

● POLITY

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INTERNAL SECURITY

MANIPUR GOVERNMENT EXTENDS AFSPA IN HILL DISTRICTS FOR 6 MONTHS

CONTEXT: The Manipur government extended the imposition of the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in the whole State — except in the jurisdiction of 19 police stations in seven districts of the Imphal valley — for another six months.

The Army has been demanding the re-imposition of AFSPA in the valley districts, arguing that its absence had hampered operations against insurgent groups. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) had registered a suo motu case on

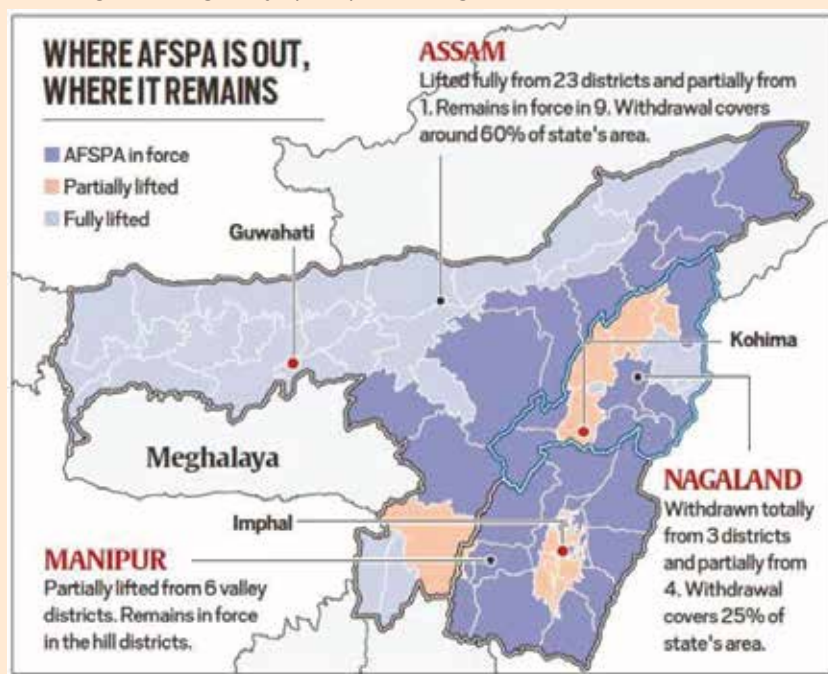
July 19 to investigate a transnational conspiracy by the Myanmar-based leadership of these terror outfits to wage a war against the government by “exploiting the current ethnic unrest”. The State government is now mulling a “one district, one force” deployment of security forces, for better operations. Around 40,000 Central security forces, including the Army, have been deployed in the State.

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act – Salient features:

The Parliament enacted the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958 in Assam. The AFSPA was later extended to the whole of Disturbed Areas in Northeast India and later introduced to J & K in 1990. The Act defines a ‘Disturbed Area’ as a site of frequent occurrence of Low Intensity Conflict among racial, religious, linguistic, castes or communities over minor differences or disputes.

Both the State and Union governments can issue notifications regarding AFSPA. Currently, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs has issued “disturbed area” notifications only for Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. The notifications for Manipur and Assam have been issued by their respective State governments.

Section (3) of the AFSPA Act, 1990 provides immunity for security personnel from prosecutions for acts done under official capacity, including shootings to kill; arrest, search and seizure without warrants to deal a committed crime or to prevent potential cognizable offence even on “reasonable suspicion”.



ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

EPFO LIKELY TO GIVE EMPLOYERS EXTENSION TO VALIDATE JOINT FORMS

CONTEXT: The Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) is likely to give yet another extension to the employers to validate the joint options of employees for higher provident fund (PF) pension.

Employers are learnt to have approached the Union Labour Ministry demanding yet another extension citing technical delays in the EPFO website and issues in accessing employment details of the applicants. The last date for submitting the validated applications is on September 30.

The EPFO had opened the online facility to submit joint

options on February 26 as part of implementing a Supreme Court verdict on higher PF pension. The time to submit the joint options was supposed to end on May 3. Later, trade unions and representatives of employers had approached Union Labour Minister Bhupender Yadav requesting him to extend the time limit. It was first extended to June 26 and again to July 11 to employees and the three more months till September 30. The EPFO had said it received a huge number of applications for validation of joint options.

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INTERNAL SECURITY

HIGH LEVEL OF MILITARY TENSION WITH CHINA OVER PAST THREE YEARS: MINISTER

CONTEXT: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar acknowledged the existence of a “high level of military tension” with China over the past three years.

S. Jaishankar characterised the overall state of “very abnormal” relations between New Delhi and Beijing since the border clashes of 2020. The very large number of troops amassed at the border — in violation of agreements — had completely impacted the relationship, he said, explaining that it was very hard to try and be normal with a country that “had broken agreements”.



GEOGRAPHY

INDIA AGEING, ELDERLY TO MAKE UP 20% OF POPULATION BY 2050: UNFPA REPORT

CONTEXT: With the decadal growth rate of the elderly population of India estimated at 41% and its share of the total population projected to double to over 20% by 2050, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), India, in its 2023 India Ageing Report, has said that by 2046, it is likely that the elderly population will have surpassed the population of children (aged up to 15) in the country.

Key Findings of the Report

More than 40% of the elderly in India are in the poorest wealth quintile, with about 18.7% of them living without an income.

Women, on an average, had a higher life expectancy at the age of 60 and 80 when compared with men — with variations across the States and Union Territories. For instance, in Himachal Pradesh and Kerala, women at 60 have a life expectancy of 23 and 22 years, respectively, which is four years more than that of men at 60 in these States — as compared with the national average differential of only a year and a half.

Life expectancy of women at 60 is greater than 20 years in States such as Rajasthan, Haryana, Gujarat, Uttarakhand, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, and the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir, raising concerns about their social and economic well-being.

Further, the sex ratio (number of females per 1,000 males) among the elderly has been climbing steadily since 1991, while the ratio in the general population has been stagnating. Between 2011 and 2021, the ratio increased in India as a whole and across all regions, barring the Union Territories and western India.

In the northeast and the east, while the sex ratio of the elderly increased, it remained below 1,000 in both years, indicating that men still outnumber women in these regions even at 60-plus years. This, however, is not true for the other regions.

A case in point is central India, where the sex ratio went from 973 in 2011 to 1,053 in 2021, implying that the women caught up with and outperformed the men in survival after 60 years over the decade.

Most States in the southern region and select northern States such as Himachal Pradesh and Punjab reported a higher share of the elderly population than the national average in 2021, a gap that is expected to widen by 2036.

While the States reporting higher fertility rates and lagging in demographic transition, including Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, expect to see an increase in the share of the elderly population between 2021 and 2036, the level will remain lower than the Indian average.

In the southern region, the old-age dependency ratio (elderly people per 100 people between 15 and 59 years) was higher than the national average at around 20 as is true of western India at 17. Overall, Union Territories (13) and the north-eastern region (13) reflected lower old age dependency ratios.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE G-20'S SCREEN OVER 'MAZDOORS', THEIR RIGHTS

CONTEXT: India missed a great opportunity to protect worker rights and advance the welfare of workers during the G-20 summit, despite the G-20's Labour 20 (L20), a coalition of G20 leaders concerned about workers, holding two meetings in India.

The issues

India's choice of the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS) to head the L20 had irked the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), a confederation of global trade unions, and they boycotted the meetings.

In the absence of the ITUC, the L20 discussed portable social security schemes, data collection for these schemes, addressing skill gaps in two meetings, and had some words on platform workers.

The Indian government should have taken the opportunity to address the serious issues facing workers in India, such as forced labour, modern-day slavery, and the kafala system in the Arab Gulf where some nine million Indians are working under exploitative working conditions. The Arab Gulf countries follow an exploitative labour system called the kafala system, which ties migrant workers to their employers. This system makes it difficult for migrant workers to leave their jobs or change employers, and it increases the risk of forced labour and modern-day slavery.

Portable insurance schemes are important, but they are not enough. Workers also need job creation, decent working conditions, equal pay, gender equality, the elimination of forced labour and child labour, an end to modern-day slavery, and the protection of their rights and the welfare of their families.

India is the world's largest migrant-sending country, with an estimated 13 million workers abroad. Of these, an estimated nine million are working in exploitative conditions in the Arab Gulf.

But the exploitation of Indian workers is not limited to the Arab Gulf. In India itself, workers in a number of industries, including textiles, brick kilns, shrimp farming, copper manufacturing, stone cutting, and plantations, face forced labour and modern-day slavery.

According to the Walk Free Foundation, there are an estimated 27 million people trapped in modern-day slavery in

G-20 countries, of whom 11 million are in India.

According to the International Labour Organization, forced or compulsory labour is "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the threat of a penalty and for which the person has not offered himself or herself voluntarily".

It must be noted that India has signed and ratified the ILO's Forced Labour Convention known as C29.

Addressing forced labour and modern day slavery is important for India because the exploitation of workers would increase inequality, unstable social justice and threaten democracy.

In addition, we should not forget that the move by the Union government to consolidate the labour laws into four labour codes is drawing protests from trade unions, civil societies, and workers, who allege that it will have a negative impact on decent working conditions.

In India, there are 530 million workers, of whom 430 million are in the informal sector, who are prone to different forms of exploitation, especially forced labour.

This is not only an Indian problem. All G-20 countries face a similar situation. If we do not address the situation of workers, we will not be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals targets for 2030, especially the first one, which aims to eradicate poverty.

Subjects not discussed

The G-20 should have discussed investments in job creation, compliance with the promise of the fundamental principles and rights at work, ensuring minimum living wages and equal pay, social protection for all with official development assistance, establishing equality of incomes, gender, and race, and coordinating action on inclusion as the basis of a rights-based development model realised through multilateral reform that deals with the threats to our peace and common security.

Unfortunately, not much happened. Workers were ignored, just as green curtains were used to screen out the dwellings of the poor that were near areas of G-20 summit events to avoid embarrassment about the reality.

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

MOVING FROM WOMEN'S RESERVATION TO GENDER EQUALITY

CONTEXT: Parliament passed the women's reservation Bill, securing one-third representation for women, addressing low gender representation.

BACKGROUND: India lags behind in women's parliamentary representation, with only 15% of seats held by women, ranking 141st out of 193 countries. Despite multiple attempts in the last 27 years to pass a women's reservation bill, opposition persisted. However, there is widespread consensus on the moral necessity of increasing women's political representation.

Delimitation Exercise

- The implementation of a present law depends on the upcoming Census and delimitation process.
- Delimitation has been frozen since 1976 to control population growth, favouring southern states with successful measures.
- Empowering women through education and economic autonomy is linked to lower fertility rates.
- States with improved women empowerment indicators may lose parliamentary seats if delimitation occurs.
- The legality of this contingency clause and its dependence on uncertain future events raise constitutional questions.

Societal Approach

While laws promoting women's representation in elected bodies are crucial, true gender justice necessitates a transformation in societal perceptions of gender roles. The

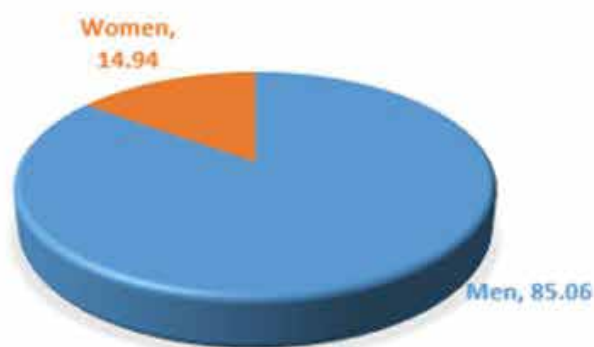
unequal distribution of unpaid domestic labour underscores this challenge, with women dedicating significantly more time to household chores and caregiving.

Addressing this disparity is essential for enabling women's full participation in the labour force and political leadership. Government programs like Tamil Nadu's Magalir Urimai Thogai, recognizing and compensating women for their unpaid household work, are steps towards achieving gender equity and boosting female labour force participation.

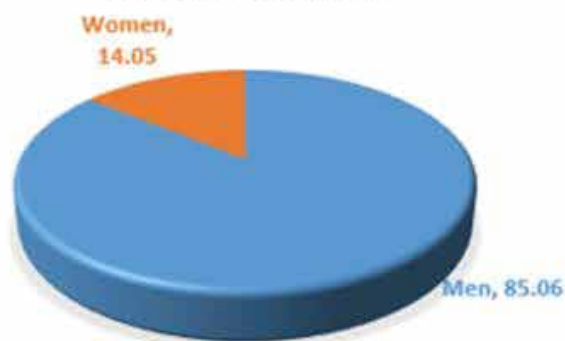
Substantive Justice

- Increasing women's representation in elected bodies is essential, but capacity-building for first-time female representatives remains a challenge.
- EMILYs List in the U.S. provides a successful model of mentoring and capacity-building for women in politics.
- Governments must take responsibility for building capacity under the reservation model, whether or not political parties groom women leaders.
- The National Commission for Women and the Parliamentary Committee on Empowerment of Women need significant revisions to ensure effective implementation.
- Achieving gender equality also depends on recognizing unpaid labor and promoting equitable sharing of household responsibilities.

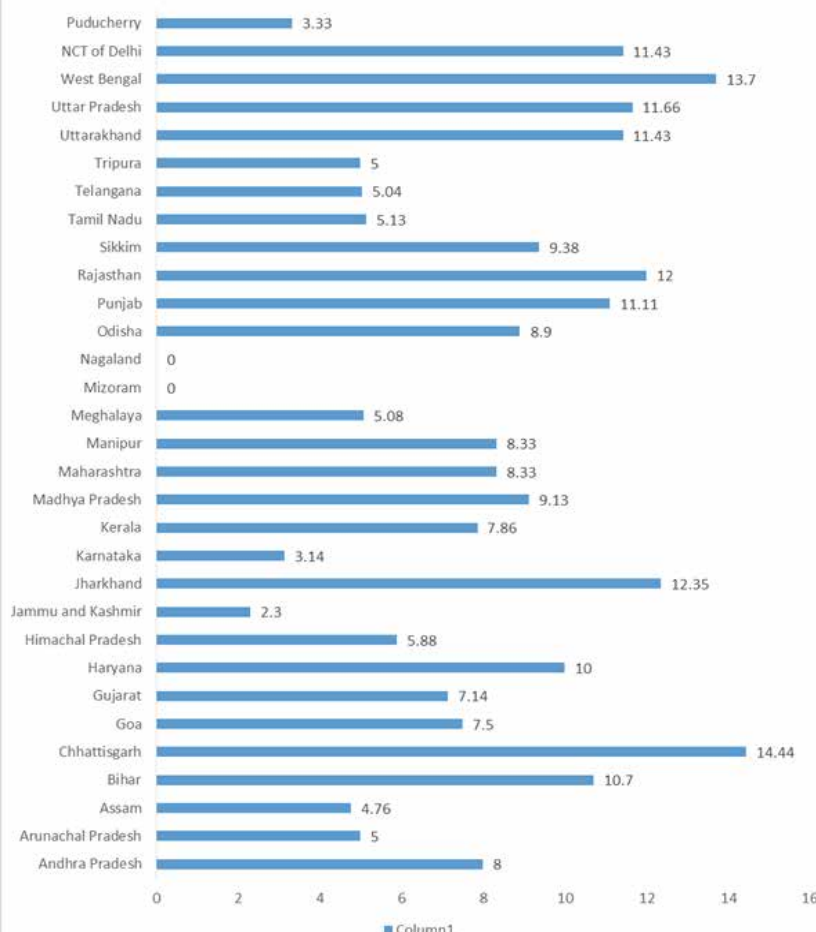
STATUS OF WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN LOKSABHA



STATUS OF WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN RAJYA SABHA



Percentage of Women Representation in State Assemblies



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

BENNU SAMPLE EXTENDS HUMAN UNDERSTANDING BEYOND

CONTEXT: On September 24, NASA's OSIRIS-REx spacecraft safely delivered 250 grams of Bennu surface material to Earth.

BACKGROUND: Bennu, a carbonaceous asteroid, offers a unique window into the early solar system, potentially holding clues about its ingredients and formation processes. Scientists believe that asteroids like Bennu may have delivered compounds crucial for life on Earth. Furthermore, studying Bennu could help devise strategies to prevent potential collisions with our planet between 2178 and 2290.



HIGHLIGHTS:

- NASA's OSIRIS-REx mission, launched in 2016, orbited asteroid Bennu, landing briefly in 2020 to collect a sample.
- It returned to Earth in 2021, carrying the sample capsule for study.
- OSIRIS-REx is part of NASA's New Frontiers program, alongside missions to the Kuiper Belt and Jupiter.
- The mission explores both scientific and commercial aspects, including space mining and asteroid impact mitigation.
- Its ultimate goal is to uncover the origins of life and the fate of our solar system, offering humanity a glimpse into the cosmos.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

WHEN INDIA-CANADA TIES WERE RESET

CONTEXT: As ties between India and Canada plummet to their lowest point since the 1980s, former diplomats say that a change in Canadian responses to the Khalistan issue are necessary for any future reset in ties, pointing to the 2010 apology by the then Canadian Prime Minister as an example.

THE GIST

Addressing families of the victims of the 1985 Air India 'Kanishka' Flight 182 which exploded over the Irish coast after a bomb placed in the luggage went off, for which Khalistani separatist operatives were convicted, Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said he was "sorry" on behalf of the Canadian government.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit for the G-20 summit in Toronto was a chance to reset ties. No Indian Prime Minister had visited Canada since 1973, and although it was a multilateral summit visit, the bilateral meeting with Mr. Harper saw a number of agreements signed.

In the joint statement during Dr. Manmohan Singh's visit in 2010, the very first issue raised was terrorism and the Kanishka bombing. Then came the big breakthrough on civil nuclear cooperation which marked a 180 degree turn in Canada's position on cooperation with India in this sector.

The shift, and the subsequent visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 changed India-Canada cooperation substantially. Trade doubled during the decade from about \$5 billion to \$10 billion, investment from Canada shot up from \$700 million to more than \$55 billion, and the two sides set up working groups on countering terrorism, improving strategy, energy ties, nuclear fuel MoUs and a number of other areas.

However, after the election of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party, and his dependence on the New Democratic Party led by Jagmeet Singh, has meant that the Trudeau government doesn't share the previous government's avowal of ties with Khalistan separatists.

Reasons for tensions

The Khalistani issue continues to bedevil the relationship, with certain political parties especially the Liberals prioritising their engagement with them over ties with India, as they control a few parliamentary constituencies and allegedly extend material and financial support to the latter parties.

Canadian record of tolerating the most egregious, criminal activity by some extremist members has continued despite denials by successive Canadian governments. Actions like the posters targeting Indian diplomats, holding a referendum for the Sikh diaspora, and the tableau glorifying Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination and even feting the Air India 182 bombing masterminds have added to the tensions.



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



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Comparing health metrics

Under each indicator, the circles labelled as 'yes' ● in the chart are indicators where STs outperformed non-STs and those labelled 'no' ● indicate the opposite. All figures are in percentage



Source: Paper titled, "Population, health and nutrition profile of the Scheduled Tribes in India: a comparative perspective, 2016–2021", published by The Lancet Regional Health - Southeast Asia. Authors: S.V. Subramanian and William Joe

Abbreviations-
Infant mortality rate: IMR; Ante-natal care: ANC; Family planning: FP; Blood sugar level: BSL; Blood pressure: BP

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

TIGERS FACING MORTALITY CRISIS IN NILGIRIS

CONTEXT: 10 tigers, including cubs and adults, died in Nilgiris; Forest department's anti-poaching efforts to protect tigers.

BACKGROUND: Ten tigers, including six cubs and four adults, have tragically perished in the Nilgiris since mid-August. These losses occurred in separate incidents, with suspicions of poisoning in one adult tiger case. Concerns loom as the state forest department struggles to locate two mother tigresses, raising questions about the overall welfare of these endangered animals.



Tigers' cause of death

- Tiger deaths occurred in various locations in India's Mudumalai Tiger Reserve and Nilgiris Forest Division.
- Causes of death included starvation, injuries from fights, and poisoning of prey.
- Suspicion of human-wildlife conflict arose with the arrest of a man for poisoning a tiger's prey.
- These incidents raised concerns about tiger conservation efforts and human-wildlife interactions.

- Conservationists are working to address the challenges faced by tigers in these regions to ensure their survival.
- Overpopulation of tigers in the Mudumalai-Bandipur-Nagarhole complex is forcing them into surrounding areas, causing increased competition and fights.
- The Nilgiris Division now hosts a significant tiger population, raising concerns about future human-animal conflicts.
- Conservationists stress the importance of restoring prey habitats to mitigate these interactions and sustain tiger populations

In response to concerns about tiger poaching and the inability to locate mother tigresses in the Nilgiris, the forest department intends to establish anti-poaching camps in six forest ranges around Mukurthi National Park. Furthermore, they plan to initiate annual tiger population monitoring for improved management and have increased patrols near crucial tiger habitats in Mukurthi and Mudumalai. These measures aim to safeguard the region's tiger population and combat potential threats.

Mudumalai Tiger Reserve

- Location: Mudumalai Tiger Reserve is situated in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, India, near the Nilgiri Hills.
- Biodiversity: It boasts rich flora and fauna, including tigers, leopards, elephants, and over 300 bird species.
- Habitats: The reserve features diverse ecosystems, from dry deciduous forests to tropical evergreen forests.
- Conservation: Mudumalai plays a crucial role in conserving endangered species and preserving their natural habitats.
- Tourism: It attracts wildlife enthusiasts and offers safaris for visitors to observe the diverse wildlife.

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