

LAST PHASE TODAY: ENTIRE PUNJAB, HIMACHAL AMONG 57 SEATS

It's a wrap

BPSC CONCEPT WALLAH

TOPIC-2 NCLAT (The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal)

The National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) is an important quasi-judicial body in India that deals with issues related to company law and insolvency. Here's a brief note on the NCLAT:

Establishment and Jurisdiction

1. **Establishment:** The NCLAT was constituted under Section 410 of the Companies Act, 2013. It was established to hear appeals against the orders of the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT).
2. **Jurisdiction:** The NCLAT hears appeals against:
 - Orders of the NCLT.
 - Orders passed by the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC), 2016.
 - Orders passed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI) relating to competition law.
 - Certain orders under the Companies Act, 2013.

Key Functions

1. **Company Law:** The NCLAT handles appeals on matters relating to company law disputes, including mergers and acquisitions, shareholder disputes, and corporate governance issues.
2. **Insolvency and Bankruptcy:** It serves as the appellate authority for cases under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, 2016, which involves the resolution of insolvency and bankruptcy matters for companies and individuals.
3. **Competition Law:** The NCLAT also adjudicates on appeals related to anti-competitive practices and regulations, as decided by the CCI.

Structure and Composition

1. **Bench Composition:** The NCLAT typically consists of a Chairperson and a number of judicial and technical members as notified by the government.
2. **Appointments:** Members of the NCLAT are appointed by the central government, with the Chairperson typically being a retired or serving judge of the Supreme Court or a Chief Justice of a High Court.

Role and Importance

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1. **Dispute Resolution:** The NCLAT plays a crucial role in resolving corporate disputes efficiently, providing a faster alternative to the traditional court system.
2. **Corporate Governance:** By adjudicating on matters of company law, the NCLAT contributes to better corporate governance practices and compliance with legal standards.
3. **Economic Stability:** Its role in insolvency resolution helps maintain economic stability by ensuring timely and effective resolution of distressed assets.

TOPIC-3 RIVER RESOURCE DISTRIBUTION

Heat, scarcity: Delhi govt asks SC to direct Haryana to release water

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 31

THE DELHI government Friday

timisation, rationing and targeted" supply of water, yet the shortage of water remains acute.

The Delhi government sought to clarify that it had filed

ter levels in the Sonia Vihar and Bhagirathi barrages, which constitute the other primary sources of water for the NCT of Delhi, are operating at their optimum level

EPT WALLAH

Constitutional Provisions

1. **Article 262:** This article empowers the Parliament to legislate on disputes relating to waters of inter-state rivers or river valleys. It also allows the Parliament to provide that neither the Supreme Court nor any other court shall exercise jurisdiction in respect of any such dispute.
2. **Seventh Schedule:** Water is a state subject under Entry 17 of List II (State List) but is also listed in Entry 56 of List I (Union List) concerning inter-state rivers and river valleys, allowing the Union to legislate on this matter.

Key Legislation

1. **Inter-State River Water Disputes Act, 1956:** This Act provides for the adjudication of disputes relating to waters of inter-state rivers and river valleys. Under this Act:
 - o **Tribunal Formation:** When a state government makes a complaint regarding a water dispute and it is not resolved through negotiations, the Central Government can constitute a Water Disputes Tribunal to adjudicate the dispute.

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- **Binding Awards:** The decision of the tribunal is final and binding on the parties to the dispute. The Act was amended in 2002 to include a mechanism for data collection and maintenance by a Central agency.
- 2. **River Boards Act, 1956:** This Act provides for the establishment of river boards by the Central Government in consultation with state governments to advise on the integrated development of inter-state river basins.

Mechanisms and Tribunals

1. **Tribunals:** Various tribunals have been constituted over the years to resolve inter-state water disputes. Some of the notable ones include:
 - **Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal:** For disputes between Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Puducherry.
 - **Krishna Water Disputes Tribunal:** For disputes between Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, and Andhra Pradesh.
 - **Narmada Water Disputes Tribunal:** For disputes between Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan.
2. **Inter-State Water Disputes (Amendment) Bill, 2019:** This bill proposes a single, permanent tribunal with multiple benches to resolve all inter-state river water disputes, aimed at speeding up the resolution process.

Legal Precedents and Case Laws

1. **Supreme Court Judgments:** While Article 262 restricts the jurisdiction of courts, the Supreme Court has occasionally intervened in inter-state water disputes, especially to enforce the awards of tribunals or to interpret legal provisions.

Inter-State Agreements

1. **Agreements and MOUs:** States often enter into bilateral or multilateral agreements for the sharing of river waters. These agreements are sometimes mediated by the Central Government and are legally binding.

Challenges and Issues

1. **Implementation of Tribunal Awards:** There are often delays and disputes over the implementation of tribunal awards, leading to prolonged legal and political battles.
2. **Data and Monitoring:** Accurate data on river flows and usage is crucial for fair adjudication, but discrepancies and lack of reliable data can hinder the process.
3. **Climate Change and Variability:** Changing climate patterns and variability in monsoons add to the complexity of water distribution, requiring adaptive and flexible management strategies.

55-year-old 2nd heat stroke fatality in city; dies at Safdarjung

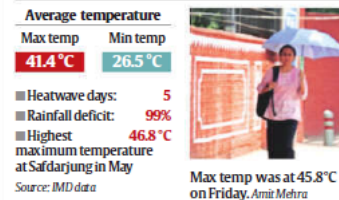
EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MAY 31

DAYS AFTER a 40-year-old factory worker died due to heat stroke at Ram Manohar Lohia

down the body fails. Anticipating heat-related illnesses, Safdarjung Hospital has prepared two beds in the Emergency Room, five beds in emergency medicine ward A, and six beds in medicine ward num-

5 heatwave days, little rain: Capital sees its hottest May since 2013

MAY AT SAFDARJUNG WEATHER STATION



Odisha confirms 5 heatstroke deaths, probe on into 18 others

SUJIT BISOIYI
BHUBANESWAR, MAY 31

THE ODISHA government Friday confirmed five heatstroke deaths, while it said in-

On Thursday, 10 people were suspected to have died of heat-related illness at the Rourkela Government Hospital (RGH). Two more deaths were reported late night, said official sources. Senior officials said at least 10 pa-

"People are advised to take precautionary measures for hot weather while going outside between 11 am and 3 pm. They should cover their heads or use wet cloth, hat or umbrella, drink sufficient water," Sahu said. Hi

Heatwave claims at least 61 lives; 21 polling officials among those dead

Jacob Koshy

Vindhyavasini Autonon have been reported officials said. All distr

Heat Waves in India

Definition and Characteristics

- Heat Wave:** According to the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD), a heat wave is declared when the maximum temperature reaches at least 40°C in the plains, 37°C in coastal areas, and 30°C in hilly regions. A departure from normal temperature by 4.5°C to 6.4°C is considered a heat wave, and a departure of more than 6.4°C is termed a severe heat wave.
- Duration and Intensity:** Heat waves typically occur during the pre-monsoon season (March to June), with May being the hottest month. The duration can range from a few days to several weeks.

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Causes

- **Climatic Factors:** High pressure systems, clear skies, and prolonged dry conditions can lead to extreme heat.
- **Urban Heat Islands:** Cities with dense infrastructure and limited green spaces can experience higher temperatures.
- **Climate Change:** Increasing global temperatures and changing weather patterns contribute to the frequency and intensity of heat waves.

Impact

- **Health Risks:** Increased incidences of heat-related illnesses, including heat strokes and dehydration.
- **Agriculture:** Adverse effects on crops, livestock, and water resources.
- **Economy:** Decreased labor productivity, increased energy demand, and strain on infrastructure.

Heat Strokes

Definition and Symptoms

- **Heat Stroke:** A severe medical condition resulting from prolonged exposure to high temperatures, where the body's temperature regulation fails, leading to an internal temperature rise above 40°C.
- **Symptoms:** High body temperature, altered mental state or behavior (confusion, agitation, slurred speech), nausea, flushed skin, rapid breathing, and a racing heart rate.

Risk Factors

- **Vulnerable Populations:** Elderly, young children, individuals with chronic illnesses, and outdoor workers are more susceptible.
- **Lack of Acclimatization:** Sudden exposure to high temperatures without gradual acclimatization increases risk.
- **Dehydration:** Insufficient water intake can exacerbate the effects of high temperatures.

Prevention and Management

- **Hydration:** Regular intake of water and electrolytes.
- **Shelter:** Seeking shade and staying indoors during peak heat hours.
- **Clothing:** Wearing light, loose-fitting clothing and using hats or umbrellas for protection.

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- **Medical Attention:** Immediate cooling measures (cool baths, wet cloths) and seeking emergency medical help for symptoms of heat stroke.

Government and Community Initiatives

- **Early Warning Systems:** IMD issues heat wave warnings and advisories to inform the public and authorities.
- **Heat Action Plans:** Local governments in many states have developed heat action plans, which include public awareness campaigns, setting up cooling centers, and ensuring medical facilities are prepared for heat-related illnesses.
- **Public Awareness:** Dissemination of information on preventive measures through media, schools, and community organizations.

Recent Trends

- **Increasing Frequency:** Studies show an increase in the frequency and duration of heat waves in India, attributed to climate change.
- **High-Impact Areas:** Northern, central, and eastern India are particularly vulnerable, with states like Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Odisha frequently experiencing extreme heat conditions.

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UN Secy Gen confers gender advocate award on Indian Major: 'True role model'

YOSHITA SINGH
UNITED NATIONS, MAY 31

MAJOR RADHIKA Sen is a true leader and role model and her service is a true credit to the United Nations, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said, as he conferred a prestigious award on the Indian peacekeeper.

Major Sen, who served with the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), received the prestigious '2023 United Nations Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award' from Guterres during a ceremony at the world body's

headquarters on Thursday on the occasion of the International Day of UN Peacekeepers.

Calling on the UN and member states to tap into the rich network created by the award, Major Sen expressed hope that "one day a peacekeeper of another gender" will be honoured with this prestigious award.

"Gender-sensitive peacekeeping is everyone's business, not just us, the women. Peace begins with all of us in our beautiful diversity," Major Sen, who served in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) from March 2023 to April 2024 as the Commander of MONUSCO's Engagement

Platoon for the Indian Rapid Deployment Battalion (IN-DRDB), said.

"A gender perspective in UN peacekeeping is essential for an effective, inclusive and sustainable peace process. Women and girls are disproportionately affected in conflict, facing increased risk and abuse. The need of the hour is to mainstream the women in nation-building, particularly in sectors of security and governance," she said.

As he presided over the 'Dag Hammarskjold Medal' and 'Military Gender Advocate of the Year' ceremony, Guterres said, "Major Sen is a true leader and role model. Her service is a true



UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres confers the 'UN Military Gender Advocate of the Year' Award on Indian Army Major Radhika Sen at the UN headquarters in New York. PTI

credit to the United Nations as a whole. Please join me in congratulating Major Radhika Sen of India. I could not be prouder to confer her with the Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award." Guterres noted that as commander of the Indian contingent's engagement platoon, Major Sen led her unit on countless patrols. During these patrols, in an escalating conflict environment in North Kivu, her troops actively engaged with conflict-affected communities, including particularly women and girls. She earned their trust ... doing so with humility, compassion, and dedication." Born in Himachal Pradesh in 1993,

Major Sen joined the Indian Army eight years ago. She graduated as a biotech engineer and was pursuing her Master's degree from IIT Bombay when she decided to join the armed forces.

Earlier, Major Sen started her remarks at the ceremony, by saying she is "deeply honoured and humbled" to accept the award on behalf of her colleagues in MONUSCO and "my home country, India." Stating that the engagement team served as the face of the contingent within the community, tirelessly striving to reach out to every segment of the DRC population, Major Sen said, her team had the opportunity to engage with the commu-

nities on topics ranging from women's health, education, child care to gender equality, women employment and combating sexual violence in conflict, along with interactions on various skill development programmes to foster self-reliance.

Lauding her "outstanding service" in DR Congo, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj said that "her dedication and bravery highlight the invaluable role of women peacekeepers in building a better world. We are incredibly proud of her achievements and inspired by her commitment to peace and equality." PTI

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Six dead, 3.5 lakh affected as Assam flood situation worsens

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
GUWAHATI, MAY 31

THE FLOOD situation in Assam

while Union Home Minister Amit Shah has called up CM Himanta Biswa Sarma.

A total of 3,49,045 people have been affected in the di-

Barak Valley with the water of River Barak flowing above the danger mark, inundating several areas of Silchar town, including the situation in Tezpur area

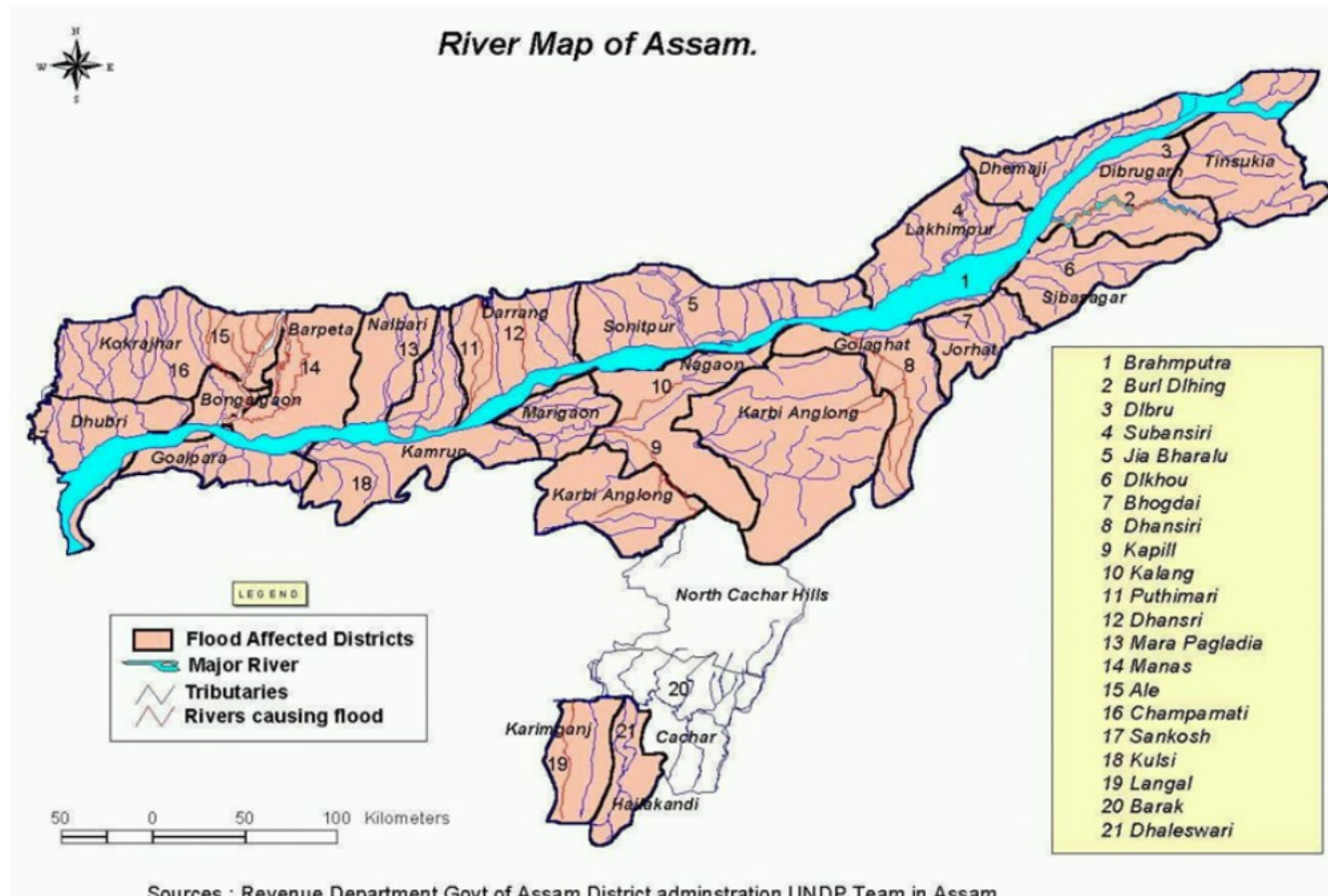
Valley's 3 districts — Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj — along with Dima Hasao and Hojai are among the worst-hit in floods.

Trains and buses which were di-

NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS- 01.06.2024

Assam, located in the northeastern region of India, is crisscrossed by several major rivers, making it particularly susceptible to flooding. The rivers not only provide vital resources and support the local economy but also pose significant challenges due to annual flood events. Here's a brief overview of the major rivers in Assam and the flooding issues they cause:

Major Rivers in Assam



1. Brahmaputra River

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- **Source:** Originates in the Tibetan Himalayas as the Yarlung Tsangpo, it enters India through Arunachal Pradesh and flows through Assam.
 - **Significance:** The Brahmaputra is one of the largest rivers in the world and the lifeline of Assam. It supports agriculture, provides water resources, and is a major transportation route.
 - **Flooding:** The Brahmaputra is notorious for its severe and frequent floods, which are exacerbated by its large catchment area, high sediment load, and monsoon rains.
2. **Barak River**
- **Source:** Originates in the hills of Manipur and flows through the Barak Valley in Assam.
 - **Significance:** The Barak River is crucial for irrigation and supports a significant portion of the population in the Barak Valley.
 - **Flooding:** The river frequently floods during the monsoon season, affecting areas in the Cachar, Karimganj, and Hailakandi districts.
3. **Subansiri River**
- **Source:** Originates in the Tibet Autonomous Region and flows through Arunachal Pradesh before entering Assam.
 - **Significance:** It is a major tributary of the Brahmaputra and supports agriculture and hydropower projects.
 - **Flooding:** The Subansiri contributes to the flooding of the Brahmaputra basin, particularly during heavy rains and glacial melt periods.
4. **Manas River**
- **Source:** Originates in the Bhutan Himalayas and flows into Assam.
 - **Significance:** The river flows through the Manas National Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and supports biodiversity and local livelihoods.
 - **Flooding:** The Manas River can cause severe floods, particularly in the Baksa and Barpeta districts.

Causes of Flooding in Assam

1. **Monsoon Rains**
 - Heavy monsoon rains from June to September lead to an increase in river water levels, often causing rivers to overflow their banks.
2. **Topography**
 - Assam's low-lying topography and the presence of numerous river channels make it naturally prone to flooding.
3. **Sediment Load**

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- High sediment loads from the Himalayas carried by rivers like the Brahmaputra reduce the river's capacity and lead to frequent overflows.
- 4. **Deforestation and Land Use Changes**
 - Deforestation in the upstream regions and changes in land use patterns have exacerbated the frequency and intensity of floods.
- 5. **Climate Change**
 - Changing climate patterns, including unpredictable and intense rainfall, contribute to more severe and frequent flooding events.

Impact of Flooding

1. **Human Lives and Property**
 - Floods lead to loss of lives, displacement of people, and destruction of property. Homes, infrastructure, and agricultural lands are severely affected.
2. **Agriculture**
 - Standing crops are destroyed, leading to significant economic losses for farmers and impacting food security in the region.
3. **Health**
 - Flooding can lead to waterborne diseases, affecting public health. The displacement of people also creates challenges for sanitation and access to clean water.
4. **Biodiversity**
 - Floods affect wildlife and their habitats, particularly in protected areas like national parks and wildlife sanctuaries.

Mitigation and Management

1. **Flood Control Infrastructure**
 - Construction and maintenance of embankments, dikes, and levees to contain river overflows.
 - Development of reservoirs and dams for flood control and water management.
2. **Early Warning Systems**
 - Implementation of advanced flood forecasting and early warning systems to provide timely alerts to communities.
3. **Disaster Preparedness**

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- Strengthening disaster preparedness and response mechanisms, including efficient evacuation plans and relief measures.
- 4. **Afforestation and Land Management**
 - Promoting afforestation and sustainable land use practices to reduce runoff and sediment load in rivers.
- 5. **Community Awareness**
 - Educating communities about flood risks and promoting resilient agricultural and housing practices.

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Journey to 2047



Raising investment rates, emphasising manufacturing, promoting new technology will be key

C RANGARAJAN AND D K SRIVASTAVA

IN LIGHT OF recent developments at home and abroad, we need to have a clear roadmap for India's growth. The expectations of the people are clear, we want to become a developed country by 2047, that is, when India completes 100 years since Independence. But what does it mean to become a developed country? International financial organisations currently classify countries with per capita income of \$13,845 and above as developed countries. In 2047, this would be higher. India's per capita income as of now is \$2,500 (IMF, April 2024), which shows the distance we have to travel. Based on assumptions of the future exchange rate of rupee and domestic inflation, we need to have an average annual real rate of growth of six to seven per cent to achieve this level of per capita income. Is it possible?

Before delving into issues such as the strategy of development, a simple calculation reveals that on the assumption of an incremental capital output ratio (ICOR) of 5, which is what we have seen in recent years, a seven per cent rate of growth will require a real gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) rate of 35 per cent of GDP. We are close to 35 per cent as of now. The recent increase in the real GFCF rate has been largely due to an increase in government capital expenditures especially of the central government. This growth in government capex cannot be sustained because it has been accompanied by a high fiscal deficit of the Centre, which was in the range of 6.7 per cent, 6.4 per cent and 5.9 per cent in the three post-covid years. What is needed is a pickup in private investment by one to two percentage points of GDP. To achieve this, we need to create an environment for private investment — both corporate and non-corporate — to increase.

What should be the strategy to become a developed country in the next two decades? Analysts are considering redesigning industrial policy in light of ongoing global developments. After World War II, many East Asian countries adopted an export-led growth strategy and made rapid progress. Subsequently, China adopted a similar pol-

Another critical issue is the creation of adequate jobs. The impact of technological changes means a reduction in the absorption of labour per unit of output. The elasticity of employment with respect to output is decreasing. In this context, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Gen AI and machine learning is causing both alarm and excitement. Owing to the distinction between new technology and earlier innovations, many fear an adverse impact on employment. We have moved from 'mechanical muscles' to 'mechanical minds'. Can this reduce the demand for human labour? Jobless growth is certainly a matter of concern. But job creation without growth is equally bad.

icy. China's share in world exports was 0.6 per cent in 1970. By 2022, it went up to 11.9 per cent. In contrast, although India's share in world exports was also 0.6 per cent in 1970, it only increased to 2.5 per cent by 2022. The world trade environment has, however, changed. The voices of protagonists of free trade are getting weaker. Some countries have turned distinctly protectionist. For a variety of reasons, growth will slow down in developed countries. For India, this old strategy is not open. But that does not mean we should shift focus from exports. Exports are a test of efficiency. We have shown our excellence in the export of services. We need to prove it in terms of merchandise too because external demand is one of the drivers of growth.

Broadly speaking, the strategy should be multi-dimensional: Emphasise exports, services, manufacturing, agriculture etc. It would be useful to identify our "sunrise" industries. For example, the food processing industry may be given high priority as it is labour-intensive, helps agriculture and has export demand. The Russia-Ukraine war threw up an important issue. Due to supply disruptions caused by the war, many countries started thinking about self-sufficiency for "critical imports". India also thought about manufacturing chips. But in all cases of "import substitution", we should not forget about cost. What is needed is efficient import substitution. Atmanirbhar should not degenerate into inefficient "import substitution".

Another critical issue is the creation of adequate jobs. The impact of technological changes means a reduction in the absorption of labour per unit of output. The elasticity of employment with respect to output is decreasing. In this context, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Gen AI and machine learning is causing both alarm and excitement. Owing to the distinction between new technology and earlier innovations, many fear an adverse impact on employment. We have moved from "mechanical muscles" to "mechanical minds". Can this reduce the demand for human labour? Jobless growth is certainly a matter of concern. But job creation without

growth is equally bad. We need to absorb this new technology, which will require further skill development. At the same time, we need to develop a mix of sectors that will ensure jobs increase along with growth.

Considerations related to equity have assumed importance. The benefits of growth must be distributed equitably. There is evidence that the poverty ratio has been coming down. According to the World Poverty Clock, extreme poverty in India measured by a poverty line of \$2.15 (2017 PPP) has fallen below the threshold of three per cent. In fact, in the latest update, it has fallen to two per cent of the population, implying that extreme poverty in India has been eliminated. A recent consumption expenditure survey for 2022-23 confirms that the computed Gini coefficient, which measures inequality, has also marginally reduced. Usually, income inequality is higher than inequality in consumption expenditure. In developing economies, the first concern should be a fast reduction in poverty ratio. The importance of social safety nets such as a supply of subsidised food grains is critically important. We cannot sequence growth and equity favouring growth first and equity later. Without growth, equity will be a distant dream. On the other hand, without equity, growth cannot be sustained. Equity also requires an emphasis on health and education as part of public expenditure in terms both of quantum and quality.

Thus, in substance, India's development strategy should be multidimensional. Growth may be stimulated by raising investment rates, emphasising manufacturing, services and exports, absorbing new technologies and promoting a mix of sectors that are employment-friendly. Job creation is going to be the toughest challenge ahead.

Rangarajan is former chairman, Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and former Governor, RBI and Srivastava is honorary professor and former director, Madras School of Economics. Views expressed are personal

THE GROWTH STORY

India's economy is faring better than expected. Monsoon, fiscal and monetary policy will shape trajectory

SURPASSING EVEN THE most optimistic projections, the Indian economy grew at a robust 8.2 per cent in the just concluded financial year (2023-24), as per the provisional estimates released by the National Statistical Office. This is higher than the RBI's earlier projection of 7 per cent, the NSO's own estimate, which had pegged growth at 7.6 per cent, and assessments by most private forecasters. The full year growth estimate has been pushed up by the fourth quarter numbers, where the economy is now estimated to have grown at 7.8 per cent, as opposed to the implicit growth of 5.9 per cent in the NSO's earlier estimate.

The disaggregated data shows that agriculture continues to fare poorly. After growing at 0.4 per cent in the third quarter, the sector grew at a mere 0.6 per cent in the fourth quarter, indicating the continuing impact of last year's unfavourable monsoon. Manufacturing, however, fared better, even though it has fallen from the highs observed in the second and third quarters. Construction activity remains healthy — this can also be seen in proxies for the sector, such as cement production and steel consumption, which grew last year at 9.1 per cent and 13.6 per cent respectively. However, trade, hotels, transport and communication — segments that employ a large section of the informal workforce — have slowed down. There are some aspects of this data that warrant a more careful analysis. Value added by the entire economy has fallen from 8.3 per cent in the first quarter to 6.3 per cent in the fourth quarter. The divergence between the GDP and the GVA (gross value added) estimates, especially in the second half of the year, point to the impact of net taxes on products (higher tax collections and/or lower subsidy outgo). Net taxes, in fact, grew at 31.2 per cent in the third quarter and 22.2 per cent in the fourth quarter. Further, while real GDP growth has risen from 7 per cent in 2022-23 to 8.2 per cent in 2023-24, in nominal terms, it has fallen from 14.2 per cent to 9.6 per cent over this period. This would suggest that the deflator has played a role. There is also the divergence in consumption and investment — private spending continues to remain weak, growing at a mere 4 per cent last year, while investment activity remains healthy, growing at almost 9 per cent.

Leading economic indicators suggest that the momentum in growth has continued in the current financial year as well. A recent study by economists at the RBI has pegged growth at 7.5 per cent in the first quarter. This is higher than the central bank's earlier estimate of 7 per cent. How the economy fares, whether rural demand improves, if private consumption and investment pick up, will be shaped by the monsoon, the proposals in the Union budget that will be tabled by the next government, and the stance of fiscal and monetary policy.

OpenAI removes influence ops 'targeting' elections, BJP

SOUMYARENDRA BARIK
NEW DELHI, MAY 31

IN A first, OpenAI – the company behind ChatGPT – said it disrupted a covert influence campaign originating in Israel that used its models to generate pro-Congress and anti-Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) content and spread those online in a bid to disrupt the ongoing election process.

OpenAI said that in May, this network used its AI models to generate “large quantities of short comments that were then posted across Telegram, X, Instagram and other sites”.

As per a report released by the company on Thursday, a commercial company in Israel called ‘STOIC,’ which was generating content about the Gaza conflict, and to a lesser extent the Histadrut trade unions organisation in Israel and the Indian elections. The company said it had nicknamed the operation as “Zero Zeno”.

OpenAI’s report, titled ‘AI and Covert Influence Operations: Latest Trends’ is a first of its kind from the company and offers a glimpse into how actors in cyberspace are using artificial intelligence (AI) in their efforts to manipulate the public. It also disrupted similar operations orig-



inating from China, Russia and Iran.

The report immediately drew a reaction from the BJP, with Minister of State for Electronics and IT Rajeev Chandrasekhar calling it a “dangerous threat to our democracy”. “It is absolutely clear and obvious that BJP was and is the target of influence operations, misinformation and foreign interference, being done by and/or on behalf of some Indian political parties,” he said on X.

“This is a very dangerous threat to our democracy. It is clear vested interests in India and outside are clearly driving this and needs to be deeply scrutinised/investigated and exposed,” he added.

The company said this operation targeted audiences in Canada, the United States and Israel with

content in English and Hebrew. In early May, it began targeting audiences in India with English-language content as well, OpenAI said. The company said that it disrupted some of its activity focused on India’s elections in less than 24 hours after it began.

“...the network began generating comments that focused on India, criticised the ruling BJP party and praised the opposition Congress party,” OpenAI said.

OpenAI’s investigations, as per the company, showed that, while the actors behind these operations sought to generate content or increase productivity using its models, these campaigns did not appear to have “meaningfully increased their audience engagement or reach as a result of their use of our services”. Many accounts have already been disabled by Meta and X, so current engagement figures may not present the complete picture, it added.

“Using the Breakout Scale to assess the impact of IO, which rates them on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 6 (highest), we would assess this as a Category 2 operation, marked by posting activity on multiple platforms and websites, but with no evidence of it being significantly amplified by people outside the network,” OpenAI said.

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