

● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

MODI, XI LIKELY TO ATTEND EAST ASIA SUMMIT, ASEAN MEETINGS IN JAKARTA

Close on the heels of the BRICS summit, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping could come face-to-face again, if both leaders decide to attend the East Asian Summit (EAS) and other meetings with the ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) bloc of countries in Indonesia in September.

The East Asia Summit (EAS) is a regional forum comprising 18 member countries from the Asia-Pacific region. It was established in 2005 to promote dialogue and cooperation on political, security, and economic issues among its members. The EAS serves as a platform for leaders of these countries to discuss various regional and global challenges, enhance regional security, and foster economic integration.

The EAS consists of 10 ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) member countries: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Additionally, it includes eight non-ASEAN countries: Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia, and the United States.

Mr. Modi's visit to Jakarta will be seen as an affirmation of India's ties with the ASEAN grouping, and underline "ASEAN centrality" as the basis for India's Indo-Pacific policy, the sources said. In addition, the trip will denote a special gesture to Indonesia, which is a member of the "G-20 Troika" at present, and helping India with negotiations for a G-20 joint declaration.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK PROPOSES BOARD EXAMS TWICE A YEAR

- In Classes 11 and 12, students will have to learn two languages, one being of Indian origin, says the final National Curriculum Framework released by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)
- Students in Classes 9 and 10 will need to learn three languages, of which at least two will be Indian tongues.
- The NCF expects students to achieve a "literary level" of linguistic capacity in at least one of these Indian languages, the draft says.
- The NCF has also said that all students will be allowed to take Board exams at least two times in a school year, with only the best score being retained.
- The NCF, drafted by the National Steering Committee headed by former Chairman of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) K. Kasturirangan, follows the lead of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, and forms the basis for formulating textbooks from Classes 3 to 12 under the Central Board of Secondary Education. Textbooks for Classes 1 and 2 have already been released by the NCERT.
- So far, students from Classes 9 to 12 studied five mandatory subjects, with an option of adding one more. Now, the number of mandatory subjects for Classes 9 and 10 is seven, and it is six for Classes 11 and 12.
- Optional subjects have been grouped in three parts in the NCF. The first includes art education, emphasising both visual and performing arts, with equal emphasis on making, thinking about, and appreciating works of art. It also includes physical education and vocational education.
- The second group includes social science, the Humanities, and interdisciplinary areas. The third group includes science, mathematics, and computational thinking.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

WHAT ARE THE AMENDMENTS TO THE PAKISTAN ARMY ACT?

THE GIST

On July 27, the Pakistan senate passed a Bill to amend the Pakistan Army Act, 1952. The amendments, in general, have been specifically designed to intimidate the veterans who have been supporting the former Pakistan PM by expressing their views on social media and public platforms. A section of journalists and human rights advocates have expressed concerns as these amendments would jeopardise the rights and liberties of individuals.

What is new ?

The Bill has expanded the Army Act by including civilians linked to the Pakistan Army's affiliated entities. It introduced new sections like 26A on unauthorized disclosure, punishing those revealing prejudicial information with imprisonment up to five years. Section 26B restricts ex-subjects from political activity for two years after leaving service. Section 55A prevents engagement with conflicting entities, and Section 55B penalizes undermining or ridiculing the Armed Forces.

Impact of the Amendment

The way the Bill was passed shows the government's submissive attitude towards the Army. The Bill was discussed without proper notice, and only a couple of senators questioned its hasty approval. The changes in the Army Act seem aimed at stopping criticism of the Pakistan Army, particularly from retired personnel who support Mr. Khan.

Some journalists and human rights advocates are worried because these changes could harm people's rights and limit information sharing. Such harsh laws could give authorities too much power to target anyone they want.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

INDIA WELCOMES CONSENSUS-BASED APPROACH TO EXPAND BRICS: PM

In Johannesburg, Prime Minister Narendra Modi welcomed the expansion of BRICS through consensus. He spoke at the 15th BRICS Summit, urging members to utilize India's digital solutions and work for Global South's welfare. BRICS includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Modi proposed African Union joining G-20 and expressed support for BRICS expansion.

Modi's speech at the BRICS Summit focused on the Global South and African Union priorities, represented by Comoros. The backdrop includes Russia's push for an alternative to the G-7 model due to sanctions after the Ukraine conflict. India wants global changes favoring the Global South, but unlike Russia and China, India hasn't aggressively pursued de-dollarization, indicating a difference among the founding members.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

IMPLEMENTING A CAR SAFETY PROGRAMME

THE GIST

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has rolled out an indigenous star-rating system for crash testing cars under which vehicles will be assigned between one to five stars indicating their safety in a collision. Though Bharat NCAP is voluntary, in certain cases cars may be subjected to a crash test such as for a base model of a popular variant (minimum clocked sale of 30,000 units). The testing protocols adopted by the Bharat NCAP are modelled on the Global NCAP, which is a project of the U.K.-based NGO, Towards Zero Foundation.

Back ground

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has rolled out an indigenous star-rating system for crash testing cars under which vehicles will be assigned between one to five stars indicating their safety in a collision. Called the Bharat New Car Assessment Programme (NCAP), the rating system will be voluntary and will come into effect from October 1, 2023.

Bharat NCAP

Under Bharat NCAP, car manufacturers can nominate their vehicles for crash testing based on the soon-to-be-released Automotive Industry Standard 197. This initiative covers passenger vehicles with up to eight seats and a gross weight below 3,500 kgs. The testing assesses adult occupant protection, child occupant protection, and safety assist technologies, resulting in a rating from one to five stars.

Testing involves frontal offset, side impact, and pole-side impact tests, simulating real-world crash scenarios. While voluntary, some cases like popular base models (minimum 30,000 units sold) or recommendations by the Ministry of Road Transport may trigger mandatory testing. About 30 car models have been offered for Bharat NCAP testing.

The program's aim is to empower consumers with safety information, fostering demand for safer cars. India witnesses around 1.5 lakh road fatalities annually, contributing to 10% of global road crash deaths despite having just 1% of the world's vehicles. These accidents cost the Indian economy 5 to 7% of GDP each year, according to a World Bank study.

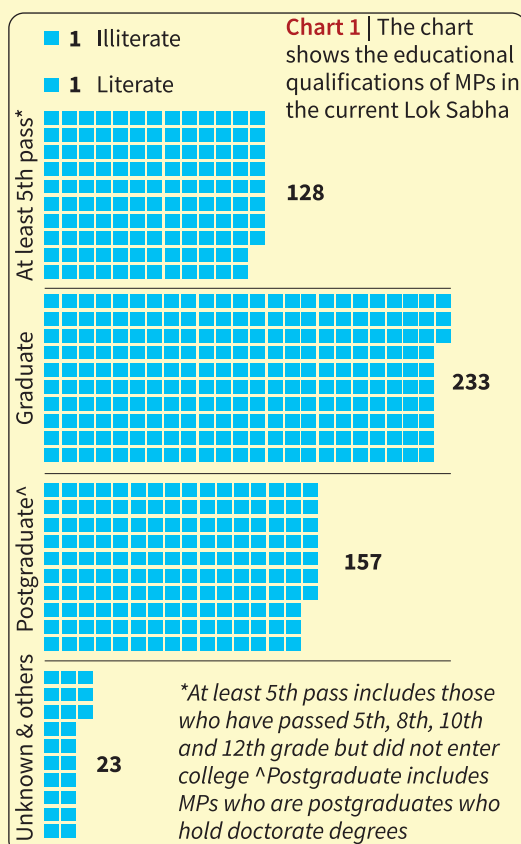
What next ?

For the Bharat NCAP to work effectively, India needs to improve its ability to test crashes and understand the injuries. This could involve using special software connected to dummies inside cars to analyze how safe they are. In the future, India should also make the Bharat NCAP more like international standards by including more kinds of tests. For instance, in the U.S., they check if a car might tip over in a sharp turn. In Japan, they examine how well a car protects passengers from electric shocks after a crash, and they look at other safety features like automatic braking and lane departure systems. So, India will have to keep growing the Bharat NCAP to match these global measures.

"Doing nothing is very hard to do. You never know when you're finished."—Leslie Nielsen

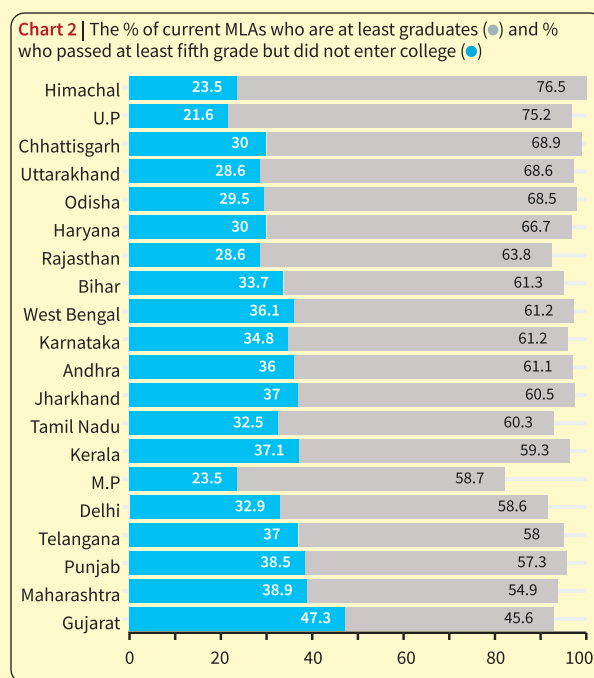
POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

HOW QUALIFIED ARE LEGISLATORS



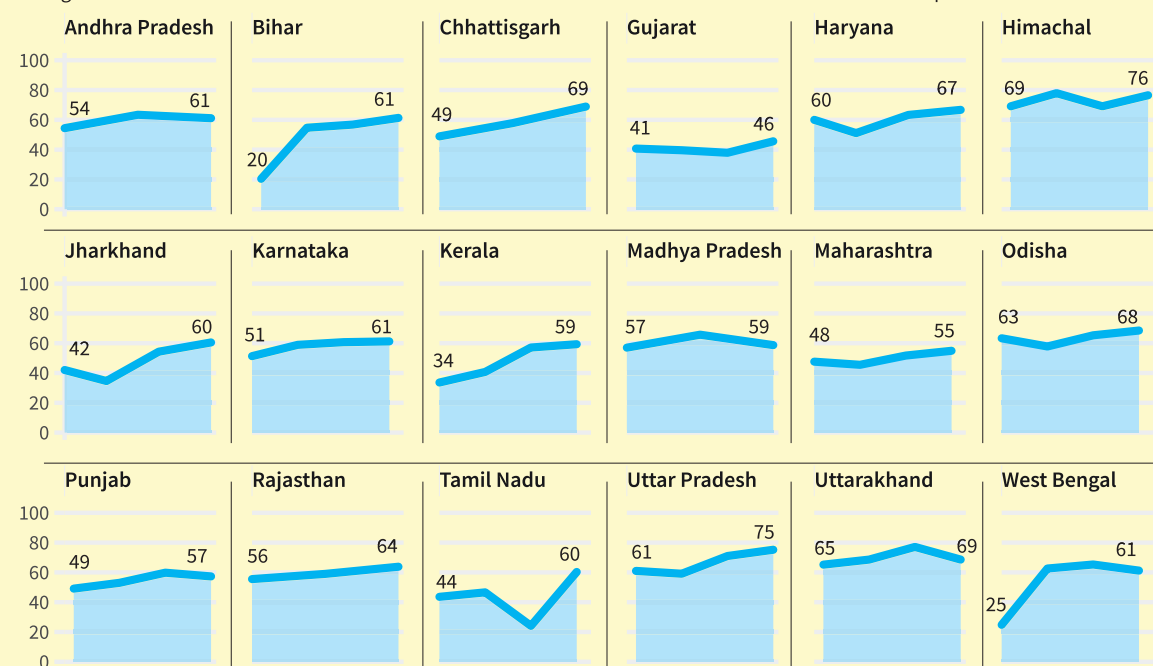
Data show that 72 % of the current MPs completed graduation. Among the rest, about 23.5 % did not go to college; they at least completed fifth grade in school. Information about the educational qualifications of 4 % of the MPs is not available. This means that only less than 0.5 % are recorded as illiterate or just literate in the current Lok Sabha. The trend holds true among most State MLAs too. A very small share of MLAs are illiterates or just literate. However, there were significant differences among the

Himachal Pradesh has the highest share of MLAs who are graduates and above (76.5 %) followed by Uttar Pradesh (75.2 %) and Chhattisgarh (68.9 %). On the other hand, Gujarat had the lowest share of graduates (45.6 %) and



Punjab (57.3 %). In Gujarat, 47.3% of the current MLAs did not go to college but had at least completed fifth grade in school. Data about educational qualifications of Lok Sabha MPs is available from 2004, and the latest trend holds true for all general elections since. However, among MLAs, some States showed distinct trends over time.

Chart 3 | The chart shows the share (in %) of MLAs who are at least graduates, over time, across major States. The graphs correspond to the share in the last four State elections in each State. The first number corresponds to the share of MLAs who are at least graduates in the earliest election with data and the second number indicates the same for the latest poll in each State



The share of graduate MLAs in Chhattisgarh surged from 49 % in 2008 to 69 % in 2018. Similarly, the share of graduate MLAs in Uttar Pradesh improved from 61 % in 2007 to 75 % in 2022. Notably, the share of MLAs who are graduates is on a rising trend across all the States. It is important to note that the education data of MLAs was not publicly available in some years in select States (in 2016 in Tamil Nadu, in the 2006 Assembly elections in West Bengal, and in 2005 in Bihar). With a majority of MPs and MLAs being graduates and the share of graduate MLAs on an increasing trend, the controversy over the remark is not backed by data, as voters' choice favour the educated already. More importantly, the share of illiterates is negligible among MPs and MLAs.



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POLITY AND
GOVERNANCENEEDED, A WELL-CRAFTED SOCIAL
SECURITY NET FOR ALL

CONTEXT: India needs to aspire to provide social security to all of its workforce, in a manner that is fiscally and administratively feasible.

Around 53% of all salaried employees in India do not have any social security benefits in India according to the Periodic Labour force survey Annual Report 2021-22. These employees have no access to provident fund, pension, health care and disability insurance.

STATISTICS TO PONDER

Just 1.9% of the poorest 20% quintile of India's workforce has access to any benefits.

gig workers, or approximately 1.3% of India's active labour force, have access to social security

India's social security system is also ranked poorly; Mercer CFS ranked it at 40 out of 43 countries in 2021.

In FY11, the National Social Security Fund was set up for unorganised sector workers, with an initial allocation of just ₹1,000 crore to support schemes for weavers, rickshaw pullers and bidi workers.

The amount was too small when compared to a requirement of over ₹22,841 crore — as estimated by the Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability.

A Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) audit on the scheme in FY17 identified ₹1,927 crore (the entire amount accumulated since inception) had just not been utilised.

National Social Assistance Programme that was set up in the 1990s, with a focus on old-age poor individuals with no able-bodied earners in their household, who were eligible to earn a monthly pension of ₹75.

Contribution by the Centre to old-age pension schemes has stagnated at ₹200 a month since 2006, i.e., below the minimum wage per day.

in July 2022, the CAG identified that the cess collected for the provision of social security to construction workers in Delhi was poorly utilised — approximately 94% of the money was not utilised.

In Haryana, the CAG noted that the direct benefit scheme of the State's Social Justice and Empowerment Department had seen the transfer of ₹ 98.96 crore to the accounts of deceased beneficiaries.

Approximately 91% (or around 475 million) of India's workforce works in the informal sector. They lack access to social security net.

In two decades, India will become an aging society with no significant social protection along with limited savings.

The Code on Social Security (2020) merged existing social security legislation. But it dealt fundamentally with formal enterprises and did not cover informal ones.

workers and families from income loss due to accidents, disabilities, death, illness, family duties, or unemployment (ILO, 2013). It covers imprisonment-related loss for low-income insured individuals and offers accessible unemployment benefits and healthcare through the Unified Health System. If funds are lacking, the National Treasury steps in, ensuring easy access to benefits with minimal paperwork (ILO, 2013).

SUGGESTION FOR INDIA

India's social security transformation could be guided by several core principles. Priorities include extending coverage to all workers, balancing fiscal viability and administrative feasibility. Formal workers' protection can be bolstered through EPFO expansion via increased contributions. Informal workers with substantial income should make partial contributions, while informal businesses need encouragement to formalize and enhance contributions. Vulnerable groups, including the unemployed and those with insufficient earnings, require government support. Alleviating financial burdens for the poorest 20% of the workforce is crucial. Easing registration for informal workers through employer involvement could improve compliance.

Mandating social security for the majority entails an expanded scope beyond construction and gig workers. Establishing a nationwide labor force card and adapting successful schemes are important. Attention to domestic and migrant workers is vital; initiatives should alleviate job uncertainty and discrimination. Organizing domestic workers across cities empowers their collective advocacy.

REVITALISING INDIAN SOCIAL SECURITY SCENARIO

Revitalizing India's social security landscape necessitates strengthening existing initiatives and implementing targeted strategies. Enhanced support for schemes like EPF, ESI, and NSAP, coupled with broader coverage, can extend benefits to a wider workforce. Administrative complexity in the unorganized sector requires streamlining, along with clear differentiation between platform workers, unorganized workers, and the self-employed.

Elevating awareness through extensive campaigns, especially for women, can educate workers about available social security provisions. Embracing universal social security entails consolidating schemes and measures for comprehensive coverage across the labor force. Addressing job insecurity in the face of evolving employment dynamics demands a focus on providing stability amid on-demand roles and hire/fire trends.

Shifting from supply-side paradigms to equitable policies fosters both balanced growth and widespread social security. This approach ensures that economic advancement benefits all strata of society while instilling a sense of confidence and protection among the workforce.

CONCLUSION: India must act swiftly to provide comprehensive social security. Despite strides, addressing disparities and administrative challenges, involving employers, expanding schemes, and raising awareness are vital for equitable growth and enhanced job security.

Schemes Overseas

Brazil's contribution-based social security scheme safeguards

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE U.K.-INDIA RELATIONSHIP IS ALIVE WITH OPPORTUNITY

- It's remarkable to witness India, the world's largest democracy, hosting the G-20 summit, a crucial platform for global collaboration. The UK has always championed trade for growth, advocating fair trade at the WTO and forging trade agreements with dynamic economies like India. Addressing issues like resilient global value chains and digitizing trade documents is vital for maximizing the benefits of global trade.
- As India's middle class burgeons to 250 million by 2050, enhancing our trade ties could greatly benefit UK businesses. UK existing trading relationship with India was worth £36 billion in 2022. India also stands as the UK's second-largest source of investment projects, contributing 8,384 new jobs across the UK in the last fiscal year.
- The partnership goes both ways, with the UK investing \$34 billion in India from 2000 to 2023, creating jobs and growth opportunities.
- During my visit to India, I'll be engaging with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal to advance an ambitious Free Trade Agreement, aiming to bolster our bilateral trade further. Negotiations are ongoing and encompass goods, services, and investment, demanding time and attention to ensure a fair and beneficial deal for both sides.
- Our partnership transcends trade and investment, encompassing culture, sport, education, and tourism. The UK's Indian diaspora of over 1.6 million significantly contributes to various sectors. To amplify these connections, the UK is launching the 'Alive with Opportunity' marketing campaign, worth £1.5 million, highlighting the strong bond between our nations and encouraging trade, cultural exchange, and investment.
- This partnership, vibrant and multifaceted, truly exemplifies a living bridge between our nations.

GOYAL UPBEAT ABOUT G20 TRADE TALKS

CONTEXT: India expressed confidence upon G20 trade and investment ministerial summit to deliver actionable and concrete outcomes that would help the world withstand "any future shocks" like the supply chain crises witnessed in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The G20's trade and investment working groups comprising officials from member countries forged a consensus on five key priorities - pursuing trade for growth and prosperity, building resilient global value chains, integrating Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in global trade, improving trade logistics and facilitation, and reform of the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

Prime Minister Modi has highlighted the need to digitise of trade and trade facilitation and the importance of resilient and timely, trusted and transparent global supply chains. India has pushed for a rules-based, open and inclusive multilateral trading system and stressed the need to revive the defunct WTO dispute resolution mechanism.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ASTRA TEST-FIRED FROM TEJAS

CONTEXT: The Indian Air Force has successfully test fired Air to Air Beyond Visual Range missile from the HAL Tejas.

Astra is an Indian family of all-weather beyond-visual-range air-to-air missile, developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation capable of engaging targets up to 340 km. Astra Mk-1 has been integrated with Indian Air Force's Sukhoi Su-30MKI and will be integrated with Dassault Mirage 2000, HAL Tejas and Mikoyan MiG-29 in the future. It uses mid-course inertial guidance driven by fibre-optic gyroscope with terminal guidance with active radar homing. Astra Mk-1 is equipped with electronic counter-countermeasures to allow operation even during enemy attempts to jam the seeker using electronic countermeasures. It uses a smokeless solid fuelled motor that can propel the missile to a speed of Mach 4.5 and allows operation from a maximum altitude of 20 km (66,000 ft). Its maximum range is 20 km (12 mi) in tail chase mode and 110 km (68 mi) in head on chase mode. The maximum range is achieved when the missile launched from an altitude of 15 km (49,000 ft). Astra's low aspect ratio wings allow it to engage manoeuvring targets up to a range of 90 km (56 mi) in head-on chase mode and 60 km (37 mi) in tail chase mode. It can be launched in both autonomous and buddy mode operation and can lock on to its target before or after it is launched.



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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

CHANDRAYAAN III

CONTEXT: India has become the fourth country to successfully land on the moon as the Chandrayaan-3's lander module, with the rover in its belly, successfully made a soft landing on the lunar surface on Wednesday. India joined an elite list of countries — the U.S., Russia and China — to achieve this feat. India has also become the first nation to touch down on the polar region of the moon. With Chandrayaan-3, India has also demonstrated familiarity with the major types of interplanetary spacecraft: orbiters, landers, and rovers. The Chandrayaan-3 rover is rudimentary, and speaks to an important focus area for the Indian space programme: the planning and implementation of scientific missions. The data from Chandrayaan-3's scientific instruments will be crucial because the mission will be the first to physically, chemically, and thermally characterise the soil, subsoil, and air near the moon's South Pole on location.

India is a member of the Artemis Accords, the U.S.-led multilateral effort to place humans on the moon by 2025 and thereafter to expand human space exploration to the earth's wider neighbourhood in the solar system.

The landing also brings to a close the second phase of India's lunar exploration programme. The third phase will begin with a collaboration between ISRO and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) for the Lunar Polar Exploration (LUPEX) mission, which also involves a lander and a rover that will study water-ice at the moon's South Pole. LUPEX is set to use the landing system that ISRO developed for Chandrayaan-2 and -3. The success of Chandrayaan-3 gives ISRO the confidence to graduate to the next steps: satellites powered by electric motors, quantum communications, human space flight, reusable launch vehicles, planetary habitation, and interplanetary communications, to name a few.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

DOWNGRADED AT THE STROKE OF A PEN

CONTEXT: Differential state rights are common in India's Constitution due to cultural and geopolitical variations. A Constitution Bench of Supreme Court is reviewing challenges to Article 370's dilution.

Background: The Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, enacted by the Indian Parliament, divided the region into two union territories: Jammu and Kashmir, with a legislative assembly, and Ladakh, governed by a lieutenant governor. Ladakh includes Leh and Kargil, while the remaining districts belong to Jammu and Kashmir. The High Court serves both union territories. The legislative assembly has authority over state list matters except "public order" and "police." The act applies Article 239A of the Indian Constitution, abolishing Jammu and Kashmir's Legislative Council.

The revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status poses constitutional queries, including presidential powers, India's obligations under Article 370, and Parliament's authority to split it into Union Territories. This transition diminishes democratic participation as a centrally appointed administrator gains power, raising concerns about decision-making and elected representation's scope.

Delhi Parallel

The unprecedented reorganization of a full-fledged Indian state into two Union Territories finds a parallel in Delhi's history. Initially a 'Part C' State with a Legislative Assembly, Delhi lost its legislative powers in 1956 and became a Union Territory administered by the President. Other UTs gained legislatures, and some transitioned to states. In 1992, Delhi obtained partial statehood but faced limitations due to a centrally appointed Lieutenant Governor's powers. In 2018, the Supreme Court acknowledged Delhi's democratic government, with the Lieutenant Governor's decision prevailing only in exceptional cases of differing views on fundamental governance matters.

DIFFERENCE FROM DELHI

Jammu and Kashmir's accession differs from Delhi's historical transition. J&K, once a sovereign princely state, joined India via the Instrument of Accession. Article 370 granted unique status underpinned by the state's integration into India, providing greater autonomy than regular states. The reorganization into a Union Territory (UT) curtailed democratic rights more than Delhi's shift in 1956. Delhi's UT status and restoration relied on constitutional amendments, while J&K's change was enacted through a regular law, easily amendable. India's constitution respects diverse states' unique contexts to foster unity.

SUMMARY : The revocation of J&K's special status and its reorganization into Union Territories poses constitutional concerns. Comparisons with Delhi's transition highlight the historical significance. J&K's accession and special status were distinct from Delhi's status. The erosion of democratic rights in J&K through reorganization prompts contemplation on potential implications for other states and their autonomy under the Indian Constitution.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

NORTH EASTS'S SPECIAL STATUS

CONTEXT : During a debate in a Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, concerns were raised about potential consequences of altering Article 370, citing Manipur's ethnic violence.

The Supreme Court has accepted the Centre's commitment not to alter the special constitutional provisions safeguarding the interests of northeastern states. This assurance arose during a Constitution Bench led by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, which is examining challenges to Article 370's dilution in Jammu and Kashmir. The debate highlighted concerns about tampering with the nation's "periphery," potentially causing unrest like the ethnic violence in Manipur.

Article 371 safeguards the cultural, economic, and legal interests of 12 states, including Sikkim, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Nagaland, and Manipur. Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta clarified that Article 370 was temporary and distinct from Article 371, which protects special provisions for the northeast and other regions. The Centre pledged not to modify these special provisions.



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