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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

EIGHT FORMER NAVY OFFICERS GET DEATH PENALTY IN QATAR

CONTEXT: Eight former Indian Navy personnel, who had been employed by a company in Doha, were handed the death penalty by a local court in Doha in an alleged case of espionage. The Indian government expressed shock at the verdict, and said all legal options were being explored.

The eight men — Captain Navtej Singh Gill, Captain Saurabh Vashisht, Commander Purnendu Tiwari, Captain Birendra Kumar Verma, Commander Sugunakar Pakala, Commander Sanjeev Gupta, Commander Amit Nagpal and Sailor Ragesh — have been in the custody of Qatari authorities since August 2022. The Court of First Instance of Qatar passed the judgment against them.

Breaching secrets

The Indian nationals were employed by Dahra Global Technologies and Consultant Services in Doha, and were allegedly accused of breaching sensitive secrets. They were reportedly involved in training various security-related service providers of the State of Qatar. The company was also involved

in producing high-tech Italian-origin submarines that are known for stealth capabilities.

The first trial in the case was held in March this year, followed by another in June. The men were granted consular access on multiple occasions and the Indian ambassador to Qatar met them as recently as October 1. Both sides, however, have maintained a veil of secrecy over the case in view of the sensitivities involved.

High-stakes relationship

There are over seven lakh Indians in Qatar and we have close economic ties. The Indian government has been following the case closely without doubt, but would need to take it up at the highest level to ensure their lives are saved.

Qatar is the largest supplier of LNG to India, which accounts for over 48% of India's global LNG imports. India also imports ethylene, propylene, ammonia, urea, and polyethylene from Qatar.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

FOR OUTREACH EVENTS, CIVIL SERVANTS WILL BE CALLED NODAL OFFICERS, NOT RATH PRABHARIS, CLARIFIES CENTRE

CONTEXT: The Union government on Thursday clarified that the use of such a term was not proper and that the officials would instead be addressed as nodal officers following a controversy over the deployment of civil servants as Rath Prabharis during the upcoming Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra across the country.

The Centre through an October 17 letter directed that Joint Secretaries, Directors, and Deputy Secretaries of all the departments would be deployed as Rath Prabharis to coordinate for the preparations, planning, execution and monitoring of the programme.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will launch the yatra on November 15, on the occasion of Birsa Munda Jayanti – Janjaati

Gaurav Divas by flagging off Information, Education and Communication (IEC) vans at Khunti in Jharkhand. Around 2.6 lakh gram panchayats (rural) and over 3,700 urban local bodies encompassing around 14,000 locations (urban) would be covered during the campaign, other than the election-bound States from November 22 to January 25. The objective of the programme was a nationwide outreach and awareness campaign to ensure that every eligible person was covered under 20 Central schemes. People would be apprised of the Central schemes covering benefits such as sanitation facilities, essential financial services, electricity connections, access to LPG cylinders, and housing for the poor

“Intelligence plus character—that is the goal of true education. — Martin Luther King Jr.



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

WHY ARE THE CHINA-BHUTAN BOUNDARY TALKS SIGNIFICANT?

CONTEXT: China and Bhutan held their 25th round of boundary talks in Beijing and signed a Cooperation Agreement on the “Responsibilities and Functions of the Joint Technical Team (JTT) on the Delimitation and Demarcation of the Bhutan-China Boundary.” This advances their 3-Step Roadmap initiated in 2021 for border resolution, building on the positive momentum since their last talks in 2016.

The Boundary talks between Bhutan and China were held after a gap of seven years and indicate significant progress has been made. Bhutan and the Tibetan Autonomous Region share a contiguous border to Bhutan’s north and west. Since 1984, Bhutan and China had held 24 rounds of talks to resolve the disputes until 2016, but the 25th round appeared to have been held up after the Doklam Standoff between Indian and Chinese armies in 2017, and then the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019-2021. However, the two sides used the pause to hold talks at other levels in rapid succession, especially after China threatened to open a new front for a border dispute to Bhutan’s east. Since then, the Expert Group of diplomats on both sides met in 2021 to agree on a 3-step roadmap, and the first boundary delimitation technical talks were held in August 2023.

3-Step Roadmap?

The 3-Step roadmap MoU signed by the Bhutanese Foreign Minister and Chinese Assistant Foreign Minister in 2021, and the JTT established to implement the roadmap by the Expert Group in August are hoping to draw a line clearly delineating Bhutanese and Chinese territory for the first time. Bhutan and China don’t have diplomatic ties, as Bhutan has traditionally

avoided diplomatic relations with all the United Nations Security Council permanent members. The 3-Step Roadmap involves first, agreeing to the border “on the table”; then visiting the sites on the ground; and then formally demarcating the boundary.

For India, given the breakdown in its ties with China over the standoff at the Line of Actual Control from 2020, any hint of closer ties between China and one of its closest neighbours is a cause for worry. More specifically, New Delhi is watching the demarcation discussions over Doklam, as amongst the proposals China has placed on the table is an agreement to “swap” areas in Doklam under Bhutanese control with areas in Jakarlung and Pasamlung which China claims. The Doklam trijunction cuts very close to India’s Siliguri corridor a narrow area that connects the North Eastern States to the rest of India and India would not like to see China gain access to any area closer to it. Since the Doklam standoff in 2017, China has doubled down on its control of the Doklam plateau, and according to a recent Pentagon report, has continued to build “underground storage facilities, new roads, and new villages in disputed areas in neighbouring Bhutan,” erasing many of the strategic gains that New Delhi had hoped for after China agreed to step back from the standoff point in 2017. Finally, India’s worry is over China’s demand for full diplomatic relations with Bhutan, and opening an Embassy in Thimphu. Given India’s challenges with Chinese projects and funding in other neighbouring countries including Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives, any Chinese presence in a small country like Bhutan would be problematic.



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ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

**ATR PANEL ASSESSES PROGRESS OF
TIGER REWILDING PROJECT**

CONTEXT: A committee tasked by the Chief Wildlife Warden visited the enclosure in the core area of the Anamalai Tiger Reserve (ATR) to assess the progress of the Forest Department’s first ever attempt at rewilding a tiger that was rescued as an abandoned cub in 2021.

ATR Field Director S. Ramasubramanian; Deputy Director (Pollachi Division) K. Bhargava Teja; Forest Veterinary Officer (ATR) E. Vijayaraghavan; WWF-India’s Landscape Coordinator (Western Ghats Nilgiris Landscape) D. Boominathan, among others, visited the 10,000 sq ft enclosure at Manthirimattam in Manambolli forest range. The tiger, which was rescued from a tea estate near Valparai in September 2021, is about 30-months-old now.

The Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden, Srinivas R. Reddy, in consultation with experts from the National Tiger Conservation Authority and the Wildlife Institute of India, had tasked the committee with assessing whether the tiger was ready to be released into the wild. Various parameters, including the animal’s health and surveillance camera visuals of it hunting small herbivores that were released into the enclosure over the past several months, were assessed. The committee would submit a detailed report to the Chief Wildlife Warden, after which a decision will be taken on releasing the animal into the wild.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

INDIA'S GREEN HYDROGEN MOVE MAY WORSEN POLLUTION IF STEPS ARE NOT IN PLACE, SAYS STUDY

CONTEXT: India's plans to produce so-called 'green hydrogen' — where the gas is produced without resulting in fossil fuel emissions — may end up worsening pollution if proper checks and balances are not in place.

The National Green Hydrogen Mission, piloted by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE), expects to manufacture five million tonnes by 2030. This would require the installation of renewable energy capacity worth 125 GW and the use of 250,000 gigawatt-hour units of power, equivalent to about 13% of India's present electricity generation.

As of August 2023, India's total renewable energy (RE) capacity stood at 131 GW. The 2030 green hydrogen plan thus envisages adding an equivalent RE capacity by 2030. This is over and above the 500 GW of RE capacity that India has committed to install by 2030 as part of the Paris Agreement. To put that in perspective, India installed only 15 GW of new solar and wind capacity in 2023, against the 45 GW per year needed to reach the 2030 target.

Using coal-based power

The MNRE has defined green hydrogen as hydrogen produced in a way that emits no more than two kg of carbon dioxide per kg of such hydrogen. Currently, producing one kg of 'grey hydrogen', as it is known, ends up emitting nine kg of carbon dioxide. "While a detailed methodology is awaited, the definition as it stands leaves a lot to interpretation," said CRH's chief executive Ashish Fernandes, in the report released on Thursday.

The main concern is that if electrolyzers were run 24x7, they would be expected to operate even at night when no solar power is available.

"Where will the electricity come from? If it comes from India's coal-powered grid in general, it will in fact increase carbon emissions, since about 70% of the electricity on the grid is coal-generated — more in non-daylight hours when solar generation is nil," the report notes. "The vast majority of projects have not disclosed their source of electricity. It is also not clear if those few projects that have committed...to meet 100% of their requirement from these sources."

BACKGROUND: India has committed itself to reduce the Green House Gas (GHG) emissions intensity by a third by 2030, compared to 2005 levels at Paris Climate Change Agreement. The Centre constituted a committee led by Tarun Kapoor, former Petroleum secretary tasked with creating a thorough, step-by-step plan for fully switching from fossil fuels to clean energy. The Government launched Prime Minister National Action Plan on Climate Change (PM-NAPCC), an umbrella programme for realising a more environmentally sustainable

development model. The Government launched National Solar Mission with a target of 20 GW by 2022, later increased to 100 GW to promote the share of solar energy in the domestic energy mixture. NITI Aayog published a report - "Harnessing Green Hydrogen – Opportunities for Deep Decarbonisation in India".

EXPECTED MISSION OUTCOMES 2030

- ~ 5 MMTPA of GH₂ production
- ~ 60 – 100 GW electrolyser capacity
- ~ 125 GW of GH₂ based RE production
- ~ 50 MMTPA of CO₂ emission mitigation
- ~ 6 lakh job opportunities
- ~ ₹ 8 trillion in investments
- ~ ₹ 1 trillion in fuel import savings

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Green Hydrogen can help India committed itself to reduce the Green House Gas (GHG) emissions intensity by a third by 2030, compared to 2005 levels at Paris Climate Change Agreement. The Centre constituted a committee led by Tarun Kapoor, former Petroleum secretary tasked with creating a thorough, step-by-step plan for fully switching from fossil fuels to clean energy. The Government launched Prime Minister National Action Plan on Climate Change (PM-NAPCC)

TIMELINE:

2003: The National Hydrogen Energy Board (NHEB) proposed the National Hydrogen Energy Road Map (NHERM).

2006: Approved National Hydrogen Energy Road Map (NHERM) to bridge the technological gaps in different areas of hydrogen energy, including its production, storage, transportation and delivery, applications, safety, codes and standards and capacity building for the period up to 2020.

2016: Constituted Dr. K. Kasturirangan Committee to prepare reports on hydrogen and fuel cells.

2021: Launched 'Mission Innovation', a global initiative to accelerate global clean energy innovation.

2021: Launched National Hydrogen Mission on August 15 to mitigate domestic GHG emissions and increase the share of renewable sources of energy in the domestic energy mixture.

2022: Formulated 'Green Hydrogen Policy (GHP)' that set a target of 5 Million Tonnes Per Annum (MTPA) of Green Hydrogen production by 2030, more than 80% of the current hydrogen demand in the country.

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

DOMESTIC MILESTONES:

GAIL has commenced India's maiden project of mixing hydrogen into the natural gas system to establish the techno-commercial feasibility of blending hydrogen in City Gas Distribution (CGD) network in line with National Hydrogen Mission.

Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Larsen & Toubro (L&T), and ReNew Power (ReNew) have signed a binding term sheet to set up a Joint Venture (JV) company to develop the green hydrogen sector in India at an "industrial scale".

The Oil India Limited (OIL) commissioned the first pure Green Hydrogen Plant in India at Jorhat, Assam. The plant produces Green Hydrogen from the electricity generated by the existing 500kW Solar plant using a 100 kW Anion Exchange Membrane (AEM) Electrolyser array.

COMPONENTS OF THE GREEN HYDROGEN (GH2) MISSION**STRATEGIC INTERVENTIONS FOR GREEN HYDROGEN TRANSITION (SIGHT):**

Financial incentive mechanisms under the Strategic Clean Energy Partnership (SCEP) to mobilise finance and

speed up green energy development to:

~ Targeting domestic manufacturing of electrolyzers via ₹ 15,000 Cr. Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for electrolyzers.

~ Production of Green Hydrogen (GH2) focussing upon regions capable of supporting large scale production and/or utilization of Hydrogen identified and developed as Green Hydrogen Hubs

STRATEGIC HYDROGEN INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP (SHIP):

A Public-private partnership framework for Research & Development facilitated:

~ Developing an enabling policy framework to support the establishment of the green hydrogen ecosystem.

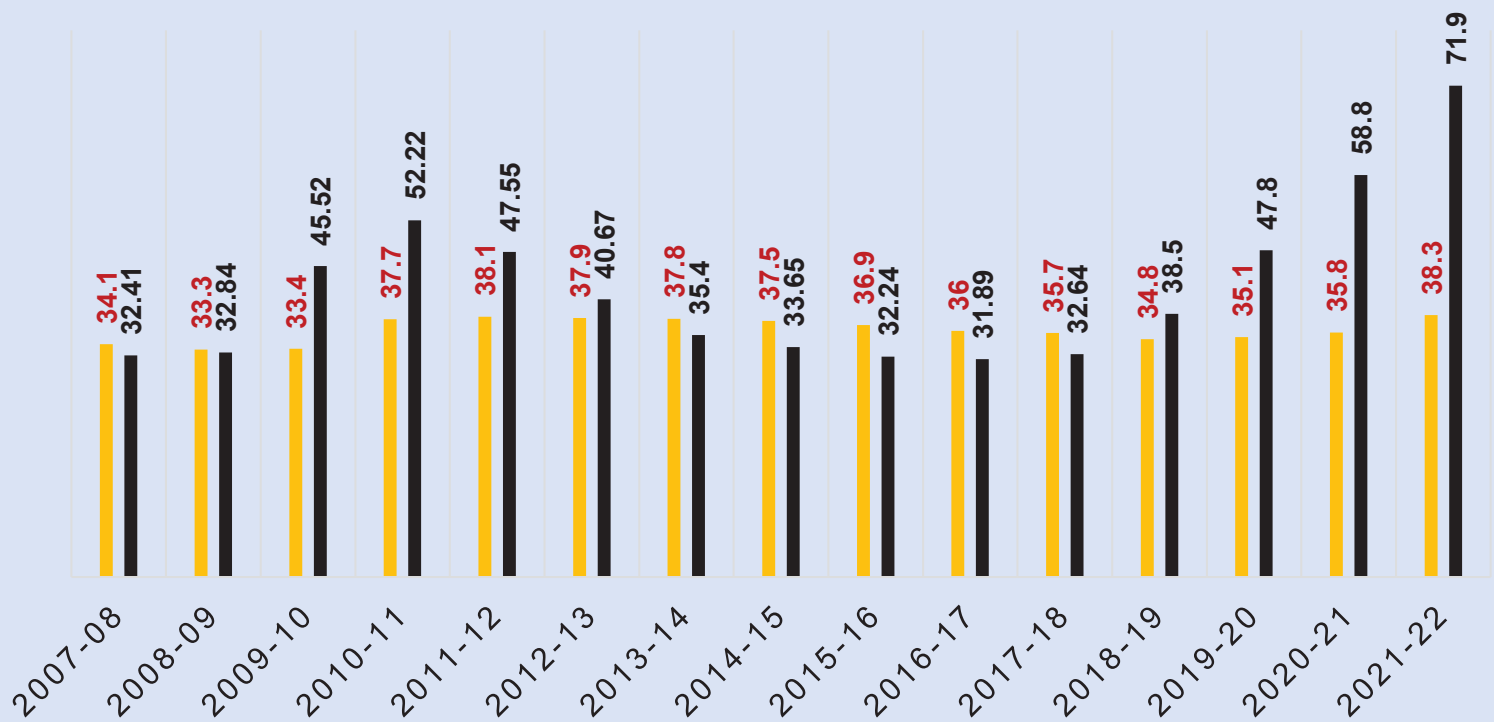
Developing standards and regulations framework

Undertaking a coordinated skill development programme

Supporting pilot projects in emerging end-use sectors and production pathway

OIL AND NATURAL GAS PRODUCTION PROFILE

■ CRUDE OIL (MT) ■ NATURAL GAS (BCM)



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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

SC ALLOWS SURROGACY, STRIKES DOWN RULE BANNING USE OF DONOR GAMETES

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court has protected the right of parenthood of a woman, suffering from a rare medical condition, by staying the operation of a law which threatened to wreck her hopes to become a mother through surrogacy.

The woman has the Mayer Rokitansky Kuster Hauser syndrome. Medical board records showed she has “absent ovaries and absent uterus, hence she cannot produce her own eggs/oocytes”. The couple had begun the process of gestational surrogacy on December 7 last year. However, a government notification on March 14 this year amended the law, banning the use of donor gametes. The amendment require “intending couples” must use their own gametes for surrogacy. The petition was filed in the Supreme Court challenging the amendment as a violation of a woman’s right to parenthood.

The petitioner’s lawyer, argued that the amended Paragraph 1(d) of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Rules, 2022, by ruling out the use of donor eggs, had made it impossible for his client and her husband to continue with the process of surrogacy to achieve parenthood. He argued that the 2023 amendment contradicted Sections 2(r) and 4 of the Surrogacy Act, 2021, which recognised the situation when a medical condition would require a couple to opt for gestational surrogacy in order to become parents. Mr. Jain referred to Rule 14(a) of the Surrogacy Rules which listed the medical or congenital conditions owing to which a woman could choose to become a mother through gestational surrogacy. They included “having no uterus or missing uterus or abnormal uterus (like hypoplastic uterus or intrauterine adhesions or thin endometrium or small unicornuate uterus, T-shaped uterus) or if the uterus is

surgically removed due to any medical condition such as gynaecological cancer”.

The lawyer said the Rule made it clear that the choice was solely that of the woman. He said his client had begun the surrogacy process months before the amendment, which cannot be implemented retrospectively. The government, through Additional Solicitor-General Aishwarya Bhati, countered that the process of surrogacy cannot be availed under the law unless the child was “genetically related” to the intending couple. This exempted the use of donor eggs. In an 11-page order, the court agreed with Mr. Jain’s argument that the law permitting gestational surrogacy was “woman-centric”. The decision to have a surrogate child was entirely based on the woman’s inability to become a mother owing to her medical or congenital condition. Such a condition included the “absence of a uterus or repeatedly failed pregnancies, multiple pregnancies or an illness which makes it impossible for her to carry a pregnancy to term or would make the pregnancy life-threatening”.

The amendment cannot contradict Rule 14(a) which specifically recognises the absence of a uterus or any allied condition as a medical indication necessitating gestational surrogacy, the court held. Addressing the government’s contention that the surrogate child should be “genetically related” to the couple, the court said the child would be related to the husband. “In this regard, it may be noted that the expression ‘genetically’ related to the intending couple has to be read as being related to the husband when Rule 14(a) applies.

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ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

SENSEX SINKS 1.4% TO 4-MONTH LOW ON GEOPOLITICAL, U.S. BOND YIELD WORRIES

CONTEXT: The benchmark S&P BSE Sensex extended losses to a sixth session on Thursday, sliding 1.4% to its lowest close in four months as investors turn skittish amid mounting geopolitical tensions over the possibility of the Israel-Hamas conflict widening across the oil-rich West Asian region, and the rising U.S. bond yields that could signal more capital outflows from emerging markets.

The 30-stock index slumped 900.91 points to 63,148.15, the lowest close since June 26, led by auto, finance and consumer stocks.

Mahindra & Mahindra led losses, declining 4.06%, followed by Bajaj Finance (3.54%) and Asian Paints (3.36%). The NSE Nifty-50 index too shed 264.90 points, or 1.39%, to 18,857.25.

The market correction has been led by global geopolitical tensions and rising bond yields in the U.S. markets. These challenges have a long-term impact on equities, but domestic factors remain encouraging.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

RENEWED RISKS

CONTEXT: On October 6, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) stuck to its 6.5% GDP growth projection for the year, with risks from geopolitical tensions, economic fragmentation, volatile financial markets and an uneven monsoon, evenly balanced out by strengthening domestic demand.

There was a belief that a period of heightened uncertainties was ebbing but as the central bank Governor signalled last Friday, new uncertainties have emerged over the fortnight since. The Israel-Hamas conflict that erupted a day after the monetary policy review has widened, and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has flagged worries about implications on global food, fuel and fertilizer supplies. Given India's dependence on fuel and fertilizer imports, disruptions or price spikes could hurt the macro-economic framework, even if the government refrains from passing on higher prices to consumers and farmers in the election season. The RBI chief also pointed to rising U.S. bond yields, which hit a 16-year high of 5% this week, mixed data points and signals from central banks around the world, as the new unknowns — even as known unknowns such as financial market turmoil — have got more pronounced. A glimpse of this anxiety was visible this week, with the sharpest sell-off on Indian bourses since July.

There is no certainty that the RBI would still uphold its 'evenly balanced' outlook towards the risks to growth. However, the

Finance Ministry, while acknowledging that global uncertainties have compounded, seems largely sanguine for now in its outlook for the economy. Its monthly economic review released on Monday asserts that growth "remains on track", inflation is easing after a "temporary" seasonal surge in July-August, consumption demand is strengthening and investment demand is "also firming up". On the "imminent fears" of rising crude oil prices, it noted that July-September quarter prices were still "way lower" than the \$109.5 and \$97.9 averages in the first and second quarter of 2022-23. The weak foreign trade picture is expected to recover and industrial job creation prospects are high for the next two quarters, while higher demand for housing and vehicle loans reflects bolstered confidence levels in households, it added. India's macro fundamentals may well hold up through the latest global storm, but the government would do well to drill a little deeper into consumption and hiring trends. The last quarter has seen a sharp slump in small car sales, consumer non-durables producers reporting weak rural demand and IT firms scaling down growth and hiring hopes. There is still much to be done to correct an uneven recovery, which would eventually hamper a broader investment revival.

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