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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Purkayastha's arrest under UAPA invalid, says SC

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it felt "no hesitation" to declare the arrest and remand of 74-year-old journalist and online portal NewsClick founder Prabir Purkayastha under the draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) by the Delhi Police as "invalid in the eyes of law", requiring his release from custody.



SC stricture

Key observations of the court in connection with Prabir Purkayastha's arrest

- The entire exercise was done in a clandestine manner and was a blatant attempt to circumvent the due process of law
- It deprived the accused of the opportunity to avail himself of the services of a legal practitioner of his choice
- As in the case of arrests, the grounds of detention should be communicated in writing to a detainee

Prabir Purkayastha after his release.

Mr. Purkayastha was arrested by the Delhi Police Special Cell on October 3, 2023 and remanded in police custody the next day, accused of using Chinese funding to promote "anti-national propaganda" through digital media. His lawyer was informed of the grounds of arrest on October 5.

"The right to be informed about the grounds of arrest flows from Article 22(1) (an arrested person shall be informed of the grounds of arrest and allowed to consult a lawyer of his or her choice) of the Constitution and any infringement of this fundamental right would vitiate the process of arrest and remand," Justice Mehta, who authored the judgment, held. The mere fact that a chargesheet was filed in the case would not validate the illegality committed at the time of arrest, the court said. Quashing the arrest, the court however said its verdict was not a comment on the merits of the case against Mr. Purkayastha.

Justice Mehta said, like arrests, the grounds of detention should also be communicated in writing to a detainee. Any lapse would be a violation of Article 22(5) of the Constitution, which mandates that a person under detention should be communicated the grounds of the detention order and allowed to make a representation against the detention at the earliest opportunity.

Communication of grounds of arrest or detention in writing by the investigating agency or police was "sacrosanct and cannot be breached under any situation". "Non-compliance of this constitutional requirement and statutory mandate would lead to the custody or the detention being rendered illegal," the Supreme Court declared.

Providing arrested persons or their lawyers the written grounds of arrest was made mandatory under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) by the top court in its Pankaj Bansal case judgment in 2023. The court has extended the same rule to UAPA cases through the current verdict in Mr. Purkayastha's case.

Mr. Purkayastha was arrested by the Delhi Police Special Cell on October 3, 2023. Mr. Purkayastha's request to provide him a copy of the FIR was ignored by the police.

He was given a copy only after he was remanded in police custody by a Sessions Judge at 6 a.m. on October 4, 2023. The senior journalist's lawyer, advocate Arshdeep Khurana, was informed about the grounds of arrest on October 5, that is, 24 hours after his client was remanded in police custody.

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

April trade gap hits \$19 bn as imports outpace exports

CONTEXT: India's merchandise exports began 2024-25 on a mildly positive note, rising 1.07% to \$ 35 billion in April. But the import bill jumped 10.3% to \$54.1 billion, thanks to a surge in global oil and gold prices, widening the trade deficit to a four-month high of \$19.1 billion.



FIGURE: Column chart representation of trade profile of India. Source: Press Information Bureau (PIB), Union Ministry of Commerce and Industries.

India's trade deficit widened to a four-month high of \$ 19.1 billion, with the import bill jumping 10.3 % to \$ 54.1 billion, while merchandise exports rose 1.07% to \$ 35 billion in April.

The Commerce Ministry revised its total exports estimates in 2023-24 to \$778.2 billion from \$776.7 billion estimated last month, reflecting a 0.42 % uptick over the record figure of \$776.4 billion achieved in 2022-23.

Gold imports tripled to \$ 3.11 billion from \$ 1.01 billion, and a 20.2 % rise in the oil import bill, which amounted to \$ 2.8 billion fuelling almost a sharp 32.3 % year-on-year surge in April's goods trade deficit, compared with the \$ 14.4 billion gap in April 2023.

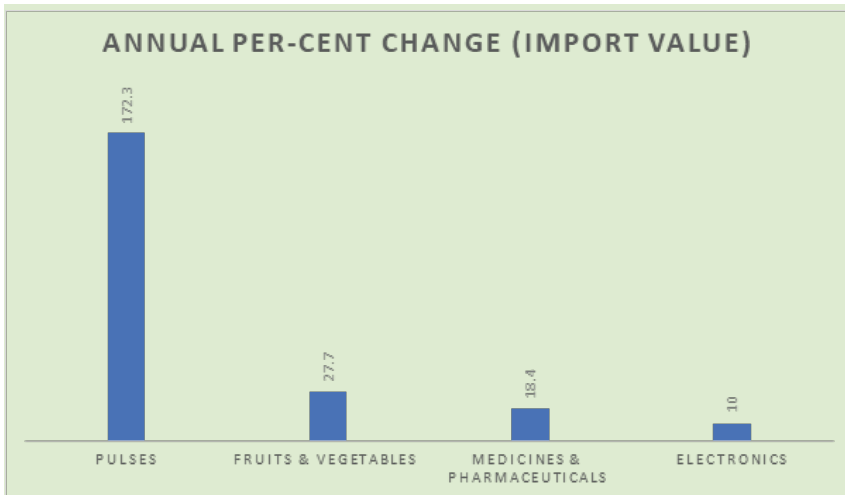


FIGURE: Column chart representation of pre centage change by import value. Source: Press Information Bureau (PIB), Union Ministry of Commerce and Industries

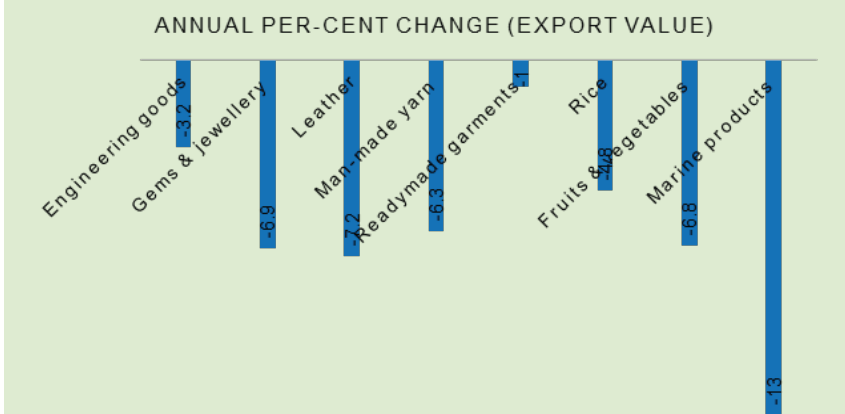


FIGURE: Column chart representation of pre centage change by export value. Source: Press Information Bureau (PIB), Union Ministry of Commerce and Industries.

On the other hand, as many as 17 of the top 30 export items recorded contractions in April, including engineering goods (-3.2%), gems and jewellery (-6.9%), leather (-7.2%), man-made yarn (-6.3%) and readymade garments (-1%). Several agricultural goods continued to see a drop in shipments, including rice (-4.8%), fruits and vegetables (-6.8%), while marine products fell almost 13%.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Slovakia PM shot multiple times, suffers life-threatening wounds

CONTEXT: Slovakia’s Prime Minister Robert Fico was shot multiple times in an assassination attempt in the central town of Handlova.



Mr. Fico, whose Smer-SD party won the general election last September, is a four-time Prime Minister and a political veteran criticised for swaying his country’s foreign policy in favour of the Kremlin.

Anti-Ukraine stance

Since he assumed office last October, Mr. Fico has made a string of remarks that have soured ties between Slovakia and neighbouring Ukraine. He has notably questioned Ukraine’s sovereignty and called for a compromise with Russia, which invaded Ukraine in 2022. After he was elected, Slovakia stopped sending weapons to Ukraine. He pledged during the electoral campaign not to provide Kyiv with “a single bullet”. He also sparked mass protests with controversial changes, including a media law that critics say will undermine the impartiality of public television and radio.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

On Delhi’s mounting waste crisis

CONTEXT: The Supreme Court’s recent criticism of solid waste management (SWM) in New Delhi highlights a critical issue. The national capital has more than 3,800 tonnes of solid waste remaining untreated. This waste reaches landfills and threatens public health and the environment.



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What is the status of Delhi's SWM system?

According to the 2011 Census, New Delhi's population was about 1.7 crore, which in 2024 is expected to be around 2.32 crore. Considering an average per capita generation of about 0.6 kg/day per person, the city generates approximately 13,000 tonnes per day (TPD) of waste — roughly 1,400 truckloads — which adds up to about 42 lakh tonnes per annum. The city's population is expected to rise to 2.85 crore by 2031, so waste generation could go up to 17,000 TPD.

About 90% of the waste generated in the city is collected by the three municipal corporations: the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Delhi Cantonment Board, and the New Delhi Municipal Corporation. Generally, about 50-55% of the waste generated in Indian cities is biodegradable wet waste; 35% is non-biodegradable wet waste; and 10% is an inert component. Accordingly, 7,000 TPD would be wet waste; 4,800 TPD dry waste; and 2,000 TPD inert.

What about the processing capacity of SWM in Delhi?

New Delhi has waste-processing facilities at Okhla, Bhalswa, Narela, Bawana, Tehkhand, SMA Industrial Area, Nilothi, and Ghazipur. These facilities have a collective design capacity of about 9,200 TPD. This includes composting facilities handling around 900-1,000 TPD and waste-to-energy projects of 8,200 TPD.

However, the MCD is disposing of unprocessed waste of 3,800 TPD in the three designated landfills: Gazipur, Bhalswa, and Okhla. These landfills, consisting of unprocessed wet and dry waste, generate methane gases, leachates, and cause landfill fires, adversely affecting the surrounding environment. The accumulation of unprocessed waste in these landfills has led to a staggering 2.58 crore tonnes of legacy waste piling up over 200 acres of land. The MCD initiated biomining to reduce the amount of waste in 2019, but the COVID-19 pandemic halted these efforts. Initially planned to be completed by 2024, this task will take another two to three years.

However, the environmental impact will persist until fresh waste is scientifically processed. With the current accumulation of 3,800 TPD of unprocessed waste, the landfills will only become bigger and taller.

What are the MCD's challenges?

The MCD faces several challenges in tackling waste within the city. One major issue is the lack of waste segregation at source. Many households and commercial establishments don't do this. As a result, unprocessed mixed waste enters landfills. Additionally, waste processing plants need large land parcels, of about 30-40 acres each, which is a challenge in Delhi. This challenge in turn leads to a significant portion of waste being left untreated.

Public awareness of proper waste management practices is also lacking, contributing to littering and improper disposal habits, which divert the MCD's attention towards clearing open points rather than processing wet waste.

Lack of regular waste collection services in certain areas also add to the buildup of waste as well as littering, while illegal dumping in open areas and water bodies increases the pressure on the municipal body, warranting more resources for clean-up.

Finally, a lack of coordination among various stakeholders — including multiple municipal corporations — results in inefficient waste management, further complicating the MCD's efforts to address the city's waste management issues.

What efforts need to be made in order to separate the waste?

As the national capital, Delhi needs to scale up its

processing capacity to manage daily waste. The quantity of waste is expected to increase in the coming years together with the per capita waste generation. With this in mind, the MCD should design a waste-management plan to cater to about three crore people while the total design capacity of the city's waste processing facility should be 18,000 TPD.

Biodegradable wet waste should be composted or used to generate biogas. The design capacity of the wet-waste-processing system should be set at 9,000 tonnes. Typically, the capacity of composting facilities is around 500 tonnes per day, which means Delhi will need at least 18 composting or biogas plants to ensure no biodegradable wet waste reaches landfills. This will demand significant efforts from the MCD: to identify land, set up composting facilities, and operate them.

As for the non-biodegradable dry waste: about 2% will be recyclable, and this can be sent to recycling facilities. The remaining 33% won't yet be recyclable. The non-recyclable dry waste fraction is called refuse-derived fuel (RDF) and consists of plastics, paper, and textile waste. This material has good calorific value and can be used to generate power in waste-to-energy projects.

Although the cost of power generation through waste-to-energy projects tends to be slightly on the higher side, the objective is to scientifically manage waste and mitigate environmental impacts, particularly those arising from landfill fires.

Can waste processing be decentralised?

Given the challenges with identifying large land parcels, Delhi will need to partner with its neighbouring States to set up a few of these composting plants. Additionally, the market for organic compost produced from wet waste lies in the neighbouring States of Haryana and Uttar Pradesh.

Delhi city has 272 wards. States like Tamil Nadu and Kerala have set up decentralised Micro-Composting Centres (MCC) of five TPD capacity at the ward level. These MCCs can manage about 20% of the city's wet waste. Bengaluru has also set up ward-level Dry Waste Collection Centres (DWCC) of 2 TPD capacity each. These DWCCs can help manage about 10% of the dry waste.

Delhi's SWM system should integrate decentralised options for both wet and dry waste, backed by large processing facilities to ensure all the waste generated is scientifically processed. The city must also ensure existing processing facilities operate at full capacity, while new facilities are built to ensure no waste goes untreated. Finally, urban local bodies should also learn from best practices from other cities in India and abroad on efficient SWM processing.



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INTERNAL SECURITY

Manipur accounted for 97% of displacements in South Asia

Conflict and violence triggered 69,000 displacements in South Asia in 2023, with Manipur violence accounting for 67,000. The report by the Geneva-based Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) termed it the highest number of displacements triggered by conflict and violence in India since 2018.

On May 3, 2023, a ‘Tribal Solidarity March’ was organised in Manipur’s hill districts to protest against the Meitei community’s demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status. The march led to ethnic clashes between the Meitei and the Kuki communities, ultimately claiming more than 200 lives. The Manipur High Court had in March last year called for recommendations to be sent to the Union government to recognise the Meitei community as a “Scheduled Tribe,” an official status designed to protect minorities from marginalisation.

The call was met with resistance from other local STs, including the Kukis. Land disputes were also an underlying driver of the tensions. “Protests turned violent in Churachandpur district on May 3, and the violence spread to other districts, including Imphal East, Imphal West, Bishnupur, Tengnoupal, and Kangpokpi, triggering around 67,000 displacements”.

An internal displacement refers to the forced movement of a person, within the borders of a country. This term refers to the events or occurrences that cause people to be displaced internally and not the number of individuals displaced. Also, the same set of people can be displaced several times over.

More than three-quarters of the movements took place within Manipur, but almost a fifth were to the neighbouring State of Mizoram and smaller numbers to Nagaland and Assam. As the violence escalated, the Union government imposed curfews, shut down the internet, and dispatched security forces. It also set up relief camps and established a peace committee for Manipur but the initiative was hampered by disagreements about its composition.

At the end of 2023, there were 0.61 million such persons in India. The report said that 68.3 million people worldwide were displaced by conflict and violence as of 2023. Over the past five years, the number of internally displaced people resulting from conflict has increased by 22.6 million, with the two biggest increases in 2022 and 2023.

Fighting in Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Palestinian territories accounted for nearly two-thirds of new movements of people due to conflict in 2023. Throughout 2023,

Displaced due to conflict

The data for internal displacements and internally displaced people in India is sourced from Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

As historical grievances resurface between the ethnic groups, violence has forced large numbers of both groups to become displaced and seek shelter. (Photo by Ritesh Shukla/Getty Images)



Chart 1: The chart shows the number of internal displacements in India from 2009 to 2023

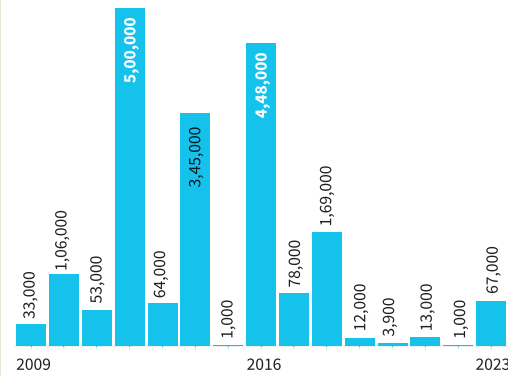
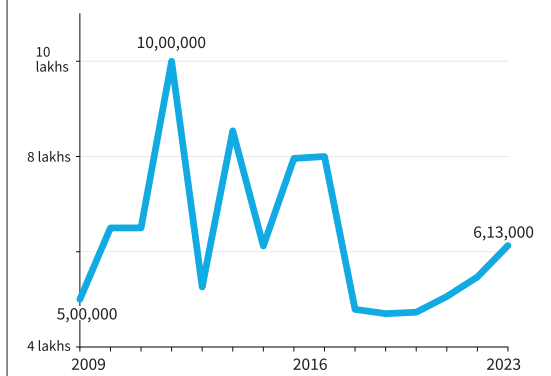
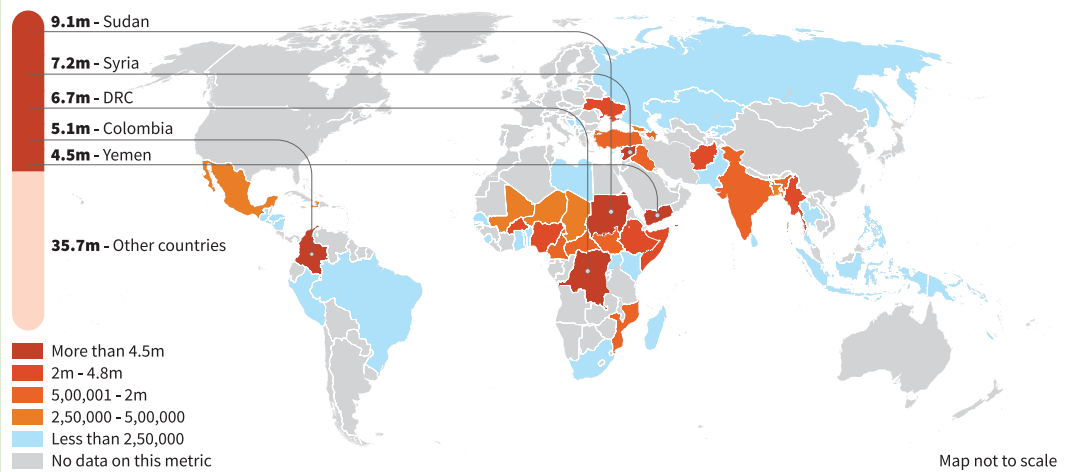


Chart 2: The chart shows the total number of internally displaced people in India due to conflict and violence (2009 to 2023)



Map 3: The map shows internally displaced people as a result of conflict and violence in 66 countries and territories, as of 31 December 2023.



there were six million forced movements of people caused by the violence in Sudan — more than in the previous 14 years combined. It is the second-highest number of forced movements within a year after Ukraine’s 16.9 million in 2022. World over, in 2023, the number of internal displacements (occurrences) resulting from conflict was 20.5 million.

Displacements can also happen due to natural disasters. If those numbers are included, the total internally displaced persons go up to a record 75.9 million (7.7 million by disasters) by the end of 2023. The figure was up from 71.1 million at the end of 2022.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Army set to receive next batch of shoulder-fired Igla-S air defence systems

CONTEXT: The Army is all set to begin receiving another set of Russian Igla-S very short-range air defence systems (VSHORAD) by the end of May or early next month, filling a critical void in its air defence requirements which has been repeatedly delayed.



In another development, multiple sources confirmed that the payments issue between India and Russia that has held up critical payments for defence deals as well as payments has been resolved.

The Igla-S systems were contracted last year under the fourth tranche of Emergency Procurements (EP) and are being assembled by Adani Defence Systems And Technologies Limited (ADSTL) in India under technology transfer from Rosoboronexport, multiple official sources confirmed.

The Army is also set to receive the first of two Israeli Hermes-900 Medium Altitude Long Endurance Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) assembled by ADSTL in Hyderabad next month.

Last year, the Army contracted 48 Igla-S launchers, 100 missiles, 48-night sights, and one missile testing station under a ₹260 crore contract and deliveries are set to begin by end of this May. The missile will be imported and some parts like sights, launcher, and battery will be assembled/manufactured here by Adani defence. A VSHORAD is the soldier's last line of defence against enemy combat aircraft, helicopters and UAVs in the multilayered air defence network.



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—Benjamin Franklin



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