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Agniveer Compensations

Context: Earlier this week, Rahul Gandhi, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, claimed that the family of Agniveer Ajay Kumar, killed in a January landmine blast, did not receive government financial assistance.

➤ Financial Compensation Breakdown

- Government sources clarified that the total compensation amounting to Rs 1.65 crore for Agniveer Ajay Kumar's family included various components:
 - Rs 48 lakh and Rs 50 lakh from central government and financial institutions respectively, as insurance under an MoU.
 - An additional Rs 39,000.
 - Rs 44 lakh provided as ex gratia.
 - Rs 8 lakh from the Army welfare fund.
 - Rs 13 lakh as balance of pay until completion of tenure.
 - Rs 2.3 lakh from Seva Nidhi, a contributory scheme for Agniveers.

➤ Insurance and Compensation Systems

- Regular soldiers contribute Rs 5,000 monthly to the Army Group Insurance Fund, ensuring coverage of Rs 50 lakh.
- Agniveers, despite not contributing from their salary, are insured for Rs 48 lakh through the same scheme.
- Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with banks secure insurance for defence personnel, including Agniveers, under the defence salary package.

➤ Ex Gratia and Additional Compensation

- Rs 44 lakh is designated as ex gratia for Agniveers in cases of service-related deaths or during operations.
- Regular soldiers are eligible for ex gratia ranging from Rs 25 lakh to Rs 45 lakh, depending on the circumstances of the casualty.
- Deaths not attributable to military service do not qualify for ex gratia benefits.

➤ Seva Nidhi and Special Benefits

- Seva Nidhi, exclusively applicable to Agniveers, accumulates contributions until the date of death along with government contributions and interest.
- Agniveers who die while on duty or during operations receive full pay for the unserved period up to four years, inclusive of the Seva Nidhi component.

➤ Exclusive Benefits for Regular Soldiers

- Regular soldiers enjoy additional benefits such as gratuity, monthly family pension, and death gratuity up to Rs 25 lakh.
- For deaths attributable to military service, a special family pension amounting to 60% of the soldier's last pay is provided.
- Liberalised family pensions, amounting to 100% of the last pay, are tax-free and awarded to families of soldiers killed in operations.

➤ Educational and Health Benefits

- Children of soldiers who die due to operational reasons receive educational allowances covering school/college fees, books, transportation, hostel charges, and uniform costs.
- Educational scholarships vary from Rs 10,000 to Rs 50,000 per annum, supporting professional courses for eligible candidates.
- Regular soldiers and their families benefit from the Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS), ensuring medical care similar to the Central Government Health Scheme (CGHS).

Balance of Payments

Context: Last week, RBI data revealed that India's current account recorded a surplus in Q4 of the 2023-24 financial year.

➤ Overview of India's Current Account Surplus

- Recent data from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) for Q4 of FY23-24 revealed India's first current account surplus in 11 quarters.
- The current account surplus signifies that more money flowed into India than out during this period.

➤ Understanding Balance of Payments (BoP)

- The BoP is a comprehensive record of a country's transactions with the rest of the world, encompassing both current and capital accounts.
- It is crucial for assessing the exchange rate of the rupee, sovereign ratings, and overall economic health.

➤ Components of the BoP

- Current Account:**
 - Divided into trade of goods and trade of services (invisibles).
 - Trade of goods includes physical goods like cars and gadgets, where a deficit indicates more imports than exports.
 - Invisibles cover services (e.g., IT, tourism), transfers (e.g., remittances), and incomes (e.g., investment earnings).
 - Q4 FY23-24 saw a surplus due to a surplus in invisibles despite a deficit in the trade of goods.
- Capital Account:**
 - Records investments such as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and Foreign Institutional Investments (FII).
 - Q4 FY23-24 showed a net surplus of \$25 billion in the capital account, reflecting inflows from foreign investments.
- Foreign Exchange Reserves:**
 - Balances the BoP, absorbing surplus funds to stabilize the rupee's exchange rate and maintain export competitiveness.

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- Prevents rupee appreciation that could hinder export growth.

➤ Interpreting BoP Data

- **Economic Implications:**
 - A current account deficit can indicate a growing economy importing capital goods to boost export capacity.
 - It also reflects strong domestic demand driving imports.
 - FY20-21's surplus, influenced by pandemic-related factors, wasn't economically beneficial despite the surplus.
- **Policy Insights:**
 - Experts suggest a current account deficit of 1.5%-2% of GDP aligns with sustainable economic growth of 7%-8%.
 - Not all deficits are negative, nor all surpluses positive, depending on economic context and drivers.

Balance of Trade (BOT)	Balance of Payments (BOP)
Deals only with transactions of visible or material goods.	Deals with transactions of visible as well as invisible items like services.
It is a partial study of the total economic transactions of a nation, thus cannot show the economic performance comprehensively.	It is a broad study of the total economic transactions of a nation, reflecting the real economic performance.
Unfavorable BOT can be recovered from favorable BOP.	Unfavorable BOP cannot be recovered from favorable BOT.
It is a narrow concept of international trade.	It is a broad concept of international trade.
A country is not overly concerned if there is a deficit in BOT.	A country is deeply concerned if there is no balance in BOP.
BOT is not as significant as BOP for economic analysis.	BOP is more significant, influencing economic policy formulation.

Telecommunications Act 2023

Context: The Union Government has gazetted the enforcement of sections 6-8, 48, and 59(b) of the Telecommunications Act, 2023, starting July 5, 2024.

- The Telecommunications Act 2023 updates and consolidates laws governing telecommunication services, networks, and spectrum allocation in India.
- It replaces outdated legislation such as the Indian Telegraph Act 1885 and Indian Wireless Telegraph Act 1933 to accommodate advancements in telecom technology.
- Guided by principles of Samavesh (Inclusion), Suraksha (Security), Vridhhi (Growth), and Tvarit (Responsiveness), the Act aims to realize the vision of Viksit Bharat (Developed India)
- Passed by Parliament in December 2023, the Act received presidential assent on December 24, 2023, and was published in the official Gazette on the same day.
- Sections 1, 2, 10-30, 42-44, 46, 47, 50-58, 61, and 62 of the Act were enforced from June 26, 2024, following Notification No. 2408(E) dated June 21, 2024, published in the Gazette of India.

➤ Highlights of the Bill:

- **Replacement of Existing Acts:** The Bill aims to replace the Indian Telegraph Act, 1885, and the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act, 1933.
- **Authorization Requirement:** Central government authorization will be mandatory for establishing and operating telecommunications networks, providing telecom services, or possessing radio equipment.
- **Spectrum Allocation:** Spectrum allocation will primarily be through auctions, except for specific entities and purposes which will be assigned administratively.
- **Interception and Suspension of Telecom Services:** Telecommunication may be intercepted for reasons including state security, public order, or crime prevention. Telecom services may also be suspended under similar grounds.
- **Right of Way for Telecom Infrastructure:** Provision for exercising the right of way to lay telecom infrastructure on public and private property is included in the Bill.
- **User Protection Measures:** Measures such as requiring prior consent for receiving certain messages and creating a Do Not Disturb register will be implemented to protect users.

➤ Key Issues and Analysis:

- **Prescription of Interception Safeguards:** The Bill leaves the procedure and safeguards related to interception to be prescribed by the central government, raising concerns about oversight.
- **Potential for Mass Surveillance:** There are concerns that provisions in the Bill may enable mass surveillance, potentially infringing on the right to privacy.
- **Lack of Procedural Safeguards for Search Powers:** Procedural safeguards regarding powers to search premises and vehicles for unauthorized telecom equipment are not clearly specified.
- **Biometric Verification Requirement:** Requiring biometric verification for users may be disproportionate and could violate the right to privacy.
- **Inclusion of Internet-based Services:** The definition of telecommunication services under the Bill encompasses internet-based services.
- **Centralized Regulatory Authority:** The Bill consolidates regulatory functions under the central government, unlike sectors such as power and finance where these functions are delegated to independent regulators.
- **Government's Power to Amend Offences:** Offences listed under the Bill's Third Schedule can be added, modified, or removed by government notification, prompting debate on parliamentary oversight.

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NEWS IN BETWEEN THE LINES

Atal Innovation Mission



Recently, Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) at NITI Aayog celebrated the graduation of its second batch of Community Innovator Fellows and launched 'Stories of Change Edition 2' in New Delhi.

About the Atal Innovation Mission:

- The Atal Innovation Mission (AIM) is a **flagship initiative** by the **National Institution of Transforming India (NITI) Aayog** to promote entrepreneurship and innovation in India.
- It was launched on **April 26, 2018**
- The mission's goals include **creating an entrepreneurial ecosystem, providing financial aid, developing innovative solutions** and **reaching underprivileged areas**.
- Its initiatives include **Atal Tinkering Labs** for fostering innovation in schools, upgrading Atal Incubation Centres to world-class standards and the flagship **Atal New India Challenge**.
- It also plans to establish a national **Small Business Innovation Research and Development (SBIR)** program for startups and SMEs.

Bureau of Indian Standards



Recently, the government mandated Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) conformity for stainless steel and aluminium utensils to ensure kitchen safety, quality and efficiency, making the ISI mark compulsory and non-compliance punishable.

About the Bureau of Indian Standards:

- The Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) is **India's national standards body**, responsible for the development of **standardization, marking and quality certification of goods**.
- The **BIS Act of 2016** established the Bureau of Indian Standards to ensure the quality, safety and reliability of products in India.
- It works under the **Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food & Public Distribution**.
- Bureau of **Indian Standards certification is required** for some products to be sold in India.
- The **BIS Act, 2016 includes the BIS (Hallmarking) Regulations, 2018** mandating hallmarking of gold and **silver jewellery and artefacts**, with stringent penalties for non-compliance.
- It is a **member of International Organization for Standardization (ISO)** and participates in the deliberations of technical committees that formulate ISO standards.
- It also **operates India's Management Systems Certification Scheme** under an Act of Parliament.
- Its headquarter is in **New Delhi**.

Li-Fi Technology



Recently, the telecom startup Velmenni has received a grant from the ministry of defence (MoD) under the Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) initiative for its innovative Li-Fi (Light Fidelity) technology.

About Li-Fi Technology:

- Li-Fi (light fidelity) is a **wireless communication technology that uses light to transmit data** and position between devices.
- It is **based on visible light**, between **violet (800 THz)** and **red (400 THz)**, instead of the radio part of the electromagnetic spectrum used by Wi-Fi. Li-Fi is designed to be faster, cheaper and more secure than Wi-Fi and doesn't require a router.
- This technology **works by using LED light bulbs** that emit light pulses that are imperceptible to the human eye.
- When data needs to be transmitted, the **LED's brightness oscillates** at ultra-high speeds, representing binary codes of 1s and 0s.
- It has a **band frequency of 200,000 GHz**, which is 100 times faster than Wi-Fi's 5 GHz, and can be up to 10 times cheaper.
- This technology can be used in a **variety of applications**, such as **internet access, phone-to-phone or phone-to-TV communications** or in emerging use cases such as extended or mixed reality.
- In February **2021**, two villages in **Gujarat became India's first smart villages** with Li-Fi-based internet connectivity.
- German **physicist Harald Haas first unveiled Li-Fi in 2011** during a TEDGlobal talk in Edinburgh.

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Apatani Tribe



Recently, the Apatani tribe of Arunachal Pradesh celebrated the compilation of their rich oral folk traditions into two books: *Gangu Ellu*, containing fifty lyrical verses of Apatani songs by Taro Tallo, and *Miji Nando*, featuring shamanic verses and folktales compiled by author Dr. Hage Tabyo.

About Apatani Tribe:

- The Apatani, also known as **Tanw, Apa and Apa Tani**, are an ethnic group of people who live in the **Ziro valley** of **Arunachal Pradesh's** Lower Subansiri district in India.
- They are known for their advanced agricultural practices and land management techniques, which have helped them become one of the more advanced tribal societies in Northeast India.
- The Apatani have practiced integrated rice-fish farming in their mountain terraces since the 1960s.
- They use an innovative **paddy-cum-fish cultivation system**, with about **48.38%** of their land dedicated to this method.
- They also **build channels through their rice terraces** so they can grow catfish and carp at the same time as rice.
- The Apatani speak a local language called **Tani**.
- The Apatani **worship the sun and the moon** and have around 20 different gods.
- They also **believe in Christianity** and some have merged all of these beliefs together.
- They celebrate **major festivals** such as **Dree, Myoko, Yapung and Murung**.

Place in News

Democratic Republic of Congo

The first Secretary-level meeting between the Defence Ministries of India and the Democratic Republic of Congo was held in New Delhi on Friday (5th July 2024).

Democratic Republic of Congo (Capital: Kinshasa)

Location: Democratic Republic of Congo is the **2nd largest** country in Africa and the **11th largest in the world in term of area**, located in Central Africa.

Political Boundaries: Democratic Republic of Congo shares its borders with **Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania** (East), the **Central African Republic and South Sudan** (North), **Zambia** (Southeast), **Angola** (Southwest).

Physical Features:

- The highest point in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is **Margherita Peak**.
- The Congo River, one of the **world's longest rivers**, flows through the country.
- Katanga Plateau in the country is considered to be a **rich mining region**, which supplies **cobalt, copper, tin, radium, uranium and diamonds**.

International Relations: The Democratic Republic of Congo is a member of the **United Nations, African Union** and **Southern African Development Community (SADC)**.

Language: The official language of this country is **French**, but other languages include **Kituba, Lingala, Swahili and Tshiluba**.



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POINTS TO PONDER

- Which organizations recently signed an MoU aimed at advancing maritime safety through the development of a ship trajectory prediction tool? – **Indian Register of Shipping (IRS) and Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (IIT Bombay)**
- What is the name of that freedom fighter who participated in Swadeshi Andolan designed the Indian National Flag, which was later adopted as the national flag of India? – **Pingali Venkayya**
- Recently, India is set to carry out trials for US-made Stryker Infantry Combat Vehicles (ICVs) in which regions? – **Ladakh and Rajasthan**
- The Karnataka state government has set up a committee to investigate the contamination of which river? – **Kaveri River**
- The Ahom era 'Moidams', which are the resting places of royal families, are located in which district of Assam? – **Charaideo**

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