● POLITY   ● ECONOMICS   ● TECHNOLOGY   ● ECOLOGY

Israel steps up assault

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Israel's overnight air strikes on Sunday, claimed as targeted strikes on a number of weapons storage facilities and terrorist infrastructure sites belonging to the Hezbollah terrorist organisation battered Beirut's southern suburbs. The overnight strikes that came just ahead of the anniversary of the October 7 attack by Palestinian militant group Hamas on southern Israel killing some 1,200 people and taking more than 250 hostages were the most intense bombardment of the Lebanese capital since Israel sharply escalated its campaign last month.

Cross-border firing between Israel and Iran-backed group Hezbollah were mostly limited to the Israel-Lebanon border area before the recent upsurge. Hezbollah acting in solidarity with the Palestinian group Hamas began firing rockets at Israel a day after the October 7 attacks and after Israel had begun bombing Gaza. Israel stepped up its assault on Hezbollah last month to enable the safe return of tens of thousands of citizens to homes in northern Israel.

Hashem Safieddine, potential successor of Hezbollah chief Hassan Nasrallah who was killed by Israeli strikes, had been rumoured to be killed in Israeli airstrikes. Israel's war on Gaza has killed nearly 42,000 people and left the coastal enclave lies in ruins. At least 26 people were killed and 93 others wounded when Israeli airstrikes hit a mosque and a school sheltering displaced people in the Gaza Strip early on Sunday.

Muizzu to meet Modi

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu is on a four-day state visit to India, his second since he attended Mr. Modi's swearing-in ceremony. Unlike leaders of other friendly countries in the neighbourhood, Mr. Muizzu did not make India his first destination abroad, and visited Turkiye, UAE, and China instead over the past year.

Mr. Muizzu won elections in the Maldives last year on the back of an 'India Out' campaign and insisted that India withdraw military personnel from the archipelago by May this year. Tensions also rose over remarks by Maldivian Ministers that were critical of Mr. Modi and led to an informal 'Boycott Maldives' campaign by certain tour

operators, that has halved the number of Indian tourists travelling there. However, after a number of bilateral ministerial meetings, and the Modi government completing the withdrawal of military personnel, ties have warmed up and Mr. Muizzu recently sacked the Ministers involved.

On October 8, Maldives is due to make a $25 million payment towards its $ 500 million sukuk (Islamic bonds) debt repayment, out of a total $ 114 million still due this year, and about $ 1.5 billion in the next two years. Credit rating agencies Moody's and Fitch have both downgraded the Maldives in recent weeks in view of the rising external debt, high debt to GDP ratio – at approximately 110 % – and falling foreign exchange reserves – at about $ 440 million. Any default on payments is likely to spiral the Maldives into a major crisis akin to the one faced by Sri Lanka in 2022.

In September, India announced that the State Bank of India would subscribe Maldivian government bonds of $ 50 million, staving off the country's most imminent crisis. Mr. Muizzu is expected to request Indian support in terms of currency swaps and debt waivers.

IAF plans to procure 12 early warning aircraft

INTERNAL SECURITY

The Indian Air Force (IAF), short of Airborne Early Warning and Control (AEW&C) aircraft, a critical force multiplier is planning to procure 12 aircraft under two different programmes. The IAF currently operates 3 Israeli Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) in addition to the 3 Netra AEW&C systems. A shortage of these force multipliers was felt during the aerial engagement with the Pakistan Air Force, a day after the Balakot air strike in February 2019.

One of them is a follow-on order of six AEW&C systems mounted on Embraer aircraft, akin to the three Netra systems in service. The other order pertains to six AEW&C systems under development by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) that would be mounted on Airbus A-321 aircraft.

Phalcons have a radome mounted on top of an IL-76 transport aircraft, provide 360-degree coverage, the Netra provides 240-degree coverage of airspace. The contract negotiations were currently ongoing to the AEW&C-Mk2, with an Airbus-based system, developed by DRDO Centre for Air Borne Systems (CABS). The AEW&C mounted on the Airbus aircraft would provide 300-degree coverage.

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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS

Page 02

Five languages got classical tag after key provision dropped

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The Union Cabinet accorded classical language status to five new languages- Marathi, Bengali, Assamese, Pali and Prakrit, after dropping a key provision, mandating a language to have original literary tradition. The Linguistic Expert Committee chaired by the president of the Sahitya Akademi, comprising of representatives of the Union Ministries of Home and Culture and four or five linguistic experts noted the difficult to prove or disprove original literary tradition as all ancient languages borrowed from each other. A Gazette notification to this effect was issued on October 4.

The Union Ministry of Culture created of a new category of languages as classical languages based on 4 norms, namely original literary tradition, distinct literary tradition, high levels of antiquity of early texts with recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years and ancient literature/texts of valuable heritage by generations of speakers. The criteria were first formulated in 2004 when Tamil was declared a classical language and were revised in November 2005 when Sanskrit was included on the list. Tamil, Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam and Odia received the Classical Language status. The Committee of Linguistic Experts recommended for granting Classical status to Maratha is currently pending with the Union Ministry of Culture.

According to the 2005 criteria which were followed till recently, to be designated as classical, a language must have high antiquity of its early texts and recorded history over a period of 1,500-2,000 years, a body of ancient literature or texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers, the literary tradition must be original and not borrowed from another speech community and the classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

Telangana's dry port logistics drive

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Telangana State Government is exploring the feasibility of setting up dry ports to boost logistics services for its industries and facilitate more exports. Currently exports from Telangana are routed through ports in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. A dry port is an inland terminal that is meant to provide connectivity to a sea port by rail or road, thus serving as trans-shipping hub for sea cargo. An exporter can complete all customs formalities at the dry dock, saving time and cost.

In July 2021, the K. Chandrasekhar Rao-led Bharata Rastra Samithi (BRS), formerly Telangana Rashtra Samithi, government approved a proposal to set up a 1,400-acre multi-modal logistics park near Nalgona on a public-private-partnership basis. It decided to set up two new integrated container depots (ICDs), on the lines of Concor ICD at Sanathnagar in Hyderabad, in collaboration with the Customs department to promote exports. The Cabinet has also approved a proposal to set up 10 additional integrated logistics parks across the State. However, none of these projects, including the dry port, have got off the ground yet.

The need for well-developed logistics infrastructure becomes to propel Telangana's industrial strengths, especially in pharmaceuticals, food processing, textiles, and defence and aerospace. As per government data, the State's logistics sector is growing annually at 12 %.

Pakistan bans ethnic Pashtun party

Pakistan banned the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), a group which fights for the rights of ethnic Pashtuns, citing it as a threat to national security. The group of ethnic Pushtu-speaking activists, which is highly critical of the Army, is active in the tribal region of the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. The ban has been placed on the group under Section 11B of the Anti-Terrorism Act 1997.

Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), led by Manzoor Pashteen, had been active for a decade, with its leadership blaming the armed forces for the problems faced by the tribal region along the Afghan border. The PTM began as the Mahsud Tahafuz Movement in May 2014 when a group of students set it up as an initiative to remove landmines from Waziristan and other parts of the tribal region. The group rose to prominence in January 2018 after rebranding itself as the PTM following the popularity it got for seeking justice for Naqeebullah Mehsud, a fellow Pashtun who was killed in Karachi by police allegedly in a fake encounter.

Pakistan authorities have alleged that the group was playing in the hands of anti-state elements operating from within and abroad, especially in Afghanistan. However, the PTM always rejected such allegations. In December last year, PTM chief Pashteen was arrested after his security guards allegedly opened fire targeting the police.

In 2019, a petition was filed in the Islamabad High Court seeking a ban on the party. The plea was filed a day after three persons were killed and five soldiers injured in a clash between security forces and PTM protesters in North Waziristan. In 2022, Pashteen was booked on terrorism charges, following his speech at the Asma Jahangir Conference where he had criticised the country's armed forces.

Centre makes U-turn on recruitment policy

The Union Government restored the policy of recruiting railway officers through the Civil Services Examination (CSE) and the Engineering Services Examination (ESE) conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). In 2019, the Indian Railways introduced exclusive recruitment of officers for technical wings to the Indian Railway Management Service (IRMS) through the CSE.

The Railways have departments of Traffic, Civil, Mechanical, Electrical, Signal & Telecommunications, Stores, Personnel, and Accounts, vertically separated from top to bottom, each headed by a Secretary-level officer (Member) on the Railway Board. On December 24, 2019, the government approved organisational restructuring of the Indian Railways by unification of eight Group-A services of the Railways into a Central Service called the IRMS. The unification of services was recommended by various committees for reforming the Railways, including the Prakash Tandon Committee (1994), Rakesh Mohan Committee (2001), Sam Pitroda Committee (2012), and Bibek Debroy Committee (2015). The unified Group-A Service called the IRMS was to enable the railways to recruit engineers or non-engineers as per need and offer equality of opportunity to both categories in career progression. The Railways found it difficult to find suitable officers for the technical categories such as Engineering, Mechanical, Electrical, and so on, resulting in more number of promotee or subordinate rank officers filling the vacancies.

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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS
Page 04

Varied voting trends in J&K

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Ups and downs in turnouts in J&K

The data for the charts and tables were sourced from Lok Dhaba and the Election Commission of India

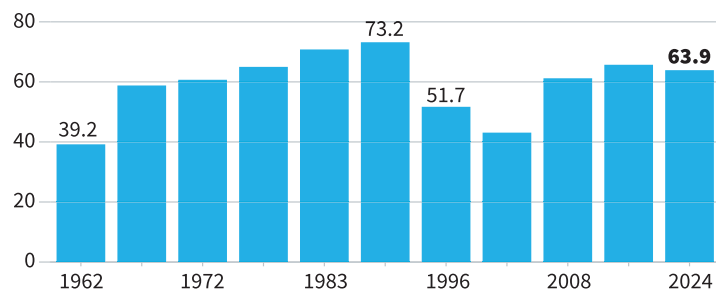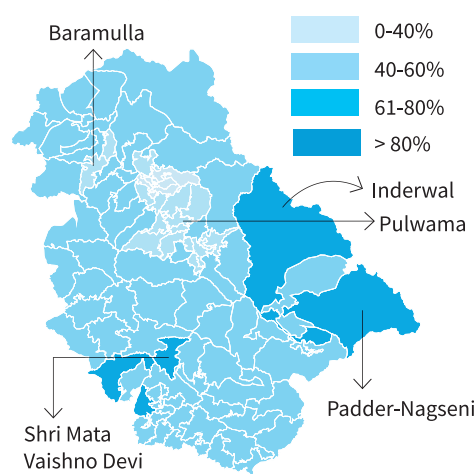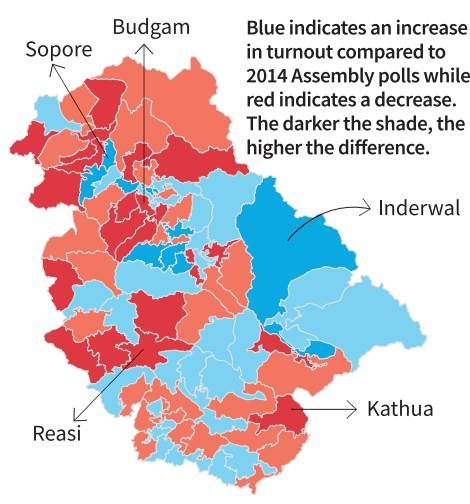**Chart 1** | Overall voter turnout in J&K Assembly polls over the years (in %)

Table 2 | District-wise voter turnout in the past 3 Assembly polls in J&K. The last column shows the difference between 2014 and 2024 turnout. Figures in %

District	Phase	Region	2008	2014	2024	Difference
Kishtwar	Phase 1	JAMMU	73.6	76.8	80.2	3.4
Ramban	Phase 1	JAMMU	66.7	71.2	70.6	-0.6
Udhampur	Phase 3	JAMMU	64.0	76.8	76.0	-0.8
Samba	Phase 3	JAMMU	76.9	77.3	76.5	-0.8
Jammu	Phase 3	JAMMU	71.8	73.6	71.4	-2.2
Doda	Phase 1	JAMMU	68.7	73.6	71.3	-2.3
Kathua	Phase 3	JAMMU	70.5	76.4	73.4	-3.0
Poonch	Phase 2	JAMMU	75.6	77.5	74.4	-3.1
Reasi	Phase 2	JAMMU	75.6	81.4	74.7	-6.7
Rajouri	Phase 2	JAMMU	73.3	78.6	71.1	-7.5
Shopian	Phase 1	KASHMIR	50.7	48.5	57.0	8.5
Kulgam	Phase 1	KASHMIR	64.4	59.7	63.1	3.4
Baramulla	Phase 3	KASHMIR	48.0	57.7	61.0	3.3
Pulwama	Phase 1	KASHMIR	46.1	44.5	47.0	2.5
Srinagar	Phase 2	KASHMIR	21.6	27.9	30.0	2.1
Anantnag	Phase 1	KASHMIR	63.2	60.7	57.9	-2.8
Ganderbal	Phase 2	KASHMIR	55.1	67.6	62.8	-4.8
Kupwara	Phase 3	KASHMIR	68.0	72.0	66.8	-5.2
Bandipore	Phase 3	KASHMIR	59.8	74.5	67.7	-6.8
Budgam	Phase 2	KASHMIR	62.4	73.2	63.2	-10.0

Map 3 | Constituency-wise voter turnout in the 2024 Assembly election in Jammu & Kashmir

- 0-40%
- 40-60%
- 61-80%
- > 80%

Baramulla
Inderwal
Pulwama
Padder-Nagseni
Shri Mata Vaishno Devi

Map 4 | Constituency-wise difference in voter turnout between 2014 and 2024

Blue indicates an increase in turnout compared to 2014 Assembly polls while red indicates a decrease. The darker the shade, the higher the difference.

Budgam
Sopore
Inderwal
Reasi
Kathua

The recently concluded three-phased Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir registered a voter turnout of 63.9 %, higher than the 58.5 % recorded in the recently concluded Lok Sabha election. The turnout figure was marginally lower compared to 2014 when the last Assembly election in the erstwhile undivided State of J&K was held. The Assembly was dissolved on November 21, 2018, by the then-Governor of J&K, Satya Pal Malik, and less than a year later, the State lost its special status with the dilution of Article 370. The State was then split into two Union Territories of Ladakh and J&K. A major delimitation exercise by the Jammu and Kashmir Delimitation Commission that followed, notified new boundaries, names, and number of Assembly constituencies. This led to an increase of seven additional seats in J&K (six in Jammu and one in Kashmir).

The status of the civil war in Sudan

On September 26, the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) launched a major offensive against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Khartoum and Bahri. The civil war in Sudan started as a power rivalry between Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, the leader of Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and Hamdan Dagalo, head of paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in the capital city of Khartoum has spread to Omdurman, Bahri, Port Sudan, El Fasher and the Port Sudan cities, as well as the Darfur and Kordofan states. With an estimated 20,000 people killed and 10,890,722 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the Sudan Civil War in the last 18 months, all ceasefire efforts and peace talks have failed so far.
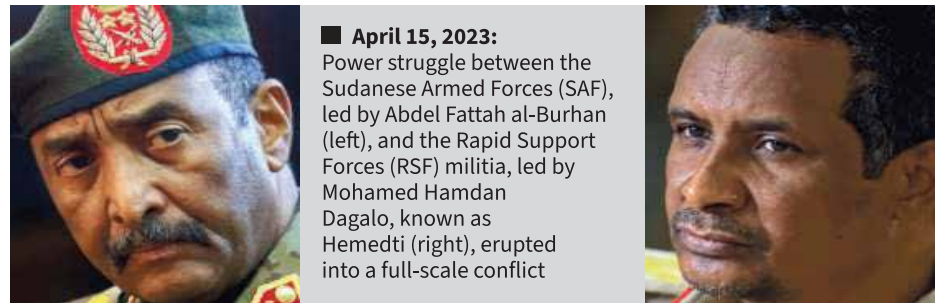
Why is the war continuing?

The UN recognised Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) claims to be the legitimate government, although it came to power through a coup in 2021. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a former Arab militia known as Janjaweed supported by several Arab countries opposes the SAF's efforts to represent Sudan internationally. The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has made significant territorial gains around the capital and other war zones.

April 15, 2023: Power struggle between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan (left), and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) militia, led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti (right), erupted into a full-scale conflict

- SAF and affiliates
- RSF and affiliates
- Contested
- Worst fighting

EGYPT
River Nile
Red Sea
LIBYA
Mostly uninhabited
SUDAN
DARFUR REGION
Conflict reigniting ethnically-targeted killings
CHAD
Port Sudan
Khartoum: Much capital was destroyed and depopulated after a year of heavy fighting
Khartoum
Wad Madani
ERITREA
Al Fashir
El Obeid
ETHIOPIA
Nyala
GEZIRA STATE
RSF momentum stalled after successful offensive in December
C.A.R.
100km
60 miles
SOUTH SUDAN

According to the latest UN-backed IPC initiative, 25.6 million people, more than half of Sudan's population, face "crisis or worse" levels of food insecurity

Sources: International Crisis Group, UNOCHA   Pictures: Getty Images   © GRAPHIC NEWS

Both warring factions have been using armed drones, drone jammers, anti-tank guided missiles, truck-mounted multi-barrel rocket launchers, and mortar munitions produced by companies registered in China, Iran, Russia, Serbia, and the UAE, despite under the UN arms embargo, since the 2004 Darfur crisis, which has recently been extended for another year. The SAF has accused the UAE and previously Russia's Wagner Group of supporting the RSF. At the same time, Russia has been supplying weapons to the SAF as well.
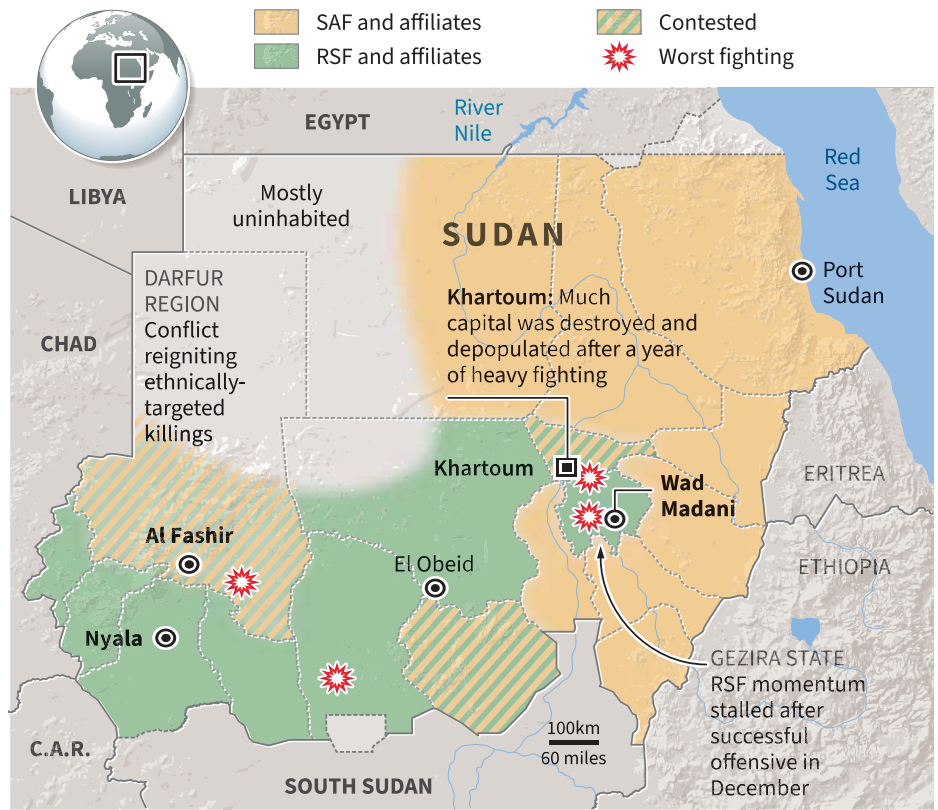
A military rivalry has now evolved through ethnic lines, involving several regional ethnic militias. Arab and non-Arab militias have taken sides with the RSF and the SAF respectively. The rebel group Sudanese People's Liberation Movement has been fighting alongside the SAF. The RSF and its allied Arab militias have been targeting the Masalit community and other non-Arabs in Darfur states.

Have there been peace talks?

There were nine rounds of ceasefire efforts led predominantly by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia; all failed in their primary phase. On August 14, the latest round of U.S.-led peace talks were held in Geneva, Switzerland. But, neither of the warring parties attended. SAF boycotted the meeting, blaming the RSF for not adhering to the Jeddah Declaration 2023, including the withdrawal of forces from civilian regions. RSF also pulled out from the

talks at the last moment.

The UN, the African Union, the U.S., the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, and the EU have all urged the parties to end the violence and work together to de-escalate the crisis. Egypt initiated a draft resolution on May 1 at the Arab League meeting in Cairo, calling for an "immediate and comprehensive cessation" of hostilities. Until now, any and all efforts at a long-lasting ceasefire have been ineffective.

What are the regional implications?

More than two million people have sought refuge in neighbouring countries including Chad, South Sudan and Ethiopia. The refugee camps are overflown and have raised concerns in Europe that many will attempt to reach the continent. In February, dozens of Sudanese drowned when a migrant boat capsized along the Tunisia-Italy route. A lack of state apparatus and institutions has triggered ethnic clashes along the South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea borders. Since January, ethnic violence in the Abiey region, a disputed land between Sudan and South Sudan, has increased, with the UN reporting more than 100 casualties. Frequent clashes over agricultural land are reported in the El Fashaga region on the Sudan-Ethiopia border. The war has jeopardised an oil pipeline from South Sudan to the Red Sea.

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DAILY NEWS ANALYSIS
Page 07

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