NEWS TODAY

Curated Insights from "The Hindu' newspaper

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Setbacks to Maoist Insurgency in 2024: A Path Towards Democratic Engagement?

Maoist setback

Security forces deliver major blows to the Maoists, but must avoid repression

With 159 Maoist cadres having been killed in anti-Naxalite operations led by security forces in 2024, the year so far has been one of major setbacks to the long-standing, left-wing extremist movement in India. After suffering major casualties in ambushes in April 2021 and April 2023, paramilitary and police forces are coordinating better and firming up a no-holds-barred approach towards the militants. This has resulted in the Maoists experiencing blow after blow in what is perhaps their only remaining bastion – south Chhattisgarh – even though they retain a presence in other forested districts in Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha and Maharashtra. The success in taking on the Maoists is also a consequence of the weakening base of support for the insurgents as intelligence is a vital component of the operations. This should not come as any surprise. Notwithstanding grievances against the Indian state among tribals in one of India's most forested and under-developed regions, there were always going to be fewer takers for the idea of a "protracted" war as espoused by the Maoists. The insurgency and the counter-operations have taken a huge toll on the tribal population, bringing in more fatigue for them. That most of the dead among the Maoist cadres are tribal youth points to the tragedy that has befallen one of India's poorest States.

The no-holds barred approach of what the Chhattisgarh government calls "Operation Prahar" might have succeeded in eliminating scores of Maoist cadres, effected surrenders and arrests, but it has also targeted peaceful activists fighting for tribal rights. Civil society organisations have complained that the attacks on the Maoists have coincided with repression against activists and tribals. Chhattisgarh and the Union Home Ministry must be mindful of these grievances as such actions could also increase disenchantment and play into the hands of the Maoists. That streams of the Maoist/Naxalite current have lasted for more than five decades shows that left extremism is still resilient in regions where governance by the Indian state is either absent or seen as detrimental to the marginalised sections. Yet, despite its resilience, the Maoist movement – as experiences of similar currents across the world show – remains an anachronistic one. Far from reaching any of its lofty goals, the Indian Maoist movement has only brought misery for those whom the insurgents claim to fight for. The earlier they realise the futility of their ideology and work towards using spaces in the Indian democratic system to articulate concerns, the better it would be for the tribals who are caught in this never-ending crossfire between security forces and the Maoists.

The ongoing anti-Naxalite operations in 2024 have dealt *significant blows* to the Maoist insurgency in India, particularly in south Chhattisgarh, where 159 Maoist cadres have been killed. Improved coordination between paramilitary and police forces, along with better intelligence, has weakened the insurgents.

While the Maoists *still retain some presence* in Jharkhand, Bihar, Odisha, and Maharashtra, the movement is *losing support*, especially among tribals who have faced heavy casualties and are fatigued by the ongoing conflict.

Despite the success of "**Operation Prahar**," concerns have arisen regarding the *targeting of peaceful activists and tribals*, which *could fuel further disenchantment*.

The endurance of the Maoist movement, even after five decades, *underscores the resilience of left-wing extremism* in regions where *governance is either weak or detrimental to marginalized populations*. However, the movement remains outdated and has failed to achieve its goals, instead bringing misery to the very people it claims to represent.

A shift towards *engaging with the democratic system* would be a *more constructive path forward* for these affected communities.

Rising Income Inequality Amid Technological Advances: A Call for Universal Basic Income and Tax Reforms

Income inequality

More jobs and higher taxes can counter the effects of automation

The ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook study (September) has definitively linked declining trends in labour's income share of total income within nations to technological advances – mainly automation and artificial intelligence. In an analysis of the past two decades, it mentions a 1.6% drop in the global labour income share between 2004-24. More ominously, almost 40% of this decline was in the pandemic years of 2019-22 – a drop that has not been recouped in the past couple of years. Labour income share is a measure widely used to assess income inequalities within economies. The 1.6% drop might seem insignificant, but it amounts to $2.4 trillion in lost wages at constant purchasing power parity, in relation to what workers would have earned had the labour income share been stable since 2004. $2.4 trillion lost globally is more than half of India's nominal GDP forecast for FY2023-24. The study also highlights the gendered aspect of this inequality. In 2024, almost a third of the world's young women (28.2%) are not in employment, education or training, it estimates, which is double that of young men (13.1%). This is alarming for developing nations with growing working age populations, as it highlights challenges in job creation. In fact, another ILO report on the status of employment in India estimates that 83% of its unemployed are youth. This coupled with the government's recent prescriptions to the private sector to invest in labour intensive employment points to a crisis in jobs growth and rising inequality, even as output and labour productivity rise.

Several countries have been mooting the idea of a universal basic income (UBI), or a floor to stand on, as economists have called it. A referendum in Switzerland on UBI was defeated in 2016, while Democratic candidate and American tech investor Andrew Yang, in his aborted 2020 bid to the White House, mainstreamed a 'Freedom Dividend' of $1,000 a month for every American adult. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi too made a proposal of ₹12,000 a month for every family, during his 2019 election campaign, calling it a "final assault on poverty". Several industry reports point to high-paying job creation due to automation and AI, to counter the jobless growth theory. But again, this only highlights an acceleration in income-inequality trends. Indeed, with the apparent advantages of automation and AI being irreversible, perhaps a global goal towards a universal basic income could address Sustainable Development Goal 10, or reduced inequality within and among countries. It is perhaps time that developing nations such as India consider the reintroduction of an inheritance tax as a measure to redress wealth inequality.

The **ILO's World Employment and Social Outlook study** (September) highlights a **1.6% decline** in the global **labour income share** between **2004-2024**, with almost **40% of the drop occurring during the pandemic years** of **2019-2022**. This decline represents a loss of **$2.4 trillion in wages**.

The report links the decline to **technological advances**, including **automation and artificial intelligence**, which exacerbate **income inequality**. The study also underscores a **gendered disparity**, with **28.2% of young women** globally not in employment, education, or training, compared to **13.1% of young men**.

In India, **83% of the unemployed** are youth, and despite **rising output and productivity**, job creation has not kept pace. Discussions around **Universal Basic Income (UBI)** have resurfaced, with examples from **Switzerland, Andrew Yang's U.S. campaign, and Rahul Gandhi's proposal** for ₹**12,000 per family**. These efforts aim to address **rising income inequality**, which is further accelerated by automation.

The article suggests that developing nations like India could consider **inheritance tax** to reduce **wealth inequality** and work towards **Sustainable Development Goal 10** — reducing inequality within and among countries.

Universal Basic Income (UBI)

Universal Basic Income (UBI) is a social welfare policy where a government provides all citizens or residents with a regular, unconditional sum of money to cover basic living expenses. The primary goals of UBI are to reduce poverty, ensure a basic standard of living, and provide financial security.

Key Aspects of UBI:

- **Unconditionality:** Payments are made without conditions or requirements, meaning everyone receives it regardless of income or employment status.
- **Regular Payments:** It is distributed on a regular basis, such as monthly, to ensure a stable source of income.
- **Universal Coverage:** All individuals within the designated population receive the benefit, aiming to eliminate poverty and reduce income inequality.
- **Simplicity:** UBI simplifies the welfare system by replacing complex benefit schemes with a straightforward cash transfer.

Advocates argue that UBI can address income inequality, support individuals in an increasingly automated job market, and provide a safety net that enhances individual freedom. Critics, however, raise concerns about the cost, potential disincentive to work, and the effectiveness of UBI in solving broader socio-economic issues.

Inheritance Tax in India

Inheritance tax, also known as estate tax or death duty, was once a part of India's tax system but was abolished in 1985. Here is a summary of the current status and considerations regarding inheritance tax in India:

Historical Context:

- India had an inheritance tax until it was abolished in **1985**.
- It was part of a broader tax regime that included wealth tax.

Current Status:

- India **does not have an inheritance tax** at present.
- The focus has shifted to other forms of taxation and wealth redistribution.

Debate and Proposals:

- There have been discussions about **reintroducing inheritance tax** to address income inequality and wealth disparity.
- Such proposals aim to help redistribute wealth and provide additional revenue for social programs.

Alternative Measures:

- India relies on **income tax**, **corporate tax**, and **social welfare programs** to address economic inequality.
- Estate planning focuses on optimizing asset transfers through **wills**, **trusts**, and **gifting strategies**.

The potential reintroduction of an inheritance tax would require careful consideration of its economic impact, administrative feasibility, and implications for investment and growth.

Evaluation of the Public Distribution System (PDS) Post-NFSA: Improvements, Challenges, and the Way Forward

The Food Security Act has revamped the PDS

The article discusses the performance and challenges of the **Public Distribution System (PDS)** in India, particularly after the implementation of the **National Food Security Act (NFSA) 2013**.

Key Points:

1. PDS Leakages: Initially, PDS leakages were a significant concern, with a national leakage rate of 41.7% in 2011-12. Reforms in some states led to substantial reductions in leakages. By 2022-23, national leakage was *reduced to 22%*, though this includes both central and state contributions.

2. Impact of NFSA Reforms: The NFSA aimed to reduce leakages by expanding PDS coverage and implementing reforms such as digitisation and doorstep delivery. The coverage increased, with *70% of households accessing PDS*, though the Centre *still falls short of the NFSA's target coverage* (50% of the rural population; 75% of the urban population).

3. **Reform Successes:** States like **Chhattisgarh** and **Odisha**, which implemented reforms before NFSA, saw significant improvements. PDS reforms led to a reduction in leakages and an increase in PDS usage among households.

4. **Technological Challenges:** While technological innovations like Aadhaar-based biometric authentication were expected to improve the system, they *did not significantly impact leakage rates*. Some states with traditionally efficient PDS systems saw increased leakages.

5. **Current Challenges:** Despite improvements, the PDS faces ongoing challenges, including inefficiencies and unsuitable measures. The focus should shift to addressing fundamental issues such as conducting the delayed Census and improving the quality of food items provided.

Challenge	Description
Inadequate Coverage	Shortfall in achieving NFSA targets of 50% rural and 75% urban coverage. Around 70% of the population is currently covered, with discrepancies in NFSA ration card distribution.
Leakages and Inefficiencies	Persisting leakage rate of around 22% in 2022-23. Estimates may be understated, and issues such as transport losses contribute to the problem.
Technological and Administrative Issues	Limited effectiveness of Aadhaar-based biometric authentication and other technologies. Some measures may be inappropriate or poorly implemented.
Operational and Structural Challenges	Inconsistent implementation of reforms like digitization and doorstep delivery. Delays in Census hinder accurate beneficiary identification.
Quality of Food Items	The PDS primarily provides staples like rice and wheat, with insufficient inclusion of more nutritious items like pulses and edible oil.
Policy and Implementation Gaps	Discrepancies in PDS effectiveness across states and gaps in coordination between central and state governments affect efficiency and reach.

Overall, while PDS has made progress, it remains an essential but vulnerable part of India's social policy, requiring ongoing attention and sensible reform.

India's Critical Mineral Mission: Strategies, Challenges, and Opportunities in Securing Global Mineral Supply

Africa can make India's 'critical mineral mission' shine

The **Union Budget 2024-25** has introduced the **Critical Mineral Mission**, aimed at bolstering India's mineral sector through three main strategies: expanding domestic production, enhancing mineral recycling, and incentivising overseas asset acquisitions.

Key actions include:

1. Legislative Changes: The **Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2023** has *removed six minerals* from the atomic list, *opening exploration to the private sector*.

Mineral
Beryllium
Tantalum
Lithium
Rubidium
Cesium
Thorium

2. **International Partnerships**: The joint venture **Khanij Bidesh India Limited (KABIL)** signed a major *agreement* with **Argentina** for lithium mining, highlighting India's push to secure critical minerals globally.

3. **Africa's Role**: India is focusing on leveraging its historical and economic ties with Africa, which holds **30% of the world's critical mineral reserves**. Collaborations with African nations are expected to enhance India's supply chain, supported by investments and diplomatic efforts.

4. **Challenges**: India faces challenges including *limited exploration capacity, lack of end-use manufacturing capabilities, and competition from China*, which has significant influence over the global mineral value chain.

5. **Opportunities**: India can benefit from its existing infrastructure projects in Africa, strategic partnerships, and technological innovations to enhance its role in the critical minerals sector, while promoting responsible practices.

The mission reflects India's strategic approach to ensuring a stable supply of critical minerals while navigating geopolitical and economic challenges.

Should digital platform owners be held liable for user-generated content?

Should digital platform owners be held liable for user-generated content?

Context: The arrest of a prominent tech founder, **Pavel Durov**, who started the messaging app Telegram, in Paris has raised significant questions about the accountability of digital platforms for the content their users generate.

Key Points:

1. Content Moderation Policies: There is debate over whether a platform's content moderation practices justify criminal charges against its founders. While some argue that platform operators should not be held criminally liable *unless they are directly involved in illegal activities*, others suggest that *negligence or reluctance to cooperate with authorities might warrant accountability*.

2. **Legal Frameworks and Safe Harbour**: Many countries have laws protecting platforms from liability for user-generated content, under the principle of **"safe harbour."** This principle allows platforms to operate without being held responsible for every post made by their users, provided they do not engage in illegal activities themselves.

3. **Balance Between Free Speech and Regulation**: As misinformation and harmful content spread more quickly, there is a growing call for stricter regulations on platforms. This raises questions about the *balance between protecting free speech and ensuring platforms do not become conduits*

for illegal activities.

4. **Regulatory Challenges**: Platforms face complex regulatory environments. Some regulations require platforms to actively monitor content, which can conflict with privacy rights and operational realities. The challenge is *finding a fair approach that holds platforms accountable without infringing on privacy or stifling innovation*.

5. **Future Trends**: The discussion highlights a *potential shift towards greater scrutiny of digital platforms*, possibly leading to increased regulation and changes in how platforms manage and moderate content.
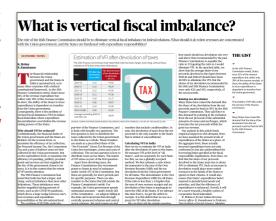
This issue is crucial as it affects *how we balance the benefits of digital communication with the need to prevent misuse and protect users*.

Addressing Vertical Fiscal Imbalance: A Path to Balanced Federal Financial Relations in India

In India, there is a significant **Vertical Fiscal Imbalance (VFI)**, where States, responsible for 61% of revenue expenditures, collect only 38% of revenue receipts. This imbalance arises because the States' ability to spend is heavily reliant on transfers from the Union government, leading to a mismatch between expenditure responsibilities and revenue-raising powers.

Why Reduce VFI?

1. **Constitutional Balance**: The Indian Constitution divides financial duties between the Union and the States, with the *Union handling major taxes and the States managing expenditures*. Reducing VFI is crucial for aligning revenue and expenditure responsibilities.

2. **Efficiency**: States, being closer to citizens, are *better positioned to efficiently provide public goods and services*. Addressing VFI can improve spending efficiency and responsiveness to local needs.

3. **Crisis Response**: During crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, VFI becomes more pronounced, exacerbating the gap between revenue and expenditure capabilities.

What is vertical fiscal imbalance?

Finance Commission's Role

The Finance Commission addresses VFI by recommending tax devolution from the Union to States and grants under **Article 275** for specific needs. However, current devolution rates (42% and 41% as per the 14th and 15th Finance Commissions) are insufficient. Analysis suggests that *raising the devolution share to about 49% could eliminate VFI* and enhance State spending capabilities.

Implications of Raising Devolution

- **Increased Untied Resources**: Higher devolution would provide States with more untied resources, allowing them to *address local priorities more effectively*.

- **Enhanced Fiscal Federalism**: It would contribute to a more balanced and cooperative fiscal federalism system, *improving overall governance and expenditure efficiency*.

Navigating the Challenges of Accessing Climate Finance: India's Approach to the Loss and Damage Fund

The article discusses the *complexities of accessing* the **Loss and Damage Fund (LDF)**, established at **COP27** to provide financial aid for regions impacted by climate change, including **Kerala's Wayanad district** after recent landslides.

While the fund **supports both** economic and non-economic losses from extreme weather events and slow-onset changes like rising sea levels, accessing these resources remains challenging, particularly for local communities.

India's role has focused more on climate mitigation than adaptation, leading to minimal engagement in **Loss and Damage dialogues**. A clear **legal and policy framework** for climate finance is necessary to help vulnerable communities, especially at the **state level**, where most disaster recovery costs are borne, as seen with Kerala's **Rebuild Kerala Development Programme**.

The **absence** of **standard damage assessment processes** complicates India's future access to LDF resources. India should advocate for **decentralised fund disbursement** methods and improve **domestic policy frameworks** for better climate resilience.

What is the Loss and Damage Fund?

The Loss and Damage Fund (LDF) was established at the 2022 UNFCCC Conference (COP27) in Egypt to provide financial support to countries and regions suffering from the **impacts of climate change**. It focuses on aiding areas facing both *economic* and *non-economic losses*, such as those caused by extreme weather events and slow-onset processes like rising sea levels.

Key Features of the LDF

Purpose: To provide financial assistance for losses caused by climate change.

Management: Overseen by a Governing Board, with the World Bank acting as an interim trustee.

Access Mechanisms: Direct access, small grants, and rapid disbursement options are being developed.

Concerns with the LDF

Despite its establishment, there are concerns that climate funds may be **too slow** to provide immediate relief to affected regions, especially for local communities. The LDF may face similar challenges in terms of timely disbursement of funds.

Overall, the LDF is a crucial step in addressing climate-induced losses, but further developments in its mechanisms are needed to ensure **efficient and prompt access** to the necessary financial support.

Breastfeeding and Rising Food Allergies: An Overview

During **Nutrition Week** (first week of September) in India, attention is drawn to the increasing **incidence of food allergies among children**, particularly linked to the consumption of westernised foods. Common allergens include *eggs, seafood, and nuts*.

Breastfeeding is shown to *significantly reduce the likelihood* of *developing allergies*. Breast milk, with its lower protein content compared to cow's milk, contributes to a lower allergy potential. This is because breast milk helps in the proper digestion of proteins, which reduces the risk of allergy development.

Food allergies are distinguished from food intolerances, with allergies causing consistent reactions to specific foods, while intolerances result in sporadic symptoms. Diagnosis typically involves skin tests, which are considered more reliable than blood tests, though some cases may still require allergist consultation.

The rise in food allergies reflects a broader trend as dietary habits evolve and western foods become more common. Despite increasing cases, particularly in developing countries like India, *there remains a lack of comprehensive data on allergies*, highlighting the **need for better awareness and management practices**.
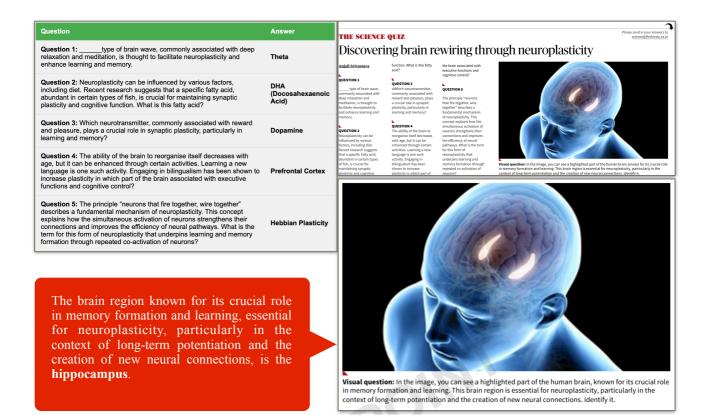
Question	Answer
Question 1: _____type of brain wave, commonly associated with deep relaxation and meditation, is thought to facilitate neuroplasticity and enhance learning and memory.	Theta
Question 2: Neuroplasticity can be influenced by various factors, including diet. Recent research suggests that a specific fatty acid, abundant in certain types of fish, is crucial for maintaining synaptic plasticity and cognitive function. What is this fatty acid?	DHA (Docosahexaenoic Acid)
Question 3: Which neurotransmitter, commonly associated with reward and pleasure, plays a crucial role in synaptic plasticity, particularly in learning and memory?	Dopamine
Question 4: The ability of the brain to reorganise itself decreases with age, but it can be enhanced through certain activities. Learning a new language is one such activity. Engaging in bilingualism has been shown to increase plasticity in which part of the brain associated with executive functions and cognitive control?	Prefrontal Cortex
Question 5: The principle "neurons that fire together, wire together" describes a fundamental mechanism of neuroplasticity. This concept explains how the simultaneous activation of neurons strengthens their connections and improves the efficiency of neural pathways. What is the term for this form of neuroplasticity that underpins learning and memory formation through repeated co-activation of neurons?	Hebbian Plasticity

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Please send in your answers to science@thehindu.co.in

Discovering brain rewiring through neuroplasticity

Anjali Srivastava

QUESTION 1
_____type of brain wave, commonly associated with deep relaxation and meditation, is thought to facilitate neuroplasticity and enhance learning and memory.

QUESTION 2
Neuroplasticity can be influenced by various factors, including diet. Recent research suggests that a specific fatty acid, abundant in certain types of fish, is crucial for maintaining synaptic plasticity and cognitive

function. What is this fatty acid?

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QUESTION 5
The principle "neurons that fire together, wire together" describes a fundamental mechanism of neuroplasticity. This concept explains how the simultaneous activation of neurons strengthens their connections and improves the efficiency of neural pathways. What is the term that underpins learning and memory formation through repeated co-activation of neurons?

Visual question: In the image, you can see a highlighted part of the human brain, known for its crucial role in memory formation and learning. This brain region is essential for neuroplasticity, particularly in the context of long-term potentiation and the creation of new neural connections. Identify it.

The brain region known for its crucial role in memory formation and learning, essential for neuroplasticity, particularly in the context of long-term potentiation and the creation of new neural connections, is the **hippocampus**.

Visual question: In the image, you can see a highlighted part of the human brain, known for its crucial role in memory formation and learning. This brain region is essential for neuroplasticity, particularly in the context of long-term potentiation and the creation of new neural connections. Identify it.

Controversy Surrounds New Eye Drops for Presbyopia: Efficacy and Safety Concerns

A pharmaceutical company's eye drops, intended to reduce dependence on reading glasses for **presbyopia**, have faced controversy regarding their approval and effectiveness.

Presbyopia is a natural aging process that *impairs the ability to focus on nearby objects*, typically becoming noticeable in the early to mid-40s and worsening until around age 65. It occurs due to the *lens in the eye becoming less flexible with age*.

The eye drops, produced by ENTOD Pharmaceuticals, claim to eliminate the need for reading glasses and offer lubrication benefits. They use *dynamic buffer technology* to adapt to tear pH, aiming for consistent efficacy and safety. However, doctors advise caution as the drops contain **pilocarpine**, a substance used for glaucoma treatment with potential side effects such as headaches, blurred vision, and impaired night vision. Pilocarpine's long-term use could also affect pupil dilation, which is important for procedures like cataract surgery.

The effectiveness of the drops for all presbyopia patients remains uncertain, prompting calls for careful consideration.

'Brazen' claims by drug maker trigger curiosity about an old eye condition

Zubeda Hamid

A pharmaceutical company's eye drops, developed to reduce dependency on reading glasses, have been mired in controversy ever since the company first said it had received approval from the Drug Controller General of India. A media report subsequently stated that claims about the approval and of the drops offering spectacular treatment for presbyopia were "unethical and false presentation of facts," and the company has issued a call for an explanation. But through all of this, there has been renewed interest in presbyopia – what is it, and whom does it affect?

Presbyopia, states the Mayo Clinic's website, is the gradual loss of your eye's ability to focus on nearby objects. It's a natural part of aging. Presbyopia usually becomes noticeable in your early to mid-40s and continues to worsen until around age 65.

Why does presbyopia occur? When you are young, the lens in your eye (behind your iris) has the ability to change shape – which means it allows you to focus on things that are both far away and close by. As you get older, this flexibility or elasticity of the lens decreases, and it becomes more rigid and is no longer able to change shape to focus on close up objects, making them seem out of focus. There is no way to stop this ageing process, but it can be corrected, as is usually done with reading glasses.

"By the age of about 40," says Mohan Rajan, chairman and medical director of

Presbyopia is the gradual loss of your eye's ability to focus on nearby objects. It usually becomes noticeable in your early to mid-40s and continues to worsen until around age 65

Rajan Eye Care Hospital, "people may need +1 reading glasses. This power will gradually increase as they age; by about 45, you may need +1.5; by 50, you may need +2, and so on. This is a common and universal condition," he said.

So where do the eye drops come in? A press release from the manufacturer, ENTOD Pharmaceuticals, states: "The proprietary formula not only gets rid of reading glasses but also helps the patient lubricate their eyes as a bonus effect. These eye drops utilise advanced dynamic buffer technology to swiftly adapt to tear pH, ensuring consistent efficacy and safety for extended use, keeping in mind that such drops will be used for years at a stretch."

Doctors however urge caution: pilocarpine, an ingredient in the eye drops, works by constricting the pupil, they say and can have multiple side effects.

"This is not a new drug - it has been used for decades for glaucoma," said S. Soundari, medical director, Dr. Agarwal's Eye Hospital in Chennai. "However, now, there is better drugs to treat glaucoma. Pilocarpine can have a number of side effects: it can cause headaches, blur the vision, hamper night vision since the pupil becomes smaller, over the course of many years, this can cause problems with pupil dilation, which may be needed for instance, if the patient requires a cataract surgery. We also don't know how effective the drops will be for all categories of presbyopia patients. So caution must be exercised," Dr Soundari pointed out.
(zubeda.h@thehindu.co.in)
(With input from AND

"As the debate unfolds, one must question: Can a drop in the ocean truly transform the age-old challenge of presbyopia, or does it merely mask the complexities of a natural aging process?"

SC reserves ruling on Kejriwal's bail plea

The Supreme Court reserved judgment on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's petitions for bail and to quash his arrest by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the excise policy case. The court referenced its earlier decision in a similar case involving former deputy Manish Sisodia, criticizing the prolonged process for bail.

Justice Ujjal Bhuyan clarified that the earlier 'snakes-and-ladders' comment about Sisodia's case was not a critique of the CBI but a reflection on the drawn-out legal process. The CBI's argument that granting bail to Kejriwal would undermine the Delhi High Court's decision was dismissed by the court, emphasizing that any action taken would not harm the institution.

Kejriwal's lawyer, A.M. Singhvi, argued that Kejriwal's case was unique, noting he had already been granted bail in related cases and questioning the need for his recent arrest. Singhvi also highlighted Kejriwal's fundamental rights and argued against the CBI's claim of non-cooperation.

The CBI's Additional Solicitor General, S.V. Raju, defended the arrest procedure, claiming it was legally justified and expressing concerns about potential witness tampering if bail was granted. The court will deliver its judgment after considering these arguments.

India-Singapore Relations and Key Developments

Visit and Meetings: Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Singapore and met with Singaporean counterpart Lawrence Wong. He attended a ceremonial welcome and oversaw the signing of significant **Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs)**, including one focused on *semiconductor supply chain resilience*.

Cultural Initiatives: Modi announced the opening of the **Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre** in **Singapore**, celebrating the 60th anniversary of India-Singapore bilateral ties next year.

Strategic Importance: Modi emphasized Singapore's role as a key partner in India's **'Act East' policy** and expressed a desire to replicate Singapore's success in India. He highlighted the shared democratic values and the historical bond, including the respect for Indian figures like **Subhas Chandra Bose**.

Bilateral Cooperation: Discussions between Modi and Wong covered various areas, including *defence, maritime domain awareness, education, AI, and regional issue*s such as the violence in Myanmar.

Assam Government to Implement Key Recommendations of Clause 6 from Assam Accord Amid Controversy

The **Assam government** has decided to implement 57 out of 67 recommendations from a panel *led by* retired **Justice Biplab Sarma** to apply **Clause 6 of the Assam Accord** by April 15, 2024.

The **Assam Accord**, signed in **1985**, aimed to address issues related to illegal foreigners and safeguard the rights of Assamese people. However, Clause 6, which guarantees constitutional, legislative, and administrative safeguards, has not been fully implemented by previous governments.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma announced that while 85% of the recommendations falling under state jurisdiction will be enacted, the remaining 10 recommendations requiring central approval will be pursued with the central government. This decision follows renewed calls for protecting indigenous communities after a recent gang rape incident in central Assam.

Opposition parties, including Congress and Trinamool Congress (TMC), have criticized the Chief Minister for allegedly misguiding the public, questioning the transparency and validity of the implementation plan. They argue that the state government's actions are limited to proposing changes, as Clause 6 falls under central jurisdiction, and demand that the full report be made public.

PAC to Review Regulatory Bodies and Public Infrastructure Fees Amidst Adani Controversies

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC), led by K.C. Venugopal, will review performance of regulatory bodies like SEBI and audit fees and tariffs on public infrastructure, including airports managed by the Adani Group.

The PAC has chosen 160 subjects for review and will focus on allegations of stock price manipulation by Adani and SEBI's handling of the issue, as well as charges of favouritism towards the Adani Group in airport management.

Overview of Public Accounts Committee (PAC)

Key Points about PAC

Aspect	Details
Establishment	Introduced in 1921 under the Government of India Act, 1919 (Montford Reforms). Constituted annually under Rule 308 of the Lok Sabha Rules.
Appointment	The Chairman is appointed by the Speaker of Lok Sabha. The committee is advisory, not executive.
Members	22 members: 15 elected by the Lok Sabha Speaker, 7 by the Rajya Sabha; Chairman Term of one year.
Purpose	To ascertain whether government money has been spent within the scope of parliamentary demands. Ministers cannot be members.
Functions	Examines accounts of appropriations, Finance Accounts, and audit reports. Reviews savings and expenditure irregularities.
Importance of Parliamentary Committees	Provides a forum for detailed examination of complex issues, builds political consensus, and examines policy issues. Recommendations are critical for government accountability.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh Advocates for Enhanced Space, Electronic Warfare Capabilities and AI Integration

Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh emphasized the need for advancing capabilities in space and electronic warfare with a focus on artificial intelligence (AI) during his address at the Joint Commanders' Conference in Lucknow. He stressed the importance of a robust national security framework to address future challenges, highlighting the need for a joint military vision and readiness to respond to emerging global conflicts and situations.

"News Highlights: Key Updates in Brief"

International Relations

- **China** has announced a *$50 billion financial support plan* for **Africa** over the next three years. This funding will include more than half in credit, $11 billion in various types of assistance, and $10 billion aimed at encouraging investments by Chinese firms, as stated by Xi Jinping during the China-Africa forum.
- French President Emmanuel Macron appointed **Michel Barnier** as **Prime Minister**, following a two-month political deadlock, making him the oldest Premier in modern French history amid discontent from the left.
- Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan inaugurated the **Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi Abu Dhabi campus**, marking the first IIT full-fledged campus established outside India and highlighting a significant step in international academic collaboration.

Economy

- The Union Cabinet, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved Kaynes Semicon Pvt Ltd's proposal to set up a **semiconductor manufacturing unit** in **Sanand, Gujarat**, marking a key milestone in India's Semiconductor Mission.
- **Reliance Industries Limited** became the *first Indian company* to surpass ₹10 lakh crore in annual revenue, achieving a record turnover of ₹10,00,122 crore and a net profit of ₹79,020 crore for the financial year 2023-24.
- Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan launched the ₹750 crore **AgriSURE Scheme** in New Delhi, a *blended capital fund* designed *to boost innovation and growth in India's agricultural and rural start-up* ecosystem.
- **HDFC Bank** has launched **GIGA**, a suite of financial products and services tailored for gig workers and freelancers in India, offering tools such as accounts, cards, insurance, and investment options.

Science & Technology

- The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) launched the **Vishvasya-Blockchain Technology Stack** to offer *Blockchain-as-a-Service (BaaS)* with a geographically distributed infrastructure, aimed at supporting permissioned blockchain applications and enhancing transparent, secure digital service delivery in India.

Environment

- Out of **Haryana's** 24 cities, *15 are listed among the top 100 most polluted cities* globally. Data from January to June reveals that **every city in the state** surpasses both India's **National Ambient Air Quality Standards** and the **World Health Organization's guidelines**.

Internal Security

- The Union Ministry of Home Affairs has *extended the ceasefire agreement* with the **Niki Sumi faction of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-K)** for one year. The original agreement, signed on September 6, 2021, aims to foster lasting peace in Nagaland with the involvement of the Naga people. Niki Sumi, who is wanted by the National Investigation Agency for a 2015 attack, remains a fugitive. The ceasefire will adhere to mutually agreed Ground Rules, which can be reviewed and amended by both parties.

State Specific

- **Kerala** has been recognized as a top performer in the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry's **Business Reforms Action Plan '22 (BRAP 22) ranking**, leading in both business-centric and citizen-centric reforms, including utility permits, tax facilitation, online services, and public distribution. **Note:** Business Reforms Action Plan '22 (BRAP 22) ranking is administered by the **Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT)** under the **Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry**.
- The **Uttar Pradesh** government has announced the construction of a **Vedic-3D museum** at **Sampurnanand Sanskrit University in Varanasi**, focusing on Indian astrology, astronomy, and Vedic literature, with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath highlighting its role in showcasing Vedic evolution and contributions of Indian sages.

Bihar Special (if any)

- In a landmark case under the **Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS)** criminal laws, the **Chhapra court** sentenced Sudhanshu Kumar (19) and Ankit Kumar Ram (18) to life imprisonment for a triple murder involving the stabbing deaths of Tarkeshwar Singh (55) and his daughters Chandani (17) and Vibha (15) on July 17. This represents the **first life sentence under the new laws** in the country.

Sports

- At the **Paris Paralympics 2024**, Indian judoka **Kapil Parmar** won a historic bronze medal in the Para **Judo men's-60kg J1 category** by defeating Brazil's Elielton de Oliveira in just 33 seconds, marking *India's first medal in this event*.

India's Paralympic Achievements

Total Medals	Gold	Silver	Bronze
56	14	21	21

Since its debut in 1960, India has participated in 12 editions of the Paralympic Games. The Paris 2024 Games mark India's most successful Paralympic performance to date, showcasing the prowess of individual athletes who have brought glory to the nation.

- At the **Paris Paralympics 2024**, Indian athletes achieved historic milestones with **Harvinder Singh** winning the *first-ever gold in men's archery*, **Dharambir** setting an Asian record in the men's Club Throw F51 Final, and **Sachin Sarjerao Khilari** earning silver in men's shot put F46.

Miscellaneous

- ISRO Chairman S. Somanath released **ISRO: Exploring New Frontiers - To The Moon, The Sun & Beyond**, a **book** by The Hindu documenting India's space achievements, including Chandrayaan missions and Mars Orbiter, with insights and photographs.
- **Hayao Miyazaki**, the acclaimed Japanese animator and Studio Ghibli co-founder, has been awarded the **2024 Ramon Magsaysay Award** for his exceptional contributions to animation and storytelling, highlighting his influence on global cultural discourse through films like "Spirited Away" and "My Neighbor Totoro."
- Prime Minister Narendra **Modi** unveiled a **commemorative postage stamp** marking **75 years of the Supreme Court of India** at the District Judges Conference in New Delhi, attended by Chief Justice Dr. D.Y. Chandrachud and Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal.
- **"Chandu Champion"** is based on the true story of **Murlikant Petkar**, a Maharashtra native who, after aspiring to be an Olympic wrestler, joined the army, represented India in boxing, and, following severe war injuries, became a Paralympic swimmer.
- President **Droupadi Murmu** *unveiled* the **new flag and insignia of the Supreme Court of India** at the National Conference of District Judiciary in New Delhi, highlighting the court's cultural and legal heritage.
- The National One Health Mission (NOHM) conducted a comprehensive mock drill called **"Vishanu Yuddh Abhyas"** in **Ajmer, Rajasthan**, from August 27 to 31, 2024, to assess the pandemic preparedness of the National Joint Outbreak Response Team (NJORT) through a simulated zoonotic disease outbreak.
- The **Ministry of Women and Child Development** *received* the **National Award for e-Governance 2024 (Gold)** for its Poshan Tracker, a digital tool under Mission Poshan 2.0 that enables real-time monitoring of children's growth and nutrition.
- **Kuldeep Gupta**'s new book, **"From Oil to Lithium: Navigating the Future of Energy,"** blends personal insight with global energy challenges to inspire sustainable solutions.
- **Siddhartha Aggarwal**, aged 49, from **Bengaluru** has become the *oldest Indian to swim solo across the English Channel*, completing the 42 km swim in 15 hours and six minutes on August 29.

End of Summary

This marks the end of today's summary from *The Hindu*. We trust this has added value to your exam preparation. Keep engaging with current affairs to sharpen your insights and strengthen your knowledge. We'll be back tomorrow with more updates to guide you on your path to success.

Thank you for reading. Stay focused and dedicated!

Understanding current affairs is crucial for **UPSC/State PSC preparation**, as it bridges the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world application, ensuring that candidates are well-informed, relevant, and capable of making insightful analyses on contemporary issues.

Stay Updated

Revisit Earlier Current Affairs for Background Information

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