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## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

## SAM ALTMAN'S BIOMETRIC PROJECT

**CONTEXT:** OpenAI CEO revives Worldcoin, offering crypto for eye scans, aims for global identity and financial network.

**BACKGROUND:** On July 24, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman announced the revival of Worldcoin, a project overshadowed by ChatGPT's success. Worldcoin offers crypto and a unique "World ID" in exchange for eye scans, aiming to build a global identity and financial network accessible to all through a public platform.

**What is Worldcoin?**

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman has revived Worldcoin, an initiative aiming to establish a digital network where everyone can participate in the digital economy. Through the "Orb" device, volunteers known as "Orb operators" scan iris patterns to create a unique "World ID" for individuals, enabling them to access Worldcoin [WLD] cryptocurrency and engage in transactions. The process, called "proof of personhood," ensures no multiple sign-ups for crypto.

Following discussions with world leaders and policymakers on AI regulation and innovation, Altman re-introduced Worldcoin. Co-founded by Altman and led by CEO Alex Blania of Tools for Humanity, the project aims to democratize access to the digital economy. With the "Orb" device's biometric data collection, the World app issues unique "World IDs" to participants, enabling them to receive Worldcoin [WLD] cryptocurrency regularly and conduct transactions securely, ensuring a single identity per person.

**How does Worldcoin work?**

Worldcoin, a digital network initiative, requires users to

scan irises or have their own scanned by "Orb operators." Users with a World ID can claim WLD cryptocurrency for transactions or investment. Orb operators receive WLD rewards for signing up more people.

WLD, a token on the Ethereum blockchain, was previously restricted in the U.S. due to strict regulations on digital currencies. Worldcoin's approach blends biometric identity verification with cryptocurrency, allowing users to trade WLD without scanning irises or using the app.

**Is collecting WLD a good idea?**

Worldcoin's WLD cryptocurrency experienced price fluctuations after its launch on July 24, reaching highs of \$3.30 and dropping to \$2.30 on July 26. Traders face risks from investing in unknown currencies, including scams and hacking vulnerabilities.

**Was Worldcoin criticised?**

Worldcoin faced criticism, including from Edward Snowden, for its privacy model using biometric scans, as the unique identifier could potentially be misused. The project's eye scanning of underprivileged people during the pandemic also raised concerns. CEO Sam Altman defended the concept but acknowledged not anticipating the strong negative response.

**Has Worldcoin come to India?**

Worldcoin's Orb operators scan eyes at 18 locations in Delhi, Noida, and Bangalore, according to the company's website. Worldcoin distances itself from operators, stating they are not employees but must follow a strict Code of Conduct.

## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## ON MERITS

**GIST :** Following the Supreme Court bail order, Bhima Koregaon case needs a relook

- The Supreme Court order granting bail to activists Vernon Gonsalves and Arun Ferreira demonstrates how even under a stringent anti-terrorism law, denial of bail need not be the norm, and a preliminary assessment can lay bare the weaknesses of a police case.
- It is difficult for someone arrested under serious provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) to get bail. Under Section 43D(5), no court can grant bail if there are reasonable grounds to believe the accusation is true.

**What is Bhima Koregaon Case ?**

The Bhima Koregaon case dates back to January 1, 2018, the

day of the bicentenary celebrations of the Bhima Koregaon battle. The celebration was marred by violence leading to death of one person and injuries to several others.

Police investigation into the incident led to the arrest of several activists who they alleged had "Maoist links". The police alleged that they funded the Elgar Parishad meeting on December 31, 2017, where inflammatory speeches were made, according to police, leading to the violence. Those arrested on August 28, 2019, included writer and poet Varavara Rao, lawyer and activist Sudha Bhardwaj, academic and activist Vernon Gonsalves, and human rights activists Arun Ferreira and Gautam Navlakha.

**What is Bhima-Koregaon Battle ?**

A small village in Pune district of Maharashtra,

Bhima-Koregaon is associated with an important phase of Maratha history.

On January 1, 1818, a Dalit-dominated British Army had defeated a Peshwa army, led by Peshwa Bajirao II, in Koregaon. The battle attained a legendary stature for Dalits, who consider the win as a victory of the Mahars against the injustices perpetuated by the Peshwas.

A pillar, known as Vijay Sthamb (victory pillar), was installed by the East India Company in memory of those who fought for them in the battle. It is at this pillar that thousands of Dalits come to pay respect every year on January 1.

What happened at Bhima Koregaon on January 1, 2018?

2018 marked the 200th year of battle and hence there was a larger gathering at Bhima Koregaon as compared to previous years. During the celebrations there were violent clashes between Dalit and Maratha groups, resulting in the death of at least one person and injuries to several others.

Tensions had started simmering on December 29, 2017, the day Govind Gopal Mahar's memorial was found desecrated. The incident found mention in the Elgar Parishad, a big public conference organised by Dalit and Bahujan groups on December 31, 2017. Police has alleged that inflammatory speeches were made in the event and that led to the violence next day.

- Apart from this, an apex court judgment in 2019 holds that there cannot be a detailed analysis of the evidence at the bail stage, and bail must be decided only on the "broad probabilities" of the case. In this backdrop, it is quite significant that the Supreme Court has now granted bail to Mr. Gonsalves and Mr. Ferreira on merits.

- In the Court's analysis, there is a clear debunking of the case. Apart from the absence of any evidence that the accused were part of a conspiracy, the Court has noted that the letters in which they were mentioned contained only third-party responses and none was recovered from them.
- In a telling comment, the order says, "Mere participation in seminars by itself cannot constitute an offence under the bail-restricting Sections of the 1967 Act (UAPA), with which they have been charged."
- This is the first time in the Bhima Koregaon violence case, in which activists and lawyers were arrested in 2018 on the charge of being part of a Maoist conspiracy, a court has recorded a finding that the accusations may not be true. Among those arrested in this case, lawyer Sudha Bharadwaj was released on "default bail", that is due to the charge sheet against her not being filed within the stipulated time, and Telugu poet Varavara Rao got the benefit of bail on medical grounds.
- Writer and scholar Anand Teltumbde was released by the Bombay High Court, holding that it could not be presumed that he had received funds from a co-accused, while Father Stan Swamy died in prison. In the latest order, a two-judge Bench has now found that the letters and witness statements, relied on by the NIA to claim that Mr. Gonsalves and Mr. Ferreira were part of a conspiracy and recruitment of persons to commit terrorist acts, are of weak probative value and quality.
- It is no surprise that many sweeping claims by the prosecution in this case wilt under judicial scrutiny. There are also reports that some of the purported evidence may have been remotely planted on computers used by the accused. The time has come for a comprehensive evaluation of the merits of this whole case.

## STATES' LAX RESPONSE TO LYNCHING

### Background:

The Supreme Court has asked the Ministry of Home Affairs and the governments of Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Haryana to respond to a petition by the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW). The petition questions their inaction against mob violence and lynching of Muslims by cow vigilantes over the past five years, despite a previous Supreme Court judgment in Tehseen Poonawala versus Union of India in 2018 against vigilantism.

The NFIW seeks an examination of police apathy, constitutional violations, and a breach of "duty of care" towards the victims, along with immediate interim compensation and a "minimum uniform amount" for the victims of such violence.

### THE GIST

The Supreme Court has asked the Ministry of Home Affairs and the governments of six States to respond to a petition by the National Federation of Indian Women seeking an explanation for their failure in the past five years to act against lynching and mob violence committed on Muslims by cow vigilantes.

The Tehseen Poonawala judgment of the Supreme Court held that it was the "sacrosanct duty" of the State to protect the lives of its citizens. It also declared that the authorities of the

States have the "principal obligation" to see that any vigilantism does not take place.

The Centre and States are facing a separate contempt petition in the Supreme Court for non-compliance with the Tehseen Poonawala judgment.

### What was Tehseen Poonawala judgment?

The judgment of the Supreme Court authored by Justice (now retired) Dipak Misra held that it was the "sacrosanct duty" of the State to protect the lives of its citizens. It said spiralling incidents of lynchings, and the gruesome visuals aired through social media have compelled the court to reflect on "whether the populace of a great Republic like ours has lost the values of tolerance to sustain a diverse culture". Bystander apathy, numbness of the mute spectators of the scene of the crime, the inertia of the law enforcing machinery to prevent such crimes and nip them in the bud and grandstanding of the incident by the perpetrators of the crimes, including in the social media, aggravates the entire problem, the court noted.

The court declared that the authorities of the States have the "principal obligation" to see that vigilantism, be it cow vigilantism or any other vigilantism of any perception, does not take place. The judgment warned that vigilantes usher in anarchy, chaos, disorder and, eventually, there is an emergence of a

violent society. "Vigilantism cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be given room to take shape".

### Which cases were highlighted in the NFIW petition?

The alleged lynching of a 22-year-old Muslim man by Hindu "extremists" for transporting a cow in Haryana in January. Two men, Junaid and Nasir, who were travelling from their home were allegedly lynched and set ablaze in Rajasthan on February 15. A 56-year-old man was allegedly lynched in Bihar's Saran district in March on the suspicion that he was carrying beef. On April 23, Asif Qureshi was allegedly assaulted in Latur, Maharashtra, in the presence of two constables and three home guards. A bus carrying Hajj pilgrims was reportedly attacked by a mob in Kota, Rajasthan on May 26. A mob allegedly attacked two Muslim men, restraining them with ropes and assaulting them savagely in Bhubaneswar, Odisha on June 17. On June 24, two men, Afan Ansari and Nasir Hussain, were allegedly intercepted by a mob on suspicion of smuggling beef and brutally assaulted. Afan died, while Nasir is currently undergoing treatment at Mumbai's State-run KEM hospital, the petition said.

### What were the seven remedial directions given by the SC to States?

They include the appointment of a designated nodal officer, not below the rank of Superintendent of Police for taking measures to prevent prejudice-motivated crimes like mob violence and lynching. The immediate lodging of an FIR if an incident of lynching or mob violence comes to the notice of the local police. It is the duty of the Station House Officer who has registered the FIR to inform the nodal officer in the district, who in turn should ensure that the families of the victims are spared of any further harassment. The investigation of the crime should be personally monitored by the nodal officer and the investigation and

chargesheet are filed within the stipulated period in law. There should be a scheme to compensate victims of such prejudice-motivated violence. Any failure to comply with the court's directions by a police or district administration officer would be considered as an "act of deliberate negligence and/or misconduct for which appropriate action must be taken against him/her and not limited to departmental action under the service rules". The departmental action shall be taken to its logical conclusion preferably within six months. States should take disciplinary action against their officials if they did not prevent the incident or an incident of mob lynching, despite having prior knowledge of it, or where the incident has already occurred, such official(s) did not promptly apprehend and institute criminal proceedings against the culprits.

### How are States responding to the contempt petition?

The Centre and States are also facing a separate contempt petition in the Supreme Court for non-compliance with the Tehseen Poonawala judgment. In that case, an apex court Bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Bela Trivedi, on July 10, directed the State governments to file by September 30 a status report giving year wise data from 2018 as to the number of complaints received, FIRs registered and chargesheets filed in lynching cases. The status report, the court ordered, should detail the steps/measures, preventive and remedial, taken by the State governments in terms of the 2018 judgment. The Bench had agreed to a suggestion made by Attorney General R. Venkataramani that the Ministry of Home Affairs would convene a meeting of the department heads of the State governments about the compliance measures (preventive and remedial) directed by the court in the Tehseen Poonawala judgment. The court directed the Centre to file an affidavit stating the outcome of the meeting and listed the case in October.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

# TWO INDIAN MILITARY AIRCRAFT VISIT AUSTRALIA'S STRATEGIC COCOS ISLANDS

**CONTEXT:** An Indian Navy Dornier maritime patrol aircraft and an Indian Air Force (IAF) C-130 transport aircraft visited Australia's Cocos (Keeling) Islands (CKI) in the Southern Indian Ocean, close to Indonesia and strategic maritime choke points earlier this month.

**SIGNIFICANCE:** The visit, latest in a series of India's growing military-to-military engagements, deepening interoperability broadly in the region and especially with Australia represents an important step in the bilateral relationship as the two countries increasingly give each other access to their military facilities in the Indian Ocean.

Cocos Islands could serve as a staging point for Australian and Indian air surveillance of the maritime choke points through Southeast Asia and the entire eastern Indian Ocean. India's access to CKI and Christmas Island, closer to the strategic choke

points would significantly enhance the on-station time of the Indian Navy's P-8Is to monitor movements into the Indian Ocean, especially by China's People's Liberation Army Navy, whose forays into the region have significantly gone up in recent years.

In February, an Indian Navy Kilo class conventional submarine, INS Sindhuksari, which was on operational deployment, travelled through the Sunda Strait and docked in Jakarta, Indonesia for operational turnaround.

Cocos Islands had been a point of cooperation between the space agencies of the two countries for India's Gaganyaan human space flight mission. Australia's active support in establishing a temporary ground station at CKI for the Gaganyaan missions, and potential opportunities for cooperation in earth observation, satellite navigation, space situational awareness, weather and climate studies using satellite data.

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## INTERNAL SECURITY

**TOTAL BREAKDOWN OF LAW AND ORDER IN MANIPUR:  
INDIA TEAM**

**CONTEXT:** A team of 21 opposition MPs from the INDIA alliance visited Manipur on July 29-30, 2023 to assess the situation in the state following the outbreak of ethnic violence on May 3.

The MPs met with the State Governor, survivors of the violence, and civil society leaders. They were shocked by the scale of the violence and the lack of government response. The MPs noted a complete breakdown of law and order in Manipur and condemned the inaction of the Union Government in the face of this violence. They called for the government to take immediate steps to restore peace and order in the state.

The MPs also met with the state government and urged them to take steps to address the root causes of the violence. They said that the violence is the result of decades of neglect and

discrimination against the Kuki community. They called for the government to initiate a process of reconciliation and healing.

The MPs' visit to Manipur comes at a time when the state is facing a severe humanitarian crisis. Thousands of people have been displaced from their homes and are living in camps. The violence has also had a devastating impact on the economy.

The MPs' report is a damning indictment of the government's response to the violence in Manipur. They have called for the government to take immediate action to restore peace and order in the state. They have also urged the government to address the root causes of the violence and to initiate a process of reconciliation and healing.



The advertisement features a smartphone on the left side, displaying a red book cover with the text "BOOK ONLINE" and a spiral logo. The phone's screen shows the time "9:30" and the day "Thursday". Above the phone is a Wi-Fi signal icon. To the right of the phone is the Vedhik IAS Academy logo, which consists of a red spiral icon and the text "VEDHIK IAS ACADEMY" in bold, with "The New Learning Mantra" in a smaller font below it. The background is a gradient of yellow and orange. The text "MASTER THE NEW LEARNING MANTRA" is written in large, bold, red capital letters. At the bottom, the website "www.vedhikiasacademy.org" is displayed.

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