

## CURRENT AFFAIRS

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# 03



## Current Affairs - India

### Supreme Court Upholds the EWS Quota

A Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on November 7, 2022 in a 3:2 majority decision, upheld the validity of the 103rd Constitutional Amendment which provides 10% reservation in government jobs and educational institutions to the 'economically weaker sections of the society'.



**People Celebrate Supreme Court's Verdict on EWS Quota**

While Justices Dinesh Maheshwari, Bela M Trivedi and J B Pardiwala agreed that the amendment does not violate the basic structure of the Constitution, Chief Justice of India U.U. Lalit and Justice S Ravindra Bhat dissented. The three judges concluded that exclusion of SCs, STs, SEBCs and OBCs from the scope of the EWS reservation did not violate the equality code. Justice Trivedi held that "unequals cannot be treated equally" as SCs, STs, SEBCs and OBCs already enjoy reservation and cannot be treated equally with the economically weaker sections. In their separate but concurring opinions, Justices Trivedi and Pardiwala, however, said reservations should be put on a timeline.

EWS quota makes persons with less than ₹8 lakh gross annual family income eligible. The quota excludes backward

classes. Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes who form 'homogenous groups' included in the prevalent 50% reservation granted separately. Petitioners had argued in court that the exclusion of backward classes left only the middle class among the forward castes to reap the benefits of the EWS quota.

The three judges noted that EWS quota did not breach the ceiling limit of 50% placed by the Indira Sawhney judgment on reservations as the state can make "special provisions from time to time in the March towards an "all-inclusive egalitarian society". The EWS quota, the three judges said, amounted to an "affirmative action" on the part of the state.

They held that making EWS quota applicable to private unaided institutions did not violate the Basic Structure of the Constitution.

Chief Justice U.U. Lalit, on his last working day, concurred with the minority view of Justice S. Ravindra Bhat, who held that reservation on the basis of economic criterion was "per se permissible" but the Constitutional Amendment should be struck down as it excluded the equally poor and deprived SCs, STs, SEBCs and OBCs from its ambit.

J. Bhat, who authored the minority view for himself and the Chief Justice, said it was not right on the part of the government to say that opening up EWS quota to backward classes would give them a "double benefit".

### D.Y. Chandrachud is the New Chief Justice of India

Dhananjaya Chandrachud assumed office as India's 50th chief justice on No-



## CURRENT AFFAIRS



**D.Y. Chandrachud takes Oath as Chief Justice of India**

November 9, 2022. Justice Chandrachud as CJI will have a term of two years and will head India's judiciary until November 10, 2024, a day before he completes 65 years. His father, Y.V. Chandrachud, holds the record of being the longest serving CJI, who headed the judiciary from February 22, 1978 to July 11, 1985.

Justice Chandrachud has long been an outspoken advocate of liberal values and minority rights. In a lecture in 2020 he condemned governments that disdain criticism. "The blanket labelling of dissent as antinational or anti-democratic" was harmful to democracy and the constitution, he argued, and use of "the state machinery" to curb such dissent violated the rule of law.

Justice Chandrachud has been part of several Constitution benches and landmark verdicts of the top court, including judgments on the Ayodhya land dispute, and the Right to Privacy. He wrote lead judgment for a nine-judge Constitution Bench in the Justice K.S. Puttaswamy Vs. Union of India case, in which it was unanimously held that Right to Privacy constituted a fundamental right. He was also on the bench that heard the Sabarimala Temple Entry case, where he held that 'the exclusion of women between the ages of 10-50 years from Sabarimala Temple violated constitutional morality.' In the Romila Thapar v Union of India case regarding the arrest of five human rights activists in the Bhima Koregaon

case, Chandrachud dissented and stated 'that the issue was whether the arrests violated the accused of their fundamental rights to free expression and personal liberty guaranteed by Articles 19 and 21 of the Constitution.' He was also on the five-judge bench that heard the Ayodhya title dispute case.

Recently, a Bench headed by him expanded the scope of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act to include unmarried women for abortion between 20-24 weeks of pregnancy. His dissenting or minority views on the Bench of the court are as incisive as his concurring opinions.

CJI Chandrachud was designated as a senior advocate by the Bombay High Court in June 1998 and became Additional Solicitor General in the same year till his appointment as a judge in the Bombay High Court on March 29, 2000.

He went on to become the Chief Justice of the Allahabad High Court from October 31, 2013 until he was elevated to the top court in May 2016.

### India's First Private Rocket Launched

India's first private rocket was launched on November 18, 2022 by Skyroot Aerospace, with support from the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), from the Sriharikota launch pad. The historic mission, titled Prarambh (the beginning), saw the rocket Vikram-S (VKS) perform a suborbital flight with three



**India's First Private Rocket Vikram-S**



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customer payloads, and tested and validated the rocket's technology.

The rocket flew to an altitude of 81.5 km, before splashing down in the Bay of Bengal. The success of the flight, made Hyderabad-based Skyroot Aerospace the very first private company in India to launch a rocket. The launch was authorised and facilitated by IN-SPaCe, ISRO's new regulatory authority tasked with facilitating ISRO resource support for private startups in the country.

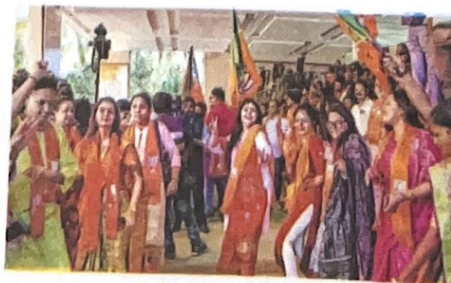
The single-stage sub-orbital rocket used the company's Kalam 80 propulsion system, weighing 545 kg at launch. It carried three payloads weighing a total of 80kg, from customers Space Kidz India, N-Space Tech India, and Bazoomq Armenia, according to the limited mission profile released by Skyroot on Twitter before the launch.

None of the payloads were ejected from the rocket's nose cone, but were instead exposed after the payload fairing separated and remained attached to the vehicle as it splashed into the Bay of Bengal.

The launch helps create a level playing field for cost-efficient satellite launch services by disrupting entry barriers.

### BJP Storms to Power in Gujarat

The BJP retained power in Gujarat for a record seventh straight term by winning 156 of the 182 seats with a vote share of 52.5%. The Congress suffered its worst-ever defeat in Gujarat but won



People Celebrate BJP Victory in Gujarat

in Himachal Pradesh. The BJP juggernaut in Gujarat saw the opposition Congress running for cover as it couldn't come anywhere near its performance in the last Assembly elections. The Congress finished a distant second with 17 seats, while the Aam Aadmi party finished a dismal third with just 5 seats. The BJP surpassed its previous best showing of 127 seats in 2002 when Modi was the Chief Minister.

Victory in Gujarat makes it the only party other than the Communist Party of India (Marxist) to have won seven straight Assembly elections. The CPI(M), which ruled West Bengal for 34 years from 1977 to 2011, had also won seven straight elections.

The Congress had to be content with 17 of the 182 Assembly seats, as compared to 77 in 2017. With another five-year term now, the BJP will rule Gujarat for 32 years, almost matching the Left Front's 34-year rule in West Bengal that ended in 2011. The BJP increased its vote share, from 49% in 2017 to 53% now. AAP finished a distant third in Gujarat, but its furious foray into the State gained it a 13% vote share, and also national party status. AAP's entry triangulated the Gujarat contest, which worked to the BJP's advantage. The BJP made inroads into tribal regions and rural constituencies which constituted patches of the Congress's strength, after AAP's generous promise of welfare schemes succeeded in seeding a new kind of class politics in the State.

Bhupesh Patil was sworn in as the chief minister of Gujarat on December 12, 2022.

### Congress Wins in Himachal Pradesh

The Congress ousted the BJP in Himachal Pradesh with 40 seats in the 68-member Assembly. The BJP, which garnered a vote





**Sukhvinder Sukhu Being Sworn in as CM**

share of 43 per cent as opposed to the Congress's 43.9 per cent, managed to get only 25 seats largely owing to over 21 rebels from its ranks cutting into the party's votes in large districts including Kangra, Mandi and Kullu.

The BJP was plagued by different factions, represented by the party chief JP Nadda and Chief Minister Jairam Thakur on one hand and Union Minister Anurag Singh Thakur on the other. It impacted ticket distribution which was followed by at least 21 candidates rebelling across the State.

The victory in Himachal Pradesh comes as a big relief for the Congress which has been losing one state after another during the last few years.

Senior Congress leader Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu was sworn in as the 15th chief minister of Himachal Pradesh on December 11, 2022. The son of a bus driver and a four-time MLA who sold milk for a living in his early years, Sukhu is a very down-to-earth politician.

### **Supreme Court Finds no Flaw in 2016 Demonetisation Process**

A five-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court on January 2, 2023 upheld the Modi government's decision to demonetise ₹500 and ₹1,000 currency notes through a gazette notification issued on November 8, 2016, saying the decision was about executive policy and could not be reversed. The court rejected the 58 petitions challenging demonetisa-

tion and said the decision-making process of the government was not flawed.

The judgment, authored by Justice B R Gavai, was agreed to by judges S Abdul Nazeer, A S Bopanna, and V Ramasubramanian. Justice B V Nagarathna faulted demonetisation in her dissenting judgment but did not quash it.

The petitioners, led by senior advocate P. Chidambaram, had argued that the proposal for demonetisation was initiated by the government on November 7, 2016, the Central Board had met the next day at 5 p.m and Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced the decision on national television at 8 p.m., just three hours later. He had contended that the decision-making process was "rushed" and "fatally flawed".



Justice Gavai however said the RBI and the Centre had been in consultation with each other for six months prior to the November 8 notification issued under Section 26(2) of the RBI Act. The judge rubbished the petitioners' argument that a hasty decision was taken to demonetise, noting that "such measures undisputedly are required to be taken with utmost confidentiality and speed. If the news of such a measure is leaked out, it is difficult to imagine how disastrous the consequences would be".

The majority said arguments that demonetisation violated citizens' right to property by taking away their money



were "without substance". There were reasonable restrictions to the right. Besides, unlike the demonetisation of 1978 when only a total of five days were given to the public to exchange their old notes for new, the 2016 one gave citizens 52 days. On whether demonetisation met its desired objectives was best left to the government.

### Union Budget for 2023-24 Presented in Parliament

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget 2023-



**Nirmala Sitharaman with the Budget Document**

24 in the Lok Sabha on February 1, 2023.

#### Here are the highlights of the Budget

- Per capita income has more than doubled to ₹1.97 lakh in around nine years.
- Indian economy has increased in size from being 10th to 5th largest in the world in the past nine years.
- Seven priorities of the Budget, 'Saptarishi', are inclusive development, reaching the last mile, infrastructure and investment, unleashing the potential, green growth, youth power and financial sector.
- Outlay for PM Awas Yojana is being enhanced by 66 per cent to over ₹79,000 crore.
- Capital outlay of ₹2.40 lakh crore has been provided for the Railways, which is the highest ever and about nine times the outlay made in 2013-14.
- 30 Skill India International Centres to be set up across different states to skill youth for international opportunities.
- Revamped credit guarantee scheme for MSMEs to take effect from 1st April 2023 through infusion of ₹9,000 crore in the corpus. This scheme would enable additional collateral-free guaranteed credit of ₹2 lakh crore and also reduce the cost of the credit by about 1 per cent.
- The maximum deposit limit for Senior Citizen Savings Scheme to be enhanced from ₹15 lakh to ₹30 lakh.
- Fiscal Deficit targeted to be below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26.
- ₹10 lakh crore capital investment, a steep increase of 33 per cent for third year in a row, to enhance growth potential and job creation, crowd-in private investments, and provide a cushion against global headwinds.
- ₹15,000 crore for implementation of Pradhan Mantri PVTG Development Mission over the next three years under the Development Action Plan for Scheduled Tribes.
- Investment of ₹75,000 crore, including ₹15,000 crore from private sources, for 100 critical transport infrastructure projects, for last and first mile connectivity for ports, coal, steel, fertilizer, and food grains sectors.
- New Infrastructure Finance Secretariat established to enhance opportunities for private investment in infrastructure.
- National Data Governance Policy to be brought out to unleash innovation and research by start-ups and academia.
- PAN will be used as the common identifier for all digital systems of specified government agencies to bring in Ease of Doing Business.
- Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes', MISHTI, to be taken up for mangrove plantation along the coastline and on salt pan lands.



**Budget at a Glance**

(₹ crore)

	2021-22 Actuals	2022-23 Budget Estimates	2022-23 Revised Estimates	2023-24 Budget Estimates
<b>1. Revenue Receipts</b>	<b>21,69,905</b>	<b>22,04,422</b>	<b>23,48,413</b>	<b>26,32,281</b>
2. Tax Revenue (Net to Centre) <sup>1</sup>	18,04,793	19,34,771	20,86,662	23,30,631
3. Non Tax Revenue	3,65,112	2,69,651	2,61,751	3,01,650
<b>4. Capital Receipts</b>	<b>16,23,896</b>	<b>17,40,487</b>	<b>18,38,819</b>	<b>18,70,816</b>
5. Recovery of Loans	24,737	14,291	23,500	23,000
6. Other Receipts	14,638	65,000	60,000	61,000
7. Borrowings and Other Liabilities <sup>2</sup>	15,84,521	16,61,196	17,55,319	17,86,816
<b>8. Total Receipts (1+4)</b>	<b>37,93,801</b>	<b>39,44,909</b>	<b>41,87,232</b>	<b>45,03,097</b>
<b>9. Total Expenditure (10+13)</b>	<b>37,93,801</b>	<b>39,44,909</b>	<b>41,87,232</b>	<b>45,03,097</b>
10. On Revenue Account, of which	32,00,926	31,94,663	34,58,959	35,02,136
11. Interest Payments	8,05,499	9,40,651	9,40,651	10,79,971
12. Grants in Aid for creation of capital assets	2,42,646	3,17,643	3,25,588	3,69,988
13. On Capital Account	5,92,874	7,50,246	7,24,274	10,00,961
<b>14. Effective Capital Expenditure (12+13)</b>	<b>8,35,520</b>	<b>10,67,889</b>	<b>10,53,862</b>	<b>13,70,949</b>
<b>15. Revenue Deficit (10-1)</b>	<b>10,31,021</b> (4.4)	<b>9,90,241</b> (3.8)	<b>11,10,546</b> (4.1)	<b>8,69,855</b> (2.9)
<b>16. Effective Revenue Deficit (15-12)</b>	<b>7,88,375</b> (3.3)	<b>6,72,598</b> (2.6)	<b>7,84,958</b> (2.9)	<b>4,99,867</b> (1.7)
<b>17. Fiscal Deficit [9-(1+5+6)]</b>	<b>15,84,521</b> (6.7)	<b>16,61,196</b> (6.4)	<b>17,55,319</b> (6.4)	<b>17,86,816</b> (5.9)
<b>18. Primary Deficit (17-11)</b>	<b>7,79,022</b> (3.3)	<b>7,20,545</b> (2.8)	<b>8,14,668</b> (3.0)	<b>7,06,845</b> (2.3)

1. RE 2022-23 is reduced by ₹32,607 crore on account of net amount payable by Centre for prior years. Growth in BE 2023-24 over RE 2022-23 is 10% excluding prior year adjustments. 2. includes drawdown of Cash Balance. Notes: (i) Nominal GDP for BE 2023-24 has been projected at ₹3,01,75,065 crore assuming 10.5% growth over the estimated Nominal GDP of ₹2,73,07,751 crore as per the First Advance Estimates of FY 2022-23. (ii) Individual items in this document may not sum up to the totals due to rounding off. (iii) Figures in parenthesis are as a percentage of GDP.

through convergence between MGN-REGS, CAMPA Fund and other sources.

- To commemorate Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, a one-time new small savings scheme, Mahila Samman Savings Certificate, to be launched. It will offer deposit facility of up to ₹2 lakh in the name of women or girls for tenure of 2 years (up to

March 2025) at fixed interest rate of 7.5 per cent with partial withdrawal option.

- Fiscal Deficit of 3.5 per cent of GSDP allowed for states of which 0.5 per cent is tied to power sector reforms.

- The fiscal deficit is 6.4 per cent of GDP for the current fiscal, adhering to the Budget Estimate.



• The gross market borrowings for 2023-24 are estimated at ₹15.4 lakh crore.

• To further improve tax payer services, proposal to roll out a next-generation Common IT Return Form for tax payer convenience, along with plans to strengthen the grievance redressal mechanism.

• Rebate limit of Personal Income Tax to be increased to ₹7 lakh from the current ₹5 lakh in the new tax regime. Thus, persons in the new tax regime with income up to ₹7 lakh not to pay any tax.

• Tax structure in new personal income tax regime, introduced in 2020 with six income slabs, to change by reducing the number of slabs to five and increasing the tax exemption limit to ₹3 lakh.

• Highest surcharge rate reduced from 37 per cent to 25 per cent in the new tax regime. This to further result in reduction of the maximum personal income tax rate to 39 per cent.

• The limit for tax exemption on leave encashment on retirement of non-government salaried employees to increase to ₹25 lakh.

• Number of basic customs duty rates on goods, other than textiles and agriculture, reduced to 13 from 21.

### Joshimath Sinking Crisis

On January 7, 2023 Joshimath city in Uttarakhand was declared a land subsidence zone. In Joshimath's Singhdhar, several houses had collapsed in the midnight hours of 2 and 3 January, 2023. Cracks at several houses and a nearby temple started widening, to the point where they eventually collapsed.

The preliminary study by ISRO's National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) said the land subsidence was slow between April and November 2022, during which Joshimath had sunk by 8.9 cm.

But between December 27, 2022 and



Repair Work Underway Following Collapse of a Wall in Joshimath

January 8, 2023, the intensity of land subsidence increased and the town sank by 5.4 cm in these 12 days. It said a subsidence zone resembling a generic landslide shape was identified – tapered top and fanning out at the base. The report noted that the crown of the subsidence was located near Joshimath-Auli road at a height of 2,180 metres.

Multiple factors including unplanned construction, over-population, obstruction of natural flow of water and hydel power activities are being cited as reasons for subsidence (sinking of the ground because of underground material movement) in Joshimath. Perennial streams around the town and highly weathered rocks with low cohesive characteristics make the area vulnerable to landslides and subsidence. But the unplanned construction activity as also NTPC's Tapovan-Vishnugad hydro project, Char Dham road project and Helang bypass by the BRO have been going on despite warnings by experts. All these projects have only now been halted when subsidence in Joshimath has reached a dangerous scale.

The city of Joshimath hosts the pilgrims of Badrinath and Hemkunt, two religious places. There is a cantonment in this city for the accommodation of soldiers. Apart from this, the city also provides a base camp for mountain climbers and accom-

Centre for prior years. Growth  
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assuming 10.5% growth rates  
of FY 2022-23. (ii) Individu-  
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modation for tourists visiting the Valley of Flowers. Big hotels have been built in Joshimath for the accommodation and catering of so many tourists and pilgrims.

### Lithium Reserves Discovered in Jammu and Kashmir

On February 9, India's Ministry of Mines announced that the Geological Survey of India, which also assesses India's mineral



Area in J&K where Lithium Exploration is Being Done

resources, located 5.9 million tonnes of lithium resources – a first in the country – in the Salal-Haimana area of Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district. In February 2021, the Indian government had announced spotting the "presence of Lithium resources of 1,600 tons (inferred category) in the pegmatites of Marlagalla–Allapatna area, Mandya district, Karnataka." The Kashmir reserve, however, is larger and has created greater enthusiasm, curiosity, and apprehension.

The impact of the discovery of lithium is huge. Lithium is one of the key components of batteries for electric vehicles (EVs), solar panels, and wind turbines. It is used, among other things, to build the batteries that electric vehicles cannot do without. Hence the name 'white gold'. Energy experts and those in the EV sector believe that the lithium reserves will provide a major boost to India's energy transition.

Lithium reserves are very rare. There are 98 million tonnes of lithium global-

ly. As per one estimate, Chile – at 9.2 million tonnes – led the world in lithium reserves, followed by Australia (6.2 million tonnes). India's recent discovery of 5.9 million tonnes of lithium puts it into the top three countries in the world with the highest lithium reserves with 5.5% of these resources. In 2020-21, India imported ₹173 crore worth of lithium and ₹8,811 crore worth of lithium ions. India's lithium needs are also likely to rise, given the push for electric vehicles.

It generally requires 10 years or more from the time of establishing inferred resources to start actual mineral extraction. This means the new development does not offer India any relief in the short run, even though it may come in handy in around 10-15 years when EV demands are also expected to record a significant increase. Till then, India has to depend on importing the ore.

The impact of lithium mining on the environment and ecology is huge. These include water, soil and air pollution. The process of extracting lithium from its ore is also extremely water-intensive; as per one estimate, it takes approximately 2.2 million litres of water to produce one ton of lithium. And the demand for lithium is only increasing. Globally, the demand for lithium is expected to increase by 488% by 2050, as compared to 2018.

### Supreme Court's Election Commission Judgment

A five-judge bench of the Supreme Court on March 2, 2023 unanimously ruled that a high-power committee consisting of the Prime Minister, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India must pick the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs).

In 2015, a public interest litigation was filed by Anoop Baranwal challenging the constitutional validity of the practice

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of the Centre appointing members of the Election Commission. In October 2018, a two-judge bench of the SC referred the case to a larger bench since it would require a close examination of Article 324 of the Constitution, which deals with the mandate of the Chief Election Commissioner. The SC had not debated this issue earlier. In September 2022, a five-judge Constitution bench headed by Justice KM Joseph began hearing the case and almost a month later, the verdict was reserved. The Bench also comprised Justices Ajay Rastogi, Aniruddha Bose, Hrishikesh Roy and C T Ravikumar.

Article 324 of the Constitution provides for the Election Commission. Article 324(1) vests the "superintendence, direction and control of elections" in the Election Commission. Article 324(2) states that "... the appointment of the



Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners shall, subject to the provisions of any law made in that behalf by Parliament, be made by the President." Article 324(5) – similarly – authorises the President (by rule) to determine the conditions of service and tenure of office of the Election Commissioners, again "subject to a law" made by Parliament. With respect to Article 324(5), Parliament did make a law in 1991 (the Election Commission Act of 1991). With respect to Article 324(2) – appointment – a law has never been made.

As per the current process, the Law

### Dakota Aircraft Used by Biju Patnaik Installed as Memorabilia



Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on March 5 unveiled the iconic Dakota (DC-3) Aircraft (VT-AUI) which was part of erstwhile Kalinga Airlines founded by former Chief Minister Biju Patnaik.



Biju Patnaik

According to the State government, which had installed the aircraft in Biju Patnaik International Airport as a relic after its refurbishment and reassembling, the airlines had operated nearly a dozen of Dakotas and the former CM was its chief pilot.

Biju Patnaik had flown this aircraft to rescue former Indonesian vice-president Mohammad Hatta and former Prime Minister Sutan Sjahrir in one of his most famous feats as a pilot.

Minister suggests a pool of suitable candidates to the Prime Minister for consideration. The President makes the appointment on the advice of the PM.

### BJP Entrenches Itself in the North-East

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) continued its winning streak in state assembly elections by returning to power in the three Northeastern states of Tripura, Nagaland and Meghalaya, forming governments either by securing an absolute



similar to the coalition during its previous term.

The Congress continued with its downhill journey in the Northeast. In Meghalaya, the Congress party could win only five seats, which was a drastic reduction from its previous tally of 21 in the state. In Tripura, despite an alliance with the Left, Congress could not topple the BJP, indicating that the latter had entrenched itself deeply in the state.

### The Centre Approves National Medical Devices Policy 2023

A Union Cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on April 26 approved the National Medical Devices Policy, 2023. The policy aims at reducing India's import dependence on medical devices. As per estimates, some 80–85 per cent of the medical devices currently sold in India, mostly high end ones, are imported. The Indian players



and manufacturers have centred their offerings in the low-cost and low-tech products, like consumables and disposables. The Centre aims to reduce India's import dependence to nearly 30 per cent in the next couple of years. Apart from import reduction, the policy will also aim at making now costly medical devices affordable; and also easily accessible.

The policy also aims at increasing India's per capita spend on medical devices. India has one of the lowest per capita spend on medical devices at \$3, compared to the global average of per capita consumption of \$47, and significantly

lower than the per capita consumption of developed nations like the US at \$415 and Germany at \$313.

### Key Highlights of the National Medical Devices Policy

1. Under the policy, the government will create a 'Single Window Clearance System' for Licensing of Medical Devices for the ease of doing business. The government has already initiated implementation of PLI Scheme for medical devices and support for setting up of 4 Medical devices Parks in the States of Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. Under the PLI scheme for Medical Devices, till now, a total of 26 projects have been approved, with a committed investment of ₹1206 crore and out of this, so far, an investment of ₹714 crore has been achieved.

2. The strategy intends to enhance the role of agencies such as Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) in product manufacturing, processing, and even looking at its performance.

3. The policy aims to upskill the professionals to have an adequate supply of skilled workforce in the medical device sector, including scientists, regulators, health experts, managers, technicians, etc.

4. The policy will work towards developing partnerships with foreign academic and industry organisations to develop medical technologies in order to be in equal pace with the world market.

5. To strengthen the infrastructure, medical device parks and clusters equipped with world-class common infrastructure facilities, Research & Development (R&D) centres, Centres of Excellence in academic and research institutions, and innovation hubs are planned.



## Congress Storms to Power in Karnataka

The Congress party on May 13 clinched the State of Karnataka in a resounding victory over the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government. In the elections held on May 10, the Congress party won 135 seats with a vote share of 42.88 per cent, 55 more than in 2018. The closest the Congress came to this score was in 1999 when it won 132 seats and had a vote share of 40.84 per cent. In 1989, it won 178 seats with a vote share of 43.76 per cent. The BJP won 66 seats with a 36 per cent vote share, and HD Kumaraswamy's Janata Dal-Secular won 19 seats with a vote share of 13.29 per cent.

With a general election due in May 2024, the result was a significant blow to the Bharatiya Janata Party. Karnataka, which has 68m people, was the only southern state under BJP control. Beyond its status as India's fifth-biggest state economy, the BJP had looked on Karnataka as a potential launch-pad for a southern expansion that would justify the party's claim to be a genuinely national force.

There was a historic turnout of over 73.19%, surpassing the 2018 figures (72.36%) after the final reconciliation of figures.

## Modi Inaugurates New Parliament Building

India's New Parliament building was inaugurated on May 28 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

As many as 20 opposition parties boycotted the inauguration of the new Sansad Bhavan. In a joint statement, opposition parties called the inauguration by Modi "not only a grave insult but a direct assault on our democracy". These parties maintain that they were open to the new Parliament House but are opposed to the inauguration by Modi.

The vast, triangular-shaped complex in the heart of Delhi will house the upper and lower parliamentary houses. It sits adjacent to the old circular parliament building that was constructed in 1927 during the colonial era, which will now be converted into a museum.

The parliament project had attracted controversy from the start, with the Modi government accused of rebuilding the corridors of power in its own image as part of a nationalistic political agenda. Launching the project in 2020, Modi had said the building would "become a witness to the creation of a self-reliant India".

The overall development, known as the Central Vista project, cost over \$2.4bn and involved building a new

Party Position Karnataka

Party	Seats		Vote Share	
	2023	2018	2023	2018
INC	135	80	42.9%	38.1%
BJP	66	104	36.0%	36.2%
JD(S)	19	37	13.3%	18.3%
Independents	2	1	5.2%	3.9%
Others	-	-	2.6%	3.5%





New Parliament Building

government secretariat and a new prime minister's residence and office. It was accused of a lack of transparency after it was awarded to architect Bimal Patel, who is from Modi's home state of Gujarat and has been granted some of the most high-profile government projects in recent years. But the government and the project's architects had argued that the old building, which is almost 100 years old, was no longer fit for purpose and could not be adapted.

The new complex is three times larger than the old one and has room to seat more than 1,200 MPs, over 500 more than the original parliament. Though India now has 800 representatives across the upper and lower house, the numbers are up for review in 2026. Given the increase in India's population to 1.4 billion people, the number of MPs could be raised.

According to the architect, materials and designs had been brought in from all over India to reflect the country's cultural diversity and different architectural styles, including marble from Rajasthan and teak from Maharashtra.

A sacred Sengol, a gold sceptre from the southern state of Tamil Nadu that is said to have been received by India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, on independence in 1947, was also placed by Modi in the new parliament chamber.

## The New Parliament

**105 Years in Time:** •1918 Blueprint for the previous Parliament finalised •1927 Parliament houses's construction completed •2012, 2015, 2019 Permission for new Parliament building sought •Sept 2020 Tata Projects Ltd awarded ₹862 crore contract for new Parliament house construction; Foundation stone laid for the New Parliament building. •2022 Main structure of the new Parliament completed •2023 Parliament building inaugurated.

### Why a new Parliament Building?

•The old Parliament building of India, was constructed in 1927 •The circular design was not intended to accommodate a bicameral legislature. •cramped and inconvenient seating arrangements during joint sessions •posed safety risks due to limited space for movement. •outgrew its Heritage Grade-I Status. •the structure suffered due to ad hoc constructions to accommodate essential services like water supply, air conditioning, CCTV cameras and security equipments.

### The New Parliament Building

Triangular-shaped house located next to the old Parliament House, New Delhi.

### Comparison: Old and New

•Area: 24,281 / 64,500 sq m •LS Seating: 552 / 888 •RS: 245 / 384 •Central Hall: 436 / 1272

**The Project** The Central Vista Project is a massive redevelopment project in New Delhi that includes the construction of the new Parliament House and the reconstruction of several other government buildings and public spaces.

**The Cost:** The total cost of the Central Vista Project is estimated to be ₹20,000 crore (US\$2.5 billion).

### Vote Share

2019	2014
38.1%	38.1%
36.2%	36.2%
18.3%	18.3%
3.9%	3.9%
3.5%	3.5%



## CURRENT AFFAIRS

**The Master Architect:** Design by Bimal Patel. The Shilp Deergha gallery was conceptualised around eight themes, showcases approx. 255 crafts sourced from around 400 artisans across India.

**The Key Features:** •The new complex is a "platinum-rated green building." •equipped with the latest State-of-the-Art technology—facilitating seamless communication, information exchange, and real-time legislative processes. •Sustainable Design: energy-efficient systems and eco-friendly materials, minimising its ecological footprint •Accessibility and Inclusivity esp. for differently-abled persons •The iconic central dome, an awe-inspiring architectural element, represents unity and the aspirations of a united India. •Symbolic Elements - adorn the building's interiors, reflecting India's diverse cultural heritage and the spirit of democracy. •Boasts of six gates: *Gaja Dwar* (north side, symbolising prosperity and happiness), *Ashwa Dwar* (represents power, strength, and courage), *Garuda Dwar* (east—symbolising power and dharma and emphasises the Parliament's embodiment of the people's power and duty), *Makar Dwar* (associated with protectors), *Shardula Dwar* (symbolising the power of the country's people), and *Hamsa Dwar* (embodies self-realisation and wisdom). •"Sengol," the 75-year-old sceptre was placed in the new Parliament building by PM Modi, originally gifted to India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, on August 14, 1947, prior to hoisting the national flag and his 'Tryst with Destiny' address by 20 Adheenam (priests) reciting 11 Theveram verses. Since then it was housed in Allahabad Museum. It is said to be an age-old practice of Chola dynasty. It was made by Vummidi B.Chetty.

## Train Crash in Odisha Kills Over 300

At least 280 people were killed and about 900 injured after two passenger trains collided in the eastern state of Odisha — the country's deadliest rail accident in almost 20 years. The Coromandel Express, which runs from Kolkata in West Bengal to Chennai in Tamil Nadu, was going around 80mph (130km/h) when it collided with a stationary freight train around 7pm on June 2, causing it to derail. Carriages from the freight train then hit two coaches from the Howrah Superfast Express train, which was travelling in the opposite direction.

The accident renewed longstanding questions about safety problems in a system that transports more than eight billion people a year — roughly equivalent to the world's population. India has invested heavily in the rail system in recent years, but it has not yet been enough to overcome decades of neglect.



Derailed Bogeys of the Train

India has one of the world's most extensive railway systems, with more than 40,000 miles of track — enough to wrap around the earth about one and a half times.

Passenger safety has come under scrutiny in India in recent years. In 2012, a committee appointed to review the safety of the rail network cited "a grim picture of inadequate performance largely due to poor infrastructure and resources." It recommended a host of urgent

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measures, including upgrading track, repairing bridges, eliminating road-level crossings and replacing old coaches with safer ones that better protect passengers in case of an accident.

The government has since invested heavily to renovate and modernise old trains and tracks. But in a system weakened by years of neglect, problems persist.

### Ethnic Violence in Manipur

More than 175 people have been killed and thousands injured in the ethnic violence between Meiteis and Kukis that has rocked Manipur since early May 2023. Meiteis account for about 53 per cent of Manipur's population and live mostly in the Imphal Valley, while tribals, which include Nagas and Kukis, constitute 40 per cent and reside mostly in the hill districts.

The violence had its genesis in a court ruling in March that granted the majority Meitei "scheduled tribal status", entitling them to the same economic benefits and quotas in government jobs and education as the minority Kuki. It also allowed Meiteis to buy land in the hills, where the Kukis predominately live, further fuelling fears that their lands, jobs and opportunities would be taken away. This prompted protests, mostly by Kuki student groups, which were met with violence and by early May, it had escalated into all-out violence. Matters took a turn for the worse on May 3, when a 'Tribal Solidarity March' organised in the hill districts to protest against the Meitei community's demand for Scheduled Tribe (ST) status, turned violent resulting in several deaths.

The state was swiftly divided along ethnic lines, with the Meiteis in the valley and the Kukis in the hills, defending their territory against violent mobs, with a buffer zone created in the middle.

To enter the territory of the opposing



A Horrific Scene from the Manipur Violence

tribe was soon considered to be a death sentence. Much of the violence has been fought with thousands of weapons stolen from police and army barracks.

Intermittent clashes have continued to erupt and those fighting on both sides have warned that Manipur remains on the brink of civil war.

The clashes have renewed and strengthened a longstanding demand by the Kukis for their own separate state. Kuki groups say the violence has proved they can no longer live safely under the oppressions of a Meitei-dominated state and have pledged they will not stop fighting until their own state is granted. The Meitei community and the state government fiercely oppose the creation of a separate Kuki state.

Police have been accused of refusing to assist those in the Kuki community who have been attacked and not investigating reports of rape, torture and violence against the Kukis. It wasn't until the video of Kuki women being stripped naked, assaulted and allegedly gang-raped went viral that the police arrested four Meitei men – more than 70 days after the attack took place.

The supreme court also chastised the government for not getting the situation in Manipur under control. Chief justice Dhananjaya Chandrachud said: "It's time that the government really steps in and



takes action because this is simply unacceptable."

## India to Revamp British-era Criminal Laws

In a historic move that promises to redefine India's legal landscape, Union Home Minister Amit Shah introduced three groundbreaking bills in the Lok Sabha on August 11: the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, 2023, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, 2023, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023. These bills aim to replace the colonial-era Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), and Indian Evidence Act, marking a significant step towards legal modernisation and reform.

### Proposed Changes in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill 2023:

**Sedition:** IPC defines sedition as bringing or attempting to bring hatred or contempt, or exciting disaffection towards the government. It is punishable with imprisonment term between three years and life imprisonment, and/or a fine. The Bill removes this offence. It instead penalises the following: (i) exciting or attempting to excite secession, armed rebellion, or subversive activities, (ii) encouraging feelings of separatist activities, or (iii) endangering sovereignty or unity and integrity of India. These offences may involve exchange of words or signs, electronic communication, or use of financial means. These will be punishable with imprisonment of up to seven years or life imprisonment, and a fine.

**Terrorism:** The Bill defines terrorism as an act that intends to threaten the unity, integrity, and security of the country, to intimidate the general public or disturb public order. Terrorist acts include: (i) using firearms, bombs, or hazardous substances (biological or chemical) to cause death, danger to life, or spread a



Amit Shah Introduces the New Bills in Parliament

message of fear, (ii) destroying property or disrupting essential services, and (iii) activities included in the treaties listed in the Second Schedule of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 such as unlawful seizure of aircraft or taking of hostages. Punishment for attempting or committing terrorism includes: (i) death or life imprisonment, where the offence has resulted in death of any person, (ii) imprisonment term between five years and life in other cases. An offender will also be liable to a fine of at least five lakh rupees.

The Bill also penalises conspiring, organising, or assisting in preparation of any terrorist act with an imprisonment term between five years and life imprisonment, and a fine of at least five lakh rupees.

**Organised crime:** The Bill defines organised crime as: (i) a continuing unlawful activity such as kidnapping, extortion, contract killing, land grabbing, financial scams, and cybercrime, (ii) carried out by use of violence, intimidation, or other unlawful means, (iii) to obtain material or financial benefit, and (iv) carried out by individuals acting singly or jointly, as members of or on behalf of a crime syndicate. Attempting or committing organised crime will be punishable with: (i) death or life imprisonment, where the offence results in death of any person, and (ii) imprisonment term between five years and life, in other cases. The offend-



er will also be liable to pay a fine.

**Petty organised crime:** The Bill makes attempting or committing petty organised crime punishable with imprisonment between one and seven years, and a fine. Petty organised crimes are those which cause general feelings of insecurity among citizens, and are committed by organised criminal groups/gangs. These include organised pick pocketing, snatching, and theft.

**Murder by a group of persons on grounds of caste or race:** The Bill specifies separate penalty for murder committed by five or more people on specified grounds. These include race, caste, sex, place of birth, language, or personal belief. Each offender will be punishable with imprisonment between seven years and life, or death. It will also attract a fine.

**Death penalty for gang rape of minor:** IPC allows death penalty for gang rape of women below 12 years of age. The Bill allows death penalty for gang rape of women below 18 years of age.

**Sexual intercourse by deceitful means:** The Bill penalises the act of sexual intercourse with a woman (not amounting to rape) through deceitful means or a promise of marriage without intending to fulfil it. It will be punishable with simple or rigorous imprisonment up to 10 years, and a fine.

**Extending applicability of certain offences to boys:** Under the IPC, importing girls under the age of 21 years for illicit intercourse with another person is an offence. The Bill specifies that importing boys under the age of 18 years for illicit intercourse with another person will also be an offence.

### **Proposed Changes in the Bhartiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita Bill, 2023:**

- It promotes the use of technology for trials, appeals, and recording depositions,

allowing video-conferencing for proceedings.

- The bill makes video-recording of statement of survivors of sexual violence compulsory, which can help in preserving evidence and preventing coercion or manipulation.

- The bill mandates that police must inform about the status of a complaint in 90 days, which can enhance accountability and transparency.

- Section 41A of the CrPC will be renumbered as Section 35. This change includes an added safeguard, stipulating that no arrest can be made without prior approval from an officer at least at the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP), especially for offenses punishable by less than 3 years or for individuals above 60 years.

- The bill requires that police consult the victim before withdrawing a case punishable by seven years or more, which can ensure that justice is not compromised or denied.

- It allows absconding criminals to be tried in-absentia by court and sentenced too, which can deter fugitives from escaping justice.

- It empowers magistrates to take cognizance of offenses based on electronic records such as emails, SMSs, WhatsApp messages etc., which can facilitate evidence collection and verification.

- Mercy petitions in death sentence cases to be filed within 30 days to the Governor and within 60 days to the President.

- No appeal shall lie against the President's decision in any court.

### **Proposed Changes in Bharatiya Sakshya Bill, 2023:**

- The bill defines electronic evidence as any information generated or transmitted by any device or system that is capable of being stored or retrieved by any means.



- It lays down specific criteria for admissibility of electronic evidence such as authenticity, integrity, reliability etc., which can prevent misuse or tampering of digital data.

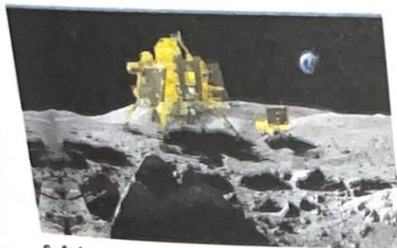
- It provides for special provisions for admissibility of DNA evidence such as consent, chain of custody etc., which can enhance accuracy and reliability of biological evidence.

- It recognises expert opinion as a form of evidence such as medical opinion, handwriting analysis etc., which can assist in establishing facts or circumstances relevant to a case.

- It introduces the presumption of innocence as a fundamental principle of the criminal justice system, which means that every person accused of an offense is presumed to be innocent until proven guilty beyond reasonable doubt.

### India Joins the Moon-landing Club

India successfully landed the Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft on the moon's south pole on August 23, notching a huge milestone for the nation. India is now the fourth country to stick a lunar landing, after the United States, the former Soviet Union and China.



Soft-landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the surface of the Moon

Chandrayaan-3 was India's second try at landing near the moon's south pole, a largely uncharted region of immense interest to scientists and exploration

advocates alike. The south polar region is thought to harbour large amounts of water ice, which, if accessible, could be mined for rocket fuel and life support for future crewed missions. The country's first attempt at a lunar touchdown, in September 2019, failed when the Chandrayaan-2 lander crashed into the moon due to a software glitch.

Close to four years and many design and software upgrades later, the homegrown Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft launched atop a LVM3 rocket on July 14 from a spaceport in Sriharikota. The spacecraft entered an elliptical orbit around the moon earlier in August, then performed multiple manoeuvres to shift into a nearly circular path, which took it about 93 miles (150 kilometers) above the lunar surface.

The Chandrayaan-3 mission, which costs a modest 6 billion rupees, is unfolding at a time when multiple nations — notably, the U.S. and China — are eyeing the moon for future crewed missions. NASA, for example, aims to land astronauts near the lunar south pole in late 2025 or 2026 on its Artemis 3 mission, and to build one or more bases in the region shortly thereafter.

### Women's Reservation Bill Becomes Law

Days after its historic passage in both houses of the Parliament, the Women's Reservation Bill received the nod of President Droupadi Murmu on September 29. With her assent, the legislation has been turned into a law.

The Government of India, in a gazette notification, stated that the Bill has become an Act following the approval granted by the President. "It shall come into force on such date as the central government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, appoint," it said.

Officially known as Nari Shakti Vandan



## CURRENT AFFAIRS

### Women Members in Lok Sabha

The share of women in the Lok Sabha has been gradually increasing since the beginning of this century, but they still don't account for even a fifth of the total members

Loksabha	No. of Women MPs	Share of Women MPs
1st (1952-1957)	24	4.4%
2nd (1957-1962)	24	4.4%
3rd (1962-1967)	37	6.8%
4 (1967-1970)	33	6%
5 (1971-1977)	28	5.1%
6 (1977-1979)	21	3.8%
7 (1980-1984)	32	5.8%
8 (1984-1989)	45	8.2%
9 (1989-1991)	28	5.1%
10th (1991-1996)	42	7.7%
11th (1996-1998)	41	7.5%
12th (1998-1999)	44	8.1%
13th (1999-2004)	52	9.6%
14th (2004-2009)	52	9.6%
15th (2009-2014)	64	11.8%
16th (2014-2019)	68	12.5%
17th (2019-2024)	82	14.9%

Adhiniyam, the law proposes to reserve one-third of the seats in Lok Sabha and all state assemblies for women. The legislation cleared the Lok Sabha hurdle on September 20, with 454 MPs voting in its favour and two voting against it, demanding a sub-quota for women belonging to the Other Backward Class (OBC) and minority communities.

The Bill was passed unanimously in the Rajya Sabha on September 21 with 214 MPs voting in its favour.

The law, however, will come into effect



Women Members of Parliament with PM Modi

only after the next census and the subsequent delimitation exercise. The redrawing of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies will determine the particular seats that are to be reserved for women. The quota for women in the Lok Sabha and Assemblies will continue for 15 years and Parliament can later extend the benefit period.

While there is quota within quota for

### Women Members in Rajya Sabha

219 women have become members of the upper house since its first sitting in 1952, accounting for 9 per cent of the total 2,423 members.

Rajyasabha	No. of women MPs	Share of Women MPs
1952	15	6.9%
1960	24	10.3%
1970	14	5.9%
1980	29	12%
1990	19	7.8%
2000	22	8.85
2004	28	11.2%
2008	23	9.5%
2014	31	12.4%
2023	31	13.2%*

\*Of current strength of 238 members

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## CURRENT AFFAIRS

Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) women, the Opposition had demanded that the benefit be extended to Other Backward Classes (OBC).

### Women in State Assemblies

19 states have less than 10 per cent women legislators

Tripura	15%
Chhattisgarh	14.4%
West Bengal	13.7%
Jharkhand	12.4%
Rajasthan	12%
Uttar Pradesh	11.7%
Uttarakhand	11.4%
Delhi	11.4%
Punjab	11.1%
Bihar	10.7%
Haryana	10%
Sikkim	9.4%
Madhya Pradesh	9.1%
Odisha	8.9%
Manipur	8.3%
Maharashtra	8.3%
Andhra Pradesh	8%
Kerala	7.9%
Goa	7.5%
Gujarat	7.1%
Tamil Nadu	5.1%
Meghalaya	5%
Telangana	5%
Arunachal Pradesh	5%
Assam	4.8%
Karnataka	3.6%
Puducherry	3.3%
Nagaland	3.3%
Himachal Pradesh	1.5%
Mizoram	0%

First introduced in 1996, the Bill has seen several twists and turns, including its passage in the Rajya Sabha in March 2010 but the Congress-led UPA did not bring the Bill in the Lok Sabha for the lack of consensus and inadequate numbers to push it through. Data show that women MPs account for nearly 15% of representation is below 10% in many State Assemblies.

### Himachal Floods

Flash floods during the 2023 monsoon season caused unprecedented damage to both lives and assets in Himachal Pradesh. The death toll crossed 350, and the estimated total loss amounted to over ₹10,000 crore. Although climate change is expected to have played a



A Building Collapses in Himachal Pradesh During the Floods

hand in causing the high precipitation leading to these flash floods, human-induced disasters resulting from planned development also played a significant role in causing such colossal losses. In the last five years (before 2022), 1,550 people lost their lives and nearly 12,444 houses were damaged.

The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) VI report has clearly stated that the Himalayas and coastal

regions of India will be the hardest hit by climate change. In the Himalayas, there is a noticeable pattern of increased precipitation occurring in shorter periods of time. The India Meteorological Department data shows that the normal rainfall during this period is expected to be between 720mm and 750 mm. However in certain instances, it has exceeded 888 mm in 2010 and 926.9 mm in 2018. In 2023, the precipitation has been attributed to the combined effect of the south-west monsoon with western disturbances.

### Floods in Sikkim

At least 55 people were killed including eight Indian Army personnel in a massive flood that resulted from a glacier-lake outburst in Sikkim in the early hours of October 4, 2023. It is the deadliest flood in the area after the 1968 Sikkim flood.

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Machinery is used to clean mud and sand along the Teesta river in Rongpo, Sikkim

when around 1000 people were killed. The voluminous outflow destroyed the Chungthang dam, which is critical to the Teesta 3 hydropower project, and rendered several hydropower projects along the river dysfunctional. The flood destroyed 11 bridges in the State, with eight bridges getting washed away in the Mangan district alone. Two bridges were destroyed in Namchi and one in Gangtok.

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Technically called a Glacier Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF), these are instances of large lakes formed from the melting of glaciers, suddenly breaking free of their moraine — natural dams that are formed from rock, sediment and other debris.

The South Lhonak glacier, located in north Sikkim, is reportedly one of the fastest retreating glaciers. The glacier receded nearly 2 km in 46 years from 1962 to 2008. It further retreated by ~400 m from 2008 to 2019. There are an estimated 7,500 glaciers in the Himalayas and GLOFs have been associated with major disasters through the years.

The National Disaster Management Agency reports that "... the primary reason for the sudden surge appears to be a likely combination of excess rainfall and a GLOF event. The lake is at a height of 5,200 metres with a towering ice-capped feature at about 6,800 metres to the north of and in close proximity to the lake." There is speculation that heavy rainfall might have tipped the moraine to collapse and trigger the flood but meteorological records don't reveal any evidence of such heavy rain.

### One Nation One Election

The Union government on September 25 set up a committee headed by President Ramnath Kovind to look at various aspects of implementing the 'one nation, one election' plan. The policy envisages holding simultaneous elections to all three tiers of democracy - Lok Sabha



(543 MPs), Legislative assemblies (4,123 MLAs) and the Panchayats/ Municipalities (31.8 lakh members) — as opposed to the current practice of holding them separately as and when their respective terms expire. The idea was first mooted by the Election Commission of India in its 1983 report. Former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was a staunch supporter of the the scheme.

India began its electoral endeavour in 1951 with simultaneous elections. Independent India's first elections were held between October 25, 1951, and February 21, 1952, an exercise for over 100 days. However, as states were restructured and assemblies were prematurely disbanded, this set-up fell apart. Nonetheless, simultaneous elections were held in 76% of the states in 1957, and 67% in 1962 and 1967. The continuity of this synchronized electoral cycle was shattered in Kerala in July 1959, when the Central government dismissed the Communist Party-led government under E M S Namboodiripad. As a result, state elections were held in February 1960, within three years of the last assembly poll.

The primary benefits of 'One Nation, One election' is the reduction in the cost of conducting elections as each separate elections require huge amount of financial resources. Having simultaneous elections would ease the burden on administrative and security forces, who otherwise are engaged multiple times in election duties. With the new policy, the government can focus more on governance rather than being in a election mode, which often hampers policy implementation. Simultaneous elections, according to the Law Commission, are expected to increase voter turnout as it will be more easy for people to cast many ballots at once.

However, there are many hurdles in implementing the plan. One Nation -



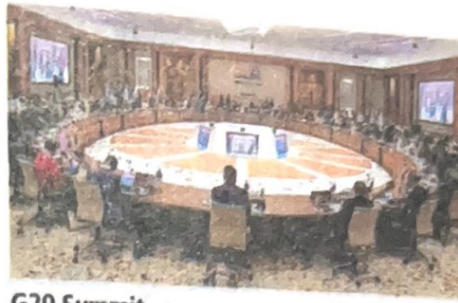
One Election would need a constitutional amendment and then it would need to be taken to state assemblies. There is also the worry that regional issues might get overshadowed by the national issues, affecting the electoral outcome at the state level.

## G20 Summit

India successfully hosted the G20 summit in New Delhi between September 8 and 11. India's successful presidency not only helped the heavily divided bloc reach a consensus but also laid the ground for deeper future cooperation. It also witnessed the inclusion of the African Union into the bloc, setting the stage for more reforms in global multilateral organisations.

Key takeaways from the New Delhi G20 Summit.

1) Inclusion of the African Union: Un-



G20 Summit

der India's presidency, G20 became G21, paving the way for the African Union to have a seat at the elite table. Africa Union represents one-fifth of global humanity. It signals an important step to the reforms that the 55-nation bloc has been seeking in global and multilateral institutions including the United Nations Security Council.

2) India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor: India, the US, the UAE, Saudi

## COUNCIL FOR TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT CONTINUING ACADEMIC EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC STUDIES



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## CURRENT AFFAIRS

Arabia, France, Germany, Italy, and the European Union jointly signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to establish the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEE-EC). This corridor aims to foster economic integration and connect Asia with Europe, presenting a strategic challenge to President Xi Jinping's BRI.

3) G20 joint Declaration: In a diplomatic coup of sorts, India achieved a unanimous "New Delhi Leaders' Summit Declaration" on all developmental and geopolitical matters during the G20 Summit's opening day, despite differences over the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Negotiators from India worked tirelessly, trying to bring a consensus between the Western Block and the Chinese-Russian faction.

4) Consensus on climate change: While the Russia-Ukraine conflict was a divisive topic at the G20, climate change also posed challenges. However, a consensus emerged on addressing the climate crisis, signalling a significant victory for India and the world. Contentious issues included commitments to reduce fossil fuel use, increasing renewable energy targets, and lowering greenhouse gas emissions, which faced objections from China and Saudi Arabia.

### Bihar Releases Caste Survey Data

In a landmark move on October 2, the Bihar government published the findings of the first-ever caste census since the country's independence in 1947. The 'Bihar Caste-based Survey 2022' shows that extremely backward classes (EBCs) and other backward classes (OBCs) together add up to nearly 63% of the 13-crore population, making it the largest caste group in the State. The state's total population is over 13.1 crore.

The idea of the caste census in Bihar has a long history. The Bihar legislature unanimously passed a resolution agreeing to a



Enumerator Staff Collects Information from Residents During the Caste-based Survey

caste census, twice: first on February 18, 2019 and then on February 27, 2020. On August 23, 2021, an all-party delegation, including the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), went to Delhi to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi to urge him to conduct a caste census in the country. The Union government later said in the Lok Sabha that as a matter of policy it had decided not to go for a caste-wise census. The Bihar government in June, 2022 issued notification for conducting a caste survey in the State on its own and subsequently allocated ₹500 crore from its contingency fund for the exercise. The two-phase counting exercise was completed in August 2023 involving around 2.64 lakh enumerators documenting details of 29 million registered households. All 214 castes mentioned in the survey form were allotted different individual codes and the survey was segmented into 17 points, to find out the socio-economic profile of the population.

The survey shows that the Extremely Backward Class (EBC) with 112 castes comprise the largest chunk of the population in the State with a 36.01% share; with 29 castes and a 27.12% share, the Other Backward Class (OBC) are the second largest contingent of the population. The Yadavs, with a 14.26% share, is the dominant caste in the OBC group. The Scheduled Caste population in Bihar is at 19.6518% while the Scheduled Tribe population is 1.6824% even as the General Caste population stands at 15.5224%.

### CMEDI Chief Minister Entrepreneur Development Program

#### Scheme Highlights

- Flagship scheme of State
- Loans up to ₹200 lakh a
- 2% pa interest under Moratorium for Returned Emigrants
- Loans for Startups and MSMEs
- Term Loans and Working Capital
- Loans up to 90% of project cost
- Quick Processing on Easy Terms

**KFC** Kerala Financial Corporation  
Kerala Financial Corporation





The report also revealed that Hindus comprise 81.9986% of the population while the Muslim share is at 17.7088%.

## India Ranks 111 in Global Hunger Index

India has been ranked 111 among 125 countries in the Global Hunger Index report released by two European agencies on October 12, 2023. India slipped four positions as compared to 2022. 'Concern Worldwide' and 'Welt Hungerhilfe', two NGOs from Ireland and Germany, respectively, are the agencies that brought out the report. According to the publishers, it is a peer-reviewed report which has been prepared annually from 2006.

India stands in a group of 40 countries where the scale of global hunger has been termed as 'serious'. The overall GHI score of India, according to the current

report is, 28.7. The calculation of this score is done on a 100-point scale. The higher the score, the worse the performance of the country.



The report says that high scores may be a symptom of several underlying problems relating to the nutritional status of the country. "For some countries, high scores are driven by high rates of undernourishment, reflecting a lack of calories for large swathes of the population," it says.

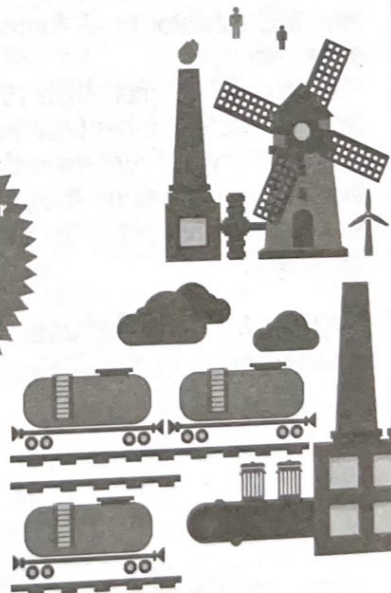
## CMEDP: Chief Minister's Entrepreneurship Development Programme

### Scheme Highlights

- Flagship scheme of State Government
- Loans up to ₹200 lakh at 5% pa interest
- 2% pa interest under Norka Department Project for Returned Emigrants
- Loans for Startups and MSMEs
- Term Loans and Working Capital Loans
- Loans up to 90% of project cost
- Quick Processing on Easy Terms

### Achievements so far

- Assisted 2404 MSMEs with ₹473 crore so far
- Created 22159 direct employment



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Four factors were taken into account for calculating the GHI scores: undernourishment (refers to the entire population – both children and adults); child stunting (share of children who have low height for their age); child under-5 mortality; and child wasting (children who have low weight for their height). All these indicators are components of the universally agreed UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The report goes on to add that for some countries, a high GHI score may also reflect acute malnutrition among children and their poor nutrition levels, in addition to other "extreme challenges facing the population". "Broadly speaking, then, a high GHI score can be evidence of a lack of food, a poor-quality diet, inadequate child care-giving practices, an unhealthy environment, or a combination of these factors," the report explains.

According to the report, India has the highest child 'wasting' (low weight for height) rate across the world, at 18.7%, reflecting acute undernutrition. In fact, 'wasting' is considered to be the worst form and indicator of all forms of child under-nutrition.

If a country has more than 15% of the children 'wasted', it has been marked as 'very high' level of concern in the report. India is the only country, thus, where the wasting has been put in the category of 'very high'.

### **Supreme Court Refuses to Grant Legal Recognition to Same-sex Marriages**

On October 17, the Supreme Court of India refused to grant legal recognition to same-sex marriages in the country, doing so by a 3-2 majority. As many as four judgments were delivered and a slew of observations made by the apex court.

The apex court had reserved its judg-



**People Gather on the Lawn Outside the Supreme Court to hear the verdict**

ment on 11 May on a batch of pleas seeking legal validation for same-sex marriage. The five-judge Constitution bench that was hearing the pleas comprised Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices SK Kaul, SR Bhat, Hima Kohli and PS Narasimha.

The court held that non-heterosexual couples cannot claim an unqualified right to marry.

Though all five judges agreed that homosexuality was neither an urban nor elitist concept, they differed on the point whether the court can obligate the State to formally recognise the relationship of queer couples by giving it the legal status of a "civil union" or "marriage".

During the course of hearings, the petitioners said that "India is a marriage-based culture" and that LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) couples should be granted the same rights as any heterosexual couples have, like the status of "spouse" in finance and insurance issues; medical, inheritance, and succession decisions, and even in adoption and surrogacy matters.

The government and religious leaders had strongly opposed the petitions. The government had insisted that only parliament could discuss the socio-legal issue of marriage and argued that allowing same-sex marriage would lead to "chaos" in society.



## Current Affairs - World

### Lula Elected President

Former Brazilian President and leftist candidate Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva on October 30, 2022 defeated far-right incumbent Jair Bolsonaro in the runoff round of Brazil's national elections. Lula got 50.9% of the vote to Bolsonaro's 49.1%. The electorate comprised 156



Lula with his Supporters

million eligible voters. Lula's winning margin is the closest since 1989, when Brazilians voted for a president for the first time since the end of the military dictatorship. In the first round of voting, Lula gained 48.43% of votes to Bolsonaro's 43.20%, failing to secure the more than 50% needed for an outright majority.

Lula has been a household name in Brazil for around three decades. After serving as the head of a steel-workers union in São Paulo in the 1970s, Lula helped to establish the leftist Worker's Party, and he won his first presidential election in 2002. His two-term presidency was marked by a commodity-driven economic boom and he left office with record popularity. However, his Workers Party was later tarred by a deep recession and a record-breaking corruption scandal that jailed him for 19 months

on bribery convictions, which were overturned by the Supreme Court in 2021. In his third term, Lula will confront a sluggish economy, tighter budget constraints and a more hostile legislature.

The election result was a rebuke for the fiery far-right populism of Bolsonaro, who emerged from the back benches of Congress to forge a novel conservative coalition but lost support as Brazil ran up one of the worst death tolls of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### Netanyahu Wins Israeli Elections

Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu emerged as the winner in the Israeli elections held on November 1, the fifth such election in four years. Netanyahu and his right-wing allies won 64 seats versus 51 seats of the incumbent government led by Yair Lapid in the 120-seat parliament. Netanyahu's Likud party won 32 seats, 14 seats went to the Religious Zionism alliance led by far-right Itamar Ben Gvir, ultra-Orthodox Shas secured 11 seats, and United Torah Judaism won seven seats, according to Israeli election commission. Lapid's Yesh Atid (There is a Future Party) won 24 seats in parliament.

The far-right Religious Zionism party is expected to play a crucial role in Net-



Benjamin Netanyahu





## CURRENT AFFAIRS

anyahu's government. The party is known for its anti-LGBTQ policies and hard line against Arab-Israelis and Palestinians, and it could affect Israel's relations with the U.S., its most important ally.

Ben Gvir was convicted of incitement to racism, interfering with a police officer performing his duty, and support for a terrorist organisation, the Meir Kahane's Kach Movement. In May 2021, he was accused by the Police Commissioner of fanning the flames of violence between Jews and Arabs in mixed cities such as Lod and Acre.

What causes concern to many organisations and progressive people is that the Religious Zionism party openly asks for the imposition of religious law, for Israeli rule over the West Bank and the expulsion from Israel of "disloyal" Palestinian citizens. It provokes Muslims by calling for the demolition of the al-Aqsa Mosque – which is one of the holiest places of Islam – and the construction of a Jewish Temple in its place.

### World Population Crosses Eight Billion Milestone

The world population surged past 8 billion people on November 15, 2022, according to United Nations estimates. The projections by the United Nations suggest that the global population could grow to around 8.5 billion in 2030, 9.7 billion in 2050 and 10.4 billion in 2100.

It took a dozen years (from 1998 to 2010) for the global population to grow from 6 billion to 7 billion. While it also took the global population 12 years to grow from 7 to 8 billion, it will take approximately 15 years--until 2037-- for it to reach 9 billion, a sign that the overall growth rate of the global population is slowing.

Middle-income countries, mostly in Asia, accounted for most of the growth,



gaining some 700 million people since 2011. India added about 180 million people, and is set to surpass China as the world's most populous nation in 2023.

About half the world's projected population growth between 2022 and 2050 will occur in just eight countries. Five of those are in Africa (Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Tanzania). The other three are in Asia (India, Pakistan and the Philippines). Africa overtook the combined populations of Europe and North America in 2022 (in 1980 it had just one-third of their total).

Even though the extra-billion milestones are passing with the same regularity, the global population growth rate is falling fast. In 1963 total population rose by 2.3%. In 2022 it grew by just 0.8%, the lowest rate since the 1950s.

Population growth is caused in part by declining levels of mortality, as reflected in increased levels of life expectancy at birth. Globally, life expectancy reached 72.8 years in 2019, an increase of almost 9 years since 1990. Further reductions in mortality are projected to result in an average longevity of around 77.2 years globally in 2050. Countries with the highest fertility levels tend to be those with the lowest income per capita.

### Cop27 Establishes 'Loss and Damages' Fund for Climate Reparations

Negotiators at the U.N.'s climate conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt came



up with an agreement on November 20, 2022 to establish a 'Loss and Damages' fund to compensate the most vulnerable countries for damages from climate-linked disasters, after more than 36 hours of negotiation beyond the prescribed November 18 deadline.

The agreement says nations cannot be held legally liable for payments. The deal calls for a committee with representatives from 24 countries to work over in 2023 to figure out exactly what form the fund should take, which countries should contribute and where the money should go. Many of the other details are still to be determined.



UN Climate Conference

There is also no guarantee that wealthy countries will deposit money into the fund. A decade ago, the United States, the European Union and other wealthy emitters pledged to mobilize \$100 billion per year in climate finance by 2020 to help poorer countries shift to clean energy and adapt to future climate risks through measures like building sea walls. They are still falling short by tens of billions of dollars annually.

There was a brewing debate over what to call the new fund. Developing nations consider it "compensation" and climate activists often refer to it as "reparations." But diplomats, particularly the Americans, called the money "loss and damage resources."

In addition to a loss and damage fund,

developing nations used the climate talks to push for reforms at two of the world's biggest lending institutions, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. The agreement reached in Sharm El Sheikh broaches the possibility of both institutions paying into the loss and damage fund. Heavy debt is one of the main obstacles developing countries face in being able to respond adequately to climate-driven crises, both immediate and long-term.

One area of concern at the talks was whether nations would strive to keep global temperatures from rising more than 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above preindustrial levels, a goal that nations emphasized at the 2021 climate talks in Glasgow. Beyond that threshold, scientists say, the risk of climate catastrophes increases significantly.

The planet has already warmed by an average of 1.1 degrees Celsius, and scientists have said that countries need to cut their carbon emissions more quickly and more significantly to keep warming

### What is COP27?

COP stands for Conference of the Parties, with "parties" referring to the 197 nations that agreed to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992.

The 197 parties, including India, ratified the treaty to address "dangerous human interference with the climate system" and stabilize levels of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere. The U.N. climate body convenes those governments once a year to discuss how to jointly address climate change. This is the 27th time countries have gathered under the convention — hence, COP27.



### What has Happened at Previous COPs?

The first COP took place in Berlin in 1995, after a critical mass of nations ratified the climate convention. It was a milestone and set the stage two years later for the Kyoto Protocol, which at the time was a landmark global climate agreement.

But the Kyoto Protocol required only wealthy, industrialized nations to curb emissions while developing countries — including major emerging economies like China, India and Brazil — would reduce emissions voluntarily.

The United States Senate unanimously opposed it and so did President George W. Bush, setting in motion nearly two decades of wrangling over which nations bear the most responsibility for tackling climate change. In 2015, the Obama administration broke the impasse by leading nearly 200 countries to sign the groundbreaking

Paris climate agreement. For the first time, rich and poor countries agreed to act, albeit at different paces, to tackle climate change.

The United States withdrew from the Paris accord under President Donald J. Trump but rejoined under President Biden.

Although leaders made big promises in Paris, countries have not taken enough actions to stave off the worst effects of climate change. In Glasgow 2021, nations pledged to be more ambitious, and some have been. But a recent report from the United Nations found only about two dozen countries have followed through and pledged stronger action.

Scientists, activists and many world leaders agree that more ambition is needed even as countries start to make good on their plans to cut emissions.

to 1.5 degrees Celsius. The world is currently on a trajectory to warm by 2.1 to 2.9 degrees Celsius by the end of this century.

Every fraction of a degree of additional warming could mean tens of millions more

people worldwide exposed to life-threatening heat waves, water shortages and coastal flooding, scientists have found.

### Anwar Ibrahim Becomes Malaysia's Prime Minister

Anwar Ibrahim, Malaysia's long-time opposition leader, was sworn in as the country's new prime minister on November 24, 2022. His ascension to power ended



Anwar Ibrahim with his Supporters

### What is Loss and Damage?

Loss and damage refers to the climate impacts that countries are experiencing right now but to which they cannot adapt — particularly poor, developing nations that have contributed the least to global warming. It's finding shelter for the more than 30 million people in Pakistan displaced by floods. Or relocating communities in Fiji away from coastlines that are underwater because of rising seas.



the uncertainty that emerged after one of the most dramatic elections in Malaysia's history, after no party managed to secure a majority to form a parliament for the first time since independence in 1957.

The elections held on November 19 delivered the country's first-ever hung parliament. Ibrahim's reform-minded Pakatan Harapan (ph) coalition won 81 seats. The Perikatan Nasional (pn) alliance of Muhyiddin Yassin won 73. With neither group close to a parliamentary majority, Anwar and Yassin both struggled to convince the king that they could nonetheless muster the support of the requisite 112 MPs. Anwar emerged victorious after smaller blocs agreed to back him to form a unity government.

Malaysia has been in political tumult since Anwar's Pakatan won the 2018 election, ending the 60-year rule of Malaysia's dominant coalition Barisan Nasional. Barisan failed to be re-elected after former prime minister and ex-chairman of Barisan Nasional, Najib Razak fell from grace for his involvement in the multi-billion dollar 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB) scandal. Najib has been sentenced to 12 years in jail. But just as Anwar was poised to take the leadership in 2020, some Pakatan members defected to form rival coalition, Perikatan Nasional. The defection led to the collapse of the Pakatan government.

Becoming prime minister caps Anwar's roller-coaster political journey, from a former deputy prime minister whose sacking and imprisonment in the 1990s led to massive street protests and a reform movement that rose into a major political force.

### Nepal Elections

Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" was on December 26 sworn in as the Prime Minister of Nepal for the third time, a day after the former guerrilla leader dramatically



**Prachanda Takes Oath as Prime Minister**

walked out of the pre-poll alliance led by the Nepali Congress and joined hands with opposition leader K.P. Sharma Oli.

The 68-year-old CPN-Maoist Centre chairman was appointed as the country's new prime minister on December 25, 2022 after he submitted a letter to President Bidya Devi Bhandari showing the support of 169 members in the 275-member House of Representatives.

Elections to the House of Representatives (HoR) and seven provincial assemblies were held on November 20 to end the prolonged political instability that had plagued the Himalayan nation.

In the 275-member HoR, 165 members are elected through direct voting, while the remaining 110 members are elected through a proportional electoral system. A party or a coalition needs 138 seats for a clear majority.

According to Nepal's Election Commission, the Nepali Congress had won 57 seats under direct voting, the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML) had bagged 44 seats, while the CPN-Maoist Centre and CPN-Unified Socialist had emerged victorious on 18 and 10 seats respectively.

Oli and Prachanda — both former Prime Ministers—had teamed up to win the election in 2017, the first election conducted according to the 2015 Constitution. After the election, the CPN-UML of Oli and the CPN (Maoist Centre) merged and formed the Nepal Communist Party.



## CURRENT AFFAIRS

The unity in party however did not translate in consultative decision making as Oli took a series of decisions without wider consultation. Angered by these decisions, Prachanda began to agitate and mobilised the Standing Committee of the Nepal Communist Party which ultimately forced Oli to dissolve the Cabinet in December 2020.

Political instability has been a recurrent feature of Nepal's Parliament since the end of the decade-long Maoist insurgency, and no prime minister has served a full term after the civil war ended in 2006.

### Indonesia Bans Sex Outside Marriage

Indonesia's parliament unanimously passed long-awaited amendments to its colonial-era criminal code on December 6, 2022 that criminalises sex outside marriage. In the amended code, sex with someone who is not one's spouse is pun-



**Rights Groups have Slammed the New Law as Morality Policing**

ishable by up to a year in prison, while living together with someone who is not one's spouse can lead to a six-month jail term. The code maintains that violators will only be prosecuted if their spouses—or in the case of unmarried individuals, their parents or children—lodge the complaints. The amendments to the criminal code also provide punishments for insulting the country's president and vice president, spreading fake news, and committing religious blasphemy. The

rules will apply to locals and foreigners alike.

Authorities were trying for more than a half century to modify the country's existing penal code, which Indonesia inherited from its former Dutch administration when it gained independence in 1949. Indonesia's parliament had planned on ratifying a new code in 2019, but some of the most controversial proposals sparked nationwide protests, and President Joko Widodo urged lawmakers to delay the process to consider public feedback.

Since then, legislators revived the bill in much the same form, though they watered down some of the draft code's statutes that many had deemed particularly problematic. The amended penal code includes exceptions to its ban on abortion, which is punishable by up to four years in prison, in cases of rape or life-threatening medical issues so long as the procedure happens within 14 weeks of pregnancy. And although capital punishment will be maintained in Indonesia, despite calls for its abolition by human rights advocates, the new penal code calls for those sentenced to the death penalty to receive a 10-year probation, after which a judge may reduce a convict's sentence to life or 20 years imprisonment for good behaviour.

The world's largest Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia has seen a rise in religious conservatism in recent years. Strict Islamic laws are already enforced in parts of the country, including the semi-autonomous Aceh province, where alcohol and gambling are banned. Public floggings also take place in the region for a range of offenses including homosexuality and adultery.

### New Peru President Sworn In

Dina Boluarte replaced Pedro Castillo as president of Peru on December 7, 2022 after Castillo tried to dissolve Congress





**Dina Boluarte Being Sworn in as President**

and install an emergency government — a move widely condemned as an attempted coup. The 60-year-old Boluarte was sworn in as president, making her the first woman to lead Peru. The 60-year-old leftist lawyer had served as vice-president to Pedro Castillo until he was swiftly voted out of office.

Castillo, a rural schoolteacher with no previous political experience, was elected president with a margin of just 50,000 votes (out of almost 18m). In just 16 months in office Castillo proved himself to be unfit for the job. He reshuffled his cabinet five times paving the way for many persons as unqualified as the president himself. According to the chief prosecutor he and several members of his family corruptly conspired to award public contracts.

Peru's constitution allows Congress to impeach presidents for "permanent moral incapacity"; two of Castillo's predecessors were booted out under this clause. Twice Congress tried to remove him under it, too. But they acted too soon, and lacked the necessary 87 votes out of the 130 legislators. A third motion, with more support, was due to be put to a vote on December 7, hours after Castillo's ill-fated announcement.

Boluarte is from the south-central department of Apurímac, a majority Indigenous Quechua-speaking region. A lawyer and civil servant, she worked for

15 years in the country's national registry, the ministry that issues identification cards and manages records of births, marriages, divorces and deaths. The national registry is politically autonomous from the rest of the government, and several Peruvian political analysts said it is generally seen as an efficient and technocratic institution.

## **COP15 Adopts Landmark Biodiversity Agreement**

A historic agreement to protect biodiversity was reached at the UN Biodiversity Conference (COP15) in Montreal, Canada on December 19, 2022. After two weeks of immense engagement from the world's largest business and financial institutions, NGOs, governments, and indigenous communities—and following four years of negotiations and COVID-re-



**UN Biodiversity Conference**

lated delays—196 countries adopted the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) agreement. Notably the United States and the Vatican did not sign the agreement.

The agreement is a solid framework with clear, measurable goals and targets, with complete monitoring, reporting, and review arrangements to track progress complemented by a robust resource mobilisation package.

**Goals and targets for ambitious action by 2030 and 2050**



## CURRENT AFFAIRS

The Kunming-Montreal biodiversity agreement includes key global targets to:

- Restore 30% degraded ecosystems globally (on land and sea) by 2030
- Conserve and manage 30% areas (terrestrial, inland water, and coastal and marine) by 2030
- Stop the extinction of known species, and by 2050 reduce tenfold the extinction risk and rate of all species (including unknown)
- Reduce risk from pesticides by at least 50% by 2030
- Reduce nutrients lost to the environment by at least 50% by 2030
- Reduce pollution risks and negative impacts of pollution from all sources by 2030 to levels that are not harmful to biodiversity and ecosystem functions
- Reduce global footprint of consumption by 2030, including through significantly reducing overconsumption and waste generation and halving food waste
- Sustainably manage areas under agriculture, aquaculture, fisheries, and forestry and substantially increase agroecology and other biodiversity-friendly practices
- Tackle climate change through nature-based solutions
- Reduce the rate of introduction and establishment of invasive alien species by at least 50% by 2030
- Secure the safe, legal and sustainable use and trade of wild species by 2030
- Green up urban spaces.

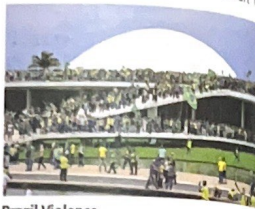
Mobilising finance and allow for business to take responsibility for biodiversity

The deal will significantly increase the mobilisation of finance for biodiversity from all sources, domestic, international – both public and private – mobilising at least \$200 billion per year by 2030. It will create incentives for domestic and international sources, including from business investment.

It also addresses subsidies harmful to biodiversity, with the commitment to identify by 2025 and eliminate by 2030 a total of at least \$500 billion per year.

### Brazil Congress Attack

Thousands of supporters of Brazil's far-right former president Jair Bolsonaro stormed the country's Congress, presidential palace and Supreme Court on



Brazil Violence

January 9, 2023 in the hope of restoring him to power. The storming was a grim echo of the US Capitol invasion two years ago by backers of former president Donald Trump. At the National Congress they overtook the police and raised a flag demanding "Intervention," a call for the military to depose current President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who defeated Bolsonaro in October 2022 and took back an office he had earlier held on Jan. 1, 2023. The rioters even posed for photographs in the legislative chamber in a throwback to events in Capitol in Washington on January 6, 2021.

The leftist president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, announced a federal security intervention in Brasília – bringing policing under the control of the central government – lasting until 31 January after capital security forces initially were overwhelmed by the invaders. He said the law enforcement bodies showed "incompetence, bad faith or malice" and promised swift action.

Bolsonaro, an acolyte of former US President Donald Trump, peddled the false claim that Brazil's electronic voting system was prone to fraud, spawning a violent movement of election deniers. Bolsonaro flew to Florida 48 hours before the end of his mandate and was absent from Lula's inauguration. The violence in Brasília could amplify the legal risks Bolsonaro faces.

### Nepal's Worst Airplane Crash in 30 Years

An aircraft went down near the city of Pokhara in central Nepal on January 15, 2023 killing all the people on board in the country's deadliest plane crash in more than 30 years. Seventy-two people – four crew members and 68 passengers – were on board the ATR 72 plane operated by Nepal's Yeti Airlines when it crashed. Thirty-seven were men, 25 were women, three were children and three were infants. 53 of the passengers and



Wreckage from ATR 72 Aircraft at the Crash Site

all four crew members were Nepali. Fifteen foreign nationals were on the plane as well: five were Indian, four were Russian and two were Korean. The rest were individual citizens of Australia, Argentina, France and Ireland.

The January 15 incident was the third-deadliest crash in the Himalayan nation's history, according to data from the Aviation Safety Network. The only incidents in which more people were killed took place in July and September 1992.

Those crashes involved aircraft run by Thai Airways and Pakistan International airlines and left 113 and 167 people dead, respectively.

The aircraft was flying from the capital of Kathmandu to Pokhara, the country's second-most populous city and a gateway to the Himalayas. Pokhara is located some 129 kilometres (80 miles) west of Kathmandu.

The Himalayan country of Nepal, home to eight of the world's 14 highest mountains, including Everest, has a record of air accidents. Its weather can change suddenly and airstrips are typically sited in difficult-to-reach mountainous areas.

The aircraft involved in the January 15 crash was an ATR 72-500, a twin-prop turbojet often used in the Asia-Pacific region, especially among low-cost carriers. Planes made by ATR, a joint partnership between European aeronautics companies Airbus and Leonardo, typically have a good reputation. However, they have been involved in crashes before. Two ATR 72s operated by the now-defunct Taiwanese airline Transasia were involved in deadly crashes in July 2014 and February 2015. The second prompted Taiwanese authorities to temporarily ground all ATR 72s registered on the island. In total, the ATR 72's various models were involved in 11 fatal incidents before the January 15 crash in Nepal, according to the Aviation Safety Network.

### China's Population Shrinks

China's population shrank in 2022 for the first time in more than 60 years. The population fell in 2022 to 1.411 billion, down some 850,000 people from the year 2021, China's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) announced on January 17, 2023 during a briefing on annual data. 9.56 million people were born in China in 2022, while 10.41 million people died. It was the first time deaths had





outnumbered births in China since the Great Leap Forward, Mao Zedong's failed economic experiment that led to widespread famine and death in the 1960s.

The national death rate was 7.37 per 1,000 people in 2022, the highest rate since 1970, and up from 7.09 in 2019. The birth rate fell to a record low of 6.77 births per 1,000 people in 2022, down from 7.52 in 2021 and the lowest level since the founding of Communist China in 1949. Some 9.56 million babies were born, compared with 10.62 million in 2021 – despite a push from the government to encourage more married couples to have children. The number of women of childbearing age, defined as between 15 and 49, also fell by more than 4mn in 2022.

The decline has roots in Beijing's one-child policy imposed in 1980, which limited the number of children a couple could have to below the average of 2.1 needed for a country's population to remain stable. Authorities scrapped the policy in 2016, replacing it with a two-child limit, but the number of births has fallen every year since then.

Policymakers further relaxed limits on births in 2021, allowing three children, and ramped up efforts to encourage larger families, including through a multi-agency plan released in 2022 to strengthen maternity leave and offer tax deductions and other perks to families. But those efforts have yet to see results amid changing gender norms, the high

cost of living and education, and looming economic uncertainty.

Many young people are choosing to marry later or deciding not to have children altogether, while decades of single births have led to the widely-discussed social phenomenon of families with one adult child as the sole caretaker for two parents – squeezing the post 1980s generation, who are expected both to care for elderly parents and raise young children.

China's elderly make up a fifth of its 1.4 billion people, with the number of those 60 and above expanding to 280 million – or 19.8% of the population – in 2022. That's an increase of roughly 13 million people age 60 and over from 2021. The graying of China's population follows a similar trajectory playing out in Asia's developed economies.

Japan and South Korea have also seen their birth rates plummet and populations age and start to shrink alongside their economic development, posing challenges for their governments in supporting a large elderly demographic, while coping with a dwindling workforce.

The UN has projected that China's population will fall to 1.31bn by 2050 and 767mn by the end of the century. The 2050 estimate would make China 3.5 times larger than the US, which is projected to have 375mn people by then. At present, it is 4.7 times larger than the US.

### Jacinda Ardern Resigns as New Zealand's Prime Minister

Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand's Prime Minister, announced her resignation on January 19, 2023 in a rather surprise move. Ardern said she had reflected over the summer break on whether she had the energy to continue in the role, and had concluded she did not. Ardern was elected prime minister in 2017 at the





**Jacinda Ardern Resigns as New Zealand's Prime Minister in Shock Announcement**

age of 37 making her the youngest female head of government in the world at the time. Her five-and-a-half-year tenure witnessed the Christchurch attacks, the Covid-19 pandemic and the Whakaari volcanic eruption. She also became only the second world leader to give birth while in office – following Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto in 1990 – after welcoming her daughter, Neve Te Aroha, in 2018.

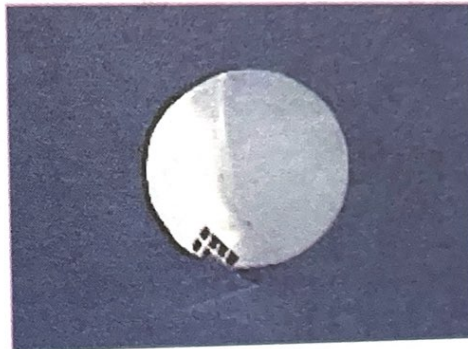
Ardern won the last election in 2020 with 49% of the vote—the best result for any party since 1951. However, her pulling power had lately weakened. Successive polls have shown that Labour is trailing National, the main opposition party. One poll conducted in December 2022 found that 38% of New Zealanders would vote for the conservatives in the coming election, compared with 33% for Ardern (though she was still their preferred prime minister).

She came into office with lofty plans to "build a fairer, better New Zealand" by slashing child poverty, ending homelessness and erecting 100,000 cheap houses. But that idealism collided hard with reality. Labour's affordable-housing targets were scrapped. A well-intentioned policy to put homeless people into emergency accommodation is blamed for causing crime. Gangs are warring. Kiwis have been getting worried about a spate of ram-raids—an ostentatious kind of theft that involves driving cars through shop windows.

Inflation in New Zealand is above 7%. Between 2020 and 2021 house prices rocketed by 25%, leaving New Zealand with some of the most expensive homes in the English-speaking world. Many Kiwis grumble that they cannot afford to buy or rent a property.

## US Shoots Down Chinese Spy Balloon

A US warplane on February 4, 2023 shot down a Chinese high-altitude balloon over the Atlantic Ocean after it had crossed the entire US and caused a diplomatic rift between the two countries. The balloon, which China said was for meteorological purposes but the US insisted had been spying, was at the centre of



a controversy for several days before it was shot down. The balloon had been downed by a single missile fired from a F-22 Raptor fighter jet that took off from Langley air force base in Virginia.

The balloon was launched in China and reached the US Aleutian Islands off Alaska on 28 January, arriving in Canada two days later. China had expressed regret for the overflight, claiming it was a weather balloon that had been blown off course, but the Pentagon rejected the claim, insisting that it was a surveillance aircraft able to manoeuvre. One of the states it flew over was Montana, which is home to some of the US arsenal of nuclear intercontinental ballistic missiles.



The incursion led the secretary of state, Antony Blinken, to cancel a planned visit to Beijing that weekend, where he had been due to meet President Xi Jinping to discuss tensions between the two countries.

### Earthquake Kills Thousands in Turkey and Syria

More than 50,000 people were killed and tens of thousands injured after a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck Turkey and Syria on February 6, 2023. The earthquake, which hit near the town of Gaziantep, was closely followed by numerous aftershocks - including one 7.5 quake which was almost as large as the first. The reverberations from the earthquakes were felt in Iraq, Israel, Lebanon,



Aftermath of Turkey Earthquake

and Jordan, though the greatest devastation occurred in southeastern Turkey and northern Syria. Home to over 2 million people, Gaziantep is the sixth largest city in Turkey.

The confirmed death toll stood at 59,259: 50,783 in Turkey and 8,476 in Syria. It is the deadliest earthquake in what is now present-day Turkey since the 526 Antioch earthquake, and the deadliest natural disaster in its modern history. It is also the deadliest in present-day Syria since the 1822 Aleppo earthquake, the deadliest worldwide since the 2010 Haiti earthquake, and the fifth-deadliest in the 21st century. In Turkey alone, across an area of 110,000 square kilometres which is roughly the size of Bulgaria,

### How are Earthquakes Measured?

They are measured on a scale called the Moment Magnitude Scale (Mw). This has replaced the better known Richter scale, now considered outdated and less accurate.

The number attributed to an earthquake represents a combination of the distance the fault line has moved and the force that moved it.

A tremor of 2.5 or less usually cannot be felt, but can be detected by instruments. Quakes of up to five are felt and cause minor damage. The Turkish earthquake at 7.8 is classified as major and usually causes serious damage, as it has in this instance.

Anything above 8 causes catastrophic damage and can totally destroy communities at its centre.

over 300,000 buildings were destroyed, damaged beyond repair, or are slated for demolition. More than 3 million people were displaced. The cost of reconstruction in Turkey is estimated at \$104 billion, or 11% of GDP.

Earthquakes are not uncommon in Turkey. Most of the country is situated on the Anatolian Plate, which borders two major fault lines: the North Anatolian fault, which stretches across the country from west to east, and the East Anatolian fault, which is in eastern Turkey. The former has been the site of several disastrous earthquakes, according to the Geological Society of London, including the 1939 earthquake in northeastern Turkey that resulted in the deaths of 30,000 people.

### Bola Tinubu Elected President of Nigeria

Bola Ahmed Tinubu, the candidate of Nigeria's ruling All Progressive Congress



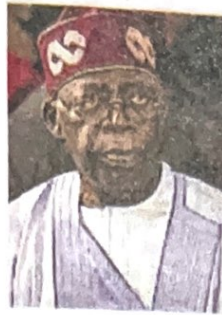
(APC) party, was declared the winner of the presidential election held on February 25. It was the closest presidential election in decades. Tinubu, a 70-year-old former governor of Lagos and longtime kingmaker in Nigerian politics, took 37% of the vote, the electoral commission said on March 1st. This placed him ahead of Atiku Abubakar (29%), a tycoon standing for the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the main opposition, and Peter Obi (25%), a wildcard third-party candidate representing the Labour Party.

To win the presidency in Nigeria, a candidate is required to win the most votes overall, and also secure a minimum of 25% support in at least 24 out of 36 states in the country. This is designed to ensure that the winning candidate's votes are a representation of the larger portion of the country amid the often political divisiveness between the Muslim north and the Christian south. The 70-year-old Tinubu largely ran on his eight-year record as Lagos governor until 2007, saying he "cleaned up" the state and increased government revenues. But critics accuse him of turning the state into his personal fiefdom by using his massive political influence to install his successors. Tinubu has also faced allegations of corruption and questions about his vast wealth. The US froze his assets in the 1990s, claiming a probable link to a narcotics operation. He reached a settlement with the US authorities, forfeiting \$460,000 while denying wrongdoing.

But the poll has been disputed. Even before Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) formally announced the results, opposition parties called for scrapping of the elections, which they termed a sham. They sought to have new elections organized. But INEC asked them to take their grievances to court.

The opposition candidates alleged manipulation of the results especially after

INEC failed to upload results streaming in its viewing platform, IReV. In its defence for the slow updating of results in the IReV, INEC blamed technical glitches and assured the public that results transmission would be smooth.



**Bola Tinubu**

Former Nigerian president Olusegun Obasanjo who backed the country's youth choice Peter Obi, also claimed fraud in the elections, holding that the results had been doctored. He wants president Muhammadu Buhari to demand a review of the collation process.

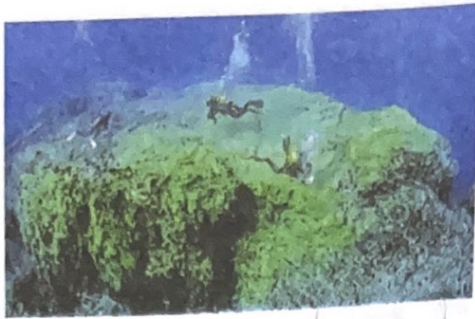
## UN High Seas Treaty to Protect Oceans Agreed

On March 5, almost 200 countries agreed upon a legally-binding treaty designed to defend the planet's oceans. The High Seas Treaty is a legal framework, or a set of legal tools, designed to protect the oceans that are beyond any country's territory. The high seas are defined as the waters that are 200 nautical miles from any national jurisdiction; they are international open waters that all countries can use for marine business such as shipping, fishing, and marine research.

The treaty provides the tools to establish and manage marine protected areas, covers the access to and use of marine genetic resources and sets out requirements for environmental assessments for deep sea activities. The treaty's formal name is the Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction Treaty, or BBNJ Treaty for short.

The last global agreement on ocean protection was signed four decades ago, the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, and it provided very little protection





for the boundaryless oceans.

The high seas do a lot of work to protect us from the impacts of climate change. Oceans are known as the world's largest carbon sink and play a vital role in absorbing carbon dioxide — in fact oceans have absorbed 90% of the world's excess heat over the last four decades. The high seas make up 60% of the world's oceans by surface area, making them vital to our protection against climate change.

Before now, the regulations that protected the unbounded open waters were fragmented and not enforced strongly enough to defend the expanse of ocean they needed to protect. Only 1.2% of international waters were considered protected, of which, only 0.8% are considered "highly protected."

### UN Releases Climate Report

The United Nations released a landmark report on climate change on March 20, a comprehensive assessment of the current state of climate change. The report, created by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, was years in the making and is considered the gold-standard synthesis of all available scientific evidence.

Here are three big takeaways.

#### 1. The 1.5-degree question

Previous reports established 1.5 degrees of warming as a critical guardrail. Blasting past that, and particularly past 2 degrees, will have catastrophic consequences for people and the planet, and

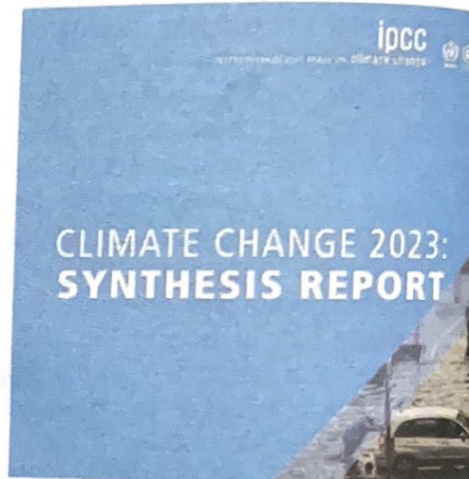
could trigger irreversible tipping points that make the Earth far less livable.

#### 2. Financing climate change

Many of the solutions to the climate change crisis are already viable and getting cheaper by the year, the report concludes, including things like solar energy and rechargeable lithium-ion batteries, which both dropped 85 per cent in cost in the last decade. In some cases, maintaining emissions-intensive systems may already be more expensive than transitioning to low-carbon ones.

#### 3. Vulnerable communities

Climate change is profoundly unequal — both in how it became a crisis, and



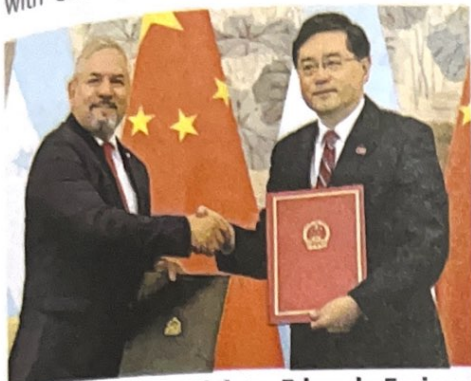
in how its effects are experienced. The wealthiest countries that produced the most greenhouse gas emissions also have the most resources to insulate their citizens, whereas the lowest-income countries that have contributed the least emissions are suffering the most.

But vulnerability exists within countries, the report makes clear. People in the Arctic, Indigenous people globally and low-income households are all among the communities experiencing the largest adverse impacts, the report says.



## Honduras Establishes Diplomatic Ties with China

Honduras established diplomatic ties with China on March 26 after breaking



Honduras Foreign Minister Eduardo Enrique Reina Garcia, and Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang

off decades-old relations with Taiwan. Foreign ministers from China and Honduras signed a joint communique in Beijing — a decision the Chinese Foreign Ministry hailed as “the right choice.”

The diplomatic victory for China came as tensions rose between Beijing and the United States, over China’s increasing assertiveness toward self-ruled Taiwan.

China and Taiwan have been locked in a battle for diplomatic recognition since they split amid civil war in 1949, with Beijing spending billions to win recognition for its “one China” policy.

China claims Taiwan is part of its territory, to be brought under its control by force if necessary, and refuses most contacts with countries that maintain formal ties with the island democracy. It threatens retaliation against countries merely for increasing contacts.

A growing list of countries have recently switched recognition from Taipei to Beijing. Nicaragua, Panama and Costa Rica are the countries that have in recent years switched recognition from Taipei to Beijing. The only remaining among the 193 member countries of the UN

that maintain diplomatic relations with Taiwan, along with the Holy See (Vatican), are the Marshall Islands, Nauru, Tuvalu, and Palau in the Pacific; Eswatini in Africa; and Belize, Guatemala, Haiti, Paraguay, St. Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Saint Kitts and Nevis, in Latin America and the Caribbean.

## Silicon Valley Bank Collapses

Silicon Valley Bank (SVB), which had \$212bn of assets, failed with spectacular speed on March 10, making it the biggest lender to collapse since the global financial crisis of 2007-09. The collapse happened for multiple reasons, including a lack of diversification and a classic bank run, where many customers withdrew their deposits simultaneously due to fears of the bank’s solvency. Many of SVB’s depositors were startup companies. They deposited large amounts of cash from investors because tech was in high demand during the pandemic.

Silicon Valley Bank invested a large amount of bank deposits in long-term U.S. treasuries and agency mortgage-backed securities. However, bonds and treasury values fall when interest rates increase. When the Federal Reserve hiked interest rates in 2022 to combat inflation, SVB’s bond portfolio started to drop. SVB would have recovered its capital if they held those bonds until their maturity date. Silicon Valley Bank used to lend out money in short durations. However, in 2021, they shifted to long-term securities such as treasuries for more yield, and they did not protect their liabilities with short-term investments for quick liquidations. They were insolvent for months because they could not liquidate their assets without a large loss.

When economic factors hit the tech sector, many bank customers withdrew money as venture capital started drying up. SVB didn’t have the cash on hand



## CURRENT AFFAIRS



to liquidate these deposits because they were tied up in long-term investments. They started selling their bonds at a significant loss, which caused distress to customers and investors.

On March 26, 2023, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) announced First Citizens Bank will purchase Silicon Valley Bank and assume the majority of its deposits and loans. As of March 10, Silicon Valley Bank reported nearly \$167 billion in total assets and \$199 billion in deposits. First Citizens Bank will purchase about \$72 billion in assets at a discounted rate of \$16.5 billion. FDIC will remain in control of nearly \$90 billion in assets and securities in its receivership.

All 17 of Silicon Valley Bank's branches will operate under Silicon Valley Bank, a division of First Citizens Bank.

### **Credit Suisse Merges with UBS**

The chairmen of Credit Suisse and UBS, the two great rivals of Swiss banking, announced a momentous but unhappy union on March 19. Credit Suisse had been battling a string of losses and scandals in recent years. Credit Suisse lost around 38% of its deposits in the fourth quarter of 2022 and revealed in its delayed annual report that outflows had yet to reverse. It reported a full-year net loss of 7.3 billion Swiss francs for 2022 and expected a further "substantial" loss

in 2023. Credit Suisse found the going very tough in the wake of the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank. The 167-year-old Credit Suisse had received a \$50 billion (54 million Swiss francs) loan from the Swiss National Bank, which briefly caused a rally in the bank's stock price. Yet the move did not appear to be enough to stem an outflow of deposits. Regulators finally tried to avert a crisis by rushing through a tie-up between Credit Suisse and UBS with combined assets worth twice as much as Switzerland's GDP. The transaction concluded a bewildering descent for Credit Suisse, as its depositors and counterparties lost faith over the course of a working week.



Credit Suisse's scale and potential impact on the global economy is much greater than U.S. regional banks, which pressured Swiss regulators to find a way to bring the country's two largest financial institutions together. Credit Suisse is designated by the Financial Stability Board, an international body that monitors the global financial system, as one of the world's globally systemic important banks. This means regulators believe its uncontrolled failure would lead to ripples throughout the financial system not unlike the collapse of Lehman Brothers 15 years ago.

Credit Suisse's balance sheet is around twice the size of Lehman Brothers' when



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### Humza Yousaf Becomes Scotland First Leader

Humza Yousaf became Scotland's first  
 leader from an ethnic minority back-  
 ground when he was sworn in as First  
 Minister on March  
 29, 2023. On  
 March 27, he had  
 won a closely  
 fought and of-  
 ten bitter race to  
 succeed Nicola  
 Sturgeon as lead-  
 er of the Scottish  
 National party. The  
 37-year-old health  
 secretary won  
 52.1 per cent of the votes cast by SNP  
 members, beating finance secretary Kate  
 Forbes who secured 47.9 per cent.



Humza Yousaf

In the SNP leadership race, Yousaf  
 presented himself as the defender of  
 Sturgeon's progressive policies on social  
 issues. He was the only candidate com-  
 mitted to fighting the UK government's  
 move to block Scottish legislation that  
 would make it easier for trans people to  
 obtain legal recognition of their gender.  
 But Yousaf did not support Sturgeon's  
 plan to use the next UK general election  
 as a "de facto" referendum on Scottish  
 independence, stressing instead a more  
 gradual approach to securing the SNP's  
 cherished goal by trying to increase pub-  
 lic support over time. Scots are divided  
 roughly in half on the question of inde-  
 pendence, according to opinion polls, af-  
 ter voters decided by 55 per cent to 45  
 per cent to stay in the UK in a referen-  
 dum in 2014.

### First Minister

As head of the Scottish Government,  
 the First Minister is responsible for  
 the overall development, implemen-  
 tation and presentation of the ad-  
 ministration's policies and for pro-  
 moting and representing Scotland  
 at home and overseas.

Subject to Parliament's agree-  
 ment, the First Minister appoints  
 other ministers - including a Deputy  
 First Minister and cabinet secretar-  
 ies - from among Members of the  
 Scottish Parliament (MSPs).

The First Minister chairs the Scot-  
 tish Cabinet, the main forum for  
 ministers to consider and make key  
 decisions on the strategic priorities  
 and policies of the government to  
 achieve its objectives.

The Scottish independence movement  
 arose as a result of the dysfunctional  
 and unresponsive nature of British pol-  
 itics. It was the SNP's opposition to the  
 invasion of Iraq that drew Yousaf into  
 its orbit. Scottish politics underwent  
 drastic changes in the wake of the fi-  
 nancial crash of 2008 and the decade of  
 austerity that followed it. The pro-union  
 parties - Labour, Liberal, Conservative  
 - had two-thirds of all seats in the first  
 two parliaments at Holyrood; since 2011,  
 they have been in a minority. At the last  
 general election, the SNP won 48 seats,  
 reducing the once dominant Labour par-  
 ty to just one Scottish MP.

### Britain's Charles III is Crowned King

Britain's Charles III was crowned king by  
 the archbishop of Canterbury in West-  
 minster Abbey on May 6, marking the  
 new Carolean era. The Archbishop of





## CURRENT AFFAIRS

**King Charles III**

Canterbury, the spiritual leader of the Anglican Church, placed the 360-year-old St Edward's Crown on Charles' head as he sat upon a 14th-century throne in Westminster Abbey. During the historic and solemn two-hour service, which dates back to the time of William the Conqueror in 1066, Charles' second wife Camilla was also crowned queen.

In his oath, the king promised to govern the UK and the 15 Commonwealth countries where he is also head of state according to the law, and to "cause law and justice, in mercy, to be executed". Charles was the 40th sovereign to be enthroned in the abbey — and, at 74, the oldest. Though King Charles III has been monarch from the moment his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, died on Sept. 8, 2022, the ceremony marked a formal confirmation of his role as head of state. Though ancient, the coronation ceremony has no legal or constitutional significance.

In the ceremony's most intimate moment, Charles was anointed with holy oil, harvested from the Mount of Olives and consecrated in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The archbishop conducted the ritual behind a screen — symbolizing the privacy of what is intended as almost a divine encounter between the sovereign and God. Like other elements of the ceremony, the anointment dates to the coronation of King Edgar in A.D. 973 in the Roman city of Bath.

Charles was four when his mother was crowned Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. He has had to wait 70 years to succeed to the throne, the longest in British history. Camilla, who is 75, is his second wife after Diana. The couple have been married for 18 years.

Today, 22% of the world's countries still have a hereditary ruler as their head of state. Though things are not quite as striking as that statistic implies, since many of those monarchs are Charles, who is sovereign of 15 countries. Several of his realms have hinted that they may get rid of him.

### Erdogan Wins Another Term in Office

Turkey's president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, won in the country's unprecedented presidential run-off on May 29— extending his two-decade grip on power for another five years. He faced off against Kilicdaroglu, leader of the centre-left People's Republican Party (CHP) and architect of a six-party opposition coalition that managed to pose the greatest political challenge to him in years. He won 52.16% of the votes against Kilicdaroglu's 47.9%. Erdogan fell shy of an outright majority in the first round of the elections on 14 May, forcing Turkey into a run-off for the first time in its history. He has been trying to secure his legacy as his nation's most consequential leader since its founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Erdogan became Turkish prime minister in 2003 and president in 2014.

The 69-year-old Erdogan defied opinion polls in the first round of voting on

**Erdogan**



May 14 that had showed Kılıçdaroglu with the edge. Public anger had mounted in Turkey over the government's response to the deadly earthquakes in 2023 that had left at least 50,000 dead. The public were also fed up with his unwonted economic policies that had resulted in runaway inflation. Erdogan is not new to political challenges: his party, the Islamist Justice and Development (AK) Party, lost its hold over Parliament in 2015, and a failed coup attempt in 2016 sought to remove him from power. But the 2023 election was the most formidable electoral challenge to Erdogan's rule in 20 years.

The election, on the centennial of Turkey's founding as a modern republic, carried much significance. Erdogan represents an Islamist-tinged nationalism, with appeals to Turkey's Ottoman imperial past, while Kılıçdaroglu and his party had projected themselves as closer to Turkey's liberal ideology and lineage rooted in Atatürk's version of secularism. In his speech to supporters, Erdogan promised to work hard for Turkey's second century.

### All 5 Aboard Titanic Sub Dead in 'Catastrophic Implosion'

The whole world waited with bated breath for the rescue of 5 persons who had travelled to see the century-old wreck of the Titanic ship in a deep-sea submersible, but found themselves trapped inside it just a few hours after they had started their voyage. At around 9am gmt on June 18th the Titan submersible, a five-man craft built and operated by OceanGate, an American company, began its latest dive. Since 2021 the firm had run a tour of the wreck (as part of a ten-day trip costing \$250,000); it had made the descent many times before. It takes about two hours to dive to the resting place of the Titanic, almost 4km beneath the surface of the north Atlantic. This time, one

hour and 45 minutes after the sub sank beneath the surface, the support vessel lost contact with it.

A robotic diving vehicle deployed from a Canadian ship discovered the debris field from the submersible Titan on the morning of 22nd June on the seabed some 1,600 feet (488 meters) from the bow of the Titanic, 2 1/2 miles (4 km) beneath the surface, in a remote corner of the North Atlantic.



British billionaire businessman Hamish Harding, British father and son Shahzada and Suleman Dawood who had roots in Pakistan as one of its richest families, OceanGate CEO Stockton Rush and former French navy diver Paul-Henry Nargeolet were the five persons who died as crew of the Titan submersible.

The 22 foot and 23000 pound submersible was made of lightweight carbon fiber, spun into a rigid tube for the vessel's body. With a nine feet wide and 8 feet tall structure, Titan left little room for its crew. Passengers were cramped in on a subfloor inside the carbon-fiber tube. With only one toilet and no seats, passengers had to sit cross-legged on the floor. There were no windows except the porthole through which passengers could view the Titanic.

### Kyriakos Mitsotakis Wins Greece's National Elections

Greece's conservatives won big on June 25's parliamentary elections, securing an





outright majority. Far-right parties also made gains, while the left struggled, giving Greece's parliament its most rightward slant since the restoration of democracy in 1974. The



**Kyriakos Mitsotakis**

New Democracy party of Kyriakos Mitsotakis managed to widen its double-digit lead over its main rival, the left-wing Syriza party, and secured 158 seats in the country's 300-seat parliament, under the new electoral system which awards the winning party 50 bonus seats.

The party of Alexis Tsipras, premier in 2015-19 when Greece was on the brink of financial collapse and facing an exit from the eurozone, shrank even further. Syriza, which dropped more than 2 percentage points from May's vote and nearly 14 points from the 2019 general election, finished behind the ruling party by more than 22 points, raising questions about Tsipras' leadership.

New Democracy won the first election in May by 20 percentage points — the largest margin in decades. But it had fallen short of the votes necessary for an absolute majority in Parliament. Mitsotakis, who as prime minister had overseen a period of economic stability and tough anti-migrant measures, opted to head for a second vote conducted under a system that grants bonus seats in Parliament to the winning party.

Mitsotakis was brought to power in the 2019 election, when his party also won 158 seats. He served as prime minister until May 2023, then stepped aside following the inconclusive verdict.

New Democracy's dominance is another sign of how Southern European countries are moving to the right, after a

decades-long financial crisis in the eurozone that led the rise of left-wing parties.

### Coup in Niger

On 26 July 2023, in a coup d'état, General Abdourrahmane Tchiani, the head of Niger's presidential guard, deposed the democratically elected President Mohammed Bazoum and declared himself as the leader of the military junta. This action led the 15-member regional economic grouping, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), to impose economic sanctions and threaten military intervention if the democratic government was not returned to power.

On August 20, the main coup leader and self-proclaimed head of state, General Abdourahmane Tiani, presented his roadmap in a televised address: a transition period of no more than three years and an inclusive national dialogue. He also reiterated that his country would defend itself in the event of military intervention.



**Abdourrahmane Tchiani**

Regional leaders are worried since they recognise that the coup in Niger is an existential challenge not only for political and economic stability of Niger but for the entire West African region. They are aware that most countries in the region are facing political and economic problems and are quite vulnerable towards any form of internal instability. The regional leaders fear that failure to take a firm stand may trigger a contagion of unconstitutional changes in the region.



The failure to reverse the coup may also hamper regional counter-terrorism efforts. In recent years, the region bordering Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali has become the epicentre of violence by terror groups affiliated to Al Qaeda and the Islamic State. As a result, lately, Niger had become the hub of counter-terrorism activities led by the West, particularly France and the US. The internal instability caused by the military coup may provide an opportunity to the terrorists to enhance their activities in the region.

While Niger's economic and social indicators place it at the bottom of global development indices, these metrics also understate the strategic importance of this vast country. Its geographical position at the crossroads of North, West, and Central Africa; its mineral and oil resources; its potential for the development of renewable energies; and its strong demographic growth help explain the seemingly outsize interest of medium and large powers in the current crisis.

### Fitch Strips US of Triple A Rating

On August 1, rating agency Fitch downgraded the United States of America's (U.S.A.) rating to 'AA+' from 'AAA' — a rating that it had been holding at the agency since 1994. This was the first major downgrade for the country since Standard & Poor's (S&P) actions in 2011. The rating agency said its downgrade reflected "expected fiscal deterioration over the next three years" and "a high burden" of growing general government debt and governance "over the past two decades that has manifested in repeated debt limit stand-offs and last-minute resolutions".

Fitch also cited a growing US debt burden as a concern. The agency expects the general government deficit to rise to



6.3 per cent of gross domestic product in 2023, up from 3.7 per cent in 2022, "reflecting cyclically weaker federal revenues, new spending initiatives and a higher interest burden".

Fitch is one of three major rating agencies whose views are closely watched by market participants and economists around the world. Moody's still maintains a triple A rating on the US, while S&P slashed its own rating to double A plus in 2011 after an earlier debt ceiling showdown.

Lower credit ratings typically increase a country's borrowing costs in debt markets. It is not clear that will be the case in this instance, however. After S&P took away its triple A rating for the US, there was little long-term effect on markets.

That puts in level with the likes of New Zealand, Austria and Canada, below countries such as Denmark and Luxembourg, and within touching distance of France, Ireland and Czechia.

### Thai Parliament Picks Srettha Thavasin as Prime Minister

Thailand's parliament on August 22 voted for real estate tycoon Srettha Thavasin to be the country's prime minister, bringing an end to three months of political deadlock.

A political newbie with a track record in business, Srettha joined Pheu Thai in 2022 before being named one of the party's three prime ministerial candidates ahead of the election in May.

That poll was won by a popular pro-



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gressive party, Move Forward, which had proposed radical reforms to capitalize on years of rising anger with how Thailand is governed. However, its efforts to form a government were later thwarted by the kingdom's political elites including the military.



Srettha Thavisin

Pheu Thai came second but led efforts to form a new alliance after parliament blocked Move Forward's leader from becoming prime minister over the party's pledge to amend Thailand's strict royal defamation laws, known as Article 112.

In a bid to secure the needed votes, Pheu Thai struck a deal with its former military rivals and in doing so reneged on a promise that it would not work with pro-military parties.

Pheu Thai also campaigned on keeping the military out of politics, but under the new alliance the military-backed Palang Pracharath and United Thai Nation Party were awarded ministerial roles. Both those parties are affiliated with coup leader and outgoing Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-Cha, and linked to the military junta that toppled Pheu Thai's democratically elected government, led by Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra, nearly a decade ago.

### Zimbabwe's President Mnangagwa Wins Second Term

Zimbabwe's President Emmerson Mnangagwa won a second and final term in office in an outcome rejected by the opposition and questioned by observers. The Zimbabwe Electoral Commission (ZEC) declared Mnangagwa the winner, with 52.6% of the vote, beating Nel-

son Chamisa of the Citizens' Coalition for Change (CCC), who trailed at 44%. Mnangagwa's party also won the parliamentary elections with 136 seats, while the CCC garnered 73 seats. Zanu-PF however failed to secure a two-thirds majority to allow the party to institute constitutional amendments, which observers feared could be used to extend presidential term limits.

Mnangagwa's victory over his closest competitor, Nelson Chamisa, after his first full term in office strengthened ZANU-PF's grip on power in a nation it has led since independence from Britain in 1980. Over the past two decades, Zimbabwe has suffered under disastrous economic policies that have led to soaring prices, high unemployment and a medical system lacking basic drugs and equipment.

Zimbabwe, a southern African nation of 16 million, has a history of election irregularities, and such tactics helped Robert Mugabe, a liberation leader turned autocrat, maintain power for nearly four decades. Mugabe was removed in a coup in 2017 by Mnangagwa and his allies. The following year, Mnangagwa scored a victory over Chamisa in an election, winning just over 50 percent of the vote.



Emmerson Mnangagwa

### Coup in Gabon

On August 30, 2023 military officers in Gabon, a former French colony of 2.4m people in central Africa, staged a coup seizing power. Army general Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, the self-declared new leader, promised "to turn the page" on over half a century of misrule





**Coup Leader Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema**

by the family of Ali Bongo Ondimba, the president he deposed.

As personal assistant to President Omar Bongo, Nguema held a position of influence within Gabon's ruling circles. But when Ali Bongo took over after his father's death in 2009, Nguema was effectively banished. There was virtually no love lost between Bongo Jr and his father's former confidant. A furore over fraud-marred August presidential election gave Nguema the opening he was waiting for.

Nguema's seizure of power is more of a palace coup than a people's revolution. Since 1967 Gabon has been ruled by the Bongo family: first Omar Bongo Ondimba, then from 2009 his son, Ali Bongo Ondimba. Brice Clotaire Oligui Nguema, the newly appointed "transitional president", leads the powerful Republican Guard—and is a cousin of Ali Bongo.

The country has the fourth highest gdp per head in sub-Saharan Africa but unemployment and poverty are rife. In 2022 French authorities reportedly charged nine of Omar Bongo's 54 children with various financial crimes.

The coup fits a disturbing pattern across sub-Saharan Africa, which has suffered a spate of military takeovers since 2020, including in Mali, Guinea, Burkina Faso, Chad, Sudan and, most recently, Niger. One common factor is demographics. All these countries have rapidly growing, ever more youthful populations. In Africa, the median age is about 19. By compar-

ison, the median age of Africa's leaders is 63.

## Earthquake in Morocco

On September 8, 2023, a devastating earthquake hit Morocco killing over 3,000 people and injuring thousands more. The shallow epicentre was south-west of Marrakesh, under the Atlas mountains, a soaring range that bisects the country. 380,000 people were severely affected due to their proximity (less than 30 miles from the quake's epicentre). At least 500,000 people are estimated to have been displaced. Hill-top villages were reduced to heaps of rubble in the earthquake which was the strongest to hit Morocco in more than a century.

Marrakesh, a historic and popular



**Buildings Reduced to Rubble at the Earthquake**

tourist destination, was the most impacted large city, with a population of 840,000 people. The quake was felt in several other Moroccan cities, including Casablanca, Agadir, Essaouira and Rabat. It was also felt in Algeria and Portugal.

The earthquake that shook Morocco came without warning. But if individual quakes are impossible to predict, trends can be spotted. A study in 2007 by a group of seismologists counted more than 1,700 of them in and around Morocco over the past millennium, including dozens in the Atlas mountains. Yet few were prepared.



## CURRENT AFFAIRS

Building codes have been strengthened in recent years, but many homes are built of simple masonry, which buckles easily during an earthquake. In the villages hit hardest by the quake, residents cannot afford to reinforce their houses. The World Bank reckons around one in five rural Moroccans earns less than \$3.65 a day, compared with 4% of city-dwellers.

### Thousands Killed as Dams Collapse in Libya

On September 10 Storm Daniel, a Mediterranean cyclone, made landfall in eastern Libya. It dumped as much as one metre of rainfall in a single day—two to three times more than the region sees in a typical year. In the port city of Derna, which sits at the end of a long wadi, or valley, two dams burst. Abu Mansur dam, 13 kilometres (just over nine miles) from the city, whose reservoir held 22.5 million cubic metres (nearly 800 million cubic feet) of water, collapsed first.

The deluge then broke Al Bilad, the second dam, which had a capacity of 1.5 million cubic metres and is just a kilometre from the coastal city. Floodwaters wiped out entire neighbourhoods. The death toll crossed 11,300, with many thousands more missing. More than 10% of the city's population may have drowned.

The scale of the catastrophe in Derna, a city of around 100,000 people, is massive. Yet its underlying causes are not unique. The disaster occurred at the confluence of sociopolitical instability wrought by civil war, a historic storm (likely exacerbated by climate change) and neglected infrastructure: the destroyed dams, first constructed in the 1970s, had reportedly not been maintained since 2002. Libya's lack of a stable and strong central government compounded the problem. Libya has not one but two governments, an internationally recognised one in the west



Floods Rescuers and relatives of victims set up tents in front of collapsed buildings in Derna

and a warlord-led one in the east, neither of which can perform the basic functions of a state.

Most of the world's large dams were built in the decades following World War II, between about 1950 and 1985. These dams are important infrastructure that provide reliable drinking water, agricultural irrigation, flood control and electricity to many. Yet dams—like all human-made structures—have a limited life span, degrade over time and require upkeep. On the lower end, 50 years is the reasonable safe age limit for dams and the Derna dams were fast approaching that age.

### Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Azerbaijan on September 19 launched an "anti-terror" strike aimed at Nagorno-Karabakh, the semi-autonomous, majority-Armenian region within its internationally recognized borders. One day later, the breakaway government agreed to disarm and dissolve its military. It was the second time in three years that Azerbaijan's government made decisive gains in a conflict with Nagorno-Karabakh.

Nagorno-Karabakh, a contested mountainous region located in the South Caucasus, has been the epicentre of two large-scale conflicts and intermittent clashes between Armenia and Azerbaijan for well over three decades. Known as "Artsakh" among Armenians, the region is officially recognized as part of Azer-

bakh. A subsequent brokered by Russia a full Azerbaijani offensive to 1,960 Russian peacekeepers in the region, including the Lachin Corridor—the lone highway to the separatist region that has previously been controlled by Russian forces.

The deployment of Russian peacekeepers to the contested territory was seen as an important step to the Kremlin's entrenchment in the Caucasus. But Russia's failure to effectively control the two decades-long conflict with its neighboring states. This has created opportunities for other external powers, including Turkey, Israel, and Iran.



baijan, yet its population of 120,000 is predominantly ethnic Armenian and has a local government that has historically maintained close cultural, social, and political ties with Yerevan. During Soviet rule, Nagorno-Karabakh held the status of an autonomous region within the Republic of Azerbaijan. The weakening and ultimate collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in the first Karabakh war between 1988 and 1994, which killed around 30,000 people and displaced more than a million, ending with an Armenian victory.

The second war erupted in 2020, leading to more than 6,000 deaths, while Azerbaijani forces recaptured previously lost territories in and around Nagorno-Kara-



bakh. A subsequent ceasefire agreement, brokered by Russia after a 44-day successful Azerbaijani offensive, provided for up to 1,960 Russian peacekeepers stationed in the region, including near the Lachin Corridor—the lone highway connecting the separatist region to Armenia that had previously been controlled by Armenian forces.

The deployment of Russian troops in a contested territory was initially perceived as an important step toward furthering the Kremlin's entrenchment in the South Caucasus. But Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has weakened its ability to effectively control and interfere in the decades-long conflict between the two neighboring states. This has created opportunities for other external actors—including Turkey, Israel, and Iran—to pro-

mote their own interests and agendas in the region.

## Canada-India Relations Crumble

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau on September 18 announced in parliament that he had credible information linking India to the killing of prominent Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

The bombshell allegation from Canada that the Indian government may have been behind the assassination of a Sikh separatist activist on Canadian soil triggered a huge diplomatic row and sent relations between the two countries rock bottom.

Both Canada and India acted swiftly to expel senior diplomats in reciprocal moves. India's foreign ministry also responded by temporarily suspending visa services for Canadian citizens over what it said are "security threats" against Indian diplomats in Canada.

Nijjar's death in June shocked the Sikh community in Canada, one of the largest outside India with more than 770,000 members. Nijjar was an outspoken supporter of the creation of a separate Sikh homeland known as Khalistan, which would include parts of India's Punjab state.

The Khalistan movement is outlawed in India and considered a national security threat by the government. A number of groups associated with the movement are listed as "terrorist organizations" under India's Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Nijjar's name appears on the Home Ministry's list of UAPA terrorists and in 2020, the Indian National Investigation Agency accused him of "trying to radicalize the Sikh community across the world in favour of the creation of 'Khalistan,'" adding that he had been "trying to incite Sikhs to vote for secession, agitate





Canadian PM Justin Trudeau and Indian PM Modi

against the government of India and carry out violent activities."

### Hamas and Israel at War

Israel came under a sustained attack on its territory on October 7, 2023 when hordes of Hamas militants broke through the border from Gaza and went on a murderous rampage in the surrounding area. The militants had fired a barrage of rockets—2,200 of them in a matter of hours—as a cover for the assault. At least 1,400 Israelis were killed, including 260 at a music festival. Hamas massacred whole families in villages and kibbutzim, including babies. Scores of hostages, including children, were seized by Hamas. The scale of the assault shocked the world. The bodies of 1,500 Hamas terrorists were recovered by the Israeli army.

It took Israel three days to secure its border with Gaza, though Hamas still attacked Israel with rockets. As the Israeli army amassed forces for a massive ground assault the air force pounded the densely populated area. Over three thousand Gazans were killed; more than a million fled their homes. Israel cut off energy and water supplies and ordered all Gazans to leave to prepare for a ground offensive. Violence also flared in the West Bank, killing dozens of Palestinians. Hizbullah, another Iranian-backed militia, attacked Israel's north by firing rockets from Lebanon.

Binyamin Netanyahu told Israelis to

prepare for a long conflict. The prime minister and Benny Gantz, an opposition leader, formed an emergency government and a war-management cabinet, which also included Gadi Eisenkot. Gantz and Eisenkot are former heads of the Israel Defence Forces. Netanyahu has been criticised for ignoring experienced military leaders while courting far-right coalition partners. The new government promised to change the "strategic reality" of dealing with Hamas.

Nearly 500 people were killed in an Israeli air attack on the Al-Ahli Arab Hospital in the besieged Gaza Strip on October 17, by far the highest death toll of any single incident in Gaza during the current war between Israel and Hamas. The health ministry in Gaza said the blast at the hos-



pital was caused by an Israeli air raid. Israel attributed the explosion to a misfired rocket launched by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) armed group. The PIJ denied the allegation.

As of October 26, 2023, over 6,000 Palestinians were killed and over 19,000 wounded. In the occupied West Bank, over 100 Palestinians were killed and over 1,800 wounded in violence and Israeli raids since Oct. 7. More than 1,400 people in Israel were killed, according to Israeli officials, mostly civilians who died in the initial Hamas rampage. In addition, 222 people including foreigners were believed captured by Hamas during the incursion and taken into Gaza.



# Nobel Prizes 2023

## Physiology or Medicine

Katalin Karikó and Drew Weissman for their pioneering work in mRNA technology, instrumental in COVID-19 vaccine development. Through their ground-



**Katalin Karikó**

**Drew Weissman**

breaking findings, which have fundamentally changed our understanding of how mRNA interacts with our immune system, the laureates contributed to the unprecedented rate of vaccine development during the pandemic that began in early 2020.

## Physics

Pierre Agostini, Ferenc Krausz, and Anne L'Huillier for their groundbreaking exper-



**Pierre Agostini**



**Ferenc Krausz**

imental techniques generating attosecond pulses of light, enabling profound studies of electron dynamics in matter, especially in atoms and molecules.



**Anne L'Huillier**

Their experiments have given humanity new tools for exploring the world of electrons inside atoms and molecules. They have demonstrated a way to create extremely short pulses of light that can be used to measure the rapid processes in which electrons move or change energy.

## Chemistry

Moungi G Bawendi, Louis E Brus, and Alexei I Ekimov for their discovery and



**Moungi G Bawendi**



**Louis E Brus**



**Alexei I Ekimov**

synthesis of quantum dots, nanoparticles so tiny that their size determines their properties. These smallest components of nanotechnology now spread their light from televisions and LED lamps, and can also guide surgeons when they remove tumour tissue, among many other things. Quantum dots are thus bringing the greatest benefit to humankind. Researchers believe that in the future they could contribute to flexible electronics, tiny sensors, thinner solar cells and encrypted quantum communication.

## Literature

Norwegian author Jon Fosse received the Nobel Prize in Literature for his in-





## CURRENT AFFAIRS

novative plays and prose, giving voice to the unspoken in a diverse body of work that spans genres, including plays, novels, poetry, essays, children's books, and translations.



Jon Fosse

Born in 1959 in the Norwegian coastal town of Haugesund, Jon Fosse is considered one of the most important contemporary European writers. Fosse published his first novel, *Red, Black*, in 1983. After his first play, whose English title is *And We'll Never Be Parted*, was published in 1994, the prolific author went on to write some 40 theatrical pieces.

His international breakthrough as a playwright came with the 1999 staging of *Someone Is Going to Come* by late French theatre director Claude Regy. The play centers on a man and a woman who move to a run-down house in the middle of nowhere to be alone, but quickly become paranoid that "someone is going to come", sparking hidden jealousies within the couple.

Fosse's magnum opus is his *Septology*, published in three volumes from 2019-2021 under the titles *The Other Name*, *I Is Another*, and *A New Name*. Through a single-sentence monologue of an elderly artist talking to himself, the 1,250-page prose work offers a bleak but ecstatic reflection on art and God.

### Peace

The Nobel Peace Prize for 2023 was awarded to Iranian activist Narges Mohammadi for her relentless fight against the oppression of women in Iran and her unwavering commitment to promoting human rights and freedom. Despite facing personal hardships, including

numerous arrests and convictions, Mohammadi continues her courageous struggle, said the statement announcing her award.



Narges Mohammadi

It's worth noting that the Nobel Peace Prize differs in that it is selected by the Norwegian Nobel Committee and announced in Oslo, while the other Nobel Prizes are revealed in Stockholm.

### Economic Science

The award for economic science was awarded to Claudia Goldin, a Harvard professor, for research that uncovered the reasons for differences in labour force participation and earnings for women. She is the third woman to win the economics Nobel.



Claudia Goldin

Dr. Goldin, 77, has long been a trailblazer in the field — she was the first woman to be offered tenure in Harvard's economics department, in 1989. Her wide-ranging work has delved into the causes of the gender wage gap, the evolution of women's participation in the job market over the past 200 years, and the implications for the future of the labour force.

Dr. Goldin's research on female employment showed that employment among married women decreased in the 1800s, as the economy moved away from agriculture and toward industry. Women's participation then increased in the 1900s, as the service sector began to expand as a part of the economy.



## Newsmakers - India

### M M Keeravani

M M Keeravani won the Oscar award for the best original song for S Rajamouli's film *RRR* on March 12, 2023. Keeravani won the Oscar for the song 'Naatu, Naatu' written by lyricist Chandrabose for the Telugu film *RRR* that was directed by Rajamouli. Besides an Oscar, 'Naatu Naatu' has won a Golden Globe, a Critics Choice Award, and a Hollywood Critics Association Film Award. Known to Hindi film music lovers as M.M. Kreem and Maragathamani to Tamil listeners, Keeravani's strongest collaboration has been with his cousin and director S.S. Rajamouli. Their partnership for Telugu cinema began with Rajamouli's debut feature film *Student No. 1* (2001), which starred NTR Jr. Keeravani's steady collaboration with Rajamouli resulted in chartbuster albums for several films such as *Magadheera*, *Eega* and *Baahubali* and *RRR*. Much before this collaboration, it was Ram Gopal Varma's 1991 film *Kshana Kshanam* which made Keeravani a popular name in Telugu cinema.



M M Keeravani

### BVR Subrahmanyam

The government on February 20, 2023 appointed former Commerce Secretary BVR Subrahmanyam as the new chief executive officer (CEO) of NITI Aayog for two years. Subrahmanyam succeeded Parameswaran Iyer who joined



BVR Subrahmanyam

World Bank as executive director in Washington DC.

Subrahmanyam, a 1987 batch IAS officer of Chhattisgarh cadre, retired as commerce secretary in September 2022. During his year-long stint at the department of commerce, Subrahmanyam played a key role in strategising the road map to a record \$422 billion merchandise exports, as the economy struggled to get out of the post-Covid slump in 2022.

He also steered at least half a dozen free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations. During his tenure in the commerce department, India signed two trade deals – with the United Arab Emirates, and Australia.

### Abhilash Tomy

On April 29, 2023, Commander (retd) Abhilash Tomy KC, NM, came second in the Golden Globe Race 2022 and created history by becoming the first Indian to secure a podium



Abhilash Tomy

finish in a solo, unassisted round-the-world sailing race. He set out from the French port of Les Sables d'Olonne on September 4, 2022, in a boat (the Rustler 36) designed in 1980, and sailed south of the five great capes using technology and tools available only in 1968. The 44-year-old is the first Indian and Asian to participate in and finish the nearly 250-day-long race, which saw him navigate unpredictable weather, treacherous seas, and immense isolation. Abhilash completed the GGR in 236 days, 14 hours, 46 minutes, 34 seconds on April 29.



## Newsmakers - World

### Kevin McCarthy

Republican Kevin McCarthy was elected Speaker of the US House of Representatives on January 7, 2023 in one of the most keenly fought contests in modern US history. The post of the House Speaker is constitutionally the third most important post in the United States after that of the President and the Vice-President. McCarthy was elected only after agreeing to a demand by hardliners that any lawmaker be able to call for his removal at any time. That sharply cut the power he held when trying to pass legislation on critical issues including funding the government, addressing the nation's looming debt ceiling and other crises that arose.

Kevin McCarthy's term as speaker was short-lived as a handful of Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives on October 3, 2023 ousted him after he relied on Democratic votes to help pass a bill on September 30 to avoid a partial government shutdown. The 216-to-210 vote marked the first time in history that the House removed its leader, with eight Republicans voting with 208 Democrats to remove McCarthy.

### Michelle Yeoh

Michelle Yeoh won best actress at the 95th Academy Awards on March 12, becoming the first woman of Asian descent to win the award. She won the award for her role as a beleaguered wife, mother and laundromat owner whose life is turned upside down when she is



Kevin McCarthy

thrown into multiple parallel universes in A24's genre-bending hit *Everything, Everywhere All at Once*. This was her first Oscar nomination and win after a venerated career that toggled between action-heavy roles (*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*) and performances of regal self-containment (*Crazy Rich Asians*). She beat out Andrea Riseborough (*To Leslie*), Cate Blanchett (*Tar*), Michelle Williams (*The Fabelmans*) and Ana de Armas (*Blonde*).

Yeoh is the fifth person of Asian descent to win an Oscar in an acting category and the first to win in a lead

acting category. Merle Oberon, a mixed-raced actress born in India who came up in the Golden Age of Hollywood, is the first woman of Asian descent to receive an Oscar nomination, for 1935's *The Dark Angel*. But fears of the industry ostracizing her led her to conceal her heritage for a great deal of her career.

The last woman of colour to win the Oscar for Leading Actress was Halle Berry in 2002, for *Monster's Ball*.

### Kirsten Neuschäfer

Kirsten Neuschäfer of South Africa won the Golden Globe Race on April 27, 2023, becoming the first woman to win a solo round-the-world race. She finished with an official time of 233 days, 20 hours, 43 minutes and 47 seconds in her boat *Minnehaha*. The race required participants to leave Les Sables-d'Olonne, France on Sept. 4, 2022 and sail nonstop around the world via the world's great



Michelle Yeoh



nonstop around the world via the world's great capes in the Southern Hemisphere, then return to Les Sables-d'Olonne. Neuschäfer and 15 other competitors, who were all men, set off from Les Sables-d'Olonne, France on September 4, 2022, with the aim of making it around the world via the five Great Capes before returning to the coastal town in the west of France. Entrants race solo, non-stop, and in boats that are reminiscent of the 'Golden Age' of solo sailing -- the yachts have to be designed before 1988 and are without electronic instruments or autopilots.



Kirsten Neuschäfer

The race is based on the 1968-69 Sunday Times Golden Globe Race which saw Sir Robin Knox-Johnston become the first person to circumnavigate the globe, sailing solo on his boat Suhaili without stopping.

### Loreen

Loreen of Sweden made history as the first woman, and only the second person, to win the Eurovision Song Contest twice when she won the contest in Liverpool on 13 May 2023 with her song "Tattoo". The only other person to win the Eurovision Song Contest



Loreen

twice is Johnny Logan, who won in 1980 with "What's Another Year" and again in 1987 with "Hold Me Now". Loreen whose real name is Lorine Zineb Nora Talhaoui had won the competition in 2012. She scored a total of 583 points after the public and jury votes were combined, narrowly beating Finland's Kaarija

who scored 526. The win also tied her native Sweden with Ireland as the nation with the most wins, with seven apiece. It also means the contest will take place in the home nation of Eurovision legends Abba on the 50th anniversary of their win in 1974.

Eurovision is an annual contest which started in 1956 with just seven countries competing. But now it's evolved into a 43-country-strong contest, held over a week with two semi finals, which is watched by an estimated global audience of 180 million. In 2023, for the first time, the rest of the world was allowed to vote, too.

### Kami Rita

Veteran Sherpa guide Kami Rita scaled Mount Everest for the 28th time on 23 May 2023, beating his own record set on 17 May 2023. His latest climb came a day after fellow Sherpa guide Pasang Dawa matched his record of 27 trips to the summit. The race for the title began with Pasang Dawa climbing the peak for the 26th time on May 14, equaling Kami Rita's previous record. Kami Rita went on to the peak three days later for the 27th time.



Kami Rita

Kami Rita first summited Everest in 1994 and has been making the trip nearly every year since. He is one of many Sherpa guides whose expertise and skills are vital to the safety and success each year of foreign climbers who seek to stand on top of the mountain.

### Hari Budha Magar

Hari Budha Magar, 43, became the first double above-the-knee amputee to summit the world's tallest mountain. The





17, exactly 13 years since his legs were destroyed by an IED in Afghanistan in 2010. But he had to wait until May 19 to reach the summit as he was forced to spend 18 days waiting at the Everest base camp for the weather to clear.



**Hari Budha Magar**

### **Barbara Kingsolver**

Barbara Kingsolver won the 2023 Women's prize for fiction, making her the first person to win the award twice in its 28-year history. Kingsolver was chosen as the winner for her Pulitzer prize-winning novel *Demon Copperhead*, which is set in the Appalachian mountains in Virginia in the US, and is a reimagining of Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. It follows the title character as he navigates foster care, labour exploitation, addiction and more in a culture that neglects rural communities. The writer previously won the prize in 2010 for *The Lacuna*. She was also shortlisted in 2013 for *Flight Behaviour*. The Women's prize, worth £30,000, is awarded for the best full-length novel of the year written by a woman and published in the UK.



**Barbara Kingsolver**

### **Yevgeny Prigozhin**

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the founder of the Wagner private mercenary group, died when his plane fell out of the sky on August 24, 2023. The group has been a key piece of Russia's strategy in Ukraine, with Wagner forces being used to hold cities like Bakhmut. Prigozhin had sharp-

ly criticized Russian military leaders. Tension between Russia's defense ministry and Wagner group escalated dramatically when Prigozhin alleged that Russian forces had attacked



**Yevgeny Prigozhin**

Wagner camps in eastern Ukraine, killing dozens of his men. Prigozhin issued video taped remarks that appeared to call for a rebellion against Russian military leadership, but he was characteristically vague in defining his plans. Prigozhin's Wagner forces left Ukraine and marched into Russia on June 23 seizing control of the Russian military headquarters for the southern region in Rostov-on-Don, which oversees the fighting in Ukraine. His group started marching towards Moscow, shooting down military aircraft and killing Russian servicemen. But it was abruptly halted when a deal was brokered by Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko.

### **Luis Rubiales**

Spanish football federation chief Luis Rubiales quit his post on September 10, 2023 after three weeks of scandal over allegations he gave an unsolicited kiss to a player



**Luis Rubiales**

on the women's national team as they celebrated their World Cup victory. His kiss on player Jenni Hermoso after the World Cup win in Sydney on August 20 had caused outrage among players, government officials and many in the wider Spanish society and raised questions over sexism in sport.



## Records of the Year

### Biggest Art Sale in History

Dozens of works by artists including Paul Cézanne and Vincent van Gogh fetched



Van Gogh's *Verger avec cyprès* (Orchard with Cypresses)

a total of \$1.5bn on November 9, 2022 at an auction of the late Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen's vast collection of paintings and sculpture. The total represented the highest amount ever collected at a single art auction, according to the auction house, Christie's in New York. Proceeds are for philanthropic causes in accordance with the wishes of Allen, who died in 2018. The auction eclipsed the \$922m achieved by the sale of the Macklowe collection in May, after the divorce of the property tycoon Harry Macklowe from his wife, Linda.

Other notable sales included the highest price ever for a van Gogh painting. The artist's *Verger avec cyprès* sold for \$117.2m. Paul Gauguin's 1899 oil on burlap *Maternité II* fetched \$105.7m.

Paintings by Georgia O'Keeffe, Claude Monet, David Hockney, Andrew Wyeth and Pablo Picasso also sold, along with sculptures by Alexander Calder and Max Ernst. A 1905 print of a photograph by Edward Steichen, *The Flatiron*, sold for \$11.8m, a record for a Steichen work

and nearly four times Christie's highest estimate.

### 'Longest Double Decker Viaduct' in Metro Category

The Nagpur metro rail project in Maharashtra achieved the Guinness Book of World Record's recognition for building the longest double-decker viaduct with an elevated highway, and Metro Rail supported on a single-column pier. The 3.1 Km long double-decker viaduct was built jointly on Nagpur's Wadha road by Maha Metro and NHAI. The double-decker viaduct made possible a three-layered transport corridor with the first layer occupied by pre-existing highway, the

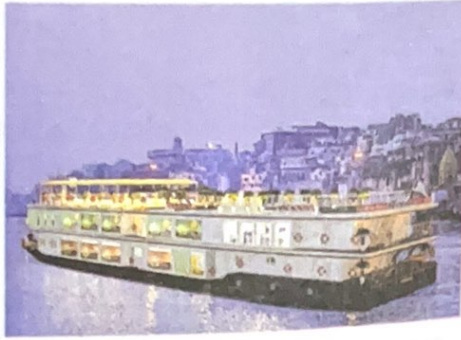


second layer by a flyover highway, and the third layer by Nagpur metro rail. The flyover highway is built at the height of nine metres, and the metro at 20 metres.

### The World's Longest River Cruise

The world's longest river cruise—Ganga Vilas—from Varanasi to Dibrugarh via Bangladesh was flagged off on January 13 by PM Narendra Modi. The cruise, with a capacity of 80 passengers, is a luxury river cruise vessel with 18 suites and all other associated facilities. The cruise ship covers 3200 kilometres in 50 days





**Ganga Vilas**

and passes 27 river systems in Bangladesh and India. Tourists have the chance to explore more than 50 noteworthy architectural sites, including world heritage sites.

The Ganga Vilas Cruise departs from Varanasi and travels through Buxar, Ramnagar, and Ghazipur before arriving in Patna on the eighth day. The cruise would depart from Patna for Kolkata and arrive at the capital of West Bengal on day 20 after travelling through Farakka and Murshidabad. It will leave for Dhaka and cross into Bangladesh the following day. It will spend the next 15 days in the territorial seas. It will then sail through Sibsagar and return to India through Guwahati before arriving at its final destination of Dibrugarh.

### Most Grammy Wins of all Time

Beyoncé has broken the record for the most Grammy wins of all time, with 32, after earning four awards from the Recording Academy in the 2023 proceedings. The award that put her over the top was a win for best dance/electronic album for "Renaissance."

Before the 2023



**Beyoncé**

Grammys, the record for most Grammy wins was held by the 31 claimed by classical music figure Georg Solti — a benchmark set all the way back in 1997 when he earned his final prize, for best opera recording. Solti died that same year.

Beyoncé led the 2023 nominations with nine, putting her in a tie for all-time Grammy nominations with her husband, Jay-Z — 88 each. Beyoncé's tally includes her pre-solo work as a member of Destiny's Child. Prior to her 2023 Grammy awards, she had won 28 Grammys, already making her the most awarded female artist in the awards' history.

### The World's Longest Railway Platform

Indian Railways' South Western Railway(SWR) zone's Hubballi has its name



registered in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for having the world's longest railway platform at Shri Siddharoodha Swamiji station. It is a 1507 m long platform that has been built at a cost of about ₹20 crore, and is a part of remodelling of the Hubballi yard and to facilitate running of additional trains in future. The longest railway platform construction was part of a remodeling project of the railway yard at Hubballi Railway Station for better operational efficiency, train operations safety and better passenger amenities and comfort.