



THE HINDU



GS Paper 1-Culture

Holi in Imphal



KEY POINTS

- Yaoshang is a five-day festival in Manipur, celebrated during the full moon of Lamta (February–March), coinciding with Holi. It begins with the burning of a straw hut and children collecting donations. A key highlight is Thabal Chongba, a moonlit folk dance. The festival includes color play, similar to Holi, with a special Pichkari day on the second day.



"Yaoshang" marks the beginning of the five-day festival.
Pic: Aribam Munidrajit Sharma



Little girls in traditional attires getting ready for "Nalchak" performance.
Pic: GuruBidya



THE HINDU



GS Paper 2-IR

India and Australia agree to deepen cooperation across maritime, land, air domains

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

India and Australia on Monday agreed to deepen cooperation and interoperability across maritime,

Indian delegation

was headed by

Amitabh Prasad, and

Australian side was

led by Bernard Philip

by First Assistant Secretary International Policy Division, Department of Defence, Australia, Bernard Philip.

“Both sides welcomed sustained progress in bilat-



KEY POINTS

- India and Australia agreed to enhance cooperation in maritime, land, and air domains, focusing on maritime domain awareness, information sharing, and collaboration in industry, science, and technology, during the 9th defence policy talks in New Delhi. They also emphasized exchanges and deployments between their territories.





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GS Paper 2-Governance

SC to examine petition on CAG appointment process

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday decided to examine a plea challenging the sole prerogative of the Centre, acting through the President, to appoint the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

Appearing before a Bench headed by Justice Surya Kant, advocate Prashant Bhushan said absolute control by the Centre over the appoint-



tion with a non-partisan selection committee, com-

vernment, among others.

Mr. Bhushan said Article 148(1) of the Constitution equates the CAG with a Supreme Court judge. A CAG can be removed only for the same reasons and in the same manner as an apex court judge.

Issuing notice to the Union government, Justice Kant, however, asked whether a judicial intervention would amount to re-writing Article 148, which deals with the appointment of a CAG. Arti-



KEY POINTS

- The Supreme Court will examine a plea challenging the Centre's control over appointing the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), arguing it undermines the CAG's independence. The CAG is governed by Articles 148 to 151 of the Constitution, which define its appointment, duties, and powers. Despite its constitutional role, the CAG has faced criticism.





THE HINDU



GS Paper 2-IR

New Delhi's perilous recalibration with the Taliban

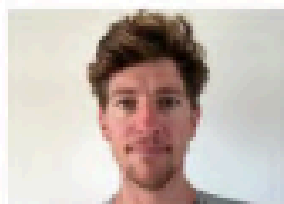
India continues to get closer to the Taliban, with reports that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will allow the regime in Afghanistan to appoint a new envoy for its embassy in New Delhi.

This comes on the heels of the first high-level meeting between India and the Taliban in January, with India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and acting Taliban 'Foreign Minister' Amir Khan Muttaqi meeting in Dubai to discuss strengthening political and economic ties, and providing humanitarian aid.

India's relationship with the Taliban has been trending this way for some time, beginning when New Delhi reopened its embassy in Kabul in June 2022, almost a year after the Taliban retook power in Afghanistan.

But accepting a Taliban diplomat in India would be a significant shift, all but recognising the regime as the legitimate rulers of Afghanistan.

This is something most countries have refused to do because of the Taliban's abysmal treatment of women, with 1.4 million school-age girls deliberately denied their right to education and women forbidden from most jobs. More recently, women have also been banned from beauty parlours and national parks, cruel steps to remove them from the public eye. The situation is so bad it has been called "gender apartheid" by United Nations experts. New Delhi believes that this is the time to back the Taliban, seeing a



Chris Fitzgerald

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which would bring the regime firmly into its sphere of influence.

India can also get a jump on rival Pakistan, with its formerly warm relationship with the Taliban now ice-cold. Once seen as natural allies, the Taliban has sought independence from Islamabad and has forged relationships with the wider region, including China, Russia and its Central Asian neighbours. A former patron of the Taliban, Pakistan now finds itself lacking influence in Kabul.

A wave of terror

But engaging with the Taliban comes with significant risks, something India will need to consider before it gets involved in Afghanistan.

The country has become a hotbed for terrorism under the Taliban. The Islamic State (IS) is running rampant, conducting deadly terror attacks across Afghanistan that target the regime and the interests of its allies.

This includes the assassination of Taliban 'Minister' and powerbroker Khalil Ur-Rahman Haqqani in December and threatening to bomb the Chinese embassy in Kabul in 2023. This came after an IS attack on a Kabul hotel popular with Chinese nationals in 2022 that left three dead and injured 18 people.

Russia has also been targeted, witnessed by the IS attack on Moscow's Crocus City Hall in March 2024 that killed at least 140 people and injured

and Pakistan's armed forces.

The relationship between the Taliban and Islamabad has completely broken down over the Taliban's inability to reign in terror groups operating within Afghanistan. The problem is getting worse, not better, with the Tehrik-e Taliban claiming to have carried out 147 attacks on Pakistani soil in February alone, killing 180 soldiers. Recently, the group's affiliate, the Jaish Al-Fursan, claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing at an army compound in northwest Pakistan that killed nine and injured 25.

It is a matter of concern that India has already caught the ire of the IS. In December, the group claimed responsibility for an attack on the Indian consulate in Jalalabad that killed one person and injured two others. This came after a United Nations report last year said that the IS has sought to recruit 'lone actors' to carry out large-scale attacks in India. India is now clearly in the firing line.

Need for caution

New Delhi has long called for Afghanistan to be free of terrorism, and this should be a key demand before any further engagement with the Taliban takes place. This includes the Taliban collaborating with regional partners to defeat the IS and forcing the group to renounce the support of the Tehrik-e Taliban.

Afghanistan has always been a dangerous place

KEY POINTS

- India is moving closer to the Taliban, planning to accept a Taliban envoy despite the regime's poor treatment of women. China has already gained influence in Afghanistan. However, India faces risks from rising terrorism in the country, including ISIS attacks. India should urge the Taliban to take stronger action against terrorism before further engagement.





THE HINDU



GS Paper 2-Governance

Why are electoral reforms necessary?

Since when have votes been registered solely through Electronic Voting Machines? Why have certain Opposition parties accused the EC of electoral roll manipulation? Should criminal cases of politicians standing for elections be given wide publicity?

EXPLAINER

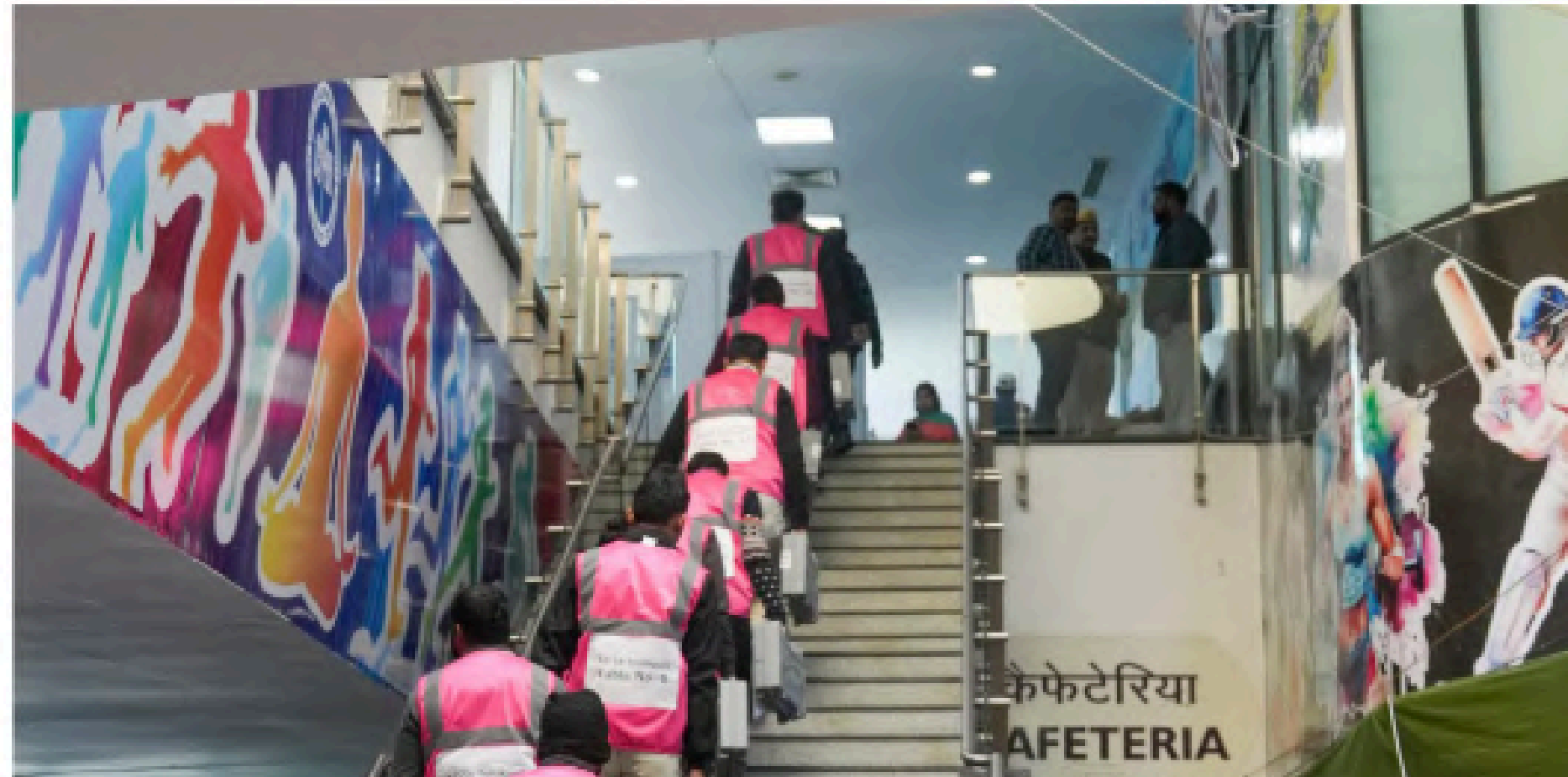
Rangarajan R.

The story so far:

The Election Commission (EC) has invited political parties to discuss strengthening the election process. This is in wake of the allegations of manipulation of electoral rolls during the recently concluded assembly elections and issues raised with respect to duplicate Electoral Photo Identity Card (EPIC) numbers in different States.

What are the legal provisions?

Article 324 of the Constitution provides that the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Parliament and State legislature shall be vested in the EC. The preparation of electoral rolls is governed by the



THE GIST

Article 324 of the Constitution provides that the superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of, all elections to the Parliament and State legislature shall be vested in the EC.

Apart from the above issues in the election process, there are significant issues related to the campaign process that have to be addressed. First, 'Star Campaigners' of most parties have been guilty of using inappropriate and abusive words against leaders of other political parties, appealing to

KEY POINTS

The Election Commission has invited political parties to discuss improving the election process, addressing issues like electoral roll manipulation, duplicate voter IDs, and campaign misconduct. Proposed reforms include enhancing EVM–VVPAT checks, linking Aadhaar to EPIC cards, capping election spending, and enforcing criminal background disclosures for candidates.



GS 3-Economy

FINANCE MINISTER LAUNCHES DEDICATED MOBILE APP FOR PMIS

PM Internship Scheme a 'national cause', more companies need to chip in, says FM

AGGAM WALIA

NEW DELHI, MARCH 17

UNION FINANCE and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has called on more companies to participate in the PM Internship Scheme (PMIS), citing larger national interest. Now, in its second round — still at the pilot stage — the scheme has drawn internship postings from 327 companies, up from around 280 in the first round.

Announced in the Union

SCHEME AIMS TO PROVIDE INTERNSHIPS TO 1 CR YOUTH



File

ANNOUNCED IN Budget for 2024-25, the scheme aims to provide internships to 1 crore youth in top 500 companies over five years

IN THE first round of the pilot over 1.27 lakh opportunities were posted and over 82,000 offers were made to successful candidates

EXPLAINED

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₹4,500 to be paid per month by the govt to candidates

UNDER THE scheme, an amount of Rs 4,500 will be provided per month by the government to selected candidates through Direct Benefit Transfer, with an additional Rs 500 offset to be provided by the company's CSR funds

reservation policy was also introduced into it. But the companies were given a shortlist, through which they could choose who they wanted to. There was no compulsion on the industry, no interference in their management process," she said.

"As much as possible, through the system itself, every intern applicant was tried to be placed in the area from which he came. Literally within the district, if not, the neighbouring district. No one was expected to get out too far, unless they chose to go far," she

KEY POINTS

- Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman called for more companies to join the PM Internship Scheme (PMIS), aiming to provide internships to one crore youth in top 500 companies over five years. The scheme offers 12-month paid internships for individuals aged 21–24, with ₹5,000 monthly support and a one-time ₹6,000. It combines training and professional experience, with at least six months of practical exposure.

