

● POLITY

● ECONOMICS

● TECHNOLOGY

● ECOLOGY

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

EC Halts Bengal Governor's Cooch Behar Trip On Poll Eve

CONTEXT: The Election Commission halted West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose's planned tour of Cooch Behar district on April 18 and 19, citing violations of the Model Code of Conduct and potential disruption to election officials and police during the silence period before voting.

EC HALTS BENGAL GOVERNOR'S COOCH BEHAR TRIP

- Election Commission (EC) advises West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose to halt his planned tour of Cooch Behar district on April 18 and 19.
- The EC states that the trip would violate the Model Code of Conduct and disrupt poll officials and police.
- The commission notes that there is no urgent need for the Governor to visit the place during this time.

SILENCE PERIOD RESTRICTIONS

- **Under Section 126 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951,** The "silence period" begins after campaigning ends and before voting day, imposing restrictions such as:
- Prohibition of public campaigning, speeches, or media coverage that could influence voters.
- Restrictions on election-related activities near polling booths and on polling day.

REASONS FOR HALTING THE TRIP

- The EC emphasizes that no local program can be organized for the Governor during the silence period and poll day.
- The district administration and police are fully occupied with election management and cannot provide security cover for the Governor's visit.

COMPLAINT AGAINST GOVERNOR

- The ruling Trinamool Congress complained to the EC, alleging that the Governor was interfering with the poll process.
- The complaint highlighted the creation of a 'Log Sabha' portal by the Raj Bhavan to connect with voters during the election, raising concerns about impartiality and influence.

These points encapsulate the key aspects of the Election Commission's decision, the silence period's restrictions, and the background of the complaint against the Governor.

WHAT IS MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT AND SILENCE PERIOD

India's Model Code of Conduct (MCC) is a set of guidelines issued by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to regulate the conduct of political parties and candidates during elections. It aims to ensure free and fair elections by preventing unfair practices and maintaining a level playing field for all candidates. The MCC covers various aspects such as campaigning, speeches, use of government resources, and conduct during the "silence period" before voting.

The "silence period" refers to a specific timeframe before the actual voting day when certain restrictions are imposed to maintain peace and prevent undue influence on voters. During this period:

- **Campaigning Restrictions:** Political parties and candidates are prohibited from campaigning through public meetings, processions, or giving speeches in the area where the election is taking place.
- **Media Coverage:** Media outlets are restricted from broadcasting election-related content that could influence voters' decisions.
- **Polling Booth Activities:** No political campaigning or distribution of campaign material is allowed near polling booths.
- **Polling Day Activities:** Only essential election-related activities are permitted, and there are restrictions on the movement of candidates and party workers.

These measures are put in place to create an environment where voters can make informed decisions without external pressures or distractions. Violating the Model Code of Conduct or the silence period can lead to penalties or legal action by the Election Commission.

CONCLUSION: India's Model Code of Conduct and the Silence Period are crucial mechanisms for ensuring fair and transparent elections, promoting voter autonomy, and preventing undue influence on electoral outcomes.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Rain Shocks

CONTEXT: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) predicts a strong monsoon season in India, with both positive and negative implications for farmers and disaster preparedness.

BACKGROUND: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) is a government agency responsible for weather forecasting and observation in India. Established in 1875, it has a long history of monitoring and predicting rainfall patterns across the country.

Every year, typically in April, the IMD issues its first forecast for the upcoming monsoon season, which runs from June to September. This forecast is eagerly awaited by millions of Indians, especially farmers who rely heavily on the monsoon rains for their crops. Traditionally, the IMD's forecasts have avoided extremes, opting for terms like "normal" or "deficit" rainfall. However, this year's prediction is a bolder one, indicating a potentially bountiful monsoon with above-average rainfall. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has made an unusual April forecast, predicting a stronger than average monsoon season (June-September) with 6% more rainfall than usual. This news comes as a welcome relief after scorching temperatures and heatwaves in many southern states.

CAUSE FOR CONCERN:

- While the overall rainfall is expected to be above average, there's a 30% chance of "excess" rains (more than 10% above normal) in the latter half of the monsoon (August & September).
- This is a significant possibility considering the "above normal" rain prediction sits at only 31%.
- The IMD is silent on the amount of rain expected in June and July, predicting only "neutral conditions."

POTENTIAL CONSEQUENCES:

- Two dry initial months followed by heavy downpours could be beneficial for agriculture but could also lead to extreme floods.
- Past experiences, like the devastating 2018 Kerala floods, highlight India's vulnerability to such natural disasters.

URGENT ACTION NEEDED:

- Given the potential for floods, states must activate their disaster management plans as soon as possible. This includes:
 - Bolstering infrastructure
 - Preparing evacuation plans
 - Inspecting dams for structural stability
 - Establishing broader early-warning networks

Farmers, heavily reliant on rain-fed agriculture, need to be informed about the possibility of excessive rainfall in the latter half of the season and adjust their sowing strategies accordingly.

LOOKING AHEAD:

An updated forecast is expected by the end of May. However, the current prediction from the IMD necessitates immediate action to mitigate potential flood risks.

this gap by establishing All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) across the country. These institutes would provide high-quality medical education and increase the doctor workforce.

- The Progress: As of today, there are 20 functional AIIMS institutions and 3 under development. This initiative has undoubtedly created opportunities for students and expanded access to medical education beyond major cities.
- **The Case of Madurai AIIMS: A Cautionary Tale**
 - **Project Delays and Shortcomings:** Despite the project's inauguration in 2019, construction of the Madurai AIIMS remains incomplete.
 - **Impact on Students:** Three batches of students have been enrolled despite the lack of a permanent facility. They are currently accommodated at a different medical college, compromising the quality of their education and patient exposure they expected from an AIIMS institution. Student protests highlight these concerns.
 - **Strained Center-State Relations:** The project's delays have become a point of contention between the central and Tamil Nadu state governments.
- **The Road Ahead:**
 - **Urgent Need for Collaboration:** Effective solutions require cooperation between the Central and State governments.
 - **Prioritizing Student Well-being:** The current situation unfairly disadvantages students and hinders the initiative's original goals.

This situation exemplifies how well-intentioned policies can be crippled by poor implementation and a lack of collaboration. India's doctor shortage remains a pressing issue, demanding a more unified approach to ensure these medical institutions reach their full potential.

CONCLUSION: The Madurai AIIMS case underscores the need for a comprehensive review of the PMSSY initiative. This review should assess not only construction timelines but also factors like faculty recruitment, curriculum development, and effective collaboration between central and state governments. Only through such a critical evaluation can course corrections be made to ensure these new AIIMS institutions function as intended and contribute meaningfully to bridging India's doctor shortage.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Missing Colleges

CONTEXT: The central government's plan to address the doctor shortage in India by building new AIIMS institutions is facing challenges due to implementation delays and tensions between the centre and states.

BACKGROUND:

- India faces a significant shortage of doctors, with a ratio of 1 doctor per 834 people according to official data. This number is even worse in rural areas.
- To address this gap, the central government launched the Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) in 2003.
- This initiative aimed to establish All India Institutes of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) across the country, increasing access to quality medical education and hopefully boosting the doctor workforce.

DOCTOR SHORTAGE IN INDIA: A CASE OF GOOD INTENTIONS, POOR IMPLEMENTATION

- **The Problem:** India has a severe doctor shortage, with a ratio of 1 doctor per 834 people, according to official data. This disparity is even more concerning in rural areas.
- **The Solution (in Theory):** The Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY), launched in 2003, aimed to bridge

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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Efforts Against Naxalites ‘Gained New Energy’

CONTEXT: The Union Home Minister, Amit Shah, highlighted the intensified efforts against Naxalites, citing the opening of 250 security camps in Left Wing Extremism-affected States since 2019, particularly emphasizing recent successes in Chhattisgarh and a broader strategy aimed at eradicating Naxalism under Prime Minister Modi's leadership.



BACKGROUND: The Indian government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's BJP administration, is actively combating Left Wing Extremism (LWE) and Naxalism, notably in Chhattisgarh. Amit Shah, the Union Home Minister, emphasized increased efforts such as opening security camps, deploying forces, adopting offensive strategies, and developing infrastructure to address Naxalite insurgency effectively.

Efforts Against Naxalites:

- Amit Shah highlights increased efforts under BJP government to combat Naxalism, citing renewed energy since 2019.
- 250 security camps opened in Left Wing Extremism-affected states, including Chhattisgarh, to address security concerns.
- Operations to uproot Naxalism will continue under Modi's leadership.

Recent Operations:

- Joint BSF and Chhattisgarh police operation resulted in the elimination of 29 alleged Maoist cadres, including 15 women.
- Specific intelligence guided the operation along the Kanker-Narayanpur district boundary in Chhattisgarh's south Bastar region.

Progress and Strategy:

- Reduced geographical spread of LWE violence, with 45 districts reporting violence in 2021 compared to 96 in 2010 across multiple states.
- Security forces adopt an offensive strategy, leading to innovative methods to tackle Naxalite threats.
- Deployment of six CRPF battalions in core LWE areas, reduction of security vacuum with new camps and joint task force initiatives.
- Infrastructure development includes the construction of roads and opening of post offices in LWE-affected districts.

ENVIRONMENT

On India's 'Heat Action Plans'

CONTEXT: This passage explains how India defines heatwaves, how governments plan for them, and the challenges of adapting those plans to diverse regions and populations.

THE GIST

- The IMD will declare a heatwave if the maximum temperature recorded at a station is 40 degrees Celsius or more in the plains, 37 degrees Celsius or more in the coast, and 30 degrees Celsius or more in the hills.
- With the severity and frequency of heatwaves increasing across the country, governments at various levels — State, district, and city — have prepared heat action plans (HAPs).
- While HAPs are excellent guidelines that have brought into focus the problem of heatwaves and the need to address them, much work remains to make them practical to the highly variable weather conditions.

The story so far:

- Unusually hot weather grips India.
- IMD heat alerts began in February, with northeastern and western India experiencing temperatures 3-5 degrees Celsius above normal.
- The IMD predicts hotter temperatures and more frequent heatwaves in eastern and southern India
- This raises concerns about India's preparedness to face such situations.

What is a heatwave?

IMD defines heatwaves based on location: 40°C+ for plains, 37°C+ for coasts, 30°C+ for hills.

- Severity depends on temperature difference from normal: 4.5-6.4°C is a "normal" heatwave, 6.4°C+ is "severe."
- Alternatively, heatwaves can be based on actual maximum temperature: 45°C+ is a heatwave, 47°C+ is severe.
- IMD uses the last two criteria only if multiple stations meet them or one station does for two days

How are we tackling heatwaves?

- To combat rising heatwaves, Indian governments have created Heat Action Plans (HAPs).
- HAPs aim to lessen heatwave impacts by outlining preparations, responses, and recovery strategies.
- National Disaster Management Authority and IMD collaborate with 23+ states on these plans.
- At least 23 state/city HAPs exist, with some states (Odisha, Maharashtra) including district plans.
- **Typical HAPs include:**
 - Regional heat data (past events, trends)
 - Vulnerability assessment (areas needing attention)
 - Response plan with actions before, during, and after heatwaves
 - Assigned roles for different departments (disaster management, labor, etc.)

What do the HAPs recommend?

- **Short-term measures:**
 - Utilize forecasts and warnings: Alert public and authorities about impending heatwaves.

- Public education campaigns: Disseminate information on heatwave risks and preventative measures.
- Establish heat shelters and cooling centers: Provide refuge from extreme heat.
- Ensure clean drinking water availability: Combat dehydration risks.
- Hospital preparedness:**
 - Stock medical supplies: Ensure adequate resources for treating heat-related illnesses.
 - Train healthcare workers: Equip medical personnel to identify and manage heatstroke and other heat illnesses.
- Long-term strategies:**
 - Urban planning for heat mitigation: Encourage tree planting and cool roofing technologies.
 - Heat-resistant building materials: Reduce urban heat island effect and indoor temperatures.
 - Multi-stakeholder coordination: Foster collaboration between government, healthcare, communities, and emergency services.

What debilitates HAPs from addressing the problem effectively?

- Local Context:**
 - National heatwave thresholds may not reflect local conditions.
 - Urban factors (heat island effect, roofing) and humidity should be considered.
 - HAPs need to encompass "humid heat" and warmer nights.
 - A heat index that considers multiple factors is needed.
 - Regional variations in climate, demographics, and infrastructure require localized strategies.
- Inconsistent Methods:**
 - Vulnerability assessments in HAPs lack consistency.
 - A shift to robust climate risk assessments is needed.
 - This should include likelihood of heatwaves, exposure of people and assets, and vulnerability mapping.
- Vulnerable Populations:**
 - Targeted interventions for specific needs are lacking.
 - Over 90% of India's workforce is informal and highly vulnerable.
 - Socio-economic differences and infrastructure impacting heat exposure need to be addressed.
- Resource Allocation:**
 - Implementation varies based on local priorities and capacities.
 - Dedicated budgets for HAPs are crucial.
 - Collaboration needed to develop financial mechanisms to support informal workers during heatwaves.
- Silos and Long-Term Measures:**
 - HAPs are currently standalone with limited funding.
 - Integration with broader urban resilience and climate adaptation plans is needed.
 - Improved data collection and monitoring systems are essential.
 - Long-term planning should prioritize nature-based solutions (green & blue spaces) alongside infrastructure

CONCLUSION: Effectively addressing India's heatwave challenges requires tailoring HAPs to local contexts, using robust

assessments, and prioritizing vulnerable populations. This necessitates stronger financial backing, collaboration across sectors, and long-term strategies that embrace nature-based solutions.

ENVIRONMENT

The Great Indian Bustard And Climate Action Verdict

CONTEXT: A recent Indian Supreme Court decision recognizing the right to be free from climate change impacts presents an opportunity to pursue equitable climate action.



BACKGROUND:

The Supreme Court of India recognized a right to be free from climate change impacts. This arose from a case concerning the Great Indian Bustard, a bird threatened by power lines for renewable energy projects. The court didn't define the right in detail, but various experts argue using a "just transition" framework for climate action can be inclusive and consider both human and environmental well-being.

THE GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD AND CLIMATE ACTION VERDICT: A LEGAL TURNING POINT

- Court's Decision:**
 - Acknowledged the right, but details on its scope are yet to be defined.
 - Established a committee to assess solutions for bustard conservation and power line placement.
- Why this matters:**
 - This is the first recognition of a right against climate change in India.
 - It opens the door for a more comprehensive approach to climate action.
- A Flaw in the Approach:**
 - The initial focus pitted biodiversity protection against climate action.
 - The right, as recognized, currently only protects humans from climate change.
- The Just Transition Framework as a Solution:**
 - This framework promotes equitable climate action that considers various interests.

- It can help protect underrepresented interests, like the Great Indian Bustard.
- **Benefits of the Just Transition Framework:**
 1. Avoids framing climate action and biodiversity protection as rivals.
 2. Enables the creation of inclusive climate rights that consider non-human nature.
 3. Makes this case a frontrunner in just transition litigation for non-human interests.
- **Shared Responsibility for Moving Forward:**
 - The judiciary, activists, academics, and litigants all have a role to play.
 - By working together, they can refine the right to be free from climate change impacts and ensure its effectiveness.

CONCLUSION: The Supreme Court's decision in the Great Indian Bustard case presents a landmark opportunity for India. By embracing the just transition framework, the court can craft a powerful legal tool that ensures climate action protects both human well-being and the natural world. This requires collaboration from all stakeholders – the judiciary, activists, academics, and the public. By working together, they can refine the right to freedom from climate change impacts and usher in a new era of environmental justice in India.

ENVIRONMENT

Centre Tweaks Green Credit Programme Norms, To Focus On Restoration Of Ecosystem

CONTEXT: To encourage participation in ecological restoration, India's Green Credit Programme is allowing individuals and companies to apply for forest restoration projects.

BACKGROUND: The Green Credit Programme (GCP) of India was launched to encourage organisations and individuals to invest in restoring degraded forest lands. Participants in the program can earn "green credits" by financing these restoration projects. However, there was concern that the program might incentivize simply planting trees for financial gain, rather than focusing on restoring the entire ecosystem.

GREEN CREDIT PROGRAMME UPDATE: FOCUS SHIFTS TO ECOSYSTEM RESTORATION

- **Concern:** There was a worry that GCP might incentivize just planting trees for profit, neglecting overall ecosystem restoration.
- **Addressing the Concern:** The Environment Ministry emphasizes prioritizing ecosystem restoration over mere tree planting.
- **States Offered Land:** Forest departments in 13 states have offered 387 degraded land parcels totaling nearly 10,983 hectares.
- **Application Process:** Individuals and companies can apply to the Indian Council of Forestry Research and Education (ICFRE) to fund forest restoration on these lands.
- **Implementation:** State forest departments will carry out the actual afforestation work.

- **Earning Green Credits:** After two years and ICFRE evaluation, each planted tree could be worth one green credit.
- **Using Green Credits: Credits can be used for:**
 - Fulfilling existing forest laws requiring compensation for diverted forest land.
 - Environmental, social, and governance (ESG) reporting or meeting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) needs.

New Guidelines:

- **Cost Calculation:** The Ministry issued guidelines (April 2024) for states to calculate degraded forest restoration costs.
- **Minimum Tree Density Removed:** The previous requirement of a minimum 1,100 trees per hectare for a reforested landscape is lifted. States will now determine appropriate densities.

Justification: Not all degraded areas can support such high tree density. Restoring some ecosystems might require shrubs, herbs, and grasses

CONCLUSION: The Green Credit Programme's adjustments address concerns about prioritizing profit over ecological restoration. By allowing for a more nuanced approach to reforestation and emphasizing ecosystem health, the programme aims to achieve a more sustainable balance. This revised framework, with its focus on collaboration between individuals, companies, and the government, has the potential to significantly improve India's degraded forest landscapes.

ECONOMICS

FY24: New Private Investments Dip 15%; States Lead Capex Rise'

CONTEXT: New private investment projects in India dipped in FY24, with manufacturing taking a major hit, but state spending on capital expenditure increased.

INDIAN INVESTMENT LANDSCAPE IN FY24: KEY TRENDS

Fresh Private Investment Dips

- Overall value of new private investment projects decreased by 15.3% compared to FY23.
- Foreign investor participation dropped significantly, with new outlays falling by almost a third.
- Manufacturing sector witnessed the sharpest decline, with proposed outlays dropping 40%.
 - Manufacturing's share in new investments shrunk from 54% to 33.8%.

Bright Spots

- State governments led the surge in capital expenditure (capex), increasing spending by 27%.
- Electricity and infrastructure sectors saw positive growth in investments, up 96% and 22% respectively.

Shifting Investment Landscape

- Maharashtra emerged as the top recipient of new projects, surpassing Andhra Pradesh.
- Odisha climbed two spots to third place despite a slight decrease in investment value.

- Tamil Nadu's ranking saw a significant jump from eighth to fifth.

Looking Forward

- Experts predict a slowdown in new investment announcements due to upcoming elections.
- Timely execution of previously announced projects (valued at ₹72.22 lakh crore) is crucial for economic growth.
- Focus on reforms and efficient project implementation, particularly in critical sectors like green hydrogen and electric vehicles, is essential for future economic trajectory.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Russian Troops Start To Withdraw From Nagorno-Karabakh

CONTEXT: Following a 2020 war where Azerbaijan reclaimed territory from Armenian separatists, Russia is withdrawing its peacekeeping forces from the Nagorno-Karabakh region.



- Areas captured by Azerbaijan during the war.
- Areas returned to Azerbaijan per the ceasefire agreement.
- Areas in Nagorno-Karabakh where Russian peacekeepers operate.
- Lachin corridor and Dadivank monastery where Russian peacekeepers operate.

NAGORNO- KARABAKH dispute

- Disputed Territory:** Nagorno-Karabakh is a region that was originally part of the Soviet Union. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Armenia seized control of the area defeating Azerbaijan in a war.
- Bloody Conflict:** In 2020, a six-week war erupted between Azerbaijan and Armenian forces over Nagorno-Karabakh.
- Russian Intervention:** Moscow brokered a ceasefire agreement in 2020, deploying a peacekeeping force of around 2,000 troops to monitor the situation.
- Azerbaijani Gains:** The 2020 war resulted in Azerbaijan regaining significant territory in Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding areas.

ARMENIAN DISSATISFACTION: Armenia accused Russia of failing to protect Armenian interests during the war and during the peacekeeping mission.

Therefore, the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers comes after a period of heightened tensions in the region, following a war and a ceasefire agreement that left some Armenians dissatisfied with Russia's role.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Inflicting Retaliation Without Escalation: Netanyahu Has A Tough Call To Make On Iran

CONTEXT: The complex strategic dilemma faced by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu following recent attacks by Iran and Hamas, where he must balance retaliatory actions against Iran without escalating the situation into a full-scale regional war while also considering the stance of key allies like the United States.



MAJOR POINTS

- Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's long-standing Prime Minister, is confronted with a critical decision regarding Iran after recent attacks by Hamas and Iran challenged Israel's security stance.
- Escalating tensions from these attacks, including an ongoing war with Hamas and Iran's direct strike, have intensified the situation.
- Israel's shadow war with Iran has seen strategic shifts, especially after Iran's embassy bombing, indicating a new strategic equilibrium sought by Iran.
- International involvement, notably from the U.S. and allies, adds complexity to Netanyahu's dilemma, as going to war without American support is risky.
- Finding a response that doesn't escalate further is challenging, potentially involving targeting Iranian proxies in other nations.
- Balancing deterrence, avoiding weakness, and navigating international dynamics shape Netanyahu's options in this volatile situation.

CONCLUSION: Netanyahu must carefully retaliate against Iran without sparking full-scale war, considering international alliances. The evolving shadow war adds complexity to his strategic decisions.

AGRICULTURE

How Can Small-Scale Farmers Benefit From Trees On Farms?

CONTEXT: The challenges and opportunities for small-scale farmers in India to adopt agroforestry practices, which integrate trees into their farms for environmental and economic benefits.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SMALL-SCALE FARMERS IN ADOPTING AGROFORESTRY IN INDIA

- **Background:**
 - Traditionally, Indian agriculture integrated crops, trees, and livestock (agroforestry).
 - After the Green Revolution, monocropping became more common.
 - The National Agroforestry Policy (2014) aimed to revive agroforestry.
- **Challenges for Smallholders:**
- **Water Availability:**
 - A major concern, especially for securing water during the sapling stage.
 - Trees competing with crops for water can be a problem in

water-stressed regions.

- **Lack of Incentives and Capital:**
 - Long gestation period of trees discourages smallholders.
 - Financing for transitioning to agroforestry is limited.
- **Market Linkages:**
 - Existing government schemes often exclude smallholders due to standardized criteria.
 - Difficulty finding lucrative markets for agroforestry products.
- **Finding Solutions:**
- **Selecting Appropriate Species:**
 - Using water-accounting tools to identify tree-crop combinations that minimize water competition.
 - Choosing native species that are climate-resilient and promote soil health.
 - Decision support tools can help identify suitable species based on specific needs.
- **Financial Incentives:**
 - Exploring concepts like ecosystem credits or payment for ecosystem services (PES).
 - PES allows farmers to receive payments for the ecological benefits provided by their trees (e.g., pollination).
- **Enabling Environment:**
 - Policies and schemes that consider land size and regional variations.
 - Creating market linkages for agroforestry products to ensure economic viability for smallholders.

CONCLUSION:

- Agroforestry offers a win-win solution for healthy ecosystems and sustainable livelihoods for smallholders.
- Collaboration among conservationists, agricultural economists, and policymakers is crucial to overcome challenges and create an enabling environment for wider adoption of agroforestry by small-scale farmers.



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