

● POLITY

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Centre and Congress spar over Katchatheevu issue

CONTEXT: The controversy over India “ceding” the island of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka in 1974 escalated after Prime Minister Narendra Modi flagged news reports and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar declared that previous Congress governments had given away the rights of Indian fishermen in that area.



BACKGROUND: The islet of Katchatheevu was part of the zamindari of the Raja of Ramanathapuram since 1803. An Indian survey team in 1874-76 identified Katchatheevu being a part of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has been asserting sovereignty since 1921 when talks began to demarcate the fishery line in the Palk Bay, following the inability of after the Madras Presidency failed to establish the islet’s original title. In 2013, the UPA regime informed the Supreme Court that no territory belonging to India was ceded to Sri Lanka. The Centre contended that the islet was a matter of dispute between British India and Ceylon and that there was no agreed boundary, a matter settled through the 1974 and 1976 agreements, leading to the India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line [IMBL]. In 2022, the External Affairs Ministry (MEA) informed the Rajya Sabha that “Katchatheevu lies on the Sri Lankan side of the India-Sri Lanka International Maritime Boundary Line [IMBL].

A similar agreement with Bangladesh in 2015 had settled the decades-old land boundary enclaves issue, and India’s decision to accept the Permanent Court of Arbitration at The Hague’s verdict in 2014 in favour of Bangladesh’s maritime boundary claims, led to an overall improvement in Delhi-Dhaka relations. The reopening of the Katchatheevu island row follows the Modi government’s decision to write to Pakistan’s government last year, calling for renegotiation of the 1960 Indus Water Treaty.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

No coercive action over tax notices against Cong. in view of polls: I-T Dept.

CONTEXT: The Income Tax Department in the Supreme Court recorded its resolve not to take any “coercive steps” against the Congress on tax demands of approximately ₹ 3,500 Cr. raised in March, in view of the Lok Sabha election.

Congress received fresh notices from the Income Tax Department raising a tax demand of ₹1,745 Cr. for the assessment years 2014-15 to 2016-17. With the latest notice, the department had raised a total tax demand of ₹ 3,567 Cr. from the Congress. Solicitor General Mehta noted the total tax demand of ₹ 3,567 Cr. was a “block assessment” of the past seven years, excluding the ₹ 135 Cr recovered from the party through attachment.

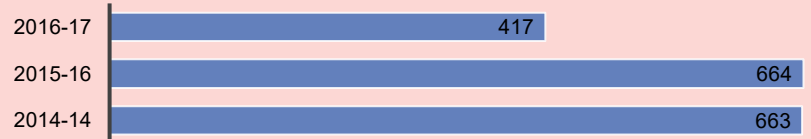


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of total tax demand of the Income Tax Department for the Congress.

The authorities had ended the tax exemption available to political parties and had taxed the party for gross receipt based on a Delhi High Court order of March 2016. The Congress has challenged the High Court order that gross receipt was taxable.

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POLITY & GOVERNANCE

New rule to save fliers from tiring wait aboard aircraft stuck by delays

CONTEXT: The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) has issued new standard operating protocols (SOPs) for airports and airlines to streamline deplaning of passengers from long delays due to reasons such as poor weather.



BACKGROUND: In January, when several parts of the country saw their worst fog in several years, there were many instances of passengers being stuck inside aircraft from three to 12 hours. On January 14, a passenger confined within the aircraft for nearly three hours and the flight had been delayed for over eight hours even hit a pilot on a Delhi-Goa flight. The same aircraft's return journey from Goa was delayed for 12 hours and forced the airline to divert to Mumbai airport for refuelling, following which the passengers refused to leave the tarmac area after being deplaned, resulting in a fine of ₹ 1.2 crore on the airline and ₹ 90 lakh on the Mumbai airport.

Currently, airlines are required to take passengers deplaned to the arrivals section of the airport have to re-enter the security queue, a long and tedious procedure escalating delays discouraging airlines from disembarking passengers. Airlines forcefully confine passengers for up to 12 hours within an aircraft waiting on the ground for its turn for a take-off.

The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) issued the new protocol on March 30, whereby passengers deplaned are escorted back to the terminal building to undergo a security check at the boarding gate itself if a flight is delayed due to either weather or technical issues or the death of a passenger onboard.

Airports will be required to earmark space at some of their boarding gates for "return boarding" where CISF personnel and x-ray machines will be deployed for frisking passengers and scanning cabin bags. Alternatively, passengers can be taken to the pre-existing security check zone for which a sterile passage will have to be created. Airlines may also print fresh boarding cards, as per the protocols. During a delay, an airline will assess a requirement to request for return boarding after consultations with a Chief Airport Security Officer (CASO) or an official of the BCAS who will examine and approve the request. If an airline fails to request for such a passage and follow the prescribed SOP despite an unreasonable delay, the BCAS and CASO can also hold it accountable.

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ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

Solar surge

CONTEXT: The Approved Models and Manufacturers of Solar Photovoltaic Modules (Requirement for Compulsory Registration) Order, 2019, requires module makers to submit to an inspection of their manufacturing facilities by the National Institute of Solar Energy.

The policy would discourage solar power project developers from relying on imported panels. An 'approved' manufacturing facility certified as legitimately manufacturing solar panels within its premises and not importing modules would be eligible to compete for the government's tenders for its flagship solar energy programmes, including the recently announced PM solar rooftop scheme. The certification is aimed at restricting imports from China, which controls nearly 80 % of the global supply.

India has ambitious plans of sourcing about 500 GW, nearly half its requirement of electricity, from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030. India needs to produce at least 280 GW from solar power by 2030 or at least 40 GW of solar capacity being annually added until 2030. In the last five years, India has barely crossed 13 GW annually, though the government has claimed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected this trajectory and the country was on track to add between 25 GW-40 GW annually.

The difficulty is that meeting the targets requires many more panels and component cells than India's domestic industry can supply. In recent years, a significant fraction of India's solar installations has been met by imports. The domestic panel manufacturers have to pay the government to be certified while at the same time losing out on orders to the cheaper Chinese panels. To meet demand, the Centre, which has kept postponing the implementation of the approved list, has now decreed that this will take effect from April 1.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Ladakh's protest; a hunger for justice

CONTEXT: Sonam Wangchuk, Ladakh's famous educationist and environmentalist, began a 21-day hunger strike in support of thousands of Ladakh residents who have been demanding Statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion in the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.



How has the formation of UTs affected the decision-making powers of Ladakh?

In August 2019, the State of Jammu and Kashmir was split into two UTs: Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh ending people's exclusive rights to land and jobs. Under the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019, Ladakh became a UT without a legislature. The draft Ladakh Industrial Land Allotment Policy, 2023 designed to attract investments in Ladakh, completely excludes Ladakh Hill Development Council (LAHDC) from having any powers related to land allotment and lease-related decision-making.

The LAB-KDA's demands since 2021 have included safeguards under the Sixth Schedule, either Statehood for Ladakh or declaring it a UT with a legislature, a separate Public Service Commission for Ladakh, and separate parliamentary seats for Kargil and Leh. The LAB and the KDA have contended that the Sixth Schedule could help tackle these issues because it enables the establishment of regional and district councils with the authority to make laws regarding land use for grazing, agriculture, residential purposes, and other purposes that cater to the residents' interests.

What are the pressures on local resources?

According to recent data from the Ministry of Tourism, Ladakh is witnessing a high influx of domestic tourists. In 2022, more than five lakh domestic tourists visited the region with 70 % of tourists visiting the UT during peak tourist season, between May and July each year. The number of tourists visiting Leh rose from over half a lakh domestic and foreign tourists visited in 2007 to 3.2 lakh by 2018.

Rapid urbanisation and increasing tourist footfall are exerting significant pressure on resources in Ladakh, particularly water. The built area in the town had increased from 36 hectares in 1969 to 196 hectares in 2017.

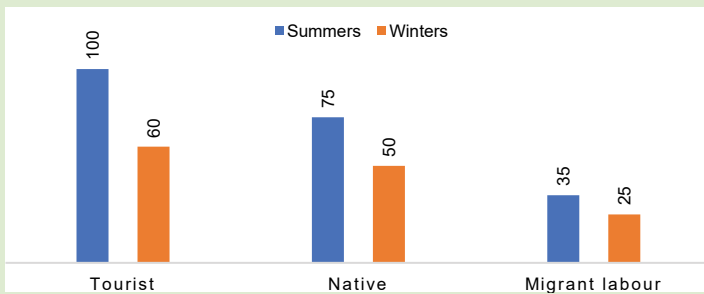


FIGURE: Column chart representation of water utilisation in litres per day (lpd) by different communities.

How does climate change threaten the region?

In the last two decades, Ladakh has been affected by several floods, landslides, and extreme rainfall events. For instance, in August 2010, several parts of Ladakh, especially Leh, were hit by flash floods. Nearly 255 people died in the deluge. In August 2014, a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF), caused when a glacial lake is breached, damaged houses and bridges in Gya village. More recently, in August 2021, a GLOF near Rumbak village also damaged roads and a bridge.

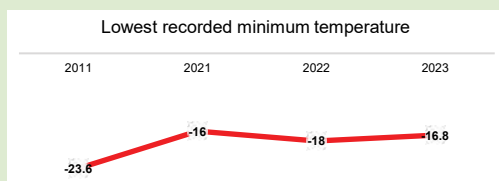


FIGURE: Line chart representation of Lowest recorded minimum temperature.

A study published in 2020 estimated that Ladakh has 192 glacial lakes. Several research articles also state that due to increasing temperature caused by global warming, the number and sizes of glacial lakes in the Himalaya are increasing, and glaciers are shrinking. This trend has increased the threat of possible GLOFs in Ladakh, especially from proglacial lakes that are formed at the edge of glaciers.

The India Meteorological Centre at Leh recorded the trend of slight increase in the region's minimum temperature over the past few years. The increased temperatures are also resulting in permafrost degradation and are causing mudflows in Ladakh.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Arunachal Pradesh will always be a part of India: Jaishankar

CONTEXT: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar rejected China renaming yet another 30 places in the State, which it claims as 'south Tibet'.

On March 9, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently visited the State for the inauguration of the Sela tunnel, built at an altitude of 13,000 ft. On March 9, the U.S. State Department Principal Deputy Spokesperson Vedant Patel released a statement recognising Arunachal Pradesh as part of India. China issued statements asserting its claims over the area and even lodged a diplomatic protest with India following Mr. Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh.

On March 30, China's Ministry of Civil Affairs issued a notification "standardising" the names of 30 places in "southern Tibet". The first such "standardised" list of six places was released in 2017, followed by a second list of 15 places in 2021, and a third list of 11 places in 2023. On March 23, Mr. Jaishankar termed China's repeated claims as "ludicrous", and said that Arunachal Pradesh was a "natural part of India".



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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Rise in demand for MGNREGS points to failure of govt.: Cong.

CONTEXT: Jairam Ramesh, Congress General Secretary noted the steady rise in demand for work of the flagship rural employment guarantee scheme more than the pre-pandemic level shows the rural distress.



As per the statistics, a total of 305.2 person days (one person working a normal shift) were generated in financial year 2023-24, which is 12 crore more person days than in 2022-23 and 40 crore more than the first pandemic year in 2019-20. In many ways, 2022-23 is seen as the first year after the country came out of the pandemic shock and it took time for the economy to pick up.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Heatwave conditions likely during election season, warns IMD

CONTEXT: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) warned of "above-normal" heatwave conditions in most parts of the country in April and May.



Heatwave days occur when day temperatures in a place are at least 4.50 C above normal, or greater than 450 C, on two consecutive days. Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, north Karnataka, Odisha, and western Madhya Pradesh, which on average see one to three heatwave days during April and May, are

likely to experience two to eight heatwave days. While these regions are particularly vulnerable, above-normal temperatures are likely over the entire country barring Kerala, Jammu and Kashmir,

Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and most of the north-eastern States.

One of the reasons for the expected hotter than usual summers is the continuing effect of the El Nino, associated with the heating of the surface waters of the Central Pacific, the El Nino is linked to drying up of the rains in India.

The Union Ministry for Earth Sciences issued advisories to the EC and the States to "take precautions" and equip polling booths with oral rehydration salts for booth officials or voters who may experience a heatstroke. Electors are advised to carry wet towels to protect themselves from dehydration and women electors are advised to avoid bringing small children to booths during hot weather conditions," the EC had said in an advisory on March 16. Given that the Lok Sabha election is held in the summer months, these are routine advisories sent by the EC to its officials.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

March's gross GST of ₹1.78 lakh crore lifts FY24 revenue to ₹20.2 lakh cr.

CONTEXT: Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenue hit its second-highest level of ₹ 1,78,484 Cr in March, even as the pace of growth in collections slowed to 11.5 %, from February's 12.5 % lifting the tally for 2023-24 by 11.6 % to a little over ₹20.18 lakh Cr.

Robust takings

Finance Ministry says average monthly collection for FY24 was ₹1.68 lakh crore, beating FY23's average of ₹1.5 lakh crore

- Gross takings for 2023-24 rise 11.6% to a little over ₹20.18 lakh crore
- Net GST revenue grew at a faster pace of 18.4% in March to ₹1.65 lakh crore
- GST Compensation Cess at ₹12,259 crore, was reckoned as the third-highest monthly collection



Gross Good and Services Tax (GST) revenue for March 2024 witnessed the second highest collection ever at ₹1.78 lakh Cr, with a 11.5 % year-on-year growth. This surge was driven by a significant rise in GST collection from domestic transactions at 17.6 %. GST revenue net of refunds for March 2024 is ₹ 1.65 lakh Cr which is growth of 18.4 % over same period last year.

FY 2023-24 marks a milestone with total gross GST collection of Rs. 20.18 lakh Cr exceeding ₹ 20 lakh Cr, a 11.7 % increase compared to the previous year. The average monthly collection for this fiscal year stands at ₹1.68 lakh Cr, surpassing the previous year's average of ₹ 1.5 lakh Cr. GST revenue net of refunds as of March 2024 for the current fiscal year is ₹ 18.01 lakh Cr which is a growth of 13.4 % over same period last year.

GST RECEIPTS

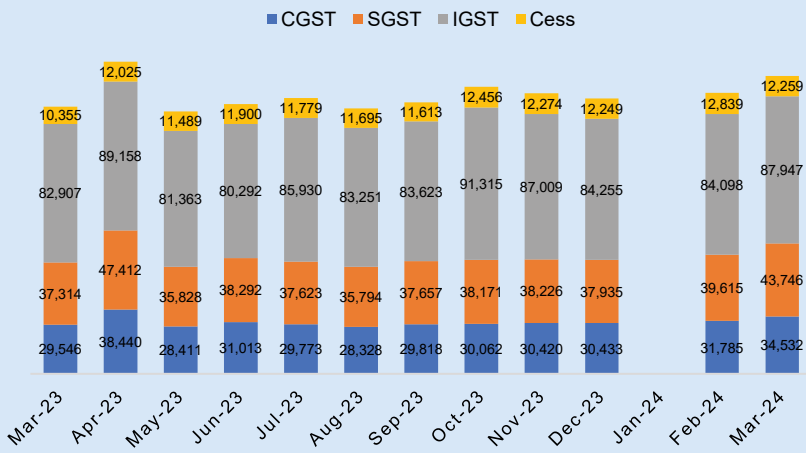


FIGURE: Column chart representation of components of GST receipts (Cr.) (on Y-o-Y basis).

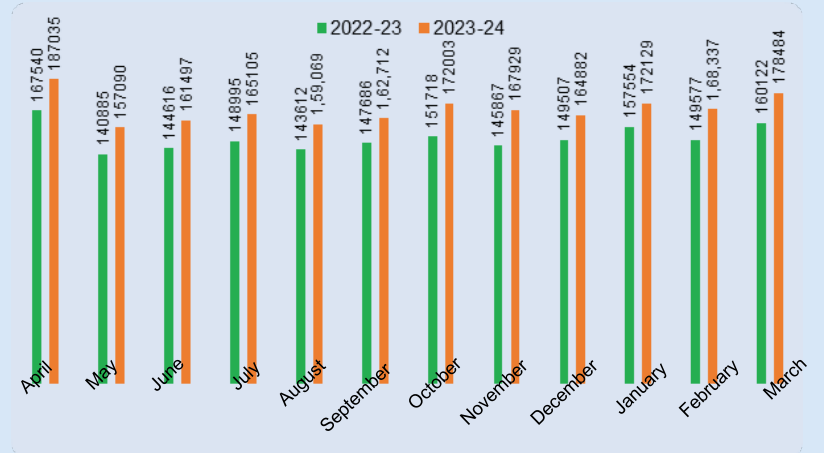


FIGURE: Column chart representation of Goods & Services Tax (GST) receipts (Cr.) (on Y-o-Y basis).



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New Delhi, Delhi-110022

Regional office

Vedhik IAS Academy
202, Raheja Chambers, 12,
Museum Road. Bangalore -
560001. Karnataka, India.

GCC Office:

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