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Jaishankar will travel to Pakistan for SCO meeting

NEW DELHI

In the first such visit in nearly a decade, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will travel to Islamabad to attend the Heads of Government meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) on October 15 and 16, the Centre announced on Friday.

The Ministry of External Affairs said Mr. Jaishankar's visit was "mainly" for the SCO grouping's meeting, given India's focus on "regional cooperation mechanisms". No bilateral meetings on the sidelines have been decided thus far, it added.

The last time an Indian External Affairs Minister travelled to Pakistan was Sushma Swaraj in 2015 for the Heart of Asia conference and bilateral talks.

"Mr. Jaishankar will be leading India's delegation to the SCO meeting," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal told presspersons at a briefing. "As and when the programme develops, the visit develops, we will keep you informed," he said, when asked if there was any request from Pakistan for a bilateral meeting with its Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar.

According to sources, it is also unclear whether Mr. Jaishankar will stay in Islamabad overnight, as he may return to New Delhi the same day.

Mr. Jaishankar may arrive for the formal SCO meeting on October 16 and return to New Delhi the same day.

Officials said the External Affairs Minister's visit was based on "reciprocity", given that despite bilateral tensions, Pakistan had sent its then-Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto to attend the SCO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Goa in May 2023.

It is also significant that the Narendra Modi-led government is sending a Minister for an SCO conference, but has refused to attend the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit, due to be held in Pakistan since 2016.

Responding to a question about the recent meeting between the new Bangladesh leader Muhammad Yunus and Pakistan Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, where Mr. Yunus called for a "revival" of the eight-nation SAARC process, the spokesperson alleged that it was Pakistan that was "stalling SAARC", not India.

"One particular country has a particular way of doing things, which is stalling SAARC," said Mr. Jaiswal, referring to Pakistan's refusal to move forward on India's suggestions for a Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) and South Asian electricity grid initiatives.

The invitation to the SCO meeting was sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi by the Pakistan government last month.

Minister pledges help to Sri Lanka

COLOMBO

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Friday met Sri Lanka's new President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, and pledged India's "full support" to the nation's economic recovery. » PAGE 4

S. Jaishankar

Jaishankar will travel to Pakistan for SCO meeting (5 October)

● External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar will visit Islamabad to attend the Heads of Government meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) on October 15-16.

● The Ministry of External Affairs stated the visit is primarily for the SCO meeting, highlighting India's focus on regional cooperation.

● No bilateral meetings have been decided as of now.

● The last visit by an Indian External Affairs Minister to Pakistan was Sushma Swaraj in 2015 for the Heart of Asia conference.

● Jaishankar will lead India's delegation to the SCO meeting, according to MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal.

● There is uncertainty about whether Jaishankar will stay overnight in Islamabad or return to New Delhi the same day.

● His arrival for the formal SCO meeting is expected on October 16.

● The visit is based on "reciprocity," following Pakistan's participation in the SCO Foreign Ministers' meeting in Goa in May 2023.

● The Modi government is sending a minister to the SCO conference while refusing to attend the SAARC summit in Pakistan since 2016.

● In response to questions about a meeting between Bangladesh leader Muhammad Yunus and Pakistan Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif, the spokesperson claimed Pakistan is "stalling SAARC."

● The spokesperson attributed the stalling to Pakistan's refusal to advance on India's Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) and South Asian electricity grid initiatives.

● The invitation to the SCO meeting was sent to Prime Minister Narendra Modi by the Pakistan government last month.

:Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA) under SAARC

- The **SAARC Motor Vehicle Agreement** is aimed at facilitating seamless movement of passengers and goods across the region by road. Initially, the agreement was proposed during
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- **18th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu, Nepal,** in **November 2014**. The agreement, however, faced political challenges and delays, notably due to opposition from **Pakistan**, one of the SAARC member states.
- The **Motor Vehicle Agreement (MVA)** was instead taken forward by **BBIN** (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal), a sub-regional grouping of SAARC nations.
- The MVA under BBIN was signed in **June 2015** in **Thimphu, Bhutan**.
- This agreement aimed to regulate cross-border vehicular movement across the four participating nations, promoting regional trade and economic integration.

Key points:

- **Objectives**: **Facilitate smooth transit and transport across the four countries, reduce logistical costs, and improve regional connectivity.**
- It **covers both passenger and cargo vehicles**.
- **Scope**: The agreement includes provisions for **road permits, customs clearance, and dispute resolution.**
- **Bhutan's reservations**: Though **Bhutan initially signed the agreement, it later chose to put the ratification process on hold due to environmental and infrastructural concerns**.
- However, the remaining three countries, **Bangladesh**, **India**, and **Nepal**, have operationalized the agreement.

Key Benefits:

- **Reduced transportation costs**: The MVA would lead to faster and more efficient movement of goods and people, reducing logistical costs.
- **Trade enhancement**: By cutting down transit times, it would improve trade volumes between these countries.
- **Infrastructure development**: It pushes for improved road infrastructure and regulatory frameworks that can facilitate better connectivity.

South Asian Electricity Grid Initiatives

- The vision for a **South Asian Regional Energy Grid** or **SAARC Electricity Grid** is part of the broader agenda to improve energy cooperation in the region.

- South Asia has large potential for energy generation, especially from renewable sources like hydropower, solar, and wind, and this potential can be harnessed through cross-border electricity trade.
- The **SAARC Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation** was signed by all eight member states during the 18th SAARC Summit in **November 2014**.
- The aim was **to create a regional energy grid that could pool resources and optimize energy distribution across borders**.

Key Features:

- **Cross-border electricity trade**: The agreement focuses on **enabling bilateral, trilateral, and regional electricity trading**.
- The idea is to **pool energy resources and ensure the efficient transfer of surplus energy from energy-rich countries (like Bhutan and Nepal) to energy-deficient countries (like Bangladesh and India)**.
- **Regional Energy Hub**: The **initiative seeks to establish South Asia as a hub for clean energy, particularly through hydropower from the Himalayan countries**.
- **Increased investments**: Cross-border electricity trading would attract more investments in energy generation and transmission infrastructure.

Progress and Challenges:

- **Operational grids**: India and Bhutan have already established strong cross-border electricity transmission systems, with India importing hydropower from Bhutan. Similarly, India and Nepal have increased energy trade over the years.
- **BBIN Cooperation**: Under the **BBIN initiative**, cross-border energy trade between India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Bhutan has seen significant progress. For instance, **Bangladesh** has been importing power from India, and **India** is looking to further invest in hydropower in **Nepal** and **Bhutan**.
- **Political challenges**: Despite the agreements, **Pakistan** has been less engaged in regional energy cooperation efforts, which has limited the potential for a truly SAARC-wide grid.

Recent Updates:

- In **2022**, India, Bangladesh, and Nepal signed new agreements to enhance power trade, further operationalizing the **BBIN energy grid** initiative.
- Discussions have been ongoing about extending power trade to other SAARC nations, including **Sri Lanka** and **Maldives**.
- A feasibility study for greater **regional hydropower cooperation** is being carried out, with Bhutan and Nepal being critical players.

Ahead of poll, credit war breaks out in Maharashtra over classical language status to Marathi (5 October)

- The Union Cabinet granted classical language status to Marathi, a demand pending since 2013, sparking a political credit war ahead of the upcoming Assembly elections.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated that "Marathi is India's pride," acknowledging its cultural contributions.
- Chief Minister Eknath Shinde welcomed the move, claiming it was a successful outcome of the Maharashtra government's continuous efforts.
- Shinde emphasized the importance of Marathi to the party's founder, Balasaheb Thackeray, and noted his own tireless work to realize this dream.
- Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis described the decision as a "golden moment" and thanked Marathi literary figures and artists for their support.
- Being recognized as a classical language will facilitate funding for teaching Marathi at universities, create job opportunities in academia and research, and support Marathi libraries.
- The decision will also lead to preservation, documentation, and digitization of ancient Marathi texts, generating jobs in archiving, translation, publishing, and digital media.
- Research centers are expected to be established, and works in Marathi could win national and international awards.
- Implementation of the decision is expected within two years.
- Senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh pointed out that the classical language status proposal was sent to the Centre by Prithviraj Chavan in July 2014.
- Ramesh claimed the Centre acted now due to an "imminent defeat" in the upcoming election and stressed that all governments in the state contributed to this demand.
- Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) chief Raj Thackeray claimed credit for the decision, referencing his party's demand in the 2014 development plan for Maharashtra.
- Thackeray expressed gratitude to Modi and the Union Cabinet for the achievement after a long wait.
- Ramesh criticized the delay in the decision, questioning Modi's timing.
- NCP (SP) and Shiv Sena (UBT) leaders highlighted their efforts towards achieving this demand, with Sharad Pawar noting the benefits for the promotion of Marathi.

- Sanjay Raut of Shiv Sena (UBT) accused the BJP of taking undue credit for the decision.
- The Congress publicly pledged to accord classical language status to Marathi in May as part of the INDIA bloc's campaign for the Lok Sabha elections.
- On October 3, the Congress suggested that the Prime Minister's action was a response to the approaching Assembly election.
- The party previously reminded Modi of the Pathare Committee report from 2014 and expressed concern over the Centre's "long silence" on the demand.

Status of Classical Language

Posted On: 04 OCT 2024 3:12PM

- The Union Cabinet, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved to confer the status of **Classical Language to Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese and Bengali** languages.
- Classical languages are regarded as the custodians of India's ancient and profound cultural legacy, preserving the rich history, literature, and traditions of their respective communities.
- By conferring this status, the government seeks to honor and protect the linguistic milestones of Bharat's diverse cultural landscape, ensuring that future generations can access and appreciate the deep historical roots of these languages.
- This move not only reinforces the importance of linguistic diversity but also acknowledges the vital role these languages play in shaping the nation's cultural identity.

1. **Why is a language declared as Classical?**

- The designation of a language as *classical* is intended to recognize its historical significance and its role as a guardian of Bharat's rich cultural and intellectual heritage.
- These languages have been essential in preserving and transmitting India's ancient knowledge systems, philosophies, and values across generations for thousands of years.

- By recognizing these languages as classical, the government acknowledges their **deep-rooted antiquity, vast literary traditions, and their invaluable contribution to the cultural fabric of the nation.**
- This recognition highlights the significant cultural and linguistic contributions these languages have made to India's heritage.
- It will not only elevate their stature but will also facilitate efforts toward the promotion, preservation, and further research of these languages, ensuring their continued relevance in the modern world

2. **What are the criteria for declaring a language as classical?**

In 2004, the Government of India, for the first time, created a new category of languages known as *Classical Languages***. It set the following as criteria for the status of Classical Language:**

- **High antiquity of its early texts/ recorded history over a thousand years.**
- **A body of ancient literature/ texts, which is considered a valuable heritage by generation of speakers.**
- **The literary tradition must be original and not borrowed from another speech community.**

This criterion was revised in 2005 and 2024 based on the recommendations of Linguistic Experts Committees (LEC) under Sahitya Akademi to examine the proposed languages for the status of Classical Language.

The criteria were revised in November 2005 as follows, and Sanskrit was declared a Classical Language:

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

The criteria were revised in 2024 as follows:

- **High antiquity of its early texts/recorded history over a period of 1500- 2000 years.**
- **A body of ancient literature/texts, which is considered a heritage by generations of speakers.**
- **Knowledge texts, especially prose texts in addition to poetry, epigraphical and inscriptional evidence.**
- **The Classical Languages and literature could be distinct from its current form or could be discontinuous with later forms of its offshoots.**

The 2024 Linguistic Expert Committee also recommended the following languages to be fulfilling revised criteria to be considered as a Classical Language: Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese, Bengali

3. **How many languages have been declared classical so far?**

Six Indian languages namely Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and Odia were earlier accorded the status of Classical Language. The Union Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi has approved to confer the status of Classical Language to Marathi, Pali, Prakrit, Assamese and Bengali languages on October 03, 2024, thus bringing the total number of classical languages to 11.

Language	Date of	Notification by	Source/Notification

	Recognition		Date
Tamil	October 12, 2004	Ministry of Home Affairs	October 12, 2004
Sanskrit	November 25, 2005	Ministry of Home Affairs	November 25, 2005
Telugu	October 31, 2008	Ministry of Culture	October 31, 2008
Kannada	October 31, 2008	Ministry of Culture	October 31, 2008
Malayalam	August 8, 2013	Ministry of Culture	August 8, 2013
Odia	March 1, 2014	Ministry of Culture	March 1, 2014

The Ministry of Home Affairs initially granted the status to Tamil and Sanskrit, and the Ministry of Culture took over the responsibility for further implementations and future recognitions. The Ministry of Culture established the Linguistic Experts Committee (LEC) on November 1, 2004, to assess future proposals for the recognition of classical languages.

4. What steps have been taken to promote classical languages?

The Ministry of Education has taken various steps for advancing Classical Languages. In 2020, three Central Universities were established through an Act of Parliament to promote

Sanskrit. The Central Institute of Classical Tamil was created to facilitate translating ancient Tamil texts, promoting research, and offering courses for university students and language scholars. To further enhance the study and preservation of Classical Languages, the Centres for Excellence for studies in Classical Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam, and Odia were established under the auspices of the Central Institute of Indian Languages in Mysuru. Additionally, several national and international awards have been introduced to recognize and encourage achievements in the field of Classical Languages. Other benefits provided by the Ministry of Education include National Awards for Classical Languages, university chairs, and centers dedicated to promoting Classical Languages.

1. Tamil (Declared in 2004)

- **Antiquity**: Tamil is one of the oldest languages in the world, with a continuous history of over 2000 years.
- **Literature**: The Tamil Sangam literature (around 300 BCE - 300 CE) is a major body of work that is central to Tamil classical heritage.
- **Cultural Importance**: Tamil literature, philosophy, and temple architecture have influenced South Indian culture significantly.
(Source: **Ministry of Culture**, Government of India)

2. Sanskrit (Declared in 2005)

- **Antiquity**: Sanskrit is the language of the **Vedas**, **Upanishads**, and ancient Indian philosophical texts, dating back over 3500 years.
- **Literature**: Sanskrit is known for its epics, such as the **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana**, as well as its contributions to science, mathematics, and medicine.
- **Cultural Influence**: It served as the liturgical language of Hinduism and the philosophical foundation for Indian civilization. (Source: **IGNOU Textbooks**)

3. Kannada (Declared in 2008)

- **Antiquity**: Kannada has a documented history of over 1500 years, with the earliest inscriptions dating back to the 5th century CE.
- **Literature**: Works such as **Kavirajamarga** (850 CE) and contributions from poets like **Pampa** and **Ranna** are cornerstones of Kannada classical literature.
- **Cultural Significance**: It played an important role in shaping the heritage of Karnataka. (Source: **NCERT Textbooks**)

4. Telugu (Declared in 2008)

- **Antiquity**: The history of Telugu dates back to the 6th century CE, with its roots

in the ancient **Prakrit** language.
- **Literature**: Telugu literature flourished in the **Kakatiya Dynasty**, and its golden age was marked by poets like **Nannaya**, **Tikkana**, and **Errapragada**.
- **Cultural Influence**: Telugu has been influential in shaping Andhra Pradesh and Telangana's cultural identities. (Source: **The Hindu**)

5. Malayalam (Declared in 2013)

- **Antiquity**: Malayalam evolved from **Tamil** and **Sanskrit** influences, with the earliest written evidence dating to the 9th century CE.
- **Literature**: Works such as **Ramacharitam** (12th century CE) and **Manipravalam poetry** are central to Malayalam literature.
- **Cultural Impact**: The language is a vital part of Kerala's identity and has contributed to various art forms, including dance and drama. (Source: **Ministry of Culture**, Government of India)

6. Odia (Declared in 2014)

- **Antiquity**: The earliest known literary works in **Odia** date back to the 10th century CE.
- **Literature**: Famous works include **Sarala Das's Mahabharata** and religious literature associated with the **Jagannath Temple**.
- **Cultural Contribution**: Odia is central to the cultural and religious identity of Odisha. (Source: **Press Information Bureau (PIB)**)

Classical Language Status

1. **Research and Development**: Universities and other academic institutions receive special grants to research classical languages.
2. **Promotion and Teaching**: Funds are allocated for the promotion and teaching of these languages, ensuring their preservation and promotion in academic and cultural forums.
3. **Recognition and Awards**: Scholars of classical languages are recognized for their contributions through prestigious awards.

Recent Developments

- **Demand for Marathi**: In recent years, there has been a movement to recognize **Marathi** as a Classical Language. Advocates argue that Marathi has an ancient history with substantial literary works dating back to over 1000 years.
- **Technological Initiatives**: Efforts are underway to digitize classical literature and make it accessible to a broader audience through platforms like **Digital India** and **National Digital Library**.
- **Government Initiatives**: Programs under the **Sahitya Akademi** and **Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL)** have been further strengthened to

promote classical languages and their cultural heritage.

Jaishankar meets Dissanayake, pledges India's support for economic recovery (5 October)

The External Affairs Minister is the 'first high-level foreign dignitary' to visit Sri Lanka after the leftist leader assumed office; the leaders discuss key issues such as India's security interests, fisheries conflicts, and the political settlement of Sri Lankan Tamils; they extend invitations for bilateral visits

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met Sri Lanka's newly elected President Anura Kumara Dissanayake in Colombo and pledged India's "full support" for the country's economic recovery and growth.
- Discussions included India's security interests, the fisheries conflict, and the political settlement for Sri Lanka's Tamils.
- Jaishankar, on behalf of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, extended an invitation for Dissanayake to visit India at a mutually convenient date.
- Dissanayake reciprocated by inviting Modi to visit Sri Lanka.
- This visit is significant as it follows the election of Dissanayake, the first after Sri Lanka's 2022 economic crisis.
- Jaishankar was noted as the "first high-level foreign dignitary" to visit Sri Lanka after Dissanayake took office.
- Jaishankar reaffirmed India's support for Sri Lanka's economic rehabilitation, focusing on tourism, investment, electricity, energy services, and the dairy industry.
- He emphasized the potential for Sri Lanka to leverage India's vast market to enhance economic recovery.
- Dissanayake expressed appreciation for India's support, amounting to nearly $4 billion during Sri Lanka's financial crisis two years ago.
- Jaishankar highlighted ongoing India-backed initiatives in energy production, fuel and LNG supply, solar electrification, connectivity, digital public infrastructure, health, and dairy development.

- These initiatives are expected to contribute to economic sustainability and generate new revenue streams.
- The discussions did not address the controversial Adani power project in Northern Province, currently facing opposition and legal challenges.
- Dissanayake has previously questioned the project's approval process and the power purchasing agreement with Adani.
- New Delhi's statement mentioned Dissanayake's reference to the potential for exporting renewable energy to India, which could lower production costs in Sri Lanka and create additional resources.
- Mr. Jaishankar discussed collaboration in Sri Lanka's tourism sector, offering to increase the flow of Indian tourists.
- He addressed India's security interests in the region, with Sri Lankan leadership assuring him they would not allow their territory to be used against India's security.
- Jaishankar reiterated India's support for the aspirations of all communities in Sri Lanka, including Tamils, emphasizing equality, justice, dignity, and peace while maintaining the country's unity and sovereignty.
- He highlighted the importance of fully implementing the 13th Amendment of Sri Lanka's Constitution and conducting Provincial Council elections to achieve these goals.
- Mr. Dissanayake discussed mutual interests, including fisheries and promoting national unity, and promised a political settlement for Tamils through a new Constitution after parliamentary elections.
- Jaishankar raised concerns about Indian fishermen detained in Sri Lanka, pressing for their early release and reconsideration of heavy fines imposed on them.
- Sri Lankan Tamil fishermen have urged Tamil Nadu fishermen to avoid destructive bottom-trawling methods that harm marine ecosystems.
- Indian fishermen from Tamil Nadu are frequently arrested for illegal fishing in Sri Lankan waters.
- On Friday, 50 Indian fishermen from Mayiladuthurai, Pudukkottai, and Nagapattinam were released and are set to be repatriated to Tamil Nadu later this week, according to the Indian High Commission.

Emergency to go through the edits suggested by CBFC (5 October)

● Zee Entertainment Enterprises and Manikarnika Films Production House (owned by Kangana Ranaut) requested 30 days to comply with suggested cuts, edits, and changes to the film *Emergency*.

● Advocate Abhinav Chandrachud, representing the CBFC, communicated this to *The Hindu*.

● After the filmmakers submit the required changes, the CBFC is expected to issue certification for the film within two weeks.

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1. Article 352: Proclamation of National Emergency

- **Article 352** allows the President to declare a National Emergency if there is a threat to India's sovereignty, security, or unity. It can be declared on three grounds: **war**, **external aggression**, or **armed rebellion**.
- The emergency must be approved by both Houses of Parliament within one month of its proclamation and can last for six months. It can be extended indefinitely with subsequent parliamentary approvals every six months.
- **Historical Background:** India has witnessed three national emergencies:
    1. **1962** – During the Sino-Indian war.
    2. **1971** – During the Indo-Pakistani war.
    3. **1975** – Declared by Indira Gandhi on grounds of internal disturbance, later amended to armed rebellion (1975-1977).

Amendments:

- **44th Amendment Act, 1978:** This amendment modified Article 352 by requiring the written recommendation of the Cabinet before the President can proclaim an emergency. It also added that "internal disturbance" would no longer be a valid ground, replacing it with "armed rebellion."

2. Article 353: Effect of National Emergency

Overview:

- **Article 353** details the effects of the proclamation of a National Emergency. It empowers the Union Government to issue directions to any state, overriding the normal federal structure. During the emergency:
  - The executive power of the Union extends to giving directions to any state.
  - Parliament can legislate on any subject, including those in the **State List** (normally under the exclusive jurisdiction of state governments).

Impact on Governance:

- It allows the Union government to centralize authority for the sake of national security.

3. Article 354: Application of Provisions Relating to Distribution of Revenues While a Proclamation of Emergency is in Operation

Overview:

- **Article 354** provides for the alteration of the financial distribution between the Union and the States during a National Emergency. The President may modify the distribution of taxes and revenues between the Union and the states under the **Finance Commission's recommendations**.
- However, any such changes require the approval of the Parliament.

4. Article 358: Suspension of Provisions of Article 19 During Emergencies

Overview:

- **Article 358** suspends the fundamental rights provided under **Article 19** (freedom of speech, assembly, movement, etc.) automatically when a National Emergency is declared due to war or external aggression (but not armed rebellion).
- This suspension lasts as long as the emergency is in force, and any law that violates these rights is protected from judicial review.

Amendments:

- **44th Amendment:** Post-1978, this provision only applies in cases of war or

external aggression, and not during an armed rebellion.

5. Article 359: Suspension of the Right to Move to Courts for the Enforcement of Fundamental Rights During Emergencies

Overview:

- **Article 359** allows the President to suspend the right to approach courts for the enforcement of specific fundamental rights during a National Emergency.
- Unlike Article 358, this suspension requires a formal Presidential order, specifying which fundamental rights will be affected.

Limitations:

- The right to life and personal liberty under **Article 21** cannot be suspended, even during an emergency (as per the 44th Amendment).

Key Updates and Facts:

1. **44th Amendment Act, 1978:** This amendment significantly curtailed the power to impose a National Emergency, ensuring that it cannot be misused as during the 1975 Emergency.
   - It made it mandatory for the President to have written Cabinet approval before declaring a National Emergency.
   - Additionally, it safeguarded civil liberties by limiting the scope of Articles 358 and 359.
2. **Recent References:** National emergencies have not been declared post-1977 due to the safeguards introduced by the 44th Amendment. The most recent discussions on National Emergency powers arise in the context of national security and constitutional debates on how to handle external aggression and large-scale internal unrest.
3. **Judicial Review:** The **Supreme Court of India** in the **Minerva Mills case (1980)** ruled that judicial review cannot be completely suspended even during an emergency, ensuring a balance between security and civil liberties.

Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC),

- The **Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC)**, commonly known as the **Censor Board**, is a statutory body under the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India**.
- It is responsible for regulating public exhibition of films in India, ensuring that films comply with the relevant rules and guidelines before they are made

available for the public.
- CBFC plays a critical role in balancing the freedom of expression with public interest and social values.

Legal Background

- The CBFC was established under the **Cinematograph Act of 1952**, which mandates that films must be certified for public exhibition in India.
- Over the years, CBFC has been guided by various amendments, recommendations, and guidelines aimed at keeping pace with changing social and cultural values.

Roles and Responsibilities of CBFC

1. **Film Certification**: The CBFC certifies films under different categories, based on their suitability for viewing by different age groups and content appropriateness.
   - **U (Universal)**: Suitable for all age groups.
   - **UA (Parental Guidance)**: Suitable for children above 12 years, but parents are advised to provide guidance.
   - **A (Adult)**: Restricted to adult audiences (18+ years).
   - **S (Restricted)**: Restricted to specialized audiences such as doctors or scientists.
2. **Advisory Role**: The CBFC not only certifies films but also advises on modifications or cuts when a film violates the prescribed guidelines of morality, decency, national security, or social harmony.
3. **Appeals and Revisions**: Filmmakers have the right to appeal against the decisions of CBFC to the **Film Certification Appellate Tribunal (FCAT)** if they feel their work has been unjustly restricted.
4. **Promoting Artistic Expression**: While censorship is often the focus of attention, CBFC is also mandated to protect filmmakers' creative freedom by facilitating the certification process in a manner that doesn't unnecessarily hinder artistic expression.

Important Facts and Data

- **Headquarters**: Mumbai
- **Regional Offices**: CBFC operates from nine regional offices located in cities such as **Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Delhi, and Thiruvananthapuram**.
- **Certification Process**: Films are viewed by Examining Committees, which include CBFC members and external experts who assess the film based on a variety of parameters like violence, sexual content, obscenity, national security, and communal harmony.

Recent Updates

1. **Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill 2021**: The Indian government recently introduced the **Cinematograph (Amendment) Bill 2021** to grant the government powers to **re-examine certified films**. This bill generated significant debate as it was seen by some as increasing governmental control over artistic freedom.
2. **Changes in CBFC Membership**: In 2021, filmmaker **Prasoon Joshi** continued as the chairperson of the CBFC. Over time, the composition of the Board has been expanded to include people from diverse fields of filmmaking and media.
3. **OTT Platforms**: With the rise of **Over-the-Top (OTT)** platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ Hotstar, there have been ongoing discussions about extending CBFC's jurisdiction to regulate online content. Although OTT platforms are currently under the **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting** and self-regulate under a **Code of Conduct**, the debate about formal censorship remains active.
4. **Certifications for Web Films**: In light of growing popularity of web-based films and series, CBFC has explored potential guidelines and standards for regulating content distributed via digital platforms.
5. **Recent Controversial Decisions**: CBFC's decisions often lead to controversies. Recent examples include demands for cuts in films like **"Padmaavat"** (2018) and **"Udta Punjab"** (2016). However, some filmmakers argue that these restrictions infringe upon creative freedom.

Challenges and Criticisms

1. **Artistic Freedom vs Censorship**: Many filmmakers and intellectuals criticize the CBFC for curbing creative expression. The debate often revolves around the thin line between **regulation** and **censorship**.
2. **Subjectivity in Certification**: Critics argue that CBFC's decisions sometimes reflect subjective moral judgments rather than objective evaluations based on law and societal interests.
3. **Censorship in Regional Cinema**: While Bollywood often gets the spotlight, the CBFC also regulates regional films. Sometimes, filmmakers in regional cinema feel that CBFC's members lack cultural understanding of local contexts.

Way Forward

1. **Balancing Act**: The CBFC faces the challenge of maintaining a balance between allowing creative expression and protecting public morality. The recent push for reforming the certification process is seen as essential to make it more transparent and accountable.
2. **Global Best Practices**: India's film certification system could benefit from adopting practices used by other countries, such as **the UK's British Board of Film Classification (BBFC)**, which focuses more on providing information

about content rather than enforcing cuts.

Maldivian President to visit India next week

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NEW DELHI

GS Paper II: IR

Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu will pay a five-day visit to India from October 6 to 10. This will be the first state visit by Mr. Muizzu, who had earlier visited New Delhi to participate in the swearing-in of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 9.

"Maldives is India's key maritime neighbor in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and holds a special place in Prime Minister's vision of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and India's Neighbourhood First Policy," the External Affairs Ministry said in a statement.

The Ministry said that during the visit, Mr. Muizzu will meet President Droupadi Murmu and hold delegation-level talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi "on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest". Both sides are expected to sign a number of agreements during the visit.

President Muizzu is expected to visit Mumbai and Bengaluru, where he will participate in business events to promote commercial ties between the two countries. He will also visit the Taj Mahal.

Maldivian President to visit India next week (5 October)

- Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu will visit India for five days from October 6 to 10.
- This will be his first state visit; he previously visited New Delhi for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's swearing-in on June 9.
- The External Affairs Ministry stated that the Maldives is India's key maritime neighbor in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and is important to India's vision of 'SAGAR' (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and its Neighbourhood First Policy.
- During the visit, President Muizzu will meet President Droupadi Murmu and hold delegation-level talks with Prime Minister Modi on bilateral, regional, and international issues.
- Both sides are expected to sign multiple agreements during the visit.
- President Muizzu will also visit Mumbai and Bengaluru to participate in business events aimed at promoting commercial ties.
- He is scheduled to visit the Taj Mahal as part of his trip.

- **SAGAR** is an initiative launched by India in 2015 aimed at enhancing security and economic cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- It highlights India's vision for ensuring a safe, secure, and stable maritime environment, focusing on collaboration and mutual growth with countries in the region.

Key Objectives:

1. **Strengthening Maritime Security**: Ensuring the safety of the Indian Ocean region (IOR) by promoting coordinated patrols, information sharing, and joint exercises among regional countries.
2. **Economic and Sustainable Growth**: Promoting sustainable development through partnerships in areas like blue economy, fishing, marine resources, and climate change mitigation.
3. **Regional Connectivity**: SAGAR aims to improve connectivity between Indian Ocean countries through infrastructure development projects like ports and shipping routes.
4. **Capacity Building**: Assisting IOR countries in developing maritime infrastructure and training their maritime forces, and sharing technological know-how.
5. **Disaster Risk Reduction**: Enhancing cooperation in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) by coordinating efforts in responding to natural disasters like cyclones, tsunamis, and maritime accidents.

Historical Background:

- The term "SAGAR" was first outlined by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his visit to Mauritius in March 2015.
- This vision marked a shift in India's maritime policy, aiming at greater regional cooperation in the Indian Ocean.
- It was also influenced by the rising geopolitical significance of the region, given that over 90% of India's trade by volume and 70% by value is carried via sea routes.

India's historical maritime engagements go back to the Chola Empire and British colonial times, and SAGAR reflects an updated approach to ensure the region remains a peaceful space amid growing tensions.

Notable Projects and Engagements:

1. **Maritime Diplomacy**: India has strengthened partnerships with nations like **Sri Lanka, Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius**, and other IOR countries through joint naval exercises, training programs, and military assistance. Notable examples include:
   - **Mission Sagar**: A COVID-19-related humanitarian mission to provide food and medical aid to several IOR nations.

- ○ **Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)**: Established in Gurugram, this center strengthens maritime domain awareness by gathering and sharing information on vessels and maritime activities across the region.

2. **Infrastructure Projects**: India has been involved in developing ports in several IOR nations, such as the **Chabahar Port** in Iran, which facilitates trade and regional connectivity, bypassing Pakistan.
3. **Climate Action and Blue Economy**: India collaborates with IOR countries in sustainable use of marine resources, focusing on clean energy, fisheries management, and the conservation of marine biodiversity. Initiatives also focus on dealing with the impact of rising sea levels on vulnerable coastal regions.

Recent Developments:

- **Indo-Pacific Partnerships**: India has strengthened its ties with the **United States, Japan, Australia, and France** to enhance maritime security, including **QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue)** initiatives in the Indo-Pacific.
- **2023 ASEAN-India Maritime Cooperation**: Strengthening maritime security and connectivity with Southeast Asian nations, particularly through port development and technology sharing.
- **G20's Emphasis on Blue Economy**: During India's G20 Presidency in 2023-24, SAGAR principles were echoed in discussions on developing a sustainable blue economy in the Indian Ocean.

Challenges:

- **China's Growing Influence**: China's expansion in the Indian Ocean, particularly through its **Belt and Road Initiative** and ports in **Sri Lanka (Hambantota)** and **Pakistan (Gwadar)**, poses strategic challenges for India's leadership in the region.
- **Piracy and Terrorism**: Ensuring maritime security against non-state actors, such as pirates and terrorists, remains a challenge in parts of the IOR.

e-Office system shutdown derails administrative work in Railways

S. Vijay Kumar
CHENNAI

For about a week, routine administrative work was affected across Indian Railways after National Informatics Centre's (NIC's) e-Office, a product of RailTel, crashed.

According to official sources, the entire file movement and related communications in the Railways came to a grinding halt after the e-Office system failed.

Emergency and urgent files were handled manually during this period. Railways is one of the many departments that had fully migrated to the platform.

RailTel restored normalcy on Friday, the sources said.

NIC e-Office, a workflow-based system that replaced the existing manual handling of files with a more efficient electronic

Urgent files were handled manually during this period.

system, is in operation in more than 236 establishments of the Indian Railways across the country and has onboarded 1.47 lakh users.

Down for 4-5 days
Confirming that NIC e-Office was down for four or five days, Southern Railway Chief Public Relations Officer M. Senthamil Selvan said that urgent administrative files were dealt with manually during the down time.

The e-Office going offline did not affect passenger and freight train operations as the Railways had an independent and dedicated IT infrastructure to run those services. "RailTel is maintaining e-Office on behalf of the Ministry of Railways and Southern Railway is one of the users," he said.

Railway officers said they had no idea why the systems went down. They did not want to comment on the security of backup data stored in iCloud and whether it was fully accessible after the services were restored. They said messages were sent to senior officials in the Zonal Railways in the middle of last week that the infrastructure issue persisted and all e-Office instances, including Railway Board, remained unavailable.

The restoration process was dependent on the storage utilisation, the message said. A top RailTel officer heading the Southern Region did not respond to phone calls or email query sent by *The Hindu* seeking clarifications on the reasons for the failure, safety of backup and other related issues.

RailTel has stated on its website that the NIC e-Office is a cloud enabled software application developed by NIC, which is hosted at Tier-III Uptime USA-certified data centres at Secunderabad and Gurugram for RailTel customers.

Besides the Railways, the application is also hosting services for many government organisations, including Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO), Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Development Corporation (IRCTC), Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RVNL), and so on.

Kerala urgently needs to identify risk zones

On July 30, two villages, Mundakkai and Chooralmala, in the Wayanad district of Kerala, were hit by landslides. On October 4, while noting that the disaster ranked among the deadliest in India, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said that 231 people had died and 41 remained missing. The catastrophic event has once again exposed our helplessness in the face of nature's fury. At the same time, it has raised questions about our approach to disaster management not only in the area of Wayanad that was affected this time and that has suffered a few deadly landslides over the last four decades, but for the State as a whole.

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No longer relatively disaster-free

With the sea to its west and the Western Ghats to its east, Kerala used to be considered a relatively disaster-free zone. Its development activities have taken place on this premise. Settlements are distributed throughout the State, from the coastline to the steep hill slopes. Kerala is perhaps the only State where human settlements have sprung up along the coastal line. Though the forest boundary is frozen, there are encroachments by the people and for development projects. Along with settlements, roads and other infrastructure have been built with complete disregard for natural drainage and slope stability. The average population density of the parts of the Western Ghats in Kerala is well above the all-India average.

The natural advantage of being relatively disaster-free seems to be waning. In the last few decades, the intensity and frequency of disasters have increased. Kerala has three distinct geographic zones, and all three are facing disasters, especially floods and landslides. Coastal erosion, a regular phenomenon, has affected more than 250 kilometres of the total coastal length of 590 km in the State. Besides, sea surge has affected different parts of the coast. The lowlands and midlands suffer from floods. Parts of the lowlands surrounding the Vembanad lake get inundated during every monsoon. The World

Once landslide susceptibility maps surrounding population centres are ready, monitoring the triggering mechanism would ensure that timely warnings are provided

Meteorological Organization described the Kerala floods of 2018 as the 'floods of the century' and attributed the disaster to climate change. Landslides in the Western Ghats are also becoming regular during every monsoon.

Landslide inventory map needed

Wayanad, located to the east of the Western Ghats bordering the Mysore plateau, is characterised by deep gorges and ravines. Like the river Sharavati, the Chaliyar also originates in the eastern side of the Western Ghats. Both these rivers cut across the mountain range and debouch into the Arabian Sea, in spite of the easterly tilt of the Wayanad-Mysore plateaus. This can be attributed to the existence of tectonic factors. A spatial correlation exists between tremors and landslides. Incidences of fractures/cracks have been reported from Wayanad and Idukki post landslides. Tremors were felt in parts of Wayanad after the July landslide as well. Recurring incidences of landslides and the huge human and economic losses call for scientific re-appraisal of the causative factors, which are now being simplified and confined to parameters such as slope, soil thickness, rainfall intensity and duration, and land use change. The ongoing debates show that there is a gap in understanding the incidence of landslides in this region.

Global research in this field calls for a nuanced approach. We need a landslide inventory map of each region/area. To finalise zones susceptible to landslides, we can prepare a landslide susceptibility map factoring in the geological set up (lithology, structure and tectonics, rock composition, physico-mechanical properties), slope, soil characteristics, hydrologic parameters, drainage and infiltration, vegetation cover, human activities such as mining and quarrying, slope alteration, and agricultural activities. Once such maps surrounding population centres are ready, monitoring the triggering mechanism (rainfall or tremors in the case of Kerala) would ensure that timely warnings of landslides are provided, and lives saved. The State and trained local self-help groups can do this together.

Due to rapid warming of the Arabian Sea, there is an increased risk of extreme weather and climate events, such as floods, heat waves, and cyclones. The heat content of the Indian Ocean has risen rapidly since the 2000s. There has been an anomalous increase of 1.2°C in summer sea surface temperatures over the last 100 years in the generally cool western Indian Ocean (Arabian Sea). This has created an environment conducive for cyclogenesis (development or strengthening of cyclonic circulation in the atmosphere) in the Arabian Sea. The impact of these changes is being felt on Kerala. In 2017, Cyclone Ockhi hit the State. It was the most severe cyclonic storm to affect Kerala in recent memory.

On the whole, the 'safe operating space', a term coined by Johan Rockstrom and the group at the Stockholm Resilience Centre in the case of global environmental change, is shrinking in Kerala. The occurrence of staggered events of floods and landslides, and simultaneous landslides on either side of the hill ranges, as in Wayanad and Vilangad (Kozhikode district) this time, and at Puthumala (Wayanad district) and Kavalappara (Malappuram district) in 2019, also warrant elucidation.

A paradigm shift

Under these circumstances, there is a need for a paradigm shift in disaster management practices, which are mostly reactive, top-down, and revolve around rescue, relief, and rehabilitation. Globally, this has given way to a more proactive and comprehensive approach of addressing all aspects of a disaster cycle, such as preparedness, resilience, risk reduction, mitigation, reconstruction, recovery, response, and relief. The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction provides guidelines for disaster risk reduction. It recognises the primary role of the State in disaster risk reduction but says that the State should share this responsibility with other stakeholders including local governments, the private sector, and communities. We need to understand the risk of disaster, strengthen disaster risk governance to manage the risk of disaster; invest in disaster risk reduction for resilience; and enhance disaster preparedness for effective response to 'build back better'.

First, Kerala needs to work out disaster risk zones based on multiple criteria covering both physical and social components within a social ecological frame with the help of subject experts and generate a permanent database. As landslides and floods follow watershed boundaries, the disaster risk zones must be translated according to the watersheds/river basins. Second, Kerala needs the people's participation in preparing disaster risk maps. Given its experience in the People's Plan Campaign, it is important for Kerala to introduce a community-based disaster risk management in which at-risk communities are actively engaged in identifying, analysing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating disaster risk reduction initiatives. This would provide opportunities for strengthening communication, discussion, and learning within the community and between the community and the local and Central government. It would also ensure a bottom-up approach, help reduce tension and potential conflicts and pave the way to integrate disaster risk management in local level development. A quadruple helix model involving community and social organisations, academia/research institutes, the government, and business and industry may be useful.

Kerala urgently needs to identify risk zones (5 October)

- On July 30, landslides hit the villages of Mundakkai and Chooralmala in the Wayanad district of Kerala.
- On October 4, Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan reported that 231 people had died and 41 remained missing due to the disaster.

- The catastrophic event highlighted the state's helplessness against natural disasters and raised questions about disaster management in Wayanad and Kerala as a whole.
- Kerala was previously considered a relatively disaster-free zone, with development activities based on this premise.
- Human settlements have developed along the coastline and steep hill slopes, with encroachments in forest areas for development projects.
- Infrastructure, including roads, has been built without regard for natural drainage and slope stability.
- The population density in the Western Ghats of Kerala is well above the all-India average.
- The natural advantage of being disaster-free is diminishing, with increased intensity and frequency of disasters in recent decades.
- All three geographic zones of Kerala are facing disasters, particularly floods and landslides.
- Coastal erosion has affected more than 250 kilometers of the state's total coastal length of 590 km.
- Sea surges have impacted different parts of the Kerala coast.
- Lowlands and midlands suffer from regular flooding, especially around Vembanad Lake during monsoons.
- The World Meteorological Organization described the 2018 floods in Kerala as the "floods of the century," attributing them to climate change.
- Landslides in the Western Ghats have become common during each monsoon season.
- Wayanad is characterized by deep gorges and ravines, with rivers like Sharavati and Chaliyar cutting across the mountain range.
- Tectonic factors influence the region's geography, creating a spatial correlation between tremors and landslides.
- Fractures and cracks have been reported in Wayanad and Idukki following landslides, with tremors felt in Wayanad after the July event.
- The recurring landslides and significant human and economic losses necessitate a scientific reassessment of the causative factors.
- Current understanding of landslides is simplified to parameters like slope, soil thickness, rainfall intensity and duration, and land use changes.
- Ongoing debates reveal a gap in understanding the incidence of landslides in the Wayanad region.
- Global research calls for a nuanced approach to landslide management, including the creation of a landslide inventory map for each region.
- A landslide susceptibility map should be prepared, factoring in geological setup (lithology, structure, tectonics, rock composition, physico-mechanical properties),

slope, soil characteristics, hydrologic parameters, drainage, infiltration, vegetation cover, and human activities (mining, quarrying, slope alteration, and agriculture).

- Once these maps are ready, monitoring triggering mechanisms (like rainfall or tremors) would allow timely warnings and save lives.
- The State and trained local self-help groups should collaborate in this effort.
- Rapid warming of the Arabian Sea increases the risk of extreme weather events, including floods, heat waves, and cyclones.
- The heat content of the Indian Ocean has risen significantly since the 2000s, with a 1.2°C increase in summer sea surface temperatures over the last century.
- This warming creates conditions conducive to cyclogenesis in the Arabian Sea.
- Kerala felt the impact of these changes when Cyclone Ockhi struck in 2017, the most severe cyclonic storm in recent memory.
- The 'safe operating space' for Kerala, a term by Johan Rockstrom, is shrinking due to the increased occurrence of floods and landslides.
- The simultaneous occurrence of landslides on either side of hill ranges (e.g., Wayanad, Kozhikode, and Malappuram) indicates the need for further elucidation.
- A paradigm shift is required in disaster management practices, which are currently reactive and focused on rescue and rehabilitation.
- There is a need for a proactive, comprehensive approach addressing all aspects of the disaster cycle: preparedness, resilience, risk reduction, mitigation, reconstruction, recovery, response, and relief.
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction provides guidelines for disaster risk reduction, emphasizing the role of the State alongside local governments, the private sector, and communities.
- Kerala should work on disaster risk zones based on physical and social components, creating a permanent database.
- Disaster risk zones should align with watershed boundaries, as landslides and floods follow these areas.
- Community participation is essential in preparing disaster risk maps, leveraging experience from the People's Plan Campaign.
- A community-based disaster risk management approach should be introduced, involving at-risk communities in identifying, analyzing, planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating risk reduction initiatives.
- This approach would strengthen communication, discussion, and learning within communities and with local and Central government.
- A bottom-up approach could help reduce tensions and conflicts while integrating disaster risk management into local development.

Caste in jail

The most notable aspect of the Supreme Court ruling prohibiting caste-based discrimination in the treatment of prisoners is that it required a judgment from the highest court to end colonial practices and systems in prisons. While the Court has dealt elaborately with specific rules in the jail manuals of various States and the way in which caste-based hierarchy plays a role in allocation of duties, classification of prisoners, and the treatment of certain social groups as "habitual offenders", it is quite remarkable that prison authorities and State governments had done so little about these aspects since independence. It is as if the prison system has been out of the reach of the core philosophy of the Constitution: the ushering in of an equal society, the ending of all forms of discrimination, the prohibition of untouchability in any form, and the abolition of forced labour and exploitation. Responding to journalist Sukanya Shantha's writ petition, the Court has analysed the controversial rules and practices in jails in the backdrop of these constitutional objectives. It has ruled such provisions unconstitutional, and directed the revision of prison manuals within three months. Tracing the history of such rules and practices, the Court has noted, with much justification: "In line with their overall approach, the colonial administrators linked caste with prison administration of labour, food, and treatment of prisoners."

Not only were menial work and supposedly polluting occupations allocated to prisoners from communities placed lower in the caste hierarchy, some were expected to carry out their "hereditary trades" within prisons, the Court found. On the other hand, the caste privileges of a few placed higher were preserved. Few can disagree with the observation that "the notion that an occupation is considered as 'degrading or menial' is an aspect of the caste system and untouchability." The provision that food must be cooked by prisoners from a "suitable caste" and rules that referred to those from the "scavenger class" being assigned tasks such as manual scavenging, sweeping, and cleaning violated the constitutional prohibition against untouchability. Distribution of labour cannot be solely based on birth. Such rules violate the right to dignity and the right against forced labour and exploitation. The Court has also favoured doing away with vague definitions of 'habitual offenders', as they seem to ascribe criminal tendencies to whole tribes, even though the idea of notifying 'criminal tribes' has long been given up. It is time for State governments to respond to the verdict and revisit their laws and regulations related to prison administration and put an end to systemic discrimination in an institution that may treat any form of resistance as indiscipline.

- A quadruple helix model involving community organizations, academia, government, and business may be beneficial.

Caste in jail (5 October)

Time for State governments to end systemic discrimination in prisons

- The Supreme Court ruling prohibits caste-based discrimination in the treatment of prisoners, highlighting the need for judicial intervention to end colonial practices in prisons.
- The Court's judgment reveals that prison authorities and State governments have done little to address these issues since independence.
- The prison system has often operated outside the core principles of the Constitution, which promotes equality and prohibits discrimination and untouchability.
- Responding to journalist Sukanya Shantha's writ petition, the Court analyzed controversial jail rules and practices against constitutional objectives.
- The Court deemed these provisions unconstitutional and directed a revision of prison manuals within three months.
- Historical analysis showed that colonial administrators linked caste with prison administration, affecting labor, food, and treatment of prisoners.
- Menial work was often assigned to prisoners from lower caste communities, while privileges were preserved for those from higher castes.
- The notion that certain occupations are "degrading or menial" reflects the caste system and untouchability.

The other monsoon

Better modelling of the impact of northeast monsoon is essential

India's southwest monsoon has ended on an optimistic note, with 8% more rain than anticipated. Reassuringly, the rainfall forecast by the India Meteorological Department (IMD), particularly since July, was accurate. Monsoon clouds continue to prevail over the country but given the centrality of rainfall to the Indian economy, focus has already shifted to the 'other monsoon', the northeast monsoon. It is named so because of the direction in which the winds exit from the land mass into the sea. Following the withdrawal of the southwest monsoon in mid-October, the northeast monsoon is characterised by a reversal of winds that brings rain to parts of coastal Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and parts of southern Karnataka. For Tamil Nadu, the northeast monsoon is the main source of rainfall. The northeast monsoon brings in only about 11% of India's annual rainfall.

The IMD has forecast that this year's post-monsoon rainfall is likely to be 'above normal' or about 12% over the historical average. Because of its limited spread and quantity, the northeast monsoon does not get as much attention as the southwest monsoon. However, it significantly affects the productivity of rice and maize in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh. Records show that in years of deficiency, there was a considerable decrease in agricultural production in the region. The northeast monsoon rainfall, averaged over the five subdivisions where it is predominant, has a variation of almost 25%, exceeding that of the southwest monsoon rainfall (10%). This translates into years of massive deluge followed by dry spells. In 2015, Chennai experienced a deluge during the northeast monsoon, resulting in significant loss of life and property. In 2019, the city faced severe water shortage. If this year's forecast holds, it will be the second consecutive year of a normal northeast monsoon. Expectations are high that a La Nina, or cooling of the equatorial central Pacific, will support this. However, most global models have struggled to forecast the timing of La Nina this year. Thanks to improved forecast systems, the northeast monsoon is less neglected than before. Nevertheless, more focus is needed on modelling its impact regarding urban flooding. Climate change uncertainty makes such prognosis essential, and disaster management agencies in States must develop credible strategies to incorporate these buffers into budgets.

- Provisions requiring food to be cooked by prisoners from a "suitable caste" and tasks assigned based on caste violated constitutional prohibitions against untouchability.
- The distribution of labor should not be based solely on birth, as it undermines dignity and violates rights against forced labor and exploitation.
- The Court suggested eliminating vague definitions of 'habitual offenders', as they unjustly attribute criminal tendencies to entire communities.
- State governments must respond to the ruling by revisiting laws and regulations related to prison administration to eliminate systemic discrimination.

The other monsoon (5 October)

Better modelling of the impact of northeast monsoon is essential

- India's southwest monsoon ended positively with 8% more rain than anticipated.
- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) accurately forecasted rainfall, particularly since July.
- Attention is shifting to the northeast monsoon, which follows the southwest monsoon and is named for the direction of wind.
- The northeast monsoon primarily affects coastal Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and parts of southern Karnataka.

- For Tamil Nadu, the northeast monsoon is the main source of rainfall, contributing about 11% of India's annual rainfall.
- The IMD predicts this year's post-monsoon rainfall to be 'above normal', approximately 12% over the historical average.
- The northeast monsoon receives less attention compared to the southwest monsoon despite its significant impact on rice and maize productivity in Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh.
- Years of deficiency in northeast monsoon rainfall correlate with decreased agricultural production in the region.
- Average rainfall from the northeast monsoon can vary by almost 25%, compared to 10% for the southwest monsoon.
- This variability can lead to extreme weather events, such as the 2015 Chennai deluge, which caused significant loss of life and property.
- In 2019, Chennai faced severe water shortages due to inadequate northeast monsoon rainfall.
- If this year's forecast holds, it will mark the second consecutive year of a normal northeast monsoon.
- Expectations are high for a supportive La Niña, although global models struggle to forecast its timing.
- Improved forecasting systems have increased attention on the northeast monsoon, but further focus on its impact on urban flooding is needed.
- Climate change uncertainty necessitates credible disaster management strategies, which should be integrated into State budgets.

A tribe out of time

The Chenchus of Panukumadugu have lived in the dense Nallamala forests for centuries, their existence intertwined with the wilderness around them. However, their inability to keep up with the relentless pace of modernisation has led to dwindling work opportunities under the MGNREGS. **Nellore Sravani** writes how the Chenchus, caught between an ancestral past and an uncertain future, are grappling with isolation, poverty, and an erosion of their traditional way of life

Sitting under a tree on a cot woven from leaves and logs, Dasari Kotaiah sighs wearily when asked about what he's going to have for lunch.

"The usual," he replies. A thin meal of rice and *pachhadi* – a simple chutney made from chilli, tamarind, and onion – has remained the family's staple diet for years now. "This is our food for 25 days in a month. We cannot afford anything beyond that. Where is the money?" Kotaiah asks, shaking his head at the thought of buying fruits or vegetables from the market. His wry laugh speaks of a life where even the simplest comforts are out of reach.

Kotaiah lives in a hamlet called Panukumadugu in Dornala mandal of Prakasam district. The hamlet is home to the Chenchus, said to be the oldest aboriginal, Telugu-speaking tribe and the most vulnerable of the 12 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in undivided Andhra Pradesh.

Around 25 kilometres away is Dornala, a small town at the edge of the Nallamala forest in Prakasam district. A pitstop for Srisailam-bound devotees, Dornala has had a growth spurt in the past two decades with hotels and eateries coming up. Dornala is the nearest go-to place for the Chenchu villages, including Panukamadugu. The contrast between the town and the hamlet of Panukumadugu is stark, more than what meets the eye.

Most of the dwellings in Panukumadugu are single-room thatched huts, simple and sparse, with conical or square roofs and rounded bases. Of the few pucca houses built under the Indiramma Illu housing scheme, many are in disrepair. The only sturdy structure in this hamlet is the Anganwadi, where a single female teacher educates around 10 children.

While Dornala thrives with an expanding menu of cuisines in its restaurants, life for the Chenchus seems to be moving in the opposite direction, with development passing them by.

"Ever since we stopped working under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2022, life has become much harder," Kotaiah explains. "The wages I earn as an agricultural labourer aren't enough to support a family of 22," says Kotaiah, who doesn't remember his exact age, though his Aadhaar card lists him as 59. Both he and his wife take whatever work they can find, earning ₹250 each per day.

But it's still not enough. "We need the 'karuvu pani' (MGNREGS) to be brought back," he says, a statement that is being echoed by other younger men and women of the village.

Left behind

However, the issue is quite complex. The Chenchus, who have steadfastly held on to their way of life, possess only a rudimentary understanding of modern society and find it difficult to adapt to the world that exists outside their village. "Most Chenchus lack post-industrialisation skills. They are still living in a pre-agrarian setup. To catch up with modern society, they first need to learn agricultural skills, and then must come to terms with

> A reason behind the disillusionment among Chenchus with the new system of MGNREGS could be the insistence on first getting Aadhaar, and then linking it to one's bank account and job card. With most Chenchus being non-literate, they were probably too intimidated by all the red tape
>
> **CHAKRADHAR BUDDHA**
> Social researcher

industrialisation," explains Chakradhar Buddha, a senior researcher with LibTech India, a consortium of activists and academics that has extensively studied the impact that MGNREGA has had on the tribe for years.

Chenchus are characterised by extremely low literacy rates, a subsistence economy, and a stagnant or declining population. The total Chenchu population in Andhra Pradesh stands at 28,349.

"The Chenchus are heavily dependent on the forest for food and other necessities. This deep reliance has made it difficult for them to migrate to other areas and has isolated them from the outside world. As many live deep within the forest, numerous development programmes, including MGNREGS, have struggled to reach them," says Mr. Chakradhar.

In response, the A.P. government launched the MGNREGS Chenchu Special Project in 2009, aimed at alleviating poverty and improving their socioeconomic conditions. Locally, the Chenchus refer to it as '15-rojula pani, upaadhi haami' (15 days of guaranteed work) or 'ITDA pani' (ITDA work).

The project was carefully tailored to the specific needs of the Chenchus, taking into account their physical strength, food insecurities, accessibility challenges, lifestyle, and cultural practices. Managed by the Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs), the special initiative provided 180 days of employment per individual, compared to the standard 100 days per household in other areas. Chenchus were able to work 15 days each month, year-round, on individual or community land.

Ill-thought-out moves

However, in December 2021, the Union government decided to bring all State-specific Management Information Systems (MIS), the operating software for MGNREGA, under the Centrally-controlled MIS, which standardised MGNREGS operations nationwide.

"This aligned the Chenchu Special Project with the broader national framework, which meant that policies in place for a person outside applied to Chenchus as well. This move of the government has had a devastating impact on the Chenchus, because of the reduction of employment days for them, removal of work concession and shift to bank-based payments," explains Mr. Chakradhar.

"A reason behind the disillusionment among the Chenchus with the new system of MGNREGS could be the insistence on first obtaining Aadhaar and then linking it to one's bank account and job card for disbursal of wages. With most Chenchus being non-literate, they were probably too intimidated by all the red tape," Mr. Chakradhar says, adding that the Chenchu Special Project was precisely aimed at helping the Chenchus overcome such hurdles.

"Earlier, Chenchus in 125 *gudems* (villages) across the three districts were going for MGNREGS work. But now, no one is interested in coming. We are also demanding that the special project be revived," said the ITDA Srisailam Project Officer.

Haves, and have-nots

Ironically, the Aadhaar card has become a subtle source of discord between those who have it and those who don't.

"Only those with Aadhaar are eligible for receiving wages under the new system. Not just that, but other things like coverage under Aarogyasri, school admission and getting ration cards are all possible only if one has Aadhaar," Venkatamma says, adding that some people do not have Aadhaar yet.

As per a Socio-Economic Survey taken up by the A.P. government in 2020-21, the project generated 69 lakh person days of employment between 2009 and 2021.

But now, most of the people in Panukumadugu, Marripalem and Billagundipenta 'gudems' in Prakasam district have stopped going for MGNREGS work. As per the data collected by LibTech India, only about 1,500 of the 4,000 enrolled households are taking up work across Atmakur, Dornala, and Yerragondapalem mandals.

A major deterrent for the villagers is the uncertainty surrounding the wage disbursement process. Kotaiah, like most others here, cannot read or write. At Panukumadugu, most of the 75 families do not have a mobile phone or a two-wheeler and more than 70 people, including children, do not have Aadhaar cards. Without Aadhaar, they are excluded from the Public Distribution System (PDS) as well as the Aarogyasri health insurance scheme.

Starting from January 1, 2024, the Aadhaar-based payment system (ABPS) was made mandatory for payment of wages to workers under MGNREGS. Now, the national framework requires a job-seeker to get their job card seeded with their Aadhaar card and then link their Aadhaar card with their bank account. This has become an overwhelmingly daunting task for the Chenchus.

> Now, we don't even know if wages are being deposited into our accounts. No one explains what's happening. Those who have bank accounts fear being cheated since they cannot read or write. Bankers often get irritated when we keep asking
>
> **BHUMANI VENKATESAM**
> Chenchu elder

"Earlier, most of us would work under the scheme because cash was handed out to us every month. Now, we don't even know if wages are being deposited into our accounts. No one explains what's happening. Those who have bank accounts fear being cheated since they cannot read or write. Bankers often get irritated when we keep asking," Kotaiah says.

Except for one or two people, no one in this habitation has a mobile phone. The only way they can find out if money has been deposited is to visit a bank in Dornala, which is 25-30 km away, at least three times a month.

While Panukumadugu is located in the plains, many Chenchu gudems are situated within the Nagarjuna-Srisailam Tiger Reserve (NSTR) and are deep in the forest, making trips to Dornala expensive.

Bhumani Venkatamma, a Chenchu from Marripalem, located deep in the forest, shares that the Chenchus struggle to find work for most of the year.

"At best, we get work for six months when farmers hire us for the chilli or cotton fields. Sometimes they ask us to herd cattle, which pays us about ₹200-₹300 per day. But we don't do that every day; it's only twice a week," she says, adding that in October, November, and December, they have nothing to do.

When asked why some people do not have Aadhaar cards, activists said many do not have birth certificates. The whole process of getting a birth certificate itself is quite tedious, it is learnt.

"Even so, we are not comfortable with our payments being deposited into bank accounts. There are many people in our tribe with the same name. Apart from me, there are two other women named Bhumani Venkatamma. Once, a villager's payment was wrongly credited into the account of another person with the same name. Ever since then, we have been wary of the whole thing," Venkatamma shares.

Traditionally, the Chenchus have been foragers. In The Chenchu of Andhra Pradesh, anthropologist Md. Azeez Mohidden notes that they rely on the forest economy, gathering leafy vegetables, wild fruits, tubers, and roots for consumption, while earning income from selling Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) like gum, honey, soapnuts, and beed at the Girijan Cooperative Corporation (GCC). However, LibTech India activists report that restrictions on their movement in the forest and the collection of forest produce have increased recently due to wildlife conservation laws.

"We sell our produce at the GCC, but the returns are insufficient. We also sell along the Srisailam ghat road or at the Devasthanam," says Venkatamma, who struggles to feed her family of six, including four children. While she has a ration card allowing her to receive 35 kg of PDS rice per month, she finds it inadequate.

P. Srinivasa Rao, former Deputy District Medical and Health Officer of ITDA-Srisailam, recalls: "About 25 years ago, when we visited the gudems for work, we were fed various curries made from leafy vegetables found in the forest. As many as 23 types of leaves were used in cooking. Each night, a family member would venture into the forest with bows to hunt small animals like rabbits and peacocks for the next day's meal. These days, we neither find these animals in the forest nor do the Chenchus utilise leaves as they once did.

This situation has led to a higher incidence of nutritional deficiencies among children. "Child marriages and consanguineous marriages are common in the community. These factors have made them more susceptible to sickle cell anemia and thalassemia, with high infant and maternal mortality rates," says Dr. Srinivasa Rao.

Venkatamma recalls how they used to spend money on milk and lentils before the project was halted. She even managed to save enough to buy a TV and some gold, she smiles. Unfortunately, her brother broke the TV in a drunken fit, and now she has no money to repair it.

"We are called the protectors of the forest, yet ironically, we are being excluded from it in the name of tiger conservation," laments Bhumani Venkatesam, another elder from Billagundipenta, a village deep in the forest. He notes that while the elders at least had access to forest produce, the youth are left with neither the forest nor any means of earning a livelihood.

The Chenchus received pattas under the Scheduled Tribes and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006, commonly known as the Forest Rights Act (FRA). During their time in MGNREGS work, those who had received pattas were tasked with clearing land, creating trenches, and removing pebbles.

The project aimed to transform the tribe from hunter gatherers to producers. Under the special project, many Chenchus worked on their own land and received government funds for purchasing pesticides and seeds. However, with its discontinuation, they are unsure how to manage their land.

Meanwhile, with dilapidated houses, irregular incomes, limited transportation, and a lack of electricity in some gudems, the Chenchus stare at an uncertain future.

the MGNREGS. Nellore Sravani writes how the Chenchus, caught between an ancestral past and an uncertain future, are grappling with isolation, poverty, and an erosion of their traditional way of life

- Dasari Kotaiah, living in the hamlet of Panukumadugu in Dornala mandal, Prakasam district, has a staple diet of rice and pachhadi (a simple chutney).
- He expresses concern about affording anything beyond this basic meal, indicating financial struggles.
- Kotaiah's hamlet is home to the Chenchus, one of the oldest aboriginal Telugu-speaking tribes and the most vulnerable among the 12 Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs) in Andhra Pradesh.
- Dornala, a small town 25 kilometers away, has experienced growth with new hotels and eateries, serving as a pitstop for Srisailam-bound devotees.
- The contrast between the developing town of Dornala and the impoverished hamlet of Panukumadugu is stark.
- Most homes in Panukumadugu are single-room thatched huts, with few pucca houses built under the Indiramma Illu housing scheme, many of which are in disrepair.
- The only sturdy structure in the hamlet is the Anganwadi, where a single female teacher educates about 10 children.
- Life for the Chenchus has declined, especially since they stopped working under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2022.
- Kotaiah, who is listed as 59 on his Aadhaar card, works as an agricultural laborer but struggles to support his family of 22.
- He and his wife earn ₹250 each per day, which is insufficient for their needs.
- Kotaiah and other villagers are advocating for the reinstatement of MGNREGS, expressing a strong desire for its return.

Left behind

- The Chenchus maintain a traditional way of life, struggling to adapt to modern society.
- They possess a rudimentary understanding of contemporary systems and lack post-industrialization skills.
- Most Chenchus are still in a pre-agrarian setup and need to learn agricultural skills before adapting to industrialization.
- Literacy rates among the Chenchus are extremely low, and they have a subsistence economy with a stagnant or declining population.
- The total Chenchu population in Andhra Pradesh is approximately 28,349.

- Chenchus heavily depend on the forest for food and necessities, making migration difficult and isolating them from the outside world.
- Many live deep within the forest, complicating the reach of development programs, including MGNREGS.
- In response to their needs, the Andhra Pradesh government launched the MGNREGS Chenchu Special Project in 2009 to alleviate poverty and improve socioeconomic conditions.
- Locally, the project is referred to as '15-rojula pani, upaadhi haami' (15 days of guaranteed work) or 'ITDA pani' (ITDA work).
- The project was tailored to the specific needs of the Chenchus, considering their physical strength, food insecurities, accessibility challenges, lifestyle, and cultural practices.
- Managed by Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs), the initiative provided 180 days of employment per individual, compared to the standard 100 days per household in other areas.
- Chenchus could work 15 days each month under this special project.

Ill-thought-out moves

- In December 2021, the Union government centralized all State-specific Management Information Systems (MIS) for MGNREGA, standardizing operations nationwide.
- This change aligned the Chenchu Special Project with national policies, leading to a reduction in employment days and removal of work concessions for the Chenchus.
- The shift to bank-based payments and the requirement for Aadhaar linkage created challenges for the largely non-literate Chenchu community.
- The previous special project was designed to help the Chenchus navigate such hurdles, but the new system has caused disillusionment.
- Previously, Chenchus from 125 gudems (villages) participated in MGNREGS work; now, interest has dwindled, with calls for the special project to be revived.
- From 2009 to 2021, the project generated 69 lakh person days of employment, but participation has decreased significantly.
- Data from LibTech India indicates that only about 1,500 of the 4,000 enrolled households are currently taking up work in Atmakur, Dornala, and Yerragondapalem mandals.
- Uncertainty regarding wage disbursement is a major deterrent for villagers, many of whom lack literacy, mobile phones, and transportation.
- Over 70 individuals in Panukumadugu do not have Aadhaar cards, excluding them from the Public Distribution System (PDS) and health insurance schemes.

- Starting January 1, 2024, an Aadhaar-based payment system (ABPS) became mandatory for MGNREGS wages, requiring job-seekers to link their Aadhaar with their job cards and bank accounts.
- The process has become daunting for the Chenchus, many of whom do not understand the new system.
- Cash payments were previously received monthly, but now villagers are uncertain if wages are deposited, leading to fear of being cheated.
- Most villagers cannot read or write, making it difficult to inquire about their accounts with bankers, who often become irritated.
- Few residents have mobile phones, so they must travel 25-30 km to Dornala multiple times a month to check for wage deposits.
- Many Chenchu gudems are located deep within the Nagarjuna-Srisailam Tiger Reserve, making travel costly.
- Chenchu Bhumani Venkatamma from Marripalem reports struggling to find work year-round, only getting hired for farm work for about six months.
- Work opportunities include herding cattle, which pays ₹200-₹300 per day, but this only occurs a couple of times a week, leaving them with no work in October, November, and December.

Haves, and have-nots

- The Aadhaar card has created a divide between those who have it and those who don't among the Chenchus.
- Only individuals with Aadhaar can receive wages under the new system and access services like Aarogyasri, school admissions, and ration cards.
- Many Chenchus lack Aadhaar due to not having birth certificates, and obtaining these documents is a tedious process.
- Concerns about bank payments have arisen due to similar names among villagers; there have been instances of payments being incorrectly credited to the wrong person.
- Traditionally, the Chenchus relied on foraging, gathering leafy vegetables, wild fruits, tubers, and roots, and earning income from selling Non-Timber Forest Produce (NTFP) like gum and honey.
- Recent restrictions due to wildlife conservation laws have limited their movement and ability to collect forest produce.
- Venkatamma struggles to feed her family of six, finding the 35 kg of rice provided under the Public Distribution System (PDS) insufficient.
- Former Deputy District Medical and Health Officer P. Srinivasa Rao recalls a time when the Chenchus had a diverse diet from the forest, but such resources have diminished.

- Nutritional deficiencies are now prevalent among children, compounded by issues like child and consanguineous marriages, increasing susceptibility to sickle cell anemia and thalassemia.
- Venkatamma reminisces about better times when she could afford milk and lentils and even saved enough for a TV and gold, but financial struggles have worsened.
- Bhumani Venkatesam expresses frustration that the Chenchus, labeled as forest protectors, are being excluded from the forest for tiger conservation.
- The youth now lack both access to the forest and means to earn a livelihood, unlike the elders who had some opportunities.
- The Chenchus received pattas under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) but now face uncertainty about managing their land after the discontinuation of MGNREGS work.
- Dilapidated houses, irregular incomes, limited transportation, and lack of electricity contribute to a bleak future for the Chenchu community.

## Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve (NSTR)

- **Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve (NSTR)** is one of India's largest tiger reserves, located in the states of **Andhra Pradesh** and **Telangana**.
- Spanning an area of approximately **3,728 sq km**, it is one of the most critical areas for tiger conservation in the country, nestled along the banks of the **Krishna River**.
- The reserve is also rich in biodiversity, supporting a variety of flora and fauna in addition to its tiger population.

Historical Background and Formation

- The Nagarjunasagar-Srisailam Tiger Reserve was created in **1983** under the **Project Tiger** initiative launched by the Government of India in **1973** to conserve the dwindling tiger population.
- **Historical Importance:** This area has historical significance due to its connection with the **Nagarjuna dynasty**, and archaeological evidence suggests that Buddhist communities flourished in this region. It is also home to the famous **Nagarjuna Sagar Dam** and the **Srisailam Temple**, a significant pilgrimage site.
- **UNESCO Tentative List:** The region, including the tiger reserve, is part of the **UNESCO tentative list** of potential World Heritage Sites for its rich biodiversity and cultural significance.

Geography and Ecology

- It is located in the **Nallamala Hills** in the Eastern Ghats, which are characterized by their rocky terrain, dense forests, and deep gorges. The Krishna River flows through the reserve, creating a complex ecosystem.
- **Area:** It covers an area of **3,728 sq km**, making it the **largest tiger reserve in India**.
- **Vegetation:** The reserve has **dry deciduous forests** interspersed with scrub forests. Important tree species include **teak**, **Terminalia**, **red sanders**, and **hardwickia**.
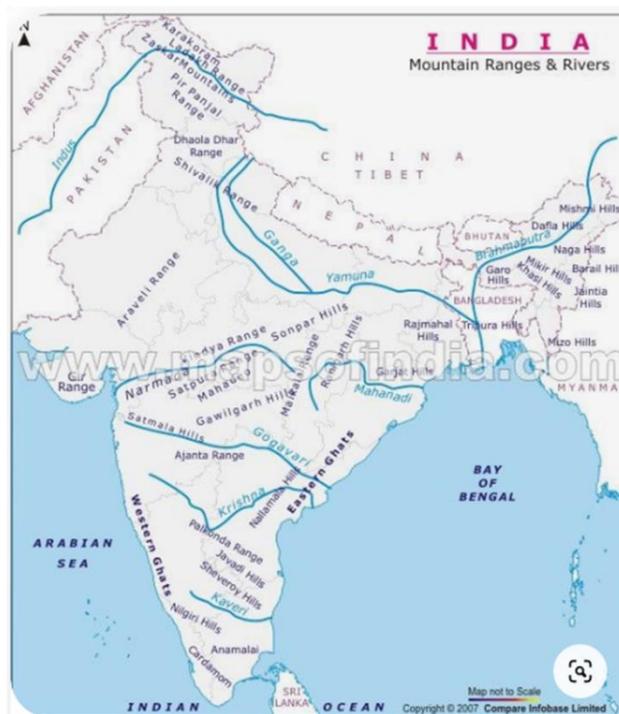
Fauna

- **Tigers:** The tiger population in the reserve has been one of the significant success stories of **Project Tiger**. According to the **All India Tiger Estimation (2018)**, the reserve hosts **60-70 tigers**, which makes it one of the most critical tiger habitats in the country.
- **Other Species:** Besides tigers, the reserve is home to several other endangered and significant species, including:
  - **Leopards**
  - **Indian pangolins**
  - **Sloth bears**
  - **Indian wolves**
  - **Chenchu people:** The **Chenchu** tribe, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), traditionally lives within the reserve and coexists with the wildlife. Their culture and livelihood are dependent on the forest, and they practice hunting and gathering.

Key Attractions and Features

1. **Nagarjuna Sagar Dam:** One of the largest dams in India, this provides irrigation and hydroelectric power to the region.

A slice of Odisha in Kochi (5 October)

Peringattu Parambu, a division of Maradu municipality on the fringes of Kochi city, is home to over 1,000 migrant workers from Surada in Odisha. Better pay and the absence of caste bias have drawn these workers, mainly from the Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes, to this part of Kerala. They keep a low profile, avoid things like pan-chewing and earn steady income.There's hardly any friction with the local people, who have, in turn, found new business opportunities,reports M.P. Praveen

- Bichitra Naik, a 22-year-old from Odisha, is engrossed in a dance video on his smartphone amid the evening noise at Peringattu Parambu in Maradu municipality, Kochi.
- He aspires to enter the film industry and has performed at weddings in Vaduthala and Fort Kochi with a dance troupe.
- Bichitra works at a kirana (provision) store and is part of a cluster of migrants from the Surada block of Ganjam district, Odisha.
- Peringattu Parambu has around 1,000 migrants from several panchayats of the Surada block, largely connected through social networking.
- A study by Gram Vikas and the Centre for Migration and Inclusive Development (CMID) found a significant number of workers from tribal communities migrating to Ernakulam district, Kerala.
- Approximately 22% of migrants from Surada prefer Ernakulam as their destination, marking a new migration corridor from Surada to Kerala.
- Nearly 70% of these migrants are from Scheduled Tribe communities, and about 48% are from Scheduled Castes.
- Nettoor has become a popular location for these migrants, prompting the establishment of the Bandhu Sramik Seva Kendra for Odia migrants in Peringattu Parambu.
- Bulu Naik, a 36-year-old migrant who moved to Nettoor 15 years ago, cites "good people, good pay, and good contractor" as reasons for his choice.
- Despite the risks, including the death of two relatives during a construction accident, Bulu continues to send a portion of his earnings to the family of one of the victims.

Non-existent complaints

- Many migrant workers in Nettoor, though categorized as footloose, have steady contractors, explaining their prolonged stay.
- Sanjay Naik, 30, has been in Nettoor for five years and is satisfied with both the work availability and pay.
- As a construction worker, Sanjay earns around ₹1,200 daily, but he prefers night work at warehouses, earning ₹3,000 to ₹4,000 per night.
- He and his brother send home about ₹3 lakh in six months.
- Nettoor is chosen by Surada migrants for its proximity to National Highway 66, facilitating easy transportation to distant work locations.
- Local store owner Jibin Moideen employs two Odia workers, adjusting to the preferences of the growing migrant clientele.
- Migrants prefer raw vegetables like bitter gourd, beans, and tomatoes, and snacks like creamy cakes and potato-based fried items.
- The local economy benefits from migrant spending, as noted by Sathish, a hairdresser who caters to Odia migrants' hairstyle requests.
- The migrant population has not caused friction with locals; in fact, it has enhanced community safety.
- A migrant worker helped rescue Jibin's missing niece, reinforcing positive relations.
- Odia workers tend to keep a low profile, focusing on work rather than asserting rights, contributing significantly to the local economy through remittances.
- Benoy Peter from CMID highlights that remittances can generate significant local economic activity, including high banking transactions in Surada villages.
- Sheeja Siby, president of the Area Development Society, affirms the peace-loving nature of the migrant community, noting the absence of tobacco shops.
- Ayaz Anwar from Bandhu Sramik Seva Kendra describes the situation as a model of coexistence, with migrants and locals mixing freely.
- Migration from Surada is more aspirational than distress-driven, as seen by migrants showcasing their wealth on social media.
- Babu Naik, 26, an outreach worker at the Kendra, has become more aspirational and is now pursuing a Bachelor of Social Work through distance education.

Why the shift from Surat

- Two main factors have shifted younger migrants from Surada to Kerala: fewer opportunities in Surat and less caste discrimination in Kerala.
- The jump in wages from ₹70,000 to ₹2.5 lakh annually, due to year-round job availability, is a significant attraction.
- Liby Johnson from Gram Vikas highlights that communal amity and networking among communities contribute to Kerala's appeal.

- Migrants from Odisha often come alone, leaving families to manage land, reflecting the joint family system in their villages.
- Bulu, who owns 15 bighas (approximately 10 acres) of land, has invested ₹30,000 in agriculture and seeks additional funds for a tractor.
- Farming (paddy, corn, ragi) in Surada is seasonal and often doesn't exceed subsistence levels.
- Vishnu Naik recalls selling brinjal at a loss during the pandemic due to high transportation costs.
- The influx of migrants to Nettoor has made accommodation a lucrative revenue model for locals, with rents between ₹1,500 and ₹1,800 per person.
- Some landlords rent to migrants while moving to cheaper accommodations themselves.
- Riaz K. Mohammed, a councillor, notes overcrowded living conditions lead to social issues, such as migrants gathering in streets post-work.
- Complaints have arisen about blocked pathways; outreach centers are encouraged to address crowding.
- Ansal P.T., president of the Priyadarshini Residents Association, states that while overcrowding is a concern, it hasn't escalated into a major issue.
- Lack of recreational options drives migrants to spend time on streets; a carrom board at the outreach center is attracting them.
- A projector for Odia programs is planned to draw migrants indoors.
- A building owner mentions migrants often hide their numbers, complicating overcrowding, but they maintain the properties well.
- Bichitra Naik continues to enhance his dancing skills through social media, gaining pride from a viral video shared in the area.

Private sector activity grew at 10-month low pace in Sept. (5 October)

HSBC India Services PMI dropped from 60.9 in August to 57.7 in September; new export orders rise at slowest pace in 9 months, while output pricehikes were at a two-and-a-half year low

- Growth in India's private sector activity slowed to a ten-month low in September.
- HSBC India Composite Output Index dropped from 60.7 in August to 58.3 in September.
- Manufacturing sector activity decreased, with factory output and sales growing at the slowest pace of 2024.
- Export orders rose at the mildest pace in 18 months.

- HSBC India Services PMI fell from 60.9 in August to 57.7 in September.
- Business Activity Index fell below 60 for the first time in 2024.
- Pranjul Bhandari, HSBC's chief India economist, noted potential for softer output growth in the coming months.
- Services companies' margins likely squeezed due to slower price increases amidst rising input cost inflation.
- Services export orders grew at the weakest pace in 2024.
- Overall new business intake growth hit a ten-month low.
- Firms attributed slower growth to fierce competition, cost pressures, and shifts in consumer preferences toward online services.

'Living standards to see steepest rise'

GS Paper III

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Friday said India would achieve near doubling of per capita income in the next five years and witness the steepest rise in living standards of the common man in coming decades, aided by structural reforms undertaken by the government in the last 10 years.

Addressing the 3rd edition of Kautiliya Economic Conclave here, the Minister said, "While it took us 75 years to reach a per capita income of $2,730, as per IMF projections, it will take only five years to add another $2,000." This is being achieved with declining inequality, as the Gini coefficient (income inequality benchmark) for rural India declined from 0.283 to 0.266, and for urban areas, it declined from 0.363 to 0.314, she noted.

Nirmala Sitharaman

'Living standards to see steepest rise' (5 October)

- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stated India would nearly double per capita income in the next five years.
- Expected steep rise in living standards for the common man in coming decades.
- Achievements supported by structural reforms undertaken by the government over the last 10 years.
- Addressing the 3rd edition of Kautiliya Economic Conclave, she mentioned it took **75 years to reach a per capita income of $2,730**.
- **IMF projections indicate it will take only five years to add another $2,000 to per capita income.**
- Declining inequality noted, with the **Gini coefficient** for rural India **decreasing from 0.283 to 0.266.**
- Urban areas also saw a decline in the **Gini coefficient from 0.363 to 0.314.**

India, U.S. sign pact on critical minerals (5 October)

- India and the U.S. signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to expand and diversify critical minerals supply chains.

- The MoU was signed by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.
- The two nations are exploring combined engagement with third countries.
- Opportunities identified in Africa and Latin America for sourcing capital, technology, critical minerals, and markets.

Time is not right for GSP, social security totalisation, says Goyal (5 October)

- Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal stated that now is not the right time for detailed negotiations on two key trade issues: a preferential trade program with the U.S. and a social security agreement.
- Goyal met with U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai to lay groundwork for the next Trade Policy Forum.
- He indicated that discussions on these issues are not currently on the agenda, especially with U.S. elections approaching.
- The Minister emphasized the need to work with the Committee on Ways and Means of the U.S. Congress regarding the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) issue.
- Goyal expressed disappointment that the previous government did not address the GSP issue seriously when it arose in 2019.

Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)

- The **Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)** is a preferential tariff system provided by developed countries to promote exports from developing countries.
- Under this system, certain products from these nations can enter the markets of developed countries duty-free. The GSP aims to aid developing countries by boosting their economies through increased trade and helping them integrate better into the global economy.
- The **United States**, **European Union**, and other developed countries have GSP programs, and the rules and criteria for eligibility can vary.
- However, the GSP is subject to regular reviews and can be withdrawn for various reasons, including concerns over labor rights, intellectual property issues, or trade imbalances.

Historical Context

- **Origin:** The GSP was introduced as part of the **United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)** recommendations in the 1970s to

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foster economic growth in developing nations.
- **Key Objectives:**
    1. Expand exports from developing countries.
    2. Support global economic integration by lowering tariffs for these nations.
    3. Encourage industries to grow, thereby increasing employment and raising living standards.

Key Features

1. **Duty-Free Access:** The most significant benefit under GSP is duty-free access to the markets of developed countries, providing a competitive advantage to developing economies.
2. **Product Coverage:** The GSP typically covers **thousands of products**, including manufactured goods, textiles, chemicals, agricultural products, and more.
3. **Beneficiary Countries:** The list of countries eligible under GSP can change, with many developing nations having benefited, though the list is subject to periodic reviews based on their economic status and compliance with criteria.

GSP Issue with India (2019-2023)

- India was historically one of the largest beneficiaries of the **U.S. GSP program**, which provided duty-free access to its goods in the American market.
- However, the **Trump Administration** decided to terminate India's GSP status in **June 2019**, citing concerns over India not providing "equitable and reasonable access to its markets" and other trade-related concerns such as high tariffs on U.S. goods, particularly in sectors like electronics and agriculture.

- **Impact on Indian Exports:** The suspension of GSP affected approximately **$5.6 billion** worth of Indian exports that had previously enjoyed duty-free access to the U.S. market. Products like **textiles, leather goods, jewelry**, and **auto parts** were affected.
- **India's Response:** India tried to negotiate a trade deal with the U.S. to restore the GSP benefits but faced challenges.
- India argued that it provided adequate market access and met the criteria for GSP benefits, while also emphasizing that it remained committed to its **Make in India** program.

Recent Developments (2021-2024)

1. **Biden Administration's Review:** Under the Biden Administration, the GSP program, including India's status, has been under review. While the U.S. Congress has discussed **reinstating** the GSP, the program lapsed in **2020**,

and many countries, including India, have lobbied for its renewal.
2. **Negotiations Between India and the U.S.:** India and the U.S. have been working towards a broader **bilateral trade agreement** that could address not only GSP but also issues related to **intellectual property rights, e-commerce**, and **agriculture**. India has expressed its willingness to address market access issues, but the discussions are ongoing.
3. **WTO Compliance:** The U.S. GSP program, like others, must comply with **World Trade Organization (WTO)** rules, particularly regarding non-discrimination and reciprocity. The **WTO Agreement on Trade Preferences** allows for such systems as long as they promote development and do not create long-term imbalances.
4. **EU's GSP System:** The **European Union** continues to operate its own GSP system, with stricter conditions, especially concerning **human rights**, **labor rights**, and **environmental standards**. India remains a beneficiary of the EU GSP system, but the benefits are more limited compared to what the U.S. GSP provided.

Key Data and Facts

- **India-U.S. Trade:** Bilateral trade between India and the U.S. in 2023 is expected to reach nearly **$120 billion**, making the U.S. one of India's largest trading partners.
- **Indian Exports to the U.S. under GSP (2018):** India exported goods worth over **$6.3 billion** under the U.S. GSP scheme, making it one of the largest beneficiaries.
- **Products Affected by GSP Withdrawal:** Key sectors affected include **textiles**, **auto parts**, **pharmaceuticals**, and **agriculture**.