



● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

Americans vote in close race for presidency

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



CONTEXT: Millions of Americans headed to the polls on Tuesday, to vote for their new President, as well as choose candidates in 'down-ballot' races, including contests that will decide control of the U.S. Congress.

Ms. Harris wrapped up her campaign in Philadelphia where America's 'founding fathers' signed the Declaration of Independence. Mr. Trump ended his campaign in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The two candidates have had contrasting tones in their closing speeches, with Ms. Harris striking a more optimistic note and stepping back from a direct focus on

Mr. Trump, marking a shift from what she had done even days earlier. Mr. Trump stuck to his usual subjects, including illegal immigration. Among the celebrities who joined Ms. Harris in Philadelphia were singer Lady Gaga and TV host Oprah Winfrey.

Core ballot issue

Abortion and women's reproductive rights have become a core ballot issue, with polling data showing women of all ages gravitating more towards Ms. Harris (and, for other reasons, men towards Mr. Trump). The FBI has set a national command post to monitor election-related threats (not new or specific to this year). At his final rally, the former President leaned into his usual messages about illegal migrants, the promise of a better economy under him and attacking Democrats. Mr. Trump promised to end inflation, including by increasing production of oil and gas domestically.

'Law validity can't be challenged for Basic Structure's violation'

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court held that the validity of a law cannot be challenged for violating the Basic Structure of the Constitution. A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India, while upholding the State's power to legislate to regulate madrasas, was responding to whether the Basic Structure doctrine can be applied to invalidate an ordinary legislation. The Chief Justice reasoned allowing courts to strike down legislation for violation of "undefined concepts" such as democracy, federalism and secularism that makes up the Basic Structure doctrine will introduce an element of uncertainty in our constitutional adjudication. The Allahabad High Court finding that the Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Education Board Act, 2004 had disregarded secularism must be traced to specific constitutional provisions dealing with the Basic Structure concept.

Raj Narain case

Chief Justice Chandrachud quoted the various judges on the Bench in the Indira Nehru Gandhi versus Raj Narain case, widely considered as the case which led to the National Emergency in 1975. The top court had used the Basic Structure doctrine, evolved in the 1973 Kesavananda Bharati case, for the first time in the Raj Narain case to strike down a Constitutional amendment. The judges on the Raj Narain Bench had differentiated between an ordinary Statute and a Constitu-

tional Amendment. He referred to the observation made by former Chief Justice A.N. Ray that applying the Basic Structure doctrine to test the validity of a Statute would amount to “rewriting the Constitution”.

SC upholds U.P. Madrasa Act

POLITY & GOVERNANCE



CONTEXT: The Supreme Court on Tuesday partially upheld the constitutional validity of the Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Education Board Act, 2004 that confirm the State to regulate madrasa education to ensure standards of excellence.

A three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud declared the provisions of the 2004 Act pertaining to higher education at the levels of Kamil (Undergraduate Studies) and Fazil (Postgraduate Studies) unconstitutional in direct conflict with the provisions of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956.

The provisions of the Uttar Pradesh Madrasa Education Board Act, 2004 conflicted with the Centre’s exclusive domain under Entry 66 of the Union List in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution. Entry 66 conferred the Union the authority to make laws to determine and regulate the standards of higher education.

Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud noted the UP Madrasa Education Board Act, 2004, except at the Kamil and Fazil levels, as consistent with the positive obligation of the State to ensure that students studying in recognised madrasas attain a minimum level of competency that allows them to effectively participate in society and earn a living. The UP Madrasa Education Board Act, 2004 allowed the Board to prescribe the curriculum, qualification of teachers and standards of infrastructure, did not directly interfere with the day-to-day administration of recognised madrasas.

‘State interest’

The court, while noting that minorities had a right under Article 30 of the Constitution to establish and administer madrasas to impart religious or secular education, said the right was “not absolute”. The State has an interest in maintaining the standards of education in minority institutions and may impose regulational conditions for grant of aid and recognition. The Constitutional scheme allows the State to strike a balance between ensuring the standard of excellence and preserving the right of the minorities to establish and administer its educational institutions.

The unanimous judgment noted ‘education’ in Entry 25 of the Concurrent List must be given a wide meaning. Though recognised madrasas imparted religious instruction, their primary aim was education, bringing them within the ambit of Entry 25. Chief Justice explained that Article 21A must be read consistently with the rights of religious and linguistic minorities to establish and administer educational institutions of their choice. The Madrasa Board under the Act, with the approval of the State government, was free to enact regulations “to ensure that religious minority institutions impart secular education of a requisite standard without destroying the minority character”.



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I & B Ministry mulls over treating Wikipedia as content publisher

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: The Union Ministry of Information & Broadcasting has sent a missive to the Wikimedia Foundation, parent body of online encyclopedia Wikipedia, asking why it should not be treated as a publisher instead of an intermediary, and therefore directly liable for legal challenges against its content. Asian News International (ANI) sues the Wikimedia Foundation over the Wikipedia entry on the news agency.

The letter marks a significant step in the government's growing assertiveness over international websites and platforms. The letter comes shortly after the Delhi High Court ordered the Wikimedia Foundation to unmask the identities of the individual people who made edits to ANI's Wikipedia page. The news agency sued after being described on its Wikipedia page as close to government interests. According to the latest version of the page over which ANI has approached the High Court, the agency has been "accused of amplifying a vast network of fake news websites spreading pro-government and anti-Pakistan propaganda". The Foundation has agreed to provide details of the individuals who added the first versions of these descriptions under sealed cover to the High Court.

Many social media and content platforms have acceded to the Indian government's stringent new rules, Wikipedia's unique position as a non-profit which has never interfered in users' editing decisions complicates the possible outcomes of the lawsuit and the I&B Ministry's letter.

Whoever wins in U.S., bilateral ties and Quad will grow, says Jaishankar

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



CONTEXT: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar expressed confidence of a thriving India-U.S. relationship and the deeper engagement with the Quad, irrespective of the outcome of the U.S. presidential elections, as Americans began voting for the 47th U.S. President. Briefing the media in Canberra about India-Australia bilateral talks, along with Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, Mr. Jaishankar slammed Canada over the violence outside an Indian consular camp at a Brampton temple community centre over the weekend, as well as for giving space to "extremist voices", while side-stepping a question about vandalism at Indian centres and temples in Australia.

Both Foreign Ministers were asked about the recent escalation in India-Canada tensions, particularly after the incident on Sunday when pro-Khalistan activists attacked a Brampton temple compound outside Toronto where Indian Consular officials were holding a camp to help Indian NRIs and PIOs with their documents. The attack led to violent clashes, despite the Indian High Commission requesting extra security from local authorities. Mr. Jaishankar called the attack "deeply concerning", but did not respond to a question about attacks on two temples in Canberra on October 26, in which the temple premises were vandalised and burgled, with donation boxes being taken away by masked men.

Buddhism can teach how to counter sectarianism: Murmu

ART & CULTURE



CONTEXT: President Droupadi Murmu inaugurated the first Asian Buddhist Summit organised by the Union Culture Ministry, in collaboration with the International Buddhist Confederation in New Delhi.

The Indian Government had granted classical language status to Pali and Prakrit that would now receive financial support, which will contribute significantly to the preservation of their literary treasures and to their revitalisation.

'Strengthening bonds'

Union Culture Minister Gajendra

Singh Shekhawat reaffirmed its commitment to strengthening the "Dhamma Setu", the Buddhist bridge connecting Asian nations; preserving and developing Buddhist heritage sites; promoting Buddhist and Pali studies and research; supporting international Buddhist cultural exchange; and facilitating Buddhist pilgrimage circuits.

This summit aims to foster Buddhist diplomatic relations, address contemporary social issues through Buddhist perspectives, strengthen cultural bonds between Buddhist nations, promote Buddhist tourism and pilgrimage, and preserve ancient Buddhist manuscript and artefacts.

Stop abuse of patent monopolies in rare diseases, say activists

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Roche, a Swiss multinational healthcare company, is seeking a permanent injunction against Natco Pharma to prevent the introduction of a generic version of Risdiplam, a drug for spinal muscular atrophy, citing patent infringement. Roche's legal action to block generic supply jeopardises public interest by limiting access to affordable medication. Roche's patent for Risdiplam is effective until 2035, allowing it to charge approximately ₹ 6 lakh a bottle, while production costs suggest the drug could be made available for as low as ₹ 3,024 annually.

Patient representatives and treatment activists have come together stating that government, courts, and lawmakers need to take urgent action to address the abuse of patent monopolies in rare diseases. The monopoly on the drug could hinder efforts of the Union Health and Family Welfare Ministry to benefit from domestic production and competitive pricing through pooled procurement (tendering) strategies.

The generic manufacturer of CF drug (elexacaftor/tezacaftor/ivacaftor) from Argentina could not supply them to Indian patients as tezacaftor and ivacaftor are patented. The production costs of CFTR modulators could be 90% lower if the government addressed patent barriers to open supply.



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On India-Canada diplomatic relations

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



CONTEXT: Recently, Canada and India expelled each other's top diplomats following Canadian PM Justin Trudeau's allegation last year of potential links between Indian intelligence and the killing of Canadian citizen Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

Is there a historical context?

India-Canada tensions have escalated following Canada's alleged links between Indian intelligence and the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, whom India labelled a Khalistani terrorist. Although Nijjar faced no criminal charges in Canada, he was on a no-fly list, and his bank accounts were frozen. The dispute is raising tensions between Hindu and Sikh communities in Canada. India has long criticized Canada for being a haven for Khalistani extremists, citing the 1985 Air India bombing by Canada-based Khalistani extremists, which killed 329 people and remains the deadliest airline terror attack before 9/11.

Is there a Sikh 'vote bank' in Canada?

Sikhs constitute only 2 % of Cana-

da's population but their political clout is far disproportionate because of geographic concentration. At one point, there were four Sikh ministers in the Trudeau cabinet. Most of the Sikh MPs are from Trudeau's Liberal Party. However, there is no public evidence to state that the only motive for the Trudeau government to lay these accusations against India is to pander to Sikh voters (of whom Khalistanis are only a minority).

What we have as 'evidence' is the Trudeau government dropping the words Sikh and Khalistani from a government report which identified, for the first time, Khalistani extremism amongst the top five terrorism threats in Canada; the Canadian parliament marking Nijjar's killing by holding a moment of silence; Mr. Trudeau and other party leaders attending Sikh community festivals which featured Khalistan flags and the glorification of Talwinder Parmar, the Air India bombing mastermind; and also drawing support from known Khalistani sympathisers. But all parties, not just the Liberal Party, have indulged in these kinds of acts. While Mr. Trudeau and his government have affirmed the territorial integrity of India, they have not explicitly condemned Khalistani extremism. In surveys, 54 % of Sikhs in Canada intend to vote for the Conservative Party and 21% for Trudeau's party in the next elections.

The Trudeau government has already been pilloried about its failures in countering Chinese interference in Canadian elections. A public inquiry into foreign interference has currently been instituted by the Canadian government. Therefore, an accusation such as this could bolster its weak image.

But the Canadian newspaper, The Globe and Mail, which exposed Chinese interference and was about to publish the allegations regarding India last year (before Mr. Trudeau went public with it), and other news outlets, have criticised Mr. Trudeau only for using a serious national security issue for political grandstanding, rather than manufacturing the case to pander to Sikh voters as India alleges.

Are there political and cultural misunderstandings?

There are misunderstandings on both sides. Canadian scholars have argued that despite the fact that a vast majority of the victims of the Air India bombing were Canadian citizens (of Indian descent), the Canadian government, for a long time,

had seen it as a “foreign tragedy” and the victims as not “real Canadians”, clearly betraying systemic racism. Both Conservative and Liberal governments treated the victims shoddily until an official apology was issued by Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2010. This racial prejudice is also emphasised by the fact that despite it being Canada’s worst terrorist act, 90 % Canadians had little or no knowledge of it, and more than 50 % under the age of 35 had never even heard of it. Further, as no Khalistani terrorist act has been perpetrated in Canada since then, the public is unaffected, and ignorant of Khalistani activism.

The Indian public, conversely, assumes that institutions work the same as in India. The rule of law is enforced in a more systematic manner in Canada than in India. Canadian police independence is guarded, and whenever there were attempts by politicians to interfere illegally, there has been a huge public outcry.

Additionally, India is angry that Khalistan referendums are held in Canada and that Khalistani parades glorify the assassination of Indira Gandhi. However, freedom of speech and expression is a much guarded value in Canada and there is a high threshold on what constitutes as hate speech that can be prosecuted. Referendums and non-violent separatism advocacy are legal in Canada, and referendums have been held to seek the separation of Quebec from Canada. Burning the Canadian flag or the Bible in themselves are not criminal.

However, Canadian critics have argued for stronger legal vigilance around Khalistani hate speech especially when threats are issued.

What are the legal complexities?

India’s extradition requests, for those who it terms as Khalistani terrorists, are very often denied not due to political reasons but because they do not meet Canadian legal standards. Western democracies are wary of extraditions to countries with much poorer human rights records, where political dissenters and opponents are jailed for prolonged periods without criminal culpability, and without trial and bail, especially under anti-terror laws such as the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). Other reasons include the weakness of evidence solely relying on statements from the accused in custody, and the inadmissibility of Indian intelligence evidence in courts abroad as it is not gathered under the Indian Telegraph Act and the Information Technology Act. Only six wanted individuals have been extradited to India from Canada from 2002-2020 (this number is 10 for the U.S, and just one for the U.K.).

Notably, India has not managed to secure the extraditions of Mehul Choksi, Nirav Modi, Lalit Modi and Vijay Mallya (the last three from the U.K. with which India has friendly relations).

FinMin asks banks to focus on cybersecurity, accelerate lending to agriculture & MSMEs

INTERNAL SECURITY

CONTEXT: The Union Finance Ministry asked public sector banks to align cybersecurity frameworks with industry-best practices and ensure customer protection and operational continuity as top priorities.

A review meeting chaired by the Department of Financial Services (DFS) Secretary M. Nagaraju, discussed measures to enhance the robustness of PSBs, building on recent financial achievements, and addressing strategic challenges with key focus on financial performance indicators, assets and liabilities management, cyber resilience, and digital payments infrastructure. The Secretary exhorted the public sector banks (PSBs) to accelerate the pace of lending to agriculture and MSMEs as well as deepen financial inclusion.

PSBs were asked to continue strengthening financial and operational frameworks, particularly in light of the evolving market dynamics and cybersecurity needs. During the meeting, the importance of enhancing the current account savings account (CASA) deposits was underlined, reinforcing the need for PSBs to mobilise CASA deposits to accelerate the pace of sustainable credit growth. PSBs were advised to align their digital and cybersecurity frameworks with best practices, ensuring that customer protection and operational continuity remain top priorities. Specific emphasis was placed on reinforcing credit support to MSMEs and streamlining customer onboarding processes through digital innovations.

Recently, PM Narendra Modi spoke about the cyber-crime of ‘digital arrests’, noting that it has hit all sections of society and urging people to adopt the mantra of “stop, think and take action” when faced with such a scam. The DFS Secretary also underscored the importance of financial inclusion initiatives of the government and urged PSBs to further intensify their efforts to expand access to various financial services for underserved communities and enterprises.

Conference of Parties – 29 at Azerbaijan

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

CONTEXT: Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan prepares to host the COP29 climate conference next week. Azerbaijan's vast oil and gas resources - seven billion barrels of proven reserves—were discovered in the mid-19th century, making what was then part of the Russian Empire one of the first places in the world to start commercial oil production “have shaped the history, culture, politics and the economy” of the Caspian nation. The world's first industrial onshore oil well was drilled in Azerbaijan, and also the first offshore one. The abundance of naturally occurring fires from the energy-rich nation's huge gas deposits has earned it the nickname “The Land of Fire”.

'Born of an oil boom'

Since gaining independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, Azerbaijan has produced 1.05 billion tonnes of oil and is set to increase its natural gas production by more than a third in the next decade. Revenues from oil and gas production make up about 35 % of the country's GDP and nearly half of the state budget.

Azerbaijan's oil revenues—up to \$ 200 billion to date since 1991—gave the country an opportunity to make a huge leap forward. Baku, once a small fishermen's hamlet of some 4,000 people, was born of an oil boom,” which led to massive population growth. Modern Baku is a bustling city with skyscrapers, seaside promenades and futuristic buildings. About 75 % of Azerbaijan's energy exports go to European markets. In 2022, the European Commission—keen to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian gas—signed a deal with Baku to double gas imports from the country. Azerbaijan's oil wells will run dry within 20 years; the natural gas reserves will last for 50 years. Economic dependence on hydrocarbons is a concern for the Azerbaijani government, which is making serious efforts to develop other sectors.

Azerbaijan's goal is to get the maximum money from its hydrocarbon resources before Europe reaches its decarbonisation objective,” which will lead to a significant drop in the continent's demand for fossil fuels. This prospect has prompted criticism from environmentalists ahead of COP 29. With all the exported gas and oil, the emissions are tallied in the CO2 production of the countries that buy and burn it, and not in those of Azerbaijan.

The country aims to increase its renewable energy capacity to 30 % by 2030 and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 40 % by 2050. The country has listed “clean energy mega projects” such as transforming Karabakh into a “green energy zone” fully reliant on solar, wind and hydro power. But experts are adamant that Azerbaijan does not have a climate plan. In September, the Climate Action Tracker group estimated that by 2030, Baku's greenhouse gas emissions will have increased between 23 to 40 % from 2020.

Russian rocket launches Iranian satellites

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



CONTEXT: A Russian rocket on Tuesday blasted off successfully to carry a pair of Iranian satellites into orbit, a launch that reflected growing cooperation between Moscow and Tehran.

The Soyuz rocket launched from Vostochny launchpad in far eastern Russia carrying two Russian Ionosphere-M Earth observation satellites and several dozen smaller satellites, including the two Iranian satellites, named Kowsar and Hodhod put its payload into a designated orbit nine minutes after the launch. In 2022, a Russian rocket launched an Iranian Earth observation satellite called Khayyam that was built in Russia on Tehran's order, and in February Russia put another Iranian satellite named Pars-1 into orbit.

Russia and Iran have expanded ties in various spheres. Ukraine and the West have accused Tehran of providing Moscow with hundreds of exploding drones for use on the battlefield in Ukraine and helped launch their production in Russia. The Iranian drone deliveries, which Moscow and Tehran have denied, have allowed for a constant barrage of long-range drone strikes at Ukraine's infrastructure.



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Pezeshkian visit

Moscow and Tehran are planning to further bolster their ties with a “comprehensive strategic partnership” that is set to be signed during Iran President Masoud Pezeshkian’s planned visit to Russia.

Myanmar junta and civil society groups meet in Delhi

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: India on Tuesday started a series of dialogues with the junta, civil society organisations and political parties with connection to the junta with the immediate goal of stopping violence between the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs), ceasefire and the path ahead for election.

The seventeen-member delegation includes chairman Deputy General Htun Htun Naung of the National Solidarity and Peace Negotiation Committee (NSPNC), Deputy Minister General Min Naing, U La Maung Shwe and U Kya Lin Oo of Centre for Peace and Reconciliation (CPR). Ko Ko Gyi, leader of the Peoples Party, is also among the delegation. The second round of discussions is to be held next week, which is aimed at engaging the officials of the rebel National Unity Government (NUG) as well the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs).

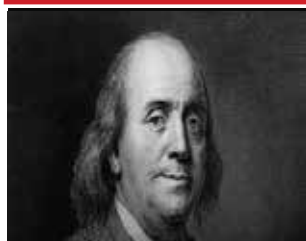
The dialogue will be followed by a broader discussion between the junta figures and members of the National Unity Government which was formed in April 2021 to restore democracy and establish a federal structure. The NUG is a significant player as it also has a People’s Defence Force (PDF) that has been fighting a “people’s defensive war” in coordination with the EAOs against the military junta.

The civil discord in Myanmar began in February 2021 after the coup that removed the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi. In recent months, the military forces of the junta faced significant setbacks in Chin, Kachin, and Rakhine States with the military losing commercially significant townships to a number of Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs). Neither the junta nor the Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) have so far indicated any plan for a ceasefire. The junta stands accused of using airpower indiscriminately against targets in Chin and other States to assert superiority over the EAOs who have expanded their control over the territory of Myanmar.



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–Benjamin Franklin