



AFSPA back in six violence-hit areas of Manipur

INTERNAL SECURITY



CONTEXT: The Union Home Ministry reimposed the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1956 in Manipur, declaring six police station limits in five districts “Disturbed Areas”, in the wake of the ethnic violence in the State effective till March 31, 2025.

A notification issued by the Home Ministry on September 26 noted the Manipur Government extending AFSPA in all the 10 hill districts of Manipur, excluding the 19 police station limits in six districts, mostly in the valley till March 31, 2025. The provisions of the Act were withdrawn from Imphal Municipality area in 2004. Manipur has 16 districts.

The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1956 has been reimposed in the fringe or buffer zones, areas where Kuki-Zo and Meitei villages converge, areas

being guarded by Central armed police forces. The Indian Army and the Assam Rifles would be able to conduct operations without waiting for the arrival of a Magistrate and the State police.

The Sekmai and Lamsang police station limits in Imphal West, Lamlai in Imphal East, the Jiribam station limits in Jiribam, Moirang in Bishnupur and Leimakhong in Kangpokpi districts have been declared disturbed areas to “carry out well-coordinated operations by the security forces” and contain activities of insurgent groups. The Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1956 gives unbridled power to the armed forces, was withdrawn from these areas in April 2022 by the Manipur State Government as the security situation improved instilling a “large sense of security among the general public”.

Volatile state

A substantial increase in the number of armed insurgents, particularly in the valley districts was a cause of concern and the rising cases of extortion and abductions were also being taken into consideration. Other than 22,000 Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) personnel, around 140 columns of the Army are deployed in Manipur. Each column can have up to 40 men. So far, more than 240 people have been killed in the ethnic violence between the Meitei people who live in the valley and the tribal Kuki-Zo-Hmar people in the hills that started in May 2023.

At least 14 killed

In the recent spell of violence since November 7, at least 14 people have been killed, including three men and women who were burnt to death and six others were abducted. In June, violence had spread to new areas such as Jiribam, which had largely remained unaffected by the ethnic violence in the past year. Both the State and Central governments can concurrently issue disturbed area notification under Section 3 of AFSPA. The periodic six-month notification for extending AFSPA in Assam and Manipur have been issued by the State governments since 1972, when the law was amended.



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BASIC countries ask nations at COP29 to honour commitments for climate finance

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

CONTEXT: BASIC countries, including India, have asked developed countries to honour their commitments to provide climate finance rather than “diluting obligations”, and rejected attempts by rich nations to shift their financial responsibilities during negotiations at the ongoing COP29 here.

As the annual climate change summit entered the fourth day on Thursday, Brazil, South Africa, India and China (BASIC) also reiterated the need for full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement 2015, a legally binding international treaty.

The Paris Agreement aims at substantially reducing global greenhouse gas emissions to hold global temperature increase to well below 20 C and pursue efforts to limit it to 1.50 C above pre-industrial levels.

The developed countries have emphasised the importance of increasing global climate ambition and have called for all nations, including emerging economies, to enhance their net-zero targets and implementation efforts.

China battles wave of violent crimes as socio-economic woes upset order

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: China’s economic malaise is fuelling social tensions that make people more likely to commit violent crimes out of anger or desperation, after the country witnessed its deadliest massacre in a decade.

China has experienced a spate of violent attacks this year, challenging Beijing’s proud reputation for public order and prompting online soul-searching about the state of society. On Monday, a man ploughed a car into crowds at a sports complex in the southern city of Zhuhai, killing 35 and wounding 43. It followed a string of similar crimes as China struggles to revive economic growth, keep people employed and boost confidence since it ended rigid Covid curbs in late 2022.

The recent spate of violent attacks in China is a reflection of its worsening social and macroeconomic conditions. Although these incidents are sporadic in nature, the increasing frequency at which they happen does suggest that more people in China are suffering from hardships and desperation that they have not previously experienced. Signs of economic distress have multiplied in China in recent years, from capital flight and emigration to rising joblessness, anger at expensive housing and childcare, and youth cultures glorifying low expectations and rejecting the rat race.

‘New to China’

The perpetrator of Monday’s rampage was a 62-year-old man “dissatisfied” with a divorce settlement. In other case, a middle-aged man used a knife and firearm to kill at least 21 people in eastern Shandong province in February, and a 55-year-old man rammed a car into a crowd in the central city of Changsha in July, killing eight, following a property dispute. A 50-year-old man wounded five in a knife attack at a school in Beijing last month; a 37-year-old man fatally stabbed three and injured 15 in a Shanghai supermarket in September; and a 44-year-old unemployed man fatally knifed a Japanese schoolboy in Shenzhen the same month.

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French weapons system in Sudan likely violation of UN arms embargo: Amnesty

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



CONTEXT: The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) captured armoured vehicles manufactured by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and equipped with French defence systems during the civil war in Sudan.

The Amnesty International report had identified the UAE-made armoured personnel carriers (APCs) in various parts of Sudan, including the Darfur region, where they were used by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in its fight with the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). The civil war broke out in April 2023 after simmering tensions between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) escalated to intense fighting across the North African country, where rampant

human rights violations were committed. The presence of the military vehicles on the battlefield "likely constitutes a violation" of a United Nations arms embargo that prohibits the transfer of weapons to Sudan.

According to the U.N., more than 20,000 people have been killed in the conflict, while 11.6 million have been forcibly displaced, including 8.3 million people internally and 3.1 million people who fled to neighbouring countries. Sudan’s claim that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has been supplying the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) with weapons that prolonged the 18-month war with the army has been denied by the UAE.

Amnesty report had identified the presence of several Nimr Ajban APCs on the ground after verifying pictures shared on social media. The vehicles were reportedly made in the UAE by Edge Group and equipped with the Galix reactive defence system, which is manufactured in France by Lacroix Defense and KNDS France. The Galix system is designed to protect vehicles from approaching threats by releasing projectiles, smoke and decoys.

‘In active use’

The weaponry designed and manufactured in France is in active use on the battlefield in Sudan. The Galix System is being deployed by the RSF in this conflict, and any use in Darfur would be a clear breach of the U.N. arms embargo. The French government must ensure that Lacroix Defense and KNDS France immediately stop the supply of this system to the UAE.

Last month, the United States sanctioned Algoney Hamdan Daglo Musa, a senior RSF leader and the brother of the paramilitary’s commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, for “leading efforts” to supply weapons throughout the war. Algoney controls the UAE-based Tradive General Trading LLC, a front company that imported vehicles to Sudan on behalf of the paramilitary RSF and retrofitted them with machine guns.

Exports rebound, but Oct. import bill hits new record

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXT: India’s goods exports, which had clocked an anaemic 1 % uptick in the first half of 2024-25, began the second half on a strong note with October shipments jumping at a 28-month high pace of 17.25 % to touch \$ 39.2 billion, this year’s second best-tally.

However, this was accompanied by a 3.9 % rise in the country’s merchandise import bill, lifting it to a fresh record high of \$ 66.34 billion, eclipsing this August’s \$ 64.34 billion import figure that was the highest at the time. The merchandise trade deficit has thus widened from a five-month low of \$ 20.8 billion in September to \$ 27.14 billion in October, the second highest so far this financial year and the third highest ever.

Economists attributed the spike in the import bill primarily to higher gold and oil imports. Although the precious yellow metal’s imports dropped a marginal 1.4 % from last October to \$ 7.13 billion, this was 62 % higher than September’s figure.

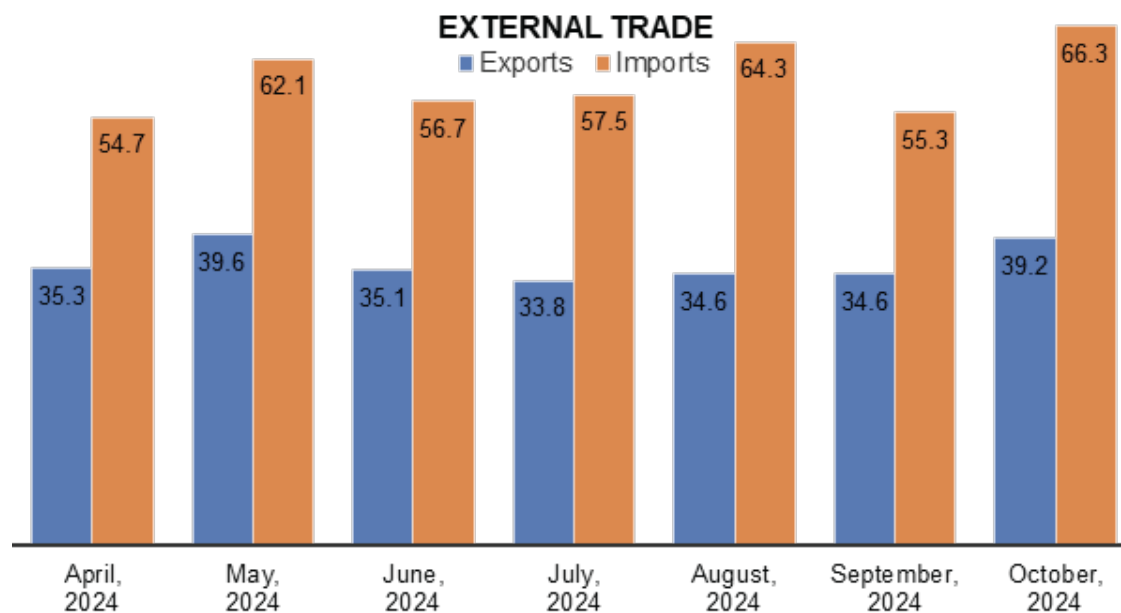


FIGURE: Column chart representation of the external trade of India.

Petroleum imports

Petroleum imports, on the other hand, rose 13.3 % year-on-year to \$ 18.3 billion, and were 46.4 % over the previous

month's \$ 12.5 billion. This coincided with a continuous decline in petroleum exports, which slipped 22.1 % in October to \$ 4.58 billion, below September's figure of \$ 4.7 billion, which had marked a 32-month low.

The Commerce Ministry downplayed the import bill rise, and highlighted the trade trends beyond the petroleum basket. Between April and October, India's non-petroleum exports have surged to the highest ever tally of \$ 211.3 billion and if this trend continues, India's total exports, including services, will cross the \$ 800 billion mark this year to set a new record. "A key factor for the 17%-plus growth in exports could be improved demand for this Christmas from developed markets as firms start stocking up inventories for the festival. This demand seems far better than last year and gives us confidence that the coming months will also see a healthy uptick.

Despite the global situation being highly volatile, growth in the Western countries slowing with some recessionary trends, and the disruptions in global trade routes, our exporters have been able to do well in several sectors. Citing healthy double-digit growth in exports of engineering goods, chemicals, electronics, rice, and labour-intensive sectors such as readymade garments and textiles, demonstrating that India's strategy of focusing on certain sectors and countries was now yielding results.

India to seek extradition of designated 'terrorist' Arsh Dalla from Canada: Centre

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: The Indian agencies would be following up on an extradition request to the Canadian police in Ontario following the recent arrest of designated pro-Khalistan "terrorist" Arshdeep Singh Gill.

Arshdeep Singh Gill is a proclaimed offender in over 50 cases of murder, attempt to murder, extortion, and terrorist acts, including terror financing, similar to illegal activities carried out in Canada. Arshdeep Singh Gill currently serves as the de-facto chief of the Khalistan Tiger Force. The Canadian police in Ontario arrested Arshdeep Singh Gill on November 10.

Arshdeep Singh Gill was designated by the Union Home Ministry as an "individual terrorist" in January 2023. In July 2023, the Indian government had requested Canada for his provisional arrest, but it was declined.

DRDO announces successful trials of Pinaka rocket system

INTERNAL SECURITY



CONTEXT: The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Thursday announced the successful completion of flight tests of guided Pinaka multi-barrel rocket (MBRL) system as part of Provisional Staff Qualitative Requirements (PSQR) validation trials paving the way for its induction. This enhances the range of the Pinaka to over 75 km. The flight tests have been conducted in three phases at different field firing ranges. "During these tests, the PSQR parameters viz., ranging, accuracy, consistency and rate of fire for multiple target engagement in a salvo mode have

been assessed by extensive testing of rockets".

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No dual eco-clearance for 39 categories of industry

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXT: The Union Environment Ministry has exempted 39 categories of industries from the mandatory requirement of approaching State pollution control Boards for permission to run their industries.

The list include manufacturing units of solar cells and modules, wind and hydel power units; fly ash bricks or block manufacturing; and leather cutting and stitching; and those assembling, repairing and servicing air-coolers and air-conditioners. All of these sectors are in the “white category” of industries, meaning they are the least polluting in nature, by a 2016 classification by the Central Pollution Control Board.

Dual compliance

The exemption of categories of industries would reduce the “compliance burden” of industries. The Government has accepted the long-standing demand of industry to remove dual compliance of Environmental Clearance (EC) and Consent to Establish (CTE) for setting up of new industries. Now, non-polluting white category industries will not be required to take Consent to Establish (CTE) or Consent to Operate (CTO) at all. The industries which have taken EC will not be required to take CTE. This will not only reduce compliance burden but also prevent duplication of approvals.

Even prior to the notification, “white category” industries were given permits by the State departments responsible for industry. These are the least polluting category but this notification formalises an existing practice where such industries got consent to operate without much trouble. The easing of this norms also flows from amendments to the Water Act earlier this year in Parliament.

The Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974, the first piece of legislation in Independent India that identified the need to have an institutional structure to address contamination of waterbodies led to the creation, in September 1974, of the Central Pollution Control Board and State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) that were charged with monitoring and preventing public water resources from getting contaminated by sewage and industrial effluents.

The amendments give the Centre greater authority to override the SPCBs in some instances. As per the original Act, the SPCB’s permission is needed for establishing any industry or treatment plant which could discharge sewage into a waterbody, sewer, or land. The imprisonment provisions for minor violations, which are simple infringements and did not lead to any injury to humans or damage to the environment, often caused “harassment” to businesses and citizens and was not in consonance with the spirit of “Ease of Living and Ease of Doing Business”.



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Poor onion, tomato, potato crop pushing up prices, says Centre

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXT: As the prices of tomato, onion, and potato, the three essential vegetables in Indian households, remain high compared with last year's that excess rainfall during the year had impacted the production of these commodities and pushed up their prices.

The Union Consumer Affairs Ministry said the price variation of the three kitchen staples under the previous United Progressive Alliance government was much higher when compared with the first 10 years of the Narendra Modi government. The all-India average price of tomato on Thursday was ₹ 52.35 / kg; it was ₹ 39.2 / kg on November 14, 2023.

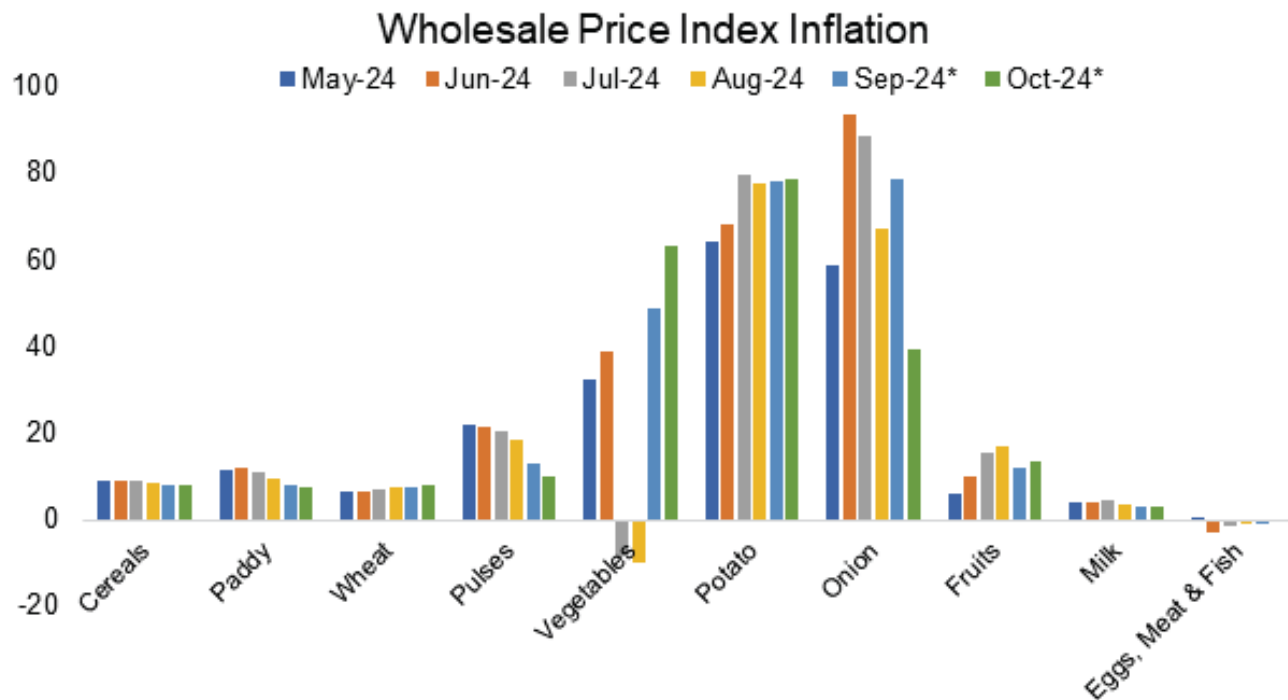


FIGURE: Column chart representation of the wholesale price index based inflation of vegetables and other cereals. For onion, the price has decreased by 1.68 % from last year's. On Thursday, the all-India average price was ₹ 58.36 / kg compared with ₹ 59.36 / kg on the corresponding date in 2023. But on October 14 this year, the price was ₹ 54.13 / kg. In the case of potatoes, the price was ₹ 37.48 / kg on Thursday, while it was ₹ 24.9 / kg on the corresponding date last year. This is an increase of 50.52 %.

Timely intervention

The prices of tomato, onion and potato were volatile due to seasonality in production and their susceptibility towards climatic conditions. The timely intervention by the government, such as sale of tomatoes at fixed price when the prices were surging, and release of onion buffer have however helped in stabilising the prices of TOP as is evident from the fact that on month-to-month variation as on November 13 in the prices of tomato has declined by 21.4 %, while the increase in prices of onion and potato has been brought down below the level of double digits.



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Wholesale food prices surged 11.6 % in October, lifting inflation to 2.4 %

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT

CONTEXT: The inflation in India's wholesale prices hardened to a four-month high of 2.4 % in October, from 1.84 % in September, led by 11.6 % acceleration in food prices, the first double digit uptick in 25 months, from a 9.5 % increase recorded in the preceding month.

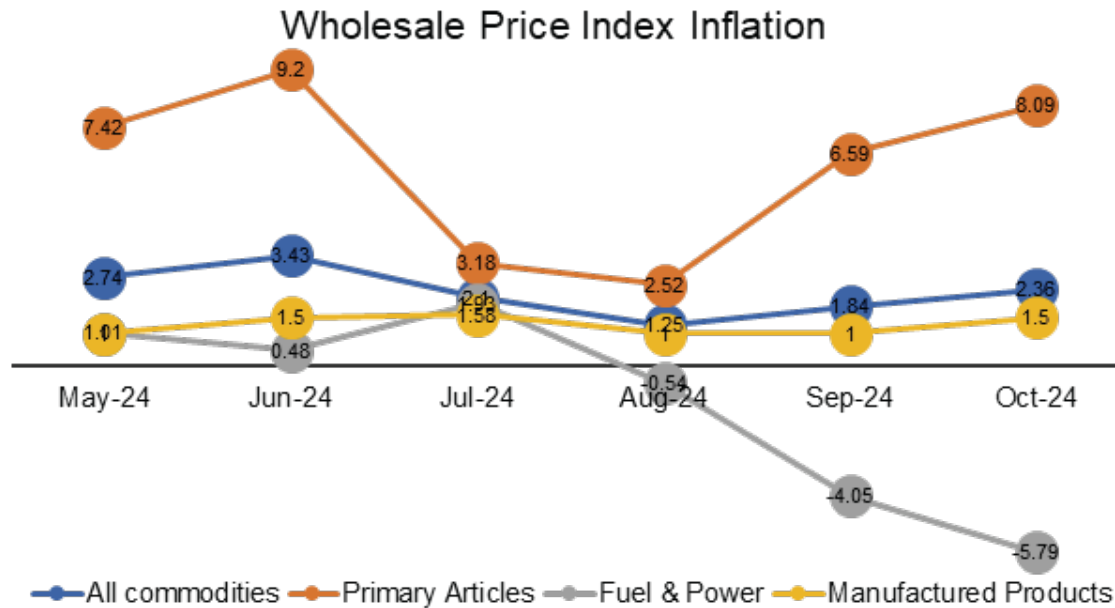


FIGURE: Line chart representation of the wholesale price index based inflation of articles.

Vegetable prices soared over 63 %, compared with the 14-month peak inflation of about 49 % recorded in September. Potato prices rose 78.7 %, marginally higher than 78.1 % in the previous month, while onion inflation halved from 78.8 % in September to 39.25 % in October. The Wholesale Food Index jumped 3 % on a month-on-month basis. The Commerce and Industry Ministry attributed the rise in wholesale price inflation to an increase in prices of food articles, manufacture of food products, machinery & equipment, motor vehicles, trailers & semi-trailers.

Inflation in manufactured products also picked up to 1.5 % in October from 1 % in the previous two months, while primary articles inflation more than tripled from August to touch 8.1 %. However, fuel and power remained in deflationary territory, with prices 5.8 % below last October's levels, as opposed to a 0.5 % decline in August and about 4 % year-on-year dip in September.

Food inflation alone pushed up the overall uptick in the Wholesale Price Index. Wholesale food inflation is expected to remain elevated this month as well, but print under 10 %, citing favourable base effects. The available data on daily wholesale prices points to a softening for 13 of the 22 items in November 2024 so far vis-à-vis October 2024, even as onions and edible oils remain a concern. The manufactured products' mild inflation reflects a "limited pass through" of costs by producers amidst the slowdown in demand conditions seen in the July-September quarter.

Rajnath to visit Laos next week, may meet Chinese counterpart

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Chinese counterpart, Admiral Dong Jun, are both scheduled to attend the ASEAN Defence Ministers' meeting in Laos next week.

Mr. Singh will visit Laos from November 20 to 22 for the 11th ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM Plus). The bilateral meeting on the ASEAN Defence Ministers' meeting comes just after the disengagement at Depsang and Demchok and resumption of patrolling in both areas of the Line of Actual Control.

The ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus (ADMM Plus) is a platform for ASEAN grouping and its eight dialogue partners — Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia, and the U.S. Last month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held their first formal bilateral meeting in five years on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Kazan, during which they welcomed the agreement for a resolution of the military stand-off at the LAC.

Hate speech cannot be equated with a false claim or a wrong assertion: SC

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna made an oral observation that ‘hate speech’ not the same as making a false claim or a wrong assertion dismissing a petition filed by an organisation, Hindu Sena Samiti, seeking framing of guidelines to prevent hate speech by political leaders.

The petition had cited recent comments by the political figures, including former Madhya Pradesh Minister Sajjan Singh Verma and Bharatiya Kisan Union spokesperson Rakesh Tikait, as instances where rhetoric had allegedly threatened public order. In his remarks, Mr. Verma had allegedly warned of a potential popular uprising, drawing comparisons to the protests in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, while Mr. Tikait allegedly referenced the farmers’ protests in a manner that suggested the possibility of violent insurrection. The petition called for the prevention of the “growing menace of delivery of provoking public speech jeopardising the sovereignty and endangering the security of the state.”

The Bench noted that a batch of petitions, titled Shaheen Abdullah versus Union of India, pertaining to the rising tide of hate speech in public domain was already pending in the apex court. In October 2022, the apex court had directed the police to suo motu register cases against hate speech offenders.

Leverage similarity, complementarity in Nigeria

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: On November 16-17, 2024, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visits Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country and second largest economy after 17 years and the last meeting of the bilateral joint commission after 13 years.

India is ubiquitous in Nigeria from Airtel to Bajaj, Bollywood to Cipla and TVS to Tata. India and Nigeria are two multi-ethnic, large developing democracies face identical issues: improved governance, socio-economic development, terrorism and corruption. At the same time, they have complementarity in such strategic areas as hydrocarbons, defence, institution building, health care and education. Leveraging this milieu of similarity and complementarity can catapult the Abuja Summit from “successful” to “historic”.

There are more than 150 Indian companies with footprints in Nigeria with investments estimated at \$ 27 billion. India is Nigeria’s second largest trading partner with a bilateral trade at \$ 7.9 billion. Nearly 50,000 Indians in Nigeria, the largest Oyibo (non-African) group in the country are well regarded for their low profile, professionalism and integrity. Nigerians flock to India for trade, medical treatment and education.

India’s hard and soft power in Nigeria has lost ground over the past decade. The bilateral trade is half its peak a decade ago when India was Nigeria’s largest trading partner. Despite being the top buyer of Nigerian crude, India has no upstream assets there. There are multiple reasons behind this stagnancy. To begin with, a more effective and comprehensive framework is indispensable for bilateral renewal and upgrading through frequent contacts. Nigeria is too big and important a partner for India to channel its development assistance multilaterally through the African Union. India also needs to better leverage the local Indian diaspora, Nigeria’s second-largest employer. The two vibrant private sectors should be better empowered through a platform, preferably with financial and underpinning. With foresight and a judicious mix of ambition and sensitivity, India and Nigeria can forge a win-win synergy.

Nigeria, which is currently facing several economic and security headwinds, is looking for friends such as India for help. Since coming to power in 2023, President Bola Tinubu has acted with political courage. Unlike most of his predecessors who merely kicked the can of worms down the road, he has confronted long-standing national challenges. The measures taken include withdrawing petroleum subsidies costing \$10 billion annually, freeing the national currency, the Naira, of controls (leading to a steep depreciation and 32% annual inflation), and dismissing several functionaries including the Central Bank Governor, Head of Secret Service and military brass. These have upended the economy and caused public disaffection. In a recent speech, President Tinubu defended these stiff measures as necessary for national

rejuvenation and assured the public that the worst was over.

Where India could help

Despite the current eco-political conundrum, Nigeria retains its long-term attractiveness for India as a major hydrocarbon supplier, a large market with physical and social infrastructure deficit, and growth potential. While its occasionally stained reputation calls for due diligence and caution, macro-economic management is quite competent and the sovereign commitments are upheld.

The Nigerian leadership has high expectations from the Modi visit. Among its top concerns is upgrading its defence and security services to meet the terrorism and economic anarchy-related challenges such as Boko Haram, oil bunkering, Gulf of Guinea piracy, and a turbulent neighbourhood. Having overcome similar challenges at home, India is well experienced and equipped to help Nigeria through a comprehensive package of defence supplies, training, and remote sensing. This can, in turn, boost India's defence exports and revive bilateral defence ties epitomised by seven Nigerian Presidents since independence in 1960 being trained in India as defence officers.

An equally urgent Nigerian requirement would be to seek India's help for economic stabilisation as it faces a critical foreign exchange shortage. India could best do so through some strategic initiatives such as partnerships for upstream hydrocarbons and infrastructure, a bilateral comprehensive economic partnership agreement and large financial facilitation through lines of credit and barter arrangements. India can provide the Nigerian requirements of petroleum products, foodstuffs (rice, wheat, milk powder), consumer goods, pharmaceuticals, compressed natural gas conversion kits, textiles and garments, agricultural inputs, and power equipment. The possibility of rupee-based trade can also be put on the table. Other complementarities to be leveraged would include importing palm oil, hides and skins, ginger, and Gum Arabic. Such moves would arrest the 29.7 % year-on-year decline in India's exports in 2023-24 to \$ 3.6 billion. Moreover, it would help locate other drivers for bilateral trade as India now buys less Nigerian crude. Though less tangible, India's services exports in areas such as Information Technology (IT) and IT-enabled services, banking, financial services and insurance, health care, skilling and education also deserve support.

Half a millennium of shared history

A less-known but interesting historical snippet is about the first direct bilateral contact. A hazy legend traces it to the arrival around 1500 AD of Baba Ghor, a gem merchant from Kano (now in northern Nigeria) who settled down in Ratanpur in Gujarat. He is still revered as a saint and for devising a method to polish agate stones. We need a similar impetus today to make the natural bilateral ties more lustrous.

How will SDS visa move hit students?

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: The Canadian government announced the discontinuation of the Student Direct Stream (SDS) visa in November 2024, likely to adverse effect Indian students, historically been one of the largest groups of international students in Canada.

On September 19, Canada has granted 35 % fewer international student permits this year going down by another 10 % by the next year. In 2022, India accounted for over 21 % of all international students in Canada, with a staggering number of 222,450 Indian students choosing to study in Canadian institutions. Over 189,000 Indian students opted for the SDS visa that year, which significantly simplified their application process.

What is the Canadian SDS visa?

The Student Direct Stream (SDS) visa scheme, specifically tailored to offer several key benefits to international students was introduced in 2018. The Student Direct Stream (SDS) visa scheme offered a faster processing time and reduced application fees, making it a popular choice among Indian students aspiring to pursue higher education in Canada. The non- Student Direct Stream (SDS) visa applicants had an approval rate of 19 %, Student Direct Stream (SDS) visa applicants enjoyed a 63 % approval rate. However, it also served students from other countries, including Antigua and Barbuda, Brazil, China, Colombia, Costa Rica, Morocco, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Trinidad and Tobago, and Vietnam.

One of the primary advantages of the Student Direct Stream (SDS) visa scheme was its significantly reduced processing time. By meeting specific eligibility criteria, such as a higher level of English language proficiency and a confirmed admission to a Designated Learning Institution (DLI), students could expect a quicker decision on their study permit application.

The SDS visa also offered a lower application fee than the standard study permit, which significantly reduced the financial burden for many international students. It simplified the application process by requiring fewer supporting documents. By adhering to the specific eligibility requirements, students could submit a more streamlined application, making it easier to navigate the immigration process.

Why was the SDS visa discontinued?

The Canadian Government to discontinue the Student Direct Stream (SDS) visa scheme was driven by a combination of factors aimed at addressing various challenges and concerns within the immigration system.

While the official reasons cited by the government focused on “strengthening program integrity, addressing student vulnerability, and giving all students equal and fair access to the application process,” several underlying factors likely contributed to this decision. Canada has been grappling with a significant housing shortage, particularly in major cities such as Toronto and Vancouver, and the rapid influx of international students, many of whom rely on off-campus housing, has exacerbated this issue. The increasing number of international students has also placed a strain on public services and infrastructure, including healthcare, education, and transportation.

The Canadian government may be reassessing its immigration policies to better manage the inflow of foreign students and ensure they contribute positively to the Canadian economy. By discontinuing the SDS visa, the government aims to regulate the number of international students, alleviate pressure on housing and resources, and implement a more equitable approach to student visa processing.

How does the discontinuation affect Indian students?

The discontinuation of the SDS visa has undoubtedly had an impact on Indian students seeking to pursue higher education in Canada and has introduced a host of challenges. One of the most immediate consequences of the SDS visa's discontinuation is the prolonged processing time for student visa applications. Before the SDS visa, the average processing time for student visas was significantly longer. With the removal of this expedited pathway, Indian students can expect to wait for a more extended period. This delay can disrupt academic plans and cause significant inconvenience.

Additionally, the discontinuation has led to increased application fees. While the exact fee structure may vary, it is generally higher for standard student visa applications than the SDS visa. This additional financial burden can be a considerable challenge, especially for students from lower-income backgrounds.

Furthermore, the application process for standard student visas is more complex and rigorous than the SDS visa. Students are required to submit a wider range of documents, including proof of funds, language proficiency test scores, and detailed study plans. The increased complexity can be overwhelming and time-consuming, potentially leading to errors and delays.

The direct impacts of the SDS visa's discontinuation have far-reaching indirect consequences for Indian students. Potential delays in study plans can disrupt academic progress and career aspirations. Students may have to defer their admissions or explore alternative study destinations, which can impact their overall educational journey.

Moreover, this has created uncertainty about future immigration opportunities. The SDS visa was often seen as a stepping stone towards permanent residency in Canada. With this pathway no longer available, Indian students may face increased challenges in securing post-study work opportunities and ultimately immigrating to Canada.

Experts and stakeholders have expressed concerns about the discontinuation and its potential impact on Indian students. Immigration consultants and education advisors have highlighted the increased processing times, higher application fees, and stricter eligibility criteria associated with the regular student visa process.

Social media platforms have been abuzz with discussions, with many students expressing frustration and uncertainty about their study plans. One student, commenting on a popular education forum, lamented, “The SDS visa was a game-changer. It made the application process much smoother. Now, with its discontinuation, I'm worried about potential delays and increased costs.” While the Canadian government has cited concerns about program integrity and equitable access, critics argue that the decision may deter talented Indian students from choosing Canada as their study destination.

What other options do Indian students have?

While the discontinuation of the SDS visa has presented challenges for Indian students, seeking to study in Canada, there are still viable alternative visa options available. The traditional student visa remains a primary pathway for international students, including Indians. By meeting the eligibility criteria, such as proof of funds, language proficiency, and a Letter of Acceptance from a DLI, students can apply for a student visa.

However, it is important to note that the standard student visa application process can be more time-consuming and requires a more comprehensive documentation package compared to the SDS visa. Additionally, students may face longer processing times and increased application fees.

To enhance their chances of visa approval, Indian students should carefully plan their applications, submit all required documents on time, and consider consulting with immigration experts to navigate the complexities of the process. The longer processing times, higher fees, and more complex application procedures have created significant hurdles. The indirect consequences, such as delayed study plans, increased financial burden, and uncertainty about future immigration opportunities further compound the challenges faced by Indian students.

For Indian students considering studying in Canada, it is crucial to plan ahead and prepare thoroughly. Early application is key, as it allows ample time for processing and addressing any potential issues. Thorough documentation is essential to meet the stringent requirements of the regular student visa process. While the discontinuation of the SDS visa has presented challenges, it is important to remain hopeful for future changes or the introduction of alternative streamlined pathways for international students.

As the Canadian government continues to evolve its immigration policies, new opportunities may arise for Indian students. By staying informed and taking proactive steps, Indian students can navigate the complexities of the Canadian immigration system and achieve their academic and career goals.

Prachanda slams Oli, says India ties are under strain

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Former Nepali PM Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', now Leader of the Opposition slammed Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli for playing the "China card".

The India-Nepal ties are under a strain due to the new government's policies, and that there is a "danger" that the border-dispute would be rekindled. Referring to Mr. Oli's decision to break from tradition where leaders of friendly neighbouring countries travel to New Delhi first after taking over power as "immaturity" after officials said India had not extended an invitation to the Nepal PM.

This is the first time in more than a decade that a Nepali PM has broken the tradition. The last time, Prachanda himself had travelled first in his tenure to Beijing in 2008, but for the Olympic Games being held at the time. Prachanda's criticism comes amid signs of increased tensions between New Delhi and Kathmandu over a number of issues.

'Two great neighbours'

At the annual Kantipur Conclave organised in Kathmandu, Mr. Oli himself likened India and China to Sufi shrines at Ajmer and Nizamuddin in Delhi, saying in a lighter vein that it should not matter which is visited first. Prachanda spoke about increasing differences between New Delhi and Kathmandu over a number of issues, including the ongoing border dispute over areas including Kalapani and Limpiyadhura, which led to a diplomatic standoff between the two countries in 2019, after India published maps showing the changes in Jammu-Kashmir since the amendment to Article 370. According to reports, the Nepali government, which has incorporated the disputed territory into the national emblem, now plans to issue new currency notes with the map as well.

The Union Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment on the issue. The regular exchanges between the two sides, including the visit of Foreign Minister Arzu Rana Deuba to Delhi in August, and the coming visit of Chief of Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi, to Kathmandu, to be conferred an honorary rank as is the tradition between the two armies.

Anura expects to secure a 'strong presence' in Sri Lanka's Parliament

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Dissanayake on Thursday expects his National People's Power [NPP] alliance to secure a "strong presence" in Parliament to steer the island nation ahead with a "new political culture".

The National People's Power [NPP] aims to run a government that is accepted by people in the "north, south, east, and west". The 55-year-old leftist leader rose to the country's most powerful office two months ago, winning a crucial presidential election on a plank of anti-corruption. The outcome of Thursday's parliamentary polls will determine the extent of his government's influence in the 225-member legislature.

Mr. Dissanayake's victory in September 2024 followed a dramatic rise in his popularity among Sri Lankans. His vote share soared from a mere 3.16 % in the 2019 presidential race to 42.3 %. Similarly, the NPP which is led by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) must now increase its presence in the legislature from three seats to 113 for a simple majority.

The two national elections this year assume great significance for Sri Lanka, as the country tries to get past an economic meltdown that pushed it to bankruptcy in 2022.

After a popular citizens' movement booted out former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, the elections offered voters' their first chance to elect their new President and representatives in Parliament. The Election Commission said the counting of the votes — Sri Lankans vote on the ballot paper — began Thursday evening.

Trump picks Matt Gaetz for Attorney General, Marco Rubio for Secretary of State

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: President-elect Donald Trump chose Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida to serve as his Attorney General, bypassing more experienced options in favour of a loyalist who has built a national reputation as a disruptor and whom Mr. Trump has tasked with dramatically overhauling the Justice Department.

Mr. Trump nominated Senator Marco Rubio of Florida for Secretary of State and selected Tulsi Gabbard, a former Democratic member of Congress and presidential candidate, to serve as his Director of National Intelligence. Mr. Trump announced the decision in a post in his Truth Social network, saying Mr. Gaetz would "root out the systemic corruption at DOJ, and return the Department to its true mission of fighting Crime, and upholding our Democracy and Constitution".

On Capitol Hill, Mr. Rubio is the vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee and a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Senator Marco Rubio has pushed for taking a harder line against China and has targeted social media app TikTok because its parent company is Chinese. He and other lawmakers contend that Beijing could demand access to the data of users whenever it wants. Mr. Trump made the personnel announcements while flying back to Florida from Washington after meeting with President Joe Biden.

Trump's climate impact is 'recoverable', say researchers

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

CONTEXT: U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's expected climate rollbacks will likely have a "small" impact on global warming, as long as other countries resist the temptation to slacken their own carbon-cutting efforts.

Mr. Trump has pledged to reverse the green policies of President Joe Biden and could pull the United States out of international efforts to limit global warming to 1.50 C above preindustrial times. The current year is almost certain to be the hottest on record, with rising temperatures unleashing a deadly torrent of floods, heatwaves and storms across the world. Trump's potential retreat from the green transition could increase global temperatures by around 0.040 C by the end of the century.

'Flat-lined'

The Climate Action Tracker (CAT) project calculated that the current crop of climate promises would see the world warm 2.60 C by century's end, with very little change in the outlook in the past three years suggesting that government action has "flat-lined". The Climate Action Tracker (CAT) looked at the plans of the biggest greenhouse gas polluters. The U.S., which accounts for the largest share of historical greenhouse gas pollution, will cut emissions from all sectors in half by 2030 from 2005 levels.



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