



DAY AND DATE: MONDAY, 19 FEBRUARY 2024

MISPLACED PRIORITIES

FREE MOVEMENT REGIME BETWEEN INDIA, MYANMAR HAD MORE BENEFITS THAN COSTS.

The concept of a nation is shaped more by its people than its borders, particularly relevant for a post-colonial country. The Home Minister of India's decision to abolish the "Free Movement Regime" (FMR) along the Indian-Myanmar border is seen as contradicting this idea. While citing concerns about narcotics and insurgent activities, the author questions the validity of these reasons, pointing out the weakened insurgent groups and the importance of strong law enforcement.

The opposition to scrapping the FMR is notable in conflict-prone Manipur, while Nagaland and Mizoram resist the move. Mizoram and Manipur, sympathetic to Myanmar's civil war refugees, face accusations of illegal migration by Meitei majoritarian forces in the Imphal valley. The FMR, initially aligned with India's Act East policy, allowed citizens within 16 kilometers of the border to engage in trade, fostering cross-border relations. The author concludes that reversing this policy, opting for extensive border fencing, reflects misplaced priorities and urges reconsideration.

DAY AND DATE: TUESDAY, 20 FEBRUARY 2024

RED SEA BLUES

JANUARY'S EXPORT NUMBERS SUGGEST GLOBAL SHIPPING WOES YET TO HIT HOME.

India's goods exports experienced a 3.1% growth in January, marking the second consecutive monthly increase, though it is a modest uptick compared to the 1% rise in December. However, this positive trend is part of only the fourth month of growth in outbound shipments for the fiscal year 2023-24. The overall value of merchandise exports for the year is down by 4.9%, totaling about \$354 billion. January's exports reached \$36.9 billion, surpassing the yearly monthly average but still 4% lower than December's figures, which is a typical post-Christmas demand dip. Notably, disruptions caused by Houthi rebels in the Red Sea have impacted global trade, but January's trade numbers indicate a limited overt concern. The trade deficit has sharply declined to a nine-month low of \$17.5 billion, contrasting with the record high of nearly \$30 billion three months earlier. However, the import bill reduction is attributed to decreased imports of project goods and electronics, signaling potential weakening investment and consumption in the economy. Despite multiple global challenges, the government expresses confidence in India matching its record export performance of \$776 billion in 2022-23. Yet, achieving last year's \$451 billion tally for goods exports appears challenging due to cooling commodity prices. The uncertainty in demand trends from key economies, such as the U.S. and Germany, and the lingering impact of Houthi disruptions in the Red Sea pose risks for the coming year, potentially leading to longer delivery times, increased shipping rates, and higher operational costs affecting market demand for Indian goods.





**DAY AND DATE: WEDNESDAY, 21 FEBRUARY
2024**

KEEP IT WHOLESOME

**A NATIONAL CERVICAL CANCER CONTROL
PROGRAMME SHOULD BE MADE ACCESSIBLE
TO ALL.**

Health is a multidimensional concern that demands comprehensive government policies. The government's plan to encourage vaccination against cervical cancer for girls aged nine to 14, as announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during the interim Budget presentation, is deemed a positive step. However, the effectiveness of any cervical cancer program is questioned if it lacks a screening aspect. Cervical cancer, primarily linked to the human papillomavirus (HPV), is the second leading cause of cancer-related deaths among Indian women, with over 77,000 annual cases. Despite the availability of a vaccine, national cervical cancer screening prevalence is below 2%, highlighting the need for comprehensive screening programs. Simple and cost-effective tests, such as VIA and VILI, can detect precancerous lesions early. Cryotherapy, a short and accessible procedure, can then be performed to destroy abnormal growth. The government is urged to integrate screening into primary health centers, making it accessible to all women, alongside the vaccination initiative, to effectively control cervical cancer and prevent unnecessary deaths.

DAY AND DATE: THURSDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2024

ENDING DISCRIMINATION

WORKPLACES MUST ENSURE FAIR TREATMENT OF WOMEN EMPLOYEES

The Supreme Court of India has denounced outdated and patriarchal employment rules penalizing women for getting married, deeming such practices unconstitutional. The court's remarks came in support of Selina John, a former Military Nursing Service officer discharged in 1988 for marriage. The judgment, led by Justice Sanjiv Khanna, ordered the Union Government to compensate Ms. John with ₹60 lakh within eight weeks. The court deemed her dismissal illegal, noting the discriminatory nature of rules applicable only to women nursing officers. The broader context highlights gender parity challenges, especially in the military, despite recent judgments granting permanent commission to women. The court's stance emphasizes the need to break down barriers hindering women's participation in the workforce, addressing issues such as education, employment opportunities, and discriminatory mindsets. The court's declaration on unconstitutional rules regarding women's marital status should resonate across organizations, fostering workplaces that empower rather than impede women, in the pursuit of genuine gender equality.



DAY AND DATE: FRIDAY, 23 FEBRUARY 2024

THE NEXT FRONTIER

THE GOVERNMENT MUST KEEP THE REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT OF SPACE SECTOR CLEAR.

The exploration of space, once a romantic notion, has evolved into a realm with profound financial, socio-economic, and geopolitical implications. Traditionally, only national agencies engaged in the expensive and risky endeavors of space technologies and flight. However, recent years have seen a shift towards increased involvement of the private sector. India initiated this transformation in 2020 through state-led reforms, opening the space sector to private companies. Key developments included the establishment of the IN-SPACe and the release of the Geospatial Guidelines and Indian Space Policy. Recently, India further opened avenues by allowing 100% FDI in satellite components and systems, with varying limits in other sectors. This move aligns with the Space Policy's ambitions and positions India to compete with China in the global space race. The government's decision aims to leverage foreign ties for economic growth while avoiding geopolitical challenges faced by other nations. India anticipates that new investments will enhance its space economy by improving access to talent and capital for start-ups, balancing upstream and downstream opportunities, boosting local manufacturing, and fostering investor confidence. The success of these endeavours hinges on maintaining a clear regulatory environment, reducing red tape, garnering public support, and facilitating Indian companies' access to foreign markets.

