

## ● POLITY

## ● ECONOMICS

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## INDIAN POLITY

## SC declines to issue order on booth-wise voter data

**CONTEXT:** The Supreme Court declined to issue an interim order requiring the Election Commission to upload authenticated, scanned copies of Form 17C detailing booth-wise vote counts after each polling phase in the Lok Sabha election.

**BACKGROUND:** A Vacation Bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and Satish Chandra Sharma deferred an application by the NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) for interim relief on publishing voter turnout data during the ongoing general election, citing the need to avoid diverting the Election Commission's attention and noting that the request is part of a pending petition since 2019.



Everyone is for a fair and free election. The Supreme Court cannot interrupt the conduct of elections. It can only enhance the conduct of the polls... We have to be conscious of the ground reality

**JUSTICE DIPANKAR DATTA**



### News Highlight - Legal Dispute Over Voter Turnout Data and Election Commission's Transparency

- **EC's Defence:** Senior advocate Maninder Singh claims ADR's application is unfounded, aiming to discredit the Election Commission (EC).
- **ADR's Allegations:** ADR argues a significant delay and unusual revision in voter turnout data raised public suspicion about its accuracy.
- **Legal Counterpoint:** Singhvi counters that the April 26 judgment barely mentioned Form 17C, contrary to Singh's claims of thorough discussion.
- **EC's Transparency Efforts:** EC emphasizes extensive scrutiny in the election process with over 87,000 polling agents monitoring, ensuring accuracy.
- **ADR's Justification:** Senior advocate Dave asserts ADR's intentions were bona fide, aiming to uphold public trust, not undermine the EC.
- **Judicial Concerns:** Justice Datta notes the EC's transparency initiative lacks statutory mandate, questioning the intent behind public interest litigations.

## INDIAN POLITY

## Will challenge high court order on OBC certificates: MAMATA

**CONTEXT:** West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee announced plans to challenge the Calcutta High Court's cancellation of all OBC certificates issued since 2010 in a higher court after summer vacation.

**BACKGROUND:** At an election rally in Sagar, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee announced that the State government would appeal a Calcutta High Court ruling, which recently struck down the OBC status of several classes granted since 2010, after the summer vacation. The ruling has sparked political debate amid the ongoing Lok Sabha elections.



### Political Fallout from Calcutta High Court's OBC Status Ruling

- **Court Ruling:** The Calcutta High Court deemed the OBC status of several classes in West Bengal, granted since 2010, illegal.
- **Muslim Classes Affected:** The court observed the inclusion of 77 Muslim classes as OBCs was politically motivated to treat them as a vote bank.
- **Political Reaction:** Ms. Banerjee accused some judges of following BJP and CPI(M) orders, urging voters to support TMC and the INDIA bloc.
- **UCC Concerns:** Banerjee accused BJP of intending to implement the Uniform Civil Code to undermine SC and ST community rights.
- **Voter Appeal:** She urged Haj pilgrims' families to vote wisely, warning UCC and CAA could disenfranchise citizens.
- **Accusations Against BJP:** Banerjee claimed BJP was running misleading advertisements to influence the electorate.

### Elevation of NCBC to Constitutional Status and Its Implications

- **Supreme Court Directive:** The Supreme Court in the Indira Sawhney case directed the establishment of the NCBC as a statutory body.
- **1993 Law:** A law was passed in 1993 to set up the NCBC to examine cases for inclusion in the BC lists.
- **Proposed Amendment:** The amendment aims to elevate NCBC's status from a statutory body to a constitutional one, like the commissions for SCs and STs.
- **Presidential Clause:** The 123rd Amendment allows the President to specify socially and educationally backward classes after consulting the State Governor.
- **Centralization Fears:** This clause has sparked fears of the Centre taking over the inclusion and exclusion of communities from the 'Backward Classes' list.

- **Foreign Exchange Reserves:** As of March 29, foreign exchange reserves increased by \$67.1 billion over 12 months to \$645.58 billion.
- **Contingent Risk Buffer:** The RBI raised provisioning under the CRB to 6.5% of its balance sheet, signalling confidence in the domestic economy.
- **Capital Spending Opportunity:** The surplus transfer from the RBI could allow the new government to boost capital spending amid weak private consumption.
- **Fiscal Consolidation:** Using surplus funds to bridge the fiscal gap would strengthen government finances and reassure investors of fiscal commitment.

### RBI Surplus and Economic Capital Framework

- **Economic Capital Framework (ECF):** The RBI maintains a Contingent Risk Buffer (CRB) between 5.5% and 6.5% of its balance sheet, per the Bimal Jalan committee.
- **Surplus Calculation:** The surplus, based on the ECF, is the excess income over expenditure, transferred to the government as dividends.
- **Risk Provisions:** The CRB includes provisions for monetary, financial stability, credit, and operational risks.
- **Transfer Mechanism:** Surplus income is transferred to the government under Section 47 of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934.
- **Foreign Exchange Reserves:** As of March 2024, the RBI's foreign exchange reserves totalled USD 646 billion, with USD 409 billion in top-rated sovereign securities.

## ECONOMICS

### The RBI's transfer of surplus should help next government start confidently

**CONTEXT:** The RBI's board decision to transfer a record ₹2.11 lakh crore surplus to the Union Government for 2023-24 will bolster the new government's July Budget.

**BACKGROUND:** The Reserve Bank of India's board has decided to transfer a record surplus of nearly ₹2.11 lakh crore to the Union Government for the fiscal year 2023-24. This substantial increase from the previous year's payout is expected to provide significant fiscal flexibility to the new government during the upcoming Budget presentation in July, amid global economic uncertainties and tightening policies by central banks worldwide.



Credit and Source: Business Standards

### RBI's Surplus and Economic Resilience

- **Increased Surplus:** The RBI's 2023-24 balance sheet is expected to show substantial gains from higher interest income and foreign exchange market interventions.

## ECOLOGY/ GEOGRAPHY

### India must continue to oppose unregulated tourism in the antarctica

**CONTEXT:** Representatives from more than 60 countries have gathered in Kochi, Kerala, for the 46th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM), scheduled to continue until the end of the month.

**BACKGROUND:** Delegates from more than 60 countries are currently gathered in Kochi, Kerala for the 46th Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting (ATCM), scheduled to continue until the end of the month. This annual meeting includes Consultative Parties, countries with voting rights on Antarctic management, and non-voting observer countries. One key agenda item this year is the proposal for a regulatory framework to govern tourism in Antarctica, advocated by a group of 'like-minded' countries including India.

### Tourism and Environmental Concerns in Antarctica

- **Unique Attraction:** Antarctica's vast unspoiled ice and geographical isolation make it highly attractive to wealthy travellers seeking exotic experiences.
- **Rising Tourism:** The number of tourists has dramatically increased from 8,000 in 1993 to 105,000 in 2022, surpassing the number of scientists present.

- **Environmental Concerns:** Increased tourism brings concerns about pollution, accidents, and threats to biodiversity in this pristine environment.
- **Geopolitical Considerations:** Nations are anxious about potential changes to the treaty that could affect territorial claims and future tourism opportunities.

### Indian Antarctic Act, 2022

- **Objectives:** The Indian Antarctic Act, 2022, aims to protect the Antarctic environment, prevent militarization, illegal activities, and nuclear tests.
- **Policy Framework:** It provides a comprehensive legal framework for India's Antarctic activities, ensuring efficient operations and sustainable development.
- **Establishment of Authority:** The act proposes the creation of the Indian Antarctic Authority (IAA) under the Ministry of Earth Sciences to oversee Antarctic programs.
- **Role of IAA:** The IAA will facilitate research, enforce environmental protection, and ensure compliance with international standards by Indian citizens involved in Antarctic activities.
- **International Collaboration:** Implementation of the act will enhance India's visibility, credibility, and collaboration in Polar governance and scientific endeavours.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### The missing links in IMEC, as shown by the gaza war

**CONTEXT:** On May 13, 2024, India and Iran signed a 10-year bilateral contract for the operation of Chabahar Port, emphasizing its importance as a crucial economic route to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

**BACKGROUND:** The Chabahar Port, beyond being a mere bridge between India and Iran, serves as a crucial economic corridor linking India to Afghanistan and Central Asian nations. Meanwhile, the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC), launched during the G-20 summit in New Delhi on September 9, 2023, under the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGII), seeks to bolster economic integration and connectivity between Asia, the Arabian Gulf, and Europe.



Credit: Hindu

### India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC): Enhancing Regional Connectivity

- **Corridor Structure:** The IMEC consists of two corridors — an east corridor connecting India to the Arabian Gulf and a northern corridor connecting the Arabian Gulf to Europe.
- **Infrastructure Components:** It includes maritime, road, and railway networks, alongside electricity and digital connectivity cables, and a pipeline for clean hydrogen export.
- **Geographical Coverage:** The corridor spans 4,800 kilometres from Indian ports like Kandla, Mumbai, and Mundra to ports in the UAE, Israel, and Europe, including Marseille, Messina, and Piraeus.
- **Objectives:** IMEC aims to secure regional supply chains, increase trade accessibility, and reduce transit time and costs between India and Europe by 40% and 30%, respectively.
- **Strategic Importance:** It is viewed as a counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the region and enjoys the support of major stakeholders like the United States.

### Impact of Gaza War on IMEC and Regional Trade

- **Stalled Project Due to Gaza War:** The IMEC project, announced in September, was halted after the outbreak of the Gaza war on October 7.
- **Concerns Acknowledged by S. Jaishankar:** External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar expressed concerns over the delay caused by the West Asia situation and the need to readjust expectations.
- **Missing Links Exposed:** The Gaza war revealed vulnerabilities in the IMEC, including ship blockades by Yemen's Houthis in the Red Sea and threats to shipping routes via the Strait of Hormuz.
- **Security Concerns and Indian Navy's Role:** Iran's repeated threats to close the Strait of Hormuz led to security concerns, with the Indian Navy launching Operation Sankalp to protect Indian-flagged ships.
- **Impact on Israeli Ports and Indian Investments:** Israeli ports like Eilat and Haifa suffered losses due to disrupted trade, affecting India's plans for expanding Haifa port after the Adani Group's purchase.

### Strategic Alternatives for IMEC Expansion

- **Strategic Location of UAE Ports:** The IMEC designates UAE ports like Fujairah and Jebel Ali for eastern offload points, but they are vulnerable within the Persian Gulf.
- **Oman's Strategic Advantage:** Oman provides a safer alternative with ports opening into the Arabian Sea, offering direct links to India and historical trade relations through dhows.
- **Political and Regional Acceptance:** Oman enjoys good political relations and is a gateway to West Asia, maintaining diplomatic ties with all stakeholders including Israel.
- **Western Route via Egypt:** Instead of Israeli ports, the IMEC should extend through Egypt to Mediterranean ports, ensuring a safe and direct sea route to Europe.



"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."

—Benjamin Franklin

## INTERNAL SECURITY

## Integration of CAPFs will save money, bring homogeneity

**CONTEXT:** National Security Adviser Ajit Doval proposed integrating Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) similar to joint theatre commands in the armed forces.

**BACKGROUND:** The National Security Adviser, speaking at the investiture ceremony of the Border Security Force (BSF), emphasized the need for "jointness" in Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), stating it's crucial for both cost-efficiency and uniformity in deployment during both wartime and peacetime. He clarified that his proposal for integration was as a police officer, not in his role as NSA.



### Enhancing Jointness in India's CAPFs

- **Need for Interoperability:** Emphasizes jointness in Central Police Organisations (CPOs) to enhance effectiveness in roles like procurement, communication, training, and standardisation.
- **Comparison with Defence Forces:** Draws parallels with defence forces' joint theatre commands, highlighting challenges and benefits of integrating CAPFs.
- **Flexibility in Deployment:** Advocates for flexibility in deploying CAPFs based on availability and interchangeability of personnel, equipment, and communication devices.
- **Example of Border Deployment:** Illustrates how different CAPFs can collaborate seamlessly, suggesting that operational readiness and training are consistent.
- **Internal Security Considerations:** Proposes ideas for utilizing CAPFs in major internal security incidents, exploring the potential benefits of joint deployments.

## GEOGRAPHY

## Cyclone remal likely to make landfall near bengal tomorrow

**CONTEXT:** Cyclonic storm "Remal", originating in the central Bay of Bengal, is forecasted to strengthen into a severe cyclonic storm by Saturday.

**BACKGROUND:** According to the latest update from the India Meteorological Department (IMD), a cyclonic storm is expected to make landfall between Sagar Island (West Bengal) and Khepupara (Bangladesh) on Sunday evening with wind speeds of 110-120 kmph, gusting up to 135 kmph. The Indian Coast Guard has intensified monitoring and pre-emptive measures to mitigate potential loss of life and property.



### Coast Guard and Stakeholder Coordination in Response to Cyclonic Storm

- **Coordination Efforts:** The Coast Guard is coordinating with State administrations and stakeholders to respond to potential contingencies from the cyclonic storm.
- **Safety of Maritime Traffic:** Remote operating stations at Haldia and Paradip are broadcasting regular VHF alerts to merchant mariners for safety precautions.
- **Surveillance and Assistance:** Coast Guard ships and aircraft are conducting surveillance along the cyclonic storm's path to provide timely assistance.
- **International Cooperation:** The Coast Guard has notified the Bangladesh Coast Guard to prepare and disseminate alerts to fishermen and merchant vessels.

### Cyclone Remal

- **Origin and Name:** The tropical cyclone named 'Remal,' meaning 'sand' in Arabic, was named by Oman.
- **Current Position:** The depression is currently located over the central Bay of Bengal, 660 km south-southeast of Sagar Island.
- **Intensification and Path:** IMD forecasts the depression to intensify into a cyclonic storm by May 25 morning. It is expected to cross the West Bengal and Bangladesh coasts between Sagar Island and Khepupara by midnight on May 26.

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- **Severity:** The cyclonic storm is predicted to be severe, posing potential risks to the affected regions.
- **Pre-monsoon Season:** 'Remal' marks the first cyclone of the 2024 pre-monsoon season in the region.

**ECONOMICS**

## Oil poses risk, farm sector to firewall

**CONTEXT:** The Finance Ministry has identified geopolitical tensions and volatile global commodity prices, particularly petroleum products, as significant challenges to the economy.

### Buffered against risks

Positive signs for farm sector from normal monsoon should firewall India against volatile global commodity prices: FinMin

- Ministry sees future inflation path shaped by several elements, including upcoming rabi harvest
- Asserts the economy closed FY24 'strongly' with growth surpassing 'market expectations'



- Says investment activity remains expansive, sees resurgence in rural consumption demand

**BACKGROUND:** The Finance Ministry has identified geopolitical tensions and volatile global commodity prices, particularly in petroleum products, as significant challenges to India's economy. However, it remains optimistic about the farm sector due to expectations of a normal monsoon, which could mitigate these challenges and help ease food prices and retail inflation.

### India's Economic Review: Inflation, Growth, and Rural Demand

- **Retail Inflation Trends:** Retail inflation dropped to an 11-month low of 4.83% in April, but food inflation rose to 8.7%, the highest in four months.
- **Factors Shaping Inflation:** The future inflation path will be influenced by elements such as the upcoming rabi harvest, expected to lower wheat and chana prices, and a predicted normal monsoon enhancing food production.
- **Economic Growth and Momentum:** The Indian economy closed FY24 with growth surpassing market expectations, with early indicators pointing to continued momentum in Q1 of the current year.
- **Macro-Economic Buffers:** Macro-economic buffers developed post-COVID are enabling the economy to navigate geopolitical challenges and volatile global commodity prices smoothly.
- **Consumption and Demand Trends:** Investment activity remains expansive, with consumption driven by growth in urban and a resurgence in rural demand, where rural FMCG demand growth outpaced urban growth in Q1 2024.



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## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## ICJ orders israel to 'Halt' rafah offensive

**CONTEXT:** The top UN court issued a landmark ruling on Friday, ordering Israel to cease military operations in Rafah "immediately," amid mounting international pressure during the Gaza war.

**BACKGROUND:** The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that Israel must keep the Rafah crossing open for humanitarian aid and urged the unconditional release of hostages taken by Hamas during an assault on October 7. ICJ rulings are binding but enforcement is challenging, as seen with previous orders to Russia over Ukraine.



### ICJ Ruling and International Reactions to South Africa's Case Against Israel

- **ICJ Provisional Measures:** The International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued strong provisional measures urging a cessation of Israel's Gaza offensive.
- **ICC Prosecution:** The International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor seeks arrest warrants for top Israeli and Hamas leaders for war crimes.
- **South Africa's Allegations:** South Africa accuses Israel of breaching the UN Genocide Convention with its actions in Gaza.
- **Humanitarian Crisis:** South Africa argues for emergency measures due to the dire humanitarian situation in Gaza, citing ongoing genocidal acts.
- **ICJ Response:** The ICJ describes the humanitarian situation as disastrous and criticizes Israel's evacuation efforts as insufficient.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## Myanmar junta revives plans for its china-backed mega-dam project

**CONTEXT:** Myanmar's military regime has revived plans for a \$3.6 billion Chinese-backed dam in the north, halted over a decade ago due to public protests.

**BACKGROUND:** The 6,000-megawatt Myitsone dam project in northern Kachin state was halted in 2011 by a previous junta. Critics argued that the dam, planned on the Ayeyarwady river and designed to export 90% of its electricity to China, would inflict severe environmental harm with minimal national benefits.

### Myanmar's Hydropower Project and Its Implications

- **New Leading Group:** Myanmar's junta has formed a new "leading group" for a controversial hydropower project, involving 11 members including the Deputy Minister for Electricity.
- **Partnership with SPIC:** The group will collaborate with China's State Power Investment Corporation (SPIC) on research, technical solutions, and public relations for the project.
- **Environmental Concerns:** A 2015 Myanmar government environmental assessment warned against the dam, citing potential wide-scale alterations to river flow.
- **Population Impact:** Approximately 34 million people in Myanmar live in the Ayeyarwady basin, where the dam is planned, comprising two-thirds of the country's population.
- **Geopolitical and Economic Significance:** Myanmar's involvement in China's Belt and Road Initiative underscores its strategic importance in the region's infrastructure development plans.

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