

● POLITY

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

BIHAR SEEKS TO RAISE QUOTA TO 65% AFTER TABLING CASTE SURVEY

CONTEXT: In Bihar, the state cabinet has approved a proposal to increase reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) to 65%, surpassing the 50% reservation ceiling set by the Supreme Court.

The proposal, presented by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar following the release of a caste survey report, aims to align reservation quotas more closely with the population distribution of these communities in the state.

STORY SO FAR: The Bihar Cabinet has approved a proposal to increase reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), Other Backward Classes (OBCs), and Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) from the current 50% to 65%, despite exceeding the 50% reservation limit set by the Supreme Court. This proposal, introduced by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, is based on a recent caste survey report and aims to align reservation quotas with the population distribution of these communities in the state. The proposed changes exclude the 10% reservation for Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), resulting in a total reservation of 75%. The detailed report also highlights economic disparities and an increase in the state's literacy rate. There are claims by the Opposition BJP legislators that the ruling coalition may have inflated the population figures of certain groups for political reasons, but the Chief Minister dismisses these claims as baseless, emphasizing that there has been no caste survey in the country before.

SIGNIFICANCE: The Bihar government's decision to increase reservations for various caste groups in the state, based on a recent caste survey, holds significant social and political implications. By exceeding the 50% reservation cap set by the Supreme Court, this move addresses socio-economic disparities and aims to provide a fairer distribution of opportunities, potentially impacting the political landscape and representation in the region.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

THE PROBLEM WITH THE '70 HOURS A WEEK LINE

CONTEXT: Infosys co-founders call for 70-hour workweeks for India's youth sparks debate, with critics pointing to hidden profit motives and questionable logic.

BACKGROUND: India's Infosys co-founder N.R. Narayana Murthy's call for 70-hour workweeks for India's youth has sparked debate. His argument that extended working hours helped advanced countries such as Germany and Japan to succeed has been met with criticism. Critics argue that working hours in advanced countries have declined, not increased and that, it is innovation, not longer hours, is the key to raising productivity. Additionally, they point out that the ILS, including the ILO's Decent Work Agenda and its Fundamental Conventions, sets limits on working hours and that companies that violate these standards could be shut out of global markets.

THE MAJOR CRITICISM OF TGE STATEMENT

Mr. Narayana Murthy's proposal for a 70-hour workweek in India is flawed for three reasons:

- It is factually incorrect. Working hours in advanced countries have declined, not increased, and innovation, no longer hours, is the key to raising productivity.
- It places the burden of increasing productivity on the shoulders of workers, when the reality is that businesses have underinvested in innovation, which is the critical factor for raising productivity.
- It violates international labor standards (ILS). The ILS, including the ILO's Decent Work Agenda and its Fundamental Conventions, sets limits on working hours and that companies that violate these standards could be shut out of global markets.

WORKING HOURS IN THE ADVANCED WORLD

Contrary to Mr. Narayana Murthy's assertion that extended working hours lead to economic success, evidence from advanced economies suggests the opposite. Working hours have declined steadily in these countries, with Germany experiencing a 59% reduction from 1870 to 2017 and Japan seeing a decrease from 44 hours in 1961 to less than 35 hours in 2017. This trend is attributed to rising incomes, increased leisure time, and the realization that productivity is more closely linked to innovation than longer working hours.

In support of this argument, the ILO highlights the negative impact of excessive working hours on physical and mental well-being, as well as the broader economic

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implications. For India, with its young and growing workforce, Mr. Narayana Murthy's proposal for a 70-hour workweek could lead to premature burnout and hinder long-term productivity.

Furthermore, the key to enhancing productivity lies in strengthening a nation's innovation system. India's low investment in research and development (GERD), with a private sector share of only 41%, pales in comparison to advanced economies. To address this deficit, India must focus on fostering innovation through increased public and private sector investments.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR STANDARDS (ILS)

Despite being aware that adopting a 70-hour workweek would violate the ILO's Convention No. 1, which sets a standard of an eight-hour average workday, certain segments of India Inc. have nevertheless advocated for such a policy.

The ILS is gaining prominence in global trade regulations, and advanced nations are demanding its inclusion in bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs). For instance, the ILS is incorporated into the FTAs that India is currently negotiating with the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom.

The ILS is also crucial to the implementation of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), a 14-nation organization led by the United States that aims to promote economic cooperation in the region. IPEF members signed an agreement six months ago to enhance supply chain resilience, which included a commitment to "promote supply chains in which labor rights are respected and create market demand for sustainable and responsible sources of supply."

Labor rights, as defined in this agreement, include the ILO's Fundamental Conventions, such as "acceptable conditions of work with respect to minimum wages and hours of work." This implies that Indian companies can only participate in IPEF member supply chains if they adhere to labor rights.

SUPPLY CHAIN REGULATIONS AND LABOR RIGHTS

European Union (EU) member states have implemented regulations known as "Supply Chain Due Diligence" that require companies to identify and address any adverse impacts their activities may have on human rights, including slavery, child labor, and labor exploitation. These regulations apply throughout the supply chain, from direct suppliers to downstream partners.

France, Germany, and other EU countries have enacted their own supply chain due diligence laws, and the EU has adopted a directive that mandates companies to assess their impact on child labor and labor exploitation. These regulations are intended to ensure that companies are held accountable for their actions and that they take steps to prevent human rights abuses in their supply chains.

India Inc., the Indian business community, should be aware of these regulations and the growing emphasis on labor rights in global trade. Supporting a weakening of labor rights could have serious consequences for Indian companies, as

they may be shut out of global markets that are increasingly enforcing supply chain due diligence requirements.

SIGNIFICANCE: The call for a 70-hour workweek in India is criticised as being flawed as it disregards evidence from advanced economies, overlooks the importance of innovation, and violates international labour standards.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CLOSER TOGETHER

CONTEXT: India and Bhutan are focusing on infrastructure and connectivity to boost regional development and trade.

BACKGROUND:

- India and Bhutan share a close and multifaceted relationship, with deep historical and cultural ties.
- Bhutan has consistently supported India's positions on various international issues, including the Doklam standoff with China.
- India is Bhutan's largest development partner, providing significant financial assistance for infrastructure projects, hydropower development, and other initiatives.
- The India-Bhutan partnership serves as a model for regional cooperation and development in South Asia.

The India-Bhutan Partnership: A Path to Regional Growth and Connectivity

India and Bhutan have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties and boosting regional development through infrastructure and connectivity projects. This renewed focus on connectivity is a significant step towards enhancing trade and economic cooperation within the region.

Key Highlights of the India-Bhutan Partnership

- Completion of surveys for the Kokrajhar-Gelephu rail link connecting Bhutan to Assam
- Initiation of discussions on another Bhutan to West Bengal rail link
- Facilitation of Bhutan-Bangladesh trade through a new rail link and upgraded checkpoints along the India-Bhutan border
- Establishment of a Special Economic Zone at Bhutan's southern border with Assam and an airport at Gelephu
- Expansion of Bhutanese export opportunities through Bangladesh's Preferential Trade Agreement
- India's "energy exchange" initiative to bring more Bhutanese and Nepali hydropower suppliers online and distribute energy to Bangladesh and Sri Lanka

Significance of the India-Bhutan Partnership

- Economic diversification for Bhutan, which has been heavily reliant on hydropower and tourism
- Increased regional trade and investment
- Bridge the economic gap between India's northeast and the rest of the country

- Strengthen regional cooperation and integration in the face of geopolitical challenges

CONCLUSION: The India-Bhutan partnership is poised to play a pivotal role in shaping the future of the region. The emphasis on infrastructure and connectivity will not only foster economic growth but also strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation between the two countries.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE MASSIVE DISPLACEMENT IN CONGO

CONTEXT: The Democratic Republic of the Congo is facing a humanitarian crisis due to ongoing conflict and ethnic tensions. The conflict has led to widespread displacement, killing, and sexual violence. The international community has been slow to respond to the crisis.

STORY SO FAR: The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis, with millions of people displaced from their homes and facing widespread violence. The recent escalation of fighting in the eastern province of North Kivu has further exacerbated the situation, with nearly a million people displaced due to the conflict with the rebel group M23. The international community has been slow to respond to the crisis, and there is an urgent need for increased humanitarian assistance and political will to resolve the conflict.

WHAT IS THE CONFLICT IN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

- The conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) began in the 1990s and is rooted in the Rwandan genocide of 1994.
- Violence by various militant groups, extrajudicial killings by security forces, and rising tensions with neighboring countries have resulted in thousands of deaths.
- The M23 rebel group has been particularly active in recent years, and a ceasefire mediated in 2022 has failed to hold.
- The international community has been slow to respond to the crisis, and there is an urgent need for increased humanitarian assistance and political will to resolve the conflict.

MAJOR ACTORS IN THE DRC CONFLICT

REBEL GROUPS:

- Allied Democratic Forces (ADF): A Ugandan rebel group operating in eastern DRC since 1999, pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in 2019.
- Cooperative for Development of the Congo (CODECO): Claims to protect the interests of the ethnic Lendu against the Hemas and the Congo army.
- Mouvement du 23 Mars (M23): A Tutsi-led rebel group accused by the DRC of receiving support from Rwanda.

STATES:

- Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): Accuses Rwanda of supporting the M23 rebels.
- Rwanda: Denies supporting the M23 rebels and accuses the DRC of supporting Hutu militias.

REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:

EAST AFRICAN COMMUNITY (EAC): Deployed troops to eastern DRC in November 2022 to stem the violence. Faced with protests demanding their withdrawal.

SIGNIFICANCE: The conflict in the DRC involves various actors, including rebel groups, regional organizations, and neighbouring states. The complex web of allegiances and accusations makes resolving the conflict a challenging task.

INTERNAL SECURITY

HOW ARE THE MIG-21 FIGHTER JETS BEING PHASED OUT?

CONTEXT: The Indian Air Force (IAF) has retired its MiG-21 fighter jets after over six decades of service.

THE STORY SO FAR: After over six decades of service, the Indian Air Force (IAF) has retired its MiG-21 fighter jets. The No. 4 squadron 'OORIALS' flew their last mission over Uttarai, Rajasthan, on October 31, 2023. The IAF is now equipped with 31 fighter squadrons, as opposed to the authorized strength of 42 squadrons. The phased-out MiG-21s are being replaced with more advanced Sukhoi-30 MKI aircraft.

THE MIG-21: A LEGACY OF SERVICE IN THE INDIAN AIR FORCE

The MiG-21, a supersonic fighter jet inducted into the IAF in 1963, played a pivotal role in India's defense for over six decades. It served as the IAF's frontline fighter jet for a significant period, participating in all major conflicts, including the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War and the 1999 Kargil War.

The MiG-21's impressive performance was evident during the 1971 War, where it helped the IAF gain air superiority over both fronts. Its effectiveness extended to the Kargil War, where night operations using the aircraft proved crucial in undermining the enemy's resilience.

Despite its contributions, the MiG-21 was not without its drawbacks. The aircraft's safety record was marred by over 400 accidents, resulting in the loss of around 200 pilots. This issue, along with delays in the induction of newer aircraft, led to the IAF's decision to phase out the MiG-21 fleet.

As the IAF transitions to more advanced aircraft like the Sukhoi-30 MKI and the Rafale, the MiG-21's legacy remains etched in the annals of Indian military history. Its contributions to safeguarding India's airspace and deterring adversaries will continue to be remembered.

INDIAN AIR FORCE MODERNIZATION

In recent years, the Indian Air Force (IAF) has embarked on a significant modernization program to upgrade its fighter jet

fleet and enhance its capabilities. This effort has involved the induction of new aircraft, the phasing out of older models, and the development of indigenous platforms.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MODERNIZATION PROGRAM INCLUDE:

Induction of New Fighter Jets: The IAF has inducted two squadrons of the LCA Tejas, India's indigenous light combat aircraft, and two squadrons of Rafale fighter jets procured from France. These advanced aircraft have significantly bolstered the IAF's airpower.

Expansion of LCA Tejas Fleet: In January 2021, the IAF signed a contract with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) for 83 LCA Mk1A aircraft, an upgraded version of the Tejas. These aircraft are expected to start arriving in early 2024 and will form the bulk of the IAF's fighter jet force.

Development of Advanced Fighter Jets: The IAF is also developing two advanced fighter jets: the LCA-Mk2, a larger and more powerful version of the Tejas, and the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), a fifth-generation fighter aircraft. These aircraft are expected to enter service in the coming years and further enhance the IAF's capabilities.

SIGNIFICANCE: The IAF is currently at 31 fighter squadrons, as opposed to the authorized strength of 42 squadrons. The modernization program aims to increase the number of fighter squadrons to 45 by 2030.

The IAF is also investing in other areas, such as air defense systems, electronic warfare capabilities, and space-based assets, to enhance its overall combat potential.

The Indian Air Force's modernization program is a crucial step in ensuring India's air superiority and safeguarding its national security in the face of evolving threats and challenges.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

UNDERSTANDING THE FUNDAMENTALS OF HOW ELECTRICITY IS TRANSMITTED

CONTEXT: Since energy exists in many forms, like light, sound, and heat, power and power transmission also exist in many forms. However, electric power transmission is more complicated because of the multiple phases of electric current, and factors like voltage, impedance, frequency, etc

BACKGROUND: Power transmission is essential for India's development, connecting power sources to consumers and enabling industries, businesses, and households to function effectively. It is a complex system that requires specialized infrastructure and expertise to ensure efficient and safe transmission. As India continues to grow and modernize, the importance of power transmission will only increase.

BASICS OF TRANSMITTING ELECTRICITY

Efficient electricity transmission requires careful consideration of voltage, current, and cable resistance. Transformers are used to increase voltage and decrease current, reducing energy loss during transmission. Transmission cables are typically made of thick conductors to minimize resistance, but cost considerations may dictate the use of thinner cables. The length of the transmission line also affects energy loss, with longer distances generally leading to higher losses. The use of alternating current (AC) allows for easier modification in transformers and higher transmission efficiency compared to direct current (DC). However, higher AC frequencies increase resistance in the transmission lines. Engineers carefully model these factors to optimize transmission efficiency and minimize energy losses.

WHAT IS AC POWER?

Three-phase AC is the most common way to transmit electricity. In AC, voltage polarity flips back and forth, completing a full circle with each flip. This flipping frequency is known as the AC frequency.

In a three-phase AC circuit, there are three wires, each with a voltage offset by 120 degrees from the others. This creates three separate phases of power.

Consumers receive three wires from the power grid, each carrying AC power. Appliances are designed to use AC because it is easier to control than DC.

HOW IS POWER TRANSMITTED?

Three-phase AC power travels from power stations through transmission lines suspended from towers. The wires carry current in different phases and their voltage is stepped up at transformers. Insulators, circuit breakers, and arresters protect the lines from surges and lightning strikes. Dampers prevent vibrations from affecting the towers' stability. Switches control current flow and substations handle power routing and voltage conversion. Supporting infrastructure includes engineers, fire protection, computerized operations, and staff facilities.



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HOW GRIDS OPERATE?

Power grids play a crucial role in modern society, delivering electricity from power plants to consumers. They operate by coordinating the production, transmission, and distribution of electricity across vast distances.

Grids must account for various factors, including the intermittent nature of renewable energy sources, fluctuating consumer demand, and the need to maintain a stable frequency and voltage. They achieve this through a combination of storage facilities, gas turbines for quick power generation, automated systems for adjusting power output, and mechanisms to prevent cascading failures.

Wide-area synchronous grids, where all generators operate in unison, offer cost-efficiency but require stringent measures to prevent large-scale disruptions. The world's largest synchronous grid spans several countries in Asia, while China's State Grid holds the title for the most powerful. India's national grid is also a wide-area synchronous grid.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

YADAVS HOLD MOST GOVT. JOBS AMONG OBCS'

CONTEXT: Social, economic, and educational data of the caste-based survey report was tabled in the Bihar Assembly on Tuesday; the report raises serious concern over the education system as only 7% of the population are graduates and less than 1% has a postgraduate degree in the State.

POVERTY

The report shows that among the general class in the upper caste, poverty, at 27.58%, was found to be highest among the Bhumihars, considered a dominant caste in Bihar.

Brahmins are in the second position with 25.32% families — 2,72,576 out of 10,76,563 — poor. Rajputs stand third with 24.89% families — 2,37,412 families out of 9,53,447 — poor.

The Kayasth caste are the most prosperous with just 13.38% poverty — 23,639 out of 1,70,985 families.

EDUCATION

The data have raised a serious concern on the education system of Bihar which indicates that nothing much has happened on this front as only 7% people are graduates and 22.67% people are fortunate enough to get education from Classes 1 to 5. Less than 1% of the people have a postgraduate degree.

Not only this, 14.33% people get education from Classes 6 to 8, whereas 9.19% get education till Classes 11 and 12.

INCOME

The monthly income of more than one-third of the families is less than ₹6,000.

The 216-page report says 29.61% of the families have income between ₹6,000 and ₹10,000 a month. Overall number

of families with income up to ₹10,000 a month is more than 63%.

There are 2.97 crore families living in the State out of which more than 94 lakh are poor. Only 4.47% families earn monthly income more than ₹50,000.

GOVERNMENT JOBS

The data reveal that the Yadavs, at 1.55%, have the highest number of government jobs among the OBCs. The Yadavs have 2,89,538 government employees, Kurmis 1,17,171 and Kushwaha 1,12,106.

Among total 6,21,481 OBC people are in government jobs. Sheikh has the maximum number of government jobs among Muslims with 0.79% people. Among the general category in upper caste, Kayasth have maximum number of government jobs with 6.68%.

Similarly, among the EBCs, which have 112 castes, the Teli caste has the most government jobs with 1.44% people.

VEHICLE OWNERSHIP

Another shocking figure presented in the Bihar legislature is the number of people owing vehicles. As per the report 95.5% people do have a vehicle and only 0.44% have four wheelers.

Of the total population, only 5,72,156 people have four-wheelers and 49,62,000 have two-wheelers which is 3.80% people.

LAPTOPS AND COMPUTERS

According to the data, Brahmins are at the forefront in terms of owning laptops or computers in the State with 47,81 280 people out of which 3.73% have Internet facility whereas 0.39% people using laptops or computers without internet. Bhumihar with 4.43% , is in second place with a total 37,50,886 people having laptops out of which 4.29% have Internet and rest 0.44% without Internet. Altogether 2.1 crore people have laptops and computers in Bihar.

HOUSING

The report also says that 14% of the State's population lives in huts.

CONCLUSION: The report highlights the stark disparities in poverty, education, income, government jobs, vehicle ownership, and access to technology across different castes in Bihar. While some cases have made significant progress, others continue to lag behind. The findings of the report underscore the need for targeted interventions to address these imbalances and promote inclusive development in the state.



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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

AFTER VIRAL VIDEO, IT MINISTRY ISSUES WARNING TO SOCIAL MEDIA SITES ON DEEPFAKES

CONTEXT: The Ministry of Information Technology has sent a notice to social media platforms reminding them of the relevant Section 66 of the Information Technology Act 2000.

THE STORY SO FAR: The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has sent notices to all social media intermediaries, reminding them that online impersonation is illegal under Section 66D of the Information Technology Act, 2000.

The Ministry has warned platforms to take down such content within 36 hours and exercise due diligence in identifying misinformation and deepfakes.

The IT Rules, 2021, also prohibit hosting any content that impersonates another person and requires social media firms to quickly take down artificially morphed images of an individual when alerted to one.

Ms. Mandanna has expressed horror over the video and said that while she has the support of the public and her family this time,

Deepfakes are usually based on real videos, and are edited to change people's appearance, how they sound, and so on. Video deepfakes are growing rapidly in ease and quality, due to the improving technology and falling costs of artificial intelligence systems that are often used to make them.

SIGNIFICANCE: The tools to create and disseminate disinformation are easier, faster, cheaper and more accessible than ever

ECONOMICS

'GST REGIME HAS BROUGHT TAX RATES DOWN VERY EFFICIENTLY'

CONTEXT: Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has claimed that the GST regime has reduced tax rates leading to lower levies for consumers compared to previous indirect tax systems.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman applauded the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime for its success in lowering tax rates and reducing levies for consumers compared to the previous indirect tax system. She emphasised that consumers are now paying lower taxes on essential goods and services due to the GST's elimination of double taxation and overlaps.

Sitharaman also urged businesses to join the GST system, warning that those who remain outside risk losing potential customers and hindering the proper assessment of India's economic strength. She stressed the importance of a transparent tax regime where all businesses contribute to the country's well-being.

RELEVANT INFORMATION

The GST was introduced in India in 2017, replacing a multitude of indirect taxes such as excise duty, value-added tax (VAT), and service tax.

The GST has been praised for its simplicity and transparency, making it easier for businesses to comply with tax regulations.

The GST has also been credited with boosting trade and commerce within India by removing inter-state barriers and streamlining tax procedures.

CONCLUSION: The GST regime has emerged as a significant step towards a more transparent and efficient tax system in India. Its implementation has benefited consumers by reducing their tax burden and businesses by creating a level playing field. As the country continues to formalise its economy, the GST is poised to play a crucial role in promoting growth and prosperity for all.

ECONOMICS

GOVT. CLEARS EARLY RELEASE OF ₹72,961-CR. STATE TAX DUES

The Centre approved the early release of States' tax devolution dues worth ₹72,961.21 crore for November, citing the upcoming festive season.

The devolution dues are normally paid on the 10th of each month but this time, the release had been authorised on November 7, the Finance Ministry said.

"This will enable the State Governments to make in-time releases and add to the festivities," it said. Currently, 41% of the taxes collected by the Centre is devolved in 14 instalments among States during a fiscal year.

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