

FEBRUARY

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MK Yadav Sir

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Earth-wide telescope confirms black hole's shadow is 'real'

The Event Horizon Telescope is a global network of radio telescopes that work together. In 2019, it produced the first image of a black hole, the one at the centre of the M87 galaxy. The network has confirmed what it observed and shared evidence of movement in the black hole's neighbourhood.

Teletext

Scientists have unveiled new details of a colossal black hole 53 million lightyears away first photographed by the earth-wide Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) in 2017. The feat provided the first visual evidence that black holes exist, confirming a fundamental prediction of general relativity.

In a new paper published on January 18, EHT scientists have reported capturing details at the level of the heliometer's event horizon – the boundary beyond which light from the other side can't reach an observer – discarding the formation of a distinct ring around it. The EHT's previous run had revealed the black hole's 'shadow', a result of the event horizon's gravitational effects and a signature of its presence. The picture also helped constrain the black hole's mass and find that it is not and shape align with the predictions of the general theory of relativity. The image was halved at the time as a matter of 'misalignment and noise' for creating 'a part of the universe that was off limit'.

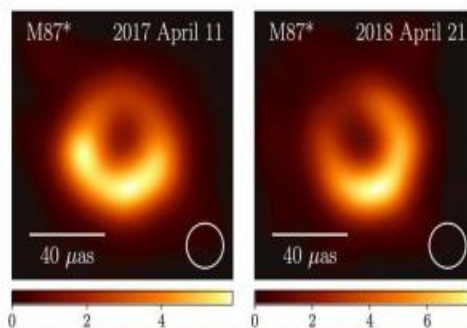
The new data, obtained after improving the telescope's coverage and resolution, widened the shadow's size and shape. The primary finding is the confirmation of the black hole 'shadow', which is the region where the light is captured by the black hole. The shadow is a dark region surrounded by a bright ring of light. The new data shows that the shadow is not perfectly circular, as predicted by general relativity, but has a slight asymmetry. This is due to the gravitational effects of the surrounding matter and the motion of the black hole itself.

Many telescopes are used. The EHT is not a single telescope but a worldwide network of radio telescopes that work together to study a common object in space. They benefit from a technique called very long baseline interferometry, where the data from each telescope is combined with data from the others using extremely precise clocks. In this way, the maximum distance between the telescopes defines the network's resolution.

In 2017, the EHT reported detecting a bright, asymmetric ring of light consistent with the presence of a supermassive black hole. Independent analyses of EHT data also supported the ring's presence. Based on these observations, scientists improved the EHT by increasing its data-recording rate, its ability to track spatial information, and by adding the Greenland Telescope to the array. The last one 'improved the resolution of the EHT in the north-south direction', Dr. Karimelidze said.

Picking the data together. In the new campaign, the EHT had nine stations gathering data across an observation day, April 2018, in their frequency.

Then the scientists correlated the datasets with each other to increase the



The images of the black hole in the M87 galaxy captured by the Event Horizon Telescope in 2017 (left) and 2018. The scale shows the lightness, temperature in billions of kelvin, 100,000, 200,000.

signal-to-noise ratio. This task and subsequent processing happened at centres in Germany and the U.S. When comparing the 2017 observations with the new results, they observed significant changes in the shadow phase – a measure of the relationship between two telescopes in an array. Specifically, they found that the way telescopes worked together during the 2018 observations differed from that during the 2017 observations. In this difference, scientists can track shifts in the configuration or structure of the black hole.

The team further used general relativistic magnetohydrodynamic (GRMHD) simulations to create models of the M87 black hole. These models incorporate the way the black hole's gravity influences spacetime around it using Einstein's theory of general relativity. By comparing the simulated black hole with the actual one, scientists gained valuable insight into the intricate dynamics near the event horizon, such as an inflow called feeding.

Gravitational lensing. The findings confirmed the presence of an asymmetric ring structure approximately 42 microarcseconds wide. This is like observing a grain of sand from 25 km away.

They also revealed in diameter hadn't changed much between observations in 2017 and 2018 – meaning the black hole's gravity has been consistently over time to form the observed ring.

This is in line with a prediction from the general theory of relativity that light around a black hole is strongly bent. Objects with a lot of mass bend spacetime more around them. When light travels in this region, its path is bent in the same way a magnifying glass does. Images carried by the light thus appear to be



The EHT image helped constrain the black hole's mass and determined that its size and shape align with the predictions of the general theory of relativity. The image was halved for revealing a part of the universe that was considered off limits.

larger than they really are, and this phenomenon is called lensing. This is also why, as the team found, the ring's southeast corner appears brighter than other parts. The black hole is rotating, dragging the spacetime around it along the direction of its rotation and emitting more light in some areas.

In technical parlance, the observations matched predictions for a shadow formed by lensed emissions around a Kerr black hole (i.e. a rotating black hole) with a mass of around 6.5 billion times that of the Sun.

The M87 galaxy is also associated with a prominent jet of high-energy particles extending from the black hole into space. Scientists believe the jet is connected to the black hole's accretion disk, a web-like structure of matter spiralling into the black hole.

Scientists observed that parts of the accretion disk and the jet appeared to be shifted by about 30 degrees between 2017 and 2018 – meaning these structures had changed their position or orientation over time.

"The 30-degree change can be attributed to the spin of the black hole," Dr. Karimelidze said. "Now this can't be directly established yet from two images taken two years apart, but such an expectation was already established in a paper published a few years ago."

imageplay between the accretion disk and the formation of the jet. For example, models like the GRMHD suggest the observed shift could correspond to variations in the magnetic field structure. This in turn can modify observable changes in the radiation emitted by matter in the disk. By studying these subtle changes, scientists gain valuable insights into the hidden physics that control the relationship between the accretion disk, the jet, and the magnetic environment around the black hole.

Known for more. Having the EHT to photograph black holes collides of light years away is a time-consuming task requiring earth-wide observations. The new results have reinforced the features of the black hole reported in 2018, including a very stable ring structure, precise and other physical characteristics. The findings also show consistent across two observation periods and multiple frequencies, pointing to their reliability.

Examining how we measure the ring's diameter shows that our observational techniques are continually improving. Image-based techniques to study objects in space need to understand distances compared to direct modelling methods. And the EHT's first measurement of the ring's diameter suggests this gap between the two techniques is closing. Future work could further reconcile the discrepancy and the EHT's overall performance.

In Karimelidze also said the telescope collaboration is planning "a so-called 'next project' in 2026, when we will track the black hole over a month or two to see the brightness changes along the black hole". (Report) (Gardner is a freelance science writer and journalist)

Context: Scientists have unveiled new details of a colossal black hole 53 million lightyears away first photographed by the earth-wide Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) in 2017. The feat provided the first visual evidence that black holes exist, confirming a fundamental prediction of general relativity.

Event Horizon Telescope (EHT)

- **About:** The Event Horizon Telescope (EHT) is a network of synchronized radio observatories worldwide.
- **Imaging Black Holes:** The primary objective of the EHT is to capture detailed images of black holes.
- **Frontiers of Universe Exploration:** Scientists utilize the EHT to explore new frontiers in the vast expanse of the Universe.
- **Very-Long-Baseline Interferometry (VLBI) Technique:** EHT observations employ VLBI, a technique that enhances angular resolution for capturing images of black holes.
- **Earth-sized Virtual Telescope:** Comprising 8 telescopes globally, the EHT forms an Earth-sized virtual telescope, offering unprecedented sensitivity and resolution.
- **Globally Distributed Components:** The components of the EHT are strategically distributed across the globe, creating a collaborative effort for groundbreaking astronomical observations.

Black Hole

- **Meaning:** It is a cosmic body of **extremely intense gravity** from which nothing, **not even light, can escape**.
 - A black hole can be **formed by the death of a massive star**.
 - When such a star has **exhausted the internal thermonuclear fuels in its core** at the end of its life, the core becomes unstable and gravitationally collapses inward upon itself, and the star's outer layers are blown away.
- **Background**
 - **1st predicted by:** Albert Einstein in 1916, with his general theory of relativity.
 - **First interpretation of "black hole":** By David Finkelstein in 1958, as a region of space from which nothing can escape.
 - **The term "black hole" was coined:** In 1967 by American astronomer John Wheeler.
 - **Cygnus X-1:** The first black hole identified by several researchers independently in 1971.
 - **Detection:** Because light cannot get out, black holes are invisible and can only be **tracked with the help of spatial telescopes**.

Jail and bail under UAPA

The bar for granting bail under the UAPA is higher than ordinary criminal law. Two Supreme Court Benches of the same strength have taken different views on what the 'prima facie test' for bail should be

APURVA VISHWANATH
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 12

UNDERLINING THAT the oft-quoted phrase, 'bail is rule, jail is the exception', does not find any place in the stringent anti-terror Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), the Supreme Court on February 7 denied bail to Gurwinder Singh, an accused in an alleged "Khalistan module" case.

Singh was arrested when he was found hanging cloth banners with "Khalistan Jindabad" and "Khalistan Referendum 2020" on them in Punjab. He is now accused of being part of a larger conspiracy with Sikhs for justice, a pro-Khalistan group banned by India.

While the bar for granting bail under the UAPA is higher than ordinary criminal law, there are some cases in which courts have granted bail.

How have courts interpreted Section 43D (5) of the UAPA? Why do courts deny bail in most cases despite some rulings that have raised the bar for the state to argue against the bail?

The law

Section 43D (5) of UAPA reads: "Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code, no person accused of an offence punishable under Chapters IV and VI of this Act shall, if in custody, be released on bail or on his own bond unless the Public Prosecutor has been given an opportunity of being heard on the application for such release."

Provided that such accused person shall not be released on bail or on his own bond if the Court, on a perusal of the case diary or the report made under section 173 of the Code is of the opinion that there are reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against such person is prima facie true.

The law essentially says that while relying only on the police version – the case diary and the police report – the accused must show to the court that it is unreasonable to believe that the accusations are prima facie true.

In shifting the onus on the accused, the cardinal principle of criminal law that a person is innocent until proven guilty is upended in the framework of the UAPA.



(From left) Student-activists Asif Iqbal Tanha, Devangana Kalita, and Natasha Narwal. They were granted bail in a UAPA case in 2021. Express photo by Gagandeep Vaidya

Narrowing the room for bail

In 2019, a two-judge Supreme Court Bench headed by Justice A M Khanwilkar ruled in *Zahoor Ahmed Shah Watali v NIA* that for granting bail under UAPA, courts must not examine the evidence but only accept it at face value. The SC in this case was hearing an appeal against a Delhi HC ruling by a Bench headed by Justice S Muralidhar granting bail to a Kashmiri businessman.

"The Court is merely expected to record a finding on the basis of broad probabilities regarding the involvement of the accused in the commission of the stated offence or otherwise," the apex court had said.

Once charges are framed in the case, the court in *Watali* said, effectively an accused "may have to undertake an arduous task to satisfy the court that despite the framing of charge, the materials presented along with the chargesheet do not make out reasonable grounds for believing that the accusation against him is prima facie true" for order for the court to grant bail.

Legal scholar Gautam Bhatia wrote in his blog "Indian Constitutional Law and Philosophy" that for the lawyer of an accused

in a UAPA case, arguing for bail would be "participating in a swimming competition with both arms tied behind their backs: they cannot deploy any part of the arsenal open to the defence team in a regular criminal trial, and they are only permitted to try and point out internal contradictions within the Prosecution's case, or show how even when you assume the Prosecution's case to be true, it does not meet the UAPA threshold." The *Watali* judgement "effectively tied a dumb-bell to the defence's legs in addition to its arms being tied behind its back, when it further restricted what materials the Court could consider in a UAPA bail hearing," he wrote.

Post-Watali rulings

The *Watali* judgement effectively closed the window, especially for trial courts, to look at the prosecution's case critically while granting bail. If the prosecution's case is flimsy, courts cannot question it, raising concerns about the liberty of an individual.

Courts have, however, granted bail in several cases, including in some high-profile ones.

The Delhi High Court in 2021 granted bail

to three student activists – Asif Iqbal Tanha, Devangana Kalita and Natasha Narwal – in the anti-CAA protests in North East Delhi. The HC applied the *Watali* precedent but placed the burden of making out a prima facie case on the police, instead of the court itself having to make out a case.

The court said that specific, individual charges must be made out by the prosecution and not broad speculations and inferences. The Court said it did not locate a "specific factual allegation" and said that it was "of the view that the mere use of alarming and hyperbolic verbiage in the subject charge-sheet will not convince us [the Court] otherwise." The SC, however, stayed the operation of this ruling as a precedent.

The Bombay High Court, in granting bail to bail rights activist Anand Telumbde, simply referred to the material before it and found no specific link to an overt act by Telumbde. "...prosecution needs to show the nexus and link of Appellant with the present crime or any specific overt act," the court said. The SC dismissed the state's appeal against this ruling.

In February 2021, in *Union of India vs KA Najeeb*, a three-judge Bench of the Supreme Court headed by then CJI N V Ramana allowed bail under UAPA when the accused had undergone incarceration for a significant period. This, however, was carved out while acknowledging that bail under UAPA is an exception, but it needs to be balanced with the right to a speedy trial.

The Supreme Court in *Vernon Gonsalves v State of Maharashtra*, in July 2023, differed with the *Watali* ruling on how the "prima facie test" would apply. "In our opinion, however, it would not satisfy the prima facie 'test' unless there is at least surface-analysis of probative value of the evidence, at the stage of examining the question of granting bail and the quality or probative value satisfies the Court of its worth," the Bench said.

However, since both the *Watali* and the *Gonsalves* ruling are by Benches of the same strength, it will have to be seen how future Benches apply the test. If there is substantial disagreement between different two-judge Benches, then a larger Bench will have to settle the law.

In the *Gurwinder Singh* case, the two-judge Bench relied on the *Watali* ruling entirely without considering the *Gonsalves* ruling.

Law under Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA)

- **Restrictions on Bail:** Section 43D (5) of the Act imposes limitations on the release of a person accused of certain offenses.
- **Public Prosecutor's Role:** The provision stipulates that no bail or self-bond release is permitted unless the Public Prosecutor is given an opportunity to be heard on the release application.
- **Exception in Release Conditions:** Even if the accused is in custody, release on bail or self-bond is not allowed if the court believes there are reasonable grounds for considering the accusations as prima facie true.
- **Prima Facie Assessment:** The law places the responsibility on the accused to convince the court, based on the police version, that it is unreasonable to believe the accusations are prima facie true.
- **Shifting Onus and the UAPA Framework:** This provision shifts the burden onto the accused, challenging the traditional presumption of innocence until proven guilty, particularly within the framework of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

Narrowing the Room for Bail

- **Supreme Court's 2019 Ruling:** In 2019, the Supreme Court, led by Justice A M Khanwilkar in a two-judge bench, made a significant ruling in the case of *Zahoor Ahmed Shah Watali v NIA*.
- **Limited Examination in UAPA Bail Granting:** The ruling emphasized that when granting bail under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), courts should refrain from examining the evidence and instead accept it at face value.
- **Broad Probabilities Standard:** The apex court clarified that the court's role is to record a finding based on broad probabilities regarding the accused's involvement in the stated offense or otherwise.
- **Appeal Against Delhi High Court Ruling:** The Supreme Court's decision came in response to an appeal against a Delhi High Court ruling by a bench headed by Justice S Muralidhar, which had granted bail to a Kashmiri businessman.
- **Arduous Task Post Charges Framing:** After charges are framed, the court highlighted that the accused might face a challenging task in convincing the court that, despite the framing of charges, the presented materials do not establish reasonable grounds for believing the accusation is prima facie true in order to secure bail.

Context: Underlining that the oft quoted phrase, 'bail is rule, jail is the exception', does not find any place in the stringent anti-terror Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), the Supreme Court on February 7 denied bail to Gurwinder Singh, an accused in an alleged "Khalistan module."

Law Commission of India submits Report titled “A Comprehensive Review of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897”

Context: The 22nd Law Commission of India has submitted its Report No. 286 titled “A Comprehensive Review of the Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897” to the Government of India.

Epidemic Diseases Act, 1897

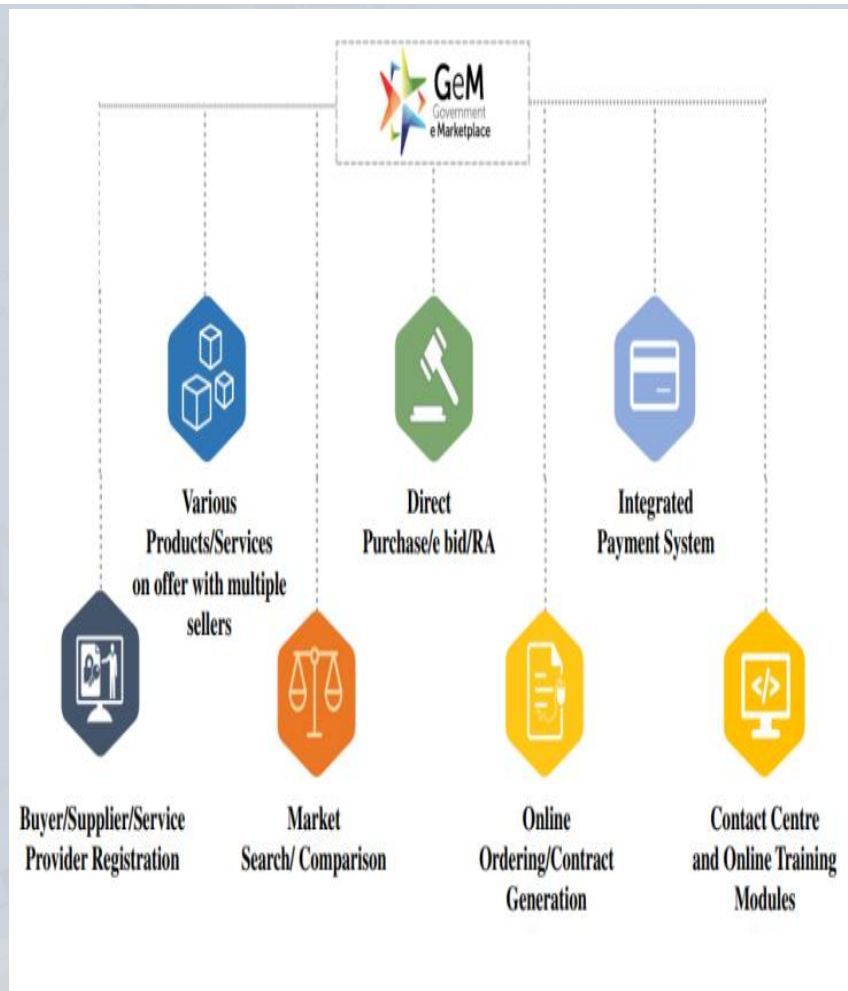
- **About:** An Act to provide for the better prevention of the spread of Dangerous Epidemic Diseases.
- Whereas it is expedient to provide for the better prevention of the spread of dangerous epidemic disease.
- **Coverage:** It extends to the whole of India except 3[the territories which, immediately before the 1st November, 1956, were comprised in Part B States.
- **Power to take special measures and prescribe regulations as to dangerous epidemic disease**
- **Empowering State Government:** When an outbreak of a dangerous epidemic disease threatens [the State], the "[State Government]" can take necessary measures.
 - If existing laws are deemed insufficient, the State Government may prescribe temporary regulations through public notices.
- **Specific Measures for Epidemic Control:** The "[State Government]" holds the authority to take specific measures and prescribe regulations.
 - These measures include the inspection of individuals traveling by various means, such as railways.
 - Suspected individuals may be segregated in hospitals or temporary accommodations based on inspections by authorized officers.
- **Prohibition of violence:** No person shall indulge in any act of violence against a healthcare service personnel or cause any damage or loss to any property during an epidemic.
- **Penalty:** Any person disobeying any regulation or order made under this Act shall be deemed to have committed an offence punishable under section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (45 of 1860).

Government EMarketplace records GMV worth three lakh crore rupees in 2024 fiscal year so far

Context: Government-E-Marketplace (GeM) has recorded Gross Merchandise Value (GMV) worth three lakh crore rupees in the current fiscal year so far.

Government-e-Marketplace (GeM)

- **About:** It is an online public procurement platform in India.
- **Launched:** In August 2016
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India
- **Objective:** To create an open and transparent procurement platform for government buyers to facilitate the online procurement of goods and services.
- **Key Features**
 - It is a **one stop portal to facilitate online procurement** of common use Goods and Services.
 - The **portal is open for all government buyers**— Central and State Ministries, departments, public sector enterprises etc.
 - **Private buyers cannot buy on the platform but private people** can sell products to government bodies through the portal.
- **Significance of GeM**
 - Transparent and Cost-effective Procurement.
 - Promotion of Atma Nirbhar Bharat.
 - Entry of Small Local Sellers.



Union Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj Shri Giriraj Singh to inaugurate project 'Smart Gram Panchayat: Revolution towards Digitization of Gram Panchayat' to extend PM-WANI (Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface) Service in Gram Panchayats of Bihar on 13th February 2024

Context: The Union Minister of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj recently inaugurated the 'Smart Gram Panchayat' project, extending PM-WANI service to Bihar's Gram Panchayats.

PM-WANI Framework

- **About:** The Union Cabinet headed by Prime Minister of India approved the proposal of Department of Telecom (DoT) to proliferate Broadband through Public Wi-Fi networks under the framework of the Prime Minister's Wi-Fi Access Network Interface (PM-WANI) on 9th December 2020.
- **Alignment with National Digital Communications Policy, 2018 (NDCP):** This framework aligns with the objectives outlined in the National Digital Communications Policy, 2018 (NDCP), which aims to establish a strong digital communications infrastructure.
- **Broadband Provision via Public Wi-Fi Hotspot Providers:** The PM-WANI framework is designed to facilitate the delivery of broadband services through Public Wi-Fi Hotspot providers.
- **Components:** The framework comprises key elements, including Public Data Office (PDO), Public Data Office Aggregator (PDOA), App Provider, and Central Registry.
- **Importance of PM-WANI Framework:** To facilitate ease of doing business and encourage local shops and small establishments to become Wi-Fi providers, it has been approved that the last-mile Public Wi-Fi providers require no license, no registration and will not need to pay any fees to DoT.
- **Access broadband on PM-WANI Wi-Fi:** The potential user who wants to access Broadband through Public Wi-Fi will need to download the relevant App, get authenticated, and thereafter access Broadband at any Public Wi-Fi Hotspot.
- **PM-WANI ecosystem:** PM-WANI ecosystem consists of four parts: Public Data Office (PDO), Public Data Office Aggregator (PDOA), App Provider, and Central Registry.
- **Benefits of PM-WANI**
 - WANI Wi-Fi architecture can lead to enhanced internet penetration which could lead to an increase in gross domestic product.
 - It can scale up internet access in rural areas, thereby narrowing the digital divide.
 - Can generate jobs in small- and medium-scale sectors.
 - Could provide affordable internet access to the mass underserved section of society and help boost digital India.

Migratory species facing peril globally shows report, as CMS COP14 begins in Samarkand

Convention On The Conservation Of Migratory Species Of Wild Animals (CMS)

- **About:** It is an environmental treaty under the aegis of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).
- **Signed in:** 1979, in Bonn, Germany. Also known as the **Bonn Convention**.
- It is the **only global, & UN-based, intergovernmental convention** established exclusively for the conservation and management of **migratory species** (terrestrial, aquatic, & avian), their **habitats** and migration **routes**.
- **Type:** The convention has **legally binding agreements** and non-legally binding Memorandum of Understandings (MoUs) which are tailored according to conservation needs.
- **Appendix I of CMS:** It lists the Migratory species **threatened with extinction**, and Parties strive towards strictly protecting them.
- **Appendix II of CMS:** Migratory species that need or would significantly benefit from international cooperation.
- **Member: 133 parties.** India is a party to this convention since 1983 (China, Russia, US, Canada, Japan are not its members).

Context: Millions of iconic migratory animal species are in peril because of anthropogenic pressures, said a report released at the start of the 14th Conference of Parties (COP14) to the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species (CMS) of Wild Animals in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

Key Points

- The **State of the World's Migratory Species** has revealed that aquatic ecosystems are the worst-hit — **97 per cent of migratory fish listed** under CMS face the risk of **extinction**. These fish species have seen a steep decline in relative abundance in the past 50 years on average.
- Twenty-eight of the total fish species facing threats are categorised as '**Critically Endangered**' under the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)'s Red List**.
- There are 4,508 species that are considered to be migratory, have had a global IUCN Red List assessment and occur in multiple Range States (non-endemic species). Of these, 3,339 (74 per cent) are not currently listed in the CMS appendices.
- Of the 3,339 non-CMS species, 277 (eight per cent) are considered to be '**Globally Threatened**' and another 122 species (four per cent) have been categorised as '**Near Threatened**'. The report recommends considering 399 Globally and Near Threatened species to meet the CMS criteria listed in the appendices.
- **Causes:** Overexploitation, habitat loss, degradation and fragmentation

India and ASEAN Discuss Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, Focus on Connectivity and Trade

Context: India-ASEAN today held discussions on taking forward their Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

- **Established:** In 1967, by the **Bangkok Declaration**.
- **Type:** A political and economic union of **10 member states** in Southeast Asia.
- **Members:** Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam.
- **Objective:** It promotes inter-governmental cooperation and facilitates economic, political, security, military, educational, and socio-cultural integration between its members and countries in the Asia-Pacific.
- **Secretariat:** Jakarta, Indonesia.

India-ASEAN Relationship (Significance)

- **Economic reasons:** With ASEAN now India's **fourth-largest** trading partner engaging in bilateral trade in 2019-20 worth \$86.9 billion.
- **For Peace & Security in the region:** ASEAN countries are known for maritime and border smuggling of drug, arms, and ammunition. Cooperation with ASEAN countries is also important for security and peace establishment in N-E region from insurgents' group.
- **Connectivity and development:** Connectivity with ASEAN countries maintaining Northeast India in the centre will assure the north-eastern states economic progress.
- **Countering China:** Improved commercial connections with ASEAN nations would provide a counterbalance to China's position in the area, as well as economic growth and development for India.
- **Meeting India's principle of 'Act East policy' and Indo-Pacific vision:** ASEAN countries are the key or central pillar of the India's foreign policy of 'act east.' And India's 'Act East' policy is a core tenet of its Indo-Pacific vision.
- **Establishing democratic and rule-based Indo-Pacific region:** ASEAN holds a pivotal place in the Indo-Pacific rules-based security architecture, which is critical for India because most of its commerce is dependent on maritime stability.
- **Key defence importer:** ASEAN countries can emerge as the major import demand of India's defence equipment's like Philippines recently finalised the order of Brahmos missile from India.
- **Others key areas of engagement:** Maritime pollution, Soft power, Climate change etc.

Big diplomatic victory for India: Qatar frees eight ex-Navy veterans jailed on espionage charges

Context: In a significant diplomatic breakthrough for India, eight former Indian Navy personnel, who were initially sentenced to death in Qatar, have been released, marking a crucial turn of events in a case that has garnered international attention.

Background of the Case

- In September 2022, former Indian naval officers were taken into custody by Qatari authorities on undisclosed charges.
- After being detained for several months, it was disclosed by Qatari authorities that the eight former naval officers had been engaged in espionage activities, allegedly spying on Qatar's confidential submarine program for Israel.
- Initially, the first bail request was turned down. But, in December 2023, the appellate court in Qatar commuted their death sentence to imprisonment ranging between three years and 25 years.
- The government of India, with the diplomatic channels managed to released these former officers.

India-Qatar Relations

- **Historical Ties:** India and Qatar share a natural partnership that dates back to 1973.
- **Political Relationship:** 2023 commemorates the 50th anniversary of the establishment of full diplomatic relations between India and Qatar.
 - India was among the earliest nations to recognize Qatar's independence in 1971.
- **Economic Ties:** In 2021, India ranked among the top four export destinations for Qatar and one of the top three sources of Qatar's imports.
 - The bilateral trade between India and Qatar, valued at \$15 billion, primarily revolves around LNG and LPG exports from Qatar to India.
 - During 2021-22, India's exports to Qatar amounted to US\$ 1.83 billion, while imports from Qatar were US\$ 13.19 billion.

Qatar

- **Located:** in the Western Asia, on the Northeastern coast of the Arabian Peninsula.
- **Bounded by:** Saudi Arabia in the south, rest of three sides; it is surrounded by the Persian Gulf.
- **A strait of the Persian Gulf:** Divides Qatar from its nearby island nation of Bahrain.
- **Capital:** Doha.

Farmers' protest 2.0: How this agitation differs from 2020-21

RAAKHI JAGGA
LUDHIANA, FEBRUARY 12

A LITTLE more than two years after they called off their massive protest at the doorstep of Delhi, farmers are once again on the road to the capital. Three union ministers were meeting them in Chandigarh for a second round of talks on Monday evening. The talks were ongoing at press time.

In both its demands and leadership, the protest of 2024 is different from the yearlong agitation of 2020-21, during which the farmers succeeded in their main goal of forcing the central government to roll back its agricultural reforms agenda.

What is this farmers' protest about?

More than 250 farmers' unions under the banner of the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM), which claims to have the allegiance of about 100 unions, and the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Non-political), a platform of another 150 unions, have called the protest that is being coordinated from Punjab.

The two forums gave a call of "Delhi Chalo" at the end of December 2023 to re-

mind Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the promises to farmers two years previously. The farmers were scheduled to march on Delhi on Tuesday. Tractor trolleys have been on the move, and barricades, nails and heavy equipment have been deployed to thwart them — even as talks have been ongoing, with the Centre claiming an "open mind" on their demands.

Are the leaders of 2020-21 active again?

No. The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Non-political) is a faction that broke away from the original Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) in July 2022. Its coordinator is Jagjit Singh Dhillon, a

president of the Punjab-based Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU). Sidhpur farm union, who broke away from the SKM following differences of opinion with the leadership of the main organisation.

KMM, the other organisation in the current protest, was formed by Sarwan Singh Pandher, convener of the Punjab-based union Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee (KMSC). The KMSC did not join the main protest against the farm laws in 2020-21, and had instead set up a separate stage at the

Delhi border at Kundli.

After the protests ended, the KMSC started to expand its base — and at the end of January, announced the formation of the KMM, comprising more than 100 unions from across India.

The SKM, the flagship body of more than 500 farmer unions of India, which led the 2020-21 agitation against the farm laws, is not involved in the ongoing protest. In Punjab, 37 farm unions, including the largest, BKU Ugrahan, are part of the SKM.

The SKM has given its own call for a Grameen Bharat bandh on February 16. While the SKM is not part of the Delhi Chalo agitation, the Morcha issued a statement on Monday evening saying there must be no repression of farmers who are participating. BKU Ugrahan too issued a statement criticising the Haryana government's efforts to stop the march.

What are the demands of the farmers?

The headline demand in the farmers' 12-point agenda is for a law to guarantee minimum support price (MSP) for all crops, and the determination of crop prices in accordance with the Dr M S Swaminathan Commission's report. The other demands are:



Police place a container on NH44 at Singhu border to prevent farmers from marching to Delhi on Monday.

■ Full debt waiver for farmers and labourers;

■ Implementation of the Land Acquisition Act of 2012, with provisions for written consent from farmers before acquisition, and compensation at four times the collector rate;

■ Punishment for the perpetrators of the October 2021 Lakhimpur Kheri killings;

■ India should withdraw from the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and freeze all free

trade agreements;

■ Pensions for farmers, farm labourers; ■ Compensation for farmers who died during the Delhi protest, including a job for one family member;

■ Electricity Amendment Bill 2020 should be scrapped;

■ 200 (instead of 100) days' employment under MGNREGA per year, daily wage of Rs 700, and scheme should be linked with farming;

■ Strict penalties and fines on companies producing fake seeds, pesticides, fertilisers; improvements in seed quality;

■ National commission for spices such as chili and turmeric; ■ Ensure rights of indigenous peoples over water, forests, and land.

How has the government responded?

KMM and SKM (Non-political) emailed their demands to the Ministries of Agriculture and Commerce and Industry on February 6. On February 8, Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, and MeS Home Nityanand Rai met a 10-member farmers' delegation in Chandigarh. The meeting was coordinated by Punjab Chief

Minister Bhagwant Mann.

Mann was not involved in the second meeting (on Monday), where a delegation of 26 farmer leaders met the three ministers. The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and Congress have extended their support to the farmers. The BJP and Shiromani Akali Dal have been silent so far.

Even as the farmers and the ministers were talking, the Haryana government started sealing its borders with Punjab on February 8. As of Monday evening, a massive 12-layer barricade had been erected at the Shambhu Barrier on national highway 1 leading to Delhi, and multiple barricades had been set up at Fatehbad, Khanouri, Dabwali, etc. The Internet had been shut down in several districts.

Rajasthan sealed its borders with Punjab and Haryana on February 11, and imposed prohibitory orders under Section 144 CrP in Sir Ganganagar and Hanumangarh districts.

Haryana's security arrangements this time are very tight compared to 2020. On November 26, 2020, farmers from Punjab had broken through the barricades. Farmers riding hundreds of tractor-trolleys this time are said to be accompanied by cranes and other equipment to remove the barricades.

FARMER PROTEST 2.0

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Economy)

Context: Recently, farmers resumed their journey to Delhi after more than two years since their previous protest, as three Union ministers convened a second round of discussions with them in Chandigarh.

Farmer Protest 2.0

- **Background:** In 2020, farmers rallied against three contentious laws at Delhi borders, leading to their eventual repeal in 2021. The laws included The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act.
- **Preparation for Delhi Chalo March:** The Delhi Chalo march, scheduled to commence at 10 am, faces pre-emptive measures by the Haryana government. Fencing around the state aims to deter a recurrence of the 2020-21 protests.
- **Farmers' Protest 2.0 vs. 2020 Agitation**
 - **Agenda Shift:** Demands include legal MSP guarantee, full debt waiver, farmer pension, Swaminathan Commission's formula implementation, and withdrawal of 2020 protest cases.
 - **Leadership Dynamics:** New unions, specifically Samyukt Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha, spearhead the movement.
 - **Government Response:** Negotiation process initiated before the march. Meetings on February 8 and 12 between farmer leaders and Union ministers.
 - **Security Measures:** Barbed wire, cement barricades, and road nails; Delhi under Section 144; Haryana-Punjab borders closed.

CMS COP14: Expect listing of new species, action plans for conservation at Samarkand summit



Context: COP14 will see proposals to include Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) in CMS Appendix II and its subspecies Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) for Appendix I. The proposal has been made by North Macedonia with co-proponents Uzbekistan, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Eurasian Lynx

- **About:** The Eurasian lynx (*Lynx lynx*) is one of the four extant species within the medium-sized wild cat genus *Lynx*.
- **Distributed:** Northern, Central and Eastern Europe to Central Asia and Siberia, the Tibetan Plateau and the Himalayas.
- **Range:** The Eurasian lynx, spanning Western Europe to Central Asia, has seen a significant reduction in its original habitat over the past few centuries.
- **Decline:** Remnant populations in Central Europe have endured persecution by humans, while substantial numbers still thrive in the Baltic countries, Scandinavia, and the Carpathian Mountains.
- **Balkan Lynx:** The Balkan lynx (*Lynx lynx balcanicus*) is an exceptionally rare sub-species of the Eurasian lynx.
- With fewer than 50 individuals remaining, it stands as one of the rarest cats globally, primarily confined to the southwest of the Balkans.
- **Threats to the Balkan Lynx:** It faces severe challenges in its limited habitat, including habitat destruction and direct persecution, including threats to its prey.
 - These factors collectively pose significant threats to the survival of the Balkan lynx population.
- **Lynx Habitat:** The lynx thrives in large forested areas, crucial for providing cover during hunting activities. These habitats also ensure an abundant supply of prey, essential for the lynx's sustenance and survival.

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