

**DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS: 26 JULY 2024****TOPICS COVERED**

- 1. States have unlimited right to tax mineral-rich lands (GS Paper-II: Centre State Relation)**
- 2. Anti-defection law: two Jharkhand MLAs disqualified (GS Paper-II: Anti Defection Law)**
- 3. BJP ex-MLA serving life term released after Governor's nod (GS Paper-II: Pardoning Power)**
- 4. Kerala's diaspora-oriented posting draws MEA's flak (GS Paper-II: State Subject)**
- 5. Over one lakh cusecs likely to be released from KRS dam; food warning issued (GS Paper-I: Geography)**
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- 19. What is behind Rwanda's election outcome? (GS paper-II: IR)**
- 20. Is there a right way to portray sexual violence on-screen? (Essay Paper)**

# दिल्ली से भी बेहतर आपके शहर गोरखपुर में



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## 'States have unlimited right to tax mineral-rich lands'

[GS Paper II: Center State Relations](#)

Constitution Bench, in an 8:1 verdict, holds that Parliament, through Mines and Minerals Act, cannot restrict States from legislating on the taxation of mining lands, quarries; any dilution will impact their ability to raise revenues; the verdict came in a batch of 86 appeals filed by different State govts., mining firms, and public sector undertakings

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

A nine-judge Constitution Bench, headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, on Thursday held by an 8:1 majority that Parliament cannot limit the power of State legislatures to tax mineral-bearing lands and quarries. The judgment, freeing States from the restrictions imposed by the Centre, is in tune with the federalist principles of governance.

"Any dilution in the taxing powers of the State legislatures will necessarily impact their ability to raise revenues, which in turn will impede their ability to deliver welfare schemes and services to the people. The ability of the State governments to invest in

physical infrastructure, health, education, human capacity, and research and development is directly correlated to the raising of government revenues... Fiscal federalism entails that the power of the States to levy taxes within the legislative domain carved out to them and subject to the limitations laid down by the Constitution must be secured from unconstitutional interference by Parliament," the Chief Justice said.

The verdict noted how mineral-rich States such as Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Odisha continue to have per capita income below the national average.

The judgment said Parliament, through the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act of 1957 cannot restrict the



Fiscal federalism entails that the power of the States to levy taxes within the legislative domain carved out to them and subject to the limitations laid down by the Constitution must be secured from unconstitutional interference by Parliament  
**D.Y. CHANDRACHUD**  
Chief Justice of India

States from legislating on the taxation of mining lands and quarries.

**'Royalty not a tax'**  
The court further held that royalty paid to the States by mining lease holders is not a tax.

"Royalty is not a tax. Royalty is a contractual consideration paid by the mining lessee to the lessor for enjoyment of mineral

rights," the Chief Justice Chandrachud said.

The judgment came in a batch of 86 appeals filed by different State governments, mining companies and public sector undertakings.

The case has its roots in a dispute between India Cements Ltd. and the Tamil Nadu government.

Chief Justice Chandrachud said State legislatures

derive their power to tax mines and quarries under Article 246 read with Entry 49 (tax on lands and buildings) in the State List of the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution.

"Mineral-bearing lands fall within the description of 'lands' in Entry 49," Chief Justice Chandrachud held.

In the sole dissenting opinion on the Constitution Bench, Justice B.V. Nagarathna said the States' power to tax under Entry 49 of List II did not include "mineral-bearing lands". However, Justice Nagarathna agreed with the majority on the Bench that royalty was not a tax.

The Centre had argued that Entry 50 in the State List had allowed the Parliament to impose "any limitations" on taxes on miner-

al rights through laws relating to mineral development, in this case, the MMDR Act.

However, the Chief Justice responded in the judgment to the argument by noting that Entries 50 and 49 of the State List "deal with distinct subject matters and operate in different fields".

The limitations imposed by Parliament in a law like the MMDR Act, which related to mineral development, did not operate on or influence State taxation of mining lands under Entry 49 in the State List for the sole reason that "there is no specific stipulation in the Constitution to that effect".

"Entry 50 of List II does not constitute an exception... The power to tax mineral rights vests in the

State Legislatures. The Parliament does not have the legislative competence to tax mineral rights, with Entry 54 of the Union List (Regulation of mines and minerals development declared by parliamentary law to be expedient in the public interest) being only a general entry. Power to tax mineral rights is enumerated in List II. The Parliament cannot use its residuary powers with respect to that subject matter," Chief Justice Chandrachud held.

Justice Nagarathna, however, agreed that the MMDR Act, especially the provision which allows the Centre to take "control of the regulation of mines and the development of minerals" on expediency in public interest, denuded or limited the scope of a State's right to tax.

### States have unlimited right to tax mineral-rich lands (26 July)

Constitution Bench, in an 8:1 verdict, holds that Parliament, through Mines and Minerals Act, cannot restrict States from legislating on the taxation of mining lands, quarries; any dilution will impact their ability to raise revenues; the verdict came in a batch of 86 appeals filed by different State govts., mining firms, and public sector undertakings

- A nine-judge Constitution Bench, led by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, ruled that Parliament cannot limit State legislatures' power to tax mineral-bearing lands and quarries.
- This judgment supports federalism and states' ability to raise revenues for welfare and development.

- The court found that the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act of 1957 does not restrict states from legislating on mining land taxation.
- The court clarified that royalty paid by mining lease holders is not a tax but a contractual payment for mineral rights.
- The decision came from appeals involving various State governments and companies, stemming from a dispute between India Cements Ltd. and Tamil Nadu.
- Chief Justice Chandrachud stated that State legislatures' power to tax is based on Article 246 and Entry 49 of the State List in the Constitution.
- Justice B.V. Nagarathna dissented, arguing that the power to tax under Entry 49 did not include mineral-bearing lands but agreed that royalty is not a tax.
- The Centre argued that Entry 50 in the State List allowed Parliament to impose limitations on taxes related to mineral rights through laws like the MMDR Act.
- Chief Justice Chandrachud responded that Entries 50 and 49 of the State List address different subjects and operate in separate areas.
- The MMDR Act, related to mineral development, does not affect State taxation of mining lands under Entry 49, as there is no constitutional provision allowing such influence.
- Entry 50 does not create an exception; the power to tax mineral rights belongs to State Legislatures, while Parliament's power is limited to regulating development under Entry 54 of the Union List.
- Chief Justice Chandrachud emphasized that Parliament cannot use its residual powers to tax mineral rights, as this power is specifically outlined in List II for States.
- Justice Nagarathna agreed that the MMDR Act, particularly its provision allowing the Centre to control mineral regulation, limited States' right to tax.

### **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act of 1957 (MMDR Act)**

The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act of 1957 (MMDR Act) is a comprehensive legislation enacted by the Indian Parliament to regulate the mining sector in India. This act provides the framework for the regulation of mining activities, ensuring the development of minerals in an orderly manner while addressing environmental and social concerns.

#### **MMDR Act, 1957:**

- **Objective:**
  - To regulate the mining sector in India.
  - To ensure systematic and scientific development of mineral resources.
- **Grant of Mining Leases:**
  - The act lays down the procedures for the grant of reconnaissance permits, prospecting licenses, and mining leases for minerals.
  - It stipulates the eligibility criteria and conditions for obtaining these permits and licenses.
- **Role of Central and State Governments:**
  - The Central Government is responsible for framing policies and issuing guidelines for mineral development.
  - State Governments are primarily responsible for the administration of mineral resources within their territories, including granting leases and licenses.
- **Royalty and Taxes:**
  - The act provides for the imposition of royalties and taxes on minerals extracted from mines.
  - It prescribes the rates of royalties and the manner of their collection.
- **Regulation of Minor Minerals:**
  - Minor minerals, such as building stones, gravel, ordinary clay, etc., are regulated by State Governments.
  - The act provides flexibility to State Governments to frame their rules for minor minerals.
- **Environmental and Social Concerns:**
  - The act mandates measures to protect the environment during mining activities.
  - It requires mining companies to implement rehabilitation and resettlement plans for displaced communities.
- **Penalties and Offences:**
  - The act prescribes penalties for illegal mining activities and violations of its provisions.
  - It provides for the seizure and confiscation of illegally mined minerals.
- **Amendments and Revisions:**
  - The act has been amended multiple times to address emerging challenges and improve the regulatory framework.
  - Significant amendments include the introduction of auction-based allocation of mineral resources and provisions for a sustainable mining environment.

#### **Recent Amendments and Changes:**

##### **1. MMDR Amendment Act, 2015:**

- Introduced auction-based allocation of mining leases to bring transparency and increase revenue.
- Established the District Mineral Foundation (DMF) to address the impact of mining on local communities.

##### **2. MMDR Amendment Act, 2021:**

- Allowed private players to explore and mine certain minerals.
- Simplified the process for mineral concession transfers.

**In U.S., Israel PM calls for global alliance against Iran (26 July)**

- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu criticized Gaza ceasefire demonstrators and called for a global alliance against Iran.
- He accused Iran of funding the demonstrators and described it as the "**axis of terror**" behind sectarian violence in West Asia.
- Netanyahu urged countries at peace with Israel and those willing to make peace with Israel to join this alliance.
- He emphasized that Israel's enemies are also the enemies of the countries in the alliance, and a shared victory is envisioned.

## Anti-defection law: two Jharkhand MLAs disqualified (26 July)

- Jharkhand Assembly Speaker's Tribunal disqualified two MLAs, Lobin Hembrom (JMM) and J.P. Patel (BJP), for defection, effective from July 26, 2024.
- The disqualification was under the **anti-defection law (10th Schedule of the Constitution)**.
- Hembrom contested the Lok Sabha election against his party's candidate and was suspended from JMM, which led to the defection charge.
- Patel joined Congress and contested against the BJP candidate, prompting a complaint from the Leader of the Opposition.
- Both MLAs had contested the recent Lok Sabha elections against their party's directives.

### The Anti-Deflection Law

- The conscious abandonment of allegiance or duties to one's political party is termed "defection".
- All MPs of the Parliament and the MLAs and MLCs of the state legislatures are covered by anti-defection law.
- The anti-defection law aims to prevent the defection of the legislators due to the reward of office or other considerations.
- The idea behind the anti-defection law is to ensure the stability of government at the state and the central levels.
- **The grounds for disqualification under anti-defection law:**
- **For members of a political party:**
  - If one voluntarily gives up membership of the party.
  - If a person is suspended/expelled by the political party then it will not be a ground of defection.
  - If a person votes or abstains from vote contrary to the whip of the party.
  - A whip is an instrument used by a political party to direct its members to either vote or abstain from voting.
- **For the independent members:**
  - If independent members join a political party then liable for disqualification.
- **For nominated members:**
  - If nominated members belong to a political party then they continue to be part of that political party.
  - If nominated members don't belong to a political party but join a political party after 6 months of the nomination then liable for disqualification.
- **The exemption to anti-defection law:**
  - It does not apply to presiding officers in certain cases:
    - If the presiding officer resigns from the party he/she belongs to just before getting elected to the office and does not rejoin the party or not join any other political party during the tenure in the office.
    - If the presiding officer rejoins the political party he/she belonged to after demitting the office.
  - The exemption in case of mergers of political parties:
    - **91st Constitution Amendment Act** provided that if **at least 2/3 of the members of a political party** in the house joins some other political party it would be an exception under the anti-defection law.
  - The presiding officer of the house decides on the defection of a member and his/her decision is final.

### Kihota Hollohon vs. Zachilhu Case:

- In this case, the supreme court of India upheld the constitutional validity of the anti-defection law.
- The court stated that the objective behind the anti-defection law is to prevent corruption in politics and reduce the role of money power in parliamentary proceedings.
- The court held that the law ensures the stability of government at center and state and therefore can be treated as an exception to other provisions of the constitution.
- However, the supreme court held that the **decision of the presiding officer of the house cannot be final** and would be subject to judicial review of the court that is part of the basic structure of the constitution.
- The court also held **paragraph 7 to be invalid not only on the grounds of violating the principle of judicial review but also because such a provision falls under proviso to Article 386(2) and requires ratification by at least half of the state legislature.**
- There is no time limit for the presiding officer to decide on the case of anti-defection.
- **The arguments in favor of anti-defection law:**
  - Ensures stability.
  - Prevents horse-trading.
  - Ensures loyalty to the party.
  - Promotes party discipline.
  - Reduces possible corruption.
- **The arguments against anti-defection law:**
  - The independence of the legislators is lost.
  - It is against the freedom of speech of the legislators.
  - The legislators become mere puppets of the political party.
  - It promotes the high command culture.
  - It undermines the principle of representative democracy.

Question: With reference to anti-defection law in India, consider the following statements: (UPSC 2022)

1. The law specifies that a nominated legislator cannot join any political party within six months of being appointed to the House.

2. The law does not provide any time-frame within which the presiding officer has to decide a defection case.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

## BJP ex-MLA serving life term released after Governor's nod (26 July)

- Former Uttar Pradesh BJP MLA Udaybhan Karwariya, sentenced to life for a 1996 murder, was released from prison.
- His release followed a pardon by Governor Anandiben Patel.
- The release orders were received by Naini Central Jail Superintendent Rang Bahadur Patel on Wednesday evening.
- The Governor acted under Article 161 of the Constitution, approving the State government's recommendation for Karwariya's premature release.
- The Speaker's Tribunal's order followed a prolonged hearing, with arguments and evidence presented from both sides.

### Clemency/mercy powers of the President

- These powers are covered in **Article 72** of the Indian constitution for the president of India.
- These powers are to be exercised in aid and advice of the council of ministers.
- **Pardon:**
  - Pardon means **absolving a person completely of the crime and letting him go free.**
  - It amounts to turning the clock back.
  - It **completely absolves the convict** from all the sentences, punishments, and disqualification.
  - The conviction and punishment will be done away with.
  - This power is to be exercised in **very special circumstances only.**
  - **Only when a person has exhausted all the judicial remedies.** but this is not an appeal against the order of the court.
- **Commutation:**
  - Under this, the nature of punishment is changed to a lighter form.
  - For example changing the death sentence to life imprisonment, changing rigorous imprisonment to simple imprisonment.
- **Remission:**
  - Under this power, the **period of the sentence** can be changed without changing the character of the punishment.
  - For example, changing 10 years of rigorous imprisonment to 7 years of rigorous imprisonment.
- **Respite:**
  - Under it either the **nature of the punishment or the quantum of the punishment** is changed in light of certain special circumstances.
  - For example pregnancy, mental condition, old age, etc.
- **Reprive:**
  - It refers to allowing **a delay in execution of the sentence**, to allow the convict some time.
  - It is only done for a temporary period and generally in cases of capital punishment.
  - The president has clemency power **for court-martial** also.

### Clemency power of the Governor (2.50 PM)

- These powers are also available with the governor of states under **Article 161** of the Indian constitution.
- **Difference between pardoning power of the governor and president:**
  - The pardoning power of the president is **wider than** that of the governor as the president can grant pardon in cases where punishment or sentence is by a court-martial whereas Article 161 does not grant such powers to the governor.
  - The president can pardon all cases where the sentence given is a sentence of death but the **pardoning power of the governor does not extend to death sentences.**
  - The power of the governor extent to the **State subjects** while that of the president extent to the **Union subjects.**

### The philosophical basis for pardoning power of the President/Governor

- It is on the basis the **no judicial system is perfect and the head of the state should have powers to grant mercy as an act of grace and humanity.**
- The purpose is to **correct possible judicial errors.**
- To save an innocent person from being punished due to miscarriage of justice and in cases of doubtful conviction.

### Is the pardoning power at the discretion of the president/governor?

- In **Maru Ram vs Uol** supreme court held the power under articles 72 and 161 is not to be exercised by the president and the governor at their own discretion.
- Rather the President/Governor is bound by the aid and the **advice of the council of the ministers.**
- In **Kehar Singh Vs Uol** supreme court held that:
  - Clemency power is not a matter of right rather it is an act of grace.
  - There is no oral hearing for these petitions.

- The president is bound by the advice of CoMs.
- No need for the court to lay down specific guidelines.

#### Judicial review of clemency power:

- **In Epuru Sudhakar case :**
- The supreme court held that the judicial review of clemency power is allowed, but only in certain special circumstances.
- Judicial review should happen only when the order has been passed:
  - Without the application of mind.
  - Without taking the advice of the council of ministers.
  - It is mala fide in nature.
  - It is passed on wholly irrelevant considerations.
  - If relevant materials were kept out of considerations.
- **Can delay be a possible reason for a commutation?**
- In the **Devendra Singh Bhullar Case, 2013** the supreme court stated that if any person has been charged with Terrorism then the excessive delay will not lead to the commutation of the death penalty to lower punishment.
- However, in the **Shatrughan Chouhan Case 2014**, the supreme court overturned the judgment in the case of the Bhullar case.
- The court also held:
  - Excessive delay in the mercy petition can be ground for commutation of the death penalty to life imprisonment under articles 32 and 21 of the Indian constitution.
  - The ministry of home affairs should place a petition with its recommendation as soon as possible in front of the president.
  - There should be at least 14 days between execution and rejection of the mercy plea.
  - Rejection of mercy plea must be communicated to convict and the family members in writing.
  - Post-mortem report to be given to family members.
  - Nature of crime no reason for the delay in execution or disposal of mercy plea.

## Kerala's diaspora-oriented posting draws MEA's flak (26 July)

On appointment of external cooperation officer, Ministry cautions against 'intrusion' into domains beyond State jurisdiction; BJP has also criticised the move of the LDF government in the State

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) reminded State governments not to intrude into areas outside their constitutional jurisdiction.
- This follows the Kerala government's appointment of senior IAS officer K. Vasuki as "secretary in charge of matters concerning external cooperation."
- The MEA stated that foreign affairs are solely under the Union Government's jurisdiction as per the Constitution's Union List.
- The BJP in Kerala criticized the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government for this appointment, as foreign affairs are traditionally managed by the Centre.
- Kerala's decision aimed at managing issues related to its diaspora, foreign investment, and other state-specific concerns.
- The MEA clarified that foreign policy is not a State subject and should remain under the Central Government's control.

## Over one lakh cusecs likely to be released from KRS dam; flood warning issued (26 July)

- Due to heavy rain, the water release from the **Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) dam** will increase from 70,000 cusecs to over one lakh cusecs.
- The release could rise further to 1.5 lakh cusecs.

- This will be the highest outflow from the dam in the last two years, as the dam has reached its full level of 124.8 feet.
- Authorities have issued a flood warning and advised people in low-lying areas and those downstream to move to safer locations.
- The Mandya district administration has identified 92 villages as vulnerable to flooding.
- Tourist spots along the banks are closed due to high water levels, and the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary is closed to the public starting Thursday.
- The Ministry of Civil Aviation received a request from the Karnataka State government to rename four airports.
- The airports are in Vijayapura, Hubballi, Belagavi, and Shivamogga.
- Proposed names are Jagajyothi Basaveshwara airport, Krantiveera Sangolli Rayanna airport, Kittur Rani Chennamma airport, and Rashtrakavi Dr. K.V. Puttappa (Kuvempu) airport, respectively.
- Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol mentioned that 10 States have proposed names for airports.
- Airports typically use the city's name unless a specific name is proposed by the State government, which then goes through consultation and approval by the Union Cabinet.

## Panel will look into issues stalling Bill, NE tribal councils told (26 July)

- The Union government will form a committee led by Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai to address issues delaying the **Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill, 2019**.
- The **Bill aims to grant more powers to tribal autonomous councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution**.
- This assurance was given to chiefs of 10 tribal autonomous councils from Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura during a meeting with Home Minister Amit Shah.
- The council chiefs had been in New Delhi to advocate for the Bill and submitted a joint memorandum requesting its prompt passage.
- A committee will be formed within one month to resolve the issues preventing the Bill's passage.
- The Khasi and Jaintia autonomous district councils are scheduled for elections later this year, and the Bodoland Territorial Council elections are due next year.
- The **amendments is crucial for addressing regional issues and implementing terms of the 2020 Bodo Peace Accord**.
- The council chiefs expressed satisfaction with the meeting's outcome and confidence in the Centre's commitment to resolving the issues.

## Jaishankar pushes for urgency in resolving stand-off at LAC (26 July)

In meeting with Wang, Jaishankar stresses significance of India and China as key economies of the world; both Ministers call for stronger guidance to officials to complete LAC disengagement

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar met with Chinese counterpart Wang Yi for the second time this month.
- The meeting emphasized the need to resolve the four-year-old military standoff at the **Line of Actual Control (LAC)** with urgency.
- This meeting was one of Jaishankar's initial bilateral meetings in Vientiane, Laos, for ASEAN-related talks, following a prior discussion at the SCO Summit in Kazakhstan.
- The talks focused on finding a resolution to the remaining issues at the LAC and stabilizing bilateral relations.
- Jaishankar highlighted the importance of stable ties between India and China for both regional and global stability.

## Panel will look into issues stalling Bill, NE tribal councils told

**GS Paper II: Sixth Schedule**

**Abhinay Lakshman**  
NEW DELHI

The Union government will form a committee headed by Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai to resolve the issues that have been holding up the **Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill, 2019**, intended to grant more financial, executive, and administrative powers to tribal autonomous councils under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution.

The assurance was made to the chiefs of 10 tribal autonomous councils in Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Tripura, during a meeting with Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday, multiple council chiefs said.

The chiefs of the 10 councils had been camping in New Delhi over the past week in a bid to present a united front to push for the amendments. They submitted a joint memorandum to Mr. Shah, asking that the Bill be passed as soon as possible.

"We have been assured that this committee will be formed within one month and that it will resolve all issues that have so far held back the passage of the **Constitution (125th Amendment) Bill**," Pramod Boro, chief executive member of the Bodoland Territorial Council, told *The Hindu*.



Nityanand Rai

The development comes as the Khasi and Jaintia autonomous district councils are set to go to polls later this year and **elections to the Bodoland Territorial Council** are due next year.

Mr. Boro said before the meeting that unless the amendments to the Sixth Schedule were passed to grant more autonomy, the people of these regions would "always think we are isolated, neglected, and lagging behind". He added that the amendments were imperative to implement several of the terms agreed upon in the 2020 Bodo Peace Accord, which promised greater autonomy for the Bodoland Territorial Region.

"All of us are satisfied with the outcome of the meeting. It was a historic moment that all 10 councils came together for this," Mr. Boro added, expressing confidence in the Centre's will to resolve the issues.

## Karnataka wants to change names of four airports: Centre

**GS Paper II: Naming of Airport**

**The Hindu Bureau**  
BENGALURU

The Ministry of Civil Aviation has received a request from the State government to name four airports in Karnataka after eminent personalities.

The airports are in Vijayapura, Hubballi, Belagavi and Shivamogga, and the proposed names by the State government are Jagajyothi Basaveshwara airport, Krantiveera Sangolli Rayanna airport, Kittur Rani Chennamma airport, and Rashtrakavi Dr. K.V. Puttappa (Kuvempu) airport, respectively.

Minister of State for Civil Aviation Murlidhar Mohol, replying to an unstarred question on the proposed naming of airports, in the Lok Sabha, gave details of 10 States that had proposed names for existing and upcoming airports.

"Airports are known by the name of the city where they are located, unless another specific name is proposed by the respective State government, which is then considered in consultation with other Ministries and then sent to the Union Cabinet for final approval," the Minister said in his reply.

- Both sides agreed to an early meeting of the Working Mechanism on Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC), which includes officials from external affairs, border, and military sectors.
- The ministers have met four times in the past year, aiming for complete disengagement of troops.

### ‘Respect the LAC’

- Disengagement was achieved on several flashpoints from 2020-22, but further progress has stalled, especially at Demchok and Depsang sectors.
- The 29th WMCC meeting was held in Beijing in March.
- Jaishankar hoped the recent meeting would provide stronger guidance to complete the disengagement process and improve India-China ties.
- He stressed the importance of respecting the LAC and past agreements from the 1990s.
- The military standoff began in April 2020 with clashes in Galwan.
- Speculation exists that the Indian government might relax some restrictions on Chinese companies, encouraged by the Economic Survey favoring more FDI from China.
- The Chinese Embassy in Delhi called for easing economic and business ties, citing issues such as declining FDI, tourist numbers, and lack of direct flights.

## Tri-services on threshold of major reforms: CDS (26 July)

- General Anil Chauhan emphasized the need to reinforce lessons from the Kargil War.
- Armed forces must adopt new practices and be ready for major reforms in organizational, structural, conceptual, and cultural aspects.
- The goal of these reforms is to enhance fighting efficiency and maintain battle readiness.
- Reforms should be tailored to the unique Indian environment and challenges.
- The sacrifices of soldiers during the Kargil conflict are to be honored and will inspire future generations.
- Lessons learned from the conflict must be remembered, mistakes avoided, and right lessons reinforced.

## A notable life of a scholar-economist of distinction and social conscience

### Ethics

#### V.K. Ramachandran

Christopher Thomas Kurien, known as CTK to those whose lives and minds he touched, was one of South India's finest and most influential teachers of economics. CTK's entry into economics was inspired by the vision of the 'Tryst with Destiny' speech, and in particular Jawaharlal Nehru's exhortation that "the service of India means...the ending of poverty and ignorance and disease and inequality of opportunity". As he explained in a 2012 interview published in the newsletter of the World Economics Association, when he decided in his final high school year to take up the study of economics, it was in the hope "I would be able to understand the causes of poverty and contribute to its eradication."

It was this quest that spurred CTK's scholarly efforts for the next seven decades. Amartya Sen, reflecting on the general dissatisfaction with eco-

nomics, once remarked that this was experienced in India with probably even better reason, "because in some ways, economic problems are more serious, more nasty in India than they were in many other parts of the world".

So it was with CTK. It was the 1950s and he was now a lecturer at the Madras Christian College, Tambaram. His restlessness over the "disjunction between theory and real-life issues" made him want to equip himself in economic theory. He decided to study for a Ph.D. and enrolled in the doctoral programme at Stanford University in 1958.

Stanford was then a special kind of hub of debate in the discipline of economics. There, CTK took the first major steps in what would be a lifelong endeavour: to test theory by confronting it with the economic problems of India. He set himself the task of testing the claims to universality of neoclassical economics by applying it

to probe the literature on surplus labour. At the end of this endeavour, the scales had fallen from his eyes. What he wanted now was "a conceptualisation of the economy other than what neo-classical theory provided and what 'dual economy' models assuming subsistence wages implied was necessary for a proper understanding of the...problems of the Indian economy".

He had developed an alternative: he was able to show that "the distribution of non-labour resources was the essence of understanding India's economy and its problems". In teaching undergraduate courses, he maintained that three related questions were required to understand an economy: "Who owns what?", "Who does what?", and "Who gets what?"

And so, in the 1960s, back to the Madras Christian College, where CTK designed and taught a course titled Indian Economic Problems (IEP). I



C.T. KURIEN (JULY 2, 1931-JULY 23, 2024)

had the good fortune of being a student in CTK's IEP class in 1969-72. He was a demanding taskmaster and one of the first things his course did was to teach us to use economic theory to build a toolbox with which to examine and analyse specific problems of the Indian economy. He then helped us study a wide range of sectors of the economy – agriculture, livestock, industry, the informal sector, banking, major services, marketing and trade, Plan models, the public sector, and much more – using these conceptual

#### tools.

The years from 1968 to 1978, his last decade at the Madras Christian College, were not only years of teaching but also of productive research and writing. In this period, CTK published, among other writings, *Indian Economic Crisis* (1968), *A Theoretical Approach to the Indian Economy* (1969), and, in 1978, his more widely known book of the period, *Poverty, Planning and Social Transformation* (the last book in the list being dedicated to "my teachers, many of them my students,

who asked questions)."

In 1974, CTK proposed a rural employment guarantee scheme (in the form of a "land army") for India; the first person, as far as I know, to have done so. In 2021, on the occasion of CTK's 90th birthday, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, paying tribute to a "consistent supporter of policies that benefit the vast majority of people", drew particular attention to the fact that CTK had been an early advocate of a rural employment guarantee.

#### MIDS term

In 1978, CTK took the major decision to leave the Madras Christian College to become the founder Director of the Madras Institute of Development Studies. MIDS, which had been established by CTK's teacher Malcolm Adiseshiah some years earlier, had been made a National Institute of the Indian Council of Social Science Research. Under CTK's distinguished and democratic leader-

ship, MIDS became the first and foremost Centre for the study of the Tamil Nadu economy. This concentration on regional economics was reflected also in the books CTK wrote over the period, including *Dynamics of Rural Transformation* (1979) and *Economic Change in Tamil Nadu* (with Josef James, 1979).

After he retired from the directorship of MIDS, CTK was a National Professor of the University Grants Commission and a National Fellow of the ICSSR. The books of his early retirement years, including *On Markets in Economic Theory and Policy* (1993) and *Rethinking Economics: Reflections Based on a Study of the Indian Economy* (1996), were the product of many years of thinking about India's economy. In his last two books, *Wealth and Illfare: An Expedition into Real Life Economics* (2012) and *Economics of Real-Life: A New Exposition* (2018), CTK sought to reconnect with the young, to reach out to new students

of economics who were struggling, as he had done in the 1950s, with the "disjunction between theory and real-life issues".

Another feature of his retirement years was a new interest in writing book reviews, mainly in *Frontline* magazine. This was his way of keeping touch with current thinking, particularly in economics.

When CTK taught his Indian economy course, a question he asked when we began and ended was "What is the major problem of the Indian economy today?" And he was in no doubt about the answer. The world is a poorer place for the death of people like CTK, those who help us identify poverty and its social and economic characteristics and inspire us to come together to fight for a just society. (V.K. Ramachandran, an economist, is Vice-Chairperson of the Kerala State Planning Board. A longer text of this article can be read at [www.thehindu.com](http://www.thehindu.com).)

## A notable life of a scholar-economist of distinction and social conscience (26 July)

- Christopher Thomas Kurien (CTK), a renowned South Indian economics teacher, was inspired by Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of ending poverty and inequality.
- CTK pursued economics to understand and address poverty, starting his journey after high school.
- In the 1950s, while a lecturer at Madras Christian College, he felt a disconnect between economic theory and real-life issues.
- He enrolled in a Ph.D. program at Stanford University in 1958 to bridge this gap.
- At Stanford, CTK challenged neoclassical economics and developed an alternative understanding of India's economy by focusing on the distribution of non-labour resources.
- He returned to teach at Madras Christian College, where he created a course on Indian Economic Problems.

- CTK's course taught students to apply economic theory to analyze various sectors of the Indian economy, helping them build a comprehensive understanding of economic issues.
- From 1968 to 1978, CTK was active in both teaching and research at Madras Christian College.
- During this time, he published influential works such as Indian Economic Crisis (1968), A Theoretical Approach to the Indian Economy (1969), and Poverty, Planning and Social Transformation (1978).
- In 1974, CTK proposed a rural employment guarantee scheme, making him an early advocate of such policies.
- In 1978, CTK left Madras Christian College to become the founder Director of the Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS).
- Under his leadership, MIDS became a leading center for studying the Tamil Nadu economy.
- He authored books like Dynamics of Rural Transformation (1979) and Economic Change in Tamil Nadu (with Josef James, 1979).
- After retiring from MIDS, CTK served as a National Professor and a National Fellow, writing books such as On Markets in Economic Theory and Policy (1993) and Rethinking Economics: Reflections Based on a Study of the Indian Economy (1996).
- In his later years, he published Wealth and Illfare: An Expedition into Real Life Economics (2012) and Economics of Real-Life: A New Exposition (2018), and wrote book reviews for Frontline magazine.
- CTK was deeply committed to understanding and addressing poverty and inspired efforts towards a just society.

# Minister launches revamped Model Skill Loan Scheme

## GS Paper III

NEW DELHI

Skill Development Minister Jayant Chaudhary launched the revamped Model Skill Loan Scheme on Thursday, two days after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced hiking the eligible size of loans for high-end skilling courses under the scheme to ₹7.5 lakh from ₹1.5 lakh.

### Low fund uptake

The earlier Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Skill Development, notified in November 2015 to create a credit guarantee fund for courses aligned to the National Skills Qualification Framework, faced multiple challenges. As on March 31, loans amounting to ₹115.75 crore had been extended to just 10,077 borrowers.

Skill Development Ministry officials said the low fund utilisation over the past decade under the scheme was due to low ticket size of loans (up to ₹1.5 lakh), even as course costs and fees rose due to inflation, leaving many high-cost courses out of the scheme.

“Only member lending institutes of the Indian Banking Association (IBA) were allowed to lend earlier, and there was low uptake by both private and public sector banks due to their limited reach,” a Ministry official added.

Under the new scheme, the lending network has been broadened from only IBA banks to include Non Banking Financial Companies and small finance banks, with access to more skill courses and higher loan limits.

## Minister launches revamped Model Skill Loan Scheme (26 July)

- Skill Development Minister Jayant Chaudhary launched the revamped Model Skill Loan Scheme.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently increased the loan limit for high-end skilling courses from ₹1.5 lakh to ₹7.5 lakh.
- The previous Credit Guarantee Fund Scheme for Skill Development had low fund uptake, with ₹115.75 crore in loans extended to only 10,077 borrowers as of March 31.
- The low uptake was due to the small loan size (up to ₹1.5 lakh) which did not cover rising course costs, and restricted lending to Indian Banking Association (IBA) member institutions.
- The new scheme expands the lending network to include Non-Banking Financial Companies and small finance banks, offering access to more courses and higher loan limits.

### Indian Banks' Association (IBA) Banks

IBA banks refer to the member banks of the Indian Banks' Association (IBA), which includes a wide range of banks operating in India. These include:

- **Public Sector Banks (PSBs):** Banks where the majority stake is held by the government. Examples include State Bank of India (SBI) and Punjab National Bank (PNB).
- **Private Sector Banks:** Banks where the majority stake is held by private shareholders. Examples include HDFC Bank and ICICI Bank.
- **Foreign Banks:** Banks incorporated outside India but operating within the country. Examples include Citibank and HSBC.
- **Cooperative Banks:** Banks organized on a cooperative basis and owned by their members. Examples include Saraswat Bank and Cosmos Bank.

- **Regional Rural Banks (RRBs):** Banks aimed at serving rural areas, jointly owned by the central government, the state government, and sponsor banks.

**Non-Banking Financial Companies (NBFCs)**

**NBFCs** are financial institutions that provide banking services without meeting the legal definition of a bank. They are regulated by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Key characteristics include:

- **Services Offered:** Provide loans, credit facilities, retirement planning, underwriting, and investment in stocks, but do not offer traditional banking services like accepting deposits repayable on demand.
- **Types of NBFCs:**
  - **Asset Finance Companies (AFCs):** Finance physical assets.
  - **Investment Companies (ICs):** Deal in securities.
  - **Loan Companies (LCs):** Provide loans.
  - **Infrastructure Finance Companies (IFCs):** Finance infrastructure projects.
- **Examples:** Bajaj Finance, Shriram Transport Finance.

**Small Finance Banks (SFBs)**

**SFBs** are a type of bank licensed by the RBI to provide basic banking services to the underserved and unserved sections of society, including small business units, small and marginal farmers, micro and small industries, and unorganized sector entities. Key characteristics include:

- **Objective:** Focus on financial inclusion by providing savings vehicles and supplying credit to small business units, small and marginal farmers, micro and small industries, and other unorganized sector entities.
- **Services Offered:** Accept deposits and provide loans and other financial services.
- **Regulation:** SFBs are subject to prudential norms and regulations similar to other commercial banks.
- **Examples:** Ujjivan Small Finance Bank, Equitas Small Finance Bank.

**Differences Between IBA Banks, NBFCs, and SFBs**

Feature	IBA Banks	NBFCs	SFBs
<b>Regulation</b>	Regulated by RBI, governed by Banking Regulation Act	Regulated by RBI, not governed by Banking Regulation Act	Regulated by RBI, similar norms as commercial banks
<b>Deposit Acceptance</b>	Can accept all types of deposits	Cannot accept demand deposits	Can accept all types of deposits
<b>Credit Creation</b>	Engages in credit creation	Engages in credit creation	Engages in credit creation
<b>Services Offered</b>	Full range of banking services	Limited to loans, credit, investments, but no demand deposits	Focus on financial inclusion, accept deposits, provide loans
<b>Primary Customers</b>	General public, businesses, government	Retail customers, businesses	Underserved and unserved sections, small businesses
<b>Examples</b>	SBI, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank	Bajaj Finance, Shriram Transport Finance	Ujjivan Small Finance Bank, Equitas Small Finance Bank

# Two halls in Rashtrapati Bhavan get names reflecting republican ethos

GS Paper I: A&C

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu has renamed two important halls at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, with the Durbar Hall now set to be called Ganatantra Mandap – which translates to Republic Hall – and Ashok Hall to be called Ashok Mandap.

The Durbar Hall is the venue of key ceremonies and celebrations such as the presentation of national awards.

“The term ‘Durbar’ refers to courts and assemblies of Indian rulers and the British. It lost relevance after India became a Republic, that is ‘Ganatantra’. The concept of ‘Ganatantra’ is deeply rooted in Indian society since the ancient times, making ‘Ganatantra Mandap’ an apt name for the venue,”



In these combination pictures, Rashtrapati Bhavan's iconic 'Durbar Hall' (left) and 'Ashok Hall' (right) has been renamed as 'Ganatantra Mandap' and 'Ashok Mandap' respectively, on Thursday. PTI

said a Rashtrapati Bhavan statement.

Commenting on the move, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said: “There is no concept of ‘Durbar’, but that of ‘Shahenshah’.” Ms. Vadra has previously targeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi by referring to him as a Shahenshah, which translates to ‘king of kings’, and it has

been used as a title by emperors.

**Removed anglicisation**  
The Rashtrapati Bhavan statement noted that Ashok Hall was originally a ballroom. “The word ‘Ashok’ connotes someone who is ‘free from all sufferings’ or is ‘bereft of any sorrow’.” Also, ‘Ashoka’ refers to Emperor Ashok, a

symbol of unity and peaceful co-existence. The National Emblem of the Republic of India is the lion capital of Ashok from Sarnath,” it said.

Renaming both the halls will bring uniformity in language and remove traces of anglicisation while still upholding the key values associated with the word ‘Ashok’, it added.

references Emperor Ashoka, symbolizing unity and peace.

- The renaming aims to remove traces of anglicisation and uphold key values associated with the terms.

# Two halls in Rashtrapati Bhavan get names reflecting republican ethos (26 July)

- President Droupadi Murmu has renamed two halls at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

- Durbar Hall is now called Ganatantra Mandap (Republic Hall) to better reflect the concept of a republic rather than the colonial term “Durbar.”

- Ashok Hall is now named Ashok Mandap. The name Ashok connotes freedom from suffering and

- The Ashok Hall is used for **presentation of credentials by Heads of Missions of foreign countries** and as a formal place of introductions for the visiting and Indian delegations prior to the commencement of the State Banquets hosted by the President.



- the Durbar Hall is used to host Civil and Defence Investiture Ceremonies wherein the Hon'ble President of India confers the prestigious honours to the recipients.
- Swearing-in ceremonies of incoming governments, additions to the Council of Ministers and the swearing in of the Chief Justices of India are all conducted at the Durbar Hall.
- The Durbar Hall was also used for paying respects to India's fifth President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed on the solemn occasion of his demise in the year 1977.
- This ceremonial hall that is right under the central Dome of Rashtrapati Bhavan can be accessed from three sides, through the front forecourt steps via the six meters tall teak door and through the twin ash grey marble stairways on Durbar Hall's either sides.

## Addressing risk factors could reduce dementia cases by 40%: report (26 July)

The steady decline in India's Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has led to an increase in the proportion of older adults. As of 2019, India is home to over 139 million people aged 60 and above, accounting for more than 10% of the population. By 2050, the percentage of elderly people is projected to double to 19.5%, with 319 million individuals over 60

- India's aging population is growing rapidly due to decreased fertility rates and increased risk factors like air pollution, hypertension, and obesity.
- Dementia is a major concern for the elderly, with millions expected to be affected in the coming decades.
- As of 2019, over 139 million people in India are aged 60 and above, making up more than 10% of the population.
- By 2050, this percentage is expected to nearly double to 19.5%, with 319 million elderly individuals.
- The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) in India has dropped from 5.2 in 1971 to 2.0 in 2020, now below the replacement level of 2.1.
- Between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5, the TFR declined from 2.2 to 2.0. Only five states (Bihar, Meghalaya, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, and Manipur) have TFRs above the replacement level.

### Need for policy reforms

- The Lancet Commission's 2020 report and NFHS 2020 emphasize the urgent need for policy reforms and targeted interventions to address the growing dementia crisis in India.
- Age-related diseases like Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and vascular dementia are increasing due to demographic shifts and rising risk factors such as hypertension, obesity, smoking, and social isolation.
- The prevalence of obesity has risen, with national rates increasing from 21% to 24% among women and 19% to 23% among men between NFHS-4 and NFHS-5.
- Overweight and obesity rates are high in several states, and with an aging population, the risk of dementia will rise significantly.
- Older individuals with disabilities often experience social isolation, worsening their health conditions.
- Up to 40% of dementia cases could be preventable by addressing modifiable risk factors like obesity, smoking, and physical inactivity.
- India needs to invest in early detection, timely intervention, and comprehensive healthcare infrastructure, including training in geriatric care and developing specialized dementia facilities.
- Air pollution, a major issue in India, contributes to cognitive decline and increased dementia risk due to its long-term health effects.
- Adopting strict air quality regulations and sustainable urban planning is crucial to reduce air pollution.
- Cleaner transportation, renewable energy, and improved air quality monitoring are essential.
- Addressing hypertension and obesity is vital, with nationwide campaigns promoting healthy lifestyles and weight management.

- Strengthening primary healthcare services for early detection and treatment of hypertension and obesity is recommended.
- Implementing public safety measures to reduce traumatic brain injuries (TBI) is necessary, focusing on road, occupational, and sports safety.
- Raising awareness about TBI and its link to increased dementia risk is important.
- Expanding investment in healthcare infrastructure, including specialized dementia care facilities and training in geriatric care, is needed.
- Investing in research to understand risk factors and develop effective dementia treatments is crucial.
- Increasing public awareness and understanding of dementia, encouraging proactive cognitive health measures, and supporting those affected by dementia are key.

**Comprehensive response**

- India needs a comprehensive strategy to address the growing dementia crisis due to an increasing elderly population and rising risk factors.
- The strategy should focus on addressing dementia risk factors, improving healthcare infrastructure, and raising public awareness.
- Key initiatives include the National Programme for Health Care of the Elderly (NPHCE), Health and Wellness Centres (HWCs) under Ayushman Bharat, and the National Policy for Senior Citizens 2011.
- These initiatives show the government's commitment to the well-being of the elderly.
- Effective implementation and monitoring of these programs are essential to ensure that senior citizens can lead healthy, dignified, and fulfilling lives.

## ‘Teaching mental well being will reduce suicides’

**R. Sujatha**

A recent article in the *Lancet* has once again turned the spotlight on suicide. Psychiatrists have been talking about ways to reduce suicides but rue the fact that governments, state and central, have shown little interest.

A blueprint to stem suicides, the **National Suicide Prevention Strategy**, was launched in November 2022. The aim was to establish effective surveillance mechanisms for suicide within three years and establish psychiatric outpatient departments to provide suicide prevention services through the District Mental Health Programmes in all districts within the next five years. It called for **integrating a mental well-being curriculum into all educational institutions within eight years**. It also sought to develop guidelines for responsible media reporting of suicides and restrict access to the means for suicide.

**Top killer**

In India, more than 1 lakh lives are lost annually to suicide, and it is the top killer in the 15-29 years category. **From 2019 to 2022,**



In India, more than 1 lakh lives are lost annually to suicide, and it is the top killer in the 15-29 age group. GETTY IMAGES

the suicide rate increased from 10.2 to 11.3 per 1,00,000.

The NSSP envisages a specific strategy for every state and district. “We have explained the strategy, who should implement it, and the cascading effect. The ministry of health, education, and agriculture in each state must have a task force. We have provided short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals. But two years later, nothing has happened,” said Lakshmi Vijayakumar, who has been running a suicide prevention programme, Sneha, for four decades. The health department should take the lead, but other departments like fertilisers, chemicals, information and broadcasting should also be represented in the task force, she said.

The education department should be included to promote emotional wellbeing.

Soumitra Pathare, Director for Centre for Mental Health Law and Policy, one of the framers blames lack of political will.

**‘Sense of fatality’**

“There is a sense of fatality when we start talking about suicide prevention. ‘We cannot completely eliminate suicides’, is what we hear. Instead of saying prevention we must say reduction. **Even a 20% drop in suicides would save 40,000 lives annually,**” he remarked. He also blamed the lack of will in the media to make conscientious efforts to educate themselves on reporting suicides. By talking about suicides we would be acknowledging the problem

and try to find solutions, he reasoned.

Dr. Pathare and Dr. Lakshmi pointed out that it is likely the only health condition which claims 1.27 lakh lives but there is no government programme to prevent it. Dr. Pathare cited Tamil Nadu as an example where suicides had reduced thanks to supplementary examinations for school students. Yet the government has done nothing to implement NSPS. “The present approach is piecemeal. We need a district wise programme that can bring about consistent results,” Dr. Pathare said. Dr. Lakshmi calls for several editions of competitive exams so youngsters gain confidence that they can appear whenever they want.

“The National Education Policy is good, but it has not been implemented. The vocational guidance programme and multiple exits, grade system, and the flexibility to make course changes are all good. But it has not been implemented,” she said.

**Policy changes work**

“I would like to emphasise that policy changes do make a difference and these policies are there and need to be implement-

ed. Once implemented, we see results. And the example is Tamil Nadu. “Tie up NEP and NSPS, and by implementing the strategies deaths can be reduced,” she said.

Dheeraj Singh, an alumnus of the IIT Kanpur who mentors students from IITs, said: “Suicides can be prevented with timely supportive action. Citizens must learn the skills of identifying someone with suicidal thoughts, asking them openly about their thoughts, talking to them without fear, and referring them to a caregiver who can complete a safety plan and provide suicide prevention counselling. These steps, if taken with care person, can save many lives at risk.”

(sujatha.r@thehindu.co.in)

(Assistance for overcoming suicidal thoughts is available on the State’s health helpline 104, Tele-MANAS 14416. and Sneha’s suicide prevention helpline 044-24640050)

**For feedback** for ‘Science’, please write to **science@thehindu.co.in** with the subject ‘Daily page’

## Teaching mental well being will reduce suicides (26 July)

- A recent Lancet article highlights the ongoing issue of suicide, noting the lack of government action.
- The National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSSP) was launched in November 2022 with goals to improve surveillance, establish psychiatric outpatient departments, integrate mental well-being into education, and develop media guidelines for reporting suicides.

- Over 100,000 lives are lost to suicide annually in India, making it the leading cause of death among 15-29-year-olds. The suicide rate increased from 10.2 to 11.3 per 100,000 from 2019 to 2022.
- The NSSP outlines specific strategies for states and districts, with short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals, but implementation has been slow.
- Experts like Lakshmi Vijayakumar and Soumitra Pathare attribute the lack of progress to inadequate political will and insufficient involvement of various departments.

#### 'Sense of fatality'

- Dr. Pathare and Dr. Lakshmi emphasize that instead of aiming to completely eliminate suicides, focusing on reducing them by even 20% could save 40,000 lives annually.
- They criticize the media for not educating itself on responsible suicide reporting and argue that acknowledging and discussing suicides can help find solutions.
- Despite suicides being a leading cause of death, there is no comprehensive government program dedicated to prevention.
- Tamil Nadu's success in reducing suicides through supplementary exams for school students is cited as an example of effective policy implementation.
- Dr. Lakshmi suggests offering multiple editions of competitive exams to help students feel confident and argues that the National Education Policy (NEP) has not been effectively implemented.
- Dr. Pathare believes a district-wise program is needed for consistent results and supports integrating the NEP with the National Suicide Prevention Strategy (NSPS) to reduce deaths.
- Dheeraj Singh highlights the importance of timely supportive action, such as identifying suicidal thoughts, talking openly, and referring individuals to caregivers for safety planning and counseling.

PatrioticIAS

# The 'geo-calculus' of the Moscow visit

GS Paper II: IR

Two weeks after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visit to Russia, his first bilateral trip in the third tenure of the government, the dust from the storm it kicked up in the United States and Europe is only just beginning to settle. The evident warmth between Mr. Modi and the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, drew sharp criticism from the Ukraine President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and also a series of statements from the U.S. State Department, the National Security Adviser and the U.S. Ambassador to India, expressing disappointment. New Delhi has asserted its "freedom of choice" but has moved to allay concerns that anything fundamental has changed in India's worldview as a result of the Russia visit. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that nothing has indeed changed, purely by examining formal outcomes. In many ways, Mr. Modi's visit was the message itself.

## Assessment of the conflict in Ukraine

To begin with, the fact that the Prime Minister decided to travel to Russia two years after the war began, and not earlier, is significant. After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he had decided not to go for an annual India-Russia summit in 2022 and 2023, and the only public messaging revolved around Mr. Modi's "this era is not of war" statement that he made to Mr. Putin at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Uzbekistan in September 2022. While the war in Ukraine continues, the nature of the conflict has changed, and Mr. Modi's Moscow visit must be read in the context of how New Delhi sees the progress of the conflict. The Russian army suffered a great toll in the first two years – there was a botched offensive on Kyiv; a gross miscalculation of the resilience of Mr. Zelenskyy and Ukrainian defences; the desperate attempt at a draft for Russian youth that led many Moscow elites to leave the country; massive military casualties, and questions over the efficacy of Russian military hardware against the new equipment Ukraine was being supplied by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries. However, today, Russia seems to be in a far better place for holding the status quo line over the area in Ukraine's east that it occupies, and has subsequently folded into its own territory with constitutional amendments.

As western countries now push for a "peace process", that began with the conference in Switzerland (June 2024), New Delhi seems to have concluded that a frozen conflict is the most likely outcome. Any change to that status quo could only come from a massive escalation by Ukraine, requiring major new commitments of men and also military ground and airpower from its western partners. New Delhi also wagered, even before U.S. President Joe Biden announced that he would bow out of the U.S. Presidential race, that there is going to be a change in Washington in November – with Mr. Biden's challenger, the former U.S. President Donald Trump, indicating a reduced commitment to Kyiv



Suhasini Haidar

There was one clear message – of the sure bet the Narendra Modi government has placed on India-Russia ties

in the war, and less antagonism towards Moscow.

If so, Mr. Modi's visit was an acknowledgement that Russia has already weathered the worst, and that it would be pointless for India to continue its rupture of the annual summit to the detriment of bilateral ties. The reference in the India-Russia joint statement, of the conflict "around Ukraine" as opposed to "in Ukraine", even seems to be a subtle acceptance of Russian claims. Another reference, showing "appreciation" for peace proposals "in accordance with international law and on the basis of the UN Charter", suggests common ground between the two countries. India has refused to criticise Russia for the war so far, with more than 20 abstentions at the United Nations, including during the latest vote, on July 11 at the UN General Assembly, over a resolution calling on Russia to cease fire after deadly missile attacks that targeted a children's hospital among other buildings. Despite meetings with Mr. Zelenskyy and a visit to India by Ukraine Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dmytro Kuleba, in March this year, New Delhi has hesitated on other requests from Kyiv as well – such as allowing Indian companies to provide construction, medical devices and telecom infrastructure to the Ukrainian government, or move beyond its aid of humanitarian items, thereby indicating its unwillingness to invoke Russian ire.

## Keeping Russia from China

The geopolitical signalling of the visit extends to other spheres: by going to Moscow, days after cancelling his visit to Astana, Kazakhstan, for the SCO Summit, Mr. Modi showed that he was willing to forego a joint appearance with Chinese President Xi Jinping, but not with Mr. Putin. This is the reverse of western messaging, that has been calling on China to reduce its support to Russia, rather than the other way around. India's concerns about keeping Russia on-side in the face of continuing tensions with China at the Line of Actual Control remain a priority, regardless of its partnerships with western countries in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S.'s actions in the past few years have also given many in New Delhi cause for pause – the Biden administration has forged AUKUS (Australia-U.K.-U.S.) for nuclear submarines, engaged "Quad Plus"-countries such as New Zealand, South Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines intensely, and during the NATO summit in Washington that was held at the same time as the Modi-Putin summit, the U.S. hosted the "AP-4" or leaders of Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Japan. With its refusal to make the Quad (India, Japan, Australia, U.S.) a strategic concept, New Delhi stands in danger of limiting its utility to Indo-Pacific partners compared to these other groups. It remains to be seen whether the Modi government is able to convince them to infuse new energy into the Quad on other fronts, with a Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting around the corner, and plans for a possible Quad summit later this year in New Delhi. In that sense, the Russia visit was not just an assertion of India's strategic autonomy but also a reminder that India

still has other options.

## Geo-economics thrust

Finally, Mr. Modi's Russian journey must be considered in its 'geo-economic' rather than just its 'geopolitical' context. Regardless of the outcomes on the battlefield in Ukraine, it is clear that western sanctions against Russia will remain, and, consequently, so will India's supply of discounted Russian oil as well. These imports have meant that India-Russia trade ties, that have hovered in the \$5 billion-\$10 billion range for decades, grew by 66% to a whopping \$65 billion last year; this has grown a further 20% in the first quarter of 2024. The spurt is unsustainable unless India develops payment mechanisms for the oil imports. The Modi-Putin summit took many steps to address that issue, listing action-items in nine specific areas in a Joint Vision statement on trade by 2030 that appeared to make circumventing western sanctions a priority.

In addition, the joint statement on furthering cooperation in Russia's Far East focuses on increasing energy (oil and LNG) supplies from Russia, as well as much-needed commodities exports from India, using the yet-to-be-operationalised Chennai-Vladivostok maritime corridor. While these will help rationalise the trade imbalance, both sides will also seek mutual investments, of the kind seen when Rosneft acquired a controlling stake in the Gujarat-based Vadinar refinery (Nayara Energy), the largest foreign direct investment of its kind in India, at more than \$23 billion, according to Mr. Putin. In turn, Indian public sector units have bought stakes in Russian oil fields to the tune of \$15 billion. Despite the financial implications, the U.S. and Europe have steered clear of sanctioning any of these transactions, as they accept Vadinar-processed Russian oil products as "Indian-products", and New Delhi is surmising that more such deals could be a safe proposition in the future as well. Russian access to the North Sea trade route around the Arctic region is invaluable as India seeks new connectivity possibilities to its east – a Trump administration is likely to double down on strictures against Iran-led connectivity routes such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Chabahar project to India's west. At a time when military hardware imports, that have been the mainstay of India-Russia ties, are being reduced due to India's decade-long diversification and Russia's preoccupation with the Ukraine war, such geo-economic strategies give New Delhi new levers in the bilateral relationship.

While all such calculations could still go awry, depending on how the Ukraine war proceeds, the Russian economy struggles with sanctions, and the U.S. sets a new course post-elections, the enduring message from the Moscow visit is the solid bet the Modi government has placed on India-Russia ties.

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## The 'geo-calculus' of the Moscow visit (26 July)

- Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Russia, his first bilateral trip in his third term, has stirred reactions in the U.S. and Europe.
- The warm reception between Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin drew criticism from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and dissatisfaction from U.S. officials.
- India has emphasized its "freedom of choice" in foreign policy, trying to reassure that its broader perspective hasn't changed.
- The timing of Modi's visit, two years into the Ukraine conflict, is notable, especially since he previously skipped the India-Russia summits in 2022 and 2023.
- Modi's earlier public statements, such as "this era is not of war," indicated a cautious stance on the conflict.
- The nature of the Ukraine conflict has evolved: Russia faced significant early setbacks, including failed offensives, underestimated Ukrainian resistance, and heavy casualties.
- Currently, Russia is better positioned to maintain its territorial gains in eastern Ukraine, which it has reinforced through constitutional changes.
- Western countries are now pushing for a peace process following a conference in Switzerland (June 2024).

- India has concluded that a frozen conflict is the most likely outcome, with any change requiring a significant escalation by Ukraine and increased support from its Western allies.
- India anticipates a shift in Washington's stance with a potential change in U.S. leadership, as former President Donald Trump may be less committed to Kyiv and less antagonistic towards Moscow.
- Modi's visit to Russia reflects the belief that Russia has weathered the worst of the conflict and that continuing to disrupt annual summits would harm bilateral relations.
- The India-Russia joint statement's wording, referring to the conflict "around Ukraine" rather than "in Ukraine," subtly acknowledges Russian claims.
- India's appreciation for peace proposals in line with international law and the UN Charter indicates some alignment with Russian positions.
- India has abstained from criticizing Russia at the UN, including during a recent vote on July 11, 2024, regarding a ceasefire resolution.
- Despite interactions with Ukrainian officials and some humanitarian aid, India has hesitated on other Ukrainian requests, such as allowing Indian companies to assist with infrastructure and medical needs.

#### Keeping Russia from China

- Modi's visit to Moscow, shortly after canceling a trip to Astana for the SCO Summit, highlights his preference for meeting Putin over Chinese President Xi Jinping.
- This move contrasts with Western calls for China to reduce its support for Russia, rather than vice versa.
- India prioritizes maintaining strong ties with Russia amid ongoing tensions with China at the Line of Actual Control, despite its partnerships with Western countries in the Indo-Pacific.
- The Biden administration's actions, including forming AUKUS and engaging various regional partners, have made some in New Delhi cautious.
- India's hesitation to fully commit to the Quad (India, Japan, Australia, U.S.) as a strategic entity risks limiting its effectiveness compared to other regional groups.
- The visit to Russia underscores India's strategic autonomy and serves as a reminder that India has multiple options in its foreign policy.

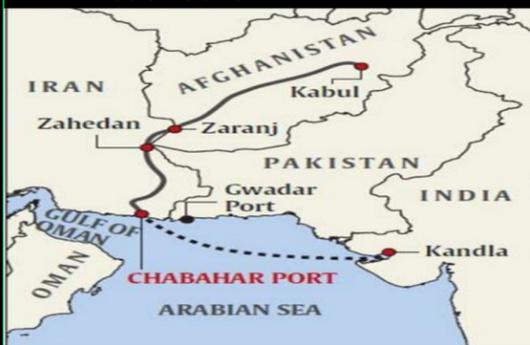
#### Geo-economics thrust

- Modi's visit to Russia should be viewed in terms of geo-economics as well as geopolitics.
- Despite the ongoing Ukraine conflict, Western sanctions on Russia will persist, allowing India to continue importing discounted Russian oil.
- India-Russia trade, which was previously around \$5 billion-\$10 billion, surged to \$65 billion last year and increased by 20% in early 2024.
- The growth is unsustainable without new payment mechanisms for oil imports, which the Modi-Putin summit addressed with a Joint Vision statement on trade by 2030.
- The summit also focused on boosting energy supplies from Russia and enhancing trade through the Chennai-Vladivostok maritime corridor.
- India and Russia are seeking mutual investments, with past deals including Rosneft's \$23 billion acquisition of Nayara Energy and Indian investments in Russian oil fields.
- The U.S. and Europe have not sanctioned these transactions, accepting processed Russian oil as "Indian products."
- India's interest in the North Sea trade route is strategic as it looks for new connectivity options, especially given potential U.S. restrictions on Iran-led projects.
- With reduced military hardware imports due to diversification and Russia's focus on Ukraine, these geo-economic strategies offer India new leverage in its relationship with Russia.
- The Moscow visit underscores Modi's commitment to strengthening India-Russia ties despite potential future uncertainties.



**International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC):**

- Iran is a crucial member of the INSTC, which is a multi-modal transportation network connecting India, Iran, Russia, and several Central Asian countries.
- The main participants in the INSTC include India, Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Oman. Other countries in the region are also involved in various capacities.
- The corridor aims to shorten the transportation time for goods traveling between South Asia, Iran, and Europe by bypassing traditional routes through the Suez Canal.



**Chabahar Port Development:**

- Located in southeastern Iran, Chabahar Port is being developed in collaboration with India and Afghanistan.
- It serves as a strategic transit hub, providing India with access to Afghanistan and Central Asia while bypassing Pakistan.
- The port's development aims to enhance trade and connectivity in the region.

**The Karnataka Bill is a symptom of a larger problem (26 July)**

- The Karnataka Reservation Bill, 2024, which mandates 50% and 70% reservation in management and non-management categories respectively, has faced significant criticism and controversy. The Bill has been paused by the State government for reassessment and assurances.
- The underlying issues include India's severe jobs crisis and regional socio-economic disparities.
- India's fast economic growth and large youth population are not translating into job creation, as high-end services-led growth has not generated sufficient employment.
- Global trends like globalization, financialization, and technological advances have benefited capital and skilled individuals, while the working class has struggled.
- This trend leads to political backlash globally; in India, it appears as regionalism and resistance to inter-State migration.
- The Bill's local reservation approach contrasts with the constitutional guarantee of freedom of movement and may challenge national unity.
- The push for local reservations reflects State leaders' efforts to address local demands, highlighting tensions between local and national interests in Indian politics.

**Issue of accountability**

- The debate centers on federalism and political accountability, particularly regarding mass unskilled jobs.

- Local reservation initiatives favor unskilled jobs, raising questions about large-scale migration for such jobs.
- Large-scale unskilled migration is often distress migration due to inadequate regional development by some State governments.
- Industries prefer migrant workers for unskilled jobs to avoid unionization and maintain exploitative practices, which negatively impacts local employment and wages.

#### In perspective

- States benefit economically and culturally from being part of India and have a national responsibility.
- The issue requires more than simplistic rhetoric and political expediency; it needs a comprehensive approach.
- A national debate involving political, corporate, and civil society sectors is necessary to address India's job crisis.
- Current skilling and production linked incentive interventions are inadequate.
- Political accountability is needed for distress migration and underdevelopment in some States.
- Federalism and national unity require institutional responses and political maturity, including reviving the National Development Council.
- The corporate sector must be accountable for working standards for unskilled labor.
- The Karnataka Reservation Bill highlights larger issues that need focus for India's future economic growth, social cohesion, and political stability.

## More for more (26 July)

#### Budget allocations have not helped States ruled by parties opposed to BJP

- The Union Budget for 2024-25 serves both as a fiscal statement and a political tool.
- Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman highlighted special provisions for Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, where the ruling parties support the BJP.
- Bihar received nearly ₹59,000 crore for infrastructure, including ₹26,000 crore for roads, ₹21,400 crore for a power plant, and ₹11,500 crore for irrigation and flood control.
- Andhra Pradesh was allocated ₹15,000 crore for developing its new capital, Amaravati, despite previous demands for ₹1 lakh crore.
- Sitharaman promised to speed up the Polavaram irrigation project, but the Budget did not specify financial details for this project.
- Both Andhra Pradesh and Bihar have high public debts and have received significant budget allocations, which is understandable given their financial situations.
- However, the Budget has not fairly distributed funds across the country, as seen in the limited support for critical infrastructure projects in Opposition-ruled States like Tamil Nadu and Kerala.
- Ignoring revenue-generating States that are becoming global economic hubs risks hindering their development.
- These economically advanced States are attracting new technology, businesses, and talent, and are essential for future industries such as energy transition, AI, and semiconductors.
- They also need support to continue their development and contribute to the nation's overall economic growth.

## Sporting extravaganza (26 July)

#### The Olympics will keep the world occupied over the next fortnight

- The Olympics begin in Paris, free from the restrictions of 'Tokyo 2020'.
- Russia is banned due to its war actions, but individual Russians will compete under a neutral banner.
- Israel is participating despite dissent over its actions on the Palestinian issue.
- The event features top countries like the U.S., China, Japan, Great Britain, Australia, Germany, and France, along with smaller nations.
- Athletes gain the title Olympian, with medals enhancing their prestige.
- Paris will be tested economically, with some local resistance to the event.
- Notable athletes like Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz will represent Spain in tennis.
- The inclusion of breakdancing shows the blend of sport and entertainment.
- 204 countries, including India, neutral athletes, and a refugee team are competing.
- Morocco's win over Argentina in football has added excitement.
- The Olympics provide hope and redemption, especially for countries like Afghanistan.
- Security remains a concern, as does COVID-19, highlighted by positive cases in the Australian women's water polo squad.
- The U.S., China, Japan, Great Britain, Australia, Germany, and France are major contenders.
- The Olympics highlight individual athletes, like Usain Bolt, and notable participants like Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz.
- Breakdancing is included, blending sport and entertainment.
- 204 countries, including India, neutral athletes, and a refugee team, are competing.

- Smaller countries have a chance to shine, exemplified by Morocco's win over Argentina in football.
- The Olympics offer hope and redemption, especially for countries like Afghanistan.
- Security is a concern, recalling the 1972 Munich terror attack.
- COVID-19 remains a reality, with positive cases in the Australian women's water polo team.
- All eyes are on Paris.

## Is the Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill draconian? (26 July)

- On July 11, the BJP-led Maha Yuti government introduced the Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024.
- Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis stated the Bill aims to combat the spread of Naxalism in urban areas.
- Naxalism is increasing in urban areas through frontal organisations.
- The Bill seeks to control the unlawful activities of these organisations through effective legal measures.
- The Bill allows the State to declare any organisation as 'unlawful' with offences being cognisable and non-bailable.
- Concerns have been raised about the potentially draconian nature of the Bill.
- Yashovardhan Azad and Brinda Adige discussed the issue in a conversation moderated by Vijaita Singh.

### What is your opinion about this Bill?

- Yashovardhan Azad questions the need for the Bill since the Home Ministry claims Naxalism is declining.
- Azad asks if the Bill targets frontal organisations, pamphlets, or literature.
- The Supreme Court ruled in 2011 that mere membership in a banned organisation is not a crime unless there is violence or incitement.
- Azad points out that existing laws like MCOCA, UAPA, and BNS already address the government's concerns.
- Brinda Adige questions the definition of 'urban Naxalism' and what is considered 'unlawful' in the Bill.
- Adige suggests the Bill could criminalize dissent against the government and give unilateral power to the police.
- Both express concern that the Bill could be misused against vulnerable sections of society.
- Azad highlights that in Chhattisgarh, similar laws have led to journalists being arrested for reporting on Naxal statements.
- They argue that excessive laws could lead to the suppression of dissent.

### Can the Bill also be used against political opponents?

- Brinda Adige argues the Bill targets civilians, activists, and environmentalists, not political opponents.
- Adige notes that peaceful resistance could be deemed unlawful under the Bill, leaving definitions to the police.
- Yashovardhan Azad states that existing laws already cover terror funding and related activities, making the Bill redundant.
- The Bill was introduced near the end of the Assembly session before elections, implying a motive to intimidate dissenters.
- Adige suggests the government is trying to scare people and has previously planted evidence against activists.
- Adige believes the Bill is unconstitutional and against the people, calling for public awareness in Maharashtra.
- Azad highlights issues of delayed trials and investigations, advocating for liberal bail provisions to prevent the process from becoming punishment.

### Do you think a judicial oversight is required when such legislation is passed?

- Brinda Adige emphasizes the need for public consultation before tabling a bill, highlighting it as a constitutional right.
- Adige criticizes the lack of public consultation for the Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024.
- Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis cited similar laws in other states affected by left-wing extremism, like Chhattisgarh and Telangana, as a rationale.
- Yashovardhan Azad argues that these laws have not significantly helped in curbing Naxalism.
- Azad mentions that targeted actions by forces like the Greyhounds in Telangana were more effective.
- The government admitted in Parliament that left-wing extremism has significantly reduced.
- Azad questions the need for the Bill in Maharashtra, stating that other states are progressing while Maharashtra is regressing.
- He also questions who has indicated that the menace of Naxalism is increasing in urban areas – whether it is the police, bureaucrats, people, or media.

# India's illegal coal mining problem

How prevalent is illegal coal mining in India? What are the legal frameworks governing coal mining in India? Why is the responsibility for addressing illegal mining placed on State governments? What factors contribute to the persistence of illegal coal mining? What safety risks do workers face?

GS Paper III: Coal Sector

Priyali Prakash

## The story so far:

On July 13, three workers died of asphyxiation inside an illegal coal mine in Gujarat's Surendranagar district. The officials said that the workers were working in a mine near Bhet village in Thangadh taluka without helmets, masks, or other safety equipment. The first information report (FIR) indicated that the accused failed to provide essential safety gear to the labourers, who died after inhaling toxic gas in the mine. The police have registered a case of culpable homicide not amounting to murder against four people.

## What is the issue?

The Surendranagar incident is not an isolated case.

In June 2023, three people, including a ten-year-old child, were reportedly killed after an illegal mine collapsed in the Dhanbad district of Jharkhand. Similarly, at least three people were killed in October 2023 after a coal mine collapsed during illegal extraction in West Bengal's Paschim Bardhaman district.

These are just a few examples of how illegal coal mining has led to worker fatalities in India.

Coal in India was nationalised in two phases: first with the coking coal (used for the production of coke in the steel industry) in 1971-72; and then with the non-coking coal mines in 1973. The Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973 is the central legislation that determines eligibility for coal mining in India. Illegal mining constitutes a law and order problem, which is a State list subject. Hence, the onus of dealing with it falls on State governments rather than the Union government.

## Why is illegal coal mining rampant in India?

According to the Ministry of Coal, illegal



Mining perils: Labourers carry baskets of coal from an open-cast mine in Jharkhand. AP

mining in India is mostly carried out in abandoned mines or shallow coal seams in remote or isolated places. Several factors contribute to illegal coal mining in India.

Coal is the most abundant fossil fuel in India, accounting for 55% of the country's energy needs. The high demand for power in India translates into a high demand for coal, which often outstrips the legal supply, prompting illegal supply. Many areas that are rich in coal are also situated close to homes for populations struggling with poverty and unemployment, which contributes to illegal mining in these areas.

In remote areas, mining regulations can be weak due to inadequate monitoring and lack of resources, leading to weaker enforcement. This can result in the rise of "coal mafias," as has been alleged in multiple cases of illegal coal mining in India. For example, in 2018, activist Marshall Biam of the North East Indigenous People's Federation registered a complaint accusing a "police-backed" coal gang of threatening him. Mining tragedies are not uncommon in coal-rich Meghalaya.

Illegal coal mining also allegedly receives tacit support from political leaders in areas where it is prevalent, making it difficult to curb. In 2023, the Assam-based political party Assam Jatiya

Parishad (AJP) submitted a petition each to the President, Vice-President, Prime Minister, Chief Justice of India, the National Green Tribunal (NGT), the National Human Rights Commission and the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, alleging that some BJP leaders are behind illegal coal mining in the State. AJP president Lurinjyoti Gogoi and general secretary Jagadish Bhuyan said that illegal rat-hole coal mining has continued in Assam, as well as in Meghalaya and other north-eastern States, with the alleged patronage of BJP leaders and in collusion with officials despite a blanket ban on such mining by the NGT in 2014.

Illegal mining is often carried out using rudimentary techniques like surface mining and rat-hole mining, rather than the scientific methods required for legal operations on a larger scale. In areas where coal seams are closer to the surface, illegal miners access them with limited safety equipment. Minimal operational costs can also turn into significant profits, making illegal mining lucrative.

## Why do so many workers die in illegal coal mines?

The lack of safety equipment and protocols is the primary reason for deaths during illegal coal mining. Miners face increased respiratory risks due to inhaling

coal dust, and the lack of safety equipment significantly increases this risk. The miners in the Surendranagar incident also died of carbon monoxide poisoning. According to District Collector K.C. Sampat, 2,100 wells had been filled in recent times, but some of them might have been illegally reopened, where the incident happened.

Illegal mines lack proper structural support to carry out the extraction of coal, making working conditions hazardous and vulnerable to cave-ins, landslides, and explosions. Workers may also be exposed to high levels of toxic substances like lead and mercury, which can cause acute poisoning or long-term chronic medical conditions.

Several people who work in illegal coal mines are untrained for the job and for the risks it poses. There is a lack of proper training, quick response facilities, and knowledge in case of emergencies.

Operator negligence and worker exploitation are also rampant in illegal coal mining.

## Why do governments struggle to cut down illegal coal mining in India?

Questions regarding illegal coal mining have been raised in the Parliament, but since it is a law and order issue, the Union government often shifts the blame to State authorities. A mix of economic, social, political, and regulatory factors makes it difficult for governments to shut down illegal coal mining in India.

Illegal coal mining, by any means, is not a novelty. It has existed since before coal was nationalised and continues to exist in pockets in coal-rich areas or near abandoned mines. The high demand for coal as a fuel makes illegal mining rampant and challenging to control. Local economies in many areas depend on mining, and once official operations run their course, illegal mining takes its place to support the local community.

The legal framework governing mining is complex, which can possibly lead to bureaucratic hurdles and inefficiency in governance, allowing illegal mining to exist.

## THE GIST

Three workers died of asphyxiation in an illegal coal mine in Gujarat's Surendranagar district on July 13 due to a lack of safety equipment.

Illegal coal mining is widespread in India and has led to numerous worker deaths.

Illegal mining is a law and order issue falling under State jurisdiction, making State governments responsible for addressing it.

High demand for coal, poverty, unemployment, weak regulations, and alleged political support contribute to the prevalence of illegal coal mining.

## India's illegal coal mining problem (26 JULY)

How prevalent is illegal coal mining in India? What are the legal frameworks governing coal mining in India? Why is the responsibility for addressing illegal mining placed on State governments? What factors contribute to the persistence of illegal coal mining? What safety risks do workers face?

- On July 13, three workers died of asphyxiation in an illegal coal mine in Gujarat's Surendranagar district.
- Workers lacked helmets, masks, or safety equipment.
- FIR indicated failure to provide essential safety gear.
- Police registered a case of culpable homicide against four people.
- Similar incidents include:
  - June 2023: three killed in Dhanbad, Jharkhand.
  - October 2023: three killed in Paschim Bardhaman, West Bengal.
- Illegal coal mining is a persistent issue in India.
- Coal mining was nationalized in two phases in the 1970s.
- Illegal mining is a state issue under the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973.
- Illegal mining often occurs in abandoned mines or shallow coal seams.
- High coal demand and poverty in coal-rich areas contribute to illegal mining.
- Weak enforcement and inadequate monitoring in remote areas lead to illegal activities.
- "Coal mafias" often emerge, as seen in multiple cases.
- Example: 2018 complaint by activist Marshall Biam against a "police-backed" coal gang in Meghalaya.
- Mining tragedies are common in coal-rich Meghalaya.
- Illegal coal mining is reportedly supported by political leaders, complicating efforts to control it.
- In 2023, Assam Jatiya Parishad (AJP) accused BJP leaders of involvement in illegal mining in Assam.
- AJP claimed that illegal rat-hole mining continues in Assam, Meghalaya, and other northeastern states with alleged BJP support, despite a 2014 NGT ban.
- Illegal mining uses basic techniques like surface and rat-hole mining, not advanced methods.
- Coal seams near the surface are accessed with minimal safety equipment.

- Low operational costs and high profits make illegal mining attractive.

#### Why do so many workers die in illegal coal mines?

- Lack of safety equipment and protocols leads to deaths in illegal coal mining.
- Miners face respiratory risks from coal dust and carbon monoxide poisoning.
- The Surendranagar incident involved carbon monoxide poisoning, and some filled wells might have been reopened illegally.
- Illegal mines lack structural support, leading to hazardous conditions, cave-ins, landslides, and explosions.
- Workers are exposed to toxic substances like lead and mercury, causing acute poisoning or chronic health issues.
- Many workers are untrained and lack emergency response knowledge.
- Operator negligence and worker exploitation are common in illegal mining.

#### Why do governments struggle to cut down illegal coal mining in India?

- Questions about illegal coal mining have been raised in Parliament, but the Union government shifts responsibility to State authorities.
- A mix of economic, social, political, and regulatory factors complicates efforts to shut down illegal mining.
- Illegal coal mining has existed since before coal was nationalized and persists in coal-rich areas or near abandoned mines.
- High coal demand makes illegal mining common and difficult to control.
- Local economies often depend on mining, with illegal operations taking over after official ones end to support the community.
- The complex legal framework and bureaucratic hurdles can lead to inefficiency and allow illegal mining to continue.

26<sup>th</sup> July 2024

MAINS PRACTICE QUESTION

#### GS Paper III: Coal Mining

**Question:** Examine the role of national and state legislation in regulating coal mining activities in India. (150 Words/10 Marks)

#### ANSWER APPROACH

- Introduce with the importance of coal mining in India and the need for regulation.
- Then highlight key national laws like the Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973, and the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, including their objectives.
- Further discuss the role of state-specific rules and policies in granting mining leases and regulating mining activities.
- Then identify and explain major challenges in enforcement, safety, and illegal mining.
- In the last conclude with the necessity for coordinated efforts between central and state governments to address these challenges effectively.

#### ANSWER

Coal mining in India is governed by a comprehensive legal framework that involves both national and state legislation. This framework aims to regulate the mining activities, ensure safety standards, and manage the environmental impact of mining operations. However, despite these regulations, illegal mining persists, leading to significant safety hazards and socio-economic issues.

#### National Legislation

##### 1. Coal Mines (Nationalisation) Act, 1973:

- This central legislation nationalized coking coal mines in 1971-72 and non-coking coal mines in 1973.
- The Act restricts coal mining operations to government companies, primarily Coal India Limited (CIL) and its subsidiaries, with exceptions for captive mining by private companies in specific industries like steel, cement, and power.

##### 2. Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act):

- This Act regulates the overall mining sector in India.
- It provides the framework for the grant of mining leases, prospecting licenses, and the regulation of mines.
- The Act empowers both the central and state governments in various capacities.
- The central government formulates policies and regulations, while the state governments are responsible for implementing these regulations and granting mining leases.

##### 3. National Mineral Policy:

- This policy outlines the strategy for the exploration and exploitation of minerals, including coal.
- It emphasizes sustainable mining practices, scientific mining methods, and the welfare of people affected by mining activities.

#### State Legislation

##### 1. State Mineral Concession Rules:

- These rules, framed under the MMDR Act, give states the power to grant mining leases for minor minerals and oversee the implementation of mining regulations within their jurisdictions.
- States have the authority to regulate minor minerals, but major minerals like coal fall under central oversight with states executing the operational regulations.

##### 2. State-specific Mining Policies:

- Many states have their own mining policies that align with national legislation but address state-specific issues.

- These policies focus on local socio-economic conditions, employment generation, and environmental sustainability.

#### Issues and Challenges

##### 1. Illegal Mining:

- Despite a robust legal framework, illegal mining remains rampant in India.
- This is often carried out in abandoned mines or shallow coal seams using rudimentary methods, which pose significant safety risks.
- The recent incident in Gujarat's Surendranagar district, where three workers died due to asphyxiation in an illegal mine, highlights the dangers of unregulated mining activities.

##### 2. Enforcement Issues:

- Enforcement of mining regulations is challenging due to inadequate monitoring, lack of resources, and sometimes the involvement of local political and economic interests.
- For instance, illegal mining in Meghalaya and Assam continues despite bans and regulations, allegedly due to political patronage.

##### 3. Worker Safety:

- The lack of safety equipment and protocols in illegal mining operations leads to frequent accidents and fatalities.
- The Surendranagar incident underscores the dire conditions under which illegal miners operate, often without basic safety gear.

##### 4. Economic Factors:

- The high demand for coal as an energy source and the economic benefits of illegal mining for local populations contribute to its persistence.
- In many coal-rich areas, local economies depend on mining activities, and illegal mining becomes a means of livelihood.

Thus, the regulation of coal mining in India involves a complex interplay between national and state legislation. While the legal framework is comprehensive, effective enforcement remains a challenge due to socio-economic and political factors. Addressing illegal mining requires coordinated efforts between the central and state governments, stricter enforcement of safety standards, and socio-economic interventions to provide alternative livelihoods for those dependent on illegal mining.

Question: With reference to the management of minor minerals in India, consider the following statements: (UPSC 2019)

1. Sand is a 'minor mineral' according to the prevailing law in the country.
2. State Governments have the power to grant mining leases of minor minerals, but the powers regarding the formation of rules related to the grant of minor minerals lie with the Central Government.
3. State Governments have the power to frame rules to prevent illegal mining of minor minerals.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 and 3 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

**Explanation:**

**Statement 1 is correct:** Sand is classified as a 'minor mineral' according to the prevailing law in the country under the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDR Act).

**Statement 2 is incorrect:** Both the power to grant mining leases and the power to form rules regarding the grant of minor minerals lie with the State Governments as per Section 15 of the MMDR Act.

**Statement 3 is correct:** State Governments have the power to frame rules to prevent illegal mining of minor minerals according to Section 23C of the MMDR Act.

Thus, the correct statements are 1 and 3.

# What is behind Rwanda's election outcome?

How did President Paul Kagame secure such overwhelming support?

GS Paper II: IR

Ayan Datta

The story so far:

On July 15, Rwanda held its fourth presidential election since the 1994 Tutsi genocide. Partial results released by Rwanda's National Electoral Commission (NEC) reveal overwhelming support for President Paul Kagame. With 79% of the votes counted, Kagame has secured over 99% of the votes. Opposition leaders Habineza Frank of the Democratic Green Party and Independent candidate Mpayimana Phillippe secured less than one per cent of the votes each.

How did Rwanda politically progress?

On 6 April, 1994, Rwanda's Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana was killed in a plane crash, allegedly by the Tutsi-led armed group, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF). Between April 7 and July 15, 1994, the state-sponsored Hutu armed group massacred over 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus in revenge attacks.

In 1994, the RPF defeated Rwanda's government, ended the genocide and

restored law and order. The RPF took control of Rwanda and established a transitional government of both Hutus and Tutsis, which ruled from 1994 to 1995. Between 1996 and 2002, Rwanda's leadership was preoccupied with fighting Hutu armed groups in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and could not prioritise nation building.

In 2003, Rwanda adopted a new Constitution and became a semi-presidential republic. The same year, multi-party elections were held for the first time. Kagame was elected as Rwanda's President. Under his leadership, the RPF rapidly consolidated power, winning landslide majorities since 2003. In 2015, the government amended the constitution through a referendum, enabling Kagame to rule till 2034 and strengthening the RPF's dominance.

What has been the role of Kagame?

A U.S.-trained military officer of Tutsi ethnicity, Kagame joined the RPF in 1990.

As the RPF's leader, Kagame led the armed group to end the genocide. Between 1994 and 2000, he was

Rwanda's *de facto* leader, first as Vice President and then as Acting President.

According to Rwanda's Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, the economy grew by over eight per cent annually under Kagame's leadership. Between 2000 and 2017, his targeted social welfare schemes lifted over one million people out of poverty, while life expectancy rose from 29 to 67 years. However, Western observers criticised his government as authoritarian for suppressing opposition forces and civil liberties. In 2024, Freedom House accused his government of surveillance, torture, arbitrary detentions, and assassinations of dissidents.

What do the election results convey?

Kagame's victory conveys wide-ranging support for his programmes of economic progress and political stability. Given that Rwanda is still a developing country, Kagame's campaign resonated with the electorate's aspirations for economic freedom and reaffirmed his successful record of providing the stability needed for development.

Kagame's victory demonstrates the effectiveness of his party machinery, with opposition candidates struggling to draw crowds. However, Kagame was virtually unchallenged, with opposition candidates receiving one per cent of votes combined, reflecting the RPF's efforts to suppress genuine political competition. The suppression of the candidates also reflected Kagame's authoritarian tendencies. The pro-government decisions of the National Election Commission reflected the absence of robust democratic institutions.

Does the Rwanda election hold any significance for Africa's democratic process?

South Africa, Senegal, Chad, and Rwanda have completed their general elections, others are heading to the polls. While South Africa and Senegal had free and fair elections, polls in Chad and Rwanda saw incumbents controlling opposition forces.

While Rwanda enjoys an impressive developmental record, its authoritarian tendencies and democratic deficits reflect the larger African trends of democratic backsliding and electoral malpractices. Since the RPF was initially an armed group that became the country's ruling party, its political dominance reflects the persistent issue of militarisation of civilian politics that affects African states like Gabon and Guinea. Kagame's victory will mark continued political stability, but its military involvement in the DRC will contribute to regional instability.

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## THE GIST

Rwanda held its fourth presidential election on July 15, with President Paul Kagame winning overwhelmingly with over 99% of the votes.

The partial results show Kagame's dominance, while opposition leaders received less than one per cent of the votes combined.

Kagame, a U.S.-trained military officer, led the RPF to end the genocide and has been a central figure in Rwanda's recovery and economic growth, despite criticism for authoritarian practices.

## What is behind Rwanda's election outcome? (26 July)

How did President Paul Kagame secure such overwhelming support?

- On July 15, Rwanda held its fourth presidential election since the 1994 genocide.
- President Paul Kagame won with over 99% of the votes counted so far.
- Opposition candidates secured less than 1% of the votes each.
- In 1994, Hutu President Juvenal Habyarimana's assassination led to the Rwandan genocide, with over 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus killed.
- The Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) ended the genocide and established a transitional government from 1994 to 1995.
- Between 1996 and 2002, Rwanda focused on fighting Hutu armed groups in the DRC.
- In 2003, Rwanda adopted a new Constitution and became a semi-presidential republic with Kagame elected as President.
- Kagame's leadership saw the RPF consolidate power and win majorities since 2003.
- In 2015, the Constitution was amended to extend Kagame's rule until 2034.
- Kagame, a U.S.-trained military officer, led the RPF and became Rwanda's *de facto* leader from 1994 to 2000.
- Under Kagame, Rwanda's economy grew by over 8% annually, and significant social improvements were made.
- However, his government has been criticized for authoritarian practices, including suppressing opposition and civil liberties.
- In 2024, Freedom House accused Kagame's government of surveillance, torture, arbitrary detentions, and assassinations of dissidents.

What do the election results convey?

- Kagame's victory shows strong support for his economic and stability programs.
- As a developing country, Rwanda's electorate values economic progress and stability.
- Kagame's party machinery was highly effective, with opposition candidates receiving minimal votes.
- The low vote share for opposition candidates reflects suppression of genuine political competition and Kagame's authoritarian tendencies.
- The National Election Commission's pro-government decisions highlight the lack of robust democratic institutions.
- Rwanda's election is part of a broader trend of democratic backsliding and electoral malpractices in Africa.
- While South Africa and Senegal had free elections, Chad and Rwanda saw incumbents controlling opposition forces.
- Rwanda's developmental progress is marred by authoritarianism and democratic deficits.
- Kagame's continued rule will bring stability but may also contribute to regional instability due to military involvement in the DRC.

## Is there a right way to portray sexual violence on-screen? (26 July)

The portrayal of violence in films, including extreme depictions such as rape, raises questions about its impact and necessity; while some films use violence to drive their plots, studies show that such depictions can contribute to real-life aggression and desensitisation among viewers

- There is ongoing debate about depicting violence and rape on screen, given the current global context of aggression and violence.
- Films often reflect societal violence, raising questions about how much violence is acceptable in media and whether it needs to make a point.
- Vijay Sethupathy's film Maharaja includes extreme violence and multiple rapes, which are portrayed in a casual and brutal manner.
- The film uses violence as a plot device, featuring graphic and disturbing scenes, including assaults, nudity, and intense flashbacks.
- The depiction of violence in the film is meant to drive the narrative but often results in a visceral, unsettling experience for viewers.
- The film's climax is anticipated as a relief from the ongoing violence and brutality depicted throughout.

#### Big influence

- Studies have shown that on-screen violence increases aggressive behavior in children, as demonstrated by Albert Bandura's research.
- Violence in media can also desensitize viewers, dulling their response to real-life violence and potentially glorifying it.
- Quentin Tarantino uses a comical and theatrical approach to violence in his films, distancing the audience from the brutality portrayed.
- Violence in films is acceptable as part of storytelling, but stylized or gratuitous violence without redemption is problematic.
- The Netflix series Sandman features a powerful, unconventional portrayal of rape that conveys the seriousness of the act.
- The series I May Destroy You addresses sexual violation and the importance of consent, emphasizing that consent can be withdrawn at any time.

#### Educate, not glorify

- Showing violence on screen is important for realism, but excessive or mindless violence detracts from the plot and reduces credibility.
- A more sensitive approach to depicting violence can avoid glorifying it and instead focus on educating and enlightening the audience.

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