

## ● POLITY

## ● ECONOMICS

## ● TECHNOLOGY

## ● ECOLOGY

## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## Voters Brave Heatwave; First Phase Has Over 62% Turnout

**CONTEXT:** The first phase of the Lok Sabha election recorded a voter turnout of over 62%, with Lakshadweep having the highest turnout at 83.88% and Bihar the lowest at 48.88%. Incidents of violence were reported in Manipur, West Bengal, and Chhattisgarh during polling.



### MAJOR POINTS:

#### 1. Overall Voter Turnout:

- The first phase of the Lok Sabha election saw a voter turnout of over 62% across 21 States and Union Territories.
- Lakshadweep recorded the highest turnout at 83.88%, while Bihar had the lowest at 48.88%.

#### 2. Polling Details:

- Polling was completed for 10 States and Union Territories in this phase, including Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Andaman and Nicobar, and most north-eastern States.
- Prominent leaders such as Nitin Gadkari, Kanimozhi, Gaurav Gogoi, and Bhupendra Yadav were among the contestants.

#### 3. Incidents of Violence:

- Violence was reported in Manipur, West Bengal, and Chhattisgarh during polling.
- In Manipur, the voter turnout was 72.17%, with incidents of violence in areas under the Inner Manipur seat.

#### 4. Regional Turnout:

- Tamil Nadu saw a turnout of 69.46% for all 39 Lok Sabha seats, with some areas boycotting the polls due to land acquisition issues.
- Very few voters from the Kuki community participated, as Kuki politicians chose not to contest.

#### 5. Other State Elections:

- Elections were held for 50 of the 60 Assembly seats in Arunachal Pradesh and 32 in Sikkim.
- Western Uttar Pradesh had a voting percentage of 60.25%, with

controversies over alleged bogus voting between the Samajwadi Party and BJP.

- Polling in Maharashtra's Vidarbha region concluded peacefully with a turnout averaging 61.87%.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## "Explosions Reported In Isfahan Amid Tensions Between Iran And Israel; President Raisi Hails Retaliatory Attack"

**CONTEXT:** The reported explosions in Isfahan, Iran, amid tensions with Israel, reflect retaliatory actions following Iran's missile and drone attack on Israel. Denials and speculations surround the source of the attacks, highlighting ongoing regional conflicts and concerns about escalation between Iran and Israel.



### MAJOR POINTS

#### 1. Explosions in Isfahan:

- Iran's state media reported explosions in Isfahan's central province.
- U.S. media quoted officials attributing these explosions to Israel's retaliatory strikes.

#### 2. Background and Warning:

- Israel warned of retaliation after Iran launched missiles and drones at Israel a week earlier.
- This retaliation was in response to a strike in Syria that Iran blamed on Israel.

#### 3. Activation of Air Defence Systems:

- Iran activated air defence systems in response to the reported explosions near Isfahan.
- No official reactions were immediately available from Israeli or

Iranian authorities.

#### 4. Denials and Speculations:

- Iran's Tasnim news agency denied external attacks on Isfahan, citing "informed sources."
- Iranian officials suggested the possibility of small drones launched from within Iran.

#### 5. Location and Impact:

- Reports mentioned explosions close to Isfahan airport and military installations.
- Despite the incidents, nuclear facilities in Isfahan were reported as secure with no major damage.

#### 6. President Raisi's Response:

- Iran's President Raisi hailed Tehran's retaliatory attack on Israel but did not mention the explosions in Isfahan.
- He emphasized Iran's authority and unity but made no direct reference to the recent blasts.

#### 7. Calls for De-escalation:

- World leaders called for de-escalation after reports of retaliatory strikes between Iran and Israel.
- No official reactions regarding the blasts were immediately provided by either country.

- External debt service payments for 16 African countries reached \$22.3 billion in 2023.
- Loan interest payments for sub-Saharan African countries have doubled in a decade.
- **International Conference on African Debt Crisis**
  - Held in Accra, Ghana in March 2024.
  - Experts discussed commonalities and differences in debt challenges faced by various regions.
  - A call for reform of the international financial system to ease the burden on developing countries.
- **Proposals for Change**
  - Increased UN role in debt negotiations, including debt reduction.
  - More affordable credit options for low-income countries.
- **Causes of the Crisis**
  - Narratives of rapid economic growth in Africa may have encouraged excessive borrowing.
  - High-interest loans used for consumption rather than development.
  - Aggressive U.S. interest rate hikes in 2022 worsened the situation for developing countries.
  - Predatory private lenders targeting low-income countries.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

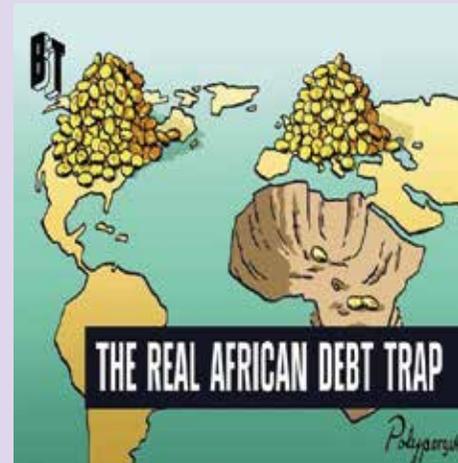
# Africa's Ballooning Debt Crisis Needs A Political Fix, Contend Experts

**CONTEXT:** African countries are heavily in debt and experts believe a reform of the international financial system is needed to address the crisis.

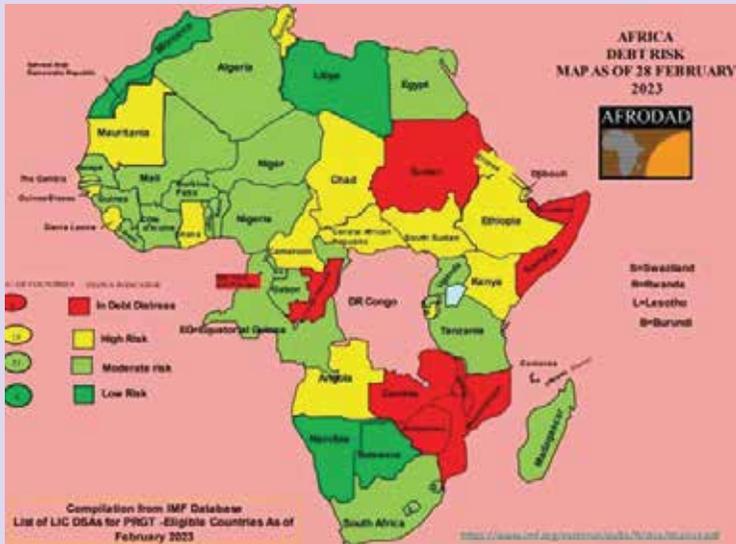


## AFRICAN DEBT CRISIS: A CALL FOR REFORM

- **Ghana's Struggles**
  - Ghanaian informal economy suffers due to national debt.
  - The country defaulted on most of its foreign debt in December 2022.
- **Widespread Debt Burden**
  - Many African countries are struggling with high debt and repayments.



- **Debunking Misconceptions**
  - The debt crisis is not solely due to African government mismanagement.
  - Structural issues within the international financial system contribute to the problem.
- **Current Solutions and Challenges**
  - G20 Common Framework for debt treatment has shown limited success.
  - Zambia's debt relief plan negotiations are ongoing.
  - Multilateral banks and international tax cooperation are seen as potential solutions.
- **Long-Term Impacts**
  - Structural adjustment programs attached to loans may hinder economic growth.
  - Lack of monetary sovereignty restricts access to affordable credit for African countries.
  - Reform of the international financial architecture is needed for sustainable development.



**ECONOMICS**

## Conditions Not Ripe For Easing Restrictive Monetary Stance'

**CONTEXT:** Minutes from the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee meeting show a cautious stance on easing restrictions due to concerns about persistent inflation.

### No let-up for now

Price stability has to be restored in order to ensure that the rising growth trajectory is sustained, MPC's Patra says

- Recent inflation prints, high frequency data on salient food prices indicate food inflation risks remain elevated'



- Stronger revival in private consumption will depend on greater confidence that inflation is declining

- Real interest rate excessively high, imposing costs on growth, says Jayanth R. Varma

### RBI MPC MEETING MINUTES: INFLATION CONCERNS HINDER EASING OF MONETARY POLICY

- Maintaining Focus on Price Stability**
  - RBI Deputy Governor Michael Debabrata Patra emphasizes the need to control inflation before easing restrictions.
  - Recent inflation data and forecasts indicate continued food price pressures.
  - Current disinflation trends are insufficient to bring headline inflation within the RBI's target range.
- Arguments Against Easing**
  - Favorable base effects, when low inflation figures from the previous year contribute to lower year-on-year comparisons, are not expected until later in 2024.

- Uncertainties surrounding the near-term economic outlook necessitate a cautious approach.
- Sustainable growth requires durable price stability, which would boost consumer and corporate confidence.
- Governor Das Reiterates Commitment**
  - Governor Shaktikanta Das emphasizes the importance of unwavering focus on price stability.
  - He warns against neglecting the vulnerability of inflation to supply-side shocks, particularly in food prices.
- Dissenting Voice**
  - External member Jayanth R. Varma argues for a 25 basis point reduction in the repo rate.
  - He believes the current real interest rate is too high and hinders economic growth.

**POLITY AND GOVERNANCE**

## Forests A National Asset And Major Contributor To Financial Wealth: SC

**CONTEXT:** The Supreme Court's recent judgment on forests in India as national assets, emphasizing their financial value and role in mitigating climate change, comes amid criticism of the Forest Conservation (Amendment) Act of 2023, which has been accused of facilitating encroachments and commercial exploitation of protected forests.



- FORESTS: A NATIONAL ASSET AND MAJOR CONTRIBUTOR TO FINANCIAL WEALTH**
- Supreme Court Judgement**
  - Forests are a national asset and a major contributor to the nation's financial wealth.
  - Concepts of carbon credit and green accounting to evaluate a nation's wealth are now a reality.
  - A country with excess forest cover can sell its excess carbon credit to others.
  - India's forests serve as a major sink of carbon dioxide (CO2). The value of mitigation has put a conservative \$5 per tonne of CO2 locked in forests. This huge sink of about 24,000 mt of CO2 is worth \$120 billion, or ₹6 lakh crores.

- Forests play a protective role against climate change.
- A 2022-2023 report of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) states that climate change and changing patterns of rainfall could cost the economy 2.8% of its GDP and depress the living standards of nearly half of its population by 2050.
- India could lose anywhere around 3% to 10% of its GDP annually by the year 2100 due to climate change.

#### Controversial Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act (FCAA) 2023

- The FCAA is accused of giving a free hand to States to regularise encroachments in protected forests and determine diversions of forestlands.
- The Act has been criticised for paving the way for the commercial exploitation of forests

- The missiles will be integrated into the Philippine Marines' coastal defense regiment.
- Philippine military personnel received training in India to operate and maintain the BrahMos systems.
- **BrahMos: A Powerful Deterrent**
- BrahMos missiles are known for their supersonic speed, enhancing the Philippines' defense capabilities.
- The missiles can be launched from various platforms including land, sea, sub-sea, and air.
- Several other countries have expressed interest in acquiring BrahMos systems.

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## India Delivers First Batch Of Brahmos Supersonic Missiles To Philippines

**CONTEXT:** India strengthens its defense ties with the Philippines by delivering the first batch of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles in a deal that boosts both nations' military capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region.



### INDIA STRENGTHENS DEFENSE TIES WITH PHILIPPINES THROUGH BRAHMOS DELIVERY

- **Missile Delivery Marks Milestone in Partnership**
- India delivers the first batch of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles to the Philippines.
- The Philippines becomes the first export customer for the BrahMos missile system, a joint venture between India and Russia.
- This delivery signifies a growing defense relationship between the two nations.
- **Boosting Philippines' Defensive Capabilities**
- The Philippines aims to use the BrahMos missiles to deter threats in the South China Sea.

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## Permanent Status

**CONTEXT:** The US veto of a UN resolution granting Palestine full-member status reignites debate over the future of Palestine and the role of the US in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.



### PALESTINE SEEKS FULL UN MEMBERSHIP AMID US OBJECTIONS

#### UNSC Resolution and Veto

- The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution proposing full-member status for Palestine was vetoed by the United States.
- The resolution aimed to fulfill the 1947 UN General Assembly promise of a partitioned Palestine into two states,

one Jewish and one Arab.

#### Historical Background

- In 1949, only Israel became a full member of the UN, leaving the "Question of Palestine" unresolved for decades.
- Palestine received permanent observer status in 2012 and temporary powers of a full member during its G-77 and China chairmanship in 2019.

#### Reasons for Veto

- The US vetoed the resolution, advocating for Palestine's statehood through direct negotiations between the parties.
- Israeli officials argued against granting full member status to Palestine, citing recent terrorist attacks by Hamas as a reason for delay.

#### Timing and Arguments for Recognition

- Despite recent conflicts, there's a case for recognizing Palestine's right to full UN membership, providing a stronger voice on the global stage.
- Critics argue against conflating Palestinian statehood with Hamas terrorism, emphasizing the need for distinctions between combatants and non-combatants.

#### Call for Reconsideration

- The US's blanket support for Israeli positions is questioned, especially considering Prime Minister Netanyahu's stance against a Palestinian state.

- A UN-member Palestine would be bound by international obligations, promoting peace and accountability within the region.

#### International Diplomacy and Principles

- The US's veto is seen as counter to the UN's principle of sovereign equality among nations, highlighting concerns about favoritism over consensus-building.
- In a fractured international order, there's a call for global leadership to prioritize building consensus and upholding fundamental principles of justice and equality.

**CONCLUSION:** Scientists' wish list for the incoming government encapsulates crucial priorities for India's scientific progress and global competitiveness. By increasing research spending, improving educational infrastructure, focusing on merit-based hiring, establishing efficient grant management systems, and ensuring academic freedom, India can pave the way for significant advancements in science, innovation, and economic growth. Addressing these key areas will not only empower scientists but also contribute to India's journey towards becoming a major global economy by 2050.

### POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## Scientists And A Wish List For The Incoming Government

**CONTEXT:** In the context of India's ongoing general election, scientists are urging the new government to address five key issues:

**BACKGROUND:** As India's general election unfolds, scientists are keenly focused on key issues for the incoming government. They emphasize increasing research spending, improving infrastructure and hiring processes in educational institutions, streamlining grant management for research, and ensuring academic freedom. These priorities are crucial for India's scientific advancement and its vision of becoming a major global economy by 2050.

#### MAJOR POINTS:

#### 1. Increase Research and Development (R&D) Spending

- Government spending on R&D to increase to at least 4% of GDP.
- Private sector encouraged to contribute, particularly through ANRF.
- Mechanisms like escrow accounts needed for funding assurance.

#### 2. Improve Infrastructure in Public Sector Institutions

- Upgrade science laboratories in colleges and universities.
- Hire more quality teachers and researchers.
- Double sanctioned positions effectively over the next five years.

#### 3. Focus on Merit-Based Hiring

- Transparent and fast hiring processes based on merit.
- Criteria for selection strictly merit-based.
- Global norms for hiring quality teachers and scientists to be followed.

#### 4. Establish Robust Science Grant Management System

- Less red tape in grant submission and disbursement.
- Timely grant and fellowship disbursement.
- Autonomy for scientists in spending on research.

#### 5. Ensure Academic Freedom

- Provide full autonomy to scientists for innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Simplify administrative processes and paperwork.
- Support fundamental science alongside innovation and entrepreneurship.

### POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## Fossils Of Huge Prehistoric Snake Found In Kutch Mine

**CONTEXT:** Researchers in India found fossils of a giant snake, *Vasuki Indicus*, estimated to be 10-15 meters long. This snake lived 47 million years ago and belonged to an extinct family. The discovery helps us understand how these giant snakes evolved and what factors may have contributed to their size.



### GIANT PREHISTORIC SNAKE UNEARTHED IN INDIA

- **Discovery:** Researchers at IIT Roorkee found fossils of a massive snake in Kutch, Gujarat.
- **Species:** Named *Vasuki Indicus*, it lived 47 million years ago (Middle Eocene) and was estimated to be 10-15 meters long (size of a school bus).
- **Uniqueness:** Belonged to the extinct *Madtsiidae* family but represents a new lineage from India.
- **Details of the Find:** Professor Sunil Bajpai and Debajit Datta discovered 27 well-preserved vertebrae at the Panandhro Lignite Mine.
- **Significance:** This discovery published in *Nature Scientific Reports* can shed light on:
  - Evolution of *Madtsiidae* snakes in various climates.
  - Factors influencing giant snake size (possibly high temperatures of the past).
- **Habitat:** *Vasuki Indicus* existed when continents like Africa, India, and South America were connected.
- **Physical Characteristics:** Likely had a cylindrical body indicating a powerful build, rivaling the size of *Titanoboa*, the longest known snake.
- **Quote:** Dr. Bajpai emphasizes the importance of this discovery for understanding ancient Indian ecosystems and snake evolution on the subcontinent.



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