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PV NARASIMHA RAO: ARCHITECT OF INDIA'S TRANSFORMATIVE POLICIES

TRADITIONAL PRACTICES: BUFFALO AND BULBUL FIGHTING DURING MAGH BIHU

Introduction to Tradition:
The buffalo and bulbul (songbird) fighting are integral parts of the Assamese winter harvest festival known as Magh Bihu. Similar to other harvest festivals across India such as Makar Sankranti, Pongal, and Lohri, Magh Bihu celebrates the season with cultural events and traditions.

Discontinuation and Legal Challenge:
The fights were discontinued following a 2014 Supreme Court ruling that banned the use of bulls as performing animals in events like jallikattu in Tamil Nadu and bullock-cart races elsewhere in the country. This decision led to the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) urging the Assam government to end animal and bird fights during Bihu celebrations.

Assam Government's Revival Efforts

Historical Significance:
Buffalo fights, deeply rooted in folk culture and tradition, have historical ties, including associations with the Ahom rulers. Similarly, bulbul fights are linked to religious practices, with rituals performed before the commencement of the events.

Legal Clearance and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs):
In May of the previous year, the Supreme Court overturned its 2014 verdict, allowing states like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, and Karnataka to amend laws to permit traditional events like jallikattu and bullock cart racing. In response, the Assam government approved the formulation of SOPs for buffalo and bulbul fights, ensuring that animals are not subjected to deliberate cruelty or torture.

Implementation of SOPs:
The SOPs stipulate strict guidelines for conducting the fights, including restrictions on the use of sharp instruments, drugs, and ensuring the animals' well-being during and after the events. Despite initial prohibitions, these guidelines have facilitated the revival of the traditional activities during Magh Bihu celebrations.

PETA's Legal Challenge

Petitions and Allegations:
People for Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) India has petitioned the Gauhati High Court to ban buffalo and bulbul fighting during Magh Bihu. Allegations include animal cruelty and violations of natural instincts, with instances of physical abuse observed during the events.

Legal Proceedings:
The court has entertained PETA's petitions and considered interim measures to prevent further fights. The recent hearing addressed concerns regarding a scheduled buffalo fight event outside the stipulated period specified in the government's guidelines, highlighting the necessity for adherence to SOPs and legal directives.

CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING MEGHALAYA'S STATE ANTHEM

Introduction to the Anthem's Controversy:
The release of Meghalaya's official state anthem coinciding with its 52nd statehood day sparked a controversy regarding the representation of languages, particularly the absence of the Jaintia or Pnar language.

Language Representation and Absence of Jaintia or Pnar:
While the anthem comprises sections in English, Garo, and Khasi languages, the exclusion of the Jaintia or Pnar language led to discontent among Jaintia communities. They argue that the anthem should reflect the linguistic diversity of Meghalaya's major matrilineal communities, including the Jaintias.

Concerns and Demands of Jaintia Community:
Pressure groups from the Jaintia community emphasized their unique history and identity, advocating for the inclusion of the Pnar language in the anthem. They highlighted administrative divisions and historical contexts to support their demand, emphasizing their distinct cultural heritage.

Government Response and Legal Framework:
The Meghalaya government defended the anthem's language selection, citing the Meghalaya State Language Act of 2005, which designates English as the official language and Khasi and Garo as associate official languages. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma emphasized the need for legal amendments to incorporate the Jaintia language into the anthem.

Perspectives on Unity and Identity
Commonalities and Unity:
While the controversy accentuates linguistic distinctions, several commentators underscore the historical and cultural commonalities between Khasi and Jaintia communities. They reference shared origin myths and historical narratives to emphasize the unity between the two tribes, suggesting a cohesive identity despite linguistic differences.

Historical and Cultural Bonds:
The belief in a shared ancestry, common traditions, and similar creation myths reinforces the unity between Khasi and Jaintia communities. Historically, they have perceived themselves as one tribe, interconnected through bloodlines and cultural practices.

Challenges of Identity and Ethnicity:
In the contemporary era marked by identity crises, the shared origin provides a common ground for unity and solidarity among the Khasi and Jaintia communities. Despite linguistic variations, historical ties and cultural affinities serve as foundational elements of their collective identity.

YALE UNIVERSITY'S HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION WITH SLAVERY

Apology and Acknowledgment:
Yale University issued a formal apology on February 16, acknowledging its historical connection with slavery. This apology coincided with the release of the book "Yale and Slavery: A History," authored by Yale history professor David W Blight and the Yale and Slavery Research Project.

Elihu Yale's Indian Connection:
The university is named after Elihu Yale (1649-1721), a former East India Company official who spent a significant portion of his life in India, particularly in Madras (now Chennai). Elihu Yale accumulated wealth through various endeavors, including participation in the slave trade.

Involvement in the Slave Trade:
During Elihu Yale's tenure in Madras, the East India Company engaged in extensive commerce, including the sale and purchase of enslaved individuals. Yale played a role in overseeing these transactions, contributing to the exploitation and suffering of many individuals.

Legacy and Controversy:
Elihu Yale's involvement in the slave trade is documented in historical accounts and artworks, including a notable painting depicting him with an enslaved child. Despite controversies surrounding his character and actions, Yale's wealth and influence contributed to the establishment and development of the university that bears his name.

Yale's Endowment and Naming of the University:
Upon his return to England, Elihu Yale became a significant benefactor of the Collegiate School in New Haven, Connecticut. In recognition of his contributions, the school constructed a building called Yale College in 1718, eventually leading to the university being named after him.

Reflection and Reckoning:
The acknowledgment of Yale University's historical ties to slavery underscores the importance of confronting and addressing the legacies of exploitation and injustice. Through initiatives like the apology and historical research, the university aims to reckon with its past and foster a deeper understanding of its origins and implications.

THE AGRARIAN LEGACY OF MS SWAMINATHAN: ARCHITECT OF INDIA'S FOOD SECURITY

- **The Bharat Ratna Tribute:**

Renowned agricultural scientist Monkomb Sambasivan Swaminathan, dubbed the 'Father of the Green Revolution', posthumously received the Bharat Ratna, India's highest civilian honor, alongside former Prime Ministers PV Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh. Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded Swaminathan's exceptional contributions to agriculture and farmer welfare, acknowledging his pivotal role in India's agricultural self-reliance and modernization.

- Championing Agricultural Transformation:

Born in 1925, Swaminathan's journey began with a deep-rooted passion for agriculture, spurred by the Bengal famine of 1942-43 and Mahatma Gandhi's call for selfless service to India. He redirected his focus from medicine to agriculture, pioneering groundbreaking research to uplift Indian agriculture from its post-independence challenges.

- The Green Revolution Architect:

Swaminathan's pioneering efforts ushered in the Green Revolution, leveraging high-yielding variety seeds, improved irrigation, and fertilization techniques. Through collaborative endeavors with global scientists like Norman Borlaug, Swaminathan engineered semi-dwarf wheat varieties that revolutionized India's wheat production, marking a quantum leap from import dependence to self-sufficiency.

- Legacy and Criticisms:

While hailed as a savior of India's food security, Swaminathan's Green Revolution faced critiques for favoring affluent farmers and environmental degradation. Addressing these concerns, Swaminathan advocated for sustainable farming practices and equitable agricultural policies, advocating for fair minimum support prices and environmental conservation.

- International Acclaim:

Swaminathan's contributions earned him global recognition, including the World Food Prize Laureate in 1987, for his instrumental role in averting famine and transforming India into a food surplus nation. His legacy endures as a beacon of agricultural innovation and social equity, inspiring future generations to navigate the complexities of sustainable food production and rural livelihoods.

CHARAN SINGH: CHAMPION OF FARMERS' WELFARE

Advocacy for Farmers' Rights:
Chaudhary Charan Singh, a prominent figure in Indian politics, championed the cause of farmers' welfare through his significant contributions and legislative efforts. His commitment to representing the interests of cultivators, irrespective of caste, earned him recognition as a messiah for farmers.

Land Reform Laws:
Singh's tenure witnessed the enactment of pioneering land reform laws, notably the UP Zamindari Abolition and Land Reforms Act, 1950 (ZALR). This legislation aimed to dismantle the zamindari system and grant tenant-cultivators permanent and heritable interests in their holdings, fostering a new rural social order characterized by peasant-proprietors.

Consolidation and Ceiling Laws:
Furthermore, Singh spearheaded the implementation of the UP Consolidation of Holdings Act, 1953, facilitating land consolidation to enhance productivity and efficiency in agriculture. The UP Imposition of Ceiling on Land Holdings Act, 1960, imposed limits on land ownership to ensure equitable distribution and viable farming practices among cultivators.

Empowerment of Middle Peasantry:
These transformative land reform measures empowered the middle peasantry socially, politically, and economically, particularly in northern India. The Green Revolution, marked by the adoption of high-yielding crop varieties and modern agricultural practices, further bolstered the economic prospects of farmers.

Contemporary Relevance:
While Charan Singh's initiatives brought prosperity to farmers, contemporary challenges such as stagnant yields, escalating production costs, and climate change-induced disruptions have threatened the socio-economic stability of the farming community. The demand for reservations in government jobs for farmers' children underscores the enduring relevance of Singh's vision for inclusive representation and support for rural livelihoods.

PV NARASIMHA RAO: ARCHITECT OF INDIA'S TRANSFORMATIVE POLICIES

- Early Life and Leadership:

PV Narasimha Rao, born on June 28, 1921, in the erstwhile Nizam's Hyderabad state, epitomized a multifaceted leader, blending roles as a freedom fighter, academician, and literary luminary. Serving as the 9th Prime Minister of India from 1991 to 1996, Rao's tenure marked a pivotal period in India's socio-economic landscape.

- Literary and Academic Contributions:

Rao's literary pursuits showcased his diverse talents, exemplified by his publication of 'SahasraPhan,' a Hindi translation of the renowned Telugu novel 'Veyi Padagalu,' illustrating his cultural richness and linguistic prowess.

- Economic Liberalization Drive:

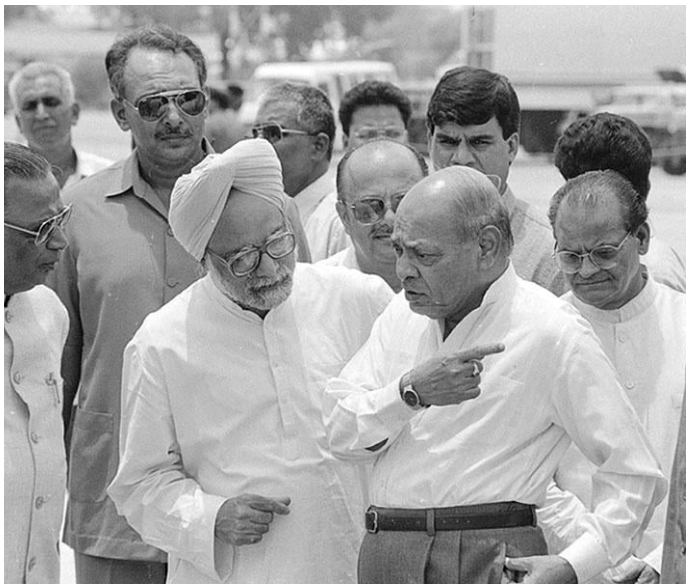
Rao's legacy resonates profoundly in India's economic sphere, characterized by his relentless efforts to dismantle the shackles of the license raj and streamline bureaucratic processes. His pioneering economic liberalization policies, initiated in 1991, heralded a new era of market-driven growth, fostering private and foreign investment while enhancing India's global competitiveness.

- Foreign Policy Triumphs:

Rao's diplomatic acumen reshaped India's global standing, marked notably by the establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel and the inception of the Look East Policy. His tenure witnessed a historic thaw in Indo-US relations, fostering amicable ties after years of estrangement, thus amplifying India's voice on the global stage.

- Empowering Local Governance:

Narasimha Rao's tenure witnessed significant constitutional reforms, including the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments Act, empowering local bodies. These reforms aimed to decentralize power, promote grassroots democracy, and enhance citizen participation in governance, laying the groundwork for inclusive development.



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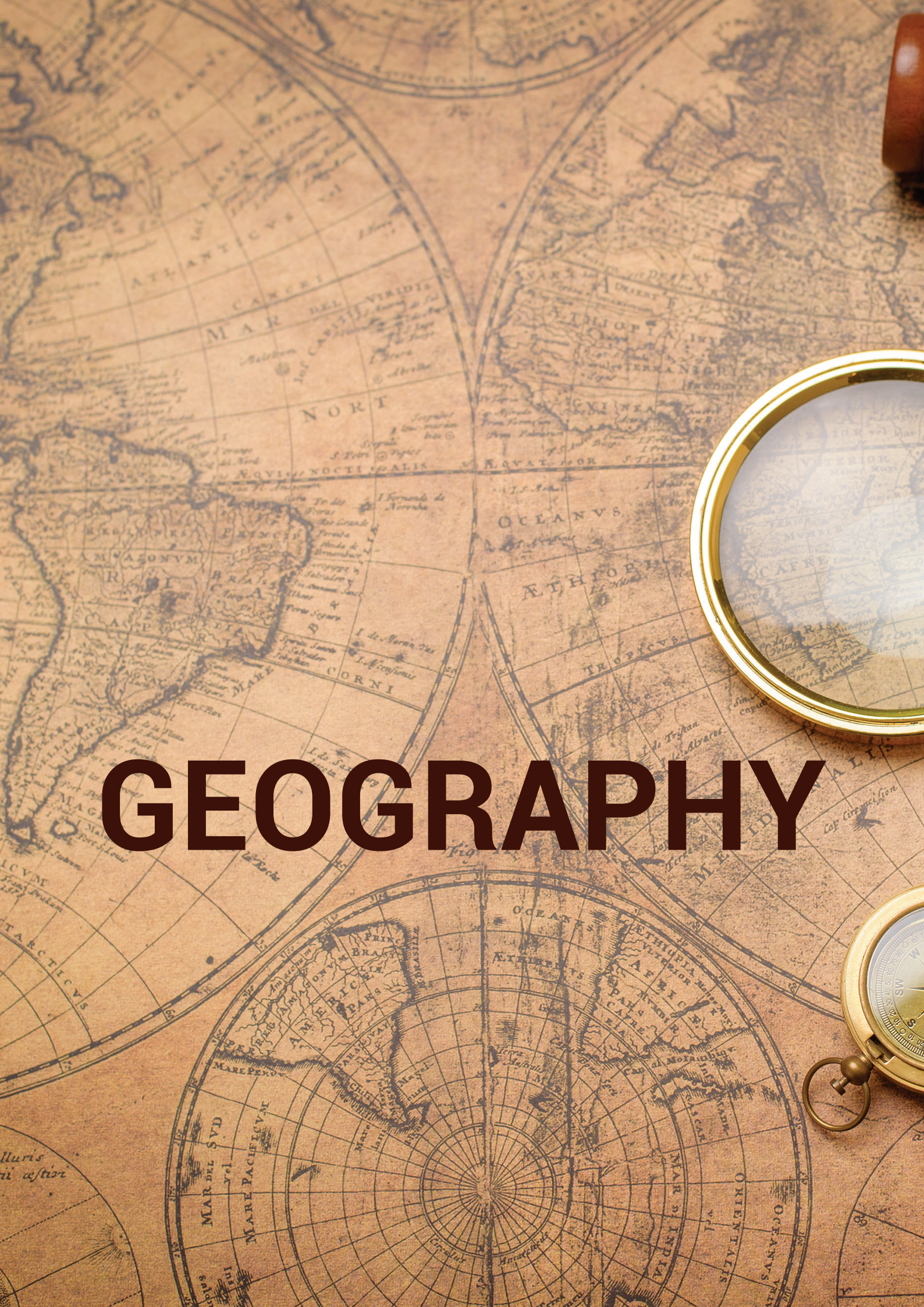
GEOGRAPHY

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- ARAL SEA
- BALTIC SEA
- BADWATER BASIN IN DEATH VALLEY (USA)
- SUDARSHAN SETU

JORDAN

Context: An Iran-backed militia group claimed responsibility for a drone strike on Tower 22, a US base in Jordan, killing three American troops and injuring at least 34 others.

The base is part of more than a dozen US military operations across Iraq, Jordan, and Syria. The attack is attributed to the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella term for various Shia militia groups affiliated with Iran.

About Jordan:

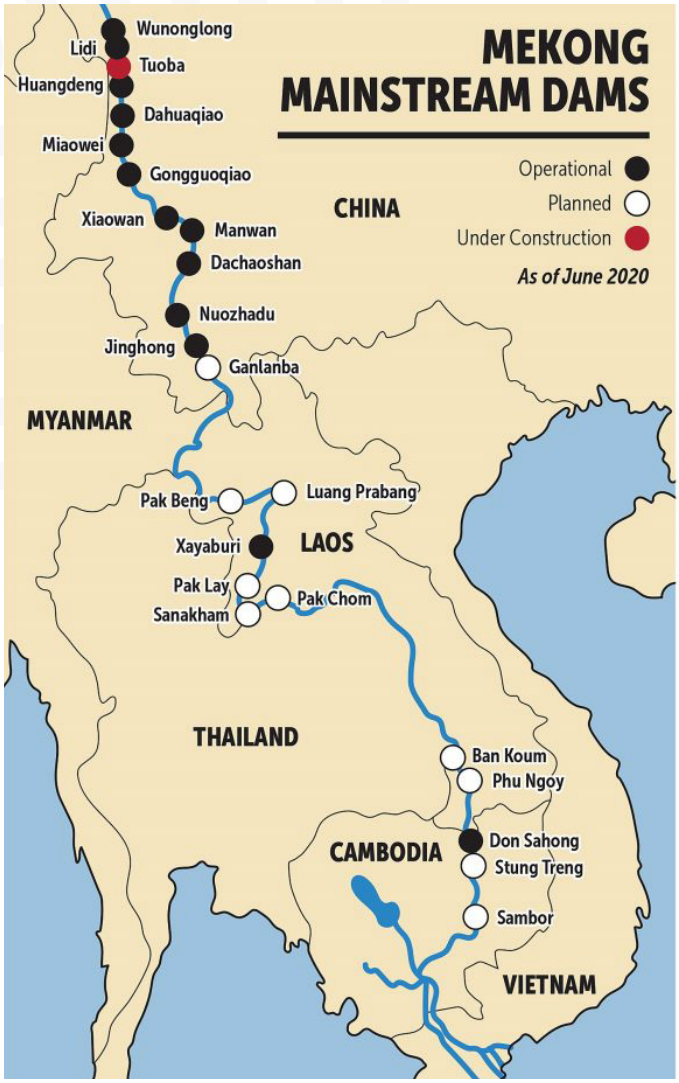
Jordan is a country in West Asia, located at the crossroads of Asia, Africa, and Europe in the Levant region. Bordered by Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria, and the Palestinian West Bank and Israel, Jordan has a coastline on the Gulf of Aqaba's Red Sea. Amman is the capital. Inhabited since the Paleolithic period, Jordan saw the rise of kingdoms like Ammon, Moab, and Edom. It is a constitutional monarchy, a founding member of the Arab League, and known for tourism and medical tourism.

MEKONG RIVER

Context: Laos, known for its natural beauty and historic sites, faces a new threat from a multibillion-dollar dam project on the Mekong River, with concerns that it could jeopardize the UNESCO status of the iconic city of Luang Prabang.

About :

The Mekong River is a significant transboundary river in East and Southeast Asia, ranked as the world's twelfth-longest and Asia's third-longest. Originating from the Tibetan Plateau, it flows through Southwest China, Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Cambodia, and southern Vietnam. Despite being a crucial trade route between Tibet and Southeast Asia, its extreme seasonal fluctuations and natural obstacles like rapids and waterfalls pose challenges to navigation.



UNDERWATER CANYON

Context: The Geological Institute of Israel has discovered a previously unknown underwater canyon near Cyprus, named Eratosthenes after the nearby underwater mountain.

- This canyon dates back to the Messinian Event approximately 5.5 million years ago.
- It measures about 10 kilometres wide and 500 meters deep and was formed during a period of decreased Mediterranean Sea levels and increased salinity, resulting in gravity currents and subsidence of the seabed.

This discovery sheds light on the environmental conditions during the Messinian event, also known as the Messinian salinity crisis, when the Mediterranean Sea experienced partial or nearly complete desiccation

A submarine canyon is a steep-sided valley that cuts into the continental slopes and rises of the ocean.

CATEGORY 6 HURRICANES

Context: Some experts are proposing the creation of a new hurricane category, Category 6, to account for increasingly intense tropical storms driven by climate change.

Currently, the Saffir-Simpson scale, with five categories, tops out at Category 5, but storms with winds exceeding 192 mph would qualify for the new category.

The Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale (SSHWS) is a tool that helps emergency officials determine the wind hazards of an approaching hurricane. The scale is a 1 to 5 rating based on a hurricane's sustained wind speed.

The scale's categories are:

- Category 1: A minimal hurricane
- Categories 3 to 5: Major hurricanes, which are considered to have the potential for significant loss of life and damage
- Category 5:A worst-case scenario

ARAL SEA

Context: Climate change exacerbates the ongoing decline of the Aral Sea, now reduced to less than a quarter of its former size. Human engineering and agricultural projects have significantly contributed to its demise.

About Aral Sea:

It was once the world's fourth-largest lake, has dramatically shrunk since the 1960s due to Soviet irrigation projects diverting its feeder rivers. The Aral Sea drainage basin encompasses Uzbekistan and parts of Afghanistan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The shrinking of the Aral Sea has been deemed one of the worst environmental disasters, devastating the region's fishing industry and causing unemployment and economic hardship. UNESCO has recognized the environmental tragedy of the Aral Sea by adding historical documents to its Memory of the World Register.

BALTIC SEA

Context: Scientists accidentally discovered a Stone Age wall beneath the Baltic Sea in Germany, believed to be Europe's oldest megastructure.

About Baltic Sea:

It is an arm of the Atlantic Ocean that is enclosed by Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Sweden, and the North and Central European Plain.

BADWATER BASIN IN DEATH VALLEY (USA)

Context: NASA images show Badwater Basin in Death Valley, North America's driest place, hosting a lake for 6 months due to increased precipitation since August 2023.

About Badwater Basin in Death Valley National Park, California:

It is North America's and the United States' lowest point, reaching 282 ft (86 m) below sea level. It features a spring-fed pool of "bad water," surrounded by salt flats, making the water undrinkable. Despite its inhospitable conditions, the pool sustains some animal and plant life. Named after its brackish pool, Badwater Basin was once believed to be the lowest spot in the Western Hemisphere until Laguna del Carbón in Argentina was discovered. Additionally, the Badwater crater on Mars shares similarities with this terrestrial basin.

SUDARSHAN SETU

Context: The Prime Minister inaugurated the Sudarshan Setu, a cable-stayed bridge connecting Okha mainland and Beyt Dwarka island in Gujarat.

The bridge, spanning 2.32 km, is India's longest cable-stayed bridge. Featuring a unique design with verses from the Shrimad Bhagavad Gita and images of Lord Krishna, the Sudarshan Setu also incorporates solar panels generating one megawatt of electricity. The bridge aims to enhance transportation and reduce travel time for devotees visiting Dwarka and Beyt-Dwarka, replacing the reliance on boat transport.

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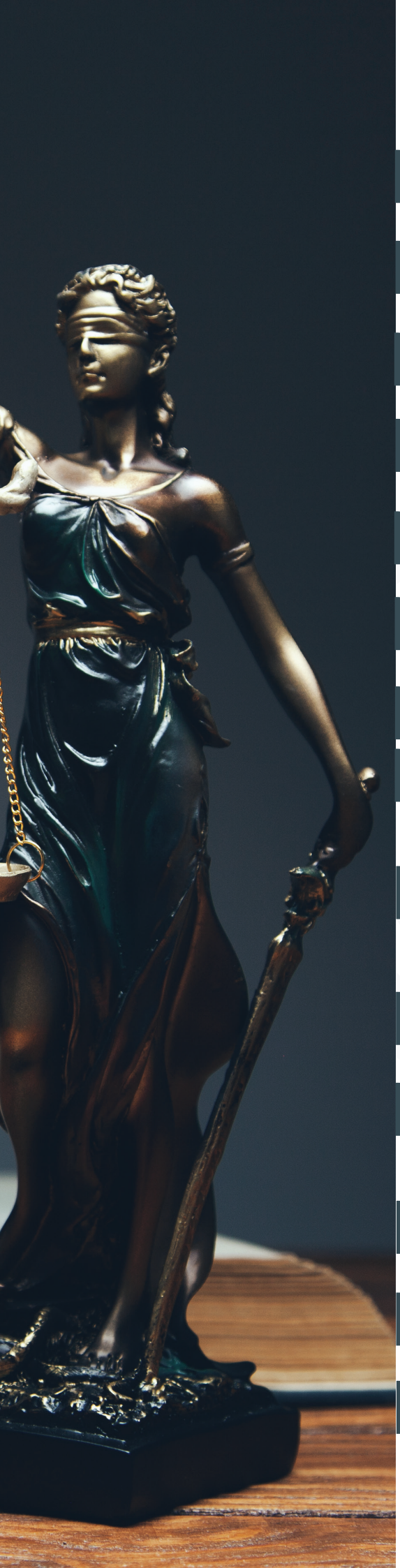

A GLOBAL ALLIANCE TO BRIDGE THE GENDER EQUITY GAP

A RECORD NUMBER OF GLOBAL VOTERS EXERCISE RIGHT IN 2024

BHARAT RATNA FOR SWAMINATHAN, RAO, CHARAN SINGH

EVERYTHING IN THE GARDEN OF ELECTIONS IS NOT LOVELY

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"PRADHAN MANTRI SURYODAYA YOJANA"

RS POLL OUTCOME PUTS NDA JUST FOUR SHORT OF THE MAJORITY MARK IN THE UPPER HOUSE

SC RULES ELECTORAL BONDS SCHEME UNCONSTITUTIONAL

STOP THE DITHERING AND ENCOURAGE GREEN ELECTIONS IN INDIA

UNDERSTANDING THE DELIMITATION EXERCISE

A GLOBAL ALLIANCE TO BRIDGE THE GENDER EQUITY GAP

CONTEXT: The New Delhi Leaders' Declaration, adopted at the G-20 under India's presidency, is testament to this commitment to the equality and inclusion at the cornerstone of India's development journey.

BACKGROUND:

- The G20 Leaders' Declaration in New Delhi emphasized gender equality and inclusion as central to India's development strategy.
- This commitment extends to socio-economic empowerment, digital access, climate action, food security, and healthcare.

MAJOR POINTS

India's Initiatives:

- Alliance for Global Good: Launched at the World Economic Forum, this multi-stakeholder initiative aims to accelerate gender equality with global impact.
- Women's Reservation Bill: Aims to reserve 1/3rd of seats in Parliament and state assemblies for women, boosting their political participation.
- Increased Gender Budget: Allocations of nearly $27 billion demonstrate the government's commitment to women-led development.

Positive Developments:

- Rising Female Labor Force Participation: Up from 23.3% in 2017-18 to 37% in 2022-23.
- Increased Female Education: Enrollment in higher education has grown by 28% in the last decade.
- Strong STEM Participation: Women comprise 43% of students in STEM fields, one of the highest rates globally.
- STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. It's an approach to learning that emphasizes the interconnectedness of these disciplines and their application in solving real-world problem
- Rural Women Empowerment: Over 9 crore women participate in self-help groups, improving rural socio-economic conditions.

The We-Lead Lounge:

- Established at Davos to foster discussions on inclusive development and women's empowerment.
- Serves as a platform for the Alliance for Global Good to translate enthusiasm into action.

The Alliance's Goals:

- Share and develop solutions for women's advancement in education, healthcare, skill development, entrepreneurship, and access to capital.
- Leverage India's strengths in areas like healthcare and pharmaceuticals to address global gender issues.
- Provide leadership and direction for stakeholders worldwide.

Opportunities:

- Businesses can share best practices for women's workplace inclusion and invest in impactful initiatives.
- The global community can collaborate to develop solutions and advance women's engagement in the economy and society.

CONCLUSION: India's leadership in promoting gender equality through the G20 declaration, the Alliance for Global Good, and domestic initiatives positions the country as a key player in advancing this critical agenda.

A RECORD NUMBER OF GLOBAL VOTERS EXERCISE RIGHT IN 2024

2024: A YEAR OF GLOBAL ELECTIONS

Record-breaking Voter Participation Expected

- Over 50 countries are holding national elections like India or European Parliament elections in 2024.
- This represents nearly half the world's population (around 4 billion people) having the opportunity to vote.
- Local elections are not included in this estimate, suggesting the actual number of voters participating could be even higher.

Statistics Supporting the Trend

- According to Freedom House, 2023 saw the highest number of democracies in the world since 1989.
- The International IDEA reports that voter turnout in national elections has increased globally over the past decade.

Possible Reasons for the Rise in Elections

- Growing populations lead to more eligible voters.
- Increased awareness of democratic rights and participation.
- The demand for accountability from governments.

Challenges and Considerations

- Not all elections are free and fair. Elections in Pakistan was questioned by many including inside that nation. Ensuring transparency and upholding democratic principles remains crucial.
- The rise of populism and disinformation campaigns can pose threats to democratic processes.

CONCLUSION: 2024 is shaping up to be a significant year for global democracy. With a high number of elections and an increasing global population, this trend highlights the importance of protecting and strengthening democratic institutions around the world.

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Democracy on the decline in many nations

The data for charts were sourced from Our World in Data, International IDEA, World Bank and the Association of World Election Bodies

Map 1: The map shows the countries going to the polls or have already completed elections in 2024

Chart 2: The chart shows the free and fair elections index, 2022. The bigger the size of the circle, the higher the voting population of the country

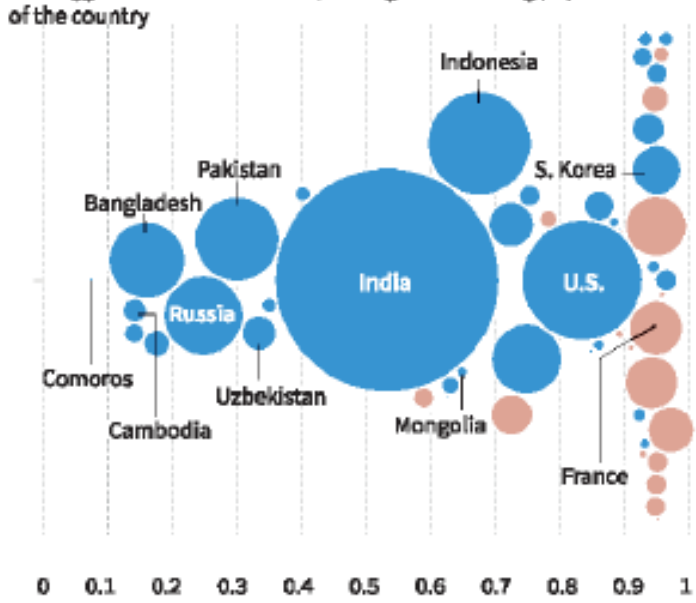
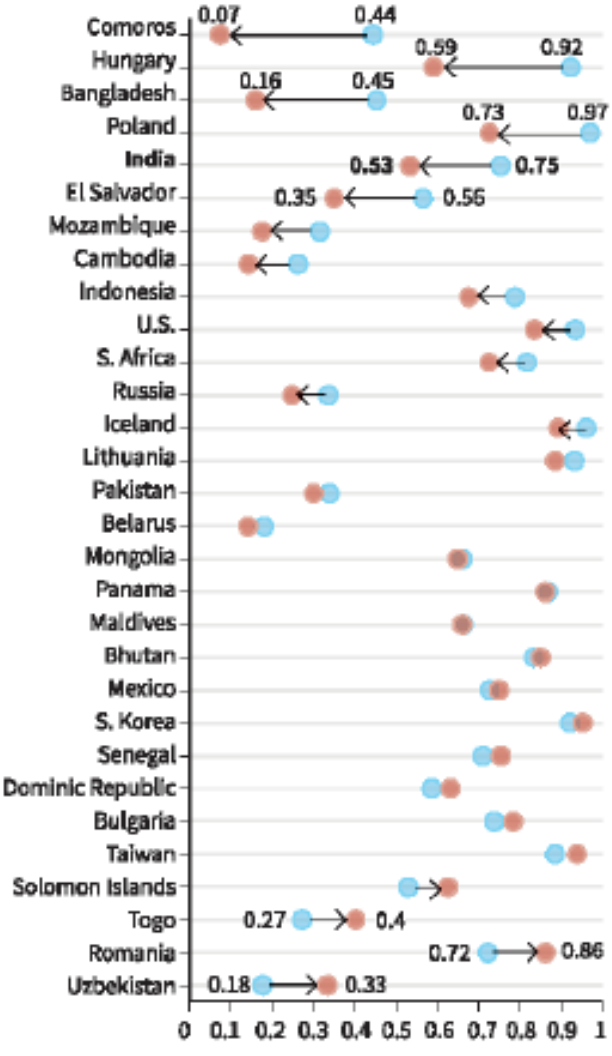
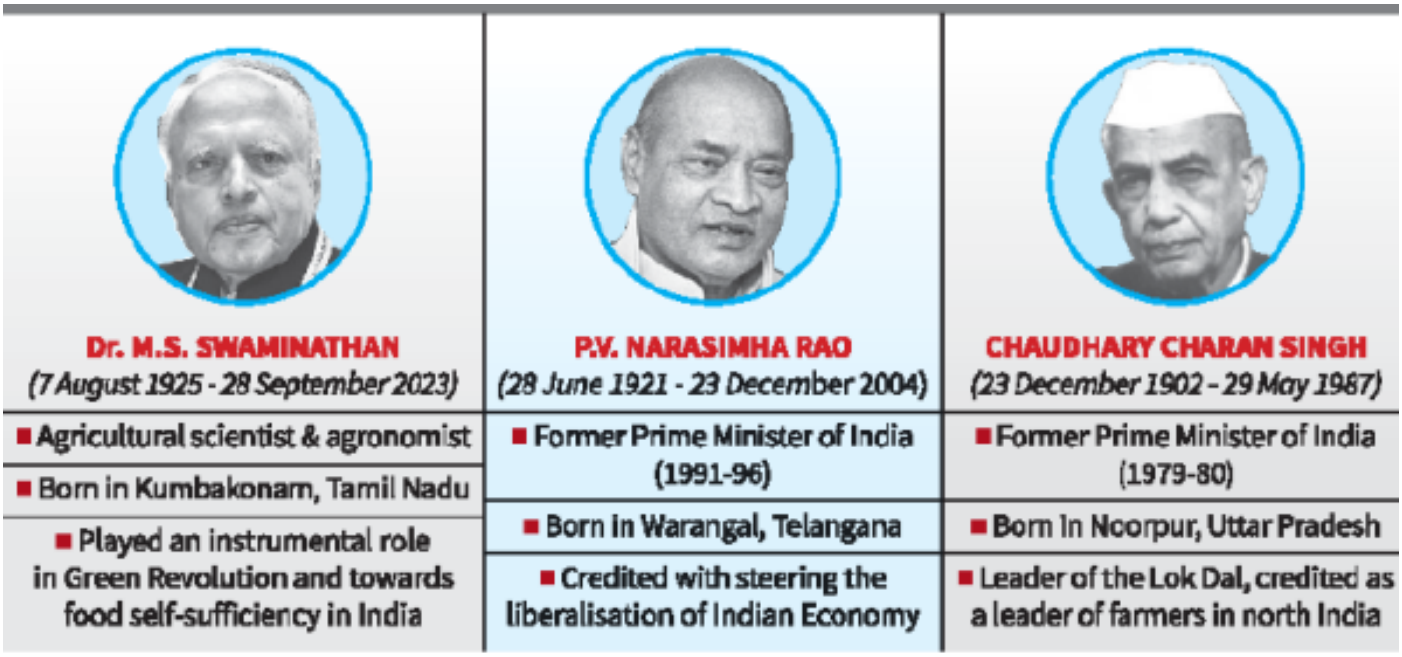


Chart 3: The chart shows the change in the free and fair elections index between 2012 and 2022



BHARAT RATNA FOR SWAMINATHAN, RAO, CHARAN SINGH

CONTEXT: The Bharat Ratna will be conferred on former Prime Ministers P.V. Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh, as well as Green Revolution pioneer M.S. Swaminathan, adding to the two awardees already announced earlier this year – socialist leader Karpoori Thakur, and former Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani.



BHARAT RATNA AWARD:

- **Meaning:** "Jewel of India," it's the highest civilian award in India, recognizing exceptional service/performance in any field. Established in 1954
- **Eligibility:** Open to any person, regardless of race, occupation, position, or sex.
- **Frequency:** Awarded a maximum of three times in a particular year.
- **Benefits:** Comes with a Sanad (certificate) signed by the President and a medallion. There's no monetary grant.
- **Selection process:** Nominations are made by the Prime Minister to the President of India.
- **No awards from 2020-2023:** The announcement you shared breaks the trend of no awards being given from 2020 to 2023. The reasons for this gap are not officially disclosed.

2024 ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- This year, the award was conferred on five individuals:
  - oSocialist leader: Karpoori Thakur (posthumously)
  - oFormer Deputy Prime Minister: L.K. Advani
  - oFormer Prime Ministers: P.V. Narasimha Rao and Chaudhary Charan Singh
  - oGreen Revolution pioneer: M.S. Swaminathan

EVERYTHING IN THE GARDEN OF ELECTIONS IS NOT LOVELY

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court's recent judgment in the Chandigarh mayoral election case, where it overturned the results due to tampering, raises concerns about the future of India's democracy, especially in the context of upcoming national elections and the increasing presence of religion in political discourse.

MAJOR ISSUES:

- Supreme Court upholds free and fair elections: The court emphasizes the importance of free and fair elections in the Chandigarh mayoral election case.
- Concerns about upcoming national elections: The Chandigarh case raises concerns about potential manipulation in the upcoming national elections.
- Religious fervor and political campaigning: The rise of religious fervor in India is seen as a potential threat to the integrity of the electoral process.
- Political parties and religious appeals: Political parties are cautioned against using religion in their campaigns, as it is considered a corrupt practice.
- Vulnerability of the electoral process: The Chandigarh case highlights the vulnerability of the electoral process at different stages, even during vote counting.
- Public apprehension and hope: The public is apprehensive about the future of democracy, but finds hope in the Supreme Court's intervention.

POLITICAL DISCOURSE NOW

- **Importance of the 2024 Elections:**
  1. India's general election is crucial for its democratic history and global image as a beacon of secularism.
  2. Concerns exist regarding a potential shift towards a theocratic system due to rising religiosity and its influence in political discourse.
- **Incident in Chandigarh:**
  1. A Returning Officer (allegedly affiliated with the BJP) allegedly invalidated valid votes favouring a rival candidate, highlighting potential manipulation within the electoral system.
  2. The Supreme Court, recognizing the incident's significance, intervened to ensure the integrity of the electoral process.
- **The Court's Response:**
  1. The Supreme Court condemned the Returning Officer's actions and emphasized its responsibility to protect electoral democracy (Article 142 of the Constitution).
  2. Highlighting the danger to the system, the Court's observations serve as a warning against future attempts to subvert elections.
- **Alarming Trends:**
  1. The incident raises concerns about the willingness of officials to manipulate elections and the ability of the current system to prevent it, even with legal protections.
  2. The defence of the Returning Officer by government officials and the High Court's initial inaction further raise concerns.
- **Importance of Upholding Electoral Integrity:**
  1. India's founding principles and legal framework emphasize the sanctity of the electoral system, which the Supreme Court has consistently upheld.
  2. Judicial vigilance in punishing electoral manipulation and upholding the system's integrity is crucial to maintaining public trust.
  3. The recent Supreme Court judgments on electoral bonds and the Chandigarh elections are widely appreciated for their role in maintaining electoral integrity.
- **The Challenge of Religious Fervor:**
  1. With heightened religious fervor in the country, the upcoming elections face the challenge of ensuring
  2. The ability to protect against manipulation based on religious sentiment remains a key question for Indian citizens.

THE ANGLE OF RELIGION IN INDIAN ELECTIONS

1. Religious Appeals and the Law:

- Political parties often resort to religious rhetoric during elections, despite it being a corrupt practice under Section 123(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- This provision recognizes the vulnerability of voters to religious appeals and aims to ensure fair elections.
- The Supreme Court has repeatedly condemned the use of religion in campaigning, citing cases like Ziyauddin Burhanuddin Bukhari vs Brijmohan Ramdass Mehra & Ors (1975), and Abhiram Singh vs C.D. Commachen (2017).

2. Importance of Adhering to Legal Precedents:

- Political parties should familiarize themselves with these judgments to avoid utilizing religious appeals during campaigns.
- This is crucial for maintaining a secular and democratic election process in India.

3. The Chandigarh Incident:

- The manipulation of votes by the Returning Officer in Chandigarh highlights the potential for subversion at various stages of the election process.
- Even though local body elections like this one aren't governed by the Representation of the People Act, similar principles of fair and free elections apply under corporation regulations.

4. Concerns and Hope:

- The Chandigarh episode raises serious concerns about the future of India's electoral democracy.
- However, the Supreme Court's intervention in this case provides a sense of hope for safeguarding the electoral process.

5. A Call for Vigilance:

- After 75 years of democratic elections, witnessing attempts to manipulate the system is alarming.
- Citizens must remain vigilant and ensure such practices don't become the norm in future elections.

CONCLUSION: The upcoming elections in India present a critical test for its democracy. While the Supreme Court's recent intervention offers hope, concerns persist about religious influence and potential manipulation. Ensuring free and fair elections, upholding secular principles, and maintaining public trust will be crucial for India's democratic future.

HOME SECRETARY GETS POWER TO DESTROY INTERCEPTION ORDERS

CONTEXT: Amid growing concerns over surveillance abuse, the Indian government has granted the Home Secretary the authority to destroy interception orders, previously held solely by security agencies, raising questions about transparency and accountability.

MAJOR ISSUES:

- Union government empowers the Home Secretary to destroy interception orders, previously held by security agencies alone.
- The move comes amid heightened surveillance of opposition figures, journalists, and activists.
- The 2018 Home Ministry order granted 10 agencies, including the Enforcement Directorate and Intelligence Bureau, authority to monitor communications.
- Agencies are required to destroy intercept orders within six months, except when needed for operational purposes.
- Recent amendment expands destruction powers to Home Secretary, raising transparency concerns.
- Digital rights activists express apprehension over potential misuse and lack of accountability.
- History of government surveillance for political purposes cited, including allegations against former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa.
- Some critics argue that a significant increase in surveillance activities was noted during the National Democratic Alliance's tenure.

POTENTIAL IMPACT OF THE GOVERNMENT ORDER ON INDIA:

Increased Concerns about Transparency and Accountability:

- **Centralized Power:** Shifting the authority to destroy interception orders from security agencies to the Home Secretary raises concerns about centralized control over information and reduced oversight.
- **Lack of Independent Scrutiny:** Critics argue that the Home Secretary, being part of the executive branch, may be less likely to scrutinize orders objectively compared to independent bodies.
- **Potential for Abuse:** The lack of independent oversight and centralized control could create opportunities for misuse of power and selective targeting of individuals or groups.

Impact on Privacy and Civil Liberties:

- **Erosion of Privacy Rights:** The order could contribute to a chilling effect on free speech and dissent, as individuals may be more hesitant to express themselves freely due to fear of surveillance.
- **Erosion of Civil Liberties:** Increased surveillance capabilities could lead to greater restrictions on civil liberties and hinder dissent and political participation.

Potential for Legal Challenges:

- Violation of Fundamental Rights: The order might be challenged in courts for potentially violating the fundamental right to privacy guaranteed under the Indian Constitution.
- Demand for Stronger Legal Safeguards: The controversy surrounding the order could fuel calls for stronger legal safeguards and independent oversight mechanisms for surveillance activities.

Uncertainty and Lack of Clarity:

- Limited Information: The lack of clear public information about the rationale behind the order and the specific procedures for destroying interception orders creates uncertainty and confusion about its implications.
- Need for Clear Guidelines: The order necessitates the development of clear and transparent guidelines to ensure accountability and prevent misuse of power.

It is important to note that the full impact of the order will depend on how it is implemented in practice. However, the concerns raised by critics highlight the need for transparent and accountable surveillance practices that safeguard individual privacy and civil liberties in India.

POSITION IN OTHER MAJOR DEMOCRACIES

In many other major democracies, the position of authorities entrusted with the destruction of interception orders differs significantly from the recent case in India:

1. Independent Oversight:

Judicial Review: Countries like the United States and Germany rely on judicial review to ensure the legality and necessity of interception orders. Courts can scrutinize orders and demand justification from agencies before granting surveillance permission.

Independent Review Bodies: Some democracies, like Canada and France, have established independent review bodies specifically tasked with overseeing intelligence and surveillance activities. These bodies investigate complaints, provide recommendations, and report to the public, fostering greater transparency.

2. Decentralized Authority:

Multiple Actors Involved: Unlike India's recent move towards centralized power, several democratic nations, including Australia and the United Kingdom, distribute the authority to issue, oversee, and destroy interception orders across multiple independent agencies. This helps to prevent the concentration of power and promotes checks and balances.

3. Legislative Scrutiny:

Parliamentary Oversight: In many democracies, like Germany and the United Kingdom, parliamentary committees play a crucial role in scrutinizing the use of surveillance powers. These committees have the authority to investigate agencies,

demand reports, and hold public hearings, ensuring greater legislative oversight.

United States:
- The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) Court oversees the issuance and monitoring of interception warrants for foreign intelligence purposes.
- Orders are retained for a minimum of seven years and can be accessed by designated officials for oversight purposes.

United Kingdom:
- The Investigatory Powers Act establishes independent oversight through the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO).
- Interception warrants are subject to judicial review, and destruction procedures are outlined in the act with safeguards to prevent abuse.

Germany:
- The G10 Commission, an independent body, oversees the activities of intelligence agencies and approves surveillance measures.
- Interception orders are subject to judicial authorization and are retained for a specific period for potential review.

France:
- The National Commission for the Control of Intelligence Techniques (CNCIS) provides independent oversight of intelligence activities, including surveillance.
- Destruction of interception orders requires justification and follows specific procedures outlined in relevant legislation.

Canada:
- The Communications Security Establishment Commissioner (CSEC) provides independent oversight of signals intelligence activities.
- Warrants for interception require judicial authorization and are subject to strict retention and destruction guidelines.

Australia:
- The Independent National Security Legislation Monitor (INSLM) oversees the operation of national security laws and practices.
- Interception warrants are issued by a designated judge and are subject to specific record-keeping and destruction procedures.

CONCLUSION

The Indian government's decision to grant the Home Secretary the power to destroy interception orders has ignited significant debate. While the stated purpose is to streamline processes, the move raises critical concerns about transparency, accountability, and the potential for misuse. Moving forward, addressing these concerns through clear guidelines, independent oversight, and robust legal safeguards will be crucial to ensuring that surveillance practices in India uphold fundamental rights and foster a truly democratic society.

MICRO-CREDENTIALS, THE NEXT CHAPTER IN HIGHER EDUCATION

CONTEXT: Higher education institutes (HEIs) in India must play a much more active role in ensuring that students become employable by connecting them with the careers and job opportunities of tomorrow. There is a gap between the knowledge that students acquire in HEIs and the knowledge they must have in order to become employable.

WHAT ARE MICRO CREDENTIALS

Micro-credentials are bite-sized, competency-based qualifications that focus on specific skills or knowledge areas. They are distinct from traditional degrees or certifications in several key ways:
- **Shorter:** Acquired in significantly less time, typically ranging from hours to weeks compared to years for degrees.
- **Focused:** Target a specific skill or knowledge set relevant to a particular job function or industry need.
- **Accessible:** Often more affordable than traditional credentials and can be earned through online or in-person learning formats.
- **Stackable:** Can be combined to build broader knowledge and skills, leading to a larger credential or demonstrating diversified expertise.
- **Validity:** Issued a digital badge, certificate, or credits as proof of completion. Validated through a standard and reliable assessment process.
- **Modes:** Offered in various modes (online, physical, hybrid) and levels (beginner, intermediate, advanced).

Contrast with Macro-Credentials (e.g., degrees):
- Micro-credentials require less time to complete (hours/ weeks vs. years).
- Cater to life-long learners who may not pursue formal degrees.

Current Landscape:
- Diverse terminology exists (digital badges, micro-master degrees, etc.).
- Offered by various players (universities, online platforms, companies).

Growing trend with more organizations expected to join.

Credits and Comparison to Traditional Programs:
- In traditional programs, credits are linked to time spent (lectures, labs).
- In micro-credentials, credits are linked to notional hours spent acquiring competency.
- This allows for universal validation and recognition.

Examples:
- Completing a short online course on cybersecurity fundamentals and earning a micro-credential in "Cybersecurity Awareness."
- Mastering a specific software program and receiving a micro-credential in "Advanced [Software Name] Techniques."
- Participating in a workshop on data analysis and obtaining a micro-credential in "Data Visualization.

THE BACKGROUND:

The concept of micro-credentials isn't entirely new, with earlier instances dating back to the 1980s. However, their recent surge in popularity stems from several converging factors:
- **Rapidly Evolving Job Market:** The pace of technological change and automation has disrupted traditional career

paths, requiring individuals to constantly update their skillsets to stay relevant.

- **Shifting Learning Preferences:** Learners today seek flexible, bite-sized learning experiences that fit seamlessly into their busy lives and address specific skill gaps.
- **Increased Demand for Skill-Based Hiring:** Employers are increasingly focusing on demonstrated skills and competencies rather than solely relying on traditional degrees when recruiting talent.
- **Technological Advancements:** Online learning platforms and digital badges have facilitated the development, delivery, and verification of micro-credentials more efficiently and cost-effectively.

WHY THEY'RE EMERGING NOW:

Micro-credentials address a critical need in today's dynamic world, offering a timely and effective solution:

- **Addressing Skill Gaps:** They enable individuals to quickly acquire in-demand skills and bridge knowledge gaps relevant to their specific career needs.
- **Demonstrating Proficiency:** They provide a tangible way to showcase mastery of specific skills to potential employers, fostering stronger job applications.
- **Fostering Lifelong Learning:** They encourage a continuous learning mindset, allowing individuals to adapt and upskill throughout their careers.
- **Offering Alternatives:** They complement, not replace, traditional credentials, providing additional avenues for career advancement and personal development.

The convergence of these factors has created a fertile ground for the emergence and proliferation of micro-credentials as a valuable tool for navigating the complexities of the contemporary job market and the evolving world of work.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

- Quality assurance: Need for clear benchmarking and regulation to prevent discrepancies.
- Fostering trust: Ensuring micro-credentials represent genuine skill acquisition.
- Integration with existing systems: Aligning with the National Credit Framework (NCrF) and the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC).

THE FUTURE OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS IN INDIA:

- Potential for millions of learners: Address skill gaps and complement traditional education.
- Collaboration with industry: Develop micro-credentials relevant to workforce needs.
- Harmonization with existing programs: Clear validation metrics for micro-credentials.

CONCLUSION:

Micro-credentials offer a valuable tool for navigating the evolving job market and fostering lifelong learning. Indian HEIs have an opportunity to be agents of transformation by introducing micro-credentials and collaborating with stakeholders to ensure their quality and integration with existing systems.

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.

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.

CONCLUSION: The decision to abolish the Free Movement Regime and erect fences along the India-Myanmar border raises concerns regarding its impact on regional stability and humanitarian relations. Prioritizing security over people-centric policies challenges the ethos of shared ethnic ties and may exacerbate existing tensions. A reconsideration of priorities is imperative to address the complex dynamics of border management while upholding humanitarian values and regional cooperation.

MIXED REACTIONS IN NE TO CENTRE'S MOVE TO FENCE INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER

CONTEXT: Home Minister Amit Shah's announcement that the Centre would fence the India-Myanmar border to facilitate better surveillance and pave a patrol track has evoked mixed reactions from the rulers of five north-eastern States.

While the Chief Ministers of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur have welcomed the decision, their Mizoram and Nagaland counterparts are against putting up a barbed wire fence along the 1,643 km border between the two countries. Of these States, only Assam does not share its border with Myanmar

FIRST TO RAISE DEMAND

Manipur Chief Minister Nongthombam Biren Singh was the first to demand barbed wire fencing along the border with Myanmar. In September 2023, he appealed to the Centre to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) agreement between the two countries that allows border residents to travel up to 16 km in each other's' territory without any visa.

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu also expressed confidence that the fencing project would "check the movement of unscrupulous elements" between Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma also said fencing would reduce incidents of cross-border insurgency and infiltration.

REACTIONS

The extremists had been exploiting the Free Movement Regime (FMR) to stoke ethnic violence in Manipur since May 3, 2023. Fencing could prevent Myanmar nationals from entering his State illegally.

Members of extremist groups such as the United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) have been carrying out hit-and-run operations in Assam from Myanmar by travelling through a mostly jungle stretch of hilly land straddling Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.

Based primarily in Manipur and Nagaland, the Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN has opposed the fencing plan that it said would cut off Nagas living on either side of the border. Similarly, the Myanmar-based Khaplang-Yung Aung faction is against the fencing.

'RIGHT TO LIVE TOGETHER'

Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma and his Nagaland counterpart Neiphiu Rio are against erecting a barbed wire fence along the border. The plan is unacceptable, adding that people of the Zo community inhabiting both Mizoram and Myanmar have a right to live without any barrier between them

CONCLUSION: The mixed reactions from the rulers of north-eastern states regarding the Centre's move to fence the India-Myanmar border highlight the complex socio-political dynamics and differing perspectives on border security and community ties, underscoring the need for careful consideration and dialogue to address concerns and ensure inclusive development in the region.

MISPLACED PRIORITIES MIZORAM ASSEMBLY ADOPTS RESOLUTION AGAINST BORDER FENCE

CONTEXT: The Mizoram Assembly passed a resolution opposing the Indian government's decision to fence the border with Myanmar and scrap a free movement agreement, citing the historical division of the Zo ethnic group and its desire for reunification.

BACKGROUND TO THE MIZORAM ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION ON THE INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER AND OTHER ISSUES:

- The Indian government announced plans to fence the 1,643-km border with Myanmar and scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) agreement.
- The FMR allows residents on both sides of the border to travel visa-free within a 16 km radius for a limited period.
- The Mizoram Assembly opposes this decision, citing the historical division of the Zo ethnic group inhabiting Mizoram and Myanmar.
- They argue that the border fence would further separate a people group with a shared history and aspirations for reunification.
- While Mizoram and Nagaland oppose the fencing plan, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh support it, highlighting differing concerns among the northeastern states bordering Myanmar.

WHO ARE ZO COMMUNITY?

The Zo people are an ethnic group spread across several countries in Southeast Asia, primarily inhabiting:

- **Mizoram, India:** The dominant Mizo people belong to the Zo ethnic group.
- **Manipur, India:** The Kuki-Zomi people are part of the Zo group.
- **Myanmar:** The Chin people are a major Zo community in Myanmar.
- **Bangladesh:** The Kuki-Chin people residing in the Chittagong Hill Tracts belong to the Zo ethnicity.

Shared characteristics bind the Zo people together, including:

- **Linguistic similarities:** They share a common ancestral language and related dialects.
- **Cultural traditions:** They have similar cultural practices, beliefs, and customs.
- **Historical background:** They share a sense of common history and ancestral origins.

POTENTIAL FALLOUT OF THE BORDER FENCE AND FMR SCRAPPING:

- **Strained relations with Mizoram:** The Mizoram Assembly's resolution signifies strong opposition from the state, potentially leading to further friction and resentment towards the central government.
- **Impact on Zo community:** The fencing and restricted movement could negatively impact the cultural, social, and economic ties between the divided Zo communities in Mizoram and Myanmar.
- **Increased border tensions:** The fencing might not effectively address security concerns and could even lead to increased tensions along the border due to perceived restrictions on movement.
- **Economic disruption:** Businesses and livelihoods reliant on cross-border trade and movement could be negatively affected, impacting communities on both sides of the border.
- **Negative impact on regional cooperation:** The dispute could hinder broader efforts towards regional cooperation and development in the Northeast.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS:

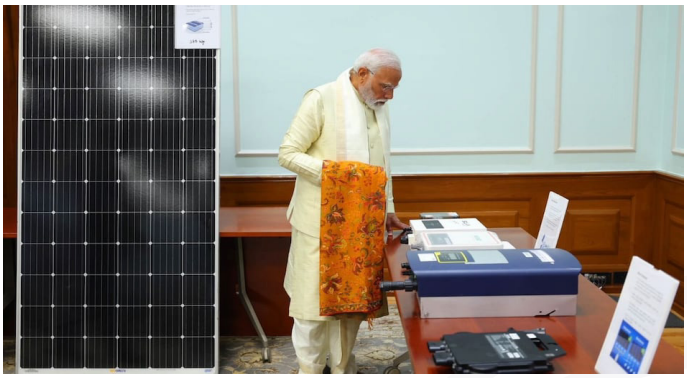
- Open dialogue and consultation: Engaging with the Mizoram government and other stakeholders through open dialogue and addressing their concerns is crucial.
- Alternative security measures: Exploring alternative security measures that do not involve physical barriers and consider the cultural and historical context of the region could be beneficial.
- Phased approach and pilot projects: Implementing a phased approach with pilot projects in specific areas could allow for evaluating the effectiveness of chosen solutions and making adjustments as necessary.
- Focus on regional development: Investing in regional development projects and initiatives that benefit all bordering states could foster a sense of shared prosperity and cooperation.
- Respecting cultural ties: Recognizing the unique cultural ties between communities and finding ways to facilitate responsible cross-border movement while addressing security concerns is essential.

CONCLUSION: The Mizoram Assembly resolution highlights the complexities of border management and ethnic aspirations. While security concerns are vital, finding solutions that address the concerns of divided communities like the Zo people and fostering regional cooperation through open dialogue and alternative security measures are crucial for a sustainable and peaceful resolution.

VEDHIK IAS ACADEMY
The New Learning Mantra
INDIA'S LARGEST ONLINE IAS COACHING ACADEMY

"PRADHAN MANTRI SURYODAYA YOJANA"

CONTEXT: The Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana marks a significant stride in India's move towards energy self-reliance. This initiative, focused on installing rooftop solar systems in one crore households, will reduce dependence on traditional energy sources and contribute to a greener future for the nation.



BACKGROUND

India's Evolving Energy Landscape: A Balancing Act

- **Soaring Demand:** India faces the highest projected energy demand growth globally, expected to double by 2040. This surge is driven by a 20% population increase, rapid economic expansion, and increasing urbanization.
- **Fossil Fuel Dependence:** Historically, India has relied heavily on coal, contributing to 70% of its power generation in 2023. This dependence raises concerns about air pollution and climate change, with India ranking among the top 3 most polluted countries. Additionally, significant reliance on imported oil poses economic and security risks.
- **Shifting Towards Renewables:** Recognizing these challenges, India has embarked on an ambitious renewable energy transition, led by solar power. India boasts the 5th largest installed solar capacity globally at 73.3 GW (as of December 2023), with ambitious targets to reach 500 GW by 2030.

Government Initiatives:

- **National Solar Mission (2010):** Set the initial framework for promoting solar, including rooftop projects.
- **Rooftop Solar Programme (2014):** Aimed to achieve 40 GW of rooftop solar capacity by 2022, but faced challenges with limited success.
- **Looking ahead:** The Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana aims to overcome these challenges and accelerate rooftop solar adoption in millions of homes, contributing to a cleaner and more secure energy future for India.

ROOFTOP SOLAR PANELS: AN OVERVIEW

What are they?

- Rooftop solar panels are photovoltaic panels installed on the roof of a building.
- They convert sunlight into electricity using the photovoltaic effect.
- These panels are connected to the main power supply unit of the building.

Benefits:

- Reduced electricity costs: Rooftop solar panels help consumers save money on their electricity bills by reducing their reliance on grid-connected electricity.
- **Surplus power benefits:** If a rooftop solar system generates more power than the building consumes, the excess can be exported back to the grid, offering monetary compensation under prevailing regulations.
- **Environmentally friendly:** Solar energy is a clean and renewable source of energy, helping to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and combat climate change.

Government Initiatives:

- Rooftop Solar Programme (2014): Aimed to achieve a cumulative installed capacity of 40 GW by 2022 (target not met, deadline extended to 2026).
- Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana: Aims to boost rooftop solar installations and potentially help reach the 40 GW target.

The Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana (PMSY) is a government scheme that aims to install rooftop solar panels in one crore households across India. The scheme was launched on January 22, 2024, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PMSY:

- To reduce electricity bills for households
- To generate income for households through the sale of surplus electricity
- To create jobs in the solar sector
- To contribute to India's renewable energy goals

BENEFITS OF THE PMSY:

- Subsidies on the cost of rooftop solar panels
- Loans at low interest rates
- Net metering, which allows households to sell surplus electricity back to the grid
- Income tax benefits

ELIGIBILITY FOR THE PMSY:

- Households with an annual income of up to Rs. 1.5 lakh
- Households that own a roof with a clear area of at least 10 square meters
- Households that have a net metering connection

HOW TO APPLY FOR THE PMSY:

- Households can apply for the PMSY online through the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy's website.
- The application process is simple and requires basic information such as the household's address, income, and roof size.
- Once the application is approved, the household will be contacted by a solar installer who will install the rooftop solar panels.

The PMSY is a significant step towards India's renewable energy goals. The scheme has the potential to reduce electricity bills for households, generate income for households, create jobs in the solar sector, and contribute to India's renewable energy goals.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

- The scheme is being implemented by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE).
- The MNRE has allocated a budget of Rs. 10,000 crore for the scheme.
- The scheme is expected to create 10 lakh jobs in the solar sector.
- The scheme is expected to generate 10 GW of solar power.

Current Solar Capacity in India (December 2023):

- Total: 73.31 GW
- Rooftop: 11.08 GW (Gujarat leads with 2.8 GW)
- Residential: Only 20% of rooftop solar capacity, with the majority in commercial and industrial sectors.
- Potential: India's households could deploy 637 GW of solar energy on rooftops, enough to meet the entire residential electricity demand.

India's Energy Demand and Renewable Goals:

- India faces the highest global energy demand growth projection over the next 30 years.
- Despite increasing coal production, India is committed to achieving 500 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030.
- The country aims for 50% of electricity generation from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030 (already at 43%, with renewables contributing 30%).
- Rapid growth in renewable capacity, especially solar, is crucial to meet rising energy demand.

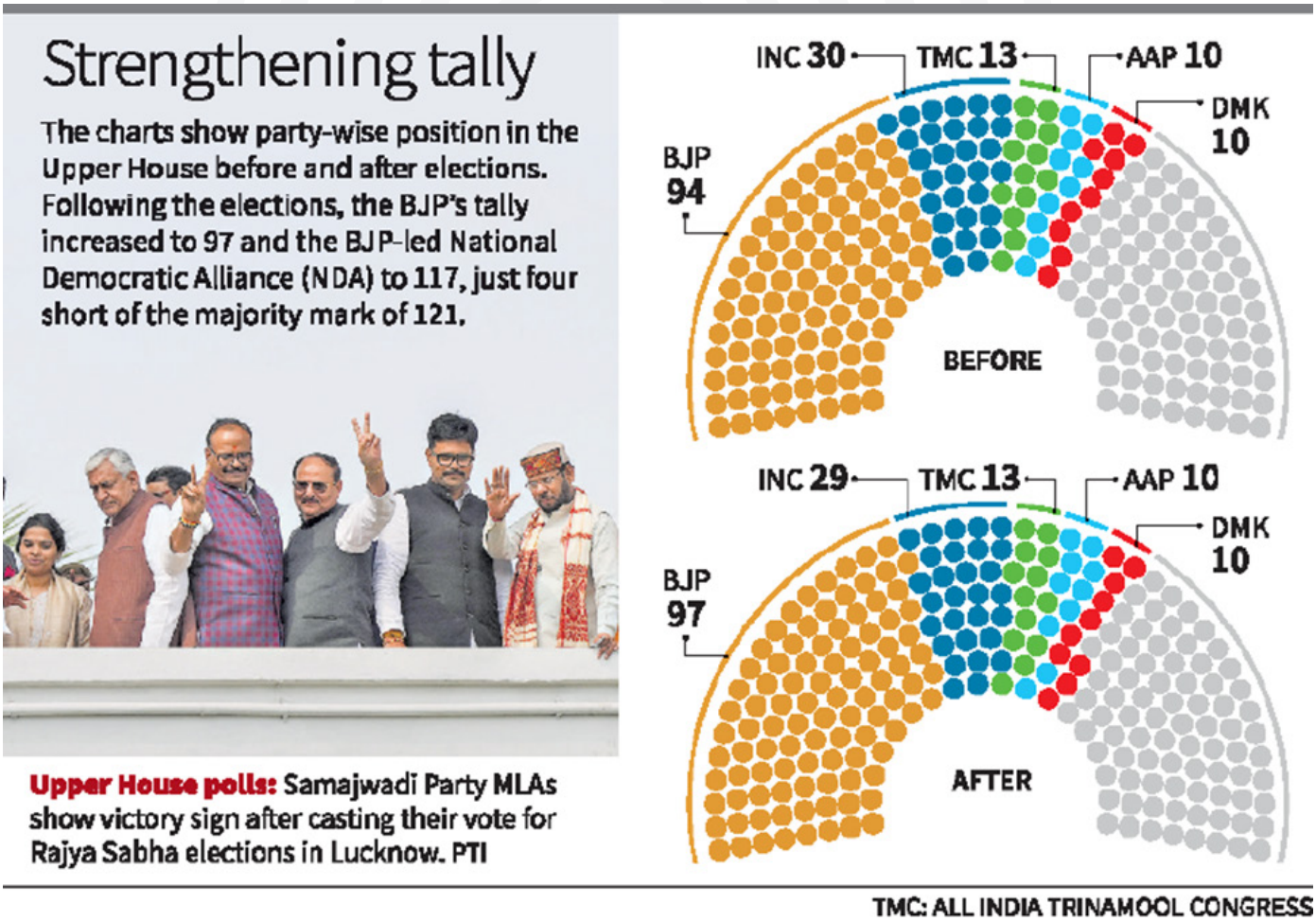
Other Relevant Information:

- National Solar Mission: A national mission promoting solar energy use across India.
- Solar Park Scheme: Encourages the development of large-scale solar parks.
- Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Utthaan Mahabhiyan (PM-KUSUM): Promotes solar irrigation pumps and grid-connected solar power plants in the agricultural sector.
- Suryamitra Skill Development Programme: Aims to train individuals for jobs in the solar energy sector.
- International Solar Alliance: An alliance of over 100 countries working towards harnessing solar energy.

CONCLUSION: The Pradhan Mantri Suryodaya Yojana stands as a pivotal initiative in India's journey towards energy self-reliance and a sustainable future. By empowering millions of households with rooftop solar panels, the scheme not only reduces dependence on traditional energy sources and combats pollution but also empowers individuals through cost savings and potential income generation. This ambitious program, coupled with existing initiatives and continued renewable energy growth, paves the way for a brighter future, powered by the clean and abundant energy of the sun.

RS POLL OUTCOME PUTS NDA JUST FOUR SHORT OF THE MAJORITY MARK IN THE UPPER HOUSE

CONTEXT: The results of the Rajya Sabha elections have improved the BJP-led NDA's position in the Upper House, bringing them closer to a majority and potentially impacting the passage of legislation.



RAJYA SABHA ELECTION RESULTS: NDA NEARS MAJORITY

Results:

- The BJP-led NDA now has 117 seats in the Rajya Sabha, just four short of a majority.
- The BJP gained two additional seats due to cross-voting in Himachal Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

Significance:

- This strengthens the NDA's position in the Upper House, potentially impacting the passage of legislation.
- Previously, the NDA lacked a majority in the Rajya Sabha, leading to challenges in passing bills.

Previous Scenario:

- Since 2014, the NDA had a majority in the Lok Sabha but faced hurdles in the Rajya Sabha.
- The NDA relied on the support of neutral parties like BJD and YSRCP for crucial legislation.

Current Standings:

- BJP: 97 seats (including nominated members)
- NDA: 117 seats
- Congress: 29 seats
- Other parties: Varied representation (TMC - 13, DMK & AAP - 10 each, etc.)

CONCLUSION: With the NDA nearing a majority in the Rajya Sabha, the upcoming legislative landscape in India could see a shift towards smoother passage of bills, potentially impacting domestic politics.

SC RULES ELECTORAL BONDS SCHEME UNCONSTITUTIONAL

Pulling the plug

Major takeaways from the Supreme Court verdict striking down the electoral bonds scheme:

- **Issuance of electoral bonds to be stopped**
- **SBI to submit full details of bonds purchased by donors and subsequently encashed by political parties since April 12, 2019 to the Election Commission of India by March 6**
- **ECI to publish the entire information given by SBI on its website by March 13**

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court on Thursday struck down as "unconstitutional and manifestly arbitrary" the electoral bonds scheme, which provides blanket anonymity to political donors, as well as critical legal amendments allowing rich corporations to make unlimited political donations.

BACKGROUND:

Electoral Bonds were a scheme introduced in India to anonymously fund political parties.

- The scheme aimed to cleanse political funding by removing cash donations.
- Supporters argued it increased transparency by bringing donations into the banking system

What were Electoral Bonds?

- Introduced in 2018, these were bearer instruments similar to promissory notes.
- Anyone could purchase them from designated branches of SBI.
- Donations to eligible political parties were made using these bonds, maintaining anonymity of the donor.

SUPREME COURT'S DECISION:

- In February 2024, the Supreme Court struck down the scheme as unconstitutional.
- The court found it violated the right to information about political funding, essential for a healthy democracy.
- Anonymity of donors raised concerns about potential corruption and undue influence on parties.

IMPACT ON INDIAN DEMOCRACY:

- The decision promotes transparency and accountability in political funding.
- Voters can now have a better understanding of who is bankrolling political parties.
- This might help curb the influence of money power in elections and promote a more level playing field.

MOVING FORWARD:

- The verdict necessitates alternative methods for regulating political funding that balance transparency with donor privacy concerns.
- The Election Commission and legislature might need to work together to devise a new framework.

CONCLUSION: The Supreme Court's decision on electoral bonds significantly strengthens transparency in Indian democracy. It paves the way for a more informed electorate and a fairer electoral process.

STOP THE DITHERING AND ENCOURAGE GREEN ELECTIONS IN INDIA

CONTEXT: As the urgency of combating the climate crisis grows, the Election Commission of India's (ECI) call for eco-friendly elections underscores the need for a paradigm shift in electoral practices, emphasizing sustainability alongside civic participation.

STORY SO FAR: As the climate crisis intensifies, the Election Commission of India (ECI) highlights environmental concerns ahead of Assembly elections in five states, urging a shift to eco-friendly practices in electoral campaigns. With every election contributing to a significant carbon footprint, the call for 'green elections' gains urgency, aligning environmental stewardship with civic engagement. Sri Lanka and Estonia serve as examples of environmentally conscious electoral processes. As India prepares for its next general election, prioritizing environmental considerations becomes imperative, setting the stage for sustainable electoral practices.

WHY IS THERE A NEED FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT?

- **Overlooked issue:** The environmental footprint of elections, often substantial, is frequently overlooked.
- **Significant impact:** Traditional methods, with paper, rallies, and disposable items, contribute significantly to environmental damage and can impact health.
- **Case study:** Campaign flights in the 2016 US elections by one candidate generated emissions equivalent to 500 Americans' annual carbon footprint.
- **India's impact:** Large-scale elections in India amplify the environmental impact due to a large voter base and extensive rallies.
- **Green solutions:** Green elections promote eco-friendly practices throughout the process, from campaigning to polling.
- **Primary source:** Transportation of voters and logistics to polling booths is the primary source of emissions (research by Willemson & Krips, 2023).
- **Digital solutions:** Transitioning to digital voting systems could reduce the carbon footprint by up to 40%.
- **Challenges:** Implementation faces technological, financial, and behavioral challenges.
  - **Technological:** Requires robust infrastructure (especially in rural areas) and robust security against hacking.
  - **Financial:** Upfront costs for materials and technology can be high, especially for financially constrained governments.
  - **Behavioral:** Cultural preference for physical presence at polling stations, public skepticism of new approaches, and fear of compromised vote security.
- **Solution:** Transparency and effective auditing of new adaptations are crucial to overcome public skepticism.

SUCCESSFUL ECO-FRIENDLY ELECTORAL INITIATIVES: EXAMPLES

- **KERALA (INDIA, 2019):**
  - Encouraged eco-friendly alternatives like wall painting and paper posters instead of single-use plastics.
  - Government bodies collaborated for training and awareness campaigns.
  - Kerala held its first clean and green election in 2019, following a ban on flex and non-biodegradable materials by the Kerala High Court.
  - CEO of Kerala, Shri TR Meena IAS, issued an advisory urging political parties to avoid single-use plastic materials and opt for eco-friendly alternatives like wall graffiti and paper posters.
  - Collaboration with Kerala Suchitwa Mission ensured the successful implementation of eco-friendly practices across the state.
  - Focus was on using reusable alternatives like glass, stainless steel, and porcelain cutlery while avoiding plastic banners and hoardings.
  - Polling stations and election offices were directed to use eco-friendly materials, including water bottles, and green-model polling booths were set up across districts.
  - The Chief Electoral Officer created a booklet outlining green protocol guidelines, with all state and district-level activities promoting plastic-free initiatives.
  - Special events such as cycle rallies, student processions, and signature campaigns were organized to raise awareness about green elections.
  - Election Literacy Clubs (ELCs) contributed handmade paper pens and paper bags for polling materials distribution.
  - Public engagement was encouraged to report violations, resulting in the removal of over 17 lakh flex boards, banners, posters, and stickers.
  - While progress towards complete adherence to the green protocol was not 100%, it marks a significant step forward in promoting eco-friendly practices in elections across Kerala.
- **GOA (INDIA, 2022):**
  - Used eco-friendly polling booths made from

biodegradable materials by local artisans.

- **SRI LANKA (2019):**
  - Launched the world's first carbon-sensitive campaign:
  - Measured and offset carbon emissions from campaign activities by planting trees.
  - Raised awareness about the importance of forest cover.
- **ESTONIA:**
  - Implemented an online voting system to reduce transportation emissions and increase participation.
  - These examples demonstrate the feasibility and benefits of eco-friendly electoral initiatives:
  - Reduce environmental impact: By minimizing waste, using renewable materials, and encouraging digital solutions.
  - Raise environmental awareness: Through innovative campaigns and public participation.
  - Increase voter participation: Through convenient and accessible voting methods like online voting.
- **BLUEPRINT FOR GREEN ELECTORAL PRACTICES:**

Legislation:

- Enact laws mandating eco-friendly practices, incorporated into the Model Code of Conduct by the ECI.

Campaigning:

- Utilize digital platforms and door-to-door campaigns (reduce large rallies).
- Encourage public transportation for election work.

Polling booths:

- Replace plastic and paper with sustainable alternatives like natural fabrics, recycled paper, and compostable plastics.
- Support local artisans in their production.

Digital voting:

- ECI pushes for digital voting while:
- Training officials to increase capacity.
- Government educates and supports voters for equitable access.

Civil society:

- Acts as a catalyst promoting green practices.

Media:

- Highlights the environmental impact of current methods and showcases eco-friendly alternatives.

This framework can set an example for other democracies worldwide.

BENEFITS OF GREEN PROTOCOLS IN ELECTIONS

- **Reduced environmental impact:** Less reliance on energy-intensive rallies, use of sustainable materials, and potentially lower energy consumption from digital voting can contribute to a smaller carbon footprint.
- **Support for the local economy:** Encouraging the use of local, sustainable materials like natural fabrics and recycled paper can benefit local businesses and artisans.
- **Improved waste management:** Replacing plastic and paper materials with compostable alternatives can aid in waste management and potentially reduce reliance on landfills.
- **Enhanced voter trust:** Implementing eco-friendly practices can demonstrate a commitment to sustainability and potentially increase voter confidence in the electoral process.

POTENTIAL MONETARY IMPACTS:

Potential cost increases:

- **Training and capacity building:** Training officials for digital voting and potentially voters who need assistance could incur costs.
- **Implementation of green alternatives:** Replacing existing materials with sustainable options like natural fabrics and compostable plastics might initially be more expensive.
- **Technology infrastructure:** Expanding access to digital voting could require investments in technology infrastructure, impacting costs.

Potential cost savings:

- **Reduced energy consumption:** Shifting away from large, energy-intensive rallies and encouraging public transportation for election work could lead to cost reductions in energy bills.
- **Lower waste management costs:** Replacing non-biodegradable materials with compostable alternatives could potentially save costs associated with waste disposal in landfills.
- **Increased efficiency:** Digital voting, if implemented efficiently, could potentially reduce costs associated with paper ballots and printing.

CONCLUSION:

- Time to act: Embracing green elections is no longer a choice, but a necessity. From legislation to digital solutions, a multi-pronged approach can ensure sustainable, accessible, and eco-friendly elections, setting a precedent for the world. Let's stop dithering and champion an environment friendly future for our democracy.

UNDERSTANDING THE DELIMITATION EXERCISE

CONTEXT: The delimitation of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies is to be carried out on the basis of the first Census after 2026. The 2021 Census was originally postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently due to delays on the part of the Central government.

WHAT IS DELIMITATION?

1. **Definition:** Delimitation is the process of determining the number of seats and boundaries of territorial constituencies for Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. It also involves allocating seats for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in these houses.
2. **Constitutional Basis:** Article 82 and 170 of the Constitution mandate the readjustment of seats and constituencies after each Census.
3. **Purpose:** The delimitation process aims to ensure fair representation and effective governance by redistributing seats based on population changes and demographic shifts.
4. **Delimitation Commission:** A Delimitation Commission, established by an act of Parliament, is responsible for conducting the delimitation process.
5. **Historical Context:** Delimitation exercises were carried out after the 1951, 1961, and 1971 Censuses to reflect demographic changes and maintain equitable representation.
6. **Procedure:** The Delimitation Commission reviews population data, geographical factors, and administrative considerations to delineate constituencies and allocate seats.
7. **Reserved Seats:** The commission also determines the number of seats to be reserved for SCs and STs, ensuring their political representation.
8. **Importance:** Delimitation plays a crucial role in upholding democratic principles, ensuring proportional representation, and facilitating effective governance at both national and state levels.

WHAT IS THE CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENT?

1.Constitutional Requirement:

- The democratic principle of 'one citizen-one vote-one value' dictates that the government is elected by a majority.
- The number of seats in the Lok Sabha was initially based on population figures from the 1951, 1961, and 1971 Censuses.

2.Freezing of Seats:

- The seat allocation was frozen as per the 1971 Census to incentivize population control measures.
- The freeze was enforced through the 42nd Amendment Act until 2000 and extended by the 84th Amendment Act until 2026.

3.Population Basis:

- Seat allocation is currently based on the 1971 Census population data to prevent states with higher population growth from gaining more seats.
- This will be reassessed after the first Census post-2026, extending the freeze until then.

4.Delimitation Process:

- Territorial constituency boundaries were readjusted (without changing seat numbers) based on the 2001 Census.
- The allocation of reserved seats for SCs and STs was also determined by this Census data.

5.Postponed Census and Implications:

- The normal delimitation process based on the 2031 Census is disrupted due to the postponement of the 2021 Census.
- Talks about the impending delimitation exercise have arisen as the year 2026, when the freeze ends, approaches.

WHAT ARE THE ISSUES?

1.Issue of Seat Allocation:

- Seats were frozen based on the 1971 Census to promote population control measures.
- Population growth has been uneven across states, with some experiencing significant increases compared to others.

2.Options for Delimitation:

- Two options are under discussion for the delimitation exercise based on projected 2026 population data.
- Option 1: Maintain the existing 543 seats and redistribute them among states.
- Option 2: Increase the number of seats to 848, with proportional distribution among states.

3.Regional Disparities:

- Both options may disadvantage southern states, smaller northern states like Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, and Uttarakhand, and northeastern states.
- Northern states with higher population growth, such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan, stand to benefit disproportionately.

4.Federal Principles and Representation:

- Imbalance in seat allocation may contradict federal principles and lead to disenchantment among states losing representation.
- It contradicts the philosophy of freezing seats based on the 1971 Census, disadvantaging states that have controlled population growth effectively.

WHAT ARE INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES?

1.US House of Representatives:

- Seats capped at 435 since 1913 despite population growth.
- Redistribution after each Census using the method of equal proportion.
- Reapportionment based on 2020 Census resulted in no change for 37 States, with Texas gaining two seats and others gaining or losing one seat each.

2.European Union Parliament:

- Consists of 720 members divided among 27 member countries.
- Allocation based on degressive proportionality principle.
- Countries with larger populations have more seats, maintaining a ratio of population to seats.

3.Example:

- Denmark with a population of around 60 lakh has 15 seats (average population of 4 lakh per member).
- Germany, with a population of 8.3 crore, has 96 seats (average population of 8.6 lakh per member).

4.Principle Difference:

- US House of Representatives maintains a fixed number of seats, with redistribution after each Census.
- EU Parliament employs degressive proportionality, ensuring representation aligns with population changes, with larger countries having more seats.

WHAT CAN BE AN IDEAL SOLUTION?

1.Democratic and Federal Principles:

- Delimitation poses a challenge in reconciling democratic and federal principles.
- Resolution lies in giving equal weight to both principles.

2.Role of Members of Parliament:

- MPs legislate on Union List matters and oversee the Central government.
- Central government schemes are primarily implemented by State governments.

3.Proposal for Lok Sabha Representation:

- Cap Lok Sabha MPs at 543 to maintain current state representation.
- Upholds federal principle by ensuring no disruption in state representation.

4.State Legislative Assembly Representation:

- Increase MLAs in each state according to population, without altering Rajya Sabha seats.
- Addresses democratic representational needs.

5.Empowerment of Local Bodies:

- Strengthen democracy by empowering panchayats and municipalities.
- Devolve powers and finances to enhance grassroots democracy.

CONCLUSION: Traversing the complexities of delimitation requires balancing democratic and federal principles. A harmonious approach, coupled with empowering local bodies, can ensure fair representation at all levels of governance, fostering a stronger and more inclusive democracy.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

7 INDIANS WHO FACED DEATH ROW IN QATAR RETURN HOME

CONCERNS IN THE KOREAN PENINSULA

EU WARY AS MACRON HINTS AT WESTERN TROOPS IN UKRAINE

THE LARGER MESSAGE TO NEW DELHI FROM THE RED SEA

FIRST AMONG FIRSTS

GAS BOOMING FOR UN COP29 HOST AZERBAIJAN

GREECE'S GATEWAY TO ASIA, INDIA'S GATEWAY TO EUROPE

INDIA ASKS U.S. TO PROBE PRO-KHALISTANI GROUPS

WHAT MAKES THE INDIA-FRANCE 'STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP' TICK

INDIA'S KALADAN PROJECT IN MYANMAR IN LIMBO AS REBELS CONTROL KEY TOWN'

NARENDRA MODI's VISIT TO QUTAR

PM MODI'S VISIT TO THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

THE DECLINE OF AMERICA'S LEADERSHIP

THE ILLUSION OF CHANGE IN PAKISTAN

TOP SPANISH OFFICIAL LIKELY TO PITCH DEAL FOR SUBMARINE

7 INDIANS WHO FACED DEATH ROW IN QATAR RETURN HOME

BACKGROUND:

- Eight Indian Navy veterans were arrested in Qatar in 2022 on espionage charges.
- The specific reasons for their arrest remain unclear.
- They were sentenced to death in October 2023 but the sentence was commuted on appeal through diplomatic effort in December 2023.
- Their case had strained India-Qatar relations but with their release the relations are on a better framework.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Strong Economic Ties: Qatar is a crucial energy supplier to India, with over 800,000 Indian workers contributing significantly to the Indian economy. This economic interdependence has fostered strong relations between the two countries.

Expatriate prisoners: The Gulf region including Qatar and the UAE, holds a significant number of Indian prisoners, highlighting the need for continued diplomatic engagement.

This situation underscores the importance of:

- Protecting the rights of Indian citizens abroad.
- Maintaining strong diplomatic relations with other countries.
- Working towards transparency in legal proceedings.

Energy Security:

Qatar is the world's largest exporter of LNG, and India is a major importer. The recent $78 billion LNG deal ensures a stable and reliable energy supply for India's growing economy.

Economic Partnership:

Bilateral trade flourishes, with India being one of Qatar's largest trading partners. This creates opportunities for both nations' businesses and generates employment.

Large Indian Diaspora:

Over 800,000 Indian expatriates contribute significantly to Qatar's economy and send back vital remittances to India, supporting families and development initiatives.

Strategic Importance:

The Gulf region is crucial for global energy supplies. Strong ties with Qatar provide India with a strategic foothold in the region.

Political Cooperation:

Both nations collaborate on issues of mutual interest, including counter-terrorism, maritime security, and regional stability.

Investment and Infrastructure:

Qatari investments play a role in India's infrastructure development, while Indian companies contribute to Qatar's economic diversification plans.

Challenges and Opportunities:

Ensuring fair treatment of Indian workers in Qatar and addressing issues related to their welfare remain important aspects of the relationship.

CONCLUSION:

India and Qatar's relationship is multifaceted and strategically significant. It goes beyond energy dependence and encompasses economic cooperation, a large diaspora, political understanding, and mutual investment. Working together to address challenges and leverage opportunities will further strengthen this vital partnership.

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

CONCERNS IN THE KOREAN PENINSULA

CONTEXT: Rising tensions between North and South Korea, fuelled by recent provocations and historical animosity, raise concerns about potential conflict and wider implications for international security.

THE GIST

- North Korea has rescinded its national objective of Korean reunification and has formally categorised South Korea as an adversarial state. The country has also ramped up the frequency and diversity of its missile tests, expanding its strategic capabilities.
- The current government in South Korea is a newly elected one led by the conservative President Yoon Suk Yeol. The Yoon government's strategy is to closely coordinate efforts with the U.S. and Japan to deter and counter North Korea's aggressive moves.
- North Korea has drifted further into the camp of the Sino-Russian axis. Russia has boosted its engagement with North Korea, especially in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine war.

STORY SO FAR: Rising tensions on the Korean peninsula see North Korea abandoning reunification goals, labelling the South an enemy, and conducting frequent missile tests. South Korea, with the US and Japan, counters with military drills. This escalating tit-for-tat raises fears of wider conflict and intensifies major power rivalries in an already strained global security landscape.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

- **Division after WWII:** North under Soviet influence, South under US, creating an ideological divide.
- **Korean War (1950-53):** The North attempted to unify the peninsula by force, sparking the first major Cold War conflict.
- **Decades of division:** The North remains authoritarian under Kim dynasty, allied with China & Russia. South becomes a US-allied liberal democracy.
- **Nuclear ambitions:** North pursues nuclear program despite international efforts for de-nuclearisation.
- **Failed initiatives:** The Agreed Framework (1994-2002), Six-party talks (2003-2009), and Trump-Kim summits (2018-2019) all fail to achieve denuclearization.
- **North's advancements:** Conducts frequent missile tests, develop delivery systems, and engages in provocative actions.
- **South's response:** Strengthens military alliance with US, acquires advanced missile defence systems.
- **Current situation:** North's recent provocations and South's response with US/Japan raise concerns about escalating tensions and potential conflict.

WHAT HAS LED TO RECENT AGGRAVATION?

NORTH KOREA:

- Abandoned reunification goal and declared South Korea an enemy state.
- Tested various missile systems, including hypersonic warhead, sparking concerns.
- Retaliated to US-South Korea-Japan drills with nuclear-capable underwater drone and strategic cruise missile tests.

SOUTH KOREA:

- A new hawkish government under President Yoon Suk Yeol seeks closer cooperation with the US and Japan.
- Trilateral meeting held at Camp David to counter North Korea's aggression.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY:

- Worried about tit-for-tat measures leading to unintended consequences and potential conflict.

POTENTIAL IMPACT ON INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

GLOBAL CONTEXT:

- Tensions escalate in Korea alongside existing conflicts like Russia-Ukraine, raising concerns for wider instability.
- Major powers involved (US, China, Russia) are already locked in global competition, further complicating the situation.

NORTH KOREA'S ACTIONS AND ALIGNMENTS:

- Recent provocations and deepening ties with China and Russia raise concerns of potential conflict.
- North Korea actively supports Russia in the Ukraine war, supplying arms and aligning with their goals.
- China remains a strong economic and political supporter of North Korea.

TIMING AND POTENTIAL MOTIVATIONS:

- Kim Jong-un may see an opportunity to leverage US preoccupation with other conflicts for bargaining.
- Aligned interests between Russia and China could benefit from North Korea creating a distraction for the US.

OVERALL:

Rising tensions on the Korean peninsula, fuelled by recent actions and complex geopolitical alignments, pose a significant threat to regional and global security.

CONCLUSION: Rising tensions between North and South Korea, fuelled by recent provocations and historical animosity, raise grave concerns for global security. Tit-for-tat actions fuelled by major power rivalries risk catastrophic consequences. The international community must urgently de-escalate tensions and prevent war on the Korean peninsula.

EU WARY AS MACRON HINTS AT WESTERN TROOPS IN UKRAINE

CONTEXT: French President Emmanuel Macron's suggestion of potentially sending Western ground troops to aid Ukraine in its conflict with Russia has stirred unease among European allies and drawn warnings from the Kremlin about the possibility of a NATO-Russia confrontation.

BACKGROUND:

- Russia continues its invasion of Ukraine, raising concerns about European security.
- France: President Macron advocates for "everything necessary" to defeat Russia, including potentially sending Western ground troops.
- Other European leaders: Mixed reactions, with some expressing reluctance and others fearing a potential confrontation with Russia.
- Russia: Warns of "inevitable" confrontation if NATO deploys troops in Ukraine.
- Current status: No consensus among European leaders on sending troops, with Germany and Sweden explicitly opposing the idea.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- This potential escalation marks a significant development in the ongoing conflict.
- The West has previously avoided deploying ground troops in Ukraine to prevent confrontation with Russia.
- Macron's stance highlights differing opinions within Europe regarding the level of military support for Ukraine.
- Russia's warning underscores the potential for further escalation of the conflict.

POTENTIAL IMPACT OF MACRON'S STATEMENT ON STAKEHOLDERS:

France:

- Positive: Demonstrates strong commitment to Ukraine's defence, aligning with public opinion that increasingly favours stronger action.
- Negative: Risks potential military confrontation with Russia, potentially straining relations and impacting French security.

Other European Allies:

- Positive: Signals France's willingness to escalate, if necessary, potentially pressuring other European nations to increase support for Ukraine.
- Negative: Creates divisions within the alliance, raising concerns about potential escalation and unintended consequences. Raises fears of being drawn into a wider conflict with Russia.

Ukraine:

- Positive: Offers hope of a more decisive response from the West, potentially strengthening their position against Russia.
- Negative: Potential escalation raises the risk of wider conflict and increased civilian casualties. Uncertain whether other European nations will follow suit, leaving Ukraine in a vulnerable position.

Russia:

- Negative: Views the statement as a threat and provocation, potentially leading to further escalation and stricter military measures.
- Positive: May solidify domestic support for the war by portraying the West as aggressive.

NATO:

- Negative: This creates internal division and raises concerns about potential direct involvement in the conflict, which could have significant consequences for member states.
- Positive: May signal a more unified and resolute stance against Russia, potentially deterring further aggression.

Global Community:

- Negative: Heightens international tensions, raising concerns about a wider conflict and potential impact on global security and economic stability.
- Positive: Signals a strong response from the West against a major power violation of international law, potentially setting a precedent for deterring future aggression.

INDIA's ROLE:

Impact on India:

- Indirect economic impact: A wider conflict could disrupt global supply chains and energy markets, potentially im-

pacting India's economic growth and inflation.
- Geopolitical considerations: The evolving situation could influence India's delicate balancing act between its historical ties with Russia and its growing strategic partnership with the United States and other Western nations.
- Increased focus on self-reliance: The situation could further emphasize the importance of India's efforts towards self-reliance in defense and critical resources.

ROLE Of MEDIATION for INDIA

- **Potential for mediation:** India, with its long history of non-alignment and friendly relations with both Russia and Ukraine, could potentially play a role in facilitating dialogue and de-escalation.
- **Humanitarian assistance:** India has already provided humanitarian aid to Ukraine and could continue to do so, focusing on alleviating the suffering of civilians caught in the conflict.
- **Focus on maintaining regional stability:** India is likely to maintain its focus on ensuring regional stability, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, amidst the evolving global situation.

CONCLUSION

Macron's suggestion of Western troops in Ukraine has sparked significant debate, raising the specter of escalation while igniting hope for a more decisive response against Russia. This development underscores the complex dynamics at play, with European nations wrestling between supporting Ukraine and avoiding confrontation. The coming days will be crucial in determining how Europe navigates this potential turning point, with global repercussions hanging in the balance.

FIRST AMONG FIRSTS

CONTEXT: Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neil was elected as the first nationalist First Minister of Northern Ireland. Sinn Fein, the political arm of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) still committed to the unification of the two Irelands emerged as a powerful political force in Northern Ireland (part of the U.K.) and the Republic of Ireland (an independent country and European Union member).

BACKGROUND: Northern Ireland's deep-seated divisions between unionists and nationalists, rooted in history, were addressed by the Good Friday Agreement. Sinn Fein's rise reflects nationalist sentiment. Brexit exacerbates tensions, notably regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol. The DUP's refusal to engage in power-sharing complicates governance, emphasizing the need for dialogue and compromise.

MAJOR ISSUES:

1.Election Results:

- Sinn Fein emerged as a powerful political force, winning the largest share of votes in the 2020 and 2022 elections in Northern Ireland.
- In 2022, Sinn Fein secured 29% of the vote share, while the pro UK Democratic Union Party (DUP) finished second with 21.3%.

2.Good Friday Agreement:

- The 1998 Good Friday Agreement mandates a power-sharing government including representatives from the largest unionist and nationalist blocs.
- It aimed to end three decades of sectarian violence known as the Troubles.

3.Chaos After 2022 Election:

- Following the 2022 vote, the DUP refused to join hands with Sinn Fein, citing opposition to the Northern Ireland Protocol.
- The Protocol introduced checks on goods between Britain and Ireland, which the DUP claimed weakened the union.

4.Resolution and Return to Power-sharing:

- The DUP agreed to return to the power-sharing agreement after London reduced customs checks on the Irish border and pledged £3 billion for Northern Ireland's finances.
- Sinn Fein focused on bread-and-butter issues and administrative challenges during campaigning.

5.Nationalist Ascendancy and Unionist Concerns:

- Despite preferences for remaining in the UK among the majority of voters, Sinn Fein's leadership in Northern Ireland signifies nationalist ascendancy.
- The symbolic significance of Sinn Fein's leadership amid economic and political discontent, particularly post-Brexit, is considerable.

6.Balance of Power:

- While the positions of First Minister and Deputy First Minister are technically equal, Sinn Fein's leadership holds symbolic value.
- After decades of turmoil and reconciliation efforts, nationalists are gaining prominence while unionists face challenges.

CONCLUSION: Sinn Fein's historic ascent to leadership in Northern Ireland symbolizes a shifting political landscape, reflecting nationalist aspirations and the complexities of post-Brexit governance. The challenges ahead underscore the imperative for dialogue, compromise, and sustained efforts towards peace and reconciliation.

GAS BOOMING FOR UN COP29 HOST AZERBAIJAN

CONTEXT: The United Nations Framework Convention of Climate Change Conference of Parties (CoP) - 29 is set to be hosted by Azerbaijan.

BACKGROUND: Azerbaijan, the former Soviet republic of 10 million people brimming with hydrocarbons is on track to increase its gas production by 35 % from 35 billion cubic metre (bcm) in 2024 to 47 bcm in 2034, contrary to efforts to contain global warming.

The forecast covers actual production figures, estimates from approved developments, as well as confirmed reserves not yet being exploited. They exclude condensate, a liquid form of gas.

LONG HISTORY

- The country, a member of OPEC+, has a long history with hydrocarbons, which make up half of its economy.
- In the 2030s, gas is expected to represent more than half of fossil fuel production in the country.
- Its exports to Turkey, Europe, Georgia and Iran have already multiplied threefold since 2015.
- To replace Russian gas, Europe turned to Azerbaijan, whose share of imports grew from 2% in 2021 to 4% in 2023
- Baku's expanding gas production is fuelled mainly by the Shah Deniz project, one of the biggest gas fields in the world, discovered in 1999 along the Caspian Sea and operated by BP, while other projects like Umid-Babek and Absheron will increase their output.
- The Absheron field, which began production in July, is operated by Jocap, which includes national oil and gas firm Socar, as well as France's TotalEnergies and Adnoc, the national Emirati firm.

REPLACING RUSSIA

- Azerbaijan and European Union suspended negotiations on the gas agreement signed in 2022 to double the gas exports to 20 bcm by 2027.
- The main obstacle to meeting that potential "is their pipelines' capacity".
- Baku exports its gas through a southern European gas corridor, a network of pipelines that reaches Europe via Georgia and Turkey, including the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP).
- Its capacity could be doubled but only with hefty investments that would require "long-term commitments" from European gas operators.

POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF AZERBAIJAN'S INCREASED GAS PRODUCTION:

Global Implications:

- **Mixed impact on climate change:** Increased gas production contradicts efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and may slow down the transition to renewable energy.
- **Geopolitical shift:** Azerbaijan could become a more significant player in the global energy market, potentially offering an alternative to Russian gas for Europe.
- **Economic benefits for Azerbaijan:** Increased gas exports could boost Azerbaijan's economy and government revenue.

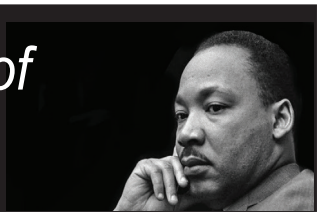
IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA:

- **Limited direct impact:** India is not a major importer of gas from Azerbaijan.
- **Indirect impact:** Increased global gas prices due to Azerbaijan's production could affect India's energy security and import costs.
- **Potential for future cooperation:** India may explore opportunities to import gas from Azerbaijan in the long term to diversify its energy sources. Right now it looks not conducive as India Azebaijan relations looks patchy at best with India arming Armenia with weapons in the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

CONCLUSION:

Azerbaijan's ramped-up gas production presents a complex situation. While it offers potential economic benefits for the country and acts as a temporary solution for Europe's energy needs, it contradicts global climate goals and could lead to higher energy prices.

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



GREECE'S GATEWAY TO ASIA, INDIA'S GATEWAY TO EUROPE

CONTEXT: The state visit by Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to New Delhi (February 21-22) will be another important step in building a strategic relationship between India and Greece – a process that began with the historic visit of the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, to Greece in August 2023.

India is perceived as an old and traditional friend of Greece, but also as a rising great power in the fast-changing global scene. Mr. Mitsotakis will be accompanied by a high-level Greek business delegation comprising business leaders not only looking at India's potential as their gateway to Asia but also as a manufacturing base for their global operations.

BACKGROUND:

Greece-India Relations: A Long History, Growing Importance

- **Ancient Ties:** Cultural and trade links date back thousands of years, with influences visible in art, philosophy, and commerce.
- **Modern Relationship:** Diplomatic relations established in 1950, with cooperation growing steadily in recent years.
- **Strategic Importance:** Both nations share concerns about regional stability, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean and Indian Ocean.
- **Economic Partnership:** Growing trade and investment, with India's potential as a gateway to Asia and Greece's role as a European gateway.

Recent Developments:

- High-level visits by both Prime Ministers in 2023 indicate a commitment to strengthening ties.
- Collaboration in areas like defense, maritime security, and infrastructure development is increasing.
- The proposed India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) could be a game-changer for economic cooperation.

SHARED GEOPOLITICAL CHALLENGES: A CATALYST FOR GREECE-INDIA PARTNERSHIP

- **Strategic Importance:** Both Greece and India occupy regions critical to global stability, facing potential volatility.
- **Interconnected Security:** Events in the Eastern Mediterranean (Greece) and Indian Ocean (India) are linked, impacting each other's security.
- **Leadership Recognition:** The importance of a strategic partnership is understood by both nations' political leaders.

AREAS OF COOPERATION:

- Bilateral cooperation in strategic, military, and business domains has progressed gradually between India and Greece.
- The Indian Navy and Air Force engage in joint exercises with the Greek armed forces, with reciprocal activities planned periodically.
- Indian construction firms collaborate with Greek counterparts in significant infrastructure projects, such as building a new airport in Crete.
- Indian investments in Greek food businesses and shipping brokerage firms in Athens reflect growing economic ties.
- A major Greek systemic bank partners with an Indian financial institution to market mutual fund products globally.
- Indian-Canadian billionaire Prem Watsa advocates for Greek-Indian business cooperation, citing Greece as a prime investment destination in Europe.
- Greece's economic reforms under the Mitsotakis government aim for sustainable growth, positioning the country as a reliable partner in the EU and NATO.
- The concept of constructing the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC) gains traction amid Greece's strategic significance in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- Both Greece and India aim to further enhance bilateral business partnerships, with Greece supporting deeper EU-India relations and advocating for the swift conclusion

of the EU-India bilateral trade and investment agreement (BTIA).

FURTHER SCOPE

- Emphasize the importance of fostering closer people-to-people ties to preserve ancient linkages between Greece and India amidst modernization efforts.
- Advocate for increased university student exchange programs, cultural exchanges, media cooperation, and collaboration between think tanks.
- Highlight the need for expanding travel links between the two countries to facilitate greater interaction and understanding.
- Acknowledge the significance of political leaders from Greece and India exchanging visits in a short timeframe, demonstrating their commitment and urgency in advancing bilateral relations.
- Call upon government policymakers and businesses to follow the lead of political leaders and prioritize strengthening the Greece-India strategic partnership.
- Recognize the year 2024 as critical for the world and Europe, underscoring its importance in the development of the Greece-India relationship.

CONCLUSION:

The state visit by Greek Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis to New Delhi signifies a significant milestone in the strategic relationship between India and Greece. With a foundation built on ancient ties and shared geopolitical challenges, both nations are poised to deepen cooperation across various domains. From economic partnerships to strategic collaborations and cultural exchanges, the prospects for enhancing bilateral relations between Greece and India are promising. As both countries continue to prioritize mutual interests and address regional concerns, the trajectory of their partnership holds immense potential in shaping the geopolitical landscape of Asia and Europe in the years ahead.

INDIA ASKS U.S. TO PROBE PRO-KHALISTANI GROUPS

CONTEXT: The India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue focused on strengthening cooperation in counter-terrorism, including addressing pro-Khalistani groups operating in the U.S. and attacks on Indian missions abroad.

BACKGROUND OF THE INDIA-U.S. HOMELAND SECURITY DIALOGUE:

- The India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue is a platform for discussing and strengthening cooperation on security issues between the two countries.
- It was first held in 2011 but was re-established in 2021 after a hiatus.
- The dialogue focuses on various security concerns, including:
  - Counter-terrorism and violent extremism: Addressing threats posed by terrorist and extremist groups operating in both countries.
  - Drug trafficking: Combating the illegal drug trade, particularly the growing issue of Fentanyl in the U.S.
  - Transnational crimes: Tackling issues like illegal immigration, human trafficking, money laundering, and cybercrimes.

RECENT TENSIONS:

- About these groups allegedly instigating violence and carrying out attacks on Indian missions abroad.
- "Assassin for hire" case: An ongoing investigation in the U.S. involving an Indian national accused of plotting the assassination of a pro-Khalistan activist, with India conducting its own separate investigation into the accusations.

INDIA'S EXPECTATIONS:

- **During the dialogue, India reiterated its demands:**

oInvestigation of pro-Khalistani groups operating in the U.S.
oAction against individuals responsible for recent attacks on Indian missions abroad.

Importance of the India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue in the Context of the India-US Strategic Partnership:

- **Enhanced Security Cooperation:** Facilitates joint efforts to tackle terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking, bolstering national security.
- **Addressing Sensitive Issues:** Provides a platform to discuss sensitive matters like pro-Khalistani groups and attacks on Indian missions, fostering solutions while preserving bilateral relations.
- **Building Trust:** Regular engagement nurtures trust between security establishments, vital for effective cooperation and long-term solutions.
- **Strengthening Partnership:** Strengthens the strategic partnership by addressing security concerns, crucial for regional stability and global challenges.

CONCLUSION: The India-U.S. Homeland Security Dialogue serves as a vital mechanism for enhancing cooperation and addressing pressing security concerns between the two nations. Amidst recent tensions and challenges, the dialogue underscores the importance of open communication, collaboration, and mutual understanding in safeguarding national interests and strengthening the strategic partnership between India and the U.S. in tackling shared security threats effectively.

WHAT MAKES THE INDIA-FRANCE 'STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP' TICK

CONTEXT: The deep-rooted "special" strategic partnership between India and France, fostered over 25 years, is undergoing advancements across defence, space, and civilian sectors, marked by President Macron's Republic Day visit and agreements like joint helicopter production.

BACKGROUND: Despite U.S. President Biden's absence, French President Macron's Republic Day visit, and recent agreements solidify the "special" strategic partnership between India and France, marked by close personal ties and expanding cooperation in defence, space, and civilian sectors.

ORIGINS OF STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE:

- **Established in 1998:** France supported India's nuclear ambitions and advocated for its inclusion in the global nuclear order.
- **Shared values:** Both countries value strategic autonomy and oppose a unipolar world.
- **Convergence on multipolarity:** France sees India as a key partner in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Mutual respect:** Despite cultural differences, both nations engage on equal terms.
- **Expanding cooperation:** Partnership extends beyond defence to space, civilian sectors, and education.

BUILDING THE PARTNERSHIP:

- **Expanded scope:** From the initial focus on nuclear, space, and defence, cooperation has grown to include counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, and cyber security.
- **Deepening defence ties:** Joint exercises, technology transfer agreements, and acquisitions of military equipment like submarines and aircraft showcase strong collaboration.
- **Boosting indigenous capabilities:** Agreements like the India-France Defence Industrial Road map and joint engine development project aim to build India's defence industry.
- **Space cooperation:** A renewed partnership between ISRO and CNES for joint missions and collaboration on space launches.
- **Shared vision:** Both countries emphasize strategic autonomy and are working together on global challenges like climate change and artificial intelligence.

BROADENING AND DEEPENING THE PARTNERSHIP:

EDUCATION & MOBILITY:

- Growing number of Indian students in France (upwards of 10,000) with an ambitious target of 30,000 by 2030.
- Five-year Schengen visa and Young Professionals Scheme for enhanced mobility.
- Encouragement for French universities like Sorbonne to set up campuses in India.

BUSINESS & TRADE:

- Nearly 1,000 French companies in India, including major players including 39 of the CAC 40 giants. ('the most influential benchmark of performance in the French economy')
- 150 Indian businesses established in France.
- Post-Brexit, France serves as a key entry point for Europe and francophone markets.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- Partnership expanding beyond government to encompass commercial and civilian sectors.
- Focus on education, mobility, and business collaboration.
- Strategic partnership emphasizes mutual respect and private communication regarding differences.

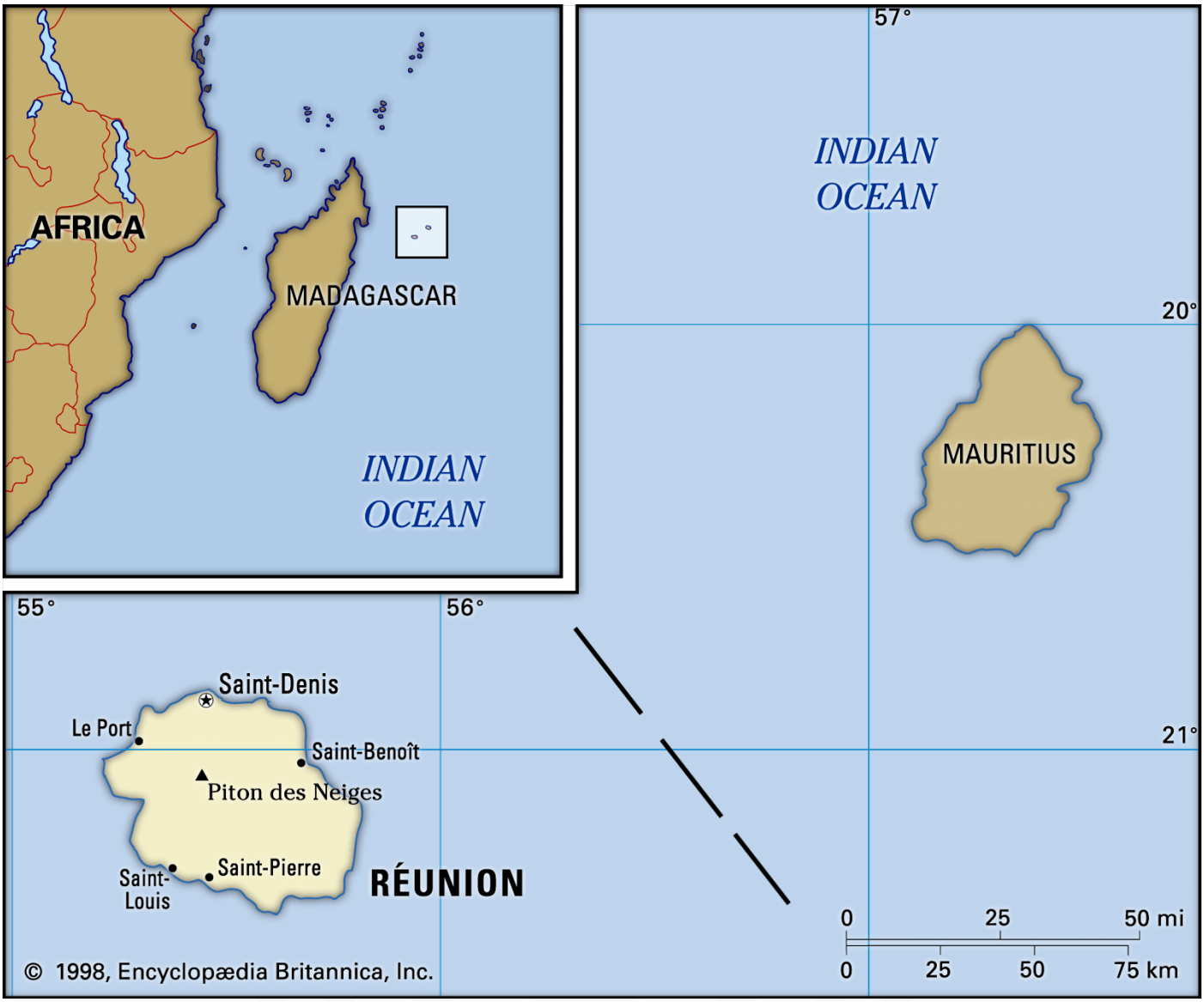
KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF INDIA-FRANCE BILATERAL MEETING DURING FRENCH PRESIDENT'S VISIT (JAN 26, 2024):

1. Indo-Pacific Cooperation:

- Both countries agreed to strengthen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, emphasizing its significance for their strategic interests.
- They committed to deepen their long-standing partnership based on a shared vision, expressing satisfaction with the expanding engagement in the region.

2. Focus on Maritime Security:

- Agreed to intensify cooperation in the Southwest Indian Ocean, building on joint surveillance missions (2020 & 2022) from the French territory of La Reunion.



- Highlighted the importance of joint tri-services exercises and capacity building, particularly in the maritime domain.

3. Trilateral Collaborations:

- Committed to revitalize trilateral cooperation with Australia and deepen collaboration with the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
- Acknowledged the success of the first India-France-UAE Maritime Partnership Exercise held in June 2023.

4. Economic Development & Connectivity:

- Recognized the importance of joint and multilateral initiatives for regional development, encompassing:
  - Sustainable economic growth
  - Human welfare
  - Environmental sustainability
  - Resilient infrastructure
  - Innovation
  - Connectivity
- Called for the early launch of the Indo-Pacific Triangular Development Cooperation Fund to support green technologies.

5. India-Middle East-Europe Corridor (IMEC):

- Leaders reaffirmed the strategic importance of IMEC in enhancing trade and energy flow between India, the Middle East, and Europe.

6. Multilateralism & UN Reform:

- Advocated for reformed and effective multilateralism, stressing the need for UN Security Council (UNSC) reform.
- France reiterated its support for India's permanent membership in the UNSC.
- Called for reform of Multilateral Development Banks and welcomed the relevant report from the Independent Expert Group.
- Acknowledged enhanced cooperation between the Paris Club and India in official debt restructuring cases.

7. Defence & Industrial Cooperation:

- Both sides reiterated their commitment to deeper integration in the defense sector.
- Discussed co-design, co-development, and co-production opportunities for defense supplies, including for other friendly countries.

8. Key Agreements:

- Tata Group & Airbus: Agreement for developing and manufacturing civilian helicopters, with a focus on significant indigenous content.
- CFM International & Akasa Air: Engine supply agreement for Akasa Air's Boeing 737 MAX aircraft.
- ISRO & Arianespace: MoU for satellite launch missions.

9. Space Cooperation:

- Launched the "Strategic Space Dialogue," signed a letter of intent on defense space cooperation, and established an MoU for satellite launches signed between ISRO's new SPACE INDIA Ltd.(NSIL). and ARIANESPACE OF France.
- Expressed dedication to expanding space cooperation, including co-development, manufacture, and launch of satellites.

MAJOR AREAS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN INDIA AND FRANCE:

1. Pillars of the Relationship:

- Long-standing cultural, trade, and economic ties.
- India-France Strategic Partnership (1998): This multifaceted partnership emphasizes:
  - Mutual respect for non-interference in internal matters.
  - Commitment to strategic autonomy and non-alignment.
  - Refraining from involving each other in respective coalitions and alliances.

2. Defense Partnership:

- France as a key defense partner: Providing advanced systems like Rafale fighter jets, 36 for Indian Air Force and 26 for Indian Navy and Scorpene-class submarines.
- Technology transfer: Enabling India to construct and maintain these systems.
- Joint military exercises: Exercise Shakti (Army), Varuna (Navy), and Garuda (Air Force).

3. Shared Stance on NATO Expansion:

- Both countries oppose NATO+ plans: This proposal would see NATO expand its partnership with countries like India and Japan.

4. Economic Cooperation:

- Growing bilateral trade: Reaching USD 13.4 billion in 2022-23.
- Significant French investment in India: Ranked 11th largest foreign investor with over USD 10.49 billion invested.

5. Cooperation at International Forums:

- France's support for India: Backing India's bid for permanent membership in the UN Security Council and entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group.

6. Climate Cooperation:

- Shared concern about climate change: Both nations are committed to mitigating its effects.
- International Solar Alliance: Launched jointly in 2015 to promote solar energy solutions.

WHY INDIAN OCEAN IS IMPORTANT TO FRANCE?

- **Historical Presence:** France has a long history in the Indian Ocean region dating back to the seventeenth century, with territories like Mayotte and Réunion remaining as French overseas departments.
- **Diplomatic Missions:** France maintains numerous diplomatic missions, including embassies and consulates, in countries across the Indian Ocean region, such as Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles, and Sri Lanka.
- **French Citizens:** The Indian Ocean region is home to approximately 1.6 million French citizens, underscoring France's significant interest and stake in the area.
- **Military Bases:** France has military bases on Réunion and Mayotte, aimed at safeguarding French territories and providing regional humanitarian assistance.
- **Strategic Partnership with India:** France and India share a strategic and maritime partnership since the early 1980s, conducting joint naval exercises like VARUNA to enhance cooperation in the western Indian Ocean.
- **Arms Supplier:** France ranks among the top arms suppliers for various countries in the Indian Ocean region, including Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia, and Tanzania.
- **Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ):** France boasts the second-largest EEZ in the world, surpassed only by the United States, further emphasizing its maritime interests and presence in the Indian Ocean.
- **Participation in Regional Organizations:** Through its overseas department of Réunion, France actively participates in regional organizations like the Indian Ocean Commission and the Indian Ocean Rim Association, contributing to regional cooperation and development.

CHALLENGES IN INDIA-FRANCE RELATIONS:

1. Economic Cooperation:

- Absence of Free Trade Agreements: The lack of an FTA and slow progress on the India-EU BTIA hinders the full potential of bilateral trade.

2. Diverging Defense and Security Priorities:

- Differing regional focus and strategic outlooks: India's "non-aligned" approach and regional concerns can sometimes clash with France's global interests, impacting defense and security cooperation.

3. Intellectual Property Concerns:

- France's concerns regarding inadequate IP protection in India: This discourages French businesses from operating in India, impacting trade relations.

4. Trade Imbalance and Product Diversification:

- Significant trade imbalance: The dominance of defense products in the trade relationship prevents a more balanced economic exchange and hinders diversification of exports.

TRADE IMBALANCE:

- India has a trade deficit with France. This means India imports more goods from France than it exports to France.
- Figures: The size of the deficit fluctuates. But here are some recent estimates:
  - 2021: Approximately €1.5 billion (Source: India-France Economic and Commercial Brief -source (Embassy of India: France)
  - 2022 (approx): €2 billion (Source: Business Standard - India-France trade likely to see significant boost: Consul General: (Embassy of India)

SOURCES OF THE IMBALANCE:

- **Dominance of Defense Products:** French exports to India are heavily dominated by defense equipment like Rafale fighter jets and Scorpene submarines. These high-value items contribute significantly to the trade deficit.
- **Diversification of Exports:** India's exports to France, while growing, still need to diversify further. Currently, they are concentrated in sectors like chemicals, pharmaceuticals, and textiles.
- **Market Access Issues:** Indian exporters sometimes face non-tariff barriers in the French market, such as complex

regulations or standards.

EFFORTS TO ADDRESS THE IMBALANCE:

Both India and France recognize the trade imbalance and are taking steps to address it:

- **Economic Partnerships:** Encouraging more French investment in India to boost Indian manufacturing and exports.
- **Exploring New Sectors:** Focusing on expanding trade in areas like agriculture, food processing, and technology.
- **Addressing Market Access Barriers:** Working to resolve challenges Indian products face in entering the French market.

5. Market Access for Indian Products:

- Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures: These measures can act as barriers, making it difficult for Indian products to enter the French market.

MAJOR MARKET ACCESS ISSUES BETWEEN INDIA AND FRANCE:

1. NON-TARIFF BARRIERS (NTBS):

- **Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures:** France's stringent SPS regulations can act as significant barriers for Indian agricultural products. Indian exporters often face challenges in meeting complex requirements related to food safety, packaging, and labeling standards.
- **Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT):** Differences in product standards and testing procedures between India and France can create hurdles for Indian businesses. This makes compliance with French regulations difficult and time-consuming.
- **Market-Specific Regulations:** Certain product categories can face specific regulations in France, such as those relating to cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, or medical devices. Indian exporters may not always be fully aware of these requirements, hindering market access.

2. INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS (IPR):

- **Patent and Trademark Issues:** Concerns exist about protection of French patents and trademarks in India. This can discourage French companies from investing or sharing technology with Indian partners.
- **Enforcement:** Limited resources and capacity for enforcing IPR laws in India create challenges for French businesses seeking to protect their intellectual property.

3. GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT:

- **Limited Access:** Indian companies sometimes perceive the French government procurement market as lacking transparency and favoring domestic suppliers. This can make it difficult for Indian firms to compete for contracts.
- **Preference for Local Suppliers:** There can be an underlying preference for French or European companies in certain public procurement projects.

4. INVESTMENT BARRIERS:

- **Sectoral Restrictions:** Some sectors in India still have limitations on foreign investment. This can hinder French companies planning to establish businesses or make investments.
- **Bureaucratic Hurdles:** Complex regulatory procedures and delays in obtaining approvals can discourage French investment in India.

5. OTHER ISSUES:

- Visa Restrictions: Challenges in obtaining visas for Indian business representatives traveling to France can sometimes impede market exploration and trade negotiations.
- Cultural and Linguistic Barriers: Language differences and navigating cultural nuances can pose challenges for Indian businesses seeking to enter the French market.

EFFORTS TO ADDRESS MARKET ACCESS ISSUES:

- Ongoing Negotiations: Both India and France are engaged in talks to address these issues, but progress can be slow.
- Bilateral Agreements: Specific agreements on IPR protection and standards harmonization can help create a more predictable environment for businesses.
- Capacity Building: Providing Indian exporters with better information on French regulations, standards, and market requirements can improve their ability to comply and succeed..

6. Student Mobility Challenges:

- Visa processes and cultural integration issues: Despite plans to welcome more Indian students, these challenges may hinder the full realization of the initiative.

7. Transnational Crime Concerns:

- Instances like the Nicaragua flight case: This case highlights the need for better cooperation in addressing transnational crimes like human trafficking and ensuring citizen safety.

CONCLUSION: Macron's India visit solidifies the 25-year partnership, expanding beyond defence to education and business. This united front against China's influence boosts India's defence, promotes multi polarity, and fosters economic cooperation, potentially shaping the Indo-Pacific's geostrategic landscape.

INDIA'S KALADAN PROJECT IN MYANMAR IN LIMBO AS REBELS CONTROL KEY TOWN'

CONTEXT: The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP) has "almost died" after the rebel Arakan Army (AA) captured the Paletwa township near Mizoram border in January.

The Arakan Army (AA) has established control in almost all the major towns and supply routes in Rakhine State. The Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP) has almost died as Paletwa, essential for this project and Paletwa is no longer in control of the military junta.

IMPACT OF THE ARAKAN ARMY (AA) CAPTURING PALETWA ON INDIA:

1. Stalled Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP):

- The capture of Paletwa by the AA has significantly impacted the KMTTP, a crucial project for India.
- Paletwa is a critical component of the project, connecting the Kaladan river route to Mizoram.
- Due to the AA's control, the project's progress has been halted, causing major setbacks for India's connectivity plans with Southeast Asia.

2. Security Concerns:

- The AA's growing influence in Rakhine raises security concerns for India, particularly in its bordering state of Mizoram.
- Potential spillover of the conflict or increased instability in Rakhine could pose security challenges for Mizoram.
- The capture of Paletwa, traditionally a Chin-majority town, raises concerns about a potential tripartite conflict involving the junta, the AA, and Chin rebels, further complicating the situation.

3. Loss of Investment:

- The $500 million project represents a significant Indian investment in Myanmar's infrastructure.
- With the project stalled, India faces potential financial losses and delays in achieving its connectivity goals.

4. Regional Stability:

- The ongoing conflict in Rakhine threatens regional stability, impacting India's broader strategic interests in Southeast Asia.
- India has a vested interest in a stable and peaceful Myanmar for its own regional security and economic development.

5. Uncertain Future:

- The AA's potential capture of Sittwe port, a crucial Myanmar port and airport, further complicates the situation.
- This could significantly impact trade and investment opportunities for India in the region.

CONCLUSION: The AA's capture of Paletwa has dealt a significant blow to India's economic and strategic interests in Myanmar. India faces challenges on several fronts, including stalled projects, potential security threats, and a loss of regional stability. The future of the KMTTP and India's broader engagement with Myanmar remains uncertain.

NARENDRA MODI'S VISIT TO QUTAR

CONTEXT: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has invited the ruler of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, to visit India.

His visit came days after Qatar's legal authorities freed eight Indian Navy veterans, who were accused in an alleged espionage case and given death sentences by a lower court in October 2023.

BACKGROUND OF MODI'S VISIT TO QATAR:

- **Following the release of 8 Indian Navy personnel:** This incident strained relations, but both nations aimed to move forward.
- **Strengthening Economic Ties:** Qatar is a crucial energy supplier to India, and India is a large source of expatriate labor for Qatar.
- **Building on "Look West" Policy:** India seeks to deepen ties with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations.

Potential Impact of the Visit:

- **Improved Bilateral Relations:** The visit can be a chance to mend fences and build trust between the two countries.
- **Enhanced Economic Cooperation:** Discussions on energy deals, investments, and trade expansion are likely.

DETAILS OF THE DEAL:

- **Focus:** Long-term Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) supplies from Qatar to India.
- **Term:** The deal extends existing contracts expiring in 2028 for an additional 20 years, till 2048.
- **Volume:** India will receive around 7.5 million tonnes of LNG per year.
- **Cost:** The deal reportedly secures LNG at a lower rate than current prices, potentially saving India billions of dollars over the contract period.

Significance of the Deal:

- **Strengthens Energy Security:** This deal helps India diversify its LNG sources and meet its growing energy demands.
- **Economic Benefits:** The potential cost savings can be significant for India's economy.
- **Deepens India-Qatar Relations:** The deal underscores the strong economic ties between the two nations.

Collaboration on Regional Issues: Sharing perspectives on security, maritime cooperation, and stability in the Middle East could be addressed.

IMPACT ON INDIA-QATAR RELATIONS IN THE GCC:

- Setting a Positive Example: A successful visit can strengthen India's position within the GCC and encourage further cooperation.
- Potential for GCC-India Bloc: Improved relations between India and Qatar could pave the way for stronger ties with other GCC members.

IMPACT ON WIDER GEOPOLITICS:

- Balancing Relations: India walks a tightrope, maintaining good relations with both Qatar and other GCC states, some of whom have strained ties with Qatar.
- Energy Security: The visit could solidify India's access to Qatari LNG, critical for its energy needs.

CONCLUSION: Prime Minister Modi's visit to Qatar presents a significant opportunity to not only repair bilateral relations

but also forge a deeper strategic partnership. The potential economic benefits, particularly the long-term LNG deal, can be mutually advantageous. Moreover, this visit could serve as a stepping stone towards stronger ties with the entire GCC, promoting regional stability and cooperation. However, India must navigate the complex geopolitical landscape, ensuring good relations with all GCC members.

PM MODI'S VISIT TO THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

CONTEXT: Prime Minister Modi embarks on an official trip to the United Arab Emirates, marking his seventh visit to the country since 2015 and his third visit in the past eight months.

BACKGROUND:

- This visit came shortly after UAE President's visit to India in January 2024, highlighting the growing closeness between the two nations.
- The UAE is a vital trade partner for India, and the visit aimed to boost economic cooperation in various sectors.

INDIA-UAE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP

Strong Political Ties:

- Established diplomatic relations in 1972.
- Upgraded to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2017.
- Frequent high-level visits by leaders from both countries.
- UAE invited India as the Guest of Honour at the OIC meet in 2019.
- PM Modi was awarded the highest civilian honour of UAE in 2019.
- The foundation stone was laid for the first Hindu temple in Abu Dhabi in 2019.
- Virtual Summit in February 2022 led to a Joint Vision Statement.
- UAE as a guest country at the G-20 held under India's presidency in 2023.

Thriving Trade:

- Bilateral trade reached USD 85 billion in 2022-23.
- UAE is India's 3rd largest trading partner and 2nd largest export destination.
- India is UAE's 2nd largest trading partner.
- Aiming to achieve USD 100 billion trade by September 2023.

CEPA Boosting Economic Cooperation:

- Signed in February 2022, covering almost all tariff lines.
- Expected to further increase trade and investments.

Growing Investment:

- UAE emerged as the 4th largest investor in India in 2022-23.
- FDI from UAE to India jumped to $3.35 billion from $1.03 billion in 2021-22.
- The annual remittances made by the large Indian community in UAE (estimated to be around 3.3 million) amount to US$ 17.56 billion for year 2018.

Energy Collaboration:

- MoU between ADNOC and ISPRL for strategic oil reserves in India.
- ONGC consortium awarded a stake in Lower Zakum Concession.

MAIN OBJECTIVES:

- Inauguration of First Hindu Temple in Abu Dhabi: This historic event held immense significance for the large Indian diaspora in the UAE.
- Participation in World Government Summit: As the guest of honor, PM Modi delivered a keynote address and engaged in discussions on global governance challenges.
- Strengthening Bilateral Ties: The visit aimed to further solidify the strong relationship between India and the UAE on economic, political, and cultural fronts.

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

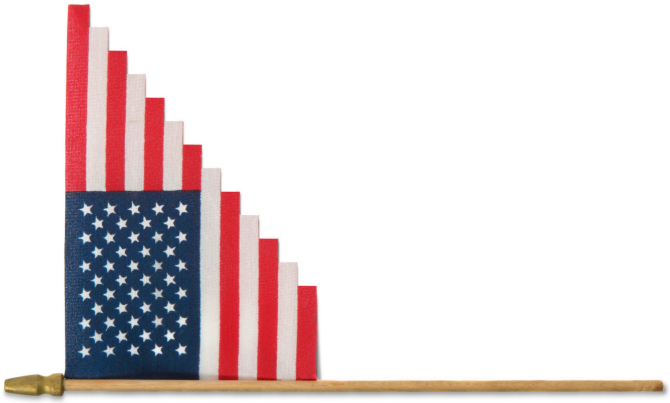
- Meeting with UAE Leaders: PM Modi held talks with President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and other dignitaries to discuss issues of mutual interest.
- Addressing Indian Community: He interacted with the Indian diaspora in the UAE, a crucial pillar of the bilateral relationship.

OUTCOMES:

- The visit successfully strengthened cultural and political ties between India and the UAE.
- A Memorandum of Understanding was signed to explore collaboration in supercomputer technology and data centers.
- The inauguration of the Hindu temple marked a milestone for the Indian community in the UAE.

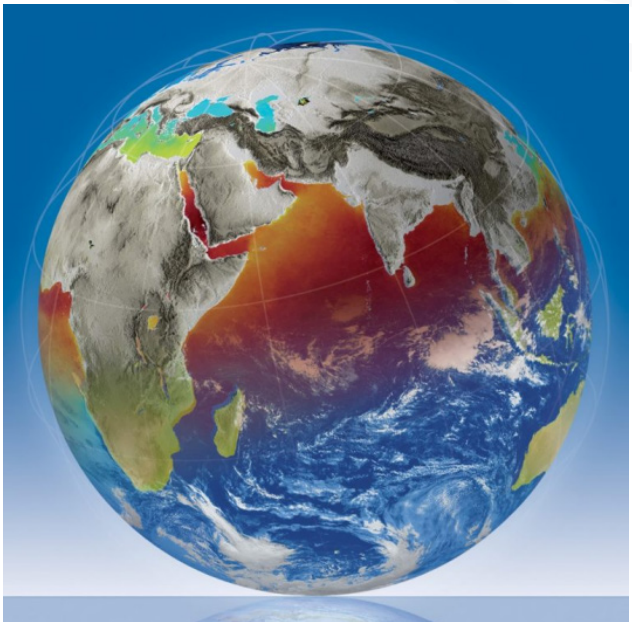
THE DECLINE OF AMERICA'S LEADERSHIP

CONTEXT: The traditional strengths of America are its values platform, its military power, its pivotal position in the global financial system, and as a technology pioneer. The energetic pro-American lobby in India advocates ever-closer engagement with the United States, rejecting arguments about its diminishing influence.



Background:

- Traditionally, the US held a dominant position due to its economic power, military strength, financial system, and technological advancements.
- However, concerns regarding the decline of US influence have emerged for several reasons:
  - Economic Competition: China's growing economic power, surpassing the US in purchasing power parity, presents a significant challenge.
  - Military Expeditions: The US's involvement in prolonged wars and its expansive global military presence raise questions about its credibility and commitment to international norms.
  - Domestic Polarization: Political divisions within the US hinder its ability to project unified leadership on the international stage.
  - Erosion of Soft Power: Foreign policy decisions like the stance on the Palestinian issue damage US soft power and global image.
- These factors, along with the rise of alternative power centers like China and Russia, contribute to the ongoing discussion about the decline of American leadership



THE DECLINE OF AMERICAN LEADERSHIP: KEY POINTS

1. Traditional Strengths of the US:

- Values platform
- Military power
- Pivotal role in global financial system
- Technological innovation

2. Arguments for Decline:

- Economic Challenge: China's growing economic power surpasses the US in purchasing power parity.
- Military Scrutiny: US involvement in prolonged wars and extensive global military presence raise questions about credibility and commitment to international norms.
- Domestic Division: Political polarization hinders unified leadership on the world stage.
- Erosion of Soft Power: Foreign policy decisions negatively impact global image.

3. Underlying Causes:

- Shifting Power Dynamics: Rise of alternative powers like China and Russia challenges US dominance.
- Domestic Polarization: Internal divisions hinder effective international engagement.
- Selective Application of Rules: The "rules-based" system historically favored US interests and lacked global inclusivity.

4. Remaining US Strengths:

- Enduring alliances in Southeast Asia and Europe.
- Cultural influence through the entertainment industry.
- Continued significance in the global financial system.

5. The Rise of China:

- China's economic growth and technological advancements pose a significant challenge to US leadership.
- China actively projects power through various means, including traditional military and non-traditional methods like cultural influence and infrastructure development.

6. The Future of US Leadership:

- US ability to adapt to the changing global landscape and address internal challenges will determine its future role in the world order.
- US-China competition, particularly in security and economics, presents potential dangers in the coming years.

DECLINE OF AMERICAN POWER AND ITS IMPACT ON INDIA

The decline of American power has potential implications for India, both positive and negative

POTENTIAL NEGATIVE IMPACTS:

- **Diminished Security Umbrella:** Traditionally, the US has acted as a security guarantor for India, particularly when it comes to countering China's influence in the region. A weakened US could diminish this support, putting pressure on India's security.
- **Instability in the International Order:** The US-led international order has generally benefited India as a developing nation. A potential decline in American leadership could create a more unstable global landscape with less predictability and fewer opportunities for cooperation in areas of importance to India.
- **Economic Uncertainty:** If the US dollar loses its dominance in global finance, it could create volatility and instability for India's economy, impacting foreign investment and trade.
- **Reduced Influence in Global Forums:** India has often found support and collaboration with the US in international forums. A less influential US could diminish India's ability to influence global policies.

Equidistant map of the world centered on Delhi
Shifting Paradigms of World Power Dynamics

POTENTIAL POSITIVE IMPACTS:

- Greater Strategic Autonomy: A declining US influence could give India more room to independently navigate and shape its foreign policy, forging alliances that reflect its own interests, rather than defaulting to traditional US-centric alliances.
- Multipolar World: If US influence wanes, it could accelerate the emergence of a multipolar world where India could have more strategic choices and greater flexibility in international affairs.
- New Leadership Roles: India could step into larger leadership roles within regional organizations and international bodies if the US retreats from its traditional position.
- More Bargaining Power: India might find it has more leverage when negotiating agreements with other major powers in the absence of a dominant US.Overall, the decline of American power presents India with both challenges and opportunities. India will need to:
- **Strengthen its capabilities:** Enhance its defence, economy, and technological development to mitigate risks associated with reduced US support.
- **Diversify Partnerships:** Build stronger relationships with other major powers like Russia, Japan, and the European Union to hedge its bets and maintain a favourable position in a changing geopolitical landscape.
- **Become a Rule-Shaper:** Rather than being a rule-taker, India needs to assert itself more assertively in shaping the new international order and promoting global norms that align with its interests.

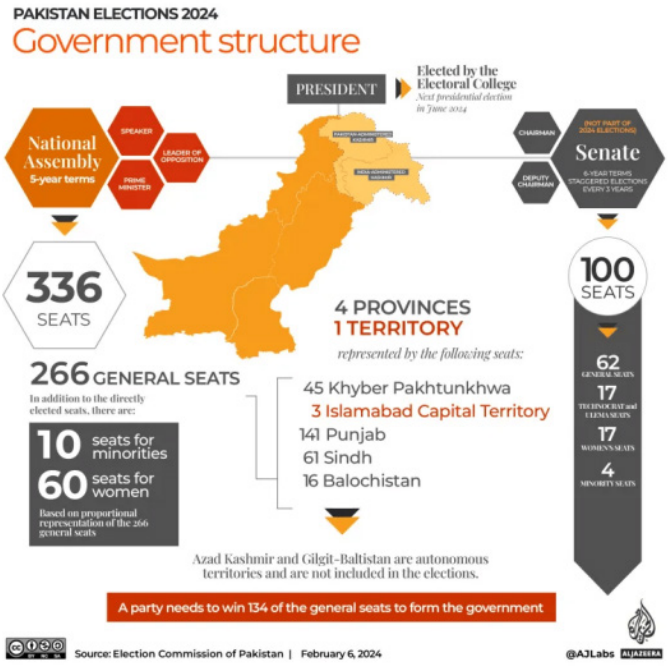
CONCLUSION

The decline of American power presents a complex and evolving scenario for India. While challenges like diminished security support and global instability are present, India also has opportunities for increased strategic autonomy, leadership roles, and diversified partnerships. Navigating this new world order will require India to focus on self-reliance, strategic partnerships, and proactive engagement in shaping the global landscape to its advantage. The future of India's position in the world will depend on its ability to adapt, seize opportunities, and become a more influential player on the international stage.

THE ILLUSION OF CHANGE IN PAKISTAN

CONTEXT: Pakistan's recent election was considered a crucial one that would lead to a stable government with a clear mandate, end political instability, and start a process of political healing at the national level, especially in Punjab.

BACKGROUND: The Establishment (the military-dominated deep state) expected the elections would end the Imran revolt and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) experiment. People expected the election process, polling and the final announcement to be free, fair and transparent.



1.Independent candidates backed by the PTI triumphed in 93 seats in the aftermath of the National Assembly results.
2.The Pakistan Muslim League (PML)-N seized 75 seats, while the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) secured 54 seats.
3.The Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM)-P clinched victory in 17 seats.
4.The remaining seats were claimed by various smaller parties and independent candidates.
5.There exists the potential for the PML-N, PPP, and MQM-P to gain additional seats through reserved allocations, including 60 for women and 10 for minorities, subject to their initial seat count.

IMRAN KHAN'S STRUGGLE FOR VICTORY IN THE 2024 ELECTIONS:

Challenges Faced by PTI:

- Despite being the leader of the PTI, Imran Khan encountered significant hurdles during the 2024 elections.
- Court verdicts barred Khan from contesting, and he faced numerous legal cases.
- Second-rung PTI leaders were coerced to leave the party by the Establishment, allegedly due to Khan's involvement in the May 9 riots of 2023.

Intra-Party Factionalism:

- In Punjab, Jahangir Tareen formed the Istehkam-e-Pakistan Party (IPP) to challenge PTI's dominance.
- Similarly, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pervez Khattak established a faction, further weakening PTI's unity.

Election Commission's Actions:

- The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) barred PTI from contesting as a party due to failure to conduct intra-party elections.
- Additionally, the party's symbol, the "bat," was removed by the ECP.

Imran Khan's Determination:

- Despite facing adversity, Khan persisted in rallying candidates and maintaining morale among PTI members.
- His leadership played a pivotal role in the PTI's performance in the elections.

PTI's Electoral Success:

- PTI-backed candidates secured 93 seats in the National Assembly, outperforming rivals such as the PML-N by 18 seats.
- Notably, PTI made significant gains in Punjab and KP, traditionally strongholds of other parties.

Impact of the Election:

- Despite PTI's potential inability to form a government, the 2024 election is seen as a victory for Imran Khan and the PTI, showcasing their resilience amidst adversity.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE ESTABLISHMENT IN THE 2024 ELECTIONS:

Mismatched Results:

- Despite the Establishment's desires, the election outcomes deviate from its expectations.
- The prevailing mandate contradicts the Establishment's preferences, with many interpreting the pro-Imran vote as a direct opposition to the Establishment.

Failed Political Engineering:

- The Establishment aimed to diminish support for Imran Khan and the PTI through pre-election political maneuvers.
- However, these efforts did not yield the desired outcome, as the PTI's performance exceeded expectations.

Continued Influence:

- Despite setbacks, the Establishment remains a dominant force in Pakistani politics.
- The lack of absolute majority for the PML-N in Islamabad and Lahore aligns with the Establishment's preference for political instability, enabling it to retain control.

Persistent Political Engineering:

- Regardless of whether election results align with its agenda, the Establishment will persist in its political engineering tactics.
- Non-compliant political parties risk facing repercussions, exemplified by Imran Khan's legal challenges and imprisonment.

Influence Over Political Parties:

- Political parties are expected to adhere to the Establishment's directives, with dissenters facing punitive measures.
- The case of Imran Khan serves as a warning to those who challenge the Establishment's authority.

NAWAZ SHARIF'S INFLUENCE IN THE 2024 ELECTIONS:

Limited Impact of Nawaz Sharif's Return:

- Nawaz Sharif's return to Pakistan, approved by the Establishment, was anticipated to bolster the PML-N's prospects, particularly in Punjab.
- However, Sharif's presence did not significantly enhance the PML-N's position either nationally or provincially.

Underwhelming Performance of PML-N:

- Despite expectations, Nawaz Sharif's return did not propel the PML-N to dominance, particularly in Punjab.
- Most of the PML-N's victories were concentrated in Punjab, and it will likely need coalition support to form a government in the province.

Comparison with PTI and PPP:

- Unlike the PTI and PPP, which maintain strongholds in KP and Sindh respectively, the PML-N's base in Punjab did not translate into a decisive electoral advantage.
- In contrast, both the PTI and PPP are poised to independently secure governments in their respective provinces.

Reflection on PML-N's Performance:

- The PML-N's performance in the 2024 elections, especially in Punjab, prompts a need for introspection.
- Unlike the PTI and PPP, the PML-N failed to capitalize on its stronghold, raising questions about its electoral strategy and appeal.

Comparative Analysis with Previous Elections:

- In comparison to the 2018 elections, the PML-N's performance in 2024 saw only a marginal increase in seats at the national level, highlighting a stagnation in its electoral growth.

CONTINUING POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN 2024:

Genesis of Political Turmoil:

- The seeds of political instability sown in 2023 persist into 2024, stemming from the efforts of the PML-N, PPP, and allied parties within the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) to oust the PTI government.
- In April 2022, the PDM successfully toppled Imran Khan's government, leading to Shehbaz Sharif assuming the role of Prime Minister with PPP support.

Resurgence of Coalition Politics:

- Presently, the PPP and PML-N, along with other political entities, are poised to form a national government, excluding the PTI.
- This development mirrors a revival of the PDM's objectives, often termed as PDM 2.0.

PTI's Reaction and Legal Challenges:

- The PTI, along with Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) and regional parties, is contesting the election results through legal channels and public demonstrations.
- Discontent with the outcome, they are adamant about challenging the legitimacy of the new government.

Regional Electoral Dynamics:

- In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the electorate has reaffirmed support for Imran Khan and the PTI.
- Conversely, in Sindh, the PPP has secured a sweeping victory in both national and provincial assembly elections, while MQM-P has retained control in Karachi.

Balochistan's Varied Results:

- Balochistan continues to exhibit mixed electoral outcomes, with no single party commanding a significant majority in either the national or provincial assemblies.
- Notably, protests from regional parties alleging electoral irregularities have emerged as a response to the election results.

ELECTION IMPACT ANALYSIS:

Limited Influence of Regional Parties:

- Apart from the MQM-P, which secured notable seats in both the national (14) and Sindh provincial (28) assemblies, other regional parties from Sindh, Balochistan, and KP have failed to make a significant impact.
- Parties like the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), Awami National Party (ANP), Balochistan National Party (BNP), and others have struggled to secure seats, if any, in the national assembly.

Minimal Presence of PML-Q:

- The PML-Q, representing Punjab, managed to secure only three seats in the national assembly, indicating a diminished influence at the national level.

Religious Parties' Performance:

- Religious political entities such as the JI, JUI-F, and the recently formed Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) faced challenges in securing significant representation.
- The JI, failing to win any national assembly seats, saw its leader, Sirajul Haq, resigning from his position.
- While the JUI-F and TLP managed to secure a few seats in the national and provincial assemblies, their overall impact remains limited.

Provincial Dominance of Regional and Religious Parties:

- With few exceptions, both regional and religious parties, aside from the MQM, are likely to remain predominantly influential at the provincial level.

Establishment's Continued Influence:

- Despite the PTI-backed candidates achieving success in terms of seat count, a closer examination of the election results suggests that the Establishment will retain its dominance.
- This holds true both at the national and provincial levels, indicating the entrenched influence of established political forces.

CONCLUSION: The recent Pakistani elections promised political transformation, especially in Punjab, yet yielded limited change. Despite PTI's success and weakened regional parties, entrenched power dynamics persist, led by the Establishment. Imran Khan's struggle showcased obstacles to reform. Coalition politics endure, underscoring the challenge of genuine change amidst ongoing instability.

TOP SPANISH OFFICIAL LIKELY TO PITCH DEAL FOR SUBMARINE

CONTEXT: Amidst Germany's push for an inter-governmental agreement on selling submarines to India, Spain's Secretary of State for Defence is set to visit Delhi, likely to pitch a deal for advanced conventional submarines as part of the Indian Navy's tender, in collaboration with Navantia and Larsen & Toubro.

Background of India's Submarine Deal:

India's Need for New Submarines:

- India's existing submarine fleet is aging, and acquiring new submarines is crucial for maintaining its underwater deterrence and safeguarding its maritime interests in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- The P-75I project aims to procure six advanced conventional submarines to replace older ones and enhance the Navy's capabilities.

Why Countries are Interested:

- The P-75I deal is a lucrative opportunity for defense companies due to its large scale (₹43,000 crore) and strategic significance.
- Participating in this project allows companies to showcase their technological prowess and potentially establish a long-term partnership with India.

Key Players and their Standing:

- **Germany (Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems - TKMS):**
  - Offered a government-to-government agreement and has experience in submarine construction.
  - Discussed the deal with Indian officials in January 2024.
- **Spain (Navantia):**
  - Partnered with Larsen & Toubro (L&T) for design and construction, respectively.
  - Showcased their next-generation AIP module and willingness for technology transfer.
  - Spanish Secretary of State for Defence visiting India in March 2024 to likely discuss the deal.
- **Companies that were not shortlisted include:**
  - France: Naval Group (formerly DCNS), the company behind the Scorpène-class submarines, did not submit a bid for the P-75I project. This could be due to various reasons, such as not meeting specific technical requirements, strategic considerations, or focusing their efforts on other Indian defense projects.
- **Challenges in the Acquisition Process:**
- The project faced delays due to technical specifications, including the requirement for a proven Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) module with a two-week endurance.
- Evaluating complex bids from different countries with varying technical aspects can be time-consuming.

Current Stage:

- Both bids are currently undergoing evaluation by Indian authorities.
- The upcoming visit by the Spanish official suggests their continued interest and potential for further discussions.

Additional Information:

- This deal is being processed under the "strategic partnership model," aiming for technology transfer and domestic production capabilities.
- The final decision on awarding the contract is expected in the future, and factors like technical specifications, cost-effectiveness, and strategic partnerships will likely play a role.

CONCLUSION: As India weighs its options for acquiring new submarines, Spain's upcoming visit adds another dimension to the competition. The coming weeks could see intensified efforts from both Germany and Spain to secure this significant defense deal.

INTERNAL SECURITY

GRANT PERMANENT COMMISSION TO WOMEN: SC TO COAST GUARD

LAW PANEL SUGGESTS RETAINING CRIMINAL DEFAMATION PROVISION

GOVT. BANS 2 FACTIONS OF JAMMU & KASHMIR OUTFIT UNDER UAPA

MYANMAR'S CIVIL WAR AND INDIA'S INTERESTS

MIXED REACTIONS IN NE TO CENTRE'S MOVE TO FENCE INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER

GRANT PERMANENT COMMISSION TO WOMEN: SC TO COAST GUARD

The Supreme Court on Monday urged the Indian Coast Guard to ensure that women are granted permanent commission. Mr. Venkataramani had pointed to functional and operational difficulties in granting permanent commissions to Short Service Commission Officers.

TYPES OF COMMISIONING IN INDIAN ARMY

- **PERMANENT COMMISSION:** Career in the army till the age of retirement.
- **SHORT SERVICE COMMISSION:** Career in the army for 10 years, with the option to either leave, choose a 4-year extension or opt for Permanent Commission at the end of 10 years.

TIMELINE OF WOMEN IN ARMY

- **1992: WOMEN SPECIAL ENTRY SCHEME (WSES)** – Commissioning of women for a period of 5 years in non-combat streams such as Army Education Corps, Corps of Signals, Intelligence Corps, and Corps of Engineers.
- **2006: SHORT SERVICE COMMISSION (SSC) SCHEME** - Commissioning of women for a period of 10 years, extendable up to 14 years in non-combat streams (Army Postal Service, Judge Advocate General Department, Army Education Corps, Signal Corps, Intelligence Corps, Corps of Engineers, Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering and Regiment of Artillery among other Corps). The first batch of women officers under the new scheme entered the Army in 2008.

JUDICIAL FIGHT FOR EQUALITY OF TREATMENT:

- 2006: Writ petitions filed in the Delhi High Court by Advocate Babita Puniya and several women SSC officers for Permanent Commission and equality of opportunity in women.
- 2008: Delhi High Court held that women SSC officers of the Air Force and Army who had opted for PC, but not granted that status would be entitled to PC at par with male SSC officers with all consequential benefits.
- 2020: The Supreme Court directed the Government to immediately grant Permanent Commission (PC) as well as command postings in all services other than combat for women officers in the Army.
- 2021: On 25th March 2021, the Supreme Court in Lt. Col. Nitisha vs. Union of India Case held that the Army's selective evaluation process discriminated against and disproportionately affected women officers seeking permanent commission.
- 2022: The Centre implemented Permanent Commission (PC) option to all eligible women Army officers.

BENEFITS OF PC: Full-time pension benefits and other allowances. In a landmark verdict on February 17, 2020, the Supreme court directed that women officers in the Army be granted a permanent commission, rejecting the Centre's stand on their "physiological limitations" as being based on "sex stereotypes" and "gender discrimination against women"

CURRENT STATUS

Grant of permanent commission to Short Service Commissioned (SSC) women officers is allowed in streams like Army Air Defence (AAD), Signals, Engineers, Army Aviation, Electronics and Mechanical Engineers (EME), Army Service Corps (ASC), Army Ordnance Corps (AOC), and Intelligence Corps in addition to the existing streams of Judge and Advocate General (JAG) and Army Educational Corps (AEC). Women officers still cannot serve in infantry, artillery and armoured corps – combat wings deployed at the most forward locations facing adversary situations. The Army has also tweaked its policy on issues like training, physical endurance and postings and service courses to bring about equilibrium in service conditions for male and female officers after the Supreme Court verdict.

LAW PANEL SUGGESTS RETAINING CRIMINAL DEFAMATION PROVISION

The twenty second Law Commission recommended for retaining the provision of criminal defamation within the scheme of criminal laws in India. The matter was referred to the law panel by the Ministry in August 2017. In its report, the Law Commission argued the "Right to Reputation", derived from Article 21 of the Constitution guarantees the right to life and personal liberty.

Reputation, something which can't be seen and can only be earned is an asset which is built in a lifetime and destroyed in seconds. The whole jurisprudence around the law on criminal defamation has the essence of protecting one's reputation and its facets. The law panel advised exercising caution as criminal prosecution for defamatory statements stands opposed to the freedom of speech and expression. Speech ought to be illegal only where it is meant to do substantial harm and when such harm materialises.

The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita has added a provision of community service as an additional punishment. This law gives a balancing approach, wherein it has safeguarded the interest of the victim and has also neutralised the scope of misuse by giving an alternate punishment of community service.

GOVT. BANS 2 FACTIONS OF JAMMU & KASHMIR OUTFIT UNDER UAPA

The Union Home Ministry declared two factions of the Muslim Conference, Jammu and Kashmir (MCJK), led by Abdul Ghani Bhat and Ghulam Nabi Sumji, respectively, as "unlawful association" under the anti-terror Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) for five years.

The two groups, which are a constituent of the Mirwaiz Umar Farooq's All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) dormant for several years have been engaging in activities against the sovereignty and integrity of the nation.

In 2017, Prof. Abdul Ghani Bhat, a moderate who had been serving as the head of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) was removed as the president of the Muslim Conference after meeting with the Government of India's special representative, the late Dineshwar Sharma, and expressing his willingness to talk to the Centre.

The MCJK-S, the outfit chaired by Ghulam Nabi Sumji, is known for its anti-India and pro-Pakistan propaganda. Ghulam Nabi Sumji, a former MLA, resigned in 1989 to join the Hurriyat. A notification by the Ministry said the Muslim Conference, Jammu and Kashmir (MCJK-B), chaired by Bhat has linkages with banned terrorist organisations and has supported terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. The members of the MCJK-B have been indulging in generating feelings of hatred and disaffection against India to separate Jammu and Kashmir from the Union of India, and its leaders have raised funds through various sources, including Pakistan and its proxy organisations, for perpetrating unlawful activities, including supporting terrorist activities and sustained pelting of stones on Indian security forces.

MYANMAR'S CIVIL WAR AND INDIA'S INTERESTS

In February 2021, the Myanmar military leaders ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, anticipating a short-lived resistance movement. Three years later, Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) and the People's Defence Forces control many towns in different parts of the country. The Arakan Army captured Paletwa in the Chin State which lies on Myanmar's western borders with Bangladesh and India.

A conflict within a conflict

Paletwa is a commercial town on the Kaladan River on the western border makes it a good launchpad for the Arakan Army to conduct its operations against the military. The fall of Paletwa, a Chin ethnic majority town in the Rakhine State with a Rohingya Muslim majority has altered the dynamic between the Chin and the Arakan ethnic groups. On the other hand, some in the Rakhine State, previously known as Arakan, contend that the township was historically part of the Arakan Hill Tracts during colonial rule and should have been part of their province. There have been instances, prior to the coup, when Chin ethnic organisations expressed displeasure with the Arakan Army's operations in Paletwa.

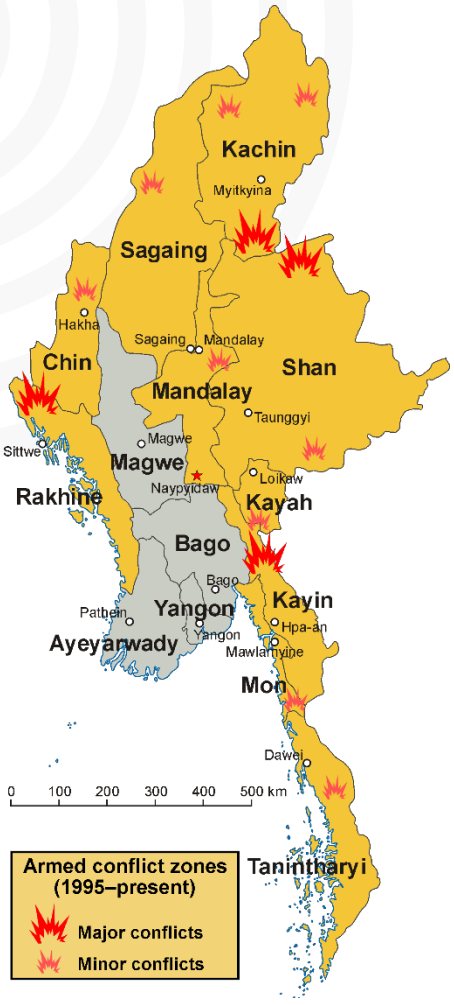
The Chin armed groups and the Arakan army fighting together against the Myanmar military have refrained from forcefully ascertaining their respective views of provincial borders. The Chin and Arakan groups agreed on an inclusive framework for the governance of Paletwa and adjoining areas to maintain peace and order. The Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) need to improve inter-ethnic solidarity by creatively accommodating each other's perspectives on ethnic boundaries for an effective fight against the military.

India's stake

The developments in Paletwa will impact the Indian government's Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project (KMTTP) in Myanmar. The Kaladan project was aimed at addressing the geo-economic and geo-political challenges of northeast India. The partition of the subcontinent and the subsequent hardening of borders converted northeast India into a landlocked region. The Kaladan project was conceptualised as an alternative route that gives northeast India access to the sea.

India and Myanmar signed the framework agreement on the Kaladan project in 2008. The Sittwe port and inland water terminal at Paletwa have been completed in the past few years, the operationalisation of the project was delayed because of rugged terrain, inadequate inter-departmental coordination, political instability and security challenges in Myanmar. The people of Mizoram and their co-ethnics across the border in Chin State are interested in the expedited completion of the Kaladan project, as it will spur economic activity in the region.

The Arakan Army is not favourably disposed to the Kaladan project. Prior to the coup, numerous reports indicated that India and Myanmar have launched coordinated operations



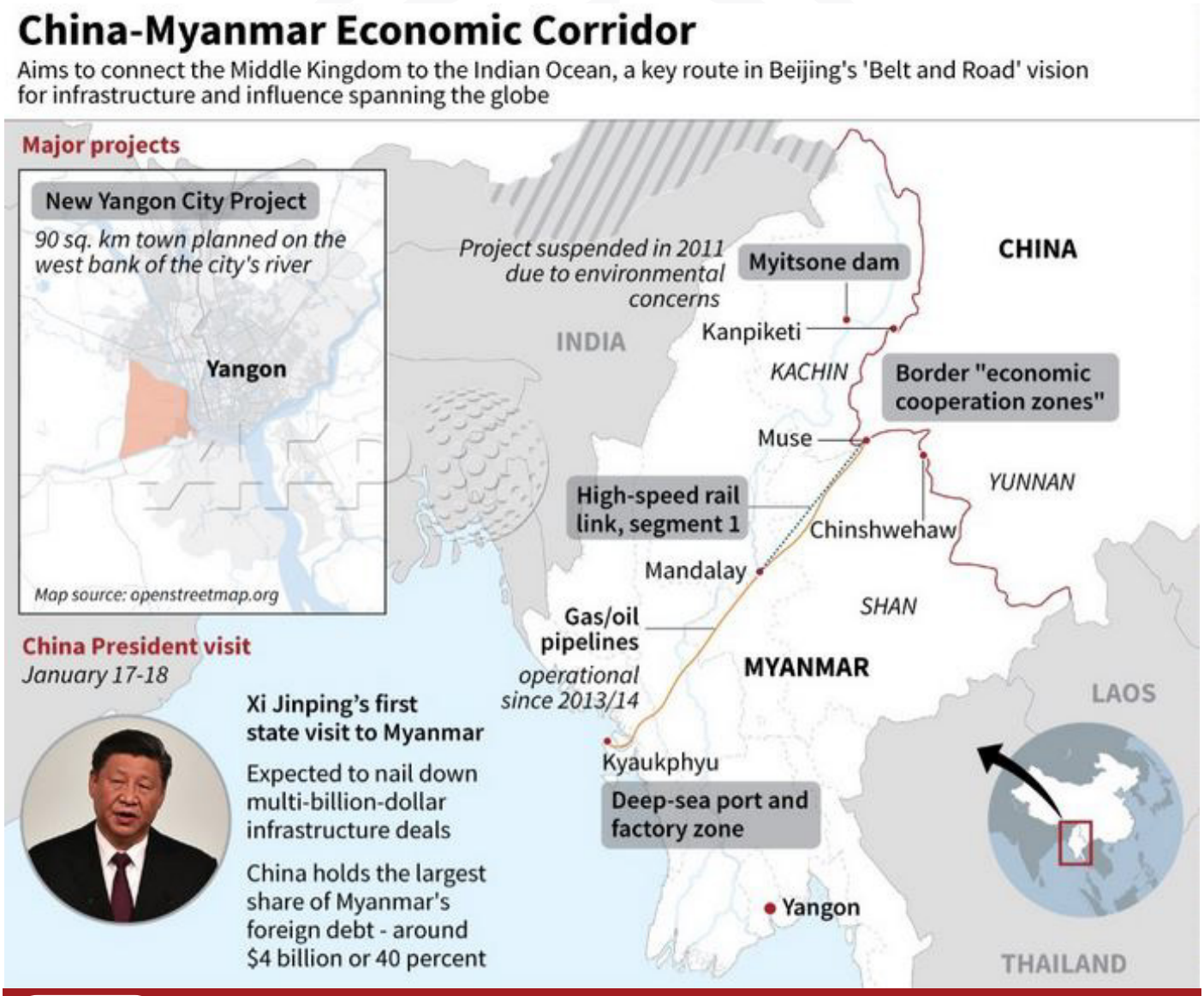
against Arakan Army units that were operating close to India's borders near Mizoram and threatening the Kaladan project.

China's investments in the region

The Chinese backed Three Brotherhood alliance comprising of the Arakan Army, Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army has pledged to protect Chinese investments in Myanmar. The Arakan Army receives considerable funding and military equipment from China. China could use armed groups to slow down India's connectivity projects in Myanmar.

Meanwhile, the Chinese economic presence along Myanmar's Bay of Bengal coast has substantially increased. Beijing has operationalised oil and natural gas pipelines from the Shwe gas fields near Kyaukpyu in the Rakhine State to Yunan province in China. Two months ago, China signed supplementary agreements with the Myanmar military to operationalise the deep-sea port and a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) near Kyaukpyu. There were renewed efforts to construct a railway line from China's Yunnan to Kyaukpyu via Mandalay as part of the China-Myanmar Economic Corridor (CMEC).Unlike India, China is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, which prompts many state and non-state actors in need of international support to be relatively more accommodating of China's concerns. Consequently, China is in a position to extend political and military support to various ethnic armed groups as well as to the Myanmar military to protect its economic interests.

There are important takeaways from the progress of the Kaladan project. Since India is a liberal democracy, its external engagement will be closely monitored for its impact on sectarian/identity-based violence in its neighbourhood. While security agencies will constantly evaluate the modalities of engaging with armed groups on India's borders, there is a need to scale up humanitarian and development assistance in coordination with a broader spectrum of ethnic organisations and local people to expedite projects such as Kaladan.



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MIXED REACTIONS IN NE TO CENTRE'S MOVE TO FENCE INDIA-MYANMAR BORDER

Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced the fencing of the India-Myanmar border along the five north-eastern States to facilitate better surveillance. The Chief Ministers of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur welcomed the decision, while the Chief Ministers of Mizoram and Nagaland opposed fencing along the 1,643 km border between the two countries.

Nongthombam Biren Singh, Manipur Chief Minister demanded barbed wire fencing along the border with Myanmar. In September 2023, he appealed to the Centre to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) agreement between the two countries that allows border residents to travel up to 16 km in each other's' territory without any visa.

Under the FMR, every member of the hill tribes, who is either a citizen of India or a citizen of Myanmar, residing within 16 km of either side of the border, can cross the border on the production of a border pass, usually valid for a year, and can stay up to two weeks per visit. India and Myanmar share an unfenced 1,643-km-long border. A 1968 government notification limited the free movement of people up to 40 km on either side of the border, which was further reduced to 16 km in 2004. The FMR's provisions were last revised in 2016.

The Union Government had initially planned to fence a 10 km stretch along the border at Moreh in Manipur in 2010 and 4.07 km of fencing had been put up till 2013-14. The Home Ministry's latest annual report for 2022-23 says that 6.81 km of fencing has been completed. Out of 1,643 km, the demarcation of 1,472 km has been completed. On February 6, Mr. Shah had announced that a fence would be constructed along the entire 1,643-km border with Myanmar.

The FMR had several drawbacks. There is no standard document or border pass recognised by both the countries. Though Assam Rifles, a central force, is deployed along the Myanmar border, the implementation of FMR through border passes is done by the State government officials. The official added that though the FMR allows each cross-border visit to last only two weeks, there is no mechanism to check when a person entered the country.

Arunachal Pradesh Chief Minister Pema Khandu also

expressed confidence that the fencing project would "check the movement of unscrupulous elements" between Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma too expressed that fencing would reduce incidents of cross-border insurgency and infiltration.

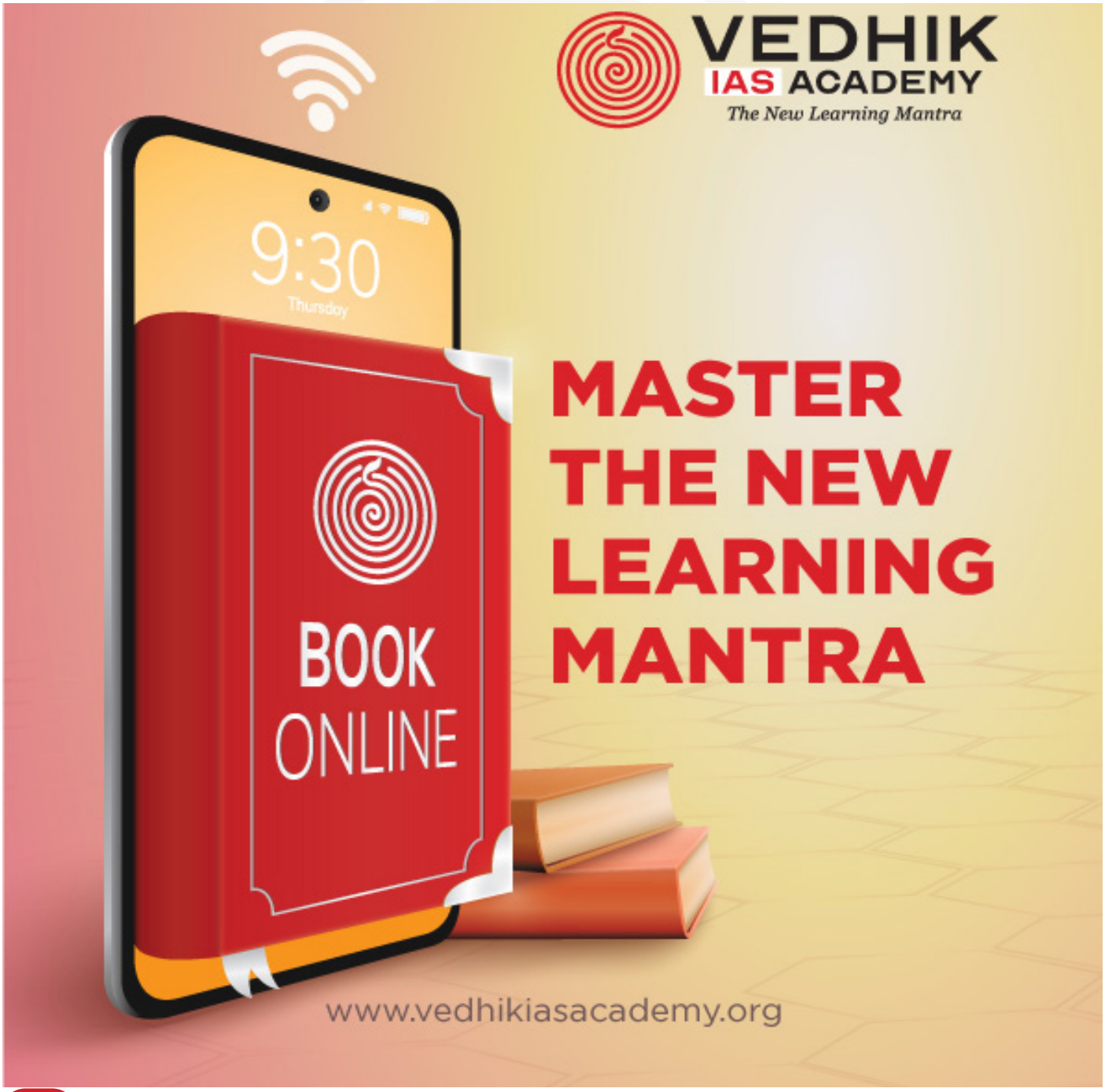
The extremists had been exploiting the Free Movement Regime (FMR) to stoke ethnic violence. Members of extremist groups such as the United Liberation Front of Asom (Independent) have been carrying out hit-and-run operations in Assam from Myanmar by travelling through a mostly jungle stretch of hilly land straddling Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland.

Reactions

The Isak-Muivah faction of the NSCN, based primarily in Manipur and Nagaland has opposed the fencing plan that it said would cut off Nagas living on either side of the border. Similarly, the Myanmar-based Khaplang-Yung Aung faction is against the fencing.

The plan is unacceptable for Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma and his Nagaland counterpart Neiphiu Rio, adding that people of the Zo community inhabiting both Mizoram and Myanmar have a right to live without any barrier between them.

The 60-member Mizoram Assembly on Wednesday adopted a resolution against the Centre's decision to fence the India-Myanmar border and scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) agreement with the civil war-torn neighbouring country. The dominant Mizos of Mizoram, the Kuki-Zomis of Manipur, the Chins of Myanmar and the Kuki-Chins of Bangladesh belong to the Zo ethnic group. The British geographically divided the Zo ethnic people who have inhabited [present-day] Mizoram and the Chin Hills of Myanmar for centuries together, once under their own administration.



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INTERIM BUDGET 2024-25

BUDGET ESTIMATES OF 2024-25 COMPARED TO REVISED ESTIMATES OF 2023-24

INDIA TO SURPASS GERMANY IN 2027

INDIA UNVEILS SCHEME TO BOOST PULSES OUTPUT

PRADHAN MANTRI MATSYA KISAN SAMRIDHI SAH-YOJANA (PM-MKSSY)

RBI SUSPENDS CORE SERVICES OF PAYTM PAYMENTS BANK

RBI'S DIGITAL PAYMENTS INDEX RISES IN SEPTEMBER 2023

UNION CABINET APPROVES EXTENSION OF SUBSIDISED SUGAR SCHEME AND OTHER SCHEMES

INTERIM BUDGET 2024-25

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman tabled the Interim Budget 2024-25 before the Parliament of India. Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded the interim Budget as "inclusive and innovative", one that "carries the confidence of continuity".

The government is estimated to spend ₹ 47,65,768 Cr. in 2024-25, 6 % higher than the revised estimate of 2023-24. Interest payments account for 25 % of the total expenditure, and 40 % of revenue receipts. The receipts (other than borrowings) in 2024-25 are estimated to be ₹ 30,80,274 crore, about 12 % higher than the revised estimate of 2023-24. Tax revenue which forms major part of the receipts is also expected to increase by 12 % over the revised estimate for 2023-24. The government has estimated a nominal GDP growth rate of 10.5% in 2024-25 (i.e., real growth plus inflation). The revenue deficit in 2024-25 is targeted at 2 % of GDP, lower than the revised estimate of 2.8 % in 2023-24. Fiscal deficit in 2024-25 is targeted at 5.1 % of GDP, lower than the revised estimate of 5.8 % of GDP in 2023-24. The allocation is for capital expenditure, and accounts for 7.5% of the total capital outlay.

MAIN TAX PROPOSALS IN THE FINANCE BILL

- **TAX RATES UNCHANGED:** Direct and indirect tax rates have remained unchanged. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed to withdraw small, non-reconciled, and disputed direct tax demands implying withdrawal of tax demands of up to ₹ 25,000 of the period up to FY 2009-10, and up to ₹ 10,000 for FY 2011 to 2015. There existed a "large number of petty, non-verified, non-reconciled or disputed direct demands", many of which went as far back as 1962. Union Finance Minister proposed to retain the same tax rates for direct and indirect taxes, including import duties. This is in contrast to the last interim Budget, which proposed amending Section 87A of the Income Tax Act to increase the income base for tax rebates from ₹ 3.5 lakh to ₹ 5 lakh.
- **TAX BENEFITS TO CERTAIN ENTITIES EXTENDED BY ANOTHER YEAR:** Certain direct tax benefits to following entities have been extended until March 2025: (i) startups, (ii) sovereign wealth funds and pension funds, and (iii) some IFSC units. These benefits would have expired in March 2024.
- **TAX EXEMPTION EXPIRY DATE FOR START-UPS GETS ONE YEAR EXTENSION:** Although the interim Budget for 2024-25 did not propose any changes in existing taxation, start-ups are offered certain tax benefits by way of extension of exemptions. According to the Budget document, certain tax benefits for start-ups and investments made by sovereign wealth or pension funds and tax exemption on certain income of some International Financial Services Centre (IFSC) units are expiring on March 31, 2024. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman proposed to extend the exemption expiry date by a year to March 31, 2025, to provide continuity in taxation and trigger growth in the sector. This gesture along with initiatives such as PM Mudra Yojana, Fund of Funds, Start-up India, and Start-up Credit Guarantee schemes highlighted the government's proactive stance in supporting entrepreneurial aspirations and generating employment for youth, according to industry players. The Budget's emphasis on the growth and global competitiveness of start-ups and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) reflect the government's commitment to fostering a robust ecosystem. Adequate finances, relevant technologies, and targeted training showcase a comprehensive approach towards empowering MSMEs.

POLICY HIGHLIGHTS

- **RAILWAYS:** Three major economic railway corridor programs will be implemented. These are: (i) energy, mineral and cement corridors, (ii) port connectivity corridors and (iii) high traffic density corridors. Forty thousand normal rail bogies will be upgraded to Vande Bharat standards to ensure passenger safety and comfort.
- **HOUSING:** An additional two crore houses will be built over the next five years under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Grameen. A new scheme will be launched to help sections of the middle-class living in rented houses, slums, and unauthorised colonies, to buy or build their own houses.
- **HEALTH:** Vaccination to prevent cervical cancer will be encouraged for girls between nine and 14 years of age. A new platform, U-WIN, will be rolled out for managing immunisation across the country. Healthcare cover under Ayushman Bharat scheme will be extended to all ASHA workers, and Anganwadi workers and helpers.
- **ENERGY:** Rooftop solarisation of one crore households will be taken up. To achieve net-zero by 2070, blending of compressed biogas in CNG and PNG will be mandated in a phased manner. Coal gasification and liquefaction capacity of 100 metric tonnes will be installed by 2030.
- **ENVIRONMENT:** EV manufacturing and charging infrastructure will be strengthened and expanded. Adoption of E-buses for public transport will be encouraged. Blue economy 2.0 scheme will be launched to restore coastal aquaculture and mariculture. A new scheme will be launched to provide environment friendly alternatives such as biodegradable polymers, bio-plastics and bio-pharmaceuticals.
- **AGRICULTURE:** Public and private investment will be promoted in post-harvest activities including aggregation, storage, supply chain, processing and marketing. Application of the Nano DAP fertiliser will be expanded in all agro-climatic zones. A programme for supporting dairy farmers will be formulated. PM Matsya Sampada Yojana will be expanded to: (i) enhance aquaculture productivity from three to five tonnes per hectare, (ii) double seafood exports to one lakh crore rupees, and (iii) generate 55 lakh employment opportunities.
- **DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES:** A high-powered committee will be set up to address challenges arising out of fast population growth and demographic changes.
- **RESEARCH:** To encourage the private sector to scale up research and innovation, a corpus of one lakh crore rupees will be set up. This corpus will provide long-term loans at low or nil interest rates.

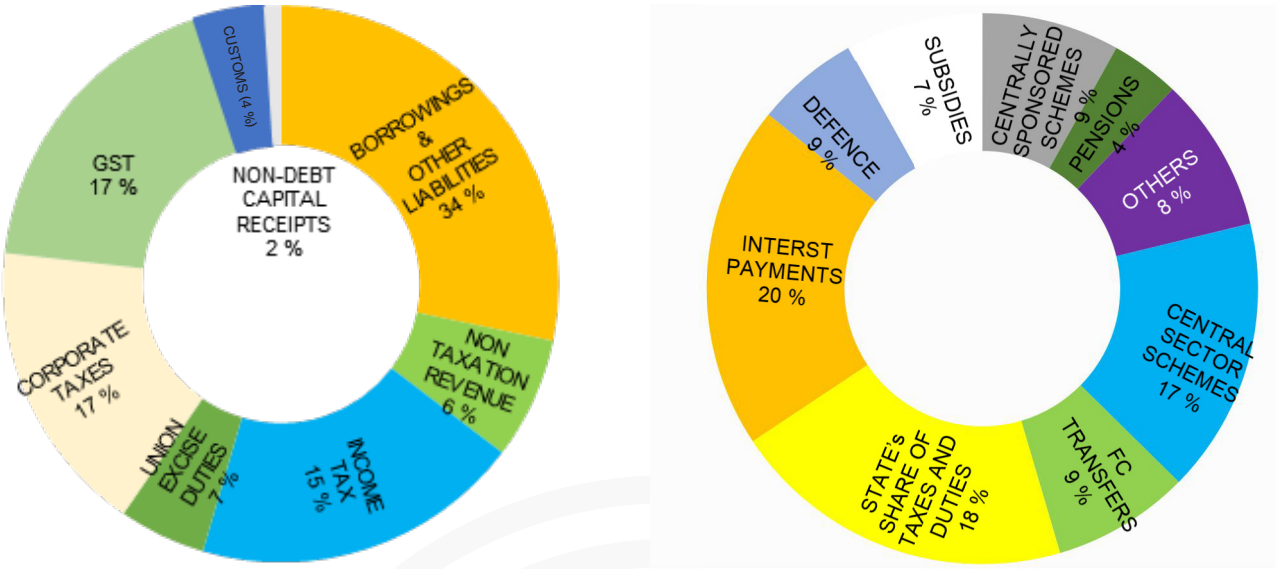


FIGURE: Pie chart representation of (a) Estimated receipts of the Union Government (b) Estimated expenditures of the Union Government.

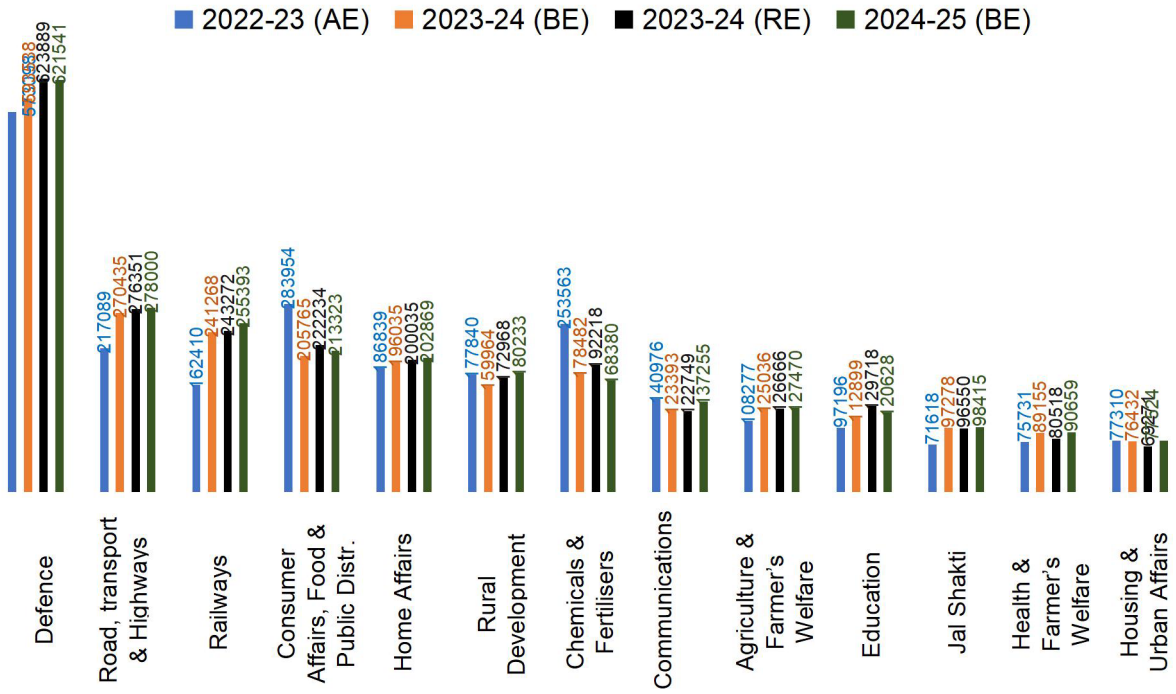


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the budgetary allocations Source: Union Ministry of Finance

BUDGET ESTIMATES OF 2024-25 COMPARED TO REVISED ESTIMATES OF 2023-24

The Government is estimated to spend ₹ 47,65,768 Cr. in 2024-25, an increase of 6 % over the revised estimate of 2023-24. The revenue expenditures are estimated to grow at 3.2 % and capital expenditure at 16.9 %. The revenue expenditure growth has been kept in check due to pension, defence expenditure, subsidies, and major schemes (MGNREGS, Jal Jeevan Mission, and PM-KISAN) together being allotted roughly the same as the revised estimate for 2023-24.

The Government receipts (excluding borrowings) are estimated to be ₹ 30,80,274 Cr., 11.8 % higher than the revised estimates of 2023-24. The gap between these receipts and the expenditure will be plugged by borrowings, budgeted to be ₹ 16,85,494 Cr., 2.8 % lower than the revised estimate of 2023-24.

The central government will transfer ₹ 22,74,541 Cr to states and union territories in 2024-25, an increase of 8.4 % over the revised estimates of 2023-24. Transfer to states includes devolution of ₹ 12,19,783 Cr. out of the divisible pool of central taxes, grants worth ₹ 8,90,858 Cr, and special loans worth ₹ 1,30,000 Cr. for capital expenditure.

Revenue deficit is targeted at 2 % of GDP, lower than the 2.9 % budgeted in 2023-24. Fiscal deficit is targeted at 5.1 % of GDP in 2024-25, lower than the revised estimates for 2023-24 (5.9 % of GDP). The lower fiscal deficit is on account of receipts growing at 11.8 %, which is higher than the expenditure growth of 6 %. The nominal GDP is estimated to grow at a rate of 10.5 % in 2024-25.

SUBSIDIES

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced expansion of application of Nano Di Ammonium Phosphate (Nano DAP) for various crops to all agro-climatic zones after the successful adoption of Nano Urea. Finance Minister expressed confidence in reducing fertiliser subsidies with increase in domestic production of essential fertilizers such as urea and improvement in Ukraine conflict.

The total food subsidy includes ₹ 2,05,250 Cr. for the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY) and ₹ 1 lakh Cr. for the sugar subsidy payable under Public Distribution System. In the last Budget, the amount was 1,97,350 Cr., while in 2022-23, the actual expenditure was ₹ 2,72,802.38 Cr.

High-Power Committee (HPC) to study 'fast population growth' and demographic changes: FM

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her interim Budget speech announced constitution of a High-Power Committee (HPC) to consider the challenges arising from "fast population growth and demographic changes. The committee would be mandated to make recommendations to comprehensively address these challenges in relation to the goal of Viksit Bharat, or a developed India.

The latest Sample Registration System report for 2020 noted a decline in the Total Fertility Fate (TFR) - average number of children born to a woman over her lifetime, dropped to 2, from 2.1 in 2019. The TFR at the national level declined from 2.2 to 2 between 2015-16 and 2019-21.

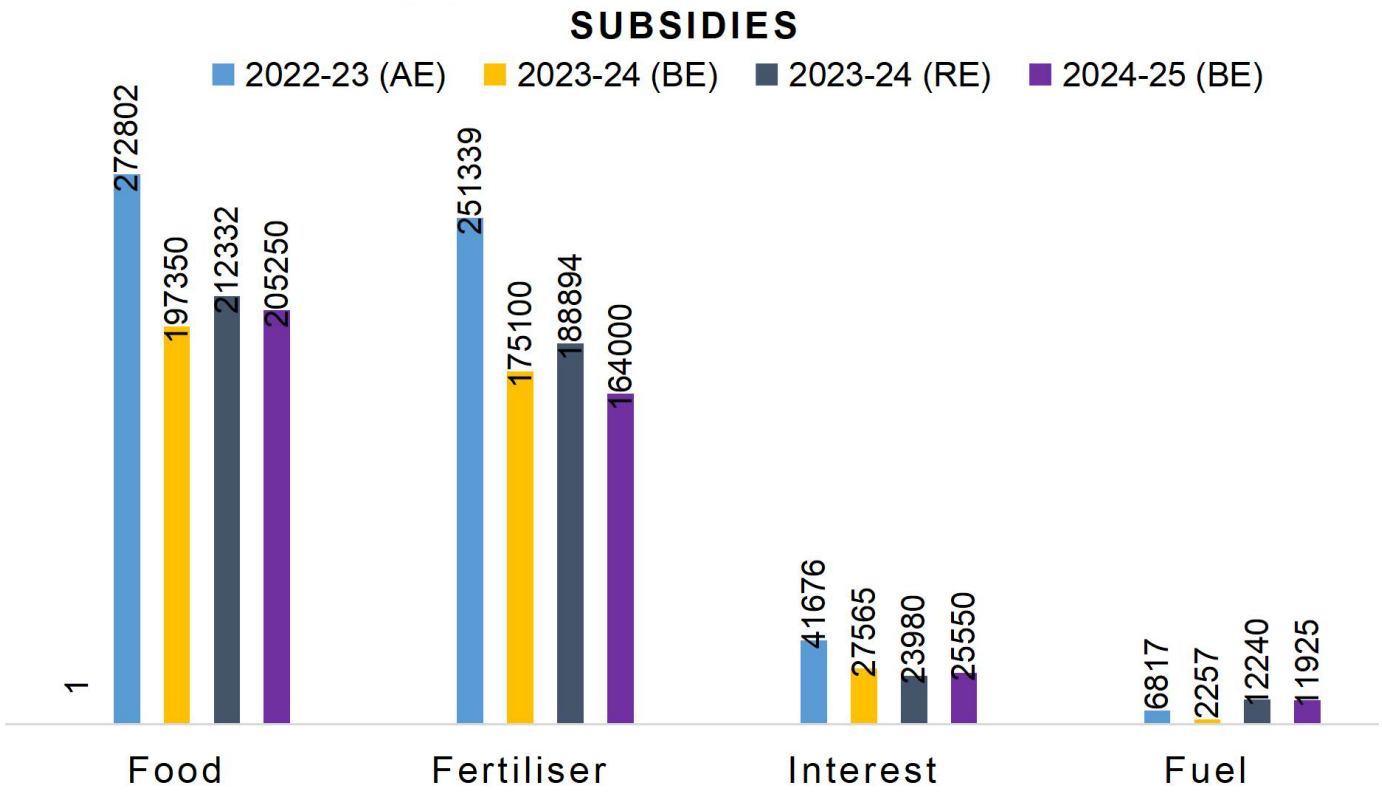


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of budgetary expenditures on subsidies in lakh Crore Rupees. (* Actual Estimates, ** Budgetary Estimates, *** Revised Estimates)

EXPENTIURES ON SOCIAL WELFARE

Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman's pre-election budget is set to focus on welfare schemes for five key sections of society – women, poor, youth, farmers and tribals. The Union Budget 2024-25 saw almost 50 % more allocation in schemes such as PM Schools for Rising India (PM SHRI) compared to the last Budget. Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN), previously known as the mid-day meal scheme, received an outlay of ₹ 12,467.39 Cr. For PM SHRI, the allocation is ₹ 6,050 Cr.

The allocations for the Social Justice Ministry and Tribal Affairs Ministry in the interim Budget largely remain unchanged with marginal increases seen in the estimated allocations for both Ministries compared with the 2023-24 Budget Estimates. The Revised Estimates for 2023-24 saw expenditures reduced by 38 % and 23 % for the Tribal Affairs Ministry and Social Justice Ministry, respectively, from the allocations set aside in the Budget Estimates.

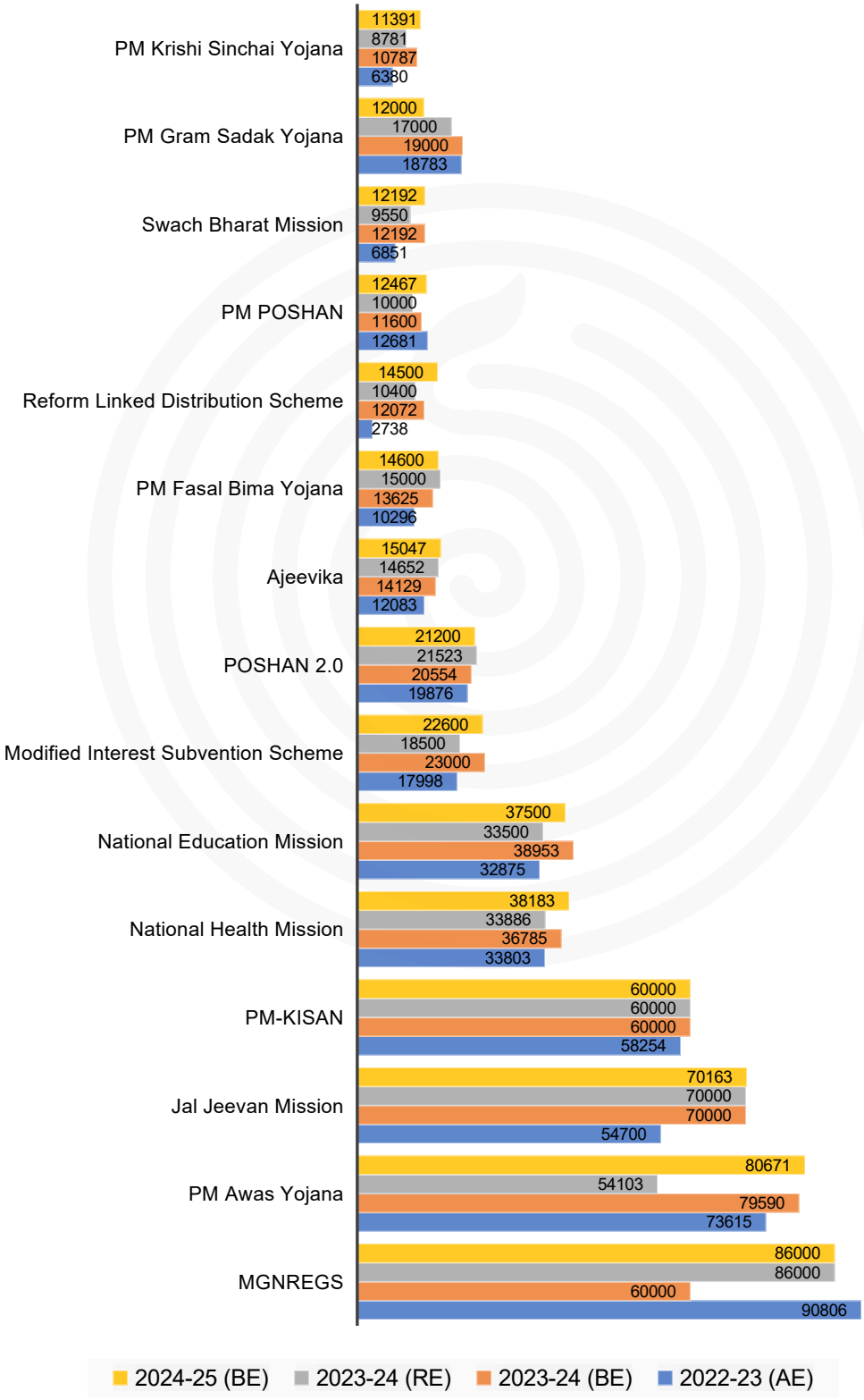


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of budgetary expenditures on welfare schemes.

EXPENDITURES ON EDUCATION

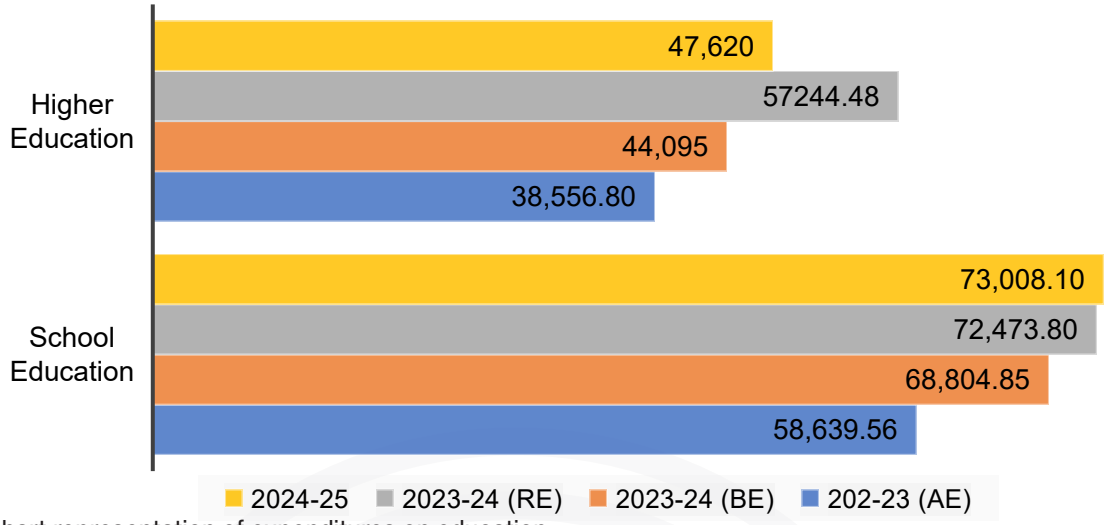


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of expenditures on education.

EXPENDITURES ON THE INFRASTRUCTURE SECTOR

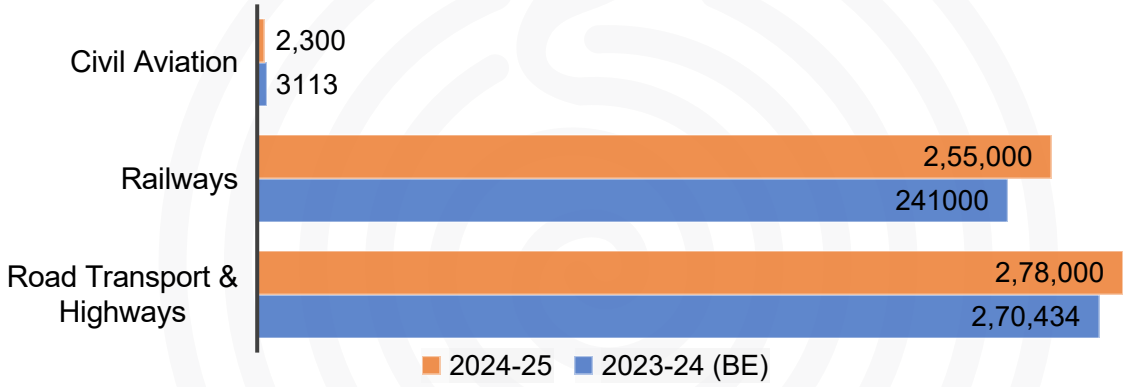


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of expenditures on infrastructure sector.

ROADWAYS

The budgetary allocation for the road sector for the current year saw a meagre increase of 2.7 % after a massive jump of 75 % and 35 % in allocation over the past two consecutive years. The Budget allocated a grant of ₹ 1,68,464 Cr. for National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) for the development of national highway corridors under Bharatmala Pariyojana.

As of November 2023, a total of 15,045 km of the total project of 26,418 km have been completed and an amount of ₹ 4.10 lakh Cr. has been spent under Bharatmala Pariyojana up to October 2023. Separately, a sum of ₹ 78,349 Cr. has been set aside for road works, which includes six landing of crowded sections of the Golden Quadrilateral, road development in Naxal-hit areas and provisioning last-mile connectivity through State government's Public Works Department.

RAILWAYS

The Railways has spent up to 82 % of last year's allocation by the end of January. The Railway Ministry could only utilise ₹ 1.6 lakh Cr., based on the actual numbers released for 2022-23. The revised operating ratio for 2023-24 was 98.7 %, which is the ratio of working expenses to traffic earnings. The interim Budget has increased the allocation to the National High Speed Rail Corridor from ₹ 19,592 Cr. to ₹ 25,000 Cr.

The Centre will implement three major economic corridor programmes – energy, mineral, and cement corridor, also being referred to as Energy Economic Corridor; port connectivity corridor aka Rail Sagar; and high-traffic density corridors, aka Amrit Chaturbhuj. A total of 434 projects with an investment of ₹ 11 lakh Cr. will be rolled out under these programmes.

An integrated approach to Railway planning has been undertaken by consulting 18 Ministries and this plan has been in the works for the past two years. The Railways is planning to overhaul 40,000 coaches over the next five years at an expected cost of ₹ 15,200 Cr. to provide a better passenger experience similar to that of the Vande Bharat trains.

Experts say this is because the Railways is interested in opening up the market to private players.

AVIATION

The budgetary allocation for the regional connectivity scheme UDAN (Ude Desh Ka Aam Nagrik) spent on reviving unused and underused airports in tier-2 and tier-3 cities has been slashed by 60 % after a record-high grant last time. The number of airports in the country had doubled to 149 since 2014, and that "expansion of existing airports and development of new airports will continue expeditiously" at a time Indian airlines have placed an order of more than 1,000 aircraft. The interim Budget has allocated ₹ 1,158 Cr. for Air India to service the interest on some of the remaining debt.

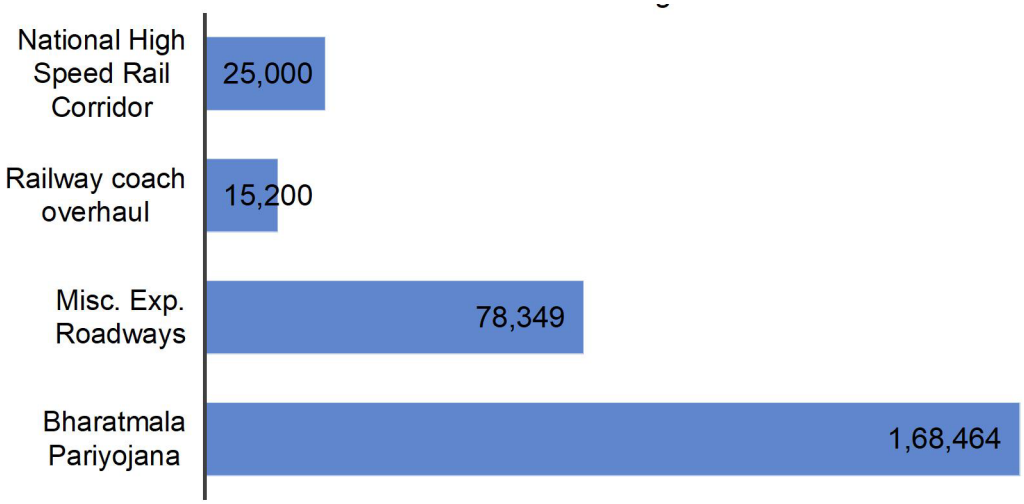


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of budgetary allocation in Crore (₹).

AFFORDABLE HOUSING SCHEME

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced launching a scheme to help "deserving sections of the middle class living in rented houses or slums or chawls and unauthorised colonies" buy or build houses. Approximately, 2 Cr. more houses would be built under the flagship Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY)-Rural. The PMAY has two components – PMAY (Urban) for the urban poor under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, and PMAY (Rural) for rural India under the Ministry of Rural Development. The total allocation for PMAY is ₹ 80,671 Cr., of which ₹ 54,500 Cr. is for PMAY (Rural).

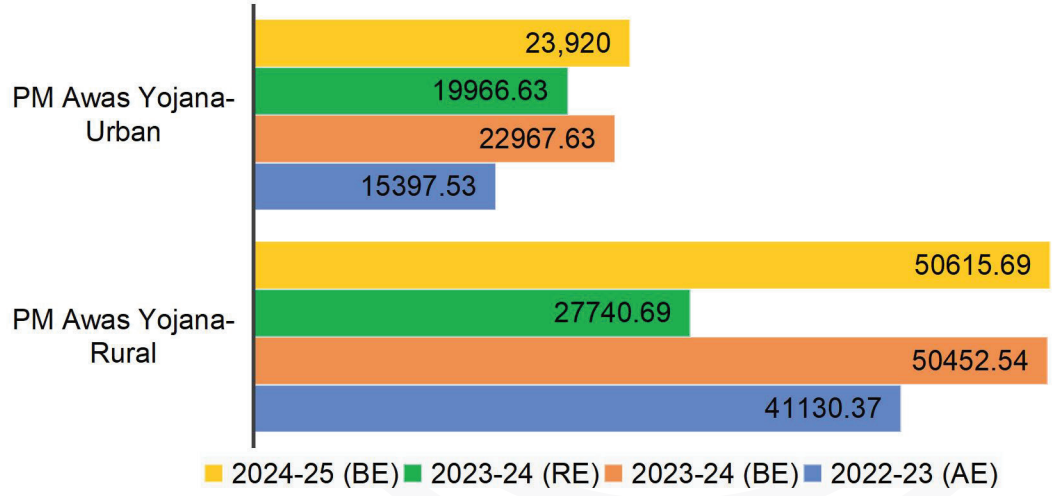


FIGURE: Bar chart representation

The interim Budget allocated ₹ 86,000 Cr. for Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme to provide employment opportunities for 5.6 Cr. BPL rural households. can provide for 25 to 30 days at most of work in a year. A crucial ₹ 3 lakh Cr. is essential to meet the employment needs of registered households under MGNREGS.

However, the allocated budget falls significantly short at a mere ₹ 86,000 Cr. Considering the outstanding dues in West Bengal that need clearing and the additional work requirements for the workers in the State this year, coupled with the historical trend of 15 to 20 % of the Budget being spent on clearing past dues, the allocation seems increasingly inadequate.

According to some estimates, as on February 1, the Centre owes ₹ 16,000 Cr. in wages to the State governments. The government has argued that MGNREGS is a dynamic scheme and the dues are cyclically paid. But for the last two years, the Centre has halted the programme in West Bengal, claiming corruption in implementation of the scheme. The Centre owes almost ₹ 7,000 Cr. to the State.

The 2024 Budget, though, breaks the continued trend of slashing the budget for the programme. In the 2023 Budget, only ₹ 60,000 Cr. was allocated which was 18 % lower than the ₹ 73,000 Cr. Budget estimates and 33 % lower than the ₹ 89,000 Cr. revised estimates for financial year 2023-24 for the scheme.

SOLAR PANELS TO GIVE FREE POWER TO 1 Cr. HOMES

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman reiterated that commitment to electrify 1 Cr. households via rooftop solar installations. The scheme enables households to obtain up to 300 units of free electricity every month, translating to benefits of ₹ 15,000 to 18,000 annually for households from free solar electricity, and selling of the surplus to the distribution companies.

The average all-India household consumption of electricity is about 100 units a month, with only a few places such as Delhi approaching close to 300 units. The net-metering policy allows users of rooftop solar power to supply their surplus power back to the grid, thus offsetting their electricity bills.

At present, India has about 11 GW of installed rooftop solar capacity, of which only 2.7 GW is in residential units and the rest in commercial or industrial spaces. About 20-25 GW worth of rooftop solar capacity could be supported through solarisation of one Cr. households. Residential consumers receive subsidised electricity from distribution companies, and if such households were to be 'solarised', it would save discoms about ₹ 2 lakh Cr. over the next 25 years (the solar plant's life). All States can leverage this opportunity as rooftop solar potential exists everywhere, unlike utility-scale solar (solar parks), which is primarily restricted to seven RE-rich States.

OFFSHORE WIND

The Budget announced a 'Viability Gap Funding' to support the capital-intensive offshore wind sector, of up to 1 GW capacity. The 'Viability Gap Funding' is expected to encourage private sector investments in the sector.

ASHA, ANGANWADI STAFF GET HEALTH COVER

Health cover under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana will be extended to all Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and anganwadi workers and helpers. India would utilise the services of the newly designed U-WIN platform for managing immunisation and the intensified efforts of Mission Indradhanush.

Other major announcements for the sector included utilising existing hospital infrastructure under various departments to offer medical seats to students and 'encouraging' HPV vaccination for girls in the 9-14 years age group for prevention of cervical cancer. The government also proposed to combine various schemes for maternity and childcare and bring them under one comprehensive programme.

CENTRE MOOTS ₹ 1 LAKH Cr. CORPUS FOR R&D

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman earmarked a corpus of ₹ 1 lakh Cr., available on 'minimal or nil interest rates' to "encourage" the private sector to invest in research and development in 'sunrise sectors'. It was not clear if this corpus was targeted at a specific Ministry or intended as a more broad-based encouragement to research.

A major long-standing concern of the government has been in getting private sector enterprises to invest in core R&D with nearly three-fourth of such expense now borne by the government. The Department of Science and Technology (DST) envisages an autonomous body with a corpus of ₹ 50,000 Cr., of which nearly ₹ 36,000 Cr. will come from the private sector and non-governmental sources. The DST has provisioned ₹ 2,000 Cr. in 2024-25 towards the NRF. A new scheme will be launched for strengthening deep-tech technologies for defence purposes and expediting 'atmanirbharta.'

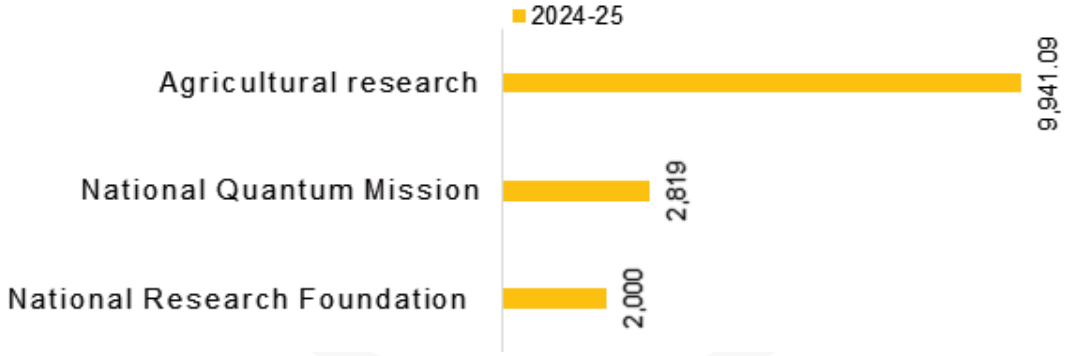


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of expenditures on research and development.

Lakhpati Didi SCHEME

The 'Lakhpati Didi' scheme seeks to train women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) to earn a sustainable income of at least ₹ 1 lakh per annum by setting up micro-enterprises within their villages. The Centre increased the target from the existing 2 Cr. to 3 Cr. women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for training under the 'Lakhpati Didi' for 2024-25. Eighty-three lakh women Self-Help Groups (SHGs) with 9 Cr. women are transforming rural socio-economic landscape with empowerment and self-reliance. Anganwadi Centres have been upgraded under "Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0" scheme for improved nutrition delivery, early childhood care and development.

SCHEME FOR BIO-MANUFACTURING, BIO-FOUNDRY

Union Finance Minister launched "a new scheme of bio-manufacturing and bio-foundry" to provide "environment-friendly alternatives such as biodegradable polymers, bio-plastics, bio-pharmaceuticals and bio-agri-inputs in a bid to have the bio-economy contribute $300 billion to the Indian economy by 2030, representing a jump of about ₹ 18 lakh Cr. in value from current levels, and $1 trillion by 2047. The products of the bio-economy also play key roles in India's sustainability and 'green' economy targets.

In the 2024-2025 Budget, the total allocation for the Department of Biotechnology (DBT) has been cut by 16 %, to ₹ 2,251.52 Cr., potentially slowing its recovery from the highs of the COVID-19 pandemic, when it helped develop vaccines, to the pre-pandemic level. The Biotechnology Industry Research Assistance Council (BIRAC), a public-sector enterprise under the DBT that interfaces between academia and industry, has been allocated ₹ 40 Cr., as in 2023-2024, even though its actual expenditure was higher. The new bio-manufacturing scheme "will also help in transforming contemporary consumptive manufacturing paradigm to the one based on regenerative principles.

SPACE PROGRAMME GETS NOMINAL HIKE OF 4%

The Department of Space has received only a nominal

increase of 4% in its allocation in the interim Union Budget for 2024-25, from ₹ 12,545 Cr. to ₹ 13,043 Cr. The Indian space programme will spend much of the year on pre-launch testing milestones for the lunar mission (Chandrayaan), human spaceflight (Gaganyaan) missions etc.

In 2023, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched and successfully executed its long-awaited Chandrayaan-3 mission. The ISRO also launched the Aditya-L1 mission to study the sun, and the XPoSat – short for 'X-ray Polarimetry Satellite' – mission to track and study neutron stars and black holes from space. India also signed the Artemis Accords to participate in the U.S. multilateral programme to return humans to the moon by 2025.

The major launches slated for 2024 include an uncrewed Gaganyaan test flight, the third developmental flight of the Small Satellite Launch Vehicle, and the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar mission. ISRO scientists have also been working on propellants, satellite propulsion systems, new launch vehicles, and technology transfer to the industry.

In her Budget speech, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a corpus of ₹ 1 lakh Cr., with five-decade interest-free loans, to boost private sector investment in research and development. While the details are not clear, India's nascent private spaceflight sector and its 200 or so start-ups are expected to benefit from this infusion. The revenue expenditure of IN-SPACe, the nodal agency setup by the Union Cabinet in 2020 to oversee the activities of this sector, also increased 24%. Similarly, revenue for space technologies – which includes work on Gaganyaan and the development of systems for new launch vehicles and spaceflight missions – increased 27%.

The 8% increase in the allocation for space technologies is, however, out of keeping with the work planned on Chandrayaan-4 and the Lunar Polar Exploration mission, a partially reusable launch vehicle, and others. Then again, the Department of Space underutilised its allocation for space technologies in 2023-24 by more than ₹ 1,500 Cr. Finally, expenditure for INSAT satellite systems was halved from ₹ 531 Cr. in 2023-24 to ₹ 276 Cr. in 2024-25.

GST RECEIPTS

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue for January stood at ₹ 1,72,129 Cr., surging 10.4 % Year-on-Year (Y-o-Y) realising the second-highest monthly collection ever and the third instance in the fiscal year 2023-24 where collections have exceeded ₹ 1.70 lakh Cr. The cumulative gross GST collection for the ten-month period from April 2023 to January 2024 stood at of ₹16.69 lakh Cr., growing on an Year – on -Year basis by 11.6 %.

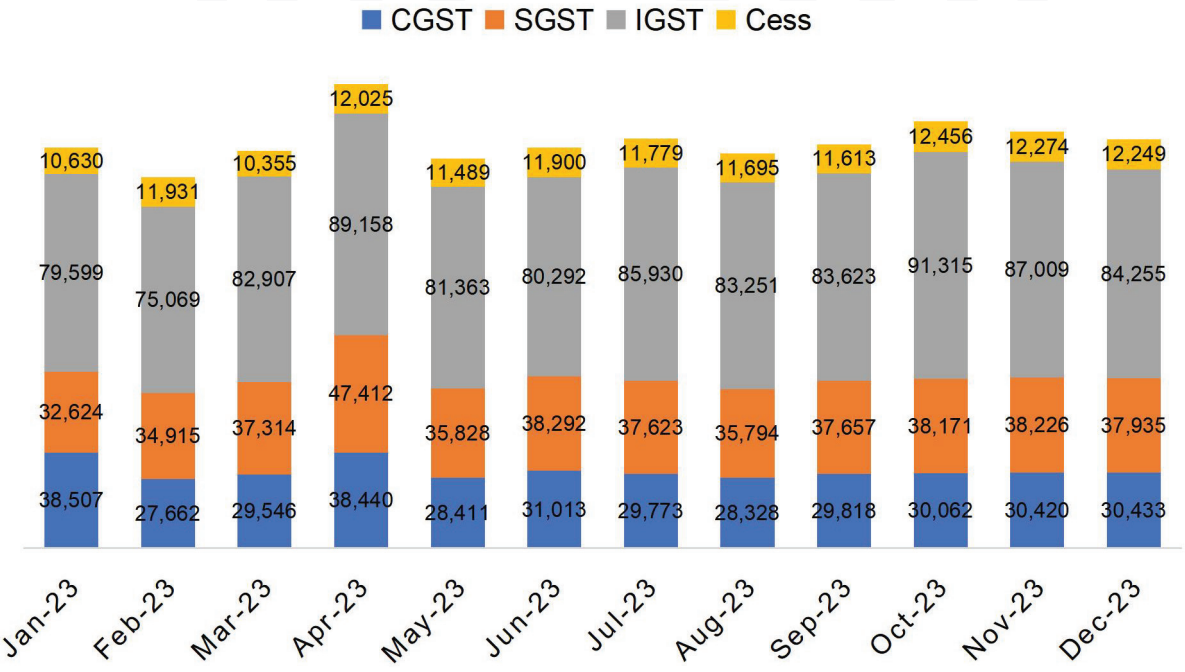


FIGURE: Column chart representation of components of GST receipts (Cr.) (on Y-o-Y basis).

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) has yielded close to ₹ 1.65 lakh Cr. in gross revenues in the last month of 2023, the seventh occasion in this fiscal year that GST revenues were over ₹ 1.6 lakh Cr.

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

MANUFACTURING & SERVICES SECTOR GROWTH:

MANUFACTURING PMI:

India's manufacturing industry improved substantially at the start of 2024 with factory activity expanding at its fastest pace in four months in January on robust demand and an upbeat year-ahead outlook. India will remain the fastest-growing major economy this year and next, bolstered by heavy government spending. The PMI's new orders sub-index, also supported by international demand, rose sharply to its highest since September, stretching the current sequence of expansion to over two-and-a-half years. Current output expanded on robust demand, with domestic orders growing at a faster pace than export orders.

The HSBC final India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index, compiled by S&P Global, rose to 56.5 in January from December's 18-month low of 54.9, although the final reading was a tad lower than a preliminary estimate of 56.9.
Strong demand and with an optimistic year-ahead outlook prompted firms to scale up their buying of raw materials. The future output sub-index strengthened to a 13-month high while purchasing rose at the fastest pace since September. However, there was hardly any change in employment levels from December as firms reported sufficient capacity for their current workloads. Despite input cost inflation ticking to a three-month high, the rate of increase was marginal. Prices charged increased mildly as firms passed on some of the additional cost burden to clients in response to greater rubber, steel, packing materials, transportation and wage costs. Inflation in India was near the upper limit of the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) target range of 2 % - 6 % in November and December but the central bank is not expected to cut interest rates until at least July.

SERVICES PMI:

India's services sector growth scaled a six-month high in January driven by higher demand and sales, as new orders with service providers rose the fastest since last July. The improvement in service sector growth follows a recovery in manufacturing, which hit a four-month-high during January, driven by a sharp uptick in orders amid mild input cost inflation. On the brighter side, January also saw gains for Indian services from across the globe, including from countries like Afghanistan, Australia, Brazil, China, Europe, the UAE and the US. Business confidence improved further at the start of the final fiscal quarter, with services companies at their most upbeat since last September.

The HSBC India Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), compiled by S&P, rose to 61.8 in January, up from 59 in December and from 56.9 in November. The HSBC Global India Services PMI is compiled from responses to questionnaires sent to about 400 service sector companies. However, the growth during January was still slower than in July, when India's PMI was at 62.3, the highest monthly reading for the service sector during the ongoing fiscal. The rise in services PMI to a six-month high will help India meet its targeted economic growth rate, which the Reserve Bank of India raised to 7% for FY24, from its earlier estimate of 6.5 %. India's services sector, one of the fastest growing in the world, contributes to over 50 % of its GDP.

Indian service companies noted a further increase in their overall expenses at the start of the 2024 calendar year, with food, labour and freight identified as the key cost pressures, and input price inflation reaching a five-month high. Besides demand strength, firms expect investment and productivity gains to induce output growth in the year ahead.

VEDHIK IAS ACADEMY
The New Learning Mantra
INDIA'S LARGEST ONLINE IAS COACHING ACADEMY

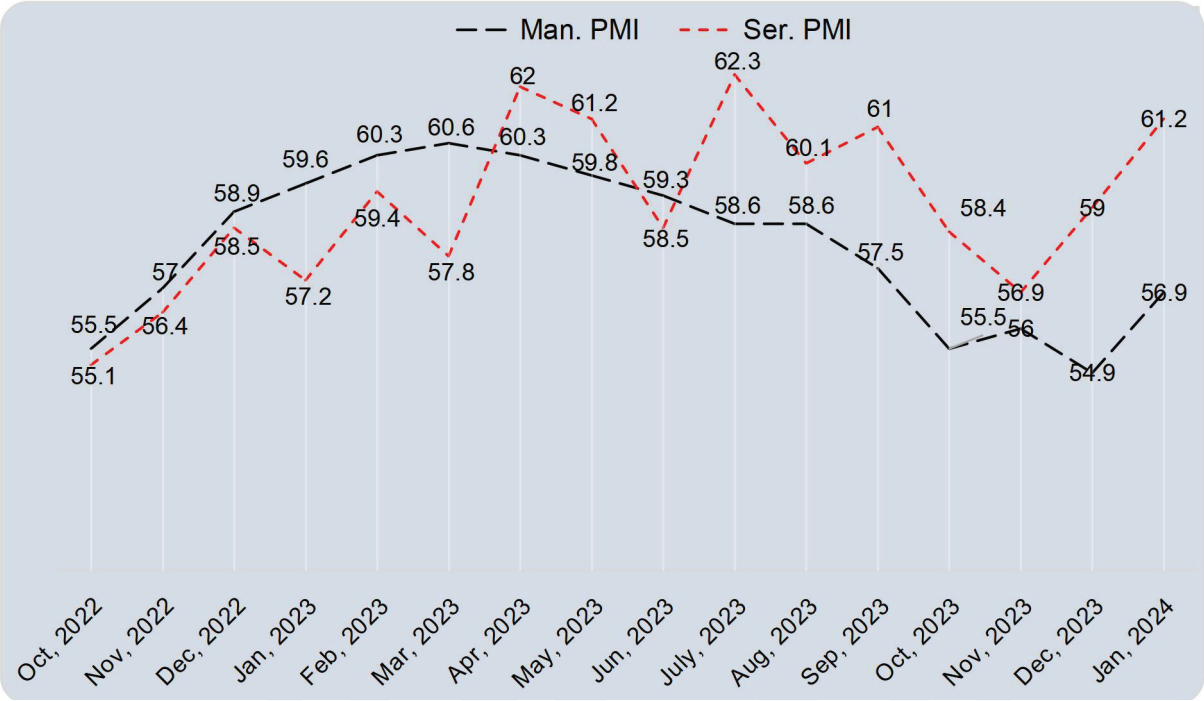


FIGURE: Column chart representation of the monthly S&P Global India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) and Services Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI).

INDEX OF INDUSTRIAL PRODUCTION

The Quick Estimates of Index of Industrial Production (IIP) for the month of December 2023 with Base Year (BY) 2011-12 shows a growth of 3.8 % on an Year on Year basis.

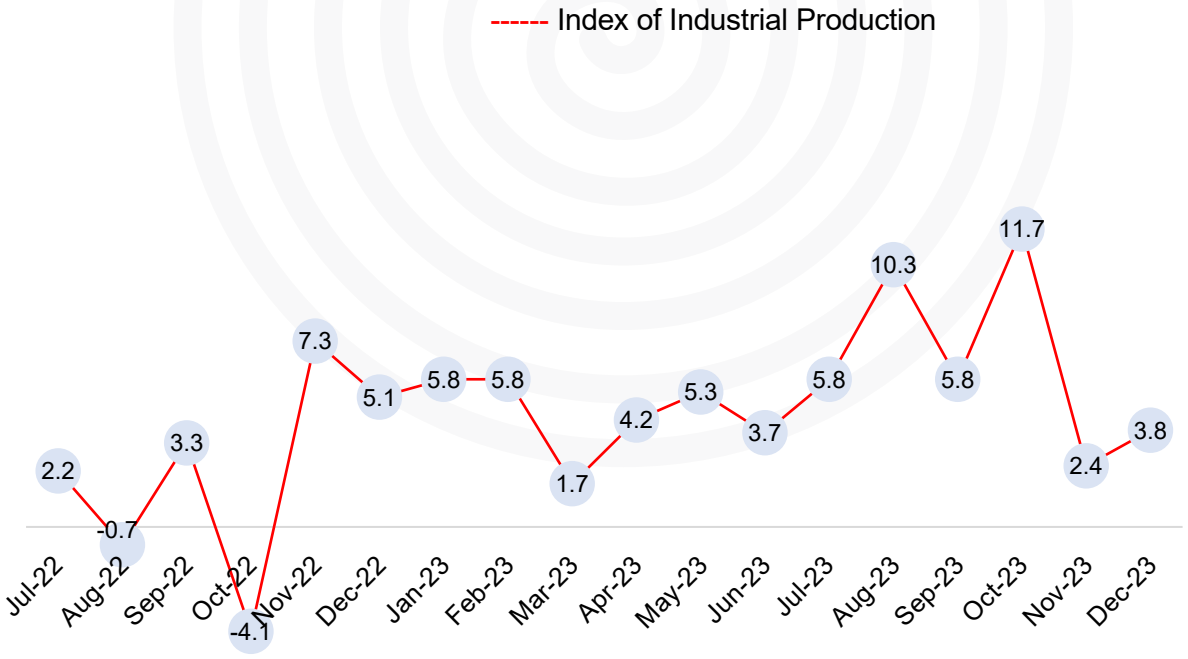


FIGURE: Line chart representation of the Index of Industrial Production growth rates (on Y-o-Y basis in per cent). Inset: Bar chart representation of the Indices of Industrial Productions of major items.

CORE SECTOR INDUSTRIES

The eight core industries' output growth slid to a 15-month low of 3.6 % in January 2024, with contractions emerging in refinery products and fertilizers and a sub-1 per cent rise in natural gas. Encouragingly, the other five components displayed a moderate-to-healthy expansion ranging from 5.2 percent to 10.2 percent in January 2024. Sequential trends were mixed as well, with only three indicators recording an improved year-on-year performance in January 2024 relative to December 2023, namely, crude oil, cement and electricity.

Sectorial monthly growth rates: Sector (per cent growth rates)
Fertiliser (-0.6), Steel (7), Refinery products (- 4.3), Crude oil (-0.4)
Cement (5.6), Coal (10.2), Natural Gas (5.5), Electricity (5.2)
(Source: Union Ministry of Commerce and Industries)

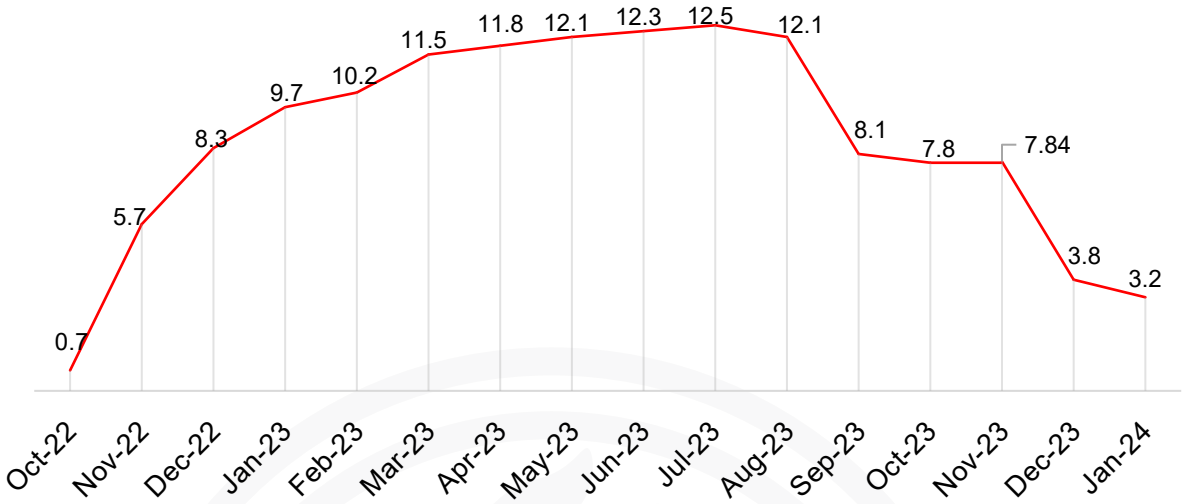


FIGURE: Line chart representation of the core sector growth rates (on Y-o-Y basis in per cent)

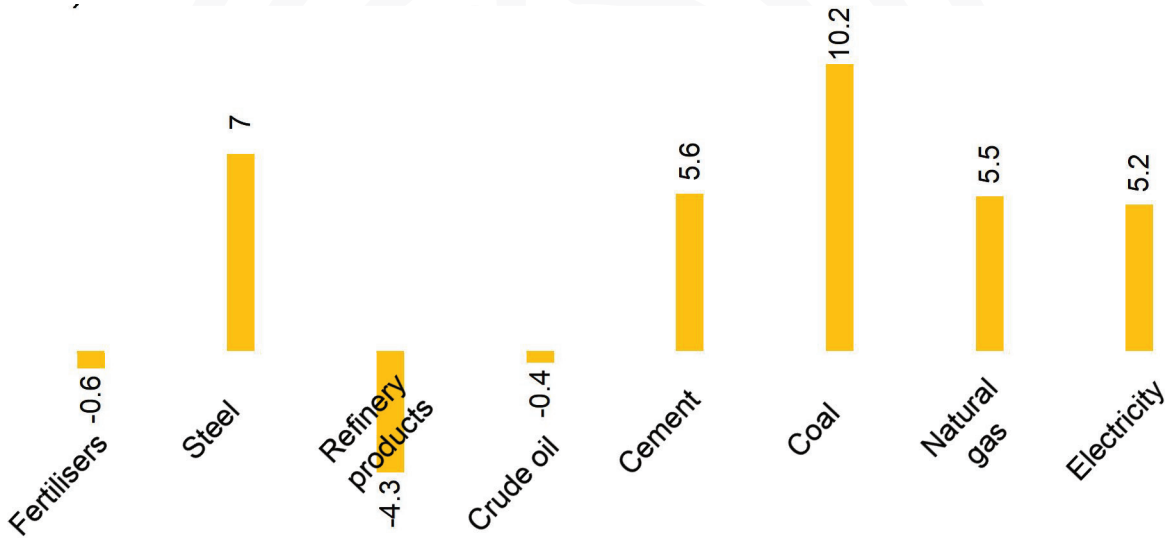


FIGURE: Line chart representation of the sub-sectorial growth rates **(on Y-o-Y basis in per cent) of core sector industries.**

RETAIL PRICE INFLATION

The National Statistical Office (NSO), Union Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) collect price data from selected 1114 urban Markets and 1181 villages covering all States/UTs through personal visits by field staff of Field Operations Division of NSO, MoSPI on a weekly roster to prepare All India Consumer Price Index (CPI) on Base 2012=100 and corresponding Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) for Rural (R), Urban (U) and Combined (C) for the month of January 2024 (Provisional).

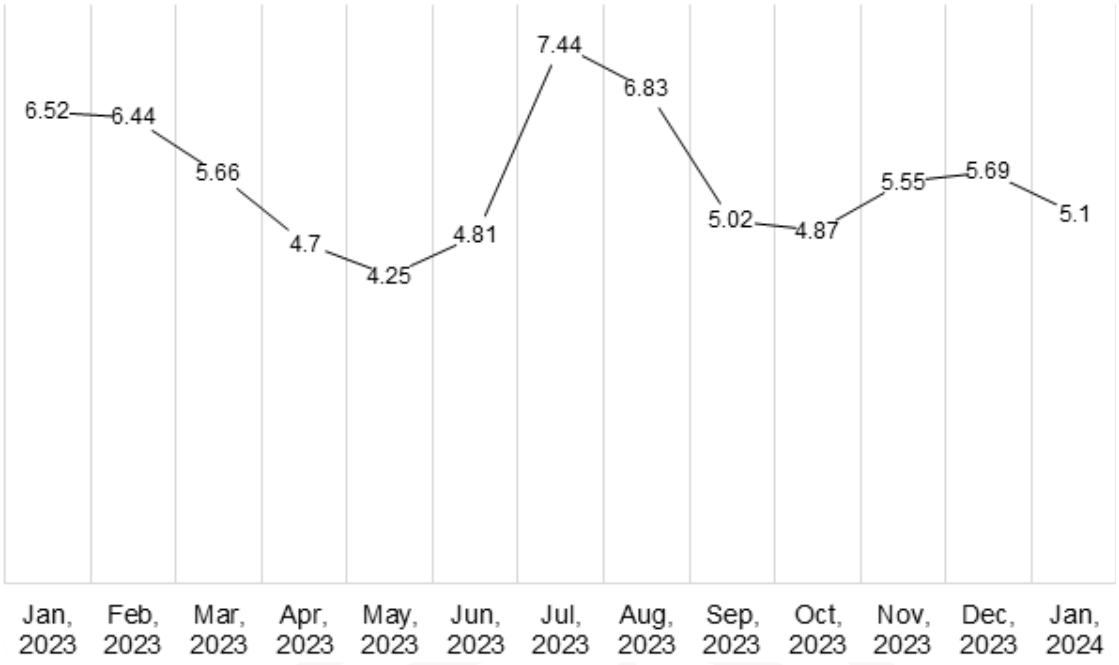


FIGURE: Line chart representation of retail price index-based inflation rates. Inset. Bar chart representation of the of All India Retail Price Indices for food articles and Rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for January, 2024.

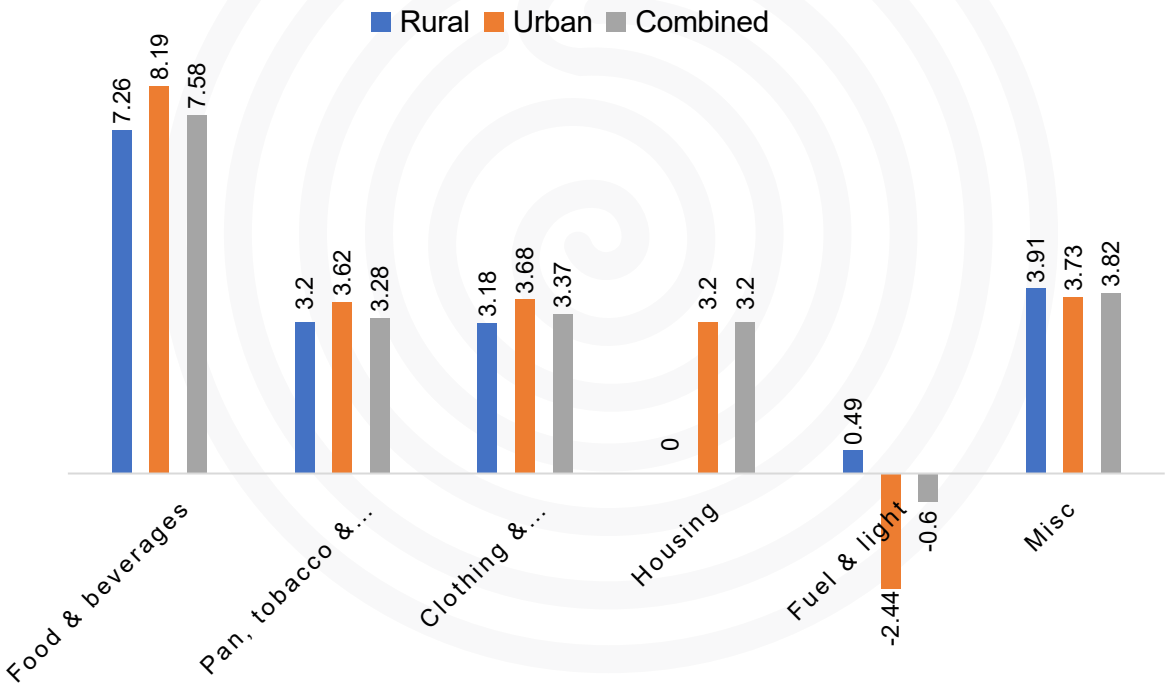
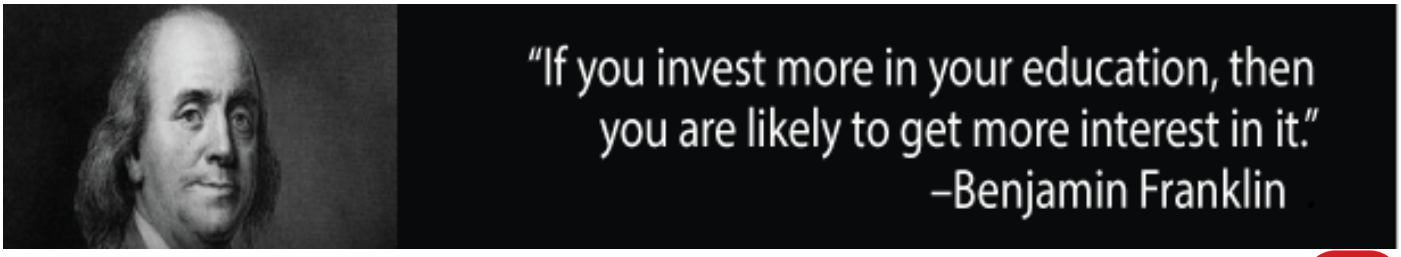


FIGURE: Column chart representation of All India Consumer Price Indices based rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for January, 2024.

WHOLESALE PRICE INFLATION

The annual rate of inflation based on all India Wholesale Price Index (WPI) number is 0.27% (Provisional) for the month of January, 2024 (over January, 2023). Positive rate of inflation in January, 2024 is primarily due to increase in prices of food articles, machinery & equipment, other manufacturing, minerals, other transport equipment etc.



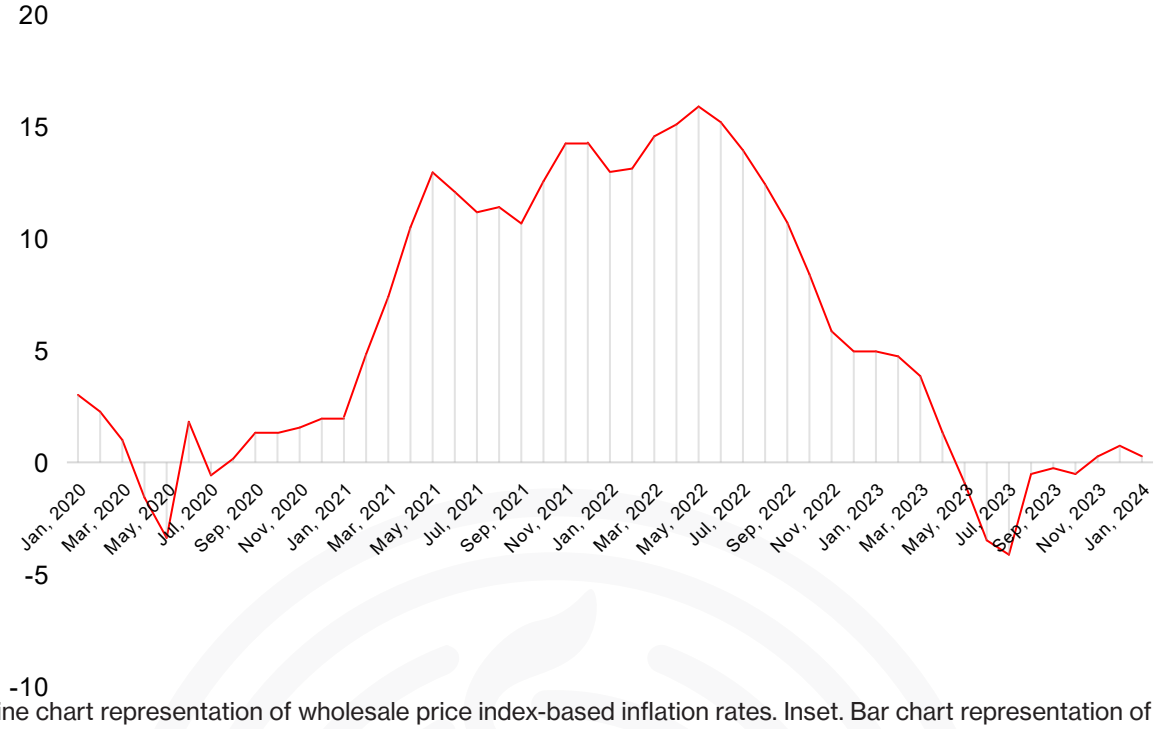


FIGURE: Line chart representation of wholesale price index-based inflation rates. Inset. Bar chart representation of the of **All India Wholesale Price Indices for** food articles and **Rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for January, 2024.**

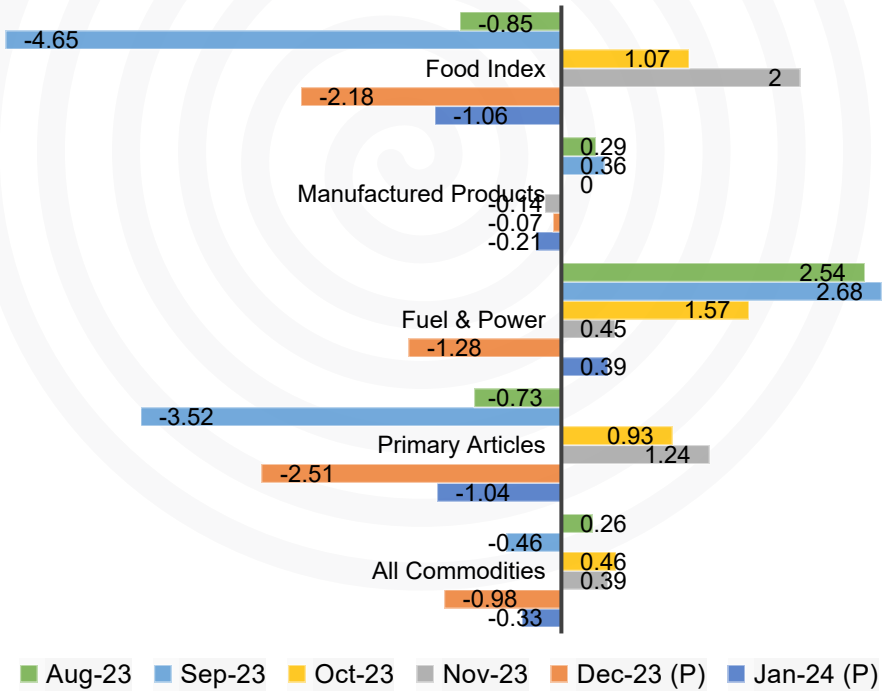


FIGURE: Line chart representation of wholesale price index-based inflation rates. Inset. Bar chart representation of the of **All India Wholesale Price Indices for** food articles and **Rates of Inflation (Base Year: 2011-12=100) for January, 2024.**

TRANSBORDER TRADE

India's overall exports (Merchandise and Services combined) in January 2024* is estimated to be USD 69.72 Billion, exhibiting a positive growth of 9.28 % over January 2023. Overall imports in January 2024* is estimated to be USD 70.46 Billion, exhibiting a positive growth of 4.15 % over January 2023.

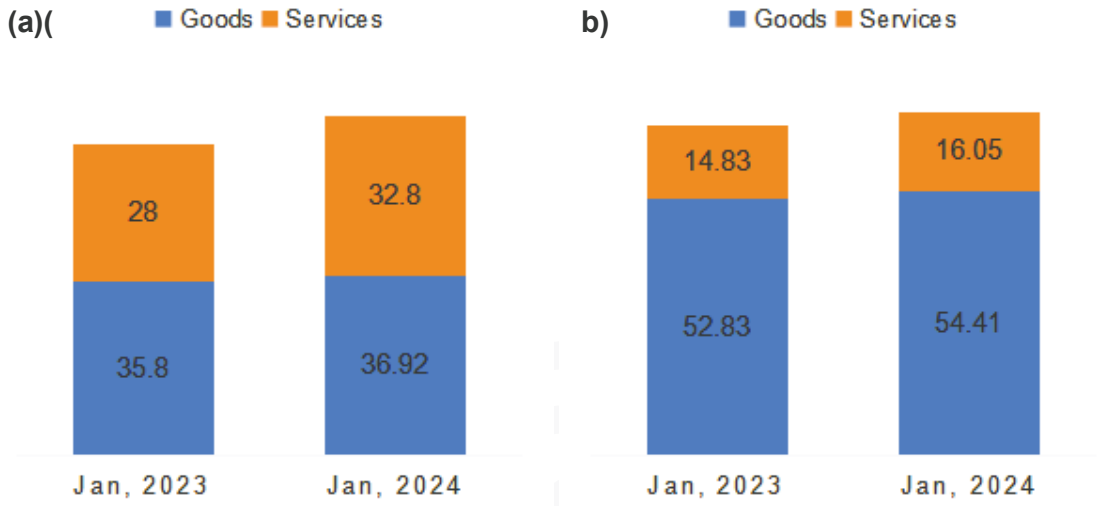


FIGURE: (L) Column chart representation of monthly value of exports of goods and services. (R) Column chart representation of monthly value of imports of goods and services.

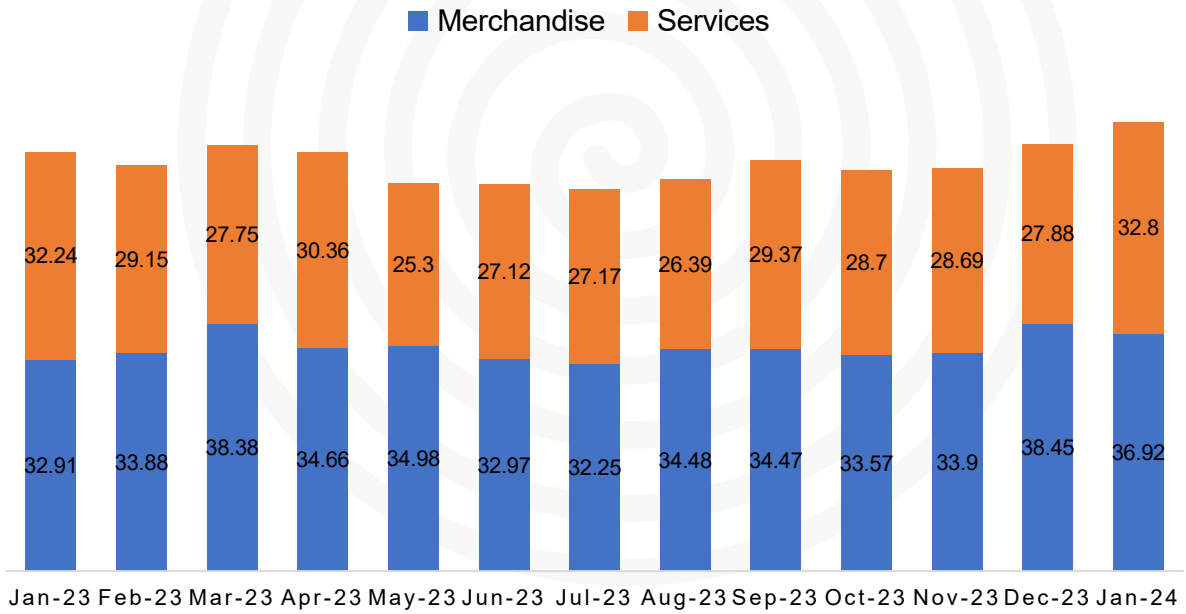


FIGURE: Column chart representation of monthly value of merchandise and services exports

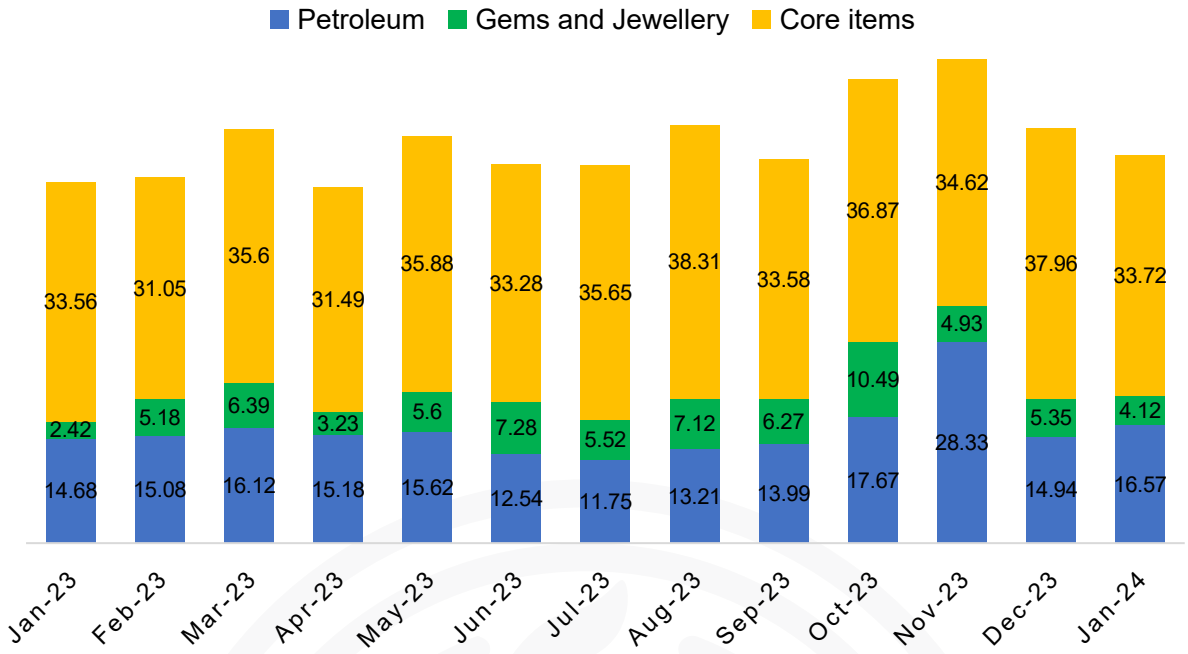


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the import profile of Indian imports. Gems & Jewellery*: Gold, Silver & Pearls, precious & Semi-precious stones.

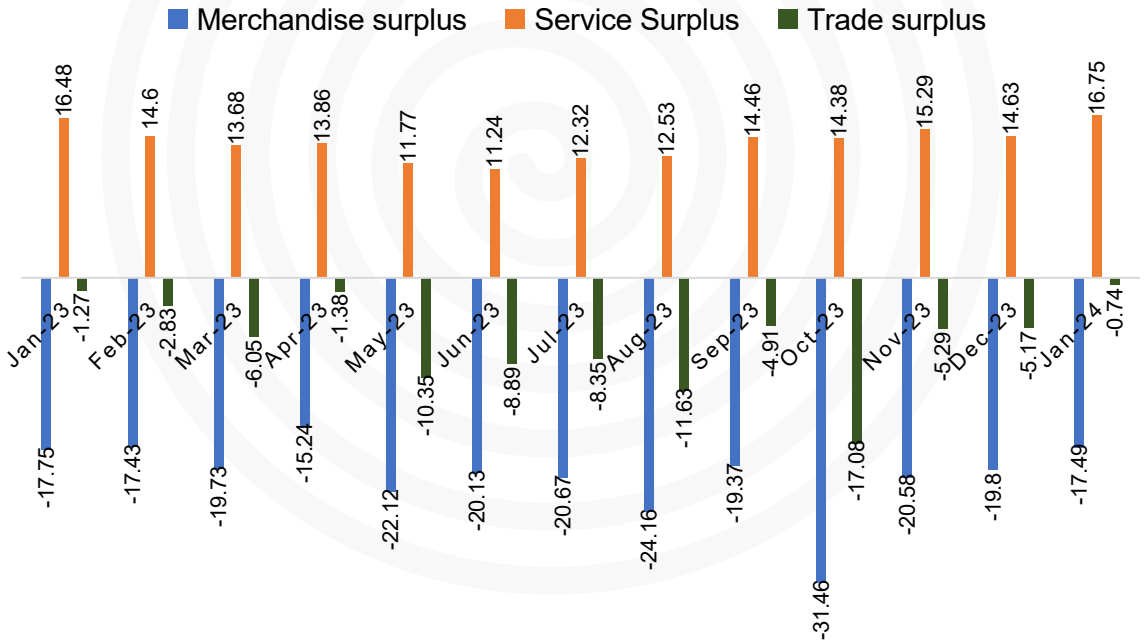


FIGURE: Column chart representation of trade surplus.

INDIA TO SURPASS GERMANY IN 2027

Japan has slipped behind Germany to fourth position among the world's largest economies in gross domestic product (GDP) terms. Japan, once projected to overtake the United States as the biggest economy stagnated and lost its competitiveness since 1990, after facing structural challenges and appreciation in currency.

According to latest GDP figures, the United Kingdom has slipped into a technical recession, with the economy contracting 0.3 % in Q4 2023 after a 0.1 % decline in Q3. Manufacturing, construction and wholesale were the largest contributors to the decrease in GDP in the fourth quarter. GDP per person has not grown since early 2022, representing the longest such unbroken run since records began in 1955.

Britain joins Japan among the Group of Seven advanced economies in a recession, although it is likely to be short-lived and shallow by historical standards. Britain's overall economic output still stands nearly 1% higher than pre-pandemic levels in late 2019, outperforming several major economies. But poor growth rates persisted through 2022 and 2023 compared to other G7 countries except Germany.

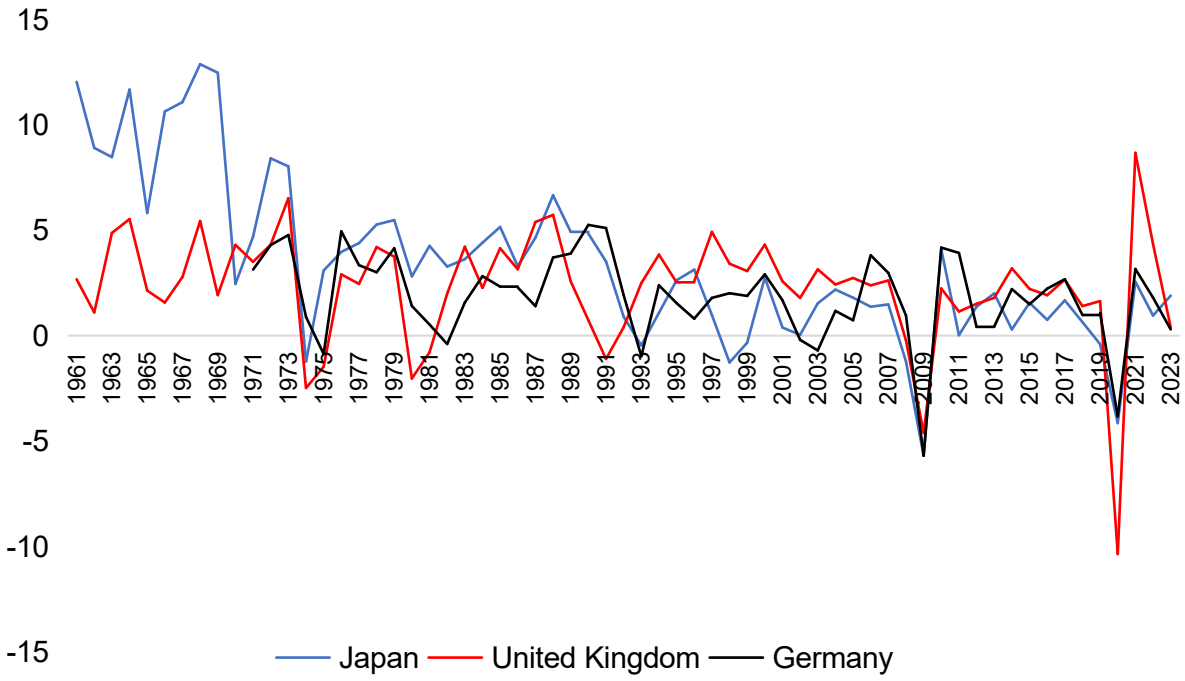


FIGURE: Line chart representation of GDP growth rates (1961-2-23)

BACKGROUND

In the 1970s-80s, Japan was widely predicted to become the world's largest economy based on rapid industrialization and growth. Japan's acute demographic struggles with a shrinking, aging population and severely low fertility rates greatly tightens labour force availability leading to uneven, unstable growth. In fact, Japan underwent a technical recession in late 2023 with two straight quarters of economic contraction due to such constraints.

The sharp depreciation of Japanese yen's, dropping 20 % against the US dollar over 2022-2023 boosted Japanese export competitiveness, benefiting some industries like automobiles. Japan's GDP grew 1.9 % in 2023 taking the GDP of Japan in terms of total dollar value amounting to $ 4.2 trillion.

Germany outperformed expectations, despite battling challenges including rising energy costs after the Ukraine invasion, skill shortages, higher interest rates and fiscal uncertainties. Germany's economy contracted 0.3 % in 2023 taking the GDP of Japan in terms of total dollar value amounting to $ 4.5 trillion.

Rising inflation, tax increases and higher interest rates have squeezed British consumer demand and business sentiment. Labour shortages have also impacted productivity. Global recession fears and trade barriers arising from Brexit hurt exports performance too. UK households face the worst living standards crunch in generations with real wage growth trailing steeply below inflation at 9 % - 10 %. This severely limits its purchasing power and spending.

India is projected to surpass Japan in economic output by 2026 and edge past Germany by 2027 as per IMF forecasts on the back of higher growth rates, favourable demographics and increased global competitiveness.

INDIA UNVEILS SCHEME TO BOOST PULSES OUTPUT

The Centre has announced a new policy at the Global Pulse Confederation (GPC)'s convention – Pulses 24, attended by top international and domestic players to promote domestic cultivation of pulses like lentils and encourage farmers to grow them instead of traditional crops with an objective to boost India's pulses output to attain self-sufficiency and reduce huge annual imports.

SALIENT FEATURES

- **ASSURED PROCUREMENTS:** Assured procurement at pre-fixed Minimum Support Prices (MSP) by public agencies namely the National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India (NAFED) and National Cooperative Consumers Federation (NCCF) for a period of 5 years from farmers. The procurement of pulses has increased by 18 times in the past decade and there has been a quantum jump in the MSP of all pulses.
- **REPLACING ACREAGE OF WHEAT/RICE:** Crop replacement diverting acreage traditionally allotted for wheat and rice with pulses and oilseeds through financial de-risking for farmers.
- **DEVELOPING DOMESTIC CAPACITY:** Enhance domestic productivity of lentils, pigeon peas and black gram to reduce import bills and associated vulnerabilities. India imports 3 – 3.5 MTPA. The Indian government is also working with Brazil and Argentina for the imports of urad as dependence on one country for imports poses risk.
- **ROADMAP FOR URAD AND TUR:** Designed large scale on-field demo projects starting 2023 Kharif season to familiarize techniques for farmers to increase yields of Urad and Tur dals with aim for self-sufficiency by 2027.
- **EXPONENTIAL PRODUCTION GROWTH:** India has managed to increase total annual pulses output from 17 MT in 2014 to 27 MT in 2023, a 60 % quantum leap in about a decade highlighting policy successes.
- **PRICE SUPPORT HIKE:** MSP rates for all pulses have also witnessed significant jumps in alignment with cultivation costs and inflation indexes.

NAFED AND NCCF

The National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd (NAFED) and National Cooperative Consumer Federation India Ltd (NCCF) are apex organizations for the cooperatives network across rural India. They aim to promote farmer producer organizations and steer procurement of agri-commodities to ensure stable crop prices and safeguard farm incomes.

PRADHAN MANTRI MATSYA KISAN SAMRIDHI SAH-YOJANA (PM-MKSSY)

The Union Cabinet approved the "Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY)", a Central Sector Sub-scheme under the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada aimed at formalizing the fisheries sector and supporting fisheries micro and small enterprises.

India is the SECOND MAJOR PRODUCER of fish through aquaculture in the world. India, the FOURTH LARGEST EXPORTER of fish in the world contributes 7.7 % to global fish production. Fisheries sector DIRECTLY EMPLOYS 1.6 Cr. and INDIRECTLY EMPLOYS 3.2 Cr. along the value chain.

SALIENT FEATURES:

The Pradhan Mantri Matsya Kisan Samridhi Sah-Yojana (PM-MKSSY) will be implemented from FY 2023-24 to FY 2026-27 in all States/Union Territories with an estimated outlay of ₹ 6,000 Cr. Almost, 50 % of the investment will be public finance and 50 % is expected from the private sector. The scheme targets fishers, fish farmers, fish vendors, micro and small enterprises, cooperatives, self-help groups, and other entities engaged in fisheries value chains.

OBJECTIVES:

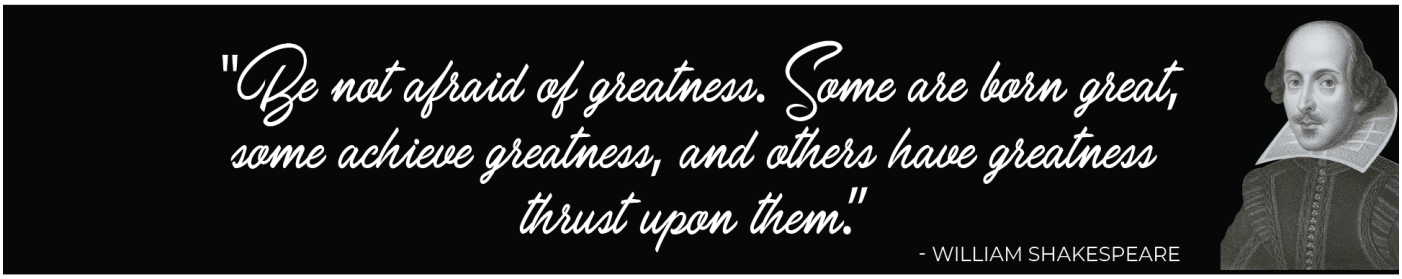
- Create a digital platform for registering 40 lakh micro and small fisheries enterprises.
- Facilitate institutional credit access for 6.4 lakh micro-enterprises and 5,500 cooperatives.
- Shift from subsidies to performance-based incentives.
- Improve value chain efficiency and ensure safe, quality fish.
- Promote sustainability and ease of doing business.
- provide insurance coverage against crop losses.
- Enhance export competitiveness through value addition.

MAJOR COMPONENTS

- Formalization of the sector through a digital platform.
- Facilitating aquaculture insurance adoption.
- Performance grants to improve value chain efficiencies.
- Grants for adopting safety and quality assurance systems.
- Project monitoring and management.

EXPECTED IMPACT

- Creation of 7 lakh new jobs with a focus on women employment.
- Enhanced incomes due to value chain efficiencies and profit margins.
- Improved quality and safety standards in domestic fish market.
- Empowerment of women through job creation and safe workplaces.



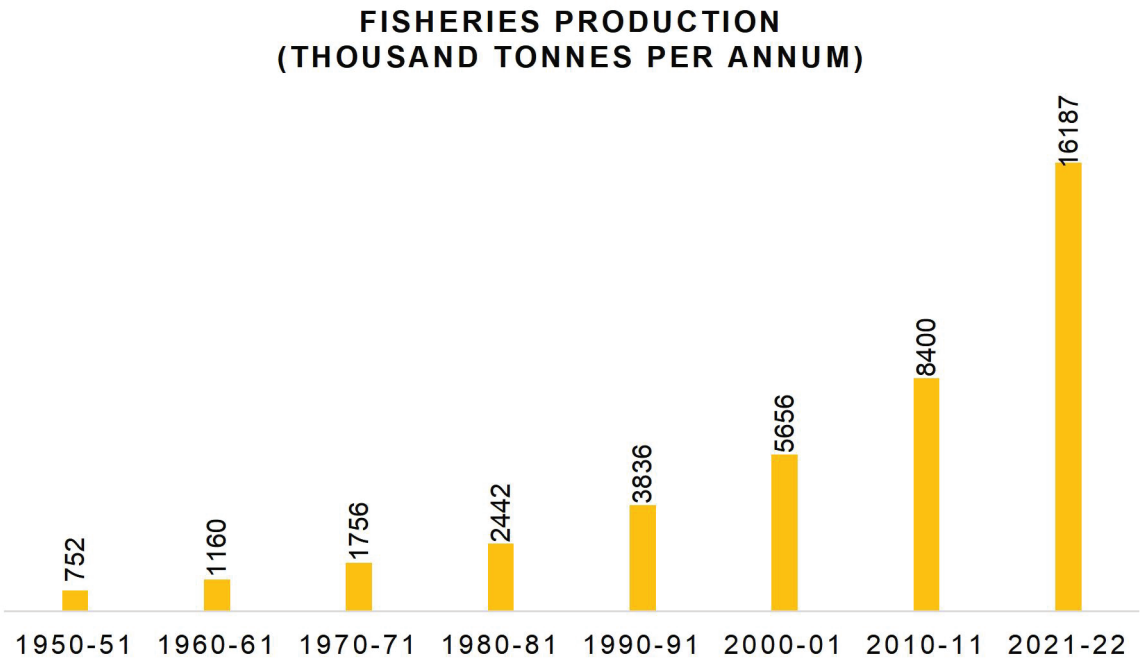


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the domestic fisheries production (Thousand tonnes per annum).

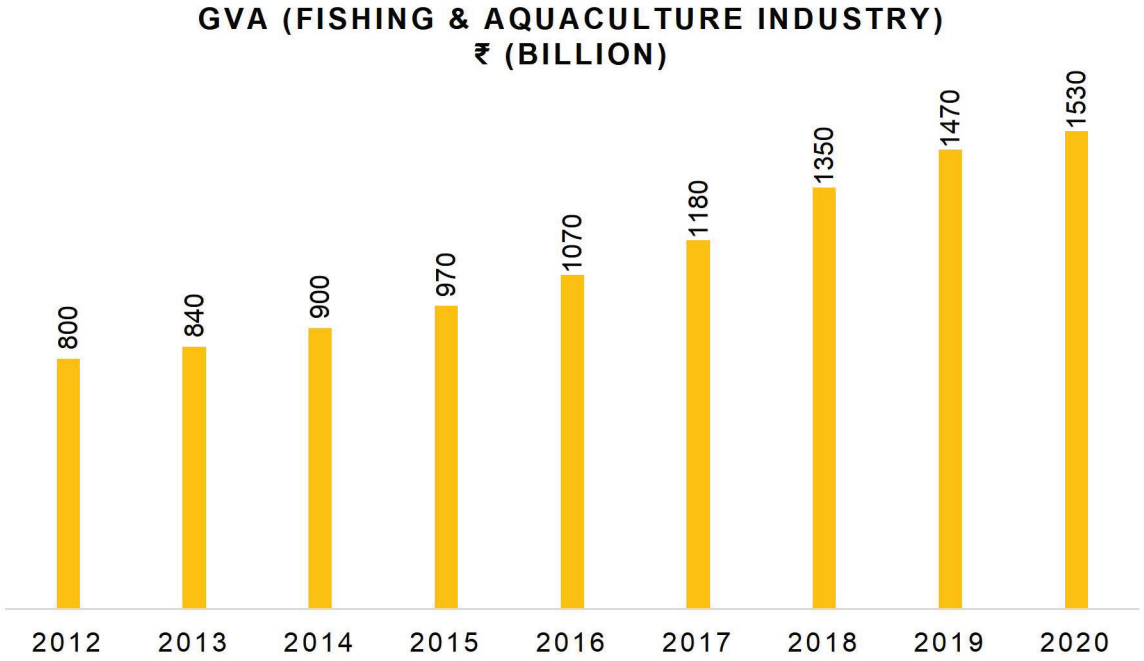


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the Gross value added from the fishing and aquaculture industry in India from financial year 2012 to 2020(in billion Indian rupees)

PRADHAN MANTRI MATSYA SAMPADA YOJANA

The Centre launched the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana for a period of 5 years from FY 2020-21 to FY 2024-25 with a total estimated investment of ₹ 20,050 Cr.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- ~ Harness potential of fisheries sector in a sustainable, responsible, inclusive and equitable manner
- ~ Doubling fishers and fish farmers' incomes and generation of employment
- ~ Enhancing contribution to Agriculture GVA and exports
- ~ Social, physical and economic security for fishers and fish farmers

The PM-MKSSY has the potential to significantly benefit the fisheries sector and improve the livelihoods of fishers and fish farmers. However, its success will depend on effective implementation, monitoring, and evaluation, as well as addressing any challenges that may arise.

The components of the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana include

- **ENHANCEMENT OF PRODUCTION AND PRODUCTIVITY:** Address critical gaps to ensure expansion, intensification, diversification and productive utilization of land and water to increase the fish production and productivity.

- **INFRASTRUCTURE AND POST-HARVEST** MANAGEMENT: Modernising and strengthening of value chain - post-harvest infrastructure and management to enhance quality.
- **FISHERIES MANAGEMENT AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK:** Establish a robust fisheries management framework for traceability and welfare of fishermen.

CONCLUSION: The fisheries sector has seen growth in production and exports from 2013-14 to 2022-23. However, challenges like informality, lack of insurance, poor credit access, and quality issues persist. The new scheme aims to address these issues with a total outlay of ₹ 6,000 Cr. Fisheries and aquaculture are an important source of food, nutrition, employment and income in India. Fish being an affordable and rich source of animal protein, is one of the healthiest options to mitigate hunger and malnutrition. The sector has immense potential to double the fishers and fish farmers' incomes as envisioned by government and usher in economic prosperity.

BENEFICIARIES
Fishers
Fish farmers
Fish workers and Fish vendors
Fisheries Development corporations
SHGs/JLGs in fisheries sector
Fisheries cooperatives
Fisheries Federations
Entrepreneurs and private firms
Fish FFPOs / Cs
SCs/STs/Women/Differently abled

RBI SUSPENDS CORE SERVICES OF PAYTM PAYMENTS BANK

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has barred Paytm Payments Bank from onboarding new customers and offering services like digital wallets and UPI transactions from March 1, 2024, effectively cripples most operations of the payments bank.

As per the RBI directive, Paytm Payments Bank cannot offer services like accepting fresh deposits, issuing credit and debit cards, opening current and savings accounts, and providing payment aggregator services. It also cannot enable transactions via UPI, IMPS, NEFT, RTGS or issue FASTags and Rupay cards. The bank can only allow withdrawals from existing accounts and balances. All pipeline transactions initiated before March 1 should be settled by March 15.

BACKGROUND

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had raised concerns regarding KYC compliance, IT systems, and data sharing with Chinese investors. Earlier in 2018, Paytm Payments Bank faced scrutiny over processes for user onboarding, KYC norms, maintaining arm's length from the promoter entity, and meeting the net worth criteria.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has been wary of Chinese investments in Paytm since Ant Financial, an Alibaba affiliate, holds around 10 % stake in One97 Communications, the parent firm of Paytm Payments Bank. With India-China tensions, Chinese investments have faced increased scrutiny. Paytm was unable to address RBI's concerns over data access by Chinese shareholders.

In March 2022, RBI had ordered stopping onboarding of new customers due to persistent non-compliance and material supervisory concerns. In October 2022, RBI had imposed a ₹ 5.4 Cr. penalty on Paytm Payments Bank for non-compliance related to identifying beneficial owners, monitoring suspicious transactions, and cyber security incident reporting delays.

IMPACT ON INDIA'S FINTECH SECTOR

The suspension of core services of Paytm Payments Bank is likely to impact a large customer base, including over 100 million KYC-verified users and 8 million FASTags issued. However, customers can withdraw their account balances without restrictions.

Paytm, a poster boy of India's fintech revolution was one of the biggest beneficiaries of demonetization in 2016. It pioneered digital payments in India. However, the RBI action represents tightening regulation for the fintech sector. Other firms will also face increased scrutiny and need to ensure full compliance. The Paytm saga is a reminder that growth with weak foundations cannot be sustained. This will push fintech firms to strengthen their risk management, compliance and corporate governance.

RBI'S DIGITAL PAYMENTS INDEX RISES IN SEPTEMBER 2023

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Digital Payments Index increased to 418.77 in September 2023 from 395.57 in March 2023.

RBI DIGITAL PAYMENTS INDEX (RBI-DPI)

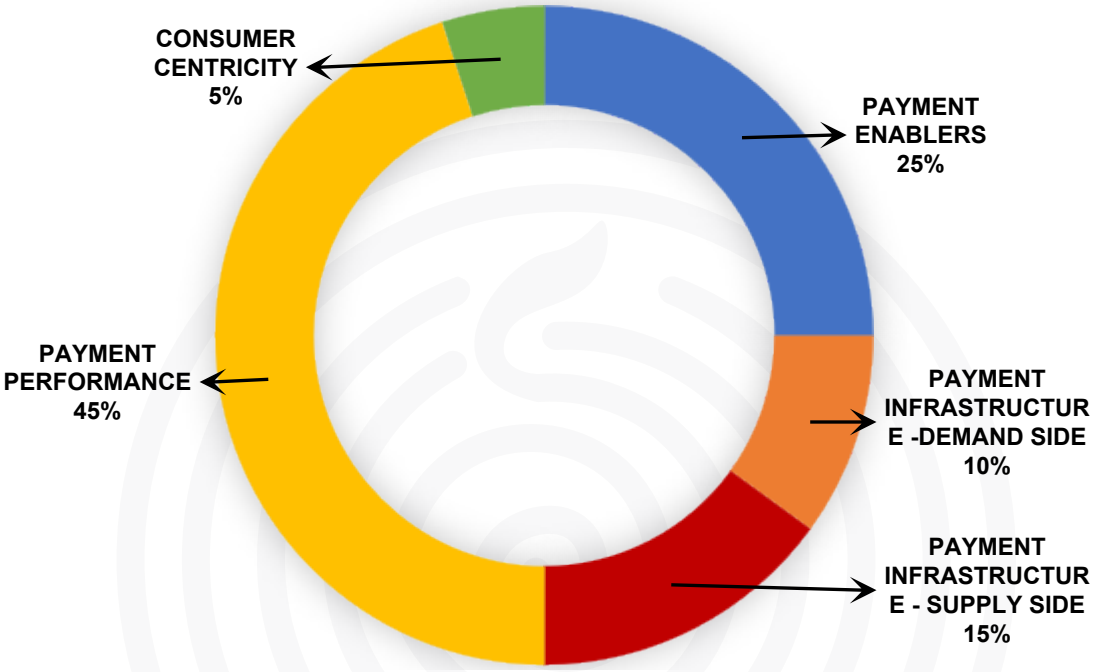
- **LAUNCHED:** January 2021.
- **PUBLISHER:** Reserve Bank of India (RBI)
- **MANDATE:** Captures the extent of digitisation of payments across the country (with 2018 as a base year-score set as 100)
- **FREQUENCY OF PUBLICATION:** Semi-annual with a lag of four months.

RBI PUBLICATIONS

- Consumer Confidence Survey (CCS – Quarterly)
- Inflation Expectations Survey of Households (IESH – Quarterly)
- Financial Stability Report (Half-Yearly)
- Monetary Policy Report (Half-Yearly)
- Report on Foreign Exchange Reserves (Half-Yearly)

RECENT INITIATIVES: RBI launched the Payments Infrastructure Development Fund (PIDF)to encourage acquirers to deploy Points of Sale (PoS) infrastructure – both physical and digital modes – in Tier III to Tier VI centres and north-eastern states.

PAYMENT ENABLERS	PAYMENT INFRASTRUCTURE -DEMAND SIDE	PAYMENT INFRASTRUCTURE - SUPPLY SIDE	PAYMENT PERFORMANCE	CONSUMER CENTRICITY
Internet Mobile Aadhar Bank Accounts Participants Merchants	Debit Cards Credit Cards PPIs FASTags Mobile Banking	Bank Branches Business Correspondent ATMs Pos Terminals QR Codes Intermediaries	Digital Payment Systems Unique systems Paper currency Currency circulation Cash withdrawals	Awareness and Education Declines Complaints Frauds System Downtime



CONCLUSION:

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Digital Payments Index measure the extent of digitisation of payments across the country. The RBI-DPI index has increased across all parameters and was driven particularly by growth in payment enablers, payment performance, and consumer centricity across the country over the period.

UNION CABINET APPROVES EXTENSION OF SUBSIDISED SUGAR SCHEME AND OTHER SCHEMES

The Union Cabinet has recently given its approval to a series of key economic decisions, including the extension of several schemes such as the Subsidised Sugar Scheme. These initiatives are expected to significantly influence India's economy and provide support to the most vulnerable sections of society.

Subsidised Sugar Scheme

The Union Cabinet has extended the Subsidised Sugar Scheme, which aims to provide sugar at subsidized rates to Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) families, until 31st March 2026. This scheme is designed to improve the health of the poorest citizens by supplementing their diet with sugar. The Central Government provides a subsidy of ₹ 18.50 per kg per month of sugar to AAY families in participating States. The extension of this scheme is will provide benefits exceeding Rs.1850 crore during the period of the 15th Finance Commission (2020-21 to 2025-26). In addition to this scheme, the Government of India also offers free ration under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PM-GKAY) and sells essential food items like 'Bharat Atta,' 'Bharat Dal,' 'Bharat Rice', tomatoes, and onions at affordable prices.

Rebate Scheme for Apparel/Garment Exports

The Cabinet has approved the continuation of the Scheme for Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) for export of apparel and garments until 31st March 2026. The extension of this scheme is expected to provide a stable policy environment for long-term trade planning, particularly in the textiles sector. Textile products not covered under the RoSCTL can avail benefits under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP).

Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund

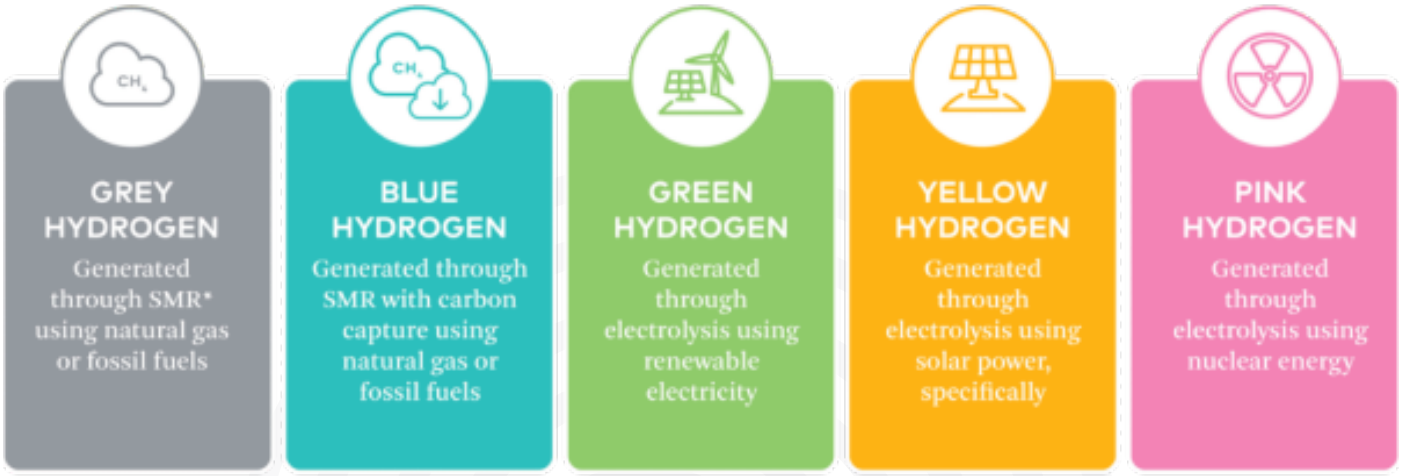
The Animal Husbandry Infrastructure Development Fund (AIHDF) has also been extended for another three years, up to 2025-26. The AIHDF aims to encourage investments in dairy processing, product diversification, meat processing, animal feed plants, and breed multiplication farms. The Government of India will provide a 3 % interest subvention for 8 years with a two-year moratorium for loans up to 90 % from scheduled banks and other financial institutions.

UNION CABINET APPROVES EXTENSION OF SUBSIDISED SUGAR SCHEME AND OTHER SCHEMES

Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL), Kerala has signed an agreement with Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) for establishing a green hydrogen production facility within CIAL's premises. The green hydrogen plant on the airport premises will make Cochin International Airport Limited (CIAL), the first airport operator in the world to have a hydrogen power generation facility on its premises.

CATEGORISATION OF HYDROGEN

Depending on the nature of the method of its extraction, hydrogen is categorised into multiple categories, such as, Grey, Blue and Green etc.



GREEN HYDROGEN

Green hydrogen refers to hydrogen produced using renewable energy sources like solar or wind instead of fossil fuels, hence it has zero carbon emissions. It is produced through a process called electrolysis which separates hydrogen and oxygen from water. As a clean fuel, green hydrogen is important for sustainable future across sectors including transportation.

SIGNIFICANCE OF GREEN HYDROGEN

India has set its sight on becoming energy independent by 2047 and achieving Net Zero by 2070. To achieve this target, increasing renewable energy use across all economic spheres is central to India's Energy Transition. Green Hydrogen is considered a promising alternative for enabling this transition. Hydrogen can be utilized for long-duration storage of renewable energy, replacement of fossil fuels in industry, clean transportation, and potentially also for decentralized power generation, aviation, and marine transport. The Government launched the National Green Hydrogen Mission to achieve its clean energy transition goals.

KERALA HYDROGEN ROADMAP

CIAL's green hydrogen aspirations mirrors state government's broader blueprint for transitioning mobility, energy and industrial sectors to hydrogen-based technologies mapped in 2021 policy eyeing 25 % mix target by 2030 and leveraging Kerala's high renewables share.

SPACE FOR ROUGH WORK

ECOLOGY

- SNOW LEOPARDS IN INDIA: CURRENT STATUS
- RECORD WARMTH: JANUARY 2024'S GLOBAL TEMPERATURE
- RECORD WARMTH: JANUARY 2024'S GLOBAL TEMPERATURE
- ODISHA DESIGNATES GUPTESWAR, KORAPUT AS FOURTH BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE SITE
- KERALA URGES CENTRE TO AMEND WILDLIFE PROTECTION ACT
- THANTHAI PERIYAR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY
- WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2024
- BLACK-NECKED CRANE
- WORLD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT 2024
- GREENING AND RESTORATION OF WASTELAND WITH AGROFORESTRY (GROW) REPORT AND PORTAL
- SPECIES THREAT ABATEMENT RESTORATION (STAR)

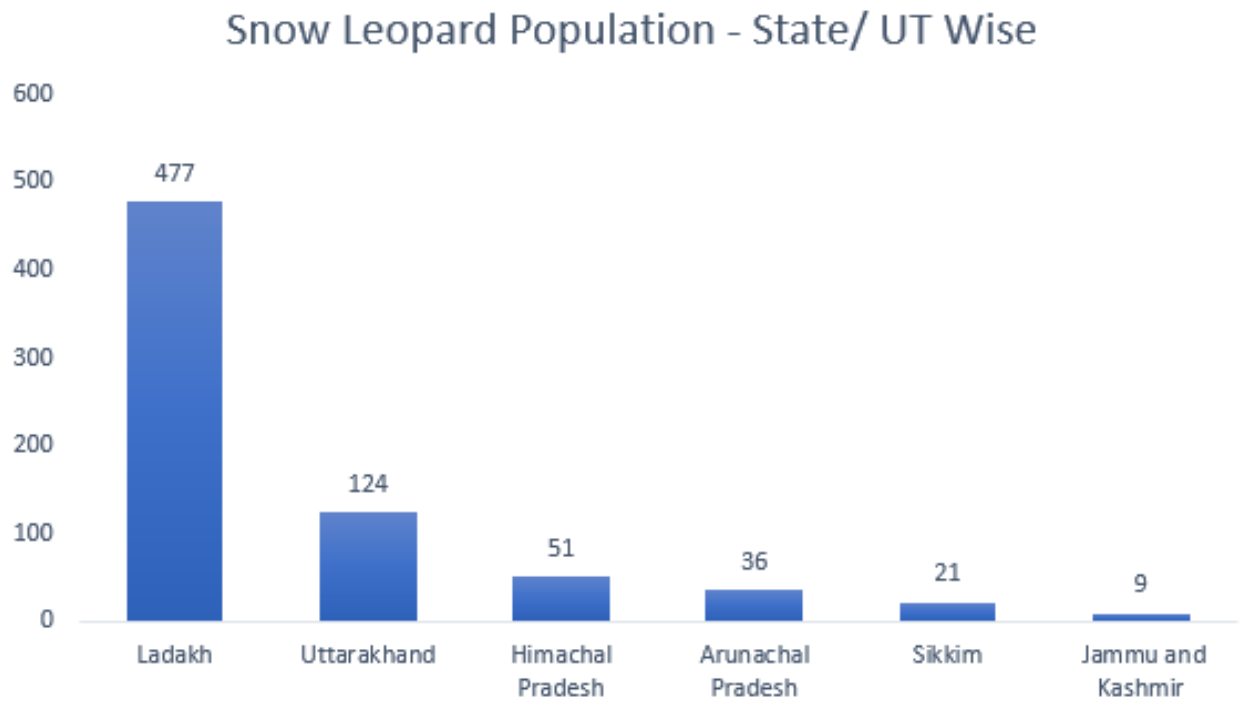
SNOW LEOPARDS IN INDIA: CURRENT STATUS

CONTEXT: Environment Minister releases India's first Snow Leopard Population Assessment, revealing 718 individuals, during the National Board for Wildlife meeting in New Delhi.

HIGHLIGHTS: The Wildlife Institute of India (WII), with support from snow leopard range states and conservation partners, conducted the Snow Leopard Population Assessment of India (SPAI) from 2019 to 2023. Spanning over 120,000km2, it covered 70% of potential snow leopard habitat, involving various stakeholders in a meticulous two-step framework.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Evaluation of Snow Leopard Distribution: Utilized habitat covariates, aligned with national assessment guidelines, employing occupancy-based sampling approach.
- Improved Understanding of Range: Previously undefined areas surveyed, substantial increase in coverage, enhanced through recent status surveys.
- Abundance Estimation: Employed camera traps in stratified regions for estimating snow leopard numbers.



- Proposal for Snow Leopard Cell: Suggested establishment at WII under MoEFCC, focusing on long-term monitoring with structured designs.
- Importance of Consistent Monitoring: Crucial for long-term survival, emphasizes need for regular field surveys.
- Periodic Population Estimation: States and UTs encouraged to adopt approach every four years in snow leopard range.
- Insights for Conservation Strategies: Regular assessments aid in identifying challenges, addressing threats, and formulating effective conservation plans.

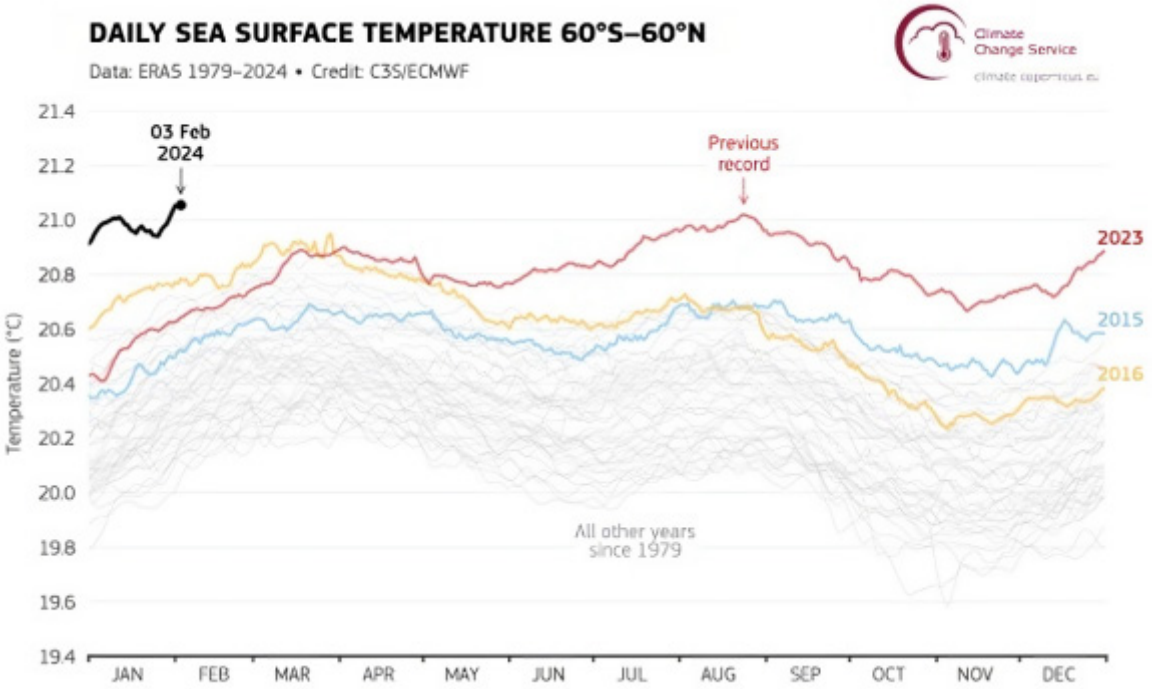
RECORD WARMTH: JANUARY 2024'S GLOBAL TEMPERATURE

CONTEXT: Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S) report highlights record-breaking heat in 2023, signalling climate change urgency, with 2024 projected to be hotter.

Surface and Sea Temperatures: Key Highlights

- **Record Warmth in January 2024:** Global surface air temperature highest on record, surpassing 2020 by 0.12°C.
- **Continued Warmth Trend:** Eighth consecutive month with record warmth, setting new highs for each respective month.
- **Temperature Anomalies:** January 2024 warmer than before July 2023 but cooler than the previous six months.
- **Pre-industrial Comparison:** January 2024 1.66°C warmer than the 1850-1900 average, designated pre-industrial period.
- **Highest Twelve-Month Average:** Feb 2023 – Jan 2024 records highest global mean temperature, surpassing pre-industrial levels.
- **European Temperature Variation:** Range from below average in Nordic countries to above average in southern Europe.
- **Sea Surface Temperature Records:** January 2024 sets new record for global sea surface temperature, surpassing previous highs.

Credit: The Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S)



Sea Ice: Notable Highlights and Trends

Arctic sea ice extent in January reached its highest since 2009, with concentrations above average in the Greenland Sea and Sea of Okhotsk but below average in the Labrador Sea. Antarctic sea ice extent was the sixth lowest, notably below average, with concentrations mainly low in the Ross and Amundsen Seas.

Notable Hydrological Highlights: Insights and Trends

- Europe's Varied Precipitation: Wetter in many areas, storms in north- and south-west; drier regions include Spain, Scandinavia, and Balkans.
- Global Wet and Dry Patterns: Wetter regions include western USA, Eurasia, southeast Africa; drier areas in North America, Australia, and Chile.
- Impact on Wildfires: Dry conditions in Australia and Chile contribute to wildfires, along with regions in North America.
- Precipitation Extremes Worldwide: Wet conditions in parts of USA, Eurasia, South America; dry areas in North America, Australia, and Chile.

The Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S)

- Integrated within Copernicus: C3S is part of the EU's Earth Observation Programme, leveraging existing research infrastructures and global collaborations.
- Aligned with global initiatives: Collaborates with WCRP and GCOS, contributing to GFCS, ensuring relevance and alignment with international climate goals.
- Implemented by ECMWF: Managed by ECMWF on behalf of the European Commission, ensuring reliable and independent climate services provision.
- Extensive European network: Utilizes expertise from 260+ organizations through competitive tenders, maximizing resources and coverage for comprehensive climate services.
- Tailored climate information: Offers customizable services through the Climate Data Store, catering to diverse public and commercial needs effectively.
- Community engagement and support: Facilitates networking, training, and technical assistance, enhancing user capabilities and fostering collaboration across Europe.

STATE OF THE WORLD'S MIGRATORY SPECIES

CONTEXT: CMS, a UN biodiversity treaty, unveils the 2024 report on global migratory species, offering the initial comprehensive assessment of conservation status and threats.

BACKGROUND: The inaugural State of the World's Migratory Species report offers a comprehensive analysis of their conservation status, trends, and pressures they face. It highlights conservation efforts and aims to enhance outcomes by supporting evidence-based decisions and raising awareness. Mandated at COP13 in 2020, it focuses on CMS-listed species while addressing broader migratory species protection.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

- Threatened Species: Over 20% CMS-listed species face extinction, with 44% experiencing declining populations.
- Appendix I and II Concerns: Majority of Appendix I species threatened, while 18% of Appendix II species are also at risk.
- Fish Conservation Crisis: 97% of CMS-listed fish are threatened with extinction, with declining populations.

- Rising Extinction Risk: 70 CMS species moved to higher Red List threat categories, highlighting worsening trends.
- Call for Protection: 399 globally threatened migratory species warrant closer CMS scrutiny and potential listing.
- Priority Species Identification: 179 Appendix II species identified as high-priority for further conservation measures.

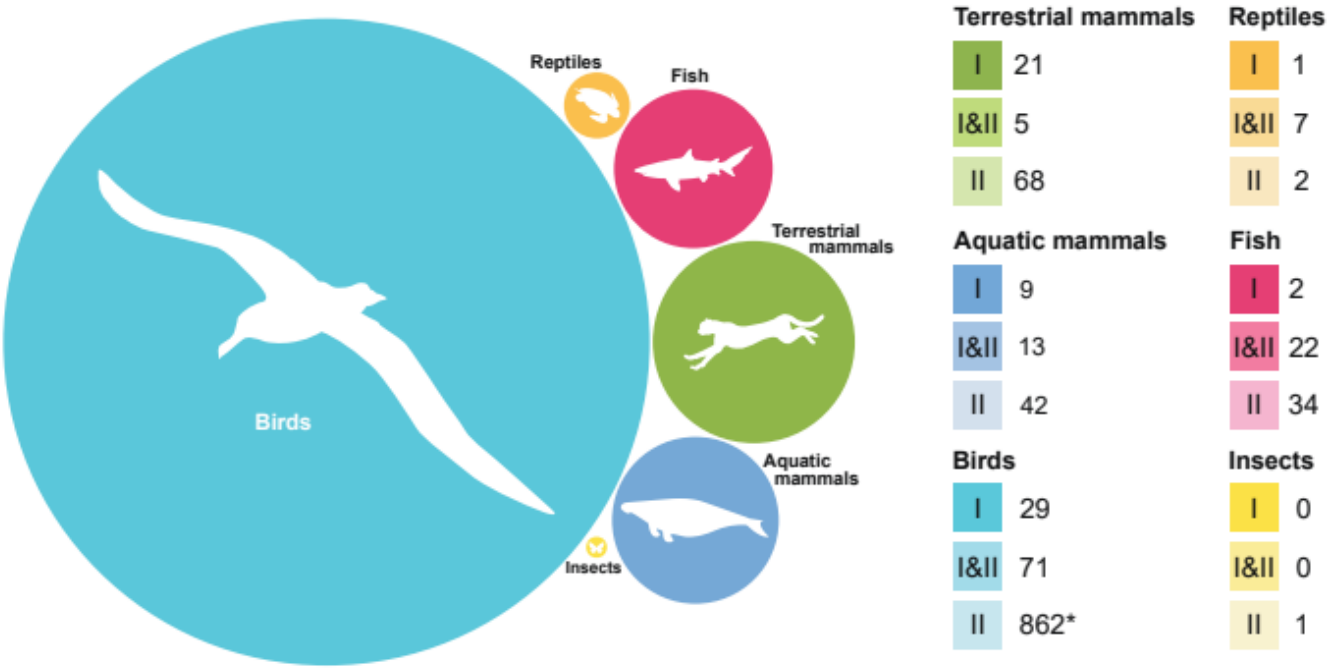


Figure: Species Listed in CMS Appendices: Taxonomic and Appendix Overview

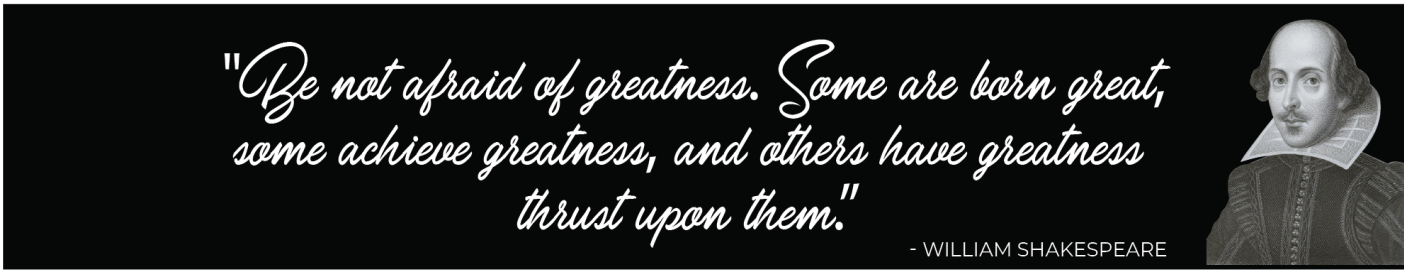
Conservation Status by Taxonomic Group

- Mixed Conservation Outlook: Reptiles and fish highly threatened, while birds and mammals show more favourable outlooks.
- Threatened Reptiles and Fish: 70% of CMS-listed reptiles and 97% of fish face extinction, with many critically endangered.
- Favourable Outlook for Birds and Mammals: Majority categorized as Least Concern, though significant numbers still globally threatened.
- Significant Threatened Species: Despite favourable outlook, substantial numbers of birds and mammals still require conservation action.
- Higher-Level Listings: Many bird species listed under higher-level categories, masking actual threat levels.
- Importance of Interpretation: Example of Monarch Butterfly shows importance of careful global conservation status interpretation.
- Subpopulation Variability: Status of subpopulations can differ significantly from global species status, requiring nuanced assessment.

Report Highlights on India

- Impact of Dams on Habitat: Extensive dam use in river systems leads to habitat fragmentation for migratory fish.
- Connectivity Challenges: Only 37% of long rivers maintain high connectivity; dams obstruct spawning and juvenile dispersal.
- Global Distribution of Fragmentation: East Asia, Europe, Indian sub-continent, North America, and Southern Africa most affected.
- Future Concerns: Tropical river systems like the Amazon, Mekong, and Congo basins face increasing dam pressure.
- Plastic Pollution's Impact: Recent CMS report highlights plastic pollution's widespread impact on migratory species across environments.

The State of the World's Migratory Species – 2024 report, launched by the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (CMS), highlights urgent concerns about the plight of migratory species worldwide. It emphasizes the need for immediate and concerted global action to address threats such as habitat loss, climate change, and unsustainable exploitation, to safeguard these vital components of ecosystems and biodiversity.



ODISHA DESIGNATES GUPTESWAR, KORAPUT AS FOURTH BIODIVERSITY HERITAGE SITE

CONTEXT: Odisha designates Gupteswar forest in Koraput as its fourth Biodiversity Heritage Site, joining Mandasaru, Mahendragiri, and Gandhamardan, known for sacred groves and diverse flora-fauna.

HIGHLIGHTS: The Gupteswar Forest, adjacent to Odisha's Gupteswar Shiva temple in Koraput district, is now the state's fourth Biodiversity-Heritage Site (BHS), according to a government notification. Spanning 350 hectares, it includes sacred groves and diverse flora and fauna, with an inventory documenting over 600 species, enhancing its conservation significance.

Why Status of Biodiversity Heritage Site?

- **Odisha Biodiversity Survey:** Identifies 608 faunal species, including mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and invertebrates.
- **Key Species Documented:** Mugger crocodile, kanger valley rock gecko, sacred Grove Bush Frog, and various avifauna species.
- **Biodiversity Hotspots:** Notable species include black baza, Jerdon's baza, Malaber trogon, and common hill myna.
- **Limestone Cave Bats:** Gupteswar caves host eight bat species, including two near-threatened species: Hipposideros galeritus and Rhinolophus rouxii.
- **Conservation Concerns:** Highlighted species' conservation status underscores need for biodiversity protection and management efforts.
- **Southern Odisha's Faunal Diversity:** Reveals diverse bat species inhabiting limestone caves, emphasizing regional biodiversity richness.

Biodiversity Heritage Sites in Odisha

Mandasaru Hills: Eastern Kandhamal District, Odisha

- **Geographical Features:** Mandasaru Hills boast rugged terrain, dense forests, and picturesque landscapes, offering a haven for nature enthusiasts.
- **Flora Diversity:** Rich biodiversity characterized by lush vegetation including deciduous trees, medicinal plants, and endemic flora species.
- **Fauna Habitat:** Home to a variety of wildlife such as leopards, deer, monkeys, and numerous bird species, enhancing its ecological value.
- **Endangered Species:** Supports conservation efforts for endangered species like the Indian pangolin, contributing to regional biodiversity conservation initiatives.

Mahendragiri: Gajapati District, Odisha.

- **Geographical Features:** Mahendragiri stands tall in the Rayagada block of Gajapati District, offering panoramic views and rugged terrain.
- **Flora Diversity:** Encompasses diverse vegetation including evergreen forests, rare orchids, and medicinal plants, supporting a rich ecosystem.
- **Fauna Habitat:** Provides habitat for various wildlife species like elephants, tigers, langurs, and endemic bird species, enhancing its ecological importance.
- **Endangered Species:** Critical for conservation efforts, hosting endangered species like the Indian elephant and Bengal tiger, requiring protection measures.

Gandhamardan Hills: Balangir and Bargarh districts, Odisha.

- **Geographical Position:** Situated amidst Balangir and Bargarh districts, Gandhamardan Hills feature undulating terrain and scenic landscapes.
- **Flora Diversity:** Abounds in diverse vegetation, including deciduous forests, rare medicinal herbs, and aromatic plants, enriching its ecological tapestry.
- **Fauna Habitat:** Provides a sanctuary for various wildlife species like leopards, deer, langurs, and numerous bird species, enhancing its biodiversity.
- **Endemic Species:** Supports conservation efforts for endemic species like the Gandhamardan orchid, contributing to regional biodiversity preservation.

The declaration of Gupteswar as a Biodiversity-Heritage Site strengthens cultural ties and biodiversity conservation. Odisha now boasts four such sites, with plans for community-involved conservation. Rs 35 lakh is allocated for action plans and awareness. Locals anticipate economic benefits through eco-tourism and forest produce, supported by the Board and community efforts.

KERALA URGES CENTRE TO AMEND WILDLIFE PROTECTION ACT

CONTEXT: Kerala Assembly unanimously passes resolution urging amendment of Wildlife Protection Act of 1972 to tackle rising human-animal conflicts in the state.

BACKGROUND: Recent protests in Wayanad highlight the escalating human-wildlife conflict in Kerala, emphasizing the imperative to tackle its root causes. The surge primarily involves elephants, tigers, bison, and wild boars, causing significant damage in districts like Kannur, Palakkad, and Idukki. Addressing these conflicts is paramount for the state.

Call for Amendment to Wildlife Protection Act's Hunting Section

- **1972 Act Amendment Proposal:** Kerala seeks to transfer CWLW's powers to Chief Conservators of Forests (CCF) under Section 11.
- **Clause (1)(A) Modification:** Allows CCFs to permit hunting of Schedule I mammals posing danger to human life.
- **Reason for Amendment:** Aims to simplify procedures, expedite decisions on handling wildlife threats, enhancing local-level responsiveness.
- **Proposed Delegation:** Kerala's move entails empowering its five CCFs for more localized, timely wildlife management.
- **Enhanced Decision-making:** Shift from CWLW to CCFs aims to streamline response to dangerous wildlife incidents.
- **Regionalized Wildlife Management:** Each CCF would oversee wildlife threats in their respective regions, improving efficiency.

Call for Wild Boar Declaration as Vermin: Demands for Amendment

- Wild Boar Vermin Declaration: Kerala urges Centre to declare wild boar as vermin under Wildlife Protection Act.
- Section 62 Provision: Allows Union Government to designate Schedule II animals as vermin in specific areas.
- Purpose of Vermin Declaration: Enables culling to mitigate threat posed by wild boars to life and crops.
- Protection Removal: Vermin status removes hunting protection, facilitating population control to safeguard livelihoods.

In Kerala, the increasing human-animal conflict is a growing concern, with wild animal attacks posing threats to both lives and the agriculture sector. The situation reached a critical point when a radio-collared wild elephant entered a village in Wayanad, resulting in fatalities.

THANTHAI PERIYAR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

CONTEXT: Tamil Nadu declares Bargur Hills' reserve forests as c connecting Nilgiris Biosphere Reserve to Cauvery South Wildlife Sanctuary, becoming the state's 18th sanctuary.

BACKGROUND: The region, integral to the Sathyamangalam Tiger Reserve and Nilgiris Elephant Reserve, serves as a vital corridor connecting various tiger reserves. It supports a diverse wildlife population, including elephants and Indian Gaur, while also playing a crucial role in water conservation and sustaining local livelihoods. Preserving the Bargur Hills is paramount for ecological and cultural reasons.

Thanthai Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary

- Location: Thanthai Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary is nestled in the Western Ghats of Tamil Nadu, India, offering diverse ecosystems.
- Geographical Features: Encompasses dense forests, rolling hills, and perennial rivers, creating a picturesque and biodiverse landscape.
- Flora Diversity: Abounds in tropical evergreen and moist deciduous forests, housing diverse plant species including rare orchids and medicinal herbs.
- Fauna Habitat: Home to a plethora of wildlife such as elephants, tigers, sambar deer, langurs, and endemic bird species.
- Endangered Species: Plays a crucial role in the conservation of endangered species like the Nilgiri tahr and lion-tailed macaque.
- Ecotourism Destination: Attracts visitors for its rich biodiversity, offering opportunities for wildlife safaris, trekking, and nature photography experiences.

What are forest villages?

- **Forest Village Conversion Mandate:** MoEF ordered conversion to revenue villages in 1990, reinforced by FRA 18 years later.
- **Rights Denial:** Despite mandates, forest villages still lack land rights, including for community facilities like schools.
- Changes in Thanthai Periyar Sanctuary: Cattle-grazing banned, impacting traditional grazing of Bargur cattle in Bargur forest hills.
- **Legal Revision:** Madras High Court restricts cattle grazing ban to National Parks, Sanctuaries, and Tiger Reserves in Tamil Nadu.
- **Unique Ban:** Tamil Nadu stands out with the only state-wide ban on cattle grazing in forests.

The Forest Village Conversion Mandate initiated in 1990 and reinforced by the Forest Rights Act (FRA) in subsequent years aimed to grant land rights to forest villages, yet many still lack these rights, including essential community facilities. Recent legal revisions by the Madras High Court restricted cattle-grazing bans to specific areas, notably excluding forests in Tamil Nadu, which maintains a unique state-wide ban on such activities.

WORLD WETLANDS DAY 2024

CONTEXT: MoEF&CC, along with Madhya Pradesh Government, hosts national event at Sirpur Lake, Indore, with Indore Municipal Corporation and EPCO to observe World Wetlands Day 2024.

HIGHLIGHTS: The theme of World Wetlands Day 2024, "Wetlands and Human Wellbeing," highlights the crucial role wetlands play in enhancing our lives by providing flood protection, clean water, biodiversity, and recreational opportunities. Three publications released during the event include revised guidelines for wetland conservation, a management effectiveness tracking tool, and a compendium on plant diversity in Ramsar sites. These resources aim to support wetland management and conservation efforts in India.

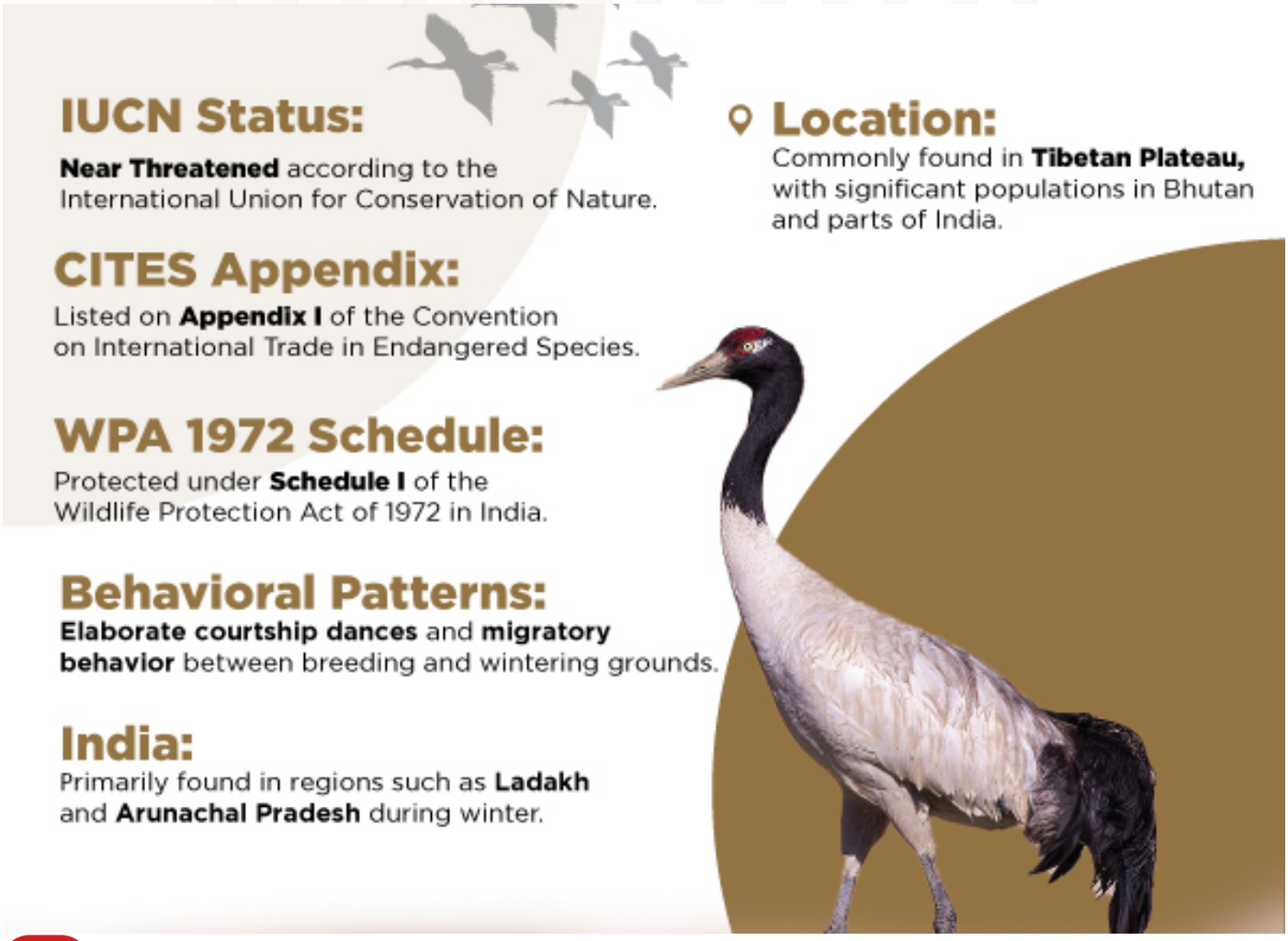
World Wetlands Day

- World Wetlands Day: Observed on February 2 to honor Ramsar Convention signing in 1971, with India joining in 1982.
- India's Ramsar Sites: Increased to 80, adding five new wetlands, totaling 1.33 million ha, up by 5,523.87 ha.
- New Ramsar Sites: Three in Karnataka and two in Tamil Nadu, contributing to international wetland importance.
- Tamil Nadu Leads: With 16 Ramsar sites, followed by Uttar Pradesh with 10, showcasing national wetland significance.
- Conservation Impact: Ramsar designation crucial for protecting wetlands of international importance and biodiversity conservation efforts.
- Celebrating Conservation: World Wetlands Day highlights global efforts in wetland preservation and sustainable management.

BLACK-NECKED CRANE

CONTEXT: Wildlife Institute of India and Zoological Survey of India assess black-necked cranes. Survey in Ladakh in 2016-2017 estimated 66-69 individuals, with about 11 in Arunachal Pradesh during winters.

HIGHLIGHTS: Designation of important Black-necked Crane habitats like Changthang Sanctuary and Tso Kar Wetlands Complex as protected areas and Ramsar sites respectively. The National Wildlife Action Plan outlines conservation priorities. Financial aid is provided to states for wildlife habitat management. Mission LiFE promotes environmental awareness, while important days raise public awareness on wildlife and biodiversity.



WORLD SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT SUMMIT 2024

CONTEXT: 23rd edition of TERI's World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS) scheduled from February 7-9, 2024, in New Delhi, focusing on Leadership for Sustainable Development and Climate Justice.

HIGHLIGHTS: In today's complex and interconnected world, achieving sustainable development requires inclusive and resilient leadership. TERI is hosting a summit bringing together representatives from various sectors to champion initiatives on sustainable development and climate justice. Topics include nature-based solutions, adaptation, sustainable consumption, energy challenges, and climate action. The summit aims to reinforce commitment to a sustainable and equitable future.

About the Submit

- **Organizer:** Organized by The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), a leading research organization focused on sustainability and environmental issues.
- **Periodicity:** Held annually, the World Sustainable Development Summit convenes global stakeholders to discuss pressing sustainability challenges and solutions.
- **Highlights:** Features high-level dialogues, thematic sessions, workshops, and exhibitions showcasing innovations and best practices in sustainable development.
- **Significance:** Serves as a crucial platform for fostering collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and action towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- **Global Participation:** Attracts participation from diverse sectors including governments, businesses, academia, civil society, and international organizations worldwide.

GREENING AND RESTORATION OF WASTELAND WITH AGROFORESTRY (GROW) REPORT AND PORTAL

CONTEXT: NITI Aayog launches GROW report and portal, assessing agroforestry potential in India using remote sensing and GIS, aiding greening and restoration initiatives nationwide.

BACKGROUND: Led by NITI Aayog, a multi-institutional initiative employed remote sensing and GIS to evaluate agroforestry potential across India's districts. An Agroforestry Suitability Index (ASI) was devised for national prioritization, aiding government and industry in green initiatives. The report offers detailed state and district analyses, facilitating greening and restoration projects.

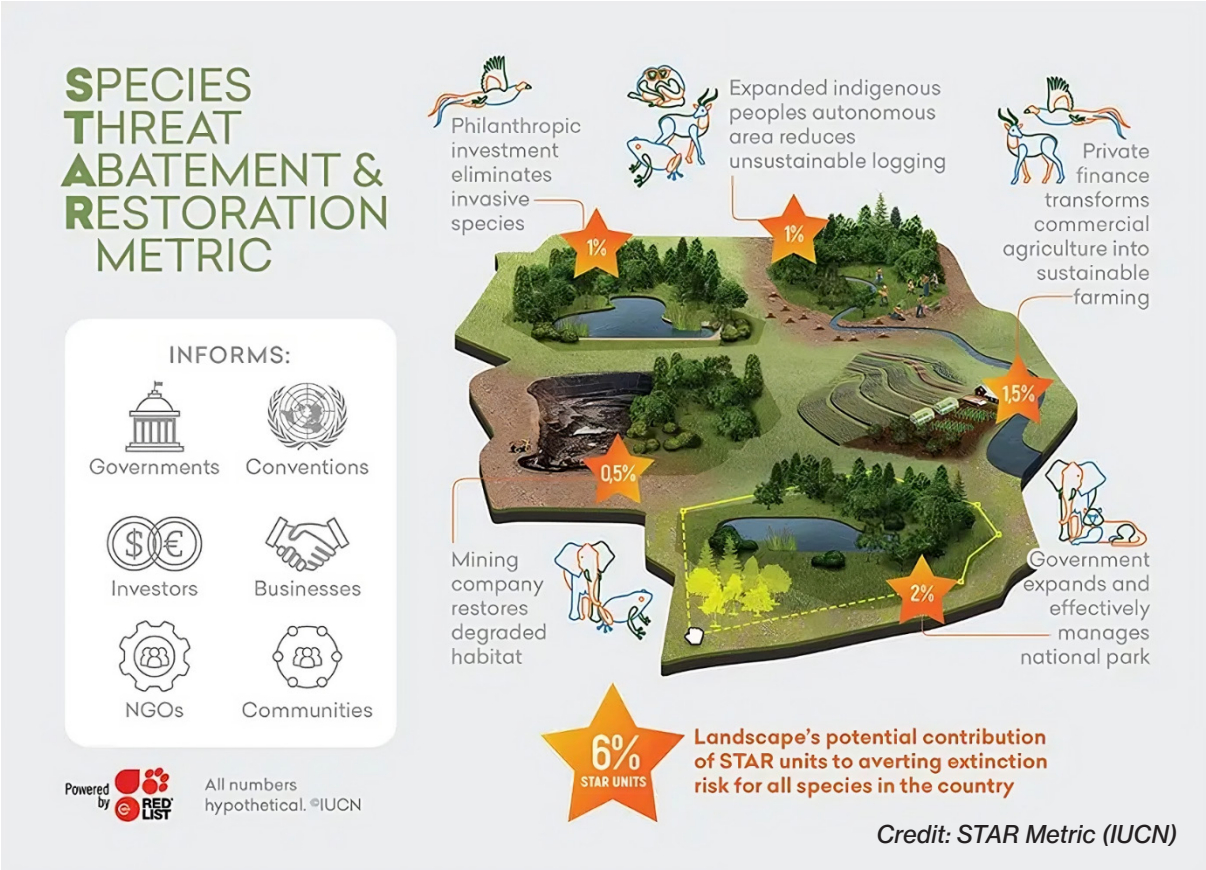
About the Portal

- **GROW-Suitability Mapping Portal:** Provides state and district-level data on agroforestry, aiming to convert wastelands for productivity.
- **Current Agroforestry Coverage:** 8.65% of India's total area, around 28.42 million hectares, underscores potential benefits.
- **National Commitments:** Aims to restore 26 million hectares of degraded land by 2030, creating additional carbon sink.
- **Agroforestry Promotion:** Union Budget prioritizes agroforestry and private forestry to address land degradation and resource imbalances.
- **Wasteland Transformation:** Geospatial technologies employed to map and prioritize wastelands for agroforestry interventions.
- **National Agroforestry Policy:** India pioneers' policy to enhance productivity, profitability, and sustainability through agroecological land use.
- **Global Alignment:** Agroforestry integrates with global commitments like Paris Agreement, UNCCD, Doubling Farmers Income, and more.

SPECIES THREAT ABATEMENT RESTORATION (STAR)

CONTEXT: IUCN introduces STAR metric to quantify efforts in ocean biodiversity conservation, aiming to halt species threat and promote restoration.

HIGHLIGHTS: The Species Threat Abatement and Restoration (STAR) metric quantifies how investments can mitigate species extinction risk, aiding various stakeholders like governments, cities, and investors to target their efforts effectively. It guides actions towards conservation outcomes, aligning with global policy goals and promoting biodiversity conservation.



Credit: STAR Metric (IUCN)

About the Metric

- **STAR Metric Overview:** Utilizes IUCN Red List data to estimate potential reduction in species extinction risk.
- Targets and Progress Measurement: Allows setting and monitoring of local or global species extinction risk targets.
- **Diverse Methodologies:** Varying methods across companies, countries, and NGOs make conservation impact assessment challenging.
- **Comparative Assessment:** STAR enables comparison of conservation achievements across different actors and geographical scales.
- **Methodology Basis:** Draws on Red List data to estimate extinction risk reduction potential at a 5 x 5 km² grid level.
- **Pixel-based Estimation:** Calculates STAR value for each pixel considering threatened species, threat levels, and habitat representation.
- **Application Scope:** Assessments can be made for larger polygons like corporate footprints or protected areas.
- **Restoration Impact:** STAR also estimates extinction risk reduction through habitat restoration, accounting for longer-term impact.

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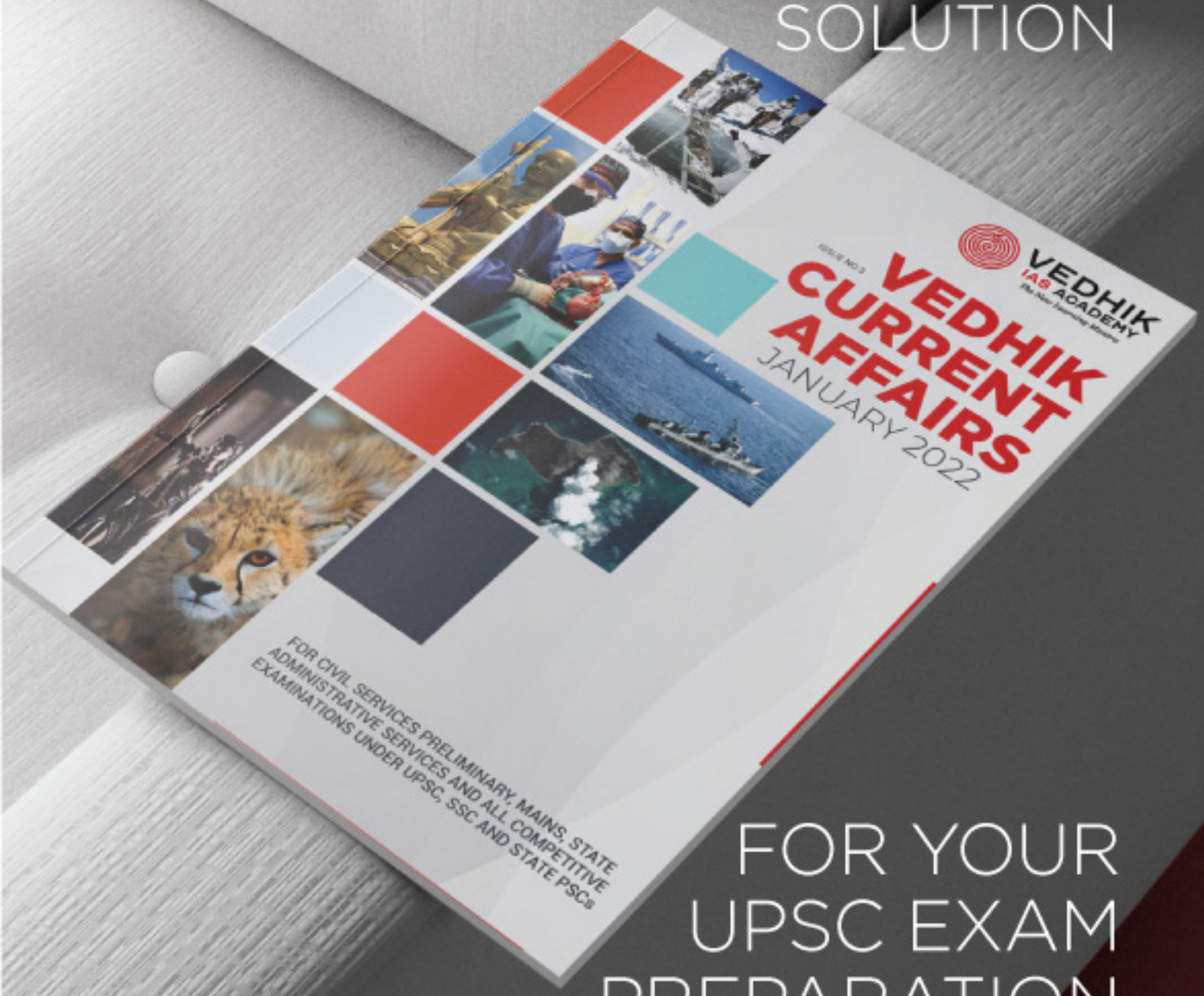

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SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

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- SMISHING
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- FIRST INDIGENOUS SPY SATELLITE BY PRIVATE INDIAN FIRM PRIMED FOR LAUNCH
- TOOL ANUVADINI
- INDIA-TAILORED FOETAL AGE DETERMINATION MODEL CREATED

BHARAT 5G PORTAL

CONTEXT: The Secretary of the Department of Telecommunications launched the Bharat 5G Portal at the Bharat Telecom 2024 Expo, facilitating integrated communication services.

HIGHLIGHTS: The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) unveiled the Bharat 5G Portal during the 'Bharat Telecom 2024 - An Exclusive International Business Expo' by TEPC. It includes a call for 6G R&D proposals and the Future Tech-Experts registration portal in partnership with PANIIT USA. Additionally, a session linking venture capital to startups showcased innovative telecom products by 26 startups/ MSMEs to attract funding.

About Bharat 5G Portal

- **India Mobile Congress:** PM awards 100 "5G Use Case Labs" to institutions, fostering 5G competencies and engagement.
- **Dedicated Portal:** Digital network connects 100+ labs, facilitating knowledge dissemination and testing/ development of 5G use cases.
- **TCIL Implementation:** Telecommunications Consultants India Limited (TCIL) oversees lab installation and portal development for seamless connectivity.
- **Bharat 5G Portal:** Integrated platform for startups, academia, and industry, focusing on 5G, 6G, quantum, IPR, and future technologies.
- **Comprehensive Solution:** Centralized hub captures academic R&D, industry standards, OEMs, startups, and subject matter experts, driving 5G innovation.
- **Atmanirbhar Bharat:** Portal fosters collaboration, innovation, and knowledge-sharing to enhance India's 5G capabilities and telecom ecosystem.

India's burgeoning startup ecosystem, now boasting over one lakh startups, presents a lucrative opportunity for global collaboration, particularly in emerging technologies like 5G and beyond. Prime Minister's emphasis on fostering new business avenues through startup participation underscores India's commitment to technological advancement. The Bharat 5G Portal, with its network of 100+ labs, epitomizes India's dedication to shaping the future of telecommunications through innovation and collaboration.

VOLT TYPHOON

CONTEXT: Tensions between the US and China, exacerbated by Beijing's Taiwan annexation threats, have escalated. Discovery of the Volt Typhoon hacking network within US critical infrastructure after five years raises significant concerns.

HIGHLIGHTS: The revelation of Volt Typhoon, a Chinese hacking network, lying dormant within US critical infrastructure for up to five years has raised significant concerns. Instead of stealing secrets, it aimed to position itself for future sabotage, exploiting technological weaknesses. FBI Director Christopher Wray labelled it as "the defining threat of our generation." Other countries like the Netherlands and the Philippines also exposed Chinese-backed hackers targeting state networks and infrastructure.

What is Volt Typhoon?

- **Volt Typhoon:** Chinese cyber operation, aliases include Vanguard Panda, targeting Western critical infrastructure via compromised internet-connected devices.
- **State-Supported:** Western intelligence confirms Chinese backing, aiming at naval ports, ISPs, communication services, and utilities infiltration.
- **Recent Dismantlement:** US authorities dismantle bot network, attributing it to Volt Typhoon, emphasizing ongoing cybersecurity threats.
- **CISA Findings:** Cybersecurity agency discovers and neutralizes Chinese intrusions across critical sectors like aviation, water, energy, and transportation.
- **US Testimony:** CISA director reports Chinese intrusions in critical infrastructure sectors, highlighting aviation, water, energy, and transportation vulnerabilities.
- **Persistent Threat:** Chinese hackers infiltrate plane, train, and water systems for five years, necessitating heightened cybersecurity measures and international

MARS HELICOPTER INGENUITY

CONTEXT: NASA announced on Thursday that its Mars helicopter, Ingenuity, the pioneering craft that accomplished the first powered flight on another planet, has concluded its remarkable mission after numerous successful flights over three years.

BACKGROUND: NASA officials announced the end of Ingenuity's mission on Mars after its 72nd flight revealed damage to one of its rotor blades, rendering it inoperable. Despite being designed for a 30-day demonstration with five flights, Ingenuity exceeded expectations. NASA Administrator Bill Nelson expressed a mix of pride and regret, referring to Ingenuity as the "little helicopter that could."

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Grounded Ingenuity:** NASA concludes the Mars helicopter's mission after surpassing expectations with 72 flights over three years.
- **Exceeded Expectations:** Ingenuity flew 14 times farther than planned, logging over two hours of flight time and covering 10.5 miles.
- **Challenges on Mars:** Overcoming Mars' thin atmosphere, Ingenuity used larger rotor blades spinning rapidly for aerodynamic lift.
- **Mission Achievements:** First vehicle to achieve powered, controlled flight on another planet, paving the way for future exploration.
- **Technical Adaptations:** Ingenuity's design adjusted for Mars' conditions, showcasing engineering ingenuity in space exploration.
- **Landmark Mission:** Despite Martian challenges, Ingenuity's success marks a significant milestone in planetary exploration and technology demonstration.

CANDIDA AURIS

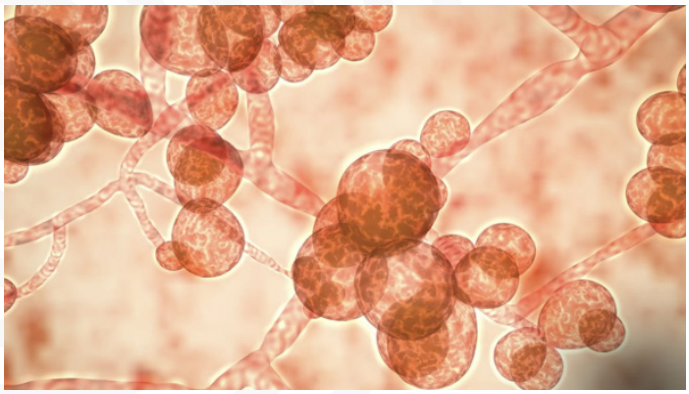
CONTEXT: Concerns arise in the United States due to the emergence of Candida auris, a rare fungal infection. Four individuals in Washington test positive, with no reported fatalities since the first case in July.

BACKGROUND: Candida auris, a cause of healthcare facility outbreaks, poses a significant risk to long-term hospital patients. Resistant to three key antifungal medication types, infections may remain asymptomatic despite widespread dissemination within the body. Although not widespread, it can lead to severe illness with a high mortality rate due to its drug resistance and rapid spread.

What is Candida auris?

- **Candida auris Discovery:** Identified in Japan in 2009 from a patient's ear secretion, known for hospital-acquired infections.
- **Persistent Presence:** Candida auris can survive on surfaces for at least two weeks, posing a longer threat than Covid.
- **Antifungal Resistance:** Resistant to multiple antifungal medications, complicating treatment in hospital settings.
- **Symptoms and Treatment:** Presents with fever, chills, body aches; treatment involves limited antifungal options due to resistance.
- **Infection Control Measures:** Focus on healthcare settings to prevent Candida auris spread, emphasizing stringent infection control protocols.

Symptoms of Candida auris: The fungus can infiltrate open wounds, lungs, or bloodstream, showcasing a variety of symptoms. Dr. Reddy notes that symptoms like fever, chills, and body aches, particularly in immunocompromised



individuals, can worsen quickly. Its elusive presentation often leads to delayed diagnosis, facilitating its covert spread within healthcare settings.

How to treat Candida auris?

While most C. auris infections respond to echinocandins, certain cases exhibit resistance to all three primary antifungal medication classes, posing treatment challenges. In such instances, treating the infection may require multiple high-dose antifungal medications.

Invasive infections, particularly bloodstream infections involving Candida species like C. auris, pose serious risks, often proving fatal, especially in individuals with underlying health conditions. Due to its ability to spread in healthcare settings despite symptom absence, special precautions such as isolation, protective gear for caregivers, and enhanced hygiene measures are crucial in preventing transmission, emphasizing the need for heightened vigilance and strict protocols.

ASTRONAUT 'VYOMMITRA'

CONTEXT: Ahead of India's inaugural human spaceflight, the Gaganyaan mission, the robotic astronaut named 'Vyommitra' will precede, marking a significant step in ISRO's space exploration endeavours.

BACKGROUND: Singh announced the upcoming uncrewed "Vyommitra" mission for the third quarter of this year and a manned mission, "Gaganyaan," slated for 2025. Derived from Sanskrit, "Vyommitra" signifies "space friend." This female robot astronaut will monitor module parameters, issue alerts, and manage life support operations. It possesses capabilities like operating panels and responding to queries.

ASTRONAUT 'VYOMMITRA'

- **Vyommitra Mission:** Female robot astronaut, precursor to Gaganyaan, demonstrates monitoring, alerting, and life support operations in space environment.
- **Gaganyaan Mission:** India's first manned space flight, aiming to launch astronauts into orbit, test human space capabilities.
- **Vyommitra Features:** Named from Sanskrit, equipped to monitor, alert, interact, and simulate human functions in space.
- **Space Interaction:** Vyommitra operates panels, responds to queries, ensuring smooth functioning and support in space missions.
- **Gaganyaan Objective:** Demonstrate India's space prowess, launching and safely returning astronauts from 400-kilometer orbit, advancing space exploration.

NASA FINDS DISTANT 'SUPER-EARTH'

CONTEXT: NASA makes a groundbreaking find, pinpointing a potential habitable "super-Earth" named TOI-715 b, positioned about 137 light-years away from our solar system, raising prospects for extraterrestrial life.

HIGHLIGHTS: NASA announced the discovery of TOI-715 b, a distant exoplanet located about 137 light-years away from our solar system. The planet, classified as a "super-Earth," orbits a small, red star, with the possibility of a second, Earth-sized planet within the same system. This finding was detailed in an official press release by NASA, signalling the potential for further investigation.

Characteristics of TOI-715 b

- **TOI-715 b Characteristics:** One and a half times wider than Earth, orbits within conservative habitable zone.
- **Potential for Liquid Water:** NASA suggests possibility of liquid water due to planet's positioning around parent star.
- **Swift Orbit:** Completes full orbit in just 19 days around a red dwarf star.
- **Red Dwarf Characteristics:** Smaller and cooler stars allow for closer orbits without compromising habitable zone position.
- **Space Telescope Observations:** Tighter orbits increase frequency of planetary crossings, aiding observations from space telescopes.
- **Red Dwarfs and Habitable Zones:** Despite closer orbits, red dwarfs enable planets to safely reside within habitable zones.

SAMARTH CENTRES

CONTEXT: Under the "Enhancement of Competitiveness in the Indian Capital Goods Sector" scheme, the Ministry of Heavy Industries establishes four Smart Advanced Manufacturing and Rapid Transformation Hub (SAMARTH) Centers across India.

HIGHLIGHTS: SAMARTH centers, established under the "Enhancement of Competitiveness in the Indian Capital Goods Sector" scheme, aid MSMEs by training their workforce in Industry 4.0 technologies. They conduct seminars, workshops, and knowledge-sharing events, offer training sessions, and provide consultancy and incubation support to startups, including MSMEs. These initiatives aim to enhance competitiveness and promote awareness of advanced manufacturing practices among Indian industries.

The key achievements of the SAMARTH Centres

- **Industry 4.0 Solutions:** Model Factory by C4i4 Pune, Smart Factory by CMTI Bengaluru showcase innovative manufacturing advancements.
- **Use-Case Compilation:** Over 50 Industry 4.0 solutions compiled by C4i4 Pune for implementation support.
- **Maturity Assessment Tool:** C4i4 develops Industry 4.0 Maturity Model (I4MM) for Indian manufacturing, assessing over 200 factories.
- **Online Assessment Tool:** C4i4 Pune launches Free Online Assessment Tool for MSMEs to gauge Industry 4.0 maturity level.
- **Smart Technologies:** I-4.0 India @ IISc Bengaluru develops 6 smart technologies, 5 smart tools, and 14 solutions.
- **Internship Opportunities:** IIT Delhi offers 82 summer internships in 2021, 61 in 2022, fostering industry-ready talent.
- **Professional Training:** CMTI Bengaluru trains 5000 professionals on Smart Manufacturing and Industry 4.0 advancements.

SAMARTH Centres assist MSMEs by organizing seminars, workshops, and knowledge-sharing events on Industry 4.0, training industries to raise awareness of these technologies, and offering consultancy and incubation support to startups, including MSMEs. These initiatives aim to equip businesses with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in the era of advanced manufacturing and technology.

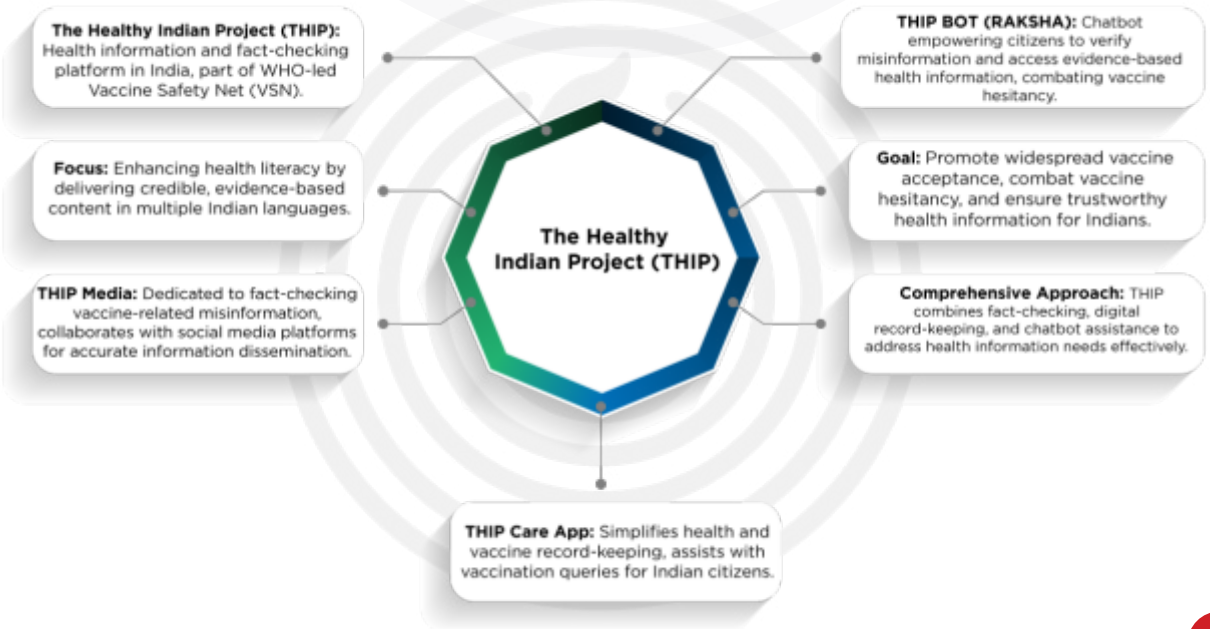
VACCINE SAFETY NET

CONTEXT: The World Health Organization's Vaccine Safety Net (VSN) welcomes The Healthy Indian Project (THIP) as a member, highlighting THIP's dedication to providing trustworthy vaccine safety information in India.

HIGHLIGHTS: As a member of VSN, THIP pledges to offer evidence-based content, empowering Indians with verified vaccine safety information for informed health decisions. Sudipta Sengupta, THIP's Founder and CEO, emphasized their dedication to providing accurate information and expressed gratitude for contributing to the global mission of accessible vaccine safety information.

Vaccine Safety Net

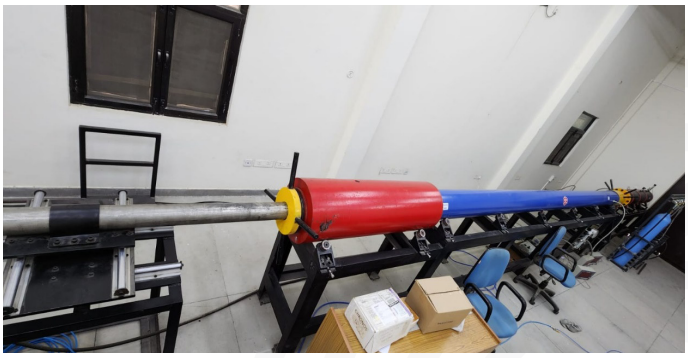
- **Vaccine Safety Net (VSN):** WHO initiative for reliable vaccine safety information on the internet, supported by GACVS.
- **Member Websites:** 58 sites in 16 languages provide quality content covering WHO regions, facilitating public access.
- **Challenges and Solutions:** Identified challenges include investment, partnerships, and engaging young professionals; solutions include collaboration and research.
- **Research Opportunities:** Focus on web analytics, tracking vaccine confidence, and digital communication models for safety information.
- **Digital Toolkit:** Proposed for updates, risk communication guidance, and resources for addressing vaccine safety events globally.
- **GACVS Support:** Endorses VSN contributions, seeks improved communication of vaccine safety information to public and partners.
- **Importance of Reliable Information:** In a crowded web environment, access to trustworthy vaccination content remains crucial for tpublic health.



HYPERVELOCITY EXPANSION TUNNEL TEST FACILITY

CONTEXT: IIT Kanpur achieves a milestone with India's inaugural Hypervelocity Expansion Tunnel Test Facility, marking a significant advancement in aerospace technology.

HIGHLIGHTS: India has reached a significant milestone in its journey towards self-reliance with the establishment and successful testing of its first Hypervelocity Expansion Tunnel Test Facility by IIT Kanpur. This achievement places India among a select group of nations possessing advanced hypersonic testing capabilities. The project, supported by the Department of Science & Technology's Fund for Improvement in S&T Infrastructure, received Rs 4.5 Crores in 2018.



About Facility

- **Hypersonic Test Facility:** Developed by IIT Kanpur's Hypersonic Experimental Aerodynamics Laboratory, simulating speeds of 3-10 km/s.
- **Indigenous Design:** Named S2, facility aids ISRO and DRDO missions like Gaganyaan and hypersonic cruise missiles.
- **Facility Components:** Comprises free piston driver, compression tube, shock/acceleration tube, test section, and high vacuum system.
- **Instrumentation:** Acquired through DST-FIST program, including pressure sensors and vacuum system for data acquisition and processing.
- **Research Growth:** Hypersonic research activities expanding in India, enabling more engineers and researchers to pursue hypersonic research.
- **Data Utilization:** Research results serve as inputs for optimizing existing vehicles and future defense and space missions.
- **Significance:** Hypersonic Test Facility enhances India's aerospace capabilities, facilitating advancement in defense and space technologies.

KYASANUR FOREST DISEASE

CONTEXT: In Karnataka, two fatalities from Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD) occurred in 2024. The death toll from the virus, observed since 1956, exceeds 560.

BACKGROUND: The health department reported a total of 4,641 tests conducted between January 1st and February 25th, with 120 positive cases and 95 discharged individuals. Currently, there are 22 active cases. The year's first death from KFD occurred on January 8th in Hosanagara taluk, Shivamogga district. Two additional fatalities were reported in Uttara Kannada and Chikkamagaluru districts.

About Kyasanur Forest Disease

- **Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD):** Caused by KFDV, identified in 1957, with 400-500 human cases annually in Karnataka, India.
- **Transmission and Reservoir:** Transmitted through tick bites or contact with infected animals; hard ticks (Hemaphysalis spinigera) serve as reservoirs.
- **Hosts and Epizootics:** Rodents, shrews, and monkeys host KFDV; epizootics with high primate fatality reported.
- **Signs and Symptoms:** Sudden onset with chills, fever, headache, followed by muscle pain, vomiting, bleeding, and low blood pressure.
- **Biphasic Illness:** Subset of patients experience a second wave of symptoms, including neurological manifestations, in the third week.
- **Case-Fatality Rate:** Estimated at 3-5%; supportive therapy crucial as there's no specific treatment for KFD.
- **Diagnosis and Treatment:** Diagnosis via PCR or ELISA; supportive therapy includes hydration and precautions for bleeding disorders.

SCIENCE FOR WOMEN-A TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION PORTAL

CONTEXT: The Principal Scientific Advisor of India launched the "SWATI" Portal, dedicated to showcasing Indian women and girls in STEMM fields, aiding policy-making to address gender disparities.

BACKGROUND: Prof. Sood launched the SWATI Portal at INSA, New Delhi, on the International Day of Women and Girls in Science. This interactive database, a first in India, aims to aid policy-making to address gender gap challenges. Developed by NIPGR under Dr. Subhra Chakraborty's leadership, it's touted as the world's first of its kind. Dr. Chakraborty emphasized its dynamic growth and ambition to include data of all women scientists nationwide.

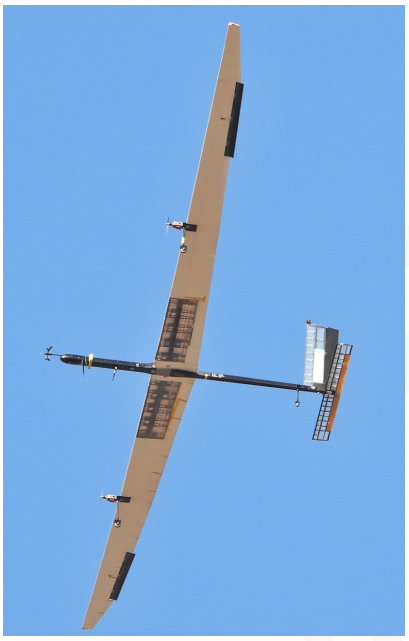
ABOUT SWATI

- **Initiative Background:** Women in Science (WiS) portal announced by Dr. Renu Swarup to highlight contributions of Indian women scientists.
- **SWATI Portal Development:** Assigned to NIPGR HRD Cell, named "SWATI" (Science for Women: A Technology and Innovation Portal).
- **Portal Purpose:** Gateway showcasing expertise and contributions of Indian women scientists, especially for Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav.
- **Expansion by IAP:** SWATI portal adopted for expansion by IAP of Indian science academies to cover all women in STEM.
- **Data Collection:** Initially focused on DBT-funded women researchers, expanding to include college students, faculty, and industry professionals.
- **Exponential Scaling:** IAP aims to scale up SWATI to reach every Indian woman in STEM, enabling comprehensive research on gender patterns.
- **Long-Term Research:** SWATI facilitates analysis of gender equality data in STEM across academia and industry for statistical significance.

HIGH-ALTITUDE PSEUDO-SATELLITE VEHICLES

CONTEXT: National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL) in Bengaluru achieved a significant technological breakthrough by successfully flying a solar-powered UAV prototype capable of flying at 20 km altitude for months.

BACKGROUND: These UAVs operate at heights up to 20 km, solely powered by solar energy, and can sustain flight for months, classifying them as HAPS (high-altitude pseudo-satellite) or HALE (high-altitude long-endurance) vehicles. Primarily used for surveillance, they also aid in disaster management. While HAPS technology is advancing, mastery remains elusive. The Airbus Zephyr holds the endurance record, flying for 64 days in August 2022 before crashing.



What is High-altitude pseudo-satellite (HAPS)?

- **Definition:** High-altitude pseudo-satellite (HAPS) vehicles are unmanned aircraft designed to operate at stratospheric altitudes, resembling satellite functionalities.
- **Altitude:** HAPS vehicles operate in the stratosphere, offering extended endurance and coverage compared to conventional drones or satellites.
- **Functionality:** Equipped with sensors, communication systems, and propulsion, HAPS serve various purposes like surveillance, communication relays, and environmental monitoring.
- Advantages: HAPS provide persistent coverage, rapid deployment, and cost-effectiveness, bridging gaps in communication and surveillance in remote or disaster-affected regions.
- Applications: HAPS find applications in telecommunications, military reconnaissance, disaster management, and scientific research, offering versatile capabilities in remote operations.

What is the need for such UAVs?

- Military Applications: UAVs play a crucial role in military operations for reconnaissance, surveillance, and target acquisition without risking human lives.
- Agriculture: They are used for crop monitoring, pest control, and precision agriculture, enhancing crop yield and reducing resource usage.
- Search and Rescue: UAVs can access remote or dangerous areas to locate and assist individuals in distress more quickly and effectively than traditional methods.
- Mapping and Surveying: UAVs equipped with sensors and cameras are employed for mapping terrain, monitoring environmental changes, and conducting surveys in challenging terrains.
- Infrastructure Inspection: They provide a cost-effective solution for inspecting infrastructure such as bridges, pipelines, and power lines, detecting defects and ensuring safety.
- Disaster Management: UAVs aid in disaster response by assessing damage, locating survivors, and delivering supplies to affected areas, especially in inaccessible or hazardous environments.
- Surveillance and Security: UAVs are utilized for monitoring borders, critical infrastructure, and events, enhancing security measures and situational awareness.

UPI PAYMENT SERVICES LAUNCHED IN SRI LANKA, MAURITIUS

CONTEXT: India expanded its Unified Payment Interface (UPI) services to Sri Lanka and Mauritius, marking a fusion of historic connections with contemporary digital technology, according to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

HIGHLIGHTS: India's RuPay card services debuted in Mauritius, marked by a virtual ceremony attended by Prime Minister Modi, Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth, and Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe. Modi emphasized India's digital public infrastructure's transformative impact and reiterated the "neighbourhood first policy." He pledged India's commitment to being the first responder in various crises. The launch coincides with growing bilateral economic relations between India and Sri Lanka and Mauritius.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI)

- **UPI Overview:** India's mobile-based fast payment system, allowing instant transactions using Virtual Payment Address (VPA).
- **Popularity and Expansion:** Rapidly increasing popularity for retail digital payments; Indian government aims to make UPI available internationally.
- **Bank Integration:** Connects over 300 banks, facilitating seamless financial transactions through third-party application providers (TPAP) like Google Pay, Amazon Pay, PhonePe, and Paytm.
- **NPCI Launch:** Launched by the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) in 2016, gaining momentum swiftly.
- **Secure and Efficient Transactions:** UPI adoption highlights the demand for secure, efficient, and user-centric payment methods.
- **Expert Insight:** Mehul Mistry from Wibmo emphasizes UPI's significance in enabling seamless financial transactions through partnerships with banking providers.
- **Impact and Need:** The widespread adoption of UPI emphasizes the urgent need for secure and efficient payment solutions in the digital era.

GSLV-F14/INSAT-3DS

CONTEXT: the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) launched the INSAT-3DS satellite aboard the GSLV-F14 launch vehicle from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.

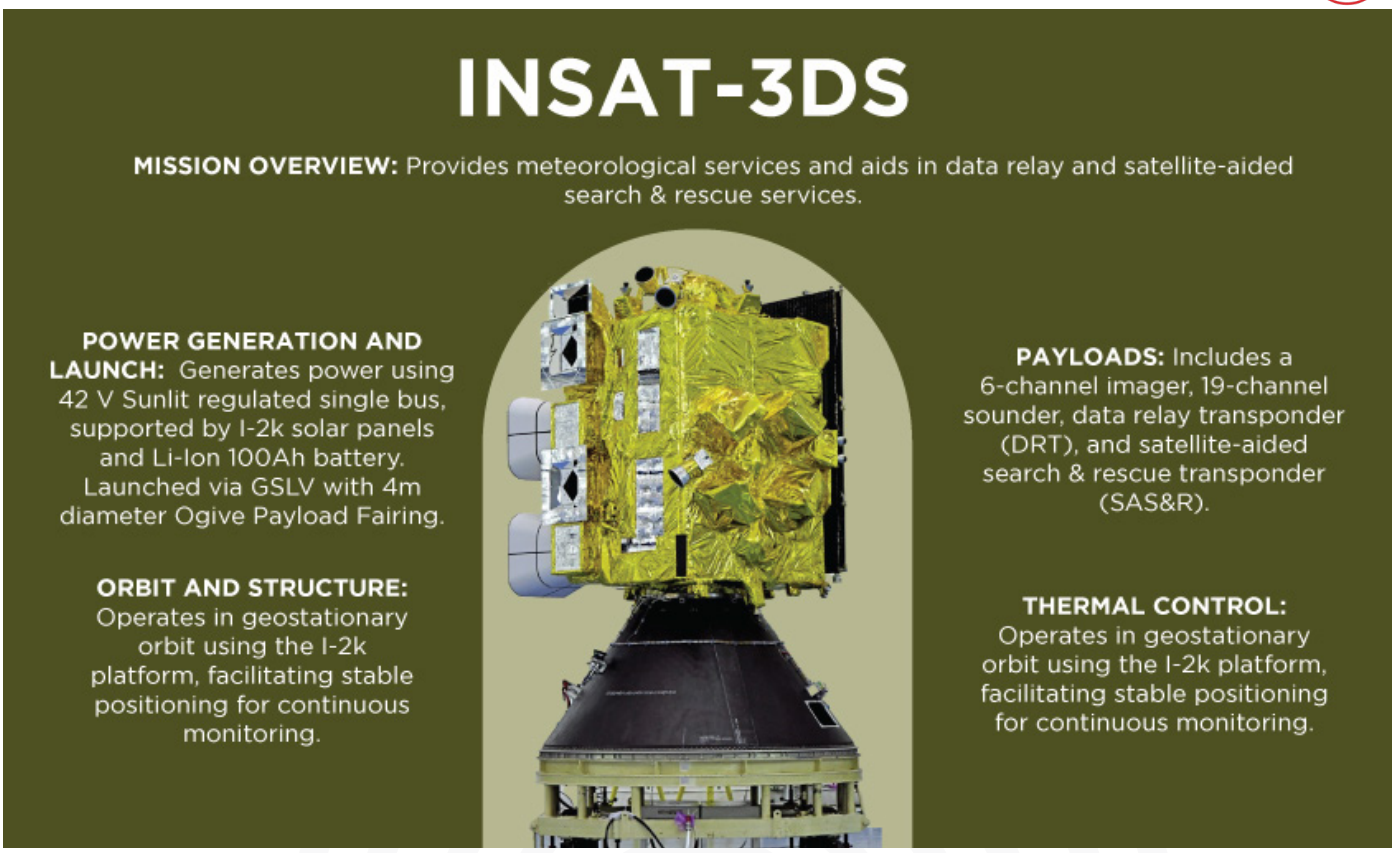
BACKGROUND: The project was fully funded by the Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES). INSAT-3DS, alongside INSAT-3D and INSAT-3DR, will bolster India's meteorological services by enhancing monitoring of Earth's surface, atmosphere, oceans, and environment. This aims to elevate data collection and dissemination capabilities and improve satellite-aided search and rescue services. The initiative will strengthen India's weather, climate, and ocean-related observations, enhancing disaster mitigation and preparedness for the future.

HIGHLIGHTS - INSAT-3DS

- **INSAT-3DS Satellite:** Follow-on mission for meteorological observations, funded by Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES), enhances weather forecasting.
- **Mission Objectives:** Monitoring land and ocean surfaces for weather forecasting and disaster warning, augmenting existing meteorological services.
- **Indian Industry Contribution:** Significant contribution from Indian industries in the satellite's development and manufacturing process.
- **Utilization of Satellite Data:** Various MoES departments and agencies, including IMD, NCMRWF, IITM, NIOT, and INCOIS, will utilize INSAT-3DS data.
- **Enhanced Meteorological Services:** INSAT-3DS data will lead to improved weather forecasts and meteorological services across India.

Objectives of the Mission

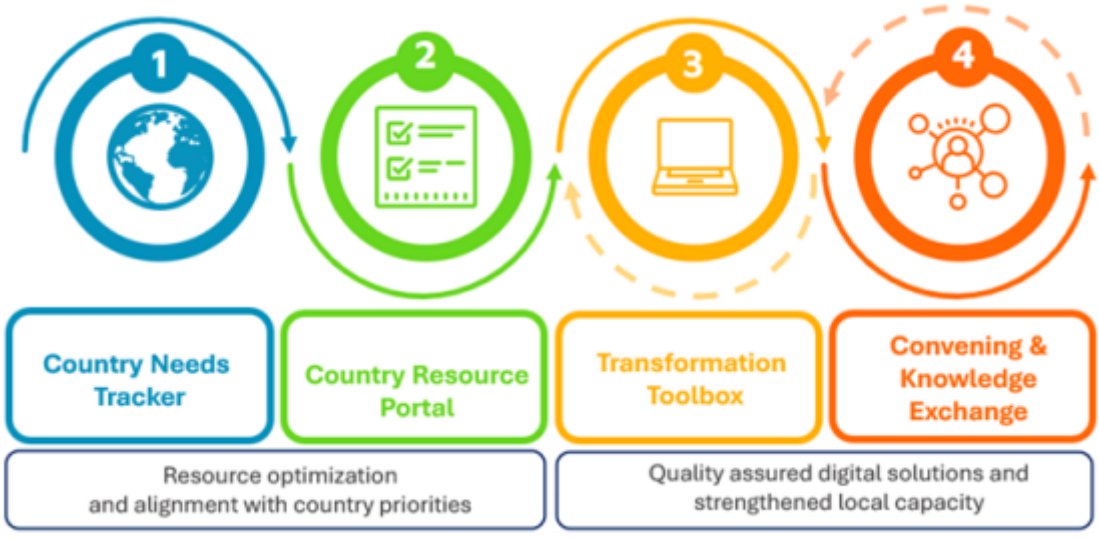
- **Earth Observation:** Monitor Earth's surface and environment, including oceanic observations, in key meteorological spectral channels.
- **Atmospheric Profiling:** Offer vertical profiles of meteorological parameters within the atmosphere.
- **Data Collection and Dissemination:** Facilitate data collection and dissemination from Data Collection Platforms (DCPs).
- **Search and Rescue Services:** Provide Satellite Aided Search and Rescue (SASAR) services for enhanced emergency response capabilities.



GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON DIGITAL HEALTH (GIDH)

CONTEXT: The Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare participated in the virtual public launch of the World Health Organization's Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH). GIDH, managed by WHO, was unanimously adopted by all G20 countries and other invited nations and organizations, launched as a key outcome of India's G20 Presidency.

BACKGROUND: Launched during the G20 Health Ministerial Meeting in Gandhinagar, India, the Global Initiative on Digital Health (GIDH) is a collaborative effort between the WHO and the Government of India. Operating as a WHO Managed Network, GIDH seeks to consolidate and amplify global digital health progress while enhancing mutual accountability. It serves as a platform for implementing the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020 - 2025 and aligning resources toward establishing digital public health infrastructure. This initiative aims to catalyse sustainable and evidence-based national digital health transformation.



About the Initiative

- **Priority Areas:** GIDH focuses on assessing Member States' needs, evaluating digital health resources, and supporting strategic objectives outlined in the Global Strategy on Digital Health 2020-2025.
- **Capacity Building:** GIDH aims to build capacity and converge efforts to develop, maintain, and adapt digital health technologies to evolving requirements.
- **Quality Assurance:** Addressing variability in digital solutions, GIDH emphasizes standards, data privacy,

security, and interoperability by promoting best practices and open standards.

- **Accelerating Health Outcomes:** Digital health is vital for achieving Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and Sustainable Development Goals, facilitating health outcomes advancement.
- **Collaboration and Support:** GIDH endeavours to strengthen collaboration among partners, amplify multinational and regional activities, and provide technical and financial support to Member States for digital health transformation.

SMISHING

CONTEXT: The Indian government alerts about 'Smishing', a fraudulent tactic combining SMS and Phishing, posing a threat with misleading texts to extract sensitive data, emphasizing vigilance.

BACKGROUND: With the increasing reliance on mobile phones, smishing poses a notable threat, urging individuals to remain vigilant. These scams mimic trusted entities like banks or government agencies, instilling urgency for recipients to act swiftly. They typically solicit sensitive information under false pretences, such as security verifications or account updates, putting individuals at risk of identity theft or financial loss.

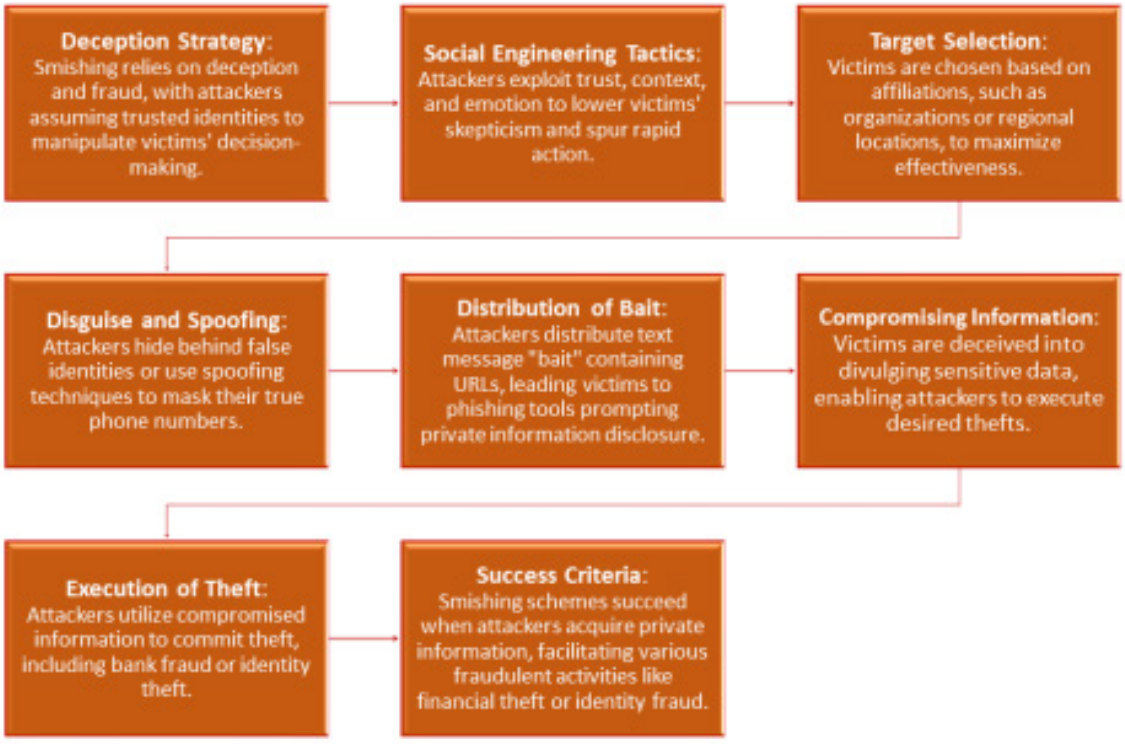
What is Smishing Attack?

Smishing is a form of cyber-attack where perpetrators send deceptive text messages, often containing malicious links or requests for sensitive information, to trick recipients into revealing personal data or installing malware.

Smishing, a form of phishing, targets victims through mobile text messages (SMS), aiming to extract sensitive information. It can involve malware or fraudulent websites and occurs across various messaging platforms.

Working of Smishing Attack

With the rise of mobile phone usage in India, smishing has become a major concern, prompting individuals to be cautious. These scams impersonate reputable sources like banks or government agencies, urging recipients to provide personal information urgently. Requests for sensitive data, disguised as security verifications or account updates, put individuals at risk of identity theft or financial fraud.



NEURALINK

CONTEXT: Experts criticize Elon Musk for the lack of transparency in Neuralink updates, citing concerns about patient safety and ethical norms. They fear it could hinder progress in neurotechnology.

HIGHLIGHTS: Billionaire Elon Musk's Neuralink initiated long-term trials for brain-computer interface implants in humans, becoming the third company to do so. Details about the trial's initial volunteer are scarce, but Musk claims the individual has fully recovered with no apparent ill effects, demonstrating the ability to control a computer mouse through thought alone. However, as typical with Musk's ventures, no concrete evidence accompanies these assertions.

What is Neuralink?

Neuralink is a neurotechnology company founded by Elon Musk, aiming to develop brain-machine interface (BMI) technology to merge the human brain with artificial intelligence for enhanced cognitive abilities.

- **Brain-Computer Interface:** Neuralink's goal is to create high-bandwidth connections between the human brain and computers for various applications.
- **Medical Applications:** Neuralink seeks to address neurological disorders and enhance human cognitive abilities through its brain-machine interface technology.
- **Implantable Devices:** Neuralink is working on developing implantable devices, including brain implants, to enable direct communication between the brain and external devices.
- **Future Vision:** Ultimately, Neuralink envisions a future where humans can seamlessly integrate with AI, unlocking new possibilities for communication, learning, and healthcare.

Possibilities in Neuralink

- **Enhanced Brain Function:** Neuralink could enable direct control of computers with thought, potentially enhancing productivity and communication efficiency.
- **Medical Treatments:** It offers hope for treating neurological disorders like Parkinson's disease or depression by directly stimulating or regulating brain activity.
- **Assistive Technologies:** Neuralink could empower individuals with disabilities by providing control over prosthetic limbs or allowing communication for those with locked-in syndrome.
- **Augmented Reality:** By integrating brain-computer interfaces with AR devices, users could experience immersive virtual environments or access information directly through thought.
- **Education and Learning:** Neuralink may revolutionize education by allowing instant access to vast amounts of information or facilitating direct knowledge transfer between individuals.

Concerns in Neuralink

- **Privacy:** Neuralink raises concerns about the privacy of neural data, as access to individuals' thoughts and brain activity could be exploited.
- **Ethical Implications:** There are ethical concerns regarding potential misuse of brain-computer interfaces, such as unauthorized manipulation or surveillance.
- **Inequality:** The technology may exacerbate existing inequalities if only accessible to the wealthy, widening the gap between those with and without enhanced cognitive abilities.
- **Health Risks:** Implanting devices into the brain poses risks such as infection or damage, raising concerns about long-term health consequences.
- **Autonomy:** There are worries about the loss of individual autonomy if external entities gain control or influence over individuals' thoughts and actions.

FIRST INDIGENOUS SPY SATELLITE BY PRIVATE INDIAN FIRM PRIMED FOR LAUNCH

CONTEXT: India's first indigenous spy satellite, crafted by Tata Advanced Systems Ltd (TASL), is scheduled for launch aboard a SpaceX rocket in April. The satellite, aimed for discreet military intelligence, marks a significant milestone.

HIGHLIGHTS: A satellite manufactured by Tata Advanced Systems Ltd (TASL) is being transported to Florida for its upcoming launch, enabling India to monitor its armed forces' precise coordinates and timings independently. The satellite will grant full ground control capabilities, with a control center slated for establishment in Bengaluru. Developed in collaboration with Satellogic, a Latin-American company, this center will guide and process imagery transmitted by the satellite.

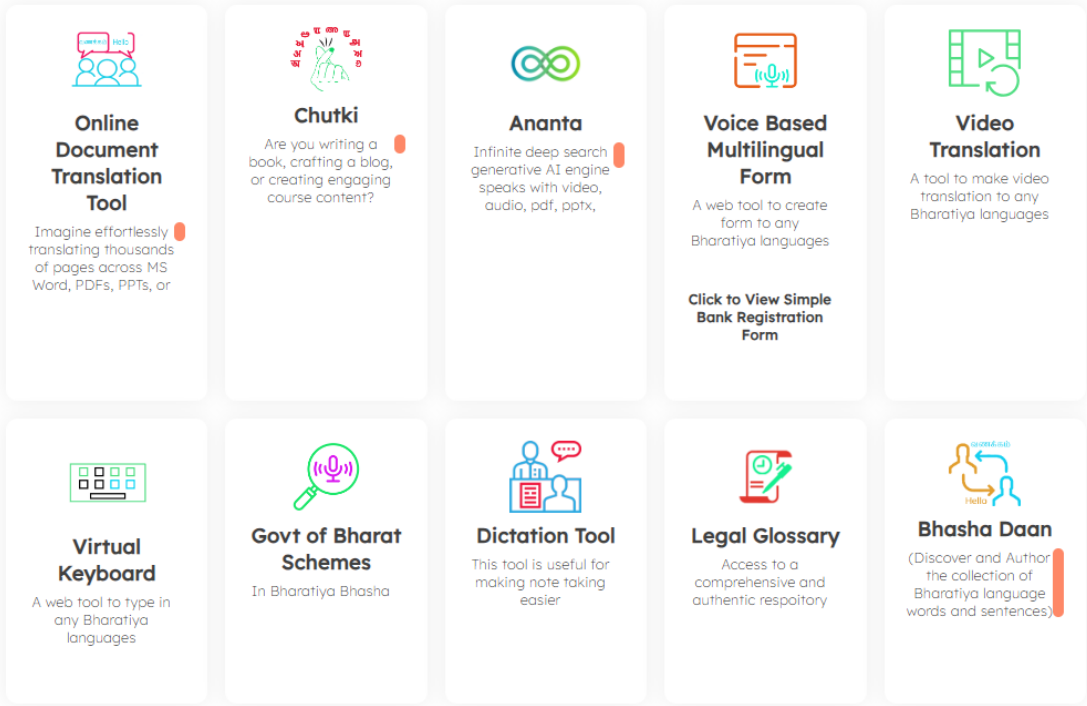
Satellite Specifications

- **Spatial Resolution:** Boasts a remarkable 0.5-meter spatial resolution for capturing fine details in imagery from space.
- **Ground Control Center:** Ground control center remains in India, ensuring secrecy of critical information required by armed forces.
- **Monitoring and Intelligence:** Satellite used for monitoring infrastructure and acquiring intelligence on military targets, enhancing India's security capabilities.
- **Launch and Control:** Completed by TASL, satellite sent to Florida for launch by SpaceX; ground control center to be established in Bengaluru.
- **Strategic Importance:** Enhances India's intelligence capabilities for monitoring borders and enemy movements, showcasing India's growing prowess in space technology.

TOOL ANUVADINI

CONTEXT: The Ministry of Education and AICTE introduced Anuvadini, an AI translation tool, to enhance teaching-learning in rural areas. Available as a mobile app, it facilitates voice and document translation for improved skill-building.

HIGHLIGHTS: The Ministry of Education and AICTE have launched Anuvadini, a voice and document AI translation tool, to enhance teaching-learning outcomes in rural and remote areas. The app aims to overcome language barriers, promote inclusivity, and encourage entrepreneurship and startup culture in underserved regions. It offers multilingual translation for online educational content, enabling students to learn in their native language. Additionally, it provides a digital audio workstation for teachers to create educational content and innovate pedagogically, ultimately improving teaching-learning practices in classrooms.



Addressing Language Barriers: The app's document translation tool allows students to translate files of up to 20 pages from one language to another. It supports 18 Indian languages and 17 foreign languages, including French, Portuguese, and Mandarin. Anuvadini, built with a large learning model like ChatGPT, aims to bridge the language gap in technical education, enabling students in rural areas to comprehend content in their mother tongue and facilitating skill-building. Chandrashekhar emphasizes Anuvadini's uniqueness compared to Google Translate, as it's tailored for Indian languages, recognizing their linguistic nuances for more accurate translations.

Enhancing Educational Opportunities

- **Tailored Features for Indian Languages:** The app offers over 600 custom dictionaries covering various subjects and provides English equivalents for technical terms, aiding comprehension.
- **Copyright-Free Image Creation:** Users can create copyright-free images within the app, addressing challenges in image sourcing from platforms like Google.
- **Support for Handwritten Document Translation:** The app supports handwritten document translation and features a robust model for Sanskrit, reflecting the government's commitment to address language barriers.
- **Empowering Education and Entrepreneurship:** Facilitating communication across languages enhances educational opportunities and promotes entrepreneurship, especially in rural areas with limited resources.
- **Accessibility and Ease of Use:** The app can be downloaded on mobile devices with minimal requirements, enabling individuals to leverage linguistic skills and reach wider audiences.

INDIA-TAILORED FOETAL AGE DETERMINATION MODEL CREATED

CONTEXT: A specialized model tailored for India has been developed to accurately determine the gestational age of a foetus during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

HIGHLIGHTS: Researchers from BRIC-THSTI Faridabad and IIT Madras have devised an India-specific model to accurately determine the age of a foetus during the second and third trimesters of pregnancy. Currently, foetal age is assessed using Western-derived formulas, leading to potential inaccuracies in later pregnancy stages due to variations in Indian foetal growth. The new Garbhini-GA2 formula significantly reduces errors, ensuring precise care for pregnant women and accurate delivery date predictions.

About the Model

- **Garbhini-GA2 Model Development:** Researchers utilized genetic algorithm-based methods to develop Garbhini-GA2, offering improved accuracy over existing models in determining gestational age (GA).
- **Clinical Application in Pregnancy Care:** Garbhini-GA2, when applied during the second and third trimesters, significantly enhances GA estimation accuracy, potentially improving pregnancy care outcomes in India.
- **Partnerships and Funding:** The study was conducted in collaboration with various medical institutions and was supported by the Department of Biotechnology (DBT), Govt of India, and other funding sources.
- **Impact on Maternal and Infant Health:** Accurate GA dating can lead to better care by obstetricians and neonatologists, ultimately reducing maternal and infant mortality rates in India.
- **Importance of Collaboration:** Dr. Shinjini Bhatnagar emphasized the importance of clinician-data scientist collaboration for translating technological advancements into tangible clinical benefits, ensuring seamless integration into healthcare workflows.

Led by IIT Madras, in collaboration with THSTI, the team focuses on enhancing public health in India by utilizing advanced data science and AI/ML techniques to predict adverse birth outcomes. Developed as part of the DBT's Garbh-Ini program, these population-specific models for estimating gestational age are undergoing validation nationwide, promising improved maternal and child health outcomes.

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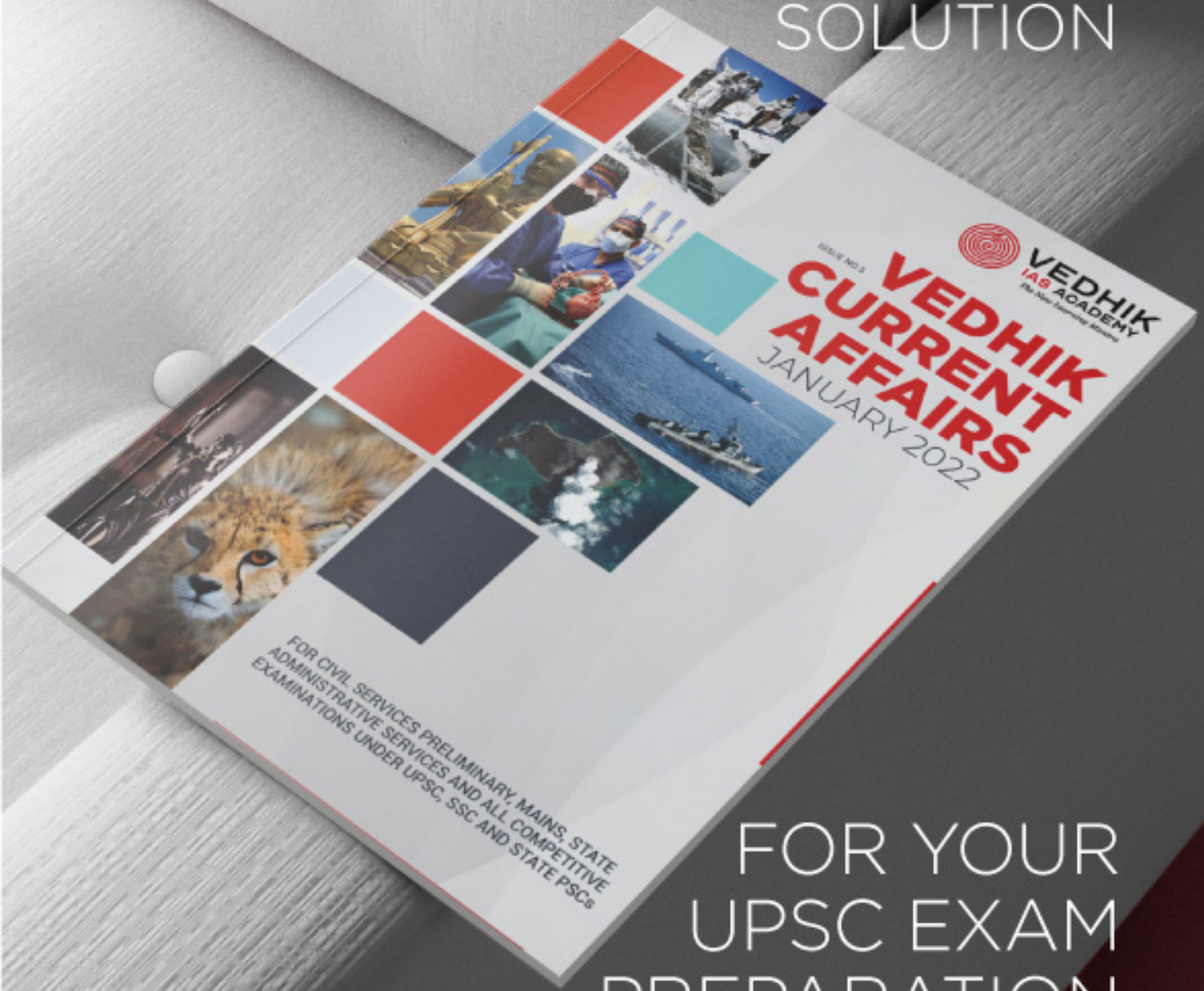
1 STOP SOLUTION



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CSAT

READING COMPREHENSION

PASSAGE 1

"The recent surge in online education platforms has revolutionized the way people learn. With the convenience of accessing courses from anywhere at any time, learners are no longer bound by geographical constraints or fixed schedules. These platforms offer a diverse range of subjects, from computer programming to creative writing, catering to learners of all ages and backgrounds. Furthermore, the interactive nature of online courses encourages active participation and engagement, enhancing the learning experience. As a result, traditional educational institutions are increasingly incorporating online components into their curricula to meet the evolving needs of students in the digital age."

1. What is the crux of the passage?

A) Traditional educational institutions are becoming obsolete.
B) Online education platforms offer convenience and diversity in learning.
C) Learners are no longer bound by fixed schedules.
D) Geographical constraints have limited the spread of education.

2. What is the most logical and rational inference from the passage?

A) Online education platforms are entirely replacing traditional educational institutions.
B) Interactive learning experiences are beneficial for learners.
C) Traditional educational institutions are resistant to change.
D) Online education platforms are accessible to learners of all ages and backgrounds.

PASSAGE 2

"In a world where technology dominates almost every aspect of our lives, the importance of cultivating human connections cannot be overstated. Despite the convenience and efficiency offered by digital communication tools, face-to-face interactions remain invaluable for fostering genuine relationships and understanding. While technology facilitates initial contact and provides avenues for staying connected across distances, it cannot fully replace the richness of in-person conversations and shared experiences. The nuances of non-verbal communication, the warmth of a smile, or the comfort of a reassuring touch are elements that technology struggles to replicate. Thus, amidst the digital age, preserving and cherishing real human connections is paramount for our emotional well-being and societal cohesion."

3. What is the MESSAGE of the passage?

A) Technology has completely replaced face-to-face interactions.
B) Digital communication tools are detrimental to human connections.
C) Human connections remain essential despite advancements in technology.
D) Face-to-face interactions are outdated in the digital age.

4. What is the ASSUMPTION from the passage?

A) Technology has made human connections more authentic.
B) In-person conversations are always superior to digital communication.
C) Non-verbal communication is irrelevant in fostering genuine relationships.
D) Human connections are crucial for emotional well-being and societal cohesion.

PASSAGE 3

In the vast expanse of the Amazon rainforest, biodiversity thrives in unparalleled abundance. This ecosystem, often referred to as the "lungs of the Earth," not only provides a habitat for an estimated 10% of the world's species but also plays a crucial role in global climate regulation. However, the Amazon faces numerous threats, primarily from deforestation, driven by agricultural expansion, logging, and infrastructure development. The loss of forest cover not only diminishes biodiversity but also disrupts vital ecological processes such as carbon sequestration and rainfall patterns. Indigenous communities, who have lived harmoniously with the forest for centuries, are at the forefront of efforts to conserve and protect the Amazon. Their traditional knowledge and sustainable practices offer valuable insights into maintaining the delicate balance between human activities and the natural environment. Despite conservation efforts, the Amazon continues to face intense pressure from deforestation, exacerbated by political and economic interests. The challenge of preserving this invaluable ecosystem requires coordinated action on local, national, and international levels, encompassing policy reforms, sustainable land-use practices, and support for indigenous rights.

5. What is the Amazon rainforest often referred to as?

A) The Green Heart of the World
B) The Desert of Plenty
C) The Lungs of the Earth
D) The Ocean of Trees

6. What is the primary threat to the Amazon rainforest mentioned in the passage?

A) Pollution from industrial activities
B) Climate change
C) Deforestation
D) Invasive species

7. Who are highlighted as key figures in efforts to conserve the Amazon?

A) Environmental activists
B) Scientists
C) Indigenous communities
D) Government officials

8. What is emphasized as necessary for preserving the Amazon rainforest?

A) Increasing agricultural expansion
B) Implementing stricter logging regulations
C) Coordinated action on various levels
D) Exploiting natural resources for economic growth

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ETHIC

WAR ETHICS

WAR ETHICS

War ethics examines the moral principles guiding conduct in armed conflicts. As Eisenhower famously said, "The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him." It delves into questions of just war, proportionality, and humanitarian considerations amid the chaos of warfare.

War ethics navigates the moral complexities inherent in armed conflicts. It involves assessing the justifiability of engaging in war and the conduct of warfare itself. At its core lies the principle of "just war," which outlines criteria for the initiation and conduct of war, such as legitimate authority, just cause, and proportionality.

Moreover, war ethics emphasizes the importance of minimizing harm to civilians and non-combatants. It challenges combatants to adhere to principles of distinction and proportionality, ensuring that military actions are directed only at legitimate targets and that the use of force is proportionate to the anticipated military advantage.

Ultimately, war ethics underscores the moral imperative of seeking alternatives to war and resolving conflicts through peaceful means whenever possible. It urges nations and leaders to prioritize diplomacy, negotiation, and mediation in addressing disputes, thereby promoting the value of human life and the preservation of peace.

Just War Theory

Just War Theory asserts that for a war to be morally justifiable, it must meet certain criteria, including just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, probability of success, proportionality, and last resort. It seeks to provide ethical guidelines for evaluating the decision to go to war and the conduct of warfare.

- Just Cause: Just Cause stipulates that a war must be fought for a morally acceptable reason, typically involving self-defence against aggression or the defence of innocent lives. For instance, World War II was widely regarded as a just war due to the necessity of stopping the aggression of Nazi Germany.
- Right Intention: Right Intention requires that the primary aim of going to war must be morally sound, such as restoring peace or securing justice, rather than pursuing selfish interests. The Gulf War of 1990-1991 aimed to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, reflecting a clear and legitimate intention.
- Last Resort: Last Resort asserts that all peaceful means of resolving a conflict must be exhausted before resorting to war. The diplomatic efforts preceding the Kosovo War in 1999 exemplify this, as negotiations and sanctions failed to halt ethnic cleansing, leading to military intervention as a last resort.
- Proportionality: Proportionality demands that the harm caused by the war must be proportionate to the good achieved, ensuring that the benefits outweigh the costs. The decision to use nuclear weapons in World War II, while controversial, was deemed proportional in the context of ending the conflict and preventing further casualties.
- Discrimination: Discrimination requires that combatants distinguish between civilians and legitimate military targets, minimizing harm to non-combatants. The Geneva Conventions established rules for protecting civilians in war, exemplified by efforts to minimize civilian casualties during targeted drone strikes in modern conflicts.

Pacifism

Pacifism, a moral stance against violence and war, poses profound ethical dilemmas when confronting armed conflict. Rooted in principles of nonviolence and compassion, pacifism challenges traditional notions of just war theory, advocating for alternative strategies to resolve disputes. Examining its complexities unveils tensions between moral ideals and practical realities.

- Absolute Nonviolence: Pacifism advocates for the rejection of all forms of violence and aggression, promoting peace through passive resistance and civil disobedience. Mahatma Gandhi's leadership in India's independence movement, characterized by nonviolent protests like the Salt March, exemplifies absolute nonviolence as a means of achieving social and political change.
- Conscientious Objection: Conscientious objection involves individuals refusing to participate in war or military service on moral or religious grounds. During the Vietnam War, many Americans opposed the conflict on ethical grounds, leading to a surge in conscientious objectors who sought alternative forms of service, such as humanitarian work or community service.
- Peaceful Conflict Resolution: Pacifism emphasizes resolving conflicts through dialogue, negotiation, and mediation rather than resorting to violence. The diplomatic efforts that led to the signing of the Camp David Accords in 1978, mediated by President Jimmy Carter, highlight the effectiveness of peaceful conflict resolution in achieving lasting peace between Israel and Egypt.

Humanitarian Intervention

Humanitarian intervention, a contentious concept in war ethics, involves the use of military force to protect civilians from widespread violence or human rights abuses. While often motivated by altruistic aims, it raises complex ethical questions about sovereignty, intervention legitimacy, and unintended consequences. Exploring its nuances reveals the tension between moral imperatives and geopolitical interests.

- Responsibility to Protect (R2P): R2P asserts that states have a responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity, even if it means intervening in the affairs of sovereign states. The NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999 aimed to protect Kosovar Albanians from ethnic cleansing by Serbian forces.
- Intervention Criteria: Intervention criteria are the standards used to determine when humanitarian intervention is justified, typically including the severity of the crisis, the likelihood of success, and the proportionality of the intervention. The United Nations Security Council evaluates such criteria when authorizing interventions, as seen in the case of the UN intervention in East Timor in 1999.
- Sovereignty vs. Human Rights: This dilemma concerns the tension between a state's sovereignty and the international community's obligation to uphold human rights. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 highlighted the

challenge, as the principle of non-interference conflicted with the imperative to prevent mass atrocities, prompting debates over the limits of state sovereignty in the face of humanitarian crises.

War Crimes and War Criminals

- Geneva Conventions: The Geneva Conventions are a set of international treaties that establish the humanitarian laws of war, protecting civilians, prisoners of war, and wounded soldiers. Violations constitute war crimes. The Abu Ghraib prisoner abuse scandal during the Iraq War violated the Geneva Conventions' prohibitions against torture and mistreatment of prisoners.
- International Criminal Court (ICC): The ICC is a permanent international tribunal established to prosecute individuals for the most serious crimes, including war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide. It provides a forum for holding perpetrators of such crimes accountable on a global scale, as demonstrated by the ICC's indictments against individuals involved in the Darfur conflict.
- Prosecution and Accountability: Prosecution and accountability entail holding individuals responsible for war crimes accountable through legal processes. The Nuremberg Trials after World War II set a precedent for prosecuting war criminals, demonstrating the importance of accountability for atrocities committed during armed conflicts to ensure justice and deter future violations.

Ethics of Drone Warfare in War ethics

The ethics of drone warfare present complex moral dilemmas at the intersection of technology and warfare. Debates center on issues such as precision targeting, civilian casualties, and the psychological distance between operator and target. Exploring these ethical dimensions reveals tensions between military necessity, humanitarian concerns, and technological advancement.

- Targeted Killings: Drone warfare allows for precise targeting of specific individuals deemed threats, often militants or terrorists, without conventional ground operations. However, ethical concerns arise regarding the legality and morality of extrajudicial executions. The killing of Anwar al-Awlaki, a US citizen and Al-Qaeda leader, by a drone strike in Yemen in 2011 sparked debates over targeted killings.
- Civilian Casualties: Drone strikes have been criticized for causing civilian deaths and injuries, raising moral questions about proportionality and discrimination. The high-profile case of a wedding party mistakenly targeted in Yemen in 2013 underscores the ethical challenges of minimizing civilian harm in remote warfare operations.
- Remote Warfare: Remote warfare involves conducting military operations from a distance, often via unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) or drones, which raises ethical concerns about detachment and accountability. Operators remotely controlling drones from thousands of miles away face moral dilemmas regarding the consequences of their actions and the psychological impact of remote killing.

Jus ad Bellum and Jus in Bello

Jus ad Bellum and Jus in Bello are foundational principles in the ethics of war. The former governs the justifications for going to war, addressing issues of legitimacy and proportionality, while the latter regulates conduct during warfare, emphasizing principles of discrimination and proportionality in the use of force. Understanding these principles illuminates the moral complexities of armed conflict.

- Jus ad Bellum (Right to War): Jus ad Bellum refers to the ethical principles guiding the decision to go to war. It includes criteria such as just cause, legitimate authority, right intention, and last resort. The invasion of Iraq in 2003 raised questions about the legitimacy of the war under jus ad Bellum principles.
- us in Bello (Conduct in War): Jus in Bello pertains to the ethical norms governing the conduct of warfare, emphasizing principles like proportionality, discrimination, and minimizing harm to civilians. Violations of jus in Bello include war crimes such as indiscriminate attacks, as seen in the bombing of civilian areas during the Syrian civil war.
- Criteria for Declaring War: This entails the conditions that must be met before a state can rightfully declare war, encompassing factors like just cause, legitimate authority, and last resort. The Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 exemplifies the careful consideration of criteria for declaring war, as tensions between the US and Soviet Union escalated but war was ultimately averted through diplomacy.

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD)

Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) pose grave ethical challenges in warfare due to their indiscriminate and catastrophic effects on human life and the environment. Ethical analysis of WMD addresses issues of proportionality, necessity, and the moral responsibility of states possessing such weapons, highlighting the imperative of disarmament and non-proliferation.

- Nuclear Ethics: Nuclear ethics examines the moral dilemmas surrounding the development, proliferation, and use of nuclear weapons. The bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II epitomize the ethical complexities of nuclear warfare, raising concerns about the catastrophic consequences and indiscriminate nature of such weapons.
- Biological Weapons: Biological weapons involve the use of living organisms or their byproducts to cause harm. The 2001 anthrax attacks in the United States highlighted the potential devastation of biological warfare, underscoring ethical dilemmas regarding the indiscriminate nature of these weapons and the difficulty in controlling their effects.
- Chemical Warfare: Chemical warfare employs toxic chemicals to incapacitate or kill adversaries. The use of chemical weapons, such as sarin gas attacks in Syria, raises profound ethical concerns due to their indiscriminate and inhumane nature, violating principles of proportionality and discrimination in warfare.

Ethics of Occupation and Post-Conflict Reconstruction

The ethics of occupation and post-conflict reconstruction encompass complex moral considerations regarding governance, justice, and rebuilding societies ravaged by war. Questions of legitimacy, responsibility, and the protection of human rights loom large, revealing the tensions between stabilization efforts and the autonomy of affected populations.

- Nation-Building: Nation-building involves efforts to establish or reestablish the institutions and infrastructure of a state following conflict or collapse. The reconstruction of Iraq after the 2003 invasion illustrates the challenges of nation-building, including fostering political stability, rebuilding infrastructure, and promoting economic development to prevent further conflict.
- Stabilization Operations: Stabilization operations aim to restore peace and security in post-conflict environments, often involving military and civilian efforts to rebuild governance structures and provide essential services. The United Nations stabilization mission in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake exemplifies such operations, focusing on restoring stability and rebuilding infrastructure.
- Occupation Responsibilities: Occupation responsibilities entail the duties of occupying powers under international law, including ensuring the welfare and security of the occupied population, upholding human rights, and facilitating the transition to self-governance. The Allied occupation of Japan after World War II exemplifies efforts to rebuild a nation while respecting the rights and sovereignty of the occupied state.

Ethics of Counterinsurgency

The ethics of counterinsurgency confront the moral dilemmas inherent in combating unconventional threats while upholding humanitarian principles. Balancing military necessity with respect for civilian lives and human rights poses profound ethical challenges. Examining these complexities sheds light on the tensions between security imperatives and moral obligations in asymmetric warfare.

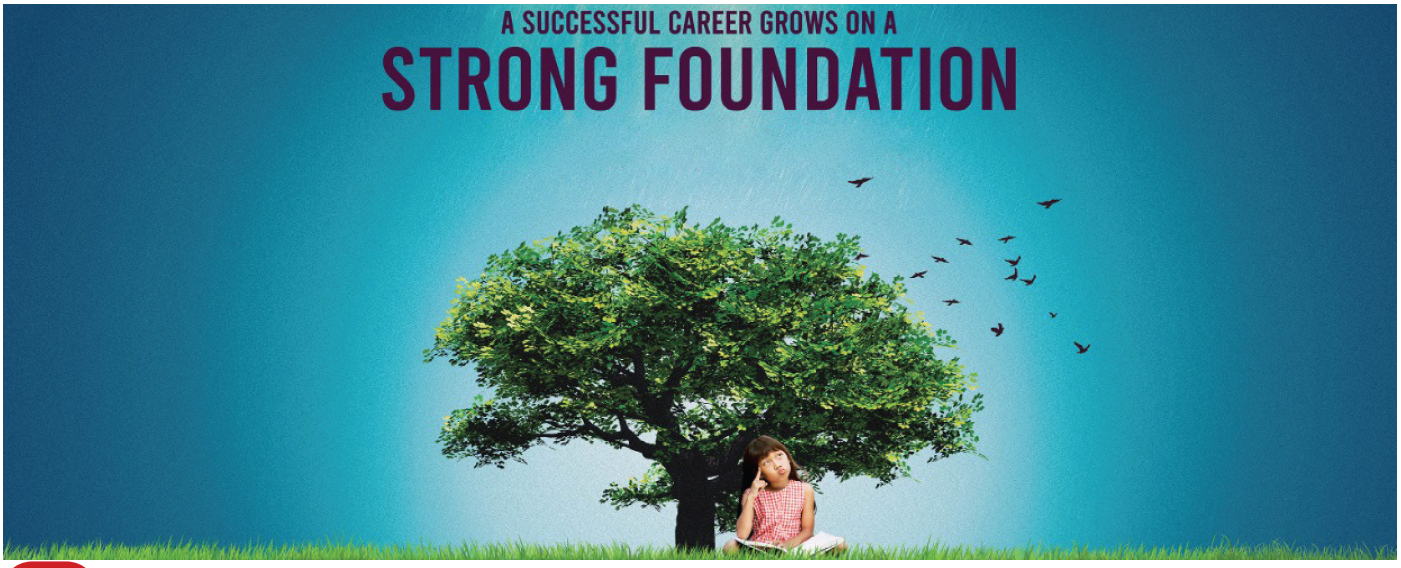
- Civilian Protection: The ethics of counterinsurgency prioritize minimizing harm to civilians while combating insurgent forces. Strategies such as targeted strikes and population-centric approaches aim to protect civilians from violence and coercion. The implementation of civilian casualty tracking mechanisms in Afghanistan reflects efforts to uphold civilian protection as a moral imperative.
- Winning Hearts and Minds: Counterinsurgency ethics emphasize building trust and cooperation with the local population to undermine support for insurgents. Humanitarian assistance, development projects, and respectful engagement aim to win over civilian support. The "Clear, Hold, Build" strategy in the Iraq War sought to win hearts and minds by providing security and delivering essential services.
- Legitimacy of Tactics: The ethics of counterinsurgency scrutinize the moral justification and proportionality of tactics used against insurgents. Practices such as targeted killings, interrogation methods, and use of force are evaluated based on their adherence to international law and ethical standards. Debates over the legitimacy of tactics arise in cases like the use of drone strikes in counterinsurgency operations.

Just War in the Age of Cyber Warfare

Navigating the principles of just war theory in the age of cyber warfare presents novel ethical quandaries. Traditional criteria such as proportionality and discrimination must adapt to the intangible nature of cyber-attacks. Examining these challenges illuminates the evolving ethical landscape of warfare in the digital era.

- Cyber Espionage: Just War theory questions the ethics of cyber espionage, balancing the need for information gathering with the respect for privacy and sovereignty. While some argue it can be justified for intelligence purposes, concerns arise over the potential for escalation and undermining trust between states.
- Cyber Attacks: Just War principles scrutinize the use of cyber-attacks, assessing their proportionality and discrimination. The Stuxnet attack on Iranian nuclear facilities exemplifies the ethical dilemmas, as it targeted critical infrastructure but also risked collateral damage and escalation.
- Attribution and Retaliation: Just War ethics grapples with challenges of attribution and retaliation in cyber warfare. The difficulty in identifying perpetrators and the potential for misattribution raise questions about the legitimacy of retaliation. Instances like the Sony Pictures hack highlight the complexities of responding proportionately to cyber aggression.

War ethics grapple with the complexities of moral responsibility, human dignity, and the ever-evolving nature of conflict. From debates surrounding pacifism to the ethical implications of emerging technologies, a commitment to principles of justice, compassion, and accountability remains paramount in navigating the ethical challenges of warfare.



SPACE FOR ROUGH WORK

TOPICS OF THE MONTH

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF, FIRST AS A TRAGEDY, SECOND AS A FARCE

- DR. Alexander Jacob IPS

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND PATRIOTISM

-DR. Babu Sebastian

POETS ARE THE UNACKNOWLEDGED LEGISLATORS OF THE WORLD

-DR. G. Prasanna Kumar IAS

HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF, FIRST AS A TRAGEDY, SECOND AS A FARCE

Born amidst the shipyard clamour of Genoa in the family of weavers, young Columbus yearned for the ocean's call, not the loom. His audacious dream: a westward path to Asia's riches. Rejected, deemed "wild," he persisted, his spirit mirroring a ship yearning to break free. Countless times, the harbour's comfort beckoned, yet the sea's whisper persisted. Finally, the Spanish crown, captivated by his unwavering spirit, granted him passage to the unknown. This is Columbus' tale, a testament to dreams and resolve. It echoes the proverb: "A ship in harbour is safe, but that is not what ships are for."

This carries a profound message that transcends the realm of nautical navigation. It speaks to a fundamental human dilemma: the allure of comfort and stability versus the pursuit of growth and exploration True purpose lies not in comfort, but in the courageous pursuit of uncharted waters, where discovery and groundbreaking achievements await. Columbus' story becomes our launch pad, urging us to set sail on our own voyages, pushing beyond the known and embracing the limitless possibilities that lie beyond the horizon. Men have reached the moon and beyond because of this unquenchable thirst to explore the unknown, leave behind the comfort of the familiar and seek adventure.

On Kurukshetra's battlefield, Arjuna faltered. Beloved kin stood on the opposing side. The war's carnage, the loss, threatened to drown him. Seeking solace in peaceful retreat, like a ship seeking harbour, he contemplated abandoning his duty. Yet, Krishna, his charioteer, reminded him of his path: to fight for righteousness regardless of the cost. Though agonizing, Arjuna's choice - like a ship venturing beyond the harbour - resonated with the proverb: True purpose lies not in escaping hardship, but in navigating it with courage, even against those closest to us. His destiny, like that of a ship, lay not in the stagnant safety of the known, but in navigating the unpredictable currents of duty and consequence.

The harbour, with its calm waters and protective walls, represents the familiar, the comfortable, and the predictable. It is the haven of routine, security, and established patterns. Staying within its confines offers a sense of security, a shield against the unknown and the uncertainties that lie beyond. However, this very security can become a double-edged sword. While it fosters a sense of peace, it can also lead to stagnation, missed opportunities, and an unfulfilled life.

The ship, on the other hand, embodies the spirit of adventure, exploration, and the potential for growth. It is designed to navigate the challenges of the open sea, to weather storms, and to reach new destinations. The vastness of the ocean represents the possibilities and potential that lie beyond our comfort zone. It is a metaphor for the challenges, risks, and uncertainties that we must encounter to truly discover ourselves, achieve our goals, and contribute meaningfully to the world.

Shelter in the harbour? A ship craves the open sea! Fortress walls offer safety, but a ship yearns to split the waves, braving storms and seeking distant shores. Unlike a fortress, it cannot choose its path, but it dances with the wind, a vessel for adventure. Life, like a ship, thrives on calculated risks, not the stagnant calm of routine. Fulfilment lies not in the mundane, but in the journey itself, a continual pursuit of purpose beyond the horizon. The harbour may offer peace, but it is in the open sea that a ship truly lives.

A ship, nestled within the harbour's embrace, may find temporary solace, but it will never reach its true destination. As Harivansh Rai Bachchan eloquently reminds us, "The boat does not cross the river, fearing the waves." To fulfill its purpose, the ship must brave the currents, embrace the challenge, and set sail for uncharted waters.

History echoes this sentiment. Empires crumble when leaders become complacent, seeking refuge in the illusion of safety. India's own story exemplifies this. After independence, a focus on domestic concerns of poverty alleviation and hunger, India left its defences neglected, leading to vulnerability. Lulled by the siren song of global security offered by the United Nations, India, like a ship seeking refuge in the harbour, temporarily lowered its guard. The promise of peace and stability offered by a revitalized world government seemed to render its own defence capabilities unnecessary. The 1962 attack served as a wake-up call, prompting India to steer its ship out of the stagnant harbour and invest in its defence capabilities.

Similarly, companies like Nokia and Kodak, once giants in their fields, met their demise by clinging to outdated models and failing to embrace calculated risks in a changing world. True success, like a fulfilling life, demands leaving the comfort zone behind. It requires action, courage, and the willingness to brave the unknown, even if it means venturing into unfamiliar territory and facing potential setbacks.

The harbour whispers promises of safety: no storms, no waves, just the soothing lull of the known. Yet, a ship, tethered to these predictable shores, risks rusting into oblivion. Its true calling lies not in the stagnant embrace of the harbour, but in braving the fury of the open sea, navigating the unpredictable currents, and forging its path through the tempest.

Similarly, we humans, creatures of comfort, find ourselves drawn to the familiar. We build walls of routine and predictability, hesitant to venture beyond the known. Yet, growth and fulfillment lie not within these safe confines, but in the uncharted territories beyond. It is in embracing the unknown and overcoming the fear of the storm that we discover our true potential.

For years, India, like a ship hesitant to leave the harbour, navigated the volatile waters of its relationship with China with caution, burdened by past defeats. However, the recent Galwan crisis served as a potent reminder. It was a moment of reckoning, a realization that true strength lies not in avoiding the storm, but in weathering it with head held high.

The fear of failure, the trepidation towards the unknown, these are formidable adversaries. But just as a ship cannot fulfill its purpose by remaining anchored, we too cannot achieve our full potential by clinging to the familiar. Let us embrace the challenge, unfurl our sails, and set course for our own uncharted destiny, even if the seas are rough and the path uncertain. For it is only by embracing the unknown that we can truly discover who we are and what we are capable of.

While the harbour offers solace to a ship, it can also become its steel coffin. Safety, though enticing, risks stagnation. Just as rust consumes a ship at anchor, so too can complacency erode our potential.

We, like ships, often settle for manageable shores, fearing the vast unknown. Yet, true growth lies beyond the comfort zone, in the untamed waters of challenge and risk. It's in navigating these uncharted territories that we discover our true potential, each hurdle a lesson learned, each setback a sail unfurled on our journey of self-discovery.

Take ISRO, for example. After the tragic failure of Aryabhatta, their first satellite, giving in to fear could have crippled their space program. Instead, they embraced the lessons learned and ventured forth, propelling India to the forefront of space research. Today we have reached the south pole of the moon, explored Mars and prepared Ganyaan to sail the oceans of space.

Remember, a ship at anchor may be safe, but it can't truly live. So, let's set sail, embrace the unknown, and unlock the potential that lies beyond the harbour. Dreams gather dust in the comfort zone. A ship, built for the open sea, finds its purpose not in the quiet harbor, but in braving the currents and reaching new shores. Similarly, fulfillment lies not in stagnant ease, but in venturing beyond the familiar. Only by pushing past the boundaries of our comfort zone can we achieve our true potential and unlock the possibilities that lie in wait."

The harbour offers a comforting embrace, but true purpose lies beyond its sheltered shores. Just as a ship thrives not in stagnant calm, but in navigating the open sea, we too must embrace calculated risks to reach our full potential.

Yes, there's a fine line between prudent planning and paralyzing caution. While blind leaps into the unknown are rarely advisable, calculated risks, meticulously weighed against potential pitfalls, propel us forward. It's in this dance between prudence and audacious spirit that we find the sweet spot for growth.

Take India's response to the persistent threat from Pakistan. After the 1971 war, the strategy of the neighbour shifted to covert attacks, aiming to "bleed India by a thousand cuts." The arrow loose must be the result of meticulous aim, not a shot in the dark. India's response to the "bleed India by 1000 cuts" policy exemplifies this approach. While harbouring the capability to retaliate under the overhang of proven nuclear capability, India opted for measured responses through surgical strikes, exemplifying the power of calculated risk-taking.

Venturing beyond the harbour, the ship discovers its true potential. It can traverse vast distances, reach distant shores, and fulfill its purpose. Similarly, venturing beyond the comfort zone, we unlock hidden abilities and forge unique paths. As Nietzsche suggests, those with a winner's mentality possess the courage to take risks, distinguishing them from those who remain mired in fear.

History is replete with examples of individuals who dared to challenge the status quo. Rosa Parks, through her simple act of defiance, sparked a revolution in America. Gandhi and Mandela, through unwavering courage and calculated risks, carved their names in history. They chose not to simply stay safe in the harbour, but to set sail on their own voyages, leaving behind a lasting legacy.

While the initial leap may feel daunting, gather your courage and take the plunge. Success rarely whispers; it roars as you persevere, and help often emerges from unexpected corners.

While venturing out and taking risks are crucial for growth, just like a ship navigating the open seas, humans also crave a sense of stability. This doesn't contradict the need for risk-taking, but rather complements it.

Think of a harbor as a safe haven for a ship. It provides a place to regroup, replenish resources, and strategize before braving the open waters once again. Similarly, in life, having a safety net, whether financial, emotional, or both, can provide the security needed to embrace calculated risks and pursue ambitious goals with greater confidence.

India's economic reforms in the 1990s offer a compelling example. While embracing liberalization and globalization involved calculated risks, certain safeguards were maintained. These included government control mechanisms like Minimum Support Price (MSP) for agricultural products and social welfare initiatives like direct benefit transfers and public distribution systems. These acted as a safety net, mitigating potential risks and allowing India to navigate the uncertainties of an open market with greater resilience.

Therefore, it's crucial to strike a balance between the exhilarating journey on the open sea and the safe haven of the harbour. Embracing risks is essential for growth, but having some form of security allows us to chart our course with greater confidence and navigate the inevitable storms with greater resilience.

Just as a sailor needs careful planning, preparation, and navigation skills to navigate the open sea, venturing beyond our comfort zone requires calculated risks, thoughtful decisions, and a commitment to learning from experiences. We must approach challenges with caution, weighing the risks against the potential rewards. We must ensure we have the resources, capabilities, and support systems necessary to weather the storm.

Prudence, the ability to harmonize reason and self-control, serves as an essential compass in life's journey. This virtue empowers us to assess our strengths and weaknesses objectively, enabling us to navigate the rapids of life with informed decision-making.

By understanding our capabilities and limitations, we can prudently choose which risks to embrace and which to avoid. This balanced approach, much like steering a ship through treacherous waters, allows us to chart a course towards success while minimizing the potential for failure.

This delicate balance between seeking challenges and navigating them with caution is crucial for achieving true fulfilment. It is not about blindly charging into the unknown, but rather about making informed decisions, learning from mistakes, and adapting to changing situations. The journey itself becomes a process of continuous learning and growth, shaping our character and refining our skills.

A life spent solely in the harbour, however safe and serene, misses the grand symphony of life played out on the open sea. While a cautious existence may hold its appeal, it offers little beyond the quiet humdrum of routine.

Remember, while failure can sting, it is often the greatest teacher. It unveils our blind spots, hones our resilience, and propels us forward with hard-earned wisdom. True growth, like a leader's calculated risk-taking, requires a delicate dance between embracing challenges and maintaining a safety net. The Buddhist principle of the Middle Path eloquently emphasizes this delicate balance.

Ultimately, the choice between harbour and ocean is deeply personal. The harbour offers comfort, but the open sea beckons with the allure of adventure, self-discovery, and boundless potential. While the familiar may hold comfort, true fulfillment lies in embracing the unknown, facing our fears, and navigating the vast expanse.

It is in navigating the uncharted waters that we truly discover the depths of our being. We develop the adaptability to weather life's storms, the resilience to overcome challenges, and the wisdom to build a life of meaning and purpose. Just as a ship cannot fulfill its destiny anchored in the harbour, we cannot truly thrive without venturing beyond the safe shores.

The open sea, with its endless horizon, represents the immensity of our own potential. It serves as a constant reminder that life is a voyage of discovery, and true fulfillment lies not in reaching a destination, but in embracing the challenges and the boundless possibilities that lie beyond the known.

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND PATRIOTISM

A nation is formed by the set of people who inhabit a certain geographical landmass, are a part of a consolidated political unit, have shared rights and duties, follow a common legal system and so on. But more than all of this, a nation is an expression of people's ideas and aspirations. These ideas have originated, condensed, changed, evolved, lost and re-gained prominence over tens of centuries and so have the geographical boundaries and the political systems associated with them. These very ideas and aspirations of people are expressed in the various symbols and rituals which a nation chooses for itself as its motifs. The internalization of and identification with these symbols and rituals constitutes what is called as national identity at the level of political or even in day to day parlance. The respect, admiration and loyalty towards these symbols and rituals, which are in turn representation of the nation- its people, is what is called patriotism.

National identity, although a collective idea, yet can be read as the most important of the multiple identities an individual subscribes to in contemporary times. It has played an immense role in evolution of the social and the political world as it looks today. Meanwhile, patriotism has been the driving force in formation, articulation and assertion of the national identity. Therefore an essay on 'National Identity and Patriotism' becomes not only an exercise at comprehending the wider meanings and ramifications of these terms but is also an attempt to look at the debates surrounding these terms in our history and present times. In this process, we have to look at the various theories regarding their origin, story of their growth and conflicting prophecies about their probable future in a globalised and technology driven world. As such this essay also offers a chance to meditate upon the lessons from history and possibilities for future from the perspective of the present.

National identity derives itself from the idea of Nation-State. Nation-Sate themselves have their own history. While there are various theories regarding the origins of Nation-States, it is generally agreed upon that the bases of the Modern Nation States were laid after the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. It led to the formation of Classical Nation States of Northern and Western Europe. It also laid the foundation for the growth of Nationalism. This ultimately led to formation and consolidation of Second generation of Nation States such as Italy, Germany, and countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The process of decolonization in the aftermath of Second World War saw the emergence of third generation of nation-states in the African and Asian Continents. The process of the formation of Nation-States continued till the end of 20th century when several new nations emerged in the aftermath of the decline and disintegration of USSR. The emergence of Kosovo in South-Eastern Europe and Southern Sudan in Africa highlight the fact that the process of Nation-Formation is still on, even in the 21st century.

The history of origin of National identity illustrates the importance of political events in the formation or emergence of modern nation-states. But that politics itself has been a derivative of interplay of diverse factors. National identity as such seems to be a superset of a combination of factors which include linguistic identities, regional loyalties, culture, religion and history.

Linguistic identities have been a feature of several demands of national self-determination. The wave of Nationalism in Europe in 18th and 19th century and the more recent struggle for and foundation of Bangladesh was largely based upon this very premise. One Nation-One Language was also mooted as the idea for the basis of national identity largely based upon the European experience. Similarly regional or ethnic identities have also acted as foundation of national identities. The disintegration of USSR into multiple nation states was seen as the culmination of the struggle for freedom of diverse groups that were ethnically diverse. The making and remaking of various African boundaries is also seen as the result of the assertion of ethnic identities as separate national identity.

Culture has also served as the bedrock of various nationalisms. The diversity of cultures has been seen as a challenge to the formation of a strong singular national identity. This line of argumentation also spilled over to religious identity as well. Religion was used as the basis for the two nation theory which led to the partition of United India into India and Pakistan. The modern state of Israel is also an example of the formation of National identity on the basis of an imagined coherence between Culture and Religion on one hand and Nation-State on the other.

All or any of these identities are given the form of National identity with the help of history. It is history of the Nation which gives legitimacy to national identity and assertion of sovereignty by that nation. Renan has even sarcastically remarked that 'Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation'. This is the reason all nations try to trace their history to a hoary past. Failure of being able to discover or forge one's history is seen as an existential question mark constantly lurking upon its national identity.

Benedict Anderson has famously theorized that 'Nation is an imagined community. It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined'. Ultimately it is the width and depth of the imagination of this community which decides the course of a nation. A country like India, with multiple and diverse linguistic, religious and ethnic identities could claim to be a nation only because of the inclusiveness and tolerance that has been its hallmark since centuries.

When various groups feel assured that their identities would not be threatened, but will actually flourish in the idea or imagination of a nation, only then a diverse but united nation like India can sustain and grow. Only an inclusive imagination can breed patriots, since exclusivity breeds division, secession and war. As such Patriotism is not only a display of love and a deep sense of affection for one's country; it is also a feeling of pride. Rabindranath Tagore often used a term 'Deshabhimaan' as a synonym for this word in his works which aptly captures one of the dimensions of this word.

National identity and Patriotism gives a sense of belonging to an individual in the world. It helps a person feel the presence of an extended family around him. Naturally the actions guided by such a philosophy will lead to betterment of a society and progress of the country. It is sometimes wrongly assumed

that patriotism is love for one's country at the cost of others. Actually, such line of thinking stems from crude understanding of the idea of National Identity and Patriotism. India has a guiding philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' i.e. whole world is my family. Only such understanding of patriotism can bring peace and prosperity to the country as well as the world. Apart from that, excessive pride in a national identity and display of Patriotism may acquire the form of 'ultra-nationalism' and jingoism. Ultra-nationalism inevitably turns exclusionary in nature and hence leads not to the assertion but disintegration of national unity and ultimately identity. Similarly, jingoism, by constantly falling back upon the idea of ultra-nationalism when faced with any issue or problem of past/present, vitiates the community atmosphere and starts imposing restrictions upon any free speech or dissent. Such extremism leads only to great destruction as exemplified several times in history by various totalitarian regimes such as those of Hitler and Mussolini. One should always keep in mind what Edward R. Murrow, an American journalist said in context of USA during one of the most volatile phases of Cold War. He said 'We must not confuse dissent with disloyalty. When the loyal opposition dies, I think the soul of the nation dies with it.'

The turn of 20th century was seen as a challenge to the age of Nations, as it has been popularly referred to in the parlance of social sciences, due to unhindered rise of globalization, emergence of multinational companies with their revenues several times the GDP of several countries, and the age of internet which connected the world more than ever before. There was also a faction of scholars that saw it as approaching 'clash of civilizations' where multiple national or other identities are bound to engage in a clash, in order to emerge as the superior-most among all.

However, both prophesies can be seen to be missing the mark. The globalization has not only brought the world closer than ever, it has also sensitized people towards their own identities. It has taught the world to be more appreciative of the diversity of cultures, thoughts and nationalities.

The demands for more apt representation from different parts of the world at United Nations and the recent reforms at International Monetary Fund (IMF) aimed at better representation of emerging nations at the international platform are two examples of the above phenomenon. Similarly, the increased contact between the various identities is not leading to any clash of civilizations but, in fact, has resulted in globally coordinated efforts to contain such clashes. Foundation of various international forums and signing of various trans-national treaties to engage with issues of security, energy and environmental concerns are cases in point. The visionary project of Inter-national Solar Alliance (ISA) launched by our Prime minister is an example of how multiple nations are coordinating in the contemporary globalised world to strike a balance between the global concerns of climate change and pressing national energy security concerns.

Towards conclusion, it can be said that National identity and patriotism are deeply humane terminologies. They represent the urge of the humankind to be a part of the collective and contribute meaningfully and loyally to it. Krishna says in Gita, that there are multiple paths to the same truth. Similarly, there may be more than one ways of not only subscribing to a national identity but also of displaying the patriotism towards one's country. One must always be ready and vigilant to defend one's national prestige but must not enforce one's own ideas and ideals of national identity and patriotism upon everyone else. The essence of National identity and patriotism, in a country like India, can be best summed up in the lines of the Ancient Philosopher Sun Tzu, who said

"There are not more than five musical notes, yet the combinations of these five give rise to more melodies than can ever be heard.

There are not more than five primary colours, yet in combination they produce more hues than can ever been seen.

There are not more than five cardinal tastes, yet combinations of them yield more flavours than can ever be tasted."

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POETS ARE THE UNACKNOWLEDGED LEGISLATORS OF THE WORLD

The poet's idea, artist's work, and writer's writing all play a crucial role in the evolution of the society. It aids in the identification of priority areas for development. It assists in decision-making during the process of formulating policies and passing legislation. The primary goal of the legislature is to establish norms for the proper functioning of society through legislation. Poets are forging new paths for culture and country. The poet talks about justice, beauty, suffering, despair, anguish and pain. Equality, justice, empathy, grief and poverty are prominent topic which always find its way to be reflected in the poetic and artistic creation.

Indian poetry in English is said to have begun with Henry Louis Vivian Derozio who was not only a poet but also a teacher of poet. He had a significant role in the profound socio-cultural transformations brought about by the Renaissance. Socio-cultural circumstances play a very prominent role during the formulation and implementation of the legislation. Poetic and artistic creation and writing by writers is influenced by the society and in the same way cinema is impacting the society.

Poet is setting norms through his poetic creations such as Vande Mataram, Jan Gan Man Adhinayak and Sarfaroshi Ki Tamanna etc. These poetic compositions not only signify patriotism, but also instill feelings of love and affection for the nation. Vande Mataram is the national song of India. On November 7, 1875, Mr. Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote this poem to honor Mother India. Maulana Hasrat Mohani, an Urdu poet and Indian freedom fighter coined the slogan Inquilab Zindabad in 1921. In the late 1920s, Bhagat Singh popularized it through his speeches and writings. The poet legislates the social norms through its poetic creation. It was also the Hindustan Socialist Republican Association's official motto. This beautiful statement instills a sense of revolution in the individual's heart and spirit.

Poetic creation is not limited to literature. It may be found in many facets of society, including film, lyrics, music, and various visual and performing arts. The song Karchale Ham Fida Jan Tan Sathiyo is from the film Haqeeqat. Cinema is a reflection of society because what happens in society influences the creativity of the cinema. The power of audiovisuals has been demonstrated and used politically, socially, and financially throughout history. During World War II, leaders such as Adolf Hitler successfully exploited films as propaganda weapons. As technology advances, leaders in politics and business have used songs, poems, and lyrics to influence public opinion for both their personal and the collective goods. The great poet and scholar Rabindranath Tagore who has written the National anthem "Jan Gan Man Adhinayak" had a huge respect and following. Rabindranath Tagore and his works were greatly influenced by a segment of his admirers. On the other side, songs serve as a reminder of the value of love and the justification for its pursuit.

A poet has a deep and farsighted vision like a legislature which enables them to see the crisis before humanity. Poet in his poem tries to summarize the crisis which a society is going through or intended to face, and a legislature tries to put a holistic solution of the problems which a society is facing.

Rahim Das, Kabir Das and Pt. Nehru are the prominent persons who secures respect by mean of their poetic and writing capability. Discovery of India is one of the very famous books written by the Pt. Nehru. The book offers a comprehensive overview of Indian history, philosophy, and culture. This book's assessment of society sheds light on contemporary situational concerns and other associated problems. It facilitated the knowledge-based decision-making policy formulation and enactment of law.

It is the magnificent culture of Indian society that Indian Saint presented his message in poetry form. Kabir Das and Rahim Das both are the prominent saints who enlighten to the society through their knowledge. Kabir used a dialect used by the average populace. His words were spontaneous, poetical, and melodic, as well as simple, direct, and colloquial. His statements were garnering respect and having too much importance for the society, much like the importance of any regulation for the society.

Rahim Das in his poetic creation is advocating that you should always keep your emotional pain concealed. Because others would mock if they got out a little about this mental sorrow. Nobody can split it apart or make it smaller for your comfort so limit your secrets to yourself. This is a universal truth of society. This universal truth prevails in society. This concept was introduced by Rahim Das, who was motivated by social conditions at the time.

Rahim Das provides an insight of life achievement in this poetry work. Rahim Das is emphasizing that attempting many activities at once is never a good idea since failure is the end result because success requires whole dedication to one objective rather than several goals. They won't be able to complete the task effectively if they do this since it is tough to handle too many tasks at once. If only one task is given complete focus, it will undoubtedly be completed successfully. Similar to how a tree's fruits, flowers, leaves, and stems stay green while only its roots receive water.

Many famous poems were written by the Hindi poet Shri Jai Shankar Prashad. In his poem, the poet is depicting that life of an individual is like full of emotions which depicts the of struggle, pain, suffering and achievements. The struggle of life evolves a warrior inside an individual. Happiness and sorrow both are the indispensable part of life and human life is blessed with it. Life is passing with the passage of time and different stages of life come with different challenges. Every circumstance of life teaches individuals the art of handling the challenges. As an individual learns the art of handling the challenges his understanding of life increases. Thus, in this way we can say that as time is passing life experiences are getting enriched.

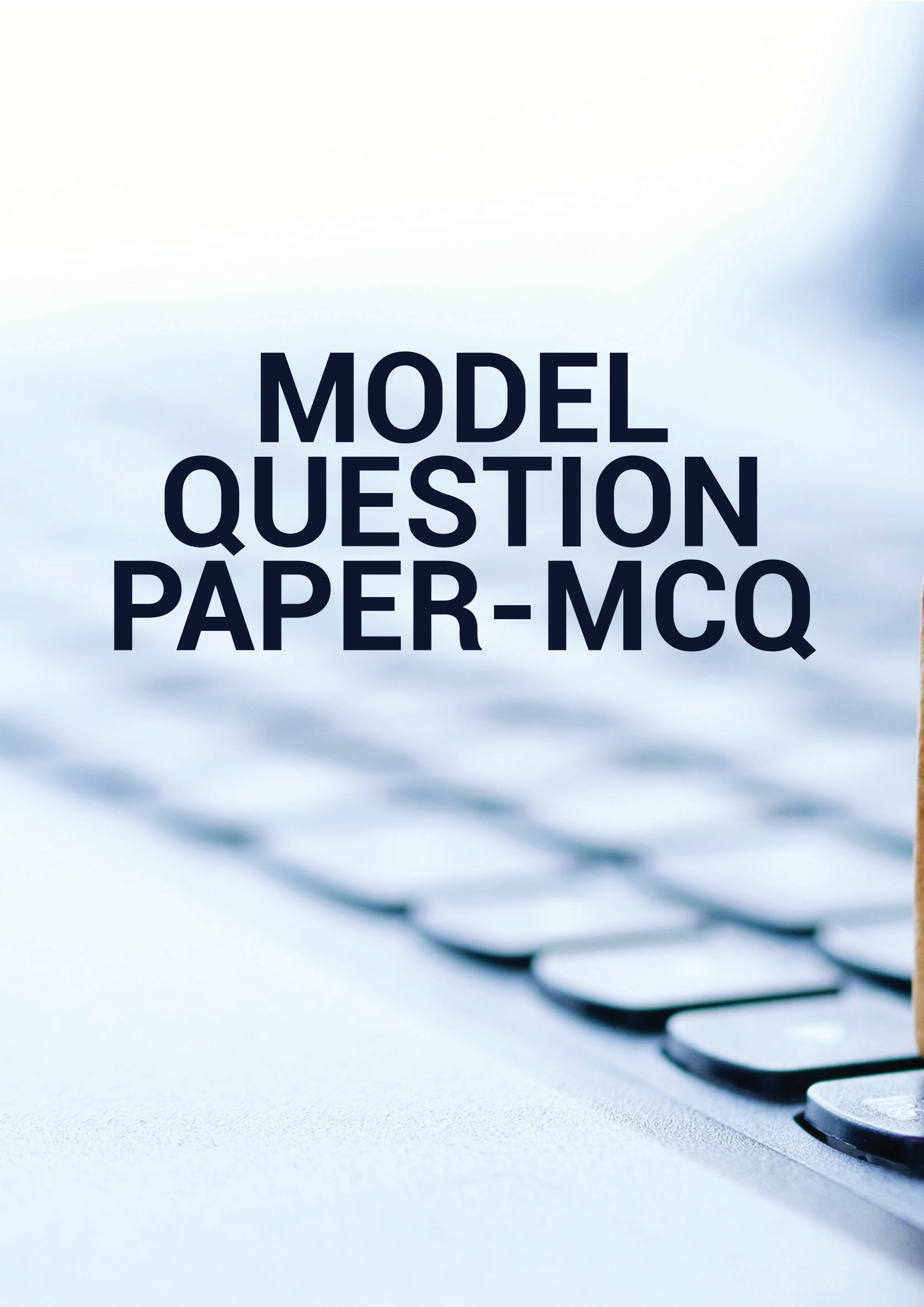
The Ramayana, Mahabharat, Shrimad Bhagvad Geeta, and Hanuman Chalisa are all examples of legendary poetic creation. These are infused with poetic expression and use storytelling to depict society norms and conditions. Bhagavad Geeta is the teaching of Sri Krishna to Arjuna. The main focus of the Bhagavat Geeta is to eliminate the suffering of the people by awakening their heart, mind and soul. These lessons are described poetically. These poetic creations set the standard and gives direction to society. The sound, letter and its arrangement produce magical effects. This reflects the transcending power of a poet.

Poems strengthen the socially weaker segments of society by giving voice to the voiceless. Poem gave the words to the

Women, Dalit, Blacks, Tribals, Humanity etc. Any relationship in a society proceeds in the manner suggested and outlined by the poet, not only by the legislator. Poem is capable of mobilizing the sentiments of the society so poetic slogans are used to mobilize the peoples for the political campaigning. The "Ekla Cholo Re" national anthem of Bengal was written in 1905 by Rabindranath Tagore. In spite of rejection or a lack of support from others, the song encourages the listener to continue on their endeavor. The song is frequently used in relation to campaigns for social or political change.

Sarojini Naidu, Hasrat Mohani, Rabindranath Tagore, and Aurobindo Ghosh were among the poets who took part in the Indian freedom struggle. Through their poetry and active participation, they made a contribution to the Indian freedom struggle.

Poetic, artistic and various writing works inspires to the masses. During the course of freedom struggle poetic artistic creations along with various writing works were used to mobilize the masses. Poets are able to inspire the masses along with bringing the revolution for social change. They inspire the government for the societal development. But they are highly unacknowledged because their impact on society is not reflected directly. Society is also ignorant for their contribution in social development. Act of legislature produces direct impact on the society so in this contrast the impact of a poets on society are underestimated. Poets are also not craving for the political power or money. Poets work behind the scenes to improve the world and build the civilizations.



MODEL QUESTION PAPER-MCQ

?
PgDn
3

1.With reference to the Competition Commission of India (CCI), consider the following statements:
1.The Competition Commission of India (CCI) is a statutory, quasi-judicial body constituted under the Companies Act, 1952.
2.The Competition Commission of India (CCI) consists of 1 Chairperson and 6 Members appointed by the Central Government.
Which among the above statement(s) regarding the Competition Commission of India (CCI) is / are true?
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
d.Neither 1 nor 2
2.Consider the following organisations:
1.Competition Commission of India.
2.National Financial Reporting Authority.
3.National Anti-Profiteering Authority.
Which among the above serve as a body subordinate to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) with regard to disposal of appeals?
a.1 and 2 only
b.1 and 3 only
c.2 and 3 only
d.1, 2 and 3
3.With reference to the 'Scheme for Capacity Building in Textiles Sector', consider the following statements:
1.The Union Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship launched the Scheme for Capacity Building in Textiles Sector.
2.Samarth is a demand-driven and placement-oriented umbrella skilling programme formulated under the broad skilling policy framework.
Which among the above statement(s) regarding the Scheme for Capacity Building in Textiles Sector is / are true?
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
d.Neither 1 nor 2
4.With reference to foreign-owned e-commerce firms operating in India, consider the following statements:
1.The foreign-owned e-commerce; firms, operating in India can sell their own goods in addition to offering their platforms as marketplaces.
2.The degree of ownership foreign-owned e-commerce firms operating in India on big sellers selling on their platforms is limited.
Which of the above statements is/are correct?
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
d.Neither 1 nor 2
5.With reference to the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), consider the following statements:
1.Public-Private Partnership (PPP) initiative led by the Union Ministry for Finance.
2.Interoperable platform to facilitate direct payments linked to a bank account.
3.Manages multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application of any participating bank.
4.Merge several banking features, facilitating seamless fund routing & merchant payments.
Which among the above statement(s) is / are features of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI)?
a.1, 2 and 3 only
b.1, 3 and 4 only
c.2, 3 and 4 only
1, 2, 3 and 4
6.With reference to the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI), consider the following statements:
1.The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) is a for-profit company founded in 2008 under the Payment and Settlement Systems Act, 2007.
2.The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) is an initiative by the RBI and the Indian Bank's Association (IBA) to operate retail payments and settlement systems in India.
3.The NPCI International Private Ltd (NIPL) is the subsidiary of NPCI to popularise domestic payment technologies such as UPI and RuPay abroad and co-create payment technologies with other countries.
Which among the above statement(s) is / are true?
a.1 and 2 only
b.2 and 3 only
c.1 and 3 only
d.1, 2 and 3
7.Which of the following is the most likely consequence of implementing the 'Unified Payments Interface (UPI)'?
a.Mobile wallets will not be necessary for online payments.
b.Digital currency will totally replace physical currency in about two decades.
c.FDI inflows will drastically increase.
d.Direct transfer of subsidies to poor people will become very effective.
8.According to India's National Policy on Biofuels, which of the following can be used as raw materials for the production of biofuels? (UPSC 2020)
1.Cassava
2.Damaged wheat grains
3.Groundnut seeds
4.Horse gram
5.Rotten potatoes
6.Sugar beet
Select the correct answer using the code given below:
a.1, 2, 5 and 6 only
b.1, 3, 4 and 6 only
c.2, 3, 4 and 5 only
d.1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6
9.Consider the following statements:
1.India is the second largest exporter of sugar after Brazil.
2.India is the world's largest producer and consumer of sugar.
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.With reference to the current trends in the cultivation of sugarcane in India, consider the following statements: (UPSC 2020)
1.A substantial saving in seed material is made when 'bud chip settlings' are raised in a nurse and transplanted in the main field.
2.When direct planting of setts is done, the germination percentage is better with single-budded setts as compared to

setts with many buds.
3.If bad weather conditions prevail when setts are directly planted, single-budded setts have better survival as compared to large setts.
4.Sugarcane can be cultivated using settlings prepared from tissue culture.
Which of the statements given above is/are correct?
a.1 and 2 only
b.3 only
c.1 and 4 only
d.2, 3 and 4 only
11.The Union Ministry for Petroleum and Natural Gas has constituted the Kirit Parikh committee in 2022 to
a.review the export profile of natural gas to India.
b.recommend measures regarding the feasibility of blending of Hydrogen to Compressed Natural Gas
c.recommend measures regarding the feasibility of introduction of piped natural gas for households
d.review the existing pricing formula for domestically produced natural gas in India.
12.Since May last year, RBI has been pursuing a policy of 'monetary tightening'. With reference to the monetary tightening, consider the following statements:
1.Increase in existing EMIs for home/car/business loans.
2.Prevent the "second-order effects" of high inflation.
3.Improve the supply of those goods and services.
Which among the above is / are likely to be a consequence of a policy of 'monetary tightening'?
a.1 and 2 only
b.1 and 3 only
c.2 and 3 only
d.1, 2 and 3
13.With reference to the Foreign Trade Policy, 2023, consider the following statements:
1.Achieve merchandise exports of US $ 1 trillion by 2023.
2.Position India as a leader in specific manufacturing-based sectors.
3.Promote a digital economy and leverage technology to enhance competitiveness of Indian exports.
Which among the above is / are objectives of the Foreign Trade Policy, 2023?
a.1 and 2 only
b.1 and 3 only
c.2 and 3 only
d.1, 2 and 3
14.With reference to the Micro Units Development & Refinance Agency (MUDRA) Ltd., consider the following statements:
1.Regulates the Micro Financial Institutions (MFIs) engaged in micro-lending activities.
2.Drive efforts to ensure Last Mile Credit delivery in micro-lending sector.
3.Lend directly to micro-entrepreneurs / individuals.
Which among the above statement(s) is / are true?
a.1 and 2 only
b.1 and 3 only
c.2 and 3 only
d.1, 2 and 3
15.Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana is aimed at (UPSC 2016)
a.bringing small entrepreneurs into the formal financial system
b.providing loans to poor farmers for cultivating particular crops
c.providing pensions to old and destitute persons
d.funding the voluntary organizations involved in the promotion of skill development and employment generation
16.Which of the following is/are true regarding the FAME Scheme?
1.The scheme is related to EV and Hybrid Vehicles in India
2.There has been Two Phases of the scheme
3. Fame 1 focussed more on research while Fame 2 focussed more on the adoption of EV in heavy vehicle sector
4.FAME 2 saw an increase in the focus on research & development and charging infrastructure development compared to FAME 1.c.providing pensions to old and destitute persons
d.funding the voluntary organizations involved in the promotion of skill development and employment generation
Which of the following is / are true regarding the above statements?
a.1 and 2
b.2 and 3
c.1, 2 and 4
d.1,2,3 and 4
17.Which amendment was included in Sri Lanka due to Indian Intervention?
a.2nd amendment
b.13th amendment
c.14th Amendment
d.15th Amendment
18.Recently, which five countries officially joined the BRICS group?
a.Saudi Arabia, Egypt, UAE, Iran & Ethiopia
b.Argentina, Chile, Iraq, Japan & Somalia
c.Chile, Namibia, Cambodia, Bulgaria & Turkey
d.Mali, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos & Bhutan
19.Consider the following statements about Energy Charter Treaty
1.It is an international agreement that establishes a framework for cross-border cooperation in the energy industry.
2.Unlike in the case of fossil fuels it allows companies to sue governments in case of Green energy over policies affecting their investments.
Choose the correct statement:
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
d.Neither 1 nor 2
20.Exercise Dharma Guardian, recently seen in the news, is a joint military exercise between the Indian Army and which of the following countries?
a.Japan
b.Vietnam
c.Nepal
d.France
21.Consider the following statements about Mekong River
1.The river flows through China, Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Cambodia.
2.Vientiane, the capital of Laos, and Phnom Penh, the capital of Cambodia, both stand on its banks.
3.The river drains into the South China Sea south of Ho Chi Minh City.
Which of the following is / are true regarding the above statements

a.Only 1 and 2
b.1 and 3 only
c.Only 2 and 3
d.1, 2 and 3
22.Consider the following statements about Whip
1.A three-line whip is the strongest, employed on important occasions and places an obligation on members to toe the party line.
2.The anti-defection law allows the Speaker/Chairperson to disqualify a member who rebels against a three-line whip.
Choose the correct statements:
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
d.Neither 1 nor 2
23.Lake Rotorua, recently seen in the news, is located in which of the following countries?
a.New Zealand
b.Iceland
c.Argentina
d.Chile
24.Consider the following statements about Nagoya Protocol
1.It is a legally binding global agreement that implements the access and benefit-sharing obligations of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
2.It does not cover the traditional knowledge (TK) associated with genetic resources.
Choose the correct statements:
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
d.Neither 1 nor 2
25.Consider the following statements about Mera Gaon Mera Dharohar programme
1.It is a pan-India initiative of the Ministry of Culture under National Mission on Cultural Mapping.
2.The objective is to culturally map India's 6.5 lakh villages, spanning 29 States and 7 Union Territories, on a comprehensive virtual platform.
Choose the correct statements:
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
d.Neither 1 nor 2
26.Consider the following statements about Committee of Privileges in Parliament
1.It is a joint committee consisting of 15 members from Lok Sabha and 7 members from Rajya Sabha.
2.The committee is headed by the deputy chairperson of Rajya Sabha.
3.The Speaker/Rajya Sabha chairperson is the first level of scrutiny of a privilege motion.
How many of the statements given above are correct?
a.Only one
b.Only two
c.All three
d.None of the above
27.Consider the following statements about the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)
1.EFTA is the intergovernmental organisation of all the members of the EU and India.
2.The Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) is the agreement that promotes investment between member countries.
Choose the correct statements:
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
d.Neither 1 nor 2
28.Consider the following statements about Lokpal
1.A selection committee that appoints the chairperson of Lokpal is composed of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha, the Chief Justice of India only.
2.Complaints against the PM are not to be probed unless the full Lokpal bench considers the initiation of the inquiry and at least 2/3rds of the members approve it.
3.Lokpal has the power to recommend the transfer or suspension of public servants connected with the allegation of corruption.
How many of the statements given above are correct?
a.Only one
b.Only two
c.All three
d.None of the above
29.Consider the following statements about Whips
1.The office of 'whip' is mentioned neither in the Constitution of India nor in the Rules of the House nor in a Parliamentary Statute.
2.A two-line whip is the strongest, employed on important occasions such as the second reading of a Bill or a no-confidence motion and places an obligation on members to toe the party line.
Choose the correct statement:
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
d.Neither 1 nor 2
30.Consider the following statements
1.Kaladan project aims to provide connectivity between India and Myanmar by connecting the port of Kolkata with the port of Sittwe.
2.The Kaladan project has 2 major components -Waterways component and road component.
3.Kaladan is a transboundary river flowing in the Indian state to Tripura and Myanmar.
How many of the statements given above are correct?
a.Only one
b.Only two
c.All three
d.None of the above
31.With reference to 'Snow Leopards' often seen in news, consider the following statements.
1.They are classified as 'Endangered' on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.
2.They are listed under Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.
3.They are listed under Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.
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
32.What is the primary objective of the 'Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S)' often mentioned in news?
a.To provide accurate weather forecasts for global agricultural planning.
b.To monitor and analyse climate-related data for research and policymaking.
c.To develop advanced technologies for space exploration and satellite communication.
d.To facilitate international cooperation in combating air pollution and ozone depletion.
33.Consider the following statements regarding 'Bonn Convention'
1.It is a global treaty focused on the conservation of migratory species and their habitats.
2.Species are listed on Appendix I for strict protection and Appendix II for international cooperation efforts.
3.India is a signatory to this convention.
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
34.Consider the following pairs.
(Biodiversity Heritage Sites: Location)
1.Hogrekan: Nagaland
2.Ameenpur lake: Telangana
3.Mandasaru: Odisha
How many of the above pair/s is/ are correctly matched?
a.One pair only
b.Two pairs only
c.All the three pairs
d.None of the pairs
35.Which state in India is home to the Thanthai Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary?
a.Kerala
b.Tamil Nadu
c.Karnataka
d.Andhra Pradesh
36.Consider the following statements.
1.India is a signatory to the Ramsar Convention.
2.Chilika Lake in India is a Ramsar Wetland Site.
Identify the correct statement/s.
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
d.Neither 1 nor 2
37.With reference to 'World Sustainable Development Summit 2024' often seen in news, consider the following statements.
1.The Summit is organized by Centre for Science and Environment
2.It serves as a platform for dialogue, innovation, and collaboration on sustainability.
3.Its expertise ensures the summit addresses pressing environmental and developmental challenges effectively.
How many of the above statement/s is/ are correct?
a.Only One
b.Only Two
c.All the Three
None of the abov
38.Consider the following statements regarding 'Bharat 5G' portal often seen in news.
1.Bharat 5G Portal integrates 5G, 6G, quantum, IPR, and future tech.
2.It serves as a platform for startups, academia, and industry.
3.The portal aims to foster collaboration and innovation.
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
39.Which of the following terms is associated with cybersecurity threats aimed at infiltrating and disrupting critical infrastructure networks?
a.Cyber Storm
b.Code Red
c.Operation Blackout
d.None of the above
40.With reference to 'Candida auris' often seen in news, consider the following statements.
1.It can persist on surfaces for at least two weeks.
2.Candida auris is resistant to multiple antifungal medications.
3.Symptoms of Candida auris include fever, chills, and body aches.
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
41.'TOI-715 b' often mentioned in news is a/ an
a.Asteroid
b.Comet
c.Exoplanet
d.None of the above
42.Consider the following statements regarding 'Vaccine Safety Net (VSN)' sometimes seen in news.
1.It is a WHO initiative for reliable vaccine safety information.
2.Research opportunities for VSN focus only on vaccine development.
Identify the correct statement/s.
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
d.Neither 1 nor 2
43.With reference to 'Kyasanur Forest Disease (KFD)' often seen in news, consider the following statements.
1.It is a viral haemorrhagic fever first identified in Kenya.
2.Initial symptoms include fever, headache, muscle pain, progressing to severe manifestations like haemorrhagic symptoms.
3.A live attenuated vaccine is available for KFD, primarily used for high-risk populations in endemic areas.
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
44.What precautionary measures are recommended for individuals potentially exposed to the Alaskapox Virus?
a.Wear protective masks in public areas to prevent airborne transmission.

b.Avoid consumption of raw or undercooked meat from wild animals.
c.Cover lesions, avoid sharing bedding, and seek medical evaluation if symptoms arise.
d.Implement strict quarantine measures for all suspected cases in affected regions.
45.Consider the following.
1.Communications
2.Surveillance and Monitoring
3.Navigation and Mapping
4.Disaster Response and Management
How many of the above can be consider as the application/s of High-altitude pseudo-satellite (HAPS) vehicles?
a.Only One
b.Only Two
c.Only Three
d.All the four
46.The wheat procurement by government agencies is set to dip to a 15-year low in the current marketing season, from an all-time high scale last year. With reference to the above statement, consider the following statements:
1.Rise in export demand
2.Lower production
3.Higher offtake during the last year.
Which among the above is / are attributed as the reason(s) for the present scenario?
a.1 only
b.1 and 3 only
c.2 and 3 only
d.1, 2 and 3
47.With reference to the Minimum Support Price (MSP) sometimes seen in news, consider the following statements.
1.The Minimum Support Price (MSP) is a "minimum price" for any crop deserving of "support" that the government considers as remunerative for farmers.
2.The Minimum Support Price (MSP) is also the price at which the government agencies procure the particular crop.
3.Currently, only the cereals and pulses were qualified under the Minimum Support Price (MSP).
Select the correct statement/s from the code given below.
a.1 and 2 only
b.1 and 3 only
c.2 and 3 only
d.1, 2 and 3
48.Consider the following:
1.Moving the sugar from the 'OPEN' category to a 'RESTRICTED' category.
2.Imposing specific permission from the Directorate of Sugar, Department of Food and Public Distribution (DFPD), Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution.
3.Prescribing Minimum Export Prices (MEPs) for sugar.
Which among the above measures are taken by the Government to check the price of sugar in the domestic markets?
a.1 only
b.1 and 3 only
c.2 and 3 only
d.1, 2 and 3

49.Consider the following:
1.Chips
2.Ghee
3.Biscuits
4.Snacks
5.Sweets
6.Milk
7.Chenna
Which among the above is included in the Scheduled List of items under the FSSAI Star Rating?
a.1, 3, 4 and 5 only
b.2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 only
c.3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 only
d.All of the above.
50.Consider the following statements regarding the Minimum Support Price (MSP) regime:
1.The Minimum Support Price (MSP) is announced immediately prior of the harvesting season.
2.The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) announce an MSP, based upon the recommendation of the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).
Which among the above statement(s) is / are true?
a.1 only
b.2 only
c.Both 1 and 2
Neither 1 nor 2

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WRONG METHODS CORRECT METHOD

	A	B	C	D		A	B	C	D		A	B	C	D		A	B	C	D		A	B	C	D
1					21					41					61					81				
2					22					42					62					82				
3					23					43					63					83				
4					24					44					64					84				
5					25					45					65					85				
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20					40					60					80					100				

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