



MILITANTS IN SYRIA CAPTURE DAMASCUS AS ASSAD FLEES

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: In a dramatic turn of events, the militant group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) has captured Damascus, marking the ouster of President Bashar al-Assad after 13 years of civil war. This seismic development ends decades of Assad family rule, raises questions about Syria's future amid fractured alliances, and signals significant shifts in regional power dynamics.



- **Key Developments in Syria**
- **Capture of Damascus**
- Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militants seized Damascus on Sunday, ending President Bashar al-Assad's 13-year rule.
- President Assad fled Damascus earlier on Sunday, reportedly to Moscow with his family, according to Russian sources.
- Flames engulfed the criminal security branch of Syria's Interior Ministry during the turmoil.
- **Political Shift and Calls for Elections**
- Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali called for free elections,

urging Syrians to choose their future leaders.

- HTS leader Abu Mohammed al-Jolani discussed transitional governance with Mr. Jalali, indicating a complex road to political stability.

Impact on Allies

- The fall of Damascus is a major setback for Assad's key allies, Russia and Iran.
- Iran's embassy in Damascus was stormed by militants.
- Russia acknowledged Assad's departure following negotiations, with instructions to transfer power peacefully.

HTS and its Evolution

- HTS, previously affiliated with al-Qaeda as the Nusra Front, severed ties with the jihadist movement in 2016.
- The group declared an end to Assad's "injustice" and freed prisoners from Saydnaya prison, notorious for torture and killings.

Military Situation

- The Syrian Army continues to operate in cities like Hama, Homs, and the Deraa countryside despite Damascus falling.
- HTS has launched attacks on U.S.-backed Kurdish-led forces in Manbij, intensifying conflicts in northern Syria.
- Turkiye-backed militants have captured areas in northern Syria from Kurdish forces.

Celebrations and Concerns

- Joyful crowds celebrated in Damascus, echoing early Arab Spring scenes.
- Revolutionary flags were raised, and the presidential palace was ransacked.

Key Developments in Syria

Capture of Damascus

- Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) militants seized Damascus on Sunday, ending President Bashar al-Assad's 13-year rule.
- President Assad fled Damascus earlier on Sunday, reportedly to Moscow with his family, according to Russian sources.
- Flames engulfed the criminal security branch of Syria's Interior Ministry during the turmoil.

Political Shift and Calls for Elections

- Prime Minister Mohammad Ghazi al-Jalali called for free elections, urging Syrians to choose their future leaders.
- HTS leader Abu Mohammed al-Jolani discussed transitional governance with Mr. Jalali, indicating a complex road to political stability.

Impact on Allies

- The fall of Damascus is a major setback for Assad's key allies, Russia and Iran.
- Iran's embassy in Damascus was stormed by militants.
- Russia acknowledged Assad's departure following negotiations, with instructions to transfer power peacefully.

HTS and its Evolution

- HTS, previously affiliated with al-Qaeda as the Nusra Front, severed ties with the jihadist movement in 2016.
- The group declared an end to Assad's "injustice" and freed prisoners from Saydnaya prison, notorious for torture and killings.

Military Situation

- The Syrian Army continues to operate in cities like Hama, Homs, and the Deraa countryside despite Damascus falling.
- HTS has launched attacks on U.S.-backed Kurdish-led forces in Manbij, intensifying conflicts in northern Syria.
- Turkiye-backed militants have captured areas in northern Syria from Kurdish forces.

Celebrations and Concerns

- Joyful crowds celebrated in Damascus, echoing early Arab Spring scenes.
- Revolutionary flags were raised, and the presidential palace was ransacked.
- Syrians fear HTS might impose strict Islamist rule or engage in reprisals.

U.S. Response

- The U.S. pledged to maintain its presence in eastern Syria to prevent an Islamic State resurgence.
- Regional powers like UAE and Egypt may resist HTS, viewing militant groups as existential threats.

Humanitarian and Historical Context

- Thousands were freed from Saydnaya prison amid jubilation.
- Assad's regime is accused of war crimes, including the 2013 chemical weapons attack.

Regional Power Dynamics

- Russia, Iran, and Hezbollah withdrew support for Assad as Damascus fell.
- The militant advances since November 27 have been the most significant in recent years, with cities like Aleppo, Hama, and Homs falling rapidly.

Future Challenges

- HTS faces the daunting task of unifying a war-torn Syria split among armed factions.
- The ongoing conflicts in northern Syria and the resurgence of ISIS remain critical threats.
- Damascus is under curfew from 4 p.m. to 5 a.m. to stabilize the capital.

CONCLUSION: The capture of Damascus by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham marks a dramatic turning point in the Syrian civil war, ending the Assad regime and ushering in an uncertain future.

While the fall of Damascus is met with jubilation by many, concerns remain about HTS's governance, the potential for renewed violence, and the long-term stability of the country. The Syrian conflict has had a devastating impact on the nation, and the road to recovery will be long and arduous, requiring significant international cooperation and addressing the deep-rooted political and social divisions that have fuelled the war.



START YOUR JOURNEY WITH THE
BEST

INDIA'S TOP MOST CIVIL SERVANTS FOR COACHING

MISRI TO VISIT DHAKA TODAY, SET TO BROACH CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Amid escalating tensions between India and Bangladesh following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina's government, Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Dhaka aims to address key bilateral issues, including trade, security concerns, and contentious developments impacting diplomatic and minority relations, while also navigating growing public and political animosity on both sides.



Vikram Misri's Visit to Dhaka

Purpose of the Visit

- Indian Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri is visiting Dhaka for Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) to engage with Bangladesh's interim government.
- He will meet Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus, Foreign Adviser Touhid Hussain, and his counterpart Foreign Secretary Muhammad Jashim Uddin.

Key Discussion Areas

1. Bilateral Issues and Cooperation

- Focus on trade, river water sharing, Ganga barrages, and Indian projects in Bangladesh.

2. Contentious Issues

- Attacks on minorities and jailing of a Hindu leader in Bangladesh.
- Security concerns following the attack on the Bangladesh Assistant High Commission in Agartala.

3. Energy and Telecommunications

- Concerns over the paused Adani electricity agreement amid an inquiry into tariffs.
- Possible cancellation of Airtel's agreement to use Bangladesh as a transit for providing broadband to India's northeast.

Growing Tensions

- Relations between India and Bangladesh have strained following the ouster of Sheikh Hasina and increasing protests in both countries.
- Protests in Dhaka by Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) youth groups against the Agartala incident, where the Bangladesh flag was torn.
- Protests in Indian cities over attacks on Hindus in Bangladesh, which Bangladesh terms as an "exaggerated narrative."

Statements and Reactions

- **Bangladesh's Stance:** Foreign Adviser Touhid Hussain noted a "qualitative change" in India-Bangladesh relations post-Hasina.
- **Indian Perspective:** Former Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla emphasized the importance of this visit amidst rising tensions.
- **Trade Concerns:** Despite prior claims of "positive momentum" in trade, traders express worries over growing acrimony.

Sensitive Topics

- Bangladesh might raise the issue of extraditing former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, though no formal request has been made.
- Syed Munir Khasru highlighted Bangladesh's expectations for India to respect its sovereignty, particularly regarding domestic policies like CAA and NRC.

Significance of the Visit

- This is the first high-level engagement since the interim administration took over in Bangladesh.
- Both nations aim to address growing tensions while maintaining bilateral cooperation in key areas.

ANTI-DRONE UNIT TO SECURE BORDERS: SHAH

INTERNAL SECURITY

CONTEXT: Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced the establishment of a comprehensive anti-drone unit to address the growing threat of unmanned aerial vehicles along India's border with Pakistan, highlighting advancements in drone neutralization and broader border security measures, including the Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS) and the Vibrant Village Programme for frontier development.



Summary

1. Creation of an Anti-Drone Unit

- Amit Shah announced plans to establish a comprehensive anti-drone unit to counter the rising threat of unmanned aerial vehicles along India's border with Pakistan.
- Initial trials of laser-equipped anti-drone gun systems have shown success, increasing drone detection and neutralization rates from 3% to 55% in Punjab.
- More than 260 drones have been intercepted or recovered in 2024, compared to 110 in 2023, with most incidents occurring in Punjab.

2. Strengthening Border Security Measures

- The Border Security Force (BSF), responsible for guarding over 6,300 km of borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh, plays a critical role in securing India's frontiers.
- The ongoing Comprehensive Integrated Border Management System (CIBMS), aimed at enhancing border security, has shown promising results, particularly in Assam's Dhubri sector along the India-Bangladesh border.

3. Focus on Frontier Development

- The Modi government's Vibrant Village Programme (VVP) will be extended to all frontier villages to enhance the welfare and development of populations in remote border areas.
- Amit Shah described the VVP as the government's "biggest achievement" in ensuring the safety and prosperity of border communities.

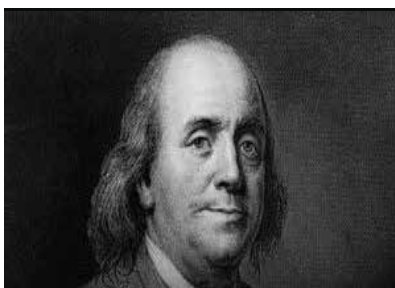
4. BSF's 60th Raising Day Observations

- Shah addressed BSF troops, reviewed the ceremonial parade, awarded gallantry medals, and praised the force for its contributions to internal and border security.
- Established in 1965, the BSF has a strength of 2.65 lakh personnel and undertakes multiple roles, including guarding borders and supporting internal security operations.

5. Collaborative Approach

- Efforts to tackle the drone menace involve a "whole of government" approach, with cooperation between border guarding forces, defence research organisations, and the DRDO.
- Continued emphasis on innovation and technological solutions is central to enhancing border security capabilities.

CONCLUSION: The establishment of an anti-drone unit, coupled with advancements in border security technologies like CIBMS and the focus on frontier development through the VVP, demonstrates India's commitment to enhancing its border security posture. This multi-pronged approach, involving collaboration between various agencies and a focus on innovation, aims to effectively counter emerging threats and ensure the safety and security of the nation.



"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."

—Benjamin Franklin

TRUMP MOOTS TRUCE IN UKRAINE, NATO WITHDRAWAL

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Donald Trump has proposed an immediate ceasefire in the Russia-Ukraine war, urging negotiations to end the conflict, while also renewing threats to withdraw the U.S. from NATO unless European allies meet military spending commitments. His comments follow a meeting with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy and French President Macron, with Russia expressing openness to talks and Ukraine emphasizing the need for a lasting peace.



Trump's Ceasefire Proposal for Ukraine-Russia War:

- Donald Trump calls for an immediate ceasefire in the Russia-Ukraine war after a meeting in Paris with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy and French President Macron.
- Trump urges Russian President Putin to act and end the fighting, citing the significant loss of life on both sides.
- Trump suggests that Ukraine is willing to negotiate, claiming the war should never have started.

Ukraine's Response:

- President Zelenskyy expresses caution, emphasizing the need for a "just and robust peace" with effective guarantees that Russia will not resume hostilities.

- Zelenskyy also highlights the staggering casualties, with 43,000 Ukrainian soldiers killed and 370,000 wounded since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.
- Zelenskyy reiterates that Ukraine will not engage in peace talks as long as President Putin remains in power.

Russia's Position:

- The Kremlin signals openness to negotiations with Ukraine, referencing previous statements and an October 2022 decree by Zelenskyy that rejected talks while Putin is in power.

Concerns Over Quick Deal:

- Western nations, including the Biden administration, express concerns over a hasty ceasefire that may lead to damaging concessions for Ukraine and give Russia the chance to rebuild and resume the war.
- A quick settlement may potentially be favorable to Russia given its military power.

Trump's NATO Warning:

- Trump reiterates his stance on NATO, warning that U.S. participation in the alliance is not guaranteed in his second term unless NATO members meet military spending commitments.
- Trump has long criticized European and Canadian NATO members for not paying their fair share, though NATO claims that most members are now meeting spending targets.
- Trump confirms his openness to withdrawing from NATO if allies are not "paying their bills" or treating the U.S. fairly.

Analysis: Trump's remarks suggest a desire for a quick resolution to the war in Ukraine, but both Ukraine and Russia have expressed concerns over the terms of such a deal. Additionally, his repeated threats to withdraw from NATO highlight ongoing tensions with U.S. allies regarding defense spending, signalling potential shifts in U.S. foreign policy.



START YOUR JOURNEY WITH THE
BEST

INDIA'S TOP MOST CIVIL SERVANTS FOR COACHING

IRAN, ISRAEL RELATIONSHIP REMAINS A SOURCE OF CONCERN: JAISHANKAR

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, during his address at the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain, emphasized India's strategic interests in West Asia, addressing escalating Iran-Israel tensions, Red Sea security challenges, and the region's critical role in India's economic growth and connectivity initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor.



JAISHANKAR HIGHLIGHTS INDIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN WEST ASIA

Key Concerns in West Asia

1. Iran-Israel Tensions

- Jaishankar emphasized the escalating tensions between Iran and Israel as a significant regional concern.
- India's diplomatic efforts are focused on mitigating these challenges.

2. Red Sea Security

- Addressed the volatile security situation in the Red Sea, referencing attacks on commercial ships.
- Highlighted India's interest in reducing maritime risks that disrupt trade and escalate costs.

Strategic Cooperation and Economic Significance

1. Economic Growth and Trade

- India, with a \$4 trillion economy, aims to double its GDP and trade within this decade.
- West Asia's strategic proximity and energy resources are critical for India's economic trajectory.

2. Security Cooperation

- Emphasized the region's importance for strategic security cooperation, particularly regarding shipping and trade.
- Highlighted challenges like higher insurance and transportation costs due to instability.

India's Naval and Connectivity Initiatives

1. Naval Presence

- India maintains a robust naval presence in the Gulf of Aden, Somalia, and the Northern Arabian Sea.
- At its peak, up to 12 ships were deployed to secure maritime trade routes.

2. Connectivity Projects

- India is actively pursuing infrastructure projects like:
 - India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral (IMTT) Highway.
 - International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).
 - India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEEC).
- These initiatives aim to enhance global connectivity and trade efficiency.

Analysis

Jaishankar's remarks underscore India's strategic pivot toward West Asia as a critical region for economic growth and regional stability. The focus on security in the Red Sea and the Iran-Israel dynamic reflects India's broader interest in maintaining stability in energy and trade routes. Simultaneously, connectivity projects like IMEC highlight India's ambition to become a global trade hub, bridging the Atlantic and Pacific through innovative infrastructure development. This dual approach combines diplomatic, economic, and security initiatives to strengthen India's regional and global influence.

WE AIM TO INSPIRE YOU

NEW NORMAL PREVAILING AT LAC': CONGRESS DEMANDS A FULL DISCUSSION IN PARLIAMENT

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: The Congress party has raised concerns about India's evolving stance on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China, accusing the Modi government of accepting a "new normal" post-April 2020 and demanding a comprehensive discussion in Parliament to address the broader implications of the disengagement process and India-China relations.

Criticism of LAC Stance

- "New Normal" Allegation: Congress accused the Modi government of accepting a "new normal" in the India-China border situation, diverging from the pre-April 2020 status quo.
- Demand for Parliamentary Debate: Congress communication chief Jairam Ramesh urged for a full discussion in Parliament on India-China relations, criticizing the government for not permitting MPs to seek clarifications on External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's statement.

Questions on Shift in India's Position

- Army vs. MEA Statements:
 - October 2024: Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi emphasized returning to the pre-April 2020 status quo before disengagement.
 - December 2024: MEA highlighted recent disengagement agreements resolving issues from 2020, hinting at a shift in position.
- Buffer Zones Concern: Congress noted that the creation of buffer zones restricted troop and herder access to areas they previously used.

Disengagement and Transparency Issues

- Unconfirmed Details from China: Congress questioned why China had not corroborated disengagement details in key areas like Depsang and Demchok.
- Grazing Rights and Patrolling Points: Congress inquired about the restoration of traditional grazing rights and access to patrolling points, as well as the reclamation of buffer zones ceded in prior negotiations.

Call for Parliamentary Oversight

- Collective National Resolve: Congress reiterated its demand for a Parliamentary debate to reflect national unity and assess the broader implications of the India-China relationship.

CHANDIGARH LEADS IN ENFORCING CRIMINAL LAWS

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: Chandigarh Leads in Enforcing New Criminal Laws



Implementation of New Laws:

- Chandigarh UT is the first in India to fully implement three new criminal laws.

Technological Advancements:

- Increased internet speed at police stations.
- Provided new tablets to investigators for efficient casework.
- Established videoconferencing facilities to expedite trials.
- Utilizes DigiLocker service for secure storage of digital evidence.

FOREIGN DIRECT INVESTMENT INFLOWS INTO INDIA CROSS \$1 TN

ECONOMICS & DEVELOPMENT



India has achieved a significant milestone, surpassing \$1 trillion in foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows since April 2000. This achievement underscores the country's growing attractiveness as a premier investment destination globally.

Impact of FDI Inflows on India:

- **Economic Growth:** FDI plays a crucial role in driving economic growth by injecting capital, technology, and expertise into various sectors. This leads to job creation, increased productivity, and overall economic development.
- **Infrastructure Development:** FDI inflows have significantly contributed to the development of

India's infrastructure, including transportation, energy, and telecommunications. This improved infrastructure further enhances the country's competitiveness and attracts more investment.

- **Technological Advancement:** Foreign investors often bring with them cutting-edge technologies and best practices, which can help to modernize Indian industries and improve their global competitiveness.
- **Skill Development:** FDI inflows often lead to the creation of high-skilled jobs and opportunities for skill development among the Indian workforce. This enhances human capital and contributes to a more skilled and productive workforce.
- **Increased Exports:** FDI can boost exports by improving the quality and competitiveness of Indian products and services in the global market.

Key Points:

- India has attracted over \$1 trillion in FDI since April 2000.
- This achievement solidifies India's position as a preferred investment destination.
- FDI plays a crucial role in driving economic growth, infrastructure development, technological advancement, and skill development in India.

AYODHYA VERDICT LIKELY TO BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF THE BATTLE OVER PLACES OF WORSHIP ACT IN SC

POLITY & GOVERNANCE



Ayodhya Verdict and the Places of Worship Act

- **Background:**
 - 2019 Ayodhya verdict emphasized the importance of the Places of Worship Act for maintaining religious harmony and preserving secularism as a fundamental value.
 - Challenges to the 1991 Act are increasing, with petitions seeking to overturn the character of several mosques.
- **Key Arguments:**
 - Petitioners argue that the 1991 Act hinders the reclamation of temples lost during the Mughal period.

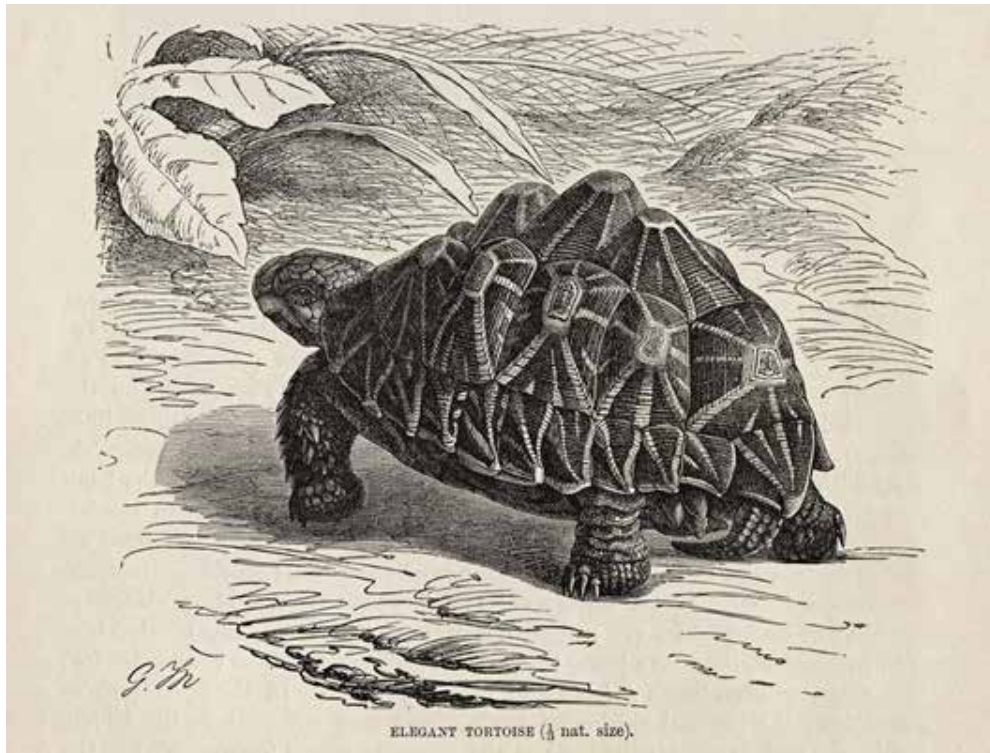
- They must address the Ayodhya judgment's emphasis on the state's obligation to protect religious harmony and equality.
- **Ayodhya Verdict's Stance on the Act:**
 - The Ayodhya judgment highlighted the need to prevent the use of history to create present-day divisions.
 - It emphasized that the 1991 Act aims to heal historical wounds and prevent individuals from taking the law into their own hands.
 - The judgment outlined exceptions to the Act's protection, such as conversions after 1947 with pending legal action.
- **Previous Court Rulings:**
 - A 1994 Supreme Court judgment recognized the equal status of mosques and other places of worship in a secular India.
 - Minority judgments in past cases have emphasized the importance of secularism as a fundamental feature of the Constitution and the state's obligation to accord equal treatment to all religions.

STUDY BRINGS INDIAN STAR TORTOISE TO EVIDENCE-BASED CONSERVATION

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

THE GIST

- Endemic to the subcontinent, Indian star tortoises reside in arid pockets of northwest India (bordering Pakistan), South India, and Sri Lanka
- The Indian star tortoise is listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and in Schedule I of the Wildlife (Protection) Act 1972
- Officials have already seized hundreds of tortoises being smuggled through the Chennai and Singapore airports and across the India-Bangladesh border this year



- Study on Indian Star Tortoise Brings Evidence-Based Conservation
- **Genetic Diversity Identified**
- Researchers identified two genetically distinct groups of Indian star tortoises: northwestern and southern populations.
- Genetic differences were linked to physical variations, which can guide conservation strategies.
- **2. Habitat and Historical Split**
- Indian star tortoises are native to arid regions in northwest India, South India, and Sri Lanka.
- The genetic split occurred around 2 million years ago due to environmental changes, creating two distinct groups.
- **3. Illegal Trade and Conservation Concerns**
- The species is heavily trafficked as exotic pets despite being protected under CITES and Indian wildlife laws.
- Hundreds of tortoises have been seized in

smuggling operations across airports and borders.

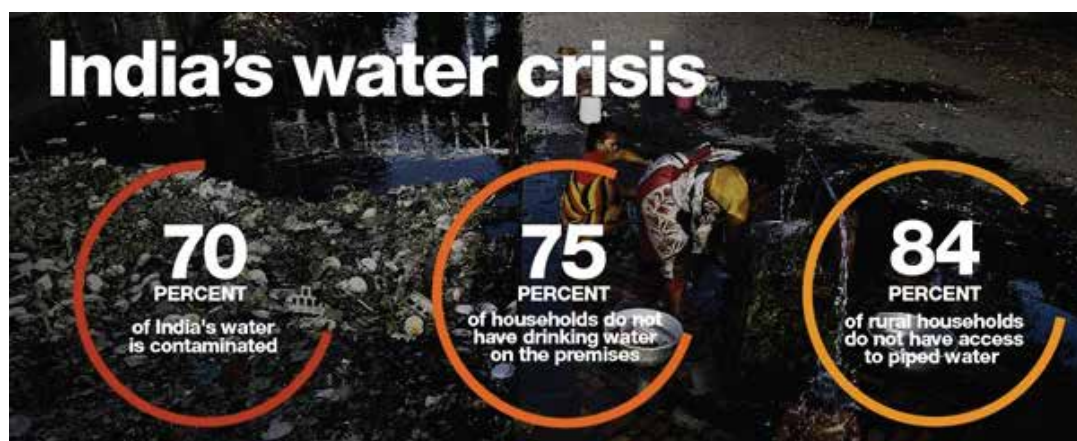
- **4. Challenges in Conservation Efforts**
- There are concerns about the unscientific release of rescued tortoises into the wild, which could worsen their situation.
- Previous releases have not accounted for genetic differences, potentially affecting the species' long-term survival.
- **5. Genetic Research Methodology**
- Researchers collected tissue samples from 14 locations across India to study genetic variation.

- Study on Indian Star Tortoise Brings Evidence-Based Conservation
- **Genetic Diversity Identified**
- Researchers identified two genetically distinct groups of Indian star tortoises: northwestern and southern populations.
- Genetic differences were linked to physical variations, which can guide conservation strategies.
- **2. Habitat and Historical Split**
- Indian star tortoises are native to arid regions in northwest India, South India, and Sri Lanka.
- The genetic split occurred around 2 million years ago due to environmental changes, creating two distinct groups.
- **3. Illegal Trade and Conservation Concerns**
- The species is heavily trafficked as exotic pets despite being protected under CITES and Indian wildlife laws.
- Hundreds of tortoises have been seized in smuggling operations across airports and borders.
- **4. Challenges in Conservation Efforts**
- There are concerns about the unscientific release of rescued tortoises into the wild, which could worsen their situation.
- Previous releases have not accounted for genetic differences, potentially affecting the species' long-term survival.
- **5. Genetic Research Methodology**
- Researchers collected tissue samples from 14 locations across India to study genetic variation.
- DNA was extracted from scutes (keratin layers on tortoises' shells), which worked as a non-invasive method for genetic testing.
- **6. Impact of Genetic Findings**
- The study confirmed the presence of two evolutionarily significant units (ESUs), which is crucial for targeted conservation efforts.
- The northern group remains genetically stable, while the southern group shows greater diversity, highlighting the importance of separate conservation strategies for each group.
- **7. Conservation Implications**
- Mixing the two groups during releases could reduce genetic diversity and negatively affect breeding.
- Captive-bred tortoises often suffer from shell deformities (pyramiding), which can hinder breeding and further complicate conservation.
- **8. Raising Awareness**
- Public awareness is needed about the legality of keeping Indian star tortoises as pets and the importance of adhering to conservation laws.
- The findings from this study are expected to inform national and international conservation strategies for the species.
- conservation laws.
- The findings from this study are expected to inform national and international conservation strategies for the species.

DEATH BY WATER

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: Despite significant strides in expanding access to piped water, the recent deaths in Chennai due to suspected contaminated water supply underscore the critical need for governments to prioritize the safety and quality of drinking water alongside increased coverage, especially in rapidly urbanizing India.



Governments need to ensure the safety of piped water while widening coverage

SUMMARY: The recent deaths in Chennai due to suspected contaminated piped water highlight a critical flaw in India's water infrastructure: while access is expanding, ensuring the safety and quality of that water remains a major challenge. This is particularly evident in urban areas, where rapid population growth strains existing systems and increases the risk of

contamination. The incident underscores the urgent need for governments to prioritize water quality alongside access, investing in robust treatment and distribution systems to prevent such tragedies and safeguard public health.

A GOOD BEGINNING BUT CHINA NEGOTIATIONS MUST CONTINUE

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: The recent remarks made by India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar regarding the ongoing India-China border negotiations, particularly the disengagement process in Eastern Ladakh. While his statement offered some clarity, it leaves several key questions unresolved about the terms of disengagement, the status of traditional patrolling points, and the broader implications of China's actions along the border.



1. Overview of Minister Jaishankar's Statement

On December 3, 2024, Union External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar delivered his first substantive statement in Parliament on India-China relations since the 2020 Chinese intrusions in Eastern Ladakh. His remarks provided some clarity but left several crucial questions unanswered.

2. Key Takeaways from the Minister's Statement

- **Troop Disengagement:** The Minister recalled the amassing of Chinese troops, India's counter deployment, and prolonged negotiations that led to disengagement from friction points. However, he provided limited

details about the arrangements, referring to "steps of a temporary and limited nature" without elaborating on their long-term implications.

- **De-escalation and Border Management:** While disengagement is considered an immediate priority, Jaishankar stressed that work remains on de-escalation and effective management of activities in border areas. He emphasized the importance of peace and tranquility in these areas for bilateral relations but did not claim that normalcy had been restored.
- **No Major Forward Movement in Relations:** Jaishankar rejected the idea of a "reset" in India-China relations, noting that any improvements must be approached cautiously, as structural challenges remain unresolved, especially concerning the border situation.

3. Unanswered Key Questions

- **Disengagement Terms:** The Minister did not provide clarity on the specifics of disengagement. Questions remain regarding the restoration of access to traditional patrolling points in Depsang and Demchok and whether there will be restrictions on patrol size, frequency, and locations, especially considering new arrangements for "coordinated patrolling."
- **Changes to the Status Quo:** While Jaishankar insisted that India would not accept unilateral changes to the status quo, there are concerns that China has already altered the situation since April 2020, particularly in areas like Depsang Plains and Galwan Valley. The status quo on patrolling and grazing areas, therefore, may have been changed in India's detriment.
- **Impact of "Temporary and Limited" Measures:** The statement did not clarify the territorial impact of "temporary steps" in areas like Galwan Valley, Hot Springs, Gogra, and Pangong Lake. These temporary measures could have long-term consequences on India's traditional patrols and grazing areas.

4. The Changing Dynamics of the LAC

- **China's Assertiveness:** Under Xi Jinping, China has increasingly asserted its sovereignty over the LAC, with a zero-tolerance approach to losing any territory. This shift poses a challenge for India, as China continues to alter the status of border areas under the guise of temporary disengagement steps, which could have significant territorial implications for India.
- **Demilitarized Zones (DMZs):** The Minister did not address the establishment of DMZs or restricted patrol zones in areas like Barahoti and Sumdorong Chu, where India has previously resisted such suggestions. The absence of these arrangements indicates that there may be no agreement on limiting patrolling rights, which could affect India's security posture.

5. Allegations of Chinese Patrolling in Arunachal Pradesh

- **Yangtse Issue:** There have been reports of Chinese troops attempting to patrol Yangtse in Arunachal Pradesh, despite

Indian forces repeatedly thwarting these efforts. If there is no reciprocal arrangement in the Eastern Sector, India must firmly deny these incursions.

6. The Status Quo of April 2020

- **Restoring the Status Quo Ante:** The Chief of Army Staff has reiterated India's desire to return to the status quo of April 2020, yet the Ministry of External Affairs has refrained from explicitly referring to this goal. Any shift in the status quo benefiting China could signal India's acquiescence to China's grey zone tactics of making incremental territorial gains without escalating to full-scale conflict.

7. Bridging the Political Divide

- **Need for Greater Transparency:** The article stresses the need for the government to be more transparent about the ongoing negotiations and for the Opposition to avoid politicizing the issue. Past instances, such as the negotiation of the 1996 Confidence Building Measures and the 2005 Agreement on Political Parameters, show that bipartisan support can be crucial for India's diplomatic and security interests in dealing with China.

8. Moving Toward a Consensus

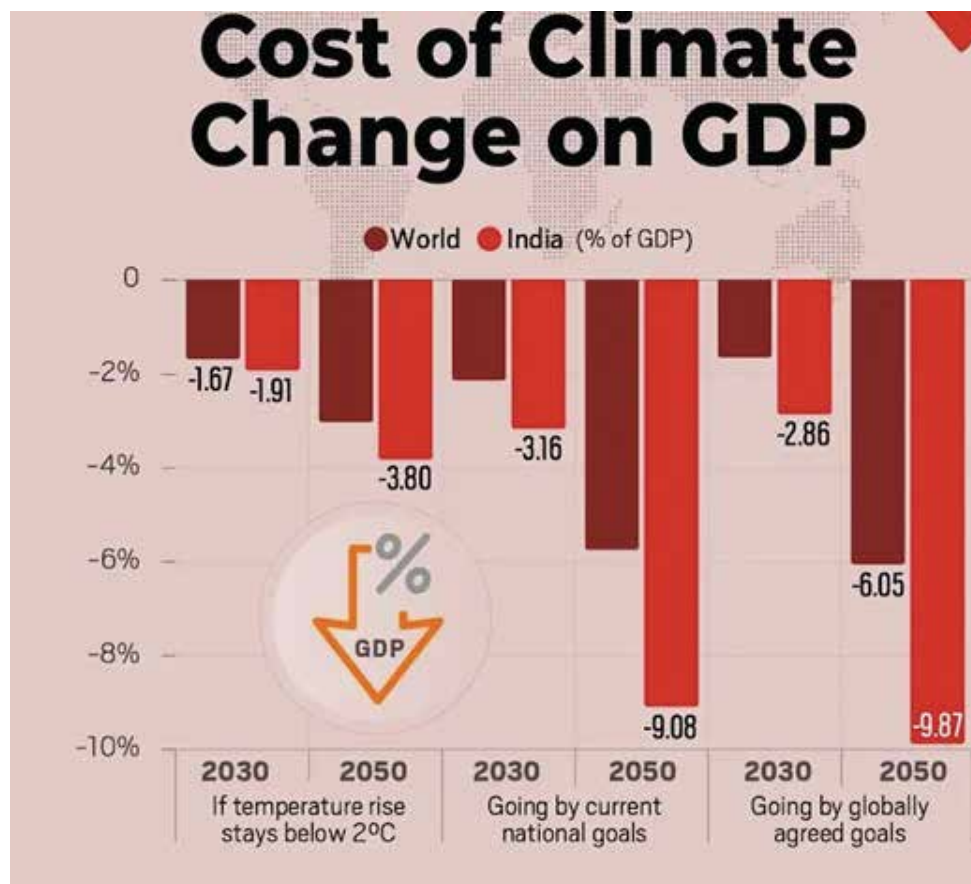
- **Building Broad Consensus:** To effectively tackle the China challenge, India must aim for a political consensus, balancing differences while working toward national unity on such a critical issue. Both transparency from the government and responsible opposition are necessary for strengthening India's position in ongoing border negotiations with China.

THE ISSUE OF INDIA'S ECONOMIC GROWTH VERSUS EMISSIONS

ECOLOGY & ENVIRONMENT

CONTEXT: The issue of India's economic growth versus emissions has been highlighted in the economic survey (2023-24), which claims that India has decoupled its economic growth from greenhouse gas emissions, with GDP growing at a faster rate than emissions between 2005 and 2019.

However, while India has achieved relative decoupling, the ultimate goal of absolute decoupling, where economic growth continues while emissions decline, remains a significant challenge that requires sustained efforts in emission mitigation and sustainable development.



1. Introduction: India's Economic Growth and GHG Emissions

- India's economy has shown robust growth, but higher growth has often led to increasing environmental pressure, especially through higher greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.
- The Economic Survey (2023-24) claims India has decoupled economic growth from GHG emissions, with GDP growing at 7% annually from 2005 to 2019, while emissions rose at a slower rate of 4%.

2. What Decoupling Means

- **Decoupling Defined:** Breaking the link between economic growth and environmental degradation.
- **Types of Decoupling:**
 - **Absolute Decoupling:** Economic growth without increasing emissions (ideal form).
 - **Relative Decoupling:** Both GDP and emissions grow, but GDP grows faster than emissions (India's current situation).
- **Debate on Growth Models:**
 - Green Growth advocates that economic

growth can continue with reduced environmental harm.

- Degrowth suggests reducing economic growth to address ecological degradation, but overlooks the need to improve living standards and reduce poverty.

3. India's Decoupling Claim

- The Economic Survey compares GDP and emissions growth rates between 2005 and 2019, without specifying whether the decoupling is absolute or relative.
- Since the 1990s, India's economy has grown significantly, while emissions have increased at a slower rate, indicating relative decoupling.
- Sector-wise Decoupling: Agriculture and manufacturing sectors, which are major sources of emissions, show slower emission growth compared to GDP growth.

4. Analysis of Decoupling

- Relative Decoupling: India has achieved relative decoupling, with emissions rising more slowly than the economy, but emissions continue to grow.
- No Absolute Decoupling: Absolute decoupling, where emissions decrease with economic growth, has not been achieved.
- Global Context: Most countries struggle with absolute decoupling, but many have managed to reduce the rate of emissions growth.
- India's Position: As a developing country, India's emissions are expected to rise with economic growth. Absolute decoupling will take time and is unlikely in the near future.

5. Future Efforts and Challenges

- Path Forward: While relative decoupling is a positive step, achieving absolute decoupling remains a long-term challenge.
- Policies and Measures Needed:
 - focus on renewable energy, emission mitigation, and sustainable development.
 - Ensuring that economic growth does not come at the cost of environmental preservation.
- Significance: Achieving absolute decoupling is essential for India to meet its long-term climate commitments and ensure a sustainable future.

6. Conclusion

- India's achievement of relative decoupling is notable, but the journey toward absolute decoupling requires sustained efforts, especially in policy formulation and sectoral changes, to balance economic growth and environmental sustainability.

THE PLACE OF CHARITY IN AN UNEQUAL SOCIETY

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

CONTEXT: The discussion centers around the ethics and implications of billionaire philanthropy, using Warren Buffet's charitable contributions as a case study. It examines the relationship between wealth accumulation, societal inequality, and the role of both private charity and state intervention in addressing disparities in opportunities.



THE GIST

- Mr. Buffet believes that wealth should be used to equalise opportunities, that the luck that favoured certain individuals and helped them get rich should be extended after one's death in order to help those less fortunate.
- Mr. Buffet's ideas with regard to wealth and welfare can be seen in the context of a philosophical idea called "luck egalitarianism", which states that no-one should have to suffer the consequences of inequality owing to bad luck or adverse situations.
- Differences in opportunities are not merely a question of luck, but of specific policy choices and interventions. Bill

Gates' and Jeff Bezos' wealth came from the monopolies they enjoyed in the marketplace; this is less luck than the failure of policy to ensure competitive market practices.

1. Introduction: Charity and Wealth Distribution

- Billionaire Warren Buffet has donated almost \$52 billion to various charities, promoting the idea of using wealth to equalize opportunities for the less fortunate.
- While commendable, the focus should also be on the processes that concentrate such wealth in the first place, regardless of whether it's directed towards charity.

2. Buffet's Philosophy on Wealth and Welfare

- Wealth as an Equalizer: Buffet believes wealth should be used to extend opportunities, correcting the "luck" that enabled certain individuals to amass wealth.
- Luck Egalitarianism: The idea that inequality resulting from bad luck should be addressed, ensuring everyone has equal opportunities regardless of birth circumstances.
- Buffet attributes much of his wealth to "luck" — being born into favorable circumstances such as being a white male in the U.S.

3. The Role of Policy in Wealth Inequality

- Wealth disparities are not solely the result of luck but also reflect specific policy decisions and interventions.
- Monopolies and Policy Failures: Wealth of figures like Bill Gates and Jeff Bezos stems from monopolies they enjoyed, which is more a failure of market regulation than luck.
- Wealth and Inequality in the U.S. and India: Deregulation and neo-liberal economic policies, particularly from the 1980s, have led to increased inequality, with stagnant wages for the majority while a few accumulate vast wealth.

4. Private Charity vs. Policy Intervention

- Charity's Role: While charity can help redistribute wealth and improve well-being, it does not address the systemic issues that create wealth disparities.
- State Intervention: Instead of relying on private philanthropy, policies such as higher taxes, minimum wages, and constraints on billionaire compensation are crucial for addressing inequality at its roots.
- Piketty's View: Economist Thomas Piketty advocates for state-backed taxation and redistribution to ensure opportunities are equalized, rather than relying on the goodwill of billionaires.

5. Charity and Its Limitations

- Charity vs. Wealth Creation: The distribution of wealth through charity addresses outcomes but not the processes that create the inequality.
- Neo-liberal Economics: Post-WWII wealth distribution was more equal, but neo-liberal economic policies since the 1980s have dramatically increased inequality, benefiting a small elite while worsening conditions for the majority.
- Amazon's Wealth: Bezos' wealth came from Amazon's market dominance, while its workers faced stagnant wages and poor conditions — highlighting the disparity between wealth creation and workers' compensation.

6. Conclusion: Rethinking Wealth and Inequality

- Moral Responsibility: Buffet's view that wealth should be used to equalize opportunities rather than passed down through generations reflects a strong egalitarian stance.
- Addressing Systemic Issues: To truly address inequality, society must focus on policy reforms that ensure fair market practices, redistribution of wealth, and equal opportunities, rather than relying on charity or the conscience of the wealthy.

A society that has more justice is a society that needs less charity.



ANALYSIS: the ethical implications of billionaire philanthropy, particularly through Warren Buffet's approach to wealth distribution. While Buffet's charitable contributions are commendable, the focus should shift toward the systemic processes that concentrate wealth in the first place. Buffet's philosophy aligns with "luck egalitarianism," emphasizing the role of chance in wealth accumulation, yet fails to address the policy failures that

foster monopolies and market imbalances. This critiques the reliance on private charity as a solution to inequality, advocating for state intervention through progressive policies, taxation, and redistribution to correct systemic inequalities and ensure equal opportunities for all.

FALL OF DAMASCUS APPEARS TO ALIGN WITH LONG-TIME GOALS OF NEIGHBOUR TURKIYE

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

CONTEXT: Escalating tensions between Israel, Syria, and Turkey, as Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu orders military actions to seize a demilitarized buffer zone on the Syrian border after Syrian forces abandon their positions, while Turkey, a key backer of opposition groups in Syria, faces both opportunities and risks amidst the shifting dynamics and the potential fall of President Bashar al-Assad's government. The situation also highlights Turkey's strategic interests in Syria, including the return of refugees and the containment of Kurdish militias.



1. Israeli Military Action on Syrian Border

- Israeli PM Netanyahu orders the military to "seize" a demilitarized buffer zone on the Syrian border after the overthrow of Bashar al-Assad in Damascus.
- A curfew is imposed on five Syrian towns within the buffer zone, instructing residents to remain indoors.
- Israel conducts airstrikes on security and research sites in Damascus, targeting Iranian missile development.
- Netanyahu declares the collapse of the 50-year "disengagement agreement" as Syrian forces vacate positions near the Golan Heights.

- Israeli forces deploy to the UN-patrolled buffer zone to assist peacekeepers and prevent armed entry.

2. Syrian Civil War Developments

- Syrian government forces retreat from positions near the Israeli-held Golan Heights following a renewed offensive by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) and the collapse of Damascus.
- Israel has occupied the Golan Heights since 1967, and annexed it, a move not recognized by the international community.
- The buffer zone was established in 1974, separating Israeli-held and Syrian territories, with UN peacekeepers stationed there.

3. Turkey's Role and Goals in Syria

- Turkey, a long-time backer of opposition groups aiming to overthrow Assad, faces risks of territorial instability and potential refugee influx.
- Syrian refugees in Turkey celebrate Assad's downfall, with many expressing a desire to return home.
- Turkey's proxy forces, the Syrian National Army, push back Kurdish forces allied with the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party).
- Turkey's involvement is denied by its officials, though observers believe Ankara gave tacit approval for the offensive.
- Turkey is focused on preventing a Kurdish-controlled autonomous region on its border and is wary of a new wave of refugees.

4. Turkey's Strategic Interests

- Turkey's primary concern is ensuring Syria's territorial integrity and avoiding a fragmented state.
- Turkey has previously conducted military incursions into Syria to counter Kurdish militants and create a buffer zone.
- Turkey supports Syrian refugees' return, but a stable transition period is necessary to avoid further instability.

5. Reconciliation Efforts and Risks

- Turkey had sought reconciliation with Assad to address the Kurdish threat and facilitate refugee return, but Assad rebuffed overtures.
- Turkey continues to maintain troops in northern Syria to counter Kurdish forces despite Syrian demands for their withdrawal.

- Analysts suggest that the rebel offensive, though denied Turkish involvement, likely could not have happened without Turkish consent.

6. Implications for Turkey-Syria Relations

- Turkey emphasizes the importance of Syria's unity and sovereignty while seeking to avoid territorial fragmentation.
- Turkey's involvement in Syria raises the risk of tensions with Syria's allies, Iran and Russia, though analysts suggest it won't break Turkey-Russia ties.
- Turkey's long-term goals include securing its southern borders and ensuring the safe return of refugees, but it must navigate complex relationships with both Syria and its allies.

ANALYSIS: The situation on the Syrian-Israeli border and within Syria itself highlights complex regional dynamics. Israel's military actions, including airstrikes and the seizure of a demilitarized buffer zone, reflect growing concerns over Syrian instability and Iran's influence. Turkey, a key backer of opposition forces, faces opportunities and risks as Assad's government weakens, aligning with its long-term goals of countering Kurdish autonomy and facilitating refugee returns. While Turkey denies direct involvement in the offensive, its strategic interests in Syria, including maintaining territorial integrity and securing borders, continue to shape its actions. These developments raise tensions with Syria's allies, Iran and Russia, complicating Turkey's position.



COME JOIN WITH US

**START
YOUR
JOURNEY
WITH THE
BEST**





VEDHIK

IAS ACADEMY

The New Learning Mantra

START YOUR JOURNEY WITH THE BEST

**INDIA'S
TOP MOST
CIVIL SERVANTS
FOR COACHING**

www.vedhikiasacademy.org

Head Office:
Vedhik IAS Academy
Mercy Estate,
MG Road, Ravipuram,
Ernakulam-682 015,

Corporate office:
Vedhik IAS Academy
Samkalp Bhawan, Plot No.15,
Sector 4, Rama Krishna Puram,
New Delhi, Delhi-110022

Regional office
Vedhik IAS Academy
202, Raheja Chambers, 12,
Museum Road. Bangalore -
560001. Karnataka, India.

GCC Office:
Bobscoedu,
Bobsco Trading & Contracting Co. W. L . L
Office 22, Dream Tower 1,
Road: 2701, Adliya, Kingdom of Bahrain
www.bobscoedu.com