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# CURRENT AFFAIRS FOR UPSC

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## INTERNATIONAL

### WHY IS TRUMP SETTING UP AN EFFICIENCY DEPT.?

#### **The story so far:**

U.S. President-elect Donald Trump on November 12 handpicked tech billionaire Elon Musk and biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy to lead the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) and pave the way “to dismantle Government Bureaucracy, slash excess regulations, cut wasteful expenditures, and restructure federal agencies.”

#### **What is the task at hand?**

Mr. Musk and Mr. Ramaswamy are tasked to advise and guide the government from the outside. They will work with the White House and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) “to drive large scale structural reform and create an entrepreneurial approach to Government never seen before.” The duo share the President-elect’s views on cutting bureaucracy in government civil services. Mr. Musk, in one Trump rally in October, said the U.S. government’s budget can be cut by at least \$2 trillion, from \$6.5 trillion. He has also called for a leaner government with fewer civil services personnel. Mr. Ramaswamy, during his run for the Republican nomination, put forward plans to dismantle federal agencies and proposed reorganisation of intelligence units.

#### **Is such an exercise necessary?**

According to the Government Accountability Office’s (GAO) Performance and Accountability Report for 2024, the federal government’s long-term fiscal future appears unsustainable. In February, the congressional watchdog reported that public debt stood at nearly 97% of the GDP at the end of FY-2023. This is projected to touch a historical high of 106% of GDP by 2028. Unless some radical policy is implemented, public debt could grow at a rate more than twice as fast as the GDP over the next three decades, potentially hitting 200% of GDP by 2050, the GAO estimates. The non-partisan audit office has previously recommended that Congress develops a comprehensive plan to address the government’s fiscal outlook and promote fiscal sustainability. A sustainable fiscal policy would ensure that public debt grows at a rate comparable to or slower than the economy.

#### **Will Trump bring back his regulatory budget policy?**

During the election campaign, Mr. Trump pledged to eliminate 10 rules for every one added if elected. That is a big jump from two rules for every new regulation policy implemented during his first term. To make this happen, Mr. Trump must work on multiple fronts, including reinstating his executive orders rescinded by the Biden administration, using the Congressional Review Act to roll back late-stage orders issued by the current regime, overhauling regulatory oversight at OMB or transferring it to Congress, and eliminating entire agencies to reduce the government’s scope and regulatory output fundamentally.

#### **Have there been efficiency drives in the past?**

In February 1982, President Ronald Reagan formed a group of business leaders, commonly known as the Grace Commission, to identify and reduce inefficiency and waste in the U.S. Federal government. They put out a report two years later with 2,500 recommendations.



Initially, the White House Office of Cabinet Affairs was tasked with tracking the implementation of the recommendations. Then the responsibility was transferred to the OMB. Most proposals required congressional approval and so were not implemented.

In 2010, President Barack Obama established a bipartisan fiscal commission, known as the Simpson-Bowles Commission, with the mission of addressing the nation's federal deficit. Their report proposed substantial cuts in domestic and military spending, an increase in the federal gasoline tax, the elimination or reduction of popular tax breaks in exchange for lower rates, and adjustments to Social Security benefits.

However, the recommendations failed to gain traction in Congress as its blueprint did not pass the 14-vote threshold required to send it to the legislative body. This highlights the importance of not merely possessing grand ideas but also demonstrating the political will and the ability to foster bipartisan cooperation to bring those ideas to fruition.

#### **What difference can DOGE make?**

The DOGE initiative may sound ambitious, but its direct impact is likely limited. The commission can only submit recommendations to reduce federal regulatory power. Even if Congress approves such changes, the final implementation relies on the OMB and other federal agencies.

Moreover, the commission's work, set to conclude by July 4, 2026, will not result in the immediate shutdown of federal agencies or job losses among government employees. However, it could play a broader role when paired with former President Trump's Schedule F initiative, which seeks to reclassify thousands of federal employees and make it easier for the President to dismiss them. If implemented, this would represent a major transformation of the U.S. civil service, giving the President significant control over positions. Supporters argue this is necessary to address a perceived "deep state" of bureaucratic resistance, but critics warn it could dismantle the nonpartisan foundation of the civil service.

For DOGE to avoid becoming an ineffective commission, it should draw inspiration from New Jersey's Red Tape Review Commission. This commission achieved tangible results by producing impactful reports highlighting how overregulation harmed everyday people. Though it was disbanded later due to political opposition, its effort demonstrated that regulatory reform commissions can achieve results when their work is collaborative and widely supported.

## **WHY IS GERMANY HEADED FOR SNAP POLLS?**

### **The story so far:**

On November 6, Germany's ruling 'traffic light' coalition, composed of the Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens and the Free Democrats (FDP), collapsed when Chancellor Olaf Scholz fired his Finance Minister, FDP's Christian Lindner. A no-confidence motion against the government will be initiated on December 16, which Mr. Scholz is sure to lose without the support of the FDP. Therefore, Mr. Scholz has agreed to hold snap elections on February 23, 2025 ahead of the scheduled election in September 2025.

### **What happened?**

Germany's current ruling coalition, which came to power in 2021, has been one of the most ineffective coalitions that the country has seen. Constant infighting over key issues such as the



budget agreement, war with Ukraine, defence and energy spending has brought about a dysfunctional governance model.

While the Chancellor's SPD and the Greens want heavy state investment by increasing government borrowing, Mr. Lindner's pro-business party has rejected the same by espousing strict adherence to Germany's debt brake rule which prohibits borrowing beyond a set limit. Further, the FDP has asked for tax cuts for the wealthy, and austerity measures both of which have been staunchly opposed by the other two coalition partners.

The looming multi-billion dollar gap in the federal budget is yet another thorn on the side of the government.

#### **What is Germany's debt brake rule?**

Germany's debt brake rule limits the EU country's borrowing to 0.35% of its GDP. This limit, written into Basic Law (German Constitution), effectively means that the government has to try to balance its books every fiscal year, that is, it can only spend what it makes via taxes and levies. This rule was written into the law in 2009 after the 2008 economic crisis to bring public finances back under the control of the government. The debt brake limits indiscriminate government borrowing which would later translate to huge interest and fall as a burden on future generations. While it had been opposed then by the Greens and other opposition parties as limiting the government's ability to spend and act, it became legally binding for the federal government and the states in 2016 and 2020, respectively. No other EU country has such strict borrowing rules.

However, there is an exception clause "which allows the Bundestag [German Parliament] to suspend the debt brake by a simple majority in the event of a natural disaster or other extraordinary emergency situations beyond the control of the state." The Bundestag has already used this exception from 2020-2022 citing the COVID-19 pandemic and the onset of the Ukraine-Russia war which caused the energy crisis in the country — Germany has been one of the strongest defenders of Ukraine in the EU, with funds for Ukraine's security capacity building initiative in 2024 alone amounting to approximately 7.1 billion euro. However, this has led to Germany cutting/weaning off from Russian energy causing an energy crisis in the country, the effects of which are still felt in the economy.

#### **What about the budget?**

To work around the debt brake and to finance its fiscal needs, Germany has a list of various off-budget 'special funds' which it uses for economic spending without breaking the debt limit. Some of these funds include the climate and transformation fund, the economic stabilisation fund, the federal armed forces fund etc. The ruling coalition was depending on these funds to get them through the increased commitments to climate initiatives and defence spending.

However, on November 15, 2023, a constitutional court ruled that transferring unused pandemic era debt of around 60 billion euros to one of the funds, specifically the climate and transformation fund, was unconstitutional. This had blown a hole into the federal budget and further stressed a coalition already frayed by ideological differences.

#### **What next?**

The leader of the opposition alliance, composed of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and the Christian Social Union (CSU), Friedrich Merz is leading in opinion surveys. A poll conducted by



Forsa, wherein they asked citizens who they would vote for if there was an election next Sunday, showed the opposition alliance leading at 33% as compared to the SPD's 16%.

However, AfD, the far-right party of Germany, is also gaining influence in the country. The anti-immigrant party recently won the election in the eastern state of Thuringia, its first state election since the Nazi-era. According to Forsa, AfD's approval rates are at 17%, higher than the SPD's. The AfD has been accused of having extensive networks with neo-Nazi groups. A former AfD member of the German parliament is currently in custody for alleged involvement in the planning of a coup. There is even a proposal to file a motion to ban the AfD. Therefore, while the AfD are unlikely to lead government, the party could get a larger seat share in the Bundestag. AfD has opposed all arms shipment to Ukraine and similar to U.S. president-elect Donald Trump has called for strict rules against irregular migration and open borders.

#### WHY HAS CANADA REDUCED TOURIST STAY PERMITS MONTHS BEFORE ENDING 10-YEAR VISAS?

Canada's tourist visa success rate for Indian applicants has seen a dramatic decline in recent months, dropping sharply from 80 per cent to around 20 per cent or even lower particularly for aspirants from Punjab. This has raised concerns among prospective travelers, who are now facing heightened uncertainty and unexpected hurdles. The trend, already noticeable over the past few months, has been compounded by Canada's recent decision to discontinue the automatic 10-year multiple-entry tourist visa for eligible applicants. This policy shift is expected to further impact frequent travellers, creating additional barriers for those who previously relied on the convenience and predictability of long-term visas.

- Experts believe the end of Canada's automatic 10-year multiple-entry tourist visa will undoubtedly impact approval rates. Previously, this visa option was a popular choice among Indian applicants, particularly for those with strong financial backgrounds, solid travel histories, and family ties in Canada. These visas were issued more readily under a relatively straightforward process.
- The sudden decline in approval rates has already placed Indian students and professionals in a challenging position. Earlier this year, the 10-year visa was often seen as an alternative for those unable to secure student visas or other long-term permits. With its discontinuation and the plummeting success rates for tourist visas, these individuals now face limited and less predictable entry options.

#### Factors behind the decline in tourist visa success rates in recent months:

- 1. Allegations of Border Misuse:** There has been a rise in cases where visitors, particularly from India, reportedly use Canada as a transit point to cross into the United States.
- 2. Policy on Reducing Temporary Residents:** Canada has been tightening its policies to limit the number of temporary residents. Concerns have emerged that many visitors with 10-year visas overstay or work illegally, prompting immigration authorities to apply stricter scrutiny to new applicants
- 3. Processing Delays and Backlogs:** Delays in visa processing and a growing backlog due to a large number of visa applications have also played a role.



**4. Strained Diplomatic Relations with India:** Political tensions between India and Canada, especially after allegations involving India in a high-profile assassination case in Canada, have impacted various areas of bilateral relations.

#### WHAT IS RUSSIA'S NUCLEAR DOCTRINE, NEWLY UPDATED BY VLADIMIR PUTIN?

President Vladimir Putin has approved changes to Russia's nuclear weapons policy, and Moscow has urged the West to study them closely.

##### **What happened?**

Putin signed a decree on Tuesday updating Russia's nuclear doctrine, last published in 2020. The document, like the one it replaces, says Moscow sees nuclear weapons as a means of deterring its enemies and sets out the scenarios under which it would consider using them.

##### **Why did Russia announce it now?**

Putin had spoken publicly about the key points of the new doctrine on September 25. Tuesday's decree came on the same day that Ukraine fired US-supplied ATACMS missiles into Russia for the first time in the war.

But some security analysts played down the timing, saying it was understandable that the state bureaucracy had taken weeks to draft and publish the document following Putin's instructions.

##### **How does the new doctrine apply to the Ukraine war?**

It states that any aggression against Russia by a non-nuclear state that is carried out with the participation or support of a nuclear state will be considered a joint attack.

It lists additional scenarios under which Moscow would consider a nuclear response, including if it had reliable information about the launch of a massive cross-border air attack on Russia using planes, missiles and drones. Ukraine has staged frequent air attacks, mostly with drones but now also with US missiles, to degrade Russia's ability to strike Ukrainian troops, cities and energy infrastructure.

##### **What are the other key changes?**

Much of the language is unchanged from 2020, but there are a number of alterations and additions that in effect lower the threshold for Russian nuclear use.

Russia is officially placing close ally Belarus under its nuclear umbrella. Russia now says it may use nuclear weapons in the event of a conventional attack against itself or Belarus that "creates a critical threat to their sovereignty or territorial integrity". Previously, Russia had said it might meet a conventional attack with nuclear weapons "when the very existence of the state is placed under threat".

Russia says its nuclear deterrent is aimed not only at other nuclear states but also at other countries that allow their land, water or airspace to be used to prepare or conduct aggression against it.

##### **What other threats could prompt Russia to go nuclear?**



The document lists several new risks and scenarios which could prompt Russia to consider a nuclear response. These include creation of new military coalitions, or expansion of existing ones, that move enemy military infrastructure closer to Russia's borders, and planning or carrying out large-scale military exercises near Russia's borders, etc.

**Note:**

— In a major escalation of the war on its 1,000th day, Russia on Tuesday alleged that debris from a US-made ATACMS missile has fallen in the Bryansk region of the country.

— Weeks before leaving the White House, Joe Biden provided authorisation to Kyiv to use the Army Tactical Missile System, also known as ATACMS, inside Russia.

— It is a surface-to-surface ballistic missile capable of hitting targets at up to 300km (186 miles). This range means that Ukraine may now be able to hit targets inside Russia, including Russian-annexed Crimea.

— The missiles are fuelled by solid rocket propellant and follow a ballistic path into the atmosphere before coming back down at a high speed and high angle, making them difficult to intercept.

## WILL RIYADH SUMMIT IMPACT THE GAZA WAR?

**The story so far:**

Saudi Arabia hosted a summit of leaders from Arab and Islamic countries last week to discuss the Palestine question. The summit demanded an immediate end to Israel's military aggression on Gaza and Lebanon.

**What did leaders say?**

The leaders condemned the Israeli military's "shocking and horrific crimes", its "crime of genocide", and "ethnic cleansing" in Gaza, and called for an "independent, credible" international committee to investigate these crimes. It urged for measures to end the Israeli occupation and "establish an independent, sovereign Palestinian state on the lines of June 4, 1967, with occupied Al-Quds [Jerusalem] as its capital, based on the two-state solution, and in accordance with the approved references and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002."

**What is the significance of the summit?**

In recent years, Arab countries had shown a willingness to improve or even normalise ties with Israel bypassing the Palestine question, in violation of the spirit of the Arab Peace Initiative, which promised recognition to Israel in return for the creation of a Palestine state. In 2020, the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan normalised ties with Israel in an agreement called the Abraham Accords. In the past, Arab-Israel normalisation — Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994 — came with some Israeli compromises. Israel signed the Framework for Peace in the Middle East with Egypt in 1979 (following the Camp David Agreement), agreeing to establish an autonomous Palestinian self-governing authority in the occupied West Bank and Gaza, and the Israel-Jordan agreement (the Wadi Araba Treaty) following the 1993 Oslo Agreement, which laid the foundations of the Palestine National Authority.



But when the Abraham Accords were signed, the Palestinians got nothing. After the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack and Israel's retaliatory war on Gaza (and the West Bank), Arabs condemned the Israeli actions but stopped short of provoking the Jewish state. However, their unease and anger over the war Israel was carrying out were on display. In the Riyadh summit, they expressed their collective anger and sent a message to both Israel and the U.S. that resolving the Palestine question is key to peace in West Asia.

#### **Where do Saudi-Israel ties stand?**

In September 2023, Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi Crown Prince, and Prime Minister, said the kingdom was in an advanced stage of finalising a normalisation agreement with Israel. For both the U.S. and Israel, an agreement with Saudi Arabia was the logical next step of the normalisation process. Arab countries were also increasingly wary of Iran and they seemed ready to bolster ties with Israel and build a joint defensive shield against potential Iranian threats. Then came the October 7 attack, and Israel's war on Gaza. Saudi Arabia and the UAE see the Hamas brand of political Islam as a threat to their monarchical systems. But they cannot ignore the mood in the Arab Street and West Asia, which is predominantly anti-Israel and pro-Palestine. A few months after the war, the Saudis said any future agreement with Israel should be linked to resolving the Palestine issue. On September 18, Crown Prince Mohammed said, "The kingdom will not cease its tireless efforts to establish an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and we affirm that the kingdom will not establish diplomatic relations with Israel without one." At the opening of the Riyadh summit, MBS, as Prince Mohammed is popularly known, said Israel was committing "genocide" in Gaza, in his harshest criticism of the war. This points to a steady deterioration in Saudi-Israel ties over the past year.

#### **Will the Arabs join the war?**

Very unlikely. The last time an Arab country attacked Israel was in 1973 when Egypt, along with Syria, launched a surprise offensive in Sinai and Golan, Egyptian and Syrian territories, respectively, that were captured by Israel in 1967. Egypt launched the attack to get its territory back, not for the Palestinians. Ever since, peace between Israel and Arab states prevailed, irrespective of Israel's military occupation of the Palestinian territories. That status quo is unlikely to change as no Arab country has the stomach to go to war against Israel. But before the October 7 attack, Arabs were moving closer to formalising their relationship with the Jewish state — that push has now derailed. Now, even the UAE, which had close ties with Israel, says it "is not ready to support the day after the war in Gaza without the establishment of a Palestinian state". Arab countries have also entered into a detente with Iran, bringing their decades-long rivalry with the Shia state to a tactical halt.

### **NO ACCOUNTABILITY**

Over 13 months of Israel's war on Gaza has destroyed much of the Palestinian enclave of 2.3 million people. The latest war, triggered by Hamas's October 7, 2023 cross-border attack, has also spilled into West Asia, with Israel invading Lebanon last month and Israel and Iran carrying out strikes and counter-strikes. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says his country is fighting for its survival and will not end the wars until he meets his objectives. While he continues the wars with his maximalist goals, there is growing criticism in Israel on the security failures of October 7. Despite Mr. Netanyahu's tall claims, it was on his watch that Israel suffered its biggest attack since 1948, the year the state was created in historic Palestine. Until now, neither Mr. Netanyahu nor his now-fired Defence Minister Yoav Gallant has taken responsibility for the





security failures. The Prime Minister has consistently denied having been briefed in advance about the Hamas attack. However, recent reports suggested that his aides are being investigated for allegedly doctoring details of a call he received from his military Secretary, Major General Avi Gil, on October 7. Gen. Gil, who left his post in May, had complained to the Attorney General that the call details appeared to have been altered — Gen. Gil had warned that militants seemed to be prepared to attack Israel.

Officials at the Prime Minister's Office face other grievous allegations, including leaking classified documents, doctoring transcripts of official conversations and intimidating those with access to such records. While Mr. Netanyahu is not a target of the investigation, there is a pattern in the alleged actions of his aides — all aimed at bolstering the Prime Minister's reputation through the wars. Israel, basically a security state, has a culture of taking security lapses seriously. Golda Meir, the Labour Prime Minister during the Yom Kippur war, had to resign within a year of Egypt's surprise attack in October 1973. The war also damaged Labour's reputation and expedited the rise of the right-wing Likud. Israel's botched 2006 Lebanon invasion cost Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and his Kadima party dearly — Kadima ceased political activities in 2015. Mr. Netanyahu is aware of the consequences, which is why he is avoiding taking responsibility for the security failures. But Israelis should ask themselves if they are feeling secure after more than a year of his aimless wars. There needs to be an independent investigation into the security lapses of October 7 and hold those responsible in the government, military and intelligence accountable. This is essential to prevent another October 7-type attack.

#### ICC ISSUES ARREST WARRANTS FOR NETANYAHU, FORMER ISRAEL DEFENCE CHIEF, HAMAS LEADER

The International Criminal Court has issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his former defence minister, and a Hamas leader, Ibrahim Al-Masri, also known as Mohammed Deif, for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, the court announced on Thursday.

- The International Criminal Court (ICC) has issued arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, former Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and Hamas military commander Mohammed Deif, alleging their involvement in war crimes and crimes against humanity during the Israel-Hamas conflict.
- The charges against Netanyahu and Gallant include the use of starvation as a method of warfare, murder, persecution, and other inhumane acts. Deif is accused of orchestrating mass killings, hostage-taking, and rape during the October 7 attacks on Israel.
- Israel, which does not recognize the ICC's jurisdiction, has condemned the warrants, with Netanyahu labeling them as "false and unjust." The United States, also not a member of the ICC, has criticized the court's decision, expressing concerns over its implications for international relations.
- The warrants obligate the 124 ICC member states to arrest the individuals if they enter their territories, potentially restricting their international travel. However, enforcement remains uncertain, as the ICC lacks its own police force and relies on member states for execution.



**Do You Know:**

- The ICC, headquartered in The Hague, Netherlands, was established under a 1998 treaty called the “Rome Statute”.

—It “investigates and, where warranted, tries individuals charged with the gravest crimes of concern to the international community: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and the crime of aggression.”

—At present, 124 countries are party to the Rome Statute, including Britain, Japan, Afghanistan, and Germany. India is not a member, nor are China and the US.

- The ICC was established to prosecute the most heinous offences only when a country’s own legal machinery was unable or unwilling to act. Unlike the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which deals with countries and inter-state disputes, the ICC prosecutes individuals.

—Additionally, the offences should be committed either in a country that ratified the agreement or by a national of a ratifying country.

—The ICC can also practise its jurisdiction over cases referred by the UN Security Council to it.

- Israel is not party to the Rome Statute, but Palestine is.

- Back in 2018, Palestine had referred the situation in the country as a whole to the ICC. Then in November 2023, South Africa, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Comoros, and Djibouti sent a further referral into the Palestine situation.

—In January 2024, “the Republic of Chile and the United Mexican State additionally submitted a referral to the Prosecutor with respect to the situation in The State of Palestine,” the ICC said.

- The ICC’s decisions are binding, but it depends on its members to ensure cooperation. Thus, if Netanyahu or Gallant were to travel to any of the 124 member states, its government would be obligated to arrest them and extradite them to The Hague.

**WHY NEW ZEALAND LAWMAKERS STAGED A ‘HAKA’ AGAINST A DIVISIVE BILL**

New Zealand’s parliament was briefly suspended on Thursday (November 14) following a protest by the Indigenous Māori group’s legislators, who staged a “haka” or ceremonial dance against a contentious Bill.

Hana-Rawhiti Maipi-Clarke, a 22-year-old Māori Party MP, led the haka after being asked about her party’s vote on the Treaty Principles Bill that seeks to reinterpret a 184-year-old treaty between the British and the Māori.

MPs from the opposition Māori, Green and Labour parties and people in the public gallery joined in the haka, as Maipi-Clarke tore up a copy of the Bill in front of its author. Here’s why.

**What is the haka and why is it significant?**

The haka is of deep cultural significance to Māori identity and is traditionally performed by warriors on the battlefield or to welcome another tribe. According to New Zealand Tourism’s website, haka “was a show of physical prowess but also an embodiment of cultural pride, strength,



and unity.” It is usually performed in a group and involves chanting, dramatic facial gestures, hand movements and stamping the feet.

Most recently, the haka made global headlines in 2019 when students from various schools – including non-Māori ones – paid tribute to their peers who died in the Christchurch shootings through it.

A range of hakas are performed in Māori culture. The 19th-century tribal leader Te Rauparaha composed the Ka Mate haka staged on Thursday. With the lyrics “Ka mate, ka mate! Ka ora, ka ora!” (“I die, I die! I live, I live!”), it tells the story of his escape from his enemies and celebrates life over death.

The All Blacks, New Zealand’s rugby team, has performed the haka before each match for nearly 120 years. The tourism website says the routine gives the team “a psychological edge and elevates their heart rates above their opponents, who must stand and watch.” But traditionally, the haka has been done to show “cultural pride, strength, and unity.”

**Other popular hakas include:**

Peruperu: A war haka performed before battle to intimidate the enemy and demonstrate strength.

Ngeri: A short haka without set actions, often used to stiffen the sinews and uplift the spirit.

Pōwhiri: A welcoming haka performed during formal greeting ceremonies.

Manawa wera: A haka performed at funerals or memorials to express grief.

**Why was the Haka performed in New Zealand’s parliament?**

Despite the protest haka and a brief suspension, Thursday’s parliamentary session passed the first reading of the Treaty Principles Bill tabled by the libertarian Act Party, a minor partner in New Zealand’s centre-right coalition government.

The Bill seeks to amend the Treaty of Waitangi, the foundational document of Aotearoa (the Māori name for New Zealand). It was signed in 1840 by a representative of the British crown and 500 Māori chiefs. It promised the tribes broad rights to their lands and interests if they ceded governance to the British Empire.

Efforts have been made over the years to enshrine the core values of the treaty in the country’s laws. According to The Guardian’s report, its principles were developed over 50 years by courts, tribunals and successive governments to improve the relations between the Māori and those in power, and to improve clarity over its interpretations.

“Many principles have been developed and continue to evolve, but the most recognised are broadly defined as participation, partnership, protection, and redress,” the report said.

**What is the Treaty Principles Bill?**

The Bill is the brainchild of Act leader David Seymour, who said there is a need to legally define the treaty’s principles as it does not list specific principles, leading to liberal interpretations. For example, the 1975 Treaty of Waitangi Act created a tribunal for recording the horrors experienced by the Indigenous communities under colonisation.



The Act party believes the country has been “divided by race, and the Bill will allow the treaty to be interpreted more fairly through parliament, rather than the courts.” The Bill does not intend to rewrite the treaty but seeks a referendum and intends to extend it equally to all New Zealanders.

Critics say this would make the treaty pointless, threaten Māori rights and promote anti-Māori rhetoric. Even the coalition partners are not all supportive of it, including Prime Minister Christopher Luxon (who called it “simplistic”) and his New Zealand National Party. Its path to a second or a third reading may be difficult. A Māori rights group is also leading a 1,000-km-long protest march, or a hikoī, against it to the capital Wellington.

#### JVP-NPP COALITION’S VICTORY IN SRI LANKA IS A MANDATE FOR HARMONY

If the victory of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP)-led National People’s Power (NPP) coalition candidate Anura Kumara Dissanayake in the presidential election in September had been indicative of the churn in Sri Lankan politics, the emphatic validation of the Marxist-Leninist coalition in the recent general election marks another landmark shift in the country’s ethnic equations. For the first time in Sri Lanka’s history, hardline Tamil areas such as Jaffna and Vanni, epicentres of the 26-year-long ethnic strife in the country, have voted overwhelmingly for the JVP, a Sinhala-Buddhist party. The NPP has also made significant inroads in the centre, in areas where Tamil plantation workers reside, and in the Muslim-majority east. Riding on the plank of ethnic and economic equality, the victory has given President Dissanayake’s alliance a thumping two-third majority in parliament.

For New Delhi, a stable government in the neighbourhood offers a renewed opportunity to strengthen regional cooperation and safeguard strategic interests. Its cordial outreach to Dissanayake in the run-up to and aftermath of his presidential victory and the visit of External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar last month show a judicious pragmatism. There have been concerns over Sri Lanka’s growing proximity to China, especially its lease of the Hambantota Port on the Indian Ocean and Beijing’s investment in infrastructure projects in the country. However, Dissanayake’s scepticism towards foreign investments — his party has also been critical of the Adani Group’s wind power project in Sri Lanka — may lead to a renegotiation of external relations. Given their shared history, deepening bilateral ties will benefit both India and Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka stands to gain from exchanges with India’s growing economy; Dissanayake’s recent endorsement of Tamil rights and the victory statistics could allay some of India’s concerns — India has long pushed for the implementation of the 13th Amendment which promises power devolution to the Tamil minority in Sri Lanka.

The spotlight will now be on Dissanayake, 55, an outsider to Sri Lanka’s dynastic politics and a key figure in the 2022 “Aragalaya” (protests) against the Gotabaya Rajapaksa government for corruption and economic mismanagement. Despite the \$2.9 billion IMF bailout package, Sri Lanka’s economy remains precarious — an estimated 25.9 per cent of its citizens were below the poverty line in 2023; the World Bank expects its economy to grow by a mere 2.2 per cent in 2024. In his election campaigns, Dissanayake had promised economic and political reforms, including abolition of executive presidency, and a renegotiation with the IMF to lessen the tax burden on citizens. In September, with only three seats and limited legislative power, it had appeared to be a daunting task. After his coalition’s victory in the general elections, Dissanayake will face more scrutiny.



**Do You Know:**

- India and Sri Lanka share a multifaceted relationship characterized by deep historical ties, economic cooperation, and strategic collaboration. The both nation continues to build upon their historical connections, focusing on economic development, defense cooperation, and cultural exchanges to foster a robust and mutually beneficial partnership.
- In September 2024, Anura Kumara Dissanayake was elected as Sri Lanka's President. Despite his party's historical scepticism towards India, Dissanayake has acknowledged India's crucial role in Sri Lanka's security and economic development. He has not indicated a preference for prioritizing relations with China over India, suggesting a balanced foreign policy approach.
- In July 2024, India and Sri Lanka unveiled a vision for deeper economic ties. Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized the importance of fulfilling the aspirations of the Tamil community in Sri Lanka. The two countries agreed to conduct feasibility studies on a petroleum pipeline and land bridge connectivity, aiming to enhance trade and energy cooperation.
- The 10th edition of the joint military exercise 'Mitra Shakti' commenced in August 2024 at the Army Training School in Maduru Oya, Sri Lanka. This annual exercise, conducted alternately in India and Sri Lanka, aims to enhance interoperability and share best practices between the two armies.
- During Sri Lanka's economic crisis, India extended significant support. In May 2024, Sri Lanka's Prime Minister acknowledged India's assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic downturn, highlighting the importance of strengthening ties based on good neighbourly relations.
- In October 2024, a ferry service between Nagapattinam in India and Kankesanthurai in Sri Lanka was launched, marking a significant milestone in strengthening bilateral relations. This service is expected to enhance connectivity, promote trade, and reinforce longstanding cultural bonds between the two nations.

**WHAT IS GLOBAL ALLIANCE AGAINST HUNGER AND POVERTY, LAUNCHED AT BRAZIL G20?**

One of the main initiatives championed by Brazil during its G20 presidency in 2024, the initiative will serve as a platform for connecting countries in need of assistance with public policies targeted towards eradicating hunger and poverty, with partners willing to offer expertise or financial support.

- The Global Alliance Against Hunger and Poverty, launched during Brazil's G20 presidency in November 2024, is a collaborative initiative aimed at eradicating hunger and poverty worldwide. Spearheaded by Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, the alliance has garnered support from 82 countries, the European Union, the African Union, and 24 international organizations.
- The alliance serves as a platform to connect nations in need with effective public policies and social technologies to combat hunger and poverty. It focuses on addressing structural causes such as social inequalities and climate change, emphasizing the importance of political commitment and international cooperation.

**Key components of the alliance include:**

—National Pillar: Encouraging countries to implement or strengthen social programs proven effective in fighting hunger.

**4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**



—Financial Pillar: Mobilizing resources through innovative financing instruments, public-private partnerships, and reforms of multilateral development banks.

—Knowledge Pillar: Sharing successful experiences and knowledge to support the implementation of effective policies.

**Do You Know:**

- Brazil launched the Global Alliance for Hunger and Poverty at the G20 Summit in Rio, with an initial 41 participating members pledging to lift 500 million people out of poverty through cash transfers and social protection systems.
- The G-20 hosted by Brazil, was by the third host country of the Global South, after Indonesia in 2022 and India in 2023. The next G-20 is to be in South Africa.
- The initiative brings together developed nations, NGOs, and financial institutions to donate money and expertise to countries in need. The intention is to remove all nations from the Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) hunger map by 2030.
- Countries such as Brazil, Ghana, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Chile, Indonesia, and the Dominican Republic have already presented their plans. Donors include Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Norway, Spain, the European Union, and institutions such as the World Bank, FAO, and World Food Programme.



**DreamIAS**



## NATION

### WHY THE ARRIVAL OF A PAKISTANI CARGO SHIP IN BANGLADESH IS A BIG DEAL

A cargo ship from Karachi docked at Chattogram (formerly Chittagong) port on Wednesday (November 13), marking the first-ever direct maritime contact between Pakistan and Bangladesh.

- Described by the Pakistan High Commission in Dhaka as “a major step in bilateral trade”, the development could signal a significant shift in the historically tenuous relationship between the two countries. This shift, however, has been on the cards ever since the ouster of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August this year.
- The shadow of 1971 has long loomed large over the bilateral relationship between Bangladesh and Pakistan.
- During the nine-month long Mukti Juddho (Liberation War) in 1971, the Pakistani military and its collaborators committed innumerable atrocities, the memories of which are deeply imprinted in Bangladesh’s national psyche. Some 3 million people were killed, thousands were tortured and raped, and millions fled their homes to escape Pakistani brutality.
- Pakistan has never apologised or expressed regret for its crimes — to the detriment of the bilateral relationship between Dhaka and Islamabad.
- Bilateral relationships have been particularly sour under certain governments in Dhaka, most notably, under Sheikh Hasina, central to whose political agenda was seeking justice for atrocities perpetrated during the Liberation War.

#### Do You Know:

- Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus said on Sunday that the interim government will seek the extradition of deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who fled to India after the fall of her government following a mass protest movement in August.

### THIS TIME FOR AFRICA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit to Nigeria, and his ongoing tours to Brazil, for the G-20, and Guyana, are important not only for ties with each of these countries but also significant as a statement on India’s commitment to the Global South. In the Abuja visit, the first after then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s 2007 visit, where the two countries declared a Strategic Partnership, Mr. Modi and Nigerian President Bola Ahmed Tinubu reaffirmed ties in areas including defence cooperation. Mr. Modi identified terrorism, separatism, piracy and drug trafficking as challenges for the two countries to work together on. Receiving Nigeria’s ‘the Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger’, Mr. Modi, the second foreign dignitary to receive the distinction, dedicated the award to the people of India and to the ‘long-standing, historical friendship between India and Nigeria’. India was among the countries that sent teachers and doctors to Nigeria after its independence from Britain in 1960. The Indian community is over 60,000-strong — India’s largest diaspora in West Africa, and a bridge builder. The two countries have strong economic ties in a region where India has often been faulted for not doing more: about 200 Indian companies have invested about \$27 billion, in pharma, health care, agriculture and energy, where both countries share low-cost technologies and experiences as they tackle similar chronic issues of poverty, pollution and



population density. Nigeria is among the top African economies in GDP. It is now a BRICS partner country. The conversations will continue, as both leaders travelled to Rio De Janeiro for the G-20 in Brazil, and where the African Union was inducted as a G-20 member in 2023.

While India's voluble commitment to the Global South and South-South cooperation has been appreciated, particularly in Africa, it also has been seen as short on follow-through at times. Its leadership of the third iteration of "Voice of the Global South" (VoGS) conference this year has seen lack-lustre participation. India's plans to use the platform to feed into the G-20 processes may find more engagement if it allows the G-20 host each year to take over the hosting of the VoGS summit. The India-Africa Forum summit, last held in 2015, is also overdue, and it is hoped that New Delhi moves, as the Foreign Secretary promised at a briefing on Mr. Modi's visit, to hold it early next year. As India shores up ties across the Southern hemisphere, and builds common cause with countries that are important when it comes to the debate over global governance, food, energy and health security, it must be seen to match its ideals with nimble footwork and a decided presence across the developing world, as is evidenced by the Prime Minister's travels this week.

**Note:**

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conferred the "Dominica Award of Honour" by President Sylvanie Burton of Dominica on the sidelines of the India-CARICOM Summit.
- The award is a recognition of PM's statesmanship and contribution to Dominica during the COVID-19 pandemic and his commitment to strengthening India-Dominica ties.
- Barbados also conferred the honorary Order of Freedom, its top award on Prime Minister Modi, bringing his tally of international honours to 19.

**EXPRESS VIEW ON PM MODI IN GUYANA: CARIBBEAN CONNECT**

India and Guyana on Wednesday sealed 10 agreements to strengthen cooperation in hydrocarbons, digital payment systems, pharmaceuticals, and defence after bilateral talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Guyanese President Mohamed Irfaan Ali.

- Upon arrival in Georgetown, PM Modi was honored with the ceremonial 'Key to the City,' symbolizing the city's recognition and respect.

**Do You Know:**

- The Second India-CARICOM Summit was held on November 20, 2024, in Georgetown, Guyana, marking a significant milestone in the relationship between India and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). This summit was the first of its kind to be hosted in a CARICOM member country, underscoring the deepening ties between the two regions.
- During the summit, India and Guyana signed ten Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) covering areas such as culture, agriculture, pharmaceuticals, and the deployment of India's Unified Payments Interface (UPI) in Guyana.
- Prime Minister Modi announced India's commitment to sharing technology for combating seaweed infestations affecting Caribbean nations. He also pledged over 1,000 scholarships for CARICOM countries, provision of mobile hospitals, drug-testing laboratories, and the introduction of ferries to improve marine transport in the region.





- Acknowledging Guyana’s growing importance as an oil-producing nation, Prime Minister Modi emphasized its role in India’s energy security. He also highlighted the strengthening trade relations between India and Guyana, with India providing lines of credit for various projects, including military passenger planes and river ferries.
- The relationship between India and Guyana is deeply rooted in their shared history as former British colonies and members of the Commonwealth of Nations. A significant portion of Guyana’s population comprises individuals of Indian descent, fostering strong cultural and familial bonds between the two nations.
- In April 2023, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar visited Guyana and, alongside President Irfaan Ali, commissioned an India-made ferry, the ‘MA Lisha,’ constructed by Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers in Kolkata. This initiative aims to enhance connectivity and economic opportunities in Guyana’s hinterlands.
- Further strengthening ties, President Mohamed Irfaan Ali of Guyana was the chief guest at the Pravasi Bharatiya Divas convention in Indore in January 2023. During this event, Prime Minister Narendra Modi held bilateral talks with President Ali, focusing on energy cooperation and other areas of mutual interest.

#### JAISHANKAR, WANG DISCUSS NEXT STEPS: RESUMING MAN SAROVAR YATRA, FLIGHTS

A month after India and China agreed to disengage at two friction points along the Line of Actual Control leading to a meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Russia, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi discussed the “next steps in India-China relations” that include “resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra pilgrimage, data sharing on trans-border rivers, direct flights between India and China and media exchanges”.

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro to discuss “next steps” in bilateral relations. The meeting focused on stabilizing ties, managing differences, and exploring areas of cooperation.

- India and China recently completed disengagement at two friction points along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) — Depsang Plains and Demchok — paving the way for improved relations.

- Indian troops have resumed patrolling in these areas, marking significant progress in the three-step process of disengagement, de-escalation, and de-induction of troops.

- Key issues discussed included:

- Resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra for Indian pilgrims.

- Data sharing on trans-border rivers to address water management concerns.

- Establishing direct flights between India and China to boost connectivity.

- Media exchanges to promote better understanding and communication.

- Both sides are planning to commemorate the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations with events in both countries.



- The October 21 agreement between India and China on patrolling arrangements at the LAC was a precursor to the recent developments. The agreement was instrumental in setting the stage for high-level discussions, including Modi and Xi's meeting during the BRICS Summit.

**Do You Know:**

- The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is the demarcation that separates Indian-controlled territory from Chinese-controlled territory. India considers the LAC to be 3,488 km long, while the Chinese consider it to be only around 2,000 km. It is divided into three sectors: the eastern sector which spans Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim, the middle sector in Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh, and the western sector in Ladakh.

- The alignment of the LAC in the eastern sector is along the 1914 McMahon Line, and there are minor disputes about the positions on the ground as per the principle of the high Himalayan watershed. This pertains to India's international boundary as well, but for certain areas such as Longju and Asaphila. The line in the middle sector is the least controversial but for the precise alignment to be followed in the Barahoti plains.

**TWO CHEERS FOR THE TOP COURT'S 'BULLDOZER' JUDGMENT**

Last week, the Supreme Court of India handed down a judgment dealing with what has come to be known as "bulldozer raj". For the last three years, in many parts of India, municipal authorities had taken to demolishing people's homes if they were accused of an offence, especially in the wake of communal tensions or large-scale protests. These demolitions were often, although not always, communally targeted, and in their wake, politicians were seen to publicly celebrate and endorse this form of state-sponsored "vigilante justice". In its judgment, the Court came down heavily on this practice, noting that it violated the basic principles of the rule of law, the separation of powers, and turned the executive into judge, jury, and executioner. The Court declared that no person's home could be demolished merely because they stood accused or even convicted of an offence, and issued a set of guidelines to prevent this kind of state action.

**A trail of significant issues**

While the Court's judgment is no doubt welcome, there are a number of issues that it raises. The first is delay. This pattern of vigilante demolition of homes — what scholars refer to as "domicide" — has been taking place for at least three years now. It had begun in the wake of the Citizenship Amendment Act-National Register of Citizens protests, and has multiplied across the country since then. Many of these demolitions were challenged in courts including the Supreme Court, but it is only now that the Court chose to act. This raises serious questions about the Court's delay in addressing such a foundational threat to the rule of law. But also, it raises questions about redress and compensation for past acts, now ruled to be illegal. In its judgment, while the Court held that state officials responsible for illegal demolitions would be held personally liable for compensation and redress, it failed to clarify how its judgment would apply to all the demolitions that had taken place so far, and how it would aid the victims of such demolitions, who have been rendered homeless. This is a significant omission.

Second, it is important to understand the two-faced nature of the state on the issue of demolitions. While politicians and Ministers would celebrate these demolitions as having delivered instant justice, with a view to dog-whistling to their constituencies, the municipal authorities who were actually responsible for the demolitions and had to defend them in Court, would invoke the much



more prosaic justification of “illegal” or “irregular” constructions. The state never argued in Court that it was engaged in vigilante, or retributive, demolitions.

Thus, when the Court framed the main question in the case as being “whether it is permissible for the State to demolish the home of someone merely because they have been accused of an offence”, it was setting up a straw man as nobody had ever claimed that such a thing was permissible. The actual claim was that the invocation of municipal building laws and “irregular construction” was a facade to legally justify what were, in effect, targeted and punitive demolitions.

In fact, a close reading of the judgment demonstrates that the Court, too, was aware of this. At one point in the judgment, it noted that if, for example, one home in a locality was singled out for demolition while surrounding homes were left untouched, that would be an indication of mala fide state action. At another point, it discussed how the demolition of an individual’s home affected their (innocent) family as well, and that “collective punishment” was impermissible under Indian law. As both these events actually happened in the recent past, it is unclear why the Court used the language of hypotheticals rather than addressing the material reality before it. The judgment, thus, reads like an indirect approach to the actual problem at hand, and reflects a hesitation on the part of the Court to identify the problem in clear terms.

#### **The core of the judgment**

This, then, brings us to the most important part of the judgment — the Guidelines — which represent the Court’s actual attempt to address the problem. A perusal of the Guidelines reveals that the Court’s objective was to prevent the state from using demolitions as a political weapon by introducing two crucial requirements into the procedure: of transparency, and of due process. The Court held that before any demolition, the state would have to serve notice upon the person whose home it proposed to demolish, and provide them with at least 15 days to reply. There would have to be a personal hearing, and even after the order of demolition became final, the affected person had a right of appeal, which again required the state to stay its hand for at least 15 days. As the entire purpose of “bulldozer raj” was to serve a form of instant “mob” justice at the instance of the state (regardless of guilt or innocence), it is to be hoped that these due process guidelines will throw enough sand into the gears of the bulldozer to preclude such actions in the future.

The Court also went an extra mile and mandated transparency requirements in order to prevent “backdating” of notices (a long-standing problem). Most importantly, it introduced a “proportionality” requirement into the process: municipal officials were required to explain, in writing, why the extreme step of demolition was the only option available, and why, for example, regularisation (through payment of compounding fees), or demolishing only a part of the structure, was not possible. This requirement, once again, would make municipal officials think twice before engaging in instant demolitions. The Court gave this teeth as well, by holding that in cases of illegal demolitions, erring officers would be personally liable.

These Guidelines, thus, represent a sincere and committed effort by the Court to check the menace of “bulldozer raj”. It now remains to be seen how effective they will be going forward, and much of this will depend on how other Benches will implement these Guidelines, when fresh cases come to the Court. In previous cases involving lynching and hate speech, for example, we have seen detailed guidelines. But these have been ineffective because the Court has refrained from following up on and enforcing its own judgment when violations take place. It is to be hoped that this order will not meet the same fate.



### A section that is still vulnerable

The other thing to note is that the Court made an exception in its judgment for structures on certain kind of public land (such as abutting a railway track, or a road). A look at this exception makes it clear that it would exclude from its protective ambit, slums and informal settlements where the most vulnerable and marginalised sections of society live. If anything, it is such individuals living in permanent precarity who are most in need of the Court's protection. There is also no reason why requirements of notice and proportionality should not apply to such individuals as well. No doubt, the Court's mind was on punitive and targeted demolitions, as that was the case before it. However, the partial application of its judgment shows that there is a long way to go, and struggles still to engage in, when it comes to securing a meaningful right to shelter and protection from evictions for all the citizens of this country.

## INDIA'S UNDERTRIAL PRISONERS

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Tuesday said that undertrials who have spent more than a third of the maximum prescribed sentence for the crime they are accused of committing should be released before Constitution Day (November 26).

- India's prison system faces significant challenges, particularly concerning the high proportion of undertrial prisoners and issues of overcrowding.
- As per the National Crime Records Bureau's (NCRB) 2022 report, undertrial prisoners constitute approximately 75% of the total prison population in India. The same report indicates that India's 1,330 prisons have an occupancy rate of 131.4%, highlighting severe overcrowding issues.
- Prolonged court proceedings result in extended pre-trial detentions, contributing to the high number of undertrial prisoners. Many undertrial prisoners come from marginalized communities and lack the financial resources to secure bail or legal representation.
- In August 2024, the Supreme Court ruled that the relaxation of bail provisions for first-time offenders should apply retrospectively. This decision is expected to impact a significant number of undertrial prisoners, potentially reducing their numbers.
- The Union Law and Justice Minister has urged state legal services authorities to intensify efforts to provide legal aid to undertrial prisoners, aiming for their release by significant national milestones.
- The prolonged detention of undertrial prisoners raises serious human rights issues, including the right to a fair and speedy trial. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive reforms in the judicial process, including expediting trials, improving legal aid services, and implementing alternative dispute resolution mechanisms.

### Do You Know:

- Section 479 of the BNSS lays down the "Maximum period for which [an] undertrial prisoner can be detained". It states that a prisoner who is not accused of offences punishable with death or life imprisonment shall be released on bail if she has "undergone detention for a period extending up to one-half of the maximum period of imprisonment specified for that offence under that law".
- In August, a Bench of Justices Hima Kohli and Sandeep Mehta held hearings on the issues faced by undertrial prisoners in the case *In re: Inhuman conditions in 1382 prisons*. The case began as

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a PIL after former Chief Justice of India R C Lahoti sent a letter to the court, highlighting issues such as overcrowding in prisons, unnatural deaths of prisoners, and the inadequacy of trained prison staff. Since 2013, the court has been hearing issues relating to prisons in this case.

—Of the 23,772 women in prisons, 18,146 (76.33%) are undertrials, the report notes.

—The report does not record how many undertrial prisoners were first-time offenders.

—As of December 31, 2022, around 8.6% of all undertrial prisoners had been in prison for more than three years.

- Constitution Day, also known as Samvidhan Divas, is observed annually in India on November 26 to commemorate the adoption of the Indian Constitution by the Constituent Assembly on this day in 1949. The Constitution came into effect on January 26, 1950, marking the country's transition to a republic.

- The observance of Constitution Day was initiated in 2015 to honor Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the principal architect of the Indian Constitution, on his 125th birth anniversary. The day serves to highlight the significance of the Constitution in guiding India's democratic framework and to promote awareness of citizens' rights and duties.

#### PRISON TAG

The suggestion for the introduction of electronic tracking of prisoners granted parole or furlough may merit consideration as a viable means of decongesting prisons. The idea of having a pilot programme to make undertrials who pose low or moderate risk wear devices that will track and restrict their movements has been mooted in a research report of the Supreme Court of India's Centre for Research and Planning. This is not the first time the use of electronic tracking has been considered, though. The Model Prisons and Correctional Services Act, 2023, contains a provision that says "prisoners may be granted prison leave on the condition of their willingness to wear electronic tracking devices" so that their movement and activities may be monitored. It speaks of cancelling the leave in case of any violation. The study points out that Odisha was the first State to propose the use of tamper-proof electronic trackers on undertrials accused of non-heinous offences to reduce congestion in jails. Such a measure would extend the concept to grant of bail. However, it also points out correctly that there are no guidelines or minimum standards for when and how the technology can be deployed without violating the prisoners' rights. The use of technology for tracking the movement of those allowed to leave prison on some conditions does raise such concerns.

The Court, earlier this year, disapproved of imposing bail conditions that would infringe their right to privacy of the accused. The context in that case was a bail condition that the accused should pin his location on Google Maps and share it with the investigating officer. However, it ought not to mean that electronic tagging should be rejected out of hand. A Parliamentary Standing Committee had approved of cost-effective devices being used with the consent of the accused, citing the possible gains of avoiding rights violation, reducing administrative costs and decongesting prisons. Rising occupancy in prisons has been a matter of concern in the last few years. Official statistics put the number of prisoners in the country's jails at 5,73,220 on December 31, 2022, amounting to 131.4% of the total capacity. Therefore, any move that will reduce the occupancy, including the use of tracking technology, ought to be a welcome measure. Several jurisdictions in the world deploy devices to track the movement of certain categories of offenders. It would be logical to use them to ensure that prisoners released recently do not approach their victims again or enter locations associated with their crimes. If the trackers were to be compact in terms of size



and visibility, it could also make the beneficiaries of bail shed their reluctance to wear them for fear of stigmatisation.

#### WAVING BLACK FLAG NOT ILLEGAL OR DEFAMATORY, SAYS KERALA HC

Observing that showing a black flag to a person is not an illegal act and does not amount to defamation, the Kerala High Court has quashed a case registered against three persons in connection with waving a black flag at the convoy of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan.

- In the incident that took place in 2017, the three young men from Paravur in Ernakulam district were accused of waving a black flag at the convoy of Vijayan with an intention to defame him, and when police tried to restrain them from proceeding towards the convoy, they allegedly used criminal force by pushing police personnel.
- The Kerala High Court has ruled that waving black flags as a form of protest is not illegal and does not constitute defamation. This decision came as the court quashed a case against individuals who had shown black flags to Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's convoy.
- The court emphasized that such actions are a legitimate expression of dissent and are protected under the right to freedom of speech and expression. This ruling reinforces the importance of upholding democratic rights and the freedom to protest peacefully.

#### Do You Know:

- Waving black flags in India is a symbolic act of protest or dissent. This practice has historical, political, and social connotations, often used to demonstrate opposition or displeasure against government policies, political leaders, or specific incidents.
- During India's struggle for independence, black flags were occasionally used to oppose oppressive policies or laws enforced by British colonial rulers. Over the decades, black flag demonstrations have continued to be a significant part of political and social movements in India.
- Protesters wave black flags to show discontent against visiting political leaders, controversial policies, or specific governmental actions. For example, black flags were waved during protests against farm laws, demonetization, and other major policy decisions.
- Waving black flags falls under the right to peaceful protest, which is protected by Article 19 of the Indian Constitution. At times, governments have sought to prevent such protests by imposing Section 144 (prohibitory orders) or detaining protesters pre-emptively.
- Black as a colour is globally associated with mourning, disapproval, or resistance. In India, black flags signify a collective objection to certain policies or decisions. The act of waving black flags often unites diverse groups under a common cause, strengthening the impact of their message.

#### GRIND ALONG

The arrest of actor Kasthuri by the Greater Chennai Police in Hyderabad on November 17 — she was granted bail by a metropolitan magistrate in Chennai on Wednesday — raises questions over hate speech and the right to freedom of expression. Just a few days earlier, her arrest seemed inevitable after the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court rejected her plea for anticipatory bail, which she had sought fearing police action for her distasteful and derogatory remarks on the



Telugu community at an event in Chennai earlier this month. The High Court did not accept her apology, but concluded that her speech “clearly hovers around hate speech” with “...no genuine attempt [on her part] to apologise for using such a bad and intemperate language”. One cannot but agree with the High Court’s position of the need for speakers using public platforms to observe caution in this age of social media, as “what is said becomes a permanent record”. The context that the actor touched upon was about the migration of people, and if anyone is keen on making a point on such a serious matter, they ought to do their homework and consult historical works of eminent historians and archaeologists. Every public speaker has to internalise the importance of exercise of restraint in thought and words. Public personalities have a responsibility to ensure that their words do not instigate any social group. But arrest should not be the reflexive response of the state in every instance of transgressions by citizens.

Three months ago, the Supreme Court of India had held that “bail is the rule and jail is an exception even in money laundering cases”. The Madurai Bench could have kept this principle in mind before dismissing the actor’s petition. Subsequently, the authorities could have looked at the matter afresh. But in her case, a special team was formed to make the arrest. The need for custodial interrogation did not arise in view of the availability of basic material with the police. Any attempt by her to tamper with witnesses is unlikely. Nor has there been any visible law and order problem following her speech. It was against this backdrop that her arrest appeared untenable. However, it was a matter of relief that the prosecution, on Wednesday, did not object to her getting the bail. The Kasthuri episode should remind public speakers that while the principle of the freedom of expression is vital to any democratic and vibrant society, its existence is bound by reasonable restrictions. The state too should not rush to curtail individual freedoms at the first sign of transgression by citizens. The wheels of justice can grind exceedingly fine without being forced to turn hurriedly by the law enforcement agencies.

## SHIELDING ADANI

It will be a matter of everlasting shame if there is no domestic investigation by Indian agencies into allegations by the U.S. Department of Justice that billionaire businessman Gautam Adani and his associates offered bribes to officials in more than one State. Federal prosecutors have filed their indictment based on perceived violations of U.S. laws that prohibit corrupt transactions with foreign entities. India will have to order its own probe in terms of domestic anti-corruption law. So far, especially following revelations by Hindenburg Research, a U.S.-based short-seller, the Modi regime has shown a marked reluctance to countenance the idea of any wrongdoing by the Adani Group. The BJP has been putting up a stout defence of the group as though its political interests are inseparable from Mr. Adani’s corporate interests. The Union government has so far remained impervious to entreaties from the Opposition for a joint parliamentary committee probe into the allegations, which range from manipulation of share prices, non-disclosure of related party transactions, round-tripping of funds and even regulatory capture. Sporadic and possibly perfunctory probes by some agencies have yielded little by way of action. However, the Supreme Court of India found the outcome of investigations by the market regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India, credible enough to reject a demand for handing the Adani probe to an independent agency.

Several State governments, most notably Andhra Pradesh, have now been named in the overseas indictment pertaining to the supply of solar power from Adani Green and Azure Power Global Ltd., the companies at the centre of the storm. The alleged amount offered as bribes amounted to ₹2,029 crore (\$265 million), of which ₹1,750 crore was meant for a ‘foreign official’ in Andhra



Pradesh. The YSR Congress Party, which was in power in A.P. at the relevant time, and the Tamil Nadu government, have denied any link with the Adani Group, maintaining that their deals were with the SECI. The indictment, however, talks of internal messages among the defendants about how “the discoms are being motivated”. Instead of taking potshots at the non-BJP parties that ran these State governments at the relevant time, the Centre should shed its reluctance to investigate the Adani Group. The fortunes of Mr. Adani, counted as one of the world’s richest, may now see a steep spiral, as not only have shares of his companies crashed but also countries that have entered investments from his conglomerate may turn their backs on him. However, this is not an issue about one tycoon suffering a setback due to developments beyond the control of his political patrons. It is about how far a government can be seen as shielding an individual.

### SC QUESTIONS DELAY IN DELIMITATION FOR NORTH-EASTERN STATES

The Supreme Court on Tuesday sought to know why the delimitation exercise for some of the north-eastern states was not being carried out, though the notification deferring it had been taken back by a presidential order in 2020.

- The Supreme Court raised questions about the lack of action on the delimitation exercise in some north-eastern states, despite the 2020 presidential order rescinding the previous notification deferring the exercise.
- The court emphasized that once the notification was rescinded, the delimitation process should have been set in motion.
- Justice Sanjay Kumar questioned the delay and urged the concerned authorities to take immediate steps after the presidential order, asserting that it was a statutory mandate.
- Chief Justice of India (CJI) Sanjiv Khanna reiterated that the process should comply with the statutory mandate once the deferment notification was withdrawn.
- The court was informed that delimitation had already been carried out in Assam, though the status of other states remained unclear.
- The Supreme Court scheduled the next hearing for January 2025, directing the Centre and the Election Commission to provide further updates on the progress of the delimitation exercise.

#### Do You Know:

- Delimitation is the act of redrawing boundaries of Lok Sabha and Assembly seats to represent changes in population. In this process, the number of seats allocated to a state may also change. The objective is to provide equal representation for equal population segments, and a fair division of geographical areas, so that no political party has an advantage. The Delimitation Commission’s orders cannot be questioned before any court.
- Delimitation is done on the basis of the preceding Census. The first such exercise in 1950-51 was carried out by the President, with the help of the Election Commission. Following the Delimitation Commission Act in 1952, all such exercises have been conducted by Delimitation Commissions — set up in 1952, 1963, 1973 and 2002.
- There was no delimitation after the 1981 and 1991 Censuses. This was a fallout of the provision that the ratio between the number of Lok Sabha seats in a state and the population of the state is, as far as practicable, the same for all states. Although unintended, this meant that states that took





little interest in population control could end up with more seats in Parliament, while the southern states that promoted family planning could end up with fewer seats. Amid these concerns, the Constitution was amended in 1976 to suspend delimitation until 2001.

## WHY NEHRU'S LEGACY OF SECULARISM MATTERS NOW MORE THAN EVER

With Jawaharlal Nehru's birth anniversary approaching on November 14, it is time to look back and see what we can learn from him 60 years after his passing. Paradoxically, Nehru has been kept alive by his detractors too, with his name being invoked to explain almost all that has gone wrong in India.

The need to demonise or erase Nehru's memory arises from the fact that he represented and fought for values which are anathema to the political forces dominant in India today. After all, Nehru was among the leading figures of the Indian freedom struggle, spending nearly 30 years of his life fighting the British, nine of those years in British jails. This, while the ancestors of those claiming to be nationalists today were collaborating with the British to create a divide in Indian society based on religion and thus weakening the national movement.

It is not for nothing that Mahatma Gandhi, as early as 1942, had declared: "...not Rajaji, nor Sardar Vallabhbhai but Jawahar will be my successor... When I am gone... he will speak my language". Nehru was seen as best suited to implement the values of the Indian freedom struggle in the newly-born Indian state, which crystallised in the Indian Constitution and was popularly called, "The Idea of India".

Nehru took on this Herculean task of lifting India from, in Tagore's words, "the mud and filth" left behind by the British, and built a modern, democratic, secular and pro-poor nation infused with a scientific temper. He left behind a glorious legacy not only for the Indian people but for all the people of the world oppressed by colonialism, who were striving to liberate themselves from their past, and achieve modern economic development but in a humane and democratic manner.

Given today's context, I would like to make a few brief points on Nehru's contribution to a secular-democratic India. In India, the term secular democracy was used conjointly as one was impossible without the other (conversely, communalism was invariably linked to loyalism, absence of democracy and even fascism). Nehru was faced with the communal challenge, the biggest challenge to the "Idea of India", at the birth of the nation itself. The holocaust-like situation created between 1946-48, with deliberately provoked communal riots and the Partition taking an estimated 500,000 lives and millions turned homeless (nearly six million refugees poured into India), ended with the assassination of the Mahatma by a Hindu communalist. It created a situation where as Nehru said a "coup d' etat was planned to enable the group concerned (communal forces) to seize power".

To the eternal regret of the communalists, Nehru, along with other stalwarts of our freedom struggle, did not allow the heightened communal situation to derail the vision of the freedom struggle. Gandhiji and Nehru made the protection of the democratic rights of every citizen of India irrespective of their religion their primary objective and fought openly and relentlessly for it. Gandhiji paid the price with his life. Nehru turned the first general election of 1951-52 into a virtual referendum on what was to be the nature of the Indian state. Was it going to be a "Hindu rashtra", a mirror image of "Muslim Pakistan" or a secular democratic Indian state? To the great credit of the legacy of our nearly 100-year-long freedom struggle, the people voted overwhelmingly in favour of a secular inclusive Indian state. The communal parties, the Hindu



Mahasabha, the newly formed Jana Sangh (the predecessor of the BJP) and the Ram Rajya Parishad won between them only 10 Lok Sabha seats out of 489 and polled less than 6 per cent of the votes.

Some important lessons can be learnt in today's context from what Nehru had to say about this election. Having virtually decimated the communal forces in the first general election of 1951–52, despite the highly charged communal atmosphere, he said, "One good thing that has emerged from these elections is our straight fight and success against communalism... We have seen at last that we need not be afraid of communalism, and we need not compromise with it... Where we fight it in a straight and honest way we win. Where we compromise with it, we lose." A lesson not learnt by many secular forces who joined hands with the communalists for short-term electoral gains in the states in the mid-1960s and at a national level in 1977 and 1989, giving legitimacy to the communalists.

Second, Nehru added that while electoral "success is significant and heartening. But it is by no means a complete success." An ideological battle along with state power had to be used "to uproot this despicable communalism. It must be obliterated from the land so that it may not take roots again. This poison . . . has permeated the land." He warned that just banning an organisation and putting them in jail (as was done to the RSS after Gandhiji's murder) was not enough: "Those who are impelled by a faith... can only be defeated by a higher idealism." The higher idealism that Nehru offered was a humane, inclusive nationalism.

Finally, Nehru was among the first to see communalism as the "Indian version of fascism". Amartya Sen, much later coined the phrase "communal fascism" to describe this phenomenon. Nehru warned, "Communalism was diametrically opposed to democracy and usually relied on Nazi and Fascist methods." By following this path, he warned in 1951 "ultimately the results would be similar to what happened to Hitler and fascism in Europe. I do not want India to follow this terrible path."

It is still not too late to heed this warning and attempt a course correction.

## WHY WERE THE KERALA IAS OFFICERS SUSPENDED?

### The story so far:

Kerala has suspended two IAS officers, N. Prashant and K. Gopalakrishnan, citing violation of service rules.

### What are the charges?

The charge against N. Prashant is that he had made 'derogatory statements' on social media against A. Jayathilak IAS, Additional Chief Secretary, that amounted to grave indiscipline and undermining the public image of the administrative machinery of the State. The government order stated that these remarks were 'unbecoming of an officer' borne in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS). Mr. Prashant alleged that Jayathilak had orchestrated baseless news reports against him. He refuted these allegations.

K. Gopalakrishnan has been suspended for allegedly creating a religion-based WhatsApp group — 'Mallu Hindu Officers' — that sowed disunity and created communal formations within the IAS cadre. He had claimed that this group was created after his mobile phone was hacked. However, the suspension order stated that the police inquiry found no evidence of such hacking and that the officer had done a 'factory reset' of the phone before handing it over to police.



### What do the rules state?

The All-India Services (Conduct) Rules, 1968 (AIS rules) governs the conduct of IAS, IPS and Indian Forest Service officers. The AIS rules provide a code of conduct for the officers. Some of the rules relevant for the current issue are briefly summarised here. Officers should maintain high standards of ethics, integrity, honesty, political neutrality, accountability and transparency. They should uphold the supremacy of constitutional values. They can participate or contribute in public media in the bonafide discharge of their duties. They shall not in any communication over any public media adversely criticise the policies of the government. They shall not have recourse to any court or press for the vindication of official act, that has been subject matter of criticism, without the previous sanction of the government. It also contains an omnibus rule that the officers shall do nothing which is 'unbecoming of a member of the service.'

### What are the issues?

There are certain overall issues that need to be addressed. First, the rules don't have explicit guidelines with respect to communication through social media. Second, the rules have been amended from time to time by including various new conduct guidelines that regulate both the private and official life of officers. The term 'unbecoming of a member of the service' however continues as an omnibus rider that can be misused/misinterpreted. It must also be borne in mind that invariably in all cases, it is the senior officers and government who enforce these rules against junior officers and hence the latter need to be protected from any such misuse.

### What can be reviewed?

Firstly, specific rules may be added with respect to the use of social media. This may include guidelines for the nature of official content that can be posted as well the right to defend against any defamatory campaign concerning official work. Secondly, an illustrative list may be provided for the term 'unbecoming of a member of the service,' based on past instances where action had been taken on this basis. Officers, especially youngsters, should remember that anonymity is an important trait of civil servants. In the present day and age, social media is a powerful medium for providing publicity to various governmental initiatives. It educates citizens when used judiciously. However, officers should exercise responsible anonymity while discharging their functions and disseminating information about the same.

## T.N. HAS HIGHEST NUMBER OF WOMEN COUNCILLORS: REPORT

Nearly 46% of the councillors in India are women, and in 19 out of the 21 capital cities that have active urban local bodies, including Patna, Shimla, Ranchi and Bhubaneswar, the figure goes well over 60%.

Among the States, Tamil Nadu has the highest number of women councillors, according to a road map on urban transformation in India released on Tuesday.

The other States in the top 10 are Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Kerala, Bihar and Chhattisgarh.

According to the report "Road map for India's city systems reforms" by Janaagraha, a not-for-profit organisation, 17 States have legislated for 50% women's quota, over the constitutional minimum of 33%.



## AS SENIOR LIVING PICKS UP IN INDIA, A 25-YEAR OLD POLICY SET TO GET A REFRESH

The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment is working on amending the Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 and updating the National Policy for Older Persons, 1999 to promote India's senior care economy, including the senior living sector.

— Both the 1999 policy and the 2007 act, which was amended in 2019, include clauses dealing with protection of property rights and old age homes. The changes are likely to address the evolving landscape of senior care, now characterised by active participation from private service providers, developers, and operators.

— In their current form, both policy and legislation deal primarily with old age homes supported by state or local governments. However, the senior living market now encompasses a much broader array of players, services, unit types, and a new dynamic between buyers, developers, and operators.

— The share of citizens aged 60-plus is set to increase from 157 million in 2024 (11 per cent of total population) to 260 million in 2040 (16 per cent) and 346 million in 2050 (21 per cent).

— Since 2022, senior living launches in India have averaged 2,000 units per year, almost double of around 1,100 units launched annually between 2014 and 2021, according to a new JLL report launched at the event.

— The report added that 60 per cent of India's senior living market is concentrated in the south, followed by 20 per cent in the north, 16 per cent in western India, and 4 per cent in east India.

— "By 2050, one in every five Indians will be a senior. That represents about 70 per cent of the world's population of seniors. It's a very large and staggering number."

— In terms of government support, Mehta suggested there should be one nodal agency that deals with senior care, which deals with issues of social justice, health, housing, and infrastructure. He added that a taskforce can also be created to study best practices followed in countries like Japan and Switzerland, where senior care is very developed.

— Mehta also suggested that when master planning is done for cities, land should be demarcated separately for senior living so that allocation is easier and costs more manageable.

— In its report on elderly-friendly living/housing sector reforms, NITI has recommended the development of a regulatory framework "to support the development of the private sector and provide necessary market stewardship while ensuring the highest quality of service delivery".

### **Do You Know:**

— Once limited to the southern states, India's senior living market is rapidly expanding nationwide, driven by evolving societal norms and the increasing nuclearisation of families. Seniors are no longer waiting for medical needs to consider a move to specialised housing—many in their early 60s are opting for independent units to enhance their quality of life. Project developers, too, are targeting growth in temple towns like Varanasi, where more seniors are choosing to spend their later years in a culturally and spiritually rich environment.

— Despite its projected fivefold growth over the next six years, the market will remain undersupplied, with penetration expected to reach just 3 per cent by 2030—still far behind the



10 per cent in some developed countries. Unlike markets like the US, where leasing dominates, Indian seniors overwhelmingly prefer to purchase their homes.

— While demand for senior living is rising across the country, roughly 60 per cent of the market continues to be concentrated in South India.

— “In the South, there has traditionally been a higher acceptance of independent senior living and senior care facilities due to evolving family structures, higher levels of urbanisation, and growing population of seniors. In contrast, north India still has traditional joint family structures, with capabilities to provide family-based care to seniors. Hence, the shift towards independent senior living communities has been slower but is picking up traction,” said Rajit Mehta, MD and CEO of Antara Senior Living, a Max Group company.

#### DECODE POLITICS: WHY ANDHRA PRADESH HAS SCRAPPED 2-CHILD RULE FOR CONTESTING LOCAL BODY POLLS

Since returning to power, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has expressed concern about the ageing population in the state and said his government was contemplating moves to incentivise families to have more children. On Monday, the Naidu government took a step in that direction by doing away with a three-decade-old law, the AP Panchayat Raj and AP Municipal Acts, that barred people with more than two children from contesting local body polls. Back in 1994, it was the Naidu government in undivided Andhra that amended the Panchayat Raj and Municipal Administration Department Acts to enforce the “two-children policy”.

Andhra Pradesh is not the first state to roll back the two-child policy. In 2005, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh rescinded the policy.

#### **Why was the policy introduced?**

It came into being after it was found that population control measures between the censuses of 1981 and 1991 were not yielding the expected results.

“India, at the time, was trying to control its population growth and the intra-census data revealed that we were not on the right track,” said Srinivas Goli, demographer and associate professor at the International Institute of Population Sciences, Mumbai.

The “unexpected” results led the National Development Council (NDC) to set up a committee chaired by then Kerala Chief Minister K Karunakaran. The panel recommended that people with more than two children should not be allowed to hold government posts, from the panchayat level to Parliament. The recommendations, submitted to the NDC were subsequently adopted by various states.

#### **Which states adopted the recommendation?**

Rajasthan became the first state to adopt the “two-child policy” at the panchayat level in 1992, followed by Andhra Pradesh (then undivided) and Haryana in 1994.

Odisha introduced the policy for local bodies in 1993 and extended it to the block panchayat level in 1994. While Chhattisgarh, Himachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh introduced the policy in 2000, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Bihar, and Assam enforced it in 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2017, respectively. The policy came into force in Uttarakhand in 2019 while the Union Territories (UTs) of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu adopted the policy in 2020.



### **Why was the policy rescinded in some states?**

Of the 13 states and UTs that adopted the policy, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh rolled it back in 2005.

“A key reason for going back on the policy was the worsening sex ratio at birth (SRB), which declined to 880:1000 between 2003 and 2005,” Goli said. Demographers claimed the steep decline in the SRB was due to the strict two-child policy and widespread access to pre-natal diagnostic technology for sex detection.

Another reason for rolling back the “two-child policy” was the National Population Policy that came into force in 2000 and deviated from the previous target-driven approach of population control. “National Population Policy in 2000 advocated target free approach and protection of reproductive rights,” Goli said.

Several individuals legally challenged the “two-child policy”. “There were several individual litigations filed against the Constitutional validity of being forced out of participation in panchayat and local body elections,” Goli said.

### **Why did Andhra Pradesh roll back the ‘two-child policy’?**

Claiming that the ageing population could adversely affect the state, Naidu recently suggested that couples must be encouraged to have more children. Elaborating, Andhra Information and Public Relations Minister, K Parthasarathy said on Wednesday that the state’s Total Fertility Rate (TFR) was abysmally low. “While the national TFR is 2.11, it is only 1.5 in the state. This could affect the productivity of the state in the long run,” he said.

### **Is there a delimitation link and has Naidu found support?**

With the Centre likely to take up the delimitation exercise in 2026, which is population-based, Naidu was not the only politician to express concerns about an ageing population and declining fertility rates.

Demographers claim offering incentives to couples to have more children will not reverse ageing. “In most parts of the world such incentives did not yield results,” said a demographer.

## **ENDING THE TRAGEDY**

The adage “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results” holds true for Manipur. It has been more than a year and a half since ethnic violence erupted between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo communities in the State. The initial clashes resulted in scores of deaths, and, since then, parts of the State, many of which are under the effective control of security forces, have witnessed sporadic but intense incidents of violence. Despite this, there has been little effort toward peace or reconciliation. Even areas such as Jiribam, which initially escaped the violence, are now engulfed in conflict, as recent events have shown. The situation in Manipur is no longer just about identifying who triggered the violence or what administrative steps are needed to stop it. The violence has spiralled to the point where ethnic divisions have become entrenched in the social fabric of the State. Every act of violence now leads to calls for retribution against entire communities, from both the Meitei and Kuki-Zo sides. Armed non-state actors, some of whom are openly or covertly supported by elected representatives, seem to control the situation, while civil society groups are marginalised.



This descent into chaos in one of India's most culturally rich and diverse border States has unfolded rapidly under the watch of an incompetent and indifferent government, which has failed to take responsibility or implement any meaningful solutions. Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh and his cabinet have long lost credibility due to their mishandling of the crisis. The Union government, too, shares the blame for allowing the situation to persist. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has remained largely silent on the issue, while Union Home Minister Amit Shah has avoided taking any decisive action to address the crisis, presumably to avoid upsetting the political balance in the State. The role of security forces, while important, cannot be the sole solution to an ethnic conflict of this nature. What is required is political will and the ability to advance meaningful dialogue that can bring the community representatives closer to finding a compromise. The Union government's refusal to even consider a change in leadership, as suggested by the Bharatiya Janata Party's ally, the National People's Party (NPP), has only allowed the situation to fester. The NPP's withdrawal of support from the government signals a growing recognition that the current leadership is not capable of addressing the crisis. It is now clear that a leadership change is necessary to chart a new course for Manipur. A political solution can be based only on consensus and compromise and these are impossible with a government headed by a partisan politician who is hoping to benefit from a polarisation of people on communal lines.

#### SAFE HARBOUR CLAUSE FOR PLATFORMS NEEDS A REVISIT, SAYS VAISHNAW

The government on Saturday reiterated its stance to revisit the safe harbour clause for social media intermediaries such as X, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, etc, amid an increase in instances of misinformation and fake news over these platforms.

##### **Do You Know:**

- Section 79 of the IT Act says any intermediary shall not be held legally or otherwise liable for any third party information, data, or communication link made available or hosted on its platform. This protection, the Act says, shall be applicable if the said intermediary does not in any way, initiate the transmission of the message in question, select the receiver of the transmitted message and does not modify any information contained in the transmission.
- This means that as long as a platform acts just as the messenger carrying a message from point A to point B, without interfering in any manner, it will be safe from any legal prosecution brought upon due to the message being transmitted.
- The protection accorded under Section 79, however, is not granted if the intermediary, despite being informed or notified by the government or its agencies, does not immediately disable access to the material under question. The intermediary must not tamper with any evidence of these messages or content present on its platform, failing which it lose its protection under the Act.

#### TWIN NEGLIGENCE

The fire in the neonatal intensive care unit of the Maharani Laxmi Bai Medical College in Jhansi district, Uttar Pradesh, where 10 newborns died on November 15 night, underscores the fatal intersection of severely neglected sectors in government budgeting and planning — health care and fire safety. There was an eerily similar incident in May this year, in a hospital in east Delhi. The neonatal care unit in Jhansi was operating at almost three times its capacity — there were 49 babies for incubators meant only for 18. Hospital staff have said that this number sometimes goes up to 60. This must not surprise given that in 2021, the doctor-patient ratio in U.P. was 1: 2,158.



A point to be noted is that India's doctor-patient ratio for 2024 is 1:836, which is well within the World Health Organisation recommendation of 1:1,000.

Established in 1968, the Jhansi hospital is the main health-care facility serving Bundelkhand, an impoverished region of about 10 districts straddling U.P. and Madhya Pradesh. Despite a patient flow of over 5,000 a day, several wings of the hospital have remained in a dilapidated state. While multi-level investigations have been announced by U.P. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's government, initial reports suggest an electric short-circuit could be the cause, exacerbated by oxygen cylinders in the care unit. According to National Crime Records Bureau data, 101 people died in 106 incidents of electrical short circuit-induced fires in U.P. in 2022, ranking it the fourth highest in fatalities after Odisha, Maharashtra and Bihar. In an editorial this year, "Insidious, incendiary", this daily highlighted the chronic disregard for India's fire safety norms: "Fire services are not well organized in India", it said, adding that "In recent years the requirements for fire safety cover have increased manifold whereas the development of fire service has not made much headway". In the Union Budgets of FY2022 and FY2023, there was an allocation of a mere 2.2% to health care, which declined to 1.75% this year. This is severely inadequate even when compared with spend by India's peers among developing countries such as Brazil and South Africa. India's public health expenditure was 3.3% of GDP in 2021. This is lower than the global average for developing countries, where public health spending often ranges between 2% to 5% of GDP. Brazil and South Africa typically allocate approximately 10% and 8% of their GDP to public health. It may, therefore, be safe to wager that even while investigations are underway, a broader indifferent approach to both public health and fire safety together led to the tragedy in Jhansi.

## SHOULD PACKAGED FOOD CONTENT BE LABELLED?

### The story so far:

A new report published by Access to Nutrition Initiative (ATNi) a non-profit global foundation, has found that leading food and beverage (F&B) companies, on average, sell products that are less healthy in low-and-middle income countries (LMICs) compared to what they sell in high-income countries (HICs). This report, which is the fifth edition of the 'Global Access to Nutrition Index', states that it assessed 30 of the world's largest F&B manufacturers — 23% of the global F&B market — on their performance to improve access to nutritious foods.

### What were the report's findings?

The report analysed 52,414 products — including those from popular brands such as Nestle, Pepsico, Unilever, Coca-Cola and Hershey among others — using a health star rating system.

Under this system products are ranked out of 5 on their healthiness, with 5 being the best, and a score above 3.5 considered to be a healthier choice. The system assesses components of food considered to increase risk (energy, saturated fat, total sugars and sodium) and offsets these against components considered to decrease risk (protein, fibre and fruit, vegetable, nut and legume) to calculate a final score that is converted to a star rating. The ATNi report found that 'portfolio healthiness' was found to be lowest in LMICs, highlighting disparities in products offered across different markets. Food product healthiness in LMICs scored much lower — 1.8 on the system — than in HICs where it scored 2.3. Only 30% of companies have demonstrated a strategy to price some of their 'healthier' products affordably for lower income consumers, the report found. It also found that in LMICs, micronutrient data were available for a smaller proportion of products as compared to those in HICs.





### **Is this the first time?**

This is not the first instance of such a finding: in April this year, a report by Swiss NGO, Public Eye and the global coalition International Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), found that Nestle's baby food products sold in India as well as in African and Latin American countries, had higher sugar content compared to the same products sold in European markets. While Nestle denied this, the Central government asked the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) to initiate "appropriate action" against Nestle.

### **Why is this of significance in India?**

India is staring at a Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) burden of epic proportions — an estimated 10.13 crore Indians have diabetes, and as per National Family Health Survey 5 data, obesity stands at 24% among women and 23% among men. At the same time, undernutrition, anaemia and micronutrient deficiencies continue to remain pressing problems.

A large chunk of the NCD burden, experts say, has to do with diets changing over the past few decades and becoming unhealthier. Citing the Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR) dietary guidelines, published in April this year, the Economic Survey of India 2023-24 noted that 56.4% of the total disease burden in India is due to unhealthy diets. The ICMR report had said the upsurge in the consumption of highly processed foods, laden with sugars and fat, coupled with reduced physical activity and limited access to diverse foods, exacerbate micronutrient deficiencies and overweight/obesity problems.

Another significant issue here is affordability: as per UN data over 50% of Indians cannot afford a healthy diet. At the same time, Indian government data reveals that households' expenditure on processed food as a proportion of their food expenditure has risen, says development economist Dipa Sinha.

### **What about food package labelling?**

India is a party to the World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions, one of which is a resolution on marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children, highlighting the need to protect children from harmful marketing of junk foods. In 2017, India launched the National Multisectoral Action Plan for Prevention and Control of Common NCDs, 2017-22 (NMAP). However, there has been very little progress made to address front-of-pack labelling of food.

Activists have, for years, been pushing the government to bring in regulations for front-of-package labelling of foods that would indicate high sugar, fat and sodium content. A draft notification: Food Safety and Standards (Labelling & Display) Amendment Regulation 2022 was brought in, but has made no headway in two years, says Arun Gupta, convener, Nutrition Advocacy for Public Interest (NAPi). Studies have shown, Dr. Gupta points out, that labelling on the front of packaged food is effective: in Chile and Mexico for instance, the consumption of sugary beverages decreased after such mandatory labelling.

An analysis by NAPi of 43 advertisements of pre-packaged food products and their composition revealed that these foods were high in one or more nutrients of concern such as saturated fat etc. "Policymakers and governments should introduce mandatory policies. To date, voluntary efforts by companies have been insufficient to ensure widespread and strong nutrition-related performance," the ATNi report states.



## TACKLING THE DIABETES EPIDEMIC

Till the 1970s, diabetes was a relatively rare condition in India. An Indian Council of Medical Research study published in 1972 showed that 2% of Indians in cities and 1% in rural areas had diabetes. Two significant events in India's history that improved the economy and living standards paradoxically propelled the obesity and Type 2 diabetes epidemic in India.

Till the 1960s, India was dependent on food from abroad through schemes such as PL 480 of the U.S. After the Green Revolution, India became self-sufficient in food. Second, in 1991, when the economy opened up, foreign investments poured in and the economy accelerated. But with the rising income levels, consumption of high-calorie foods rich in carbohydrates, sugar, fat and salt, but deficient in protein and fibre, coupled with physical inactivity, became the norm. Obesity rates and prevalence of Type 2 diabetes soared. Today in the major cities in India, over 25% of adults above 20 years of age and almost half of all adults by the age of 50 have Type 2 diabetes. Rural areas are not far behind.

### **Excess fat**

So what fuelled the diabetes epidemic? There is evidence that excess fat deposition inside the abdomen, especially in the liver, is linked to diabetes. Our studies at the Madras Diabetes Research Foundation (MDRF) showed that excess calories in the form of refined carbohydrates such as white rice or refined wheat is a major driver of the epidemic. The excess carbohydrate gets converted into fat, which then gets stored in the intra-abdominal compartment and soon the liver gets filled up with fat, leading to insulin resistance. Fat accumulates in the pancreas, leading to decreased insulin secretion.

Meanwhile, newer aetiological factors have also begun to emerge. A CARRS Study carried out in New Delhi and Chennai showed that air pollution is an important cause of Type 2 diabetes. Air pollution acts as an endocrine disruptor, affecting both the pancreas and the liver, leading to diabetes.

### **Are there unique genetic factors which makes us more predisposed to diabetes?**

There is new evidence that genes which are responsible for insulin deficiency are more prominent in Indians than in White Europeans. Epigenetic factors may also contribute. During pregnancy, malnutrition, with deficiency of vitamin B12 and perhaps excess of folate in the blood, may trigger intrauterine programming of the foetus to develop diabetes in the future. Studies done in Pune have shown that even at the time of birth, babies born in India, though much smaller in size, have more fat. This is referred to as the "thin fat Indian" paradox. Recent studies from the U.K. have thrown new light on why South Asians accumulate more intra-abdominal fat.

When South Asians and Europeans were overfed as part of an experimental study, Europeans gained both fat and muscle. On the other hand, South Asians mostly gained fat. South Asians have reduced small adipocytes in comparison with those of Europeans. When excess food was consumed, Europeans increased their fat deposits in the abdominal wall rather than inside the abdomen. In South Asians, due to the deficiency of the small adipocytes, these superficial fat cells get filled up very quickly and thus "overflow" of the fat occurs, which enters inside the abdomen and then on to the liver. This explains why Indians have such high rates of Type 2 diabetes.



### **What can be done to prevent the diabetes epidemic in India?**

We have to obviously start early. Even before marriage, women should shed excess weight, exercise regularly and thereby reduce the risk of gestational diabetes (diabetes during pregnancy). During pregnancy, a nutritious diet with enough protein and fibre, less carbohydrate and providing sufficient vitamin B12 can reduce the risk of the child becoming programmed to develop diabetes. Next, from a young age, children should be taught to be physically active and eat healthy diets. This can help prevent childhood obesity. Other factors such as increasing physical activity, ensuring adequate sleep and preventing air pollution can slow down the epidemic.

Once Type 2 diabetes sets in, it is still possible to reverse it in some individuals. Indeed, if it is identified at the stage of pre-diabetes, remission becomes even more feasible. Even in those for whom remission is difficult, good control of the ABCD factors — A1c, blood pressure and cholesterol, along with discipline (diet, exercise, proper sleep and regular check-ups with diabetologists), can help prevent the dreaded complications of diabetes.

To mark World Diabetes Day, which was celebrated on November 14, let us strive to have a “Diabetes Complications Free India”. This is possible, if we all work together.

#### **Note:**

While consumption of unhealthy food, particularly high-calorie foods rich in carbohydrates and saturated fat, and a sedentary lifestyle are two major controllable risk factors for diabetes, the role of tobacco in causing diabetes has not been highlighted sufficiently. According to a November 2023 WHO report, there is overwhelming evidence that cigarette smoking raises the risk of developing diabetes by 30%-40% compared with those who do not smoke. Nicotine, the addictive substance in tobacco, impairs the function and amount of insulin producing beta cells, thereby affecting insulin production and regulation of glucose production, which together play an important role in the onset of diabetes. Nicotine also induces insulin resistance, another factor causing diabetes. Besides sharply lowering the risk of diabetes, avoiding tobacco in all forms is associated with a reduced risk of cardiovascular disease and mortality in people with diabetes. The role of managing gestational diabetes in reducing the risk of both mother and child developing diabetes at a later date cannot be overemphasised. With 133 million people remaining undiagnosed, India has to rapidly scale up diagnosis to meet the 2030 WHO target for diabetes — 80% of people with diabetes are diagnosed and 80% of people with diagnosed diabetes have good control of glycaemia.

## **THE DANGERS OF HIGH-ALTITUDE SICKNESS**

### **The story so far:**

In September, a trekker from Idukki, Kerala, died in Uttarakhand while attempting to scale Garur Peak due to respiratory failure. Every year, numerous tourists like this succumb to the effects of high-altitude sickness in the pristine but challenging inner Himalayas. These regions present hidden dangers due to their extreme altitudes, where thinner air and reduced oxygen can lead to potentially fatal conditions.

### **What is high-altitude sickness?**

High-altitude sickness, or Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS), occurs when the body cannot acclimatise to high elevations, typically over 8,000 feet (2,400 metres). As altitude increases, the



air pressure and oxygen levels decrease, leading to hypoxia — a shortage of oxygen in the body's tissues. Early symptoms of AMS include headache, nausea, fatigue, and shortness of breath. If left untreated, it can escalate into high-altitude pulmonary edema (HAPE), a life-threatening condition where fluid accumulates in the lungs, or high-altitude cerebral edema (HACE), where fluid collects in the brain. Both conditions require immediate medical intervention, and descent to lower altitudes is often the only way to prevent fatal outcomes.

At higher altitudes, the body tries to adjust by increasing the breathing rate, which can cause hyperventilation, and produce more red blood cells to carry oxygen, which thickens the blood and strains the heart. In cases of HAPE, fluid accumulation in the lungs exacerbates breathing difficulties, while HACE causes symptoms like confusion, hallucinations, and even coma.

#### **What are the infrastructural issues?**

While the Himalayan States witness a steady stream of tourists, healthcare facilities beyond major towns like Shimla are inadequate to handle cases of high-altitude sickness. Leh, in the Union Territory of Ladakh, serves as a model, having developed specialised facilities for high-altitude ailments. Yet, most high-altitude regions lack this kind of infrastructure. Immediate and preventive health measures are also lacking. Basic preventive screenings or health checks at entry points for tourists venturing into high-altitude areas could save lives. Such protocols could mirror the erstwhile "Inner Line Permit" system, whereby tourists entering high-altitude zones such as Kinnaur or Lahaul-Spiti undergo screenings at base hospitals.

#### **What about a registration system?**

To better manage high-altitude tourism, it is essential to implement a mandatory registration system for tourists entering remote mountain areas. Registrations, stored in a State government database, would allow authorities to monitor tourist movement and respond swiftly in case of emergencies. Such records would also support research on high-altitude illnesses by tracking demographic patterns and risk factors, helping scientists better understand how altitude impacts various populations.

#### **What about early intervention?**

The primary cause of high-altitude sickness is rapid ascent without allowing the body time to acclimatise. Gradual ascent, which allows the body to adapt to lower oxygen levels, is the best way to prevent high-altitude illnesses. According to the Wilderness Medical Society, travellers ascending above 3,000 meters should take a rest day every 3-4 days and avoid increasing their sleeping elevation by more than 500 metres per day.

For travellers at moderate to high risk of AMS, doctors recommend medications like Acetazolamide, which aids acclimatisation by promoting better oxygenation, or Dexamethasone, a steroid that reduces inflammation in severe cases. Those with a history of HAPE may take Nifedipine as a preventive measure, starting a day before ascent. However, no prophylactic medication guarantees complete immunity, and anyone travelling to high altitudes with pre-existing health conditions should first consult with a doctor familiar with altitude-related risks.

#### **What are the treatment strategies?**

When high-altitude sickness does develop, the most effective treatment is immediate descent to lower altitudes. Symptoms usually improve significantly with a descent of 300-1,000 metres. Supplemental oxygen or a portable hyperbaric chamber, if available, can also help alleviate



symptoms of AMS and HACE in emergencies. Pharmacological treatments, such as acetazolamide and dexamethasone, may provide short-term relief, but descent remains the cornerstone of treatment.

#### **What are some policy proposals?**

The following steps are recommended — establish state-of-the-art medical facilities in high-altitude regions of the Himalayas; create research centres dedicated to studying high-altitude illnesses; equip Himalayan States with air-ambulance services for rapid medical evacuation in emergencies; and provide health and safety information on government websites and at check-in points.

### INDIA CONDUCTS 'HISTORIC' FLIGHT TEST OF HYPERSONIC MISSILE WITH A RANGE OF 1,500 KM

- The missile, developed by the DRDO, is designed to carry various payloads for ranges greater than 1,500 km, an official readout said.
- This missile has been indigenously developed by the laboratories of the Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Missile Complex, Hyderabad, along with various other DRDO laboratories and in-industry partners. "India has achieved a major milestone by successfully conducting a flight trial of a long-range hypersonic missile from Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Island, off- the coast of Odisha," Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said in a post on X.
- Generally, hypersonic missiles, capable of carrying conventional explosives or nuclear warheads, can fly in the range of five times the speed of sound (Mach 5, which is roughly 1,220 km/h at sea level).
- At present, Russia and China are ahead in developing hypersonic missiles, while the US is in the process of developing a range of such weapons under an ambitious program.

#### **Do You Know:**

- A key feature of hypersonic missiles is their manoeuvrability, which sets them apart from ballistic missiles that follow a set course or trajectory.
- The two types of hypersonic weapons systems are Hypersonic Glide Vehicles (HGV) and Hypersonic Cruise Missiles. The HGVs are launched from a rocket before gliding to the intended target while HCMs are powered by air-breathing high-speed engines or 'scramjets' after acquiring their target.

### WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT INDOOR AIR QUALITY AND PURIFICATION

The more privileged among us spend most of the day indoors — in homes, offices, gyms, and air-conditioned vehicles — where air quality can be controlled. Outdoor exposure is typically limited to commutes or errands, during which a properly fitted N95 mask is the only reliable way to reduce exposure to harmful pollutants.

- Indoor air quality (IAQ) significantly impacts health and well-being, especially in urban areas with high pollution levels. Understanding IAQ and effective purification methods is essential for maintaining a healthy indoor environment.



- External pollutants like vehicle emissions and industrial discharges can infiltrate indoor spaces, contributing to poor IAQ. Common household activities such as cooking, smoking, and using certain cleaning agents release pollutants like particulate matter and volatile organic compounds (VOCs). Materials used in construction and furnishings can emit VOCs and other harmful substances over time.
- Exposure to indoor pollutants can lead to respiratory issues, allergies, and other health problems. Vulnerable groups, including children, the elderly, and individuals with pre-existing health conditions, are particularly at risk.
- Ensuring adequate ventilation helps dilute indoor pollutants. However, in areas with high outdoor pollution, it's crucial to balance ventilation with filtration to prevent introducing more contaminants indoors.
- Devices equipped with High-Efficiency Particulate Air (HEPA) filters can effectively remove particulate matter from indoor air. It's important to choose purifiers appropriate for the room size and to maintain them regularly.
- Certain plants can absorb pollutants and improve IAQ. However, their effectiveness is limited, and they should complement other purification methods rather than replace them.
- Minimizing the use of products that emit VOCs, such as specific paints and cleaning agents, can reduce indoor pollution. Keeping HVAC systems and air purifiers in good condition ensures their optimal performance in maintaining IAQ. Maintaining indoor humidity levels between 30-50% can prevent mold growth and reduce dust mites, both of which can affect IAQ.

**Do You Know:**

- An air purifier is essentially a fan paired with a HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter, designed to trap fine particulate matter like PM2.5. Many modern purifiers come with sensors that automatically adjust fan speed based on air quality, improving efficiency. For those on a budget, a DIY purifier can be made using a HEPA filter and a fan. HEPA filters are critical for trapping PM2.5, while activated carbon filters, though not essential for particulate matter alone, are useful for capturing gaseous pollutants.
- A key metric is the Clean Air Delivery Rate (CADR), which indicates how quickly a purifier can filter air in a given space. Higher CADR ratings are particularly important for larger rooms. It is essential to avoid purifiers that generate ozone, as they can do more harm than good. While stratospheric ozone protects us from UV radiation, ground-level "bad ozone" can worsen indoor air quality by producing additional pollutants through chemical reactions.
- While air purifiers and similar measures can reduce health risks for those who can afford them, these solutions are inherently inequitable. This selective insulation can also diminish the urgency to push for systemic changes, which ultimately perpetuates the problem.

**A CONSISTENT RESPONSE**

Every year, the first instance of the air quality index (AQI) vaulting to hazardous levels in Delhi is a bugle for pandemonium. On Monday, official measurements reported an average AQI of 488, with some private stations reporting over a 1,000. While all these stations do not follow a consistent reporting framework, what is unambiguous is that despite all the analysis of the causes



of pollution in the national capital, the political response and the crores invested in measurement and improvising technology fixes, the system is unable to contain episodes of 'severe' pollution or when the AQI crosses 400. Official data suggest that since 2016, there have only been two years when the number of 'severe' days was in the single digits. The number of 'poor' days (AQI over 200) in the same period has declined from 200 in 2016 to 121 in 2024, with the worst yet to come for this year. This further underlines that meteorological conditions will continue to play an outsized role in tipping over the air quality in Delhi, from the concerning to the catastrophic. Unlike from even five years ago, there is a wealth of publicly available analytical tools- private and public sources that can track, even at a daily level, the sources of pollution. Thus a week back, stubble burning or farm fires from Punjab may have been a prominent source, but behind the latest spikes lie 'household' sources and 'road dust'. However despite such nuanced understanding and the creation of empowered bodies such as the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), which is tasked with coordinating a response involving not just Delhi but also surrounding States, there is no attempt by the Centre and the Delhi government to allay public consternation. Both central Ministers in Delhi who are responsible for the environment are away, coordinating election work in Maharashtra and addressing the 29th Conference of Parties in Baku, respectively. The Delhi Ministers cite faulty satellite data from Punjab to show that fires are down or bandy stop-gap solutions such as 'cloud seeding'.

The CAQM chooses not to engage except when it is getting lambasted by the Supreme Court of India, furthering the impression that it is a toothless body with little independence or gumption. Addressing stubble burning, which is a problem only in mid-November, is easier than tackling road dust, which is a perennial problem all through the year. The air quality gains from road dust are significant but of limited, immediate political gains. For the state to be seen as serious about tackling the crisis, it must consistently communicate its intent and rise above politics.

#### WHAT IS CLOUD SEEDING?

The Delhi government's appeal to the Centre to permit cloud-seeding and induce artificial rain as a means to tackle the national capital's ongoing air pollution crisis is misplaced, scientists at the Indian Institute of Tropical Management, Pune, said.

- The Delhi government has appealed to the central government to allow cloud seeding to induce artificial rain as a temporary solution to tackle the city's severe air pollution crisis. Environment Minister Gopal Rai suggested that artificial rain could help settle airborne pollutants and improve visibility.
- Cloud seeding requires moisture-laden clouds, which are often absent during Delhi's winter months. The dry and cloudless conditions in winter make artificial rain efforts ineffective.
- Winter weather in Delhi often involves temperature inversions, which trap pollutants near the surface and discourage cloud formation necessary for cloud seeding. Even if cloud seeding were possible, isolated rain would not be enough to address the vast scale of Delhi's pollution crisis. Sustained and widespread rainfall, which is not feasible, would be required.
- The success of cloud seeding depends heavily on pre-existing weather conditions and precise execution. Artificial rain might temporarily wash away pollutants but would not address the root causes of emissions, meaning pollution levels would likely rebound quickly.
- The primary contributors to Delhi's winter air pollution are:



- Vehicular emissions
  - Stubble burning in nearby states
  - Industrial activities
  - Fine particulate matter (PM2.5 and PM10) from these sources significantly worsens air quality.
- Many Expert are saying that Artificial rain is not a practical or sustainable solution to Delhi's pollution crisis. Addressing the root causes of pollution, such as emissions from vehicles, industries, and agricultural practices, is essential for long-term improvement.

**Do You Know:**

- Cloud seeding is a kind of a weather modification technology to create artificial rainfall. It works only when there is enough pre-existing clouds in the atmosphere. Rain happens when moisture in the air reaches levels at which it can no longer be held, and cloud seeding aims to facilitate and accelerate that process by making available chemical 'nuclei' around which condensation can take place. These 'seeds' of rain can be the iodides of silver or potassium, dry ice (solid carbon dioxide), or liquid propane. The seeds can be delivered by plane or simply by spraying from the ground.
- Cloud seeding is not new to India and it has earlier been attempted in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra to address drought. Similar experiments of cloud seeding had earlier been tried in Australia, America, Spain and France. In United Arab Emirates, the cloud seeding technique led to creation of 52 storms in Abu Dhabi. Till last year, IMD had around 30 successful incidents of seeding. Also, such seeding is routine in Russia and other cold countries where the technique is used to disperse fog at the airports.

**EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CHHATTISGARH'S NEWEST TIGER RESERVE**

Earlier this month, the Chhattisgarh government notified the Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla in the state as India's 56<sup>th</sup> tiger reserve.

The reserve is expected to help Chhattisgarh improve its tiger population, which has been dwindling in recent years. It also opens an avenue to the state's ambition of reintroducing cheetahs at the reserve — the last cheetah was spotted here in the 1940s.

**What do we know about the reserve?**

The Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla is the fourth tiger reserve in Chhattisgarh after Achanakmar, Indravati, and Udanti Sitanadi. The total area of the new tiger reserve is 2,829.387 sq km, making it the third largest tiger reserve in India. Andhra Pradesh's Nagarjunasagar Srisailem Tiger Reserve is the country's largest tiger reserve, covering 3,296.31 sq km. Manas Tiger Reserve in Assam is the second largest with an area of 2,837.1 sq km. Both have 58 tigers.

It is spread across four districts, Manendragarh-Chirmiri-Bharatpur (MCB), Korea, Surajpur, and Balrampur in the northern tribal Sarguja region of Chhattisgarh.

The Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla falls between two other important tiger reserves located in Bandhavgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Palamau, Jharkhand. It is adjacent to Sanjay Dubri Tiger Reserve, also in MP.





The reserve comprises a wide range of wildlife species (apart from tigers) such as elephants, sloth bears, vultures, peacocks, wolves, leopards, otters, chitals, jackals, nilgai, bison, hyenas, langurs, cobras etc.

The Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla is also rich in flora — comprising sal, saja, dhavda, kusum etc — different types of vegetation. It consists of hills, plateaus, valleys, and a river system which create a diverse habitat for its rich wildlife.

#### **What is Chhattisgarh's current tiger population?**

Currently, there are 30 tigers, including three sub-adults and two cubs, in the state, according to Sudhir Kumar Agrawal, Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW), Chhattisgarh. There are five to six tigers at the Guru Ghasidas-Tamor Pingla Tiger Reserve as of now.

The state's tiger population fell from 46 in 2014 to 17 in 2022, the last official tiger status report released by the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), released in 2023, revealed.

#### **How does Chhattisgarh plan to boost its tiger population?**

Agrawal told The Indian Express that to increase the tiger population “we are proposing to bring a few tigresses [to the new tiger reserve] from Madhya Pradesh's Bandhavgarh and Sanjay Dubri to meet the proportion of male tigers.”

He also said that several other measures are being implemented. These include creating rapid response teams, building a good rapport with villagers, developing informer-based wildlife protection/prevention, and deploying full-time guards.

Increasing the prey base for tigers. To do so, in the past few years, authorities have been developing grasslands and water bodies. They have also translocated hundreds of cheetal and wild boars to the reserve from other places in the state.

### **REPORT ON DIP IN INDIA FOREST COVER DEVOID OF FACTS: GOVT**

The Global Forest Watch (GFW) project monitoring data that said India had lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover is “devoid of facts, ground reality and internationally accepted norms”, the Union Environment Ministry and the Forest Survey of India (FSI) have told the National Green Tribunal.

- According to the GFW data, the “tree cover” was derived from satellite data and it does not discern the land use, as per its methodology. It relies on a standardised definition of “forest” adopted by the Food and Agriculture Organisation, which takes into account biophysical criteria — tree height, canopy cover, extent of trees — and land use criteria.
- The affidavit filed by the Union Environment Ministry and the Forest Survey of India (FSI) challenged the GFW's findings that an average of 51 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent per year was released into the atmosphere as a result of the tree cover loss in India. It said that the question of such CO<sub>2</sub> emissions does not arise as there was no decrease in forest and tree cover.
- The affidavit said that the country's forest cover was reported in FSI's biennial India State of Forest Report (ISFR) and is based on internationally accepted criteria. However, it added, GFW's



parameter for forest cover was not based on these internationally accepted criteria, and it might have a different methodology and definition for assessment.

**Do You Know:**

- According to the GFW data released in April 2024, India lost 2.33 million hectares or 6% of tree cover between 2001 and 2023 — 60% of it in five Northeastern states of Assam, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur. It attributed around 18% of the total tree cover loss to the decline in humid primary forests by 4.14 lakh hectares.
- The Global Forest Watch, which tracks forest changes in near real-time using satellite data and other sources, said the country lost 4,14,000 hectares of humid primary forest (4.1 per cent) from 2002 to 2023, making up 18 per cent of its total tree cover loss in the same period.
- Assam had the maximum tree cover loss at 324,000 hectares compared to an average of 66,600 hectares. Mizoram lost 312,000 hectares of tree cover, Arunachal Pradesh 262,000 hectares, Nagaland 259,000 hectares, and Manipur 240,000 hectares.
- According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the rate of deforestation in India was 668,000 hectares per year between 2015 and 2020, the second highest worldwide.

**ANCIENT INDIAN GODDESSES COME HOME: US RETURNS \$10 MILLION WORTH OF STOLEN TREASURES TO INDIA**

The sculpture of Tanesar Mother Goddess, carved from green-gray schist, and looted from the village of Tanesara-Mahadeva in Rajasthan, and a sandstone sculpture looted from Madhya Pradesh in the 1980s, were among the 1,400 antiquities valued at \$10 million returned to India by the US authorities this week.

First documented in the late 1950s, along with 11 other similar sculptures of goddesses, the Tanesar piece was stolen in the early 1960s. After passing through two other collectors in New York, the Met accessioned the Tanesar Mother Goddess in 1993, where it remained on display until it was seized by the US' Antiquities Traffic Unit (ATU) in 2022.

The pieces were returned at a ceremony with the Consulate General of India in New York and Alexandra deArmas, Group Supervisor from the Homeland Security Investigation of New York Cultural Property, Art, and Antiquities Group, according to a statement from Manhattan District Attorney Alvin L Bragg, Jr on November 13.

More than 600 more antiquities looted from India are scheduled to be repatriated in coming months, officials said.

Looted from MP, the sandstone sculpture depicted a celestial dancer. It was cleaved into two halves to facilitate smuggling and illicit sale, and by February 1992, the two halves were illegally imported from London into New York, professionally reassembled, and donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MET). It remained on display and was seized by ATU in 2023.

These antiquities were recovered under several ongoing investigations into criminal trafficking networks, including those of alleged antiquities trafficker Subhash Kapoor and convicted trafficker Nancy Wiener, the statement said.



According to an investigation in March 2023 by The Indian Express, in association with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and the UK-based Finance Uncovered, a treasure trove at the Met was traced to antique dealer Kapoor, who is serving a prison term in Tamil Nadu.

On March 30, 2023, the Met issued a statement saying it would “transfer 15 sculptures for return to the government of India, after having learned that the works were illegally removed from India. Of the 15 items listed in the search warrant, 10 were flagged in The Indian Express report. “We will continue to investigate the many trafficking networks that have targeted Indian cultural heritage,” Bragg said. The statement said that during Bragg’s tenure, the District Attorney’s Antiquities Trafficking Unit recovered just over 2,100 antiquities stolen from more than 30 countries and valued at almost \$230 million.

In October 2023, The Indian Express had reported that the US had offered 1,414 objects to India for repatriation. As per the procedure, a team from Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) is dispatched to the host country, the US in this case, to verify the objects, following which the repatriation process is initiated. Officials in the ASI say besides antiquities, the batch is likely to include non-antiquities as well, and will be ranked accordingly, keeping in mind the definition of ‘antiquity’.

#### ROCK-CUT FOOTPRINTS, HUMAN FIGURE DATING BACK TO MEGALITHIC PERIOD UNEARTHED AT KERALA’S KANHIRAPOIL

A remarkable archaeological discovery has come to light at Kanhirapoil in Madikkai grama panchayat of Kerala where 24 pairs of prehistoric footprints and a human figure have been found carved into rock on private property. Experts believe these carvings date back to the Megalithic period, providing a fascinating glimpse into ancient culture.

The find was first reported by local archaeology enthusiast Satheesan Kaliyanam recently, following which archaeologist Professor Ajith Kumar and history Professor Nandakumar Koroth confirmed its significance during a site visit.

The carvings, made with iron tools, include footprints varying in size from six to 10 inches, suggesting representations of both children and adults. At the end of the footprints, a human figure has been intricately etched, accompanied by four circular pits around it.

Mr. Kumar said that the footprints represent souls of dead people and have been carved out to honour them. All the footprints are pointing towards the west. However, local people believe these footmarks to be that of a goddess.

He further said these carvings bear similarities to prehistoric rock art found in Avalakki Pera in Udupi district in Karnataka. Notably, this discovery aligns with earlier findings in north Kerala, including a temple decoration at Erikulam Valiyapara in Kasaragod, a running tiger near Bangalam Government Higher Secondary School in Neeleswaram, human figures in Cheemeni Ariyittapara, bull figures at Ettukudukka in Kannur, and the celebrated carvings at Edakkal Caves in Wayanad.

He said the 2,000-year-old rock art sheds light on the lives and artistic expressions of early inhabitants of Madikkai grama panchayat and Kerala as a whole.

These carvings and artefacts found here have long been attributed to the Megalithic period, indicating a shared cultural heritage in prehistoric north Kerala, Mr. Kumar said. He added that



this discovery reinforces the historical significance of the area and invites further exploration into the region's ancient past.

## WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE EXPOSITION OF SACRED RELICS OF SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER IN GOA

The decennial exposition of the sacred relics of Saint Francis Xavier, the patron saint of Goa, will begin on Thursday (November 21), and go on till January 5 next year.

Pilgrims, especially from the Catholic community, and tourists will converge in Goa over the next 45 days to pay homage to the saint, whose mortal remains will be put on public display for veneration. Considered to be a time of spiritual reflection, devotion and celebration, the event will be marked by religious ceremonies including masses, prayer services, novenas, and processions.

### **What happens during the exposition?**

The “incorruptible” mortal remains of the Spanish Jesuit missionary St Francis Xavier, one of the founding members of The Society of Jesus, have been housed at the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa since 1624.

During the exposition, a four-century-old silver glass casket holding the relics will be lowered from its resting place in the mausoleum at the Basilica in a private ceremony. On Thursday, the relics will then be carried in a ceremonial procession from the Basilica to Se Cathedral, some 300 metres away, where they will be kept for the following 45 days for devotees to venerate.

### **When did this decennial tradition begin?**

Although the decennial tradition is relatively new, the relics of St Francis Xavier have long been “exposed” to the public. The body of the revered saint has been looked upon as a miracle among the faithful, given that it showed minimal signs of decay.

It is believed that the body was “exposed” for veneration of the public on his death anniversary in 1554. After the saint was canonised in 1622, the tradition gained further prominence. The body was later put in a coffin due to fear of deterioration of the relics and to avoid untoward incidents.

In 1782, rumours circulated that the body of the saint was not in Goa, and had been replaced by another body. Following this, a public exposition took place to dispel these rumours. Subsequently, in the latter half of the 18th century, the sacred relics were exposed at irregular intervals on special occasions, which came to be known as the solemn exposition.

This became a more regular event after Goa was liberated from Portuguese rule in 1961, and has been held once every decade since 1964. Fr Falcao said, “This is the eighteenth exposition. We are expecting over 8 million people to visit this time. Though it is hard to estimate a number. During the previous exposition in 2014, over 5.5 million people visited.”

### **And who was St Francis Xavier?**

St Francis Xavier, also referred to as “Goencho Saib” (Lord of Goa), arrived in Goa — then a Portuguese colony — in 1542. His primary mission, as ordered by King John III, was to restore Christianity among the Portuguese settlers.



He died in 1552 on Shangchuan island off China's coast. He was first buried on the island. The following year, his body was exhumed and transported to Malacca, where it was housed in the Church of St Paul for several months. The saint's body was shipped to Goa in 1554, and kept at St Paul's college in Old Goa — the first building constructed by Jesuits in Goa. The body was later transferred to Casa Professa near the Basilica by 1613, and placed in the Basilica in 1624.

#### DANIEL BARENBOIM AND ALI ABU AWWAD PRESENTED INDIRA GANDHI PEACE PRIZE

The Indira Gandhi Prize for Peace, Disarmament, and Development for 2023 was presented to classical pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim and Palestinian peace activist Ali Abu Awwad on Tuesday.

Mr. Barenboim was selected for his contribution to foster peace through musical and cultural dialogue initiatives and Mr. Awwad for his advocacy for dialogue through his organisation Roots, an outfit that he started after spending time in jail.

Accepting the prize, Mr. Awwad recounted that he was imprisoned in Israel in 1990 when he and his mother carried out a hunger strike for 17 days. "What makes us human is our ability to recognise each other and protect dignity. This is what makes us human," he said.

He recounted that he was hurt when his brother was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers but he decided not to seek revenge. "Because I was strong enough to let go."

He recounted his meetings with Israeli victims who had died because of Palestinian attacks, and said that he found humanity among the Jewish victims of violence as well.

"I realised that my enemies were not just enemies. There was a tremendous humanity behind. I could see the Jewish humanity," he said, adding, "Our non violence struggle for Palestinian struggle has to pass through Jewish hearts and not through Jewish bodies."

In his remark, Shivshankar Menon, former Foreign Secretary and member of the Indira Gandhi Memorial Trust, described the initiatives by Mr. Barenboim and Mr. Awwad as "exemplary". The event was held in virtual mode.

#### SHORT NEWS

##### WORLD HERITAGE WEEK

— Every year, November 19 to November 25 is celebrated as World Heritage Week 2024, under the theme "Discover and Experience Diversity."

— This annual global observance marks the heritage sites recognised by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

— The roots of this week were created by UNESCO in 1945 to promote moral and intellectual unity following two catastrophic world wars as a way to support enduring world peace.

##### QUAD CANCER MOONSHOT:

The QUAD has launched it as a collective effort to leverage public and private resources to reduce the number of lives lost to cancer in the Indo-Pacific, with an initial focus on cervical cancer. India

**4<sup>TH</sup> FLOOR SHATABDI TOWER, SAKCHI, JAMSHEDPUR**



has pledged a grant of \$7.5 million for testing, screening, and diagnosis of the disease in the Indo-Pacific region.

#### DHUDMARAS, CHHATTISGARH

— A small village in Chhattisgarh's Bastar district, Dhudmaras has been selected by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) for its Best Tourism Village Upgrade programme, highlighting its potential for sustainable tourism development.

— Under this, it will receive support to enhance tourism infrastructure, promote cultural heritage, and improve the quality of life for residents.

— This year, 55 villages across the world received the recognition of Best Tourism Village under the UNWTO initiative.

— Dhudmaras is situated in the heart of Kanger Valley National Park. Nestled in dense forests with the Kanger River flowing through it, Dhudmaras offers an idyllic setting for eco-tourism.

#### SHEIKH ZAYED GRAND MOSQUE

— Pictures of Diljit Dosanjh from the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque—dressed in traditional attire—are making rounds on the Internet.

— It is the largest mosque in the United Arab Emirates, and one of the largest places of worship in the world.

— The mosque was envisioned by the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founding father of the United Arab Emirates.

— The first considerations to build the Mosque began in the late 1980s, the construction began on November 5th, 1996, and it opened for worship on Eid Al Adha in the year 2007.

#### JOINT STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN 2025-29

— India and Italy have announced the Joint Strategic Action Plan 2025-29 outlining their vision for collaboration in a range of key sectors, including defence, trade, energy, and space.

#### WOH G64

— Scientists have captured an extreme close-up of the dying star WOH G64 that is 1,60,000 light years away, dwelling in another galaxy.

— WOH G64 has been imaged with remarkable sharpness by the European Southern Observatory's Very Large Telescope Interferometer (ESO's VLTI). The latest image reveals that the star emanates dust and gas, a sign that it is in its last stages before becoming a supernova triggered by a powerful explosion towards the end of a star's life.

— The WOH G64 is a giant star that dwells in the Large Magellanic Cloud, a dwarf or satellite galaxy that orbits our Milky Way, which also happens to be one of the closest galaxies to us. It was discovered in the 1970s by Bengt Westerlunds, Olander, and Hedin.



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POORVI PRAHAR

- A joint exercise of the Army, Navy, and Air Force was organised in Arunachal Pradesh's Shi-Yomi district.
- This exercise, being conducted from November 10-18, aims to hone the combat effectiveness of the Indian Army, Navy, and Air Force in executing Integrated Joint Operations in the challenging mountainous terrain of the region.

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S M KHAN

- S M Khan, a retired Indian Information Services officer and Press Secretary to former President A P J Abdul Kalam, passed away in New Delhi at the age of 67.
- He has written a book titled "The People's President", narrating his experiences working with Dr Kalam.

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K. SANJAY MURTHY

- K Sanjay Murthy, a 1989-batch Himachal Pradesh cadre IAS officer, will be the next Comptroller and Auditor General of India.
- He will succeed incumbent Girish Chandra Murmu, who is retiring on November 20.
- Article 148 of the constitution provides for the appointment of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India who shall be appointed by the President and shall only be removed from office in like manner and on like grounds as a Judge of the Supreme Court.

**DreamIAS**



## BUSINESS & ECONOMICS

### HOW INDIA COULD COUNTER THE CBAM

Protectionism is a threat to the collaboration required between the developed and developing world in addressing climate issues. Innovative protectionist ideas, such as the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (EU-CBAM), the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, and the EU Deforestation Regulation, have led to concerns in developing nations. India has criticised the EU-CBAM, in particular, as being "arbitrary".

#### A 'discriminatory' tool

The CBAM is meant to ensure that imported products bear a carbon emission cost comparable to the cost imposed on goods produced within the EU. Exporters will be mandated to provide information on the quantity and emissions of their goods and buy certificates to match those emissions. The definite phase of the CBAM will enter into force on January 1, 2026. This may pose significant risks to India's international trade. The EU comprises 20.33% of India's total merchandise exports, of which 25.7% are affected by CBAM. During the last five fiscal years, iron and steel have accounted for 76.83% of these exports, followed by aluminium, cement, and fertilizers.

In recent editions of the Conference of the Parties (COPs), India has said that CBAM is "discriminatory" and called on developing countries to establish a coordinated response to what it considers as an unjust transfer of responsibilities. The CBAM is attracting considerable attention at COP29 in Baku. However, under-prepared arguments presented at COP29 could undermine India's credibility as a leading voice of the Global South.

It is important to recognise that not all developing economies share the same economic aspirations as India, nor will they be equally affected by the impacts of climate change. Therefore, perceptions regarding CBAM are complex even within the developing world. Issues related to multilateral and bilateral trade and cultural ties between developed and developing economies influence the tone of their arguments. The current production-based accounting principle practiced under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) includes the emissions resulting from the production of exportable commodities within the emission inventory of the exporting nation. The exporting nation is held accountable for the reduction of these emissions, even though these products are not consumed within its domestic market. As a result, many developing economies with less stringent emission reduction measures are accused of climate change when they export more.

#### The proposed arguments

Therefore, India's arguments should also align with other developing countries' agenda, if India wishes to speak like a leader. The following could be some of the arguments. First, on the time for preparing for CBAM. With administrative deftness, the EU set a target to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 20% compared to 1990 levels by 2020; this is outlined in the EU Climate Action and Renewable Energy Package in 2008. Following the accomplishment of these targets, the European Green Deal was unveiled in 2019, extending the emission reduction target to 55% below the 1990 levels in a Fit for 55 Package. Does the CBAM offer developing economies a matchable time to adapt?





The second is on empowerment. The EU has decided to keep the revenues generated from the CBAM as its resources, which will be used to fund the NextGenerationEU recovery tool and operate the CBAM. Depending on the mechanism's ultimate design, the anticipated additional money generated by CBAM for 2030 is estimated to be €5 to €14 billion annually. Is it appropriate for the EU not to share this revenue with non-EU trading partners? Doing so may contribute to capacity building and technology transfer in developing economies.

Third, there is the issue of quantifying emission reduction responsibilities. India can justifiably advocate for an alternative called Equity-based Accounting (EBA) of Nationally Determined Contributions, which emphasises a collective obligation for emission reductions among trade partners based on the ideas of horizontal intra-generational equity and vertical inter-generational equity. In the context of the EU-CBAM, India can introduce the concept of EBA to the developing world concerning retaliation measures. Using the EBA, a formula can be proposed to calculate the tariff base on imports from the EU, which considers factors such as relative per capita GDP, relative per capita emissions, relative gains from trade, and relative avoided emissions through trade. By expressing the actual emissions embedded in imports in a way that reflects the developmental and historical heterogeneities between trade partners, any developing economy can be better positioned under these new rules of the game, which provide an unbiased evaluation of climate initiatives.

Even the PBA adheres to the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities and Respective Capabilities, which is significantly compromised under the CBAM framework. CBAM does not acknowledge compensatory justice or distributive justice. Consequently, the allocation of emission responsibilities is not equitably assigned to countries based on their historical contributions to climate change or their capacity to mitigate its effects. It is apparent that through CBAM, the EU wants to intimidate non-EU nations into adopting its self-proclaimed position as climate leader.

## TURNING TIDE

From a reasonably healthy show at the onset of this financial year, India's goods exports had stumbled sharply in the second quarter, shrinking an average 5.8% over the first two months and rising a mere 0.5% in September. With half the year gone by, exports were up just 1%. In this backdrop, the 17.25% surge in merchandise shipments to overseas markets through October is a positive surprise, with the year's second-highest tally of \$39.2 billion. Trade mandarins have attributed the uptick to stronger demand for the Christmas season in developed markets. If this festive demand holds, at least the next couple of months should see healthy numbers. With services exports rising 14.6% by September, official hopes of cumulative exports through 2024-25 crossing a record \$800 billion may yet be attained. Non-petroleum exports led the way in October with a 25.6% rise, and such shipments have now hit the highest ever tally for the first seven months of a year, at \$211.3 billion.

The petroleum story, however, is starkly different and a tad puzzling. India's oil imports rose 13.2% in October to \$18.3 billion (almost 46.4% over September), while exports tanked for the fifth straight month, by over 22% to \$4.6 billion, the lowest in almost three years. The oil trade deficit has hit a record \$13.7 billion. While one can attribute the export slide to significantly lower global oil prices vis-à-vis last year, the same should have held true at least partly for the import bill as well, even if higher domestic demand is factored in. The oil influx spike has also lifted the overall import bill to a fresh high of \$66.3 billion, breaking this August's tally of \$64.3 billion, which was fuelled by gold imports. Over the past three months, the trade deficit has widened to



its second- and third-highest level. While gold imports are likely to stay high till the wedding season ends, oil trends and the widening import bill warrant closer monitoring even if the foreign exchange reserves situation is comfortable, and adequate to cover about a year's imports. The World Trade Organization has pegged global trade growth at 3% in 2025, relative to a 2.7% estimate for this year. Apart from the slowdown in China and festering conflicts around the world, the biggest fly in the ointment for all such hopes is likely to be the incoming United States administration, with Donald Trump expected to prioritise the elevation of import tariffs and sops for domestic production. India must avoid any policy gestures such as the updated laptop import management system — it is in the works, with possible curbs — that could draw the U.S. government's focus away from Mr. Trump's primary trade target — China.

#### GOVERNMENT AND RBI DISAGREE ON INTEREST RATES. NEITHER IS WRONG

The Narendra Modi government and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) seem to be at odds over the need for cutting interest rates amid concerns on slowing growth and stubborn inflation. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that if Indian industry is to expand and build new capacities, "our bank interest rates will have to be far more affordable". Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal has been more direct. The central bank, according to him, shouldn't factor in food inflation while taking a decision on lowering its policy interest rates, which have been unchanged since February 2023. Doing so, he believes, is based on "flawed theory", while clarifying that it was "my personal view and not that of the government". The RBI, on the other hand, has termed the 6.2 per cent year-on-year consumer price index inflation number for October — above its 6 per cent upper tolerance limit — a "sticker shock". The current inflation, if allowed to run unchecked, "can undermine the prospects of the real economy".

Neither side is wrong. The RBI's latest 'State of the Economy report' has noted that it isn't retail food inflation alone that's rising — from 5.4 per cent in July and 5.7 per cent in August to 9.2 per cent in September and 10.9 per cent in October. Even "core" inflation, which excludes price increases in food and fuel, has edged up from 3.1 per cent to 3.8 per cent between June and October. The central bank is worried, rightly, whether elevated food prices are having second order effects by transmitting to wages and spilling over into generalised inflation. Such inflation, in turn, can hurt growth itself by biting into household consumption demand and corporate earnings, impacting their inducement to invest. Bringing down inflation closer to the RBI's 4 per cent target, and anchoring the public's inflation expectations, is hence desirable even from a growth perspective. But the government's argument that high interest rates can do little to rein in food prices — more so, the 42.2 per cent vegetable inflation for October — cannot be dismissed either.

Food inflation, in all likelihood, should ease by December-January with the market arrivals of the kharif/late-kharif crops and also winter vegetables — from tomatoes and carrots to cauliflower, radish, beans and spinach. That should enable the RBI's monetary policy committee to cut rates by February, if not earlier. The government, on its part, would do well to adhere to the rules of fiscal prudence. The ruling BJP and the Opposition have been equally guilty of tilting the political discourse towards higher spending on populist welfare schemes, the former markedly after the Lok Sabha election reverses. In today's uncertain global geo-political environment and fragile investor confidence, the last thing the country needs is a fiscal gravy train wreck.



## SEBI'S STRICTER GUIDELINES TO PROTECT INVESTOR INTERESTS IS A STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

The last few years have seen a dramatic surge in stock prices of small and mid cap companies, notwithstanding the recent correction. This surge has been accompanied by concerns not only of irrational investor exuberance but also of manipulation and misconduct in the segment. These worries have been voiced by market participants as well as the stock market regulator. The Sebi chairperson has, for instance, talked about the possibility of price manipulation in initial public offering (IPOs) and trading of SMEs. Sebi has also cautioned investors about some promoters creating an “unrealistic” assessment of their operations in order to ensure a “positive sentiment” which allows them to offload their shares at higher prices. On Tuesday, the stock market regulator went a step ahead and issued a consultation paper proposing several changes to the guidelines for listing small and medium enterprises. This is a step in the right direction.

For instance, the market regulator has proposed increasing the minimum application size. This would raise the entry barrier for investors, and lead to only “informed investors who have the risk taking appetite” applying for allotment. Sebi has also suggested increasing the number of minimum investors to 200 from 50. This would ensure a bigger investor base and greater liquidity. The regulator has also proposed that the lock-in on the minimum promoter contribution be increased to five years, and that the holdings in excess of the minimum contribution be released in a phased manner. This could ensure that promoters have “skin in the game”. It has also been put forth that if the purpose of the SME issue is to repay loans of promoters or related parties then those should not be allowed, and that a monitoring agency be appointed to ensure that funds are utilised in the manner stated if the issue size is more than Rs 20 crore. This could guard against the risk of siphoning of funds.

In recent years, there has been a steady increase in small and medium sized companies tapping the markets. Data shows that the number of companies listed at NSE has risen from 31 in 2021-22 to 138 in 2023-24 and from 33 to 58 at BSE. So far this year, Rs 5,700 crore has been raised through 159 SME IPOs. The proposals put forth by the stock market regulator — which follow recent measures to tighten the norms around derivatives trading — are designed to bring greater scrutiny of these SME IPOs, protect the interests of ordinary investors, and ensure the integrity of markets.

## HOW DOES PM VIDYALAXMI DIFFER FROM OTHER SCHEMES?

### The story so far:

On November 6, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi approved a new Central Sector Scheme, PM Vidyalaxmi, which seeks to provide financial support to meritorious students applying for higher education. Students will now be eligible to get collateral-free, guarantor-free loans from banks and financial institutions to cover the full amount of tuition fees and other expenses related to the course.

### What does the scheme cover?

The government has said that students who have gained admission in 860 quality higher education institutions, as defined by the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), are eligible for the loans. The scheme will potentially cover 22 lakh students, a Ministry of Education spokesperson said. For students with an annual family income of up to ₹8 lakh, and not eligible



for benefits under any other government scholarship, a 3% interest subvention for loans up to ₹10 lakh will be provided during the moratorium period. The interest subvention support will be given to one lakh students every year. Preference will be given to students from government institutions who have opted for technical or professional courses. “An outlay of ₹3,600 crore has been made during 2024-25 to 2030-31, and seven lakh fresh students are expected to get the benefit of this interest subvention during the period,” the Ministry added.

#### **What about past schemes?**

PM Vidyalaxmi differs from previous central government schemes in the number of institutions eligible, mode of processing of loans, the income cap, and the amount of money to be disbursed. For example, students can apply for loans through the Vidyalaxmi portal, which simplifies loan applications and has links to all major public sector as well as private banks. It also facilitates the tracking of the loan status.

Moreover, while previous schemes offered benefits to only low-income groups, the Vidyalaxmi scheme expands coverage to middle-income families, irrespective of other factors such as caste.

For earlier schemes, the eligible institutions needed to be accredited with the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) and the National Board of Accreditation (NBA). With 820 universities of NAAC and 15,501 colleges, along with 3,348 NBA institutions, the total was about 20,000 institutions. However, under Vidyalaxmi, only institutions with NIRF ranks are eligible. This means that the scheme will be applicable to all government and private institutions ranked within the top 100 in NIRF rankings in the overall list as well as all institutions in the category-specific and domain-specific lists. Professor O R S Rao, Chancellor, ICFAI University, Sikkim, who helped to compile the list of universities eligible for the scheme, says the list does not feature 860 unique institutes as some are ranked in multiple categories. An institute has to register for the ranking as a prerequisite to feature in the rankings. While some institutions apply to a single category, some others apply for multiple categories and hence feature on more than one list.

#### **What are the implications?**

Rankings are now becoming more and more important with loan eligibility being conditional on them. As this scheme significantly reduces the number of eligible institutions, the stakes of performing well in higher education entrance tests just got higher. Banker Thomas Franco said that this makes it difficult for students who do not have excellent marks to avail the loan. Banks may charge higher rates of interest for other institutions or straight away reject them if they don't have a good rank.

### **AROUND 6.5 LAKH APPLICATIONS COME IN FOR PM'S INTERNSHIP SCHEME PILOT PROJECT**

As many as 6.5 lakh youth had applied for internships under the PM Internship Scheme in Top Companies (Scheme) pilot project as of Friday last, when the window closed for the 1.27 lakh opportunities initially being offered by Corporate India under the scheme, according to government sources.

The project is aimed at providing on-the-job training to one crore people over five years.



The number of applications does not equate to the number of individual applicants, clarified an official source, as every applicant can apply for five different internships that have been offered.

The scheme's pilot, learnings from which would be used to scale it up for a full-fledged roll-out, has attracted internship offers from 280 major firms such as Tata Steel, ITC Limited, ICICI Bank, and the Mahindra Group.

The deadline for applications was extended from November 10 to November 15 to provide youngsters more time to apply.

Unemployed youth between 21 and 24 years of age, who do not have a family member earning over ₹8 lakh per annum, are eligible for the scheme.

Companies that have signed up for the scheme would now begin the selection process. As per the original timeline, the selected interns are expected to begin their year-long tenure with companies on December 2.

Many youth who had registered said they were hopeful of getting selected, while for a few it was a "back-up" option.

College professors said while students were enthusiastic, very few had applied as only those not currently enrolled in full-time programmes were eligible.

While applying, candidates could key in preferences such as sector, functional role, State and district. According to the dashboard on the PM internship portal, internships have been offered across States and Union Territories, with the highest being in Maharashtra at 14,694, followed by Tamil Nadu at 13,263. The lowest was from Lakshadweep, which had just two offers. Delhi offered a total of 3,543 opportunities.

According to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs' guidelines, companies will pay ₹500 per month from their CSR funds, based on attendance and conduct, after which the government would initiate a direct benefit transfer of ₹4,500 to the intern's Aadhaar-seeded bank account.

A one-time grant of ₹6,000 for incidental expenses would be provided to an intern upon joining.

While for those such as Kratika the stipend of ₹5,000 is a "huge bonus", some feel they would not be able to sustain with ₹5,000 per month, for an entire year.

Ravikant Tiwari, 19, a third-year student at Aryabhata College, who had applied under the scheme, said he was worried that his expenses might exceed the stipend amount. At the Delhi University, an official said while there was interest in the scheme among students, many had also applied for the six-month vice-chancellor internship scheme – initiated last year – that offers a stipend of ₹5,500 per month.

#### META 'DISAGREES' WITH CCI FINE OVER WHATSAPP PRIVACY POLICY, WILL APPEAL IT

A day after being fined by the Competition Commission of India (CCI), Meta said it "disagrees" with the body's decision over WhatsApp's controversial 2021 privacy policy update and plans to appeal it.

- The Competition Commission of India (CCI) imposed a ₹213.14 crore fine on Meta for "abusing" its dominant position through WhatsApp's 2021 privacy policy update.



—The CCI found that the policy’s mandatory nature and expanded data-sharing scope violated the Competition Act by imposing unfair conditions and creating barriers for competitors.

- Meta stated that the 2021 update was optional and did not alter the privacy of personal messages, focusing instead on introducing business features. Meta plans to appeal the CCI’s decision, emphasizing WhatsApp’s role in supporting small businesses and governments in India.

- The CCI directed WhatsApp to:

—Cease sharing user data with Meta companies for non-messaging purposes for five years.

—Provide detailed explanations in its privacy policy about what user data is shared and why.

—Data sharing cannot be a condition for users to access WhatsApp’s services in India.

- The CCI ruled that Meta leveraged WhatsApp’s dominant position in messaging apps to strengthen its online display advertising market. Sharing user data with Meta companies creates entry barriers for competitors and denies market access.

- In January 2021, WhatsApp introduced a mandatory privacy policy update, expanding data sharing between Meta companies. Users in India had no option to opt out, unlike users in the European Union, protected by stronger data privacy laws. The update led to public outrage, prompting many users to switch to rival apps like Signal and Telegram.

- Since Meta’s acquisition of WhatsApp in 2014, privacy concerns have persisted. A 2016 policy allowed limited data sharing with Facebook, but users had the option to opt out within 30 days, which was removed in the 2021 update. WhatsApp’s metadata, while not end-to-end encrypted, can still reveal sensitive information about users.

- Europe’s GDPR mandates that WhatsApp provide users with an opt-out option for data sharing, unlike India where no such provision exists. Meta has previously faced scrutiny and fines in Europe over misleading information regarding WhatsApp’s privacy commitments.

**WITH EXCESS POLICY INTERVENTION, BOTH FARMERS AND CONSUMERS SUFFER**

In governance, as in other things, timing is crucial. Take the paddy crop stubble burning, which has shown a sharp spike since the second week of this month. Between November 8 and November 19, the number of farm fires, at 15,475, were more than the 13,238 from September 15 to November 7. And these are the officially reported events in Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi. Researchers have suggested the possibility of farmers shifting their burning to the late afternoon period, when the NASA satellites don’t actively monitor the region. Whether or not such “timing” of fires — to avoid satellite overpasses, thereby escaping detection — is happening, tardy paddy procurement by government agencies certainly hasn’t helped. During October, only 8.4 million tonnes (mt) of rice equivalent was bought, as against 10.6 mt and 11.4 mt in the same month of 2023 and 2022 respectively

The above slow pace of purchases was due to inadequate storage space, with much of the rice from last year’s procured crop remaining in Punjab and Haryana. That rice not being moved out in time meant warehouses there having little capacity to accommodate fresh grain arriving from October. It led to un-lifted paddy in the mandis, in turn, prompting farmers to slow down harvesting of their already-ripened crop in the fields. But the more the procurement got extended, the narrower was the window to sow the next wheat crop, ideally by mid-November. With lesser



time left between paddy harvesting and wheat sowing, farmers have probably taken greater recourse to stubble burning to clear their fields. Delayed paddy procurement may have, then, aggravated the damage to air quality in north India, including the national capital, this time round.

The cost of not taking a timely decision is also being felt in di-ammonium phosphate (DAP), a crucial phosphorus-containing fertiliser applied at the time of sowing. Lower imports of both the finished fertiliser and raw material/intermediates used in domestic production have left companies with not enough material to sell. With supply not matching the higher demand from farmers on the back of a good monsoon, it has resulted in shortages and reports of sales at above the government-directed maximum retail price (MRP). The government has not just fixed the MRP very low, but also not provided a high enough subsidy/concession to make it viable for companies to import and market the fertiliser. Fertilisers, like rice and wheat, are victims of excess policy intervention. Farmers produce the latter not for the market, but government agencies. They buy urea and DAP at government-fixed MRPs. When decisions on subsidy and procurement are delayed or out of sync with market realities, the ultimate sufferer is the farmer and the general public.

#### CENTRE AIMS TO MAKE ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS A TUNA EXPORT HUB

As export of tuna fish from India increased by 31.83% in 2023-24, the Centre is exploring new areas to source one of the most commercially valuable fish. According to the Union Fisheries Department, a recent meeting of investors held on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands was a step towards making the Union Territory a hub of tuna export.

The global tuna market is worth \$41.94 billion and the Indian Ocean is considered the second largest tuna region, producing 21% of world's tuna. A concept note prepared by the department, a copy of which is available with The Hindu, says that the Exclusive Economic Zone around the islands is home to a range of tuna species, with substantial untapped fishery resources.

The department's estimates suggest a total potential yield of 64,500 tonnes of tuna annually. Out of this, the Centre expects a stock of 24,000 tonnes of yellow fin tuna, which has a steady market across the world annually from the islands. Similarly, 22,000 tonnes of skipjack tuna, 500 tonnes of bigeye tuna, and 18,000 tonnes of neritic tuna may also be available for exports from the islands annually.

India exported 51,626 tonnes of tuna in 2023-24 worth \$87.96 million, according to the Marine Products Export Development Authority. The concept note added that the islands primarily harvest neritic tuna, which is caught closer to the shore, while small quantities of oceanic species, including skipjack, big-eye, and yellowfin tuna, are also landed. "Despite the high demand for these species, the region's tuna fishery is still underdeveloped and remains underutilised due to a combination of challenges, including lack of infrastructure, limited access to modern fishing technologies, and inadequate fish processing and storage facilities," the note said.

By holding an investors' meet, the Centre expects increased networking among the business communities and relevant stakeholders involved in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors in the Union Territory, other parts of India, and the Southeast Asian region. The Centre sees that technological limitations such as a lack of modern fishing technologies hamper the ability to optimise tuna catch rates.



## SMOG DISRUPTS FLIGHTS AS SOME 'PILOTS NOT TRAINED IN CAT III OPERATIONS': WHAT THIS MEANS

With the national capital enveloped in a blanket of noxious smog, flight operations at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in Delhi have been impacted.

At least 15 flights were diverted — 13 to Jaipur, one to Dehradun, and one to Lucknow — and many more delayed on Monday (November 18) due to poor visibility levels. According to sources at the airport, these diversions were made due to some pilots not being trained in CAT III operations.

Put simply, CAT III refers to an Instrument Landing System (ILS) which allows planes to land in extremely poor visibility conditions, like what is currently being seen in Delhi.

### **Landing in low visibility**

Landing is considered to be the most difficult aspect of flying an aircraft — and the most dangerous. According to research by Boeing, the final descent and landing takes about 4% of the average flight time. But a whopping 49% of fatal accidents occur in this tiny window.

Poor visibility is one of many factors that make landing aircraft difficult. In such conditions, pilots have little to no visual cues they can rely upon while landing an aircraft, making it very hard to accurately judge the glide path to the ground and the alignment of the aircraft with the runway. Mistimed or misaligned touchdowns significantly increase the risk of accidents.

This is why modern aircraft and runways are equipped with various kinds of instruments which allow aircraft to land even in poor or no visibility. The ILS is a specific ground-based radio navigation system that provides pilots accurate information about their aircraft's glide path and alignment with the runway.

### **How the ILS works**

The ILS provides the pilot with two key pieces of information that she needs while landing an aircraft.

First, it provides azimuth guidance. Azimuth refers to the horizontal angle between a reference direction (in this case the runway) and a line to a point of interest (the aircraft). This information is provided with the help of the ILS localiser (LOC), whose antennae are usually located on the far end of the runway.

These radio antennae transmit two narrow intersecting beams, one from slightly to the right of the runway's centreline and the other to the left. Where they intersect provides the centreline of the runway. This information comes to the pilot flying the aircraft in the form of the vehicle's displacement from the runway centreline, which then allows her to course-correct horizontally.

Second, the ILS provides the correct vertical descent profile for the aircraft. In other words, it tells the pilot whether the aircraft is too high or too low at any given distance from the runway. This is done with the help of a glidescope (GS).

The GS antennae work in the same manner as the LOC antennae, they are just turned on one side. Located generally somewhere along the middle of the runway, they transmit two narrow intersecting beams, one slightly below the required vertical profile and the other slightly above it





which, with the point of these beams intersection providing the optimum descent position of an aircraft.

### Categories of the ILS

ILS approaches are categorised based on two parameters: decision height (DH) and runway visual range (RVR). (Refer to Table below).

DH refers to the lowest altitude during descent till which pilots can rely solely on the ILS. At this altitude if the RVR — the distance over which a pilot can see the runway's lights or markings — is below a certain threshold, then the landing has to be aborted.

Whether an aircraft is capable of making a certain category of ILS-based landing is a product of the equipment it has aboard, the equipment on the ground, and a pilot's training.

Currently, six Indian airports — Delhi, Lucknow, Jaipur, Amritsar, Bengaluru and Kolkata — are equipped to handle CAT IIIB operations. India does not have a single airport capable of CAT IIIC operations. Airports such as New York's John F Kennedy Airport and the London Heathrow Airport support CAT IIIC landings.

## HOW ZOMATO'S 'FOOD RESCUE' WILL WORK, WHAT'S IN IT FOR DELIVERY WORKERS, RESTAURANTS

Zomato has launched a new feature – called Food Rescue – that will allow customers to buy a cancelled order at a discounted rate, a fix the company says could work towards reducing food wastage.

Every month, around 4 lakh food orders on their way to the customers are cancelled on Zomato, as per the company. With the new feature, which is currently being scaled up, such cancelled orders will show up on the Zomato app of nearby users, who can purchase them at a lower value, in its original packaging, the company's CEO Deepinder Goyal said in a post on X on Sunday.

While the company said it will not keep any proceeds from the sale except the required government taxes, the feature could boost the app's usage and user retention, as people are likely to be scouring through the app, waiting for a cancelled order to pop up.

The company said its delivery workers will be compensated fully for the entire trip, from the initial pickup to the final drop-off at the new customer's location.

### How does the 'Food Rescue' feature work on Zomato?

Once the initial purchaser of a particular food item cancels the order, it will show up on the app of users within a three kilometre radius of the delivery worker carrying the order. The option to claim the order will only be available for a few minutes, which Zomato says is essential to ensure the freshness of the food.

To prevent any abuse of the system, the original customer and those in their immediate vicinity will not receive the option to claim the order. Customers who prefer vegetarian food will not see non-veg orders.



“Zomato will not keep any proceeds (except the required government taxes). The amount paid by the new customer will be shared with the original customer (if they made payment online), and with the restaurant partner,” Goyal said.

Orders containing items sensitive to distances or temperature such as ice creams, shakes, smoothies, and certain perishable items, will not be eligible for the new feature.

Currently it is unclear whether there would be a minimum or maximum money limit to a food order which would be available under the feature. It is also unclear whether Zomato will issue a flat discount on the cancelled order, or if it will be a percentage based discount, depending on the value of the order. In a screenshot shared by Goyal, the cancelled order’s value was shown as Rs 322 and the discounted rate was Rs 161, which is half of the original value.

#### **How does it work for restaurants, delivery workers?**

In a blog post, Zomato said that 99.9 per cent of its restaurant partners “want to be a part of this initiative”.

As per the company, restaurant partners will continue to receive compensation for the original cancelled order, plus a portion of the amount paid by the new customer if the order is claimed.

They can see ‘Food Rescue’ orders in the order history section on the restaurant partner app and in their weekly payout statement, in the ‘Order Level’ tab.

“If, for any reason, restaurant partners don’t wish to participate, they can instantly opt out via their Restaurant partner app and dashboard,” Zomato said.

“Delivery partners will be compensated fully for the entire trip, from the initial pickup to the final drop-off at the new customer’s location,” Zomato added.

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## LIFE & SCIENCE

### WHY IS A U.K. CONSUMER PROTECTION GROUP GOING AFTER APPLE'S ICLOUD?

#### The story so far:

A U.K. consumer protection group called 'Which?' has filed a £3 billion claim against Apple as it represents U.K. customers who paid for the company's iCloud services since October 1, 2015. The consumer group claims that Apple's customers were locked into using iCloud and forced to pay unfair prices for it, as the iPhone-maker violated competition law in the process.

#### How does Apple iCloud work?

Apple's iCloud is a storage service that allows Apple customers to back up their device-based data such as photos, videos, emails, files, and more. They can then access the stored media from other devices or through the web.

For example, if a user who dropped their iPhone into the sea had opted for automatic backup to iCloud, they would not have to worry about losing precious videos of a deceased pet, voice memos from their loved ones, the poem they were composing on their phone, the health metrics they were planning to show their doctor, their saved passwords, important to-do lists, downloaded books, device-based text messages, and more, since these would be preserved through iCloud.

Naturally, storing so much data from different apps and features — and constantly updating it — takes up space. With the free version of Apple's iCloud, users get 5 GB of storage. However, they can subscribe to various iCloud+ plans, which offer up to 12 TB of storage, if they need more space. The premium plans also come with additional privacy and security features.

#### Why is the U.K. consumer group taking legal action against Apple?

'Which?' believes that Apple forced its iPhone and iPad customers to use iCloud and did not give them fair ways to explore rival cloud services. By the group's calculation, Apple owes customers around £3 billion.

According to the group, Apple gave greater preference to its own cloud storage service on devices such as iPhones and iPads, and tied iCloud to these iOS devices. As a result, 'Which?' claimed that Apple customers were locked into using iCloud, finding it harder to switch to other services, and were caught in an environment that let Apple overcharge users. The group also claimed an iOS monopoly across Apple systems helped it get an "unfair advantage" in the cloud storage market as well. "A key tactic to achieve this has been encouraging users to sign up to iCloud for storage of photos, videos and other data while simultaneously making it difficult to use alternative providers, because Apple does not allow customers to store or back-up all of their phone's data with a third-party provider. iOS users then have to pay for the service once photos, notes, messages and other data go over the free 5GB limit," said the 'Which?' press team in a statement on November 14. If legal action is successful, the group estimated that the average damages per consumer would be around £70 (approximately ₹7,458.92).

This action by 'Which?' has been filed with the Competition Appeal Tribunal. The group said it wants Apple to address the grievances by giving customers back their money and opening up the iOS ecosystem, thus avoiding litigation.



Eligible customers in the U.K. will be part of the legal proceedings by default, but they can opt out if they want to. Meanwhile, eligible users overseas can request to be part of the proceedings. Now, 'Which?' must get permission from the Competition Appeal Tribunal to act as a class representative.

However, Apple has rejected the allegations about iCloud's anticompetitive practices, pointing out that using its cloud storage service was not compulsory and that there were alternatives.

The iPhone- maker said it would defend itself against legal claims, according to a Reuters report.

#### **Will Google's Cloud offerings also come under legal review?**

The U.K. consumer group is specifically targeting Apple in its legal case, alleging anti-competitive action such as restricting alternative options and locking in customers. 'Which?' has pointed to how the dominance of iOS on Apple devices boosted iCloud's dominance in the cloud market.

By contrast, the Android market has more options for cloud services that are easy to install and use across diverse devices, with less of a "walled garden" structure.

Google itself offers both Drive and Cloud services. While Drive enables file sharing by using cloud features and AI, Google Cloud lets enterprises and developers run more complex operations with its tools. A user with a basic Google Account also gets 15 GB of storage for free, which applies to their Gmail, Google Drive, and Google Photos.

While Google is not mentioned in this particular claim by the U.K. consumer group, the internet giant has been deemed a monopolist in the search engine market, after a high-profile trial in the U.S.

While it is not certain whether the legal claim by U.K.'s 'Which?' will move forward successfully, the case will likely spark both customers and regulators across the world to question whether cloud service providers — be they Apple, Google, Microsoft, Amazon, or others — should be pulled up for their market practices and fee structure.

#### **U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE SEEKS TO BREAK UP GOOGLE**

U.S. regulators want a federal judge to break up Google to prevent the company from continuing to squash competition through its dominant search engine after a court found it had maintained an abusive monopoly over the past decade.

The proposed breakup floated in a 23-page document filed late on Wednesday by the U.S. Department of Justice calls for sweeping punishments that would include a sale of Google's industry-leading Chrome web browser and impose restrictions to prevent Android from favouring its own search engine.

A sale of Chrome "will permanently stop Google's control of this critical search access point and allow rival search engines the ability to access the browser that for many users is a gateway to the Internet," Justice Department lawyers argued in their filing.

Although regulators stopped short of demanding Google sell Android too, they asserted the judge should make it clear the company could still be required to divest its smartphone operating system if its oversight committee continues to see evidence of misconduct.



The broad scope of the recommended penalties underscores how severely regulators operating under President Joe Biden's administration believe Google should be punished following an August ruling by U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta that branded the company as a monopolist.

The Justice Department decision-makers who will inherit the case after President-elect Donald Trump takes office next year might not be as strident. The Washington D.C. court hearings on Google's punishment are scheduled to begin in April and Judge Mehta is aiming to issue his final decision before Labour Day.

## IF DIAMONDS AND PENCILS ARE MADE OUT OF CARBON, HOW IS IT THAT PENCILS CAN WRITE?

The core of the pencil is made of carbon — the same carbon most of us are primarily made of. Carbon is one of the most common elements on our planet. It can come in different phases and forms.

In ambient conditions, water is a liquid. When it's hotter, it becomes vapour, a gas. When it's cold enough, it becomes a solid called ice. These phases of matter have completely different properties. You could sit (with some inconvenience) on a block of ice but you shouldn't risk sitting on a pool of water. Yet both are made of the same molecules of hydrogen and oxygen: H<sub>2</sub>O. The difference is in how these molecules connect to each other.

Similarly, when carbon atoms are arranged and stacked in different ways, they have completely different properties. Imagine each carbon atom has four hands. Each hand is a restless electron. If the hand forms a bond with another carbon, the atoms share the electron and it becomes calmer. In this way, if the carbon atoms arrange themselves in the form of an Egyptian pyramid-like structure, they form a diamond.

Diamonds are shiny, transparent, and the hardest material known in nature. This is why it's often used to cut other metals. No wonder diamonds are expensive and, for no fault of their own, often confused with expressions of love. The real magic lies with the carbon in a pencil.

### Graphite and sandwiches

Pencil cores are made of carbon, too, but a different form called graphite.

Unlike in diamonds, the carbon atoms in graphite are arranged in sheets, like slices of bread in a sandwich. Each layer contains carbon atoms connected to each other with three hands — that's a very strong bond. However, the bonds between sheets are weak. Each layer in this arrangement is called graphene.

When graphene is stacked in multiple layers, it creates graphite — which is at the core of a pencil.

If you like, imagine the pencil's core to be a tower of your favourite sandwich, containing millions of layers of bread with some cheese, patties, and/or sauce in between. If both graphite and diamond are made of carbon atoms, why can't we write with diamonds?

### Writing by sliding

When you write using a pencil, you are sliding the core of the pencil on paper. In the process, you're forcing the carbon atoms of the pencil to slide on the atoms of the paper.



If you slide a hard material like diamond or a steel spoon on paper, the atoms of the material are so tightly bound to each other they have absolutely no interest in leaving and moving to the surface of the paper.

But something amazing happens when you slide graphite. Graphite has layers of graphene. And just as it is slightly harder to remove a slice of bread from the middle of the sandwich than from the top, sliding graphite on paper sloughs off graphene-like layers onto the paper.

This is how scientists first discovered graphene, too. They stuck cellophane tape on graphite and then ripped it off. When they looked at the tape under a microscope, they found thin layers of carbon stuck to it, i.e. graphene.

As you go on wiggling the pencil, more and more layers of carbon come off. Each of these layers is black and shiny and is readily apparent to the human eye.

This is how a pencil can write even though it lacks liquid ink.

### **Condensed matter physics**

Carbon atoms arranged in one way behave so differently from when they're arranged in a different way — even though each carbon atom itself behaves the same way. Diamond is whitish transparent while graphite is shiny and black. These differences arise based on how the electrons the carbon atoms share behave even though, again, all electrons are the same.

The underlying physics here is similar to why birds form patterns in the evening sky or how even humans behave so differently when they are in large groups. We may not be able to predict the behaviour of even a single bird or a person in general, but when they get together, they can acquire altogether new behaviours. The same is true for cars in traffic and ants in a colony.

## **PLANETARY CRISIS PUTS CHILDREN AT RISK: UNICEF REPORT**

The world is facing an unprecedented planetary crisis with nearly half the world's children — about one billion — living in countries that face high risk of climate and environmental hazards, said the UNICEF's State of the World's Children 2024 (SOWC-2024) report, released on Wednesday.

The report examines impact of three long-term global forces — demographic shifts, climate and environmental crises, and frontier technologies — which it claims will have a profound effect on children's lives between now and 2050.

The report notes that climate destabilisation, biodiversity collapse and widespread pollution threats are intensifying globally.

"Children are confronting a more unpredictable, hazardous environment than any previous generation," it warns.

Explaining the adverse impact, UNICEF said that children's developing bodies are uniquely susceptible to these hazards.

From before their first breath, children's brains, lungs and immune systems are vulnerable to pollution and extreme weather. Air pollution is especially harmful to children; its impact on their respiratory health and development can last a lifetime.



Rising temperatures increase mosquito populations, spreading diseases such as malaria, dengue and Zika. Floods contaminate water supplies, leading to waterborne diseases, which are a major cause of death for children under five years of age. Extreme weather limits food production and access, increasing children's risk of food insecurity. Climate-related disasters can also cause feelings of helplessness, trauma and anxiety in children, the report notes.

"Since 2022, 400 million students around the world have experienced school closures due to extreme weather. In addition to violating child rights, inhibiting learning stifles economic growth. Climate and environmental hazards also displace children from their homes," the report states.

Additionally, it notes that by the 2050s, the global child population is projected to stabilise at around 2.3 billion. However, this global figure obscures regional shifts where while South Asia will remain one of the regions with the largest child populations, it will be joined by eastern and southern Africa, as well as western and Central Africa.

"These regions already struggle to meet children's basic needs, while also facing significant climate risks and lacking adequate digital infrastructure," says the report adding that with fewer young dependents relative to workers, more resources could be freed to support children and boost the economy.

On frontier technologies, the report notes that artificial intelligence, neurotechnology, next-generation renewable energy and vaccine breakthroughs could significantly improve childhood in the future.

"Digitalisation can empower children but it can also expose children to online risks, including sexual exploitation and abuse," the report cautions.

It adds that over 95% of people in high-income countries are connected to the Internet, compared with barely 26% in low-income countries. Infrastructure limitations, high costs and permission barriers continue to impede progress. This digital exclusion threatens to exacerbate existing inequalities, especially in regions with rapidly growing child populations.

#### THE CHINA EMISSIONS PARADOX

- Despite being the world's second-largest economy and the largest emitter of greenhouse gases (accounting for over 30% of global emissions), China is considered a "developing" country under the United Nations framework. This status exempts China from mandatory short-term emission reductions, a significant challenge for achieving global climate targets.
- Global targets require a 43% reduction in emissions from 2019 levels by 2030, but current projections show only a 2% decline.
- According to Climate Action Tracker, China would need to reduce emissions by 66% by 2030 and 78% by 2035 to align with the 1.5°C goal under the Paris Agreement.
- Rapid emission cuts in China could negatively impact global renewable energy transitions because China dominates the production of clean energy technologies:
  - Solar panels: Over 80% of global manufacturing.
  - Wind turbines: About 60% of global production.



—Other technologies: Batteries, hydrogen electrolyzers, and critical minerals essential for energy transition.

- Despite significant renewable energy additions (e.g., over 300 GW in 2022), renewables still contribute less than 10% to China's primary energy mix. Coal remains the dominant energy source, generating over half of China's electricity.
- China leads in renewable energy deployment, likely achieving its target of 1,200 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2023 — six years ahead of schedule. Its cheap production of solar and wind equipment has made renewables affordable worldwide, with solar power becoming the cheapest energy source in many regions.

**Do You Know:**

- The analysis, by Carbon Action Tracker (CAT), an independent scientific project, essentially means that the 1.5 degree Celsius target would be missed if China did not cut down its emissions by more than half in a span of just six years, an extremely improbable event.

## WHY CO<sub>2</sub> IS THE PRIMARY DRIVER OF CLIMATE CHANGE

India's carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from burning fossil fuels are expected to increase by 4.6% in 2024, the highest among major economies, according to a new report by Global Carbon Project, an organisation that quantifies the world's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

Globally, fossil-based CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are set to touch a record high of 37.4 billion tonnes this year, a rise of 0.8% from 2023, the report said. At this rate, there is "a 50% chance global warming will exceed 1.5 degree Celsius consistently in about six years".

CO<sub>2</sub> is one of the most important GHGs in the atmosphere and is the primary driver of anthropogenic climate change.

Here is a look at why CO<sub>2</sub> has caused most of the global warming.

### But first, what are greenhouse gases?

GHGs are those gases in the Earth's atmosphere that trap heat. The Sun emits shortwave radiation or sunlight that passes through the atmosphere and is absorbed by the planet's surface to warm it. However, some of this sunlight is reflected back by the surface as infrared radiation (heat) which has a longer wavelength.

GHGs such as CO<sub>2</sub> and methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), which cannot absorb shortwave radiation, trap infrared radiation. That is because unlike oxygen or nitrogen molecules, CO<sub>2</sub> and methane are made up of three or more atoms, which gives them a larger variety of ways to stretch and bend and twist. This means that they can absorb a wider range of wavelengths, including infrared radiation, Jason Smerdon, a climate scientist at Columbia University, told State of the Planet, a news site of the Columbia Climate School.

Simply put, GHGs act like a blanket that envelopes Earth and insulates it from the cold of space. This process of maintaining a warmer temperature is called the greenhouse effect. GHGs like CO<sub>2</sub>, CH<sub>4</sub>, and water vapour occur naturally and are a boon for the planet as in their absence there would not be the greenhouse effect without which there would not be liquid water and any form of life.





The issue is not the presence of GHGs but their concentration levels, meaning their amount in the atmosphere. For about a thousand years before the Industrial Revolution, the GHG concentration remained relatively constant. Since then, there has been a constant rise in the amount of some of the GHGs, especially CO<sub>2</sub>, due to human activities like burning fossil fuels. As a result, more heat is getting trapped in the atmosphere, leading to a rise in global temperatures.

#### **Why has CO<sub>2</sub> caused most of the global warming?**

Studies have shown that CO<sub>2</sub> has contributed more than any driver to climate change. In fact, CO<sub>2</sub> is responsible for about 70% of global warming, according to an analysis by Facts on Climate Change, a Czech Republic-based independent think tank.

In 2013, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) — the United Nations body that advances scientific knowledge about climate change — compared the “radiative forcing” (RF) or heating effect of three different climate drivers: GHGs, aerosols, and land use change. It was found that between 1750 and 2011, CO<sub>2</sub> had the highest positive RF, meaning it had the greatest warming effect on the planet.

The analysis also showed that other GHGs such as CH<sub>4</sub> or Hydrofluorocarbons (an entirely human-made GHG) which are much more potent — while CH<sub>4</sub> is around 80 times more powerful than CO<sub>2</sub>, HFCs can be thousands of times more powerful — had less heating effect than CO<sub>2</sub>.

There are two reasons for this. One, CO<sub>2</sub> is much more abundant in the atmosphere compared to CH<sub>4</sub> and HFCs. Since the onset of industrial times in the 18th century, human activities have raised atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> by 50%, which means the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> is now 150% of its value in 1750, according to a report in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

Two, CO<sub>2</sub> remains in the atmosphere longer than the other major GHGs emitted due to human activities. It takes about a decade for CH<sub>4</sub> emissions to leave the atmosphere (it converts into CO<sub>2</sub>) and about a century for nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O).

“After a pulse of CO<sub>2</sub> is emitted into the atmosphere, 40% will remain in the atmosphere for 100 years and 20% will reside for 1000 years, while the final 10% will take 10,000 years to turn over,” a report by the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), a US-based non-profit organisation, said.

Notably, water vapour is the most abundant GHG in the atmosphere. However, it has a short cycle (10 days on average) and does not build up in the atmosphere in the same way as CO<sub>2</sub> does. Therefore, water vapour does not have much heating effect compared to CO<sub>2</sub>. But as global temperatures continue to soar, more water evaporates into the atmosphere, causing more warming.

#### **Note:**

— The Nature study found that the **most effective emissions reductions** happened in projects that involved the abatement of **HFC-23** chemicals.

— HFC-23, also known as trifluoromethane, is produced during the manufacture of a common refrigerant gas called HCFC-22, belonging to the hydrochlorofluorocarbon family. HFC-23 has 14,800 times more potential to cause global warming as compared to carbon dioxide.



## DEVELOPING NATIONS SAY INTERESTS OF SOME GETTING PRIORITISED

As the stalemate over climate finance negotiations continues at COP29 in Azerbaijan's Baku, a group of developing countries Wednesday expressed "concern" and complained that their needs were not being given attention while the interests of the developed countries were being sought to be protected.

- At the COP29 climate summit in Baku, Azerbaijan, significant tensions have emerged between developed and developing nations over climate finance and emission reduction commitments.

- **Financial Demands:** Developing countries are advocating for a substantial increase in climate finance, proposing a target of at least \$1.3 trillion annually from developed nations to support climate action.

- **Equity in Contributions:** These nations emphasize the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities," asserting that developed countries, having historically contributed more to greenhouse gas emissions, should bear a greater financial burden.

- **Developed Nations' Position:** Developed countries suggest that wealthier developing nations also contribute to climate finance, arguing that the current economic landscape has evolved since the original agreements.

—**Financial Commitments:** While acknowledging the need for increased funding, developed nations have not specified exact figures, leading to dissatisfaction among developing countries.

- **Key Points of Contention:** Disagreements persist over what constitutes climate finance, including the balance between grants and loans, and the sources of these funds. Developing nations express concerns that stringent emission reduction targets could hinder their economic growth, advocating for flexibility in commitments.

- **Current Status:** Negotiations remain at an impasse, with both blocs holding firm on their positions. The outcome of these discussions is crucial for establishing a new global climate finance goal and determining the future framework for international climate action.

### Do You Know:

- COP29, the 29th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is a pivotal international summit addressing global climate change. Held from November 11 to 22, 2024, in Baku, Azerbaijan, this conference brings together representatives from nearly every country to negotiate and implement strategies aimed at mitigating climate change impacts.

- **Key Objectives of COP29 are:**

—A primary focus is setting a new collective quantified goal (NCQG) on climate finance to replace the previous \$100 billion annual target. This aims to provide developing nations with the necessary resources to adopt clean energy solutions and build resilience against climate impacts.

—Countries are expected to present updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) that outline their plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change.

—Discussions include mechanisms for compensating countries that suffer irreversible losses due to climate change, ensuring that vulnerable nations receive adequate support.



—Improving the transparency framework for tracking progress on climate actions and financial flows is essential for building trust among nations and ensuring accountability.

• **Controversies and Challenges:**

—The selection of Azerbaijan, a major oil and gas producer, as the host nation has been controversial. Critics argue that hosting a climate conference in a country heavily reliant on fossil fuels sends mixed signals about global climate commitments.

—Additionally, significant divisions have emerged regarding a new global finance deal aimed at supporting poorer countries in combating climate change. The latest proposals offer two extreme options that fail to satisfy any party, leaving key issues unresolved as the deadline approaches.

**NO HELP COMING FROM RIO G20, COP29 GETS DOWN TO RESOLVING DIFFERENCES ITSELF**

The ‘positive signals’ it was desperately seeking from the G20 summit in Brazil nowhere to be found in the G20 leaders’ declaration that came out Tuesday morning, the COP29 climate meeting got down to resolving the critical differences on finance negotiations on its own.

• COP29 aims to finalize the New Cumulative Quantitative Goal (NCQG) to ensure larger financial flows for climate action, especially for developing countries.

• The G20 declaration in Rio de Janeiro lacked substantial contributions to resolve immediate climate finance issues. Reiterated the need to scale up climate finance “from billions to trillions” and committed to reforming the international financial system. Offered symbolic support, urging negotiators at COP29 not to leave without a successful NCQG outcome, but provided no clear mandates.

• UN Climate Change Chief Simon Stiell viewed the G20’s message as a positive signal, urging negotiators to turn political will into practical action. COP29 President Mukhtar Babayev confirmed that a draft NCQG text would be ready soon, enabling further ministerial consultations and working sessions.

• Developing countries demand at least \$1.3 trillion annually post-2025, compared to the \$100 billion annual target set for 2020-2025. European Union informally discussed a commitment of \$200–300 billion annually. No official figure has yet been agreed upon by developed nations, though expert assessments suggest tripling the \$100 billion target.

• The Paris Agreement mandates a significant increase in climate finance beyond 2025 to match growing climate challenges. Efforts aim to make finance flows consistent with low-carbon development and sustainability goals. Scaling up finance remains crucial for enabling developing countries to transition to sustainable pathways and address climate vulnerabilities.

• **G20 reaffirmed its commitment to:**

—Reforming the international financial system for better accessibility and affordability of climate finance.

—Supporting public and private climate finance for developing countries.

—Aligning international finance with sustainable development and poverty eradication.



- Negotiations continue in Baku with a focus on achieving a consensus on NCQG. A full draft of the NCQG text is expected to catalyse meaningful dialogue in the final stages of COP29.

**Do You Know:**

- The New Cumulative Quantitative Goal (NCQG) is a framework being developed under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to establish a new target for climate finance in the post-2025 period. It aims to replace the current goal of mobilizing \$100 billion annually by developed countries to support developing nations in addressing climate change. The NCQG is being negotiated as part of the broader climate finance discussions under the Paris Agreement.
- Developing countries often complain of double-counting and innovative accounting, and say that the actual amount of money flowing in for climate action is significantly lower than the claims made by developed countries.
- The other complaint relates to the neglect of adaptation activities. Most of the climate finance flows are directed at mitigation projects, the ones that lead to emissions reductions. This is because mitigation brings global dividends. Any emission reduction anywhere in the world benefits the entire planet.
- On the other hand, adaptation has local benefits. Donor countries are less inclined to invest in projects that only benefit the recipients. Developing countries have been demanding that adaptation should receive at least 50% of climate finance, much more than the less than 20% that has gone into it so far. Even this amount has reduced in absolute terms in the last couple of years, according to a 2023 UN report. The finance agreement is supposed to ensure a more healthy balance.
- The most important element of the finance agreement, however, is a decision on the new quantum of climate finance, over and above the \$100 billion figure. Several assessments have shown that the money required for climate action now runs into trillions of dollars every year. The revised amount — known as the New Cumulative Quantitative Goal on finance (NCQG) — must reflect this changed reality.
- Several developing countries, including India, have made formal proposals on the NCQG amount. The figures are mostly between \$1 trillion and \$1.5 trillion annually — about 1.5% of the combined GDP of the OECD countries, most of which are part of the group that are obligated to provide climate finance. But countries, which failed to meet even the \$100 billion targets can hardly be expected to agree to such a large amount. As a result, little progress has been made on working out the contours of the finance agreement.

**ARGENTINA CONSIDERING LEAVING THE PARIS AGREEMENT: WHAT DOES IT MEAN?**

Argentina's far-right President Javier Milei is considering withdrawing his country from the Paris Agreement, which aims to curb global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, according to several Western media reports. The speculation surfaced after Milei's government asked its negotiators to leave the ongoing COP29 climate summit last week.

Argentina's review of the landmark climate treaty comes at a time when the world is preparing for President-elect Donald Trump to withdraw the United States from the deal for the second time.



### **What is the Paris Agreement?**

The Paris Agreement is an international accord that was adopted by nearly every country in 2015 to address climate change and its adverse effects. Its primary goal is to substantially reduce GHG emissions in a bid to limit global warming in this century to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, while pursuing the means to curb warming to 1.5 degrees.

The agreement mentions the safer limit of 1.5 degrees based on a fact-finding report which found that breaching the threshold could lead to “some regions and vulnerable ecosystems” facing high risks, over an extended, decades-long period.

The treaty also requires all Parties (countries which have joined the agreement) to state every five years what they are doing to tackle climate change — what is known as their nationally determined contribution (NDC). Each successive NDC is meant to reflect an increasingly higher degree of ambition compared to the previous version, according to the website of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

### **How does a country withdraw from the Paris Agreement?**

Article 28 of the Paris Agreement lays out the procedure and timeline for a country’s withdrawal from the treaty.

It says, “[a]t any time after three years from the date on which this Agreement has entered into force (this happened in 2016) for a Party, that Party may withdraw from this Agreement by giving written notification to the Depository”.

The Article also states, “[a]ny such withdrawal shall take effect upon expiry of one year from the date of receipt by the Depository of the notification of withdrawal, or on such later date as may be specified in the notification of withdrawal.”

If a member state wants to withdraw from the treaty, it has to submit the notification of a withdrawal to the Office of Legal Affairs of the UN, based at UN Headquarters in New York.

Once the withdrawal notification has been received, it only becomes effective after one year (or later if the member state so says in the notification). Until the withdrawal comes into force, the member state remains in the Paris Agreement and has to fully participate in all activities under it, according to the UNFCCC website.

### **Why is Argentina considering leaving the treaty?**

Argentina’s Foreign Minister Gerardo Werthein told The New York Times that although the country’s government is yet to make a decision on whether it will leave the treaty, it is reconsidering its participation in a deal that “has a lot of elements” that it does not agree with.

“We are re-evaluating our strategy on all matters related to climate change... And so far, we have not made any other decision beyond standing down until things are clearer,” he said.

Notably, President Milei is a climate denier. In the past, he has called climate change a “socialist lie”. Last year, President Milei had vowed to withdraw Argentina from the Paris Agreement but later backed out.

Werthein told The NYT that Argentina’s government doesn’t deny the existence of climate change and the discussion around the causes behind the warming was a “philosophical issue.”



“We have different views on the reasons,” he said. “We consider it to be linked to natural cycles, and we agree on the need to take measures to mitigate it.”

#### **What impact will Argentina’s withdrawal have?**

Experts fear that Argentina’s exit could trigger a domino effect, causing other countries to reconsider their own participation. This could undermine the Paris Agreement and the world’s climate goals — countries have to slash their emissions by 42% by 2030 and 57% by 2035 to ensure that the planet does not breach the 1.5 degree Celsius threshold.

Argentina is South America’s second-largest economy and the world’s 24th-largest emitter of GHGs. It comprises significant fossil fuel resources and exports, with the second-largest reserves of shale gas (a type of natural gas) and the fourth-largest reserves of shale oil worldwide, according to a report by The Washington Post.

The withdrawal could also isolate Argentina, Niklas Höhne, an expert in climate policy at the nonprofit think tank NewClimate Institute, told DW.

“Argentina will become even less attractive as a trading partner for anyone who takes climate protection seriously, especially now that various countries, above all the EU, are introducing import duties for climate-damaging products,” said Höhne.

However, some observers believe that President Milei will not be able to withdraw Argentina from the treaty easily due to domestic opposition. To implement the withdrawal, he will need the approval of the parliament which can prove to be a daunting task for him. Argentina ratified the Paris Agreement in 2016 and all international treaties ratified by the country hold constitutional status.

### **CAN FOSSIL FUELS BE REGULATED LIKE NUCLEAR WEAPONS? THE GROUP THAT IS TRYING, THE SUCCESS ACHIEVED SO FAR**

Should fossil fuels be regulated the way nuclear weapons are? A group of governments and civil society organisations believe so, and are pushing the idea of a fossil fuel non-proliferation treaty (FF-NPT).

“Just like 50 years ago, when the world used international treaties to defuse the threats posed by nuclear weapons, today, the world needs a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to phase out fossil fuels, support dependent economies, workers and communities to diversify away from fossil fuels, ensure 100% access to renewable energy globally and promote a just transition that leaves no-one behind,” the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative says on its website. The global organisation is made up of civil society members, indigenous peoples, activists, academics, and experts.

The global organisation is made up of civil society members, indigenous peoples, activists, academics, and experts.

- FF-NPT has been endorsed by 13 Small Island Developing States of the Pacific, such as Vanuatu, Tuvalu, Tonga, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands, who were least responsible for global warming but are most vulnerable to its impact. Colombia, one of the largest coal producers and exporters globally, endorsed FF-NPT in December 2023, at COP28.



**Do You Know:**

- The FF-NPT proposes to make it legally binding on nations to end fossil fuel extraction, wind down existing production, and manage a just transition to renewable energy.
- It operates on three pillars — non-proliferation, which is a global cooperation model to end the expansion of coal, oil and gas production; a fair phase-out, which comprises an equitable plan to shut down existing fossil fuel production in a way that nations with the capacity and historical responsibility for emissions transition fastest and empowers others; and ‘just transition’, which calls for fast-tracking the adoption of renewable energy and economic diversification away from fossil fuels such that no worker, community or country is left behind.

**PENDING ISSUES LOOM AS COP29 NEARS DEADLINE**

The marathon COP29 climate talks entered their final stretch on Wednesday as Azerbaijan, the host country, prepared to publish an update on negotiations so far.

The summit seeks to agree a new goal on issues including climate finance. The talks, which began on November 11, are due to end on Friday at 1400 GMT but COP summits have a history of running long.

Officials spent the first week trying to agree deals across a range of different issues including finance, carbon markets, the future of fossil fuels, and efforts to mitigate the rise in global temperatures.

The outstanding items have now been handed over to ministers so they can use their political clout to try to get agreements across the line.

The next steps are about trying to whittle down draft texts containing a huge range of wording options into a final document that can be adopted by consensus at the end of the summit.

Draft texts will be published periodically by the Azerbaijani presidency as they zero in on an acceptable deal.

The primary aim of COP29 is to agree a new target for how much money should be provided to developing countries to help them adapt to climate-fuelled weather disasters and transition to cleaner energy systems.

A previous goal to provide \$100 billion per year expires in 2025. The new goal needs to be \$1 trillion annually by the end of the decade, according to experts.

The focus in the negotiating rooms has been on defining the structure of a new target, including what counts as climate finance and who needs to pay in. Only once that is agreed are parties expected to start talking about the size of the target.

Among issues to iron out include whether China should be counted among the richer core donors and the degree to which countries should provide finance in the form of grants or loans.

Talks in Baku began with an early deal on some of the quality standards that would govern a global market for carbon credits, but there is still much to be agreed on, including how to track trades and disclosure rules.



If fully agreed, market watchers expect a U.N.-backed global market could fund billions of dollars of projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions from projects such as reforestation.

Scrutiny of the details is intense amid concern that without watertight regulation carbon credits may not deliver the benefits they claim.

COPs rarely finish on time. COP28 in Dubai closed almost a full day after the initial deadline; COP27 in Egypt overran by around 36 hours.

In the final hours, delegations consult intensively in private with the presidency on the proposed deal, often through the night, in search of something that can be adopted by consensus.

Once finalised, every country is called to the main hall to begin an hours-long process of formal approval.

### EXPLAINED: NEW STUDY ON APHANTASIA, WHEN SOME PEOPLE CANNOT 'SEE' IN THEIR MIND

When one hears, one's mind sees. Imagine being on a train, with an infant a few rows ahead. Even if one does not see the child, her wail will trigger a visualisation of a child crying. What exactly that visualisation is, will be influenced by past experiences, but most people will visualise something.

Those who do not, have a condition known as aphantasia. This is not a disability, just a condition which entails having very limited or no visual imagination.

A study by University of Glasgow cognitive scientist Roberto S Luciani and others, delved deeper into the connection between humans' auditory and visual senses.

While in a brain scanner, blindfolded people were made to listen to three different sound scenes: a forest full of birds, a crowd of people, and a street bustling with traffic. In people without aphantasia, these auditory scenes created reliable neural hallmarks in parts of the brain's visual cortex. But in people with aphantasia, these hallmarks were weaker.

The study found that the ability to visualise in the mind occurs in a spectrum. The authors say that their research proves that different parts of the human brain are more interconnected than what is commonly believed.

**The study was published in Current Biology on November 4.**

More research is needed on the subject. While the existence of aphantasia was first noted by British polymath Francis Galton in the 1880s, the term itself was coined in 2015 by neurologist Adam Zeman.

For a condition that might affect roughly 2% of the population, very little is known about exactly why aphantasia occurs. And only now are scientists understanding how it works.

Luciani, who himself has this condition, believes that understanding aphantasia might give us a glimpse of the "invisible differences between people that make [their] lived experiences unique, without [them] realising".

"I find it fascinating that there may be other differences lurking in the shadow of us assuming other people experience the world like us," he told Science News.





## OPTICAL BIOSENSOR RAPIDLY DETECTS MONKEYPOX VIRUS

A new variant of human mpox has claimed the lives of approximately 5% of people with reported infections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 2023, many of them children. Since then, it has spread to other countries. In addition, a different but rarely fatal mpox variant was responsible for an outbreak that has spread to more than 100 countries since 2022. There is an urgent need for faster and more cost-effective diagnostic tools to curb the spread of mpox and to prepare for the possibility of a future global pandemic.

Researchers from University of California San Diego School of Medicine, and Boston University have now developed an optical biosensor that can rapidly detect monkeypox, the virus that causes mpox. The technology could allow clinicians to diagnose the disease at the point of care rather than wait for lab results. The study was published on November 14, 2024, in *Biosensors and Bioelectronics*.

In the clinic, mpox symptoms such as fever, pain, rashes, and lesions resemble those of many other viral infections. So it is not easy for clinicians to distinguish monkeypox from these other diseases by just looking at the patient.

A PCR test is expensive, requires a laboratory, and can take days or weeks to get results. The Boston University lab has developed optical biosensors for detecting the viruses that cause Ebola hemorrhagic fever and COVID-19, among others.

The researchers used samples collected from the lesions of a patient with laboratory-confirmed mpox. They incubated the samples with monoclonal monkeypox antibodies that bind to proteins on the surface of the virus. The virus-antibody complex was then transferred into tiny chambers on the surface of silicon chips on the sensor that were treated to fix these nanoparticles.

Shining precise wavelengths of red and blue light simultaneously on the chips caused interference, which resulted in slightly different responses when the virus-antibody nanoparticles were present. A colour camera was used to detect this small signal and count individual particles with high sensitivity. The biosensor assay easily discriminated mpox samples from these other viruses within two minutes.

## EYE DONATION AND CORNEAL TRANSPLANT

The International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) marks every second Thursday of October, which falls on October 14 this year, as World Sight Day. The aim is to increase awareness and support efforts to ensure everyone across the world can benefit from the vision. This includes offering eyeglasses to those who need them, treating the damaged parts of the eye, say, by replacing an opacified lens in the eye (a cataract) or offering corneal transplants to restore vision. Corneal blindness is a major cause of blindness in India. A corneal transplant involves restoring vision to an individual with a damaged cornea by using healthy tissue from a donor. However, many factors impact the long-term success of such grafts: the quality of the donor tissue, the kind of corneal condition, and crucially, long-term follow-up care.

The cornea is a thin, clear, dome-shaped tissue layer of the eye that covers the pupil and iris. Corneal tissue is specialised to remain transparent, so that it bends the light inwards towards the retina in the back, which has photo-receptor cells that help us see. If the cornea is damaged due to



any reason, it loses this ability to refract and let in light, and a person loses vision. The only means of restoring vision is through corneal transplant.

An Austrian ophthalmologist, Dr E K Zim, did the first human corneal transplant from a donor eye in 1905. In India, the first transplant was performed by Dr. Muthiah in 1948 from his eye bank in Chennai, and Dr R P Dhonda of Indore managed to make the first successful corneal transplant in 1960. Since then, the sophistication and success rates of corneal transplants have grown in leaps and bounds. The clear corneal tissue itself can be divided into six layers, and today's surgeons can transplant just a specific lamellar sub-layer instead of the whole cornea. These surgeries allow for faster recovery and reduce the chances of immune rejection after a transplant.

All these features make corneal transplants an easy choice. However, over a million people in India are estimated to be impaired due to corneal blindness. It is the main cause of blindness in people less than 50 years of age, according to the National Programme for the Control of Blindness and Visual Impairment. For years now, India has had an informal target of achieving an annual rate of 1,00,000 corneal transplants. We are far short of this rate. Tissues like the cornea can only be donated after the death of a person. Of the millions of deaths recorded in India, a small percentage are eligible for corneal donation. However, we do not currently receive corneas from all eligible donors, especially because of procedural delays and consent laws.

To address this, the government is considering a modification to the Transplantation of Human Organs Act, 1994 allowing 'presumed consent'. This means all eligible donors are presumed to have given their consent. However, presumed consent must not be draconian, it needs to also include formal permission from the family to ensure social acceptance — a 'soft' opt-in.

A gracious donation, a diligent recipient who follows up with care, and a system that enables them both is the need of the hour. It is important then that the government's slogan: 'Netra Daan' is in synchrony with the motto of ophthalmologists: 'Pashyanttu Sarve Janah,' bolstered with consent from the family: 'Sammati Parivarasya.'

#### DURING AMR WEEK, LESSONS IN VACCINATION

Immunisation has been one of the biggest success stories in public health globally, second only to sanitation and water safety. Vaccination has led to the eradication of small pox and polio in India, which are no longer the scourges they used to be. However, our vaccination initiatives in the country still leave many opportunities underutilised, leading to an actual cost to be paid in the future. While India's success in recovering its childhood vaccination rates post pandemic is laudable, unfortunately, we do not have accurate data on the scenario with some vaccines — for instance, the vaccine against pneumococcal pneumonia (pneumococcal conjugate vaccine- PCV) and the Haemophilus influenzae vaccine (Hib). These two vaccines are fairly recent additions to the government's immunisation programme, and were designed for rapid upscale when COVID-19 hit. Data on these burden from these two pathogens is not currently available, but the last estimate from 2015 had placed it at 1.84 million cases and 84,000 deaths. The significance of this lies in the fact that these two pathogens — Streptococcus pneumoniae and Haemophilus influenzae — are a leading cause of upper and lower respiratory infections in all decades of life, and are an important concern for children under five. They are amongst the commonest causes of ear infections (otitis media), lung infections (pneumonia) and brain infections (meningitis). The introduction of the PCV as a childhood vaccine has been achieved in most developed countries across the globe, as well as in 60 of the 73 Gavi vaccine alliance eligible countries. This has resulted in a steep fall in pneumonia cases in children, as well as deaths.

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### A larger problem

Whilst the direct, short-term effects are often reported, what is generally not recognised is that non-vaccination fuels a larger problem that is of global concern.

Studies indicate that unvaccinated or under-vaccinated children are vulnerable to preventable illnesses and have to seek medical care, as well as, crucially, often the unnecessary abuse of antibiotics, fuelling the epidemic of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). AMR week is recognised from November 18–24.

### 'One Health' approach

South and Southeast Asia account for 6.5% of global antibiotic usage, including 54.9% of the World Health Organization Watch classified antibiotics. This has set off alarm bells, and compounded by the problem of extensively drug-resistant infections set against a practically dry drug development pipeline, is a nightmare in the making. Many interventions are being designed to address this as part of the 'One Health' approach, but the value of vaccination in reducing antibiotic use has not been given enough attention.

A recent paper in The Lancet Regional Health South Asia by Chirag Kumar and his colleagues has assessed the possible benefits of increasing coverage of both these vaccines. Their assessment was of increasing vaccine coverage across India, and the anticipated benefits in terms of reduction of infection rates from the two pathogens mentioned above, and the potential reduction in antibiotic use fuelled by these illnesses.

Firstly, there is an expectation of a significant reduction in the disease burden, and the benefit, the paper found, would be striking in vulnerable States including Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and West Bengal. There is also an anticipated fall in the disease burden and mortality in all groups, irrespective of economic background. If the population were subdivided by wealth, the benefit would be greatest — including in mortality reduction — in those most economically disadvantaged. In addition, the estimate is of a reduction of 67,000 deaths a year.

Secondly, on the issue of antibiotic abuse, the model strongly indicates a meaningful reduction in antibiotic consumption in children, and this fall would be most pronounced in the economically advantaged group due to cost reasons. However, this reduction in usage could lead to more equitable usage of antibiotics, and reduction in the burden amongst those most economically disadvantaged.

## HOW BRISK WALK OR CLIMBING STAIRS FOR 5 MINUTES CAN LOWER YOUR BLOOD PRESSURE

Even five minutes of a brisk walk, stair-climbing or jogging — in short, a moderate or vigorous physical activity — could help lower blood pressure, a new study finds. Many ask me what qualifies as a vigorous activity. Simply put, it is one during which you cannot talk.

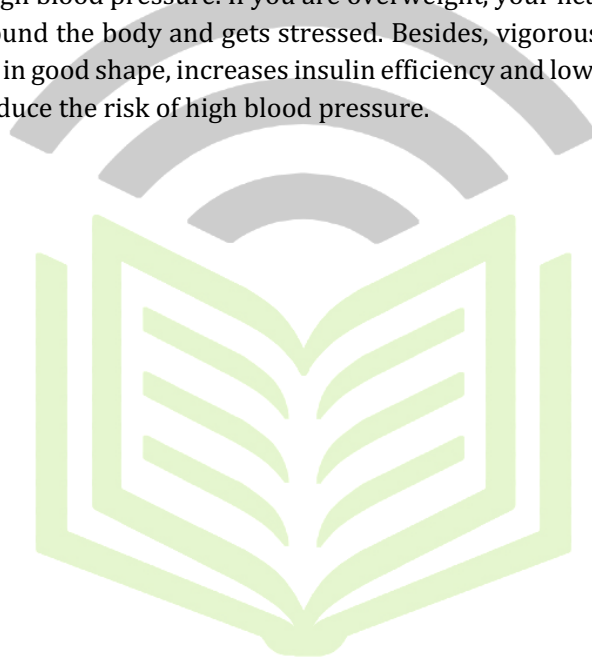
Findings from the international ProPASS (Prospective Physical Activity, Sitting, and Sleep) Consortium, led by the University of Sydney and University College London (UCL) Consortium and conducted on 15,000 people, reveal that adding even small amounts of physical activity, such as uphill walking or stair-climbing, to your daily routine could help you build exercise tempo and lower blood pressure.



### What's the link between exercise and blood pressure?

Vigorous exercise strengthens your heart, helping to pump oxygenated blood more efficiently and easily. This reduces the force on your arteries and your heart doesn't have to pump so hard. In other words, your blood pressure goes down. Blood vessels remain relatively dilated after exercise, which lowers blood pressure. There is a spike at the moment of vigorous activity, when your body functions accelerate. Then as you wind down after a short burst of intense activity, the parasympathetic nervous system gets activated, decreases respiration and heart rate. The BP level goes down and can be sustained through the day. So if you repeat your exercise cycle five days a week, the body can keep low blood pressure levels.

Besides, vigorous exercise can burn calories and keep obesity and high cholesterol at bay, which are risk factors for high blood pressure. If you are overweight, your heart has to pump extra hard to get blood flow around the body and gets stressed. Besides, vigorous exercise keeps the lining of your blood vessels in good shape, increases insulin efficiency and lowers levels of inflammation, which collectively reduce the risk of high blood pressure.



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