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# Simultaneous polls plan gets Union Cabinet nod

Govt. to form implementation group to take forward recommendations of Kovind panel

[GS Paper II: Elections](#)

**Sandeep Phukan**  
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday accepted the recommendations of the high-level committee, headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind, that had proposed simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies as the first step, and municipal and panchayat polls within 100 days of the general election in the next phase.

"This is an important step towards making our democracy even more vibrant and participative," Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a strong votary of simultaneous polls, said in a post on X.

Calling it a giant stride towards electoral reforms,

Union Home Minister Amit Shah, in a post on X, said, "This reflects Modi Ji's iron will to bolster our democracy through clean and financially efficient elections and accelerate economic growth through more productive allocation of resources".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, however, dismissed the idea as "impractical".

"This is against the Constitution, this is contrary to democracy, this is against federalism. The country will never accept this," he said.

Announcing the Union Cabinet's approval to the proposal of simultaneous elections at a media briefing, Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said an



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw addresses a press conference after the Cabinet meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday. Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting L. Murugan is also present. ANI

implementation group would be formed to take forward the recommendations of the Kovind panel.

"Our government believes in creating a consensus on items that affect our democracy, the nation in the long run. And this is a subject that will strengthen

our democracy, Centre-State relations..." Mr. Vaishnaw said.

Asked if the government had a specific timeline such as the 2029 Lok Sabha election for its implementation, Mr. Vaishnaw said the implementation would take place after

PM calls proposal an 'important step' towards making democracy 'vibrant and participative'

## It will destroy federalism, says Opposition

NEW DELHI

Opposition parties criticised the proposal for simultaneous elections, claiming that it will destroy federalism and is "impractical". They asked how the government would deal with situations when a ruling party loses majority in a State or at the Centre. » PAGE 4

completing the legal processes. The report of the Kovind panel, which ran into more than 18,000 pages, was submitted to President Droupadi Murmu in March.

To synchronise the elections, the committee has suggested that the Presi-

Congress terms the idea impractical, against the Constitution, and contrary to democracy

dent, through a notification issued on the first sitting of the Lok Sabha post general elections, set an 'Appointed Date'. This date would mark the beginning of the new electoral cycle. State Assemblies, that are formed after the date and before the completion of the Lok Sabha's term, would conclude before the subsequent general elections. After this, election to the Lok Sabha and all State Assemblies would be held simultaneously.

The Committee had factored scenarios such as a hung House, or a no-confidence motion, and recommended amendments to Article 83 (duration of Houses of Parliament) and Article 172 (duration of State legislatures) of the Constitution. It recom-

mended a common electoral roll, which would need coordination between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and State Election Commissions (SECs). The ECI is responsible for the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, while the local body elections for municipalities and panchayats are managed by the SECs. The proposed changes regarding the single electoral roll and single voter ID card would need ratification by at least half of the States.

In all, the Kovind panel has recommended 18 constitutional amendments, most of which will not need ratification by State Assemblies. However, any Constitutional amendment Bill needs to be passed by a two-third majority in each house of Parliament.

## Simultaneous polls plan gets Union Cabinet nod (19 September)

- The Union Cabinet has accepted recommendations for holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.
- Former President Ram Nath Kovind headed the high-level committee that made this proposal.

- In the first step, Lok Sabha and Assembly elections will be held simultaneously.
- Municipal and panchayat elections will be conducted within 100 days after the general elections in the next phase.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi supports the idea, stating it will strengthen democracy and increase participation.
- Home Minister Amit Shah called it a significant electoral reform, praising its efficiency in reducing election costs and boosting economic growth.
- Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge opposed the proposal, calling it impractical and against the Constitution, democracy, and federalism.
- Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced that an implementation group would work on executing the recommendations of the Kovind panel.
- The government aims to build a consensus on this issue to improve democracy and Centre-State relations.
- The government has not yet set a specific timeline for implementing simultaneous elections, such as the 2029 Lok Sabha election.
- Implementation will occur after completing necessary legal processes.
- The Kovind panel's report, which is over 18,000 pages long, was submitted to President Droupadi Murmu in March.
- To synchronize elections, the President will set an 'Appointed Date' after the Lok Sabha elections, marking the start of a new electoral cycle.
- State Assemblies formed after this date will conclude before the next general elections.
- Future Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections will be held simultaneously.
- The committee considered scenarios like a hung House or no-confidence motions and recommended changes to Articles 83 and 172 of the Constitution.
- It suggested creating a common electoral roll, which requires coordination between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and State Election Commissions (SECs).
- The ECI handles Lok Sabha and Assembly polls, while SECs manage municipal and panchayat elections.
- Proposed changes include a single electoral roll and voter ID card, needing approval from at least half of the States.
- The Kovind panel recommended 18 constitutional amendments, most of which do not need State Assembly ratification.
- Any constitutional amendment bill must be passed by a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament.

## Indus waters: India to freeze negotiations with Pakistan

**Jacob Koshy**  
**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

There will be no more meetings of the **Permanent Indus Commission** till the governments of India and Pakistan meet and discuss the renegotiation of the **64-year-old Indus Water Treaty**, a highly placed official told *The Hindu*.

The last meeting was in Delhi in May 2022. Since January 2023, India has written four times to Pakistan to initiate talks on revising the treaty but not received a "satisfactory response", according to sources.

**FULL REPORT**  
» PAGE 4

### River Allocation:

- The Indus River system consists of six rivers: the **Indus, Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej**.

## Indus waters: India to freeze negotiations with Pakistan (19 September)

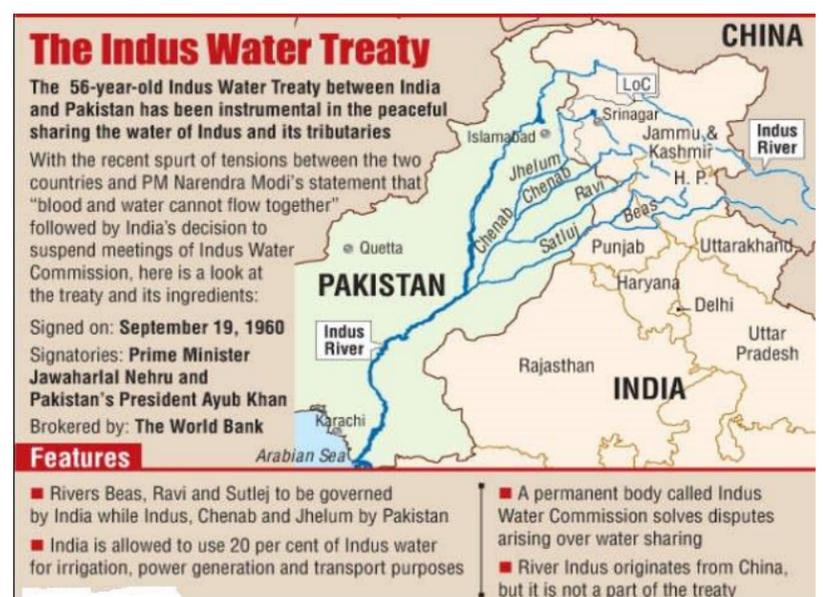
- There will be no further meetings of the Permanent Indus Commission until India and Pakistan meet to discuss renegotiating the Indus Water Treaty.
- The Indus Water Treaty has been in place for 64 years.
- The last meeting of the commission took place in Delhi in May 2022.
- Since January 2023, India has sent four letters to Pakistan asking to start talks on revising the treaty.
- India has not received a "satisfactory response" from Pakistan regarding these requests.

### Indus Water Treaty

• The **Indus Water Treaty (IWT)** is a water-distribution agreement between **India and Pakistan** that was brokered by the **World Bank**. It was mediated by World Bank on the insistence of the US.

- It was signed on **19th September 1960** by **Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru** and **Pakistani President Ayub Khan**.
- It is considered as the most successful treaty of the world.
- The treaty primarily addresses the **sharing and usage rights** of the **Indus River system**, which spans across both countries.

### Key Features of the Indus Water Treaty:



- The treaty divides the rivers into two categories:
  - **Western Rivers:** Indus, Jhelum, and Chenab – allocated to **Pakistan**.
  - **Eastern Rivers:** Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej – allocated to **India**.

**Water Rights:**

- **Pakistan** has the exclusive right over the waters of the **Western rivers**.
- **India** is allowed limited uses of these rivers for domestic, non-consumptive agricultural purposes, and hydropower generation, but cannot divert their flow for other purposes.
- **India** has full control over the waters of the **Eastern rivers**, and can use them for irrigation, power generation, and other uses.

**Permanent Indus Commission:**

- The treaty established the **Permanent Indus Commission** comprising representatives from both India and Pakistan.
- The Commission ensures the implementation of the treaty and facilitates communication and cooperation between the two countries on water issues.

**World Bank’s Role:**

- The **World Bank** plays a significant role in ensuring the implementation and functioning of the treaty.
- It has been involved as a mediator and helped fund some of the infrastructure projects for both countries, particularly those enabling Pakistan to better utilize its allocation of the Western rivers.

**Dispute Resolution:**

- The treaty outlines a framework for resolving disputes or differences that arise between India and Pakistan over the waters. In the event of a dispute, it can be referred to the **Permanent Indus Commission**, neutral experts, or even the **World Bank** for arbitration.

**Challenges and Controversies:**

- **Pakistan's Concerns:** Pakistan has often expressed concerns over India's construction of dams and hydroelectric projects on the Western rivers (such as the **Baglihar Dam** on the Chenab River and the **Kishanganga project** on the Jhelum River). Pakistan believes such projects could reduce water flows into its territory.
- **India’s Concerns:** India argues that it has been unable to fully utilize the waters allocated to it under the treaty, particularly from the Eastern rivers. It is currently working on projects to better use the waters of Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej for irrigation and hydropower.
- **Climate Change:** With the threat of climate change, both countries are increasingly concerned about potential changes in river flow patterns due to melting glaciers, changing rainfall patterns, and increasing demand for water. This adds further stress to an already delicate balance of water-sharing arrangements.
- **Brahma Chellany:** Indus Water Treaty is the very unique treaty that any upper riparian country will agree with it.
- India agreed as per the historical context under that India was weak.
- If India plan for any non-consumptive use in the Western river allotted to Pakistan, Pakistan has veto power.
- As per the Indian PM Modi “Water and blood cannot flow together”.
- However, technical the same is not possible due to lack of infrastructure, technology and also it sets wrong precedence.
- Besides that India is also lower riparian nation with respect to the Brahmaputra River.
- Pakistan has given Veto with respect projects on the Western Rivers. It causes delays in completion of the projects that causes rise in cost.

**Important Dates and Data:**

- **Signed:** 19th September 1960.
- **Western Rivers:** Indus, Jhelum, Chenab – for Pakistan.
- **Eastern Rivers:** Ravi, Beas, Sutlej – for India.
- **World Bank’s Role:** Mediator and arbitrator.

# India to freeze talks with Pakistan on Indus waters

**Jacob Koshy**  
**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

There will be no more meetings of the Permanent Indus Commission (PIC) till the governments of India and Pakistan meet and discuss the renegotiation of the 64-year-old Indus Water Treaty, a highly placed official told *The Hindu*.

The last meeting was in Delhi in May 2022. Since January 2023, India has written four times to Pakistan to initiate talks on revising the treaty but not received a “satisfactory response”, according to sources.

The PIC is the most consequential product of the Indus Water Treaty (IWT), signed in 1960 to manage the sharing of six Himalayan rivers between India and Pakistan. Commissioners of both countries are mandated to meet every year, and sometimes have met multiple times in a year, to discuss and resolve differences on the sharing of river water and construction of hydel projects.

**Risking oblivion**  
Despite wars and disputes between India and Pakistan, and the occasional stalling of the meetings, the PIC has been a perma-



On August 30 this year, India had sent a letter to Pakistan, the fourth since 2023, asking to renegotiate the treaty. FILE PHOTO

nent fixture. However, with India’s call to renegotiate the IWT in January 2023, the PIC risks oblivion.

“Pakistan’s first response [following India’s call] was to discuss issues at the level of commissioners. But India denied this on the grounds that the commissioners are meant to execute the treaty and so this can be done only by governments. If the governmental negotiations were to begin to renegotiate the treaty, India could consider reviving the commission as a goodwill measure,” the official told *The Hindu*.

On August 30 this year, India sent a letter to Pakistan, the fourth since 2023, asking to renegotiate the

treaty. “India’s notification highlights fundamental and unforeseen changes in circumstances that require a reassessment of obligations under various Articles of the Treaty. Among various concerns, important ones include change in population demographics; environmental issues – need to accelerate development of clean energy to meet India’s emission targets; impact of persistent cross-border terrorism, etc,” said a government note summarising aspects of the notification sent in August.

However, India’s “prime” focus, the official cited earlier said, was solving the dispute resolution mechanism set out in the treaty.

## Pulikali (Tiger Dance)

- **Pulikali**, also known as the **Tiger Dance**, is a folk art and dance form celebrated primarily in the Indian state of **Kerala**.
- The name "Pulikali" comes from the Malayalam words "Puli" (tiger) and "Kali" (play), meaning the "play of the tiger."
- This traditional performance is an integral part of the cultural festivities during **Onam**, the state's **harvest festival**.

### Artistic Body Painting:

- The most striking aspect of Pulikali is the elaborate body painting.
- Performers are painted to resemble tigers and leopards, using bright colors like yellow, red, black, and white.

### Performance and Dance:

- The dancers, who act as "tigers," perform to the beat of traditional percussion instruments like the **Chenda** and **Thakil**.
- Their movements mimic the actions of a tiger, including stalking, hunting, and attacking.
- The dance is vigorous and full of energy, symbolizing the wild spirit of the tiger.

### Celebration during Onam:

- Pulikali is performed on the **fourth day of Onam**, known as **Nalam Onam**.
- The most famous Pulikali celebration takes place in **Thrissur** district, where large crowds gather to witness the colorful event.

### Historical Significance:

- Pulikali has been celebrated for over 200 years and is believed to have been introduced during the reign of **Maharaja Rama Varma Sakthan Thampuran**, who wanted to create a performance that represented the spirit of courage and the hunter's prowess.

### Stripes of all colours



**Friendly tigers:** Artists perform pulikali (tiger dance) on the streets of Thrissur in Kerala on Wednesday, marking the end of Onam celebrations. Thousands of people, including foreigners, thronged the streets to witness the annual show. K.K. NAJEEB

GS Paper I: Art and Culture



## Walkie-talkies, solar equipment explode a day after Lebanon pager blasts, kill 14 (19 September)

- Explosions occurred in Beirut and other parts of Lebanon, involving detonations of electronic devices.
- On Wednesday, at least 14 people were killed and 450 injured when walkie-talkies and solar equipment exploded.
- These blasts followed a previous incident where hundreds of pagers exploded, which was blamed on Israel.
- Explosions happened during a funeral in Beirut for Hezbollah members and a child who died from the pager explosions on Tuesday.
- Hezbollah officials reported that walkie-talkies used by their group exploded.



- Lebanon’s official news agency mentioned that solar energy systems exploded in homes in Beirut and southern Lebanon, injuring at least one girl.
- Israel’s Defence Minister Yoav Gallant announced a “new phase” of the war but did not address the recent explosions in Lebanon.
- The new explosions intensified confusion and anger from the previous day’s pager bombings, which had caused significant civilian casualties: at least 12 people killed, including two children, and about 2,800 injured.
- The second wave of explosions raised concerns about indiscriminate casualties, affecting anyone near the pagers.
- Palestinian militant group Hamas condemned the attacks and blamed Israel, saying it threatens regional security and stability.



## Semites:

- The term "**Semites**" refers to a group of peoples who speak **Semitic languages**, which include Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, and others. The term comes from "Shem," one of the sons of Noah in the Bible, who is said to be the ancestor of these peoples.

### Who are Semites?

- Semites include a variety of ethnic groups, including:
  - **Jews:** The descendants of ancient Hebrews who speak Hebrew.
  - **Arabs:** The largest group of Semites today, whose primary language is Arabic.
  - **Assyrians and Arameans:** These are other ancient Semitic groups who spoke Aramaic.

### Important Data and Facts:

- Semitic languages have been spoken in the **Middle East** and parts of **North Africa** for over **4,000 years**.
- Semites do not only refer to Jews; it is a broader ethnic-linguistic classification.

### Recent Updates:

- The term "Semite" is rarely used in modern discourse outside of linguistic contexts. It is most often encountered today in discussions of **anti-Semitism**, which specifically refers to hostility toward Jews, despite the broader meaning of the term.

## Zionists: A Political and Ideological Movement

- **Zionism** is a **political and nationalist movement** that emerged in the late 19th century, advocating for the **establishment of a Jewish homeland** in **Palestine**, the ancient land of Israel.
- The movement gained momentum due to European anti-Semitism and the desire for Jewish self-determination.

### Who are Zionists?

- **Zionists** are people who support or advocate for the **establishment** and continuation of a **Jewish state in Israel**.
- Zionists are **not limited to Jews**. Non-Jews can also be Zionists if they support the idea of a Jewish state.

### Key Events in Zionism:

- **The First Zionist Congress:** Held in **1897** in Basel, Switzerland, led by **Theodor Herzl**, often considered the father of modern political Zionism.
- **Balfour Declaration (1917):** A key moment in Zionist history, where the British government expressed support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people."
- **1948:** The establishment of the State of Israel, fulfilling Zionism's primary objective.

### Important Data and Facts:

- **Zionism** emerged in the late **19th century** as a response to growing **anti-Semitism** in Europe.
- The **UN Partition Plan of 1947** allocated territory in Palestine for both a Jewish and Arab state, leading to the creation of Israel in 1948.
- The Zionist movement is divided into several ideological branches, such as **Labor Zionism** (socialist Zionism) and **Revisionist Zionism** (more conservative and nationalistic).

## Madras High Court junks plea to declare Tamil saint-poet’s birthday on Vaikasi Anusham

**GS Paper I: A&C**

**Mohamed Imranullah S.**  
CHENNAI

The Madras High Court has refused to declare the day of **Anusham** star in the Tamil month of **Vaikasi** as the birthday of **Tiruvalluvar**, who is believed to have penned **Tirukkural**, a highly celebrated compendium of 1,330 couplets containing life lessons.

Justice M. Dhandapani also refused to issue a direction to the Tamil Nadu government to shift the annual **celebration of ‘Tiruvalluvar day’** from the second day of Tamil month **Thai**, as it is being followed now, to the **Vaikasi Anusha Natchathiram** day.

The judge dismissed a writ petition filed in 2021 by **Samy Thiagarajan**, the president of **Tiruvalluvar Tirunatkazhagam**.

The petitioner had claimed to be a Tamil pro-



Statue of **saint-poet Tiruvalluvar**.

fessor with 36 years of teaching experience and a doctorate for his research on **Tirukkural**.

He stated that a temple for **Tiruvalluvar** was in existence at **Mylapore** in **Chennai** and that it was around 600 years old. It was under the control of **Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments** department and it celebrates the birth anniversary of

the saint-poet on **Vaikasi Anusham** day, he said.

The petitioner said that even **Colombo-based Tamil scholar K.P. Ratnam**, who founded **Tamil Marai Kazhagam**, had spread the message worldwide that the birth anniversary of **Tiruvalluvar** must be celebrated only on **Vaikasi Anusham**.

A Government Order issued on **March 18, 1966**, after the conclusion of the first **Tiruvalluvar conference**, had ordered that **‘Tiruvalluvar day’** would be celebrated on **June 2, 1966**, which was a **Vaikasi Anusham** day. Subsequently, it was shifted to the **second day of Thai**, the **litigant** said.

Advocate General **P.S. Raman** told the court that the government celebrated **‘Tiruvalluvar day’** only to celebrate the literary works of the saint-poet.

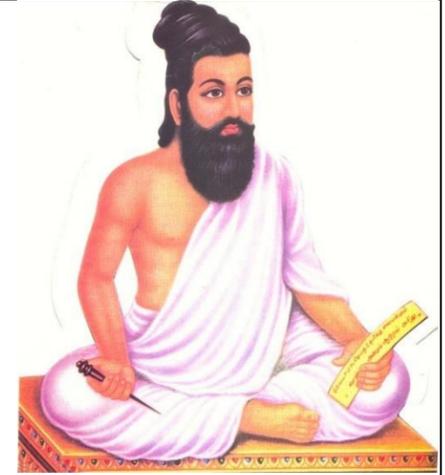
## Madras High Court junks plea to declare Tamil saint-poet’s birthday on Vaikasi Anusham (19 September)

- The Madras High Court refused to recognize **Anusham** star in the Tamil month of **Vaikasi** as the birthday of **Tiruvalluvar**.
- **Tiruvalluvar** is believed to have written the **Tirukkural**, a collection of 1,330 couplets with life lessons.
- The court also declined to direct the **Tamil Nadu** government to move **‘Tiruvalluvar Day’** celebrations from the second day of the Tamil month **Thai** to **Vaikasi Anusha Natchathiram** day.
- The writ petition was filed in 2021 by **Samy Thiagarajan**, president of **Tiruvalluvar Tirunatkazhagam**.
- **Thiagarajan**, a Tamil professor with 36 years of teaching experience, claimed that a 600-year-old temple for **Tiruvalluvar** in **Mylapore, Chennai**, celebrates his birth anniversary on **Vaikasi Anusham** day.

- He also noted that Tamil scholar K.P. Ratnam advocated for Tiruvalluvar's birth anniversary to be celebrated on Vaikasi Anusham.
- A 1966 Government Order initially set 'Tiruvalluvar Day' to June 2, 1966, which was Vaikasi Anusham, but it was later changed to the second day of Thai.
- Advocate General P.S. Raman stated that the government celebrates 'Tiruvalluvar Day' to honor the literary works of Tiruvalluvar.

## Thiruvalluvar

- Thiruvalluvar, commonly known as Valluvar, was an Indian poet and philosopher.
- He is best known as the author of the ***Tirukkura***, a collection of couplets on ethics, political and economic matters, and love.
- The text is considered an exceptional and widely cherished work of **Tamil literature**.
- Almost no authentic information is available about Valluvar, states Kamil Zvelebil – a scholar of Tamil literature.
- His life and likely background are variously inferred from his literary works by different biographers.
- There are **unauthentic hagiographic and legendary accounts of Valluvar's life**, and all major Indian religions, as well as Christian missionaries of the 19th century, have tried to claim him as secretly inspired (crypto-) or originally belonging to their tradition.
- Little is known with certainty about his family background, religious affiliation, or birthplace.
- He is believed to have lived at least in the town of Mylapore (a neighbourhood of the present-day Chennai), and his *floruit* is dated variously from the **4th century BCE to the early 5th century CE**, based on traditional accounts and the linguistic analyses of his writings. Kamil Zvelebil infers the *Tirukkura* and Valluvar are best dated to around 500 CE.



## Mpox conformed in Kerala's Malappuram (19 September)

**A person who arrived from Dubai tested positive for the infection; condition of the patient said to be stable; Kerala Health Department has arranged treatment and isolation facility in 14 districts of the State; health workers have been asked to exercise caution while dealing with suspected cases**

- Kerala Health Department confirmed the state's first recent Mpox case on Wednesday.
- The patient is a 38-year-old man from Dubai who tested positive for Mpox.
- Regarding Nipah virus, 10 more people from Malappuram tested negative, including close relatives of a man who died from Nipah and the doctor who treated him.
- All 26 people tested so far in Malappuram for Nipah have been negative.
- Passengers arriving from **African countries** are being screened for Mpox.
- **Mpox, formerly known as monkeypox, originally spread from animals to humans but is now transmitted between people.**
- **Mpox is less dangerous than smallpox, which was eradicated in the 1980s.**
- **Unlike COVID-19 or H1N1, Mpox does not spread easily through the air but requires close contact with an infected person, such as through touching, sharing bedding or clothing, or sexual contact.**
- Early symptoms of **Mpox include fever, severe headache, back pain, muscle pain, lack of energy, and swollen lymph nodes.**
- Rashes and red marks appear on the body within a week after the fever starts.
- Health officials warned that Mpox could spread to those who do not follow contact restrictions with infected individuals.
- District Medical Officer R. Renuka advised health workers to be cautious when handling suspected cases.

## Mpox

**Mpox**, previously known as **Monkeypox**, is a viral zoonosis caused by the monkeypox virus. This virus belongs to the **Orthopoxvirus genus, which also includes smallpox**. Mpox is primarily found in **Central and West Africa** but has gained global attention due to outbreaks in non-endemic regions.

### 1. Origin and Naming:

- The virus was first identified in **1958 in monkeys used for research, hence the name**. The disease was first reported in humans in 1970 in the **Democratic Republic of the Congo**.
- In **November 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially renamed Monkeypox to Mpox** to avoid stigmatization and simplify its name.

### 2. Symptoms:

- Initial symptoms include **fever, headache, muscle aches, and fatigue**.
- A characteristic rash typically follows, progressing from flat lesions to raised bumps, and then to pustules before crusting over.
- The rash often starts on the face and can spread to other parts of the body, including palms, soles, and genitalia.
- Lesions may also be found in the mouth, throat, and on other mucosal surfaces.

### 3. Transmission:

- **Animal-to-Human:** Direct contact with infected animals, such as rodents or primates. Animal hosts include Gambian rats and squirrels.
  - **Human-to-Human:** Through respiratory droplets, bodily fluids, or contact with contaminated materials or skin lesions. Close contact with infected individuals is a primary mode of spread.
4. **Prevalence and Risk Factors:**
- Historically endemic to Central and West Africa. Cases have been rare but are increasing in frequency.
  - Risk is higher for those in contact with infected animals or people, especially in regions where the disease is prevalent.
5. **Outbreaks:**
- **2022 Outbreak:** The most significant global outbreak occurred in 2022, spreading to countries outside Africa, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, and several European nations. This marked the first major spread of mpox outside its traditional endemic regions.
  - **Data from 2022:** Over 70,000 cases were reported worldwide in 2022. The outbreak prompted a global health response, including vaccination campaigns and public health advisories.

**Prevention and Treatment:**

- **Prevention:** Avoiding contact with infected animals and practicing good hygiene. Using **personal protective equipment (PPE)** in outbreak settings.
- **Vaccination:** The smallpox vaccine provides cross-protection against mpox. During the 2022 outbreak, **targeted vaccination campaigns** were implemented in high-risk areas.
- **Treatment:** No specific antiviral treatment for mpox; care is generally supportive. However, antiviral drugs like tecovirimat may be used in severe cases or outbreaks.

# ‘We are sharing state-of-the-art expertise with ISRO for Gaganyaan’

Philippe Baptiste, chief of Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales, the French space agency, says India-France collaboration is not only a great success of the past but an ongoing one, and that France is impressed by what India is doing, especially in lunar exploration; on Gaganyaan mission, he says France is sharing knowledge, especially on space medicine

**GS Paper III: Basic Science**

**INTERVIEW**

**Philippe Baptiste**

Hemanth C.S.

Philippe Baptiste, President of the French Space Agency, Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales (CNES), who is in India to participate in the Bengaluru Space Expo 2024, spoke to *The Hindu* on the sidelines of the event on a wide range of topics from celebrating 60 years of French-India space cooperation to the Gaganyaan and the



K. MURALI KUMAR

**TRISHNA missions.**

India and France have had a partnership of over six decades in

**space. How do you see this collaboration evolving?**

It (India-France collabora-

tion) is not only a great success of the past but an ongoing one. It started off with our launchers where we had a strong cooperation many decades ago. Then we also had a partnership in engines and Earth Observation and so on. It is an ongoing cooperation. We have many projects coming very soon for launching satellites, in the domain of space exploration and there is a lot of discussion in the areas of defence and security, especially in Space Situational Awareness.

**Any update on the Indo-French Thermal Infra-Red Imaging**

**Satellite for High-resolution Natural Resource Assessment (TRISHNA) mission? When will it be launched?**

TRISHNA which is our next project together is a very highly visible project. It is an infrared satellite project. It will greatly help to get information on climate, agriculture, drought forecasting and urban heat island monitoring. The project is going very well. We expect to launch the satellite in 2026.

**India and France in 2021 had signed an agreement for**

**cooperation for the Gaganyaan mission. Could you please elaborate on the areas in which CNES is helping ISRO and how is it progressing?**

We do have a bit of expertise in this area (human spaceflight) as we have been sending astronauts to space for several decades. With regard to the Gaganyaan programme, we are sharing knowledge, especially on space medicine, to understand the physiology of astronauts, to train them and so on. People from both India and France are going back and forth from Bengaluru and

Toulouse sharing knowledge and expertise. We are sharing latest state-of-the-art expertise with ISRO.

**India has lined up ambitious missions like the Chandrayaan-4 and Chandrayaan-5 which aim at bringing back samples from the moon. Is France keen to be part of this?**

We are looking forward to these missions. We are very impressed by what you are doing in India, especially in lunar exploration. We are looking forward to seeing close cooperation in these areas.

## ‘We are sharing state-of-the-art expertise with ISRO for Gaganyaan’ (19 September)

Philippe Baptiste, chief of Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales, the French space agency, says India-France collaboration is not only a great success of the past but an ongoing one, and that France is impressed by what India is doing, especially in lunar exploration; on Gaganyaan mission, he says France is sharing knowledge, especially on space medicine

- **Philippe Baptiste, President of the French Space Agency CNES,** is in India for the **Bengaluru Space Expo 2024.**
- He discussed the **60-year collaboration between India and France in space,** which started with launchers and has expanded to include engines, Earth Observation, and more.
- The partnership is ongoing with future projects in **satellite launches, space exploration, and discussions in defense and Space Situational Awareness.**
- The **TRISHNA mission, an Indo-French project,** is an infrared satellite that will help with climate, agriculture, drought forecasting, and urban heat island monitoring. It is expected to launch in 2026.
- For the **Gaganyaan mission, CNES is assisting ISRO** by sharing expertise in human spaceflight, space medicine, and astronaut training.
- There is active knowledge exchange between **Bengaluru and Toulouse.**



- France is interested in India's upcoming **Chandrayaan-4 and Chandrayaan-5 missions**, particularly those aimed at bringing back moon samples, and is keen on close **cooperation in lunar exploration**.

## Simultaneous polls hurt federalism: Opposition (19 September)

**Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge dismisses proposal as 'diversionary' tactic; CPI leader D. Raja says framers of the Constitution had anticipated multiple and frequent elections in a federal polity**

- Opposition parties criticized the Union Cabinet's approval for simultaneous elections, arguing that it threatens federalism and is impractical.
- They are concerned about how the government will handle situations where a ruling party loses its majority in a State or at the Centre.
- Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge called the idea of "**one nation, one election**" a "**diversionary**" tactic, claiming it is impractical and that the government uses it to distract from real issues.
- Kharge believes that States will not support this scheme.
- Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien questioned the government's ability to synchronize elections, citing issues with scheduling elections in Maharashtra, Haryana, and Jammu and Kashmir.
- O'Brien criticized the "one nation, one election" proposal as a tactic by the BJP and alleged that the timing of elections in Maharashtra was delayed to benefit from the Ladki Bahin scheme, with funds being distributed in two tranches.
- RJD leader Manoj K. Jha argued that the government needs to address key questions before implementing simultaneous elections, such as what happens if there's no clear majority in a State election and whether a proxy government will be run until the next election. He also stated there is no evidence that multiple elections slow down the country's growth.
- Communist Party of India (CPI) general secretary D. Raja opposed the idea, mentioning that his party has previously challenged it before the **Law Commission and the Kovind committee**. He emphasized that the Constitution's framers intended for a federal polity with multiple elections, supported by the Election Commission of India under Article 324.
- AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi criticized the proposal as damaging to federalism and democracy, describing it as a solution looking for a problem. He believes it undermines the basic structure of the Constitution. Owaisi suggested that the only beneficiaries of the proposal are Prime Minister Modi and Home Minister Shah, who want to campaign in every election.

## India to freeze talks with Pakistan on Indus waters (19 September)

- The **Permanent Indus Commission (PIC)** will not have any more meetings until India and Pakistan negotiate the Indus Water Treaty.
- The last meeting of the PIC was held in Delhi in May 2022.
- Since January 2023, India has requested four times for talks with Pakistan to revise the treaty but hasn't received a satisfactory response.
- The **PIC was established by the Indus Water Treaty of 1960 to manage the sharing of six Himalayan rivers** between the two countries.
- The **commissioners from both countries usually meet annually or more frequently to address water-sharing issues and hydropower projects**.
- Despite ongoing disputes and wars, the PIC has remained operational, but the recent call for renegotiation puts its future at risk.
- Pakistan initially suggested discussing the issues at the commissioner level, but India insisted that renegotiation must involve government-level discussions.
- India sent a fourth letter in August 2024, requesting renegotiation of the treaty due to changes in demographics, environmental issues, and cross-border terrorism.
- The main focus for India is to address the dispute resolution mechanism within the treaty.

## SC comes to the rescue of man languishing in prison despite bail (19 September)

- **The Supreme Court released Ramchandra Thangappan Aachari, who had been in jail for four months despite having been granted bail** earlier.
- Aachari was granted bail on May 3, 2024, but couldn't be released because he couldn't provide a local surety.
- The court decided he could be released on his own personal bond, without needing a local surety.
- **Aachari was involved in a POCSO case and had already served over seven years of a 10-year sentence before being granted bail.**

- The Supreme Court ruled that not allowing Aachari to be released due to his inability to provide a local surety was a **violation of his rights under Article 21 of the Constitution**.
- The court emphasized that the **justice system should consider the difficulties faced by people who cannot provide local surety due to financial constraints**.

## BAIL IS NORM JAIL IS EXCEPTION

### Satender Kumar Antil v. CBI (2022)

- **Judgement:** The Court re-emphasized that bail should be granted unless there is compelling evidence of flight risk, tampering with witnesses, or obstruction of justice.

### P. Chidambaram v. Directorate of Enforcement (2019):

- The Supreme Court reaffirmed the principle of bail being the norm and jail being the exception, emphasizing that the accused should not be unnecessarily detained if there is no risk of flight or tampering with evidence.

### Dataram Singh v. State of Uttar Pradesh (2018):

- The Court emphasized that the power to grant or deny bail should be exercised judicially and not mechanically, considering the facts and circumstances of each case.

### Nikesh Tarachand Shah v. Union of India (2017)

- **Context:** This case involved the constitutional validity of certain provisions of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) that made it difficult for the accused to get bail.

- **Judgement:** The Supreme Court struck down these provisions as unconstitutional, reasserting the importance of bail.

In these judgment, the Supreme Court observed that bail should be granted liberally, and the incarceration of an individual should be seen as an exception. The court reiterated that the right to bail is a part of the fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India, which states that no person shall be deprived of his life or personal liberty except according to the procedure established by law.

Key factors that the court highlighted in determining bail included:

- The nature of the offense
- The severity of the punishment
- The possibility of the accused fleeing from justice
- The risk of tampering with evidence or influencing witnesses

## Govt. to fence Myanmar border at ₹31,000 crore (19 September)

- The Union government has approved ₹31,000 crore to build a fence along the Myanmar border.
- The **Myanmar border is 1,643 km long and runs along the Indian states of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram**.
- Home Minister Amit Shah said 30 km of fencing has already been completed, identifying the border as a key factor in Manipur's ethnic violence.
- The Cabinet Committee on Security approved the fencing and road construction along the entire Myanmar border.
- So far, 10 km of fencing has been completed near **Moreh in Manipur**, and work is ongoing to fence another 21 km.
- The Home Ministry also ended the **Free Movement Regime (FMR), which previously allowed people living near the border to travel 16 km into the other country without documents**.

## Chandrayaan-4, Venus orbiter get approval from Union Cabinet (19 September)

### Gaganyaan expansion project also gets nod; next lunar project plans to bring moon rocks to earth; space docking experiment later this year

- The Union government has approved several major space projects, including the Chandrayaan-4 mission, which aims to bring moon rocks back to Earth.
- A new spacecraft will be sent to orbit Venus, and the Gaganyaan project will be expanded to build an Indian space station.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi chaired the Cabinet meeting that approved these projects.
- The government approved the development of a next-generation launch vehicle to carry heavier payloads into space, which is crucial for future missions like the space station and sending an Indian astronaut to the moon.
- Prime Minister Modi announced plans for a self-sustained Indian space station by 2035 and a manned lunar mission by 2040.
- ₹2,104 crore has been allocated for the Chandrayaan-4 mission to collect and return lunar samples to Earth.
- The Chandrayaan-4 mission will involve multiple launches, and ISRO will perform a space docking experiment to prepare for this complex mission.
- The government has also approved ₹1,236 crore for the **Venus Orbiter Mission, which will be launched in March 2028**.

- The Gaganyaan programme has been given additional funding of ₹11,170 crore, adding to its already approved budget of ₹9,023 crore.

# Chandrayaan-4, Venus orbiter get approval from Union Cabinet

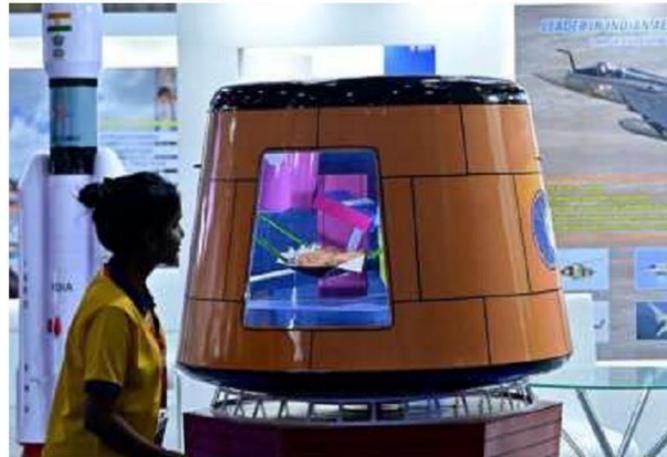
Gaganyaan expansion project also gets nod; next lunar project plans to bring moon rocks to earth; space docking experiment later this year

## GS Paper III: Basic Science

In a boost to the space programme, the Union government on Wednesday approved the Chandrayaan-4 mission to bring moon rocks to earth, send a spacecraft to orbit Venus and expand the Gaganyaan project to build an Indian space station.

The Cabinet, at a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also approved a proposal of the Department of Space to build a next-generation launch vehicle capable of placing heavier payload in orbits, which could also be key to achieving the targets of setting up a space station and landing an Indian astronaut on the moon.

“Great news for the space sector! The Union Cabinet has approved the first step towards the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (BAS), expanding the Gaganyaan programme,” Mr. Modi said in a post on X. “This landmark decision brings us closer to a self-sustained space station by



**Cutting edge:** A model of the Gaganyaan crew module at the Bengaluru Space Expo 2024 on Wednesday. K. MURALI KUMAR

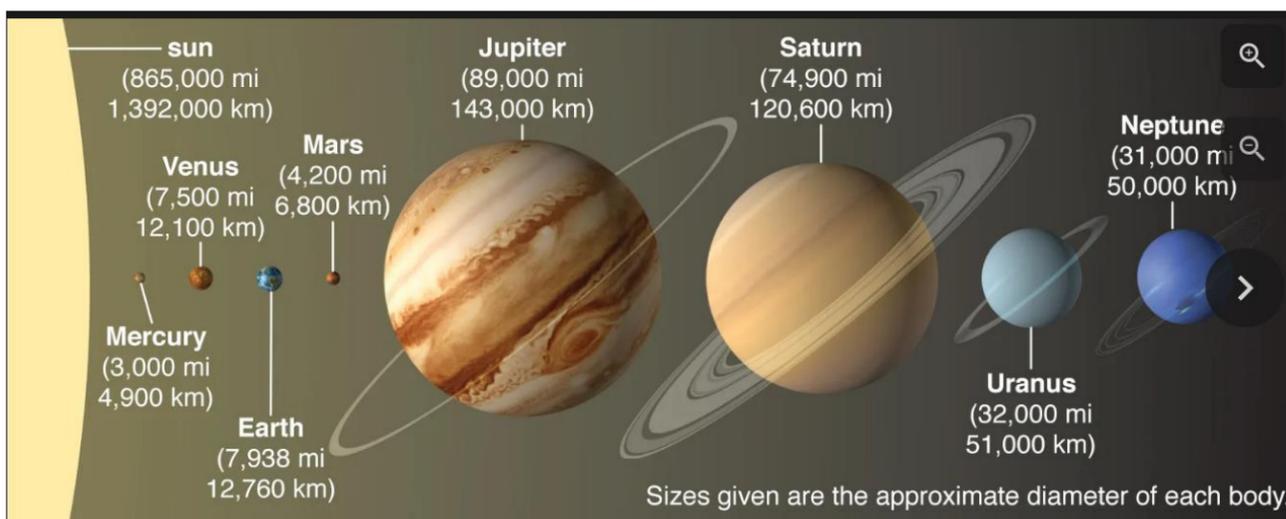
2035 and a crewed lunar mission by 2040,” he said.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the government had allocated ₹2,104 crore for the Chandrayaan-4 mission.

“A natural successor to Chandrayaan-3 is the demonstration of the ability to collect lunar samples and return them safely back to earth,” ISRO Chairman S. Somanath said. Chandrayaan-4 will involve multiple launches, and the premier space agency is set to perform a space docking

experiment later this year to develop its capabilities for the challenging endeavour.

The Cabinet approved ₹1,236 crore for the Venus Orbiter Mission, which is expected to be launched in March 2028. This will be India’s second interplanetary mission after the Mars Orbiter Mission, launched on November 5, 2013. The Cabinet also gave its nod to an additional funding of ₹11,170 crore to the Gaganyaan programme, which already has a sanctioned budget of ₹9,023 crore.



## PM-AASHA schemes to continue with additions: Centre (19 September)

- The Union Cabinet has approved the continuation of the Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA) schemes.
- These schemes aim to **ensure farmers receive fair prices for their crops and help control price volatility of essential commodities for consumers.**
- The Cabinet also set **Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) rates for phosphatic and potassic fertilizers** for the upcoming rabi season, with a budget requirement of ₹24,475.53 crore.
- The total financial outlay for PM-AASHA during the 15th Finance Commission cycle (up to 2025-26) is ₹35,000 crore.
- PM-AASHA includes components like the **Price Support Scheme (PSS), Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF), Price Deficit Payment Scheme (PDPS), and Market Intervention Scheme (MIS).**
- The PSF scheme extension will protect consumers from large price fluctuations of agricultural and horticultural products by maintaining buffer stocks of pulses and onions.
- This will help prevent hoarding and speculation, ensuring affordable supplies for consumers.
- For fertilizers, the government will continue subsidies to ensure affordable availability for farmers, adjusting rates based on international market trends.

## Centre may argue on law if it doesn't respond to pleas on marital rape: SC (19 September)

- Chief Justice of India, D.Y. Chandrachud, said the Union government must present oral arguments on the law if it does not file a written response to petitions seeking the **criminalization of marital rape.**
- Senior advocate Indira Jaising requested a specific hearing date for the case, but the Chief Justice asked lawyers to wait for the case's turn on the court's schedule.
- The case is important due to conflicting decisions from the Karnataka High Court and the Delhi High Court, which led to the need for a decision from the Supreme Court.
- The **Karnataka High Court ruled that a husband can be charged with rape if he has forced sex with his wife, and the Karnataka government supported this judgment.**
- **Exception 2 to Section 375 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) decriminalized marital rape, stating that non-consensual sex by a man with his wife, if she was over 15 years old, was not considered rape.**
- The new **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS); Section 63 retained the exception but raised the age from 15 to 18 years.**
- The **Karnataka High Court held that "rape is rape," whether committed by a husband or anyone else.**
- The Delhi High Court gave a split verdict on the issue in May 2022: Justice Rajiv Shakdher struck down the exception as unconstitutional, while Justice C. Hari Shankar believed changing the law was the responsibility of the legislature.
- The **Justice J.S. Verma Committee of 2013 had recommended removing the exception.**

## ₹5 lakh to transform tribal house into homestay unit (19 September)

- The Union Cabinet approved a package to provide up to ₹5 lakh to each tribal household and village to convert their homes into tourist homestays or build new ones under the Swadesh Darshan scheme.
- The goal is to "tap the tourist potential of tribal areas" and provide an alternative livelihood to tribal communities.

## PM-AASHA schemes to continue with additions: Centre

**GS Paper II: Government Scheme**

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the continuation of schemes of the Pradhan Mantri Annadata Aay SanraksHan Abhiyan (PM-AASHA).

The Centre said the schemes under PM-AASHA will ensure remunerative prices to farmers and control price volatility of essential commodities to benefit consumers.

The Cabinet also fixed the Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) rates for the upcoming rabi season on phosphatic and potassic (P and K) fertilisers. The tentative budgetary requirement for this will be ₹24,475.53 crore.

The total financial outgo for PM-AASHA will be ₹35,000 crore during the 15th Finance Commission cycle up to 2025-26. The Centre has converged the Price Support Scheme (PSS) and Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) schemes in PM-AASHA.

"PM-AASHA will now have the components of PSS, PSF and the Price Deficit Payment Scheme (PDPS) and Market Intervention Scheme (MIS)," the Centre said.

It said the extension of the PSF scheme will help in



The schemes under PM-AASHA will ensure remunerative prices to farmers, the Centre said.

protecting consumers from extreme volatility in prices of agri-horticultural commodities by maintaining strategic buffer stock of pulses and onion for calibrated release. It will also discourage hoarding and unscrupulous speculation, and ensure supplies to consumers at affordable prices.

### Subsidy for fertilizers

On the fertilizer subsidy, the Centre said it will ensure availability of fertilizers to farmers at subsidised, affordable and reasonable prices. It added that the rationalisation of subsidy on P and K fertilisers is taken in view of the recent trends in the international prices of fertilizers and inputs.

- This is one of 25 interventions planned under the **Pradhan Mantri-Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan (PMJUGA), a broader package for implementing schemes in 63,000 Scheduled Tribe-majority villages.**
- The Swadesh Darshan scheme was originally launched in 2014-15, but the tribal homestay proposal is a new feature.
- The **PMJUGA aims to ensure basic schemes are implemented in tribal villages, involving 17 Ministries with a total outlay of ₹79,156 crore over five years, with the Central government contributing ₹56,333 crore and States contributing ₹22,823 crore.**
- Maharashtra and Jharkhand, with significant tribal populations, account for over 18% of the country's tribal population, and both are set for elections later this year.
- The package includes bringing sustainable agricultural practices to Forest Rights Act (FRA) titleholders to help them with the maintenance and conservation of forests.
- By June 2024, over 24 lakh FRA titles have been granted, covering more than 1.9 crore acres of forest land.
- However, out of 50.5 lakh claims filed under the FRA, 34.83% have been rejected, and 15.9% are still pending.
- The government aims to speed up pending claims and improve the recognition of forest rights.

## GPT-4 can help break the hold of conspiracy theories (19 September)

- Conspiracy theories are important in the context of the upcoming U.S. presidential elections, especially after the rumours about the 2020 election being "stolen" from Donald Trump.
- A new study published in the journal Science explored if AI chatbots could help convince people to stop believing in conspiracy theories.
- Researchers conducted a study with 2,190 individuals in the U.S. who shared a conspiracy theory they believed in.
- The researchers had AI chatbots (based on GPT-4 Turbo) talk to these individuals, trying to present arguments with evidence.
- The goal was to see if the conversations could change the participants' minds, as just showing facts alone might not work.
- The chatbots had three rounds of conversations with the participants.
- After these conversations, there was a 20% drop in how strongly the participants believed in the conspiracy theories.
- These changed beliefs lasted for at least two months after the conversations.
- The researchers found that debunking one conspiracy led to a general reduction in belief in other rumours as well.
- The study suggests that presenting strong, personalized evidence can change the minds of people who strongly believe in conspiracy theories.
- It shows that people who believe in conspiracy theories can be convinced with the right kind of evidence.
- The study also highlights the persuasive power of AI large language models (LLMs) like GPT-4 and their potential to do good.

## Shed the myopia, refocus on the relevance of English (19 September)

- Many Indian parents aspire for their children to speak English, seeing it as a key to better opportunities.
- Despite this, national education policies have often neglected English language instruction for over 70 years.
- Since India's independence, policies like the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have aimed to limit the spread of English, influenced by political ideologies.**
- However, **English is recognized by the Indian Constitution as a neutral tool of equality**, protecting its role in the country.
- The conflict between restrictive policies and constitutional protections has made it hard for economically disadvantaged people to learn English.
- This has increased educational and socioeconomic inequalities, especially for marginalized children in government schools.
- In contrast, children from wealthier families can access English education, widening the gap between those who can and cannot speak English.
- The **2011 Census showed that 90% of India's population does not speak any English, highlighting the failure of education policies to address this divide.**
- The NEP 2020 does not address this issue or provide measures to improve access to English.
- NEP 2020 continues to downplay the importance of English, calling it a foreign language, and lacks a clear plan to help disadvantaged groups learn English.
- The three-language formula in NEP 2020, while promoting linguistic diversity, may be aimed at reducing the role of English and promoting Hindi.
- This policy conflicts with the aspirations of millions who see English as a means for socioeconomic mobility and also contradicts constitutional protections.

- The **Indian Constitution ensures both English and Hindi as official languages, without declaring a national language, and protects regional languages.**
- English is important for education, trade, law, and global communication, maintaining neutrality among ethnic groups, while regional languages preserve cultural heritage.
- NEP 2020 may upset this balance by overlooking the constitutional protections for language diversity.
- The move to prioritize regional languages over English is misguided and will waste time and resources.
- It could reignite old debates about language in India instead of elevating English to complement regional languages.
- Understanding this conflict can help India avoid past mistakes and move toward a more inclusive language policy.
- Since the 1991 economic liberalization, the demand for English has increased, as it is essential for economic growth and international opportunities.
- Successive governments have ignored this shift, focusing on regional and nationalistic language policies instead.
- NEP 2020 continues to marginalize English and emphasizes regional languages, fueling regional identity politics.
- There is no conflict between promoting both regional languages and English, but the issue arises when Hindi is pushed as the national language.
- This anti-English stance is not new and began after independence with efforts to establish Hindi as the primary language.
- Some believed Hindi, unlike English, could not serve as a neutral bridge across India's diverse cultures.
- The bias toward Hindi can be traced to the freedom struggle, led mostly by Hindi-speaking leaders, who wanted a monolingual, Hindi-speaking India after independence.
- After the partition with Pakistan, the focus on Hindi increased as Urdu was no longer part of the language debate.
- However, the multilingual nature of India and constitutional provisions for equality and linguistic diversity required that English be retained as an official language along with Hindi.
- The National Policy on Education 1968 introduced a three-language formula to spread Hindi across non-Hindi-speaking regions, aiming to linguistically integrate the nation.
- The three-language formula, introduced in earlier policies, faced opposition, especially from Tamil Nadu, which saw it as pushing Hindi and reducing the role of English.
- The NEP 2020 claims flexibility in language choice but still subtly promotes Hindi, failing to address concerns about language imposition.
- The policy's implementation reveals flaws, as infrastructure and resources are skewed towards Hindi, limiting real language choices.
- While Hindi and Sanskrit are emphasized for cultural and political reasons, English, important for professional and legal contexts, is neglected.
- Other countries, like China, recognize the value of English and mandate its study to stay competitive in the global economy, whereas India's lack of focus on English could hinder global economic engagement.
- India needs a practical language policy that respects cultural diversity while meeting citizens' needs, with a two-language formula: one regional language and English.
- This approach would help Indians participate in global opportunities and ensure they are equipped for professional and educational success.
- English should not be seen as a competitor to Indian languages but as a crucial tool for national and international communication.
- A balanced language policy that promotes English and respects regional languages aligns with democratic principles and supports the aspirations of all citizens.
- For India to succeed as a liberal democracy, it must create a language policy that reflects the needs of its people, with English playing a vital role.

## In Wilmington, juxtaposing immediacy with legacy (19 September)

- The leaders of the **Quad (Australia, India, Japan, and the U.S.) will meet for their fourth summit in Wilmington, Delaware, U.S., on September 21.**
- This meeting continues the progress of the Quad partnership since their first in-person summit in 2021.
- The summit is important due to global challenges and leadership changes in some member countries.
- U.S. President Joe Biden will not seek re-election, and Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's party is facing possible defeat.
- India was supposed to host this year's summit but allowed the U.S. to host it instead, and India will host the next one.
- The summit will focus on reinforcing maritime domain awareness (MDA) in the Indo-Pacific, particularly the Indian Ocean.
- At the last **Quad meeting in July 2024, the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) was expanded to include the Indian Ocean.**
- The **Quad supports a rules-based order at sea, emphasizing the importance of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).**
- A Quad Maritime Legal Dialogue may be launched to strengthen international maritime law.

- India plays a key role in the Quad's efforts to maintain maritime security through the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) by sharing real-time information with partners.

### Tracking progress, looking to opportunities

- The Quad's agenda includes 16 working groups, covering important issues like climate change, emerging technologies, health, disaster relief, maritime security, and counterterrorism.
- **The Wilmington summit will review progress on several projects, such as:**
  - **Open-Radio Access Network (RAN) in Palau.**
  - **A space-based climate warning system in Mauritius.**
  - **Off-grid solar projects in Indo-Pacific islands.**
  - **Outcomes of the first Quad STEM cohort.**
- The Quad is becoming a key framework for maintaining peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific, responding to global conflicts and security threats.
- China's assertive actions and global supply chain shifts highlight the importance of regional security and economic resilience.
- The **Quad's strategy includes strengthening regional supply chains and promoting economic growth.**
- The Wilmington summit sets the stage for the upcoming Summit of the Future, focused on global governance, sustainable development, and peace.
- The Quad could serve as a model for addressing global challenges, focusing on cooperation and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

## Party on the move (19 September)

### AAP's Kejriwal continues to surprise, also outlining his political ambitions

- Arvind Kejriwal, leader of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), resigned as Delhi Chief Minister, appointing Minister Atishi as his replacement.
- Kejriwal resigned after being released on bail from the Supreme Court. He was in jail for corruption charges while still holding the position of Chief Minister.
- AAP and the BJP have overlapping voter bases in Delhi, with AAP winning two Assembly elections and the BJP winning the last three Lok Sabha elections in Delhi.
- The BJP aims to weaken AAP by questioning its anti-corruption claims and limiting the party's ability to deliver its welfare schemes.
- Kejriwal's bail restricts his powers, but a fully empowered Chief Minister, like Atishi, could boost welfare initiatives before the elections, which are expected in February.
- AAP wants to hold the Delhi election earlier, alongside Maharashtra's election in November, to prevent the BJP from focusing solely on Delhi.
- Atishi, Delhi's third woman Chief Minister, has a strong administrative reputation but stated that she is a placeholder for Kejriwal, who has larger national ambitions.

## A fair share (19 September)

### Finance Commission must address the concerns of high-performing States

- The Finance Ministers of five opposition-ruled states met in Thiruvananthapuram and demanded an increase in the **share of taxes allocated to states from 41% to 50%**.
- They also called for limiting the amount the central government can collect through cesses and surcharges, which are not included in the tax-sharing formula.
- Karnataka's Chief Minister Siddaramaiah plans to meet with other state leaders, both opposition and BJP-ruled, to discuss the growing reduction in states' ability to collect taxes under the GST system and penalties on economically better-performing states.
- The meeting is significant because important state projects, such as Bengaluru's Suburban Rail, Kerala's Vizhinjam Port, and the second phase of the Chennai Metro, received little or no funding in the 2024-25 Union Budget.
- The meeting also focused on how states are facing increasing natural disasters, such as floods in Tamil Nadu and Gujarat and a landslide in Kerala, and need more financial resources.
- The Fifteenth Finance Commission gave more weight (45%) to the difference in State Gross Domestic Product when deciding tax sharing, which reduced the funds for higher tax-contributing states like Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu.
- These states, which are economic powerhouses, need customized funds to address development, climate, and industrial needs, but the low share of taxes and restrictions from the GST framework limit their ability to do so.
- Neither the GST nor the Finance Commission have provisions for emergency spending to deal with extreme weather events.

- There is a call for changes in the tax devolution system to give states more financial independence and ensure true federal governance in India.

## Fast-track courts: Justice on the clock (19 September)

**Several States, including Odisha, Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Telangana, had no functional fast-track courts in 2023**

- **Fast-track courts in India were set up to handle the large backlog of cases and deliver timely justice.**
- **These courts focus on serious crimes like sexual offenses and crimes against women and children.**
- **However, their effectiveness is affected by issues like lack of resources, poor investigations, and insufficient staff in the judiciary.**
- The demand for these courts often rises after incidents like the tragic rape and murder of a doctor in Kolkata.
- From 2018 to 2020, there was a significant increase in the number of fast-track courts, growing from 699 to 907.
- This increase was a response to public outcry after high-profile cases like the Nirbhaya gang rape.
- Since 2020, the number of fast-track courts has dropped to 832 in 2023 **due to financial and administrative challenges faced by the States.**
- While the Union government provides some support, it is the States' responsibility to run these courts, and many struggle to allocate the necessary resources.
- States like Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu have maintained a higher number of courts, but others, like Odisha, Kerala, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and Telangana, have few or no functional fast-track courts.
- These differences are due to local resource limitations, varying priorities, and different administrative capabilities across the States.
- Chart 3 shows that States with fewer financial resources struggle to keep fast-track courts running smoothly.
- Even in States where fast-track courts are operational, they are often overwhelmed by the high number of cases, leading to delays.
- These courts handle a wide range of cases, which adds to the delays since their capacity is limited.
- Many States only use fast-track courts for sexual offenses, missing the opportunity to address other cases with long pending times.
- Expanding the scope of fast-track courts to include more types of cases could ease the burden on the regular courts and speed up justice.
- For fast-track courts to work effectively, States need to prioritize them and ensure they have enough resources.
- States should also improve investigations and offer advanced forensic services to support fast-track courts.
- Using technology like digital case management, e-filing, and video conferencing could reduce delays and help fast-track courts work better.
- With the right support, fast-track courts can ensure justice is delivered quickly, giving victims the closure they need without unnecessary delays.

## Can Sheikh Hasina be extradited? (19 September)

**Why is Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal asking for the extradition of Ms. Hasina? Does the treaty signed in 2013 by India and Bangladesh allow for an extradition request to be turned down?**

**What could be the potential implications of such a request?**

- Bangladesh's chief prosecutor plans to seek the extradition of Sheikh Hasina from India.
- Sheikh Hasina fled to India in August after being ousted due to a mass uprising.
- Multiple criminal cases have been filed against her, including charges of murder, torture, abduction, crimes against humanity, and genocide.
- Bangladesh and India have an extradition treaty that could allow for her return to face trial.
- The International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) in Bangladesh was established in 2010 by Hasina to investigate crimes from the 1971 independence war.
- Under Bangladeshi law, trials can proceed even if Hasina is not present, but there are concerns about fairness and due process.
- The 2013 extradition treaty between India and Bangladesh was created to address insurgency and terrorism and was amended in 2016 to simplify the extradition process.
- Notable extraditions under the treaty include political prisoners and convicts involved in high-profile cases.
- The treaty requires that the crime in question be punishable in both countries (dual criminality), and the charges against Hasina meet this requirement.
- The 2016 amendment made it easier to extradite individuals by removing the need for concrete evidence and allowing an arrest warrant to initiate the process.

**Can extradition be refused?**

- Article 6 of the treaty states that extradition can be refused if the crime is of a "political nature," but crimes like murder and terrorism are excluded from this.
- Many charges against Sheikh Hasina, like murder and enforced disappearance, are not considered political, so India may not use this reason to deny her extradition.
- Article 8 allows refusal if the accusation is not made "in good faith" or involves military offenses not considered criminal under general law.
- India could refuse extradition if it believes Hasina may face political persecution or an unfair trial in Bangladesh.
- There are reports that some of Hasina's ministers were arrested by bystanders, raising concerns about the fairness of the legal process in Bangladesh.
- The decision to extradite Hasina will likely depend on diplomatic talks and political factors, not just legal terms of the treaty.
- Refusing extradition is expected to have minor political effects and won't significantly damage India-Bangladesh relations.
- Bangladesh is India's largest trading partner in South Asia, with bilateral trade reaching \$15.9 billion in 2022-23.
- Before Hasina's ouster, India and Bangladesh were discussing a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) to boost economic ties.
- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken with the new interim government of Bangladesh and pledged continued support for development projects.

## On Adani's proposal to lease Kenya's Nairobi airport (19 September)

### Why are there protests against a proposed takeover of the Jomo Kenyatta International Airport?

- **Kenyans are protesting a proposed 30-year lease for Nairobi's Jomo Kenyatta International Airport (JKIA) to India's Adani Group.**
- Airport workers went on strike last week, leading to flight cancellations and stranded passengers. They ended the strike after the government agreed to let them have veto power over the final agreement.
- The airport expansion project has been planned since 2013, including a new terminal and runway to increase capacity to 20 million passengers a year.
- The contract was canceled in 2016 and the project was inactive until 2022. In June 2023, the government said it would invite bids to revive the project.
- **In July, a whistle-blower revealed that the government had secretly signed a deal with Adani Group for managing the airport, causing widespread outrage.**
- According to leaked documents, Adani Airport Holdings Ltd submitted a proposal in March 2024 to refurbish the airport under a build-operate-transfer model with an investment of \$1.85 billion.
- Adani would refurbish the airport, add a new runway, and possibly a terminal, using their own funds and revenues from the airport.
- They would control the airport for 30 years and receive 18% equity in it after this period.
- The deal includes a clause preventing the construction of any new airports within a 100 km radius of JKIA and proposes a significant increase in annual fees for airport users.

### What are the Kenyans objecting to?

- **In February 2024, a consultancy firm recommended an open tender process for expanding JKIA, which is preferred under Kenya's PPP Act.**
- Kenyans are questioning why the KAA and the government ignored this recommendation and the PPP law to proceed with the Adani Group's proposal.
- Senator Richard Onyonka raised concerns that the deal might give Adani a 10-year tax break and allow them to fire and rehire 5,000 KAA employees under potentially unfair terms.
- Onyonka and others suspect the deal might be corrupt and that bribes could be involved.
- The Law Society of Kenya and the Kenya Human Rights Commission have filed a lawsuit against the deal, leading to a court order that suspends further action on the Adani proposal.
- Adani Group argues that their proposal is better for Kenya because it allows for terms beyond just financial aspects, and competitive bidding might only focus on financial factors without considering broader benefits.