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Motivation gets you
going, but discipline
keeps you growing.

John C. Maxwell

Free speech is an integral part of healthy society: SC

Law enforcement must employ 'standards of reasonable minds' before inciting criminal action against freedom of expression, says top court; it quashes hate speech case against Congress MP

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday said the fundamental right to free speech through poetry, theatre, stand-up comedy, and satire must be cherished, even as it quashed a criminal case accusing Congress MP Imran Pratapgadhi of inciting discord through his poem on "suffering injustice with love".

The judgment was based on an appeal filed by Mr. Pratapgadhi against the registration of a criminal case by the Gujarat police under Section 196 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sahita. "Seventy-five years into our Republic, we cannot be seen to be so shaky on our fundamentals that a mere recital of a poem, or



The Gujarat police had filed a case against Imran Pratapgadhi, accusing the Congress MP of inciting discord through his poem. ANI

for that matter, any form of art or entertainment, such as stand-up comedy, can be alleged to lead to animosity or hatred amongst different communities. Subscribing to such a view would stifle all legitimate expressions of view in the public domain, which is so fundamental to a free so-

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Reasonable restrictions
Justice Bhuyan explained to Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta that the "reasonable restrictions" on free speech must remain reasonable. "Restrictions can-

not be harmful or oppressive. Restrictions cannot overshadow the fundamental right to free speech," Justice Bhuyan said pointedly.

The top court said free speech was an integral part of a healthy and civilised society. A person's views cannot be silenced merely because the majority does not like the sound of them. The law enforcement authorities and courts must employ the standards of reasonable, strong-minded, firm, and courageous minds, and not weak and vacillating ones who scent danger in every hostile point of view, before initiating criminal action against freedom of expression.

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Content.

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- “Seventy-five years into our Republic, we cannot be seen to be so shaky on our fundamentals that a mere recital of a poem, or for that matter, any form of art or entertainment, such as stand-up comedy, can be alleged to lead to animosity or hatred amongst different communities. Subscribing to such a view would stifle all legitimate expressions of view in the public domain, which is so fundamental to a free society,” a Bench of Justices A.S. Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan wrote in its verdict.

Fact

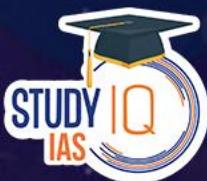
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Article 19 guarantees to every Citizen of India the following six basic, fundamental freedoms-

- **19(a). Freedom of speech and expression.**
- **19(b).Freedom to assemble peaceably and without arms**
- **19(c). Freedom to form associations or unions or co-operative societies**
- **19(d). Freedom to move freely throughout the territory of India**
- **19(e). Freedom to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India and**
- **19(g). Freedom to practise any profession, or to carry on any occupation trade or business**

Fact

- Article 19 (2) of Indian Constitution empowers the State to instil reasonable restrictions on the following grounds:
- Security of the State
- Friendly Relation with Foreign States
- Public Order
- Decency and morality
- Contempt of court
- Defamation
- Incitement to offence
- Integrity and sovereignty of India



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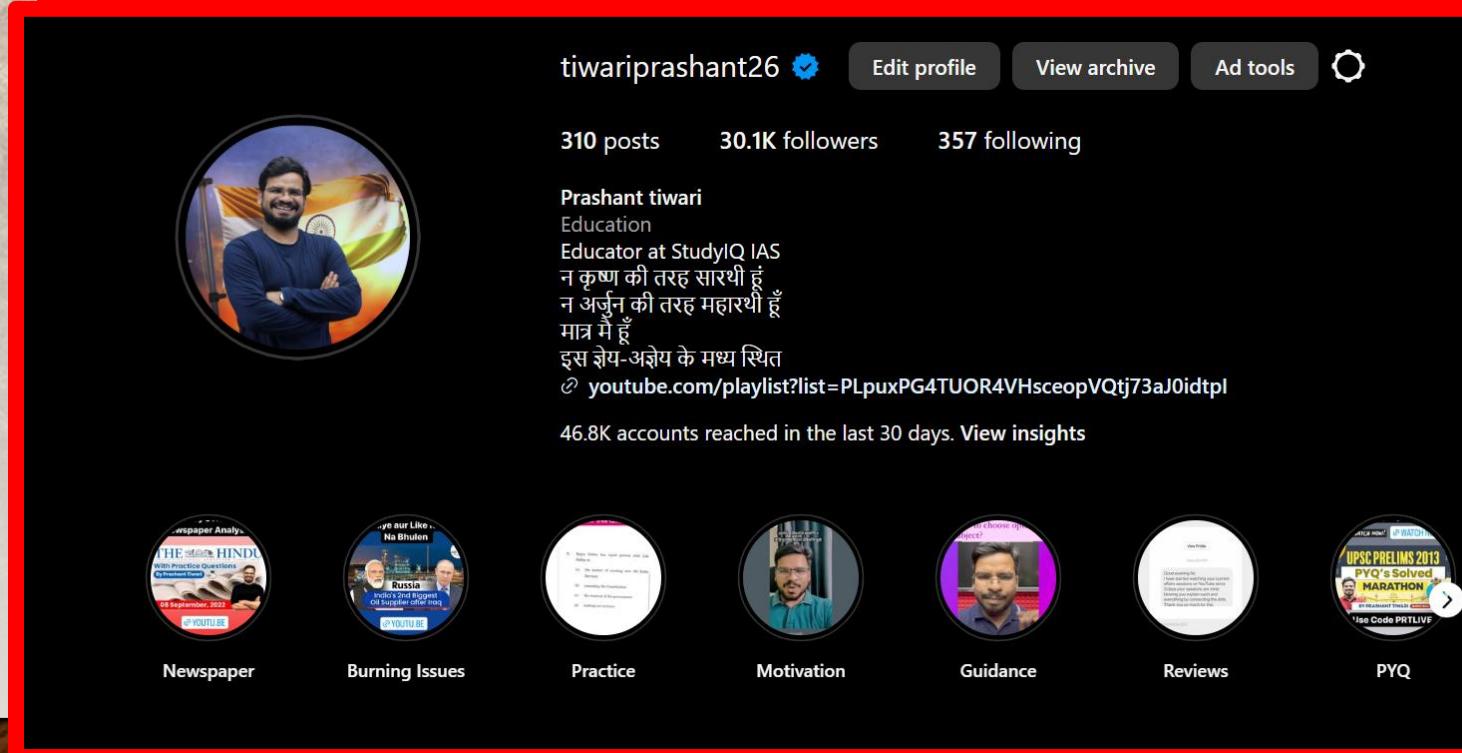
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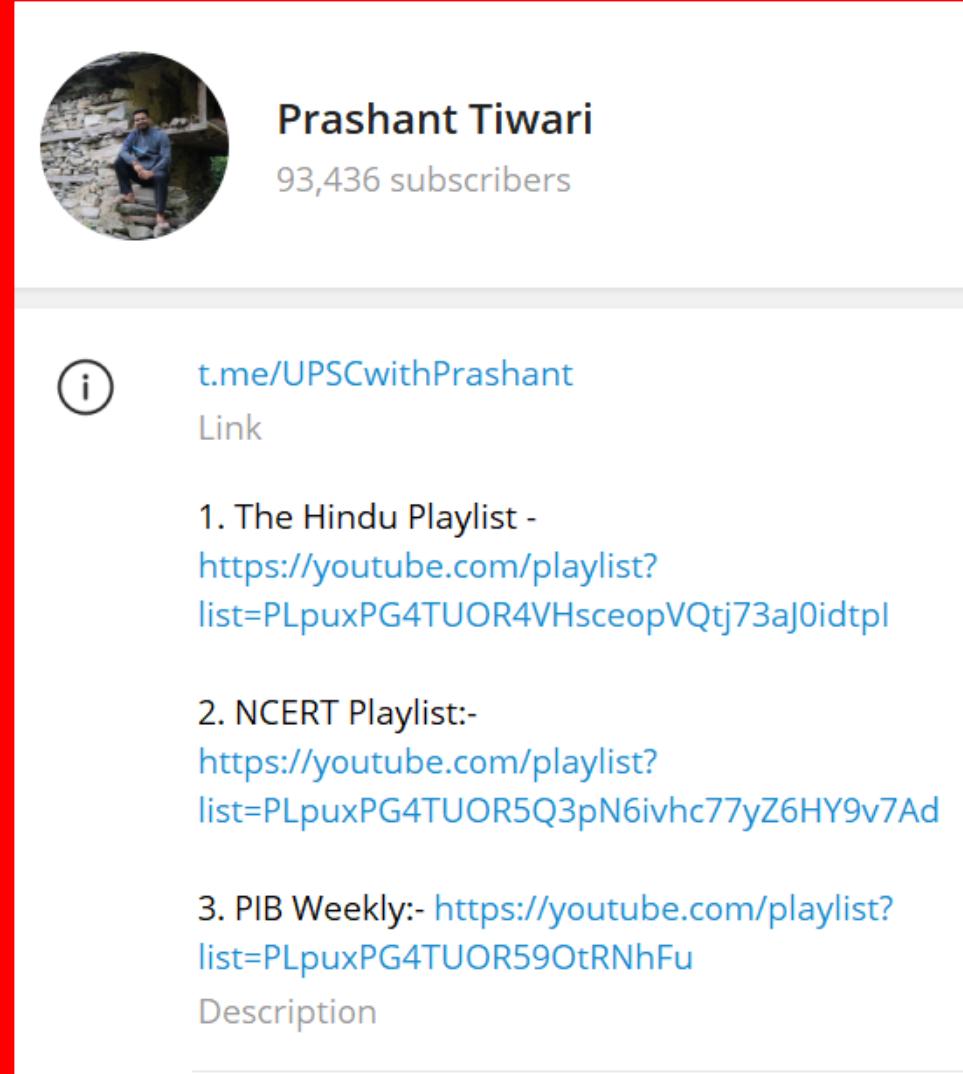
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Educator at StudyIQ IAS
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Description

Junta seeks aid as 7.7-magnitude earthquake kills 144 in Myanmar

Agence France-Presse

NAYPYIDAW

A huge earthquake killed nearly 150 people and injured hundreds across Myanmar and Thailand on Friday, with dozens trapped in collapsed buildings and the death toll expected to rise.

The 7.7-magnitude tremor hit near Mandalay, second-largest city in Myanmar, and was followed minutes later by a 6.4-magnitude aftershock.

Chief of Myanmar's isolated junta Min Aung Hlaing invited "any country, any organisation" to help with relief, saying at least 144 people had been killed, and 730 injured following the earthquake. A state of emergency was declared across the six worst-affected regions in the country.

FULL REPORT ON

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Rubble remains: Rescue workers near an under-construction building that collapsed after the tremor hit Bangkok, Thailand, on Friday. AP

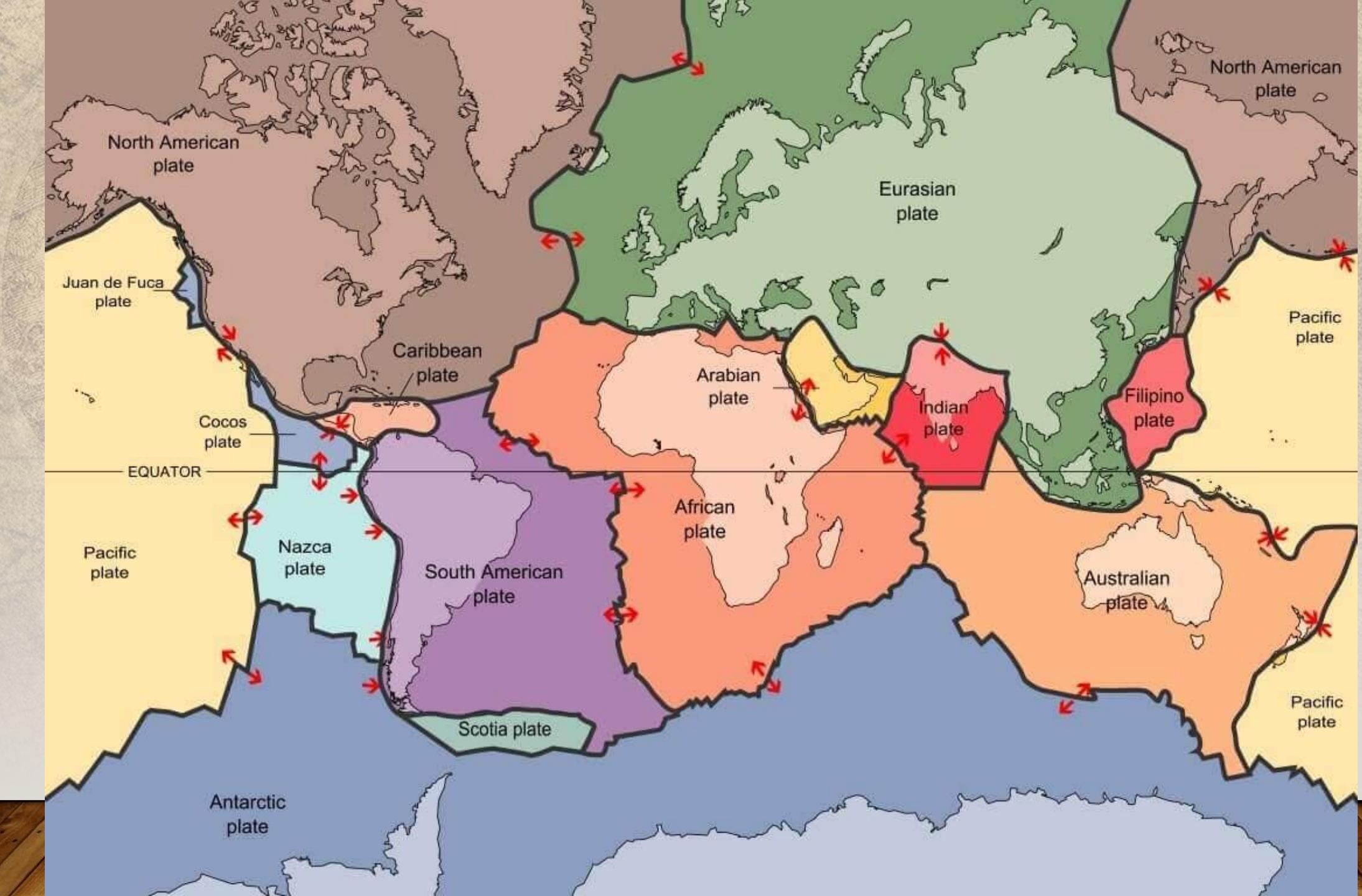
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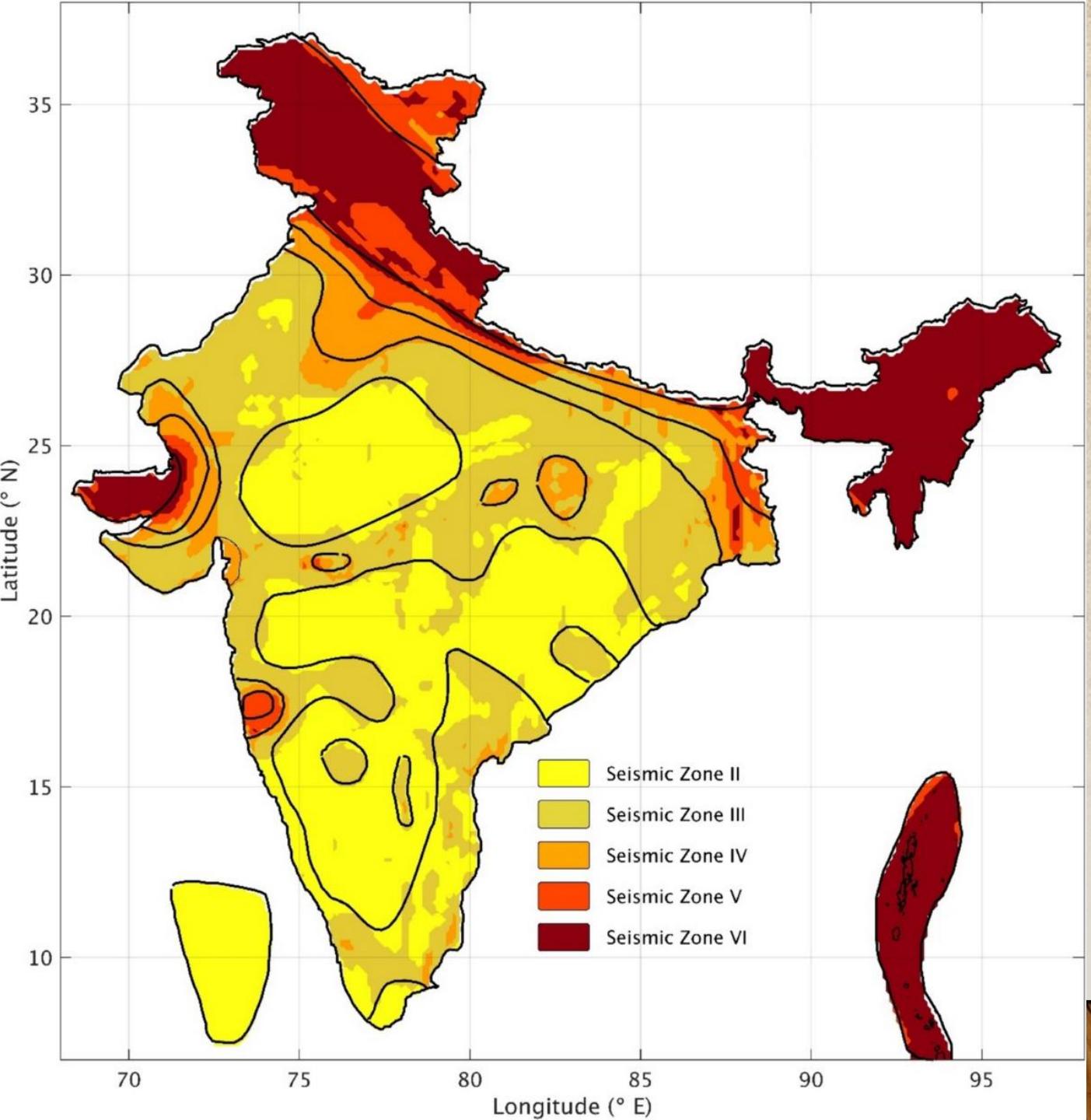




Content.

- A powerful earthquake rocked Myanmar and neighbouring Thailand on Friday, destroying buildings, a bridge and a dam. At least 144 people were killed in Myanmar, where photos and video from two hard-hit cities showed extensive damage. At least eight died in the Thai capital, where a high-rise under construction collapsed.
- The 7.7 magnitude quake, with an epicentre near Mandalay, Myanmar's second largest city, struck at midday and was followed by a strong 6.4 magnitude aftershock.
- The full extent of death, injury and destruction was not immediately clear — particularly in Myanmar, one of the world's poorest countries. It is embroiled in a civil war and information is tightly controlled.





Earthquake mitigation strategies are actions taken to reduce the risk of damage and loss of life from earthquakes.

- **Building codes:** Earthquake-resistant building codes can help to ensure that buildings can withstand the forces of an earthquake.
- **Land use planning:** Land use planning can help reduce the risk of earthquake damage by locating buildings and other structures in areas that are less likely to be affected by earthquakes.
- **Public awareness:** Public education can help to raise awareness of the risks of earthquakes and teach people how to protect themselves during an earthquake.
- **Disaster preparedness:** Disaster preparedness can help communities to be better prepared for an earthquake by developing emergency plans and stocking up on supplies.
- **Assessment of high-risk cities:** Regular earthquake risk assessment in Indian cities helps mitigate negative consequences, prepare for future events, and guide government agencies in prioritising disaster management and response measures.

Centre signs ₹62,700-crore deals with HAL for 156 LCH

Dinakar Peri

NEW DELHI

The Defence Ministry on Friday signed two contracts with Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) to buy 156 indigenous Light Combat Helicopters (LCH) and training and associated equipment for a total of over ₹62,700 crore, excluding taxes.

The Army will get 90 of the helicopters, while the remaining 66 are meant for the Air Force. The contracts were signed soon after the deal got final sanction from the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS).

"The supply of these helicopters shall commence from the third year and will be spread over the next five years. The contracts will enhance the combat capability of Armed Forces at high altitudes," a Defence Ministry statement said.

This is India's first indi-



An HAL Light Combat Helicopter in flight.

genously designed and developed combat helicopter designed to operate at an altitude of over 5,000 metres. The helicopter has a large number of components designed and manufactured in India and it is planned to achieve an overall indigenous content of over 65% during the execution of this procurement, the Ministry said. "This will involve over 250 domestic companies mostly MSMEs and will generate over 8,500 direct & indirect jobs."

The Ministry also signed a contract with Metrea Management for Wet Leasing of one flight refueller aircraft for providing air-to-air refuelling training to pilots of the IAF and Navy. "Metrea will provide one KC135 aircraft within six months which will be the first FRA to be wet leased by IAF," the statement added. Another major deal, an order for 97 Light Combat Aircraft (LCA)-Mk1A, is set to be concluded in the next few months.

The Army and IAF have already inducted 15 Limited Series Production models of the LCH which were approved at a cost of ₹4264 crore.

The IAF inducted the LCH in October 2022 into 143 Helicopter Unit 'Dhanush' at Jodhpur Air Force Station.

The Army raised its first LCH Squadron on June 1, 2022 at Bengaluru and it was later moved to Misamari in Assam.

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- This is India's first indigenously designed and developed combat helicopter designed to operate at an altitude of over 5,000 metres.
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- “This will involve over 250 domestic companies mostly MSMEs and will generate over 8,500 direct & indirect jobs.”
- The LCH is the only attack helicopter in the world which can land and take off at an altitude of 5,000 meters with a considerable load of weapons and fuel.
- The helicopter uses radar-absorbing material to lower radar signature and has a significantly crash-proof structure and landing gear.

Content.

- A pressurised cabin offers protection from nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) contingencies.
- The helicopter is equipped with a countermeasure dispensing system that protects it from enemy radars or infrared seekers of the enemy missiles.
- As far as weapons systems are concerned, a 20 mm turret gun, 70 mm rockets and air-to-air missile systems are onboard.
- LCH is powered by two French-origin Shakti engines manufactured by the HAL.

Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS)

- It is headed by the Prime Minister.
- The Committee discusses, debates, and is the apex body when it comes to the appointments of the officials in the national security bodies.
- It also makes all the important decisions on defence policy and expenditure and, generally, all matters of India's security.
- Members: PM, Ministers of Defence, Home Affairs, Finance and External Affairs.
- Cabinet Committees are extra-constitutional, meaning, they are not mentioned in the Indian Constitution.
- They are partly designed to reduce the burden on the Union Cabinet by allowing smaller groups of ministers to make decisions on specific policy areas.
- They are constituted or reconstituted when a new government takes over or the Cabinet undergoes a reshuffle.

There are a total of 8 cabinet committees:

- Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs.
- Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs.
- Cabinet Committee on Investment and Growth.
- Cabinet Committee on Security.
- Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs.
- Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development.
- Cabinet Committee on Accommodation.
- Appointments Committee of the Cabinet.

Indian courts have 1.45 lakh contempt cases pending

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

More than 1,800 contempt cases are pending in the Supreme Court while another 1.43 lakh cases are pending in the High Courts, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal told the Lok Sabha in a written reply on Friday.

As per data shared by the top court, 1,852 contempt cases are pending before the Supreme Court as of March 20, the Minister said.

Citing information available on the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG), the Minister said that 1,43,573 contempt cases were pending with the High Courts as of March 24. “The reasons for non-compliance with the orders in contempt cases pending before the Supreme Court and various High Courts are not available with the government,” Mr. Meghwal said.

“As far as the Government of India is concerned, the responsibility of implementation of court orders rests with the respective administrative Ministries,” he added.

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Content.

- **Contempt of court seeks to protect judicial institutions from motivated attacks and unwarranted criticism, and as a legal mechanism to punish those who lower its authority.**
- **When the Constitution was adopted, contempt of court was made one of the restrictions on freedom of speech and expression under Article 19 (2) of the Constitution of India.**
- **Separately, Article 129 of the Constitution conferred on the Supreme Court the power to punish contempt of itself. Article 215 conferred a corresponding power on the High Courts.**
- **The Contempt of Courts Act, 1971, gives statutory backing to the idea.**

Content.

- **Civil Contempt:** It is the wilful disobedience to any judgment, decree, direction, order, writ or other process of a court or wilful breach of an undertaking given to a court.
- **Criminal Contempt:** It is the publication of any matter or the doing of any other act which scandalises or lowers the authority of any court, or interferes with the due course of any judicial proceeding, or obstructs the administration of justice in any other manner.
- **Baradakanta Mishra vs. Registrar of Orissa High Court (1973):** The Supreme Court held that the power to punish for contempt of court is a necessary power to maintain the rule of law and preserve the dignity and authority of the courts.
- **Prashant Bhushan and another (2020):** The Supreme Court held his tweets could have undermined the dignity and authority of the Supreme Court in general and the CJI's office in particular. The court held Prashant Bhushan guilty of criminal contempt.

India's geopolitical vision should be larger

Earlier this month, Russian President Vladimir Putin thanked world leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for their "noble mission" to end the fighting between Ukraine and Russia. This has brought cheer to Indians.

But there is a question to be asked – Why has India refrained from playing a more active political role in regional and international conflicts around the world?

This is all the more surprising when one considers the decisive steps taken by Indian leaders in conflicts in the neighbourhood whether, *inter alia*, in Bangladesh in 1971 when India helped stop a genocide and give birth to a new nation; in the Maldives in 1988 by stopping armed mercenaries overthrow its President; in Sri Lanka in 2009 by helping in the defeat of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, or, recently, by combating piracy in the region.

Let there be no mistake, India has been an active net contributor to global public good whether through the 'Vaccine Maitri' initiative during the COVID-19 pandemic, robust climate action which includes establishing the International Solar Alliance, the sharing of digital public infrastructure to the world or its role as first responder during natural disasters.

A reticence

However, in the last two decades, India has, rightly, prioritised economic growth, both under the United Progressive Alliance and National Democratic Alliance governments. This has catapulted India to the rank of fifth largest economy. Having reached there, we seem to have convinced ourselves that if we take an active political role in global or regional conflicts, it could adversely affect our growth and development.

India's reticence may also stem from the fact that it feels that getting involved in regional conflicts will upset the strong bilateral relations that have been carefully cultivated with countries. Or that these conflicts are best left to key players in that region and outside, like in West Asia where India has big stakes but does not want to be more proactive than the Gulf countries, which are lukewarm to the unfolding tragedy in Gaza and the region. Yes, all of the above has some rationale. At a time when the world order is disintegrating, and with India having global ambitions of its own, India's geopolitical vision should be larger, which will only help, not hinder, our economic ambitions.

Historically, one will be right to say that India provided political leadership to the Non-Aligned Movement to empower developing countries emerging from colonisation to find their voice. One might also be right to say that our multi-alignment policy of today is an equally



T.S. Tirumurti

was Ambassador/
Permanent
Representative of
India to the United
Nations, New York
(2020-22) and
President of UN
Security Council for
August 2021

compelling political stand to navigate geopolitical fissures by strengthening our bilateral relations with every key country. But non-alignment was also for the Global South while multi-alignment is primarily for us.

However, when a country becomes the fifth largest economy, prides itself as a thriving democracy, aspires for a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seat as a permanent member and also aspires to be an important pole in a multipolar world, the expectations of the international community from India only increase. India needs to do much more than take a stand or be a bystander. If in the UNSC, India claims that decisions are not credible without the participation of the world's largest democracy, then this logic applies equally to decisions taken outside the UNSC.

Mr. Putin's statement is an expression of gratitude to India's Prime Minister, who made a bold statement in his visiting Russia last year in the midst of the Ukraine war. India's decision to abstain on UNSC votes on the war, when there was considerable pressure to vote against Russia, influenced big developing countries to take a more balanced position on the war. Further, Mr. Modi had conveyed to the Russian President earlier that this is "not an era of war" and pressed him not to use nuclear arms. But Mr. Putin's statement is also a subtle encouragement to India to play a much bigger role. When India is one of the few countries with credibility which can speak to both Russia and Ukraine, should it not be on the high table?

There is a global reset

The flip side is that if India does not meet those expectations, it is ceding space to countries such as Türkiye or Saudi Arabia or Qatar, to tackle conflicts in Europe, West Asia, Africa, or the South China Sea, where the stakes for India are high. The meeting between Ukraine and Russia in 2022 took place in Türkiye. The U.S.-Russia and U.S.-Ukraine talks that took place in Saudi Arabia recently, fit into an ambitious Saudi Arabia's version of multi-alignment. And just now, the Presidents of Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo met in Qatar to forge a ceasefire in eastern Congo. Further, geopolitical clout is something the Trump 2.0 administration recognises, unlike when India was ignored by its 'strategic partner' the U.S. during Troika Plus talks on Afghanistan, or in Bangladesh recently, in India's own neighbourhood.

Faced with a global reset, with the U.S. and parts of Europe lurching to the right, where the U.S. could downsize its engagements in some regions, particularly Europe and Asia on the one hand, and with fragmentation of trade and rising protectionism on the other, India needs to reach outwards instead of just trying to protect its

space. Given that its adversarial relations with China are not going to vanish anytime soon and its trade deficit with China is set to increase with the supply chains closely linked, strengthening of alignments with friends in theatres outside the region is key. It becomes even more relevant when the U.S. and China move towards a "deal" which could end up dividing regions into their spheres of influence and the balance of power shifts in Asia, where the Quad (India, Japan, Australia and the U.S.) could potentially lose its strategic relevance and India comes under pressure.

A time for a shift and also reform

This calls for regional policies, since regional policy is not just the sum of India's bilateral relations with countries in that region, be it West Asia or Central Asia. For example, India developed close bilateral relations with the Central Asian countries and important regional stakes, but downgraded its participation in the regional grouping, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. East Asia demands India's enhanced attention too, especially after its refusal to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). This is the time for a strategic shift towards Europe, which is under pressure. And also a time to undertake internal economic reforms to enhance India's competitiveness and meet U.S. expectations on a bilateral trade agreement, which could be the fulcrum for a broader engagement with the Trump 2.0 administration. However, being proactive in conflicts does not mean that India becomes a mediator or passes messages from one party to another. Further, waiting for warring parties or a dominant power such as America to invite India may be a prudent policy, but they will not ask India unless New Delhi conveys its readiness to be a geopolitical player committed to international peace and security.

For example, India played an important role, but not a mediatory one, in the Korean war in the UN Security Council between 1951-52 barely four years after Indian independence. The fact that India was an impoverished nation did not deter it. In recognition, it was made chair of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission. During India's recent stint in the UNSC (2021-22), it was a bridge for divergent views.

Therefore, in a 'Trumpian' world, and as the world order gets shaped in favour of the big powers, both old and new, and when there is geopolitical fragmentation, even unilateralism, let us not treat economic development and geopolitics as mutually exclusive. We need to practise multi-alignment in all its dimensions to gain the full benefits. India should use the window of Trump 2.0 and emerge as a major pole by actively shaping a disintegrating world order.

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Fact

- However, in the last two decades, India has, rightly, prioritised economic growth, both under the United Progressive Alliance and National Democratic Alliance governments. This has catapulted India to the rank of fifth largest economy.
- Historically, one will be right to say that India provided political leadership to the Non-Aligned Movement to empower developing countries emerging from colonisation to find their voice.
- One might also be right to say that our multi-alignment policy of today is an equally compelling political stand to navigate geopolitical fissures by strengthening our bilateral relations with every key country.
- But non-alignment was also for the Global South while multi-alignment is primarily for us.

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- However, when a country becomes the fifth largest economy, prides itself as a thriving democracy, aspires for a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) seat as a permanent member and also aspires to be an important pole in a multipolar world, the expectations of the international community from India only increase.
- India needs to do much more than take a stand or be a bystander. If in the UNSC, India claims that decisions are not credible without the participation of the world's largest democracy, then this logic applies equally to decisions taken outside the UNSC.
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Advantage China in Africa's nuclear energy market race

The Russia-Ukraine war has demonstrated the importance of energy security, where many European countries were caught scrambling and developing new energy partnerships. The devastating impact of the war did not spare Africa too despite the geographical distance. As African leaders are reworking the energy basket of their countries, nuclear energy is emerging as the driver of this energy transformation.

Currently, Africa has only one nuclear plant, at Koeberg in South Africa, built by a French consortium. However, other African countries, which includes Ghana, Nigeria, Sudan, Rwanda, Kenya and Zambia, are projecting the use of nuclear energy to enhance electricity access for their citizens.

According to some estimates, Africa is expected to generate 15,000 MW of nuclear energy by 2035. Africa's nuclear energy market is poised for significant growth, representing an investment opportunity of \$105 billion. Unsurprisingly, many countries want a slice of this strategic market.

The scramble for Africa's nuclear market

So far, France has dominated Africa's nuclear market. However, it is rapidly losing its influence and struggling to maintain its relevance, particularly in Francophone Africa. Meanwhile, since 2023, the United States has been organising the US-Africa Nuclear Energy Summit (USANES). However, it will depend on U.S. President Donald Trump on whether and how he wants to proceed with the U.S.'s nuclear expansion plan in Africa.

Russia, another important player in Africa's nuclear market, has inked several agreements with Egypt, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Burundi. Since July 2022, Russia's Rosatom has been building a reactor in El Dabaa, Egypt, though progress is slow. With Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power (KHNP) at the helm, South Korea has also shown its interest in capturing this untapped market. However, the country that is



**Samir
Bhattacharya**

is Associate Fellow at
the Observer
Research Foundation

With a number of African countries reworking their energy basket, Beijing could emerge as the partner country of choice

undoubtedly winning the race for the nuclear market is China.

Explaining China's dominance

China's nuclear ambition in Africa is a relatively new phenomenon. In 2012, in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the China Atomic Energy Authority began a scholarship programme for students from African and South Asian countries wishing to develop national nuclear programmes. It served, among other things, to provide training in Chinese procedures and equipment to increase the chances of African countries purchasing them. Today, China has more than 50 operating reactors. Undoubtedly, China has emerged as an attractive partner for African countries interested in developing nuclear energy.

China's nuclear expansion in Africa is being spearheaded by two large state-owned companies – the China General Nuclear Power Group (CGN) and the China National Nuclear Corporation (CNNC).

In 2024, during the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing, Nigeria signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with China that includes the design, construction, operation, upgrading, maintenance and decommissioning of nuclear power stations in Nigeria. The visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Nigeria in early 2025 further cemented this collaboration.

At the same summit, Uganda also signed an MoU with China to build a 2 GW nuclear plant. The first unit, of 1 GW, is expected to be connected to the grid by 2031. Kenya also plans to have a research reactor in operation by 2030. While Kenya is still open on its choice of partner country, Ghana has selected the U.S.-based NuScale Power and Regnum Technology Group to build its Small Modular Reactors (SMRs), while China National Nuclear Corporation is set to build a Large Reactor (LR).

In West Africa, the junta leaders of Burkina

Faso, Niger and Mali are all leading pro-Russian governments, and signed an MoU with Russia on the sidelines of the Russia-Africa Summit 2023. Although they have approached the Russian nuclear behemoth, Rosatom, to build their nuclear capacity, the massive investment required to make a nuclear power plant and Russia's own economic stagnation due to the Ukraine war and associated sanctions may deter Russia from investing on such a large scale in far-away Africa. This would again most likely push these countries, desperate for foreign investment, toward China.

Africa's nuclear ambition, impact on India

As the global drive toward cleaner and more efficient energy accelerates, Africa will increasingly consider nuclear energy as a panacea to the problem. Therefore, regardless of China and the debt trap risk, African countries would look to Chinese financing to support them in their nuclear journey. Today, China is already leading the race in constructing new nuclear power plants across the world.

Further, very few African countries possess the transmission networks required to receive and distribute power from these nuclear plants. China can also help build these transmission networks under the framework of its schemes such as the "Belt and Road Initiative". If China manages to do that, this will not only enhance its position as a leader in Africa's clean energy market but also entrench its overall dominance in Africa.

As of January 30, 2025, India's nuclear generation capacity is 8,180 MW. As India aims to generate 100GW of nuclear energy by 2047, it would be important for India to secure African uranium. In 2009, India signed a civil nuclear cooperation agreement with Namibia. India also plans to develop some uranium mining projects in Niger and Namibia. Yet, with increasing Chinese dominance, it would be harder for India to venture in Africa's nuclear market, impacting India's energy security in the long run.

Content.

- The Russia-Ukraine war has demonstrated the importance of energy security, where many European countries were caught scrambling and developing new energy partnerships. The devastating impact of the war did not spare Africa too despite the geographical distance. As African leaders are reworking the energy basket of their countries, nuclear energy is emerging as the driver of this energy transformation.
- Currently, Africa has only one nuclear plant, at Koeberg in South Africa, built by a French consortium. However, other African countries, which includes Ghana, Nigeria, Sudan, Rwanda, Kenya and Zambia, are projecting the use of nuclear energy to enhance electricity access for their citizens.
- According to some estimates, Africa is expected to generate 15,000 MW of nuclear energy by 2035. Africa's nuclear energy market is poised for significant growth, representing an investment opportunity of \$105 billion. Unsurprisingly, many countries want a slice of this strategic market.

- So far, France has dominated Africa's nuclear market.
- Meanwhile, since 2023, the United States has been organising the US-Africa Nuclear Energy Summit (USANES). However, it will depend on U.S. President Donald Trump on whether and how he wants to proceed with the U.S.'s nuclear expansion plan in Africa.
- Russia, another important player in Africa's nuclear market, has inked several agreements with Egypt, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Burundi.
- Since July 2022, Russia's Rosatom has been building a reactor in El Dabaa, Egypt, though progress is slow. With Korea Hydro and Nuclear Power (KHNP) at the helm, South Korea has also shown its interest in capturing this untapped market.
- However, the country that is undoubtedly winning the race for the nuclear market is China.

Fact

- China's nuclear ambition in Africa is a relatively new phenomenon.
- In 2012, in cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the China Atomic Energy Authority began a scholarship programme for students from African and South Asian countries wishing to develop national nuclear programmes.
- It served, among other things, to provide training in Chinese procedures and equipment to increase the chances of African countries purchasing them.
- Today, China has more than 50 operating reactors.
- Undoubtedly, China has emerged as an attractive partner for African countries interested in developing nuclear energy.

Fact

- As the global drive toward cleaner and more efficient energy accelerates, Africa will increasingly consider nuclear energy as a panacea to the problem.
- Therefore, regardless of China and the debt trap risk, African countries would look to Chinese financing to support them in their nuclear journey. Today, China is already leading the race in constructing new nuclear power plants across the world.
- Further, very few African countries possess the transmission networks required to receive and distribute power from these nuclear plants.
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Equitable distribution

PAC recommendations on GST reforms will resonate with States

The 19th report of Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is appropriately scathing in its criticism of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) regime, introduced in July 2017 to simplify, unify and improve indirect tax compliance in India. At the outset, the PAC highlights a nearly 2% drop in indirect tax revenue between FY18 and FY20 – the first two years of GST prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Among the several discrepancies flagged, it is the non-auditing and non-finalisation of the States' Compensation Fund for over six years that stands out as particularly troubling. This has strained the functioning of what was meant to be a unified yet federal tax structure. The PAC notes the Centre's failure to furnish the Compensation Fund Account to the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), a necessary step to certify and release timely compensation to States for revenue losses since the rollout of GST. The centralising tendencies of the GST regime have long been a point of contention for major revenue-generating States, many of which have raised concerns over diminished fiscal autonomy and sharp declines in indirect tax collections. As a destination-based tax, GST is levied at the point of consumption, adversely affecting manufacturing-heavy States.

To address these concerns, the GST (Compensation to States) Act, 2017, mandated a Compensation Fund and promised States a 14% annual revenue growth for five years (2017-22), using FY16 as the base year. However, many States have reported either non-receipt of funds or serious delays, which they say have negatively impacted governance. The PAC attributes this to the Centre's indifferent approach. In one striking example, the PAC cites 2,447 inconsistencies – amounting to ₹32,577.73 crore – out of a sample of 10,667 cases – and criticises the Finance Ministry's audit approach as "lackadaisical". The PAC has recommended establishing a formal mechanism with the CAG to ensure timely audits and updates on pending cases. It also calls for a comprehensive review to develop a "GST 2.0" – a recommendation that is likely to resonate with States demanding a greater share of GST revenues, closer to 70%-80%, up from the current 50%.

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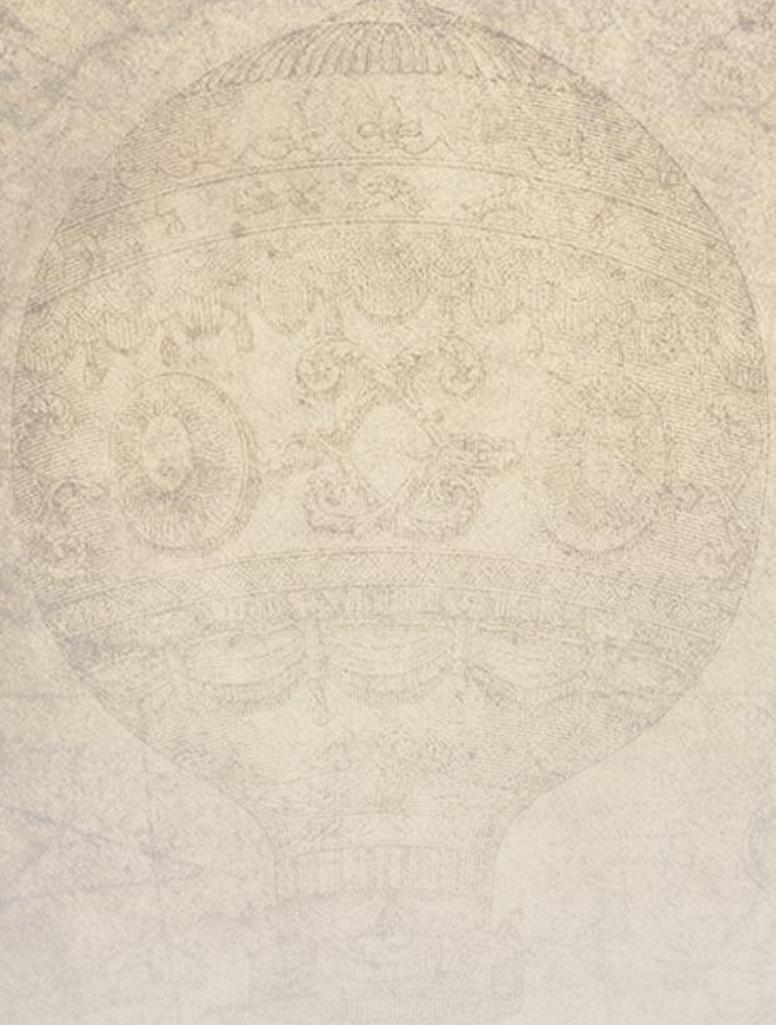
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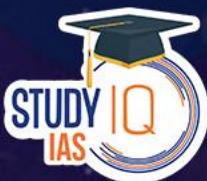
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- 101st Constitutional Amendment Act introduced the GST in 2017.
- GST is a comprehensive indirect tax levied on the supply of goods and services.
- Tax Slabs: 0%, 5%, 12%, 18%, and 28%.
- Governance: GST Council is key decision making body.

Public Accounts Committee (PAC)

- Established in 1921 (oldest parliamentary committee in India).
- Purpose: Audits the revenue and expenditure of the Government of India to ensure public funds are spent efficiently and legally.
- 22 members (15 from Lok Sabha, 7 from Rajya Sabha).
- Chairperson: A Lok Sabha MP, traditionally from the Opposition.
- Term: One year.
- Ministers cannot be members of the PAC.





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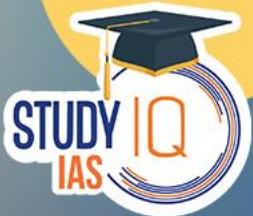
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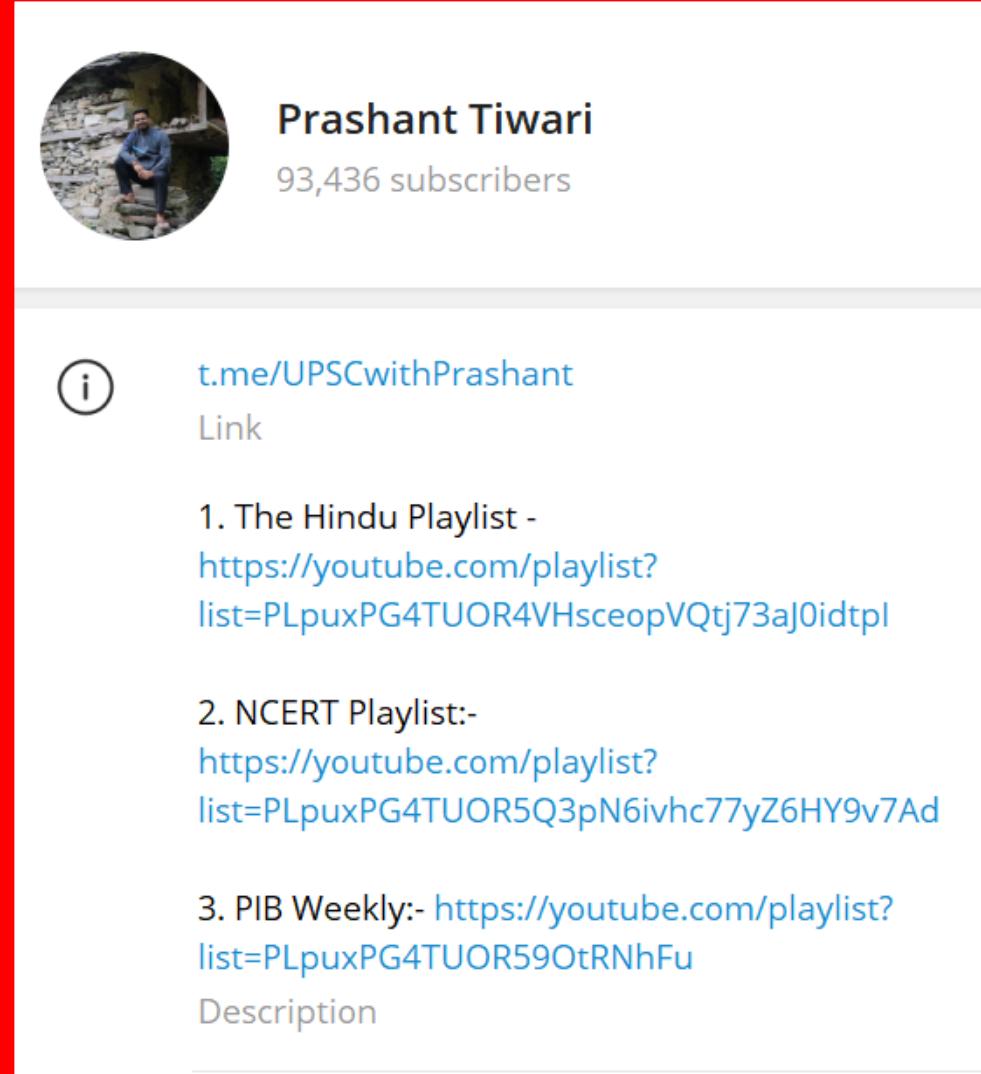
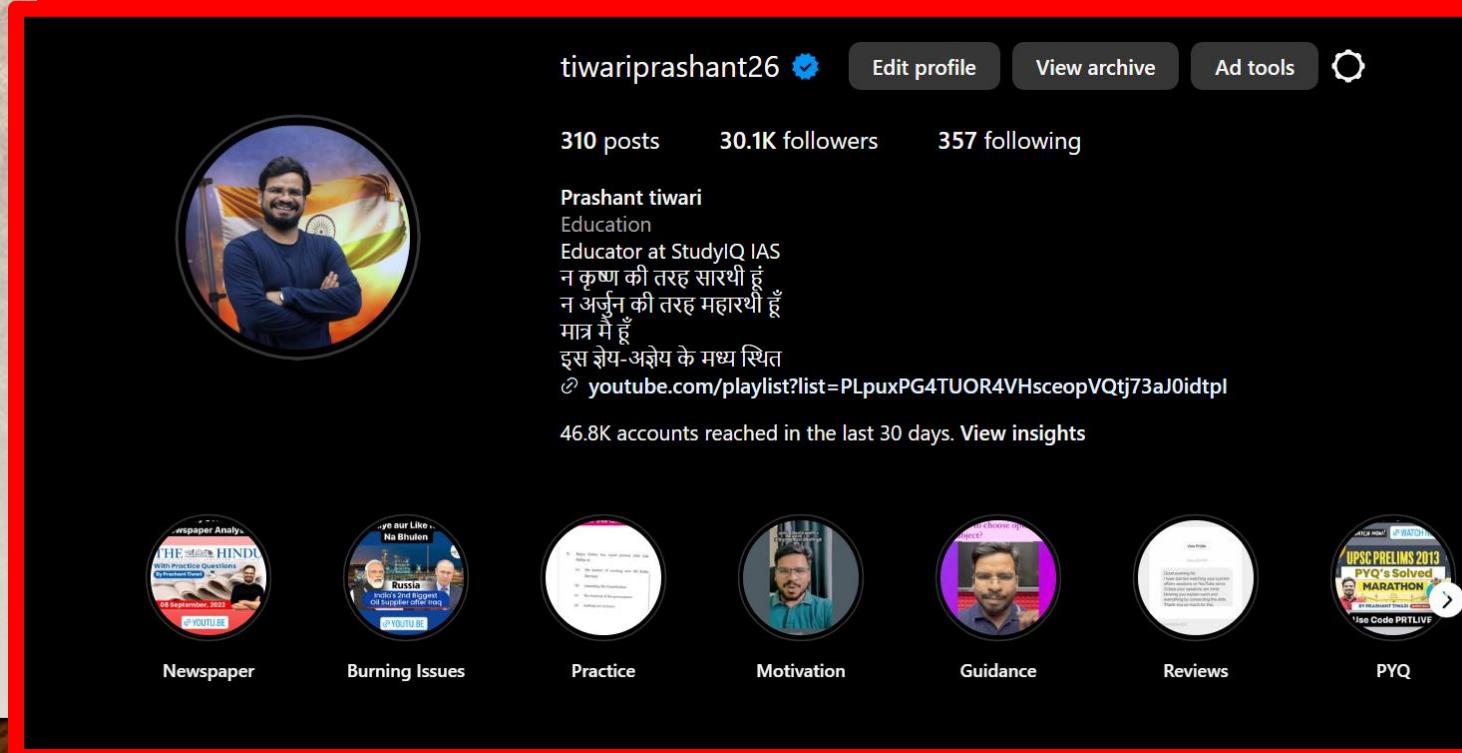
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