

● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

INTERNAL SECURITY

DIGITAL INDIA ACT

CONTEXT: The Union Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY) proposed a Digital India Act, 2023 (DIA), poised to replace the two-decade-old Information Technology Act, 2000 (IT Act), is designed to address the challenges and opportunities presented by the dramatic growth of the internet and emerging technologies.

The IT Act, 2000 crafted during a time when the internet was in its infancy, has struggled to keep pace with the rapid changes in technology and user behaviour. India's internet user base has exploded from a mere 55 lakh to a staggering 85 Cr between 2000 and 2023. The nature of internet usage has also evolved, with the emergence of various intermediaries and the proliferation of new forms of user harm, such as cyberstalking, trolling, and doxing. The DIA recognises these changes and aims to provide a comprehensive legal framework to address them.

1. Focus on online safety and trust, with a commitment to safeguarding citizen's rights in the digital realm while remaining adaptable to shifting market dynamics and international legal principles.
2. Recognise the growing importance of new-age technologies such as artificial intelligence and blockchain to not only encourage the adoption of these technologies but also to ensure that their deployment is in line with ethical and legal principles.
3. Upholds the concept of an open internet, striking a balance between accessibility and necessary regulations to maintain order and protect users.
4. Mandates stringent Know Your Customer (KYC) requirements for wearable devices, accompanied by criminal law sanctions.
5. Review of the "safe harbour" principle, which presently shields online platforms from liability related to user-generated content, indicating a potential shift in online accountability standards.
6. Foster innovation and safeguard against potential harms. It promotes ethical AI practices, data privacy in blockchain applications, and mechanisms for accountability in the use of these technologies.

DIA's success hinges on effective enforcement, which will require substantial resources, expertise, and infrastructure. Balancing the interests of various stakeholders, including tech giants, while ensuring the protection of citizen rights, poses a significant challenge. Therefore, while the DIA is a progressive move, its implementation and potential repercussions warrant vigilant monitoring and adaptability to avoid unintended consequences.

INTERNAL SECURITY

INDIAN AIR FORCE UNVEILS
NEW ENSIGN

CONTEXT: The Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Vivek Ram Chaudhari unveiled a new Ensign for the force, as it marked its 91st anniversary, by the inclusion of the Air Force Crest in the top right corner of the Ensign, towards the fly side.



The new Ensign with the IAF Crest has the national symbol, the Ashoka lion, on the top with the words Satyameva Jayate in Devanagari below it. Below the Ashoka lion is a Himalayan eagle with its wings spread, denoting the fighting qualities of the IAF. A ring in light blue colour encircles the Himalayan eagle with the words 'Bharatiya Vayu Sena' and the motto of the IAF is inscribed below Himalayan eagle in golden Devanagari.

The Air Force Day parade was held at the Air Force Station, Bamrauli in Prayagraj. The theme for this year's Air Force Day was "IAF — air power beyond boundaries", aptly reflecting the "inherent global reach of air power and how air power will prove decisive in future conflicts". This is the first Air Force Day Parade to be commanded by a woman officer, Group Captain Shaliza Dhama. She is also the first woman officer of the IAF to command a combat unit.



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INTERNAL SECURITY

ARMY CONCLUDES 70 SCHEMES UNDER EP-4 WORTH ₹11,000 CRORE

CONTEXT: The Army has completed the fourth tranche of Emergency Procurements (EP) undertaken between September 2022 and September 2023 with over 70 schemes concluded worth nearly ₹11,000 crore.

Emergency financial powers were granted to the armed forces by the Defence Ministry for the first time after the 2016 Uri terror attack, followed by the 2019 Balakot air strikes and the 2020 standoff with China in Eastern Ladakh. Under this, the services could procure weapons systems up to ₹300 crore, on an "urgent basis without any further clearance to cut short the procurement cycle".

The Indian Air Force has also concluded 64 contracts under EP-4 worth around ₹ 8,137 Cr. The Army finalised 68 contracts worth approximately ₹ 7,000 Cr in the earlier three tranches.

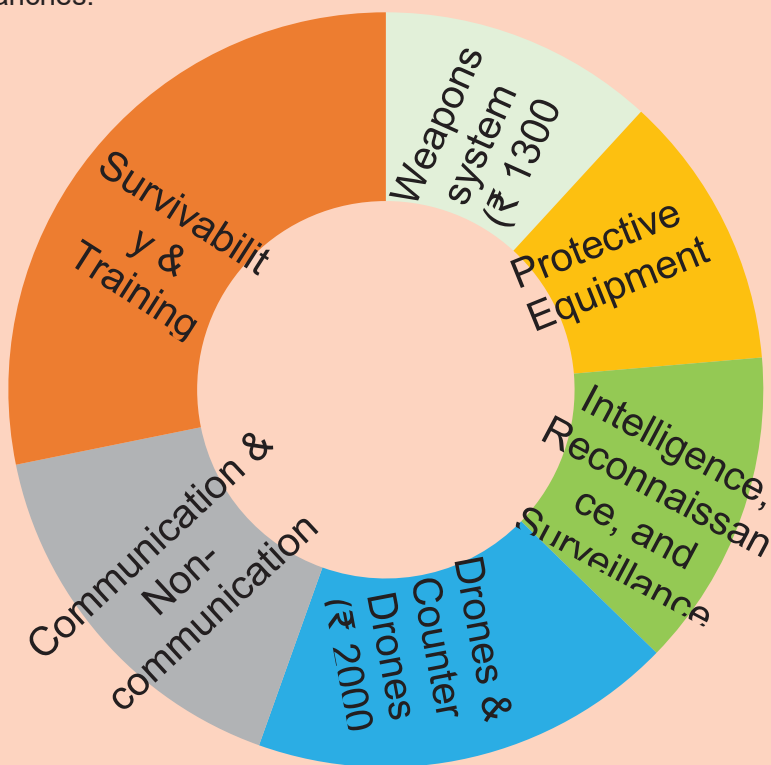


FIGURE: Pie chart representation of allocations under the Emergency Procurement Scheme.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

RBI MONETARY POLICY REVIEW

CONTEXT: The RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) decided to leave interest rates unchanged.

The headline retail inflation during the First Quarter averaged 4.63 % as against the RBI's projection of 4.6 %. Consumer Price Index (CPI) accelerated sharply in the last quarter with July and August seeing readings of 7.44 % and 6.83 %, respectively.

The MPC last week raised its projection for average second-quarter inflation by 20 basis points, from the August forecast of 6.2 % to 6.4 %. The MPC is hoping that the recent reduction in domestic LPG prices combined with a lowering of vegetable prices would provide some near-term respite to price pressures.

The methodology used to posit 7.8% real GDP growth in the first quarter may have given rise to an overestimation, have to be seen in tandem with economic forecasters' increased caution over India's GDP growth outlook for the current fiscal year. The Central Bank acknowledged the weakness in India's goods exports and the uneven monsoon, which has also led to a drop in kharif sowing of crucial oilseeds and pulses, as key risks to the RBI's projection for 6.5 % GDP growth in FY24. The RBI also runs the risk of importing inflation and adding to the external sector vulnerabilities if it fails to raise interest rates with weakening of Indian Rupee by about 0.7% since the last policy meeting in August.

Retail inflation likely eased in September

India's retail inflation is likely to have retreated below 6% in September after two months over the central bank's tolerance threshold.

Economists expect consumer prices of September to have dropped to 5.7 % from 6.8 % in August and a 15-month high of 7.4 % in July. Food inflation stood at around 10 % in August.

The upgraded average inflation projections for the July to September quarter from 6.2 % to 6.4 % by the RBI implies that the RBI expects September's retail inflation print to be between 4.9 % and 5 %.

Price pressures assuaged in September, with the reversal of tomato, potato and onion prices being the primary driver. The moderation in food prices is broad-based, noting that the base effects from last September when inflation stood at 7.4 % will also alleviate the headline inflation number to an extent.

Rice prices remained sticky, rising 11.1 % in September compared to 11 % in August, while onion inflation is expected to have sped to 29.5 % from 17.6 % in the previous month.

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ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

GST COUNCIL CLEARS A FEW MEASURES TO BOOST FOREIGN TRADE

CONTEXT: The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council has cleared a few measures to boost foreign trade, including enabling tax credits for services exporters receiving payments in rupees, critical for trade with countries such as Iran and Russia that face global sanctions.

The Government has been pushing for rupee-based trading arrangements with several countries to reduce the dependence on the U.S. dollar, and banks from over 20 nations have opened special rupee (INR) Vostro accounts with Indian banks to remit payments for their imports from India. However, many exporters of such services were being denied input tax credits under the GST regime as the norms required foreign currency receipts to recognise the 'export' status.

Issue: GST officers deny refund applications on the ground that receipt of consideration in INR did not meet the condition prescribed for the purpose of qualifying as 'exports of services.'

Recommendations of the GST Council: Issue a circular to clarify the admissibility of export remittances received in Special INR Vostro account, as permitted by the Reserve Bank of India, for the purpose of consideration of supply of services to qualify as export of services under the Integrated GST [IGST] Act, 2017.

Effect: Bring respite to the exporters whose refunds of GST were stuck for a long time on account of the disputes in respect of this particular aspect, and they were also being subjected to GST demands.

ISSUE: Ambiguity with the explicit inclusion of such supplies for rebate.

Recommendations of the GST Council: Issuance of a circular to clarify the place of supply treatment for services entailing transportation of goods in cases where the location of supplier or the location of recipient of services is outside India

Effect: Undo the effects of a July 31 notification that had made it difficult for firms supplying goods or services to special economic zones (SEZs) to claim tax refunds.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

NC-CONGRESS ALLIANCE WINS 22 OF 26 KARGIL SEATS; BJP CLAIMS TWO

CONTEXT: National Conference-Congress alliance dominates Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council-Kargil election, securing 22 out of 26 seats.

BACKGROUND: In the recent election, the INDIA partners lost to the BJP in a seat, while independent candidates won two seats. The NC framed the election as a referendum on the Centre's actions of August 5, 2019, when Jammu and Kashmir's special constitutional status was revoked. Meanwhile, the BJP emphasized development initiatives post-2019. Voter turnout was 77.61% among 74,026 registered voters.

ELECTION HIGHLIGHTS

- The recent election results in Jammu and Kashmir serve as a wake-up call for the BJP, emphasizing the demand for a democratically elected government.
- The Congress supported the Kargil Democratic Alliance's (KDA) demands for Statehood and protection of Ladakh's culture, land, jobs, and environment.
- Rahul Gandhi's tour in Ladakh was credited with the Congress's performance, with Jairam Ramesh highlighting its impact.
- Despite a pre-poll alliance, the NC-Congress alliance fielded candidates against each other, leading to a loss in the Zaskar region.
- The BJP managed to win two out of three Buddhist-majority constituencies, despite Ladakh's direct rule by the Centre since 2019, with some BJP leaders expressing gratitude for the voters' support.

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

ISRO CORRECTS ADITYA-L1 TRAJECTORY SUCCESSFULLY

CONTEXT: ISRO conducts successful trajectory correction for Aditya-L1 spacecraft en route to sun-earth Lagrangian-1 (L1) point.

BACKGROUND: On October 6, 2023, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully conducted a Trajectory Correction Manoeuvre (TCM) lasting 16 seconds for the spacecraft headed towards Sun-Earth L1. The TCM was executed to rectify the trajectory based on tracking data following the Trans-Lagrangian Point 1 Insertion (TL1I) manoeuvre on September 19, and the spacecraft remains in good condition.



News Highlights

- **Correction Maneuver:** ISRO performed a Trajectory Correction Maneuver (TCM) on Aditya-L1 after the Trans-Lagrangian Point 1 Insertion (TL1I) on September 19, ensuring it follows the intended path to the Halo orbit around L1.
- **Journey to L1:** Aditya-L1, India's solar observatory, began its 110-day journey to the L1 point, situated 1.5 million km from Earth along the sun-earth line, after the TL1I maneuver.
- **Significance of L1:** L1 is 1% of the Earth-sun distance away. Aditya-L1's mission is critical for solar observations, positioned strategically at this point for a clear view of the sun.
- **Magnetometer Payload:** The spacecraft carries a magnetometer developed in Bengaluru, capable of measuring interplanetary magnetic fields at L1. This payload will be activated again as the spacecraft progresses.
- **Expected Arrival:** Aditya-L1 is slated to reach the L1 point by January, marking a significant milestone in India's space exploration endeavors.

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

HABITAT AND PREY SHAPE ASIATIC WILD DOG-TIGER COEXISTENCE: STUDY

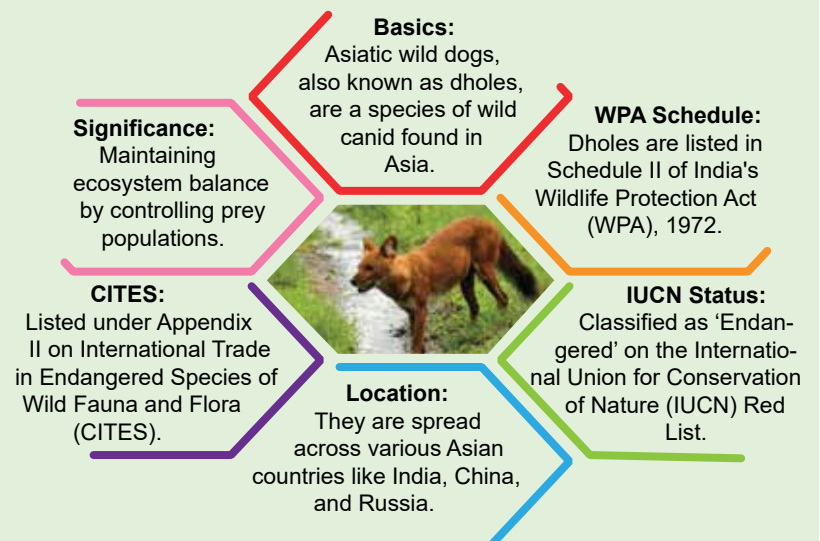
CONTEXT: Study reveals possible positive link between dholes and tigers due to shared prey and habitat.

BACKGROUND: A study conducted by Urjit Bhatt and Salvador Lyngdoh at Assam's Manas National Park utilized camera traps to examine the behavior of dholes (wild dogs). They found that dholes had the highest activity overlap with leopards and the lowest with clouded leopards. The research, published in Mammalian Biology, explores carnivore coexistence in the park from 2017 to 2019.

Study Highlights

- **Dhole Decline:** Dholes, or Asiatic wild dogs, once widespread in Asia, face endangerment due to factors like habitat loss, prey decline, and human conflict.
- **Population Estimate:** The global adult dhole population is between 949 and 2,215, making them an endangered species.
- **Manas National Park Study:** A study in Manas National Park aimed to understand dhole habitat use and their interactions with other carnivores.
- **Primary Threat:** Researchers hypothesized that human conflict posed the primary threat to dholes, leading to their habitat decline.
- **Surprising Discovery:** Contrary to expectations, the study found a positive relationship between dholes and tigers, challenging the assumption of antagonistic interactions.
- **Possible Explanations:** Overlapping prey availability or habitat suitability may explain the positive association between dholes and tigers, suggesting further research is needed.
- **Complex Ecological Dynamics:** The findings highlight the need to unravel the mechanisms driving this unexpected relationship between dholes and tigers.

DHOLES/ ASIATIC WILD DOGS



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ISRAEL-GAZA CONFLICT: THOUSANDS DEAD AND DISPLACED AS VIOLENCE ESCALATES

Unprecedented Surprise Attack

More than 24 hours after an unprecedented surprise attack from Gaza, Hamas militants, supported by thousands of rockets, breached Israel's security barrier and wreaked havoc in nearby communities. They took captives, including women, children, and the elderly, with the intention of potentially exchanging them for Palestinian prisoners held by Israel. In northern Israel, a brief exchange of strikes with Lebanon's Hezbollah raised concerns about the potential for a broader conflict.

Human Toll

The conflict has taken a staggering toll on both Israeli and Palestinian civilians. As of now, at least 600 people have reportedly been killed in Israel, including 44 soldiers. In Gaza, officials have reported 313 casualties. Israeli security forces claim to have killed 400 militants and captured dozens more.

Israeli Military Deployment

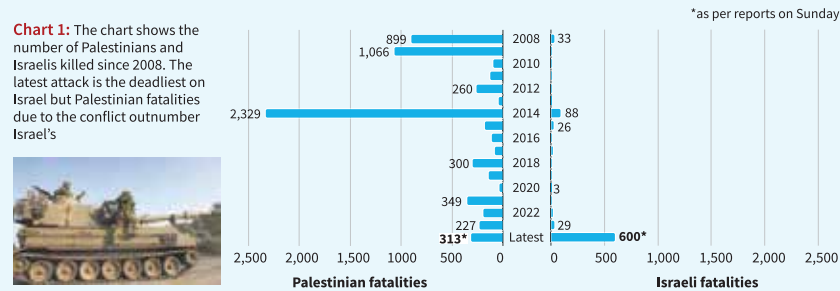
The Israeli military has deployed tens of thousands of soldiers around Gaza and initiated the evacuation of Israeli residents living near the territory's border. Gaza, a densely populated Palestinian enclave, has been under Israeli blockade since 2007 and is ruled by Hamas, which has engaged in conflict with Israel multiple times over the past 15 years.

Historical Perspective

The chart provides a historical perspective on the number of Palestinian and Israeli casualties since 2008, highlighting the deadly nature of this attack on Israel compared to previous conflicts. Palestinian casualties have consistently outnumbered Israeli casualties over the years.

Israel-Palestine conflict in numbers

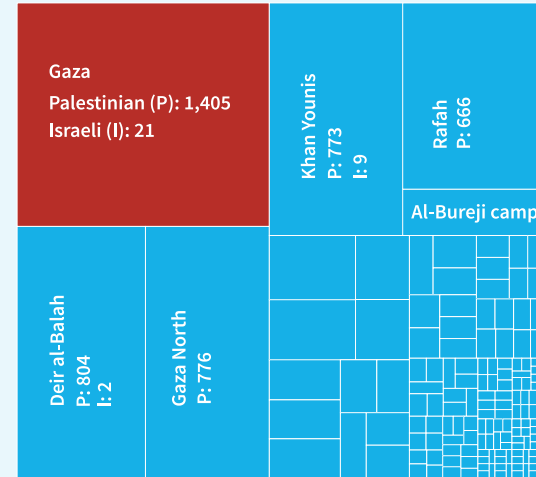
The data for the charts were sourced from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs



Infiltration into Israeli Urban Areas

The chart shows the number of casualties on both sides since 2008, with Gaza experiencing the highest number of deaths. Hamas militants infiltrated Israeli urban areas on Saturday, marking an unprecedented breach from Gaza into Israeli territories.

Chart 2: The chart shows the number of Palestinians and Israelis who were killed since 2008, across cities and camps

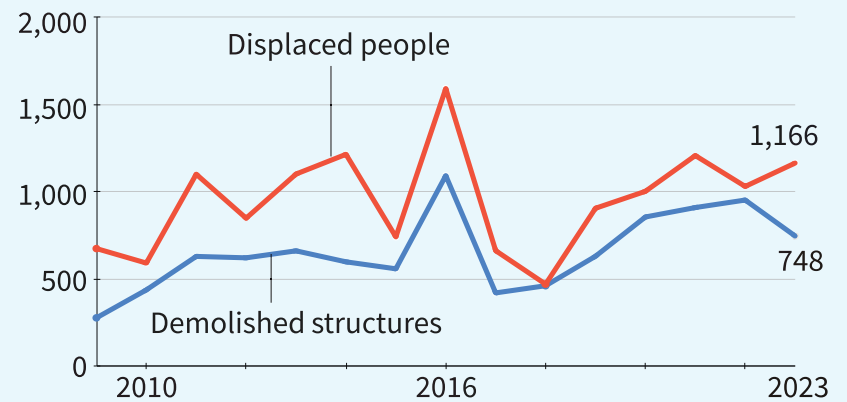


Tensions in the West Bank

Over the past year, tensions in the West Bank have escalated due to increased settlement construction, settler violence, and disputes around the al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, a sensitive holy site. The chart displays the demolition of

Palestinian-owned structures and resulting displacements in the West Bank since 2009.

Chart 4: The chart shows the demolition of Palestinian-owned structures and the resulting displacement of people



Historical Parallels

The operation Toofan Al-Aqsa by Hamas bears striking similarities to the start of the Yom Kippur War, which occurred 50 years ago. Although the Yom Kippur War was inconclusive, it eventually led to a regional shift with Israel accepting a 'land for peace' formula at the Camp David Accords six years later.

Regional Geopolitical Consequences

The crisis could impact regional geopolitics, potentially delaying the Saudi Arabia-Israel rapprochement. Other Abraham Accords signatories may prioritize economic gains over regional politics. Iran might feel emboldened by Israel's involvement in a conflict.

Global Impact

While India may not be directly affected, it could experience indirect consequences, such as oil price fluctuations, impacts on the Indian diaspora, and effects on infrastructure projects like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. Nevertheless, it could highlight India as a stable and attractive investment destination insulated from regional turmoil.



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