

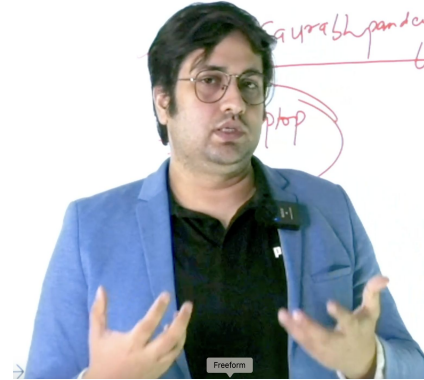
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- **Supreme Court Decision on Auroville**

Development

- **Supreme Court Examines Lokpal's Jurisdiction Over Judges**
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**By saurabh
pandey sir**

'Right to development a priority under fundamental rights'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court set aside, in separate judgments on Monday, a National Green Tribunal (NGT) order and a Madras High Court decision to halt development activities at Auroville. The decision cited lack of environmental clearance while outlining the need for sustainable development which strike a "golden balance" between the rights to development and clean environment.

"Though it is true that the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle are part of the environmental law of the country, it is equally true that while the right to clean environment is a guaranteed fundamental right under Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, the right to development through industrialisation equally claims priority under fundamental rights, particularly under Articles 14, 19 and 21 of the Constitution," a Bench of Justices Bela M. Trivedi and P. B. Varale observed in their judgment.

A Bench of Justices Trivedi and Varale set aside the April 2022 order of the NGT, Chennai, which directed the Auroville Foundation not to proceed with further construction in its township project until environmental clearance was obtained.

Setting aside the NGT verdict of 2022, Justice Trivedi concluded that the Tribunal had "committed gross error in assuming the



The members of Auroville Foundation gather around the Matrimandir. FILE PHOTO

jurisdiction and giving directions untenable in law". The court, in a second judgment also delivered on March 17, upheld a separate appeal filed by The Auroville Foundation against a March 2024 order of the High Court.

In the judgment concerning the NGT order, the apex court explained that the grievance raised by the respondents was with regard to the construction of roads as mentioned in the Master Plan by the Foundation.

Justice Trivedi noted the Master Plan had been approved by the the Foundation and by the Minister of Human Resource Development back in 2001 and published in the official gazette in 2010.

The argument raised in the Tribunal against the construction was that it would destroy an area called the Darkali forest.

The Foundation had countered that areas cannot be treated as a forest. They contended that it was a man-made plantation which did not require environmental clearance mandated under the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980.

Supreme Court Decision on Auroville Development

Overview

The Supreme Court set aside NGT order and Madras High Court decision.
Focused on the balance between the right to development and environmental protection.

Key Points

Judgment Highlights:

- Emphasizes sustainable development.

- Right to clean environment (Articles 14, 21) vs. right to development (Articles 14, 19, 21).

- NGT's assumption of jurisdiction was deemed incorrect.

Auroville Foundation:

- The foundation was allowed to continue construction activities.

- Master Plan approved in 2001, published in 2010.

Environmental Concerns:

- Grievances regarding construction impacting Darkali forest.

- Counterargument: Area is a man-made plantation, not a forest needing clearance

Standing stones of Mudumal in Telangana on tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites

Serish Nanisetti

HYDERABAD

The *menhirs* or the standing stones of Mudumal in Narayanpet in Telangana have made it to the tentative list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The application was forwarded by the Centre to the world body.

Mudumal, on the banks of the Krishna that separates the State from Karnataka, has been a well-known *menhir* site.

“Nearly 1,200 large sized stones standing vertically map the skies as it existed 3,000 years ago. From them, we know the date and positions of the



The *menhirs* in Mudumal in Narayanpet of Telangana.

constellations of Leo, Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Virgo, Taurus etc.,” says conservation architect Surya Narayan Murthy who helped

prepare the application for the Mudumal site in collaboration with DAM and Decan Heritage Academy Trust.

The Menhirs of Mudumal: A Step Towards UNESCO Recognition



Overview

 Menhirs of Mudumal in Narayanpet, Telangana, are now on the tentative list for UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

 The application for UNESCO recognition was submitted by the Indian government.

 Mudumal is located on the banks of the Krishna River, which separates Telangana from Karnataka.

 The site features approximately 1,200 large standing stones that date back around 3,000 years.



These stones provide insights into the positions of various constellations, including Leo, Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Virgo, and Taurus.



Conservation architect Surya Narayan Murthy played a key role in preparing the UNESCO application, collaborating with DAM and Deccan Heritage Academy Trust.



Mudumal is recognized as a significant menhir site, contributing to our understanding of ancient astronomy.

Supreme Court to consider if Lokpal has powers over judges of constitutional courts



Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

A Bench of the Supreme Court's senior-most judges headed by Justice B.R. Gavai on Tuesday decided to examine in detail if judges of constitutional courts come within the jurisdiction of the country's top ombudsman, Lokpal, as public functionaries including the Prime Minister, Union Ministers, Members of Parliament and Union government officials.

"We will consider the issue of the jurisdiction of the Lokpal," Justice Gavai addressed the courtroom.

The court was hearing a *suo motu* case initiated after Lokpal, through a January 27 order, assumed jurisdiction to investigate complaints against serving High Court judges. The



ombudsman classified High Court judges as public servants who came within the ambit of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 same as Government Ministers and officials.

The Special Bench had stayed the Lokpal order on February 20, terming it "very disturbing" with a potential to impact the independence of the judiciary.

Appearing on Tuesday before the Special Bench also comprising Justices Surya Kant and A.S. Oka, Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta said the "limited question" was whether judges of constitutional courts were indeed public servants under the Lokpal Act.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, assisting the court, said he wanted to go a "little further" to urge the Bench to examine if criminal complaints against judges could be registered in police stations.

"Can a complaint be ever filed outside the remit of a constitutional authority. That is the fundamental issue. Can someone go to a police station and register a first information report (FIR)?" he submitted.

However, Mr. Mehta ob-

jected to extending the ambit of the *suo motu* case. He insisted the Bench should confine its present line of inquiry to whether the judges of constitutional courts were public servants under Section 14 of the Lokpal Act.

The top law officer contended that the Constitution Bench had already, in a majority judgment in the *K. Veeraswami* case of 1991, settled the question of whether the police could register an FIR against a sitting High Court or Supreme Court judge.

The Lokpal has effectively bypassed long Constitutional and procedural formalities by directly assuming jurisdiction to investigate High Court judges.

In its January 27 order, the Lokpal had found the

argument that a High Court judge was outside the ombudsman's jurisdiction "too naive".

It concluded that a High Court judge came well within the ambit of clause (f) of Section 14(1) of the 2013 Act.

Clause (f) of Section 14 notes the Lokpal has jurisdiction over "any person who is or has been a chairperson or member or officer or employee in any body or Board or corporation or authority or company or society or trust or autonomous body (by whatever name called) established by an Act of Parliament or wholly or partly financed by the Central government or controlled by it".

The Lokpal interpreted the term 'any person' in the clause to include a judge of a High Court.

Supreme Court Examines Lokpal's Jurisdiction Over Judges



Judicial Independence: The Special Bench, comprising Justices B.R. Gavai, Surya Kant, and A.S. Oka, expressed concerns about the potential erosion of judicial independence, leading to a stay of the Lokpal's order on February 20.

Public Servant Debate: The crux of the matter revolves around whether judges of constitutional courts can be deemed public servants under the Lokpal Act, raising questions about accountability and oversight.

Legal Perspectives:

. Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta articulated that the pivotal question is whether judges of constitutional courts fall under the definition of public servants as per Section 14 of the Lokpal Act.

Arguments Presented: Mehta contended that extending the inquiry beyond this definition could lead to unnecessary complications in the legal framework.

Impact on Judicial Independence:

The implications of classifying judges as public servants extend beyond legal definitions. The fundamental concern arises from the potential encroachment on the independence of the judiciary, a cornerstone of democratic governance.

Historical Context: The Supreme Court's ruling in the K. Veeraswami case of 1991 established a precedent regarding the inviolability of judicial functions from external inquiries.

Judicial Integrity: Allowing the Lokpal to investigate judges could set a precedent that undermines the judiciary's ability to operate free from political or administrative pressures.

Pockets of insulated sound



Q. What are audible enclaves?

Audible enclaves are small pockets of sound that

are not disturbed by surrounding noise. They are produced by new technologies designed to deliver sounds that only one specific person can hear, even if they are in a crowd.

Sound consists of waves moving through a medium, moving the medium's particles back and forth. How fast this back-and-forth motion happens determines the sound's frequency. The faster they move, the higher the frequency of the sound. When sound waves are emitted from a source, like a speaker, they diverge as they pass through the air in a phenomenon called diffraction. Higher frequency sounds diverge more. Devices called parametric array loudspeakers are still able to create focused 'beams' of sound. They emit high-frequency waves modulated with an audio signal. As the waves travel through the air, they self-demodulate to produce a



When sound waves are emitted from a source, like a speaker, they diverge as they pass through the air in a phenomenon called diffraction. DESMOND LIAN/UNSPLASH

sound wave confined in a narrow beam, audible only to those in the beam's path.

Audible enclaves go a step further. In a study published on March 17 in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, researchers in the US reported doing this by using two high-frequency waves of different frequencies. They are inaudible in this form. But when they intersect, non-linear interactions cause them to produce a sound wave at that spot, audible only to people nearby.

mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in



For feedback and suggestions

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Definition

 **Audible Enclaves:** Small pockets of sound designed for individual listening in crowded environments, undisturbed by surrounding noise.

Sound Mechanics

 **Wave Dynamics:** Sound is produced by waves moving through a medium. The frequency is determined by the speed of particle motion; faster motion results in higher frequency sounds.


Diffraction

 **Wave Divergence:** Sound waves from a source, such as a speaker, diverge as they travel through air. Higher frequency sounds diverge more than lower frequencies.

Parametric Array Loudspeakers

 **Focused Sound Beams:** These devices emit high-frequency waves modulated with audio signals, directing sound to specific listeners.

Research Findings

 **Study Insights:** Research published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science on March 17 shows that audible enclaves can be created using two inaudible high-frequency waves intersecting to produce sound.

Non-linear Interactions

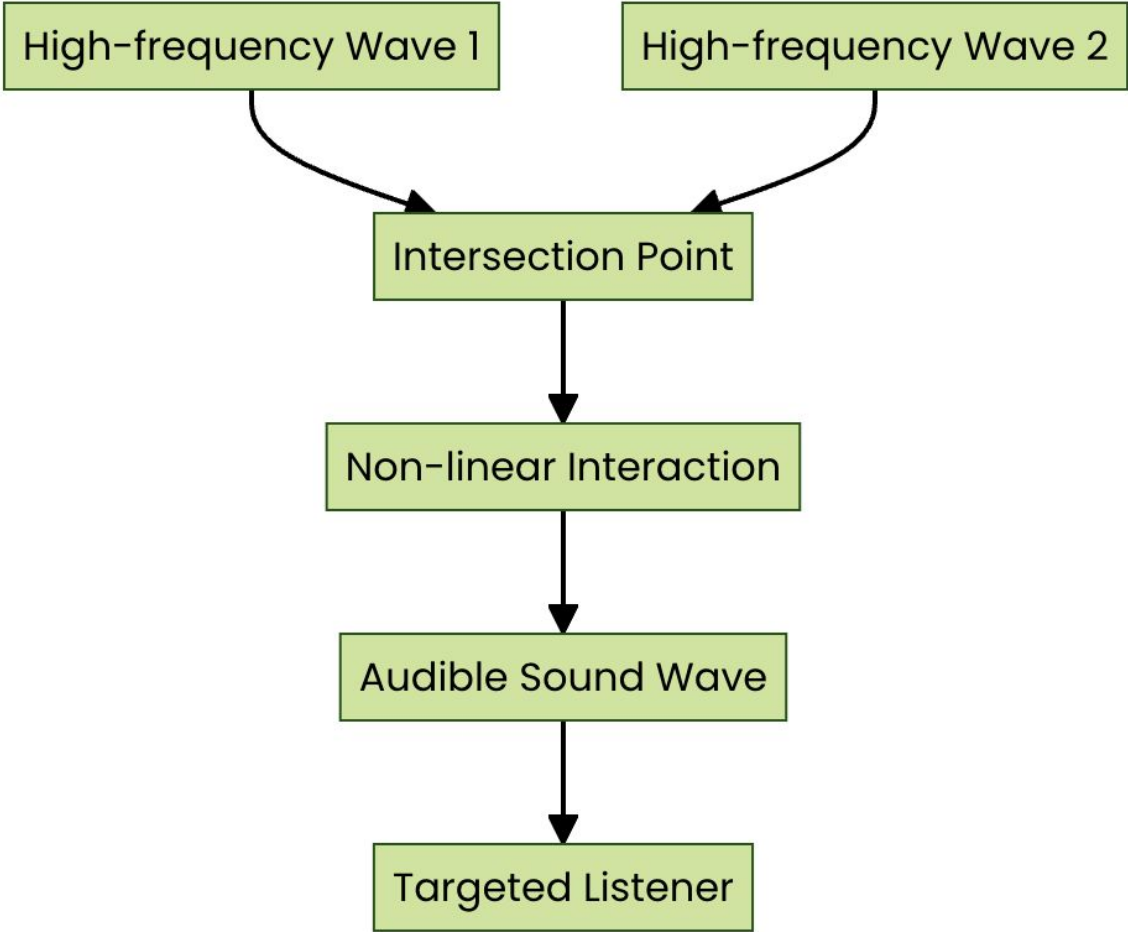
 **Wave Intersections:** The intersection of two high-frequency waves leads to non-linear interactions, generating a sound wave audible only to those nearby.

Applications

 **Potential Uses:** Audible enclaves can be applied in various fields, enhancing personal audio experiences in public spaces.

Summary: Audible enclaves are targeted sound pockets created by intersecting high-frequency waves, enabling individual listening in noisy environments.

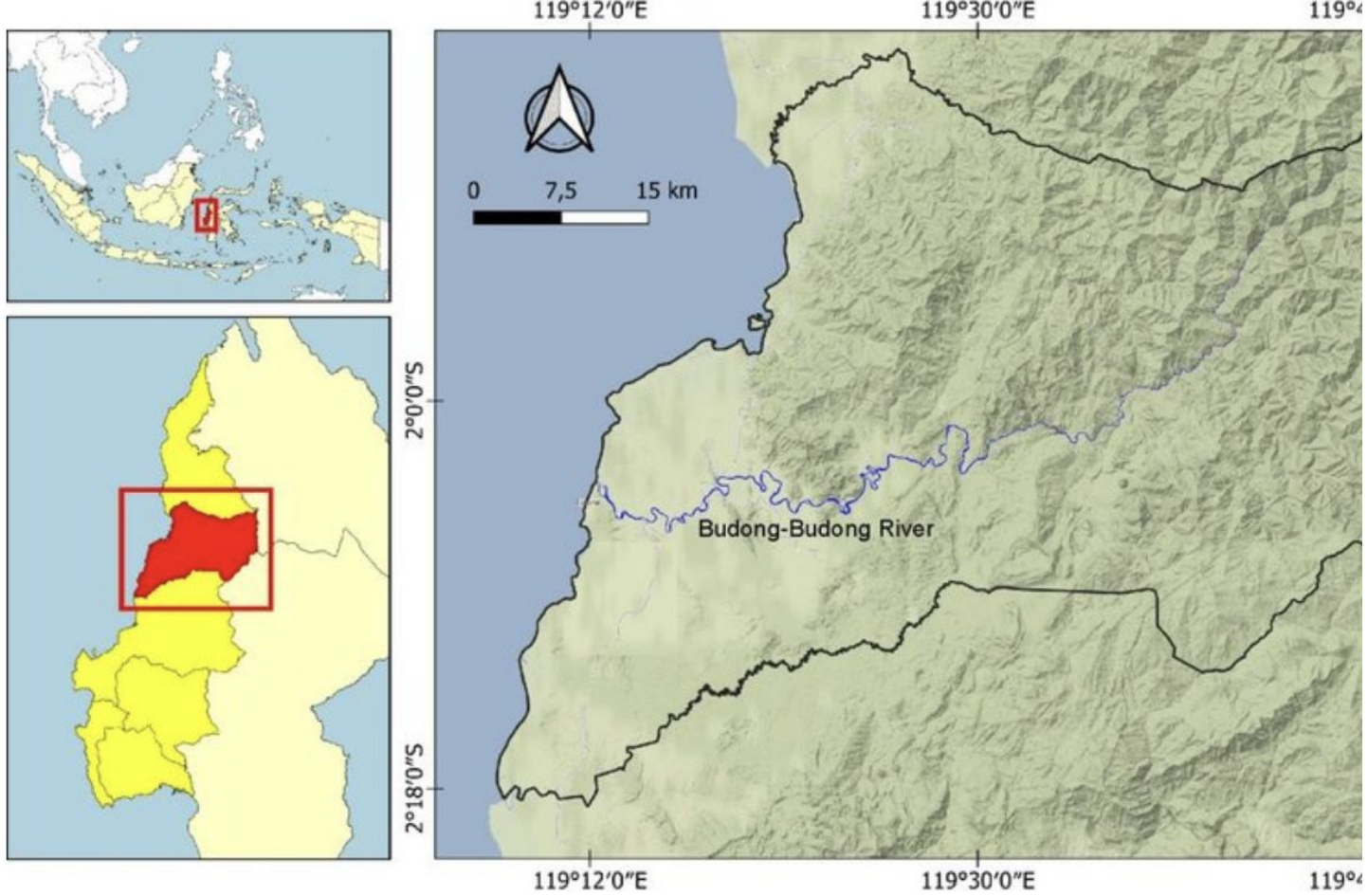
Conceptual Diagram:



BIG SHOT



Crocodiles, mostly rescued after encounters with people, inside an enclosure in Budong-Budong, West Sulawesi, Indonesia, on February 24. With crocodile attacks on the rise in the province, where the Budong-Budong River meets the sea, people are learning to coexist with the protected animals as they balance conservation with their own safety. AP



Map of the Budong-Budong River, Central Mamuju District, West Sulawesi Province, Indonesia and location

What is happening in Balochistan?

Pakistan's domestic politics will broadly define the trajectory of unrest in Balochistan. However, considering the lack of legitimacy and confidence in Pakistan's military and government, serious negotiations between the insurgents and the military-civilian leadership seem to be out of the picture



WORLD INSIGHT

Sanjay Pulipaka

In March 11, militants of the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) hijacked a train with approximately 400 passengers in the mountainous region between Quetta and Sibi in Pakistan. After releasing the women and children, the BLA militants demanded the release of their compatriots from prison in exchange for the remaining passengers. The government of Pakistan refused to negotiate and launched a military operation to free the passengers, which lasted for well over 24 hours. Pakistan's Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR) official stated that there were 21 civilian fatalities and that four Frontier Corps personnel lost their lives in the operation. However, various media outlets have hinted that the Pakistani forces may have incurred further significant losses. Subsequently, Pakistan's security forces came under heavy attack in different parts of Balochistan.

A united insurgency

Before the train hijacking, there were growing concerns about the deteriorating security situation in Balochistan. During a discussion in Pakistan's National Assembly, some members expressed anxiety that parts of Balochistan may secede from Pakistan. However, intelligence agencies failed to detect a large operation in the making.

The train hijack has demonstrated that insurgents have acquired operational capabilities to launch massive attacks on Pakistan's security forces and that they can withstand the firepower of special forces for well over 24 hours. Notably, during the stand-off, the militants also deployed effective social media strategies to convey their narrative to the wider world, which is indicative of the insurgents' increasing tactical sophistication. The episode also shows that there seems to be improved coordination between various Baloch insurgent groups.

As society in Balochistan is structured along tribal loyalties, numerous organisations and armed groups have emerged to articulate the grievances of the Baloch people. While tribal loyalties continue to endure, there seems to be a gradual shift in the composition of armed groups, with middle-class and educated youngsters joining them. The BLA is the most formidable group and has been declared a terrorist organisation by Pakistan and the U.S. While the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF) is reportedly more popular among the younger population in southern regions of the province, the Baloch Republican Guard (BRG) is active in areas such as Bolan, Quetta, Sibi, and Naseerabad. A few years ago, these armed groups along with the Sindhuudesh Revolutionary Army (SRA) decided to collaborate under the banner of Baloch Raj Aajoi Sangar (BRAS). The objective of the BRAS is to launch coordinated attacks on Pakistan's military infrastructure and its intelligence apparatus with greater ferocity.

Concerns of the Baloch people

The current insurgency in Balochistan is not the first of its kind. In fact, the province has witnessed multiple insurgencies, such as the ones in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and mid-2000s.

It is important to note that, alongside armed insurgency, there exists a people's movement advocating for improved



Lingering tensions: Pakistani army soldiers stand at the tunnel where the train was attacked by militants, in Bolan, Balochistan, Pakistan on March 15, 2019.

access to basic necessities such as drinking water, tackling the rising costs of essential commodities like petrol and medicine, regulating the presence of Chinese fishing trawlers, and ensuring unhindered access to the sea for fishermen. Last year, Balochistan witnessed massive protests led by women who demanded the cessation of custodial killings and fake encounters. The defence forces have often deployed coercive measures such as enforced disappearances (illegal detentions/abductions).

Over the years, the Pakistani government has attempted to portray the discontent in Balochistan as a consequence of power contestations involving a few tribal chieftains in the province. However, there is no denying that Balochistan was subjected to political and socio-economic neglect. Many in Balochistan complain that their province was forcefully incorporated into Pakistan in 1948. Furthermore, the people of Balochistan rarely experienced political empowerment because of decades of military rule and centralised governance. The province has numerous natural resources, such as coal, copper, gold, and natural gas. However, the exploitation of these resources has not improved local people's livelihoods.

To compound such miseries of the local population, massive infrastructure projects (such as the Gwadar Port) as part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) were operationalised without adequate stakeholder consultation. The construction of these projects resulted in people migrating to Balochistan from different parts of the country, prompting concerns about demographic shifts that would adversely impact the interests of the local Baloch population.

Insurgent groups have often articulated their protest against the CPEC and have called upon China to withdraw from the province. Sadly, there were instances – such as the suicide bombing at Karachi University and the bombing of a bus near the Dada Hydrowepower project – in which

Chinese civilians were killed. There is, therefore, growing concern in Beijing about the Pakistan army's ability to provide security to Chinese personnel working on various CPEC projects. There are reports that China may consider a proactive approach, such as deploying private security companies, to protect its civilians and interests. While China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was criticised for pushing countries into debt traps, in Pakistan, which is Beijing's most valued strategic partner, the CPEC, a critical component of the BRI, has come under sustained physical attacks.

Regional complexities

The geopolitical context, thus far, has not been conducive to the success of the Baloch insurgent movement. While the province accounts for 44% of the country's landmass, it has approximately 5% of the country's population. It may be easy for security forces to contain the separatist movement, as they constitute a very small percentage of the population.

Additionally, the Balochistan independence movement has not received significant international support. The province is not geographically contiguous to India, and therefore, India is not in a position to provide material support to Baloch armed groups. The Baloch nationalist imagination also incorporates the Sindh province of Iran, which consequently makes Iran reluctant to support the Baloch separatist movement. Further, with the deterioration of the security environment in Pakistan, Tehran is worried that anti-Iranian groups are finding a haven in the neighbouring Balochistan province. Last year, Iran conducted missile and drone strikes targeting 'Iranian terrorists' in Balochistan.

The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan brought about significant geopolitical shifts in the region. There is a growing rift between the Taliban and the Pakistan army, with occasional skirmishes on the borders. Taliban representatives have often made statements which suggest that

they would not recognise the Durand Line that delineates the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The Taliban has also, despite many demands from the Pakistan Army, refused to contain the presence of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). There has been a significant uptick in the activities of TTP in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province in Pakistan. Many in Pakistan's security establishment perceive growing coordination between the TTP and the BLA. Pakistan's official statements that "terrorists were in direct communications with Afghanistan-based planners" suggest that all is not well between Pakistan and various armed groups in Afghanistan. The TTP, with its Pashtun cadres and the BLA, with its Baloch cadres, constitute a significant threat on Pakistan's western border. On the other hand, Pakistan has invested considerable security resources on its eastern borders with India. The India-Pakistan bilateral relationship continues to remain cold, and Islamabad's Kashmir policy has yet to factor in different ground realities. It is unclear how the new Trump administration would respond to the unrest in Pakistan.

Lack of popular support

Pakistan's domestic politics will broadly shape the trajectory of unrest in Balochistan. Pakistan's military lost considerable respect because of its crude handling of a popular leader like Imran Khan. The current civilian leadership's hold on power is attributed to its closeness to the military rather than to its popularity among the masses. Given the legitimacy crisis of the military-civilian leadership, it is unlikely they would indulge in serious negotiations. It would be prudent of Pakistan's military-civilian leadership to decentralise power and share revenues from resource extraction with the people of Balochistan.

Otherwise, the turmoil in Balochistan will continue to endure.

Sanjay Pulipaka is the Chairperson of the Policy Research Foundation. The views expressed here are personal.

THE GIST

▼ The current insurgency in Balochistan is not the first of its kind. In fact, the province has witnessed multiple insurgencies, such as the ones in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, and mid-2000s.

▼ Over the years, the Pakistani government has attempted to portray the discontent in Balochistan as a consequence of power contestations involving a few tribal chieftains in the province. However, there is no denying that Balochistan was subjected to political and socio-economic neglect.

▼ The Balochistan independence movement has not received significant international support. The province is not geographically contiguous to India, and therefore, India is not in a position to provide material support to Baloch armed groups.





The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA)

The BLA stands as the most formidable insurgent group within Balochistan, claiming responsibility for numerous attacks aimed at Pakistan's military apparatus. Their operational sophistication has evolved, as evidenced by the hijacking incident.

Origins and Objectives:

Established to advocate for Baloch rights and autonomy, the BLA has emerged as a potent force, particularly following the recent surge in coordinated attacks.

Comparison with Other Insurgent Groups:

Unlike the Balochistan Liberation Front (BLF), which enjoys popularity among southern youth, the BLA has been labeled a terrorist organization by both Pakistan and the U.S.

The formation of Baloch Raji Aajoi Sangar (BRAS), a coalition of various groups, indicates enhanced collaboration among insurgents.

Socio-Political Context of Balochistan

Balochistan's current insurgency is deeply rooted in historical grievances. The province, rich in resources yet politically neglected, has witnessed a series of uprisings throughout its history.

Historical Grievances:

Many Baloch people feel marginalized, believing their province was forcibly incorporated into Pakistan in 1948.

Decades of military rule and centralized governance have stifled political empowerment.

Geopolitical Implications and Future Outlook

The geopolitical landscape surrounding Balochistan is fraught with complexity, influenced by regional actors and historical tensions.

Tensions with Afghanistan and Iran:

Pakistan is wary of growing insurgent coordination between the BLA and groups like the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Iran's concerns about anti-Iranian groups finding refuge in Balochistan complicate matters further.

International Stakeholder Influence:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has drawn significant investment but also resistance, especially from local insurgents.

China's involvement raises concerns about security for its investments amidst ongoing violence.

What factors influence women's political participation?

While discussions on women's participation often highlight the social and cultural biases that hinder their electoral success, less attention is given to how everyday women engage with the electoral process

Rebecca Rose Varghese

Deshpande R., 'Shaping of the Woman Constituency in Indian Elections: Evidence from the NES Data', *Studies in Indian Politics*, Vol 12 Issue No. 2, 303-317, November 16, 2024

The participation of women in Indian politics has been a subject of extensive discourse among scholars, especially given the paradox that while India has produced several influential women leaders, overall political engagement among women remains poor. Unlike many countries where the gender gap in political participation began narrowing in the 1990s, India saw this shift only in the 2010s.

While discussions on women's participation often highlight the social and cultural biases that hinder their electoral success, less attention is given to how everyday women engage with the electoral process when opportunities arise. Their voting patterns, choices, and agency in shaping election outcomes remain under-explored. And, though political parties and women's movements frequently celebrate women voters during elections, this recognition often treats them as a homogeneous group, overlooking the intersections of caste, class, religion, and region that shape their political behaviour. Women's support for Donald Trump in the 2016 U.S. elections, and their participation in the riots of the 1990s in India illustrate how women's political engagement is far more complex and requires in-depth understanding.

It is within this context that Rajeswari Deshpande's study, 'Shaping of the Woman Constituency in Indian Elections: Evidence from the NES Data', becomes significant. Her analysis of National Election Studies (NES) data sheds light on the increasing voter turnout among women and their growing participation in the political sphere. By examining how women vote and whether their choices are influenced primarily by gender or by other social identities, her research provides a nuanced understanding of the evolving role of women in Indian elections. Her findings help to understand whether we are closer to shaping a women's constituency in Indian elections. This study offers critical insights into the gendered dimensions of Indian elections, highlighting key patterns, contradictions, and challenges in women's political agency and its broader socio-political implications.

More beneficiaries or active agents? As mentioned earlier, it was only in 2010 that there was a significant increase in the share of women who voted; and all political parties sought to capitalise on this shift by introducing policies and schemes specifically targeting women. However, these policies often frame women as passive beneficiaries rather than political agents. Welfare programs like Ujjwala and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana were pivotal to the Bharatiya Janata Party's BJP victory in the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, while schemes like 'Ladli Behna' and 'Ladli Laxmi' were credited for the party's success in Madhya Pradesh. These initiatives reinforce the



Women voters after casting their vote in the Lok Sabha elections in Prayagraj, on May 25, 2024. AP

notion of women as dependents, with political leaders positioned as benevolent providers rather than recognising women as autonomous decision-makers.

Deshpande argues that high voter turnout does not necessarily translate to real political power. For years, women were considered marginal participants in politics, with efforts made to carve out a 'non-political' political constituency for them. Despite their growing presence at the polls, political parties and media continue to frame their votes as driven by welfare benefits. Analysing NES data helps assess whether the rise in women voters signals real political agency or mere surface-level inclusion.

Beyond voting

While the increasing turnout of women voters in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections is noteworthy, voting is not the only form of political participation. Participation in rallies, campaigns, political affiliations, and policy advocacy also indicates political involvement. In these areas, women still lag behind men. Only 14% of women report seeking advice from their spouses on voting decisions – indicating growing agency – but this remains significantly higher than men's. This

suggests that despite increased voter participation, deeper political engagement faces social and structural barriers.

One explanation scholars offer for the increased turnout of women is the self-empowerment hypothesis, which suggests that rising literacy rates and employment opportunities have empowered women to vote independently. Efforts by the Election Commission to ensure women's voter registration could also be attributed to the increased turnout.

However, the author challenges this explanation, pointing out two critical contradictions: women's overall workforce participation remains low, weakening the argument that economic independence is driving higher turnout. Additionally, the proportion of registered female voters compared to male voters remains imbalanced, indicating that fewer women are being registered.

An alternative explanation for the increased women voter turnout could be the large-scale male migration of men contributing to higher turnout among women in States traditionally considered socially and economically 'backward'.

These trends highlight that while

participation has increased, broader political participation remains limited.

Other identities

Women's voting behaviour in India is not driven solely by gender identity but is also deeply shaped by regional, caste, and class dynamics. The NES data highlight that State-specific political and social contexts significantly influence electoral choices, undermining the idea of a unified, pan-Indian women's voting bloc. Instead, women's voting preferences are moulded within the broader framework of their community identities.

State-level variations demonstrate this complexity. For instance, in States such as Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and West Bengal, where electoral politics have historically been shaped by strong regional parties, women's preferences are often aligned with regional political movements rather than national gender-based voting trends. Caste and class divisions further complicate this narrative. The BJP's voter base has traditionally been skewed toward urban, upper-class, and upper-caste groups, while Congress has drawn more support from the urban poor and marginalised communities. However, this alignment is also not absolute – many women, particularly from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, continue to vote based on the interests of their communities rather than on a broader gender-based agenda.

Women's support for different parties

NES data indicate that Congress has historically maintained a gender advantage, consistently receiving more female support than male. This trend continued in 2024, except in 2014, when the party suffered a nationwide decline. Left parties also had a gender advantage, but their declining influence has diminished this effect on the national stage. The BJP, in contrast, has faced a gender disadvantage, with fewer women voting for the party compared to men. However, this gap has been narrowing. Previously, the gender gap in BJP support exceeded 20%, whereas in 2024, it reduced to approximately 7%. The BJP's targeted outreach to women has contributed to this shift, though much of its support still comes only from welfare beneficiaries. Even within this group, men support the BJP more than women.

Region-specific variations further complicate women's support for the BJP. In some non-BJP-ruled States, more women than men voted for the party, despite a lack of increased female voter turnout. Conversely, in other States, women showed a stronger preference for opposition parties, creating an uneven gender gap. This suggests that while the BJP has made inroads among female voters, gender alone does not define women's electoral choices – other intersecting identities and political contexts remain crucial.

The data from past elections highlight three key trends in women's political participation in India. First, while women's voter turnout has steadily increased, their overall political engagement beyond voting remains lower than men's. Second, women's voting patterns and political involvement are not just shaped by gender identity; factors such as caste, class, and regional influences also play a significant role. Third, despite targeted outreach, the BJP has historically faced a gender disadvantage, with more men than women supporting the party. These developments indicate that we are still far from the formation of a distinct women's constituency in Indian politics, as their electoral choices remain intertwined with broader socio-political factors.

Rebecca Rose Varghese is a freelance journalist.



Introduction

The participation of women in Indian politics is a fascinating yet complex topic. Despite the presence of several influential women leaders, the overall political engagement of women in India remains surprisingly low. This paradox raises questions about the factors influencing women's political participation and the societal structures that shape their experiences.

Historical Context of Women in Indian Politics

The roots of women's political involvement in India are interwoven with the country's struggle for independence. From the early 20th century, women like Sarojini Naidu played pivotal roles in the freedom movement, advocating for both national and gender rights.

Post-Independence Era: The establishment of the Constitution in 1950 enshrined equal rights, yet the actual political participation of women lagged.

Key Milestones: The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in 1992 reserved seats for women in local governance, marking a significant step toward political representation.

Influential Women Leaders

India has produced remarkable women leaders who have significantly shaped the political landscape.

Indira Gandhi: As the first female Prime Minister, her tenure was marked by bold decisions, though often controversial.

Mamata Banerjee: Known for her grassroots approach, she has transformed West Bengal's political dynamics.

These leaders, while iconic, often overshadow the broader issue of women's political engagement at the grassroots level.

The Gender Gap in Political Participation

Unlike many countries where the gender gap in political participation began to narrow in the 1990s, India only witnessed this shift in the 2010s.

Statistics: Recent studies reveal that women's voter turnout has increased, yet their representation in legislative bodies remains disproportionately low.

Barriers: Social norms, lack of access to resources, and political violence are significant factors hindering women's political involvement.

Current Trends in Women's Political Engagement

Recent studies indicate a notable increase in women's voter turnout, particularly in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections.

Voter Turnout Statistics: Reports suggest a surge in female participation, with political parties actively courting women voters through various initiatives.

Everyday Women and Electoral Processes: The experiences of ordinary women engaging with the electoral process remain under-explored, yet their voting patterns are crucial in understanding the dynamics of political participation.

The Role of Social and Cultural Biases

Women's political behavior is not monolithic; it is shaped by various intersecting identities, including caste, class, religion, and region.

Intersectionality in Women's Political Behavior: This complexity challenges the notion of a unified women's voting bloc and highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of their political choices.

Rajeshwari Deshpande's Study: Her research reveals that women's voting choices are influenced by a combination of gender and other social identities.

Women as Beneficiaries or Active Agents?

Political parties have often framed women as passive beneficiaries of welfare programs rather than recognizing them as active political agents.

Welfare Programs: Initiatives like Ujjwala and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana have garnered support, but they reinforce the notion of women as dependents.

Political Agency: Recognizing women as active participants is crucial for fostering genuine political empowerment.

Beyond Voting: Other Forms of Political Participation

While voting is significant, it is not the only form of political participation.

Barriers to Deeper Engagement: Women's involvement in rallies, campaigns, and policy advocacy remains limited compared to men, with social and structural barriers continuing to impede deeper engagement.

State-Specific Political Dynamics: Women's voting behavior is deeply influenced by regional, caste, and class dynamics.

Influence of Caste, Class, and Region

Women's voting behavior is shaped by their socio-economic status and regional affiliations.

State-Specific Trends: In states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala, women's preferences often align with regional political movements rather than national trends.

Women's Support for Political Parties: Historically, Congress has received more female support than male, while BJP's gender gap has been narrowing.


Conclusion


In conclusion, while the participation of women in Indian politics has seen some positive trends, significant challenges remain. The complexities of their political engagement, shaped by various intersecting identities, underscore the need for a more nuanced approach to understanding women's roles in the electoral process. As we move forward, it is crucial to recognize women not just as beneficiaries of political initiatives but as active agents capable of shaping the political landscape.


Melioidosis





 Melioidosis is an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Burkholderia pseudomallei*.

 It is primarily found in tropical and subtropical regions, particularly in Southeast Asia and northern Australia.

 The disease can manifest in various forms, including pneumonia, skin infections, and septicemia.

 Symptoms may include fever, cough, chest pain, and abscess formation, which can lead to severe complications if untreated.








 Melioidosis can be treated with antibiotics, but early diagnosis is crucial for effective management.

 The bacterium can survive in the environment, making it a potential bioweapon and a concern for public health.

 Melioidosis has a high mortality rate, especially in individuals with underlying health conditions.

Summary: Melioidosis is a serious infectious disease caused by *Burkholderia pseudomallei*, prevalent in tropical regions, with various clinical manifestations and a high mortality rate if untreated

Restoring Biodiversity in Grasslands

-  Recovered grasslands need over 75 years of continuous management to restore biodiversity.
-  Plant diversity in these areas reaches levels comparable to ancient grasslands after this period.
-  Pollinator communities lag behind, remaining less specialized and effective even after 75 years.
-  Over time, these communities gradually shift towards higher specialization and successful pollination as grasslands age.
-  The identity of pollinators, rather than their diversity, is crucial for effective pollination in recovered grasslands.
-  Conservation efforts should prioritize maintaining ancient grasslands as reserves for specialized pollinators.
-  The study emphasizes the need to consider pollinator communities in conservation strategies for threatened grassland plants

efavirenz



A preliminary study has found that efavirenz — a non-nucleoside inhibitor of HIV virus that is used for treating HIV/AIDS — can be repurposed for the treatment of chikungunya.

 **Chikungunya is a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes, primarily *Aedes aegypti* and *Aedes albopictus*.**

Former Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte was flown to the Netherlands on March 12 to face charges of crimes against humanity before the International Criminal Court (ICC) for his role in the deadly “war on drugs” during his tenure.

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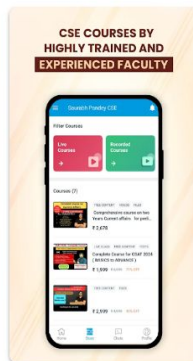
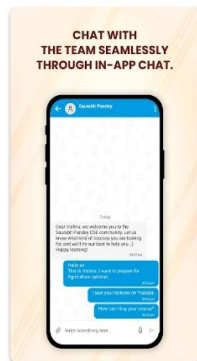
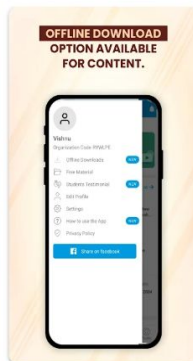


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