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Why simultaneous elections are impractical and complicated

Critics of simultaneous elections have raised a few objections. First, the logistical nightmare of conducting simultaneous elections in a country of a little over 1.4 billion people, in a context where even State elections need to take place in multiple phases

Gautam Bhatia

The Winter Session of the Lok Sabha is currently underway. The introduction of the two Bills which would enable simultaneous elections in the country, mainly the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill 2024 and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment Bill) 2024, have now been postponed to a later date. In this article, Gautam Bhatia, explains the problem with such a concept.

In recent weeks, there has been increasing discussion about the possibility of having national and State elections at the same time, popularly known as 'one nation, one election'. The formation of a committee, helmed by a former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, to determine how this might be implemented, and what manner of constitutional changes might be required to make it a legal reality, have generated further debate. The primary arguments in favour of simultaneous elections are twofold: first, that it will decrease the costs of conducting elections (and of electioneering); and second, that it will free up political parties from being in 'permanent campaign mode', and allow them to focus on governance (and, for that matter, constructive opposition) for a five-year period.

Point and counterpoint

Against this, critics have pointed out that when you crunch the numbers, the actual financial savings are relatively minuscule. Furthermore, it is a relatively recent pathology of the Indian political system that central government Ministers and politicians spend a significant amount of time campaigning in State elections: if the concern, therefore, is that frequent State elections hamper governance and the business of Parliament, then simultaneous elections seem a needlessly complicated answer when a simple one is available: that State elections should be primarily fought by State party units, while national politicians can get on with the task of governance. The reality,

however, is that the increasingly centralised – and presidential – character of Indian election campaigns means that this is unlikely to be a reality in the near future.

Critics of simultaneous elections have raised a few other objections. First, the logistical nightmare of conducting simultaneous elections in a country of a little over 1.4 billion people, in a context where even State elections need to take place in multiple phases.

The second, and graver concern, is the incompatibility of a rigid election timetable with some of the fundamentals of parliamentary democracy: as is well-known, at the time of Independence, central and State elections were conducted simultaneously. This arrangement broke down towards the end of the 1960s because of the use of Article 356 of the Constitution, which authorises the Union to suspend (or even dismiss) State governments in a narrowly-defined range of circumstances; but also, and apart from that, the essence of parliamentary democracy is that at all times, the government must enjoy the confidence of the House, failing which it must step down, and go back to the people for a fresh mandate.

Consequently, it is obvious that even if, legally and practically, one is able to synchronise central and State elections for one cycle, this will break down the moment a government falls. To this, two solutions have been proposed, both of which tend to make the problem worse. The first is that President's Rule (that is, central rule) will be imposed in that State until the five-year-period is over. Needless to say, this will starkly undermine both federalism and democracy. The second is that elections will be held in that State, but the term of the new Assembly will only be until the next cycle (which could be in a year, or three years, or four years). Not only does this undercut both the justifications for simultaneous elections – cost and an avoidance of continuous campaign – but, rather, leads to perverse incentives (for example, how much

'governance' will a State government be able to do if elections are scheduled in a year?).

The possibility of 'horse-trading'

The upshot of this is that there will be a strong push towards avoiding the fall of a government, even when it has lost the confidence of the House in the ordinary course of things. And, as we have seen in India, there is an almost institutionalised remedy for this: defections, or "horse-trading". It is, by now, clear that the Tenth Schedule's prohibition on horse-trading has been rendered more or less a dead letter, as politicians have found various ways to get around this (and courts have not been successful in stopping it). Thus, as was pointed out by lawyer and parliamentarian Kapil Sibal in an interview recently, simultaneous elections are likely to see an explosion of horse-trading, where the political parties with the biggest pockets will be the biggest beneficiaries.

While these intractable issues speak to the implementation of simultaneous elections, at a deeper level, there are two principled and interrelated arguments against the idea: federalism and democracy.

First, let us take federalism. Over the years, it has increasingly come to be accepted that Indian federalism is not simply a matter of administrative convenience but also a matter of principle that recognises the legitimacy of linguistic, cultural, ethnic, and other forms of collective aspiration, through the grant of Statehood. In this context, there is, of course, Indian democracy at the central level, but also, at the level of each State, democracy takes its own set of claims, demands, and aspirations. Simultaneous elections risk a blurring of these distinct forums and arenas of democracy, with the risk that State-level issues will be subsumed into the national (this is inevitable, given the cognitive dominance of the national, as well as the fact that national-level parties frequently campaign in a national register, for

understandable reasons).

Keeping absolute power in check

A related point is that in our constitutional scheme, the federal structure is an important check upon the concentration of power (buttressed by the existence of the Rajya Sabha at the central level).

The federal structure, in turn, is sustained by a plurality of democratic contests, and a plurality of political outfits, at the State level. Simultaneous elections, for the reasons pointed out above, risk undermining that plurality, and risk precisely the kind of concentration of power that federalism is meant to be a bulwark against.

Second, on democracy: despite the ringing words with which the Preamble of the Constitution begins, the "People" have very little space in the Constitution, especially when it comes to exercising control over their representatives. Unlike many other Constitutions, where public participation in law-making is a guaranteed right, along with other rights such as the right to recall, in the Indian constitutional scheme, elections are the only form of public participation in the public sphere. There is a different conversation to be had about why this is not enough, but given this framework, relatively regular and frequent elections allow for more extended public participation and debate; simultaneous elections would shrink this scope substantially, without any countervailing changes to deepen it in other domains.

Therefore, it is clear that the administrative benefits from simultaneous elections are overstated at best, and non-existent at worst. However, the costs, both in the implementation and in the concept itself, are significant, and create non-trivial risks when it comes to protecting and preserving the federal and democratic design of the Constitution. These, therefore, are good reasons why the idea is a bad one, and ought not to be acted upon.

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Why is the BJD opposing the Polavaram project?

What are the concerns of tribal communities residing in Odisha's Malkangiri district?

Satyasundar Barik

The story so far:

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) has recently intensified its efforts to highlight the potential adverse impacts of the Polavaram Dam project, undertaken by the Andhra Pradesh government, on the tribal communities in Odisha's Malkangiri district. A delegation comprising BJD's Rajya Sabha members submitted a fresh memorandum to the Central Water Commission (CWC), the Ministry of Tribal Affairs, the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change stating that the impact of submergence due to 'unilateral' change in the design of the project has not yet been studied.

What is the status of the project?

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has vowed to

complete the Polavaram Project on River Godavari by 2027 as the interstate dispute involving mainly Odisha, Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh has entered a crucial phase. The Union government has assured ₹15,000 crore in this year's budget for the completion of the project.

However, the BJD has alleged that the CWC had refused to conduct a backwater study for the revised design flood, despite the recommendations of experts and the Odisha Government's concerns regarding the safety of tribal populations. The BJD argued that various studies, including those by the Government of Andhra Pradesh and CWC, have shown different estimates for submergence levels. "A backwater study by AP in 2009 indicates that 50-lakh cusec flood will cause submergence up to 216 feet in Odisha, far exceeding the originally agreed maximum level of 174.22 feet. A report from IIT Roorkee in 2019 further estimates that a flood of 58 lakh cusecs would result in

submergence levels of Reservoir Level of 232.28 feet in Odisha," it said.

How did the project start?

The Polavaram Irrigation Project on the river Godavari was conceived as a part of the recommendations of the Godavari Water Disputes Tribunal (GWDT). Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Odisha had entered into an agreement dated April 2, 1980, where the project was to be executed by Andhra Pradesh. As per the Andhra Pradesh State Reorganization Act (APRA), 2014, the Polavaram Irrigation Project was declared as a national project.

In response to an RTI query, the Ministry of Jal Shakti said that the maximum height of the concrete dam of Polavaram Project, measured from the deepest foundation level (-18.50m) to the top of bridge is 72.60 metre. The initial project cost was ₹10,151.04 crore in 2005-06 which reached ₹55,548.87 crore in 2019.

What are the concerns?

Though no comprehensive study has been carried out with regards to the likely submergence of the Malkangiri district by backwaters due to the Polavaram project, the Odisha State government in the year 2016 submitted to the NCST that the project was going to submerge 7,656 hectares of land, including forestland, and displace more than 6,800 people including 5,916 tribals in Malkangiri.

The Ministry of Jal Shakti said that as per the Water Resource Department of Andhra Pradesh, by providing remedial measures such as constructing protective embankments for a length of 30 kms along Sileru and Sabari River in Odisha, and 29.12 km along Sabari River in Chhattisgarh, the submergence in both Odisha and Chhattisgarh could be avoided completely. In August this year, the Ministry had asked the State Pollution Control Boards of Odisha and Chhattisgarh to conduct a public hearing for the construction of protective embankments without further loss of time as the project is in an advanced stage of construction. The Odisha State Pollution Control Board is yet to hold a public hearing. The Odisha government had earlier expressed its reservation over the high protective embankment saying it was not feasible. "The construction of an embankment requires the diversion of forestland and creates flooding in Odisha territory."

THE GIST

The Biju Janata Dal (BJD) has recently intensified its efforts to highlight the potential adverse impacts of the Polavaram Dam project, undertaken by the Andhra Pradesh government, on the tribal communities in Odisha's Malkangiri district.

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How would a carbon market function?

What are carbon credits and how would they be traded between firms? Why do corporations not want the government to be involved in the issue of carbon credits? Who introduced the concept of carbon credits? Why are some experts critical of carbon offsets?

EXPLAINER

The Hindu Bureau

The story so far:

COP29, the ongoing climate conference in Azerbaijan's capital Baku, has given a fillip to the idea of using carbon markets to curb carbon emissions by approving standards that can help in the setting up of an international carbon market as soon as the coming year.

What is a carbon market?

A carbon market is a market that allows the buying and selling of the right to emit carbon into the atmosphere. Suppose a government wants to limit the amount of carbon emitted into the atmosphere. It can issue certificates called carbon credits that allow the holder of the certificate to emit a certain amount of carbon into the atmosphere. One carbon credit is equivalent to 1,000 kilograms of carbon dioxide. By limiting the number of carbon credits that are issued, governments can control how much carbon is released into the environment. It should be noted that anyone who doesn't hold carbon credits to their name would not be allowed to emit any carbon into the atmosphere.

Carbon credits were first used in the 1990s in the U.S., which introduced the cap-and-trade model to control the emission of sulphur dioxide.

Individuals and firms that hold carbon credits but don't actually need them for any reason can sell their credits to interested buyers. The price at which these carbon credits are traded is determined by market forces, which in this case are the supply of carbon credits and the demand for these certificates. A carbon market can also include the trading of carbon offsets. In this case, a business that pollutes the environment for example, can purchase carbon offsets sold by an environmental NGO that promises to plant trees that suck a certain amount of carbon emissions out of the



atmosphere for each offset that it sells.

What is good about carbon markets?

Pollution of the environment and climate change caused by carbon emissions is a classic case of what economists call an externality. An externality is caused when the cost of an economic activity is not properly accounted for (or internalised) by the market price system due to the absence of well-defined property rights. For example, a business that uses raw materials such as iron will have to pay the supplier who owns the iron to be able to procure and use it, thus incurring a certain cost. But when the same firm emits carbon into the atmosphere, it doesn't usually have to pay any money to anyone. In other words, firms are generally able to emit their waste into the atmosphere for free. This of course leads to unhindered pollution of the

atmosphere as firms in this case have no financial incentive to curb their carbon emissions. Carbon markets in which the right to pollute is traded for a price can solve the problem by imposing a certain cost on firms for polluting the atmosphere, helping to curb emissions in the process.

The intersection of standardised accounting frameworks and technological advancements has improved the ability of corporations to monitor and report their carbon emissions. While, this is difficult for the vast majority of small businesses in the developing world, particularly in accurately capturing supply chain emissions, ongoing developments, like real-time data tracking of the energy sector, continue to enhance the granularity and reliability of corporate carbon accounting. However, corporations have preferred a voluntary

reporting system, like the Carbon Disclosure Project. They have been loathe to government interventions limiting carbon emissions, arguing that such budgeting may lead to output restrictions or rise in costs. They also point to varied production processes, some that might have diverse supply chains that might make it difficult to find the optimal carbon budget for their facilities. Large multinational corporations such as ExxonMobil and General Motors have advocated for carbon markets that allows free trading of carbon credits among firms at a price determined by market forces, that would allow these firms to purchase carbon credits from other firms, which don't need them as much. This they say, helps allocate carbon credits more efficiently than government diktat.

What can go wrong?

Even when there is a functioning carbon market, a government that is not very keen on reducing emissions may increase the supply of carbon credits and drive down the price of the right to pollute, leading to no noticeable drop in emissions. Others may keep a strict cap on the supply of carbon credits but allow firms to cheat by allowing them to illegally emit carbon. The success of carbon offsets also depends on the degree of personal incentive that firm owners possess to care about carbon emissions, which may often be very little. Critics claim that firms that purchase carbon offsets often do it for the sake of virtue signalling and may have little incentive to ensure that their investments in these instruments are actually helping offset carbon emissions. Meanwhile, other critics have raised more fundamental questions regarding how exactly a government would be able to arrive at the optimum supply of carbon credits. They argue that politicians, who do not incur any personal economic cost when they legislate emission reductions, may restrict the supply of carbon credits more than what is really necessary, leading to slower economic growth.

THE GIST

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IAS Academy



Over 78% of top paid H-1B applicants were from India

Many of them were sponsored by relatively smaller U.S. companies

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

In the last four years, more than 78% of the top paid H-1B applicants (whose proposed wage rate exceeded \$1 million per year) were from India. Among the Indians whose wage rate exceeded \$1 million per year, over 25% were women. Also, over 65% of these high-paid H-1B applicants from India were sponsored by relatively smaller companies in the U.S.

Moreover, the salary range of H-1B applicants whose sponsors were U.S.-based companies was in general higher than the salary range of H-1B applicants whose sponsors were India-based companies. The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows U.S. companies to employ foreign workers in specialty occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise.

These conclusions are based on data obtained by Bloomberg from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). Each April, the USCIS conducts a random lottery to determine which H-1B applicants can proceed to submit visa petitions. Candidates may have multiple registrations submitted by different employers. Once selected, an employer can file an H-1B petition on behalf of the beneficiary. These petitions include details about the proposed job, such as salary and location, and form the basis of the conclusions presented in the story. Only about 1 lakh approved H-1B petitions, filed in the 2021-2024 period, for which all relevant data were available, were taken for the analysis.

While an approved H-1B petition is necessary for obtaining an H-1B visa, it does not guarantee one. After receiving approval from the USCIS, applicants may either apply for an H-1B visa at a U.S. consulate abroad or seek an Adjustment of Status with the USCIS if they are already in the U.S.

Chart 1 shows the proposed yearly wage rate in \$ (vertical axis) against the number of workers employed by the sponsor in the U.S. (horizontal axis). Each circle corresponds to an applicant whose application got selected in the lottery and whose H-1B petition was approved. The higher the circle, the higher the proposed salary. The farther to the right, the bigger the company size of the sponsor. Indian applicants are highlighted in a different colour.

Of the 1 lakh H-1B applications, only 123 had a proposed salary of \$1 million and above per year. Of them, 96 (78%) were from India. Over 90% of the proposed salaries were in and around the \$1,00,000 range.

Chart 2 shows the same information, but only for Indians. Here, female and male applicants are differentiated using colours. Of the 96 applicants from India identified in Chart 1, 25 (26%) were women.

As can be seen in both charts, most of the applications with a higher pay – circles on the top – are crowded towards the left of the chart, pointing to the low employee count for those sponsors. Sixty-three of the 96 applicants identified in Chart 1 were sponsored by U.S. companies which had fewer than 1,000 employees in the U.S. In other words, bigger companies – both U.S.-based and India-based – did not sponsor many high-paid H-1B applicants. Most of their applicants' proposed salaries were in the lower range, with very few exceptions.

Chart 3 shows the proposed yearly wage rate in \$ for H-1B applicants of well-known sponsors (big-sized firms), in the 2021-2024 period. It ignores outlier salaries to find the usual salary range proposed for most applicants. The proposed salary range of U.S.-based employers such as Apple and Google were considerably higher than the proposed salary range of Indian-based companies such as Infosys and TCS.

Indians on top

The data for the charts were sourced by the Bloomberg News from the Department of Homeland Security under the Freedom of Information Act.

Chart 1: The proposed yearly wage rate in \$ (vertical axis) against the number of workers employed by the sponsor in the U.S. (horizontal axis). Each circle corresponds to an applicant whose application got selected in the lottery and whose H-1B petition was approved. The higher the circle, the higher the proposed salary. The farther to the right, the bigger the company size of the sponsor. ● Indians ○ Other applicants

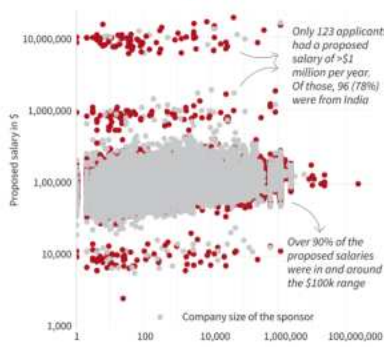


Chart 2: Proposed yearly wage rate in \$ (vertical axis) against the number of workers employed by the sponsor in the U.S. (horizontal axis). Each circle corresponds to an Indian applicant whose H-1B petition was approved. ● Male ○ Female

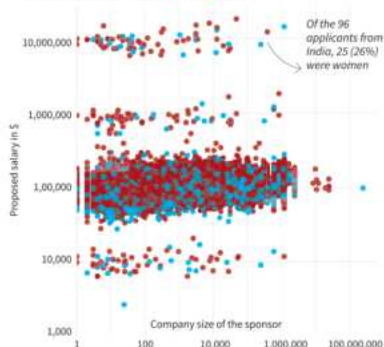


Chart 3: Proposed yearly wage rate in \$ for H-1B applicants of well-known sponsors (big-sized firms), in the 2021-2024 period.



Warding off fire

There should be no slackening in fire safety norms in hospitals

There is no greater betrayal than when a sanctuary turns into a death trap. Fire accidents in hospitals that kill the vulnerable would fall squarely in this category. A massive fire that broke out at City Hospital, an orthopaedic specialty unit in Dindigul in south Tamil Nadu, last week caused the death of six people, including a child and two women. All the victims were trapped in the hospital lift and initial reports suggested they died of suffocation. Only one of the six persons, who was on a wheelchair, was an inpatient at the hospital; all the others were visitors. They were trapped, over half an hour, in the lift as the smoke poured in through the vents, all escape routes sealed. The fire, which reportedly started as a short circuit in the ground floor, swept up to the first floor, and smoke soon curled up to all the floors in the four-storey building, affecting patients. Initially, smoke was noticed in the outpatient department, after patient files caught fire. In response, the power supply was shut down, but six persons still entered the lift at the ground floor. In the melee that ensued, no one paid any attention to the lift, stuck in between two floors. Meanwhile, patients on the higher floors struggled to breathe, but for many, because of mobility issues, there was no opportunity to escape. Thirty-two patients were shifted to the nearby Dindigul government hospital for further treatment and three of them needed ventilator support.

The rash of fire accidents in hospitals in India, in recent times, and the lives lost are uncanny reminders that hospital infrastructure upkeep, in the private or public health-care sector, is astonishingly low priority across the country. One month ago, on November 15, 10 newborns died in a fire in Maharani Laxmi Bai Medical College and Hospital, Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh. In May this year, seven newborns were killed in New Born Baby Care Hospital, a private facility in East Delhi, after a fire broke out there. It is unconscionable that, as a nation, India pays little attention to fireproofing its hospitals, making sure all equipment in hospitals and the hospitals themselves are ready to act and limit damage if, and when, a mechanical fault was to cause a fire. The government should ensure that periodic renewal of fire licences stops being a travesty. Existing government fire safety regulations must be followed implicitly and spiritedly, without any slacking, with respect to hospitals and public places. If a hospital ever gets into the news, it must be for its healing process, not for being a towering inferno.



India's firmer attempts at mineral diplomacy

As India seeks to expand its manufacturing and technological capability, critical minerals will become vital to fulfil this ambition. However, India, a major critical mineral importer, still depends on other countries, primarily China, for its mineral security, which has become a cause of strategic concern. Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, who voiced India's apprehensions at a defence think tank gathering, said, "While [the] scramble for resources for economic reasons has had a long history, their weaponisation by some nations for strategic reasons is a comparatively new phenomenon", hinting at Chinese attempts. To address India's mineral security challenge, which is aimed at reducing its strategic vulnerability, New Delhi has started an attempt to engage in mineral diplomacy.

Establishing joint ventures

This attempt is based on the pillars of: developing international engagement with mineral-producing countries, and establishing strategic partnerships with intergovernmental organisations. The first pillar focuses on building bilateral ties with resource-rich countries such as Australia, Argentina, the United States, Russia, and Kazakhstan to secure the supply of lithium and cobalt. To facilitate this vision, post-2019, India established the Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL), a joint venture company with a mandate "to ensure a consistent supply of critical and strategic minerals to the Indian domestic market". The objective was to achieve mineral security by securing agreements, and acquisitions through government-to-government, government-to-business, and business-to-business routes.

In March 2022, KABIL signed a Memorandum of understanding with Australia for a critical mineral investment partnership, identifying two lithium and three cobalt projects. Latin America's Lithium Triangle, which constitutes Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia, has also attracted India's



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attention. In January 2024, India signed a \$24 million lithium exploration pact with a state-owned enterprise in Argentina for five lithium brine blocks. KABIL is also actively working to secure mineral supplies by facilitating the buying of assets from Bolivia and Chile. Apart from the government, India's private sector has also benefited. Altmin Private Limited signed an agreement with YLB, Bolivia's national company, to secure the raw material supply chain of Li-ion batteries.

Central Asia has also caught India's attention. Recently, India and Kazakhstan formed a joint venture, IREUK Titanium Limited, to produce titanium slag in India. This was one of India's first joint ventures with the Central Asian Republics. This attempt is aligned with New Delhi's proposal to establish an India-Central Asia Rare Earths Forum to leverage the region's rich resources.

Cooperative engagements

The second pillar of mineral diplomacy is international engagement, which is forging and strengthening partnerships with multilateral and multilateral initiatives related to mineral security, such as the Quad (Australia, Japan, India, the United States), the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), Mineral Security Partnership (MSP) and the G-7, for cooperation in the critical mineral supply chain. These cooperative engagements aim to align India with the global best practices in the critical mineral sector across its three segments – upstream, midstream, and downstream.

Additionally, they also facilitate knowledge sharing and capacity building, which is important for coordinating with international partners such as the U.S., the European Union (EU), South Korea, and Australia.

To further this collaboration with western partners, India's Ministry of Mines signed a MoU with the International Energy Agency to strengthen cooperation on critical minerals, helping India to "streamline its policies,

regulations, and investment strategies in the critical mineral sector, aligning them with global standards and best practices".

The missing pieces

India's attempt at mineral diplomacy has led to many positive outcomes, but still lacks three essential ingredients required for its international diplomatic engagement. These are: a lack of private sector participation; weak diplomatic capacity, and insufficient sustainable partnership. Also, India's private sector has largely been missing from the equation.

The absence of a critical mineral supply chain strategy and a clear road map for the private sector are two primary variables responsible for the lack of policy clarity, leading to their absenteeism. To address these, India needs to formulate a comprehensive approach for de-risking, considering the role of the private sector across the supply chain. An important step would be to have a supply chain strategy based on India's growth prospects and national security priorities.

Second, India must strengthen its mineral diplomacy engagement. Having a dedicated mineral diplomacy division within the Ministry of External Affairs, similar to the New and Emerging Strategic Technologies (NEST) division and a special position for mineral diplomacy in selected diplomatic missions can be the first step.

Third, India's goal towards mineral security necessitates that New Delhi forge strategic, sustainable, and trusted partnerships with bilateral partners and multilateral forums. Among all its partners, working with EU, South Korea, and the other Quad members is critical to India's mineral security due to its domestic capabilities, diplomatic network and technological know-how. If these issues can be resolved, India's attempts at mineral diplomacy will gain strength and will be able to better complement New Delhi's domestic critical mineral initiatives, which are currently moving at a slow pace.

The moves are to reduce India's strategic vulnerability, but there are issues that need to be resolved



Permissive no more

The Supreme Court must put an end to violations of the Places of Worship Act

The Supreme Court's interim order halting the registration of fresh suits across the country regarding disputes of places of worship is a welcome departure from the permissive approach of the judiciary in recent times towards such motivated litigation. A Division Bench, headed by the Chief Justice of India, Sanjiv Khanna, has done well to stop the flow of litigation and interim orders, including those that allow 'surveys' of such sites and structures, while it deals with the challenges to the validity of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991. The order signifies a deep understanding that this is not about a set of civil disputes but the future of the country's secular character. It is amply clear to right-thinking citizens that the law, which freezes the religious character of all places of worship in the country as they were on the day of Independence, would want this legislation to remain on the statute book as a bulwark against elements that want to perpetuate the religious divide caused by such disputes. It is unfortunate, and even condemnable, that courts of law have failed to block these suits at a nascent stage by invoking the bar under this law. Instead, they have been allowing applications for surveys, either disregarding the Act and the Court's endorsement of its necessity in past judgments or ruling that the statutory bar does not apply to them.

In the name of reclaiming religious sites lost to invaders, several groups and purported devotees have been moving civil courts and obtaining questionable orders for surveying mosques for evidence that they may have been built on the ruins of destroyed temples. The success of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement was largely due to the political patronage enjoyed by its spearheads, and a final verdict from the Court, which handed over the disputed land to the Hindu litigants while condemning the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in December 1992. That the vandals involved in the demolition were acquitted, without any further appeal, added to the triumphalism that marks this movement for altering the status of mosques. This has given rise to further claims in Varanasi, Mathura, and, more recently, Sambhal, among other places that house mosques dating back to the 16th century. A notable feature of this permissive judicial attitude is the complete absence of any understanding of the history of the temple movement that was largely political in character. That judges could entertain obviously baleful and ill-motivated cases is a great cause of concern for those rightfully invested in the secular nature of the country. The criminal imprint on the nation's fabric left by political movements in a religious garb should not be forgotten.



Let's talk about 'one candidate, multiple constituencies'

Ever since the panel for 'One Nation One Election' led by the former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind, recommended simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, much has been written on its positive and negative aspects, the practical considerations and of course the politics around the subject. Amidst all the political accusations and counter-accusations, another important issue has gone missing from attention. The matter is about one candidate contesting from multiple constituencies (OCMC) for the same office.

The background, the challenges

The Constitution of India provides for regular elections every five years to the Legislative Assembly and the lower House of Parliament. However, the Constitution, other than providing for the Election Commission of India (ECI), has empowered Parliament to regulate the manner of conducting the elections. Therefore, 'contesting from multiple constituencies' has been dealt with in the Representation of the People Act 1951. Under the Act, there was no limit on the number of constituencies a candidate could contest – until 1996. This resulted in candidates contesting from multiple constituencies, sometimes more than two, winning them and vacating all but one seat, in accordance with Section 70 of the same Act. This necessitated by-elections frequently.

Due to this, Parliament amended the Act in 1996 to limit the number of constituencies that a candidate can contest from, to two. The amendment intended to discourage one candidate from contesting from multiple constituencies. Despite this, the practice has continued. The numbers are even more frequent in State Legislative Assembly elections, leading to frequent by-elections – there were 44 by-elections for State Assemblies in November 2024 due to the resignation of sitting legislators.

Frequent by-elections due to candidates winning from multiple constituencies pose several challenges. First, they add to taxpayer costs. The administrative cost of the Lok Sabha elections is borne by the central government, and Legislative Assemblies by the State governments; in the 2014 general election, it amounted to ₹3,870 crore. Adjusted for 6% annual inflation, the 2024 general election is put at a cost of ₹6,931 crore, or ₹12.76 crore per seat. If 10 politicians win from two constituencies, the extra cost of holding a by-election would be around ₹130 crore. While this is relatively small when compared to overall election spending, the real issue lies in the massive expenditure by political parties, estimated at ₹1,35,000 crore for the recent general election, or about ₹250 crore per constituency, according to the estimates by the Centre for Media Studies. This burden ultimately



Santosh Kumar Dash

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falls on the public, and much of the funding comes from black money, which undermines financial transparency.

Second, the by-election necessitated by the vacation of a winning candidate within an initial six months tends to favour the ruling party. This is borne out in by-election trends across multiple States. This emanates from the fact the ruling party can mobilise resources and provide patronage to party workers. Such a scenario of a non-level playing field is skewed against the Opposition, which has negative implications for parliamentary democracy.

Third, the financial burden of organising a by-election disproportionately falls on the already defeated candidate and their party, forcing them to spend resources once again.

Fourth, the saying "Democracy is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people" suggests that elections should serve people's needs. However, a candidate contesting from multiple seats serves as a hedging mechanism against uncertainties and often prioritises the leader's interests, not the people's. This undermines democratic principles, placing politics above the public.

Fifth, OCMC is sometimes used to enhance the reach and message delivery of the leader, relying on their popularity for electoral success. This often reflects the leader's dominance within the party, particularly in family- or leader-centric parties. Moreover, OCMC goes against the fundamental right to freedom of speech and expression of citizens. A petition filed in 2023 (*Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay vs Union of India*) argued that when people elect a representative, they trust that person to be their voice. Contesting multiple constituencies, winning them, and vacating one for a by-election violates Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution. This practice causes voter confusion and discontent, as seen in Wayanad, Kerala, when Rahul Gandhi vacated his seat in 2024, potentially leading to voter apathy. The voter turnout was 64.24% in the bypoll and 72.92% in the general election.

Some advantages

The OCMC is common in many countries. It may also have some practical considerations. First, contesting multiple seats provides a safety net for candidates, especially in tightly contested constituencies. Second, in a polity such as India, where politics is centered around the leader and family, OCMC smoothes the leader's continuation or transition in case a leader-centric party secures a majority in the elections but the leader of the party loses out. For instance, Mamata Banerjee lost the Nandigram seat in the 2021 West Bengal Assembly elections. To make way for her, another leader elected from the Bhabanipur constituency had to resign from the

Assembly. Similar things unfolded in the case of Pushkar Singh Dhami, Chief Minister of Uttarakhand in the 2022 Assembly elections.

International experience

OCMC is not unique to India. Pakistan and Bangladesh allow candidates to contest multiple constituencies but require them to relinquish all but one seat. Pakistan places no limit on the number of constituencies a candidate can contest, as seen in the 2018 elections when the former Prime Minister contested five seats and vacated four. Similarly, Bangladesh allowed candidates to contest up to five constituencies until 2008 but now limits it to three. The practice was once common in the United Kingdom but has been banned since 1983. Most European democracies have phased it out to promote clear representation and accountability.

The misuse of the OCMC far outweighs the benefits. There have been demands for reforms, and probable solutions may be considered. First, amend Section 33(7) of the RP Act 1951 to ban one candidate contesting from multiple constituencies for the same office. The ECI, in 2004, recommended the government ban the practice. The 255th Law Commission report in 2015 made the same recommendation.

Second, recovering the full cost of by-elections from the candidate vacating a seat can serve to discourage candidates from contesting simultaneously. The ECI recommended cost imposition on candidates contesting from multiple constituencies in 2004. However, the practice of OCMC will continue as the winning candidate or political party can afford to pay the cost.

Third, a more effective deterrent would be to hold the by-elections after a year, allowing voters ample time to make an informed decision and giving the defeated candidate sufficient time to recover and prepare strategically for another contest. This would also provide a more balanced and fair electoral process. This could be done by amending Section 151A, Representation of Peoples Act 1951 which provides for by-election within six months of the occurrence of vacancy.

Holding elections requires substantial financial resources from the state. Furthermore, with elections being a round-the-year affair in India, the frequent need for by-elections takes time and money – resources that could otherwise be better invested in the country's development. However, as the issue of OCMC is political, it requires political willpower and the support of the major parties to bring about change. However, unlike the One Nation One Election, it does not have many proponents in political parties. If "one person, one vote" is the core democratic principle for voters, it is time to enforce "one candidate, one constituency" for candidates.

If 'one person, one vote' is the core democratic principle for voters, it should be 'one candidate, one constituency' for politicians



WHAT IS IT?

Mirror life: a deadly geometry

In a mirror, left and right become swapped. While you unscrew a bottle cap anti-clockwise in the real world, in the mirror you'll be rotating it clockwise.

Anything that has a handedness — left or right — is said to be chiral.

Chiral molecules that are mirror images of each other are called enantiomers. A good example is the compound thalidomide. It was sold as a sedative for four years in the late 1950s before being withdrawn.

Scientists found that the right-handed enantiomer worked as a sedative, but the left-handed one caused severe birth defects.

In the human body itself, the amino acids used to make proteins are all left-handed whereas the DNA is right-handed (the double-helix twists to the right). The reasons are a mystery.

Scientists have been making and studying enantiomers in the lab for a long time, but recently a few of them have started on the road to creating “microbes” — synthetic bacteria whose building blocks are enantiomers of their natural counterparts.



This illustration shows a DNA molecule twisting to the left. In our bodies, DNA twists to the right, and left-twisting DNA is absent. GETTY IMAGES

Earlier this month, an international group of scientists, including Deepa Agashe of the National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru, published a 300-page technical report and a commentary in the journal *Science* warning against efforts to build mirror life.

“Our analysis suggests that mirror bacteria would likely evade many immune mechanisms mediated by chiral molecules, potentially causing lethal infection in humans, animals, and plants,” the commentary read.

- *The Hindu Bureau*



For feedback and suggestions

for 'Science', please write to
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with the subject 'Daily page'

Can we make black holes reveal themselves in echoes of light?

When light passes around a black hole, its path bends. So some parts of the light take a direct route to the viewer while others pass around the black hole a few times before getting back on the original path. In this way, light emitted by a distant source in the cosmos may reach the earth at different instances, creating light echoes

Qudsia Gani

When it comes to making sense of our universe, the importance of black holes is hard to understate.

Scientists know that a black hole exerts a strong gravitational pull, so much so that any object that gets closer to its centre beyond a point can never get back out. The effects of black holes on their surroundings include the release of a tremendous amount of energy. These effects are crucial to determining the structures of the galaxies they occupy and how the stars around them evolved over time.

A study published in the *Astrophysical Journal Letters* on November 7 is notable in this wider context. It was carried out by astrophysicists from the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey, and led by George Wong of the School of Natural Sciences at Princeton University. In their study, the researchers presented a new method to measure the properties of black holes by using the effects they have on light flowing around them.

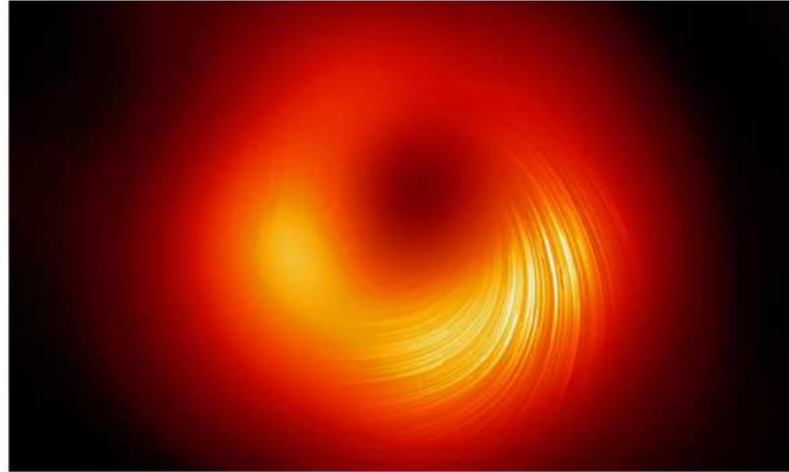
Signatures in the light

When light passes around a very heavy object, like a black hole, its path bends. As a result some parts of the light may take a direct route to the viewer while others may pass around the black hole a few times before getting back on its original path. In this way, light emitted by a distant source in the cosmos may reach the earth at different instances, depending on its interactions with black holes on the way. When two beams of light emitted by the same source reach the earth at different points, the beam to arrive second will be an echo of the beam that arrived first. This phenomenon is thus called a light echo.

The manner and extent to which light circles around a black hole depends on the black hole's mass and radius. If the black hole is spinning (a.k.a., a Kerr black hole), it will also depend on the object's angular momentum. Thus, according to the study, scientists can use light echoes as a new and independent way to the masses and spins of black holes.

In general, the task of measuring a black hole's mass and spin is quite tedious because all the matter, hot gases, and the radiation swirling around the object complicate observations and make signals harder to extract from the noise. Light, fortunately, is affected differently and light echoes could offer a better signal-to-noise ratio.

An object that bends light is called a



A view of the M87 supermassive black hole in polarised light as captured by the Event Horizon Telescope and released in 2021. EHT COLLABORATION (CC BY 4.0)

lens. Black holes do this by the sheer strength of their gravity; thus, the phenomenon is called gravitational lensing. Scientists theorised long ago that gravitational lensing could create light echoes, but they have not been directly measured so far. To get around this issue, the new study proposes the use of a technique called long-baseline interferometry. The principle here is that the non-simultaneous arrival of two signals – like two light beams – could interfere with each other to create a new, unique signal.

To spot light echoes created by a black hole, one telescope could be placed on the earth and the other in space. While the number of instruments may seem modest, they will have to operate with supreme technical rigour.

The main motivation for the new study was the fact that some of the supermassive black holes in the centre of the Milky Way and the nearby M87 galaxies have been found to have bright rings of light at a frequency of 230 GHz around them. The structure of these rings is influenced by astrophysical forces and the spacetime geometry of black holes, and scientists have been keen to study them in detail using very long baseline interferometry techniques. One particular aspiration is to trace the black hole's

Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity also anticipated the phenomenon of light echoes. In particular the theory predicts the echoes will be achromatic, meaning light of all frequencies should be able to form echoes

shadow on these rings to understand spacetime around the black holes.

Independent of colour

The analysis in the new study essentially focused on a black hole at the centre of the M87 galaxy – an appealing object of study for light echoes since it's quite large in the sky. But the results are also applicable to other black holes. The baseline in 'long baseline interferometry' refers to the distance between the two telescopes that receive the light. According to the study, it should be at least 40 Gλ, where Gλ is a unit of measurement that refers to the telescopes' ability to collect signals at a specific frequency.

The Princeton team also carried out preliminary high-resolution simulations to test the credibility of their technique. For this, team members collected several thousand instantaneous images of light

travelling around the M87 black hole, located nearly 55 million lightyears away, using the Event Horizon Telescope. Then they estimated the time beams of light took to travel from the near end of the black hole to its far end, which, according to their idea, would depend on the black hole's mass and angular momentum, after adjusting for the angle at which the telescope was viewing it. From this simulated data, the team inferred the echo delay.

Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity also anticipated the phenomenon of light echoes. In particular the theory predicts the echoes will be achromatic, meaning light of all frequencies should be able to form echoes. (Since Gλ is inversely proportional to the frequency, building a telescope to detect the echoes is a separate headache.) Thus any approach to detect light echoes at multiple frequencies at the same time could provide a good test of the new technique. A positive result will also be yet another confirmation that the general theory of relativity provides an accurate description of black holes.

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THE GIST

The effects black holes have on their surroundings are crucial to determining the structures of the galaxies they occupy and how the stars around them evolved over time

The mass and radius of a black hole impact the manner in which light behaves. The study claims that light echoes can be used as a new way to determine the masses and spins of black holes

Researchers collected images of light travelling around the M87 black hole. They estimated the time light took to travel from the near end to its far end, which depends on its mass and momentum. From this data, the team inferred echo delay

Centre launches Jalvahak scheme for cargo movement via inland waterways

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

The Centre on Sunday launched the Jalvahak scheme to boost long-haul cargo movement via inland waterways.

The scheme incentivises cargo transport on National Waterways 1 (Ganga), 2 (Brahmaputra), and 16 (Barak) and provides an opportunity for the trade interests to explore movement of cargo via waterways with positive economic value proposition, Union Minister for Ports, Shipping, and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal said.

He flagged off cargo ships *MV AAI*, *MV Homi Bhaba*, and *MV Trishul* along with two dumb barges *Ajay* and *Dikhu* from the G.R. Jetty in Kolkata.

This marks the beginning of fixed scheduled sailing service of cargo vessels from Haldia for NW-1



New network: Sarbananda Sonowal, Minister for Ports, Shipping, and Waterways, flags off cargo vessels in Kolkata on Sunday. PTI

(Ganga) and NW-2 (Brahmaputra), the Ministry said in a statement.

“With its advantage of being an economical, ecologically sound, and efficient mode of transportation, we want to boost cargo movement via waterways to decongest the railways and roadways,” Mr. Sonowal said.

Further, the regular scheduled freight service,

which began from Kolkata, will ensure that the cargo is transported and delivered within a stipulated time frame, he said.

35% reimbursement

The Jalvahak scheme offers reimbursement of up to 35% of the total operating expenditure incurred, the Ministry said.

To encourage the business proposition of vessel

operators, the scheme encourages cargo owners to hire vessels owned or operated by government entities. “The incentive scheme is ideal for major shipping companies, freight forwarders, trade bodies and associations that handle bulk and containerised cargo. By opting for the scheme, it provides them an opportunity to optimise their supply chain network. The scheme is initially valid for three years.”

The fixed day scheduled sailing service will ply vessels between Kolkata-Patna-Varanasi-Patna-Kolkata stretch of NW-1 and between Kolkata and Pandu in Guwahati on NW-2 via Indo Bangladesh Protocol Route (IBPR), the Ministry said.

UltraTech Cement said it became the first cement company to leverage NW-1 for gypsum transport at scale.



Modi refers to past to build a fresh narrative

NEWS ANALYSIS

Nistula Hebbar

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the debate in the Lok Sabha on the journey of the Constitution was full of references to the past.

Some of them, including references to the late Purushottam Das Tandon, former Congress chief, and the late K.M. Munshi, who was a Minister in the Nehru government, were packed with political narrative-building.

Mr. Modi quoted Tandon's views with regard to India's glorious past and its past experiences with democracy predating the

British. He quoted Munshi's advocacy of a Uniform Civil Code over a religion-based personal law for modernity and progressivism. The UCC is one of the is a core issue for the BJP and Mr. Modi repeated his government's intention to bring in what he terms a "Secular Civil Code" along with the removal of religion-based personal laws.

Munshi parted ways with the Congress in the 1950s and formed the Swatantra Party with C. Rajagopalachari, and was one of the founders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad. A well-known writer in Gujarati, Hindi and English, he founded the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan institutions, and He is identified with what the BJP terms the



Narendra Modi

now defunct 'conservative Hindu strain' within the Congress that existed before and a few years after Independence.

"Prime Minister Modi raised the issue of Tandon to build and strengthen two narratives – how Nehru was anti-democratic and turned the Congress into the fiefdom of one par-

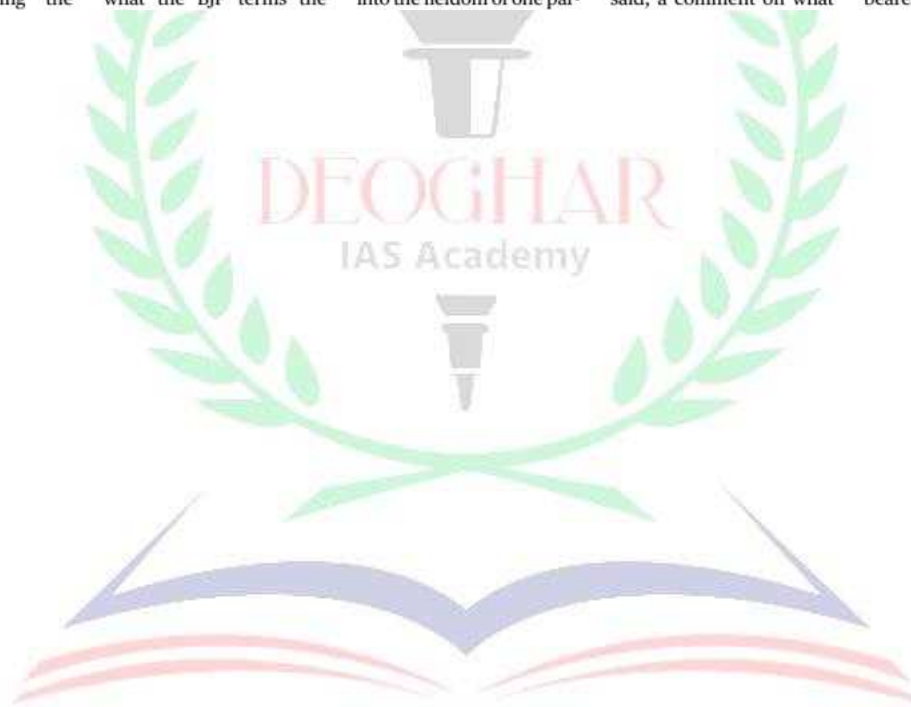
ticular family; and second, Nehru was opposed to 'pro-Hindu' leaders right from the beginning. Tandon was known for being a 'pro-Hindu' nationalist leader within the Congress, and was opposed to Nehru's policy of 'Muslim appeasement'. Tandon defeated Nehru's candidate in the election for Congress president. But Nehru made Tandon resign in 1951, threatening to walk out of Congress Working Committee," Arun Anand, author of two books on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, including *The Saffron Surge: Untold Story of RSS Leadership*, said.

Side-lining of leaders

It was also, BJP leaders said, a comment on what

they say is the situation within the Congress, with the sidelining of the "G23" group of leaders who attempted to lead an eventually unsuccessful banner of revolt within the Congress a few years ago.

"The Congress is on a particular path, [and] due to the leadership of the Gandhis, it appears irreversible. The recollection of what happened to leaders like Munshi and Tandon shows that Congress had all manner of opinion within its fold, including of Hindu consciousness, generally espoused by leaders who were not part of the dynasty. Under the one-family rule, those strains of opinions have been weeded out," a senior office-bearer of the BJP said.



Morocco welcomes Indian defence companies to set up production units

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI

Morocco is emerging as a springboard for India's ambitions to expand its footprint in Africa for defence exports. Pitching Morocco as a gateway to Africa and Europe for Indian companies, Abdeltif Loudyi, Morocco's Minister Delegate to the Head of the Government, and In-Charge of Administration of National Defence, said they would like "to offer state-of-the-art environment, zero bureaucracy, and profitability for Indian defence companies".

"Morocco and India enjoy excellent bilateral relations based on mutual respect, and have every potential to pursue their positive momentum in various fields, including defence," Mr. Loudyi said, addressing the India-Morocco defence industry seminar held in Rabat on December 9 and 10, and jointly organised by the Defence Ministries of the



Stronger ties: Officials at the first edition of the India-Morocco Defence industry seminar held in Rabat. X@SIDMINDIA

two countries, the Indian Embassy in Morocco, and the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers. "We want you in Morocco; we will support you," he said.

This seminar can only strengthen the historic ties between Morocco and India, two emerging economies with growing strategic cooperation in the defence sector, the Minister observed.

Mr. Loudyi said the launch of the strategic defence industry project placed Morocco at the

centre of attention as a defence development hub, and opened up promising prospects for investors interested in the defence and high-tech sectors, as demonstrated by the new strategic partnership signed between the National Defence Administration and the Tata Group, aimed at local production of the WhAP 8x8 ground combat vehicle. "The partnership between ADN and TASM is part of a broader drive to develop Morocco's defence industry, with the

aim of gradually building strategic autonomy," he observed.

The seminar offered opportunities for joint ventures, technology sharing, and procurement potential for Indian defence companies in Morocco, officials said.

"Presentations by Moroccan officials emphasised the country's investor-friendly climate; free zones, including the Atlantic Free Zone; and incentives for foreign investments. The Indian delegation also visited the Atlantic Free Zone, gaining a comprehensive understanding of Morocco's industrial landscape," the Society of Indian Defence Manufacturers said on social media platform X.

Bilateral trade between India and Morocco was approximately \$4.1 billion in 2023, with major exports from India including refined petroleum, vehicles, and various chemicals. India is the largest buyer of phosphate from Morocco.



Carcasses of Olive Ridley turtles continue to wash ashore in Vizag

V. Kamalakara Rao
VISAKHAPATNAM

Carcasses of Olive Ridley turtles, which are currently in their breeding season, continue to wash ashore along the Visakhapatnam coast.

For the past few days, visitors continue to find the carcasses on the beaches in the city such as Mangamaripeta, near Bhimili. Eyewitnesses say that a number of carcasses were found on the beach on Saturday night.

Environmental experts say that a majority of the deaths are due to marine pollution and trawling activities for catching fish.

National Fisherfolk Forum general secretary A.



The carcass of an Olive Ridley turtle found at R.K. Beach in Visakhapatnam. K.R. DEEPAK

Dasu said, "We saw dead turtles on the city beaches where at least 10 carcasses were washed ashore on Saturday. During this season, the turtles come close to the shore, up to nearly 500 metres, to lay eggs."

The Andhra Pradesh

State Forest Department usually takes up conservation of turtles every season. Officials say that this year too they have started four artificial hatcheries as part of the conservation measures.

"Four hatcheries (nest-

ing points) have been set up in areas such as R.K. Beach and Jodugullapalem," said Visakhapatnam District Forest Officer Shambangi Venkatesh.

"We usually receive reports of dead turtles on city beaches. This happens when the turtles come to the surface of the sea to breathe and are accidentally caught by heavy fishing vessels during trawling operations," he said.

"Nobody will intentionally harm a turtle. However, we are continuously educating the fishing community and others to take special care of turtles in the deep sea during the breeding season," Mr. Venkatesh told *The Hindu* on Sunday.

