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A collection of historical artifacts is arranged on a surface covered with an old, detailed map. On the left, a large, dark brown leather-bound book stands upright. In the center, a rolled-up scroll of parchment or leather lies horizontally. In the foreground, a brass ring with a square opening and a chain with several links are visible. The background is a textured, brownish-gold surface with faint, dark patterns, possibly another map or parchment. The overall lighting is warm and focused, highlighting the textures of the leather and metal.

# HISTORY- ARTS AND CULTURE





**INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS**

**THE MAURYAN PERIOD UNDER ASHOKA**

**THE BOOKER PRIZE**



## INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

**CONTEXT:** The Indian National Congress (INC) was founded on December 28, 1885. On the 139th Congress Foundation Day, we take a brief look at the history of the INC, and its evolution

**BACKGROUND:** "The Indian National Congress: Catalysts of Freedom – Origin, Contributions, and Evolution"

The Indian National Congress (INC) stands as a towering institution in the annals of India's struggle for independence. Established in 1885, it became the vanguard of the freedom movement, providing a platform for diverse voices and ideologies.

### The Genesis of Indian National Congress:

The birth of the Indian National Congress in 1885 marked a pivotal moment in India's political landscape. The Congress was founded with the aim of obtaining a greater share in government for educated Indians, as well as providing a forum for civic and political dialogue. A.O. Hume, a retired British civil servant, played a crucial role in its inception. The first session, held in Bombay, brought together prominent leaders like Dadabhai Naoroji, Dinshaw Wacha, and Womesh Chunder Bonnerjee, who became the first president of the INC.



### Early Contributions and Moderate Phase:

In its initial years, the INC operated within the framework of constitutional methods, emphasizing dialogue and constitutional reforms to secure Indian rights. This period, known as the moderate phase, witnessed leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale and Dadabhai Naoroji advocating for constitutional reforms and representation in the British administration. The INC's early contributions lay in fostering political awareness, promoting education, and laying the groundwork for a united anti-colonial front.

### The Swadeshi Movement and the Rise of Extremism:

The turn of the 20th century witnessed a shift in the Congress's approach with the emergence of the Swadeshi Movement. Triggered by the partition of Bengal in 1905, leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Lala Lajpat Rai advocated for more assertive measures against British rule. This marked the advent of the extremist phase within the Congress, demanding swaraj or self-rule. The contributions of this phase were profound, injecting a sense of nationalism and self-reliance into the movement.

### Role in World War I and the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms:

World War I brought about a change in the Congress's stance, as it initially supported the British war effort in exchange for promises of constitutional reforms. The Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919, also known as

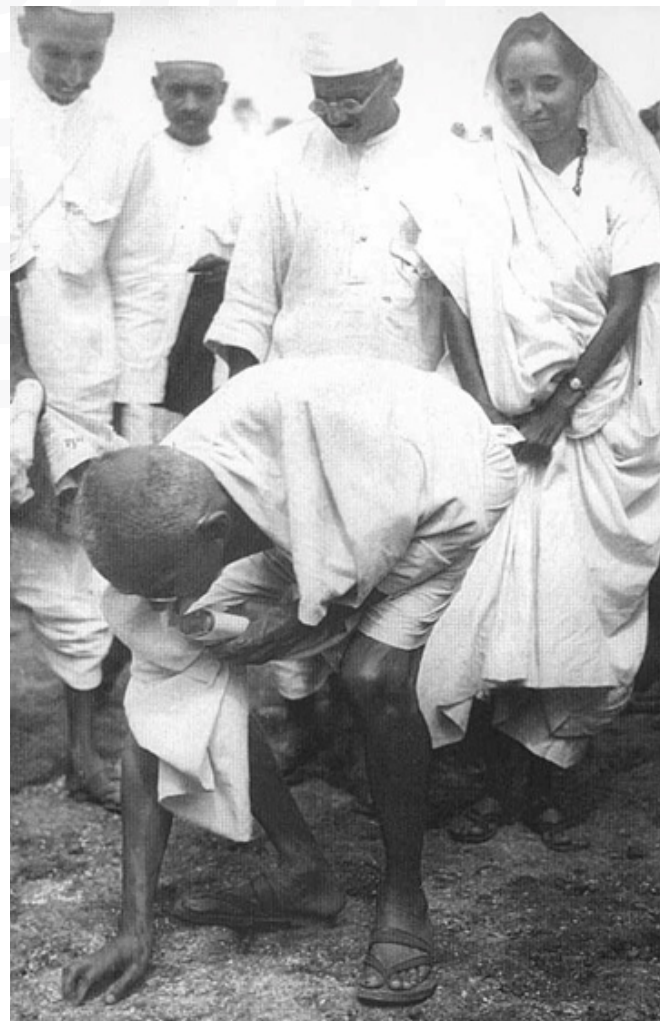
the Government of India Act, aimed at devolving power to Indians. However, it fell short of the Congress's expectations, leading to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and a hardening of the nationalist stance.

### The Non-Cooperation Movement and Civil Disobedience:

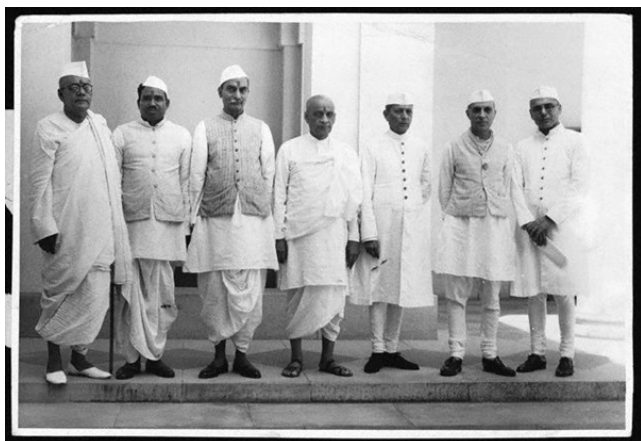
The turning point in the evolution of the Congress came with Mahatma Gandhi's arrival on the political scene. The Non-Cooperation Movement (1920-1922) marked a departure from constitutional methods, urging Indians to refuse cooperation with British authorities. The INC's contribution during this period was significant, as it mobilized masses, fostering a sense of self-reliance and unity. However, the movement was suspended due to incidents like the Chauri Chaura incident, highlighting the challenges of maintaining non-violence.

### Salt Satyagraha and Quit India Movement:

Gandhi's leadership reached its zenith during the Salt Satyagraha in 1930, where he marched to the Arabian Sea to produce salt in defiance of the British salt monopoly. The INC played a pivotal role in mobilizing people across class, caste, and gender lines. The Quit India Movement of 1942, calling for an immediate end to British rule, showcased the Congress's commitment to total independence. Leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Patel, and Maulana Abul Kalam Azad took center stage, and the INC became synonymous with the broader national struggle.







### Post-Independence and Nation-Building:

The attainment of independence in 1947 marked a new chapter for the Congress. Jawaharlal Nehru became the first Prime Minister, steering the country through the challenging task of nation-building. The Congress played a crucial role in drafting the Indian Constitution, establishing democratic institutions, and implementing social and economic reforms. Its commitment to secularism, democracy, and socialism shaped the foundational principles of the Indian state.



### Challenges and Evolution in Post-Independence Era:

The post-independence era brought both success and challenges for the Congress. It remained a dominant political force for several decades, winning successive elections. However, internal rifts, economic challenges, and instances of corruption eroded its political capital. The emergence of regional parties and a more diverse political landscape altered the Congress's position.

### Contemporary Relevance and Challenges:

In the 21st century, the Indian National Congress faces new challenges. The rise of regional parties, changing demographics, and the emergence of identity politics have altered the political dynamics. The Congress has been grappling with issues of leadership, ideological clarity, and adapting to the evolving aspirations of a diverse electorate.

The Indian National Congress, from its humble beginnings in 1885, evolved into a symbol of India's struggle for independence. Its journey reflects the changing dynamics of the freedom movement – from a moderate approach to the assertiveness of the extremist phase, and eventually, the Gandhian philosophy of non-violence. The Congress played a pivotal role in mobilizing the masses, articulating national aspirations, and negotiating with the British for greater self-rule.

Post-independence, the Congress continued its role in shaping India's destiny, contributing to the framing of the Constitution and the establishment of democratic institutions. While it faced challenges and underwent transformations, the Congress remains an integral part of India's political narrative. The party's contemporary relevance depends on its ability to address current challenges, resonate with a diverse electorate, and adapt to the ever-changing political landscape. The Indian National Congress, with its rich history, stands as a testament to the enduring spirit of India's struggle for freedom and its commitment to democratic ideals.

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1885	Bombay: W.C. Bannerjee The Indian National Congress is formed.
1886	Calcutta: Dadabhai Naoroji
1887	Madras: Syed Badruddin Tyabji <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Muslim President.</li> </ul>
1888	Allahabad: George Yule <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First English President.</li> </ul>
1905	Benaras: Gopal Krishan Gokhale <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal proclamation of the Swadeshi movement against the government.</li> </ul>
1906	Calcutta: Dadabhai Naoroji <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopts four resolutions on Swaraj (Self Government), Boycott Movement, Swadeshi &amp; National Education.</li> </ul>
1907	Surat: Rash Bihari Ghosh <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Split in Congress between Moderates &amp; Extremists.</li> <li>• Adjournment of Session.</li> </ul>
1911	Calcutta: B.N. Dhar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First recital of Jan-Gan-Man in a Congress session.</li> </ul>
1916	Lucknow: A.C. Majumdar <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unity between two factions - Moderates and Extremists.</li> <li>• Lucknow Pact signed between Congress and Muslim League to build political consensus.</li> </ul>
1917	Calcutta: Annie Besant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Woman President of Congress.</li> </ul>
1920	Calcutta: Lala Lajpat Rai <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mahatma Gandhi moves the Non-cooperation resolution.</li> </ul>
1924	Belgaum: M.K. Gandhi Belgaum: M.K. Gandhi <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only Session presided over by Mahatma Gandhi.</li> </ul>
1925	Kanpur: Sarojini Naidu <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Indian Woman President.</li> </ul>



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1929	Lahore: Jawahar Lal Nehru <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Passes the resolution on 'Poorna Swaraj.'</li> <li>○ Civil Disobedience movement for complete independence to be launched.</li> <li>○ 26 January to be observed as 'Independence Day.'</li> </ul>
1931	Karachi: Vallabhbhai Patel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Resolutions on Fundamental Rights and National Economic Programme.</li> <li>● Endorsement of Gandhi-Irwin pact.</li> <li>● Gandhi nominated to represent INC in the Second Round Table Conference to be held in London.</li> </ul>
1938	Haripura: Subhas Chandra Bose <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● National Planning Committee set up under Jawahar Lal Nehru.</li> </ul>
1939	Tripuri: Rajendra Prasad <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Subhas Chandra Bose is re-elected but has to resign.</li> <li>● Rajendra Prasad is appointed in his place.</li> <li>● Subhash Chandra Bose forms the Forward Bloc.</li> </ul>
1946	Meerut: J.B Kripalani <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Last session before independence.</li> <li>● J.B Kriplani is the president of INC at independence.</li> </ul>

## THE MAURYAN PERIOD UNDER ASHOKA

**CONTEXT:** Patrick Olivelle, an academic, highlights that Ashoka possessed the strength to express remorse. In his scholarly work, Olivelle delves into the dichotomies of the Mauryan ruler and explores the enduring appeal of Ashoka.

**BACKGROUND:** The Mauryan Period under Ashoka: A Glance at India's Golden Era of Peace and Dharma

The Mauryan Empire, established by Chandragupta Maurya in 322 BCE, marked a significant chapter in ancient Indian history. However, it was during the reign of Ashoka the Great, the third emperor of the Mauryan Dynasty, that the empire reached its zenith. Ashoka's rule, spanning from 268 BCE to 232 BCE, is often considered the Golden Era of the Mauryan Empire due to its remarkable achievements in various aspects of governance, culture, and religion.

### Ashoka's Early Life and Rise to Power:

Ashoka, originally known as Chand Ashoka Bindusara Maurya, ascended to the throne after a gruesome struggle for succession following the death of his father, Bindusara.

His early rule was marked by military conquests and expansion of the Mauryan Empire, but it was the Kalinga War in 261 BCE that profoundly transformed Ashoka's perspective on the use of force.

### Conversion to Buddhism:

The Kalinga War, with its immense bloodshed and suffering, deeply affected Ashoka, leading him to embrace Buddhism.

Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism marked a pivotal moment in the history of the Indian subcontinent, influencing the spread and acceptance of Buddhism across the region.

### Ashoka's Dhamma - The Edicts of Peace and Tolerance:

Ashoka's commitment to Buddhist principles is evident in his Dhamma, a set of ethical and moral guidelines inscribed on numerous rock edicts and pillars.



Administrative Reforms and Governance:

Ashoka's reign witnessed remarkable administrative efficiency. The empire was divided into provinces, each under the supervision of a royal official, ensuring effective





governance.

The establishment of a vast network of roads facilitated trade and communication, contributing to the economic prosperity of the Mauryan Empire.

### Ashoka's Patronage of Buddhism:

Ashoka played a pivotal role in spreading Buddhism not only within his empire but also beyond its borders.

He sent emissaries to various regions, including Southeast Asia, promoting the teachings of Buddhism and establishing diplomatic ties.

### Architectural Achievements:

The Mauryan period saw the construction of impressive architectural marvels, including the famous Ashoka Pillars with their lion capitals, representing Ashoka's commitment to dharma.

The Sanchi Stupa and other stupas built during this period became centers of Buddhist worship and pilgrimage.



### Decline of the Mauryan Empire:

Despite Ashoka's efforts towards peace and ethical governance, the Mauryan Empire began to decline after his death in 232 BCE.

The reasons for the decline are debated among historians and include factors such as weak successors, economic challenges, and external invasions.

### Legacy of Ashoka:

Ashoka's legacy endured long after the fall of the Mauryan Empire. His contributions to Buddhism, ethical governance, and social welfare left an indelible mark on Indian history.

The symbol of the Ashoka Chakra, found on the Indian national flag, reflects the enduring influence of Ashoka's principles of righteousness and justice.



## THE BOOKER PRIZE

**CONTEXT:** Since its establishment in 1969 (initially recognized as the Booker Prize for Fiction), the Irish have consistently shone brightly in the literary firmament of the Booker Prize. Paul Lynch now stands as the fifth writer to claim the Prize, securing the honor for a novel that delves into a dystopian Ireland facing threats to democratic rights from a totalitarian regime.

### Foundation:

The Booker Prize, originally known as the Booker Prize for Fiction, was established in 1969. It was initiated by Booker McConnell, a British multinational company engaged in trade, sugar, and agricultural activities.

### Purpose:

The primary aim of the Booker Prize is to recognize and reward outstanding works of fiction written in the English language. The prize aims to celebrate literary excellence and contribute to the worldwide promotion of quality literature.

### Sponsorship Changes:

Initially, the prize was solely sponsored by Booker McConnell. However, over the years, sponsorship arrangements have changed. In 2002, the Man Group took over sponsorship, and the prize was then known as the Man Booker Prize until 2019.

### International Expansion:

In 2013, the rules for eligibility were modified, allowing authors from any part of the world to be considered for the prize, as long as their work was published in English and in the United Kingdom.

### The "Booker of Bookers":

In 1993, to mark the Booker Prize's 25th anniversary, a special award known as the "Booker of Bookers" was presented. The public voted for Salman Rushdie's "Midnight's Children" as the best novel among the winners from the first 25 years.

### Name Changes:

The prize underwent a name change in 2019 and is now known as the Booker Prize. The change followed the conclusion of the Man Group's sponsorship.

### The Two-Part System:

The Booker Prize is distinctive for its two-stage judging process. Initially, a longlist is announced, followed by a shortlist, and finally, the winner is selected.

### Recognition and Impact:

Winning the Booker Prize significantly enhances an author's international recognition and often results in increased



book sales.

The Booker Prize has played a crucial role in bringing attention to exceptional literary works, contributing to their longevity and impact.

#### **Booker Prize Foundation**

The administration of the prize is overseen by the Booker Prize Foundation, a registered charity.

The Foundation also awards the biennial International Booker Prize, celebrating outstanding translated fiction.

#### **Prestigious Literary Honor:**

Over the years, the Booker Prize has become one of the most prestigious and sought-after literary honors globally, contributing significantly to the literary landscape.



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**TROPICALISATION**

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**GOLAN HEIGHTS**

**KRA ISTHUMUS**

**CYCLONE MICHAUNG**

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**WORLD SOIL DAY (WSD)**

**BELT ROAD INITIATIVE**

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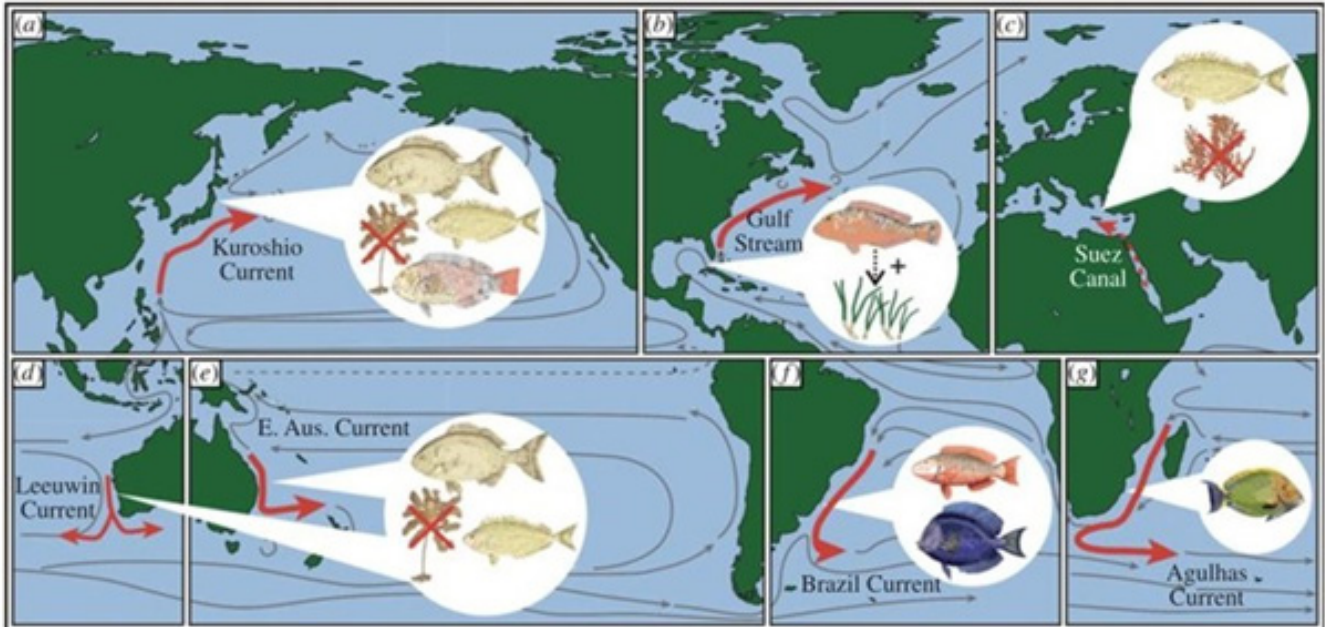


## TROPICALISATION

Climate change is causing a significant global phenomenon known as tropicalisation, where tropical species in the ocean are moving towards the poles, while temperate species are retreating.

- This mass movement of marine life is driven by rising sea temperatures and marine heat waves due to climate change.

- The trend is observed in areas with strong currents away from the equator, leading to consequences for ecosystems, biodiversity, and potential impacts on the global economy.
- The socio-economic impacts vary by region, influencing global fisheries, carbon storage, and tourism.



## PAMPORE

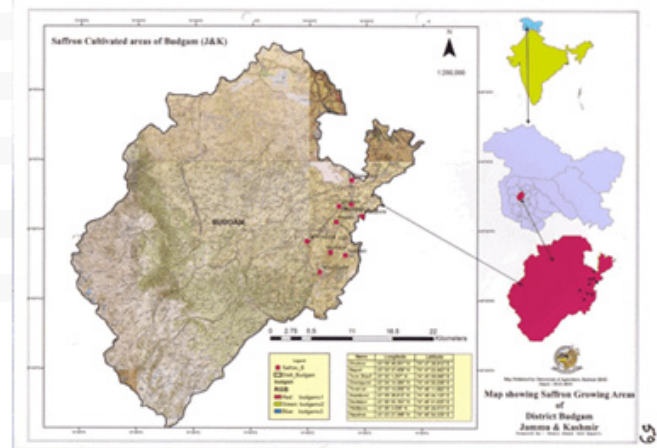
**CONTEXT:** Pampore, known as the centre of the country's saffron (referred to as "red gold") cultivation has seen a decline in productivity.

### ABOUT SAFFRON:

Saffron is a spice derived from the flower of *Crocus sativus*, commonly known as the "saffron crocus". The vivid crimson stigma and styles, called threads, are collected and dried for use mainly as a seasoning and colouring agent in food

The main issues impacting saffron production in Pampore are:

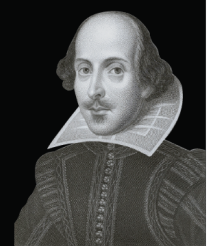
- Climate change
- Erratic rainfall patterns
- Higher temperatures
- Expansion of urban areas onto saffron fields
- Insufficient investment in irrigation and farmer training, contribute to the challenges faced by saffron cultivation



Iran, India, Spain and Greece are the major saffron-producing countries with Iran occupying the maximum area and contributing about 88% of the world's saffron production. Though, India occupies the 2nd largest area but produces approximately 7 per cent of the total world production.

*"Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them."*

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE





## GOLAN HEIGHTS

Recently, India has voted in favour of a UN General Assembly draft resolution expressing deep concern over Israel's failure to withdraw from the Syrian Golan Heights.

The resolution called for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the June 4, 1967 line, emphasizing the hindrance of the occupation to achieving

a just, comprehensive, and lasting peace in the region.

The Golan Heights, spanning about 1,800 km<sup>2</sup>, is a basaltic plateau bordered by the Yarmouk River, the Sea of Galilee, Hula Valley, Mount Hermon, and Wadi Raqqad. It was captured by Israel from Syria during the 1967 Six-Day War.



## KRA ISTHUMUS

**CONTEXT:** The Kra Isthmus, located on the Malay Peninsula in Thailand, has gained strategic importance due to a proposed transit artery that could connect the Andaman Sea and the Gulf of Thailand.

This isthmus, just 44 km wide at its narrowest point, has the potential to impact international trade and security similarly to the historical significance of the Suez and Panama Canals. Recently, the Thai Prime Minister

officially presented a multi-billion-dollar land-bridge project.

An isthmus is a narrow strip of land that connects two larger land masses and is bordered by water on two sides.

The Kra Isthmus in Thailand is the narrowest part of the Malay Peninsula. The isthmus is bordered to the west by the Andaman Sea and to the east by the Gulf of Thailand







## CYCLONE MICHAUNG

**CONTEXT:** Cyclone Michaung, heading towards the Andhra coast, is considered unusual due to its high intensity and timing in December, a month when storms in the North Indian Ocean typically don't reach destructive levels.

- The cyclone, initially predicted to be a 'tropical cyclone,' was upgraded to a 'severe' storm, with wind speeds ranging from 88 kph to 166 kph.
- This intensification in December is unique, attributed to above-normal heat index values off the southern Andhra Pradesh coast.

Cyclone intensification is influenced by factors such as warm ocean temperatures, Tropical Cyclone Heat Potential (TCHP), atmospheric conditions, wind shear, convection, Rossby waves, and air-sea interaction.

### About Cyclones:

Cyclones are large-scale weather systems characterized by low-pressure centers, rotating winds, and atmospheric instability. They are known by different names in various regions, such as hurricanes (Atlantic and eastern Pacific), typhoons (northwestern Pacific), and tropical cyclones (southwestern Pacific and Indian Ocean).

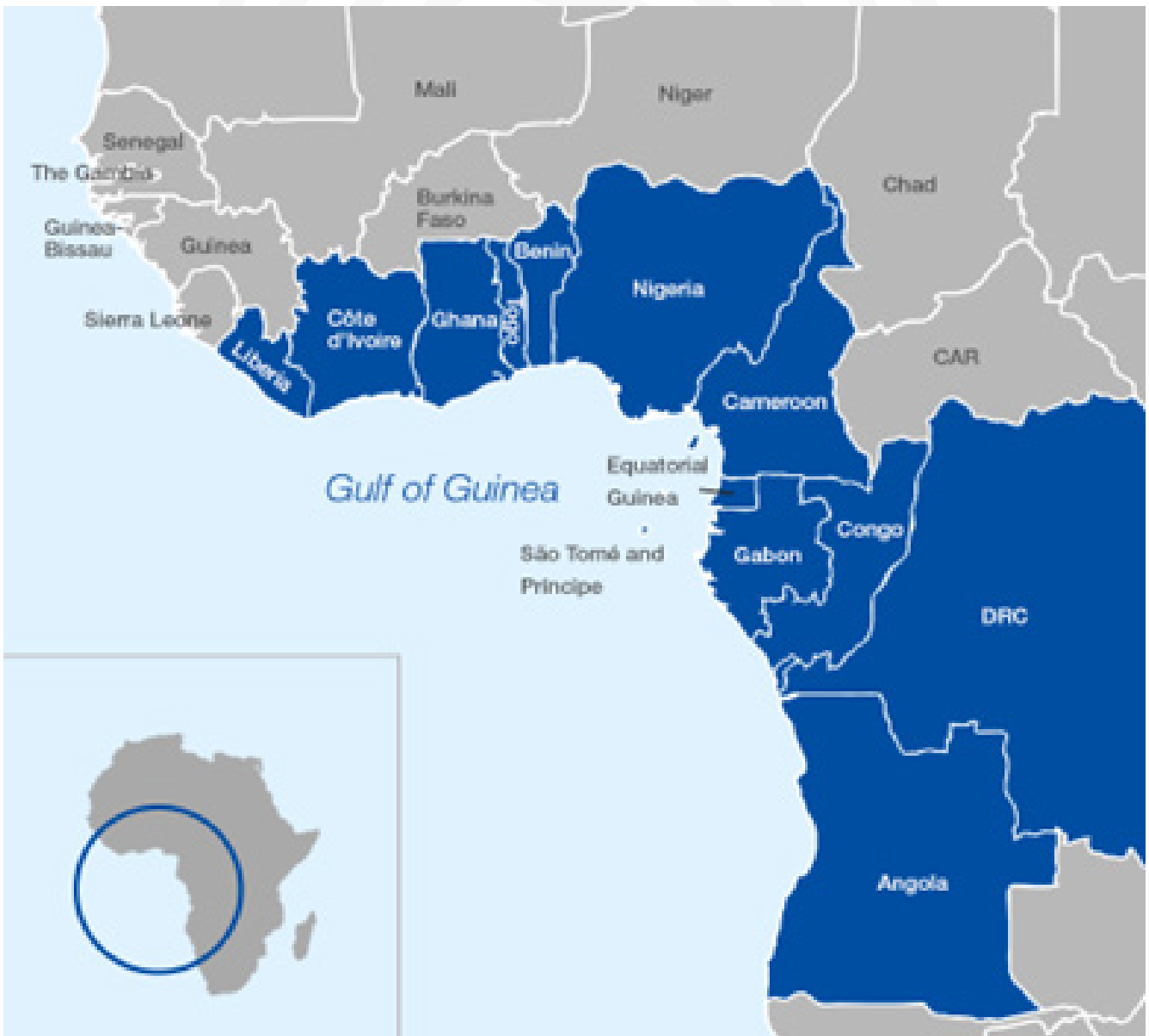
## ACCRA (GHANA)

**CONTEXT:** The 2023 United Nations Peacekeeping Ministerial Meeting is scheduled to take place in Accra, Ghana, with participation from over 85 countries and international organizations.

**AIM:** The meeting is aimed at expressing collective commitment to UN peacekeeping, in alignment with ongoing reforms under Action for Peacekeeping and the

Action for Peacekeeping Plus plan.

Ghana is a country in West Africa. It abuts the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean to the south, sharing borders with Ivory Coast in the west, Burkina Faso in the north, and Togo in the east. Accra is the capital of Ghana, on the Atlantic coast of West Africa.





## WORLD SOIL DAY (WSD)

It is observed annually on December 5, emphasising the significance of healthy soil and advocating for sustainable soil management. Proposed by the International Union of Soil Sciences in 2002, it was formally established under the Global Soil Partnership, with FAO's support. The UN General Assembly designated December 5, 2014, as the first official World Soil Day, commemorating the late King of Thailand Bhumibol Adulyadej's commitment to sustainable soil management. The theme for this year is "Soil and Water: A Source of Life."

## BELT ROAD INITIATIVE

Context: Italy, the only major Western nation to join China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2019, has confirmed its withdrawal from the project ahead of the year-end deadline.

The BRI, a massive trade and infrastructure initiative, has faced criticism, with the US labelling it "debt-trap

diplomacy."

The Belt and Road Initiative (One Belt One Road) is a global infrastructure development strategy adopted by the Chinese government in 2013 to invest in more than 150 countries and international organizations.



## ALMORA FAULT

**CONTEXT:** Union Earth Sciences Minister reported an increased number of earthquakes in 2023, attributing it to the activation of the Almora Fault in Western Nepal.

However, experts dispute this claim, asserting that tectonic collisions, not the Almora Fault, cause earthquakes in the Himalayan region.

### What is the Almora Fault?

It is a geological fault located in Western Nepal and extends to the Uttarakhand region in India. It lies on the Main Boundary Thrust (MBT) in the Himalayan fault zone. There are two thrusts in Kumaon, Uttarakhand: One is the

South Almora Thrust and the other is the North Almora Thrust.

**MBT (Main Boundary Thrust):** It is a significant fault in the Himalayas, marking the boundary between the Lesser Himalayas and the Sub-Himalayas.

A fault is a fracture or zone of fractures between two blocks of rock. Faults allow the blocks to move relative to each other. This movement may occur rapidly, in the form of an earthquake - or may occur slowly, in the form of creep. Faults may range in length from a few millimeters to thousands of kilometers.



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## ESSEQUIBO REGION

Guyana and Venezuela are in conflict over the resource-rich Essequibo region, historically claimed by both nations.

The dispute intensified after Exxon Mobil's 2015 oil discovery, leading to a Venezuelan referendum in December 2023, supporting Essequibo as a new province. Despite ICJ warnings, Venezuela proceeded. Guyana responded by raising its flag, alerting defence forces, and seeking international support.

India, with diasporic ties, supports Guyana; the US backs Guyana's sovereignty, Brazil reinforces its border, and

China calls for diplomacy.

### About Esequiba

Guayana Esequiba is a disputed territory west of the Essequibo River, claimed by both Guyana and Venezuela. Guyana's claim has been internationally accepted since the 1899 Paris Arbitral Award. The boundary dispute originated from colonial powers (Spain in the case of Venezuela, and the Netherlands and the United Kingdom in the case of Guyana) and persisted after the independence of Venezuela and Guyana.



## ARMENIA AZERBAIJAN CONFLICT

Armenia and Azerbaijan have reached a significant agreement, agreeing to exchange prisoners of war and work towards signing a peace treaty, a move praised by the European Union as a major step towards peace in the historically troubled region.

Both countries are fighting over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region, resulting in casualties and significant tensions. The region, recognized as part of Azerbaijan but controlled by ethnic Armenians, has been

a source of conflict for decades, with recent escalations in 2020 and 2023.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is an ethnic and territorial dispute between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It centres on the Nagorno-Karabakh region, predominantly Armenian-populated but within Azerbaijan's borders. A ceasefire mediated by Russia in 1994 left the region under Armenian control, though it's still recognized as part of Azerbaijan.





## BANNI GRASSLAND

The central government has approved a proposal to establish a cheetah conservation breeding centre in Gujarat's Kutch district's Banni grassland.

Banni Grassland is situated near the Great Rann of Kutch in Gujarat. It is considered to be the largest Grassland in Asia, spreading over 2,618 kilometres and accounting for almost 45% of the pastures in Gujarat.

The land in Banni was formed from the sediments deposited by the Indus and other rivers over thousands of years. Two ecosystems, wetlands, and grasslands, coexist in Banni.

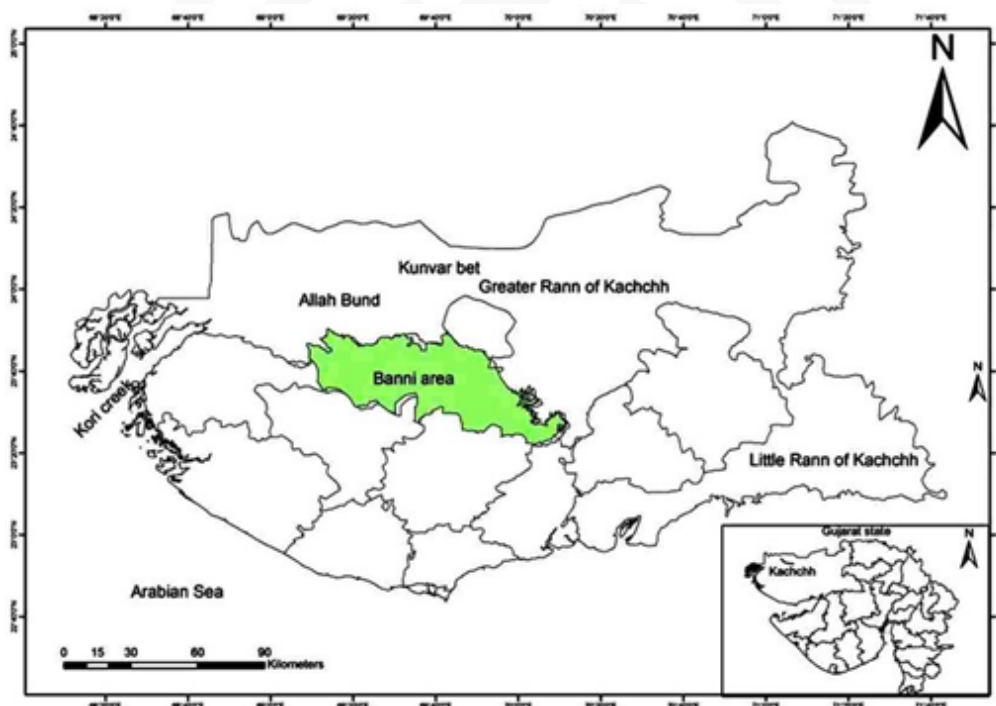
The vegetation is sparse and highly dependent on rainfall. It is dominated by low-growing forbs and graminoids, many of which are halophiles (salt-tolerant). The grasslands were traditionally managed by a system of rotational grazing.

Rich biodiversity with 192 species of plants, 262 species of birds, several species of mammals, reptiles, and amphibians. It is also known for the Banni breed of buffaloes

In 1955, the court notified the grassland as a reserve forest. In 2019, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) ordered to demarcation of the boundaries of Banni grassland and restricted non-forest activities.

Most of the livestock keepers in Banni belong to the Maldhari community. They rear the Banni or Sindhi buffalo, Kankrej cattle, sheep, goats, horses, donkeys and camels

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII) has identified Banni Grassland as one of the last remaining habitats of the cheetah in India.



## VALPARAI PLATEAU

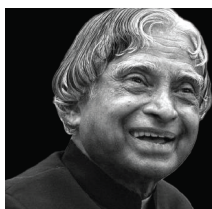
**CONTEXT:** In preparation for the annual migration season of elephants in the Valparai plateau, the Forest Department, NGOs like the Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF), and local residents are taking measures to facilitate the free movement of the elephants.

### ABOUT ANNUAL MIGRATION:

Elephants in the Valparai plateau undertake an annual migration that typically starts in September and continues until March. The elephants usually migrate from the Kerala side to the Valparai plateau (Tamil Nadu)

### WHAT IS VALPARAI PLATEAU?

It is a region located in the Western Ghats mountain range of India, specifically in the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu. Valparai is a hill station known for its tea, coffee plantations, and cardamom plantations. The area serves as a crucial habitat for wildlife, including elephants that undertake an annual migration through the region. The Valparai plateau is part of the Anamalai Tiger Reserve (ATR), contributing to its biodiversity and ecological significance.



*You have to dream before your dreams can come true..*

- A. P. J. ABDUL KALAM





## SURAT DIAMOND BOURSE (SDB)

**CONTEXT:** Surat is set to launch the Surat Diamond Bourse (SDB), claimed to be the “world’s biggest workspace” with 4,200 diamond trading offices, surpassing the capacity of the Pentagon.

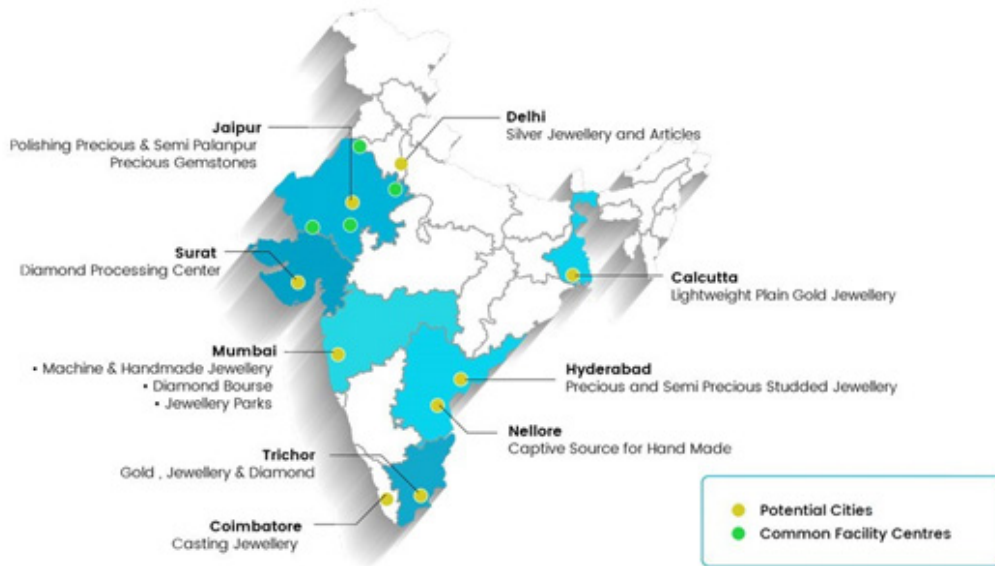
**AIM:** The SDB aims to shift the entire diamond trading business from Mumbai to Surat. It also aims to boost business, attract international clients, and create a significant economic impact on the region.

The project is part of the Diamond Research and

Mercantile (DREAM) City, a greenfield project spread over nearly 700 acres.

Surat is the hub of diamond cutting and polishing. It is the world’s biggest centre for cutting and polishing, accounting for 90% of the diamonds traded globally.

Surat is located beside the Tapi River in the west Indian state of Gujarat. Historically it was known for silk weaving and remains a commercial center for textiles.



## ENNORE CREEK

During the recent Cyclone Michaung, an oil spill occurred from the Chennai Petroleum Corporation Limited (CPCL) into the Buckingham Canal and Ennore Creek in Tamil Nadu.

The wetland has suffered from pollution caused by industries and neglect, as evidenced by the continuous presence of fly ash and hot water. Despite NGT directives, little progress has been made in restoring and protecting

the fragile ecosystem of the Ennore wetlands.

Ennore Creek in Chennai, situated along the Coromandel Coast, serves as a crucial buffer for the aquifers of the Araniyar-Kosasthalaiyar Basin, protecting them from the sea. Positioned in the floodplains of three rivers on a disaster-prone coastline, Chennai relies on wetlands like Ennore Creek as natural shock absorbers during calamities.

## HOUTHİ REBELS IN YEMEN

**CONTEXT:** In the last four weeks, Houthi militants from Yemen have attacked commercial ships 12 times. Prominent shipping fleet operators have paused/rerouted their movements through the Red Sea route.

The Houthi movement originated in the early 1990s in Yemen as a Zaydi revivalist group (a sect of Shia). Initially focused on religious and social networks, it evolved into a powerful force, leading insurgency against perceived corruption and external interventions. The Houthi-Saleh

alliance captured Sana’a in 2015, triggering a civil war in Yemen.

Yemen is a country in West Asia located at the southern end of the Arabian Peninsula. It shares borders with Saudi Arabia and Oman and maritime borders with Eritrea, Djibouti, and Somalia. Yemen is a member of the Arab League, the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.



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### GELEPHU SMARTCITY PROJECT (BHUTAN)

**CONTEXT:** Bhutan's King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck has unveiled the 'Gelephu Smartcity Project,' a mega international city near the Indian border covering 1,000 square kilometres.

The project aims to create an economic corridor connecting South Asia with Southeast Asia via India's northeastern states, particularly Assam. The Gelephu Special Administrative Region (SAR) will have different laws to attract foreign investment and include plans for an international airport. The project involves an India-Bhutan

railway line to Gelephu and aims to connect Bhutan to Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Singapore.

Bhutan is a landlocked country in the Eastern Himalayas, bordered by China and India. Known as "Druk Yul" or "Land of the Thunder Dragon," it has a constitutional monarchy with a king as the head of state and a prime minister as the head of government. Vajrayana Buddhism is the state religion, and Gangkhar Puensum is its highest peak, also the highest unclimbed mountain globally.







## PAPUA NEW GUINEA

**CONTEXT:** India has dispatched relief material worth \$1 million to aid those affected by a major volcanic eruption in Papua New Guinea, particularly around Mount Ulawun. The eruption caused extensive damage, leading to the evacuation of over 26,000 people.

Papua New Guinea, in the southwestern Pacific, encompasses the eastern half of New Guinea and its

offshore islands. A country of immense cultural and biological diversity, it's known for its beaches and coral reefs.

It has several volcanoes primarily due to its location on the Pacific Ring of Fire. This region is characterized by intense tectonic activity, including the subduction of several tectonic plates beneath the Pacific Plate



## IRIDESCENT CLOUDS

**CONTEXT:** Rare iridescent clouds, known as nacreous clouds, were spotted over parts of Scotland, northern England, and the West Midlands recently.

- The clouds, resembling mother of pearl, are known for their pastel light reflections during sunset and sunrise.
- This phenomenon occurs as sunlight diffracts around tiny ice crystals within the clouds, creating an effect similar to a thin layer of oil on water.

Nacreous clouds are rare in the UK and are usually seen when cold air from the polar vortex temporarily hovers over the region.

The mechanism behind iridescent clouds is diffraction, which occurs when small water droplets or small ice crystals scatter the sun's light. Larger ice crystals do not produce iridescence but can cause halos.



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## WORLD'S OLDEST FORT (AMNYA FORT) IN SIBERIA

Context: Hunter-gatherers built the world's oldest known fort 8,000 years ago in Siberia, challenging the assumption that fortresses were exclusive to agricultural societies.

The Amnya fort along the Amnya River in western Siberia consists of pit-house depressions with earthen walls and wooden palisades, suggesting advanced agricultural and defensive capabilities.

Siberia is a vast Russian province encompassing most of Northern Asia, with terrain spanning tundra, coniferous forest and mountain ranges including the Ural, Altai and Verkhoyansk. Lake Baikal, in its south, is the world's deepest lake, circled by a network of hiking paths called the Great Baikal Trail. The Trans-Siberian Railway passes Baikal on its route between Moscow and the Sea of Japan



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# POLITY AND GOVERNANCE







**THE ROLE OF SPECIAL INQUIRY COMMITTEES  
OF PARLIAMENT**

**ON SELECTING ELECTION COMMISSIONERS**

**INDIA, DISABILITY INCLUSION AND THE POWER  
OF 'BY'**

**TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION IN  
WAKE OF A370 JUDGEMENT**

**IMPROVING THE CAPABILITY OF THE INDIAN  
STATE**





## THE ROLE OF SPECIAL INQUIRY COMMITTEES OF PARLIAMENT

**CONTEXT:** Following an investigation into allegations of misconduct, the Ethics Committee had recommended, MP Mahua Moitra's removal from Parliament. The alleged offenses include sharing confidential login information and using parliamentary questions to benefit a private business in exchange for payment.

### What is the role of the ethics committee?

#### 1. Overseeing Conduct:

- Acts as a watchdog for the moral and ethical behavior of parliament members.
- Ensures members adhere to the established code of conduct for the House.

#### 2. Investigating Misconduct:

- Examines complaints filed against members related to unethical behavior.
- These complaints can come from other members, the public through members, or directly from the Speaker.
- Conducts preliminary inquiries to assess the validity of complaints before launching full investigations.

#### 3. Recommending Action:

- Based on investigation findings, recommends appropriate actions to address misconduct.
- This could range from reprimands and warnings to even expulsion from Parliament in severe cases.

#### 4. Maintaining Discipline and Decorum:

- Through its oversight and investigation roles, the Ethics Committee works to uphold the integrity and dignity of Parliament.
- Aims to maintain discipline and decorum within the House by addressing ethical breaches.

In essence, the Ethics Committee plays a crucial role in safeguarding the ethical standards and public trust in Parliament by holding members accountable for their conduct and upholding the principles of parliamentary democracy.

### What are Special Inquiry Committee?

**Beyond Ethics Committees:** While the Ethics Committee investigates complaints and recommends appropriate action, the Special Inquiry Committee takes on the heavier task of probing more serious accusations against members of Parliament. These situations often involve allegations of corruption, financial misdeeds, or serious breaches of parliamentary decorum.

### Examples of Special Inquiry Committee Action:

**1951:** A special committee successfully investigated and held a member guilty of promoting a business interest through parliamentary questions in exchange for financial benefits.

**2005:** The infamous "cash for query" scam, where bribes were exchanged for asking specific parliamentary questions, led to a special inquiry committee recommending the expulsion of 10 Lok Sabha MPs.

### Expulsion: A Legally Murky Waters:

Article 101 lists down the grounds for vacation of a seat by an MP. It includes voluntary resignation, disqualification, and continuous absence from the House for 60 sittings.

**BUT** Expulsion is not mentioned explicitly in the Constitution. Though not explicitly mentioned in the Constitution, the power of Parliament to expel its members has been a contentious issue, leading to conflicting Supreme Court rulings.

**Raja Ram Pal vs. Hon'ble Speaker (2007):** Upheld Parliament's right to expel members for privilege breaches, implying expulsion falls under Article 101's grounds for vacating a seat.

**Amarinder Singh vs. Special Committee, Punjab Vidhan Sabha (2010):** Declared expulsion by a State Assembly unconstitutional, citing potential misuse to undermine democratic representation.

### Balancing Privileges and Representation:

Mahua Moitra's "cash for query" allegations highlight the critical need to navigate the complex space between protecting the House's dignity and safeguarding democratic representation.

**Medieval Roots:** The concept of parliamentary privileges originated in medieval Britain to shield the House of Commons from the excesses of the monarch. While maintaining the House's dignity is crucial, it's essential to adapt its application to the modern democratic context.

**Potential for Misuse:** Concerns exist that expulsion powers could be used for political vendettas, disproportionately impacting opposition voices. This underlines the need for robust and transparent investigative procedures before considering such drastic measures.

**Limitations of Parliamentary Hearings:** Compared to courts bound by the Evidence Act, Parliament committee proceedings offer less stringent evidentiary standards. This necessitates thoroughness and impartiality during investigations to ensure fair outcomes.

**Alternative Solutions:** Instead of immediate expulsion, exploring options like temporary suspensions or censure motions allows for proportionate responses while ensuring due process.

**Fast-Track Courts:** Addressing the concerns about prolonged and inconclusive probes, setting up dedicated fast-track courts specifically for MP misconduct cases (with a stipulated timeframe like 60 days) could provide swift and conclusive verdicts.

**Consequences of Conviction:** If found guilty in such courts, disqualification under the Representation of the People Act, 1951, would naturally lead to MP removal, upholding both accountability and due process.

**CONCLUSION:** The Mahua Moitra case underscores the urgent need to find a workable balance between upholding the sanctity of Parliament and protecting democratic representation. Implementing comprehensive procedures, exploring alternative solutions, and establishing fast-track courts can offer a way forward to ensure fairness, accountability, and the smooth functioning of India's parliamentary democracy.



## ON SELECTING ELECTION COMMISSIONERS

**CONTEXT:** The Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Office and Terms of Office) Bill, 2023, passed the Rajya Sabha on December 12. It now heads to the Lok Sabha for final approval.

### WHAT DOES THE CONSTITUTION SAY?

Article 324 of the Indian Constitution outlines the composition of the Election Commission (ECI), comprising the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and two Election Commissioners (ECs). However, while the Constitution entrusts the President with the authority to appoint these officials, subject to parliamentary legislation, the existing law only addresses their service conditions. Notably, it remains silent on the appointment process itself, leaving it entirely within the purview of the central government. This lack of a defined mechanism raises concerns about ensuring the independence of the ECI during the crucial selection of its leadership.

### WHAT DID THE SUPREME COURT DECREE?

In 2015, a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) by Anoop Baranwal sought Supreme Court intervention to establish an independent, quasi-collegium system for appointing the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs). Recognizing the legislative vacuum created by Parliament's inaction, the Supreme Court, in March 2023, drew parallels with other democratic institutions like the National Human Rights Commission and the Central Bureau of Investigation, which possess independent appointment mechanisms. Echoing recommendations from the Dinesh Goswami Committee and the Law Commission, the Court, invoking its Article 142 powers, decreed that the CEC and ECs be henceforth appointed by a committee comprising the Prime Minister, the Chief Justice of India, and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

### WHAT DOES THE PROPOSED LAW PROVIDE?

The CEC and other ECs shall be appointed from persons who are holding or have held a post equivalent to the rank of Secretary to the Government of India. There shall be a search committee headed by the Minister of Law and Justice, who shall prepare a panel of five persons for consideration to the selection committee. The CEC and EC shall be appointed by the President on the recommendation of this selection committee consisting of the Prime Minister, the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha and a Union Cabinet Minister to be nominated by the Prime Minister. It is for the first time that the Parliament is proposing a structured mechanism for identification of suitable persons for the post of CEC and EC. The bill removes the CJI from the selection process that was laid down in the Anoop Baranwal case.

### WHAT ARE THE BEST PRACTICES GLOBALLY?

In South Africa, the President of the Constitutional Court, representatives of the Human rights Court and

gender equality are involved. In the U.K., the House of Commons approves the candidates, whereas in the U.S., the appointment is by the President and confirmed by the Senate. While the proposed Bill moves the appointment process from just an executive decision to a committee-based selection, it is still tilted in favour of an incumbent government.

### SUGGESTIONS TO IMPROVE INDEPENDENCE OF ELECTION COMMISSION

#### SELECTION PROCESS:

- Independent Committee: Move beyond political figures. Include jurists, retired CECs, civil society, and academics for a diverse, impartial selection panel.
- Public Scrutiny: Announce shortlisted candidates, invite feedback, and prioritize transparency in choosing ECI leadership.
- Fixed Tenure and Security: Guarantee fixed terms and protect against arbitrary removal or transfer, ensuring stability and independence.

#### INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY:

- Financial Independence: Allocate a dedicated, independent budget for the ECI to minimize government influence. Expenses of the Election Commission are charged on the Consolidated fund of India.
- Administrative Autonomy: Grant control over staff and resources to enable the ECI to function without political interference.
- Investigative Powers: Equip the ECI with independent investigative powers to effectively tackle electoral malpractices and enforce laws.

#### TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY:

- Regular Audits: Conduct independent performance audits to ensure transparency and accountability to the public.
- Open Communication: Encourage regular updates and explanations from the ECI to enhance public understanding of its decisions.
- Strong judicial oversight: Maintain robust judicial oversight to address irregularities and provide legal recourse.

**CONCLUSION:** The proposed Bill offers a step towards ECI independence, but falls short. To truly safeguard its integrity, India needs a selection committee beyond political actors, fixed tenures, and a dedicated budget for the ECI. Transparent communication, independent audits, and robust judicial oversight are crucial. Only through such measures can India ensure a truly impartial guardian of its electoral democracy.





## IMPROVING THE CAPABILITY OF THE INDIAN STATE

**CONTEXT:** India's aspirations for progress clash with reality: a resource-strapped state, which needs to expand rapidly to truly fulfil its potential to serve all its citizens.

Compared to peers, its tax-to-GDP and public spending ratios paint a picture of scarcity. This translates to inadequate schools, hospitals, and justice systems, leaving millions struggling for necessities. To break this cycle, India needs to boost revenue through efficient tax collection and targeted spending, while navigating the political tightrope between fiscal responsibility and public expectations.

### STORY SO FAR:

#### THE SKINNY STATE VS. THE HEAVY LIFTERS: INDIA'S PUBLIC SECTOR IN FOCUS

The Indian state, despite its aspirations, remains disappointingly thin on the ground when it comes to its public sector muscle. This translates to critical shortcomings in delivering essential services, implementing welfare programs, and ensuring swift justice.

- In the G-20 group, the country has the smallest number of civil servants per capita. The public sector share in total employment in India (at 5.77 %) is half the corresponding figures for Indonesia and China, and just about a third of that in the United Kingdom.
- Civil servants per million: As mentioned, India boasts only 1,600 central government personnel per million citizens.
- Public sector employment share: The public sector share of total employment in India stands at a meager 5.77%, compared to Indonesia's 11.5% and China's 20.5%.
- Central government personnel: India has approximately 1,600 central government personnel per million, a stark contrast to the United States' 7,500.
- Doctors: With just 0.7 doctors per 1,000 people, India falls behind the global average of 1.5 and pales in comparison to China's 2.1 and Indonesia's 1.1.
- Teachers: India's student-teacher ratio of 30:1 remains significantly higher than the recommended 20:1, impacting the quality of education.

#### COMPARISONS WITH DEVELOPING PEERS:

- Indonesia: The public sector accounts for 11.5% of total employment in Indonesia, nearly double India's figure. With 3,500 civil servants per million, Indonesia boasts a significantly thicker public workforce.
- China: China presents an even greater disparity. Its public sector share of total employment reaches 20.5%, and it employs a whopping 6,000 civil servants per million citizens.

#### A WORKFORCE OVERSTRETCHED AND BURDENED:

- India, with its burgeoning population of over 1.3 billion, currently employs a mere 1,600 central government personnel per million.
- This pales in comparison to developed nations like the United States with 7,500 and even developing peers like Indonesia (3,500) and China (6,000).

- This stark contrast paints a picture of a workforce stretched thin, struggling to manage the demands of a vast and diverse population.

#### A DUAL BURDEN: POLICYMAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION TANGO:

Adding to the strain is the Indian state's practice of having departments juggle both policymaking and implementation functions.

- Conflict of interest: This creates a conflict of interest, with departments incentivized to prioritize compliance over effectiveness.
- Stifles innovation and adaptability: Moreover, it stifles innovation and adaptability, as one-size-fits-all policies often fail to cater to the nuanced needs of different regions and communities.

#### LEARNING FROM PEERS: SEPARATION FOR STREAMLINED EXECUTION:

Countries like Australia and Malaysia have successfully addressed this challenge by separating policymaking and implementation responsibilities.

In Australia, independent statutory authorities handle implementation, allowing policymakers to focus on strategic planning and evaluation. This model not only streamlines execution but also enables programs to be better tailored to local contexts, leading to a more responsive and effective state.

The case of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) is indeed a compelling example of how separating policymaking and implementation can benefit the Indian state. Here's a deeper look at the reasons for its success:

#### BENEFITS OF NHAI'S SEPARATION:

- **Focus and Expertise:** By separating policymaking from execution, the NHAI can concentrate on its core task of project development and construction, attracting talent with specialized expertise in engineering, procurement, and project management.
- **Streamlined Processes:** Clear delineation of roles avoids bureaucratic bottlenecks and facilitates faster decision-making at the implementation level, leading to fewer delays and cost overruns.
- **Accountability and Performance:** Independent execution allows for better performance monitoring and holds the NHAI accountable for project outcomes. This transparency incentivizes efficiency and innovation.
- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** The NHAI can respond more quickly to changing circumstances and adapt project solutions based on ground realities without needing to navigate complex policy approval processes.

#### EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS:

- **Reduced Delays:** Since its inception in 1995, the NHAI has significantly reduced highway construction timelines. Previously, projects could take decades to complete, whereas the NHAI now averages around 4-5 years.



- **Cost Savings:** Streamlined processes and efficient procurement practices have led to cost savings on many projects. For example, the Golden Quadrilateral project was completed under budget despite its large scale and complexity.
- **Improved Quality:** The NHAI sets high standards for construction quality and has implemented stringent quality control measures, resulting in better-built and longer-lasting highways.

### LESSONS FOR THE INDIAN STATE:

The NHAI's success shows that separating policymaking and implementation can be a valuable strategy for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the Indian state. This model can be replicated in other areas, such as:

- **Education:** Separate curriculum development from school administration to allow schools greater autonomy and flexibility in adapting to local needs.
- **Healthcare:** Establish independent hospital management boards to improve operational efficiency and patient care standards.
- **Urban Development:** Create special authorities for specific projects like smart cities to accelerate implementation and attract private investment.

### CHALLENGES AND CONSIDERATIONS:

- **Coordination and Collaboration:** Clear communication and cooperation between policymakers and implementers are crucial to ensure alignment with overall goals and avoid policy conflicts.
- **Capacity Building:** Implementing agencies might require additional resources and training to effectively handle their newfound responsibilities.
- **Political Obstacles:** Resistance from vested interests within the bureaucracy could hinder the adoption of separation models.

### REGULATING AGENCIES:

In today's India, regulatory agencies play a critical role in navigating the complexities of a burgeoning economy and safeguarding its diverse populace. They act as sentinels, standing guard over sectors like finance, food safety, environment, competition, and aviation. Their vital tasks include:

1. **Upholding Public Trust:** By ensuring fair market practices, safe food and medicines, clean air and water, and ethical business conduct, these agencies build trust in institutions and foster a responsible ecosystem.
2. **Fostering Sustainable Growth:** By preventing monopolies, promoting healthy competition, and safeguarding resources, they pave the way for sustainable and inclusive economic development.
3. **Protecting Public Health and Safety:** Through rigorous oversight and swift action against violations, they safeguard citizens from contaminated food, environmental degradation, unsafe air travel, and harmful drugs.
4. **Enabling Progress and Innovation:** By creating a level playing field and encouraging best practices, they act as catalysts for innovation and technological

advancements across various sectors.

### STRENGTHENING INDIA'S MARKET WATCHDOGS: A CALL FOR MORE TEETH

India's economic rise demands a robust and effective regulatory framework, with well-equipped market watchdogs like the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) playing a crucial role. However, a stark reality emerges when comparing their professional staff strength to their global counterparts, revealing a potential gap in their ability to govern the nation's burgeoning corporate landscape effectively.

#### THE NUMBERS TELL A STORY:

- **SEBI vs. SEC:** With just around 800 professionals, SEBI, responsible for regulating India's capital markets, stands significantly behind its US counterpart, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), which boasts over 4,500 experts. This translates to a staggering ratio of 1 SEC professional for every 5 million Americans, compared to 1 SEBI professional for every 150 million Indians.
- **RBI vs. Federal Reserve:** The story is similar with the RBI, India's central bank. Its professional staff strength of less than 7,000 pales in comparison to the US Federal Reserve's 22,000-strong workforce. This disparity becomes even more glaring when considering the sheer size and complexity of the Indian economy, which is now the world's fifth-largest.

#### CONSEQUENCES OF UNDERSTAFFING:

The understaffing of these crucial institutions has potential consequences for India's financial stability and economic growth:

- **Limited Oversight:** With fewer personnel, regulators struggle to effectively monitor the vast and increasingly complex financial system, increasing the risk of undetected malpractices and systemic failures.
- **Delayed Investigations:** Resource constraints can lead to lengthy investigation times, hindering swift action against rule violations and potentially harming investor confidence.
- **Inadequate Expertise:** Addressing sophisticated financial instruments and evolving market trends requires specialized knowledge, which a smaller workforce may lack, compromising the effectiveness of regulatory interventions.

#### POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

To address these challenges, India can consider a multi-pronged approach:

- **Increase Staff Strength:** Significantly expanding the professional staff at SEBI and RBI through targeted recruitment and competitive compensation packages can significantly enhance their oversight capacity.
- **Invest in Training:** Equipping existing and new personnel with cutting-edge training in financial regulations, data analysis, and investigative techniques can ensure they are equipped to tackle complex financial challenges.
- **Leverage Technology:** Embracing technology like data analytics and artificial intelligence can automate routine tasks and free up resources for more critical





investigations and policy analysis.

- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborating with industry experts and academic institutions can provide valuable insights and expertise, further strengthening the regulatory framework.

Investing in robust market watchdogs is not simply an economic necessity; it's a cornerstone of building a thriving and sustainable financial system. By acknowledging the existing resource constraints and taking concrete steps to address them, India can ensure its regulatory framework effectively governs its financial sector, protecting investors, promoting fair competition, and ultimately fuelling the nation's continued economic growth.

### **BEYOND NUMBERS: THE TRUE COST OF WEAK REGULATION IN INDIA**

While the stark figures showcasing the understaffed nature of India's market watchdogs like SEBI and RBI paint a clear picture, the real impact goes beyond mere statistics. It's in the everyday struggles of citizens and the missed opportunities for economic growth that the true cost of weak regulation manifests.

#### **MARKET FAILURES: REAL-WORLD CONSEQUENCES:**

- **The Satyam Scandal:** In 2009, India witnessed one of the biggest accounting frauds in history when Satyam Computer Services inflated its profits. A more robust SEBI with adequate investigative resources could have potentially unearthed these discrepancies earlier, protecting investors and preventing financial turmoil.
- **Ponzi Schemes and Microfinance Woes:** The lack of effective oversight in the microfinance sector has led to predatory lending practices and widespread defaults, plunging vulnerable families into deeper debt. Stronger regulation by agencies like the RBI could have ensured responsible lending and protected millions from financial distress.

#### **ECONOMIC IMPACT: A MISSED MULTIPLIER EFFECT:**

- **Foreign Investment Hesitation:** Weak regulatory frameworks pose risks for foreign investors, deterring them from putting their capital into India. Robust and transparent financial regulation builds trust, paving the way for increased foreign investment, job creation, and technological advancements.
- **Stunted Financial Innovation:** Fear of regulatory ambiguity stifles innovation within the financial sector. A predictable and efficient regulatory environment encourages the development of new financial products and services, boosting economic activity and financial inclusion.

#### **CHALLENGES AND REFORMS: BRIDGING THE GAP:**

Addressing the manpower crunch in regulatory agencies requires a multi-pronged approach, acknowledging the practical hurdles:

- **Budgetary Constraints:** Allocating additional resources for recruitment and training requires navigating fiscal limitations. Exploring public-private partnerships and leveraging technology can potentially optimize resource utilization.
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Streamlining internal processes and fostering a culture of efficiency within government

agencies is crucial to overcoming existing bureaucratic bottlenecks that impede reform efforts.

- **Political Pressures:** Resisting undue political influence and ensuring regulatory independence is vital to maintain objectivity and enforce regulations without bias.

### **BEYOND SEBI AND RBI: A SURVEY OF INDIA'S MANPOWER-STARVED WATCHDOGS**

The understaffing woes plaguing the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) are not isolated. This challenge extends to a multitude of other crucial regulatory agencies in India, hindering their ability to effectively safeguard various sectors and uphold public trust. Let's delve into the manpower struggles faced by some key players:

#### **1. Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI):**

Tasked with ensuring food safety for 1.3 billion people, the FSSAI operates with a meager 850 personnel. This translates to one inspector for every 1.5 million citizens, far below the recommended ratio of 1:100,000.

**Consequences:** Limited inspections and delayed investigations risk widespread food adulteration and public health hazards.

#### **2. Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB):**

Responsible for monitoring and controlling air and water pollution across the country, the CPCB struggles with a workforce of around 400. This leaves vast stretches of polluted landscapes inadequately monitored.

**Consequences:** Weak enforcement and delayed interventions fuel environmental degradation, jeopardizing public health and ecosystems.

#### **3. Competition Commission of India (CCI):**

Mandated to prevent anti-competitive practices and promote fair market competition, the CCI grapples with a staff strength of barely 300. This hinders its ability to effectively investigate complex market manipulations and enforce competition laws.

**Consequences:** Unchecked anti-competitive behaviour can stifle innovation, harm consumers, and distort market dynamics.

#### **4. Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA):**

Overseeing the safety and security of India's booming aviation industry, the DGCA faces a manpower crunch with around 500 inspectors for over 800 civil airports. This raises concerns about the adequacy of safety checks and inspections.

**Consequences:** Compromised safety standards threaten passenger well-being and risk reputational damage to the aviation sector.

#### **5. Drug Controller General of India (DCGI):**

The DCGI, responsible for approving and regulating drugs across India, suffers from a staff shortage, impacting timely drug approvals and post-market surveillance.

**Consequences:** Delayed access to critical medications and inadequate monitoring of potential drug safety risks can endanger public health.



## THE COMMON THREADS:

Across these diverse domains, a pattern emerges:

- **Inadequate Staff Strength:** All these agencies operate with significantly fewer personnel than recommended or seen in comparable economies, hampering their ability to fulfill their mandates effectively.
- **Multiple Consequences:** The manpower crunch translates to delayed investigations, limited oversight, and compromised enforcement, jeopardizing public safety, environmental well-being, fair competition, and economic growth.

## INDIA'S FISCAL SCARCITY AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:

### CHALLENGES:

- **Low tax-to-GDP ratio:** Compared to other developing nations, India struggles to mobilize adequate resources for public goods and welfare programs.
- **Inefficient resource allocation:** Leakages due to corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and poorly targeted spending hinder the impact of available resources.
- **Overburdened public services:** Healthcare, education, sanitation, and the justice system grapple with resource constraints, leading to inadequate service delivery and delayed outcomes.
- **Technocratic gap:** Policymakers lack the technical expertise to effectively manage the complex Indian economy, leading to reliance on expensive consultants.
- **Narrowly scoped audits:** Oversight agencies focus on rule compliance rather than policy objectives, discouraging officials from taking risks and hindering efficient decision-making.
- **Political appointments:** Filling regulatory bodies and tribunals with retired officers raises concerns about manipulation and compromises public trust.
- **Ineffective public sector incentives:** Performance-linked pay schemes are not effective, and high salaries compared to the private sector attract individuals with

less intrinsic motivation for public service.

### SOLUTIONS:

- **Broaden the tax base and improve tax administration:** Increase revenue through targeted measures and utilize technology to enhance efficiency and reduce evasion.
- **Implement targeted welfare programs:** Leverage data-driven approaches to identify and support the most vulnerable populations, maximizing impact with limited resources.
- **Prioritize social sector spending:** Allocate a larger budget share to critical areas like healthcare, education, and infrastructure for long-term development.
- **Bridge the technocratic gap:** Encourage lateral entry of qualified non-IAS officers into senior positions and provide subject-specific training to civil servants.
- **Senitize oversight agencies:** Promote context-aware review of policy decisions, considering costs and alternatives before judgment.
- **Limit political appointments:** Set a maximum age limit for appointments and prioritize meritocratic selection based on expertise and qualifications.
- **Moderate public sector pay raises:** Reduce the salary gap between public and private sectors to attract individuals driven by social good rather than financial gain.
- **Promote high economic growth:** Create more lucrative private sector jobs to make government positions less attractive for solely money-driven individuals.

**CONCLUSION:** India's chronic fiscal woes demand a nuanced attack. Broadening tax bases and tightening administration is key, but throwing money at issues won't fix them. We need data-driven welfare, prioritized social spending, and a bridge across the technocratic chasm. Strengthening oversight through meritocratic appointments and outcome-focused audits is crucial. To curb the allure of public service salaries, a vibrant private sector and moderate pay adjustments are vital. Ultimately, India's fiscal health depends not just on raising money, but on using it wisely. Only then can we unlock our true potential.

## INDIA, DISABILITY INCLUSION AND THE POWER OF 'BY'

**CONTEXT:** Globally, 1.3 billion people, which is equivalent to nearly the entire population of India live with some form of disability. Of them, 80 % live in developing countries; further, 70 % of them live in rural areas.

Current systems are designed for persons without disabilities and end up being exclusionary to people with disabilities, resulting in them experiencing higher instances of poverty, lack of access to education and opportunities, informality and other forms of social and economic discrimination.

### A CASE FOR INCLUSION

A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) "The price of exclusion: The economic consequences of excluding people with disabilities from the world of work" noted that the inclusion of persons with disabilities into the economy can help boost global GDP between 3 % to 7 %.

The current employment scenario is limited, providing fewer jobs for persons with disabilities and perpetuating stereotypes that create further barriers for people with disabilities to access the labour market. It is also in direct contravention of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which advocates changing attitudes and perceptions towards persons with disabilities and viewing inclusion from a social development dimension. Disability inclusion is rooted in assuring the rights of persons with disabilities and recognising the economic benefits of inclusion.

### GREATER CHALLENGES IN RURAL AREAS

In India, the Central and State governments have various schemes for persons with disabilities and a Unique ID for Persons With Disabilities (UDID) card, established as part of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act (2016). Persons with disabilities (PWDs) in rural areas face a multitude of challenges that hinder their full participation in society and





limit their access to basic resources and opportunities. These challenges stem from a combination of factors, including physical, social, economic, and attitudinal barriers.

The first step is awareness to ensure Last-Mile Connectivity of the benefits enumerated for people with disabilities by the government, which begins with the capacity-building of community leaders who can advocate for this at the grass-roots level.

### PHYSICAL ACCESSIBILITY:

**Limited or no access to transportation:** Public transportation in rural areas is often scarce or inaccessible to PWDs, making it difficult for them to travel to essential services, such as healthcare, education, and employment.

**Inaccessible infrastructure:** Rural roads, buildings, and public spaces are often not designed with accessibility in mind, creating physical barriers to movement and participation.

### SOCIAL INCLUSION AND STIGMA:

**Negative attitudes and discrimination:** PWDs in rural areas often face stigma, prejudice, and discrimination, which can lead to social isolation, exclusion from community activities, and limited opportunities for personal and professional advancement.

**Lack of awareness and understanding:** Misconceptions and a lack of understanding about disability can perpetuate negative attitudes and hinder efforts to include PWDs in community life.

### ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES AND LIVELIHOOD:

**Limited employment opportunities:** Rural areas often have fewer job options, making it challenging for PWDs to find suitable employment. They may also face discrimination in the workplace.

**Barriers to education and training:** Access to quality education and vocational training is often limited in rural areas, restricting PWDs' ability to acquire skills and knowledge that could enhance their employment prospects.

### ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES:

**Healthcare:** Healthcare services, particularly specialized

care for specific disabilities, are often scarce or inaccessible in rural areas, posing significant challenges to PWDs in managing their health and well-being.

**Education:** Rural schools may lack the resources and facilities to accommodate PWDs, limiting their access to education and hindering their progress.

**Assistive technology:** Assistive technology, such as wheelchairs, prosthetics, and communication devices, is often difficult to obtain or maintain in rural areas due to limited availability and affordability.

Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that involves policy changes, infrastructure improvements, community awareness campaigns, and targeted interventions to empower PWDs and promote their inclusion in rural society.

The private sector holds a key in promoting the employment of persons with disabilities. In addition to a robust legal framework, experience shows the importance of engaging the private sector and building the confidence of companies to hire and retain workers with disabilities. Additionally, engagement of employers' federations, including those representing small and medium-sized enterprises, as well as with trade unions, has shown to have great potential to promote the employment of persons with disabilities.

### The SPARK Project

The ILO and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), in collaboration with the Women's Development Corporation in Maharashtra, are implementing the Sparking Disability Inclusive Rural Transformation (SPARK) project. Through this project, persons with disabilities were put in the lead, identified from the villages, and trained as Disability Inclusion Facilitators (DIFs). The DIFs engage with the community, persons with disabilities, caregivers of persons with disabilities, women from self-help groups, and other stakeholders to raise awareness about disability inclusion and barriers to inclusion. The DIFs identify women with disabilities and mainstream them in existing self-help groups for social and economic development, where these women have been able to access funds to start an enterprise. The SPARK project has been able to bring an attitudinal shift towards persons with disabilities, right from the societal to administrative levels.

## TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION IN WAKE OF A370 JUDGEMENT

**CONTEXT:** Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul, delivering a judgment on Article 370, urged the constitution of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to heal the wounds inflicted by the Kashmir Valley's insurgency, particularly during the harrowing years of 1989-90.

**BACKGROUND:** Justice Kaul's suggestion for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Kashmir prompts an analysis of their purpose, history, and potential challenges. While past commissions focused on dictatorships and insurgencies, their application to Kashmir's complex situation raises concerns about amnesty, military involvement, and delayed justice, particularly for Kashmiri Pandits. Exploring reparations beyond the commission's scope offers alternative paths to healing and rebuilding.

### DEFINING PURPOSES

Truth and reconciliation commissions aim to mend societies torn by violence and human rights abuses. They seek to expose the truth of these dark pasts, fostering

understanding and healing collective wounds. These commissions have investigated violations under various regimes, like the Ugandan inquiry into disappearances and the South African commission probing apartheid's injustices. In essence, they shed light on the past, hoping to bridge divisions and pave the way for reconciliation.

Priscilla B. Hayner, known for her expertise on truth commissions and transitional justice, in her book, *Unspeakable Truths: Transitional Justice and the Challenge of Truth Commissions*, has delineated the five main characteristics of truth commissions.

1. Officially authorised or empowered by the state.
2. Temporary body, to conclude with a final report.
3. Focus on the past, rather than ongoing events.
4. Investigates a pattern of events that took place over some time.



5. Engages directly and broadly with the affected population, gathering information on their experiences.

The United Nations appointed Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Timor-Leste or East Timor). A non-governmental organisation (NGO) such as the World Council of Churches, in Brazil too set up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ), an NGO established in March 2001 to propagate truth commissions and help to transfer expertise, is still working in many countries.

### CAUTION NEEDED TO FIX MANDATE

Setting up a truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) in India requires caution due to potential controversy surrounding amnesty for non-state actors (terror groups) and imputations against state actors (Army/security forces).

Issues with amnesty:

- Terror groups in Kashmir are often linked to foreign actors, raising concerns about granting them amnesty.
- Homegrown terror groups may have been influenced by foreign actors, further complicating the issue.

### Challenges with imputing blame on state actors:

- The Indian government may find it difficult to accept accusations against the Army, crucial for maintaining stability in Kashmir.
- Past attempts to prosecute military personnel for alleged violations have been denied by the government.
- Supreme Court ruling requires government sanction for prosecuting officials if their actions were within their lawful duties.

The Supreme Court of India, in General Officer Commanding (Army) vs CBI & Anr. (2012), held that the government's sanction is necessary if there is a 'reasonable nexus' between action and the lawful discharge of duties of the official.

Therefore, a carefully designed TRC with clear guidelines for amnesty and accountability is essential to address past human rights violations in India.

### THE CASE OF KASHMIRI PANDITS: CHALLENGES AND POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

**Issues:**

**Delayed redress:** The mass exodus of Kashmiri Pandits

in 1989-90 happened decades ago, making it difficult to gather evidence and ensure justice for those who may not be alive.

**Limited utility of TRC:** Setting up a truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) now might be too late for optimal reconciliation, as the wounds have festered for years.

**Contentious solutions:** Restitution, involving returning to former homes or property, faces logistical and security obstacles. Monetary compensation might not reach the neediest or fully address their suffering.

### Potential solutions:

**Reparation within existing parameters:** Even though delayed, the UN-recognized forms of reparation can still be applied:

**Restitution:** Explore feasible alternatives like land or property swaps near their original homes.

**Compensation:** Provide financial aid and ensure it reaches the most vulnerable.

**Rehabilitation:** Offer legal and social support to rebuild lives and restore dignity.

**Satisfaction:** Consider public apologies, memorials, and commemorations to acknowledge their pain.

**Non-repetition:** Implement measures to prevent future violations and train security forces accordingly.

While facing challenges, addressing the plight of Kashmiri Pandits through tailored reparation efforts within existing frameworks remains crucial for healing and rebuilding their lives. Finding pragmatic solutions that balance justice, feasibility, and reconciliation is key to moving forward.

**CONCLUSION:** While the need for healing and reconciliation in Kashmir is undeniable, establishing a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) presents complex challenges regarding amnesty, military involvement, and delayed justice for victims like the Kashmiri Pandits. Exploring alternative paths to reparations, focusing on concrete forms of redress like restitution, compensation, and rehabilitation, within existing legal frameworks, offers a potentially more pragmatic approach toward rebuilding lives and fostering reconciliation in the Valley. Ultimately, finding solutions that navigate the sensitive realities of Kashmir while balancing justice, feasibility, and societal peace is crucial for moving forward.



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# INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS





**INDIA'S GROWING NEIGHBOURHOOD  
DILEMMAS**

**A TIME-HONOURED CONNECT THAT WILL  
HELP BRIDGE THE GULF\**

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## INDIA'S GROWING NEIGHBOURHOOD DILEMMAS

**CONTEXT:** Neighbourhoods are difficult for any major power, but contemporary India is faced with an exceptionally hard one, complicated by a rising superpower in its neighbourhood, for the first time in its history.

**BACKGROUND:** India faces an unprecedented challenge in its neighbourhood. The rise of China, a powerful neighbour with contrasting approaches, has disrupted the traditional balance of power. This complexity is further amplified by the diverse political landscapes and economic disparities within South Asia.

India's past reliance on its cultural ties and regional primacy are proving insufficient in the face of China's economic clout and strategic manoeuvres. To navigate this evolving environment, India must adapt its strategies, engage multiple actors, and seek support from friendly external powers. Only through flexibility and a realistic acknowledgement of the new dynamics can India secure a stable and prosperous future in its backyard.

### STORY SO FAR:

Navigating a Shifting Neighbourhood: India's South Asian Dilemmas

### CHALLENGES:

- **Rise of Anti-India Regimes:** New Delhi faces the emergence of governments in South Asia, like the Maldives' new administration, that exhibit instrumental or ideological opposition to India.
- **China's Growing Influence:** Beijing's economic clout, strategic initiatives like BRI, and engagement with politically ostracized nations like Myanmar and Sri Lanka, are creating a China-centric South Asia.
- **Geopolitical Shifts:** The decline of US influence has created a power vacuum filled by China, while regional states leverage the "China card" for strategic advantage.
- **Domestic Dynamics:** India's traditional approach of engaging primarily with ruling elites in neighbouring countries overlooks diverse political landscapes and risks alienating other power centres.

### CAUSES:

- **Evolving Geopolitical Architecture:** The diminishing US presence and China's assertive rise have fundamentally changed the regional balance of power.
- **Economic Disparities:** South Asia's relative poverty makes it susceptible to China's economic allure, compared to India's comparatively limited capabilities.
- **Normative vs. Non-Normative Approaches:** India's focus on normative principles is challenged by China's flexible, "no-frills" approach, creating a "norms-free zone" in the region.
- **Historical Legacy:** India's past dominance in South Asia may now be a disadvantage, as China's position as a

non-resident power avoids the complexities of being a resident power.

- **Policy Stance:** India's focus on the status quo and engaging only with ruling elites creates path dependencies and overlooks potential allies within neighbouring countries.
- **Misconceptions:** The assumption that South Asia minus Pakistan would be amenable to Indian influence and that India's cultural ties would guarantee regional primacy have proven inaccurate.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Acknowledge Reality:** India needs to accept the new power dynamics in South Asia and adjust its strategies accordingly.
- **Engage Friendly External Actors:** Proactive involvement of other nations with shared interests can help counter China's influence.
- **Multi-Actor Diplomacy:** Indian diplomacy must engage with diverse actors within neighbouring countries, including opposition leaders and non-state entities.
- **Strengthen Diplomatic Capacity:** India needs to address its critical shortage of diplomats to effectively implement its foreign policy goals.
- **Further Information:**
  - The rise of populism and non-state actors in the region adds further complexity to the geopolitical landscape.
  - Environmental challenges and concerns like water security require regional cooperation, potentially offering avenues for collaboration beyond traditional security issues.
  - India's focus on developing its own infrastructure and economic capabilities can create a more attractive alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

### CONCLUSION: A NEW CHAPTER FOR SOUTH ASIA

- India's neighbourhood stands at a crossroads. The rise of China and the changing geopolitical landscape demand a strategic shift. To navigate this complex terrain, India must shed outdated assumptions, embrace multi-actor diplomacy, and forge partnerships with like-minded nations. By acknowledging reality, investing in its economic might, and engaging diverse actors, India can reshape its role in South Asia. Only through proactive adaptation and a nuanced understanding of the region can India secure a stable and prosperous future, not just for itself, but for the entire neighbourhood. This is not just a challenge for India; it's an opportunity to write a new chapter for South Asia, one defined by cooperation, shared prosperity, and respect for the region's unique tapestry of cultures and aspirations.



**INDIA'S LARGEST ONLINE IAS  
COACHING ACADEMY**



## A TIME-HONOURED CONNECT THAT WILL HELP BRIDGE THE GULF

**CONTEXT:** As the Israel-Hamas conflict tests regional stability, Oman's Sultan visits India, seeking to leverage their long-standing partnership and shared commitment to peace as a bridge between East and West in the volatile Middle East. This is Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik's first visit to India after taking over in January 2020 following the passing away of Sultan Qaboos



**BACKGROUND:** For millennia, India and Oman have woven a deep tapestry of connection, with trade winds carrying not just spices and goods, but also cultural understanding and mutual respect. Today, this ancient bond has blossomed into a strategic partnership, making Oman crucial to India's West Asia ambitions and India a vital source of support for Oman's regional diplomacy.

For India, Oman offers a stable, neutral haven in a volatile region. It balances ties with the West and regional actors, acting as a trusted interlocutor where others struggle. This neutral ground, coupled with Oman's strategic ports overlooking key shipping lanes, allows India to project its naval presence and secure its energy imports.

Oman, in turn, finds in India a powerful economic partner and a reliable source of trade diversification. Indian investments and joint ventures fuel Oman's economic development, while its vibrant Indian community strengthens cultural ties. Beyond economics, India's security cooperation and unwavering support for Oman's peaceful foreign policy further solidify the bond.

As the Middle East grapples with conflict, this time-honoured partnership between India and Oman stands as a beacon of stability and cooperation. Their shared commitment to peace and their strategic alignment makes them natural allies, navigating the choppy waters of the region together, both vital to each other's success.

### ROLE OF OMAN AS A STRATEGIC BRIDGE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Oman's role in the Middle East holds significant importance for India, weaving a complex tapestry of strategic advantage, cultural connection, and diplomatic synergy.

#### STRATEGIC BRIDGE:

- **Neutral Haven:** Oman's unique ability to navigate complex regional relationships makes it a stable, neutral haven for India in a volatile region. This allows India to engage with diverse actors without compromising its interests.

- **Maritime Access:** Oman's strategic ports overlooking key shipping lanes like the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Sea provide India crucial access to trade routes and energy supplies, bolstering its regional maritime presence.
- **Strategic Partner:** Oman is the closest neighbour to India in the Arabian Gulf region and a crucial pillar of India's West Asia policy, with their multi-faceted engagement increasingly taking on a more strategic shape in recent decades.
- **Twin Pillars:** The India-Oman strategic partnership was signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's visit to Oman in November 2008 and is based on twin pillars of mutual trust and shared interests.
- **Trio of Key Partnership:** Along with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman completes the trio of key strategic partners of India in the Gulf region.
- **Balanced Relationship:** It has carefully balanced its close relations with the Western powers and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, with a pragmatic approach to neighboring Iran, maintaining that the Straits of Hormuz will not be closed. Even during the Persian Gulf crisis in 2019, when the United States and Iran were on the brink of a military conflict, it was Oman which played a key role in diffusing tensions.

#### ECONOMIC PARTNER:

- **Trade Diversification:** Oman offers India a valuable avenue to diversify its trade beyond traditional partners. Indian investments and joint ventures play a vital role in Oman's economic development, strengthening economic ties.
- **Energy Security:** As a reliable oil and gas exporter, Oman contributes to India's energy security, ensuring a steady flow of resources for its growing economy.
- Trade and commerce forms yet another important pillar of engagement. Bilateral trade during FY2022-23 reached \$12.388 billion.
- There are over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures in Oman, with an estimated investment of over \$7.5 billion.
- India was the second largest market for Oman's crude oil exports for the year 2022 after China.
- In October 2022, India and Oman launched the Rupay debit card in Oman, a key footprint of India's initiative to promote digital public infrastructure (DPI) in the world.
- India was the second largest market for Oman's crude oil exports for the year 2022 after China.
- The proposed India-Middle-East-Europe Connectivity Corridor (IMEEC) infrastructure project to link India to Europe across West Asia could also see Oman playing an important role
- There is a proposal from the South Asia Gas Enterprise (SAGE), a private consortium based in India, to lay a 1,400 km long deep-sea pipeline from Oman to India for the transfer of gas. With IMEEC too looking at similar undersea connectivity, there could be convergence on it with Oman in the future.





## DIPLOMATIC ALLY:

- **Peaceful Mediation:** Oman's long-standing commitment to peaceful mediation resonates with India's foreign policy approach. This shared commitment fosters cooperation in regional conflict resolution and promotes stability in the region.
- **Shared Interests:** Both countries share common concerns regarding maritime security, terrorism, and regional instability. This alignment of interests paves the way for collaborative efforts to address these challenges.
- Oman's key role in the Iran nuclear deal in July 2015 is well documented and acknowledged too.
- During the GCC-Qatar diplomatic stand-off, Oman refused to join Saudi Arabia and other countries in breaking diplomatic ties with Qatar in June 2017.
- Oman is an integral part of all important groupings in the region; the GCC, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the Arab League.
- Its ability to manage rival ideologies and power games in the region makes it vitally important to India. Both countries consider themselves as ambassadors of peace and enjoy goodwill across ideologies in the world.

## CULTURAL CONNECTION:

- **Historical Ties:** Centuries-old trade and cultural exchange have forged a strong bond between India and Oman, evident in their vibrant communities and shared traditions. This cultural understanding strengthens the foundation of their strategic partnership.
- **People-to-People Links:** The large Indian community residing in Oman acts as a bridge between the two nations, fostering mutual respect and understanding.
- **Indian Community:** There is a large Indian community of almost seven lakh people which has contributed to

## GAZA, A NEW POINTER TO INDIA'S CHANGED WORLDVIEW

**CONTEXT:** India's complex stance on the ongoing Israel-Gaza conflict unveils an intriguing narrative of its evolving foreign policy. In the years following Independence, India's global outlook was shaped significantly by its historical encounter with Western colonialism.

### INDIA'S EVOLVING STANCE ON THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

The recent Israel-Gaza conflict has ignited a fascinating debate about India's foreign policy evolution. From unwavering anti-colonial moralism to strategic realignments, this essay delves into the nuances of India's changing stance on the complex issue.

### LEGACY OF NON-ALIGNMENT:

Post-independence, India's foreign policy was shaped by its bitter experience of colonialism. Jawaharlal Nehru, driven by a fierce anti-imperialist zeal, championed "non-alignment," eschewing Cold War alliances and advocating for a world order free from superpower domination. This stance often aligned India with the USSR against the West on issues like decolonization and apartheid, while its internal commitment to democracy earned it Western sympathies.

the constantly evolving vibrant relations.

## INDIA-OMAN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

- Defence and security engagement form a key pillar of this strategic partnership and are governed by a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed in 2005.
- Oman is the first Gulf country with which all the three wings of India's defence forces hold joint exercises.
- Since 2012-13, an Indian naval ship has remained on duty in the Gulf of Oman for anti-piracy operations.
- Oman has allowed overflights/transit by Indian military aircraft too. In recent years, both countries have cooperated in ensuring maritime security in the Indian Ocean region.
- During the Persian Gulf crisis in June 2019, the Indian Navy launched 'Operation Sankalp' to ensure the safe passage of Indian-flagged ships which most often operated off the coast of Oman.
- The MoU on Duqm Port during Mr. Modi's visit is a historic landmark in our security cooperation, providing basing facilities, Operational Turn Round and other logistics facilities to Indian naval ships operating in the region.

**CONCLUSION:** As Sultan Haitham bin Tarik's visit concludes, the future of India-Oman relations shines bright. Their ancient bond, woven through trade, culture, and shared values, has blossomed into a strategic partnership vital to both nations' success in the volatile Middle East. Oman, a neutral haven and maritime gateway, offers India strategic access and economic diversification, while India provides Oman with security, investment, and diplomatic support. Their shared commitment to peace positions them as a bridge across the region's turbulent waters, navigating toward a future of stability and prosperity together. This visit has reaffirmed their deep ties and laid the groundwork for a partnership that will continue to flourish, contributing to a more peaceful and prosperous Middle East.

### EARLY RESERVATIONS ON ISRAEL:

On the Israel-Palestine question, India's initial stance was marked by reservations. Having endured a partition of its territory on religious lines, India opposed the 1947 UN resolution establishing Israel, advocating instead for a single, secular state. This reflected India's empathy for the Palestinian cause and its historical struggle against the British Raj's divisive policies.

### GRADUAL ENGAGEMENT WITH ISRAEL:

However, the rise of Pakistan-backed Islamist militancy in India led to a gradual shift in its approach. Recognizing a shared threat in extremist ideologies, India and Israel began forging closer security and intelligence ties. Political and diplomatic relations blossomed, culminating in Ambassadorial-level exchanges in 1992.

### BALANCING ACT: SUPPORT FOR PALESTINIANS AND ISRAELIS:

Despite deepening ties with Israel, India maintained its support for the Palestinian cause. Recognizing the PLO in 1974 and the Palestinian state in 1988, India advocated for a two-state solution, urging peaceful coexistence within



secure borders. This diplomatic juggling act reflected India's desire for cordial relations with both sides while upholding its commitment to Palestinian rights.

### MODI ERA: A CLOSER EMBRACE OF ISRAEL, A NEW REALPOLITIK:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure witnessed a significant acceleration of India-Israel ties. Israel became a vital source of defense technology, intelligence cooperation, and reportedly, surveillance tools used by Modi's government. The personal warmth between Modi and Israeli Prime Ministers like Benjamin Netanyahu symbolized the burgeoning closeness.

### THE GAZA CONFLICT: A TEST OF INDIA'S STANCE:

The 2021 Israel-Gaza conflict exposed the complexities of India's evolving stance. Initial tweets expressing solidarity with Israel drew criticism amidst the mounting death toll in Gaza. India eventually called for a ceasefire and resumption of peace negotiations, but its abstention from a UN resolution demanding a truce attracted further scrutiny.

### BEYOND GAZA: A REORIENTATION OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY:

The Gaza episode exemplifies a broader shift in India's foreign policy under Modi. China's rise has prompted India to lean closer to the US, sharing concerns about Beijing's ambitions. This strategic realignment is evident in initiatives

like the "I2U2" Quadrilateral dialogue and the proposed India-Middle East-Europe-Economic Corridor.

### FURTHER NOTE

- India's domestic Muslim population and its historical sympathy for the Palestinian cause create internal pressures for a balanced stance.
- The rise of Hindu nationalism under Modi has influenced India's foreign policy, with some observers noting a shift towards a more assertive and pragmatic approach.
- India's growing economic and strategic interests in the Middle East add another layer of complexity to its relationship with Israel and Palestine.
- Proposals like India Europe Middle East Corridor also mark India's expanding role in the Middle east.

### CONCLUSION:

India's stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict is a tapestry woven from historical legacies, strategic realities, and evolving domestic priorities. While its support for Israel has deepened, its commitment to Palestinian rights and a peaceful two-state solution remains. As India navigates the shifting sands of global politics, the Gaza conflict serves as a crucial test case, highlighting the challenges and complexities of its evolving worldview.

## MAKING PEACE IN PALESTINE

**CONTEXT:** The United Nations reports that 1.3 million out of 2.3 million residents in Gaza, controlled by Hamas, have been displaced, with nearly half of Gaza's homes damaged or destroyed.

**BACKGROUND:** The Hamas-Israel conflict is a recent flare-up in the Middle East following the attack of Israel by Hamas on the 7th of October 2023. This has revived the century-old dispute between the Israel-Palestine Conflict once again, necessitating the intervention by global and regional powers.



**EMERGING SITUATIONS:** The recent Israeli-Hamas conflict could result in gains for both sides, though in different areas. While Israel is expected to have the upper hand militarily, Hamas might see increased support among Arab populations, particularly in the West Bank.

This is partly attributed to the unpopularity and perceived shortcomings of the Palestinian Authority under President Abbas. Such an emerging reality calls for a reassessment

of the two-state solution and emphasizes the need for fresh elections and international involvement to break the cycle of violence and move towards a more peaceful future.

- Possible Aftermath:** Under Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, Israel has the inherent right of self-defense against the HAMAS attack on Israel on 7th October 2023. The same article lays down that after acting in self-defense, the state concerned must report the action taken by it to the UN Security Council (UNSC). This does not seem to have been done.
- Another major criticism against the response of Israel is that self-defense does not mandate disproportionate and indiscriminate use of force against civilians. Both Hamas and Israel have engaged in annihilation of civilians labelling them as collateral damage.
- Uncertainty after Hamas:** The potential replacement for Hamas after its defeat is a major concern.
- Unsuitable solutions:** Suggestions like involving the unpopular Palestinian Authority or relying on Arab states are unlikely to work. The Palestine Authority, which has been ruling there for the past 30 years, has become vastly unpopular and corrupt.
- Proposed solutions:** Conducting fresh elections under international supervision, deploying UN peacekeepers, and lifting the Gaza blockade are offered as alternatives.
- Rebuilding Gaza:** 'The rich Arab states', would be asked to finance the rebuilding of Gaza.
- Challenges:** Israeli resistance to UN involvement and US leadership needed in the UNSC are acknowledged.





## THE DREAM OF TWO STATES: A REALITY CHECK

The idea of a two-state solution, once seemingly dormant, has reignited in the wake of recent conflict. Yet, a stark reality stands in its path: the ever-growing presence of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. With over 450,000 settlers now residing there, extracting them through persuasion seems near impossible. Forcing them out would risk further escalation and instability.

The landscape has been undeniably altered. The West Bank resembles a patchwork quilt, woven with settler roads and settlements, making the notion of a contiguous Palestinian state increasingly complex. Additionally, the current political climate, with Benjamin Netanyahu at the helm, offers little optimism for territorial concessions. This is because the space available for the incumbent Israeli prime minister to offer territorial concessions is limited by the fact that the highest civilian casualty happened in Israel under his administration.

However, abandoning the two-state solution entirely would be a missed opportunity. Instead, a critical re-evaluation is necessary. We must engage in a "reality check," scrutinizing what aspects of this vision remain viable and where compromises are essential. Perhaps land swaps could offer a path forward, ensuring territorial continuity for both sides. Establishing a robust monitoring mechanism would be crucial to guarantee adherence to any agreed-upon concessions.

Ultimately, the key to lasting peace lies in Israel relinquishing its occupation of the West Bank. Only then can a truly independent and viable Palestinian state blossom. This, undoubtedly, necessitates a shift in political will and a commitment to peaceful coexistence.

## ABRAHAM ACCORDS ARE A FOUNDATION

- To ensure Israel's legitimate concern for the safety of its people, the new state should be demilitarized.
- Other measures can be thought of to assure the Israelis of their safety. Israel's neighboring Arab states should all be engaged in this process.
- The Abraham Accords provide a foundation. It helps in forging diplomatic ties between Israel and several Arab nations and offers a glimmer of hope for lasting peace in the Middle East. By bridging historical divides and fostering economic and cultural exchange, they lay the groundwork for a more stable and interconnected

region. While challenges remain, these agreements signal a shift towards mutual understanding and cooperation, paving the way for a brighter future for all.

- If Israel has the vision of living in harmony in the region with its Arab neighbors, this is the only way.
- When that happens, Iran will lose its proclaimed reason for its anti-Israel tirades.
- Hezbollah will, likewise, lose its most important plank for threatening Israel.

## IMPORTANCE OF THE ACCORD.

- Reduced regional tensions: The Accords break down long-standing hostility, promoting dialogue and cooperation instead of conflict.
- Increased regional stability: Stronger diplomatic and economic ties between Arab countries and Israel create a more resilient and interconnected region.
- Economic benefits: Collaboration opens doors for trade, investment, and shared prosperity, fostering mutual dependence and a vested interest in peace.
- Shifting political landscape: The Accords encourage other Arab nations to consider similar agreements, potentially creating a domino effect for wider peacebuilding.
- Psychological impact: Recognition and normalization can break down stereotypes and foster greater understanding and empathy between communities.

**CONCLUSION:** The recent Israeli-Hamas conflict has caused immense suffering in Gaza, with mass displacement and destruction. While both sides might gain in specific areas, the long-term cost seems immense. The two-state solution faces new challenges due to growing Israeli settlements, requiring a "reality check" and innovative approaches like land swaps.

Meanwhile, the Abraham Accords offer a glimmer of hope. By fostering diplomatic and economic ties between Israel and Arab nations, they pave the way for a more stable and interconnected region. Ultimately, lasting peace requires a shift in political will, demilitarization of a potential Palestinian state, and continued engagement with Arab neighbors. This path, though challenging, holds the potential for a brighter future for all in the Middle East.

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## IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECENT ARGENTINE ELECTIONS?

**CONTEXT:** In a significant shift for Argentina, Javier Milei, a far-right libertarian, ousted left-wing Economic Minister Sergio Massa in the November 19th elections, and was sworn in as President on December 10th.

### WHO IS JAVIER MILEI?

Javier Milei, a radical libertarian economist and self-proclaimed anarcho-capitalist, is known for his economic policies which challenge the “thieves” of the political elite. Mr. Milei was elected to Congress in 2021, successfully attracting voters with his promise to “flatten” the political system. He popularly came to be known as the “chainsaw man,” as he used a chainsaw during his campaign to highlight the vitality of the “reconstruction of Argentina.” Additionally, he is an admirer of former U.S. President Donald Trump, and has been compared to Brazil’s Former President Jair Bolsonaro.

### WHAT ARE MILEI’S POLICY PROPOSALS?

#### Milei’s Drastic Vision for Argentina: Shock Therapy or Recipe for Disaster?

Javier Milei’s recent election victory in Argentina was fueled by a radical vision for change. His campaign centered around dismantling the “left’s propaganda machine” and implementing “drastic reforms” to tackle the country’s crippling inflation.

At the heart of his agenda lies a bold plan: dollarize the economy and slash government spending by 5%, a painful “shock adjustment” he warns Argentines to prepare for. Public projects would be put on hold, trade and currency controls lifted, and the state would shrink significantly, with 10 ministries abolished and state-owned media privatized.

Milei’s anti-establishment rhetoric resonates with those disillusioned with the country’s “decadent model.” He promises a “limited government” that respects private property, a stark contrast to Argentina’s historically interventionist state.

Whether Milei’s unorthodox approach can truly slay the inflation dragon or plunge Argentina into deeper turmoil remains to be seen. His bold promises carry immense risks, but also the potential for transformation.

## NAVIGATING THE U.S.-CHINA RELATIONSHIP

**CONTEXT:** US President Joe Biden and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping held a summit, their second, in San Francisco on November 15, on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation conference. They aimed to resurrect a bilateral relationship that is now at its lowest point since Washington and Beijing established diplomatic ties in 1979.

### WHAT DID THE MEETING ACCOMPLISH?

The status of Taiwan, a self-ruled island remains a bone of contention between China and the US. Under the “one-China” policy, Washington accepts Beijing as the only legitimate government of China and acknowledges, but does not endorse, Taiwan as part of that country, and provides concrete security guarantees under the Taiwan Relations Act. President Biden has on several occasions pledged that the U.S. would intervene if China attacked Taiwan.

Beijing condemned the visit of Nancy Pelosi, the

Only time will tell if this “shock therapy” paves the way for a brighter future or throws Argentina into further chaos.

### WHAT DO THE ELECTION RESULTS SIGNIFY?

The recent elections in Argentina carry significant implications, notably the decline of Peronism, a longstanding movement rooted in social justice. This marks the first time since 2015 that a Peronist government hasn’t secured victory. Mr. Milei’s win signals a rising right-wing sentiment, reflecting discontent among groups seeking an alternative to the status quo.

Yet, concerns linger regarding the potential impact on established societal institutions. Moreover, the electorate’s rejection of conventional politics, driven by disillusionment with traditional parties’ handling of economic issues, underscores a shift. Particularly, the youth support Mr. Milei as an “academic” challenging “conservative” policy, symbolizing a rebellion against the established system.

### WHAT ABOUT OTHER COUNTRIES?

Mr. Milei has been vocal on his foreign relations plans between Argentina and other countries. While stating that he is going to be “aligned with the United States, Israel, and the free world,” he remained sharply critical of working with China, Brazil, and Russia, countries he considers as “communist regimes.” There are several concerns that ending ties with these countries, especially China and Brazil, could have negative implications for Argentina’s trade. His belief that the Mercosur-EU trade deal has no benefits from Argentina is already straining the country’s foreign relations.

### WHAT NEXT FOR ARGENTINA?

It is uncertain whether Mr. Milei will be able to implement his radical policies. His supporters maintain that “he is the change that Argentina needs.” However, his party only holds 38 of the 257 seats in the lower house, which means that these radical ideas will not necessarily get adequate political support. Mr. Milei’s election marks a difference from the recent ‘pink tide’ that has taken over Latin America, resulting in many countries electing left-leaning governments. There could be regional ramifications from Argentina’s choice.

then Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Taiwan in August 2022, the first visit by a Speaker in 25 years as constituting a serious violation of the status quo. More recently, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy received Taiwan’s President Tsai Ing-wen in April in California, the highest American official to do so on U.S. soil.

The US and China decided to restore military-to-military communications between the two nuclear weapons states, critical to prevent potentially catastrophic miscalculations. The respective defence forces will now resume the regular exchange of information under the Military Maritime Consultative Agreement that started in 1998. The consultation was suspended following the visit of Nancy Pelosi to Taiwan.

### WHERE DOES THE TRADE DISPUTE STAND?

The Trump administration has blacklisted several Chinese Artificial Intelligence (AI) start-ups for alleged human rights abuses in Xinjiang in 2019. In June 2021,





President Biden issued an executive order blacklisting 59 defence and surveillance companies under the so-called “Chinese military-industrial complex”, further extended to exports of advanced computer chips for the manufacture of semiconductors in October 2023. In August, Biden administration prohibited US investments in the high-tech arena. The curbs bar US and non-US firms, whose products contain American technology, from supplying hardware and software to specific Chinese companies, besides prohibiting American citizens and firms from collaborating with Chinese chip makers, except under special permission. The rationale behind the export bans is to undercut Beijing’s strides in AI and supercomputing, which have powered its supersonic and nuclear weapons capability, which Washington views as detrimental to its security interests.

China clamped a ban in July on gallium and germanium exports, raw materials used in the production of microchips and weapons systems, listed in the U.S. inventory of materials critical for economic and national security. In October, curbs were imposed on exports of various types of graphite, a vital mineral for the production of electric vehicle batteries, where China enjoys dominance in the global supply chain. The government further tightened its anti-espionage and data protection laws on the grounds of strengthening national security, forcing firms to designate “for China” digital tools, set up China-specific email ids, and hive-off country country-exclusive servers.

### WHAT IS THE WAY FORWARD?

The escalation of the bilateral dispute was epitomised in the muscular approach that the U.S. adopted to shore up global hegemony during the Trump presidency and, conversely, China’s quest for world military and technological supremacy that has crystallised under President Xi. The contours of this conflict have not fundamentally altered under President Biden’s leadership. But a slight dose of realism seems to have been infused into navigating this complex relationship. There is evidence of a greater accent on exploring pragmatic avenues of coexistence through de-risking the two economies, rather than disengagement or ‘decoupling’. This is a subtle but significant shift, and the only hope in the short term is that the superpowers will climb down from their hard positions.

### IMPACT ON INDIA:

**Strategic opportunity:** Navigating the complexities of the US-China rivalry creates strategic space for India to pursue

## REBOOTING INDIA-RUSSIA TIES

**CONTEXT:** India’s external affairs minister is on a trip to Russia and India-Russia ties are expected to strengthen. Trade ties dominate the agenda.

### BACKGROUND:

- Longstanding strategic partnership dating back to the Cold War era, with cooperation in defense, nuclear energy, space exploration, and anti-terrorism.
- Both nations share common interests in a multipolar world order, Russia opposes US dominance.
- India relies heavily on Russia for military equipment and technology but is diversifying its procurement.

### STORY SO FAR:

- The Indian imports from Russia have grown a massive 368 % year on year from 2022 to 2023, mainly due

independent interests and potentially leverage partnerships with both powers.

**Economic challenges:** Trade disruptions and technology restrictions could affect Indian trade and access to vital components. Diversifying trade partners and domestic manufacturing could be crucial.

**Security concerns:** Increased military tensions between the US and China heighten security risks in the region, potentially impacting India’s maritime interests and border security.

**Diplomatic role:** India can play a constructive role in promoting dialogue and de-escalation between the US and China, leveraging its regional clout and non-aligned position.

### Additional Points:

- The rise of other Asian powers like Japan and South Korea further complicates the regional dynamics.
- Domestic politics in both the US and China influence their foreign policy choices and may constrain their flexibility in engaging with each other.
- Technological advancements and global dependencies on critical resources complicate efforts at complete decoupling.

**CONCLUSION:** The US-China summit, despite limited progress, offers a glimmer of hope for a more stable future. The restored military communication channels and subtle shift towards economic de-risking are positive steps, albeit tentative, in navigating this complex relationship.

For India, this complex dynamic presents both challenges and opportunities. While trade disruptions and security concerns require proactive measures like diversification and diplomacy, the strategic space created by the US-China rivalry can be leveraged to pursue independent interests and forge partnerships with both powers.

Ultimately, the future of the region hinges on the superpowers’ ability to move beyond their hard stances and embrace pragmatic solutions. India, with its regional clout and non-aligned position, can play a crucial role in fostering dialogue and de-escalation, contributing to a more peaceful and prosperous Asia.

to an increase in the import of Russian oil. The U.S. and EU sanctions against Russia over the Ukraine war disrupted the rupee-rouble payment mechanism, forcing India to use third-country currencies, including the UAE Dirham and Chinese Yuan to pay, leading to a major trade deficit.

- In addition, Russia’s supply of the fourth and fifth regiment of the S-400 Triumf Air Defence Systems, also under U.S. sanctions, has been delayed and is now expected in 2024.
- The two sides have now skipped the India-Russia Annual Summit for the second year in a row, ostensibly due to the Ukraine conflict. Apart from bilateral issues, conflicts in Ukraine, as well as Israel’s continued bombardment of Gaza is expected to be discussed. While Russia has been openly critical of Israel’s actions, and in particular, the U.S.’s support to Israel



over the bombing of civilians, India's stand has been less strident. India abstained in one vote at the UNGA in October that was critical of Israel, before joining a majority of the international community in UNGA votes calling for a ceasefire this month. India's decision to not join the U.S.-led naval operation against Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea.

- The two sides have signed wide-ranging agreements, including one that will further Russian collaboration on the Kudankulam nuclear power plant, and one renewing diplomatic consultation protocols for the period between 2024 and 2028. India and Russia had agreed to deepen cooperation on the International North-South Transport Corridor that connects the two countries via Iran's Bandar Abbas port, as well as the development of the Chennai-Vladivostok shipping route and the Polar Northern Sea routes.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his counterpart Lavrov discussed a bilateral investment treaty, and plans to resume talks for the Eurasian Economic Union-India Free Trade Agreement in the "second half of January". India-Russia bilateral trade has crossed \$ 50 billion in the past year, on the back of increased Indian imports of Russian oil and fertilizer in the wake of the war in Ukraine.

#### PRESENT DYNAMICS:

- Strengthening Ties:** Recent meetings between Foreign Ministers Jaishankar and Lavrov show a reaffirmation of the strong India-Russia relationship, despite the Ukraine war and Western pressure.
- Economic Cooperation:** Increased bilateral trade, particularly Indian imports of Russian oil and fertilizers, due to the Ukraine conflict. Agreements were signed on trade, connectivity, nuclear energy, military technology, and arms supplies.

- Challenges: India's balancing act between its close ties with Russia and its strategic partnership with the US, as well as concerns about human rights violations in Russia and the Ukraine war.

#### KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- India and Russia remain close strategic partners, despite global pressures and the Ukraine war.
- Economic ties are strengthening, driven by energy imports and new agreements.
- India faces the challenge of balancing its relationships with both Russia and the US.

#### ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- India has abstained from voting against Russia at the UN but has also expressed concern about the Ukraine war.
- India is looking to diversify its military procurement sources, reducing its dependence on Russia.
- The future of India-Russia relations will depend on how the Ukraine war unfolds and how India navigates its relations with the US and other major powers.

#### CONCLUSION: REBOOTING WITH REALITIES

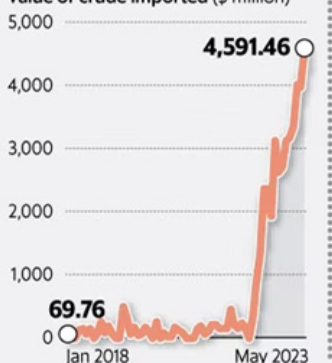
Despite global turbulence and Western pressure, India and Russia are actively rebuilding their ties. The emphasis on economic cooperation, particularly in energy and infrastructure, shows a pragmatic approach. However, challenges remain, like balancing competing partnerships and navigating ethical concerns. Ultimately, the success of this reboot will depend on navigating these realities while forging a future that benefits both nations.

## THE TRADE GAP

Aggregate imports in FY23 jumped almost five times from the previous year as India purchased huge quantities of crude oil from Russia.

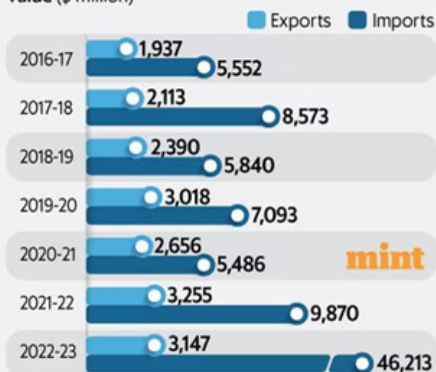
#### BURGEONING CRUDE IMPORTS FROM RUSSIA

Value of crude imported (\$ million)



#### TOTAL TRADE WITH RUSSIA

Value (\$ million)



Source: Ministry of commerce

#### INDIA-RUSSIA ARRANGEMENT

INDIA trade deficit with Russia stands at \$43 billion

AS a result, Russian exporters are left with huge surpluses

THE surpluses can be invested in various Indian instruments





## THE STORMY RED SEA, THE COMPLEXITIES OF GLOBAL EVENTS

**CONTEXT:** The simmering Israel-Palestine conflict has taken a dangerous turn, with the Yemeni Houthi militia, closely tied to Iran, now entering the fray. This development threatens to embroil the critical Red Sea, a cornerstone of global trade carrying nearly 15% of all East-West traffic, in the escalating tensions.



**BACKGROUND:** The Houthis' attack on a vessel in the Red Sea has raised concerns about security in this vital shipping lane. Their growing military capabilities, including longer-range missiles and drones, have prompted the US to call for a multinational task force. However, Saudi Arabia, engaged in talks with the Houthis and seeking a regional détente with Iran, urges restraint. Meanwhile, China's balanced stance in the Gaza conflict finds favour among Arabs, contrasting with the US's staunch support for Israel.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF RED SEA

#### Global Trade Artery:

- Connects the Suez Canal to Asia, offering a shorter alternative to the Cape of Good Hope route.
- Crucial for maintaining the political and economic stability of many countries.
- Carries nearly 15% of all global trade between East and West.

#### Strategic Importance:

- Lies between Asia and Africa, separating the Middle East and Far East as well as Europe and Asia.
- Natural border between East Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.
- Vital route for unarmed oil transportation via the Bab el-Mandeb and Suez Canal.

#### Military Significance:

- Navigation route between nations and their global bases.
- The stage for regional conflict and competition, such as Houthi-led attacks on vessels.

#### Emerging Economic Importance:

- Large oil reserves throughout the region.

- Recent discoveries of vast undersea mineral deposits: zinc, copper, silver, gold, cobalt, hydrocarbons.
- Potential for future economic development and resource extraction.

#### Additional Points:

- Saudi Arabia has actively explored mineral deposits, while other coastal states are catching up.
- Environmental concerns exist regarding potential harm from resource extraction.
- Geopolitical tensions in the region, including the Yemeni conflict, pose security risks to shipping.

### WHY IS THE SUEZ CANAL SO IMPORTANT TO INTERNATIONAL SHIPPING?

#### ISRAEL'S STRATEGIC NEED FOR THE RED SEA:

- Founded with an eye on access to the Red Sea as an alternative to the Suez Canal, potentially subject to closure by Arab nations.
- Occupied Um Rashrash in 1949 to secure a Red Sea foothold and developed it into a key naval and air base (Eilat).
- Attempted and failed to GAIN passage through the Suez Canal in the early 1950s due to Egyptian opposition.

#### Historical Flashpoints:

- The 1967 war led to the closure of both the Tiran Straits and the Suez Canal, impacting Israel's trade and communication.
- Palestinian attacks on Israeli shipping in the Red Sea further escalated tensions.
- The 1973 Egyptian crossing of the Suez Canal highlighted the vulnerability of Israel's maritime access.

#### Additional Points:

- Bab el-Mandeb, the southern chokepoint of the Red Sea, has also been a site of tension due to regional conflicts and piracy concerns.
- Israel's growing economic and technological ties with African and Asian nations further underline the importance of Red Sea access.

### US INTERESTS IN THE RED SEA: A WEB OF OIL, SECURITY, AND POWER

#### Historical Context:

- The Red Sea's strategic importance for the West stretches back centuries, transitioning from a spice route to a crucial artery for oil.
- After European decline, the US saw an opportunity to fill the void, starting in 1968 with post-colonial withdrawals from the region.

#### Strategic Goals:

- **Oil Security:** Ensuring uninterrupted oil flow to Western nations from the Arabian Gulf through the Red Sea is



paramount, making it a global control center for crude oil transportation.

- **Free Navigation:** Maintaining free navigation in the Red Sea during peace and war is vital for US economic and political interests.
- **Counterbalancing Russia:** The US presence serves as a counter to Russian influence in the region, built through political and military alliances and economic incentives.
- **Regional Security:** Many US allies, like Israel, see the US presence as a guarantee against regional aggression.

#### **Additional Points:**

- US military bases and equipment across the Indian Ocean, Arabian Gulf, and Red Sea directly support these strategic goals.
- The Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the southern gateway to the Red Sea, is crucial for Israel's trade with Africa and Asia.
- Recent events like the Houthi attack on a cargo vessel and the ongoing Yemen conflict highlight the vulnerability of Red Sea shipping lanes.

#### **OVERALL:**

- The Red Sea is a strategic nexus for US interests in the Middle East and beyond. Its oil flow, free navigation, and counterbalancing of Russia are intertwined with regional security and alliances, making it a complex and vital region for US foreign policy.

### **RUSSIA AND THE RED SEA: A STRATEGIC GATEWAY**

#### **Historical Opportunity and Strategic Importance:**

- Following the decline of British influence, Russia saw an opportunity to expand its influence in Africa and Asia, using the Red Sea as a key strategic asset.
- This route serves as Russia's shortest water link between Europe and the Indian Ocean, facilitating communication and supporting its military presence in the region.

#### **Cold War Concerns and Proxy Wars:**

- During the Cold War, Russia viewed the Indian Ocean as a potential staging ground for US submarines and weapons targeting them. This led to:
- Building partnerships with regional actors, including the Soviet-backed Haile Mariam regime in Ethiopia.
- Supporting radical regimes and revolutionary movements, often counterbalancing US influence.

#### **ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE:**

- The Red Sea provides Russia's only year-round maritime link between Europe and its Far East, making it crucial for trade, shipping, and fishing.
- Unlike the US, Russia's dependence on the Red Sea for oil is less pronounced, but its overall economic importance remains significant.

#### **ADDITIONAL POINTS:**

- Russia's naval base in Tartus, Syria, further strengthens its presence and influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and Red Sea.
- Recent events like the Ukraine war and the growing instability in the Horn of Africa have raised concerns about Russia's potential role in the region.
- Balancing its economic interests with geopolitical considerations will be key for Russia's future strategy in the Red Sea.

#### **OVERALL:**

- The Red Sea holds immense strategic and economic importance for Russia, offering a vital gateway for communication, military support, and trade. Understanding Russia's historical motivations, Cold War-era strategies, and current economic dependence on this region provides crucial context for its present and future actions in the Red Sea.

### **THE RED SEA: A STRATEGIC CROSSROADS FOR ARAB STATES**

#### **Central Location and Economic Importance:**

- The Red Sea sits at the heart of the Arab world, geographically and politically, serving as a major trade route and lifeline for several countries.
- For coastal states like Sudan, Ethiopia, Jordan, and Israel, it's a vital economic artery, with Jordan, Djibouti, and Sudan relying solely on it for maritime access.
- The Red Sea also serves as the primary export route for Arabian oil, forming the backbone of the economies of many Arab countries, with some exporting 93-100% of their total goods through it.
- The Bab el-Mandeb Strait at its southern entrance acts as a strategic chokepoint, allowing for potential control over maritime traffic.

#### **Beyond Trade: Geopolitical Influence and Pressure:**

- Arab states leverage the Red Sea's strategic importance to exert influence and pressure on regional players.
- The Red Sea connects the Arab world to Asia, Africa, and Europe, making it a key node in global trade and commerce.
- Security concerns, including piracy and the recent Houthi attack on a cargo vessel, highlight the vulnerability of this vital waterway.
- The Suez Canal, connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean, further amplifies its strategic significance, impacting global trade flows.
- Carries a significant portion of Arabian oil exports, with some countries like Saudi Arabia relying on it for 93-100% of their total oil exports
- The Suez Canal further enhances its importance by providing a shorter route between Europe and Asia compared to the Cape of Good Hope.





- Growing economic ties between Arab states and countries like China and India further underscore the Red Sea's global significance.

#### **Additional Relevant Information in the Present Scenario:**

- The ongoing conflict in Yemen and the Houthi threat to Red Sea shipping raise concerns about regional stability and potential disruptions to trade.
- Rising global energy prices and the importance of Red Sea oil exports underscore the economic interdependence of Arab states on this waterway.
- Increasing investments in Red Sea ports and infrastructure development, like Saudi Arabia's Neom project, signal the growing importance of the region for future economic growth and diversification.
- Regional cooperation among Arab states, particularly in areas like maritime security and environmental protection, is crucial for ensuring the Red Sea's stability and prosperity.
- Balancing economic development with environmental sustainability will be key for the Red Sea's future.

#### **OVERALL:**

The Red Sea remains an essential economic and political lifeline for Arab states, serving as a major trade route, export outlet, and tool for geopolitical influence. Its strategic location and vulnerability to regional instability make it a critical focal point for both cooperation and security concerns in the Arab world and beyond.

#### **UNINHABITED JEWELS OF THE RED SEA: TIRAN AND YOTVAT ISLANDS**

Tiran and Yotvat, uninhabited islands previously under Egyptian administration but ceded to Saudi Arabia in 2017, hold a unique position in the Red Sea. Located at the entrance to the strategically vital Straits of Tiran, they act as gatekeepers to the Gulf of Aqaba and beyond, shaping the maritime landscape for Jordan and Israel.

#### **STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE:**

- **Tiran Island:** Forms the narrowest point of the Straits of Tiran, a crucial passage for major ports like Aqaba in Jordan and Eilat in Israel.
- **Straits of Tiran:** Israel's sole access to the Red Sea from the Gulf of Aqaba, making it vital for trade and tourism.
- **Military Presence:** Historically housed Egyptian and Multinational Force and Observers (MFO) personnel, potentially influencing future security arrangements in the region.

#### **HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

- The ownership and access rights surrounding these islands have been a source of tension and conflict in the past.
- In 1967, Egypt blockaded the Straits of Tiran, triggering the Six-Day War with Israel.
- The 1979 Israel-Egypt peace treaty included provisions guaranteeing Israel's free passage through the Strait, which remain in effect.

#### **PRESENT-DAY CONSIDERATIONS:**

- The handover of the islands to Saudi Arabia raises questions about the future of these guarantees and the potential for any change in access policies.
- Although Saudi Arabia has reaffirmed its commitment to the peace treaty, navigating the complex geopolitical landscape in the region remains crucial.
- Recent events like the Houthi attack on a cargo vessel in the Red Sea highlight the region's vulnerability and the need for regional cooperation to ensure maritime security.

#### **ADDITIONAL POINTS:**

- The islands themselves are largely uninhabited, primarily housing military personnel from Egypt and the MFO, which monitors the implementation of the peace treaty.
- Tourism could potentially play a role in the future of these islands, but security concerns and the delicate regional dynamics must be carefully considered.
- Understanding the historical context and present-day complexities surrounding Tiran and Yotvat is essential for comprehending the wider geopolitical dynamics of the Red Sea and its strategic importance.

#### **OVERALL:**

Tiran and Yotvat islands, small in size but significant in strategic value, represent a crossroads of historical tensions, evolving regional alliances, and potential opportunities. With Israel's sole Red Sea access at stake, these islands remain a focal point for ongoing diplomatic efforts and security considerations in the Red Sea region.

#### **THE RED SEA: A STRATEGIC CROSSROADS FOR INDIA**

The Red Sea, with its connection to the Suez Canal, holds significant strategic importance for India, impacting various aspects of its national interests. Here's a breakdown of the key points:

#### **ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE:**

- **Trade Route:** The Red Sea is a vital trade artery, connecting India to markets in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Nearly 80% of India's trade with Europe and the Mediterranean passes through the Suez Canal, making it a critical shipping lane for exports and imports.
- **Energy Security:** The Red Sea is a key route for oil imports, particularly from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries. India relies on these imports to meet its energy needs, and disruptions in the Red Sea could have significant economic ramifications.
- **Port Investments:** India has invested in developing port infrastructure along the Red Sea, like its partnership with Sudan in Port Sudan. This strengthens its logistical network and provides access to new markets.
- **Trade diversification:** The Red Sea provides India access to alternative trade routes, reducing dependence on the Malacca Strait and mitigating potential chokepoints.

#### **GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE:**



- **Security Concerns:** The Red Sea is prone to piracy and terrorist threats, posing risks to Indian shipping and personnel. The Houthi attack on a cargo vessel in November 2023 highlighted the region's vulnerability.
- **Regional Stability:** India has a vested interest in maintaining stability in the Red Sea, as it impacts its trade routes and energy security. The ongoing conflicts in Yemen and the Horn of Africa pose potential threats to regional stability.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** India has cultivated partnerships with Red Sea countries like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Djibouti. These partnerships can enhance maritime cooperation, combat security threats, and promote economic ties.
- **Global competition:** Growing presence of other major powers like China and the US in the Red Sea creates a complex geopolitical landscape.
- **QUAD:** Security cooperation with the US, Japan, and Australia can potentially contribute to maintaining stability and freedom of navigation in the Red Sea.

#### ADDITIONAL POINTS:

- The growing Chinese presence in the Red Sea, with investments in ports and infrastructure projects, raises concerns about potential competition for influence in the region.
- India's participation in multinational naval exercises in the Red Sea, like the Cutlass Express, showcases its commitment to maritime security and regional cooperation.
- The development of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which connects India with Russia via Iran and the Red Sea, could offer an alternative trade route and reduce dependence on the Suez Canal.

#### CONNECTIVITY AND PARTNERSHIPS:

- **Port development:** India's investments in developing ports like Chabahar in Iran and Duqm in Oman enhance connectivity and trade prospects in the region.
- **Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA):** India plays a vital role in IORA, promoting maritime cooperation and security in the Indian Ocean region, including the Red Sea.

**CONCLUSION:** The Red Sea's strategic significance for India is multifaceted, encompassing trade, energy, security, and connectivity. Navigating this complex landscape will require a multipronged approach, balancing economic interests with security concerns, fostering regional partnerships, and adapting to the evolving geopolitical dynamics of the region. By actively engaging in the Red Sea, India can ensure its vital trade arteries remain open, secure its energy supplies, and contribute to a stable and prosperous maritime environment.

## VENEZUELAN CLAIM GUYANA REGION IN VOTE

**CONTEXT:** Venezuelan electoral authorities on Sunday claimed that 95 % of voters in a non-binding referendum approved of the nation's territorial claim on a huge chunk of neighboring oil-rich Guyana.



#### BACKGROUND TO THE VENEZUELAN REFERENDUM ON THE ESSEQUIBO TERRITORY:

The Venezuelan referendum on the Essequibo territory, held on December 3rd, 2023, is rooted in a long and complex historical dispute between Venezuela and Guyana over this oil-rich region. Here's a breakdown of the key points:

#### HISTORICAL CLAIMS:

**Venezuela:** Claims the Essequibo territory, around 70% of Guyana's landmass, based on pre-colonial Spanish maps and a disputed arbitration in 1899.

**Guyana:** Maintains the border was definitively established by the 1899 arbitration, recognized internationally, and reinforced by Guyana's independence in 1966.

#### RECENT TENSIONS:

**2015:** Venezuela rekindled the dispute, issuing a decree claiming sovereignty over the Essequibo after ExxonMobil discovered oil there.

**2018:** The International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled it has jurisdiction to hear the case, but Venezuela withdrew its participation.

**2023:** President Maduro called the non-binding referendum aimed at strengthening Venezuela's claim and potentially bolstering domestic support ahead of his 2024 re-election.

#### IMPACT OF OIL

The discovery of oil in the Essequibo territory has undoubtedly amplified the pre-existing territorial dispute between Venezuela and Guyana, playing a significant role in fuelling the tension and driving actions on both sides. Here's a deeper look at the connection:

#### OIL AS A CATALYST:

**ExxonMobil discovery:** The 2015 discovery of a massive oil field by ExxonMobil within the Essequibo territory served as a major trigger for Venezuela's renewed assertiveness in the border dispute. The potential economic windfall of this resource significantly increased the stakes for both





nations.

**Economic desperation:** Venezuela's ongoing economic crisis, characterized by hyperinflation and shortages, fueled by mismanagement and declining oil production, likely increased their motivation to secure the Essequibo's resources. Access to this oil could potentially provide much-needed economic relief and bolster Maduro's regime.

**Guyana's development aspirations:** For Guyana, a developing nation, the potential oil revenue from the Essequibo presents an opportunity to accelerate economic growth and improve living standards. This further emphasizes the importance of securing their claim to the territory.

### IMPACT ON THE DISPUTE:

**Heightened tensions:** The presence of valuable oil resources has intensified the rhetoric and actions on both sides. Venezuela's strong-arm tactics like the recent referendum and military exercises can be seen as attempts to pressure Guyana and assert their dominance.

**Geopolitical involvement:** The oil in the Essequibo has attracted the attention of international players, with countries like the US and China potentially interested in securing access to these resources. This external involvement can further complicate the dispute and lead to increased pressure on both parties.

**Legal complexities:** The presence of oil adds another layer of complexity to the legal arguments surrounding the border dispute. Both sides may try to use the potential economic benefits as leverage in legal proceedings or negotiations.

### IMMEDIATE REGIONAL IMPACT:

**Increased tensions between Guyana and Venezuela:** The referendum, coupled with Maduro's stated intentions, could escalate tensions between the two nations. This could range from diplomatic disputes to potential military skirmishes, impacting regional stability and potentially hindering economic partnerships.

**The strain on regional organizations:** Organizations like the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Organization of American States (OAS) could face pressure to mediate the dispute, potentially straining their resources and diplomatic clout.

**Impact on resource exploration:** The uncertainty surrounding the Essequibo could deter foreign investment in oil and gas exploration in the region, hindering economic growth and development.

### Wider global implications:

**Oil market volatility:** The potential disruption of oil production in the Essequibo could send shockwaves through the global oil market, leading to price fluctuations and impacting economies reliant on energy imports.

**Disruptions in global supply chains:** The instability in the region could disrupt vital shipping routes and supply chains, impacting the movement of goods and raising prices for consumers worldwide.

**International legal precedent:** The outcome of the dispute could set a precedent for other territorial claims around the world, potentially leading to increased conflicts and instability.

**Concerns about authoritarianism:** The Venezuelan government's strong-arm tactics surrounding the referendum, including accusations of voter intimidation and manipulation, could raise concerns about the erosion of democratic principles in the region and beyond.

### POSSIBLE MITIGATING FACTORS:

**International pressure:** The international community, including the US and other major powers, could exert pressure on both sides to engage in dialogue and find a peaceful resolution.

**Legal channels:** Guyana could pursue legal channels through international courts and tribunals to challenge Venezuela's claims.

**Economic interdependence:** The economic ties between Venezuela and other regional countries could incentivize them to work towards a peaceful resolution to avoid economic losses.

**CONCLUSION:** Overall, the Venezuelan referendum has the potential to trigger a cascade of negative consequences, both regionally and globally. However, the situation remains fluid, and the possibility of a peaceful resolution through diplomatic efforts and international pressure should not be discounted.

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# INTERNAL SECURITY





**₹2.23 LAKH CR. TO BUY 97 TEJAS JETS,  
156 PRACHAND HELICOPTERS**

**INDIA RECEIVES PRICE BIDS FOR 26  
RAFALE JETS, 3 SUBMARINES**

**CENTRE AGREES TO EXAMINE DEMANDS  
FOR LADAKH SAFEGUARDS**

**INDIA'S DEFENCE BUDGETING AND THE  
POINT OF DETERRENCE**

**INS IMPHAL COMMISSIONED**

**UNJUST AND UNWISE**





## ₹2.23 LAKH CR. TO BUY 97 TEJAS JETS, 156 PRACHAND HELICOPTERS



In a major move to enhance the combat capabilities of the armed forces significantly, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN), initial approval to defence acquisition projects estimated at ₹ 2.23 lakh Cr. that included procurement of 97 Tejas light combat aircraft and 156 Prachand combat helicopters from Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) under Buy (Indian-IDDM) category.

The DAC also approved a proposal of the Indian Air Force to upgrade its Su-30 fighter fleet by state-run aerospace major Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. and further accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) or initial approval

for procurement of two types of anti-tank munitions namely Area Denial Munition (ADM) Type-2 and -3.

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister cleared the projects at a time India is locked in a military stand-off with China at a number of friction points in eastern Ladakh for over three years. The Defence Ministry intend to source 98 % of the total procurement from domestic industries and that the move will give a substantial boost to the Indian defence industry in achieving the goal of aatmanirbharta (self-reliance).

### For the Navy

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) cleared acquisition and integration of Automatic Target Tracker (ATT) and Digital Basaltic Computer (DBC) for T-90 tanks besides approving another proposal to buy medium-range anti-ship missiles (MRAShM) for the Navy. The MRAShM is a lightweight surface-to-surface missile which will be a primary offensive weapon aboard various Indian naval ship.

In February 2021, the Defence Ministry sealed a ₹ 48,000-Cr. deal with the HAL for procurement of 83 Tejas MK-1A jets for the IAF. With the additional fleet, the number of Tejas aircraft being procured by the IAF would go up to 180.

## INDIA RECEIVES PRICE BIDS FOR 26 RAFALE JETS, 3 SUBMARINES



India has received price bids from France for the purchase of 26 Rafale-M carrier-based fighters as well as three additional Scorpene-class conventional submarines. While the Rafale-M is being processed through an Inter-governmental agreement, the submarine deal is a follow-on to the earlier contract with Naval Group, under which Mazagon Dockyard Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai manufactured six submarines in India.

### Letter of Acceptance

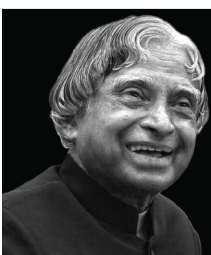
On July 13, the Defence Acquisition Council chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh accorded its

Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for the procurement of the 26 Rafale-M fighters and three additional Scorpene-class diesel-electric submarines from France. The deal includes 22 single-seater Rafale-M fighters and non-carrier compatible four twin-seater Rafale trainers. Earlier this week, France submitted a Letter of Acceptance, outlining the pricing and other details of its offer for 26 Rafale-M jets which are meant to operate from the Navy's two aircraft carriers. On December 11, Mazagon Dockyard Shipbuilders Limited (MDL), Mumbai has submitted its commercial offer for three more Scorpenes to the Indian Navy.

The price and other terms of purchase will be negotiated with the French Government after taking into account all relevant aspects, including "comparative procurement price of similar aircraft by other countries.

The 26 jets are meant to fill the gap in the numbers till the indigenous Twin Engine Deck Based Fighter, still under development, is inducted into service. Both the contracts are expected to be concluded by end-2024 and delivery of the submarines is likely to begin in 2031.

The major difference between the existing Scorpenes and the new ones is their Integrated Combat System (ICS). The earlier submarines had systems from France, while the new ones will have indigenous ICS, with significant localised solutions provided by Bharat Electronics Limited in collaboration with French suppliers.



*You have to dream before your dreams can come true..*

- A. P. J. ABDUL KALAM



## CENTRE AGREES TO EXAMINE DEMANDS FOR LADAKH SAFEGUARDS

The Union Home Ministry has agreed to examine the demand of civil society groups in Ladakh to provide “constitutional safeguards” for the Union Territory. Civil society organisations have been demanding Ladakh’s inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution and granting tribal status to the Union Territory.

The key detail is mentioned in an order issued by the Ministry to reconstitute a high-powered committee for Ladakh. The 22-member panel, chaired by Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai, will have representatives from both Kargil and Leh divisions. The panel is expected to hold its first meeting in Delhi on December 4.

The terms of reference of the committee are to discuss measures to protect the region’s unique culture and language taking into consideration its geographical location and strategic importance; to ensure protection of land and employment for people of Ladakh; to discuss measures for inclusive development and employment generation in the region, to discuss measures related to the empowerment of the Ladakh Autonomous Hill District Councils of Leh and Kargil; and to examine constitutional safeguards that could be provided to ensure the measures and protection detailed above. Ladakh has erupted in protests several times since it was carved out of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019.

## INDIA’S DEFENCE BUDGETING AND THE POINT OF DETERRENCE

The Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) programme of the Indian Air Force (IAF) earned the sobriquet of being the ‘mother of all procurements’ due its cost, pegged at around \$10 billion in 2007.

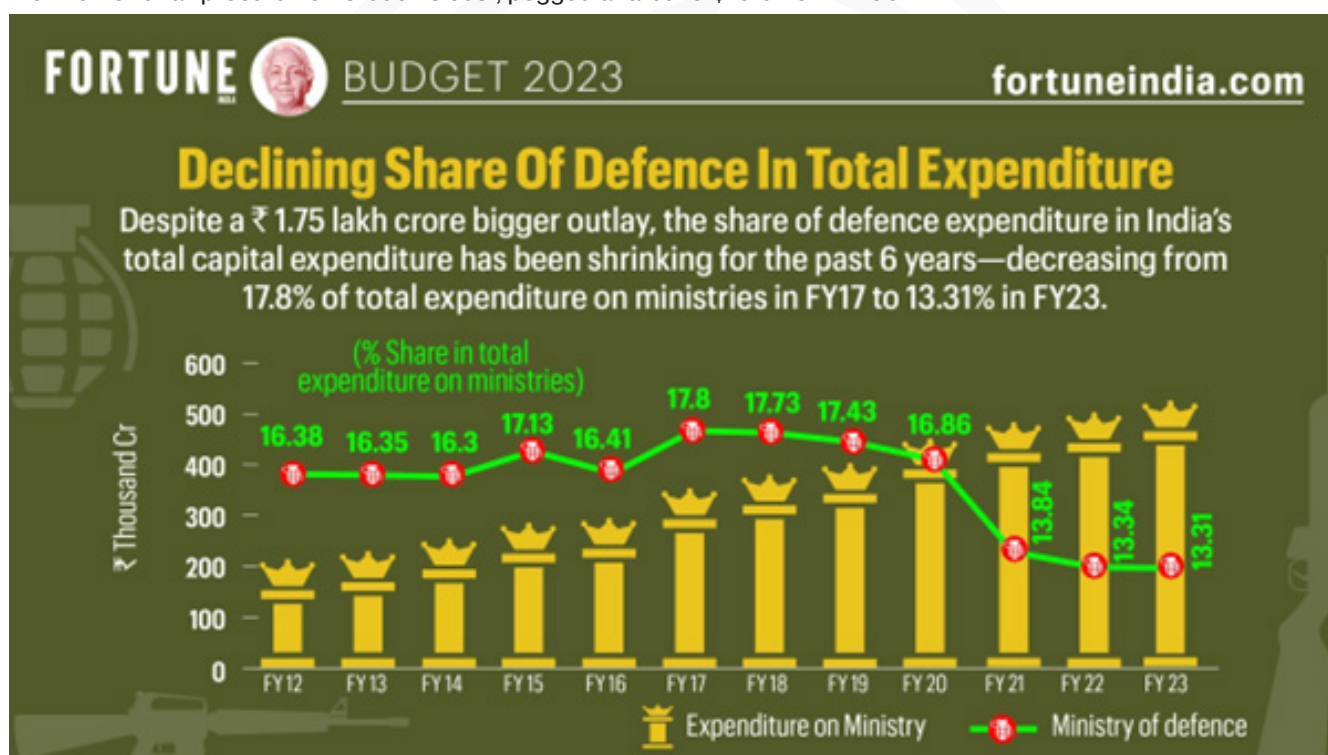


FIGURE: Column chart representation of the defence expenditures and share of defence in total expenditures.

India’s defence Budget, in real terms, has been more or less stagnant. Defence expenditure (revenue and capital), as a percentage of central government expenditure, has been declining – from around 16.4 % in 2012-13 to 13.3 % in 2022-23. The Ministry of Defence had asked for ₹1,76,346 Cr. in 2023–24 for capital acquisitions but only ₹1,62,600 Cr. was allotted, creating a deficit of ₹13,746 Cr.

In the sphere of research and development, the picture is not rosy either. The Global Innovation Index 2022 pegs India’s research and development expenditure at just 0.7 % of its GDP which places it 53rd globally. China, incidentally, spent \$ 421 billion in 2022, which is 2.54 % of its GDP. Though the research and development allocation need a substantial jump, it is good that 25 % of the allocation was for the private sector







## INS IMPHAL COMMISSIONED



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh commissioned the P-15B class stealth guided missile destroyer INS Imphal, the first warship to be named after a city in Northeast India, at the Naval Dockyard in Mumbai. INS Imphal is the third of four indigenous Visakhapatnam class destroyers, designed by the Navy's Warship Design Bureau and built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd.

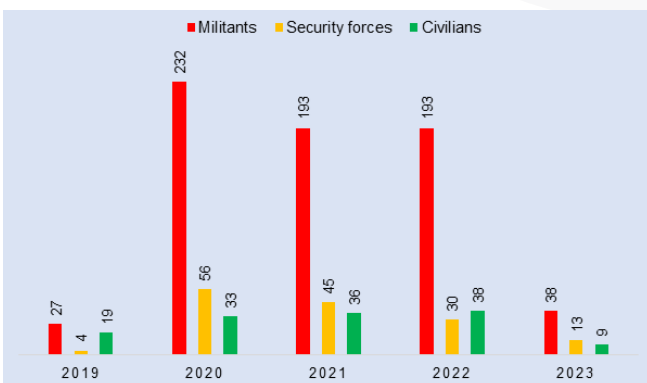
India plays the role of a net security provider in the entire Indian Ocean Region. The Navy had four destroyers of Project 15B and 15A class deployed to counter pirate and drone attacks. The P8I and Dornier aircraft, the Sea Guardian unmanned aerial vehicles, helicopters, and Coast Guard ships were deployed to counter the threats.

## UNJUST AND UNWISE

Security forces have to tackle not only terrorism but also engage in counter-insurgency operations in a precise and just manner in a conflict-prone border province such as Jammu and Kashmir (J&K).

The Pir Panjal Valley, comprising Poonch and Rajouri districts, has witnessed fierce encounters between

security forces and militants in jungle terrain, leading to the death of 28 soldiers this year. This is a blow against counter-insurgency in an area that has been relatively more peaceful in comparison to the Kashmir Valley. In fact, the Pir Panjal region has been experiencing militancy in the last two years after relative calm for a decade and a half.



**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of the casualties in the Jammu and Kashmir.

The death of three civilians who were detained by the Army in the Poonch-Rajouri area following a deadly ambush on an Army convoy on December 21, and the fact that five other civilians were badly injured due to alleged torture by the security forces, is a severe indictment of the counter-insurgency tactics there. Such heinous actions by

security forces targeting civilians in response to militant attacks are clearly problematic, on two counts.

First, this increases the unpopularity of a regime that has not been democratically elected in the Union Territory where provincial elections have not been held for more than half a decade. Counter-insurgency operations of the kind that followed the ambush last week breed discontent among residents in a region which has not been supportive of militancy in the near past.

One of the aims of militants in the asymmetric warfare waged against Indian security forces is to provoke the forces into committing rights violations against civilians and to use grievances and indignation among them to increase their own support base. Such actions by security forces play into the hands of militants and their handlers across the border. Second, the legitimacy of force or violence and its use by the state depend on the justness of the actions. Indiscrimination in the use of violence targeting civilians without just cause only results in the questioning of that legitimacy in the eyes of the people.



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# ECONOMICS



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**INDIA'S FUTURE GROWTH**

**CARD-ON-FILE TOKENISATION**

**'BUILD FOR BHARAT' INITIATIVE**

**MULTI MODAL LOGISTICS PARK (MMLP) IN NAGPUR**

**GLOBAL REMITTANCES**

**PARLIAMENT ADVANCES KEY TAX-RELATED BILLS**

**INDIAN BANKS' ASSET QUALITY IMPROVED TO DECADAL HIGH**

**INDIA AND ADB SIGN \$ 250 MILLION AGREEMENT FOR DELHI-MEERUT RRTS CORRIDOR**

**E-SVARNA: CORPORATE RUPAY CREDIT CARD WITH UPI**

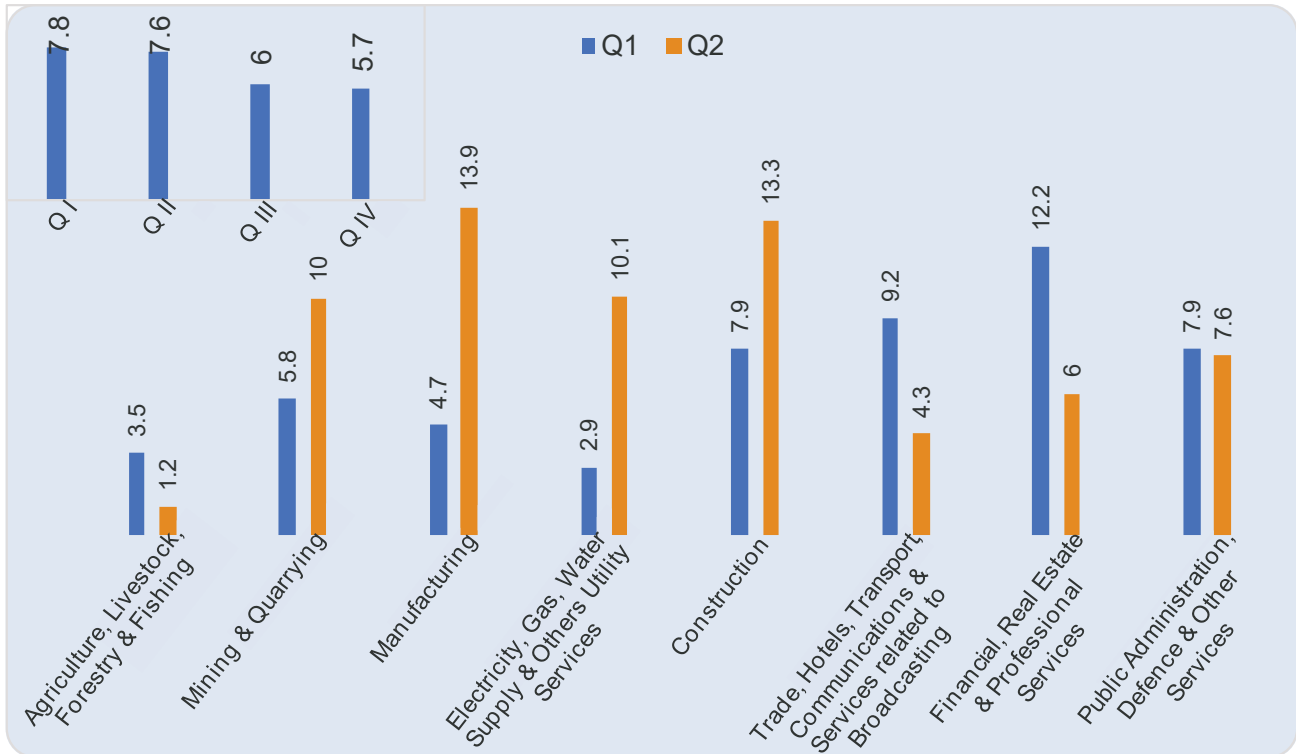




## INDIA'S FUTURE GROWTH

As per initial estimates from the National Statistical Office, India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew at a higher-than-expected 7.6 % in the July-September 2023 quarter. The July-September 2023 quarter growth was slightly lower than the 7.8 % rise in the previous quarter, but well over the central bank's projected uptick of 6.5 %. The Reserve Bank of India projected India's growth in 2023-24 at 7 %, while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have pegged it at 6.3 %. The IMF has projected

an annual growth of 6.3 % up to 2028-29 in the medium-term. Though, RBI forecasted a broad-based recovery in the second quarter projecting a growth of 7.8 % and 7.6 % in the first two quarters of 2023-24, respectively the GVA growth in the farm sector skidded sharply to just 1.2 % from 3.5 % in Q1 while it more than halved for services sectors such as trade, hotels and transport from 9.2 % in Q1 to 4.3 %.



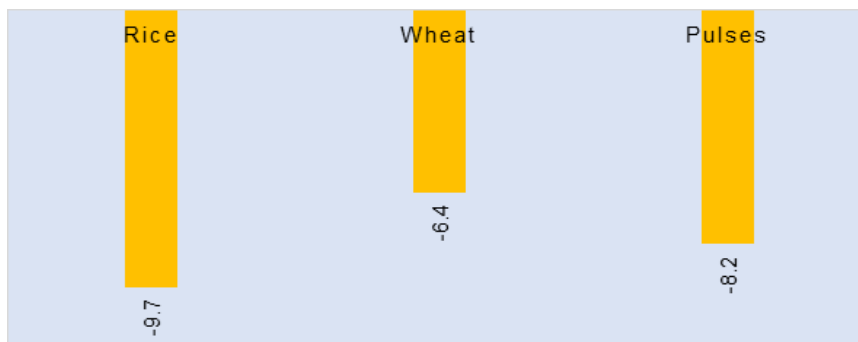
**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of the Quarterly Estimates of sectorial GVA growth rates. (Inset) Column chart representation of the quarterly GVA growth rates.

### FARM SECTOR GROWTH TO SLIP BELOW 1 % IN H2

Investment Information and Credit Rating Agency of India (ICRA) Limited warned of a further slowdown in farm sector growth in the second half which could weaken rural demand and accentuate food price pressures. GVA growth from the agriculture sector may slip below 1 % in the last two quarters of this year, from 1.2 % in Q2, dragging the full year's growth under the 2 % mark, compared with a 4 % uptick in FY23. The weak prospects for rabi crop output amid the El Nino effects, casts a shadow on rural sentiment and consumption demand going forward.

Foodgrain output set to hit a four-year low and

rabi crop sowing significantly lagging last year's levels by mid-December with kharif crop yields dropping. The first advance estimates of kharif output suggest foodgrain production slid 4.6 % to a four-year low of 148.6 MT, with all kharif crops' output declining. Even crops that clocked an increase in their sown areas this year are expected to see a dip in output, including sugarcane (-11.4 %), rice (-3.8 %) and coarse cereals (-6.5 %). The decline in the output of most crops is larger than the fall in their area sown, reflecting a contraction in yields. ICRA noted in a report on the farm sector amid delayed harvesting of paddy in some States, the cumulative rabi sowing trailed the year-ago levels by 5.1 % as on Dec. 15.



**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of year-on-year change in cumulative rabi sowing.



By December 15, about 77 % of the total area sown in 2022, had been covered for the rabi crop. A weaker rural economy also prompted the rating firm to add 'downside risks' to its forecast of a 0-2 % growth in tractor sales for the year, after they declined 3.7% in the first half and 0.5 % through October and November.

### GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES

Unilateral and multilateral sanctions with many ongoing geopolitical conflicts such as the Russia-Ukraine war and the Israel-Hamas war have not only disrupted supply chains, but disrupted international settlements due to non-access to systems such as SWIFT for the sanctioned countries. World real GDP growth has also fallen, leading to reduced demand for global exports. Many countries including India want to reduce their dependence on imported petroleum due to supply uncertainties and price volatility.

There is a movement towards deglobalisation. In India's case, exports experienced a sharp acceleration in the share of GDP during 2003-04 to 2008-09. This peaked at 25 % in 2013-14. In 2022-23, it was 22.8 %, having fallen to a trough of 18.7 % in 2019-20 and 2020-21.

India needs to mobilise domestic growth drivers, including domestic savings to achieve and sustain a 7 % plus real growth. The household sector's savings in financial assets which declined to 5.1 % of GDP in 2022-23 from an average of 7.8 % during the pre-COVID-19 period of 2015-16 to 2019-20 – a fall of 2.7 % points, including 2.2 % points in change in gross household financial liabilities and 0.5% points fall in change in gross household financial assets. At present, the nominal saving rate in 2022-23 is estimated to be about 29 % of GDP.

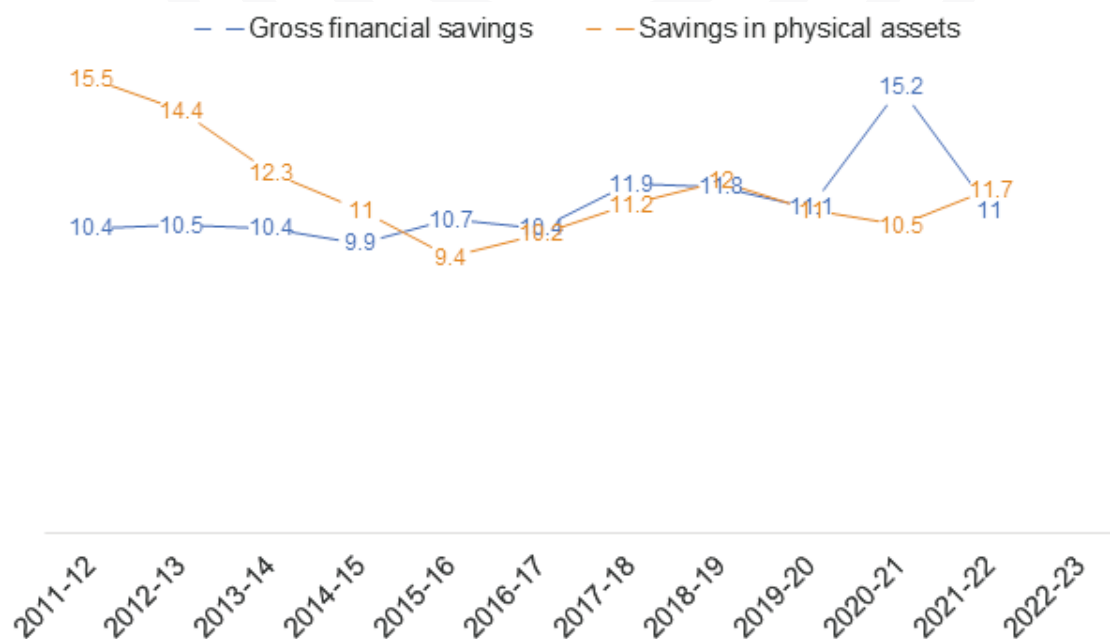
Savings are converted into Gross Fixed Capital Formation (GFCF) by adding net capital inflows and

### MOODY'S CUTS CHINA OUTLOOK ON GROWTH, PROPERTY RISKS

Ratings agency Moody's cut its outlook on China's sovereign credit ratings to negative from stable. There has been a surge in local government debts and a deepening property crisis on the world's second-largest economy. The downgrade reflects the broad and growing risks posed by debt-laden local governments and state firms to China's fiscal, economic and institutional strength. The outlook change also reflects the increased risks related to structurally and persistently lower medium-term economic growth and the ongoing downsizing of the property sector.

Moody's noted the shock-absorption capacity of China's A1 long-term local and foreign-currency issuer ratings. China's blue-chip stocks slumped to almost five-year lows. The cost of insuring China's sovereign debt against a default rose to its highest since mid-November. The markets are more concerned with the property crisis and weak growth, rather than immediate sovereign debt risk

deducting change in stocks, valuables, and discrepancies. The estimated nominal investment rate, that is GFCF relative to GDP was 29.2 % in 2022-23. The deflator of capital goods is lower than that of all goods. Using the five-year average of the relative magnitude of the two deflators, the nominal investment rate of nearly 29 % would provide a real investment rate of about 33 %. This needs to be increased by 2 % points to provide investible resources amounting to 35 % of GDP, enabling a growth of 7 % at an Incremental Capital-Output Ratio (ICOR) of 5, which was its value in 2022-23. If the ICOR is lower, achievable growth would be higher.



**FIGURE:** Line chart representation of the household financial savings and physical assets as a share of GDP.

According to United Nations population projections, the share of India's working age population is projected to peak at 68.9 % in 2030 while its overall dependency ratio would be at its lowest at 31.2 %. These patterns call for increased allocation of resources for training and skilling India's growing working age population.

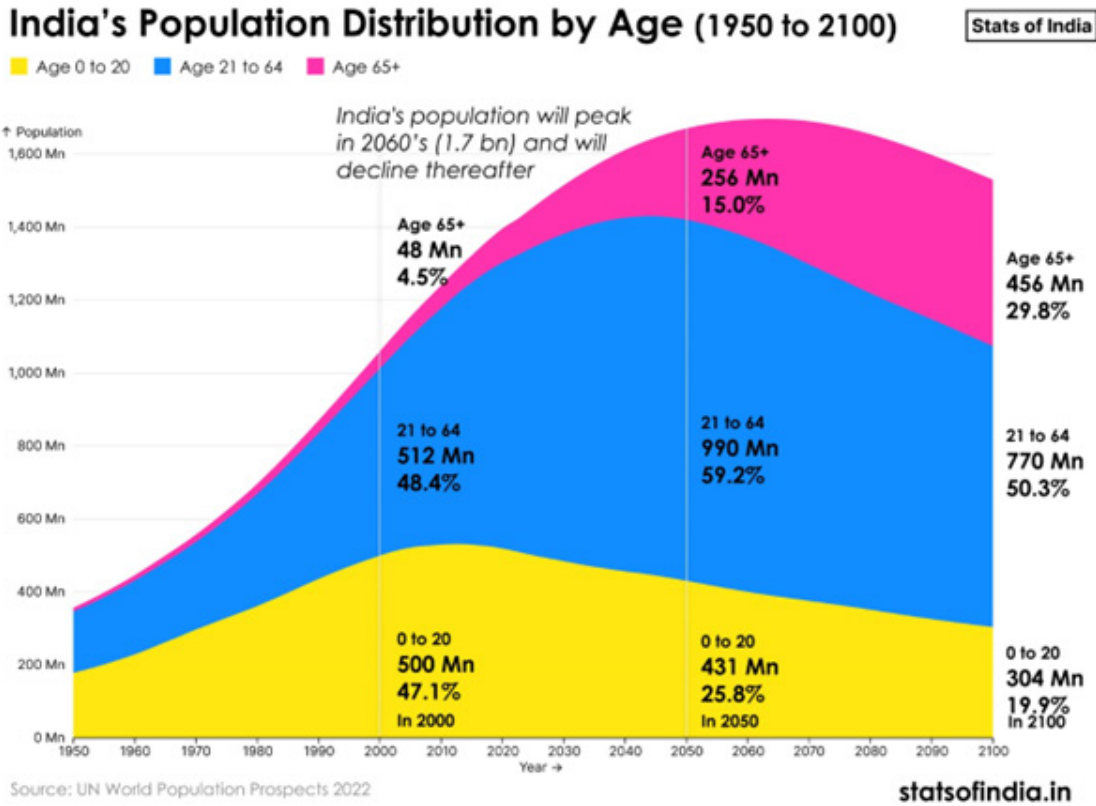
Employment growth is critically dependent on GDP growth and the structure of output. The growth rate of the working age population is projected to progressively fall from 1.2 % in 2023-24 to 0 % in 2048-49. In 2022-23, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), the worker population ratio, showing the number of employed persons





in the population above 15 years of age, increased to 51.8 % from 44.1 % in 2017-18, depicting an average increase of 1.5 % points per year. The non-agricultural growth will have to

be high enough to absorb labour released from agriculture which is estimated at 45.8 % in 2022-23 by the PLFS.

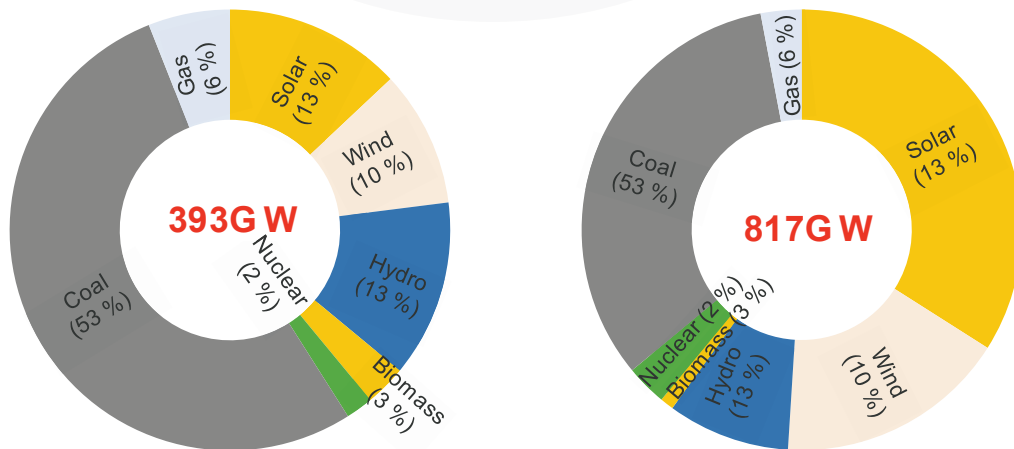


**FIGURE:** Chart representation of the population distribution by age. (1950-2100)

It should also be able to absorb the labour-substituting impact of new technology. Facilitating absorption of productivity-enhancing technologies including Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Generative AI would add to overall growth.

total carbon emissions by one billion tonnes between 2021 to 2030 and achieving the target of net zero emissions by 2070. India's own initiatives include the Green Grids Initiative (GGI) and One Sun One World One Grid (OSOWOG). It is also placing an emphasis on the use of electric vehicles and ethanol-based and hydrogen fuels. Climate-promoting technological changes may reduce the potential growth rate. This adverse impact can be minimised by emphasising service sector growth which is relatively climate friendly.

India has committed to certain targets to reduce carbon emissions in view of global climate concerns. In the COP26 Summit, in 2021, India had committed to reducing



**FIGURE:** (L) Pie chart representation of the share of sector in the domestic energy mix (2021). (R) Pie chart representation of the forecasted share of sector in the domestic energy mix (2030).



## GST RECEIPTS

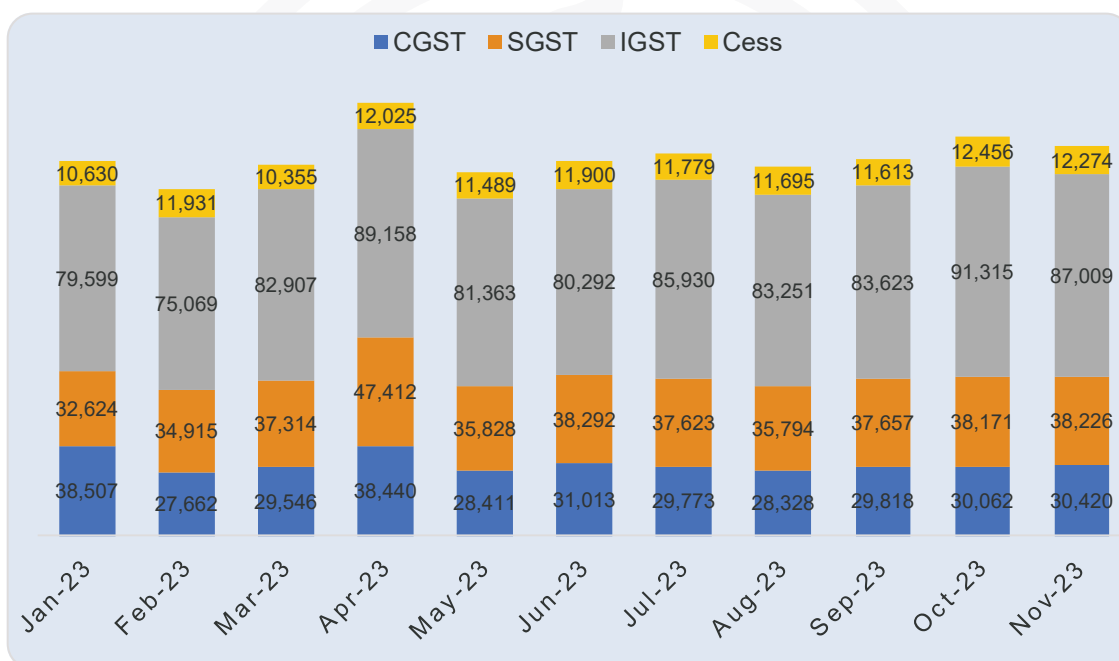
India's gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenues grew 15.1 % in November to hit nearly ₹ 1.68 lakh Cr., the third highest monthly tally so far from the indirect tax. The GST revenues in October marked the second highest monthly collections, November's kitty is the third highest. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) has yielded almost ₹ 3.4 lakh Cr. through October and November.

The average monthly collection so far in 2023-24 stands at ₹1.66 lakh Cr. October's GST inflows were up 13.4 % and November's by 15.1 %, with revenues from domestic transactions up 20 %, the highest in 14 months bolstered by festive fervour. Prior to this two-month spike, GST revenues had crossed ₹1.65 lakh Cr. on only three occasions, which were typically driven by year-end compliances., and economists believe central GST receipts may surpass Budget estimates even if one factors in a relative slowdown

in the final quarter of this year.

That certainty needs to be pursued at a broader level to provide genuine comfort to investors about India's tax regime being stable and predictable. For one, pending taxpayer appeals against central GST levies have risen by a quarter this year to hit nearly 15,000 cases by October and it is necessary that appellate tribunals cleared by the GST Council become operational at the earliest to unwind this pendency and set clear precedents for future tax treatment disputes.

The GST collections surpassed the 10-month high growth of 13.4 % in October. Taxes from domestic transactions and services imports rose over 20 %, noting the sixth time in this fiscal year that revenues have crossed ₹ 1.6 lakh Cr. Between April and November 2023, GST revenues are now up 11.9 % compared to the same period of 2022-23.



**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of components of GST receipts (Cr.) (on Y-o-Y basis).

November's revenues included Central GST of ₹ 30,420 Cr, State GST of ₹ 38,226 Cr and Integrated IGST of ₹ 87,009 Cr, which included ₹ 39,198 Cr collected on import of goods. GST Compensation Cess inflows stood at ₹ 12,274 Cr, including ₹ 1,036 Cr collected on import of goods.

Among the States, Manipur was the only one to record a negative growth in revenues as GST collections fell 21 %, while the Union Territory of Lakshadweep saw a 15 % drop. Revenues of 13 States grew at or higher than the 20 % pace averaged nationally from domestic transactions, led by Nagaland (99 %), Arunachal Pradesh (48 %) and Haryana (44 %).

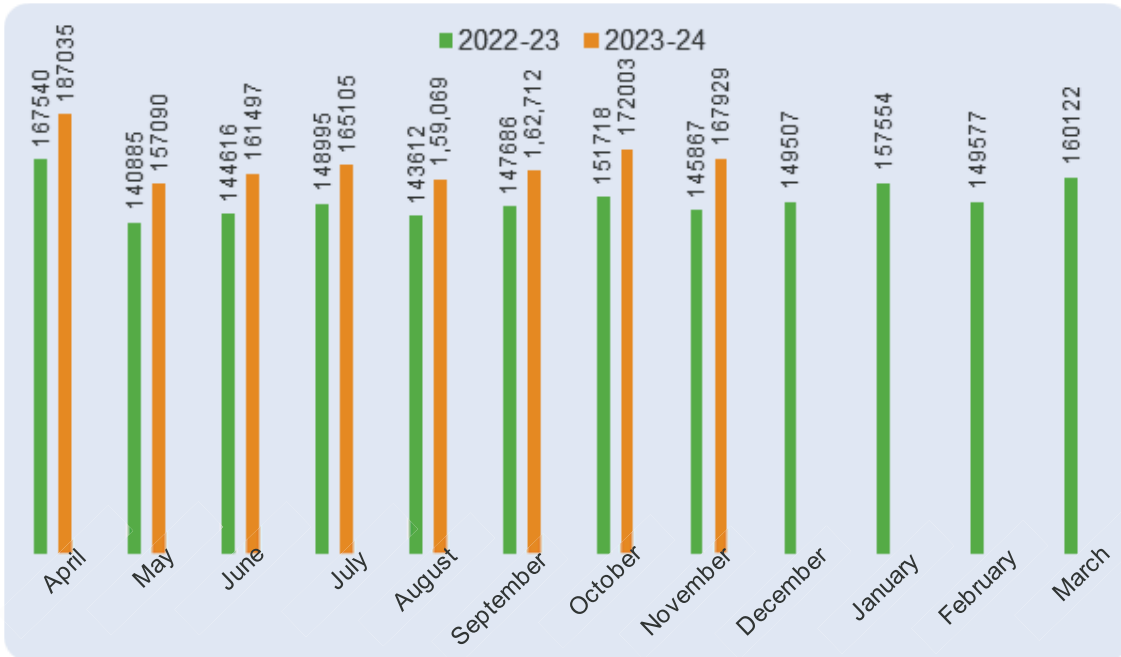


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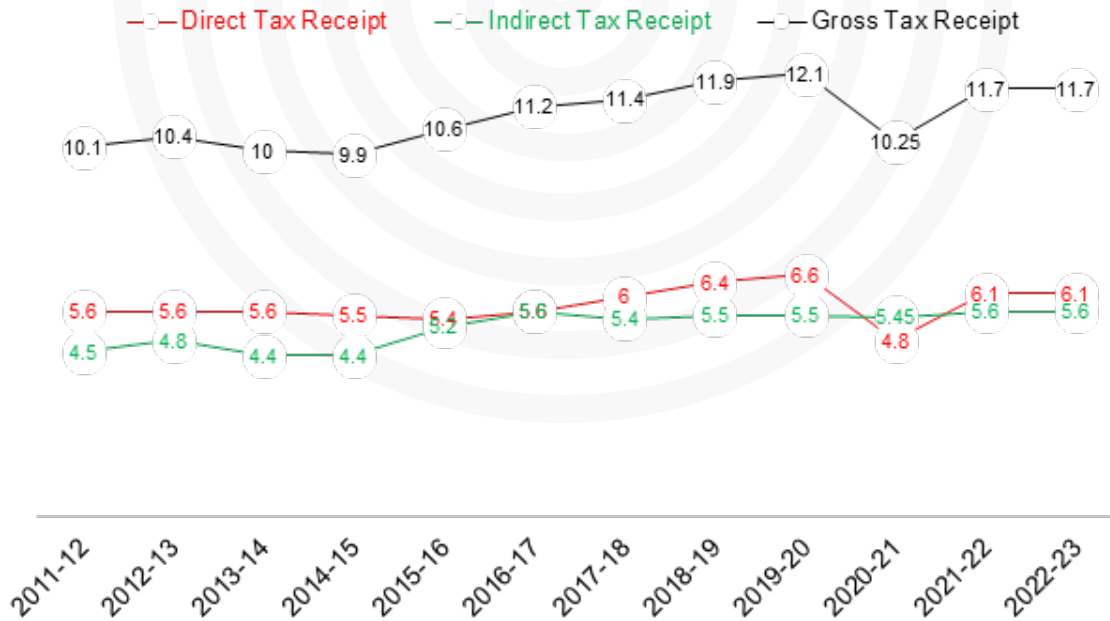




**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of Goods & Services Tax (GST) receipts (Cr.) (on Y-o-Y basis).

**TAX-GDP RATIO AND PUBLIC EXPENDITURE-GDP RATIO**

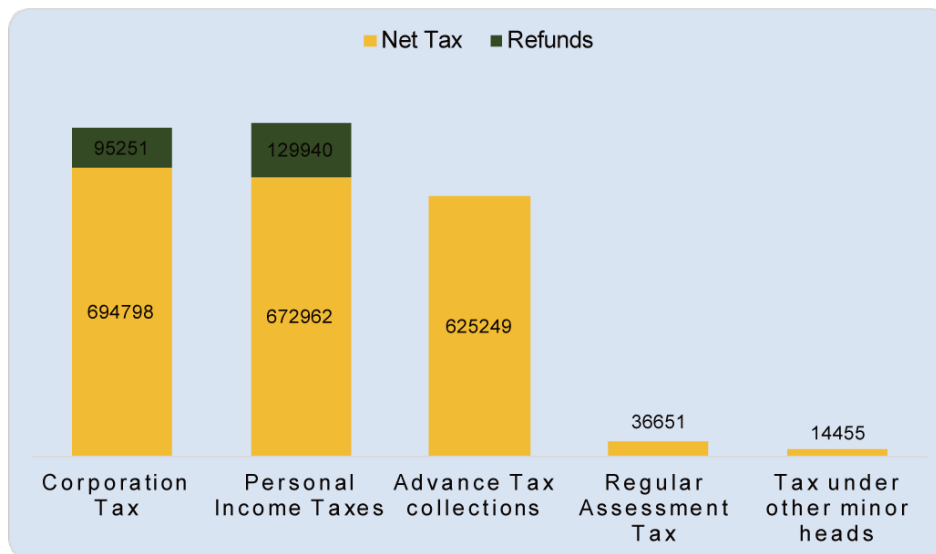
The Indian state is relatively small on the other metrics, such as the tax-GDP ratio and public expenditure-GDP ratio. Be it public goods provisions, welfare payments, or the justice system, it is a story of scarcity rather than surplus.



**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of Goods & Services Tax (GST) receipts (Cr.) (on Y-o-Y basis).

As on December 17, 2023, India's net direct tax collections had grown 20.7 % by December 17 to cross ₹ 13.70 lakh crore, indicating that 75.15 % of the year's direct tax target had been met. The net direct tax collection of ₹ 13,70,388 Cr. includes Corporation Tax (CIT) at ₹ 6,94,798 Cr. (net of refund) and Personal Income Tax (PIT) including Securities Transaction Tax (STT) at ₹ 6,72,962 Cr. (net of refund). Total Advance Tax collections so far this year stood at ₹ 6,25,249 Cr., reflecting a growth 19.94 % so far this year, with corporate taxes of ₹ 4,81,840 Cr. and personal income tax of ₹ 1,43,404 Cr. A little over ₹ 22,000 Cr. of refunds

have been effected in December, as per the ministry's data which showed total tax refunds stood at ₹ 2,25,251 Cr. as of Sunday, from about ₹ 2.03 lakh Cr. by November 30. Gross direct tax collections stood at ₹ 15,95,639 Cr., which included CIT of ₹ 7,90,049 Cr. and ₹ 8,02,902 Cr. from Personal Income Tax and Securities Transaction Tax. Minor head-wise collection comprises Advance Tax of ₹ 6,25,249 Cr.; Tax Deducted at Source of ₹ 7,70,606 Cr.; Self-Assessment Tax of ₹ 1,48,677 Cr.; Regular Assessment Tax of ₹ 36,651 Cr.; and Tax under other minor heads of ₹ 14,455 Cr.



**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of different components of direct tax receipts (Cr.) (as on December 17, 2023).

### PUBLIC DEBT

Indebtedness of a State is measured as the ratio of its debt to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). Before COVID-19, the debt-GSDP ratio was at 28-29 %. The Aggregate Gross Fiscal Deficit (GFD) as a ratio of GSDP is expected to remain at 2.5, well below the mandated level of 3 under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act.

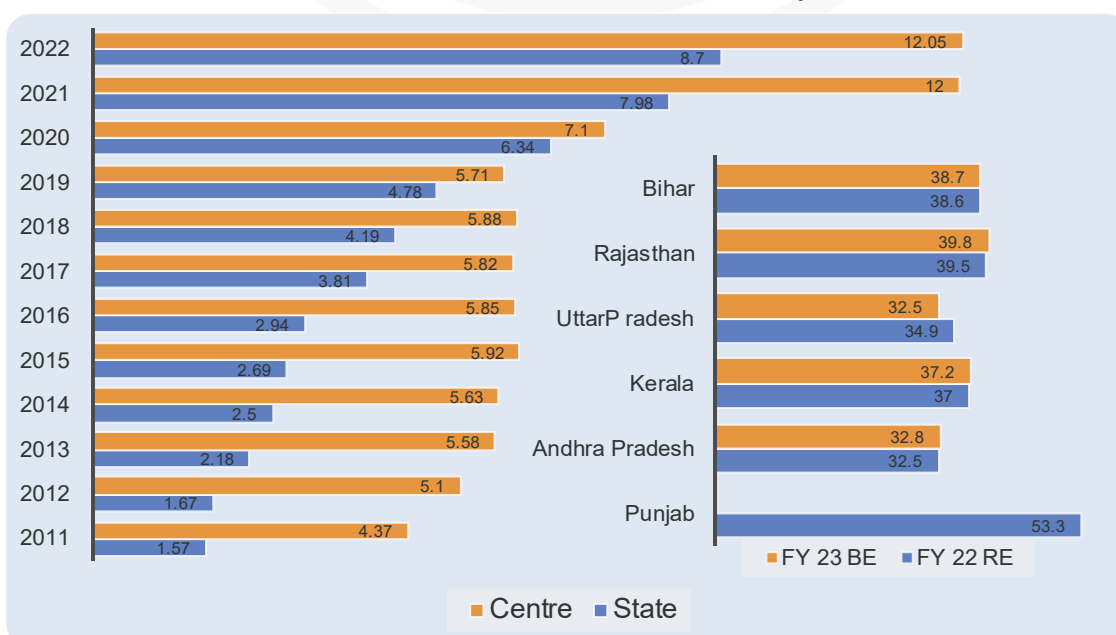
States' debt will remain elevated at 31-32 % of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) amid higher capital outlays and moderate revenue growth this fiscal, with overall borrowings likely to rise by 9 % to more than ₹ 87 lakh crore.

With lower-than-expected revenue growth, States are forced to borrow more to expand capital outlays, besides meeting high committed revenue expenditure related to salaries, pensions and interest costs. The debt-GSDP ratio is expected to hover at 31-32 % of the gross domestic output. The report is based on the numbers

available from the top 18 States accounting for 90 % of the aggregate GSDP.

The Finance Ministry allowed States to tap about ₹ 2.04 lakh crore as additional borrowings over their net borrowing limits for the year. The Centre had allowed 22 States to raise additional borrowings of almost ₹61,000 crore this year on top of their net borrowing ceilings of 3 % of Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP). The extra borrowing ceiling was granted to States who met their pension liabilities by making required contributions to the National Pension System (NPS), which oversees the retirement savings of government employees since 2004.

Moreover, States are eligible to raise a little more than ₹ 1.43 lakh crore this year, based on the recommendations of the Ministry of Power. This is linked to the Fifteenth Finance Commission's (FFC) suggestion to grant States an additional borrowing space of 0.5 % of GSDP as a performance-based incentive for carrying out reforms in the power sector that improve operational and economic efficiency at the State level.



**FIGURE:** Bar chart representation of debt in lakh Crore (₹). (Inset) Bar chart representation of State's debt to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP).





## SPECIAL ASSISTANCE FOR CAPITAL EXPENDITURES

The Centre had released ₹ 60,307.19 Cr. to States as Special Assistance (loan) for Capital Expenditure, less than half of the ₹1.3 lakh Cr. allocated for special assistance loans to States to undertake capital expenditure with a little more than a quarter to go in financial year 2023-24. The scheme provides 50-year interest-free loans for State capex and was introduced in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21.

Four States – Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Punjab and Manipur – have not been given any funds as they failed to meet the specified eligibility criteria under the scheme. Before their disqualification this year, Andhra Pradesh had availed ₹ 7,285 Cr. under the scheme, while Kerala and Punjab had utilised ₹ 2,222.7 Cr. and ₹ 1,318.2 Cr., respectively, followed by Manipur at almost ₹ 1,000 Cr.

The scheme began with an allocation of ₹ 12,000 Cr., it was raised to ₹ 15,000 Cr. in 2021-22. States had availed almost the entire allocations in those two years. In 2022-23, when the outlay was increased sharply to ₹1.07 lakh Cr., States availed a little over ₹ 81,000 Cr. The States that have received the highest amount of funds as capex loans so far in this financial year are Uttar Pradesh (₹ 12,458.4 Cr.), Bihar (₹ 6,135.5 Cr.) and Madhya Pradesh (₹ 5,325.6 Cr.).

In recent years, there has been considerable slippage in achieving the fiscal responsibility targets. It is important to ensure that the combined fiscal deficit and debt to GDP ratios are brought down to 6 % and 60 %, respectively, so that the burden of interest payments relative to revenue receipts is kept within acceptable limits. This would enable achieving a balance or surplus on the revenue account of the central and State governments, which in turn would reduce government dissavings and augment the overall savings rate of the economy.

In the next two years, a growth rate of 6.5% seems feasible. This represents, partially, a recovery from the low growth rate in the COVID-19 period. Over the medium term, India's growth performance will be adversely affected by many factors, both domestic and external.

Raising the savings and investment rates, improving the skill acquisition of the young entrants to the labour market and adopting a technology mix which is employment friendly are issues on which the country must focus to achieve a growth rate of 7 % to 7.5 %.

### MANUFACTURING RECOVERY AND SERVICES SECTOR GROWTH:

**MANUFACTURING PMI:** Manufacturing sector activity rebounded slightly in November from October's eight-month low pace, as per the seasonally-adjusted S&P Global

India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) that rose to 56 from 55.5, but positive sentiment among firms dropped to the lowest level in seven months. New orders improved at a better pace than October's one-year low, but the uptick in export orders was the slowest since June. Manufacturers scaled up production volumes and output expanded sharply and at an above-trend pace with total new sales rising and demand conditions remaining positive. Manufacturing employment among firms surveyed for the index increased for the eighth successive month, but at a moderate pace. The uptick in output was aided by input costs inflation easing to a 40-month low and producers opted to raise output costs at the slowest pace in seven months. Prices for raw materials and components still rose in November, but improved availability at suppliers amid subdued global demand for inputs led to a considerable retreat in cost pressures. While there were some concerns over prices increasing in the near-term, collectively India's manufacturing economy is in good shape. Surveyed firms' outlook on future prospects remained favourable in November, with firms seeing opportunities in the form of demand strength, marketing initiatives and new client enquiries. However, overall positive sentiment slipped to a seven-month low amid rising inflation expectations.

**SERVICES PMI:** As per the seasonally adjusted S&P Global India Services Business Activity Index, India's services sector momentum faltered to a one-year low in November with widespread slowdowns in growth rates for new orders and output. The S&P Global India Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) slid from 58.4 in October to 56.9 in November. The S&P Global India Composite PMI Output Index eased to 57.4, from 58.4 in October. New export orders for services firms grew at the slowest pace since June even as input costs and output prices rose at an eight-month low rate. While firms surveyed remained positive about business prospects in the year ahead, there was some evidence of optimism fading due to worries about faster inflation. Outstanding business volumes were broadly stable among services firms, which triggered a restrained approach to fresh hiring. Though net employment still expanded, it was at a pace that was the weakest since April. Firms reported a further increase in operating expenses, with labour, food, material and transportation costs rising since October, but the overall uptick was below the long-run average. Consumer services firms recorded the highest rate of input cost inflation. However, the pace at which prices were raised was above the long-run trend, despite being the slowest in eight months. The strongest upturn in selling prices was evident in finance and insurance. India's service sector has lost further growth momentum midway through the third fiscal quarter, but we continue to see robust demand for services fuelling new business intakes and output. With some relief on costs, fewer firms raised their own fees in November, an aspect that might provide a further boost to demand as 2023 draws to a close.



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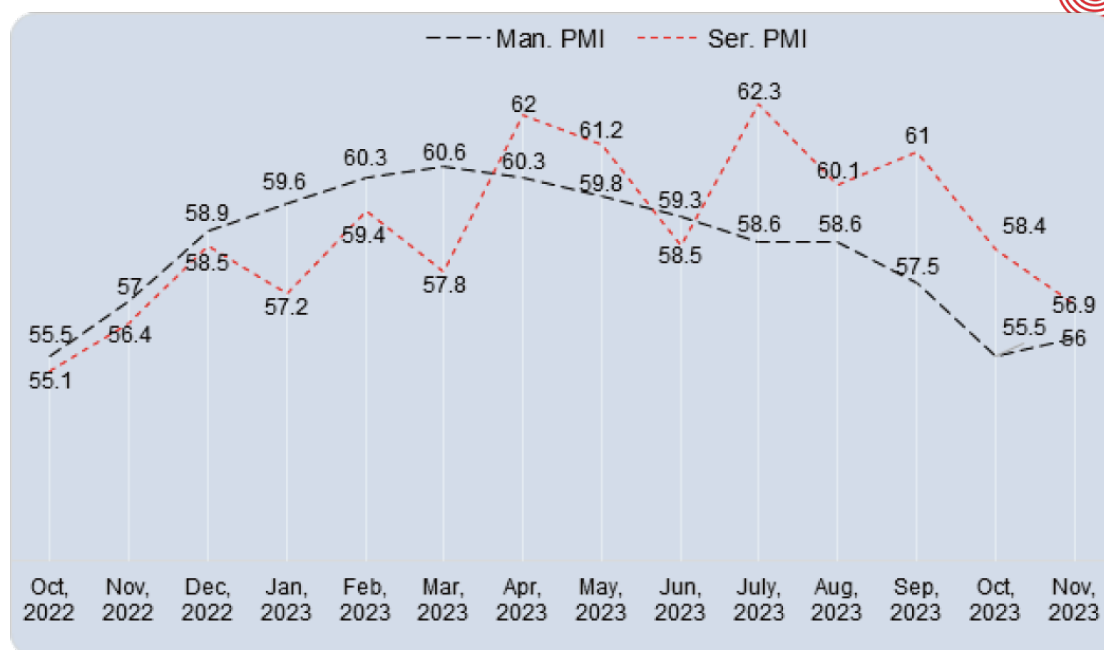
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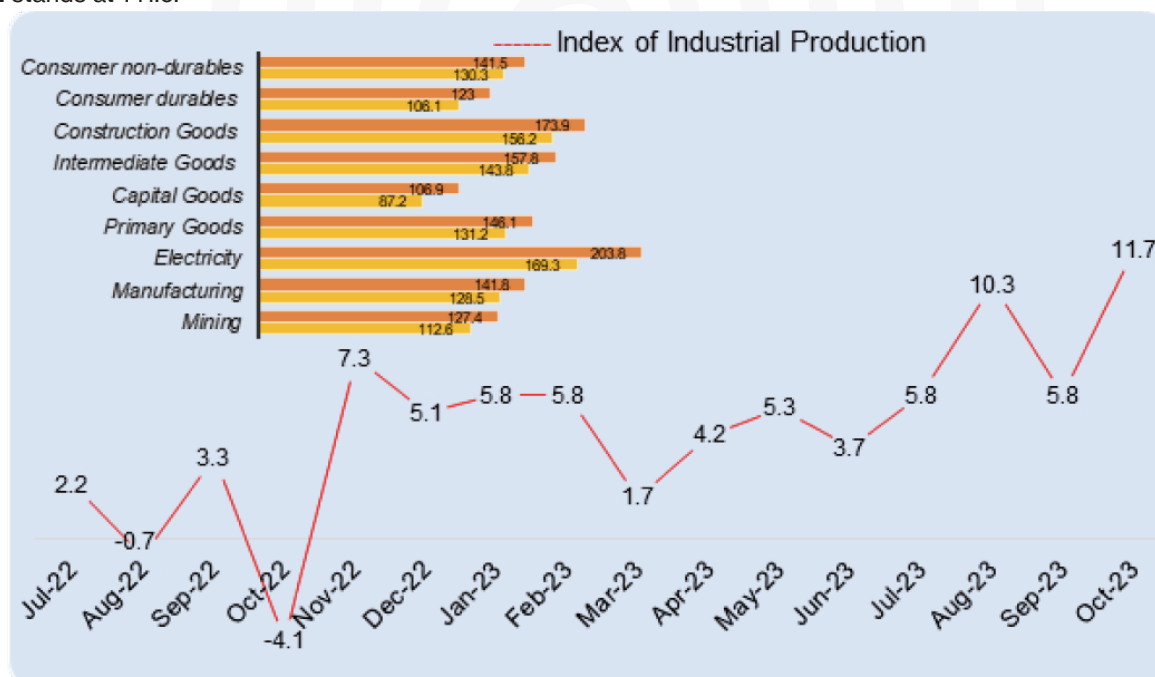
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**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of the monthly S&P Global India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) and Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI).

### INDEX OF INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

The Quick Estimates of Index of Industrial Production (IIP) for the month of October 2023 with Base Year (BY) 2011-12 stands at 141.6.

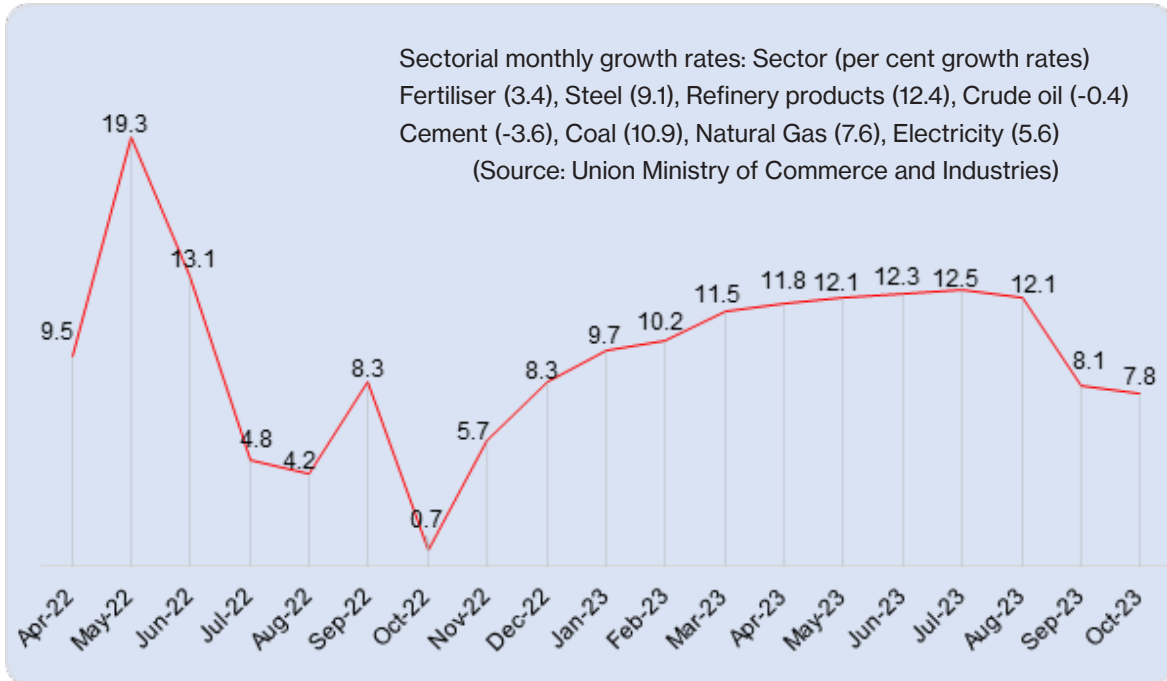


**FIGURE:** Line chart representation of the Index of Industrial Production growth rates (on Y-o-Y basis in per cent). Inset: Bar chart representation of the Indices of Industrial Productions of major items.

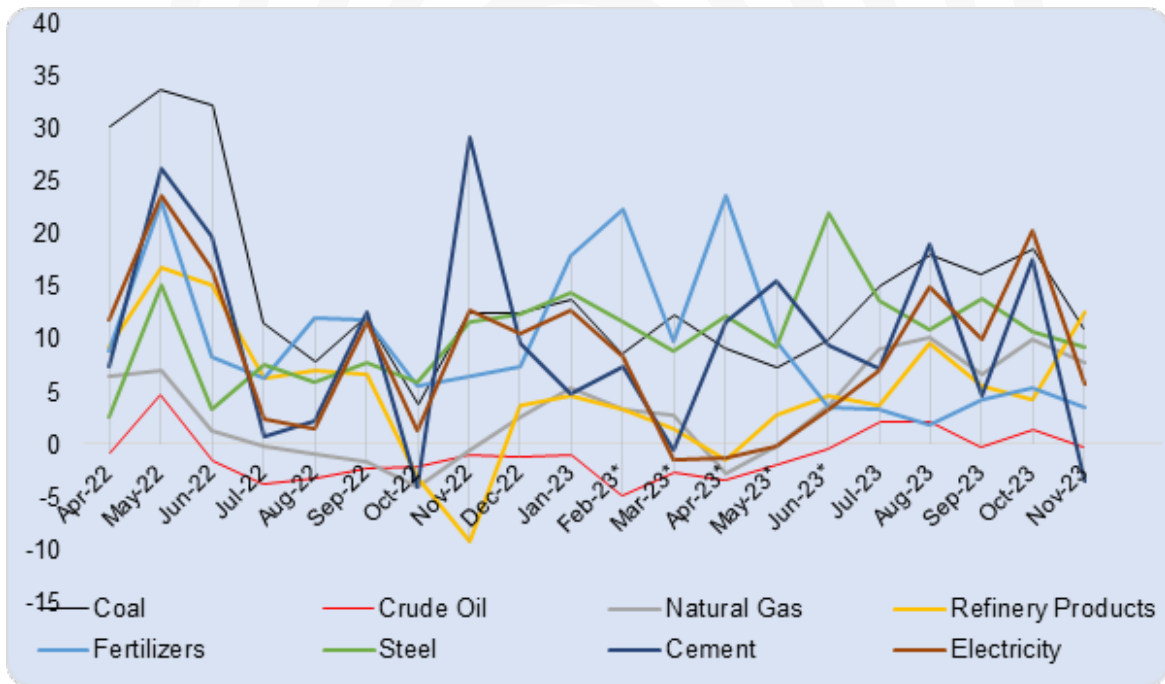
### CORE SECTOR INDUSTRIES

The combined Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) increased by 7.8 % (provisional) in November 2023 as compared to the Index of November 2022. The production of coal, electricity, fertilizers, natural gas, refinery products and steel recorded positive growth in November 2023. The details of annual and monthly indices and growth rates are provided at Annex I and Annex II respectively. The ICI measures combined and individual performance of production of eight core industries viz. cement, coal, crude oil, electricity, fertilizers, natural gas, refinery products and steel. The Eight Core Industries comprise 40.27 % of the weight of items included in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP). The final growth rate of Index of Eight Core Industries for August 2023 is revised to 13.4 %. The cumulative growth rate of ICI during April to November, 2023-24 is 8.6 % (provisional) as compared to the corresponding period of last year.





**FIGURE:** Line chart representation of the core sector growth rates (on Y-o-Y basis in per cent)



**FIGURE:** Line chart representation of the sub-sectorial growth rates (on Y-o-Y basis in per cent) of core sector industries.

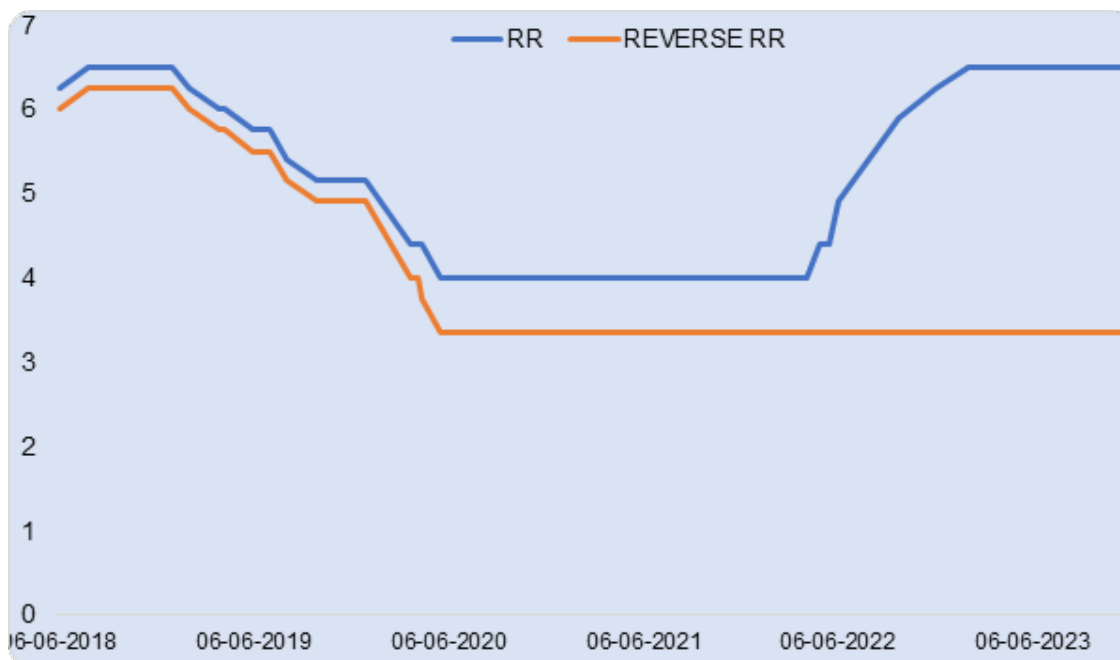
**RBI BI MONTHLY POLICY REVIEW**

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its Bi Monthly Policy Review unanimously decided to keep key interest rates unchanged at 6.5%. The objective of the monetary policy is not only to achieve 4% inflation but to maintain it at that level on a durable basis and it is not possible to provide a “forward guidance” in the current scenario when there is excessive uncertainty. The target of 4% inflation is yet to be reached.

India’s retail inflation has declined from an average of 7.1% in April-October 2022 to 5.4% in the corresponding period of 2023. Retail inflation is now stable and within the notified tolerance band of 2% to 6%, adding that the pace

of price rise had been “mostly within acceptable limits” since the introduction of the tolerance band in 2016.

Consumer prices rose at a three-month high pace of 5.55% in November from 4.87% in October, with food price inflation surging to 8.7% from 6.6% driven by a surge in the inflation rate for vegetables, pulses, fruits, and sugar. Temporary increases in inflation “on a few occasions were caused by demand-supply mismatches arising out of global shocks and adverse weather conditions” and the government and the Reserve Bank of India had helped resolve such mismatches and reined in inflation through proactive supply-side initiatives and effective demand stabilisation measures.



**FIGURE:** Line chart representing the Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF). Source: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Handbook of Statistics

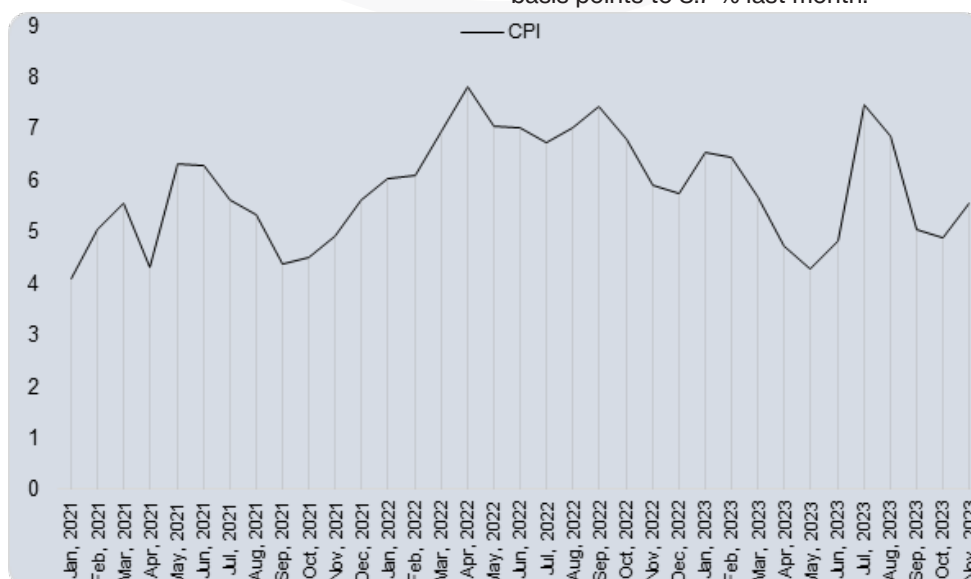
The retail inflation has moderated since the MPC last met in early October, with the headline reading softening by almost two percentage points, from August's 6.83 % to 4.87 % in October. The RBI's latest 'Households' Inflation Expectations Survey', undertaken in November, reveals that most households expect faster inflation in the three-months- ahead and one-year-ahead time horizons, and at median levels of 9.1% and 10.1%, respectively, unequivocally underlining the fact that price gain expectations are still far from durably anchored.

The RBI Monetary Policy Committee flagged food price shocks-induced volatility in inflation. The "uncertainties in food prices along with unfavourable base effects are likely to lead to" headline inflation quickening in November-December, and that "recurring food price shocks are impeding the ongoing disinflation process" forced RBI to keep repo rate unchanged at 6.5 % for a fifth

straight bi-monthly meeting.

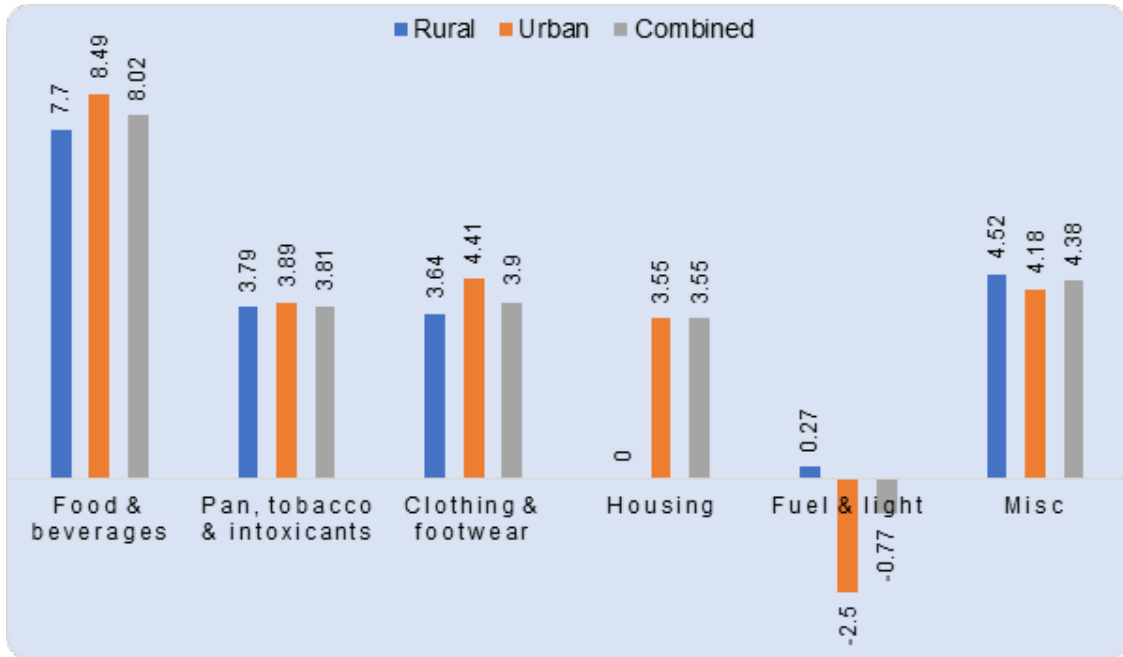
The Central Bank has cited robust investment, besides continued strengthening in manufacturing, buoyancy in construction and a gradual rural recovery to upgrade its projection for real GDP growth in the fiscal year ending in March 2024 to 7 %, from 6.5 % as recently as in October. The CPI inflation would ease to an average of 4.6 % in the first three quarters of 2024-25 from CPI inflation rate of 5.6 % in November as the recurrence of food price spikes punctured a brief respite in September and October.

The RBI predicted a likely 'uptick' in headline retail inflation. The National Statistical Office's provisional reading of headline inflation shows the Consumer Price Index rose by 5.55 % year-on-year to a three-month high, from October's 4.87 %, food price gains measured by the Consumer Food Price Index accelerated by a step 209 basis points to 8.7 % last month.



**FIGURE:** Line chart representation of retail price index-based inflation rates. Inset. Bar chart representation of the of All India Retail Price Indices for food articles and Rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for November, 2023.





**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of All India Wholesale Price Indices based rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for November, 2023.

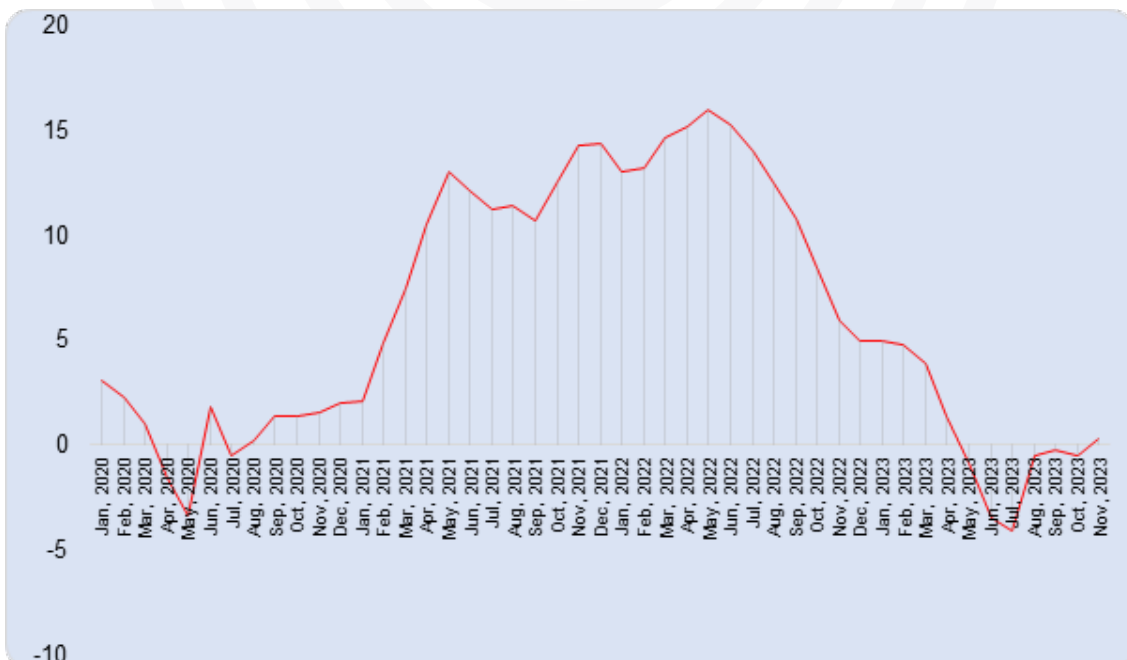
Among the 22 major States that the National Statistical Office computes inflation rates for, Odisha recorded the highest inflation at 7.65 % in November, followed by Rajasthan at 7 %, and Haryana with 6.8 %.

The inflation rate was above the central bank's tolerance threshold of 6 % in eight States, including Gujarat, Bihar, Punjab, Karnataka and Telangana. Uttar Pradesh, with a 5.56 % inflation, was the only other major State to

witness higher inflation than the national average of 5.55%.

### WHOLESALE PRICE INFLATION

After seven successive months of deflation, India's wholesale prices rose 0.26 % in November, with primary food articles seeing a sharp 8.2 % uptick, fuelled by a 21.6 % spurt in pulses, 10 %-plus rise in vegetables and paddy, and onion prices more than doubling from a year earlier to rise 101 %.



**FIGURE:** Line chart representation of wholesale price index-based inflation rates. Inset. Bar chart representation of the All India Wholesale Price Indices for food articles and Rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for November, 2023.



**INDIA'S LARGEST ONLINE IAS COACHING ACADEMY**

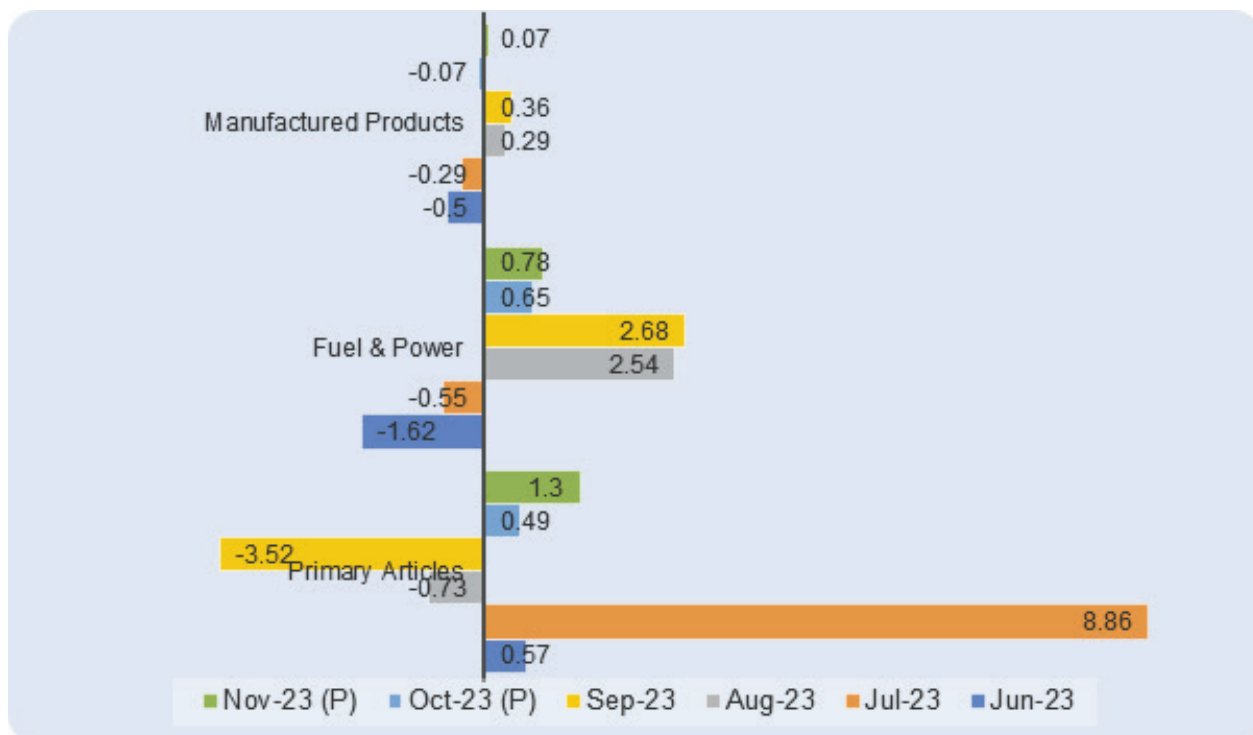


FIGURE: Line chart representation of topic-based wholesale price index-based inflation rates. Inset. Bar chart representation of the of All India Wholesale Price Indices for and Rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for November, 2023.

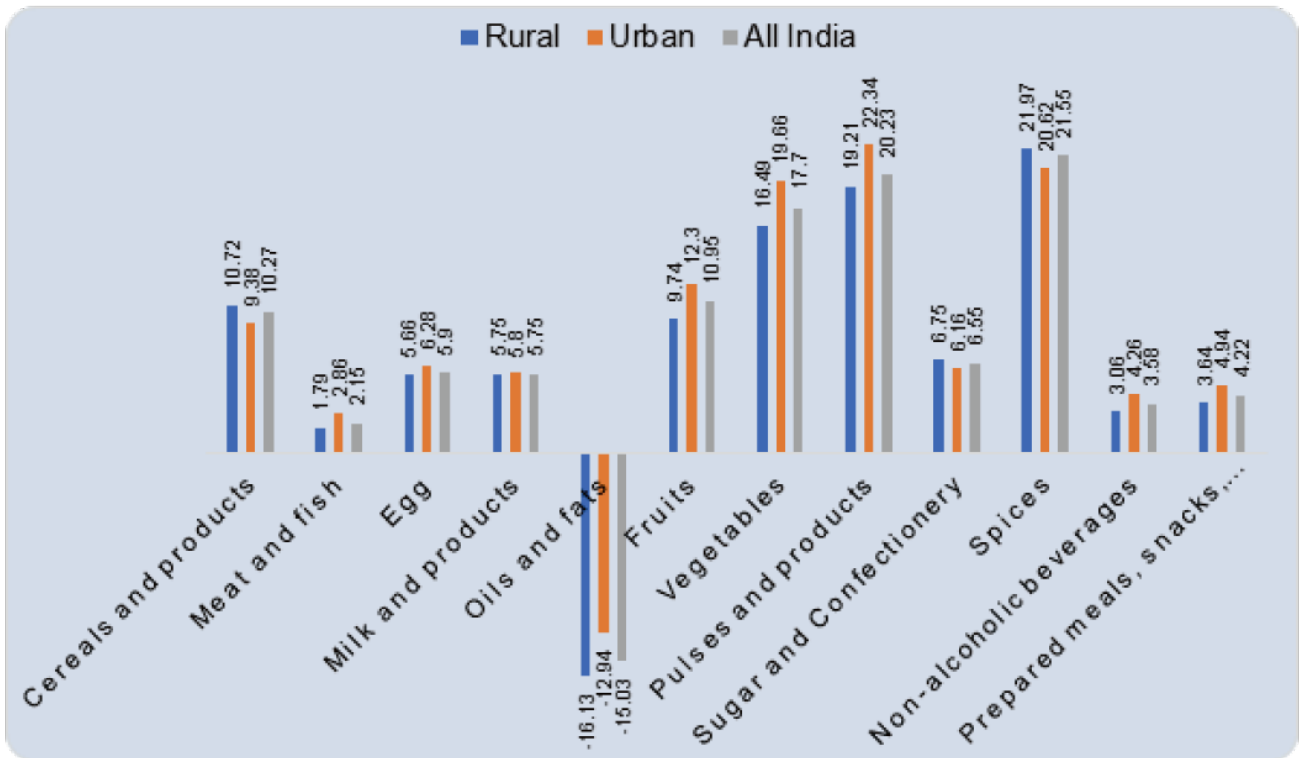
The annual rate of inflation based on all India Wholesale Price Index (WPI) number is 0.26 % (Provisional) for the month of November, 2023 (over November, 2022). Positive rate of inflation in November, 2023 is primarily due to increase in prices of food articles, minerals, machinery & equipment, computer, electronics & optical products, motor vehicles, other transport equipment and other manufacturing etc.

Cereals and vegetables, constituents of the 'food and beverages' subgroup, that logged 10.3 % and 17.7 % inflation, respectively propel the upsurge in food prices. Cereals, that account for almost one-tenth of the CPI and logged double-digit inflation for a 15th straight month, also saw a month-on-month acceleration in inflation with rice, wheat, and the coarse cereal of jowar, a rural hinterland staple, all registering palpable sequential price gains. Vegetable prices were back on a boil with the year-on-year inflation rate surging by almost 15 percentage points from October's 2.8 %. While price gains in the perishable tomato swung from two straight months of sizeable deflation to a more than 11 % year-on-year rate of inflation last month, the extent of increase could be truly gauged from the fact that prices surged a steep 41 % from the preceding month's levels, as per data aggregated on the Centre for Monitoring

Indian Economy's website. And the key masala essentials of ginger and garlic registered more than 100 % rates of inflation for the seventh and third months, respectively.

From the TOP or tomato, onion and potato triumvirate of India's most widely consumed vegetables, onion prices remained the biggest source of concern as year-on-year inflation ballooned to 86 %, from October's 42 % pace, and the sequential pace swelled to 48%. With reports that inclement weather and depleting groundwater are likely to cause a near 25% shortfall in onion output during the key rabi season, the outlook for prices of the nutrient-dense bulb moderating in the near future appears bleak, the government's move to impose a ban on its exports notwithstanding. Only potato prices, which continued to remain in deflationary territory, offered some respite. Pulses and sugar are other areas of concern, with the first witnessing more than 20 % inflation and the sweetener also experiencing an uptick in the pace of price gains to 6.55 %. With sugar production also expected to take a hit due to lower rainfall, the number of supply-related challenges policymakers face to rein in price gains is rising. With the RBI having opted to refrain from raising rates for now, the onus is squarely on the government to help temper inflation, or risk suffering an erosion in broader consumption and economic growth.





**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of the retail inflation

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Shaktikanta Das, who will outline the Monetary Policy Committee's decisions on Friday, is expected to convey a continuation of the central bank's hawkish stance with a pause on interest rates, but may reset growth and inflation projections for 2023-24 in view of the second quarter growth numbers and food inflation worries.

While retail inflation had eased to 4.87 % in October, the rise in food prices remained sticky at 6.6 % and may have risen further in November as prices of

onions, tomatoes and pulses have hardened since. The RBI had forecast an average inflation rate of 5.6% in the current quarter, based on which November and December may yet experience an almost 6% inflation rate.

For the full year, the RBI had projected an average inflation rate of 5.4 % and real GDP growth of 6.5 %, which may need a revisit as growth in Q2 overshoot its estimate of 6.5 % for the quarter to touch 7.8 %. There can be upward revision in the GDP growth numbers though they will not be very significant, expecting a status quo on rates and policy stance in the bi-monthly review.




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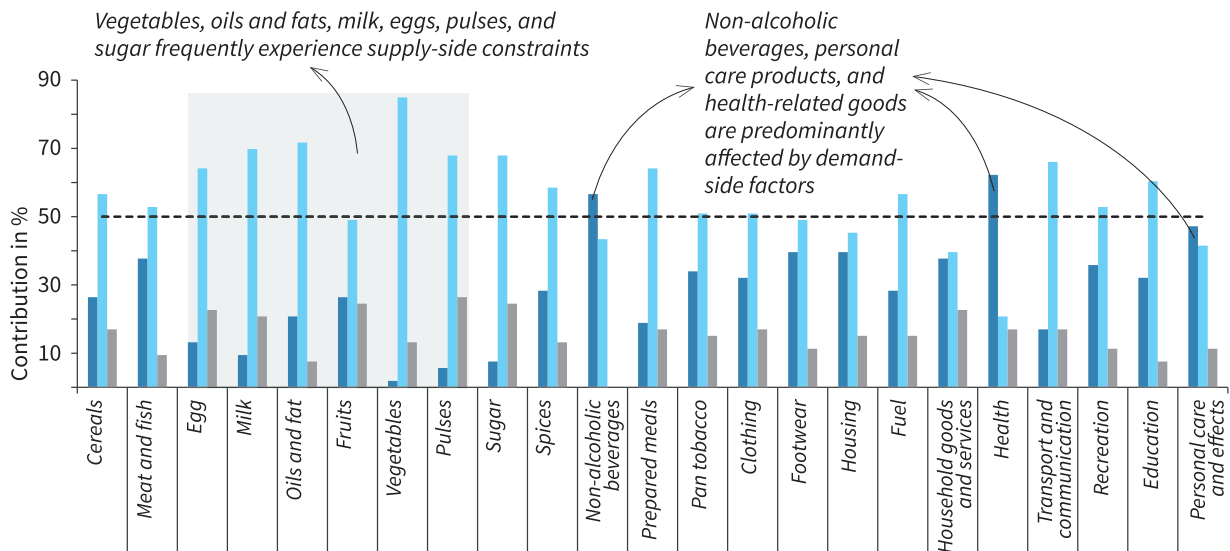
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# Drivers of inflation

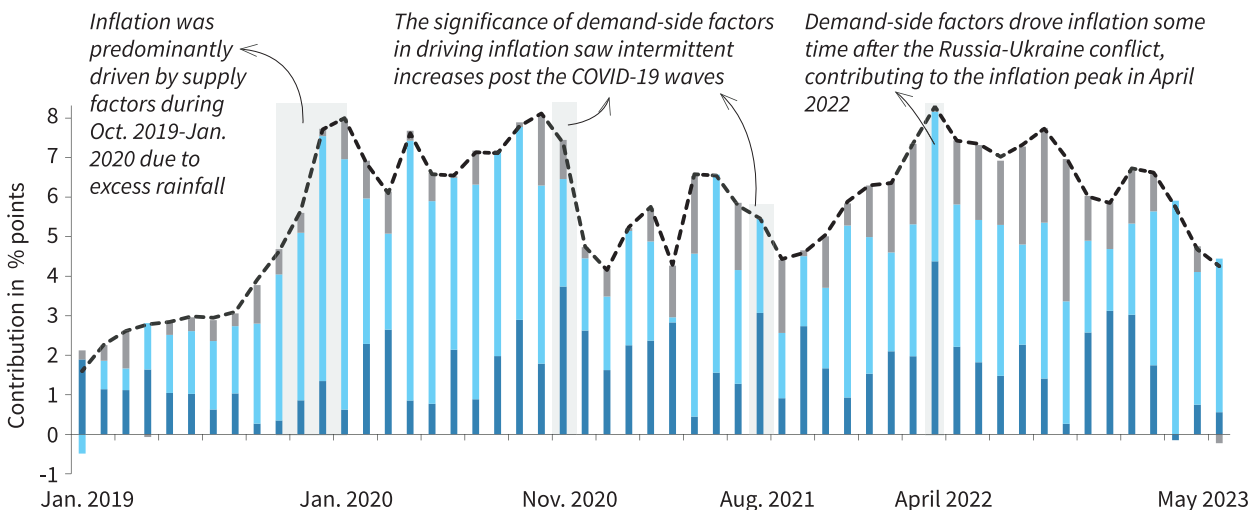
The charts and text are based on the RBI article titled, 'Recent Inflation Dynamics in India: Role of Supply vis-à-vis Demand' by Himani Shekhar, Vimal Kishore and Binod B. Bhoi



**Chart 1:** The chart shows the percentage contribution of demand and supply factors to CPI sub-groups level inflation between January 2019 and May 2023. ■ Supply factors ■ Demand factors ■ Ambiguous factors



**Chart 2:** The chart shows the contribution of demand and supply factors to CPI Inflation excluding housing, each month, between January 2019 and May 2023. ■ Supply factors ■ Demand factors ■ Ambiguous factors --- CPI Inflation

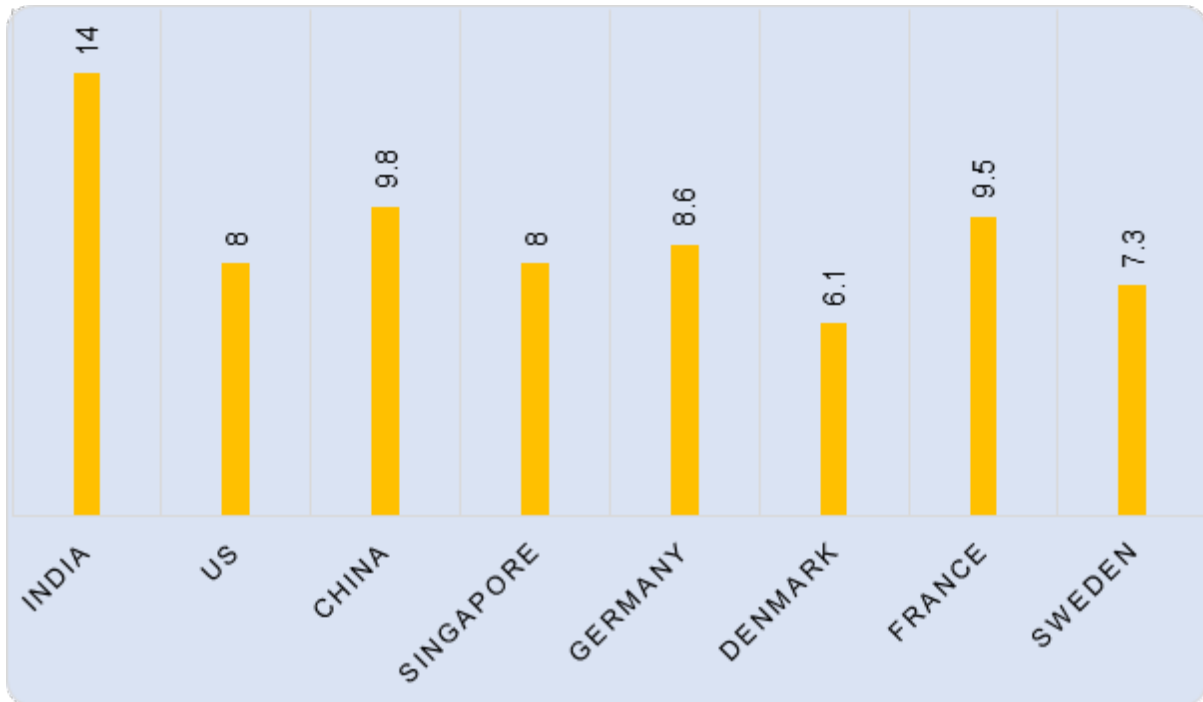






### LOGISTICS COSTS TO DROP

As per a report by the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) commissioned by the Commerce and Industry Ministry, India's logistics costs had reduced from a range of 8.6 % to 9.8 % in 2013-14 to 7.8 % - 8.9 % of GDP in 2021-22.



**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of the logistics cost as a per centage of GDP

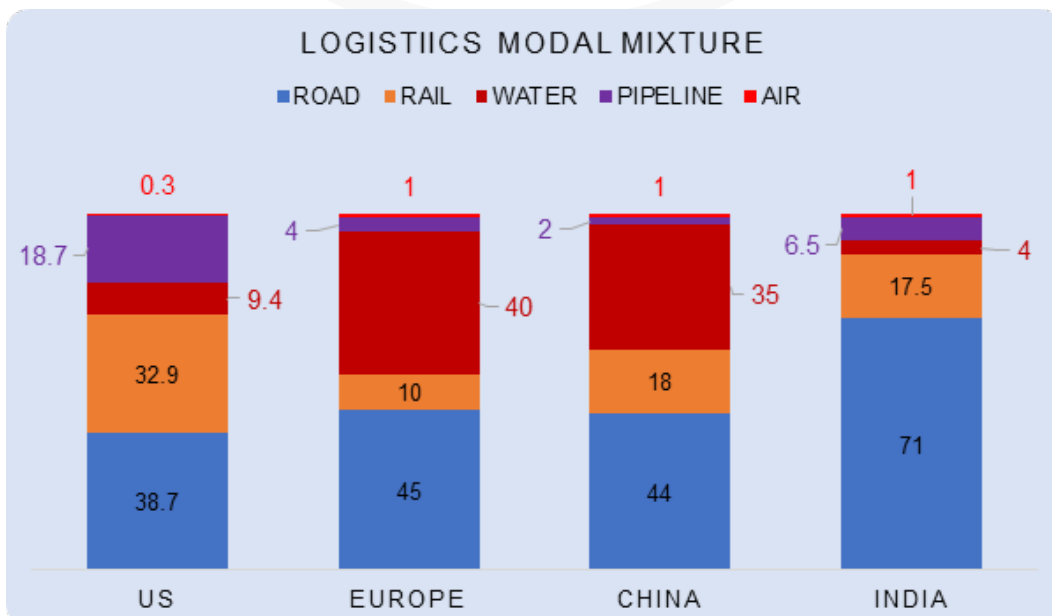
The estimate, which relied on National Accounts Statistics for data such as the output of transport services, storage and warehousing sectors, dispels earlier estimates that pegged the country's logistics costs as high as 14% of GDP. This range is a ballpark estimate and must not be interpreted as the contribution of logistics to GDP in terms of income and job creation, but as an absolute cost measure used for cross-country comparison.

export basket but also of products and countries.

- **OBJECTIVE:** Promote the seamless movement of goods and enhancing the competitiveness of the industry.
- **SIGNIFICANCE:** Employs more than 22 million people and expected to grow at the rate of 10.5 % over the next 5 years.
- **ISSUE:** Highly fragmented and complex logistics system result in logistics cost, approximately 13-14 % of GDP, compared to 2 – 5 % for other developed economies.

### NATIONAL LOGISTICS POLICY - 2022

- **SIGNIFICANCE:** Backbone of India's international trade and will help in the diversification of not only India's



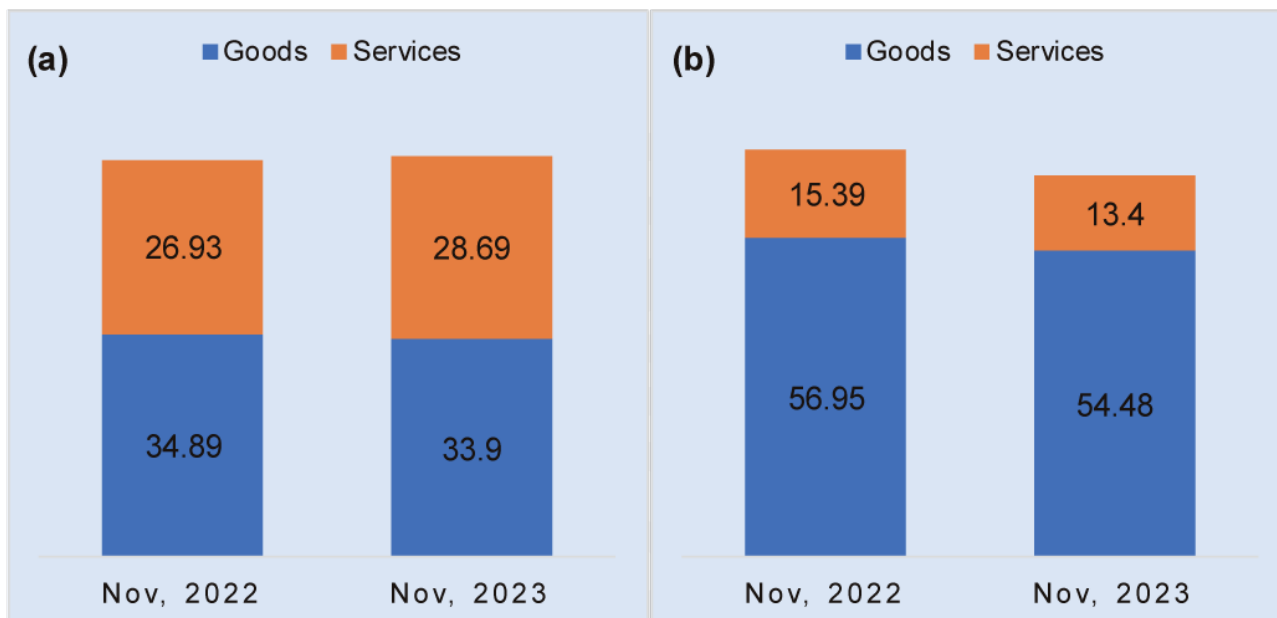
**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of the logistics modal mixture.

## TRANSBORDER TRADE

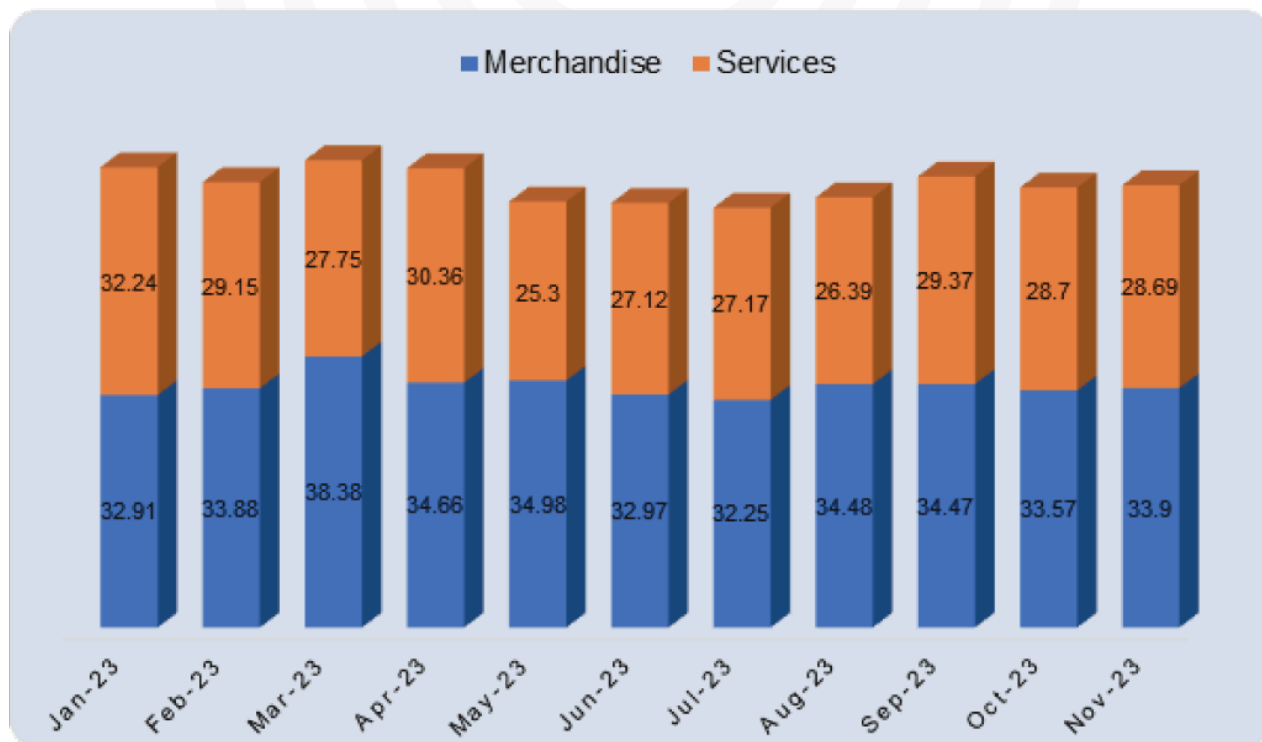
India's goods exports slipped back into contraction, dropping 2.83 % in November to \$ 33.9 billion, while imports fell by a sharper 4.33 % to \$ 54.48 billion. India's merchandise trade deficit unexpectedly shrunk in November, with a better-than-expected performance of exports resulting in a narrower deficit than our projection of \$23.5 billion. The monthly trade deficit is estimated to

hover in the range of \$20 billion to 25 billion through the rest of 2023-24.

Between April and November, merchandise exports are now 6.5% lower at \$278.8 billion, while imports have dropped 8.7 % to \$ 445.15 billion. At \$ 166.35 billion, the trade deficit so far this fiscal is 12.1 % narrower than in the same period last year when several commodity prices had shot up after the conflict in Ukraine.

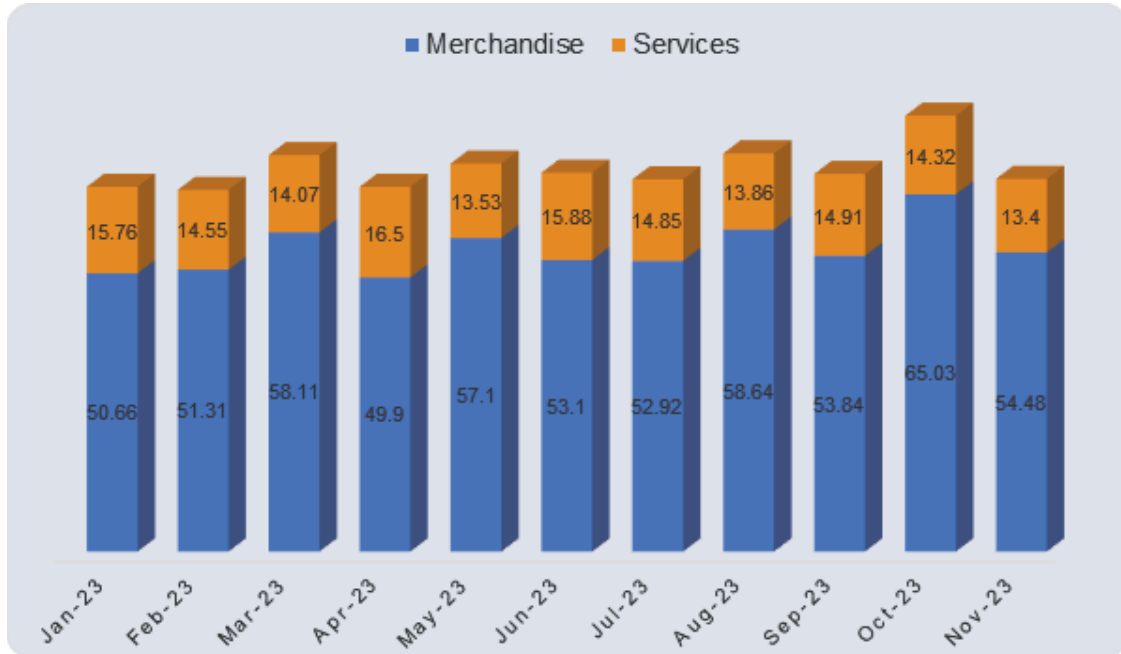


**FIGURE:** (L) Column chart representation of monthly value of exports of goods and services. (R) Column chart representation of monthly value of imports of goods and services.



**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of monthly value of merchandise and services exports

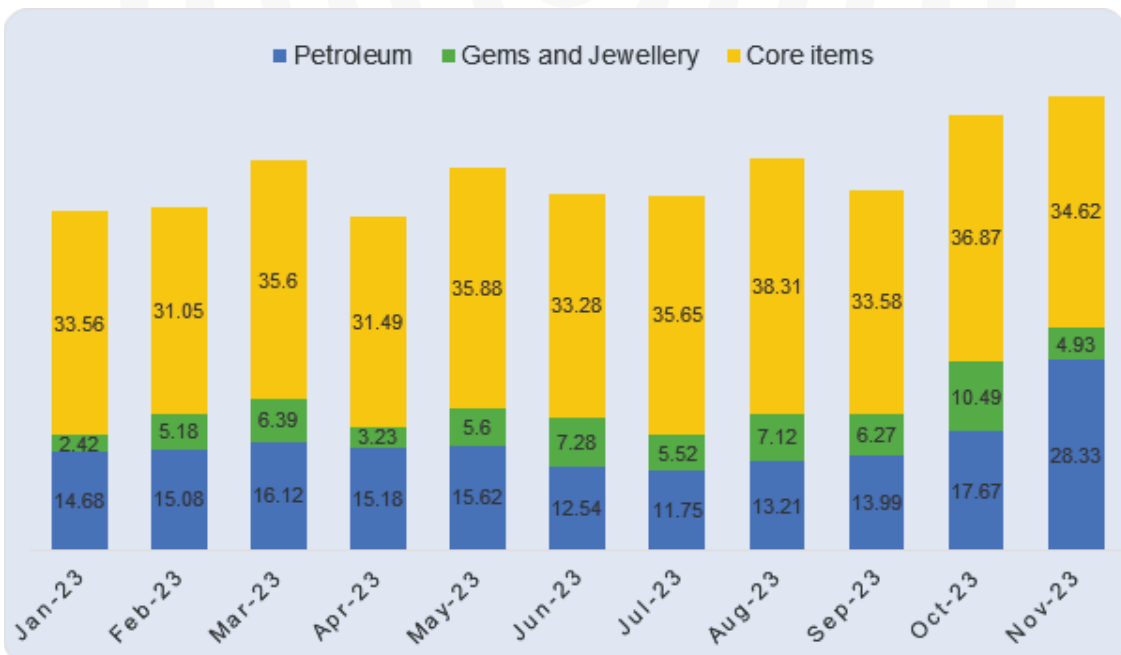




**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of monthly value of merchandise and services imports

Exports had recorded only their second uptick this year in October, and though the value of outbound shipments was up 1.1% on a month-on-month basis, they still marked the second-weakest level since November 2022. The trade deficit for November narrowed sharply beyond expectations to \$ 20.58 billion, from the all-time high of \$

29.91 billion recorded in October. November's trade deficit was 6.7% narrower on a year-on-year basis, and 31.2% less than October's tally. The originally estimated deficit of \$ 31.5 billion for October was revised downward thanks to a \$ 1.6 billion correction from the initially released import estimate of \$ 65.03 billion.

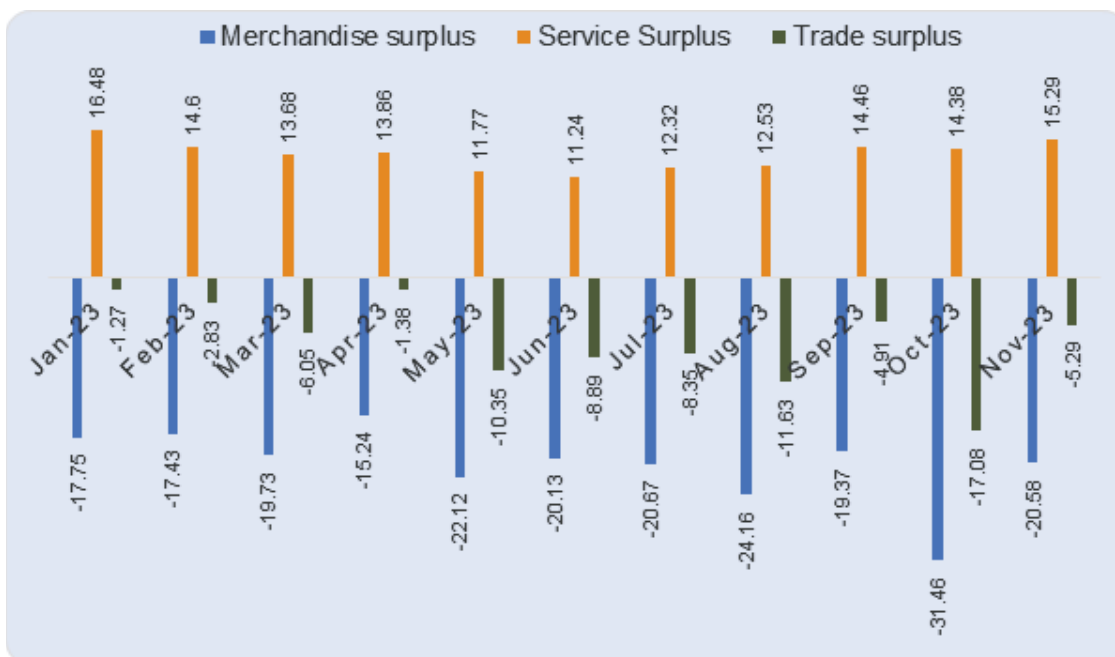


**FIGURE:** Bar chart representation of the import profile of Indian imports. Gems & Jewellery\*: Gold, Silver & Pearls, precious & Semi-precious stones.

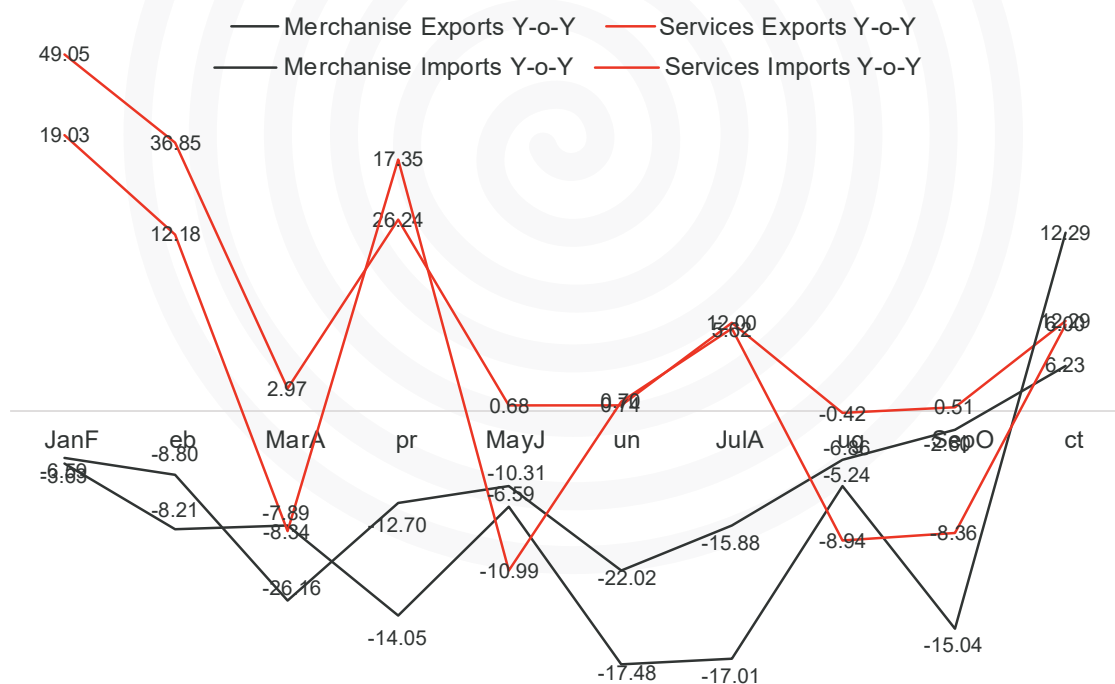
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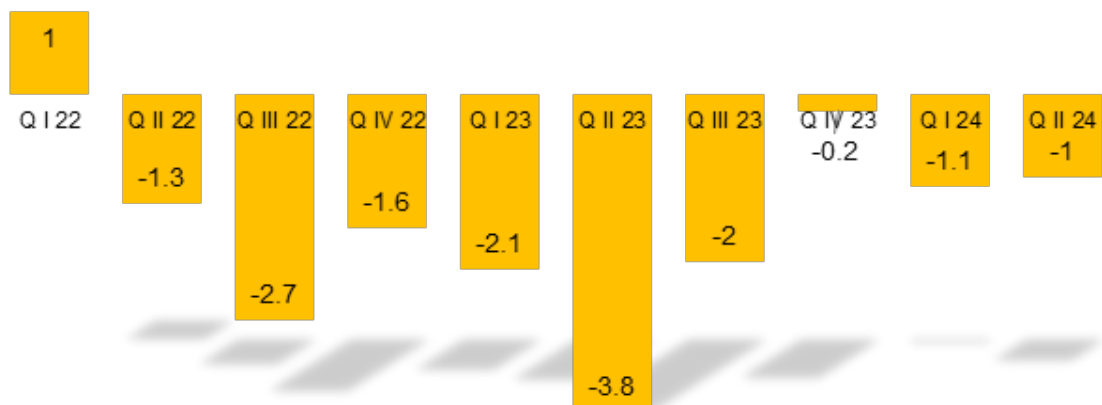
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**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of trade surplus.



**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of Year on Year (Y-o-Y) merchandise and services export and import growth.



**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of share of Current Account Deficit as a per centage of GDP.





India's goods exports retreated into contraction in November, dipping 2.8 %, they were higher than October's tally, lowest in 12 months, yet denoted a year-on-year uptick unlike in November. The significant dip in imports in November can be attributed to factors like a decline in discretionary demand for high-value goods such as gems and jewellery and the global dip in prices of key items like petroleum products. Economists expect the deficit to stay range-bound between \$ 20 billion and 25 billion through the remaining four months of the year.

August's goods trade deficit was moderated by nearly three billion dollars, with the overall export-import tally seeing revisions of \$ 5 billion. The magnitude of upward revision in the monthly merchandise trade deficit has averaged around \$ 1.5 billion since July compared to an average of \$ 0.5 billion in the first quarter of 2023-24. At the risk of repeating the obvious, the government must get a better grip on the data it bases its decisions on. Officials hope for an uptick in exports in the final quarter of the year, citing similar trends in recent years. Global demand is expected to ramp up in 2024, with the World Trade Organization expecting global trade flows to strengthen in 2024 and the US Federal Reserve signalling interest rate cuts that other central banks.

India's Current Account Deficit (CAD) declined to \$ 8.3 billion, which is 1% of the country's GDP in the second quarter of FY24 (July 2023 - September 2023) owing to a "narrowing of merchandise trade deficit". Q2 deficit is

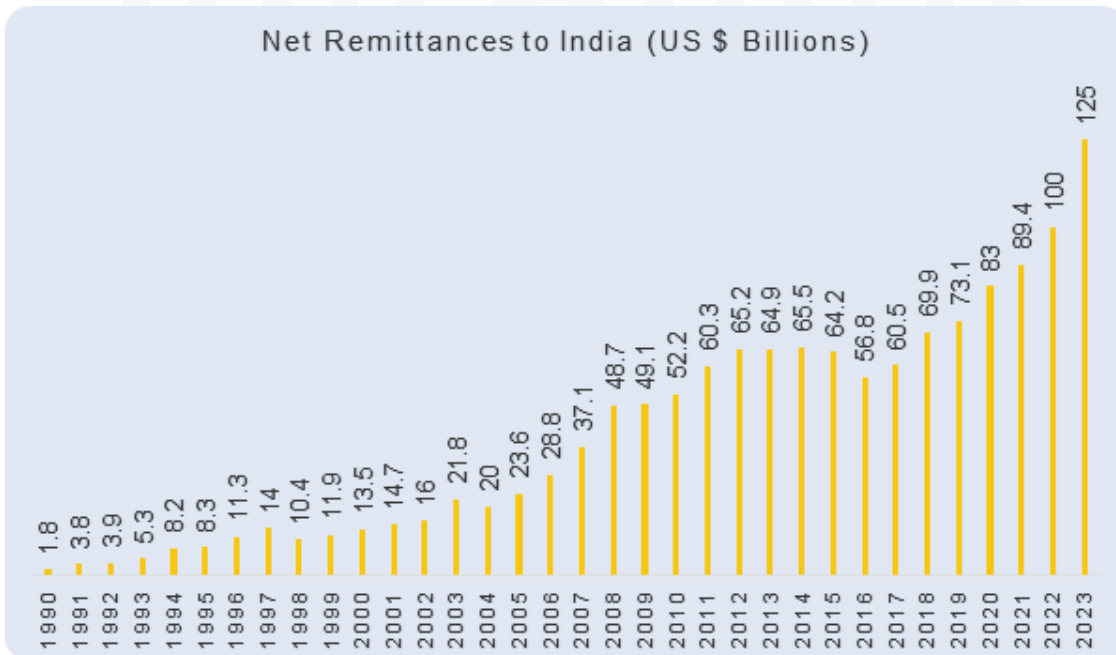
lower than \$ 9.2 billion (1.1 % of GDP) in Q1 (April 2023 - June 2023) and \$ 30.9 billion (3.8 % of GDP) a year earlier.

Underlying the lower CAD on a year-on-year (y-o-y) basis in Q2 FY24 was the narrowing of merchandise trade deficit to \$ 61 billion from \$ 78.3 billion in Q2 FY23. As per data, services exports grew by 4.2 % on a y-o-y basis on the back of rising exports of software, business and travel services. Net services receipts increased both sequentially on a y-o-y basis. Net outgo on the primary income account, mainly reflecting payments of investment income, increased to \$ 12.2 billion up from \$ 11.8 billion a year earlier.

### Remittances rise

Private transfer receipts, mainly remittances by Indians employed overseas, amounted to \$ 28.1 billion, an increase of 2.6 % from their levels during the corresponding period a year ago. In the financial account, net foreign direct investment witnessed an outflow of \$ 0.3 billion as against \$ 6.2 billion in Q2 FY23. Foreign portfolio investment recorded net inflow of \$ 4.9 billion, lower than \$ 6.5 billion during Q2 FY23.

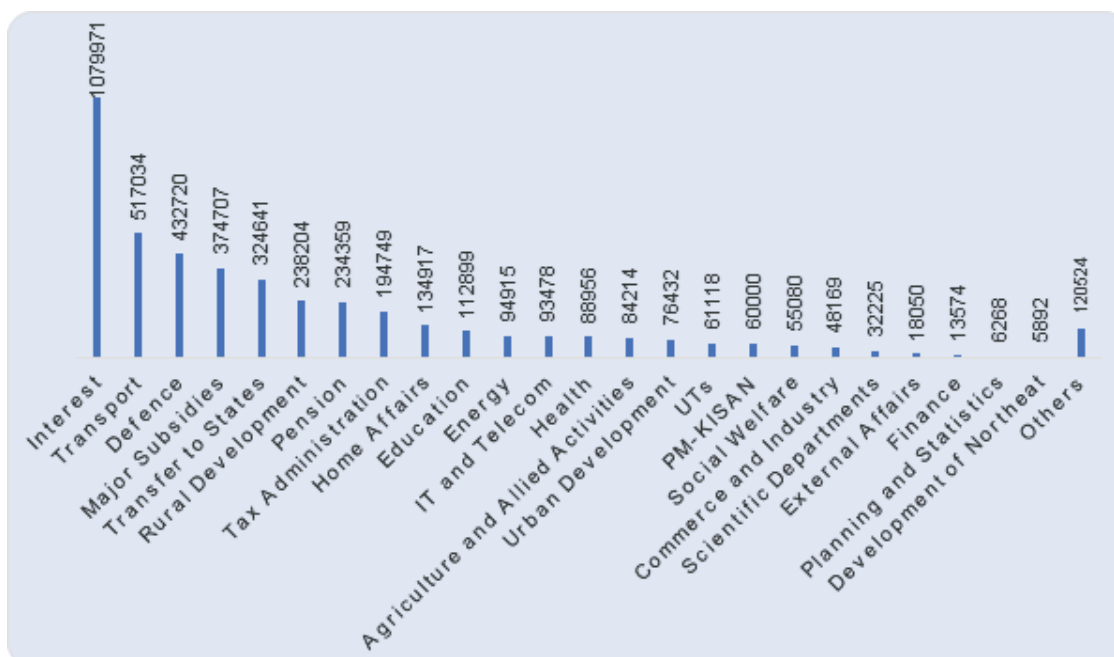
External commercial borrowings to India recorded net outflow of \$ 1.8 billion in Q2 FY24 as compared with net outflow of \$ 0.5 billion in Q2 FY23. Non-resident deposits recorded net inflow of \$3.2 billion as compared with \$ 2.5 billion in Q2 FY23.



**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of private inward remittances to India. Source: RBI Handbook for Statistics

### PARLIAMENT APPROVAL FOR ADDITIONAL SPENDING

The Union Government sought parliament's approval for spending an additional ₹ 1.29 lakh Cr.in the current fiscal year, mainly towards higher subsidies for farmers and a rural employment guarantee programme. The net additional spending for the current fiscal year ending March 31, would be ₹ 58,378 Cr., while the rest would be accommodated by reshuffling expenses. The additional spendings would include ₹ 13,351 Cr. for fertiliser subsidies, while it would spend another ₹ 14,524 Cr. for a rural jobs scheme. The additional fertiliser subsidies will raise the total subsidy for the current fiscal year by almost 8 % to ₹ 1.88 lakh Cr., while the minimum wage paying rural income scheme will be raised by almost 24 % to ₹ 74,524 Cr. for the current fiscal year.



**FIGURE:** Column chart representation of the total expenditures of the FY 2023-24.

### KEY ALLOCATIONS

- Fertilizer Subsidy:** The government is proposing an additional expenditure of ₹ 13,351 Cr. towards fertilizer subsidy, aiming to support the agriculture sector.
- Department of Food and Public Distribution:** Approximately ₹ 7,000 Cr. is allocated for spending by the Department of Food and Public Distribution, addressing essential needs and public distribution.
- Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas:** Parliament approval is sought for an additional spending of ₹ 9,200 Cr. by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, emphasizing the significance of the energy sector.
- Ministry of Rural Development (MGNREGA):** An additional ₹ 14,524 Cr. is proposed for the Ministry of Rural Development, specifically for the Mahatma

Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), addressing rural development and employment.

- Ministry of External Affairs:** The Ministry of External Affairs is slated for total supplementary spending of ₹ 20,000 Cr., to be adjusted against a reduction in expenditure of over ₹ 9,000 Cr.

### Implications

The proposed additional spending signals the government's commitment to addressing key sectors and initiatives crucial for economic development, welfare, and employment generation. As Parliament deliberates on these Supplementary Demands for Grants, it reflects the ongoing efforts to navigate economic challenges and prioritize strategic allocations in the current fiscal year.

## CARD-ON-FILE TOKENISATION

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has introduced a Card-on-File (CoF) tokenisation facility through banks, enabling cardholders to conveniently create and link tokens to their existing accounts with various e-commerce applications. The RBI had earlier introduced Card-on-File Tokenisation in September 2021, with implementation starting from October 1, 2021. The move allows CoF tokens to be generated directly through card-issuing banks and institutions, offering cardholders an additional choice for tokenising their cards across multiple merchant sites through a single process.

### SALIENT FEATURES:

- OBJECTIVE:** The RBI aims to enhance the convenience for cardholders by allowing the generation of Card-on-File Tokenisation (CoFT) directly through banks and financial institutions.
- TOKENISATION BENEFITS:** Tokenisation replaces actual card details with token credentials, providing an additional layer of security. The 16-digit token is unique for a combination of card, token requestor, and merchant.

- IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH BANKS:** The RBI's circular allows the generation of CoF tokens for a card through mobile banking and internet banking channels provided by the card issuer.
- CUSTOMER CONSENT AND AFA VALIDATION:** CoFT generation should be done only with explicit customer consent and with Additional Factor of Authentication (AFA) validation. If a cardholder selects multiple merchants for tokenisation, AFA validation may be combined for all these merchants.
- FLEXIBILITY FOR CARDHOLDERS:** Cardholders can tokenise their cards at their convenience, either at the time of receiving a new card or later. The circular emphasizes that the process should be initiated only with customer consent.
- LIST OF MERCHANTS FOR TOKENISATION SERVICES:** Card issuers are required to provide a complete list of merchants for whom they can offer tokenisation services to ensure transparency.
- EVOLUTION OF TOKENISATION:** Tokenisation has

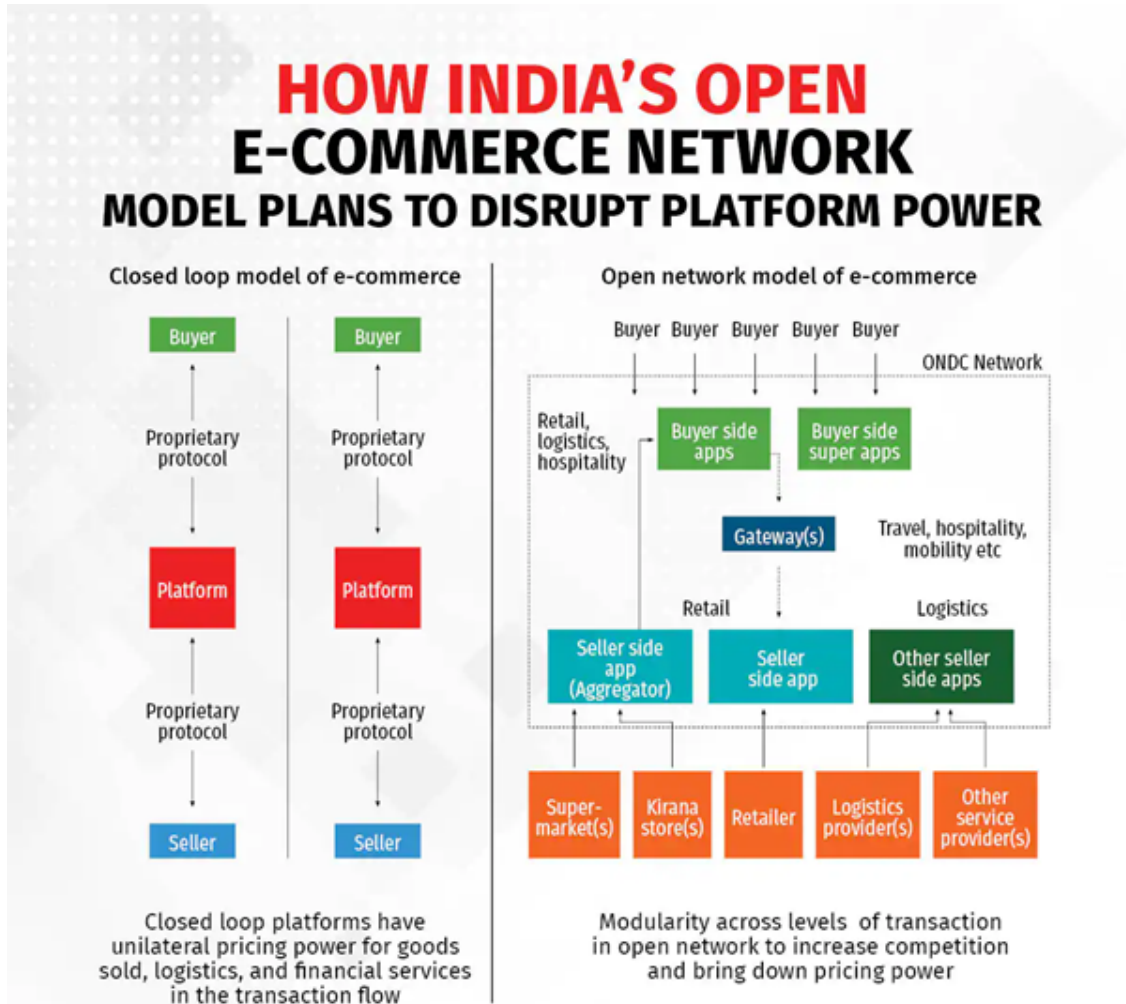




been recognized as a security-enhancing measure, and its implementation has contributed to improved transaction security and approval rates.

### 'BUILD FOR BHARAT' INITIATIVE

The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), in collaboration with Google Cloud India, Antler in India, Paytm, Protean, and Startup India, officially launched the 'Build for Bharat' initiative. The nationwide program aims to address challenges in digital commerce, fostering innovation and practical solutions across various sectors. The initiative is expected to draw over 200,000 participants, including startups, enterprises, and educational institutions.



#### KEY CATEGORIES OF THE INITIATIVE:

1. NextGen Ventures (Category I): Focuses on propelling venture creation on ONDC, providing a pathway for aspiring founders and early-stage teams to raise capital, launch, and scale companies. Winners in this category stand to gain exclusive opportunities, mentorship, and equity-free grants.
2. Scalable Solutions (Category II): Invites participation from organizations and individuals with a focus on addressing friction points faced by Network Participants (NPs) on the ONDC platform.
3. Foundation Solutions (Category III): Designed for college students over 18 years of age, aiming to identify proof of concept for the friction points faced by NPs.

#### PRIZES AND COLLABORATIONS:

1. Category 1 winners stand to gain exclusive

opportunities from Antler in India, mentorship from industry leaders, and equity-free grants of up to 5 crore rupees (\$600,000).

2. Category 2 and 3 winners will receive Cloud credits from Google Cloud India to foster further innovation in their projects.

#### ABOUT ONDC

The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), established on December 31, 2021, under the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Commerce and Industry, aims to democratize and decentralize e-commerce. ONDC's mission is to provide customers with more options and autonomy while ensuring accessibility and inclusion for sellers, especially small and local enterprises. The 'Build for Bharat' initiative aligns with ONDC's mission to transform digital commerce in India.



## MULTI MODAL LOGISTICS PARK (MMLP) IN NAGPUR

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has entered into a significant agreement with M/s. DC Multi Modal Park (Nagpur) Limited, a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) of M/S. DeltaBulk Shipping India Pvt. Ltd., for the development of a Multi Modal Logistics Park (MMLP) in Nagpur. This project, estimated at Rs.673 crore, will be developed over 150 acres under the Public Private Partnership model, marking a pivotal milestone in the country's development and aligning with the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan.

### Significance

The MMLP, to be developed in three phases, is poised to become the first in Maharashtra under the PM Gati Shakti National Master Plan. Phase-I, with an investment of Rs. 137 crore, is anticipated to be completed within two years. This initiative aligns with the country's vision for infrastructural growth and will boost industrial zones in the catchment region, including Nagpur, Wardha, Chandrapur, and Gondiya.

### Strategic location

The MMLP will be situated in Sindi, near the railway station, in Wadha district of Maharashtra. The strategic location boasts proximity to the Nagpur–Mumbai Maha-Samruddhi Mahamarg and the Howrah–Nagpur–Mumbai rail line. Additionally, it has access from the four-lane Nagpur–Aurangabad NH 361. The site is strategically positioned, being 48 km from Nagpur International Airport

and 56 km from Nagpur railway station.

### Collaboration

The project involves collaboration between NHAI and Jawaharlal Nehru Port Authority (JNPA) through a government SPV named Nagpur MMLP Pvt. Ltd. NHLML, a 100% owned company of NHAI, and JNPA have formed this SPV, with JNPA providing the land for MMLP development and NHLML supplying external rail, road connectivity, as well as water and power supply.

### Facilities provided

The MMLP will offer diverse facilities, including warehouses, cold storages, intermodal transfers, container terminals, and bulk/break-bulk cargo terminals. Value-added services like sorting/grading, aggregation/desegregation areas, bonded warehouses, and customs facilities will also be provided. The project is expected to generate substantial employment opportunities and drive economic development in the region.

### Impact on Indian logistics sector

The development of MMLP aligns with the Government of India's initiative to enhance the country's freight logistics sector. By facilitating efficient inter-modal freight movement, lowering overall freight costs, improving warehousing, and enhancing tracking and traceability, this project aims to significantly boost the efficiency of the Indian logistics sector.

## GLOBAL REMITTANCES

According to the latest report from the World Bank, India is set to become the largest recipient of remittances, with inflows expected to increase by 12.4 % to \$ 125 billion in 2023, constituting 3.4 % of the country's gross domestic product.

The report identifies several key drivers behind the surge in remittances for 2023. These include a historically tight labour market in the United States, substantial employment growth in Europe due to worker retention programs, and a reduction in inflation in high-income countries.

### Global trends

While the projected inflows are estimated to reach \$ 135 billion in 2024, the growth rate is expected to moderate to 8 % compared to the robust 12.4 % in 2023. Although this growth rate is half of the previous year's 24.3 %, it significantly outpaces the 3.8% growth recorded by low- and middle-income countries.

### Positive Outlook for 2024

The report expresses confidence in India's remittance outlook for 2024. It cites factors such as marginal increases in unemployment rates in the United States and the United Kingdom, coupled with declining rates in Singapore. The sustained remittance flows from India's highly skilled migrants are expected, contingent upon geopolitical factors and developments in Gulf countries.

### Role of India's Fintech Revolution

India's fintech evolution plays a crucial role in facilitating remittance inflows. The government's initiatives, such as the Unified Payments Interface (UPI-PayNow) linkage with Singapore, aim to reduce transaction costs and enhance remittance flows through formal channels.

Malaysia and Singapore emerge as the least expensive corridors for transactions in 2023, while Japan, South Africa, and Thailand to India face the highest transaction costs. The report emphasizes the significant support from Gulf countries, particularly the United Arab Emirates, which, through a 2023 agreement, promotes the use of local currencies for cross-border transactions.

### Leveraging Local Currencies

The agreement with the United Arab Emirates is highlighted as instrumental in channelling more remittances through formal channels. The use of dirhams and rupees in cross-border transactions is expected to positively impact the remittance landscape, contributing to India's growing financial inflows.

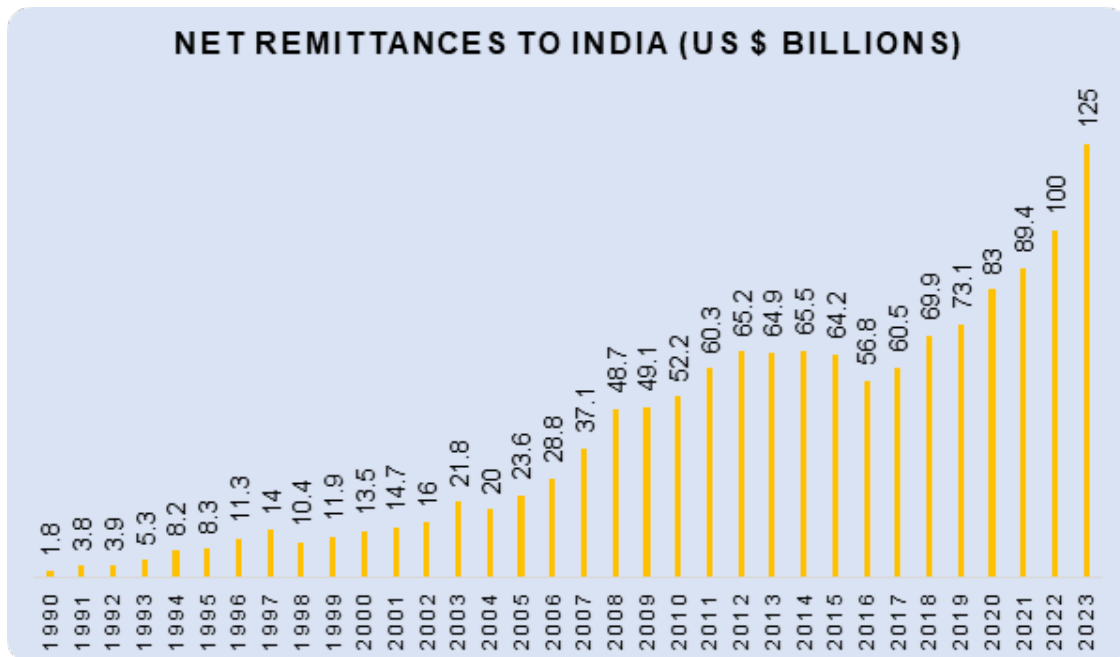
## REMITTANCES

Money transfers from the approximately 3.5 Cr. Indian diaspora community employed outside the country to family, friends or relatives residing in India and are a vital source of household income.

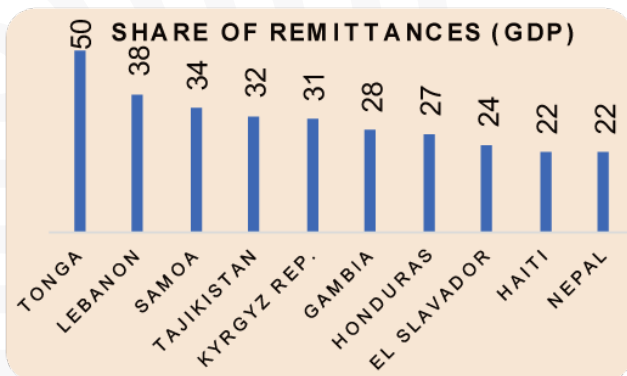
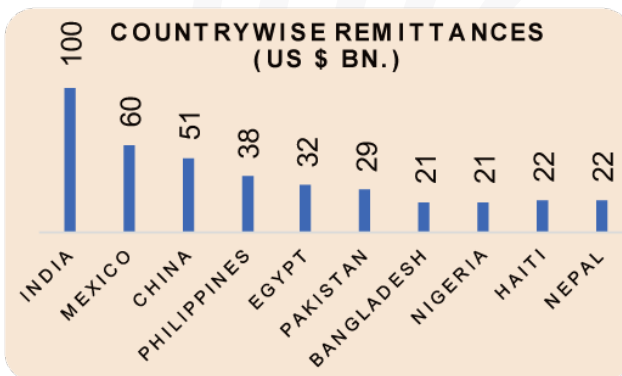




## MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT BRIEF



Source: RBI Handbook for Statistics



### REMITTANCE TRENDS

- **GRADUAL STRUCTURAL SHIFT** with Indian migrants moving to higher income earner-category with qualifications. Migrants moved from informal employment in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

countries to high-income countries – the US, UK, East Asia and Oceania.

- **RUPPEE DEPRECIATION:** Strong labour market in the US and other OECD countries and depreciation of the Indian Rupee (₹) to the US Dollar (\$) have increased remittance flows.

## PARLIAMENT ADVANCES KEY TAX-RELATED BILLS

The Lok Sabha recently approved two vital indirect tax-related bills, addressing various aspects of the tax framework. The Central Goods and Services Tax (Second Amendment) Bill, 2023, and the Provisional Collection of Taxes Bill, 2023, each serve distinct purposes in enhancing the tax administration system.

### Central Goods and Services Tax (Second Amendment) Bill, 2023

The CGST Amendment Bill focuses on aligning the Central Goods and Services Tax Act, 2017, with the Tribunal Reforms Act of 2021. The objective is to facilitate the operationalization of the Goods and Services Tax Appellate Tribunals (GSTAT) promptly. Key provisions include:

- **APPOINTMENT CRITERIA:** An advocate with a minimum of 10 years of substantial experience in litigating matters related to indirect taxes in the

Appellate Tribunal is eligible for the position of a judicial member in GSTAT.

- **TERM LIMITS:** The President, judicial members, and technical members of GSTAT shall hold office for four years or until reaching the age of 70 years (President) and 67 years (judicial and technical members), whichever is earlier.
- **AGE LIMIT AMENDMENTS:** The amendment increases the age limit for the president and members of GSTAT, providing more flexibility for their tenure.
- **LITIGATION FACILITATION:** Taxpayers currently litigating against GST demands in High Courts or the Supreme Court can withdraw cases and approach GSTAT once its benches start functioning.



### Provisional Collection of Taxes Bill, 2023

The Provisional Collection of Taxes Bill, 2023, primarily focuses on obtaining parliamentary authority to provisionally levy and collect newly imposed customs and excise duties for a 75-day period. Key features include:

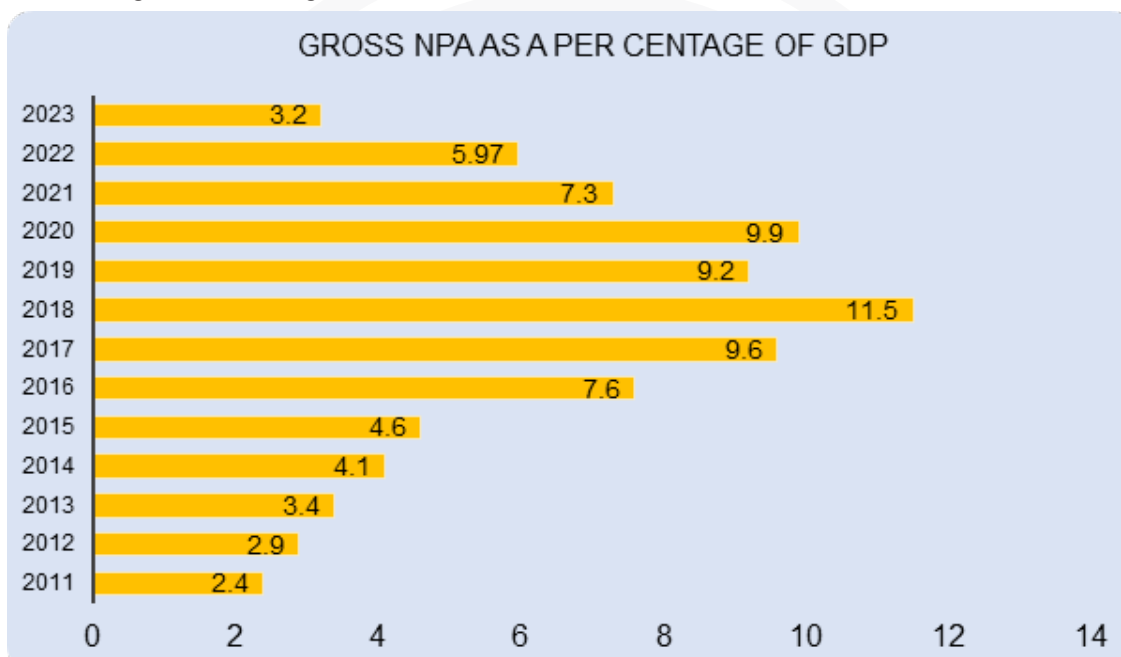
- **REPLACING THE 1931 ACT:** The bill proposes replacing the Provisional Collection of Taxes Act of 1931 with a minor technical change.
- **IMMEDIATE EFFECT CLAUSE:** The Bill provides immediate effect for a limited period, ensuring the

prompt application of provisions related to the imposition or increase of customs/excise duties.

- **PREVENTING SPECULATIVE ACTIVITIES:** By invoking this Act, the government aims to prevent speculative activities until the Finance Bill is passed, ensuring temporary stability in the tax structure.
- **EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION:** Considering that customs and excise duty changes often take effect at midnight, the Bill facilitates the immediate implementation of these changes.

### INDIAN BANKS' ASSET QUALITY IMPROVED TO DECADAL HIGH

The Gross Non-Performing Assets (GNPA) ratio of Indian Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs) consistently improved in the second quarter of FY24, sliding to a fresh decadal low, as per the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI's) report titled 'Trend and Progress of Banking in India'.



**FIGURE:** Bar chart representation of the Gross Non-Performing Assets (GNPA) ratio of Indian Scheduled Commercial Banks (SCBs)

The GNPA ratio of SCBs fell to a decadal low of 3.9 % at end-March 2023 and further to 3.2% at end-September 2023. About 45 % of the reduction in SCBs GNPA's during 2022-23 came from recoveries and upgradations. The consolidated balance sheet of SCBs (excluding Regional Rural Banks) grew by 12.2 % in 2022-23, the highest in nine years. The main driver of this growth on the asset side was bank credit, which recorded its fastest pace of expansion in more than a decade.

During 2022-23, the combined balance sheet of commercial banks expanded in double digits, driven by sustained credit growth. Higher lending rates and lower provisioning requirements helped improve the profitability of banks and shored up the capital positions.

The Capital to Risk Weighted Assets Ratio (CRAR) of SCBs was 16.8 % at end-September 2023, with all bank groups meeting the regulatory minimum requirement and the common equity tier 1 (CET1) ratio requirement. The

combined balance sheet of Urban Co-Operative Banks (UCBs) expanded by 2.3 % in 2022-23, driven by loans and advances. Their capital buffers and profitability improved through 2022-23 and Q1:2023-24.

#### NBFCs expand

The consolidated balance sheet of non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) expanded by 14.8 % in 2022-23, led by double-digit credit growth. Profitability and asset quality of the sector also improved in 2022-23 and in H1:2023-24, even as the sector remained well-capitalised with Capital to Risk (Weighted) Asset Ratio (CRAR) higher than the regulatory requirement.

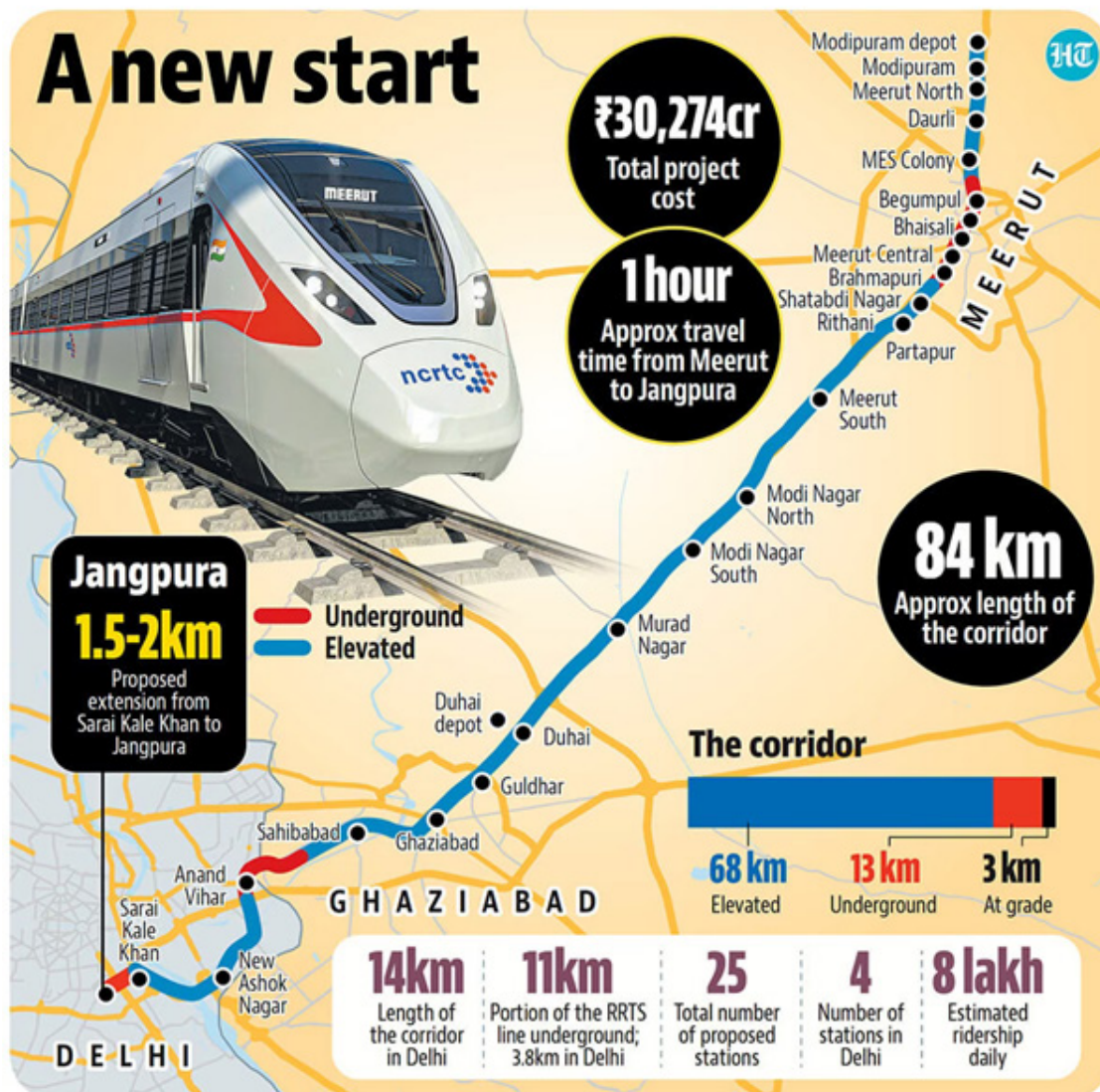
Banks must guard against credit losses although higher capital buffers and Provision Coverage Ratio (PCR) provide cushions. Qualitative metrics such as enhanced disclosures, strong code of conduct and clear governance structures would contribute towards financial stability.





## INDIA AND ADB SIGN \$ 250 MILLION AGREEMENT FOR DELHI-MEERUT RRTS CORRIDOR

On December 15, 2023, the Government of India (GoI) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a 37 billion Japanese Yen (\$ 250 million) loan for Delhi-Meerut Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) corridor to support the construction of the 82-kilometer Delhi-Meerut RRTS corridor. The \$ 250 million loan is part of a broader \$ 1,049 million Multi-tranche Financing Facility (MFF) approved by ADB in 2020 for the RRTS project.



### ADB's SUPPORT FOR RRTS

The first tranche of the ADB loan, totalling \$500 million, was further co-financed by \$500 million from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). This financial support underscores ADB's commitment to enhancing urban mobility and creating multi-modal hubs for efficient transport interchange.

### IMPACT AND BENEFITS

The RRTS, a priority rail corridor under the NCR Regional Plan 2021, aims to connect Delhi with cities in adjoining states. The project would significantly improve urban

mobility, with economic impacts benefiting women and differently-abled individuals. The RRTS is designed to provide fast, safe, and high-capacity commuter transit services, cutting travel time from 3-4 hours to about 1 hour. It is a low-carbon and efficient railway system, contributing to substantial reductions in CO2 emissions. The project aligns with climate change mitigation efforts, showcasing the commitment to sustainable and environmentally friendly transportation. The 82 km corridor will traverse populated sections of the national capital region, fostering economic and employment opportunities. The RRTS project is poised to be a game-changer, offering a transformative solution for commuters and contributing to regional development.



**INDIA'S LARGEST ONLINE IAS COACHING ACADEMY**



## E-SVARNA: CORPORATE RUPAY CREDIT CARD WITH UPI

IndusInd Bank has launched a pathbreaking new corporate credit card – e-Svarna – on the RuPay network. It is India's first corporate credit card that allows linking with UPI apps for payments. The card offers comprehensive features tailored to frequent business travellers.

### Smooth transactions

The e-Svarna RuPay corporate credit card enables smooth transactions at merchant outlets, both physical and digital. Its marquee feature is linking with any UPI payment app to facilitate seamless UPI-based payments as well. This gives it an edge over other business credit cards as linking credit cards to UPI is currently only enabled for RuPay cards by RBI. Hence, the e-Svarna card allows the convenience of UPI payments combined with credit card rewards and protections.

### Privileges for discerning travellers

The card is designed keeping in mind premium business travellers who seek exclusive privileges and value-added benefits. It offers complimentary domestic and international airport lounge access up to 10 times annually

to relax and unwind during travels. Additionally, it provides comprehensive travel insurance covering passport, baggage delays, flight cancellations and accidents. The 1% fuel surcharge waiver up to ₹ 4000 also helps control expenses for high business mileage users.

### Coverage and security

e-Svarna offers lost card liability insurance of ₹15 lakhs for protection against unauthorized transactions in case of loss or theft. Users also get complete insurance protection for counterfeit transactions if the card credentials are compromised but not reported lost. These features enable corporate clients to use the card securely and conveniently during their regular business expenses.

### Hassle-free usage

Unlike most premium cards, e-Svarna has no joining or annual fees to maximize value. It also provides business-focused rewards on daily transactions. The RuPay network offers reliability combined with acceptance at most merchant outlets across the country.

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# ECOLOGY





**UN CLIMATE CONFERENCE: 28TH SESSION (COP28)**

**LOSS AND DAMAGE FUND ADOPTED AT COP 28**

**WMO REPORT: ALARMING CLIMATE CHANGE ACCELERATION**

**GOVERNMENT: ARSENIC IN 25 STATES' GROUNDWATER, FLUORIDE IN 27**

**SOUTH EASTERN COALFIELDS LTD ADOPTS MIYAWAKI METHOD FOR GREEN COVER**

**GLOBAL COOLING PLEDGE AT COP28**

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**IUCN RED LIST REVEALS CLIMATE IMPACT ON FRESHWATER FISH**

**INDIAN FOREST & WOOD CERTIFICATION SCHEME**

**APPROVAL FOR CHEETAH BREEDING CENTER IN KUTCH'S BANNI GRASSLAND**

**GREEN VOYAGE 2050 PROJECT**

**NAMDAPHA FLYING SQUIRREL**





## UN CLIMATE CONFERENCE: 28TH SESSION (COP28)

**CONTEXT:** India's delegation at COP 28 in Dubai led to a pivotal decision, emphasizing global climate ambition through the First Global Stocktake by 2030.

**BACKGROUND:** COP28 concluded in Dubai with a landmark agreement, marking the "beginning of the end" of the fossil fuel era. Nearly 200 nations united in a commitment for deep emissions cuts and increased funding, culminating in the world's first 'global stocktake' to accelerate climate action and limit global warming to 1.5°C. UN Climate Change Executive Secretary Simon Stiell emphasized the urgency for governments and businesses to swiftly translate these commitments into tangible results.



### HIGHLIGHTS

- **Global Stocktake Outcome:** COP28's central outcome, the global stocktake, emphasizes the need for a 43% reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.
- **Paris Agreement Goals:** Parties are off track in meeting Paris Agreement goals, prompting a call for ambitious emission reduction targets by 2025.
- **Renewable Energy and Efficiency:** Parties urged to triple renewable energy capacity and double energy efficiency improvements globally by 2030.
- **Coal Phase-Down:** Accelerate efforts to phase down

## LOSS AND DAMAGE FUND ADOPTED AT COP 28

**CONTEXT:** COP 28, including India, unanimously adopts decision on operationalizing new funding for responding to loss and damage.

**BACKGROUND:** Since the decision's adoption, countries have pledged approximately USD 700 million to the loss and damage Fund. Key contributors include the UAE (USD 100 million), UK (GBP 40 million), Japan (USD 10 million), the USA (USD 17.5 million), and the EU (including Germany, 225 million euros). The Fund aims to support vulnerable developing nations in addressing climate change-induced loss and damage.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- **COP27 Announcement:** Loss and damage fund introduced at COP27; agreement reached on key point's weeks before COP28.
- **Global Financial Package:** Aims to rescue and rehabilitate nations facing climate change impacts, addressing rich nations' responsibility.
- **Rich Nations' Compensation:** Targets industrialized nations responsible for global warming, requiring them to compensate low-carbon footprint nations.

unabated coal power, eliminate fossil fuel subsidies, and transition from fossil fuels equitably.

- **Resilience and Loss and Damage:** Historic agreement on loss and damage fund operationalization, with commitments exceeding USD 700 million. UN agencies to support vulnerable countries.
- **Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA):** COP28 agrees on GGA targets and framework, highlighting the need for global consensus, finance, technology, and capacity-building support.
- **Climate Finance Boost:** Green Climate Fund receives record pledges of USD 12.8 billion, with additional commitments to adaptation and least developed countries.
- **Finance Reform:** Global stocktake underscores the importance of reforming financial architecture for climate action, with discussions on a new collective quantified goal.
- **Mitigation Work Programme:** Mitigation work programme continues until 2030, emphasizing the need for at least two global dialogues each year.
- **Inclusivity and Collaboration:** COP28 witnesses participation of 85,000 stakeholders, emphasizing the importance of collaboration between governments, businesses, civil society, and other stakeholders.

COP28's Global Climate Action platform showcased collaborative efforts among governments, businesses, and civil society for real-world climate solutions. The Marrakech Partnership unveiled the 2030 Climate Solutions roadmap, addressing emissions, adaptation, and resilience. The enhanced transparency framework sets the stage for implementing the Paris Agreement, with reporting tools to be finalized by June 2024. UN Climate Change emphasizes the urgency of delivering new commitments in 2025 and encourages global citizens to persist in advocating for change.

- **Diverse Climate Impacts:** Fund addresses rising sea levels, floods, droughts, cyclones, impacting lives, livelihoods, biodiversity, culture, and identities.
- **Economic vs. Non-Economic Categories:** Loss and damage classified into economic (monetary impact) and non-economic (immeasurable impacts) categories.

### SIGNIFICANCE

- **Industrialization Impact:** Industrial era since 1850 disrupted Earth's natural greenhouse gas balance, with the US, UK, and EU responsible for 50% of emissions.
- **Global Emission Contributors:** Including Russia, Canada, Japan, and Australia increases emission responsibility to 65%; India responsible for 4%, and China for 30%.
- **Greenhouse Gases and CO2:** Greenhouse gases, including CO2, released in large quantities during industrialization, causing global heating and long-lasting atmospheric impact.
- **Climate Crisis Losses:** Over the last 20 years, 55 vulnerable countries faced \$525 billion in climate



- crisis-fueled losses, projected to reach \$580 billion annually by 2030.
- **Unequal Impact:** IPCC predicts increasing losses with rising global warming, disproportionately affecting developing nations, especially socially and financially vulnerable sections.
- **Loss and Damage Fund Oversight:** Initially managed by the World Bank, funded by rich nations (US, UK, EU) and some developing countries.
- **Fund Scale and Replenishment:** Scale and replenishment cycle unclear, but the urgent need for several trillion dollars to address climate-induced loss and damage.
- **World Bank's Role Acceptance:** Initially resisted, developing nations now accept the World Bank's oversight to ensure fund management transparency.
- **Control Dynamics:** Developing nations cautious about richer nations' control, but current acceptance reflects a compromise for addressing urgent climate challenges.

The Loss and Damage Fund, bolstered by pledges totaling around USD 700 million at COP28, holds immense significance. Designed to aid climate-vulnerable developing nations in coping with economic and non-economic losses from climate change, the fund underscores global collaboration and responsibility in addressing the impacts of extreme weather events and gradual climatic changes.

## WMO REPORT: ALARMING CLIMATE CHANGE ACCELERATION

**CONTEXT:** Report highlights alarming polar and mountain transformations, unprecedented glacier loss, and Antarctic ice sheet decline, with a positive note on ozone hole shrinkage.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** The decade spanning 2011-2020 marked the warmest on record, witnessing unprecedented glacier and ice sheet loss. Accelerated sea level rise, ocean heat, and acidification posed threats to marine ecosystems, while extreme weather events challenged sustainable development. Despite challenges, the ozone layer is on track to recovery.

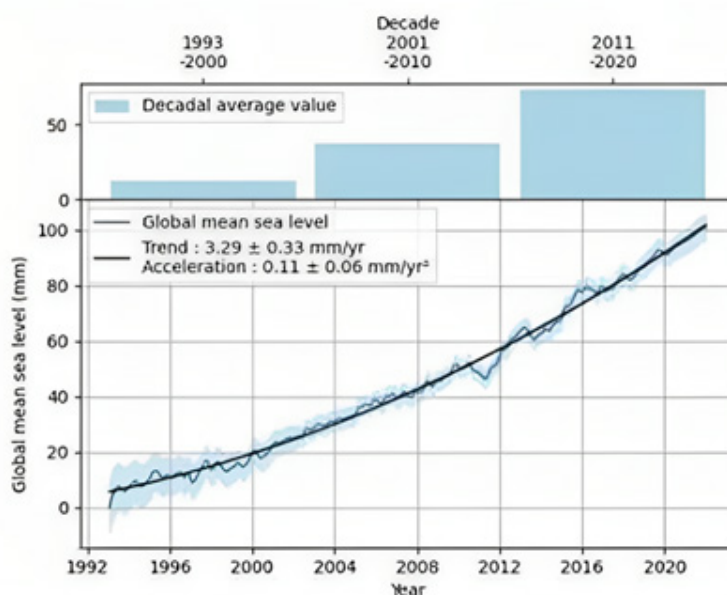
### IMPORTANT FINDINGS

- **Warmest Decade:** The decade from 2011-2020 was the warmest on record, with a global mean temperature  $1.10 \pm 0.12$  °C above the 1850-1900 average.
- **Greenhouse Gas Rise:** Over a decade, concentrations of major greenhouse gases, especially CO<sub>2</sub>, increased, with levels rising significantly from 1991-2000 (361.7 ppm) to 2011-2020 (402.0 ppm).
- **Ocean Changes:** Accelerating ocean warming rates in the past two decades, with upper 2000m depth reaching record highs in 2020. Increased CO<sub>2</sub> causing

ocean acidification, affecting marine life.

- **Increasing Marine Heatwaves:** Between 2011-2020, 60% of the ocean's surface experienced heatwaves, with 2016, 2020, and 2019 having the highest average days. Intensity and frequency rose significantly.
- **Accelerating Sea Level Rise:** From 2011-2020, global mean sea level rose at 4.5mm/yr, accelerating from 2.9mm/yr in 2001-2010. Main contributors: Greenland ice sheet loss, glacial melting, and ocean warming.
- **Unprecedented Glacier Loss:** Glaciers globally thinned by approximately 1m/year from 2011-2020, marking the lowest mean mass balances of any observed decade, with rapid decline noted near the Equator.

Improved early warning systems and disaster management have reduced short-term events with over 10,000 deaths since 1950. However, economic losses from extreme weather events surged. The 2011-2020 decade saw the costliest disasters, notably hurricanes, with a stark contrast between casualties and economic impact, emphasizing the need for global resilience and adaptation efforts.



Rise in Global Mean Sea Level – Credit WMO





## GOVERNMENT: ARSENIC IN 25 STATES' GROUNDWATER, FLUORIDE IN 27

**CONTEXT:** Widespread groundwater contamination: Arsenic found in 230 districts across 25 states, fluoride in 469 districts across 27 states, reveals government report.

**BACKGROUND:** Arsenic and fluoride contamination in groundwater have been identified in numerous districts across 25 and 27 states, respectively. The Central Ground Water Board monitors and assesses these geogenic contaminations, with studies revealing occurrences beyond permissible limits, necessitating mitigation efforts outlined in the 2010 Vision Document. Recent collaborations, such as the MoU with the Geological Survey of India, focus on specific states to address the alarming groundwater quality concerns.

### Cause of Arsenic Contamination

- **Natural Deposits:** Arsenic naturally occurs in Earth's crust, and groundwater can absorb it from geological formations.
- **Human Activities:** Certain industrial processes and mining activities can release arsenic into groundwater, contaminating water sources.
- **Agricultural Practices:** The use of arsenic-containing pesticides and fertilizers can contribute to groundwater contamination.
- **Microbial Activity:** Certain microorganisms can convert naturally occurring arsenic in sediments into more soluble and toxic forms.
- **Geographical Factors:** Geological conditions, such as low oxygen levels and specific rock types, can enhance arsenic mobilization into groundwater.

### Impact of Arsenic Contamination

- **Health Risks:** Arsenic-contaminated groundwater poses severe health risks, causing skin lesions, cancers, and neurological issues with prolonged exposure.

- **Environmental Impact:** Arsenic pollution harms aquatic ecosystems, affecting fish and other aquatic life, disrupting food chains.
- **Drinking Water Contamination:** Arsenic in groundwater can contaminate drinking water, leading to widespread health problems in affected populations.
- **Agricultural Consequences:** Irrigation with arsenic-contaminated water can accumulate arsenic in crops, posing threats to food safety and agricultural productivity.
- **Social and Economic Burden:** Arsenic contamination imposes a significant burden on affected communities, straining healthcare systems and limiting economic opportunities.

### Mitigation Measures

- **Water Testing:** Regular testing of groundwater to identify arsenic levels helps implement timely mitigation measures and protect communities.
- **Alternative Water Sources:** Introducing alternative, arsenic-free water sources ensures access to safe drinking water for affected communities.
- **Water Treatment Technologies:** Implementing water treatment technologies, like filtration and adsorption, can effectively remove arsenic from contaminated groundwater.
- **Educational Programs:** Raising awareness and educating communities about safe water practices helps prevent arsenic exposure and promotes sustainable water management.
- **Regulatory Measures:** Implementing and enforcing regulations on industrial activities and agricultural practices can minimize arsenic contamination, protecting groundwater quality.

## SOUTH EASTERN COALFIELDS LTD ADOPTS MIYAWAKI METHOD FOR GREEN COVER

**CONTEXT:** Coal India's subsidiary, SECL, pioneers Miyawaki method for afforestation in Chhattisgarh's coal belt, partnering with CGRNVN for a Rs 4 crore pilot project.

**BACKGROUND:** Over a two-year period, 20,000 saplings will be planted using the Miyawaki technique, featuring diverse plant species such as Bargad, Peepal, Aam, Jamun, Karanj, Amla, Ashok, Kaner, Gudhal, Trikoma, Ber, Anjeer, and Nimbu. Originating from Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki, this method involves densely planting native trees and shrubs within every square meter, fostering rapid growth and resilience to adverse conditions. The selected plant species require minimal maintenance and thrive in harsh climates, contributing to the creation of dense green cover.

### What is miyawaki method for green cover?

The Miyawaki method is a dense and diverse afforestation technique involving native plant species to rapidly create resilient and biodiverse forests, enhancing green cover and ecological restoration.

- **Afforestation Technique:** Miyawaki method is a dense, fast-growing afforestation technique developed by

Japanese botanist Akira Miyawaki.

- **Biodiversity Focus:** Emphasizes native plant species for increased biodiversity and ecological restoration in degraded areas.
- **Rapid Growth:** Promotes quick growth, creating a self-sustaining, natural forest environment in a short period, typically 20-30 years.
- **Species Diversity:** Incorporates a mix of native species to mimic natural forests, fostering resilience and adaptation to local conditions.
- **Soil Enrichment:** Enhances soil quality through mulching and organic matter, contributing to sustainable forest development and ecosystem health.
- **Community Engagement:** Involves local communities in planting and maintaining forests, fostering a sense of ownership and environmental stewardship.
- **Urban Applications:** Popular for urban afforestation, creating small, dense forests in limited spaces to enhance green cover and mitigate environmental



impact.

The Miyawaki plantation pilot project by SECL at the Gevra mine, India's largest coal mine, aims to rapidly increase green cover, benefiting local communities and wildlife. SECL, committed to environmental conservation, plans to

invest Rs 169 crores over four years for extensive plantation efforts in Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. The initiative aligns with SECL's ongoing commitment to enhancing green cover and mitigating the environmental impact of mining activities.

### UPSC PREVIOUS YEAR QUESTION

Q1. The "Miyawaki method" is well known for the:

- A. Promotion of commercial farming in arid and semi-arid areas
- B. Development of gardens using genetically modified flora
- C. Creation of mini forests in urban areas
- D. Harvesting wind energy on coastal areas and on sea surfaces

### GLOBAL COOLING PLEDGE AT COP28

**CONTEXT:** Global milestone at COP28: 63 nations, including the US, Canada, and Kenya, commit to cutting cooling emissions by 68% by 2050.

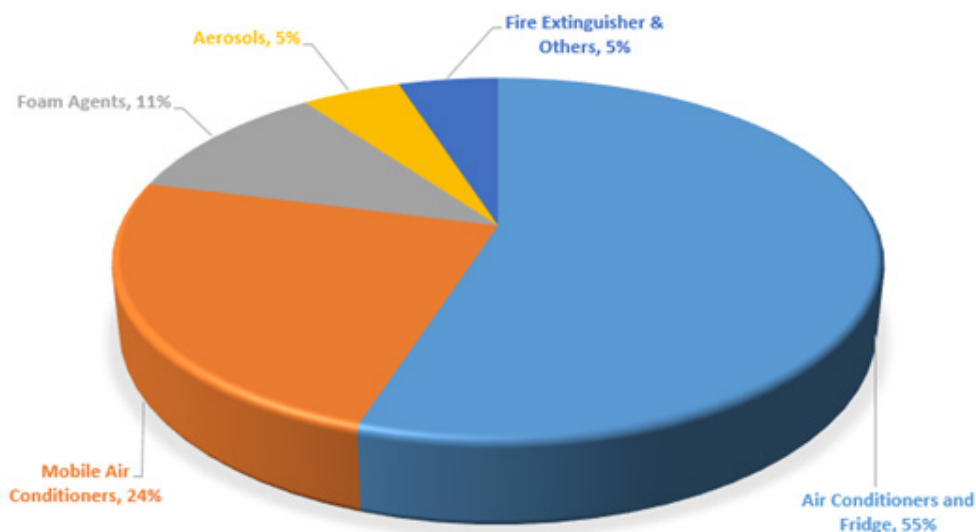
**BACKGROUND:** The Global Cooling Pledge requires nations to cut cooling emissions by a minimum of 68% by 2050, addressing a sector responsible for 7% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Anticipated to triple by 2050, these emissions result from the escalating demand for cooling amid rising temperatures, emphasizing the urgent need for sustainable strategies to mitigate environmental impact.

#### PRESENT STATUS

- CFCs and Ozone Depletion: Before 1987, cooling appliances used CFCs, linked to ozone depletion. The Montreal Protocol froze CFC production globally.
- Shift to HFCs and HCFCs: Post-Protocol, HFCs and HCFCs replaced CFCs, lacking ozone-depleting properties but contributing significantly to greenhouse gas emissions.

- Greenhouse Effect: HFCs and HCFCs, while sparing the ozone layer, act as potent greenhouse gases, trapping infrared radiation and contributing to global warming.
- Global Warming Potential: HFC-134a, common in fridges, has a global warming potential 3,400 times that of CO<sub>2</sub>, raising environmental and climate concerns.
- Energy Consumption and Cooling: Since 1990, energy consumption for space cooling tripled, with fossil fuel-sourced power, mainly coal, contributing significantly to climate change.
- Electricity Generation Impact: Fossil fuels, responsible for over 75% of greenhouse gas emissions, significantly contribute to electricity generation for cooling appliances, worsening climate change.
- Future Challenges: Energy consumption for cooling is set to rise, posing a threat if reliant on fossil fuels. Urgent transitions to sustainable alternatives are crucial.

#### MAJOR SOURCE OF HFC

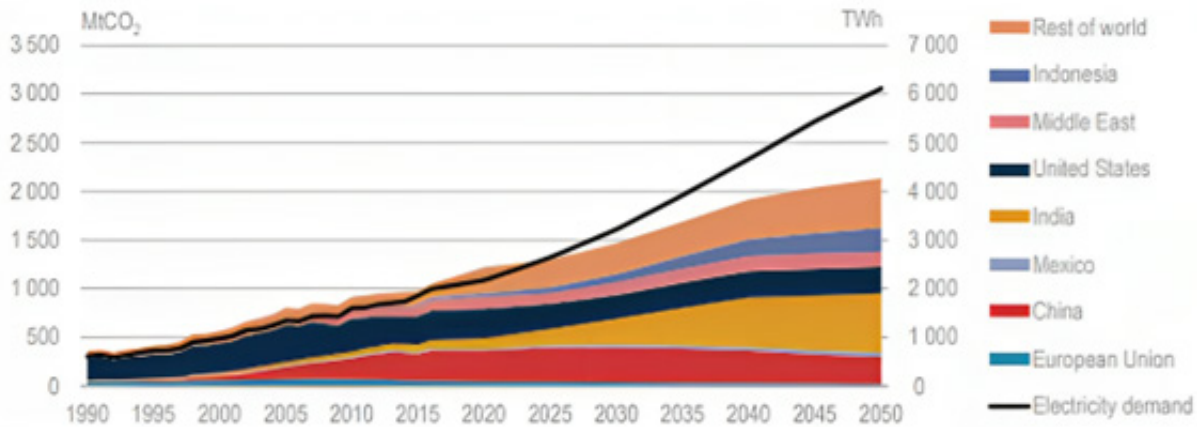


Credit: Climate and Clean Air Coalition (CCAC)

#### SIGNIFICANCE

As global warming intensifies, the demand for cooling will surge, perpetuating a destructive feedback loop. Africa and Asia, with over 1 billion people at high risk due to limited cooling access, will face the greatest cooling demand. The global number of cooling devices is projected to rise from 3.6 billion to 9.5 billion by 2050, and for universal access, an estimated 14 billion devices will be required by the same year, according to a report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the IEA.





Electricity demand from space cooling and resulting CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the Baseline Scenario, The Future of Cooling – (Credit-IEA)

Phasing out HFCs involves promoting natural refrigerants with lower global warming potential. Proper disposal and reuse of potent refrigerant gases could significantly cut 100 billion gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from 2020 to 2050. Additionally, exploring alternative cooling methods, like improved insulation and better ventilation in buildings, is crucial for sustainable cooling practices.

## BLUE DROP NATIONAL REPORT 2023

**CONTEXT:** South Africa's Blue Drop National Report 2023, released by the Department of Water and Sanitation, aids improvement focus for water services in nine provinces serving 48.5 million people.

**BACKGROUND:** In South Africa, the nine provinces supply drinking water to a population of 48,486,567 people. The Department assessed 958 water supply systems across 144 water services authorities, examining infrastructure, maintenance, operation, treatment processes, monitoring, and staff expertise. Blue Drop audits in 2022 revealed a decline in the quality of South Africa's drinking water. Systems with over a 95% Blue Drop score receive prestigious Blue Drop Certification.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- **Critical Water Supply Systems:** In South Africa, 29% of water supply systems (WSS) are critical, a significant increase from 2014, signaling an overall decline.
- **Microbiological Quality:** Among 958 WSS, 46% had unacceptable microbiological quality, attributed to poor operations, infrastructure issues, and lack of monitoring.
- **Root Causes:** Water supply failures stem from poor

operations, defective infrastructure, inadequate dosing, lack of disinfection chemicals, and knowledge gaps.

- **Blue Drop Risk Rating:** National risk improved from 52.3% in 2022 to 47.15% in 2023, categorized as low, medium, high, or critical risk.
- **Risk Analysis:** The Department of Water and Sanitation uses risk analysis to identify, quantify, and manage risks, prioritizing institutions with high-risk water supply systems.
- **Provincial Performance:** Gauteng and Western Cape lead in excellent or good drinking water system performance. Northern Cape and Free State show deteriorating performance.

The Blue Drop findings play a crucial role in assessing drinking water quality, identifying strengths, and addressing failures at municipal and water service provider levels. The report informs targeted interventions by government departments, emphasizing the need for collaborative action to elevate water services to excellence. Minister for Water and Sanitation, Senzo Mchunu, emphasizes a commitment to achieving excellence in the South African water industry through the Blue Drop Certification program.

## IUCN RED LIST REVEALS CLIMATE IMPACT ON FRESHWATER FISH

**CONTEXT:** COP28 update: Climate change endangers various species, freshwater fish assessed for the first time, illegal activities impact mahogany, and successful antelope conservation faces climate threats.

**BACKGROUND:** The IUCN Red List now identifies 157,190 species, with 44,016 facing extinction. The latest assessment, covering all freshwater fish species, reveals that 25% (3,086 out of 14,898 assessed species) are threatened. Climate change impacts 17% of these species, exacerbating threats from pollution (57%), dams and water extraction (45%), overfishing (25%), and invasive species and disease (33%). Notably, the economically vital Lake Turkana robber (*Brycinus ferox*) in Kenya shifted from Least Concern to Vulnerable due to overfishing, habitat degradation from climate change, and dam-related

reduction in freshwater inflow.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- **Atlantic Salmon Decline:** Atlantic salmon moved from Least Concern to Near Threatened, facing a 23% global population decrease (2006-2020) due to climate change, dams, pollution, and invasive species.
- **Green Turtle Status:** Central South Pacific and East Pacific green turtles are respectively Endangered and Vulnerable due to climate change, bycatch, and harvesting.
- **Conservation Success - Scimitar-Horned Oryx:** The scimitar-horned oryx, extinct in the wild, is now Endangered, marking a successful reintroduction



- project in Chad with 140 mature individuals.
- Conservation Success - Saiga Antelope: Saiga antelope status improves from Critically Endangered to Near Threatened, driven by a 1,100% population increase in Kazakhstan, though disease outbreaks and poaching persist.
- Big Leaf Mahogany Decline: Big leaf mahogany, a sought-after timber tree, shifts from Vulnerable to Endangered due to a 60% population reduction, driven by logging, encroachment, and high demand.
- Freshwater Fish Threat: One-fourth of freshwater fish face extinction, exacerbated by climate change, posing a threat to ecosystems and human services.
- Botanic Gardens' Role: Botanic gardens play a crucial role in protecting threatened timber species, emphasizing the need for conservation and sustainable practices.
- Biodiversity and Climate Change: Biodiversity and climate crises are interconnected; species decline due to climate change while nature's resilience aids in combating greenhouse gas accumulation.

### IUCN RED LIST

- Species Assessment: The IUCN Red List assesses the conservation status of global species, providing a comprehensive database on their extinction risk and ecological health.
- Threatened Species: It highlights species facing threats, including habitat loss, climate change, and overexploitation, aiding conservation efforts.
- Conservation Monitoring: The Red List helps monitor the effectiveness of conservation actions and guides strategies to protect biodiversity.
- Global Collaboration: It involves global collaboration, engaging scientists, conservationists, and organizations to gather and analyze data for informed assessments.
- Conservation Impact: The Red List influences policy-making, funding priorities, and public awareness, contributing significantly to global biodiversity conservation and sustainability efforts.

### INDIAN FOREST & WOOD CERTIFICATION SCHEME

**CONTEXT:** India introduces the Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme, promoting sustainable forest management and agroforestry through voluntary third-party certification.

**BACKGROUND:** The Indian Forest and Wood Certification Scheme offers market incentives for responsible forest management and agroforestry practices. It applies to entities like state forest departments, individual farmers, Farmer Producer Organizations involved in agroforestry, and wood-based industries.

#### HIGHLIGHTS

- Forest Management Certification: Based on the Indian Forest Management Standard, it includes 8 criteria, 69 indicators, and 254 verifiers, aligning with the National Working Plan Code 2023.
- Trees Outside Forests Standard: Introduced in the Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme, addressing non-forest tree management, enhancing sustainability practices.
- Certification Oversight: The Indian Forest and Wood

Certification Council, a multistakeholder body, will oversee the scheme, with representation from key institutions, ministries, and industries.

- Scheme Management: The Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal, will serve as the scheme operating agency, responsible for overall management and implementation.
- Accreditation Body: The National Accreditation Board for Certification Bodies, under the Quality Council of India, will accredit certification bodies conducting independent audits to ensure adherence to standards.
- Stakeholder Engagement: The scheme involves collaboration with forest research institutions, survey bodies, quality councils, government ministries, state forest departments, and wood-based industries for holistic implementation and credibility.

The Indian Forest & Wood Certification Scheme offers market incentives for responsible forest management and agroforestry practices. Aligned with national standards, it encompasses Forest Management and Trees Outside Forests certifications, promoting sustainability across various entities in the wood value chain.

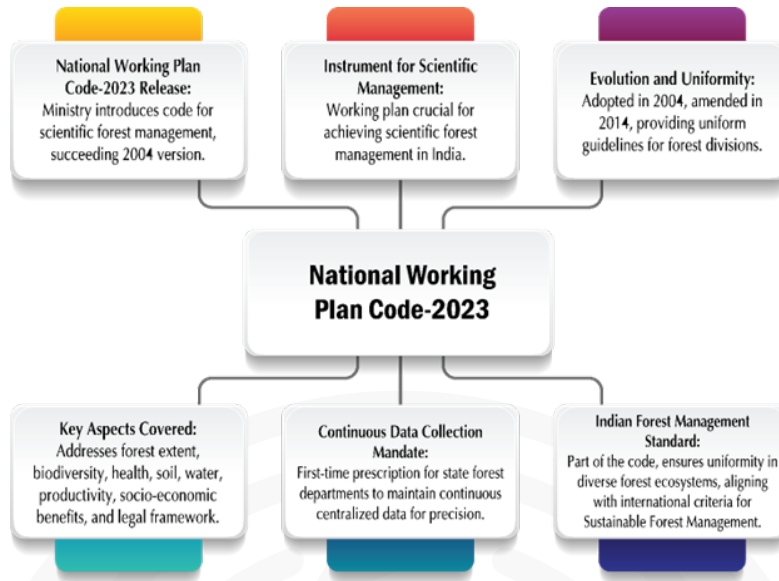
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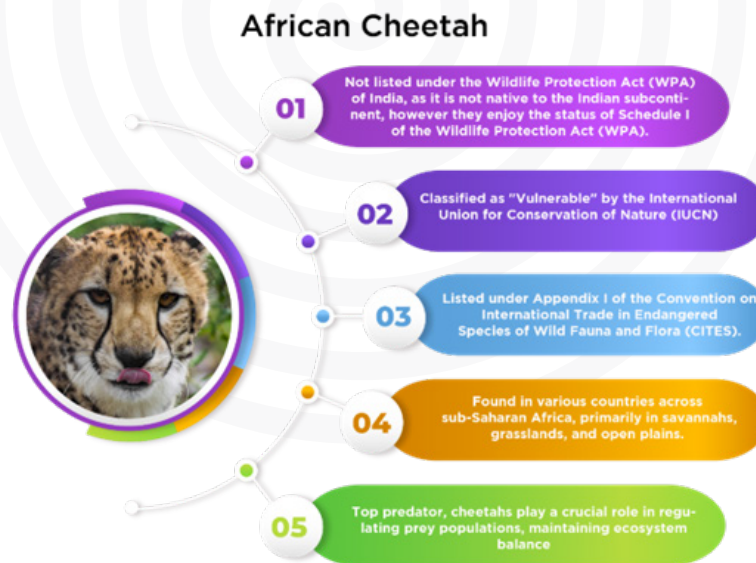


## APPROVAL FOR CHEETAH BREEDING CENTER IN KUTCH'S BANNI GRASSLAND

**CONTEXT:** Central government approves the establishment of a breeding center in Gujarat's Kutch district for African cheetahs in Banni grassland after Kuno National Park.

**BACKGROUND:** Gujarat proposed a "Cheetah conservation

breeding centre" in the Banni grassland, believed to be the historical habitat of cheetahs. The Central government approved the project, aiming to reintroduce cheetahs to their former territory, enhancing biodiversity and making Gujarat a home for these iconic species once again.



## BANNI GRASSLAND

- **Unique Landscape:** Banni grassland, in Gujarat, India, is a vast and unique landscape known for its biodiversity and distinct ecosystem.
- **Flora and Fauna:** Home to diverse plant and animal species, including endangered wildlife like the Indian wild ass.
- **Biodiversity Hub:** Recognized for its rich floral diversity, hosting endemic and rare plant species adapted to arid conditions.
- **Geographical Significance:** Serves as a transitional zone between marine and terrestrial ecosystems, showcasing unique ecological features.

- **Cattle Grazing:** Traditionally used for cattle grazing, playing a crucial role in the pastoral economy of local communities.
- **Conservation Challenges:** Faces threats from overgrazing, invasive species, and developmental activities, requiring sustainable conservation measures.
- **Cultural Importance:** Integral to the culture and livelihoods of local communities, emphasizing the need for balanced conservation strategies.

Banni, with its diverse flora and fauna, including small carnivores, herbivores, reptiles, and numerous bird species, is a vital ecosystem in Gujarat. The forest department is actively restoring the grassland, focusing on removing invasive species. Establishing the cheetah



conservation breeding centre marks the initial step, fostering wildlife enthusiasm, conservation efforts, and rejuvenating the region.

## GREEN VOYAGE 2050 PROJECT

**CONTEXT:** India named pioneer lead country for IMO Green Voyage2050 Project, aiming to aid developing nations in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from ships.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** The IMO-Norway GreenVoyage2050 Project focuses on expanding government and port management capacities globally to facilitate legal reforms, develop National Action Plans, and foster private sector partnerships. Twelve pioneer pilot countries are championing actions across high-priority regions, aiming to demonstrate and test technology solutions for zero and low-emission shipping. The project emphasizes industry alliances, technology transfer, and strategic partnerships to drive sustainable maritime practices.

### IMO Green Voyage2050 Project

- **Project Initiation:** The GreenVoyage2050 Project, launched in May 2019, is a collaborative effort between Norway and the International Maritime Organization (IMO).
- **Global Reach:** Focused on transforming the shipping industry globally, with a special emphasis on developing countries, Small Islands Developing States (SIDS), and Least Developed Countries (LDCs).
- **Climate Commitment:** Aligned with the Initial IMO GHG Strategy, the project supports countries in meeting climate change and energy efficiency goals in international shipping.
- **Strategic Objectives:** Aims to assess maritime emissions, develop policy frameworks, implement relevant legislation, and create port-specific emission reduction strategies.
- **Holistic Approach:** Encompasses the drafting of National Action Plans (NAPs), fostering public-private partnerships, accessing funding for energy-efficient technologies, and promoting innovative solutions for low carbon shipping.
- **Legislative Implementation:** Specifically involves drafting legislation to implement MARPOL Annex VI into national law, ensuring regulatory alignment for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
- **Industry Collaboration:** Establishes partnerships with the shipping industry to drive innovation and develop new solutions, emphasizing a comprehensive and collaborative approach.
- **The GreenVoyage2050 Project,** a collaboration between the IMO and Norway, aims to transform the maritime industry by fostering legal reforms, developing action plans, and catalyzing private sector partnerships. With 12 pioneer pilot countries leading the way, the initiative focuses on demonstrating and testing technology solutions for sustainable shipping.

## NAMDAPHA FLYING SQUIRREL

**CONTEXT:** After 42 years, the Namdapha flying squirrel, last recorded in 1981, reemerges in Arunachal Pradesh, sharing habitat with the red giant flying squirrel.

**BACKGROUND:** The Namdapha flying squirrel, unseen for 42 years, reemerged in Arunachal Pradesh. Last documented in 1981 in Namdapha Tiger Reserve, its absence led to theories of misidentification or extinction. The recent rediscovery brings hope for the elusive nocturnal species in the biodiversity-rich region.



**Namdapha Flying Squirrel**





# **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY**



**ISRO SET TO LAUNCH PSLV-C58  
CARRYING XPOSAT**

**ASW SHALLOW WATER CRAFT**

**WHITE LUNG SYNDROME**

**AAROGYA MAITRI AID CUBE**

**VO5G**

**WORLD MALARIA REPORT 2023**

**NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES**

**WORLD'S LARGEST NUCLEAR FUSION  
REACTOR**

**GRAM MANCHITRA**

**YUVAI INITIATIVE**

**BARRACUDA: INDIA'S FASTEST  
SOLAR-ELECTRIC BOAT**

**3D-PRINTED ROTATING DETONATION  
ROCKET ENGINE**





## ISRO SET TO LAUNCH PSLV-C58 CARRYING XPOSAT

**CONTEXT:** India set to launch its first X-Ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat) on a Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) in 2024, a major milestone in space exploration by ISRO.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** India's XPoSat mission, the country's first polarimetry mission and the world's second, follows NASA's IXPE. Set to study 50 bright cosmic sources, including pulsars and black holes, XPoSat will orbit at 500–700 km, with POLIX measuring X-ray polarization and XSPECT providing spectroscopic data in distinct energy ranges.

About X-ray Polarimeter Satellite (XPoSat)

- **Mission Overview:** XPoSat is India's first dedicated X-ray Polarimeter Satellite, studying bright astronomical X-ray sources in extreme conditions.
- **Scientific Payloads:** The spacecraft carries two payloads—POLIX for polarimetry (8-30 keV) and XSPECT for spectroscopy (0.8-15 keV).
- **Complex Emission Mechanism:** Astronomical sources like black holes and neutron stars exhibit complex emission processes, posing challenges for understanding.
- **Information Challenges:** While existing observatories offer spectroscopic and timing data, understanding emission nature remains challenging for astronomers.
- **Polarimetry's Role:** Polarimetry measurements, capturing polarization degree and angle, serve as a crucial diagnostic tool, aiding in understanding emission processes.
- **Research Direction:** XPoSat's focus is to break theoretical model degeneracy, combining polarimetric and spectroscopic observations to unravel the mysteries of astronomical emissions.
- **POLIX Payload:** Medium X-ray Polarimeter (8-30 keV) developed by RRI Bangalore and URSC, restricting field

of view for precise observations of 40 astronomical sources.

- **XSPECT Payload:** Soft X-ray Spectroscopy and Timing instrument with Swept Charge Devices, enabling long-term monitoring of spectral changes in diverse celestial sources.

### Significance of Black Hole Study

- **Gravitational Phenomena:** Black holes reveal extreme gravitational forces, allowing the study of space-time distortions and testing Einstein's theory of relativity.
- **Cosmic Evolution:** Understanding black hole formation provides insights into the evolution of galaxies and the broader cosmic structure.
- **Matter Dynamics:** Observing matter falling into black holes informs scientists about accretion processes and the behavior of dense, hot plasmas.
- **Energy Emission:** Black holes emit X-rays and other radiation, offering clues about the nature of matter in extreme conditions.
- **Galactic Center Mysteries:** Studying supermassive black holes at galactic centers helps unravel mysteries about galaxy formation and dynamics.
- **Gravitational Waves:** Black hole mergers produce gravitational waves, opening a new observational window and confirming key predictions of general relativity.

XPoSat, India's polarimetry mission, aims to unravel the intricate emission mechanisms of celestial sources like black holes and pulsars. By measuring the degree and angle of polarization, along with spectroscopic data, XPoSat serves as a crucial diagnostic tool, providing a deeper understanding of astronomical emission processes and aiding in breaking theoretical model degeneracies.

## ASW SHALLOW WATER CRAFT

**CONTEXT:** Cochin Shipyard launches three anti-submarine watercraft for the Indian Navy.

**BACKGROUND:** Cochin Shipyard Limited launched the first three of eight Anti-Submarine Warfare Shallow Water Crafts for the Indian Navy. Part of the Mahe Class, these vessels replace the existing Abhay class ASW Corvettes, focusing on coastal anti-submarine operations and mine-laying activities. The contract for building these ships was signed in April 2019.

### About the Project

- **Launch Event:** Mahe, Malvan, and Mangrol, the first three ASW Shallow Water Craft ships, were launched on Nov 30, 2023, at CSL, Kochi.
- **Naming Convention:** The Mahe class ships, named after strategic Indian ports, aim to continue the legacy of minesweepers in coastal defense.
- **Contract Details:** The contract between MoD and CSL for eight ASW SWC ships was signed on Apr 30, 2019.
- **Capabilities:** Equipped with indigenously developed underwater sensors, these 78m long, 900-ton displacement ships will perform anti-submarine, LIMO,

and Mine Laying Operations.

- **Indigenous Focus:** Over 80% indigenous content emphasizes India's strides in defense production, contributing to Aatmanirbhar Bharat, generating employment, and enhancing national capabilities.



### Anti-Submarine Watercraft

- Purpose: Anti-submarine watercraft are specialized vessels designed to detect, track, and counter underwater threats, primarily submarines.
- Sensors: Equipped with advanced sonar and other sensors, these craft detect subtle acoustic signatures of submarines beneath the water.
- Operations: Conduct anti-submarine warfare in coastal waters, employing tactics to neutralize and defend against potential submarine threats.
- Armament: Armed with depth charges, torpedoes, and sometimes anti-submarine missiles, ensuring offensive capability against underwater adversaries.
- Role in Naval Strategy: Integral to naval defense strategies, these watercraft play a crucial role in safeguarding maritime interests and controlling sea lanes.

### WHITE LUNG SYNDROME

**CONTEXT:** White Lung Syndrome sparks pandemic fears. Speculation arises in northern China and Ohio, US, despite it not being a new threat after COVID-19.

**BACKGROUND:** Health authorities in China and Ohio have associated rising cases of pneumonia with various pathogens and viruses. In China, it's linked to mycoplasma pneumoniae, while in Ohio, it's attributed to familiar pathogens unrelated to clusters in China and Europe. Dr. GC Khilnani of PSRI Hospital, New Delhi, downplays the situation, describing the "White Lung Syndrome" as a symptomatic manifestation of viral or bacterial infections, asserting there's no cause for alarm.

#### ABOUT SYNDROME

- Symptoms: White lung syndrome symptoms include shortness of breath, coughing, chest pain, fever, and fatigue, varying based on the cause.

- Underlying Causes: Investigation ongoing; believed to result from a mix of bacterial, viral, and environmental factors damaging the lungs.
- Viral Causes: Influenza or COVID-19 viruses can damage air sacs, contributing to white lung syndrome.
- Bacterial Causes: Infections like Mycoplasma pneumoniae can induce white lung syndrome by affecting the lungs.
- Environmental Factors: Inhaling pollutants, such as silica dust, may irritate the lungs, increasing susceptibility to infection.
- Treatment Options: Varied approaches include antibiotics, antivirals, oxygen therapy, mechanical ventilation, and corticosteroids, tailored to severity and overall health.

### AAROGYA MAITRI AID CUBE

**CONTEXT:** World's first portable hospital, 'Aarogya Maitri Aid Cube,' unveiled in Gurugram.

**BACKGROUND:** India has developed the world's first disaster hospital, named 'Aarogya Maitri Cube,' as part of project BHISHM. Comprising three frames, each housing 12 mini-cubes, this modular and airliftable hospital aims to revolutionize emergency medical care, offering a swift response to disaster-stricken areas.

#### About India's First Portable Hospital

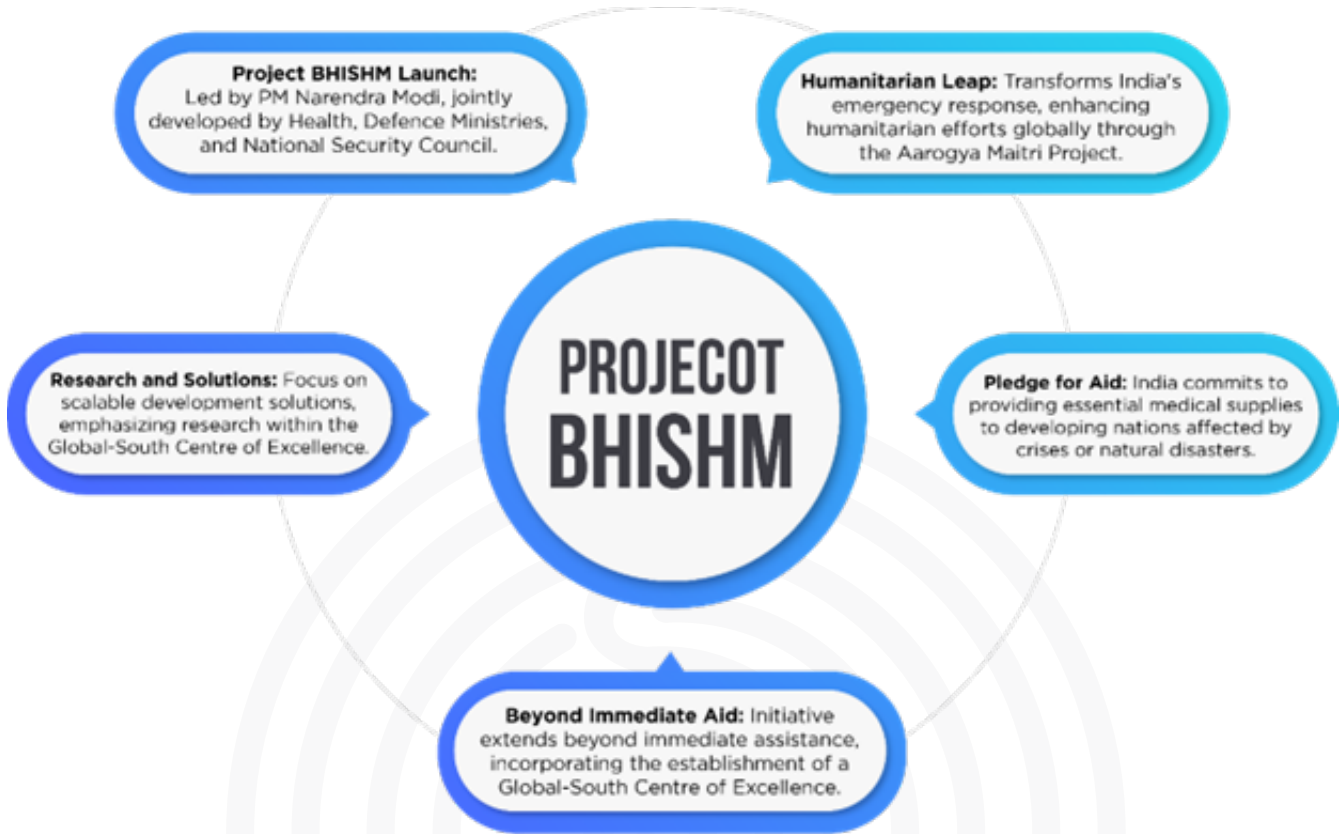
- Innovative Hospital Design: The "flatpack" field hospital, part of Project BHISHM, comprises 72 cubes with customized medical equipment, designed for portability and rapid deployment.
- Bharat Health Initiative: Developed under BHISHM, the hospital, named 'Aarogya Maitri Cube Cage,' is a part of India's initiative to aid countries facing natural disasters.
- Modular Structure: Each cube, weighing below 15kg and measuring 38cm x 38cm x 38cm, is resilient and can be dropped from aircraft. A single cage contains 36 mini-cubes.
- Quick Assembly: Assembled by five trained individuals within an hour, the cubes form a functional hospital. Ideal for deployment in war zones or disaster-stricken remote areas.
- Life-Saving Capabilities: The portable hospital facilitates critical surgeries in challenging terrains,

equipped with ventilators, generators, ultrasound machines, defibrillators, surgical devices, and a portable laboratory.

- Prime Minister's Initiative: Part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BHISHM project, aiming to support developing nations during humanitarian crises and natural disasters.







## Vo5G

**CONTEXT:** Indeed, voice calling via VoLTE is a game-changer. Now, envision the potential shifts as this standard progresses into 5G-enabled VoNR (Voice over New Radio).

**HIGHLIGHTS:** With the advent of 5G in India, tech enthusiasts are anticipating a new calling standard to complement next-gen speeds, introducing Vo5G (Voice over 5G). Already deployed in various countries, Vo5G is expected to surpass VoLTE, which is tied to 4G systems. This article explores the nuances of Vo5G, its advantages over VoLTE, and the anticipated timeline for its introduction in India.

### What Is Vo5G?

- **VoNR Introduction:** Voice over New Radio (VoNR) is the future of voice calling, utilizing the advancements of 5G networks.
- **Enhancements from 5G:** VoNR leverages 5G's speed, capacity, and responsiveness, offering improved voice communication over traditional 4G standards.
- **Evolutionary Shift:** Similar to past leaps like VoLTE, Vo5G signifies a significant shift in how mobile networks handle voice.
- **Infrastructure Readiness:** Vo5G aims to have infrastructure and interoperability ready in advance as carriers phase out older LTE networks.
- **Adoption Challenges:** Similar to VoLTE, widespread adoption of Vo5G might take time, especially in regions where 5G deployment is still progressing.

### Expected Impact on India

- **Enhanced Call Quality:** VoNR in India will likely offer

improved call quality, clear voice transmission, and reduced latency, providing a superior calling experience.

- **Seamless Video Calling:** The advanced capabilities of VoNR could lead to seamless and high-quality video calling experiences, fostering better communication for businesses and individuals.
- **Remote Work Support:** With the rise of remote work, VoNR can enhance voice calling for virtual meetings, conferences, and collaborations, contributing to the evolving work landscape.
- **IoT and Smart Cities:** VoNR can play a role in supporting communication in Internet of Things (IoT) devices and contributing to the development of smart cities by enabling efficient and reliable voice communication between devices.
- **Emergency Services:** In critical situations, VoNR can provide more reliable and responsive voice communication, potentially benefiting emergency services and disaster management efforts.
- **Education Sector:** Improved voice services can enhance remote education initiatives, facilitating clearer communication between teachers and students, especially in regions with limited connectivity.

As 5G emerges in India, the anticipation for Vo5G (Voice over 5G) grows among tech enthusiasts. With its deployment in several countries, Vo5G offers advantages over VoLTE, promising an enhanced calling standard aligned with the next-gen speeds, ushering in a new era of communication.

Aspect	VoNR	VoLTE
Call Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Superior clarity and fidelity with advanced audio codecs based on 5G's increased data capacity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Good quality, but not as advanced as VoNR due to lower data capacity of 4G LTE.</li> </ul>
Call Connection Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faster due to reduced network latency in 5G.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slightly longer connection times compared to VoNR due to higher latency in 4G LTE.</li> </ul>
Reliability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better reliability with lower packet loss, resulting in fewer voice cutouts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reliable, but may experience occasional voice cutouts and interruptions.</li> </ul>
Network Transition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Smooth transition without delays or drops, as 4G goes dormant on 5G-supported phones.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential delays and drops when transitioning from 5G to 4G during VoLTE calls.</li> </ul>

## WORLD MALARIA REPORT 2023

**CONTEXT:** In 2022, India reports 66% of malaria cases in the WHO South-East Asia Region, according to the World Malaria Report.

**BACKGROUND:** In 2022, India constituted 66% of malaria cases in the WHO South-East Asia Region, with Plasmodium vivax contributing to nearly 46% of cases. The region accounted for 2% of global malaria cases, experiencing a 76% decline from 23 million in 2000 to about five million in 2022. Malaria case incidence in the region dropped by 83%, from approximately 18 cases per 1,000 population at risk in 2000 to about three cases per 1,000 population at risk in 2022, according to the 2023 World Malaria Report by the World Health Organization (WHO).

### REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Global Malaria Programme Strategy (2024–2030): Developed by WHO/GMP, addressing stalled progress with four objectives and context-based country support.
- New WHO Recommendations: Strong endorsement for pyrethroid-chlorfenapyr nets in areas of resistance, with conditional recommendations for alternative nets based on evidence and cost-effectiveness concerns.
- Malaria Vaccine Recommendations: WHO endorses

R21/Matrix-M as the second malaria vaccine for children in endemic areas, complementing the RTS,S vaccine.

- COVID-19 Status: WHO declares COVID-19 as an ongoing health issue but no longer a public health emergency internationally.
- Global Malaria Cases (2022): Estimated 249 million cases, a 5 million increase from 2021, with major contributions from Pakistan, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Uganda, and Papua New Guinea.
- Regional Malaria Trends: Declines in the WHO African Region, increases in Southeast Asia, a surge in Pakistan, and varied trends in other regions, impacting global malaria statistics.
- Global Malaria Deaths: Declined from 864,000 in 2000 to 608,000 in 2022, with a notable increase in 2020.
- Regional Malaria Mortality: WHO African Region experienced fluctuations, with a decrease from 808,000 (2000) to 580,000 (2022).
- Malaria Elimination Progress: Countries with fewer than 100 malaria cases increased from 6 (2000) to 27 (2022), with 25 achieving 3 consecutive years of zero cases.



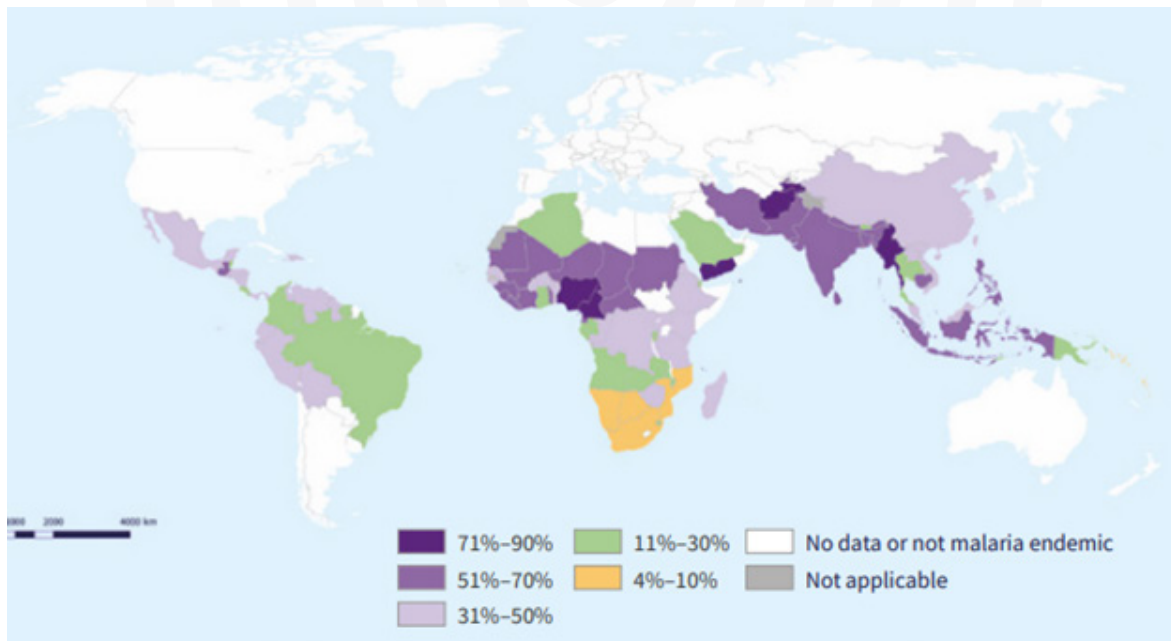
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Out-of-pocket health expenditure as a percentage of total current health expenditure on Malaria – Credit WHO

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**CONTEXT:** Scientists from the Department of Atomic Energy and IDRS Labs in Bengaluru collaborate to develop AKTOCYTE tablets, aiming to minimize radiotherapy side effects for cancer patients. Collaboration includes experts from BARC, Tata Memorial Hospital, and ACTREC, Navi Mumbai.

**HIGHLIGHTS:**

- **AKTOCYTE Tablets Efficacy:** Remarkable recovery in pelvic cancer patients undergoing radiotherapy, eliminating the need for surgical interventions.
- **Versatile Cancer Care:** AKTOCYTE serves as an adjuvant to radiotherapy, regenerative nutraceutical, immunomodulator, and antioxidant, offering versatile applications in cancer care.
- **Regulatory Clearance:** Approved by FSSAI, ensuring safety and compliance, instilling confidence in healthcare professionals and patients regarding



efficacy and quality.

- **Market Availability:** Anticipated launch in January 2024, AKTOCYTE tablets set to transform cancer treatment protocols.
- **Collaborative Breakthrough:** Collaboration between DAE institutions and industry pivotal in merging scientific innovation with practical solutions for cancer care.

**NEGLECTED TROPICAL DISEASES**

**CONTEXT:** WHO adds noma, a severe gangrenous disease of the mouth and face, to neglected tropical diseases list with a 90% mortality rate.

**BACKGROUND:** WHO officially designated noma as one of the neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) following collaborative efforts by 32 countries, led by Nigeria and 14 other African nations. This recognition marked a significant milestone in the global initiative for noma control, building on progress in sub-Saharan Africa, including the development of national action plans, training for healthcare workers, integration into surveillance systems, and improved cross-border patient referrals.

Disease Noma

*Noma Overview:*

- Severe gangrenous disease affecting the mouth and face, primarily in malnourished children aged 2–6.

*Causes and Affected Regions:*

- Linked to malnutrition, infectious diseases, extreme

poverty, and weakened immune systems.

- Predominantly found in sub-Saharan Africa but reported globally, affecting adults with conditions like HIV.

*Disease Progression:*

- Starts as a gum lesion, progresses to acute necrotizing gingivitis, rapidly destroying soft and hard tissues.

*Impact on Survivors:*

- Results in severe facial disfigurement, speech and eating difficulties, social stigma, requiring complex surgery.

*Clinical Staging and Diagnosis:*

- WHO classifies into five stages: gingivitis, necrotizing gingivitis, oedema, gangrene, scarring, and sequelae.
- Diagnosis based on clinical criteria; no current point-of-care diagnostic test available.







## WORLD'S LARGEST NUCLEAR FUSION REACTOR

**CONTEXT:** Japan reveals world's largest operational nuclear fusion reactor, JT-60SA, a significant step in the pursuit of clean and limitless power.

**HIGHLIGHTS:** The JT-60SA, a colossal tokamak developed through collaboration between the European Union and

Japan, is a critical experiment exploring fusion as a potential secure, scalable, and carbon-neutral energy source. Operating at 200 million degrees Celsius, it precedes the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) in France, with both projects aiming to achieve a net energy gain from fusion, revolutionizing global energy systems.

Aspect	Fission Reactors	Fusion Reactors
Fuel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Uses uranium or plutonium as fuel, undergoes nuclear fission.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Involves combining light atomic nuclei, like isotopes of hydrogen, undergoing nuclear fusion.</li> </ul>
Reaction Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Splits heavy nuclei into smaller ones, releasing energy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fuses light nuclei into heavier ones, releasing a tremendous amount of energy.</li> </ul>
Waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Produces long-lived radioactive waste, disposal challenges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generates minimal radioactive waste, with shorter-lived isotopes, reducing disposal issues.</li> </ul>
Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Risk of meltdowns and radioactive leaks, safety concerns.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Inherently safer, no risk of meltdown, minimal radioactive materials involved in the process.</li> </ul>
Energy Output Potential	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>High energy output but with finite fuel supply.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Potential for unlimited energy with abundant fuel (hydrogen isotopes), mimicking the sun's energy production.</li> </ul>





## GRAM MANCHITRA

**CONTEXT:** Ministry of Panchayati Raj launches GIS application "Gram Manchitra," aiding Gram Panchayats in spatial planning and decision support for development.

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Geo-Spatial Planning:** The application empowers Gram Panchayats with geo-spatial technology for better planning and visualization of developmental works.
- **mActionSoft Integration:** mActionSoft, a mobile solution, facilitates geo-tagging of assets during various stages, enhancing data repository and project visibility.
- **Finance Commission Funds:** Assets funded by the Finance Commission are geotagged, providing visual GIS data on Gram Manchitra for effective planning.
- **Comprehensive Development Plans:** Gram Manchitra offers planning tools utilizing GIS, aiding officials in realistic development plans, cost estimation, and project impact assessment.
- **Decision Support System:** The platform acts as a unified decision support system, enabling Gram Panchayats to

streamline and enhance their development initiatives.

### Significance in India

- **Rural Development:** Geo-spatial technology aids in rural planning, enhancing resource allocation and development initiatives for inclusive growth.
- **Disaster Management:** Crucial in disaster response, geo-spatial tools enable real-time mapping, risk assessment, and efficient disaster management strategies.
- **Agriculture Precision:** Precision farming using geo-spatial data optimizes crop management, resource allocation, and boosts agricultural productivity across diverse landscapes.
- **Infrastructure Planning:** Geo-spatial technology guides infrastructure development by providing accurate mapping, surveying, and planning tools for smart urban growth.
- **Environmental Conservation:** Essential for monitoring environmental changes, geo-spatial tools aid conservation efforts, ensuring sustainable resource management and biodiversity preservation.

## YUVAI INITIATIVE

**CONTEXT:** NeGD and Intel India's collaborative initiative, 'YUVAi-Youth for Unnati and Vikas with AI,' to feature prominently at GPAI Summit.

**BACKGROUND:** YUVAi, a collaborative initiative by the National e-Governance Division (NeGD) and Intel India, focuses on equipping Indian school students (class 8 to 12) with essential AI skills. The program, set to be highlighted at the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI) Summit, aims to empower youth to become human-centric designers and users of AI, contributing to a future-ready workforce.

### HIGHLIGHTS

- **YUVAi Programme Overview:** YUVAi Programme advances in three phases, engaging students and teachers, fostering AI knowledge application on real-

world issues.

- **Cohort Engagement:** Over 8,500 students participated in Cohort 1, attending online sessions, submitting innovative AI ideas across eight core themes.
- **Idea Submission and Shortlisting:** Phase 1 garnered 750+ AI-based idea entries; in Phase 2, the top 200 ideas underwent deep dive AI training and mentorship.
- **Prototyping and Workshop:** Phase 3 included a face-to-face workshop for the top 50 students, providing mentorship and guidance to refine AI projects into prototypes.
- **Jury Evaluation and Recognition:** The final phase featured project presentations, with a jury selecting the top 10 students based on innovation and impact.

## BARRACUDA: INDIA'S FASTEST SOLAR-ELECTRIC BOAT

**CONTEXT:** India launches Barracuda, its fastest solar-electric boat, at Alappuzha, developed jointly by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders and Navalt for eco-friendly maritime transportation.

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Cutting-Edge Design:** The Barracuda, jointly developed by Mazagon Dock and Navalt, is an innovative electric vessel designed for workboat purposes.
- **Electric Propulsion:** Powered by twin 50 kW electric motors and a marine-grade LFP battery, it achieves a top speed of 12 knots.
- **Renewable Energy Integration:** The 14m x 4.4m vessel incorporates 6 kW solar power, ensuring a range of 7 hours on a single charge.
- **Challenging Environments:** Engineered to navigate 4-meter waves, the Barracuda is IRS-certified, offering a noise-free and pollution-free journey.

- **Eco-Friendly Initiative:** Mazagon Dock plans to deploy the Barracuda, renamed Saur Sakthi, for eco-friendly operations at its Mumbai dock.





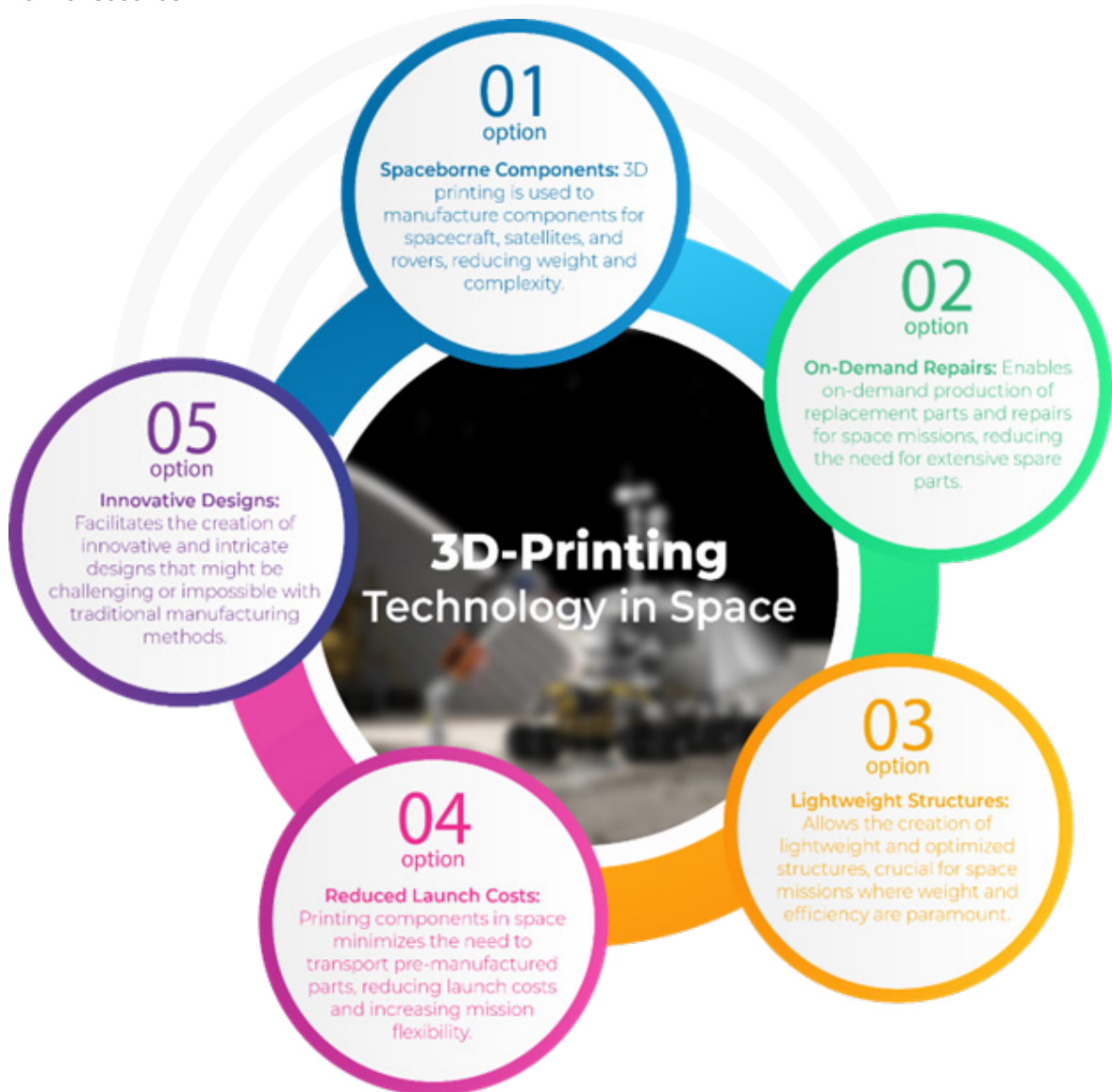


## 3D-PRINTED ROTATING DETONATION ROCKET ENGINE

**CONTEXT:** NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center tests a 3D-printed Rotating Detonation Rocket Engine (RDRE) for over 251 seconds, achieving significant thrust.

### HIGHLIGHTS:

- NASA's Breakthrough: Engineers at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center successfully tested a 3D-printed rocket engine for over 4 minutes.
- Thrust and Duration: The Rocket Development and Test Engine (RDRE) produced more than 5,800 pounds of thrust for 251 seconds.
- Versatile Applications: The test aims to scale the combustor for different thrust classes, supporting various engine systems for diverse space missions.
- Previous Test Success: In a 2022 test with In Space LLC and Purdue University, the RDRE generated 4,000 pounds of thrust for a minute.
- Mission Range: The scalable RDRE technology can be applied to landers, upper stage engines, and supersonic retropropulsion for Mars missions.



### 3D-Printed Engines in Indian Space Sector

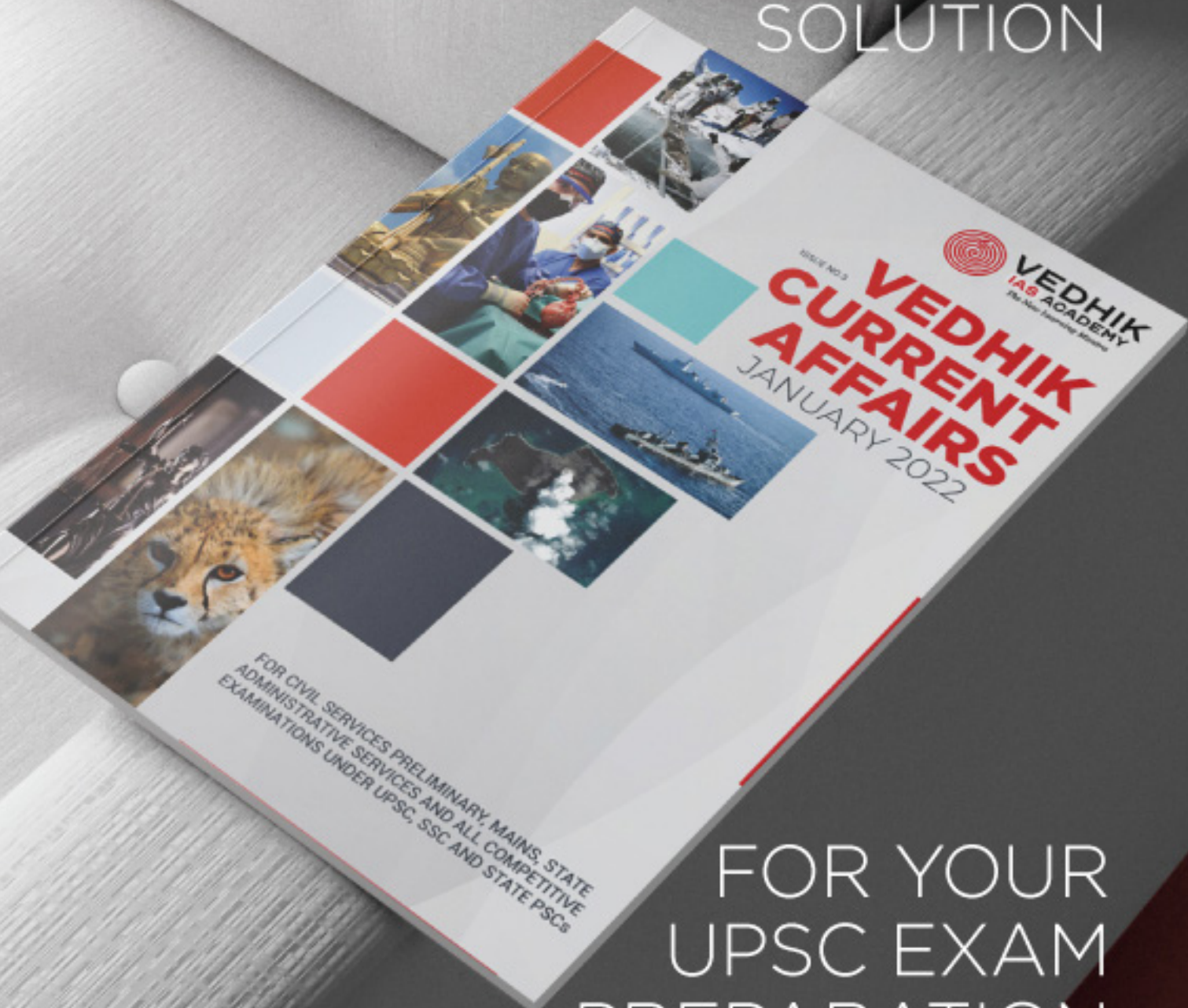
- Agnikul's Milestone: Agnikul aims to be the second Indian private space company with its launch vehicle, following Skyroot Aerospace's success.
- Innovative Engine Technology: Agnikul's Agnilet engine is an entirely 3D-printed, 6 kN semi-cryogenic engine, using liquid kerosene and supercold liquid oxygen.
- Launch Industry Pioneers: Skyroot Aerospace pioneered India's private space industry with the launch of its 545-kg rocket named Vikram-S in 2022.
- 3D Printing Advancements: Agnikul's Agnilet and Skyroot's Dhawan-1 engines showcase advancements in 3D printing technology, reducing manufacturing time significantly.
- Propellant Innovation: Agnilet engine uses a propellant mixture of liquid kerosene and supercold liquid oxygen, contributing to fuel efficiency in space travel.



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**CSAT**





## CSAT COMPREHENSION





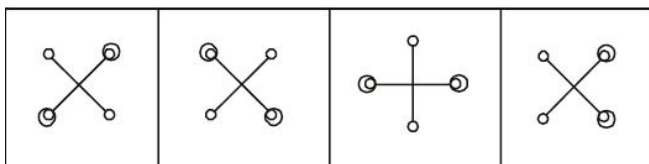
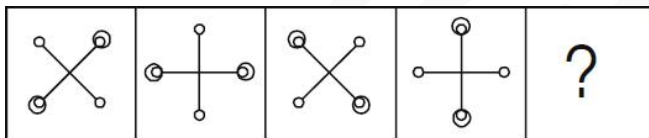
1. Excluding stoppages, the speed of a bus is 54 kmph and including stoppages, it is 45 kmph. For how many minutes does the bus stop per hour?

- a. 5 min
- b. 10 min
- c. 4 min
- d. 9 min

2. A man wants to reach a window which is 40 feet above the ground. The distance from the foot of the ladder to the wall is 9 feet. How long should the ladder be?

- a. 81 feet
- b. 40 feet
- c. 41 feet
- d. 54 feet

3. Which figure will replace the question mark?



(A) (B) (C) (D)

- a. A
- b. B
- c. C
- d. D

4. A, B, C, D, E, F and G are members of a family consisting of four adults and three children, two of whom, F and G are girls. A and D are brothers and A is a doctor. E is an engineer married to one of the brothers and has two children. B is married to D and G is their child. Who is C?

- a. E's daughter
- b. G's brother
- c. F's father
- d. A's son

Answer the questions no. 5 to no. 9 based on the based on the figure given below in which Rectangle represents Males, Circle represents the urbans, Square represents the educated and (4) Triangle represents the civil servants.

5. The number indicating the uneducated urban males is

- a. 5
- b. 4
- c. 1
- d. 9

6. The number indicating the educated urban males who are not civil servants is

- a. 7
- b. 8
- c. 9
- d. 10

7. The number indicating the educated civil servants who are males but not urban is

- a. 7
- b. 10
- c. 8
- d. 4

8. The number indicating the educated males who are urban civil servants is

- a. 5
- b. 4
- c. 11
- d. 8

9. The number indicating the uneducated females who are urban civil servants is

- a. 11
- b. 5
- c. 9
- d. 7

10. Roy and Kavi are working on an assignment. Roy takes 6 hours to type 32 pages on a computer, while Kavi takes 5 hours to type 40 pages. How much time will they take, working together on two different computers to type an assignment of 110 pages?

- a. 8 hours 15 minutes
- b. 10 hours
- c. 7 hours 50 minutes
- d. 6 hours 40 minutes

11. A man can cover a distance in 1hr 24min by covering  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the distance at 4 km/h and the rest at 5km/h. What is the total distance to be covered?

- a. 4 km
- b. 6 km
- c. 10 km
- d. 8 km

Study the paragraph and answer the questions (questions 12 to 15) that follow:

The most important reason for this state of affairs, perhaps, is that India was the only country in the world to truly recognise the achievements of the Soviet Union—rather than merely focus on the debilitating faults that Communism brought to its people. The people of India realised that the achievement of one hundred percent literacy in a country much, much larger than its own and with similarly complicated ethnic and religious groupings, the rapid industrialization of a nation that was a primarily agrarian society when the Bolshevik revolution took place in 1917, the attendant revolutionary steps in science and technology, the accessibility of health care (primeval according to Western standards, perhaps, but not according to Indian ones) to the general population, and despite prohibition of the government of the time the vast outpourings in literature, music, art, etc. are momentous and remarkable feats in any country. In contrast, all that the West focused on were the massive human rights violations by the Soviet State on its people, the deliberate uprooting and mass migrations of ethnic peoples from one part of the country to another in the name of industrialization, the end of religion. In short, all the tools of information were employed to condemn the ideology of Communism, so much at variance with capitalist thinking. The difference with the Indian perception, I think here is, that while the Indians reacted as negatively to what the Soviet governments did to its people in the name of good governance (witness the imprisonment of Boris Pasternak and the formation of an



international committee to put pressure for his release with Jawaharlal Nehru at its head), they took the pain not to condemn the people of that broad country in black and white terms; they understood that mingled in the shades of grey were grains of uniqueness (The Russians have never failed that characteristic in themselves; they have twice experimented with completely different ideologies, Communism and Capitalism both in the space of a century).

12. Which of the following statements according to the passage is correct?

- a. India took heed of the weak faults of Russian policies and systems.
- b. The process of industrialisation had already started when the Russian Revolution took place in 1917.
- c. India seriously commended the achievements of Russia, i.e., hundred percent literacy and rapid industrialisation.
- d. Literature, art and music received a setback during the communist regime in Russia.

13. The Indian perception of the Soviet Union was always

- a. Neutral
- b. Applauding
- c. Counter-reactionary
- d. Critical

14. The West did not focus on

- a. Massive human rights violation of the Soviet state on its people.
- b. Rapid growth of nuclear weapons in Russia.
- c. Deliberate uprooting and mass migration of ethnic people in the name of industrialisation.
- d. Both (a) and (c)

15. The passage is

- a. Descriptive
- b. Thought-provoking
- c. Paradoxical
- d. Analytical

16. Out of 130 students appearing in an exam, 62 failed in Science, 52 failed in English, whereas 24 failed in both

Science and English. The number of students who passed is

- a. 50
- b. 20
- c. 40
- d. 30

17. A girl introduced a boy as the son of the daughter of the father of her uncle. The boy is girl's

- a. Brother
- b. Son
- c. Nephew
- d. Uncle

18. If TRANSFER is coded as RTNAFSRE, then ELEPHANT would be coded as

- a. LEPEHATN
- b. LEEPAHTN
- c. LEPEAHTN
- d. LEPEAHNT

19. A number series is given with one term missing. Choose the correct alternative that will continue the same pattern and fill in the blank spaces.

1, 4, 27, 16, ?, 36, 343

- a. 121
- b. 244
- c. 125
- d. 81

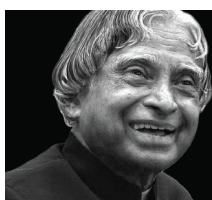
20. All good athletes want to win and all athletes who want to win eat a well-balanced diet; therefore, all athletes who do not eat a well-balanced diet are bad athletes. The best conclusion from this statement is that

- a. No bad athlete wants to win.
- b. No athlete who does not eat a well-balanced diet is a good athlete.
- c. Every athlete who eats a well-balanced diet is a good athlete.
- d. All athletes who want to win are good athletes.

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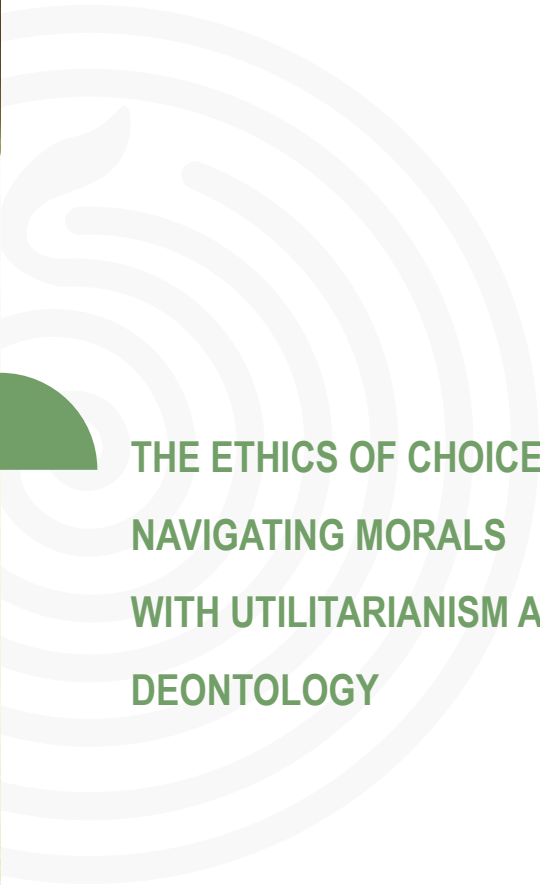

- A. P. J. ABDUL KALAM



ETHICS







THE ETHICS OF CHOICE:  
NAVIGATING MORALS  
WITH UTILITARIANISM AND  
DEONTOLOGY





## THE ETHICS OF CHOICE: NAVIGATING MORALS WITH UTILITARIANISM AND DEONTOLOGY

In the labyrinthine realm of human experience, choices stand at every juncture, each one laden with moral weight. How do we navigate this ethical maze, ensuring our actions resonate with righteousness? Two prominent theoretical frameworks offer guidance: utilitarianism and deontology. While seemingly diametrically opposed, these philosophies illuminate different facets of the ethical gem, highlighting the complexities and nuances of morality.

Utilitarianism, the champion of consequences, champions maximizing happiness for the greatest number. Developed by thinkers like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, it posits that actions are deemed moral if they contribute to overall well-being. This framework appeals to its practicality, offering a quantifiable approach to measuring the ethical impact of decisions. Imagine a doctor faced with two patients needing organ transplants; the utilitarian lens prioritizes saving the patient with the higher life expectancy, maximizing the total years of happiness lived.

However, utilitarianism's simplicity comes at a cost. Critics argue that it can disregard individual rights and justify morally repugnant actions for seemingly "greater good" outcomes. Imagine sacrificing one innocent person to save a hundred; while the net happiness might increase, the violation of individual rights remains problematic. The trolley problem, a thought experiment where one must divert a runaway train to save five workers at the cost of one worker on another track, highlights this dilemma. Is sacrificing the one for the five truly ethical, regardless of the utilitarian benefit?

Deontology, the guardian of duty, stands in stark contrast. Pioneered by Immanuel Kant, it emphasizes adherence to universal moral principles, regardless of consequences. These principles, like respecting human dignity and treating others as ends in themselves, form the bedrock of ethical decision-making. Deontology emphasizes the inherent rightness or wrongness of actions, independent of their outcomes. In the doctor's scenario, deontology might dictate treating both patients equally, respecting their individual right to medical care despite potential differences in life expectancy.

The strength of deontology lies in its protection of individual rights and its insistence on upholding certain moral absolutes. It prevents the slippery slope of sacrificing a few for the many, promoting a consistent ethical framework. However, deontology can sometimes be inflexible, struggling to address situations where adhering to principles leads to undesirable consequences. Consider a doctor bound by a deontological rule to never lie, even to terminally ill patients. While honesty is admirable, withholding the truth about their condition could cause unnecessary suffering.

The true ethical landscape is rarely black and white, but rather a tapestry woven with threads of both utilitarianism and deontology. In real-world scenarios, navigating ethical dilemmas often requires a nuanced approach, drawing upon both frameworks. Consider the development of life-saving medication with potentially harmful side effects. A purely utilitarian approach might readily prioritize saving lives, while a strict deontological stance might condemn its potential harm. By understanding both frameworks, we can engage in a cost-benefit analysis, exploring options that maximize well-being while minimizing harm, respecting individual rights while striving for the greater good.

Furthermore, moral decision-making is not solely an intellectual exercise but also involves understanding the specific context and the lived experiences of those involved. Cultural values, beliefs, and lived experiences influence how we perceive consequences and duties, enriching our ethical deliberations. By engaging in empathetic dialogue and acknowledging diverse perspectives, we can ensure that our moral compass is not solely guided by theoretical frameworks but also informed by human reality.

Ultimately, navigating the ethics of choice is an ongoing journey. While utilitarianism and deontology offer invaluable tools, it is our responsibility to engage critically with each framework, understanding both their strengths and limitations. By considering context, fostering empathy, and embracing an open-minded approach, we can move beyond theoretical constructs and arrive at ethical decisions that resonate with our deepest values and contribute to a world where the greatest good is pursued with respect for individual rights and dignity.

## ETHICS AND ETHICAL PROBLEMS OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Artificial intelligence (AI) is a broad term that encompasses several areas, including computer science, business, engineering, biology, psychology, mathematics, statistics, logic, philosophy, and linguistics. AI is unique and contentious due to its complexity and power. AI can be divided into two types: weak AI and strong AI. In contrast to weak AI, which can only process certain tasks, researchers from several areas are working together to develop strong AI (artificial general intelligence), which will be capable of processing multiple tasks with human-like intelligence. Researchers are concerned that general AI would lead to superintelligence, which might be loosely defined as "any intellect that substantially exceeds the cognitive performance of humans in almost all sectors of interest".

Humans have now created artificial life that can execute simple tasks utilizing artificial intelligence technology. With the advancement of technology, more

complex artificial life will be born and evolve, eventually producing human-like emotions and 'humanity'. At that moment, we must decide if they have rights and whether – and when – they are entitled to the same rights, freedoms, and protections as humans. The idea is that the more advanced AI becomes, the more risks it will pose to humans. For example, AI may bring mass unemployment, make decisions that people do not comprehend or control, lead to wealth redistribution, and finally replace humans.

Ethics is a difficult, intricate, and perplexing topic. Even the definitions of ethics demand their own article. The goal of this paper is not to define its concept; rather, it is to review relevant literature, obtain a broader overview of what are the perceived ethical and moral issues related to AI, and collect expert opinions on how ethical and moral issues related to AI can be studied, analyzed, and addressed. Because AI has been used in so many different industries, it is impossible to research AI ethics in all contexts.



## Ethical Issues with AI

As AI advances and becomes more sophisticated, there may be opportunities as well as challenges in various domains such as employment, law enforcement, medical, defense warfare systems, and transportation. Machines are gaining the ability to gauge, detect, understand, and interact with human emotions as affective computing, machine learning, and AI improves.

At the moment, AI is referred to as narrow AI or weak AI. It is effective in a narrow and specialized domain. The performance of narrow AI is heavily reliant on training data and programming, both of which are strongly tied to big data and humans. Thus, the ethical challenges of Narrow AI incorporate human factors. "A separate set of ethical difficulties emerges when we consider the prospect that some future AI systems may be candidates for moral status".

According to this viewpoint, once AI obtains moral status, we should regard it as an object with equal rights to humans rather than a machine system. The research on ethical issues in AI is divided into three categories: AI features that may give birth to ethical problems, human aspects that produce ethical hazards, and methods to teach AI systems to be ethical.

## Traffic Application Legal Issues of Automatic Driving

The car is the most common example of artificial intelligence technology in the transportation area. It has made a qualitative jump from the prior manual vehicle to the currently unmanned automatic driving. China has a vast population, and people's economic status and living conditions have both improved significantly. As a result, many self-driving automobiles are currently capturing the attention of our country's citizens. Many businesses believe China will be the largest market for self-driving cars. The drawbacks are generated by disputes between laws and regulations.

When someone is drunk and begins driving, if it should be called drunk driving, and who should be held liable for the car accident. To conclude, self-driving cars must make sensitive decisions under extreme conditions. The most essential thing to remember is that the increased sales of self-driving cars will raise the overall number of accidents that occur in self-driving cars, and how to govern in accordance with the law needs us to take this into account.

Smart travel planning has resulted in legal issues. The navigation system first appeared at the turn of the century. Because of the limited technology available at the time, the placement was not very accurate. However, as science and technology advanced, navigation became increasingly accurate. Today, we can use navigation to make our lives easier at any time by using computers, mobile phones, and other gadgets. Artificial intelligence technology is also being offered to help consumers plan their trips more quickly. Despite the fact that artificial intelligence technology will be used in navigation, there are still numerous aspects that will affect us, such as poor signal and intelligent judgement errors.

Many examples in life now tell us that navigation is not perfect and that there is a high level of security. A related issue might be navigation and operation failure, or an artificial intelligence information error. In a nutshell, the use of artificial intelligence in navigation raises concerns about security, who should bear accountability, and how to

protect victims' rights. All of these difficulties necessitate the application of the law.

## Surgical Robots' Legal Issues

The first surgical robot was employed in a number of operating rooms. Although it is not perfect enough to carry out an operation on its own, it can be used by doctors to carry out surgical instructions. However, as technology advances, robots will grow more sophisticated, and robots capable of performing surgery on their own will become a reality. Surgical robots are working on designing a single procedure that may be completed autonomously. Many trials have proven that robots outperform surgeons in terms of surgical results and efficiency, but they are not without risk. When an intelligent robot fails during surgery, it is classified as a medical error.

## The Legal Issues of Intelligent Medical Diagnosis

In several trials, artificial intelligence robots quickly acquire medical knowledge and can diagnose the patient's health. They can also, like doctors, regularly synthesize experiences based on patient feedback outcomes and improve their abilities. This technology was first investigated at the turn of the century. This part of our country, however, is still in its infancy. There is still a significant difference between us and the developed world.

We can quickly understand a large number of medical knowledge, that were also used for reference to a large number of cases using the learning function of artificial intelligence technology, but we can also improve the experience in the diagnosis process and everything has a relationship, if there is misdiagnosis of doctor-patient dispute occurs at the same time, there is also a big problem that we will face the who should responsible for the accident.

## Legal Issues of Smart Stock Operations

Artificial intelligence is commonly used to undertake operations on stock investments in its current state. It can employ a variety of calculations to improve the stability and accuracy of typical processes. Many public funds and private equity firms will create artificial intelligence technology for stock operations, and many Internet companies are researching artificial intelligence systems that operate stocks. All of this indicates that artificial intelligence technology will become a machine for investors to profit from, and more and more intelligent trading products will follow suit, lowering the cost of investors.

However, the system developer's learning basis, operating methodologies, and data conduits change, as does the product's profitability. The first goal of such a design is to increase profits. This design does not address how their trading conduct will hurt the market. This tool will enable the market to promote the effect of supporting the decline, if it is utilized by people who have goals that will lead the market to skyrocket and plunge. And we still need to think about how to account for the benefits of people who utilize intelligent programs trading, which causes the entire market to alter in stock or other market behaviour.

## Legal Issues Presented by Smart Investment Consultants

A smart investment advisor may give you with financial advice and is the one who is compensated. A set of analysis methodologies can be used to optimize financial management approaches to develop smart robots





and provide advice to investors based on the investor's acceptance range, earnings expectations, investment style, and other factors. Intelligent investment advisers have been growing for many years in other countries, but our country was late to the game, but it is quickly catching up. Many consultants integrate artificial intelligence with ongoing research and development of investment approaches to open up investment consultancy marketplaces, allowing everyone to get relatively optimal profits.

The introduction of many service providers into the smart investment consultant sector has made the market extremely competitive. However, more investors are obtaining wise investment counsel, and more individuals are paying attention to investment. However, if we wish to start an investment consulting business, the management department must first confirm the qualification. Although expert advice on the advancement of artificial intelligence technology has been provided, it is the supervision department that is required to give a license and take photographs.

### Business Applications and Legal Issues

The recommendation of smart goods raises legal issues. Many e-commerce suppliers are launching solutions for the retail business. They collect historical behaviour data to analyse customer care preferences, locate fit points for customers, and use intelligent customer service robots by understanding and deep learning large data. Customer chat, recommended products, and intelligent recommendation bring significant ease to life, and companies profit as well, but we must be cautious of counterfeit goods. When e-commerce vendors utilize artificial intelligence systems to propose things to customers, if clever counterfeit goods are recommended, the smart recommendation system will be held accountable for more than the sale of fake goods.

Legal issues were raised as a result of the smart search. An intelligent search engine combines artificial intelligence and classical search technology. It can teach the user and show him or her the most likely outcome. User registration, interest detection, semantic understanding, automatic push and result filtering, and other humanized services are all possible with the intelligent search engine. The number of clicks on Internet search sites makes for a significant share of total Internet traffic, and it is also a visually appealing site. However, the economic gains shared by search engines and merchants might allow unethical businesses to swiftly extend their influence. In the framework of artificial intelligence technology, there will be no economic benefits between smart search engines and enterprises.

Legal issues arise as a result of smart identification. Artificial intelligence is commonly used to recognize fingerprints, faces, and voice prints. The majority of contacts, however, are fingerprint identification, such as mobile phones, computers, access control, and safety, which require security authentication to improve security level. Face recognition and voice printing are also becoming increasingly popular. Now that the identification technology

is ready to go, internet shopping must identify fingerprint verification payments, and bank cards and safes must all be fingerprint confirmed. Intelligent identification is continually being updated and evolving. However, in the process of strengthening security, it has neglected to consider its own security.

Following the collecting of fingerprints, faces, and voiceprints, the intelligent system is penetrated, taking information and using it at a risky time. While we use artificial intelligence technology to identify people, it is also keeping an eye on our privacy.

### Legal Implications of Smart Homes

Smart housing is built on the integration of audio, video, network communications, automation, and artificial intelligence technologies to form an intelligent integrated system. It can give protection for the family and provide convenient services that can improve the family's taste. It is a necessary prerequisite for creating an ideal family life, as well as an eco-friendly and efficient way of living, which we are looking forward to. Economic income in China has gradually expanded since this period, and there are open-ended communities. Home security has emerged as a major source of anxiety.

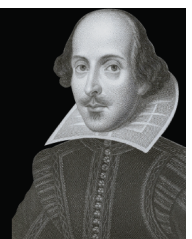
Internal and external security are all key parts of home security. Artificial intelligence is used by merchants to connect cameras, access control, appliances, and gas to detect risks and inform them in real time. Everything has benefits and drawbacks. We can see why there is a camera in public settings, but in the private sector, privacy is less important. As a result, we deploy smart cameras, access control, and other gadgets to monitor our daily activities and personal privacy. Although this can make the system more familiar to the user, the implications are unthinkable if the merchant abuses or steals the private data.

### Conclusion

The most crucial aspect of applying artificial intelligence technology is to be mindful of ethical concerns. Each ethical approach will have a distinct advantage. At the same time, it recognizes its limitations and can choose the path of moral design based on the product scenario. Humans generate science and technology to serve humanity, but artificial intelligence technology should be better able to contribute to human discovery for the benefit of humankind. Understanding and tackling AI-related ethical and moral issues is still in its early stages. It is not a simple question of 'right or wrong', 'good or terrible', or 'virtue and vice'. It is not even a problem that a small group of people can tackle. However, ethical and moral issues of AI are essential and must be addressed immediately. This study emphasizes the importance of stakeholders paying attention to the ethics of AI systems. While attempting to develop ethical standards for AI and other sophisticated computer technologies, we will also get a deeper understanding of human ethics, improve existing ethical principles, and improve the application of ethical principles and values.

*"Be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and others have greatness thrust upon them."*

- WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE







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# TOPICS OF THE MONTH



**A SMILE IS A CHOSEN VEHICLE FOR ALL  
AMBIGUITIES**

**- DR. Alexander Jacob IPS**

**ADVERTISEMENT AND ITS IMPORTANCE**

**-DR. Babu Sebastian**

**CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

**-DR. G. Prasanna Kumar IAS**

**HISTORY OF NATIONS: TOWARDS  
GLOBAL GOVERNMENT**

**-Mr.Solomon John**





## A SMILE IS A CHOSEN VEHICLE FOR ALL AMBIGUITIES

Smiling is a globally understood gesture of happiness, friendliness, and optimism. It is a straightforward yet deep statement that cuts over linguistic and cultural barriers. It is an effective nonverbal communication technique that may express a wide range of feelings, from joy and friendship to compassion and understanding. Smiling is a fundamental human behaviour that not only conveys our emotional condition but also plays a vital function in social relationships. We discover the multiple nature of a smile as we examine its intricacies and subtleties, delving into the physiological, psychological, and social aspects that contribute to this magnificent part of human connection.

A smile is a potent tool for social connection and communication. Smiles, whether they come from a politician or a loved one, have a significant influence on our emotions and behaviour in both private and public settings. even if a happy smile radiates positivity. Sometimes, smiles are only meant to be affiliative or even to conceal negative feelings and intentions. Cherry-coloured eyes give off the impression of being naturally happy. A person with sorrow in their eyes and a smile on their face is showing indecision. To make necessary modifications, smiles must be interpreted correctly. When a smile is part of an ambiguous expression on a face with sad eyes, one can wonder how the smile affects the expression.

On our earth, everyone is dealing with something. Happiness and sadness are inherent aspects of existence. They've put on a mask to hide their true feelings. This happy mask is used by some people to hide their problems, eccentricities, or worries. Some use it as a coping mechanism for losing a loved one.

We need to understand what the uncertainties mean. In actuality, ambiguities can have more than one meaning. This is neither clear nor obvious. We could make reference to something that is creating ambiguity or misunderstanding. Some manipulative or gray area issues propagate the uncertainty. The burden of diplomacy is being carried by the ambiguity. It's not always essential to confront someone who is uncommitted. We could just smile and carry on with our talk. Even if we disagree with something, we can still smile or make a nice gesture and move on. If we want to pause and reflect, we can simply smile without taking a stance.

A smile is a tool for dispersing uncertainty. The question of what a smile means in this situation now emerges. A smile essentially conveys qualities such as a nice behaviour, kind remarks, and disagreeing with something without being confrontational or criticizing someone. Additionally, polite gestures are part of the polite gesture's foundations. You can be pleasant, smile, and make a beautiful gesture to show that you don't agree with someone without getting into an argument. Conflict is a quality that impedes a person's growth and prosperity since it depletes their energy. It will be considerably better to handle the situation with harmony and serenity rather than tactics that deplete your vitality.

Constructive ambiguity is thought to be the best illustration of a negotiation tactic. It discusses the deliberate use of confusing language on a touchy subject in order to achieve a political objective. People can be brought down to suit one's wishes by polite gestures, a smiling face, kind words, and vague language with clear political meanings. They are able to effectively progress linked matters so that neither side has excessive discomfort.

For example, New Delhi has chosen a calculated public neutrality toward Russia despite its disapproval of Ukrainian conflict. Among the great democracies and among American strategic allies, India's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine has distinguished itself. It has consistently voted against Russian aggression in Ukraine by abstaining from votes in the UN Security Council, General Assembly, and Human Rights Council. It has also refrained from publicly blaming Russia for the Crisis. India was displaying solidarity for Ukraine on the opposite side of the public stage. A smile has the power to cross chasms and overcome obstacles.

Given that modern religion is a complex, ambiguous reality, reasonable and sane people can only have an ambivalent view toward it. It cannot be naively disregarded or unquestioningly cherished since it provokes both love and rage. For as long as there is life on Earth, there will be religion, and with that comes ambiguity. It won't be something that people can embrace fully or reject totally. It is evident from this that although people are receiving it with grace and happiness, they are nevertheless unsure about the faith. Humans are a greedy creature of nature that accepts or rejects anything based on the balance of their selfishness. Rationality will be overlooked if interest is achieved by accepting something with ambiguity.

There is a well-known tale that claims Krishna smiled while he decapitated Shishupala. Killing is a serious act, and attempting to carry it out while grinning and attributing it to a God leaves a lot of room for misunderstanding. Buddha would often smile but say nothing when someone posed a question to him. Such behavior from an enlightened soul raises many issues concerning God's smile.

When we discuss mental health concerns, we will discover that despite increased understanding, many individuals continue to fail to recognize or treat mental discomfort seriously, which frequently has a detrimental effect on a person's life. The main cause of this is a lack of knowledge about mental health illnesses and their consequences. They keep their experiences a secret, even after talking about such things. Then have a deep-seated sense that something is amiss in his emotional and psychological realm, but that people are accepting it as an essential aspect of existence since there is insufficient clarity.

Mutual understanding and compassion have the power to improve the quality of life on Earth. It is closely related to happiness and smiling. We must first emphasize the reasons for empathy and understanding between people. If empathy and understanding between people are becoming less important, we can preserve them by speaking gently and having a positive attitude. There are five components to compassion that can be applied to oneself or others. These five components include acknowledging suffering, realizing that all people endure suffering, empathizing with the person's suffering and emotionally connecting to their anguish, and accepting any uncomfortable emotions evoked, such as fear, disgust, sadness, wrath, etc. All of these are associated with the prevailing ambiguity of life. So that we remain accepting and open to the person in their suffering and acting or being motivated to act to alleviate the suffering.

Without ambiguity, nothing in this world is successful. Clarity is sought after when there is ambiguity. In many situations, soft skills are employed as instruments to address the complexity of the problem, but they are



also frequently used to resolve states of ambiguity. Soft skills such as a smile, a pleasant gesture, and an attractive demeanour were used to maintain situational ambiguity. Diplomacy always seeks to preserve circumstantial ambiguity if it serves the individual's interests.

Ambiguity in a smile can arise when the emotions behind it are unclear or when there is a mismatch between the facial expression and the person's true feelings. For

example, someone might smile to mask their true emotions, convey politeness in a socially awkward situation, or express irony or sarcasm. In literature, art, and psychology, the ambiguity of a smile is often explored and depicted as a complex interplay of emotions and intentions. The famous painting "Mona Lisa" by Leonardo da Vinci, for example, is known for the mysterious and ambiguous smile of the subject, sparking centuries of interpretation and speculation.

## ADVERTISEMENT AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Advertising encourages consumers to buy in quantity rather than promoting quality. Advertising business is a form of marketing communication used to encourage, persuade or manipulate an audience to take or continue to take some action. The purpose of advertising may also be to reassure employees or the shareholders that a company is viable or a successful. We come across advertisements on TV, radio or hoardings at the side of the road. It has become art of our lives. The advertising is a powerful and persuasive medium. Advertisement is encouraging people to buy in quantity. However, it does not promote the quality. On the one hand advertisements make up, puts up things in the home which we may never ever use. Even with all the shortcomings the positive aspects of advertisement overwhelm the negative aspects and the society cannot do away with it.

It is true that the advertising provides us with the different information on the new products. If it were not for electronic and print advertising many products will not be bought. In this way, the advertising provides us the opportunity to make a link with manufacturers. Advertising influences the consumers, the advertisements tell us about new products that are launched in the market. They also tell us about the working of these products. After seeing the product, the consumers go in the market and select the things of their choice.

The advertisement informs the consumers about the qualities and price of goods and this makes purchasing goods easier for the consumers. As the prices of the goods are already advertised, the consumers cannot be overcharged from the goods he/she buys from the market. By the regular advertisements on television, the manufacturer can sell the goods directly to the consumers without depending on the middleman. This helps to eliminate the middle man's charges and the profit which is to be distributed among them. It means that there will be higher profit for the manufacture, and lower prices for the consumer. It helps in the improvements of the quality of goods.

The consumers are attracted by the quality of products that is advertised, they continue buying. It also helps the consumers to save the time. As the consumer has already been the consumers, it helps to raise the lowering standard of the consumer. It also provides us about the knowledge of the new designs of the goods. Thus, the consumers purchase these commodities and increase their living standard. Advertisements make us able to shop on the television also for really good prices. We can buy the good items by dialling up the number on the screen.

There are different types of the advertising though which we can easily buy the goods. The successful advertising campaign will spread the world about your products and also the services which also help in attracting the consumers and also help to generating the sale. Whether you are trying to encourage the new customers to

buy an existing product or may be of launching of the new services, there are many options to choose from. The most important or the suitable advertising option depends on the products or the services which you are advertising and you target the audience.

The foremost type of the advertising is found in newspaper. Newspaper gives us all variety of advertisements regarding to any type incidents happens in the country whether it is news related to sports or the main headlines. So there are lots of newspapers which are published here as all people are in habit of reading the newspaper daily. The newspaper may be in different languages like the English, Hindi or the Punjabi and different newspaper are Times Hindustan, Dainik Bhaskar,

There are many advertising techniques which can be used. One of the common advertising techniques used are the claims. Advertisement that promotes specific feature or also makes the claims about what a product or the services can do for the potential customers as it provides the successful results by informing, educating and also developing expectation in the buyers. Claims can also be used to facts or simply use type such as the calling of one brand of orange juice the best hen the nutritionally it is identical to other brand. Claims may also mislead through omission or by using what some advertisement and the political campaigner call we sell words.

The next advertisement technique used is the promotions. The coupons, sweeps take, games with prize and gifts with purchases creates the excitement and also the participation encourages the customers to build a relationship with the sponsoring product or the services. The attraction of getting something "free" or the earning rewards makes the promotion successful. There is also limited time offers and also the entry deadlines.

The advertisement which appears helps the customers to levy goods from them depending on their choice. India has a very high number of the television lovers. Most of the Indian Advertisements originate from the television. These ads help us to represents the motto of the each of the companies for a fixed period of time and also after a certain period. These advertisements get replaced with some another advertisement. But some advertisements are there which have been extensively popular among the viewers. We can quote some very popular examples. The first advertisement is of Fevicol. The advertisement of Fevicol has always proved that the advertisements can bring in lot of different in marketing strategy. Most of the advertisements were very catchy and were liked by the Indian audience. Another example is of Dhara-oil. Dhara refined oil is one of the most loved cooking oil manufacturing brands in India. Most of commercial advertisements of Dhara were very meaningful and also gained much of the popularity in the Indian television. The demand of the oil increased very much.

Advertising research is a specialized form of





research works done to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of advertising. It also involves numerous forms of research which employ different methodologies. But on the other side there are some disadvantages too we can't see the items before buying it. We may also be addicted to it and spend more money in buying than we originally wanted to. We couldn't be getting as much as exercise as we usually would be if you were going to shop every weekend.

There is an increasing amount of advertising directed at children that encourage them to buy the goods such as toys, clothes and the snacks. Many parents put too such pressure on children, while there are some advertisement claims that they provide us the useful

information to the children. Especially advertisements target the children who are considered to be vulnerable. As a result of this that many parents are wary of this phenomenon. The society would not benefit from ban on all the forms of advertising because it serves for no useful purpose and can even be damaging while advertising has many disadvantages the positive influence of advertising outweigh the negative advertising.

Advertisements are a huge business. In fact, it is a form of industry in itself. A number of persons are employed in advertisement industry at different levels. Advertisements are very important for us. They have influenced our lives like no other thing has ever effected.

## CULTURAL DIVERSITY

For most people culture means high artistic or intellectual achievement, the development of art and science, the humanities, philosophy, the expression of the genius of a people. The diversity of culture can be understood better from the fact that it is impossible to have a comprehensive definition of the culture. The same difficulty is also faced while trying to understand a culture of the group due to presence of numerable sub-cultures. This diversity often leads to creation of different tensions which cannot be solved.

It is perhaps not too surprising that in the history of human contacts most groups have been much more impressed by their differences from others than by the similarities. All too frequently this has been associated with the belief that if they are different from us they must be inferior. In the language of many of the pre-literature societies described by anthropologists the expression 'that people' referred only to one's own group; other groups were often considered strange, exotic, inferior and somewhat less than human. This attitude, although widespread, is not necessarily universal, but it has certainly played an important role in the relations between peoples, not only in the obvious cases of colonization an other forms of exploitation, but even in situations which are motivated by liberal high-minded programmes such as technical assistance or cooperation, in which the receiving areas are expected to adopt the standards and models of the donors.

Culture refers to behaviour which is specifically human and also to the distinctive ways of life found in different human populations. From this point of view of education in for international understanding, it has frequently been suggested that it is important to supply information as to how others behave; although such information does not necessarily lead to friendly attitudes, it does seem safer to base our relations with other people on knowledge rather than on ignorance. On the other hand, the psychologist Gordon Allport suggested a number of years ago that educators had gone too far in stressing the differences among peoples, and presenting others as strange and even exotic in their behaviour. He called instead for an "encyclopaedia of human similarities," with greater stress on the common-human. A more reasonable position would be to include both the resemblances and the differences. Our understanding of culture requires a concern with both similarities and differences, and is with the ease and likelihood with which the differences occur.

A serious difficulty arises when we attempt to identify the characteristics of a particular culture. Every group is complex, with variations in behaviour according to social class or status, occupation, education or role; that kind of culture exhibited or absorbed by the individual will be somewhat different for men and women, for young

and old, for each individual; in a nation-state it may vary considerably from one region to another. These variations are often characterized as sub-cultures, but it is not easy to determine how many subcultures should be distinguished. In addition, cultures change. How much continuity is there been Czarist and Communist Russian, Elizabethan and Victorian England, or the France of Louis XIV and today?

In connection with cultural change, there is an important development in recent years which is usually defined as the 'counter-culture,' because of the position taken by its adherents in relation to, and often in opposition to the prevailing values of the larger community. It is mainly confined to the young in industrial societies; it denies the relevance of many of the ideals of the parents; it is not concerned with making preparations for the future, but insists on living intensely the experience of the present (the now generation). Success is seen not in material terms but as personal development, self-fulfilment, self-realization.

One aspect of this movement is particularly striking in connection with cultural variations. For many of the devotes of the counter-culture in west, salvation is to be found in the religions of the Orient. Man parents and teachers of the young in revolt against their society find it hard to understand the attraction of Zen Buddhism or Hinduism, but the emphasis on contemplation and inner peace must seem very palatable to those trying to escape from a society which stresses hard work and material success. Not only do the Eastern religions provide an alternative style; they also reduce or remove any feelings of guilt that may benefit as the result of defection from the goals which the young had been brought up to respect, but which no longer satisfied them. On the other hand for the devotes of the counter-culture in east, salvation is found in west.

The whole movement included within the concept of the counter-culture has lost many of its adherents, and is frequently considered to have abandoned a good part of its programme. This may be the case, but recent research on the attitudes of young men and women with regard to work and their future, indicates that at least some of its components continue to have an impact.

It has frequently been pointed out that there is a tendency in the industrially world to see itself as a universally valid model to be imitated by others. In this connection Galtung analyses the important question of human needs, their universal and variable character, and the necessity of avoiding cultural ethnocentrism, paying more direct attention to what the recipient societies want, and less to what the donors think they ought to want. What they want may, however, be difficult to determine since the political leaders and the leaders in many developing



countries have themselves adopted a position close to that of the Western world.

The fact remains that technological change is not always accompanied by the disappearance of traditional culture. There can be no doubt as to the industrial and technical achievement of the Japanese, but at the same time they have retained many distinctively Eastern and national traits. It has been suggested, for example, that their life continues to be affected by the notion of mutual dependence, whereas the West, centred on the individual, tends to develop more self-reliance. In Japan a business enterprise, no matter how large, is seen in the image of a

household, with the accompanying interdependence and loyalty characteristic of the family.

The real question we ought to ask ourselves is whether, among the patterns of universal character put forward there is one more likely to respect diversity in the overall development scheme. For there are many advantages in diversity and these advantages are not only cultural but also economic. Are there, then, patterns and ideologies which, while necessarily being presented as they are that is of universal character are more likely than others to maintain diversity rather than consider it as an obstacle to development, and how can they be applied?

## HISTORY OF NATIONS: TOWARDS GLOBAL GOVERNMENT

Global Nation: The human drama, whether played out in history books or headlines, is often not just a confusing spectacle about confusion. The big question these days is, which political forces will prevail, those stitching nations together or those tearing them apart? Optimists believe that unity will prevail over disunity, integration over disintegration. They say that the nations have slowly involved from the tribes and they within the next hundred years, nationhood as we know it will be obsolete; all states will recognize a single, global authority. A phrase briefly fashionable in the mid-20th century "Citizen of the world" will have assumed real meaning by the end of 21st century.

All the countries are basically social arrangements, accommodations to changing circumstances. No matter how permanent and even sacred they may seem at any one time, in fact they are all artificial and temporary. Through the ages, there has been an overall trend towards larger unit claiming sovereignty and, paradoxically, a gradual diminution of how much true sovereignty any one country actually has.

The forerunner of the nation was a pre-historic clustered around a fire beside the river in a valley. Its members had a language, a set of supernatural beliefs and a repertoire of legends about their ancestors. Eventually they forged primitive weapons and set off over the mountain, mumbling phrases that could be loosely translated as having something to do with "vital national interests" and "manifesto destiny". When they reached the next valley, they massacred and enslaved some weaker band of people they found clustered around some smaller fire and thus became the world's first imperialists.

Empires were a popular force for obliterating natural and demographic barriers and forging connections among far-flung parts of the world. The British left their system of civil services in India, Kenya and Guyana, while the Spaniards, Portuguese and French spread Roman Catholicism to almost every continent.

Empire eventually yielded to the nation-state, made up primarily of a single tribe. China, France, Germany and Japan are surviving examples. Yet each of them too is the consequence of a centuries-long process of accretion. It took the shedding of much blood in many valleys for Normandy, Brittany and Gascony to become a part of France.

Today fewer than 10 percent of the 186 countries on earth are ethnically homogeneous. The rest are multinational states. Most of them have pushed their boundaries outward, often until they reached the sea. The main goal driving the process of political expansion and

consolidation was conquest. The big absorbed the small, the strong the weak. National might made international right. Such a world as in a more or less constant state of war. From time to time the best minds wondered whether this wasn't a hell of a way to run a planet, perhaps national sovereignty was not such a great idea after all. Aante in 14th century, Erasmus in 16th and Grotius in 17th all envisioned international law as a means of overcoming the natural tendency of states to settle their differences by force.

In the 18th century the enlightenment represented by Rousseau in France, Hume in Scotland, Kant in Germany, Paine and Jefferson in the US gave rise to the idea that all human beings are born equal and should, as citizens, enjoy certain basic liberties and rights, including that of choosing their leaders. Once there was a universal ideology to govern the conduct of nations towards their own people, it was more reasonable to imagine a compact governing nation's behaviour towards one another. In 1795 Kant advocated a "peaceful league of democracies"

But it has taken the events in our own wondrous and terrible century to clinch the case for World government. With the advent of electricity, radio and air travel, the planet has become smaller than ever, its commercial life free, its nations more interdependent and its conflicts bloodier. The price of settling international disputes by force was rapidly becoming too high for the victors, not to mention the vanquished. The conclusion should have been clear enough at the battle of the Somme in 1916 by the destruction of Hiroshima in 1945, it was unavoidable.

Once again, great minds thought alike; Einstein, Gandhi, Toynbee and Camus all favoured giving primacy priority to interests of the nation. So, finally, did many statesmen. Each world war inspired the creation of an international organisation, the League of Nations in the 1920 and the United Nations in the 1940s.

The plot thickened with the heavy-breathing arrival on the scene of new species of ideology expansionist totalitarianism. It threatened the very idea of democracy and divided the world. The advocacy of any kind of world government became highly suspect.

The cold war saw the European Community pioneer the kind of regional cohesion that may pave the way for Globalism. Meanwhile, the free world formed multilateral financial institutions that depend on member state's willingness to give up a degree of sovereignty. The International Monetary Fund can virtually dictate fiscal policies, even including how much tax a government should levy on its citizens. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade regulates how much duty a nation can charge on imports. These organisations can be seen as





the protoministries of trade, finance and development for a united world.

The internal affairs of a nation used to be off limits to the world community. Now the principle of "Humanitarian Intervention" is gaining acceptance. A turning point came in April 1991 shortly after Saddam Hussein's withdrawal from Kuwait, when the UN security council authorised allied troops to assist starving Kurds in northern Iraq.

Globalisation has also contributed to the spread of terrorism, drug trafficking, AIDS and environmental degradation. Because these threats are more than any one nation can cope with on its own, they constitute an incentive for international co-operation, Azerbaijan, Moldova and Czechoslovakia were part of the world's last, now deceased empire. Their break-up may turn out to be the old business of history, not the wave of the future. National self-assertiveness in the West can be mighty ugly, especially in its more extreme Irish and Basque versions. But when Scots, Quebecois, Catalans, and Bretons talk separatism, they are, in the main, actually renegotiating their ties to London, Ottawa, Madrid and Paris.

They are the disputatious representatives of a larger, basically positive phenomenon; a devolution of power not only upward supernatural bodies and outward towards common wealth's and common markets, but also

down-wards towards freer, more autonomous units of administration on that permit distinct societies to preserve their cultural identities and govern themselves as much as possible. The American buzz word empowerment and the European one, subsidiarity is being defined locally, regionally and globally all the same time.

The best mechanism for democracy, whether at the level of multinational state or that of the planet as a whole, is not an all-powerful leviathan or centralised superstate, but a federation, a union of separate states that allocate certain powers to a central government while retaining many other for themselves.

Federalism has already proved the most successful of all political experiments, and organisation like the World Federalist Association have for decades advocated it as the basis for global government. Federalism is largely an American invention. For all its trouble, including its own serious bout of secessionism 130 years ago and the persistency of various forms of tribalism today, US is still the best example of a multinational federal state. If that model does indeed work globally, it would be a great idea. As for humanity as a whole, federally united we won't really be very far from those much earlier ancestors, the ones huddled around that primeval fire beside the river, it is just that by then the whole world will be our valley.





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# **MODEL QUESTION PAPER-MCQ**









1. Consider the following statements:

1. Establish a more equitable, effective, and efficient direct taxation system.
2. Create a uniform sets of principles to guide matters related to direct taxes.
3. Increase the tax-GDP ratio and improve voluntary compliance.

Which among the above is / are feature(s) of the Direct Tax Code?

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2 only
- c. 1 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

2. Following is a description: "Revenue receipts forgone mainly on account of tax exemptions attributable to tax provisions that often result from the use of the tax system to promote social goals without incurring direct expenditures". The above description refers to

- a. Tax expenditures
- b. Tax to GDP ratio
- c. Collection rate
- d. None of the above

3. Laffer's curve is a relationship between

- a. total tax revenues and the Gross Domestic Production (GDP) of a country
- b. total tax revenues and tax rates
- c. total tax revenues to the per capita income of a country
- d. None of the above

4. No tax shall be levied or collected except by authority of law is in accordance with Article ----- of the Indian Constitution.

- a. 265
- b. 266
- c. 267
- d. 269

5. Consider the following statements:

1. Stamp duties and such duties of excise on medicinal and toilet preparations as are mentioned in the Union List shall be levied and collected by the Centre but appropriated by the States.

2. Service taxes are levied by the Centre, but collected and appropriated by the Centre and States.

Which among the above statement(s) is / are true during the pre-GST period?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

6. Consider the following statements:

1. No moneys out of the Consolidated Funds and Public Accounts shall be appropriated except in accordance with law and for the purposes and in the manner provided in the Constitution.

2. All money collected in form of surcharges and Cess are appropriated to the Public Accounts.

Which among the above statement(s) is / are true?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

7. During the pre-GST period, a tax levied on the sale or purchase of or consignment of goods takes place in the course of inter State or commerce

- a. levied by the Centre, but appropriated to the Producer States.
- b. levied by the Centre, but appropriated to the Consumer States.
- c. levied and appropriated to the Centre
- d. levied and collected by the Centre and shared between Centre and States in accordance with principles provided under the Finance Commission.

8. Which one of the following statements regarding the levying, collecting and distribution of Income Tax is correct? [UPSC Preliminary (1999)]

- a. The Union levies, collects and distributes the proceeds of income tax between itself and the states.
- b. The Union levies, collects and keeps all the proceeds of income tax to itself.
- c. The Union levies and collects the tax but all the proceeds are distributed among the states.
- d. Only the surcharge levied on income tax is shared between the Union and the states.

9. Consider the following statements:

1. The Parliament of India can enact a law to empower the Union to levy, collect and assign surcharges to the Public Accounts of India and appropriate the surcharges.

2. A surcharge is levied for no specific purpose.

Which among the above statement(s) is / are true?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

10. Consider the following:

1. Creation of unified national market
2. Boost to 'Make in India' initiative
3. Reduction of compliance burden on taxpayers
4. Buoyancy to the Government Revenue
5. Elimination of multiple taxes and double taxation

Which among the above is / are benefits of the Goods and Services Taxes (GST) system?

- a. 1, 3, 4 & 5 only
- b. 2, 3, 4 & 5 only
- c. 1, 2, 4 and 5 only
- d. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5



11. Consider the following statements:

1. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Second Amendment) Bill, 2016 was enacted to introduce the Goods and Services taxes.

2. The Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Second Amendment) Bill, 2016 require a special majority of the Parliament of India and ratification of at least half of the State Legislature.

Which among the above statement(s) is / are true?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

12. Consider the following statements:

1. Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN) is a non-profit organisation formed to provide IT infrastructure and services to the Central and State Governments, taxpayers and other stakeholders for the implementation of GST.

2. The Government of India of State Governments cumulatively holds a 51 % stake in GSTN.

Which among the above statement(s) is / are true?

- a. 1 only
- b. 2 only
- c. Both 1 and 2
- d. Neither 1 nor 2

13. What are the proposed benefits of GST?

- 1. Overall reduction in prices for consumers.
- 2. Reduction in multiplicity of taxes, cascading and double taxation.
- 3. Decrease in 'black' transactions.

Choose the correct option.

- a. 1 only
- b. 1 and 2
- c. 2 and 3
- d. 1, 2 and 3

14. Consider the following statements:

1. The CGST Bill makes provisions for levy and collection of tax on intra-state supply of goods or services or both by the Central Government.

2. IGST Bill makes provisions for levy and collection of tax on inter-state supply of goods or services or both by the Central Government.

3. The UTGST Bill makes provisions for levy on collection of tax on intra-UT supply of goods and services in the Union Territories without legislature.

Which of the below statements about GST is/are correct?

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

15. Which of the following products are outside the purview of GST?

- 1. Alcohol for human consumption
- 2. Electricity
- 3. Medicines

Choose the correct option.

- a. 1 and 2 only
- b. 1 and 3 only
- c. 2 and 3 only
- d. 1, 2 and 3

16. With reference to 'Un Climate Conference: 28th Session (COP28)' often seen in news, consider the following statements.

- 1. The session calls for a 43% reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.
- 2. Parties are encouraged to triple renewable energy capacity and double energy efficiency improvements globally by 2030.
- 3. The Green Climate Fund receives minimal pledges without additional commitments to adaptation and least developed countries.

How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

- A. Only One
- B. Only Two
- C. All the Three
- D. None of the above

17. Consider the following statements regarding 'Arsenic and fluoride contamination in groundwater' sometime seen in news.

- 1. Elevated levels of arsenic and fluoride pose health risks to populations dependent on contaminated groundwater.
- 2. Fluoride contamination in groundwater has no association with dental and skeletal fluorosis.

Which of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

18. The "Miyawaki method," frequently discussed in the news, is primarily associated with:

- A. Traditional Japanese gardening techniques
- B. Urban planning and sustainable architecture
- C. Afforestation and ecological restoration
- D. Marine conservation and coral reef rehabilitation

19. Which among the following statements best explains the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol?

- A. The Amendment focuses on marine conservation, setting guidelines for sustainable fishing practices to protect ocean biodiversity, unrelated to the Montreal Protocol.
- B. It addresses ozone layer depletion by phasing down hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), potent greenhouse gases used in refrigeration and air conditioning, under the Montreal Protocol.





C. Amendment regulates carbon emissions from industrial processes, aiming to mitigate climate change impacts, unrelated to the environmental concerns addressed by the Montreal Protocol.

D. This amendment introduces measures to control deforestation and preserve biodiversity, unrelated to the goals of the Montreal Protocol.

20. The "Blue Drop National Report 2023," frequently discussed in the news, is related to water quality management and sanitation efforts on which continent?

- A. Asia
- B. Europe
- C. Africa
- D. North America

21. Consider the following statements regarding 'Green Voyage2050' often mentioned in news.

1. It is a maritime sustainability initiative led by the World Shipping Council.

2. The project aims to decarbonize the shipping industry and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

3. India named pioneer lead country for this Project.

How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

- A. Only One
- B. Only Two
- C. All the Three
- D. None of the above

22. With reference to 'Namdapha flying squirrel' often seen in news, consider the following statements.

1.They are endemic to Namdapha National Park in Manipur.

2.They are listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

3.They are listed under Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act in India.

How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

- A.Only One
- B.Only Two
- C.All the Three
- D.None of the above

23. The terms 'POLIX' and 'XSPECT' often seen in news is related with

- A.Disease diagnostic techniques
- B.Space Technology
- C.Defence engineering
- D.Advanced Robotics

24. Consider the following statements regarding 'Anti-Submarine Watercraft' often seen in news.

1.They are naval vessels designed to detect and combat submarines.

2.They are equipped with advanced sonar systems for underwater detection.

3.INS Kalvari in Indian navy is an example of Anti-Submarine Watercraft

Which of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

- A. 1 and 2 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

25. The term "AAROGYA MAITRI AID CUBE" often seen in the news, is associated with:

- A. A new initiative for promoting yoga and wellness in rural areas
- B. A space exploration mission to study Mars' atmosphere
- C. An international collaboration for promoting mental health awareness
- D. India's first portable hospital for emergency medical assistance

26. With reference to 'Voice over New Radio (VoNR)' often seen in news, consider the following statements.

1. It is a technology for providing voice communication in 4G networks.

2. The technology enables high-quality voice calls over 4G networks with low latency.

3. The technology supports features like enhanced HD voice and simultaneous data transmission during voice calls.

How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

- A. Only One
- B. Only Two
- C. All the Three
- D. None of the above

27. Consider the following statements regarding Malaria

1. It is caused by bacteria.

2. It is primarily transmitted to humans through the bites of infected female Anopheles mosquitoes.

Identify the correct statement/s.

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 only
- C. Both 1 and 2
- D. Neither 1 nor 2

28. The term "AKTOCYTE TABLETS," often seen in the news, is related to:

- A. An innovative cancer treatment utilizing nanotechnology
- B. A breakthrough in stem cell research for cancer therapy
- C. A new class of targeted therapy drugs for cancer treatment
- D. A preventive vaccine for certain types of cancer

29. Which among the following statements best explains the neglected tropical diseases (NTDs)?

A. It refer to common viral infections prevalent in urban areas with well-established treatment protocols.



B. These diseases are characterized by their geographic concentration in affluent regions requiring high-cost interventions.

C. They are a group of parasitic and bacterial infections affecting marginalized populations requiring targeted interventions for elimination under global health programs.

D. These diseases primarily afflict temperate climates with minimal impact on vulnerable populations.

30. Consider the following statements.

1. Fusion reactions involve combining light atomic nuclei to release energy.

2. Nuclear fusion reactions primarily occur in nuclear power plants.

3. The sun's energy is primarily produced through nuclear fission reactions.

How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?

A. Only One

B. Only Two

C. All the Three

D. None of the above

31. Consider the following statements regarding Tropicalisation.

1. In Tropicalisation, where tropical species in the ocean are moving towards the poles, while temperate species are retreating.

2. This mass movement of marine life is driven by rising sea temperatures and marine heat waves due to climate change.

Which of the above statements are correct.

a) Only 1

b) Only 2

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

32. Pampore which was recently in news was famous for?

a) Glacial Outburst

b) Saffron cultivation

c) Economic corridor

d) None of the above

33. Consider the following statements regarding Golan heights.?

1. The Golan Heights, spanning about 1,800 km<sup>2</sup>, is a basaltic plateau bordered by the Yarmouk River, the Sea of Galilee, Hula Valley, Mount Hermon, and Wadi Raqqad.

2. It was captured by Israel from Syria during Yom Kippur war of 1973

Which of the above statements are correct.

a) Only 1

b) Only 2

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

34. Kra Isthmus connects

a) Celebs Sea and Sulu Sea

b) South China Sea and East China Sea

c) Gulf of Thailand and Andaman Sea

d) None of the above

35. Identify the incorrect pair among the following

a. Hurricanes - Atlantic and eastern Pacific

b. Typhoons - North western Pacific

c. Tropical cyclones - Southwestern Pacific and Indian Ocean.

d. Willi willies- Mediterranean Sea

36. The conflict over the resource-rich Essequibo region which was recently in news is between :

a) Argentina – Brazil

b) Ecuador – Peru

c) Guyana – Ecuador

d) Venezuela – Columbia

37. Consider the following statements regarding Banni grasslands.

1. It is considered as the largest grasslands in Asia

2. It was formed from the deposition by Indus and other rivers in the regions

3. Banni grassland is in Punjab

Which among the above statements are correct

a) 1,2,3

b) 1,2

c) 2,3

d) 1,3

38. Houthi movement is related to

a) Yemen

b) Syria

c) Sudan

d) Eritrea

39. Consider the following statements regarding Valparai plateau?

1. It is a region located in the Western Ghats mountain range of India

2. The Valparai plateau is part of the Anamalai Tiger Reserve (ATR), contributing to its biodiversity and ecological significance.

Which among the above statements are correct.

a) Only 1

b) Only 2

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

40. Almora fault is located in

a) Central China

b) Western Nepal

c) Eastern China

d) None of the above





41. India did not sign global renewable energy pledge at COP28 recently because

- a) Technological challenges
- b) Lack of resources
- c) Concerns regarding India's development
- d) Lack of political Consenses

42. Suchitwa theeram project is conceptualised by which State?

- a) Kerala
- b) Tamilnadu
- c) Jharkhand
- d) Uttarakhand

43. Consider the following statements regarding the bill mandating the appointment of election Commission

- 1.The bill was passed by the Lok Sabha
- 2.The bill was rejected by the Rajya Sabha

Which of the Following is / are true regarding the above statements

- a)Only 1
- b)Only 2
- c)Both 1 and 2 are true
- d)Neither 1 nor 2 are true

44. Consider the Following statements regarding National Legal Services authority

- a) The National Legal services Authority has been constituted under legal Services Authorities Act, 1987.
- b)Objective of the NALSA is to provide free Legal Services to the weaker sections of the society and to organize Lok Adalats for amicable settlement of disputes.
- c) The Head quarters is at Delhi
- d) The Chief Justice of India is the Executive Chairman of NALSA.

Which of the above statements is / are false?

45. Consider following statements with respect to Central water Commission?

- 1. The Objective of the Central Water Commission is to promote integrated and sustainable development and management of India's water resources using state-of-the-art technology and competency and to coordinate all stakeholders.
- 2. The CWC is chaired by a Chairman who also serves as the Government of India's Ex-Officio Secretary.

Which of the following is true with respect to above statements

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

46.Consider the following Statements regarding Bharat NCAP

a) Bharat New Car Assessment Programme (Bharat NCAP) is a new car safety assessment program which proposes a mechanism of awarding 'Star Ratings' to automobiles based on their performance in crash tests

b) Recently, the first round of crash testing under the Bharat New Car Assessment Programme (Bharat-NCAP) was completed.

c) It proposes a mechanism of awarding 'Star Ratings' to automobiles based on their performance in crash tests.

d) Legal Metrology Department, is the nodal ministry for implementing Bharat NCAP

Which of the above statements is false

47. Consider the following statements regarding Prevention of Money Layundering Act (PMLA)

- 1. PMLA became law and came into force on July 1, 2005.
- 2. It has blanket powers assigned to the Enforcement Directorate (ED) under PMLA for seizing, investing, searching and attaching assets.
- 3. It was introduced due to India's commitment at the Vienna Convention to combat money laundering.
- 4. Enforcement Directorate is a multi-disciplinary organization
- 5. It is a law enforcement organization tasked with enforcing economic laws and combating economic crime in India, such as money laundering and foreign exchange irregularities.

Which of the following is true regarding the above statements

- a) Only 1,2 and 3
- b) Only 2, 4 and 5
- c) All the statements are true
- d) Only 1, 2,3 and 4

48. Consider the following statements regarding Indian Community Welfare Fund(ICWF)

- 1. The Indian Community Welfare Fund (ICWF) is set up at Missions and Posts abroad to assist overseas Indian nationals in distress situations in deserving cases.
- 2. The support extended under ICWF includes financial assistance for legal aid as well as travel documents and air tickets during repatriation.

Which of the following is / are true regarding the above statements

- a) Only 1
- b) Only 2
- c) Both 1 and 2
- d) Neither 1 nor 2

49. Consider the following statements about Maldives

- 1.)The new president of Maldives is Mohammed Muizzu
- 2) He rode to power on the India Out Campaign

Which of the following is / are true regarding the above statements



a) Only 1

b) Only 2

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

50. Consider the following statements

1. The Houthi rebels are active around the Red sea

2. Houthi rebels are in conflict with Iran.

Which of the following is / are true regarding the above statements

a) Only 1

b) Only 2

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

51. Consider the Following Statements

1. The bab- el- Mandab starits leads Suez canal to Red Sea.

2. The Panama Canal connects the Pacific ocean with the Atlantic ocean

Which of the following is/ are true regarding the above statements

a) Only 1

b) Only 2

c) Both 1 and 2

d) Neither 1 nor 2

52. Consider the following statements regarding India – Oman Relations

a) The Sultanate of Oman is a strategic partner of India in the Gulf and an important interlocutor at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Arab League and Indian

Ocean Rim Association (IORA) fora.

b) 2019 Gandhi Peace prize was conferred on Late Sultan of Oman Sultan Qaboos.

c) India - Oman bilateral Military exercise between both armies are called Eastern Bridge

d) India is the 2nd largest market for Oman's crude oil exports for the year 2022 after China.

Which of the above statement is not true

53. Consider the following statements regarding Oman

a) UAE lies to the south west of Oman.

b) Saudi Arabia lies to the north west of Oman

c) The largest desert in Oman is Rub al Khail or the Empty Quarter.

d) Yemen lies to the north east of Oman

Which of the above statement is True?

54. Mahe, Malvan and Mangrol are the names of which products recently launched?

a) Robotic Drones

b) Anti Submarine Warships

c) Mine Sweeper crafts

d) Submarines

55. India's first Regional Rapid Transit System (RRTS) project "Namo Bharat" is being constructed between

a) Mumbai and Pune

b) Delhi and Meerut

c) Hyderabad and Secunderabad

d) Bangalore and Mysore








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SHEET</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. This sheet should not be folded or crushed.</li> <li>2. Use only blue/black ball point pen to fill the circles.</li> <li>3. Use of pencil is strictly prohibited.</li> <li>4. Circles should be darkened completely and properly.</li> <li>5. Cutting and erasing on this sheet is not allowed.</li> <li>6. Do not use any stray marks on the sheet.</li> <li>7. Do not use marker or white fluid to hide the mark.</li> </ol> <p>WRONG METHODS      CORRECT METHOD</p> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">    </div> <div style="text-align: center;">     </div> </div>
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