



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point by Dhananjay Gautam

Table Of Content 22 Nov 2024

1. African Penguins: Endangered and Fighting for Survival
2. Measuring Unemployment in India
3. Green World Environment Award 2024
4. India Fines Meta \$25.4 Million
5. India's Maritime Sector: Enhancing Connectivity and Infrastructure
6. Tropical Rainforests: Resilient to Global Warming?



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1 African Penguins: Endangered and Fighting for Survival

Context: Listed as **Critically Endangered** by the **International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN)**. Global population plummeted to **fewer than 10,000 breeding pairs**, compared to **42,500 pairs in 1991**. At this rate, **extinction in the wild is projected by 2035**, warns **BirdLife NGO**.

Key Threats:

- Food Scarcity:**
 - Declining stocks of **sardines and anchovies**, their primary diet, result in **abandoned breeding**.
- Climate Change:**
 - Shifting ocean temperatures disrupt fish distribution.
- Human Impacts:**
 - Oil spills, industrial activities, and tourism** disturb habitats.
- Predators and Disease:**
 - Threats from **seals, sharks**, and land predators like **feral cats**; outbreaks of diseases further stress the population.

**Conservation Efforts to Save the Penguins:****Fishing Ban:**

- A **10-year ban on commercial fishing** around six penguin colonies began in **January 2024**.
- Conservationists** argue the no-fishing zones are too small and have filed a lawsuit seeking expansion.
- The **fishing industry** claims its impact on penguin food sources is minimal.

Other Measures:

- Installation of **artificial nests** and attempts to establish new colonies.
- Government discussions and a court hearing on broader conservation strategies scheduled for **March 2025**.

Balancing Tourism and Awareness:**Impact of Critically Endangered Status:**

- Increased Awareness:** Brings in funding for conservation but also encourages **tourist activity**, risking disturbance.
- Overenthusiastic visitors with **selfie sticks** and excessive closeness harm penguin well-being.

Economic Importance:

- Penguin tourism** generates millions of dollars annually for South Africa, creating a complex balance between conservation and economic gain.

About the African Penguin:**Physical Features**

- Medium-sized, **flightless seabird** with **black-and-white plumage** and unique **black spots on its chest**.
- Known as the "**jackass penguin**" for its distinctive braying call.

Habitat and Diet:

- Found along the **southwestern coast of Africa**, inhabiting **offshore islands** and **coastal areas** in South Africa and Namibia.
- Diet includes **small fish** like sardines and anchovies, along with **squid** and **crustaceans**.

Breeding and Behavior:

- Monogamous:** Penguins return to the same mate and nesting site annually.
- Burrow Breeding:** They build nests under **rocks, vegetation**, or burrows for protection from predators and the sun.
- Both parents share duties of **incubating eggs** and **caring for chicks**.

Significance of the African Penguin:

- Ecosystem Health Indicator:**
 - The species reflects the overall **health of marine ecosystems**.
- Tourism Magnet:**
 - Major attraction contributing significantly to local economies.
- Global Conservation Icon:**
 - Highlights the importance of **sustainable practices** to protect **marine biodiversity**.

Urgent action is critical to prevent the extinction of these iconic seabirds. Conservation measures, sustainable fishing, and public awareness can collectively ensure a future where African penguins thrive.

2 Measuring Unemployment in India

Context: Unemployment refers to individuals who are **willing and capable of working**, actively seeking jobs, but are **unable to find employment** at prevailing wages. It serves as a critical measure of a country's **economic health**, reflecting **productivity, economic activity, and social well-being**.

Types of Unemployment:

1. **Cyclical Unemployment:** Arises due to **economic fluctuations**—job losses during downturns.
2. **Structural Unemployment:** Caused by a **skills mismatch** or **technological advancements**, leaving workers unfit for available jobs.
3. **Frictional Unemployment:** Temporary unemployment during **job transitions** or **re-entry into the workforce**.
4. **Seasonal Unemployment:** Found in industries like **agriculture** or **tourism**, with employment fluctuating by season.
5. **Disguised Unemployment:** Seen when **more workers** are engaged than necessary, especially in **low-productivity sectors** like agriculture.

How is Unemployment Measured in India?

1. National Sample Survey Office (NSSO):

- **Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status (UPSS):** Classifies individuals based on the activity they spent the **most time on in the previous year**.
 - An individual working in any capacity for at least **30 days in a year** is counted as employed.
- **Current Weekly Status (CWS):** Uses a shorter reference period of **seven days**.
 - If an individual works for **at least one hour** during the week, they are considered employed.

2. Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE):

- An independent organization providing **high-frequency data** on unemployment.
- Conducts the **Consumer Pyramids Household Survey (CPHS)**, updated monthly to track trends.

Key Unemployment Indicators in India:

1. **Unemployment Rate (UR):** The percentage of the **labor force** actively seeking work but unemployed.
2. **Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR):** The share of the **working-age population** either working or seeking work.
3. **Worker Population Ratio (WPR):** The percentage of the **working-age population** currently employed.

Challenges in Measuring Unemployment:

1. **Informal Sector Dominance:** India's large informal economy makes **accurate data collection difficult**.
2. **Underemployment:** Many work in **low-productivity jobs**, hiding the true extent of unemployment.
3. **Data Timeliness:** Delays in collection and reporting hinder **real-time assessment**.

Government Initiatives to Reduce Unemployment:

1. **Skill India Mission:** Provides **vocational training** to align workforce skills with industry needs.
2. **Make in India:** Focuses on expanding **manufacturing** to generate employment.
3. **Atmanirbhar Bharat:** Promotes **domestic production** and job creation.
4. **Startup India:** Encourages **entrepreneurship** and innovation to create jobs.

News Highlights: Decline in Urban Unemployment:

The **National Statistical Office (NSO)** reported a record-low urban unemployment rate of **6.4%** for **July-September 2024**, down from **6.6%** in the previous quarter. This is the **lowest rate** recorded since the **Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS)** began in 2018.

Key Labour Market Indicators:

- **LFPR:** Rose to **50.4%**, a record high.
- **WPR:** Increased to **47.2%**, indicating more individuals are employed.

Gender-Specific Trends:

- **Female Unemployment:** Dropped to **8.4%**, the lowest recorded, though consistently above **8%**.
- **Male Unemployment:** Declined to **5.7%**, from **6%** a year ago.

Shift in Employment Types:

- **Regular wage/salaried workers:** Increased to **23.1%**, up from **22%** last year.
- **Self-employed workers:** Rose to **15.3%**, reflecting growth in entrepreneurial activity.

Conclusion:

India's urban unemployment rates are improving due to **increased economic activity** and **boosted hiring** by **MSMEs**. However, challenges like the **informal economy** and **underemployment** remain, requiring sustained government efforts and private sector collaboration.

MEASUREMENT OF UNEMPLOYMENT IN INDIA



3 Green World Environment Award 2024

Context: Coal India Limited (CIL), a leading state-owned coal mining corporation, has been awarded the 'Green World Environment Award 2024' in the CSR category for its impactful initiatives in healthcare sustainability.



About the Green World Environment Award

- **Significance:**
Recognizes organizations for **outstanding contributions to environmental sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)** globally.
- **2024 Recipient:**
 - **Coal India Limited (CIL)** for its **Thalassemia Bal Sewa Yojna**, which provides **curative treatments for Thalassemia through Bone Marrow Transplants (BMT)**.
 - Financial assistance of up to **₹10 lakh** is offered for BMT operations across **17 partner hospitals**.
- **Presented By:** The award was conferred by **The Green Organisation at Kensington Palace, London**.

About The Green Organisation

- **Founded:** 1994.
- **Nature:** Independent, non-political, and non-profit group.
- **Objective:** To recognize, reward, and promote **environmental and CSR best practices** worldwide.
- **Initiatives:**
 - Hosts global awards such as the **Green World Awards** to encourage **sustainability and CSR excellence**.

About Coal India Limited (CIL)

- **Establishment:** November 1975.
- **Largest Producer:**
 - World's **largest coal producer** and one of India's biggest corporate employers.
 - Produces **83% of India's overall coal production**, meeting approximately **40% of the country's primary commercial energy needs**.
- **Subsidiaries:** Seven major producing subsidiaries operate under CIL.
- **Role in Energy:** Coal is the backbone of India's **primary commercial energy needs**, accounting for **57% of energy dependency**, with CIL playing a pivotal role in energy security.

This recognition underscores CIL's efforts in **healthcare support** and its broader commitment to **sustainable development**.

4

India Fines Meta \$25.4 Million, Restricts WhatsApp Data Sharing

Context: The Competition Commission of India (CCI) has imposed a \$25.4 million fine on Meta and prohibited WhatsApp from sharing user data with other Meta-owned entities for advertising purposes for the next five years.



Background: The Data Privacy Controversy:

- **2021 Privacy Policy Update:** WhatsApp's updated privacy policy allowed data sharing with Facebook and its subsidiaries.
 - This sparked a global backlash due to concerns over user privacy and potential anti-competitive practices.
- **CCI Investigation:**
 - In March 2021, the CCI launched an investigation into WhatsApp's updated policy, deeming it a violation of antitrust regulations.

India's Regulatory Actions:

- **Panel Recommendations:**
 - A Ministry of Corporate Affairs panel emphasized the need for stricter digital competition regulations to address rising concerns regarding large tech companies.
- **Digital Competition Bill:**
 - The government is considering introducing a Digital Competition Bill, inspired by the EU's antitrust frameworks.
 - This bill is expected to complement existing antitrust laws and ensure fair competition in the digital space.

Competition Commission of India (CCI):

- **Role and Establishment:**
 - The CCI was constituted in March 2009 under the Competition Act, 2002 to promote fair competition, prevent anti-competitive practices, and safeguard consumer interests.
 - It replaced the outdated MRTP Act, 1969, following recommendations by the Raghavan Committee.
- **Structure:**
 - The Commission comprises one Chairperson and six Members, appointed by the Central Government.

Significance of the Fine:

- **Major Antitrust Action:**
 - The fine and restrictions signal India's growing regulatory scrutiny of tech giants.
 - It underscores the government's commitment to upholding data privacy and promoting fair competition.
- **Global Implications:**
 - The case echoes global concerns over the dominance of big tech firms and the need for stringent digital regulations.

Conclusion:

India's move to fine Meta and restrict WhatsApp's data-sharing practices sets a precedent for digital privacy and fair competition in one of the world's largest digital markets. With the upcoming Digital Competition Bill, the country aims to reinforce its regulatory framework and address the challenges posed by big tech's dominance.

5 India's Maritime Sector: Enhancing Connectivity and Infrastructure

Context: The Ministry of Ports, Shipping, and Waterways of India, in collaboration with the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), recently hosted the inaugural Sagarmanthan: The Great Oceans Dialogue. This event highlighted crucial developments in India's maritime sector, focusing on maritime logistics, ports, and shipping.

**Key Developments in India's Maritime Sector:**

1. Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor:

- **Operational Since 2023:** The new maritime route between India and Far East Russia cuts the travel distance and significantly reduces transport time. It facilitates key imports like crude, food, and machinery.
- **Strategic Impact:** The route strengthens trade between the two nations, boosting economic connectivity and enhancing India's global maritime presence.

2. India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC):

- **Collaborative Project with Greece:** Announced during the G20 Summit 2023, this ambitious corridor will integrate sea, rail, and road routes to boost trade between India, the Middle East, and Europe.
- **Multi-modal Connectivity:** IMEC will include railroad networks, ship-to-rail connections, hydrogen pipelines, and high-speed data cables for enhanced economic and energy cooperation.

3. Maritime Vision 2047

- **India's Ambition:** India aims to be the top maritime nation by 2047. Key goals include enhancing port infrastructure, ship ownership, and shipbuilding capabilities.
- **Port Capacity Expansion:** India plans to increase its port handling capacity to 10,000 million metric tonnes per annum by 2047.

4. Massive Investment in Maritime Infrastructure:

- **Rs 80 Lakh Crore Investment:** India is making significant investments in projects such as the Vizhinjam International Seaport (Kerala), new mega ports in Vadhavan (Maharashtra) and Galathea Bay (Nicobar Islands).
- **Sustainability Focus:** There is a shift towards building ships powered by clean fuels like ammonia, hydrogen, and electricity.

5. Improved Port Efficiency:

- **Reduced Turnaround Time:** The port turnaround time has significantly improved, dropping from over 40 hours to 22 hours, outperforming countries like the US and Singapore.

6. Revamped Maritime Legislation:

- The introduction of acts like the Major Port Authority Act (2021), National Waterways Act (2016), and Inland Vessel Act (2021) have accelerated growth in ports, waterways, and ship recycling.
- The upcoming Coastal Shipping Bill (2024) and Merchant Shipping Bill (2020) are set to further enhance India's maritime capabilities.



Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor: Key Facts

- **Operational Since 2023:** This sea link connects the **east coast of India** with **Vladivostok**, Russia's largest Pacific port.
- **Distance Reduction:** The new route shortens the journey from **8,675 nautical miles** (via Europe) to **5,600 nautical miles**.
- **Time Reduction:** The transit time has been cut from **40 days** to just **24 days**, reducing delays and boosting trade efficiency.
- **Strategic Importance:** Vladivostok's proximity to the **China-Russia border** makes it crucial for India-Russia trade, especially in **coking coal, oil, fertilizers, LNG**, and more.
- **Complementary Routes:** The corridor aligns with initiatives like the **Northern Sea Route** and the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)**.

Challenges in India's Maritime Sector:

1. Competition from China:

- **China's Maritime Power:** China has emerged as a **global maritime leader** with a dominant navy, merchant fleet, and **port infrastructure**, further strengthened by its **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**.

2. Inefficient Port Infrastructure:

- **Delays in Modernization:** Despite initiatives like **Sagarmala**, many ports still face delays in modernization and **intermodal connectivity** issues, especially linking ports with inland transport.

3. Lack of Private Sector Involvement:

- **Insufficient Private Participation:** India's maritime economy, particularly in **port-led industrialization**, is still hindered by low private sector investment.

4. Environmental Concerns:

- **Sustainability Issues:** **Port development** and **maritime trade** often face **environmental scrutiny**, particularly regarding coastal **ecosystem degradation** and the **environmental impact** of large infrastructure projects.

5. Geopolitical Challenges:

- **New Maritime Risks:** Increasing **geopolitical tensions** and risks from **non-state actors** (e.g., attacks on commercial vessels) pose threats to India's maritime trade.

6. Dependence on Foreign Shipbuilding:

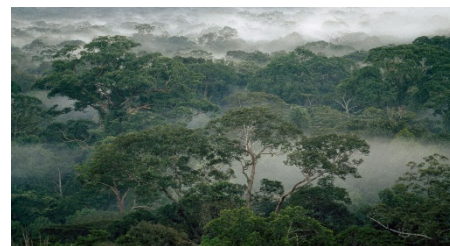
- Despite efforts to boost **indigenous shipbuilding**, India remains largely dependent on **foreign technology** for **shipbuilding** and **maritime equipment**.

Conclusion:

India's maritime sector is undergoing transformative growth with strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing **trade connectivity, port efficiency, and sustainability**. While challenges remain, including **competition from China, infrastructure inefficiencies, and private sector participation**, India's ambitious goals for 2047 position the country as a rising global maritime power. The ongoing investments and **collaborative international projects** like the **IMEC** and **Chennai-Vladivostok Corridor** are set to redefine India's position in the global maritime landscape.

6 Tropical Rainforests: Resilient to Global Warming?

Context: A recent study by IIT Kharagpur sheds light on the **resilience of tropical rainforests** in the face of **global warming**. The research, based on fossilized tropical rainforests found in **Vastan coal mines** (Gujarat), reveals that these ecosystems may have the potential to withstand future climate changes, much like they did during a period of extreme warming millions of years ago.

**The Palaeocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum (PETM) and Its Lessons:**

- **What is PETM:** The **Palaeocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum (PETM)**, occurring around **56 million years ago**, was a period marked by a **dramatic global temperature rise**. This event lasted about **100,000 years** and saw a spike in **atmospheric CO₂ levels**. Despite this extreme warming, tropical rainforests managed not only to **survive** but also **diversify**.
- **Fossil Evidence from Vastan Coal Mines:** Fossils of **plants, pollen, mammals, and insects** from the PETM era were found in the coal layers of the **Vastan coal mines** in Gujarat. These fossilized remains provide invaluable insight into the biodiversity of tropical rainforests during a time when **India was a tropical island** surrounded by high levels of CO₂.

Key Findings: Why Did Tropical Rainforests Survive PETM?

- **Rainfall-Buffered Temperature:** One of the significant findings of the study is that **increased rainfall** during the PETM may have played a crucial role in **buffering temperatures**. The excess rainfall helped **lower temperatures**, creating a more stable environment that allowed tropical rainforests to **thrive** despite the high CO₂ levels and rising global temperatures.
- **Diversity and Adaptation:** Even under extreme climatic conditions, these rainforests were not only able to survive but **diversified**. This suggests that tropical rainforests may have natural mechanisms that can help them **adapt** to temperature shifts, provided there is sufficient **rainfall**.

Understanding Rainforests and Their Global Significance

- **What Are Rainforests:** Tropical rainforests are dense forests that are rich in **tall, mostly evergreen trees**. They thrive in areas that receive substantial rainfall, typically between the **Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn**. Major rainforest regions include parts of **Central and South America, Africa, Western India, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Pacific Islands**.
- **Importance of Rainforests:** Rainforests are crucial for global **biodiversity, carbon sequestration**, and maintaining ecological balance. They support diverse species of plants, animals, and insects, and regulate local and global **climates** by absorbing carbon dioxide and producing oxygen.

Implications for the Future of Rainforests:

This study offers a **hopeful perspective** for the future of tropical rainforests amidst concerns over **climate change**. If the pattern observed during the PETM is applicable today, tropical rainforests may have an innate resilience that could help them **withstand future global warming**, as long as **rainfall patterns** are preserved.

Conclusion:

The research from IIT Kharagpur underscores the **resilience** of tropical rainforests, suggesting that despite the challenges posed by **global warming**, these ecosystems may be able to **adapt and survive**—just as they did during the **Palaeocene-Eocene Thermal Maximum**. As we continue to study these natural systems, understanding the role of **rainfall-buffered temperature** could be crucial in formulating conservation strategies to protect these vital ecosystems in the future.