



Devendra Fadnavis Sworn in as Maharashtra's 21st Chief Minister

INDIAN POLITY

CONTEXT: Devendra Fadnavis, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Legislature Party leader, assumed office as Maharashtra's 21st Chief Minister at a grand swearing-in ceremony held at Azad Maidan, Mumbai. The event, attended by thousands, saw Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan administering the oath of office and secrecy to Mr. Fadnavis in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Ministers, and leaders from National Democratic Alliance (NDA)-ruled states.

Eknath Shinde, the outgoing Chief Minister and Shiv Sena leader, took the oath as Deputy Chief Minister, along with Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) chief Ajit Pawar. No other ministers were inducted, with the Cabinet expansion scheduled for the following week.



BACKGROUND

State Legislature Overview

Articles 168 to 212:

The Constitution mandates a Legislature for every State, with the flexibility for each State to decide if its Legislature will be unicameral (one House) or bicameral (two Houses).

Structure and Provisions

Constitution of State Legislature (Article 168):

- States with two Houses designate them as the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly.
- States with one House designate it as the Legislative Assembly.

Creation and Abolition of Legislative Council (Article 169):

- Article 169 empowers Parliament to enact

laws for creating or abolishing a Legislative Council based on a resolution passed by the State's Legislative Assembly with a special majority (two-thirds of members present and voting).

- Such a law does not count as a Constitutional amendment under Article 368.

Composition of Legislative Council (Article 171):

- Membership:
 - Shall not exceed one-third of the State's Legislative Assembly members, with a minimum of 40 members.
- Members are elected or appointed as follows:
 - One-third by State MLAs.
 - One-third by local bodies like municipalities and district boards.
 - One-twelfth by registered graduates.
 - One-twelfth by teachers.
 - Remaining members are nominated by the Governor for contributions to literature, science, art, cooperative movements, or social services.

Functions and Significance

- **Institution of Checks and Balances:** Reviews and revises legislation to prevent hasty, ill-considered decisions by the Assembly.
- **Diverse Representation:** Provides a platform for professionals and experts not elected directly.
- **Prevents Autocracy:** Limits the dominance of the Legislative Assembly.
- **Reduces Workload:** Shares the legislative burden with the Assembly.

Example: The Karnataka Legislative Council influenced decision-making on the anti-conversion bill by moderating potential hasty legislation.

Criticisms

- **Superfluous:** Often mirrors the Assembly if both Houses are dominated by the same party.
- **Limited Power:** Bills can proceed despite Council opposition after four months.
- **Vested Interests:** Perceived as a sanctuary for individuals prioritizing personal interests.
- **Backdoor Entry:** Sometimes used to accommodate unelected party members.
- **Expensive:** Seen as a financial burden.

Example: Andhra Pradesh sought to abolish its Legislative Council due to legislative deadlocks.

Legislative Assembly (Article 170):

- **Composition:**
 - Members (60 to 500) are directly elected by the State's electorate.
 - Constituencies are designed to maintain uniform representation across the State.
 - Seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes and Tribes.
- **Duration (Article 172):**
 - The term is five years unless dissolved earlier by the Governor.
 - In emergencies, Parliament may extend the term.

Qualifications for Membership (Article 173):

- Must be a citizen of India and take an oath as prescribed.
- **Minimum age:**
 - 25 years for Legislative Assembly.
 - 30 years for Legislative Council.
- Other qualifications as determined by Parliament.

Disqualifications for Membership (Article 191):

- Holding an office of profit under the government (exceptions apply).
- Unsound mind, insolvency, or loss of Indian citizenship.
- Disqualifications under the Tenth Schedule (defection laws).

Decision on Disqualification (Article 192):

- The Governor decides questions on disqualification, based on the Election Commission's opinion.
- Defection-related cases are decided by the Presiding Officer under the Tenth Schedule.



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Farmers Protest Intensifies Amid Heavy Police Presence

INDIAN POLITY

CONTEXT: Farmers from Punjab, Haryana, and western Uttar Pradesh have intensified their protests, with those at the Shambhu border remaining resolute in their plans to march towards Delhi. In western Uttar Pradesh, farmers alleged significant police deployment and restrictive measures in their villages to curb their movement. The protests, initiated on Monday, demand higher compensation for land acquired by the State government.



Who is Leading the Protest?

Farmers' groups such as the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), Bhartiya Kisan Parishad (BKP), and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) are leading the agitation. These groups, some of which were prominent in the 2020 farm law protests, are now focused on state-level issues in Uttar Pradesh.

Demands of the Farmers

The primary demands include:

- Allocation of 10% of acquired land to displaced farmers' families.
- A 64.7% increase in compensation rates to align with current market values.
- Legal benefits for displaced families, including 10% reservation in schools and colleges in Gautam Buddh Nagar, and provisions for free

electricity and water.

Reasons for Renewed Intensity

While smaller protests have occurred since 2008, the movement gained momentum in 2024 due to unfulfilled assurances from the state government. Earlier in the year, a committee set up by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath recommended measures such as compensation increases and land demarcation, but farmers claim these were not implemented.

Current Status and Next Steps

On December 2, farmers paused their march after verbal assurances of a meeting with Uttar Pradesh government officials. They have stationed themselves at the Dalit Prerna Sthal in Noida, pledging to avoid traffic disruptions. However, if demands are not met within a week, they plan to resume their march towards Delhi.

This movement underscores long-standing land acquisition grievances and the farmers' resolve to secure fair compensation and benefits.

Growing Rift Between J&K Chief Minister and Lieutenant Governor

INDIAN POLITY

CONTEXT: Key Points of Disagreement

Tensions between Jammu and Kashmir's Chief Minister Omar Abdullah and Lieutenant Governor Manoj Sinha are escalating, particularly over two major administrative issues:

- **Advocate General Appointment:**
 - Chief Minister Omar Abdullah attempted to retain Advocate General D.C. Raina, who resigned after the new govern-

ment took office.

- Despite being asked by the CM to continue, Mr. Raina has not resumed duties, reportedly due to resistance from Raj Bhavan.
- **Transfers of Officers:**
 - Recent transfers of senior officers, including three IAS officers, by the Lieutenant Governor have drawn objections from the CM.
 - Government officials noted that the L-G is only authorized to transfer IAS officers, raising concerns over administrative overreach.



Underlying Friction

The conflict highlights a power struggle between the elected government and the Lieutenant Governor's office, with differing interpretations of authority under the region's administrative framework.

Implications

This growing discord could affect governance in Jammu and Kashmir, as both leaders appear to be asserting control over key appointments and administrative decisions.

BACKGROUND

Federalism in India

Federalism in India represents a unique political arrangement, where power is divided between the central and state governments to accommodate the country's vast diversity. The Constitution establishes this division through the Union, State, and Concurrent Lists, fostering unity while allowing regional autonomy. However, challenges such as power imbalances, regional disparities, and administrative conflicts continue to test the resilience of this federal structure.

Key Challenges to Federalism in India

1. Balancing Central Authority and Regional Autonomy

India faces the challenge of reconciling central control with regional aspirations:

- **Language Imposition:** Efforts to promote Hindi as a national language have sparked opposition, particularly in Tamil Nadu, which emphasizes its Dravidian identity.
- **Article 370 Revocation:** The central government's 2019 decision to unilaterally revoke Jammu and Kashmir's special status without consulting its legislature has been criticized for eroding federal principles.

2. Rising Regional Discontent

Demands for greater autonomy based on linguistic and cultural identities often lead to tensions:

- **Bodoland Demand:** The Bodos in Assam have long sought the creation of a separate state.
- **Gorkhaland Movement:** Gorkhas in Darjeeling, West Bengal, continue to push for statehood for their region.

3. Conflicts in the Division of Powers

The constitutional distribution of powers often results in disputes:

- **Concurrent List Conflicts:** The 2020 farm laws enacted by the Centre were contested by states like Punjab, arguing that agriculture falls under the State List.
- **Overlapping Jurisdictions:** Frequent overlaps between Union, State, and Concurrent Lists lead to disagreements in areas such as education and agriculture.

4. Misuse of the Governor's Office

The Governor's role has faced criticism for partisanship and undermining state autonomy:

- **Arbitrary Decisions:** In Arunachal Pradesh (2016), the Governor recommended President's Rule despite the ruling

party's majority, a decision later overturned by the Supreme Court.

- Delaying Legislation: Governors often withhold assent to state bills, affecting governance.

5. Overuse of Article 356

Article 356, meant for emergencies, has been frequently misused for political gains:

- Political Motives: Until 2000, over 100 instances of President's Rule were recorded, with many deemed politically driven.
- Sarkaria Commission Report: It found that one-third of these cases lacked adequate justification.

6. Fiscal Imbalances

Uneven revenue sharing and delayed fund allocation strain Centre-State financial relations:

- Unequal Distribution: Southern states feel disadvantaged, contributing more to taxes but receiving fewer funds due to population-based allocation criteria.
- GST Compensation Delays: States like Kerala and West Bengal have reported delays in payments, disrupting financial planning.

7. Asymmetric Representation in Parliament

Population-based representation in the Lok Sabha creates inequities:

- Disparities in Seats: Uttar Pradesh has 80 seats, while smaller states like Sikkim have only one, leading to underrepresentation for smaller states.

8. Inter-State Disputes

Conflicts over resources, boundaries, and governance impact federal harmony:

- Water Disputes: The Cauvery River dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka remains contentious, with recurring legal and political conflicts.
- Boundary Issues: The Maharashtra-Karnataka dispute over Belagavi has led to prolonged litigation and significant financial costs.

9. Regional Economic Disparities

Uneven development and investment exacerbate regional inequalities:

- FDI Imbalances: Maharashtra and Gujarat attract the bulk of foreign investments, leaving northeastern states marginalized.
- Developmental Gaps: According to NITI Aayog's SDG Index, states like Bihar lag far behind Kerala in achieving sustainable development goals.

Strategies to Strengthen Federalism in India

1. Empowering States Through Devolution of Powers

- Amend constitutional provisions to provide greater autonomy to states.
- Enhance the share of states in central tax revenues and allow flexibility in the allocation of resources.
- Strengthen grassroots governance by granting more authority and resources to Panchayats and municipalities.

2. Promoting Balanced Development

- Implement a transparent and objective formula for resource distribution, accounting for factors like population, poverty, and infrastructure needs.
- Provide special support to address regional disparities and uplift underdeveloped regions.

3. Reinforcing Inter-Governmental Mechanisms

- Revive and strengthen the Inter-State Council as a platform for dispute resolution and collaborative policymaking.
- Establish regular communication channels between the Centre and states to enhance coordination and ensure effective governance.

4. Encouraging Cooperative and Competitive Federalism

- Foster collaboration between the Centre and states on critical national concerns, including disaster management and national security.
- Promote healthy competition among states to attract investments, improve governance, and drive innovation.

5. Upholding Federal Principles and Autonomy

- Curb excessive central intervention by limiting the misuse of Articles 355 and 356 to maintain state autonomy.
- Ensure inclusive decision-making by increasing the involvement of state representatives in national policymaking processes.

Aravallis: A Crumbling Shield and the Struggle for Survival

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

CONTEXT: Environmental Degradation in the Aravallis

The Aravalli mountain range, a critical natural barrier against desertification and a rich biodiversity hotspot, is under severe threat from illegal mining and stone-crushing activities. Once thriving ecosystems in regions like Mahendragarh, Haryana, now suffer from hazardous levels of air pollution, soil degradation, and declining agricultural productivity.



- **Dust Pollution:** Stone crushers operating continuously emit fine grey dust, coating everything from trees to crops in the vicinity. This has led to a permanent haze in affected villages.
- **Declining Agriculture:** Dust settles on crops, adversely impacting yields despite fertile, irrigated land.

Health Hazards

Stone-crushing zones have turned villages near the Aravallis into hotbeds of respiratory and other health issues:

- **Respiratory Diseases:** A report by the Narnaul Civil Surgeon highlighted that air-borne diseases in the region nearly doubled between 2011 and 2019, with respiratory ailments being a leading cause of death

among the elderly.

- **Tuberculosis Cases:** Dust exposure has contributed to a rise in tuberculosis cases, with multiple fatalities reported in villages like Khatoli Ahir.
- **Child Health Issues:** Children exhibit alarming symptoms, including kidney-related ailments, labored breathing, and severe skin allergies.

Socioeconomic Impacts

Residents face growing financial strain due to medical expenses and the loss of agricultural income:

- **Daily Struggles:** Families must dedicate significant time to cleaning their dust-laden homes, often at the cost of other livelihoods.
- **Financial Burden:** Villagers report spending large portions of their earnings on medical treatments for dust-induced ailments.

Community Resistance

Local communities have been waging a prolonged battle against illegal mining and crushers, often facing threats and systemic challenges:

- **Court Orders Ignored:** Despite National Green Tribunal (NGT) and Supreme Court rulings mandating the closure of illegal crushers, compliance remains partial.
- **Activism and Awareness:** Individuals like Tejpal Yadav have mobilized villagers, held demonstrations, and fought legal battles to enforce environmental norms. Significant victories include a 2019 NGT order imposing ₹20 lakh compensation per illegal crusher under the "polluter pays" principle.

Governance Challenges

Despite regulatory frameworks, enforcement remains weak due to political and administrative lapses:

- **Lax Inspections:** Local authorities claim regular inspections, but many crushers operate in violation of environmental rules.
- **Profit Over People:** Some local landlords profit by leasing land to stone crushers, while the majority suffer environmental and health consequences.

Aravallis at a Crossroads

The plight of communities near the Aravallis underscores the urgent need for sustainable development:

- **Stricter Enforcement:** Effective implementation of court orders and penalties is critical.
- **Alternative Livelihoods:** Investment in eco-friendly industries could provide employment while preserving the region's ecological balance.

- **Restoration Efforts:** Reforestation and stricter mining regulations are necessary to rejuvenate the Aravallis. The battle for the Aravallis is emblematic of the larger struggle to balance development with environmental preservation. Without immediate action, this ancient range may be reduced to a barren memory.

BACKGROUND

Geography of the Aravallis

The Aravalli Range is one of the oldest mountain ranges in the world, playing a significant role in the geography, climate, and ecology of northwestern India.

Location and Extent

- The Aravalli Range stretches across 692 km, traversing four Indian states: Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, and Gujarat.
- It starts near Palanpur in Gujarat, extends through Rajasthan and Haryana, and terminates in Delhi.
- The range divides the Thar Desert from the fertile plains of northern India.

Geological Significance

- **Oldest Mountain Range:** Formed during the Precambrian Era, approximately 1.5 billion years ago.
- **Composition:** Composed mainly of gneiss, schist, and quartzite, the range is a relic of ancient fold mountains.
- **Tectonic Activity:** The Aravallis are a non-seismic zone, as they have been eroded and stabilized over millennia.

Topographical Features

- **Highest Peak:** Guru Shikhar (1,722 meters) in Mount Abu, Rajasthan.
- **Average Elevation:** Ranges between 300 to 900 meters.
- **Erosion:** The range exhibits advanced erosion, with many areas reduced to low-lying ridges.

Climate Influence

- Acts as a climatic divide, blocking the monsoon winds and contributing to arid conditions in the Thar Desert.
- Provides moderate temperatures to regions on its leeward side, benefiting agriculture.

Water Resources

- The range is the origin of rivers such as the Banas, Luni, Sahibi, and Chambal.
- Numerous lakes, like Nakki Lake and Pushkar Lake, are found in the region.

Biodiversity

- **Flora:** Comprises dry deciduous forests, with species like dhok, khejri, and salai.
- **Fauna:** Hosts species such as leopards, striped hyenas, and various birds like the Indian peafowl.
- The Aravallis are classified as a biodiversity hotspot, despite increasing deforestation and mining activities.

Economic and Environmental Importance

- **Natural Barrier:** Prevents desertification of the fertile Gangetic plains.
- **Mineral Deposits:** Rich in minerals like marble, granite, and mica.
- **Water Recharge:** Helps in replenishing groundwater in arid and semi-arid zones.

Threats and Conservation

- **Threats:** Mining, deforestation, and urbanization have significantly degraded the range.
- **Legal Protection:** Governed by the Aravali Plantation Act and rulings from the Supreme Court to curb illegal activities.
- **Restoration Efforts:** Programs like reforestation and eco-tourism are being implemented to conserve the range.

The Aravallis remain a critical feature of India's geography, influencing the region's climate, ecology, and livelihoods, necessitating focused conservation efforts to preserve its legacy.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Visit to Nigeria, Brazil, and Guyana (November 16-21, 2024)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nigeria, Brazil, and Guyana from November 16-21, 2024, was a significant diplomatic journey that aimed to strengthen India's ties across multiple regions—Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The visit was strategically designed to achieve a range of objectives, highlighting India's global influence and advancing bilateral, regional, and global partnerships.

BACKGROUND

Nigeria: Strengthening Bilateral Ties

The visit to Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and its fourth-largest economy, marked the first leg of the Prime Minister's tour. Nigeria's growing international stature was evident in its participation at the G-20 summit and its membership in BRICS. During the visit, India and Nigeria reaffirmed their commitment to a strategic partnership across sectors like trade, energy, education, healthcare, and people-to-people exchanges.

Prime Minister Modi received high honors, including the keys to the city of Abuja and a prestigious national award, recognizing his leadership and contributions to enhancing India-Nigeria relations.



While the visit produced only three MoUs due to bureaucratic delays, it highlighted the growing potential for bilateral cooperation, particularly in areas such as agriculture, urban transportation, renewable energy, and digital transformation. The two countries also emphasized their shared commitment to combatting terrorism and extremism.

G-20 Summit in Brazil: Advancing Global South Priorities

The 19th G-20 Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, on November 18-19, 2024, served as the centerpiece of the visit. With the participation of 19 major economies, the summit focused on three key issues: social inclusion, sustainable development, and the reform of global governance institutions.

Key outcomes included the launch of the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, designed to mobilize resources and foster knowledge sharing. Although there was no breakthrough on climate finance, the G-20 made significant progress by adopting a roadmap for the reform of Multilateral Development Banks. While experts debated the summit's effectiveness, it was clear that implementation of previous commitments should be prioritized.

Prime Minister Modi engaged with global leaders, including those from the United States, Europe, and the Global South, furthering India's diplomatic relations. Additionally, Indian Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar held crucial discussions with Chinese officials to advance the India-China rapprochement.

Guyana: Deepening Ties with the Caribbean

The final leg of the trip took Modi to Guyana, a small Caribbean nation with a significant Indian-origin population (40%). The visit underscored Guyana's importance due to its growing energy resources and its active role in regional affairs. India and Guyana agreed to expand cooperation in various sectors, including energy, defense, urban development, education, and food security, with 10 MoUs signed.

Modi also met with leaders of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) during the second India-CARICOM summit in Georgetown. He proposed seven areas for deeper collaboration: capacity building, agriculture and food security, renewable energy, innovation and technology, trade, cricket and culture, and health. These initiatives were designed to align with the region's specific needs and priorities.

Conclusion: A Diplomatic Success

Prime Minister Modi's visit was a multi-faceted diplomatic success, enhancing India's global standing and furthering its relationships with key regions. The visit not only bolstered bilateral ties with Nigeria and Guyana but also provided India

with an opportunity to advance its influence on the global stage, especially in the context of the G-20 summit. The swift implementation of the agreements made during the trip will determine the long-term impact of this trans-continental diplomatic venture.

TFAPA's Writ Petition: Seeking a Ban on Movie Reviews for Initial Three Days

INDIAN POLITY



1. Review bombing through reviews filmed in cinema halls,
2. Stage-managing fake reviews by purchasing bulk tickets, and
3. Spreading negative perceptions through fake social media accounts.

These concerns focus on the need for greater protection for creators against targeted harassment. TFAPA's petition emphasizes that paid reviews are akin to advertisement space, as recently pointed out by actress Taapsee Pannu, quoting Shah Rukh Khan. When such platforms are misused to unfairly damage a film's reputation, legal intervention becomes necessary. However, ambiguities in the industry's handling of these issues raise concerns about censorship.

BACKGROUND

Defining 'Reviewers': Ambiguity and Criticism

The question of who qualifies as a reviewer remains a point of contention in the current film industry discourse. In the past, the film industry often celebrated the idea that audiences had the final say on films. However, recent events have highlighted a shift in this perception.

A cinema-goer leaving the theater might find themselves immediately approached by a journalist for their review—often part of post-release promotions. Independent YouTube reviewers, too, are tasked with providing their opinions, which can be used to either promote or demote a film. If a review is positive, it can amplify the film's success; if negative, it can result in legal threats such as defamation suits or copyright strikes.

While stars like Vijay Deverakonda and Jyotika have pointed out instances of review bombing, the reluctance to directly call out fake accounts or malicious online entities suggests a growing intolerance toward criticism. Referring to these online reviewers as part of a broad, homogenous group only adds to the challenges faced by traditional film critics, who have long been scapegoated by the industry.

The Role of Film Critics: Between Criticism and Censorship

Historically, film critics have been seen as an essential part of the filmmaking ecosystem, offering insightful critiques that differentiate quality films from others. However, in today's democratized, post-internet world, anyone with an interest in film can engage in criticism. This has led to a growing passion for film appreciation among audiences, with many becoming increasingly adept at reading films and writing reviews.

However, in the current media landscape, the distinction between a professional critic and an amateur reviewer is often blurred. The challenge is that film producers often fail to differentiate between the two when responding to negative criticism. Some critics have faced personal attacks, with critics being labeled as immoral or even accused of "killing" a film by filmmak-

ers and their supporters.

While the TFAPA's petition seems to acknowledge constructive criticism from established newspapers and online platforms, the broader film industry continues to blur the lines between legitimate reviews and sensationalized content. The irony lies in how film producers who champion responsible journalism often engage with sensationalist platforms, undermining the very criticism they claim to protect.

The Impact of Film Reviews on Audience Opinions

The promotion of films through reviews—positive or negative—plays a significant role in shaping audience perceptions. However, placing restrictions on reviews, especially for the first three days of a film's release, could have unintended consequences. While the film industry might see this as a way to protect films from unfair criticism, it risks undermining the democratic nature of audience feedback and discourse.

If film critics are shielded from censorship, a gag order on other review platforms could silence diverse voices, disrupting the open exchange of opinions. The industry's dependency on both producers and critics could suffer if such censorship becomes a reality.

Legal Implications: Madras High Court's Stance

The Madras High Court appears to lean towards protecting free speech rather than endorsing a blanket ban on reviews. The court seems more inclined to consider guidelines that ensure online platforms remain safe from targeted attacks and review bombing. In 2021, the Kerala High Court heard a similar petition to ban film reviews for seven days post-release, leading to the appointment of an amicus curiae. This resulted in recommendations, including:

1. A 48-hour cooling-off period before reviews are posted,
2. Avoiding spoilers in reviews,
3. Prohibiting disrespectful language or personal attacks, and
4. Establishing a dedicated portal to handle grievances related to review bombing.

The outcome of the Madras High Court's consideration of the TFAPA's petition will depend on how it navigates the ambiguities in the petition, particularly regarding censorship concerns.

ISRO Successfully Launches PROBA-3 Mission

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

CONTEXT: After a brief delay to address an anomaly, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) successfully launched the PROBA-3 mission of the European Space Agency (ESA). The mission was carried aboard the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle-C59 (PSLV-C59), which lifted off with a powerful roar from the first launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre in Sriharikota.



BACKGROUND

Successful Launch and Mission Accomplishment

ISRO Chairman S. Somanath confirmed the successful launch, stating, "The PSLV-C59/PROBA-3 mission has been successfully accomplished. The spacecraft has been placed in the right orbit." The mission objectives were achieved as the satellites were deployed into their designated orbits with precision.

ESA's Role and Mission Details

Josef Aschbacher, Director-General of ESA, remarked on the mission's success, highlighting that PROBA-3 is the latest addition to ESA's in-orbit demonstration missions. The

mission consists of two spacecraft launched together, which, after safely reaching orbit, will separate and perform precise formation flying. Almost immediately after separation, Yatharagga station in Australia began receiving signals from the spacecraft, and telemetry was transmitted to ESA's mission control center in Belgium.

Innovative Features of the PROBA-3 Mission

According to ESA, the two spacecraft, which were launched together, are designed to perform precise formation flying to an accuracy of a single millimeter, functioning as a single giant spacecraft. The mission aims to create artificial solar eclipses in orbit, providing prolonged views of the Sun's corona. This groundbreaking mission is expected to change the nature of future space missions, enabling more detailed observations of the Sun's atmosphere.

Separation and Initial Commissioning

Approximately 18 minutes after the launch, the two spacecraft separated from the upper stage and will remain attached during the initial commissioning phase, which will be monitored from ESA's European Space Security and Education Centre in Redu, Belgium. PROBA-3 mission manager, Damien Galano, expressed excitement about the successful lift-off, emphasizing the long-awaited achievement for the ESA team and their partners.

Future Phases of the PROBA-3 Mission

If the initial commissioning phase progresses as planned, the spacecraft will be separated early in the New Year to begin individual check-outs. The operational phase, which includes the first observations of the Sun's corona through active formation flying, is expected to begin within four months.

India and Bhutan Discuss Bilateral Cooperation

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: India and Bhutan engaged in discussions regarding bilateral projects focusing on electricity and urban planning during the visit of King Jigme Khesar Namgyal Wangchuk and Queen Jetsun Pema. The King met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and both sides reiterated their commitment to collaboration on various fronts, including the Gelephu Mindfulness City project and hydropower development



BACKGROUND

Support for Gelephu Mindfulness City Project
A joint statement issued following the meeting highlighted that Prime Minister Modi reaffirmed India's support for the Gelephu Mindfulness City Project. This initiative is expected to enhance prosperity and well-being in Bhutan and its border areas, strengthening economic and investment linkages between the two nations.

Progress on Hydropower Projects
The leaders also discussed the progress of hydropower projects, particularly the 1020-MW Punatsangchhu-II project, which is nearing completion. Both sides expressed satisfaction with the developments and

emphasized the need for early conclusion of the Punatsangchhu-I project. They reiterated the importance of cooperation in the hydropower sector, including finalizing modalities for new projects, particularly reservoir hydro projects.

Cross-Border Connectivity and Digital Networks

In addition to energy projects, the discussions also covered cross-border connectivity, including the establishment of a rail line and the enhancement of digital networks between India and Bhutan.

Significance of the Visit Amid Diplomatic Challenges

The royal visit comes shortly after Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay's visit to New Delhi in November, where he inaugurated the Global Cooperatives Alliance. India's commitment to the Gelephu project during this visit holds particular significance in light of recent diplomatic challenges in the region. These challenges include strained relations with Bangladesh, where India's ties with the interim government have faced difficulties since the Sheikh Hasina government's fall in August, and Nepal, where Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli has strengthened ties with Beijing.

Adani Group's Involvement in Gelephu Project

Reports earlier this year indicated that the Adani Group was in talks with Thimphu regarding investments in the Gelephu project. In July, King Wangchuk and Prime Minister Tobgay visited Gujarat to discuss cooperation with the Adani Group in areas such as airport development, infrastructure, and renewable energy. While neighboring countries like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have raised concerns about Adani's projects recently, the Bhutanese government has remained silent on the issue.

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