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DownToEarth
FORTNIGHTLY ON POLITICS OF DEVELOPMENT,
ENVIRONMENT AND HEALTH

**Science
Reporter**



विज्ञान एवं
प्रौद्योगिकी मंत्रालय
MINISTRY OF
SCIENCE AND
TECHNOLOGY



MK Yadav Sir

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More than 1.6 Lakh air travelers have taken benefit of Digi Yatra

Context: The total number of passengers who have used the **Digi Yatra process** at the airports from 1st Dec 22 to 14th Feb 23 is 1.6 Lakh Plus. Total app user base of **Digi Yatra** on the Android Play Store & iOS Apple App Store is 422K.

Digi Yatra

- **About:** It is a **biometric boarding system using Facial Recognition Technology** to provide a seamless and hassle-free experience for passengers at airports.
- **Objectives:** It enhances passenger experience by **eliminating the need for verification of ticket and ID** at multiple touchpoints and provides better throughput through existing infrastructure using a Digital Framework.
- **Implemented across airports in a phased manner:** In the first phase, it was **launched by Minister of Civil Aviation** on 01.12.2022 at Delhi, Bengaluru, and Varanasi Airports.
 - The implementation of Digi Yatra under phase I is also planned at Kolkata, Pune, Vijayawada, and Hyderabad Airports by March 2023.
- **Implementing Agency:** The project is being implemented by the **DigiYatra Foundation** - a joint-venture company whose shareholders are the Airports Authority of India (26% stake) and Bengaluru Airport, Delhi Airport, Hyderabad Airport, Mumbai Airport and Cochin International Airport.
 - These five shareholders equally hold the remaining 74% of the shares.
- **Key Features:** It is a **voluntary facility**.
 - There is **no central storage** of passengers Personally Identifiable Information data.
 - All the passenger's **data is encrypted and stored in the wallet of the passenger's smartphone** and shared only for a limited time duration with the airport of travel origin where the passenger's Digi Yatra ID needs to be validated.
 - The **data is purged from the system** within 24 hours of the flight.

Centre may soon okay ₹3 tn for Bharatmala 2.0

Road ministry has sought approval for the second phase ahead of schedule

Subhash Narayan
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NEW DELHI

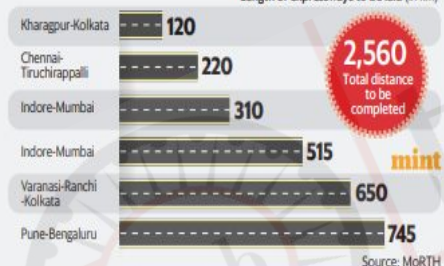
The Union road ministry is set to move a cabinet note for the second phase of India's ambitious **Bharatmala project** to build over 5,000 km of expressways and highways at the cost of almost ₹3 trillion, two people aware of the development said.

The Union road ministry has already prepared the note, and approval is expected next month, the people cited above said. Approval for Phase-2 has been advanced to allow for its completion alongside that of Phase-1, which got delayed by five years due to covid-19 disruptions and land acquisition delays.

Though 5,000 km of roads are expected under the new phase, more projects could come into its fold. An earlier plan had envisaged six expressways and 17 access-controlled corridors of length of over 8,100 km as part of Bharatmala Pariyojana Phase II at a total

CLEAR ROAD MAP

Approval for starting Phase-2 of Bharatmala project has been advanced to allow for its completion alongside that of Phase-1.



WELL CONNECTED

PHASE-2 will improve road links to infra projects

- NEW** highways will decongest existing roads
- SIX** expressways will be constructed as part of 2nd phase

SARVESH KUMAR SHARMA/MINT

capital cost of over ₹3.66 trillion.

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) proposes to issue tenders for the construction of some sections of the roads under Phase-2 as early as the first half of FY24 so that a big chunk of these expressways and highways

become operational in line with remaining projects under Phase-1 that is now scheduled to be completed by 2027, said the persons quoted above.

A query sent to the roads ministry remained unanswered till press time.

Bharatmala Phase-2 aims to provide better connectivity to

various infrastructure projects, including multi-modal logistics parks (MMLPs) and under-construction expressways to enable seamless movement across major economic centres. The new phase would also take up the construction of highways that decongest existing roads, ring roads around major industrial centres and bypasses.

The prime component of this ambitious project would be the construction of six key expressways totalling 2,560 km. This will include 120 km long Kharagpur-Kolkata expressway that would also provide connectivity with an eastern dedicated freight corridor, 220 km Pune-Ahmednagar- Aurangabad expressway, 310 km Chennai-Tiruchirappalli expressway, 515 km Indore-Mumbai expressway that would also connect with under-construction Mumbai-Delhi expressway, 650 km Varanasi-Ranchi-Kolkata expressway and 745 km long Pune-Bengaluru expressway that would provide the longest

Context: The Union road ministry is set to move a cabinet note for the second phase of India's ambitious **Bharatmala project** to build over 5,000 km of expressways and highways at the cost of almost ₹3 trillion.

Bharatmala Project

- Prohibited:** Bharatmala Pariyojana is a new umbrella program for the highways sector envisaged by the **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways** that focuses on optimizing the efficiency of freight and passenger movement across the country.
 - Under **Phase-I of Bharatmala Pariyojana**, the implementation of 34,800 km of national highways in 5 years (from 2017 to 2022) has been approved at an estimated outlay of Rs. 5,35,000 crore.
- Key features:**
 - The Bharatmala project envisions improving the efficiency of the **National Corridor** including the **Golden-Quadrilateral and North, South-East West corridors** by decongesting the choke points through the construction of elevated corridors, bypasses, ring roads, lane expansion, and logistics parks at identified points.
 - The project plan includes the **construction of Border Roads of strategic importance** along international boundaries and International Connectivity roads to promote trade with Myanmar, Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal.
 - The program has **identified around 26,200 km of Economic Corridors** or routes that have heavy freight traffic.
 - Feeder Corridors** will be developed to address the infrastructure asymmetry that exists in many places.
 - All projects implemented under Bharatmala are to be technically, financially, and economically appraised by an empowered Project Appraisal & Technical Scrutiny Committee to be set up in the **National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) and Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH)**.
 - Emphasis on the **use of scientific and technological planning** for Project Preparation and Asset Monitoring.
 - Satellite mapping** of corridors to identify up-gradation requirements.

MATERNAL MORTALITY IN INDIA

(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 - Issue Related to Women)

India recorded 24,000 maternal deaths in 2020, second only to Nigeria, UN report shows

Globally, there were 287,000 maternal deaths in 2020, only a marginal improvement from 309,000 in 2016 when the Sustainable Development Goals were established



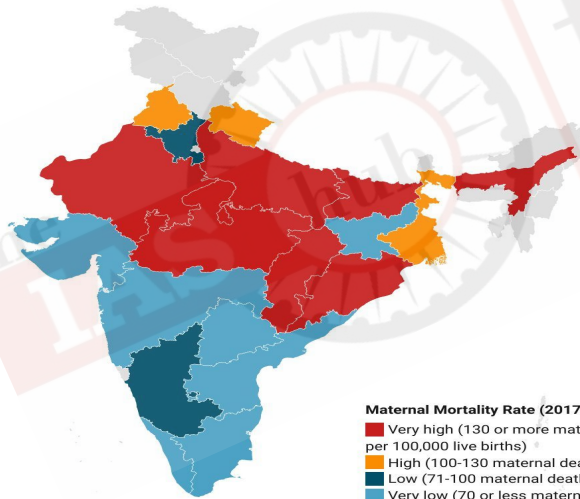
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By Taran Deol
Published: Thursday 23 February 2023



Seven states have very high maternal mortality

India's maternal mortality ratio (MMR) has improved from 113 in 2016-18 to 103 in 2017-19. The ratio has worsened in **West Bengal, Haryana, Uttarakhand and Chhattisgarh**.



MMR is defined as the number of maternal deaths during a given time period per 100,000 live births during the same time period. Sustainable Development Goals (target 3.1) says the global maternal mortality ratio should be less than 70 per 100,000 live births by 2030

Map: Rajit Sengupta / Down to Earth • Source: Special bulletin on maternal mortality in India 2017-19 by Office of the Registrar General, India • Map data: © OSM • Created with Datawrapper

Context: India recorded the **second highest number of maternal deaths in 2020**, coming second at 24,000 to only Nigeria which saw 82,000 maternal deaths in the pandemic year.

Key Points

- In 2020, **India's MMR stood at 103**, a vast improvement from 384 at the turn of the century.
- In comparison, other developing countries like Argentina (45 MMR in 2020), Bhutan (60), Brazil (72), Kyrgyzstan (50) and Philippines (78) have performed better than India.
- However, **there has been an overall reduction of 73.5 per cent** in maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in India - deaths per lakh live births - between 2000 and 2020, findings from the latest United Nations' report on Trends in Maternal Mortality released February 23 showed.

Maternal mortality in India

- **Maternal death:** As per the World Health Organisation, maternal death is the death of a woman while **pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy**, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management.
- **Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR):** It is defined as the **number of maternal deaths during a given time per 1,00,000 live births** during the same time.
 - In India, the **Sample Registration Survey (SRS)** is used to get an estimate of the maternal mortality rate.
- **Current Status:** According to the Registrar General of India's (RGI) latest 'Special Bulletin on Maternal Mortality' for the period 2018 to 2020, the Maternal Mortality Ratio at the national level **declined from 130 per lakh live births in 2014-16 to 97 per lakh live births in 2018-20**.
 - **Kerala tops in maternal and child health**, recording the lowest Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) of 19 (per one lakh live births) in the country. Kerala is way ahead of the **national MMR of 97**.
 - Kerala followed by Maharashtra (33), then Telangana (43) and Andhra Pradesh (45).
 - According to the data, Kerala has achieved the target based on the **U.N. Sustainable Development Goals**, of an MMR of 30 by 2020.
 - The **maternal mortality ratio in Assam is highest** in the country, the state has recorded 195 deaths per lakh live births, which is an improvement from the previous figure of 215 in the period 2016 to 2018.

Nine guest countries for G-20 to bring their own plans to the summit: officials

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

The “nine guest countries” to the G-20 summit and Ministerial meetings are expected to bring their own plans to the events but they will be ultimately guided by the “continuity” of G-20, a source familiar with the planning of the summit has informed.

Under India’s Presidency, nine countries – Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain and the United Arab Emirates – have been invited to be the “guest countries” in a year when the G-20 is struggling to strike a balance between the agenda of the western countries and Global South.

“The invitee countries



The agenda of the G-20 remains a strongly contested matter.

are like any other participants of G-20. We will not create preconditions for countries saying ‘don’t bring this or that’ but G-20 has a certain agenda. G-20 has a continuity as the summit represents a continuous process that has run through many Presidencies,” said the source,

emphasising that it lays seeds for actionable policy and the “invitee countries” are also expected to play an important role.

The agenda of this year’s G-20 summit is in the early stage and the ideas are being “socialised”, said the official. The evident caution regarding the ideas is partly fuelled by the intense differences that have been generated by the division among the group because of the Ukraine crisis.

The agenda of the G-20 has so far remained a strongly contested matter with two different groups demanding differing subjects to be highlighted. While the western bloc in G-20 led by the U.S. and the U.K. are expectedly focused on cornering Russia

the other side is determined not to allow the event to become an anti-Russia meeting.

A sign of the western focus was evident in U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen’s comments in Bengaluru on Thursday when she pledged to bump up economic support to Ukraine by \$10 billion while coming down heavily on Russia’s military campaign. The meeting of the Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (FMCBG) to be chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Reserve Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das is being keenly watched here as it will be held on February 24, which marks the first anniversary of Russia’s attack on Ukraine.

Context: Under India’s Presidency, **nine countries have been invited** to be the “guest countries” in a year when the G20 is struggling to strike a balance between the agenda of the western countries and that of the Global South.

- The 9 Countries are **Bangladesh, Egypt, Mauritius, Netherlands, Nigeria, Oman, Singapore, Spain and the United Arab Emirates.**

Key Facts about G20 India Presidency

- **About:** India assumed the presidency of the G20 grouping from Indonesia, on **December 1, 2022**, and will hold the post for a year.
- **Troika:** During the Presidency, **India, Indonesia and Brazil would form the troika.**
 - This would be the **first time** when the troika would consist of three developing countries and emerging economies, providing them a greater voice.
 - Troika **refers to the top grouping within the G20** that consists of the current, previous and the upcoming presidencies (Indonesia, India and Brazil).
- **G20 Theme:** “**Vasudhaiva Kutumba-Kam,**” or “One Earth, One Family, One Future,” is the focus of India’s G20 Presidency.
 - The theme also spotlights **Life (Lifestyle for Environment)**, with its associated, environmentally sustainable and responsible choices, both at the level of individual lifestyles as well as national development, leading to globally transformative actions resulting in a cleaner, greener and bluer future.
- **Logo:** India’s G20 logo juxtaposes planet **Earth with the lotus**, India’s national flower and the theme is ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ or ‘One Earth-One Family-One Future’
 - The G20 Logo draws inspiration from the vibrant colours of India’s national flag - **saffron, white and green, and blue.**
 - The Earth reflects India’s pro-planet approach to life, one in perfect harmony with nature.

Lok Sabha Speaker urges all lawmakers to act on cyberbullying

LIZ MATHEW

GANGTOK, FEBRUARY 23

LEGISLATIVE BODIES should ensure people's participation in the process of lawmaking, said Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla on Thursday. He also urged lawmakers to work collectively to end drug abuse and cyberbullying among the youth, with new laws if required.

"Youth is our future, so it's the responsibility of each Assembly and every lawmaker to see that they are on the right track. Every state assembly should pledge

that the youth in their respective states would be free of drugs," Birla said delivering inaugural address at 19th Annual Zone III conference of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) India region in Gangtok.

With the two-day conference focusing on ways to tackle drug abuse and cyberbullying, the Lok Sabha speaker said cyberbullying, with the advent of social media, has a direct impact on the lives of the young. "Lot of people, especially teenagers and youth are getting affected by it. It is our endeavour to enact laws which aim to provide security and safety to



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla in Gangtok on Thursday. ANI

all citizens. Information technology should be used to improve efficiency in governance and improve the lives of people but at the same time safeguards should be

taken to protect institutions and people from its demerits," he said. "We should be fighting it with both awareness and legislation," he added.

Hari Vansh, Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha also said the studies have pointed out that India is leading in cyberbullying particularly among students. He said that our mission of adopting new digital technologies to become a digitally empowered nation also has a negative aspect like cyberbullying.

Pointing out that a detailed members of Parliament, after a detailed discussion in Parliament

during the winter session, have agreed to launch comprehensive public awareness campaign across the country to educate the youth against drug menace, Birla said all legislative bodies and members should work with a "collective spirit to end the growing problem of drug abuse in the nation and work towards a drug free India". He expressed hope that public representatives would create awareness among the people in this direction and will work to provide the right direction to the youth.

Speaker Birla also emphasised on the need to get people's par-

ticipation — right from panchayat level to Parliament — in every level of law making, from the drafting to rule formation. "The law making process should get more input from people. The better participation, the more effective laws. The more participation of people, the stronger the democracy is," he said.

According to Birla, the Legislature, as a forum to solve people's problems, must be a centre of unhindered debate sans disruption, which will increase people's faith in democratic institutions, thereby strengthening our democracy.

Context: Lok Sabha Speaker urged lawmakers to work collectively to end drug abuse and **cyberbullying** among the youth, with new laws if required.

Cyberbullying

- **About:** It involves the **use of electronic communication to bully a person**, typically by sending messages of an intimidating or threatening nature.
 - It also involves **posting pictures or videos** aimed at harassing someone.
 - A wide range of social platforms, including chat rooms, blogs and instant messaging are used in cyberbullying.
- **Punishable offence:** It is a punishable offence **under the Information Technology Act, 2000 and the Indian Penal Code (IPC).**
- **Steps have been taken so far:** UNESCO in partnership with NCERT has brought out an **information booklet on Safe Online Learning** in Times of COVID-19.
 - The Department of School Education and Literacy has circulated exhaustive **guidelines to raise children and parental awareness** to prevent the adverse effect of online gaming and the psycho-emotional stress that children could be undergoing.
- **Global Initiatives:** UNESCO Member States declared the first Thursday of November as the **International Day against Violence and Bullying at School**, including cyberbullying.

In a 1st, Indian sub docks in Indonesia amid SCS conflict

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New Delhi: An Indian submarine has, for the first time ever, docked in Indonesia, which is among the countries locked in a maritime dispute with China in the contentious South China Sea, as part of the continuing overall diplomatic-military outreach to Asean countries.

The 3,000-tonne diesel-electric submarine, INS Sindhukesari, reached Jakarta for the 'maiden operational turnaround' after transiting through the Sunda Strait on Wednesday. "Indian warships often visit Indonesia and other Asean countries. This first long-range deployment of a submarine underlines the operational capability and reach of the country's underwater combat arm as well," a senior official told TOI.

INS Sindhukesari had undergone a major Rs 1,197-crore 'medium refit-cum-life extension' at Severodvinsk in Russia that ended in 2018, as part of the ongoing plan to upgrade four old Sindhughosh-class (Russian-origin Kilo-class) and two Shishumar-class (German HDW) submarines to stem depletion in the underwater fleet.

The submarine's deployment to Indonesia comes soon after India conducted operational training to handle the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles for 21 military personnel from Philippines at Nagpur earlier this month.

India will supply three



INS Sindhukesari's deployment to Indonesia comes after India conducted operational training to handle the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles for 21 military personnel from Philippines in Nagpur earlier this month

missile batteries of the shore-based anti-ship systems of the BrahMos, a deadly conventional (non-nuclear) weapon that flies almost three times the speed of sound at Mach 2.8 with a strike range of 290-km, under the \$375 million contract inked in January last year.

The first such BrahMos export order to Philippines, which also has bitter territorial disputes with China in the South China Sea, is expected to pave the way for such deals with other Asean countries like Indonesia and Vietnam.

Along with the push for military ties with African and Gulf countries on one side, India has been steadily cranking up defence relations with Asean countries on the other side through combat exercises, exchanges, training programmes to operate fighters and submarines, and now increasingly weapon supplies.

India, for instance, had transferred a Kilo-class submarine INS Sindhuvir to Myanmar in 2020, as was then reported by TOI. Apart from

BrahMos, jointly developed with Russia, India also hopes to sell the indigenous Akash missile systems, which can intercept hostile aircraft, helicopters, drones and subsonic cruise missiles at a range of 25-km, to countries like Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam, among other countries.

On the bilateral exercises front, India has conducted the 'SIMBEX' naval exercise with Singapore, the 'Agni Warrior' Army exercise with Singapore, 'Harimau Shakti' with Malaysia and the 'Garud Shakti' with Indonesia in recent months.

With Indonesia, India also conducts coordinated naval patrols twice a year, with the last one being held along the international maritime boundary line in December.

"India and Indonesia have expanded their strategic and defence cooperation in a wide range of areas, especially after inking a new defence cooperation agreement during PM Narendra Modi's visit to the country in 2018," another official said.

Context: An Indian submarine INS Sindhukesari has, for the first time ever, docked in Indonesia, which is among the countries locked in a maritime dispute with China in the contentious South China Sea, as part of the continuing overall diplomatic-military outreach to Asean countries.

- The INS Sindhukesari reached **Jakarta** for the 'maiden operational turnaround' after transiting through the Sunda Strait.

Submarines Of Indian Navy: In Service

Class	Type	Boats	Origin
Arihant class	Ballistic missile submarine (SSBN)	INS Arihant (S2)	India
Shishumar class	Attack submarine	INS Shishumar (S44) INS Shankush (S45) INS Shalki (S46) INS Shankul (S47)	West Germany India
Kalvari class	Attack submarine	INS Kalvari (S21) INS Khanderi (S22) INS Karanj (S23)	France India
Sindhughosh class	Attack submarine	INS Sindhughosh (S55) INS Sindhudhvaj (S56) INS Sindhuraj (S57) INS Sindhuratna (S59) INS Sindhukesari (S60) INS Sindhukirti (S61) INS Sindhuvijay (S62) INS Sindhurashtra (S65)	Soviet Union Russia

Medicinal plant commonly called Borthekera in Assamese found to have cardioprotective potential

Context: *Garcinia pedunculata*, a medicinal plant commonly called 'Bor Thekera' in the Assamese language, traditionally forbidden for raw consumption, has been found to protect from heart diseases.

Key Points

- The **sun-dried slices** of the ripe fruit are used for culinary and medicinal purposes and are known to have therapeutic properties like **anti-inflammatory, anthelmintic, antibacterial, antifungal, antidiabetic, hypolipidemic, nephroprotective, and even neuroprotective activity**.
- With scientific interventions seeking proof of these claims, multiple studies have been reported that *G. pedunculata* is a **rich source of antioxidants**. However, the cardioprotective potential has yet to be explored earlier.

Bor Thekera

- **About:** *Garcinia pedunculata*, popularly known as Bor Thekera in **Assamese**, is an evergreen tree related to the more familiar purple mangosteen (*Garcinia mangostana*).
 - The tree is **endemic to the south-eastern regions of Asia** such as parts of Myanmar and north-eastern parts of India.
- **Tree and fruit:** The tree has a **fluted trunk with short spreading branches**.
 - The roundish fruit has a **juicy interior with edible arils**.
- **Usage:** The ripe fruit is eaten **cooked or raw**.
 - Sun-dried slices are much valued and used for preparing delicacies like "**tenga diya masor jol**" meaning Assamese sour fish curry.



PRESIDENT OF INDIA PRESENTS SANGEET NATAK AKADEMI FELLOWSHIPS AND AKADEMI AWARDS

Context: The President of India presented the **Sangeet Natak Akademi's Fellowships (Akademi Ratna)** and **Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards (Akademi Puruskar)** for the year 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (Ratna) & Award (Puraskar)

- **Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship:** It is the **highest honour conferred by Sangeet Natak Akademi**, an autonomous body of the **Ministry of Culture**, without distinction of nationality, race, caste, religion, creed, or sex.
 - **Origin:** The first Fellow of the Akademi was elected in **1954**.
 - The most prestigious and rare honour of Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (Akademi Ratna Sadasyata) was restricted to 30 eminent persons at any given time till 2008.
 - However, consequent upon the **amendment of the Rules and Regulations** in the meeting of the General Council on 29 January 2010, ten (10) more seats of Akademi Fellows have been increased to be filled up in a phased manner over five years – two seats per year.
 - **Criteria:** The criteria restricts **any person below the age of 50** to ordinarily be considered for the honour.
 - **Recommendations:** The recommendations are received from the current fellows along with the members of the **General Council of the Akademi**.
 - **Awards:** The Akademi Fellowship carries purse money of **Rs. 3.00 lakhs, a Tamrapatra and an Angavastram**.
- **Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards:** It is now than seventy years old and the large body of practitioners, gurus and scholars in the performing arts honoured by the Akademi **represents the nation's highest achievement in music, dance and drama**.
 - **Origin:** The Awards in **Hindustani and Carnatic music** were instituted as early as in 1951, even before the Akademi was set up and these were known as **Presidential Awards**.
 - With the formation of the Akademi the Awards came to be known as Sangeet Natak Akademi Awards and the investiture became the responsibility of the Akademi.
 - The **Presidential Awards for 1952 and 1953** were subsequently incorporated in the list of Sangeet Natak Akademi Award As regards.
 - **Awards:** The Akademi Awards carries purse money of **Rs. 1.00 lakh, a Tamrapatra and an Angavastram**.

Taliban reopens key trade route with Pak

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

Peshawar, 23 February

Afghanistan's Taliban rulers reopened a key border crossing with Pakistan on Thursday, allowing thousands of trucks carrying desperately needed food and other items to creep forward for the first time in days, officials said.

The jam at the Torkham crossing between the two nations began to ease after Islamabad sent a high-level delegation to Kabul to discuss a range of issues, including the Taliban's closure of the border on Sunday.

Taliban-appointed officials in Afghanistan's Nangarhar province confirmed the reopening of the Torkham border. The Afghan embassy in Pakistan also posted news of the reopening on Twitter.



Context: Afghanistan's Taliban rulers reopened **Torkham border crossing** with Pakistan, allowing thousands of trucks carrying desperately needed food and other items to creep forward for the first time in days.

Torkham border crossing

- **About:** It is a major border crossing **between the Pakistani city of Torkham and Afghanistan**, located along the **Grand Trunk Road** on the international border between the two countries.
 - It connects **Nangarhar province** of Afghanistan with Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.
 - It is the **busiest port of entry** between the two countries, serving as a major transporting, shipping, and receiving site.
 - **Highway 7** connects Torkham to Kabul through Jalalabad.
 - On the Pakistani side, the border crossing is at the end of the **N-5 National Highway**, which connects it to Peshawar in the east via the Khyber Pass and further connects it to Islamabad by other routes.
- **Controlled by:** The **Afghan Border Police** and **Pakistan's Frontier Corps** are the main agencies for controlling Torkham.
 - They are backed by the **Pakistani and Afghan Armed Forces**.
- **Seized by Taliban:** On 15 August 2021, **Torkham was seized by Taliban fighters**, becoming the second border crossing with Pakistan to be captured by Taliban as part of wider 2021 Taliban offensive.
 - As a response, Pakistan temporarily **closed the border crossing**.

DTE

FEB 24

CYCLONE FREDDY

(Syllabus: GS Paper 1 - Geography)

Cyclone Freddy travelled from Australia to batter Madagascar, one of the most climate-vulnerable nations

The world's fourth-largest island is suffering a drought since 2018; cyclones and also the first famine caused by climate change



How tropical storms are formed

High humidity and ocean temperatures of over 26°C are major contributing factors

Water evaporates from the ocean surface and comes into contact with a mass of cold air, forming clouds

A column of low pressure develops at the centre. Winds form around the column

As pressure in the central column (the eye) weakens, the speed of the wind around it increases



Context: Cyclone Freddy, which made landfall along Madagascar's south-eastern coast February 21, 2023, is the most recent among the cyclones and tropical storms to badger the country for the past year or so.

Key Points

- Freddy travelled around 7,200 km from the **southeast Indian Ocean** to Madagascar in 15 days.
- This is the first time since 2000 that a cyclone has moved such a long distance from the south-eastern parts to the **south-western parts of the Indian Ocean**.
- Tropical Cyclone Freddy is now in the **Mozambique Channel** moving westwards away from Madagascar tracking towards Mozambique.
- In Madagascar most of the impact is around the town of **Mananjary** which was severely hit by cyclone Batsirai in February 2022.
- Madagascar was also hit by **tropical storm Cheneso** in January 2023.

Cyclone Freddy

- **About:** It is **one of only four systems** to traverse the entirety of the southern Indian Ocean from east to west; the others were cyclones **Litanne** in 1994 and **Leon-Eline** and **Hudah** in 2000.
- **Origin:** During 30 January, the **Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BoM)** began monitoring a developing weak tropical low embedded within a monsoon trough in Timor Sea.
- **Naming:** It was the fourth named storm of the 2022–23 **Australian region cyclone season**, and the second very intense tropical cyclone of the 2022–23 South-West Indian Ocean cyclone season.

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