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SCIENCE AND
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MK Yadav Sir

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Decoding the judgment on Jim Corbett

In its ruling in March, the Supreme Court brought to light the unholy nexus of politicians, forest officials, and local contractors responsible for the felling of 6,000 trees in the Jim Corbett National Park in Uttarakhand. This state of affairs underlines one fact clearly: despite conservation goals receiving priority through policies and laws including the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, Project Tiger, and the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, the state's main interest remains increasing revenue. The illegal destruction of trees in Jim Corbett can be seen in contravention of the 1983 Supreme Court judgment in *Rural Litigation and Entitlement Kendra vs. State of Uttar Pradesh*, which said that "economic growth cannot be achieved at the cost of environmental destruction and people's right to healthy environment."

The Judgment

National and State forest authorities have leaned on ecotourism to simultaneously attain conservation goals, enhance revenue, and improve the livelihoods of local people. In its recent judgment, instead of treating ecotourism as a panacea for conservation and revenue generation, the Supreme Court said that the approach must be of eco-centrism and not anthropocentrism. The court directed the banning of tiger safaris in core areas and the constitution of a committee to explore the feasibility of permitting tiger safaris in peripheral areas in not just Jim Corbett, but across India. It also disagreed with the 2009 guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority permitting a tiger safari on the lines of a zoo in a national park. The court stressed that tigers should be sourced from the same landscape as where the safari is being conducted and not outside the tiger reserve.

According to British environmentalist Norman Myers,



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the precautionary principle is becoming an established principle for policymakers tackling environmental problems. The principle says "where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent such environmental degradation." On banning safaris in core areas, the Court invoked this principle to ensure that there is least damage to the environment. Myers had said, "In salient respects, the principle applies to biodiversity more than any other environmental problem. This is because the main extinction gathering force will, if it proceeds unchecked, not only eliminate half or more species but will leave the biosphere impoverished for at least 5 million years." The International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species monitors 1,202 animal species in India. In 2021, it found that 12% of them are endangered. According to a report of the Centre for Science and Environment in 2021, India has lost 90% of the area under its four biodiversity hotspots. The precautionary principle therefore applies not only in the case of tigers, but also other species, especially endangered ones.

What the court missed
However, the Court's decision to assess the damage done to the green cover of Jim Corbett so as to identify the cost of restoration and recover the same from the errant individuals and officers appears to be a mirage in the absence of a well-defined methodology. Recovering the cost of restoration does not amount to necessarily recovering the loss of the ability of the environment to provide goods and services. As per the European Liability Directive 2004, the conservation status of natural habitat means the "sum of influences acting on a natural habitat and its typical species that may affect its long-term natural

distribution, structure, and functions as well as the long-term survival of its typical species." In India, the framework of valuation which predated the T.N. Godvarman case (1996) was aimed at replacing lost natural forest with compensatory plantations. The two choices which are supported legally and institutionally and serve as the background for the valuation of forest land in India are now compensatory afforestation levy and net present value (NPV). The levy is essentially a form of replacement cost, designed to replace the forest land which was lost as a result of diversion of forest towards non-forestry use. Since the levy is found to be insufficient in terms of making good the loss, the Court introduced the NPV in 2002 as an additional payment obligation. But both these methodologies do not rightly account for the correlation between the removal of trees and the harm caused to other environmental goods and services.

In the context of the growing degradation of biodiversity hotspots and the support to revenue-generating eco-tourism, a valuation method which is based on ecosystem services (food, water, and services regulating the climate and floods, etc.) is a must. The system refers to the benefits people obtain from natural ecosystems in contrast with man-made structures. The Court could have set a precedent by saying that ecosystem services are more important and generate more revenue than eco-tourism or raised the need of putting in place a precise law and policy relating to ecosystem services. The reasoning provided by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in *Costa Rica v. Nicaragua* (2018) could have been used to understand the methodologies in evaluating damage to the environment. The ICJ asserted that damage to the environment, and the consequent loss of the ability of the environment to provide goods and services, is compensable.

JIM CORBETT NATIONAL PARK

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Env and Eco)

Jim Corbett National Park

- **Location:** Situated in the Nainital district of Uttarakhand state, India.
- **Establishment:** 1936 during the British Raj.
 - Originally named Hailey National Park after William Malcolm Hailey, a governor of the United Provinces.
- **Renamed:** Corbett National Park in 1956, after the hunter and naturalist Jim Corbett.
- **Tiger Reserve:** Highest Number of tigers in India.
- **Geography:** Spans an area of 520.8 km², including hills, riverine belts, marshy depressions, and grasslands.
 - Elevation ranges from 1,300 to 4,000 ft (400 to 1,220 m).
- **Vegetation:** Encompasses dense moist deciduous forests dominated by species like Sal (*Shorea robusta*).
- **Fauna:** Home to a diverse range of wildlife, including Bengal tigers, Asiatic elephants, leopards, deer species, sloth bears, Indian pythons, and various bird species.
 - More than 550 species of resident and migratory birds documented.
- **River:** Ramganga (A tributary of Ganga River).

Supreme Court Judgement

- **Court Bans Tiger Safaris in Core Areas:** The court directed the banning of tiger safaris in core areas across India, not just limited to Jim Corbett.
- **Formation of Committee:** A committee was constituted to explore the feasibility of permitting tiger safaris in peripheral areas.
- **Disagreement with NTCA Guidelines:** The court disagreed with the 2019 guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) regarding tiger safaris resembling zoos in national parks.
- **Emphasis on Local Sourcing:** Stressing on conservation, the court mandated that tigers for safaris should be sourced from the same landscape as the safari location, prohibiting sourcing from outside tiger reserves.

HOW DID STAR RESIDING IN 'DRAGON'S EGG' NEBULA GET A MAGNETIC FIELD?

TWO LARGE stars, residing inside a spectacular cloud of gas and dust nicknamed the 'Dragon's Egg' nebula, have long presented a puzzle to astronomers. One of them has a magnetic field, like our Sun. But its companion does not. Moreover, such massive stars are not usually associated with nebulae.

Researchers now appear to have solved this mystery.

What has the new research found?

According to a study published on Thursday in the journal *Science*, the bigger star apparently gobbled up a (third) smaller sibling star, and the mixing of their stellar material during this hostile takeover created a magnetic field.

"This merger was likely very violent. When two stars merge, material can be thrown out, and this likely created the nebula we see today," said Abigail Frost, astronomer at the Chile-based European Southern Observatory, and the study's lead author.

Computer simulations previously had predicted that the blending of stellar material during such a merger could create a magnetic field in the star born in the process.

The two remaining stars – gravitationally bound to each other in what is called a binary system – are located in our Milky Way galaxy, about 3,700 light years from Earth in the constellation Norma. A light year is the distance light travels in a year, roughly 9.5 trillion km.

The magnetic star is about 30 times more massive than the Sun, and its companion is about 26.5 times more massive than the Sun. They orbit each other at a distance varying from seven to 60 times the distance between the Earth and the Sun.

What do we know about the Dragon's



The 'Dragon's Egg' nebula surrounding a pair of stars. Reuters

Egg nebula?

The Dragon's Egg is so named because it is located relatively near a larger nebula complex called the 'Fighting Dragons of Ara'. The stars inside the Dragon's Egg appear to have started out 4-6 million years ago as a triple system – three stars born at the same time and gravitationally bound.

The triple system's two innermost members included a larger star – perhaps 25 to 30 times the mass of the Sun – and a smaller one – maybe five to 10 times the Sun's mass.

The more massive one evolved more quickly than the other, with its outer layer engulfing the smaller star and triggering a merger that ejected into space the gas and dust that make up the nebula, the researchers said.

This occurred very recently in a cosmic time scale – only about 7,500 years ago, based on the expansion velocity of the material in the nebula. It consists mostly of hydrogen and helium, but also an unusually large amount of nitrogen, thanks to the merger. Many Sun-sized stars generate magnetic fields.

REUTERS

Context: Two large stars residing inside a spectacular cloud of gas and dust nicknamed the "Dragon's Egg" nebula have presented a puzzle to astronomers.

New Research Findings

- **Star Cannibalism Revealed:** A recent study in *Science* suggests that a larger star devoured a smaller sibling, resulting in a merger that generated a magnetic field through the mixing of their materials.
- **Violent Stellar Merger:** Astronomer of the study, indicates that the merger was likely turbulent, potentially ejecting material and forming the observed nebula.
- **Binary System Discovery:** The two remaining stars, now a binary system, are situated approximately 3,700 light-years away in the Milky Way galaxy's Norma constellation, with a light-year representing about 9.5 trillion kilometers.
- **Stellar Characteristics:** The magnetic star, 30 times more massive than the Sun, and its companion, 26.5 times more massive, orbit each other at varying distances, ranging from seven to 60 times the Earth-Sun distance.

Dragon's Egg Nebula

- **About:** The Dragon's Egg nebula surrounds a pair of stars and is named after its proximity to the 'Fighting Dragons of Ara' nebula complex.
- **Birth of the Triple Star System:** The stars within the Dragon's Egg nebula formed approximately 4-6 million years ago as a triple system, originating from the same stellar birth event.
- **Composition:** The triple system comprised a larger star, possibly 25 to 30 times the mass of the Sun, and a smaller star, estimated to be five to 10 times the Sun's mass.
- **Evolution and Merger:** The larger star evolved faster, leading to its outer layers engulfing the smaller star, culminating in a merger event that ejected gas and dust, forming the nebula.
- **Recent Cosmic Event:** The merger event occurred relatively recently in cosmic terms, around 7,500 years ago, based on the expansion velocity of the nebular material.
- **Unusual Composition:** The nebula primarily consists of hydrogen and helium but contains a notable amount of nitrogen, attributed to the merger event.
- **Magnetic Fields:** Many stars similar in size to the Sun produce magnetic fields, contributing to the dynamics within the Dragon's Egg nebula.

Jallianwala Bagh massacre anniversary: PM Modi and President Murmu pay tribute to victims

Context: Prime Minister of India paid tribute to the people killed in the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in 1919 and shared a video defining the incident and showcasing the unparalleled courage and sacrifice of the victims.

Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

- **About:** It was a culmination of British colonial policies, including the introduction of laws like the Defence of India Act and the Rowlatt Act, granting extraordinary powers to the government.
- **Return of Gandhi and Rising Unrest:** Gandhi's return to India and his opposition to the Rowlatt Act heightened tensions, leading to widespread protests and strikes across the country.
- **Tense Situation in Punjab:** Punjab, with its strategic importance and significant presence in the British Indian Army, was a focal point of unrest, especially with the imposition of martial law in certain areas.
- **Events Leading to the Massacre**
 - **Proclamation and Disobedience:** Despite General Dyer's proclamation prohibiting public gatherings, thousands defied the order and gathered at Jallianwala Bagh on April 13, 1919.
 - **Brutal Response:** General Dyer ordered his troops to open fire on the unarmed crowd, leading to a massacre that lasted for about ten minutes.
- **Immediate Effects of the Massacre**
 - **Public Outrage and International Response:** The brutality of the massacre shocked the nation and drew condemnation worldwide, with figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore taking significant actions in protest.
 - **Impact on British Rule:** The incident shattered the perception of British justice and fueled the resistance against colonial governance, marking a turning point in India's struggle for independence.
- **Aftermath and Long-term Consequences**
 - **Ineffective Inquiry and Lack of Accountability:** Despite condemnations, the British government's response, including the ineffective Hunter Commission, failed to hold General Dyer accountable, exacerbating the sense of injustice among Indians.
 - **Legacy of Resistance:** The Jallianwala Bagh massacre galvanized the Indian populace, leading to movements like the Non-cooperation movement and contributing to the eventual downfall of British colonial rule in India.

Lamp to Lotus, Two Bullocks to Hand: a story of symbols

SHYAMLAL YADAV
NEW DELHI, APRIL 14

ELECTION SYMBOLS are a critical component of elections. They are a party's identity, and help voters recognise candidates. When parties split, a battle is fought for its election symbol. What is the history of the iconic election symbols of the country's oldest and largest parties, the Congress' 'Hand', and the BJP's 'Lotus'?

Beginning of symbols

Before the first Lok Sabha election of 1951-52, the Election Commission of India (ECI) realised that election symbols were critical in a country where the literacy rate was less than 20%. It was decided that symbols should be familiar and easily recognisable, and should not show any object with a religious or sentimental association, such as cow, temple, the National Flag, spinning wheel, etc. Parties that were recognised as national and state parties, were offered choices from a list of 26 symbols approved by the ECI.

Allotment of symbols

At present, Rules 5 and 10 of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961 deal with symbols. Rule 5 states that the ECI shall "specify the symbols that may be chosen by candidates at elections in parliamentary or assembly constituencies and the restrictions to which their choice shall be subject".

The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968 defines a "reserved symbol" as one that is "reserved for a recognised political party for exclusive allotment to [its] contesting candidates". A "free symbol" is "a symbol other than a reserved symbol".

Free symbols are allotted to independent and unrecognised registered parties based on their request and preferences.

Symbol of the Congress

Ahead of the first election, the preferred symbol of the Indian National Congress was 'Plough with Bullock', followed by 'Congress Flag with Charkha'. However, on August 17, 1951, the Congress was allotted 'Two Bulls (later 'Bullocks') with Yoke on'. The 'Human Hand', the Congress symbol today, was allotted to the All India Forward Bloc (Raiiker Group).

JOURNEYS OF THE ELEPHANT, ENGINE, BICYCLE

ELEPHANT, the symbol of the Bahujan Samaj Party, was allotted to the All India Scheduled Castes' Federation in the first Lok Sabha election.

RAILWAY ENGINE was removed from the list of free symbols in 1957 after many parties said it was unrecognisable to rural populations. It is today the symbol of Raj Thackeray's



Maharashtra Navnirman Sena.

BICYCLE, now the symbol of the Samajwadi Party, was earlier allotted to some state parties.

BOW & ARROW was allotted to the Shiromani Akali Dal in 1952. After many splits, however, the SAD now has the 'Balance' (Tarazu).

In 1969, the Congress split into the Congress (O) and Congress (R), where 'O', headed by S Nijalingappa, stood for 'Organisation' and 'R', headed by Jagjivan Ram, for 'Requisitionists'. On January 11, 1971, the ECI decided that Jagjivan Ram's Congress, which was supported by Indira Gandhi, was the real Congress.

But the Supreme Court stayed the ECI's

order and ruled that neither group would be entitled to use 'Two Bullocks with Yoke on'. On January 25, 1971, the ECI allotted 'Charkha' being Plied by Woman' to the Nijalingappa group, and 'Calf and Cow' to the Jagjivan Ram/Indira group.

Several leaders objected, saying 'Calf and Cow' or 'Gornata' was related to religious sentiments, but the ECI overruled these objections.

Calf and Cow to Hand

In the late Seventies, the Indira-Jagjivan Ram Congress split again, and the anti-Indira group was led by Devraj Urs and K Brahmananda Reddy. On January 2, 1978, Indira was elected president of the Indian National Congress, and she approached ECI to retain 'Calf and Cow'. After the ECI said no, Indira moved the SC, which refused to interfere and dismissed the petition as withdrawn.

On February 2, 1978, the ECI recognised the Indira group as a national party named Indian National Congress (I) and allotted it the symbol 'Hand'. In 1979, the ECI froze the symbol 'Calf and Cow', and later recognised the Devraj Urs faction as a national party named Indian National Congress (U) with the symbol 'Charkha'.

The ECI subsequently decided that Congress (I) was in fact the real Indian National Congress. From the 1984 Lok Sabha election onward, Congress (I) became Congress, with the 'Hand' election symbol.

BJS to BJP, Lamp to Lotus

The Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) was allot-

ted 'Deepak' ('Lamp') as its election symbol on September 7, 1951. The BJS continued to use 'Lamp' until it was informally merged with the Janata Party before the 1977 election. Janata was born as an amalgam of four national parties and some unrecognised parties.

But the Janata Party very soon suffered a series of splits. On April 6, 1980, a group of leaders who had earlier been with the BJS met in Delhi and declared Atal Bihari Vajpayee as their leader. Both groups claimed to be the real Janata; however, the ECI ruled that neither could use the name until its final decision.

On April 24, 1980, the ECI froze the Janata Party's symbol 'Haldhar within Wheel', and recognised Vajpayee's group as a national party under the name of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and allotted it the symbol 'Lotus'.

Besides 'Haldhar within Wheel', the Janata splits resulted in the freezing of four other symbols — 'Lamp' (of the erstwhile BJS), 'Tree' (of the erstwhile Socialist Party), 'Woman ploughing Charkha' (of the Congress-O), and 'Farmer Ploughing the Field' (of the Janata Party-S).

Context: Election symbols are a critical component of elections. They are a party's identity, and help voters recognise candidates. When parties split, a battle is fought for its election symbol.

Election Symbol

- **About:** Election symbols were recognized as crucial tools in a low literacy rate environment like India pre-1951, prompting the Election Commission to prioritize their selection carefully.
- **Criteria for Symbol Selection:** Symbols had to be easily recognizable and devoid of any religious or sentimental connotations, such as national flags or religious symbols, to ensure neutrality and inclusivity.
- **Limited Choices:** Recognized national and state parties were presented with a selection of 26 pre-approved symbols by the Election Commission, reflecting a diverse yet restricted range of options.
- **Allotment of symbols**
 - **Regulatory Framework:** Rules 5 and 10 of the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961, outline the Election Commission's authority to specify permissible symbols for candidates and the associated regulations.
 - **Reserved Symbols:** The Election Symbols (Reservation and Allotment) Order, 1968, categorizes symbols as either "reserved" for exclusive use by recognized political parties or "free" for general use, ensuring fairness and order in symbol allotment.
- **Under Paragraph 15 of the Order:** EC can decide disputes among rival groups or sections of a recognised political party staking claim to its name and symbol.
- **Authority of the Election Commission:** The EC is the only authority to decide issues on a dispute or a merger under the order, as upheld by the Supreme Court.

What is doxxing and what measures can you take if it happens to you?

The act of digitally publicising a person's private details is called doxxing. It allows abusers and criminals who are thousands of miles away to target victims by putting their private details online for others to exploit

Sahana Venugopal

A woman in mid-February reached out to the Mumbai Police through X (formerly Twitter) to report a man who had shared a video of her dancing at an event and compared her performance to sex work. The woman clarified that the video was re-posted without her consent and requested the man multiple times to take down the video, but he refused to do so. Many others began to share the video as well, and joined in to harass the woman, who locked her X account. Though the video was later disabled by X on copyright grounds, the man – a verified X user with a blue tick – continued to defend his actions.

The act of digitally publicising a person's private details is called doxxing, or doxing. Doxxers generally publicise highly personal data such as other people's home addresses, phone numbers, private email IDs, medical conditions, government documents, social security numbers, live locations, insurance information, private employment details etc. Such information is usually obtained through illegal methods such as hacking or theft. However, publicising private or semi-public content that an individual did not intend to share for public consumption can also result in doxxing and harassment.

The intent behind doxxing

For example, an ordinary person smoking or sipping whiskey at a house party might consent to their video being shared on

their friend's Instagram account, but they may not want that same clip to be publicly re-posted on X or YouTube, with their employers tagged. While the user who circulates an already public image or video may be legally in the clear, their intentions can be malicious and may endanger others.

"We also factor in the intent of the person sharing the information. For example, if we believe that someone is sharing information with an abusive intent, or to harass or encourage others to harass another person, we will take action," stated X in its 'private information and media policy' page.

Doxing does not end with bringing the perpetrator to justice. These users often share details that easily allow others worldwide to launch their own attacks against the victim, making it harder for the police to take action against all those who are responsible. Furthermore, doxxing is a direct attack on a person's physical, digital, and emotional security. A person who has been doxxed may have to flee their physical location, remain calm for the sake of young family members, clarify the situation with their employers, secure their leaked finances, file a report with the police, upgrade their internet security, be on the lookout for stalkers, and deal with a barrage of violent threats – all at once. Doxxing can also expose the people who live or work near the victim, increasing the affected person's chances of being evicted or fired.

What to do when doxxed

Mishi Choudhary, a technology lawyer and the founder of SFLC.in, advised

people who have been doxxed to keep an incident log containing evidence of what has taken place, including the relevant platforms and all those who were involved in the harassment. This can later be shown to law enforcement authorities.

"Report the accounts to all platforms on which you have been doxxed as it's against the policies of most social media platforms and they will be quick to take action," Choudhary advised, adding that users should also change all their passwords and turn on two-factor authentication to ensure their security. People who have been doxxed in India can report what happened through the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal, Choudhary said, and stressed that one has a legal right to file an FIR. This is where the incident log becomes useful.

Platforms such as Meta are aware of the need to protect users who have been doxxed, as the company's oversight board in February 2022 concluded that

Facebook and Instagram should have stricter rules concerning incidents where data such as home addresses are leaked online. "Once this information has been shared, the risk is that it can result, such as doxing, are difficult to remedy. Harms resulting from doxing disproportionately affect groups such as women, children and LGBTQIA+ people, and can include emotional distress, loss of employment and even physical harm or death," noted Meta's oversight board in its findings. Google also has tools in place to assist people who have been doxxed. The company allows internet users to submit removal requests that it then reviews for further action. Remember that YouTube

is owned by Google, so one can directly report any content posted there as well. X has an in-app reporting mechanism for private information, and a grievance officer whose job is to take action based on such reports. Reddit also provides a complaint forum.

Recently, messaging platform Discord updated its community policies by separating doxing and harassment guidelines. The change is set to go into effect in April. "Previously, doxing was combined with our harassment guideline. However, we consider these distinct harm types, so we separated them to better reflect how we organise our policies," said the new guidelines on the platform support page.

However, since social media companies operating within the country are bound by India's IT Rules, submitting a cybercrime complaint is one way to make sure the platform is forced to take action quickly.

That being said, victims of doxing do not have to leave social media forever. "I always tell people to be generally careful in what they are sharing so they can avoid such a situation but if you get doxxed, once you feel mentally ready, you can go back," Choudhary said. At the same time, users also need to make sure that their Personally Identifiable Information (PII) has been removed and that their accounts are secure, she noted. "Have a self care plan. Recruit friends, family and a support structure," Choudhary suggested. "Without support, it gets harder to do it alone. Women are targeted for several reasons and we must not feel weakened or ashamed."

DOXXING

(Syllabus: GS Paper 3 – Cyber Security)

Context: Recently, a woman in Mumbai filed a case of doxxing against a man with the police station, alleging that her video had been reposted without her permission.

Doxing

- **Definition:** Doxxing involves revealing intimate information about someone with the intent of harassment, often targeting individuals with opposing views or public figures.
- **Real-life Consequences:** Doxxing can have severe real-life consequences, including sending armed police or SWAT teams to victims' homes.
- **Private Information:** This information typically includes addresses, phone numbers, and financial details, posing a serious threat to personal safety and security.
- **Impact on Security:** Doxxing attacks encompass physical, digital, and emotional security, necessitating various actions for protection.
- **Immediate Responses:** Victims of doxxing must manage multiple tasks simultaneously, such as relocating, informing employers, securing finances, and seeking legal assistance.
- **Broader Implications:** Doxxing can endanger not only the victim but also those in their proximity, potentially leading to eviction or termination.

Modi promises 30 mn 'Lakhpati Didis', higher MSP

SANJEEB MUKHERJEE
New Delhi, 14 April

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Sunday pledged to make 30 million 'Lakhpati Didis', up from the 10 million rural women who have already achieved the feat.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday released the BJP's manifesto for the upcoming Lok Sabha elections. The manifesto says the ruling party will continue the quarterly financial disbursements under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM KISAN) yojana. It also promised to increase the Minimum Support Price (MSP) from time to time but stopped short of providing any legal backing to it as is being demanded by a section of farmers.



STATUS CHECK PM KISAN

Year	Amt disbursed (₹ cr)	Farmers benefitted (in mn)
FY19	6,323.58	30.2
FY20	48,740.01	88.1
FY21	61,937.01	101.3
FY22	67,132	107.8
FY23	58,274	107.3
FY24*	38,788.23	92.1

*Till January 31, 2024

Source: Parliament questions

All major opposition parties, including the Congress, in their manifestos, have promised to provide a legal guarantee of MSP.

According to data collated till a few months ago, the Central government has disbursed almost ₹282,000 crore through PM KISAN to farmers since 2018-19. The manifesto claimed that the

Central government has improved the livelihood of almost 40 million poor people through the PM-Awas Yojana.

The manifesto also talks of launching a Krishi Infrastructure Mission for integrated planning and coordinated implementation of agri-infrastructure projects like storage facilities, irrigation, grading and sorting units, cold storage facilities,

RURAL HOUSES CONSTRUCTED

Under PM-Awas Yojana

Total: 33,601,035

2,212,640

7,500,000

5,000,000

2,500,000

0

FY15

*Latest available data according to the website

Source: Ministry of Rural Development

and food processing, among others.

A special Krishi Satellite will also be

launched for farm-related activities like

crop forecasting, pesticide application,

irrigation, soil health, and weather

forecasting, it said.

The ruling party said it would support

the farmers to make India self-sufficient

in pulses like tur, urad, masoor,

moong and chana, and edible oils such as mustard, soybean, til and groundnut.

Strengthening the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana through more technological interventions to ensure speedy and more accurate assessment, faster payouts and quicker grievance resolution were other commitments made by the party.

For the allied sectors, the BJP said the network of dairy cooperatives would be expanded over the next five years through fodder banks, milk testing laboratories, bulk milk coolers, and milk processing units. It also promised to bring a new national policy to make the cooperative movement strong, efficient, transparent, technically rich and vibrant at the grassroots level.

The party vowed to double the custom hiring centres for mechanisation from the existing 25,000 with a specific objective of making agricultural machinery and equipment at stable prices.

Context: The ruling party recently pledged to create 30 million 'Lakhpati Didis', a significant increase from the 10 million rural women who have already attained this status.

Subset of the Program

- **Drone Didi:** Within this initiative, approximately 15,000 women SHGs will receive drones for agricultural activities. Drones hold the potential to transform agriculture by facilitating precision farming, crop monitoring, and pest control.
- **Skill training:** Women enrolled in this program undergo training in various skills, including LED bulb manufacturing, plumbing, and others.

Lakhpati Didi Scheme

- **About:** The announcement to promote women's engagement in micro-enterprises was made during the Independence Day speech.
- **Launched in:** 2023
- **Nodal Ministry:** Ministry of rural development
- **Objective:** The government, through the Lakhpati Didi Initiative, aims to train two crore women, fostering the creation of micro-enterprises within their respective villages.
- **Sustainable Income Goals:** To train women in self-help groups (SHGs), empowering them to generate a sustainable annual income of at least Rs 1 lakh per household.
- **Target:** Train two crore women
- **Diverse Skill Development:** Women under the scheme will receive training in various skills like plumbing, LED bulb making, drone operation and repair, tailoring, and weaving.
- **Transformative Rural Economy Vision:** The Ministry of Rural Development is adopting a comprehensive, whole-of-government approach to bring about maximum impact and convergence, aiming to transform the rural economy by empowering 'Lakhpati Didis.'

India lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000: Global Forest Watch

Context: India has lost 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000, according to the latest data from the Global Forest Watch monitoring project.

Global Forest Watch (GFW)

- **About:** It is an open-source web application developed to monitor global forests in near real-time.
- **Development and Affiliation:** It is a project of the Washington-based nonprofit research organization, the World Resources Institute (WRI).
- **Accessibility and Functionality:** GFW is free and user-friendly, allowing individuals to create custom maps, analyze forest trends, subscribe to alerts, and download data for specific regions or the entire globe.
- **Monitoring Metric:** In assessing forest extent, loss, and gain, GFW primarily utilizes the metric of tree cover. This metric is advantageous as it can be readily measured from space using freely available, medium-resolution satellite imagery.

Highlights of the GFW

- **Decline in Primary Forest:** Loss of primary forests in the tropics decreased by 9% in 2023 compared to 2022.
- **Magnitude of Tropical Forest Loss:** Approximately 37,000 square kilometers of tropical primary forest were lost globally in 2023, almost equivalent to the size of Switzerland.
- **Top Countries:** Brazil, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Bolivia led in tropical countries with the most primary forest losses.
- **Global Deforestation Trend:** Deforestation increased by 3.2% worldwide in 2023.
- **Tree Cover Loss in India:** India witnessed a loss of 2.33 million hectares of tree cover since 2000, marking a 6% decrease during this period.
- **Loss of Humid Primary Forest in India:** India lost 414,000 hectares of humid primary forest from 2002 to 2023, comprising 18% of its total tree cover loss.
- **Carbon Emission and Sequestration:** Indian forests emitted 51 million tons of CO₂ equivalent annually between 2001 and 2022, while removing 141 million tons annually, indicating a net carbon sink of 89.9 million tons per year.
- **Regional Distribution of Tree Cover Loss in India:** Five states accounted for 60% of all tree cover losses between 2001 and 2023, with Assam, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Manipur experiencing significant losses.

Uncertainty prevails over pact extension with Kuki-Zo groups

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Two months after the Manipur government refused to send a representative to a meeting called by the Centre to extend the suspension of operations (SoO) pact with Kuki-Zo insurgent groups, the "status quo" on the agreement exists on the ground.

Despite the Centre's directives to extend the pact, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government in Manipur did not send any official to the tripartite meeting on February 29, leaving the agreement in limbo.

The tripartite pact was signed in 2008 by the United Peoples' Front and the Kuki National Organisation, an umbrella of 24 insurgent groups, the Union Home Ministry, and the Manipur government. It has been extended periodically since 2008.

After ethnic violence between the Kuki-Zo people and the Meitei people

The BJP govt. in Manipur did not send any official to the tripartite meeting on Feb. 29

erupted in the State on May 3, 2023, there were strong demands from the Valley areas to abrogate the SoO agreement. Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh had claimed that the SoO groups violated ground rules and instigated the violence. Meitei civil society groups have demanded that the Home Ministry should not extend the pact.

On February 29, the Ministry chaired a meeting with the representatives of SoO groups and Manipur government. "There was one chair that was empty, it belonged to the Manipur government official. Since no one came, the SoO pact could not be extended on papers. As of now status quo exists," said a source.

KUKIS TRIBES

(Syllabus: GS Paper 2 – Vulnerable Section)

Context: Recently, as the Manipur Assembly passed a resolution urging the Union Government to abrogate the Suspension of Operations (SoO) pact with Kuki-Zo insurgent groups, which has been in effect since 2008, uncertainty loomed over the extension of the agreement.

Kukis

- **About:** These are an ethnic group consisting of multiple tribes originally from North-Eastern India, parts of Myanmar, and Bangladesh.
- **Origin of the Term:** "Kuki" is a term used generically for tribes associated with the group under colonial rule, not coined by the ethnic group itself.
- **Presence:** Present in all Northeast Indian states except Arunachal Pradesh.
- **Recognition:** About fifty Kuki tribes in India are recognized as scheduled tribes.
- **Kindred Tribes:** The Chin people of Myanmar and the Mizo people of Mizoram are kindred tribes of the Kukis, collectively known as the Zo people.
- **History:**
 - **Resistance to British Rule:** The Kuki Rebellion of 1917-19 marked the first resistance to British hegemony by the Kuki people.
 - **Subjugation by British:** After the rebellion, Kuki territory was subjugated by the British and divided between British India and British Burma.
 - **Former Independence:** Prior to their defeat in 1919, the Kukis were independent people ruled by their chieftains.
 - **Marriage Practices:** Traditionally, they do not arrange marriage alliances outside their community.
 - **Religious Practices:** Initially animist, the majority have embraced Christianity over the last 90 years.

BJP firm on CAA but silent on NRC...

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The promise to roll out National Register of Citizens (NRC) is missing from BJP's 'Sankalp Patra' released on Sunday, even as the promise to cut the geographical area under the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in north-eastern states has made an entry.

BJP's 'Sankalp Patra' for 2019 had promised to expeditiously complete the NRC process in Assam — then under way under scrutiny of the Supreme Court — and "actively consider its extension to other states". It attributed the intent to implement NRC in a phased manner in parts of the country to

illegal immigration, talking of the huge change it had made on the cultural and linguistic identity of these areas and its adverse impact on local people's livelihood.

The party's manifesto for 2024 cited the zero terror attacks in any city since 2014, a significant decline in vio-

TO CURB AFSPA

lence in J&K post nullification of Article 370 and the 52% dip in Left-wing extremist violence.

Though there is no reference to NRC this time, the manifesto reiterates the promise to confer citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) on citizens of

Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh from six minority faiths who had migrated to India before Dec 2014.

When CAA was passed, its opponents had tried to link it to NRC, claiming that CAA was the stepping stone to the creation of NRC and declaring Indian Muslims lacking any proof of citizenship as non-citizens. However, the govt has repeatedly clarified that there is no link between CAA and NRC. It maintains that CAA has no provision to take away citizenship of anyone, Muslim or otherwise, and that as far as NRC is concerned, the govt has not declared any intent to prepare it. CAA was implemented last month, more than four

years after it was enacted.

Though no promise of phased rollback of AFSPA from the north-east was made in BJP's 2019 manifesto, the last five years have seen a significant reduction in areas declared as "disturbed" under the Act, thanks to the 71% decline in insurgency incidents in the region.

As of now, AFSPA is restricted to only eight districts of Assam. In Manipur, AFSPA has been removed from 19 police stations in seven districts; and in Nagaland, 18 police stations across eight districts are out of its purview. AFSPA was totally withdrawn from Tripura in May 2015 and from Meghalaya in March 2018.

Context: Recently, the ruling party's 'Sankalp Patra' was released without the promise to roll out the National Register of Citizens (NRC), while it did include a pledge to reduce the geographical area covered by the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act in northeastern states.

National Register of Citizens (NRC)

- **About:** The NRC is the register containing names of Indian citizens.
- **Prepared by:** Recording particulars of all the persons enumerated during that Census.
- The register was first prepared after the 1951 Census of India and since then it has not been updated until recently.
- **About:** The NRC in Assam is a roster of Indian citizens residing in the state, aiming to distinguish them from foreign nationals, especially those from neighboring Bangladesh.
- **Historical Context:** The first NRC in Assam was crafted in 1951 amid concerns over migration from East Pakistan, now Bangladesh.
- **Initiation and Legal Mandate:** The process to update the register commenced after a directive from the Supreme Court in 2013, with the task of verifying the citizenship status of approximately 33 million individuals in Assam prior to March 24, 1971..
- **How does one prove citizenship?**
 - **Criteria for Proof:** Applicants in Assam were required to demonstrate familial ties to individuals listed in the 1951 NRC or in electoral rolls up to March 24, 1971.
 - **Documentary Evidence:** Alongside lineage evidence, applicants could submit various documents such as birth certificates, land records, government-issued licenses, passports, and educational certificates.

Ageing India gets Ayushman Bharat cover guarantee for senior citizens above 70

SOHINI DAS & SANKEET ROUL
Mumbai/New Delhi, NAgar

The Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), the flagship health care insurance scheme of the Bharatiya Janata Party-led central government (launched in September 2018) is likely to see an expansion in scope, covering all citizens above the age of 70 and the transgender community if the party returns to power this year.

Releasing the party manifesto for the 2024 Lok Sabha elections on Sunday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said the BJP was "determined to encompass every senior citizen above 70 years of age under the Ayushman Bharat Scheme".

Till now, the PMJAY has covered over 341 million citizens who received free health insurance of ₹5 lakh for hospitalisation. The manifesto read: "We have provided quality free health treatment of up to ₹5 lakh to poor families under Ayushman Bharat. We will continue to provide free health treatment by strengthening Ayushman Bharat and other such initiatives."

COVERAGE PATTERN (Ayushman cards created)

TOP 5 Cards created (mn)	BOTTOM 5 Cards created
Uttar Pradesh 59.6	Goa 80,705
Madhya Pradesh 39.8	Sikkim 74,266
Bihar 28.42	Andaman and Nicobar Islands 72,206
Maharashtra 27.36	Lakshadweep 35,619
Gujarat 25.21	Dadra and Nagar Haveli; Daman and Diu 9,720

Gendewise breakup of Ayushman cardholders

	Total (mn)
Male 172.51	
Female 168.84	
Others 0.47	

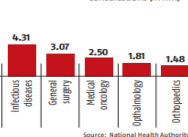
Note: Figures until April 16, 9:50 am

The data from the National Health Authority dashboard shows that cumulatively the scheme has covered 66 million cases of hospitalisation, entailing ₹81,979 crore since its inception. In the past one month alone, 17 million people were hospitalised under the scheme, entailing ₹2,344.7 crore.

General medicine, infectious diseases, and general surgery are the three main therapy areas covered by the Ayushman Bharat scheme now, while haemodialysis is the top-most procedure the scheme covers. The scheme is aimed at reducing out-

IN DEMAND

Most consulted specialties under Ayushman Bharat Consultations (in mn)



Source: National Health Authority

the Union health ministry had said in November.

This fall in OOPEx can be attributed to an increase in the share of government health expenditure from 45 per cent in 2021 to a projected 55 per cent by 2025-26.

If voted back to power, the BJP is thus banking on this flagship scheme and promising to expand its coverage further. "We will expand the Ayushman Bharat Yojana to cover Senior Citizens and provide them access to free and quality healthcare. We will expand the network of Garima Ghats to cater to the needs of transgender individuals. We will issue identity cards to ensure their recognition nationwide. Furthermore, all eligible transgender individuals will be covered under the Ayushman Bharat Yojana," the manifesto said.

The focus on senior citizens is understandable because the recent data shows the relatively young India today will turn into a rapidly ageing society in the coming decades.



According to the "India Ageing Report 2023", by the United Nations Population Fund, in collaboration with the International Institute for Population Sciences, by 2050 one-fifth of India's population will comprise people above 60. The figure was 10.5 per cent in 2022. The percentage of the elderly increased swiftly in recent years, and the trend is likely to continue in the coming decades. By the end of the century, the elderly will constitute over 36 per cent of the population of the country.

Probal Ghosal, chairman and director, Ujala Cygnus, which runs a network of 21 hospitals in five states, said through the promises made in this latest manifesto, the idea was to address the middle tier of the population, which was left uncovered in health care insurance or had limited access to healthcare facilities.

Industry sources said the Centre was working on increasing coverage under Ayushman Bharat to ₹10 lakh. Speaking to Business Standard, public health policy expert Dilip Marlandkar said there was a need to move towards universal health care, and also improve the public health infrastructure and quality at the same time.

The manifesto also noted the upgrading of secondary and primary health care under PM-ABHA (PM-Ayushman Bharat Health Infrastructure Mission).

Context: Recently, there have been discussions about expanding the scope of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY), potentially encompassing all citizens above the age of 70 and the transgender community, if the ruling party returns to power this year.

Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY)

- **About:** It is also known as Jan Arogya Abhiyaan, or the National Health Protection Mission (AB-NHPM) or Modicare.
- This initiative has been created with the goal of aligning with SDG principles, which is "leave no one behind".
- **Ministry:** Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW).
- **Implementing Agency:** National Health Authority (NHA)
- **Aim:** To make significant changes in healthcare by addressing all aspects of health (like prevention, promotion, and outpatient care) across primary, secondary, and tertiary levels.
- **Launched by:** National Health Policy 2017, to achieve the vision of Universal Health Coverage (UHC).
- **Funding:** Centrally Sponsored Scheme (expenditure incurred in premium payment will be shared between Central and State governments).
- **Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM):** It was introduced in 2021 with the aim of issuing Unique Digital Health IDs (UHID) to every Indian citizen.
 - This initiative facilitates electronic access to health records for hospitals, insurance companies, and citizens as needed.
- **Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) IDs.**
 - **About:** Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) is an account/ number used to link all the health records of a person.
 - ABHA is an integral component of the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), which is India's flagship national health protection scheme.
 - **Any individual** can enroll in Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM) to generate a Health ID or ABHA, free of cost.
 - ABHA number is a 14-digit number that will uniquely identify you as a participant in India's digital healthcare ecosystem.

FREE



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