

Mains Master

United Nations calls for ceasefire in Gaza during month of Ramzan

- **Context:**
 - The United Nations Security Council passed a resolution urging a ceasefire in Gaza during the month of Ramzan, highlighting ongoing efforts to address the conflict in the region.
 - Despite previous attempts to pass similar resolutions being blocked by Russia and China, the Security Council persisted in its diplomatic efforts to secure a ceasefire.
 - Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu expressed dissatisfaction with the U.S. for abstaining from the vote, accusing them of backtracking on their stance and allowing the resolution to pass without addressing Israel's concerns.
- **Background:**
 - The resolution was approved with a vote of 14-0, with the United States choosing to abstain rather than exercise its veto power.
 - Netanyahu's decision to cancel a planned visit to Washington with a high-level delegation underscored the significance of the resolution and Israel's displeasure with the outcome.
 - The resolution called for a ceasefire during Ramzan but did not include provisions addressing the release of hostages held by Hamas, a key demand made by Netanyahu.
- **Resolution Details:**
 - The resolution specifically called for a ceasefire during the month of Ramzan, with the aim of halting the ongoing violence in Gaza until April 9.
 - It received support from key players such as Russia, China, and the Arab Group at the UN, indicating a broad international consensus on the need for a temporary cessation of hostilities.
 - Initially, the draft resolution included a demand for a "permanent sustainable ceasefire," but this language was revised at the request of the United States, indicating diplomatic negotiations and compromises during the drafting process.
- **Reasons for Delay:**
 - The delay in reaching a resolution can be attributed to disagreements among Security Council members over the wording of the resolution, particularly regarding the condemnation of Hamas and the linkage of the ceasefire to the release of hostages.
 - These disagreements reflect broader divisions and tensions within the international community regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, making consensus-building a challenging process.
- **Critical Outlook:**
 - The resolution's failure to address the release of hostages held by Hamas raises concerns about its effectiveness in addressing the root causes of the conflict and achieving a lasting peace.
 - Netanyahu's criticism of the United States underscores the complex dynamics at play and the challenges of balancing competing interests within the Security Council.
 - While the resolution represents a step forward in diplomatic efforts to mitigate the violence in Gaza, its limitations and potential shortcomings highlight the need for continued engagement and dialogue to address the underlying issues fueling the conflict.
- **Conclusion:**
 - The resolution marks a significant diplomatic initiative aimed at de-escalating tensions in Gaza and promoting stability in the region.
 - However, its effectiveness in achieving a lasting ceasefire and addressing the underlying grievances of both parties remains uncertain.
 - Moving forward, sustained diplomatic efforts and constructive dialogue will be essential to build upon the resolution and advance the prospects for a comprehensive peace agreement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Sordid scheme

- **Context:**
 - Following the Supreme Court's directive, the State Bank of India released data regarding electoral financing through electoral bonds, a previously opaque channel.
 - The delay and reluctance of the SBI to provide comprehensive data highlights the entrenched opacity and lack of transparency within the electoral financing system in India.
- **Background:**
 - Electoral bonds were introduced by the Union government as a means of funding political parties while ensuring anonymity for donors.
 - Despite assurances of anonymity, concerns were raised about the lack of transparency and accountability in the electoral bond scheme.
 - The Supreme Court rejected arguments advocating for the need for opacity in electoral bonds, emphasizing the importance of transparency and accountability in the electoral process.
- **Crony Capitalism and Favoritism:**
 - Analysis of the data reveals a troubling pattern wherein large donations to certain political parties correspond with bond purchasers receiving lucrative infrastructure contracts.
 - Entities under investigation by enforcement agencies were found to have purchased electoral bonds, which were later encashed by the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), suggesting potential quid pro quo arrangements.
 - The concentration of donations from top firms overwhelmingly towards the BJP suggests a systematic use of electoral bonds to gain favor with the ruling establishment, undermining the principles of fair competition in the electoral arena.
- **Mockery of Indian Democracy:**
 - The electoral bond scheme has significantly skewed the landscape of campaign and party financing, tilting the balance in favor of the ruling party and diminishing the level playing field in Indian democracy.
 - By obscuring the true motivations behind donations, the lack of transparency in the electoral bond scheme has enabled potential abuse of power and influence, undermining the integrity of the democratic process.
- **Way Ahead:**
 - Civil society plays a pivotal role in raising awareness among the electorate about the flaws and biases inherent in the electoral bond scheme.
 - Educating the public about the disproportionate influence of electoral bonds on political financing is essential for holding political parties accountable and fostering transparency in the electoral process.
 - Reforms aimed at restructuring the electoral financing system to ensure transparency, accountability, and fairness are imperative for upholding the principles of democracy and restoring public trust in the electoral process.

Understanding what the right to equality promises

Context

- India's Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2019 (CAA) faces legal challenges in the Supreme Court for alleged violations of Article 14 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees equality.

Background

- The CAA offers a path to citizenship for persecuted minorities from neighboring countries but excludes Muslims, sparking criticism.
- The government defends the CAA, arguing it reasonably differentiates between persecuted minorities and others.

Equality: A Constitutional Ideal

- The author argues that the traditional "reasonable classification" test used to assess equality violations may not fully protect the values enshrined in Article 14.
- This test focuses on identifying differences between groups and their link to a policy objective but can miss deeper nuances and the spirit of equality.

Challenges

- The CAA may pass the classification test but still violates the broader concept of equality and India's secular principles by discriminating based on religion.
- The "reasonable classification" test leaves too much to judicial discretion, making the protection of equality unpredictable.
- There's a lack of robust alternatives; other tests like "manifest arbitrariness" are too vague.

Way Forward

- The author calls for a radical rethinking of how the right to equality is understood and applied.
- This involves:
 - Moving beyond the simple idea of "treat equals equally, unequals unequally."
 - Developing a more comprehensive constitutional understanding of equality.
 - Courts asking tougher questions of the state to justify policies potentially violating equality.
- The CAA case provides an opportunity to make a clear break from the past and set new standards that truly protect India's commitment to equality.

On campaigning in the name of religion

- **Context:**
 - Recent complaints filed with the Election Commission of India (ECI) by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) against Rahul Gandhi and counter complaints by the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) against the Prime Minister highlight the issue of campaigning in the name of religion.
- **Background:**
 - **Section 123(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RP Act)** prohibits appeals based on religion, race, caste, community, or language as corrupt electoral practices.
 - The **Model Code of Conduct (MCC)** mandates political parties and candidates to refrain from activities that aggravate existing differences or create mutual hatred based on caste, religion, or language.
- **Issue:**
 - Despite legal provisions, there have been instances of political leaders appealing for votes on religious grounds, undermining the secular fabric of the Indian democracy.
 - Bal Thackeray of Shiv Sena is the only notable leader convicted by the Supreme Court for violating electoral laws by appealing for votes on religious grounds.
- **Legal Provisions to Curb:**
 - Section 123(3) of the RP Act and Section 123(3A) denounce appeals based on religion as corrupt electoral practices, punishable by debarment from contesting elections for up to six years.
 - The MCC, though lacking statutory backing, is enforced by the ECI to ensure fair and transparent elections, prohibiting appeals to caste or communal feelings for securing votes.
- **Supreme Court Observation:**
 - In the case of **Abhiram Singh versus C. D. Commachen (2017)**, the Supreme Court ruled that candidates must not appeal for votes based on their own religion or that of the voters, emphasizing the secular nature of elections.
 - The court provided a 'purposive interpretation' to Section 123(3), extending the prohibition to appeals based on the religion of voters as well.
 - Law Commission's Recommendation:
 - The Law Commission may recommend further strengthening of electoral laws to deter candidates from making appeals based on religion or communal affiliations.
 - Mechanisms for swift action against violators of electoral laws, particularly those making appeals in the name of religion, should be devised by the Election Commission and the courts.

- **Way Forward:**
 - Political parties and candidates should address citizens' concerns on traits originating from religion, caste, or community through policies without jeopardizing the secular fabric of the country.
 - Overt and covert use of places of worship for canvassing and the involvement of religious leaders in political campaigns should be discouraged to maintain the separation of politics and religion.
 - Strengthening legal provisions, strict enforcement of the MCC, and swift action against violators are crucial to preserving the secular and democratic ethos of India's electoral process.

On semiconductors: how they are made, used and who manufactures them

Context

- Semiconductors are the foundation of modern electronics. They are essential for the devices and technologies that make our current way of life possible.

Background

- Semiconductors possess unique electrical properties. They have a conductivity level between that of conductors (like metals) and insulators (like glass). This allows precise control over the flow of electricity, a crucial function within electronic devices.

What are semiconductors?

- Semiconductors are typically made from pure elements like silicon or germanium, or compounds like gallium arsenide.
- Their conductivity and other properties can be finely tuned through a process called "doping," where small amounts of impurities are intentionally added.
- Transistors, the building blocks of modern electronics, are the most important application of semiconductors.

Manufacturing Process

- **Ultra-pure Materials:** Semiconductor production begins with highly purified silicon wafers.
- **Photolithography:** Circuit patterns are etched onto the wafer using light in a process similar to photography.
- **Doping:** Specific areas of the wafer are selectively infused with impurities to modify conductivity.
- **Layering:** Thin layers of conductive and insulating materials are deposited to create intricate connections.

Global Landscape

- Semiconductor manufacturing is a complex, global enterprise involving specialized companies:
 - **Equipment:** ASML (lithography machines), Applied Materials, Lam
- **Research**
 - **Design Software:** Synopsys, Cadence
 - **Fabrication:** TSMC (Taiwan)
 - **Intellectual Property:** Arm (UK)

Benefits of Semiconductors

- Semiconductors power countless everyday devices and drive essential technologies across industries.
- They are pivotal in advancements in AI, electric vehicles, space exploration, and healthcare.
- This field fuels innovation, creates jobs, and helps tackle global challenges.
- **Geopolitical Implications**
 - **Economic Power & National Security:** The ability to design and produce advanced semiconductors translates into significant economic power as well as enhanced national security capabilities. Modern militaries, intelligence systems, and critical infrastructure heavily rely on these chips.
 - **The US-China Rivalry:** The US sees China's growing semiconductor capabilities as a strategic threat. Sanctions on Chinese companies like Huawei and SMIC aim to limit China's technological advancement and protect the dominance of US firms. This technological arms race is a core element in the broader geopolitical competition between the two superpowers.

- Supply Chain Dilemma: The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragile nature of global supply chains. Nations are scrambling to establish or strengthen their own semiconductor capabilities to ensure resilience and have more control over the technology they depend on for both economic and defense purposes.

- The Scramble for Talent: The semiconductor industry requires a highly skilled workforce of engineers, scientists, and technicians. Competition for these specialists is fierce, with nations vying to attract and retain the best talent.

India's Initiatives

- Reducing Reliance: India is currently a major importer of semiconductors. Government initiatives aim to reduce this reliance on foreign nations and the vulnerabilities it creates.
- "Make in India" Push: The government is incentivizing foreign companies to invest in semiconductor manufacturing within India. This fits into the broader "Make in India" program to boost domestic manufacturing across various sectors.
- Developing an Ecosystem: India recognizes that simply building fabrication plants is insufficient. Efforts are underway to develop the supporting ecosystem, including research institutions, material suppliers, and specialized workforce training programs.
- Leveraging Software Strengths: India's strong IT and software engineering sectors provide a potential advantage. The government hopes to capitalize on this talent pool and grow competency in chip design and other higher-value areas of the semiconductor industry.

Challenges and Considerations

- Immense Capital Investment: Building advanced semiconductor fabs is incredibly expensive, running into the tens of billions of dollars. India will need to attract major foreign investment and offer favorable conditions to international companies.
- Technological Complexity: Cutting-edge semiconductor manufacturing requires state-of-the-art equipment, highly controlled environments, and sophisticated processes. Developing this expertise will take time and resources.
- Water and Energy Demands: Semiconductor fabs consume large amounts of ultra-clean water and electricity. India will need to ensure its infrastructure can support these needs.
- Way Forward
 - Continued investment in semiconductor research and manufacturing is crucial for technological advancement and economic competitiveness.
 - International collaboration, while complex, will be important in ensuring supply chain stability and addressing the global need for semiconductors.

Prelims Booster

El Nino impact leaves Malawi and region on the edge of a hunger crisis

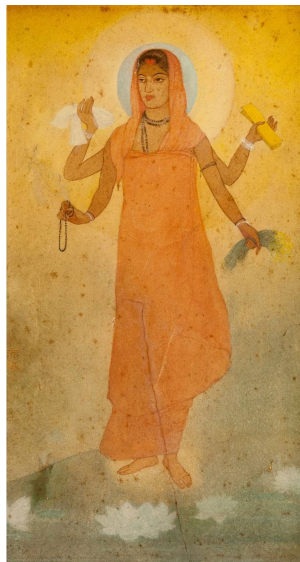
- Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe are facing a severe hunger crisis due to drought conditions exacerbated by the El Niño weather phenomenon, with millions of people in southern and central Africa at risk of food insecurity and malnutrition, prompting urgent appeals for humanitarian assistance and declarations of states of disaster.
- The drought has decimated crops, particularly corn, the staple food in the region, leading to severe food shortages and malnutrition among vulnerable populations, with Malawi reporting a significant failure in its corn crop and a high number of households directly impacted by the crisis.
- El Niño, known for causing below-average rainfall in southern Africa, has been intensified by climate change, resulting in one of the driest spells in decades, exacerbating food insecurity and water scarcity in the region, with countries like Malawi, Zambia, and Zimbabwe grappling with the devastating impacts on agriculture and livelihoods.
- International organizations like the World Food Programme (WFP) and USAID have launched emergency feeding programs to assist millions of people facing acute food shortages, highlighting the urgent need for humanitarian aid and long-term solutions to address the root causes of the hunger crisis in southern and central Africa.

Will Sangh Parivar renounce 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai': Pinarayi

A controversy erupted after the remark of Kerala CM. Some Sangh Parivar leaders who visited here have asked those in attendance to chant the slogan 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai'. Do they know who coined the slogan? I'm not sure if the Sangh Parivar is aware that it was Azimullah Khan," the CM remarked. Let's look how the term Bharat Mata originated ..

- The slogan 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' holds a significant place in Indian history and culture, representing a deep sense of reverence and patriotism towards the nation. It symbolizes not only the abstract idea of the nation but also embodies the iconic representation of Bharat Mata, often depicted as a motherly figure symbolizing the spirit and essence of the land. This dual symbolism reflects a profound connection between the people of India and their homeland, evoking sentiments of love, respect, and unity.

- The origins of the slogan can be traced back to literary works such as 'Unabimsa Purana' and gained widespread popularity through Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's novel 'Anandamath'. Published in the late 19th century, 'Anandamath' played a pivotal role in popularizing the concept of Bharat Mata as a divine mother figure, inspiring a sense of national pride and unity among Indians. The novel's iconic song 'Vande Mataram' further reinforced the idea of reverence towards the motherland and became synonymous with the freedom struggle.



During the Swadeshi movement in 1905, Abanindranath Tagore painted an image of 'Banga Mata' but decided to title it as Bharat Mata

- The visual representation of Bharat Mata evolved over time, with artists depicting her in various forms, often intertwined with the map and territory of the nation. These artistic representations portrayed Bharat Mata as a divine and maternal figure, embodying the collective spirit and identity of the Indian people. The fusion of Hindu religious symbolism, such as the portrayal of Bharat Mata as a goddess, with nationalist fervor created a powerful visual symbol that resonated deeply with the masses.

- Despite its widespread acceptance and popularity, the slogan 'Bharat Mata Ki Jai' has also faced controversies and objections due to its religious connotations. The association of Bharat Mata with a Vaishnav Hindu goddess raised concerns among certain sections of society, leading to debates and discussions about the secular nature of the slogan. These controversies, both pre and post-Independence, underscore the complex interplay between religious imagery and nationalist sentiments in Indian discourse, highlighting the diverse and multifaceted nature of the country's cultural and political landscape.

