

● POLITY

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DISASTER MANAGEMENT

FIRST VISUALS OF 41 PERSONS TRAPPED IN TUNNEL EMERGE

CONTEXT: The first visuals of the 41 workers trapped inside the Silkyara tunnel in Uttarakhand since November 12 emerged after an endoscopic camera was sent in through the six-inch pipe which was drilled through the debris blocking the tunnel.



A five-point action plan has been chalked out for the rescue, including vertical drilling, excavating two escape channels/tunnels on both sides of the tunnel, and digging a tunnel from the other end, the Barkot side. Meanwhile, horizontal drilling through the debris with a U.S.-made auger machine resumed on Tuesday. The operation was suspended on Friday after the machine encountered hard material. The rescue teams plan to insert a 900-mm pipe through the rubble to create an escape passage for the workers. The authorities are planning to place an 800-mm pipe inside the 900-mm one to provide more strength.

Lieutenant-General Syed Ata Hasnain (retd), National Disaster Management Authority member said efforts were being made on five fronts to save the workers. The two-km section of the tunnel, with completed concrete work ensuring the safety of the workers, is the focus of the rescue efforts. In this secured portion of the tunnel, electricity and water supply are operational, and provisions, including food and medicines, are being delivered through a dedicated four-inch compressor pipeline. Five agencies — ONGC, SJVNL, RVNL, NHIDCL, and THDCL— have been assigned specific responsibilities, working collaboratively with occasional task adjustments for operational efficiency.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

NETANYAHU, HAMAS CHIEF HINT AT DEAL ON GAZA TRUCE

CONTEXT: A truce agreement between Israel and Hamas is likely with a deal to pause fighting and free captives.



The deal, as described by the first source, envisages the release of around 50 civilian hostages by Hamas and of female and minor-aged Palestinian detainees from Israeli custody, as well as a multi-day pause in fighting. Both sides would free women and children, and details would be announced by Qatar, which is mediating in the negotiations.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

AT BRICS SUMMIT, XI CALLS FOR IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE IN GAZA

CONTEXT: Chinese President Xi Jinping addressing a virtual summit of BRICS leaders called for all parties involved in the Israel-Palestinian conflict should immediately cease fire and suspend hostilities.

Mr. Xi called for a safe passage for humanitarian relief and pressed for an end to the forced relocation of the Gaza Strip's civilian population. The supply of water, energy, and electricity must also be restored in the Palestinian enclave, which has been battered by Israeli bombs. The Chinese President added that the only way out of the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian crisis is to implement the two-state solution.

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, who represented Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the summit condemned the killing of civilians in the conflict, but stopped short of echoing the Chinese demand for a ceasefire in Gaza. Mr. Jaishankar expressed India's concern about the situation in Gaza and called for "direct and meaningful negotiation" between the Israeli authorities and the Palestinians. The ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza is causing immense human suffering, including to civilians, the elderly, women, and children.

INTERNAL SECURITY

ISRAEL LISTS LASHKAR-E-TAIBA AS A TERRORIST ORGANISATION

CONTEXT: Israel listed Pakistan-based militant organisation Lashkar-e-Taiba as a terror outfit ahead of the 15th anniversary of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks.



The move is in sync with Israel's attempts to support a global war on terror. Israel has formally completed all necessary procedures and has satisfied all required checks and regulations to the result of introducing Lashkar-e-Taiba into the Israeli list of illegal terror organisations despite any request by the Government of India. Israel has been urging India to ban Palestinian militant group Hamas as New Delhi has not so far proscribed it.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CHINESE PREMIER LI QIANG TO ATTEND G-20 VIRTUAL MEET

CONTEXT: China on Tuesday announced that Premier Li Qiang will attend the virtual G-20 Leaders' Summit at India's invitation, and hoped that the meeting will address global challenges through cooperation and make positive contributions to economic recovery.



In the face of the volatile international situation and sluggish economic recovery, it is all the more important for the G-20 to reinforce partnership, address global challenges through cooperation

MAO NING
China Foreign Ministry spokesperson



The G-20 virtual summit will take forward key outcomes and action points firmed up at the annual conclave of the grouping in September under India's presidency. The summit will also delve into the impact of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas conflict. Leaders of all G-20 members, including the Chair of the African Union, as well as nine Guest countries, and Heads of 11 International Organisations, have been invited to attend the virtual summit.

INTERNAL SECURITY

ED ORDERS ATTACHMENT OF ₹752-CRORE ASSETS IN

CONTEXT: The Enforcement Directorate issued an order to provisionally attach properties worth ₹ 751.9 crore in an alleged money-laundering case involving Associated Journals Ltd. (AJL), which runs the National Herald newspaper, and Young Indian.

AJL was given land on concessional rates in various cities of India for the purpose of publishing newspapers. AJL closed its publishing operations in 2008 and started using the properties for commercial purposes. AJL had to repay a loan of ₹90.21 crore to All India Congress Committee (AICC), however AICC treated the said loan of ₹90.21 crore as non-recoverable from AJL and sold it for ₹50 lakh to a newly incorporated company, Young Indian, without any source of income to pay even ₹50 lakh.

Congress Parliamentary Party Chairperson Sonia Gandhi and former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi were on the Board of Directors of Young Indian, of which they owned 38% shares each. AJL was in possession of "proceeds of crime" in the form of immovable assets worth ₹661.69 crore in several cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, and Lucknow; and Young Indian to the tune of ₹90.21 crore as the equity shares of AJL.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

MINISTRY ASKS STATES TO ENCOURAGE USE OF SATHEE PORTAL

CONTEXT: Education Ministry would write to all States to encourage aspirants to utilise the newly launched portal — SATHEE (Self-Assessment Test and Help for Entrance Exams) — an online coaching platform has been launched by the Ministry and the IIT-Kanpur for exam preparation.



SATHEE is an open learning platform available to students free. SATHEE has launched a 45-day crash course for aspirants to test their level of preparation. SATHEE hosts live and recorded lectures, expertly designed curriculum, and doubt-clearing sessions [for students] to brush

up their knowledge. Nearly 5,000 students have registered on the platform so far.

The portal uses artificial intelligence (AI) to interact with students, and can be customised to each student's pace of learning. SATHEE's integrated AI chatbot helps students align their learning needs. The initiative is in line with the National Education Policy, with the goal to provide inclusive, high-quality education even to remote parts of the country. Pan-India mock tests are held every weekend, with the same look and feel adopted by the National Testing Agency for conducting the JEE.

SATHEE hosts lectures and video content prepared by Professors and students of the IITs, and the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS). With National Eligibility Cum Entrance Test (NEET) scheduled to take place in May, courses for NEET preparation will be hosted soon. Currently, digital learning material is available on the portal in English, Hindi, Odisha, and Telugu.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

INFLATION STILL REMAINS A KEY RISK TO GROWTH, CAUTIONS FINANCE MINISTRY

CONTEXT: Inflationary pressures have moderated but price rise remains a key risk to growth along with external financial flows that could affect the rupee's value and the balance of payments situation.

Inflation watch

Ministry flags potential risk that price gains pose to growth even as it sees drop in crude oil prices as a moderating factor



- Says private consumption spending has emerged as strongest driver of growth this year
- Notes that the festive season has further strengthened consumption demand
- Flags possibility of demand being tempered by fuller transmission of monetary policy

Asserting that the economy had been remarkably resilient amid a global slowdown, the ministry said private final consumption expenditure had emerged as the strongest driver of growth this year. While domestic demand had been solid, a fuller transmission of monetary policy may temper that demand, the ministry observed in its monthly economic review for October. Exuding confidence that the Centre was on track to achieve the fiscal deficit target of 5.9 % of GDP for the current year. The recent steep and rapid decline in global crude oil prices removes an important source of potential impact on public finances as well. The rapid reversal of rate hike expectations in the U.S. and the slide in the U.S. 10-year Treasury yield, coupled with the decline in oil prices, was good news for emerging markets in general, including India.

Rural demand has sustained sequential momentum" in the July to September quarter, attributing it to stable incomes from foodgrain production and moderating inflationary pressures. The festive season has further strengthened consumption demand. While accumulated savings and declining unemployment constitute the underlying strength of consumption demand" rising real estate prices had also helped boost consumption.



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

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ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

‘INDIA’S ECONOMY TO GROW 7% IN Q2, BUT LIKELY TO SLOW DOWN IN H2’

CONTEXT: The Indian economy is expected to grow by 7% in the second quarter, surpassing the central bank’s estimate of a 6.5% uptick, citing improved industrial performance despite a weak monsoon hitting the farm sector.



India’s real GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and Gross Value Added (GVA) had grown 7.8 % in the April to June 2023 quarter. A normalising base and an erratic monsoon are expected to result in a sequential moderation in the GDP growth to 7.0 % in Q2 from 7.8 % in Q1. Regardless, we anticipate that the GDP expansion in this quarter will exceed the Monetary Policy Committee’s October 2023 projection of 6.5 %.

Looking ahead, uneven rainfall, narrowing differentials with year-ago commodity prices, the possible slowdown in momentum of Government capex as we approach the Parliamentary Elections, weak external demand and the cumulative impact of monetary tightening are likely to translate into lower GDP growth in H2 FY2024. As a result, we maintain our 2023-24 GDP growth estimate at 6.0%, lower than the MPC’s projection of 6.5% for the fiscal.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

‘MORE OPEC+ SUPPLY CUTS LIKELY NEXT YEAR, AS OIL PRICES PLUNGE’

CONTEXT: The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies (OPEC+) are likely to extend or even deepen oil supply cuts into next year, after a more than 15 % drop in Brent prices from a peak in September, a majority of 18 analysts polled predicted.

OPEC+ is set to consider whether to make additional cuts when the group meets later this week. The sharp sell-off in oil prices has come despite a supply deficit due to OPEC+ cuts, in the fourth quarter and the risk of further supply disruption due to escalating tensions in West Asia, as investors fret about rising non-OPEC supply and softening demand in major economies.

Saudi Arabia, Russia and other members of OPEC+ have already pledged total oil output cuts of about 5 million barrels per day (bpd), or about 5% of daily global demand, in a series of steps that started in late 2022.

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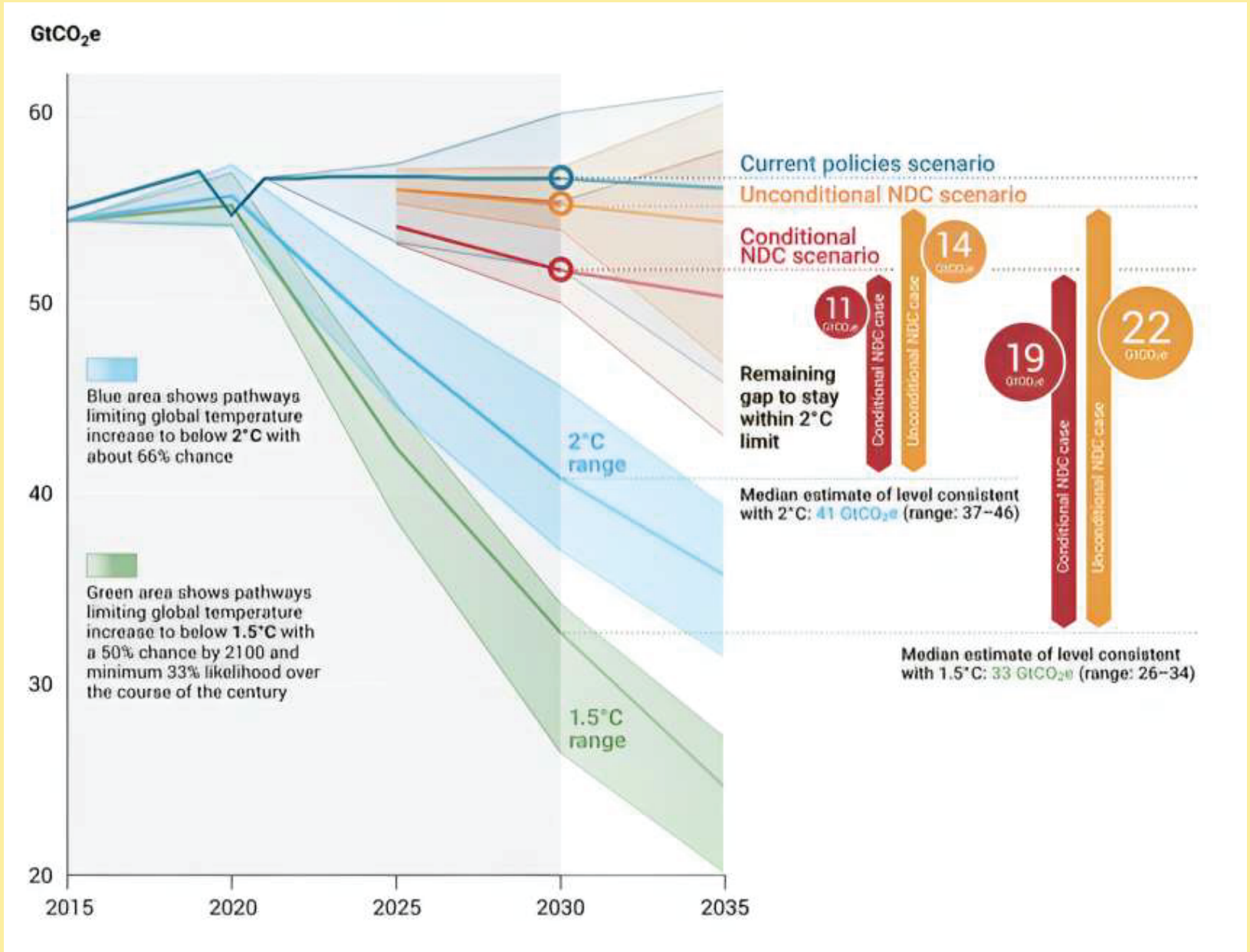
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ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

ALARMING COUNTDOWN

CONTEXT: The United Nations (UN) released its latest Emissions Gap Report 2023, titled "Broken Record," on November 29, 2023. The report found that the world is on track for warming of nearly 30 Celsius above pre-industrial levels by the end of the century, far exceeding the goals of the Paris Agreement.

The Emissions Gap Report 2023 found that greenhouse gas emissions are still rising, and that the gap between promised and actual emissions reductions is growing wider. The Broken Record report, suggests that temperatures would still result in an overshoot of 2.50 C -2.90 C by the end of the century accounting for all commitments made by countries, as per the PA, to minimise their economies' reliance on fossil fuel. UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for "dramatic action" to reduce emissions and limit warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, which is the most ambitious goal of the Paris Agreement.



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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

PAROCHIAL LAW

CONTEXT: The Punjab and Haryana High Court quashed the Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020 that provides for 75% reservation to State domiciles in the private sector in jobs that provide a monthly salary of less than ₹30,000.

The court stated that it was beyond the purview of the State to legislate on the issue and restrict private employers from recruiting people from the open market. It also held that the Act was violative of equality guaranteed under Article 14 and freedom under Article 19 of the Constitution. The court said that by allotting 75 % reservation for “locals”, the Act militates against the rights of citizens of the rest of the country, and that such acts could lead to other States coming up with similar enactments, in effect putting up “artificial walls” throughout India. It argued that the Act was imposing unreasonable restrictions on workers’ right to move freely throughout the territory of India.

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

RECOGNISING THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON HEALTH

CONTEXT: Dubai is set to host the 28th edition of the Conference of Parties of the Climate Change in December, 2023.

Climate change affects health directly, causing more sickness and death. In more indirect ways, it affects nutrition, reduces working hours, and increases climate-induced stress. India’s inadequate health systems make our population particularly vulnerable to the impact of climate risks on health.

One estimate suggests that if global temperature were to rise by 2°C, many parts of India would become uninhabitable. All nations during the Paris Agreement agreed to cap the rise in temperature at 1.5°C. Clearly, we have failed. The year 2023 saw the highest temperatures and heat waves in recorded history. The situation is likely to worsen for the planet. Climate emergencies — extreme heat, cyclones, floods — are expected to occur with increasing regularity. These will interfere with food security and livelihoods and sharpen health challenges.

Double burden

Climate change is indirectly impacting NCDs through a variety of mechanisms, including:

1. Air pollution: Climate change is exacerbating air pollution levels, which is a major risk factor for respiratory diseases such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), and lung cancer. Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Diseases are exacerbated by increased and extended episodes of air pollution. The risk of dying from pulmonary disease increases by 1.8–8.2% during a heat wave and hospitalisation rates will go up by 8% for every 1% increase in temperature above 29°C.

2. Extreme weather events: Climate change is increasing the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events such as heat waves, floods, and droughts. These events can disrupt healthcare infrastructure, displace populations, and increase the risk of infectious diseases and malnutrition.
3. Food insecurity and malnutrition: Climate change is impacting agricultural production and food security, leading to malnutrition and micronutrient deficiencies. These conditions can increase the risk of NCDs such as diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer.

Direct Impacts

Climate change is also having a direct impact on NCDs through:

1. Heat stress: Heat waves are becoming more common and severe due to climate change. Heat stress can lead to dehydration, heatstroke, and other health problems, especially for vulnerable populations such as older adults and people with chronic health conditions.
2. UV radiation: Climate change is leading to an increase in ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which is a major risk factor for skin cancer.
3. Waterborne diseases: Climate change is increasing the risk of waterborne diseases, which can lead to diarrheal diseases and other health problems that can exacerbate NCDs.

Climate change is also having a direct impact on urbanisation

One of the most significant impacts of climate change on urban areas is the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. These events, such as heat waves, floods, droughts, and wildfires, can have a devastating impact on urban infrastructure, housing, and public services. In addition, they can displace populations and lead to the loss of life.

Climate change is also leading to rising sea levels, which is threatening coastal cities around the world. Sea level rise is inundating low-lying coastal areas, leading to saltwater intrusion into freshwater supplies, and increasing the risk of flooding. This is forcing many coastal cities to invest in expensive adaptation measures, such as seawalls and flood barriers.

In addition to these direct impacts, climate change is also having a number of indirect impacts on urban areas. For example, climate change is exacerbating air pollution levels, which can have a serious impact on human health. Climate change is also impacting agricultural production, which can lead to food insecurity and malnutrition. These conditions can increase the risk of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as heart disease, stroke, cancer, and diabetes.

Action to control climate change needs to happen at global, regional, and local levels. Pathways of climate change and their impact will determine the appropriate area of intervention. To achieve this, India has to recognise climate change and its impact on health as a problem that can be and needs to be addressed. Researchers who work in this area

need to come up with policy options for action. National, State, and local governments have to decide to act on the policy options that have been generated by research. Only when the three streams of problematisation, policy options, and political decision-making come together is meaningful change likely to happen. It will be worthwhile to examine if these necessary conditions have been satisfied before expecting a change in the status quo on climate change and its impact on health.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIA, JAPAN CONVERGES IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

CONTEXT: The Philippines is increasingly tilting towards Japan and India in recent years, as it seeks to diversify its alliances and partnerships in response to a changing geopolitical landscape. This shift is evident in a number of areas, including defence, trade, and investment.

- 1. Defence Cooperation:** The Philippines has strengthened its defence cooperation with Japan and India in recent years. This includes joint military exercises, training programs, and equipment sales. For example, the Philippines has purchased BrahMos missiles from India and frigates from Japan.
- 2. Economic Cooperation:** The Philippines has also deepened its economic cooperation with Japan and India. This includes bilateral trade agreements, investment projects, and development assistance. For example, Japan is a major investor in the Philippines' infrastructure development, while India is a key source of IT and outsourcing services.
- 3. Political Engagement:** The Philippines has also engaged more actively with Japan and India at the political level. This includes high-level visits, diplomatic exchanges, and participation in regional forums. For example, the Philippines has hosted the India-ASEAN Summit and the Japan-ASEAN Summit in recent years.

FACTORS DRIVING THE TILT

A number of factors are driving the Philippines' tilt towards Japan and India. These include:

- 1. Rise of China:** Under the leadership of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the Philippines has been steadfast in securing its sovereignty and sovereign rights in the West Philippine Sea against China's revisionist interests in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, at the heart of Marcos Jr.'s foreign policy lies the intent to work closely with like-minded traditional and non-traditional partners.
- 2. US's focus on other priorities:** Forging robust ties with friendly regional powers is crucial to Southeast Asian countries' hedging strategies, especially as the U.S.-China competition continues to intensify. In fact, based on the authoritative State of Southeast Asian Survey of 2023, Japan and India are the top two choices of Southeast Asian

countries for alternative Indo-Pacific strategic partners.

- 3. Philippines' desire for economic development:** The Philippines and Japan share a close strategic partnership, with the former being Manila's major investor and its largest source of overseas development assistance (ODA). From being the first recipient of Japan's overseas security assistance (OSA) to formalising negotiations for a reciprocal access agreement (RAA), the meeting between Marcos Jr. and Kishida paved the way for a "golden age" in the Philippines-Japan strategic partnership, which has the makings of more regularised military-to-military engagements

IMPLICATIONS OF THE TILT

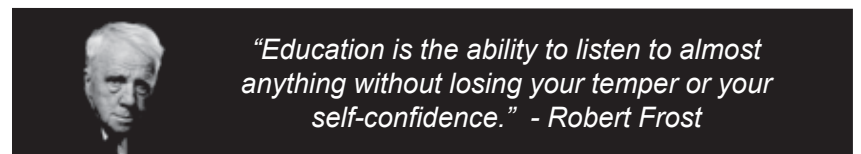
The Philippines' tilt towards Japan and India has a number of implications for the region. These include:

A more complex geopolitical landscape: The Philippines' tilt towards Japan and India makes the geopolitical landscape in the region more complex. This could lead to increased competition and tensions between major powers.

A more stable and prosperous Philippines: The Philippines' tilt towards Japan and India could help to make the country more stable and prosperous. This is because Japan and India are both democracies with strong economies.

A more peaceful and rules-based order in the region: The Philippines' tilt towards Japan and India could help to promote a more peaceful and rules-based order in the region. This is because Japan and India are both committed to the rule of law and peaceful resolution of disputes.

Overall, the Philippines' tilt towards Japan and India is a significant development that is likely to have a major impact on the region. It is a reflection of the Philippines' desire to diversify its alliances and partnerships in response to a changing geopolitical landscape. The tilt could lead to increased competition and tensions between major powers, but it could also help to make the Philippines more stable and prosperous. Ultimately, the implications of the tilt will depend on how it is managed by all parties involved.





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