

DAILY PT POINTERS

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The Hindu-Judiciary(GSII)-Page 12

Justice Sanjiv Khanna appointed next CJI, to take oath on Nov. 11

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union government on Thursday notified the appointment of Justice Sanjiv Khanna as the 51st Chief Justice of India with effect from November 11.

"In exercise of the powers conferred by Clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution of India, the President is pleased to appoint Shri Justice Sanjiv Khanna, Judge of the Supreme Court, to be the Chief Justice of India with effect from November 11, 2024," the Department of Justice notification read.

Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, who is scheduled to retire on November 10, had recommended Justice Khanna as his successor in office, on October 17.

Born on May 14, 1960, Justice Khanna enrolled as an advocate with the Bar Council of Delhi in 1983.

He was senior standing counsel for the Income Tax Department and had also functioned as standing



Justice Sanjiv Khanna

counsel for the National Capital Territory of Delhi. He was elevated as an Additional Judge of the Delhi High Court in 2005 and made a Permanent Judge in 2006.

He was appointed a Judge of the Supreme Court on January 18, 2019. Justice Khanna was ranked 33 in the combined seniority of High Court judges on an all-India basis, but the then Supreme Court Collegium headed by Chief Justice Ranjan Gogoi had recommended him over others on grounds of merit and integrity.

- The Union government notified the appointment of Justice Sanjiv Khanna as the 51st Chief Justice of India with effect from November 11.
- The appointment of the CJI and judges of the apex court is governed by a Memorandum of Procedure. The CJI and the judges of the Supreme Court are appointed by the President under clause (2) of Article 124 of the Constitution.
- The appointment to the office of the CJI should be of the senior-most judge of the Supreme Court considered fit to hold the office

Cabinet nod for ₹1,000-cr. VC fund for space firms

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet has approved a ₹1,000-crore venture capital fund to support firms in the space tech domain, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announced on Thursday.

The fund, to be set up under the Indian National Space Promotion and Authorisation Centre, will select approximately 40 firms on the basis of commercialisation potential, Mr. Vaishnaw said. It will deploy the amount over a period of five years, with a planned deployment of ₹150 crore in the financial year 2025-26, followed ₹250 crore each in the next

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- “The indicative range of investment is proposed to be ₹10 crore-₹60 crore, contingent upon the stage of the company, its growth trajectory, and its potential impact on national space capabilities,

Govt. approves two railway projects worth ₹6,798 crore

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA), chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has approved two railway projects with a total estimated cost of ₹6,798 crore, covering eight districts in three States of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Bihar. This will increase the existing network of the Railways by about 313 km.

The projects are construction of a line between Errupalem and Namburu, via Amaravati, covering 57 km, and doubling of the Narkatiaganj-Raxaul-Sitamarhi-Darbhanga and Sitamarhi-Muzaffarpur section, covering 256 km. Both these projects are planned to be completed in five years.

The new line proposal will provide direct connectivity to Amaravati, the proposed capital of Andhra Pradesh, and improve mobility for industries and

The plan includes connectivity to Amaravati, the proposed capital of Andhra Pradesh

the population. The doubling proposal will ease operations and reduce congestion, providing the much-required infrastructure development on the busiest sections, a statement released by the Ministry of Railways said.

The new line project will provide connectivity to approximately 168 villages and about 12 lakh population with nine new stations.

The doubling project enhances connectivity to two aspirational districts, Sitamarhi and Muzaffarpur, which serves essential routes for transportation of commodities such as agriculture products, fertilizer, coal, iron ore, steel, cement, etc.

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The Hindu –GS 2(Health)-Page 22

Trachoma eliminated as a public health problem in India; what next?

The achievement marked a significant public health victory for the country and has profound economic implications. Trachoma's impact, through blindness and visual impairment, results in an estimated economic loss of \$2.9 to \$5.3 billion annually due to reduced productivity. India successfully reduced prevalence to 0.7% and gained worm infection levels.

Aravind

On October 12, 2024, an outbreak at Trichy Airport involving an aircraft tail fin kept the aircraft circling in the skies for hours. The pilots' efforts to safely land the plane, preventing potential disaster, earned the public's admiration. Their crisis over tangible, immediate, and visible, making it easy for people to appreciate the significance of their work. In contrast, the invisible, chronic, and significant disease and social ills, such as trachoma, which is not always visible, are often overlooked. Another important achievement unfolded after safety on October 5, India's health system achieved a goal that greatly improved vision in eliminating trachoma as a public health problem—a success for first time but just as important.



Trachoma's impact, through blindness and visual impairment, results in an estimated economic loss of \$2.9 to \$5.3 billion annually due to reduced productivity. India successfully reduced prevalence to 0.7% and gained worm infection levels.

THE GIST

The WHO defines trachoma as one of 20 neglected tropical diseases, which it seeks to eliminate by 2030. WHO developed criteria that eliminated trachoma, countries like India have struggled.

India's success in reducing trachoma prevalence is largely attributed to the SAFE strategy, which stands for surgery, antibiotics, facial cleanliness, and environmental improvements.

Elimination of trachoma as a public health problem is due to the success of the SAFE strategy, which stands for surgery, antibiotics, facial cleanliness, and environmental improvements.

India's health works face the paradox where the nature of their work makes them highly sought after and visible, leading to localities, while their enormous responsibilities often go unacknowledged. Recognizing these achievements is essential, as they reflect the dedication and perseverance of countless individuals working behind the scenes to prevent, diagnose and improve lives. The achievement marked a significant public health victory and has profound economic implications. Trachoma's impact, through blindness and visual impairment, results in an estimated economic loss of \$2.9 to \$5.3 billion annually due to reduced productivity. Trachoma, a chronic infectious eye disease, affects regions with poor hygiene and sanitation. The disease primarily affects young children and women in areas with limited clean water and sanitation access. *Chlamydia trachomatis*, the bacterium responsible for trachoma, has serotypes A, B, C, and D, which cause eye infections. These infections tend to reappear such as eye irritation, discharge, swollen eyelids, sensitivity to light, and, in severe cases, blurred vision. If left untreated, repeated infections can cause scarring of the inner eyelid and eventually blindness. Trachoma is transmitted through contact with eye secretions from an infected person's fingers, contaminated hands or clothes, or flies (which can spread such the infected secretions), often exacerbated by poor hygiene and unimproved living conditions. Trachoma is one of 20 diseases the World Health Organization (WHO) has listed as neglected tropical diseases.

WHO's Criteria The WHO defines trachoma as eliminated as a health problem when prevalence of trachoma in children falls below 0.2% in population aged 10 years and above. The prevalence of active trachoma in children aged 1-9 years is less than 5% in endemic countries. It also includes a health system capable of managing new cases. Exceeding these thresholds is a significant milestone, but it does not equate to the total eradication of the disease. In 2005, trachoma accounted for 4% of all blindness cases in India. Remarkably, by 2015, this figure declined to just 0.008% of all blindness. Even with India's commendable achievement of a 0.7% prevalence, specific cases can still exist. The elimination target means that the disease's burden has been significantly

Epidemiological challenges From an epidemiological standpoint, achieving the elimination threshold is like an associate member country of the ICC being granted test status – it's a milestone, but maintaining this status requires continuous effort and excellence. Similarly, India has reached an impressive point in the fight against trachoma, but to sustain it, efforts must be ongoing. Developed countries achieved trachoma elimination much earlier in the 1950s. The road to completely eradicating trachoma is long due to lack of vaccines. With no long-lasting protective immunity and the presence of active trachoma cases, the focus must remain on interrupting the transmission cycle of the disease through sustained improvements in sanitation, access to clean water, and continued health education. India's progress has been remarkable, but it is essential to continue the battle with the same vigour. The WHO's decision not to set an eradication target for trachoma (unlike polio and guinea worm) reflects the complex epidemiological challenges. Surveillance systems must be vigilant to catch cases early and prevent resurgence. The National Programme for Control of Blindness and Visual Impairment (NPCVD) needs to regularly conduct surveys, at least once a decade, across all districts to detect any new cases and prevent the resurgence of the disease to maintain India's status as free from trachoma as a public health threat. It's time public health workers across the country acknowledge the progress they've made for protecting the nation's health, and we should have strong in-built future challenges with the same determination. Eliminating trachoma as a public health problem is a significant achievement for India, and the journey continues. Ongoing surveillance, adherence to the SAFE strategy, and initiatives like Swachh Bharat will be critical in ensuring that trachoma remains a disease of the past. We should keep up the momentum. This is an important milestone, but it's not the end. We must continue to work towards this goal, ensuring that India's children can grow up in a world free from trachoma. This solution should serve as a reminder that, with continued collective effort, we can also target and eliminate other diseases like malaria and tuberculosis. The success against trachoma shows that even in tough conditions, sustained efforts can bring about change. (Dr. L. Aravind is an academic and a public health physician)

Trachoma is transmitted through contact with eye secretions from an infected person's fingers, contaminated hands, or clothes, or flies transmitting secretions exacerbated by poor hygiene

elimination is crucial in epidemiology, where reaching elimination is a major milestone. India has conducted three major trachoma prevalence surveys, the most recent from 2014 to 2017. Historically, trachoma was highly endemic, especially in northern states like Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. The national surveys conducted in the 2000s revealed a dramatic decline in rates of infection, but excessive public health resources have dramatically reduced the burden. However, this achievement does not mean India is free from trachoma. The term "elimination as a public health problem" signifies that trachoma is no longer a significant threat, but sporadic cases may still exist. This is an important distinction, while India has achieved the elimination of trachoma as a "public health problem," this does not mean that the disease and transmission have been eliminated. There is often confusion between the terms "elimination as a public health problem" and "eradication of disease." The former refers to reducing disease prevalence to such low levels that it no longer poses a significant public health threat. In contrast, the latter implies very negligible to zero transmission of the

- India successfully eliminated trachoma as a public health problem, marking a significant victory despite the achievement receiving less visibility.
- Trachoma previously accounted for 4% of blindness cases in India; this figure has now decreased to 0.7%. Trachoma's burden results in economic losses estimated between \$2.9 to \$5.3 billion annually due to reduced productivity.
- Trachoma, caused by *Chlamydia trachomatis*, primarily affects vulnerable populations, particularly young children and women in areas with poor sanitation. The disease spreads through contact with infected eye secretions and is exacerbated by overcrowding and poor hygiene.
- The WHO defines elimination as a health problem when prevalence rates drop below specific thresholds, but this does not mean total eradication. India has implemented the WHO's SAFE strategy (Surgery, Antibiotics, Facial cleanliness, Environmental improvements) to combat trachoma.

The Hindu –GS 2(Health)-Page 22

Why did the Central govt. sanction a 50% hike in prices of commonly used drugs?

Bindu Shajan Perappadan

The story so far:

On October 14, the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority of India (NPPA) increased the ceiling prices of eight drugs, comprising medication for common diseases including asthma, tuberculosis, bipolar disorder, and glaucoma, among others. Prices have been increased by 50%.



The government cited "extraordinary circumstances." GETTY IMAGES

Extraordinary circumstances:

The Central Government passed the order, citing "extraordinary circumstances" and "public interest." The NPPA comes under the department of pharmaceuticals under the Union Ministry of Chemicals and Fertilizers, and a government release stated that it increased prices in greater public interest.

"The NPPA's mandate is to ensure availability of essential drugs at affordable prices and ensure affordability without jeopardising access.

Essential drugs must remain available, and their price regulation should not lead to a situation where these drugs become unavailable," it said.

The NPPA added that it has been

and a change in the exchange rate, making production and marketing of the drugs unviable. Companies also applied for discontinuation of some formulations on account of their unviability.

The mechanism:

The NPPA, constituted in 1997, regulates ceiling prices of drugs and has the power to fix costs under what is known as a 'Drug Price Control Order' (DPCO) issued by the government under the Essential Commodities Act.

The Central Government said the decision to hike the cost of drugs comes after deliberations in a meeting on October 8.

It invoked extraordinary powers under Para 19 of the DPCO, 2013.

"Most of these drugs are low-cost and generally used as first line treatment crucial to the public health programmes of the country," it said.

Formulations for which ceiling prices have been revised include: atropine injection 0.6mg/ml; streptomycin powder for injection 750mg and 1000mg; salbutamol tablet 2mg and 4mg and respirator solution 5mg/ml; pilocarpine 2% drops; cefadroxil tablet 500mg, desferrioxamine 500mg for injection; and lithium tablets 300mg.

Such extraordinary powers have been invoked by the NPPA in 2019 and in 2021. Prices of 21 and 9 formulations respectively were increased by 50%.

Section 19 of the DPCO allows the government to revise the ceiling cost. This can be done in extraordinary circumstances.

Section 19 states: "Notwithstanding anything contained in this order, the Government may, in case of extraordinary circumstances, if it considers it necessary to do so in public interest, fix the ceiling price or retail price of any drug for such period, as it may deem fit and where the ceiling price or retail price of the drug is already fixed

year."

Annual revision:

Every financial year starting April 1, the NPPA increases ceiling prices of drugs based on Wholesale Price Index (WPI) of the preceding year.

Pricing of drugs in India is strictly controlled by the Central government. Action is taken against companies found selling at higher prices. During 2023-24, ₹72.73 crore was recovered from defaulting companies.

Additionally, according to the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1945 and Rules, manufacturers of drugs are required to comply with conditions of the manufacturing licence and the requirements of Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP).

According to Drugs Rules, 1945, manufacturing, testing, labelling, packaging, storage, and distribution are required to be carried out in compliance with the conditions of license including the GMP prescribed under Schedule M of the Drugs Rules, 1945.

(Bindu.p@thehindu.co.in)



For feedback and

- the NPPA increased ceiling prices of eight essential drugs by 50%.
- Drugs affected include those for asthma, tuberculosis, bipolar disorder, and glaucoma. The Central Government cited "extraordinary circumstances" and "public interest" for the decision.
- The NPPA, established in 1997, regulates drug prices under the Drug Price Control Order (DPCO).
- The recent increase follows a meeting on October 8, invoking extraordinary powers under Para 19 of the DPCO, 2013.
- Section 19 of the DPCO allows the government to adjust drug prices in extraordinary circumstances for public interest. The NPPA typically revises ceiling prices annually based on the Wholesale Price Index (WPI) starting April 1.

The Hindu –Internal Security(GSIII)

'Money laundering a major threat to India's online gaming sector'

Devesh K. Pandey
NEW DELHI

Identifying money laundering as a major threat to the Indian online gaming sector's integrity and long-term success, a report by the Digital India Foundation (DIF) has recommended that the government should establish a "whitelist" of compliant gaming companies, ensuring that payment gateways and internet service providers serve only the listed operators.

The report titled 'Combating Money Laundering in Online Gaming Ecosystem' said the use of international online betting sites both for the purpose of money laundering and terror financing had become a key trend in cybercrime. It suggested a dedicated task force for a clamp down on illegal operators, stringent Know Your Customer (KYC) practices, and



The Indian real money gaming sector has become a key player in the global market.

from FY20 to FY23. Its revenue is projected to reach \$7.5 billion within the next five years.

Challenges in sector

"However, the report's extensive research and consultation has shown that there are several challenges in the sector, such as issues of financial integrity, cybersecurity, and user protection, that can impede progress. The severity of these challenges is un

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- The report titled 'Combating Money Laundering in Online Gaming Ecosystem' said the use of international online betting sites both for the purpose of money laundering and terror financing had become a key trend in cybercrime. It suggested a dedicated task force for a clamp down on illegal operators, stringent Know Your Customer (KYC) practices, and action against misleading advertisements. As per the report, the Indian real money gaming (RMG) sector has become a key player in the global market with a compound annual growth rate of 28% from FY20 to FY23. Its revenue is projected to reach \$7.5 billion within the next five years.

The Hindu –IR(GSII)-Edition-International-Page 4

India, Germany discussing military logistics support agreement: official

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

India and Germany are close to finalising a memorandum of arrangement for logistics arrangement between the armed forces, according to a senior German official. With focus on expanding maritime security cooperation, Germany is set to post a liaison officer at the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region in Gurugram.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz arrived in India on Thursday night on an official visit accompanied by eight senior Ministers. He is scheduled to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday morning.

A memorandum of arrangement for logistics arrangement between the armed forces for cooperation and joint exercises in one of the two countries or the surrounding maritime domains is in the works, said Jasper Wieck, political director in the German Mi-



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. FILE PHOTO

the likelihood that this arrangement will also facilitate co-development and co-production and joint research....," he said.

Mr. Wieck was speaking at the India-German defence industry dialogue organised by the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers.

Pushing for co-development and co-production of defence equipment, he said they have specific areas in mind. Underwater technology, which brings in the Project-75I pro-

for six conventional submarines in which Germany's TKMS is competing with Navantia of Spain, is one of them.

Other areas are cruise missiles, with MBDA as a potential partner, and drones. An agreement for peacekeeping training agreement between respective agencies in both countries is also on the anvil.

Last week, the German government had adopted a focus document on India which says that Germany

partner to India, Mr. Wieck said.

Officials said that Germany is keen on repair and maintenance of German ships in the region in India, on the lines of U.K. and U.S., which have been leveraging the logistics agreement for this purpose.

Stressing on the importance attached by Germany in deepening partnership with India, officials said that since the visit of German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius in June 2023, a lot of export licences have been given. Over 95% of the licences have been cleared, the German envoy Philipp Ackermann said on Wednesday (October 23, 2024).

Mr. Modi and Mr. Scholz will address the 18th Asia-Pacific Conference of German Business 2024 with about 800 CEOs of various companies attending. The two sides will hold talks as part of the 7th Inter-Governmental Consultations and a number of agreements are expected to be

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Indian Express –Governance (GSII)-Page 1

Officer competency model draws from PM's Mann Ki Baat, speeches

Karmayogi model mapped to Govt online training portal

AGGAM WALIA

NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 24

THE CAPACITY Building Commission (CBC), constituted by the government three years ago, has developed the Karmayogi Competency Model for civil servants, which is a framework of behavioural and functional competencies designed to aid their transition from a *karmachari* (employee) to a *karmayogi* (dedicated worker).

Inspired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's *Mann Ki Baat* programme and his public speeches and statements, the

EXPLAINED

E Karmachari to karmayogi

ACCORDING TO the CBC, it is responding to the Prime Minister's call to build a bureaucracy in which the mindset transitions from feeling and acting like a *karmachari* or a public servant to behaving like a *karmayogi* where service is done without any expectation in return.

model aims to optimise deployment of officials to roles based on their competencies, which are also mapped to courses on the Integrated Government Online Training (iGOT) portal.

"We looked at what the PM said. We go by the decisions of the government of the day and what the chief executive talks about. We didn't want to just go by mapping out something. We did a large language model (LLM) analysis of all his *Mann Ki Baat* episodes, speeches, tweets, etc.," R Balasubramaniam, Member (Human Resource), CBC, said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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- The *Karmayogi* Competency Model was developed through primary and secondary research, extensive stakeholder engagement, "including representatives from the public and private sectors, academia, and experts in Indian Knowledge Systems", and a process of global benchmarking against competency models developed by Australia, Singapore, and South Korea.

1.5 degrees Celsius target will be 'gone' in a few years: UN report

AMITABH SINHA

NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 24

GREENHOUSE GAS emissions of China and India, two of the top three emitters, grew by 5.2 per cent and 6.1 per cent respectively in the year 2023, a new UN report revealed on Thursday.

It said the global emissions in 2023 was 1.3 per cent higher than the previous year.

The Emissions Gap Report, an annual publication of the UN Environment Programme, warned that the Paris Agreement objective of keeping global rise in temperatures to within 1.5 degree Celsius would be "gone within a few years" and even the 2 degree Celsius threshold would be in danger of being breached, unless countries dramatically scale up their climate actions to reduce global emissions in two years.

The report, which is released just ahead of climate change conference every year, said current climate actions, even in the most optimistic scenario, could reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by only 10 per cent by 2030 on 2019 levels, when the bare minimum required to keep the 1.5 degree target in sight was 42 per cent reduction. The reductions must increase to 57 per cent by 2035.

As such, the updated climate action plans which every country has to submit by next year, must be significantly stronger than the current ones, the report said. However, global emissions are still on the rise. The report said a sharp turnaround, with at least a 7.5 per cent reduction every year till 2035, was essential to keep the 1.5 degree target alive.

The report called for a massive increase in investment in emissions reductions. It said the emis-

sions gap for 2030 and 2035 could still be bridged at the cost of US\$ 200 per ton of CO2 equivalent. At this cost, about 31 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalent could potentially be reduced from annual emissions by 2030, more than the nearly 28 billion CO2 equivalent that is required for 1.5 degree goal.

In three weeks, countries are scheduled to assemble for the annual climate conference in Baku where delegates will discuss a major scale-up of financial resources for climate action.

"Every fraction of fossil fuel emissions is pushing us closer to catastrophe. The findings of Emissions Gap Report are alarming yet again, while political inaction threatens to lock in irreversible damage," said Harjeet Singh, Climate Activist and Global Engagement Director for the Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty Initiative.

- Greenhouse gas emissions of China and India, two of the top three emitters, grew by 5.2 per cent and 6.1 per cent respectively in the year 2023, a new UN report revealed on Thursday. It said the global emissions in 2023 was 1.3 per cent higher than the previous year.
- The Emissions Gap Report, an annual publication of the UN Environment Programme, warned that the Paris Agreement objective of keeping global rise in temperatures to within 1.5 degree Celsius would be "gone within a few years" and even the 2 degree Celsius threshold would be in danger of being breached, unless countries dramatically scale up their climate actions to reduce global emissions in two years. The report, which is released just ahead of climate change conference every year, said current climate actions, even in the most optimistic scenario, could reduce global greenhouse gas emissions by only 10 per cent by 2030 on 2019 levels, when the bare minimum required to keep the 1.5 degree target in sight was 42 per cent reduction. The reductions must increase to 57 per cent by 2035.

Indian Express –Environment(GSIII)-Page 12

Just 150 of them left, glimmer of hope for great Indian bustard after first-ever artificial insemination birth

PARUL KULSHRESTHA
JAIPUR, OCTOBER 24

THE BIRTH of a great Indian bustard through artificial insemination at the Sudasari Great Indian Bustard Breeding Centre in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer district is an "extremely important step" in the conservation of the critically endangered species, authorities said.

The chick was hatched on October 16, in what was the first birth of a great Indian bustard (GIB) through artificial insemination. "This is an extremely important step in the conservation of the GIB, which is an endangered species," said Pavan Kumar, Chief Wildlife Warden of Rajasthan. He said a similar initiative had been started in Abu Dhabi, where a project by the International Fund for Houbara Conservation has

been using artificial insemination to hatch the houbara bustard.

"A team of researchers from the Wildlife Institute of India went to Abu Dhabi to learn the techniques of artificial insemination to implement it on the great Indian bustard. In this manner, we will be able to save other endangered species also," said Pavan Kumar.

According to the government, there are fewer than 150 GIB - birds that are found only in India. Most of these are found in Rajasthan. Increased human activity in their habitat, predators preying on their eggs, and deaths due to overhead power lines are seen as being among the causes of the bird's population decline.

In 2020, a study carried out by WII in the 4,200-sq-km of the great Indian bustard (GIB) habitat in and around Desert National Park in Rajasthan estimated that



The chick was hatched on October 16. Express

power lines had killed around 84,000 birds of multiple species every year. This included the endangered GIB, which are particularly vulnerable due to their narrow frontal vision and large size.

In April 2021, the Supreme Court had ordered that all power lines in the GIB habitat be buried underground. However, earlier this year, the SC said it would re-

view its 2021 order after the Centre found that it would be "practically impossible to implement" over long distances.

As part of conservation efforts, the Centre, the Rajasthan government and WII have been collaborating on a captive breeding programme for GIB. The artificial insemination method was successfully implemented as a part of this project. The plan is to release the captive bred birds into the wild. According to wildlife experts, while the birth of the GIB chick by artificial insemination is an important step, it is too early to speculate on the extent of the impact this could have.

Wildlife biologist Sumit Dookia, from the University School of Environment Management at Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, said: "This is part of a captive breeding project that has been go-

ing on since 2019. While this is a positive step in the right direction, it will take at least 25 years to be able to develop enough birds to allow for natural increase of their population after they are released in the wild... Moreover, these efforts will not be fruitful until we are able to save the wild GIB habitat, which is getting destroyed due to human footprint and development activities."

Dookia said the great Indian bustard lays one egg - the size of three chicken eggs - a year. The eggs are laid on ground nests, and due to their size, they become easy prey for other animals. While the birds try to find isolated areas to lay the eggs, changes in their habitat have meant that such locations are harder to come by. Once the egg is hatched, the bird raises the chick for two years before laying another egg, according to Dookia.

The birth of a great Indian bustard through artificial insemination at the Sudasari Great Indian Bustard Breeding Centre in Rajasthan's Jaisalmer district is an "extremely important step" in the conservation of the critically endangered species, authorities said.

One of the heaviest flying birds endemic to the Indian subcontinent.

omnivorous

State Bird of Rajasthan

Habitat:

Untamed, Arid grasslands.

A Maximum number of GIBs were found in Jaisalmer and the Indian Army-controlled field firing range near Pokhran, Rajasthan.

Other areas: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

Protection Status:

IUCN Status: Critically Endangered.

Listed in **Wildlife Protection Act's Schedule 1**

How panchayat-level weather forecasts will help

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 24

FIVE-DAY weather forecasts, updated every hour, are now available at the level of gram panchayats, marking a major step towards localised forecasting across the country.

The initiative was formally launched by Panchayati Raj Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh and MoS (Independent Charge), Ministry of Science & Technology and Ministry of Earth Sciences, Dr Jitendra Singh, on Thursday.

The initiative

Gram Panchayat-Level Weather Forecasting is a joint program of the Panchayati Raj Ministry, India Meteorological Department (IMD), and the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

According to the Panchayati Raj Ministry, it is aimed at “empowering rural communities and enhancing disaster preparedness at the grassroots”. It will “promote sustainable agri-

cultural practices, making rural populations more climate-resilient and better equipped to tackle environmental challenges”, it said.

The forecasts

Hourly forecasts will be available on the e-GramSwaraj and Gram Manchitra portals, and the Meri Panchayat app.

e-GramSwaraj is already operational.

Users can see data on the current temperature, wind speed, cloud cover (in percentage), rainfall, and relative humidity at the level of gram panchayats; five-day forecasts of minimum and maximum temperatures, rainfall, cloud cover, wind direction, and wind speed; and an overall weather forecast.

The benefits

Detailed and localised weather information will help farmers to better plan their activities including sowing, irrigation, harvest-

ing, etc. The Panchayati Raj Ministry has underlined the importance of localised weather forecasts in the context of intensifying climate change.

“As weather patterns become increasingly unpredictable, the introduction of weather forecasting at the Gram Panchayat level will serve as a crucial tool in safeguarding agricultural livelihoods and enhancing rural preparedness against natural disasters,” the Ministry said.

“Gram Panchayats will receive daily updates on temperature, rainfall, windspeed, and cloud cover, empowering them to make critical decisions in agriculture, such as planning sowing, irrigation, and harvesting activities,” it said.

Why local matters

Despite the significant advances made in IMD’s forecasting capabilities, the science of forecasting has inherent uncertainties.

The more precise a forecast — in terms of the spatial spread or time-window for the event — the greater the uncertainty. Also, the earlier the forecast, the less precise it is likely to be. It is usually easier to predict large systems that are spread over large geographic areas — such as the Indian monsoon, or a cyclone that develops over the Bay of Bengal or a heat wave covering several states. But sudden, localised events — like a cloudburst — are more difficult to predict.

Localised weather forecasts can help even small communities of farmers plan their economic activities with greater confidence. There are 2.55 lakh village panchayats across the country, with resident populations of few thousands on average.

The IMD has developed the system of localised weather forecasting based on gram panchayat boundaries data provided by the Panchayati Raj Ministry.

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EXPLAINED
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- Five-day weather forecasts, updated every hour, are now available at the level of gram panchayats — the first major step towards localised forecasting across the country.
- The initiative was formally launched by **Panchayati Raj** Minister Rajiv Ranjan Singh and MoS (Independent Charge), Ministry of Science & Technology and Ministry of Earth Sciences, Dr Jitendra Singh, on Thursday (October 24) evening. The initiative, Gram Panchayat-Level Weather Forecasting, is a joint program of the Panchayati Raj Ministry, **India Meteorological Department (IMD)**, and the Ministry of Earth Sciences.
- According to the Panchayati Raj Ministry, the initiative is aimed at “empowering rural communities and enhancing disaster preparedness at the grassroots, and will benefit farmers and villagers across the country”. It will “strengthen grassroots governance and promote sustainable agricultural practices, making rural populations more climate-resilient and better equipped to tackle environmental challenges”

HEADLINES OF THE DAY

PIB –Defense(GSIII)



- The 31st edition of the Singapore India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX) is scheduled from 23 to 29 Oct 2024, in the Eastern Naval Command at Visakhapatnam. Republic of Singapore Navy Ship RSS Tenacious with embarked helicopter, arrived at Visakhapatnam on 23 October 24 for participating in SIMBEX2024.
- SIMBEX, which began as 'Exercise Lion King' in 1994, has since evolved into one of the most significant bilateral maritime collaborations between the Indian Navy and the Republic of Singapore Navy (RSN).
- The exercise will be conducted in two phases - the Harbour Phase from 23 to 25 October at Visakhapatnam and the Sea Phase from 28 to 29 October in the Bay of Bengal. This year's edition aims to further strengthen the strategic partnership between India and Singapore by enhancing interoperability, improving maritime domain awareness, and fostering cooperation to address common maritime challenges.

HEADLINES OF THE DAY

Air –Education(GSII)

UNESCO Report: India Spends More On Education Than China & Japan



- India's education spending is higher than that of countries like China and Japan.
Investment in GDP Percentage: India allocated approximately 4.1% to 4.6% of its GDP to education from 2015 to 2024.
- Consistency with International Standards: This expenditure aligns with the UN Education 2030 Framework for Action, which recommends that countries allocate 4% to 6% of GDP for education.