

Snow Leopard Population Assessment in India (SPAI) Program



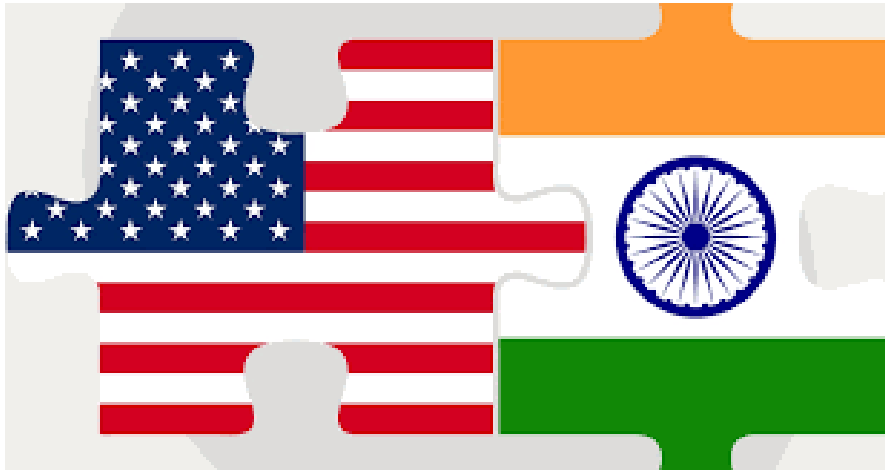
The SPAI systematically covered over 70% of the potential snow leopard range in the country, involving forest & wildlife staff, researchers, volunteers, and contributions from knowledge partners. Covering approximately 120,000km² of crucial Snow leopard habitat across the trans-Himalayan region, including UTs of Ladakh and J & K, and states such as Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh, the SPAI exercise was conducted from 2019 to 2023 using a meticulous two-step framework.

The first step involved evaluating Snow leopard spatial distribution, incorporating habitat covariates into the analysis, aligning with the guidelines of the National population assessment of snow leopards in India by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) in 2019. This systematic approach included assessing the spatial distribution through an occupancy-based sampling approach in the potential distribution range. In the second step, Snow leopard abundance was estimated using camera traps in each identified stratified region. Based on data analysis, the estimated population in different states are as follows: Ladakh (477), Uttarakhand (124), Himachal Pradesh (51), Arunachal Pradesh (36), Sikkim (21), and Jammu and Kashmir (9).

Until recent years, the snow leopard range in India was undefined due to a lack of extensive nationwide assessments for this vulnerable species. Before 2016, approximately one-third of the range (around ca. 100,347 km²) received minimal research attention, reduced to just 5% in pockets like Ladakh, Jammu & Kashmir, Uttarakhand, and Himachal Pradesh. Recent status surveys have significantly increased understanding, providing preliminary information for 80% of the range (about 79,745 km²), compared to 56% in 2016. To gather robust

information on Snow leopard numbers, the SPAI exercise surveyed habitats using a substantial network of camera traps.

India-United States (US) initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET)



iCET is designed to deepen partnerships in specific domains of critical and emerging technologies. By doing so, this unique and agile structure, led by the National Security Council (NSC) in the United States and the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) in India, seeks to intensify and multiply economic, technological, and strategic ties between these outsized democracies.

The United States and India underlined their commitment to working to resolve issues related to regulatory barriers and business and talent mobility in both countries through a standing mechanism under iCET.

To expand and deepen technology partnership, the United States and India are working on new bilateral initiatives and welcoming new cooperation between both governments, industry and academia in the following domains:

Strengthening Innovation Ecosystems

A new Implementation Arrangement for a Research Agency Partnership between the National Science Foundation and Indian science agencies to expand international collaboration in a range of areas — including artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and advanced wireless — to build a robust innovation ecosystem between our countries.

Establishing a joint Indo-U.S. Quantum Coordination Mechanism with participation from industry, academia, and government to facilitate research and industry collaboration.

Drawing from global efforts to develop common standards and benchmarks for trustworthy AI through coordinating on the development of consensus, multi-stakeholder standards, ensuring that these standards and benchmarks are aligned with democratic values.

Promoting collaboration on High Performance Computing (HPC), including by working with Congress to lower barriers to U.S. exports to India of HPC technology and source code.

Defense Innovation and Technology Cooperation

Developing a new bilateral Defense Industrial Cooperation Roadmap to accelerate technological cooperation between both countries for the joint development and production, with an initial focus on exploring projects related to jet engines, munition related technologies, and other systems.

Noting the United States has received an application from General Electric to jointly produce jet engines that could power jet aircraft operated and produced indigenously by India.

Enhancing long-term research and development cooperation, with a focus on identifying maritime security and intelligence surveillance reconnaissance (ISR) operational use cases.

Launching a new “Innovation Bridge” that will connect U.S. and Indian defense startups.

Resilient Semiconductor Supply Chains

Enhancing bilateral collaboration on resilient semiconductor supply chains; supporting the development of a semiconductor design, manufacturing, and fabrication ecosystem in India; and leveraging complementary strengths, both countries intend to promote the development of a skilled workforce that will support global semiconductor supply chains and encourage the development of joint ventures and technology partnerships on mature technology nodes and packaging in India.

Space

Strengthening cooperation on human spaceflight, including establishing exchanges that will include advanced training for an Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO)/Department of Space astronaut at NASA Johnson Space Center.

Identifying innovative approaches for the commercial sectors of the two countries to collaborate, especially with respect to activities related to NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services (CLPS) project. Within the next year, NASA, with ISRO, will convene U.S. CLPS companies and Indian aerospace companies to advance this initiative.

Initiating new STEM talent exchanges by expanding the Professional Engineer and Scientist Exchange Program (PESEP) to include space science, Earth science, and human spaceflight and extending a standing invitation to ISRO to participate in NASA's biannual International Program Management Course

Strengthening the bilateral commercial space partnership, including through a new U.S. Department of Commerce and Indian Department of Space-led initiative under the U.S.-India Civil Space Joint Working Group. This initiative will foster U.S.-India commercial space engagement and enable growth and partnerships between U.S. and Indian commercial space sectors. Expanding the agenda of the U.S.-India Civil Space Joint Working Group to include planetary defense.

Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Talent:

Noting a new joint task force of the Association of American Universities and leading Indian educational institutions, including Indian Institutes of Technology, which will make recommendations for research and university partnerships.

Next Generation Telecommunications:

Launching a public-private dialogue on telecommunications and regulations.

Advancing cooperation on research and development in 5G and 6G, facilitating deployment and adoption of Open RAN in India, and fostering global economies of scale within the sector.

Infrastructure status to the shipping industry soon



The Union government is working on a plan to grant infrastructure status to the shipping industry, including coastal shipping, that aims to promote ownership and construction of vessels in the country.

This will allow shipping entities to secure earlier financial access from commercial banks with long-term repayment periods at low interest rates.

Shipyards were granted infrastructure status since 2016, enabling them to avail of flexible structuring of long-term project loans at lower interest rates for tenures equivalent to the economic life of their assets. This also means ship builders can issue infrastructure bonds to meet working capital requirements and enjoy tax benefits. However, this status remains closed to the shipping industry, depriving shippers who need long-term funds to purchase vessels and support domestic shipbuilding with bigger orders.

The ministry of ports, shipping, and waterways (MoPSW) has already proposed including coastal shipping as a sector in the “Harmonized list of Infrastructure” to make it eligible for various concessions and help in attracting cargo and passengers to this mode of transport.

Language skills dip, maths slightly better: ASER data



The ASER 2023 report titled “Beyond Basics”, led by Pratham Foundation, an education-focussed non-profit.

According to the report, 86.8% of the respondents are enrolled in either school or college, compared to 85.6% in 2017, although the enrolment percentage drops with age. For instance, the proportion of youth who are currently not enrolled in school or college is 3.9% among 14-year-olds, 10.9% of 16-year-olds and 32.6% of 18-year-olds. That would suggest that a third of the respondents do not study beyond Class 12 (it can’t be said whether they take the school leaving exam or not), a statistic that does not bode well for a country that is looking to parlay its demographic dividend into economic growth. The most common reason (one in four) for boys to drop out is “lack of interest” while for girls (one in five) it is “family constraints”. The report highlights that one in every four persons between the ages of 14 and 18 in rural India cannot fluently read a Class 2 level text in their own language, and at least 42.7% cannot read sentences in English.

In 2017, 16% of girls aged 14-18 were not in school/college, compared to 11.9% of the boys— a gap of 4.1 percentage points. In 2023, that gap has narrowed to just 0.2 percentage points.

The Survey evaluated the youth on the basis of four parameters— basic reading, math and English abilities; application of basic skills to everyday calculations; reading and understanding written instructions; and financial calculations that need to be done in real life.

In 2017, 76.6% of 14-18 year-olds could read a Class 2 level text, while in 2023, this number is slightly lower at 73.6%. In arithmetic, in 2017, 39.5% of youth could do a simple (class 3-4 level) division problem, while in 2023, this proportion is slightly higher at 43.3%.

In terms of calculation, the report highlighted that while nearly 85% of surveyed youth can measure length using a scale when the starting point is 0 cm, the proportion drops sharply to 39% when the starting point is moved.

Female students (76%) do better than males (70.9%) in reading class 2 level texts in their regional language, but male students do better than their female counterparts in arithmetic and English reading

For the first time, ASER also recorded the course stream of students enrolled in classes 11 and 12 and in college: 54% of the students were enrolled in humanities, followed by science (33.4%), and commerce (9.3%). It found that female students are less likely to be enrolled in STEM streams (28.1%) than male ones (36.3%). The study found that 92.7% students enrolled in STEM streams in classes 11 and 12 could read at least a class 2 level text against 86.4% commerce and 87% humanities students.

The survey also mapped the digital awareness of students and highlighted that 90% of all young people surveyed came from households that had a smartphone and that they knew how to use it.

Among youth who can use a smartphone, two-thirds report having used it for some education related activity, such as watching online videos related to studies, solving doubts, or exchanging notes. “Close to 80% of the youth report having used their smartphone to do an entertainment related activity, such as watching a movie or listening to music, during the reference week,” the report stated.

Highlights of economic achievements- latest



Ministry of Finance has released *The Indian Economy—A Review* on January 29, 2024. Prepared by the Department of Economic Affairs, the report takes stock of the Indian economy and presents an outlook for a variety of sectors in the coming years.

The report replaces the annual Economic Survey usually presented by the finance minister ahead of the presentation of the budget in Parliament. Since 2024 is an election year and voting are scheduled to be held in April–May, the government is presenting an interim budget instead of a full budget and it has released the report as a mini-Economic Survey.

SECTORAL HIGHLIGHTS

Agriculture

- From FY15 to FY23, the sector grew at an average annual rate of 3.7%, which was higher than the 3.4% growth from FY05 to FY14. In comparison to the prior year, the sector expanded by 4.0% for the FY23 year.
- Agricultural exports surged to INR 4.2 lakh crore (USD 50.5 billion) in FY23.
- Alongside a more notable decline in the share of agriculture in the rural male workforce from 55% in 2017–18 to 49.1% in 2022–23, there has been a rise in the share of agriculture in the rural female workforce from 73.2% in 2017–18 to 76.2% in 2022–23.

- A structural change has occurred in the rural female workforce, as the percentage of skilled labourers in agriculture has increased (from 48% in 2018–19 to 59.4% in 2022–23) while the percentage of labourers in elementary agriculture requiring significant physical effort has decreased (from 23.4% to 16.6% in the same period).
- Active promotion of digital inclusion and mechanization has improved productivity. Digital platform e-NAM (National Agriculture Market) has facilitated the integration and optimized various intermediaries in the value chain. From 250 in 2016 to 1,389 in 2023, more markets are connected to the e-NAM platform, enabling the online trading of 209 commodities related to agriculture and horticulture.
- The government is aiming to position India as a hub for drones in the agriculture sector. It is providing several incentives in the form of financial and technical support to promote drone tech adoption.
- This year saw measures initiated to promote practices around natural farming, water irrigation and conservation, diversifying nutrient content, and improving post-harvest infrastructure investment to develop a climate resilient sustainable agriculture landscape in India.

Trade and Investments

- The public sector capital investment has surged in the last 10 years. Between FY05 and FY14, India's cumulative FDI inflows were USD 305.3 billion. Further, raising investments, particularly in the private sector, has been a key focus area for the government.
- India continues to remain a preferred destination among foreign investors, owing to its young workforce and large middle-class population. In this regard, the government has taken several measures such as opening FDI for almost all sectors, promoting policies such as the Production Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme, and incentivizing long-term investments under the Make in India program.
- India's exports have been showing significant upswing. Over the past decade (FY13 to FY23), merchandise exports have increased by more than 50% and services exports by 120%. The highest-ever merchandise export of USD 451.1 billion was achieved in FY23. The non-food credit growth is strong, enabling the Indian economy to grow at a brisk rate.

- Investment incentives and initiatives taken to ease business compliances and remove policy uncertainties have created an ecosystem for start-ups to nurture.
- India is the third largest fintech economy in the world after the US and the UK.
- India became the world's fourth largest stock market by market capitalization, overtaking Hong Kong.

Digital Public Infrastructure

- India's robust Digital Public Infrastructure has transformed the authentication ecosystem.
- The cost of conducting e-KYC has been reduced from INR 1000 to INR 5.
- India has also enabled online, paperless, and cashless digital access to various public and private services.

Skill Development

- The skilling ecosystem has ramped up with the launch of the Skill India Mission in 2015.
- According to India Skills Report 2023, the employable percentage of final-year and pre-final-year students has increased from 33.9% in 2014 to 51.3% in 2024.
- There's ample scope to mainstream skilling into the education curriculum and upskill a large size of the existing workforce into future-relevant skills. For instance, according to the PLFS 2022–23 report, 72.6% of workers aged 15–59 years did not receive any formal/informal vocational/technical training.

Climate Action

- India has adopted a comprehensive approach that addresses adaptation, resilience building, and mitigation action as part of its contribution to the global response with periodic updates. It has met the targets of building non-fossil fuel-installed electricity capacity, reaching 43.9% in November 2023.
- Focus on Hydrogen as a key option to be promoted as long-duration storage of renewable energy, replacement of fossil fuels in industry, and clean transportation.
- In its first phase, the India-led global mass movement Lifestyle for Environment (LiFE) has identified 75 environment-friendly actions under seven categories

including energy saving, waste and e-waste reduction, water conservation, and phasing out of single-use plastics. Key market-based incentives introduced under this program include the Green Credit Programme (GCP) and Ecomark scheme.

- Various regulatory measures have been undertaken to mainstream climate action into the financial economy by the Securities and Exchange Board of India and foster a green ecosystem in the country. Some of the key initiatives include developing frameworks for sovereign green bonds and acceptance of green deposits.
- India championed the cause of the Global South by emphasizing that the current global approach to climate change runs the risk of making the low-income status of several countries permanent. It suggested that there is need to strike the right balance between development and emission mitigation on a global level.

Women's Development

- Women's required representation in panchayats has increased funding for public goods like drinking water and public roads that are directly related to the concerns of women.
- The Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) for women in higher education has quadrupled from 6.7% in FY01 to 27.9% in FY21, while the overall GER has more than doubled from 24.5% to 58.2% between FY05 and FY22.
- Female Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) rose from 23.3% in 2017–18 to 37% in 2022–23, reflecting a growing shift towards women-led development in India.
- Through programs like the Skill India Mission, Start-Up India and Stand-Up India, female participation is also growing in human capital formation.
- With the PM Jan-Dhan Yojana, a national financial inclusion scheme, women bank account holders have increased from 53% in 2015–16 to 78.6% in 2019–21.

OUTLOOK

- Over the next three years, India is expected to become world's third-largest economy, with a GDP of USD 5 trillion. It is likely to grow at over 7% in the coming years on the strength of the financial sector and other recent and future structural reforms. The elevated risk of geopolitical conflicts may deter these optimistic projections.

- Priority areas for future reforms include skilling, learning outcomes, health, energy security, reduction in compliance burden for MSMEs, and gender balancing in the labor force.
- The adoption of GST, a goods and services tax, has brought in unification of the domestic markets and allowed expansion of the tax base. The reform will further strengthen the finances and enable growth-enhancing public expenditures.
- The role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) may pose a key challenge to governments in terms of employment in the service sector.

Moon sniper



The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency (JAXA) has confirmed that its Smart Lander for Investigating Moon (SLIM) successfully landed on the Moon's surface. With the landing, the list of countries that have soft-landed a spacecraft on the Moon now has five members — the United States, the erstwhile Soviet Union, China, India and Japan.

The SLIM mission is called the Moon Sniper because it attempted to land within 100 metres of its target. Usually, spacecraft have an accuracy of within a few kilometres from its target. JAXA believes this technology can be a powerful tool in future exploration as it can be used to reach hilly parts of the Moon that could be a source of oxygen and water. These life-sustaining elements also have an important use as fuel source for rockets.

The mission could also examine how potential water resources might be harnessed to help build bases on the moon. The possibility of lunar commercialisation would depend on

whether there is water at the poles. Slim is equipped with a “rolling” robot – a spherical rover slightly bigger than a tennis ball that can change its shape as it negotiates the contours of the moon’s surface. Japan is actively participating in NASA’s Artemis programme with the goal of sending one of its astronauts to the moon.

Nasa has announced a delayed timetable for sending humans to the moon under its Artemis programme. Russia, China and other countries, including South Korea and the United Arab Emirates, are also planning missions. Jaxa landed a spacecraft on a speeding asteroid in 2019.

Naerwekar panel to look for Xth schedule.



A committee to investigate constitutional provisions that underpin the anti-defection law for elected representatives has been constituted by the Lok Sabha speaker.

The committee will investigate the 10th Schedule of the Constitution and recommend changes. The anti-defection law contains provisions to disqualify MPs or MLAs if they switch their political allegiances unless the defection involves at least two-thirds of the elected members of a party.

After 40 years, Centre revises rules on wildlife trade



India has revised its rules on the wildlife trade. The Union environment ministry issued a notification titled: Wild Life (Protection) Licencing (Additional Matters for Consideration) Rules, 2024, providing guidelines on matters to consider before granting licence to those dealing in captive animals, snake venom, trophy animals, and stuffed animals.

The rules published in 1983 state that no such licence shall be granted to trade in a wild animal specified in Schedule I or Part II of Schedule II to the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972, except with the previous consultation of the central government.

This condition has been changed in the new guidelines, which say no such licence shall be granted if it relates to any wild animal specified in Schedule I to the Act, except with the previous consultation of the Central Government.

The notification doesn't mention why the licensing restriction for schedule II species has been removed. To be sure schedules of the Wildlife Protection Act 1972 had been rationalised following an amendment to the act in 2022 but Schedule II still has a number of important species of mammals including endangered species of bats, shrews, squirrels; and a very large variety of birds including barbets, bee eaters, bulbuls, buntings, prinias, falcons, and pittas. Turtles, geckos, snakes, frogs etc are also in schedule II of amended act.

Before the amendment in 2022, the schedules were made based on how endangered a certain species is. Now the schedules have been rationalised, the government has clarified. As per the

revision, Part II of Schedule II does not exist. Basically, the wild animals listed in part II of Schedule II have been included in schedule I after the amendment. This notification is only because of the fact that the four schedules of wild animals have been reorganised into two schedules.

According to recent reports, more than 70,000 native and exotic species were trafficked via air routes. To address this pressing issue, the Indian government introduced a one-time amnesty program through the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).

The World Wildlife Report 2020 by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime found that between 1999 and 2018, 6,000 different species of flora and fauna were seized. Suspected traffickers from 150 citizenships were identified, illustrating that wildlife crime is a global issue.

In the amendment act schedule I specifies the animal species with the highest level of protection, and Schedule II specifies the animal species with a relatively lower degree of protection. Schedule III in the amendment act is for plant species and Schedule IV is for species protected under Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). In contrast, the original law had six schedules—Schedule I for animals with highest priority particularly endangered species; Schedule II species with a relatively lesser degree of protection; Schedule III and IV for non-endangered species; Schedule V for vermin; and schedule VI for plant species.

India: Concerned over bid to rush IPCC report(60th session of the IPCC)



India along with other developing countries has flagged serious concerns over attempts by developed nations to shorten the timeline for the delivery of the seventh assessment cycle report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Many developing countries (at the meeting) were concerned that the agenda of the developed countries was to rush the IPCC AR7 for completion in less than five years (four and a half years or less) and therefore compromise on the quality of the reports. Some developed countries also shared these concerns, notably Russia. Many other developed countries were initially for a longer timeline like the developing countries but slowly fell in line with the US which was pushing for an early timeline.(According to schedule, the final Synthesis Report of this cycle is expected by the end of 2029.)

The IPCC informs governments about the state of knowledge of climate crisis by examining all relevant literature on the subject. The panel completed its sixth assessment cycle last year with the Synthesis Report — a summary of its earlier reports — releasing in March 2023.

The Third World Network, a non-profit international research and advocacy group, reported that the US, Jamaica, Grenada and other island nations supported the light cycle option (with fewer products and shorter timeline than the AR6). These nations also called on IPCC to respond to the invitation by the UNFCCC to provide information for the second global stocktake (GST) scheduled for 2027-28 period.

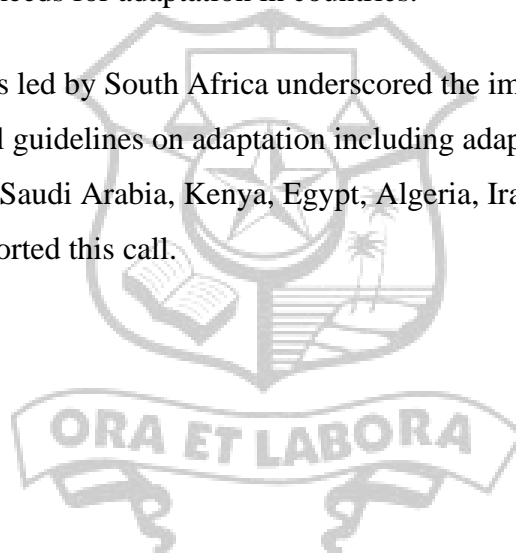
The first GST, which reviewed the progress made globally on curbing climate crisis in line with the Paris Agreement, was completed last year.

Pointing to the implications of a shortened cycle would have on the AR7 cycle, India asked the co-chairs what the meaning of “comprehensive” was. India added that underrepresented communities did not mean just indigenous peoples. “In science, developing country authors are also underrepresented, women authors are underrepresented.

India was supported by Brazil, South Africa, India and China (BASIC) and Like-Minded Developing Countries (LMDC).

Another important development from the IPCC meeting was the resolution to produce a report related to state and needs for adaptation in countries.

Many developing countries led by South Africa underscored the importance of IPCC updating its 1994 technical guidelines on adaptation including adaptation indicators, metrics and methodologies. India, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Egypt, Algeria, Iran, Iraq, Bolivia, and Brazil, among others supported this call.



Indo-French relations



India and France are strategically located resident powers and key partners with vital stakes in the Indo Pacific region. The Indo-French partnership in the Indian ocean has become an important focus of our bilateral relations. In 2018, India and France agreed on a 'Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region'.

Both the countries believe in a free, open, inclusive, secure and peaceful Indo Pacific region. The cooperation seeks to secure our own economic and security interests; ensure equal and free access to global commons; build partnerships of prosperity and sustainability in the region; advance the rule of international law; and, working with others in the region and beyond, build a balanced and stable order in the region, with respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Indian vision of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) and French vision of security and cooperation outlined in the Indo Pacific Strategy of France are very much aligned. The cooperation is comprehensive and covers defence, security, economic, connectivity, infrastructure, sustainability and human centric development.

Bilateral cooperation advances mutual security and supports peace and stability in the Indo Pacific region. The level of cooperation extends from seabed to space. It will continue to deepen exchanges, cooperate on situational and domain awareness, intensify maritime cooperation across the region such as the one we conduct in the South West Indian Ocean Region in liaison with partner countries in the region.

Both the countries decided to increase militaries' naval visits and develop defence industrial capabilities in India and jointly support the needs of other countries.

Both will continue to work together to extend development cooperation to countries in the region, including in Africa, the Indian Ocean Region, South Asia, Southeast Asia and the Pacific. It is also decided to strengthen the plurilateral arrangements with Australia and UAE and build new ones in the region. Strengthening the cooperation in regional forums such as Indian Ocean Rim Association, Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, the Indian Ocean Commission, Djibouti Code of Conduct, the ADMM+ and ARF are given priority.

Both will work together to advance the objectives of Indo Pacific Oceans Initiative which aims to address common challenges in the region through collaborative actions under its seven pillars. Under France's lead on the Maritime Resources pillar, both will work together to implement practical projects, in synergy with, and under, the various bilateral, regional and global initiatives by the two sides, for creating an ecosystem for sustainable development of maritime resources and combatting activities like IUU fishing.

India and France launched the International Solar Alliance and are committed to the deployment of renewable energies in the region. They are also proposing that start-ups in the region benefit from the Solar X Challenge project.

India and France are continuing to implement the Indo-Pacific Parks Partnership and are supporting a mangrove conservation initiative aimed at the Pacific States in particular.

The two sides will work on finalizing the India-France Indo-Pacific Triangular Development Cooperation Fund. Our partnership in the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure will help build a more resilient and sustainable future for the people of the region, especially in the small island states. Furthermore, France invites India to join the KIWA initiative, a multi-donor program designed to strengthen resilience to climate change and the preservation of biodiversity in the Pacific through simplified financial support for concrete projects.

India and France will work to set up the Indo-French Health Campus for the Indo-Pacific, with the aim of making it a regional magnet for research and academia. Building on the experience in the Indian ocean, we may consider opening the Campus to Pacific Island Nationals.

We believe that India-France partnership will be a crucial pillar of the inter-connected and intersecting arrangements in Indo Pacific region and indispensable for a peaceful and prosperous future for the Indo Pacific region.

ICJ ruling on Israel.



Background

On 29 December 2023, South Africa brought a case against Israel at the ICJ under the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide over allegations of genocide against the Palestinian people in the wake of the attacks on 7 October 2023 by Hamas and other armed groups, in which nearly 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in Israel were killed and some 240 were taken hostage. Hearings on South Africa's request for provisional measures took place in The Hague on 11 and 12 January 2024.

The 84-page filing by South Africa accuses Israel of acts and omissions “genocidal in character, as they are committed with the requisite specific intent ... to destroy Palestinians in Gaza as a part of the broader Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group.”

The International Court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations (UN). It does not pursue individual criminal responsibility, rather the Court's role is to settle, in accordance with international law, legal disputes submitted to it by States, including those relating to the interpretation, application or fulfilment of the Genocide Convention and the responsibility of a State for genocide.

Article 94 of the UN Charter provides that judgments of the ICJ are binding on the parties to the dispute and that, if they are not implemented, then recourse is to be had to the Security Council, which may make recommendations or decide upon measures to be taken to give effect to the judgment.

The ruling issued by the ICJ ordered six provisional measures including for Israel to refrain from acts under the Genocide convention, prevent and punish the direct and public incitement to genocide, and take immediate and effective measures to ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance to civilians in Gaza. Crucially, the Court also ordered Israel to preserve evidence of genocide and to submit a report to the Court, within one month, of all measures taken in line with its order.

Wheat output set for a record high, sowing area crosses 34mn hectares



The area under the main winter cereal crossed 34 million hectares, a three-year-high, as sowing has been nearly complete in the country's cereal belt of Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh, according to official data. The crop is sown in November and harvested in March.

Higher wheat output will help put a lid on prices and could prompt the world's second-biggest producer of the grain to lift a ban on exports of the staple.

In the past two years, the country's wheat crop has been roiled by early onset of summer and extreme weather, leading to high cereal prices averaging an annual 20%.

Wheat inventories at state-owned granaries have dropped to 19 million metric tons, the lowest in seven years, as the Union government sold about 6 million tonnes agencies to private players to cool the prices.

Taking steps to mitigate the impacts of climate crisis, cultivators in key food-bowl states have switched to heat-tolerant wheat varieties on a large scale this season, a change analysts attribute to growing awareness about changing weather patterns.

Following two consecutive years of heat waves and extreme weather, which shaved off cereal output and stoked prices, wheat-growers have planted a record 80% area under climate-resilient varieties that should help bolster the country's food security impacted by adverse weather, according to a latest survey by the agriculture ministry.

Poverty, based on access to basic services, dips: NITI AAYOG



According to a NITI Aayog discussion paper, multidimensional poverty in India declined from 29.17% in 2013-14 to 11.28% of the population in 2022-23, with about 24.82 crore people moving out of this bracket in nine years to 2022-23. They also claim that Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh registered the largest decline.

The National Multidimensional Poverty Index or NMPI measures simultaneous deprivations across three equally weighted dimensions of health, education, and standard of living that are represented by 12 sustainable development goals-aligned indicators, according to NITI Aayog. These include three Health (nutrition, child and adolescent mortality, maternal health), two Education (years of schooling, school attendance), and seven Standard of Living indicators (cooking fuel, sanitation, drinking water, electricity, housing, assets, and bank accounts).

Centre may bring incentive scheme for critical minerals



The Mines Ministry has approved a 25% (of the approved cost) incentive for exploration of critical minerals in the country. This will be provided through National Mineral Exploration Trust and will help in the discovery of critical minerals in the country.

The decision aims to accelerate the discovery and extraction of vital minerals within India's borders, reducing the nation's reliance on imports and promoting self-sufficiency in these critical resources.

Exploration agencies from both public and private sectors can avail this financial incentive on successful discovery of critical minerals in the projects .

This move is in line with recently approved amendments to the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957. After these changes, the centre can auction mines and ramp up production of critical minerals in India. Lithium, cobalt, and graphite output are expected to get a fillip as the government hopes to speedily conduct auctions for these minerals.

India's renewable energy supply on the rise: Report



India's renewable energy supply is increasing, rapidly raising the share of clean energy sources in the energy mix even as the country battles a severe air pollution crisis, the 38th edition of TERI Energy & Environment Data Diary and Yearbook (TEDDY) said.

The share of renewable energy (wind, solar and other RE) increased to 30.1% in 2023 compared to 27.5% in 2022 with the share of coal-based power plants decreasing from 51.1% to 49.3% , marking a change in the energy supply mix, according to the TERI data book which sources information from various government and non-government sources. The book tracks various energy sectors, including coal and lignite, petroleum and natural gas, and renewables.

In its updated nationally determined contribution (NDC) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change submitted in 2022, India put forth its goal of 50% installed power capacity from non-fossil sources. Already India's non-fossil (including hydro and nuclear) installed capacity is around 43% of total installed capacity according to the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy.

The report cites worrying statistics: the Global Burden of Disease study which found 1.7 million deaths attributable to air pollution in India in 2019; and a World Bank study which estimated that the annual cost of health damages from PM 2.5 exposure in India was 10.6% of the country's GDP.

The top Indian states in terms of renewable energy capacities are Rajasthan, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, and Maharashtra. Gujarat has the country's highest cumulative rooftop capacity (approx 2.2 GW).

India ranks fourth in renewable energy installed capacity after China, the US and Brazil and third in renewable energy attractiveness after China and the US. The National Institute of Solar Energy has estimated that India's potential for solar power is over 750 GW.

Cabinet approves ₹8,500cr scheme for coal gasification



The government has approved the scheme for the promotion of coal/lignite gasification projects of government PSUs and private sector with an outlay of Rs.8,500 crore towards incentive for coal gasification projects under three categories.

Total outlay of Rs.8,500 crore will be provided as financial assistance for coal gasification projects under three categories.

In category I, Rs.4,050 crore provisioned for Government PSUs in which upto 3 projects will be supported by providing a lump-sum grant of Rs.1,350 crore or 15% of capex, whichever is lower.

In category II, Rs.3,850 crore is provisioned for the private sector as well as Government PSUs in which a lump-sum grant of Rs.1,000 crore or 15% of capex, whichever is lower provided for each project. At least one project will be bid out on a tariff-based bidding process and its criteria will be designed in consultation with NITI Aayog.

In category III, Rs.600 crore provisioned for demonstration Projects (indigenous technology) and/or small-scale product-based Gasification Plants under which a lump-sum grant of Rs.100 crore or 15% of capex, whichever is lower, will be given to the selected entity that will have a minimum Capex of Rs. 100 Crore and minimum production of 1500 Nm³/hr Syn gas.

The selection of entities under category II and III shall be carried out through a competitive and transparent bidding process. The grant will be paid to the selected entity in two equal instalments.

The adoption of gasification technology in India is expected to reduce the country's reliance on imports of natural gas, methanol, ammonia and other essential products.

The government is targeting to gasify 100 million tonnes (MT) of coal by 2030.

In gasification process, coal is partially oxidised by air, oxygen, steam, or carbon dioxide under controlled conditions to produce a liquid fuel known as syngas. Syngas or synthesis gas can be used for power generation and to make methanol as well.

