● POLITY   ● ECONOMICS   ● TECHNOLOGY   ● ECOLOGY

SOCIAL JUSTICE

CENTRE TO CLARIFY ON AADHAAR AS BIRTH DATE PROOF, WITH RISK RIDERS

CONTEXT: UIDAI may allow using Aadhaar for age verification with a risk-based assessment, easing concerns over its exclusion as a proof of date of birth.

BACKGROUND: High Court judgments emphasized that Aadhaar cards only serve as proof of identity, not citizenship or date of birth. Despite this, the UIDAI won't retract its directive but plans to issue an advisory for agencies using Aadhaar for welfare benefits and KYC compliance.

- Aadhaar's birthdate a reasonable assessment, not foolproof evidence; entities decide acceptance: The birthdate on Aadhaar is a reasonable estimate, not definitive proof. User entities must decide whether to accept it or request additional documentation.

- Passport, driving license suitable for confirming age; UIDAI to clarify stance: Other documents like passport or driving license serve better for age confirmation. The UIDAI plans to clarify its position on this matter.

   Entities are urged to recognize that Aadhaar's birth date and address serve as estimations, not definitive evidence, prompting a need for additional verification measures. While some organizations have ceased using Aadhaar for such purposes, others are assessing the directive's impact, particularly concerning PAN card linkage.

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

- UIDAI reaffirms Aadhaar's identity verification, not proof of birthdate: The UIDAI emphasizes that while Aadhaar can establish identity, it is not sufficient proof of birthdate. Authentication must consider risk factors.

- Finance Secretary assures arrangements to safeguard public and scheme beneficiaries: T.V. Somanathan ensures measures to prevent negative impacts on the public and beneficiaries of government schemes.

- Birthdate verification crucial for banking, pension; EPFO scraps Aadhaar's birthdate proof: EPFO discontinues using Aadhaar as proof of birthdate, highlighting the importance of precise age verification for critical transactions.

- Revenue Secretary: Aadhaar used in GST registrations, birthdate not vital: Sanjay Malhotra notes that while Aadhaar is used for GST registrations, birthdate verification isn't critical, preferring birth certificates or Class 10 certificates.

UIDAI, a statutory body under Aadhaar Act 2016, issues Aadhaar numbers, aiming to empower Indians with unique digital identities.

It operates under the Ministry of Electronics & IT, ensuring authentication accessibility nationwide.

Responsible for Aadhaar enrolment, authentication, and lifecycle management.

Comprising a Chairperson, two part-time Members, and the CEO doubling as Member-Secretary.

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MISPLACED PRIORITIES

CONTEXT: Free movement between India and Myanmar brought more advantages than drawbacks, emphasizing people-centric nationhood over border demarcations, vital for post-colonial states.

BACKGROUND: Home Minister Amit Shah's decision to abolish the "Free Movement Regime" along the Indian-Myanmar border and opt for fencing aims to curb narcotics trafficking and insurgent activities. However, skepticism arises as insurgent groups have weakened, and the drug trade persists due to weak law enforcement and local cooperation.

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

- FMR demand endorsed by Manipur, opposed by Nagaland and Mizoram: Reflects regional sentiments on Free Movement Regime (FMR).
- Myanmar's civil war prompts refugees to seek shelter: Mizoram and Manipur support Chin refugees, sparking debate.
- Kinship felt with Chin community: Mizos and Kuki-Zo community offer humanitarian relief, oppose FMR opposition.
- Meitei forces raise concerns over illegal migration: Fear Chin refugees entering Manipur, sparking FMR debate.
- FMR reversal challenges Act East policy: Border fencing disrupts ethnic relations, calls for reconsideration of priorities.

Scrapping the "Free Movement Regime" and erecting fences along the India-Myanmar border, despite opposition from states like Nagaland and Mizoram, contradicts the ethos of nation-building based on shared ethnic ties. Prioritizing border fortification overlooks humanitarian concerns and may exacerbate regional tensions, urging reconsideration of the decision.

What is the India-Myanmar border Free Movement Regime?

The Free Movement Regime (FMR) permits border tribes to travel up to 16 km inside each other's territory without visas, established in 2018 under India's Act East policy. Initially scheduled for 2017, its implementation was delayed due to the Rohingya refugee crisis, reflecting the strengthening diplomatic ties between India and Myanmar.

- British-imposed border: Demarcated in 1826 without local consent, dividing people of the same ethnicity and culture across India and Myanmar.
- Ethnic and familial ties: Strong connections across the border, with villages straddling both nations, even splitting homes and villages.
- Facilitation of trade: The Free Movement Regime (FMR) aimed to boost people-to-people contact and local trade, critical for livelihoods.
- Trans-border commerce: Region historically engaged in cross-border trade through customs and border haats, vital for sustaining local economies.
- Accessibility to services: Indian towns closer for business, education, and healthcare for border people in Myanmar than those in their own country.

The Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the India-Myanmar Border (IMB) has faced criticism for inadvertently facilitating illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and arms smuggling due to its porous and unfenced nature. The ongoing Manipur conflict highlights tensions surrounding the FMR, with accusations from different ethnic groups exacerbating the debate. The recent influx of Myanmarese refugees into India following the military coup adds further complexity to the situation.

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TIES ACROSS THE SEA

CONTEXT: India's Prime Minister Modi's frequent visits to the UAE underscore a deeper significance, highlighting shared values of tolerance and pluralism between the two nations.

BACKGROUND: Prime Minister Modi's seventh visit to the UAE underscores India's emphasis on strengthening ties with the Emirates, surpassing its engagements with other Gulf nations. The visit coincides with significant events like addressing the World Governments Summit and inaugurating Abu Dhabi's first Hindu temple. Notably, the rapid conclusion of bilateral agreements, including the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement and Bilateral Investment Treaty, highlights the growing importance of the UAE as a key partner for India.

NEWS HIGHLIGHTS

- UAE: India's key trading partner: Third largest trading partner, second largest export destination, and fourth largest source of FDI.

- Bharat Mart inauguration: Boosts trade ties, strengthens engagement with Indian MSMEs.

- Technological agreements: Focus on digital infrastructure, energy security, green hydrogen, energy storage, and digital cross-payments.

- India-Middle East Economic Corridor: Intergovernmental framework fosters multilateral cooperation, aligns with I2U2 initiative and BRICS membership.

- UAE as stable interlocutor: Discussions on regional conflicts indicate India's trust in UAE's stability.

- Historical and cultural ties: Centuries-old maritime trade, diaspora contributing 18% of global remittances.

- Potential friction points: UAE's push for democratization, concern over rise of majoritarian and sectarian forces in India.

India and the UAE's deepening ties, evident in their significant trade volumes and strategic agreements, mark a crucial partnership. Despite potential friction points due to evolving political landscapes, shared historical and cultural ties, coupled with mutual values of tolerance and pluralism, underpin the enduring bond between the two nations.
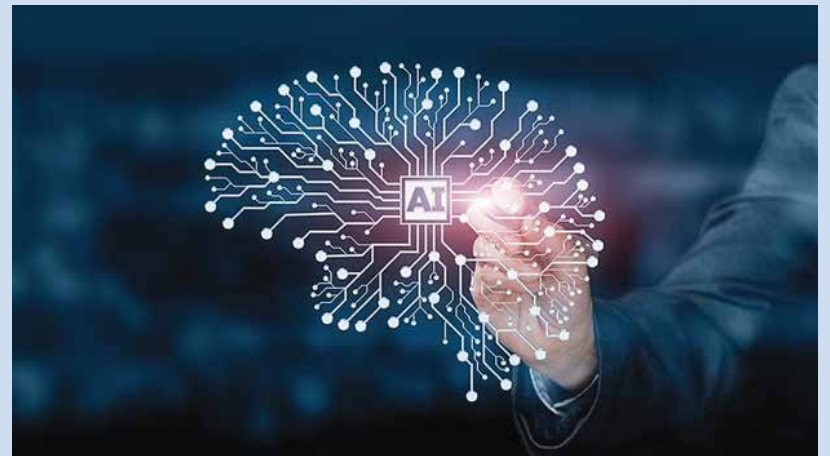
RECALIBRATING MERIT IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

CONTEXT: Meritocracy, rewarding based on abilities, faces debate on societal impacts. Influenced by thinkers like Young, Sandel, and Wooldridge, its evolution undergoes scrutiny.

HIGHLIGHTS - Varied views

In "The Rise of the Meritocracy" (1958), sociologist Young envisioned a future where social class is determined solely by intelligence and effort, critiquing the emerging merit-based system. Sandel and critical theorists argue that meritocracy fosters entitlement among the successful and resentment among others, masking deeper inequalities and eroding social cohesion.

Post-structuralists challenge the concept of merit, asserting that it's socially constructed and reflects power dynamics. They argue that meritocracy perpetuates existing inequalities. Wooldridge, in "The Aristocracy of Talent," acknowledges meritocracy's potential for progress but warns of its unintended consequences, proposing reforms to address inherited privileges and improve access for underprivileged students.

HIGHLIGHTS - AI as a disruptive factor

- AI challenges human merit: Sora showcases creativity, raising doubts about traditional merit metrics.

- Access to AI alters meritocracy: Technology access outweighs personal abilities, reshaping merit's definition.

- Bias perpetuation by AI: Trained on biased data, AI systems produce discriminatory outcomes in various sectors.

- AI predicts diseases, displaces jobs: Pancreatic cancer prediction precedes radiologists, signaling job displacement in routine tasks.

- High-wage job impact: AI's predictive abilities disrupt high-wage jobs, emphasizing the need for skill adaptation.

- Opaque AI algorithms challenge accountability: Understanding evaluation criteria is hindered, eroding meritocracy.

- Tech giants' data dominance shapes merit standards: Control over vast datasets sidelines smaller players with innovative ideas.

- Data hegemony impacts AI power: Access to unprecedented data advantages tech giants in training sophisticated AI models.

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AI advancements will polarize the job market, favoring high-skill, high-wage jobs and low-skill, low-wage roles, exacerbating socioeconomic disparities. Recalibrating meritocracy necessitates redefining merit and reward systems to address the interplay between technology and societal structures, especially as AI both enhances human capabilities and widens inequalities.

ECOLOGY

SEVENTH ASSESSMENT REPORT (AR7)

CONTEXT: IPCC's AR6 reports (2021-2022) detail climate change consequences, adaptation, and mitigation. Urgent action is needed to limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C.

BACKGROUND: Since 1988, the IPCC has released numerous assessment reports, special reports, and methodology reports, including three from its sixth assessment cycle (AR6) in 2021-2022. These documents, authored by scientists from 195 countries, analyze climate science, consequences, adaptation, vulnerability, and mitigation, consistently affirming human-induced global warming.

Highlights of the Report

- AR6 warns of urgent climate crisis: Urgency to limit temperature rise to 1.5°C, suggests strategies for adaptation and resilience in natural and human-made systems.
- IPCC launches AR7 cycle: Turkey meeting discusses budgeting, timelines, and work program, emphasizing lessons learned from AR6 cycle.
- Informal Group on Lessons Learned: Produces paper consolidating AR6 feedback, member country submissions, stresses importance of IPCC input for 2028 global stocktake.
- Recommendation for AR7 input: Member countries emphasize need for adequate IPCC input for 2028 global stocktake.
- 'Options for Programme of Work' report: Discusses publication options, clustering reports, pros and cons for production of special or additional reports.
- Turkey discussions informed by AR6 lessons: Papers on lessons learned and work options contribute to AR7 planning and decision-making process.

What will the AR7 cycle produce?

In Turkey, the IPCC Bureau agreed to produce full assessment and synthesis reports, methodology reports, and a special report, considering time constraints and workload. The decision includes reports from three Working Groups and a synthesis report, with revisions to technical guidelines. Only one special report on climate change and cities will be produced despite suggestions for more.

Member countries requested the IPCC Bureau to align assessment reports with the GST in 2028, but no consensus was reached on the release date due to concerns about content quality, incomplete research, and engagement challenges. A decision is pending and will be made at the 61st IPCC session. Special and methodology reports are scheduled for 2027.

> **Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)**
> - IPCC's inception and objective: Founded in 1988 by WMO and UNEP, aims to provide scientific information for climate policy development.
> - IPCC's role in climate change negotiations: Reports inform international climate change negotiations, serving governments at all levels.
> - Composition and membership: Organization comprises 195 UN or WMO member governments, with contributions from global experts.
> - Expert contribution: Thousands of experts volunteer as authors to assess scientific papers for assessment reports, ensuring comprehensive summaries.
> - Review process: Open and transparent review by experts and governments ensures objectivity, completeness, and diverse viewpoints in assessments.
> - IPCC's role in research: Identifies scientific consensus, highlights areas needing further research, does not conduct research itself.

INTERNAL SECURITY

ARMY UPGRADES FIREPOWER IN EASTERN ARUNACHAL NEAR LAC

CONTEXT: The Indian Army reinforces its combat capabilities along the Line of Actual Control in Arunachal Pradesh with advanced weaponry deployment.

BACKGROUND: The CH-47F(I) Chinook helicopters have revolutionized heavy-lift capabilities, facilitating the transportation of M777s and reaching remote posts in Arunachal Pradesh. All helipads in the region adhere to Chinook specifications, connecting seven valleys for aerial connectivity. Between 2020 and 2023, nine helipads were built, with six more under construction, including five Chinook-standard helipads in Lohit, Anjaw, and Dibang districts.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Chinook helicopter's significance: Game changer for transporting heavy loads across challenging terrains, aided by its capacity and maneuverability.
- M777 howitzer's versatility: Provides flexibility in deploying

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long-range firepower, can be transported underslung by the Chinook helicopter.

- Equipment demonstration: Army showcases M777 howitzers and other modern equipment to journalists near the Line of Actual Control (LAC).
- Induction of new-generation equipment: Includes SIG-716 rifles, Negev light machine guns, Sako TRG-42 sniper rifles, and tactical drones.
- Communication infrastructure enhancement: New equipment includes satellite terminals and portable communication devices for remote and forward areas.
- Ghatak commando demonstration: Platoon briefed before embarking on long-range patrols lasting from seven to 30 days.

Recent years have seen the induction of advanced weaponry like SIG-716 rifles, Negev light machine guns, and Sako TRG-42 sniper rifles, alongside tactical drones, aimed at enhancing communication infrastructure. Ghatak commandos undergo training for long-range patrols. The Indian Air Force operates 15 Chinook helicopters and is in talks for seven more.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

WHAT OUR ANCESTORS' GENOMES CAN TELL US ABOUT MODERN HEALTH?

CONTEXT: Scientists utilize whole-genome sequencing on degraded DNA to understand chromosomal abnormalities and investigate ancient tool repair and tool origin through genetic analysis.

BACKGROUND: Ancient DNA (aDNA) studies using advanced genomic techniques offer profound insights into our ancestors' genetic makeup. By analyzing DNA from ancient skeletal remains, scientists can unravel genetic diversity, migration patterns, and disease evolution. These studies provide valuable glimpses into ancient communities and their interactions, shedding light on human evolution.

Ancestral DNA and health: Recent research utilizing ancient DNA sequences sheds light on genetic diseases in ancient humans, providing insights into the medical practices and tools of early communities. Understanding these diseases enriches our evolutionary understanding and informs modern healthcare by revealing genetic susceptibilities and the origins of health disparities among populations.

Ancestral DNA and a disease's history

- Chromosomal karyotyping limitations: Requires live cells and laborious culturing/staining methods for diagnosis of abnormalities.
- Advances in whole-genome sequencing: Enable analysis of fragmented/degraded DNA for understanding chromosomal abnormalities, including in ancient DNA (aDNA).
- Evidence from aDNA studies: Francis Crick Institute researchers identify Turner syndrome, Kinefelter's syndrome, and Down's syndrome in Iron Age British individuals.
- Study on cardiovascular diseases: Italian, German, and U.S. researchers analyze genetic variants associated with cardiovascular diseases in mummified individuals from various regions and time periods.
- Novel approach: Scientists enrich specific genome parts associated with atherosclerotic cardiovascular disease, compute risk based on mapped genetic variants.
- Widespread prevalence of cardiovascular disease: Findings suggest cardiovascular disease existed in human populations for at least 5,000 years.

Linking ancestral DNA to diets: Ancient human lifestyles can be understood through genetic analysis of remains like birch pitch. Researchers analyzed 9,500-year-old pitch samples from Sweden, discovering microbial imbalances associated with inflamed gums, offering insights into ancient oral health. DNA matches with various plant and animal species also provide clues about ancient diets.

Recent studies of ancient DNA offer insights into the creation of stone tools. A re-excavation of a cave in Germany revealed bone remains belonging to Homo sapiens, suggesting they were the creators of ancient stone tools around 45,000 years ago, during a period of coexistence with Neanderthals and Denisovans.