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# Privilege breach proceedings against MLAs can continue in next Assembly: Madras HC

GS Paper II: Privilege Motion

**Mohamed Imranullah S.**

CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Wednesday held that the breach of privilege proceedings initiated against Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) could continue even after the dissolution of the Assembly to which they had been elected and such incomplete proceedings could not be considered to have lapsed after the election of the next Assembly.

Justices S.M. Subramaniam and C. Kumarappan said the purpose of granting certain privileges to the House would become meaningless if the proceedings had to be considered to have lapsed along with the completion of the tenure of a particular Assembly. They also said the MLAs might not take the privileges seriously if the law was interpreted in such a manner.



**Landmark ruling:** The powers of the Committee of Privileges and those of the Speaker of the House will not lapse merely on account of change of government, the Madras High Court has said. THE HINDU

The court made the observations while allowing writ appeals filed in 2021 by the then Legislative Assembly Secretary as well as the then chairman of the Committee of Privileges against a single judge's order in 2020, quashing the show-cause notices issued to incumbent Chief Minister, M.K. Stalin, and 17 other DMK MLAs for having displayed 'gutkha' sachets in the Assembly in July 2017.

The Division Bench held that the single judge ought not to have "assumed the role of the Speaker" and interfered at the very preliminary stage itself by quashing the show-cause notices issued by the Privileges Committee to the DMK MLAs. It remitted the matter back to the present Speaker as well as the Committee of Privileges for continuing the proceedings and taking a final decision on merits.

## Privilege breach proceedings against MLAs can continue in next Assembly: Madras HC (01 August)

- The Madras High Court ruled that breach of privilege proceedings against MLAs can continue even after the Assembly is dissolved.
- Such proceedings do not lapse with the election of a new Assembly.
- Justices S.M. Subramaniam and C. Kumarappan stated that privileges would be meaningless if proceedings ended with an Assembly's term.
- They also noted that MLAs might disregard privileges if the law were interpreted otherwise.
- The court allowed writ appeals from 2021 against a 2020 order that quashed show-cause notices issued to Chief Minister M.K. Stalin and 17 DMK MLAs.
- The notices were for displaying 'gutkha' sachets in the Assembly in July 2017.
- The Division Bench criticized the single judge for interfering prematurely and overstepping their role.
- The court sent the matter back to the current Speaker and the Committee of Privileges to continue proceedings and make a final decision.

## Hema panel report: Kerala HC extends stay on SIC order

**The Hindu Bureau**

KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Wednesday extended till August 6 the stay on a State Information Commission (SIC) order directing the State government to disclose the K. Hema Committee report on the working conditions of women in the film industry with limited redactions.

The court passed the order when a writ petition filed by film producer Sajimon Parayil challenging the SIC order came up for hearing.

According to the petitioner, making public the report would violate the

fundamental and privacy rights and breach the confidentiality of the witnesses who deposed before the committee. The petitioner feared that making the report public could lead to identification of the witnesses, potentially exposing them to retaliation or further harassment.

The Hema committee constituted in the aftermath of a case of sexual assault on an actor in 2017, had submitted the report to the Chief Minister on December 31, 2019. Despite repeated demands over the years from various stakeholders, the report had remained shrouded in secrecy.

## Outflow from KRS, Kabini dams stepped up; officials sound alert for people living downstream

GS Paper I:  
Geography

Incessant rain in the Cauvery catchment areas has forced the authorities to step up the outflow from the Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) and Kabini dams in Karnataka. A fresh flood warning has been issued for people living downstream of the two dams.

The low-lying areas are in the districts of Mandya, Mysuru, and Chamarajanager, and people living along the riverbanks have been asked to relocate to safer places.

The outflow from KRS, which had increased to 1.5 lakh cusecs on Tuesday



A late evening alert said that the discharge from Krishnaraja Sagar dam had been increased to 1.7 lakh cusecs. M.A. SRIRAM

night, was reduced to 1.07 lakh cusecs by Wednesday morning. But a late evening alert said that the discharge from KRS had been increased to 1.7 lakh cusecs.

The cumulative outflow from KRS and the Kabini

reservoirs was in excess of 2.4 lakh cusecs on Wednesday evening.

The Kabini joins the Cauvery at T. Narsipur and the villages downstream from this confluence point will feel the brunt of the discharge.

## Hema panel report: Kerala HC extends stay on SIC order (01 August)

- The Kerala High Court extended the stay on a State Information Commission order to disclose the K. Hema Committee report until August 6.
- The extension came in response to a writ petition by film producer Sajimon Parayil challenging the SIC order.

- The petitioner argues that making the K. Hema Committee report public would violate privacy rights and breach witness confidentiality.
- They fear that publicizing the report could identify witnesses and expose them to retaliation or harassment.
- The report, submitted to the Chief Minister on December 31, 2019, has remained secret despite calls for its release since a 2017 sexual assault case.

## Outflow from KRS, Kabini dams stepped up; officials sound alert for people living downstream (01 August)

- Continuous rain in the Cauvery catchment areas has led to increased outflow from the Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) and Kabini dams.
- A flood warning has been issued for people living downstream of the dams in Mandya, Mysuru, and Chamarajanagar districts.
- Residents along the riverbanks are advised to relocate to safer areas.
- The outflow from KRS increased to 1.7 lakh cusecs by Wednesday evening, while the combined outflow from KRS and Kabini exceeded 2.4 lakh cusecs.
- The Kabini river joins the Cauvery at T. Narsipur, affecting villages downstream from this confluence.

# SC to decide if States can demand taxes on mines retrospectively

Solicitor-General urges the court to clarify that its July 25 judgment will apply prospectively, says allowing States to demand retrospective taxes will have cascading effects, which will ultimately impact the common man; top court reserves order

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

A nine-judge Bench of the Supreme Court on Wednesday reserved orders for a query raised by the Centre on whether its July 25 judgment upholding the power of State legislatures to tax mines and mineral rights would be applied retrospectively.

Appearing before the Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta urged the court to clarify that the judgment would only apply prospectively, that is, from July 25, and not prior.

Mr. Mehta said allowing States to demand retrospective taxes on mines and mineral rights would have “cascading effects”, which would ultimately impact the common man.

He said industries, including public sector undertakings (PSUs) involved in the manufacture of



**Independent decision:** The July 25 judgment freed States from restrictions of the Centre and is in tune with the federalist principles of governance. REUTERS

steel, relied on mines.

The mines were leased out in public auctions based on the terms of the 2015 amendments made to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulations) Act of 1957. The bids were formulated according to the then-existing rates. Retrospective evaluation of tax would lead to a heavy load, which could crush these sectors.

“Lordships may consid-

er stating that neither the State may demand any levy retrospectively nor the private parties or PSUs who have paid would seek any refund of the money,” Mr. Mehta submitted.

### Bankruptcy risk

Senior advocate Harish Salve, appearing for Mahanadi Coalfields Limited, submitted that past levy demands may be more than the net worth of many

companies. Retrospective implementation of the judgment ran the risk of bankrupting these companies.

On July 25, the Constitution Bench, in a majority judgment of 8:1 had held that the power of State legislatures to tax mineral-bearing lands and quarries could not be limited by Parliament.

The judgment freed States from the restrictions

of the Centre and is in tune with the federalist principles of governance.

“Fiscal federalism entails that the power of the States to levy taxes within the legislative domain carved out to them and subject to the limitations laid down by the Constitution must be secured from unconstitutional interference by Parliament,” Chief Justice Chandrachud had laid down in the judgment.

The verdict noted how mineral-rich States like Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, and Odisha continue to have per capita income below national averages and trail in economic development. The court had further held that royalty paid to States by mining lease holders was not tax. “Royalty is not a tax. Royalty is a contractual consideration paid by the mining lessee to the lessor for enjoyment of mineral rights,” Chief Justice Chandrachud noted in his majority opinion.

# Ex-Health Secretary Preeti Sudan is new UPSC Chairperson

GS Paper II: UPSC

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Former Union Health Secretary Preeti Sudan was appointed Chairperson of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) after Manoj Soni resigned from the post earlier this month, according to an official order. She would take the oath of office on Thursday.

Ms. Sudan, currently a member of the UPSC, will take charge on Thursday and will have a tenure till April 29, 2025 or till further orders. She will turn 65 in April next year.

Ms. Sudan is only the second woman to head the UPSC since R.M. Bathew served as the chairperson from 1992 to 1996.

“The President has approved the appointment of Preeti Sudan, Member, UPSC under clause (1A) of the Article 316 of the Constitution for performing the duties of Chairman, UPSC with effect from August 1, 2024, till further orders or till April 29, 2025, whichever is earlier,” a July 29 letter addressed by Additional Secretary, Depart-



Preeti Sudan

ment of Personnel and Training to Secretary, UPSC said.

The same communication said that Mr. Soni submitted his resignation on July 4 and the President has accepted the same with effect from July 31 under Article 316(2) of the Constitution.

A 1983-batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the Andhra Pradesh cadre, Ms. Sudan has served in various capacities, including as Union Health Secretary for three years till July 2020.

The Hindu reported on July 19 that Mr. Soni resigned for “personal reasons,” almost five years before his tenure ends in 2029.

## Ex-Health Secretary Preeti Sudan is new UPSC Chairperson (01 August)

- Preeti Sudan, former Union Health Secretary, was appointed Chairperson of the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) following Manoj Soni’s resignation.
- Sudan, currently a UPSC member, will take office on Thursday and serve until April 29, 2025, or until further notice.
- She will turn 65 in April 2025.
- Sudan is only the second woman to lead the UPSC, after R.M. Bathew, who served from 1992 to 1996.
- Preeti Sudan has been appointed Chairperson of the UPSC from August 1, 2024, until April 29, 2025, or until further orders.
- Her appointment was approved by the President under Article 316 of the Constitution.
- Manoj Soni resigned from the UPSC Chairperson position on July 4, and his resignation was accepted effective July 31.
- Soni resigned for "personal reasons," nearly five years before his term was set to end in 2029.

- Preeti Sudan, a 1983-batch IAS officer from Andhra Pradesh, previously served as Union Health Secretary until July 2020.

# India, China hold 30th round of border talks; both agree to uphold peace, tranquillity

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

India and China on Wednesday held the 30th meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) in New Delhi during which the discussion was “in-depth, constructive and forward-looking”, and both sides agreed to maintain the momentum through established diplomatic and military channels, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

The talks come amid indications that the two countries are making efforts to resolve the stand-off along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

“Further to discussions between the two Foreign Ministers in their recent meetings at Astana [in Kazakhstan] and Vientiane [in Laos], the two sides reviewed the current situation along the LAC with a



**Tough stance:** Armoured vehicles of the Indian Army at a military camp in eastern Ladakh. AFP

view to finding an early resolution of the outstanding issues. Restoration of peace and tranquillity, and respect for the LAC are an essential basis for restoration of normalcy in bilateral relations,” the MEA said in a statement. The 29th WMCC meeting was held on March 24 in Beijing.

## **Economic restrictions**

Both sides agreed on the need to jointly uphold peace and tranquillity on the ground in the border

areas in accordance with bilateral agreements and protocols reached between the two governments, the statement added.

This also comes amid speculation that the government is considering relaxing some of its economic restrictions on Chinese companies following the recommendations of the latest Economic Survey, which called for more Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from China.

# 'Constitute commission to hive off Naga villages from Kuki-dominated districts'

**The Hindu Bureau**  
GUWAHATI

Three principal organisations of the Zeliangrong community in ethnic strife-torn Manipur have asked Chief Minister N. Biren Singh to constitute a District Reorganisation Commission to keep Naga villages out of Churachandpur and Kongpokpi, two districts dominated by the Kuki-Zo people.

Zeliangrong is a collec-

tive term for three Naga communities – Zeme, Liangmai, and Rongmei.

The Nagas and Kuki-Zo are two groups of tribes inhabiting the hills of Manipur while the non-tribal Meitei people dominate the central Imphal Valley.

In a memorandum to the Chief Minister a couple of days ago, the apex Zeliangrong Baudi, Zeliangrong Youth Front, and the Zeliangrong Students' Union said the committee to redraw the districts should

be formed during the monsoon session of the 60-member Manipur Assembly that began Wednesday, July 31. The session ends on August 6.

Forming the panel would fast-track the "alteration and amalgamation of Zeliangrong villages" in the Churachandpur and Kongpokpi districts with the adjoining Noney and Tamenglong districts. The groups said hiving off these villages to the Naga-inhabited hill district has been a de-

mand dating back to the tenure of the late former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh.

The renewed demand has attained significance at a time when Manipur is divided along ethnic lines. The Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities have avoided travelling to each other's areas of dominance. There are hardly any Kuki-Zo people in the Imphal Valley while Meiteis have stayed away from the surrounding foothills.

# IAF's largest multilateral exercise to begin this month

**Dinakar Peri**  
NEW DELHI

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is all set to host its largest multilateral exercise, *Tarang Shakti*, in two phases in August and September. Eighteen countries, 10 of them with air assets, will join the exercise, which will see a total of 150 aircraft, both foreign and IAF, soar into the skies over Sullur and Jodhpur. The exercise will be a landmark event and has no particular nation or theme "in mind", Air Marshal A.P. Singh, Vice-Chief of the Air Staff, said on Wednesday.

"Invitations have been extended to 51 countries. Ten countries will be participating with assets and 18 as observers with one more country likely to join," Air Marshal Singh said while briefing the media. "The aim is to foster interoperability and share



A.P. Singh

best practices and also to showcase indigenous defence industry."

Besides the observer countries, Germany, France, Spain, and the U.K. are scheduled to take part in Phase-1, while Phase-2 will see participation of Australia, Bangladesh, Greece, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates and the U.S.

Given the diverse participation and to cater to the requirements of friendly foreign countries, the IAF has decided to do it in two phases, the Vice-Chief ex-

plained. Several countries which are taking part in the multilateral exercise *Pitch Black* in Australia will join the exercise on their return leg.

Each phase of the exercise will see participation of 70-80 air assets. Phase-1 will be held from August 6-14 at Sullur in Tamil Nadu, and see participation of 32 foreign aircraft, Exercise Director Air Vice-Marshal Rajat Mohan said. Similarly, Phase-2, to be held from September 1-14 at Jodhpur, will see participation of 27 fighters, two refuelling aircraft, two airborne early warning aircraft, and four C-130 Special Forces aircraft from foreign countries, Phase-2 Director Air Commodore S.K. Taliyan said. The IAF will field over 40 aircraft each in both the phases. The Indian Navy will participate in Phase-1 with its MiG-29K carrier borne fighters.

## IAF's largest multilateral exercise to begin this month (01 August)

- The Indian Air Force (IAF) will host its largest multilateral exercise, Tarang Shakti, in August and September.
- Eighteen countries will participate, with ten bringing air assets, and a total of 150 aircraft from both foreign and IAF will be involved.
- The exercise will take place over Sullur and Jodhpur.

- The event aims to foster interoperability, share best practices, and showcase India's defense industry.
- Germany, France, Spain, and the U.K. will join Phase-1, while Phase-2 will include Australia, Bangladesh, Greece, Singapore, the UAE, and the U.S.
- The IAF's Tarang Shakti exercise will be conducted in two phases to accommodate diverse participation and needs.
- Phase-1 will be from August 6-14 at Sulur, Tamil Nadu, with 32 foreign aircraft and over 40 IAF aircraft.
- Phase-2 will be from September 1-14 at Jodhpur, featuring 27 fighters, two refueling aircraft, two airborne early warning aircraft, and four C-130 Special Forces aircraft from foreign countries, with over 40 IAF aircraft.
- Several participating countries in the Pitch Black exercise in Australia will join Tarang Shakti on their return.

- The Indian Navy will also participate in Phase-1 with MiG-29K carrier-borne fighters.

## Ransomware attack halts services at small banks (01 August)

- Around 300 small-sized lenders have been affected by a ransomware attack at C-Edge Technologies.
- Customers of cooperative banks and regional rural banks are unable to access payment services like ATM withdrawals and UPI.
- The issue has been ongoing for the past two days following a breach at C-Edge.
- Other banking services remain normal, and precautions are being taken to protect the payment system.

## Ransomware attack halts services at small banks

GS Paper III: Cyber Security

AHMEDABAD/MUMBAI

Customers of around 300 small-sized lenders across the country have not been able to access payments services such as withdrawing cash at ATMs or using UPI due to a ransomware attack at technology service provider (TSP) C-Edge Technologies.

The impact was felt by customers of cooperative banks and regional rural banks which depend on C-Edge, a joint venture between the SBI and TCS, officials said. Other banking services were normal, they said. The issues are being faced for the past two days after the discovery of a breach of the system at C-Edge, they said, adding that precautions had to be taken to protect the larger payments system.

## In 3 years, power cuts in India will rise, says report

Jacob Koshy  
NEW DELHI

India's rising electricity needs will likely be accompanied by increasing evening power cuts by 2027 because of insufficient renewable energy-powered back-up, says a research report from the India Energy and Climate Centre, University of California (Berkeley).

This scenario is likely even if all the planned coal plants and thermal power assets were to be fully functional by that year.

India has an installed electric capacity of 446 GW, with 211 GW coming in from coal, 195 GW from renewable energy sources, and the rest from gas and nuclear energy.

However not all of this capacity is available all the time. Therefore, a heatwave that lasts all day and



**Power source:** India has an installed electric capacity of 446 GW, with 211 GW coming in from coal. FILE PHOTO

whose impact can linger through the night will elicit high electricity demand even at night from air conditioners. Unlike in the day when spikes in demand can be met by solar energy, this is not possible at night.

On May 30, peak power demand touched 250 GW at 3 p.m. and estimates are that it hovered around 225 GW at night, suggesting that this demand cannot be met by coal, India's

most reliable power (or firm power) source, on its own.

The way out, said the researchers associated with the study, would be to have more utility-scale solar plants alongside battery storage, which can store the solar energy made during the day. Moreover solar plants and batteries can be deployed much faster than coal and hydropower plants.

# The global struggle for a pandemic treaty

## GS Paper III: Disaster Management

After great fanfare and over two years of political negotiations, 194 World Health Organization (WHO) member states failed to finalise a historic Pandemic Agreement, an international treaty designed to fortify global pandemic preparedness, implement mechanisms for prevention of the same, and reduce unconscionable inequities that were painfully obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 77th World Health Assembly, or WHA (May 27-June 1, 2024), in Geneva, witnessed two significant developments for global health governance. First, it agreed on a package of amendments to the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005, drawn from 300 proposals for reform by governments of both the global north and south, and extensively negotiated over the last two years. The IHR amendments aim to enhance the ability of countries to prepare for and respond to Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEIC) and introduce a new category for urgent international response – a Pandemic Emergency (PE). The amendments aim to ensure equitable access to health products during health emergencies and to mobilise financial resources to support developing countries in building and maintaining core health system capacities required under the IHR. Notably, the amendments emphasise solidarity and equity, while mandating the creation of a National IHR Authority for better coordination.

Second, the 77th WHA extended the mandate of the Pandemic Treaty negotiating body, namely, the intergovernmental negotiating body (INB), stipulating that the proposed WHO Pandemic Agreement must be completed as soon as possible. The outcome should be submitted for consideration at the 78th World Health Assembly in May 2025, or earlier if possible, at a Special Session of the World Health Assembly in 2024.

### Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing

Three key contentious issues in the latest draft of the Pandemic Agreement remain significant obstacles to its adoption: a pathogen access and benefit sharing (PABS) mechanism; technology transfer, local production, and intellectual property; and the One Health approach which emphasises coordinated public health measures based on animal, human, and environmental health. These core provisions, which are fundamental to achieving a safer and fairer world, are stalled due to geopolitical discord and competing interests between higher- and lower-income countries. Skilled diplomats and political leaders must understand that international cooperation and mutual solidarity are a win-win for global health security.

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The most contentious issue in the pandemic agreement negotiations has been the Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) system in Article 12, often seen as the "heart" of the agreement. The imperative for PABS emerged in response to the gross inequities in treatment access and vaccine distribution witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The PABS system aims to ensure that genetic resources and pathogen samples shared from developing countries (which are the most likely sources for such pathogens), are reciprocated with corresponding benefits such as vaccines and diagnostics that result from research and development on samples and data provided from the Global South. The latest proposal suggests that manufacturers of vaccines and diagnostics – primarily based in wealthy countries – using genetic information from pathogens in low- and middle-income countries, would commit to donating a portion of their products to WHO for global distribution based on the principles of need and effectiveness.

Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) are pushing for a guarantee of at least 20% of shared pandemic products, while many high-income countries argue that 20% should be the maximum limit, and some rich countries will not even agree to 20%.

### Technology transfer, intellectual property

Intellectual property protections, rich-world hoarding, export restrictions, and manufacturing limitations all contributed to vaccine inequity during the COVID-19 pandemic. The transfer of technology, know-how, and skills is often a crucial step toward preparing for and responding to pandemics. Strong provisions for technology transfers and local production could potentially compensate for the failures in PABS negotiations. Above all, technology transfer and intellectual property waivers are needed to ensure diverse manufacturing capacities globally so that LMICs are no longer reliant on "charity" from high-income countries and can maintain self-sufficiency.

Next to PABS, the fierce division over governance of production and technology transfer, and its implications on intellectual property, outlined in Articles 10 and 11, has significantly delayed negotiations. The central issue is the conditions for technology transfer to "facilitate sustainable and geographically diversified production" through mechanisms such as product information sharing and use of WTO- Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) flexibilities such as compulsory licensing. There remains a lack of consensus on the transfer of 'know-how' and the binding nature of these transfers.

The world must strive to overcome the obstacles as the treaty is a blueprint for a more equitable and resilient global health system

High-income countries advocate for Voluntary and Mutually Agreed Terms (VMAT), but the use of VMAT language could discourage countries, particularly LMICs, from adopting mandatory approaches recognised under the TRIPS Agreement.

Disagreement also mounts over the so-called 'peace clause' which requires member states to respect the use of the TRIPS flexibilities and not exercise any direct or indirect pressure to discourage the use of such flexibilities.

### One Health

The draft Agreement requires member states to adopt a pandemic preparedness and surveillance approach that recognises the interconnection between the health of people, animals, and the environment and promotes a coherent, integrated, coordinated, and collaborative effort among all relevant organisations, sectors, and actors, as appropriate. High-income countries, particularly the European Union, strongly support One Health. However, LMICs view it as an unfunded mandate that imposes an additional burden on their already strained resources.

The enduring obstacle in international law is its enforcement. Given the lack of robust compliance mechanism and, consequently, the lack of real accountability in International Health Regulations (IHR), implementation of the Pandemic Agreement remains a critical concern. The proposed Conference of Parties (COP) will play a crucial role in this regard by taking stock of its implementation and reviewing its functioning every five years. The latest draft of the agreement has proposed the COP to consider establishing, at its first meeting, an inclusive, transparent, and effective monitoring and evaluation system, in a manner consistent with the IHR. In the forthcoming negotiations, it remains to be seen how countries, especially wealthy nations, respond to this proposal.

A core aim of the Pandemic Agreement – beyond ensuring the immediate availability of medical products during emergencies – should be to promote long-term and sustainable access to these products by diversifying production and enhancing regional manufacturing capabilities. Issues of pathogen access and technology transfer are not mere technicalities; they are essential to the success of the pandemic agreement once it is adopted. With the recent amendments to the IHR and the ongoing Pandemic Agreement negotiations, the world has already made unprecedented strides in international law. The coming months of negotiations are crucial. This treaty is not just for the next pandemic but also serves as a blueprint for a more equitable and resilient global health system.

## The global struggle for a pandemic treaty (01 August)

- WHO member states did not finalize a historic Pandemic Agreement despite over two years of negotiations.
- The agreement aimed to improve global pandemic preparedness, prevention, and reduce inequities seen during COVID-19.
- The 77th World Health Assembly (May 27-June 1, 2024) in Geneva had two key developments in global health governance.
- Agreed on amendments to the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005, from 300 reform proposals by governments.
- IHR amendments aim to enhance countries' abilities to handle Public Health Emergencies of International Concern (PHEIC) and introduce a Pandemic Emergency (PE) category.
- Amendments focus on ensuring equitable access to health products during emergencies and mobilizing financial resources to support developing countries.
- Emphasis on solidarity and equity, and creation of a National IHR Authority for better coordination.
- The 77th WHA extended the mandate of the Pandemic Treaty negotiating body (INB).
- The proposed WHO Pandemic Agreement should be completed by the 78th World Health Assembly in May 2025, or earlier at a Special Session in 2024.

- Three contentious issues in the Pandemic Agreement draft are obstacles: pathogen access and benefit sharing (PABS); technology transfer, local production, and intellectual property; and the One Health approach.
- Geopolitical discord and competing interests between higher- and lower-income countries stall these provisions.
- International cooperation and mutual solidarity are essential for global health security.
- The most contentious issue in the pandemic agreement negotiations is the Pathogen Access and Benefit Sharing (PABS) system in Article 12.
- PABS emerged in response to inequities in treatment access and vaccine distribution during COVID-19.
- PABS aims to ensure that genetic resources and pathogen samples from developing countries are reciprocated with vaccines and diagnostics.
- The proposal suggests that vaccine and diagnostic manufacturers in wealthy countries donate a portion of their products to WHO for global distribution based on need and effectiveness.
- Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) want a guarantee of at least 20% of shared pandemic products.
- Many high-income countries argue that 20% should be the maximum limit, with some rich countries not agreeing to 20%.

#### Technology transfer, intellectual property

- Vaccine inequity during COVID-19 was exacerbated by intellectual property protections, rich-world hoarding, export restrictions, and manufacturing limitations.
- Technology transfer, know-how, and skills are crucial for pandemic preparedness and response.
- Strong provisions for technology transfers and local production could help address failures in PABS negotiations.
- Technology transfer and intellectual property waivers are needed to ensure diverse manufacturing capacities globally and reduce reliance on high-income countries.
- Governance of production and technology transfer, particularly in Articles 10 and 11, is a major point of contention in negotiations.
- Conditions for technology transfer aim to facilitate sustainable and geographically diversified production through product information sharing and TRIPS flexibilities like compulsory licensing.
- There is no consensus on the transfer of 'know-how' and the binding nature of these transfers.
- High-income countries advocate for Voluntary and Mutually Agreed Terms (VMAT), which may discourage LMICs from adopting mandatory approaches under the TRIPS Agreement.
- There is disagreement over the 'peace clause,' which requires respect for TRIPS flexibilities and discourages pressure against their use.
- The draft Agreement includes the One Health approach, recognizing the interconnection between human, animal, and environmental health.
- One Health promotes integrated and coordinated efforts among relevant organizations and sectors.
- High-income countries, especially the EU, support One Health.
- LMICs see One Health as an unfunded mandate that adds to their resource burdens.
- Enforcement remains a major obstacle in international law, with the lack of a robust compliance mechanism affecting the implementation of the Pandemic Agreement.
- The proposed Conference of Parties (COP) will monitor and review the implementation and functioning of the agreement every five years.
- The latest draft suggests the COP establish an inclusive, transparent, and effective monitoring and evaluation system.
- It remains uncertain how countries, especially wealthy nations, will respond to this proposal.
- A core aim of the Pandemic Agreement is to promote long-term and sustainable access to medical products by diversifying production and enhancing regional manufacturing capabilities.
- Pathogen access and technology transfer are essential to the success of the agreement.
- Recent amendments to the IHR and ongoing negotiations represent significant progress in international law.

- The treaty aims to create a more equitable and resilient global health system, not just for the next pandemic but for future preparedness.

## AI needs cultural policies, not just regulation (01 August)

- The future of AI requires a balance of regulation and policies promoting high-quality data as a public good.
- Fair and wide access to data fosters transparency, creates a level playing field, and builds public trust.
- More and diverse human-generated text improves the performance of Large Language Models (LLMs).
- Data, computing power, and algorithmic innovations are key drivers of AI progress.
- There is a problem with insufficient human-generated digital content to train AI models.
- Meta's LLama 3, for example, is trained on 15 trillion tokens, much more than the British Library's book collection.
- A study suggests we might reach 'peak data' before 2030 due to high demand for pristine text.
- Public data contamination by LLMs could cause feedback loops, amplifying biases and depleting diversity.
- Fears of an 'AI winter' arise from the relentless race for data, sometimes compromising quality and ethics.
- 'Books3', a collection of pirated books, is used to train leading LLMs, raising legal and ethical concerns.
- LLMs are often trained on a mix of licensed content, publicly available data, and social media interactions.
- These training data reflect and sometimes exacerbate the biases of an anglophone and presentist cyberspace.
- LLMs lack primary sources, relying mostly on secondary English-language commentaries.
- Missing are primary sources like archival documents, oral traditions, and inscriptions, which are crucial to our cultural heritage
- State Archives in Italy alone contain 1,500 kilometers of shelved documents, excluding Vatican holdings.
- Worldwide archives could potentially provide as much or more data than currently used to train LLMs.
- Harnessing these data would enrich AI's understanding of cultural heritage and make it more accessible.
- This could revolutionize historical understanding and protect cultural heritage from neglect, war, and climate change.
- Releasing these data into the public domain could benefit the economy by allowing smaller companies, startups, and the open-source AI community to develop applications.
- This would level the playing field against Big Tech and foster global innovation.

### Examples from Italy and Canada

- Advances in AI have reduced digitization costs, allowing for accurate and fast text extraction from printed and manuscript documents.
- Italy allocated €500 million for the 'Digital Library' project to make its heritage accessible as open data, but this initiative was deprioritized and restructured.
- Canada's Official Languages Act, once seen as wasteful, provided valuable data for training translation software.
- Debates about adopting regional languages in the Spanish Cortes and EU institutions have overlooked the benefits of digitizing low-resource languages.
- Digitizing cultural heritage is crucial for preserving history, democratizing knowledge, and enabling inclusive AI innovation.

## Unnatural disaster (01 August)

**Kerala must restore denuded flora and rehabilitate people in vulnerable areas**

- Climate change can lead to extreme weather and natural disasters that may surprise local responders.
- The landslides in Wayanad, Kerala on July 30 are not uncommon but have become deadly this year.
- Heavy rains during the southwest monsoon triggered landslides that killed 200 people and devastated villages.
- The Chaliyar river, which flows fast and carries sediment, was further swollen by this year's rains, causing more debris to be deposited in less steep areas.
- Previous heavy rains in 2020 stripped plant cover upstream, increasing the vulnerability of rocks and soil to displacement.
- Landslide-prone areas like Idukki, Kottayam, Malappuram, and Wayanad have been known for years and are highlighted on risk maps.
- The deadly recurrence of landslides is due to both climate change and the State's inadequate response.
- There is a lack of advance warning and emergency preparedness for landslides.
- Intense rains, quarrying, infrastructure development, and monocropping have worsened soil instability and compromised ecosystems.
- Patterns of land use should remain unchanged, and the State must restore vegetation and provide alternative welfare opportunities.
- Kerala should follow recommendations to avoid engineering projects in sensitive areas and establish expert committees for project feasibility.
- Balancing development with environmental concerns has become increasingly difficult for Kerala.

PatrioticIAS

GS Paper III: S&amp;T

## Problem power

### Small modular reactors must deal with the cost of proliferation resistance

**T**he Indian government is planning to team up with the private sector to study and test small modular reactors (SMRs).

Nuclear energy is an important power source in the world's energy mix as it waits for the development and maturation of (other) renewable energy technologies while fossil-fuel-based sources, especially coal, continue to remain relevant and more affordable. Nuclear power offers a sufficiently high and sustainable power output, even if externalised costs like those of building safe and reliable reactors and handling spent nuclear fuel complicate this calculus. Indeed, cost and time estimates that expand to nearly twice as much as at the point of a project's commissioning are not unheard of. The nuclear power tariff is thus higher from 'younger' facilities, even if they also fill gaps that haunt power from renewable sources. SMRs, of 10 MWe-300 MWe each, are smaller versions of their conventional counterparts. They aspire to be safer without compromising commercial feasibility by leveraging the higher energy content of nuclear fuel, a modular design, a smaller operational surface area, and lower capital costs. But the challenge is to have this aspiration survive SMRs' external costs.

The government's privatisation of nuclear power generation will also increase the demand for regulatory safeguards against radioactive material being diverted for military use. The first-generation SMRs are expected to use low-enriched uranium in facilities assembled on-site with factory-made parts, to produce waste that can be handled using existing technologies and power that can be sold at economical rates. But the reactor will need frequent refuelling and will yield a consequential amount of plutonium; both outcomes will stress proliferation resistance. The IAEA has touted the use of 'safeguardable' reactor designs but such solutions will increase capital costs. Subsequent SMR generations may also require more enriched uranium, especially if their feasibility is pegged on longer periods of continuous generation, or more sophisticated systems to increase fuel-use efficiency, which would increase the operational surface area and the generation cost. In fact, nuclear reactors have a fixed baseline cost and safety expectations that do not change with energy output, which means SMR-based tariffs need not automatically be lower. This is why the Department of Atomic Energy increased its reactors' capacity from 220 MW to 700 MW. SMRs' ability to bolster the prospects of nuclear power in India will thus depend on their commercial viability – and in turn on the availability of less uncertain market conditions, stable grids, and opportunities to mass-produce parts – and the price of proliferation resistance.

## Problem power (01 August)

### Small modular reactors must deal with the cost of proliferation resistance

- The Indian government plans to collaborate with the private sector to study and test small modular reactors (SMRs).
- Nuclear energy is important as a power source while renewable technologies develop and coal remains relevant and affordable.
- Nuclear power provides high and sustainable output but involves high costs for building reactors and handling spent fuel, with cost and time estimates often doubling.
- SMRs are smaller, aiming to be safer and more commercially feasible with lower capital costs and higher energy content.
- The challenge is to ensure SMRs remain viable despite their external costs.
- The privatization of nuclear power generation will increase the need for regulatory safeguards to prevent radioactive material from being diverted for military use.
- First-generation SMRs will use low-enriched uranium and factory-made parts, producing manageable waste and economically priced power.
- However, these reactors will need frequent refueling and produce plutonium, raising concerns about proliferation resistance.
- The IAEA has suggested 'safeguardable' reactor designs, which would increase capital costs.
- Future SMRs may require more enriched uranium or advanced systems to improve fuel efficiency, raising costs and complexity.
- Nuclear reactors have fixed baseline costs and safety expectations, so SMR prices may not be lower.
- The success of SMRs in India will depend on their commercial viability, stable market conditions, stable grids, and mass production opportunities, as well as managing proliferation resistance costs.

#### Spent Nuclear Fuel

- Spent nuclear fuel (SNF) refers to the used fuel that has been irradiated in a nuclear reactor and is no longer efficient for sustaining a nuclear reaction.
- This material is highly radioactive and requires careful management and disposal.

#### Spent nuclear fuel is composed of:

1. **Uranium Isotopes:** Primarily uranium-238 and a smaller fraction of uranium-235.
2. **Plutonium Isotopes:** Generated during the reactor operation from uranium-238.
3. **Fission Products:** Various isotopes resulting from the splitting of uranium and plutonium atoms.

The fuel becomes less efficient over time due to the accumulation of fission products that absorb neutrons and the reduction of fissile material.

#### Management and Storage

According to the **Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL)** and the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC), spent nuclear fuel management includes several steps:

1. **Cooling:** After removal from the reactor, SNF is stored in pools of water, which cools the fuel and provides radiation shielding.
2. **Interim Storage:** Once cooled, SNF may be transferred to dry cask storage, which involves sealing the fuel in steel and concrete containers.
3. **Reprocessing:** In some cases, SNF is reprocessed to extract usable materials like uranium and plutonium, which can be recycled into new fuel.

#### Disposal

- Long-term disposal of SNF is a significant challenge due to its **long-lived radioactivity**.
- The preferred method is deep geological disposal, where SNF is buried in stable geological formations hundreds of meters below the surface.

#### Regulatory Framework

- The management of spent nuclear fuel in India is governed by the **Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB)** and adheres to stringent safety standards to protect public health and the environment.

# Early detection of lung cancer can save lives

GS Paper III: Basic Science

**T**he insidious nature of lung cancer has made it one of the most formidable public health challenges of our time. Lung cancer was first discovered in the early 1900s in autopsies. Later advances in imaging technologies, bronchoscopy, and molecular diagnostics helped diagnose it more frequently and reliably in the 20th century. As we confront this growing epidemic on August 1, observed as World Lung Cancer Day, understanding the multifaceted aspects of lung cancer – from its risk factors to the critical importance of early detection – becomes paramount.

## A silently growing concern

Lung cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer and the leading cause of cancer-related deaths globally. As per the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), the incidence of lung cancer is rising rapidly every year in India, and contributes to 10% of cancer deaths. India ranks fourth globally in terms of the absolute number of lung cancer cases, with 81,000 cases and 75,000 deaths reported in 2022. This is expected to double by 2025.

Currently, lung cancer is most often detected in Indians only at Stage 3 or 4, by which time it is no longer curable, leading to poor survival rates. Over half of the patients present with distant metastasis at diagnosis. This delay is often due to inadequate screening, resource constraints, lack of a structured referral system, and a high burden of tuberculosis (TB). Primary care physicians may not recognise lung cancer due to these factors. So, an augmented intelligence system to suggest diagnoses based on imaging or history may help.

While India has developed frameworks for different cancer screening programmes, lung cancer is yet to be included. The recent ICMR call to researchers for a rigorous evaluation of population health to set the appropriate guidelines for



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Despite having a considerable burden of lung cancer, India does not yet have a systematic screening programme

screening is an encouraging sign.

The increasing prevalence of lung cancer is attributed not only to smoking but also to rising levels of air pollution. Alarming, the number of lung cancer deaths attributed to air pollution has surged by nearly 30% since 2007. When a large number of harmful substances accumulate in the air, such as particulate matter (PM10, PM2.5, toxic metals) and gases (sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide), they can cause detrimental effects on lung health, resulting in lung cancer.

Smoking tobacco (including cigarettes, beedis, cigars, and pipes) is the primary risk factor for lung cancer. Factors affecting non-smokers include exposure to second-hand smoke, occupational hazards (such as asbestos, radon and certain chemicals), air pollution, hereditary cancer syndromes, and previous chronic lung diseases. Notably, about 40% of lung cancer patients in north India are non-smokers. This underlines the need for broader awareness and preventive measures. Often, a combination of factors contributes to lung cancer among non-smokers. One of the strongest predictors can be genetic mutation. Lung cancers associated with non-smokers often affect younger individuals and show distinct genetic changes compared to smoker-related cancers.

## Importance of early detection

The high rate of disability-adjusted life years due to lung cancer in India underscores the critical need for early detection, which is vital to improving lung cancer outcomes. Despite having a considerable burden of lung cancer, India does not have a systematic lung cancer screening programme because of cost and logistical constraints, and concerns regarding high false-positive rates owing to the TB burden. Although newer medications may extend life in advanced stage lung cancer, these are often expensive. It is better to

prevent and detect it early.

When detected early enough, lung cancer is curable. Lung cancer can be diagnosed by imaging methods such as Chest X-ray and CT scan. Chest X-rays typically only pick up nodules or masses which are either greater than 2 cm in size or closer to the chest wall (<2.5 cm), and so may not detect early-stage lung cancer effectively. There are no blood biomarkers for lung cancer yet, although active investigation into various techniques including exhaled breath analysis is ongoing.

In recent times, the Low-Dose Computed Tomography (LDCT) has emerged as a game-changer. This scan uses five times less radiation than a conventional CT scan and has become the first choice for early lung cancer screening. It is currently being recommended in the United States and Europe for routine lung cancer screening. Since LDCT uses a much lower dose of radiation, the test can be done periodically and sometimes even annually in certain groups.

Studies have shown that LDCT can lower the mortality rate from lung cancer by 20% compared to detection with Chest X-rays and by 24% compared to no screening at all. Although LDCT uses lower radiation, the sensitivity allows detection of potentially cancerous nodules or lesions within the lungs years before the onset of symptoms, improving both the range of possible therapies and treatment.

Lung cancer is a serious problem that demands a concerted effort from individuals, healthcare providers, and policymakers to raise awareness, implement smoking cessation programmes as well as safety measures for occupational exposures. In addition, research into better diagnostic technologies and treatment modalities for the Indian population, alongside a national lung cancer screening programme, will be required to combat this silent epidemic and ensure better survival rates.

## Early detection of lung cancer can save lives (01 August)

- Lung cancer, discovered in the early 1900s, has become a major public health challenge.
- Advances in imaging, bronchoscopy, and molecular diagnostics improved diagnosis in the 20th century.
- August 1, World Lung Cancer Day, highlights the importance of understanding lung cancer's risk factors and early detection.
- Lung cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer and the leading cause of cancer-related deaths worldwide.
- In India, lung cancer incidence is rising rapidly, contributing to 10% of cancer deaths.

- India ranks fourth globally in lung cancer cases, with 81,000 cases and 75,000 deaths reported in 2022, expected to double by 2025.
- Lung cancer in India is often detected at Stage 3 or 4, making it less curable and leading to poor survival rates.
- More than half of patients have distant metastasis at diagnosis.
- Delays in diagnosis are due to inadequate screening, resource constraints, lack of structured referral systems, and a high burden of tuberculosis (TB).
- Primary care physicians may miss lung cancer diagnoses due to these factors.
- An augmented intelligence system could help suggest diagnoses based on imaging or patient history.
- Lung cancer is not yet included in India's cancer screening programmes.
- The ICMR's recent call for research to evaluate population health and set screening guidelines is a positive development.
- Increasing prevalence of lung cancer is due to smoking and rising air pollution levels.
- Lung cancer deaths attributed to air pollution have surged by nearly 30% since 2007.
- Harmful air substances (PM10, PM2.5, toxic metals, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide) negatively impact lung health and can cause lung cancer.
- Smoking tobacco is the primary risk factor for lung cancer.
- Non-smokers are affected by second-hand smoke, occupational hazards (asbestos, radon, certain chemicals), air pollution, hereditary cancer syndromes, and previous chronic lung diseases.
- About 40% of lung cancer patients in north India are non-smokers, highlighting the need for broader awareness and preventive measures.
- Lung cancer in non-smokers can be due to a combination of factors, with genetic mutations being a strong predictor.
- Non-smoker-related lung cancers often affect younger individuals and exhibit distinct genetic changes compared to smoker-related cancers.

#### Importance of early detection

- High rate of disability-adjusted life years due to lung cancer in India highlights the need for early detection.
- India lacks a systematic lung cancer screening program due to cost, logistical constraints, and high false-positive rates related to the TB burden.
- Newer medications can extend life in advanced lung cancer but are often expensive; prevention and early detection are preferable.
- Early-stage lung cancer is curable when detected early.
- Lung cancer diagnosis methods include Chest X-ray and CT scan.
- Chest X-rays are less effective at detecting early-stage lung cancer, typically identifying nodules or masses greater than 2 cm or close to the chest wall.
- No blood biomarkers for lung cancer exist yet, but research into various techniques, including exhaled breath analysis, is ongoing.
- Low-Dose Computed Tomography (LDCT) has emerged as a significant advancement in early lung cancer screening.
- LDCT uses five times less radiation than a conventional CT scan.
- It is the first choice for early lung cancer screening in the US and Europe.
- LDCT allows periodic and sometimes annual testing in certain groups due to its lower radiation dose.
- Studies show LDCT can reduce lung cancer mortality by 20% compared to Chest X-rays and by 24% compared to no screening.
- Despite lower radiation, LDCT's sensitivity allows for early detection of potentially cancerous nodules or lesions.
- Early detection with LDCT improves the range of possible therapies and treatment outcomes.
- Lung cancer is a serious issue requiring concerted efforts.
- Efforts needed from individuals, healthcare providers, and policymakers.
- Raise awareness about lung cancer.
- Implement smoking cessation programs.

- Implement safety measures for occupational exposures.
- Research better diagnostic technologies and treatment modalities for the Indian population.
- Establish a national lung cancer screening program.
- Aim to combat the silent epidemic and ensure better survival rates.

Question: Consider the following imaging methods:

1. Chest X-ray
2. CT scan.
3. Low-Dose Computed Tomography (LDCT)

How many of the above method(s) is/are used for the diagnosis of Lung cancer?

- a. Only one
- b. Only two
- c. All the three
- d. None

# Why have violent protests in Kenya continued?

Why was the financial Bill so controversial? Why are people protesting even after the Bill was withdrawn by Kenyan President William Ruto? What does this mean for the region at large?

[GS Paper II: International Relations](#)

**Anu Maria Joseph**

## The story so far:

On June 25, protests turned violent in Kenya when lawmakers passed a controversial financial Bill. Although President William Ruto withdrew the Bill the next day, protests continued. According to the Kenya National Human Rights Commission (KNHRC), over 50 people have been killed and 628 were arrested in the violence.

## What did the Bill entail?

The Bill was introduced in May and imposed a 16% Value-Added Tax (VAT) on bread, 25% excise duty on cooking oil, 5% tax on digital monetary transactions, an annual 2.5% tax on vehicles, an eco-tax on plastic goods, a 16% tax on goods and services for the construction and equipping of specialised hospitals and an increase in import tax from two to three per cent. The government dropped a few

of them after the initial round of protests. The state's larger objective is to collect \$2.7 billion in taxes to pay off the debt of \$80 billion, which is 68% of Kenya's GDP. The Bill caused public distress due to the increasing cost of living.

## Why are protests continuing?

Mr. Ruto withdrew the controversial Bill on June 26 following country-wide violent protests, and when his use of force and the death of the protesters drew global criticism. The protest has since then expanded on its causes, demands, geography and intensity.

The protests were an expression of long-standing discontent over Mr. Ruto's administration and financial management. For example, a month after coming to power, Mr. Ruto scrapped fuel subsidies. The July 2023 protests against another Bill, which introduced a 5% housing levy and a 16% tax on petroleum products, killed 23 people. And thus, the initial intentions behind the protests

diverted after the President withdrew the Bill as the use of force, live ammunition and deaths angered the protesters. The second phase of protests was against police brutality. By the third week, it had evolved into anti-government protests over unaddressed public grievances, corruption, mis-governance, and a demand for Mr. Ruto's resignation.

Moreover, the immediate success of the protests encouraged Kenyans to join the masses against all public grievances. Mr. Ruto came to power in September 2022 promising to address unemployment and poverty. However, he failed to maintain the popularity he received during the elections. The trading economics website recorded Kenya's inflation rate at 5.1% in May. The World Bank reported that although Kenya is one of the most developing countries in Africa, a third of its 52 million people live in poverty and that 5.7% of the labour force is unemployed, which is the highest in East Africa.

According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2023, Kenya ranks 126 out of 180.

## What next?

Mr. Ruto sacked his cabinet and announced a new one on July 19. While the inclusion of four opposition figures into the cabinet might hold the opposition party from joining the protests, it is less likely to slow down the protests. While the country plunges into a debt crisis, any further financial reforms in the near future would trigger a similar response, implying that Mr. Ruto's administration is in crisis.

Several other African countries are also vulnerable to similar instabilities due to the debt crisis. According to the World Bank, nine African countries face a debt crisis in 2024, and 15 among them are at risk of distress. They depend on regular borrowing, doubling the total debt. The debt burden often forces the governments to either increase the taxes or wait for a debt reconstruction.

However, the Kenyan protests have influenced the African youth and their potential to mobilise the masses. Ugandan youth have followed Kenya, protesting against corruption on July 23. Several other illiberal democracies in Africa are likely to follow Kenya and Uganda. Chosen the same method, protests would trigger violence across the region.

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## THE GIST

On June 25, protests turned violent in Kenya when lawmakers passed a controversial financial Bill. Although President William Ruto withdrew the Bill the next day, protests continued.

The protests were an expression of long-standing discontent over Mr. Ruto's administration and financial management.

The World Bank reported that although Kenya is one of the most developing countries in Africa, a third of its 52 million people live in poverty and that 5.7% of the labour force is unemployed.

# Why have violent protests in Kenya continued? (01 August)

Why was the financial Bill so controversial? Why are people protesting even after the Bill was withdrawn by Kenyan President William Ruto? What does this mean for the region at large?

- Protests in Kenya turned violent after lawmakers passed a controversial financial Bill on June 25.
- President William Ruto withdrew the Bill the next day, but protests continued.
- According to the Kenya National Human Rights Commission, over 50 people were killed and 628 arrested.
- The Bill proposed various tax measures:
  - 16% VAT on bread
  - 25% excise duty on cooking oil
  - 5% tax on digital transactions
  - Annual 2.5% tax on vehicles
  - Eco-tax on plastic goods
  - 16% tax on construction and equipping specialized hospitals
  - Increase in import tax from 2% to 3%

- The government aimed to collect \$2.7 billion to help pay off \$80 billion in debt, which is 68% of Kenya's GDP.
- The Bill increased the cost of living, causing public distress.

#### **Why are protests continuing?**

- President Ruto withdrew the controversial Bill on June 26 due to violent protests and global criticism.
- The protests expanded beyond the Bill's issues, reflecting broader discontent with Ruto's administration.
- Discontent included Mr. Ruto's scrapping of fuel subsidies a month after taking office.
- Previous protests in July 2023 against a Bill with a 5% housing levy and 16% tax on petroleum products had already resulted in 23 deaths.
- After the Bill withdrawal, the protests shifted focus to police brutality.
- By the third week, the protests turned into anti-government demonstrations addressing corruption, mis-governance, and demanding Ruto's resignation.
- The success of the protests led more Kenyans to join in, addressing various public grievances.
- President Ruto, who took office in September 2022, promised to tackle unemployment and poverty but failed to maintain his popularity.
- Kenya's inflation rate was recorded at 5.1% in May.
- The World Bank reported that a third of Kenya's 52 million people live in poverty and 5.7% of the labor force is unemployed, the highest in East Africa.
- Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2023 ranks Kenya 126 out of 180 countries.

#### **What next?**

- On July 19, President Ruto sacked his cabinet and announced a new one, including four opposition figures, which may not significantly reduce protests.
- Kenya is in a debt crisis, and any future financial reforms could provoke more protests, indicating a crisis for Ruto's administration.
- Nine African countries are facing a debt crisis in 2024, and 15 are at risk of distress, leading to increased taxes or debt restructuring.
- The Kenyan protests have inspired youth across Africa, with Ugandan youth protesting against corruption on July 23.
- Other illiberal democracies in Africa might follow Kenya and Uganda's example, potentially leading to widespread violence in the region.