



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point by Dhananjay Gautam

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1 India's Impressive Climb in the Network Readiness Index 2024

Context: India has achieved a significant milestone by rising from **60th position in 2023** to **49th in 2024** in the **Network Readiness Index (NRI)**. This leap highlights India's **advancements in digital infrastructure** and **technological capabilities**.

About the Network Readiness Index (NRI)

The **NRI**, published by the **Portulans Institute**, assesses the **digital readiness** of **133 economies**. It uses **54 variables** categorized under four pillars:

- **Technology**
- **People**
- **Governance**
- **Impact**

India's Key Achievements in NRI 2024:

India's overall score rose from **49.93 in 2023** to **53.63 in 2024**, reflecting significant progress in multiple areas.

Global Rankings Across Key Metrics:

- **1st place globally:**
 - **AI scientific publications**
 - **AI talent concentration**
 - **ICT services exports**
- **2nd place globally:**
 - **Fiber-to-the-Premises (FTTH) Internet subscriptions**
 - **Mobile broadband traffic**
 - **International internet bandwidth**
- **3rd place globally:**
 - **Domestic market scale**
- **4th place globally:**
 - **Annual telecom investments**

Telecom Sector Transformations:

India's telecom industry has witnessed remarkable growth:

- **Tele-density:** Increased to **84.69%**.
- **Wireless connections:** Surged to **119 crore**.
- **Internet subscribers:** Rose from **25.1 crore** to **94.4 crore**.

Impact of 5G and Beyond

The launch of **5G services in 2022** propelled India's global mobile broadband speed ranking from **118th** to **15th**.

India's ambitious **Bharat 6G Vision** is setting the stage for it to become a **global leader in telecom innovation**.

India's advancements in the NRI underline its growing stature in the global digital landscape and its commitment to building a robust and inclusive digital ecosystem.



2

Accelerated and Extended Degree Programmes: A New Horizon in Higher Education

Context: The University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced a Standard Operating Protocol (SOP) enabling Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to offer two innovative options for undergraduate students: the Accelerated Degree Programme (ADP) and the Extended Degree Programme (EDP).

What are ADPs and EDPs?

Accelerated Degree Programme (ADP):

- Students opting for ADP can complete their degree faster by earning additional credits starting in their chosen semester.
- The curriculum and credit requirements remain the same as a standard **three- or four-year UG programme**.
- **Completion Time:**
 - A **three-year UG programme** can be completed in **five semesters** (instead of six).
 - A **four-year UG programme** can be completed in **six or seven semesters** (instead of eight).

Extended Degree Programme (EDP):

- The EDP allows students to take a lighter academic load, earning fewer credits per semester.
- This flexibility enables them to take longer to complete their degree without compromising academic standards.

Recognition:

Both ADPs and EDPs are regarded as equivalent to standard-duration degrees by **government departments, private organisations, and recruiting agencies** like the UPSC and State Service Commissions.

How Will ADPs and EDPs Be Implemented?

1. **Eligibility and Selection:**
 - Students must choose ADP or EDP by the end of the **first or second semester**.
 - HEIs will establish committees to evaluate and approve applications for these programmes.
2. **Capacity:**

Up to **10% of the sanctioned intake** can opt for ADP in each institution.

 - There is **no cap** on the number of students who can enrol in EDP.
3. **Timeline:**
 - HEIs may start offering ADPs and EDPs from the **2025–26 academic year**.
 - Participation is voluntary for institutions.

Significance of ADPs and EDPs:

For Students:

- **ADP:** Empowers high-performing students to **fast-track** their education, enabling them to join the workforce or pursue higher studies sooner.
- **EDP:** Offers flexibility for students needing **extra time** to balance academics with personal or professional commitments.

Alignment with NEP 2020:

- The initiative reflects the vision of the **National Credit Framework (NCrF)** under the **National Education Policy (NEP) 2020**, fostering **personalised learning** and **academic flexibility**.

This progressive step by the UGC is set to transform the Indian education system, making it more **flexible, inclusive**, and aligned with the diverse needs of students.



3 SC Mandates Prior Sanction to Prosecute Public Servants under PMLA

Context: In a landmark ruling on **November 6, 2023**, the **Supreme Court of India** mandated that the **Enforcement Directorate (ED)** must obtain prior sanction before prosecuting public servants under the **Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA)** if the alleged offenses are linked to their **official duties**.

**About the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA), 2002:**

Enacted in **2003**, the **PMLA** aims to combat money laundering in India. It has three primary objectives:

- **Prevent and control money laundering.**
- **Confiscate and seize properties** obtained from laundered money.
- Address any other issues related to **money laundering**.

Key Provisions of the Act:

1. **Definition of Money Laundering (Section 3):** Any act where a person knowingly assists, participates, or is involved in processing **proceeds of crime** to project them as untainted property.
2. **Responsibilities of Financial Entities:** Obligation for **banks, financial institutions**, and intermediaries to verify and maintain transaction records.
3. **Powers of the Enforcement Directorate (ED):**
 - Investigate money laundering offenses.
 - Attach properties involved in money laundering.
4. **Adjudicating Authority and Appellate Tribunal:**
 - Resolve disputes related to property attachment and confiscation.
5. **Special Courts:** Designated courts to try offenses under the PMLA.
6. **International Cooperation:** The Act enables agreements with other countries to enforce its provisions globally.

News Summary:**The Supreme Court Ruling:**

The SC upheld a **2019 Telangana High Court judgment** that overturned charges against IAS officers **Bibhu Prasad Acharya** and **Adityanath Das** in a money laundering case linked to former Andhra Pradesh CM **Jagan Mohan Reddy**.

- The court emphasized the necessity of **prior sanction** for public servants under **Section 197 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC)** when offenses relate to their **official duties**.

Key Points from the Ruling:

- **Prior Sanction Provision (CrPC Section 197):**
 - Prohibits courts from taking cognizance of offenses by public servants in their official capacity **without government approval**.
 - Exceptions: Certain serious offenses like **rape, trafficking**, and **sexual harassment** do not require prior sanction.
- **Compatibility with PMLA:**
 - **Section 65 of the PMLA** aligns with CrPC provisions, ensuring cases against public servants adhere to the requirement for sanction.

Impact on High-Profile Cases:

1. **Arvind Kejriwal (Excise Policy Scam):** Challenged the cognizance of an **ED chargesheet**, citing the absence of prior sanction.
2. **P. Chidambaram (Aircel-Maxis Case):** Successfully argued for a stay on trial proceedings due to lack of government approval.

Implications of the Ruling**For Public Servants:**

- Protects honest officials from **frivolous prosecutions** while ensuring accountability for misconduct.

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For Investigative Agencies:

- Delays in prosecution as **government sanction** becomes a mandatory requirement.
- Risk of overturned convictions if sanction requirements are not met.

Understanding Money Laundering

Money laundering is the process of disguising the **illicit origin of funds** derived from criminal activities, such as:

- **Drug trafficking**
- **Corruption**
- **Terrorism financing**
- **Embezzlement**

What is Hawala?

Hawala is an informal system for transferring money without physical movement. It relies on **trust-based networks**, requires no documentation, and ensures **anonymity**, making it a favored method for illegal transactions.

This landmark ruling underscores the delicate balance between ensuring accountability for corruption and protecting public servants from undue harassment, setting a significant precedent for future cases under the PMLA.



4 Ajmer Sharif Dargah: A Spiritual and Cultural Treasure of Rajasthan

Context: An **Ajmer court** recently admitted a **petition** calling for a survey of the Ajmer Sharif Dargah, the revered shrine of **Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti**. The petition claims the dargah was built on the remnants of **Hindu and Jain temples**.

Historical Background of Ajmer;**Origins of the City:**

- Ajmer, historically known as **Ajaymeru**, was the **capital of the Chauhan Rajputs** who ruled parts of modern-day **Rajasthan, Haryana, Delhi, and Uttar Pradesh** between the 7th and 12th centuries.
- The city was founded by **Ajaydeva** in the mid-12th century.

The Ghurid Invasion:

- In **1192**, Ajmer was attacked by **Muhammad of Ghor**, following the **defeat of Prithviraj Chauhan** at the Second Battle of Tarain.
- According to **Har Bilas Sarda**, a historian, the **Ghurid army looted the city** and destroyed many temples.
- Despite allegations, Sarda does not explicitly claim that the dargah was constructed on a demolished temple site.

Revival Under the Mughals:

- After centuries of decline, Ajmer was revitalized under **Mughal Emperor Akbar's reign (1556–1605)**.

The Evolution of Ajmer Sharif Dargah:**The Beginning:**

- **Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti** was laid to rest in **1236** in a modest cell where he had lived.
- For over 200 years, no formal structure marked his grave.

First Constructions by the Khaljis:

- In the **1460s**, **Sultan Mahmud Khan Khalji of Malwa** and his son **Ghiyasuddin** built the first permanent mausoleum and the **Buland Darwaza**.
- The gateway, featuring intricate carvings, is believed to have used materials from a **demolished Jain temple**.

Mughal Contributions:

- The shrine saw substantial development under the Mughals:
 - **Humayun** added the iconic **white marble dome** in 1532.
 - **Akbar**, a devoted follower of the Chishti saints, built the **Akbari Masjid** in the 1570s.
 - **Jahangir** installed a gold railing around the tomb in 1616.
 - **Shah Jahan** expanded the complex further, blending Mughal grandeur with spiritual significance.

Architectural Brilliance of Ajmer Sharif Dargah:**An Architectural Masterpiece:**

- The dargah is an exceptional example of **Indo-Islamic architecture**, showcasing a blend of **white marble** and intricate **silver and gold work**.
- The **Nizam Gate**, donated by the **Nizam of Hyderabad**, exemplifies the saint's widespread reverence.

Key Features:

- The **tomb** is enclosed in a silver railing and surrounded by a **marble screen**.
- The **prayer room**, built by **Chimni Begum**, Shah Jahan's daughter, is a serene space reserved for women.

Spiritual Importance of Ajmer Sharif Dargah:**A Beacon of Unity:**



- As one of India's holiest Muslim shrines, the dargah embodies **religious harmony and inclusivity**, attracting visitors of all faiths.
- Devotees, including **celebrities and politicians**, visit to seek blessings and solace.

The Urs Festival:

- The annual **Urs festival**, commemorating the saint's death anniversary, is the dargah's most significant event.
- It features:
 - **Qawwali performances**
 - **Special prayers**
 - Offerings of **chaddars** at the tomb.
- Thousands of devotees from across the globe gather to celebrate this spiritual occasion.

Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti and the Chishti Order

The Life of Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti

- Born in **1141** in **Sistan (Persia)**, Moinuddin began his spiritual journey after becoming an orphan at 14.
- He studied theology, philosophy, and ethics in renowned seminaries in **Bukhara and Samarkand**.
- Moinuddin traveled extensively, meeting his mentor **Khwaja Usman Harooni** and being initiated into the **Chishti order**.

Arrival in Ajmer:

- In **1191**, Moinuddin settled in Ajmer, where his simple lifestyle and compassion earned him the title **Gharib Nawaz (Friend of the Poor)**.
- His teachings emphasized **tolerance and selflessness**, influencing followers across the Indian subcontinent.

The Chishti Order:

- The **Chishti Sufi order**, introduced to India by Moinuddin Chishti, embraced local traditions and emphasized **devotion over orthodoxy**.
- It laid the foundation for a spiritual movement that encouraged inclusivity and interfaith harmony.

Conclusion:

The **Ajmer Sharif Dargah** is more than a shrine; it is a testament to **spiritual devotion, architectural brilliance**, and the enduring legacy of **Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti**. Its universal appeal transcends religious boundaries, making it a symbol of unity and peace in India's cultural and spiritual tapestry.

5 Exercise CINBAX: A New Chapter in India-Cambodia Defence Cooperation

Context: The first edition of the Joint Table Top Exercise CINBAX has commenced at the Foreign Training Node, Pune. This significant event marks a new milestone in defence collaboration between India and Cambodia.

What is Exercise CINBAX?

India-Cambodia Partnership:

- Exercise CINBAX is a joint planning exercise between the Indian Army and the Cambodian Army.
- Both contingents consist of personnel from Cambodia's Army and an Infantry Brigade of the Indian Army.



Primary Objectives

- The exercise aims to simulate and plan joint Counter-Terrorism (CT) operations under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.
- It fosters discussions on establishing a Joint Training Task Force for Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) operations.

Focus Areas of CINBAX:

Core Operational Themes:

The exercise addresses critical aspects of modern warfare and peacekeeping operations, including:

- Information Operations
- Cyber and Hybrid Warfare
- Logistics and Casualty Management
- Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Operations

Showcasing Indigenous Defence:

- A dedicated segment will exhibit Indian-origin weapons and equipment, emphasizing the country's progress in 'Atmanirbharta' (self-reliance) and indigenous defence production capabilities.

Structure of the Exercise:

Three Phases

The exercise unfolds over three distinct phases:

1. **Phase I:**
 - Orientation and preparation of participants for Counter-Terrorism operations during UN peacekeeping missions.
2. **Phase II:**
 - Execution of Table Top exercises, simulating scenarios to test operational strategies.
3. **Phase III:**
 - Finalization of plans and comprehensive reviews.
 - Discussions on situation-based tactics and refinement of joint operational procedures.

Significance of Exercise CINBAX:

Enhancing Interoperability:

- The exercise aims to strengthen trust, camaraderie, and interoperability between the armed forces of India and Cambodia.

Strategic and Tactical Gains:

- Participants gain practical insights into Counter-Terrorism strategies through thematic training sessions and simulated wargame discussions.

Promoting Regional Stability:

- By focusing on CT operations, cybersecurity, and HADR, the exercise contributes to building regional peacekeeping capacities and addressing emerging security challenges.

The inaugural edition of Exercise CINBAX sets the stage for a stronger India-Cambodia defence partnership and reaffirms India's commitment to fostering regional stability and peacekeeping capabilities on a global scale.

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6 RS-28 Sarmat: Russia's New Era of Nuclear Power

Context: Russia is set to deploy the **RS-28 Sarmat**, an advanced **intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM)**, known in the West as "**Satan 2**". This missile is designed to replace older systems, marking a significant step forward in Russia's nuclear capabilities.

**What is the RS-28 Sarmat?****A Powerful New ICBM:**

The **RS-28 Sarmat** is a **liquid-fueled** intercontinental ballistic missile developed by Russia, named after the **Sarmatian people** who lived during the **4th and 5th centuries BC**. In Western military circles, it is often referred to as "**Satan 2**" due to its formidable power and capabilities.

Key Features of the RS-28 Sarmat:**Massive Range and Size:**

- **Range:** The RS-28 has an impressive range of **18,000 km**, making it capable of targeting almost any location on Earth.
- **Weight and Size:** The missile weighs around **208.1 metric tons** and is **35.3 meters** long with a **3-meter diameter**. It is classified as a "**heavy**" ICBM due to its sheer size and power.

Payload Capacity:

- The **Sarmat** is capable of carrying a **10-ton payload**, offering incredible flexibility in the type of warheads it can deploy.
- It can carry **up to 10 heavy nuclear warheads, 16 smaller warheads**, or a combination of warheads and **countermeasures** to evade enemy interception.
- The missile is also designed to carry **hypersonic boost-glide vehicles**, further enhancing its ability to overcome modern missile defense systems.

Advanced Evasion Techniques:

One of the most significant features of the **RS-28 Sarmat** is its ability to **evade anti-missile defense systems**. It achieves this by having a **short initial boost phase**, making it difficult for enemy surveillance systems to track the missile as it launches.

Why is RS-28 Sarmat Important?**A New Era of Strategic Deterrence:**

The deployment of the **RS-28 Sarmat** significantly enhances Russia's **nuclear deterrent** capability, making it a powerful tool for national defense and strategic power projection. With its immense payload and evasion capabilities, it is poised to be a key element of Russia's defense strategy for decades to come.

A Replacement for Older Missiles:

The **RS-28 Sarmat** is designed to replace older, aging **Russian ICBMs**, providing the country with a more modern, more powerful, and more reliable system to ensure its nuclear deterrence is maintained at the highest levels.

The **RS-28 Sarmat** represents a major leap forward in **missile technology** and **nuclear defense**, solidifying Russia's position in the global strategic arena.