

Topics - MINDS MAPS included (Daily current affairs 24th December 2024)

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- Mains



By saurabh Pandey



THE HINDU

Target Mains -2025/26 -

Q “Indian bureaucracy steel frame nature will make it less useful in present democratic decentralised and digital era ” Discuss.

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Q. Fishbone structure recently seen in news is associated with which among the following.

(PIB)

A) Bamboo plantation .

B) Mangroves plantation.

C) Coffee plantation.

D) Acacia plantation.

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Cephalopods and their kin are a new animal welfare frontier

It appears that cephalopods as a group may be similar in intelligence to vertebrates as a group. Since many societies have animal welfare standards for mice, rats, chickens, and other vertebrates, logic would suggest that there's a case for regulations enforcing humane treatment of cephalopods.

Rachel Blaser.

Ve named him Spirit – not because he was the smallest of the fin cuttlefish in the pool, but because anyone with the audacity to scoop him into a separate tank to study him was likely to get soaked. Spirit had notoriously accurate aim.

As a comparative psychologist, I'm used to assaults from my experimental subjects. I've been stung by bees, pinched by crayfish, and battered by indignant pigeons. But, somehow, with Spirit it felt different. As he eyed us with his W-shaped pupils, he seemed clearly to be plotting against us.

Of course, I'm being anthropomorphic. Science does not yet have the tools to confirm whether cuttlefish have emotional states or whether they are capable of conscious experience, much less sinister plots. But there's undeniably something special about cephalopods – the class of ocean-dwelling invertebrates that includes cuttlefish, squid, and octopus.

As researchers learn more about cephalopod cognitive skills, there are calls to treat them in ways better aligned with their level of intelligence. California and Washington state both approved bans on octopus farming in 2024. Hawaii is considering similar action, and a ban on farming octopus or importing farmed octopus meat has been introduced in Congress. A planned octopus farm in Spain's Canary Islands is attracting opposition from scientists and animal welfare advocates.

Critics offer many arguments against raising octopuses for food, including possible releases of waste, antibiotics, or pathogens from aquaculture facilities. But as a psychologist, I see intelligence as the most intriguing part of the equation. Just how smart are cephalopods, really? After all, it's legal to farm chickens and cows. Is an octopus smarter than, say, a turkey?

A big, diverse group

Cephalopods are a broad class of molluscs that includes the colorful cuttlefish, octopus, and squid – as well as the chambered nautilus. Calves range in size from adult squid only a few millimetres long (dropping to the lightest living invertebrates, the giant squid (*Mesoproteutha*), which can grow to over 40 feet in length and weigh over 450 kg.

Some of these species live alone in the nearly featureless darkness of the deep ocean; others live socially on active, sunny coral reefs. Many are skilled hunters, but some feed passively on floating debris. Because of their enormous diversity, the size and complexity of cephalopod brains and behaviors also vary tremendously.

Almost everything that's known about cephalopod cognition comes from intensive study of just a few species. When considering the welfare of a designated species of captive octopus, it's important to be careful about using data collected from a distant evolutionary relative.

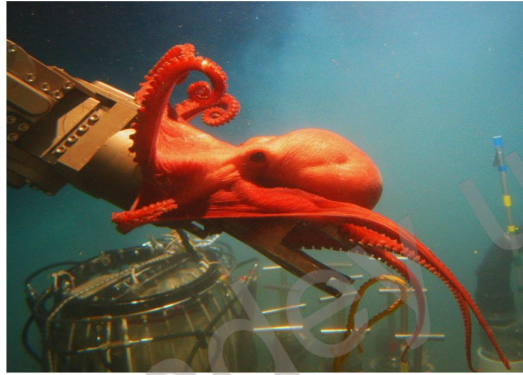
Can we measure alien intelligence?

Intelligence is fondly hard to define and measure, even in humans. The challenge grows exponentially in studying animals with sensory, motivational, and problem-solving skills that differ profoundly from ours.

Historically, researchers have tended to focus on whether animals think like humans, ignoring the abilities that animals may have that humans lack. To avoid this problem, scientists have tried to find more objective measures of cognitive abilities.



A common octopus, ALBERT KOK (CC BY-SA)



A deep-water octopus investigates the pearl penguin-like form of the SLVR submarine (pilot school, US Navy).

One option is a relative measure of brain to body size. The best-studied species of octopus, *Griffinia vulgaris*, has about 500 million neurons; that's relatively large for its small body size and similar to a starling, rabbit, or turkey.

More accurate measures must include the size, neuron count, or surface area of specific brain structures thought to be important for learning. While this is useful in mammals, the nervous system of an octopus is built completely differently.

Over half of the neurons in *Griffinia vulgaris*, about 300 million, are not in the brain at all but distributed in "mini-brains" or ganglia, in the arms. Within the central brain, most of the remaining neurons are dedicated to visual processing, leaving less than a quarter of its neurons for other processes such as learning and memory.

In other species of octopus, the general structure is similar, but complexity varies. Winkles and folds in the brain increase its surface area and may enhance neural connections and communication. Some species of octopus, notably those living in reef habitats, have more wrinkled brains than those living in the deep sea, suggesting that these species may possess a higher degree of intelligence.

Holding out for a better snack

Because brain structure is not a foolproof measure of intelligence, behavioural tests may provide better evidence. One of the highly complex behaviours that many cephalopods show is visual camouflage. They can open and close tiny sacs just below their skin that contain coloured pigments and reflectors, revealing specific colours. *Griffinia vulgaris* has up to 1,500,000 chromatophores, or pigment sacs, in a single square inch of skin.

Like many cephalopods, the common cuttlefish (*Griffinia officinalis*) is thought to be colour-blind. But it can use its excellent vision to produce a dizzying

array of patterns across its body as camouflage. The Australian giant cuttlefish, *Griffinia gigas*, uses its chromatophores to communicate, creating patterns that attract mates and warn of aggressors. This ability can also come in handy for hunting: many cephalopods are ambush predators that blend into the background or even turn their prey.

The hallmark of intelligent behaviour, however, is learning and memory, and there is plenty of evidence that some octopuses and cuttlefish learn in a way that is comparable to learning in vertebrates. The common cuttlefish (*Griffinia officinalis*), as well as the common octopus (*Griffinia vulgaris*) and the day octopus (*Griffinia cuvieri*), can all form simple associations, such as learning which image on a screen predicts that food will appear.

Some cephalopods may be capable of more complicated forms of learning, such as reversal learning – learning to flexibly adjust behaviour when different stimuli signal reward. They may also be able to inhibit impulsive responses. In a 2021 study that gave common cuttlefish a choice between a less desirable but immediate snack of crab and a preferred meal of live shrimp after a delay, many of the cuttlefish chose to wait for the shrimp.

A new frontier for animal welfare

Considering what's known about the brain structures, sensory systems, and learning capacities, it appears that cephalopods as a group may be similar in intelligence to vertebrates as a group. Since many societies have animal welfare standards for mice, rats, chickens, and other vertebrates, logic would suggest that there's a case for regulations enforcing humane treatment of cephalopods.

Such rules generally specify that when a species is held in captivity, its housing

Cephalopods are capable of visual camouflage. They use tiny sacs just below their skin that contain coloured pigments and reflectors, revealing specific colours. *Griffinia vulgaris* has up to 1,500,000 chromatophores in a single square inch of skin.

conditions should support the animal's welfare and natural behaviour. This view has led some U.S. states to outlaw confined cages for egg-laying hens and crates too narrow for pregnant sows to turn around.

Animal welfare regulations say little about invertebrates, but guidelines for the care and use of captive cephalopods have started to appear over the past decade. In 2010, the European Union required considering ethical issues when using cephalopods for research. And in 2015, AAALAC International, an international accreditation organisation for ethical animal research, and the Federation of European Laboratory Animal Science Associations promoted guidelines for the care and use of cephalopods in research. The U.S. National Institutes of Health is currently considering similar guidelines.

The "alien" minds of octopuses and their relatives are fascinating, not the least because they provide a mirror through which we can reflect on more familiar forms of intelligence. Deciding which species deserve moral consideration requires selecting criteria, such as neurons count or learning capacity, to which thresholds for these criteria are set. It may be well to also consider how they apply to the rodents, birds, and fish that occupy more familiar roles in our


(Rachel Blaser is professor of psychology and behaviour at the University of San Diego. This article is published from The Conversation.)




A common cuttlefish (Griffinia officinalis) in Portugal's Arrábida Natural Park. (CC BY-SA)

Topic → Cephalopod Insights


Cephalopod Classification

 Cephalopod Classification: Cephalopods are a diverse class of molluscs that includes coleoids (cuttlefish, octopus, squid) and the chambered nautilus.


Size Range

 Size Range: Coleoids vary significantly in size, from tiny adult squid (*Idiosepius*) to the giant squid (*Architeuthis*) and colossal squid (*Mesonychoteuthis*), which can exceed 40 feet in length and weigh over 450 kg.

Habitat Diversity

 Habitat Diversity: Some cephalopods inhabit the dark depths of the ocean alone, while others thrive socially in vibrant coral reef environments.

Feeding Strategies

 Feeding Strategies: Cephalopods exhibit a range of feeding behaviors, from skilled hunting to passive feeding on floating debris.



- The class now contains two, only distantly related, **extant** subclasses: **Coleoidea**, which includes **octopuses**, **squid**, and **cuttlefish**; and **Nautiloidea**, represented by ***Nautilus*** and ***Allonautilus***.
- In the Coleoidea, the molluscan shell has been internalized or is absent, whereas in the Nautiloidea, the external shell remains.
- About 800 living **species** of cephalopods have been identified. Two important extinct **taxa** are the **Ammonoidea** (ammonites) and **Belemnoida** (belemnites).

Behavioral Complexity



Behavioral Complexity: The diversity of cephalopods leads to significant variations in brain size, complexity, and behavior.

Welfare Considerations



Welfare Considerations: When assessing the welfare of captive octopuses, it is crucial to avoid relying on data from unrelated evolutionary species.

Summary: Cephalopods are a diverse group of molluscs with varying sizes, habitats, feeding strategies, and cognitive abilities, necessitating careful consideration in research and welfare assessments.

India's 'steel frame' does need a check

India's governance challenges demand urgent reforms to modernise its bureaucracy. The country's economic story, which is marked by significant strides in growth and innovation, is juxtaposed with enduring issues of income inequality, underinvestment in critical sectors, and bureaucratic inefficiency. Central to this narrative is the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), which has for long held sway over the nation's governance. However, persistent challenges within the IAS and the wider bureaucracy have highlighted the urgent need for administrative reforms to unlock India's true economic potential.

The legacy and challenges of the IAS

The IAS, often called India's "steel frame", traces its origins to the colonial Indian Civil Service (ICS). Post-Independence, it became the backbone of India's administrative machinery, with officers occupying pivotal roles in governance. Yet, this legacy has not been without its cracks. Political interference, lack of specialisation, and outdated personnel practices have gradually eroded its effectiveness.

One of the pressing issues is the politicisation of the IAS. Frequent transfers, suspensions, and promotions influenced by political loyalty rather than merit, have undermined morale and professionalism. Officers often struggle to develop domain expertise due to frequent rotations across departments, preventing them from becoming effective policy specialists in an increasingly complex governance landscape.

Corruption and inefficiency plague the bureaucracy further. According to the World Bank's measure of government effectiveness, India ranks only moderately, reflecting the poor quality of policy implementation and administrative independence. Without reform, these systemic inefficiencies threaten to stymie India's economic growth and governance objectives.

Executive-led governance in India, characterised by centralised decision-making, has yielded mixed results. While it has facilitated rapid economic reforms and infrastructure development, it has also led to bottlenecks in policy implementation and a lack of accountability. The centralised power structure often sidelines bureaucrats' insights and expertise, reducing their ability to act as effective policy executors.

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, the government has attempted to address some of these shortcomings by curbing politicised transfers and introducing measures to



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Persistent
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enhance bureaucratic accountability. However, critics argue that centralising power in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) risks undermining the autonomy of senior bureaucrats, leading to further disempowerment of the IAS.

The need for administrative reforms in India is not new. Since Independence, over 50 commissions and committees have been tasked with reimagining the country's administrative apparatus. The First Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC) in 1966 and subsequent commissions, have consistently emphasised the need for specialisation, accountability, and merit-based promotions within the bureaucracy.

The Second ARC, set up in 2005, laid out a blueprint for administrative reforms. It included recommendations for lowering the permissible age of entry into the civil services, introducing performance-based promotions and lateral entry, and establishing safeguards against arbitrary transfers. However, many of these recommendations remain unimplemented, stalled by bureaucratic inertia and political resistance.

Government's push for reform

Recognising the limitations of the IAS-centric administrative model, the Modi government has sought to diversify governance by introducing lateral entry into senior bureaucratic positions. This move is aimed at bringing domain experts from the private sector and other government services into key policymaking roles, infusing fresh perspectives and specialised knowledge.

Since 2018, the central government has pursued lateral recruitment to bring individuals with specialised knowledge and domain expertise into specific assignments. By 2023, this initiative saw the appointment of 57 officers, many of whom were drawn from the private sector, reflecting a deliberate effort to infuse fresh talent and perspectives into governance. The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) recently advertised 45 posts for lateral entry, including positions for Joint Secretaries and Directors across various ministries. This shift has disrupted the IAS's traditional dominance, with only 33% of Joint Secretaries at the Centre now belonging to the IAS, compared to near-total dominance a decade ago.

However, the lateral entry initiative has faced resistance. Critics, including retired civil servants, argue that it could undermine incumbent morale and distort promotion incentives. Opposition parties have also voiced concern about the lack of reservation provisions for marginalised groups in these appointments. The Modi government's recent U-turn on lateral entry appointments,

reportedly due to political pressure from political allies, underscores the contentious nature of this reform.

The U.S.'s proposed Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), under U.S. President-elect Donald Trump, offers an intriguing model for reforming India's administrative apparatus. DOGE aims to streamline government operations, reduce inefficiency, and eliminate redundant agencies, all while leveraging the expertise of leaders such as Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy.

DOGE's focus on cutting wasteful expenditures and introducing accountability mechanisms resonates with the challenges faced by the Indian bureaucracy. A similar advisory body in India could help identify inefficiencies within the civil service, promote data-driven decision-making, and develop metrics to assess bureaucratic performance. A time-bound commission, such as the DOGE's expiration date tied to the U.S. semi-quintennial, could also ensure that reform initiatives remain focused and actionable.

Challenges to reform

Reforming India's bureaucracy is no small task. Despite its flaws, the IAS remains deeply entrenched in the country's governance structure. Proposals for lateral entry, performance-based promotions, and specialised training often face resistance from within the service, where seniority-based progression and generalist approaches are deeply institutionalised. Political interference further complicates reform efforts. Proposals such as the Civil Services Standards, Performance, and Accountability Bill (2010), which sought to protect bureaucrats from arbitrary transfers, have languished in legislative limbo. Even judicial interventions, such as the Supreme Court of India's directive to establish civil services boards in 2013, have had limited impact due to lack of enforcement.

A multifaceted approach to administrative reform is vital to address the challenges of India's bureaucracy. Recruitment must prioritise merit and domain expertise, with promotions tied to measurable performance rather than seniority. Protecting bureaucrats from politically motivated transfers and fostering specialisation in policymaking roles would enhance accountability and efficiency. Further, the government should invest in a robust data infrastructure to track bureaucratic performance, enabling informed decisions on placements, promotions, and policy implementation. Reform is essential for India's economic aspirations and ensuring governance effectively serves its people.

Topic → India's Steel frame



Introduction

India is a land of contrasts, where rapid economic growth and innovation coexist with deep-rooted issues like income inequality and bureaucratic inefficiency.

At the heart of this paradox lies the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), a body that has long been the backbone of governance in the country.

However, the persistent challenges within the IAS and the broader bureaucracy highlight an urgent need for reforms to unlock India's true economic potential.

saurabh pandey upsc

The Legacy and Challenges of the IAS

Historical Context of the IAS

The IAS, often referred to as India's "steel frame," has its roots in the colonial Indian Civil Service (ICS).

After Independence, it became the cornerstone of India's administrative framework, with officers playing crucial roles in governance.

However, this legacy is marred by significant challenges that have emerged over the years.

Current Issues Facing the IAS

Politicisation of the IAS

One of the most pressing issues is the politicisation of the IAS. Frequent transfers and promotions based on political loyalty rather than merit have eroded morale and professionalism. This constant rotation prevents officers from developing domain expertise, which is essential in today's complex governance landscape.

Corruption and Inefficiency

Corruption and inefficiency further plague the bureaucracy. According to the World Bank, India ranks only moderately in government effectiveness, indicating poor policy implementation and a lack of administrative independence. Without reform, these systemic issues threaten to stifle India's economic growth and governance objectives.

The Role of Executive-Led Governance

Centralised Decision-Making

Executive-led governance in India, characterised by centralised decision-making, has produced mixed results. While it has facilitated rapid economic reforms, it has also created bottlenecks in policy implementation and accountability. The centralised structure often sidelines bureaucratic insights, limiting their effectiveness as policy executors.

Impact on Bureaucratic Effectiveness

The concentration of power in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has raised concerns about the autonomy of senior bureaucrats. Critics argue that this centralisation undermines the IAS, further disempowering it in the governance process.

Recent Government Initiatives

Lateral Entry into Bureaucracy

Recognising the limitations of an IAS-centric model, the Modi government has introduced lateral entry into senior bureaucratic positions. This initiative aims to bring in domain experts from the private sector and other government services, infusing fresh perspectives into policymaking.

Successes and Challenges

Since 2018, the government has appointed 57 officers through lateral recruitment, disrupting the IAS's traditional dominance. However, this initiative has faced resistance, with critics arguing it could undermine morale and distort promotion incentives. The lack of reservation provisions for marginalised groups has also raised concerns.

Learning from Global Models

The U.S. Department of Government Efficiency

The proposed U.S. Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) offers an intriguing model for reforming India's administrative apparatus. DOGE aims to streamline operations and reduce inefficiency while leveraging expertise from various sectors. A similar advisory body in India could help identify bureaucratic inefficiencies and promote data-driven decision-making.

Challenges to Reform

Resistance within the Bureaucracy

Reforming India's bureaucracy is no small feat. Despite its flaws, the IAS remains entrenched in the governance structure. Proposals for lateral entry and performance-based promotions often face resistance from within, where seniority-based progression is the norm.

Political Interference

Political interference complicates reform efforts. Proposals like the Civil Services Standards, Performance, and Accountability Bill (2010) have languished in legislative limbo, and judicial interventions have had limited impact due to lack of enforcement.

A Multifaceted Approach to Reform

Prioritising Merit and Specialisation

A multifaceted approach is essential for addressing the challenges of India's bureaucracy. Recruitment should prioritise merit and domain expertise, with promotions tied to measurable performance rather than seniority.

Investing in Data Infrastructure

Additionally, the government should invest in robust data infrastructure to track bureaucratic performance, enabling informed decisions on placements and policy implementation. Reform is crucial for India's economic aspirations and ensuring governance effectively serves its people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, India's governance challenges are significant, but they are not insurmountable. By modernising its bureaucracy through urgent reforms, the country can unlock its true economic potential and create a more effective governance structure that serves all its citizens.

The GATT-ification of the World Trade Organization

The Geneva-based World Trade Organization (WTO), which serves as a multilateral trade referee, is set to miss yet another crucial target of revitalising “a full and well-functioning dispute settlement system” by the end of 2024. It has been five years since the Appellate Body (AB), the second tier of the WTO’s two-tier dispute settlement system, has been non-operational due to the persistent blocking, by the United States, of the appointment of the Appellate Body members.

This obstruction began during Barack Obama’s administration, escalated under Donald Trump’s first presidency, and has continued under President Joe Biden, reflecting a bipartisan political consensus in the U.S. The U.S.’s hostile stance towards the Appellate Body will intensify further under what is anticipated to be a highly protectionist Trump 2.0 administration. While the WTO panels, the first stage of dispute settlement, continue to operate and render decisions resolving trade disputes between WTO member countries, this is of little significance because the losing country uses its legal prerogative to appeal to a non-operational AB, and thus stall the adjudicatory process. However, it is a fool’s errand to put the Appellate Body back on track because the real issue is the WTO’s existential crisis and its quest to be a relevant player in global trade. The larger game is not about killing the Appellate Body but, rather, making the WTO dysfunctional.

The promise

To understand the future, it is important to first reflect on the past. The establishment of the WTO in 1995 marked a milestone in international law. The rise of neoliberal ideology in the 1990s played a critical role in this development. The WTO established a comprehensive system of



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The legal
revolution of
international
trade
multilateralism
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reversed

rules governing trade in goods, services, and intellectual property, along with a binding two-tier dispute settlement system featuring an appellate function, compulsory jurisdiction, and effective retaliation for non-compliance. The WTO’s promise of international rule of law was so compelling that it could not be matched even by the International Court of Justice. Scholars in international law began to regard the WTO as a constitutionalism project that would ensure the triumph of international law over international politics.

As the international trading community witnessed the transition from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) era that held sway from 1948 to 1994 to the WTO, it marked a shift from diplomacy-based trade multilateralism to a rule-based system. Celso Lafer, a former Chairman of the WTO’s dispute settlement body, described the creation of the WTO as the “thickening of legality” in international trade relations. Put differently, countries were willing to accept several restrictions on their state conduct and subject themselves to the binding jurisdiction of the WTO’s dispute settlement system including the Appellate Body.

The unravelling

However, things began to unravel as the global landscape changed due to China’s significant rise over the last two decades. The U.S. facilitated China’s accession to the WTO in 2001, hoping this would lead Beijing to dismantle its state-led industrial policies which were detrimental to international trade, and adopt free-market principles. However, this expectation did not materialise. There is a widespread belief in the U.S. that China exploited the WTO system to its advantage. The WTO and its institutional controls

hinder the U.S. from dealing decisively with China. As a result, the U.S. aims, in the words of international lawyer Daniel C.K. Chow, to “wreck” the WTO system, including the Appellate Body, which would provide it with a free hand to address the perceived Chinese threat. The U.S. can now employ trade remedial measures and develop industrial policies to counter the Chinese challenge, even if these actions violate WTO law, as there is no one to call it out. A classic example of this is the Trump administration’s decision in 2018 to impose a 25% tariff on Chinese products across various sectors. Mr. Trump’s promise to impose further tariffs during his second term, which could trigger another round of trade war, indicates that international politics, rather than international law, will dictate international trade.

Regime change

This has led international lawyers such as Geraldo Vidigal to argue that there is no longer a crisis in the WTO but a regime change. As against the thickening of the legality of international trade relations that we saw from a period of 1995 to 2019, we are witnessing its thinning. In other words, while there is no complete de-legalisation of international trade relations, countries are reclaiming significant control that was previously ceded to the WTO in managing their state conduct. The legal revolution of international trade multilateralism that began in 1995 has not only been paused but is being reversed, moving us back to the era of GATT diplomacy. Understanding this “GATTification” of the WTO, as Prof. Vidigal puts it, is crucial for grasping the current state of the international trading order. No amount of technical negotiations in Geneva can obscure this fact.

Topic → The WTO's Dispute Settlement Crisis

Introduction

The World Trade Organization (WTO), based in Geneva, is facing a significant challenge as it is set to miss yet another crucial target for revitalizing its dispute settlement system by the end of 2024. This situation has been brewing for five long years, primarily due to the persistent blocking of the Appellate Body (AB) by the United States. So, what does this mean for global trade?

The Role of the WTO

A Multilateral Trade Referee

The WTO serves as a multilateral trade referee, ensuring that trade flows as smoothly and predictably as possible. It provides a platform for negotiating trade agreements and resolving disputes between member countries. However, the effectiveness of this system is now in jeopardy.

The Appellate Body's Non-Operational Status

A Five-Year Standstill

For five years, the Appellate Body, which acts as the second tier in the WTO's two-tier dispute settlement system, has been non-operational. This is largely due to the U.S. blocking the appointment of new members. The implications of this are profound, as it stalls the adjudicatory process and leaves countries in limbo.

U.S. Political Dynamics

The Obama Era to Biden Administration

The obstruction began during Barack Obama's administration, escalated under Donald Trump, and has continued under President Joe Biden. This bipartisan consensus reflects a significant shift in U.S. trade policy, with a growing hostility towards the Appellate Body.

The Implications of a Dysfunctional WTO

The Stalling of Trade Disputes

While WTO panels continue to operate and resolve disputes, the losing country can appeal to a non-operational Appellate Body, effectively stalling the process. This situation raises questions about the WTO's relevance in global trade.

The Historical Context

The Promise of the WTO

To understand the current crisis, we must reflect on the WTO's establishment in 1995. It was a milestone in international law, promising a comprehensive system of rules governing trade. The WTO was seen as a beacon of international rule of law, even outshining the International Court of Justice.

Transition from GATT to WTO

The transition from the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) to the WTO marked a significant shift from diplomacy-based trade to a rule-based system. Countries willingly accepted restrictions on their state conduct, subjecting themselves to the WTO's jurisdiction.

The Unraveling of WTO's Effectiveness

The Rise of China

However, the global landscape began to change with China's significant rise over the last two decades. The U.S. had hoped that China's accession to the WTO in 2001 would lead to the dismantling of its state-led industrial policies. Unfortunately, this expectation did not materialize.

U.S. Perception of China

Many in the U.S. believe that China has exploited the WTO system to its advantage, leading to a desire to "wreck" the WTO system to address the perceived Chinese threat.

The U.S. Strategy

Wrecking the WTO System

The U.S. can now employ trade remedial measures and develop industrial policies to counter the Chinese challenge, even if these actions violate WTO law. This shift indicates that international politics, rather than international law, will dictate trade.

The Concept of Regime Change

Thinning of Legality

International lawyers argue that we are witnessing a regime change rather than a mere crisis in the WTO. The legal revolution of international trade that began in 1995 is being reversed, moving us back to the era of GATT diplomacy.

The Future of International Trade

GATTification of the WTO

Understanding this "GATTification" of the WTO is crucial for grasping the current state of international trade. No amount of technical negotiations in Geneva can obscure this fact.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the WTO is at a crossroads. The ongoing dysfunction of the Appellate Body and the shifting dynamics of international trade raise serious questions about the future of global trade governance. As countries reclaim control over their trade policies, the promise of a rule-based international trading system hangs in the balance.

India's reliance on China for critical minerals

Does China have unparalleled dominance in the critical minerals sector? How was it able to do so? What are the minerals for which India is heavily dependent on China? Why has India not been able to excavate the lithium reserves found in Jammu and Kashmir?

EXPLAINER

Rakshith Shetty

The story so far:

The Ministry of Mines in 2023 identified 30 critical minerals deemed essential for the nation's economic development and national security. While the report highlighted India's complete import dependency for 10 critical minerals, it did not fully address a more pressing concern – the extent and nature of dependency on China.

Is China a dominant player?

China's unparalleled dominance in critical minerals stems from its vast resource base and strategic investments across the value chain. As the world's largest mining nation, China has discovered 173 types of minerals, including 13 energy minerals, 59 metallic minerals, and 95 non-metallic minerals. Reserves of nearly 40% of these minerals, particularly copper, lead, zinc, nickel, cobalt, lithium, gallium, germanium, and crystalline graphite, increased significantly last year, supported by an exploration investment of \$19.4 billion. This led to the discovery of 132 new mineral deposits, including 34 large ones. China's dominance extends beyond reserves to include processing and refining, with control over 87% of rare earth processing, 58% of lithium refining, and 68% of silicon processing. Furthermore, China has strategically invested in overseas mining projects and built unparalleled midstream refining capabilities, raising supply chain vulnerabilities for countries including India, the U.S., and EU nations.

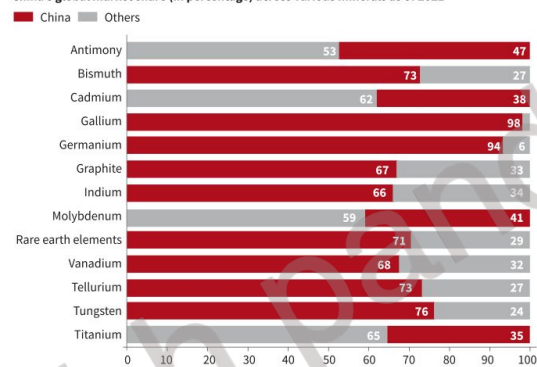
What about China's export controls?

When it comes to China's approach to weaponising critical mineral exports, it is strategic and calculated. Beijing primarily targets minerals deemed critical by Western nations and their allies, especially those essential for

China, a leading player in critical minerals

China's dominance in critical minerals stems from its vast resource base and strategic investments across the value chain. As the world's largest mining nation, China has discovered 173 types of minerals

China's global market share (in percentage) across various minerals as of 2022



semiconductors, batteries, and high-tech manufacturing. However, China carefully balances these decisions against two constraining factors: it avoids controlling minerals which heavily depend on Western raw material imports, and it refrains from actions that could disrupt its domestic industrial enterprises or export-dependent sectors. This strategic calculus was evident in China's 2010 rare earth embargo against Japan, its recent restrictions on antimony, gallium, and germanium exports, and its December 2023 ban on rare earth extraction and processing technologies.

Is India dependent on China?

An in-depth examination of import data of 30 critical minerals spanning 2019 to 2024 reveals India's acute vulnerability to Chinese supplies, particularly for six critical minerals where dependency

exceeds 40%: bismuth (85.6%), lithium (82%), silicon (76%), titanium (50.6%), tellurium (48.8%), and graphite (42.4%). Bismuth, primarily used in pharmaceuticals and chemicals, has few alternative sources, with China maintaining an estimated 80% of global refinery production. Lithium, crucial for EV batteries and energy storage, faces processing bottlenecks, despite alternative raw material sources, as China controls 58% of global refining. Silicon, vital for semiconductors and solar panels, requires sophisticated processing technology that few countries possess. Titanium, essential for aerospace and defence applications, has diversified sources but involves high switching costs. Tellurium, important for solar power and thermoelectric devices, is dominated by China's 60% global production share and finally graphite, indispensable for EV

batteries and steel production, faces supply constraints as China controls 67.2% of global output, including battery-grade material.

Why does India rely on imports?

Despite being endowed with significant mineral resources, India's heavy reliance on imports stem from several structural challenges in its mining and processing ecosystem. Many critical minerals are deep-seated, requiring high-risk investments in exploration and mining technologies – a factor that has deterred private sector participation in the absence of adequate incentives and policy support. The country's processing capabilities are also limited. This is particularly evident in the case of the recently discovered lithium deposits in Jammu and Kashmir, where despite the presence of 5.9 million tonnes of resources in clay deposits, India lacks the technological capability to extract lithium from such geological formations.

What is the way forward?

India has initiated a multi-pronged approach to reduce its dependency on China. The government has established KABIL, a joint venture of three State-owned companies, to secure overseas mineral assets. India has also joined strategic initiatives like the Minerals Security Partnership and the Critical Raw Materials Club to diversify its supply sources and strengthen partnerships. The country is also investing in research through institutions like the Geological Survey of India and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research while promoting recycling and circular economy practices to reduce virgin mineral dependency. Production-linked incentives for extracting critical minerals through recycling also seem promising. However, transitioning away from China will require sustained investment and long-term commitment to these various initiatives.

The writer is a research analyst at The Takshashila Institution.

THE GIST

China's dominance extends beyond reserves to include processing and refining, with control over 87% of rare earth processing, 58% of lithium refining, and 68% of silicon processing.

An in-depth examination of import data of 30 critical minerals spanning 2019 to 2024 reveals India's acute vulnerability to Chinese supplies, particularly for six critical minerals where dependency exceeds 40%.

Despite being endowed with significant mineral resources, India's heavy reliance on imports stem from several structural challenges in its mining and processing ecosystem.

Topic → India and critical minerals



Introduction

The significance of critical minerals for a nation's economic development and security cannot be overstated. In 2023, the Ministry of Mines in India identified 30 critical minerals that are essential for the country's growth. Alarmingly, India is completely dependent on imports for 10 of these minerals, raising concerns about national security and economic stability. However, the most pressing issue is the extent of India's dependency on China, the dominant player in the critical minerals market.

China's Dominance in Critical Minerals

China exhibits an unparalleled grip on the global critical minerals landscape, thanks to its extensive resource base and strategic investments. Here are some salient points:

Enormous Resource Base: As the world's largest mining nation, China has discovered 173 types of minerals. This includes:

- 13 energy minerals

- 59 metallic minerals

- 95 non-metallic minerals

Significant Reserves: China controls nearly 40% of global reserves of essential minerals such as copper, lead, zinc, nickel, cobalt, lithium, gallium, germanium, and crystalline graphite.

Investment in Exploration: An investment of \$19.4 billion in exploration has led to the discovery of 132 new mineral deposits, including 34 large ones.

Processing Power: China dominates mineral processing, controlling:

- 87% of rare earth processing

- 58% of lithium refining

- 68% of silicon processing

Strategic Overseas Investments: By investing in overseas mining projects, China has fortified its position in the global minerals supply chain.

China's prowess in critical minerals is not just about reserves; it extends to processing and refining capabilities, creating supply chain vulnerabilities for countries like India.

India's Dependency on China



An analysis of India's import data reveals an acute vulnerability to Chinese supplies. For six critical minerals, the dependency exceeds 40%:

Bismuth: 85.6% dependency; primarily used in pharmaceuticals.

Lithium: 82% dependency; crucial for electric vehicle batteries.

Silicon: 76% dependency; essential for semiconductors.

Titanium: 50.6% dependency; vital in aerospace.

Tellurium: 48.8% dependency; important for solar power.

Graphite: 42.4% dependency; indispensable for EV batteries.

The implications of this dependency are profound, as India faces significant challenges in diversifying its supply sources.

Challenges in India's Mineral Sector



Despite being resource-rich, India's reliance on imports is attributed to several structural challenges:

Deep-Seated Minerals: Many critical minerals are located deep underground, necessitating high-risk investments in exploration and mining technologies.

Limited Processing Capabilities: A stark example is India's inability to exploit newly discovered lithium deposits in Jammu and Kashmir, which contain 5.9 million tonnes of resources but lack the technology for extraction.

Private Sector Participation: The absence of adequate incentives and policy support has deterred private sector investment in the mining ecosystem.

Strategic Moves to Mitigate Dependency



India is embarking on a multi-faceted strategy to reduce its reliance on China, including:

KABIL Initiative: The establishment of KABIL, a joint venture of three state-owned companies aimed at securing overseas mineral assets.

Global Partnerships: Joining initiatives like the Minerals Security Partnership and the Critical Raw Materials Club to diversify supply sources.

Research Investments: Investing in research through the Geological Survey of India and promoting recycling practices to minimize dependency on virgin minerals.

Incentives for Recycling: Implementing production-linked incentives for extracting critical minerals through recycling, which shows promise for a sustainable future.

Why has the MHA reimposed restrictions in three NE States?

What is the protected area regime? What did the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958 stipulate? Did the ethnic violence in Manipur lead to imposing restrictions on movement and mobility?

Vijaita Singh

The story so far:

In December 17, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reimposed the Protected Area Regime (PAR) in the States of Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram to restrict and monitor the movement of foreigners. From now on, foreigners visiting the three States would have to seek prior permission and Protected Area Permits (PAP) from the government. The circular stated that the relaxation provided to the three States under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order, 1958 was being withdrawn with immediate effect.

What does the 1958 Order entail?

The Order stated that no foreigner shall enter into or remain in any protected area except under and in accordance with a

permit issued by the Central government or any office authorised by the Central government. The permit shall include the following details – place of entry, place of residence and period of stay. The areas falling between the inner line and the international Border of the following States and Union Territories were declared as Protected Areas – parts of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand and the whole of Manipur, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Sikkim (partly as protected areas and partly as restricted areas). Another Order in 1963 declared entire Andaman & Nicobar Islands and parts of Sikkim as “restricted area.”

When was the Order first relaxed?

The PAR was relaxed for the whole of Manipur, Mizoram and Nagaland on December 30, 2010 in wake of an improved security scenario, and to

promote tourism. The relaxation was initially for a period of one year. It was subsequently extended for a duration of 1-2 years till 2022 when it was further relaxed for another five years till December 31, 2027. On December 17, the relaxation was withdrawn for the States.

Why was it withdrawn?

A copy of the circular accessed by *The Hindu* said that the matter was examined by the Ministry in “the backdrop of growing security concerns in border areas of these States.” Manipur, bordering Myanmar has been affected by ethnic violence between the tribal Kuki-Zo and the Meitei people since May 3, 2023. Chief Minister N. Biren Singh has attributed the ongoing violence in the State to “outsiders and foreign hands.”

After a military coup in Myanmar in February 2021, there was an influx of undocumented migrants – over 40,000

refugees took shelter in Mizoram and around 4,000 refugees are said to have entered Manipur. The migrants belonging to the Kuki-Chin-Zo ethnic group share ethnic ties with the communities in Mizoram and Manipur. India shares a 1,643 km long border with Myanmar which passes through the States of Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram, The Free Movement Regime (FMR) between the two countries, allowing movement of people living within 16 kms of the international border, was suspended by the MHA in January.

How does one obtain a PAP?

The permits can be secured from Indian missions, the MHA, district magistrates, resident commissioners of a State, Home Commissioners or Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO) among others.

Like earlier, citizens of Afghanistan, China, Pakistan and foreign nationals having their origin in the three countries would continue to require prior approval from the MHA. All foreigners visiting these States will mandatorily register themselves with the Foreigners Registration Officer of the State or the District they visit within 24 hours of their arrival. Myanmar nationals visiting the three States, who till now were excluded from the requirement of obtaining a PAP if they had an e-tourist visa or any other visa, should compulsorily register with the FRRO within 24 hours of their arrival.

THE GIST

On December 17, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) reimposed the Protected Area Regime (PAR) in the States of Manipur, Nagaland, and Mizoram to restrict and monitor the movement of foreigners.

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From now on, foreigners visiting the three States would have to seek prior permission and Protected Area Permits (PAP) from the government.

Topic → Reimposition of the Protected Area Regime in Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland: What You Need to Know.

Introduction

The Indian government has once again tightened its grip on foreign visitors in the northeastern states of Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland by reinstating the Protected Area Regime (PAR) on December 17, 2023.

This drastic shift comes amid increasing security concerns and ethnic tensions, making it imperative for potential visitors to understand the implications of this decision.

Historical Context of the Protected Area Regime

The Protected Area Regime was initially established under the Foreigners (Protected Areas) Order of 1958. This legislation mandated that no foreigner could enter or remain in designated protected areas without a permit from the Central government. Key aspects of the order include:

Permit Requirements: Foreigners must obtain a permit detailing their place of entry, residence, and duration of stay.

Geographical Scope: The regime covered several regions, including parts of Himachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, and the entirety of Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland.

The regime was relaxed in 2010, allowing freer movement to promote tourism, but recent developments have necessitated a re-evaluation of this policy.

Reasons for the Reimposition

The recent resurgence of violence in Manipur—particularly ethnic clashes between the Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities—has been a pivotal factor in the reimposition of the PAR. Contributing factors include:

Growing Security Concerns: The MHA's circular cited rising tensions and safety issues as primary reasons for the restrictions.

Impact of the Myanmar Crisis: The influx of refugees from Myanmar, following the military coup in February 2021, has exacerbated tensions in the region, leading to increased scrutiny of foreign presence.

The Chief Minister of Manipur, N. Biren Singh, has publicly attributed the ongoing violence to "outsiders and foreign hands," highlighting the political implications of foreign visits.

Obtaining a Protected Area Permit (PAP)

For foreign tourists wishing to visit these states, obtaining a Protected Area Permit is essential. Here's how to navigate the process:

Where to Apply: Permits can be secured from Indian missions abroad, the MHA, district magistrates, or the Foreigners Regional Registration Office (FRRO).

Who Needs a PAP: Citizens from Afghanistan, China, and Pakistan, as well as foreign nationals with origins in these countries, will continue to require prior approval from the MHA.

Registration Requirement: Upon arrival, all foreigners must register with the local Foreigners Registration Officer within 24 hours.

This process ensures that the government can monitor foreign visitors and maintain security in sensitive areas

Conclusion

The reimposition of the Protected Area Regime in Manipur, Mizoram, and Nagaland highlights the delicate balance between security and tourism in the region. As tensions continue to rise, foreigners must stay informed about the regulations that govern their travel plans.

'MFN not to hit India-EFTA pact'

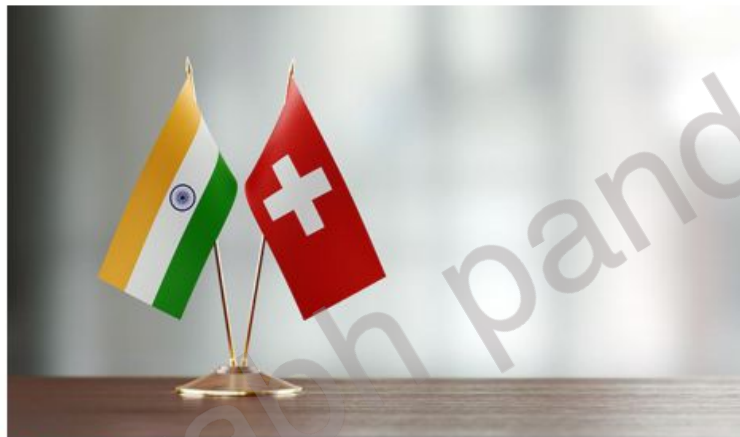
The Switzerland government's decision to suspend the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status will not delay ratification and implementation of the four-nation EFTA-India Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA)

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

The Swiss decision to suspend the most favoured nation clause in the Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement will not delay the ratification and implementation of the already signed trade agreement between India and the EFTA bloc, Switzerland has said.

The Swiss government has suspended the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status, which could potentially impact Swiss investments in India and lead to higher taxes on Indian companies operating in



On track: MFN decision does not negatively hit investments from Switzerland to India, the Swiss government said. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

the European nation.

India and the four-nation European Free Trade Association (EFTA) signed the pact, officially dubbed as TEPA (Trade and Eco-

nomic Partnership Agreement), in March. Its members are Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

The agreement is yet to

be implemented.

"No, the decision will not delay the ratification and implementation of EFTA-India TEPA," the Embassy of Switzerland in India said in a response to PTI queries on the matter.

The decision does not negatively hit investments from Switzerland to India.

"The current suspension from the Swiss side of the application of the MFN clause under the protocol to double taxation agreement between Switzerland and India does neither affect trade ties between the two countries nor Swiss investments in India," it said.

India and the four-na-

tion European bloc signed a free trade agreement under which New Delhi received an investment commitment of \$100 billion in 15 years from the grouping while allowing several products like Swiss watches, chocolates and cut and polished diamonds at lower or zero duties.

In 2023-24, India's imports from Switzerland stood at \$21.24 billion against \$1.52 billion exports, leading to a huge trade deficit of \$19.72 billion. India got about \$10.72 billion in foreign direct investments from Switzerland between April 2000 and September 2024.


Topic → Switzerland and EFTA-India Trade Agreement Overview


Key Developments in the EFTA-India Trade Agreement


🇨🇭 Suspension of MFN Clause: Switzerland has temporarily suspended the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) clause in its Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement. This decision will not hinder the ratification of the EFTA-India trade agreement.


🤝 TEPA Signing: The Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) was signed in March between India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which includes Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland.

📈 Impact on Investments: The Swiss government assures that the suspension of the MFN status will not adversely affect Swiss investments in India or the trade relations between the two nations.

 Investment Commitment: India is projected to receive a \$100 billion investment commitment from the EFTA over the next 15 years as part of the trade agreement.

 Trade Balance: In the fiscal year 2023-24, India's imports from Switzerland amounted to \$21.24 billion, while exports were only \$1.52 billion, leading to a trade deficit of \$19.72 billion.

 Foreign Direct Investment: From April 2000 to September 2023, India received approximately \$10.72 billion in foreign direct investments from Switzerland.

 Tariff Reductions: The trade agreement facilitates lower or zero duties on several Swiss products, including watches, chocolates, and cut and polished diamonds.

Summary: Switzerland's suspension of the MFN clause will not impact the EFTA-India trade agreement, which is set to bring substantial investment and trade advantages.

Bangladesh anti-graft panel to probe Russia-backed Rooppur nuclear project

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

An anti-corruption outfit in Bangladesh has initiated an investigation into the \$12.65 billion Rooppur nuclear powerplant that is being constructed with Russian assistance. A statement from the Anti-Corruption Commission of Bangladesh has alleged that around \$5 billion financial irregularities have been discovered in the project that has been progressing for more than a decade.

‘\$5 billion’

The Anti-Corruption Commission said in its statement that “Bangladesh’s ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, her son Sajeeb Ahmed Wazed Joy and niece Tulip Siddiq – who have embezzled \$5 billion



The Rooppur nuclear power plant is located 160 km from Dhaka and is one of the largest nuclear projects built by Russia. FILE PHOTO

from overpriced \$12.65 billion Rooppur nuclear power plant through various offshore bank accounts in Malaysia”.

The commission further said that Tulip Siddiq who is a Labour MP in the United Kingdom and has been facing scrutiny in the U.K. since the fall of the government of her aunt Sheikh

Hasina was involved in an elaborate scheme to launder money that involved her paternal uncle Tarique Ahmed Siddique.

Money laundering

“Tulip Siddiq and her family members are stakeholders in a company named Prochchaya which along with another entity Destin-

ty Group had laundered \$900 million,” it has been alleged.

Earlier, *Sunday Times* in the U.K. reported that U.K. Treasury Economic Secretary Tulip Siddiq was questioned by the Cabinet Office’s propriety and ethics team over allegations of siphoning around £3.9 billion from the Rooppur nuclear power plant project.

Ms. Siddiq’s mother Sheikh Rehana is the younger sister of Sheikh Hasina and was evacuated by a Bangladesh military helicopter to India on August 5 when the Awami League government fell in Dhaka.

The under-construction Rooppur nuclear power plant is located 160 km from Dhaka and is one of the largest nuclear projects that Russian nuclear major Rosatom has been building.

Topic → Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant Overview

Key Highlights

- 🔬 Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant: Bangladesh's first nuclear power facility.
- 🏗️ Location: Situated in the Pabna district of Bangladesh.
- 🌍 Objective: Enhance energy security and reduce reliance on fossil fuels.
- 💡 Capacity: Designed for a total of 2,400 megawatts with two reactors.
- 🤝 Collaboration: Developed with Russian technology and financial support.
- 📅 Timeline: Construction started in 2017; first reactor expected operational by 2024.
- 🌱 Impact: Contributes to sustainable development and meets growing energy demands.

Summary: The Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant marks Bangladesh's entry into nuclear energy, aiming to bolster energy security and sustainability with a 2,400 MW capacity, leveraging Russian expertise.

Bangladesh anti-graft panel to probe Russia-backed Rooppur nuclear project

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Topic → The Philippines' Acquisition of the U.S. Typhon Missile System

 The Philippines is planning to acquire the U.S. Typhon missile system to enhance its maritime security.

 Earlier this year, the U.S. Army deployed the Typhon missile system in the northern Philippines for joint military exercises.

 China has issued warnings that this acquisition could trigger a regional "arms race."

 Philippine Army chief Lieutenant-General Roy Galido highlighted the missile system's feasibility and functionality for archipelagic defense.

Key Developments and Implications



Military Exercises: The deployment of the Typhon missile system in the northern Philippines for joint exercises underscores the strategic military collaboration between the U.S. and the Philippines.

Regional Tensions: China's warning about a potential "arms race" highlights the geopolitical sensitivities in the region.

Economic Considerations: The acquisition cost will be influenced by economic conditions, impacting the Philippines' defense budget.

Sovereignty Protection: The Philippines' focus on military capability development is crucial for maintaining sovereignty amid territorial disputes.

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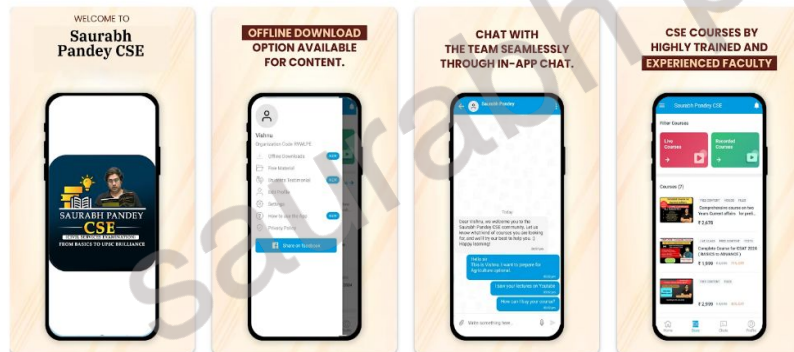
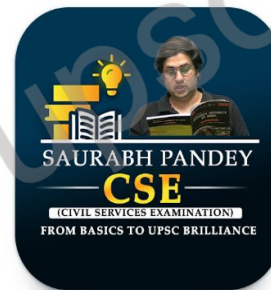
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Q. Fishbone structure recently seen in news is associated with which among the following.

(PIB)

A) Bamboo plantation .

B) Mangroves plantation.

C) Coffee plantation.

D) Acacia plantation.

Ans: B

The fishbone channel plantation method is a conservation technique used to reforest mangroves in areas that don't regularly get tidal inundation.

Target Mains -2025/26 -

Q “Indian bureaucracy steel frame nature will make it less useful in present democratic decentralised and digital era ” Discuss.

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