

WEEKLY CURRENT AFFAIRS

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28/07/24  
TO  
03/08/24

# CURRENT AFFAIRS



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# Employment Schemes and Issues in India

## Why in News?

The Union Budget for 2024-25 emphasized employment as a key priority, with significant measures announced to address unemployment and generate formal jobs.

## Current State of Employment in India

- **Economic Survey Insights:**
  - India's workforce was estimated at 56.5 crore in 2022-23.
  - Employment distribution: 45% in agriculture, 11.4% in manufacturing, 28.9% in services, and 13% in construction.
  - Unemployment rate stood at 3.2% in the same period.
- **Underemployment and Unemployment Rates:**
  - Many job seekers continue to work in informal sectors.

Urban unemployment for March 2024 was at 6.7%, while youth unemployment was at 10%.

Proportion of regular salaried workers dropped from 22.8% in 2017-18 to 20.9% over five years. Key Employment Schemes in the 2024-25 Budget

- **First Scheme:** Incentivizes hiring of first-time employees with a wage incentive of up to ₹15,000.
- **Second Scheme:** Supports wage subsidies for first-time employees, providing a maximum incentive of 24% of ₹25,000 monthly wage for four years.
- **Third Scheme:** Offers a ₹3,000 monthly EPFO contribution for new workers.
- **Fourth Scheme:** Boosts skilling efforts through Industrial Training Institutes, benefiting 20 lakh students.
- **Fifth Scheme:** Focuses on internships in top companies with a ₹5,000 monthly allowance.

## Analysis of Schemes and Their Impact

- **Expert Opinions:**
  - Schemes aim to encourage hiring by reducing employer costs but may not address broader issues.
  - Critics highlight the need for a holistic approach including low wage economy, inadequate skills, and investment gaps.

- Implementation Challenges:
  - Small employers may find it difficult to absorb the costs despite incentives.
  - Manufacturing sector requires a significant number of employees but has high minimum wage requirements.

## Stagnation of Wages and Economic Challenges

- Wage Costs: Noted as a deterrent for employers to hire new workers.
- Economic Factors: Lack of demand, low consumption, and insufficient investment cited as critical issues.
- Policy Measures: Suggested to target specific sectors, such as the MSME sector, for more substantial impact.

### Need for Focus on MSME Sector

- MSME Sector Importance:
  - Represents a significant part of India's economy.
  - Potential to generate a large number of formal jobs if properly incentivized.
- Policy Recommendations:
  - Tailored schemes to address unique challenges of the MSME sector.
  - Support in terms of credit, technology, and market access.

## Conclusion

The employment measures announced in the 2024-25 budget reflect a focused attempt to generate formal employment through various incentives. However, the success of these schemes will depend on their effective implementation and addressing broader economic issues to create a sustainable and inclusive job market.



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# Natural Farming in India



## ***Why in news?***

The Union Budget for 2024-25 introduced significant measures to promote natural farming across India, targeting one crore farmers to transition to chemical-free agriculture over the next two years.

### Mission and Objectives

National Mission on Natural Farming (NMNF):

Aim: Encourage farmers to adopt chemical-free farming.

Strategy: Implementation through scientific institutions and gram panchayats.

Bio-input Resource Centers: 10,000 centers to be established for support.

### What is Natural Farming?

#### Definition and Practices:

Natural farming eschews the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides,

emphasizing traditional practices such as on-farm biomass recycling, biomass mulching, the use of cow dung and urine formulations, and on-farm botanical concoctions. These methods aim to enhance soil fertility, improve environmental health, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, thereby promoting a sustainable and eco-friendly approach to agriculture.

## **Benefits of Natural Farming**

- ***Sustainability:***

Promotes a natural nutrient cycling system.

Enhances organic matter in the soil.

- ***Diversified Farming System:***

Integrates crops, trees, and livestock.

Utilizes functional biodiversity.

- ***Environmental Impact:***

Restores soil fertility.



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Reduces dependency on chemical inputs.

## **Challenges and Concerns**

- ***Agricultural Expert Opinions:***

Skepticism about large-scale transition to natural farming.

India's huge population and food security concerns.

Findings from studies such as the 'Zero Budget Natural Farming' (ZBNF) raise concerns about yield sustainability and profitability.

## **Lessons from Sri Lanka**

### ***Case Study:***

Sri Lanka's transition to natural farming faced significant challenges.

Banned chemical fertilizers abruptly, leading to:

Severe economic and political repercussions.

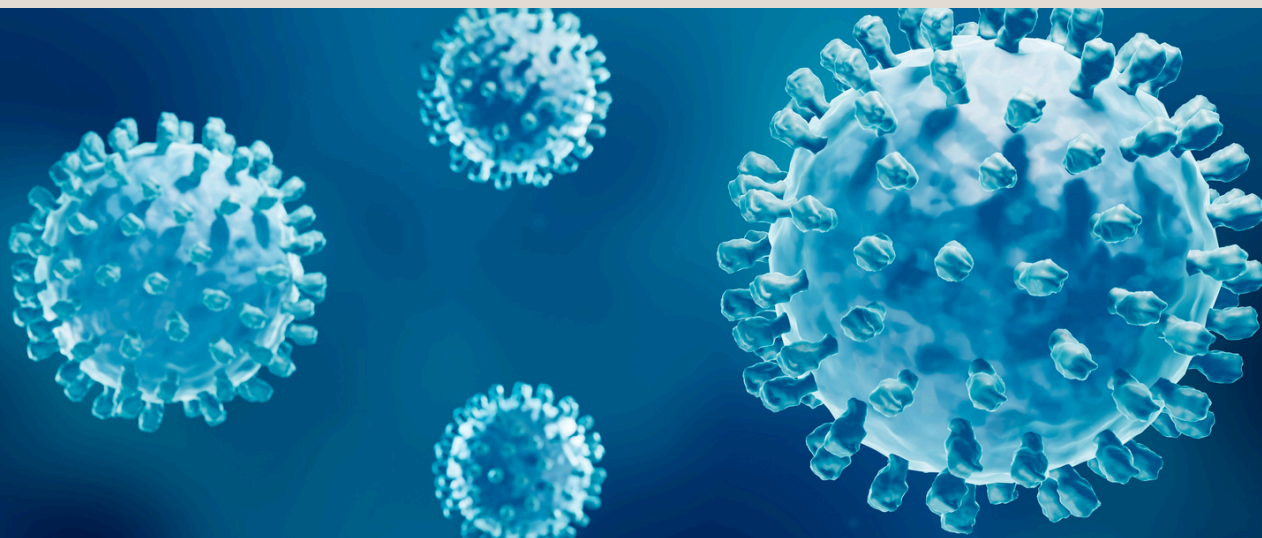
A 59% decline in rice yields and a 32% decline in tea yields.

Resulted in food security risks and civil unrest.

## **Conclusion**

Natural farming presents a promising yet challenging avenue for sustainable agriculture in India. Its success will depend on careful implementation, scientific support, and addressing economic and food security concerns. Lessons from international examples like Sri Lanka underscore the need for a balanced and informed approach.

# Decentralized Testing and Sequencing in Kerala: A UPSC Perspective



## Why in News?

On July 20, the Thiruvananthapuram-based Institute of Advanced Virology (IAV) successfully conducted a rapid test for the Nipah virus, marking a significant shift from centralized testing. This advancement facilitated quicker public health responses in Kerala.

Background

- **Previous Testing Protocol:**

- In past Nipah virus outbreaks in Kerala (2018, 2019, 2021, 2023), samples were sent exclusively to the National Institute of Virology (NIV) in Pune.
- Delays were common due to the centralized nature of testing, resulting in slower public health responses.

## Decentralized Testing Initiative

- **Implementation:**

- In 2022, the IAV in Thiruvananthapuram was equipped to test Nipah virus samples locally.
- On July 20, 2024, IAV tested samples in four hours and reported results to the State government by 9 am, with NIV confirmation arriving in the evening.

## Impact and Advantages

- **Speed and Efficiency:**

- The local testing reduced the time needed to initiate public health responses.
- Kerala was able to swiftly implement measures to prevent the virus spread.



- **Enhanced Capabilities:**

- IAV's advanced facilities include BSL-3 laboratories capable of testing various viruses, including Nipah, Zika, Chikungunya, and Influenza.

## ***Case Study: Recent Nipah Outbreak***

- **Testing and Response:**

- The latest outbreak saw IAV testing samples locally, with results in four hours.
- NIV's confirmation followed, but the initial quick response was crucial.

- **Public Health Measures:**

- Immediate action was taken to contain the virus spread.
- Isolation wards and other containment measures were promptly implemented.

## **Genome Sequencing Efforts**

- **Current Initiatives:**

- IAV is conducting whole genome sequencing of the Nipah virus to study its relatedness to previous strains.
- The goal is to make genome data publicly accessible for research and public health planning.

## ***Broader Implications***

- **Decentralized Model:**

- Similar decentralization efforts are underway in Gujarat and other states to improve response times for emerging pathogens.
- Rapid testing and local capacity building are seen as vital for effective disease control.

## **Conclusion**

The move towards decentralized testing and sequencing, exemplified by Kerala's recent actions, highlights the importance of local capabilities in managing viral outbreaks. This approach allows for faster responses, better containment, and improved public health outcomes, setting a precedent for other regions to follow.

# Manu's historic bronze starts India's medal race

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## Emotional turnaround from Tokyo 2020

Three years ago, Manu Bhaker broke down in tears after a disappointing performance at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, where she failed to win a medal in three events. On Sunday, the 22-year-old experienced a contrasting emotional moment at the Paris 2024 Olympics.



## Historic feat in Chateauroux

Competing in the women's 10m air pistol event, Bhaker won the bronze medal, India's first medal at the Games, becoming the first Indian woman shooter to achieve the feat.

## Consistent performance in the final

Bhaker entered the final in third place and maintained a strong performance throughout, with only 7 of her 22 shots hitting the '9' ring. She was in contention for the silver medal until her final shot, where she was beaten by South Korea's Kim Yeji by just 0.1 points. South Korea's Hee Jin Oh won the gold medal.

## Upcoming events

Bhaker's Olympic journey continues as she is set to compete in the women's 10m pistol mixed team event on Monday and the women's 25m pistol events later in the competition.



# CULTURE MINISTRY TO ORGANIZE THREE-DAY MUSEUM CONFERENCE IN DELHI



## Collaboration for a grand vision

Next week, curators, museum administrators and domain experts will gather in Delhi for a three-day conference to promote collaboration between the Centre and states for the 'Epochal Bharat Rashtriya Sangrahalaya' project.

## Event details

Organized by the Culture Ministry, the State Museum Conference will be held from August 1 to 3 at Bharat Mandapam, currently the venue for the 46th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee.

## World's largest museum

The proposed Epochal Bharat Rashtriya Sangrahalaya will have eight thematic sections showcasing 5,000 years of India's history. Spread over 1,54,000 square meters in the capital's North Block and South Block, it will be the world's largest museum.

## Expert Master Classes

According to officials, the conference will include master classes with experts from India and abroad, covering topics such as conservation, fine art handling, curation and global best practices in museum management.

# ITALY AND CHINA SIGN 3-YEAR ACTION PLAN

## **Renewed cooperation**

Italy and China have signed a three-year action plan to implement previous agreements and explore new avenues of cooperation.

The announcement was made by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni during her official visit to Beijing.

## **Addressing trade concerns**

Ms Meloni's visit is aimed at resetting ties with China amid concerns over a possible trade war with the European Union, while still seeking Chinese investments, especially in the auto manufacturing sector.

During his meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, Meloni said, "We have a lot of work ahead and I believe this effort can be beneficial in such a complex global stage and also important at the multilateral level."



## **After Belt and Road Initiative**

The visit comes after Italy's recent decision to withdraw from China's Belt and Road Initiative, a flagship policy of Chinese leader Xi Jinping designed to develop global infrastructure, boost trade and strengthen China's international ties.



# INDIAN SCIENTISTS ACHIEVE UNPRECEDENTED BREAKTHROUGH IN GENE-EDITING




## **Increased precision and efficiency**

Scientists at CSIR-Institute of Genomics and Integrative Biology (IGIB) in New Delhi have created a more precise and efficient genome-editing system than existing CRISPR-based technologies.

This new system uses an improved version of FnCas9, an enzyme derived from *Francisella novicida* bacteria, engineered to increase binding affinity and reduce off-target effects.

## **Wide applications and testing**

The improved FnCas9 demonstrated higher DNA cutting rates and better targeting in laboratory tests, including in human kidney and eye cells.



It successfully corrected the genetic mutation that causes Leber congenital amaurosis type 2, an inherited form of blindness, showing significant therapeutic potential.

## **Future development and access**

Researchers are optimizing delivery methods and obtaining patents in India to develop affordable gene therapies. This advancement makes India a leader in precision gene editing, making advanced treatments more accessible, especially in low- and middle-income countries.



# ARE STATES ALLOWED TO TAX MINING ACTIVITIES?



## Landmark judgment

On July 25, the Supreme Court affirmed that states have the authority to tax minerals in addition to the royalty that the Centre has to pay.

The landmark judgment, delivered by an 8:1 majority led by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, upholds federalism by making it clear that the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957, does not restrict the state's powers to tax mineral activities.

## Royalty vs tax

The judgment defines royalty not as a tax but as a contractual payment for mineral extraction.

The court highlighted that while states can tax mineral rights under the State List, it does not conflict with the Centre's regulatory authority under the Union List.

The dissenting opinion warned that additional state taxes could disrupt mineral markets and impede resource development.

## Future implications

The court will decide on July 31 whether to apply the ruling retroactively, which could affect the financial benefits of states with existing local mineral taxes.

# DEFENCE ACQUISITION COUNCIL APPROVES AMENDMENT TO MQ-9B UAV DEAL WITH US NAVY



## MQ-9B UAV DEAL APPROVED

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, has approved amendments to the deal for procurement of 31 MQ - 9B High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE) Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) from General Atomics, US.

The amendments, which focus on indigenous content and related aspects, are in line with the Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) granted earlier.

## Procurement process and timeline

The US has completed its work by submitting a letter of offer and acceptance to India in March. India will now have to complete its internal processes and get the approval of the Cabinet Committee on Security before finalizing the deal.

The MQ - 9B and GE - 414 jet engine deal is expected to be concluded during the US President's visit to India for the Quad Leaders Summit in December.

## Additional Approvals

The DAC also approved Advanced Land Navigation System (ALNS) for armored fighting vehicles and AoN for 22 interceptor boats for the Coast Guard.

The ALNS procured from Bharat Electronics Limited will enhance navigation accuracy while the new interceptor boats will strengthen coastal surveillance and patrol capabilities.



# MANU COMPLETES THE SET AND WINS ANOTHER BRONZE WITH SARABJOT.



Sarabjot Singh and Manu Bhaker, two history-makers, celebrate their bronze in the mixed team 10m air pistol event at the Paris Olympics on Tuesday at the Chateauroux shooting range.

After winning a bronze in the 10m air pistol mixed team event on Tuesday, Manu Bhaker will go down in Indian sporting history as the first athlete to win multiple medals at an Olympic Games. Her achievement would also be documented in history books as being made possible by her excellent teammate Sarabjot Singh.

After defeating South Korea 16–10, Manu would join her teammate Sarabjot on the podium in a matter of minutes. She would be wearing her second medal from the Games, a shiny bronze one, around her neck. With her place in history assured, she would be taking a photo with the gold and silver medal winner. However, she was attempting to hide as best she could during this stoppage by positioning herself to the left of the firing line. The computerized scoreboard displayed an 8.3, which was the lowest the 22-year-old had shot in the whole tournament thus far.

Points are awarded in mixed team competitions. Each team has two shooters who each get one shot; the team with the better overall score wins two points. Whoever reaches 16 points wins.

She wasn't only keeping India in the competition on Tuesday morning at Chateauroux's finals range; she was also well ahead of a Korean duo that featured Oh Ye Jin, who had won the women's solo title with a world record two days prior.

## **Wonderful beginning**

Manu had surpassed Sarabjot in five of the seven series, and in the sixth, they were tied. India has won five series to South Korea's two, leading 10 to 4. This was largely because of her efforts.

Sarabjot almost missed qualifying for his individual event final, but Manu was entering the final full of confidence from his previous medal victory.

However, she stumbled as severely as she possibly could, forcing a timeout just when it appeared that Manu would help the Indians cruise to win. Now was Sarabjot's moment to shine, and he did so brilliantly.

On his very next try, he scored his best point of the game, a 10.5. It increased Manu's lead over the Koreans and supported her score of 10.0, which was her second-lowest of the competition thus far. The Koreans trimmed the deficit to make it 14-10 after the Indians won the following series to take a 14-6 lead.

Manu shot a 9.4, which was another poor effort. Most of the time, it ought to have been sufficient to provide room for the Koreans to advance. However, they also created a subpar series. All Sarabjot needed to do was make another bad shot, and his scorecard appeared to be full of them. But he came through with a 10.2 when it counted most. Although it's not his best score, it's still quite sufficient.

Even though he delivered the game-winning blow, Sarabjot refuses to accept the credit for the victory.

He'll talk about how the contest was hazy but express his gratitude for Manu and him accomplishing enough. "I don't recall much of the game, but I do recall what we both did."

With the world having just witnessed the hottest day on record, extended heat waves are becoming more frequent due to climate change. Not only do these harsh circumstances directly endanger our health, but they also have an adverse effect on pharmaceuticals. Heat has a significant impact on individuals taking medications as well as the effectiveness of such treatments, thus it must be carefully considered.

# HEAT AND MEDICINE: A HAZARDOUS MIXTURE



Drugs used to treat a variety of common ailments can make a patient more sensitive to heat by preventing the body from responding normally to high temperatures, including sweating and blood flow control. Sweating is an essential part of the body's cooling process. In the event that this capacity is impaired, the body may quickly build up hazardous heat levels, which may result in heat stroke or other heat-related ailments.

Furthermore, if pharmaceuticals are not stored within a designated temperature range, excessive temperatures can hasten the deterioration of almost all types of medication, including capsules, sprays, tablets, and syrups. The deterioration of pharmaceuticals by heat may lead to diminished efficacy or potentially detrimental consequences, contingent on an individual's health status, dosage, and surrounding circumstances.



## Substances that Increase Your Sensitivity to Heat

Many medications can make a person more sensitive to heat:

### **Blood pressure and heart failure medication:**

ACE Inhibitors: These drugs lessen thirst, which increases the risk of dehydration.

Calcium channel blockers: They may cause mineral imbalances that exacerbate the body's inability to regulate temperature.

## Guidelines for Medications Storage

Extreme temperatures, including both hot and cold, can have a significant impact on a drug's effectiveness. Most medications should preferably be stored between 15 and 25 degrees Celsius in a cool, dry place away from the sun, while certain medications can be stored at temperatures as high as 30 degrees Celsius. Manufacturer websites typically offer detailed storage guidelines. It is challenging to forecast the extent of deterioration caused by elevated temperatures, as each medicine exhibits unique reactions.

It is never advisable to keep prescription drugs in hot cars or mailboxes for a long time. The stability and efficacy of medications can be adversely affected by excessive heat, according to Amy Bachyrycz, a pharmacy faculty member at the University of New Mexico. This necessitates careful storage practices.

It is advised that during hot weather, patients discuss any potential adjustments to drug regimes or dosages with their physicians. We can guarantee that medications continue to function and lessen the risks related to heat sensitivity by taking preventative measures.

In conclusion, handling medications during heat waves requires heightened awareness and caution. Patients who are aware of the risks and follow storage guidelines can protect their health and ensure that their medicines continue to function in excessively hot conditions..

# THE DIFFERENT ARMED GROUPS OF MYANMAR

The military has lost control of large parts of the country. Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) and resistance groups such as the People's Defence Forces (PDFs) have made considerable gains.

Over the years, China has extended support to EAOs as well as the military, which ensured that Myanmar remained a country with fragmented sovereignty.

India can share its experiences and toolkit on federalism, such as institutional frameworks, financial arrangements and special provisions stemming from agreements like the Mizoram Peace Accord.



# THE INDIAN AIR FORCE'S LARGEST MULTILATERAL EXERCISE WILL BEGIN THIS MONTH

## OVERVIEW

The Indian Air Force (IAF) is all set to conduct its largest multilateral exercise, Tarang Shakti, in two phases during August and September. The program will involve the participation of 18 countries, with 10 contributing air assets and a total of 150 aircraft from both foreign countries and the IAF.



## Participation and purpose

Air Force Vice-Chief Air Marshal 'A.P. Singh announced that the exercise aims to enhance interoperability, share best practices and showcase India's indigenous defense industry.

51 countries have been invited, of which 10 will participate with their assets and 18 will be for maintenance.

## Step description

Germany, France, Spain and the U.K. will compete in Phase-1 from August 6 to 14 in Sullur, Tamil Nadu. will participate, which will include 32 foreign aircraft. The second phase to be held in Jodhpur from September 1 - 14 will involve 27 fighter jets and other special aircraft from Australia, Bangladesh, Greece, Singapore, UAE and the US.

The Indian Air Force will deploy more than 40 aircraft in both phases, while the Indian Navy will participate in the first phase with MiG-29K fighter jets.



# THE 'ZOMBIE' PRESENT IN OUR GENES CAN ALSO HELP US DEVELOP AND FIGHT CANCER



## Widespread presence and influence

Viruses are common and have long plagued humans with infections such as the common cold. While many viral encounters are brief and mild, some can lead to serious illness, exemplified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Retroviruses and genetic integration

Unlike most viruses, retroviruses can integrate their RNA genome into the host's DNA using an enzyme called reverse transcriptase. This unique ability, discovered by Howard Temin and David Baltimore in 1971, has important implications for genetic research.

## Historical achievements

Key discoveries include the identification of cancer-causing retroviruses by Olof Bang and Ludwig Gross and in 1980 by Robert C. Gallo. Includes the isolation of the first human retrovirus, HTLV, by Gallo. In 1983, François Barre-Sinoussy and Luc Montagnier discovered HIV, which earned them the Nobel Prize.

## Endogenous retrovirus (ERV)

Retroviruses that integrate into germ cells form ERVs, which are inherited. Comprising about 8% of the human genome, these elements have influenced development, such as placental development and cell differentiation.

## **Future information**

Ongoing research on ERVs is expected to reveal more about their role in human biology, potentially leading to medical advances in regenerative medicine, cancer treatment, and personalized medicine.

# LTCG UPON TERMINATION OF LISTING



## FINANCE MINISTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's proposal to remove indexation for calculation of Long Term Capital Gains (LTCG) tax in the Union Budget has received little enthusiasm.

Indexation allows taxpayers to tax real profits, not just nominal profits increased by normal price increases.

## Impact on taxpayers

A bank market study based on the RBI's house price index suggests that scrapping indexation will lead to a significant increase in LTCG tax. The study found that without indexation, taxes on properties purchased after 2010 would nearly triple.

It also noted a 'significant reduction in tax savings', particularly from FY 2016-17, using FY 2010-11 as the base year for comparison.

# SWAPNIL WINS THIRD BRONZE MEDAL FOR INDIA



Swapnil Kusale created history by winning the bronze medal in the men's 50m 3 - 3-position shooting at the Chateauroux Olympics. The feat marked India's first medal in the event.

## **Initial struggles and recovery**

Struggling initially in his first kneeling shot with a 9.6, Kusale managed to stay focused by focusing on his breathing to stay calm. By the end of the first two stages, he was in 5th place but was determined to make a mark.

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## **Standing position breakthrough**

In the decisive standing position, Kusale started with a 9.5 but bounced back with consistent shots in the 10 ring. His competitors, Jiri Privartsky and John Herman Hegg, faltered, allowing Kusale to grab the bronze medal.

## **Celebrations and legacy**

Although narrowly missing out on silver, Kusale's bronze was a great achievement. His smile as he celebrated while wrapped in the tricolour symbolised his new status as an icon in Indian sporting history.

# STATES CAN SUB-CLASSIFY SCS FOR QUOTA

A 7-judge Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud ruled by a 6:1 majority that states can sub-classify Scheduled Castes (SCs) from the Presidential List to provide preferential treatment in public employment and education.

## Ensuring substantive equality

Citing a previous 9-judge bench verdict in the *Indira Sawhney* case, Chief Justice Chandrachud said that when the social status among SC groups is not comparable, the principle of sub-classification applies to SCs to achieve substantive equality.

## Debate on creamy layer principle

The 4 judges suggested that the government should apply the creamy layer principle to SCs and STs as it does to the OBC category, to exclude affluent individuals from reservations and ensure that benefits reach the underprivileged.

## Dissenting opinion

Justice Bela Trivedi dissented, arguing that states do not have the power to modify the Presidential list of Scheduled Castes.



## Legal basis

The judgment was a response to a 2020 reference about the constitutionality of certain reservation acts and was based on Articles 15(4) and 16(5) of the Constitution, which addressed the need for inter-group equality among Scheduled Castes.

# CONTROLLING GESTATIONAL DIABETES IS CRUCIAL FOR THE FUTURE OF MOTHER AND CHILD



## Understanding and addressing GDM

GDM, characterized by glucose intolerance during pregnancy, increases the risk of type 2 diabetes in mothers and obesity and in The Delhi Declaration, a pioneering document focused on the prevention of diabetes, particularly gestational diabetes (GDM), was unveiled at the 18th Annual Conference of the Pregnancy Study Group India (DIPSI) 2024, held in New Delhi in March.

insulin resistance in their children. Early identification and management are crucial.

## Innovative screening and treatment

The Delhi Declaration promotes a government-approved single-test procedure, developed by DIPSI, for early detection of glucose intolerance.

Recommendations include medical nutrition therapy and metformin for women with high postpartum blood sugar levels to ensure euglycemia.

### **Call to action for healthcare professionals**

The manifesto urges healthcare professionals to focus on early screening at 8 weeks of pregnancy and maintaining maternal glucose levels below 110 mg/dL. It also emphasises on fetal programming to prevent NCDs in future generations.

### **Future agenda**

DIPSI 2024 aims to increase social media advocacy, improve postpartum compliance and reduce discrimination, striving for a diabetes-free generation through early prevention and intervention.



# INDIA'S PER CAPITA INCOME TO BE A QUARTER OF US LEVELS IN 75 YEARS



## Difficulties in achieving developed status

The 'World Development Report 2024' mentions Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ambition to transform India into a developed economy by 2047. The report suggests that achieving this in 50 years, as Korea did in 25 years, will be a significant challenge.

## Long road to income equality

Despite being the fastest growing major economy, India is expected to take 75 years to reach a per capita income level of a quarter of the US, according to a World Bank report.

India is one of over 100 countries, including China, that are at risk of falling into the 'middle income trap'.

## Outdated economic strategies

The World Bank criticised several middle-income countries for relying on outdated investment strategies. Chief economist Indermeet Gill warned that without a new approach, these countries risk falling behind in economic progress.

## **Middle-income trap**

Countries such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa face considerable obstacles in reaching high-income status. The report identifies a 'middle-income trap' equivalent to about 10% of U.S. GDP per capita, currently around \$8,000.

## **Need for new approach**

With 108 middle-income countries contributing more than 40% of global GDP, the World Bank has called for a new approach to address the growing need for a developing economy, with growing populations and the environmental concerns.

# FROM NO-GO ZONE TO PERMITTED AREA: NICOBAR PORT PLAN



## Great Nicobar 'Holistic Development' Project

**Project Synopsis:** The Great Nicobar Island (GNI) project is a massive infrastructure project that was started in 2021 with the goal of modernizing the southern end of the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

## Why in News

Much discussion has been sparked by the Great Nicobar "Holistic Development" Project, which is being led by the National Institute for Transforming India, or NITI Aayog.

The project was first considered to be in a no-go area, but a high-powered committee (HPC) that the National Green Tribunal (NGT) created has now declared it to be acceptable.

## Parts:

**Trans-shipment Port:** An International Container Trans-shipment Terminal (ICTT) is anticipated to support the maritime economies of the area and the world.

**Greenfield International Airport:** Encouraging international communication.

**Township Development:** Brand-new metropolitan area with potential SEZ inclusion.

**Power station:** A solar- and gas-powered 450 MVA power station.

**Strategic Location:** Situated close to the Malacca Strait, a vital sea route that links the Pacific and Indian oceans.

The project intends to make it easier for more soldiers, bigger vessels, planes, missile batteries, and personnel to be deployed. The improvement is essential for India's strategic interests because it is close to the Malacca Strait, especially in light of China's growing influence and presence in the area.

### **Environmental Impact of the Project:**

**Deforestation:** The project will result in the removal of almost 8.5 lakh trees from Great Nicobar's lush rainforests.

**Animal Displacement:** Vital habitats are under danger due to the de-notification of the Galathea Bay Wildlife Sanctuary and the designation of a "zero extent" eco-sensitive zone for Galathea National Park.

**Ecological Destruction:** The building may permanently harm the island's biodiversity, which includes endemic species like the Nicobar Megapode and leatherback turtles. The island is home to rare and fragile tropical evergreen forest habitats.



rotection of Biodiversity: The initiative runs counter to India's obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity to stop and reverse the loss of biodiversity by 2030 and to save highly ecologically significant places.

The Shompen and Nicobarese tribes, who make up the majority of the island's population, are worried about substantial cultural disturbance and displacement.

Local communities have expressed concerns and requested relocation, but have not gotten proper solutions, despite assertions that tribal interests are being protected.

In November 2022, the local communities withdrew their authorization for the project, which was required for it to be implemented because the property was a tribal reserve.

## **Legal and Technical Concerns:**

**Seismic Risks:** Due to its location on a significant fault line, Great Nicobar is vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis. No thorough risk evaluation has been carried out for these natural disasters.

**Reports That Are Not Enough:** The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) report does not comply with several Terms of Reference and does not address important environmental and social repercussions.

**Legal Challenges:** A number of permits and exemptions given under different statutes safeguarding tribal rights, forests, and coastal habitats may encounter legal challenges in tribunals and courts.

## **What made the project flagged as a no-go area before?**

**First Information:** According to the Andaman & Nicobar Coastal Management Authority, the township, port, and airport are all located within the Island Coastal Regulation Zone-IA (ICRZ-IA), which forbids port operations. The area covered by these areas is 7 sq km.

**Environmental Concerns:** Marine parks, wildlife habitats, salt marshes, turtle and bird nesting grounds, mangroves, coral reefs, sand dunes, mudflats, and ecologically sensitive zones are all included in the ICRZ-IA areas.

In ICRZ-IA, permitted activities include ecotourism pursuits such as mangrove walks and natural trails, as well as defense and strategic project-related roads and roads-on-stilts, provided they have the required permits.

## **What caused the area to be reclassified as a permitted area?**

Based on a "ground-truthing exercise" conducted by the National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM), the High-Powered Committee (HPC), which was established by the National Green Tribunal (NGT), determined that no portion of the project is located in the ICRZ-IA area.

The NCSCM verified that the project was within the authorized Island Coastal Regulation Zone-IB (ICRZ-IB) area and found that no portion of the project was within the ICRZ-IA area.

## **Conclusions and Suggestions from HPC:**

**Coral Colonies:** The Zoological Survey of India recommended that 16,150 out of 20,668 coral colonies be relocated, and the HPC agreed.

**Baseline Data Collection:** The HPC concluded that gathering baseline data for a single season—that is, without include the monsoon season—was sufficient to evaluate the environmental effects of the project as stated in the 2006 EIA notification.

**Environmental Compliance:** The Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) presented the HPC's findings to the NGT bench.

As promised, ANIIDCO will ensure that all activities inside the ICRZ-IA area adhere to the general and specific requirements of the environmental clearance.

ANIIDCO withheld the minutes of HPC's meetings, alleging the strategic and defensive character of the initiative.

### **The Way Ahead**

An impartial entity should carry out a thorough and open EIA to evaluate the project's whole environmental and social ramifications.

It is important to put into practice efficient ways to reduce the project's negative environmental effects, such as wildlife conservation, carbon offsetting, and habitat restoration.

It is imperative to adopt a participative approach that involves the Shompen and Nicobarese tribes. Plans for a just and equitable resettlement ought to be created.

Building trust requires regular public engagements and information dissemination about the project.

Investigate other methods of development that put sustainability first and reduce their negative effects on the environment.

Create a strong monitoring system to keep tabs on the environmental and social effects of the project.




## ENCOURAGING THE LEAST ADVANCED SCS TO HAVE SUB-QUOTAS ENHANCES SOCIAL JUSTICE.

The case law around affirmative action has been continuously developing. It has evolved from the idea of formal equality, which was founded on the broad concept of non-discrimination, to substantive equality. By accepting diversity and providing accommodations for persons with historical and social disabilities, reservations are no longer viewed as an exception to the equality standard but rather as a way to further the idea of equality. This trend is supported by the most recent Supreme Court ruling that permits States to divide Scheduled Castes (SC) into groupings and provide preferential treatment to the weaker and more disadvantaged members of those groups.



The Court has rejected the argument that the SCs are one homogeneous class and that subclassification would be against the equality criterion by a majority of 6 to 1. The ruling overturns a 2005 ruling by the Constitution Bench (*E.V. Chinnaiah v. AP*), which had declared an Andhra Pradesh law that divided SC people into groups unlawful. Subsequently, the Court decided that States may not "tinker" with the list of SCs after the President notifies it in accordance with Article 341 and that only Parliament could amend the list through legislation. The Punjab and Haryana High Court referenced this ruling when it invalidated a preferential sub-quota for Balmikis and Mazhabi Sikhs under the SC quota.



When the case reached the highest court, a Bench questioned E.V. Chinnaiah's accuracy and forwarded the inquiry to a bigger Bench.

The majority decision is predicated on the explicit acknowledgment that SCs are not a monolithic class. Although they have a common constitutional status under the Presidential List, this does not indicate that their levels of backwardness are the same. True, they have a shared heritage of being untouchable, but historical and factual data show that their degree of advancement varies.

States have the authority to further identify and provide advantageous treatment to the weaker segments of SCs. According to four judges, in order to fully implement the affirmative action concept that the least advantaged should receive the benefits of the program and not be pushed aside by those who are more advanced than them, the "creamy layer" among the SCs must be excluded from reservation privileges. It could be difficult to apply the "creamy layer" idea, which was previously limited to OBCs.

The opinions may not be legally binding at this time, and the Bench was not asked to rule on the exclusion of Dalits from the more advanced parts. Even though that might happen eventually, the emphasis should be on ensuring that Dalits who are marginalized receive sufficient representation