



SIVARAJAVEL IAS ACADEMY
AN IDEAL INSTITUTE FOR CIVIL SERVICE EXAMS

the **CATALYST**

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The CATALYST

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Sivarajavel IAS Academy

The CATALYST is a monthly magazine for current affairs which tries to give aspirants an in-depth comprehension of certain topics which appeared in different sources over the month. The Magazine has been designed in such a way that the reading experience is enriching and insightful for the readers.

The contents have been grouped into a thematic structure to help aspirants focus on the overall GS syllabus.

Inside The Catalyst Magazine

- I. Within the Sub themes first few topics will be Prelims oriented followed by indepth coverage of Mains Topics.
- II. Book Summary Relevant for UPSC Exam.
- III. Fact Sheet and Quotes have also been provided.

**New sections will be added or removed based on the new updates we include in the forthcoming issues.*

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SIVARAJAVEL IAS ACADEMY

AN IDEAL INSTITUTE FOR CIVIL SERVICE EXAMS

the **CATALYST**

From the Editor's Desk

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the January Issue of our magazine, where we've covered a range of topics like the Bilkis Bano case, Iran-Pakistan conflict, Polar Vortex, HPV vaccine, etc. We've even thrown in the second part of the review of "The Cases That India Forgot" by Chintan Chandrachud.

As February approaches, so does the Budget. But fear not, Civil Service Exam aspirants! 2024 is an election year, which means we only have an Interim Budget to decipher, and no Economic Survey to lose sleep over. In our next issue of The Catalyst, we'll break down the budget for you, so you can spend less time worrying and more time preparing for the UPSC Prelims.

Speaking of the UPSC exam, the notification is out and there are over 1000 vacancies! As the preliminary examination looms, we encourage you to stay focused, maintain a balanced lifestyle, and remember that all-nighters and energy drinks are not your friends.

Your feedback and support continue to inspire us. We're committed to making each issue better than the last, so don't hesitate to send us your suggestions to sivarajaveliasacademy@gmail.com. After all, we're all in this journey together!

Sincerely,
P. Mohan
(Head UPSC)

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PURI'S BAN ON "IMPROPER" DRESSES

Context:

A dress code meant to discourage devotees from wearing "improper" clothes came into force at the Shree Jagannath Temple, Puri.

About:

Male devotees wearing short pants and torn jeans were not allowed to enter the temple and were provided dhotis instead. For girls and women, skirts, jeans, and sleeveless clothes are prohibited.

It also put a complete ban on chewing gutkha and pan in the shrine premises and use of plastic and polythene from the New Year's day of 2024.

Religious rights vs Liberty:

The constitution of India is an embodiment of both individual rights and religious rights. The balance have been attempted to be jolted in many circumstances. The cases involving the issue of Religious right vs individual liberty are as follows:

1. Sabarimala Verdict - In 2018, a Constitution Bench allowed the entry of women irrespective of age into the Temple on the grounds that the ban violated the fundamental right of freedom of religion as per Article 25 of the Constitution. The provision restricting entry of women in the state legislation was struck down and deemed unconstitutional.
2. Shirur Mutt Case (1954): This case dealt with the question of whether the right to manage religious affairs was protected under Article 26 of the Constitution of

India. The Supreme Court held that the term "religion" in Article 26 includes rituals, observances, ceremonies, and administration of properties connected with religious institutions.

Bijoe Emmanuel v. State of Kerala (1986)

Puri Jagannath temple

The temple is believed to have been constructed in the 12th century by King Anantavarman Chodaganga Deva of the Eastern Ganga Dynasty.

Jagannath Puri temple is called 'Yamanika Tirtha' where, according to the Hindu beliefs, the power of 'Yama', the god of death has been nullified in Puri due to the presence of Lord Jagannath.

This temple was called the "White Pagoda" and is a part of Char Dham pilgrimages (Badrinath, Dwaraka, Puri, Rameswaram).

The temple is known for its unique architecture, which includes a massive compound wall and a large temple complex with multiple towers, halls, and shrines.

The temple's main attraction is the Annual Rath Yatra festival, in which the three main deities of the temple, Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra are taken out in a grand procession on a chariot.

The temple is also known for its unique food offering, the Mahaprasad, which is prepared in the temple kitchen and is distributed among the devotees.

PRESS AND REGISTRATION OF PERIODICALS ACT, 2023

Context:

Draft press rules allow physical inspection of newspaper premises in 'exceptional' cases framed under the recently enacted Press and Periodicals Registration Act 2023.

About the Act:

1. Registration of periodicals: The Act provides for the registration of newspapers, periodicals, and books. It also provides for the cataloguing of books.

- The Act provides that a declaration specifying the printer/ publisher be made to the District Magistrate (DM). The DM sends the declaration to the Press Registrar, who then issues a certificate of registration. Making such declaration and authentication by the DM is necessary for the publication of the newspaper.
 - A person who has been convicted of a terrorist act or unlawful activity, or have acted against the security of the State will not be allowed to publish a periodical.
2. Foreign periodicals: An exact reproduction of a foreign periodical may be printed in India only with the prior approval of the central government.
 3. Press Registrar General: The Act provides for the central government to appoint a Press Registrar who maintains a register of newspapers.

Functions: The Act provides for the Press Registrar General of India who will

1. To issue registration certificates for all periodicals
2. Maintaining a register of periodicals
3. Making guidelines for the admissibility

of title of periodicals

4. Verifying circulation figures of prescribed periodicals
5. Revising, suspending, or cancelling registration.
4. Registration of a printing press: The Act requires a printing press to be declared before the DM.
5. Suspension and cancellation of registration: The Act allows the Press Registrar General to suspend a periodical's registration for a minimum period of 30 days which can extend to 180 days.
6. Penalties and appeal: The Act empowers the Press Registrar General to impose penalties for: (i) publishing periodicals without registration (up to five lakh rupees), (ii) failing to furnish annual statement within the specified time (up to Rs 20,000 on first default).
7. Any person may appeal against the refusal to issue a registration certificate, suspension/ cancellation of registration, or imposition of penalty. Such appeals may be filed before the Press and Registration Appellate Board within 60 days.

CONVENTION ON THE PREVENTION AND PUNISHMENT OF THE CRIME OF GENOCIDE/ GENOCIDE CONVENTION

Context:

International Court of Justice (ICJ) Says Israel Must Comply with Genocide Convention, but Stops Short of Halting Military Op in Gaza.

About:

It is an instrument of international law that codified for the first time the crime of genocide. The Genocide Convention was the first human rights treaty adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on 9 December 1948 and signified the international community's commitment to 'never again' after the atrocities

committed during the Second World War.

According to the Genocide Convention, genocide is a crime that can take place both in time of war as well as in time of peace. The definition of the crime of genocide, as set out in the Convention, has been widely adopted at both national and international levels, including in the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC).

Importantly, the Convention establishes on State Parties the obligation to take measures to prevent and to punish the crime of genocide,

including by enacting relevant legislation and punishing perpetrators, “whether they are constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private individuals”

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- a. Killing members of the group;
- b. Causing serious bodily or mental harm

to members of the group;

- c. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d. Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- e. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

PRITHVI INITIATIVE

Context:

Cabinet clears PRITHVI initiative for ease of research in earth sciences

About

The Union Cabinet recently approved the comprehensive scheme “PRITHvi VIgyan (PRITHVI)” by the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

PRITHVI scheme comprehensively addresses the five components of Earth System Sciences: atmosphere, hydrosphere, geosphere, cryosphere, and biosphere.

This holistic approach aims to enhance understanding and deliver reliable services for the country.

The funds at the disposal of the Ministry of Earth Sciences are Rs 4,797 crore which collates allocations to the sub-schemes. It encompasses five ongoing sub-schemes, namely:

1. ACROSS: Atmosphere and Climate Research-Modelling Observing Systems & Services.
2. O-SMART: Ocean Services, Modelling Application, Resources and Technology.
3. PACER: Polar Science and Cryosphere Research.
4. SAGE: Seismology and Geosciences
5. REACHOUT: Research, Education, Training and Outreach.

The major Objectives of the overarching Prithvi Scheme are:

- Augmentation and sustenance of long-term observations of the atmosphere, ocean, geosphere, cryosphere and solid earth to record the vital signs of the Earth System and change
- Development of modelling systems for understanding and predicting weather, ocean and climate hazards and understanding the science of climate change
- Exploration polar and high seas regions of the Earth towards discovery of new phenomena and resources;
- Development of technology for exploration and sustainable harnessing of oceanic resources for societal applications
- Translation of knowledge and insights from Earth systems science into services for societal, environmental and economic benefit.

Benefits of the scheme:

Ministry of Earth Sciences (MoES) is mandated to translate Science to Services for the Society in providing services for weather, climate, ocean and coastal state, hydrology, seismology, and natural hazards; to explore and harness marine living and non-living resources in a sustainable manner for the country and to explore the three poles of the

Earth (Arctic, Antarctic and Himalayas).

These services include weather forecasts (both on land and in the Oceans) and warnings for various natural disasters like tropical cyclones, storm surge, floods, heat waves, thunderstorm and lightning; alerts for Tsunamis and monitoring of

earthquakes, etc.

The services provided by the Ministry are being effectively used by different agencies and state governments for saving human lives and minimising damages to the properties due to natural disasters.

AADHAAR-BASED PAYMENT SYSTEM (ABPS)

Context:

The government has made the Aadhaar-based payment system (ABPS) system mandatory for disbursement of payments under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) scheme.

About:

Aadhaar Enabled Payment System finds its application in the bank led financial inclusion model. AEPS allows debits at micro-ATMS with Business correspondent of the bank using Aadhaar authentication.

AEPS empowers a bank customer to use Aadhaar as his/her identity to access his/ her respective Aadhaar-enabled bank account and perform basic banking transactions like cash withdrawal and intrabank or interbank fund transfer.

The following services can be carried out through AEPS

- Balance enquiry

- Cash withdrawal
- Cash Deposit
- Aadhaar to Aadhaar Fund Transfer
- Best Finger Detection (BFD)
- Mini statement

Note: APBS & AEPS (Aadhaar Payment Bridge System & Aadhaar Enabled Payment System)

Aadhaar Payment Bridge System (APBS) and Aadhaar Enabled Payment System (AEPS), leverage the power of the unique Aadhaar number issued by UIDAI (Unique Identification Authority of India).

AEPS and ABPS were introduced by NPCI for payment services. APBS enables the Government to make direct benefit transfers to the beneficiary's bank account, while AEPS supports a business correspondent to assist the user to withdraw or deposit money.

MAHARASHTRA GIVES OPTION FOR OPS

Context:

The Eknath Shinde-led Maharashtra Cabinet cleared a proposal that offers State government to give the old pension scheme option to those employees who joined government service on or after November 1, 2005 as per the advertisements before November 1, 2005.

About:

Old Pension Scheme:

Under the OPS, a government employee got

an assured monthly pension equivalent to 50% of their last drawn salary. There was no need for any contribution by employees. The OPS was discontinued in 2005.

To compensate price rise/inflation depending upon the Consumer Price Index two installments of Dearness Relief on the basic pension is given every year i.e. on 1st of January and 1st of July.

The government bears all the costs of the pension amount. The employee has no income tax benefit, but the pension amount is tax-exempt.

New Pension Scheme

Under the New Pension Scheme (NPS), a State government employee contributes 10% of their basic salary plus dearness allowance, with the State making a matching contribution. The money is then invested in one of the several pension funds approved by the Pension Fund Regulatory and Development Authority (PFRDA) and the returns are market-linked.

Employees can claim tax deductions of up to 1.5 lakh under Section 80C of income tax and up to Rs.50,000 on other investments under 80CCD (1b)

60% of the NPS corpus is tax-free, while the remaining 40% is taxable

Rationale Behind NPS Adoption

Pension Debt Sustainability: The OPS was a fiscal burden without accumulated funds, whereas the NPS relies on accumulated funds.

Addressing Ageing Population: With increasing life expectancy, the OPS became unsustainable.

Preventing Early Retirements: The NPS encourages longer service due to its long-term investment fund ideology.

Investment and Flexibility: NPS offers flexible investment options and the freedom to switch investment options and fund managers.

BHARATIYA NYAYA SANHITA (BNS)

CONTEXT:

The provision in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) that treats hit-and-run accident cases as an aggravated form of the offence of causing death by rashness or negligence will be the first in the new, yet-to-be implemented code to be scrutinised for its severity.

Hit-and-run Law:

The hit-and-run provision is part of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), which is set to replace the colonial-era Indian Penal Code, 1860.

Section 106 (2) of the BNS, 2023 stipulates a penalty of up to 10 years in jail and a fine for fleeing an accident spot and failing to report the incident to a police officer or a magistrate.

NEED FOR SUCH PROVISION:

The National Crime Records Bureau recorded 47,806 hit-and-run incidents which resulted in the deaths of 50,815 people in 2022.

In 2022, India recorded over 1.68 lakh road crash fatalities, averaging 462 deaths daily.

India experienced a 12% increase in road accidents and a 9.4% rise in fatalities, while global road crash deaths decreased by 5%.

India, with only 1% of the world's vehicles, contributes to about 10% of crash-related deaths and suffers an annual economic loss of 5-7% of its GDP due to road crashes.

Concerns of the Protesters:

Section 106 (2) of the BNS, 2023:

- Transporters and commercial drivers are demanding the withdrawal or amendment of Section 106 (2) of the BNS, 2023.
- Protesters argue that the prescribed penalties, including a 10-year imprisonment and Rs. 7 lakh fine, are excessively severe.
- The widely circulated view that Section 106 (2) of the BNS stipulates imprisonment of up to 10 years and a fine of Rs. 7 lakh for fleeing an accident spot and failing to report the incident to a police officer/magistrate is grossly incorrect.
- While this Section discusses a maximum punishment of 10 years and a fine, there is no actual mention in the BNS about the fine being Rs 7 lakh.

BILKIS BANO CASE

CONTEXT:

The Supreme Court on Monday struck down the remission granted by the Gujarat government to 11 convicts who were serving life imprisonment for the gangrape of Bilkis Bano during the communal riots in Gujarat in 2002.

The Bench of Justice B V Nagarathna and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan said that the Gujarat government did not have the authority or jurisdiction to consider the remission applications of the convicts, to reduce their sentence.

BACKGROUND:

Lack of Authority and Concealed Facts:

The Court emphasized that the Gujarat government lacked the authority or jurisdiction

at a reduced point. Remission is distinct from both furlough and parole in that it is a reduction in sentence as opposed to a break from prison life.

In remission, the nature of the sentence remains untouched, while the duration is reduced i.e., the rest of the sentence need not be undergone.

However, in case of breach of any of the conditions of remission, it will be cancelled, and the offender has to serve the entire term for which he was originally sentenced.

Constitutional Provisions:

The scope of the pardoning power of the President under Article 72 is wider than the pardoning power of the Governor under Article 161.

PRESIDENT	GOVERNOR
Under Article 72, the President can grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any person.	Under Article 161, a Governor can grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment, or suspend, remit or commute the sentence.
The punishment or sentence is by a court-martial, the sentence is for an offence under any law relating to the Union government's executive power, and in all cases of death sentences.	This can be done for anyone convicted under any law on a matter which comes under the State's executive power.

to issue the remission orders.

Under Section 432 of the CrPC, state governments do have the power to suspend or remit a sentence. But the court noted that Section 7(b) of the law clearly states that the appropriate government is the one in whose jurisdiction the offender is sentenced.

It pointed out that the decision to grant remission should be within the domain of the state where the convicts were sentenced, not where the crime occurred or where they were imprisoned.

REMISSION:

Remission is the complete ending of a sentence

Statutory Power of Remission:

The Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) provides for remission of prison sentences, which means the whole or a part of the sentence may be cancelled.

Under Section 432, the 'appropriate government' may suspend or remit a sentence, in whole or in part, with or without conditions.

Under Section 433, any sentence may be commuted to a lesser one by the appropriate government.

This power is available to State governments so that they may order the release of prisoners

before they complete their prison terms.

IMPORTANT JUDGEMENTS:

Laxman Naskar v. State of West Bengal (2000)

The grant of remission can be given under

certain grounds.

Epuru Sudhakar v. State of AP (2006)

The grant of remission can be judicially reviewed.

PLACES OF WORSHIP ACT, 1991

CONTEXT:

Calls to hand over the Gyanvapi mosque to the Hindus have come even after appeals by the Anjuman Intazamia Masjid in the Supreme Court to protect the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act of 1991 from becoming a dead letter.

Places of Worship Act:

It was enacted to freeze the status of religious places of worship as they existed on August 15, 1947, and prohibits the conversion of any place of worship and ensures the maintenance of their religious character.

Major Provisions of the Act:

Prohibition of Conversion:

Prevents the conversion of a place of worship, whether in full or part, from one religious' denomination to another or within the same denomination.

Maintenance of Religious Character:

Ensures that the religious identity of a place of worship remains the same as it was on August 15, 1947.

Abatement of Pending Cases:

Declares that any ongoing legal proceedings concerning the conversion of a place of worship's religious character before August 15, 1947, will be terminated, and no new cases can be initiated.

Exceptions to the Act (Section 5):

- The Act does not apply to ancient and historical monuments, archaeological sites, and remains covered by the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.
- It also excludes cases that have already been settled or resolved and disputes that have been resolved by mutual agreement or conversions that occurred before the Act came into effect.
- The Act does not extend to the specific place of worship known as Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, including any legal proceedings associated with it.

Penalties (Section 6):

Specifies penalties, including a maximum imprisonment term of three years and fines, for violating the Act

BANGLA URGES FOR CLASSICAL LANGUAGE STATUS

Context:

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said she has written to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and urged him to include 'Bangla' as a classical language.

About:

Classical Language:

The Indian classical languages, or the Shastriya Bhasha, is an umbrella term for the languages of India having high antiquity, and valuable, original and distinct literary heritage.

Currently, six languages enjoy the 'Classical' status: Tamil (declared in 2004), Sanskrit (2005),

Kannada (2008), Telugu (2008), Malayalam (2013), and Odia (2014).

Criteria:

According to information provided by the Ministry of Culture in the Rajya Sabha in February 2014, the guidelines for declaring a language as 'Classical' are:

1. High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500-2000 years;
2. A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generations of speakers;
3. The literary tradition be original and not borrowed from another speech community;
4. The classical language and literature being distinct from modern, there may also be a discontinuity between the classical language and its later forms or its offshoots.

Benefits:

The benefits it provides once a language is notified as a Classical language:

1. Two major annual international awards for scholars of eminence in classical Indian languages.
2. A Centre of Excellence for studies in Classical Languages is set up.
3. The University Grants Commission is requested to create, to start with at least in the Central Universities, a certain number of Professional Chairs for the Classical Languages so declared."

Bengali language:

Bengali, apart from being the national language of a country, an official language of our State and the second most spoken language in India, is also the seventh most spoken language in the world. The Bengali people have a rich heritage and culture dating back to prehistoric times.

It is the official language of the Indian states of West Bengal and Tripura and the Barak Valley region of the state of Assam. It is also the second official language of the Indian state of Jharkhand

since September 2011.

It is the most widely spoken language in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, and is spoken by significant populations in other states including Bihar, Arunachal Pradesh, Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Odisha and Uttarakhand. In Pakistan, Bengali is a recognised secondary language in the city of Karachi.

It is an Indo Aryan language native to the Bengal region of South Asia

There had always been claims to the antiquity of the Bengali language, but concrete research was not present to scientifically substantiate the claim. Now, there are concrete evidence-based research to prove that Bengali as a language existed, even in writing, as early as 3rd-4th BCE.

Important literatures of the Bengali language:

In South Asia, Bengali literature became emblematic of Indian literature as a whole through the success of its poets and novelists.

Bengali intellectuals were the first to import literary forms such as the novel and sonnet in India.

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was the first non-western author to be awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 1913. His art and philosophy deeply influenced artists and intellectuals worldwide.

The first works in Bengali appeared between 10th and 12th centuries C.E. It is generally known as the Charyapada and are 47 mystic hymns composed by various Buddhist monks,

Medieval Bengali literature is also one of the richest of the subcontinent. It became the medium of many religious traditions (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam) and it was in dialog with several other literary traditions (Sanskrit, Persian, Hindi...).

Romesh Chunder Dutt and Mir Mosharrif Hossain are notable for their works of fiction. Girish Chandra Ghosh and Dwijendralal Ray were prominent playwrights of the time, whereas Akshay Kumar Boral and Ramendra Sundar Tribedi are famous for their influential essays. Rassundari Devi authored the first full-

fledged autobiography in modern Bengali literature in 1876

The national anthems of both Bangladesh (Amar Sonar Bangla) and India (Jana Gana Mana) were written in Bengali by the Bengali Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Additionally, the first two verses of Vande Mataram, a patriotic song written in Bengali by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, was adopted as the “national song” of India in both the colonial period and later in 1950 in independent India.

Around 1970s, West Bengali writers like Sunil Gangopadhyay, Samaresh Majumdar, and Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay, wrote with a fresh view of West Bengal in the era of globalization.

Gangasagar Mela

Banerjee also urged the Prime Minister to recognise Gangasagar Mela as a National Fair

and invited him to visit this year.

Gangasagar Mela is a mela and festival in Hinduism, held every year at Gangasagar, West Bengal, India. The confluence of the Ganges and the Bay of Bengal is called the Gangasagar, the fair is held every year on Makar Sankranti at Kapilmuni's ashram located on the Gangasagar. The mela is celebrated on 14 or 15 January every year

The Gangasagar pilgrimage is also mentioned in Raghuvamśa, a Sanskrit epic poem written by the great poet Kalidasa in the fifth century AD.

Also, King Devapala of the Pala dynasty mentions in an inscription that he performed rituals at the confluence of the Gangasagar

PROBITY IN CIVIL SERVICES

Probity in governance refers to the adherence to the highest standards of integrity, honesty, and ethical behaviour in the conduct of public affairs. It encompasses principles such as transparency, accountability, fairness, and responsibility in decision-making processes and actions undertaken by government officials and institutions.

When probity is upheld in governance, it ensures that public resources are used efficiently and responsibly, that public officials act in the best interest of the citizens they serve, and that there is trust and confidence in the government and its institutions.

One of the best examples for probity in governance are the actions and leadership of S. Venkitaramanan during India's 1991 crisis:

1. Integrity and Ethical Conduct: Venkitaramanan exhibited integrity and ethical conduct by taking decisive actions to address the severe balance of payments stress facing India. He didn't shy away from difficult decisions, such as pledging the country's gold reserves

2. Transparency and Accountability: Venkitaramanan displayed transparency and accountability by openly communicating with stakeholders, including economists critical of RBI policies. His invitation to meet with a diverse group of economists to discuss measures taken to address the crisis demonstrated a commitment to openness and dialogue.

3. Responsibility and Courage: It is well known today how a concatenation of events, such as the first breakdown of the USSR, the first Gulf War and a slowdown in Europe, threw India into its worst-ever BoP crisis, with just \$ 1.1 billion of forex reserves and how Venkitaramanan (along with Prime Minister Chandrasekhar and Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha), saved the country by taking a bold decision to pledge gold to raise \$500 million thereby secure hard currency loans, despite facing criticism and skepticism from some quarters.

4. Adherence to the Rule of Law: Venkitaramanan's actions were in line with the principles of the rule of law, as he utilized legal mechanisms,

such as pledging reserves, to address the crisis within the framework of established regulations and international agreements.

5. Promotion of National Interest: Throughout the crisis, Venkitaramanan prioritized the national interest, ensuring that India's prestige and financial credentials were safeguarded. His focus on maintaining India's reputation as a reliable counterparty in business transactions underscored his commitment to serving the broader interests of the nation.

6. A Visionary: Most in the government did not even want to think of a default, but Governor Venkitaramanan had ordered that technical work on disaster management be undertaken by the RBI in secret, so that we were not unprepared if matters went out of control. When the debate about current account convertibility was on, Venkitaramanan was on the side of caution in permitting import of capital goods under the head as it could lead to a sudden spike in the demand for US dollar.

Venkitaramanan's leadership during the 1991 crisis exemplifies probity

in governance through his adherence to ethical principles, transparency in decision-making, responsibility in addressing challenges, and unwavering commitment to

promoting the national interest.

Venkataramanan's leadership traits included a sharp mind, the ability to cut through complex problems, a willingness to listen to diverse

viewpoints, and courage in making crucial decisions. He was also known for his humility and simplicity, as well as his dedication to public service.



INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



What's Inside?

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IRAN -PAKISTAN CONFLICT

Context:

Iran launched missile strikes on three different countries this week - Iraq, Syria and Pakistan - while proxy militant groups it backs continue to target U.S. and Western interests and fight Israel, stoking fears of conflict that could engulf the Middle East and spread to other regions.

About:

Recently, the relationship between Iran and Pakistan has taken serious hits over Iranian missiles and drones that struck two alleged bases of the Jaish al-Adl (JAA), an anti-Iran Baloch militant group, in Pakistan's Balochistan province. Iranian missiles and drones hit targets in Panjgur in Pakistan's Balochistan province.

Pakistan reacted strongly to the "blatant breach" of its sovereignty and carried out its own cross-border missile strikes on alleged terrorist sanctuaries in Iran.

The JAA came under the scanner of Indian security agencies following the abduction of an Indian, Kulbhushan Jadhav. The group allegedly traded Jadhav to Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI).

What is Jaish al-Adl?

- Jaish al-Adl, or the Army of Justice, is a Sunni Militant group that emerged in 2012. It is primarily composed of members from the ethnic Baluch community, residing on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan border.
- The group is considered an offshoot of the Jundullah

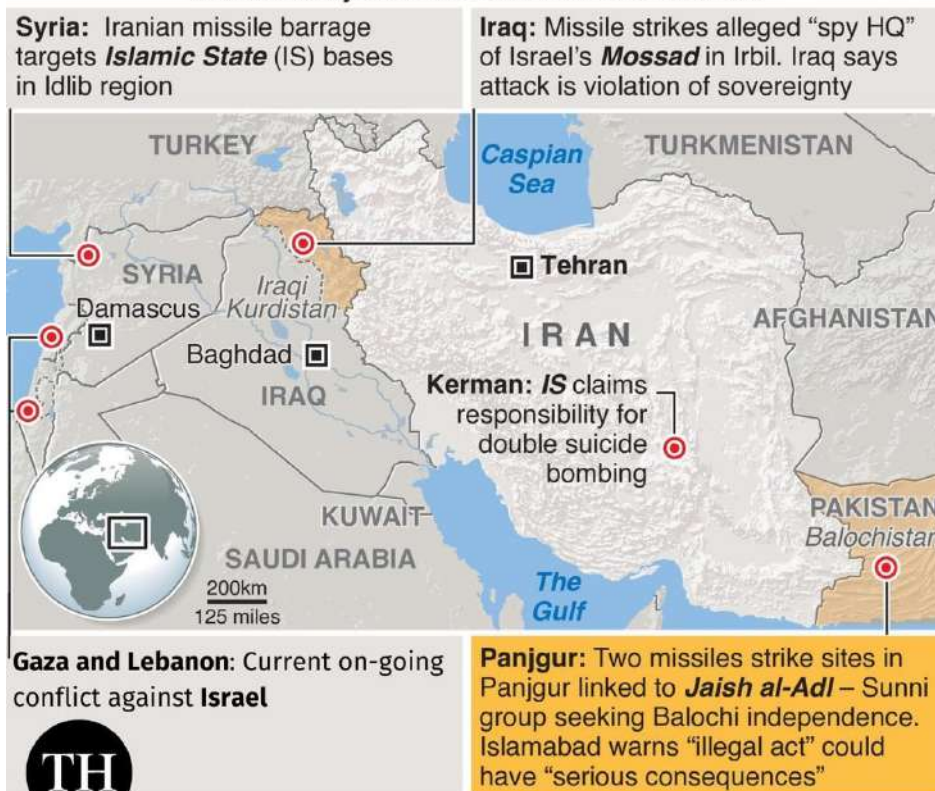
organisation, which saw its strength diminish after Iran arrested many of its members.

• Jaish al-Adl's main objectives include seeking independence for Iran's eastern Sistan province and Pakistan's southwestern Baluchistan province. These goals, advocating for the rights of the Baluch people, make the group a common target for both the Iranian and Pakistani governments.

- The ethnic Baluch

Iran hits Pakistan in new reprisal strike

Iran has carried out a third strike in reprisal for the January 3 terror attack in Kerman that killed over 80 people, while the world remains distracted by events in Gaza and the Red Sea



community faces discrimination in both Iran and Pakistan, with concerns about a lack of fair distribution of resources and wealth in their respective provinces. Baluch separatists and nationalists demand a more equitable share and often resort to insurgency as a means of expressing their grievances.

- The group's presence in Balochistan, particularly in the border regions, has been a source of tension between Iran and Pakistan.
- Both countries have a history of suspicion and accusations regarding each other's involvement in supporting militant activities.

Relationship between Iran and Pakistan:

- Before the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, both countries (Iran and Pakistan) were firmly allied to the United States.
- They had joined the Baghdad Pact in 1955 which later became known as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), a military alliance modeled on NATO.
- Iran went from being an ally to a sworn enemy of the United States almost overnight, the Americans embraced Pakistan closer.
- Since 1979, has been a major reason for the Iranian distrust of Pakistan, which increased after 09/11 as Islamabad extended unqualified support to the US "War on Terror".
- Iran's post-1979 foreign policy, which focused on exporting the revolution, made its Arab neighbours nervous.
- The Islamic Revolution in Iran led to the rise of an ultra-conservative Shiite regime under Ayatollah Khomeini. This was concurrent with Pakistan's own Islamization under military dictator General Zia-ul-Haq.
- The two countries found themselves on

opposite ends of the sectarian divide.

- Iran and Pakistan found themselves on opposite sides in Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal.

The Balochistan problem:

- Balochistan is a historical region in Western and South Asia, located in the Iranian plateau's far southeast and bordering the Indian Plate and the Arabian Sea coastline.
- This arid region of desert and mountains is primarily populated by ethnic Baloch people.
- The Balochistan region is split among three countries: Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- It comprises of:
 - The Pakistani province of Balochistan,
 - The Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchestan, and
 - Southern areas of Afghanistan, which include Nimruz, Helmand and Kandahar provinces.



The 909-km Iran-Pakistan border, known as the Goldsmith Line which stretches from a tripoint with Afghanistan to the northern Arabian Sea.

Roughly 9 million ethnic Baloch live on either side of the line i.e. in the Pakistani province of Balochistan and the Iranian province of Sistan and Baluchistan.

Another 500,000 live in the neighboring areas of Afghanistan in the north.

The Baloch homeland is rich in natural resources, but economic disparities persist. In Iran, a significant portion of the Baloch population lives under the poverty line.

The marginalisation of the Baloch people in both Iran and Pakistan has fueled separatist movements seeking a “Greater Balochistan” nation-state.

Baloch insurgents operate on both sides of the Iran-Pakistan border, attacking military and occasionally civilian targets.

Insurgents, affiliated with groups like the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF), have been involved in armed struggles against the respective states.

Impact on India

Affects Chabahar Project: The Chabahar port project located in Iran’s Sistan-Baluchistan province may be affected due to the instability.

Spillover Effect: The clashes between Iran and Pakistan may escalate into a war, and may have a spillover effect in the South Asia region.

India’s Interests in Afghanistan: The clashes

may spread to Afghanistan where India has stakes in developmental projects.

Security Crisis in Pakistan: India would not want nuclear weapons to proliferate into the hands of non-state actors in case the state of Pakistan collapses.

Increase in Militancy in Jammu and Kashmir: Pakistan may escalate militancy in Jammu and Kashmir in order to divert attention of its citizens during election year.

India’s Stance over the Faceoff Between Pakistan and Iran

India emphasised its “uncompromising position of zero tolerance towards Terrorism.” This statement underscores India’s consistent stance against terrorism, aligning with its long-standing concerns regarding cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan.

India acknowledged and expressed an understanding of “actions that countries take in their self-defence.” It suggests a recognition of the complex security dynamics in the region and a cautious approach to the actions taken by countries to address their security concerns.

UN RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINIANS (UNRWA)

Context:

Britain, Italy, Finland pause funding for UN agency in Gaza

About:

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is a UN agency that supports the relief and human development of Palestinian refugees.

UNRWA was established in 1949 by the UN General Assembly (UNGA) to provide relief to all refugees resulting from the 1948 conflict. It also provided relief to Jewish and Arab Palestine refugees inside the State of

Israel following the 1948 conflict until the Israeli government took over responsibility for them in 1952.

UNRWA operates in five areas: Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

UNRWA is the only UN agency dedicated to helping refugees from a specific region or conflict. Unlike UNRWA, UNHCR has a specific mandate to assist refugees in eliminating their refugee status by local integration in the current country, resettlement in a third country or repatriation when possible.

DISPUTE SETTLEMENT MECHANISM AT WTO

Context:

US blocks fresh proposal to restart dispute settlement mechanism at WTO. This is the 73rd occasion when a proposal moved by Guatemala, a Central American country, on behalf of 130 members was not able to launch the selection processes.

About:

The dispute settlement mechanism (DSM) in the World Trade Organization (WTO) is a key component of the organization's framework, designed to resolve disputes between member countries regarding the interpretation and application of the WTO agreements.

1. **Consultations:** The first step in the dispute settlement process involves consultations between the parties involved. The complaining party (the country initiating the dispute) requests consultations with the respondent party (the country against whom the complaint is made) to discuss and try to resolve the issue bilaterally.
2. **Panel Establishment:** If consultations fail to resolve the dispute, the complaining party can request the establishment of a panel to examine the matter further. The Dispute Settlement Body (DSB) usually grants this request. The General Council convenes as the DSB to deal with disputes between WTO members. The DSB has authority to:
 - establish dispute settlement panels,
 - refer matters to arbitration,
 - adopt panel, Appellate Body and arbitration reports,
 - maintain surveillance over the implementation of recommendations and rulings contained in such reports; and
 - authorized suspension of concessions

in the event of non-compliance with those recommendations and rulings.

The panel is composed of independent experts who review the case, hear arguments from both sides, and issue a ruling on whether the respondent's measures are consistent with WTO agreements.

3. **Panel Report and Adoption:** The panel submits a report to the parties involved, detailing its findings and conclusions. The report is also circulated to all WTO members. If either party disagrees with the panel's findings, they can appeal the decision to the WTO's Appellate Body.

4. Appellate Body Review:

Either party can appeal certain issues of law and legal interpretations contained in the panel report to the WTO's Appellate Body. The Appellate Body, composed of seven members, reviews the legal aspects of the

WTO'S APPELLATE BODY

- The Appellate Body is the apex institution for adjudicating trade disputes
- The Appellate Body was established in 1995 under Article 17 of the Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes (DSU).
- It is a **standing body of seven persons** that hears appeals from reports issued by panels in disputes brought by WTO Members. *The members of Appellate body serve for a four-year term.*
- It can uphold, modify or reverse the legal findings and conclusions of a panel, and Appellate Body Reports, once adopted by the DSB, must be accepted by the parties to the dispute.
- The Appellate Body has its seat in Geneva, Switzerland.

case and issues a final decision.

However, the Appellate Body has been unable

to function fully due to a lack of sufficient members, which has led to concerns about the functioning of the dispute settlement mechanism.

Implementation of Ruling: Once the rulings are adopted (either by the DSB if no appeal is made, or after the Appellate Body decision), the respondent country is expected to bring its measures into compliance with WTO rules. If it fails to do so, the complaining party can request authorization from the DSB to impose retaliatory measures.

Issues associated with Appellate body of WTO:

The US has been blocking the appointment of new judges to the WTO's seven-member appellate court since 2017 on grounds of judicial activism at the WTO and concerns over US sovereignty.

The lack of a functional Appellate Body is concerning as global trade is already slowing with growing geo-political tensions. Moreover, developed countries are turning inward with the introduction of several environment related trade measures such as carbon tax which could hurt India's trade prospects.

A proposal moved by Guatemala, a Central American country, backed by 130 World Trade Organization (WTO) members to restart the selection processes for filling vacancies on WTO's Appellate Body was shot down by the United States

This comes ahead of the 13th ministerial conference (MC) of the WTO in Abu Dhabi on February 26-29 where India is set to bat for a resolution of the system.

The US repeated that it does not support the proposed decision to commence the appointment of Appellate Body members as its longstanding concerns with WTO dispute settlement remain unaddressed.

At the 12th WTO ministerial meeting, countries resolved to create a fully functioning DSM by 2024. As part of this decision, India and several developing countries have rightly

demanded the body's restoration.

Options available for developing countries:

Developing countries face three options to maintain a two-tiered DSM at the WTO. i.e., refers to a system that includes two stages of dispute resolution: a panel stage and an appellate stage.

1. Joining the European Union-led Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA),
2. Accepting a diluted appellate body
3. Resurrecting the original appellate body with an opt-out provision.

The first option is to join the European Union-led multi-party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement (MPIA), which formalizes the mechanism for arbitration already available under the WTO to provide the appellate review for panel reports. The MPIA's procedure is quite like the one that the AB followed. However, there are two downsides. First, its voluntary nature means that each MPIA tribunal would be an ad hoc one. Second, though MPIA awards are binding on the parties to the dispute, unlike the AB ruling, they are not required to be adopted by all WTO members. This means that all MPIA rulings would remain ad hoc, unlike the AB, whose rulings set a body of jurisprudence that subsequent panels have frequently relied on to ensure certainty and predictability in dispute settlement.

The second option is a diluted AB. While the US has so far opposed the AB in principle, it may consider an AB with limited powers. The powers of the AB can be truncated in various ways, such as requiring it to be largely deferential to the parties to the dispute, stating that AB rulings will not have a persuasive value, etc. But a diluted AB will be antithetical to the role that WTO law expects the DSM to play: To provide security and predictability to the multilateral trading regime. It will also be inimical to the interests of countries like India. Even if the US does not like AB's

jurisprudence, the fact remains that the AB, over the years, has clarified the meaning of WTO law.

There is a third interim option, is to resurrect AB in the same form as it existed till 2019, but with one important change — countries will have the option to opt out of AB's compulsory jurisdiction. A country opting out cannot participate in an appellate process either as a complainant or as a respondent. Thus, if the US opts out of the appellate mechanism, any country with a dispute against the US would have to settle for only a single-tier panel jurisdiction over such disputes. But there would be a functional AB for all other disputes. But, this will change the intrinsic nature of a two-tier binding DSM

and, more importantly, keep the US — one of the WTO's most frequent litigators — outside the appellate mechanism's purview. But this is a price that one might have to pay to safeguard the AB in its current form. The US not joining the AB will not undermine its prominence. The non-compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), for example, hasn't diminished its legitimacy and stature.

India and other developing countries should continue striving for the ideal solution: The restoration of the AB in the form it existed till 2019. However, if India is pushed to the wall to choose between the status quo and an AB for only willing countries, the latter, not the former, will be preferable.

DAVOS SUMMIT, WEF

CONTEXT:

The 54th annual meeting of the Geneva-based WEF will begin on Jan 15 to January 19.

HIGHLIGHTS:

Around 28% of the total of 3,000 participants, including 350 heads of state and government and ministers, who gathered in Davos this year were women.

“This year marks a significant milestone in the 54-year history of the Annual Meeting, as we expect to welcome more than 800 women to Davos — the highest number in our records.

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM:

The WEF is a Swiss non-profit foundation established in 1971, based in Geneva, Switzerland.

Committed to improving the state of the world by engaging business, political, academic, and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

Artificial Intelligence

The report also found that generative AI could

enable labour productivity growth of 0.1 to 0.6% annually through 2040.

AI Governance Alliance

The AI Governance Alliance brings together leaders from across industry, government, academia and civil society to champion responsible global design and release of transparent and inclusive AI systems.

Climate

Renewable capacity must increase threefold in the next six years to meet climate and energy security goals.

The Global Collaboration Village is a purpose-driven platform powered by next-generation technology, that brings leaders together to solve real-world problems through the collaborative potential of extended reality.

Security and cooperation

Business leaders spoke of the risks posed by fragile geopolitical situations in various parts of the world - wars in the Middle East and Europe, the threats to global supply chains, and the uncertainty around food security.

Yet, no plans or roadmaps for peace were

offered about the Israel-Gaza violence.

China's economy

Facing a slowing economy, China tried to attract more investment from the West, which has witnessed some cooling.

At 5.2%, China's GDP growth in 2023 is still below pre-pandemic levels, and it is battling American attempts to isolate it, as evidenced in the semiconductor trade standoff.

Meeting held that China is experiencing very significant structural economic challenges. A lot of companies in the West are no longer investing what they used to invest.

But even 3%-4% growth in China is still fairly meaningful for a lot of companies that are attending the WEF summit.

India

Davos' meeting highlights that India is transforming rapidly as one of the fastest growing large economies in the world. India also made its presence felt in ways other than its economic potential.

When it comes to technology, talent, healthcare, and other areas, its future in 2024 and beyond, is worth paying attention to.

ECOWAS

CONTEXT:

The military regimes in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger announced on Sunday their immediate withdrawal from the West African bloc ECOWAS.

What is the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)?

integration, cooperation, and development among West African nations.

- The Secretariat, headquartered in Abuja, Nigeria.

Member States:

ECOWAS consists of 15-member states: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d' Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Senegal, and Togo.



Objectives:

1. Promoting economic integration among member states.
2. Facilitating the free movement of people, goods, and services.
3. Enhancing regional cooperation in various sectors, including industry, transport, energy, and finance.

About:

- The ECOWAS, also known as CEDEAO in French, is a regional intergovernmental organization established in 1975.
- Created through the Lagos Treaty, ECOWAS aims to foster economic

4. Fostering a borderless region governed by democratic principles, the rule of law, and good governance.
5. Addressing security and political challenges through collaboration and conflict resolution.

INDIA – BANGLADESH TIES

Context:

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina returned to power in Bangladesh for a historic fourth straight term earlier this month after her party, the Awami League, secured two-thirds of the seats in the January 7 national elections. The elections saw an abysmal 40% voter turnout, marked by the Opposition's boycott and sporadic incidents of violence.

“people-centric partnership” and illustrating the close bilateral relationship between the South Asian neighbours.

The dynamics in relations over the period:

India's relationship with Bangladesh is anchored *in common history, heritage, culture and geographical proximity*, the foundation of

India is a cornerstone of the foreign policy of Bangladesh.”

Despite this, relations soured within a few years as military regimes took control. There was a rise in anti-India sentiment in the mid-1970s over issues ranging from boundary disputes and insurgency to the sharing of water. The instability continued for a few decades until Sheikh Hasina stormed to power in 1996 and scripted a new chapter in bilateral ties *with a treaty on the sharing of Ganga waters*. She returned for a second term in 2009, and bilateral relations between the two governments further improved following a slew of measures.

Ms. Hasina visited India in 2010, followed by then PM Manmohan Singh's historic tour to Dhaka in 2011. *India announced duty-free access to several Bangladesh products and a Framework for Cooperation pact* cemented their trade partnership.

Addressing India's security concerns about insurgency and extremism, she ordered a crackdown on anti-India groups, shut down terror camps and handed over “most-wanted” terrorists and criminals to India. Her government *also enforced stricter border controls to check the influx of illegal migrants*.

The then PM Manmohan



In the light of these happenings the discussion about the India-Bangladesh ties is important.

Shortly after the results were announced, Ms. Hasina expressed her gratitude to “trusted friend” India, while PM Narendra Modi was among the first world leaders to congratulate the 76-year-old leader, underlining New Delhi's commitment to deepening the

which was laid in the *1971 Bangladesh Liberation War*.

India provided critical military and material support to assist Bangladesh in its fight for independence from Pakistan. This became a primary factor in shaping the newly independent nation's policy, as acknowledged by ‘Bangabandhu’ Sheikh Mujibur Rahman: *“Friendship with*

Singh and his Bangladeshi counterpart Sheikh Hasina exchange signed agreements during a meeting in Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2011.

Relations after 2014 (For the Last Decade)

The relationship gained momentum after the NDA came to power in 2014. India and Bangladesh gradually expanded their partnership to strengthen cooperation in trade, development and water-sharing.

The two countries successfully resolved long-pending issues, like the **land boundary agreement (LBA) in 2015 and a maritime dispute over territorial waters.**

During Sheikh Hasina's visit to India in September 2022, India and Bangladesh inked *an agreement on the sharing of the waters of the common border river Koshiyara* — the first such pact since the Ganga Waters Treaty of 1996. PM Modi termed the period a '*Shonali Adhyaya*' or golden chapter in diplomacy.

PM Narendra Modi and Bangladesh's Sheikh Hasina jointly inaugurate **the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline (IBFP) from Siliguri to Parbatipur** via video conferencing.

Bangladesh, as India's immediate neighbour in the East, plays a crucial role in its strategic plans. Sharing 54 rivers and a 4,096-km border, the India-Bangladesh border is

the longest land boundary India has with any of its neighbours.

Trade and Commerce:

Bilateral trade between India and Bangladesh has grown steadily over the last decade. ***Bangladesh has emerged as India's largest trade partner in South Asia***, with bilateral trade reaching \$18 billion in 2021-2022 from \$10.8 billion in 2020-21, though there was a dip in 2022-23 when the trade dropped to \$14.2 billion due to the COVID pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war.

Reflective of the growing trust between the two nations, Bangladesh ***started using rupees in its trade transactions with India*** last year to reduce dependence on the U.S. dollar and strengthen regional currency.

India is also the second biggest trade partner of Bangladesh, with exports amounting to \$2 billion in Indian markets.

With the continuation of the previous regime in Bangladesh, New Delhi and Dhaka are poised ***to take forward discussions on a free trade agreement*** to enhance their economic partnership and boost investments.

In 2022, both nations successfully concluded a ***joint feasibility study on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA)***. The agreement, typically designed to reduce or eliminate customs duties on traded goods and simplify trade

norms, is anticipated to open up broader social and economic opportunities, ultimately raising living standards in both countries. The CEPA gains additional significance as Bangladesh is set to lose its Least Developed Country (LDC) status after 2026, thereby losing its duty-free and quota-free market access in India.

Dhaka will be eager to finalise a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with New Delhi, ***yet pursue the China-backed Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)***. This dual approach raises concerns for India, as the dynamics of regional economic partnerships continue to evolve.

The two countries are members of various regional trade agreements such as

the Asia Pacific Trade Agreement (APTA),

the SAARC Preferential Trade Agreement (SAPTA) and

the Agreement on South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA)

which govern the tariff regimes for trade.

Bangladesh is also part of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) which has its headquarters in Dhaka. The group is a multilateral regional organisation established to improve cooperation between littoral and adjacent countries in the Bay of Bengal region.

As for informal trade, more border haats are likely to come

up as the two countries have emphasised the potential of weekly markets and expressed willingness to set up over 15 new haats on the border.

India will play a crucial role as Ms. Hasina works to get Bangladesh's sputtering economy back to achieve the country's vision of attaining upper middle-income status by 2031.

Security

India and Bangladesh have established an annual Coordinated Patrol (CORPAT) as a joint initiative between their navies.

India also signed an Extradition Treaty with Bangladesh in January 2013 to ensure a proactive role in dealing with security concerns with each other.

Regional connectivity for a stronger South Asia

The two countries have revived old railway links and taken up several new multifaceted projects under the leadership of PM Hasina in the past decade to expand bilateral and sub-regional connectivity, aligning perfectly with India's vision to develop the Northeast and foster integration across South and Southeast Asia. The Khulna-Mongla Port rail link is another project constructed with financial assistance from India.

As a "major development partner" of Bangladesh, India is funding several infrastructure

and connectivity projects. Since 2010, India has extended Lines of Credits worth over \$7 billion.

PM Modi and Sheikh Hasina made history last year when they inaugurated the Akhaura-Agartala rail link that connects Bangladesh and the northeast through Tripura. The link has given India access to Chattogram and Mongla ports in Bangladesh for the movement of cargo. It is likely to boost small-scale industries and develop Assam and Tripura.

As for passenger trains, there are three routes operational at present. The Maitree Express connecting Kolkata with Dhaka was started in 2008 after a hiatus of over 40 years. Later, the Kolkata-Khulna Bandhan Express and New Jalpaiguri-Dhaka Mitali Express were added to the network. A cross-border bus service operates from Shillong, Agartala and Kolkata to Dhaka.

India is also collaborating with Bangladesh to upgrade the India-Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) route and the Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWT&T) for transport of cargo.

The BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity focuses on connecting major transport projects in India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand, thereby establishing a shipping network.

The Hasina government has also expressed its eagerness to partner in the ongoing India-Myanmar-Thailand

trilateral project — a 1,400-km highway that will link India with Southeast Asia by land.

India's attention will primarily be directed towards the Matarbari Port, located about 100 km from Tripura, which Bangladesh is building with Japanese assistance. The port, pitched as a "game changer," will establish a crucial industrial corridor linking Dhaka and the northeast part of India.

Regional Energy security

In the energy sector, Bangladesh imports nearly 2,000 megawatts of electricity from India. The joint venture of the Maitree Super Thermal Power Project in Rampal began commercial production last year. India also extended financial assistance for the construction of the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline for the supply of diesel from Siliguri to Parbatipur.

Power transmission between the two countries takes place through interconnections like the Berhampur-Bheramara interconnection and Suraj Mani Nagar-Comilla interconnection.

India, Russia, and Bangladesh signed an agreement to construct the Rooppur atomic plant in Bangladesh.

Cultural Exchange:

The High Commission of India has been publishing the Bengali literary monthly magazine 'Bharat Bichitra'

in both print and electronic editions for the past 43 years.

This magazine is highly regarded in Bangladesh and enjoys a large readership across different sections of society.

The Indira Gandhi Cultural Centre conducts regular training courses in various disciplines such as Yoga, Hindi language, Hindustani Classical Music, Manipuri Dance, Kathak, and Painting. These courses are well-received by Bangladeshi students and have gained popularity.

Concerns and Disputes

Teesta Dispute:

The issue revolves around the sharing of Teesta's waters, with Bangladesh seeking an equitable distribution. Back in 2011, during PM Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka, objections from West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee derailed a budding deal. China later stepped in with a river management proposal, seizing an opportunity in the absence of an Indian agreement.

Rohinya Issue

Another contentious matter on the table is the Rohingya issue. New Delhi and Dhaka hold differing stances on this humanitarian crisis. The Hasina government aims for peaceful repatriation to Myanmar, but its talks with the military junta have been unsuccessful so far.

Bangladesh seeks India's cooperation to influence

Myanmar, but the current Modi government, maintaining ties with the junta, asserts that it will deport Rohingyas from its mainland.

Security Issues

Cross-border terrorism, infiltration, and human trafficking are additional threats to internal security. Around 60% of the border is fenced and a large section of the border runs through rivers, fishponds, farming lands, villages... Thus, guarding the border zones is not simple due to improper roads and difficult terrains. Consequently, it becomes easier for illegal groups to misappropriate these porous stretches.

The rise of majoritarian forces adds another layer to the complex landscape. While violence against Muslims has increased in India in the past few years, PM Hasina has stood at the forefront to condemn the attacks and express displeasure over comments by Indian leaders on "illegal" immigrants.

The China Issue

Beijing has significantly expanded its footprint in small South Asian countries with its Belt and Road infrastructure initiative.

Dhaka joined Beijing's BRI in 2016. China is building infrastructure that includes bridges, power plants and rail projects in Bangladesh. China is also Bangladesh's key supplier of military hardware.

Some projects that are dual use in nature have raised questions in New Delhi. Beijing is building a submarine base in Bangladesh and has supplied two submarines to Dhaka

Way Forward

Analysts said that Hasina's continuation in Bangladesh is a relief for New Delhi, which recently saw a pro-China government take office in the Maldives, straining ties with the archipelago nation.

Bangladesh is also crucial to the security of India's remote northeastern states where insurgent groups used to be active. They often took sanctuary in Bangladesh, which shares borders with some of these states.

There are many controversies regarding the elections held there. After the election results were out, Hasina described her fifth term in power as a "victory of the people" and dismissed the opposition's allegation that the vote was a "sham"

All these things apart, If Delhi and Dhaka are able to build upon the gains of the past decade and realise the full potential of their partnership, not only will South Asia be able to emerge as the anchor in the wider Indo-Pacific, but the people of India and Bangladesh will also be able to once again write another chapter in their shared destinies.



SOCIAL JUSTICE

What's Inside?

INTERSECTIONALITY OF GENDER
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NATIONAL ESSENTIAL DIAGNOSTICS LIST (NEDL)

Context:

The Indian Council of Medical Research released the first National Essential Diagnostics List (NEDL) in 2019 to make the availability of diagnostics an essential component of the health care system

About:

The list will include the minimum number of tests that should be available at various levels of healthcare facilities, including village level, Sub Health Centre/Health & Wellness Centres (HWCs), Primary Health Centres (PHC)/HWCs, Community Health Centres (CHC), Sub-District Hospital (SDH), and District Hospital (DH).

India was the first Member State globally to develop a National Essential Diagnostics List, published in 2019, following its development of the Free Diagnostics Initiative in 2015.

Benefits:

1. Improved healthcare services: A National Essential Diagnostics List Improves access to diagnostics reduces morbidity and mortality from late referral, delayed treatment, and wrong treatment.

2. Reduced out-of-pocket spending: By accessing diagnostics testing in their first encounter near home, patients avoid costs due to traveling to another facility and seeking testing via high-cost providers.

3. Reduced antimicrobial resistance (AMR): Diagnostics enhance antimicrobial stewardship through accurate identification of infective organisms and by identification of drug-resistant organisms. Diagnostics access reduces incorrect- and over-prescribing.

4. Efficient government spending: The limited set of diagnostics in the National Essential Diagnostics List enables lower costs through several pathways: bulk purchasing, supply chain management, equipment maintenance, focused regulatory efforts, focused lab and clinician trainings and accreditation, and focused targets for quality assurance improvements.

5. Universal Health Coverage: Adequate access to diagnostics is prerequisite to universal health coverage. UHC cannot be established without including access to the basics, including appropriate essential diagnostics at primary care level.

STATUE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Context:

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy unveiled a 206-foot-tall statue of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar at Swarajya Maidan in Vijayawada on January 19

About:

The Statue of Social Justice is the tallest Dr BR Ambedkar bronze statue in the world, and is situated at the Ambedkar Smriti Vanam in Vijayawada, Andhra Pradesh.

The statue is 125 feet tall and is installed on an 81-foot pedestal.

With a total height of 206 feet, it is the

fourth tallest, and the second tallest standing statue in India. The statue is made of 352



tonnes of steel and 112 tonnes of brass. The government has studied various countrywide models, which include Ambedkar Deeksha Bhoomi (Nagpur), Chaitya Bhoomi (Mumbai), Ambedkar Memorial (Lakhanpur), and Prerana Sthal (Noida).

The statue of social justice is made of steel frame and bronze cladding and is completely made in India.

The 81-foot pedestal building is designed as Kalachakra Maha Mandal of Buddhist architecture.

Complex areas also include the Dr BR Ambedkar Ambedkar Experience center under the statue where the exhibits of BR Ambedkar Ambedkar's life are displayed.

Kalachakra Mahamandala:

It depicts a mythic reality whereby cosmic and socio-historical events correspond to processes in the bodies of individuals. These teachings are meant to lead to a transformation of one's body and mind into perfect Buddhahood through various yogic methods



Life of Dr. B R Ambedkar:

He was the Chairman of Drafting Committee and remembered as the Father of the Indian Constitution.

In 1947, Dr. Ambedkar became

Minister of Law in the first Cabinet of independent India.

He resigned from the cabinet in 1951, over differences on the Hindu Code Bill.

Later in life, He converted to Buddhism. He passed away on December 6, 1956, which is commemorated as Mahaparinirvan Diwas

Chaitya Bhoomi is a memorial to B R Ambedkar, located in Mumbai.

He was also awarded India's highest civilian honour the Bharat Ratna in 1990.

Important Works:

- Journals:
- Mooknayak (1920)
- Bahishkrit Bharat (1927)
- Samatha (1929)
- Janata (1930)

Books:

- Annihilation of Caste
- Buddha or Karl Marx
- The Untouchable: Who are They and Why They Have Become Untouchables
- Buddha and His Dhamma
- The Rise and Fall of Hindu Women

Organisations:

- Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha (1923)
- Independent Labor Party (1936)
- Scheduled Castes Federation (1942)

ALL INDIA SURVEY OF HIGHER EDUCATION (AISHE) 2021-22

Context:

The report of the All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-22, made public on January 25

About:

The Ministry of Education, Government of India releases All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2021-2022.

The Ministry has been conducting AISHE since 2011, covering all Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in the country registered with AISHE collecting detailed information on different parameters such as student enrollment, teachers, infrastructural information, etc.

Aims of the survey

To portray the status of higher education in the country.

The survey covers all the institutions in the country engaged in imparting higher education.

Data is being collected on several parameters, such as teachers, student enrollment, programmes, examination results, education finance, and infrastructure.

Indicators of educational development such as Institution Density, Gross Enrolment Ratio, Pupil-teacher ratio, Gender Parity Index, Per Student Expenditure will also be calculated from the data collected through AISHE.

For the purpose of this survey, Higher Education is defined as education, that is obtained after completing 12 years of schooling or equivalent.

Findings of the survey

- The total enrolment in higher education has increased to nearly 4.33 crore in 2021-22 from 4.14 crore in 2020-21.
- The Female enrolment has increased to 2.07 crore in 2021-22 from 2.01 crore in 2020-21. There has been an increase of around 50lakh in the female enrolment from 1.57 crore (32%) in 2014-15.
- The enrolment of SC and ST students have increased.
- GER has increased to 28.4 in 2021-22 from 23.7 in 2014-15 [as per 2011 population

projections for 18-23 years age group]. Female GER has increased to 28.5 in 2021-22 from 22.9 in 2014-15.

- Gender Parity Index (GPI), the ratio of female GER to male GER is 1.01 in 2021-22. GPI has continued to be above 1 since 2017-18i.e., female GER continues to be more than male GER for fifth consecutive year.

Enrolment in UG and PG courses:

- Among Disciplines at undergraduate level in AISHE 2021-22, enrolment is highest in Arts (34.2%), followed by science (14.8%), Commerce (13.3%) and Engineering & Technology (11.8%).
- Among streams at postgraduate level in AISHE 2021-22, maximum students are enrolled in Social Science (21.1%) followed by science (14.7%).
- Ph.D. enrolment has increased by 81.2% to 2.12 lakh in 2021-22 compared to 1.17 lakh in 2014-15.
- Female Ph.D. enrolment has doubled to 0.99lakh in 2021-22 from 0.48 lakh in 2014-15.
- In all, 341 Universities/University level institutions have been established since 2014-15.
- 17 Universities (of which 14 are State Public Universities) and 4,470 Colleges are exclusively for women.
- The total number of Universities / University level institutions registered is 1,168, Colleges 45,473 and Standalone Institutions 12,002.
- As per the survey, the total number of faculty/teachers in 2021-22 is 15.98 lakh, of which about 56.6% are male and 43.4% are female.

PM YOUNG ACHIEVERS SCHOLARSHIP AWARD SCHEME (PM YASASVI SCHEME)

Context

The government has recently released Rs 32.44 Crore for Pre-matric Scholarship and Rs 387.27 Crore for Post-Matric Scholarship to States/UTs under PM YASASVI scheme.

PM YASASVI is a Scholarship scheme for Other Backward Class (OBCs), Economically Backward Class (EBC) and Denotified Nomadic Tribes (DNT) Students.

Objective

To provide financial assistance to the OBC, EBC and DNT students studying at post-matriculation or post-secondary stage to help them complete their education.

Salient features of the Scheme

Pre-Matric Scholarship

Pre-Matric Scholarship is for students studying in class IX and X on a full-time basis in Government Schools only.

Income from all sources does not exceed Rs.2,50,000/- per annum.

The students shall be given a consolidated academic allowance of Rs. 4000/- per annum.

During the year 2023-24, an amount of Rs 32.44 Crore has been released to States/UTs for implementation of the Scheme till 18th January,2024.

Post-Matric Scholarship

Scholarship is awarded to students studying at post-matriculation or post-secondary stage to enable them to complete their education.

Income from all sources does not exceed Rs.2,50,000/- per annum.

Academic allowance from Rs.5000 to Rs.20000 is awarded to students as per category of course.

During the year 2023-24, an amount of Rs

387.27 Crore has been released to States/UTs for implementation of the Scheme till 18th January,2024.

Top Class School Education

The scheme provides premium education to the meritorious students belonging to OBC, EBC and DNT categories by funding their education from Class 9 onwards till they complete Class 12.

Income from all sources does not exceed Rs.2,50,000/- per annum.

Scholarship is awarded for tuition fee, hostel fee and other charges as required by the school, subject to a maximum of Rs. 75,000/- per annum per student of class 9 and 10 and Rs. 1,25,000/- per annum per student of class 11 and 12.

National Scholarship Portal is open till 31st January, 2024 for submitting applications under the Scheme.

Top Class College Education

The scheme is to recognize and promote quality education amongst Students belonging to OBC, EBC and DNT categories by providing full financial support.

Income from all sources does not exceed Rs.2,50,000/- per annum.

Construction of Hostel for OBC Boys and Girls

The scheme aims at providing hostel facilities to students belonging to socially and educationally backward classes, especially from rural areas to enable them to pursue secondary and higher education in the Govt. schools, universities, institutions and institutes located at a reasonable distance in order to provide them greater access to high quality education.

ANNUAL STATUS OF EDUCATION REPORT(ASER) 2023

CONTEXT:

The 18th Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 titled 'Beyond Basics' was released by NGO Pratham, discussing the activities students are engaged in, their basic and applied reading and maths abilities and digital awareness and skills.

ASER (2023):

The ASER is an annual survey that aims to understand whether children in rural India are enrolled in school and whether they are learning.

ASER surveys provided representative estimates of the enrolment status of children aged 3-16 and the basic reading and arithmetic levels of children aged 5-16 at the national, state and district level.

Facilitated by Pratham Education Foundation since 2005, the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) is a large-scale citizen-led household survey.

Key Highlights of the ASER 2023:

Enrollment Rates:

Overall, 86.8% of 14-18-year-olds are enrolled in an educational institution.

However, there are notable differences visible by age, with 3.9% of 14-year-olds and 32.6% of 18-year-olds not enrolled.

Most students in the 14-18 age group are enrolled in the Arts/Humanities streams, with more than half (55.7%) in Class XI or higher studying in this stream.

There are gender differences, with fewer females (28.1%) enrolled in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) stream compared to males (36.3%).

Vocational Training:

Only 5.6% are taking vocational training or related courses. Vocational training is

more prevalent among college-level students (16.2%).

Most youth are taking short duration courses of six months or less.

Basic Abilities:

About 25% of the youth cannot read a Class II level text fluently in their regional language.

Over half struggle with division problems (3-digit by 1-digit), with only 43.3% of 14-18-year-olds able to solve such problems correctly.

Language and Arithmetic Skills:

While females (76%) outperform males (70.9%) in reading a Standard II level text in their regional language, males excel in arithmetic and English reading.

Only 57.3% can read sentences in English, and of those, almost three-quarters understand their meanings.

Digital Awareness and Skills:

Close to 90% of all youth have a smartphone in the household, and 43.7% of males have their own smartphone compared to 19.8% of females.

Males generally outperform females in digital tasks, and performance on digital tasks improves with education level and basic reading proficiency.

Foundational Numeracy Skills:

Over 50% of students in the 14-18 age group face difficulties with elementary division problems, and around 45% struggle with tasks such as calculating the number of hours a child slept based on bedtime and wake-up time.

Inadequate foundational numeracy skills hinder youth proficiency in everyday calculations, including budget management, applying discounts, and calculating interest rates or loan repayments.

VAIBHAV FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

Context:

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) announced the first batch of 'Vaibhav' fellows – a scheme meant to attract Indian-origin scientists based abroad for short-term collaboration.

Features of the scheme:

Eligibility: Scientists of Indian origin, or of Indian ancestry.

Timeframe: These Scientists can apply to spend up to three months in a year, for three years, at a host research laboratory in India.

Aim: In that period, these researchers are expected to begin a project or technology start-up, build long-term connections with the institute, collaborate with the host faculty and bring in new ideas to the field, in Indian university and research settings.

Grants: Fellowship would include fellowship grant (INR 4,00,000 per month), international and domestic travel, accommodation and contingencies.

Significance: Boosting of Knowledge for Transformation- The Indian origin faculty could be encouraged to take on students,

more associates and even supervise degrees that could lead to a genuine transfer of knowledge, innovation and work culture and perhaps optimistically, the non-resident Indian scientist even considering staying on in India.

The VAIBHAV Fellow would identify an Indian Institution for collaboration and may spend up to two months in a year for maximum 3 years.

VAJRA Scheme: Vaibhav is not an original idea. Earlier, the Department of Science and Technology (DST) conceived the VAJRA (Visiting Advanced Joint Research) Faculty Scheme with similar objectives.

Differences Between Vaibhav Fellowship Scheme and VAJRA Scheme:

Eligibility: Vaibhav is exclusively for the Indian diaspora, while VAJRA scheme can include other nationalities too.

Timeframe and Grants: VAJRA, though generous in the amount offered as fellowships, was restricted to one-year engagements, unlike Vaibhav which pays less but extends to three years.

WALK-IN CENTRE - ONE STOP TB SOLUTION

Context:

To strengthen services at primary health facilities, Tamil Nadu has adopted the 'Walk-in Centre - One Stop TB Solution' in which a primary facility is designated as a walk-in TB centre in each block. Over 100 walk-in centres have been rolled out.

The Block Medical Officer is the nodal officer for the operationalization of the Walk in centre. As on now 100 Walk in centres are inaugurated. It will be expanded to all 424 Community Health Centres. All centres will be monitored by the Deputy Director Medical Services (TB) and the Deputy Director of

Health Services at district level

About:

- All services starting with screening to monetary assistance and provision of nutritional supplements will be provided under one roof.
- This approach states that a single primary health facility will be designated as a walk-in tuberculosis centre in each block. It will offer the following facilities.
- Diagnostic tests must be available (Microscopy/NAAT) in the facility. The results of the microscopy testing to be

provided within 24 hours. In the event that the facility is unable to conduct the NAAT tests, the sample should be transported to the NAAT testing facility through Hub and Spoke and the results must be provided within 48 hours. And also the samples from other primary health centres of the block should be transported and processed in the One Stop TB centre

- Appropriate linkages for chest X-ray needs to be identified such as nearest community Health Centre, Government Taluk Hospital or Government Medical college Hospitals.
- The TB patients should be screened for other immune compromised diseases such as Diabetes and HIV and vice versa. The family members and close contact will be screened for TB . TB Preventive therapy given to all close contacts of the patient
- Patients with tuberculosis must get monthly clinical follow-up as well as laboratory follow-up at the end of intensive phase and continuation phase.
- All the required entries such as registration, treatment details, direct beneficiary transfer etc to be done in Nikshay portal
- The medical officer has to ensure that every patient receives the Direct Benefit

Transfer (Financial Incentive of Rs.500 per month for each notified TB patients for duration for which the the patient is on Anti-TB treatment) provided through Nikshay Pojan Yojana.

WHO target on Tuberculosis

- 95% reduction by 2035 in number of TB deaths compared with 2015.
- 90% reduction by 2035 in TB incidence rate compared with 2015.
- Zero TB-affected families facing catastrophic costs due to TB by 2035.

Efforts of the Government of India to eliminate TB:

In 2018 India set the target to “eliminate TB by 2025”. To fulfil this goal, the Health Ministry rolled out the National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2017-2025 to “eliminate” TB by 2025.

Key initiatives launched by the Government of India which are good examples of multisectoral action and community engagement include:

1. TB Mukh Panchayat Abhiyan Initiative (campaign to end TB at the village level). This intervention involves the local self-government ministries and aims to enhance awareness about TB in the community, increase ownership and empower more than 500,000 villages in India to support national efforts in TB prevention and care.

2. Shorter TB preventive treatment regimen roll-out: The Government of India is emphasizing the importance of TB prevention and has drawn ambitious plans to offer TB preventive treatment using the shorter 3HP regimen across the country. The Ministry of Health is making substantial investments for the procurement of millions of patient courses and is enabling incentives for providers to support the national scaleup of 3HP over the next two years. (3HP is one of several regimens recommended for treatment of latent TB infection. The term 3HP comes from the regimen duration (once weekly doses for three months))

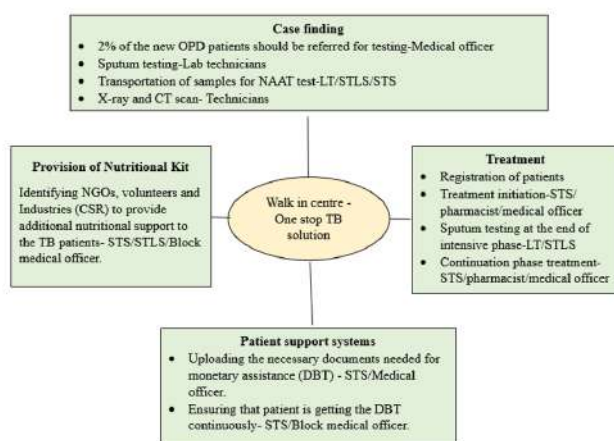


Figure 1 : Functions of Walk in TB centre and the responsibilities of each person

3. Family-centric care model for TB: The Ministry of Health developed guidance and launched a programme to support family caregivers. This includes easy-to-use tools for counselling and capacity building in the form of videos, animations, and brochures in local languages offered on Internet and mobile phone-based platforms.

4. Ni-kshay Mitra Campaign: Recognizing the major challenge of nutrition for people with TB, the campaign calls on citizens to embrace and support TB patients through

their TB treatment journey in different ways including nutritional support

5. Direct Benefit Transfer scheme: Since 2018, the Government of India has been providing cash incentives to TB patients aimed at improving nutrition. This has benefitted nearly 8 million TB patients over the past 5 years, with about US\$260 million disbursed.

INTERSECTIONALITY OF GENDER AND CASTE IN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE LABOR FORCE

Over the past two decades, there has been a significant decline in female Labour Force Participation (LFP), in line with an overall reduction in labour force engagement. Structural rigidities in India's manufacturing and service sectors have restricted employment opportunities in the informal sector, where a substantial 90% of the workforce is involved.

When compounded with gender bias and caste discrimination, women often find themselves situated at the bottom of the labour pyramid, which limits their employment choices primarily to the agricultural or the informal sector.

Access to education is crucial for women to secure employment. Historically, women from higher castes had better access to education and thus better job opportunities. Women from lower castes often relied on public sector jobs due to reservation policies. Surprisingly, women from upper castes have the lowest workforce participation rates, while lower caste women are more likely to work due to economic instability.

Scholars studied various factors influencing women's participation in non-farm informal sector work in rural areas. LFP in the rural informal

economy tends to rise under two primary conditions

1. **Women are more likely to work in informal jobs when there are more lower caste households**
2. **When there are economically disadvantaged female-headed households.**

However, if female-headed households are economically stable, women are less likely to seek employment.

The caste and gender bias

Gender Barriers:

Women face many gender barriers when attempting to contribute to economic activities, such as societal expectations from women to primarily focus on housework and care work and manage the needs of a household, mostly preventing them from participating in the workforce. Women also face legal and economic constraints in their pursuit of employment.

For instance, there are laws in many companies that prevent women from working on the night shift. In the non-farm, informal sector, such laws do not hinder women from participating in the workforce but by strong social and patriarchal constraints.

However, from the

labor market perspective, participation of women in the informal sector is more desirable than the lack of any employment or unpaid domestic work.

In Case of lower caste households,

Higher female LFP in the informal sector is explained through economic constraints and limitations in social mobility. Historically, people from the lower castes have been expected to engage in manual and domestic work irrespective of their gender.

While men were expected to do heavy manual labour, women helped with domestic work in higher caste households. Thus, lower-caste women's participation in the workforce is explained through the caste structure itself.

LFP of "Upper caste Women" < LFP of "Lower caste women"

While there is a clear caste pattern when it comes to the employment of women, where women from upper castes have lower work participation rates compared to women from the lower castes, education also plays an important role in determining the nature of work accessed by women.

Lower-caste women often face economic disadvantages,

resulting in a higher share of them being illiterate. Limited educational opportunities confine them to jobs in the informal sector. However, if a woman from this background manages to pursue education beyond school, affirmative action policies from the state enable entry into the formal economy, particularly in the public sector.

Conversely, educated women from higher castes, who challenge societal norms, have greater prospects in the formal sector.

Impact of education & employment:

Studies show that a woman's ability to create revenue increases her capacity to make decisions for her and her family. Moreover, education and employment are directly associated with a delayed age of marriage and the age of the first childbirth among women.

Studies have also shown that when the mother is earning, the chances of a child's schooling are higher.

Further, when women have control over resources, they are less susceptible to domestic violence and enjoy more mobility.

Thus, despite obstacles rooted in caste and gender bias, women's participation in the workforce has a favourable influence on the socio-economic fabric of society.

It not only liberates women from societal and economic constraints but also contributes to shaping a more educated and enlightened future.

Economic Development & Agriculture

Agriculture



What's Inside?

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EXPORT CREDIT GUARANTEE CORPORATION

Context:

Centre keen to expand ECGC cover to jewellery exporters

About:

The ECGC is a wholly owned by government of India, and was set up in 1957 with the objective of promoting exports from the country by providing credit risk insurance and related services for exports.

ECGC is essentially an export promotion organisation, seeking to improve the competitiveness of the Indian exports by providing them with credit insurance covers.

ECGC provides insurance cover for

1. a range of insurance covers to Indian exporters against the risk of non-realization of export proceeds due to commercial or political risks
2. different types of credit insurance covers to banks and other financial institutions to enable them to extend credit facilities to exporters and
3. Export Factoring facility for MSME sector which is a package of financial products consisting of working capital financing, credit risk protection, maintenance of sales ledger and collection of export receivables from the buyer located in overseas country.

BANK'S LIQUIDITY

Context:

As liquidity deficit widens, RBI to infuse ₹2.5-lakh cr. liquidity via 15-day variable repo rate (VRR).

What is liquidity deficit and surplus?

Liquidity reflects a financial institution's ability to fund assets and meet financial obligations.

On a given day, if the banking system is a net borrower from the RBI under Liquidity Adjustment Facility (LAF), the system liquidity can be said to be in deficit and if the banking system is a net lender to the RBI, the system liquidity can be said to be in surplus.

Overall liquidity in the banking system depends on VRR auctions, liquidity drawn from the marginal standing facility, surplus funds parked at the standing deposit facility, and liquidity infused by the RBI via various long-term repo operations.

Variable Reverse Repo Rate (VRRR):

When RBI desires that liquidity should be squeezed from the economy but Banks are

not eager to deposit money with RBI at rate fixed by RBI when rate of interest in market is higher than Reverse Repo Rate as fixed by RBI.

To tackle this situation, RBI comes up with instrument of Variable Reverse Repo Rate where Rate of interest is not fixed by RBI but by the market through auction.

While Reverse Repo is for Overnight or One day, Variable Reverse Repo are for more than one day (generally 14 days, however it can be less like 2, 3, 7, 10 days etc.). Hence, Variable Reverse Repo are also called Term Reverse Repo.

Variable Repo Rate (VRR):

Just like Variable Reverse Repo Rate, when RBI desires to infuse liquidity in economy but Banks are not eager to borrow from RBI at Repo Rates as interest rates in economy may already be lower, in that case RBI allows Banks to borrow at rate decided by market generally lower than Repo Rate (though not less than Reverse Repo Rate) for duration more than One Day.

Other monetary policy tools like Repo Rate, Reverse Repo Rate, Open Market Operations, Bank Rate policy (discount rate), cash reserve

ratio (CRR), Statutory Liquidity Ratio (SLR) are used by RBI to regulate the liquidity in Banking Sector.

LEMONGRASS, MINT SPREAD SCENT OF CHANGE IN ODISHA

Context:

Odisha's tribal communities, finding it difficult to make a living from rain-fed agriculture and scarce natural resources, have new hope. High-value aromatic crops and floriculture have recently emerged as a means to supplement their livelihood.

About:

With the help of the Central Institute of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants (CIMAP) in Lucknow, the district of Odisha has recently introduced different aromatic plants such

Some Important Facts

- In India, tribal population makes up for 8.6% of the total population.
- Odisha has the **third highest tribal population** in India with 62 Scheduled Tribe (S.T.) communities, including 13 designated Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) that are predominantly rural, with about 95 percent of them residing in villages.
- Among the 75 listed PVTG's the **highest number are found in Odisha**.

as menthol mint (the CIM-Unnati variety), rosemary (Hariyali variety), patchouli (CIM-Samarth), damask roses (Ranisahiba), chamomile, and geraniums (CIM-Bharat).

Tribal farmers in Nabarangpur, Odisha, are transitioning to high-value crops like lemongrass and aromatic plants, encouraged by successful experiments with strawberries and lemongrass.

Lemongrass, mentha, vetiver, and citronella

are now cultivated across 300 acres, with the installation of distillation units for processing lemongrass oil.

Aromatic plants are in high demand due to fewer regulatory challenges compared to medicinal crops, offering farmers promising returns with minimal effort. In Odisha, the CSIR-Aroma Mission has reached 26 districts,

About Aroma Mission

- It was launched in 2016 to boost the cultivation of plants like lavender, Aloe Vera, Mehndi, Menthol, Mint which have aromatic medicinal properties through new technology developed by the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research (CSIR).
- It is envisaged to bring transformative change in the aroma sector through desired interventions in the areas of agriculture, processing and product development.
- It also seeks to provide technical and infrastructure support for distillation and value-addition to farmers/growers all over the country, apart from enabling effective buy-back mechanisms to assure remunerative prices to the farmers/growers.
- It aims to bring an additional area of 30,000 hectares under cultivation of these crops by interventions of CSIR to further catalyse the cultivation of aromatic crops in about 60,000 hectares.
- This will help in production of an additional 700 tonnes of essential oil for perfumery, cosmetics and pharmaceutical industries, and use of these oils in value addition and herbal products would generate a business of at least 200 crores.

establishing 46 clusters and planting nearly 850 hectares with aromatic crops.

Lemon Grass:

The successful introduction, notably lemongrass, began on a small scale but quickly gained market traction, selling out its distilled oil instantly.

Cymbopogon, also known as lemongrass, barbed wire grass, silky heads, oily heads, Cochin grass, Malabar grass, citronella grass or fever grass, is a genus of Asian, African, Australian, and tropical island plants in the grass family.

Some species (particularly *Cymbopogon citratus*) are commonly cultivated as culinary

and medicinal herbs because of their scent, resembling that of lemons (*Citrus limon*). Lemongrass and its oil are believed to possess therapeutic properties.

Aromatic plants like lemongrass, citronella, and vetiver have served as effective deterrents against wild elephants in Angul district, causing them to vomit upon consumption.

This success led to the expansion of aromatic plantations to over 150 acres in Angul and Dhenkanal districts within two years. Cultivating aromatics on uncultivable lands is preferred to avoid interference with paddy fields while providing additional income to farmers.

PLASTIC CREDIT BOND

Context:

The World Bank and Citi recently launched a \$100mn Plastic Credit Bond (PCB) to fund plastics collection and recycling projects in Ghana and Indonesia.

About:

The bond is an innovative financial fund issued wherein the proceeds will fund plastics collection and recycling projects.

It is also called Principal-Protected Plastic Waste Reduction-Linked Bond as it will fund plastic investors to receive the principal back at the end of the 7-year maturity.

It is guaranteed by the World Bank alongside a minimum interest payment of 1.75%.

The primary goal of this bond is to mobilize private capital for projects that yield financial returns and generate positive climate and development impacts.

The repayments on the notes are partly determined by the sale of plastic and carbon offset credits.

The success of the bond is measured by

Plastic Waste Collection Credits, Plastic Waste Recycling Credits, and Verified Carbon Units.

Outcomes and Impacts of the Bonds:

The funds generated through the bond would enhance existing facilities, establish new collection and recycling sites, and install state-of-the-art food-grade recycling equipment.

The infusion of about \$14 million in up-front financing would increase the capacity of these projects, ensuring a more robust infrastructure for effective plastic waste management.

Up-front financing refers to the provision of capital at the initial stages of a project, typically provided in advance to support immediate funding needs.

The projects can decrease plastic pollution, and improve local pollution, and air quality.

This creates employment opportunities in marginalized communities, fostering socio-economic development.

It provides investors with a promising financial return and contributes to global efforts to curb plastic leakage into nature and oceans.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC PROSPECTS REPORT

Context:

Recently, the World Bank (WB) has released its Global Economic Prospects Report, which shows that the global economy may witness a poor performance by the end of 2024, the slowest half-decade of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth in 30 years.

Key Highlights of the Report:

The global economy is in a better place than it was a year ago and the risk of a global recession has receded, largely because of the strength of the United States' economy. Global growth is expected to slow for the third consecutive year, from 2.6 per cent last year to 2.4 per cent in 2024

The medium-term outlook has deteriorated for many developing economies. Most major economies report slowing growth, sluggish global trade and the tightest financial conditions in decades. Developing economies are expected to grow at a rate of 3.9 per cent, more than a percentage point lower than the previous decade's average.

The low-income countries are expected to grow by 5.5 per cent, which is lower than previously expected.

By the end of 2024, people in about one out of every four developing countries and about 40 per cent of low-income countries will still be poorer than they were on the eve of the COVID pandemic in 2019

The report advocated for a 'formidable' increase in investment by developing countries — approximately \$2.4 trillion per year — to address climate change and achieve other key

global development goals by 2030.

Otherwise, per capita investment growth in developing economies is expected to average 3.7 per cent between 2023 and 2024, or slightly more than half the rate of the previous two decades.

India Specific Highlights

Indian economic growth is projected to slow from 8.7% in FY2021/22 to 6.9% in FY2022/23. RBI's projection of India's GDP growth in FY23 is 6.8%.

Indian economy is expected to grow at 6.6% in the fiscal year 2023-24. India is expected to be the fastest-growing economy of the seven largest developing economies (EMDEs).

India accounts for three-fourths of the (South Asia) region's output.

India's growth expanded by 9.7 per cent on an annual basis in the first half of the fiscal year 2022-23, reflecting strong private consumption and fixed investment growth.

Other Reports of World Bank

- Ease of Doing Business
- World Development Report
- Global Economic Prospect (GEP) Report
- Logistics Performance Index
- Remittance Report
- Ease of Living Index
- India Development Update
- Universal Health Coverage Index
- The Service Trade Restriction Index

INDIA'S INCLUSION IN BLOOMBERG EM INDEX

Context

The Bloomberg Index Services recently proposed to include India's Fully Accessible Route (FAR) bonds in the Bloomberg

Emerging Market (EM) Local Currency Index from September 2024.

The development comes months after the announcement by JPMorgan to include Indian

government bonds in its widely tracked emerging market debt index.

India's Fully Accessible Route (FAR) bonds are those that foreign investors can buy without any limits.

What will happen?

The development which can infuse billions of dollars in India's sovereign debt market comes as Indian government bonds are set to become part of JPMorgan's Government Bond Index-Emerging Markets (GBI-EM) global index suite from June 2024.

The Indian FAR bonds will be included in the EM Local Currency indices with an initial weight of 20% of their full market value in September 2024.

The weight of FAR bonds will be increased in

increments of 20% of their full market value every month over the 5-month period ending in January 2025, at which point they will be weighted at their full market value (100%) in the indices.

The proposal said that once completely phased into the Bloomberg Emerging Market 10% Country Capped Index, India FAR bonds will be fully capped at 10% weight within the index. Using data as of November 30, 2023, the index would include 32 Indian securities and represent 6.99% of a \$5.96 trillion index.

Bloomberg Index Services Limited (BISL) also cleared that India will continue to be excluded from the Bloomberg Global Aggregate and related indices, while Bloomberg will continue to monitor related market developments.

GOVERNMENT BRINGS FERTILISERS UNDER REASONABLE PRICING CONTROL

Context

The Central government has brought di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), muriate of potash (MOP) and all other such fertilisers that receive nutrient-based subsidy (NBS) support under "reasonable pricing" controls.

About the price control

NBS fertilisers — unlike urea, whose maximum retail price (MRP) is fixed by the government — are technically decontrolled. Under the NBS scheme, introduced in April 2010, their MRPs are supposed to be market-determined and set by the individual companies selling them. The government merely pays a fixed per-tonne subsidy on each of these fertilisers, linked to their nutrient content or specific percentage of nitrogen (N), phosphorous (P), potassium (K) and sulphur (S).

But the Department of Fertilisers (DoF) has now, in an office memorandum dated January 18, issued detailed guidelines for the evaluation of "reasonableness" of the MRPs

for all non-urea fertilisers covered under NBS.

The guidelines, to be effective retrospectively from April 1, 2023, have prescribed maximum profit margins that will be allowed for fertiliser companies — 8% for importers, 10% for manufacturers and 12% for integrated manufacturers (those producing finished fertilisers as well as intermediates such as phosphoric acid and ammonia).

Companies with unreasonable profit

Companies earning "unreasonable profit", i.e. over and above the stipulated percentages, in a particular financial year (April-March) will have to refund the same to the DoF by October 10 of the following fiscal.

If they don't return the money within the said time limit, "an interest @12% per annum on pro-rata basis would be charged on the refund amount from the next day of end of financial year (i.e. in case of FY 2023-24, the interest would be charged from April 1, 2024)," the memorandum has said. The

unreasonable profits would also get adjusted against subsequent fertiliser subsidy payments by the government.

Simply put, the new guidelines impose indirect MRP controls on non-urea fertilisers by capping the profits that companies can earn from their sales. These will be based on their “total cost of sales”, which would cover cost of production/ import, administrative overheads, selling and distribution overheads, and net interest and financing charges. Deduction for dealer’s margin will be allowed to the extent of 2% of the MRP for DAP and MOP, and 4% for all other NBS fertilisers.

The guidelines have mandated fertiliser companies to “self-assess” unreasonable profits, based on the cost auditor’s report along with audited cost data approved by their board of directors.

This report and data has to be furnished to the DoF by October 10 of the following fiscal year. The DoF will then scrutinise the “reasonability of MRPs”, as submitted by the companies, “by 28th February for each completed previous financial year (i.e. for FY 2023-24 by 28th February 2025)”.

GEOGRAPHY,

ENVIRONMENT,

BIODIVERSITY AND

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

What's Inside?

1. PAKKE PAGA HORNBILL FESTIVAL (PPHF)
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PAKKE PAGA HORNBILL FESTIVAL (PPHF)

Context:

The 9th edition of the Pakke Paga Hornbill Festival (PPHF) commenced in the town of Seijosa in Arunachal Pradesh's Pakke Kessang district on January 18, 2024, with a call to protect and conserve hornbills.

About Hornbill:

- Seijosa is located near the Pakke Tiger Reserve (PTR), which is home to four species of hornbills: Wreathed, Great Indian, Oriental Pied and the endangered Rufous-necked.
- The Great Hornbill is found in the Himalayan foothills, the Northeast and the Western Ghats. It is the state bird of Arunachal Pradesh and Kerala.
- With a wingspan of five feet, it presents an awesome (and noisy) spectacle while landing on a perch.
- The wreathed hornbill, the brown hornbill and the rufous-necked hornbill are slightly smaller, and only found in Northeast India.
- A great place to spot the oriental pied hornbill is the Rajaji National Park, Uttarakhand.
- The Malabar grey hornbill's loud 'laugh' echoes in the Western Ghats.
- The smallest of the group, the Indian grey hornbill is found all over (except the Thar Desert), and is often spotted in urban settings such as Theosophical Society gardens in Chennai.
- Hornbills are called "gardeners or farmers of the forest" for playing a key role in dispersing seeds of tropical trees.
- Hornbills are large, fruit-eating birds found along certain fleshy fruit trees.
- The hornbills are found in tropical and

subtropical Africa and Asia.

- Threats: Illegal logging, forest clearance, hunting for meat & medicinal value of body parts.
- Conservation Status: IUCN: Vulnerable; WPA, 1972: Schedule I; CITES: Appendix I.

Nyishi people:

- Seijosa area is the traditional homeland of the Nyishi people, the largest tribal group in Arunachal Pradesh.
- Their language, Nyishi, belongs to the Sino-Tibetan family.
- Polygyny (more than one wife) is a prevalent practice among them.

Pakke paga Hornbill Festival:

- The first-ever PPHF was held on January 16-18, 2015.
- PPHF was declared a 'state festival' by then-Arunachal Chief Minister Pema Khandu in 2019
- The aim was to recognise the role played by the Nyishi in conserving hornbills in PTR. The Nyishi had formerly hunted hornbills and used their bills to craft traditional headgear. They had later turned into hornbill conservationists.
- Other objectives were to raise alternative sources of income for the region and to create awareness in the rest of India about the wonders of PTR and its surrounding areas.
- This year, the festival's theme is Domutoh Domutoh, Paga hum Domutoh. It translates to 'Let Our Hornbills Remain' in the Nyishi language.
- This year's festival aims to underscore the critical need for preserving these iconic birds.

- The festival has had a positive impact over the years in uniting people from diverse backgrounds to combat pollution, protect wildlife, and address environmental degradation.

HORNBILL FESTIVAL OF NAGALAND

- Hornbill Festival is celebrated in Nagaland to encourage inter-tribal interaction.
- It is one of the largest indigenous festival organised by the state government of Nagaland to promote tourism in the state.
- The festival is celebrated annually in the first week of December in order to preserve, protect and revive the uniqueness and richness of the Naga heritage.
- The festival is considered the “Festival of Festivals” in Nagaland.
- The festival is named after the bird – Hornbill which is the most revered and admired bird for the Nagas.
- The festival is a tribute to this bird, known for its qualities of grandeur and alertness.
- The bird is also closely identified with the social and cultural life of the Nagas, as reflected in various tribal dances, songs and folklores.
- Hornbill festival exposes the culture and tradition of the tribal people and reinforces the identity of the Nagaland.

SNOW LEOPARD

Context:

Kyrgyzstan has officially declared the snow leopard as its national symbol, underscoring its commitment to conservation and ecological balance

About:

- A decree signed by President Sadyr Zhaparov of the Kyrgyz Republic, states: “The snow leopard is not only a symbol of natural wealth and cultural prosperity, but also an indicator of the stability and health of the mountain ecosystem, which occupies 1/3 of the global territory.
- The loss of snow leopards in the wild will lead to the risk of disturbing the fragile ecological balance, which will have a detrimental impact on various animal species and on humans.
- There is a critical need to make the snow leopard the mascot of climate adaptation in the ‘Third Pole’.
- Inner Asia comprises mountain ranges such as the Altai, Tian Shan, Nan Shan, Kunlun Shan, Pamir, Karakorum, Hindu Kush, and of course, the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalayas.
- This region is home to most of the snow and ice on Earth outside the poles. From this region, at least 15 rivers fan out in every direction across the Asian continent.
- This ‘Water Tower of Asia’ provides essential ecosystem services — it provides clean water for a third of the world’s population. It is estimated to be warming at nearly two times the average rate of warming in the Northern Hemisphere.
- The snow leopard’s habitat range extends across the mountainous regions of 12

countries across Asia: Afghanistan, Bhutan, China, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Cultural significance:

In ancient Kyrgyz culture, Panthera uncia, or the snow leopard, held significance as a totem animal linked to the legendary hero of the Kyrgyz people, Manas. Within Kyrgyz culture, the snow leopard symbolizes greatness, nobility, courage, bravery, and resilience.

Global Snow Leopard Forum in 2013

- Kyrgyzstan has taken a leading role in snow leopard conservation at the international level, hosting the inaugural Global Snow Leopard Forum in 2013 in the capital, Bishkek. The Forum is co-organized by Global Tiger Initiative, NABU, Snow Leopard Trust, UNDP, and World Bank and sponsored by Global Environment Facility, Snow Leopard Conservancy, and WWF.

- During this event, the Bishkek Declaration on Snow Leopard Protection was unanimously adopted.
- The objective of the Forum is to discuss urgent actions and a new global strategy to address the conservation of the endangered snow leopard and its habitat in the critical ecosystems of Central Asia.

Global Snow Leopard and Ecosystem Protection Programme (GSLEP)

GSLEP is an unprecedented alliance of all snow leopard range countries, non-governmental organizations, multi-lateral institutions, scientists and local communities, united by one goal: saving the snow leopard and its mountain ecosystems.

The snow leopard range countries agree, with support from interested organizations, to work together to identify and secure at least 20 snow leopard landscapes across the cat’s range by 2020 or, “Secure 20 by 2020.”

UPSC PYQs 2012

1. Consider the following:
 1. Black-necked crane
 2. Cheetah
 3. Flying squirrel
 4. Snow leopard

Which of the above are naturally found in India?

- (a) 1, 2 and 3 only
- (b) 1, 3 and 4 only
- (c) 2 and 4 only
- (d) 1, 2, 3 and 4

Explanation: (A)

- Black-necked crane: Yes, it is found in India. It is a winter visitor to the high-altitude wetlands of Ladakh, in Jammu and Kashmir.
 - Cheetah: No, cheetahs are extinct in India. They were once found in various parts of India, but the last recorded sighting was in 1947.
 - Flying squirrel: Yes, there are several species of flying squirrels found in India, such as the Indian giant flying squirrel, the Malabar giant flying squirrel, and the red giant flying squirrel.
 - Snow leopard: Yes, snow leopards are found in India. They are found in the high-altitude regions of the Himalayas, such as Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Sikkim.
- Therefore, the correct answer is: 1, 3 and 4 only.**

Note:

- *The Cheetah Reintroduction Project in India formally commenced on September 17, 2022, to restore the population of cheetahs, which were declared extinct in the country in 1952.*
- *The project involves the translocation of cheetahs from South Africa and Namibia to Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh.*

OBELISKS – THE VIRUS LIKE PARTICLES ON THE GUT BACTERIA

Context:

Recently, there was report of a new kind of viruslike entity that inhabits bacteria dwelling in the human mouth and gut. These “obelisks,” as they’re called by the Stanford University team that unearthed them, have genomes seemingly composed of loops of RNA and sequences belonging to them have been found around the world.

About:

Obelisks are a newly discovered type of viruslike entity found in bacteria living in the human mouth and gut. These entities, identified by researchers at Stanford University, have circular RNA genomes and are distinct from traditional viruses.

The name obelisks was proposed not only because of their shape, but also to provide wiggle room in case they turn out to be more like RNA plasmids (a different type of genetic element that resides inside bacteria) than either viruses or viroids.

They resemble viroids, which are infectious loops of RNA found in plants, but they are more complex and do not encode proteins that make up a shell.

Like viroids, obelisks have a circular single-stranded RNA genome and no protein coat but, like viruses, their genomes contain genes that are predicted to code for proteins.

Obelisks may influence the genetic activity of their bacterial hosts, potentially impacting human genes. They have been found in 7% of human gut bacteria and in half of the bacteria in the human mouth, with distinctive sequences in microbes from different parts of the body.

This discovery suggests that we are still exploring the frontiers of the viral universe and raises questions about the evolutionary relationship between viruses, viroids, and

obelisks.

While the specific functions of obelisks remain unclear, their presence in human-associated bacteria suggests potential interactions with host biology. These interactions could range from influencing bacterial gene expression to modulating host immune responses or metabolic pathways.

If obelisks change or upset the human microbiome, this may in turn have implications for human health – they may even have therapeutic potential.

Human gut microbiota

Human gut microbiota is a complex ecosystem with several functions integrated in the host organism (metabolic, immune, nutrients absorption, etc.). Human microbiota is composed by bacteria, yeasts, fungi and, last but not least, viruses, whose composition has not been completely described.

Virion:

A virion is a complete virus particle that consists of genetic material (either DNA or RNA) surrounded by a protein coat called a capsid.

Some viruses also have an outer envelope derived from the host cell membrane. Virions are the infectious form of viruses and are capable of infecting host cells to replicate and produce new virions.

Examples of viruses include influenza virus, HIV, and SARS-CoV-2 (the virus responsible for COVID-19).

Viroid:

Viroids are small, circular RNA molecules that lack a protein coat.

They are much simpler than viruses and are not known to encode any proteins. Despite their simplicity, viroids are infectious and

can cause diseases in plants.

Viroids replicate by hijacking the host cell's machinery to produce more viroid RNA molecules. They are not known to infect animals or humans but are significant pathogens in agriculture.

Examples of viroids include the potato spindle tuber viroid and the citrus exocortis viroid.

Prion:

Prions are unique infectious agents composed entirely of protein, with no nucleic acid component.

They are responsible for causing a group

of neurodegenerative diseases known as transmissible spongiform encephalopathies (TSEs) or prion diseases.

Prions have the ability to induce misfolding of normal cellular prion proteins, leading to the accumulation of abnormal protein aggregates in the brain, which results in neurological damage.

Examples of prion diseases in humans include Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (CJD), variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (vCJD), and kuru. Prions are also found in other animals, such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in cattle and chronic wasting disease (CWD) in deer and elk.

INDIA'S OLDEST SLOTH BEAR IS NO MORE

Context

A 36-year-old male sloth bear died due to multi-organ failure at a zoo-cum-animal rescue centre in Madhya Pradesh capital Bhopal. This bear named Bablu was the oldest one in captivity in the country at present.

The average lifespan of a bear is 25 to 30 in the wild. After the death of another bear named Gulabo in January 2022, Bablu became the oldest bear in captivity in India.



Distribution and habitat

The sloth bear's global range includes India, the Terai of Nepal, temperate climatic zones of Bhutan and Sri Lanka. It occurs in a wide range of habitats including moist and dry

tropical forests, savannahs, scrublands and grasslands below 1,500 m (4,900 ft) on the Indian subcontinent, and below 300 m (980 ft) in Sri Lanka's dry forests. It is regionally extinct in Bangladesh.

Dietary habits

Sloth bears are expert hunters of termites and ants, which they locate by smell. On arriving at a mound, they scrape at the structure with their claws till they reach the large combs at the bottom of the galleries, and disperse the soil with violent puffs.

The termites are then sucked up through the muzzle, producing a sucking sound which can be heard 180 m away. Their sense of smell is strong enough to detect grubs 3 ft below ground. Unlike other bears, they do not congregate in feeding groups.

Behaviour

They are capable of galloping faster than running humans. Although they appear slow and clumsy, both young and adult sloth bears are excellent climbers. They occasionally will climb to feed and to rest, though not to escape enemies, as they prefer to stand their ground. They are good swimmers, and primarily enter water to play.

Status and conservation

As per the IUCN Red List, the Sloth bear is listed as vulnerable. IUCN estimates that fewer than 20,000 sloth bears survive in the wilds of the Indian subcontinent and Sri Lanka. The sloth bear is listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife Protection Act, 1972,

which provides for their legal protection. Commercial international trade of the sloth bear (including parts and derivatives) is prohibited as it is listed in Appendix I of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species.

POLAR VORTEX

Context

Extremely cold Arctic air and severe winter weather swept southward into much of the U.S. in mid-January 2024, breaking daily low temperature records from Montana to Texas. Tens of millions of people were affected by dangerously cold temperatures, and heavy lake-effect snow and snow squalls have had severe effects across the Great Lakes and Northeast regions.

These severe cold events occur when the polar jet stream – the familiar jet stream of winter that runs along the boundary between Arctic and more temperate air – dips deeply southward, bringing the cold Arctic air to regions that don't often experience it.

An interesting aspect of these events is that they often occur in association with changes to another river of air even higher above the jet stream: the stratospheric polar vortex, a great stream of air moving around the North Pole in the middle of the stratosphere.

What is Polar vortex?

Almost 10 years ago, the “polar vortex” entered into pop culture during a January 2014 cold outbreak. Located near the poles (hence “polar”) this spinning cone of low pressure - a vortex - is always there in the colder months. But it's high up in the stratosphere, that layer of the atmosphere above which most of our weather occurs .

Why the polar vortex matters?

There are two polar vortexes in the Northern Hemisphere: one in the lower atmosphere, or the troposphere (sometimes called the

“circumpolar vortex”), and one higher up in the stratosphere. The stratospheric one is stronger and is present each winter as cold, dense air sinks and spirals near the North Pole. The stronger the vortex, the faster it spins and the more bottled-up the cold air is over the high latitudes.

But if something disrupts the polar vortex, it can be knocked off-kilter. Imagine a spinning top; if you jiggle the table, it might wobble out of control. If the polar vortex weakens, it can no longer contain the cold air — and pockets of frigid Arctic chill crash south over North America.

What happened now?

There was a subtle disruption to the polar vortex a couple of weeks ago. Temperatures inside the vortex warmed a little bit, and the whirlpool of air slowed down its spin. It didn't reverse direction initially, which is the criterion for a major disruption, but it did slow markedly.

It occurred at the lower levels of the stratosphere, allowing it to warm up and destabilize.

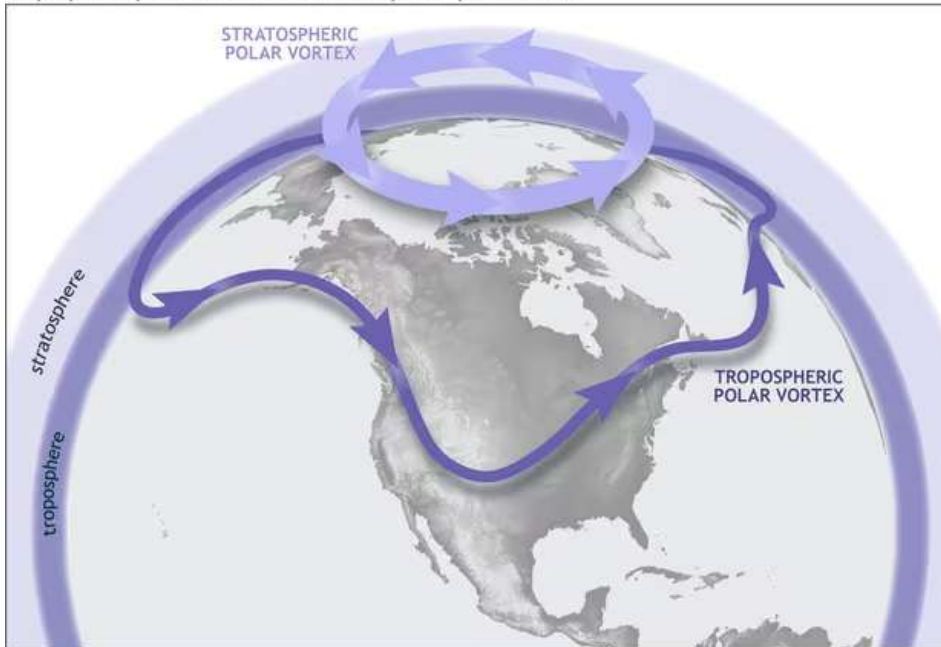
But what makes the stratosphere's current behavior unexpected and somewhat rare is that the polar vortex seems to be more disrupted at the lower levels, closer to the stratosphere-troposphere boundary. For more than a week, high pressure has been sitting in the troposphere over Greenland.

When this stratospheric vortex becomes disrupted or stretched, it can distort the jet stream as well, pushing it southward in some

areas and causing cold air outbreaks.

Greenland block

Tropospheric polar vortex versus stratospheric polar vortex



NOAA Climate.gov
Data: Waugh et al., 2017

are “blocked” and have to move either north or south of the high-pressure center. The persisting high pressure over Greenland is not uncommon in the winter and is sometimes called a Greenland block.

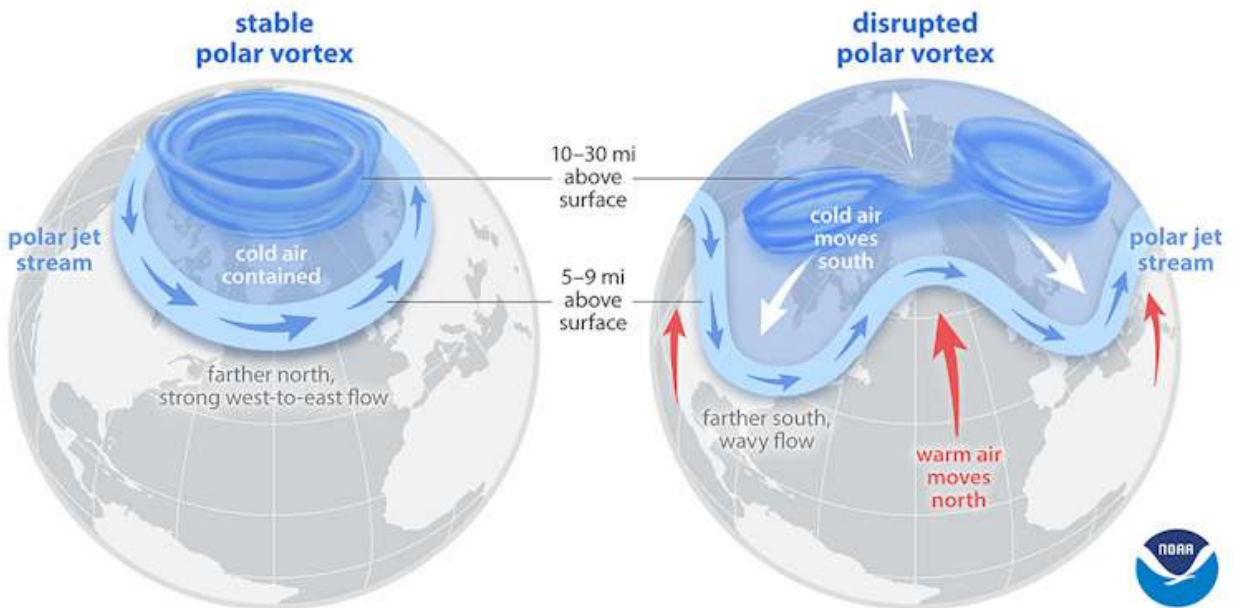
The polar vortex’s next move

Meteorologists believe that polar vortex disruption a couple of weeks ago in the lower levels of the stratosphere could help energize a stronger disturbance higher up. The jostled polar vortex would briefly collapse, filling in with warm air and even briefly reversing its spin.

That theoretically could let the jet stream, or river of winds high up, shift south, spilling the cold over the Lower 48.

Sometimes a high-pressure center will set up over a region (like Greenland) and sit there for multiple days. When this happens, the weather patterns that normally move from west to east

let the jet stream, or river of winds high up, shift south, spilling the cold over the Lower 48.



NOAA
NOAA Climate.gov
2021

BAMBOO FIBER-REINFORCED POLYMERIC COMPOSITES (BFRCS)

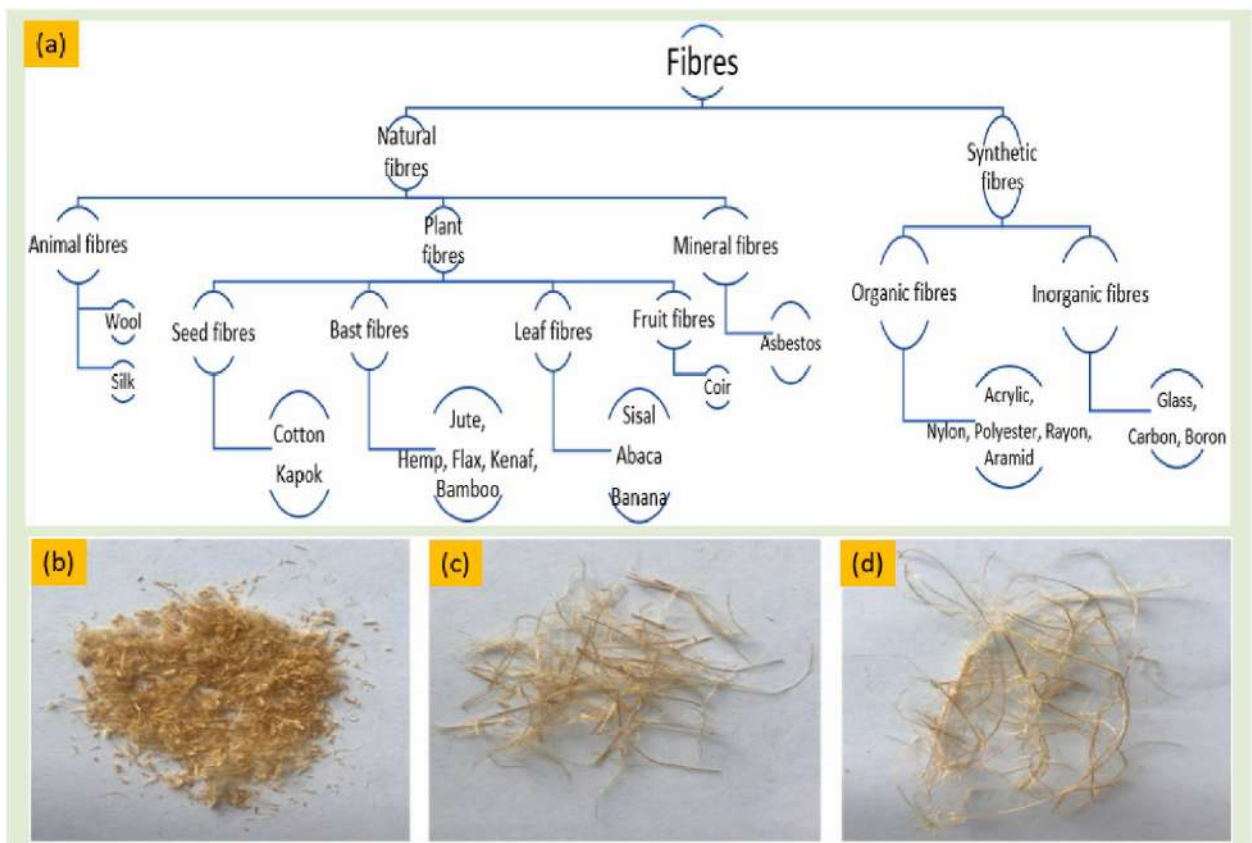
Context

Because of its rapid growth, renewability, and minimal environmental effect, bamboo has emerged as a viable contender in response to the increasing demand for eco-friendly materials across a variety of sectors. Bamboo is going to be a significant lignocellulosic material.

The research on bamboo fiber reinforced polymeric composites as a substitute for

polymeric composites, namely synthetic fiber reinforced composites. Therefore, manufacturers and scientists are relentlessly trying to explore more sustainable routes of composites. Therefore, bamboo is showing the new milestone.

Figure: (a) Classification of various natural and synthetic fibers. (b) powder of bamboo, (c) bamboo fiber (short), and (d) bamboo fiber (long).



conventional petroleum-based composites has been on the rise, driven by the growing demand for environmentally friendly materials in various industries.

The use of bamboo as a reinforcement for polymeric composites is attractive since it is a renewable resource and has exceptional mechanical and physical properties, however, they are not much popular compared to other

Bamboo fiber reinforced thermoplastic polymeric composites

Bamboo fiber reinforced thermoplastic polymer composites are a form of composite material created by mixing bamboo fibers with a thermoplastic polymer. Bamboo fibers serve as reinforcement, increasing the composite material's strength, stiffness, and durability.

The thermoplastic polymer matrix acts as a binder that keeps the bamboo fibers together and gives the composite with its shape and form. Because of its excellent strength-to-weight ratio, low density, and rapid growth rate, bamboo is an appealing material for composite manufacture.

Bamboo fibers may be removed by either mechanical or chemical techniques, and the resultant fibers can be utilized to manufacture a broad variety of composite materials, including thermoplastic polymer reinforced bamboo composites.

Polypropylene (PP), polyethylene (PE), and polylactic acid (PLA) are thermoplastic polymers utilized in the production of reinforced bamboo composites. These polymers were selected for their ease of processing and mechanical qualities. The thermoplastic polymer reinforced bamboo composites manufacturing method normally includes combining the bamboo fibers with the polymer matrix and then subjecting the combination to heat and pressure to generate the composite material. The resultant composite may be shaped and sized as desired.

Bamboo fiber reinforced thermosetting polymeric composites

Composites produced from bamboo fibers with a thermosetting polymer are known as thermosetting polymer reinforced bamboo composites.

The great strength, stiffness, and resistance

to deformation of composite materials make them a viable alternative to more conventional materials like wood and metal. Bamboo is a sustainable material that has been used for centuries due to its resilience and strength.

It's great for usage in composites since it's lightweight and simple to manipulate. When mixed with a thermosetting polymer, bamboo's strong but malleable fibers produce a composite material that is both durable and lightweight.

Cross-linking occurs during the curing process of thermosetting polymers, making them extremely deformation- and heat-resistant. Because of their exceptional adherence to fibers and their ability to be molded into various forms, they are often utilized in the production of composite materials.

Overall, bamboo composites supplemented with thermosetting polymers are a sustainable and adaptable material with several benefits over more conventional options. These materials are great for a variety of uses since they are durable, lightweight, and resistant to deformation and moisture. The extensive use of this material across sectors is projected to increase as technology develops.

Bamboo fiber reinforced cementitious composites

Cement is also another significant binder used to produce composite panels for sustainable products development. Different wood and fibers are used for these purposes.

BIOLOGICAL E'S CORBEVAX BAGS EMERGENCY USE LISTING FROM WHO

Context

The World Health Organization (WHO) has granted an Emergency Use Listing (EUL) to Biological E Ltd's (BE) Covid vaccine, Corbevax. The Hyderabad-based vaccine-maker's Corbevax is India's first indigenously developed Covid vaccine based on a protein sub-unit platform.

The Drugs Controller General of India (DCGI) approved Corbevax for restricted use in emergency among adults, adolescents and young children in a sequential manner from December 2021 to April 2022 as well as India's first heterologous Covid booster shot for adults age 18 and above in June 22.

BE supplied 100 million doses of Corbevax

to the Government of India, which were then utilised in pan-India immunisation campaigns, mainly in 12-14-year-old children.

Emergency Use Listing Procedure for vaccines

The WHO Emergency Use Listing Procedure (EUL) is a risk-based procedure for assessing and listing unlicensed vaccines, therapeutics and in vitro diagnostics with the ultimate aim of expediting the availability of these products to people affected by a public health emergency.

This will assist interested UN procurement agencies and Member States in determining the acceptability of using specific products, based on an essential set of available quality, safety, and efficacy and performance data.

The procedure is a key tool for companies wishing to submit their products for use during health emergencies.

Eligibility of candidate products

For vaccines to be eligible under the EUL procedure the following criteria must be met:

The disease for which the product is intended is serious or immediately life threatening, has the potential of causing an outbreak, epidemic or pandemic and it is reasonable to consider the product for an EUL assessment, e.g., there are no licensed products for the indication or for a critical subpopulation (e.g., children);

Existing products have not been successful in eradicating the disease or preventing outbreaks (in the case of vaccines and medicines);

The product is manufactured in compliance with current Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) in the case of medicines and vaccines and under a functional Quality Management System (QMS) in the case of IVDs; and

The applicant undertakes to complete the development of the product (validation and verification of the product in the case of IVDs) and apply for WHO prequalification once the product is licensed.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF CAMELIDS 2024

Context

The United Nations declared 2024 the International Year of Camelids (IYC 2024). The Year will highlight how camelids are key to the livelihoods of millions of households in hostile environments across over 90 countries, particularly Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

communities across the world.

Camelids play an important role in advancing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) related to the fight against hunger, the eradication of extreme poverty, the empowerment of women and the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems.

About Camelids

From alpacas to Bactrian camels, dromedaries, guanacos, llamas, and vicuñas, camelids contribute to food security, nutrition and economic growth as well as holding a strong cultural and social significance for



From providing milk, meat and fibre for communities to transport for products and people, and organic fertilizer, camelids thrive where other livestock species cannot survive.

Camelids play a key role in the culture, economy, food security and livelihoods of communities in Andean highlands and in the arid and semi-arid lands in Africa and Asia, including Indigenous Peoples.

Even in extreme climatic conditions they continue to produce fibre and nutritious food.

Indeed, the International Year of Camelids presents a unique opportunity to raise awareness of the role of camelids in building resilience to climate change – particularly in mountains and arid and semi-arid lands.

The International Year of Camelids 2024 aims to build awareness of the untapped potential of camelids and to call for increased investment in the camelid sector, advocating for greater research, capacity development and the use of innovative practices and technologies.

GREEN FUELS ALLIANCE INDIA (GFAI) INITIATIVE

Context:

Denmark has launched a new green fuels alliance in India as it looks to boost collaborations on sustainable energy between the two countries.

About:

1. The new alliance is a strategic initiative poised to play a pivotal role in advancing the Green Fuels sector, including Green Hydrogen, by fostering innovation, collaboration, and partnerships between Danish industries and their counterparts in India.
2. GFAI's primary objective is to promote sustainable energy growth in India by establishing an ecosystem that encourages collaboration among businesses, government entities, research institutions, and financial stakeholders from both the Indian and Danish sectors.
3. The GFAI is demonstrative of activities under the Green Strategic Partnership (GSP) signed in 2020 between India and Denmark that seek to meet the partner countries' ambitious climate targets.



SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

What's Inside?

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PULSAR GLITCHES

Context:

In 1967, two astronomers at the University of Cambridge discovered the First Pulsar, later named PSR B1919+21, setting the stage for a journey into the depths of neutron stars and their enigmatic pulsar counterparts.

About:

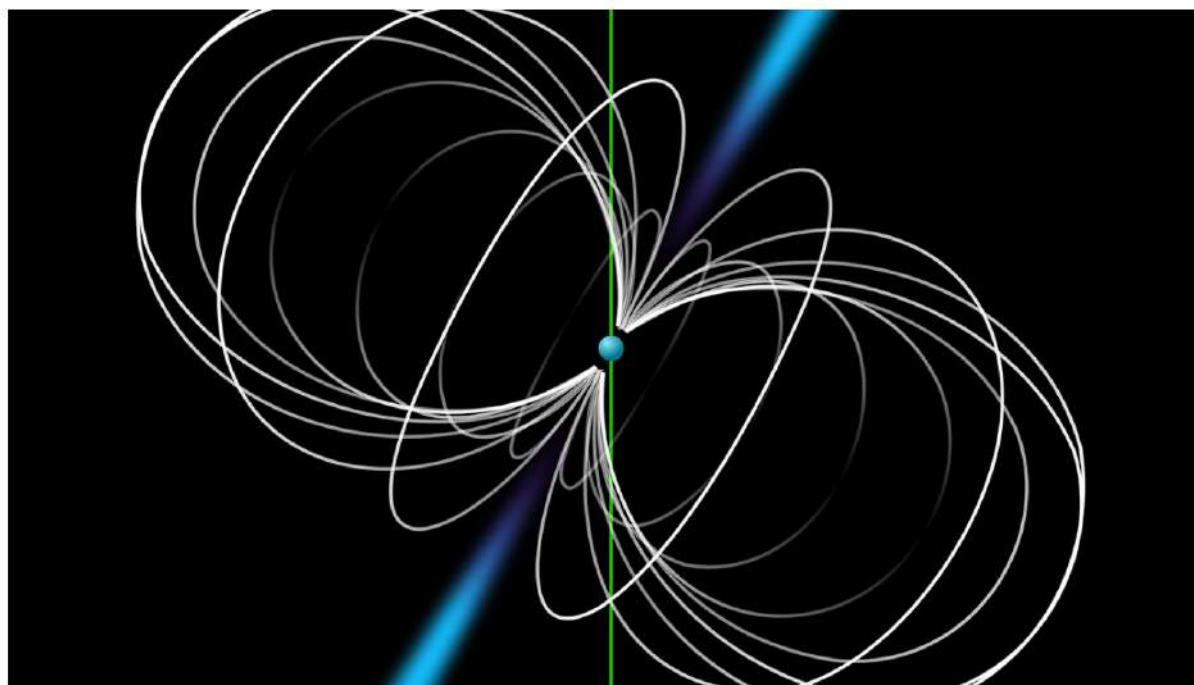
Pulsar glitches are sudden and brief increases in the rotation rate of pulsars, which are highly magnetized rotating neutron stars. These glitches are one of the most intriguing phenomena observed in astrophysics and offer valuable insights into the nature of neutron stars and the physics governing their behavior.

to the loss of rotational energy. However, during a glitch, the rotation rate increases abruptly before gradually returning to its original value.

Frequency: Glitches are relatively rare events, but they have been observed in many pulsars. Some pulsars exhibit multiple glitches over their lifetime, while others may only experience one or a few.

Post-Glitch Relaxation: After the initial increase in rotation rate during a glitch, the pulsar undergoes a slow relaxation process back to its original rotation rate. This post-glitch relaxation period can provide valuable insights into the internal structure and dynamics of the neutron star.

Superfluidity: The observed characteristics of



A schematic diagram of a pulsar. The sphere at the centre is the neutron star, the curves indicate the magnetic field lines, and the two cones show the emitted radiation. The green line is the pulsar's axis of rotation. | Photo Credit: Mvsid (CC BY-SA 3.0)

Discovery: Pulsar glitches were first observed in 1969 when two separate research groups reported an abrupt increase in the rotation rate of the pulsar PSR 0833-45. Since then, hundreds of glitches have been observed in various pulsars.

Nature of Glitches: A typical pulsar exhibits a steady decrease in its rotation rate over time due

pulsar glitches, particularly the slow post-glitch relaxation, suggest the presence of superfluidity within the neutron star. Superfluidity is a state of matter characterized by frictionless flow and is believed to exist in the neutron star's core.

Mechanism: The most widely accepted explanation for pulsar glitches involves the

interaction between the solid crust and the superfluid core of the neutron star. As the crust slows down due to energy loss, the pinned vortices

in the superfluid gradually become unpinned, leading to a sudden transfer of angular momentum from the superfluid to the crust during a glitch.

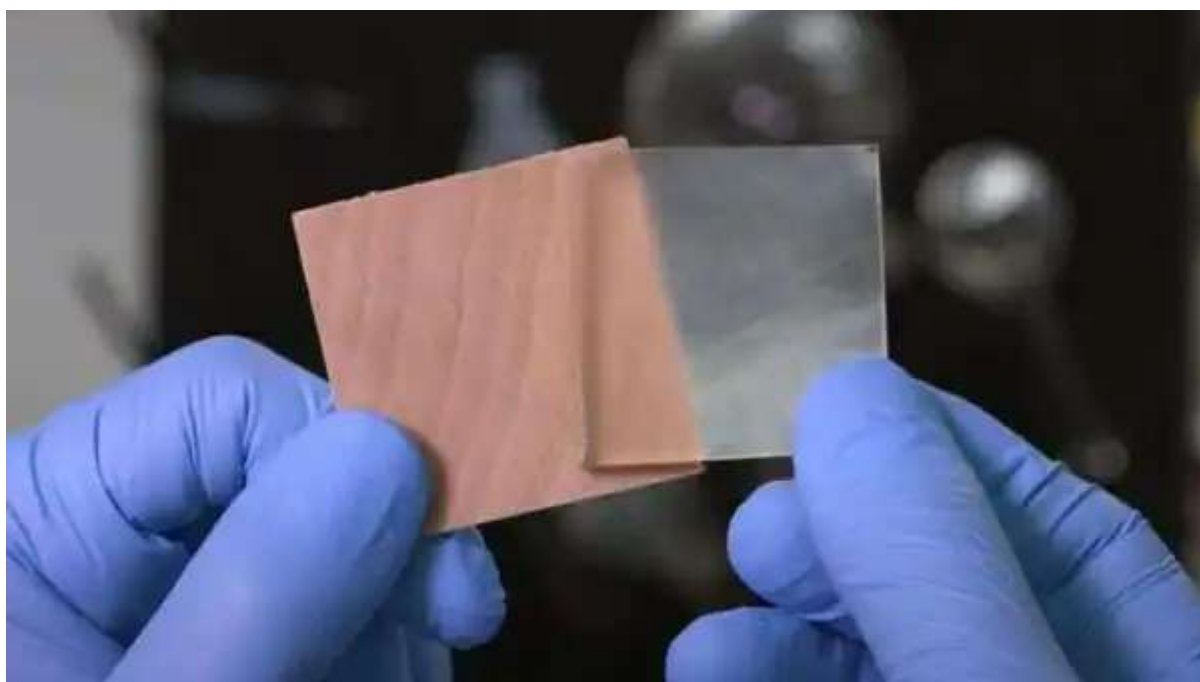
TRANSPARENT WOOD

Context:

Researchers are looking to tune wood's optical, thermal, mechanical and ionic transport properties by chemically and physically modifying its naturally porous structure and chemical composition

construction, energy storage and environmental remediation.

Transparent wood is created when wood from the fast-growing, low-density balsa tree is treated to a room temperature, oxidising bath that bleaches it of nearly all visibility. It is then penetrated with a synthetic polymer called polyvinyl alcohol (PVA),



About:

Conventionally, wood is used in making furniture, construction and as a source of fire. But now, researchers are exploring the possibility of making wood transparent as an eco-friendly alternative to glass.

Researchers are looking to tune wood's optical, thermal, mechanical and ionic transport properties by chemically and physically modifying its naturally porous structure and chemical composition.

Such modifications can be used to produce sustainable, functional materials for various emerging applications such as automobiles,

creating a product that is virtually transparent, according to the US Department of Agriculture.

In 1992, German scientist Siegfried Fink developed the initial transparent wood, a creation that researchers have refined further. In simple words, it is made by removing the lignin (a polymer that's found in the cell walls of plants) from wood and replacing it with clear plastic materials.

Understanding wood's lack of transparency

Wood's lack of transparency comes from the combination of its two main components- cellulose and lignin.

The lignin absorbs light, and the presence of chromophores – light activated compounds – in the material makes the wood look brown.

The fibres in the wood, which mainly comprise cellulose, are hollow tube-like structures.

The air in these hollow tubes scatters light, further reducing the material's transparency.

Advantages of using wood over plastics

Apart from being abundant and renewable, wood is also an eco-friendly alternative to high-carbon footprint materials.

Adopting transparent wood could also be cost-effective. It offers about five times better thermal efficiency than glass, reducing energy expenses.

However, the widespread use of natural wood is constrained by its opaque appearance, modest mechanical strength compared with metals like aluminium and steel, and elevated thermal conductivity when compared to foams and wools, according to researchers.

For a green future

In recent research, scientists created transparent wood using acrylic derived from natural basswood and examined its resistance to various elements.

The transparent wood showed strong resistance to fungi. In fire tests, it ignited later and produced less harmful carbon monoxide than regular wood.

The material also experienced changes in colour and transmittance when exposed to UV radiation, with significant changes occurring in the first few hours.

Challenges:

The first challenge is creating high-performance materials with good product durability and service life. Currently, most modification methods have focused on enhancing the performance of wood. Little research has been conducted on the durability of wood-based materials when exposed to fire, microorganisms, water, or weathering. "This is a crucial factor to consider due to the hydrophilicity and biodegradability of the wood components."

The second challenge is scaling up fabrication and reducing manufacturing and installation costs. One approach to tackle this is the use of high temperature and pressure to facilitate the diffusion of chemicals in the wood microchannels, resulting in a more homogeneous modification.

The third challenge is that of reducing environmental pollution. Toward this goal, researchers are investigating the use of green solvents for wood de-lignification such as deep eutectic solvents or organic acid, which lead to much lower environmental impacts.

To overcome these challenges, efforts are directed towards exploring stability improvement methods, optimising production processes, and adopting environmentally friendly chemical approaches.

POEM-3

Context:

According to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), POEM-3 has successfully achieved all its payload objectives.

About:

Purpose: POEM-3 serves as an experimental platform to conduct various scientific experiments and technology demonstrations in space.

Payloads: The platform is equipped with nine payloads, including instruments and experiments developed by different organizations and institutions. These payloads cover a range of scientific disciplines and technology demonstrations.

Experiments:

The space agency said that the platform had completed 400 orbits by the 25th day. During this

period, each of the nine experiments were put to operation and their performance determined. The experiments include the Women Engineered Satellite (WESAT) developed by LBS Institute of Technology for Women to study the comparison between solar irradiance and UV index, a radiation shielding experiment, an amateur radio, three propulsion systems by space start-ups, and an interplanetary dust count experiment by Physical Research Laboratory.

Two types of fuel cell systems developed by the Vikram Sarabhai Space Centre were also onboard. One of the fuel cells that uses hydrogen and oxygen to generate electricity and releases heat and water as bi-product is expected to be a

precursor for energy systems required for a space station. The cell system is ideal for human missions in space because the heat and water generated as bi-products are also essential, meaning a single system can meet multiple requirements of the mission.

Lowering Orbit: To mitigate space debris and optimize mission efficiency, ISRO has lowered the orbit of POEM-3 from 650 km to 350 km after deploying the payloads.

Future Missions: After achieving its objectives, POEM-3 is expected to re-enter Earth's atmosphere and burn up within the next 75 days, ensuring no debris is left in orbit.

HPV VACCINE

Context:

India gears up for HPV vaccine drive against cervical cancer.

About:

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Many people with HPV don't develop any symptoms but can still infect others through sexual contact.

Symptoms may include warts on the genitals or surrounding skin. At least 14 HPV types have been identified to have the potential to cause cancer. Among these, HPV types 16 and 18 are the most lethal.

Cervical Cancer & HPV Connection:

Cervical cancer is a prevalent sexually transmitted infection.

It's a type of cancer that occurs in the cells of the cervix, the lower part of the uterus that connects to the vagina.

It is mostly caused by long-term infection with particular forms of HPV.

Cervical cancer ranks as the second-most common cancer among Indian women, with its origin in the cervix, the entrance to the uterus from the vagina.

Persistent infection by the human papillomavirus (HPV) is the primary cause of cervical cancer. HPV is a common virus that

WHO STRATEGY

- *In 2022, the WHO adopted a strategy aimed at eliminating cervical cancer as a public health problem, worldwide.*
- *The strategy had three pillars*
 - **90% of girls fully vaccinated by 2030 with the HPV vaccine, this to be done by age 15;**
 - **70% of women screened with a high-performance test between 35 and 45 for early treatment of precancerous lesions, and**
 - **90% of women identified with cervical disease receive treatment.**

affects nearly all sexually active individuals, often without any symptoms. While the immune system typically clears the virus, high-risk strains can lead to cancer.

India's Alarming Stats: India bears a heavy burden, accounting for nearly a quarter of global cervical cancer deaths. Every year, approximately 1.25 lakh women are diagnosed with cervical cancer, and tragically, around 75,000 lose their lives to this disease.

CERVICAL CANCER SCREENING

- Up until some years ago, the gold standard, world over, to screen for cervical cancer, used to be the pap smear. The **pap smear** involves the scraping and brushing of cells from the cervix. These cells are then examined. The smear is recommended every three years, for women between the ages of 25 and 65.
- Issues with Pap Smear:
 - It requires a cytologist to study the smear, and many places, especially in rural India, may not have access to the test itself, or to **cytologists** to study the samples.
 - Awareness continues to remain low, and even in urban areas where women come forward to do the test, it is difficult to get them to come back for follow-up screenings.
- As of 2019, the WHO says, fewer than one in 10 women in India had been screened for cervical cancer in the previous five years.
- Now, **HPV DNA testing** is the recommended method for screening for cervical cancer which involves testing cells from the cervix for infections with any of the HPV types that could cause cancer.
- The WHO, too, recommends that HPV DNA testing be the first-choice screening method for cervical cancer prevention – these tests are less prone to quality problems and human errors, it says.
- India will receive the ***first at-home self-test kit for women to screen for the Human Papilloma-virus (HPV)***. The at-home vaginal swab test will cost Rs. 2,500 per test and is being offered by **LifeCell**, a renowned stem cell and tissues storage bank provider that also offers genetic screening tests and cell and tissue-based medicines.

Vaccination drive:

- The quadrivalent vaccines, including the Serum Institute of India's Cervavac, prevent the entry of four of the most common types of HPV 16, 18, 6 and 11 thereby preventing infections, genital warts, and eventually cancer.
- The indigenously developed, cheaper Cervavac will be used in the government campaign.
- At least 14 HPV types have been identified to have the potential to cause cancer. Among these, HPV types 16 and 18 are considered to be the most oncogenic, causing about 70 per cent of all cervical cancer cases globally.
- Universal immunisation of girls also reduces the transmission of the infection to boys and protects them from other cancers. The immunisation drive, planned

in three phases over three years. Every year for three years, one-third of girls aged 9 to 14 will get vaccinated. Also, in states where this happens, each new group of 9-year-olds will receive the vaccine during these three years.

Cost of Vaccination:

- Currently, the two-dose HPV vaccine is available commercially for about Rs 2,000 per dose.
- But once the government includes it in its immunisation programme, it will be available for free.

Besides CERVAVAC, two vaccines licensed globally are available in India;

a quadrivalent vaccine (Gardasil, marketed by Merck) and

a bivalent vaccine (Cervarix, marketed by Glaxo Smith Kline).

These vaccines are costly and hence are unaffordable for the vast majority of Indians.

Challenges:

At present, SII has a production capacity of about 2-3 million doses of Cervavac per year.

However, it needs to increase this capacity, with a target of 60-70 million doses.

The biggest task will be in allocating adequate resources and manpower for vaccinating the

massive demographic of adolescent girls aged

between 9 and 14.

There is a huge need for stepping up awareness about the disease and the vaccine in the community.

Unlike Covid and the vaccination programme, there is very little awareness about cervical cancer.

There is an urgent need to have a communication strategy in place and to ensure that any myths circulating online are promptly busted.

T-HUBS

Context:

A milestone in the journey of the National Quantum Mission (NQM) is reached with the launch of the call for pre-proposals for setting up Thematic Hubs (T-Hubs).

About:

- The initiative is launched by the Secretary, Department of Science and Technology (DST).
- The preproposal invites academia institutions/ R&D Labs to submit innovative pre-proposals in consortia mode.
- This is in alignment with the objectives of the National Quantum Mission (NQM) to set up T-Hubs in Quantum Computing, Quantum Communication, Quantum Sensing & Metrology and Quantum Materials & Devices.
- The NQM will also work in collaboration with industry and startups to translate research to deployable technologies.
- The initiative highlighted the spirit of collaboration in the mission could help make a meaningful impact at the national and global level.

About National Quantum Mission (NQM):

- National Quantum Mission (NQM) launched on 19th April 2023, is being implemented by DST.
- The mission is launched with a total outlay of Rs.6003.65 Crore for a period of eight years.
- The Mission aims to seed, nurture and scale up scientific and industrial R&D and create a vibrant & innovative ecosystem in Quantum Technology (QT).
- This will accelerate QT led economic growth, nurture the ecosystem in the country and make India one of the leading nations in the development of Quantum Technologies & Applications (QTA).
- The National Quantum Mission will focus on developing magnetometers with high sensitivity in atomic systems and Atomic Clocks for precision timing, communications, and navigation.
- The Mission would greatly benefit various sectors including communication, health, financial, energy with applications in drug design, space, banking, security etc.
- The Mission will also provide a huge boost to National priorities like Digital India, Make in India, Skill India and Stand-up India, Start-up India, Self-reliant India and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

PEREGRINE MISSION 1

Context:

Private lunar lander Peregrine Mission-1, the first US spacecraft due to land on the moon's surface since Apollo 17 in 1972, suffered an "anomaly".

About:

Peregrine Mission 1 (TO2-AB), or the Peregrine Lunar Lander, carrying scientific and other payloads to the Moon, was planned to touch down on the lunar surface on Sinus Viscositatis.

The scientific objectives of the mission were to study the lunar exosphere, thermal properties and hydrogen abundance of the lunar regolith,

magnetic fields, and the radiation environment. It would also have tested advanced solar arrays.

Peregrine Mission 1 was selected through NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) initiative, in which NASA contracts with a commercial partner, in this case Astrobotic, that provides the launch and lander.



GOOD MANUFACTURING PRACTICES (GMP) REGULATIONS IN PHARMA SECTOR

Context:

Ministry issues revised rules to ensure quality in the pharma sector in compliance with international quality standards such as World Health Organization-Good Manufacturing Practices (WHO-GMP).

About:

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has notified revised rules under Schedule M of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945. The revision aims to ensure that the pharma sector recommits to the manufacture of safe, effective, and high-quality drugs in compliance with international quality standards, thus benefiting both patients and industry.

This is a response to the backlash India has been receiving over reports of substandard medicine being exported from India such as after cough syrup linked child deaths in Gambia and Uzbekistan.

The latest revision includes five new categories of drugs —

Pharmaceutical products containing hazardous substances such as sex hormones,

1. Steroids (anabolic and androgenic),
2. Cytotoxic substances,
3. Biological products and
4. Radiopharmaceuticals.

It also has additional sections including — the introduction of a pharmaceutical quality system (PQS), quality risk management (QRM), product quality review (PQR), qualification and validation of equipment, and a computerised storage system for all drug products.

According to the new notification, the manufacturer must assume responsibility for the quality of pharmaceutical products to ensure that they are fit for use, comply with the requirements of the license, and do not place patients at risk due to inadequate safety, quality or efficacy.

Additionally, companies must market a finished product only after getting "satisfactory results" from tests of the ingredients and retain enough of the samples of intermediate and final

products to allow repeated testing or verification of a batch.

Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) are mandatory standards which enhance quality by

way of control on materials, methods, machines, processes, personnel and facility/environment etc. GMP was first incorporated in Schedule M of the Drugs and Cosmetics Rules, 1945 in the year 1988.

INDIA'S FIRST DARK SKY PARK

Context:

The Pench Tiger Reserve (PTR) in Maharashtra has been marked as India's first Dark Sky Park and the fifth such park in Asia for protecting the night sky and preventing light pollution, making the facility ideal for astronomy enthusiasts.

About Pench Tiger Reserve:

Pench Tiger Reserve or Pench National Park is one of the premier tiger reserves of India and the first one to straddle across two states - Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The fictional works of Rudyard Kipling, The Jungle Book and The Second Jungle Book, are set in the region. Kipling himself never visited the area, instead basing his descriptions on other

locations in India.

What is a Dark Sky Park?

A dark-sky preserve is an area, usually surrounding a park or observatory that restricts artificial light pollution. The purpose of the dark-sky movement is generally to promote astronomy.

The Indian Astronomical Observatory (IAO), a high-altitude astronomy station located in Hanle, and operated by the Indian Institute of Astrophysics, is India's first dark-sky preserve.

Situated in the Western Himalayas at an elevation of 4,500 meters (14,764 ft), the IAO is one of the world's highest located sites for optical, infrared and gamma-ray telescopes.

AI GOVERNANCE ALLIANCE

Context:

AI Governance Alliance Report on Generative AI Governance was released by the World Economic Forum.

About:

The World Economic Forum launches the AI Governance Alliance uniting industry leaders, governments, academic institutions, and civil

society organizations to champion responsible global design and release of transparent and inclusive AI systems.

To regulate the future of AI governance, fostering innovation, and ensuring that the potential of AI is harnessed for the betterment of society while upholding ethical considerations and inclusivity at every step.

MAGNETOMETER BOOM OF ADITYA L-1

Context:

ISRO successfully deploys magnetometer boom on Aditya-L1 in Halo orbit.

About:

Purpose: This experiment aims to examine the subtle interplanetary magnetic fields in space.

Sensor Configuration: The boom hosts two

advanced magnetometer sensors placed 3 and 6 metres apart on a rod extending from the spacecraft, designed to reduce interference from the spacecraft's own magnetic field and enhance measurement accuracy.

Boom Structure: Made from carbon fibre reinforced polymer, the boom comprises five interconnected segments with spring-driven hinges, enabling it to fold during transit and

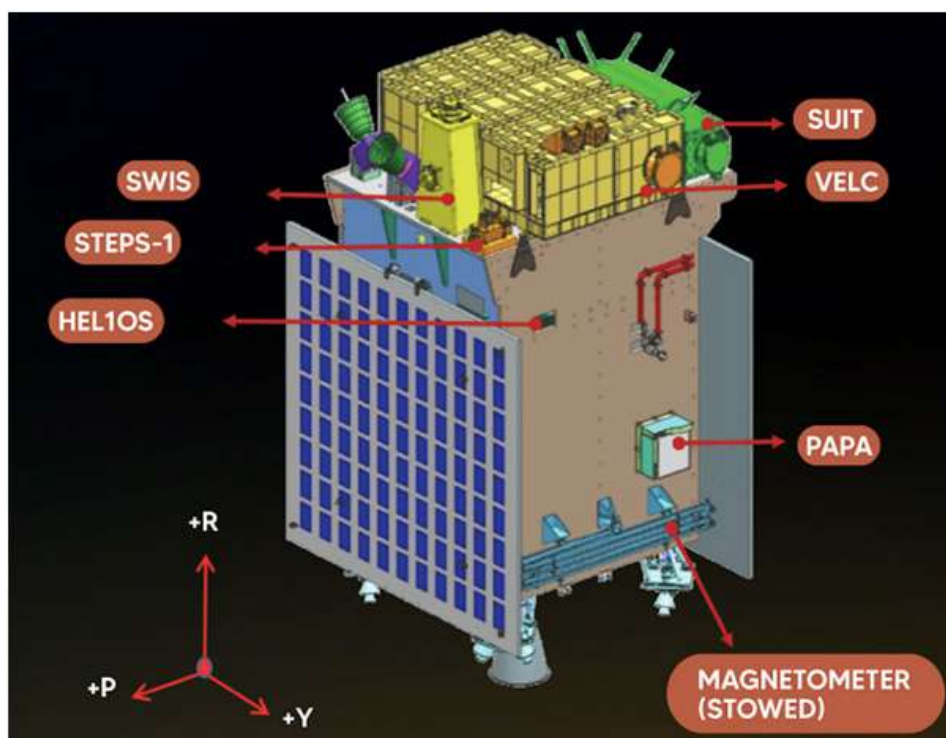
unfold in orbit.

What is a Magnetometer?

A magnetometer measures magnetic fields, focusing on their strength and direction.

Example: Compass (determines the Earth's magnetic field direction.)

Some magnetometers assess magnetic dipole moments, akin to the effect observed in a ferromagnet, where the magnetic material influences the current in a surrounding coil by its magnetic properties.



How Magnetometers Work?

There are different types of magnetometers, but they all work on the same basic principle: they convert a magnetic field into an electrical signal.

This can be done in a few different ways, but some common methods include:

Induction: A changing magnetic field can induce a current in a coil of wire. The strength

of the current is proportional to the strength of the magnetic field.

Hall effect: When a conductor is placed in a magnetic field, a voltage is created across the conductor. The strength of the voltage is proportional to the strength of the magnetic field.

Magnetoresistive effect: The electrical resistance of some materials changes in the presence of a magnetic field. The change in resistance can be used to measure the strength of the magnetic field.

THORIUM BREAKTHROUGH

Context:

The Chicago-based company has developed (and patented) a fuel, which is a mix of Thorium and Uranium of a certain level of enrichment, called HALEU (High Assay Low Enriched Uranium). Clean Core calls this concoction ANEEL (Advanced Nuclear Energy for Enriched Life) — named so to honour one of India's foremost nuclear scientists, Dr Anil Kakodkar.

Status and utility of thorium reserves in India:

India has the world's largest reserves of

Thorium, estimated at 1.07 million tonnes, enough to last over a century. If India uses this Thorium, it can then produce enough green energy and easily turn net-zero by its target date of 2070.

However, Thorium is a fertile material and not a fissile material. This means, it must be paired with Uranium-235 or Plutonium-239 to be used as fuel in a reactor. As neutrons from these fissile materials bombard Thorium, it mutates into Uranium-233, which is also a fissile material. So, to use the Thorium in India, you need sufficient stocks of Uranium-235 (which India has very little of), or Plutonium-239 (which is produced

using Uranium-235)

About:

ANEEL can be used in the existing Pressurized Heavy-Water Reactors (PHWRs), an indigenous reactor system that is the workhorse of India's nuclear fleet. India has 18 PHWR reactors of a total capacity of 4,460 MW and is building ten more of 700 MW each.

If pursued, Clean Core's ANEEL fuel can prove to be a game-changer for India.

HALEU is Uranium enriched to more than 5 per cent but less than 20 per cent. It is needed for many of the advanced nuclear reactor designs under development.

At present only Russia and China have the infrastructure to produce HALEU at scale

Advantages:

Furthermore, in utilising this fuel, reactor operators can enjoy a dramatic reduction in nuclear waste volume and operating costs.

ANEEL fuel bundle lasts much longer and burns more efficiently. Its burn-up is 60,000 MW-days per tonne, compared with the 7,000 MW-days per tonne of the conventional natural uranium fuel in PHWRs. This higher burn-up significantly impacts the waste volumes and economics of reactor operations compared with the currently used natural uranium.

The spent ANEEL fuel cannot be used for weapons — a source of comfort for foreign uranium suppliers and reactor operators.

Pressurized heavy-water reactor (PHWR)

A pressurized heavy-water reactor (PHWR) is a nuclear reactor that uses heavy water (deuterium oxide D₂O) as its coolant and neutron moderator.

PHWRs frequently use natural uranium as fuel, but sometimes also use very low enriched uranium.

The advantage of using heavy water is that it has a low absorption of neutrons, which means that more neutrons can cause further nuclear

fission in the fuel and sustain a chain reaction. It also ensures that there is an element of safety.

India's Three Stage Nuclear Programme:

India's three-stage nuclear power programme was formulated by Homi Bhabha in the 1950s to secure the country's long term energy independence, through the use of uranium and thorium reserves found in the monazite sands of coastal regions of South India. The ultimate focus of the programme is on enabling the thorium reserves of India to be utilised in meeting the country's energy requirements.

Stage 1- Pressurised heavy water reactor (PHWR): The first stage involved using natural uranium to fuel PHWR to produce electricity and Plutonium-239 as a byproduct.

Stage 2- Fast breeder reactor (FBR): The second stage involves using plutonium-239 to produce fuel, which would be used in Fast Breeder Reactors. Plutonium 239 undergoes fission to produce energy. Once a sufficient amount of plutonium-239 is built up, thorium will be used in the reactor, to produce Uranium-233. This uranium is crucial for the third stage.

Stage 3- Advanced Heavy Water Reactor (AHWR): The main purpose of stage-3 is to achieve a sustainable nuclear fuel cycle. The advanced nuclear system would be used a combination of Uranium-233 and Thorium. Thorium use was reserved for the last stage as despite of having significant availability, use of Thorium in production of energy has been full of certain challenges. It cannot be used directly. Thorium absorbs the neutrons, which can more efficiently produce more Plutonium in Fast Breeder Reactor for a faster growth.

Thus, the ultimate objective of the above programme is to create capacity to use Thorium for sustainable production of nuclear energy and make India energy independent.

SQUARE KILOMETER ARRAY

Context

The Government of India has accorded its approval for India's participation in the international mega science project, Square Kilometer Array (SKA), at an estimated cost of ₹ 1250 Cr.

This approval covers funding support for the construction phase of the international SKA Observatory (SKAO) spread over the next 7 years. The project will be jointly funded by the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and Department of Science and Technology (DST), with DAE as the lead agency.

The Indian participation in SKA is a truly nationwide, inclusive project led by a consortium of more than 20 academic and research institutes (with NCRA-TIFR as the nodal institute).

Square Kilometer Array

SKA is a state of the art, mega science international facility to build the world's biggest and most sensitive radio telescope for addressing a wide variety of cutting-edge science goals.

The SKAO, collocated in Australia (SKA-Low) and South Africa (SKA-Mid) with operational headquarters in the UK, is expected to revolutionize radio astronomy, while driving

the growth of many important new state-of-the-art technologies.

What will happen for India?

Subsequent to this approval, India will be signing the SKAO treaty to become a full-fledged member of the SKA Observatory and thus join the growing list of countries participating in the project.

India's membership in SKAO will enable the large-scale participation of Indian industry not only for fulfilling our commitments towards in-kind contributions but also in other open tenders that may be floated by the SKAO.

Participation in this project will open up possibilities for development of niche skills in Indian industry and research organizations in different areas of next generation technologies, such as modern antenna design, sophisticated cryogenic receiver systems, high volume optical fibre data transport technology, state-of-the-art digital signal processing systems, high performance super-computing technologies, big data archival and analysis techniques, modern end-to-end system management hardware and software, artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms.

CYBER KIDNAPPING

Context

A Chinese student who was a victim of 'cyber kidnapping' has been found in rural Utah, unharmed. The 17-year-old, Kai Zhuang, was reported missing on December 28. By the time the police traced him, his parents back in China had paid \$80,000 in ransom.

The boy's parents had informed his host school, in Utah's Riverdale, that he appeared to have been kidnapped. The school then contacted the police. He was found in a tent about 40 km north of Brigham City, where he seems to have self-isolated.

What is cyber kidnapping?

Cyber kidnapping refers to a crime where the 'kidnappers' convince their victim to hide, and then contact their loved ones for ransom. The victim is also made to send pictures that make it look like they are being held captive — showing them bound or gagged.

These are then shared with the family. Both parties believe their loved ones will be harmed if they don't do as the kidnappers ask.

The 'kidnappers', though not physically present, monitor the victim online through video-call platforms.

In the Utah boy's case too, his parents were sent a picture indicating he had been kidnapped. The police believe the kidnappers have manipulated him since December 20. He was traced by analysing call data and bank records.

The rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI), such

the US Senate about receiving just such a call. When Jennifer DeStefano picked up a call from an unknown number, "her 15-year-old daughter", crying, told her some "bad men" had her. A man

crimes can rise, as scammers can send people voice notes that sound exactly like a loved one in distress.

then threatened her and demanded ransom. After she cut the call, she called up her daughter, and realised she was safe.

THE MPEMBA EFFECT

Context

The Mpemba effect, named after Tanzanian student Erasto Mpemba, who brought attention to this counterintuitive phenomenon in 1969, makes for curious observation. The effect is that hot water can freeze faster than cold water in similar conditions.

While Aristotle, Francis Bacon, and René Descartes had noticed the effect centuries earlier, the Mpemba effect caught scientists' attention only more recently. Researchers have conducted numerous experiments to determine the causes of this confusing phenomenon, but a consensus conclusion remains wanting.

One cause, they have posited, is microbubbles left suspended in water that has been heated by boiling. These cavities promote convection and

transfer heat faster as the water cools. Another is evaporation: as warmer water evaporates more, it also takes away some heat (evaporation is inherently endothermic, which is how sweat cools your skin). Both convection and accelerated heat transfer are enhanced in warmer water because such water is less dense.

Yet another factor could be the presence of frost in cold water. Frost is an insulator and could slow the loss of heat. Scientists have also considered whether compounds in water like calcium carbonate could be precipitated by boiling, and then dissolve, thus increasing the water's freezing point.

This way, the Mpemba effect continues to captivate scientists with its complex interplay of physical mechanisms.



SECURITY

What's Inside?

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DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL

Context:

The Defence Technology Council, as proposed by the expert committee chaired by Prof K Vijay Raghavan, is envisioned as a top-level body responsible for determining India's defence technology roadmap and overseeing major defence projects. Here are the key points about the Defence Technology Council:

About:

Composition: The council is proposed to be chaired by the Prime Minister of India, with the Defence Minister and the National Security Advisor serving as its Vice Presidents. Additionally, it will include the Chief of Defence Staff, the Principal Scientific Advisor, the three

service chiefs, and their vice chiefs as members. Representatives from academia and industry, with two members from each sector, will also be part of the council.

Purpose: The primary role of the Defence Technology Council is to chart out India's strategic direction in defence technology development and deployment. It will decide on major defence projects, set priorities, and oversee their execution. By bringing together key stakeholders from government, academia, and industry, the council aims to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated approach to advancing India's defence capabilities.

Executive Committee: The Defence Technology Council is proposed to have an executive committee chaired by the Chief of Defence Staff. This committee will be responsible for implementing the decisions and directives of the council, as well as coordinating activities related to defence technology development and procurement.

Role in Research and Development: The council is expected to streamline the research and development efforts in the defence sector, with a focus on innovation, efficiency, and effectiveness. It will encourage collaboration between government agencies, research institutions, and the private sector to foster innovation and accelerate technological advancements in defence.

Promotion of Indigenous Capabilities: One of the key objectives of the Defence Technology Council is to promote indigenous research, development, and production of defence technologies. By leveraging India's scientific and industrial expertise, the council aims to reduce dependency on foreign imports and enhance self-reliance in defence.

Secretariat The panel has also suggested the creation of a separate department under the Defence Ministry - the Department of Defence Science, Technology, and Innovation. This department, proposed to be headed by a technocrat,

Vijayaraghavan committee:

- The Vijay Raghavan Committee was constituted by the government to review the functioning of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) due to concerns about delays and inefficiencies in its projects.
- The Vijay Raghavan Committee was **formed due to delays in DRDO projects**, as highlighted by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) and concerns expressed by the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Defence.
- Its recommendations focused on **refocusing DRDO on research and development (R&D) while avoiding involvement in downstream activities better suited for the private sector**.
- The committee emphasized the importance of identifying expertise domestically and internationally for defence technologies. It proposed the establishment of a Defence Technology Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, to coordinate defence technology development and leverage expertise from various sectors.

will Promote defence research and development in the academic and start-up ecosystem, Serve as the secretariat for the Defence Tech Council

and Operate labs for testing and certification, a function also performed by DRDO.

PUNJAB CHALLENGES THE EXPANSION OF BSF JURISDICTION

Context:

On October 11, 2021, the Ministry of Home Affairs issued a notification expanding the jurisdiction of the BSF in Punjab, West Bengal and Assam. This was challenged by the Punjab government the following December.

Border Security Force:

The BSF was created after the enactment of the Border Security Force Act in September 1968. The BSF is meant to secure India's borders with its neighbouring nations and is empowered to arrest, search and seize under a number of laws, such as the Criminal Procedure Code, the Passports Act, the Passport (Entry into India) Act, and the NDPS Act, to name a few.

Powers of Central Government to expand the BSF powers

Section 139(1) of the BSF Act allows the central government, through an order, to designate an area "within the local limits of such area adjoining the borders of India" where members of the BSF can exercise powers to prevent offenses under any Acts that the central government may specify.

Prior to the notification issued in October 2021, the BSF could exercise its powers within 15 kilometres of the border in Punjab, West Bengal and Assam. The Centre expanded this to within 50 kilometres of the border.

The notification states that, within this larger 50-kilometre jurisdiction, the BSF can only exercise powers under the Criminal Procedure Code, the Passport (Entry into India) Act and the Passports Act. For other central legislations, the 15-km limit remains.

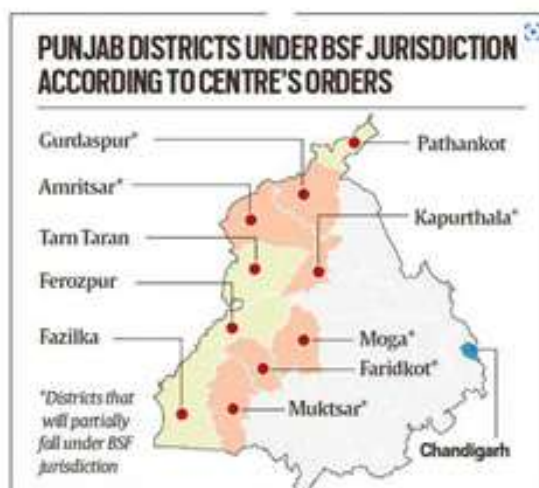
Reason for such expansion:

On December 7, 2021, the Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai clarified in writing that this expansion was in response to the increased use of drones and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, which have long-range capabilities and enable surveillance and the smuggling of arms and fake currency. He also highlighted the 'menace of cattle smuggling' and pointed out that smugglers often seek refuge outside BSF jurisdiction.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta also claimed that the notification makes the BSF jurisdiction uniform across states, as the 50-kilometre limit was already in place in Rajasthan. The same notification reduced the jurisdiction in Gujarat from 80 km to 50 km.

Why has Punjab challenged this?

The state of Punjab filed an 'original suit' against the central government in the Supreme Court in December 2021. The Supreme Court has 'original jurisdiction' in disputes between the central government and states under Article 131 of the Constitution, which means cases of this kind can only be heard for the first time at the





SC “to the exclusion of any other court”.

The Punjab government claimed that expanding the jurisdiction of the BSF would compromise the state’s exclusive powers to legislate on matters involving the police and public order.

These powers are provided in Entries 1 and 2 of the State List under Article 246 of the Constitution. They also claimed that the notification was issued without consulting with any of the states concerned. Shortly after the notification was released, the then Chief Minister of Punjab Charanjit Singh Channi called it “a direct attack on federalism”.

Arguing before the SC in December 2023, Additional Advocate General for the state of Punjab, Shadan Farasat, claimed that in Punjab, a large number of cities and towns would fall within this 50-kilometre jurisdiction, whereas in Gujarat and Rajasthan, most areas along the international border are sparsely populated, primarily containing marshlands or deserts.

Have other states joined the

challenge?

Currently, no other challenge is tagged with the Punjab government’s, though the notification was met with pushback from West Bengal when it was released. Shortly after the October 2021 notification, the West Bengal Assembly had passed a resolution demanding its withdrawal.

What are the issues that the SC will consider?

The court will decide if the notification expanding the jurisdiction of the BSF was arbitrary or backed by legitimate reasons. Further, the court will determine if this notification interferes with the powers of the local police and encroaches upon states powers under the Constitution.

The SC will also decide what factors have to be considered when deciding which areas are “within the local limits of such area adjoining the borders of India” and whether all states must be treated alike when determining these local limits. Finally, the court will decide if the notification can be challenged through an original suit under Article 131 of the Constitution.

FREE MOVEMENT REGIME

CONTEXT:

The Union government is all set to scrap the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Myanmar border, a senior government official said on January 2.

The official said that around 300 km of the border will be fenced and a tender will be issued in the next few days.

BACKGROUND:

After a military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, there was an influx of undocumented migrants, over 40,000 refugees took shelter in Mizoram, and around 4,000 refugees are said to have entered Manipur.



FREE MOVEMENT REGIME:

India shares a 1,643 km-long border with Myanmar, which passes through the States of Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km), and Mizoram (510 km).

Under the FMR, every member of the hill tribes, who is either a citizen of India or a citizen of Myanmar, and who resides within 16 km on either side of the border, can cross the border on production of a border pass, usually valid for a year, and can stay for up to two weeks per visit.

It was implemented in 2018 as part of the Narendra Modi government's Act East policy, at a time when diplomatic relations between India and Myanmar were on the upswing.

HISTORY:

The border between India and Myanmar was demarcated by the British in 1826, without seeking the opinion of the people living in the region.

The border effectively divided people of the same ethnicity and culture into two nations without

their consent. The current India-Myanmar Border reflects the line the British drew.

ISSUES WITH FMR:

The illegal migration of tribal Kuki-Chin peoples into India from Myanmar.

Aids illegal immigration, drug trafficking, and gun running.

The border runs through forested and undulating terrain, is almost entirely unfenced, and difficult to monitor.

Data from the Manipur Chief Minister's Office show that 500 cases were registered and 625 individuals were arrested under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act in Manipur in 2022.

BUREAU OF CIVIL AVIATION SECURITY (BCAS)

CONTEXT:

Union Civil Aviation Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia on Saturday said his ministry is looking at a template to restructure the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS). Besides, the minister said the workforce at BCAS, the country's aviation security body, will be increased by 400-450 people.

Bureau of Civil Aviation Security:

The Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) was initially set up as a Cell in the DGCA in January 1978 on the recommendation of the Pande Committee.

The BCAS was reorganized into an independent department under the Ministry of Civil Aviation on 1st April, 1987.

The main responsibilities of BCAS include laying down standards and measures with respect to security of civil flights at international and domestic airports in India.

BCAS Head quarter is located at "A" Wing, I-III floor, Janpath Bhavan, Janpath, New Delhi-110001.

It has got four Regional Offices located at International airports i.e. Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata

and Chennai.

Functions:

Laying down Aviation Security Standards in accordance with Annex 17 to Chicago Convention of ICAO for airport operators, airlines operators, and their security agencies responsible for implementing AVSEC measures.

Monitoring the implementation of security rules and regulations and carrying out survey of security needs.

Ensure that the persons implementing security controls are appropriately trained and possess all competencies required to perform their duties.

Planning and coordination of Aviation security matters.

Surprise/Dummy checks to test professional efficiency and alertness of security staff.

Mock exercise to test efficacy of Contingency Plans and operational preparedness of the various agencies.



EUROPEAN PORT ALLIANCE

CONTEXT:

On 24 January, the Commission, together with the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU, launched the European Ports Alliance and its Public-Private Partnership to step up the fight against drug trafficking and organised crime.

BACKGROUND:

Last year was record-breaking in terms of cocaine seizures in Belgium and the Netherlands. Violence from gangs fighting for control of trafficking routes, or from law-enforcement pushback, prompted local politicians to call on the EU to step in.

OBJECTIVE:

The European Ports Alliance is a flagship initiative of the EU Roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime, adopted by the Commission on the 18 October 2023.

The initiative was inaugurated at Belgium's Antwerp port, the main gateway for cocaine into Europe.

The new European Ports Alliance was jointly initiated by the Belgian government, which currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, to reinforce port security, combat corruption and stop illegal drugs from entering the Continent.

The alliance will connect governments, EU officials, law enforcement, port authorities, shipping companies and terminal operators to share best practices in countering organized crime groups and drug trafficking.

This partnership aims to bring all relevant stakeholders together, to form solutions to protect ports.

PEACE PACT

Context:

Centre, Assam sign peace pact with ULFA faction.

ULFA:

ULFA – United Liberation Front of Assam was born during the anti-foreigner movement of 1979.

Aim – To establish a sovereign Assamese nation through an armed struggle against the Indian state.

Geographical spread – It still has camps in Myanmar, and previously had camps in both Bangladesh and Bhutan.

Lying deep in jungles and hilly areas, these camps act as launch pads for cross border operations, as well as shelter after the fact.

Links to other insurgents – Outfits in the Northeast, Myanmar and also with Islamic terror outfits like Al-Qaeda.

It also has links to Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which has reportedly trained ULFA insurgents in the past.

Impact – For over 44 years, this struggle has been chequered with kidnappings and extortion, executions and bomb blasts, leading to tragic loss of life in Assam and beyond.

Historical background:

There was an influx of migrants from all over since 19th century into Assam.

It was further exacerbated by the Partition in 1947 and the subsequent exodus of refugees from the erstwhile-East Pakistan.

The competition for resources skyrocketed, resulting in a 6-year long mass movement from 1979.

Response by Indian government:

Military measures – It has launched Operation Bajrang (1990) that has arrested many ULFA insurgents.

Assam was declared a 'disturbed area', President's rule was imposed and Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) was invoked.

Strategic measures – It has allegedly supported certain factions of ULFA, like Surrendered ULFA (SULFA) in 1992 that offered to surrender and engage in dialogue with the government.

Later SULFA allegedly carried out secret killings of ULFA cadres on behalf of the State government.

ULFA Peace Accord

Surrendering the arms - ULFA cadres have agreed to surrender arms and ammunition, vacate their camps. They have decided to join the mainstream and to engage in the peaceful democratic process established by law and maintain the integrity of the country.

(2) It would be made a time-bound programme by the Ministry of Home Affairs to fulfil the demands of the ULFA.

(3) Committee formation - A committee would also be formed for monitoring the programme implementation.

(4) Reservation - 97 out of 126 Assembly seats in Assam would be reserved for indigenous people and the future delimitation exercise would follow this principle.

(5) Financial support – Rs. 1.5 lakh crore investment had been pledged in the peace accord.

(6) Constitutional safeguards – It would be ensured by protecting land rights and putting restrictions on migration from one constituency to another.



HISTORY



ART & CULTURE



What's Inside?

1. ICONIC MONUMENTS OF RAJASTHAN
2. KHARSAWAN MASSACRE OF 1948
3. KARPOORI THAKUR
4. CHITTORGARH FORT
5. AYODHYA TEMPLE- PINK SANDSTONE

ICONIC MONUMENTS OF RAJASTHAN

Context:

Rajasthan CM reviews preparations for visit of PM Modi and French President Macron to Jaipur.

After taking stock of the preparations from the Jaipur Airport to Jantar Mantar, Hawa Mahal and Amber Fort, the chief minister gave necessary directions to the officials.

THE JANTAR MANTAR, JAIPUR:

(Not to be confused with Jantar Mantar of New Delhi which is also built by Maharaja Jai Singh II of Jaipur)

- In the early 18th century, Maharaja Jai Singh II of Jaipur constructed five Jantar Mantars in total, in New Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Mathura and Varanasi; they were completed between 1724 and 1735.
- It includes a set of some 20 main fixed instruments.
- They are monumental examples in masonry of known instruments but which in many cases have specific characteristics of their own.
- The instruments enable for naked-eye observation of astronomical positions. The observatory is an example of Ptolemaic positional astronomy, which was widely used.
- The monument was completed in 1734.
- It features the world's largest stone sundial, and is a UNESCO World Heritage site.
- The Jantar have Samrat Yantra, Jai Prakash, Ram Yantra and Niyati Chakra; each of which are used for various astronomical calculations.
- The primary purpose of the observatory

was to compile astronomical tables and to predict the times and movements of the sun, moon and planets.

It was designated a monument of national importance in 1968.



Maharaja Sawai Jai Singh II (1693-1744):

He was a great warrior and astronomer. He came to power at the age of 11 on the death of his father Maharaja Bishan Singh.

He was feudatory of the Mughals and Aurangazab conferred the title of Sawai to Jai Singh, meaning one and a quarter, a title that all of Jai Singh's descendants kept.

He was trained by the best teachers and scholars in art, science, philosophy and military affairs.

Jai Singh's lineage can be traced back to the Kuchwaha Rajput clan who came to power in the 12th century.

He built Astronomy Observatories at Delhi, Jaipur, Varanasi, Ujjain and Mathura known as the Jantar Mantar.

Jaipur gets its name from him.

ABOUT HAWA MAHAL

Hawa Mahal, also known as “Palace of Breeze”, was built in 1799 as an extension to the Royal City Palace of Jaipur

Allowed the royal ladies who at the time strictly observed “pardah”, to be able to watch any processions and activities on the street without being seen by the public.

Constructed in 1799 by Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh who belonged to the Kachhwaha Rajput dynasty.

The main architect of this palace, built of red and pink sandstone, is Lal Chand Ustad and the palace is believed to have been constructed in the form of the crown of Krishna, the Hindu god.

The main highlight of Hawa Mahal is its pyramid shape and its 953 windows or ‘Jharokhas’ which are decorated with intricate designs.

Architectural Style: Blend of Hindu Rajput architecture and the Islamic Mughal architecture. The former style is palpable from the fluted pillars, floral patterns and domed canopies while the arches and stone inlay filigree work are manifestations of the latter style.

The façade of the building intricately carved with beautiful motifs is cognate to that of the honeycomb of a beehive. Several potholes of the structure each having small lattice windows, chiselled sandstone grill and decorated domes give the building a look of a mass of semi-octagonal bays.

These jharokhas were built in such a manner that air circulates naturally through them



creating Venturi effect (doctor breeze) thus air conditioning the entire structure during the hot summers.

The inspiration for the monument is said to have come from the Khetri Mahal (also known as the Wind Palace) at Jhunjhunu, Rajasthan.

AMBER FORT AND PALACE:

Location: Jaipur, Rajasthan

Built By: Raja Man Singh

Built in the Year: 1592

Materials Used: Red sandstone and marble

Purpose: Main residence of the Rajput Maharajas

Current Status: Amber fort was declared as UNESCO World Heritage Site

Also referred to as the Amber Palace, the fort is located on a hill in Amer, Rajasthan. Just eleven kilometers from the city of Jaipur, the Amber fort is a major tourist attraction. Built by Raja Man Singh, the fort, which is also spelt as Amer fort, is a scenic marvel.

It stands on top of an easily scalable mountain, which is situated right next to the beautiful Maota Lake.

The fort's majestic appearance and its geographical advantages make it a special place to visit.

The fort presents a fascinating blend of Hindu and Muslim architecture. It is built using red sandstone and white marble.

The palace complex of the Amber fort has very attractive apartments. This complex was built by Raja Man Singh, Mirza Raja Jai Singh and Sawai Jai Singh over a period of about two centuries.

This palace complex was used as the main residence of the Rajput Maharajas for a long period of time.

KHARSAWAN MASSACRE OF 1948

Context:

Remembering independent India's 'Jallianwala Bagh': The Kharsawan massacre of 1948. As the world makes merry on New Year's Day, Adivasis from Jharkhand's Kolhan region observe January 1 as a day of mourning and remembrance.

About:

On January 1, 1948, the town of Kharsawan in present-day Jharkhand witnessed a massacre reminiscent of what happened in Jallianwala Bagh in 1919. Police opened fire at a crowd gathered for a protest and the weekly haat (market), killing hundreds, or by some accounts, thousands of Adivasis.

Struggle for an Adivasi state

In 1912, the Bengal Presidency was partitioned to create Bihar and Orissa Province.

However, within this new province, there existed a large Adivasi population with its distinct culture, and many grievances with both the British and non-tribal populations.

Thus, in 1912 itself, the demand for a separate tribal state was articulated for the first time at St Columba's College, Hazaribagh.

Over the next few years, this demand would

gain momentum.

The Simon Commission, mandated to report on constitutional reforms in India, gave it official credence in 1930.

It observed: "The province of Bihar and Orissa... is the most artificial unit of all the Indian provinces.

It was formed by bringing under a single administration three areas which differ markedly, not only in physical features, but in many social, linguistic and cultural characteristics."

In 1938 the Adivasi Mahasabha was formed to continue the struggle, with Jaipal Singh Munda (1903-70), former captain of the Indian hockey team, emerging as its tallest leader.

Kharsawan's merger with Orissa

Kharsawan was a small princely state, less than 400 sq km in area, lying to the west of Jamshedpur.

At the time of Independence, Kharsawan, alongside 24 other princely states in eastern India, decided to accede to the Union of India and join the state of Orissa.

After all, Kharsawan and neighbouring Saraikela (which today form the Seraikela

Kharsawan district in Jharkhand), had more Odia speakers than Hindi speakers.

But most Adivasis did not support this merger. They also did not want to join Bihar — the alternative option. What they wanted was a separate Adivasi state.

In protest, a huge meeting was called at Kharsawan on January 1, 1948, the day when the merger was to take place.

This was also the day of the weekly haat in the town. Jaipal Munda himself was supposed to be present and address the crowd.

It was on his [Munda's] call that more than 50 thousand tribals gathered in Kharsawan,"

The crowd comprised young and old, men and women, those from nearby villages and those living hundreds of kilometres away. While the merger of Kharsawan was a major issue, many had come to simply catch a glimpse of Jaipal Munda.

Echoes of Jallianwala Bagh

The sheer size and enthusiasm of the crowd spooked the Orissa military police, which had taken charge of law and order in the town.

On the day of the massacre, Kharsawan resembled a "police camp".

Amidst this, the 50,000-strong crowd gathered, raised their demands, and waited eagerly for Jaipal Munda to show up. Moreover, many more were shopping at the nearby haat.

Kharsawan, which had a population of less than 7,000 in 2001, was full to the brim.

However, due to some reason, Munda could not show up. Many believe that his mere presence could have averted the tragedy that followed.

The crowd was restive and pretty much surrounded by the police. Suddenly, the cops opened fire with their Sten guns.

People were constantly getting shot at... By the time the firing stopped, the entire ground was littered with dead bodies.

There was a well near the spot where the massacre took place and the police started disposing of dead bodies in it. After the well was filled with bodies, the rest were taken to the jungle and dumped there. Yet, those injured probably had it even worse.

To date, there is no consensus regarding just how many lives were lost in the massacre. The then Orissa government confirmed only 35 dead, a number which was published in *The Statesman* two days later — the headline read '35 Adivasis Killed in Kharsawan'.

However, actual numbers are likely to have been far higher. In *Memoir of a Bygone Era* (2000), PK Deo, a former Lok Sabha MP and the last ruler of Kalahandi, stated that at least 2,000 Adivasis were killed, and many more were likely injured.

KARPOORI THAKUR

Context:

Former Bihar Chief Minister Karpoori Thakur was awarded Bharat Ratna posthumously. The Rashtrapati Bhavan announced this in its communique. The announcement to honour Karpoori Thakur with India's highest civilian award comes a day before his 100th birth anniversary. He was a prominent socialist leader.

About:

Karpoori Thakur, called as "Jan Nayak", was a prominent Indian politician who served as the 11th Chief Minister of Bihar twice, from 1970-71 and 1977-79.

He was a freedom fighter and a staunch socialist who worked under the guidance of stalwarts such as Jayaprakash Narain, Dr Rammanohar Lohia and Ramnandan Mishra.

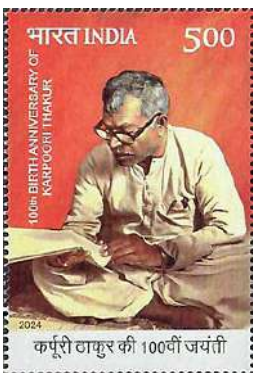
Represented the Nai community, listed as an Extremely Backward Class (EBC) among OBCs.

Entered politics in 1952, serving as a legislator until 1985.

In 1977, during his Chief Ministership, Mungeri Lal Commission recommended reclassifying backward classes into extremely backward classes (including weaker sections of Muslims) and backward classes.

In 1978, he introduced a groundbreaking reservation model, allocating 26% of reservations with specific quotas for OBCs, EBCs, women, and economically backward classes among upper castes.

This reclassification was also seen as a percussor of the Mandal Commission report, advocating for 27% reservations for Other Backward Classes.



Implemented wide-ranging policies, including the promotion of Hindi, and Urdu as the second official language, waiving school fees, and strengthening Panchayati Raj.

Karpooori Thakur's Israel engagement

Karpooori Thakur was critical of India's

diplomatic distance from Israel. He did not consider Zionism as a settler-colonial project but a legitimate Jewish national movement with unique socialist ethos.

According to Israeli archives, he was impressed by the country's socialist movement and labour organisations in the 1950s. In those years, India did not have diplomatic relations with the country. It recognised Israel in 1950, establishing full diplomatic relations only in 1992.

Yet, Thakur spent two months in the country – from June to August 1959 – to study its cooperative organisations and different agricultural settlements. Inspired by the socialist Zionist movement and the Kibbutz – a traditionally agrarian voluntary collective community – his visit was part of the decade-long engagement with Israel by leaders like Ram Manohar Lohia, Ashok Mehta and Jayaprakash Narayan.

Thakur was one of the most vibrant and potent symbols of social justice in North India, loved by the underclass and hated by the dominant upper castes at the same time. The former Bihar chief minister was known for implementing reservations in government jobs for the backward and extremely backward classes in the state. He did many things and devised many policies for the empowerment of the poor and downtrodden. He was also an icon of secular politics.

CHITTORGARH FORT

CONTEXT:

SC shields Chittorgarh Fort from mine blasting.

FEATURES:

The Chittorgarh (literally Chittor Fort), also known as Chittod Fort, is one of the largest living forts in India.

It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



The fort was the capital of Mewar and is located in the present-day city of Chittorgarh.

It is situated on the left bank of the Berach river (a tributary of the Banas River)

HISTORY:

Built by local Maurya rulers in the 7th century A.D., the Chittorgarh Fort in Rajasthan is one of the largest forts in India.

The common belief is that Chitrangada Mori, the local Maurya ruler, developed the fort. Later, the fort was captured by the Mewar rulers in 728 CE.

It used to be the capital of the Mewar rulers.

The Fort has been witness to several legendary warriors in Indian history, including Badal, Gora, Maharana Pratap, Rana Kumbha, Patta, and Jaimal, among others.

It was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2013.

Jauhar Mela:

Every year, a Jauhar Mela is held in Chittorgarh.

This Rajput festival celebrates the anniversary of one of the jauhars.

What is Jauhar?

Jauhar was a Hindu tradition practiced by Rajput women who wanted to avoid falling into the hands of the enemy. Instead of consuming poison, they preferred to burn in flames, as fire symbolised purity.

It is said that the practice was performed only during wars. The women did this to avoid being enslaved and raped by the invaders.

AYODHYA TEMPLE- PINK SANDSTONE

Context:

A new landmark of India — both structural and spiritual — has risen on Ayodhya's horizon on January 22 in the form of a new-age architectural marvel of elegant sandstones, diligently carved by craftspeople with dedication and devotion to Lord Ram.

The temple complex, built in the traditional Nagara style, will be 380 feet long from the east to the west, 250 feet wide and 161 feet high.

Unique features of the temple:

Around the grand temple is a rectangular periphery called percota, a feature found in temples in south India, but not generally in north India.

About 70 per cent of the complex will be a green area.

The complex will have two sewage treatment plants — a water treatment plant and a dedicated electricity line from the power house.

The fire brigade post will be able to source water from an underground reservoir.

Temple's construction has been done through pink sandstone. Iron and steel were not used.

SANDSTONE PROMINENCE:

Over 90% of the deposits of sandstone are in Rajasthan.

Pink Sandstone has a favourable concentration of feldspar and quartz.

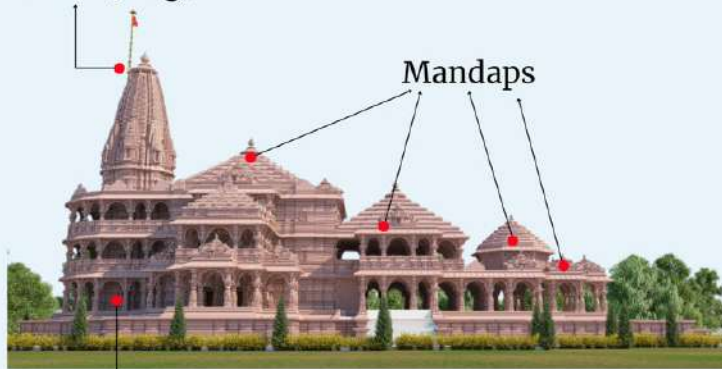
This makes it one of the most naturally weather-resistant stones on the Earth.

Along with the suitability for all seasons, its strength and durability allow any architectural design to sustain beautifully for decades.

Limestones and sandstones stand out for their porosity, which gives them non-slip properties.

Ram temple at Ayodhya

Shikhara (Flag)



Mandaps

Garbh Griha
(Temple sanctum)

- Ram Darbar comprises **statues of Ram, Sita, Lakshman, & Hanuman**

- Temple can accommodate **1500** people at a time
- Expected daily footfall: **1-2 lakh**
- Expected footfall on special days: **upto 5 lakh**



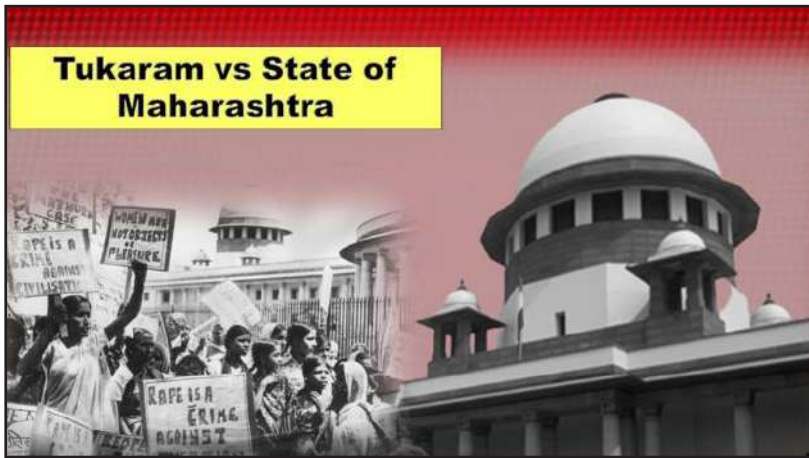
Pradhakshin patha

16 ft.

32 steps

CASES THAT INDIA FORGOT (PART 2)

- CHINTAN CHANDRACHUD



A. Gender:

Rape and other violent crime episodes seldom promote reform in a country where social attitudes regarding these crimes frequently center on the victim. The rape of Nirbhaya in Delhi in 2012 sparked demonstrations and changes to the criminal code. But in the Mathura case, governmental institutions like the police, lower courts, and Supreme Court all failed. It would be oversimplifying to characterize the rape of Mathura by two men as an atrocious crime.

Desaiganj, a town in Maharashtra, was home to Mathura, an Adivasi teenager between the ages of 14 and 16. Mathura lived with her brother Gama, who worked as physical laborers. She developed a relationship with Nunshi's nephew Ashok whom she married subsequently, leading to a police complaint in March 1972. When Mathura and her husband Ashok arrived at the police station. After the complaint, as those at the police station proceeded to leave, two constables – Ganpat and Tukaram – requested Mathura to wait inside the station and asked the others to leave and she was raped by Ganpat and Tukaram. The crowd gathered around the police station, and Mathura recounted the events to Nunshi and Gama.

The state would later revictimize Mathura repeatedly over years, holding her responsible for the rape. As word about the incident spread, the crowd grew agitated, and Head Constable

Baburao persuaded the crowd to disperse and register an FIR against those constables. Mathura was examined by a doctor, who reeked of social prejudices by focusing on the victim's sexual history. The lower court acquitted Ganpat and Tukaram, but Mathura was described as a "shocking liar" with false testimony. The court concluded that Mathura had engaged in consensual sexual intercourse with Ganpat, based on the doctor's testimony that she was "habituated to sexual intercourse."

The court's answer was that Mathura invented the story of rape to sound virtuous, as the crowd gathered outside the police station included her lover Ashok and employer Nunshi, who were angry and suspected something fishy. Mathura, a woman in India, was accused of consensual intercourse with a constable at a police station in the middle of the night. The court deemed her rape allegation to protect her reputation, but other evidence was dismissed due to ludicrous assumptions. Stains on Mathura's pyjamas were attributed to Ashok, who was in love with Mathura. The case then proceeded to the Nagpur bench of the Bombay High Court, where it found Mathura's account credible and noted the difference between consent and passive submission. The high court convicted Ganpat of rape and Tukaram of outraging the modesty of a woman, sentenced them to rigorous imprisonment for five years and one year respectively.

However, the high court's judgement did not stand for long. In 1978, the Supreme Court reverted to the sessions court's reasoning that the absence of injuries implies consent. The court rejected the high court's reasoning that Mathura's case may have involved passive submission but was not consent. The Supreme Court assumed that Mathura consented under a fear of death or injury, and acquitted Ganpat.

Tukaram faced similar fate, with Mathura's allegations against him described as "wholly unproved." The Supreme Court was engaged in

rehabilitating its image as a sentinel of human rights, following its loss of face during the Emergency. Only a few months before the Mathura case, the court held in a celebrated judgement that a procedure established by law which derogates from the fundamental right to life under the Constitution must be 'fair, just and reasonable, not fanciful, oppressive or arbitrary'.

The Mathura case, a case in India, was initially dismissed by the Supreme Court in 1978. However, four academics wrote an open letter to the chief justice of India, Justice Y.V. Chandrachud, criticizing the decision. They noted that the court's judgment overlooked important factual considerations, such as Mathura's wrongful confinement by the police and Tukaram's intoxication on duty. They also pointed out the court's mistaken understanding of the law on rape and its chauvinistic assumptions.

The letter concluded with a plea for Mathura's case to be reheard at the Supreme Court by a larger panel of judges, possibly even the whole court. The case became part of public consciousness within months, sparking protests across India. A public meeting was organized in Bombay on 25 February 1980 to discuss legal, political, and social aspects of rape. Women's rights groups were established, including the Forum Against Rape, which circulated leaflets and circulars to gather support for protests.

Women's and students' organizations in Delhi formed the Joint Action Committee Against Rape and Sexual Harassment, seeking decisive and immediate steps in the aftermath of the Mathura case. These included the reopening of the Mathura case, suspension and departmental inquiry against Tukaram and Ganpat, amending the rape law to exclude evidence concerning a woman's past sexual history, harsher sentences in rape cases, and special courts for speedy trials and decisions.

The Mathura case in India was a significant event in the fight for women's rights, with protests directed towards two avenues: the Supreme Court and reforms in criminal law. The Supreme Court's decision in the Mathura case damaged its reputation in respect of women's rights, and it formulated a "face saving measure" in determining whether

corroborating evidence was required in cases involving sexual offences. However, this decision reinforced prejudices underpinning the Mathura judgement, as Indian women were different from women in the Western World and were unlikely to concoct allegations of sexual assault.

The Congress government asked the Law Commission to study the law on rape and sexual assault of women, which produced a report that suggested several far-reaching amendments to the law. The report suggested that courts should presume that a woman did not consent in situations where sexual intercourse is established and the woman has stated in her evidence that she did not consent. The Commission also recommended increasing the minimum age of consent from sixteen to eighteen, meaning sex with a female below that age would be treated as rape.

Despite these recommendations, many of the Law Commission's recommendations were disregarded. Parliament did not presume a lack of consent when the complainant said she did not consent, but instead enacted special provisions to address custodial situations. The minimum sentence for rape was set at seven years in most instances, and ten years in some others, with the maximum sentence being life imprisonment. Parliament also attempted to address the identification and revictimization of rape victims following the offence, making it a criminal offence to disclose the identity of the rape victim without her consent.

Despite the women's movement and legislative reforms following the rape of an Adivasi child, Mathura remained on the sidelines. She moved to a different village, remarried, and started a family. Despite fear of social backlash, police apathy, and judicial delays, Mathura filed a rape complaint and followed it to its conclusion. Despite the Supreme Court's failure, she persevered. The Supreme Court – famously described at the time as the 'last resort for the oppressed and bewildered – failed her.'

R.D. Bajaj v. K.P.S. Gill

On 27 July 2005, the Supreme Court confirmed the conviction of K.P.S. Gill, the 'supercop' who

ended the militancy and Khalistan separatist movement in Punjab, for slapping R.D. Bajaj on the bottom at a party in 1988. This was the culmination of a legal process that involved eight judgements over a period of seventeen years, decisions by several senior judges, complaints to bureaucrats, by bureaucrats against bureaucrats, and claims of government secrecy and privilege. The case meandered from one court to the next, India having seen eighteen chief justices and nine prime ministers.

On 18 July 1988, Surrinder Lal Kapur, an IAS officer and senior bureaucrat in the Punjab government, hosted a dinner party at his home. The party included twenty-five of the most senior bureaucrats, police officers, and lawyers in the city, many of whom were accompanied by their spouses. The joint director of the Intelligence Bureau (IB), the inspector general of the Chandigarh Police, and the advocate general of Punjab were all present that evening.

Among the most high-profile attendees that evening was K.P.S. Gill, director general of the Punjab Police. Bajaj and her husband B.R. Bajaj, both senior IAS officers of the Punjab cadre, arrived at the Kapur residence at about 9 p.m. The guests were seated in the lawn at the back of the house. About an hour later, Gill walked over to the women's semicircle and occupied a vacant chair about five to six seats away from Mrs. Bajaj. Gill called out to Bajaj, and asked her to sit on the vacant chair next to him.

As Bajaj rose from her chair and turned to leave, Gill slapped her on the bottom. Bajaj was furious and determined not to let this pass. She initially approached her host Kapur. Together with another guest, Kapur then physically escorted Gill away from the lawn and into the house. Bajaj was congratulated by the other women for her fortitude in dealing with Gill's conduct.

Mrs. Bajaj, sought to have national hero K.P.S. Gill reprimanded for his misconduct at a dinner party. She approached the chief secretary of Punjab and Governor S.S. Ray, who dismissed her concerns. Bajaj then approached Julio Ribeiro, Gill's predecessor as director general of the Punjab Police, who promised to share a draft of the report with her before sending it to the governor. But Ribeiro sent the report without Bajaj's knowledge.

Bajaj met with the secretary to Governor Ray, who informed her that Ribeiro had already sent his report to the governor. The governor was believed to have summoned Gill and privately censured him for his conduct. Bajaj considered Governor Ray's proposal of debarring Gill from attending dinner parties after 8.30 p.m. and apologizing to her in private. However, the media chose not to report the story.

Bajaj filed a police complaint, alleging that Gill committed several offenses under the Indian Penal Code (IPC). The inspector general registered her complaint and told Bajaj that he would not actively investigate the complaint without a court order. The police investigation went nowhere, and Bajaj filed a separate complaint with the chief judicial magistrate, claiming that a fair and impartial investigation had not taken place due to Gill's position.

She requested the magistrate to summon the report sent by Ribeiro to the governor and an order passed by the governor. The state government opposed the disclosure of these reports, arguing they were privileged and concerned state affairs. The magistrate rejected this claim, stating the documents did not concern state affairs but individual conduct. The state government challenged the magistrate's decision in the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which held that the reports were protected from disclosure.

Gill, filed a petition with the High Court to quash the complaints of Mrs and Mr Bajaj. His lawyer, K.T.S. Tulsi, argued that Gill had no intention to commit any of the alleged offences and that the incident was so "slight" that it could not be treated as an offence. The high court held in favor of Gill, quashing the complaints due to several reasons. The Bajajs failed to justify the delay in filing the police complaint and the magistrate complaint, ignoring that the investigation was not being meaningfully pursued. The administration was against Bajaj, and she was deemed reckless and a devious liar.

Gill was awarded a Padma Shri shortly after the high court's decision. The Bajajs appealed the decision in the Supreme Court, which consolidated and considered both appeals. It took six years for the Supreme Court to arrive at its decision, and the lawyer representing the Chandigarh administration

suggested that the matter could be put to rest if Gill expressed regret for his conduct. The court chose not to engage with this suggestion, leaving it to the parties to decide whether they wished to compromise in this way.”

The Supreme Court, held that the high court committed a “gross error of law” in quashing complaints against K.P.S. Gill, who outraged the modesty of a woman for the purposes of Sections 354 and 509 of the IPC. Gill’s suggestion that he lacked any intention to outrage Mrs. Bajaj’s modesty was rejected, as there was nothing that suggested his actions involved an honest mistake or a slip. The court decided that there was sufficient material for the magistrate to take cognizance of the offences and directed him to conduct the trial of the case.

Despite the Supreme Court’s decision, Gill remained relatively confident in his prospects in the trial. He was in transit to Himachal Pradesh to supervise the building of his house on the day of the decision, and his lawyer Tulsi warned that it was still somewhat early for Bajaj to celebrate victory. Public opinion and the press remained firmly in Gill’s camp, with journalist Tavleen Singh critiquing Bajaj for wasting the Supreme Court’s time.

The Supreme Court directed the magistrate to endeavour to conclude the trial within six months, but the trial ultimately overshot this time frame by a small margin. On D-Day, 6 August 1996, Gill was convicted on both counts, sentenced to three months’ rigorous imprisonment for “outraging the modesty” of a woman and two months’ rigorous imprisonment for engaging in speech and gestures intended to “insult the modesty” of a woman. As the sentences would run concurrently, Gill faced the prospect of spending three months in prison unless he succeeded on appeal. The chief judicial magistrate also imposed fines in the amount of Rs 700 on Gill.

In eight years, judicial opinion about the strength of Bajaj’s case had turned, but public opinion had not. The largest English newspapers took editorial positions that were sympathetic to Gill, and in some instances, blamed Bajaj for Gill’s indiscretions. The Hindu’s (newspaper) turn to defend Gill: “The sentence of three months’ rigorous imprisonment looks somewhat harsh

considering that Gill had an outstanding record as a supercop.”

In 1998, the Sessions Court upheld Gill’s conviction for sexual harassment, but modified his sentence. Gill would no longer need to go to prison but would remain on probation upon entering a bond for Rs 20,000 and complying with a set of conditions. These conditions included being of good behavior, appearing in court when called upon for three years, leading an honest and industrious life, abstaining from consuming alcohol in public places and parties, remaining under the supervision of the Delhi chief probation officer for three years, and depositing Rs 2,00,000 as compensation to Bajaj and Rs 50,000 towards costs of the legal proceedings.

The sessions judge rejected arguments presented on behalf of Gill, such as political vendetta or the unladylike nature of Gill’s account. The court observed that Gill’s argument was entirely unsubstantiated. The high court also confirmed Gill’s conviction but further modified the conditions imposed by the sessions judge. The court dropped the conditions that Gill should lead an honest and industrious life and refrain from consuming alcohol in public places, on the basis that they were vague and hard to enforce.

Both Gill and Bajaj decided to appeal against the high court’s decision, as Gill had been let off the hook too easily and nothing short of exoneration was acceptable. The Supreme Court made its decision on 27 July 2005, seventeen years and nine days after the party at the Kapur residence. The final judgement in this case, delivered by Justices Balakrishnan and Srikrishna, was short and succinct, rejecting the argument that the criminal proceedings were an attempt to malign Gill and observed that his conduct was not befitting that of a top-ranking police officer.

At the Supreme Court, Bajaj made it clear that she had pursued legal proceedings as a matter of principle and had no intention of withdrawing the compensation of Rs 2,00,000 that Gill had been ordered to deposit. The court directed that the compensation be paid over to a women’s rights organization. Gill’s lawyer downplayed the judgement as ‘academic’ since it imposed no practical disqualifications on Gill.

This case, left a significant legacy in the women's rights movement. The IPC was based on Victorian conceptions of modesty and honor, which portrayed women as meek and modest. This led to the framing of crimes of sexual assault and harassment as only providing protection to women who retained modesty. Bajaj, an upper-class married woman with a powerful husband, embodied this image, calling upon a Victorian law to win a case. She questioned whether agricultural laborers or manual scavengers would benefit from the same legal protections, as they would likely be dismissed due to their loss of modesty. It is unthinkable that 'a woman from the roadside', in particular a lower-caste or lower-class woman, would ever secure even the token of justice that Bajaj did."

B. Religion

State of Madras v. Champakam Dorairajan

In the early 20th century, there was growing dissatisfaction among non-Brahmins in the Madras Presidency of British India. Brahmins, a small segment of the population, had disproportionate access to education and government jobs. The South Indian Liberal Federation, or the Justice Party, was established as a party articulating anti-Brahminism and acting against the ideals of the freedom movement.

The Justice Party secured the reservation of seats for non-Brahmins in the provincial legislative council as part of the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919. Following an extended round of discussions in 1921, the Justice Party yielded an order reserving government job for non-Brahmins, which was called the 'Communal G.O.' It prescribed a ratio by which government jobs would be allotted to non-Brahmins, Brahmins, Muslims, Anglo-Indians, and Christians. However, the Communal G.O. met with immediate protests and resistance, including from sections of the Congress party.

In 1927, a revised Communal G.O. was passed and implemented. As the influence of the Justice Party waned and the Congress party gained ascendancy in Madras in the 1930s, the Congress made an about-turn from its earlier

position, backed the Communal G.O. and made it "very much its own policy."

Within weeks of the Constitution coming into force, an aspiring medical student and an aspiring engineering student filed petitions in the Madras High Court challenging the Communal G.O. on the basis that it violated their fundamental rights.

The Madras High Court heard arguments in Srinivasan and Dorairajan's cases, which were represented by prominent lawyers. V.V. Srinivasa Iyengar and Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer, former advocate general of Madras and member of the Constituent Assembly, argued that the Communal G.O. violated two fundamental rights of the newly enacted Constitution. Article 15(1) prohibited the state from discriminating against citizens based on religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, or any of them. Article 29(2) stated that no citizen shall be denied admission into any educational institution maintained by the state or receiving aid out of state funds on grounds only of religion, race, caste, language, or any of them. The advocate general responded by relying on Article 46, which required the state to promote the educational interests of the weaker sections of the people and protect them from social injustice and exploitation.

The Madras High Court agreed that the Communal G.O. should be struck down as unconstitutional for its provisions regarding college admissions. Rajamannar argued that the Communal G.O. caused an obvious disparity in candidate treatment, as a Brahmin candidate with high marks would not secure admission, while a non-Brahmin candidate with significantly lower marks would. Sastri also noted that Articles 15 and 29 of the Constitution did not include a clause analogous to Article 16(4), which specifically authorized the state to make reservations in government jobs for backward classes of citizens.

Sastri held that the Communal G.O. violated Article 15(1) of the Constitution by making caste and religion a ground of admission or rejection. He did not see any merit in the Attorney General's argument based on Article 46, as it was an artificial construct and unfair to equate the 'weaker sections of society' with non-Brahmin Hindus.

Somasundaram, the third judge of the Madras

High Court, interpreted the provisions of the Constitution differently from his colleagues but hesitantly agreed that the Communal G.O. had to be struck down. He considered the use of the word 'only' in Article 15 significant and did not lend much weight to the absence of a clause similar to Article 16(4) in Articles 15 and 29.

After the Communal G.O. was struck down, discussions were afoot as to what next steps should be taken by the Madras government and the central government. The law minister of Madras announced that the government would file an appeal to the Supreme Court, but the question of an amendment would only arise after a definite decision had been reached by the Supreme Court.

In March 1951, the Supreme Court in India decided to dismiss an appeal against the Madras High Court's decision to strike down the Communal G.O. The court had eight judges, including Chief Justice H.J. Kania and six of his colleagues. The central government anticipated an adverse decision from the Supreme Court, leading to a proposal for amendments to Article 15 of the Constitution to protect measures like the Communal G.O. The court dismissed the appeal and upheld the Madras High Court's decision.

The Supreme Court's response to the Madras government's arguments based on Article 46 was that it was a directive principle of state policy that was unenforceable by a court. If the government's argument was correct, a special provision authorizing reservations would have been unnecessary to include in the Constitution. The Communal G.O. discriminated on the basis of religion, race, and caste and violated the government's obligation under Article 29(2).

The court's interpretation argued that reservation was an exception to the right to equality, rather than a facet of it. This meant that a specific constitutional provision authorizing reservation was needed to establish an exception to the right to equality. Fourthly, the court could have arrived at the same conclusion without relegating directive principles to secondary status. The decision prompted widespread agitation and protests across the state and neighboring areas.

The central government had several options to amend the Constitution to nullify a Supreme

Court decision in Dorairajan. One of these options was to make amendments to Article 15 and Article 29, either by amending existing clauses or adding new ones. Alladi Krishnaswamy Iyer, a lawyer who secured a favorable decision for Dorairajan, advised the government on the form of the constitutional amendment. The formula included a new clause to Article 15, which provided that neither Article 15 nor Article 29(2) would prevent the state from making special provisions for the 'educational, economic and social' interests of the backward classes.

The amendment arose for discussion in the provisional Parliament, where Dr. Ambedkar mounted a robust defense of the decision to nullify the Supreme Court's judgement. He argued that the court had misinterpreted the text and scheme of the Constitution, overlooking the use of the word 'only' in Article 29(2), which should have meant that the constitutional prohibition was on deploying caste as the exclusive parameter for discriminating between applicants. No discrimination could be alleged when other parameters, such as economic status and levels of education, were also taken into account.

The Constitution was amended, and the Dorairajan judgement was overturned efficiently, in a matter of two months. The decision of the Supreme Court in Dorairajan was repudiated in the years that followed, and the principle of reservations in educational institutions for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and socially and educationally backward classes was accepted by the courts. However, the court's decision influenced constitutional doctrine long after it was effectively overturned by the provisional Parliament.

The idea that reservations are an exception to, rather than a facet of, the right to equality enshrined in the Constitution persisted. This established and deepened the vocabulary of binaries – such as "reservations versus merit" – that should never have existed. Seventy years on, Dorairajan continues to cast its long shadow.

State of Bombay v. Narasu Appa Mali

Personal law is a body of law that applies different rules to different religious or ethnic communities, covering family law, property law, and religious establishments. During colonial

rule, the British Raj opted to preserve religion-specific personal law rather than replace it with uniform law across communities. The Regulating Act of 1773 established that the Quran would apply to Muslims and the Shastras to Hindus in all suits concerning marriage, inheritance, and caste. Personal law was largely not codified into legislation but was included in religious texts and scriptures.

During the later years of the Raj, some uncodified personal law was codified and reformed through legislation. The Constituent Assembly of India debated whether to maintain these systems of religion-specific codified and uncodified personal law or supplant them with a uniform civil code. The assembly found a compromise solution by aiming to secure a uniform civil code for the country under Article 44. The Bombay High Court faced an important case involving personal law, where Hindu men were charged with bigamy offences under Bombay's bigamy law.

The Narasu case involved Chief Justice M.C. Chagla and Justice P.B. Gajendragadkar, who were among the greatest judges never to serve in the Supreme Court. The law was challenged on two grounds: first, it was argued that it violated the right to profess, practise, and propagate religion under Article 25 of the Constitution. The court found it relatively easy to reject this argument, as Article 25 allowed the state to provide for social welfare and reform. The legislature of Bombay was free to prohibit bigamy in recognition of this.

The other ground was the challenge of the law violating the right to equality by applying only to certain communities (Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, and followers of the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj) and not others (Muslims, Parsis, and Christians). The Bombay bigamy law was harsher than the IPC, and it did not permit a compromise solution following an agreement with the complainant. The high court concluded that a more robust law for Hindus was understandable and justified, assuming that a Hindu wife was less likely to make a complaint than a Parsi or Christian wife.

It was argued that the Bombay law was unconstitutional for singling out and criminalizing bigamy among Hindus and excluding Muslims. The inconsistency arose from the discrimination

between men and women, as it allowed Muslim and Hindu men to have more than one spouse. Shah argued that the Bombay law only applied to Hindus, making it unconstitutional for singling out and criminalizing bigamy among Hindus and excluding Muslims. This argument was based on Article 13 of the Constitution, which states that all laws in force in India immediately before the Constitution would be void if they were inconsistent with fundamental rights. If the court held that personal law was not 'law in force', all uncodified personal law would be immune from legal challenge on the grounds of violating fundamental rights.

The Bombay High Court in India ruled that personal law was not "law in force" and that the Bombay law was constitutionally valid. The court cited various reasons for their decision, including Article 13 of the Constitution, Section 112 of the Government of India Act of 1915, Article 17 of the Constitution, and Article 372 of the Constitution.

Article 13 defined "law to include custom or usages," leaving the court to decide whether personal law was synonymous with a custom and therefore should be treated as "law in force." Section 112 laid down the principles for deciding which "personal law" or "custom having the force of law" would apply to high court proceedings against the inhabitants of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay. However, the court found that these provisions did not have the same meaning, as they were designed for different purposes.

Article 17 abolished untouchability and its practice in any form, making it unfounded that if personal law was intended to be subject to the scrutiny of fundamental rights, it would have been superfluous. The court also invoked Article 372 of the Constitution, which permitted the President within the first three years to make adaptations or modifications to any "law in force" to bring it into conformity with the Constitution.

Two important factors played a role in the court's decision-making process: being sensitive about religious practices and being aware of the compromise reached by the Constituent Assembly in the form of Article 44. The judges believed that their decision insulated uncodified personal law from the scrutiny of fundamental rights, but did so in the belief that it would remain relevant

only for a brief period.

The court upheld the Bombay Prevention of Hindu Bigamous Marriages Act, a progressive law aimed at eradicating and punishing social evils. However, the court's approach to protecting personal law from rights-based challenges had the potential to safeguard regressive religious practices indefinitely. This decision could have been avoided by recognizing that polygamy is no longer recognized under Muslim personal law but there were good reasons for making it a criminal offense among Hindus but not Muslim.

The court also generated a paradox, as uncodified personal law carried over from colonial rule would occupy a higher position than law enacted by democratically elected legislatures. While ordinary law covering any subject (including religion) could be challenged on the basis that it violated fundamental rights, uncodified personal law was now effectively free from scrutiny in the courts. Conversely, if and when personal law was codified by the democratically elected legislature, that would be subjected to greater judicial scrutiny than uncodified personal law lacking democratic sanction.

Many progressive, pro-women decisions of various courts have been in respect of enacted law rather than uncodified personal law. The Shah Bano case, for example, addressed the question of whether a Muslim divorcee would be entitled to a maintenance allowance from her ex-husband under Section 125 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC). The Supreme Court rejected this argument, deciding that Khan would pay a monthly sum of maintenance to his ex-wife.

In 2018, the court was presented with another opportunity to set right the mistakes of Narasu, when Muslim women approached the court claiming that the practice of 'instant triple talaq' was unconstitutional. The majority of judges struck down the practice on different grounds, stating that instant triple talaq was not integral to Islamic practice and therefore not part of personal law at all.

This decision suggests that uncodified personal law, a category of law, is above the Constitution itself. Courts have sometimes sidestepped the decision by stating that a practice

claimed to be personal law is not personal law or has been codified by statute. However, the ultimate overruling of Narasu would have substantial and symbolic significance, establishing that the Constitution is above all other law. Parliament could overturn Narasu with a simple amendment to Article 13, but there seems to be little political appetite to do so. The Bombay High Court's decision was based on legal interpretation and socio-political context, and the greater error lies in the failure to make course corrections despite ample opportunity.

C. National Security

Naga People's Movement of Human Rights v Union of India

The Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) was enacted in 1958 in response to insurgency and demands for self-determination in the Northeast. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru initially sent the army with instructions to act cautiously, treating the rebels as "fellow Indians" and using proportionate force. However, the law was not passed unopposed, with criticism from MPs from Inner Manipur.

The AFSPA was not drafted on a clean slate, but its ancestry can be traced back to a series of laws enacted in the 1940s. One such law was the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Ordinance of 1942, promulgated by the British viceroy of India, Lord Linlithgow, one week into the Quit India movement. Another predecessor to the AFSPA of 1948 was enacted by the Constituent Assembly shortly after Independence.

As enacted in 1958, the AFSPA had seven sections, which comprised the difference between accountability and impunity. It allowed the governor of the state or the central government to declare any part of any state as a "disturbed area." The real sting of the AFSPA was Section 4, which conferred certain special powers on members of the armed forces operating in "disturbed areas." These powers included the "licence to kill," "licence to destroy," "licence to arrest," and "licence to search."

No legal proceedings could be initiated against any member of the armed forces acting under the AFSPA without the prior permission

of the central government. The Armed Forces Special Action Plan (AFSPA) was enacted in the 1980s, defining large parts of Assam and Manipur as 'disturbed areas'. The army operated a parallel administration in these areas, using methods such as village regrouping and forced relocation of civilians under close surveillance.

Petitions began to be filed in the Supreme Court and the Gauhati High Court, challenging the government's decision to declare areas as 'disturbed' and the constitutional validity of the AFSPA. In 1980, Justice B.L. Hansaria ordered a stay on the enforcement of Section 4(a) of the AFSPA, the 'licence to kill' section. The Congress government and Assam state government approached the Supreme Court, arguing that agitations and protests were taking place across the state and that the atmosphere was not conducive to a fair trial.

The petitions were first heard out of term, when the Supreme Court was in recess. Justice Kailasam stayed proceedings in the Gauhati High Court until the Supreme Court could decide the case during term time. The Supreme Court agreed to transfer the petitions from the Gauhati High Court to the Delhi High Court, despite arguments that a tense atmosphere could impact the investigation but not the adjudication.

The Supreme court rejected challenges to the AFSPA's constitutional validity, arguing that collective security would take precedence over individual rights and liberties. The court also noted that the AFSPA was in operation in a sensitive geographic region, with China, Nepal, Burma, and Bangladesh in the North and North West.

As the petitions accumulated, the human cost of the AFSPA was incalculable. In 1988, over a dozen women were gang-raped by paramilitary forces in Tripura, while in 1995, soldiers began shooting indiscriminately in Kohima, killing seven people and injuring 22. In 1997, the Supreme Court heard these petitions in a consolidated proceeding, with Justice J.S. Verma as the twelfth chief justice.

The challenge to the AFSPA was two-pronged: Parliament lacked the legislative authority to enact the law, as it addressed public order, and that the provisions violated fundamental rights under the

Constitution. After a delay of over fifteen years, the court took only three months to pronounce judgment in the winter of 1997.

The court rejected the argument that the AFSPA addressed 'public order', a subject within the domain of state legislatures rather than Parliament. It relied on an amendment in 1976, which carve out a power for Parliament to deploy the army, navy, or air force 'in aid of civil power'. The court also relied on Article 355 of the Constitution, which imposes a duty on the union to protect every state from internal disturbance, in arriving at this conclusion.

The petitioners presented an argument that the AFSPA would allow the government to circumvent emergency provisions of the Constitution, but the court did not address this argument head-on. Instead, it reaffirmed that it was within Parliament's competence to enact the AFSPA. The court upheld sections of the AFSPA on the grounds that they were not arbitrary or unreasonable. Section 3 granted the governor or central government the power to declare an area as 'disturbed' without independent review, oversight, or scrutiny. However, the court did not see anything particularly problematic with this power, except for the requirement that these declarations be reviewed every six months.

The court also upheld the 'licence to kill' section, which had inbuilt safeguards, but did not consider the issue that two of those safeguards were left entirely to the judgement of the relevant officer. The court also upheld Section 6 of the AFSPA, which granted immunity from prosecution to officers without permission from the central government. The army headquarters circulated a memorandum titled 'Dos and don'ts while acting under the 'Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act 1958', which included directions not to use excessive force, engage in torture, and accept presents, donations, and rewards.

The extended delay to the hearing of the case allowed the court to consider how the AFSPA operated in practice over that period. However, the court's analysis focused on the language of the law without considering its lived realities. This led to business as usual in the Northeast following the court's decision. Most NGOs and human rights

organizations reported that the list of 'dos and don'ts' had little traction and was rarely observed in practice. Commissions of inquiry revealed that there was little awareness of the list even among the armed forces.

About three years after the court's decision, Irom Sharmila, a Manipuri woman working with a human rights organization, commenced a hunger strike seeking the repeal of the AFSPA. The AFSPA survived a series of committees and commissions of inquiry that recommended its repeal. The Justice Jeevan Reddy Committee was established in 2005 to review the operation of the AFSPA after the killing of Thangjam Manorama in the custody of Assam Rifles. The committee observed that the AFSPA had become a symbol of oppression, an object of hate, and an instrument of discrimination and highhandedness. It recommended repealing the

AFSPA and placing some of its provisions into a different law, the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act of 1967.

The Second Administrative Reforms Commission recommended the repeal of the AFSPA in 2007 and 2013, respectively. The Justice Verma Committee and Justice Hegde Commission noted that the AFSPA had little effect on insurgency in Manipur. Governments began lifting disturbed area notifications from parts of the Northeast in 2015 and withdrawn them entirely from Meghalaya, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura in 2019. However, the AFSPA remains on the statute book despite its legitimacy being questioned by scholars, public officials, and human rights organizations. The court missed the opportunity to review the AFSPA in 1997, which would prove costly.

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FACT SHEET

GENERAL STUDIES – I

SOCIETY

- ◆ Women excelled at the Republic Day parade, recording a number of firsts such as 100 women artists replacing the military band and an all-woman tri-services marching contingent.

GENERAL STUDIES – II

POLITY

Corruption Perceptions Index, 2023 - by Transparency International, a global civil society organization:

- ◆ India's rank in the 2023 index has slipped to 93 out of 180 countries, with a score of 39. In 2022, India was ranked at 85.
- ◆ It shows that most countries have made little to no progress in tackling public sector corruption. CPI global average score remains unchanged at 43 for the twelfth year in a row.
- ◆ Denmark topped the index for the sixth consecutive year. Somalia was ranked last.

SOCIAL ISSUES

International Labour Organisation (ILO) in its 'World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends 2024' report

- ◆ The global unemployment rate is set to increase in 2024 while growing social inequalities remain a concern.
- ◆ The real wages declined in most G20 countries in 2023 as wage rates failed to keep pace with inflation, pushing 1 million workers into extreme poverty.
- ◆ In 2023, the number of workers living in extreme poverty — earning less than \$2.15 per day per person in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms — grew by about one million globally.

Health

- ◆ In 2022, India had notified 24,22,121 TB cases, which the India TB Report 2023 remarked as a “milestone year for TB surveillance efforts in India, with a record high notification”.

Poverty

- ◆ According to a NITI Aayog discussion paper, multidimensional poverty in India declined from 29.17% in 2013-14 to 11.28% in 2022-23. A total of 24.82 crore people escaped multidimensional poverty in the last 9 years. States like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, and Rajasthan recorded the sharpest decline in MPI.

International Relations

- ◆ India and France have agreed to intensify their cooperation in the southwest Indian Ocean, building on the “joint surveillance missions” carried out from French La Reunion in 2020 and 2022.

GENERAL STUDIES – III

ECONOMY

- ◆ Recently, the Indian stock market has surpassed Hong Kong to claim the position of the fourth-largest stock market globally. Factors contributing to India’s stock market growth include a strong GDP growth forecast, manageable inflation, political stability, and foreign portfolio investors’ inflow. The US, China and Japan are the top stock markets in the world.

Energy

- ◆ Price of Russian crude has risen in the face of OPEC+ production cuts and increased demand from China, making it less attractive to Indian customers; in the 10 months after Russia invaded Ukraine, India saved \$3.6 billion by importing heavily discounted crude from Moscow.

ENVIRONMENT

- ◆ The European Union’s policy on taxing carbon-intensive imports starts from 2026. It aims to reduce emissions by 55% by 2030.
- ◆ The World Bank estimates that developing countries will need an average of \$2.4 trillion a year between now and 2030 to address the “global challenges of climate change, conflict, and pandemics; the bank’s lending commitments in the most recent financial year were less than \$130 bn.
- ◆ ‘Waste-to-Wealth’: Ayodhya Municipal Corporation has embarked on a project to produce incense sticks through the processing of flowers offered in all Ayodhya Dham temples.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

- ◆ According to the Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia Journal, India recorded 12 lakh new cancer cases and 9.3 lakh deaths from the disease in 2019, making it the second-highest contributor to the disease burden in Asia that year.
- ◆ As per the survey by the National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), when applying the WHO's Access, Watch, and Reserve (AWaRe) classification, a substantial 57% of the prescriptions were for antibiotics in the Watch group, designated for specific, limited infective syndromes and more susceptible to antibiotic resistance. It concludes that a major factor contributing to antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is the excessive and inappropriate use of antibiotics.
- ◆ The WHO's Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE) has said that the HPV vaccine is highly effective for the prevention of HPV serotypes 16 and 18, which cause 70% of cervical cancer.

SECURITY

- ◆ As per an RTI reply, there is a rapid rise in web blocking orders. The increase has coincided with a massive uptick in Internet use; the Telecom Department seeks easier portal blocking; the Ministry has not given a breakdown of statistics, citing confidentiality.
- ◆ Since 2011, the FCRA registrations of around 20,000 NGOs have been cancelled on various grounds of violation of FCRA provisions.

1. An earthquake of at least magnitude 7.5 struck Ishikawa prefecture and nearby areas, including the Noto Peninsula and Mindanao in the southern Philippines on January 1, 2024. It was followed by tsunami warnings and aftershocks, causing significant damage.
2. Mulya Pravah 2.0 by the University Grants Commission aims to instil ethics in higher education. Despite promoting transparency and accountability, concerns arise over confidentiality, union autonomy, and potential stifling of dissent, highlighting challenges for implementation.
3. The European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) aims to tax carbon-intensive imports by 2026, impacting India's key sectors. India introduced the Carbon Credit Trading System (CCTS) and faces challenges while exploring options to align with global environmental standards.
4. Namibian cheetah 'Jwala' has given birth to four cubs at the Kuno National Park in Madhya Pradesh. The births came just weeks after three cubs were born to another Namibian cheetah, Aasha.
5. Recently, the Union Home Minister launched the 'E-Samridhi Portal'. It aims to provide a platform for registration, procurement, and payment of tur dal-producing farmers across India. It has been announced to make India self-reliant in the pulses sector by the year 2027. Through this portal, farmers will be able to get payment at MSP or above the market price through DBT.
6. IIT Delhi's HydroSense Lab has created India's first high-resolution landslide susceptibility map. It involves creating maps that depict areas prone to landslides based on certain factors. For example, using data on past landslide events and factors like slope steepness, soil type, and vegetation cover, a computer model can analyse these variables to predict areas at high risk.
7. According to the World Economic Forum, False and misleading information supercharged with cutting-edge artificial intelligence that threatens to erode democracy and polarize society is the top immediate risk to the global economy.
8. China widens trade highway in South America with new mega port project. The \$3.5 billion deep water port in the Peruvian fishing town of Chancay will be the first controlled by China in South America. It is a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, and will provide the Asian nation a direct gateway to the resource-rich region.
9. Recently, the Uttarakhand government has imposed an interim ban on "outsiders" to purchase land for agriculture and horticulture in the state. On one hand, it may promote regionalism and threaten the social fabric. But it may also help to protect the agricultural lands from possible non-agricultural usage.
10. 'MPLADS e-SAKSHI' Mobile Application offers convenience and accessibility, allowing MPs to propose, track, and oversee the projects in real-time, which enhances decision-making processes, enabling swift responses to emerging needs or issues.

TERMS IN NEWS:

1. **Momentum investing** refers to a system of buying stocks or other securities that have had high returns over the past three to twelve months, and selling those that have had poor returns over the same period.
2. **Wet leasing & Dry leasing:** Wet leasing an aircraft refers to renting the plane along with the operating crew and engineers. Dry leasing refers to taking only the aircraft on rent.
3. **Alpha and Beta in Mutual Funds:**
 - **Alpha** measures the amount that the investment has returned in comparison to the market index or other broad benchmark that it is compared against. For example, an alpha of +3 indicates that a portfolio beat the return of the S&P 500 index by 3% over a certain period of time.
 - **Beta** measures the relative volatility of an investment or an indication of its relative risk. For example, a stock with a beta greater than 1 is considered to be more volatile than the broader market, while a stock with a beta less than 1 is considered to be less volatile.

QUOTES/POEMS (FOR ESSAY & GS)

1. "The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting" - Sun Tzu.
2. 'Two wrongs don't make a right.' - Proverb.
3. ***"The loveless to themselves belong alone;
The loving men are others' to the very bone"*** - Thirukkural
4. "The Road Not Taken"
***"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference."*** - Robert Frost.
5. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"
***"The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep."*** - Robert Frost.