

The Vilnius summit minced no words on the challenges and threats emerging from China's stated ambitions and coercive policies.

How did Ukraine's presence influence the Vilnius summit? Why did Turkey lift its opposition against Sweden?

For quite a few years, many questions were asked about the relevance of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). However, the war in Eastern Europe has upended these

narratives and provided a renewed raison d'être not just for strengthening the alliance but its expansion as well. The latest NATO summit held in Vilnius this month underscored both these strategic necessities for the NATO.

How was this summit different?

A standout of the Vilnius Summit was the attendance of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the anticipation around the possibility of extending NATO membership to Ukraine. In this regard, the launch of the NATO-Ukraine Council as a forum for crisis consultations and decision-making indicated that NATO tried to assuage the feelings of Ukraine for not being included in the alliance by creating a mechanism for its wider engagement, support and future inclusion as a full member.

From Ukraine's perspective, the Vilnius summit did usher promise but little immediate gains. All three priorities outlined by

President Zelenskyy — new weapons packages, security guarantees and an invitation to join NATO — went unfulfilled. However, the U.K. did pledge ammunition support to Ukraine. Additionally, garbed in the urgency to help Ukraine, NATO has levelled up its own defences. NATO's new plans involve maintaining a force of 300,000 troops, with air and naval capabilities, while emphasising the importance of a strong industrial base, leading to the endorsement of a Defence Production Action Plan.

What is the significance of the entry of new members?

The inclusion of Finland and approval of Sweden as NATO members indicates a few things. First, it signals that the Alliance continues to practise Article 10 of the Washington Treaty signed in April 1949 which states that member countries can invite other European countries to become members of NATO.

It rests Ukraine's potential membership on fertile grounds and conceptually deters Russia from taking steps against members of NATO. Secondly, Turkey's scaling back of its long-standing opposition to Sweden's inclusion in NATO is a significant shift. While the final approval remains contingent on Turkey's parliament, Turkey President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's facilitation of Sweden's membership prompts a desire to mend relations with the U.S. A better relationship with the U.S would cushion Ankara's faltering economy and provide opportunities to resolve bilaterally contentious issues.

What was the U.S.'s stance?

U.S. President Joe Biden's speech at the summit extended unwavering support to the alliance as well as Ukraine. This is seen as an important assurance as former president Donald Trump's approach to NATO was drastically different from Mr. Biden's. Mr. Trump had considered withdrawing the U.S. from NATO while the current President has pitched his support to Ukraine as a political legacy of his administration, not just in resurrecting trans-Atlantic solidarity but also by drawing a bipartisan consensus on Ukraine domestically.

Who are other threat actors to NATO?

The Vilnius summit minced no words on the challenges and threats emerging from China's stated ambitions and coercive policies. It stated that NATO faces threats from China's malicious hybrid cyber operations, as well as confrontational rhetoric and disinformation, which specifically aim at NATO allies and pose a threat to the security of the Alliance. The NATO summit emphasised that the developments in the Indo-Pacific have become increasingly consequential for Euro-Atlantic security with expanding space for Quad countries, along with other regional countries like New Zealand and South Korea.

But even as the summit was on, Russia launched a drone attack on Kyiv, depicting an undeterred approach to NATO's potential expansion. It is this contestation that is likely to define the future of Eurasian security.

INDIA SUPPORTS UN'S BLACK SEA GRAIN INITIATIVE

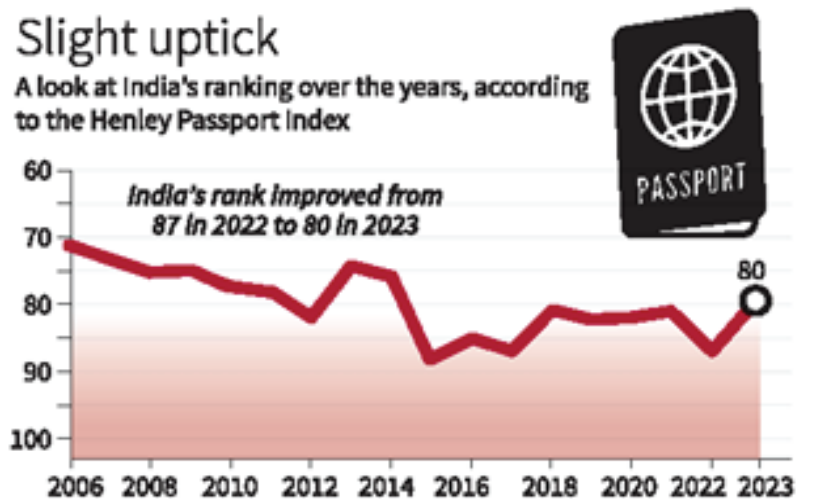
- India has voiced support for the U.N.'s efforts in continuing the Black Sea Grain initiative and expressed hope for an early resolution to the present impasse.
- Russia on Monday terminated the implementation of the Black Sea Initiative — a U.N.-brokered deal that allowed food exports from Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict with Russia — including the withdrawal of Russian security guarantees for navigation in the North-Western part of the Black Sea.
- The U.N. noted that nearly one year into the agreement, more than 32 million tonnes of food commodities have been

exported from three Ukrainian Black Sea ports to 45 countries across three continents.

- The World Food Programme (WFP) has shipped more than 725,000 tonnes to support humanitarian operations — relieving hunger in some of the hardest-hit corners of the world, including Afghanistan, Horn of Africa and Yemen,
- At a time when the production and availability of food are being disrupted by conflict, climate change, energy prices and more, these agreements have helped to reduce food prices by over 23 per cent since March last year.

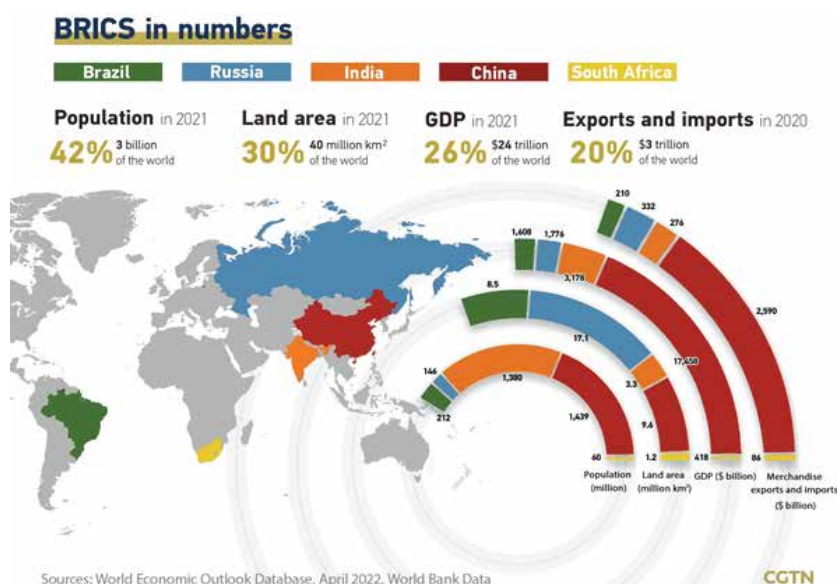
INDIA RANKING ON THE HENLEY PASSPORT INDEX

- India has climbed seven places on the Henley Passport Index, 2023 to the 80th rank from 87 last year.
- However, though the number of countries allowed visa-free access to Indian passport holders remains unchanged.
- The Henley Passport Index is the ranking of all the world's passports according to the number of destinations their holders can access without a prior visa.
- The index includes 199 passports and 227 travel destinations.
- The index is brought out by Henley and Partners.
- Singapore is now officially the most powerful passport in the world, with its citizens able to visit 192 travel destinations out of 227 around the world visa-free.
- Germany, Italy, and Spain occupied the second place. And Japan is at third place.



PUTIN TO SKIP BRICS'S JOHANNESBURG SUMMIT IN PERSON

- Russian President Vladimir Putin will not travel to South Africa to attend the upcoming BRICS summit at Johannesburg. In his place, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov will attend the summit in person.
- Johannesburg summit will be held during August 22-24. The Johannesburg BRICS summit will include discussion on increasing the number of member-states.
- Also, the war in Ukraine is likely to feature prominently as BRICS has emerged as a major forum for dealing with the concerns of the developing economies.
- South Africa is a member of the International Criminal Court (ICC) which issued a warrant against Mr. Putin in March this year. The action of the ICC put South Africa in a difficult position as it is expected to carry out its obligations as an ICC member.



GEOGRAPHY

MANUFACTURING ECOSYSTEM FOR AIRBUS C-295 AIRCRAFT TAKING SHAPE IN INDIA

In September, the Indian Air Force (IAF) will receive the first C-295 transport aircraft. The second C-295 will be delivered in May 2024 followed by seven aircraft in 2024 at the rate of one per month. In September 2021, the Defence Ministry signed a ₹22,000-crore deal with Airbus and Space S.A., Spain, for procurement of 56 C-295MW transport aircraft to replace the Avro aircraft in service with the IAF. As per contract, 16 aircraft would come in fly away condition, manufactured at the Airbus facility in Seville, and 40 would be manufactured in India by Airbus jointly with Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL).

The Final Assembly Line (FAL) at Vadodara in partnership with Tata Advanced Systems Limited (TASL) is being set up and will be ready by mid-2024 and start production by November 2024 with the first aircraft manufactured in India to be delivered in September 2026.

The MCA in Hyderabad is set to start production by next week beginning with the rear-end fuselage, followed by rear fuselage, centre fuselage and so on.

Indigenous radar warning receiver and missile approach warning systems made by Bharat Electronics Limited and counter-measure dispensing system made by Bharat Dynamics

Limited have been certified and installed on the first aircraft.

In all, 14,000 detailed parts would be made in India and roughly around 3,500 parts will be industrialised every year. The project will create 15,000 direct jobs and 10,000 indirect jobs over 10 years.



GOVERNANCE

40% OF DISTRICTS DO NOT HAVE NURSING COLLEGES, HEALTH MINISTRY DATA SHOW

According to data from the Union Health Ministry, 40% of districts in India do not have any nursing colleges. This means that there are millions of people who live in these districts who do not have access to quality nursing education.

The lack of nursing colleges is a major problem in India, as it is leading to a shortage of nurses in the country. Currently, India has only 2.06 nurses for every 1,000 residents, which is well below the World Health Organization's recommended ratio of 4.7

nurses per 1,000 residents.

The shortage of nurses is having a negative impact on the quality of healthcare in India. In many areas, patients have to wait long hours to see a doctor, and they often receive inadequate care. The shortage of nurses is also making it difficult to staff hospitals and other healthcare facilities.

The government has taken some steps to address the shortage of nurses, such as increasing the number of nursing

schools and providing scholarships to students who want to study nursing. However, more needs to be done to ensure that everyone in India has access to quality nursing education.

Challenges that India faces in addressing the shortage of nurses:

- Lack of funding: The government does not allocate enough funding to nursing education. This makes it difficult to build

new nursing schools and train more nurses.

- Lack of awareness: Many people in India are not aware of the importance of nursing education. This makes it difficult to attract students to nursing programs.
- Gender bias: Nursing is still seen as a women's profession in India. This discourages men from pursuing nursing careers.

ECONOMICS

MISSING NUMBERS

News in gist: The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation has constituted a new Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) headed by India's first Chief Statistician, Pronab Sen to advise on official data, including the household surveys carried out by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO).

Background: In November 2019, the government had opted to junk the findings of the last Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) with another quinquennial employment survey, was conducted in 2017-18, citing data quality issues.

The Standing Committee on Statistics (SCoS) formed has a broader mandate

to help design surveys for all types of data, identify data gaps that must be plugged, and conduct pilot surveys for new data sets.

The panel's first tasks will likely pertain to the results of the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey (HCES) by the NSSO over the past year, and it must sensitise users on the methods deployed and interpretational nuances they necessitate. The HCES is critical not only to ascertain people's living standards over time but also the key to revising economic indicators such as the Consumer Price Index and the Gross Domestic Product used to measure the economy's output.

TATA TO INVEST £4 BILLION FOR BUILDING JLR BATTERY CELL GIGAFACTORY IN U.K.

Tata Group, the Indian conglomerate that owns Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), announced on July 19, 2023 that it would invest £4 billion (about \$5.2 billion) to build a battery cell gigafactory in the United Kingdom. The factory, which will be located in Bridgwater, Somerset, is expected to create up to 4,000 jobs and have an initial output of 40 gigawatt hours (GWh). This would make it one of the largest battery cell factories in Europe.

The gigafactory is part of Tata's plan to transition JLR to an all-electric vehicle lineup by 2030. The company has already announced plans to launch a number of new electric models in the coming years, including the Jaguar I-Pace and the Land Rover Defender PHEV.

The UK government has welcomed Tata's investment,

saying that it will "help to power the automotive sector's transition to electric mobility." The government is also providing £100 million in funding to help support the project.

The construction of the gigafactory is expected to begin in 2024, and it is scheduled to be operational by 2025. The factory will use a mix of lithium-ion and solid-state battery technologies.

Tata's investment is a major boost for the UK's electric vehicle industry. It is also a sign that the global automotive industry is shifting towards electric vehicles. As more and more automakers announce plans to electrify their lineups, the demand for battery cells is expected to grow significantly in the coming years.

WHY ARE TOMATO PRICES STILL HIGH?

News in gist: The Reserve Bank of India's latest monthly bulletin has highlighted that the volatility of tomato prices has historically contributed to overall inflation levels in the country.

Tomato production centres

Tomato production in the country is concentrated regionally in the States of Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, Odisha, and Gujarat, which account for close to 50% of total production. There are two major crops of tomato annually — kharif and rabi. The rabi crop hits the market between March and August annually while the kharif crop comes to markets from September. Some regions in Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh's Solan are able to grow tomatoes during the monsoon months, while in the summer, Andhra Pradesh's Madanapalle region alone accounts for tomato cultivation in the entire country. As for tomato production, it peaked in 2019-20 at 21.187 million tonnes (MT) and has been declining since. In 2021-22, it dropped to 20.69MT and 20.62MT in 2022-23.

Reason for fuelling tomato prices:

Dip in overall tomato production this year, with the two key reasons being extreme weather conditions and low commercial realisation of the crop for farmers in the months before June as well as last year.

The heatwaves and high temperatures in April and May along with delayed monsoon showers in southern India and Maharashtra led to pest attacks in tomato crops. As a result, inferior-quality varieties came to markets earlier this year, fetching farmers prices ranging as low as ₹6 to ₹11 per kg between December last year and April 2023. A lot of farmers resorted to selling whatever crop they had at these prices while some abandoned their crops. This led to a crunch in supply. Later, incessant rains in tomato-growing regions further affected the new crop. The fact that July-August is a lean production period for tomato, as it falls between yields, compounded the problem. Reports show that many farmers in the Kolar district of Karnataka,

which is usually responsible for sizeable tomato supplies, shifted to beans owing to the higher prices it fetched last year.

While the weightage of the food and beverages component in the combined CPI is 45.86, vegetables account for a relatively small part of this at 6.04, and the TOP commodities are even lesser at 2.20. Even with such a low weightage, the contribution of TOP to the overall CPI has been quite volatile. In June 2022, at 8.9%, tomato had the largest contribution among 299 commodities in the CPI basket

Solutions proposed

Setting up of an organised value chain involves a market-focussed collaboration of a set of entities working in

tandem to produce, process and market products and services in an effective and efficient manner.

Building more processing units and linking tomato value chains to processing of at least 10% of tomato production into tomato paste and puree during peak seasons, and using them in the lean season when fresh tomato prices spike can be a solution.

Eliminating middlemen and encouraging Farmer Producers Organisations to sell produce directly, as well as amending rules of Agricultural Produce Market Committees to reduce commission and other fees.

POLITY

SC AGREES TO LIST PLEAS TO CRIMINALISE MARITAL RAPE BEFORE 3-JUDGE BENCH

Exception Two to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code decriminalises marital rape; the petitions are largely triggered by decisions from Karnataka and Delhi High Courts, requiring an authoritative pronouncement from the Supreme Court

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on Wednesday agreed to list early a series of petitions seeking the criminalisation of marital rape.

Senior advocate Indira Jaising and advocate Karuna Nundy jointly mentioned the case for urgent listing before the Bench led by the Chief Justice.

Ms. Nundy said that Ms. Jaising would address the court on the issues in law. Ms. Jaising said her petition also concerned child abuse, and even sought a hearing after the ongoing Constitution Bench session.

The court said the case would require a three-judge Bench, and agreed to list it early.

In an earlier hearing, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the Union government, had said the case had not only legal ramifications but widespread social impact.

The petitions are largely triggered by decisions from the Karnataka and Delhi High Courts, requiring an authoritative pronouncement from the apex court.

The Karnataka High Court had held that a husband was liable to be charged for rape if he had forcible sex with his wife. The Karnataka government had supported the High Court judgment in an affidavit in the apex court subsequently.

Exception Two to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) decriminalises marital rape and holds that sexual intercourse by a man with his own wife, who is not under 18 years of age, without her consent is not rape.

“A man is a man; an act is an act; rape is a rape, be it performed by a man the ‘husband’ on the woman ‘wife’,” the

Karnataka High Court had observed in its decision, saying an accused should be brought to trial regardless of the immunity in the penal code.

A Division Bench of the Delhi High Court had, however, in May 2022, delivered a split verdict in a separate case on the identical issue. Justice Rajiv Shakdher, who headed the two-judge Bench, had struck down as unconstitutional the Exception Two to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC).

Split verdict in Delhi HC

However, Justice C. Hari Shankar, the associate judge on the High Court Bench, had rejected the plea to criminalise marital rape, noting that any change in the law should be carried out by the legislature since the issue required consideration of various aspects, including social, cultural, and legal.

Mr. Mehta had asked Chief Justice Chandrachud whether the apex court should wait till a three-judge Bench of the Delhi High Court delivered its decision in the case. But the CJI said the apex court already had the benefit of the crystallised views of two judges and would go forward and hear the petitions.

The Karnataka government has referred to the report of the Justice J.S. Verma Committee of 2013, which had recommended the removal of the exception for marital rape and proposed that the law should specify that “marital or other relationship between the perpetrator or victim is not a valid defence against the crimes of rape or sexual violation”.

The petitions in the issue, including one by activist Ruth Manorama, had argued that the Exception undermined women’s consent to sex and violated bodily integrity, autonomy and dignity.

The petitions had argued that the Exception undermined women’s consent to sex and violated bodily integrity, autonomy and dignity

CENTRE AMENDS RULES, CAN ACT AGAINST IAS, IPS, IFOS PENSIONERS ON ITS OWN

A source in the DoPT said this means that the Centre may not have to wait for a reference from the state government to act

against a pensioner found guilty of grave misconduct or convicted of a serious crime by a Court.

The central government has amended rules relating to retirement benefits of IAS, IPS (Indian Police Service) and IFoS (Indian Forest Service) pensioners empowering itself to act against them and withhold or withdraw their pension even without a reference from the state government if they are found guilty of grave misconduct or are convicted of a serious crime.

In a July 6 notification on the All India Services (Death-cum-Retirement Benefits) Amendment Rules, 2023, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) said a 'grave misconduct' includes communication or disclosure of any document or information mentioned in the Official Secrets Act and a 'serious crime' includes any crime involving an offence under the Official Secrets Act.

Sources in the government pointed to an earlier rule 3(3) in the All India Services (Death-cum-Retirement Benefits) Rules, 1958, which stated that the Central government may withhold or withdraw pension or any part of it "on a reference from the State Government concerned, if after retirement a pensioner is convicted". The amended rules have added "or otherwise" after "...the State Government concerned".

A source in the DoPT said this means that the Centre may not have to wait for a reference from the state government to act against a pensioner found guilty of grave misconduct or convicted of a serious crime by a Court.

A source in a state government said if the state government concerned does not send such references in such cases, the central government may initiate a process of action.

The rationale behind this amendment was that sometimes

state governments concerned do not send a reference for action against retired officials even after conviction by courts of law. On applicability of the Centre's rules related to deputation of All India Services officials also, the Central and West Bengal governments were at loggerheads two years ago and prior to that. Considering the nature of All India Services, the Central government is often helpless in taking action against such officers without a reference from state governments.

The amended rules reiterate that the decision of the Central Government on withholding or withdrawing the pension "shall be final".

A new rule states that no member of a service who has worked in any Intelligence or security-related organisation "shall, without prior clearance from the Head of such Organisation, make any publication after retirement of any material" relating to domain of the organisation, including any reference or information about any personnel and his designation, and expertise or knowledge gained by virtue of working in that organisation; and sensitive information. "This means that expressing and writing in the media and writing books which disclose sensitive information will result in action against officials concerned," the source in DoPT said. A similar amendment was made in 2021 in the respective pension rules for Central Civil Services.

Officers who served with intelligence or security-related organisations will have to give an undertaking to abide by new rules and any failure to observe such an undertaking on the part of a retired member of services "shall be treated as grave misconduct."

RAJASTHAN MINIMUM INCOME BILL: PROVISIONS, WHAT MAKES IT UNIQUE

Under the Bill, all families of the state get guaranteed employment of 125 days every year, while the aged, disabled, widows, and single women get a minimum pension of Rs 1,000 per month. Importantly, the pension will be increased at the rate of 15 per cent each year.

Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot. In his budget speech this year, Chief Minister Gehlot had increased the employment guarantee per family from 100 days to 125 days for his urban employment scheme. (Express File Photo by Rohit Jain Paras)

The Ashok Gehlot government on Tuesday tabled the Rajasthan Minimum Guaranteed Income Bill, 2023, which effectively seeks to cover the entire adult population of the state with guaranteed wages or pension.

What is the Bill?

Under the Bill, all families of the state get guaranteed employment of 125 days every year, while the aged, disabled, widows, and single women get a minimum pension of Rs 1,000 per month. Importantly, the pension will be increased at the rate of 15 per cent each year.

The Bill has three broad categories: right to minimum guaranteed income, right to guaranteed employment, and right to guaranteed social security pension.

The government anticipates an additional expenditure of Rs 2,500 crore per year for this scheme, which may increase with

time.

What are its major provisions?

Minimum guaranteed income: Each adult citizen of the state has been guaranteed a minimum income for 125 days a year through the Rajasthan government's flagship Indira Gandhi Shabri Rozgar Guarantee Yojana for urban areas, and through Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in rural areas.

In his budget speech this year, Chief Minister Gehlot had increased the employment guarantee per family from 100 days to 125 days for his urban employment scheme. The state will supplement the MGNREGA's 100 days by providing jobs for an additional 25 days in rural areas.

Next, the government will provide eligible categories with a minimum pension of Rs 1,000.

Guaranteed employment: The right to employment states that post the work in urban or rural employment schemes, the minimum wages should be paid "weekly or in any case not later than a fortnight."

The state will designate a program officer — not below the rank of Block Development Officer in rural areas and an Executive Officer of the local body in urban areas — to implement the Act. Among other things, the Program Officer shall ensure that the work site is within a radius of five kilometres of

where the job card is registered in both rural and urban areas.

If the Program Officer fails to provide employment within 15 days from the receipt of the application, the applicant shall be entitled to an unemployment allowance on a weekly basis “and in any case not later than a fortnight.”

Guaranteed social security pension: Every person falling in the category of old age/specially abled/widow/single woman with prescribed eligibility shall be entitled to a pension. It will increase over the base rate in two instalments — 5 per cent in July and 10 per cent in January of each financial year 24 starting 2024-2025.

Why the Bill?

While announcing the scheme in his budget speech earlier this year, CM Gehlot had said that Mahatma Gandhi’s message, “The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members”, was a focal point of all his government’s policies.

Last week, at an interaction with social security pension beneficiaries, the CM had said, “When the government gives you Rs 1,000, it is not a favour. The one who rules has a moral

responsibility that everyone gets justice. And we are bringing in a law so that no one can stop the pension.”

The Bill is part of a bouquet of schemes and measures undertaken by his government to provide relief from inflation with an eye on the polls later this year.

How have social activists reacted?

Social activist Nikhil Dey of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS), which had shared a draft of the Bill with the state government, said, “The Bill contains many firsts in the country. It is a very welcome step. We’re really happy that it has come, especially since it has all the essentials.”

He said that the Bill’s approach, guaranteeing minimum employment and pensions by law, distinguishes it from the cash transfer schemes that various other states have.

While the civil society network Soochna Evum Rozgaar Adhikar Abhiyan had submitted a more detailed draft to the government, Dey said that parts which have been skipped can still be included in the rules brought under the Act.

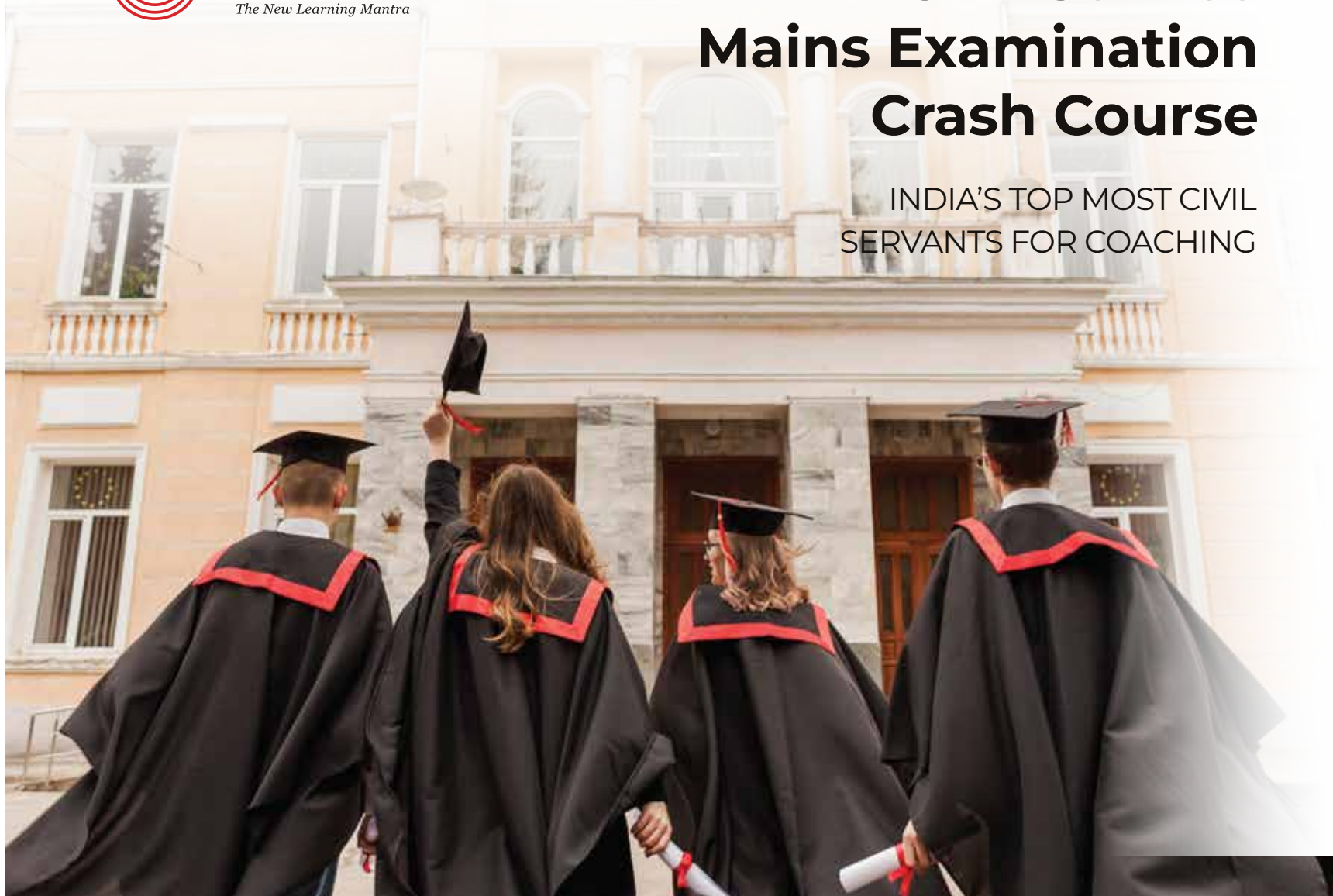
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