



Daily Current Affairs



To The Point by Dhananjay Gautam

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1 eCourts Mission Mode Project: Revolutionizing India's Judiciary

Context: The eCourts Mission Mode Project is a transformative initiative announced by the Minister of Law and Justice, Arjun Ram Meghwal, to enhance the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure of the Indian Judiciary.

Overview of the eCourts Project:

- 1. Conceptualization:** Introduced in 2005 by the eCommittee, Supreme Court of India.
- 2. Launch Year:** Officially launched in 2007 under the Department of Justice, Ministry of Law and Justice.
- 3. Key Objectives:**
 - Boost judicial productivity and efficiency.
 - Ensure predictable and reliable access to justice.
 - Automate judicial processes for better accountability among stakeholders.
- 4. Implementation Authority:** Managed by the High Courts within their respective jurisdictions.

**Phases of Implementation:****Phase I (2007–2015): Foundational Phase**

- Focused on **basic computerization** of courts.
- **Internet connectivity** was established across various courts.
- Introduction of **Case Information Systems (CIS)**.

Phase II (2015–2023): Advancing Technology

- Enabled ICT solutions for **district and subordinate courts**.
- Introduced **video conferencing facilities**.
- Rolled out **citizen-centric services**, such as:
 - **e-Payment gateways** for court fees and fines.
 - Access to **certified documents online**.

Phase III (2023–2027): Digital Transformation

- Focused on creating **digital and paperless courts**.
- **Digitization** of legacy records and pending cases.
- Expanded **video conferencing** to include **hospitals and jails**.
- Adoption of **cloud computing architecture** for seamless data management.

Potential Benefits of the eCourts Project

- 1. Increased Efficiency:** Streamlines court processes, reduces delays, and improves case management.
- 2. Enhanced Transparency:** Public access to court information promotes transparency and accountability.
- 3. Improved Accessibility:** Ensures justice for remote and underserved communities, making the judiciary more inclusive.
- 4. Cost Reduction:** Minimizes costs associated with physical paperwork and travel.
- 5. Judicial Modernization:** Aligns the Indian Judiciary with global best practices, ensuring a modern, tech-driven approach.

Challenges in Implementation

- 1. Digital Literacy:** Need for enhanced digital literacy among judges, lawyers, and court staff.
- 2. Data Security Concerns:** Protecting sensitive judicial data from cyber threats.
- 3. Infrastructure Deficits:** Bridging infrastructure gaps, particularly in rural and remote areas.

Conclusion:

The eCourts Mission Mode Project is a landmark step towards building a modern, efficient, and transparent judicial system in India. While the initiative holds immense promise, addressing challenges like digital literacy, data security, and infrastructure development will be pivotal to its success. Through sustained efforts, the project aims to transform the Indian judiciary into a global model of innovation and inclusivity.

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2 Internal Policy Barriers to Unlocking the China-Plus-One Opportunity

Context: The 16th Finance Commission Chairman, Arvind Panagariya, has emphasized the importance of **keeping India open to Chinese investments**, except in a few critical sectors, to maximize economic opportunities.

What is the China-Plus-One Strategy?

The **China-Plus-One strategy** involves companies diversifying their **manufacturing and sourcing operations** beyond China to reduce dependence and minimize risks.



Key Features:

- Focuses on reducing **over-reliance on China**.
- Promotes **market diversification** and increases **global supply chain participation**.
- Creates opportunities for countries like **India, Vietnam, Thailand, and Malaysia** to become manufacturing hubs.

Advantages of the Strategy:

- Encourages **technology transfer** and skill development.
- Enables **broader access to global markets**.
- Strengthens economic resilience through diversification.

Why Has India Struggled to Fully Leverage China-Plus-One?

1. **Complex Land Acquisition Processes:**
 - Lengthy and bureaucratic **land acquisition procedures** make it difficult for multinational companies to set up operations.
2. **Rigid Labour Laws:**
 - While there have been improvements, **labour law rigidity** continues to undermine **manufacturing scalability and competitiveness**.
3. **Regulatory Hurdles:**
 - Despite the introduction of **GST**, excessive **compliance requirements** and bureaucratic delays inflate operational costs for businesses.
4. **Limited Free Trade Agreements (FTAs):**
 - India's **cautious stance on FTAs** limits its integration into global value chains.
 - In contrast, **Vietnam** has aggressively signed FTAs, making it an attractive destination for global investors.

Policy Recommendations to Seize the Opportunity:

1. **Expand Free Trade Agreements (FTAs):**
 - India should prioritize signing FTAs to **reduce tariffs** and enable smoother integration into **global supply chains**.
2. **Leverage Chinese Investments:**
 - The **Economic Survey 2023-24** advocates welcoming **FDI from China**, particularly in non-sensitive sectors, to strengthen local manufacturing and boost exports.
3. **Streamline Land and Labour Reforms:**
 - Simplified **land acquisition processes** and **flexible labour laws** will attract companies seeking to relocate from China.

Conclusion:

Countries like **Vietnam and Thailand** have demonstrated how proactive reforms in **labour, taxation, and trade policies** can attract global investments under the China-Plus-One strategy.

For India, this moment presents a **crucial opportunity to become a manufacturing hub**. However, proactive reforms and **removal of internal barriers** will be vital to fully leverage this strategy and achieve global economic competitiveness.

3

Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024

Context: The Lok Sabha recently passed the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024, which introduces significant changes to the Disaster Management Act, 2005, aiming to modernize and enhance disaster management in India.

Overview of the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024:

The Bill amends the Disaster Management Act, 2005, which established:

- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA),
- State Disaster Management Authority (SDMA), and
- District Disaster Management Authority (DDMA).

These authorities manage disasters at the national, state, and district levels.

Key Provisions of the Bill:

1. **Preparation of Disaster Management Plans:** The responsibility of preparing disaster management plans now lies with the NDMA and SDMA, rather than the National and State Executive Committees.

2. **Enhanced Functions of NDMA and SDMA**

The Bill assigns additional responsibilities, including:

- Assessing disaster risks periodically, including risks from extreme climate events.
- Providing technical assistance to subordinate authorities.
- Recommending guidelines for minimum standards of relief.
- Creating national and state-level disaster databases.

The NDMA is also empowered to frame regulations under the Act, with prior approval from the central government.

3. **Creation of Comprehensive Disaster Databases:** The Bill mandates the establishment of detailed disaster databases at both the national and state levels to improve disaster planning and response.

4. **Establishment of Urban Disaster Management Authorities:** State governments are now authorized to form Urban Disaster Management Authorities for state capitals and cities governed by municipal corporations.

5. **Formation of State Disaster Response Force (SDRF):** States are empowered to create their own State Disaster Response Forces, with the functions and service terms defined by the state government.

6. **Statutory Status for Key Committees:**

- The Bill grants statutory recognition to:
 - National Crisis Management Committee (NCMC): Acts as the nodal body for managing disasters with serious or national implications.
 - High-Level Committee (HLC): Provides financial assistance to states during disasters.

7. **Appointments to NDMA:**

- The NDMA can determine the number and categories of officers and employees required, with central government approval.
- It can also hire experts and consultants as needed to enhance its operations.

Concerns Raised by the Opposition:

- **Centralization of Powers:** Critics argue the amendments could reduce state autonomy by centralizing decision-making powers with the central government.
- **Early Warning Systems and Prevention:** Calls were made to emphasize early warning mechanisms, disaster prevention, and enhanced financial support for disaster-affected regions.

Conclusion:

Despite opposition concerns, the Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill, 2024 was passed by the Lok Sabha. It now awaits consideration in the Rajya Sabha, marking a step forward in modernizing India's disaster management framework to address emerging challenges effectively.



4 No Indian City Meets WHO Air Quality Standards

Context: A recent study published in *Lancet Planet Health* has revealed that no part of India meets the **World Health Organization's (WHO)** recommended yearly air quality standards. This highlights the alarming extent of air pollution across the country.

WHO's Updated Air Quality Guidelines (2021):

In **September 2021**, the WHO updated its **Air Quality Guidelines (AQGs)** to address the significant health risks posed by air pollution.

Key Recommendations:

- **PM2.5:** Annual average should not exceed **5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** (reduced from 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2005).
- **PM10:** Annual average should not exceed **15 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** , with a daily mean limit of **45 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** .
- **NO2:** Annual average should not exceed **10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** .
- **Ozone:** 8-hour mean during peak season should remain below **60 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** .
- **SO2:** Daily mean should not exceed **40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** .
- **CO:** 24-hour mean should remain under **7 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** .

Nature of Guidelines:

- These guidelines are **non-binding** but serve as a benchmark for countries to establish air quality policies.
- They are grounded in **scientific evidence** from global studies to minimize health impacts.

India's National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS):**What is Ambient Air Quality?**

Ambient air quality refers to the **condition of outdoor air** in a specific area.

India's Standards:

Under the **Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act, 1981**, the **Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB)** defines the NAAQS.

- The standards cover **12 pollutants**, including **PM10, PM2.5, SO2, NO2, Ozone, and CO**.
- The NAAQS sets the **PM2.5 limit at 40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** , significantly higher than WHO's guideline of 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

Key Findings of the Lancet Study:**1. Alarming Air Pollution Levels**

- **No Indian city** meets the WHO's annual air quality standard of **PM2.5 at 5 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** .
- A staggering **81.9% of India's population** lives in areas exceeding even the NAAQS limit of **40 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** .

2. Severe Health Impacts:

- **PM2.5 pollution** contributes to approximately **1.5 million deaths annually** in India.
- Prolonged exposure to polluted air is linked to:
 - **Respiratory diseases, strokes, and heart attacks**
 - **High blood pressure**
 - **Developmental delays in children**
- For every **10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ increase in PM2.5**, the risk of death rises by **8.6%**.

3. Regional Disparities in Pollution:

- Pollution levels vary significantly across regions:
 - **Arunachal Pradesh's Lower Subansiri district (2019): 11.2 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** (lowest recorded).
 - **Ghaziabad and Delhi (2016): 119 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$** (highest recorded).

4. Potential for Change:

- Meeting NAAQS standards could save **300,000 lives annually**.
- Achieving WHO guidelines would prevent even more fatalities.

Addressing the Air Pollution Crisis:



- Focus on **key sources** of pollution such as:
 - **Vehicular emissions**
 - **Construction activities**
 - **Crop stubble burning**
- Strengthen regulatory frameworks and incentivize cleaner technologies.
- Public awareness campaigns and stricter enforcement of air quality standards are crucial for meaningful change.

Conclusion:

The **Lancet study** underscores the urgent need for India to prioritize air quality management. **Aligning with WHO standards** can significantly reduce health risks and save countless lives, offering a pathway to a cleaner and healthier future.



5 Abathsahayeswarar Temple: A Cultural Heritage Marvel Honored by UNESCO

GS Paper – Indian Heritage and Culture

Context: The 1,300-year-old Abathsahayeswarar Temple, located in Tamil Nadu, has been awarded the prestigious **UNESCO Asia-Pacific Award for Cultural Heritage Conservation**. This recognition highlights its **architectural grandeur** and the **meticulous restoration efforts** that preserved its legacy.

About Abathsahayeswarar Temple:

Location and Historical Significance

- Situated in **Thukkatchi**, Thanjavur district, Tamil Nadu.
- Built during the reign of **Chola kings Vikrama Chola** and **Kulothunga Chola**, showcasing the **architectural brilliance** of the **Chola dynasty**.
- Historically, the village was named **Vikrama Chozheeswaram** and **Kulothunga Chola Nallur**, in honor of these rulers.

Architectural and Spiritual Legacy:

- Houses the **idol of Aadhi Sarabeshwarar**, installed by **Kulothunga Chola**.
- Features numerous deities, including **Soundaryanayaki Ambal** and **Ashtabhuja Durga Parameshwari**.
- The temple consists of **five prakarams (enclosures)**, reflecting its **spiritual and architectural complexity**.

About UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards for Cultural Heritage Conservation:

Purpose of the Awards

The UNESCO Asia-Pacific Awards **recognize** outstanding contributions **to restoring, conserving, and rejuvenating** structures of cultural significance in the region.

Key Highlights:

- Established in **2000**, the awards celebrate the efforts of **individuals, organizations, and public-private partnerships**.
- Aim to inspire others to **undertake heritage conservation projects**, breathe new life into historic properties, and ensure their preservation for future generations.

Why the Award Matters:

- Honors the **dedication and expertise** involved in conserving a **1,300-year-old cultural treasure**.
- Encourages a deeper appreciation of **India's rich heritage** and **global recognition** of its historical monuments.
- Sets an example for **community-driven conservation efforts** across the Asia-Pacific region.

Conclusion:

The **Abathsahayeswarar Temple** stands as a proud symbol of India's **cultural and historical richness**, enhanced by the **UNESCO recognition**. This award not only celebrates the temple's **legacy and preservation** but also serves as an inspiration for conserving heritage sites worldwide.



6 Exercise Desert Knight: Strengthening Trilateral Defence Collaboration

Context: Exercise Desert Knight, a recently launched air combat exercise, unfolded over the Arabian Sea to **bolster military interoperability** and deepen **defence ties** among participating nations.

About Exercise Desert Knight

Trilateral Air Combat Drill

- This is a **trilateral military exercise** involving **India, France, and the UAE**.
- It builds upon the **trilateral framework established in 2022** by the foreign ministers of the three nations, focusing on **defence, technology, energy, and environmental cooperation**.

Location and Scope

- Conducted approximately **350-400 km southwest of Karachi**, over the **Arabian Sea**.
- A **“large force engagement”** featuring **intensive combat manoeuvres** and realistic combat scenarios.

Aircraft and Capabilities

- Included advanced aircraft such as **Sukhoi-30MKIs, Rafales, and F-16s**.
- Demonstrated **high-level combat readiness** with the integration of multiple aircraft types from the participating air forces.

Strategic Importance

Enhancing Interoperability

- Strengthens the **combat synergy** among the air forces of **India, France, and the UAE**.
- Focuses on **joint operations in dynamic and realistic settings** to improve operational skills and coordination.

Broader Strategic Goals

- Aligns with efforts to deepen **defence cooperation** in strategically significant areas such as the **Indo-Pacific** and **Persian Gulf** regions.
- Reflects the growing importance of **like-minded nations working together** to counter **China’s assertive actions** and expanding influence in these areas.

Significance of Exercise Desert Knight

- A testament to the increasing **focus on interoperability** among the three nations, ensuring a **united front** in regions of strategic interest.
- Reinforces **India’s role** as a vital player in **trilateral defence initiatives** and highlights the **importance of military diplomacy** in global geopolitics.
- Strengthens security collaboration in the **Indo-Pacific** and **Persian Gulf**, both crucial regions amidst **evolving global tensions**.

Conclusion

Exercise Desert Knight represents a significant step forward in **trilateral military cooperation**, showcasing a shared commitment to **regional stability, strategic partnerships, and operational excellence**. As global challenges intensify, such collaborations underline the importance of **united efforts** among nations with shared values and interests.

