

## Mains Master

### Democratic backsliding: On the state wielding the FCRA as a weapon

#### Context:

- The Indian government cancelled the FCRA license of the Centre for Policy Research (CPR), a renowned think tank.
- Justification: CPR's publications were deemed equivalent to news reporting, prohibited under FCRA funds.

#### Concerns:

- **Free Speech:** This move stifles dissent and knowledge sharing, portraying India as intolerant of differing views.
- **Targeted Suppression:** It aligns with a pattern of using FCRA to silence NGOs and activists on sensitive issues like human rights and environment.
- **Historical Burden:** FCRA, enacted during the Emergency, has become increasingly restrictive through amendments.
- **International Backlash:** The International Commission of Jurists criticized FCRA amendments for hindering civil society.

#### Consequences:

- **Global Aspirations Conflict:** India's image as a "Vishwaguru" and "Mother of Democracy" clashes with its suppression of dissent.
- **Democratic Backsliding:** Actions like cancelling FCRA licenses contribute to a narrative of India's declining commitment to freedom and democracy. Freedom House's Democracy Index downgrades India to an "electoral autocracy" citing erosion of civil liberties.
- **Ranking Downgrade:** These actions negatively affect India's rankings in global freedom and democracy indices.

#### Outlook:

- This raises worrying concerns about shrinking space for dissent and independent voices in India.
- Reconsidering the approach and fostering an environment for diverse voices to flourish is crucial to maintain India's democratic values.

### Post Office Act, its unbridled powers of interception

#### Context:

- India recently passed two new laws: the Post Office Bill, 2023 and the Telecommunications Bill, 2023, replacing older acts.
- Both laws grant authorities the power to intercept mail and communication, raising concerns about potential misuse.

#### Concerns:

##### • Post Office Bill:

- Lacks procedural safeguards for interception, unlike the Telecommunications Bill which incorporates safeguards from existing rules.
- Vague definition of "emergency" allows for broader interpretation and potential abuse.
- Interception intrudes on individual privacy guaranteed by Article 21 of the Constitution.

##### • Telecommunications Bill:

- While safeguards exist, they leave room for arbitrary action by authorities.
- Lack of accountability for misuse of interception powers.

#### Historical Context:

- Supreme Court rulings have established safeguards for interception under older laws like the Telegraph Act.
- These safeguards require justification for interception and limit its scope.

#### Recommendations:

- The government should clarify and strengthen procedural safeguards for interception in the Post Office Bill.
- Clear definition of "emergency" is needed to prevent arbitrary use of interception powers.
- Authorities responsible for interception should be held accountable for misuse.



**Main Points:**

- The ongoing Yemen conflict is making shippers consider alternative routes to the Suez Canal for east-west trade.
- This strengthens the case for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) as a viable alternative, despite the recent setback caused by the Gaza war.
- Critics remain skeptical about IMEC's feasibility due to the complex geopolitical landscape in West Asia, particularly strained relations between Arab nations and Israel.
- **IMEC has several potential benefits for various stakeholders:**
  - **India:** Improved containerization through rail and road, reducing logistics costs and aligning with the National Logistics Policy.
  - **Gulf nations:** Continued relevance in the hydrogen economy by transporting fossil fuel-based hydrogen via pipelines.
  - **United States:** Alignment with a "business-focused" Trump administration's interests in global infrastructure projects.
- **Key challenges for IMEC include:**
  - **Geopolitical tensions:** Turkey's exclusion and its proposed alternative route through Iraq.
  - **Limited capacity of Israeli ports:** Haifa's current container traffic is insufficient to be India's primary gateway to Europe.
  - **Uncertain commitment:** Doubts regarding long-term U.S. involvement and funding.
- **Potential solutions and opportunities:**
  - Expanding Haifa port's capacity, potentially with collaboration between India's Adani Ports and Israel.
  - Utilizing US International Development Finance Corporation funding for Colombo port as a model for Haifa.
  - Bringing Turkey into the project eventually to address geopolitical concerns.

**Overall:**

The Yemen conflict highlights the vulnerability of relying solely on the Suez Canal for global trade, making alternative routes like IMEC more attractive. However, IMEC faces significant challenges due to regional political complexities and logistical limitations. Overcoming these obstacles will require coordinated efforts and innovative solutions from all stakeholders involved.

**Context:**

- The Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2023 reveals widespread smartphone usage among 14-18 year olds in India (92%).
- However, ownership varies significantly by gender, with boys (44%) owning phones far more than girls (20%).

**Main Findings:**

- Access to a smartphone, regardless of ownership, allows basic information browsing and learning basic skills.
- Ownership unlocks deeper engagement with technology, enabling activities like video sharing, safety features usage, and accessing services.
- Entertainment apps like WhatsApp and YouTube serve as strong motivators for learning technology use, closing gender gaps in basic skills.
- Schoolwork utilization remains relatively equal between boys and girls regardless of ownership, suggesting smartphone access offers limited direct benefit for studying current curriculum.
- Social barriers hinder girls' full participation in certain online activities like commercial transactions and accessing services.
- Pratham's experiment demonstrates children's strong ability to learn technology without explicit teaching when provided motivated access.
- Girls perform equally well as boys in technology use when given unrestricted access, highlighting social constraints as the primary barrier.

**Key Concerns:**

- Limited ownership restricts girls' potential for deeper learning and engagement with technology.
- Social barriers disproportionately affect girls' ability to fully utilize smartphones for education and development.
- Current educational materials do not capitalize on the potential of smartphones for effective learning.

**Way Forward:**

- Promoting equal access to affordable smartphones for girls, potentially through subsidized programs or partnerships.
- Developing educational apps and content specifically designed for smartphones and aligned with learning objectives.



- Addressing social barriers through awareness campaigns and encouraging parental support for girls' technology use.
- Integrating technology into teaching methods and encouraging its creative use in classrooms.
- Learning from initiatives like Pratham's experiment to create environments where children can be self-directed learners with technology.

### Overall Outlook:

The widespread access to smartphones presents a tremendous opportunity for education and development in India. However, bridging the ownership gap and overcoming social barriers, particularly for girls, is crucial to maximize this potential. By focusing on equitable access, relevant content, and innovative pedagogy, India can leverage technology to transform its education landscape and empower future generations.

### Why are conflicts spreading in West Asia?

#### Context:

- The Israel-Hamas war in Gaza has escalated into a wider regional security crisis, involving multiple states and non-state actors.
- Hezbollah, Houthis, Iran-backed militias, and even the Islamic State have joined the fray, targeting Israel, US interests, and other regional players.

#### Key Players:

- **Israel:** Vengeful war on Hamas with US support, aiming to dismantle Hamas and release hostages.
- **Iran:** Main backer of anti-Israel actors, seeking to strengthen its deterrence and challenge US dominance in the region.
- **US:** Protecting Israel and US interests, attempting to maintain the US-led order in West Asia.

#### Historical Background:

The current crisis in West Asia cannot be fully understood without acknowledging its historical roots. Decades of conflict between Israel and Palestine, coupled with regional rivalries between Iran and Saudi Arabia, have laid the groundwork for the current escalation. The unresolved Palestinian issue fuels anti-Israel sentiment across the region, providing fertile ground for Iran's proxy groups like Hezbollah and Hamas. Additionally, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 and subsequent rise of ISIS further destabilized the region and empowered Iran.

#### Impact on India:

- **Energy Security:** India is heavily reliant on oil imports from West Asia, and the ongoing conflict threatens the stability of supply chains and could lead to price hikes.
- **Trade:** Disruptions in shipping routes like the Red Sea due to Houthi attacks could impact India's trade with countries in the region.
- **Diaspora Safety:** The large Indian diaspora in the Gulf region could be impacted by the worsening security situation.
- **Regional Stability:** A wider West Asian conflict could destabilize neighboring Pakistan and Afghanistan, further impacting India's security interests.



#### Way Ahead for India:

- **Active Diplomacy:** India should leverage its strong relationships with both Israel and the Arab world to advocate for a peaceful resolution to the conflict.
- **Energy Diversification:** India needs to diversify its energy sources and reduce its dependence on oil imports from West Asia.
- **Maritime Security:** Enhancing India's maritime capabilities to secure shipping routes in the Indian Ocean is crucial.
- **Regional Cooperation:** India should work with other regional powers like China and Russia to promote stability in West Asia.
- **Economic Partnerships:** Despite the current turmoil, India can explore opportunities for economic partnerships with West Asian countries, particularly in areas like infrastructure and renewable energy.

#### Impact on Regional Security:

- **Instability and escalation:** This polycentric crisis transcends traditional state-to-state conflicts, posing complex challenges.
- **Old order crumbling:** US dominance waning, Iran-backed actors growing bolder, Arab allies frustrated.
- **Unclear way out:** Israel unlikely to end Gaza war soon, fueling further attacks from Hezbollah, Houthis, and others.

## Impact on Regional Security:

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## Overall Outlook:

- A highly volatile and unpredictable situation with no immediate resolution in sight.
- Potential for further escalation and spillover effects across the region.
- Saudi-Iran detente and Saudi-Houthi peace a fragile silver lining amidst the chaos.

## Prelims Booster

### Ethnic killings in a Sudan city left up to 15,000 dead, says UN

- 😞 Between 10,000 and 15,000 people reportedly killed in West Darfur, Sudan, with the involvement of paramilitary forces and allied militia.



- 🌐 The United Nations report implicates the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in providing military support to the Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

- 🚫 The UAE denies these claims, stating humanitarian aid deliveries to Sudanese war refugees and inviting UN monitors to witness their efforts.

- ⚠️ Concerns arise about the complex dynamics and potential consequences of external involvement in the Sudanese conflict.

### Temples In News

#### 🏛️ Ramanathaswamy Temple:

- Known for its imposing structure, majestic towers, intricate sculptural works, and corridors, making it an architectural marvel.

- The main deity worshipped in the temple is in the form of lingam, with a massive 17.5 feet tall idol of Nandi.
- Other deities worshipped here include Goddess Vishalakshi, Parvathavardhini, Lord Vinayaka, Lord Subrahmanya, Utsava idol, Sayanagriha, and Perumal.

#### 📖 Legend:

- Associated with Lord Rama from the Indian epic Ramayana, where it is believed that the self-same Shiva Linga, known as Ramalingam, is now worshipped at the Ramanathaswamy temple.
- The lingam brought by Hanuman from Kailash is called Vishwalingam.

#### 🏛️ Srirangam Temple Tiruchirappalli:

- Hindu temple dedicated to Sri Ranganatha, one of the most important temples for worshipping Lord Vishnu.
- Also known as Ranganathaswamy Temple, Ranganatha Temple, and Sri Ranganatha Temple.
- Constructed in Hindu architectural style during the Vijayanagara period (1336–1565) and follows the Thenkalai tradition of Sri Vaishnavism.

#### 🌐 Significance:

- India's largest temple compound and one of the world's greatest religious complexes.
- The abode of Lord Ranganatha, a form of Lord Vishnu in a reclining pose, also known as Nam Perumal and Azhagiya Manavaalan, Tamil for "our god" and "beautiful groom".

### Digital University Kerala introduces Kairali AI Chip, the first of its kind

#### 🧠 Introduction of Kairali AI Chip:

- Unveiled by Digital University Kerala, the State's first silicon-proven artificial intelligence (AI) chip – Kairali AI Chip.
- Designed by the AI Chip Centre at Digital University Kerala, led by Dean (Academics) Alex P. James.

#### 🚀 Key Features and Applications:

- Offers speed, power efficiency, and scalability, contributing to edge intelligence (edge AI) applications.
- Applications span various sectors, including agriculture, aerospace, mobile phones, automobiles, drones, and security.

#### 🌱 Agriculture Sector Revolution:

- Facilitates precision farming through real-time monitoring of crop health, soil conditions, and environmental factors.
- Aims to optimize resource usage and enhance crop yields.

#### 📱 Impact on Mobile Phone Industry:

- Improves efficiency and performance in the mobile phone industry, enabling advanced features like real-time language translation and AI-powered personal assistants.

#### 🚁 Enhancing UAVs and Satellites:

- Augments capabilities of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and satellites with advanced processing power, supporting navigation, data collection, and real-time decision-making.

#### 🚁 Applications in Drones:

- Promises enhanced navigation and autonomous decision-making for drones, crucial for applications ranging from delivery services to environmental monitoring.

#### 🚗 Potential in Autonomous Vehicles:

- Provides computing power for real-time processing of sensory information, essential for safe and efficient autonomous driving.

#### 🔒 Edge Computing for Security and Surveillance:

- Enables faster and efficient facial recognition algorithms, supporting threat detection and real-time analytics in security and surveillance applications.