DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (21 JULY 2024)

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Boy infected with Nipah critical; health protocol put into place in Kerala (21 July)

The 15-year-old is on ventilator support at Kozhikode hospital; Health Minister Veena George rushes to Malappuram to oversee measures to counter spread of the virus; 3 persons quarantined

- A Nipah virus case has been confirmed in Malappuram district, Kerala.
- A 15-year-old boy from Chembrassery is in critical condition and on a ventilator at Kozhikode Government Medical College Hospital.
- The hospital has set up an isolation block with ten beds and staff equipped with personal protection gear.
- Fourteen committees are handling surveillance, treatment, and other tasks related to the outbreak.
- Kerala Health Minister Veena George visited Malappuram to manage the response.
- The National Institute of Virology and State labs confirmed the presence of Nipah virus.
- The Health Department has implemented the Nipah protocol and formed 25 committees to prevent further spread.
- Three people who had close contact with the boy, including his father, are under quarantine.

Feverish symptoms

- The boy began showing feverish symptoms on July 10, sought treatment on July 12, and was admitted to various hospitals, finally being transferred to Kozhikode.
- A 24x7 control room has been set up by the Health Department.
- Monoclonal antibody for Nipah treatment is being transported from Pune and is expected in Kozhikode soon.
- Masks and PPE are being sent to medical colleges in Kozhikode and Malappuram.
- Health Minister Veena George assured that the situation is under control but urged people to be cautious.
- Health officials advised wearing masks due to the Nipah scare and launched a safety drive in Malappuram.
- Kerala's first Nipah case was reported in May 2018; the last case occurred in September 2023.

ED makes third arrest in REET paper leak case (21 July)

- The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has arrested Raju Ram Iram in connection with the 2021 REET question paper leak case.
- Iram allegedly distributed the leaked paper to candidates with the help of his accomplices.

- He was produced in the PMLA Special Court and remanded to ED custody for three days.
- This is the third arrest in the money laundering probe related to the REET paper leak.
- Previously, retired assistant professor Pradeep Parashar and his assistant Ram Kripal Meena were arrested.
- The REET paper leak involved over 16 lakh candidates and led to the cancellation of the exam.
- The Special Operations Group of Rajasthan Police found the paper was leaked from the Education Department's building in Jaipur.
- The ED's investigation, based on FIRs and chargesheets, included search operations at 32 premises, resulting in incriminating documents and cash seizures.

Nipah virus

It is a zoonotic paramyxovirus that causes a serious disease in animals and humans. The virus is named after Nipah village in Malaysia, where it was first identified in 1998. Nipah virus infection is a newly emerging zoonosis that can cause severe disease and death.
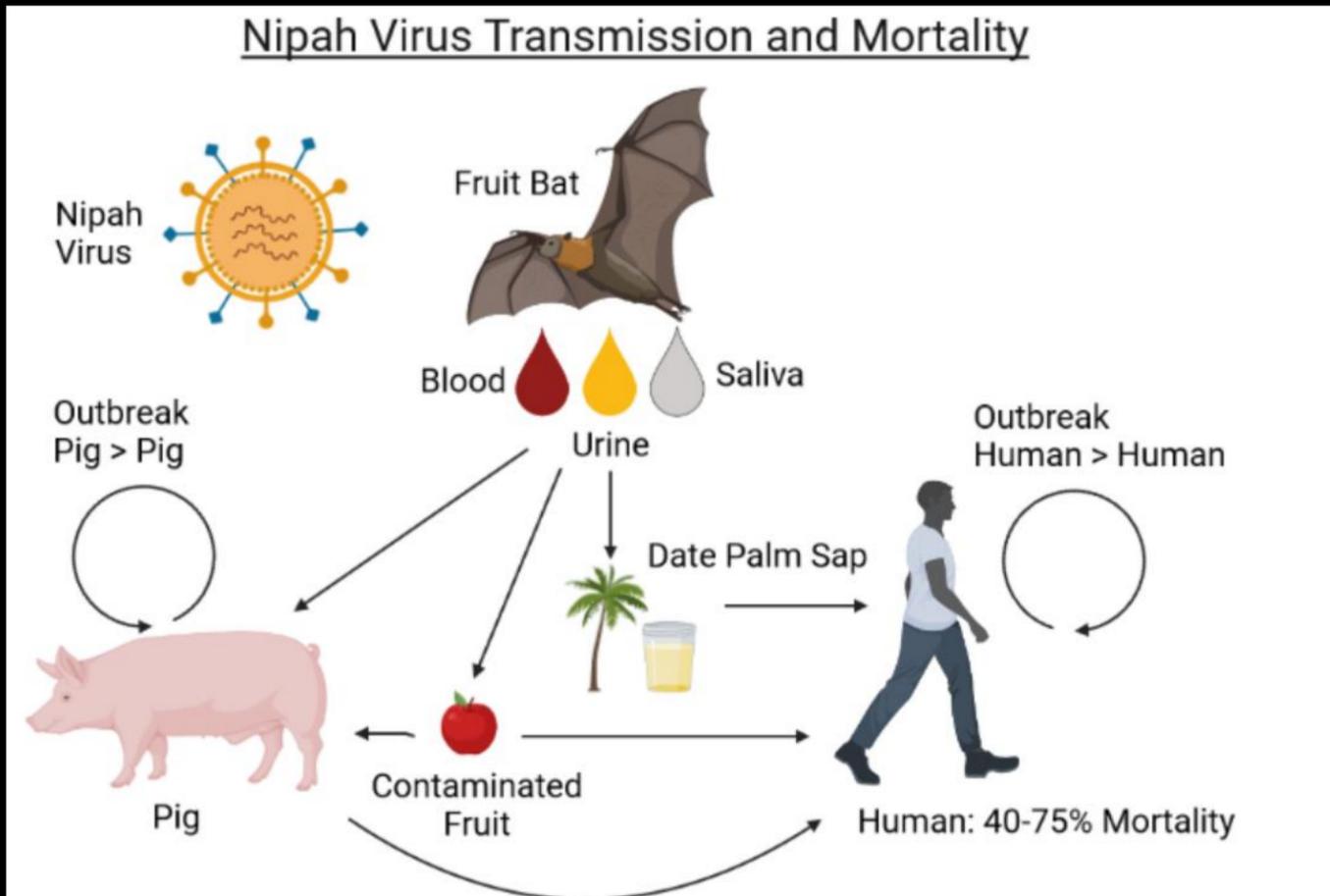
Symptoms of Nipah Virus Infection

The symptoms of Nipah virus infection can vary depending on the stage of the infection. In the early stages, symptoms may include:

- Fever
- Headache
- Muscle aches
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Dizziness
- Cough

As the infection progresses, more serious symptoms can develop, including:

- Encephalitis (inflammation of the brain)
- Meningitis (inflammation of the membranes around the brain and spinal cord)
- Coma
- Seizures
- Death

Transmission of Nipah Virus

Nipah virus is transmitted from animals to humans through contact with infected animals or their bodily fluids. The virus can also be transmitted from person to person through close contact with an infected person's secretions, such as saliva or respiratory secretions.

Treatment of Nipah Virus Infection

There is no specific treatment for Nipah virus infection. Supportive care is the mainstay of treatment, which may include:

- Fluids and electrolytes to prevent dehydration
- Medication to manage symptoms, such as pain relievers and anti-seizure medications
- Respiratory support if needed

Prevention of Nipah Virus Infection

There is no vaccine available to prevent Nipah virus infection. The best way to prevent infection is to avoid contact with infected animals and their bodily fluids. This includes:

- Avoiding travel to areas where Nipah virus outbreaks are occurring
- Avoiding contact with bats and pigs
- Washing hands frequently with soap and water
- Cooking meat and meat products thoroughly

- Avoiding consuming raw date palm sap

Opposition leaders slam order for eateries to display name plates on Kanwar Yatra rout (21 July)

- Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments directed eateries along the Kanwar Yatra route to display their owners' names.
- Former Congress leader Kapil Sibal criticized this directive, suggesting it is a distraction from more important national issues and could harm traders.
- Mehbooba Mufti, president of the People's Democratic Party, argued that the directive violates constitutional guarantees of equal rights and criticized the BJP for undermining the Constitution.
- The CPI(M) called the order unconstitutional and aimed at communal polarization.
- Union Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi of Hindustani Awam Morcha defended the order, stating it helps buyers locate businesses more easily.
- The directive has faced criticism from BJP allies, including Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U) and Union Minister Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas).

DoPT denies service allocation to scientist with muscular dystrophy who cleared UPSC exam (21 July)

- Kartik Kansal, a 28-year-old scientist with muscular dystrophy, has moved the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) after the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) declined to allocate any service to him.
- Kansal has cracked the Civil Services Examination (CSE) four times.
- DoPT claims Kansal does not meet the physical standards required for the service.
- Kansal works for ISRO, uses a wheelchair since age 12, and is a graduate of IIT Roorkee.
- Kansal's case contrasts with IAS officer Puja Khedkar, who is accused of forging documents and misusing the PwBD quota.
- Khedkar continued her job despite a CAT ruling against her and secured entry into the IAS by changing her disability criteria.
- In CSE-2021, Kansal secured a rank of 271 but was denied service despite being eligible for the Indian Revenue Service (Income Tax).
- The Medical Board at AIIMS certified Kansal with 90% muscular dystrophy, but DoPT claimed he had cerebral palsy and did not meet physical eligibility.
- Retired IAS officer Sanjeev Gupta, supporting Kansal's case, argues the DoPT erred in reading the documents.
- Kansal also cracked the examinations in 2019, 2022, and 2023.
- The CAT is expected to hear Kansal's petition in August.

Left has critical role in creating a Second Republic of India (21 July)

- Yogendra Yadav, political activist and psephologist, spoke in Kozhikode about the Left's role in creating a 'Second Republic of India'.
- He suggested that the Republic of India established in 1950 ended in 2019, leaving citizens in "no man's land".
- Yadav noted that the 2024 election did not create a Second Republic but prevented a worst-case scenario.
- He emphasized the importance of shaping India for the next few decades and the critical role the Left can play in this process.
- He argued that the Left should oppose the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh's political ideology, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's personality, and the BJP's politics.
- He advocated for a politics of radical democratic republicanism, which focuses on creating a community of equal citizens.
- Yadav stated that those who do not believe in democratic means cannot be part of the modern understanding of what is Left and radical.

Two different income tests to decide creamy layer among OBC candidates

Abhinay Lakshman
NEW DELHI

A series of contradictory positions taken over the past few years has obscured how the Union government determines which candidates from Other Backward Class (OBC) communities can be allowed to claim reservations for jobs in civil services.

When the OBC quota was introduced in 1993, a guiding charter was created to exclude candidates whose families had accumulated certain social and economic privileges over the years, known as the creamy layer. This will then allow reservation benefits only for those declared as "non-creamy layer", or NCL, candidates, based on several criteria, including a crucial income or wealth test.

Now, it has emerged that the Department of Personnel and Training has been applying two different income tests to different categories of OBC candidates.

The tangle of regulations governing the OBC quota has come into the spotlight with the current row over Puja Khedkar whose OBC-NCL certificate has come under scrutiny. Given that she is a medical doctor and her father is a retired civil servant who contested the recent Lok Sabha election, filing a candidate affidavit which valued his assets at over ₹40 crore, questions have arisen about how she could be given "non-creamy layer" status.

In the wake of this case, several OBC candidates have taken to social media to highlight how they were denied reservation benefits because of irregularities in the application of the income test.

The DoPT's 1993 charter had declared some OBC families ineligible based on their occupations. Thus, children of people in constitutional posts, senior Central and State government employees, members of the armed forces, and property owners supposedly could not get the

Several OBC candidates have highlighted how they were denied reservation benefits.

OBC quota for civil services. Exceptions were carved out of these exclusions: for instance, children of MPs and MLAs; government officials who have been promoted, not hired, into senior positions; owners of unirrigated agricultural land, and others are all now eligible for OBC quotas, subject to a parental annual income limit of ₹8 lakh or the prescribed wealth test.

However, the DoPT has discriminated in terms of how this income test is applied. Only the exempted cases mentioned above are allowed to exclude their parents' salaries and agricultural income from the

prescribed limit. For other OBC candidates whose parents are salaried professionals, business owners, farmers, or simply not part of the initial exclusions, the ₹8 lakh limit includes parental salaries. The DoPT explained these dual standards in an October 2020 affidavit filed in the Supreme Court.

This seems to contradict what the Social Justice Ministry told Parliament in December 2019 that there is only one income test for OBC candidates, which excludes income from salaries and agriculture. In December 2021, the government told the Supreme Court that the OBC income test excluded such income for all candidates while arguing that the income test for the economically weaker section quota was more stringent.

The court is yet to decide whether the DoPT's explanation on excluding parents' salaries and agricultural income applies to the income test for categories of OBCs. The next hearing is on August 22.

Two different income tests to decide creamy layer among OBC candidates (21 July)

- The Union government has unclear criteria for determining OBC candidates eligible for reservations in civil services.
- OBC quota introduced in 1993 excludes candidates with certain social and economic privileges, known as the creamy layer.
- Benefits are for "non-creamy layer" (NCL) candidates based on criteria including an income/wealth test.
- Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) applies two different income tests to different OBC categories.
- The issue came to light with the case of Puja Khedkar, whose OBC-NCL certificate is under scrutiny.
- Khedkar's eligibility is questioned due to her family's significant wealth and her father's political involvement.
- Many OBC candidates on social media reported being denied reservation benefits due to irregularities in income test application.
- The 1993 charter excluded OBC families based on occupations but made exceptions for MPs, MLAs, promoted officials, and others, subject to an annual income limit of ₹8 lakh or a wealth test.
- The DoPT applies the income test for OBC reservations differently based on exemptions.
- Exempted cases can exclude parents' salaries and agricultural income from the ₹8 lakh limit.
- Non-exempt OBC candidates must include parental salaries in the limit.
- The DoPT explained these dual standards in an October 2020 affidavit to the Supreme Court.
- This contradicts the Social Justice Ministry's 2019 statement that there is one income test excluding salaries and agriculture.
- In December 2021, the government argued to the Supreme Court that the income test excluded such income for all OBC candidates.
- The court will decide on the DoPT's explanation regarding the income test for OBCs on August 22.

Opposition attacks govt. over UPSC chairperson's resignation (21 July)

- UPSC chairperson Manoj Soni resigned five years before his tenure was to end in 2029.
- The resignation was reportedly for "personal reasons" and happened a month ago.
- The resignation comes amid controversy surrounding trainee IAS officer Puja Khedkar.
- Opposition parties questioned the government's silence on the issue.
- Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge accused the BJP and RSS of taking over constitutional bodies, damaging their reputation and autonomy.
- Kharge highlighted cases of unqualified individuals faking caste and medical certificates.
- He emphasized this issue affects genuine aspirants, including SC, ST, OBC, and EWS candidates.

- Kharge questioned why Soni's resignation was kept secret and if there was any connection to the scandals.
- He mentioned Soni was promoted from Gujarat and termed as the 'blue-eyed-gem' of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Centre rejects study that claims 11.9 lakh excess deaths during pandemic (21 July)

The report, published in the academic journal Science Advances, is 'gross and misleading'; the study fails to acknowledge India's robust Civil Registration System, says Union Health Ministry

- The Union Health Ministry dismissed a study from Science Advances claiming a high number of deaths in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic in India.
- The Ministry called the study's estimate of 11.9 lakh excess deaths in 2020 "grossly misleading" and said it was based on flawed methodology.
- The Ministry explained that excess mortality includes deaths from all causes, not just those directly caused by COVID-19.
- The study reported higher excess mortality in women and younger age groups, which the Ministry disputed, citing data showing higher mortality in men and older age groups.
- The Ministry criticized the study's methodology, particularly its use of a subset of NFHS-5 data from early 2021 and extrapolation to the entire country.
- The Ministry asserted that the actual all-cause excess mortality in 2020 was much lower than reported in the study.
- The Union Health Ministry criticized the Science Advances study for using an unrepresentative sample of 23% of households from 14 states, rather than a nationwide sample.
- The Ministry refuted the study's claim that India's vital registration system is weak, stating that the Civil Registration System (CRS) is highly robust and captures over 99% of deaths.
- Data from the CRS showed a 4.74 lakh increase in death registrations in 2020 compared to 2019, similar to previous yearly increases.
- The Ministry noted that not all excess deaths are due to the pandemic; some are due to improved death registration and population growth.

CPCB plans to check violations in plastic waste trading regime (21 July)

- The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) has launched a national audit of about 800 plastic-waste recyclers after discovering that four firms in Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Gujarat issued nearly 600,000 fake certificates under the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) programme.
- The EPR scheme requires businesses to recycle a certain percentage of plastic used in packaging over the previous two years.
- CPCB has also filed a complaint with the Delhi Police about stolen EPR credits from its online portal, leading to an ongoing investigation.
- An official from CPCB explained that the issue of fake certificates was due to early challenges with the new scheme and lack of clarity among recyclers.
- The CPCB is closely monitoring EPR filings and will impose heavy fines on companies involved in fraudulent activities.
- The investigation, which began in October, is also focusing on enhancing the security features of the EPR-trading platform.

The Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) is a statutory organization under the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). It was established in 1974 under the Water (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1974.

Muslims back in Purola, with wounds of a hounding over a kidnap that never happened (21 July)

- Muslim residents who had fled Purola, Uttarkashi due to communal tensions last year have returned, but they feel deeply affected by the events.
- The tensions started after two men, Ubaid Khan and Jitendra Saini, were arrested on allegations of abducting a minor Hindu girl. They were later acquitted when the girl testified she was not abducted.
- Right-wing groups had accused the men of "Love Jihad" and put up posters demanding that Muslims leave Purola.
- Some residents sold their properties and moved out permanently. Sonu Khan sold his house due to fear and faced reduced business at his garment shop.
- Sahil Khan moved to Vikas Nagar and is haunted by the anti-Muslim rally organized by his Hindu friends.
- Ubaid Khan's family had to sell their furniture shop in Purola at a loss and are now trying to set up a new business in Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh.
- Jitendra Saini has also moved to Bijnor.

All things huge: jumbos, feast and the crowd

The annual feeding of some 60 elephants organised by Sree Vadakkumnathan Temple in Thrissur of Kerala drew a massive crowd as usual

GS Paper I: Art and Culture

A nts, *Aanayoottu* in Malayalam, is a ritual meant to propitiate Lord Ganesha, who, according to Hindu belief, removes obstacles in one's life. Sree Vadakkumnathan Temple in Thrissur district of Kerala holds a mega *Aanayoottu* on the first day of the Malayalam month of *Karkkidakam* (mid-July to mid-August) every year, drawing a huge crowd of elephants and elephant lovers.

As many as 60 elephants from across the State participated in this year's feast held on July 16.

The event resembled a miniature Thrissur Pooram; the only difference was that the elephants lined up without any accoutrements.

The temple premises was packed to capacity. The heavy rain did not deter the audience. Perching on the shoulders of their parents, children were trying to get a glimpse of the elephants. People also had the chance to feed the elephants. The elephants were allowed for the ceremony after fitness tests by veterinary doctors and officials of the Forest Department. Elephants in *musth* and those with a history of unruly behaviour were banned.

The eating marathon was kicked off after rituals. In no time, the elephants polished off 500 kg of rice, laced with ghee, jaggery and turmeric. They were also given fruit, sugar cane and specially prepared Ayurvedic medicine.

The jumbo feast at the temple started in 1982. The first time was for the elephants who participated in the parade during the opening ceremony of the Asian Games held in New Delhi that year, to help them regain their health after the long journey to the national capital and back and the parade duties. As many as 34 elephants were taken from various parts of Kerala to New Delhi on a train. The long journey made many of them sick and weak. The temple fed them nutritious food to nurse them back to health, a practice that has now become a tradition.

(Text: Mini Muringatheri)

All things huge: jumbos, feast and the crowd (21 July)

The annual feeding of some 60 elephants organised by Sree Vadakkumnathan Temple in Thrissur of Kerala drew a massive crowd asusual

- Aanayoottu is a ritual in Kerala to honor Lord Ganesha, believed to remove obstacles.
- It takes place at Sree Vadakkumnathan Temple in Thrissur on the first day of Karkkidakam (mid-July to mid-August).
- This year's feast on July 16 had 60 elephants participating, drawing a large crowd despite heavy rain.
- The event, similar to Thrissur Pooram but without decorations, involved elephants lining up for a feast.
- Children and visitors fed the elephants, who had passed fitness tests by veterinarians and Forest Department officials.
- Elephants were served 500 kg of rice with ghee, jaggery, turmeric, fruit, sugar cane, and Ayurvedic medicine.
- The tradition began in 1982 to help elephants recover from their journey and duties during the Asian Games opening ceremony in New Delhi.

What is the gender gap in education?

What do figures from the Unified District Information System for Education and the All India Survey on Higher Education indicate? Are girls more likely to complete secondary education when they have access to it? What needs to be done to ensure girls, and boys, don't drop out?

GS Paper I: Society

Priscilla Jebaraj

The story so far:

The World Economic Forum (WEF) report of 2024 on global gender gaps recently ranked India at 129 out of 146 economies, with a decline in the education sector being one of the reasons for India's rank slipping a couple of places this year.

Where does the gap lie?

According to the WEF's June report, updated figures in educational attainment indicators have caused India's gender parity levels to dip from the previous year. "While the shares of women are high in primary, secondary and tertiary education enrolments, they have only been modestly increasing, and the gap between men and women's literacy rate is 17.2 percentage points wide, the 18th edition of the report said, recording a score of 0.964 in the education category. In the 17th edition, published in 2023, however, India had attained a perfect 1.000 score in terms of educational parity, ranking 26th in that category. The main indicators being tracked are enrolment levels in primary, secondary and tertiary education, as well as the adult literacy rate.

Asked about India's regression from the perfect score, WEF's Insight and Data Lead Ricky Li said that source data for Educational Attainment indicators is collected by UNESCO, whose figures are subject to data updates on a periodic basis. "In the 18th edition of the Index, the values used in the computation of India's Educational Attainment gender parity score correspond to [the] 2022 and 2023 periods. The 17th edition included data from 2018, 2021, and

Several States have closed the gender gap in higher classes; there are worries about boys dropping out before completing school

2022," he told *The Hindu*. "An important aspect of the data to consider when interpreting the gender parity is the corresponding period, as a seemingly significant change in score could be reflecting an update in the values corresponding to the indicator," he added.

What do Indian statistics show?

The Union Education Ministry tracks school and college enrolment data using two major collection systems: the Unified District Information System for Education (UDISE+) and the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE). The UDISE+ report for 2021-22 shows that 13.79 crore boys were enrolled in school, in comparison to 12.73 crore girls, meaning that girls make up 48% of the school population. However, this varies at the different stages of school education. In preschool or kindergarten, girls make up 46.8% of enrolled children. By primary school (Classes 1 to 5), this rises to 47.8%, improving still further in upper primary or elementary school (Classes 6 to 8), when girls make up 48.3% of enrolled children. Clearly, some girls drop out of school at that stage, when the right to free education ends after Class 8. The gender gap widens in secondary school (Class 9 and 10), with girls dropping to 47.9% of enrolled children.

However, girls who do have access to secondary education are more likely to stick to the finish: the higher secondary level (Class 11 and 12) has the lowest gender gap of 48.3%.

That trend continues into higher education, according to the AISHE report for 2021-22. In that year, the gross enrolment ratio (GER) for women in higher education – meaning the percentage of the population between 18 and 23 years enrolled in colleges and universities – across the country was 28.5, slightly higher than the male GER of 28.3. Female enrolment in higher education has seen a 32% increase since 2014-15. Neither the UDISE+ nor AISHE have yet published data for 2022-23.

What is the impact of a slew of packages to incentivise girls to get an education?

The biggest impact has come from simply building more schools. If a primary school exists within one or two kilometres of a child's home, parents are more likely to enrol their children, especially girls. "There has been enormous growth in the number of schools, especially since the mid-90s, which is when you also saw a spike in the enrolment of girls nationwide," says Vimala Ramachandran, a former Professor at the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration and the first national director for Mahila Samakhya, a flagship Central

government programme on education for rural girls and women. She notes regional differences, pointing out that in Gujarat, where the government built few secondary and higher secondary schools, leaving these largely to the private sector, girls make up only 45.2% of students in secondary classes, far behind much poorer States like Jharkhand (50.7%), Chhattisgarh (51.2%), Bihar (50.1%) and even Uttar Pradesh (45.4%).

Another important factor is the presence of women teachers. An adviser on child rights to a State government which has made progress in enrolment says the areas with low enrolment are mostly those with primary schools employing only one or two teachers. "If a school has only a male teacher, parents are not comfortable sending their daughters there," he said.

Transport to and from school can also be a barrier, and free bus passes for schoolgirls in States like Haryana, Punjab and Tamil Nadu, as well as schemes to give free cycles to girls in Bihar and other States have improved enrolment, though it did not work as well in Rajasthan. Sanitation issues remain a major obstacle for girls education in higher classes, especially after puberty, and may cause a large number of dropouts after Class 8. Though the Union and State governments have funded the construction of washrooms in schools, there is no funding for cleaning and maintenance, which is often left to lax local bodies.

What is the next challenge?

A number of States have successfully closed the gender gap in higher classes, to the extent that there are worries about boys dropping out before completing school. In West Bengal for instance, girls make up 55.7% of higher secondary students, and there are similar situations in Chhattisgarh (53.1%) and Tamil Nadu (51.2%). The State government adviser notes that this could partly be attributed to the Right to Education Act stipulating that students cannot be failed till Class 8. "Girls who make it to Class 9 are usually interested in studying, but some boys who make it to the secondary level and then fail simply drop out. There may also be higher pressure on poorer boys to earn a living," he says, warning that boys must not be allowed to slip through the cracks.

At the college level, although the female GER is higher than the male GER, the picture changes when looking at regional and discipline-wise data. For instance, women students make up only 42.5% of those enrolled in STEM subjects from undergraduate to Ph.D levels, and the challenge lies in encouraging more girls to opt for these disciplines. Adult literacy is also still a matter of concern, with only 64.63% of women who are literate, in comparison to 80.88% of men, according to the last Census data from 2011. This calls for steps to improve foundational literacy in schools as well as to take education to rural women to close the gender gap.

Moving up: Girl students with their bicycles in Mandya in 2018. FILE PHOTO

What is the gender gap in education? (21 July)

What do figures from the Unified District Information System for Education and the All India Survey on Higher Education indicate? Are girls more likely to complete secondary education when they have access to it? What needs to be done toensure girls, and boys, don't drop out?

- The World Economic Forum (WEF) 2024 report ranked India 129 out of 146 economies in global gender gaps.
- India's rank slipped due to a decline in the education sector.
- The report highlighted that India's gender parity levels in education have dipped.
- Women have high enrollment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education, but the literacy rate gap between men and women is 17.2 percentage points.
- India ranked 124th in literacy rate indicator with a score of 0.964 in the education category.
- In the 2023 report, India had a perfect score of 1.000 in educational parity, ranking 26th.
- Indicators tracked include enrollment levels in primary, secondary, and tertiary education, and adult literacy rate.
- WEF's Ricky Li mentioned that the data for educational attainment indicators is collected by UNESCO and updated periodically.
- The 2024 report used data from 2022 and 2023, while the 2023 report used data from 2018, 2021, and 2022.
- Changes in gender parity scores can reflect updates in the data corresponding to the indicators.

What do Indian statistics show?

- The Union Education Ministry uses UDISE+ and AISHE to track school and college enrolment data.
- UDISE+ report for 2021-22 shows 13.79 crore boys and 12.73 crore girls enrolled in school, with girls making up 48% of the school population.

- At preschool or kindergarten, girls make up 46.8% of enrolled children.
- In primary school (Classes 1 to 5), girls' enrollment rises to 47.8%.
- In upper primary (Classes 6 to 8), girls' enrollment increases to 48.3%.
- Some girls drop out after Class 8 when free education ends.
- In secondary school (Class 9 and 10), girls' enrollment drops to 47.9%.
- In higher secondary (Class 11 and 12), girls' enrollment is 48.3%, showing a lower gender gap.
- AISHE report for 2021-22 shows the gross enrolment ratio (GER) for women in higher education is 28.5, slightly higher than the male GER of 28.3.
- Female enrolment in higher education has increased by 32% since 2014-15.
- Data for 2022-23 from UDISE+ and AISHE is not yet published.

What is the impact of a slew of packages to incentivise girls to get an education?

- Building more schools has significantly increased enrolment, especially for girls.
- Proximity of schools (within 1-2 km) increases the likelihood of parents enrolling their children.
- Since the mid-90s, the number of schools has grown, leading to a spike in girls' enrolment nationwide.
- Regional differences exist: Gujarat, with fewer government secondary schools, has lower girls' enrolment (45.2%) compared to poorer states like Jharkhand (50.7%), Chhattisgarh (51.2%), Bihar (50.1%), and Uttar Pradesh (45.4%).
- Presence of women teachers boosts enrolment; parents are hesitant to send daughters to schools with only male teachers.
- Transport facilities, such as free bus passes and free cycles for schoolgirls, have improved enrolment in states like Haryana, Punjab, Tamil Nadu, and Bihar, though less effective in Rajasthan.
- Sanitation issues, especially post-puberty, cause dropouts after Class 8.
- Funding for school washrooms' construction exists, but not for cleaning and maintenance, often left to local bodies.

What is the next challenge?

- Some states have closed the gender gap in higher classes, raising concerns about boys dropping out.
- In West Bengal, girls make up 55.7% of higher secondary students; similar trends are seen in Chhattisgarh (53.1%) and Tamil Nadu (51.2%).
- The Right to Education Act, which prevents students from being failed till Class 8, contributes to this trend.
- Girls who reach Class 9 are typically more interested in studying, while some boys who fail at the secondary level drop out.
- Poorer boys face higher pressure to earn a living, increasing dropout rates.
- At the college level, while the female GER is higher, fewer women (42.5%) enroll in STEM subjects from undergraduate to Ph.D. levels.
- Adult literacy remains an issue, with 64.63% of women being literate compared to 80.88% of men (2011 Census).
- There is a need to improve foundational literacy in schools and extend education to rural women to close the gender gap.

Will local job quotas pass the legal test?

What does the Constitution say? Why is the constitutionality of the Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories and Other Establishments Bill, 2024, being doubted? What is the status of similar laws in other States such as Haryana?

GS Paper II: Reservation

The story so far:

The Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories and Other Establishments Bill, 2024, which aims to provide reservation for Kannadigas in the private sector in the State, has been put on hold after severe backlash from business leaders and industry representatives. The Bill was cleared by the Cabinet, but is yet to be introduced in the Assembly. The government has promised wider consultations with stakeholders before it takes the next step. The legality and constitutionality of such quotas for local candidates, however, are in doubt, as similar steps elsewhere have run into legal impediments.

What does the Bill propose?

The Bill made it a rule that any factory, industry or establishment must appoint local candidates to 50% of its managerial category and 70% of its non-managerial category.

'Local candidate' is defined as anyone born in Karnataka, domiciled for at least 15 years in the State, and who can read, write and speak Kannada. Candidates not possessing a secondary school certificate with Kannada as a

Business and industry feel such reservations will drive out companies from Karnataka

language must pass a Kannada proficiency test prescribed by a nodal agency.

Where qualified or suitable candidates are not available, the Bill gives three years to the establishments to train and engage local candidates. They may also apply to the government for relaxation of norms, but the relaxation cannot be less than 25% for management category and 50% for non-management category.

Why is industry opposed to it?

Business and industry responded with alarm on hearing of the features of the proposed Bill. They felt that such measures would drive out companies from the State and impact foreign investment. NASSCOM, the national lobbying body of the software industry, said it was deeply disturbing. The Bill, it felt, would "hamper the growth of the industry, impact jobs and the global brand for the State". Many expressed concern over the impact of such measures on Karnataka's leading position in technology and described it as regressive and short-sighted.

What about similar laws in other States?

Andhra Pradesh, Haryana and Jharkhand are among the States that have tried to bring in legislation to mandate reservation for domiciles or local residents in the government or private sector. The Andhra Pradesh Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries/Factories Act, 2019, sought to introduce 75% reservation for local people in any industry, factory, joint venture or project taken up in the public-private partnership mode. It also gave a three-year period for training and engaging local candidates, if suitable candidates were not available. The Act has been challenged in the Andhra Pradesh High Court, but the government itself has not been zealously implementing its provisions so far.

The Haryana State Employment of Local Candidates Act, 2020, was struck down by the Punjab and Haryana High Court, and the matter is now before the Supreme Court. It provided for 75% reservation in the private sector for jobs that entailed a salary of up to ₹30,000 a month. It also came with a sunset clause that said it

would lapse after 10 years. The court held that the law violates fundamental rights and that it is beyond the State Assembly's purview to legislate on the issue. It said such enactments would result in States putting up "artificial walls" throughout the country.

The Jharkhand Definition of Local Persons and for Extending the Consequential Social, Cultural and Other Benefits to such Local Persons Bill was passed in 2022. Jharkhand Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan returned the Bill with comments to the effect that providing for 100% reservation for locals in Class III and Class IV employment opportunities may be unconstitutional. The Hemant Soren government, however, got it re-enacted in the Assembly in December 2023.

What are the constitutional issues that arise?

In broad terms, these issues arise from the absence of any provision in the Constitution for private sector job reservation, the absence of legislative power in State Assemblies to prescribe residential criteria for employment, the constitutional guarantee of freedom from discrimination on grounds of place of birth or residence and the fundamental right to practise any profession, or carry on any occupation, trade or business.

Article 16 lays down that there shall be equality of opportunity in public employment. It prohibits discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, descent, place of birth or residence with respect to any employment or office under the state.

Article 16(3) allows Parliament to make any law prescribing a requirement as to residence within a State or Union Territory prior to employment or appointment to a public office in that State or Union Territory. Article 35(a) says Parliament alone, and not any State legislature, will have the power to enact such a law as to a residential requirement.

Another constitutional issue is the effect local quotas have on the freedom of movement of citizens throughout the territory of India, guaranteed by Article 19(1)(d). Any curbs on people belonging to one State to seek employment in another will inevitably impinge on their right to reside and settle in another State, enshrined in Article 19(1)(e).

As far as individuals are concerned, the restriction on hiring people of their choice may violate their right under Article 19(1)(g) to carry on any occupation, trade or business.

At an impasse: Karnataka Chief Minister Siddharamaiah speaks at a press conference in Belagavi. P. K. BADIGER

Will local job quotas pass the legal test? (21 July)

What does the Constitution say? Why is the constitutionality of the Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories and Other Establishments Bill, 2024, being doubted? What is the status of similar laws in other States such as Haryana?

- The Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates Bill, 2024, aims to provide reservation for Kannadigas in the private sector.
- The Bill has been put on hold due to backlash from business leaders and industry representatives.
- It was cleared by the Cabinet but not yet introduced in the Assembly.
- The government promised wider consultations with stakeholders before proceeding.
- The legality and constitutionality of such quotas are in doubt, as similar steps elsewhere faced legal challenges.
- The Bill proposes that factories, industries, or establishments must appoint local candidates to 50% of managerial roles and 70% of non-managerial roles.
- A 'local candidate' is defined as someone born in Karnataka, domiciled for at least 15 years, and who can read, write, and speak Kannada.
- Candidates without a secondary school certificate with Kannada must pass a Kannada proficiency test.
- If qualified candidates are unavailable, establishments have three years to train local candidates.
- Establishments can apply for relaxation of norms, but not less than 25% for managerial roles and 50% for non-managerial roles.
- Industry opposition includes concerns that the Bill would drive companies out of the State and impact foreign investment.
- NASSCOM stated the Bill would hamper industry growth, affect jobs, and harm Karnataka's global technology brand.
- Many industry representatives view the Bill as regressive and short-sighted.

What about similar laws in other States?

- Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, and Jharkhand have proposed laws to reserve jobs for local residents.

- Andhra Pradesh's 2019 Act aimed for 75% reservation for locals in industries and projects, with a three-year period for training if suitable candidates weren't available. The Act is currently challenged in the Andhra Pradesh High Court and is not being strongly implemented.
- Haryana's 2020 Act, which provided 75% reservation for jobs paying up to ₹30,000 per month in the private sector, was struck down by the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The matter is now before the Supreme Court. The court found the Act violated fundamental rights and was beyond the State Assembly's authority, creating "artificial walls."
- Jharkhand's 2022 Bill aimed for 100% reservation for locals in Class III and IV jobs but was returned by the Governor due to potential unconstitutionality. The Bill was re-enacted in December 2023 despite the Governor's concerns.

What are the constitutional issues that arise?

- Issues with reserving private sector jobs for locals arise from:
    - No constitutional provision for private sector job reservation.
    - State Assemblies lacking authority to set residential criteria for employment.
    - Constitutional guarantees of freedom from discrimination based on place of birth or residence.
    - Fundamental right to practice any profession or carry out any occupation, trade, or business.
- Article 16 ensures equality of opportunity in public employment and prohibits discrimination based on race, religion, caste, sex, descent, place of birth, or residence.
- Article 16(3) allows Parliament to make laws requiring residence within a State or Union Territory for public office appointments. Only Parliament can enact such laws, not State legislatures (Article 35(a)).
- Local quotas may affect the freedom of movement of citizens (Article 19(1)(d)) and their right to reside and settle in any State (Article 19(1)(e)).
- Restrictions on hiring choices may infringe on the right to carry on any occupation, trade, or business (Article 19(1)(g)).

What are the rules for IAS probationers?

Who conducts the examination? Who is responsible for checking details supplied by candidates?

GS Paper II: Civil Services

The story so far:

⚠ n July 19, the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) said it has registered a criminal case against Puja Khedkar, a 2022 batch Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer on probation, and issued a show cause notice cancelling her candidature from the Civil Services Examination-2022. It said she had fraudulently availed attempts beyond the permissible limit under the examination rules by faking her identity by changing her name, her father's and mother's name, photograph and signature, email ID, mobile number and address.

How did things come to a head?

Earlier in July, Ms. Khedkar was transferred from Pune to Washim in Maharashtra following complaints of misuse of power by a senior officer. Ms. Khedkar, posted as Assistant Collector in Pune, allegedly demanded special privileges such as a separate office, house, car, and staff which she was not entitled to. Soon it transpired that the trainee officer, daughter of a retired bureaucrat who also contested the 2024 parliamentary elections from Ahmednagar, allegedly submitted fake disability and Other Backward Class (OBC) certificates to clear the civil services exam. Following the controversy, on July 11, the Department of Personnel and Training (DOPT) constituted a single-member committee, chaired by a senior officer of the rank of Additional Secretary, to verify the candidature claims and other details of Ms. Khedkar. The committee will submit its report within two weeks. In an order in 2023, the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) said though Ms. Khedkar had successfully cleared the examinations, she skipped six medical examinations to prove her disability before a medical board at AIIMS, Delhi, adding that "her candidature is liable to be cancelled."

> 'A person is appointed on probation in order to assess his suitability for absorption in the Service to which he has been appointed. Probation should not, therefore, be treated as a mere formality'

The CAT order was in response to a petition filed by Ms. Khedkar in 2021 seeking relaxation of the number of attempts by Persons with Benchmark Disabilities (PwBD). Despite the ruling, she was inducted in the services after she reappeared for the exams in 2022 and with a rank of 821 got PwBD reservation benefits under a different category – "visually impaired and hearing loss." In the previous instance, she had applied under the "visual impairment and mental illness" category. Significantly, the DOPT was a respondent in the 2021 petition. By forging her identity, name etc., Ms. Khedkar appeared for the civil services examination 12 times. General category candidates are allowed six attempts till they attain 32 years of age. Those availing OBC and PwBD reservation are allowed nine attempts till the age of 35 and 42 years respectively. Candidates belonging to Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) are allowed unlimited attempts till 37 years of age.

How are documents scrutinised?

The UPSC conducts examinations and interviews on behalf of the Union Government after which candidates are recommended for appointment by the commission to various Services. At the examination stage, candidates have to submit documents supporting their claims for reservation under various categories – SC, ST, OBCs, Economically Weaker Section (EWS) and PwBD. The first phase of scrutiny is done by the UPSC, which only goes by the documents submitted by the candidates. After the personal interview, all candidates are sent for a medical check-up at government hospitals endorsed by the commission. PwBD candidates have to appear before a medical board at AIIMS, Delhi to determine the level of disability. The files are then sent to the DOPT, which accords the Service after accommodating various quotas.

What is the probation period?

The probation period typically lasts two years, but it may be extended for a maximum of four years if the candidate needs improvement or has been unable to clear the examinations at the training academy. According to DOPT, "A person is appointed on probation in order to assess his suitability for absorption in the Service to which he has been appointed. Probation should not, therefore, be treated as a mere formality."

What disciplinary action can be taken?

A probationer is discharged from service. The discharge can be on account of failure to clear the examinations at the training academy or "if the Central Government is satisfied that the probationer was ineligible for recruitment to the Service or is unsuitable for being a member of the Service." The discharge can also be ordered if in the opinion of the Central Government he/she has wilfully neglected his probationary studies or duties or is found lacking in qualities of mind and character needed for the Service.

What are the rules for IAS probationers? (21 July)

Who conducts the examination? Who is responsible for checking details supplied by candidates?

- On July 19, UPSC registered a criminal case against Puja Khedkar, a 2022 batch IAS officer on probation, and issued a show cause notice cancelling her candidature from the Civil Services Examination-2022.
- Ms. Khedkar allegedly fraudulently availed attempts beyond the permissible limit by changing her identity details.
- Earlier in July, Ms. Khedkar was transferred from Pune to Washim in Maharashtra following complaints of misuse of power.
- She allegedly demanded special privileges she was not entitled to, such as a separate office, house, car, and staff.
- Ms. Khedkar, daughter of a retired bureaucrat, allegedly submitted fake disability and OBC certificates to clear the civil services exam.
- The Department of Personnel and Training (DOPT) formed a single-member committee to verify her candidature claims and other details.
- The committee will submit its report within two weeks.
- In 2023, the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) noted that Ms. Khedkar skipped six medical examinations to prove her disability before a medical board at AIIMS, Delhi.
- The CAT order stated that her candidature is liable to be cancelled.
- Despite this, Ms. Khedkar was inducted into the services after reappearing for the exams in 2022 and received PwBD reservation benefits under a different category.
- Ms. Khedkar appeared for the civil services examination 12 times by forging her identity.
- General category candidates are allowed six attempts till 32 years of age, OBC and PwBD candidates are allowed nine attempts till 35 and 42 years respectively, and SC/ST candidates have unlimited attempts till 37 years of age.

How are documents scrutinised?

- The UPSC conducts exams and interviews for the Union Government and recommends candidates for various services.
- Candidates must submit documents supporting their reservation claims for SC, ST, OBC, EWS, and PwBD categories.
- The UPSC initially scrutinizes these documents.
- After the personal interview, all candidates undergo a medical check-up at government hospitals.
- PwBD candidates must appear before a medical board at AIIMS, Delhi.
- The files are then sent to the DOPT, which assigns services based on quotas.
- The probation period usually lasts two years but can be extended up to four years if needed.
- Probation assesses a candidate's suitability for absorption into the Service.
- Probation is not a mere formality.
- Disciplinary action during probation can include discharge from service.
- Discharge can occur if a candidate fails to clear exams, is found ineligible, is unsuitable for the Service, neglects studies or duties, or lacks necessary qualities of mind and character.

A digital storm

CrowdStrike

The U.S.-based company says a defect found in a content update of Falcon, its security platform, was what caused the global digital outage

GS Paper III: Cyber Security

Saha

"Yesterday, CrowdStrike released an update that began impacting IT systems globally. We are aware of this issue and are working closely with CrowdStrike and across the industry to provide customers technical guidance and support to safely bring their systems back online," posted Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella on X on July 19.

The statement did not capture the hours of global chaos, fear, and frustration that preceded his words. That day, airports in India switched to giving stranded flyers hand-written boarding passes while airlines in the U.S. grounded flights. Shoppers in Australia could not carry out digital payments and U.K. hospitals had to cancel patient appointments. The outage also affected thousands of everyday users who rely on Windows or other Microsoft offerings.

The Indian Computer Emergency Response Team, CERT-In, issued a severity rating of 'Critical' for the incident. In the U.S., the White House said President Joe Biden was briefed about the situation.

At the centre of this digital mayhem was CrowdStrike, a U.S.-based cybersecurity company. Its CEO George Kurtz announced later a defect was found in a Falcon content update for Windows hosts, meaning Mac and Linux hosts were not affected during the outage. Falcon is CrowdStrike's security platform. The company "quickly identified the issue and deployed a fix".

Outage to outrage

The CrowdStrike CEO stressed that the incident was not a cyberattack as many had feared, though he warned that "adversaries and bad actors" could still try to exploit the incident.

While most might think of scammers impersonating CrowdStrike company officials, the incident was instead exploited for political gain. Users on X quickly found CrowdStrike's pro-diversity messaging and its recent posts celebrating the LGBTQ+ community. Many replied with homophobic and racist comments, blaming the IT outage on the company's DEI (Diversity, equity, and inclusion) policies. Some users also posted anti-Semitic abuse targeting Mr. Kurtz.

Founded in 2011 by Mr. Kurtz, Dmitri Alperovitch, and Gregg Marston, the company is based in Austin, Texas, and provides cybersecurity solutions across areas such as generative AI workflows, data protection, endpoint security, threat intelligence, real-life simulation exercises, and cloud security. Mr. Kurtz has held significant positions at McAfee.

On June 24, CrowdStrike said it will be added to the S&P 500 Index. The company has around 8,000 employees and operations in over 170 countries. CrowdStrike has worked with Intel, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, Target, Amazon, Google, and the U.S. government.

In May, CrowdStrike announced the launch of its Falcon for Defender offering, supporting Microsoft's Defender deployments, so that it could hunt the threats missed by Microsoft's own security solution.

"CrowdStrike's proven AI-powered detections, enriched with industry-leading threat intelligence, identifies the threats that Microsoft Defender misses," said CrowdStrike at the time, noting that Falcon for Defender would deploy without reboots and would run "silently" along with Microsoft.

Despite the partnership, CrowdStrike markets itself aggressively and does not shy away from pitting itself against rivals – including Microsoft. On the company's website, CrowdStrike says, "Microsoft's security products can't even protect Microsoft. How can they protect you?"

On July 19, CrowdStrike shares fell by more than 10%, but the company is still up by 100% compared to this time last year. For the quarter ending April 30, 2024, it announced a total revenue of around $921 million.

On the CrowdStrike website, Mr. Kurtz apologised to customers and partners, but only after users criticised the absence of a public apology during the early hours of the outage.

Others question whether too many critical companies, sensitive organisations, and governments are delegating their security and operational needs to too few providers.

A digital storm (21 July)

The U.S.-based company says a defect found in a content update of Falcon, its security platform, was what caused the global digital outage

- On July 19, a major IT systems issue disrupted various sectors worldwide.
- Airports in India issued handwritten boarding passes.
- U.S. airlines grounded flights.
- Digital payments in Australia were affected.
- U.K. hospitals canceled patient appointments.
- The incident was rated 'Critical' by CERT-In in India.
- President Joe Biden was briefed in the U.S.
- CrowdStrike, a cybersecurity company, was responsible for the issue due to a defect in a Windows update.
- Mac and Linux systems were not affected.
- CrowdStrike quickly identified and fixed the problem.

Outage to outrage

- CrowdStrike CEO clarified that the IT outage was not a cyberattack but warned that it could be exploited by adversaries.
- Some online users exploited the incident to attack CrowdStrike's diversity and inclusion policies, posting homophobic, racist, and anti-Semitic comments.
- CrowdStrike, founded in 2011 and based in Austin, Texas, provides various cybersecurity solutions.
- The company will be added to the S&P 500 Index and has around 8,000 employees in over 170 countries.
- CrowdStrike has collaborated with major companies and government entities.
- In May, CrowdStrike launched Falcon for Defender to enhance Microsoft's security capabilities.

- CrowdStrike's AI-powered Falcon for Defender claims to detect threats missed by Microsoft Defender without requiring system reboots.
- Despite collaborating with Microsoft, CrowdStrike aggressively competes with rivals and criticizes Microsoft's security products.
- On July 19, CrowdStrike's shares dropped by over 10%, though they have doubled in value over the past year.
- The company reported $921 million in revenue for the quarter ending April 30, 2024.
- CrowdStrike's CEO apologized to customers and partners only after criticism for not doing so earlier.
- There is concern about reliance on a few major providers for critical security and operational needs.

Spring of the patriarch

Paul Kagame

The Rwandan leader, known for both his economic modernisation drive and repressive policies at home, won a fourth term in power with '99%' votes

GS Paper II: International Relations

ILLUSTRATION: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

Priyali Prakash

Paul Kagame, the President of Rwanda, won his fourth term as the leader of the country with more than 99% votes last week. The outcome of the election was never in doubt. Mr. Kagame, 66, beat his own previous record of 98.79% votes, which he polled seven years ago, to continue his three-decades long rule of Rwanda,

"The results that have been presented indicate a very high score, these are not just figures, even if it was 100%, these are not just numbers. These figures show trust, and that is what is most important," he said after the election.

Even though Mr. Kagame became the President of Rwanda in 2000, he was the country's de facto leader since 1994, as its Vice President and Defence Minister. Mr. Kagame is widely recognised for ending a genocide in Rwanda in 1994, in which around 8,00,000 people were killed by government-backed extremists.

Rwanda was already in the clutches of a civil war when a plane carrying the then-President, Juvénal Habyarimana, was shot down over capital Kigali in 1994.

Habyarimana belonged to the majority Hutu community, and Tutsi rebels were blamed for killing him. Hutu extremists killed Tutsis across the country for months.

After months of violence, Mr. Kagame's Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), which was founded in 1988 in Uganda, played a key role in ending the genocide.

Economic development
As the de facto leader since 1994, Mr. Kagame has championed economic development in Rwanda. One of the areas where the East African country has made remarkable progress under Mr. Kagame is the healthcare sector. Mr. Kagame is often credited for improving the standards of the country's medical sector. His administration has emphasised building community-based healthcare services to reduce the "walking time" to the nearest health centres. The walk that previously took an average of 95 minutes was reduced to 47 minutes in 2020, the World Health Organisation noted.

Mr. Kagame also oversaw faster economic growth. Rwanda's economy grew by 7.6% in the first three quarters of 2023, according to the World Bank, even though efforts towards poverty reduction had mixed results.

Through the Rwanda Education Quality Improvement Programme, the Kagame regime aims to improving learning among students. "The future of billions of children and young people across the world depends on overcoming the challenges of inclusion and quality of instruction, particularly as we recover from the pandemic," Mr. Kagame said at the 77th UN General Assembly in 2022. Focal points of his government's educational initiatives include digital literacy for all by 2035, and for Rwanda to become a high-income country by 2050.

The focus on economic development is only one side of the story. Critics accuse Mr. Kagame of being a ruthless dictator. In 2015, Rwanda amended its Constitution to allow Mr. Kagame to extend his rule by a seven-year term that started in 2017, followed by two more five-year terms.

A major blot on Mr. Kagame's term was the blame for the death of Patrick Karegeya, who was Rwanda's former chief of external intelligence. He was found dead in a hotel room in Johannesburg on January 1, 2014. He had fled to South Africa in 2008 after falling out of favour with Mr. Kagame's regime and had helped found the Rwanda National Congress, an Opposition group in exile.

Reporters Without Borders calls Mr. Kagame a "predator" and says that even three decades after the genocide ended, "censorship continues, and self-censorship has become the rule, for those who want to avoid becoming government targets".

Mr. Kagame's alleged autocratic policies, however, do not take away from his seemingly positive imagery at international platforms. He is the current chairperson of the Commonwealth. He headed the African Union from 2018 to 2019, and the East African Community from 2018 to 2021. Rwanda also has significant female representation in Parliament, with 61.3% women in the Chamber of Deputies and 37.4% in the Senate.

Spring of the patriarch (21 July)

The Rwandan leader, known for both his economic modernisation drive and repressive policies at home, won a fourth term in power with '99%' votes

- Paul Kagame won his fourth term as President of Rwanda with over 99% of the vote, surpassing his previous record of 98.79%.
- Kagame, 66, has led Rwanda for three decades and was the de facto leader since 1994 as Vice President and Defence Minister.
- He is recognized for ending the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, where around 800,000 people were killed by Hutu extremists targeting Tutsis.
- The genocide began after a plane carrying then-President Juvénal Habyarimana was shot down, leading to widespread violence by Hutu extremists.
- Kagame's Rwanda Patriotic Front (RPF), established in 1988 in Uganda, played a crucial role in stopping the genocide.

Economic development

- Since becoming the de facto leader in 1994, Kagame has advanced Rwanda's economic and healthcare sectors.
- Significant progress in healthcare includes reducing average walking time to health centers from 95 minutes to 47 minutes by 2020.
- Rwanda's economy grew by 7.6% in the first three quarters of 2023, though poverty reduction efforts had mixed results.
- The Rwanda Education Quality Improvement Programme aims to enhance education, with goals for digital literacy by 2035 and becoming a high-income country by 2050.
- Critics accuse Kagame of dictatorship, citing the 2015 constitutional amendment that extended his rule and his alleged role in the death of Patrick Karegeya, a former intelligence chief and opposition figure.
- Kagame is also criticized for censorship and self-censorship issues in Rwanda.
- Despite criticisms, Kagame has a strong international presence, serving as the current chairperson of the Commonwealth and having led the African Union and the East African Community.
- Rwanda has notable female representation in Parliament, with 61.3% women in the Chamber of Deputies and 37.4% in the Senate.

Question Corner

GS Paper III: Basic Science

Zika infection

Does prenatal Zika infection have long-term immune consequences in children?

A new study has found that maternal Zika virus infections can reprogramme foetal immune development, leading to long-term consequences in children's immunity. These changes even occur in children born without the physical characteristics associated with congenital Zika syndrome – suggesting that the 95% of babies born of Zika-infected pregnancies who did not exhibit symptoms may have been affected by the virus with long-term immunological repercussions. The study used blood samples from newborn and two-year-old children whose mothers were infected by Zika virus during pregnancy. Immune analysis revealed highly elevated levels of inflammation, even two years after the Zika virus infection was cleared. The children's immune systems favored producing one type of T-cell over another, altering their responses to childhood vaccines. These changes left them likely vulnerable to future infections including diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

Zika infection (21 July)

Does prenatal Zika infection have long-term immune consequences in children?

- A new study shows that maternal Zika virus infections can affect a child's immune development even if the child doesn't show physical symptoms of congenital Zika syndrome.
- The study used blood samples from newborns and two-year-olds whose mothers had Zika during pregnancy.
- Findings revealed high levels of inflammation in the children even two years after the infection.
- The children had altered T-cell responses, affecting how their immune systems react to childhood vaccines.
- This could make them more susceptible to future infections like diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis.