



● POLITY

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIA MULLS GREEN POWER TRADE WITH SE ASIA

Context: India is in talks with several Southeast Asian nations, including Singapore and Thailand, for cross-border trade of renewable energy (RE) electricity.

More details

- Indian power officials are holding separate and joint discussions with countries of Southeast Asia including Singapore, Malaysia, Myanmar, Indonesia and Thailand at the ongoing G20 Clean Energy Ministerial meeting in Goa.
- As per the officials India are in an advanced discussions with Singapore for signing a deal on laying down a direct under-sea interconnection for trade in renewable power.
- Grid linkages will be established both under the sea and on

land, depending on cost equations.

Significance

- The move will help expand cross-border sale of electricity by India manifold. Currently, cross-border interconnections exist with Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Myanmar, and these facilitate total power transfer of about 4,423 megawatt (MW).
- New Delhi is also considering trading power with West Asian countries, including the UAE.
- Analysts believe the upcoming arrangement with Southeast Asian countries reflect India's growing diplomatic ties in the region, and signals its intent to be a large producer.

INDIA AND SRI LANKA DEEPEN ECONOMIC TIES

Context: India and Sri Lanka adopted a 'vision document' for a deeper economic partnership after talks between Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Background

- Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe is currently on visit to India. This is his first visit to India since he assumed office a year ago after an economic crisis triggered widespread protests in Sri Lanka.
- Last year, Sri Lanka defaulted on its foreign debt, and India, along with Japan and other Paris Club members, established a common platform to assist the country in restructuring its debt.
- India's support, amounting to nearly \$4 billion between January and July of the previous year, played a crucial role in helping Sri Lanka overcome a financial crisis. India remains a significant creditor to Sri Lanka, with outstanding debt amounting to \$1.9 billion.
- Also India calls for implementation of 13th Amendment and provincial elections in Sri Lanka ensure a "life of respect and dignity" for its Tamil population.

Outcomes of Current visit – The Vision Document

The 'vision document' is based on five pillars: maritime connectivity; air connectivity; energy and power connectivity; trade, economic and financial connectivity, and people-to-people connectivity.

1. Maritime Connectivity

- Cooperation in development of ports and logistics at Colombo, Trincomalee and Kankesanthurai, with an aim to consolidate regional logistics and shipping
- Resumption of passenger ferry services between Nagapattinam in India and Kankesanthurai in Sri Lanka

besides working towards early resumption of ferry services between Rameshwaram and Talaimannar

2. Air Connectivity

- Expansion of flights between Chennai and Colombo, besides exploring connectivity between Chennai and Trincomalee, Batticaloa and other destinations in Sri Lanka

3. Energy and Power connectivity

- The two sides plan to "establish a high capacity power grid interconnection to enable bidirectional electricity trade between Sri Lanka and other regional countries, including those of the BBIN (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal) initiative.
- The document also talks of expediting "implementation of understanding reached" on the Sampur Solar power project and LNG infrastructure, and exploring cooperation in Green Hydrogen and Green Ammonia.
- The two countries will also be working on a multi-product petroleum pipeline from India's South to Sri Lanka, besides undertaking a "mutually agreed" joint exploration and production of hydrocarbons in Sri Lanka's offshore basins to develop Sri Lanka's upstream petroleum sector.

4. Trade, Economic and Financial connectivity

- The two sides will undertake discussions on the Economic and Technology Cooperation Agreement with an aim to comprehensively enhance bilateral trade and investments in new and priority areas.
- The decision to designate Indian Rupee as currency for trade settlements between the two countries has forged stronger and mutually-beneficial commercial linkages. Sri Lanka has notified the Indian rupee as a designated currency for .
- It said both sides agreed to operationalise UPI-based digital

payments for further enhancing trade and transactions between businesses and common people.

- The two sides also agreed to leverage India's Digital Public Infrastructure in accordance with Sri Lanka's requirements and priorities towards effective and efficient delivery of citizen-centric services to the people of Sri Lanka.

5. People-to-people connectivity

- The two countries also plan to promote awareness and popularize India's Buddhist circuit, and Ramayana trail as

well as ancient places of Buddhist, Hindu and other religious worship in Sri Lanka for enhancing tourism, besides exploring cooperation between educational institutions.

- To expand cooperation between research and academic institutes in areas of mutual interests such as agriculture, aquaculture, IT, business, finance and management, health and medicine, earth and marine sciences, oceanography, space applications, as well as history, culture, languages, literature, religious studies and other humanities.

UKRAINE USING U.S. CLUSTER MUNITIONS ON BATTLEFIELD

Context: Ukrainian forces are using United States-supplied cluster munitions on the battlefield. Washington provided the weapons to Ukraine for the first time earlier this month.

What is a cluster bomb?

- A cluster munition, or cluster bomb, is a weapon containing multiple explosive submunitions. Cluster munitions are dropped from aircraft or fired from the ground or sea, opening up in mid-air to release tens or hundreds of submunitions, which can saturate an area up to the size of several football fields.
- Anybody within the strike area of the cluster munition, be they military or civilian, is very likely to be killed or seriously injured.
- The fuse of each submunition is generally activated as it falls so that it will explode above or on the ground. But often large numbers of the submunitions fail to function as designed, and instead land on the ground without exploding, where they remain as very dangerous duds.

- There are a wide variety of types of cluster munitions. According to the Cluster Munition Monitor, a total of 34 states have at one time developed or produced over 200 types of cluster munitions.

Convention on Cluster Munitions

- Under the Convention on Cluster Munitions, cluster munitions are defined and prohibited as a category of weapons. The definition of a cluster munition under Article 2 is "a conventional munition that is designed to disperse or release explosive submunitions each weighing less than 20 kilograms, and includes those explosive submunitions."
- The Convention was adopted in Dublin by 107 States on 30 May 2008 and signed in Oslo on 3 December the same year. The Convention became binding international law when it entered into force on 1 August 2010. To date, a total of 123 States have joined the Convention – 111 States Parties and 12 Signatories.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

VARANASI COURT ORDERS ASI SURVEY OF GYANVAPI MOSQUE

A Varanasi court gave directions Friday for a "scientific investigation/survey/excavation" of the Gyanvapi mosque premises by the Archaeological Survey of India and asked it to "find out" whether the "present structure" was "constructed over a pre-existing structure of a Hindu temple".

Ground Penetrating Radar

Allowing an application by four Hindu women petitioners, District and Sessions Judge Dr Ajaya Krishna Vishvesha, in his order, directed the ASI to "conduct Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey just below the 3 domes of the building in question and conduct excavation if required".

Ground-penetrating radar (GPR) is a geophysical method that uses radar pulses to image the subsurface. It is a non-intrusive method of surveying the sub-surface to investigate underground utilities such as concrete, asphalt, metals, pipes, cables or masonry.

This nondestructive method uses electromagnetic radiation in the microwave band (UHF/VHF frequencies) of the radio spectrum, and detects the reflected signals from subsurface structures.

GPR can have applications in a variety of media, including rock, soil, ice, fresh water, pavements and structures. In the right conditions, practitioners can use GPR to detect subsurface objects, changes in material properties, and voids and cracks.

The survey will exclude the wuzukhana area which was sealed last year on the orders of the Supreme Court after Hindu litigants pointed to the presence there of what they identified as a Shivling — Muslim litigants say the object is a fountain.

The women petitioners had filed a suit seeking the right to worship Maa Shringar Gauri on the outer wall of the Gyanvapi mosque complex, located next to the Kashi Vishwanath temple.

The court said areas sealed by the Supreme Court will be excluded from the survey.

It directed the ASI to investigate the age and nature of construction of the western wall of the building in question through scientific methods.

It also called for a GPR survey beneath the ground of all the cellars and to conduct excavation, if required.

It told the ASI to "prepare a list of all the artefacts which are found in the building specifying their contents and carry out scientific investigation and undertake dating exercises to find out the age and nature of construction".

The ASI director, it said, must ensure that no damage is done to the "structure standing on the disputed land and it remains intact and unharmed".

The Hindu litigants contend that the mosque was built on the site of the original Kashi Vishwanath temple. Muslim litigants maintain that the mosque was built on Waqf premises, and that the

Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991 barred changing the character of any place of worship as it existed on August 15, 1947.

Special counsel for the Gyanvapi matters before the Varanasi court, Rajesh Mishra said, "The application filed by the four women seeking a survey of the Gyanvapi mosque premises by the ASI was allowed by the district court. The court has said that the survey must be done without causing any harm to the structure. The court has also said that the survey will exclude the area which was sealed last year after the Shivling was found there. The wuzukhana area where the Shivling was found was sealed on

orders of the Supreme Court."

Advocate Hari Shankar Jain, who is representing the four women, said the court has allowed the ASI survey and has directed the ASI to submit a preliminary report, explaining how the survey will be done.

"We had filed the application seeking the ASI survey a few months ago. We had argued that the structure (mosque) was built on a temple under the rule of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb. We had argued that through the ASI survey, this can be proved – that the mosque was built after destroying a temple of Baba Bhole Nath," Jain said.

CENTRE SEEKS MORE SOCIAL DIVERSITY IN JUDGES' APPOINTMENT

- Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal informed the Lok Sabha that of the 604 judges appointed since 2018 to various High Courts, 454 belong to the general category.
- Mr. Meghwal's written answer was in response to a question by Asaduddin Owaisi, All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen MP, who asked if "79% of the High Court judges appointed since 2018 belonged to upper castes".
- The Minister also informed the member that judges of the Supreme Court and High Courts are appointed under Articles 124, 217 and 224 of the Constitution that do not provide for reservation for any caste or class.
- The government has been requesting the Chief Justices of High Courts to ensure social diversity by considering suitable candidates from Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), Other Backward Classes (OBC), minorities, and women.
- Mr. Meghwal gave a breakdown of the social background of

the judges on the basis of an annexure that they are supposed to fill at the time of recommendation. "As per information provided by the recommendees, out of 604 High Court Judges appointed since 2018 till 17.07.2023, 458 Judges belong to the General Category..." the Minister replied.

- The Minister noted that 18 judges belong to the SC category, nine are from the ST category, 72 from OBC category, 34 from Minority category and for the remaining 13 judges, there is no information available in the annexures filled by them.
- "As per the Memorandum of Procedure for appointment of Judges in the Supreme Court and High Courts, the government appoints only those persons who are recommended by the Supreme Court Collegium," Mr. Meghwal added.

CAN'T ASK GOVT. TO RECOGNISE A LANGUAGE AS OFFICIAL ONE: SC

The Supreme Court on Friday said it cannot direct the Centre to include Rajasthani as an official language in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud said the subject of the petition concerns a policy matter.

"Today you have come to include the Rajasthani language in the Eighth Schedule, tomorrow somebody else may come for some other language. This is a policy matter and not for the courts to give a mandamus," the Bench informed the petitioner, Ripudaman Singh. The court referred to a 1997 reported decision of the Supreme Court in the Kanhaiya Lal Sethia case to note that "to include or not to include a particular language in the VIIIth Schedule is a policy matter of the Union".

8th Schedule

- The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India lists the official languages of the Republic of India.
- Part XVII of the Indian Constitution deals with the official languages in Articles 343 to 351.
- The Constitutional provisions relating to the Eighth Schedule occur in articles 344(1) and 351 of the Constitution.
- Article 344(1): It provides for the constitution of an official language Commission by the President, which shall consist of a Chairman and such other members representing the different languages specified in the Eighth Schedule to make

recommendations to the President for the progressive use of Hindi for official purposes of the Union.

- Article 345: Official language or languages of a State subject to the provisions of Article 346 and 347.
- It would thus appear that the Eighth Schedule was intended to promote the progressive use of Hindi and for the enrichment and promotion of that language.
- Article 351: It provides for enriching the Hindi language by assimilating in it the forms, style and expressions used in the languages specified in the Eighth Schedule so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India.
- The eighth schedule includes the recognition of the following 22 languages:
- Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, Urdu, Bodo, Santhali, Maithili and Dogri are the 22 languages presently in the eighth schedule to the Constitution.
- Of these languages, 14 were initially included in the Constitution. Subsequently, Sindhi was added in 1967; Konkani, Manipuri and Nepali were added in 1992; and Bodo, Dogri, Maithili and Santali were added by the 92nd Amendment Act of 2003.

USE ANY INDIAN LANGUAGE AS OPTIONAL MEDIUM, SAYS CBSE

CONTEXT: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has asked its affiliated schools to consider using Indian languages as optional mediums of instruction.

BACKGROUND: The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has been taking steps to facilitate education through Indian languages. The Union Ministry of Education and the National Council of Education, Research and Training (NCERT) have also taken measures to introduce education in multiple languages under the National Education Policy, 2020. The CBSE's move is in line with the government's efforts to promote multilingual education. The schools can use available resources and collaborate with each other to make the best out of multilingual education. The schools should ensure that the quality

of education is not compromised if Indian languages are used as mediums of instruction.

Benefits of using Indian languages as optional mediums of instruction:

1. *Students who are taught in their mother tongue tend to learn better than those who are taught in a foreign language.*
2. *Help preserve Indian languages. Many Indian languages are endangered, and using them as mediums of instruction can help to keep them alive.*
3. *Help to promote national integration, with people from different parts of the country communicating in each other's languages.*

PORTAL LAUNCHED TO REPORT VIOLATION OF BAN ON E-CIGARETTES

CONTEXT: The Union Health Ministry has launched an online portal, www.violation-reporting.in on May 20, 2023 to report violations of the ban on e-cigarettes.

SIGNIFICANCE: The portal allows anyone to report violations of the ban, including the sale, manufacture, import, export, transport, storage, and advertisement of e-cigarettes. Reports can be submitted anonymously. The portal will help to "ensure effective implementation" of the ban on e-cigarettes. The ministry also said that it will take "swift action" against violators. The Government imposed a ban on e-cigarettes in September 2019. The ban was imposed in order to protect public health, as e-cigarettes have

been linked to a number of health risks, including cancer and heart disease.

Here are some of the things that you can report on the portal:

- Sale of e-cigarettes
- Manufacture of e-cigarettes
- Import of e-cigarettes
- Export of e-cigarettes
- Transport of e-cigarettes
- Storage of e-cigarettes
- Advertisement of e-cigarettes

HOUSE PANEL APPROVES DEFENCE BILL, SAYS MUST BE PASSED WITHOUT CHANGE

Parliament's Standing Committee on Defence has agreed to all provisions of The Inter-Services Organisation (Command, Control and Discipline) Bill 2023

A parliamentary committee on Defence gave a go-ahead to a Bill that seeks to empower the Commander-in-Chief and Officer-in-Command of Inter-Services Organisations (ISOs) with all disciplinary and administrative powers in respect of personnel serving in or attached to such organisations.

The Standing Committee on Defence, headed by Jai Oram, has agreed to all provisions of the Inter-Services Organisations (Command, Control and Discipline) Bill, 2023, saying it must be passed without any amendment.

command of a Commander-in-Chief.

Control of Inter-services Organisations: Presently, the Commander-in-Chief or Officer-in-Command of Inter-services Organisations are not empowered to exercise disciplinary or administrative powers over the personnel belonging to other services. The Bill empowers the Commander-in-Chief or the Officer-in-Command of an Inter-services Organisation to exercise command and control over the personnel serving in or attached to it. He would be responsible for maintaining discipline and ensuring proper discharge of duties by the service personnel.

The superintendence of an Inter-services Organisation will be vested in the central government. The government may also issue directions to such organisations on grounds of national security, general administration, or public interest.

Other forces under central government: The central government may notify any force raised and maintained in India to which the Bill will apply. This would be in addition to army, navy, and air force personnel.

Commander-in-Chief: The officers eligible to be appointed as the Commander-in-Chief or Officer-in-Command are: (i) a General Officer of the regular Army (above the rank of Brigadier), (ii) a Flag Officer of the Navy (rank of Admiral of

Key features of the Bill include:

Inter-services Organisation: Existing Inter-services Organisations will be deemed to have been constituted under the Bill. These include the Andaman and Nicobar Command, the Defence Space Agency, and the National Defence Academy. The central government may constitute an Inter-services Organisation which has personnel belonging to at least two of the three services: the army, the navy, and the air force. These may be placed under the command of an Officer-in-Command. These organisations may also include a Joint Services Command, which may be placed under the

the Fleet, Admiral, Vice-Admiral, or Rear-Admiral), or (iii) an Air Officer of the Air Force (above the rank of group captain).

He will be empowered to exercise all disciplinary and administrative powers vested in: (i) General Officer Commanding the Army, (ii) Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of a Naval Command, (iii) Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief of an Air Command, (iv) any other officer/authority specified in the service Acts, and (v) any other officer/authority notified by the government.

Commanding Officer: The Bill provides for a Commanding Officer who will be in command of a unit, ship, or establishment. The officer will also perform duties assigned by the Commander-in-Chief or Officer-in-Command of the Inter-services Organisation. The Commanding Officer will be empowered to initiate all disciplinary or administrative actions over the personnel appointed, deputed, posted, or attached to that Inter-services Organisation.

The Bill was introduced in Lok Sabha on March 15 and was referred to the Standing Committee on Defence by the Speaker on April 24 for examination and report. The committee had the oral evidence of the representatives of the Ministry of Defence on the Bill on May 29 and the draft report was considered and adopted by the committee during a sitting on July 20.

Giving reasons for agreeing with the Bill, the report said: "The committee has every reason to believe that enactment of the

Bill will have various tangible benefits such as maintenance of effective discipline and efficiency in Inter-services establishments by the Heads of Inter-Services Organisations, abolition of the system of reverting personnel under disciplinary proceedings to their parent Service units, expeditious disposal of cases of misdemeanor or indiscipline, saving of government expenses and time by avoiding multiple proceedings."

According to the report, currently, personnel of the Army, Navy and Air Force are governed in accordance with the provisions contained in their specific Service Acts. When these Acts were enacted, most of the service organisations largely comprised personnel from a single service. However, currently several Inter-Services Organisations exist such as

- Andaman & Nicobar Command,
- Strategic Forces Command,
- Defence Space Agency
- National Defence Academy
- National Defence College

Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that several ISOs are fully operational, the Commander-in-Chief or Officer-in-Command of the ISOs are hitherto not empowered to exercise disciplinary/administrative powers over the personnel belonging to other services.

Hence, the personnel serving in these organisations need to be reverted to their parent Service units for undergoing any disciplinary or administrative action.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

PLEDGE TO WATERMARK AI CONTENT FOR SAFETY

Context: Top AI companies including OpenAI, Alphabet and Meta Platforms have made voluntary commitments to the White House to implement measures such as watermarking AI-generated content to help make the technology safer.

Background

- Since generative AI, which uses data to create new content like ChatGPT's human-sounding prose, became wildly popular this year, lawmakers around the world began considering how to mitigate the dangers of the emerging technology to national security and the economy.
- The Biden administration said it would work to establish an international framework to govern the development and use of AI, according to the White House.
- The US Congress is considering a bill that would require political ads to disclose whether AI was used to create imagery or other content.
- The U.S. lags the EU in tackling artificial intelligence regulation. In June, EU lawmakers agreed to a set of draft rules where systems like ChatGPT would have to disclose AI-generated content, help distinguish so-called deep-fake images from real ones and ensure safeguards against illegal content.

More details on the Pledge

- The companies - which also include Anthropic, Inflection, Amazon.com and OpenAI partner Microsoft pledged to thoroughly test systems before releasing them and share information about how to reduce risks and invest in cybersecurity.
- As part of the effort, the seven companies committed to **developing a system to "watermark" all forms of content, from text, images, audios, to videos generated by AI** so that users will know when the technology has been used.
- This **watermark, embedded in the content in a technical manner**, presumably will make it easier for users to spot deep-fake images or audios that may, for example, show violence that has not occurred, create a better scam or distort a photo of a politician.
- It is unclear how the watermark will be evident in the sharing of the information.
- The companies also **pledged to focus on protecting users' privacy** as AI develops and on **ensuring that the technology is free of bias** and not used to discriminate against vulnerable groups.
- Other commitments include **developing AI solutions to scientific problems** like medical research and mitigating climate change.

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ECONOMICS

AFTER FURORE OVER CMIE DATA, GOVT. FIGURES SHOW HARYANA SLIDING ON UNEMPLOYMENT

The Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), conducted by the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) reported a decline in unemployment rate from 34.5 % in April to 22.9% in June. The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) reported unemployment rate of Haryana as the highest in the country at

34.5% in April. The PLFS is a more comprehensive survey than the CMIE data, as it covers a larger sample size and takes into account both rural and urban areas. The decline in Haryana's unemployment rate is likely due to increase in agricultural activity during the monsoon season.

OIL'S WELL WITH INDIA, RUSSIA

CONTEXT: In May, India imported 8.5 million barrels of oil from Russia, up from 2.7 million barrels in April, making Russia India's second-largest supplier of oil, after Saudi Arabia. India has been increasing its oil imports from Russia in recent months, even as the US and other Western countries have imposed sanctions on the country following its invasion of Ukraine.

- Russia is offering discounted prices on its oil.
- India has been looking for alternative sources of oil after the US and other Western countries-imposed sanctions on Iran and Venezuela.
- India has a long-standing relationship with Russia, and the two countries have a strategic partnership.

The US has urged India to reduce its oil imports from Russia, and some experts have warned that India could face sanctions if it continues to buy Russian oil. India has so far resisted US pressure, and there is no indication that it will reduce its oil imports from Russia. The Indian government has said that it will continue to buy oil from the cheapest source, and that it is not concerned about the US sanctions.

SIGNIFICANCE: The increase in India's oil imports from Russia is a sign of the changing dynamics of the global oil market. As the US and other Western countries move away from Russian oil, India is filling the gap. This could have implications for the global oil market, and it will be interesting to see how the situation develops in the coming months.

FOREX RESERVE TOPS \$600BN, AT 15 MONTH HIGH

CONTEXT: India's foreign exchange reserves increased by \$12.74 billion from the previous week, on the back of strong foreign portfolio inflows and rose to a 15-month high of \$609.02 billion on July 14, 2023.

FACTS AND FIGURES: Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have pumped in a net of \$33.83 billion into Indian equities so far in July, after withdrawing a net of \$4.92 billion in June. The increase in

forex reserves is a positive sign for the Indian economy, as it gives the RBI more room to intervene in the foreign exchange market to smoothen volatility. The RBI had intervened in the foreign exchange market in recent months to sell dollars and prop up the rupee, which had been under pressure due to rising oil prices and concerns about the global economic outlook.

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