



23 May, 2024

Political affiliations of judges

Context: In his farewell speech on Monday, May 20, a retiring judge of the Calcutta High Court stated that he was, and continues to be, a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS).

India: Judges Appoint Judges

➤ Historical Context:

- Before the 1970s, a judicial candidate's political ideology was not a major concern in the appointment process.
- This changed after setbacks to Indira Gandhi's government in the Supreme Court (Golak Nath, bank nationalisation, and privy purses cases).

➤ Ideology in Appointments:

- S Mohan Kumaramangalam, a minister in Indira's cabinet, advocated considering judges' ideologies for Supreme Court appointments.
- Justice M N Chandurkar's elevation was blocked due to alleged links with the RSS.

➤ Collegium System:

- Since the 1990s, appointments are made through the Collegium system, presuming judges' neutrality without overt political affiliations.
- Controversy arose with the appointment of Justice Victoria Gowri, who had a history with the BJP, leading to objections and a dismissed petition against her appointment.

UK: Merit and Experience

➤ Selection Process:

- Judges are selected based on merit and experience, not political affiliation.
- The process involves senior judiciary members and others familiar with the judiciary.

➤ Judicial Conduct:

- Judges should avoid political ties and public demonstrations that could compromise their independence.
- They are prohibited from running for Parliament under the House of Commons (Disqualification) Act, 1975.

US: A Highly Political Judiciary

➤ Appointment Process:

- The President appoints judges, and the Senate confirms them, often in partisan votes.

- Judges serve for life and have known political positions, with the Supreme Court having a significant conservative or liberal influence based on its composition.

➤ Judicial Conduct:

- The American Bar Association Model Code prohibits judges from political activity except for improving the law, legal system, or justice administration.
- Judges should not engage in political activities inconsistent with judicial independence, integrity, or impartiality.

Singapore: Independence and Competence

➤ Judicial Code of Conduct:

- Emphasizes an independent and competent judiciary.
- Judges should avoid associations with political parties and not hear cases where their impartiality could be questioned due to family political activities.

Australia: Keep Politics at Arm's Length

➤ Judicial Conduct:

- Judges are expected to sever ties with political parties upon appointment.
- Avoiding political gatherings and contributions to political parties is crucial to maintain impartiality.
- Strong public opinions on relevant topics can lead to disqualification from cases to ensure impartiality.

RBI dividend to Government

Context: On May 22, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approved a dividend payout of ₹2.11 lakh crore to the central government for the fiscal year 2023-24.

- The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) approved a ₹2.11 lakh crore dividend payout to the central government for 2023-24, which is 2.41 times the previous year's ₹87,416 crore.
- Following the announcement, the yield of the new 10-year benchmark G-Sec closed below 7% at 6.9919%.
- Economists attribute the higher surplus to increased interest income from rising global and domestic yields and revaluation gains on forex reserves.
- The surplus will aid in maintaining the targeted fiscal deficit and provide flexibility for fiscal policy.

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- It may reduce reliance on the government's slow-moving disinvestment programme.
- The RBI Board decided to increase the Contingent Risk Buffer (CRB) to 6.50% for FY24 due to robust economic growth.

Economic Capital Framework Review:

➤ Committee Formation:

- The RBI established a committee chaired by former Governor Bimal Jalan to reassess its economic capital framework and propose the amount of surplus provision to be transferred to the government.

➤ Components Distinction:

- The committee recommended a clear differentiation between the two elements of RBI's economic capital: Realised equity and Revaluation balances.
- Revaluation reserves consist of periodic marked-to-market unrealised/notional gains/losses in values of foreign currencies and gold, foreign securities and rupee securities, and a contingency fund.
- Realised equity, also known as the Contingent Risk Buffer (CRB), serves as a contingency fund for meeting all risks/losses primarily accumulated from retained earnings.

➤ Surplus Distribution Policy:

- The finalised Surplus Distribution Policy aligns with the suggestions of the Bimal Jalan committee.
- The committee recommended setting the Contingent Risk Buffer (CRB) level within a range of 5.5-6.5% of RBI's balance sheet.
- Following the recommendations, RBI opted to establish the CRB level at 5.5% of the balance sheet, transferring the remaining excess reserves totalling ₹52,637 crore to the government.
- **Risk Provisioning:** In case the Contingent Risk Buffer falls below the lower bound of the requirement, risk provisioning will be conducted to the necessary extent, with only the residual net income (if any) transferred to the Government.
- **Implications:** Maintaining the Contingent Risk Buffer at the lower range of 5.5% limits RBI's flexibility in manoeuvring monetary policy.

➤ Understanding Rangelands:

- **Definition:** Rangelands are natural or semi-natural ecosystems grazed by livestock or wildlife, comprising grasses, shrubs, and trees, influenced by climate factors.
- **Coverage and Importance:** Rangelands cover over 80 million sq km, serving as carbon sinks, freshwater stores, and vital for food security and livelihoods globally.
- **Global Significance:** They generate 16% of food production and 70% of feed for herbivores, with India alone spanning about 1.21 million sq km.

➤ Challenges and Degradation:

- **Degradation Overview:** Nearly half of the world's rangelands face degradation due to climate change, unsustainable practices, biodiversity loss, and conversion to farmlands.
- **Impact on Communities:** Degradation leads to decreased soil fertility, biodiversity loss, income reduction, and conflicts over grazing rights with authorities.

➤ Understanding Pastoralism:

- **Livelihood System:** Pastoralism involves livestock production, including rearing, dairy, meat, wool, and leather production.
- **Community Profile:** Globally, about 500 million pastoralists are involved in livestock production, with around 13 million in India across diverse groups.

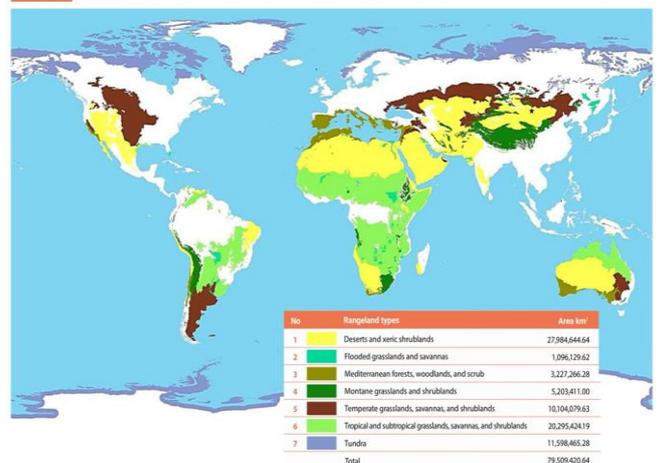
➤ Economic Contributions:

- **Livestock Sector:** Pastoralists significantly contribute to India's livestock sector, safeguarding indigenous breeds, preserving traditional knowledge, and playing a crucial role in dairy and meat production.
- **Global Leadership:** India ranks as a global leader in dairy and meat production, with pastoralists playing a pivotal role in maintaining this status.

Rangelands under threat

Context: A new UNCCD report highlights that around half of the world's rangelands are degraded, requiring policy actions, and the communities relying on them need focused assistance.

FIGURE 2 Indicative map of global rangelands according to ecoregions⁹⁹



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NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Buddha Purnima



President Droupadi Murmu and Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar have greeted the nation on the occasion of Buddha Purnima which is being celebrated in different parts of the country today.

About Buddha Purnima:

- Buddha Purnima, also known as **Vesak** or Buddha Jayanti, is a festival celebrated by Buddhists worldwide on the **first full moon of the Hindu calendar month Vaishakha**.
- It commemorates the **birth of Lord Gautam Buddha, the founder of Buddhism**, around 563 BC in **Lumbini, present-day Nepal**.
- The day is considered a **triple-blessed day**, marking **Buddha's birth, enlightenment (Bodhi) and death (Maha Parnirvana)**.
- In **1999**, Buddha Purnima was **designated as an international day by the United Nations** to acknowledge Buddhism's contributions to society.
- This day is commemorated as a major festival in **India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, China, Tibet, Korea, Laos, Mongolia, Vietnam, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, Indonesia and Singapore**.
- The **Mahabodhi Temple**, where Lord Buddha is believed to have attained enlightenment, is a **UNESCO World Heritage Site**.

International Solar Alliance

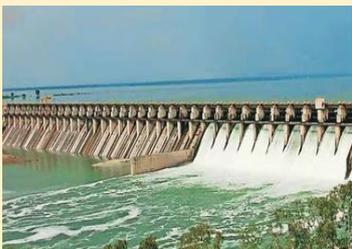


Spain recently joined the International Solar Alliance as its 99th member, announced by the External Affairs Ministry.

About International Solar Alliance:

- The International Solar Alliance is an **intergovernmental organization** and a **collaborative platform** aimed at increasing the deployment of **solar energy technologies**.
- It was founded by the **Prime Minister of India (Narendra Modi)** and the **President of France (François Hollande)** at the **United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris**.
- Its goals include enhancing **energy access, ensuring energy security** and driving the energy transition in member countries.
- It aims to **install 1000 GW** of solar energy capacity and **mitigate 1000 million tonnes of CO2 annually**.
- It was conceptualized during the **21st Conference of Parties (COP21)** to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in **Paris in 2015**.
- Its headquarter is at **Gurugram in Haryana**.

Ujani Dam



Recently, six individuals, including two children, were reported missing after a boat carrying seven overturned in the Ujani dam waters in Maharashtra.

About the Ujani Dam:

- The Ujani Dam, also known as the **Bhima Dam**, is an **earth and concrete masonry dam** in Maharashtra.
- It was commissioned in June **1980** and is **2,534 meters long**.
- The dam is **built on the Bhima River, a tributary of the Krishna River** in Solapur District.
- The dam's reservoir has a **capacity of 1,517 Giga Litres (GL)** and supplies water for drinking and irrigation.
- The dam's reservoir also provides water for **fisheries** and is a popular **bird-watching spot for flamingos**.
- The **Ujani Hydro power station**, located next to the dam, runs on water released from the dam and has a reversible generating unit that can **produce 12 MW**.

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Place in News

Spain

Recently, Spain has become the 99th member of the International Solar Alliance.

Spain (Capital: Madrid)

Location: Spain is located in southwestern Europe on the Iberian Peninsula.

Boundaries:

Spain shares its borders with **Mediterranean Sea** (East & Southeast), **Portugal** (West), **Andorra** and the **Bay of Biscay** (North), **Gibraltar** (South), **France** (Northeast) and **Atlantic Ocean** (Northwest).

Physical Features:

- Spain includes the **Canary Islands** in the **Atlantic Ocean** and the **Balearic Islands** in the **Mediterranean Sea**.
- Major mountain ranges in Spain include the **Pyrenees**, **Sierra Morena**, **Central Sierra** and the **Cantabrian Mountains**.
- Spain is divided into **17** autonomous communities, including **Catalonia**, **Andalusia**, **Madrid** and more.
- The **Ebro River** is one of the significant rivers in Spain.



POINTS TO PONDER

- When was the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court (ICC), the Rome Statute, adopted? – **July 1998**
- Who is the author of the book "Kairos," which won the International Booker Prize in 2024? – **Jenny Erpenbeck**
- Which initiative was launched by the Khadi and Village Industries Commission (KVIC) to address plastic waste management? – **Project REPLAN (REducing PLAstic from Nature)**
- Which collaborative initiative, launched in 2023, involves the Indian Army and the United Service Institution of India (USI)? – **Project Udbhav**
- How many members, including the Chairperson, does the Competition Commission of India (CCI) consist of? – **Chairperson and 6 Members (appointed by the Central Government)**

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