



● POLITY

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## BJD Delegation Raises Concerns Over Polavaram Dam's Impact on Tribal Communities

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

A delegation from the Biju Janata Dal (BJD), the principal opposition party in Odisha, met with Antar Singh Arya, the Chairperson of the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes (NCST), in New Delhi on Wednesday. The meeting aimed to express concerns about the Polavaram Dam project in Andhra



The delegation, led by senior BJD leader Debi Prasad Mishra, included elected representatives, former ministers, and legislators from Malkangiri and Koraput regions. They submitted a memorandum highlighting issues with the project, particularly its impact on tribal populations in Odisha. The delegation warned that the project could significantly affect the lives and livelihoods of tribal communities in upstream areas.

A major concern raised was the alleged increase in the project's flood discharge capacity from 36 lakh cusecs to 50 lakh cusecs without adequate consideration of its backwater impact on upstream states like Odisha and Chhattisgarh. This adjustment has caused apprehensions among affected communities in Malkangiri, who fear losing their lands and homes.

The delegation urged the NCST to initiate a comprehensive backwater study to evaluate the potential impact on tribal populations in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana. They also highlighted a lack of public consultation and transparency in the project's clearances. According to the leaders, Odisha was inadequately involved in discussions regarding the environmental clearances and the updated flood discharge capacity.

The memorandum also pointed out that the National Green Tribunal had formed a committee to assess submergence issues, but Odisha was neither consulted nor included as a stakeholder. The committee's report failed to address safety concerns for tribal populations, especially in Malkangiri district.

The leaders referred to a review by the former NCST in 2021, which found that proper impact assessments had not been conducted in potentially affected villages in Odisha. During their visit to Podia and Kalimela blocks in Malkangiri in August this year, they observed widespread concerns among local

communities.

The memorandum emphasized the vulnerability of tribes in Malkangiri, including primitive tribal groups, to submergence caused by the project. It warned that flooding their ancestral lands would result in the loss of habitat, culture, and livelihoods. Despite these significant risks, Odisha has not been adequately consulted on the project's environmental, social, and livelihood impacts.

## Siddaramaiah Criticizes ED's Move Ahead of Lokayukta Probe

POLITY

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah accused the Enforcement Directorate (ED) of attempting to "influence" the judiciary by writing to the State Lokayukta regarding alleged irregularities in site allotments by the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) to his wife, Parvathi. Speaking to the media during a visit to Mandya district, Siddaramaiah expressed concerns over the timing of the ED's letter, coinciding with the eve of the High Court hearing on his appeal against a previous judicial order in the MUDA case.

### Lokayuktas in India

The institution of Lokayuktas, which functions as an anti-corruption ombudsman at the state level,



predates the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act of 2013.

### Establishment of Lokayuktas

- Maharashtra was the first state to establish a Lokayukta in 1971.
- Odisha enacted a law for Lokayukta in 1970, but it came into effect only in 1983.
- By 2013, 21 states and 1 Union Territory (Delhi) had set up Lokayuktas.
- Chronological order of establishment:

- **1970s:** Odisha (1970), Maharashtra (1971), Rajasthan (1973), Bihar (1974), Uttar Pradesh (1975).
- **1980s:** Madhya Pradesh (1981), Andhra Pradesh (1983), Himachal Pradesh (1983), Karnataka (1985), Assam (1985), Gujarat (1986).
- **1990s:** Punjab (1995), Delhi (1995), Kerala (1999).
- **2000s:** Jharkhand (2001), Chhattisgarh (2002), Haryana (2002), Uttarakhand (2002), Jammu & Kashmir (2002), West Bengal (2003), Tripura (2008), Goa (2011).

### Structural Variations

- States with Lokayukta and Upalokayukta: Rajasthan, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra.
- States with only Lokayukta: Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh.
- States with designated Lokpal officials: Punjab and Odisha.
- The pattern of variation was not suggested by the Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC).

## Appointment

- Lokayuktas and Upalokayuktas are appointed by the Governor.
- Consultation during appointment involves:
  - Chief Justice of the State High Court.
  - Leader of Opposition in the State Legislative Assembly.

## Qualifications and Tenure

- Qualifications:
  - Judicial qualifications required in states like Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha, Karnataka, and Assam.
  - No specific qualifications in states like Bihar, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan.
- Tenure:
  - Fixed term of 5 years or until the age of 65, whichever is earlier.
  - Not eligible for reappointment.

## Jurisdiction

- Chief Minister:
  - Included in states like Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Gujarat.
  - Excluded in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar, and Odisha.
- Ministers and Higher Civil Servants: Covered in all states; Maharashtra includes former ministers and civil servants.
- Members of State Legislatures: Included in Andhra Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, and Assam.
- Local Bodies and Corporations: Jurisdiction covers these entities in most states.

## Investigations

- Lokayuktas can investigate cases based on:
  - Complaints from citizens.
  - Suo moto actions (except in Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Assam).
- Investigates allegations of corruption or maladministration, with limited coverage of grievances in some states.

## Scope of Cases Covered

- Lokayuktas handle both grievances and allegations in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, and Karnataka.
- Focuses exclusively on allegations in Himachal Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Gujarat.

## Additional Features

- Annual reports are submitted to the Governor, who places them before the state legislature.
- Assistance from state investigative agencies is sought for inquiries.
- Lokayuktas can demand files and documents from state government departments.
- Recommendations are advisory and not binding on the state government.

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# Navigating the Changing Global Landscape: America, China, and India's Strategic Dilemmas

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Donald Trump's surprising victory in the U.S. presidential elections, marked by a significant Electoral College win of 312 votes to 226, has sparked mixed reactions globally. While some mourn the perceived erosion of liberal American values, others see his ascent as the rise of a pragmatic, right-leaning leader who could benefit India. However, both perspectives share the notion that Trump's presidency symbolizes a declining America amidst a multipolar world where China's influence grows steadily.



### America's Enduring Strengths

Despite narratives of decline, America retains several fundamental strengths that anchor its global influence:

- **Economic Power:** It remains the largest and most innovative economy, with unparalleled financial stability and productivity.
- **Military Dominance:** The U.S. defense budget surpasses that of all other nations combined, underlining its global military supremacy.

- **Energy Security:** With domestic reserves of oil, gas, and renewable energy, the U.S. enjoys significant energy independence.
- **Cultural Influence:** Iconic brands like Coca-Cola, Google, and Hollywood ensure its unmatched global cultural presence.

These factors collectively sustain America's position as a dominant player, even as multipolarity emerges.

### Challenges and Weaknesses

America does face undeniable challenges:

- **Economic Concerns:** A weakened industrial base due to reliance on Chinese imports and escalating public debt, projected to reach 122% of GDP by 2034.
- **Social Division:** Rising xenophobia, insularity, and public discontent with globalization highlight internal fractures.
- **Declining Global Engagement:** A diminishing appetite for international intervention signals a shift toward isolationism.

### The Rise of China

China's rapid ascent as a global power poses a formidable challenge to the U.S.:

- **Economic Growth:** Fueled by decades of American investments and export-driven strategies, China rivals the U.S. in economic size and leads in advanced technologies like 5G.
- **Strategic Ambitions:** Under Xi Jinping's assertive leadership, China aims to establish itself as a hegemonic power, creating tensions with the U.S.

To counter this, American policymakers may revisit containment strategies reminiscent of the Cold War era.

### Trump's Strategic Focus

Donald Trump's presidency underscores a proactive approach to preserving U.S. dominance:

- **China Containment:** Through trade wars and initiatives like the Quad, Trump signaled his intent to challenge China's influence in Asia.
- **Regional Alliances:** Efforts to broker a new geopolitical alignment involving Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other moderate powers in West Asia reflect his transactional leadership style.

### India's Strategic Calculations

India faces critical choices in navigating the evolving global order:

- Balancing its strained ties with China against growing economic dependence.
- Managing relationships with Russia, now increasingly aligned with Beijing.
- Preserving ties with Iran amid geopolitical tensions and American pressure.
- Maintaining strategic autonomy while aligning with U.S. interests against common adversaries.

### Conclusion

While narratives of America's decline persist, its enduring strengths and strategic recalibrations under leaders like Trump cannot be ignored. For India, this dynamic era demands deft diplomacy to safeguard its interests in an increasingly complex and competitive global landscape.

## The Stalemate Over the Global Plastics Treaty: Balancing Economics and Environmental Responsibility

### ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

The Global Plastics Treaty, an ambitious initiative spearheaded by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), aimed to address the escalating crisis of plastic pollution. Emerging from a landmark 2022 resolution by UN member states, the treaty sought to "end plastic pollution, including in the marine environment." Over two years, member nations convened multiple times to frame a cohesive agreement, with the final round of negotiations recently held in Busan. However, despite the urgency of the issue, diverging perspectives among nations have stalled progress, leaving the treaty in limbo.



After years of negotiations, the UNEP-led effort to phase out plastic pollution has reached an impasse. The Global Plastics Treaty, initiated following a 2022 UN resolution, was envisioned as a historic step toward curbing plastic pollution worldwide. However, differences among the 170 participating countries during the fifth and final meeting in Busan derailed the initiative.

Countries were sharply divided on solutions. Around half, led by the European Union and supported by Pacific island nations, emphasized the environmental harm caused by plastic's

durability, which has led to its accumulation in ecosystems and even the bodies of animals. For these nations, reducing the production of virgin polymers—the primary raw material for plastics—was seen as the only viable solution to combat the pollution crisis.

Conversely, many developing nations and those reliant on oil and petrochemical industries resisted this approach. They viewed production cuts as thinly veiled trade restrictions, arguing that such measures extended beyond the scope of the 2022 resolution. These countries, including India, advocated for better recycling and reuse systems as more pragmatic solutions, despite evidence suggesting that recycling alone cannot match the volume of plastic waste generated.

India, aligning with the bloc opposing production cuts, faces its own challenges. The country recycles only about one-third of its annual plastic waste, yet plastic remains deeply ingrained in its economy. While India resists immediate restrictions, it must confront the health risks posed by plastic pollution to its people, ecosystems, and marine life.

Though the treaty negotiations have stalled, member nations are expected to reconvene in the coming year. A fresh perspective and innovative approaches will be essential to breaking the deadlock.

## Strengthening Ties with Africa: Prime Minister Modi's Historic Visit to Nigeria

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

In a landmark diplomatic move, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Nigeria on his way to the G-20 Summit in Brazil. This trip, the first by an Indian Prime Minister to Nigeria in 17 years, highlights India's commitment to fostering stronger ties with Africa. During his tenure, Mr. Modi has prioritized engagement with African nations, having visited 10 countries across the continent during his first two terms. His visit to Nigeria marks a significant step in deepening India's strategic partnership with one of Africa's most influential nations.



Last month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi made a pivotal stop in Nigeria while en route to Brazil for the G-20 Summit. This visit, his first to Africa during his third term, was the first by an Indian Prime Minister to Nigeria in nearly two decades. Nigeria underscored the significance of the visit, with President Bola Ahmed Tinubu personally welcoming Mr. Modi at Abuja airport and conferring upon him the Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger, Nigeria's second-highest national honor.

This rare distinction, awarded to only one other foreign leader since 1969, reflects India's growing global influence and Mr. Modi's commitment to championing the Global South.

## India-Nigeria Relations

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy and democracy, plays a vital role in West Africa and the African Union. Known as a democratic role model, it has mediated disputes across the continent. Strengthening ties with Nigeria has implications that extend beyond bilateral relations, impacting the broader African region.

During his meeting with President Tinubu, Mr. Modi emphasized India's commitment to expanding collaboration in defense, trade, energy, technology, health, and education. He also addressed Nigeria's pressing challenges, such as terrorism, piracy, separatism, and drug trafficking, advocating for enhanced security cooperation. This includes counterterrorism efforts targeting groups like Boko Haram and the potential purchase of Indian defense equipment. Earlier this year, a defense industry delegation from India visited Lagos, reflecting Nigeria's interest in Indian arms.

India has been a longstanding development partner to Nigeria, providing concessional loans worth \$100 million and offering capacity-building programs. These initiatives embody the distinct "India Way" of partnership, emphasizing mutual growth and respect.

## Nigeria's Strategic Relationship with China

Nigeria has also cultivated strong ties with China, hosting over 200 Chinese companies. China is Nigeria's largest export market in Africa, with bilateral trade underpinned by significant infrastructure investments. China has funded \$47 billion for projects like the Lekki Deep Sea Port, the Abuja Light Rail, and airport expansions, and it is also involved in Nigeria's mining and technology sectors. Despite this, India remains an essential partner for Nigeria, although trade has declined recently due to India's increasing oil imports from Russia.

## Future Prospects

Prime Minister Modi's visit underscores the need for sustained effort to convert diplomatic goodwill into actionable outcomes. With both nations serving as leaders of the Global South, strengthening the India-Nigeria partnership could have far-reaching implications for global cooperation and development.



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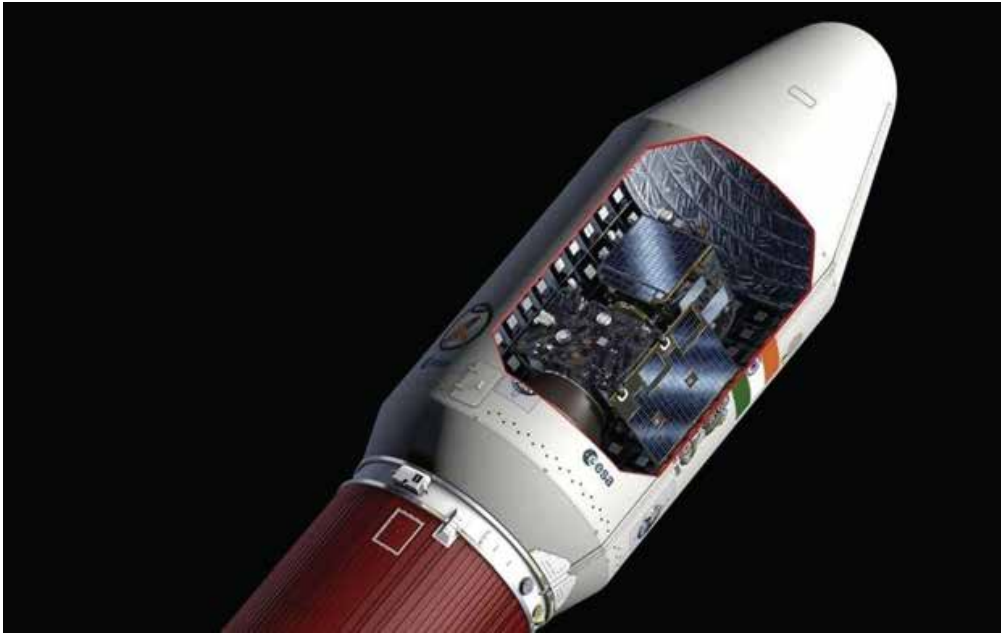
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# PSLV-C59/PROBA-3 Launch Rescheduled Due to Anomaly

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The PSLV-C59/PROBA-3 mission is a collaborative effort between ISRO and the European Space Agency (ESA) to deploy advanced satellites into a highly elliptical orbit. Initially slated for launch on December 4, 2024, this mission marks the 61st flight of the PSLV and its 26th in the XL configuration. The mission is set to deliver ESA's PROBA-3 satellites, designed for onboard autonomy and precision operations.



The launch of the PSLV-C59/PROBA-3 mission, originally scheduled for 4:08 PM on Wednesday, December 4, 2024, has been postponed to 4:12 PM on Thursday, December 5, due to an anomaly detected in the spacecraft.

### Mission Overview

The PSLV-C59/PROBA-3 mission is a significant step in space collaboration, marking the 61st flight of the PSLV rocket and its 26th mission in the XL configuration. The 44.5-meter-tall rocket will carry the 550-kg PROBA-3 satellites into their designated orbit in a mission

duration of approximately 18 minutes. The launch will take place from the First Launch Pad at SDSC-SHAR, Sriharikota.

The ESA's PROBA-3 satellites, part of the Project for Onboard Autonomy, are equipped for precision tasks in a highly elliptical orbit, promising advancements in satellite autonomy and space observation capabilities.

# Agroforestry Practices and Their Impact on Frog Biodiversity in the Western Ghats

## SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The lateritic plateaus of Maharashtra's northern Western Ghats, formed millions of years ago through volcanic activity, are biodiversity hotspots. These low-elevation plateaus support unique flora and fauna, including endemic frog species. However, agroforestry practices, particularly the conversion of these plateaus into agricultural lands, have emerged as a significant threat to the region's amphibian diversity.



A recent study has revealed that agroforestry practices may negatively impact certain species of endemic frogs, while others are relatively less affected by habitat modifications. The research, conducted by the Mysuru-based Nature Conservation Foundation (NCF-India) and the Bombay Environmental Action Group (BEAG), was carried out by Vijayan Jithin and Rohit Naniwadekar from NCF, and Manali Rane and Aparna Watve from BEAG. The findings were



published in *Ecological Applications*, a journal of the Ecological Society of America.

## Research Overview

The study, conducted during the monsoon season between June and September 2022, focused on amphibian diversity and abundance in Maharashtra's northern Western Ghats. Researchers sampled four geographically distinct lateritic plateaus—Devi Hasol, Devache Gothane, Gaonkhadi, and Bakale—to understand spatial variability. They examined habitats across orchards, paddy fields, and unmodified plateaus.

The findings showed that amphibian diversity was lowest in paddy fields, and abundance was minimal in orchards compared to the relatively undisturbed plateaus. Endemic species like the CEPF Burrowing Frog (*Minervarya cepfi*) and Goan Fejervarya (*Minervarya gomantaki*) were less abundant in modified habitats, indicating the detrimental effects of agroforestry practices on these vulnerable amphibians.

## Key Threats and Recommendations

Jithin, the study's lead author, highlighted that the conversion of plateaus into agricultural lands poses a significant threat to these habitats and the species they support. The replacement of traditional paddy fields with mango and cashew orchards further exacerbates the problem by eliminating critical habitats such as rock pools, which are essential for protecting tadpoles and eggs during dry spells.

To mitigate habitat loss, the researchers recommend adapting agroforestry practices to be more amphibian-friendly. Suggested measures include retaining natural water bodies, adding water sources in orchards, and raising awareness among landowners through incentives and sensitization programs.

## Habitat Shifts and Species Adaptation

Generalist species like *Minervarya sahyadrensis*, commonly found across South Asia, were observed to thrive in modified habitats such as paddy fields. However, Jithin clarified that these species are not necessarily adapting in an evolutionary sense but are instead spreading into these environments.

## Ecological Significance

The lateritic plateaus are rich in endemic biodiversity and serve as indicators of the health of aquatic resources, which are vital for local communities. Watve, a coordinator for the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Western Ghats Plant Specialist Group, emphasized the importance of conserving these freshwater habitats to ensure the survival of all life forms dependent on them.

## Funding and Support

The study was funded by On the Edge Conservation (UK), BEAG, The Habitat Trust, and NCF-India. It underscores the need for sustainable practices to preserve the unique biodiversity of the Western Ghats.



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