



3 March, 2024

Supreme Court barred unregulated soil extraction

Context: The Supreme Court reversed a three-year-old Environment Ministry notification exempting ordinary earth extraction for linear projects like road and railway construction from needing Environmental Clearance (EC).

➤ Background:

- In March 2020, the Environment Ministry issued an exemption allowing extraction of ordinary earth for linear projects, like roads and pipelines, from requiring Environmental Clearance (EC).
- The exemption faced challenge before the National Green Tribunal (NGT), which directed the Ministry to review it within three months.
- As the Ministry delayed action, the matter reached the Supreme Court, which struck down the exemption on March 21, 2023, deeming it "blanket" and "arbitrary".

➤ Nature of the Exemption:

- The 2020 notification added "Extraction or sourcing or borrowing of ordinary earth for linear projects such as roads, pipelines, etc" to the list of exempted activities.
- The Centre argued that the exemption was necessary for the aid of the general public and for various non-mining activities identified by states.

➤ Supreme Court Verdict:

- The SC held that the "completely unguided and blanket exemption" was arbitrary and violated Article 14.
- It criticized the lack of defined safeguards and justifications for dispensing with public notice.
- Even subsequent notifications failed to address concerns regarding the concept of linear projects and environmental safeguards.

➤ Past Judicial Scrutiny:

- January 2018: NGT overturned Ministry's 2016 exemption for construction projects over 20,000 sq m.
- July 2015: NGT struck down Ministry's 2012 and 2013 Office Memorandums granting ex-post facto EC.
- July 2021: Ministry extended amnesty window for projects categorized as violations; SC intervened in January next year.
- March 6: Kerala HC nullified 2014 exemption for educational and industrial structures exceeding 20,000 sq m.

Environment Protection Act, 1986

- The Act came into force on Nov. 19, 1986 and extends to the whole of India.
- The Act was passed to provide for the protection and improvement of environment and for matters connected therewith.
- The Act gives certain powers to the Central Government to take measures for the purpose of protecting and improving the quality of the environment and to prevent environmental pollution.
- The Act is an "umbrella" legislation designed to provide a framework for Central Government coordination of the activities of various central and state authorities established under previous laws, such as the Water Act and the Air Act.

Paradip Port tops Indian Major Ports in cargo handling

Context: Paradip Port Authority achieved a record-breaking cargo throughput of 145.38 MMT in FY 2023-24, surpassing Deendayal Port, Kandla.

➤ Performance Highlights:

- Paradip Port Authority (PPA) achieved a record-breaking cargo throughput of 145.38 MMT in FY 2023-24, surpassing Deendayal Port.
- Recorded a growth of 10.02 million metric tonnes (7.4%) of traffic on a Year-on-Year (YoY) basis.
- Achieved highest ever coastal shipping traffic of 59.19 million metric tonnes, with a growth of 1.30% over the previous year.
- Thermal coal coastal shipping reached 43.97 million metric tonnes, a 4.02% increase over the previous year.

➤ Operational Improvements:

- Improved berth productivity to 33014 MT, registering 6.33% growth.
- Handled 21,665 numbers of rakes, a growth of 7.65% over the previous financial year.
- Handled 2710 ships, an increase of 13.82% over the previous financial year.

➤ System Improvement Measures:

- Enhanced operation system at mechanized coal hand plant resulted in the highest handling of thermal coal at MCHP.
- Declaration of the northern dock for handling 16 meters draught cape vessels.
- Simultaneous handling of 1 Cape and 1 Panamax at coal handling berths.

➤ Financial Results:

- Operating revenue crossed Rs. 2,300 Crores, exhibiting a 14.30% increase over the previous fiscal.
- Operating surplus crossed Rs. 1,510 Crores, showing a growth of 16.44%.
- Net surplus before tax crossed Rs. 1,570 Crores, with a growth of 21.26%.
- Net surplus after tax increased by 20% to Rs. 1,020 Crores.
- Operating ratio improved to 36% from 37% last year.

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➤ Future Plans and Developments:

- Poised to cross 300 million metric tonnes capacity mark in another 3 years with the commissioning of Western Dock project.
- Planning to become 100% mechanized by 2030.
- Commissioning two road flyovers within its premises to improve connectivity.
- Allotted 769 acres of land to various industries to attract more investment and traffic.
- Aim to plant 1 million trees by 2025 and develop a 10 MW solar power plant.
- Developing ultramodern signal station with the latest vessel traffic management information system in association with IIT, Chennai.

PMI survey

Context: The latest March manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) survey indicates a significant surge, reaching its highest level in 16 years.

- India's manufacturing sector experienced a significant surge in March, with both new orders and output levels rising at the fastest pace since October 2020.
- Export orders also saw substantial growth, reaching the fastest pace since May 2022, while producers resumed job creation after a two-month pause.
- Output growth accelerated across consumer, intermediate, and investment goods sectors, with the steepest expansion seen in investment goods makers.
- Despite positive trends, sentiment levels among firms slipped to a four-month low, with concerns about inflation weighing down confidence levels.

➤ What is the Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI)?

- The PMI is an index that indicates the prevailing direction of economic trends in manufacturing and service sectors.
- It summarizes whether market conditions are expanding, staying the same, or contracting from the perspective of purchasing managers.
- The purpose of the PMI is to provide information about current and future business conditions to decision-makers, analysts, and investors.

➤ Formula and Calculation of the PMI:

- $PMI = (P1 * 1) + (P2 * 0.5) + (P3 * 0)$
- P1 represents the percentage of answers reporting an improvement, P2 represents no change, and P3 represents a deterioration.

➤ How the PMI Works:

- It is a survey-based indicator compiled monthly by the Institute for Supply Management (ISM).
- The survey is sent to senior executives at over 400 companies in 19 primary industries, covering areas such as new orders, inventory levels, production, supplier deliveries, and employment.
- A PMI above 50 indicates expansion, under 50 indicates contraction, and at 50 indicates no change.

➤ Using the PMI:

- Corporate managers use PMI results to make key decisions about their businesses, including production, inventory management, and staffing.
- Suppliers use the PMI to estimate future demand for their products, manage inventory, and determine pricing strategies.
- Investors leverage the PMI as a leading indicator of economic conditions to gain insights into developing trends in the overall economy.

➤ Global PMI:

- The Global PMI is an economic indicator derived from questionnaires sent to manufacturing and services companies in over 40 countries.
- It gathers responses from approximately 28,000 global companies, representing 89% of global GDP.

➤ Interpreting a High PMI Reading:

- The Purchasing Managers' Index ranges from 0 to 100.
- A reading above 50 indicates economic expansion, with higher readings indicating greater growth.
- Readings below 50 signal economic contraction, with lower readings indicating more severe contraction.
- A reading of 50 signifies no change in the economic environment.

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NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India



Recently, the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) has issued a directive to e-commerce Food Business Operators regarding the categorization of food products sold on their platforms.

About the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India:

- The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) is a **statutory body established under the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare**, Government of India.
- It was established on **5 September 2008 under Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006**
- It serves as the apex body responsible for **regulating and supervising the food safety and standards in India**.
- Its regulations aim to prevent foodborne illnesses and promote consumer confidence in the food supply chain.
- It is comprised of a **Chairperson and 22 members** representing various stakeholders including food industry, consumer organizations and food scientists.
- FSSAI undertakes various initiatives such as **the Eat Right India movement** to promote healthy eating habits and reduce food wastage.
- Its headquarter is in **New Delhi**.

BSF Prahari 2.0 app



The Union Home Secretary recently inaugurated the BSF Prahari 2.0 app at an art and craft exhibition at Ashwini BSF Officers' Institute in New Delhi.

About BSF Prahari 2.0 app:

- The BSF Prahari 2.0 app is an **upgraded version** of the BSF Prahari app that is developed by the BSF IT wing for serving BSF personnel.
- The app provides **24/7 access 24x7 access** to various essential service-related matters for **Seema Praharis** (BSF personnel).

Cyber-Slavery



Recently, it was revealed that over 5,000 Indians are victims of cyber-slavery in Cambodia, prompting discussions by the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) to devise a rescue strategy.

About the Cyber-Slavery:

- Cyber-slavery refers to the **exploitation of individuals through digital means**, where victims are coerced or forced to engage in various forms of online criminal activities, often under threats, deception or coercion.
- Victims of cyber-slavery **may be forced to conduct fraudulent activities** such as phishing scams, identity theft, online fraud or other forms of cybercrime.
- They may also be coerced into producing or distributing illicit digital content including child exploitation materials or propaganda.
- Victims are often recruited or trafficked through deceptive means, promising **legitimate job opportunities** or **financial gains**, only to be trapped in exploitative situations once they are under the control of perpetrators.
- Victims of cyber-slavery **endure profound physical, emotional and psychological trauma**.

Tornado



Recently, a devastating tornado wreaked havoc in the Mainaguri area of Jalpaiguri district, West Bengal.

About Tornado:

- Tornado is a **vertical column of violently rotating air** that extends from thunderstorms to the ground.
- It forms due to the **collision of warm, moist air** with dry, **cool air** in the presence of a **low-pressure system** like a trough.
- It exhibits wind **speeds ranging from 105 to 322 kilometers per hour** and can be stationary or move at speeds of around 97 km/hr.
- Increasing tornado occurrences in India attributed to warming Bay of Bengal and land, along with anomalous wind patterns.
- Tornado is **commonly monitored in countries like the United States, Argentina** and Bangladesh.
- In India, **there is no official tornado monitoring system**, though IMD records recent incidents in press releases.
- Factors such as warm ocean temperatures, warming land, and anomalous wind patterns contribute to tornado formation in India.

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Personality in News

Rakesh Sharma



The Indian Air Force paid tribute to Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma, the only Indian to have gone into space on the anniversary of his space journey on this day (3rd April), 40 years ago.

Rakesh Sharma:

Rakesh Sharma, a former Indian Air Force pilot and Wing Commander was born on 13 January 1949 in Patiala of present-day Punjab.

Contributions:

- Rakesh Sharma went on to become **the first Indian citizen to reach outer space on April 3, 1984**, when he flew aboard the Soviet rocket **Soyuz T-11** launched from Baikonur Cosmodrome in the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic.
- After retiring from the Indian Air Force, Rakesh Sharma **put his skills as a pilot** to use in the Indian civil services, specifically in Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), where he served till retirement.
- He spent **7 days, 21 hours and 40 minutes in space** and took **India to become the 14th nation to travel to outer space**.

Award and Honours:

- Rakesh Sharma was conferred the **honour of the Hero of the Soviet Union** upon his return from space and he remains to date the only Indian to have been conferred this honour.
- India also conferred its highest peacetime gallantry award, the **Ashoka Chakra** to Rakesh Sharma.

Ethical Values: Integrity, Compassion, Courage, etc.

Place in News

Taiwan

A massive earthquake of 7.4 magnitude struck Taiwan in the early hours of April 3, 2023, as reported by the United States Geological Survey (USGS), prompting Japan to issue a tsunami warning for Okinawa and other Ryukyu islands.

Taiwan (Capital: Taipei)

Location: Taiwan, officially the Republic of China, is a country in **East Asia** located at the juncture of the East and South China Seas.

Political Boundaries: Taiwan shares its borders with the **People's Republic of China (PRC)**, **Japan** and the **Philippines**.

Coastal Boundaries: It is surrounded by bodies of water, including the **Philippine Sea (East)**, the **East China Sea (North)**, the **Luzon Strait (South)** and the **South China Sea (Southwest)**.

Physical Features:

- The highest point in **Taiwan** is **Yu Shan**, also known as Jade Mountain.
- Taiwan's major rivers include the **Zhuoshui, Tamsui, Gaoping, Agongdian** and **Xindian** Rivers.
- Taiwan has limited mineral resources, with some deposits of coal, natural gas, **limestone, marble** and **small reserves of gold, copper**, and iron ore.



POINTS TO PONDER

- Recently, where was the world's first Om-shaped temple inaugurated? – **Rajasthan**
- Tantalum, a rare metal, was recently discovered in which river? – **Sutlej**
- What are 'Cicadas', recently seen in the news? – **Sound producing insects**
- Recently, which organisation has launched a new network for coronaviruses, CoViNet? – **WHO**
- Recently, which space company has successfully test-fired the 'Kalam-250' at the propulsion testbed of the ISRO? – **Skyroot Aerospace**

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