

● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

**ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT**

## AQI HITS 'POOR,' TRIGGERING ANTI-POLLUTION MEASURES

**CONTEXT:** Delhi's AQI worsens, triggers Stage 1 GRAP in NCR to prevent further air quality decline.

**BACKGROUND:** Delhi's AQI reached "poor" at 4 p.m. on Friday, prompting the implementation of Stage 1 of the Graded Response Action Plan (GRAP) in the NCR to address worsening air quality and combat air pollution emergencies.

### Pollution control measures

A checklist for Delhi residents as GRAP Stage 1 is enforced across the NCR

- Keep up to date PUC certificates
- Turn off the engines at red lights
- Do not dispose of garbage in open spaces
- Report polluting activities on the 311 App, Green Delhi App, and SAIVIER App
- Celebrate festivals in an eco-friendly manner

Source: Delhi government



An anti-smog gun sprinkling water on a road in Delhi. FILE PHOTO

**NEWS HIGHLIGHTS**


- GRAP Stage 1 Actions: Involves a 27-point plan, including water sprinkling, anti-smog guns, banning coal use in eateries, and monitoring construction sites.
- Air Quality Index (AQI) Levels: AQI ranges from 0-50 (good) to 401-500 (severe), indicating pollution levels in the region.
- Committee's Responsibility: The Committee for Air Quality Management ensures strict implementation of pollution control measures outlined in GRAP stages.
- Subsequent Measures: Further stages include increased parking fees, improved public transport, and restrictions on specific vehicle types in major cities.
- Stringent Actions: GRAP stages mandate diverse actions to curb pollution, emphasizing both public awareness and regulatory enforcement.

**POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

## RELEASE OF BIHAR CASTE SURVEY UPHELD

**CONTEXT:** Supreme Court declines to halt Bihar's caste-based survey data release despite pending legality challenges.

**BACKGROUND:** Justice Sanjiv Khanna's bench, despite pending petitions challenging a survey's legality, declined to intervene in the state government's decision to release data. The case is scheduled for a January 2024 hearing, with the state required to respond to the petitions.

 You cannot stop a State government or any government from taking a decision... Yes, if there is an issue with regard to the data, that will be considered

JUSTICE SANJIV KHANNA



**NEWS HIGHLIGHTS**

- Data Collection Challenge: The issue revolves around the legality of unlawfully collected data, and whether it can be used for public welfare.
- Patna High Court Judgment: Justice Khanna mentioned that they had reviewed the Patna High Court judgment, which supported the survey's legality.
- Transparency vs. Privacy: The central question is the extent of data transparency, with the court dismissing concerns about privacy infringement.
- Status Quo Denied: The court declined to issue a stay order despite the request, stating that the case was still at a pre-admission stage.
- Bihar's Defense: Bihar argued that the data was voluntarily provided by the people and needed analysis to identify welfare areas.
- Previous Supreme Court Decision: Earlier, the Supreme Court had refused to stay the uploading of caste-based survey data.
- Centre's Stand: The Union government insisted that only the Centre had the authority to conduct census-like actions.
- Commitment to Welfare: The Centre reaffirmed its commitment to uplifting marginalized communities according to constitutional and legal provisions.

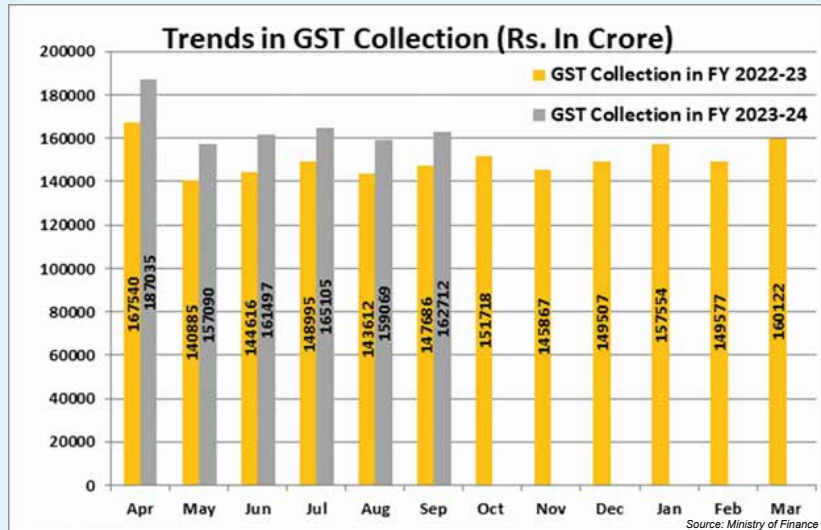
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## REVENUE RIDDLES

**CONTEXT:** India's GST revenues surpass ₹9.92 lakh crore, with an 11.1% YoY increase for the first half of the fiscal year.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** In the fiscal year 2023-24, average monthly GST revenues are robust at ₹1,65,418 crore, with September's collections slightly below the average but 2.3% higher than August, indicating potential for sustained ₹1.6 lakh crore collections during the festive quarter.



### CONCERNS ARISE OVER SLOWING GST REVENUE

- **GST Revenue Comfort:** The Indian government is comfortable with its GST revenues, even allowing for some moderation in early 2024.
- **Growth Slowdown:** There's a noticeable slowdown in GST inflow growth, dropping to 10.2% in September, the slowest since July 2021.
- **Average Growth Dip:** The average GST growth between July and September decreased from 11.5% to 10.6% between Q1 and Q2.
- **Concerns in Transaction Types:** Growth in domestic transactions and service imports has slowed from 18% in June to 14% recently.
- **Pending Dues Impact:** Revenues in September include pending dues from businesses since GST's inception in 2017-18.
- **E-invoicing Mandate:** Mandatory e-invoicing for firms with over ₹5 crore turnover since August 1 added to compliance efforts.
- **Unrealized Growth:** Despite a record 9.34 crore e-way bills generated in August, the highest-ever revenues weren't achieved, suggesting possible transaction size reduction.
- **Import Revenue Discrepancy:** Import-related GST revenues have dropped despite an increase in imports, indicating potential revenue leakage that requires investigation.

**ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT**

## CLIMATE CHANGE THREATENS 2 IN 5 AMPHIBIANS

**CONTEXT:** Climate change poses a major threat to global amphibian populations, according to a 20-year study in Nature.

**BACKGROUND:** The study 'Ongoing declines for the world's amphibians in the face of emerging threats' was published in Nature on October 4. It's the second global amphibian assessment led by the Amphibian Red List Authority, part of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Amphibian Specialist Group, and managed by Re: wild, a wildlife conservation organization.

### STUDY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Amphibian Extinction Risk:** A global assessment involving 8,000 amphibian species found that 2 out of 5 are threatened with extinction.
- **Climate Change Impact:** Climate change is a major threat, affecting 39% of species, with amphibians being highly sensitive to environmental changes.
- **Habitat Destruction:** 93% of threatened amphibians face habitat destruction and degradation, emphasizing the need for habitat protection.
- **Expert Contribution:** Over 1,000 experts worldwide, including Indian researchers, contributed data for this assessment.
- **IUCN Red List:** The findings will be published on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species to raise awareness about amphibian extinction risks.

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## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## NOBEL PEACE PRIZE 2023 GOES TO JAILED IRANIAN ACTIVIST NARGES MOHAMMADI

Narges Mohammadi, a prominent Iranian activist, was honored with the Nobel Peace Prize on Friday for her unwavering dedication to advocating for women's rights, democracy, and the abolition of the death penalty. Despite enduring numerous arrests by Iranian authorities and spending several years incarcerated, Ms. Mohammadi has remained a steadfast figure in nationwide protests led by women, which were ignited by the tragic death of a 22-year-old woman in police custody last year.

Ms. Mohammadi now joins the ranks of 19 women who have been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, becoming the second Iranian woman to receive this distinction after human rights activist Shirin Ebadi received the award in 2003.

### Nobel Prizes

The Nobel Prizes are prestigious international awards presented annually in recognition of outstanding achievements in various fields. They were established in accordance with the will of Alfred Nobel, a Swedish inventor, scientist, and philanthropist, who left a substantial portion of his fortune to fund these prizes.

The Nobel Prize has been conferred in the categories of physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, and peace since 1901, with the addition of an economic sciences memorial prize in 1968.

### Institutions and Disciplines

**The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences:** This institution is responsible for awarding the Nobel Prize in Physics and the Nobel Prize in Chemistry. These prizes recognize exceptional

contributions to the fields of physics and chemistry.

**The Nobel Assembly at the Karolinska Institute:** This assembly awards the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. It acknowledges remarkable discoveries and achievements in the field of medical and life sciences.

**The Swedish Academy:** This academy presents the Nobel Prize in Literature, which recognizes outstanding literary work by an author, poet, or playwright.

**The Norwegian Nobel Committee:** Unlike the other prizes, the Nobel Peace Prize is awarded in Oslo, Norway. It is presented by the Norwegian Nobel Committee and recognizes individuals or organizations that have made significant contributions to the promotion of peace and conflict resolution on a global scale.

**The Sveriges Riksbank (Swedish National Bank) Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel:** Often referred to as the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences, this award recognizes outstanding contributions to the field of economics. It is presented along with the other Nobel Prizes and follows a similar format.

Each Nobel Prize is awarded in its respective discipline and is considered one of the highest honours in that field. The Nobel Laureates are selected through a rigorous nomination and evaluation process, and the prizes are awarded during ceremonies in Stockholm, Sweden, except for the Nobel Peace Prize, which is presented in Oslo, Norway.

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

## ALIGNING HIGHER EDUCATION WITH THE UNITED NATIONS SDGS

Points from the article that can be used for descriptive answers with subheadings:

### *The Importance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)*

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) encompass 17 objectives with 169 associated targets, universally agreed upon by all 193 UN member states, to be achieved by 2030. These goals address various pressing issues, such as poverty alleviation, environmental concerns, and socio-economic challenges, necessitating concerted efforts from both developed and developing nations.

### *Challenges to SDG Progress in 2023*

Despite the passage of eight years since the initiation of these goals, the SDGs Report 2023 has raised concerns about sluggish progress, primarily attributed to the enduring effects of COVID-19, climate change impacts, geopolitical conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and a weakened global economy. This issue has been particularly pronounced in the Least Developed Countries, including India, which, despite its resilience in managing global economic crises and pandemic challenges,

faces setbacks in SDG attainment.

### *The Role of National Education Policy (NEP) 2020*

India's commitment to achieving the SDGs is underscored by recent actions and policies. SDG4, which focuses on quality education, is recognized as a pivotal element for realizing other SDGs. India's historical emphasis on equitable and inclusive education is reflected in its accelerated efforts to align with the SDGs. Notably, the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 plays a significant role in this endeavor.

### *Empowering Through Higher Education*

Within NEP 2020, there is an emphasis on changes across all educational levels, with particular priority given to higher education. Higher education is seen as a catalyst for social mobility, fostering creativity, critical thinking, and employability. Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) underscores the economic benefits of higher education, including increased employability and income. This has direct implications for poverty reduction, hunger alleviation, health and well-being, gender equality, economic growth, and reduced inequalities.

**The Importance of the Research-Teaching Nexus**

To maximize the benefits of higher education, universities must strengthen the connection between research and teaching. This approach equips students with knowledge derived from research and nurtures multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary skills essential for addressing global challenges, including clean energy, sustainable communities, climate change mitigation, and economic impact analysis.

**Promoting Sustainable Development and Innovation**

Sustainable development, encapsulated in SDG12, requires fundamental shifts in production and consumption patterns. Collaboration with private enterprises is essential for fostering innovation (SDG9) to address pressing challenges. Value-Based Education (VBE) can instill responsibility towards self, society, and the environment, contributing to SDG15 ("Life on Land").

**Suggestions and Conclusion**

To expedite progress toward achieving the 2030 SDG agenda, higher education stakeholders must align their activities with these goals. Ranking universities based on SDG achievement is commendable but insufficient. Collaboration among India's numerous higher educational institutions is imperative, fostering community engagement, energy conservation, efficient resource allocation, and skill development.

Universities must embrace sustainability as a guiding principle, embedding SDGs into institutional strategies across administration, teaching, and research. Higher education should integrate with socio-economic development, demonstrating tangible impacts on SDGs. Ultimately, universities must be perceived as contributing directly to the well-being of citizens and nation-building, making the SDGs a shared aspiration for all.

**THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS**

In 2015, the United Nations introduced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), often referred to as the Global Goals. These goals represent a worldwide initiative aimed at eradicating poverty, safeguarding the environment, and securing peace and prosperity for all individuals by the year 2030.

These 17 SDGs are designed to work together in a cohesive manner, acknowledging that efforts in one domain can have repercussions in others. They emphasize the necessity of achieving development that harmonizes social well-being, economic growth, and environmental sustainability.

**SDG timeline:**

2000 - Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):

- The Millennium Development Goals were established, providing a framework for global development efforts.



2002 - World Summit on Sustainable Development (Rio+10):

- A summit in Johannesburg discussed progress on sustainability goals but did not result in new global goals.

2012 - Rio+20 - UN General Assembly Resolution:

- During the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Member States endorsed the document titled "The Future We Want." Among their decisions in this document was the initiation of a process aimed at creating a collection of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that would build upon the foundation laid by the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

2013 - UN Working Group:

- The UN established a working group to begin the process of developing the SDGs. This group engaged in consultations and negotiations.

2014 - Open Working Group (OWG) on SDGs:

- The OWG, consisting of UN member states, released a proposal for the SDGs, outlining 17 goals and associated targets.

2015 - Adoption of the SDGs:

- In September, the United Nations General Assembly formally adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the 17 SDGs.

2016 - Implementation Begins:

- Implementation of the SDGs began worldwide, with countries working to integrate them into national development plans.
- Ongoing - Monitoring and Reporting:
- Continuous monitoring and reporting on progress toward the SDGs occur at various levels, from local to global.



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## GEOGRAPHY

## GLACIAL LAKE OUTBURST FLOODS (GLOFS): A GROWING THREAT

The catastrophic consequences of glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) and the pressing need for proactive measures to mitigate this threat.

### Chungthang Dam Breach: The Devastation of a 1,200-Megawatt Hydroelectric Project

Over 20,000 individuals have been impacted following the overflow of a glacial lake, which breached the Chungthang dam situated on the Teesta River, resulting in the destruction of a 1,200-megawatt hydroelectric project.

### Expanding Hazard: Glacial Lakes and Their Vulnerabilities

Glacial lakes, such as South Lhonak Lake, are substantial bodies of water positioned in proximity to, on the surface of, or underneath melting glaciers. As these lakes expand, they become increasingly hazardous because they are primarily dammed by unstable ice or sediment comprised of loose rocks and debris.

### GLOFs: Triggers and Consequences

If the containment around them ruptures, significant volumes of water rush down the mountainsides, potentially leading to downstream flooding. This phenomenon is referred to as glacial lake outburst floods (GLOF). GLOFs can be triggered by various factors, including seismic activity, exceptionally heavy precipitation, and ice avalanches.

### Sikkim Himalayas: Melting Glaciers and Rising Glacial Lakes

These lakes are commonly located in steep, mountainous regions, making them susceptible to landslides or ice avalanches

that may directly impact the lakes. Consequently, they can displace water, resulting in overtopping the natural dam and causing downstream flooding. An example of such an event occurred in 2013 in Uttarakhand's Kedarnath, where flash floods and a GLOF from the Chorabari Tal glacial lake claimed numerous lives.

### Monitoring South Lhonak Lake: A Vulnerable Glacial Lake

With rising global temperatures, glaciers in the Sikkim Himalayas are rapidly melting, leading to the formation of numerous glacier lakes and the expansion of existing ones in the area. According to a 2020 report by Mongabay, there are currently more than 300 glacial lakes in the Sikkim Himalayas, with 10 identified as vulnerable to outburst floods. Among these lakes is the South Lhonak Lake, which has been under continuous monitoring by government authorities.

### Mitigating the Risk: The Innovative Approach to Siphoning Water

A report from the Sikkim Forest and Environment Department revealed a significant increase in the lake's area over the past five decades. In 2016, in collaboration with various stakeholders, including the Sikkim State Disaster Management Authority and Sikkim's Department of Science and Technology and Climate Change, efforts were made to siphon water from the South Lhonak Lake. This technique, overseen by innovator Sonam Wangchuk, involved the installation of three eight-inch wide and 130-140 meters long High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) pipes to draw off water from the lake at a rate of 150 liters per second, as reported by the Sikkim SDMA.

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