



● POLITY

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With just two days to polls, 'dead heat' continues in U.S.

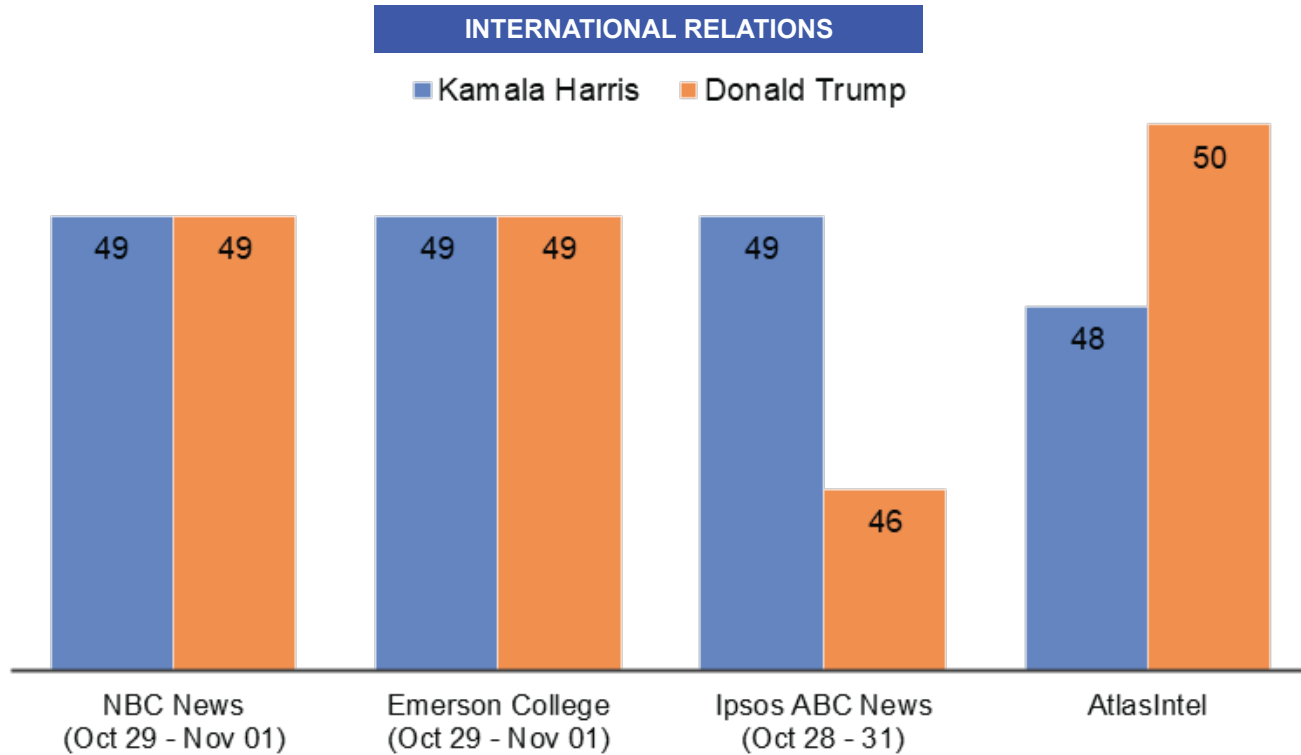


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the opinion polls of the US Presidential elections.

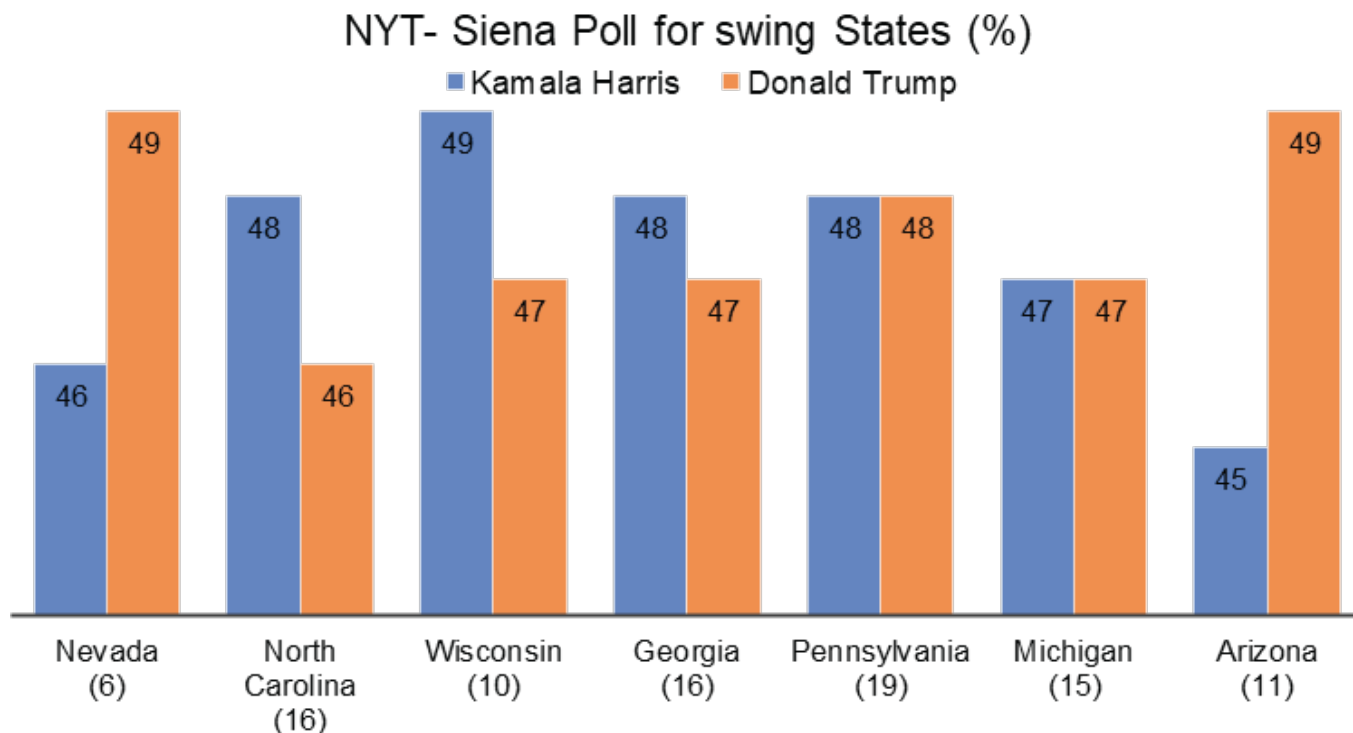


FIGURE: Bar chart representation of the opinion polls of the US Presidential elections in swing states.

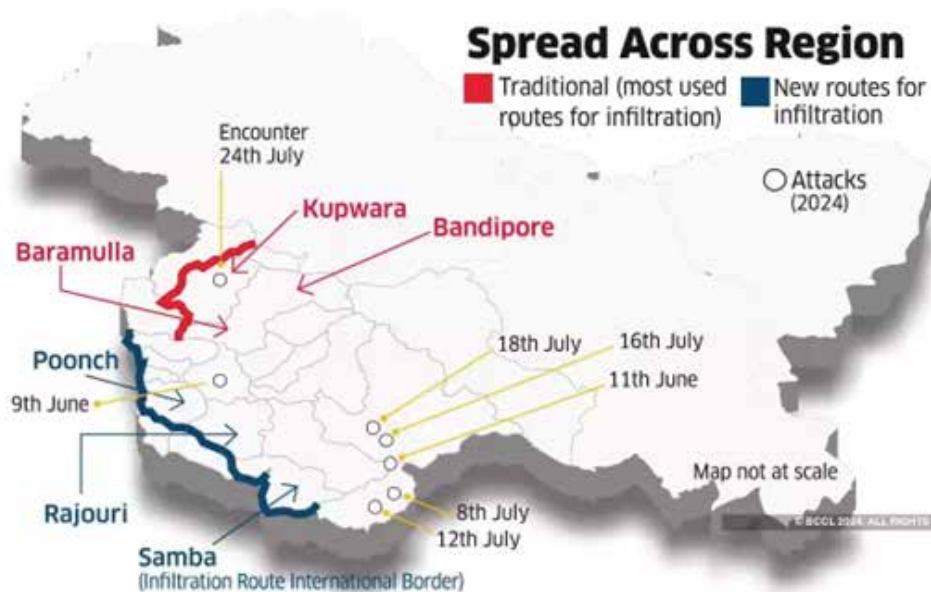
CONTEXT: Reputable pollsters in the country have called the race a “dead heat” with less than two days to go for the presidential election in the U.S. In latest national opinion polls, Vice-President and Democrat Kamala Harris was narrowly ahead of former President and Republican Donald Trump. Pollster Nate Silver estimates her lead to be a single percentage point (48.5% to 47.6 % on average).

Recent polls include those by NBC News and Emerson College projecting a 49 %-49 % tie nationally, Ipsos giving Ms. Harris a three-point lead (49 %-46 %) and AtlasIntel a two-point lead (50 %-48 %) to Mr. Trump. But the margins were even closer in the seven “battleground” States that could decide the winner of the Electoral College and the next President.

The New York Times-Siena polls, which enjoy one of the highest ratings in the polling analysis website 538.com, released a new set of polls that showed Mr. Trump ahead of Ms. Harris in Arizona (49 % vs 45 %, the State carries 11 electoral votes) close to the error margin of 3 % points. But in the other six States, Ms. Harris was marginally ahead in four and tied in two but well within the error margin.

12 injured in a grenade attack at Srinagar market

INTERNAL SECURITY



CONTEXT: Twelve civilians, mostly weekend shoppers, were injured in a militant attack near a popular flea market in Srinagar on Sunday, with one woman sustaining serious injuries. There has been a sudden spurt in militant attacks in Jammu and Kashmir over the past month, with at least eight such incidents since the new government took charge.

The leaders who condemned the attack include J&K Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, J&K Deputy Chief Minister

Surinder Choudhary, People’s Democratic Party chief Mehbooba Mufti, J&K Peoples Conference chief Sajad Lone, and J&K Apni Party’s Altaf Bukhari.

Delhi’s air quality dips further, likely to persist till Wednesday

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: The Central Pollution Control Board’s (CPCB) daily bulletin recorded the air quality of Delhi on Sunday plummeting to the upper end of the ‘very poor’ category, with a 24-hour average air quality index (AQI) of 382 at 4 p.m., up from 316 on the previous day.

According to the Centre’s Air Quality Early Warning System for Delhi, Delhi’s air quality is expected to remain in the ‘very poor’ category until Wednesday, and may even deteriorate to ‘severe’ in the subsequent six days. The primary cause of pollution in the city is attributed to extreme meteorological conditions, which have reduced the dispersion of pollutants. Additionally, stubble burning in neighbouring States has contributed significantly to the poor air quality.

AIR QUALITY INDEX

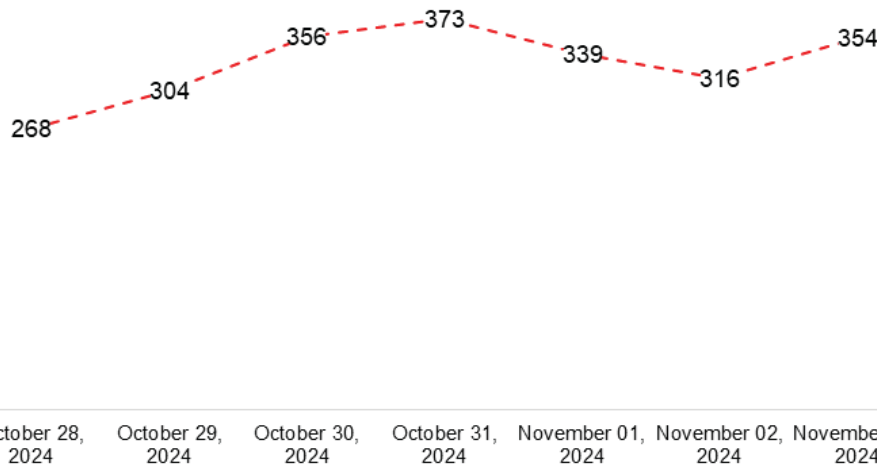


FIGURE: Line chart representation of the air quality index of Delhi. Source: Central Pollution Control Board.

during winter due to meteorological factors such as lower wind speed and dropping temperatures. Stubble burning in Punjab and Haryana further exacerbates the pollution.

Stubble burning

On November 2, stubble burning accounted for 14.9 % of PM2.5 pollutants in Delhi, down from 35.1% on November 1, which was the highest this harvest season, according to the Union Ministry of Earth Sciences data.

On Sunday, the number of paddy fires in Punjab decreased to 216 from 587 on November 1, the highest this season. Similarly, in Haryana, the number of paddy fires decreased to 19 from the highest of 98 recorded on October 12.

Delhi and other parts of north India typically experience a surge in pollution

U.S. bomber takes part in joint air drill with S. Korea, Japan

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



CONTEXT: South Korea, Japan, and the U.S. on Sunday conducted a joint air drill involving a heavy bomber, three days after Pyongyang launched one of its most powerful and advanced solid-fuelled intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), which experts say could reach targets in the mainland U.S.

The drill mobilised the U.S.'s B-1B bomber, South Korea's F-15K and KF-16 fighter jets, and Japan's F-2 jets. During the manoeuvre, South Korea and Japan's jets escorted the U.S. strategic bomber to a designated location south of the Korean peninsula, "demonstrating a capability to swiftly and accurately strike simulated targets". The B-1B Lancer is a supersonic heavy bomber known for its high-speed performance with a payload of 34,000 kg of munitions, including both conventional and precision-guided weapons. It was the fourth time this year the bomber was deployed to the Korean peninsula, and the second time for a trilateral aerial exercise to counter Pyongyang's military threats.

'India and China made some progress in disengagement'

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar noted India and China of making “some progress” in disengagement, describing it as a “welcome” move which opens up the possibility that other steps could happen. Indian and Chinese troops completed disengagement at two friction points in Demchok and Depsang Plains in eastern Ladakh. The Indian Army commenced verification patrolling at Depsang, while patrolling at Demchok.

'A welcome step'

On October 21, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said in Delhi that an agreement had been finalised between India and China following negotiations over the past several weeks and that it would lead to a resolution of the issues that arose in 2020. The agreement was firmed up on patrolling and disengagement of troops along the LAC in eastern Ladakh, a breakthrough to end the over four-year standoff.

Ties between the two Asian giants nosedived following a fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades.

Rejuvenating the millet market in rural India by tackling challenges

POIITY & GOVERNANCE



CONTEXT: Rural consumers are also consuming millets on par with their urban peers, while countering this narrative of rural decline for millets at the recently-held international conference on millets in Hyderabad. Rising incomes and changing dietary preferences have contributed to an increase in urban millet consumption, rural India has steadfastly held onto its millet traditions, growing and consuming certain millet varieties and cuisines that are peculiar to those areas.

Millet consumption continued in rural India over decades. While it is significantly lower than what it used to be, it is still much larger than the consumption in urban

India. In rural areas where millets are grown, it is part of the regular diet, primarily in the form of centre-of-plate staples. States with sizeable production such as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka grow and consume millets at varying proportions for food, fodder and industrial uses.

In order to expand the opportunity in rural markets, millet players could look at all consumption occasions and formats similar to the approach in urban areas besides raising awareness about their nutritional value. Stakeholders in the millet industry contend that there is a need to recalibrate their policies and strategies to tap new opportunities. They, however, can't bombard the rural market with the same products that they are selling in urban areas.

Not the sole factor

Historically, millet consumption was prevalent in rural areas, especially with home-made recipes. This is still continuing in those areas. However, with the green revolution and the rise of wheat and rice, millet

consumption declined, even in rural areas. The introduction of ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat millet products in smaller, more affordable packs for rural markets might spur interest, especially among urban consumers. This involves supporting local entrepreneurs who are developing millet-based products that resonate with local palates.

Supply chain 'missing'

Supply chains connecting the growers to the markets is missing by and large. We can leverage technology to connect farmers and consumers, facilitating direct sales and promoting local produce.

Government initiatives

Some consumers shifted to millets by appreciating its nutritional value. Farmers growing millets consume them as a matter of habit over generations. There is a significant consumption of millets through various government initiatives as well. Part of the demand for millets is driven by various Central and State government initiatives. States like Odisha and Karnataka procure millets and distribute at subsidised rates through the PDS. Odisha is even procuring millets from other States to ensure that millets are distributed its PDS.

ED files charge sheet in digital arrest cases, I4C issues advisory

INTERNAL SECURITY

CONTEXT: The Enforcement Directorate filed a charge sheet in one case related to digital arrest and the Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C) issued a fresh advisory days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged people to guard against the menace of 'digital' arrests.

The ED issued a statement on Saturday, saying it filed a prosecution complaint before a special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) court in Bengaluru last month against eight accused who allegedly "lured" common people through "fake" IPO allotments and stock market investments through fraudulent apps.

The "digital" arrest scams involve fraudsters posing as law enforcement officials, intimidating victims into transferring their savings by fabricating scenarios that suggest illegal involvement of the victim. The I4C issued a public advisory on Sunday asking people to "Beware of Digital Arrests" reminding them that "those making video calls are not the police, CBI, Customs officials or judges". The advisory asked people not to fall for these "tricks" and report such crimes "immediately" by calling the national cybercrime helpline 1930 or logging on the portal www.cybercrime.gov.in.

Mr. Modi, during his Mann ki Baat radio address on October 27, urged people to adopt the mantra of "stop, think and take action". The ED booked a money laundering case after studying multiple police FIRs and arrested eight persons.



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How cyber scams use social engineering and malicious APKs to swindle users

INTERNAL SECURITY

In 2023, Indian citizens lost ₹ 66.66 crore in 4,850 reported cases of online scams. A report by the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) revealed that digital financial frauds amounted to a staggering ₹1.25 lakh crore over the last three years.

According to the National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP), at least ₹10,319 crore was reported lost by victims of digital financial fraud in 2023. Additionally, 5,252 suspect URLs have been reported so far. The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance's report on 'Cybersecurity and Rising Incidents of Cyber/White Collar Crimes' noted that domestic fraud reported by Supervising Entities (SE) in FY23 totalled ₹2,537.35 crore. The use of sophisticated technical knowledge, coupled with social engineering techniques and a rise in data leaks, exacerbates the problem. India ranked fifth globally in the number of breached accounts in 2023, with 5.3 million leaked accounts. Scams enabled by social engineering and technical expertise are unlikely to disappear anytime soon. Users are advised to tread with caution when clicking on unverified links, downloading new apps, and scanning QR codes. They should periodically check for compromised passwords across all online accounts, and regularly review their card records for unknown transactions.

T.N. train accident: police file case of 'negligent driving'

POLITY & GOVERNANCE



CONTEXT: Even as the National Investigation Agency (NIA) is yet to find any evidence pointing to a sabotage in the October 11 train accident at Kavaraipettai in Chennai Division of Southern Railway, the Government Railway Police (GRP) have registered a case of "rash" or "negligent" driving.

According to police sources, the GRP have invoked provisions under Sections 281 (rash or negligent driving endangering human life), 125(a)

(rash or negligent act causing hurt), and 125(b) (rash or negligent act causing grievous hurt) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, read with Section 154 (endangering safety of passengers travelling by railway by rash or negligent act or omission) of the Railway Act, 1989.

Though the FIR has not named any accused in the case, the act of rash or negligent driving will apparently refer to the loco pilots. The derailment pertains to the rear-end collision of the Mysuru-Darbhanga Bagmati Express (train No. 12578) with a stationary goods train at the Kavaraipettai station on the night of October 11.

Preliminary investigation revealed that the express train was given the green signal to pass through the main line. However, after passing the signal it entered the loop line and collided with the goods train stabled there. More than 20 passengers were injured after 13 coaches derailed.

A parcel-cum-power car went up in flames in the impact of the collision. But there was no reference to how the coach caught fire in the multi-departmental inquiry report. While some railway officials and loco pilots said the power (generator) car would have contained diesel stored in a drum, as is done in many trains, there was no mention of it in any formal report so far.

Assessing India's tuberculosis burden

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

A stunted recovery

The data for the charts were sourced from World Health Organization's "Global tuberculosis report 2024"



Chart 1: The chart shows the countries with the highest levels of TB burden (in %)

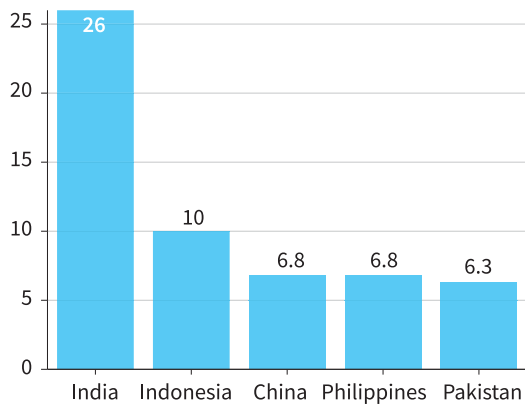


Chart 2: The chart shows the estimated number of deaths caused by TB in India

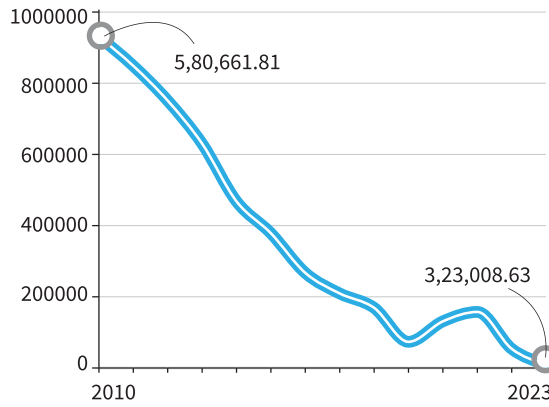


Chart 3: The chart shows the estimated TB incidence rate per 1,00,000 population in India

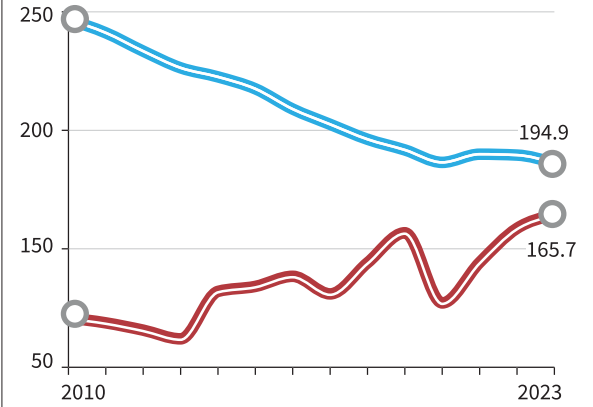


Chart 4: The chart shows the new and relapse TB cases notified by gender in India in 2023

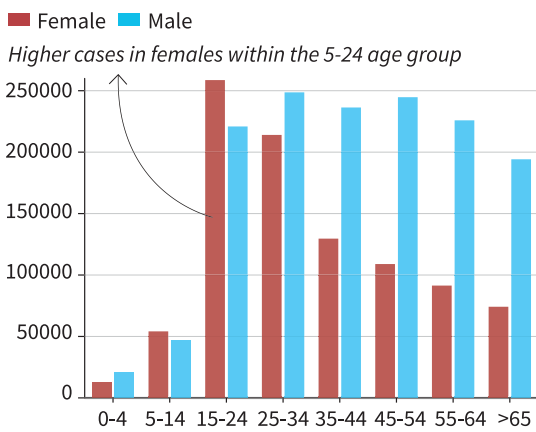


Chart 5: The chart shows the estimated number of TB cases in India attributable to five risk factors, 2023

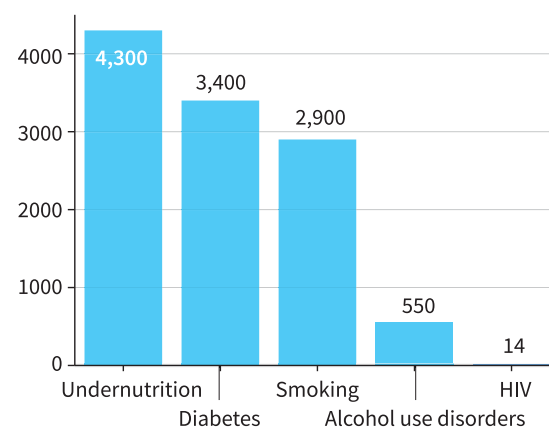
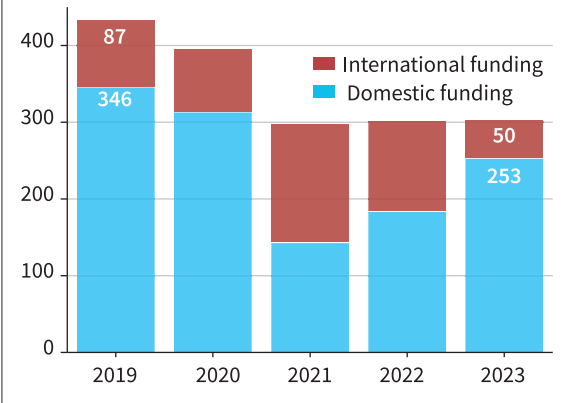


Chart 6: The chart shows the funding available in India for TB prevention, diagnostics and treatment services (in USD million)



What are major challenges faced by Indian cities?

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: Every year, October 31 is observed as World Cities Day. The world's urban population has reached an estimated 4.7 billion, or 57.5% of the world's total population, with projections to double by 2050. The theme for this year's World Cities Day is 'Youth Climate Changemakers: Catalysing Local Action for Urban Sustainability'.

What are challenges faced by cities?

The UN underscores that cities face unprecedented challenges, especially climate change. While strides have been made towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), urban centres remain plagued by poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. In the Global South, these challenges are intensified by rapid urbanisation, inadequate infrastructure, and limited resources. Cities here often suffer from housing shortages, poor access to clean water and sanitation, and increased vulnerability to climate-related events.

What about Indian urbanisation?

India's urbanisation trajectory differs from the cities in the Global North. In Western countries, urbanisation followed industrialisation, which created jobs that absorbed rural labour. Their urbanisation was sustained also because of massive economic transfers from colonies. Economist Utsa Patnaik has highlighted that India alone contributed over \$ 45 trillion to England's economy during colonial rule. In contrast, India's urbanisation is largely driven by economic distress, resulting in "poverty-driven urbanisation," with both rural-to-urban and urban-to-urban migration. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the strain on urban planning became apparent, as reverse migration trends highlighted gaps in infrastructure.

What are urban challenges in India?

World Bank estimates suggest around 40 % of India's population live in urban areas, in around 9,000 statutory and census towns. The main challenges Indian cities face include inadequate spatial planning, climate change, massive migration, growing inequality and social segregation, and governance limitations. Urban planning agencies have struggled due to two main issues. First, spatial and temporal plans are often outdated and fail to accommodate population growth. Since the 1980s, deindustrialisation has led to job losses in cities like Ahmedabad, Delhi, Surat, and Mumbai. Many workers displaced by this trend moved to peri-urban areas, where they live in overcrowded conditions. Currently, 40 % of India's urban population resides in slums. Second, plans often focus on capital growth rather than people's needs, leading to a lack of local ownership and engagement in the planning process. Additionally, inequality is widening, with exclusive developments catering to the wealthy while millions lack basic housing. Similarly, climate change severely impacts Indian cities. Cities face severe pollution and are increasingly subject to urban flooding and "heat island effects." Among the 10 most polluted cities in India, eight are in the NCR region around Delhi.

Most Indian cities remain controlled by undemocratic bodies, despite the 74th Constitutional Amendment. Though cities have elected representatives, they rarely control urban planning, which is often outsourced to parastatals and private entities. For example, less than three of the 18 functions outlined in the 12th Schedule have been universally transferred to urban governments, and cities receive a mere 0.5 % of the GDP in intergovernmental transfers.

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The BRICS summit boost to India-Iran ties

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: During the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, hosted by Russia from October 22-24, 2024, India and Iran, both longstanding civilizational friends, held a bilateral meeting to strengthen their stagnating partnership.

Much potential

During the meeting, they acknowledged the strong and untapped potential in the bilateral relationship. Mr. Pezeshkian appreciated India's growing role in the world and underlined its potential role in de-escalating the Gaza conflict. He also acknowledged the key role played by India in 2023 in Iran's entry into key multilateral organisations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS. Both sides also discussed the possibilities of strengthening cooperation in key areas such as the Chabahar port and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Iran holds significant importance for India beyond the Chabahar port and its connectivity benefits. Its vast reserves of crude oil and natural gas are crucial, with estimated oil reserves of 209 billion barrels and natural gas reserves of 33,988 billion cubic meters, making up 24% of West Asia's oil and 12% of the world's total. Despite facing severe economic sanctions and the ongoing conflict in Gaza, Iran increased its crude production to 3.4 million barrels per day in May 2024, with exports averaging 1.61 million barrels per day in March 2024.

Options for a closer partnership

The Chabahar port has become a key element in the India-Iran bilateral relationship. On May 13, India and Iran signed a 10-year agreement for the port's operation, which offers easy access to India's Kandla and Mumbai ports. Its location outside the Strait of Hormuz protects India's trade from potential disruptions in the Persian Gulf. Additionally, a 700 km railway link between Chabahar and Zahedan is being expedited, with plans to connect it to Iran's railway network. A road link from Zahedan to Zaranj in Afghanistan will further facilitate humanitarian aid from India to Afghanistan.

Energy supplies represent a significant opportunity for India-Iran relations. Before May 2019, Iran supplied nearly 12% of India's crude oil needs. As bilateral ties improve, the resumption of oil and gas imports from Iran could help meet India's energy requirements. Additionally, the proposed Iran-Oman-India gas pipeline, discussed since 1993, may offer further possibilities. In May 2022, Iran and Oman agreed to develop two undersea gas pipelines and an oil field along their maritime borders, which could potentially be extended to India if realized.

Close military cooperation with Iran is also a possibility. The two countries had signed a defence cooperation agreement in 2001 but nothing came of it, mainly due to western sanctions on Iran. In recent years, Iran has developed modern weapons platforms such as short and medium range ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles, and armed drones. Iran is already supplying armed drones to Russia in its war with Ukraine. India too is looking to develop cheap and effective armed drones and could find an effective partner in Iran.

To combat the threat of terror groups operating from Pakistan, India and Iran could conduct joint counterterrorism exercises and develop intelligence-sharing mechanisms. On the naval front, port calls at Iranian ports and the development of logistical facilities in the Persian Gulf could prove extremely useful.

Aspects of Indian diplomacy

India and Iran can achieve a lot together. There is recognition that too much time has already been lost. India's ability to de-hyphenate ties and engage independently with nations that are adversarial to each

other, such as Iran and Israel, could be useful in driving the ties. Also, India's decision to exercise strategic autonomy in issues of national interest, as seen in its engagement with Russia during the Ukraine war, is a useful precedent to invigorate ties with Iran.

On the new coastal zone plan of Kerala

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

CONTEXT: The Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change has approved the Coastal Zone Management Plan (CZMPs) of 10 coastal districts of Kerala in tune with the provisions of the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification, 2019, permitting the coastal districts to take advantage of the relaxed Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules and initiate development activities including construction of buildings towards the seaward side.

What is the process?

The Ministry has asked the State government to make available the signed copies of the approved CZMPs of all the 10 coastal districts in the public domain through the Kerala Coastal Zone Management Authority website within one month. The Ministry has clarified that all applications seeking CRZ clearance received after the approval of the CRZ 2019 shall be considered as per the CRZ Notification, 2019. The Union Government had initiated the process of declaring the designated areas as Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) to conserve and protect the "unique environment of coastal stretches and marine areas, besides providing livelihood security to the fisher communities and other local communities in the coastal areas and to promote sustainable development based on scientific principles taking into account the dangers of natural hazards, sea level rise due to global warming."

What does it mean for Kerala?

Kerala has a coastline of around 590 km and nine of its 14 districts are located on the coast of the Arabian Sea. The 2011 Census put the population density of Kerala at 859 persons per square kilometre, which is more than double the national average of 382 people per square kilometre. The coastal areas of the State are marked by a high density of population when compared to other parts of the State. It is estimated that five corporations, 36 municipalities and 245 Grama Panchayats will come under the CRZ regime in the State in the 10 districts.

The high demographic pressure on land had resulted in rampant violations of the CRZ rules along the coast. Thousands of land modifications, which include the illegal reclamation of wetlands and encroachments, have been reported along the Kerala coast. Hundreds of constructions have come up along the coast in blatant violation of the rules. The focus of the CRZ 2011 regime, which was in force till the approval of the CZMP, was on the conservation of the coastal ecosystem, which in turn protected the livelihood of millions of fishers and coastal communities.

What are the benefits?

The approval of the CZMP would directly benefit around 10 lakh people, according to an estimation of the State government as the earlier restrictions for the construction of new houses and repair of existing homes will be relaxed. The approval of the CZMP was made a pre-condition for the States to make the CRZ 2019 applicable and enjoy its benefits.

The new regime will see the No Development Zone (NDZ) — the area which has to be left untouched — around the tidal-influenced water bodies reduced to 50 metres from the earlier 100 metres from the High Tide Line in at least 122 local bodies in the State. The decision will see 37 village panchayats categorised as CRZ-III A, where the NDZ has been reduced to one-fourth of the earlier regime. The CRZ-III A are densely populated rural areas with a population density of 2,161 per square kilometre as per the 2011 Census. The NDZ in the category is 50 meters from the High Tide Line against 200 meters as specified by

CRZ 2011 notification. The new regime will see 66 village panchayats being included in the CRZ-2 category paving way for the construction of both commercial and residential buildings along the building line of authorised structures.

The NDZ in the CRZ areas of Kerala will be reduced to half. It will be 108.397 sq. km against the earlier 239.431 sq. km, as fixed by the CRZ 2011 notification.

What about mangroves?

Vast tracts of mangrove vegetation, which has an important role in the coastal ecosystem and are also considered breeding grounds for a large number of fishes and other organisms, would be exposed to exploitation as the 2019 notification has limited the legal protection of government holdings of an extent over 1,000 sq. metre to 50-metre buffer zones. The changes in rules will see a reduction in the buffer zones of mangroves to 2,500 hectares from the earlier 4,300 hectares in the State.

The new regime has also taken away the mandatory buffer zone around mangrove vegetation located in private holdings. Though the owners of private holdings in which the mangrove patches have survived may rejoice at the decision, it could leave a disastrous impact on the fast-depleting mangrove vegetation. The decision could lead to the wiping out of large tracts of mangrove vegetation, it's feared.

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