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Weekly Bulletin

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Inside India

India

Election Procedures and the Representation of the People Act in India

- The Representation of the People Act, 1951, deals with the procedure in uncontested elections.
- If the number of candidates is less than the number of seats to be filled, the returning officer (RO) must declare all such candidates to be elected.
- The RO's actions are governed by Section 33 of the Act, which pertains to the presentation of nomination papers and requirements for a valid nomination.
- Three proposers of the Congress' candidate for Surat, Nilesh Kumbhani, claimed they had not signed his nomination form and did not turn up before the district election officer (DEO) on April 21 to support the candidate's nomination form.
- The Election Commission (EC) issued the Handbook for Returning Officers (Edition 2) in August 2023, which states that if in any constituency, there is only one contesting candidate, that candidate should be declared to have been duly elected immediately after the last hour for withdrawal of candidature.
- The NOTA option has been in force since 2013, and has been available on electronic voting machines (EVMs) since November 2013.
- The EC's stand has been that the person getting the largest number of votes in any constituency will still be declared the winner, regardless of the number of NOTA votes.
- In Maharashtra, the Maharashtra State

Election Commission said that NOTA would be regarded as a fictional electoral candidate for the polls to urban local bodies.

- The Supreme Court has asked the poll panel to respond to a plea seeking fresh elections to constituencies where NOTA votes were in a majority. The petitioner-author Shiv Khera prayed that the court should direct the EC to frame rules, stating that candidates who polled fewer votes than NOTA should stand debarred from contesting elections for five years.

Nagaland to hold civic polls with women quota after 20 years

- Nagaland Cabinet approves elections for urban local bodies (ULBs) with 33% women-reserved seats.
- The first municipal elections in the State with a women-quota are scheduled for June 26, 2023.
- The State Election Commission approved the election schedule, specifying the number of wards reserved for women on rotation.
- Nominations can be filed from June 7 to 11, with the last date of withdrawal of candidature being June 20.
- Votes will be counted and declared on June 29 after the polls and re-polls.
- The Nagaland Municipal and Town Council Act was passed in 2001 without the provision of 33% seats for women, as required under Article 243T of the Constitution.

Central attempts to soothe Maharashtra onion farmers

- The Centre permits exports of 2,000 tonnes of white onions from Gujarat, amidst an extended onion shipments ban.
- This move has sparked criticism from opposition leaders and Maharashtra's onion farmers.

- The Consumer Affairs Ministry states that 99,150 tonnes of exports have been allowed.
- The move was welcomed by BJP leaders, including Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who hoped it would aid the State's farmers.
- Horticulture exporters and farmers' bodies in the State dismiss the statement as a repackaging of export quotas for six countries.
- The ban on onion exports has been in place since December and was extended indefinitely last month.
- White onion exports have been permitted without NCEL's involvement and without specifying a destination country.

Ethnic Conflict in Manipur Continues

- One person killed and three injured in gunfights along the Kangpokpi and Imphal West districts in Manipur.
- The conflict between valley-based Meitei and hills-based Kuki-Zo communities continues.
- The clash follows an attack on a CRPF camp in Narainsena of Bishnupur district, which killed two CRPF personnel and injured two.
- Manipur Security Adviser Kuldip Singh pledges to punish those responsible.
- The latest clash began around 2.30 a.m. on Sunday, with gunfire reported from Koutruk village in Imphal West district.
- Security operations were launched and both groups of armed miscreants were dispersed.
- The Committee on Tribal Unity in Kangpokpi called for a shutdown across the district until 5 a.m. on Monday

NHRC accreditation status faces review test this week

- The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is preparing to defend India's human rights processes at a meeting in Geneva.
- The decision on whether NHRC will retain its "A status" is expected to be made.
- The ratings were put on hold in 2023 due to concerns over its composition procedure, police presence in human rights investigations, and lack of gender and minority representation.
- The decision will affect NHRC's ability to vote at the UN Human Rights Council and some UNGA bodies.
- The meeting of the Sub-Committee on Accreditation (SCA) of the UN-recognised Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) worldwide is scheduled for May.
- The NHRC Chairperson, retired Supreme Court judge Justice Arun Kumar Mishra, is expected to attend the review meeting online.

The Hindi Heartland's Influence on Government Formation

- The heartland, comprising Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, U.P., and Uttarakhand, is a key electoral region in India.
- The BJP and Opposition are in direct competition for the next government in these states.
- The BJP's campaign began with a high target of 400 seats, a target set by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The Opposition's campaign was boosted by the Supreme Court-dictated disclosure of electoral bond data and the arrest of Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal.
- The BJP counters this with a focus on nationalism and Hindu consolidation, labeling the Opposition as 'anti-Santana dharma' and

targeting the Congress.

- Fear among Hindu subaltern segments about the '400-plus' slogan has put the BJP on the defensive.
- The BJP campaign aims to explain that there is no threat to caste reservations and accuses the Congress of planning reservations for Muslims.
- The BJP's success is largely determined by religious mobilisation that overwhelms caste.
- The Congress's promise of policies advancing economic and social justice is central to the campaign.

The Poultry Industry in India: Urgent Reforms

- The Indian poultry industry is facing a biosecurity crisis due to the H5N1 outbreak.
- The virus has spread across 15 states in India, causing mortality among polar bears in the Arctic and seals and seagulls in Antarctica.
- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has classified poultry units with over 5,000 birds as a polluting industry, requiring compliance and regulatory consent.
- Poultry farmers often struggle to exit the industry due to contract farming, large debts, and specialized skills.
- The industry practices, such as the use of antibiotics, are causing a surge in antibiotic use in livestock.
- The faecal matter generated at these facilities is collected for fertilizer, leading to piled-up manure that becomes a pollutant.
- The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PCA) Act, 1960 prohibits keeping animals in intensive confinement and causing unnecessary pain and suffering to animals.
- The 269th Law Commission of India Report in 2017 recommended more open, cleaner, and

ventilated living spaces to reduce antibiotic resistance in poultry.

- The draft rules for the welfare of chickens in the meat and egg industries are weak and tokenistic, requiring strict oversight for compliance and enforcement of environmental regulations.
- The situation is crucial due to the bird flu public health crisis and the climate emergency.

Coca-Cola bottler SLAM establishes ₹700-cr. Plant

- SLAM Beverages Private Ltd., South Asia's largest independent bottler, commissions its largest bottling plant in Trishundi, Amethi, U.P.
- The plant will start production in May to meet summer product demand.
- The plant has a manufacturing capacity of 4,600 bottles per minute.
- SLAM plans to invest ₹200 crore in capacity expansion.

Dalit Groups Demand Appeal Against Acquittals in Kumher Massacre

- Dalit groups in Rajasthan demand an appeal against a seven-month-old judgment of Bharatpur's special court acquitting 41 persons in the Kumher massacre of 1992.
- The acquittal was due to lack of evidence and conviction of nine accused, with a life sentence handed down 31 years after the incident.
- The Jat community attacked a locality inhabited by Dalits in Bharatpur district's Kumhertown on June 6, 1992, resulting in the worst-ever anti-Dalit carnage.
- The case was initially investigated by the Rajasthan Police and handed over to the CBI.

- The CBI recorded the statements of 283 witnesses and filed charge sheet against 83 accused persons.

- The Centre for Dalit Rights (CDR) and other Dalit groups have submitted memorandums to the CBI Director, Union Minister of State for Law and Justice Arjun The Hindu Bureau, Jaipur Ram Meghwal, and the State government's Principal Secretary (Home) and Principal Secretary (Social Justice and Empowerment).

Kejriwal's Incarceration and Election Campaign

- Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's incarceration during a general election highlights political realities determining corruption charges.

- The relationship between the ruling party and those facing charges dictates the course of action for independent agencies.

- The number of leaders whose offences are forgotten as they join the ruling party or become an ally is increasing.

- Kejriwal's case is vitiated by politics, leading to his arrest and prosecution for allegedly taking kickbacks to formulate a liquor policy favoring the industry.

- Kejriwal, leading the Aam Aadmi Party, has been denied participation in the general election campaign.

- The Delhi excise policy case was registered in August 2022, with the CBI and Enforcement Directorate filing charge sheets.

- Witnesses have been giving multiple statements, each containing newer material.

- The arrest of political leaders is based on statements made by approvers, not independent witnesses.

- The timing of the arrest has become an issue of substance, with Kejriwal's non-response to multiple ED summonses cited as a reason.

- The question arises whether arresting serving

Chief Ministers through central agencies and keeping them in prison throughout a multi-phase election does not amount to subversion of federalism and democracy.

Women block Army contingent moving weapons in Manipur

- Around 100 women blocked an Army contingent carrying weapons seized from an armed group in Manipur's Bishnupur district.

- The women demanded the return of the seized weapons, which were seized during patrolling.

- The Army opened fire to disperse the women, who claimed the weapons belonged to village volunteers.

- Additional forces were rushed in to control the situation.

Indian Navy Chief Takes Charge

- Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi becomes the 26th Chief of the Naval Staff.

- Tripathi succeeds Admiral R. Hari Kumar, who retired after 40 years.

- Tripathi emphasizes the need for operational readiness to deter maritime challenges and win wars.

Liquid Nitrogen in Food in Tamil Nadu: A Controversy

- A viral video of a child consuming a food item infused with liquid nitrogen went viral, leading to the Tamil Nadu government banning its use in food.

- The substance was used to improve food quality and shelf life by introducing droplets of liquid nitrogen in the packaging.

- Liquid nitrogen has traditionally been used in the management of benign pre-cancers and

cancers since the 1960s.

- The Tamil Nadu Food Safety Department issued a circular on the use of liquid nitrogen, stating it can only be used to preserve packaged food.

- The department warned of stringent action, including fines and legal proceedings, if liquid nitrogen is used for other purposes.

Understanding Opinions Shaping in Elections

- Voters' personal experiences and opinions are often influenced by the spread of disinformation during elections.

- The internet and mobile phone have led to a surge in disinformation, making it difficult to separate personal experiences from propaganda.

- The 2017 Uttar Pradesh elections saw complaints from upper castes and non-Yadav backward communities against the incumbent government.

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's comments about creating graveyards and uninterrupted electricity during Ramzan and Diwali were interpreted as propaganda.

- In Churu, Rajasthan, fear of reservation being scrapped was fueled by BJP candidate Jyoti Mirdha's election speech, which did not mention any scrapping of reservation.

- In Chhattisgarh, voters had been hearing about reservation for the last three or four months, with Modi's remarks countering Congress's demand for a caste census.

- The voters believed that ignoring caste reality would lead to reservation.

India's Palm-Oil Imports Reach 3-Month High

- India's palm-oil imports surged by 41% in April, reaching the highest level in three months.

- The increase could support Malaysian palm oil futures trading near their lowest level in three months.

- The price correction has made palm oil more attractive to buyers.

- Crude palm-oil imports are offered at about \$920 a metric tonne for June delivery, while soyoil and sunflower oil are offered at about \$920 and \$945 a tonne, respectively.

Union Government Trains State Police Forces on New Criminal Laws

- The Union government has implemented an intensive training strategy for police and prison department personnel on new criminal laws.

- The new laws replace the existing Indian Penal Code, 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973, and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872.

- The new laws aim to provide speedy justice and strengthen the judicial and court management system.

- The new criminal law is synchronized with modern-day times and contemporary technologies, aiming for an era of ease of policing and justice.

- The Bureau of Police Research & Development developed a training module for different levels of police/prison personnel on the new criminal laws.

- Integration with the 'Integrated Government

Online Training' portal has been completed for course availability.

Karnataka Police Book Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna on Rape Charges

- Prajwal Revanna, a former MP, was booked on rape charges by the Karnataka Police.
- A lookout circular was issued against him after he failed to appear before the Special Investigation Team (SIT) investigating his alleged sexual crimes.
- His father, H.D. Revanna, also skipped the SIT summons and sought anticipatory bail.
- The charges against Revanna were filed after a second woman claimed she was "coerced to have sexual relationship" with him.
- The charges were invoked under Section 376 of the Indian Penal Code, which deals with rape.
- Karnataka Home Minister G. Parameashwara appealed to other victims, especially those featured in explicit videos, to come forward and make statements before the SIT.
- The lookout circular has been issued for all immigration points, indicating Prajwal's detention at any immigration point.

Recent Judgements / court cases

Supreme Court Issues Notice to Union Government on Non-believer Muslim Petition

- The Supreme Court of India issued formal notices to the Union government regarding a petition filed by a non-believer Muslim woman in

Kerala.

- The woman, P.M. Safiya, argues that she should be governed by secular statutes rather than Sharia law.
- The court emphasized the fundamental postulate of secularism, which treats all religions equally and allows individuals the fullest liberty to believe or not to believe.
- Advocate Prashant Padmanabhan argued that leaving her faith should not disqualify her from inheritance or other civil rights.
- The petition argued that a declaration that she will not be governed by Muslim Personal Law would leave her with no recourse to succeed to her parental property.

Sounding the gavel on curative jurisdiction

- The Supreme Court of India, the highest court of appeal, federal court, advisory jurisdiction, and the Court itself, has the power to appoint and transfer judges of the High Courts and the Court itself.
- In 2002, the Court took on a new power called the "Curative Jurisdiction", which is a power to correct its judgments after they have become final.
- The Court has a constitutional role to declare the law and its judgments must reflect and sometimes trigger changes in law.
- Curative Jurisdiction is different from the power of review under Indian law, which enables all courts to rectify errors which are apparent from their records.
- The article argues that the Supreme Court does more harm than good in the exercise of this jurisdiction, as demonstrated through a judgment rendered on April 10, 2024.

- The judgment was a curative petition in Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Ltd. ("DMRC") vs. Delhi Airport Metro Express Pvt Ltd ("DAMEPL"), which rekindled the question of the Supreme Court's exercise of this jurisdiction.
- The Court's interference was based on two grounds: that the interpretation of the termination clause was perverse and that the CMRS sanction was vital evidence which had been ignored.
- The Court's interference was significant as it supported a position of minimal interference in arbitral awards and held that its own verdict in 2019 was wrong.
- The Court's exercise of Curative Jurisdiction, while meriting in correcting one's mistakes, is not good for an institution that declares the law for the nation and posterity, and not for one-off cases.
- The exercise of revisiting one's own decisions is good in an individual, but is not good for an institution that declares the law.

The EVM-VVPAT Case Judgment: A Detrimental Perspective

- K. Ashok Vardhan Shetty, a former IAS officer and Vice-Chancellor of the Indian Maritime University, Chennai, argues for a statistically sound VVPAT-based system of EVM audit in India.
 - The system should detect instances of mismatch with 99% or 99.9% accuracy, and should be done at the beginning of counting day.
 - Shetty cites the U.S. House of Representatives' bill in 1897 to establish the 'true value' of pi (π) as 3.20, which was stalled by

Indiana's Senate due to the efforts of a mathematician named C.A. Waldo.

- Shetty argues that truths cannot be established by fiat of the executive, parliament, or the judiciary.
 - The Supreme Court of India cannot arbitrarily mandate a uniform sample size of "5 EVMs per Assembly Constituency" for Voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT)-based audit of electronic voting machines (EVMs).
 - The Supreme Court did not specify the 'population' of EVMs to which its sample size relates and the 'next steps' in the event of a 'defective EVM' turning up in a sample.
 - The Election Commission of India (ECI) has left these details vague, implying that manual counting of VVPAT slips should be done for all the remaining EVMs of that particular 'population' and its results declared based on VVPAT count only.
 - The ECI and the Supreme Court cannot proclaim "all is well" with the current egregiously wrong sample size and opaque audit protocol.
 - The court's judgment in the Association for Democratic Reforms vs Election Commission of India and Another (2024) is disappointing because it did not compel the ECI to make public how it has defined the 'population' to which its sample size relates and its 'next steps' in the event of a mismatch.
 - The court rejected the demands of the ADR for a return to paper ballots or 100% verification of VVPAT slips.
 - Shetty suggests implementing a statistically sound VVPAT-based system of EVM audit that can detect instances of mismatch with 99% or 99.9% accuracy.

Supreme Court's Rejection of 100% Verification of Paper Trail in Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)

- The Supreme Court of India rejected the demand for 100% verification of the paper trail left by votes cast through EVMs.
- The court reiterated the faith the judiciary has reposed in the integrity of the electoral process, especially after the introduction of the voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT).
- The court rejected the idea of reverting to paper ballots, stating it would be regressive and negate the gains from eliminating vulnerabilities associated with paper ballots.
- The court has previously refused to interfere with the existing system, refusing to order 50% or 100% verification of the paper trail in one case and 50% or 100% verification in another.
- The court directed the symbol loading units to be secured and kept in safe custody for 45 days after declaration of results.
- The court also suggested that VVPAT slips may be counted through machines and symbols loaded in the VVPAT units may be barcoded for easy counting in the future.
- The apprehensions and suspicions of possible manipulation indicate a level of mistrust in the Election Commission of India.

Supreme Court Ruling on Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs)

- The Supreme Court ruled that a return to paper ballots would reintroduce booth-capturing, a

criminal offence under Section 135A of the Representation of the People Act of 1951.

- EVMs reduce paper usage and allow for more than four votes per minute, eliminating booth capturing.
- EVMs also provide administrative convenience by expediting the counting process and minimizing errors.
- Election officials have complete control over the polling process, with the total number of votes displayed without indicating the candidate-wise result of votes.
- The micro-controllers of EVMs are programmed at the manufacturing stage, making it impossible to pre-programme them spuriously.

Supreme Court Upholds Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in India

- The Supreme Court upheld the electronic voting machine (EVM) system of polling.
- The court refused a plea to revive paper ballots, citing the system's weaknesses and the large Indian electorate.
- The court argued that "blind distrust" breeds unwarranted skepticism and impedes progress.
- The court acknowledged the right of voters to question the working of EVMs, but cautioned against raising doubts on the electoral process's integrity.
- The court declined the petitioners' suggestion for paper slips from Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) units to be handed over to electors.

Supreme Court Requests EC Response on NOTA Petition

- Supreme Court requests EC response on petition for fresh election in constituencies where NOTA (no of the above) wins majority votes.
- Petition seeks rules stating candidates polling fewer votes than NOTA should be barred from contesting elections for five years.
- NOTA was introduced in November 2013 and treated as a "fictional electoral candidate" in several states since 2018.
- Petition calls for uniform application of rules from these states across the country.

Supreme Court Highlights POCSO Act's Objective

- The Supreme Court emphasized the importance of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.
- The court questioned the validity of the Act due to child marriages and abusers marrying minor victims to avoid conviction.
- The case involved a 14-year-old girl in West Bengal who was kidnapped and raped by a 20-year-old man.
- The Calcutta High Court acquitted the man, stating they were romantically linked.
- The court took suo motu cognisance of the case, stating judges are not there to preach.
- The court directed the West Bengal government to provide her with institutional protection and counseling.
- The State was also asked to consider expert guidance from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

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International Events & Relation

US- China

Chinese President Xi Jinping's Address to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken

- Chinese President Xi Jinping met US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Beijing, urging the two nations to be partners rather than rivals.
- He emphasized the importance of non-alliance and urged the US not to create small blocs.
- Xi expressed China's happiness at the prospect of a prosperous and thriving U.S. and hoped the U.S. would also view China's development positively.
- He emphasized that cooperation should be a two-way street and competition should focus on progress together, not zero-sum games.

In order to implement the San Francisco vision that Xi and President Biden came up with to improve, stabilize, and advance bilateral relations, Xi emphasized the need for ongoing active cooperation.

International - Asia, Oceania & Middle East

India and Oman to Sign Trade Deal

- India and Oman are set to sign a trade deal in the coming months to expand ties in West Asia.

- The deal will provide India with a strategic partner and access to key trade routes in a volatile region.

- The relationship is significant as it is a gateway to the Strait of Hormuz between Oman and Iran, a major transit point for global oil shipments.

- The trade deal requires approval from the government that wins India's ongoing national elections, which are set to be announced on June 4.

- India has also moved to seeking bilateral deals with GCC member nations such as Oman and United Arab Emirates.

- Oman has agreed to eliminate duties on Indian exports worth an annual \$3 billion.

India Protests Chinese Road Construction in Shaksgam Valley

- India registers to protest against China's "illegal attempts" to alter facts in Shaksgam valley, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.
- Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, defended the Shaksgam valley's territorial integrity and rejection of the "China Pakistan Boundary Agreement" of 1963.

Sri Lanka Leases Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport

- Sri Lanka leases Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, a white elephant built with Chinese loans, to a foreign joint venture.
- The airport, near a wildlife sanctuary, opened in 2013 but has been plagued by problems.
- The 30-year lease was awarded to a joint venture between India's Shaurya Aeronautics

and Russia's Airports of Regions Management Company.

- Only four other companies have shown interest in managing the airport.

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- He emphasized that cooperation should be a two-way street and competition should focus on progress together, not zero-sum games.
- Xi emphasized the need for continued active cooperation to follow through on the San Francisco vision reached by Xi and President Biden to stabilize, improve, and move forward bilateral relations.

India and China Taipei Request WTO Delay on ICT Levy Ruling

- India and China Taipei request WTO's dispute settlement body to delay ruling on New Delhi's import duties on certain ICT products until July 26, 2024.
- The request was made during a meeting of the DSB in Geneva on April 26.
- The DSB agreed to the demand, following three previous requests from India and China Taipei.
- The panel's ruling must be adopted by DSB

within 60 days of the order's release, but countries can request a delay.

- The dispute panel on April 17, 2023, criticized India's import duties as violating global trading norms.

India to Sign Trade Deal with Oman to Expand West Asia Ties

- India and Oman are set to sign a trade deal to expand West Asia ties.
- The deal will provide India with a strategic partner and access to key trade routes in a volatile region.
- The relationship is important for India as it is a gateway to the Strait of Hormuz between Oman and Iran, a major transit point for global oil shipments.
- The trade deal requires approval from the government that wins India's ongoing national elections, whose results are expected to be announced on June 4.
- India has also moved to seeking bilateral deals with GCC member nations such as Oman and United Arab Emirates.
- Oman has agreed to eliminate duties on Indian exports worth an annual \$3 billion.

Union Government Allows 1 lakh tonnes of Onion Export to 6 Countries

- The Union government has allowed an additional 99,150 tonnes of onion to six countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, UAE, Bahrain, and Mauritius.
- The move follows a ban on onion exports since last year, imposed to ensure domestic availability due to lower kharif and rabi harvest in 2023-24.

- The National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL) is the nodal agency for exporting all prohibited agri produce, including onion, sugar, and rice.
- The total quantity permitted so far in 2024-25 exceeds 1.30 lakh tonnes.

Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad and Narcotics Control Bureau Arrest Pakistani Boat with Narcotics

- Gujarat Anti-Terrorist Squad and Narcotics Control Bureau seized a Pakistani boat with 14 crew members and 86 kg of drugs valued at ₹602 crore off the Porbandar coast in Gujarat.
- All 14 Pakistan nationals were arrested.
- The consignment was intended to be delivered to unidentified handlers in Tamil Nadu, smuggled to Sri Lanka.
- The case has been handed over to NCB for further investigation.
- The ATS received intelligence that a Pakistani fishing trawler headed towards India was handing over a consignment of narcotics.
- The ATS, Indian Coast Guard, and NCB intercepted the suspected boat about 180 nautical miles off the Porbandar coast.

Dubai plans to build 'world's largest' airport

- Dubai plans to build a new terminal at Al Maktoum International Airport, aiming to become the world's largest.
- The project is estimated to cost nearly \$35 billion.
- Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, announced the construction of the terminal.
- The new terminal will handle a passenger capacity of 260 million annually.
- The terminal is five times the size of the

current Dubai International Airport, which can handle up to 120 million passengers annually.

India's Chinese Import Bill Increases 2.3 Times in 15 Years

- India's imports from China increased from \$70 billion in 2018-19 to \$101 billion in 2023-24.
- China's share of India's industrial goods imports rose from 21% to 30% over 15 years.
- Goods imports from China have risen 2.3 times faster than India's total imports over 15 years.
- China is the top supplier in eight major industrial sectors, contradicting the perception that Chinese imports are high only in electronics.
- A cumulative trade deficit exceeding \$387 billion over six years has been observed.
- India's exports to China increased in 90 principal commodities, including iron ore, telecom instruments, and electronic components.
- India's total merchandise imports stood at \$677.2 billion in 2023-24, with 15% or \$101.8 billion worth goods sourced from China.

Pantabangan Ruins Reemerge in Philippines

- Pantabangan, a 300-year-old settlement in Nueva Ecija province, Philippines, has reemerged due to severe drought.
- The ruins, including a church and tombstones, have been submerged since the 1970s.
- The water level in the reservoir has dropped nearly 50 meters, causing drought declarations in half of the Philippines.

Hamas to Respond to Israel's Gaza Truce Plan

- Hamas to deliver response to Israel's counterproposal for a Gaza ceasefire in Egypt.
- Hamas delegation, led by Khalil al-Hayya, to arrive in Egypt tomorrow.
- Egypt sent its own delegation to Israel to initiate negotiations.
- Israel's proposal includes discussions on "restoration of sustainable calm" in Gaza post-hostage release.
- Hamas open to discussing the new proposal positively.
- Aims for a permanent ceasefire, free return of displaced people, acceptable prisoner exchange deal, and end to Gaza siege.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas Calls on US to Stop Israel's Rafah Attack

- Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas argues that only the US can halt Israel's attack on Rafah, the border city of Gaza.
- Abbas calls on the US to prevent Israel from continuing the attack, stating that America is the only country capable of preventing such actions.
- Abbas warns that a "small strike" on Rafah could force the Palestinian population to flee the Gaza strip.
- Abbas rejects the displacement of Palestinians into Jordan and Egypt and expresses concern that Israel may attempt to force the Palestinian population out of the West Bank and into Jordan once Gaza operations are completed.

Indian Navy aids Panama tanker after Houthi attack

- Indian Navy guides a Panama-flagged crude oil tanker with 30 crew members, including 22 Indians, out of troubled waters after a missile attack from Houthi militants.
- The attack occurred on April 26, following the launch of three antiship ballistic missiles from Yemen into the Red Sea.
- The vessel reported minor damage and was intercepted by the Indian Navy ship.
- An aerial reconnaissance involving a helicopter was undertaken to assess the situation.
- An Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) team was deployed to carry out a "residual risk assessment."
- The swift action reiterates the Indian Navy's commitment to safeguarding seafarers passing through the region.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar appointed as Deputy Prime Minister

- Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, 73, has been appointed as the country's Deputy Prime Minister.
- Dar, a chartered accountant and veteran politician, is from Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party.
- The appointment was made by Prime Minister Sharif "with immediate effect and until further orders".
- Dar has served as Finance Minister in two previous governments.
- This is not the first time a Deputy Prime Minister has been appointed.
- Chaudhry Parvez Elahi served as Deputy Prime Minister during the Pakistan Peoples

Party's (PPP) tenure from 2012 to 2013.

- Elahi is currently president of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and is in jail due to corruption allegations.

Thailand King Appoints Former Energy Official Pichai as Finance Minister

- Former corporate energy executive and bourse chair Pichai Chunhavajira appointed as Finance Minister.
- Pichai, 75, previously served as Bangkok Corp board chair.

China's Chang'e-6 Mission to the Far Side of Moon

- China is set to launch Chang'e-6 using the backup spacecraft from the 2020 mission.
- The mission will collect soil and rocks from the moon's side that faces away from the earth.
- The mission is part of three technically demanding missions aimed at establishing a base on the lunar south pole.
- China has made significant strides in its lunar exploration program since 2007, narrowing the technological gap with the U.S.
- The mission will rely on a recently deployed relay satellite orbiting the moon, including a never-before-attempted ascent from the moon's "hidden" side.
- The same relay satellite will support the uncrewed Chang'e-7 and 8 missions in 2026 and 2028.
- China aims to put its astronauts on the moon by 2030.
- China will carry payloads from France, Italy, Sweden, and Pakistan on Chang'e-6 and Russia, Switzerland, and Thailand on Chang'e-7.

- The mission will attempt to land on the northeastern side of the South Pole-Aitken Basin, the oldest known impact crater in the solar system.

Global Uncertainties Impacting Exports in India

- FIEO, India's apex exporters' body, warns of potential global impact due to geopolitical tensions.
- The ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine has led to a 3.11% dip in India's outbound shipments in 2023-24, and a 8% drop in imports.
- FIEO Director General Ajay Sahai predicts a demand slowdown in the first quarter of 2024.
- Freight rates are softening, indicating potential future impact on demand.
- India's rupee depreciated only about 1.3% in 2023-24 compared to other currencies.
- FIEO DG suggests government steps for exporters, including longer payment periods and interest subvention support.
- The Union Cabinet approved an additional allocation of ₹2,500 crore for the continuation of the interest equalisation scheme up to June 30.

Paul Marriott's Perspective on Sustainability Initiatives in Asia-Pacific

- Paul Marriott, President of SAP Asia-Pacific and Japan, believes India can lead on climate change and drive sustainability and ESG initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The Asian market, which accounts for over 50% of global emissions, is a fast-growing hub of innovation and economic activity.
- Marriott encourages Indian firms to invest in sustainability and ESG activities.
- He predicts strong leadership, young talent,

and innovation capabilities will help India reach its \$30 trillion GDP goal by 2047.

- SAP, a German cloud software firm, is investing significantly in India to empower cutting-edge technology.
- A recent SAP study found a positive correlation between sustainability and profitability in Indian firms, urging greater sustainability investments.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk Visits China During Auto Show

- Tesla CEO Elon Musk met with Chinese Premier Li Qiang during the Beijing auto show.
- Qiang expressed hope for more "win-win" cooperation between the US and China, citing Tesla's operations in China as an example of economic cooperation.
- Musk's visit is seen as a welcome antidote to US tough talk and China's efforts to attract foreign investment.
- The auto show, which runs through this week, is not yet confirmed.
- Musk met with the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade's president, Ren Hongbin, to discuss further cooperation.

Indian Official in Pannun Case Identified

- Washington Post reports that R&AW official Vikram Yadav directed businessman Nikhil Gupta to hire a hitman to kill Khalistani activist Gurpatwant Singh Pannun.
- The plot was ordered by the previous chief of the Indian Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW) and had official sanction from senior intelligence officials with ties to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's inner circle.

• The report identified an R&AW officer whose name had been withheld in case papers made available by the Justice Department in New York in November 2023.

- The Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment on the report.
- U.S. intelligence officials have assessed that the operation targeting Pannun was approved by the RAW chief at the time, Samant Goel.
- The report also suggests that Modi's National Security Adviser, Ajit Doval, was likely aware of RAW's plans to kill Sikh activists.
- The MEA maintains that such killings are not Indian policy and has denied Canadian allegations of a similar hit on Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada.

Solomon Islands' PM Ends Pro-China Rule

- Manasseh Sogavare withdraws from new term.
- Withdrawal follows inconclusive April 17 elections.
- Party chooses Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele as parliamentary leader.

Solomon Islands MPs Choose China-Friendly PM

- Former Foreign Minister Jeremiah Manele elected as Prime Minister.
- Manele won 31 votes in secret ballot of 50 MPs.
- His election will impact China, U.S., and South Pacific.

Palestinian National Liberation

Movement and Hamas Hold Talks in Beijing

- Representatives of Fatah and Hamas held a dialogue in Beijing to promote Palestinian reconciliation.
- The dialogue was initiated by China, with discussions on various issues.
- Both sides expressed their political will for reconciliation and agreed to continue the dialogue.
- They expressed gratitude for China's support for restoring Palestinian national rights.
- They agreed on future dialogue ideas.

Chinese Coast Guard Fires Water Cannons at Philippine Vessels

- Chinese coast guard ships fire water cannons at Philippine patrol vessels near disputed Scarborough shoal.
- Causes minor damage to one vessel.
- No immediate reports of injuries

Sri Lanka Leases Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport

- Sri Lanka leases Mattala Rajapaksa International Airport, a white elephant built with Chinese loans, to a foreign joint venture.
- The airport, near a wildlife sanctuary, opened in 2013 but has been plagued by problems.
- The 30-year lease was awarded to a joint venture between India's Shaurya Aeronautics and Russia's Airports of Regions Management Company.
- Only four other companies have shown interest in managing the airport.

International - America

US Senate Passes \$95 Billion Aid Package to Ukraine, Israel, Taiwan

- The US Senate has passed a \$95 billion program to send aid to Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan with bipartisan support.
- The final vote tally was 79-18, with three Democrats and 15 Republicans voting against the bill.
- The aid package includes four separate bills, providing almost \$61 billion in aid for Ukraine, over \$26 billion for Israel, over \$8 billion for Taiwan and the Indo-Pacific region, and one bill related to Tik Tok.
- The legislation will move forward to President Joe Biden to sign into law, opening doors to help Ukraine resist Russian aggression, provide wartime assistance to Israel, humanitarian aid to Gaza, and counter China-linked territorial threats in the Indo-Pacific.
- The omnibus aid bills package is a key win for Biden, Democrats, and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, who has been working to send aid to Ukraine.
- The far-right House Freedom Caucus, who support former President Donald Trump's agenda, is particularly opposed to aid packages.
- The aid package is likely to be the last approved for Ukraine and other U.S. allies until after November, when the White House, House of Representatives, and one-third of the Senate head to the polls.

U.S.-China Relations: Stability and Conflict

- U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken's talks with China's top officials, including President Xi Jinping, highlight the desire to stabilize their relationship.
- Blinken emphasized the U.S.'s commitment to prevent competition between the world's two largest economies from escalating into conflict.
- China criticized the U.S. for supporting Russia's defense industry and criticized the U.S.'s policy towards Taiwan and the South China Sea.
- Both countries have deep misgivings, with the U.S. labeling China as a "revisionist power" and a pacing technological and military challenger.
- The U.S. has imposed export controls, high tariffs on Chinese goods, and increased support for Taiwan and the Philippines.
- Despite these challenges, there are areas of cooperation, including resuming bilateral military-to-military communication, addressing AI risks, controlling fentanyl production, and tackling climate change and global food security.
- The lesson from the Cold War is that if competition between superpowers becomes ugly, it could lead to proxy conflicts, economic wars, and diplomatic crises.

Columbia University Locks Down Campus Post Anti-War Protests

- Student protesters occupy Hamilton Hall, a building on Columbia University's main campus, escalating tensions.
- The building, last occupied in 1968, has been occupied multiple times by student activists.
- Protesters barricaded doors, blocked entrances with wooden tables and chairs, and

shut doors.

- The university closed the campus to all but students living in dormitories and employees providing essential services.
- Columbia suspended students who refused to leave a 'Gaza Solidarity Encampment' after negotiations failed.
- Columbia claims the protest violated university policies, created an "intolerable" environment for Jewish students, and contributed to a hostile environment around university gates.
- Student organizer Sueda Polat claims Columbia has not made significant concessions to the protesters' main demand: divestment from companies linked to the Israeli occupation of Gaza.

Pro-Palestinian Protests Arrested on US College Campuses

- Pro-Palestinian protesters were arrested on college campuses across the U.S. overnight, including at the University of California, Los Angeles.
- Police in riot gear made arrests after hundreds of protesters defied orders to leave, forming human chains and firing flash-bangs.
- Hundreds of protesters were arrested, their hands bound with zip ties.
- The action came after hours of threatening arrests over loudspeakers if people did not disperse.
- Tent encampments calling on universities to stop doing business with Israel or companies supporting the war in Gaza have spread nationwide.
- In Oregon, police are working to clear demonstrators out of a library at Portland State University.
- Protests at UCLA received the most attention, with Iranian state television, Qatar's Al Jazeera

satellite network, and Israeli television networks playing live images of the police action.

U.S. FDA Investigates Indian Spice Contamination

- U.S. FDA is investigating Indian spice makers MDH and Everest after Hong Kong suspended sales of certain products.
- The products were allegedly contaminated with a cancer-causing pesticide.
- Hong Kong suspended sales of three MDH spice blends and an Everest spice mix for fish curries.
- Singapore also ordered a recall of the Everest spice mix due to high levels of ethylene oxide.
- MDH and Everest have not commented on the matter.

International - Europe

Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf Faces No-confidence Votes

- Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf has stated he will not resign following the end of a power-sharing agreement with the Scottish Greens.
- The agreement, the Bute House agreement, was ended due to cracks in the agreement, following the SNP's decision to scrap climate targets.
- Opposition parties have tabled a motion of no-confidence against Yousaf, with the Scottish Tories and Scottish Labour also expressing their opposition.
- To stay in power, Yousaf needs the support of his 63 SNP colleagues and 65 other MSPs. If he fails to survive the vote, the SNP will have to find

a new leader within 28 days, leading to fresh elections in Scotland.

- Yousaf expressed hope to work with the Greens on an issue-by-issue basis.
- Alba Party spokesperson stated that those supporting independence for Scotland could rely on the Alba Party.
- No-confidence votes could be held as early as next week.

Scottish First Minister Humza Yousaf Resigns

- Humza Yousaf, the leader of the Scottish National Party (SNP), has announced his resignation following a power-sharing agreement with the Scottish Greens.
- The agreement was a result of political differences between the Greens and the SNP, with the SNP backtracking on climate-related commitments.
- Yousaf decided to end the relationship on April 25, as the Greens proposed an internal party vote on whether to stay in the power-sharing agreement.
- Unionist parties, including the Scottish Conservatives and Scottish Labour, attacked Yousaf and the SNP.
- Yousaf, a first-generation British and child of Pakistani immigrants, expressed his dissatisfaction with the current political landscape, citing multiculturalism in the UK.
- He emphasized the need for a fairer tax system and the need to resist populism at the expense of minorities

- Swinney to become First Minister of Scottish National Party (SNP) after Kate Forbes's decision.

UK Expects Deportation of 5,700 Migrants to Rwanda

- UK's senior minister predicts deportation of 5,700 migrants to Rwanda this year.
- Rwanda has "in principle" agreed to accept the migrants already in the UK.


Venice's Tourist Entry Fee and Overcrowding

- Venice, Italy, has introduced an entry fee for tourists to control overtourism.
- Day-trippers visiting between 8.30 am and 4 pm are required to pay €5. Overnight visitors, residents, commuters, students, and children under 14 are not charged.
- The fee is applicable on 29 peak days from April 25 to July 14, with fines ranging from €50 to €300.
- Some locals view the fee as a joke, arguing it could turn Venice into a 'theme park'.
- Residents' associations have protested, claiming it is a political ploy.
- On its first day, 5,500 individuals purchased tickets, bringing in €27,500, which may just be enough to cover operating costs.
- The tax is seen as an effort to lessen overcrowding, promote longer stays, and enhance the quality of life for locals.
- Overtourism is a significant issue in Venice, with the city experiencing congestion when the number of day-trippers approaches 30,000-40,000.
- The tax could reduce the number of unauthorised Airbnbs within the city, requiring legitimate registration and tax payment.
- Overtourism is a problem in many other European cities, including Amsterdam, Barcelona, and London.
- Other popular spots like Seville's main Plaza de España and the Italian town of Bagnoregio have also implemented fees to collect funds for their rescue.

International - Africa


45 Killed in Kenya Dam Burst

- Dam burst near Rift Valley town.
- Floods and torrential rains cause death.
- Total death toll over March-May exceeds 120.
- Heavy rainfall and El Nino compound it.


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Economy & Business

Economy & Business - India

RBI's Monetary Policy Report on Climate Change Impact on Economic Stability

- RBI's latest Monetary Policy Report emphasizes the impact of extreme weather events and climate shocks on food inflation and the natural rate of interest.
- The report uses a New-Keynesian model to estimate the macroeconomic impact of climate change.
- The report warns that without climate mitigation policies, long-term economic output could be lower by around 9% by 2050.
- The report suggests that the RBI and the Finance Ministry could draw inspiration from the developing world, particularly the ASEAN region, for a layered green taxonomy.
- The RBI should undertake a thorough assessment of the impact of climate change on economic and financial stability.
- The goal is to mitigate transitional risks to the financial system as the economy moves towards a sustainable future.

SEBI board approves changes to mutual fund regulations

- SEBI Board approves amendments to Mutual Funds (MF) Regulations, 1996 to enhance regulatory framework.
- The changes require AMCs to establish a structured institutional mechanism for identifying and deterring potential market abuse, including

front-running and fraudulent transactions.

- The mechanism includes enhanced surveillance systems, internal control procedures, and escalation processes.
- Front-running involves trading in financial assets by brokers with inside knowledge of future transactions.
- The Board also approves enhancing AMCs' responsibility and accountability and fostering transparency through a whistle blower mechanism.

India's GDP Growth May Surpass 7% Estimate

- National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) predicts India's GDP growth could surpass the central bank's 7% estimate for 2024-25.
- The forecast of an above-normal monsoon and improved global growth and trade volumes are key factors.
- High-frequency indicators performed well in March and April, indicating potential for growth rates higher than 7%.
- The IMF and WTO's benign global outlook also predict positive economic outcomes.
- Indicators like GST collections and digital payments showed resilience in March.

Goldman Sachs' View on India's Services Exports

- Goldman Sachs predicts India's services exports could reach \$800 billion by 2030.
- Concerns include lack of skilled talent and resource stress in key hubs like Bengaluru.
- Services exports are projected to reach 11% of GDP by 2030, limiting current account deficit to an average of 1% GDP between 2024 and 2030.
- Goldman warns against taking services export

growth for granted due to domestic constraints and potential resource stress.

Cost of Meals and Salaries in Maharashtra

- The average cost of a home-cooked vegetarian thali in Maharashtra rose by 71% in the last five years, while the average monthly salary earned by a person through regular employment in the State increased by only 37%.
- The average cost of all the ingredients for two thalis in Maharashtra totalled ₹79.2 this year, ₹64.2 last year, and ₹46.2 in 2019.
- The cost of making two thalis in a household in Maharashtra every day of a month increased from ₹1,386 in 2019 to ₹2,377 in 2024.
- The daily average wage of an individual in Maharashtra increased from ₹218 a day in 2019 to ₹365 a day in 2024.
- The cost of making two thalis every day of a month marginally increased from 21.1% of a casual labourer's monthly earnings in 2019 to 21.7% in 2024.
- In the case of regular salaried workers, there was a considerable increase from 8.1% to 10.1% in the same period.
- Despite the 71% increase in the cost of making a thali, the monthly salary increased by only 37%.
- This disparity between salaries and expenditure suggests that households with regular salaried people might be cutting back on spending on non-essential items or luxury products.

India's Core Sectors' Output Growth in March

- India's eight core infrastructure sectors' output growth moderated to 5.2% in March, from a 7.1% increase in February.

• High growth in Cement and Electricity production offset contractions in fertilisers and refinery products.

- For the full year 2023-24, the core sectors recorded a three-year low growth of 7.5%, compared with 7.8% in 2022-23.
- For the first time in 12 years, all eight sectors recorded annual growth, led by double-digit upticks in steel and coal.
- The Index of Core Industries (ICI) was 9.9% over February levels, marking the highest print in at least seven and a half years.
- Fertilisers contracted 1.3% from last March, marking the third successive month of a drop in output.
- Steel output grew 5.5%, the slowest pace since July 2022.
- Cement production and electricity generation rose at a five-month high pace of 10.6% and 8%, respectively.
- Coal output rose 8.7%, marking the slowest growth since last June.
- Overall industrial output growth is expected to cool off from the 5.7% uptick recorded in February.

India and China Taipei Request WTO Delay on ICT Levy Ruling

- India and China Taipei request WTO's dispute settlement body to delay ruling on India's import duties on certain ICT products until July 26, 2024.
- The request was made during a meeting of the DSB in Geneva on April 26.
- The DSB agreed to the demand, following three previous requests from India and China Taipei.

- The panel's ruling must be adopted by DSB within 60 days of the order's release, but countries can request a delay.
- The dispute panel's report on April 17, 2023, alleged India's import duties violate global trading norms.

Union Government Allows Onion Export to 6 Countries

- The Union government has allowed an additional 99,150 tonnes of onion to six countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, UAE, Bahrain, and Mauritius.
- The move follows a ban on onion exports since last year, imposed to ensure domestic availability due to lower kharif and rabi harvest in 2023-24.
- The National Cooperative Exports Limited (NCEL) is the nodal agency for exporting all prohibited agri produce, including onion, sugar, and rice.
- The total permitted quantity so far in 2024-25 exceeds 1.30 lakh tonnes.
- NCEL sources onion for exports through e-platform at L1 prices and supplies to agencies nominated by the destination country's government at a negotiated rate on a 100% advance payment basis.

U.S. FDA Investigates Indian Spice Contamination

- U.S. FDA is investigating Indian spice makers MDH and Everest after Hong Kong suspended sales of certain products.
- The products were allegedly contaminated with a cancer-causing pesticide.
- Hong Kong suspended sales of three MDH spice blends and an Everest spice mix for fish curries.

- Singapore also ordered a recall of the Everest spice mix due to high levels of ethylene oxide.
- MDH and Everest have not commented on the matter.

NPCI's Global Arm Develops UPI-like System for Namibia

- NPCI International Payments Ltd. (NIPL) partners with Bank of Namibia to develop UPI-like instant payment system.
- Partnership aims to modernize Namibia's financial ecosystem.

Reliance Starts Trading U.S. Oil

- Reliance, India's largest oil refinery operator, has initiated trading of U.S. crude oil, which underpins the global Brent benchmark.
- The company offered a cargo of WTI Midland in the Platts Market on Close process, known as the Platts window.
- This is Reliance's first time offering WTI in the window.
- India, the world's third-largest oil importer and consumer, is diversifying its oil supplies due to potential U.S. sanctions on Russia.
- The company made its first oil purchase from Canada's Trans Mountain pipeline last month.
- U.S. WTI Midland is one of six crude-oil grades assessed by Platts that can set the value of dated Brent.

India's Manufacturing Activity Signals Second-Best Gain in 42 Months

- Manufacturing activity eased in April, but still showed the second-best improvement in

three-and-a-half years, according to the HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI).

- New orders rose at the second-fastest pace in almost 40 months, with domestic demand outpacing export orders.

- Output growth slowed but was still the second-fastest in 42 months.

- Manufacturers reported higher confidence levels with expectations of higher output a year ahead.

- Firms added employees at a moderate pace, the quickest since September.

- Despite rising input costs, producers took input purchases to the highest level since June.

- Price gains were reported for materials like aluminium, paper, plastics, and steel.

- HSBC's chief India economist, Pranjul Bhandari, noted that firms passed these increases onto consumers through higher output charges.

GST Revenues and Next Government's Prioritization

- GST revenues reached ₹2 lakh crore for the first time in April, marking a significant increase from the previous year.

- Last month's GST collection was 12.4% higher than April 2023's ₹1.87 lakh crore, marking the highest monthly intake.

- The ₹2 lakh crore figure may not be the new normal for monthly GST collections, but if the economy continues and GST revenue growth remains in the 11%-12% range, this could be the year's monthly average.

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman referred to last month's ₹2 lakh crore-plus GST revenues as a "landmark," attributed to a strong economy and efficient collections.

- The next government should prioritize the

expansion of the GST net and the reboot of its complex rate structure to make it a simpler tax for consumers and investors.

- Smart GST reforms, informed by stakeholder consultations, should be at the forefront of the agenda of the next government to correct anomalies and set the foundations for the next cycle of investment and growth.

Economy & Business - International

Microsoft Announces \$2.2 Billion AI, Cloud Investment in Malaysia

- Microsoft pledges \$2.2 Billion investment in AI and cloud computing.

- The investment aims to develop Malaysia's AI infrastructure.

- CEO Satya Nadella announces investments in data centres, AI, and cloud services during Southeast Asia tour.

Maersk Raises Profit Guidance Amid Red Sea Conflict

- Maersk raises full-year profit guidance due to strong demand and longer sailing times to avoid conflict in the Red Sea.

- Shipping disruptions caused by Houthi militants' attacks are expected to last until the end of the year.

- Growth in container shipping demand has been stronger than forecast.

- Maersk and rivals have diverted ships around Africa since December to avoid attacks by Houthi militants, increasing freight rates.

- Maersk expects full-year underlying EBITDA between \$4 billion and \$6 billion this year.

- EBITDA stood at \$1.59 billion in the first three months of the year, compared to \$1.46 billion expected by analysts.
- Maersk posted a third consecutive quarterly loss in its ocean container shipping division due to higher costs related to the Red Sea disruptions.

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Environment & Ecology

India - Environment & Ecology

Uttarakhand Forest Fires Extend Over 140 Hects

- Over 142 hectares of forest land in Uttarakhand have been gutted in a 72-hour period due to massive forest fires.
- The Indian Air Force deployed a Mi-17 V5 helicopter to douse the fires using a 'Bambi Bucket'.
- The Forest Department reported 23 new incidents of forest fires on Saturday, 31 on Friday, and 54 on Thursday.
- The Indian Army has also deployed two columns for firefighting in Kumaon.
- The fire was first reported in the Nanda range and spread downwards.
- The IAF is using water from the Bhimtal Lake to douse the fire near their establishment.

CPCB Develops Plan to Prevent Illegal Solid Waste Transport from Kerala to Tamil Nadu

- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has developed an action plan to prevent illegal inter-State movement of solid waste from Kerala to Tamil Nadu.
- The plan was based on a directive from the Southern Bench of the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which is hearing a suo motu case against illegal waste dumping.
- The CPCB identified significant gaps in Kerala's solid waste management, including limited collection, unavailability of solid waste management inventory, inadequate facilities, and

lack of a system to monitor waste movement at inter-State borders.

- The plan also found mismanagement of biomedical waste generated from households, violating the Bio Medical Waste Management Rules.
- The Kerala SPCB has been asked to ensure all local bodies prepare

"State of the Climate in Asia" Report Highlights Asia's Extreme Climate Impact

- The 2023 'State of the Climate in Asia' report by the World Meteorological Organization shows Asia has warmed faster than the global average since 1960.
- The report highlights an alarming gap between climate projections and the ability of Asian countries to adapt to and mitigate climate change.
- Over 2,000 people were killed and over nine million were affected by extreme climate events across Asia in 2023, with over 80% of these events related to storms and floods.
- Heatwaves, particularly in India, led to multiple fatalities, but heat-related mortality is widely under-reported.
- An early-warning system monitors, predicts, and forecasts hazards, including risk-assessment, communications, and preparedness.
- The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction reports that fewer than half of all Asian countries have the tools to mitigate climate change impact.
- Sreejith O.P., a scientist with the India Meteorological Department, Pune, commended India's early preparedness for cyclones but emphasized the need for improvement in managing deaths and destruction caused by lightning.

- Harjeet Singh, Global Engagement Director at the Fossil Fuel Treaty Initiative, emphasized the need for urgent attention and a strategic overhaul of current policies and adaptation strategies to combat emerging climatic challenges.

Anticyclones and Global Warming in India

- The record warming of 2023 has not been fully explained due to the impact of El Niño on global warming.
- The impact of the El Niño during its pre-monsoon demise on the Indian Easterly Jet (IEJ) tends to produce a stronger and more persistent anticyclone, leading to longer lasting and intense heat waves.
- Anticyclonic circulations were the drivers of unusual rainfall over Odisha, and could explain the historic Dubai floods of April 17.
- The persistence of anticyclones is not unusual, as they form during the premonsoon season across the Arabian Sea, peninsular India, and the Bay of Bengal.
- The strength of the anticyclone this year and its connection to global warming and heat waves is a key question.
- The pre-monsoon season is India's summer, and heat waves are expected. The focus is always on predicting them accurately and providing early warnings to save lives.
- The background drivers of the duration, intensity, and frequency of heat waves are helpful to identify the hotspots of heat waves at the timescales relevant to the evolution of the weather and the climate.
- The India Meteorological Department can use this background state of cool seasonal temperatures but a strong and persistent

anticyclone to ensure accurate predictions and build early warnings accordingly.

- The 'ready-set-go' system, under the 'Subseasonal-to-Seasonal Predictions' project of the World Climate Research Program, is used to improve the accuracy of early-warning systems.

- The NDMA has worked these details well into its 'ready-set-go' system.

- The remaining challenges are to build resilience for the future by better predicting the trajectory of the weather at every location over India.

- Governments, their departments, and the people at large need to be trained and engaged to make this a sustained success.

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Science & Technology

Science

Solar Radiation in India Declining

- Scientists from the India Meteorological Department (IMD) report a decreasing trend in solar radiation available for electricity production in several Indian locations.
- The study suggests increased aerosol load and clouding as causative factors, but more efficient solar panels could counter this.
- The efficiency of solar panels is significantly influenced by the amount of sunlight falling on them.
- The study examined radiation trends at 45 in-house stations, but only 13 had a continuous record from 1985 to 2019.
- The study found a general decline in solar photovoltaic (SPV) potential in all stations, including Ahmedabad, Chennai, Goa, Jodhpur, Kolkata, Mumbai, Nagpur, New Delhi, Pune, Shillong, Thiruvananthapuram, and Vishakhapatnam.
- India's largest solar parks are located in the north-west, particularly Gujarat and Rajasthan, and cities in these states are also showing a decrease in SPV potential.
- India's installed solar power capacity is about 81 GW, or roughly 17% of the total installed electricity.
- The government plans to source about 500 GW from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030, with at least 280 GW from solar power by that year.

Coconut's Numerous Benefits

- Coconut is a native of Malesia, a bio-geographical region including Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Australia, New Guinea, and Pacific Island groups.

- It has been recorded in archaeological excavations and epigraphic inscriptions in India, earning epithets like the Tree of life, Tree of abundance, and Kalpavriksha.

- In addition to its food value, coconut has health, medicinal, and cosmetic benefits.

- In India, coconut is mainly grown in southern states—Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh—producing over 90% of coconuts.

- North India's temperate climate and distinct seasons with uneven rainfall are not conducive to the growth of coconut trees.

- Coconut is used in religious and social ceremonies, with no inch of the tree going waste.

- Coconut plays an important role in daily life in South India, with temples decorated with coconut palm trees, whole nuts offered to the deity, and devotees offered a bit of the nut and some coconut water.

- Coconut oil, derived from the 'meat' of the broken coconut, is high in fat, rich in fibre, and contains vitamins A, D, E, and K.

- Some groups suggest that coconut oil may benefit cardiovascular health and delay Alzheimer's disease.

MIT and Oxford University Discover Ancient Rocks with Earth's Magnetic Field

- MIT and Oxford University scientists discovered ancient rocks in Greenland, containing the oldest remnants of the earth's early magnetic field.

- The rocks, estimated to be about 3.7 billion years old, retain signatures of a magnetic field with a strength of at least 15 microtesla.

- The ancient field is similar in magnitude to the earth's current magnetic field.

- The study extends the magnetic field's lifetime

by another 200 million years, providing some of the earliest evidence of a magnetic field surrounding the earth.

- The researchers suspect that the earth's early magnetic shield was strong enough to retain a life-sustaining atmosphere and shield the planet from damaging solar radiation.
- The team sampled from rock formations in the Isua Supracrustal Belt in southwestern Greenland, confirming the rocks likely harbored an ancient, 3.7-billion-year-old magnetic field.

Understanding Combustion: A Question of Fuel

- Combustion is a type of chemical reaction known as a redox reaction, short for "reduction oxidation".
 - The losing substance is the oxidant, which provides oxygen atoms in a reaction.
 - The gaining substance is the reductant, which is the fuel during combustion.
 - All combustion reactions release energy, sometimes vaporizing the fuel and producing a flame.
 - The combustion of fossil fuels in internal combustion engines and industrial processes contributes to global warming.
 - Combustion scientists study the reaction in various ways, including in space, to understand control methods and cleaner reaction products.

Indian Ocean Warming Set to Accelerate

- The Indian Ocean is expected to reach a "near-permanent heatwave state" due to global warming.
 - From 1950 to 2020, the ocean had increased by 1.2 degrees Celsius.
 - Climate models predict a further increase of 1.7 to 3.8 degrees Celsius from 2020 to 2100.

- Marine heatwaves, linked to cyclone formation, are expected to increase tenfold from 20 days per year to 220-250 days per year.
 - This warming will accelerate coral bleaching, seagrass destruction, and loss of kelp forests, negatively impacting the fisheries sector.
 - The ocean's heat content is increasing deeper and at a rate of 16-22 zetta-joules per decade.
 - Rising heat content contributes to sea-level rise, as it increases the volume of water, causing thermal expansion.

Study Reveals Microbes as Top Sources of New Methane

- A study by Naveen Chandra at the Research Institute for Global Change in Japan found that methane emissions from fossil fuels declined between 1990 and the 2000s, and have been stable since then.
 - The study also found that microbes have been producing more methane recently, possibly due to an increase in cattle-rearing in Latin America and more emissions from waste in South and Southeast Asia.
 - The study suggests that the atmospheric concentration of methane today is three times what it was 300 years ago.
 - Methane is the second most abundant anthropogenic greenhouse gas after carbon dioxide, but it warms the planet more.
 - The study focuses on two main processes: biogenic and thermogenic.
 - Biogenic methane comes from microbial action, while thermogenic methane comes from geological action.
 - The study used data from 12 monitoring sites worldwide since the 1990s, sorted the methane isotope data by year, and ran it through a program to recreate the atmosphere from 1980 to 2020 on a supercomputer.
 - The team found discrepancies between their

results and two emissions inventories, EDGAR and GAINS, which reported an increase in methane emissions from oil and natural gas exploration between 1990 and 2020.

- The study also found that the year-wise total methane emissions overshoot the total production.
- The study suggests that ground models are required to confirm these interpretations, as satellite data is interpreted using models and is prone to uncertainties.

Shivering: A Physical Thermogenesis Mechanism

- Shivering is an involuntary contraction of muscles to maintain body temperature during cold or fever.
- It involves oscillating skeletal muscle contractions at 10-20 per second, initially irregular, then quick involuntary movements.
- The posterior hypothalamus region in the brain is the primary motor center responsible for shivering.
- When body temperature falls below 37.1 degrees C, the skin sends cold signals to the spinal cord.
- The hypothalamus picks these cold signals, utilizing increased skeletal-muscle activity to generate heat.
- Shivering begins throughout the body when muscle tension rises beyond the critical level, producing heat and increasing body temperature.
- Shivering can produce up to 42.5 cal/hr, seven times greater than man's normal resting metabolism at room temperature.
- Shivering is typically seen only in birds and mammals.

India's Patent Filings Rise by 24.6% in FY23

- India saw an annual growth rate of 24.6% in patent filings in FY2023, marking the highest in the last two decades.
- The number of patents granted also saw significant growth, rising more than two times between FY19-23.
- The proportion of patents filed by residents doubled over the past decade, from 33.6% in 2019 to over 50% in 2023.
- Educational Institutes were a key driver of this growth.

Technology

India Cellular & Electronics Association (ICEA) Advocates for Domestic Patents and Subsidy for Semiconductors

- ICEA suggests promoting semiconductor design initiatives with improved local fundraising opportunities and incentives for using domestically registered intellectual property (IP).
- The semiconductor push presents opportunities for India, despite geopolitical tensions causing hesitant investors.
- ICEA chairman, Pankaj Mohindroo, argues that India needs to build capacity for high tech and semiconductors.
- Mohindroo suggests incentivizing domestic registration of IPs in key sectors, like telecom networks.
- ICEA also highlights China's over-investment in low-tech chips, crashing global prices and investment appetite.

Health & Wellbeing

Health

Kerala's Kidney Transplantation Challenges

- Kerala, once a leader in deceased donor transplantation, is now behind Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in routine organ transplants.
- Kidney disease and failure are prevalent among the poor and economically underprivileged, with over 50,000 patients on dialysis for terminal kidney failure.
- The yearly mortality rate in the dialysis population is over 20%, making it difficult for many to afford kidney transplantation and immunosuppressants.
- The Kerala government pays a modest amount for each dialysis treatment but does not promote transplantation, which is cheaper in the long run and improves the quality of life for dialysis patients.
- Public mistrust of doctors, healthcare system, and the pronouncement of brain death is a significant barrier to cadaver donor transplantation.
- The Transplantation of Human Organs and Tissue Act of India is unnecessarily rigorous, leading to delays in organ harvesting and compromised organ viability.
- To improve organ donation after brain death, Kerala should promote ethical, transparent, and well-defined steps in organ procurement and allocation.

- The government should authenticate a methodical assessment of a prospective donor before organ donation.

- The government can demand and facilitate recordkeeping of patients on dialysis and a waiting list for kidneys and other organs.

- The government could also cap hospital charges that private hospitals levy from recipients of deceased donor transplants.

- The state has a plethora of available medical, surgical, immunological, and organizational skills that should not be wasted.

Wellbeing

The P vs NP Problem: A Potential Solution to Healthcare Challenges

- The P vs NP problem, a mathematical problem, could hold the key to solving complex healthcare problems.
- The problem involves solving 'P' problems quickly, while 'NP' problems take longer to solve but can be verified quickly.

Implications for Healthcare

- The P vs NP problem could help in analyzing bacterial genomes and predicting resistance patterns, improving patient outcomes.
- It could also help in determining the best treatment plan for cancer patients, despite the need for a large volume of data.
- Insurance companies could optimize their decision-making by cracking the P vs NP problem, leading to fairer and more accurate premiums and conditions.

- This could also help in utilizing government spending on healthcare with minimal leakage and programs like Ayushman Bharat more effectively.

- By solving these complex problems more efficiently, we could potentially reduce resource constraints and improve health outcomes.

Surprising Sources of Progress in Computer Science

- The P vs NP problem is a topic of ongoing study in computer science, with experts stating that P does not equal NP.

- Despite this, researchers have discovered improvements to algorithms and new approaches to complex problems.

- Historical examples include Thomas Edison's incandescent bulb, Isaac Newton's expansion of the binomial theorem, and Apple's transformation of watch expectations.

- A potential drawback of P equal to NP is in cryptography, where encryption schemes and algorithms rely on hard-to-solve but easy-to-verify problems.

- The P vs NP problem could lead to paradigm shifts in fields like logistics, finance, and climate modelling.

- The Clay Mathematics Institute offers a million dollars to anyone who can definitively solve the P vs NP problem, but the rewards could revolutionize various human enterprises.

- The future of problems may see solutions from unexpected sources, redefining healthcare.

Sports

International Sports

Peres Jepchirchir's Return to the Marathon World

- Peres Jepchirchir, a 30-year-old Kenyan, has broken the women-only world record at the London Marathon, proving her strength when healthy.

- Jepchirchir has won five marathons between 2019 and 2022, including Olympic gold in Sapporo in August 2021, the New York City Marathon, and the Boston Marathon in 2022.

- Despite a hip injury, Jepchirchir nearly won the 2023 London Marathon, coming in third in a tight finish, five seconds behind winner Sifan Hassan.

- Jepchirchir's daughter, Natalia, was surprised by her third place finish, despite her usual winning streak.

- Jepchirchir's performance in the 2024 London Marathon was particularly impressive, with three of the four fastest women in history competing.

- Jepchirchir's fastest time in a women-only marathon was 2:17:01 set by Mary Keitany in London in 2017.

- Jepchirchir's victory also puts her in a position to defend her Olympic crown, as the London Marathon was the final qualifying race before Kenya's Olympic selectors pick their team for Paris.

- Jepchirchir's success in the London Marathon is a confidence boost for her, as she is known for her finishing kick and her knack of winning close races.

- No woman has ever won two Olympic marathon titles, adding to her case for being considered the greatest-ever.

- Jepchirchir's journey to the Olympic stage was

a result of her hard work and talent, which led her to the Olympic stage.

Asian Games.

- AIFF president Kalyan Chaubey presented mementos to six members of the squad, including captain Shabbir Ali, C.C. Jacob, Dilip Palit, Shishir Guha Dastidar, Ranjit (Gobinda Das), and S.P. Kumar.
- Arun Ghosh, the winning squad coach, couldn't attend due to health reasons.
- AIFF President Amitabha Das Sharma criticized India's lack of international exposure after five decades post-independence.

Barcelona's 4-2 win over Valencia: Robert Lewandowski's Hat-Trick

- Barcelona secured a 4-2 victory over Valencia, securing a 2-1 lead.
- Lewandowski's hat-trick in the second half helped Barcelona move back to second in LaLiga.
- The win postponed Real Madrid's title celebrations, as they currently hold a top position of 84 points.
- Barcelona's victory postponed Real Madrid's title celebrations.
- Valencia's Hugo Duro and Ronald Araujo's Ronald Araujo foul led to a goal each.
- Results: Barcelona 4 in LaLiga, Genoa 3 in Serie A.

Indian - Sports

Indian Men's Archery World Cup: Recurve Gold and Individual Silver

- Indian recurve men's team, Tarundeep Rai, B. Dhiraj, and Pravin Jadhav, defeated top-ranked

Korea for the first time in 14 years to win the gold medal in a World Cup stage.

- Deepika Kumari, returning to a global event after her motherhood in December 2022, took an individual silver in the Archery World Cup Stage-1 in Shanghai.
- The achievement boosts the trio's confidence ahead of the last Olympic qualifier in Antalya in June.
- Dhiraj, who combined with Ankita Bhakat to bag the mixed team bronze, expressed hope for more medals and stronger performance for the Olympics.
- Deepika Kumari, who had previously defeated Korean Jeon Hunyong and Nam Suhyeon, fell to World and Asian Games champion Lim Sihyeon in the title clash.

India women claims 4x400m crown

- India's women's 4x400m relay team won gold at 21st Asian under-20 athletics championships in Dubai.
- The team, including Anushka Kumbhar, Kanista Teena, Sai Sangeetha Dodla, and Sandramol Sabu, clocked 3:41.50s.
- The Indian 4x400m men's relay team won silver with a time of 3:09.36.
- The 4x100m men's relay team won bronze with a junior national record time of 40.01s.
- The women's 4x100m relay team finished third but was disqualified for a baton exchange.
- Mohammed Atta Sajid won bronze in men's long jump.

Maheshwari Chauhan Wins Olympic Quota in Women's Skeet

- Maheshwari Chauhan won the Olympic quota in women's skeet at the Shotgun Olympic qualification championship in Doha, Qatar.
- This marks India's 21st Olympic quota for the

Paris Games, and the fifth in shotgun.

- India missed three Olympic quotas in men's and women's trap, apart from men's skeet.
- Chauhan qualified in fourth place with a national record score of 121 out of 125.
- Only four of the six shooters were eligible to get the quota.
- Chauhan missed a double in the shoot-off after being tied on 54 with Francisca Chadid of Chile.
- In men's skeet, Mairaj Ahmad Khan, Angad Vir Singh Bajwa, and Sheeraz Sheikh shot identical scores and were placed 75th, 77th, and 79th in a field of 136.

Mumbai City FC Wins ISL 10 Semifinal

- Mumbai City FC defeated FC Goa 2-0 in the second leg of the ISL 10 semifinal.
- Goals from Jorge Pereyra Diaz and Lallianzuala Chhangte secured the win.
- Goa started aggressively, while MCFC dominated the first half.
- Goa failed to create good chances on goal in the final third.
- Diaz scored the opener after a corner kick was met by Rahul Bheke's header.
- Vikram Partap Singh countered a corner-kick, allowing Chhangte to pass it into the empty net.
- MCFC will face Mohun Bagan Super Giant in the ISL Final on May 4.

ISL Final: Bagan's Super Sub Sahal Scores Goal

- Sahal Abdul Samad scored the decisive goal for Mohun Bagan Super Giants in injury time at Salt Lake Stadium.
- Bagan, the League Shield winner, reached the final of ISL-10 with a 2-0 win over Odisha FC in the second leg of semifinal 1.
- The Kolkata giant won 3-2 on aggregate.

- Bagan will face the winner of the other semifinal between Mumbai City FC and FC Goa in the summit clash on May 4.
- Odisha FC failed to find the equaliser, with the Bagan defence thwarting their attempts.
- Sahal scored the goal in the 72nd minute, bringing the match to extra-time.

Mumbai City FC to Host FC Goa in ISL 10 Semifinal

- Mumbai City FC is set to host FC Goa in the second leg of the ISL 10 semifinal.
- FC Goa had a one-goal advantage in the first leg, but struggled in the reverse fixture.
- FC Goa, led by Lallianzuala Chhangte and Vikram Partap Singh, struggled throughout the match.
- MCFC coach Petr Kratky emphasized the need for learning and improvement.
- FC Goa, led by seasoned coach Manolo Marquez, has finished third in the league and hopes to end its campaign on a high note.

Seven Indian Shuttlers Qualify for Paris Games

- Seven Indian shuttlers, including P.V. Sindhu, have officially qualified for the Paris Games based on their Olympic Games Qualification rankings.
- The formality was completed on Monday, the cut-off date set by the international badminton federation (BWF).
- The top-16 shuttlers in men's and women's singles book their tickets to the quadrennial showpiece.
- Sindhu, a silver and bronze medallist at the Olympics, was placed 12th.
- Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, a men's doubles pair, placed third at the end of the Olympic qualification cycle.

- Tanisha Crasto and Ashwini Ponnappa made the grade in women's doubles.

India's Attempt at Defending Men's Badminton Title

- India is aiming to defend its title win in men's badminton, a significant event in the sport.
- The Thomas & Uber Cup in Chengdu, China, is a significant event leading up to the Olympic year.
- The Indian men's team, including H.S. Prannoy, Lakshya Sen, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy, and Chirag Shetty, will use the event as a chance to test their competitive skills before the Paris Olympics.
- The women's Uber Cup roster includes P.V. Sindhu, Ashwini Ponnappa, and Tanisha Crasto, who have prioritised a solid training block.
- The focus will be on 17-year-old Anmol Kharb, Isharani Baruah, and Ashmita Chaliha.
- The tournament comes as India aims to restock its women's singles cupboard, with the hope that the next generation of stars could emerge from the squad.

Indian Grand Prix Track and Field Results

- Springer Hima Das, who was provisionally suspended by the National Anti-Doping Agency (NADA), failed to complete the women's 200m event in the Indian Grand Prix track and field competition.
- The event was won by Andhra Pradesh's Chelimi (23.92s).
- All three competitors in the IGP bib entry list — Sourabh Vij, Siddharth Rao, and Tajinderpal Singh Toor — failed to turn up to the venue.
- D.P. Manu won the men's javelin with an 81.91m throw.
- Praveen Chithravel shut out Eldhose Paul in

the men's triple jump with a leap of 17.12m but fell short of the Olympic mark of 17.22m.

- Shaili Singh won the women's long jump with a 6.52m throw, while Nayana James took silver.

Indian Grand Prix Track and Field Competition

- Tajinderpal Singh Toor aims to surpass Paris Olympics' 21.50m qualification standard.
- The event also features return of sprinter Hima Das, who was suspended by NADA for three failed attempts.
- Eight competitors in the women's 200m event, including Hima and Srabani Nanda.
- Eldhose Paul, who won the men's triple jump gold at the 2022 Commonwealth Games, is also in action.
- The Olympic qualification mark of 17.22m may be a barrier.
- Shaili Singh and Nayana James compete for the women's long jump crown.

India Takes 2-0 Lead in Bangladesh T20 International

- India defeated Bangladesh by 19 runs in a rain-marred second women's T20 International.
- Radha Yadav and D. Hemalatha's all-round performance contributed to the victory.
- India bowlers bundled out Bangladesh for 119, with Radha completing the hat-trick with 3/19.
- Deepti Sharma (2/14) and Shreyanka Patil (2/24) also contributed to the victory.
- Bangladesh's opener, Murshida Khatun, scored 46 off 49 balls.
- Dilara Akter and Sobhana Mostary contributed to the victory, with Radha removing Bangladesh captain Nigar Sultana and Fahima Khatun off successive balls.

- Despite a promising start by the batter, Radha couldn't complete a hat-trick as Sultana Khatun struck her for a boundary.

India to host 2025 badminton World Junior Championship

- The Badminton World Federation (BWF) has allocated the 2025 Badminton World Junior Championship to the National Centre of Excellence in Guwahati.
- The decision was made during the BWF AGM on the sidelines of the Thomas and Uber Cup in Chengdu.
- The National Centre of Excellence, inaugurated in August last year, has 14 courts and a seating capacity of around 4000.
- This will be India's second hosting of the competition, the previous being in Pune in 2008.
- The allotment of the BWF World Juniors to Guwahati is a testament to India's growing reputation as a badminton powerhouse.

"Daryl Mitchell's Record Set for Most Catches by Non-'keeper in IPL Match"

- Mitchell's five catches in CSK-SRH match equal Mohammad Nabi's 2021 record.
- CSK scored 212/3 in 20 overs, SRH 134 in 18.5 overs.

Indian Boxing Team Secures Eight Medals at ASBC Asian u-22 & Youth Championships 2024

- Bhrijesh Tamta, Sagar Jakhar, and Sumit secure semifinal spots and medals in the youth category.
- Sagar and Sumit secured 5-0 victories to reach the last four.

- Bhrijesh, a 48kg fighter, won the final round against Uzbekistan's Sabirov Sayfiddin, securing the bout 4-3.

- Five women - Annu, Parthavi Grewal, Nikita Chand, Khushi Pooniya, and Nirjhara Bana - will begin campaigns in the semifinals.

AIFF commemorates 50 years of AFC Youth Championship win

- The All India Football Federation (AIFF) celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the Indian team's 1974 AFC Youth Championship victory.
- The team was declared joint winner with Iran in the final, tied 2-2.
- The victory was the last notable triumph for India in the international arena after a bronze in the 1970

Thomas & Uber Cup: India's Badminton Team's Challenges

- Indian men aim to defend their title at the Thomas Cup, while a young Indian women's team, without star player P.V. Sindhu, begins its campaign in the Uber Cup.
- India's maiden Thomas Cup crown was won two years ago, marking an unprecedented chapter in the sport's history.
- The Indian men's campaign will start against Thailand, with reigning world champion Kunlavut Vitidsarn and young Panitchaphon Teeraratsakul.
- Indonesia, with top players like Jonatan Christie and Anthony Ginting, will be the most formidable opponent.
- Ashmita Chaliha will lead a young Indian team in the Uber Cup, testing their mental and

physical fortitude against top international players.

Thomas Cup: India's Progress

- Defending champion India secured a 5-0 victory over England in a Group C contest.
- India, which defeated Thailand 4-1 in its opening tie, qualified for the last eight.
- H.S. Prannoy returned to winning ways, defeating Harry Huang 21-15, 21-15, giving India a 1-0 lead.
- Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty's star pair was stretched to three games by Ben Lane and Sean Vandy in the first doubles fixtures.
- Former World No. 1 K. Srikanth recorded a 21-16, 21-11 victory over Nadeem Dalvi, giving India a 3-0 lead.
- M.R. Arjun and Dhruv Kapila brushed aside Rory Easton and Alex Green in the second doubles pair.
- Kiran George prevailed over Cholan Kayan in the final group fixture.
- India will face record 14-time champion Indonesia in its final group fixture on Wednesday.

India's Uber Cup Quarterfinals: India vs Singapore

- India's women's badminton team secured a 4-1 win over Singapore in the second tie of Group A.
- The Indian women's team, which had defeated Canada 4-1 in the opening match, recovered from an opening match loss of Ashmita Chaliha.
- The team won the rest of the contests with ease, securing last-eight spots.
- China also secured the last-eight spots, with India now second behind China.
- The team's lead was doubled by Isharani

Baruah, who won 21-13, 21-16 against Insyirah Khan.

- The 64th-ranked pair of Simran Singhi and Ritika Thaker secured a 3-1 lead.
- Rising star Anmol Kharb secured the tie with a 21-15, 21-13 victory over Lee Xin Megan in the third singles.

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Thomas and Uber Cup Final Results

- Indian men's shuttlers failed to defend their title in the Thomas and Uber Cup Final.
- Lakshya Sen was the only Indian to win in the quarterfinals.
- The men's team lost 1-3 to China in the quarterfinals.
- The women's team suffered a 0-3 loss to Japan.

- World No. 9 H.S. Prannoy, World No. 3 Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty, Dhruv Kapila and K. Sai Pratheek failed to go the distance in their respective matches.
- Lakshya Sen's 6-3 head-to-head count against Li Shi Feng helped India regain the lead.
- Dhruv and Sai went down 10-21, 10-21 to World No. 11 pair of Ren Xiang Yu and He Ji Ting.
- Ashmita Chaliha and Isharani Baruah won a game, but the Indian women lost to formidable Japan.

Federation Cup Wrestling Results

- Sanjeev wins Greco-Roman 55kg gold medal in Federation Cup wrestling tournament.
- 23-year-old Delhi boy outclasses Manish in final to win his maiden gold medal at the elite level.
- Sanjeev used his advantageous position in par terre to flip Manish for a 3-0 lead.
- Manish injured his left ankle in the process and conceded the bout.
- Pravin Patil, an Army wrestler, rallies from 0-2 to beat Sunny Kumar 6-2 in the 63kg title clash.
- The medallists include Sanjeev, Manish, Chetan, Govind, Govind, Jagmal Singh, Anil Ruhil, Anish Singh, Ravi Kumar, Satender Yadav, Parmanand Bujammagol, Chhagan Meena, Hardeep, Amit Gope, Bhupender, Raveen Hipparigi, Ajay, Inderjit, Darshan, Aditya Bedikyal, Sonu, Vijender, Subham Kumar, and Ashish.

Indian Boxing Semifinals

- Menengbam Jadumani Singh, Nikhil, Ajay Kumar, and Ankush advance to the men's under-22 semifinals at ASBC Asian Under-22 & Youth Boxing Championships 2024.
- Jadumani won 5-0 against Bhutan's Phuntsho Kinley in the 51kg category.
- Nikhil won 4-0 against Uzbekistan's Bakhtiyorov Ayubkhon in the 57 kg category.
- Ajay and Ankush won their bouts against Mongolia's Damdindorj P. and Korea's Lee Ju Sang.
- Ashish lost to Oyun Erdene E in the 54 kg category.
- Aryan, Nisha, Akansha Phalasal, and Rudrika won their quarterfinals in the youth category

Indian Women's Hockey Team's FIH Pro League 2023-2024

- Salima Tete, a youngster, is set to lead the Indian women's hockey team in the upcoming European leg of the FIH Pro League 2023-24.
- Navneet Kaur has been named her deputy as the 24-member squad.
- The squad includes long-serving captain Savita and seniors like Vandana Katariya, Monika, and Neha Goyal.
- India will play in Belgium and England twice each, starting May 22 and ending June 9.
- Currently sixth in the nine-team competition with eight points from eight matches.
- The squad includes goalkeepers Savita, Bichu Devi Kharibam, defenders Nikki Pradhan, Udit, Ishika Chaudhary, Monika, Jyoti Chhatr, Mahima Chaudhary, midfielders Salima Tete (capt.), Vaishnavi Vitthal Phalke, Navneet Kaur, Neha, Jyoti, Baljeet Kaur, Manisha Chauhan, Lalremsiami, forwards Mumtaz Khan, Sangita Kumari, Deepika, Sharmila Devi, Preeti Dubey, Vandana Katariya, Sunelita Toppo, Deepika Soreng.

IOC Unveils Largest Refugee Team for Paris Olympics

- The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has announced its largest refugee Olympic team for the Paris 2024 Games.
- The team includes 36 athletes from 11 countries, including Syria, Sudan, Iran, and Afghanistan.
- The athletes will compete in 12 sports including aquatics, athletics, badminton, boxing, canoe, cycling, judo, shooting, taekwondo, weightlifting, and wrestling.
- The team will compete under its own emblem and the acronym EOR (French équipe olympique des réfugiés).
- The team was first unveiled for the Rio 2016 Olympics with 10 athletes to raise awareness about the issue of displaced people.

India Takes Unassailable Lead in Women's T20I Series

- India leads 3-0 in the five-match women's T20I series against Bangladesh.
- India's bowlers restrict Bangladesh to 117 for eight, which they overtake with nine balls to spare.
- Smriti Mandhana and Shafali Verma's 91 runs in 12.1 overs help India close to a series win.
- Bangladesh's decision to bowl first did not yield immediate results, but India's dismissal of Dilara Akter tightened the screws on the home team batters.
- Bangladesh's brisk start was largely due to Dilara's batting.
- Bangladesh's middle order struggled, leading to the dismissal of Sobhana (15 off 20 balls).
- Bangladesh Women lost to India Women 121 for three in 18.3 overs.

Discussion on Important Topics

Discussion

Tea Workers Struggle in Dooars, West Bengal

- Workers in the lower Himalayas in West Bengal face hunger, poor pay, and intermittent shutdowns of large tea plants.
- Workers in small tea gardens are treated as agricultural laborers without rights of wages and provident fund.
- Asharani Oraon, a worker at Madhu Tea Garden, is frail and unable to walk after her husband, Dhani Oraon, died of starvation.
- The Dooars region, located between 90 and 1,500 meters above sea level, is a unique area for tea production, with the first tea plantations set up in 1874.
- The death of Dhani, a permanent worker, has raised questions about incomes lower than the minimum wage, food insecurity, and the sector's use by politicians as a poll platform.
- Of the 150 big tea gardens, 18 are closed, with 54.5% of the annual production from West Bengal in 2023 being produced from the Dooars.
- The closure of the tea garden has led to uncertainty of the public distribution system, with Dhani's Aadhaar and ration cards not linked and the system not recognizing his fingerprints.
- A fact-finding mission by the PBCMS and the Right to Food and Work Campaign highlighted the inaction by the government, making the entire population weak due to the long closure.

Tea Garden Workers in West Bengal Struggle with Low BMI and Poor Livelihoods

- A survey conducted by the PBCMS and RTFWC revealed that 64 out of 122 tea garden workers in Alipurduar and Jalpaiguri districts were underweight, with a BMI less than 18.5 kg/m².
- Workers like Marayam and Swati Oraon, two tea garden workers, struggle to sustain families due to the daily wage being ₹250.
- Tea garden management is mandated to provide for repair, but they often fail to do so, leaving workers to fend for themselves.
- The Minimum Wages Advisory Committee on Tea for the State of West Bengal has held 20 meetings but has not reached an agreement on minimum wages.
- Small tea growers contribute to the bulk of the tea production in the state, contributing 63.7% of all tea production in the state.
- Tea growers in the Dooars face price stagnation, with low rainfall forcing planters to use pesticides.
- The issue was raised with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during her campaign for the Lok Sabha poll in north Bengal.
- The Trinamool Congress leadership accuses the BJP of doing nothing for the tea gardens.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi blamed the West Bengal government for the plight of tea garden workers during the election campaign.

Tea Garden Workers' Land Rights and Dwelling Issues in West Bengal

- Tea garden workers in West Bengal live on land leased by the state government, resulting in lack of land rights and potential eviction.
- The government's Cha Sundari Scheme, formulated in 2020, aimed to provide free housing units to tea garden workers. However, the scheme now involves issuing pattas for 5 decimals of land (approximately 2,000 square

feet) to build houses, with a ₹1.2-lakh bank transfer.

- The scheme has been met with resistance from workers, with some resisting the move, citing the government's intention to usurp their land.
- Kirsan Kharia, a worker at Nagaisuree Tea Garden, has been attempting to unite workers against accepting homestead pattas, arguing that the government's plan is to sell tea garden land to corporates and shift workers into remote corners.
- The Joint Action Committee, a local association, fielded an Independent candidate, Arjun Indavar, for the Alipurduar Lok Sabha seat, based on the demand for land rights for tea workers.
- The tea plucking season in April is a time of tension, with women discussing leopard attacks and the higher incentive for those who pluck over 25 kg a day.

New Insurance Rules for Senior Citizens in India

- The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has introduced new regulations covering various aspects of life, general and health insurance.
- The regulations aim to enable insurers to respond faster to emerging market needs, improve business ease, and enhance insurance penetration while ensuring policyholders' interests.
- The new norms are particularly significant in health insurance, reducing the "specific waiting period" from four years to three years.
- The time-frame for defining pre-existing disease has been set to three years.
- The regulator has advised insurers against denying renewal of a health insurance policy on

the grounds that the insured had made a claim or claims in the preceding policy years.

- The April 1 notification attempts to broaden insurance coverage from a demographic perspective, broadly in line with IRDAI's 'Insurance for All by 2047' goal.
- The new regulations have asked insurers to establish a separate channel to address health insurance related claims and grievances of senior citizens.
- The new regulations have not been explicit age restrictions in the previous regulations either.
- The new regulations allow insurers to fix their minimum and maximum entry ages.
- The affordability or the ability to pay premiums is crucial for senior citizens in terms of opting for health insurance.
- The new regulations allow insurers to offer the facility of premium payment in instalment, devise mechanisms or incentives to reward policyholders for early entry, continued renewals, favourable claims experience, preventive and wellness habits, and disclose upfront such mechanisms or incentives in the prospectus and the policy document.

The Right and Future of India's Masjids

The Role of Masjids in the Religious Lives of Muslims

- Masjids are central to the religious lives of Muslims.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's frequent references to the Ram Mandir in the election campaign indicate the Bharatiya Janata Party's desire for electoral benefits.
- The mandir-masjid conflict may enter a new era post-2024 election period.

The Role of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Chief Mohan Bhagwat

- In June 2022, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat made an appeal in Nagpur arguing that the present generations of Muslims should not be held responsible for the wrongs committed in history by Muslim rulers.
- Yogi Adityanath, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, has remained vocal regarding Kashi and Mathura.

History and the Jama Masjid

- Delhi's Jama Masjid is closely connected with Muslim history.
- During the 1857 Rebellion, the Jama Masjid was defiled and desecrated by the colonial army.
- There were discussions to demolish the Jama Masjid during the 1857 rebellion.

The Danger of Further Polarisation

- The Hindutva right has a template based on politics, mobilisation, and judicial intervention to grapple with future mandir-masjid disputes.
- The Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991, which aims to maintain the religious character of places as they existed on August 15, 1947, stands in the way.
- The mandir-masjid controversy may take center stage and go beyond Kashi and Mathura, deepening religious polarisation and undermining India's secularism.

Curative Jurisdiction in Indian Law

- The Supreme Court of India, the highest court of appeal, federal court, advisory jurisdiction, and the Court itself, has the power to appoint and transfer judges.
- In 2002, the Court took on the "Curative Jurisdiction" which is a power to correct its judgments after they have become final.

- The Court has a constitutional role to declare the law and its judgments must reflect and sometimes trigger changes in law.
- Curative Jurisdiction is different from the power of review under Indian law, which enables all courts to rectify errors which are apparent from their records.
- The article argues that the Supreme Court does more harm than good in the exercise of this jurisdiction, as demonstrated through a judgment rendered on April 10, 2024.
- The judgment was a curative petition in Delhi Metro Rail Corporation Ltd. vs. Delhi Airport Metro Express Pvt Ltd.
- The Court's interference was based on two grounds: perverse interpretation of the termination clause and the CMRS sanction being vital evidence which had been ignored.
- The Court's interference was significant as it supported a position of minimal interference in arbitral awards and held that its own verdict in 2019 was wrong.
- The Court's exercise of Curative Jurisdiction, however, is beyond the confines of permissible interference with an arbitral award.
- The Supreme Court is seen as the beacon of law and should not swing back and forth based on changing trends. It lacks the constancy and gravitas that are fundamental to a court of last resort.

The Representation of the People Act (RPA) and the Potential for Control

- The RPA is designed to be pragmatic, but it creates a dichotomy where voters' choice is presumed due to lack of choice.
 - The system could be controlled or manipulated by a few candidates, potentially nullifying the right of millions of voters.
 - The democratic process is fulfilled only when there is interest among contestants and voters.
 - The RPA provides that a complete boycott is treated as everyone receiving zero vote.
 - The system is weighed in favor of contesting candidates, as a complete boycott is treated as everyone receiving zero vote.
 - The RPA provides for issuing another notification if there are no candidates filing their nomination the first time but is silent if the same thing is repeated thereafter.
 - The RPA has a solution by completely excluding people if they abstain from elections and are deprived from the NOTA option.
 - The issue of 'rain washes out play' or 'collusive walkover' is raised, calling for a wide-ranging debate to avoid 'rain washes out play' or 'collusive walkover'.
- ### **Election Procedures and the Representation of the People Act in India**
- The Representation of the People Act, 1951, deals with the procedure in uncontested elections.
 - If the number of candidates is less than the number of seats to be filled, the returning officer (RO) must declare all such candidates to be elected.
 - The RO's actions are governed by Section 33 of the Act, which pertains to the presentation of nomination papers and requirements for a valid nomination.
 - Three proposers of the Congress' candidate for Surat, Nilesh Kumbhani, claimed they had not signed his nomination form and did not turn up before the district election officer (DEO) on April 21 to support the candidate's nomination form.

- The Election Commission (EC) issued the Handbook for Returning Officers (Edition 2) in August 2023, which states that if in any constituency, there is only one contesting candidate, that candidate should be declared to have been duly elected immediately after the last hour for withdrawal of candidature.
- The NOTA option has been in force since 2013, and has been available on electronic voting machines (EVMs) since November 2013.
- The EC's stand has been that the person getting the largest number of votes in any constituency will still be declared the winner, regardless of the number of NOTA votes.
- In Maharashtra, the Maharashtra State Election Commission said that NOTA would be regarded as a fictional electoral candidate for the polls by urban local bodies.
- The Supreme Court has asked the poll panel to respond to a plea seeking fresh elections in constituencies where NOTA votes were in a majority.
- The petitioner-author Shiv Khera, prayed that the court should direct the EC to frame rules, stating that candidates who polled fewer votes than NOTA should be debarred from contesting elections for five years.

Valerie Adams' Interview with Neeraj Chopra

- Valerie Adams, a retired shot putter, shares her journey and advice for Neeraj Chopra.
- Adams, a four-time World champion, four-time World Indoor champion, two-time Olympic winner, and three-time Commonwealth Games champion, shares her journey and the challenges she faced.
- Adams' journey began when she lost her mother at 15, leading her to pursue athletics.
- She faced bullying due to her height, but believes in accepting and embracing her size.
- Adams' half-brother, Steven Adams, is a NBA veteran who has made significant contributions

to the sport in New Zealand.

- Adams' dream was to win a third straight gold at Rio, but she finished second due to major surgeries.
- Adams believes in the progress of track and field athletes and the need for other federations to find ways to offer prize money.
- Adams has faced drug cheating, with her gold medal at London 2012 being impacted by a failed drug test.
- Adams believes in the need for stricter testing requirements and the punishment of cheaters.
- She rates her gold at 2008 Beijing highly, despite her appendicitis surgery just before the Games.
- Adams believes there is still time for her to get an Athens medal, despite the challenges she faced.

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Transgender Community in Kolkata Advocates for Equal Election Participation

- Transgender community in Kolkata views elections as crucial to them as to other citizens.
- They advocate for equal treatment in government decisions, including those for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Dalits, and minorities.
- Despite a small number of third-gender registered voters, many prefer the Central government.
- The Central government has provided support to the transgender community, including establishing a Transgender Council, introducing Garima Griha for shelter, training, and medical treatment.
- Despite numerous schemes for women and girls, the state government has not provided support to the transgender community.

- The community hopes for public representatives to support their ongoing struggle for rights.

Court's nudge on hospital charges, a reform opportunity

- The Supreme Court of India has directed the central government to regulate the rates of hospital procedures in the private sector.
 - The Court highlighted the issue using the procedure costs of cataract surgeries, which cost only around ₹10,000 in a government set-up and between ₹30,000 to ₹1,40,000 in private hospitals.
 - The Central Government Health Scheme rates were ruled as an interim measure if the government failed to find ways to regulate rates.
 - The Court emphasized the need for a benchmark for pricing, standard treatment guidelines (STGs), to establish relevant clinical needs, the nature and extent of care, and the costs of total inputs required.
 - STGs can address confounders that account for varying levels of care for various hospital procedures while ensuring clinical autonomy to respond to individual needs.
 - The Court observed that pricing-related discussions must start with a benchmark for price determination, which can be established through standard treatment guidelines (STGs).
 - The Court noted that the implementation of STGs will be uncertain due to limited regulatory capacity and unclear enforcement mechanisms for adherence to prescribed rates.
 - The Court also highlighted the need for a comprehensive health financing reform strategy informed by robust and ongoing research on appropriate processes for formulating and adopting STGs.
 - The judgment presents an opportunity to create effective processes to solve a major health system problem, with rate standardisation policies that must be feasible, easily implementable, and follow established price discovery practices.

Implementing the Street Vendors Act in India

Provisions of the Act

- The Act recognizes the role of street vendors in city life, providing daily services, income, and making city life affordable.
- It aims to protect and regulate street vending in cities through State-level rules and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).
- The Act establishes a participatory governance structure through Town Vending Committees (TVCs), with street vendor representatives required to constitute 40% of TVC members.
- The Act also outlines mechanisms for addressing grievances and disputes, proposing the establishment of a Grievance Redressal Committee.

Three Broad Challenges

- Administrative level: Increase in harassment and evictions of street vendors due to outdated bureaucratic mindset.
- Governance level: Weak urban governance mechanisms, as the Act does not integrate well with the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act for urban governance.
- Societal level: The prevailing image of the 'world class city' tends to marginalize street vendors as obstacles to urban development.

The Way Forward

- The Act requires support, possibly from the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, and decentralization over time.
- New challenges include the impact of climate change on vendors, a surge in vendors, competition from e-commerce, and reduced incomes.
- The Act's welfare provisions must be used

creatively to meet emerging needs of street vendors.

BJP's Promises for Migrants

- The BJP's manifesto, Sankalp Patra, aims to reach out to migrant workers registered on the e-Shram portal.
- The manifesto ensures the benefits of various welfare programs to workers registered on the portal, but issues such as Aadhaar-seeding and technical and infrastructural problems have not been addressed.
- The manifesto also promises to enhance Special Train Services for migrant workers, but these should run throughout the year due to the high degree of inter-State migrants.
- The BJP's manifesto also ensures a periodic review of the National Floor Wages considering the minimum living standards of workers.
- The manifesto ignores women, children, and young migrants who all face unique challenges.

Congress's Promises

- The Congress's manifesto, Nyay Patra, promises to enact a law to regulate the employment of migrant workers and ensure their fundamental legal rights and social security.
- The party promises to update ration card holders, expand Public Distribution System (PDS) coverage, allocate sufficient funds to PDS and the Integrated Child Development Service, and launch a mid-day meal scheme.
- The party promises to increase the wage under MGNREGA to ₹400 per day and keep the same amount as the national minimum wage.
- The party promises to launch an urban employment scheme for the urban poor.
- The manifesto focuses on women's welfare and promises to build sufficient night shelters for migrant women workers and safe and hygienic public toilets for women in towns and cities.

• The manifesto would have been more effective if it had addressed the specific challenges faced by migrant women.

• Both parties have overlooked critical areas such as public health inclusion, education of migrating children, housing, water, sanitation, and legal aid and dispute resolution.

Israel-Iran Crisis: A Three-Dimensional Perspective

- Iran's strategic patience in its shadow war with Israel has been disrupted by the recent bombing in Damascus.
- Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's longest-serving Prime Minister, viewed Iran as building an aggressive empire in the Middle East.
- Despite Netanyahu's opposition to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, Iran launched a direct attack on Israel on April 14, marking the first such attack in over three decades.
- The attack shattered Israel's deterrence, but the US still reined Israel in.
- Israel's response to the attack was deemed "feeble," as Netanyahu's National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir called it.
- The crisis reinforces Iran's growing risk appetite in volatile West Asia, America's strategic reluctance, and Israel's near-total dependency on the US for its security.
- The Biden administration's focus has been on preventing the Israel-Hamas conflict from escalating into a regional war.
- The Biden administration intercepted "99%" of Iranian projectiles, averting a disaster on Israeli soil, and stated that the U.S. would not participate in any Israeli retaliation against Iran.

Israel-Iran Shadow War and Iran's Strategic Shift• Israel has been conducting over 400 air strikes in Syria and inside Iran, targeting Iranian interests.

- The assassination of Mohsen Fakhrazadeh, a senior nuclear scientist, in November 2020, was a cost-free operation.
- Israel's recent retaliation against Iran has left Prime Minister Netanyahu in a dilemma, as he

has always favored force against Iran.

- The strategic reality of Iran's strike was not favorable to Netanyahu, who wanted America's support.
- Netanyahu resorted to a symbolic strike inside Iran, targeting a radar system, which did little to bolster its deterrence.
- Iran has shown strategic patience in its shadow war with Israel, showing patience due to its growing presence in the region.
- The Israeli bombing on its embassy annex has altered strategic thinking in Tehran, imposing a cost on Israel's continuing strikes on its officials.
- Iran's strategic ties with Russia and China, and its assessment of the U.S.'s low appetite for prolonged war in West Asia, have influenced the change.
- Israel's vengeful use of force on Gaza has triggered an international uproar, leading Iran to launch an open attack on Israel.
- Iran is the only country in West Asia to have launched missile/drone attacks against the U.S. and two of its closest allies.

The Importance of Indian Aircraft Carrier Aviation

- The Indian Navy's aircraft carriers, INS Vikramaditya and INS Vikrant, showcased "twin carrier operations" on March 5, showcasing India's unique naval presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- The design work for the Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC)-I, later christened Vikrant, began in 1999.
- The decision to develop and produce warship grade steel in India was a collaborative effort between the Steel Authority of India, the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO), and the Indian Navy.
- The development of DMR-249 steel was a commercial decision, now used for the construction of all warships in India.
- The construction of Vikrant ushered in new processes and spin-offs benefiting the

shipbuilding industry, including the introduction of 3-D modelling in 2002.

- The keel of Vikrant was laid in 2009, launched into water in 2013, and went through extensive user acceptance trials between August 2021 and July 2022 before its commissioning.
- INS Vikrant can operate an air wing of 30 aircraft, including MiG-29K fighter jets, Kamov-31, MH-60R multi-role helicopters, and indigenous Advanced Light Helicopters and Light Combat Aircraft (Navy).
- The Navy has moved a case for a second Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC-II), a repeat of a Vikrant-like carrier.
- Built at an overall cost of around ₹20,000 crore and 76% indigenous content, Vikrant has around 2,200 compartments for a crew of around 1,600.
- The ship houses two galleys that cater to all onboard, preparing up to 4,500-5,000 meals every day.

Vikrant Aircraft: A History and Future Prospects

- Vikrant, India's first aircraft carrier, can operate 30 aircraft including MiG-29K fighter jets, Kamov-31, MH-60R helicopters, and indigenous Advanced Light Helicopters and Light Combat Aircraft.
- It uses the STOBAR method to launch and recover aircraft, equipped with a ski-jump to launch and three 'arrestor wires' for recovery.
- The flight deck is prepared with debris and pilot briefings, and equipped with an independent lighting system for bad weather and night operations.
- The aircraft are safely vectored back to the ship and guided for a precision landing.
- Vikrant has larger deck space and hallways compared to previous carriers, including Vikramaditya.
- India is currently negotiating with France for

the purchase of 26 Rafale-M carrier jets as the MiG-29Ks are in short supply.

- The Navy has moved a case for a second Indigenous Aircraft Carrier (IAC-II), a repeat of a Vikrant-like carrier.
- The IAC-II, displacing 45,000 tonnes, will see modifications and newer technologies incorporated in the original design of the Vikrant and will be manufactured by CSL.
- The Navy has shelved its earlier plans for a 65,000 tonne carrier due to the new technology cycle involved and the resultant cost and timelines.
- The proposed IAC-II is often referred to as India's third aircraft carrier, but design, construction, and operationalisation of a carrier takes a long time.
- The Indian Navy will have only two aircraft carriers in operation for the foreseeable future, with a force structure around three carriers, two at sea while one is in maintenance.
- There is a renewed global interest in carriers versus submarines, with several countries now going for carriers of varying sizes.

Unclassed Forests in India: A Case Study

- The Forest (Conservation) Act Amendment (FCAA) 2023 mandates the identification, status, and location of unclassified forests, which have legal protection under the T.N. Godavarman Thirumalpad (1996) case.
- The FCAA would lead to the inevitable diversion of unclassified forests, which would require Central government approval for non-forest use.
- The Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC) uploaded the State Expert Committee (SEC) reports on its website in response to a public interest litigation challenging the constitutionality of the FCAA.

- The SEC reports reveal that no State has provided verifiable data on the identification, status, and location of unclassified forests.
- Seven States and Union Territories — Goa, Haryana, and Goa, Haryana — appear not to have constituted the SEC at all.
- Twenty-three States have shared their reports, but only 17 are in line with the Court's directives.
- The reports were hastily put together, using incomplete and unverified data collected from readily available records.
- Only nine States have provided the extent of unclassified forests, most states and Union Territories only shared the extent of different types of forest areas specified in the order.
- The treatment of SECs without on-ground verification is likely to have resulted in the large-scale destruction of forests.
- The loss of such forests is likely to be a recurring theme in all States, and needs to be investigated.
- The failure to implement the Godavarman order of the SC is a lost opportunity to achieve the requirements of the Indian Forest Policy.
- Promulgating the FCAA without examining the SEC reports displays a lack of diligence on the MoEFCC's part and will have consequences for India's ecosystems and ecological security.

Chennai's Desalination Solution

- Chennai is set to become the desalination capital of India, with three operational plants in Minjur and Nemmeli, and Southeast Asia's largest plant, Perur, set to open.
- Experts suggest a multi-pronged approach to water resilience, including desalination, to address water scarcity.
- Desalination plants have helped avert water scarcity in the city, despite storage dipping in reservoirs.
- South Chennai has already received desalinated water through pipelines, and work is

underway on creating drinking water supply infrastructure on the southern fringes.

- The plants are expected to meet the thirst of residents living along the Information Technology Corridor, who have been relying heavily on private water suppliers and groundwater for over a decade.
- Metrowater plans to expand desalinated water supply to cover more areas within the next three to four years.
- Despite environmental concerns, Metrowater has been conscious of the establishment of new desalination plants.
- The new plant at Perur will have components such as lamella clarifier units and the DAF to remove lighter materials and gravity dual media filters to separate total suspended solids in the seawater.
- The Perur plant will have two separate 200-mld units to ensure it produces 200mld of treated water at any given point of time.
- Plans include installing energy recovery devices and booster pumps and units for post-mineralisation of treated water before supply.

Desalination in Chennai: A Solution to Water Scarcity

2019 Drought and Desalination Plants

- The Nemmeli facility has filled the gap left by the dry Veeranam tank, stabilizing the daily supply.
- The water supplied now has a permissible TDS level of 700 ppm.
- The RO membranes will be replaced at the Nemmeli plant by next week, and residents will get better quality water by the first week of May.

More Desalination Plants

- The Tamil Nadu Water Supply and Drainage Board is considering the possibility of establishing desalination plants in Ramanathapuram, Villupuram, and Thoothukudi.
- The production cost of desalinated water, including conveyance, is put at ₹60 per kilolitre.
- The TWAD Board collects charges directly from domestic and industrial consumers, and the

gap between charges and production cost is filled with government subsidy.

Safer and Cheaper Desalination

- Desalinated water is a reliable, drought-proof source of water security and economy.
- Consumers will pay only seven or eight paise for each litre of desalinated water as opposed to 15 or 20 paise for a litre of tanker water.
- The cost of establishing a desalination plant has come down over the past decade due to advances in technology.

Traditional Waterbodies

- The Tamil Nadu Public Works Department Seniors Engineers' Association has proposed increasing the storage of the tanks in the Chennai Metropolitan Area.
- The Association has prepared a list of 507 tanks in 322 villages to augment sources of surface water and supply drinking water to Chennai.
- An additional storage of 3.75 tmcft can be created by desilting the tanks at a cost of ₹500 crore.

The Physics and Maths of Election Fairness

Election Science and Practice

- The science behind elections is a complex process, with the earliest form of elections in ancient Athens relying on random choice.
- The first-past-the-post (FPTP) system, used in India, the U.S., the U.K., and other countries, has many drawbacks, including a disproportionate difference between the popular vote share and the seat share.
- The FPTP system often secures less than 50% of the vote share, a metric that has never been surpassed in India or the U.K.

Condorcet and Borda Systems

- Ramon Llull's 13th-century work, *De Arte Eleccionis*, provides a detailed algorithm for a two-stage election process for church officials.
- The Condorcet system, named after 18th-century French mathematician Nicolas de

Condorcet, ensures that the winner receives more than 50% votes and is the most preferred candidate.

- Despite being better than FPTP, the Condorcet system is not used in any national elections due to its mechanism allowing participants to prevent the election of a particular candidate.

The Borda Electoral Process and its Challenges

Borda Electoral Process

- Proposed by Jean-Charles de Borda in 1784, first described by Nicolas of Cusa in 15th century.
- A rank-based voting system (RVS) similar to points table in sporting tournaments.
- Allows voters to rank each candidate on the ballot paper.
- Vote redistribution ensures the winner has at least 50% of the vote.

Challenges with RVS

- The original Borda method is complex and challenging to implement in large elections like those in India.
- In 1951, Kenneth Arrow proved that RVS can conflict with certain fairness criteria required of elections.
- In an RVS election, outcomes are unavoidable due to the distribution of preferences.

Mathematical and Physics Perspectives

- Mathematical analysis helps sharpen an algorithm for the election process.
- Physical analysis serves to diagnose if the algorithm is fairly implemented in practice.
- The absence of such order suggests that elections are/were not fair and could be used to diagnose and flag electoral malpractices.

The Importance of Labour Statistics in India

The Role of Trade Unions in Labour Statistics

- Trade unions can play a crucial role in producing labour statistics.

- The industrial relations system and labour market (IRS-LM) are subject to constant changes in objective and subjective factors.

- Social dialogue is a crucial procedural institutional process for forming consensus on reforms.

- The Indian Labour Conference (ILC) is used by the government to push reform agendas.

Labour Statistics and Reform Arguments

- Labor inspection system is criticized as a case of "Inspector-Raj" and calls for reforms.
- Some academics and global agencies have consistently supported the benevolent impact of reforms.
- Trade unions should collect relevant information on inspection to counter these reform arguments.

Closure Reform and Strikes

- Trade unions have not collected data on retrenchment/closure applications under Chapter V-B.
- The Industrial Relations Code, 2020 Code on Industrial Relations (CIR) has made legal strikes nearly impossible.
- Trade unions could have used data on strikes and lockouts published by the Labour Bureau to challenge the need for harsher strike clauses.

The Need for Valid, Comprehensive, and Reliable Statistics

- India has ratified the Labour Statistics Convention (No.160), 1985 and Labour Inspection Convention (081), 1947.
- Trade unions should produce labour statistics, research on IRS-LM, and build an active interface with academics.
- If not done, statistical agencies such as the Labour Bureau will be reformed.

"Essential Programme on Immunisation: Making EPI an 'Essential Programme on Immunisation'"

- 2024 marks a significant milestone for immunisation programmes globally and in India, marking 50 years since the launch of the Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1974.
- The EPI was introduced to leverage the immunisation infrastructure and a trained workforce to expand the benefit of available vaccines.
- India launched the EPI in 1978, later renamed as the Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) in 1985.
- Significant progress has been made in terms of the impact of immunization and vaccines globally and in India.
- Vaccines against 13 universally recommended diseases and 17 additional diseases are recommended for a context-specific situation.
- Research is in progress to develop vaccines against nearly 125 pathogens, many of which would prevent diseases prevalent in low- and middle-income countries.
- The coverage of children with three doses of DPT, a tracer indicator of coverage, has been rising over the years.
- Studies have shown that vaccines have saved millions of lives and prevented billions of hospital visits and hospitalisations.
- In nearly all low- and middle-income countries, including India, the immunisation programme remains a success among all government initiatives.
- However, there are persisting inequities in coverage by geography, socio-economic strata, and other parameters, which demand urgent interventions.

Understanding the Evolution of Vaccines in India

Vaccine History and Prioritization

- Vaccines have been available for all age groups since the first smallpox vaccine in 1798.
- The first anti rabies, cholera, and typhoid vaccines were primarily developed for adults.
- The first vaccine against plague was developed in India in 1897, intended for individuals across all age groups.
- The BCG vaccine against tuberculosis was first introduced in 1951 and was also administered to the adult population.

Childhood Focus and Vaccine Coverage

- Children are most vulnerable from vaccine-preventable diseases, hence they have been prioritized for vaccination.
- Vaccine supply was limited and government resources were scarce, leading to vaccine delivery to children.
- Over the last five decades, vaccine coverage has improved, but diseases preventable with vaccines are becoming more common in the adult population.

Improving Adult Vaccine Coverage

- Initial policy discussions are underway to expand vaccination coverage in additional populations.
- The Indian government should consider providing recommended vaccines for a wider section of adults and the elderly population.
- The National Technical Advisory Groups in Immunization (NTAGI) should start providing recommendations on the use of vaccines in adults and the elderly.
- Myths and misconceptions about vaccines must be proactively addressed to tackle vaccine hesitancy.
- Professional associations of doctors should work to increase awareness about vaccines among adults and the elderly.
- Medical colleges and research institutions should generate evidence on the burden of diseases in the adult population in India.

Recommendations for Future Expansion

- Expanding coverage of vaccines for adults and the elderly may result in improved coverage with childhood vaccines and reduced vaccine

inequities.

- India's EPI has made major progress, and another independent national level review of the UIP is needed.

The Paradox of Thrift: Does a Rise in Savings Cause a Fall in Investment?

Origins of the Theory

- Popularized by British economist John Maynard Keynes in his 1936 book *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*.
- Advocates that higher savings are detrimental to the wider economy and that boosting consumer spending is the key to economic growth.
- Savings are invested by capitalists to sell their output to consumers, and a decrease in consumer spending can discourage further investment.

Criticisms of the Theory

- Critics argue that saving more is not bad for the economy and a fall in consumer spending does not lead to a fall in investment.
- They argue that a rise in savings leads to an increase in entrepreneurial demand from capitalists for various factors of production
- They also argue that a drop in consumer spending will not lead to a drop in investment due to a lack in consumer demand for the final goods and services produced by businesses.
- They argue that when people spend less on consumer goods and save more, capitalists will invest a greater amount of available savings to satisfy consumer demand in the more distant future.
- They also argue that capitalists in a free economy will effectively reallocate higher savings in accordance with the greater preference that consumers show for goods in the distant future than in the near future.

Addressing Inequality in India: A Development Economist's Perspective

Inequality and Growth in India

- The Congress party's election manifesto, the *Nyay Patra*, has sparked debate on inequality and wealth redistribution.
- In 2022-23, 22.6% of the national income went to the top 1%, the highest since 1922.
- The top 1% population has a 40.1% share in wealth.

As an Election Issue

- The unfairness of some individuals and corporations while most of the population struggles for decent employment opportunities is becoming more apparent.
- The logic of supporting 'wealth creators' to create more jobs and spread prosperity has failed repeatedly.
- The futility of relying solely on economic growth at the cost of increasing inequality is a core political economy question.

Redistribution Measures

- Direct redistribution measures of the 'Tax the rich, subsidise the poor' nature are relevant in India.
- India has a low tax-GDP ratio and a regressive taxation structure.
- Direct taxes are not very progressive.

Welfare Spending

- Public spending on welfare and the social sector is low compared to other countries.
- Despite COVID-19, there have been no massive increases in health expenditures.
- Improving revenue mobilisation and increasing spending on areas directly affecting the lives of the poor is a relevant issue.

Questioning Growth Nature

- Growth that does not generate jobs contributes to development.
- The focus should be on generating decent jobs with adequate remuneration.
- Governments can contribute to more equitable growth by spending on programs like the NREGA and the Public Distribution System.

Job Creation

- Governments can contribute to job creation by filling up vacancies and expanding public services.

- These efforts will create employment opportunities for many, especially women, and contribute to improving human development outcomes.

- An employment-centered growth pattern will focus on supporting small and medium enterprises, promoting skill training, and enabling women to participate in the labour market.

Recognizing Menstrual Leave as a Woman's Right

Political Parties' Stand on Menstrual Leave

- The ruling political party in Tamil Nadu, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), has pledged to insist on a law providing menstrual leave to women.

- The promise was made after a debate in the 17th Lok Sabha in December 2023.

Legislators and Bills

- S. Jothimani, a Congress Member of Parliament from Tamil Nadu, introduced the 'Right to Menstrual Hygiene and Paid Leave Bill, 2019', which aimed to include menstrual leave in women's rights.

- Other bills introduced include the Menstruation Benefit Bill, 2017, and the Women's Sexual, Reproductive and Menstrual Rights Bill, 2018.

- The Supreme Court of India refused to entertain a public interest litigation in Shailendra Mani Tripathi vs Union of India, which sought direction to the state on menstrual leave.

Progressive Indian States and Asian Nations

- Kerala was the first state to recognize the need for "period leave" for students and allowed it during examinations in 1912.

- Kerala has encouraged the use of other menstrual hygiene products and made them available for students.

- Bihar allowed government employees two-day menstrual leave in 1992, and in January 2023, introduced menstrual and maternity leave to all students above the age of 18.

- Several international organizations have promoted menstrual leave as a women's right.

Gender Sensitivity Needed

- Policy solutions to gender inequalities defined by differentiated gender experiences of women will ensure equity and bring new social change.

- The instrumentality of public policy and discussions on menstruation lies in shattering taboos and creating a gender-sensitive world.

- Recognition of the issue by political parties this election season will be a major step to promote women's rights and gender equality.

The Judicial Shadow Over Standard Essential Patents in India

- Prashant Reddy T., co-author of 'Create, Copy, Disrupt: India's Intellectual Property Dilemmas' (2017), suggests that the government must regulate standard essential patents (SEPs) to prevent further damage to India's manufacturing dreams.

- SEPs are patents covering technologies adopted by the industry as "standards", such as CDMA, GSM, LTE.

- SEPs are crucial for ensuring interoperability of different brands of cellular phones manufactured by different companies.

- The process of setting standards in the technology sector is largely privatised and dominated by "standard setting organisations" (SSOs) run largely by private technology companies.

- The SSOs are supposed to prevent such a scenario by requiring the owners of SEPs to license their technologies at a fair, reasonable and non-discriminatory (FRAND) rate.
- The model of self-regulation by the technology industry has been marked with opacity and has failed spectacularly, as evidenced by the record fines that some SEP owners have had to cough up across the world for engaging in anticompetitive practices.
- The Indian response to the issue has been characterized by both judicial lethargy and judicial activism at the Delhi High Court.
- Ericsson challenged the power of the Competition Commission of India (CCI) to investigate whether Ericsson abused its dominant position by demanding extortionate royalties for its SEPs.
- The matter remains pending, with the CCI appealed against this decision to the Supreme Court of India.

Delhi High Court's Role in Patent Law and Manufacturing

- The Delhi High Court has been hearing lawsuits filed by Ericsson and other SEP owners against cellular phone manufacturers, focusing on whether they infringe SEPs owned by the former and the damages payable.
- The litigation should have been stayed until the competition law issues were resolved.
- The court has granted interim remedies pending the conclusion of long-winded trials, requiring manufacturers to "deposit" money with the court to continue manufacturing during the pendency of the trial.
- These orders are unprecedented in commercial law history and unfair to defendants as they deprive them of working capital.
- The court has justified this judicial activism by

invoking its "inherent powers to do justice."

- This judicial activism and delays will negatively impact the government's efforts to attract more investment in the manufacturing sector.
- The government's "production linked incentives" scheme for manufacturing in India has included payouts to manufacturers, but the money is being removed from the pockets of SEP owners.
- The Indian government needs to intervene and put in place measures to regulate SEPs before the judiciary damages India's manufacturing dreams.
- India has a stronger case to push for similar or stronger regulatory measures due to its lack of control over SEP selection by SSOs and international agreements to enforce patents of foreign technology companies.

Satyajit Ray's Unfinished Films and Ideas

- Ray was a renowned cinematic auteur who was always assessing the cinematic potential of literary sources.
- His unfinished projects include *The Alien*, *A Passage to India*, and *the Mahabharata*.
- Ray's ideas and scripts were often overlooked by his fans.

An Idea About Aliens

- Ray drafted the screenplay for his sci-fi film, *The Alien*, in 1967, based on his own story and ideas.
- The project was abandoned due to unexpected twists and turns, and the script was not released until Steven Spielberg's *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* was released.
- Ray's depiction of aliens as benign, small, and acceptable to children, possessed of

supernatural powers, and interested in earthly things was influential.

The West's Image of India

- Ray met E.M. Forster in 1966 with the intention to film A Passage to India.
- Ray was approached by King's College trustees in 1980 but lost interest due to the book's distorted and unreal views.
- Ray's essay "Under Western Eyes" highlighted the limitations of the West's interest in India and the distorted views it often had.

The Mahabharata

- Ray had been planning to film the Mahabharata from his early childhood, but had to decide on the language to introduce the main characters to a non-Indian audience.
- He had considered casting Dilip Kumar, Toshiro Mifune, and others, but these ideas were abandoned due to non-availability of actors.

Ray's Other Film Ideas

- Ray was approached by Indira Gandhi to make a documentary on Jawaharlal Nehru, and proposed several films on various subjects.
- He also had an interest in the operatic form of Balmiki-Pratibha and documentaries on notables like Radhanath Sikdar.

The Need for Researchers to Probe and Investigate

- Researchers are now urged to probe and delve into the available material to understand why many of Ray's ideas couldn't be transported to the medium of cinema.

Indian Spices Contamination Concerns

• Indian spice brands, MDH and Everest, are facing an investigation into possible contamination of spice mixes sold by Singapore, Hong Kong, and the U.S.

• The allegations are based on the presence of ethylene oxide (EtO), a toxic chemical used as a food stabilizer.

• The Spices Board of India has initiated mandatory testing of products shipped abroad and is working with exporters to identify the root cause of contamination.

• Hong Kong's Centre for Food Safety suspended the sale of three MDH spice blends and Everest Fish curry masala due to high levels of EtO.

• Singapore ordered a recall of the Everest spice mix, stating it is unfit for human consumption.

• MDH has called allegations over EtO contamination "baseless and unsubstantiated".

• The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA), which had previously rejected food and spice imports from India, is "aware of the reports and is gathering additional information about the situation".

• The health concerns of MDH and Everest's spice mixes include the potential formation of toxic and carcinogenic compounds.

• A history of rejections in the U.S. shows at least 30 instances where entry was refused because the products appeared to contain salmonella, misbranding, adulteration, artificial colouring, or incorrect labeling.

India's Response to EtO Contamination in Spice Exports

• The Spice Board of India has initiated corrective measures, including mandatory testing of consignments shipped to Singapore and Hong Kong.

- The board also seeks to propose corrective measures to exporters and initiate inspections to ensure adherence to relevant standards.
- A circular dated April 30 contains guidelines to prevent EtO contamination, prescribing norms for testing at raw and final stages, storage of EtO treated products, and alternate methods curtailing the use of the chemical compounds.
- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has directed state regulators to collect samples of major spice brands to test for EtO.
- Activists have called for stringent safety checks of curry powders and spices to detect and control the use of EtO in food products and ensure proper implementation of regulatory norms.
- The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) warns that the integrity and future of India's spice trade hang in a delicate balance due to cascading regulatory actions in many countries.
- The chain of events could put other small companies or co-operatives' exports under a cloud of suspicion and could be used as a pretext to reduce prices, burdening the farmer.
- If regulators in China, Hong Kong, and ASEAN follow suit, Indian exports could see a "dramatic downturn", affecting exports valued at \$2.17 billion.

Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) Needs Design Change

- PMJAY, launched in 2018, aims to provide ₹5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation to over 12 crore families.
- The scheme has issued 34.27 crore cards, with about 6.5 crore receiving treatment and over 30,000 empanelled hospitals.

- Hospitals in some states have reported being owed hundreds of crores in dues and some are turning away or taking in fewer PMJAY patients.
- Research suggests that if government departmental expenditure is pooled with PM-JAY expenditure in many States, government health expenditure may be enough to offer universal health coverage, including drugs and diagnostics.

Kerala's Healthcare Out-of-pocket Expenditure and Public Sector's Inefficiency

- Kerala's public sector, despite being well-funded, struggles to deliver universal healthcare due to underutilization of primary care and waste.
- The implementation of hospital-centric schemes could exacerbate misallocation of government resources.
- Government hospitals are now checking if patients are authorized to receive PMJAY, creating barriers for low-income families.
- The National Health Authority (NHA) and the State Health Authority (SHA) could help in organizing and purchasing high-quality care.
- Private hospitals are preferred over public ones due to perceived superior services.
- The private sector's capacity is a significant issue, with many states having high numbers of people per empanelled healthcare provider (EHCP).

PMJAY Challenges and Solutions

- Insufficient beds and facilities to meet demand.
- Delays in claim payments despite clear guidelines.
- Claim rejections due to documentation errors or technicalities.
- Union government's cap on treatment charges,

which may not benefit private providers.

- Delivery of PMJAY will be challenging until the public sector is strengthened.
- Private hospitals face increased costs and unnecessary procedures due to public sector's inefficiency or lack of trust.
- Inactive hospitals and skewed hospital dispersion within states.
- Delays in claim payments, with some states experiencing over 45 days delay.
- Concentration of claims in Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu.
- Further research needed to understand the root causes of these issues.

NM and AK Discuss Healthcare Delays in India

- NM argues that payment delays are not due to poor or rich states but rather technology-enabled platforms.
- NM points out the lack of hospital capacity in Shravasti district in U.P., a key factor in these delays.
- NM argues that the insurance scheme in India doesn't require network adequacy, allowing cards to be offered without a claim process.
- AK criticizes the equating PMJAY and health and wellness centres with government healthcare efforts.
- NM suggests that the largest component of healthcare expenditure is government expenditures through the State and Centre, which are higher than PMJAY and health and wellness centres.
- AK suggests that the current PMJAY model may not cover all healthcare needs due to its fiscal cost.

State Schemes for Free Medicines in India

- Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan are implementing universal healthcare.

- India ranks 67th out of 189 countries in out-of-pocket expenditure.

- The Union government is supposed to allocate 60% of PMJAY funds, but the amount is not allocated.

Performance Disparity Among States under PMJAY

- India's out-of-pocket expenditure for health has decreased, but still hovers around 47-50%.
- PMJAY was designed to address healthcare cost shocks, but needs to be considered in its entirety.

Insurance Model in India

- The insurance model, separating money from providers, could significantly impact performance, especially in poorer states.
- This model has become the only way many countries have delivered Universal Health Coverage (UHC).
- India's current model is no longer the dominant model.

Healthcare Reforms: A Pathway to Better Outcomes

- The Medicare/Medicaid error in 1965 led to massive healthcare price inflation.
- The purchaser-provider split is the only solution, if restricted to the public sector.
- Current insurance design may not yield desired outcomes, including reducing out-of-pocket expenditure and ensuring quality care.
- The issue lies not just in government subsidy channeling, but also in specific payment structures and non-price mechanisms that can change provider behavior and patient choice.
- PM-JAY's current form may not achieve desired outcomes unless more focus is placed on the public health system.



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