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MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



MK Yadav Sir

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GOVERNMENT E-MARKETPLACE

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 - ECONOMY)

'GeM may offer works contracts'

The procurement portal wants works contracts for construction projects to also be bid out through the platform with a transparent monitoring mechanism; procurements through the GeM platform this year rises past the ₹4 lakh crore mark

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Government e-Marketplace (GeM), an online platform for public procurement of goods and services, plans to seek the Centre's approval to enable work contracts for construction and building projects to also be bid out through the platform with a transparent monitoring mechanism to assess the progress in such contracts.

This is part of a broader reboot of the GeM platform, which is now used for everything from critical defence procurements to services like aircraft chartering and printing of election-related material, its chief executive officer P. K. Singh said on Friday.

The planned upgrade includes a revamp of its online interface to switch to an open Application Programming Interface (API) architecture, that will allow individual departments, States, and local bodies to create customised micro-procurement portals with multi-lingual interfaces and flexibilities for local rules.

On Thursday evening, a service procurement order from the State Bank of India worth about ₹400 crore pushed the total gross merchandise value of procurements done through the GeM platform this year beyond the ₹4 lakh crore mark–double the ₹2.01 lakh crore recorded in 2022-23.

On work contracts, Mr. Singh said the tendering process is often time-consuming, starting with the need to draft Requests for Proposals that can take six months to a year, and the tendering process often attracts only local contractors and also faces delays.

If the GeM is allowed for such projects, a contractor in Kerala can bid for work in Rajasthan and the project's progress can be monitored online. Milestone-linked payments released electronically which save contractors from having to pursue officers, and post-contract management features can also be included, the GeM CEO said.

Better practices

GeM says it wants to expedite the tendering process for public works contracts and attract contractors across India



- Currently, the tendering process for public procurement is often time-consuming and attracts only local contractors
- Total GMV of procurement via the GeM platform doubled from ₹2.01 lakh crore in 2022-23
- 'Platform now used even for defence procurement'

Advantages of GeM:

- Enhance seller access.
- Provision of easy return policy.
- Transparent and easy procurement.
- New product suggestion facility available to sellers.
- Price can be changed based on market conditions.
- Seller friendly dashboard for selling and monitoring supplies and payments.

Context: The Government e-Marketplace (GeM), an online platform for public procurement of goods and services, plans to seek the Centre's approval to enable work contracts for construction and building projects.

Government e-Marketplace (GeM)

- **About:** It is the national procurement portal of India.
- **Launched**: in 2016
- **Nodal Ministry**: Ministry of Commerce and Industry
- **Owned by:** The platform is owned by GeM SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle) which is a 100% Government-owned, non-profit company under the MoC&I
- **Objectives:** To facilitate procurement of goods and services by various government departments and organisations.
- **Organisation:** Open to all organizations, including autonomous bodies, public sector businesses, and government departments.
- **Developed by**: DGS&D with technical support from the National e-Governance Division (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology)
- **Country of Origin Mandatory:** Every time a new product is registered on GeM, sellers are required to list the Country of Origin.
- **Mandatory under rule**: Procurement of goods and services by Ministries and the Central Public Sector Enterprises (CPSEs) is mandatory for goods and services available on GeM under Rule 149 of the General Financial Rules, 2017.
- **e-bidding and reverse e-auction:** Provides tools of e-bidding and reverse e-auction to facilitate users to get best price for their goods.
- **Private players:** Private players cannot purchase but can sell products to government through the portal.
- **Product and services categories:** The portal features over 11,000 product categories with more than 29 lakh listed products, as well as over 270 service categories with more than 2.5 lakh service offerings.

THE HINDU

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FOREIGN CONTRIBUTION (REGULATION) ACT

Syllabus GS Paper 2 - Governance)

Govt. extends validity of FCRA registration of NGOs till June 30

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry on Thursday extended the validity of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) registration of non-government organisations (NGOs) and associations till June 30.

Registrations of many NGOs are up for renewal since September 29, 2020. The registration, mandatory to receive foreign funds, is renewed every five years.

The Ministry has extended the validity of NGOs at least nine times since 2020 as the applications could not be processed within the stipulated time frame.

On Thursday, the Ministry, in an order, said the registration certificates of entities whose validity was extended till March 31 and "whose renewal application is pending will stand extended till June 30, 2024, or till the date of disposal of renewal application, whichever is earlier".

The Ministry said all FCRA-registered associations should note that in case of refusal of the application for renewal of registration, the validity of the certificate shall be deemed to have expired on the date of refusal of the application and the association or the NGO shall not be eligible either to receive the foreign contribution or utilise the foreign contribution received.

The order said that the registration of FCRA entities whose five-year validity period is expiring between April 1 and June 30 this year and the NGOs that have applied for renewal before the expiry of the registration will also stand extended till June 30 "or till the date of disposal of renewal application, whichever is earlier."

Context: The Union Home Ministry extended the validity of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) registration of non government organisations (NGOs) and associations till June 30.

Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA)

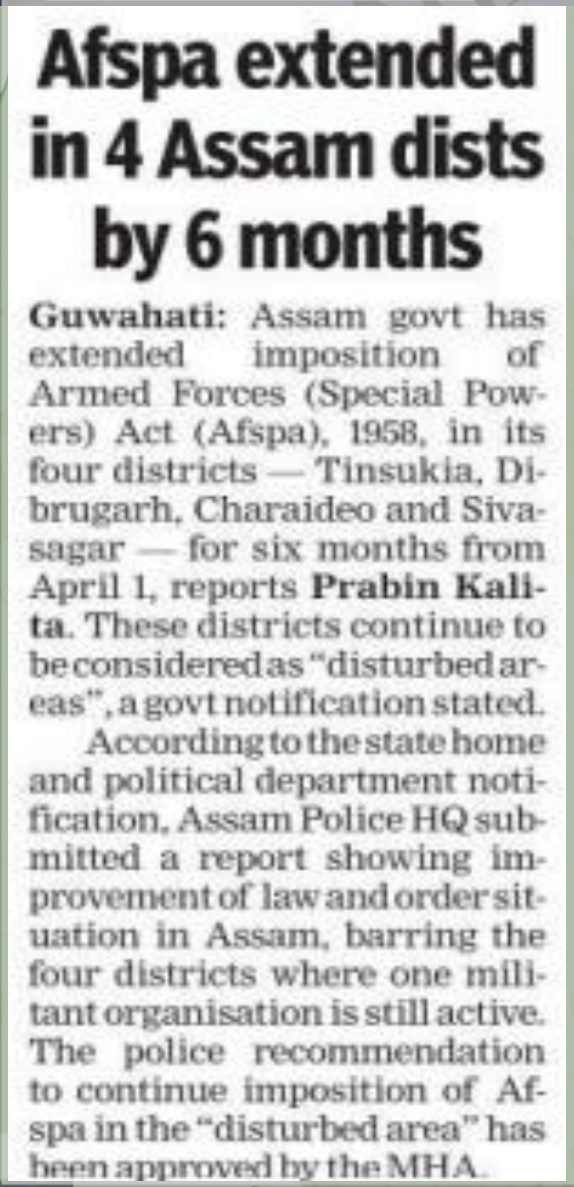
- **About:** Regulates the receiving and use of foreign contributions by individuals and corporations established in India. The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010 has come into effect from 2011.
- **Objectives:** The law sought to regulate foreign donations to individuals and associations so that they functioned "in a manner consistent with the values of a sovereign democratic republic.
- **Extend to**: It extends to the whole of India.
- **Apply to:**
  - Citizens of India outside India.
  - Associate branches or subsidiaries, outside India, of companies or bodies corporate, registered or incorporated in India.
- **Validity:** Once granted, FCRA registration is valid for five years.
- **Renewal**: NGOs are expected to apply for renewal within six months of the date of expiry of registration.
- **Expiry:** In case of failure to apply for renewal, the registration is deemed to have expired, and the NGO is no longer entitled to receive foreign funds or utilise its existing funds without permission from the ministry.
- **FCRA requires every person or NGO seeking to receive foreign donations:**
  - Registered under the Act.
  - To open a bank account for the receipt of the foreign funds in State Bank of India, Delhi.

TIMES OF INDIA

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ARMED FORCES (SPECIAL POWERS) ACT (AFSPA)

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Internal security)



Afspa extended in 4 Assam dists by 6 months

Guwahati: Assam govt has extended imposition of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (Afspa), 1958, in its four districts — Tinsukia, Dibrugarh, Charaideo and Sivasagar — for six months from April 1, reports **Prabin Kalita**. These districts continue to be considered as "disturbed areas", a govt notification stated.

According to the state home and political department notification, Assam Police HQ submitted a report showing improvement of law and order situation in Assam, barring the four districts where one militant organisation is still active. The police recommendation to continue imposition of Afspa in the "disturbed area" has been approved by the MHA.

Context: Assam govt has extended imposition of Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (Afspa), 1958, in its four districts, for six months from April 1.

Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA), 1958

- **About**:An Act to enable certain special powers to be conferred upon members of the armed forces in disturbed areas.
- **History:** The Act in its original form was promulgated by the British in response to the Quit India movement in 1942. After Independence, Government decided to retain the Act, which was first brought in as an ordnance and then notified as an Act in 1958.
- **Imposition Of AFSPA:** It has been imposed on the Northeast states, Jammu & Kashmir, and Punjab during the militancy years. Punjab was the first state from where it was repealed,
  - It remains in force in Nagaland, Manipur, Assam, J&K, and parts of Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Powers to declare areas to be disturbed areas**: Governor of that State or the administrator of that Union Territory or the Central Government.
- **Ground For declaration**: If in the opinion of concerned authority, Disturbed or dangerous condition that the use of armed forces in aid of the civil power is necessary, the authority, may by notification, declare the whole or such part of such State or Union territory to be a disturbed area.

GREAT INDIAN BUSTARD

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Environment)

Power threat to the bustard

The Centre has told the SC that it is not possible to put power lines underground in the habitat of the Great Indian Bustard. What is the nature of the threat to the bird, and how valid is the Centre's argument?

JAY MAZOOMDAAR
NEW DELHI, MARCH 29

THE SUPREME Court last week said it will review its April 2021 order to bury underground all power lines in the habitat of the Great Indian Bustard (GIB), after the Centre found the order "practically impossible to implement" over long distances.

The court created a seven-member committee that will suggest steps to protect and conserve the GIB, identifying critical areas where power lines may have to go underground.

With fewer than 150 individuals of this large, ostrich-like bird species left in the wild, the critically endangered GIB is caught in a deadly maze of power lines that criss-cross its last refuge in the Kutch and Thar deserts of western India.

As these vast, open landscapes also carry the promise of abundant solar and wind energy, the high-tension networks evacuating power are only getting denser with new projects proposed every year.

Following the deaths of a number of birds due to collisions with power lines over the years, the Supreme Court three years ago ordered that the overhead transmission network should be sent underground in key habitats of the GIB.



Devesh Gaukwar





WII/Bipin CM

Windmills and power transmission lines criss-cross the last refuge of the Great Indian Bustard, in Thar desert.

Why power lines kill bustards

Power lines pose a risk to all flying birds. In 2020, a study carried out by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) in 4,200 sq km of GIB habitat in and around Desert National Park (DNP) in Rajasthan estimated that power lines killed around 84,000 birds of multiple species every year.

GIBs are especially vulnerable because of their narrow frontal vision and large size. Unlike some birds that have a panoramic vision around the head, species like raptors and bustards have extensive blind areas above their heads. When they stretch their head forward to scan the ground below, they fly blind in the direction of travel.

In an affidavit submitted in court in March 2021, the Ministry of Power had said: "They (GIBs) cannot detect power lines ahead of them from far. As they are heavy birds, they are unable to manoeuvre across power lines within close distances."

The 2020 WII study estimated that a "conservative estimate of 4 power line induced mortalities per year was sufficient" to cause the extinction of the GIB within 20 years. Acknowledging the urgency, the SC in April 2021 ordered the lines to be buried "irrespective of the cost factor".

Arguments of the Centre

In an affidavit submitted to the SC this February, the Centre said taking lines of 66 KV and higher voltage underground was not feasible for the evacuation of bulk power due to constraints such as transmission losses, maintenance challenges, multiple cable joints, increased time requirements, and concerns of safety.

"The cost implications of undergrounding of all power lines in the large area identified are very heavy — running into many thousands of crores," the Centre said. "The cost of externalities that will burden the nation", it said, were "huge" and "disproportionate".

The affidavit also said that harnessing renewable power from high-potential areas of Rajasthan and Gujarat was "essential for meeting rising power demand...and...India's international commitments on climate change".

On the ground, a reality check

On March 5, 2020, Power Minister R K Singh told Lok Sabha that underground cable systems of 220-400 KV voltage were "an integral part of the Modern Day Power Transmission Infrastructure".

However, the Minister explained, due to higher reactive compensation requirements and higher costs compared to overhead systems, underground cables were being used on a case-by-case basis for short distances. His answer annexed a list of 54 underground power lines — the longest being a 320 KV line over 32 km.

In its 2021 order, the SC listed two types of power lines — those that would install bird diverters, and those that would be converted to underground lines, if feasible, within a year.

In Rajasthan, 25 transmission lines with a total length of 1,342 km were to install bird diverters. Only four of these lines, of 104 km cumulative length, were to be laid underground. All four are 33 KV lines, the longest of which stretches 45 km.

A summary cost estimate put the total expenses of installing bird diverters across 1,342 km and undergrounding 104 km at Rs 287.36 crore, which "could be reduced to approx Rs 150 crore by opting for economic but quality diverters".

While the Centre's affidavit protested against spending "many thousands of crores", none of the four 33 KV lines — budgeted at only Rs 59 crore for 104 km in Rajasthan — have been laid underground in the three years since the SC's 2021 order.

Over this period, a court-appointed committee appraised applications for new power lines of around 2,356 km through the GIB landscape in the Thar, and ratified 98% of the length for overhead laying.

Other threats faced by GIB

Power lines are not the only threat to the GIB. Free-ranging dogs have proliferated alarmingly in the Thar landscape. In 2017, feral packs accounted for up to a third of Chinkara depredation in the DNP.

While GIBs continue to be hunted sporadically, the widespread use of pesticides in farmlands poses a greater risk to the bird. Loss of grassland, particularly nesting sites, and an erosion of support from local communities are other concerns.

In its affidavit, the Centre said the government was working to save the bustard through initiatives such as captive breeding and habitat restoration and protection. Despite teething troubles, efforts at captive breeding succeeded at Sam in Jaisalmer district, when two GIB females laid eggs in captivity and a chick was hatched through artificial incubation in March 2023.

However, the purpose of captive breeding is to supplement the wild population, which is possible only when a sizable habitat is freed of hostile infrastructure. "Burying cables is the priority, since bird diverters are not foolproof. Where undergrounding is not feasible, we should buy the best diverters and spend well on their maintenance. The government has enough CAMPA funds (meant for compensatory afforestation and improvement of wildlife habitat)," a former member of the Rajasthan State Wildlife Board said.

Not green energy vs wildlife

A forest officer who has served in DNP cautioned against pitting sustainable development goals against the survival needs of a species. "Godavan [GIB] is the flagship species of the grassland, and the state bird of Rajasthan. We cannot greenwash its potential loss in the name of renewable power," he said.

A WII researcher who has worked on the species stressed the danger of "an infrastructure overdrive" in the desert. "We need to demarcate how much land we can devote to installations for harnessing the sun and wind without damaging the desert ecology," he said.

In its order passed on March 21, the SC was inclined to modify the scope of burying power lines from 88,636 sq km of potential GIB area to 13,696 sq km of priority GIB area in Rajasthan and Gujarat. On his part, M K Ranjitsinh, the petitioner in the case, has asked that at least 20,890 sq km of GIB habitat be freed of overhead lines.

The expert committee appointed by the court has until July 31 to make its recommendations.

Context:The Supreme Court said it will review its April 2021 order to bury underground all power lines in the habitat of the Great Indian Bustard.

Great Indian Bustard

- **About:** It is the State bird of Rajasthan and is considered India's most critically endangered bird.
- **Flagship species:** It is considered the flagship grassland species, representing the health of the grassland ecology.
- **Habitat:**
  - Its population is confined mostly to Rajasthan and Gujarat.
  - Small populations occur in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.
- **Protection Status:**
  - IUCN: Critically Endangered
  - CITES: Appendix 1
  - Convention on Migratory Species (CMS): Appendix 1
  - Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule 1
- **Concerns**: As Rajasthan shares the international border with Pakistan's Sindh and Punjab provinces, the birds will become easy prey for the gun-toting poachers there.
- **Initiatives taken to protect GIB:**
  - **Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats:** GIB is kept under the species recovery programme under the Integrated Development of Wildlife Habitats of the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

ANGEL TAX

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Economy)



'Angel tax aimed at hawala-like deals'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: Commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said that the angel tax was introduced because fly-by-night entities were using this route to inflate value and create capital. The minister said he would like to see more domestic funding for startups as foreign investors pick up ideas of bright young people and end up owning most of the companies.

Goyal also ruled out tax relief for startups that registered overseas and now wanted to return to India. "If someone wants to come back to India, they will have to pay the tax, as discrimination would be very difficult to justify. They (startups) did not go out because of pressure or any reason. They went out for better tax planning. If they pay some tax here, it will help us give some more scholarships to poor children, it will help us make a few houses for the poor, it will help us replace slums with proper housing," he told newspersons during his visit to the **TOI** office on Friday.

Goyal dismissed suggestions that govt was at a standstill due to the general elections. Instead, he said, it's super active in leveraging the foundation laid over the last 10 years to ensure that India is a developed nation by 2047.

The minister said that while he has not been appraised of any recent income tax notices to startups under Section 68 of the Income Tax Act and they were likely linked to the issue of valuation, he would seek an explanation from the department. Goyal said that India had over 100 unicorns — the third-largest number in any country worldwide. "The startup ecosystem is working very smoothly, and govt is supportive through various funds. I wish to see more private sector investment from domestic funds and domestic industry."

"Our young men and women come up with brilliant ideas. Foreign investors are super savvy. They picked up that idea and almost start owning all our brilliant companies and startups," said Goyal.

There was a time when fly-by-night companies were being used for Hawala transactions or for creating capital. "They created a company and issued shares at inflated values and created capital. That was the reason that (angel) tax was brought in to ensure valuation norms," said Goyal, who is also in charge of textiles and food and consumer affairs ministries.

He said that the tax had a fallout on startups. "We have to balance the two. If it is totally opened up, the startup issue should be resolved but the other problem will start.," said Goyal.

'No backdoor imports of Chinese goods'

Commerce & industry minister **Piyush Goyal** said that the country's move to link lower duties to foreign direct investment included a consultation mechanism that allowed the government to claw back benefits to those countries if promised investments were not made. Goyal also ruled out any backdoor imports of Chinese goods through bilateral treaties that have trade agreements with China. "We bring elements into agreements so that such circumvention cannot take place," said Goyal. TNN

Context:Commerce and industry minister said that the angel tax was introduced because fly-by-night entities were using this route to inflate value and create capital.

Angel Tax

- **About**: An income tax levied, when an unlisted company issues shares to an investor at a price higher than its fair market value.
- **Under:** Under Section 56(2)(viib) of the Indian Income Tax Act.
- **Tax rate**: The effective rate of the angel tax is 30.6%.
- **Aim:** To curb the practice of issuing shares at a premium much higher than their fair value, which could potentially involve money laundering or tax evasion.
- **Applicability**:
  - Angel Tax was applicable to startups and unlisted companies that raised capital through the issue of shares.
  - If the issue price of the shares exceeded the fair market value, the excess amount was treated as income and taxed according.

Exemptions:

- The entity should be a DPIIT recognized Startup; Aggregate amount of paid up share capital and share premium of the Startup after the proposed issue of share, if any, does not exceed INR 25 Crore.

Eligibility Criteria for Startup:

- Turnover should be less than INR 100 Crores in any of the previous financial years.
- An entity shall be considered as a startup up to 10 years from the date of its incorporation.

BUSINESS STANDARD

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EXIT POLL
(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – POLITY)

No exit poll from 7 am of Apr 19 to 6:30 pm of June 1: EC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi, 29 March

The Election Commission has issued a notification banning the conduct, publication or publicising of exit polls between 7.00 am of April 19 and 6.30 pm of June 1 when votes will be cast for the Lok Sabha and four state assembly polls.

The notification issued on Thursday also made it clear that under the provisions of the Representation of the People Act, displaying any election matter including results of any opinion poll or any other poll survey, in any electronic media, would be prohibited during the 48-hour period ending with the time fixed for the conclusion of the poll. Besides Lok Sabha polls, assemblies of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Odisha and Sikkim are going for elections.

Separately, bye-election to 25 assembly constituencies in 12 states are also being held in this period.

Meanwhile, The Election Commission (EC) on Friday said its C-Vigil mobile application has become an effective tool in the hands of people for flagging poll code violations and since the announcement of the Lok Sabha election, more than 79,000 complaints have been received.

More than 99 per cent of the complaints have been resolved and close to 89 per cent of those were resolved within 100 minutes, the poll panel said.

Context: The Election Commission has issued a notification imposing a ban on the conduct, publication, or publicizing of exit polls from 7.00 am on April 19 to 6.30 pm on June 1, coinciding with the voting period for the Lok Sabha and four state assembly elections.

Exit Poll:

- **About**: An exit poll is conducted immediately after voters have cast their ballots in an election.
  - It aims to assess the support for political parties and their candidates based on the responses of voters as they exit the polling station.
- **Difference from Opinion Polls**:
  - Exit polls differ from opinion polls, which gather voters' views on election-related issues before voting takes place.
  - While opinion polls gauge general sentiments before elections, exit polls provide real-time data on voting patterns and outcomes.
- **Section 126A of the Representation of people Act 1951: It** prohibits conduct of Exit poll and dissemination of their results by means of print or electronic media during the period mentioned therein, i.e. **between the hour fixed for commencement of poll in the first phase and half an hour after the time fixed for close of poll for the last phase in all the States.**
- **About C-VIGIL APP:** cVIGIL is a user-friendly and easy to operate application that empowers Citizens to report **Model Code of Conduct Violations** such as bribery, free gift, liquor distribution, playing loudspeakers beyond the permissible time during the elections. By using a simple mobile app, the citizen captures the live photo or video.

INDIAN EXPRESS

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UN SECURITY COUNCIL
(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 - I.R)



Why US allowed UNSC resolution on Gaza ceasefire to pass

EXPERT EXPLAINS

ARUN K SINGH

THE UN SECURITY Council this week demanded an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas, and the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages, after the United States, which has repeatedly used its veto to shield its ally Israel, abstained from the vote. Why is this important, and does it matter?

The US has historically gone to great lengths to protect Israel from censure. Why did it abstain in the recent vote?

Historically, there has been broad bipartisan support in the US for Israel. But the situation in Gaza has divided opinion — a significant section of Americans is now critical of both Israel's action, and the full US backing for it.

This is important also in the context of the Presidential election in November. For President Joe Biden, the Arab and Muslim vote, as well as the vote from the Democratic party's left wing, will be crucial — and these voters have been critical of Israel. Swing states like Michigan and Wisconsin (both of which Biden carried in 2020) have significant Muslim populations, and will be crucial for the President in his likely re-match with Donald Trump.

Also, many Arab countries, some which are important partners to the US, are growing increasingly concerned at Israel's actions.

It is due to these reasons that the US felt it was politically prudent to not use its veto to block the call for an immediate ceasefire. In fact, only a couple of days earlier, the US itself had sought to move a resolution calling for a ceasefire and release of hostages, which was vetoed by Russia, which found some of the language unacceptable.

Has the US allowed a UNSC resolution critical of Israel to pass earlier? Does this mark a shift in US policy?

It is definitely an important signal from the US, which has been supportive of the Israeli government in the UNSC since the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023.

However, this is not the first time that the US has distanced itself from the Israeli position. In the final days of the Obama administration in 2016, the UNSC passed a resolution deeming Israel's settlements in Palestine illegal and a violation of international law, after the US abstained. Then, like now, relations between Israel's Prime Minister [Benjamin Netanyahu] and the US President were frayed over multiple issues.

Nonetheless, it is rare for the US to not provide cover to Israel in the UNSC. According to an analysis by the think tank Chicago Council on Global Affairs, until December 18, 2023, the US had vetoed 45 resolutions critical of Israel, accounting for more than half of its 89 vetoes in the UNSC.

Is the UNSC resolution binding? How can it be enforced?

In general, UN General Assembly resolutions are in the nature of recommendations, which explicate the UN membership's position on a certain matter. UNSC resolutions are normally seen as somewhat more prescriptive. However, there is a difference between UNSC votes under Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, with the latter considered as binding.

In any case, options for enforcing a UNSC resolution are limited if the country in question refuses to accept it, as Israel has already done. If the UNSC wants to enforce its decision, it can decide to authorise travel bans, sanctions, or the sending of troops — none of which is going to happen in this case. So the vote is more of a political message, including in terms of the US administration's current stance on the issue.

How will the decision to abstain play out domestically in the US?

It is yet to be seen how Biden's target demographic reacts — or whether the abstention will have any impact on disaffected traditionally Democrat voters.

However, the Republicans are already trying to exploit the situation. Mike Johnson, the Republican Speaker of the US House of Representatives, said last week that he will invite Netanyahu to address a joint meeting of Congress. This is unusual — normally, it is the President who invites a foreign leader to visit, and the leader may on occasion be invited to address a joint sitting. In 2015 though, Netanyahu was invited to address a joint meeting before any invitation from the President.

Democrats have traditionally enjoyed nearly 70-80 per cent of the Jewish vote.

Does the abstention signal any fundamental change in the US position on Israel?

No. The US has taken this position in a very specific situation. Its leaders remain invested in the broader US-Israel relationship. They do not identify all of Israel with Netanyahu, whose relations with the current US administration have deteriorated significantly. Earlier this month, Senate majority leader Chuck Schumer described Netanyahu as an obstacle to peace, and called for early elections in Israel — this is the line that the Democrats are taking, distancing themselves from the ruling dispensation and their political choices, but not necessarily from Israel.

In practical terms, I don't visualise any reduction in the US assistance to Israel. In 2016, the US made a long-term commitment of a 10-year, $38 billion aid program to Israel. There's also a deep connection between the industries on both sides — for example, the technology for the Iron Dome project, which Israel uses to protect itself from missile attacks, was developed in Israel, but the US had invested a lot of money in it. I do not see the US-Israel aid, trade, or defence partnership deteriorating.

So, what will be this resolution's impact?

It is undoubtedly an important political message in the current context. But it is not going to end the conflict.

The October 7 attacks, viewed as the largest single-day loss of Jewish life since the Holocaust, has left a deep impact on the Israeli psyche. From their perspective, their effort has been to restore deterrence, so something like that never happens again.

To that end, they have set themselves certain fairly maximalist goals, such as eliminating Hamas in its entirety. Such goals can be difficult to achieve, as the US found out in Afghanistan with respect to the Taliban, and Israel itself experienced when it had a military presence in Southern Lebanon from 1982-2000, which led to a strengthened Hezbollah.

Israel has so far not articulated any sustainable short-, medium-, or long-term goal that could command broader international support.

Arun K Singh is a former Indian Ambassador in both Washington DC and Tel Aviv. ***He spoke to Arjun Sengupta.***

Context: In a significant development, the UN Security Council has issued a demand for an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. The resolution also called for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

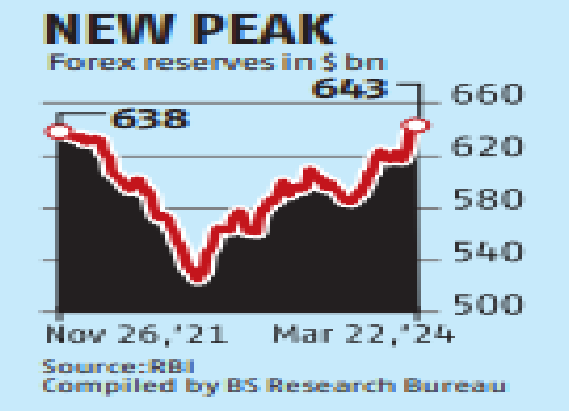
- United States, traditionally a staunch supporter of Israel and known for frequently exercising its veto power to shield Israel from UN actions, abstained from the vote.

UN Security Council (UNSC)

- **About:** The UNSC is one of the six principal organs of the United Nations, responsible for maintaining international peace and security.
- **Function:** Its primary functions include the establishment of peacekeeping operations, the imposition of sanctions, and the authorization of military action.
- **Membership: Comprises 15 member states:** 5 permanent members with veto power (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, United States) and 10 non-permanent members elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly.
  - **The permanent members' veto power allows them to block any substantive resolution, regardless of the level of international support.**
- **Decision-Making Process:**
  - **Resolutions** require the affirmative votes of at **least nine members**, including the concurring votes of all five permanent members, to pass.
  - Permanent members may **abstain from voting without exercising their veto power.**
- **Nature of UNSC Resolution:** In general, UN General Assembly resolutions are in the nature of recommendations, which explicate the UN membership's position on a certain matter. **UNSC resolutions are normally seen as somewhat more prescriptive.**
  - However, there is a difference between UNSC votes under Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, with the latter considered as binding.
  - In any case, options for enforcing a UNSC resolution are limited if the country in question refuses to accept it.
  - If the UNSC wants to enforce its decision, it can decide to authorize travel bans, sanctions, or the sending of troops.

FOREX RESERVE
(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Economy)

India's forex kitty jumps to record high of $642.63 bn



India's foreign exchange reserves rose for a fifth straight week to hit a record high of $642.63 billion as of March 22, data from the the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) showed on Friday. The reserves jumped by $139 million in the reporting week.

Changes in foreign currency assets, expressed in dollar terms, include the effect of appreciation or depreciation of other currencies held in its reserves.

Context: India's forex reserves have scaled to a historic pinnacle, reaching an impressive $642.463 billion as on March 2024, marking a significant milestone for the country's economic landscape.

INDIA'S FOREX RESERVES

- **Definition:** These reserves are assets like foreign currencies, gold reserves, and treasury bills, among other things, maintained by a country's central bank or other monetary authority.
- **Nodal body in India:** Reserve Bank of India.
- **Legal status**: RBI Act and the Foreign Exchange Management Act, 1999 govern the foreign exchange reserves.
- **Components:** Four categories of foreign exchange reserves:
  - **Foreign Currency Assets:** Largest component, constituting more than 80% of the total portfolio.
    - ✓ India heavily invests in US treasury bills, with about 75% of foreign currency assets in dollar-denominated securities.
    - ✓ Treasury bills of foreign countries > Deposit in foreign central banks > Deposit in commercial banks abroad.
  - **Gold Holdings:** Represents physical gold reserves held by the central bank. 2nd largest component.
  - **Special Drawing Rights SDRs:** International reserve assets allocated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).
    - ✓ Supplemented to member countries' official reserves.
    - ✓ **The SDR is not a currency, but its value is based on a basket of five currencies—the US dollar, the euro, the Chinese renminbi, the Japanese yen, and the British pound sterling.**
  - **Reserve Tranche Position: Portion of a country's IMF quota available for immediate use without conditions.**
    - ✓ **Provides liquidity support during financial crises or balance of payments deficits.**
    - ✓ Smallest component.

PIB

Mar 30

INDRA MOBILE APP

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – ENVIRONMENT)

METOC SEMINAR 'MEGHAYAN 2024' - AN INSIGHT INTO THE FRONTLINE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Posted On: 29 MAR 2024 2:57PM by PIB Delhi

Context:During the METOC seminar 'Meghayan-24', organized jointly by the School of Naval Oceanology & Meteorology (SNOM) and the Indian Naval Meteorological Analysis Centre (INMAC) as part of the World Meteorological Day celebrations, a significant milestone was achieved with the launch of the INDRA mobile application.

INDRA mobile application:

- **It stands for** Indian Naval Dynamic Resource for Weather Analysis.
- **Objective:** To disseminate weather related information and forecasts empowering optimal & quick decision making.
- **Developed By:** The application has been developed by BISAG (Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics) in coordination with Directorate of Naval Oceanology and Meteorology, Indian Navy.

BISAG (Bhaskaracharya National Institute for Space Applications and Geo-informatics):

- **Legal Status:** BISAG is an Autonomous Scientific Society registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.
- **Nodal Ministry:** The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).
- **Objective:** To undertake technology development & management, research & development, facilitate National & International cooperation, capacity building and support technology transfer & entrepreneurship development in area of geo-spatial technology.

World Meteorological Day:

- The World Meteorological Day is commemorated every year on 23rd March.
- It marks the origin of World Meteorological Organization (WMO) on 23 Mar 1950.
  - A specialized agency of the United Nations whose mandate covers weather, climate and water resources.

PIB Mar 30

SANCHAR SAATHI PORTAL
(Syllabus: GS Paper 3– CYBER SECURITY)

Government issues advisory against calls impersonating DoT, threatening people to disconnect mobile numbers

Context: The Department of Telecommunications (DoT), Ministry of Communications, has issued a cautionary advisory to citizens regarding fraudulent calls impersonating DoT officials. Moreover are encouraged to utilize the Sanchar Saathi portal.

Sanchar Saathi portal:

- **Launched In: 2023.**
- **Nodal Ministry**: Sanchar Saathi portal is a citizen centric initiative of Department of Telecommunications.
- **Developed By:** Designed, Developed and Hosted by Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT).
- **Objective: T**o empower mobile subscribers, strengthen their security and increase awareness about citizen centric initiatives of the Government.
- **Features:**
  - Sanchar Saathi empowers citizens by allowing them to know the mobile connections issued in their name
  - Get disconnected the connections either not taken by them or not required by them
  - Block and trace stolen/lost mobile phones and check genuineness of devices while buying a new/old mobile phone.
  - Sanchar Saathi facilitates citizens for reporting suspected fraud communication.
- **Various modules:**
  - Chakshu facilitates citizens to report the suspected or unsolicited communications received through call, SMS or WhatsApp which are intended for cyber-crime, financial frauds, impersonation.
  - Centralized Equipment Identity Register (CEIR).
  - Telecom Analytics for Fraud Management and Consumer Protection (TAFCOP)
  - ASTR (Artificial Intelligence and Facial Recognition powered Solution for Telecom SIM Subscriber Verification)

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