

● POLITY

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CHINESE PRESIDENT WILL NOT ATTEND DELHI G-20 SUMMIT

CONTEXT: China's Foreign Ministry stated on Monday that President Xi Jinping will not attend the upcoming G-20 summit. Instead, Chinese Premier Li Qiang, who is the second-ranked leader, will represent China at the summit in New Delhi on September 9-10.

STORY SO FAR: It will be the first time a Chinese leader has not attended the G20 leaders' summit since the first was held in 2008, although Xi attended only virtually in 2020 and 2021 because of the pandemic. China has typically considered the G-20 summit as a crucial diplomatic event to shape global order and showcase its growing influence. The Chinese side has not issued any official reason for the same.

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador have also expressed regret for not attending the summit. Instead, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Mexican Economy Minister Raquel Buerrostro Sanchez will represent their countries.

Official sources downplayed the absence of these leaders, citing the busy schedules of world leaders and noting that such occurrences are not unusual. They mentioned that at least six leaders did not attend the 2021 Rome G-20 summit.

Analysts offer many reasons for Why President Xi Jinping chose to skip the G20 Delhi summit.

- Xi's absence could be a snub to the host country, India, with which China is embroiled in border disputes.
- It could also be a part of the effort from China to elevate other multilateral forums over those seen as dominated by the US.
- Xi had recently attended BRICS, summit in South Africa, a bloc Chinese leader is pushing as an alternative to the western – led groups such as the G20 and the G7
- Xi's skipping of the West – heavy club of G20 right after attending the BRICS summit might be to serve as a visual illustration of Xi's narrative of east is rising and the west is falling.
- Though China and the US are engaged in a battle for influence in the INDO- Pacific, neither of them has attended the ASEAN summit this week.

CONCLUSION: Negotiators are currently working on a joint statement for the summit. However, there may be challenges in reaching a consensus, particularly concerning issues like Ukraine and climate financing, where Russia and China have opposing views. Additionally, differences between developed and developing nations persist. Chinese officials have also raised objections to some of India's proposed additions, including the use of the Sanskrit phrase Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

EXPERT COMMITTEE FOR ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT IN HIMALAYAN STATES

CONTEXT: Frequent landslips leading to deaths and destruction had led the Supreme Court to moot a re-evaluation of the load-carrying capacity of hill towns and cities.

In August, 2023 a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud suggested constitution of an expert committee to conduct a "complete and comprehensive" study on the carrying capacity of the Himalayan region in the country, where unplanned development had caused devastation in recent times, terming it a "very important issue". The Centre has proposed forming a 13-member technical committee headed by the Director of the GB Pant National Institute of Himalayan Environment and members as experts drawn from multiple disciplines, including hydrology, remote sensing, Himalayan geology, forestry, wildlife, architecture disaster management, pollution and groundwater protection to evaluate the "carrying capacity" of 13 Himalayan States. The carrying capacity is the maximum population size that an ecosystem can sustain without getting degraded.

The Environment Ministry filed an affidavit stressing the need to collect factual aspects of each hill station with the help of local authorities cutting across multiple disciplines. The Union government circulated guidelines for assessing the carrying capacity of their hill stations, including cities and eco-sensitive zones among the 13 Himalayan States. The Centre sent a reminder on May 19, 2023 to all the 13 States to undertake the study and submit the action plan "as early as possible". The States could constitute committees headed by their respective Chief Secretaries to collect information on the load-carrying capacity of their hill stations, cities, and eco-sensitive zones.



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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

IS A 370 ABOVE THE BASIC STRUCTURE AND AMENDING POWER OF PARLIAMENT? C.J.I.

CONTEXT: While heading a Constitutional bench hearing the challenge to repeal Article 370, Chief Justice of India D.Y. ChandraChud wondered whether the petitioners were placing the Article 370 on a pedestal loftier than the basic structure of the Constitution and amending powers of the Parliament of India.

STORY SO FAR: Govt. of India had bifurcated the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories in August 2019. Petitioners are challenging the same in the Supreme Court of India.

Presenting the arguments in favour of the petitioners, Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing the petitioners challenging the repeal of Article 370, argued that Article 370(1) became permanent when the Jammu and Kashmir Constituent Assembly dissolved in 1957. He claimed that clause (3) of Article 370, which allowed the President to abrogate the Article as was done on August 5, 2019, no longer existed.

Sibal contended that Article 368 (Parliament's power to amend the Constitution) did not apply to Article 370 because the special procedure for repealing or modifying Article 370 was only available under clause (3) of Article 370. This clause allowed the President to declare the provision inoperative through a notification, provided the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir recommended it. The Chief Justice questioned whether this provision held a higher status than the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

Sibal emphasised that neither the court nor the petitioners were advising the Union government on how to abrogate Article 370, as it was a political process with a political solution.

The government argued that the President had a unique "plenary power" to repeal Article 370, combining elements of constituent, legislative, and executive authority.

Sibal countered these arguments, stating that such claims needed to be challenged. He pointed out changes in the terminology used in Article 370, suggesting that it limited the President's power rather than granting plenary authority.

SC asks petitioner-MP to file affidavit pledging allegiance to Constitution

The Supreme Court has asked Mohammad Akbar Lone, a leader from the National Conference party and one of the petitioners in the Article 370 abrogation challenge case, to submit an affidavit. In this affidavit, he must unequivocally affirm that he recognizes Jammu and Kashmir as an integral part of India and commits allegiance to the Constitution.

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, leading the Constitution Bench, has directed Mr. Lone to provide this affidavit by Tuesday.

During the proceedings on Monday, the central government and other respondents accused Mr. Lone, who is a Member of Parliament (MP), of having chanted slogans like "Pakistan Zindabad" (Long live Pakistan) in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly in 2018. They highlighted that he has not expressed any remorse for his actions up to the present moment.

INTERNAL SECURITY

IAF BEGINS WESTERN AIR COMMAND'S ANNUAL EXERCISE

CONTEXT: The annual training exercise, Trishul, of the Western Air Command (WAC) of the Indian Air Force (IAF) scheduled from September 4 to 14 and will validate the command's operational preparedness and will see the employment of all the frontline assets from fighter jets, transport aircraft, helicopters and other force multipliers in high tempo.

The exercise will see activation of all air assets and force multipliers spread across the Line of Control (LoC) with Pakistan to the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China. Since the stand-off with China in eastern Ladakh in May 2020, which is still ongoing, the Indian military has seen a major reorientation from its focus from Pakistan to China and the IAF has maintained a high tempo of operations. As the Army mobilised in a big way, the IAF pressed in its entire transport fleet and airlifted over 68,000 troops, 330 infantry vehicles and over 90 tanks in addition to artillery guns.

The two sides recently held the 19th round of Corps Commander talks towards disengagement and de-escalation on the Line of Actual Control to end the stand-off which was immediately followed by Major-General-level talks at Depsang and Demchok to find a way out. However, the two militaries continue to remain deployed with extensive build-up on both sides.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

MAKING CROSS BORDER PAYMENTS EFFICIENT

Vouching for CBDCs

RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das elaborated on the various benefits that CBDCs can offer the global economy



- With its instant settlement feature, CBDCs can make cross-border payments more secure, Mr. Das said
- Using local currencies in cross-border payments can shield emerging market currencies from global shocks, he added
- The adoption of an inter-operable technology platform can benefit the cross-border payments ecosystem, Mr. Das noted

CONTEXT: Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das said that adoption of the Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) can make existing cross-border payments efficient, cost effective, real-time, inclusive and transparent. The instant settlement features of CBDCs can play an important role in making cross-border payments cheaper, faster and more secure.

The use of local currencies in cross-border payments could help to shield emerging market currencies from global shocks, protect against exchange rate fluctuations and encourage the development of local forex and capital markets.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ADITYA L1: UNDERSTANDING PAYLOADS



CONTEXT: Discovered by mathematician Joseph Louis Lagrange, L1 is one of the five points located approximately 1.5 million kilometres away, where the gravitational forces of the Sun and the Earth are in equilibrium. Hence, a spacecraft placed at L1 orbits the Sun at the same rate as Earth and affords an uninterrupted view of the Sun, making it an ideal observation post for space-based solar observatories.

The L1 is currently home to the European Space Agency (ESA)- National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) observing the Sun and its dynamics. Aditya L1 will join this observatory to unravel the mysteries of the dynamics of the Sun.

Launched on September 2, the craft will undergo five orbit-raising manoeuvres before being slingshot to the L1 point. The ship will coast for about four months before it reaches L1. At that stage, the thrusters will be fired to make the craft circle around the L1, placing it in what is known as a halo orbit around L1. From this vantage point, Aditya L1 can observe the Sun 24X7 using its four remote sensing payloads, and measure in-situ the various parameters of space weather.

Seven payloads onboard Aditya-L1 satellite

1. Visible Emission Line Coronagraph (VELC): Developed by the Bengaluru-based Indian Institute of Astrophysics in close collaboration with the ISRO, VELC can monitor as close as 1.05 solar radii, a region never imaged by any solar telescope upto three solar radii to get crucial information about the mechanism responsible for CME acceleration.
2. Solar Ultraviolet Imaging Telescope (SUIT): Developed by the Inter-University Centre for Astronomy & Astrophysics, in close collaboration with the ISRO, the Center of Excellence in Space Sciences India, Mohanpur, the Manipal Academy of Higher Education etc, will observe the UV radiation from different zones of the solar atmosphere to generate a 3D tomographic view of the Sun. The onboard intelligence system will detect any sudden appearance of bright spots, such as solar flares (a sudden burst of high energy visible light, UV rays, X rays and Gamma rays) on the disc.

3. Solar Low Energy X-ray Spectrometer (SoLEXS): Developed by the U R Rao Satellite Centre, Bangalore, the Solar Low Energy X-ray Spectrometer (SoLEXS) would study soft X-ray spectrometer: Sun-as-a-star observation.
4. High Energy L1 Orbiting X-ray Spectrometer (HEL1OS): Developed by the U R Rao Satellite Centre, Bangalore, the High Energy L1 Orbiting X-ray Spectrometer (HEL1OS) would study hard X-ray spectrometer: Sun-as-a-star observation
5. Aditya Solar wind Particle Experiment (ASPEX): Developed by the Physical Research laboratory, Ahmedabad, Aditya Solar wind Particle Experiment (ASPEX) study Solar wind/Particle analyzer protons and heavier ions with directions
6. Plasma Analyser Package For Aditya (PAPA): Study solar wind / particle analyzer electrons and heavier Ions with directions.
7. Advanced Tri-axial High Resolution Digital Magnetometers: In-situ study of magnetic field (Bx, By and Bz).

Along with sunlight and electromagnetic radiation, such as ultraviolet rays, the Sun emits a constant stream of charged particles and a mixture of solar magnetic fields that travel throughout interplanetary space. Called a solar wind, the average speed of the flow near the Earth is about 300 kilometres per second. The solar wind constantly rams the Earth's magnetosphere, which functions like a shield and deflects most of it. Nevertheless, the energetic particles from the solar wind sneak through the weak magnetic regions of the Earth — the north and south poles and interact with the molecules in the atmosphere, creating the dazzling display of aurora.

Violent eruptions like solar flares and CMEs trigger a strong wind or solar storm. A geomagnetic storm occurs when the solar storm bashes the Earth's magnetosphere. While brilliant, beautiful auroras appear as more energetic particles flow through the north and south poles, GPS and short-wave communication are disrupted, and the electronics in the satellite are in danger. Intense geomagnetic storms can induce magnetic-induced currents in the power grid and pipelines, resulting in power outages and fire. The energy from the charged particles heats the upper atmosphere, increasing the density and causing extra drag on satellites in low-earth orbit.

Data from Aditya Solar Wind Particle Experiment (ASPEX) developed by the ISRO's Ahmedabad-based Physical Research Laboratory, the Plasma Analyser Package For Aditya (PAPA) developed by the Thiruvananthapuram based Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre and the advanced Tri-axial High-Resolution Digital Magnetometers developed by the Bengaluru based ISRO's Laboratory for Electro-Optics Systems can predict probable geomagnetic storms and better understand space weather dynamics.

Near Earth environ is filled with hundreds of satellites and the change in the space weather can affect them directly. The trajectory can be deflected by impact of a solar storm on upper atmosphere. ISRO alone has 50,000 crore worth of space assets. Understanding space weather is an international issue, and the data from Aditya L1 will aid in making models and predicting storms in advance.

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

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

TIERS APART

CONTEXT: Govt. of India had recently announced a committee under Former President to report on the feasibility of One Nation - one election, to simultaneously hold Parliament and Assembly polls for the entire country.

Challenging Multi-Tiered Governance

In India's multi-tiered governance system, where power is constitutionally distributed between the Union, States, and local bodies, people elect representatives for each level based on their suitability for that specific tier. This setup, which includes Parliament, Assemblies, and local bodies, ensures distinct roles for representatives and diverse voter choices. It may also provide for continued accountability of the polity to the electorate.

Simultaneous Elections in some states are coincidental

Some Indian states, like Andhra Pradesh and Sikkim, hold simultaneous Assembly and parliamentary polls due to coinciding electoral cycles. However, the BJP-led Union government's proposal for simultaneous elections at all levels, examined by a committee led by former President Ramnath Kovind, challenges the core principles of multi-tiered governance and federalism.

Constitutional Challenges

One of the committee's terms of reference suggests that amending the Constitution for simultaneous elections may require ratification by the States. This is considered unconstitutional and impractical. Amendments affecting the federal nature of the Constitution requires ratification by the states too. This proposition could also lead to the premature dissolution of Assemblies, which is problematic. After the elections, there are no guarantees that further assembly elections will also coincide with parliament elections too.

Cost-Cutting and Campaign Mode

The proposal for simultaneous elections claims to save costs by allowing voting in parliamentary, Assembly, municipal, and panchayat elections all at once. It also implies that frequent Assembly elections keep governments in a perpetual campaign mode. However, there is no concrete evidence to support significant cost savings, and election-related spending stimulates economic activity.

Distinct Roles and Voter Accountability

Elections at different times serve the purpose of electing representatives for their respective tiers and are not referendums on one tier or individual leaders. Advocates of India's federal structure should support the separation of Lok Sabha elections from Assembly polls, as campaign issues and democratic choices vary.

Practical Challenges

For the idea of simultaneous elections to work, fixed terms for Lok Sabha and Assemblies and restrictions on premature dissolution would be necessary. Further some amendments may necessitate constructive Confidence votes etc which may require massive overhaul of the Constitution. Without these measures, the proposal remains unworkable and challenges the essence of India's multi-tiered governance and federalism.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

VIKRAM LANDER HOPS ON LUNAR SURFACE



CONTEXT: After Chandrayaan-3's rover Pragyan, its lander, Vikram, has been put into sleep mode. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Monday said that it had put Vikram into sleep mode around 8 a.m.

Data received

Before sleep mode was activated, ChaSTE, RAMBHA-LP and ILSA payloads on the lander did in situ experiments at the new location. On Saturday, the space organisation said that Pragyan had completed its assignments and it had been safely parked and set into sleep mode. The solar panels on the lander and the rover have stored energy during the lunar day and will recharge their batteries. Once the sun sets on the moon, temperature can plunge below minus-200 °C.

'Kick-start'

Vikram lander successfully underwent a hop experiment, firing the engines, elevating itself by about 40 cm as expected and landed safely at a distance of 30 cm to 40 cm away. This 'kick-start' enthruses future sample return and human missions. The successful hop experiment and kick-start could have significant bearing on the future missions which are launched with an objective to bring back samples from the moon and also future human missions to the moon.

Folded and redeployed

On November 17, 1967, NASA's Surveyor 6 carried out a lunar hop, becoming the first spacecraft to do lift-off from a celestial body. NASA Surveyor 6 fired its three main liquid propellant thrusters for 2.5 seconds lifting up to about 10 feet (3 metres) before landing about 8 feet (2.5 metres) west of its original landing point.



"Education is the ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence." - Robert Frost

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

A DISTRACTION BALLOON IN THE WINDS OF FEDERALISM

CONTEXT: The Indian government has established a committee, led by a former president, to assess the practicality of implementing the concept of "One Nation, One Election." This initiative aims to synchronize the scheduling of parliamentary and state assembly elections across the entire country.

Back Ground: The 'One Nation, One Election' proposal by the Indian government is flawed and unworkable. It's seen as a distraction tactic from other issues. The claim that India is in a constant election cycle is inaccurate, and the proposal overlooks the country's diverse political landscape. It's criticized for undermining India's federalism and lacking practical benefits.

Do not conflate these two

India's 'One Nation, One Election' proposal is criticized for conflating state and national elections. It's emphasized that when one state holds an election, it doesn't affect the entire country. The burden of constant elections is felt more by national parties like the BJP and Congress, with their centralized leadership. Changing the constitutional structure for the convenience of a few leaders is seen as an attack on federalism. The proposal is viewed as an attempt to prioritize the BJP's electoral interests and disregards India's political diversity. It curtails the powers of state leaders and undermines federalism, causing concern.

Misleading argument

The argument that India previously had simultaneous elections between 1951-52 and 1967, therefore justifying a return to such a system, is misleading. Those simultaneous elections were not by design but coincidental due to stable state tenures and varied political representation needs. Cost savings, another argument, is debunked as estimates reveal minimal benefits, with the short-term costs of synchronizing elections even higher. Attempting to subvert federalism and political diversity for a mere ₹5 saving per voter is deemed impractical. The proposal's compatibility with India's parliamentary democracy is questioned, as it may work in a presidential system but not in India's diverse and complex political landscape.

Unitarism in the form of efficiency

The 'One Nation, One Election' proposal is deemed politically unviable, administratively impractical, and constitutionally unsound. It rests on weak arguments of cost savings, governance efficiency, and policy paralysis. Instead, it appears to be a deliberate strategy by the Narendra Modi government to divert attention from issues like cronyism and China. This underscores a lack of faith in India's federal democratic parliamentary structure. The proposal reflects a deep ideological divide in Indian politics, with the BJP advocating uniformity, while others support India's diversity. Those valuing India's true essence reject the notion of imposing Unitarianism disguised as efficiency.

CONCLUSION: the proposal of conducting simultaneous elections across the country is fraught with many hurdles and challenges. It has many advantages and at the same exposes the deep cleavages in the present-day Indian Polity. Let more discussions and deliberations be conducted before a decision is reached.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

WOMEN-LED CLIMATE ACTION

CONTEXT: The impact of climate change is one that has profound consequences for humans and has emerged as one of the biggest global challenges in recent decades. The effects of climate change vary according to location, socioeconomic status, and gender.

Women across the world face severe risks to their health, safety, and quality of life. Women in developing and less developed countries, especially in low-income areas are more vulnerable to climate change because of their dependence on natural resources and labour-intensive work for their livelihood. Women are more likely to live in poverty than men, which is just one of several social, economic, and cultural variables that makes them more susceptible to the effects of climate change. Women from low-income households are more at risk because they are more responsible for food, water, and other homely unpaid work.

Due to the climate crisis, more time and effort are needed to obtain basic necessities. Rural women often shoulder the burden of ensuring access to clean water, adequate cooking fuel, and nutritious food for their families. Women may be at increased risk for health and safety because they must travel long distances every day to collect water and fuel. Women in low-income countries (predominantly South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa) engage in climate-vulnerable occupations such as farming and other labour-intensive work. According to the ILO, over 60% of working women in southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are still in agriculture, where they are often underpaid and overworked. Despite being the backbone of the food production system, women own only about 10% of the land used for farming. A McAllister (2023) study has highlighted how there could be 1.2 billion climate refugees by 2050. This is why climate change has a disproportionate effect on rural women.

Gender-specific issues

According to a UN study, most (80%) of those displaced by climate-related disasters are women and girls. Women, especially those from vulnerable communities, face particular difficulties during and after natural disasters. When women are uprooted, they are more susceptible to prejudice and exploitation. For instance, after the earthquake in Nepal in 2015, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) found women were more exposed to trafficking and exploitation. Separation from social networks, a higher risk of gender-based violence, and decreased access to employment, education, and essential health services, such as sexual and reproductive health care and psychosocial support, are just some gender-specific issues women face.

Women make up a disproportionately large portion of the agricultural workforce in emerging countries. Climate change impacts agricultural productivity negatively and significantly. Heat stress affects workers a lot in this sector, especially in South Asia and Africa. Changing precipitation patterns and more frequent extreme weather events are just the beginning of the problems. Their effects on crop production and food security fall disproportionately on these people, who already face significant challenges in obtaining resources, expertise, and technology. Women engaged in agriculture do not have access to quality inputs and possess low education and technical knowledge. Thus, women farmers and labourers are vulnerable and seriously impacted. Various studies also reflect how flooding has increased

water scarcity and also violence against and the exploitation of women.

Invest in women's education, training

Climate change impacts can particularly exacerbate poverty and socioeconomic vulnerabilities among women. Climate change is also linked to women's inequality. According to estimates, 130 million people could be pushed into poverty by 2050 due to climate change risks, natural disasters, and food inflation, impacting women's inequality. When it comes to adjusting to a changing climate, women have a lot to offer. Investments in women's education, training, and access to resources are essential if we are to be resilient to the impact of climate change. Reduce the negative impacts of climate change on people's living standards by teaching them how to practise sustainable agriculture, water management, and energy generation. For example, in India, the Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) teaches women farmers how to respond to shifting climate patterns to support themselves better financially. Therefore, it is essential to support groups that educate the public, train people to adapt to climate change and invest in women's education and training in environmentally-friendly farming methods.

Women's participation in climate policy decision-making at all levels is crucial for effective climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies as well as getting decent employment. As women face greater risks in climate change, gender parity in decision-making bodies is essential. One such programme in South Asia is the Gender and Climate Change Development Programme, which aims to increase women's influence in policymaking by providing them with a stronger voice. Globally, similar efforts are required for efficient climate change adaptation and mitigation. We can say that developing and emerging countries urgently need women-led climate action.



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INTERNAL SECURITY

NAVY BRINGS OUT MARITIME INFRASTRUCTURE ROAD MAP

CONTEXT: Minister of State for Defence Ajay Bhatt released the Maritime Infrastructure Perspective Plan (MIPP), 2023-37 at the second edition of the biennial Naval Commanders Conference. The MIPP aims to synchronise and enmesh the infrastructure requirements of the Navy, over the next 15 years, through a comprehensive perspective plan model. The Plan Document is aligned with the government's vision on creation of sustainable infrastructure, and encompasses for compliance with broader policy directives on PM Gati Shakti project, disaster resilience, transition to net zero, among others.

The IRS Rules and Regulations Handbook for construction and classification of Naval combatants, handbook, family logbook, and electronic service document project released as part of the programme has been revised since the previous 2015 edition to cater for technological advancements and Aatmanirbharta.

Chart 1 | The chart shows the number of beneficiaries who bought no refill and one refill (in crore)*

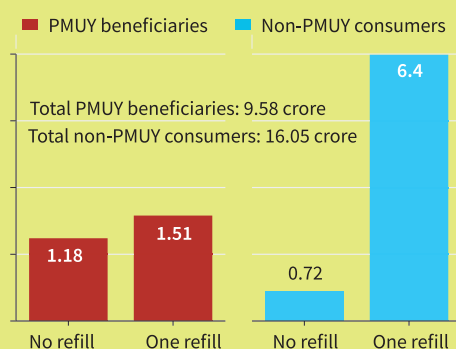


Chart 2 | The chart shows the price of subsidised LPG cylinders for PMUY beneficiaries and non-subsidised cylinders (in ₹)

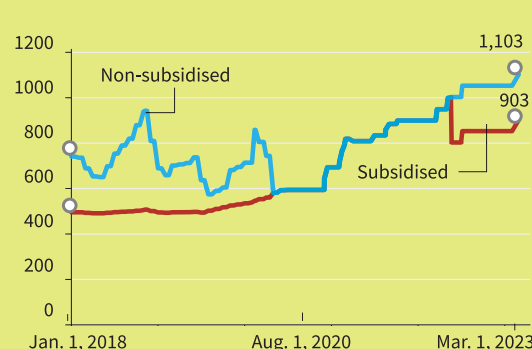
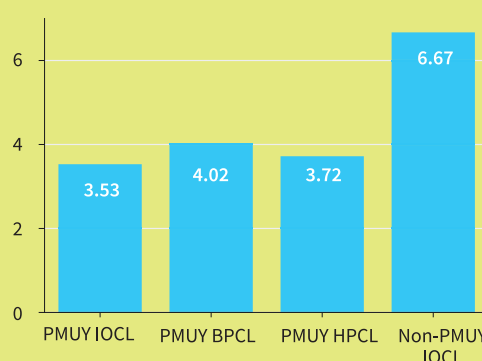
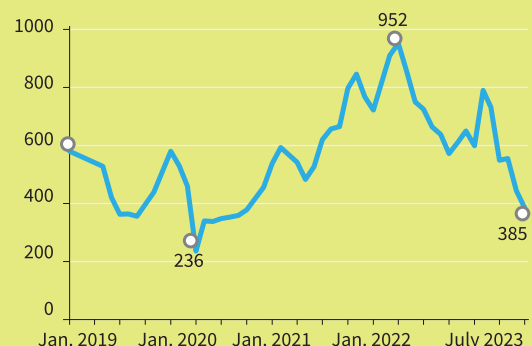


Chart 3 | The chart shows the average refills of LPG cylinders per household in 2022-23 by PMUY and non-PMUY consumers



*BPCL did not provide data regarding refills for non-PMUY beneficiaries

Chart 4 | The chart shows the international FOB price of LPG in \$ per metric tonne between January 2019 and July 2023



ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

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