



DAY AND DATE: MONDAY, 26 FEBRUARY 2024

AT THE HIGH TABLE

THE RAISINA DIALOGUE LACKED DIVERSITY IN CONVERSATIONS ON FOREIGN POLICY.

At the ninth Raisina Dialogue, India's External Affairs Minister, S. Jaishankar, emphasized India's role as a "bridging power" with a "multi-vector" policy, positioning the country as a global friend. Greek Prime Minister Mitsotakis highlighted connectivity projects like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. Discussions covered global governance, UN Security Council reform, and India's place in global decision-making. Despite the absence of major powers due to conflicting events, Central and Eastern European ministers provided a diplomatic opportunity for India. However,

conversations primarily focused on global conflicts, with European leaders shedding light on the Russian war in Ukraine and addressing concerns about an assertive China. The absence of Russia and China, limited representation from various regions, and the exclusion of certain topics like the Israeli-Gaza conflict raised concerns about the dialogue's diversity and balance. Jaishankar's characterization of the Raisina Dialogue as a "Made in India" global platform was tempered by the gaps in addressing diverse global challenges.

DAY AND DATE: TUESDAY, 27 FEBRUARY 2024

OLD BEGINNING

SHEHBAZ SHARIF'S POLITICAL DIFFICULTIES ARE COMPOUNDED BY THE ECONOMIC CRISIS.

In the February 8 general elections in Pakistan, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by jailed former Prime Minister Imran Khan, faced challenges as it was barred from using its cricket bat symbol. Despite this, the PTI secured the most seats in the National Assembly with 93, while the military-backed Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) came second with 75 seats. The PML-N formed a coalition government with the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), sidelining the PTI. Shehbaz Sharif became the Prime Minister, and Maryam Nawaz became the Chief Minister of Punjab. Asif Ali Zardari is likely to replace President Arif Alvi. The coalition, supported by the military, mirrors a previous government, and Shehbaz faces economic challenges, including high inflation and a precarious \$8.2 billion foreign exchange reserve. Pakistan's debt-laden economy, coupled with security concerns on the Afghanistan border, poses significant challenges. Despite the election outcome, the PTI plans to stay in opposition and challenge contested results legally, indicating continued political tensions.



DAY AND DATE: WEDNESDAY, 28 FEBRUARY 2024

DECODING SPENDING

THE LATEST HOUSEHOLD SPENDING SURVEY SIGNALS SOME SHIFTS IN PEOPLE'S PRIORITIES.

The Statistics Ministry released findings from the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey covering August 2022 to July 2023, marking the first significant survey-based data since 2011-12. This is crucial as the once-a-decade Census, due since 2021, is still pending. The 2017-18 survey was abandoned due to "quality issues," possibly related to the impact of demonetization and the Goods and Services Tax on India's informal economy. The latest survey may magnify the post-pandemic consumption rebound. Initial results indicate a 33.5% rise in average monthly per capita consumer expenditure (MPCE) in cities (₹3,510) and a 40.4% increase in rural areas (₹2,008) since 2011-12. The government interprets this as rising incomes, reduced inequality, and decreased poverty. However, a closer look reveals a compounded annual growth below inflation and GDP rates. Proportional spending on food has decreased, potentially impacting Consumer Price Index weightages. The data's reliability may be affected by pent-up demand and inflation, with a clearer picture expected from the upcoming survey concluding in July. Recalibrating poverty, inflation, or GDP calculations should await those results.





DAY AND DATE: THURSDAY, 29 FEBRUARY 2024

LIVES AND LIVELIHOODS

INDIA MUST HAVE PROTOCOLS IN PLACE TO PROTECT EMIGRANTS FROM CONFLICTS.

The Indian government has officially acknowledged that some of its nationals have been recruited by the Russian Army and deployed within Ukrainian borders, now under Russian control. These individuals reportedly took on support roles like military helpers and loaders, contrary to the government's discouragement of such engagements. The Ministry of External Affairs revealed that the Indian Embassy pressed Russia for the early release of these individuals. However, families accused Indian officials of being unresponsive. Reports indicate that Indians were enticed by online ads and middlemen for lucrative jobs, prompting criticism of the government's delayed response. The government is urged to address the issue promptly, raise awareness, and investigate unscrupulous recruiters charging high fees. Calls for a review of procedures in conflict countries, enhanced vetting of contracts, better advice, and protection for Indian workers abroad are emphasized. The article also criticizes the government for allowing recruitment drives in other conflict zones, like Israel, highlighting the broader issue of Indians seeking dangerous opportunities due to economic distress and job shortages. The need for comprehensive protocols and support structures for emigrants is stressed.

DAY AND DATE: FRIDAY, 1 MARCH, 2024

A RESPITE

TRUMP GETS LEGAL RELIEF AS CHALLENGES TO HIS CANDIDACY RECEDE

Former US President Donald Trump has gained a legal reprieve from the Supreme Court, which agreed to hear arguments in mid-April regarding his immunity from federal criminal prosecution for allegedly undermining the 2020 presidential election. This decision pushes any potential trial beyond May, with a verdict likely by the end of June. The move disrupts Special Counsel Jack Smith's plans, who had sought an immediate hearing without intermediate court action. A previous ruling by the US Court of Appeals denying Trump broad immunity is now on hold pending the Supreme Court's decision. The timing of this ruling impacts multiple legal cases against Trump, including four criminal indictments. The Supreme Court is also poised to reconsider a Colorado Supreme Court decision barring Trump from the presidential ballot due to his alleged role in an insurrection. The legal battles underscore the deep political divisions in the US, with the 2024 election potentially hinging on Trump's legal outcomes and revealing a lack of unifying national leadership.



DAY AND DATE: SATURDAY, 2 MARCH, 2024

DECODING THE SCRIPT

FINDINGS FROM THE GENOME SEQUENCING MUST BE SHARED WIDELY.



The Genome India Project, funded by the Department of Biotechnology, has completed sequencing the genomes of 10,000 individuals, creating a 'reference' Indian human genome. Although representing a small fraction of the billion-plus population, it serves as a crucial template for insights into the genetic diversity of India. The project's immediate application lies in disease research, exemplified by a 2009 discovery correlating a genetic variant with a high risk of heart failure among Indians. India's complex population groups, shaped by historical caste-based endogamy, result in the persistence of rare harmful genetic variants. Despite the promises of personalized medicine and decoding the genome's secrets, the reality has been more complex, with a small fraction of diseases being monogenic, and the costs of necessary medicines often prohibitively high. The Genome India Project aims to exceed 10,000 genomes, emphasizing the need for democratization, collaboration with various stakeholders, and avoiding academic exclusivity to advance India's self-understanding.