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POLITY & GOVERNANCE

LOK SABHA TO WITNESS RARE CONTEST FOR SPEAKER'S POST

CONTEXT: The 18th Lok Sabha is set for a rare Speaker election contest between BJP's Om Birla and Congress's Kodikunnil Suresh, highlighting divisions between the NDA and the INDIA bloc.

CONTEST FOR LOK SABHA SPEAKER'S POST

Key Details

- **Candidates:** Om Birla (BJP) vs. Kodikunnil Suresh (Congress)
- **Context:** National Democratic Alliance (NDA) and the INDIA bloc failed to reach a consensus.

Attempts at Consensus

- **Meeting:** Held between Congress leader K.C. Venugopal, DMK's T.R. Baalu, and NDA leaders Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, and J.P. Nadda.
- **Outcome:** No agreement reached; Opposition leaders walked out.
- **Accusation:** Venugopal accused the government of not following the convention of nominating an Opposition candidate for Deputy Speaker.

Candidates' Background

- **Om Birla:** Third-term BJP MP from Kota, previous Speaker.
- **Kodikunnil Suresh:** Eight-term MP from Kerala, Dalit community representative.

Historical Context

- **Previous Contests:**
 - 1952: G.V. Mavalankar vs. Shantaram More.
 - 1967: Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy vs. Tenneti Viswanathan.
 - 1976: Baliram Bhagat vs. Jagannath Rao Joshi.
- **Voice Votes:** Contests in 10th and 12th Lok Sabha resolved by voice vote.

Reactions and Statements

- **Opposition:** Rahul Gandhi willing to support NDA candidate if Deputy Speaker post given to Opposition.
- **Government:** Accused Opposition of "pressure politics".
- **INDIA Bloc:** Trinamool Congress initially opposed Congress's unilateral decision, later backed Suresh.

Importance of Election

- **Conventions:** Traditionally, Speaker from ruling party, Deputy Speaker from Opposition.
- **Significance:** Demonstrates consolidation of anti-NDA bloc.

Party Strategies

- **NDA's Approach:** Emphasizing continuity and dominance.
- **Opposition's Aim:** To show unity and push for convention adherence.

Additional Points

- **NDA's Numbers:** BJP has 240 MPs; additional support from YSRCP MPs.
- **Parliamentary Affairs Minister:** Kiren Rijju emphasized non-partisan nature of Speaker's role and desirability of unanimous election.

CONCLUSION:

The upcoming election for the Speaker's post in the 18th Lok Sabha is a significant event, reflecting the broader political dynamics between the NDA and the INDIA bloc. The contest between Om Birla and Kodikunnil Suresh underscores the current polarization in Indian politics and the challenges in reaching bipartisan agreements.

The historical context of previous Speaker elections adds to the importance of this event, highlighting its rarity and the stakes involved. As both sides prepare for this critical vote, the outcome will not only decide the next Speaker but also set the tone for the parliamentary proceedings and the relationship between the ruling coalition and the opposition in the coming term.

The election serves as a litmus test for the strength and unity of the respective political alliances, with broader implications for the governance and legislative agenda of the 18th Lok Sabha.

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POLITY & GOVERNANCE

DELHI HC STAYS BAIL GRANTED TO KEJRIWAL

CONTEXT: The Delhi High Court has stayed the bail granted to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the excise policy case, prompting the Aam Aadmi Party to plan an appeal to the Supreme Court. This development comes amid the Supreme Court's recent admonition against indefinitely adjourning bail applications, as highlighted in the plea filed by former Delhi Minister Satyender Jain.

Delhi High Court Stays Arvind Kejriwal's Bail Court Proceedings

- **Stay on Bail:** The Delhi High Court imposed a stay on the regular bail granted to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal by a trial court in the excise policy case.
- **Judge's Ruling:** Justice Sudhir Kumar Jain stated the trial court had not adequately appreciated the evidence submitted by the Enforcement Directorate (ED).
- **ED's Argument:** Additional Solicitor-General S.V. Raju contended that the Central agency was not given sufficient opportunity to argue its stay application.
- **High Court's Decision:** The High Court agreed with ED's contentions, staying the trial court's order and accepting ED's plea.

Aam Aadmi Party's Response

- **Supreme Court Appeal:** The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) announced plans to challenge the High Court's order in the Supreme Court.
- **Trial Court's Release Order:** Special judge Niyay Bindu had ordered Kejriwal's release on a ₹1 lakh bail bond, noting the lack of direct evidence linking him to the crime.

Enforcement Directorate's Action

- **High Court Appeal:** The ED moved the High Court the day after the trial court's ruling, calling it "perverse" and based on irrelevant facts.
- **Interim Stay:** The High Court imposed an interim stay on Kejriwal's release and reserved its verdict to review the case records.

Supreme Court's Position on Bail Petitions

- **General Principle:** The Supreme Court emphasized that bail petitions should not be adjourned indefinitely, as seen in its recent hearing of former Delhi Minister Satyender Jain's plea.
- **Jain's Case:** Jain was arrested by the ED on money laundering charges in May 2022. His bail plea had been adjourned by the Delhi High Court for six weeks.
- **SC's Observation:** The Supreme Court noted the unusual nature of indefinitely reserving orders in cases affecting personal liberty and urged the High Court to take a timely decision.

Analysis of Events

The sequence of legal events highlights the complexities and nuances of judicial proceedings in high-profile cases involving political figures. The Delhi High Court's decision to stay Arvind Kejriwal's bail, citing insufficient appreciation of evidence and procedural lapses by the trial court, underscores the rigorous scrutiny such cases undergo. The involvement of the Enforcement

Directorate and the subsequent legal maneuvers indicate the intensity of the legal battle.

The AAP's decision to approach the Supreme Court reflects their strategy to contest what they perceive as judicial overreach and to protect the personal liberty of their leader. The Supreme Court's remarks on the indefinite adjournment of bail pleas underscore the importance of timely judicial decisions, especially in cases impacting personal freedom.

Overall, these events not only illustrate the legal challenges faced by political leaders but also emphasize the judiciary's role in ensuring fair and prompt adjudication of bail applications. The outcome of these proceedings will have significant implications for the involved parties and the broader political landscape.

CONCLUSION: The ongoing legal battle over Arvind Kejriwal's bail highlights the intricate dynamics of judicial processes in politically sensitive cases. The Delhi High Court's stay, the AAP's planned appeal to the Supreme Court, and the apex court's emphasis on timely decisions in bail matters collectively underscore the critical balance between legal scrutiny and personal liberty. The resolution of this case will significantly impact the involved parties and set important precedents for judicial conduct in similar future cases.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

LACK OF FOCUS, NOT FINANCE, BEHIND SLUGGISH KAVACH DEPLOYMENT

CONTEXT: The Indian Railways plans to reduce the maximum speed of Vande Bharat and Gatiman Express trains on select routes from 160 kmph to 130 kmph for safety reasons, following system failures and recent accidents. The slow deployment of the Kavach ATP system, crucial for train safety, remains a significant concern.

RAILWAYS TO REDUCE SPEED OF SELECT PREMIUM TRAINS

Speed Reduction Plan

- **Announcement:** Indian Railways will reduce the maximum speed of premium trains, including Vande Bharat and Gatiman Express, from 160 kmph to 130 kmph on select routes for safety reasons.
- **Routes Affected:**
 - Delhi-Jhansi-Delhi Gatiman Express (Train no. 12050/12049)
 - Delhi-Khajuraho-Delhi Vande Bharat Express (22470/22469)
 - Delhi-Rani Kamalapati-Delhi Vande Bharat Express (20172/20171)
 - Delhi-Rani Kamalapati-Delhi Shatabdi Express (12002/12001)
- **Speed Adjustments:**
 - Gatiman and Vande Bharat Express: from 160 kmph to 130 kmph
 - Shatabdi Express: from 150 kmph to 130 kmph

- **Impact:** Increase in running time by 25-30 minutes, changes in timings of at least 10 superfast express trains on these routes.

Reasons for Speed Reduction

- **Safety Concerns:** The reduction is to ensure safety due to the failure of the Train Protection & Warning System (TPWS) on the Delhi-Agra-Jhansi routes.
- **Recent Accidents:** The decision follows the Kanchanjunga Express accident, raising safety concerns.
- **Pending Proposals:** Northern Railway's proposal to either dispense with TPWS or reduce train speed to 130 kmph has been pending since November 2023.
- **Approval:** With two zonal railways recommending speed reduction for safety, the Railway Board is likely to approve the proposal.

Kavach Deployment Challenges

- **Accident Spotlight:** The June 17 accident involving the Sealdah-bound Kanchenjunga Express has highlighted the absence of Kavach, India's Automatic Train Protection (ATP) system.
- **Minister's Review:** Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw has directed the installation of an advanced version of Kavach 4.0 to be taken up in "mission mode."

Kavach System Overview

- **Functionality:** Kavach warns loco pilots of risks and can automatically apply brakes if necessary.
- **Components:**
 - Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags in tracks
 - RFID readers, computer, and brake interface equipment in engines
 - Radio towers at stations
- **Cost:**
 - ₹50 lakh per km for track installation
 - ₹70 lakh per engine
 - Total estimated cost: ₹45,000 crore for entire network

Financial Feasibility

- **Budget:** Railways' capital expenditure budget for FY25 is ₹2,52,000 crore.
- **Kavach Cost:** Yearly cost of ₹4,500 crore is less than 2% of the annual capital expenditure.
- **Funding Availability:** Sufficient funds are available, but deployment pace is slow.

Deployment Progress

- **Slow Implementation:** Since adoption in 2020, Kavach has been installed on only 1,465 route km out of 68,000 (2%) and on 139 engines out of 15,200 (1%).
- **Required Pace:** To complete in 10 years, installation must increase to 6,800 route km/year and 1,500 engines/year.

Analysis

The decision to reduce the speed of select premium trains highlights significant safety concerns within the Indian Railways. The failure of the TPWS system necessitated immediate action to prevent potential accidents, thus leading to the proposed speed reductions. This decision underscores the critical need for effective safety measures, such as the timely deployment of Kavach, to

enhance the safety and reliability of train operations.

The analysis of Kavach deployment reveals a stark contrast between the availability of funds and the pace of implementation. Despite having a substantial budget, the slow progress in installing Kavach points to a lack of focus and urgency in addressing safety concerns. The figures indicate a dire need for accelerating the deployment process to ensure comprehensive safety coverage across the railway network.

CONCLUSION: while the speed reduction of premium trains is a necessary short-term measure for safety, the long-term solution lies in the efficient and expedited deployment of advanced safety systems like Kavach. Indian Railways should look forward to ensuring safe and comfortable travel at affordable prices to Indians while adopting measures to cater to the demands of 21st-century India. Ensuring the safety of passengers and the integrity of train operations must be a top priority for Indian Railways.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

MOSCOW PREPARING FOR LIKELY VISIT BY MODI, SAYS PUTIN AIDE

CONTEXT: Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to visit Moscow for bilateral talks with President Vladimir Putin in the coming weeks, marking his first visit since the Ukraine war began and the suspension of the annual summit mechanism, with preparations underway for the visit in early July.

MOSCOW PREPARING FOR MODI'S LIKELY VISIT, SAYS PUTIN AIDE

Visit Context and Background

- **First Visit Since Ukraine War:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to visit Moscow for bilateral talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, marking his first visit since the onset of the Ukraine war.
- **Annual Summit Mechanism:** This visit falls under the annual summit mechanism established in 2000 but has been suspended for the past few years.

Confirmation and Preparations

- **Kremlin Confirmation:** Kremlin official and Presidential aide Yuri Ushakov confirmed the preparations for Modi's visit.
- **Date Confirmation Pending:** Ushakov mentioned that the dates for the visit have yet to be agreed upon by both sides.
- **Early July Target:** Russian state-owned RIA Novosti news agency indicated that preparations are being made for an early July visit.

External Affairs Ministry Stance

- **No Official Comment:** The Indian External Affairs Ministry has declined to comment on the possible visit.
- **No Government Confirmation:** No confirmation of Ushakov's statement has been made by the Indian government.

Upcoming Visits and Significance

- **October Visit:** Modi is also scheduled to visit Russia in October for the extended 10-member BRICS Summit in Kazan hosted by Putin.

- **Significance of Bilateral Meeting:** The planned bilateral meeting with Putin is significant, especially given Modi's recent cancellation of his plans to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council meeting in Astana, Kazakhstan.

SCO Summit and Modi's Decision

- **SCO Meeting Attendees:** The SCO Summit in Astana will be attended by leaders including Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, and leaders of Iran and Central Asian states.
- **Cancellation of Attendance:** Modi conveyed to Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev that he would not attend the SCO Summit, where India has been a full member since 2017.
- **Parliament Session:** Sources suggested that the ongoing Parliament session requiring Modi's presence was the reason for his decision not to attend the SCO Summit.

Analysis

- **Breaking Tradition:** If Modi travels to Moscow in July, it would break the tradition of Indian Prime Ministers making their first bilateral visit within the neighbourhood after the start of their term.
- **Strategic Implications:** This visit signals a strategic emphasis on maintaining and strengthening India-Russia relations amidst global geopolitical shifts and the ongoing Ukraine conflict.
- **Diplomatic Balancing:** Modi's visit to Moscow, despite tensions and the global stance on the Ukraine conflict, highlights India's diplomatic balancing act between major global powers.
- **Bilateral Focus:** The emphasis on a bilateral meeting with Putin suggests a priority on deepening ties with Russia, which remains a significant defense and energy partner for India.
- **Geopolitical Context:** Modi's decision to skip the SCO Summit but proceed with a visit to Moscow underscores the nuanced approach in India's foreign policy, balancing parliamentary responsibilities and strategic international engagements. It may be a hint at India giving special importance to Russia, within SCO where China is a significant player. This may be to send a signal to Beijing as new Delhi has stepped up its stance with regards to China by allowing a US EU delegation to visit Dalai Lama at Dharam Shala and a very successful visit to G7 where India was a special invitee.

CONCLUSION: Modi's upcoming visit to Moscow probable skipped SCO Summit underscores India's nuanced foreign policy, emphasizing strategic ties with Russia amidst evolving global dynamics and regional tensions.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ASSANGE TO BE 'FREE' AFTER U.S. PLEA DEAL

CONTEXT: Julian Assange, founder of WikiLeaks, is set to plead guilty to a single count of conspiracy to obtain and disseminate national defense information under a plea deal, marking the end of his prolonged legal battle and enabling his return to Australia after years of confinement and extradition efforts by the United States.

1. Julian Assange's Legal Journey

Arrest and Extradition Battles

Julian Assange, co-founder of WikiLeaks, was initially arrested in the UK in 2010 due to extradition requests related to sex crime allegations in Sweden, which were later dropped. He sought asylum in the Ecuadorian embassy in London until 2019 to avoid extradition to the US.

US Extradition and Legal Charges

The US government pursued Assange for publishing classified documents on WikiLeaks, including from Chelsea Manning. Charges against Assange included violating the Espionage Act and conspiracy to obtain and disseminate national defense information.

Legal Proceedings and Appeals

Assange fought against extradition, citing concerns about fair trial conditions and the nature of the charges. Legal battles spanned years, involving appeals to various courts, including the UK Supreme Court.

What is a Plea Deal?

A plea deal refers to an agreement between a defendant and prosecutors where the defendant agrees to plead guilty to certain charges in exchange for concessions, such as reduced charges or sentencing. It aims to resolve a legal case without a full trial, often benefiting both parties by saving time and resources.

2. The Plea Deal and Its Terms

Terms of the Plea Deal

Assange recently agreed to a plea deal involving pleading guilty to a single count of conspiracy to obtain and disseminate national defense information. He is expected to receive a sentence of five years and two months, which includes credit for time served in UK custody.

Implications of the Plea

The plea deal allows Assange to be released and return to his native Australia. It marks an end to his legal saga in the US, concluding years of international legal controversy over his activities with WikiLeaks.

3. Reactions and Public Opinion

Support and Criticism

Supporters view Assange as a whistleblower and advocate for press freedom, citing his role in exposing government misconduct. Critics argue that his actions jeopardized national security and violated laws protecting classified information.

Political and Legal Fallout

The case has raised debates about the balance between national security and press freedom. It also highlights challenges in extraditing individuals for cyber-related crimes across international



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borders.

4. Legacy of WikiLeaks and Future Impact

Impact on Journalism and Free Speech

WikiLeaks revolutionized investigative journalism by providing a platform for anonymous whistleblowers. The legal actions against Assange set a precedent for how governments handle leaks of classified information in the digital age.

Lessons Learned and Future Scenarios

Assange's case prompts discussions on the limits of journalistic freedom, government transparency, and international legal cooperation in cyber-related crimes. It underscores the complexities of balancing national security with public interest disclosures.

CONCLUSION

Julian Assange's plea deal marks a significant chapter in the global debate on press freedom and government accountability. While his release ends a prolonged legal battle, the implications of his actions and the legal precedents set will continue to shape discussions on journalism, whistleblowing, and democratic governance worldwide.

- Inclusion of stakeholders like question setters, translators, printing presses, and exam centre officials crucial for integrity.

2. Transparency and Accountability

- Commendable efforts by NTA in voluntary disclosure under RTI Act Section 4.
- Successful implementation of SOPs for answer key disclosure and OMR sheet evaluation, despite broader challenges.

Recommendations for Improvement

1. Learning from Legal Precedents

- Lessons from legal battles in IIT admissions underscore the need for transparent and rational SOPs.
- Supreme Court directives emphasize ongoing refinement of selection processes for fairness and relevance.

2. Forward Steps for NEET

- Implementation of stabilized cut-offs akin to IIT practices to mitigate score inflation.
- Embrace a professional war-room culture for agile decision-making and crisis management.

CONCLUSION

NEET 2024 reveals critical governance lapses and the need for robust SOPs to uphold exam integrity. Transparency initiatives and legal insights from other competitive exams provide a pathway for improvement, ensuring fairness and trust in future exams.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

PREVENTING ANOTHER NEET FIASCO

CONTEXT: The NEET exam in 2024 faced controversies over inflated scores and procedural irregularities, highlighting vulnerabilities in governance and the need for stringent Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to ensure fairness and transparency in admissions.

ISSUES HIGHLIGHTED

1. Inflation of Scores and Ranks

- Many candidates may not secure admission to desired colleges due to inflated scores.
- Coaching centres and counselling services, despite their advice, failed to ensure expected outcomes for NEET aspirants.

2. Governance and SOP Failures

- Irregularities such as alleged cheating, paper leakage, and mishandling of question papers persisted.
- Weak links in SOP compliance from question setting to exam conduct were evident.
- Distribution of wrong question papers and subsequent confusion highlighted systemic failures.

3. High Stakes and Vulnerabilities

- NEET's significance in 'One Exam, One Nation' model amplifies issues due to large candidate numbers, diverse languages, and varying quality and costs of education.
- High stakes lead to pressure on parents and candidates, making the exam susceptible to irregularities.

Governance and Compliance

1. Need for Comprehensive SOPs

- Urgent requirement for foolproof SOPs across all stages of exam management.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

WILL THE AGNIPATH SCHEME BE REVAMPED?

CONTEXT: The Agnipath scheme, introduced in June 2022 for recruiting soldiers, sailors, and airmen on a temporary basis with potential for permanent selection, faces scrutiny amid concerns over personnel shortages and operational effectiveness, prompting discussions among NDA allies and stakeholders on potential revisions and enhancements.

THE GIST

- The Agnipath scheme for recruitment of soldiers, sailors and airmen into the three services was announced on June 14, 2022 doing away with the earlier process of permanent recruitment.
- One of the biggest concerns for the armed forces, especially the Army, is the shortage of personnel in the 'below the officer's rank' cadres.
- As reported by The Hindu earlier, as the Agnipath scheme completes two years of implementation, the Department of Military Affairs (DMA) in the Defence Ministry headed by the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) has sought feedback from the forces on the scheme.

OVERVIEW OF AGNIPATH SCHEME AND CURRENT ISSUES

- **Introduction of Agnipath Scheme (June 14, 2022)**
 - Replaces permanent recruitment with a temporary model.
 - Agniveers recruited for four years, with up to 25% potentially selected for permanent roles.
 - Intake capped at 1.75 lakh until 2026; Army recruits 40,000/year, Navy and Air Force 3,000 each.
 - Benefits include educational and skill certifications; no

pension post-service.

- Defence Minister hails it as transformative for reducing armed forces' average age.

Concerns Raised by Stakeholders

Personnel Shortage

- Significant deficit in 'below officer's rank' cadres exacerbated by COVID-19 hiatus.
- Annual shortfall persists despite recruitment efforts; conversion rate concerns.

Political and Public Reaction

- Scheme becomes contentious in election campaigns, sparking protests and demands for revision or scrapping.
- JD(U) and LJP voice dissent, pushing for comprehensive review amid ongoing NDA discussions.

Current Status and Proposed Revisions

Feedback and Review Process

- Department of Military Affairs (DMA) solicits armed forces' feedback after two years of implementation.
- Recommendations include increasing permanent recruitment to 50% and raising technical entry age limit to 23 years.
- Navy and Air Force feedback compiled; Army compilation ongoing, delaying DMA's final recommendation to Defence Ministry.

Analysis

The Agnipath scheme, designed to address personnel shortages and lower the armed forces' age profile, faces substantial scrutiny and criticism, particularly regarding its operational impact and conversion rates. Political and stakeholder pressures are influencing ongoing discussions within the NDA, potentially leading to revisions aimed at enhancing effectiveness and addressing recruitment challenges.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

COST OF FUTURE WARS IS ENORMOUS, RESOURCES SHOULD BE OPTIMISED: CHIEF OF DEFENCE STAFF

CONTEXT: General Anil Chauhan, Chief of Defence Staff, emphasized the imperative of optimizing resources and integrating military services to manage the enormous costs of future wars, highlighting the need for strategic planning and efficiency in defense operations amidst evolving geopolitical challenges and technological advancements.

Chief of defence staff's perspective on future war costs and resource optimization

- Enormous Costs of Future Wars:** General Anil Chauhan highlights the significant financial implications of future wars, stressing the need for optimizing resources and manpower to afford advanced weapons and systems.
- Integration within the Armed Forces:** Emphasizing service integration as a priority, General Chauhan outlines over 170 initiatives where the Army, Navy, and Air Force can collaborate to streamline time, resources, processes, infrastructure, and manpower.

Strategic Education and Integration Initiatives

- Warfare & Aerospace Strategy Program (WASP):**
 - Introduced in 2022, WASP aims to deepen participants' understanding of geopolitics, grand strategy, and national power, fostering a more integrated approach among military professionals.
- Expansion of Integration Efforts:**
 - Beyond intra-service integration, General Chauhan advocates extending integrated approaches to other services like the Navy and Coast Guard, as well as involving Central Armed Police Forces in logistics and infrastructure.

Strategic Imperatives for India's National Security

- Challenges and Strategic Risks:**
 - India faces multifaceted challenges from climate change to geopolitical tensions with China, necessitating a proactive and coordinated national security strategy.
- Importance of a National Security Strategy (NSS):**
 - Lack of an NSS hampers India's ability to systematically assess threats, plan long-term defense capabilities, and signal strategic intentions to allies and adversaries alike.

Benefits of Implementing a National Security Strategy

- Comprehensive Strategic Assessment:**
 - An NSS would compel periodic reviews of threats and opportunities, ensuring that emerging challenges like China's naval expansion are addressed proactively.
- Framework for Long-term Planning:**
 - Provides a structured approach to prioritize defense investments, avoiding ad-hoc decisions and ensuring alignment with India's strategic objectives.
- Instrument for Strategic Signaling:**
 - Clarifies India's role as a security provider in the region,



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enhances transparency in defense policies, and manages expectations of international partners.

- **Enhanced Inter-Agency Coordination:**
 - Facilitates synchronized efforts across defense and security agencies, promoting cohesive national security planning and operational efficiency.
- **Accountability and Transparency:**
 - Introduces accountability mechanisms to ensure governmental alignment with strategic goals, enhancing transparency and public confidence in national security decision-making.

Call for a Holistic Approach to National Security

- **Need for a Holistic Approach:**
 - Advocates for a systematic and comprehensive approach to national security planning, moving beyond reactive responses to strategic foresight and preparedness.
- **Role of National Security Strategy:**
 - Proposes the formulation of a robust NSS as a foundational document to guide India's trajectory as a global power, aligning defense investments with long-term strategic imperatives.

CONCLUSION: General Anil Chauhan's call to optimize resources and integrate military services reflects a crucial step towards enhancing India's defense capabilities amid escalating global challenges. Emphasizing the need for a National Security Strategy underscores the imperative for strategic foresight, efficiency, and transparency in safeguarding national interests and advancing India's global security posture.

- Effective from July 1st.
- **Benefits of eSakshya**
 - Mandates recording of search and seizure for all criminal cases.
 - Ensures mandatory forensic examination for serious offences.
 - Aims to increase conviction rates through uniformity in investigations.
- **App Features and Concerns**
 - Developed by National Informatics Centre (NIC).
 - Available for download at police stations.
 - Two recording options:
 - Record on personal device and upload later (for areas with poor connectivity).
 - Direct upload through eSakshya (requires good internet speed).
 - Concern: Maintaining chain of evidence to avoid benefiting the accused.
 - Digital evidence hinges on proper collection and handling procedures.

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

RAHUL GANDHI TO BE LEADER OF OPPOSITION IN LOK SABHA

CONTEXT: Rahul Gandhi has been appointed as the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, marking a significant constitutional role in his political career, following the Congress party's entitlement to the position with its current parliamentary strength.

Rahul Gandhi Appointed Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha: Key Points

1. **Decision and Announcement**
 - Rahul Gandhi appointed Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha by the Congress.
 - Announcement followed a meeting of the floor leaders of the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) at Mallikarjun Kharge's residence.
2. **First Constitutional Position**
 - First constitutional position in Rahul Gandhi's 20-year political career.
 - Decision coincided with his oath-taking for the fifth consecutive term as an MP.
3. **Role and Responsibilities**
 - Expected to initiate debates, including the Motion of Thanks to the President's address in Parliament.
 - Holds rank equivalent to a Cabinet Minister, involved in key official appointments like Election Commissioner and CBI Director.
4. **Formal Communication**
 - Sonia Gandhi, Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson, formally informed pro tem Speaker Bhartruhari Mahtab of Rahul Gandhi's appointment.
 - Announcement made public through party channels and social media.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

AHEAD OF ROLL-OUT OF THE NEW CRIMINAL LAWS, UNION HOME MINISTRY TESTS ESAKSHYA APP

CONTEXT: The Union Home Ministry is preparing to implement new criminal laws in India by testing the eSakshya mobile app, aimed at enhancing evidence collection through mandatory audiovisual recordings and forensic examinations, amidst concerns over infrastructure readiness and procedural integrity.

ESAKSHYA: A MOBILE APP FOR CRIME SCENE RECORDING BY POLICE

- **What is eSakshya?**
 - A mobile application for police to record crime scene, search and seizure in a criminal case.
 - Uploads recorded files to a cloud-based platform.
 - Requires a selfie from the officer after recording.
 - Maximum 4-minute video clips, with multiple clips allowed per FIR.
- **Implementation alongside new Criminal Laws**
 - To be rolled out with the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Sakshya (BS) and Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS).

5. Party's Confidence and Expectations

- Mallikarjun Kharge expressed confidence in Rahul Gandhi's ability to represent diverse voices across India.
- KC Venugopal emphasized Gandhi's role in ensuring accountability of the NDA government.

6. Historical Context

- Congress previously ineligible for LoP due to insufficient parliamentary strength.
- Presently entitled with 99 MPs in the 543-member Lok Sabha.

7. Party Endorsement

- Congress Working Committee (CWC) urged Rahul Gandhi to assume the responsibility, reflecting party consensus and support.

CONCLUSION: This restructuring aligns Rahul Gandhi with a pivotal role in parliamentary proceedings, underscoring his leadership within the opposition ranks.

Long-term Risks and Thresholds:

- Moody's underscores that water stress could undermine India's resilience against economic shocks, given its significant agricultural workforce.
- The threshold for water scarcity (1,000 cubic meters per capita) looms as a critical marker amid India's diminishing water resources.

ECONOMY

WATER STRESS CAN HURT CREDIT PROFILE'

CONTEXT: Moody's Ratings highlighted India's vulnerability to water management risks, citing its poorest access to basic water services among G-20 nations and warning that increasing water stress due to climate change and rapid economic growth could adversely affect the country's sovereign credit strength, potentially leading to economic instability and social unrest.

Moody's Warning on Water Management Risks in India:

- **Vulnerability and Impact on Sovereign Credit Strength:**
 - Moody's flags India as highly vulnerable to water management risks, noting its poorest access to basic services among G-20 nations.
 - Growing water shortages and climate change-driven disasters threaten India's sovereign credit strength, potentially disrupting economic stability.
- **Economic Implications of Water Stress:**
 - India's heavy reliance on monsoon rains for water supply makes it susceptible to disruptions affecting factories, farms, and overall economic activities.
 - Potential outcomes include inflation in food prices, income declines for businesses, and social unrest, amplifying volatility in economic growth.
- **Sectoral Vulnerabilities:**
 - Sectors like coal-fired power generation and steel production are particularly vulnerable to water stress, posing risks to industrial operations and economic output.
- **Water Availability Projections:**
 - India's average annual water availability per capita is projected to decrease from 1,486 cubic meters in 2021 to 1,367 cubic meters by 2031.
 - These levels indicate increasing water stress, with implications for managing water resources amidst rapid industrialization and urbanization.

ECONOMY

INDIA'S EXTERNAL DEBT RISES \$39.7 BN YOY TO \$663.8 BN: RBI DATA

CONTEXT: India's external debt rose to \$663.8 billion by March 2024, increasing by \$39.7 billion year-on-year, with a diversified composition and a declining debt-to-GDP ratio, according to RBI data.

INDIA'S EXTERNAL DEBT STATISTICS AS OF MARCH 2024:

- **Total External Debt Amount:**
 - India's external debt reached \$663.8 billion by the end of March 2024, marking an increase of \$39.7 billion from March 2023 levels.
- **External Debt-to-GDP Ratio:**
 - The external debt-to-GDP ratio decreased to 18.7% by March 2024, down from 19.0% recorded in March 2023, as per RBI data released on Tuesday.
- **Valuation Effect:**
 - Appreciation of the U.S. dollar against the Indian rupee and other major currencies (yen, euro, SDR) led to a valuation effect amounting to \$8.7 billion.
- **Composition by Currency Denomination:**
 - U.S. dollar-denominated debt constituted the largest share at 53.8% by March 2024, followed by Indian rupee (31.5%), yen (5.8%), SDR (5.4%), and euro (2.8%).
- **Components of External Debt:**
 - Loans accounted for the largest portion of external debt at 33.4%, followed by currency and deposits (23.3%), trade credit and advances (17.9%), and debt securities (17.3%).
- **Sectoral Increase in Debt:**
 - Both government and non-government sectors saw an increase in outstanding debt levels by the end of March 2024 compared to the previous year.

Analysis: India's external debt surged to \$663.8 billion by March 2024, up \$39.7 billion from the previous year, emphasizing its reliance on external funding for economic activities. Despite this rise, the debt-to-GDP ratio slightly decreased to 18.7%, indicating improved debt sustainability relative to economic output. Currency fluctuations, notably the U.S. dollar's appreciation, added \$8.7 billion to the debt burden, underscoring the need for robust currency risk management. With a diversified debt composition, led by loans (33.4%) and varying currency denominations, India aims to mitigate risks. However, sustained borrowing across sectors highlights ongoing economic development needs, necessitating prudent debt management for fiscal stability and growth.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CHINESE PROBE RETURNS TO EARTH WITH FIRST SAMPLES FROM FAR SIDE OF THE MOON

CONTEXT: China's Chang'e 6 mission successfully returned rock and soil samples from the moon's far side, marking a significant scientific milestone in lunar exploration.

CHINA'S CHANG'E 6 MISSION: A LUNAR FIRST

Mission Success

- Chang'e 6 probe returns to Earth with lunar samples.
- China National Space Administration declares mission a success.

Samples from the Far Side

- First-ever collection of lunar samples from the moon's far side.
- Scientists expect samples to include 2.5 million-year-old volcanic rock.
- Samples aim to answer questions about geological differences between the moon's two sides.

The Far Side vs. Near Side

- Near side: the side of the moon that faces Earth.
- Far side: also known as the dark side, faces outer space and is less explored.
- Far side has mountains and craters, contrasting with the near side's flat expanses.

Promising Discoveries

- Probe landed in the South Pole-Aitken Basin, a massive impact crater.
- Samples expected to come from different basin layers, revealing geological history.

Historical Achievement

- While past missions collected samples from the near side, Chang'e 6 is the first to collect from the far side.

CONCLUSION: The successful return of lunar samples by China's Chang'e 6 mission from the moon's far side marks a pioneering achievement in space exploration, promising valuable insights into lunar geology and history.



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