

DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS (25 JULY 2024)**TOPICS COVERED**

- 1. Kerala HC stays order on release of Hema Committee report (GS Paper-I: Society)**
- 2. No progress on UN Security Council expansion, say former Ambassadors**
- 3. Economist C.T. Kurien no more; tributes pour in (PCS)**
- 4. RSS leader asks Amit Malviya not to troll people (GS Paper-III: Taxation)**
- 5. Grasslands in Kutch likely to host cheetahs from Africa (GS Paper-III: Environment)**
- 6. Right to shelter is a fundamental right, says SC (GS paper-II: FR)**
- 7. ICMR ready to transfer technology of a 'breakthrough' TB detection system (GS Paper-II: Health Sector)**
- 8. Centre defends fact-check unit, says right to correct information important (GS Paper-II: Article-19 And Article-21)**
- 9. Budget 2024 — long on intent, short on details (GS paper-III: Budget)**
- 10. A n outlining of urban transformation strategies (GS paper-III:)**
- 11. A Budget that places health on the margins (GS paper-II: Health Sector)**
- 12. The government's focus is on ease of paying taxes (GS Paper-III: Taxation)**
- 13. A big step towards the transformation of various sector (GS Paper-III: Skill, Development and Employment)**
- 14. Prioritising inclusivity and fiscal prudence (GS Paper-III: Inclusive Growth)**
- 15. Is immunity for the President and Governors absolute? (GS Paper-II: Executive)**
- 16. Europe bound: on the myths surrounding migrants and asylum seekers (GS Paper-II: IR)**

दिल्ली से भी बेहतर

आपके शहर गोरखपुर में



Patriotic IAS

IAS/PCS wali Pathshala

पैडलेगंज, गोरखपुर **Mob. 9971932488**



Team Led by:
Amit Kumar

(More than 4 Years of Teaching Experience In Vision IAS Delhi & Qualified 4 Times For The IAS Mains).



Piyush Gambhir Sir

(More than 5 years of teaching experience in Vision IAS Delhi & qualified 3 times for the IAS mains & 2 times IAS Interview)



Sonal Choudhary Ma'am

More than two years of experience in Vision IAS and qualified 3 Times for IAS mains.



Tanya Sehgal Ma'am

More than four years of experience in Vision IAS and qualified 2 times for IAS mains.



Manohar Pandey Sir

(More than 5 years of experience in Vision IAS Delhi & qualified 3 times for the IAS mains & 2 times for PCS Interview).



Piyush Kannaujiya Sir

(More than 4 years of teaching experience in Vision IAS Delhi & qualified 6 times for the IAS Mains & 2 IAS Interview)



Abhishek A. Singh Sir

(More than 3 years of experience in Vision IAS Delhi & qualified 2 times for the IAS Mains).



Divyansh Srivashtava sir

More than 3 years Working experience with Vision IAS Delhi and Qualified 2 times for IAS mains and 2 times for CAPF interview.

Kerala HC stays order on release of Hema Committee report

GS Paper I: Society

K.C. Gopakumar
KOCHI

The Kerala High Court on Wednesday stayed for one week the State Information Commission's order directing the State government to disclose the K. Hema Committee report on women's working conditions in the film industry with limited redactions.

Justice P.M. Manoj passed the order on a writ

petition filed by film producer Sajimon Parayil challenging the SIC order. The court directed the State, the SIC and other respondents to file an affidavit in response to the petition.

The petitioner contended that the disclosure would violate fundamental privacy rights, breach the confidentiality promised to the witnesses, and go against public policy.

The disclosure of the re-

port, even with purported redactions, would run the risk of identifying individuals who provided testimonies on assurances of confidentiality.

As the film industry was interconnected in its nature, making public the seemingly innocuous details of the report could lead to the identification of witnesses or complainants and would potentially expose them to retaliation or

further harassment.

The confidential nature of the report was crucial in maintaining the integrity of the investigation and safeguarding the participants, thereby fostering trust in government inquiries and ensuring honest reporting of workplace issues.

Moreover, the order to make the report public without prior consultation with those who testified

before the commission would violate principles of natural justice and could damage their reputations and livelihoods.

During the hearing on the petition, M. Ajay, counsel for the SIC, said the petitioner was trying to prevent the disclosure of the report which had been put in cold storage for the last four-and-a-half years. He argued that the public had every right to know the

contents of the report since it would help improve conditions of women in the film industry. He said the commission had already taken steps to protect the privacy of individuals by redacting sensitive information.

The Hema committee, constituted in the wake of the sexual assault of an actor in 2017, submitted its report to the government on December 31, 2019.



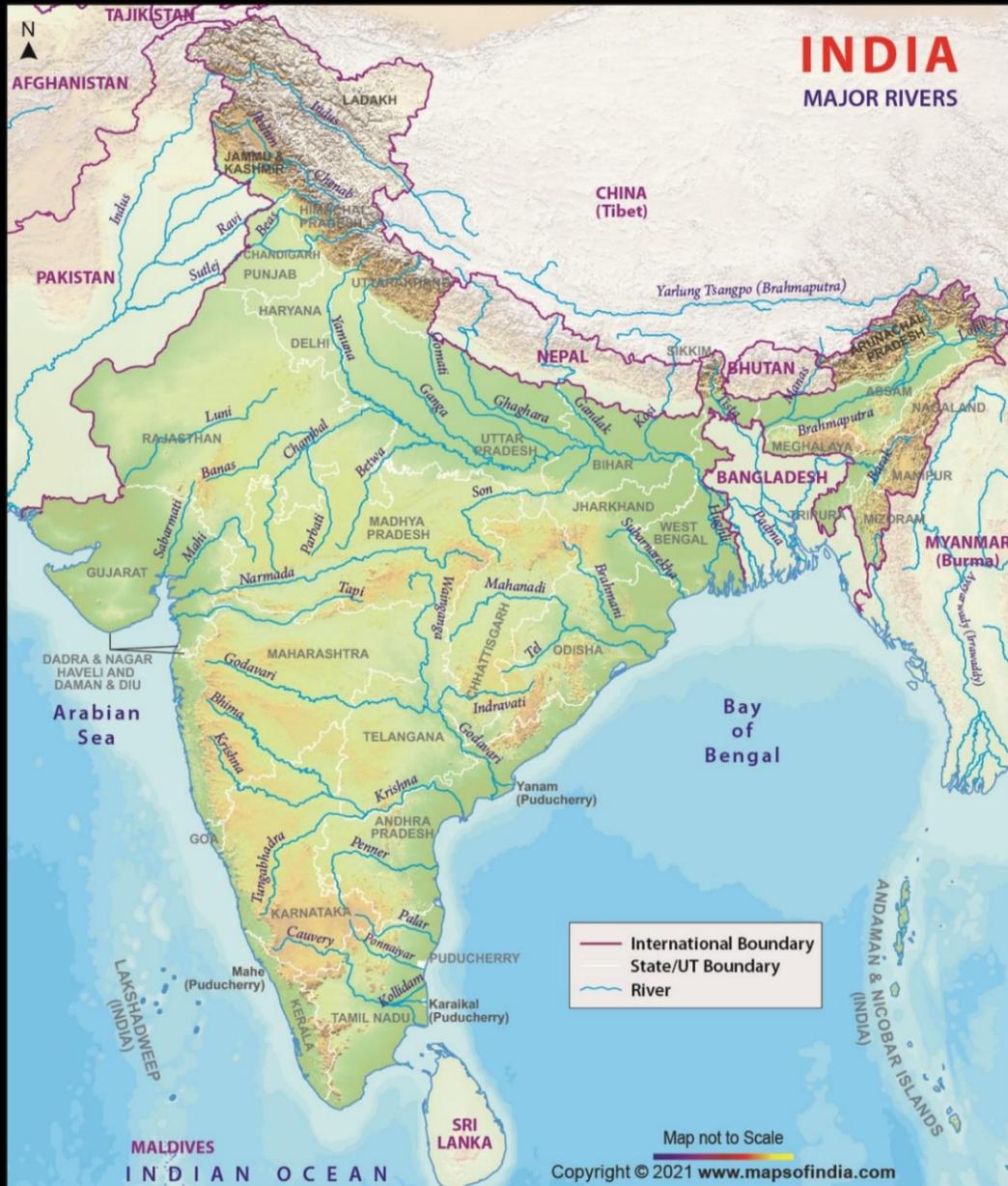
Due to continuous rain, the water level of the Krishna river has been increasing. A view of the partially submerged Sangameswara temple in Nandyal district of Andhra Pradesh on Wednesday. U. SUBRAMANYAM

Kerala HC stays order on release of Hema Committee report (25 July)

- The Kerala High Court has stayed for one week the order to disclose the K. Hema Committee report on women's working conditions in the film industry, following a petition by film producer Sajimon Parayil.
- The petition argues that disclosure could violate privacy rights, breach confidentiality promises, and risk identifying and retaliating against witnesses.

- The court has asked the State, State Information Commission (SIC), and other respondents to file an affidavit in response to the petition.
- Disclosure of the report might expose witnesses to further harassment and harm the integrity of the investigation.
- Counsel for the SIC argued that the report, which has been stalled for over four years, should be made public to improve conditions for women in the film industry, emphasizing that sensitive information would be redacted to protect privacy.
- The Hema Committee report was submitted to the government on December 31, 2019, following the 2017 sexual assault incident.

River Systems of India: India River Map



Classification of Indian River Systems:

- **Himalayan Rivers:** Originating from the Himalayas and flowing through the Northern Plains.
- **Peninsular Rivers:** Emerging mainly from the Western Ghats, flowing either eastwards into the Bay of Bengal or westwards into the Arabian Sea.

Major Himalayan River Systems:

- **Indus River System:**
 - Originates in Tibet near Mansarovar Lake.
 - Flows westwards through Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, and enters Pakistan.
 - Tributaries: Zaskar, Nubra, Shyok, Hunza, Sutlej, Ravi, Beas, Chenab, Jhelum.
- **Ganga (Ganges) River System:**
 - Originates from the Gangotri glaciers.
 - Main source: Bhagirathi, which joins Alaknanda at Devprayag to form the Ganga.
 - Tributaries: Yamuna, Son (right bank); Gomti, Ghaghara, Gandak, Kosi (left bank).
 - Flows through Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, and West Bengal to the Bay of Bengal.
- **Yamuna River System:**
 - Originates from Yamunotri.
 - Flows through Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, and Haryana; passes through Delhi, Mathura, and Agra.
 - Tributaries: Tons, Chambal, Hindon, Betwa, Ken.
 - Joins the Ganga at Allahabad.
- **Brahmaputra River System:**
 - Originates from the Angsi glacier in Tibet (Tsangpo River), Mansarovar Lake
 - Enters India in Arunachal Pradesh (Dihang River).
 - Flows through Assam, enters Bangladesh, and falls into the Bay of Bengal.
 - Tributaries: Dibang, Lohit, Kenula.

3. Major Peninsular River Systems:

- **Mahanadi:**
 - Originates in the Sihava mountains, Chhattisgarh.

- Flows through Odisha, and cities like Sambalpur, Cuttack, and Banki.
- **Godavari:**
 - Originates at Triambakeshwar, Maharashtra.
 - Flows through Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Puducherry.
 - Tributaries: Pravara, Indravati, Maner, Sabri.
 - Known as Dakshina Ganga.
- **Krishna:**
 - Originates from Mahabaleshwar, Maharashtra.
 - Flows through Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh.
 - Tributaries: Ghataprabha, Malaprabha, Bhima, Tungabhadra.
- **Kaveri (Cauvery):**
 - Originates from Kogadu, Karnataka (Brahmagiri Hill).
 - Flows through Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and touches Puducherry.
 - Tributaries: Hemavati, Moyari, Shimsha, Arkavati, Honnuhole, Kabini, Bhavani, Noyill, Amaravati.
- **Narmada:**
 - Originates from Amarkantak, Madhya Pradesh.
 - Flows through Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and empties into the Arabian Sea.
- **Tapti (Tapi):**
 - Flows parallel to the Narmada.
 - Originates in the Satpura range, flows through Maharashtra and Gujarat.
 - Tributaries: Purna, Girna, Panjhra.
 - Empties into the Gulf of Khambhat.

Sangameswara Temple:

- **Location:** Nandyal District, Andhra Pradesh, India, near Muchumarri, at the confluence of the Krishna and Bhavanasi rivers, within the Srisailam reservoir's foreshore.
- **Submersion:** The temple is submerged for part of the year due to the Srisailam Dam, which was constructed in 1981. It first surfaced in 2003 and remains visible for approximately 4 months when water levels recede.

Historical and Religious Significance:

- **Deity:** The temple is dedicated to Lord Shiva and houses a wooden Lingam called Sangameshwaram, which is believed to have been installed by Dharmaraja, the eldest of the Pandavas, following their visit to the Srisailam Mallikarjuna temple.
- **Confluence:** The temple is situated at the confluence of seven rivers: Krishna, Bhavanasi, and five others — Veni, Tunga, Bhadra, Bheemarathi, and Malapaharini. This confluence is considered a site of religious sanctity.
- **Importance:** Known as Sapta Nadi Sangameswar, the temple is regarded as the north-west gateway of Srisailam, the second of the twelve Jyothirlingas. It is a holy shrine with significant historical importance and has provided shelter to many sages.

Architectural Style and Spiritual Significance:

- **Nagara Influences:** The temple's architectural style aligns with the Nagara (North Indian) tradition, showcasing influences prevalent during the construction period.
- **Sacred Confluence:** The temple's original location held immense spiritual significance. It stood at the confluence of the Krishna and Bhavanasi rivers, a revered meeting point considered holy in Hinduism.

Early Mentions and Construction (7th-8th Century AD):

- **Estimated Period:** Historical records suggest the temple's construction dates back to the 7th-8th century AD.
- **Chalukya Dynasty:** Attributions credit the construction to a ruler from the **Chalukya dynasty, possibly Pulakesi II (609-642 AD)** during their reign in South India.
- **Architectural Style:** The temple reflects the architectural style prevalent during the Chalukya era, characterized by its Nagara (North Indian) influences.

Accessibility and Devotion:

- **Visibility:** The temple is generally submerged for about 8 months each year and becomes visible only during the remaining 4 months. During its visibility period, it is accessible with considerable difficulty.
- **Devotees:** Thousands of devotees visit the temple during the months it is visible, emphasizing its importance in regional religious practices. The temple's unique location and periodic emergence attract significant religious attention.



Mallikarjuna Temple, Srisailam:

The Mallikarjuna Temple in Srisailam, Andhra Pradesh, is a revered Hindu pilgrimage site dedicated to Lord Shiva. Here's a breakdown of its key aspects:

History and Significance:

- **Ancient Origins:** While the exact date of construction is unknown, historical estimates place it between the 2nd and 12th centuries AD.
- **Shiva and Shakti:** The temple enshrines Lord Shiva as Mallikarjuna (meaning "Lord of Ardhanareeshwara") and his consort, Parvati, as Brahmaramba.
- **Jyotirlinga and Shakti Peetha:** Mallikarjuna is one of the twelve revered Jyotirlingas, representing the fiery aspects of Shiva. Srisailam is also one of the 18 Shakti Peethas, associated with the divine feminine energy of Sati, consort of Shiva. This confluence of Shiva and Shakti symbolism imbues the temple with immense significance.



Architectural Brilliance:

- **Dravidian Style:** The temple complex showcases Dravidian architectural influences, with towering gopurams (gateway towers), intricately carved pillars, and mandapams (halls).
- **Sculptural Grandeur:** The temple walls and pillars are adorned with exquisite sculptures depicting various deities, mythological scenes, and floral motifs.
- **Spiritual Significance:** The temple complex houses several shrines dedicated to other Hindu deities, including Vishnu, Ganesh, and Subramanya.

Pilgrimage and Traditions:

- **Sacred Abode:** Srisailam is revered as one of the holiest places in India, attracting thousands of devotees throughout the year.
- **Maha Shivaratri:** The annual festival of Maha Shivaratri is a particularly significant time for pilgrimage, witnessing grand celebrations and special pujas (worship rituals).
- **Spiritual Practices:** Devotees undertake the holy circumambulation (pradakshina) around the temple complex, offering prayers and seeking blessings.

Additional Notes:

- The temple is situated on a hilltop, offering panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.
- The Krishna River flows nearby, adding to the temple's spiritual aura.
- The temple complex also houses a museum showcasing artifacts related to the temple's history and religious significance.

Mallikarjuna Temple stands as a testament to India's rich heritage, spiritual traditions, and artistic excellence. It continues to be a beacon of faith and a source of solace for millions of devotees.

After a week, traffic resumes on Gap road stretch near Munnar (25 July)

- Traffic resumed on the Gap road stretch of the Kochi-Dhanushkodi National Highway near Munnar on Tuesday after a landslide on July 16.
- The District Collector instructed the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) to clear the landslide debris by July 20, and the NHAI complied on the same day.
- The Udumbanchola tahsildar reported to the Idukki Collector that the debris was cleared and the road was ready for traffic.
- Traffic resumption was initially on a trial basis, and an official order from the Collector is still pending.
- Tourism stakeholders claim that the traffic ban is impacting tourist arrivals in Munnar and allege that the ban is imposed whenever a heavy rain alert is issued, regardless of actual landslide conditions.

India committed to FTA with the U.K., says Modi

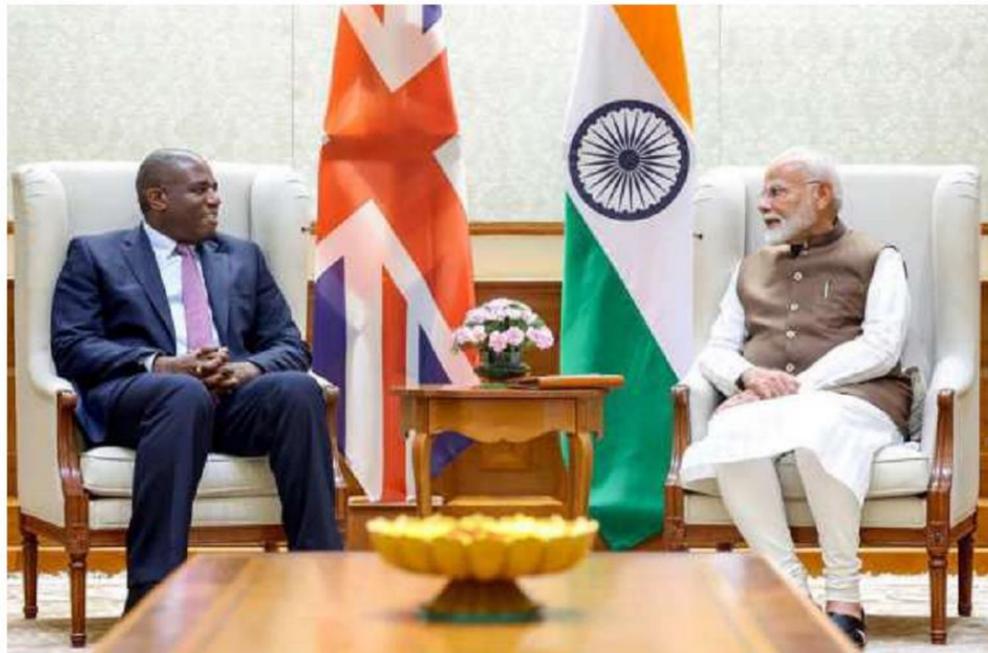
British Foreign Secretary David Lammy refers to 'unique living bridge' between the two countries, and says they are working together on climate action and creating opportunities for businesses

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India is committed to concluding a Free Trade Agreement with the United Kingdom, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday, after meeting the visiting Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs David Lammy – the highest ranking official from the United Kingdom to visit India since the Labour government won a landslide victory in the recent election.

"[I] appreciate the priority accorded by PM Keir Starmer to broaden and deepen the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Remain committed to elevating the ties. Welcome the bilateral Technology Security Initiative and the desire to conclude a mutually beneficial FTA," Mr. Modi said.

Mr. Lammy was hosted by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar for a round of talks where the two sides exchanged ideas on a wide range of issues. Mr. Jaishankar said the two sides should cooperate on "global matters on global plat-



Strengthening ties: Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a meeting with U.K. Foreign Secretary David Lammy, in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI/@NARENDRAMODI/X

forms", indicating that India is seeking collaboration with the U.K. to deal with globally relevant issues like climate action.

"We are both countries which have a big global presence in different ways. So I think it's also important India and the U.K. work together on global issues and in global platforms," said Mr. Jaishankar.

After meeting Mr. Modi, Mr. Lammy referred to the

"unique living bridge" that connects India with the United Kingdom and said the two sides are building on "climate action while creating opportunities for British and Indian businesses". India and the U.K. have been discussing the FTA for several years now and have been caught up in a protracted negotiation.

"I am travelling to India in my first month as Fo-

reign Secretary because resetting our relationship with the Global South is a key part of how this government will reconnect Britain for our security and prosperity at home," Mr. Lammy had said in a statement ahead of his departure, calling India the "emerging superpower of the 21st century", one of the fastest growing economies, with the world's largest population.

India committed to FTA with the U.K., says Modi (25 July)

British Foreign Secretary David Lammy refers to 'unique living bridge' between the two countries, and says they are working together on climate action and creating opportunities for businesses

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi affirmed India's commitment to finalizing a Free Trade Agreement with the United Kingdom.
- This statement came after a meeting with David Lammy, the UK Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Affairs.
- Lammy is the highest-ranking UK official to visit India since the Labour government's recent election victory.
- Modi praised UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer for prioritizing the strengthening of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries.
- Modi welcomed the bilateral Technology Security Initiative and the goal of concluding a mutually beneficial FTA.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Lammy discussed various topics, including cooperation on global issues such as climate action.
- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar emphasized the importance of India and the UK working together on global issues and platforms.
- After meeting with Prime Minister Modi, David Lammy highlighted the "unique living bridge" between the two countries and their focus on climate action and business opportunities.
- India and the UK have been negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) for several years, facing prolonged discussions.
- Lammy traveled to India early in his tenure as Foreign Secretary to reset relations with the Global South and reconnect Britain for security and prosperity.
- He described India as a "emerging superpower of the 21st century," with a fast-growing economy and the world's largest population.

No progress on UN Security Council expansion, say former Ambassadors

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Despite consistent efforts by India and other countries, the move for United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reform and expansion has made “no progress” so far, conceded two former Indian Ambassadors to the United Nations, stressing that India must, however, continue to push its demand for inclusion in the top global decision-making body.

The lack of progress has been the subject of considerable frustration ahead of this year’s Summit of the Future at the UN (September 22-23) that is expected to bring in more than 150 world leaders to discuss plans to “reboot” the UN, with India and its partners in the G-4 (Brazil, Germany



Since 2023, there has only been movement in making the Inter-Governmental Negotiations process on UN reforms transparent

RUCHIRA KHAMBOJ
Former Indian Ambassador to UN

and Japan), all of whom claim a permanent seat at the UNSC, lashing out in recent statements about the proposed “Pact of the Future” that will be released.

“The short answer to whether there is progress in concrete terms, is no,” said India’s former Permanent Representative to the UN Ruchira Khamboj (2022-2024), who retired at the end of June, at a seminar organised at the India International Centre (IIC)

in Delhi. She added that since 2023, there has only been movement in making the Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN) process on UN reforms more transparent.

“You now have a live broadcast of the Inter-Governmental Negotiations. This wasn’t the case until last year, and there’s also a digital repository where you can put your proposals, and India’s proposals are very much there on ex-

pansion and reforms on their website, but in terms of real progress, let’s be very honest... the answer is no,” Ms. Khamboj said.

Last week, India’s Acting Permanent Representative R. Ravindra delivered a sharp address during an open debate at the UNSC, blaming the failure of the multilateral system on the “1945-vintage binary outlook reflected clearly in the composition of the Security Council”, referring to the fact that the five permanent members of the Security Council, or P5, are still those who are considered “victors” of the Second World War.

“Disillusionment with the existing multilateral system has led member states to consider various alternatives,” Mr. Ravindra said.

No progress on UN Security Council expansion, say former Ambassadors (25 July)

- Despite ongoing efforts by India and other countries, there has been no progress in reforming and expanding the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).
- Former Indian Ambassadors to the UN stress that India should continue pushing for inclusion in the UNSC.
- The lack of progress is a point of frustration ahead of the UN Summit of the Future (September 22-23), where over 150 world leaders will discuss UN reforms.
- India and its G-4 partners (Brazil, Germany, Japan), who seek permanent UNSC seats, have criticized the proposed "Pact of the Future."
- Former UN Permanent Representative Ruchira Khamboj noted that while there has been some movement in making the Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN) process more transparent, such as live broadcasts and a digital repository for proposals, there has been no real progress.
- India’s Acting Permanent Representative R. Ravindra criticized the UNSC’s outdated composition and suggested that disillusionment with the current multilateral system has led member states to explore alternatives.

RSS leader asks Amit Malviya not to troll people

GS Paper III:
Taxation

NEW DELHI

Ratan Sharda, an RSS leader, on Wednesday came down heavily on Amit Malviya, the head of the Bharatiya Janata Party's IT cell, for trolling social media users who criticised the Union Budget.

Terming it a "serious problem", Mr. Sharda, who is also a columnist in the RSS's English mouthpiece *Organiser*, said the IT cell should instead focus on simplifying the government's schemes for citizens.

In a post on X, Mr. Malviya flayed those complaining about the Budget proposal to eliminate indexation on long-term capital gains from property sales. "Everyone is an indexation specialist tonight," Mr. Malviya wrote in a post which he deleted later.

"This attitude of BJP IT Cell is a serious problem. Instead of coming up with simplified communication about good points of #Budget2024, he ends up trolling citizens. Answer their fear, don't insult them dear Amit Malviya," Mr. Sharda wrote.

The RSS maintained that Mr. Sharda's articles expressed his personal opinion and did not reflect the views of the Sangh.

Economist C.T. Kurien no more; tributes pour in (25 July)

- C.T. Kurien, a renowned economist and former Professor at Madras Christian College, passed away at the age of 93 from age-related ailments.
- He earned a Master's degree in economics from Madras Christian College in 1953 and pursued a Ph.D. from Stanford University on a study related to poverty in India.
- Kurien was disappointed with mainstream economics for not addressing poverty, which led him to focus on this issue in his studies.
- He was a Visiting Fellow at Yale University in 1968-69 and served as a Professor at Madras Christian College from 1962 to 1978, then at the Madras Institute of Development Studies until 1991, where he was also the Director.
- He held roles as National Fellow at the University Grants Commission and Indian Council of Social Science Research and was president of the Indian Economic Association in 2000.
- Kurien authored 15 books on economics, with a focus on combating poverty, reflecting his deep concern for social issues.
- C.T. Kurien focused on poverty in his writings and believed that growth alone wouldn't eradicate poverty.
- N. Ram described Kurien as an exceptional scholar, beloved teacher, and progressive intellectual.
- Historian A.R. Venkatachalapathy praised him as an institution builder.
- Madras Christian College honored Kurien, acknowledging his significant contributions to poverty eradication and innovative leadership.
- U. Sankar remembered Kurien as an original thinker who questioned conventional economics.
- J. Jayaranjan, Kurien's last doctoral student, recalled Kurien's dedication to high standards and rigorous academic guidance.

RSS leader asks Amit Malviya not to troll people (25 July)

- Ratan Sharda criticized Amit Malviya, head of the BJP IT cell, for trolling users who criticized the Union Budget.
- Sharda, an RSS leader and columnist, said the IT cell should focus on simplifying government schemes instead.
- Malviya had mocked critics of the Budget's proposal to eliminate indexation on long-term capital gains.
- Sharda urged the IT cell to address citizens' concerns rather than insult them.
- The RSS clarified that Sharda's comments were his personal opinion, not the official stance of the Sangh.

Grasslands in Kutch likely to host cheetahs from Africa

While the Gandhi Sagar sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh is the preferred location for the next lot of imports, Banni in Gujarat is also getting readied to house some of the big cats to land in India

GS Paper III: Environment

JACOBI ROSE
NEW DELHI

Some of the next batch of cheetahs being brought in from Africa, as part of the next phase of Project Cheetah, may be sent to a cheetah-breeding and conservation centre being built in the sprawling grasslands of Banni in the Rann of Kutch in Gujarat, senior officials in the Environment Ministry told *The Hindu*.

While the Gandhi Sagar sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh is the preferred location for the next lot of wild cats, with Banni being considered a potential habitat for over a decade, officials say there is a surge in activity to set up basic infrastructure in Banni and get it ready this year.

"The next [lot of] animals will go to Gandhi Sagar. However, the Gujarat government is setting up suitable enclosures in Banni where cheetahs can be bred. If all goes to plan, there is no reason (the site) cannot be readied in the next six months and some animals sent there," an official told *The Hindu*.

Banni is a vast grassland in the southern part of Kutch and extends to near-



Banni is a vast grassland in the southern part of Kutch and extends to nearly 3,500 sq.km. VIJAY SONEJI

ly 3,500 square kilometres. While that is plenty of space, more than that available in Kuno and Gandhi Sagar, there is barely enough prey to sustain a viable population.

Antelope species such as chinkara and blackbuck – the prey for the cheetah – are present in the Banni landscape but not enough for the big cat. "It will take years for enough prey, and practically this means chital – the main prey for the cheetahs in India – needs to be brought into these grasslands. There isn't an official plan yet but it is a site that is under consideration," the official added.

While the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department is tasked with managing the

cheetahs at Kuno in Madhya Pradesh, an expert steering committee gives scientific input on managing the programme. This includes recommending future sites for introducing fresh batches of cheetahs at regular intervals.

Of the 20 adult cheetahs brought to Kuno since September 2022, 13 survive. Additionally there are 13 cubs, making it 26 animals overall. However, the maximum capacity (in terms of available prey) of the Kuno reserve is for 21 adult animals.

The government's estimate is that India will need to import anywhere between 10 and 12 adult cheetahs every year for the next five years to groom a sus-

tainable breeding population. "One attractive aspect of Banni is that there are no leopards. So with enough prey, we can over-time sustain a larger population. But this is a long-term plan," an official said.

In October, all of the cheetahs in Kuno are expected to be released into the wild. Currently, most of them are in the bomas, or large enclosures that are a kilometre wide and long. These animals were brought in after infections and acclimatisation problems led to fatalities. Following the release of all the animals into the wild, preparations for the next batch are expected to begin – again from South Africa and Namibia.

Grasslands in Kutch likely to host cheetahs from Africa (25 July)

While the Gandhi Sagar sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh is the preferred location for the next lot of imports, Banni in Gujarat is also getting readied to house some of the big cats to land in India

- Some of the next batch of cheetahs from Africa may be sent to a new cheetah-breeding and conservation center in Banni, Gujarat, as part of Project Cheetah.
- Gandhi Sagar sanctuary in Madhya Pradesh is currently the preferred location for the next cheetah batch.
- The Gujarat government is working to set up suitable enclosures in Banni, which could be ready in six months.
- Banni, a vast grassland in Kutch, has ample space but lacks sufficient prey for cheetahs.
- Chital, the main prey for cheetahs in India, may need to be introduced to Banni for a viable population.
- The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department manages cheetahs at Kuno, where 13 of the 20 cheetahs brought since September 2022 are alive, along with 13 cubs.
- Kuno's capacity is limited to 21 adult cheetahs due to prey constraints.
- India plans to import 10 to 12 adult cheetahs annually for the next five years to establish a sustainable breeding population.
- Banni is attractive due to the absence of leopards, which could help sustain a larger cheetah population long-term.
- All cheetahs in Kuno are expected to be released into the wild in October, and preparations for the next batch from South Africa and Namibia will follow.

Right to shelter is a fundamental right, says SC

GS Paper II: FR

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday urged a balance to be struck between railway infrastructure development at Haldwani, considered to be the doorway to the hills in Uttarakhand, and the fundamental right to shelter of nearly 50,000 people accused of illegally living on railway land. "They are also human beings," a Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant observed.

The court said while it cannot be ruthless about the fate of these families, its orders cannot also be misinterpreted as a note of encouragement for future encroachments.

The hearing was based on an application filed by the Railways to modify a 2023 top court order staying a Uttarakhand High Court direction to evict these families within a week. It said a flooding Ghaula river has disrupted railway operations in the region. The railway needed more land urgently to lay new tracks.

It asked the State Chief Secretary to meet with the Railway authorities and the Ministry of Urban Affairs to iron out a "fair and equitable" rehabilitation project for the families.

Right to shelter is a fundamental right, says SC (25 July)

- The Supreme Court urged a balance between railway infrastructure development in Haldwani, Uttarakhand, and the fundamental right to shelter of nearly 50,000 people accused of living illegally on railway land.
- The court emphasized that these families are human beings and their fate should not be treated ruthlessly.
- The court clarified that its orders should not be misinterpreted as encouragement for future encroachments.
- The hearing was based on a Railways application to modify a 2023 Supreme Court order that stayed a Uttarakhand High Court direction to evict these families within a week.
- The Railways argued that a flooding Ghaula river has disrupted operations and more land is needed to lay new tracks.
- The Supreme Court asked the State Chief Secretary to collaborate with Railway authorities and the Ministry of Urban Affairs to develop a fair and equitable rehabilitation project for the families.

ICMR ready to transfer technology of a 'breakthrough' TB detection system

GS Paper II: Health Sector

Bindu Shajan Perappadan

NEW DELHI

The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has begun work on spreading an affordable, faster and easy-to-use testing technology for detection of tuberculosis.

The council has invited an Expression of Interest from organisations, companies and manufacturers for "transfer of technology" for commercialisation of "a CRISPR Cas-based TB detection system".

Developed by the ICMR Regional Medical Research Centre, Dibrugarh, the technology is touted as the "world's cheapest TB testing system". It can detect the TB bacterium using DNA from saliva at a very low cost. It can identify the bacterium with preliminary symptoms, and test over 1,500 samples within two hours.



Over 1,500 samples can be simultaneously tested within two hours.

"It is so simple that it can be used even in the primary health centre of a village," say researchers at the centre.

TB kills an estimated 4,80,000 Indians every year or over 1,400 patients every day. Additionally, the country has more than a million "missing" TB cases annually, which are not notified. Most remain either undiagnosed, or unaccountably and inadequately diagnosed and treated in the private sector.

A senior Health Ministry official had noted that India's efforts to achieve rapid decline in the burden of TB morbidity and mortality, towards the elimination of the infection by 2025, have plateaued.

He added that there is now a move to rework the protocol to tackle the disease, specifically TB medication and its duration, to reboot the TB-free initiative with zero deaths, disease, and poverty resulting from the disease.

Expert guidance

The ICMR has developed the "CRISPR Cas-based TB detection system" and is lawfully entitled to enter into any form of exclusive or non-exclusive agreements with eligible manufacturing companies through a defined agreement for licensing and commercialisation of the system, which shall be go-

verned by the ICMR IP Policy, it said.

Listing out its role, the council has noted that the Dibrugarh centre will provide expert guidance and technical support for the production of the system in all phases.

"The ICMR through its institutes would provide support and facilitation to conduct the R&D/clinical study of new technology/product in India, in collaboration with the company/institutions in a professional and mutually agreed upon manner and timelines, which will be decided later under the Agreement. It will also provide technical support in development of technology/product and will also facilitate the validation as per the terms & conditions of the agreement. It shall have no financial implications unless otherwise specified," it said.

ICMR ready to transfer technology of a 'breakthrough' TB detection system (25 July)

- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) is working on spreading an affordable, faster, and easy-to-use TB testing technology.
- ICMR has invited an Expression of Interest for the "transfer of technology" for commercializing a CRISPR Cas-based TB detection system.
- Developed by the ICMR Regional Medical Research Centre, Dibrugarh, it is touted as the "world's cheapest TB testing system."
- The technology uses DNA from saliva to detect the TB bacterium at a very low cost and can test over 1,500 samples within two hours.
- Researchers state it is simple enough to be used even in village primary health centers.
- TB kills an estimated 4,80,000 Indians every year, with over 1,400 deaths daily, and there are more than a million "missing" TB cases annually.
- India's efforts to rapidly reduce TB morbidity and mortality towards eliminating the infection by 2025 have plateaued.
- There is a move to rework the TB medication protocol and duration to reboot the TB-free initiative with zero deaths, disease, and poverty resulting from TB.

- The ICMR has developed the "CRISPR Cas-based TB detection system" and can enter into exclusive or non-exclusive agreements with manufacturing companies for licensing and commercialization.
- The agreements will be governed by the ICMR IP Policy.
- The Dibrugarh center will provide expert guidance and technical support for production.
- ICMR will support and facilitate R&D/clinical studies of the new technology/product in India in collaboration with companies/institutions.
- Technical support will be provided for the development and validation of the technology/product as per agreement terms and conditions.
- ICMR's involvement will have no financial implications unless specified otherwise.

Centre defends fact-check unit, says right to correct information important

GS Paper II: Article 19 and Article 21

Defending the formation of a fact-checking unit (FCU), the Union government said in the Bombay High Court on Wednesday that the right to know factually correct information and the right to not be misled were equally important as the right to freedom of speech and expression under Article 19(1)(a).

Stand-up artist Kunal Kamra, the Editors Guild of India, and the Association of Indian Magazines have challenged the constitutionality of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Amendment Rules, 2023 that permit an FCU of the Union government to identify "fake or false or misleading" online content "related to the business of the Central Government" and



The Centre will continue its arguments in the Bombay High Court on Thursday.

demand its removal.

Tie-breaker judge Justice A.S. Chandurkar is hearing arguments in the case after a Division Bench of the High Court delivered a split verdict on January 31.

Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta, for the Union government, said the FCU would prevent people from false information.

"This approach represents the least restrictive method to counteract fake, false, and misleading infor-

mation. Private companies and individuals also maintain fact-checking units and the government is similarly justified in providing accurate information to the public. In many instances, the government acts as the adjudicator and beneficiary. However, in this context, my [government's] role is simply to identify and highlight instances of falsehood or misinformation," he said.

The petitioners completed their argument in April, contending that the amendment enables the government to be the "prosecutor, the judge, and in that loose sense, the executioner" of what constitutes the 'truth' online, thereby violating the cardinal principles of natural justice. They also pointed out that the "over-broad and vague" nature of the rules created a "chilling effect" on the freedom of speech

and expression guaranteed under Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution.

Mr. Mehta said the argument of "chilling effect" was incorrect.

"We (government) are not the final arbiter here. Just like individuals, the government can also intimate. The FCU is a methodical way of doing that. And being a statutory regime, it has consequences. We are not the arbiter. The first arbiter is the intermediary, the final arbiter is a court of competent jurisdiction. The right to be informed correctly is necessarily inherent in my right under Article 21. Because, if somebody's freedom of speech incites violence or threatens public order, it directly infringes my right under Article 21," Mr. Mehta added.

The government will continue its arguments on Thursday.

Centre defends fact-check unit, says right to correct information important (25 July)

- The Union government defended the formation of a fact-checking unit (FCU) in the Bombay High Court.
- The government argued that the right to know correct information and not be misled is as important as the right to freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a).
- Stand-up artist Kunal Kamra, the Editors Guild of India, and the Association of Indian Magazines challenged the constitutionality of the 2023 IT Amendment Rules.
- These rules allow an FCU to identify and demand the removal of fake or misleading content related to the Central Government.
- Justice A.S. Chandurkar is hearing the case after a split verdict by a Division Bench.
- Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta argued the FCU prevents misinformation and is the least restrictive method to counteract false information.
- He stated that private companies also maintain fact-checking units, justifying the government's role in providing accurate information.
- Petitioners argued the amendment allows the government to act as prosecutor, judge, and executioner, violating principles of natural justice and creating a chilling effect on free speech.
- Mr. Mehta refuted the chilling effect argument, stating the FCU is a methodical way for the government to highlight falsehoods and the final arbiter is a court.
- The government will continue its arguments on Thursday.

Ketamine pill offers hope, and risks, for treatment-resistant depression

Reports have suggested tablets that release ketamine slowly can improve symptoms of depression. Based on these reports, a team led by Paul Glue at the University of Otago, in New Zealand, proposed that patients could dose themselves safely at home using slow-release ketamine tablets

Sneha Khedkar

A new tablet that slowly releases the drug **ketamine** can ease **treatment-resistant depression**, offering an alternative to cumbersome clinic-based treatments for people with the condition, researchers have found in a clinical trial.

Ketamine, sometimes called a “party drug”, blocks the receptor for an **excitatory neurotransmitter** – those that **cause neurons fire and send messages** – called **glutamate**. It was originally used as an **anaesthetic** but researchers found that it had rapid antidepressant effects, acting within hours.

As such, health workers routinely prescribe ketamine to people with treatment-resistant depression, where antidepressants don't improve symptoms, and with suicidal ideation.

Slipping past side-effects

It is most commonly administered **intravenously** (i.e. by injecting into the blood), and can also be delivered via an **intranasal spray**. However, in these routes ketamine can have many side effects, including **headache, nausea, and drowsiness**, and serious ones like **increased blood pressure, loss of focus or dissociation from reality**.

As a result, clinicians monitor patients who have been given ketamine for two hours while the side effects subside. This means an in-clinic treatment protocol that those suffering from depressive symptoms have said are inconvenient and render the drug more inaccessible.

Previous reports have suggested that tablets that release ketamine slowly can improve symptoms of depression with fewer side effects. Based on these reports, a team led by Paul Glue at the University of Otago, in New Zealand, proposed that patients could dose themselves safely at home using slow-release ketamine tablets.

“If ketamine is formulated as an extended-release tablet where it takes about 10 hours to release, most ketamine is broken down in the liver before it can get into the blood,” Dr. Glue told *The Hindu* in an email. Ketamine's metabolites – the compounds formed when the liver breaks ketamine down – are the main drivers of its antidepressant effects, he explained. “However, the lower blood ketamine levels mean patients experience few or no side effects.”

An enriched clinical trial

Dr. Glue's team developed an extended-release **ketamine pill called R-107**. To test its effects, they administered it to 231 volunteers recruited from 20 psychiatric clinics in New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, and Taiwan. All the participants had a major depressive disorder and whose symptoms hadn't shown any improvement despite being treated with at least two antidepressants.

In the first stage of the study, the researchers treated all the participants with 120 mg of R-107 every day for five days. They assessed the participants' depression symptoms after eight days. Those whose symptoms had not improved left the study at this point, leaving 168 people to proceed to the second stage of the trial.

Many clinical trials use this sort of stepped intervention – called an enrichment phase – to exclude people who don't respond to acute treatment in



Ketamine is a drug of abuse, and unsupervised treatment in people with depression symptoms or suicidal ideation could be dangerous. Representative image. BEN WHITE/UNSPLASH

the first stage. Only those who respond to the treatment proceed to the next stage, which is double-blind, meaning neither the participants nor the researchers know which participant has received the actual treatment and which a placebo.

According to Dr. Glue, “Normally, depression treatment studies have a high failure rate of about 50%,” where there is no visible difference in responses between those treated with the drug and those treated with the placebo. “The risk of study failure drops to about 20% by using this two-stage design.”

‘Very satisfying to see the results’

The 168 people recruited to the double-blind stage received either placebo tablets or one of four R-107 doses – 30, 60, 120 or 180 mg – twice a week for three months. The participants reported experiencing minimal side effects, including headache, nausea, and anxiety. Very few reported symptoms of dissociation. While some people reported more dire side effects such as severe headache, chest pain, and suicidal ideations, the researchers were able to determine them to be unrelated to the treatment.

After the trial period, more participants treated with the tablets showed improved depression symptoms compared to those who had received placebo (as measured using a standard clinical scale to assess symptom severity). Those treated with 180 mg of ketamine reported the most signs of improvement. And compared to 43% of those who received the highest ketamine dose, 71% of those taking placebo relapsed and suffered from symptoms of depression.

These results didn't surprise Dr. Glue, since previous early clinical data had



Researchers designed R-107 to be exceptionally hard and difficult to shatter, so people can't crush the tablet and snort it or dissolve it in water to inject it intravenously for recreational use

revealed rapid antidepressant response to ketamine. “However, antidepressant drug trials can be unpredictable, so it was very satisfying to see the results,” he added.

Rishabh Bajaj, a psychiatrist at Asha Hospital in Hyderabad, also said the results, described in the journal *Nature Medicine* on June 24, were to be expected: “I would be surprised if people did not respond to ketamine.”

The cost question

Most participants in the double-blind stage consumed the pills at home, with brief visits to the clinic that they said did not inconvenience them. This was a sign that **extended-release ketamine tablets with fewer or no side effects could ease access to treatment for the people who need it the most**, Dr. Glue said.

“A ketamine-containing tablet is convenient, particularly for those in tier-three cities,” said Dr. Bajaj, since they **may not have access to clinics for ketamine treatment sessions**. The **drug costs only about ₹ 20 whereas intravenous treatment, which is more common, can cost anywhere between ₹ 750 and ₹ 2,500 per session**, he said. **Nasal sprays are usually inaccessible because they are even more expensive, ₹ 10,000 to ₹ 20,000**, he said.

However, he added that licensing costs might push up the tablets' cost as well.

The major limitation of the study, per Dr. Bajaj, was the enrichment phase, which can skew the results because a significant number of people had been excluded after acute treatment. Dr. Glue expressed a similar concern: “Enrichment is fine to demonstrate that the tablets work,” but further studies in more people for regulatory approval will need to have an ‘unenriched’ population as well.

Risk of abuse and overdose

Another concern, according to Dr. Bajaj, is that ketamine is a drug of abuse, and unsupervised treatment in people with depression symptoms or suicidal ideation could be dangerous.

To address some of these concerns, Dr. Glue's team designed R-107 to be exceptionally hard and difficult to shatter, so people can't crush the tablet and snort it or dissolve it in water to inject it intravenously for recreational use. Fortunately, none of the trial participants reported craving the tablet either.

Dr. Bajaj agreed making the tablets shatter-proof could mitigate its abuse, but said there was still the possibility of users with severe symptoms overdosing themselves with multiple tablets. He suggested this risk could be reduced by rationing the number of tablets available to users. But the downside of this idea is that patients would have to visit the clinic to refill their prescriptions, which was the point of devising R-107 in the first place.

Having more data about the treatment in more people can make the picture clearer, Dr. Bajaj concluded. “But that is going to take time.”

(Sneha Khedkar is a biologist turned freelance science journalist.)

Children at risk as mpox variant hits Congo camps for displaced

Reuters

Scars from the mpox pustules are still visible on 7-year-old Grace Kabuo's face, as well as on a handful of her playmates at a camp for displaced people near Goma, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Grace has otherwise recovered from the virus. Her mother, Denise Kahindo, says she is still unsure how her daughter was infected earlier this month.

"I just helplessly noticed the symptoms on her body," she said. For disease experts, Grace's case embodies a new concern about mpox, which was first identified over 50 years ago. Her infection was caused by a new variant that appears to be more capable of transmitting between people than previous strains.

Local doctors say they have seen 130 suspected mpox cases, almost entirely in children and adolescents, in the last four weeks at a nearby facility that treats displaced people from the camp.

"Fifty percent [of the 130 cases] are even less than five years old," said Pierre-Olivier Ngadjole, a medical advisor for Medair, a charity helping with treating and transporting patients from the camp near Goma to the nearby medical center in Munigi. An estimated 750,000 people have fled to the area due to fighting between the M23 rebel group and the Congolese government.

"You know the children; they play together... and in the displaced person camps, people are side-by-side," he added.

Mpox, a viral infection that can spread through close contact, is usually mild but can lead to death in some cases. It causes flu-like symptoms and pus-filled lesions on the body.

The current mpox outbreak in Congo has already seen around 27,000 cases and

Local doctors say they have seen 130 suspected mpox cases, almost entirely in children and adolescents, in the last four weeks at a facility that treats displaced people from the camps

claimed more than 1,100 lives, most of them children, since the beginning of 2023. It began with the spread of an endemic strain, known as Clade I. But the new variant, known as Clade Ib, appears to spread more easily through routine close contact, as seems to be the case among children.

Another mpox variant, Clade IIb, prompted an international health emergency when it spread globally in 2022, mainly through sexual contact among men who have sex with men. Public health officials in the U.S. and Europe launched campaigns to promote safe sex practices and vaccinated at-risk populations to curb the spread.

In Congo, there are no vaccines or specific treatments for mpox available outside of clinical trials. Stigma, regulatory hurdles, and a lack of money, along with measles and cholera outbreaks in the displacement camps have made it a challenge for people to access medical tools, especially in densely packed locations.

Last month, the country approved the use of two mpox vaccines, but funding remains a significant challenge. Only a few countries have offered to donate shots to Congo, and WHO approval regulations remain a hurdle for international vaccine organisations.

Children at risk as mpox variant hits Congo camps for displaced (25 July)

- 7-year-old Grace Kabuo has visible scars from mpox pustules but has recovered from the virus.
- Grace's mother is unsure how she contracted the infection, which is caused by a new, more transmissible variant of mpox.
- Local doctors report 130 suspected mpox cases in children and adolescents in the past four weeks at a facility near Goma, Congo.
- Half of these cases are in children under five years old.
- Mpox spreads through close contact and usually causes mild symptoms but can be severe or fatal.
- The current outbreak in Congo has seen around 27,000 cases and over 1,100 deaths since early 2023, primarily among children.
- The outbreak began with Clade I and is now being driven by the more easily spread Clade Ib.
- Clade IIb, another mpox variant, caused a global health emergency in 2022, spreading mainly through sexual contact.
- Congo lacks vaccines and specific treatments for mpox outside of clinical trials. The situation is complicated by stigma, regulatory issues, and other outbreaks like measles and cholera.
- Congo has approved two mpox vaccines, but funding and regulatory hurdles remain significant challenges.

Budget 2024 — long on intent, short on details (25 July)

- The Budget focuses on three main aspects: Vikisat Bharat@2047 vision, addressing unemployment, and coalition government challenges.
- The Budget aims for continuity with fiscal consolidation efforts, reducing the fiscal deficit to 4.9% from 5.1%.
- A significant portion of surplus from the Reserve Bank of India is used for fiscal prudence.
- The goal is to reduce the fiscal deficit to below 4.5% of GDP by FY2026.
- The medium-term fiscal consolidation path focuses on reducing the debt/GDP ratio.
- The Budget size has increased marginally, with a slight decrease in overall borrowing.
- Capital expenditure remains mostly unchanged, with a marginal increase in overall expenditure.
- Budget estimates for 2024-25 show a slight increase or decrease in various expenditure items compared to 2023-24.
- Revised estimates for 2023-24 are lower than the Budget estimates for the same year, particularly in social welfare and scientific departments.
- Effective capital expenditure has decreased, indicating the government's spending capacity issues.
- The government relies more on private investments, which have not significantly increased in recent years.

Consumption and employment

- The Budget aims to increase demand and private consumption by adjusting the new income-tax regime to leave more disposable income for taxpayers.
- There was room for more income-tax reliefs, which could have stimulated demand and increased household savings, but this opportunity was missed.
- Employment growth is expected through an internship scheme, incentives for hiring first-time employees, and salary top-ups, though these measures may not address deeper labor market issues.
- The MSME sector is expected to revive through a credit guarantee scheme and state assistance, but MSMEs also need a conducive operating environment.
- Tax benefits for start-ups, including scrapping the angel tax and increasing MUDRA loan limits, were announced.
- The Budget lacks significant initiatives for the industrial sector, Railways, PLI Scheme, Gati Sakthi, and the Census.
- There were no clear initiatives for education and health sectors, which are crucial for the vision of 2047.
- Balancing development between urban and rural areas and distinguishing between jobs and internships are important but not adequately addressed.

An outlining of urban transformation strategies

GS Paper III:

Cities are home to about 50 crore people, accounting for about 36% of India's population. The urban population has been growing at a steady pace of 2% to 2.5% annually. The ever-growing pace of urbanisation in India calls for sustained investments, with a vision and determination. The maiden Budget of the new government has recognised cities as the growth hubs and offered many options and opportunities for the planned development and the growth of cities.

The issue of housing

The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) has been under implementation since 2015 and has provided as many as 85 lakh housing units for the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS)-Middle Income Groups (MIG) categories of population, with an investment of about ₹8 lakh crore. Of this, a quarter has been provided by the central government and the remaining by the beneficiaries and State governments. The Budget has proposed to give a further push to the scheme by announcing support for the construction of another one crore such units in urban areas with an investment of ₹10 lakh crore, which will include central assistance of ₹2.2 lakh crore in the next five years, against which ₹30,171 crore has been provided in the Budget for the current year. A part of this allocation will be available to provide interest subsidy to facilitate loans at affordable rates.

The migrant population working in industries has been surviving in general in slums and yearning for a roof over their heads and a functional housing unit close to their workplaces. The Budget has announced new rental housing with dormitory-type accommodation for industrial workers. This is envisaged to be developed in public-private partnership (PPP) mode with upfront financial support under the Viability Gap Funding (VGF) scheme. This is to the extent of 20% from the central government, with the possibility of similar support from the State government.

The core infrastructure requirement for cities includes water supply, sanitation, roads and sewerage systems. Specific to the cities, the Atal



Sudhir Krishna

former Secretary,
Urban Development,
Government of India

State governments, their municipalities and also citizens will have to take forward the provisions outlined in the Budget

Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT) provides ₹8,000 crore, which, by itself, may not appear to be very substantial. However, the Finance Minister has announced the availability of the VGF window, provided that the project is taken up as a commercial venture in PPP Mode. Most cities have, over the years, got exposed to the PPP model, and it should be possible to speed up the development of such core infrastructure, where it is unavailable and upgrade it where it exists but is inadequate.

The Budget Speech also mentions a huge investment of ₹11.11 lakh crore for capex in infrastructure. While this would include highways and many other sectors, cities can also make efforts to partake a share in it. Similarly, a provision of ₹1.50 lakh crore is made available to States as an interest-free loan for infrastructure development. States could use this window also, for cities.

The Smart Cities Mission, that was launched in 2015, was provided budgetary support of ₹8,000 crore in 2023-24, which has been scaled down to ₹2,400 crore in 2024-25, to take care of the remnant commitments. However, a new window, the National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM), has been opened in this Budget, with a provision of ₹1,150 crore, with a focus on the digitisation of property and tax records and their management, with GIS mapping. These will help urban local bodies in managing their finances better, and also help property owners.

On city planning

The Budget has declared the intention of focusing on the planned development of cities. Municipalities would get the normal 'Finance Commission Grant' of ₹25,653 crore. In addition, a provision of ₹500 crore has been made for the incubation of new cities. With the development of mass rapid transit systems, cities can embark on transit-oriented development, wherein transit hubs can be surrounded by denser development without creating a traffic overload on roads. Moreover, a well-designed mobility plan can conveniently connect cities with their peri-urban areas and 'new cities'. Accordingly, the Budget

has announced an enhanced focus on economic and transit planning, with the orderly development of peri-urban areas utilising town planning schemes. The Budget has also proposed encouraging electric bus systems for cities and has provided ₹1,300 crore for it. E-buses offer an economical and eco-friendly operating system, but the main challenge is their higher upfront cost. However, with this budgetary support, it should get going.

Solid waste management

Solid waste management (SWM) is perhaps the biggest challenge that most cities face today. The Budget has announced a special thrust to introduce bankable projects for SWM in collaboration with State government and financial institutions. States and municipalities can also make use of the VGF for this purpose. Cities such as Indore, Madhya Pradesh, have shown the way in making SWM a financially viable proposition.

The Street Vendors Act, 2014, was enacted by Parliament to regulate street vendors in public areas and protect their rights. It also envisaged the preparation of street-vending plans and the creation of street-vending zones, with a view to make street-vending a healthy and safe option for consumers and vendors. The Budget has proposed to develop 100 weekly 'haats' or street food hubs in select cities. Perhaps States need not feel constrained with the number and can facilitate all cities in preparing street-vending plans and developing street vending 'haats' in various parts of the city, according to felt needs.

While the Budget has made a slew of provisions, financial as well as procedural, to push for planned urbanisation, cities, represented by the municipalities, and guided by the respective State governments, will have to show the vision and the determination to incorporate all the resources coming not only from the Union Budget but also augmented by their own resources.

Above all, the participation of citizens would remain the bedrock for the success of any city's development strategy.

The views expressed are personal

An outlining of urban transformation strategies (25 July)

- Cities house about 50 crore people, 36% of India's population, with urbanisation growing at 2-2.5% annually.
- The new government's Budget recognises cities as growth hubs, offering options for planned development.
- Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) has provided 85 lakh housing units for EWS-MIG since 2015, with ₹8 lakh crore investment.
- The Budget proposes support for constructing another one crore units with ₹10 lakh crore investment, including ₹2.2 lakh crore central assistance over five years.
- ₹30,171 crore is allocated for the current year, part of which will provide interest subsidy for affordable loans.
- New rental housing with dormitory-type accommodation for industrial workers is announced, to be developed in PPP mode with 20% central government support under the Viability Gap Funding (VGF) scheme.
- Core infrastructure needs like water, sanitation, roads, and sewerage are addressed with ₹8,000 crore under AMRUT, with potential PPP mode projects.
- ₹11.11 lakh crore is allocated for infrastructure capex, including highways and other sectors; cities can partake.
- ₹1.50 lakh crore is available to States as an interest-free loan for infrastructure, which can also benefit cities.
- Smart Cities Mission budget reduced from ₹8,000 crore in 2023-24 to ₹2,400 crore in 2024-25 for remaining commitments.
- National Urban Digital Mission (NUDM) introduced with ₹1,150 crore for digitising property and tax records with GIS mapping to improve urban local body finances and property management.

On city planning

- Budget focuses on planned development of cities.
- Municipalities receive ₹25,653 crore Finance Commission Grant.
- Additional ₹500 crore for new city incubation.
- Mass rapid transit systems enable transit-oriented development.
- Enhanced focus on economic and transit planning for peri-urban areas with town planning schemes.
- ₹1,300 crore allocated for encouraging electric bus systems in cities.
- Special thrust on solid waste management (SWM) with bankable projects in collaboration with State governments and financial institutions.
- Use of Viability Gap Funding (VGF) for SWM projects.
- Indore, Madhya Pradesh, cited as a successful example of SWM.

- Street Vendors Act, 2014, regulates and protects street vendors; Budget proposes 100 weekly 'haats' or street food hubs in select cities.
- States encouraged to develop street-vending plans and zones beyond the proposed number.
- Cities and municipalities must incorporate Union Budget resources and augment with their own resources.
- Citizen participation is essential for successful city development strategy.

Cleansing NEET (25 July)

Next year, the test must have safeguards against malpractice and inefficiency

- The Supreme Court of India ruled on the correct answer to a disputed NEET 2024 physics question, reducing the number of toppers from 61 to 17.
- Four lakh students, including 44 toppers, chose the wrong answer and will lose five marks each.
- The National Testing Agency (NTA) was directed to revise the scores based on the correct answer.
- The wrong answer was in older NCERT textbooks (until 2021).
- The Court refused to cancel the entire NEET, which had over 23 lakh applicants.
- Counselling, initially scheduled for July 24, has been delayed due to the need to re-tally marks.
- NEET-UG 2024 faced issues such as paper leaks, wrong question papers, damaged answer keys, impersonation, and an unusual number of toppers from certain centers.
- Judicial interventions have addressed these issues, but significant action from the executive is needed.
- Overemphasis on medicine as a career choice should be dialed down, promoting other scientific streams.
- The government needs to reorient the system to conduct NEET professionally with safeguards against malpractice and inefficiency.

Not in order (25 July)

The directives on display of names on Kanwar Yatra route must be withdrawn

- Supreme Court of India stopped enforcement of directives by Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand governments.
- Directives required food stalls on the Kanwar Yatra route to display owner and employee details.
- Petitioners argued the directives were discriminatory and negated the secular character of the country.
- Court issued notices to Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Delhi, and Madhya Pradesh, and scheduled a hearing for Friday.
- Kanwar Yatra is a popular pilgrimage for Shiva devotees, especially among Dalits and Other Backward Classes in the Hindi heartland.
- Muzaffarnagar police first issued the directive to prevent incidents.
- Directives criticized as discriminatory by the Opposition and BJP allies.
- U.P. Chief Minister extended the requirement statewide; Uttarakhand followed suit.
- Reports emerged of Hindu hotel owners being asked to remove Muslim workers and harassment of meat shop owners.
- BJP allies RLD and JD(U), along with Congress and Samajwadi Party, criticized the directives as communal.
- Many pilgrimages in India involve people of different faiths working together; Muslims also participate in and support the Kanwar Yatra.
- Government directive was seen as promoting communal enmity and should be withdrawn.

A Budget that places health on the margins (25 July)

- The Union Budget shifted focus to economic growth through infrastructure and employment.
- Expected continued investment in health systems did not materialize as detailed in the Interim Budget.
- The Finance Minister had announced plans for HPV vaccination, U-WIN program for routine immunisation, and inclusion of ASHA and Anganwadi workers in PMJAY.
- These initiatives were not elaborated or presented as line items in the main Budget.
- Budget increases should be compared using budgetary estimates (BE) from year to year, not revised estimates (RE).
- Comparing BE of 2023-24 with 2024-25 shows a small increase: 1.98% for the overall Health Ministry budget, 1.16% for the National Health Mission (NHM), and 1.4% for PMJAY.
- These modest increases are insufficient for expanding coverage and enhancing impact of Ayushman Bharat's flagship programs.
- NHM needs better resources to address child immunisation, tuberculosis elimination, and rising non-communicable diseases.
- Universal health coverage by 2030 cannot be achieved if PMJAY's inclusivity is limited by minimal budget increases.
- Extending PMJAY to cover all elderly persons appears untenable with the current budget.

A missed opportunity

- Increase in new medical colleges mentioned, but no acknowledgment of need for a multi-layered, multi-skilled workforce.
- Health sector represents a significant area for employment generation and skill-building, especially for young people.
- Customs duties waived on three anti-cancer drugs, but price controls needed for many other drugs.
- Pooled procurement with price negotiation can reduce drug prices for public and private healthcare institutions.
- Budget missed opportunity to establish pooled procurement mechanisms.

- Investment in climate-resilient agriculture is welcomed.
- Diversification to climate-resilient crops provides nutrition security and is climate smart, reducing water, pesticide, energy use, and greenhouse gas emissions.

The government's focus is on ease of paying taxes (25 July)

- Budget focuses on growth with inclusion to strengthen India's economy.
- Simplification and rationalisation of the tax structure are key goals.
- Budget aims to minimize disputes and expand the tax net, with 'ease of doing business' as a theme.
- Equalisation levy of 2% on e-commerce transactions withdrawn, aligning with OECD BEPS Action Plan.
- Proposals to expand safe harbour rules, streamline transfer pricing, and reduce corporate tax rate on foreign companies expected to attract foreign investments.
- Angel tax abolished to support Indian startups and boost investor confidence.
- Withholding Tax regime rationalized and simplified, enhancing ease of doing business.
- Changes in capital gains tax regime aimed at rationalisation; industry hopes for tax certainty and simplification.
- Raising standard deduction, increasing tax slabs, and enhancing deductions for pensions to provide tax relief to middle-class individuals.
- New scheme of block assessment for search cases and reducing reassessment time limit introduced.
- 'Vivad se Vishwas Scheme, 2024' proposed for settling pending appeals to reduce litigation.
- Digitisation of major taxpayer services to enhance ease of doing business.

Customs duty rates

- Government focuses on promoting domestic manufacturing and integrating India into the global value chain to boost exports.
- Rationalisation of customs duty rates and simplification of compliance to enhance ease of doing business.
- Removal of duty inversion and reduction of disputes.
- CII appreciates the waiver of interest and penalty on late GST payment and exclusion of cash balance in taxpayers' cash registers for interest calculation.
- Budget aims to boost competitiveness, growth, and tax reforms.
- Overall, the Budget meets expectations with a focus on realism.

A big step towards the transformation of various sectors (25 July)

- The 2024-25 Budget aims to drive economic growth and social progress.
- Allocates ₹1.48 lakh crore for job creation, employment, and skilling.
- Emphasizes skilling over manufacturing, indicating a shift towards a service-based economy.
- Recognizes the success of the service sector in driving GDP growth, elevating per capita income, and improving employee health and well-being.
- Supports energy transformation with initiatives for solar panel manufacturing and nuclear energy.
- Allocates ₹89,287 crore towards sectoral transformation for an inclusive and dynamic economy.
- Exempts certain goods from customs duty, including three life-saving cancer medications, making treatments more accessible and affordable.
- Exempts customs duty for components of X-ray tubes and digital detectors for advanced medical equipment, enhancing domestic capabilities.
- Aligns customs duty with domestic capacity under the phased manufacturing programme, creating a conducive environment for startups and fostering growth and innovation.
- The Budget introduced a framework with nine priorities focusing on advanced technology and public-private collaboration for growth and innovation.
- Emphasizes incorporating state-of-the-art technology and creating databases to enhance efficiency and accessibility.
- Effective collaboration between private organizations and the government is crucial.
- India spends just 0.7% of its GDP on research; the private sector should collaborate with the government to co-create the future.
- McKinsey report: India can boost its 2025 GDP by 16%-60% by enabling women to participate equally in the economy.
- Budget focuses on boosting women's workforce participation with initiatives like hostels, creches, and skilling programs.
- Skilling is emphasized, with internships and research to develop a highly skilled workforce.
- Budget reflects the government's commitment to building a healthier and stronger economy.
- Prioritizes demographic dividend, public-private partnerships, and investment in research and development for sustainable growth.

Prioritising inclusivity and fiscal prudence (25 July)

- The Budget was highly anticipated as the first major public policy announcement from the new government.
- It aims to outline the government's approach for the next five years towards achieving Viksit Bharat@2047.
- Key focuses include employment, skilling, MSMEs, and the middle class.
- The Budget articulates an economic policy framework to accelerate growth and inclusivity.
- Agriculture is a priority, with emphasis on climate-resilient seed varieties and strengthening national missions for pulses and oilseeds.

- Efforts include creating large-scale vegetable production clusters to increase self-reliance and stabilize farmers' incomes.
- A comprehensive package for employment and skilling has been introduced, including three schemes offering employment-linked incentives.
- New working women hostels and creches will be set up to support greater female workforce participation.
- Increasing female labor force participation is expected to boost growth, with suggestions to strengthen the care economy.
- A new credit guarantee scheme for MSMEs in the manufacturing sector has been introduced.
- Public sector banks will develop models for credit evaluation based on MSME digital footprints.
- Measures are in place to ensure credit flow to MSMEs during periods of stress.
- The annual turnover threshold for registration on the TreDS platform is reduced from ₹500 crore to ₹250 crore.
- Sustainability measures include promoting small modular nuclear reactors, supporting the rooftop solar program, and investing in water supply, sewage treatment, and solid waste management.
- A Critical Minerals Mission will ensure access to essential minerals for sustainability goals.
- The government plans to partner with states for factor market reforms in land, labor, and power to reduce production costs.
- A reduction in the projected fiscal deficit for 2024-25 from 5.1% to 4.9% demonstrates fiscal consolidation efforts.
- The Budget has outlined clear priorities for growth and development, with a focus now needed on implementation.

On increase in electricity tariff in T.N. (25 July)

- Tamil Nadu Electricity Regulatory Commission (TNERC) announced a 4.83% average tariff hike for all consumers, effective retrospectively from July 1.
- The announcement was delayed until after the Lok Sabha and Vikravandi Assembly byelection results.
- In September 2022, TNERC indicated the new tariff would take effect from July 1 each year.
- The previous 2.18% increase was effective from July 1, 2023, but the State government absorbed the increase for most consumers, including 2.3 crore domestic consumers.
- The current tariff revision is part of a multi-year tariff framework from FY2022-23 to 2026-27, based on Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) rates.
- The CPI rates ranged from 4.9% to 6.3% between 2018 and 2022, and the annual increase is capped at 6%.
- State government support for Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited (TNPDC) has been increasing over the years.
- Tariff subsidy and grants rose from ₹20,547.42 crore in 2021-22 to ₹32,103.6 crore in 2023-24.
- The tariff increase is expected to generate an additional ₹2,720 crore in revenue, but TNPDC is still expected to end the year with a ₹12,280 crore loss, assuming no significant increase in demand.

What has been the impact?

- The State government claims that about one crore domestic consumers are exempt from the tariff increase.
- The free consumption scheme of 100 units bi-monthly for domestic users and free power for huts and agriculture remains unchanged.
- Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) with over 25 lakh members are protesting the tariff hike, saying it burdens them financially.
- Open-end spinning mills face an additional ₹25,000 in monthly costs due to the tariff increase, with higher charges impacting their competitiveness.
- Political parties have criticized the tariff increase, but the government remains unresponsive.
- Recently, the Directorate of Vigilance and Anti-Corruption (DVAC) started a preliminary inquiry into alleged irregularities in coal import by the former TANGEDCO, which reportedly caused a ₹6,066 crore loss between 2012 and 2016.
- The Tamil Nadu Power Generation Corporation Limited (TNPGL) now monitors coal quality, engaging the Quality Council of India and Central Power Research Institute for analysis.
- Industrialist Gautam Adani reportedly visited Chennai to discuss the Parandur airport project and Kattupalli port expansion.

Is immunity for the President and Governors absolute?

Does Article 361 grant absolute to the Governor even against criminal charges?

GS Paper II: Executive

The story so far:

A three-judge Bench headed by the Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud has impleaded the Union government and sought assistance from the Attorney General of India to decide if a "blanket" immunity granted under Article 361 to the President and Governors, while in office, from criminal proceedings undermines fairness, constitutional morality and violates fundamental rights to equal protection of the law and fair trial.

What is the case?

The question came up in a petition filed by a contractual woman employee with the Raj Bhavan who has accused West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose of sexual harassment and molestation.

The woman, identified as 'XXX' in Supreme Court records to protect her identity, said the "absolute immunity" given to the Governor is based on the

victorian belief that the "King can do no wrong". She said the police have treated her complaint against the constitutional authority in a "cavalier manner" citing the immunity clause. She said the only option left to her is to wait for the Governor to demit office for the investigation to commence on her complaint of gender violence. She, however, fears that the delay in the criminal investigation against such a powerful person may eventually deny her justice during trial. She has urged the court to mandate the State of West Bengal through its police machinery to carry out an investigation. The employee has also asked the court to frame guidelines and qualify the extent of the immunity.

Do Governors have immunity?

Article 361 (1) provides that the President and Governors are not answerable to any court for acts done in exercise and performance of their powers and duties.

However the first proviso to Article 361(1) allows the conduct of the President

to be reviewed by any court, tribunal or body designated by either House of Parliament for the investigation of a charge under Article 61 (impeachment for violation of the Constitution). The second proviso to Article 361(1) holds that the immunity cannot stop a person from suing the Centre or State concerned.

The clause in question before the Supreme Court in the current case is clause (2) of Article 361 which mandates that "no criminal proceedings whatsoever shall be instituted or continued against the President, or the Governor of a State, in any court during his term of office". The apex court has decided to interpret clause (2) of Article 361 to determine when exactly could criminal proceedings be instituted against a President or Governor. In short, the court has decided to rattle the protective cover of immunity to see if it is "unfettered or unbridled".

Interestingly, the Constituent Assembly debates on Article 361 (Draft Article 302) in September 1949 show that a Member had indeed found the language of clause

(2) vague. The discussion concerned the phrase "during the term of his office" in Article 361(2). The Member had queried if this would mean the President or a Governor could enjoy immunity by continuing in office despite committing a criminal act. The question was left open.

What are the arguments raised?

The petitioner argues that a bar on criminal proceedings under Article 361(2) does not extend to illegal acts or those which "strike at the roots" of a citizen's fundamental rights. The alleged actions of Governor Bose infringed upon her right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution, she submitted. The immunity under Article 361 cannot impair the police's powers to investigate the offence or even name the perpetrator in the complaint/FIR. No part of the powers of the Governor provide for him to sexually abuse employees, the employee said.

The Supreme Court, in *Rameshwar Prasad vs. Union of India*, had interpreted that 'civil immunity' under Article 361(4) did not take away the power of citizens to challenge the actions of the President or Governors on the ground of 'malafides'. An analogy could be drawn to interpret criminal immunity the same way. The petition referred to a Madhya Pradesh High Court ruling in *Ram Naresh vs State of Madhya Pradesh*, which had held that the immunity would not impair the police's powers to investigate an offence, which included recording the Governor's statement.

THE GIST

A three-judge Bench has impleaded the Union government to decide if a "blanket" immunity granted under Article 361 to the President and Governors, while in office, from criminal proceedings undermines fairness and constitutional morality.

The question came up in a petition filed by a contractual woman employee with the Raj Bhavan who has accused West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose of sexual harassment and molestation.

The petitioner argues that a bar on criminal proceedings under Article 361(2) does not extend to illegal acts or those which "strike at the roots" of a citizen's fundamental rights.

Is immunity for the President and Governors absolute? (25 July)

- The Supreme Court, led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, is examining if the blanket immunity granted to Presidents and Governors under Article 361 affects fairness, constitutional morality, and fundamental rights.
- The case involves a woman who accused West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose of sexual harassment and molestation.
- The woman claims the immunity allows the Governor to avoid investigation and prosecution, impacting her access to justice.
- Article 361(1) grants immunity from court proceedings for the President and Governors, but allows review for impeachment and does not prevent lawsuits against the government.
- Article 361(2) bars criminal proceedings against the President or Governor during their term.
- The Supreme Court is deciding if this immunity is absolute or if it should be limited in cases of serious offenses.
- The petitioner argues that such immunity should not shield illegal acts that violate fundamental rights and that the police should be able to investigate.
- Past rulings suggest that immunity should not obstruct legal challenges or investigations into serious offenses.

25th July 2024

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

GS Paper II: Executive

Question: Critically examine the constitutional immunity granted to the President and Governors under Article 361 of the Indian Constitution. (250 Words/15 Marks)

ANSWER APPROACH

- Introduction to Article 361 and its provisions.
- Explanation of the current case and the issues raised.
- Analysis of the balance between constitutional immunity and fundamental rights.
- Discussion on the principles of fairness and constitutional morality.
- Conclusion with potential reforms or guidelines.

ANSWER

Article 361 of the Indian Constitution provides the President and Governors with immunity from legal proceedings while in office. This provision, rooted in the doctrine that "the King can do no wrong," aims to protect the dignity and functionality of these high offices. However, this immunity has come under scrutiny for potentially undermining principles of fairness, constitutional morality, and fundamental rights.

Immunity Provisions and Scope

- Article 361(1) states that the President and Governors are not answerable to any court for acts done in the exercise of their powers and duties.
- However, this is not absolute.
- The first proviso allows their conduct to be reviewed by any court, tribunal, or body designated by Parliament for the investigation of charges under Article 61 (impeachment).
- The second proviso clarifies that this immunity does not prevent someone from suing the Union or State governments.
- Clause (2) of Article 361 explicitly states that "no criminal proceedings whatsoever shall be instituted or continued against the President, or the Governor of a State, in any court during his term of office."
- This clause is currently being examined by the Supreme Court to determine the extent and limitations of this immunity.

The Case in Question

- A three-judge bench led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud has taken up the issue of whether this "blanket" immunity undermines fairness and violates fundamental rights.
- The case involves a contractual woman employee who accused West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose of sexual harassment and molestation.
- The complainant argued that the immunity under Article 361 prevented the police from taking her complaint seriously and delayed justice, as the investigation could only begin after the Governor demits office.

Constitutional Morality and Fairness

- Critics argue that the absolute immunity granted under Article 361 can lead to abuse of power and a lack of accountability.
- The petitioner in the current case contends that such immunity does not extend to illegal acts that violate fundamental rights.
- She emphasized that the alleged actions of Governor Bose infringed on her right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution.
- The argument is that the immunity should not impair the police's powers to investigate the offense or even name the perpetrator in a complaint or FIR.
- No part of the Governor's powers includes the right to commit sexual abuse, and thus, immunity should not shield such acts.

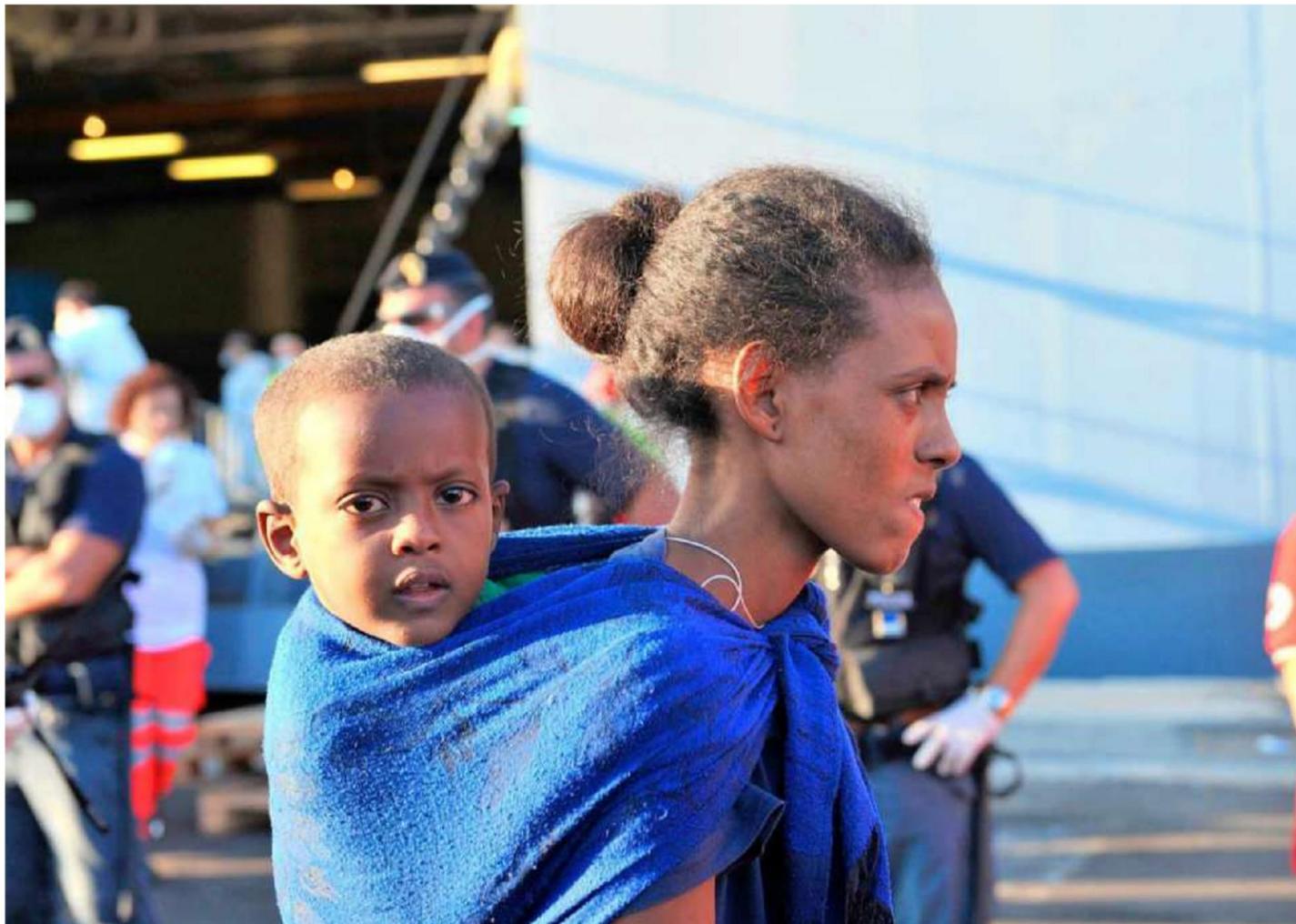
Judicial Interpretations and Debates

- The Supreme Court, in *Rameshwar Prasad vs. Union of India*, interpreted that 'civil immunity' under Article 361(4) does not remove the power of citizens to challenge actions of the President or Governors on grounds of 'mala fides.'
- This interpretation suggests that a similar approach could be applied to criminal immunity.
- The Constituent Assembly debates on Article 361 reflect concerns about the vague language of clause (2).
- Members questioned whether this would allow a President or Governor to enjoy immunity indefinitely by remaining in office despite committing criminal acts. This question remains pertinent today.

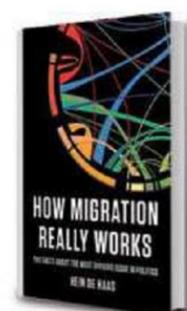
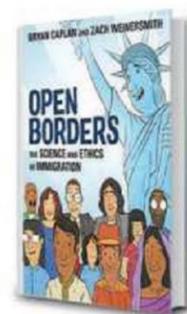
Thus, constitutional immunity provided under Article 361 aims to protect the dignity and ensure the unimpeded functioning of the highest offices in the country. However, it raises significant concerns regarding fairness, constitutional morality, and the protection of fundamental rights. The ongoing Supreme Court deliberations are crucial in determining the balance between immunity and accountability, ensuring that no individual, regardless of their position, is above the law. This case could lead to the formulation of guidelines that clearly define the extent of immunity and ensure justice for all citizens.

PatrioticIAS

BIBLIOGRAPHY



Dangerous journey: A woman and child, part of a group of more than 1,370 immigrants, disembark from an Italian ship in the port of Crotona, southern Italy, in 2014. AFP



Europe bound: on the myths surrounding migrants and asylum seekers

From overcrowded boats, hostile politics, taunts of encroachment, and detention centres, writers lay down the facts on the influx of refugees and immigrants, and why countries in Europe must do better for the people flocking its shores

GS Paper II: IR

Joan Sony Cherian

Migration was a key issue in Europe's recent elections. In April, the European Union (EU) had voted for reforms in its migration policy to tackle how the bloc handles the influx of refugees fleeing conflict zones in Africa and Asia. From international organisations such as the United Nations to the media which show us overcrowded boats of immigrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea or politicians who ring the death knell of the 'European way of life' due to massive 'encroachment' of 'illegal' immigrants, migration policies have been at the top of every electoral agenda in the EU in the recent past.

One of the main factors being attributed to the resurgence of the right-wing in Europe and elsewhere in the Global North is 'uncontrolled' immigration. An issue which compounded after the migrant crisis of 2015-16, post the civil war in Syria, has been used by right-wing parties and groups to stoke fears of replacement, unemployment, invasion, culture clashes, crime, religious fanaticism and so on. Even sections of the left have raised apprehensions of jobs being taken over by immigrants who might be willing to work for cheaper rates and longer hours.

Not a new spectacle

However, is migration really a new phenomenon in Europe? Why do immigrants make the risky journey putting their lives at stake? Scholars are grappling with these questions and trying to spread awareness and quell fears on

the impact of migration on Europe.

One such scholar, Hein de Haas, tackles these questions head-on in his book *How Migration Really Works*. He places the debate historically and states that during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, in the era of colonisation of the Global South by various European nations, Europe was a region of net out-migration, a continent of emigrants flowing to different colonies. Haas talks about how people from the colonies were first forced to immigrate to European countries or other colonies as indentured labour, especially after the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade post the American civil war. It is only after the Second World War and the establishment of the welfare state that emigration from Europe stopped.

Analysing the current situation, he deconstructs the myth that Europe is going through a phase of unprecedented migration. Using global migrant population data from the Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2017 Revision database, compiled by the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations, he states that the percentage of migration as a share of world population has remained stable at 3% from 1960 till 2017. This effectively means that there has been no sudden rise in immigration, it has just increased with the increase in global population, making the rate constant. The only novelty is that the flow of migration has changed – where now instead of immigration to the Global South, it's the reverse.

On human rights

The road to Europe is fraught with

dangers. Fleeing repressive governments and inhumane conditions, immigrants from West Asia and North Africa try to reach the European continent via sea in overcrowded boats. These boats are mostly provided by illegal smugglers who extort huge sums of money from refugees in order to get them to Europe. However, even then safe passage is not guaranteed. Most of these boats are intercepted and routed back while some even drown in the perilous sea. Since 2014, the International Organization of Migration has recorded over 20,000 deaths in the Mediterranean Sea.

To place a deterrent for illegal immigrants coming via boats, the government of Italy has struck a deal with Libyan coastguards to stem the influx of immigrants. The EU pledged a sum of almost 100 million euros to train and equip these coastguards over the years. These coastguards are authorised to intercept these boats and take the people in them to detention centres in Tripoli, the capital of Libya, indefinitely.

In *My Fourth Time, We Drowned*, Sally Hayden chronicles the lives of people held for years in such detention centres without any clarity, and most often undergoing torture, hunger and sexual violence. She documents how the EU and the UN are complicit in the human rights violations such detention centres commit. Hayden tells us the story of Kaleb, an Eritrean refugee fleeing an oppressive government, and his journey – not only from Libya via sea to Italy but also his journey from Eritrea to Libya via Ethiopia and Sudan. Braving smuggling rings, trafficking attempts and the moral apathy of international humanitarian

organisations, hundreds of refugees like Kaleb make the journey hoping for a better life somewhere else.

A melting pot boiling over

It is not only Europe that is rallying against the boogeyman of immigration. Even in the U.S., illegal immigration has been the top agenda in the ongoing electoral race. Former President Donald Trump's 'Build the Wall' campaign and his Muslim travel ban is testament to the fact that U.S. society is growing increasingly intolerant of immigrants and refugees.

In the light of increasing polarisation around the issue, economist and graphic novel aficionado Bryan Caplan attempts to break down myths regarding immigration and its history via data and numbers through the visual medium of a comic book. *Open Borders: The Science and Ethics of Immigration*, written by Caplan and illustrated by Zach Weinersmith, advocates for complete freedom for people to move and work wherever they want without restrictions.

People fleeing repressive governments or aspiring to increase their economic stature are never a threat to democracy or prosperity.

After all, countries of the Global North still depend on their labour.

As these books clarify, it is easy for politicians and the media to point fingers at immigrants for a country's fiscal irresponsibility and incite fears of invasion and lack of integration.

There needs to be a clear restructuring about how one talks about immigration – from a perspective of fear to one based on human rights and dignity.

Europe bound: on the myths surrounding migrants and asylum seekers
(25 July)

- Migration was a central issue in recent European elections.
- In April, the EU voted for migration policy reforms to address refugee influx from conflict zones in Africa and Asia.
- Migration policies have been heavily discussed by international organizations, media, and politicians, especially concerning the impact on European society and culture.
- The rise of right-wing parties in Europe is partly attributed to concerns over 'uncontrolled' immigration, exacerbated by the 2015-16 migrant crisis.
- Right-wing and some left-wing groups express fears about job competition, cultural clashes, and other negative impacts of immigration.
- Historically, Europe was a region of net out-migration during the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to colonization.
- Migration from Europe stopped after World War II with the rise of the welfare state.
- Scholar Hein de Haas argues that Europe is not experiencing unprecedented migration; rather, global migration rates have remained stable.
- Migration rates have stayed constant at 3% of the global population from 1960 to 2017, with changes in migration flows rather than a significant increase in overall migration.

On human rights

- Immigrants from West Asia and North Africa face severe dangers when trying to reach Europe via overcrowded boats provided by illegal smugglers.
- Many boats are intercepted and sent back, or they drown, with over 20,000 deaths recorded in the Mediterranean since 2014.
- Italy has struck a deal with Libyan coastguards, funded by the EU, to intercept boats and detain people in Libyan centres indefinitely.
- Sally Hayden's book "My Fourth Time, We Drowned" details the harsh conditions and human rights violations in these detention centres, highlighting the complicity of the EU and UN.
- The book follows the story of Kaleb, an Eritrean refugee, and his perilous journey through Libya and beyond, emphasizing the dangerous and often inhumane treatment refugees face.
- In the U.S., illegal immigration is a major electoral issue, with increasing intolerance reflected in former President Trump's policies and rhetoric.
- Bryan Caplan's comic book "Open Borders: The Science and Ethics of Immigration" argues for complete freedom of movement and work, challenging myths about immigration and emphasizing its benefits.
- Caplan's work suggests that immigrants are not a threat to democracy or prosperity and highlights the need for a shift in discourse from fear to a focus on human rights and dignity.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM)

- The International Organization for Migration (IOM), established in 1951, is the leading intergovernmental organization dedicated to promoting humane and orderly migration.
- As a related organization within the United Nations system, IOM operates in over 171 countries with more than 550 field offices worldwide.

Mission and Objectives

- IOM is committed to the principle that humane and orderly migration benefits both migrants and society.
- The organization aims to ensure the dignity and well-being of migrants, manage migration effectively, and provide aid in migration crises.
- IOM's work is guided by the principles of the UN Charter, focusing on human rights and sustainable development.

Key Areas of Work

1. **Migration Management:** IOM assists governments in managing migration flows, promoting migration policies that respect human dignity and are economically beneficial.
2. **Crisis Response:** The organization provides emergency assistance, including shelter, healthcare, and psychosocial support, to migrants affected by natural disasters or conflicts.
3. **International Cooperation:** IOM fosters cooperation between countries to address migration challenges collectively.
4. **Data and Research:** IOM conducts research to inform migration policies and practices, ensuring they are based on accurate data and analysis.

Strategic Initiatives

IOM supports the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by addressing migration-related issues that intersect with humanitarian assistance and long-term development goals. Some of its key initiatives include:

- **Gender Equality:** Promoting the rights and well-being of migrant women and ensuring their equal participation in migration processes.
- **Environment and Climate Change:** Addressing the impact of environmental changes on migration and developing strategies to manage climate-induced displacement.
- **Countering Xenophobia:** Promoting social cohesion and countering negative attitudes towards migrants.

Organizational Structure

- IOM is led by a Director General and a Deputy Director General, supported by various offices focusing on strategy, partnerships, advocacy, and performance.
- The organization operates through regional and country offices to implement its programs and provide support on the ground.

Partnerships

- IOM collaborates with a range of partners, including governments, NGOs, and the private sector, to enhance its capacity to address migration challenges.



Helping hand: Residents in Quezon city in Manila being rescued on Wednesday after Typhoon Gaemi hit Philippines. GETTY IMAGES

Streets turn into rivers as Typhoon Gaemi blows past Philippines (25 July)

- Typhoon Gaemi brought intense rainfall to northern Philippines, causing severe flooding in Manila and deadly landslides.
- Streets in Manila turned into rivers, trapping vehicles and forcing people to use boats and shopping trolleys to navigate.
- A state of calamity was declared in Manila, allowing funds for relief efforts. Government offices were closed, classes were suspended, flights were canceled, and many lost power.
- Some malls and churches provided temporary shelter for affected people.

- The typhoon intensified the southwest monsoon rains typical for this season, with over 200 mm of rain falling in Manila within 24 hours.
- Landslides resulted in deaths in Batangas and Pampanga provinces and blocked major roads in Benguet province.
- The death toll from recent heavy rains reached at least 14, with tens of thousands in evacuation centers.
- President Ferdinand Marcos ordered disaster officials to ensure sufficient food supplies for the hardest-hit areas.
- The Philippines frequently experiences major storms and typhoons, causing extensive damage and casualties.

दिल्ली से भी बेहतर

Patriotic IAS

IAS/PCSwali Pathshala



Now admission open for Offline Classroom Programme.

Students can attend free demo classes before taking the admission for their satisfaction.

FOUNDATION COURSE (OFFLINE/LIVE)

1. Holistic coverage of all the syllabus of the IAS Prelims & Mains, UP-PCS Prelims & mains. Also Comprehensive Material for each topics.
2. Offline class (In addition Live Class & Recorded Videos of the same class).
3. IAS Prelims Test Series (25 Tests) & IAS Mains Test Series. (20 Tests)
4. UP-PCS Prelims Test Series. (20 Tests) & UP-PCS Mains Test Series. (20 Tests)
5. Mentoring Sessions & Interview Guidance.

We are committed to providing the best preparation environment for the IAS/PCS at an affordable Fee (even better than those provided in the top institute of Delhi but at much lesser than their Fee)

Address : 3rd Floor, KV Tower, Padleyganj Road, Gorakhpur

Email Id : info@patrioticias.in

Contact Number : 9971932488

Website : patrioticias.in