Pakistan Government admits before Islamabad High Court that PoK is a Foreign Territory

Pakistan's Additional Attorney General told the court that Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) is a foreign land which does not come under Pakistan's jurisdiction.

About PoK

- PoK was **illegally occupied by Pakistan in 1947** and comprises of **two ethnically and linguistically different regions: Mirpur-Muzaffarabad region** and **Gilgit-Baltistan region.**
- PoK is part of the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh, and hence an **integral part of India.**
- It is a major bone of contention in **India-Pakistan territorial dispute.**

Current status of India-Pakistan Territorial demarcation

- **International Border (IB):** Stretches for approximately 2,400 km from Gujarat to the north banks of Chenab in Akhnoor in Jammu.
- **Line of Control (LoC):** It is a ceasefire line (runs from parts of Jammu to parts of Leh) which came into existence after the 1948 and 1971 wars between India and Pakistan and was **delineated in the Simla Agreement (1972).**
- **Actual Ground Position Line (AGPL):** It divides the current position of Indian and Pakistani troops in Siachen region and extends from **NJ 9842 to Indira Col in north.**
- Further, IB in Sir Creek area and International Maritime Boundary line between India and Pakistan have not been demarcated.

Related News

- Recently, former Pakistani prime minister admitted that Pakistan had violated the **Lahore Pact (1999)** signed between the then Indian PM and his Pakistani counterpart.
- Lahore Pact emphasized on **composite and integrated dialogue** to resolve outstanding issues between the two countries.
  - However, shortly after signing the pact, Pakistani troops infiltrated the Kargil district, leading to the **Kargil conflict of 1999.**

RBI to expand Unified Payment Interface (UPI) to 20 countries by 2028-29

In its Annual Report for 2023-24, RBI, in collaboration with **NPCI International Payments Ltd. (NIPL),** set an agenda to work on expanding UPI.

- RBI also aims to explore **collaboration on Fast Payment System** with groups of countries such as **European Union** and **SAARC,** along with multilateral linkages.

About UPI

- **UPI,** launched by NPCI in **2016,** powers **multiple bank accounts into a single mobile application,** merging several banking features, seamless fund routing & merchant payments.
- Currently, several countries, including **Bhutan, Nepal, UAE, France, Mauritius,** etc., **support UPI payment.**

Significance of Internationalization of UPI

- **Global market expansion:** Faster and easier cross-border payments can stimulate trade between India and other countries.
- **Interoperability and standardization:** Wider adoption of UPI can promote interoperability between payment systems across countries ensuring smoother integration with financial technologies worldwide.
- **'Digital' diplomacy:** Strengthening of India's influence and goodwill through technological collaboration.

Challenges in Internationalization of UPI

- **Regulatory compliance:** Ensuring compliance with diverse regulatory frameworks across multiple jurisdictions can be complex and time-consuming.
- **Security and data privacy:** Robust security measures, encryption protocols, and data protection mechanisms are needed to maintain user trust.
- **Others:** infrastructure disparities, competition from established players such as China's Alipay, etc.

Steps taken for Internationalization of UPI

- **NIPL:** Wholly owned subsidiary of **National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI),** incorporated in 2020, for **deployment of RuPay and UPI outside of India.**
- **UPI One World:** Prepaid payment instrument linked to UPI provided to foreign nationals/ NRIs coming from G20 countries.
- **India's Initiatives under G20:**
  - **Global Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Repository.**
  - **Social Impact Fund** to advance DPI in the Global South.

Note: UPI is an integral part of the Payments layer of Digital Public Infrastructure.

NHRC directed all states to have 'anti-human trafficking (AHT) nodal officer'

After ensuring criminal action against those involved in **selling minor girls** on stamp papers **in Rajasthan's Kanjar community,** the NHRC directs states to appoint AHT Nodal Officers.

- These officers shall not be **below the rank of a State Secretary or an Inspector General of Police.**
- They are mandated to coordinate with the government and take effective measures through **District Anti-Human Trafficking Units** (led by officers, not below Deputy SP) **to combat human trafficking.**

Human Trafficking

- **Definition:** Human Trafficking is the **recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt** of people through **force, fraud, or deception to exploit them** for profit (UN).
- **Status:** In 2022, India reported 2,250 human trafficking cases (NCRB).
- **Regulation:** Since **'Police'** is a **State subject,** registration, investigation and prevention of human trafficking is primarily the responsibility of State Governments.
- **Constitutional Provisions: Article 23** prohibits human trafficking; **Articles 39(e) and 39(f) ordain that** no one is forced into unsuitable work due to economic necessity.

Causes of Human Trafficking

- **Economic:** Poverty, unemployment, migration, and lack of access to quality education.
- **Political:** Political instability, war, and natural calamities, etc.
- **Cultural Practices:** Devaluation of women and girls in a society, Child marriage, etc.

Initiatives against human trafficking

- **Global:** Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking In Persons, Especially Women and Children adopted by the UNGA in 2000.
- **India**
  - **Legislations:** Immoral Traffic Prevention Act, 1956
  - **Anti-Human Trafficking Units:** Ministry of Home Affairs, provides **funding to all States/ UTs under the Nirbhaya Fund to set up/strengthen AHTUs in every district.**
  - **Cri-MAC:** Facilitates dissemination of information about significant crimes, including human trafficking cases on real time basis.
  - **Mission Shakti:** Under the Ministry of Women and Child Development. Its **Shakti Sadan** subscheme provides **Integrated Relief and Rehabilitation Homes** for women in distress situations (including trafficking).

ICRIER Releases Policy Brief on Post-Harvest Losses (PHL) in India

The policy brief highlights the **triple win of reducing PHL:**

- Benefiting farmers (enhanced income),
- Enhancing food security, and
- Ensuring sustainability (less resource exploitation) in agri-food systems.

Key highlights

- **Production in India**
  - **Food Grain:** Increased from 74.23 million metric tonnes (MMT) in 1966-67 to **330.5 MMT** in **2022-23.**
  - **Horticulture:** Increased from 96.6 MMT in 1991-92 to **355.25 MMT in 2022-23.**
- **India's Storage capacity:** Expanded from **108.8 MMT in 2010 to 219.4 MMT in 2021**
- **PHL:** Globally, around 30% of food produced never reaches consumers (FAO, 2021).
  - **India faces higher PHL** in cereals, pulses, and oilseeds than global levels.
  - **Annual loss of US $18.5 billion** from 2020 to 2022, despite some reduction in PHL from 2012 to 2022.

Key factors behind PHL in India

- **On-Farm Operations:** Low farmer education and skill levels, weather conditions, and the use of defective machinery.
- **Marketing Channels:** En-route leakages from open lorry transport, poor quality packaging, use of iron hooks, improper storage practices, etc.
- **Policy Issues:** Jute Packing Material Act (1987) mandates using jute bags, which are susceptible to pests, insects, and contamination.

Way forward

- **Mechanization** in agriculture,
- **Reforming the Public Distribution System (PDS)** and boosting direct cash transfer, etc.

Initiatives to reduce PHL

- **Private Entrepreneurs Guarantee (PEG) Scheme:** For augmenting the food storage capacity through private participation.
- **PM Kisan Sampada Yojana:** To reduce the PHL of horticulture and non-horticulture produce by creating modern infrastructure **for food processing closer to production areas.**
- **Agriculture Infrastructure Fund:** To mobilize a medium – long-term debt financing facility for investment in viable projects for post-harvest management Infrastructure and community farming assets
- **National Cooperative Grain Storage Project:** Launched in 2023 to expand cooperative sector storage facilities by 700 lakh tonnes.

Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act (2014): 10 years of Telangana State

Telangana was carved out of the erstwhile **Andhra Pradesh with Hyderabad as its capital** in 2014.

- After independence, **Andhra Pradesh State** was the first state to be formed **based on language** (in 1953 following the death of PottiSriramulu).
- The move for a separate Telangana state was motivated by **perceived regional inequality in the development.**
- Article 3 has provisions for the **Formation of new States and the alteration of areas, boundaries or names of existing States.**
- Currently, there are **28 states and 8 Union territories** in the country

Major factors driving the demand for new states in post-independence India

- **Language:** In 1953, the Central Government appointed the **State Reorganization Commission (SRC)** led by Justice **Fazal Ali.**
  - It recommended forming **14 states and 6 union territories (UTs)** based on factors like **financial viability, national welfare, development, language, culture, etc.**
  - Parliament implemented these recommendations through the **Constitution (7th Amendment) Act, 1956.**
- **Development:** Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand formed in **2000 and Telangana in 2014** are examples of new states created based on the level of development.
- **Other factors**: For example, reorganisation of the **States in India's northeast part** was based on **race, culture and customs.**

> **Formation of New States**
> - **According to the Article 3**
>   - **Power: Parliament may** by law form a new State.
>   - **Presidential Recommendation:** Such a Bill shall be introduced in **either House of Parliament** only on the recommendation of the President.
>   - **Consultation with State Legislatures:** Before recommending a Bill, which affects the area, boundaries or name of any of the States, the **President shall refer this Bill to the State to the Legislature to express its view within a specified time.**
> - Parliament can Create a new state through **ordinary legislation** (i.e. with a simple majority).

'Women in Leadership in Corporate India' report released by LinkedIn India

Report sheds light on progress made so far and outstanding challenges towards gender diversity and inclusion in women's corporate leadership.

Key Highlights of the report

- Globally, in **lower-middle income countries, 19.2% firms had female top manager** as against 17.3% in high-income countries. (World Bank, 2022)
- **In India**
  - Only 16% of employed people **in senior and middle management positions were female in 2022. (World Bank).**
  - Substantial **increase in proportion of women serving on boards** over the past decade, from **6% in 2013 to 18% in 2022.**

Reasons for gaps in Women's Corporate Leadership roles

- **Gaps in enforcement of existing regulatory measures:** During 2018-2023, 507 of companies have been fined for non-compliance with the Companies Act 2013 which mandates women directors on company boards.
- **Limited pool of women:** Due to lower female labor force participation rates (37% in 2022-23), women dropping off the workforce due to familial responsibilities, etc.
- **Social conditioning:** Women not applying for leadership roles due to their environments, cultural gender roles, etc.
- **Sector-wise discrepancies:** Representation of women greatly varies across sectors with determining factors such as work environment, travel requirements, disparity in pay, number and nature of the work-hours, etc.

> **Initiatives to promote women leadership**
> **Government-led**
> - **Companies Act, 2013:** Mandates presence of at least one woman director on the governing board of certain class/ classes of companies.
> - **Business Reporting requirements on Social Responsibility:** Seeks data on women representation in workforce and leadership.
> **Industry-led**
> - **Standing Conference of Public Enterprises (SCOPE):** Pledged to make concerted efforts to address the gap with a focus on ensuring gender-diversity in leadership positions in Public Sector Enterprises.
> - There are **similar initiatives from private sector corporations** like Accenture, Cognizant, etc.

Also in News

Sarus Crane

Some experts have highlighted that agricultural biodiversity plays a crucial role in conservation of Sarus Crane.

- **Agrobiodiversity** refers to variety and variability of living organisms that are associated with **cultivating crops and rearing animals within ecological complexes.**

About Sarus Crane

- It is **tallest flying bird in world.**
- **Distribution:** Found in northern India, Southeast Asia, and northern Australia.
- **Habitat:** Small seasonal marshes, floodplains, high altitude wetlands, human-altered ponds, fallow and cultivated lands and paddy fields.
- **Behavior:** Social creature (found in pairs or small groups), mate for life with single partner.
  - Its breeding season coincides with heavy rainfall in monsoon.
- **Conservation Status:**
  - **IUCN**: Vulnerable
  - **CITES:** Appendix II
  - **Wildlife** (Protection) Act, 1972: Schedule I

Cellulose decomposition

A study found that **agriculture and urbanization** are **accelerating the decomposition of plant litter** in rivers and streams.

- Plant litter are primarily cellulose.

Cellulose

- Cellulose is a **polymeric polysaccharide** made of **glucose** and is the **primary structural component of plant cell walls.**
- It is the **most abundant**
  - **Extracellular structural polysaccharide**
  - **Biomolecule in the biosphere.**

Cellulose decomposition

- **Cellulase** enzymes **hydrolyze cellulose into glucose,** a sugar that can be **fermented to ethanol** or could also undergo cellular respiration to yield CO_2 **and water.**
- Thus, cattle and termites can digest cellulose as their gut **harbours Cellulase-producing bacteria.**
  - However, **Cellulose cannot be digested by humans** as their gut lacks **cellulase enzyme.**

Far side of the Moon

Chang'e-6 landing marks **China's** second descent on the **far side of the moon.**

- **So far no other country has landed** on that half of the **moon.**
- **India's Chandrayaan-3 mission landed on the South Pole of the Near Side of the Moon.**

Far side of the Moon

- It refers to the **hemisphere of the Moon that always faces away from Earth** (hence also referred to as the dark side of the Moon).
  - ⊘ This happens because the **Moon is tidally locked with Earth** due to gravitational pull.
- **Soviet Union's Luna 3 spacecraft took the first photo** of this side of the Moon
- It has a **thicker crust, more craters, and fewer lava plains** than near side.

Multilateral Peace Operations

SIPRI published a topical backgrounder titled **'Multilateral peace operations in 2023: Developments and trends'** on important developments related to multilateral peace operations during 2023.

Key Findings on multilateral peace operations

- **Largest numbers of multilateral peace operations** (20) were conducted by the United Nations.
- India was the **highest contributor of military personnel for UN peacekeeping forces** in 2023.
- In 2023, **63 multilateral peace operations** were active in **37 countries.**
- **Largest deployment** of peacekeeping forces was in **Sub-Saharan Africa.**

Unified India Organic Logo

FSSAI and APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority) have jointly developed Unified India Organic logo **to replace the India Organic and Jaivik Bharat logos.**

- Currently, **India Organic logo** is used on organic products complying with National Programme for Organic Products (NPOP), while **Jaivik Bharat** was used on organic products certified by FSSAI.

About Unified India Organic Logo

- It is aimed to bring **uniformity and convergence in implementation of Indian regulations on organic products.**
- It will distinguish organic products from non-organic communicating adherence to the **National Standards for Organic Production.**

RBI's Gold Reserve

In FY24, RBI moved **100 metric tonnes of gold** from the U.K. to **domestic vaults** (at Mumbai and Nagpur).

- India's total gold holdings in **FY24** reached **822 metric tonnes of which around 50% is stored locally.**
  - ⊘ **All banknotes issued by RBI** are backed by assets such as **gold, Government Securities and Foreign Currency Assets,** as defined in Section 33 of the RBI Act, 1934.
- **Storing gold abroad poses risks,** especially during geopolitical tensions, as highlighted by the **freezing of Russian assets by Western nations.**

Tmesipteris oblanceolata

News research shows that Tmesipteris oblanceolata, a species of fork fern, has **largest genome.**

- **Genome** is the complete set of genetic information in an organism.

About Tmesipteris oblanceolata

- Contains **160 billion base pairs** (the units that make up a strand of DNA) outstripping the human genome by more than 50 times.
- It belongs to a **primordial group of plants** that evolved long before dinosaurs set foot on the earth.
- Found only in **New Caledonia and a few nearby islands in the Pacific Ocean** and thrives on the trunks and branches of trees in rainforests.

Biocover

A recent study has proposed a **sustainable approach of microbial methane oxidation system** (called as **biocover**) to control fugitive methane emissions from old dumpsites.

About Biocover

- Biocovers are **porous material layer laid directly on top of a landfill** which is then covered by an **oxidizing layer of mature compost.**
- It provides optimal conditions for **methanotrophic (methane utilizing) bacteria** to thrive and act as biofilters, hence **control methane emissions by converting methane to CO_2.**
- **Potential applications:** Road construction, land reclamation, etc.
- **Concerns:** As they are found in old and deep dumpsites, they may be contaminated with heavy metals and microplastics.

Places in News   📰 Iraq (Capital: Baghdad)

UNSC voted to end the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) established in 2003 following the United States-led invasion.

- UNAMI was established to coordinate post-conflict humanitarian and reconstruction efforts, and to help restore a representative government in the country.

Political Features

- **Territorial Boundaries:** Turkiye (north), Iran (east), Syria and Jordan (west), Saudi Arabia and Kuwait (South)
- **Maritime Boundaries:** Opens into **Persian Gulf**

Geographical Features

- **Major Mountains:** Sinjar Mountains, Zagros Mountains (Northern Iraq, bordering Iran)
- **Rivers:** Tigris, Euphrates
- **Lakes:** Habbaniya, Razzaza or Lake Milh (man-made lake and it at the risk of drying up)

AHMEDABAD | BENGALURU | BHOPAL | CHANDIGARH | DELHI | GUWAHATI | HYDERABAD | JAIPUR | JODHPUR | LUCKNOW | PRAYAGRAJ | PUNE | RANCHI