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L69, G4 countries seek urgent reform of UN Security Council

GS Paper II: International Relations

Sriram Lakshman
NEW YORK

With the United Nations (UN) approaching its 80th anniversary next year, the Group of Four (G4) countries – India, Brazil, Germany and Japan – seeking permanent membership and reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC) on Thursday called for urgent reform of the world body. Other plurilateral groupings, such as the L69 and C-10 also echoed these calls.

The G4 meeting, held on the fringes of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) at the Foreign Minister level on September 23, reviewed progress made on these reforms. In

a joint statement released on September 26, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his G4 counterparts noted the “significant challenges” to the multilateral system, centred around the UN, as they welcomed the urgent call for reform at the UN’s ‘Summit of the Future’ held earlier this week.

The G4 Ministers reiterated the need for an increase in both permanent and non-permanent categories of UNSC membership, to enhance the participation of developing countries, as well as “those significantly contributing to international peace and security” at the UNSC.

The group highlighted the need for better repre-



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with German, Brazilian and Japanese counterparts during the G4 Foreign Ministers Meeting. ANI

sentation for regions such as Africa, Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean in permanent and non-permanent categories.

The L69 group of countries, of which India is a part, met on Thursday, un-

der the chairmanship of the Prime Minister of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Ralph E. Gonsalves. The group held a joint meeting with the C-10 group of 10 African countries. “Encouraged by the first-ever Joint Ministerial

Meeting of L69 and C-10 groupings of nations,” Mr. Jaishankar tweeted.

Greater representation
They emphasised that transformative reform of the Security Council must include greater representation for the Global South. The Ministers said developing countries had an “indispensable” role in safeguarding the relevance and effectiveness of the Security Council.

“The Ministers reiterated the urgent need to make the Security Council more representative, transparent, efficient, effective, democratic and accountable, and recognised that the Summit of the Future provided an opportunity

for renewed commitment to Security Council reform,” the group said.

Both the L69 and the G4 reaffirmed their strong support to the Common African Position (CAP) based on the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration. The countries said further delays in comprehensive reform impacted the UN’s “credibility and legitimacy”.

On Thursday, Mr. Jaishankar announced that he had also met his counterparts Foreign Ministers Mauro Vieira of Brazil and Ronald Lamola of South Africa in the IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) group.

“We share convergent views on reforms of UN system and of its Security Council,” he said.

L69, G4 countries seek urgent reform of UN Security Council (27 September)

- The United Nations (UN) will celebrate its 80th anniversary next year.
- The Group of Four (G4) countries—India, Brazil, Germany, and Japan—are pushing for permanent membership and reform of the UN Security Council (UNSC).
- Other groups, like L69 and C-10, also support these calls for reform.
- The G4 meeting took place on September 23 at the Foreign Minister level during the UN General Assembly (UNGA).
- A joint statement was released on September 26, highlighting “significant challenges” to the multilateral system centered around the UN.
- The G4 Ministers welcomed the urgent call for reform made at the UN’s ‘Summit of the Future.’
- They emphasized the need to increase both permanent and non-permanent UNSC membership to include more developing countries and those contributing to international peace and security.
- The group called for better representation for regions like Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean in both categories of membership.
- The L69 group, which includes India, met under the leadership of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines’ Prime Minister Ralph E. Gonsalves, discussing commitment to Security Council reform.
- The L69 group held a joint meeting with the C-10 group of 10 African nations and expressed encouragement from their collaboration.
- Both groups reaffirmed their support for the Common African Position (CAP) based on the Ezulwini Consensus and the Sirte Declaration.

- They stated that delays in reform hurt the UN's credibility and legitimacy.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar also met with the Foreign Ministers of Brazil and South Africa within the IBSA group (India, Brazil, South Africa).
- Jaishankar noted shared views on the need for UN and UNSC reforms.
- The meetings emphasized the importance of greater representation for the Global South in the UNSC.
- The Ministers stressed that developing countries play a crucial role in maintaining the relevance and effectiveness of the Security Council.
- They called for the UNSC to become more representative, transparent, efficient, effective, democratic, and accountable, recognizing the Summit of the Future as an opportunity for these changes.

New pact to be signed between Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh for modified river-linking project

GS Paper I: Geography

Mohammed Iqbal

JAIPUR

A new memorandum of agreement will be signed shortly between the Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh governments for implementing a modified project for linking of Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP) with Parvati, Kali Sindh, and Chambal rivers. The modified river linking project is expected to ensure optimum utilisation of water resources available in the Chambal basin.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma met his Madhya Pradesh counterpart Mohan Yadav in the presence of Union Jal Shakti Minister C.R. Patil in New Delhi on Wednesday to discuss the modalities of the river linking project.

Mr. Sharma said the disputes between the two States on interlinking of

Project is expected to ensure optimum utilisation of water resources available in the Chambal basin

rivers had been resolved.

Various components of the modified river links, including the areas of benefit, will be firmed up at the stage of formulation of the detailed project report (DPR) in consultation with officials and stakeholders of both the States.

The tripartite meeting helped evolve a consensus in favour of the Central government's national perspective plan for the interlinking of rivers.

The previous Congress government in Rajasthan had turned the demand for the national project status for the ₹37,200-crore ERCP into a major election issue,

accusing the Bharatiya Janata Party-led government at the Centre of not taking care of the interests of the people in 13 districts of the State, which were set to benefit from it. The Congress alleged that the BJP had gone back on its promise, and said the huge project cost could not be borne by the State alone.

Work under Cong. govt.

In its original form, the ERCP was to be implemented along with the interlinking of Parvati, Kali Sindh, and Chambal rivers.

Since the Centre did not accept the demand for the national project status, the Congress government started the work with its own resources, with the construction of the Navnera-Bisalpur-Isarda link, Mahalpur barrage, and Ramgarh barrage at a cost of ₹9,600 crore.

New pact to be signed between Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh for modified river-linking project (27 September)

- A new memorandum of agreement will be signed between the Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh governments for the Eastern Rajasthan Canal Project (ERCP).
- The project aims to link the ERCP with the Parvati, Kali Sindh, and Chambal rivers.

- This modified river linking project will help utilize water resources effectively in the Chambal basin.
- Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma met with Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav and Union Jal Shakti Minister C.R. Patil to discuss the project in New Delhi.
- The Chief Ministers announced that disputes over the river interlinking had been resolved.
- Details such as areas of benefit will be finalized during the preparation of the detailed project report (DPR) with input from officials and stakeholders from both states.
- The meeting helped build consensus around the Central government's national perspective plan for river interlinking.
- Previously, the Congress government in Rajasthan had made the demand for national project status for the ₹37,200-crore ERCP a key election issue, criticizing the BJP-led central government for neglecting the people in 13 districts that would benefit from it.
- The Congress party accused the BJP of breaking promises and stated that the state could not afford the project's high cost alone.
- The original plan for the ERCP included interlinking with the Parvati, Kali Sindh, and Chambal rivers.
- Since the central government did not grant national project status, the Congress government initiated work using its resources.
- This work included the construction of the Navnera-Bisalpur-Isarda link, Mahalpur barrage, and Ramgarh barrage at a cost of ₹9,600 crore.

Special initiative to drive away wild elephants from human habitations in Idukki village

GS Paper III:
Environment

IDUKKI

The Forest Department started a special initiative to drive away wild elephants that wreak havoc in Kanthallur village under the Marayur forest division in Idukki. According to the department officials, an 84-member team began the initiative on Thursday morning to drive away the elephants from human habitations in Kanthallur panchayat to Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary.

Marayur divisional forest officer P.J. Shuhaib said the drive will continue on Friday. "The department aims to drive away problematic elephants from farm-



A wild tusker roaming in Kanthallur panchayat in Idukki on Thursday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

lands," said the official.

Kanthallur panchayat president P.T. Thankachen expressed satisfaction with the department's special drive addressing man-animal conflict in the panchayat. "As many as 18 wild elephants were camping in

various parts of the panchayat, which made it hard for the people to engage in farming activities," he said.

M.R. Kumaravel, a farmer in Kanthallur, said that for the past three months, wild elephants have been camping on the farmlands.

Special initiative to drive away wild elephants from human habitations in Idukki village (27 September)

- The Forest Department has launched a special initiative to drive away wild elephants causing problems in Kanthallur village, Idukki.

- An 84-member team started this initiative on Thursday morning to move the elephants from human areas to Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Marayur divisional forest officer P.J. Shuhaib stated that the operation will continue on Friday, aiming to protect farmlands from the elephants.
- Kanthallur panchayat president P.T. Thankachen expressed satisfaction with the department's efforts to address the man-animal conflict in the area.
- He noted that around 18 wild elephants have been staying in various parts of the panchayat, making farming difficult for the residents.
- Farmer M.R. Kumaravel mentioned that wild elephants have been present on the farmlands for the past three months.

Centre tells States to take steps to curb Mpox spread (27 September)

- India has reported a fast-spreading type of Mpox infection, becoming the third country outside Africa to do so.
- The Union Health Ministry has instructed States and Union Territories to isolate individuals showing symptoms of the infection.
- States are also required to implement strict measures for infection prevention and control.
- Samples from skin lesions of symptomatic patients should be sent to designated labs immediately.
- For patients who test positive, samples must be sent to the ICMR-National Institute of Virology for genome sequencing to identify the specific clade of the virus.
- The Ministry confirmed that there is robust diagnostic testing capability, with 36 labs supported by the ICMR across the country.
- Three commercial PCR kits validated by the ICMR have also been approved by CDSCO for use.

Centre tells States to take steps to curb Mpox spread

GS Paper III:
Basic Science

After India became the third country outside Africa to report a fast-spreading type of Mpox infection, the Union Health Ministry on Thursday wrote to the States and the Union Territories to keep those with symptoms in isolation and put in place strict infection prevention and control measures.

The Ministry said samples from skin lesions of patients with symptoms should be sent to the designated labs immediately. For those who test positive, a sample should be sent to the ICMR-National Institute of Virology for genome sequencing to determine the clade.

“Robust diagnostic testing capability is already available: 36 labs supported by the ICMR across the country and three commercial PCR kits validated by ICMR that are now approved by CDSCO,” it said.

World Rabies Day: tracing the journey from myths to modern medicine

World Rabies Day, on September 28 which commemorates the death of Pasteur, encourages reflection on the misconceptions that once shaped the approach to this disease, and the ongoing efforts to develop vaccines. By connecting past and present, we are reminded of the need for awareness, education, and vaccination to eradicate rabies

GS Paper III: Basic Science

In May 2024, a tragic incident in Alappuzha, Kerala, highlighted the ongoing threat of rabies in the 21st century. A nine-year-old boy died from rabies after being bitten by a stray dog. He was not vaccinated after the attack owing to the absence of major wounds. This preventable death prompted school assemblies that turned into science classes. A message was delivered to over 159,000 students across 740 schools, underscoring the critical need for immediate medical attention and vaccination after any animal bite to prevent rabies.

This incident serves as a stark reminder that, despite advancements in medical science and the availability of effective rabies vaccines, the disease remains a significant public health challenge. With a nearly 100% fatality rate once symptoms develop, rabies continues to be a formidable threat.

World Rabies Day, observed on September 28 to commemorate the death of Louis Pasteur, encourages reflection on both the historical misconceptions that once shaped the approach to this deadly disease and the ongoing efforts to develop vaccines and modern strategies for rabies control. By connecting the past and present, we are reminded of the continuous need for awareness, education, and vaccination to eradicate rabies.

Weird theories

Historically, rabies has been surrounded by superstitions and misguided theories. One ancient remedy was consuming dog hair to cure rabies. Another 19th-century idea from Italian Monsignor Storti was to set up brothels for dogs—to counteract what he believed was canine sexual frustration. Such theories did nothing to stop the disease's spread. Rabies, known for over 4,000 years, was first noted in ancient Mesopotamia and India, where early texts like the *Susruta Samhita* described its symptoms. However, understanding and treatment remained limited for centuries, with many misconceptions persisting. Despite this ancient awareness, progress in understanding and treating rabies stagnated for centuries.

Advent of vaccination

The 19th century marked a turning point in the battle against rabies with the advent of germ theory, which fundamentally shifted medical science's approach to infectious diseases. Pasteur turned his attention to rabies in the 1880s. At the time, the understanding of



A stray dog being caught to administer anti-rabies vaccine in Salem. FILE PHOTO.

immunology was rudimentary, and the concept of viruses as distinct infectious agents was non-existent. Pasteur himself referred to the rabies pathogen as a "virus," but this term merely signified an unknown infectious agent smaller than bacteria. Despite the lack of a clear understanding, Pasteur hypothesised that a weakened, or "attenuated," version of the rabies virus could stimulate the immune system to fight off a real infection.

After years of painstaking work, which included drying infected rabbit spinal cords to weaken the virus, Pasteur developed a vaccine that could be administered after exposure but before the onset of symptoms, providing a critical window to save lives. This work was groundbreaking, especially considering that the immune system's workings were poorly understood, and Pasteur's methods were developed largely through trial and error.

Pasteur's first major success came in 1885 when he treated a nine-year-old boy Joseph Meister, who had been severely bitten by a rabid dog. Given the high mortality rate associated with rabies, Meister's survival following Pasteur's vaccination regimen was hailed as a scientific triumph. However, it is important to note that modern ethical standards for clinical trials were not in place at the time.

Pasteur's decision to test the vaccine on

Rabies, known for more than 4,000 years, was first noted in ancient Mesopotamia and India, where early texts like the *Susruta Samhita* described its symptoms. However, the understanding and treatment remained limited for centuries

human subjects, including Meister and other rabies victims, was driven by desperation and the absence of alternatives, rather than a fully informed understanding of the risks involved. After the smallpox vaccine was developed, there was an 89-year gap before Pasteur created the rabies vaccine, the second vaccine ever developed.

The success of the rabies vaccine had far-reaching consequences. Just months after Meister's treatment, four boys from Newark, New Jersey, who had been bitten by a rabid dog, were sent to Paris to receive the vaccine.

Their successful recovery brought international attention to Pasteur's work and solidified his reputation as a pioneer of modern medicine.

The publicity surrounding these cases spurred the global demand for the rabies vaccine and led to the establishment of the Pasteur Institute in the year 1888, a research facility that would become a cornerstone in the development of many

future vaccines.

Epidemiology in India

Rabies in India, as of 2021, caused 59,000 deaths, representing 33% of the global total. Notably, 96% of these fatalities resulted from dog bites, highlighting the urgent need for improved rabies control and dog vaccination programs to prevent this preventable disease. The overall economic cost of dog-mediated rabies was estimated to be \$8.6 billion.

Newer rabies immunoglobulin (Rabies Ig) and the rabies vaccine are essential for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) against rabies. Rabies Ig is specifically used for category 3 bites, which involve severe exposure such as transdermal bites or scratches, and provides immediate protection by supplying ready-made antibodies. It is administered once, ideally infiltrated around the wound, on day 0 with the first vaccine dose.

The newer rabies vaccine is used for both category 2 and 3 bites; category 2 involves minor bites or scratches without bleeding. The vaccine stimulates the immune system to produce long-term antibodies and is given in a series of four intra-dermal doses on days 0, 3, 7, and 28 (Modified Thairegimen) or 0,3,7,14 and 28 intramuscular doses (Essen regimen) for unvaccinated individuals. Previously vaccinated individuals receive two doses on days 0 and 3 without Rabies Ig.

One Health Approach

The "One Health" approach, recognises the interconnection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment. This strategy emphasises collaboration among veterinary, medical, and environmental sectors to effectively manage rabies at the human-animal-environment interface. Local bodies play a vital role in animal control efforts, such as stray dog population management, vaccination drives, and public education campaigns, which are critical to preventing rabies outbreaks. To achieve the dream of zero rabies deaths by 2030, India needs to establish a robust surveillance mechanism, including GIS-enabled tracking, and ensure successful coordination among key institutions such as wildlife, urban and rural ministries, animal husbandry, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, the Ministry of Panchayat Raj, and the Health Ministry.

Effective collaboration among these stakeholders is crucial, as operating in isolation will lead to little to no success in eradicating this preventable disease. (Dr. C. Aravinda is an academic and public health physician. aravindaaiimsjr10@hotmail.com)

THE GIST

The disease remains a significant public health challenge. With a nearly 100% fatality rate once symptoms develop, rabies continues to be a formidable threat

The 19th century marked a turning point in the battle against rabies with the advent of germ theory. Pasteur turned his attention to rabies in the 1880s. He hypothesised that a weakened rabies virus could stimulate the immune system to fight an infection

Pasteur's first major success came in 1885. Just months later, four boys from New Jersey who had been bitten, were sent to Paris to receive the vaccine. Their recovery brought international attention to Pasteur and solidified his reputation as a pioneer of modern medicine

World Rabies Day: tracing the journey from myths to modern medicine (27 September)

World Rabies Day, on September 28 which commemorates the death of Pasteur, encourages reflection on the misconceptions that once shaped the approach to this disease, and the ongoing efforts to develop vaccines. By connecting past and present, we are reminded of the need for awareness, education, and vaccination to eradicate rabies

- In May 2024, a nine-year-old boy in Alappuzha, Kerala, died from rabies after being bitten by a stray dog.
- The boy did not receive a rabies vaccination because he did not have major wounds from the bite.
- This tragic incident led to school assemblies in over 740 schools, educating more than 159,000 students about the importance of immediate medical attention and vaccination after animal bites.
- Rabies is a significant public health challenge, with a nearly 100% fatality rate once symptoms appear.
- World Rabies Day, observed on September 28, commemorates Louis Pasteur and emphasizes the need for awareness, education, and vaccination to combat rabies.
- Historically, rabies has been associated with superstitions and misguided theories, such as consuming dog hair to cure it.
- An outdated 19th-century idea suggested setting up brothels for dogs to relieve their supposed sexual frustration.
- Rabies has been known for over 4,000 years, with early descriptions found in ancient Mesopotamia and India, including texts like the *Susruta Samhita*.

- Despite this long history, understanding and treatment of rabies remained limited for centuries, with many misconceptions continuing to exist.

Advent of vaccination

- Rabies has a long history filled with superstitions and misguided theories.
- An ancient remedy for rabies was to consume dog hair.
- In the 19th century, Italian Monsignor Storti suggested setting up brothels for dogs to relieve their supposed sexual frustration.
- These theories did not help stop the spread of rabies.
- Rabies has been known for over 4,000 years, first documented in ancient Mesopotamia and India, with early texts like the Susruta Samhita describing its symptoms.
- Understanding and treatment of rabies were limited for centuries, with many misconceptions persisting.
- The 19th century saw a shift in the battle against rabies with the introduction of germ theory, changing how infectious diseases were approached.
- Louis Pasteur focused on rabies in the 1880s, even though immunology was not well understood at the time.
- Pasteur referred to the rabies pathogen as a “virus,” which meant it was an unknown infectious agent smaller than bacteria.
- He hypothesized that a weakened version of the rabies virus could stimulate the immune system to fight real infections.
- Pasteur developed a vaccine by drying infected rabbit spinal cords to weaken the virus, allowing it to be administered after exposure but before symptoms appeared.
- In 1885, Pasteur successfully treated a nine-year-old boy, Joseph Meister, who had been severely bitten by a rabid dog.
- Meister's survival was a major scientific success, but ethical standards for clinical trials were not established at that time.
- Pasteur's decision to test the vaccine on humans was driven by urgency and a lack of alternatives.
- There was an 89-year gap between the development of the smallpox vaccine and Pasteur's rabies vaccine, which was the second vaccine ever created.
- The success of the rabies vaccine gained international attention, leading to four boys from Newark, New Jersey, traveling to Paris for treatment after being bitten by a rabid dog.
- Their recovery helped solidify Pasteur's reputation as a pioneer in modern medicine.
- The publicity from these cases increased global demand for the rabies vaccine and led to the establishment of the Pasteur Institute in 1888, which became crucial in developing future vaccines.

Epidemiology in India

- In India, rabies caused 59,000 deaths in 2021, accounting for 33% of global rabies fatalities.
- 96% of these deaths were due to dog bites, highlighting the urgent need for better rabies control and dog vaccination programs.
- The economic cost of dog-mediated rabies in India is estimated at \$8.6 billion.
- Rabies immunoglobulin (Rabies Ig) and rabies vaccines are essential for post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) against rabies.
- Rabies Ig is specifically for category 3 bites, which involve severe exposure, providing immediate protection by supplying ready-made antibodies.
- Rabies Ig is given once, ideally around the wound, on day 0, along with the first vaccine dose.
- The newer rabies vaccine is used for both category 2 (minor bites or scratches without bleeding) and category 3 bites.
- The vaccine stimulates the immune system to produce long-term antibodies.
- For unvaccinated individuals, the vaccine is given in a series of four doses on days 0, 3, 7, and 28 (Modified Thai regimen) or 0, 3, 7, 14, and 28 (Essen regimen).
- Previously vaccinated individuals receive two doses on days 0 and 3 without Rabies Ig.
- The “One Health” approach recognizes the connection between people, animals, plants, and their shared environment.
- This approach emphasizes collaboration among veterinary, medical, and environmental sectors to manage rabies effectively.
- Local bodies play a crucial role in controlling stray dog populations, conducting vaccination drives, and educating the public to prevent rabies outbreaks.
- To achieve zero rabies deaths by 2030, India needs a robust surveillance system, including GIS-enabled tracking.
- Successful coordination among key institutions such as wildlife, urban and rural ministries, animal husbandry, and health ministries is essential.
- Effective collaboration among these stakeholders is vital, as working in isolation will not effectively eradicate rabies.

An opportunity to rethink India's pension system

GS Paper II: Government Scheme

The pension system in India has undergone a significant transformation over the years with three major schemes, the **Old Pension Scheme (OPS)**, **New Pension Scheme (NPS)**, and the **proposed Unified Pension Scheme (UPS)**, marking the different phases of government policy. Each scheme impacts retirees in different ways, with the **OPS often being viewed as a more secure system compared to the NPS, which ties retirement funds to volatile market conditions**. As the world witnesses a retreat from **neoliberal policies**, the debate around welfarism is being reignited. In this context, the UPS requires considerable rectification to ensure that it serves the interests of retirees effectively.

A shift with greater individual risk

The OPS, prevalent before 2004, guaranteed a defined benefit pension to government employees. In this scheme, the pension amount was fixed and determined by the last drawn salary, and the government was solely responsible for disbursing the pensions. The OPS provided stability and ensured that retirees were insulated from any financial market risks. The reliance on a fixed percentage of the last drawn salary for pensions meant that employees could plan their retirements with a sense of financial security, knowing that they would have a guaranteed income stream throughout their post-retirement years. The OPS reflected the government's commitment to social security by excluding the market from the equation and offering guaranteed pensions.

In 2004, the Government of India replaced the OPS with the New Pension Scheme (NPS). Here, the shift was from a defined-benefit model to a defined-contribution model, wherein employee and the government contributed towards a pension fund, which was then invested in financial markets. The pension payout under the NPS is linked to the performance of these investments, meaning retirees' incomes are now subject to the fluctuations of market forces.

The shift from OPS to NPS represents the neoliberal tendency to reduce state involvement



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With the return to welfarism worldwide, India's proposed Unified Pension Scheme should ensure that retirees are supported by a robust welfare system

in welfare provisions and transfer risk to individuals. The NPS left retirees vulnerable to market volatility, effectively placing their futures at the mercy of speculative market conditions. The NPS has drawn criticism because the security once provided by the state under OPS has been eroded. During periods of economic downturn, retirees may face reduced returns, undermining their financial stability.

This market-driven pension model has also fuelled wider concerns about the commercialisation of public welfare programmes and the weakening of the state's social responsibility.

A return to welfarism

Globally, the era of neoliberalism that dominated economic policy for the past few decades is showing signs of a retreat. The 2008 financial crisis exposed the risks associated with excessive market reliance, leading to calls for stronger social safety nets and a return to welfarism. The COVID-19 pandemic further amplified these demands, as governments worldwide were compelled to intervene in unprecedented ways to protect the health and livelihoods of their citizens. India, too, is experiencing a similar shift, with demands for the return of state-backed welfare provisions.

The UPS, as proposed by the Narendra Modi government, emerges in this context as an attempt to provide universal pensions while balancing state involvement and market participation.

While the U-turn of the Modi government, as pointed out by the Opposition, aims to address the issues raised by the NPS, the UPS is still in its nascent stages and requires significant rectification before it can be seen as a viable alternative to the NPS. Critics have already pointed out that the UPS promises retirement payouts but offers reduced returns compared to the OPS and exposes retirees to the risks of uncertain market-based assets. The requirement of 25 years of service for a full pension is a disadvantage for those who join late, while potential underfunding raises concerns about

future pension delays or corpus depletion.

Moreover, the scheme only covers Union government employees, excluding many public sector workers such as teachers, and may disincentivise further pay commissions. One of the critical aspects of the UPS that needs attention is the need for greater state intervention to ensure that retirees are not left vulnerable to market forces. While the UPS offers a universal framework, its structure should incorporate safeguards against market fluctuations, possibly by providing a minimum guaranteed pension similar to the OPS.

Issue of government contribution

Another area that needs reform is the level of government contribution. The UPS hybrid model would not completely mitigate risks associated with market reliance and may fail to offer a balanced pension system. Further, ensuring the inclusivity of the UPS across all sectors, including informal labour, is critical. India's vast informal workforce currently lacks adequate pension coverage. The UPS must broaden its scope to provide pension security to all citizens, and not just to government employees, aligning with the broader return of welfarism that is gaining momentum globally.

The comparison of the OPS, the NPS and the UPS illustrates the tension between state-backed welfare and market-driven policies in India's pension system. While the OPS provided a stable and predictable pension income, the NPS shifted retirees' financial futures into the volatile realm of market investments, creating uncertainties and vulnerabilities. The retreat of neoliberalism and the return to welfarism worldwide, although on a limited scale or even notionally, provide an opportunity to rethink India's pension system and strike a better balance between state responsibility and market participation. The UPS, if properly restructured, could become an important tool in protecting the financial security of retirees and addressing the shortcomings of the NPS, ensuring that India's retirees are not left to the mercy of market forces but are supported by a robust welfare system.

An opportunity to rethink India's pension system (27 September)

- The pension system in India has evolved significantly over the years, primarily through three schemes: Old Pension Scheme (OPS), New Pension Scheme (NPS), and the proposed Unified Pension Scheme (UPS).
- The OPS is often seen as a more secure option for retirees compared to the NPS, which is affected by market fluctuations.
- There is a growing debate about welfarism as the world shifts away from neoliberal policies, raising concerns about the effectiveness of the proposed UPS for retirees.
- The OPS, in place before 2004, provided a guaranteed pension based on the last drawn salary, ensuring financial stability for retirees.
- The government was solely responsible for paying out pensions under the OPS, protecting retirees from market risks.
- In 2004, the OPS was replaced by the NPS, which shifted from a defined-benefit model to a defined-contribution model.
- Under the NPS, both employees and the government contribute to a pension fund that is invested in financial markets.
- Pension payouts under the NPS depend on the performance of these investments, making retirees' incomes vulnerable to market changes.
- The transition to NPS reflects a neoliberal approach that reduces government involvement in welfare and transfers financial risks to individuals.
- Retirees under the NPS may face financial instability during economic downturns due to potential reduced returns on their investments.
- The NPS has been criticized for undermining the security that the OPS provided, raising concerns about the commercialization of public welfare programs and the diminishing social responsibility of the state.

A return to welfarism

- Neoliberalism, which dominated global economic policy for decades, is retreating, especially after the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The 2008 crisis revealed the dangers of relying too much on markets, prompting calls for stronger social safety nets and a return to welfare-focused policies.
- In India, there is a growing demand for state-backed welfare provisions, leading to the proposal of the Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) by the Narendra Modi government.
- The UPS aims to provide universal pensions while balancing state involvement with market participation.

- Critics argue that the UPS needs significant adjustments before it can effectively replace the New Pension Scheme (NPS).
- The UPS promises retirement payouts but offers lower returns than the Old Pension Scheme (OPS) and exposes retirees to market risks.
- A requirement of 25 years of service for a full pension disadvantages those who start working later, and potential underfunding raises concerns about future pension delays.
- Currently, the UPS only covers Union government employees, excluding many public sector workers like teachers, which may discourage future pay commissions.
- Greater state intervention is necessary to protect retirees from market fluctuations, possibly by ensuring a minimum guaranteed pension similar to the OPS.
- The government contribution level in the UPS needs reform to create a balanced pension system and reduce market reliance risks.
- The UPS should also include informal labor to provide pension security for all citizens, not just government employees, aligning with the global trend toward welfarism.
- Comparing the OPS, NPS, and UPS highlights the conflict between state-backed welfare and market-driven policies in India's pension system.
- The OPS offered stable income, while the NPS linked retiree finances to volatile market investments, creating uncertainty.
- The retreat from neoliberalism and the move toward welfarism globally create an opportunity to rethink India's pension system for a better balance between state support and market roles.
- If restructured effectively, the UPS could enhance financial security for retirees and address the shortcomings of the NPS, ensuring retirees are supported by a robust welfare system.

Is India's growth story benefiting only big capital?

GS Paper III: Economy

PARLEY

India's impressive economic growth since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic has surprised many, including those who were critical of the Centre's economic policies. The Indian growth story is today widely praised across the world. In 2023-24, the country grew at 8.2%, the fastest among major economies. However, most of the economic gains in the last few years have mostly come from big businesses. Is India's growth story benefiting only big capital? Himanshu and Ritesh Kumar Singh discuss the question with Prashanth Perumal J. Edited excerpts:

Is it true that India's economic growth story is fuelled by just a handful of big businesses?

Himanshu: It is now more or less accepted that India's growth story is K-shaped, where the richer sections of the population have been growing much faster than the bottom half of the population, which has not seen increases in their incomes. It is not a dispute any more; even the government data shows it.

Ritesh Kumar Singh: There is no dispute about uneven growth. GDP growth is currently led by government capital expenditure, which is mostly related to infrastructure. Private sector investments also depend on infrastructure-related spending. So, steel producers might be doing well and infrastructure companies might be doing well, but there is no revival of broad-based private capital expenditure. Small-scale industries are losing market share and they are distressed.

Fundamentally, what causes growth in an economy to be either broad-based (benefiting many) or narrow (benefiting a few)?

Ritesh Kumar Singh: The cost of capital and the general compliance filing and reporting requirements for smaller businesses are just too much. I run a small business. Most of the time I seem to be dealing only with compliance-related filings; they just keep going up. For larger corporations, most of the compliance filing is easier to deal with, but for owners of smaller businesses, it is getting very complicated. Also, when it comes to the cost of capital, most small businesses are getting capital [at an interest rate of] 12-14% as compared to larger corporations, which might be getting capital at [an interest rate of] 8-9%. There is one more issue, which is taxation. The government slashed the corporate tax in September 2019. But 95% of the businesses are non-corporate, so they are not



A man walks through a solar plant, an Adani Group project, in Ramanapeta, in Telangana. REUTERS

benefiting from this tax cut. Further, because of the government's policy of protecting the producers of key industrial inputs – for example, steel and aluminium – downstream businesses are seeing increased cost of production.

Himanshu: Two of the greatest man-made economic shocks that the country has seen – demonetisation and the rollout of the Goods and Services Tax – were favouring big businesses at the cost of the small and medium enterprises or the unorganised sector. Data from the Budget clearly show that in the last 10 years, the effective rate of taxation for big businesses has come down much more compared to small and medium enterprises. So, there is this mindset where we depend on big businesses to drive growth. I don't think that is going to work given a demand deficient economy.

Is the market economy to blame for uneven economic growth? Should big businesses be taxed at higher rates, as many recommend?

Himanshu: The effective tax rate has always been lower for the larger corporations compared to the smaller corporations. That is a problem. In the last 10 years, the effective tax rate paid by large corporations has actually declined, but not so much as far as the small and medium enterprises are concerned. We are basically following the policy of effectively subsidising the large corporations at the cost of the smaller companies. The support that is being given to the private corporate sector has not actually even contributed to the growth of the economy. A large part of capital expenditure is being supported by the government. All this is happening at a time when the amount spent to raise consumption for the bottom 50% of the population is on the decline. For example,



If the government can reduce the compliance burden, or if it is ready to look at ease of doing business from the perspective of smaller businesses, that would be a big help. Smaller businesses don't need more subsidies.

RITESH KUMAR SINGH

expenditure on rural development, agriculture, rural infrastructure, etc., which could have actually turned small and medium enterprises into growth drivers, is not happening partly because there are funding cuts in those sectors. The whole approach of supporting only the corporate sector at the cost of small- and medium-scale enterprises, which are going to create employment, demand, and investment in the economy, is likely to lead to unsustainable growth in the long run.

The government also has to realise that not all small and medium enterprises are tax evaders and reduce the regulatory hurdles to them, so that they can also become large enterprises. This does not require it to spend a large amount of money. I think it is necessary to reduce the regulatory burden, reduce the compliance costs, and reduce the kinds of discriminatory policies it has against small companies.

There is also a case for adopting a progressive taxation policy, which would imply a larger tax burden on big business and a much smaller burden on smaller companies which have less of an ability to pay.

On paper, smaller companies are supposed to pay low taxes. But the problem is that large corporations are able to game the system and have a much lower taxation rate compared to the small and medium enterprises. In the latest year for which data are available, the effective tax rate for large corporations was close to 20%, whereas for small firms with the profit range of ₹1 crore to ₹10 crore, it was 26%. That is unacceptable. It is not just about tax rates, but also the kinds of loopholes that big businesses are able to use to game the system.

Ritesh Kumar Singh: I have a different opinion when it comes to taxing the profit of different businesses. I don't want progressive taxation or lower taxation for smaller firms. I believe we should have the same tax rate for all businesses. So, the corporate tax which has been slashed should be extended to all kinds of businesses. Otherwise, if you devise progressive taxation, there is also misuse. Progressive taxation will encourage firms to remain smaller. So, my suggestion would be to treat the profit from all

types of businesses as the same.

The major problem is the increasing compliance burden. If the government can reduce the compliance burden, or if the government is ready to look at ease of doing business from the perspective of smaller businesses, that would be a big help. It is not that we need more subsidies. There are a lot of things that can be done without spending money, without ruining our fiscal targets.

What kinds of reforms can help India achieve economic growth that benefits people across the board rather than just a few business groups?

Ritesh Kumar Singh: My expectations from the government are low. I would like the GST system to be made like the income tax system, so that we have quarterly filings and quarterly payments of taxes and annual filing of taxes. Right now, there are too many gaps, too much confusion, conflicting interpretations, etc., so much so that even a chartered accountant doesn't know what to do. It is also very difficult for smaller businesses to get GST refunds or input tax credits.

Next, when it comes to banking, the whole credit appraisal system is asset-based rather than cash flow-based. Private banks are slightly better in the sense that they rely on cash flows to extend loans. But government banks, which have a far greater reach in smaller towns and villages, should also switch to cash flow-based lending.

Himanshu: The solution lies in first recognising that there is a problem of demand in the economy and that it comes from the distressed incomes of a large majority of the population. Once you recognise that, the solution automatically arises. The solution is to find ways of increasing incomes in the rural economy, to spend more money in the rural economy and, through this, benefit small and medium enterprises. This is also the best way to raise wages for the workers at the bottom of the pyramid. The government has enough regulatory ammunition; it can actually facilitate small business owners by easing the regulatory burden. These owners can also be provided some kind of credit access support. But all this will require the political willingness to realise that the problem lies at the bottom of the pyramid.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

Is India's growth story benefiting only big capital? (27 September)

- India's economy has shown impressive growth post-COVID-19, surprising critics of the government's economic policies.
- In 2023-24, India recorded an 8.2% growth rate, the fastest among major economies.
- However, this growth primarily benefits large businesses, raising questions about whether it serves only big capital.

- Himanshu notes that India's growth story is K-shaped, meaning the wealthy are experiencing faster growth, while the lower half of the population sees stagnant incomes.
- Ritesh Kumar Singh agrees that uneven growth is evident, with GDP growth driven mainly by government capital expenditure focused on infrastructure.
- While sectors like steel production and infrastructure companies are thriving, small-scale industries are struggling and losing market share.
- Ritesh explains that the high cost of capital and increasing compliance requirements for smaller businesses hinder their growth.
- Small businesses often face interest rates of 12-14% for capital, while larger corporations benefit from lower rates of 8-9%.
- The reduction of corporate tax in September 2019 primarily benefits corporate businesses, but 95% of businesses in India are non-corporate and do not receive these tax advantages.
- Government policies protecting producers of key industrial inputs, like steel and aluminum, lead to higher production costs for downstream businesses.
- Himanshu argues that major economic shocks in India, like demonetization and the Goods and Services Tax, have benefited big businesses at the expense of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the unorganised sector.
- Data shows that over the last decade, the effective tax rate for large corporations has decreased significantly compared to that of small and medium businesses.
- There is a prevailing mindset that relies on big businesses to drive economic growth, which may not be effective in a demand-deficient economy.
- Himanshu highlights that larger corporations have a lower effective tax rate, and this trend has worsened in recent years, effectively subsidising them at the cost of smaller firms.
- The government's support for the corporate sector has not translated into overall economic growth, while spending on consumption for the bottom 50% of the population is declining.
- Cuts in funding for rural development and infrastructure hinder the potential growth of SMEs, which could drive employment and investment.
- A policy that favors large corporations over SMEs could lead to unsustainable growth in the long run.
- The government should recognize that not all SMEs evade taxes and should reduce regulatory hurdles for them to help them grow.
- Reducing compliance costs and discriminatory policies against small businesses is essential for their development.
- There is a case for progressive taxation, where larger businesses bear a higher tax burden while smaller ones pay less.
- Although smaller companies are supposed to pay lower taxes, larger corporations exploit loopholes to pay even less.
- For example, the effective tax rate for large corporations is about 20%, while small firms with profits between ₹1 crore and ₹10 crore face a rate of 26%, which is deemed unacceptable.
- Ritesh Kumar Singh believes that all businesses should have the same corporate tax rate, opposing progressive taxation or lower taxes for smaller firms.
- He argues that a uniform tax rate for all businesses would prevent misuse and encourage firms to grow rather than stay small.
- The primary issue is the increasing compliance burden on businesses; reducing this burden would help without needing more subsidies or compromising fiscal targets.
- Ritesh suggests reforms to make the Goods and Services Tax (GST) system simpler, similar to the income tax system, with quarterly filings and payments.
- He highlights the confusion and conflicting interpretations in the current GST system, which makes it difficult for small businesses to get refunds or input tax credits.
- He points out that the credit appraisal system in banks is asset-based, which is less favorable for small businesses; government banks should switch to cash flow-based lending like private banks do.
- Himanshu emphasizes the importance of recognizing the demand problem in the economy, driven by low incomes for many people.
- He suggests increasing spending in the rural economy to help small and medium enterprises and raise wages for lower-income workers.
- The government has the regulatory tools to ease the burden on small business owners and provide credit access support, but this requires political will to address the issues affecting the lowest income groups.

Storms brewing in East, South China

What has led to a flare-up in tensions in recent times? Why does China see its claims over the seas as defensive actions? Why do the regional countries provocative? Why is the U.S. drawn into the conflict? What lies ahead?

GS Paper II: International relations

EXPLAINER

Sankalp Gurjar

The story so far:

In the last few years, maritime East Asia has become an arena for intensified power politics. The East China Sea borders China, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea. China asserts that the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands, located in the East China Sea and under Japanese control, belong to Beijing. There have been multiple crises over these islands in the past. The South China Sea lies between China, Taiwan and five Southeast Asian countries – Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, and Indonesia – and has emerged as one of the most important flashpoints in the Indo-Pacific. China has been aggressively pushing its claims in the South China Sea.

Why are the seas important to China?

China views the East and South China Seas through the prism of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security. China's Defence White paper, issued in 2019, declares, "South China Sea islands and Diaoyu Islands are inalienable parts of the Chinese territory." In responding to the criticism regarding China's activities, it asserts that "China exercises its national sovereignty to build infrastructure and deploy necessary defensive capabilities on the islands and reefs in the South China Sea, and to conduct patrols in the waters of Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea." What China perceives as its defensive actions are considered offensive and provocative by the regional countries surrounding the East and South China Seas.

What is the significance of the seas?

The key maritime trade routes in East Asia pass through these two seas. Taiwan Strait is a critical maritime choke point. The region is home to undersea cables that are important for the global digital economy. As per the U.S. Energy Information Administration, in 2023, 10 billion barrels of petroleum and petroleum products and 6.7 trillion cubic feet of liquefied natural gas passed through the South China Sea. It is also home to vast reserves of untapped oil and natural gas.

What is China doing in the region?

China has been aggressively pushing its territorial claims in both seas in two ways: by building defence-related infrastructure such as ports, military installations, airstrips, and artificial islands and by pushing back against the claims of regional countries. In the East China Sea, China vehemently contested Japanese claims and, both countries found themselves embroiled in multiple crises, the most notable being the arrest of a Chinese captain of a fishing boat in 2010 and Japan's nationalisation of the Senkaku islands in 2012. These crises saw both countries taking maximalist positions. China had imposed a ban on the export of rare earth minerals to Japan. In the last few years, there has been a slight easing of tensions over the issue regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands. As per the Japan Coast Guard data, 2023 saw the highest level of activity by the Chinese Coast Guard in the contiguous zone of the Senkakus. Owing to China's assertive foreign policy, its relationship with South Korea, Taiwan and Japan has deteriorated rapidly.

Meanwhile, the South China Sea has become a major theatre of Chinese belligerence. The power asymmetry between China and the South China Sea claimant countries is large and is



Tensions rise: Members of the Philippine Coast Guard on alert as a Chinese Coast Guard vessel blocks their way to a resupply mission at Second Thomas Shoal in the South China Sea, on March 5, 2024. REUTERS

Conflict in the waves

The South China Sea has become a focal point of geopolitical tensions amid territorial disputes with China fortifying its presence



growing continuously. China's navy is also the largest naval force in the world by numbers. Therefore, the South China Sea is seeing the ever-growing projection of Chinese power. For asserting its claims, China has deployed a Coast Guard and maritime militia. The tactics include dangerous and aggressive manoeuvres at sea, harassing resupply missions, ramming vessels, collisions, and using water cannons and military-grade lasers, etc. These tactics are known as 'grey zone' operations, which fall short of war but are designed to alter the status quo.

China has been actively pushing its claims in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Philippines. Since 2022, tensions between China and the Philippines have been rising due to a significant increase in the frequency of such incidents. In June-July 2024, multiple incidents of clashes occurred. The Second Thomas Shoal and Sabina Shoal have been the focus of China's recent assertiveness. The Philippines' resupply missions to the grounded ship, BRP Sierra Madre, have been repeatedly disrupted by China and have become a point of

contention. China aims to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its treaty partners in East Asia. Chinese Coast Guard ships are considerably heavier and larger in terms of tonnage compared with Coast Guard vessels of other countries. For example, the Chinese vessel CCG 5901 (541 feet long and displaces 12,000 tons) is three times larger than the main ships of the U.S. Coast Guard. Hence, China's frequent ramming of the Philippines' vessels is dangerous and risky. There is a chance of miscalculation.

In July, China conducted naval exercises with Russia in the South China Sea to demonstrate the support that it enjoys over it while projecting its claims. China's claims in the South China Sea lack a legal basis, according to a permanent court of arbitration ruling in 2016. However, China has rejected that ruling.

What has been the response from regional countries?

The regional countries have responded in three ways: First, they are building their defence capabilities. Defence spending has increased across the Indo-Pacific with

regional countries trying to catch up with China. For example, by 2027, Japan wants to double its defence expenditure. The Philippines too is ramping up its defence capabilities and, among others, has acquired the anti-ship, BrahMos missiles from India.

Second, regional countries are responding to China's activities at sea. From 2016 to 2022, Under President Rodrigo Duterte, the Philippines sought to minimise the friction between Manila and Beijing. Since 2022, the Philippines has been pushing back and publicising these incidents. The change in policy was crafted by the new President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. As a result, the frequency of incidents has gone up. Regional countries are engaged in a battle of narratives as well. They are deploying tools such as public diplomacy. The Philippines has been filming the behaviour of Chinese vessels and is releasing it through social media. The Philippines has also taken international journalists along with its resupply missions in the West Philippine Sea. The shaping of perceptions has become a key battleground.

Third, the Philippines, Japan and South Korea are treaty allies of the U.S. and are strengthening their defence relationship with it. The U.S. and the Philippines have enhanced their cooperation in the South China Sea to "historic levels" and expanded cooperation in domains such as base access, training and joint exercises. They are working with Australia and Japan in "a complex multilateral maritime cooperative activity." It is dubbed as the 'Squad'. According to U.S. Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin, the U.S.' commitment to the security of Japan is "ironclad" and includes the Senkaku islands as well. The U.S., Japan, and South Korea are deepening their trilateral cooperation. For the first time in history, the Defence Ministers of the three countries met in Japan in July 2024. In view of aggressive Chinese maritime activities, the press statement noted that these three countries "strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the waters of the Indo-Pacific." They also "stressed the importance of fully respecting international law including the freedom of navigation and overflight."

Despite the efforts at bolstering the U.S.' alliances in the Indo-Pacific, concerns remain about American credibility and the impact of the U.S.' domestic politics on its external security commitments. There is also a debate about whether the U.S. engagement in East Asia balances the Chinese power or fuels conflict. (Sankalp Gurjar is an expert on Asian Security and Indo-Pacific Geopolitics)

Storms brewing in East, South China seas (27 September)

What has led to a fare-up in tensions in recent times? Why does China see its claims over the seas as defensive actions? Why do the regional countries consider it provocative? Why is the U.S. drawn into the conflict? What lies ahead?

- Maritime East Asia has become an area of intensified power politics in recent years.
- The East China Sea borders China, Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea.
- China claims the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands in the East China Sea, which are under Japanese control.
- There have been multiple crises over these islands in the past.
- The South China Sea is located between China, Taiwan, and five Southeast Asian countries: Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, and Indonesia.
- The South China Sea has become one of the most critical flashpoints in the Indo-Pacific due to China's aggressive territorial claims.
- China views the East and South China Seas through the lens of sovereignty, territorial integrity, and national security.
- China's 2019 Defence White Paper asserts that the South China Sea islands and Diaoyu Islands are inalienable parts of Chinese territory.
- China defends its actions in these seas as necessary for national sovereignty and defensive purposes, including building infrastructure and conducting patrols.
- Regional countries view China's actions as offensive and provocative.
- The seas are crucial for key maritime trade routes in East Asia, particularly through the Taiwan Strait, a critical maritime choke point.
- The region also contains undersea cables essential for the global digital economy.
- According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, in 2023, 10 billion barrels of petroleum and petroleum products and 6.7 trillion cubic feet of liquefied natural gas passed through the South China Sea.
- The South China Sea also contains vast reserves of untapped oil and natural gas.

What is China doing in the region?

- China has been aggressively pushing its territorial claims in both the East China Sea and South China Sea.
- In both seas, China is building defence-related infrastructure such as ports, military installations, airstrips, and artificial islands.
- China is also pushing back against the territorial claims of other regional countries.
- In the East China Sea, China has contested Japan's claims, leading to multiple crises.
- Notable incidents include the arrest of a Chinese fishing boat captain in 2010 and Japan's nationalisation of the Senkaku islands in 2012.
- China retaliated by imposing a ban on the export of rare earth minerals to Japan.
- Tensions regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands have slightly eased, but Chinese Coast Guard activity in the area increased in 2023, as per Japan Coast Guard data.
- China's assertive foreign policy has worsened its relationships with South Korea, Taiwan, and Japan.
- The South China Sea has become a major focus of Chinese belligerence due to the power imbalance between China and other claimant countries.
- China's navy is the largest in the world by numbers, which contributes to its growing projection of power in the South China Sea.
- To assert its claims, China has deployed a Coast Guard and maritime militia, engaging in aggressive tactics such as dangerous manoeuvres, harassing resupply missions, ramming vessels, and using water cannons and lasers.
- These tactics, known as 'grey zone' operations, fall short of war but are aimed at altering the status quo.
- China has been pushing its claims in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Philippines, leading to rising tensions since 2022.
- In June-July 2024, multiple clashes occurred between China and the Philippines over the Second Thomas Shoal and Sabina Shoal.
- China has repeatedly disrupted the Philippines' resupply missions to the BRP Sierra Madre, a grounded ship, which has become a point of contention.
- China aims to drive a wedge between the U.S. and its treaty partners in East Asia.
- Chinese Coast Guard ships are much larger and heavier than those of other countries. For example, the Chinese vessel CCG 5901 is three times larger than the main U.S. Coast Guard ships.
- China's frequent ramming of Philippine vessels is risky and could lead to miscalculation.
- In July 2024, China conducted naval exercises with Russia in the South China Sea to demonstrate support and project its claims.
- China's claims in the South China Sea lack legal basis according to a 2016 ruling by a permanent court of arbitration, but China has rejected this ruling.

What has been the response from regional countries?

- Regional countries have responded to China's actions in three main ways:
- **Building Defense Capabilities:**
 - Defense spending across the Indo-Pacific has increased to catch up with China.
 - Japan plans to double its defense expenditure by 2027.
 - The Philippines is also boosting its defense capabilities and has acquired BrahMos missiles from India.
- **Responding to China's Actions at Sea:**
 - Under President Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022), the Philippines minimized tensions with China. However, since 2022, under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., the Philippines has been pushing back more actively.
 - The Philippines is publicizing Chinese actions at sea, releasing videos of Chinese vessels' behavior through social media, and inviting international journalists to accompany resupply missions.
 - Regional countries are shaping perceptions and engaging in a battle of narratives.
- **Strengthening Defense Ties with the U.S.:**
 - The Philippines, Japan, and South Korea, as U.S. treaty allies, are deepening their defense relations with the U.S.
 - U.S.-Philippines cooperation has reached "historic levels," with expanded joint exercises, training, and base access.
 - The U.S. is working with Japan and Australia in a multilateral maritime cooperation effort, referred to as the 'Squad.'
 - The U.S. has reiterated its "ironclad" security commitment to Japan, including the Senkaku Islands.
 - For the first time, the Defense Ministers of the U.S., Japan, and South Korea met in July 2024 to oppose unilateral changes in the Indo-Pacific waters, emphasizing respect for international law and freedom of navigation.
- **Despite these efforts to bolster U.S. alliances in the Indo-Pacific, concerns remain about:**
 - The credibility of American commitments.
 - The impact of U.S. domestic politics on its external security promises.
 - Whether U.S. engagement in East Asia balances Chinese power or escalates conflict.

REAFFIRMATION



Rich legacy: His writings must be read widely, this perhaps would be a better tribute to Bhagat Singh's life as a revolutionary than propagandism or empty political posturing. FILE PHOTO

A life in revolution: Bhagat Singh, a radical thinker and ideologue

A look back at the works of a revolutionary who was martyred in the fight for freedom; erudite, and a polyglot, he filled his short and tumultuous life writing on many subjects, from communalism and inequality to religion and faith, words which have a chilling contemporary relevance

GS Paper I: History
Essay Paper

In our age and clime, a radical worldview is often simplified. As if an entire ideology could be reduced to a haiku, and the worth of a man reduced to mere sloganeering. Whether it is Gandhi, Ambedkar, Bose, Savarkar, or Nehru, all are victims of this malaise; as if those who existed in the past serve merely the political interests of the present. One such figure in history is Bhagat Singh. On his birth anniversary, we take a look back at some of the works of the thinker and ideologue.

Literary references

Bhagat Singh was able to communicate in Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, and English, and was familiar with the fundamentals of Sanskrit.

In one of his earliest pieces in 1923, *The Problem of Punjab's Language and Script*, a 16-year-old Singh lucidly explains the distinction between the Gurmukhi script and the Punjabi language, and how a language is suffused with influences far beyond man-made borders.

Singh's jail notebook and letters also reflect the eclecticism of his literary diet.

In *Vishwa Prem* (Universal Love), published in November 1924, Singh declares "Visvabandhuta (Universal Brotherhood)! For me the greatest meaning of this word is equality and nothing else. None will need to cry for bread when hungry... There would be peace without penal codes."

Singh extols Rana Pratap, Mazzini, Gandhiji, Lenin, Washington, Savarkar, Tilak, and MacSwiney as models for the youth, and harkens to Brutus in Roman history, and Krishna in the Mahabharata in the article.

By 1928, the stark realities of the Indian situation were more apparent to

the young Singh.

In the article *Communal Riots and their Solution*, Singh comes down hard on the journalists of his day, writing, "These people arouse public sentiment by writing bold headlines in the newspapers against one or the other and compel people to start fighting with one another... riots started in many locations just because of the fact that local newspapers had written articles that stoked passions."

"The actual duty of newspapers is to educate, to liberate people from narrow-mindedness, eradicate fundamentalism, to help in creating a sense of fraternity among people, and build a common nationalism in India, but these papers behaved in a manner entirely antithetical to their duties," he says.

Students and politics

"We are hearing a wide clamouring that students should not take part in political work," Singh writes in a July 1928 article, *Students and Politics*, explaining how the then Punjab government required aspiring collegiates to "sign off on an undertaking that they will not take part in political activities." Singh says that an education which will "only equip them for clerical jobs" would be "worthless". "They should study, but at the same time they should acquire the knowledge of politics too, and when the need arises they should jump into the fray and sacrifice their lives for the nation," Singh states.

In his June 1928 article, *The Problem of Untouchability*, Singh exhorts the "so-called untouchables, the real sustainers of life" to remember that they "were the backbone of Guru Gobind Singh's army. Shivaji was able to achieve all he did with your participation and it made him forever shine in history." Singh

urges them to "unite to stand on your own feet and challenge the existing order of society."

Declaring the idea that "since someone is born in a poor sweeper's family, he shall continue cleaning toilets all his life" as "utter nonsense", Singh stokes the depressed classes to "start a revolution from a social agitation." Singh reminds the untouchables that they "are the pillars of the nation and its core strength. Awake, O sleeping lions! Rebel, raise the banner of revolt."

In a December 1929 article, *What is Revolution?*, Singh explains, "The spirit of revolution should always permeate the soul of humanity so that reactionary forces may not accumulate to check its eternal onward march. Old order should change, always and ever, yielding place to new, so that one 'good' order may not corrupt the world. It is in this sense that we raise the shout 'Long Live Revolution'."

In a three-part piece titled, *What is Anarchism?*, published in 1928, Singh reflects, "Anarchists are against God and religion to begin with because they feel this is the root of mental slavery. And then they are against the State because it is the root of physical slavery. They say that motivating people with the temptation of heaven, fear of hell, or with the iron hand of law is the wrong approach and it is also an insult to a superior being like a human."

In his 1931 *Letter to Young Political Workers*, Singh writes, "According to our definition of the term, revolution means the complete overthrow of the existing social order and its replacement with the socialist order... the state, the government machinery is just a weapon in the hands of the ruling class to further and safeguard its interest. We want to snatch it, and handle it, to utilise it for the consummation of our ideal, i.e., social

reconstruction on a new, i.e., Marxist, basis."

Challenging faith

As an atheist and a materialist, Singh had thought organised religion to be an impediment to the freedom struggle in particular and to social progress in general. "We can see the mountain of religion standing in our path," Singh writes in an April 1928 article, *Religion and our Freedom Struggle*. "... a clash between people could be instigated with the loud recitation of Koranic verses and Vedic mantras. The question is then, why should we not do away with all this once and for all?" he asks.

In *Why I am an Atheist*, Singh declares, "Any man who stands for progress has to criticise, disbelieve and challenge every item of the old faith. Item by item, he has to reason out every nook and corner of the prevailing faith... An individual who claims to be a realist has to challenge all of ancient faith."

In an April 1929 letter to his compatriot Sukhdev, Singh writes about how the emotion of "love" can elevate a human life. Writing of Mazzini in the aftermath of the failed rebellion, Singh says, "He could have either gone mad or committed suicide, but with a letter from his beloved, he became not only as strong as the others, but stronger than everybody else... The character of a person is always elevated by love; it never shows one in a bad light provided that the love is true love. True love can never be created. It wells up by itself when no one can predict."

Bhagat Singh wrote and worked extensively in his short and tumultuous life. His writings must be read widely – this perhaps would be a better tribute to Singh's life as a revolutionary than propagandism or empty political posturing.

A life in revolution: Bhagat Singh, a radical thinker and ideologue
(27 September)

A look back at the works of a revolutionary who was martyred in the fight for freedom; erudite, and a polyglot, he filled his short and tumultuous life writing on many subjects, from communalism and inequality to religion and faith, words which have a chilling contemporary relevance

- **Radical worldviews are often oversimplified:**
 - Historical figures like Gandhi, Ambedkar, Bose, Savarkar, and Nehru are often reduced to slogans for present-day political interests.
- **Bhagat Singh's intellectual contributions:**
 - proficient in Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, and English, and had a basic understanding of Sanskrit.
- **1923 work - The Problem of Punjab's Language and Script:**
 - At 16, Singh wrote about the difference between Gurmukhi script and Punjabi language, discussing how languages transcend man-made borders.
- **Eclectic literary diet:**
 - All notebook and letters reflect a diverse range of influences.
- **Vishwa Prem (Universal Love), 1924:**
 - Singh emphasized universal brotherhood and equality, envisioning a world without hunger, where there would be peace without the need for penal codes.
- **Admiration for various leaders:**
 - Singh praised figures such as Rana Pratap, Mazzini, Gandhiji, Lenin, Washington, Savarkar, Tilak, and MacSwiney, and drew parallels to Brutus in Roman history and Krishna in the Mahabharata.
- **Communal Riots and their Solution, 1928:**
 - Singh criticized journalists for inciting communal violence through provocative headlines, blaming the press for fueling tensions and riots.
 - He believed the true duty of newspapers was to educate, liberate from narrow-mindedness, eradicate fundamentalism, promote fraternity, and build a common Indian nationalism.
- In a July 1928 article, Bhagat Singh criticizes the notion that students should not engage in political activities. He argues that education solely for clerical jobs is worthless and that students should also gain political knowledge to serve the nation when needed.
- In a June 1928 article, "The Problem of Untouchability," Singh calls on the untouchables, who he refers to as the "backbone of Guru Gobind Singh's army" and critical to Shivaji's success, to unite, stand on their own feet, and challenge the existing social order.
- Singh condemns the idea that being born in a poor family condemns someone to a life of servitude, encouraging the untouchables to start a revolution through social agitation, declaring them "the pillars of the nation and its core strength."
- In a December 1929 article, "What is Revolution?", Singh explains that the spirit of revolution should constantly evolve, ensuring that old orders yield to new ones, so that one 'good' order does not corrupt the world.
- In a three-part piece titled "What is Anarchism?", Singh reflects that anarchists are against God, religion, and the State because they believe these are the roots of mental and physical slavery. They oppose motivating people through heaven, hell, or law.
- In his 1931 "Letter to Young Political Workers," Singh defines revolution as the overthrow of the existing social order, replacing it with a socialist one. He states that the government is a tool of the ruling class and must be seized to implement Marxist ideals.
- As an atheist and materialist, Singh viewed organized religion as a hindrance to both the freedom struggle and social progress. He argues for the removal of religious influences that divide people, as discussed in his April 1928 article "Religion and our Freedom Struggle."
- In "Why I am an Atheist," Singh declares that anyone who stands for progress must challenge every aspect of old faiths, reasoning through each belief to question its relevance and truth.
- In an April 1929 letter to his comrade Sukhdev, Singh reflects on the power of love to elevate human life, citing Mazzini's strength after receiving a letter from his beloved as an example. He asserts that true love strengthens character and cannot be forced.
- Bhagat Singh's extensive writings and ideas from his short but impactful life should be widely read as a true tribute to his revolutionary legacy, rather than being reduced to propaganda or political posturing.

