

● POLITY

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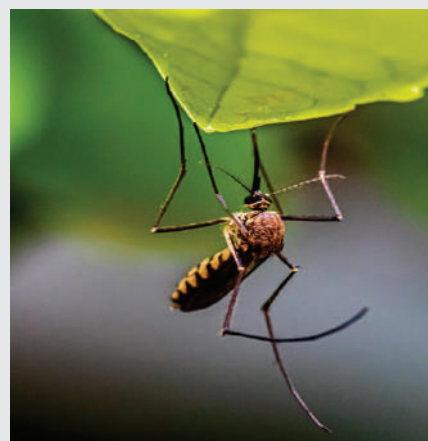
● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

TROUBLE WITH INDIA'S GUIDELINES ON GENETICALLY MODIFIED INSECTS

CONTEXT: In April 2023, the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) issued the 'Guidelines for Genetically Engineered (GE) Insects'. They provide procedural roadmaps for those interested in creating GE insects.



BACKGROUND:

India's economy contributes 2.6% to the GDP, but the government's ambitious goal of increasing this to 5% by 2030 will require aggressive investment and policy support.

Funding for the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), India's primary promoter of biotechnology, has been stagnating, and recent policies

do not reflect a serious intention to uplift this sector.

The reduced funding is detrimental to India's national interests, as the DBT is essential to any pandemic preparedness efforts.

Further efforts are also needed to attract private funding in biotechnology research and development.

Biotechnology policies also need to be aligned to the economic goals set out in the Bioeconomy report. However, the language in a set of guidelines that the Indian government released recently, pertaining to genetically edited insects, indicate a problem.

They have three major Issues:

FIRST: UNCERTAINTY OF PURPOSE

- The guidelines for genetically engineered (GE) insects in India are primarily focused on the use of GE insects for public health and environmental purposes.
- The guidelines do not clearly articulate the potential economic benefits of GE insects, such as their use in honey production or silk production.
- This lack of clarity is concerning, given India's stated goal of expanding its economy.
- The government should develop a clearer policy on the commercial use of GE insects in order to attract investment and promote innovation in this sector.

SECOND: UNCERTAINTY FOR RESEARCHERS

- The guidelines for genetically engineered (GE) insects in India

are currently only applicable to research and not to confined trials or deployment.

- The government will need to closely monitor the deployment of GE insects, as they cannot be recalled once released and consumers will not have a choice but to be exposed to them.
- The government will be the primary buyer of many GE insects, but it is unclear whether the Environment Ministry will approve their deployment.
- The guidelines should be revised to differentiate between GE insects for human/animal consumption and those for other purposes, such as silk or lac production.

THIRD: UNCERTAINTY OF AMBIT

- The guidelines for genetically engineered (GE) insects in India are unclear about what constitutes a "beneficial" insect.
- This lack of clarity is hampering investment in GE insect research, particularly in a country with limited public and private funding.

Other gene-editing guidelines, such as the National Guidelines for Gene Therapy Product Development and Clinical Trials, also suffer from similar ambiguity.

- The new guidelines do not adequately address the potential for GE insects to be used for malicious purposes, such as creating bioweapons.

CONCLUSION: India's guidelines on genetically modified insects suffer from three major issues: uncertainty of purpose, uncertainty for researchers, and uncertainty of ambit. These issues hinder investment and innovation in this sector and jeopardize India's ambitious bioeconomy goals. The government needs to address these issues to foster a thriving GE insect industry.

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ECONOMICS

RBI MAY CUT RATES IN 2024-25 IF FOOD INFLATION IS TAMED'

CONTEXT: S&P Global Ratings anticipates a potential interest rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India in 2024-25, contingent on favourable food inflation and monsoon conditions. They also expect India to maintain its fiscal discipline until 2026, despite the extension of the free food grain scheme, by making adjustments to other expenses."

THE STORY SO FAR: • S&P Global Ratings expects India's GDP to grow 6% this year and 6.9% the next two years, the highest among its BBB- to A-rated peers in the Asia-Pacific region.

- However, higher interest rates pose a fiscal headwind. Indian government bond yields remain high, putting additional pressure on the cost of funding the country's large debt stock.

- Monetary policy is likely to be a key economic theme through 2024, in the backdrop of the 'higher for longer' interest rates in the U.S.

- In India's case, headline inflationary pressures are likely to remain controlled over the next several months, giving the central bank some room to consider normalizing monetary policy.

- However, the central bank will need to balance this with the need to maintain financial stability and exchange rate and capital flow stability amid tight global conditions.

SWING FACTOR:

- S&P Global Ratings expects India's interest rates to be lower in the next fiscal year, assuming inflationary pressures remain under control.

- Food inflation will be the "swing factor" for India, and normal monsoons next year could lead to lower interest rates.

- The rating firm believes that the extension of the free foodgrains scheme and other potential freebies ahead of the general elections may not have a major impact on India's fiscal health in the medium term.

CONCLUSION: The rating firm believes that the extension of the free foodgrains scheme and other potential freebies ahead of the general elections may not have a major impact on India's fiscal health in the medium term.

However, the central bank will need to balance this with the need to maintain financial stability and exchange rate and capital flow stability amid tight global conditions.

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

WORLD WILL OVERSHOOT 2030 FOSSIL FUEL LIMIT BY TWICE OVER: REPORT

CONTEXT: Despite the global agreement to reduce fossil fuel emissions, a new report indicates that many governments are planning to produce twice as much fossil fuel in 2030 as would be compatible with limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius, and 69% more than would be consistent with limiting warming to 2 degrees Celsius.

BACKGROUND: Though committing to Net-Zero emissions by 2050-2070, many governments are planning to increase fossil fuel production until 2030, contradicting their promises made under the 2015 Paris Agreement. This widening gap between commitments and actions is creating a dangerous situation for the environment.

COP SUMMIT IN DUBAI:

- Around 190 countries will meet in Dubai for the annual Conference of the Parties to discuss fossil fuel emissions, renewable energy, and climate change adaptation.

- The Production Gap Report, released on Wednesday, assesses governments planned and projected production of coal, oil, and gas against global levels consistent with the Paris Agreement's temperature goal.

- The report analyses emissions trends for 20 major fossil-fuel-producing countries.

- Many governments are promoting fossil gas as a "transition" fuel without clear plans to phase it out in the future.

CONCLUSION: Even though there are global agreements to curb fossil fuel emissions, many governments plan to produce more than double the amount needed to limit warming, jeopardizing climate goals.

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

11.5 CRORE PAN CARDS DEACTIVATED FOR NOT LINKING WITH AADHAAR

CONTEXT: A total of 11.5 crore permanent account numbers (PAN) have been deactivated for not being linked with Aadhaar before the stipulated deadline, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) said in a reply to a Right to Information (RTI) query.

STORY SO FAR: The deadline for linking PAN with Aadhaar has expired and over 11 crore PAN cards have been deactivated as a result. This means that people whose PAN cards have been deactivated will need to pay a fine of ₹1000 to get them reactivated. This has been criticized by some who say that the fine is too high and that it will be difficult for people to file their income taxes if their PAN cards are deactivated.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

BRAZIL WILL GIVE CONTINUITY TO INDIA'S PRESIDENCY OF G-20, SAYS AMBASSADOR

CONTEXT: Brazil aims to continue the priorities set by India during its G-20 presidency, as the latter prepares to conclude its term with two virtual summits headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

BACKGROUND: India's G-20 presidency has been marked by a focus on the Global South and developing world. The country has hosted a number of events aimed at promoting the interests of these countries, including the First Voice of Global South Summit in March 2023.

Brazil is set to take over the G-20 presidency from India in December 2023. The country has expressed its intention to continue India's focus on the Global South and the developing world.

As part of its G-20 presidency, India is hosting two virtual summits in November 2023. The Second Voice of Global South Summit will be held on November 17, and the G-20 Virtual Summit will be held on November 22.

Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has confirmed his attendance at both summits. He has said that he hopes to take forward the focus on the Global South and developing world during Brazil's G-20 presidency.

MULTILATERAL SYSTEM:

- Brazil will continue India's focus on the Global South and developing world during its G-20 presidency.
- Brazil will also focus on fighting hunger and poverty, bringing the idea of sustainable development centre stage to the climate change debate, and reforming the multilateral system.
- Brazil's President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has confirmed his

attendance at both the Second Voice of Global South Summit and the G-20 Virtual Summit.

SIMILAR GOALS:

- Brazil shares many goals and targets with India as both are developing countries and members of groupings like BRICS, IBSA, and the G-4.
- Brazil is currently hosting IBSA and will host G-20 in 2024 and the COP30 Climate Change Summit in 2025.
- Brazil hopes to work closely with partners like India, South Africa, and Indonesia to address global challenges.
- During the G-20 Summit in Delhi, India was able to forge a breakthrough joint statement from the group, deeply divided over the Ukraine war, after a joint proposal by India-Indonesia-Brazil-South Africa was offered to other members as an ultimatum a day before the Summit.

GLOBAL SOLIDARITY:

- Ahead of the upcoming Virtual G-20 summit, India has indicated that it will not focus on any new issues, such as the Israel-Gaza conflict, but instead prioritize the implementation of agreements made at previous summits.
- The Prime Minister's Office wants the upcoming summits to focus on deliverables and outcomes from the previous summits, rather than making new declarations or statements.

FOSTERING COOPERATION:

Indian officials are committed to successfully implementing the G-20 Leaders' Declaration and fostering global cooperation in development and welfare.

CONCLUSION: As India prepares to hand over the G-20 presidency to Brazil, both countries are committed to upholding the interests of developing nations and fostering global cooperation on key issues such as hunger, poverty, climate change, and multilateralism. Brazil plans to build upon India's legacy during its presidency, focusing on implementing agreements made at previous summits and promoting global solidarity.



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ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

IMPORTANCE OF 'LOSS AND DAMAGE' FUNDS

CONTEXT: Climate-change-induced instability can have security implications as well, as conflicts and tensions emerge in vulnerable nations and threaten to spill across borders.

GIST:

- Loss and Damage represents the irreversible consequences of climate change: impacts that can't be avoided or mitigated through adaptation efforts.
- At the 19th Conference of the Parties (COP 19) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Warsaw, Poland, in 2013, representatives of member countries formally agreed to establish the L&D fund.
- The L&D fund was conceived as a critical component of global climate action, recognizing that some of the consequences of climate change are irreversible and beyond the capacity of vulnerable nations to handle.

THE STORY SO FAR:

- Adaptation is the proactive response to climate change, while loss and damage (L&D) is the irreversible consequences of climate change.
- Adaptation involves making deliberate choices to prepare for and cope with climate-related challenges.
- L&D encompasses the real losses that extend beyond monetary value and cut to the core of human rights and well-being.
- L&D includes economic losses, human casualties, and the degradation of ecosystems and cultural heritage.

WHAT IS THE LOSS AND DAMAGE FUND?

- The concept of loss and damage (L&D) has been around for over 30 years, but there has been no concrete action to address it.
- The L&D fund was established in 2013, but no countries have committed any funds to it.
- At COP 27, countries agreed to set up a Transitional Committee (TC) to work out how the L&D fund would operate.
- The TC has now met four times, but there are still no clear recommendations on how the fund will work.
- This lack of progress is a major problem, as it means that developing countries are not receiving the financial assistance, they need to cope with the impacts of climate change.

WHAT HAS CAUSED THE IMPASSE AT THE TC MEETINGS?

- The fourth meeting of the Transitional Committee (TC) on the L&D fund ended without a clear consensus on how to operationalize the fund.
- The main points of contention were the fund's location, the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR), climate reparations, and whether all developing countries should be eligible for funding.
- At the fifth meeting of the TC, developing countries agreed to allow the World Bank to temporarily host the fund, but

developed countries remained non-committal about being primary donors and rejected references to CBDR, equity, and liability.

- The current draft of the fund's recommendations urges developed countries to provide funding, but there is no indication of how much money they will contribute.
- Overall, there is still a lot of disagreement about how the L&D fund should be implemented and funded. This could delay the fund's launch and make it difficult to provide much-needed assistance to developing countries that are already suffering from the impacts of climate change.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THIS OUTCOME?

- The lack of agreement on the L&D fund highlights the deep divisions between developed and developing countries on climate change.
- Developed countries are unwilling to fulfill their commitments to provide funding for the fund, which is undermining trust and cooperation.
- The watered-down L&D fund will not be able to provide adequate support to vulnerable communities in developing countries.
- This will exacerbate climate injustice, humanitarian crises, and environmental damage.
- It could also have security implications, as climate change-induced instability could lead to conflicts.

HOW WILL L&D FUNDS ENSURE CLIMATE JUSTICE?

- Adaptation and L&D are not mutually exclusive, rather they are two sides of the same coin in our fight against climate change.
- A successful response to climate change requires us to focus on both adaptation and addressing the losses and damages caused by climate change.
- Developed countries have a moral and financial responsibility to help developing nations cope with the impacts of climate change.
- If developed countries do not fulfil their obligations, global climate action will be derailed and more pressure will be put on the already strained COP 28 talks.

CONCLUSION:

The establishment of a robust loss and damage (L&D) fund is a critical step towards addressing the irreversible consequences of climate change and ensuring climate justice.

The lack of progress on the L&D fund is a serious concern, as it highlights the deep divisions between developed and developing countries on climate change. Developed countries have a moral and financial responsibility to provide adequate funding for the L&D fund, as they are historically responsible for the majority of greenhouse gas emissions. Without this funding, vulnerable communities in developing countries will continue to bear the brunt of the impacts of climate change.

The L&D fund must be implemented in a way that is fair, equitable, and transparent. It must also be accessible to all developing countries, regardless of their income level.

The failure to establish a strong L&D fund will have a

devastating impact on vulnerable communities around the world. It will exacerbate climate injustice, hinder global climate action, and increase the risk of humanitarian crises and security threats.

Developed countries must step up and fulfill their obligations to provide L&D funding. Only then can we ensure a just and equitable transition to a low-carbon future.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

MOVE TOWARDS E-FIR, BUT WITH CAUTION

CONTEXT: The Law Commission of India, in its 282nd Report, recommended that electronic First Information Reports (e-FIRs) could be filed for all cognizable offenses where the accused is unknown. For cognizable offenses where the accused is known, e-FIRs could be filed as a preliminary step for offenses punishable by up to three years of imprisonment under the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and other relevant laws.

VERIFICATION OF COMPLAINANT and SUSPECT

- The complainant's verification can be done using a one-time password (OTP) for their mobile number and by uploading a valid ID proof, such as an Aadhaar card.
- The name of the suspect will not be displayed on the centralized national portal until the complainant signs the e-FIR.
- If the informant intentionally doesn't sign the registered information within the specified time period, the information will be deleted within two weeks.

An e- FIR

The concept of 'e-FIR' involves obtaining information or complaints electronically through a national portal. However, the process requires physical signature confirmation from the complainant within three days to convert it into an actual FIR. The Commission acknowledges that eight states are adopting e-FIR, but it doesn't delve into the specific models used, especially regarding signature acquisition methods. While the system ensures quick registration and prevents tampering with complaint contents, it highlights that the e-FIR is not automatically registered using electronic means, and any investigation before FIR registration may not align with the true spirit of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

HUMAN INTERVENTION IS CRUCIAL

- While most states are implementing e-FIRs for property offenses where the accused is unknown, the Law Commission recommends extending this to all cognizable offenses without considering other aspects.
- For example, in cases like kidnapping, immediate medical attention and timely crime scene investigation are crucial, which may not be possible with e-FIRs.
- While approaching a police station remains an option, the three-day period for filing an FIR may mislead people into thinking it won't affect their case.
- Electronic FIRs should be limited to cases where human interaction can be delayed without impacting the investigation.

E-AUTHENTICATION TECHNIQUE

The Commission has overlooked discussing the use of the 'e-authentication technique or digital signature' defined in the IT Act, 2000, for signing complaints in the context of 'e-FIR.' While the IT Act deems electronically rendered information acceptable, suggesting the use of electronic signatures, the Commission hasn't explored this aspect. The Act recognizes the 'e-authentication technique using Aadhaar e-KYC services' and digital signatures as legally valid methods. Without these, an electronic record sent to the police may be considered an unsigned complaint. The suggestion is to mandate the use of e-authentication techniques for complainant verification and immediate e-FIR registration.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Law Commission's recommendation to extend e-FIRs to all cognizable offenses, while progressive, should be implemented with caution and consideration of practical challenges.

While e-FIRs can streamline the registration process and prevent tampering, they should not replace human interaction, especially in cases requiring immediate attention or investigation. Electronic signatures should be mandated for complainant verification and prompt e-FIR registration. Careful consideration of these aspects is crucial for effective implementation of e-FIRs.

In addition to the aforementioned points, the following should also be considered:

- The need for training and sensitization of police officers on handling e-FIRs
- The development of a robust IT infrastructure to support e-FIRs
- The implementation of measures to protect the confidentiality and integrity of e-FIR data

E-FIRs have the potential to revolutionize the way FIRs are registered and investigated in India. However, their successful implementation requires careful planning, coordination, and a commitment to addressing the concerns raised.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TAIWAN, A MALACCA BLOCKADE AND INDIA'S OPTIONS

CONTEXT: There is the oft-posed question of whether India would take action in the Strait of Malacca or the Andaman Sea in the event of a conflict between the United States and China over Taiwan.

BACKGROUND:

- China has been intimidating Taiwan with its military presence in the region.
- There is speculation about whether India would intervene in a conflict between the United States and China over Taiwan.
- Any action by India in the Strait of Malacca or the Andaman Sea would likely involve a naval blockade or military action against Chinese naval vessels.
- However, commercial shipping has the right to freedom of navigation on the high seas, making a naval blockade impractical.

INDIA'S OPTIONS, THE CONSTRAINTS

- There are multiple constraints in regard to India's options in the Strait of Malacca.
- First, "distant blockades" away from a belligerent nation's geography can be challenged under international law.
- Second, the trade that passes through the Strait of Malacca is not just China's economic and energy lifeline. An overwhelming volume of the trade of Japan, South Korea, and even India itself passes through the same Strait.
- Third, the channel of the Strait of Malacca is long, nearly 500 miles, and involves the sovereignty of other states such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore which would all be affected adversely by a naval blockade. The affected countries are unlikely to support a naval blockade.
- Fourth, commercial shipping is extremely complex to identify in terms of the sovereignty of the vessel, flag, registration, insurance, and ownership of cargo. These are often multinational in nature and can also be changed as convenient through transshipment at any port in Southeast Asia.
- Fifth, apart from the fact that it is difficult to interdict China's trade and energy supplies, the additional reality is that even if the Strait of Malacca were "choked", shipping can take a detour either through the Sunda or the Lombok Straits to reach China. In any case, very large crude carriers carrying crude or natural gas to China do not use the Strait of Malacca which is shallower. They use the Sunda Strait.
- Sixth, China also has a huge onshore and floating Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) which can help it tide over disruptions, especially with growing overland energy supplies from Russia and Central Asia.
- A naval blockade or unilateral action against an adversary's

naval vessels would tantamount to a declaration of war; at the very minimum, it could lead to a conflict, not necessarily limited to the maritime sphere. Regional countries which are adversely affected by disruption in the Strait of Malacca, including friendly countries, are unlikely to endorse any unilateral action. China would use its permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council and regional influence to good effect to thwart any such effort.

- It is important to note that a naval blockade would be a very serious and potentially escalatory act. It is unlikely that India would take such a step without the support of the United States and other major powers.
- Even if India were to attempt a blockade, it is likely to be ineffective, as China has several ways to circumvent it.
- In conclusion, India has very limited options in the Strait of Malacca. A naval blockade is not feasible, and any other unilateral action is likely to be ineffective and dangerous.

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

- Naval blockades and sanctions have a history of leading to war.
- During World War I, the British blockade of Germany led to Germany retaliating with its submarines (U-boats), which eventually drew the United States into the war.
- During World War II, the U.S. embargoed Japan's energy supplies, which played a key role in Japan's decision to attack Pearl Harbor.
- The ongoing tensions between Iran and the United States in the Strait of Hormuz are a reminder that interdiction of even commercial shipping can lead to a military conflict.
- Whenever Iran has attempted to disrupt the passage of internationally flagged oil tankers, it has immediately escalated the situation, leading to the United States sending its naval and air assets to confront the Iranian vessels.

CONFLICT SCENARIOS

- In the event of a conflict between India and China, it is unclear whether India's strategic partners, such as the United States, would support any interdiction of Chinese vessels in the Strait of Malacca.
- Even if India were to receive support for such an action, there is no guarantee that other stakeholders in the region, such as Southeast Asian nations, would also support it.
- If a full-blown U.S.-China conflict over Taiwan were to occur, India's primary role would be to defend its territorial interests and the security of its sea lanes of communication, as well as those of its strategic partners in the Eastern and Western Indian Ocean.
- In such an event, India's primary focus would remain on its continental borders with China.
- The new U.S.-India partnership in the economic, high-tech, and military areas is expected to strengthen in the years ahead.
- The United States increasingly regards India as a regional



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ballast for stability in the region.

- A robust India with a strong economy, nuclear deterrence capability, and a credible military can contribute to multi-polarity in the Indo-Pacific.

CONCLUSION: India faces a complex and delicate situation in the event of a conflict between the United States and China over Taiwan. While India has a growing partnership with the United States and is increasingly seen as a regional power, it must carefully consider its options and avoid actions that could escalate tensions or jeopardize its own security interests. A naval blockade of the Strait of Malacca is unlikely to be feasible or effective, and any unilateral action could have serious consequences. India's primary focus should remain on defending its territorial interests and maintaining the security of its sea lanes of communication. The evolving dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region demand a nuanced and cautious approach from India, ensuring its strategic autonomy while contributing to regional stability.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

G-7 MEET APPEALS FOR HUMANITARIAN PAUSES IN GAZA

CONTEXT: G-7 Foreign Ministers on Wednesday called for humanitarian pauses in the Israel-Hamas war to let aid in and help the release of hostages and sought a return to a "broader peace process",

THE STORY SO FAR: The G-7 reiterated support for Ukraine against Russia, emphasized the need for engagement with China, and condemned North Korea's missile tests. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu mentioned considering "tactical little pauses" but rejected calls for a ceasefire. The G-7 faced challenges in forming a united approach to the conflict, and discussions also focused on post-Gaza conflict plans, including Israel's vague long-term strategy for Gaza. While Netanyahu suggested indefinite security responsibility, Israeli Foreign Minister Cohen proposed an international coalition or Gaza-led administration. The U.S. Secretary of State, Blinken, ruled out Gaza under Hamas or Israeli control, prompting discussions on various options, including multinational forces, interim Palestinian-led administration, Arab states' involvement, and temporary U.N. supervision.



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