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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

EX-PM CAMERON IN, SUELLA BRAVERMAN OUT IN U.K. CABINET REJIG

CONTEXT: U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has reshuffled his cabinet by removing Home Secretary Suella Braverman and has appointed former U.K Prime Minister David Cameron as the Foreign Secretary. Outgoing Foreign Secretary James Cleverly has been appointed as the Home Secretary.

STORY SO FAR: U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has reshuffled his Cabinet, sacking Home Secretary Suella Braverman and appointing former Prime Minister David Cameron as Foreign Secretary. Braverman has been criticized for her provocative statements, including her latest allegations of bias in the Metropolitan Police over their handling of pro-Palestinian protests. Cameron's appointment has been met with mixed reactions, as some praise his experience while others criticize his role in the Brexit referendum and his close ties to the Chinese government. Cleverly has been appointed the new Home Secretary, and he has pledged to continue the government's policy of reducing illegal migration. Other changes made by Sunak include appointing Victoria Atkins as Health Secretary and Steve Barclay as Environment Secretary.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

ENHANCING REPRESENTATION, FOR A JUST ELECTORAL SYSTEM

CONTEXT: India's current electoral system does not provide equal representation to all citizens due to uneven population distribution. Several proposals have been suggested to address this issue, including increasing the number of seats in Parliament, using a proportional representation system, and creating more States. Reforming India's electoral system is crucial to ensure equitable representation and a stronger democracy.

BACKGROUND: India's vast population and uneven distribution pose a challenge to ensuring equal representation in its electoral system. Currently, an MP represents an average of 2.5 million citizens, a significantly higher number compared to other democracies. This disparity leads to concerns about the effectiveness of representation and the ability of MPs to adequately address the needs of their constituents.

India's political landscape is further complicated by malapportionment, where some States hold more legislative power than others. This imbalance can favour certain political groups and regions, potentially undermining the principles of fairness and equity.

The growing sense of a distinct political culture in southern and northeastern India adds another layer of complexity. Addressing these issues requires careful consideration of India's diverse population, political dynamics, and regional aspirations.

DELIMITATION AS A POTENTIAL SOLUTION

Delimitation, the process of redrawing electoral constituencies based on population, could be a potential solution to address the issue of unequal representation in India's Parliament. However, it's crucial to consider the potential consequences of delimitation, such as favouring Hindi-speaking northern States and empowering certain political parties. To mitigate these risks, the number of seats in Parliament should be significantly increased, and delimitation should take into account factors beyond population, such as geography, economic productivity, linguistic diversity, and a sense of fairness. Additionally, the fiscal impact of delimitation on future transfers to States needs to be carefully evaluated.

The historical practice of delimitation has favoured more populous States, such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, while penalizing States that have effectively controlled their population growth, such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala. To address this disparity, the number of seats in Parliament should be increased substantially, ensuring that no State loses representation.

Delimitation should not be solely driven by population data. Geographical factors, economic productivity, linguistic history, and a sense of fairness should also play a role in determining constituency boundaries. This will ensure that all States, regardless of their population size, have a voice in Parliament. The fiscal impact of delimitation on future transfers to States also needs to be carefully considered to avoid any unintended financial consequences.

PROMOTING FEDERALISM:

The promotion of federalism and electoral system reforms are essential for strengthening Center-State relations in India. To enhance the voice of States, constitutional reforms are proposed for the Rajya Sabha, suggesting equal representation for each state and encouraging direct elections with strict domicile requirements. Additionally, the adoption of proportional representation, inspired by systems in Australia and France, is recommended for Lok Sabha and

State Assembly elections. While India's current first-past-the-post system ensures swift results, it often results in legislators representing constituencies without majority support.

HAVING MORE STATES:

To enhance democratic representation and reduce the dominance of large States, consider creating more States. For instance, Uttar Pradesh is too large to be governed effectively as a single unit. A New State Reorganization Commission could evaluate the viability of creating new States, such as Bundelkhand, Gorkhaland, Jammu, Karu Nadu, Kongu Nadu, Mithila, Saurashtra, Tulu Nadu, and Vidarbha.

To improve urban governance and democratic representation, introduce direct elections for mayors in every Census town. Empower these mayors with decision-making power over crucial functions like urban planning, water supply, fire, land use regulations, and slum improvement. Encourage States like Bihar and Rajasthan to relinquish control over city-level authorities.

Enhancing local democratic representation will strengthen India's democracy and address the concerns of citizens in various regions. These measures could lead to a more just electoral system, where anyone, regardless of their region, can aspire to become Prime Minister.

CONCLUSION: India's electoral system is in dire need of reform to address the issue of unequal representation and ensure a more just and equitable democracy. Delimitation, while a potential solution, needs to be carefully considered to avoid unintended consequences and favouritism towards certain regions or political parties.

Promoting federalism by strengthening the Rajya Sabha and considering proportional representation systems for Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections could help enhance democratic representation and give States a stronger voice. Additionally, creating more States and empowering local authorities through direct mayoral elections could further strengthen India's democracy.

These measures, along with a commitment to fairness and transparency, will help alleviate the concerns of citizens across the country and ensure that India's democracy truly represents the aspirations of all its people. Only then can a child from any corner of India, regardless of their region or background, aspire to become the Prime Minister of this great nation.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

CENTRE EXTENDS UAPA BAN ON EIGHT MEITEI EXTREMIST ORGANISATIONS

CONTEXT: The government has banned eight groups that are trying to break Manipur away from India.

STORY SO FAR: The Union Home Ministry has extended the ban under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) against eight "Meitei extremist organizations" for advocating the secession of Manipur from India through armed struggle. These organizations have been engaging in activities prejudicial to the sovereignty and integrity of India, including armed attacks on security forces and civilians, intimidation, and extortion, and procuring arms and ammunition from across the international border. The government believes that if these activities are not curbed, they will lead to further violence and instability in Manipur.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

VOTES ON UN DRAFT RESOLUTIONS CRITICISING ISRAEL WERE 'ROUTINE', REGULAR STANCE MAINTAINED, SAYS UNION GOVT.

CONTEXT: India's votes on UN resolutions criticizing Israel were not unusual. They were the same as India's votes on similar resolutions in the past. India's vote on the UN General Assembly ceasefire resolution in October was different. India abstained on that resolution.

STORY SO FAR: India voted in favour of five out of six resolutions criticizing Israel at the UNGA Fourth Committee. The resolutions called for condemnation of Israeli demolitions of Palestinian villages and support for aid to Palestinians. India's vote was seen as a shift in position, as it had abstained from a similar resolution in October. An official explained that the October resolution was a special vote, while the resolutions voted on last week were routine. However, former diplomats said that India's vote reflects a more transactional approach to its relationship with Israel.



“Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence.” - Robert Frost

ECONOMY

RETAIL INFLATION EASES TO A FOUR-MONTH LOW OF 4.87% IN OCTOBER

CONTEXT: India's inflation rate fell to its lowest level in four months in October, driven by a slowdown in the rise of vegetable prices.



BACKGROUND: India's retail inflation rate has been on a downward trend in recent months, but it remains above the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) target of 4%. The RBI has been raising interest rates in an effort to cool inflation, but this has also slowed economic growth.

STORY SO FAR:

- India's retail inflation rate eased to a four-month low of 4.87% in October 2023.
- The decline in inflation was driven by a slowdown in the rise of vegetable prices.
- Inflation faced by rural consumers eased from 5.33% in September to 5.1%.
- Urban households saw a fractional increase in inflation at 4.65%.
- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) is unlikely to lower interest rates anytime soon, as inflation remains above its target of 4%.

ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- Inflation in India is a key indicator of the health of the economy.
- High inflation can erode purchasing power and make it difficult for businesses to plan ahead.
- The RBI has a mandate to keep inflation within a certain range.
- The RBI's interest rate decisions can have a significant impact on the economy.

ECONOMY (EDITORIAL)

GROWTH DICHOTOMY

CONTEXT: Slowdown in industrial output growth shows low consumer confidence

BACKGROUND: India's industrial output growth slowed to 5.8% in September, the slowest in three months. Manufacturing led the decline, with year-on-year growth dropping from 9.3% in August to 4.5% in September. Consumer goods' output was just 0.3% higher than pre-COVID-19 levels this September, with durables being the only use-based segment to record a contraction so far this year.

STORY SO FAR: India's industrial production growth slowed to 5.8% in September, the slowest in three months. This was due to a decline in manufacturing output, which fell 2% month-on-month. Consumer goods output was particularly weak, with durables contracting 20% and non-durables down 3.5%. This is a cause for concern, as it suggests that consumers are not spending as much as they used to.

However, there were some positive signs. Output of infrastructure/construction goods and capital goods remained resilient, up 12.1% and 6.7%, respectively, this year. This is likely due to public capex on infrastructure sectors, which has lifted output of items such as steel and cement.

CONCLUSION: Going forward, the government will need to watch the consumption story closely. If consumers continue to tighten their belts, it could further dampen economic growth.

ECONOMY

GEM PROCUREMENT CROSSES ₹2 LAKH CRORE ON BUYING ACTIVITY

CONTEXT: The procurement of goods and services from the government portal GeM has crossed ₹2 lakh crore so far, this fiscal due to higher buying activity by different ministries and departments.

STORY SO FAR: The government e-Market (GeM) portal has achieved an impressive ₹2 lakh crore gross merchandise value in just eight months of 2023-24. This is a significant increase from the ₹1.06 lakh crore in 2021-22. The portal now has over 63,000 government buyer organisations and over 62 lakh sellers and service providers.



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ECONOMY

'ONE-FOURTH INFRA PROJECTS HIT BY ₹5 LAKH CR. COST OVERRUNS IN SEPT.'

CONTEXT: Over 400 infrastructure projects in India have been hit by cost overruns of over ₹477,000 crore. This is mentioned in the latest report by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.

STORY SO FAR: A recent report by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation found that 417 infrastructure projects worth ₹150 crore or more have been hit by cost overruns of more than ₹4.77 lakh crore in September. This represents one-fourth of the total number of projects being monitored by the ministry. Half of the projects (842) have also been delayed.

The report found that the original cost of implementation of the 1,763 projects was ₹24,86,402.70 crore, but the anticipated completion cost is likely to be ₹29,64,345.13 crore, an increase of almost 20%.

The report also found that project executing agencies are not reporting revised cost estimates and commissioning schedules for many projects, suggesting that the true extent of time and cost overruns may be under-reported.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

40 WORKERS TRAPPED IN TUNNEL IN UTTARKASHI SAFE; RESCUE EFFORTS ON

CONTEXT: A tunnel collapse in Uttarakhand has trapped 40 workers. Rescue teams are working to save them. The tunnel is being built for the Char Dham all-weather road project. The government says the accident happened as the area had soft rock that collapsed under pressure.

STORY SO FAR: A portion of an under-construction tunnel in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand collapsed early on Sunday, trapping 40 workers. Rescue teams are working to save the trapped laborers. The tunnel is part of the Char Dham all-weather road project.

Officials have established contact with the trapped laborers, who are safe and have enough water for a few days. Oxygen is being pumped into the collapsed area through a pipe. Rescue teams are working day and night to evacuate the workers safely.

The accident happened as the area had soft rock that collapsed under pressure. The government is investigating the cause of the accident and will take steps to prevent similar incidents in the future.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami visited the site on Monday to take stock of the situation.

SIGNIFICANCE: The tunnel collapse in Uttarakhand is a stark reminder of the importance of disaster preparedness and mitigation. While rescue teams are working tirelessly to save the trapped workers, this incident highlights the need for better infrastructure design and construction practices to prevent such accidents in the future.

Disaster preparedness involves taking steps to minimize the impact of disasters, while disaster mitigation focuses on reducing the risk of disasters occurring in the first place. In the case of the tunnel collapse, better disaster preparedness would have involved having a more effective communication system in place to reach trapped workers quickly and provide them with essential supplies.

Disaster mitigation measures could have included conducting thorough geological surveys to identify areas with unstable rock formations and designing the tunnel accordingly. Additionally, having stricter safety regulations and regular inspections of construction sites could help prevent future accidents.

The tunnel collapse in Uttarakhand serves as a wake-up call for the need to prioritize disaster preparedness and mitigation. By investing in these measures, we can reduce the risk of disasters and protect the lives of those who may be affected by them.

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"Intelligence plus character-that is the goal of true education. — Martin Luther King Jr.



ENVIRONMENT

COMMUNITY RIGHTS AND FOREST CONSERVATION

CONTEXT: The Forest Conservation Amendment Act of 2023 has been met with criticism from various groups, including indigenous communities, environmental activists, and human rights organizations. Critics argue that the law will lead to deforestation, undermine the rights of indigenous people, and fail to address the growing issue of human-wildlife conflict.

THE GIST

- The Forest Conservation Amendment Act of 2023 aims to determine how forests can be utilised for economic gain, and the manner in which it seeks to achieve this goal is outlined in the legislation. The primary method used to achieve this objective involves removing forests from the law's jurisdiction, thereby facilitating various forms of economic exploitation.
- The Forest Conservation Act underwent important amendments in 2016 and 2017, which stipulated that prior consent from the tribal grama sabha was mandatory for any alterations to forests for non-forest purposes.
- Despite the initial enthusiasm, it appears that both the Central and State governments have become less enthusiastic about implementing the Forest Rights Act in their States.

STORY SO FAR: The Forest Conservation Amendment Act of 2023 has received limited attention and little discussion about its impact on forests and its inhabitants. From the colonial forest law in 1865 to the Forest Conservation Amendment Act, 2023, more than fifteen laws, Acts, and policies have been formulated interlinking forests with legal and policy frameworks. However, there is little to no recognition of the rights of indigenous communities in these Acts, who are the rightful inhabitants of forest lands.

WHAT IS THE NEW AMENDMENT?

- The Forest Conservation Amendment Act of 2023 aims to address climate change and deforestation by removing forests from the law's jurisdiction, allowing for various forms of economic exploitation.
- This includes areas converted for non-forest use after December 12, 1996, and land within 100 kilometres of the China and Pakistan border.
- The government can also build security infrastructure in areas up to ten hectares and implement initiatives like eco-tourism and safaris.

REASONS FOR THE AMENDMENT:

- The Godavarman Thirumulkpad case led to an interpretation of forest land that brought all private forests under the ambit of the 1980 law.
- This was debated as the law was seen as restricting forest land from being used for non-forest purposes, including land conversion for large-scale industries.

- The law faced opposition from private landowners, individuals, and organizations involved in forest conservation due to its perceived adverse impact on the country's industrial progress.
- The need to exclude forest land from the legal framework was mainly driven by the requirements of the industrial classes in the country.
- Concerns regarding the Forest Conservation Act resurfaced periodically, echoing the apprehensions of indigenous communities and human rights activists.
- These factors came to the forefront again when the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Bill was introduced in Parliament in March, triggering extensive discussions and debates.
- The Parliament then referred the Bill to a 31-member Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC).

JPC'S RECOMMENDATIONS AND THE AFTERMATH:

- The JPC submitted its report to Parliament within three months, but its critical comments and those from the public were largely disregarded.
- The Bill passed both houses of Parliament without substantial debates or discussions.
- There were no collaborative discussions with southern states regarding their specific geographical concerns.
- The Odisha government revoked the "deemed forest" status in the state but later canceled the order due to public outrage and cited a need for detailed rules and guidelines from the central ministry.
- Removing forests from the purview of the Forest Conservation Act would hinder indigenous communities from asserting their rights.

PRIOR CONSENT REQUIREMENT AND ITS IMPLICATIONS:

- The Forest Conservation Act was amended in 2016 and 2017 to mandate prior consent from tribal grama sabhas for forest alterations for non-forest purposes.
- However, recent revisions have removed this requirement, but state governments can still proactively engage grama sabhas in specific activities, including land acquisition, through state-level steering committees.
- Many state governments may hesitate to do so due to a preconceived notion that tribal grama sabhas are "anti-development" and could hinder economically lucrative afforestation initiatives.

COMPENSATORY AFFORESTATION:

- compensatory afforestation involves afforestation or reforestation efforts to compensate for the loss of forest land.
- The Compensatory Afforestation Act has faced challenges due to ambiguities and land shortages.
- The new amendment aims to streamline the process but

raises concerns about potential environmental impacts.

- The law mandates afforestation of an equivalent amount of land for every parcel lost, but it doesn't specify the type of trees to be planted.

IMPACT ON THE FOREST RIGHTS ACT (FRA):

- The FRA has had positive impacts in various regions, but there is a growing reluctance from both central and state governments to implement it fully.
- Many view the FRA as an obstacle to converting forest land for non-forest purposes.
- State governments and their bureaucracies believe that granting community rights under the FRA could weaken their authority over forests.
- To avoid legal challenges, the government has chosen to reduce forest areas rather than amend the FRA, limiting the potential for further Adivasi claims.
- The amendment fails to address the growing issue of human-animal conflicts in forest areas, particularly in the Adivasi hamlets of the Western Ghats region. This conflict threatens both Adivasi livelihoods and wildlife.

PROBLEMS WITH THE FOREST CONSERVATION AMENDMENT ACT:

- The law's focus on afforestation incentivized by financial gains clashes with the principles of forest governance and contradicts the concept of decentralized forest management.
- Defining strategic linear projects is ambiguous and complex, making it difficult to implement the law effectively.
- Internal environmental security, particularly in states prone to natural disasters, is not adequately addressed by the law.

CONCLUSION: The Forest Conservation Amendment Act of 2023 has been met with widespread criticism from various stakeholders, including indigenous communities, environmental activists, and human rights organizations. The law's focus on economic exploitation, disregard for indigenous rights, and inadequate consideration of environmental concerns raise serious questions about its effectiveness in achieving its stated goals of addressing climate change and deforestation.

The amendment's removal of prior consent requirements for tribal grama sabhas, its promotion of compensatory afforestation without clear guidelines, and its failure to address human-animal conflicts further undermine its credibility.

To ensure the sustainable management of forests and the protection of the rights of forest-dwelling communities, a comprehensive and inclusive approach is needed. This approach must prioritize conservation, respect indigenous rights, and ensure transparency and accountability in decision-making processes.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

STARRY EUCLID IMAGES SPUR PROBE OF 'DARK UNIVERSE'

CONTEXT: European astronomers have released the first images from the newly launched Euclid space telescope, designed to unlock the secrets of dark matter and dark energy, hidden forces thought to make up 95% of the universe.

THE STORY SO FAR :

- The images are the sharpest of their kind and showcase the telescope's ability to monitor billions of galaxies up to 10 billion light years away.
- Scientists believe dark matter makes up 85% of the universe, and its influence is implicated in pulling together some of the most massive structures in the universe, like clusters of galaxies.
- Dark energy is even more enigmatic, and scientists hope to better understand its role in the expansion of the universe.
- The mission is designed to last six years, but ESA hopes Euclid has another six months of propellant to keep it in solar orbit.



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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

UNRAVELLING THE SECRETS OF SWING IN CRICKET WITH PHYSICS

CONTEXT: The dew and moisture have an effect on cricket matches. It explains how dew can affect the ball's movement and grip, and how the DLS method is used to adjust scores when rain interrupts a match. Therefore, it is important for teams to understand the physics of friction in order to play effectively in wet conditions.

DEWY DILEMMA: THE IMPACT OF MOISTURE ON CRICKET MATCHES

Cricket matches played under day-night conditions often encounter shifts in humidity and moisture, leading to the formation of dew on the ground in the evening. This dew factor poses challenges for bowlers, as it reduces the grip of the ball and diminishes the effectiveness of spin and swing bowling. Batters, on the other hand, find the dewy conditions more favourable, as they face less lateral movement of the ball and can anticipate a skiddy bounce.

Traditionally, captains winning the toss in day-night matches opt to bowl first, hoping to exploit the early dry conditions and gain an advantage before the dew settles in. However, this strategy carries risks, as the chasing team may find it easier to score runs under the dew-affected pitch.

Understanding the impact of moisture on cricket matches is crucial for teams to formulate effective strategies and adapt their tactics accordingly. By carefully considering the dew

factor and its influence on the game's dynamics, teams can increase their chances of success in day-night encounters.

FRICITION ISN'T SO STRAIGHTFORWARD:

The belief that dew always increases slipperiness is scientifically flawed. Friction is reduced only when the water film in between is thick enough. When the thickness is below a certain threshold, it increases the overall friction. In moist weather, the coefficient of friction increases, advantaging the bowler. Bowling speed also has some impact on the friction. In wet conditions, fast bowlers can use this feature to force the ball to grip more by launching it at a higher speed.

EFFECTS OF WEATHER CONDITIONS

Cricketers believe that dew negatively affects swing. In specific conditions, there are optimum bowling speed, seam angle, and spin rate for swing. The ball's trajectory creates an asymmetric flow field around it, generating the Magnus force. This force increases with lower temperature and more moisture. Cooler air offers less turbulence, giving bowlers more control. Misunderstanding dew's impact can result in overconfident batter to get out. Batters can improve their chances by maintaining a particular moisture level on gloves and soles.

INS AND OUTS OF DLS METHOD

The DLS method is used to adjust scores in cricket matches when rain interrupts play. It is based on the ratio of runs scored to resources used, such as overs and wickets. However, the method has been criticized for favouring teams that maintain a low run rate and keep wickets in hand. It also does not take into account the impact of rain on the pitch, which can disadvantage the team batting second.



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