● POLITY   ● ECONOMICS   ● TECHNOLOGY   ● ECOLOGY

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

NEW CRIMINAL LAWS IN FORCE; CR.PC, IPC APPLICABLE ONLY FOR OLD CASES

CONTEXT: The Indian government has enacted three new criminal laws, replacing older codes. States can amend these new laws, introducing changes like mandatory forensic examinations and the ability to file e-FIRs.

Crime and punishment

The new Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita has 358 Sections against the 511 in the Indian Penal Code that it replaces. The Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita replaces the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam comes in place of the Indian Evidence Act

ISTOCKPHOTO

What is new?

■ Provision for **Zero FIR** allowing filing of a first information report at any police station, regardless of jurisdiction

■ **Online registration** of police complaints and mandatory videography of crime scenes for all heinous crimes

■ A person can now report incidents by **electronic communication**, without the need to visit a police station

■ Judgment in criminal cases has to come **within 45 days** of completion of the trial

■ Provisions against false promise of marriage, gang rape of minors and **mob lynching**

■ Statement of a woman rape victim will be recorded by a woman police officer **in the presence of her guardian or relative**

■ Death sentence or life imprisonment for **gang rape of a minor**

■ **Sedition** has been replaced with 'secession' or 'act against the country's sovereignty, unity and integrity'

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW CRIMINAL LAWS

1. **Effective Date and Scope**
   ◦ From July 1, 2024, three new criminal laws will be enforced nationwide.
   ◦ The Indian Penal Code (IPC) and Code of Criminal Procedure (Cr.PC) will apply only to cases pending before this date.

2. **State Amendments**
   ◦ States, including those governed by non-BJP parties, can amend the new laws.
   ◦ Training has been provided to help states adapt to the new system.

3. **Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)**
   ◦ Replaces the Code of Criminal Procedure (Cr.PC).
   ◦ Defines procedures for arrest, bail, and custody.
   ◦ Cognisable offences now registered under Section 173 of the BNSS.

4. **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)**
   ◦ Replaces the Indian Penal Code, 1860.
   ◦ Amendments may soon include a section on sexual crimes against men and transgender persons.
   ◦ Until then, police can use allied charges like wrongful confinement and physical hurt.

5. **Bharatiya Sakshya (BS)**
   ◦ Replaces the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.

Transition and Technology

1. **Court and Police Adaptation**
   ◦ Over 650 district courts and 16,000 police stations must transition to the new system.

2. **Crime and Criminal Tracking Network Systems (CCTNS)**
   ◦ First Information Reports (FIRs) are filed through CCTNS.
   ◦ Upgrades include e-FIR filing and zero FIR capabilities.
   ◦ FIRs can now be registered in languages other than English and Hindi.

Mandatory Procedures

1. **Audio-Video Recording**
   ◦ Mandatory recording of search and seizure operations.
   ◦ Recordings must be submitted electronically to the court.

2. **Forensic Examination**
   ◦ Required for all cases with punishments of seven years or more.
   ◦ States have until June 2029 to upgrade forensic capabilities.

Data Security
   • The cloud-based system's security is a primary concern.
   • The e-sakshya platform will be hosted by the National Informatics Centre.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

EXIT POLLS SHOW VICTORY FOR FAR-RIGHT IN THE FIRST ROUND OF FRANCE ELECTION

CONTEXT: Exit polls show Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally leading the first round of France's parliamentary elections, creating political uncertainty. President Macron urges voters to oppose the far-right in the second round.

What are EXIT Polls?

Exit polls are surveys conducted immediately after voters leave polling stations, asking whom they voted for. They aim to predict election outcomes before official results are available, providing early insights into voter behavior and trends. However, they are estimates and may not always accurately reflect the final vote count. Eg. Many exit polls predicted a sweep for BJP led NDA alliance estimating to get over 400 seats. In reality NDA got 290 odd seats.

OVER VIEW OF ELECTIONS IN FRANCE

Elections in France follow a two-round system for both presidential and legislative elections.

Presidential Elections

1. **First Round:**
   - Candidates from various parties compete.
   - If a candidate receives more than 50% of the votes, they win outright.
   - If no candidate gets over 50%, the top two candidates proceed to the second round.
2. **Second Round:**
   - The two leading candidates from the first round compete.
   - The candidate who receives the most votes in this round wins the presidency.

Legislative Elections (National Assembly)

1. **First Round:**
   - Candidates compete in individual constituencies.
   - To win outright, a candidate must secure an absolute majority (over 50%) of the votes cast and at least 25% of the registered voters in their constituency.
   - If no candidate meets these criteria, the top candidates (those with votes equal to at least 12.5% of the registered voters) move to the second round.
2. **Second Round:**
   - The candidates with the highest votes from the first round compete.
   - The candidate with the most votes in the second round wins the seat.

Municipal, Regional, and European Elections
- These elections also use a two-round system, but the specifics can vary based on the level of government and the electoral laws in place for each type of election.

Voting Process
- **Eligibility:** French citizens aged 18 and over, registered on the electoral rolls, can vote.
- **Polling Stations:** Voters go to polling stations, where they present identification and vote in secret using paper ballots.
- **Counting:** Votes are counted manually, and results are announced publicly after the polls close.

EXIT POLL RESULTS
- **Far-Right Victory:** Marine Le Pen's National Rally (RN) party won the first round of France's parliamentary elections with around 34% of the vote.
- **Other Parties:**
  - President Emmanuel Macron's Together alliance: 20.5%-23%
  - New Popular Front (left-wing coalition): around 29%

Election Projections
- **Final Outcome**:
  - Depends on negotiations before next week's run-off.
  - Elabe pollster: RN might win an absolute majority of 289 seats.
- **Expert Opinions:**
  - Seat projections after the first round can be highly inaccurate.

Voter Sentiments
- **Discontent:** Many voters are frustrated with economic concerns and President Macron's leadership.
- **Macron's Appeal:** Urged voters to rally against the far-right in the second round.
- **Le Pen's Appeal:** Called for an absolute majority in parliament to make Jordan Bardella Prime Minister.

Political Context
- **RN's Success:**
  - Built on success in European elections.
  - Prompted Macron to dissolve parliament and call surprise elections.

Election Details
- **High Turnout:**
  - 49.5 million registered voters.
  - Turnout: 59% three hours before polls closed, 20 percentage points higher than in 2022.
- **Key Issues:**
  - Inflation, economic concerns, and unpopular pension reform raising the retirement age to 64.

Coalition Dynamics
- **New Popular Front:**
  - Left-wing coalition includes French Socialists, Communists, Greens, and France Unbowed.
  - Challenges Macron's pro-business centrist alliance.

CONCLUSION: The exit polls indicating a strong lead for Marine Le Pen's National Rally in the first round of France's parliamentary elections highlight a significant shift in voter sentiment and political dynamics. The

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upcoming run-off will be crucial in determining the final composition of the National Assembly and the future political landscape of France.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

WEAPONISING PMLA

CONTEXT: The grant of bail to Hemant Soren reveals potential misuse of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to target political opponents, raising concerns about judicial fairness.

WEAPONISING PMLA: SOREN CASE HIGHLIGHTS ED'S APPROACH

Introduction

- The grant of bail to former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren highlights potential misuse of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) to target political adversaries.

Bail and Preliminary Findings

- The PMLA mandates courts to make a preliminary finding on the guilt of those jailed for money laundering.
- Bail can only be granted if the court finds reason to believe the accused are not guilty.

Case of Hemant Soren

- Soren, leader of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, spent five months in prison and had to resign as Chief Minister.
- Justice Rongon Mukhopadhyay of the Jharkhand High Court granted bail based on the conclusion that Soren is not guilty.

ED's Allegations

- The ED registered a case under PMLA based on a police case related to forgery and fabrication of documents.
- The ED claimed 8.86 acres of land sold to unauthorized buyers belonged to Soren and was in his possession since 2010.
- The ED argued that its intervention prevented the illegal acquisition of the land.

Court's Findings

- The court questioned why no one who was allegedly unlawfully evicted had approached any court for redress.
- It also questioned the inference that Soren planned to build a banquet hall based on an image found on an accused's phone.
- The court discounted the argument that Soren set up Raj Kumar Pahan to exculpate himself by restoring the land in Pahan's name.

Implications and Observations

- The court's findings may be appealed or revisited during the trial.
- The case highlights how central agencies may hastily arrest political functionaries based on inferences and surmises.
- Weaponising the PMLA against political opponents can have serious consequences for their personal liberty and embarrass the prosecution when bail is granted.

CONCLUSION: The Hemant Soren case underscores the potential for misuse of the PMLA by the ED, raising concerns about judicial fairness and the implications for personal liberty and political integrity.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

THE ROT IN INDIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

CONTEXT: The article criticises the National Testing Agency (NTA) and its influence on India's higher education system, particularly through the Common University Entrance Test (CUET), highlighting delays and controversy surrounding PhD admissions and university autonomy issues.

THE ROT IN INDIA'S HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM: EXAMINING THE NTA-UGC-VICE CHANCELLOR NEXUS

Introduction

- The academic year 2022-23 witnessed significant delays in university admissions due to the NTA-implemented CUET regime.
- The introduction of CUET affected undergraduate, postgraduate, and initially planned PhD admissions.

Jawaharlal Nehru University's (JNU) Experience

- JNU, known for its autonomy in conducting entrance exams, faced disruptions under the NTA's CUET system.
- JNU's long-standing tradition of conducting its own entrance exams was disrupted despite internal resistance.

NTA's Influence and Actions

- PhD admissions for 2022-2023 were delayed until mid-March 2023.
- Despite new UGC regulations allowing universities to conduct their own exams, NTA continued to dictate terms.
- NTA's control extended to consortiums involving universities like Delhi University and Jamia Millia Islamia.

Controversies and Contradictions

- JNU Vice Chancellor cited Ministry of Education directives as reasons for compliance, despite government denials.
- UGC's non-binding notice contradicted its own 2022 regulations, favoring NTA-administered exams without transparency.

Impact on University Autonomy

- Central universities' academic calendars and admission processes were controlled by NTA, endorsed by UGC officials.
- Vice-Chancellors collaborated in implementing UGC directives against internal concerns and university autonomy.

Call for Examination and Reform

- A thorough investigation into the NTA-UGC-Vice Chancellor nexus is necessary to restore university autonomy.
- Government intervention is essential to restore student confidence and adherence to established academic processes.

CONCLUSION: New CUET system by NTA delayed admissions across India. JNU, known for autonomy in exams, faced disruptions. Despite UGC allowing universities to conduct exams, NTA maintained control. This centralization by NTA and UGC, backed by VCs, harms university autonomy. Revaluation is needed to restore student trust and academic freedom.

WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

SHOULD EDUCATION BE BROUGHT BACK TO THE STATE LIST?

CONTEXT: In India, education was shifted from state control to central control in 1976. There's a debate on returning it to state control for better autonomy.

THE GIST

- The Government of India Act, 1935 during the British rule created a federal structure for the first time in our polity.
- During the Emergency, the Congress party constituted the Swaran Singh Committee to provide recommendations for amendments to the Constitution. One of the recommendations of this committee was to place 'education' in the concurrent list.
- Considering the need for autonomy in view of the lion's share of the expenditure being borne by the States, there needs to be a discussion towards moving 'education' back to the State list.

The story so far: India's NEET-UG, UGC-NET, CSIR-NET & NEET-PG exams face cancellations & delays due to controversies.

SHOULD EDUCATION RETURN TO STATE CONTROL IN INDIA?

The Debate:

Originally under state control, education was shifted to the concurrent list (shared control by central and state governments) during the Emergency in 1976.

Arguments for State Control:

- **State Autonomy:** States bear most of the financial burden for education (85% vs. central government's 15%). Granting them more control would allow for tailor-made policies suited to their specific needs and demographics.
- **Addressing National Issues:** The recent controversies surrounding centralized entrance exams (NEET, UGC-NET) highlight the potential downsides of a centralized approach.

Historical Background:

- Pre-independence: Education was under provincial control.
- Post-independence: Remained under state control.
- 1976 (Emergency): Shifted to concurrent list for a uniform national education policy.

International Examples:

- **USA:** Education primarily controlled by states, with the federal government focusing on financial aid and broader educational issues.
- **Canada & Germany:** Education largely managed by provinces/states.
- **South Africa:** Shared responsibility between national and provincial departments.

The Way Forward:

- A productive discussion is needed to weigh the benefits of a centralized approach against the potential for greater state autonomy.
- States could design their own curriculums, testing methods, and admissions processes for higher education.

- Central regulatory bodies like the National Medical Commission could oversee national standards.

CONCLUSION: India debates returning education to state control. States fund most education (85%) but lack control. This could allow for more local customization, as seen in the US, Canada, and Germany.

LEGAL COMMUNITY BRACES FOR CHANGE AS NEW LAWS TAKE EFFECT

CONTEXT: Legal reforms in India introduce three new laws replacing key criminal statutes, prompting anticipation and concern among legal professionals over implementation challenges and potential impacts on judicial processes and rights.

LEGAL COMMUNITY BRACES FOR CHANGE AS NEW LAWS TAKE EFFECT

Introduction

- Starting Monday, three new criminal laws will reshape India's legal framework.
- The legal community is reacting with a mix of apprehension and preparedness.

Key Laws

- On December 25, 2023, President Droupadi Murmu approved:
  ◦ Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (replacing IPC)
  ◦ Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (replacing Cr.PC)
  ◦ Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam, 2023 (replacing Indian Evidence Act)

Judicial Training

- Delhi judges received extensive training at Delhi Judicial Academy, Dwarka.
- Training included one-on-one lectures to equip judges for upcoming challenges.

Criticism of New Laws

- K.C. Mittal, former Chairman of Bar Council of Delhi, criticizes new laws as oppressive.
- Opposes new power allowing handcuffing without court permission, citing potential misuse and human rights concerns.

Confusion and Chaos

- Concerns raised about confusion over new provisions among lawyers and in courts.
- Uncertainty about applicability and interpretation contributing to chaos in legal circles.

Concerns Raised by Senior Advocates

- Pramod Kumar Dubey highlights challenges of retrospective versus prospective application of new laws.
- Identifies mandatory Zero FIRs as particularly contentious, warning of potential for misuse and infringement of rights.

Preparedness of Legal Community

- Rahul Singh, vice-president of New Delhi Bar Association,

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asserts readiness of lawyers through seminars on new laws.

CONCLUSION
- The introduction of these new laws marks a significant legal shift in India, prompting varied reactions and highlighting challenges ahead for the legal fraternity.

POLITY & GOVERNNACE

CONCERNS EMERGE OVER BNSS PROVISION ON POLICE CUSTODY

CONTEXT: India's new criminal law, BNSS, extends police custody beyond 15 days. Legal experts fear this violates citizen rights and allows for police misuse.

CONCERNS RAISED ABOUT NEW CRIMINAL LAW PROVISIONS

Background:
- Three new criminal laws are set to be implemented across India.
- Legal and civil rights activists have expressed concern about specific provisions within these laws.

Key Point of Contention:
- **Extension of Police Custody:**
  ◦ Previously, police custody was limited to a maximum of 15 days, and only within the first 15 days following arrest.
  ◦ The new law (BNSS) allows police to request custody beyond 15 days.
  ◦ This extension is seen as a "retrograde step" that undermines citizen rights.

Arguments Against Extended Police Custody:
- **Increased Risk of Abuse:**
  ◦ Human rights activists fear the provision could be misused by police to pressure or torture suspects.
  ◦ V. Suresh (PUCL) argues it exposes detainees to "police torture, intimidation, and other dangers."
- **Violation of Custodial Jurisprudence:**
  ◦ Henri Tiphagne (People's Watch) argues the law weakens existing protections for detainees in India.
  ◦ He suggests it could violate the spirit of the Constitution.
- **Impact on Bail:**
  ◦ The extended custody period could make it harder for detainees to be granted bail.

Arguments For Extended Police Custody:
- **Improved Investigations:**
  ◦ Police officers argue the extra time allows for more thorough investigations and prevents rushed interrogations.
  ◦ They believe it will be particularly helpful in complex cases like property offenses and fraud.

CONCLUSION: New criminal laws in India raise concerns. A key worry is extended police custody (beyond 15 days) under the BNSS law. Experts fear this violates rights and allows for abuse. They argue it weakens suspect protections and hinders bail. Police counter that extra time improves investigations, especially in complex cases.

DEFENCE

GENERAL DWIVEDI ASSUMES CHARGE AS THE 30TH CHIEF OF THE ARMY STAFF

CONTEXT: General Upendra Dwivedi assumes office as the 30th Chief of the Army Staff, succeeding General Manoj Pande, amidst strategic security challenges and senior leadership changes.

Appointment of General Upendra Dwivedi as Chief of the Army Staff:
- General Upendra Dwivedi assumed office as the 30th Chief of the Army Staff (COAS) on Sunday, succeeding General Manoj Pande.
- General Pande retired after more than four decades of service, leading to a series of senior leadership changes in the Indian Army.

Strategic Context and Priorities:
- The Defence Ministry highlighted the dynamic global geo-strategic environment and evolving security challenges.
- Emphasis on operational preparedness to counter modern security threats and non-traditional challenges is a key priority for General Dwivedi.

Background and Career Highlights:
- Born on July 1, 1964, General Dwivedi was commissioned into the Infantry (Jammu & Kashmir Rifles) in 1984.
- He has held significant roles including Director-General of Infantry and General Officer Commanding-in-Chief (Northern Command) before becoming Vice-Chief.

Technological Acumen and Approach:
- General Dwivedi is known for his deep understanding of modern security technologies.
- He focuses on integrating cutting-edge technologies into military systems to enhance operational effectiveness.

Other Senior Appointments:
- Lieutenant-General N.S. Raja Subramani will assume the role of Vice-Chief of the Army Staff.
- Lieutenant-General Anindya Sengupta is slated to become the Central Command chief, succeeding Lieutenant-General Raja Subramani.
- Lieutenant-General Dhiraj Seth will replace Lieutenant-General A.K. Singh as General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Command.
- Lieutenant-General Devendra Sharma will take over as Chief of Staff, Western Command, replacing Lieutenant-General Manjinder Singh, who will become the South West Army chief.

CONCLUSION:
General Upendra Dwivedi's appointment as the new Chief of the Army Staff marks a pivotal moment amidst evolving global security challenges. His emphasis on operational readiness and technological integration underscores a proactive approach to safeguarding India's interests. The concurrent senior appointments reflect a strategic alignment towards bolstering the Indian Army's leadership capabilities.

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DRDO TAKES UP STUDY ON DEVELOPMENT OF INDIGENOUS CONVENTIONAL SUBMARINE

CONTEXT: DRDO initiates Project-76 for an indigenous conventional submarine, continuing from the ATV and nuclear submarine projects, aiming for advanced technology and substantial indigenous content in submarine capabilities.

DRDO's Project-76: Indigenous Conventional Submarine

- **Preliminary Study Initiation**
  ◦ DRDO authorized by Defence Ministry for preliminary study under Project-76.
  ◦ Study expected to conclude within a year, followed by Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approval.
- **Continuation from ATV Project**
  ◦ Project-76 builds on ATV project, continuing Arihant series (SSBN) and nuclear-powered submarine (SSN) development.
  ◦ Emphasis on indigenous development of conventional submarines post P-75I procurement.
- **Indigenous Content and Capabilities**
  ◦ Project-76 to feature substantial indigenous components:
    ▪ Weapons, missiles, combat management system, sonars, communications, electronic warfare suite, mast, and periscope.
  ◦ Indian Navy's 30-year submarine building program underscores commitment to indigenous submarine design and construction.
- **Propulsion Advancements**
  ◦ DRDO-developed air independent propulsion (AIP) module awaits fitment on Scorpene-class submarines.
  ◦ Scheduled for refit of first Scorpene-class submarine Kalvari in 2025, enhancing submarine endurance and stealth capabilities.

CONCLUSION: DRDO's Project-76 marks India's stride towards self-reliance in submarine technology, enhancing national defense capabilities.

MODI'S VISIT TO MOSCOW TIMELY, SAY EXPERTS

CONTEXT: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to Moscow aims to strengthen India-Russia ties amid perceived drift, focusing on strategic, economic, and military cooperation, amidst Western sanctions and geopolitical complexities.

Modi's Visit to Moscow: Strategic Significance and Expectations

Overview of the Visit

- **Timing and Purpose:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi's standalone state visit to Moscow on July 8-9 aims to reaffirm and strengthen India-Russia relations amid perceived drift and geopolitical complexities.
- **Strategic Focus:** Discussions will encompass strategic, economic, and military ties, crucially addressing trade dynamics amidst Western sanctions and bilateral defence cooperation.

Key Agenda Points

- **Trade and Economic Cooperation:** Focus on enhancing India-Russia trade, particularly in oil imports, and resolving payment issues under Western sanctions.
- **Maritime Connectivity:** Advancing discussions on the Chennai-Vladivostok maritime route to bolster connectivity and economic cooperation.
- **Defence Cooperation:** Finalizing the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS) to facilitate enhanced defence exchanges and cooperation.

Political Significance

- **Reversing Perceptions:** Addressing the perceived drift in bilateral relations due to COVID-19 disruptions and changing global dynamics.
- **Geopolitical Signal:** Balancing India's foreign policy interests vis-à-vis Western countries amidst the Russia-Ukraine conflict and broader global tensions.

Strategic Partnership Reinforcement

- **Historical Context:** Restoring regular summitry following disruptions, emphasizing the strategic depth of the India-Russia partnership.
- **Future Collaboration:** Exploring avenues for increased investments in maritime corridors and Siberian resources, amid logistical challenges.

CONCLUSION

- **Outcome Expectations:** Anticipated resolution of pending issues, including defence hardware delays and economic cooperation barriers, to strengthen bilateral ties.
- **Geopolitical Implications:** Signaling India's strategic autonomy and commitment to multi-polarity in international relations amid global uncertainties.

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END OF PETRODOLLAR? WE WOULDN'T HOLD OUR BREATH

CONTEXT: The debate over the future of the U.S. dollar as the world's reserve currency versus the potential rise of the Chinese yuan amid geopolitical and economic complexities continues to unfold.

CHALLENGES TO CHINESE YUAN AS WORLD RESERVE CURRENCY

1. **Monitoring and Restrictions**
   - Chinese yuan closely monitored, lacks free manoeuvrability.
   - Hinders its adoption as global reserve currency compared to freely traded U.S. dollar.

2. **Shift Towards Autarky**
   - Global trend towards autarkical economic and political policies.
   - Signals departure from previous global openness, impacting currency preferences.

3. **Debate on U.S. Dollar's Future**
   - Growing forecasts of U.S. dollar decline as world reserve currency.
   - Some pundits predict Chinese yuan could replace it.

4. **Examining U.S. Economic Influence**
   - Misguided claims of U.S. economic decline amid global shifts.
   - U.S. remains pivotal with strong political alliances and trade volumes.

5. **Investment Preference**
   - U.S. dollar continues to attract major investments globally.
   - High confidence shown during recent periods of U.S. Federal Reserve rate adjustments.

6. **Chinese Influence Efforts**
   - China's Belt and Road Initiative expands economic and political sway.
   - Faces challenges including debt-trap diplomacy criticisms and economic mismanagement.

7. **Sustainability Issues**
   - Chinese economic strains from COVID policies and real estate collapse.
   - Impact on domestic demand and global economic perceptions.

8. **Petrodollar vs. Petroyuan Debate**
   - Speculations on the decline of petrodollar and the rise of petroyuan.
   - Challenges in replacing entrenched U.S. dollar dominance in global energy trade.

9. **Geopolitical Dynamics**
   - Attempts by China to forge new alliances amid changing global dynamics.
   - Mixed success due to economic vulnerabilities and political constraints.

10. **Future Outlook**
    - Significant barriers remain for the yuan to replace the dollar as the global reserve currency.
    - Possibility of new currencies gaining prominence with free traceability and stable economies.

CONCLUSION: While debates persist over the future of the U.S. dollar and the potential rise of the Chinese yuan, significant hurdles and complexities suggest the status quo is likely to endure.

WOMEN BOMBERS KILL 18 IN COORDINATED ATTACKS IN NIGERIA

CONTEXT: Boko Haram, a terrorist group in Nigeria, is suspected of using female suicide bombers in attacks that killed 18 at a wedding, funeral, and hospital.

DEADLY SUICIDE BOMBINGS IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

- **Attacks:**
  - Multiple suicide bombings targeted a wedding, funeral, and hospital.
  - At least 18 people were killed and 30 injured.
  - Children and pregnant women were among the casualties.
- **Location:**
  - Gwoza, Borno State, northern Nigeria.
- **Suspects:**
  - Female suicide bombers carried out the attacks.
  - No group has claimed responsibility.
- **Possible Culprit:**
  - Borno State has a history of attacks by Boko Haram, an Islamic extremist group.
  - Boko Haram has used women and girls in suicide bombings before.

CONCLUSION: The attacks raise fears of renewed violence by Boko Haram and highlight the ongoing security threat in northern Nigeria.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

TALIBAN MEMBERS MEET AFGHANISTAN, UN ENVOYS IN DOHA

CONTEXT: UN officials and envoys, including the U.S. special representative, meet Taliban in Doha, marking first direct talks with the regime, amidst concerns over legitimacy and inclusivity.

Introduction to Meetings in Doha

- Taliban representatives meet UN officials and over 20 envoys in Doha.
- Talks facilitated by the UN include Taliban authorities for the first time.

Participants and Expectations

- UN officials and 20+ envoys, including the U.S. special representative, engage with Taliban delegation led by spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid.
- Meeting marks a significant diplomatic engagement amidst ongoing Afghan developments.

Pre-meeting Statements

- Taliban Foreign Ministry official Zakir Jalaly asserts meetings beyond Monday are not part of the official agenda.
- Indicates Taliban's stance and control over meeting parameters.

Concerns and Criticism

- Civil society groups, including women's rights activists, express outrage over exclusion from discussions.
- Amnesty International's Agnes Callamard warns against legitimizing Taliban's gender-based oppression through dialogue concessions.

CONCLUSION: The Doha talks symbolize a pivotal moment in Afghan diplomacy but raise questions about inclusivity and the Taliban's commitment to human rights amid international scrutiny.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

INDIA IDENTIFIED 641 FAUNA SPECIES, 339 TAXA OF PLANTS IN 2023

CONTEXT: India's biodiversity received a significant boost in 2023 with the discovery of 641 new fauna species and 339 taxa of plants, highlighting ongoing conservation and scientific exploration efforts.

India's Biodiversity Discoveries in 2023

Fauna Discoveries:

- Total Species Identified: 641, including 442 new to science and 199 newly recorded in India.
- Southern India Dominance: Majority of new animal species reported from states like Kerala (101 additions), West Bengal (72), and Tamil Nadu (64).
- Key Discoveries: Includes Capra himalayensis (distinct Himalayan Ibex) and Miniopterus srinii (new bent-winged bat species from Karnataka's Kodagu district).
- Invertebrates Lead: 564 new species, with vertebrates, primarily fish, totaling 77.

Flora Discoveries:

- Taxa Added: 339, comprising 326 species and 13 infraspecific taxa.
- Southern India Contribution: Notable plant discoveries from Kerala, West Bengal, and Tamil Nadu.
- Highlighted Species: Curcuma kakchingense (new turmeric species from Manipur) and Asystasia venui (flowering plant from West Bengal's botanical garden).
- Regional Insights: West Bengal recorded the highest number of new plant taxa (52), followed by Kerala and Uttarakhand.

Initiatives and Tools:

- Fauna of India Checklist Portal: Launched to document all known taxa, covering 36 phyla and cataloging 1,04,561 animal species across India.
- Objectives: Includes conservation of endemic, threatened, and scheduled species, emphasizing the preservation of bio-geographic zones.
- Minister's Emphasis: Bhupendra Yadav underscores the importance of biodiversity conservation beyond individual species, focusing on ecological habitats.

CONCLUSION: In 2023, India's biodiversity achievements underscored robust scientific advancements and conservation efforts. The discoveries of new fauna and flora species highlight ongoing commitments to safeguarding diverse ecosystems and species richness nationwide.

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