

UPSC CURRENT AFFAIRS NOTES

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IBSA World Games 2023: India women's blind cricket team beats Australia in final to claim gold medal

Playing in the maiden cricket event in the World Games 2023, the Indian women's blind team thrashed Australia by nine wickets on the DLS.



In a historic moment for India, the women's blind cricket team beat Australia in the final of the ISBA World Games 2023 to claim a gold medal on Saturday, August 26. Indian women's team thrashed mighty Australia by nine wickets on the DLS method in a T20 match at England's Edgbaston.

“Chandrayaan-3 has proved India's capability for cost-effective Space missions”

“Chandrayaan-3 has proved India's capability for cost-effective Space missions”.

This was stated by Union Minister of State for Space, Dr. Jitendra Singh, while speaking at an interactive meet of intellectuals, prominent citizens and media persons in Indore.

He said, India’s space missions are designed to be cost effective.

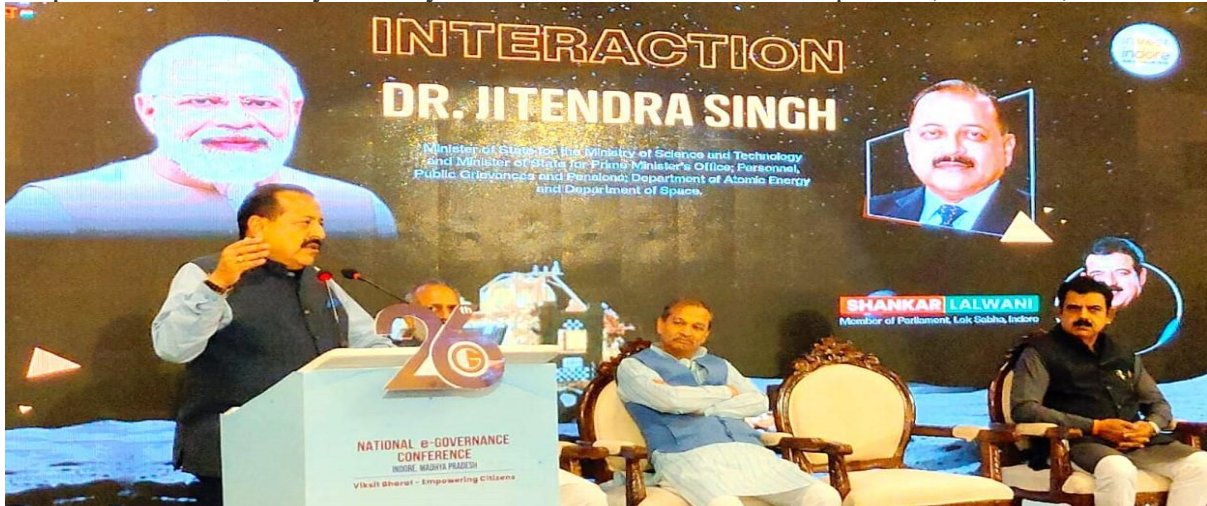
The Minister further elaborated saying, “The Russian moon mission, that was unsuccessful, cost Rs.16,000 crore, and our (Chandrayaan-3) mission cost just around Rs.600 crore. Consider, Hollywood films based on Moon & Space Missions cost over Rs.600 crore”.

We have learnt to compensate for cost through our skills, said Dr Jitendra Singh, who is also the Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) Science & Technology; MoS PMO, Personnel, Public Grievances, Pensions, and Atomic Energy.

“Questions will arise, how? We made use of gravitational forces, the spacecraft made about 20 orbits of the earth, each rising in parabola, until it escaped and was captured in the Moon's gravity and it made 70-80 revolutions of the moon before landing at the designated spot,” he said.

Dr Jitendra Singh said, in order to involve the private sector in R&D efforts, Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi came out with the "Anusandhan National Research Foundation" Bill, passed by the Lok Sabha in the last session of Parliament, with a budget of Rs.50,000 crore over five years.

“When it is implemented fully, it will be a game-changer. We are planning a unique Public Private Partnership (PPP) entity for which ₹36,000 Cr of the research funding is to come from the private sector, mostly industry whereas the Government will put ₹14,000 crore,” he said.



Dr Jitendra Singh said, under PM Modi India launched a unique initiative which even the US and other countries would envy.

“Two years ago, a provision was made that companies can earmark 10% of their CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility) budget on R&D, earlier this was not so,” he said.

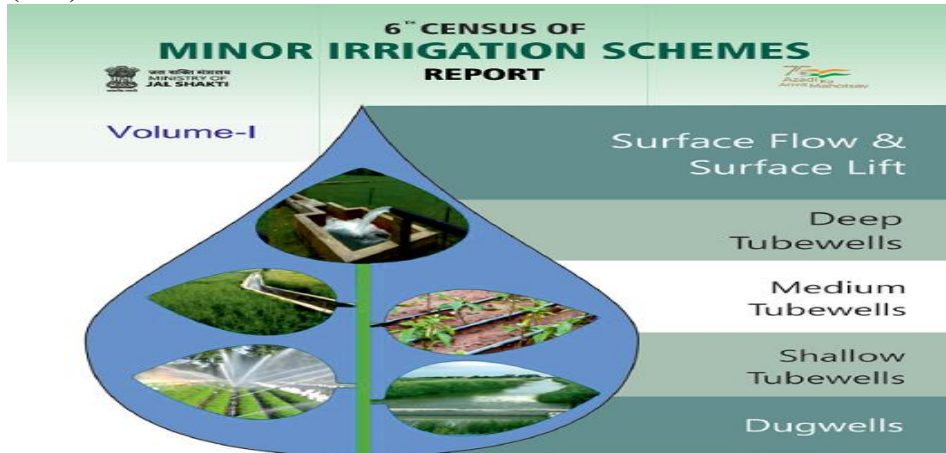
Calling for collective synergy, Dr Jitendra Singh said, we have to get rid of this mutual scepticism between the public and private sector. We can never emerge successful in the geopolitical race by working in silos, the minister said.

“We have to take this off our minds that the Government will and should do everything, those countries that stand developed did not achieve it by depending solely on their government. If today NASA sends rockets for the US, the maximum contribution to such missions is made by private agencies and industry, " he said.

Stating that no government can provide a Sarkari Naukri to every individual, the Minister said, a responsible government creates job opportunities like PM Modi has done.

“From 350 Startups (in 2014), we now have over one lakh Startups, Startups have sprung up even in Governance technology, which nobody could have imagined earlier. Under Mudra scheme, easy loans of Rs.10-20 lakh are made available to the youth, without mortgage; so, a whole environment has been created to trigger innovation,” he said.

Ministry of Jal Shakti Releases the 6th Census Report On Minor Irrigation (MI) Schemes



Out of 23.14 million MI schemes, 21.93 million (94.8%) are Ground Water and 1.21 million (5.2%) are Surface Water Schemes

Uttar Pradesh Possesses Largest Number of MI Schemes Followed by Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu

The Ministry of Jal Shakti, Department of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation today released the report on the 6th census on minor irrigation schemes. As per the report, 23.14 million minor irrigation (MI) schemes have been reported in the country, out of which 21.93 million (94.8%) are Ground Water (GW) and 1.21 million (5.2%) are Surface Water (SW) schemes.

Uttar Pradesh possesses the largest number of MI schemes in the country followed by Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. Leading States in GW schemes are Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and Telangana. In SW schemes Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Odisha and Jharkhand have the highest share. GW schemes comprise dugwells, shallow tube wells, medium tube wells and deep tube wells. The SW schemes comprise surface flow and surface lift schemes.

The census was conducted under the centrally sponsored scheme “Irrigation Census”. Detailed information on various parameters like irrigation sources (dug well, shallow tube well, medium tube well, deep tube well, surface flow and surface lift schemes), irrigation potential created (IPC), potential utilized, ownership, holding size of land by owner, devices used for lifting water, sources of energy, energy conserving devices such as sprinkler and drip irrigation, use of non-conventional energy sources such as solar pumps, windmills etc was collected.

This report will be useful for planners, policy makers, researcher scholars, agricultural and ground water scientists, administrators & all concerned with development of irrigation and agricultural economy of the country.



CBDT launches revamped National Website of the Income Tax Department www.incometaxindia.gov.in

New website is aesthetically redesigned for mobile-responsive layout and has ‘Mega Menu’ for content, with new features and functionalities. Guided virtual tour for all new additions and new button indicators. New functionalities on the revamped site allow users to compare different Acts, Sections, Rules, and Tax treaties.

In order to enhance taxpayer experience and keep pace with new technology, the Income Tax Department has revamped its National website www.incometaxindia.gov.in with a user-friendly interface, value-added features, and new modules. The newly revamped website was launched by Shri. Nitin Gupta, Chairman, Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), at the ‘Chintan Shivir’, organised by Directorate of Income Tax (Systems) at Udaipur.

This website serves as a comprehensive repository of tax and other related information. It provides access to Direct Tax laws, several other Allied Acts, Rules, Income Tax Circulars and Notifications, all cross-referenced and hyperlinked. The site also offers a 'Taxpayer Services Module' featuring various tax tools to assist taxpayers in filing their income tax returns.

The revamped website has been aesthetically redesigned with a mobile-responsive layout. The website also has a ‘Mega Menu’ for content, with new features, and functionalities. For the convenience of the visitors to the website, all these new additions are explained through a guided virtual tour and new button indicators.

The new functionalities, allow users to compare different Acts, Sections, Rules, and Tax treaties. All relevant content on the site is now tagged with Income Tax sections for easy navigation. Further, dynamic due date alerts functionality provides reverse countdowns, tooltips, and links to relevant portals to help taxpayers to comply easily.

The revamped website is another initiative in providing enhanced taxpayer services and will continue to educate taxpayers and facilitate tax compliance.

HIGH INFLATION and INTEREST RATES

The projected GDP growth rate for 2023-24 stands at 6.5%. Simultaneously, the benchmark stock market index, Sensex, is currently at a level of 65,000. However, the potential impact of high inflation on returns from stock market movements is a concern.

Retail inflation spiked to 7.44% in July, creating uncertainty for investors. The Reserve Bank of India projects inflation to stay above 5% until the first quarter of 2024-25, with the potential for it to reach 6.2% in the current quarter. This exceeds the RBI's comfort level of 4%.

Food price pressures, including surges in vegetable prices, cereals, pulses, spices, and milk, are expected to continue for a few months. Government interventions and fresh crop arrivals are expected to provide relief afterwards.

High inflation can impact stock prices and gold, as well as increase interest rates and bond yields. This affects the cost of equity and debt, leading to changes in equity valuations. Despite rising inflation and high-interest rates, India's stock market has performed well due to a strong earnings outlook and macro conditions.

India's market performance remains positive despite inflation and high rates. Earnings resilience is essential for sustained positive momentum. Long-term investors are advised to



stay invested in strong holdings while exercising caution in applying for IPOs and considering equity mutual funds for long-term investments.

High Inflation and Interest Rates

High inflation refers to a sustained and significant increase in the general price level of goods and services within an economy. It erodes the purchasing power of money over time, as consumers need more money to buy the same quantity of goods.

Interest rates represent the cost of borrowing money or the return on investment. Central banks, like the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), use interest rates as a tool to influence economic conditions.

Relation and Impact

Direct Relationship: High inflation and interest rates indeed often have a direct and positive correlation. Central banks frequently raise interest rates to counteract high inflation by reducing consumer spending and investment, which, in turn, can help control inflationary pressures.

Impact on Borrowing: High inflation can increase the cost of living and doing business. To offset the eroding purchasing power of money caused by inflation, lenders typically demand higher nominal interest rates. This ensures that they maintain a real return on loans after accounting for the declining value of money. As a result, borrowing becomes more expensive for both consumers and businesses when inflation is high.

Impact on Investment: Higher interest rates can discourage borrowing for investment purposes. When businesses face high borrowing costs, they may be less inclined to take out loans for expansion, research, and development, or other investments. Likewise, consumers might reduce borrowing for big-ticket purchases, such as homes and vehicles. This reduction in borrowing can potentially slow down economic growth since investment is a key driver of economic activity.

Key consequences and challenges associated with high inflation

Rising Prices: High inflation leads to a widespread increase in the prices of goods and services. This affects not only individual consumers but also businesses that rely on various inputs for their operations. When costs of production rise, businesses might pass these increased costs onto consumers, leading to a spiral of increasing prices.

Reduced Purchasing Power: As prices rise, the purchasing power of money diminishes. Consumers find that their money can buy fewer goods and services than before. This can lead to a lower standard of living, especially for those on fixed incomes or with limited resources, as they struggle to afford the same quantity of goods they used to.

Uncertainty: High inflation introduces uncertainty into the economy. Businesses and investors find it challenging to make financial plans and decisions when price levels become unpredictable. This uncertainty can hinder long-term investment and planning, as well as erode consumer confidence.

Distorted Allocations: Inflation can lead to misallocation of resources in the economy. When prices rise rapidly and unexpectedly, the price signals that guide businesses and individuals in their decision-making can become distorted. This can lead to inefficient allocation of



resources, as businesses might invest in sectors that seem profitable due to the distorted prices but might not be sustainable in the long run.

Impact of High Inflation and Interest Rates

Interest Rates: When facing high inflation, central banks often respond by raising interest rates. This is a measure to manage an overheating economy and to control the rapid rise in prices. Higher interest rates increase the cost of borrowing, which in turn discourages spending and investments. This mechanism helps to rein in inflation by reducing overall demand.

Investment Decisions: High-interest rates can significantly affect investment decisions. The process of discounting future cash flows at higher rates leads to lower present valuations for assets like stocks and bonds. The uncertainty caused by high-interest rates can also lead to more cautious business investment and expansion plans.

Consumption: The impact of high inflation on consumer spending can be significant. As prices rise, consumers' purchasing power diminishes, leading them to prioritize essential purchases and cut back on discretionary spending. This shift in consumer behaviour can have a cascading effect on overall economic activity, potentially leading to slower economic growth.

Savings: Fixed-income savers, particularly those relying on conservative investment options like savings accounts or bonds, can face challenges during times of high inflation. The returns on these investments might not keep up with the rising cost of living, causing a reduction in real purchasing power for these savers.

Steps Taken by India

Monetary Policy: The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) employs various monetary policy tools to manage inflation. One of the key tools is the repo rate, which is the rate at which banks borrow funds from the RBI. When inflation is high, the RBI might decide to raise the repo rate. This has the effect of making borrowing more expensive for banks, which can then lead to higher interest rates for consumers and businesses. The aim is to reduce excess liquidity in the economy, restrain borrowing, and consequently temper demand, thus helping to control inflation.

Supply-Side Measures: To address inflation, especially when it's driven by supply constraints, the government can implement supply-side measures. These steps might include initiatives to increase the production and availability of essential goods, such as agricultural products. The government might also take measures to prevent hoarding and ensure efficient distribution of goods to prevent artificial scarcity and price spikes.

Challenges

Policy Dilemma: Striking the right balance between controlling inflation and promoting economic growth is indeed a complex challenge. Aggressive interest rate hikes can slow down economic activity and potentially hinder job creation and investment. Conversely, keeping interest rates too low for too long could lead to continued inflationary pressures. This highlights the delicate task policymakers face in navigating these conflicting objectives.



Structural Factors: Inflation can often be influenced by structural issues within an economy. Factors like supply-side constraints, inefficient distribution networks, and imbalances between supply and demand can contribute to inflationary pressures. Addressing these structural challenges requires comprehensive policy interventions and reforms.

Impact on Vulnerable Groups: High inflation can have a disproportionate impact on low-income and vulnerable populations. Rising prices for essential goods and services can erode the purchasing power of individuals with limited resources. This can exacerbate income inequality and lead to a decline in the standard of living for those who are already economically marginalized.

Way Forward

Effective Monetary Policy: Continuously monitoring inflation and adjusting interest rates are essential for central banks. A proactive approach to monetary policy helps maintain price stability while ensuring that economic growth is not unduly compromised.

Supply Chain Reforms: Addressing supply-side constraints and improving distribution networks can contribute to stabilizing prices. By enhancing the production and availability of essential goods and reducing inefficiencies, economies can better withstand supply shocks that might lead to inflation.

Financial Literacy: Educating the public about the implications of inflation on savings and investments is crucial. This empowers individuals to make informed financial decisions that protect their purchasing power and adapt to changing economic conditions.

Inclusive Policies: Formulating policies that consider the impact of inflation on vulnerable groups is important for social equity. Ensuring that inflation-control measures take into account the potential adverse effects on low-income populations helps mitigate income inequality.

Balancing the management of high inflation and interest rates requires a comprehensive approach involving sound monetary policy, structural reforms, and inclusive policies to safeguard the interests of all segments of the population while maintaining economic stability.

CHABAHAR PORT

India and Iran have agreed not to seek commercial foreign arbitration for disputes between users and operators at Chabahar Port, paving the way for the two sides to sign a long-term deal for the development of the strategic port. Chabahar Port is a seaport in Chabahar located in southeastern Iran, on the Gulf of Oman.

It serves as Iran's only oceanic port, and consists of two separate ports named Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti.

It is only about 170 kilometers west of the Pakistani port of Gwadar. The port of Chabahar is located on the Makran coast of Sistan and Baluchistan Province, next to the Gulf of Oman and at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz.



It is the only Iranian port with direct access to the Indian Ocean. Being close to Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and others, it has been termed the "Golden Gate" to these landlocked countries.

Chabahar is 700 km (430 mi) away from Zahedan, the capital of the Sistan and Baluchistan province.

History

Development of the port was first proposed in 1973 by the last Shah of Iran, though development was delayed by the 1979 Iranian Revolution.

India and Iran first agreed to plans to further develop Shahid Beheshti port in 2003 but did not do so on account of sanctions against Iran.

Strategic importance

Located on the edge of the Indian Ocean, it is the only deep-sea port in Iran with direct ocean access.

Its geographic proximity to countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India, as well as its status as a key transit center on the burgeoning International North-South Transport Corridor, gives it the potential to develop into one of the most important commercial hubs in the region.

Recent Development

In May 2016, Narendra Modi became the first Indian prime minister in 15 years to visit Iran, and during his visit, he pledged up to \$500 million to develop and operate Iran's Chabahar port as part of a trilateral engagement between India, Iran and Afghanistan.

Chabahar has two ports -- Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti -- each with five berths. The project investment arm of the shipping ministry -- India Ports Global -- is partnering with a joint venture between the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust and Gujarat's Kandla Port Trust to develop two container berths with a length of 640 metres and three multi-cargo berths by investing \$85 million.

Following the re-imposition of sanctions against Iran, foreign companies became reluctant to participate in the port's expansion.

Sanctions also played a role in reducing India's involvement and investment in the US\$1.6 billion Chabahar–Zahedan railway.

In October 2017, India's first shipment of wheat to Afghanistan was sent through the Chabahar Port.

Reasons why Chabahar Port is crucial for India

The first and foremost significance of the Chabahar port is the fact that India can bypass Pakistan in transporting goods to Afghanistan.

Chabahar port will boost India's access to Iran, the key gateway to the International North-South Transport Corridor that has sea, rail and road routes between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.



Chabahar port will be beneficial to India in countering Chinese presence in the Arabian Sea which China is trying to ensure by helping Pakistan develop the Gwadar port. Gwadar port is less than 400 km from Chabahar by road and 100 km by sea.

With Chabahar port being developed and operated by India, Iran also becomes a military ally to India. Chabahar could be used in case China decides to flex its navy muscles by stationing ships in Gwadar port to reckon its upper hand in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf and Middle East.

With Chabahar port becoming functional, there will be a significant boost in the import of iron ore, sugar and rice to India.

The import cost of oil to India will also see a considerable decline. India has already increased its crude purchase from Iran since the West-imposed ban on Iran was lifted.

Chabahar Port will ensure the establishment of a politically sustainable connectivity between India and Afghanistan. This is will, in turn, lead to better economic ties between the two countries.

From a diplomatic perspective, Chabahar port could be used as a point from where humanitarian operations could be coordinated.

The Zaranj-Delaram road constructed by India in 2009 can give access to Afghanistan's Garland Highway, setting up road access to four major cities in Afghanistan - Herat, Kandahar, Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif.

Chabahar: An arena for Geopolitical Competition

India has served as the primary investor in Chabahar port, as New Delhi sees the port as a way to access Afghan and Central Asian markets without relying on Pakistan's land routes.

Furthermore, the port could strengthen Indo-Iranian ties, which could balance out growing Sino-Pakistani cooperation.

At the same time, China has been growing increasingly influential in Iran, seeking to gain access to critical natural resources and shipping routes.

Chabahar port has the capacity to transform trade in South and Central Asia. The proposed land-based trade routes linked to the port would facilitate greater access to the Afghan and Central Asian markets. The impact of this increased connectivity has enormous implications for Afghanistan in particular, although the fallout from the Taliban's rapid takeover of the country could jeopardize these plans moving forward.

Currently, Afghanistan conducts most of its trade via routes through Pakistan; Chabahar port could provide an alternative trade outlet for the country. In turn, Chabahar has the potential to generate massive economic growth in Afghanistan, as it would allow goods from other countries to more easily enter the country and bolster its export potential.

As for the Central Asian countries, Chabahar would offer these landlocked countries access to sea-based trading routes and serve as a bulwark against Chinese and Russian attempts to dominate trade in the region. Therefore, expanded trade with Afghanistan and the Central Asian countries has the potential to bolster Iran's own status on the international stage.



Chabahar port represents a means of connecting not only with Afghanistan and Central Asia, but also with the global economic juggernauts of India and China.

Given that Iran's development budget for the port's home province has skyrocketed by 2,200 percent since 2018, it's clear that Chabahar will be an integral part of Iran's eastern engagement strategy.

Establishing a sea-based trade route to Western and Central Asia via Chabahar port would allow India to bypass Pakistan and establish trade networks with the countries in these regions.

Concern: Chinese collaboration with Pakistan via the development of Gwadar port and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor raised concerns over how the partnership of India's two main adversaries could impact the country.

A major catalyst for their renewed cooperation stemmed from Chinese President Xi Jinping's 2013 announcement that China would commence its massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) infrastructure project.

India's involvement with Chabahar port, thus, serves as a key strategy for using the Indo-Iranian alliance to buffer China and particularly Sino-Pakistani cooperation.

India is not the only superpower that has a stake in Chabahar port, as China has also sought to strengthen ties with Iran to secure energy and mineral resource reserves and gain access to advantageous Eurasian trade routes. Chinese access to Chabahar port would immensely benefit these objectives, as China could connect the port to its own extensive maritime-based trade network. Considering China's investment in Pakistan's Gwadar port, another key driver of China's interest in Chabahar port would be to block India from accessing routes to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Analysts perceive the recently signed China-Iran 25-year cooperation program, in which China agreed to invest \$400 billion into the Iranian economy in exchange for discounted and guaranteed energy prices and BRI project cooperation, as a way to gradually assert its presence in the port.

Iran's Balancing Act

The economic and diplomatic opportunities presented by India and China could help Iran bolster its own great power ambitions, but asymmetrical power sharing and trade deals could render Iran as a junior partner or glorified resource appendage. Therefore, Iran is trying to find ways to strategically balance India and

Recent moves by India and Iran

In a significant diplomatic move, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi engaged in discussions to harness the complete potential of the Chabahar Port. [August 2023]

The leaders deliberated on enhancing infrastructure, streamlining trade processes, and addressing logistical challenges to optimise the port's operations.



The discussions underscored the joint commitment of India and Iran to regional development and cooperation. By leveraging Chabahar's capabilities, both nations aim to foster economic growth and stability in Afghanistan and beyond.

Closing Remarks

The Chabahar Port project exemplifies the multi-dimensional potential of diplomacy, trade, and connectivity. It aligns with India's larger vision of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which seeks to establish efficient trade routes linking the Indian Ocean to the Caspian Sea through various modes of transport.

As geopolitical dynamics evolve, the collaboration between India and Iran over Chabahar Port reinforces their shared commitment to circumvent challenges and promote trade-led development.

The recent discussions between PM Modi and President Raisi lay the foundation for realizing the port's transformative influence on regional trade, connectivity, and prosperity.

The logic of geography and strategy make Chabahar an important node for India. It is a critical project for India's strategy towards the Indian Ocean, Eurasia, and Afghanistan.

The growing Chinese naval presence and the expanding strategic relationship between Tehran and Beijing underscores the need for India to stay engaged and perhaps even augment its presence at Chabahar.

State of India's Birds 2023 Report: Most species show dip, Indian Peafowl among those flourishing

According to the State of India's Birds 2023 Report, there is a general decline in numbers in most bird species in the country.

While the raptors, migratory shorebirds and ducks have declined the most, several bird species such as the Indian Peafowl, Rock Pigeon, Asian Koel and House Crow are showing an "increasing trend".

The SoIB report was created to assess the conservation status of the majority of species that regularly occur in the country.

SoIB is published by the State of India's Birds Partnership, a group of 13 government (including SACON, WII, ZSI) and non-governmental organisations.

Worldwide, common and widespread species are declining. But in India, lack of information has meant that conservation attention has been focused on only a few species (usually large, charismatic and threatened).

The 2023 Report, in its second iteration (1st in 2020), fills this gap by using over 30 million observations uploaded to the eBird platform by more than 30,000 birdwatchers.

This helped in evaluating the distribution range size of 942 Indian birds, and their trends in abundance in both the long term (over 25+ years) and currently (since 2015).



Using these three measures, plus information from the IUCN Red List of global threat status, this report places Indian species into Low, Moderate and High categories of Conservation Priority for India.

A large number of species that are thought to be common and widespread find themselves as of High Conservation Priority in the SoIB 2023 Report.

Highlights of the SoIB 2023 Report:

Decline, overall:

Of the 338 species that had enough data to assess for long-term trends, 60% of the species showed long-term declines. Of the 359 species analysed for current annual trends, 40% are declining.

Birds that feed on vertebrates and carrion (including raptors and vultures) have declined greatly, suggesting harmful pollutants in their food resources, a decline in prey availability, or both.

Birds endemic to the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka biodiversity hotspot have rapidly declined in India over the past few decades.

Some increases:

A few generalist bird species such as the national bird - the Indian peafowl, are doing extremely well in the country.

There has been a 150% increase in the abundance of peafowl across the country over the past decades.

The good news of the increase is tempered by a recognition of increased reports of crop damage in different parts of the country, and the negative impacts on snakes and other reptiles.

Therefore, it is important to investigate the impacts of this peafowl boom on both people and ecosystems.

Species of high conservation priority:

Out of all 942 species, 178 species are classified as High Priority, 323 as Moderate Priority, and 441 as Low Priority.

The High Priority species include migratory wetland birds like the Ruddy shelduck, resident species such as the **Indian courser**, endemics such as the **Narcondam hornbill** and the **Nicobar megapode** on Nicobar Island.

Major Threats to Bird Species:

The report also highlighted major threats including - forest degradation, urbanisation and energy infrastructure - that bird species face across the country.

Environmental pollutants including veterinary drugs such as nimesulide still threaten vulture populations in India.

Other concerns include the impacts of climate change (such as on migratory species), avian disease and illegal hunting and trade.

Way Ahead - Need for More Actions, Research:

The report points to the need to conserve specific groups of birds.

For instance, the grassland specialists have declined by more than 50% - indicating the importance of protecting and maintaining grassland ecosystems.

Systematic monitoring of bird populations over long periods of time are critical to understand small-scale changes in bird populations.

More research is needed to understand the reasons behind the declines or increases.

As the abundant, widespread species provides several ecosystem services, river, water, or wasteland development policies must also converge, rather than act in opposition to each other.

An action plan for conservation of bird populations and habitats must include citizen participation, which is an important contributor towards biodiversity conservation.

Grand Cross of the Order of Honour

The Indian Prime minister was recently conferred with the Grand Cross of the Order of Honour by the Greek President in Athens.



About Grand Cross of the Order of Honour:

It is the second-highest civilian honour in Greece.

It is conferred to "eminent personalities who, by reason of their distinguished position, have contributed to enhancing the stature of Greece".

The Order of Honour was established in 1975.

The head of the goddess Athena is depicted on the front side of the Star with the inscription “ONLY THE RIGHTEOUS SHOULD BE HONOURED”.

Key Facts about Greece:

Location: It is located in southeastern Europe, on the southern tip of the Balkan Peninsula.

Official Name: Hellenic Republic

Bordering Countries:

- The country is bordered by Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and North Macedonia.
- Greece shares maritime borders with Cyprus, Egypt, Italy, and Libya.

Geography:

- The mainland has rugged mountains, forests, and lakes.
- The country is well known for the thousands of islands dotting the blue Aegean Sea to the east, the Mediterranean Sea to the south, and the Ionian Sea to the west.

Olympics:

The Olympic Games have their origins in ancient Greece, where the first Olympic Games were held in Olympia in 776 BC.

Greece also hosted the first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896.

Bidriware

Indian Prime Minister recently gifted Bidri work pair of 'Surahi' from Telangana to South African President Cyril Ramaphosa.

It is a form of metal handicraft that has Persian influences and has been made for centuries by artisans from Karnataka's Bidar district. It is renowned for its intricate, handcrafted designs.



The origin of Bidriware as a craft is attributed mostly to the Bahamani Sultans who ruled the region during the 14th and 15th centuries.

It was first brought to India by the noted Sufi Khwaja **Moinuddin Hasan Chisti** in the form of utensils.



The art form developed in the kingdom was a mix of Turkish, Persian and Arabic influences, which were intermingled with the local styles, and thus a unique style of its own was born.

This native art form has obtained a Geographical Indications (GI) registry.

Bidar in Karnataka and Hyderabad in Telangana are the most vibrant centers of Bidriware.

Bidriware :

- Bidriware is manufactured from an alloy of **copper and zinc (in the ratio 1:16)** by casting.
- The zinc content gives the alloy a deep black colour.
- The craftsman uses small chisels to engrave the design over the freehand etching.
- Fine wire or flattened strips of pure silver are then carefully hammered into these grooves.

A special variety of soil, which is available only in the unlit portions of the Bidar fort, is used for the final blackening process. It is mixed with ammonium chloride and water to produce a paste, which is then rubbed onto a heated Bidri surface. The paste selectively darkens the body while it has no effect on the silver inlay. The product then undergoes a process called buffing to smoothen the surface.

Former British nurse Lucy Letby was sentenced to life in prison earlier this week after being found guilty in the worst child serial killer case in the history of the U.K.

Letby killed infants by injecting them with air, others were force-fed milk and two were poisoned with insulin.

Patient safety is a fundamental element of public healthcare.

As per the Union Health Ministry document titled, 'National Patient Safety Implementation Framework (2018-2025)', patient safety is defined as the freedom for a patient from unnecessary harm or potential harm associated with provision of healthcare.

Patients in India are protected under multiple layers of law that are largely fragmented.

The first idea of patient safety is enshrined in the Hippocratic Oath

Additionally, the Consumer Protection Act, 2019 deals with medical negligence and deficiency of services.

Legal rights of the patients are set out in the Clinical Establishment Act, 2010.

The National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority and Drugs Controller General of India have mechanisms to see that patients' rights in terms of medication and devices are protected and that they are not overcharged, among other things.

How is Neonatal Safety Maintained in India?

A new-born infant, or neonate, is a child under 28 days of age. During these first 28 days of life, the child is at highest risk of dying. There are no exclusive rules for neonatal care and safety, or protection against external harm in Indian hospitals.



However, there are provisions and checks against issues like inadvertent mix-up of babies at birth and abduction.

Infant Mortality Rate

World Health Organization data shows that in 2019, 47% of all under-five deaths occurred in the new-born period with about one third dying on the day of birth and close to three quarter dying within the first week of life.

The current infant mortality rate for India in 2023 is 26.6 deaths per 1,000 live births, a 3.89% decline from 2022.

The infant mortality rate for India in 2022 was 27.6 deaths per 1,000 live births.

Children who die within the first 28 days of birth suffer from conditions and diseases associated with lack of quality care at birth or skilled care and treatment immediately after birth and in the first days of life.

Pre-term Birth

Pre-term birth, intrapartum-related complications (birth asphyxia or lack of breathing at birth), infections and birth defects cause most neonatal deaths.

Women who receive midwife-led continuity of care (MLCC) provided by professional midwives, educated, and regulated to international standards, are 16% less likely to lose their baby and 24% less likely to experience pre-term birth.

Conclusion:

The WHO has advised families that prompt medical care should be sought in case of danger signs, including feeding problems, or if the new-born has reduced activity, difficult breathing, a fever, fits or convulsions, jaundice in the first 24 hours after birth, yellow palms and soles at any age, or if the baby feels cold.

Families are also required to register the birth and bring the baby for timely vaccination, according to national schedules. Some new-borns require additional attention and care during hospitalisation and at home to minimise their health risks.