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NDA nominee Droupadi Murmu elected 15th President of India (Page no. 1)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

Former Jharkhand Governor and National Democratic Alliance (NDA) candidate **Droupadi Murmu** was elected the 15th President of India, the first tribal woman to be elected to the position and the youngest as well.

She was declared elected on Thursday after four rounds of counting, although she had crossed the halfway mark after the third round of counting itself, posting an unassailable lead over her rival and the Opposition's candidate Yashwant Sinha, who conceded the election thereafter.

After four rounds of polling, Ms. Murmu received 2,824 votes of 6,76,803 value while Mr. Sinha received 1,877 votes or 3,80,177 value. She received 64.03% of total valid votes polled, much more than what was openly declared in her support and pointing to the fact there had been a lot of cross-voting in Ms. Murmu's favour from the Opposition ranks.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the first to greet Ms. Murmu at her residence in New Delhi after the third round of counting showed that she had crossed the half-way mark. "India scripts history.

At a time when 1.3 billion Indians are marking Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav, a daughter of India hailing from a tribal community born in a remote part of eastern India has been elected our President.

Smt Droupadi Murmu's life, her early struggles, her rich service and her exemplary success motivates each and every Indian. She has emerged as a ray of hope for our citizens especially the poor, marginalised and the downtrodden.

Ms. Murmu, who had been a former Governor of Jharkhand, hails from the Santhal tribe and was born in the district of Mayurbhanj, coming up the hard way in life, graduating and teaching in Odisha before entering electoral politics at the local body level and later being elected MLA and serving as a Minister in the Biju Janata Dal-BJP coalition government from 2000 to 2004.

She remained an MLA till 2009, representing Rairangpur in Odisha, a town that burst into celebrations since her name was announced as a candidate for the post of President of India.

She holds the record of being the only Governor of Jharkhand till date to complete a full tenure, and was known to intervene in stopping amendments to the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act that was being brought in by the BJP government of Raghubar Das, which involved changing land use in tribal areas.

Congratulatory messages poured out as her victory was assured, with Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and BJP president J.P. Nadda also going in person to greet Ms. Murmu. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla said Ms. Murmu "has always given voice to the hopes and aspirations of the people, understood their grievances and resolved them."

Clarify actions taken against hate speech: SC (Page no. 1)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Centre and States to clarify actions taken against **hate speeches** even as petitioners argued that the distinction between dissent and hate speech is getting deliberately "muddied".

A Bench led by Justice A.M. Khanwilkar asked petitioners to prepare a chart of instances of hate speech and provide it to States in a week. The States would in turn inform the steps taken by them in these cases.

The Bench was hearing a petition filed by Maulana Mahmood Asad Madani, the president of Jamiat Ulama-i-Hind, highlighting incidents of hate speech and humiliation of Prophet Mohammed.

Senior advocate Meenakshi Arora contended that hate speech and insult of the Prophet would be an attack on secularism. The petitioners highlighted how hate speeches continue to hold sway with impunity despite its 2017 judgment in Tehseen Poonawalla case.

In this verdict, the court had called for zero tolerance on the part of the Centre and States for hate crimes. It had termed hate crimes as a "product of intolerance, ideological dominance and prejudice".

Among other steps, the apex court had directed State governments to form special task forces to prevent hate crimes and "procure intelligence reports about the people who are likely to commit such crimes or who are involved in spreading hate speeches, provocative statements and fake news".

The court had held that any failure on the part of the authorities would be viewed as an "act of deliberate negligence and/or misconduct".

The court had reiterated its position against hate crimes in another judgment in the Amish Devgan case in December 2020, holding that hate speech was an attack on dignity in the "matter of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship" and threatened the unity of the nation as a whole.

Stolen 19th century painting traced to U.S. museum (Page no. 1)

(GS Paper 1, History)

A rare 19th century painting of Raja Serfoji and his son Sivaji, which was stolen from Saraswathi Mahal, Thanjavur, a few years ago has been traced by Idol Wing CID police to the Peabody Essex Museum, Massachusetts, USA.

The painting was purchased in 2006 from an international antique dealer Subash Kapoor who was arrested by the State police in 2011 on charges of smuggling several antiques/artefacts.

Director General of Police,(DGP) Idol Wing CID K. Jayanth Murali told *The Hindu*, "The rare painting was reportedly stolen years ago.

But a complaint was lodged only recently. We have traced the painting in the U.S. and registered a case against Subash Kapoor who is the mastermind behind the theft. We will take him into custody to identify the other accused involved in the offence."

Originally, Idol Wing CID received a complaint from Elephant G. Rajendran in 2017 about the disappearance of the painting of Raja Serfoji and his son Sivaji from Saraswathi Mahal.

After the registration of a case, the Idol Wing CID took up investigation. There was no breakthrough in the investigation initially and later the investigation was expedited by the officers led by Mr. Murali.

For long, the rulers of Thanjavur had been devoid of absolute power. Serfoji, placed by the British on the throne over his step brother Amar Singh, died in 1832. His only son Sivaji ruled until 1855.

However, he had no male successor. Thanjavur became a casualty of Lord Dalhousie's infamous 'Doctrine of Lapse', and it got absorbed into British-ruled Indian provinces. The painting, which has Raja Serfoji and his youthful son, according to some historians, was probably painted between 1822 and 1827 and kept in the Saraswathi Mahal.

In 1918, the Saraswathi Mahal Library was opened to the public. Efforts were made to microfilm and catalogue the contents in 1965 when Indira Gandhi, who was then Information and Broadcasting Minister, sanctioned the fund for the library's development. Despite this, there exists no record to show the disappearance of the painting from the mahal.

When there was no progress in the case, the Idol wing officers decided to check the museums and websites of antique collectors abroad.

Editorial

In Pegasus battle, the fight for surveillance reform (Page no. 8)

(GS Paper 3, Internal Security)

A year has passed since the disclosures about the **Pegasus Project** revealed the threat to India's democracy. A leading digital news platform reported that the cellphones of at least 300 Indians had been hacked with Pegasus, the spyware from the Israel-based NSO Group; 10 of the cases were confirmed by Amnesty International's Security Lab using forensic analysis.

The victims, important members of India's constitutional order, included cabinet Ministers, Opposition leaders, journalists, judges and human rights defenders.

India has been aware of the existence of Pegasus since October 30, 2019 when WhatsApp confirmed that the spyware has been used to exploit a vulnerability in its platform to target activists, academics, journalists and lawyers in India.

Since then, NSO has been able to advance its technology, and Pegasus can now infect devices without any action on the user's part.

Considering the severity of the threat posed by these disclosures, and the credibility of the evidence which backs them, it is important to examine how each branch of the Indian state has responded, or failed to respond, in protecting the privacy of citizens.

The expectation is that the executive will provide the first response and that government agencies will respond with action given the serious nature of the disclosures. But on July 19, 2021, the Minister of Electronics and Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw, referring to "press reports of 18th July 2021", refused to directly address the claims made by the Pegasus Project; he stated that the existing legal framework prevents unauthorised surveillance.

On November 28, 2019, the former Minister of Electronics and Information Technology, Ravi Shankar Prasad, had responded similarly to allegations over the use of Pegasus.

A report by *The New York Times* of January 31, 2022 contradicted both their statements and stated that 'India has bought Pegasus in 2017 as part of a \$2-billion' defence package. The apathy shown by cabinet Ministers has been mirrored by specialised agencies.

'Advantage New Delhi' in Sri Lanka's India lifeline (Page no. 8)

(GS Paper 2, International Relations)

Ranil Wickremesinghe's election as the President of Sri Lanka in a crucial Parliament vote on July 20, 2022, gives India an opportunity to take the lead in the foreign aid game in its neighbourhood.

Sri Lanka has been facing economic turbulence since its pre-emptive default on its foreign debt obligations in mid-April this year — the mass protests in its wake eventually forcing the former President of Sri Lanka, Gotabaya Rajapaksa, to flee the country on July 12.

Following the debt default and a shortage of dollars, the Sri Lankan economy is experiencing stagflation. Inflation has spiralled to over 50%, translating into higher food and fuel prices.

Many families are surviving on one meal a day. The economy could contract by at least 6% in 2022. Some three-quarter of a million people are becoming the 'new poor'.

Sri Lanka's worst economic crisis since its independence in 1948 is due to a tepid recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine conflict shock and economic mismanagement under the administration of the Rajapaksas. Sri Lanka is also facing challenges in getting foreign aid, as 60% of the world's poorest countries are also experiencing debt distress; further, the prospect of a second global recession in three years could dampen enthusiasm to support Sri Lanka.

There are questions by some on why taxpayers in another country should bail out a failed economy such as Sri Lanka, when the perception is that Sri Lanka's debt default is largely one of its own making — the result of mismanagement and corruption.

India was the first responder to Sri Lanka's desperate calls for foreign aid to help tackle its crippling debt and economic crisis. India has been motivated by the unfolding humanitarian crisis affecting the Sri Lankan people and the political pressure from South India for Indian intervention.

In the first six months of 2022, Indian aid worth \$3.8 billion has flowed to Sri Lanka through loans, swaps and grants. This is India's largest bilateral aid programme in recent times.

Supporting Sri Lanka could be in India's best interests. Stabilising Sri Lanka's economy could prove to be a major win for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 'neighbourhood-first' policy.

Moreover, once the Sri Lankan economy stabilises, India can deepen its trade and investment linkages with Sri Lanka, transcending the current humanitarian aid relationship. This could spur regional integration and prosperity.

On the other hand, an unstable Sri Lankan economy could pose security risks to India and lead to a flood of refugees across the Palk Strait. This is an opportunity for India to strengthen bilateral and regional partnerships.

Explainer

One year since the Pegasus spyware revelations (Page no. 10)

(GS Paper 3, Internal Security)

The Supreme Court will be hearing the case pertaining to the alleged use of the Pegasus spyware software later this month. Last year, a consortium of 17 journalistic organisations globally put forth a list alleging the use of the spyware by the Union government to snoop on several prominent individuals.

The matter first reached the apex court on October 27 last year. Back then, the court constituted a committee, overseen by former Supreme Court judge Justice R.V Raveendran, to look into the charges and accordingly submit a report "expeditiously".

The committee overseen by Justice R.V Raveendran was mandated to inquire, investigate and determine, among other things, if Pegasus was used to eavesdrop on phones and other devices of Indian citizens.

Details were sought on whether the government had taken any action after reports emerged in 2019 about WhatsApp accounts being hacked by the same spyware and if the government had indeed acquired such a suite.

The article had alleged that Pegasus was part of a \$2 billion "package of sophisticated weapons and intelligence gear" between India and Israel after Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel. It added that it was after this deal that India changed its historically pro-Palestine stance.

The Pegasus spyware can not only mop up information stored on phones such as photos and contacts, but can also activate a phone's camera and microphone and turn it into a spying device without the owner's knowledge.

The earliest avatars of Pegasus used spear phishing to enter phones, utilising a message designed to entice the target to click on a malicious link.

However, it evolved into using "zero-click" attacks wherein the phones were infected without any action from the target individual. In 2019, WhatsApp released a statement saying that Pegasus could enter phones via calls made on the platform, even if they were not attended.

Pegasus used several such “exploits” to enter Android and Apple phones. Many of these exploits were reportedly “zero day”, which meant that even the device manufacturers were unaware of these weaknesses.

Pegasus can also be delivered through a nearby wireless transmitter, or manually inserted if the target phone is physically available. Once inside the phone, Pegasus can start transmitting any data stored on the phone to its command-and-control centres.

Kerala’s fight against monkeypox (Page no. 10) (GS Paper 2, Science and Technology)

The story so far: On July 14, Kerala detected the first case of monkeypox in the country in a 35-year-old, who had flown into Thiruvananthapuram from the UAE.

Four days later, the authorities confirmed a second case, this time at Kannur again in a passenger from the UAE. While both patients are in isolation and treatment, the State Health department has strengthened surveillance and control measures across all districts.

As a State with four international airports, a sizeable expatriate population and being a globally favoured travel destination, the probability of any newly emerging pathogen first arriving at the shores of Kerala has always been high. The State Health authorities are, therefore, relieved that the health system managed to pick up the first two cases of monkeypox, an affirmation of the robustness and efficiency of the State’s disease surveillance mechanism.

In Thiruvananthapuram as well as Kannur, the patients themselves had approached the doctors/authorities, raising the suspicion that they might have contracted monkeypox.

Doctors point to the increased public awareness, the high level of clinical suspicion maintained by the medical fraternity about the new disease and the social commitment of the people that led to the detection of the monkeypox cases.

One of the first public health messages sent out by the Health department was that there was no need for the public to panic as monkeypox was not a disease which could spread through the air like COVID-19.

However, the public needed to be vigilant about maintaining all universal precautions that were put in place when COVID-19 was first reported.

As soon as the patient was isolated, close contacts were also isolated. A list of primary contacts for contact tracing was also drawn up. The contacts were put on symptom surveillance for 21 days and the respective districts were asked to monitor them closely.

Furthermore, monkeypox advisories were sent out to districts which resulted in the setting up of State and district-level monitoring cells. All districts were asked to set up isolation facilities in select hospitals and special ambulances to transport sick persons.

Next, all districts were asked to strengthen field-level surveillance of cases with fever and rashes along with one or more of these symptoms — enlarged lymph nodes, headache, bodyache and profound weakness. Help desks were set up at all airports, with trained health workers manning them.

News

Karnataka tops NITI Aayog innovation index list (Page no. 12) (GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

Karnataka has bagged the top rank in NITI Aayog’s India Innovation Index, 2022, which determines innovation capacities and ecosystems at the sub-national level. The State has held this position, under the Major States category, in all three editions of the Index so far.

In the Index released on Thursday, Manipur secured the lead in the Northeast and Hill States category, while Chandigarh was the top performer in the Union Territories and City States category.

Karnataka was followed by Telangana, Haryana, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Bihar and Gujarat were at the bottom of the index.

Pointing out that India’s average innovation score is arguably insufficient, given the country’s ambitious targets to be named among the top 25 nations in the Global Innovation Index, the report by the government think tank has recommended measures, such as increasing Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D (GDERD), promoting private sector participation in R&D and closing the gap between industry demand and what the country produces through its education systems.

The report went on to state that countries that spend less on GDERD fail to retain their human capital in the long run and the ability to innovate is dependent on the quality of human capital; India’s GDERD as a percentage of GDP stood at about 0.7%.

Therefore, GDERD needs considerable improvement and should touch at least 2%, which would play an instrumental role in India achieving the goal of a 5 trillion economy and further influence its innovative footprint across the globe. It added that the private sector needs to pick up pace in R&D. Taking the evidence from countries like South Korea, USA, and Germany, where the presence of private players is quite evident, the report noted that public expenditure is productive up to some extent; once the growth follows a trajectory, it is desirable to shift to R&D mostly driven by the private sector.

Women have right to safe abortion: SC (Page no. 14)

(GS Paper 2, Polity and Governance)

Denying an unmarried woman the right to a safe abortion violates her personal autonomy and freedom, the Supreme Court held in an order.

A Bench led by Justice D.Y. Chandrachud was hearing the appeal of a woman who wanted to abort after her relationship failed and her partner left her.

The lower court had taken an "unduly restrictive view" that her plea for a safe abortion was not covered under the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act as the pregnancy arose from a consensual relationship outside wedlock.

Chastising the lower court, the Bench said live-in relationships had already been recognised by the Supreme Court. There were a significant number of people in social mainstream who see no wrong in engaging in pre-marital sex.

The law could not be used to quench "notions of social morality" and unduly interfere in their personal autonomy and bodily integrity.

The court noted that an amendment to the Act in 2021 had substituted the term 'husband' with 'partner', a clear signal that the law covered unmarried women within its ambit.

A woman's right to reproductive choice is an inseparable part of her personal liberty under Article 21 of Constitution. She has a sacrosanct right to bodily integrity. There is no doubt that a woman's right to make reproductive choices is also a dimension of 'personal liberty'.

The court said forcing a woman to continue with her pregnancy would not only be a violation of her bodily integrity but also aggravate her mental trauma.

The court ordered a medical board to be formed by the AIIMS to check whether it was safe to conduct an abortion on the woman and submit a report in a week.

The Bench posted the case for August 2.

Business

ADB pares India FY23 growth forecast to 7.2% citing price rise (Page no. 16)

(GS Paper 2, International Relations)

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has lowered its growth forecast for India to 7.2% for 2022-23 from a 7.5% projection made in April, citing higher than anticipated inflation since April along with monetary policy tightening.

In a supplement to its Asian Development Outlook report, the Bank on July 21 also moderated its growth hopes for 2023-24 to 7.8% from 8% and raised its inflation projection for that year to 5.8%, just a tad below India's 6% upper tolerance threshold for price rise, from 5% earlier.

For this financial year, the ADB has raised its inflation forecast from 5.8% to 6.7% on higher-than-expected oil prices and cautioned that elevated prices will erode consumers' purchasing power even as their confidence levels continue to improve.

While some of the impact of high prices may be offset by a cut in excise duties, the provision of fertilizer and gas subsidies, and the extension of India's free-food distribution programme, the ADB noted that private investment will soften due to the higher cost of borrowing for firms as the central bank continues to raise policy rates to contain inflation. Net exports will shrink due to subdued global demand and a rising real effective exchange rate eroding export competitiveness despite a depreciating rupee.

On the supply side, higher commodity prices will boost the mining industry. But manufacturing firms will bear the brunt of higher input costs due to rising oil prices.

The services sector, that was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic's onset in 2020, will do well this year 'and beyond as the economy opens up and travel resumes', the Bank reckoned.

India's GDP growth moderated to 4.1% in Q4 of 2021-22 on disappointing growth in private consumption and a contraction in manufacturing.

India has been hit by the Omicron COVID-19 variant and the economic impact of the war in Ukraine. Consequently, GDP growth for 2021-22 is revised down from 8.9% to 8.7% and from 7.5% to 7.2% for 2022-23.