



'Hitmen' linked to Nijjar's Canada aide held

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Canadian Police arrested Arshdeep Singh Gill for the killing of Sikh activist Gurpreet Singh Hari Nau in Faridkot last month. Arshdeep Singh Gill is a close accomplice of murdered Khalistan Tiger Force (KTF) chief Hardeep Singh Nijjar. According to sources, Dalla, designated a terrorist by India, was likely to have been arrested in Ontario province in connection with a shooting incident that reportedly took place in Milton on October 28.

Gurpreet Singh Hari Nau, who ran a YouTube channel, was gunned down by assailants on October 9, while returning home from Gurdwara Sahib village on a motorcycle. The Punjab Police arrested Anmolpreet Singh and Navjot Singh thwarted at least four more possible target killings, and solved three sensational crimes, including a murder in Madhya Pradesh. The Punjab Police arrested their accomplice, Balvir Singh, who is Mr. Navjot's brother, on the charge of aiding and abetting the crimes.

With the attack on the temple further worsening the diplomatic relations between the two countries, members of the Hindu Sikh Global Forum on Sunday took out a march towards the Canadian High Commission in Chanakyapuri, leading to the Delhi Police increasing the mission's peripheral security.

Protest in Delhi

Many raised slogans against Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The Hindu Sikh Global Forum submitted a memorandum to the Canadian Ambassador to India demanding immediate investigation of the incident and immediate action against the culprits.

According to the police, preliminary investigations revealed that Arshdeep Singh Gill had tasked Neetu to target the Sikh activist and also made arrangements for the firearm, a getaway vehicle, and hideouts. The police said the accused had also killed one Jaswant Singh Gill in Gwalior (Madhya Pradesh) on Thursday, at Dalla's instance.

Arshdeep Singh Gill has links with banned terror outfit 'Sikhs For Justice' and has been involved in smuggling of arms, ammunition, explosives, and improvised explosive devices from Pakistan for other proscribed outfits like Babbar Khalsa International, Khalistan Liberation Force, and International Sikh Youth Federation, as per probe agencies. In January 2023, the Union Home Ministry declared him a "terrorist" under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. The NIA has been probing multiple cases against him and nabbed several of his aides.



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National minority

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: The entitlement of constitutional protection to religious and linguistic minorities in India often questions about determining the 'minority character' of an institution. A seven-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court of India, by a 4:3 majority, has laid down the 'indicia' required for identifying a minority institution.

The Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) was established by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan in 1875 as a teaching college for the benefit of Muslim students, and was recognised as a university by an Act of the Central Legislature in 1920. In the Constitution, the Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) was referred to as an institution of national importance, along with the Benares Hindu University. A Supreme Court judgment in 1967 held that it was not entitled to the benefit of being a minority institution under Article 30 (1), as it was established by legislation and not by the Muslim community. The Aligarh Muslim University (Amendment) Act, 1981 sought to dilute the import of this verdict by changing some definitions. The current dispensation at the Centre argued in court that it was not a minority institution.

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud ruled that the fact that a statute was enacted to confer university status would not remove the minority character of a pre-existing institution, and that the main criteria for identifying an institution's status would be based on details such as who founded it, who made efforts to bring it into being, whether it was aimed at promoting the interests of that particular minority, and its administrative structure affirmed its minority character. A statute was required to incorporate any university prior to the passage of the University Grants Commission Act, 1956, and it could not be argued that an institution surrenders its constitutional right in exchange for getting its degrees recognised. Justice Dipankar Datta, a dissenting judge held that the AMU was not a minority institution. The Aligarh Muslim University (AMU) stripped of its minority character could be brought under the ambit of the reservation for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. Whether an institution of national importance requires the minority tag is a valid question, but it is a matter of equal concern if a prestigious university identified with a distinctive educational and cultural ethos should be stripped of its original character. An ahistorical perspective unaided by any sense of context is unhelpful.

States and the Centre's fetter of 'net borrowing ceiling'

ECONOMY & DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXT: The Centre imposed a 'Net Borrowing Ceiling' (NBC) on the State of Kerala, 3 % of the projected Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) for FY 2023 – 24 in 2023 to restrict the maximum possible borrowing that the State can make under the law.

The 'Net Borrowing Ceiling' (NBC) now encompasses all borrowing avenues, including open market loans, financial institution loans, and liabilities from the public account of the State. The ceiling has been extended to cover certain borrowings by these entities as well to stop States from circumventing the borrowing cap through State-owned enterprises.

Kerala approached the Supreme Court of India on the issue of the encroachment on the executive power that is conferred on the State under Article 293 of the Constitution of India to borrow on the security and guarantee of the Consolidated Fund. This has been the first case in the history of the Court wherein Article 293 has come up for interpretation. The State has alleged that the State's fiscal autonomy, as guaranteed and enshrined in the Constitution of India, has been illegally curtailed by the Centre.

Borrowing powers and provisions

Chapter II of Part XII of the Indian Constitution deals with the borrowing powers of the central and state governments. Both the central and state governments have the power to borrow, but their borrowing capacities are regulated by legislative provisions. The scope of borrowing by both central and state governments is determined by laws enacted by Parliament and state legislatures, respectively. Article 292 grants the central government the power to borrow loans secured by the Consolidated Fund of India. Article 293 gives state governments the

authority to borrow within India, secured by the Consolidated Fund of the State. Article 293 (2) allows the central government to grant loans to states, subject to conditions set by Parliament, within the limits specified under Article 292.

The Centre also provide guarantees upon the Consolidated Fund of India in respect of loans raised by any State. Article 293 (3) imposes a restriction on the State government if the repayment of loans or a guarantee which has been given by the Government of India (if taken by the predecessor government is still outstanding). In such a case, the consent of the central government is essential to raise such a loan. The Centre afforded broad discretion over “consent” by specifying that it may be granted subject to any conditions as the Government of India deems appropriate.

Article 293 of the Constitution is adopted from Section 163 of the Government of India Act, 1935. In the Constituent Assembly, while Article 293 (draft Article 269) was debated on August 10, 1949, a member, Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, noted that the issue of borrowings and loans requires greater scrutiny as borrowing imposes heavy obligations on not only the present generation but also future generations. He suggested that a commission akin to the Finance Commission may be constituted.

Section 163(4) of the Government of India Act, 1935 stated that while exercising the power conferred under Section 163(3) regarding ‘consent’, the Federation shall not refuse or make unreasonable delay in granting the loan or providing guarantee, or impose any unreasonable conditions when sufficient cause is shown by the provinces. If any dispute arises out of the matter stated it was to be referred to the Governor-General whose decision shall be final.

But this clause was not adopted into the Constitution. The reason was that this provision was included in the Government of India Act, 1935 as it expected that a different agency that was not a national of India would be in charge of the administration. But after the Independence, it was felt that such a provision was not necessary as State governments replaced the provinces and a national government was established at the Centre.

Eliminating revenue shortfall

To implement the mandates in Article 292, the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Act, 2003 was enacted to maintain financial restraint by establishing goals such as the elimination of revenue shortfall and the reduction of fiscal deficit. To eliminate the revenue shortfall and the budgetary deficit, a target of 3% of GDP is established for the Centre’s yearly fiscal deficit ratio (FD). As in the Centre’s directives, States enacted their own pieces of legislation to control their fiscal deficit. The FRBM Amendment Act, 2018 required the central government to ensure that the fiscal deficit did not surpass 3% of GDP and that the total public debt did not surpass 60 % of GDP. By 2025–26, the government expects to reduce the fiscal deficit to less than 4.5 % of GDP. The Centre’s restriction on the borrowing limits of the States so as to attain fiscal consolidation by restricting the fiscal deficit, and without considering the financial position of States, is an encroachment of the autonomy of States. It also lowers their ability at budget balancing.

The issue of the borrowing power of States guaranteed under Article 293 of the Constitution is before the Supreme Court in the case filed by the State of Kerala. As the interpretation of Article 293 of the Constitution of India raises key questions about fiscal decentralisation, State fiscal autonomy and past borrowing practices, the Court has referred the issue of a State’s borrowing powers to a Constitutional Bench. The matter also touches on whether the fiscal regulations imposed by the Centre have negatively impacted the Reserve Bank of India’s control over fiscal consolidation.

Contemplating the transforming economic, political, and fiscal landscape in India, it is time to revisit Article 293 of the Constitution. Section 163(4) of the Government of India Act, 1935 warns the unnecessary refusal or delaying or the imposing of conditions in granting loans by the Centre. Similarly, a remedial measure, as mentioned in Section 163(4), could have been adopted in the Constitution when a dispute arises.

There is a need to strengthen this Article

Article 293 of the Constitution must be strengthened in the following manner. As suggested by Ananthasayanam Ayyangar, a commission akin to the Finance Commission is essential to decide any issues that may arise regarding the approval of a loan upon considering the financial position of States as well as the Centre’s

goal of limiting fiscal deficit.

There must be proper guidelines which are to be adhered to when the Centre exercises the wide powers granted under Article 293(4) of the Indian Constitution — crucial in maintaining a balanced fiscal framework between the Centre and the States, and which enhance cooperative federalism. Otherwise, there could be arbitrary decision-making that may disrupt fiscal discipline, leading to either unchecked borrowing or overly restrictive conditions.

When exercising the wide powers granted under Article 293(4), the Centre should adhere to the following guidelines: transparency in decision-making thereby ensuring that the procedures and standards for accepting or rejecting governmental borrowings are transparent to the public; having a consultative process, where there is consultation with State governments before prescribing any terms or limitations on borrowing which enhances cooperative approach; ensuring equitable treatment where there an employment of borrowing terms and restrictions applied uniformly for all States to eliminate prejudice or favouritism; an admiration for fiscal autonomy, ensuring that there is financial autonomy for a State, the restrictions are reasonable and do not unduly hamper a State's ability to manage its finances effectively.

Adhering to these guidelines can ensure that the Centre's powers under Article 293(4) are exercised fairly, transparently and in a manner that supports balanced fiscal management and cooperative federalism.

Declining health spending risks SDG goals

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: A World Bank paper examining public health expenditures across 63 Low-Income Countries (LICs) and Lower Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) analysing data from 2019 to 2023, with comparisons to pre-pandemic trends from 2015 to 2019 reveal worrying shifts as nations approach the deadline for the Sustainable Development Goals.

An initial spike in public health expenditures during the pandemic followed by a steady decline, challenging the necessary momentum for health-related SDG targets. In particular, Low-Income Countries (LICs) and Lower Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) are seeing declines in health spending per capita.

Between 2019 and 2023, government health spending per capita grew only modestly, constrained by a decreasing share of health within overall government budgets as general government expenditure rose faster than health spending. This shift reversed the pre-pandemic trend where health had steadily gained priority in national budgets. The impact was starkest in LICs, where health funding remained minimal and heavily reliant on external aid.

The paper underscores risks for 35 nations, including India, where government health spending per capita and health spending's budget share have dropped. In 23 of these countries, projections by the International Monetary Fund indicate a likely contraction in government budgets from 2023 to 2029, potentially forcing policymakers to make difficult trade-offs to keep health spending on track.

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Health spending on life support

The data for the charts were sourced from the World Bank paper titled 'Peaks, declines and mounting risks' and India's Budget documents



RISING HEALTH RISK: India is one of the LMIC countries where health spending has significantly decreased since its peak during the pandemic.

Chart-1 The average real government health spending per capita by income group (constant US\$ 2023). Includes data for 63 countries.

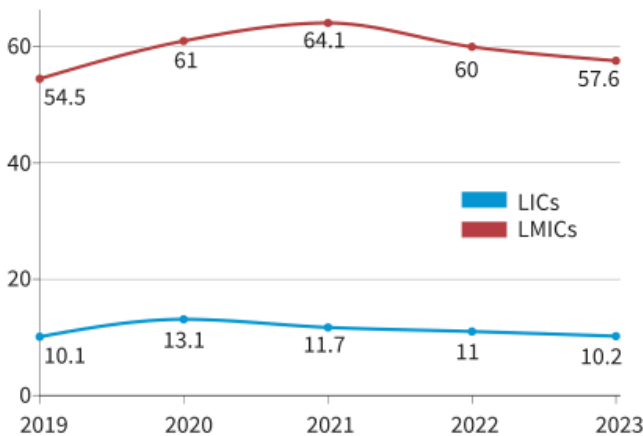


Chart-2 The average annual growth rate of real GHS per capita by income group (in %)

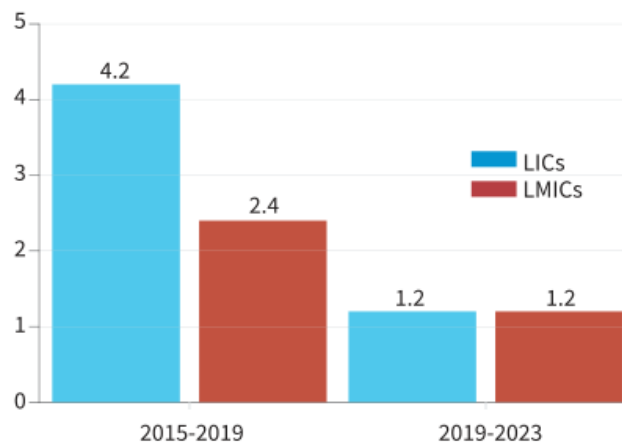


Chart-3 The average government health spending to government health expenditure ratio by income group (in %)

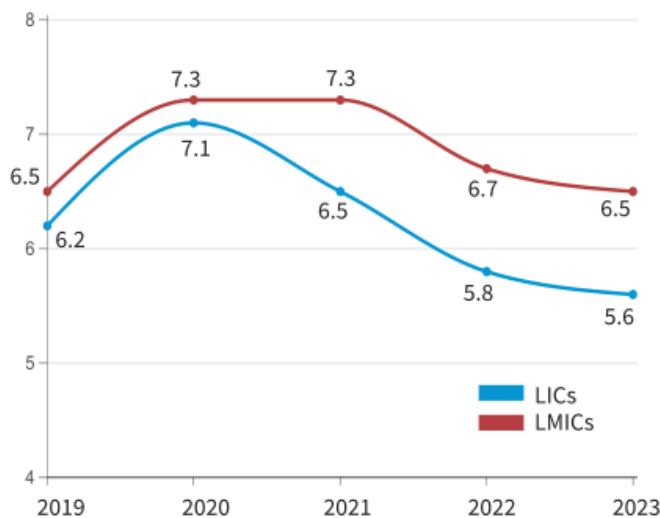
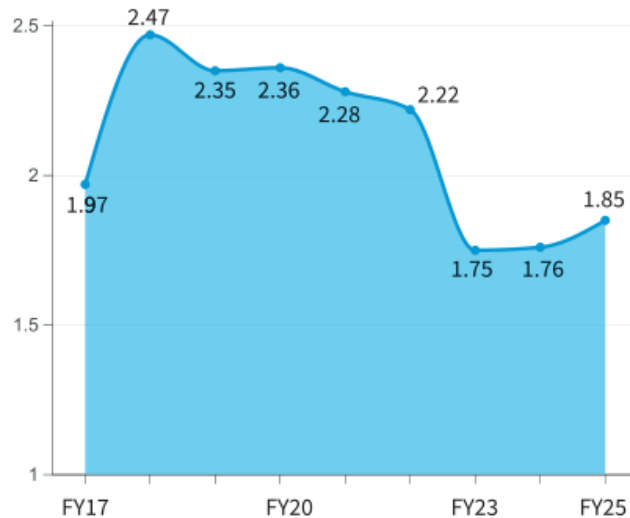


Chart-4 The share of health expenditure in total expenditure in India (in %). Figures for FY24 are revised estimates; for FY25, they are budget estimates



On improving wind energy generation

ECONOMY & DEVELOPMENT

Tamil Nadu, a pioneer in wind mill installations, has wind turbines that are over 30 years old. The Tamil Nadu government released the “Tamil Nadu Repowering, Refurbishment and Life Extension Policy for Wind Power Projects - 2024” in August this year. However, wind energy generators have opposed the policy, approached the Madras High Court and got a stay. They have demanded a policy that will “promote wind energy generation”.

What is the wind energy capacity and potential in India?

The National Institute of Wind Energy (NIWE) estimates a domestic wind power potential of 1,163.86 GW at 150 metres above ground level, and is ranked fourth in the world for installed wind energy capacity. At 120 metres above ground level, normal height of wind turbines now, the potential is 695.51 GW, including the 68.75 GW from Tamil Nadu. Approximately, 6.5 % of the wind potential is used at the national level and nearly 15 % in Tamil Nadu. Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Andhra Pradesh are the leading States for installed wind energy capacity, collectively contributing 93.37 % of the country’s wind power capacity installation. According to data available with the Union Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), Tamil Nadu presently has the second largest installed wind energy capacity with 10,603.5 MW and seen installation of wind turbines since the 1980s. Nearly, 10,000 of the 20,000 wind turbines in the State are of small capacities, that is less than one MW.

How are wind turbines maintained?

Repowering wind turbines, completely replacing more than 15 years old or have less than 2 MW capacity with new turbines can also be refurbished by increasing the height of the turbine, changing the blades, installing a higher capacity gear box, etc., to improve the energy generated. These can be done for standalone wind mills, or a group of wind mills owned by multiple generators. When wind energy generators take up safety measures in the old turbines and extend its life, its called life extension.

The MNRE first came out with a “Policy for Repowering of the Wind Power Projects” in 2016 and based on consultations with stakeholders, released the “National Repowering & Life Extension Policy for Wind Power Projects -2023”. The NIWE estimates the repowering potential to be 25.4 GW if wind turbines of less than 2 MW capacity are taken into consideration.

What does repowering and refurbishing entail?

Wind energy generators say that when turbines were installed in the 1980s, potential wind sites were mapped and the mandatory gap required between two wind mills were determined based on the technology available then. All the turbines were in the sub one MW category. Over the years, the wind mill manufacturing sector has matured and technology has evolved. Habitations have come up between wind sites, posing new challenges, and wind energy evacuation and transmission infrastructure close to the wind sites needs to be strengthened to match the generation.

The wind energy industry point out that a 2 MW wind turbine is usually 120 metres high and requires 3.5 acres of land. It can generate upto 65 lakh units of power. A 2.5 MW turbine, which is available in the market now, is 140 metres high and can generate 80 lakh units. It requires five acres. So, when an existing wind turbine is to be repowered by replacing it with a high capacity turbine, more land is required.

At Aralvaimozhi in Tamil Nadu, a high potential wind site, the 48 MW installed capacity now is made up of mostly 250 KW turbines and the potential at the site is for 100 MW. A project to have three sub-stations of 230 KVA each at ₹ 800 Cr was sanctioned six years ago and is yet to take off for multiple reasons. In Tamil Nadu, wind mills installed after 2018 do not have banking facility. When a turbine is repowered, it will be treated as a new installation and the generator cannot bank the energy generated. This impacts the financial viability of the project, say the sources.

What is the way forward?

Among the wind energy generating States, the repowering potential is the highest in Tamil Nadu with over 7,000 MW of installed capacity that can be replaced or refurbished. If the small turbines are repowered or refurbished, the contribution of wind energy to total energy consumed during the peak windy seasons can go up easily by 25 %. While there have been generators which have replaced turbines in the past without government support, the policy itself does not promote wind energy generation, claim the generators. It should look at challenges on the field and consider how the wind energy potential can be harnessed fully by the generators.

What is the status of NEP's implementation in Odisha?

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: The Odisha Government has announced the roll-out of the National Education Policy (NEP) - 2020 in the State's higher education sector. A new curriculum will be introduced in all government universities, and under-graduate students will now enrol in a four year course instead of three years. Additionally, to increase employability of students, 112 multi-disciplinary courses, 14 vocational courses, 56 value-added courses and 84 skill development courses have been approved to be included in 40 undergraduate subjects.

Why hadn't it been implemented yet?

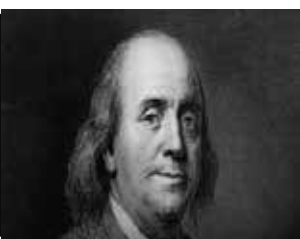
The previous Biju Janata Dal Government had convened a meeting by inviting different stakeholders for its implementation immediately after the National Education Policy (NEP) -2020 was unveiled. More than 40 % of Odisha's population belongs to socially and economically disadvantaged groups. There were issues of infrastructure bottlenecks, shortage of human resources and other technical shortcomings which needed to be addressed. Moreover, the NEP stresses research, flexible education, multiple entry and exit options, four-year degrees and one-year PG and so on; online education is also a big part of the NEP.

In colleges nationally, the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is around 28. The NEP talks about increasing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) to 50 %, and Odisha is only at 22.1 %. The government would need to spend about ₹ 10,000 - ₹ 12,000 Cr in higher education if National Education Policy (NEP) - 2020 were to be implemented. Currently, the State spends only one-fourth of that. The National Education Policy (NEP) - 2020 also says that every student should have four credit scores from a compulsory internship.

What has been done so far?

From 2022-23, committees were formed on every subject by drawing experienced faculties from all colleges and universities. After preparation of syllabus, it was sent for outside review. By early 2024, the complete undergraduate syllabus, incorporating skill and value-added courses as well as a multidisciplinary approach, was prepared.

Odisha has partnered with NASSCOM for providing digital skills to students and to also help students with internships. The government would fund the internship process and the university would recognise marks obtained through the same. However, conducting exams online is still a big challenge. In Odisha, there are only two Swayam centres where examinations can be conducted. The Centre for Distance and Online Education (C.D.O.E) at Utkal University is currently developing virtual tutorials for all undergraduate courses, which will be available to students free of charge. Experienced teachers are being engaged to lead these sessions. Plans are underway to expand the range of these tutorials. In 2018, Odisha had started its own research scheme christened the Odisha University Research and Innovation Incentivisation Plan (OURIIP) under which young lecturers are provided seed research funding either in college or universities. Every year, 60 teaching faculty are awarded ₹10 lakh seed funding for research and around 300 fellowships are given at ₹30,000 per month.



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

—Benjamin Franklin

New Sri Lankan President vows to return Tamils' land grabbed by state agencies

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake assured Tamils of their land currently held by state agencies will be returned by his government. Mr. Dissanayake made the pledge at a public rally in Jaffna, days ahead of Sri Lanka's November 14 parliamentary polls.

Over the last few years, Tamils living across the island's war-affected north and east have been agitating to reclaim their lands that state agencies, including the archaeology and forest departments, have forcibly taken over.

Local body polls

Mr. Dissanayake assured elections to the country's now-defunct provincial councils and local bodies will be held soon. In his first rally in the Tamil-majority area after being elected President. Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake made no direct reference to Tamils' enduring demand for greater power devolution and a political settlement to the ethnic question that his manifesto said would be addressed through a new constitution. In the September 21 Presidential election, former Opposition Leader Sajith Premadasa emerged the most popular candidate in Tamil-majority areas. Mr. Dissanayake also acknowledged the poor performance of his political party in the north. This was because we did not convey our message effectively to the Tamil-speaking people. It was also because we did not work as hard in the north as we did in the [Sinhala majority] south. Mr. Dissanayake vowed to build a country where all citizens, regardless of ethnicity and religion feel equal.

Mr. Dissanayake acknowledged the key concerns of Tamils such as joblessness and the growing use of narcotics among youth and promised to revive industries in the region, create jobs, and ensure that the problem of drugs is fully eliminated. The President pledged to lift villages out of poverty assuring his government supporting farmers and fisher folk.

France evaluating India's Pinaka rocket system for its use

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



CONTEXT: France is considering India's Pinaka Multi-Barrel Rocket Launch (MBRL) system for its requirements and is soon going to carry out a detailed evaluation of the system. Noting that procurement processes take a lot of time, he said it was in the initial stage. Brigadier-General Richou was in India last week for the 20th Army to Army staff talks.

Importance of ties

France has announced plans to replace its M270 Lance-Roquettes Unitaire (LRU) rocket systems in service. The French Army has 13 upgraded M270 systems and since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, six systems were transferred to Ukraine. Armenia became the first export

customer for the indigenously developed Pinaka with interest expressed by several countries in the system. The Indian Army has four Pinaka regiments in service and six more are on order. The Pinaka Mk1 has a range of 38 km and it can fire a variety of ammunition. Several extended range ammunition are under development. Trials for guided extended range Pinaka rockets are in the final stages which would increase the range to over 75 km. Eventually, the plan is to increase the range to 120 km and then to 300 km.

The seventh edition of the bilateral Army exercise Shakti was held at Meghalaya in May. The next edition of Exercise Shakti would focus on high altitude warfare.

Four broad domains

On the focus of the staff talks, he said there were four broad domains in the cooperation — capability; education, information and training; equipment and understanding between the senior leadership. India and France are currently in advanced stages of negotiations for 26 Rafale-M fighter jets and three additional Scorpene-class conventional submarines for the Indian Navy. Discussions are also under way for the co-design and co-development of a jet engine for India's Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft that is under development.

Soldier killed, 3 injured as troops engage militants in Kishtwar of J&K

INTERNAL SECURITY

CONTEXT: A soldier was killed and three were injured as security forces encircled and engaged a group of hiding militants in Kishtwar of Jammu and Kashmir on Sunday.

In another operation, security forces tracked another group of militants in the Zabarwan forest close to Srinagar city. A joint operation was launched by security forces in the Bhart Ridge forest area of Kishtwar following a tip-off about the presence of militants. The hiding militants were engaged in a fierce gunfight. Four soldiers were injured in the initial firing. Naib Subedar Rakesh Kumar of the Army's 2 Para (SF) died later.

Fierce gunfight

A joint police and security forces operation was launched in Zabarwan forest area of Srinagar based on specific intelligence about the presence of terrorists. An exchange of fire ensued during the operation. The encounter site in Srinagar witnessed a fierce gunfight in the morning. However, the area fell silent after 10 a.m. and the security forces continued to track militants throughout the day.

Combing operation

Two civilians, Nazir Ahmad and Kuldeep Kumar, were killed in the area while grazing cattle in the upper reaches of the forest on Thursday. The militants affiliated to Kashmir Tigers, believed to be an off-shoot of the Jaish-e-Muhammad (JeM), took responsibility for the kidnapping and killing. It took more than 24 hours to trace the bodies from a rivulet. One militant was killed in an operation in Sopore of Baramulla on Saturday evening. Seven militants had been killed in the Kashmir Valley in the past one week amid a sudden spurt of militancy in the Union Territory.





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Parliamentary panel to review mechanism to curb fake news post court verdict

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: The Bombay High Court struck down a key provision of the amended Information Technology (IT) Rules, 2021, which empowered the government to identify “fake news” on social media platforms through its fact-check unit (FCU), the Parliamentary Panel on Communications and Information Technology has called for a review of mechanism to curb fake news.

The panel headed by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Nishikant Dubey, has summoned the News Broadcasters and Digital Association and the Editors Guild of India on November 21. They will also be meeting the representatives of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting on the same day. The Opposition feared that the deliberations at the panel would revive the debate on the issue. The PIB still has a fact check unit, though it is not empowered with mandate of taking down the content that it labels as “fake news”.

In April 2022, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology promulgated the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023, which amended the Information Technology Rules, 2021. The amendment expanded the general term “fake news” to include “government business”. The Editors Guild of India along with stand-up comedian Kunal Kamra had challenged the provision in the Bombay High Court. On September 21, the Bombay High Court struck down the amended rule as “unconstitutional”.

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