

## Mains Master

### Change and continuity in India's Palestine policy

- **Historical Support for Palestine:**
- **Alignment with Arab Bloc (1947):** India historically aligned with the Arab bloc, standing against the partition of Palestine in 1947, echoing a solidarity with the Arab nations in their stance against dividing historical Palestine.
- **Careful Balance with Israel (1992 onward):** Despite forging stronger ties with Israel since 1992, India has navigated a delicate balance, maintaining diplomatic ties with Israel while upholding its historical commitment to the Palestinian cause.
- **Shift After October 7 Hamas Attack:**
- **Solidarity with Israel:** In response to the October 7 Hamas attack, Prime Minister Modi expressed solidarity with Israel, marking a potential shift in India's stance towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- **Abstention from UNGA Vote:** India's decision to abstain from a UNGA vote, which called for a humanitarian truce in Gaza, raised concerns and sparked discussions about a potential deviation from India's traditional balancing act.
- **Evolution of India's Palestine Policy:**
- **Pragmatic Stance Post-1992:** Over the years, India's policy evolved from staunch advocacy for a negotiated solution for a sovereign Palestinian state to a more pragmatic approach, reflecting the changing geopolitical landscape.
- **Modi's 2018 Visit to Ramallah:** Prime Minister Modi's 2018 visit to Ramallah in the occupied West Bank marked a subtle shift, as he emphasized the need for dialogue without explicitly addressing contentious issues such as the status of Jerusalem and borders.
- **Post-October 7 Voting Record:**
- **Nuanced Position at the UN:** India's voting record at the UN post-October 7 showcased a nuanced position, carefully avoiding alignment with either extreme, emphasizing a diplomatic approach.
- **Support for Resolutions (November-December 2023):** India voted in favor of resolutions condemning Israeli settlements, expressing concern over the occupation of Golan Heights, calling for a ceasefire, and supporting Palestinian self-determination, indicating a multifaceted stance.
- **Balancing Act Maintained:**
- **No Strong Moral Criticism:** India's post-October 7 stance neither strongly criticizes Israel nor completely aligns with it, demonstrating a continued diplomatic balancing act.
- **Emphasis on Diplomacy:** India's approach emphasizes the importance of diplomacy for a two-state solution, condemns Israeli settlements, and supports the Palestinian right to self-determination, showcasing a nuanced strategy.
- **India's Interests:**
- **Limited Support Rooted in Tangible Interests:** India's limited support for the Palestinian cause is rooted in tangible national interests, as concerns about the humanitarian tragedy in Gaza align with India's broader aspirations to lead the Global South.
- **Impact on Regional Dynamics:**
- **Halt in Arab-Israel Reconciliation:** The October 7 attack and Israel's response have disrupted India's strategic considerations, leading to a pause in further Arab-Israel reconciliation.
- **Impact on IMEC Plans:** The developments affect India's plans for the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), showcasing how regional dynamics influence India's broader economic and strategic goals.
- **Guiding Core of India's Act West Policy:**
- **Jaishankar's Criticism at Munich Security Conference:** External Affairs Minister Jaishankar's criticism of Israel's war at the Munich Security Conference reflects India's concerns about civilian casualties in Gaza, underlining the complexity of India's stance in the conflict.
- **Emphasis on Stability in West Asia:** India stresses the need for an immediate end to the war, restoration of stability in West Asia, and a permanent resolution to the Palestine question as essential components of India's Act West policy.

### India's burgeoning death penalty crisis

#### Context:

- India has a growing death row population, reaching its highest level since 2004.
- The Supreme Court acquits a significant portion of death row cases (55% in 2023).

#### Background:

- The Supreme Court has attempted to reform death penalty sentencing guidelines.
- However, trial courts continue to impose death sentences without following these guidelines.
- High Courts rarely confirm death sentences.

#### Issue with Trial Courts:

- Trial courts are not following Supreme Court directives on proper sentencing procedures.
- This leads to unreliable convictions and a high number of acquittals on appeal.

#### Supreme Court's Initiative:

- The Supreme Court established a Constitution Bench to address death penalty sentencing.

#### Too Little, Too Late:

- Focusing solely on sentencing reform may be insufficient.
- The crisis extends beyond sentencing to issues throughout the criminal justice system, including police investigations and prison conditions.

#### Way Forward:

- A broader approach is needed to address systemic problems within the entire criminal justice system.
- The high rate of acquittals highlights the risk of errors in capital punishment cases.

### Decoding the script

#### Context:

- The Department of Biotechnology funded Genome India Project has successfully sequenced 10,000 Indian genomes.
- This accomplishment marks the creation of the first comprehensive reference point for the Indian human genome, acting as a blueprint for future research.

#### Background:

- Prior to this project, India relied on general human genome references, lacking the specific details relevant to its population.
- The country's immense diversity, with nearly 4,500 population groups and a history of endogamy within castes, necessitates a specific reference genome to account for potential rare genetic variations.

#### What is Genome Sequencing?

- Genome sequencing is the process of determining the complete genetic makeup, or DNA code, of an individual. This analysis provides a wealth of information about an individual's inherited traits and potential predispositions to diseases.

#### How it Will Help Indians:

- Improved disease prediction and prevention: By comparing the reference Indian genome with individual genomes, scientists can identify genetic variations associated with diseases prevalent in the Indian population. The example cited in the passage is the discovery of a gene variant linked to a higher risk of heart failure in Indians. This knowledge can be used to develop better screening programs and preventative measures for at-risk individuals.

## Other Benefits:

- Understanding the unique genetic makeup of the Indian population: The data from the Genome India Project will shed light on the specific genetic characteristics of Indian people. This knowledge can be crucial in various fields, such as developing targeted medications or personalized medicine approaches tailored to the Indian population's genetic makeup. It can also improve our understanding of human history and migration patterns within the Indian subcontinent.

## Key Concern:

- Sharing and accessibility of research findings:** The project emphasizes the importance of ensuring that the research findings are not restricted to academic institutions. There's a need for "imaginative collaborations" to ensure this knowledge reaches various stakeholders, including scientists in different fields, students, technology companies, ethicists, and social scientists. Limiting access to these findings hinders further research and development and delays the potential benefits for the Indian population.

## Way Forward:

- Sequencing more than 10,000 genomes:** The current sample size provides a valuable starting point, but a larger sample encompassing a wider range of the Indian population is necessary to create a more robust and representative reference genome.
- Fostering collaboration among scientists, students, and other stakeholders:** Encouraging collaboration between researchers, students, medical professionals, and other relevant parties will accelerate scientific progress, promote innovation in healthcare, and ensure the ethical application of these findings.
- Ensuring ethical considerations and public access to research findings:** Ethical considerations such as informed consent and data privacy must be addressed. Public outreach programs are necessary to raise awareness about the project's goals and findings, empowering the public to make informed decisions about their health and participate in future research endeavors.

# Prelims Booster

## India to establish international alliance to protect big cats

- The Union Environment Ministry plans to establish an International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA), headquartered in India, to lead initiatives in disseminating good practices in conserving big cats, with India committing ₹150 crore for five years. This initiative is modeled after the International Solar Alliance and aims to leverage India's global leadership in tiger conservation to promote the protection of big cats worldwide.
- The IBCA aims to address the conservation challenges of big cats across their range of habitats, with 16 countries already giving their written consent to be part of the alliance. The alliance is open to other countries, conservation organizations, scientific organizations, businesses, and corporates interested in supporting big cats. This collaborative approach seeks to bridge the gap in availing resources and the optimal use of practices and processes in big cat conservation.
- The alliance will serve as a central common repository for technical know-how and a corpus of funds, strengthening existing species-specific intergovernmental platforms, networks, and transnational initiatives on conservation and protection. By providing a platform for sharing best practices and resources, the IBCA aims to facilitate the replication of successful conservation strategies developed in India to other range countries.
- Frontline staff in member countries will be trained in eliciting local support for big-cat conservation, and research and development in wildlife monitoring. This training will enhance the capacity of conservation efforts by empowering local stakeholders and ensuring effective wildlife management.
- Additionally, communities living near forests will be trained in developing eco-tourism and livelihood opportunities. This approach aims to create sustainable economic alternatives for local communities, thereby reducing human-wildlife conflict and promoting the coexistence of humans and big cats.

## Delhi HC sets aside CIC order on Ram Temple trust

- The Delhi High Court has set aside an order issued by the Central Information Commission (CIC) that directed the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) to provide information related to tax exemptions/deductions sought by the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, which manages the Ram Temple in Ayodhya.
- The Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust, established by the Union government in February 2020 for the construction and management of the Ram Mandir, has collected about ₹3,500 crore in donations since its establishment and received donations of up to ₹25 crore since the temple's consecration in January 2022.
- The CIC's directive to the CBDT in November 2022 to share the complete details of applications filed by the Ram Temple Trust for tax exemptions/deductions under Section 80G(2)(b) of the Income Tax Act was in response to an RTI application filed by Kailash Chandra Moondra, who also sought a copy of the trust deed.
- The judgment delivered by the single-judge Bench of Justice Subramonium Prasad on February 28 stated that it is open to the petitioner to approach the appropriate authority under the Income Tax Act, with the government's counsel maintaining that the information pertaining to an assessee cannot be granted under the RTI Act in view of Section 138(1)(b) of the Income Tax Act, 1961.

## NBDSA raps 3 news channels for violating Code of Ethics

- The News Broadcasting & Digital Standards Authority (NBDSA) has directed three TV news channels to remove videos of certain programs on communal issues as they violated the Code of Ethics and other guidelines, imposing penalties on two of them.
- Times Now Navbharat was fined ₹1 lakh and directed to remove a program video from its website, YouTube, and hyperlinks within seven days for violating the Code of Ethics and Broadcasting Standards, particularly the principles relating to impartiality, objectivity, neutrality, and accuracy.
- News18 India was admonished by the NBDSA for four programs on the Shradha Walker murder case and alleged "love jihad", with a fine of ₹50,000 imposed and a directive to remove the videos from all online platforms within seven days of the order.
- Aaj Tak's program broadcast on March 31, 2023, attracted a complaint alleging a violation of the Code of Ethics, particularly for failing to mention the burning of a mosque and Muslim shops and houses in Nalanda, Bihar, and the delayed police response.
- The **News Broadcasters & Digital Association (NBDA)** [Formerly known as News Broadcasters Association (NBA)] represents the private television news, current affairs and digital broadcasters. It is the collective voice of the news, current affairs and digital broadcasters in India. It is an organization funded entirely by its members.

The NBDA has presently 27 leading news and current affairs broadcasters (comprising 125 news and current affairs channels) as its members. The NBDA presents a unified and credible voice before the Government, on matters that affect the growing industry.

## FIU imposes ₹5.49 cr. fine on Paytm bank for PMLA lapses

- The Financial Intelligence Unit-India has fined Paytm Payments Bank Ltd. (PPBL) ₹5.49 crore for violations of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, after finding substantial proof of money generated from illegal activity being routed through accounts held by entities with the bank.
- The FIU-IND initiated a review of PPBL's operations after receiving "specific information" from law enforcement agencies about entities engaging in illegal acts, including organizing and facilitating online gambling, with the money generated from these illegal operations being routed through bank accounts maintained by these entities with PPBL.
- The penalty pertains to issues within a business segment that was discontinued two years ago, according to a PPBL spokesperson. The FIU found PPBL to be in breach of KYC, anti-money laundering, and terrorism financing norms, allowing entities to route their illegal activities' proceeds through its accounts.