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Supreme Court finds discrepancy in Delhi L-G's version on tree-felling in protected ridge area

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday found that Delhi Lieutenant-Governor and Delhi Development Authority (DDA) ex-officio Chairperson V.K. Saxena's version on oath in a personal affidavit about when exactly he came to know that trees were illegally felled in the protected ridge area did not match with official records.

Mr. Saxena had told the court that he was informed by the DDA Vice-Chairperson of the tree-felling in a letter only on June 10. However, a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud

was alerted by advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for the petitioners, to entries in official files that pointed to the Lieutenant-Governor being informed of it on April 12.

"Consequently, the statement that it was only on June 10 that the L-G was apprised of the fact that the actual felling of trees commenced on February 16 will require further clarification," the court noted.

It directed the Lieutenant-Governor and former DDA Vice-Chairperson Subhasish Panda, who was in the saddle at the time the trees were cut and is facing **contempt proceedings**, to file affidavits to ex-



The L-G had told the court that he was informed of the issue on June 10, but official entries show he was informed earlier. FILE PHOTO

plain the "discrepancy". The L-G and Mr. Panda were asked to make "specific disclosures" of the actual date on which they "obtained knowledge of the felling of the trees".

The court called for the original records concerning the issue to be placed

on record for its perusal. It posted the case for Tuesday.

The personal affidavit filed by the L-G in the court had explained the circumstances leading to the illegal felling in the ridge area as part of widening access to the Central Armed Pol-

ice Forces Institute of Medical Sciences (CAPFIMS) in Maidangarhi. Petitioners who approached the Supreme Court had alleged that the trees were chopped down on the orders of the Lieutenant-Governor, who had visited the site on February 3.

On October 16, the apex Court had decided to have the LG himself file an affidavit explaining his alleged role and what really happened on February 3. Mr. Saxena said he had visited the road-widening site in February while on his way back from the hospital site. He said no one told him that felling the trees would require permission from the Supreme Court.

Supreme Court finds discrepancy in Delhi L-G's version on tree-felling in protected ridge area (25 October)

- **Supreme Court Observation:** Found a discrepancy in Delhi L-G V.K. Saxena's affidavit statement about when he learned of illegal tree-felling in the protected ridge area, differing from official records.
- **L-G's Claim:** L-G Saxena claimed he was informed by the DDA Vice-Chairperson about tree-felling in a letter on June 10.
- **Petitioner's Evidence:** Advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan presented official files indicating that the L-G was informed on April 12, earlier than his stated date.
- **Court's Requirement:** The Supreme Court noted that the discrepancy in dates regarding the notification to the L-G needs further clarification.





- **Directed Action:** The Supreme Court instructed L-G Saxena and former DDA Vice-Chairperson Subhasish Panda to file affidavits detailing the actual date they became aware of the tree-felling.
- **Disclosure Requirement:** L-G Saxena and Panda must make “specific disclosures” about the date they gained knowledge of the illegal tree-felling.
- **Original Records:** The court asked for the original records concerning the matter to be produced for review and set the case for a hearing on Tuesday.
- **Affidavit Details:** L-G Saxena's affidavit explained the tree-felling was linked to widening access to CAPFIMS in Maidangarhi.
- **Petitioners' Allegation:** The petitioners claimed that the L-G had ordered the tree felling after his visit to the site on February 3.
- **October 16 Decision:** The Supreme Court decided on October 16 that L-G Saxena should submit a personal affidavit explaining his role and the events of February 3.





- **L-G's Clarification:** L-G Saxena clarified that he visited the site on his way back from CAPFIMS in February but was unaware that felling required Supreme Court approval.

Aadhaar not a valid paper to determine age, rules SC

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday set aside an order of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which had accepted Aadhaar card for determining the age of a road accident victim to grant compensation.

A Bench comprising Justices Sanjay Karol and Ujjal Bhuyan, therefore, said the age of the deceased had to be determined from the date of birth mentioned in the school leaving certificate under Section 94 of the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015.

“We find that the Unique Identification Authority of India, has stated that an Aadhaar card, while can be used to establish identity, is not per se proof of date of birth,” noted the Bench.

Aadhaar not a valid paper to determine age, rules SC (25 October)

- **Supreme Court Decision:** Overturned Punjab and Haryana High Court's order allowing Aadhaar as proof of age for accident compensation.
- **Bench Composition:** Justices Sanjay Karol and Ujjal Bhuyan presided over the case.
- **Age Determination:** The Supreme Court stated that age should be determined by the date of birth on the school leaving certificate under Section 94 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015.
- **UIDAI Clarification:** The Bench noted that UIDAI specifies an Aadhaar card can confirm identity but is not definitive proof of date of birth.



SC seeks reply on non-believer's plea

GS Paper II:
Fundamental Right

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday asked the Centre to respond to a plea by a Kerala-based woman, born a Muslim but now a non-believer, to be governed by the secular statute of Indian Succession Act of 1925 rather than the sharia law.

Appearing before a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, Shafiya PM, represented by advocate Prashant Padmanabhan, said the fundamental right

to religion under Article 25 of the Constitution includes both the right to believe and not to believe.

The Chief Justice remarked that the 1925 specifically did not include Muslims within its ambit.

Additional Solicitor-General Aishwarya Bhati, appearing for the Union government, said the prayer in the petition came within the legislative domain as it could be realised only with an amendment in the 1925 Act.

The court asked the government to file a response

to the petition.

The petition filed by Mr. Padmanabhan said the top court had emphasised on the “fundamental postulate of secularism which treats all religions on an even platform and allows to each individual the fullest liberty to believe or not to believe”.

Mr. Padmanabhan submitted that a person who leaves her faith should not incur any disability or a disqualification in matters of inheritance or other important civil rights. The petition said a person born a

Muslim is governed by the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937.

“Persons who do not want to be governed by the Muslim Personal Law must be allowed to be governed by the secular law of the country, viz., the Indian Succession Act, 1925, both in the case of intestate and testamentary succession,” it said. Ms. Safiya said that a person who leaves her faith in Islam, is ousted from her community and not entitled for any inheritance right in her parental property.

SC seeks reply on non-believer's plea (25 October)

- **Supreme Court Request:** Asked the Centre to respond to a plea by a Kerala-based woman who wishes to be governed by the Indian Succession Act of 1925 instead of sharia law.
- **Petitioner's Background:** The woman, Shafiya PM, was born a Muslim but now identifies as a nonbeliever.
- **Legal Representation:** Shafiya PM is represented by advocate Prashant Padmanabhan.
- **Argument on Rights:** The petitioner argued that Article 25 of the Constitution includes the right to both believe and not believe in religion.
- **Chief Justice's Observation:** Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud noted that the 1925 Act excludes Muslims from its scope.
- **Government's Stance:** Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati, representing the Union government, stated that granting the petitioner's request would require amending the 1925 Act.



- **Court's Directive:** The court directed the government to respond to the petition.
- **Secularism Emphasis:** The petition highlighted the importance of secularism, which ensures equal treatment for all religions and freedom to believe or not believe.
- **Civil Rights Argument:** The petition argued that renouncing one's faith should not lead to disadvantages in inheritance or civil rights.
- **Current Governing Law:** The petition noted that Muslims by birth are governed by the Muslim Personal Law (Shariat) Application Act, 1937.
- **Petitioner's Contention:** Individuals who do not wish to be governed by Muslim Personal Law should have the option to be governed by the Indian Succession Act, 1925.
- **Community Exclusion Concern:** Shafiya highlighted that those renouncing Islam may face exclusion from their community and lose inheritance rights to parental property.

Will put an end to 'doli deaths': A.P. Home Minister

GS Paper I: Society

Harish Gilal

VISAKHAPATNAM

Andhra Pradesh Home Minister V. Anitha said that the NDA government would take steps to put an end to the "doli deaths" in the Agency by increasing road connectivity to the interior villages of Alluri Sitharama Raju (ASR) district. She also assured to improve medical facilities in the Agency areas and to come up with measures to resolve drinking water issues by completing "Jal Jeevan Mission" works before the summer in undivided Visakhapatnam district.

She was speaking to Zilla Parishad Territorial Committee (ZPTC) members during the Zilla Parishad General Body meeting here on Thursday. A wide range of issues from various departments like irrigation, agriculture,



Basic demand: Tribals staging a protest with 'doli', seeking roads and power in Visakhapatnam on Thursday. V. RAJU

medical & health, Roads & Building, Rural Water Supply (RWS), education have come for discussion.

A number of ZPTCs raised concern over increasing "doli deaths" in the 11 mandals under ITDA Paderu limits. Explaining the sufferings of pregnant woman and patients, the ZPTCs alleged that the go-

vernment has failed to address the issues and also allocate funds to improve connectivity to the tribal hamlets.

ASR Collector A.S. Dinsh Kumar said there are 1,350 habitations in the district (11 mandals of Paderu ITDA limits), which do not have road connectivity. He also said that it would take

around ₹1,800 crore to improve road connectivity in the region and the proposals were already forwarded to the government.

Ms. Anitha informed the members that she had recently attended a meeting organised by Union Home Ministry, where she spoke about the road connectivity in the Agency areas, for which Home Minister Amit Shah has also responded positively.

"With the help of State, Centre, Tribal Corporation and from Home Ministry, we would try to gather funds to improve road connectivity to the villages on war-foot basis," she said.

Speaking about the ganja menace, some of the ZPTCs have sought the Home Minister to provide alternate crops for the tribals who have stopped cultivating the ganja and also appealed to organise

awareness programmes over their cultivation.

Water issue

In the view of recent incidents in Vizianagaram, she directed the Rural Water Supply (RWS) authorities to ensure chlorination, water tanks cleaning is done regularly without fail. She also said that in some areas, drains which were arranged nearby the water pipelines are mixing up.

The Home Minister also said that about ₹4.68 crore was sanctioned for Anakapalli district for repairing the potholes, while nearly ₹20 crore was sanctioned for Visakhapatnam and ASR districts. She asked the authorities to speed up tender procedures and initiate pothole repairing works. She also spoke about lack of jungle clearance works especially in Anakapalli district.

Will put an end to 'doli deaths': A.P. Home Minister (25 October)

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- **Road Connectivity Improvement:** Andhra Pradesh Home Minister V. Anitha stated that the NDA government plans to end “doli deaths” in the Agency by enhancing road connectivity to interior villages of Alluri Sitharama Raju (ASR) district.
- **Medical and Water Facilities:** She assured improvements in medical facilities and pledged to address drinking water issues by completing “Jal Jeevan Mission” works before summer in undivided Visakhapatnam district.
- **Zilla Parishad Meeting:** Spoke to Zilla Parishad Territorial Committee (ZPTC) members at the Zilla Parishad General Body meeting, covering issues across departments like irrigation, agriculture, health, Roads & Building, RWS, and education.
- **Concerns over “Doli Deaths”:** ZPTCs raised concerns over rising “doli deaths” in 11 mandals under ITDA Paderu limits, highlighting challenges faced by pregnant women and patients due to poor connectivity.
- **ASR District Connectivity Issue:** ASR Collector A.S. Dinesh Kumar noted that 1,350 habitations in the district lack road connectivity and estimated ₹1,800 crore is required, with proposals submitted to the government.
- **Union Home Ministry Meeting:** Ms. Anitha reported attending a Union Home Ministry meeting, where Home Minister Amit Shah responded positively to her request for road improvements in Agency areas.
- **Funding Efforts:** She said they would gather funds from the State, Centre, Tribal Corporation, and Home Ministry to enhance connectivity on a priority basis.
- **Ganja Cultivation Issue:** Some ZPTCs requested alternative crops for tribals who have stopped cultivating ganja and appealed for awareness programs.
- **Water Supply and Contamination:** Ms. Anitha instructed RWS authorities to ensure regular chlorination and cleaning of water tanks and addressed issues with drain contamination near water pipelines.
- **Pothole Repair Funds:** She mentioned ₹4.68 crore allocated for Anakapalli district pothole repairs and nearly ₹20 crore for Visakhapatnam and ASR districts, urging swift tender procedures.
- **Jungle Clearance:** Addressed the need for jungle clearance in Anakapalli district.



Trachoma eliminated as a public health problem in India; what next?

The achievement marked a significant public health victory for the country and has profound economic implications. Trachoma's impact, through blindness and visual impairment, results in an estimated economic loss of \$2.9 to 5.3 billion annually due to reduced productivity. India successfully reduced prevalence to 0.7%

GS Paper III: Basic Science

October 12, 2024, an incident at Trichy Airport involving an aircraft malfunction kept the aircraft circling in the skies for hours. The pilots' efforts to safely land the plane, preventing potential disaster, captured the public's imagination. Their actions were tangible, immediate, and visible, making it easy for people to appreciate the significance of their work. This event dominated headlines, occupied significant airtime and social media space, while just days earlier, another important achievement unfolded rather quietly: on October 8, India's health system achieved a quiet but equally important victory in eliminating trachoma as a public health problem – a success far less visible but just as impactful.

Public health works face the paradox where the nature of their work makes failures highly tangible and visible, leading to headlines, while their successes remain intangible, often going unnoticed despite their significant impact. Acknowledging these achievements is essential, as they reflect the dedication and perseverance of countless individuals working behind the scenes to prevent blindness and improve lives. The achievement marked a significant public health victory and has profound economic implications.

Trachoma's impact, through blindness and visual impairment, results in an estimated economic loss of \$2.9 to 5.3 billion annually due to reduced productivity.

Trachoma, a chronic infectious eye disease, affects regions with poor hygiene and sanitation. The disease primarily affects young children and women in areas with limited clean water and sanitation access. *Chlamydia trachomatis*, the bacterium responsible for trachoma, has serotypes A, B, Ba, and C, which cause eye infections. These infections lead to symptoms such as eye irritation, discharge, swollen eyelids, sensitivity to light, and, in severe cases, blurred vision. If left untreated, repeated infections can cause scarring of the inner eyelid and eventually blindness.

Trachoma is transmitted through contact with eye secretions from an infected person's fingers, contaminated towels or clothes, or flies (*Musca sorbens*) touching the infected secretions, often exacerbated by poor hygiene and overcrowded living conditions.

Trachoma is one of 20 diseases the World Health Organization (WHO) has classified as neglected tropical diseases (NTDs) and seeks to eliminate by 2030.



Trachoma affects regions with poor hygiene and sanitation. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

NTDs disproportionately affect impoverished communities, and controlling them is a key target under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Target 3.3).

While many developed nations have long eliminated trachoma, countries like India have struggled due to socio-economic and environmental challenges.

India's success in significantly reducing trachoma prevalence is largely attributed to the WHO's SAFE strategy, which has been pivotal in global trachoma elimination efforts. The SAFE acronym stands for surgery to correct trichiasis (misdirected eyelashes), antibiotics to treat and control the infection, facial cleanliness to reduce transmission, and environmental improvements such as access to clean water and sanitation.

WHO's Criteria

The WHO defines trachoma as eliminated as a health problem when prevalence of trachomatous trichiasis falls below 0.2% in people aged 15 years and above. The prevalence of active trachoma in children aged 1-9 years is less than 5% in endemic countries. It also includes a health system capable of managing new cases. Reaching these thresholds is a significant milestone, but it does not equate to the total eradication of the disease.

In 2005, trachoma accounted for 4% of all blindness cases in India. Remarkably, by 2018, this figure declined to just 0.008% of all blindness.

Even with India's commendable achievement of a 0.7% prevalence, sporadic cases can still exist.

The elimination target means that the disease's burden has been significantly reduced but not eradicated. This

Trachoma is transmitted through contact with eye secretions from an infected person's fingers, contaminated towels or clothes, or flies touching secretions exacerbated by poor hygiene

distinction is crucial in epidemiology, where reaching elimination is a major milestone.

India has conducted three major trachoma prevalence surveys, the most recent from 2014 to 2017.

Historically, trachoma was highly endemic, especially in northern states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. The national surveys conducted in the 20th century demonstrated alarming rates of infection, but successive public health measures have drastically reduced the burden.

However, this achievement does not mean India is free from trachoma. The term "elimination as a public health problem" signifies that trachoma is no longer a significant threat, but sporadic cases may still exist.

This is an important distinction. While India has achieved the elimination of trachoma as a "public health problem," this does not mean that the disease and transmission have been eliminated. There is often confusion between the two terms: **elimination as a public health problem** and **elimination of disease**.

The former refers to reducing disease prevalence to such low levels that it no longer poses a significant public health threat. In contrast, the latter implies very negligible to zero transmission of the disease, as seen in India's polio, measles,

and guinea worm infection levels.

Epidemiological challenges

From an epidemiological standpoint, achieving the elimination threshold is like an associate member country of the ICC being granted test status – it's a milestone, but maintaining this status requires continuous effort and excellence. Similarly, India has reached an impressive point in the fight against trachoma, but to sustain it, efforts must be ongoing.

Developed countries achieved trachoma elimination much earlier in the 1950s.

The road to completely eradicating trachoma is long due to lack of vaccines. With no long-lasting protective immunity and the presence of active trachoma cases, the focus must remain on interrupting the transmission cycle of the disease through sustained improvements in sanitation, access to clean water, and continued health education.

India's progress has been remarkable, but it is essential to continue the battle with the same vigour.

The WHO's decision not to set an eradication target for trachoma (unlike yaws and guinea worm) reflects the complex epidemiological challenges. Surveillance systems must be vigilant to catch cases early and prevent resurgence.

The National Programme for Control of Blindness and Visual Impairment (NPCBVI) needs to regularly conduct surveys, at least once a decade, across all districts to detect any new cases and prevent the resurgence of the disease to maintain India's status as free from trachoma as a public health threat.

It's time public health workers receive the acknowledgement they've earned for protecting the nation's health, and we should keep striving to tackle future challenges with the same determination. Eliminating trachoma as a public health problem is a significant achievement for India, and the journey continues.

Ongoing surveillance, adherence to the SAFE strategy, and initiatives like Swachh Bharat will be critical in ensuring that trachoma remains a disease of the past. We should keep up the momentum.

The government must be committed to this goal, ensuring that India's children can grow up in a world free from trachoma. This validation should serve as a reminder that, with continued collective effort, we can also target and eliminate other diseases like kala-azar and tuberculosis. The success against trachoma shows that even in tough conditions, coordinated efforts can bring about change.

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THE GIST

The WHO classifies trachoma as one of 20 neglected tropical diseases, which it seeks to eliminate by 2030. While developed nations have eliminated trachoma, countries like India have struggled

India's success in reducing trachoma prevalence is largely attributed to the SAFE strategy, which stands for surgery, antibiotics, facial cleanliness, and environmental improvements such as access to clean water and sanitation

Elimination of trachoma as a 'public health problem,' does not mean the disease and transmission have been eliminated. Negligible to zero transmission, as seen in India's polio, measles, and guinea worm infection levels, has not been achieved



Trachoma eliminated as a public health problem in India; what next? (25 October)

The achievement marked a significant public health victory for the country and has profound economic implications. Trachoma's impact, through blindness and visual impairment, results in an estimated economic loss of \$2.9 to 5.3 billion annually due to reduced productivity. India successfully reduced prevalence to 0.7%

- **October 12, 2024:** Trichy Airport incident involving aircraft malfunction; pilots safely landed the plane, gaining significant media attention.
- **October 8, 2024:** India quietly achieved a milestone by eliminating trachoma as a public health issue.
- **Public Health Work Paradox:** Failures gain visibility and headlines, while successes often go unnoticed.
- **Economic Impact:** Blindness and impairment from trachoma lead to an estimated \$2.9 to \$5.3 billion in annual productivity loss.
- **Trachoma Details:**
 - Chronic infectious eye disease affecting areas with poor hygiene and sanitation.
 - Primarily affects young children and women in regions lacking clean water and sanitation.
 - Caused by *Chlamydia trachomatis* (serotypes A, B, Ba, C).
- **Symptoms and Effects:**
 - Symptoms: eye irritation, discharge, swollen eyelids, light sensitivity, and, in severe cases, blurred vision.
 - Untreated cases can lead to scarring of the inner eyelid and blindness.
- **Transmission:** Through eye secretions from infected persons' fingers, contaminated towels or clothing, or flies (*Musca sorbens*).
- **WHO's Classification:** Trachoma is a neglected tropical disease (NTD), targeted for elimination by 2030.
- **NTDs and Sustainable Development Goal 3:** Control of NTDs aligns with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 3 (Target 3.3).
- **Challenges in Developing Nations:** Socio-economic and environmental challenges delayed elimination in countries like India.
- **WHO's SAFE Strategy:**
 - Surgery to correct trichiasis
 - Antibiotics to treat and control infection





- Facial cleanliness to reduce transmission
- Environmental improvements, such as access to clean water and sanitation
- **WHO's Criteria for Elimination:**
 - Trachomatous trichiasis prevalence below 0.2% in people aged 15+.
 - Active trachoma prevalence below 5% in children aged 1-9 in endemic areas.
 - Elimination does not mean complete eradication of the disease.
- **2005:** Trachoma accounted for **4% of blindness cases** in India.
- **2018:** Declined to **0.008% of blindness cases**.
- **Current Prevalence: 0.7%;** sporadic cases may still exist.
- **Elimination:** Disease burden reduced, not eradicated.
- **Surveys Conducted:** 3 major trachoma prevalence surveys; last from **2014–2017**.
- **Historical Endemic Areas:** Northern states like **Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh**.
- **Public Health Measures:** Drastically reduced trachoma burden.
- **“Elimination as a Public Health Problem”:** Not disease-free; sporadic cases can exist.
- **Key Difference:** “Elimination as a public health problem” (low threat) vs. “elimination of disease” (low-zero transmission).
- **Examples of Disease Elimination:** **Polio, measles, and guinea worm** in India.
- **Epidemiological Milestone:** Similar to achieving “test status,” needs continuous effort.
- **Ongoing Efforts:** Essential to maintain India’s progress against trachoma.
- **1950s:** Developed countries achieved trachoma elimination.
- **Eradication Challenges:** Lack of vaccines and long-lasting immunity.
- **Focus:** **Sanitation, clean water, health education** to stop transmission.
- **WHO:** No eradication target for trachoma due to complexities.
- **Surveillance:** Must detect early cases to avoid resurgence.
- **NPCBVI:** Regular surveys every decade across districts to keep trachoma-free status.
- **Public Health Worker Recognition:** Acknowledgment for protecting health.
- **Trichiasis:** A significant milestone for India; journey continues.
- **SAFE Strategy and Swachh Bharat:** Essential for keeping trachoma in the past.
- **Momentum:** Should continue.
- **Government’s Commitment:** Ensures trachoma-free childhood for India’s children.
- **Inspiration for Other Diseases:** Kala-azar, tuberculosis.



- **Significance:** Trachoma success shows coordinated efforts yield results in tough conditions.

Why did the Central govt. sanction a 50% hike in prices of commonly used drugs?

GS Paper II: Governance

The story so far:

On October 14, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority of India (NPPA) increased the ceiling prices of eight drugs, comprising medication for common diseases including asthma, tuberculosis, bipolar disorder, and glaucoma, among others. Prices have been increased by 50%.

Extraordinary circumstances:

The Central Government passed the order, citing “extraordinary circumstances” and “public interest.” The NPPA comes under the department of pharmaceuticals under the Union Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, and a government release stated that it increased prices in greater public interest.

The NPPA's mandate is to ensure availability of essential drugs at affordable prices and ensure affordability without jeopardising access.

Essential drugs must remain available, and their price regulation should not lead to a situation where these drugs become unavailable,” it said.

The NPPA added that it has been receiving applications from manufacturers for upward revision of prices, citing increased cost of active pharmaceutical ingredients; increase in the cost of production;



The government cited “extraordinary circumstances.” GETTY IMAGES

and a change in the exchange rate, making production and marketing of the drugs unviable. Companies also applied for discontinuation of some formulations on account of their unviability.

The mechanism:

The NPPA, constituted in 1997, regulates ceiling prices of drugs and has the power to fix costs under what is known as a ‘Drug Price Control Order’ (DPCO) issued by the government under the Essential Commodities Act.

The Central Government said the decision to hike the cost of drugs comes after deliberations in a meeting on October 8.

It invoked extraordinary powers under Para 19 of the DPCO, 2013. The NPPA approved an increase in ceiling prices of eleven scheduled formulations of eight drugs by 50% of their current ceiling prices, in the larger public interest.

“Most of these drugs are low-cost and generally used as first line treatment crucial to the public health programmes of the country,” it said.

Formulations for which ceiling prices have been revised include: atropine injection 0.6mg/ml; streptomycin powder for injection 750mg and 1000mg; salbutamol tablet 2mg and 4mg and respirator solution 5mg/ml; pilocarpine 2% drops; cefadroxil tablet 500mg, desferrioxamine 500mg for injection; and lithium tablets 300mg.

Such extraordinary powers have been invoked by the NPPA in 2019 and in 2021. Prices of 21 and 9 formulations respectively were increased by 50%.

Section 19 of the DPCO allows the government to revise the ceiling cost. This can be done in extraordinary circumstances.

Section 19 states: “Notwithstanding anything contained in this order, the Government may, in case of extraordinary circumstances, if it considers it necessary to do so in public interest, fix the ceiling price or retail price of any drug for such period, as it may deem fit and where the ceiling price or retail price of the drug is already fixed and notified, the government may allow an increase or decrease in the ceiling price or the retail price, as the case may be, irrespective of annual wholesale price index for that

year.”

Annual revision:

Every financial year starting April 1, the NPPA increases ceiling prices of drugs based on Wholesale Price Index (WPI) of the preceding year.

Pricing of drugs in India is strictly controlled by the Central government. Action is taken against companies found selling at higher prices. During 2023-24, ₹72.73 crore was recovered from defaulting companies.

Additionally, according to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1945 and Rules, manufacturers of drugs are required to comply with conditions of the manufacturing licence and the requirements of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP).

According to Drugs Rules, 1945, manufacturing, testing, labelling, packaging, storage, and distribution are required to be carried out in compliance with the conditions of license including the GMP prescribed under Schedule M of the Drugs Rules, 1945.

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Why did the Central govt. sanction a 50% hike in prices of commonly used drugs? (25 October)





- **Price Increase:** On October 14, the NPPA raised ceiling prices of eight drugs by 50%, covering treatments for asthma, tuberculosis, bipolar disorder, and glaucoma.
- **Government Decision:** The Central Government passed this order due to “extraordinary circumstances” and “public interest.”
- **NPPA’s Objective:** The NPPA, part of the Union Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, ensures essential drugs remain affordable and available, despite cost challenges.
- **Manufacturers’ Requests:** Companies have applied for price increases due to rising costs of ingredients, production, and exchange rates, making some drugs economically unviable.
- **Regulatory Background:** The NPPA, established in 1997, manages drug prices through the Drug Price Control Order (DPCO) under the Essential Commodities Act.
- **Extraordinary Powers:** The government invoked powers under Para 19 of the DPCO, 2013, to allow a 50% price increase on eleven formulations, including atropine, streptomycin, salbutamol, pilocarpine, cefadroxil, desferrioxamine, and lithium tablets.
- **Past Instances:** Similar price increases occurred in 2019 and 2021 for 21 and 9 formulations, respectively.
- **Provision Under Para 19:** This provision allows the government to revise prices under extraordinary circumstances, regardless of the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) adjustments.
- **Annual Revisions:** The NPPA revises ceiling prices annually, based on the WPI of the prior year, typically on April 1.
- **Enforcement and Compliance:** In 2023-24, ₹72.73 crore was recovered from companies overcharging for drugs. Compliance with Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP) under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1945, is mandatory.

Trachoma

- Trachoma is a chronic infectious eye disease caused by the bacterium *Chlamydia trachomatis*. It is a leading cause of blindness in areas with poor hygiene, sanitation, and limited access to clean water. This disease is highly contagious and spreads through personal contact, such as touching the eyes or nose of an infected person, and indirectly via contaminated objects like towels.
- **Symptoms:** The infection initially presents as inflammation of the eyelids, which can cause irritation, eye discharge, and swelling. Repeated infections lead to scarring of the inner eyelid, turning the eyelashes inward (trichiasis). This condition causes the eyelashes to rub against the cornea, leading to blindness if untreated.

Primary Affected Demographics



- **Vulnerable Groups:** Trachoma predominantly affects children and women. In communities where trachoma is common, children act as a reservoir for the infection, spreading it to adults. Women are often more susceptible due to close contact with infected children.
- **Environmental and Socioeconomic Factors:** The prevalence of trachoma is closely linked to limited access to clean water, poor sanitation, and inadequate hygiene practices. Regions with overcrowded living conditions and insufficient healthcare infrastructure are at higher risk.

Historical Background and Control Efforts in India and Worldwide

- **Global and Indian Initiatives:** The World Health Organization (WHO) has designated trachoma as a priority in its global health agenda, with the goal of eliminating it as a public health concern under the **SAFE strategy**:
 - **S:** Surgery to treat advanced disease
 - **A:** Antibiotics to treat and prevent infection
 - **F:** Facial cleanliness to reduce disease spread
 - **E:** Environmental improvement to provide access to clean water and sanitation
- India has actively participated in this strategy and has made significant progress in reducing trachoma prevalence, especially in areas such as Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Madhya Pradesh.
- **India's Success:** In 2017, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare declared India free from active trachoma, citing reduced prevalence in high-risk states. Efforts included antibiotic distribution, hygiene education, and increased access to sanitation. However, continued surveillance remains crucial to prevent resurgence.

Recent Data and Facts

- **Global Statistics:** According to WHO, trachoma remains endemic in 42 countries, affecting approximately 1.9 million people, primarily in Sub-Saharan Africa. Global efforts to eradicate trachoma have made strides, reducing the at-risk population by 91% since 2002.
- **Current WHO Targets:** WHO has set a target for the elimination of trachoma as a public health concern by 2030. The organization focuses on implementing the SAFE strategy in endemic regions and maintaining high standards of hygiene and sanitation as preventive measures.

Doli deaths

- "Doli deaths" refer to the tragic deaths of pregnant women in rural and tribal areas due to the lack of accessible medical facilities and infrastructure.
- These incidents primarily occur in remote regions where pregnant women face significant difficulties in reaching hospitals for safe deliveries or urgent care.
- The term "doli" (meaning "palanquin" in Hindi and Telugu) is used because, in the absence of roads and ambulances, women are often carried in makeshift stretchers or palanquins over long distances through rough terrain to reach the nearest medical facility.
- In many cases, these efforts fail due to the time taken and the lack of immediate medical care, resulting in fatalities for either the mother, the baby, or both.
- The Andhra Pradesh (A.P.) government, recognizing this issue, has pledged to end "doli deaths" by improving healthcare access in rural and tribal areas.



- This could involve building new roads, enhancing medical facilities, deploying mobile clinics, and providing emergency transport to prevent these tragic losses.

Polio, Measles, and Guinea Worm Infection

Polio

- Polio, or Poliomyelitis, is caused by the **Poliovirus**, a highly infectious virus belonging to the genus *Enterovirus* within the family *Picornaviridae*. It mainly affects children under five years of age, with potential symptoms like fever, fatigue, and muscle weakness, sometimes leading to irreversible paralysis.
- **Historical Background and Eradication Efforts in India:** India had a high burden of polio cases until the **Pulse Polio Immunization Programme** was launched in 1995, aiming to vaccinate children under five on designated National Immunization Days (NIDs). This mass immunization campaign, along with sustained oral polio vaccine (OPV) distribution, drastically reduced cases.
- **Current Status and Data:** In 2014, WHO declared India **polio-free**, with no reported cases since 2011. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) continues to conduct surveillance under the **Universal Immunization Programme (UIP)** to ensure India remains polio-free.
- **Recent Updates:** India is closely monitoring for any re-importation of the virus, especially given remaining cases in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan. The government continues routine immunizations and has strengthened border-area monitoring.

Measles

- **Overview:** Measles is caused by the **Measles virus**, a single-stranded RNA virus from the genus *Morbillivirus* within the family *Paramyxoviridae*. It spreads through respiratory droplets and is highly contagious, leading to symptoms like high fever, cough, runny nose, inflamed eyes, and a characteristic red rash.
- **Historical Background and Eradication Efforts:** The **Measles-Rubella (MR) Campaign** was launched in India in 2017 to eliminate both measles and rubella by 2023. This campaign under the **Universal Immunization Programme** aimed to vaccinate children between the ages of 9 months and 15 years.
- **Global and National Data:** India's measles vaccination efforts have led to a significant reduction in cases, although occasional outbreaks persist. The WHO and MoHFW report a vaccination coverage of around 95% as of 2023, targeting rural and underserved regions for higher coverage.

Guinea Worm Infection

- **Overview:** Guinea worm disease, or dracunculiasis, is caused by the parasitic worm **Dracunculus medinensis**. Humans become infected by drinking water contaminated





with water fleas carrying larvae of the Guinea worm. After a year of incubation, the worm emerges through painful skin blisters, often leading to incapacitation.

- **Historical Background and Eradication Efforts:** India reported a significant number of Guinea worm cases until the late 1980s, especially in regions like Rajasthan and Gujarat. Through initiatives by the **Carter Center** and WHO, along with the Indian government's efforts, India achieved **Guinea worm-free status** in 2000.
- **Current Status and Data:** Today, Guinea worm cases are confined to a few African countries. Thanks to global efforts, including water purification and public health education, the disease is close to eradication worldwide, with fewer than a dozen cases reported globally in 2023.



Move on madrasas, the alienation of Muslims

Essay Paper

As the Supreme Court of India has stayed the recommendations of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) to stop government funding to madrasas (which are not compliant with the Right to Education (RTE) Act, 2009 and to conduct an inspection of all madrasas) as well as subsequent actions taken by the Centre and various States, there is mild relief for the minorities and secular-minded people of the country. But the apprehension triggered by the move remains.

The NCPCR's initiative is apparently guided by the ideology propounded by *Bunch of Thoughts* by M.S. Golwalkar. That '*vicharadhara*' declares religious minorities as enemies of the nation. From the stance of the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) leader, A.K. Bajpai, against this move, it is evident that even constituents of the ruling National Democratic Alliance have realised the danger behind this initiative.

The Commissions for Protection of Child Rights (CPCR) Act, 2005 is one of the prominent progressive pieces of legislation in independent India. The directive issued by the NCPCR to State governments on October 11, 2024, was under this Act. In India, children are trafficked for sex work, beggary and even for trade of vital organs. Many of them denied the first letters of knowledge. There has been a mockery of the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986. But, unfortunately, none of these seems to concern the NCPCR. History shows that across the world, fascists have achieved their ulterior motives by a manipulation of rules and regulations.

The concept and history

The NCPCR further demands that children belonging to other religious groups should be thrown out of madrasas. It would be like "throwing the baby out with the bath water", as cited now by the Supreme Court. According to the NCPCR, it is proved that many children belonging to other religious groups are also going to the madrasas. Why did it happen? It is difficult for anybody familiar with the experiences of the real Kerala story, a State that succeeded in the universalisation of public education, to understand this scenario. Primary education is not accessible to all in this country before and even after the enactment of the RTE Act, 2009. That is why a system has emerged of imparting secular education along with religious



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A statutory commission such as the NCPCR should not be eroding pluralism in India; it needs to step back from its move

instructions and the government was compelled to provide financial assistance for the same in many States. The NCPCR has failed to understand this reality.

The training centres started by the ultra-terrorist Taliban in the late 1970s, under the patronage of the United States to overthrow the leftist government in Afghanistan, were later named as madrasas. It was deliberate propaganda which fits the present Islamophobic narrative put forward by the same U.S. and its imperial allies. However, the concept is inconsistent with the realities of Indian history and society. The Arabic word 'madrasa' means school and nothing else. And this name was used for long for both the religious and the secular schools till the introduction of the distinct system of colonial education by the British regime. In the absence of a free and universal education system, many non-Muslim children depended on madrasas. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, the father of the Indian Renaissance, Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, and the writer Munshi Premchand and many others absorbed the early rays of knowledge from madrasas and maulvis. This historical fact may be offensive to Hindutva communalists. The hatemongers of our time may not like to establish that India's history is not one of competition and confrontation but one of coexistence and tolerance. While it is hard to stand up and speak the truth in today's hateful discourse, it cannot be left unsaid.

The madrasa system prevailed since the days of the Delhi Sultanate and was patronised by slave, Khilji and Tughlaq dynasties. From the travelogues of Ibn Battuta, a Moroccan traveller, it is evident that Firoz Shah Tughlaq (1309-1388), the successor of the Muhammad-bin Tughlaq, instrumentalised this practice to educate women and slaves in the arts, science and handicrafts. Later, in various regions of India, and particularly in Kerala, Christian denominations widely established schools next to churches not only for the children of their own community but also for those who wanted to learn. It was not seen as a shame to get knowledge from anyone, even from those belonging to a different faith.

Social justice and not appeasement

Kerala has been a target of venomous attack in recent years, through fake and fabricated news, for the only fault of upholding solidarity and communal amity among all sections of the society despite attempts to promote hate and

mistrust from various corners. The issue related to the functioning of madrasas is no exception. What is the truth? As a State that has an exemplary system of primary education, Kerala does not need to run madrasas with financial assistance from the government. Dissemination of fake news that the Government of Kerala is spending a huge amount on madrasas is simply untrue. But the Madrasa Teachers' Welfare Fund, the financial source of pension and other benefits, is statutorily established akin to that of other categories of employees. It is based on the policy of social justice and not of religious appeasement.

Freedom of religion is constitutional. Article 25 guarantees every Indian citizen the freedom to profess, practise and propagate the religion of their choice. The government has the power to prevent anything illegal and detrimental to national security. Be it religious or secular schools, all should operate as in the guidance of the law. But the action of the NCPCR, fuelling the alienation of religious minorities, does show justice neither to the Child Rights Act nor to the country.

An aggressive majoritarianism

In a country such as ours, imparting secular values to upcoming generations is of paramount importance. The existence and the growth of India depend upon its unity in diversity. Religious leaders and people belonging to all faiths will understand the pluralistic content of this great nation. That can be inculcated by following the teachings of the great leaders of all streams irrespective of their religion. In this context, the words of Sree Narayana Guru are worth remembering: "*Sarvamatha Saravum Ekam (Essence of all religions is one and the same)*".

But, unfortunately, the NCPCR has shut its eyes tightly to the fact that from Kashmir to Kanniyakumari, the religious minorities are passing through days of insecurity. The vicious forces of aggressive majoritarianism frighten them with words and deeds of hatred. The move of the NCPCR can be approached only in this socio-political context. It will only rub salt into the wound of crores of Indians, whom the Bharatiya Janata Party treats as the 'others'. A statutory commission is not expected to sow the seeds of division in society and alienate the minority psyche. That is why the people of India, upholding constitutional values, urge the NCPCR to step back from its present move.

Move on madrasas, the alienation of Muslims (25 October)

- The Supreme Court of India has stayed the NCPCR's recommendations to stop government funding to non-compliant madrasas and to conduct inspections.





- There is mild relief among minorities and secular-minded individuals, but apprehension persists regarding the initiative.
- The NCPCR's actions are seen as influenced by the ideology in M.S. Golwalkar's "Bunch of Thoughts," which portrays religious minorities as enemies of the nation.
- A.K. Bajpai's opposition to the NCPCR's move reflects concern even among constituents of the ruling National Democratic Alliance.
- The CPCR Act, 2005 is a significant piece of progressive legislation in India.
- The NCPCR's directive on October 11, 2024, falls under this Act.
- Children in India are trafficked for sex work, begging, and organ trade, often denied basic education.
- There has been a disregard for the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986.
- Historical patterns show that fascists manipulate rules to achieve their goals.
- The NCPCR's demand to expel children of other religious groups from madrasas is criticized as "throwing the baby out with the bathwater."
- The NCPCR claims many children from different religious backgrounds attend madrasas due to lack of accessible primary education.
- The emergence of a system offering secular education alongside religious instruction is a response to this gap.
- The NCPCR has overlooked this reality in its approach.
- The term "madrasa" originated from Arabic, meaning school, and historically referred to both religious and secular institutions.
- The narrative around madrasas has been shaped by propaganda, particularly after the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan.
- Many non-Muslim children relied on madrasas due to the lack of a free, universal education system in India.
- Prominent figures in Indian history, such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Rajendra Prasad, received education in madrasas.
- India's history is characterized by coexistence and tolerance rather than competition and confrontation.
- Acknowledging this history is crucial despite the prevailing hateful discourse.
- The madrasa system has existed since the Delhi Sultanate, supported by the slave, Khilji, and Tughlaq dynasties.
- Ibn Battuta's travelogues indicate that Firoz Shah Tughlaq promoted education for women and slaves in various subjects.
- In India, especially Kerala, Christian denominations established schools for all children, regardless of their faith.
- Kerala has faced attacks due to its commitment to communal harmony and solidarity.
- Claims that the Kerala government spends heavily on madrasas are false; financial support is for the Madrasa Teachers' Welfare Fund, akin to other employees.



- This fund is based on social justice principles, not religious appeasement.
- Article 25 of the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion for all citizens.
- The government can intervene in illegal activities threatening national security; all schools must operate within the law.
- The NCPCR's actions alienate religious minorities and contradict the Child Rights Act.
- Imparting secular values is essential for India's unity in diversity.
- The teachings of various religious leaders can promote pluralism and understanding.
- The NCPCR overlooks the insecurity faced by religious minorities from Kashmir to Kanniyakumari due to aggressive majoritarianism.
- The NCPCR's move could exacerbate divisions and alienate minorities seen as “others” by the ruling party.
- Citizens urge the NCPCR to reconsider its actions to uphold constitutional values and prevent societal division.

Ibn Battuta: A Notable Traveler and Historian of the Medieval Islamic World

- **Basic Information:** Ibn Battuta was a renowned **14th-century** Moroccan traveler, geographer, and historian who embarked on one of the most extensive journeys of the medieval era.
- His travels spanned over 30 years, covering nearly 75,000 miles across Africa, Asia, and Europe. Battuta’s journey is a significant record of the socio-economic, political, and cultural landscapes of the 14th-century Islamic world.
- **Historical Background: Born in 1304 in Tangier, Morocco,** Ibn Battuta began his travels in 1325 with a pilgrimage to Mecca, which was the starting point for an expansive exploration that included North Africa, West Africa, the Middle East, Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.
- His works document the life and customs of diverse societies under the influence of Islam and other religions.
- **Influence and Works:** Ibn Battuta’s observations were recorded in his work, *Rihla (The Journey)*, which he composed upon the request of Sultan Abu Inan in Morocco. His detailed travelogue provides a first-hand account of various regions, including Delhi under the rule of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq.
- He served as a **Qadi (Islamic judge) in the Tughlaq court**, witnessing Indian political and social structures first-hand.

Ibn Battuta’s Travels and Key Observations

1. India and Southeast Asia:

- During his time in India, Ibn Battuta noted the complexities of the Indian caste system and the diverse religious practices. As a guest of Sultan Muhammad bin Tughlaq, Ibn Battuta observed the administrative systems, military organization, and judicial practices of the Delhi Sultanate.
- He traveled through South India and the Malabar Coast, documenting Indian



maritime trade, cultural practices, and the influence of Islamic traders in the Indian Ocean region.

2. **West Africa:**

- Ibn Battuta's observations in West Africa, particularly in the Mali Empire, are among the earliest records of the region. He documented the wealth of the Mali king and the religious life, noting practices such as respect for local customs while observing Islamic rituals.

3. **Central and Southeast Asia:**

- In regions like Persia and Southeast Asia, Ibn Battuta provided insights into the cultural syncretism between local practices and Islamic traditions, showcasing the adaptive nature of Islam as it spread across different cultural landscapes.

4. **China:**

- Ibn Battuta's accounts of China highlight his observations of the unique customs of the Yuan dynasty, including trade practices, the multicultural nature of Chinese society, and the coexistence of religions such as Islam, Buddhism, and Confucianism.

Significance and Legacy

- **Historical Contribution:** Ibn Battuta's writings provide invaluable insights into the medieval world, offering historians a unique glimpse into diverse regions from a non-European perspective. His detailed accounts are among the few remaining documents describing certain aspects of 14th-century cultures.
- **UNESCO and Commemorations:** Ibn Battuta's contributions have been recognized by UNESCO, which celebrates his travel narrative as part of the world's cultural heritage. His work supports understanding cross-cultural exchanges in the medieval Islamic world.
- **Recent Interest and Research:** In recent years, there has been a renewed scholarly interest in analyzing Ibn Battuta's accounts in light of modern historical interpretations, especially in countries he visited. Research institutes like the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR) and international universities focus on his travels to better understand pre-colonial societies.

Sree Narayana Guru:

- Sree Narayana Guru (1856–1928) was a revered social reformer, spiritual leader, and philosopher from Kerala.
- He is remembered for his teachings on equality, social justice, and religious tolerance, particularly for his vision of a society free from caste discrimination and religious barriers.
- His philosophy was encapsulated in the phrase "**Sarvamatha Saravum Ekam**"



(Essence of all religions is one and the same), highlighting his belief in the unity of all religions.

- Sree Narayana Guru was born in the village of **Chempazhanthy in Kerala** in a time marked by rigid caste systems and social stratification.
- The teachings of the Guru emerged in response to the societal inequality and discrimination faced by marginalized communities, especially in Kerala.
- His dedication to spiritual enlightenment and social reform led to the establishment of temples and institutions, including the **Aruvippuram Temple** in 1888, challenging traditional caste restrictions in religious spaces.

Key Teachings and Contributions

1. Philosophy of Religious Unity:

- The phrase "Sarvamatha Saravum Ekam" reflects Guru's belief that all religions ultimately share the same spiritual essence and purpose.
- This view sought to transcend religious boundaries and foster unity across diverse beliefs.
- Guru's philosophy promoted the idea that the core teachings of religions—compassion, peace, love, and kindness—are universally applicable and lead to the same ultimate truth.
- This message has resonated across religious, linguistic, and cultural boundaries in India.

2. Social Reforms:

- Sree Narayana Guru's efforts were instrumental in promoting **caste equality** and social justice. His open access to temples and religious institutions, such as the **Varkala Temple** in 1915, symbolized inclusivity for all castes.
- Guru founded the **Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP)** in 1903, which became an important socio-religious movement aimed at uplifting the marginalized communities through education, social awareness, and economic empowerment.

3. Educational Contributions:

- Guru strongly believed in the power of education as a means for social upliftment. He established schools and educational institutions to improve access to learning for marginalized communities, particularly the Ezhavas, the community to which he belonged.

4. Significant Works and Writings:

- Sree Narayana Guru's literary contributions, such as *Atmopadesa Satakam*, emphasized the importance of self-realization and inner spiritual growth. His philosophical writings continue to inspire socio-religious discourse.

Legacy and Recent Commemorations

- **National Recognition:** Sree Narayana Guru's teachings are celebrated across India, particularly in Kerala. His birth anniversary is observed as **Sree Narayana Guru Jayanti**, with various events commemorating his contributions.
- **Impact on Modern Social Movements:** His teachings continue to influence social





justice movements and discussions on religious inclusivity and caste equality in India. Educational initiatives by the **Sree Narayana Trust** carry forward his mission of uplifting marginalized communities.

- **Government Initiatives:** The Kerala government has supported the preservation of Guru's legacy through the establishment of memorials, public awareness campaigns, and educational programs inspired by his teachings. For instance, the **Sree Narayana Guru Open University** was established in 2020 in Kerala to expand educational opportunities.



The Gaza war and the Global South's 'interventions'

GS Paper II: ICJ and West Asia

The killing of Hamas chief **Yahya Sinwar** in Gaza at the hands of the Israeli military, on October 16, 2024, ended a critical aim for the Jewish state. Sinwar, who took over the reins of Hamas only some months ago after the assassination of then **chief Ismail Haniyeh** in Iran, in July 2024, was known to be a main architect of the October 7, 2023 terror attacks.

As Israel's core kinetic aims come to fruition, with the elimination of a plethora of leaders from Hamas and Hezbollah, the question of 'what next?' remains palpable. Civilian casualties in both Gaza, and now Lebanon, have mounted, and political space in both regions that are under siege continue to persist without a blueprint for any off-ramps. The United States, paralysed with its own domestic electoral requirements, has been unable to turn the keys towards a ceasefire. Others have increasingly looked towards alternatives, including India and China.

Countries and their moves

The proverbial Global South, so to speak, has arguably shown a fragmented approach to the crisis. South Africa, led by its own experiences of the apartheid era, took Israel to the **International Court of Justice (ICJ)** in December 2023, looking for the ICJ to issue a warrant against Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. While Israel has lost a lot of goodwill in these countries, the two biggest powers within this construct, China and India, have taken divergent positions which are anchored more around their individual national interest rather than trying to build a consensus within newer multilateral formats such as BRICS. This is despite calls for ceasefire and diplomacy-led resolution promoted by both these states.

This divergence between the two Asian powers, representing over a third of the global population, ultimately decides the rudders of what the 'Global South' is, despite the



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The proverbial Global South seems to be showing a fragmented approach to the crisis

non-monolith nature of this construct. Both India and China have clear diplomatic and political markers on the Palestine issue. **Beijing has put its eggs in the Arab basket, in tune with its own postures of supporting causes such as that of Palestinian sovereignty from a de-colonisation lens.** It was only in July 2024 that 14 **Palestinian factions**, including Hamas, travelled to China for a conference aimed at "ending divisions and strengthening Palestinian unity".

China's view and the Indian line

China, since October last year, has not condemned Hamas by name for planning and executing the attack against Israel. This, in part, was to keep its own mediation window open, something it had mobilised previously between **Iran and Saudi Arabia, which had created a lot of fanfare for China's increasing clout in the international order.** Those calculations were made redundant with the assassinations of Ismail Haniyeh and now Sinwar as follow-up conversations on said 'unity' remain far and few. To back the now hyphenated Arab-Iranian position, China undermined its relations with Israel, calculating that Israeli proximity to the U.S. is endearing and its capacities are better utilised elsewhere.

But **China still sees newer forums, such as BRICS, to incubate the narrative of the Global South in its own favour. This was reflected in the recent expansion of the group which India was not particularly keen on but had to go along with.** Interest to join BRICS has grown since, with even Palestine looking to apply as **Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas** attended this year's BRICS summit in Kazan, Russia.

The Indian position, on the other hand, has been consistent and balanced regarding its national interest and international obligations. Many analysts believe **Indian approach to the conflict has been skewed towards Israel, giving**

tacit yet critical support, and this is not an entirely incorrect view of things. Contrarian to China's approach, New Delhi also sees this from the view of countering terrorism. To put this in perspective, beyond their different domestic and regional realities, both states suffer from the designs of cross-border terrorism. To colour this argument further, the fact that Israel was forced to release Sinwar from prison in 2011 in exchange for a captured Israeli soldier is a parallel experience to India being forced to release Jaish-e-Muhammad's Masood Azhar during the hijacking of IC814 in 1999. India continues to push a return of countering terrorism as a core multilateral deliverable as the U.S.-pushed 'war on terror' draws down. Parallely, **India continues to support a two-state solution and recognised the Palestinian state in 1988.** Both these policies running concurrently, does create polarised impressions. However, both do co-exist as realities and do not undermine one from the other.

A perspective

Ultimately, the war in Gaza has shown that while the idea of **America's 'Pax Americana' design** is diminishing, and finding fewer takers within the U.S. itself, alternatives remain distant realities. The **India-China contestation by itself undermines any real unity within the Global South, while other disparities, such as democracies versus non-democracies, present more crevasses to navigate.** True mediation relies on political and military power to mobilise and exploit levers, and no power in the Global South, individually or collectively, has the correct tools in place to project such influence in West Asia today. Whatever little such projection is witnessed, is more about individual interests, rather than any collective aim to design, promote, and, most importantly, guarantee peace.

The Gaza war and the Global South's 'interventions' (25 October)

- The killing of Hamas chief Yahya Sinwar by Israeli military on October 16, 2024, achieved a significant goal for Israel.
- Sinwar had recently taken over leadership after Ismail Haniyeh was assassinated in July 2024 and was a key figure behind the October 7, 2023, attacks.
- With the elimination of many leaders from Hamas and Hezbollah, the pressing question of "what next?" arises.
- Civilian casualties in Gaza and Lebanon have increased, and there is a lack of political solutions for these besieged regions.



- The United States is unable to facilitate a ceasefire due to its domestic electoral challenges, leading others to seek alternatives, such as India and China.
- The Global South has exhibited a fragmented response to the crisis, with South Africa taking legal action against Israel at the International Court of Justice.
- Israel has lost goodwill in various countries, but China and India have adopted divergent positions based on their national interests rather than seeking multilateral consensus.
- This divergence shapes the identity of the Global South, which is not a monolithic entity.
- Both India and China have established distinct diplomatic stances on the Palestine issue.
- China supports Palestinian sovereignty from a de-colonization perspective and has engaged with Palestinian factions to promote unity.

China's view and the Indian line

- Since October last year, China has not condemned Hamas by name for its attacks on Israel to keep its mediation options open.
- China's mediation efforts between Iran and Saudi Arabia had previously boosted its international influence.
- The assassinations of Ismail Haniyeh and Yahya Sinwar have hindered follow-up conversations on Palestinian unity.
- To support the Arab-Iranian position, China has weakened its relations with Israel, believing that Israeli ties to the U.S. are secure and can be leveraged elsewhere.
- China views forums like BRICS as platforms to promote the Global South narrative to its advantage.
- The recent expansion of BRICS has been met with mixed reactions, with Palestine expressing interest in joining, highlighted by President Mahmoud Abbas's attendance at the summit.
- India maintains a consistent and balanced position that aligns with its national interests and international responsibilities.
- Analysts argue that India's stance on the conflict leans towards supporting Israel, viewing this as a response to counter-terrorism.
- Both India and China face challenges from cross-border terrorism, drawing parallels between their experiences with hostage negotiations.
- India emphasizes counter-terrorism in its multilateral engagements as the U.S. focus on the 'war on terror' wanes.
- India supports a two-state solution and recognized the Palestinian state in 1988, with both policies coexisting despite creating polarized perceptions.
- The conflict in Gaza illustrates the diminishing influence of America's 'Pax Americana' and the challenges in finding viable alternatives.
- The competition between India and China complicates unity within the Global South, and the divide between democracies and non-democracies adds further complexity.



- Effective mediation in West Asia requires political and military power, which no single power in the Global South currently possesses.
- Most existing influences are driven by individual interests rather than a collective commitment to peace and stability.

International Court of Justice (ICJ)

- **Introduction:** The **International Court of Justice (ICJ)**, also known as the **World Court**, is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN), headquartered in **The Hague, Netherlands**. It was established in **1945** following the adoption of the UN Charter and became operational in **April 1946**. The ICJ is responsible for settling legal disputes between states and providing advisory opinions on international legal questions referred to it by UN organs and specialized agencies.
- **Legal Framework and Structure:** The ICJ operates under its own statute, which is an integral part of the UN Charter. Its decisions are binding for the parties involved, but enforcement relies on the UN Security Council. The court consists of **15 judges**, elected for **nine-year terms** by the UN General Assembly and Security Council. Judges must represent the world's principal legal systems and are expected to act independently of their national governments.

Key Functions and Jurisdiction

1. **Dispute Resolution:**
 - The ICJ settles disputes submitted by states, which often involve issues related to **sovereignty, territorial boundaries, maritime boundaries, diplomatic relations, and human rights**. Only states may be parties to disputes before the ICJ.
2. **Advisory Opinions:**
 - The ICJ provides advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by the UN General Assembly, Security Council, or other UN agencies. Although non-binding, these opinions carry significant moral and political weight and contribute to the development of international law.
3. **Enforcement Mechanism:**
 - The enforcement of ICJ rulings depends on the **UN Security Council (UNSC)**. If a party fails to comply, the other party may bring the issue to the UNSC for action. However, enforcement can be complex due to the political dynamics of the UNSC, particularly the veto power held by its permanent members (the **P5**: the US, UK, France, Russia, and China).

Notable Cases Involving India

- **Kulbhushan Jadhav Case (India vs. Pakistan):** In **2017**, India brought the case of Kulbhushan Jadhav, an Indian national sentenced to death by a Pakistani military court on charges of espionage, to the ICJ. India argued that Pakistan had violated the **Vienna Convention on Consular Relations** by denying Jadhav access to Indian consular





services. In **July 2019**, the ICJ ruled in favor of India, ordering Pakistan to review Jadhav's conviction and provide consular access.

- **Portugal vs. India (Right of Passage Over Indian Territory):** This case (1955-1960) involved Portugal's right of passage to its enclaves in Goa. The ICJ upheld India's sovereignty, though it recognized Portugal's limited rights of passage for specific administrative purposes.

Recent Developments and Updates

- **ICJ and Climate Change:** In recent years, the ICJ has seen calls from the global community to take a stance on issues such as **climate change** and **environmental protection**. In 2023, the **UN General Assembly** adopted a resolution to seek the ICJ's advisory opinion on the obligations of states regarding climate change, marking a historic step in global climate governance.
- **Gender Representation:** The ICJ has made progress in terms of gender diversity on the bench. In 2021, **Judge Joan Donoghue** became the first female president of the ICJ. Gender representation in international legal bodies has been increasingly discussed, with the ICJ committed to promoting diversity within its judicial ranks.

Importance of ICJ in Modern International Relations

- The ICJ is a cornerstone of the international rule of law, facilitating peaceful dispute resolution and promoting accountability between states. Its advisory opinions contribute to the development of international norms on critical issues like **nuclear disarmament, territorial disputes, human rights, and environmental obligations**. However, its influence is limited by the lack of direct enforcement power, highlighting the complex balance between international law and state sovereignty.



GS Paper II: BRICS Grouping

Building blocks

The BRICS Summit showed that Russia was not without friends

Russia's hosting of the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan had several messages, watched closely by particularly the western countries. This was the biggest such conference in Russia since the Ukraine war began in 2022. With leaders of nine countries (and Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister) arriving as BRICS and BRICS partner countries, and about 30 leaders of the Global South attending a special BRICS outreach conference, Russian President Vladimir Putin dispelled any notion that Russia had been "isolated" due to Ukraine. The summit agenda and the Kazan Declaration sent a concerted message on strengthening economic bonds within the group that together represents a third of global GDP, in a signal that unilateral sanctions against members – Russia and Iran, for instance – are not acceptable to all. Among the agreements, the push for an interbank cooperation mechanism, a grain exchange, a cross-border payment system and insurance company, and growth of the BRICS New Development Bank, indicate the intent to seek alternatives to the prevailing international governance structures. The induction of members, Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE and Saudi Arabia, is another sign that the counter-balancing arrangement of emerging economies that BRICS was envisaged as, cannot be mocked. While many BRICS countries have strong ties with the U.S. and Europe, it is clear that they feel that the present institutions of global governance are skewed unfairly towards the "old guard" of the West.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's statement at the closed plenary sought to allay some concerns about this challenge, describing BRICS as an inclusive, "not a divisive organisation but one that works in the interest of humanity". Given that India is the only member of BRICS that is also a part of U.S.-led arrangements (the Quad and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework), this is a necessary balance. His oft-repeated phrases, that India supports "dialogue and diplomacy, not war", and that there are "no solutions on the battlefield", were a necessary reminder that all members do not completely align on geopolitics. It was significant in this context that India backed the strong paragraphs in the Declaration on Israel in Gaza and support for the state of Palestine. Apart from the substance of the summit, the BRICS grouping also affords its members a stage to discuss thorny bilateral issues, given differences between members, including Iran-UAE and Egypt-Ethiopia. The detentes between India and China over Doklam, and agreement on resolving the four-year LAC standoff, were both held in meetings between Mr. Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the side-lines of BRICS summits.

Building blocks (25 October)

The BRICS Summit showed that Russia was not without friends

- Russia hosted the 16th BRICS Summit in Kazan, a significant event since the start of the Ukraine war in 2022.
- The summit featured leaders from nine countries and Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister, along with about 30 leaders from the Global South at a special outreach conference.
- President Vladimir Putin aimed to dispel perceptions of Russia being "isolated" due to the Ukraine conflict.
- The summit agenda and Kazan Declaration emphasized strengthening economic ties within BRICS, which represents a third of global GDP.
- Agreements included an interbank cooperation mechanism, a grain exchange, a cross-border payment system, an insurance company, and growth of the BRICS New Development Bank.
- These initiatives reflect a desire to find alternatives to existing international governance structures.
- The induction of new members (Iran, Egypt, Ethiopia, UAE, Saudi Arabia) reinforces BRICS as a counter-balancing coalition of emerging economies.
- Despite some BRICS countries having strong ties with the U.S. and Europe, there is a shared sentiment that current global governance institutions favor the "old guard" of the West.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi characterized BRICS as an inclusive organization that works for the interests of humanity.
- India is unique within BRICS as a member also involved in U.S.-led arrangements (the Quad and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework).
- Modi emphasized support for "dialogue and diplomacy, not war," noting that not all members align on geopolitical issues.
- India backed strong statements in the Declaration regarding Israel in Gaza and support for the Palestinian state.





- The BRICS summit provided a platform for members to address bilateral issues, despite differences (e.g., Iran-UAE, Egypt-Ethiopia).
- Meetings between Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of BRICS summits helped ease tensions over issues like Doklam and the LAC standoff.

BRICS New Development Bank (NDB)

- The **New Development Bank (NDB)**, initially known as the **BRICS Development Bank**, was established in **2014** by the **BRICS** countries: **Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa**.
- The main purpose of the NDB is to mobilize resources for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in BRICS and other emerging economies.
- The **agreement to establish the NDB** was signed during the **6th BRICS Summit in Fortaleza, Brazil on July 15, 2014**.
- Headquartered in **Shanghai, China**, the NDB formally started operations in **2015** with a commitment to supporting sustainable development and infrastructure projects.

Structure and Key Concepts

1. **Capital and Membership:**
 - The NDB has an initial authorized capital of **\$100 billion**, with each founding BRICS country initially contributing **\$10 billion** in subscribed capital.
 - Membership is open to all United Nations members, though BRICS countries retain a minimum shareholding of **55%**.
2. **Governance:**
 - The NDB is governed by a **Board of Governors** and a **Board of Directors**. Decisions are made by a **consensus model**.
 - The bank's President is selected from one of the founding BRICS nations and serves a **five-year term** on a rotational basis. The first president was **K. V. Kamath from India (2015-2020)**.
3. **Focus Areas:**
 - The NDB focuses on funding projects in **infrastructure** and **sustainable development**. It supports sectors such as renewable energy, water resources, urban development, and connectivity.

Recent Updates and Developments

1. **Expansion of Membership:**
 - In recent years, the NDB has expanded its membership to include **Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bangladesh, and Uruguay**. These additions mark the NDB's shift toward becoming a more globally representative development bank.
2. **Loan Commitments and Approvals:**
 - As of **2023**, the NDB has approved loans totaling over **\$30 billion** for projects across its member countries, including **India's Mumbai Metro project** and **renewable energy projects in China and Brazil**.
3. **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):**





- The NDB aligns its projects with the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**, with a strong focus on **clean energy, climate action, and poverty reduction**.
- 4. **Local Currency Financing:**
 - To reduce reliance on the U.S. dollar and encourage regional cooperation, the NDB has also started financing projects in **local currencies**. This initiative aims to reduce currency risk and support financial stability among BRICS nations.
- 5. **India's Role and Projects:**
 - India has received substantial support from the NDB for projects like **infrastructure improvements, water management systems, and green energy projects**. The **Ministry of Finance, India**, coordinates these projects with the NDB to ensure alignment with India's developmental priorities.

Significance and Impact

- The NDB represents an **alternative** to Western-led financial institutions like the **World Bank** and the **IMF**, emphasizing **South-South cooperation** and **non-conditional financing**.
- Through its emphasis on sustainable projects and infrastructure, the NDB contributes to the **economic stability** and **development of emerging economies**. Its support for clean energy and sustainable development aligns with global climate goals and helps countries move toward low-carbon futures.

Sources: Down to Earth; New Development Bank official reports; IGNOU study material on international institutions.



Cost of Games

Taking out popular sports from the CWG is a short-term solution

As spiralling costs of organising multi-sport events and the lack of appeal for a Games with a colonial hangover have forced Glasgow 2026 to be a much scaled-down affair, the immediate impact was felt by India - the most populous country in the Commonwealth Games family. It has consistently earned top-five finishes in the new millennium, including its best-ever showing of a second place, with 101 medals, when Delhi played host in 2010. As the organisers have decided to limit the Games to 10 integrated disciplines (including para-sports) to be held at four venues, Indians are disappointed to note that some of the country's medal-producing disciplines - including wrestling, badminton, table tennis, hockey, squash and cricket - have been dropped. Even after excluding shooting, which contributed the most to India's overall tally in the Games, the nation was fourth with 61 medals in Birmingham 2022, and 30 came from these six disciplines. India's medal prospects in 2026 will be practically restricted to athletics and para-athletics, weightlifting and para-powerlifting, boxing, judo, bowls and para-bowls. Shooting and wrestling, which have featured in most of the editions barring a few, have not only enriched the Indian medal kitty but have also produced glorious moments for the Games.

Top medal-getting shooters Jaspal Rana (15), Samaresh Jung (14), and triple gold-winning wrestlers Sushil Kumar and Vinesh Phogat have etched their names among the all-time greats. Athletes such as Abhinav Bindra, Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, and Yogeshwar Dutt have experienced Olympic fame after shining at the Commonwealth Games. The Indian women's hockey team's gold medal-winning moment in Manchester in 2002 and wrestler Geeta Phogat's historic gold in Delhi in 2010 inspired blockbuster movies *Chak De! India* and *Dangal*, respectively. In table tennis, India has consistently been placed among the top countries, and many still remember Manika Batra's superb showing of four medals in 2018. Hockey remains an all-time favourite for the Indians while the country's silver medal in women's cricket's debut in Birmingham is still fresh in fans' minds. Shuttlers Saina Nehwal and P.V. Sindhu and squash players Saurav Ghosal and Dipika Pallikal have ensured that their sports contributed medals regularly. While the organisers' compulsion was understandable after Victoria's pull-out last year, it would have been prudent to include a couple of disciplines with a significant global appeal as those could have ensured a better future for the Games, which began as the British Empire Games in 1930, and now is closer to the centenary mark. Sadly, the cost burden has impacted the staging of what appears to be a dying 'spectacle'.

Cost of Games (25 October)

Taking out popular sports from the CWG is a short-term solution

- The rising costs of organizing multi-sport events and a lack of appeal for Games with a colonial legacy have led to a scaled-down Glasgow 2026.
- India, as the most populous country in the Commonwealth Games family, is significantly impacted by these changes.
- India has consistently finished in the top five since 2000, with its best performance being second place with 101 medals in Delhi 2010.
- The Glasgow 2026 organizers have limited the Games to 10 integrated disciplines (including para-sports) at four venues.
- Many of India's medal-producing sports—such as wrestling, badminton, table tennis, hockey, squash, and cricket—have been dropped.
- In Birmingham 2022, India won 61 medals, 30 of which came from the excluded six disciplines, even without shooting.
- India's medal prospects for 2026 are now mainly in athletics, para-athletics, weightlifting, boxing, judo, and bowls.
- Shooting and wrestling, historically significant for India, have produced memorable achievements and moments at the Games.
- Notable Indian shooters and wrestlers include Jaspal Rana, Samaresh Jung, Sushil Kumar, and Vinesh Phogat.
- Athletes like Abhinav Bindra, Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, and Yogeshwar Dutt gained Olympic fame after success at the Commonwealth Games.
- Iconic moments include the Indian women's hockey team's gold in 2002 and Geeta Phogat's historic gold in 2010, inspiring films like *Chak De! India* and *Dangal*.
- India has consistently excelled in table tennis, with Manika Batra's four medals in 2018 being a highlight.



- Hockey remains a favorite sport, and India's silver medal in women's cricket in Birmingham is still memorable.
- Shuttlers Saina Nehwal and P.V. Sindhu, along with squash players Saurav Ghosal and Dipika Pallikal, have contributed significantly to India's medal tally.
- The organizers' decision to limit disciplines was influenced by Victoria's withdrawal last year.
- It would have been wiser to include a few globally appealing disciplines to secure a better future for the Games.
- The Commonwealth Games, which began as the British Empire Games in 1930, are approaching their centenary but face challenges due to rising costs.

Should chess be an Olympic sport?

PARLEY

India won a historic double gold at the 2024 Chess Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary, by clinching the top spot in both the open event and women's team competitions. These victories will forever remain among India's greatest achievements in sport. Chess enjoys huge popularity across the world. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) considers chess as a sport and recognises the International Chess Federation or World Chess Federation (FIDE) as an official federation. Yet, chess is not yet an Olympic sport. Should chess be an Olympic sport? Viswanathan Anand and Pravin Thipsay discuss the question in a conversation moderated by P.K. Ajith Kumar. Edited excerpts:

Do you think chess should be considered an Olympic sport?

Viswanathan Anand: Back in 2000, chess was played as an exhibition sport at the Sydney Olympics. I played a match with Alexei Shirov. We played very combative chess in that match. It was nice for us to visit the Sydney Olympics and see how it was organised. We hoped at that time that it would be a first step to the Olympic Games. I think getting into the Olympic Games is desirable for chess.

Pravin Thipsay: Chess has every reason to be an Olympic sport. There was a lot of interest generated (in chess) by the Indian contingent which participated at the Sydney Olympics. They were curious to see a chess match being played. That sort of interest among athletes who were there to play other sports showed that they considered chess as an equal sport and felt that this game could be a part of the Olympics as well. It deserves to be a part of the Games.

Chess is played by about 200 countries. The sport is run very systematically; FIDE regularly conducts the world, continental, and regional championships. There are events for various age groups, from children to veterans. Competitions are even held for inmates of jails. Chess is also played as a hobby by many people, like badminton. So I feel there is a strong case for chess to be included in the Olympics.

How realistic are the chances of chess becoming an Olympic sport?

VA: I don't have a number for you, but we are in close contact with the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Chess is already part of the Olympic Esports, which is also an Olympic discipline or an Olympic event. (Esports is a global virtual and simulated sports competition



Indian chess players pose with their medals after winning the gold in the women's section and the men's open event at the 45th FIDE Chess Olympiad 2024, in Budapest. ANI

created by the IOC, and in collaboration with International Federations and game publishers.) Maybe that is the pathway for chess to become an Olympic sport.

PT: I think chess has to be presented in a different way than it has been so far. I was part of the Indian team at the 1994 Chess Olympiad. I had talked to the then IOC president, Juan Antonio Samaranch, who was there for four or five days, about the possible inclusion of chess in the Olympic Games. The quiet atmosphere when the game is being played and the slow nature of the game might have led to some of his observations about chess. He said that he did not see chess being a part of the Olympic movement during his tenure. That was, of course, 30 years ago. Chess has changed a lot since. Now the game has become faster and we have more rapid and blitz formats, which do not take much time. And unlike earlier times, we also have people paying and watching chess tournaments. I was the head of the Indian delegation at the Chennai Chess Olympiad two years ago, and there were days when about 10,000 people would turn up to watch the Olympiad at Mamallapuram. If we project the game in the right way, there is a really good chance of making it (to the Olympic Games).

How can chess gain by becoming an Olympic discipline?

VA: Here is the thing. We are already part of the Olympic movement, but chess is not an Olympic sport. If it does become an Olympic sport, it would facilitate interactions between the federation and the government and the sports ministries in many countries across the world. Chess would also benefit from the worldwide



Any sport that drags on for an unlimited time does not really attract a crowd. So, I think we should have quicker time control.

PRAVIN THIPSAI

attention given to the Olympic Games.

PT: The Summer Olympics particularly draws the attention of almost every sports lover in the world. Even those who are not sports fans follow it because it is a matter of pride for the country. I have been in touch with some developing countries' federations and they say that the government doesn't support them enough because they are not a part of the Olympics.

Can the Olympics and the Chess Olympiad coexist?

VA: I don't see why they cannot. Many sports continue with their traditions as long as they do it on their own. Of course, the scheduling may be an issue, so Chess Olympiads may not happen during the years when the Olympic Games are held. Some compromise like that will have to be found. The Chess Olympiad is an event that sees participation from so many countries and this great tradition goes back 100 years. It is an event where many teams, whether they are composed of fully professionals or many amateurs, all compete together. It is traditional and special for chess. So, ideally, I would like to see it continue.

PT: I think the Chess Olympiad should continue for two reasons. Even if you have a team championship at the Olympic Games, it will still not include so many countries. It may be restricted to 12 or 16 countries, so it will not have this kind of an environment or promotional effect. As for the Olympiad, of course the name of the tournament may be a problem and FIDE could change the name of the Chess Olympiad into something else, like World Team Championship, and do away with the existing World Team Championship. The Olympiad must continue, perhaps under a different name.

It has been said that chess has a better chance of making it to the Winter Olympics rather than the Summer Games. Is such a scenario appealing, especially from an Indian point of view?

VA: I don't see a big disadvantage in chess being at the Winter Olympic Games. For me, the price of being in the Olympic Games is so big that I

think the rest should be flexible.

PT: I believe that chess should be a part of the Summer Olympics, which has better viewership. So, if we get an option, being included in the Summer Games would be better than the Winter Games. Of course, some may argue that there is an optimal temperature for intellectual activity, that is, the lower the temperature, the better for the brain. The brain is more active then. But since players play in an air-conditioned environment anyway, it doesn't really matter. I think the Summer Olympics would be the best option for chess.

Why has chess not appealed to the IOC so far? What could be done to make chess more appealing?

VA: It may not be about chess at all. It may be a decision taken by the IOC and how big their games are and how many sports they should have. By the same logic, I wouldn't say that the IOC objected to cricket before.

PT: It was 30 years ago, but Samaranch said chess did not appeal to him as a sport. He said chess looked more like an intellectual activity. So, as a solution for that, I was wondering what could be done. After the two seasons of the Global Chess League (a joint venture by FIDE and Tech Mahindra), I think that is perhaps a great way of making it a community sport, a spectator sport. It could probably appear like a sport to the IOC.

One of the good things in the Global Chess League is the specific time control. Any sport that drags on for an unlimited time does not really attract a crowd. So, I think we should have quicker time control, which is fixed, and no incremental time given.

Japan has its own chess format (Shogi). Spectators are allowed to shout and cheer the players and even suggest moves during the game. I think we can go for that sort of version of chess. I am sure that the top players are really strong and very rarely would they benefit from spectators' help. It would be nice if they are able to adjust to the noise from the crowd. They could make it a quicker game where there are fewer chances of cheating. We have to make chess look more like a sport in order to get into the Olympics. So somewhere, the players will have to adjust.



To listen to the full interview
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www.thehindu.com



Should chess be an Olympic sport? (25 October)

- **Historic Achievement:** India wins **double gold at the 2024 Chess Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary (open and women's teams).**
- **Global Popularity:** Chess recognized by the IOC as a sport and FIDE as the official federation, yet not an Olympic sport.
- **Anand's Experience:**
 - Chess was played as an exhibition sport in the **2000 Sydney Olympics**, where he competed against Alexei Shirov.
 - Anand hopes this experience could lead to Olympic inclusion for chess.
- **Thipsay's Argument:**
 - Chess meets all criteria for Olympic inclusion, and FIDE conducts world championships for all ages.
 - Sydney Olympics showed interest among other athletes, who viewed chess as an equal sport.
- **IOC Connection:**
 - Anand notes that chess is part of Olympic Esports, which could be a pathway to full Olympic inclusion.
- **Appealing to the IOC:**
 - Thipsay recalls IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch in 1994, who viewed chess as more of an intellectual activity than a sport.
 - Recent changes, including quicker formats and high spectator turnout, could make chess more appealing to the IOC.
- **Coexistence with Chess Olympiad:**
 - Anand sees value in retaining the Chess Olympiad's legacy, possibly adjusting its schedule if chess joins the Olympics.
 - Thipsay suggests renaming the Chess Olympiad to "World Team Championship" if needed.
- **Winter or Summer Olympics:**
 - Anand supports Olympic inclusion for chess regardless of season.
 - Thipsay favors the Summer Olympics for better global viewership.

