

Topics - MINDS MAPS included (Daily current affairs)

11th APRIL 2025



- **Eden Wrap:**
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By saurabh Pandey



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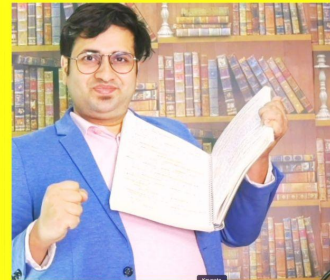


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Kerala duo develops eco-friendly edible wrappers

Akhila Ajayan

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

What if we could bite into our burger without worrying about peeling off its wrapper? Two students at the College of Agriculture, Vellayani, a suburb of Kerala capital Thiruvananthapuram, have now made this possible by developing edible food wrappers.

Ashir Kariyattil, who finished his M.Sc. (Integrated) Biotechnology at the college recently, and Mohammed Nabin, a B.Sc. (Hons.) Agriculture student, are behind this invention. "We wanted to begin a start-up that is beneficial to society. The



Art and artists: Bacterial cellulose film that will be developed into edible wrappers (left); Mohammed Nabin and Ashir Kariyattil (right).

edible wrappers will help in reducing plastic waste and promote sustainable living," they say.

A material developed using cellulose-producing bacteria will act as the base product of the wrapper. Emulsifiers derived from bacteria along with essen-



tial oils extracted from specific plants will be incorporated into this material to form the wrapper.

Named 'Eden Wrap', the packaging material will also help extend the shelf life of food. The essential oils used in the wrapper will give it an anti-micro-

bial property, thus extending the shelf life. "The wrapper, which will decompose in a month if discarded, has a plastic like appearance. More awareness about edible wrappers could encourage wider public acceptance," says Mr. Ashir.








"We had initially begun the project with a different concept. However, we started modifying our plans based on the opinions and advice of industry experts and judges whom we met while attending various competitions," says Mr. Mohammed.

"Excellent mentorship helped us improve our

concept. I am extremely thankful to my M.Sc. research guide Soumya V.I. from the Department of Microbiology, who provided a stress-free atmosphere to work on our start-up along with my thesis," says Ashir. "Competition winnings also helped fund the project," they add.

Ashir and Mohammed have decided to spend the next year further developing the project, researching market trends, and acquiring a patent. "We have an opportunity to work on the next step of the product with the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research [CSIR]," says Mr. Mohammed.

Eden Wrap: A Sustainable Packaging Solution

-  **Material Source:** The wrapper is crafted from cellulose-producing bacteria, offering a sustainable base product.
-  **Emulsifiers:** Bacterial-derived emulsifiers are integrated into the wrapper's formulation.
-  **Essential Oils:** Plant-derived essential oils are included, enhancing the wrapper's properties.
-  **Shelf Life Extension:** The wrapper possesses anti-microbial properties, aiding in the extension of food shelf life.
-  **Decomposability:** 'Eden Wrap' decomposes within a month when discarded, promoting eco-friendliness.
-  **Appearance:** The wrapper resembles plastic, potentially appealing to consumers.
-  **Public Awareness:** Increased awareness of edible wrappers could boost public acceptance and usage.

Summary: 'Eden Wrap' is an eco-friendly, cellulose-based food wrapper that incorporates bacterial emulsifiers and essential oils to extend shelf life and decompose within a month.

Global order is disrupted by trade weaponisation: Rajnath

Issues such as de-globalisation, intense nationalism, resource scarcity loom large, Defence Minister says; artificial intelligence and other technology is revolutionising warfare in critical ways, he adds

The Hindu Bureau
UDHAGAMANDALAM

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said the weaponisation of trade and finance, anxieties created by concentration of supply chains, monopolies over disruptive technologies and lack of transparency of data flows were leading the world to “an era of self-help and unilateral decisions, leading to a decline of global institutions and order”.

He was speaking at the convocation of the 80th course of the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington, Nilgiris, comprising 479 student officers, including 38 from 26 foreign countries.

The “global geopolitical situation is marked by tremendous flux, with rapidly shifting alignments, disruptions and conflicts being the order of the day”, he said. “Issues such as de-globalisation, intense nationalism, resource scarcity, human migration, food security, climate concerns, and threat of global pandemics loom large.”

He said technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, military autonomy, dronery, and



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh attends the convocation at the Defence Services Staff College in Wellington on Thursday. ANI

quantum blockchains were “revolutionising” deterrence and warfare in critical ways.

“Warfare is moving rapidly, beyond the traditional domains of land, sea, and air, to space, cyberspace, the undersea and newer domains of creative endeavour. Dronery, for instance, has emerged in the Ukraine-Russia conflict virtually as a new arm, if not a transformative science. The majority of losses of soldiers and equipment has been attributed neither to traditional artillery nor to armour but to drones. Space capacities in the Low Earth

Orbit similarly, are transforming military intelligence through persistent surveillance, positioning, targeting and communications – thus taking combat to a new high,” he added.

The armed forces will “increasingly need to operate jointly in a multi-domain environment where cyber, space, and information warfare will be as potent as conventional operations”, he said adding that “we are in an age where cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, and economic warfare have become tools that can prosecute and achieve politico-military aims without

a single shot being fired”.

Mr. Singh said India faced persistent threats along its northern and western borders, “compounded by the threat of proxy war and terrorism emanating from the epicentre of terrorism in our neighbourhood”.


He called upon the officers to develop the ability to be “critical thinkers, capable of analysing issues, extracting relevant deductions and anticipating future requirements”, while being conscious of emerging technologies, geopolitical landscape and national security requirements.


The Defence Ministry decided to observe 2025 as the “Year of Reforms”.


“This would aim at transforming the armed forces into a technologically advanced combat-ready force capable of multi-domain integrated operations. Nine broad areas have been identified, addressing the entire range of modernisation imperatives to include defence acquisition and procedural reforms. I am pleased to share that collectively we are making significant progress on the aims we have set for ourselves,” he added.


Trade weaponization





 **Definition:** Trade weaponization refers to the strategic use of trade policies and economic measures to achieve political or military objectives.

 **Global Impact:** It affects international relations and can lead to tensions between countries, impacting global trade dynamics.

 **Economic Leverage:** Countries may impose tariffs, sanctions, or trade restrictions to exert pressure on other nations.

 **Retaliation:** The practice often leads to retaliatory measures, escalating conflicts and creating trade wars.

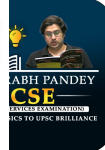
 **Policy Implications:** Governments must navigate the complexities of trade weaponization in their foreign policy strategies.

 **Market Volatility:** Trade weaponization can lead to uncertainty in markets, affecting businesses and consumers alike.

 **Security Concerns:** It raises national security issues, as economic dependencies can be exploited for strategic gains.

Summary: Trade weaponization involves using economic measures for political ends, impacting global relations and market stability.

Drop the piecemeal ways to social security for workers



India's efforts to establish social security for online (app-based) gig workers are gaining momentum, with the central scheme awaiting Cabinet approval. Benefits announced include health coverage under Ayushman Bharat, registration on the eShram portal for access to various social security schemes, and a transaction-based pension policy, where a universal account number assigned to each gig worker helps track their earnings across platforms for deductions and company contributions. This pension scheme is particularly notable because, in a way, it acknowledges that gig workers (operating outside traditional employee-employer relationships) can have multiple employers, and ensures that each contributes, albeit in a limited capacity, towards worker welfare. In a country where social security is typically tethered to formal employment and informal workers are excluded or otherwise disadvantaged, this is clearly a step forward.

However, this progress highlights the reactive nature of current social protection systems which tend to respond only when new worker categories emerge. This underscores the need for India to proactively reimagine its social security framework to address these evolving challenges.

The flaws in the existing system

Despite being a founding member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), India is yet to ratify the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), the ILO's Convention aimed at establishing basic social security principles. India's Code on Social Security (Code), one of its four new Labour Codes, enacted nearly 70 years after the 102



Renjini Rajagopalan

is a lawyer and Research Lead at the Centre for Gender Analysis, JustJobs Network (JJN)

As India strives to make its workforce 'future ready', robust social protection systems that can withstand workforce and sectoral changes need to be in place

Convention, intends to provide a comprehensive framework for social protection. But it has faced significant criticism for its ambiguous definitions, watered down protections, and on-going implementation challenges.

One of the Code's most prominent features is its insistence on relying on welfare boards for the distribution of social welfare – a process that has long been found falling short of its intended goals. For instance, a recent Right To Information petition showed that Welfare Boards for Building and Other Construction Workers of various States were yet to use ₹70,744.16 crore worth of cess they had collected from employers for the welfare of workers. In another instance, a Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) 2024 report found that 99 local bodies in 10 districts had delayed remittance payments to the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board (TNCWWB), amounting to ₹221.8 crore. Even in Kerala, with its strong thrust on worker welfare, only five out of its 16 boards were found to function effectively, with some boards (as per 2016-17 data) not reporting any beneficiaries at all. This has led to repeated calls from activists and advocacy groups for improvements in the management and the functioning of welfare boards.

The problem with incremental approaches

One of the main arguments in favour of India's fragmented, welfare-board run social welfare systems is its ability to provide targeted relief to segments of workers in need – for example, beedi and cigarette workers of Karnataka have sought the revival of a defunct welfare fund to deal with their welfare woes. Today it is the gig worker; but new worker categories are bound to

emerge with advancements in technology or other forces of disruption.

So, relying on a piecemeal approach – as opposed to a combination of universal social protection and targeted support – can fail to account for the precarious nature of all informal work. Such an approach could also create artificial distinctions between different types of informal work such as between gig work and domestic work, and in turn impose arbitrary thresholds on who is deserving of social protection, and who is not.

It is also risky to assume that focusing on just one worker segment will automatically solve the challenge of formalising informal labour. Because right now, there is understandably growing excitement about how gig work will employ more people in the future. But banking on it as a solution to formalising informal labour is overly optimistic.

Towards universal social protection systems

As India strives to make its workforce 'future ready', it is crucial to create robust social protection systems that can withstand workforce and sectoral changes. Which raises the key question: what is the most realistic way forward? The Code, despite its implementation logjam, looks here to stay. And while it leaves the bulk of the oversight to the Centre, it allows States some flexibility to enact social security measures within its framework.

A sensible starting point might be to treat the Code's mandates as the bare minimum, and use these as a foundation to build stronger, more inclusive, accessible and ultimately, universal social protection systems that leave no worker behind.

Gig economy & social security



The gig economy is booming in India, with app-based jobs like Uber, Zomato, and Swiggy transforming the employment landscape. However, the rise of gig work brings with it a pressing question: what about social security for these workers? As the Indian government begins to address this issue, we must critically evaluate whether the initiatives being introduced are a genuine step towards comprehensive support or merely a temporary fix.

The Current Landscape of Gig Work in India

Understanding Gig Workers

Gig workers are not your traditional employees; they thrive in the realm of short-term jobs, often juggling multiple gigs simultaneously. This flexibility can be exhilarating, but it also leaves them vulnerable without the protections typically afforded to full-time workers.

Characteristics of Gig Workers:

Engage in multiple short-term contracts.

Often lack access to health benefits and retirement plans.

Operate in a chaotic work environment without job security.

The Rise of App-Based Work

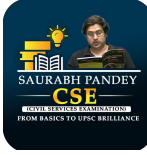
The rapid advancement of technology has catalyzed the growth of app-based jobs in India. While this shift provides numerous opportunities, it also highlights a significant gap in social safety nets.

Pros and Cons of App-Based Work:

Pros: Flexibility, increased job opportunities.

Cons: Lack of benefits, job instability, absence of labor rights.

Government Initiatives for Gig Workers



Central Scheme Awaiting Approval

The Indian government is finally acknowledging the plight of gig workers with a central scheme aimed at providing social security. However, the scheme is still pending Cabinet approval.

Key Features Expected:

- Health insurance coverage.

- Benefits accessible through a simplified registration process.

Health Coverage under Ayushman Bharat

One of the most promising elements of this initiative is the inclusion of gig workers in the Ayushman Bharat scheme. This program aims to provide essential healthcare services to millions.

Benefits of Ayushman Bharat:

- Access to quality healthcare.

- Financial protection against high medical costs.

Registration on the eShram Portal

The eShram portal is designed to streamline the registration process for gig workers, allowing them to access various social security benefits easily.

Advantages of the eShram Portal:

Centralized access to benefits.

Enhanced visibility of gig workers and their contributions.

The Flaws in the Existing System

India and the ILO's Social Security Convention

Despite being a founding member of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), India has yet to ratify the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952. This oversight raises questions about the country's commitment to basic social security principles.

Critique of the Code on Social Security

India's Code on Social Security, enacted long after the ILO's convention, has drawn criticism for its vague definitions and lack of robust protections. The reliance on welfare boards for benefit distribution has proven ineffective.

Critiques include:

Ambiguous definitions leading to confusion.

Ineffectiveness of welfare boards in delivering benefits.

The Problem with Incremental Approaches

While some argue that a fragmented welfare system can provide targeted relief to specific worker segments, this approach can create barriers between different types of informal work.

Risks of a Fragmented System:

Artificial distinctions among worker categories.

Many workers remain unprotected and unsupported.

Towards Universal Social Protection Systems



The Need for a Comprehensive Framework

As India navigates the complexities of the gig economy, it is crucial to develop robust social protection systems that can adapt to workforce changes.

Building on the Code's Mandates

Though the Code may have its shortcomings, it serves as a foundation to build a more inclusive and accessible social protection system.

Strategies for Improvement:

- Treat existing mandates as a minimum standard.

- Expand benefits to encompass all forms of informal labor.

Conclusion

While India's recent efforts to establish social security for gig workers are commendable, they barely scratch the surface of what is required. A proactive approach is essential to reimagine the social security framework, ensuring that every worker has access to the safety net they deserve—regardless of their employment status.

The issue with delimitation's population-based process

Delimitation, enshrined in Articles 82 and 170 of the Constitution of India, has stirred unprecedented passions that have taken shape in both serious and ludicrous ways. The serious ones stem from what the Constitution provides and its possible implications if implemented as provided. The ludicrous ones include calls by some who are asking people to 'multiply' rapidly to deal with the fear of being outnumbered.

As passions run high, there is a need to look at the issues dispassionately. Ironically, those who had hitherto accused the government of flouting constitutional principles, now want that the government does not act in accordance with the Constitution. Are the 'protectors of the Constitution' chasing their tail in asking for the 'freezing' or 'postponing' the delimitation exercise for sound reasons?

The Constitution provides that "upon the completion of each census, the allocation of seats in the House of the People to the States and the division of each State into territorial constituencies shall be readjusted". A similar provision exists for the Vidhan Sabhas. Through the 42nd and subsequent amendments, this 'readjustment' was deferred till 2026. The Census after that will be the basis of any future delimitation, which has also caused much apprehension in the southern States. There is little evidence to justify their apprehensions but there is no reason to dismiss their fear.

There is heated debate, justifiably so, on the principle of population proportionality and federalism and whether any principle enshrined in the Constitution should be used to undermine the other. It is clear that a mathematical approach to delimitation and allocation of seats based on population alone will benefit States where population growth has been faster than the rest.

Data from the past and trends

The data published by the Election Commission of India show that in the first general election in 1951-52 there were 489 Lok Sabha seats; 494 in 1957, and 520 in 1967 (as per the Delimitation Commission's Report of March 21, 1963 based on the 1961 Census). Thirty-one seats were added and five reduced from the previous election. Andhra Pradesh went down from 43 to 41, Madras, 41 to 39, and Uttar Pradesh, 86 to 85. Assam, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, Mysore, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Delhi, Himachal Pradesh made gains. Besides, seats were added in new States such as Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Goa, Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep and Pondicherry.

In the 1971 Lok Sabha election, two seats were reduced in Himachal Pradesh bringing the total to 518. In the 1977 election, 24 seats were added,



Ashok Lavasa

is a former Election Commissioner and Union Finance Secretary of India

taking the number to 542. Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka (erstwhile Mysore), Orissa, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Haryana made gains, and new States such as Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, and Mizoram got additional seats. Daman and Diu was allotted a separate seat much later to take the total to 543 – which is the current strength of the Lok Sabha based on the 1971 Census.

What needs to be considered

An analysis of these trends suggests that any debate on delimitation must consider three issues: the principle of population as the basis of allocation of seats; the impact of public policy on the population criterion, and the 'representative' hue of those who are elected.

The increase in the number of seats between 1951 and 2004, determined by the Delimitation Commissions, contains no formula for the ideal population that a Lok Sabha/Vidhan Sabha member should represent. If the population is divided by the number of Lok Sabha/Vidhan Sabha seats, the average goes up from 7.32 lakh per seat in 1951 to about 8.70 lakh in 1967, and 10.10 lakh in 1977. In 2024, this is about 27 lakh per Lok Sabha seat. Similarly, the number of Vidhan Sabha seats have increased from 3,283 in 1951-52 to 4,123 in 2024, tripling the average population that a Vidhan Sabha member represents. Going by the nearly 98 crore electors in the 2024 general election, each Member of Parliament on an average represented about 18 lakh electors; Lakshadweep had 57,760 electors and Malkajgiri 29.5 lakh.

This shows that while population was chosen as the primary principle of representation, it has not been followed without accommodating other concerns such as geographical contiguity and political boundaries. The Census-based population criterion was the only basis that had no qualifications attached, unlike in the past where voting rights were based on religion and educational background. It was the simplest criterion to ensure universal franchise and one vote, one value. Is the criterion so sacred that it does not permit any adjustment based on current circumstances to avoid fissures in our polity, creating distortions in the representative federal character of the Parliament, and the feeling of regional injustice? After all, the Finance Commission, set up every five years, keeps modifying its criteria for financial allocation and devolution based on changing reality, regional aspirations and national priorities.

The question that also needs to be debated is this: "what does it mean to 'represent' a constituency"? The Lok Sabha/Vidhan Sabhas are essentially law-making bodies and the representative weight of the elected person does

not change because of the number of people in the constituency. Also, the constituency size does not influence the other functions that elected representatives perform – namely asking questions or being a part of various House committees. There are no surveys to show that a smaller constituency is better represented than a larger one. For example, let us evaluate how the people of the tenth parliament constituency created in Haryana in 1977, or the Daman and Diu constituency benefited because of having a Member of Parliament represent them in the Lok Sabha? Or whether in Haryana, Narnaul Assembly segment with 1.6 lakh voters is better served by its elected representative than Badshahpur with 5.2 lakh electors. In the first-past-the-post system, numerical strength of the constituency is immaterial to the 'representativeness'. Moreover, how many times do citizens need the Lok Sabha/Vidhan Sabha representative to deal with day-to-day problems? Strengthening the third tier of elected bodies may be more meaningful for democracy, and devolution of authority to local bodies, a more effective measure of improving governance than clamouring for more seats adhering to the 'fetish' of population-based representation in elected Houses.

A primary criterion that needs moderation

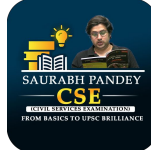
The importance of population as the primary criterion needs moderation because the population control policy was promoted by the central government. There may not be another parallel policy, the outcome of which is used to the detriment of the performer. Perhaps, there is a need to use a deflator that can moderate the benefit that States might derive on account of higher population. As real GDP growth is determined by adjusting nominal growth for inflation, we need to think of a divisor that will neutralise the unintended gain due to population growth. For example, if we calculate the number of seats that the Lok Sabha should have on the basis of the 10.10 lakh average for the 1977 election of 543 seats, we might get about 1,440 seats as per the estimated population of 2024. But if this number is divided by the national total fertility rate (TFR, the single significant factor that is proportional to population growth) for 2024, this might reduce to about 680 seats. Since State-level TFR data is available, this can be applied to every State for moderating its population growth figures. Experts may suggest a more sophisticated formula.

A Parliament that can debate constitutional amendments aimed merely to achieve managerial efficiency in conducting elections, can certainly debate ways in which the structural political imbalance inherent in the population-based delimitation of constituencies can be managed.

The focus needs to shift to what it means to 'represent' a constituency and steps such as strengthening the third tier of elected bodies



Understanding Delimitation in India



What is Delimitation? 📌

Definition: Redrawing boundaries of electoral constituencies.

Purpose: Ensures representation in Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas reflects current population distribution

Constitutional Provisions 📜

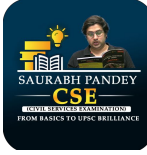
Articles 82 and 170 Explained

Article 82: Post-census seat allocation in Lok Sabha.

Article 170: Similar provisions for Vidhan Sabhas.

Amendments: 42nd Amendment defers readjustment until 2026

The Current Controversy



Serious Concerns vs. Ludicrous Claims

Concerns: Potential political marginalization, especially in southern states.

Claims: Calls for rapid population growth to avoid being outnumbered.

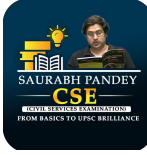
The Need for Dispassionate Discussion

Irony of Constitutional Protectors

Irony: Critics of constitutional flouting now demand ignoring the Constitution.

Debate: Freeze or postpone delimitation exercise?

Census and Delimitation



The Role of Census in Seat Allocation

Mandate: Delimitation based on latest census data.

Apprehensions: States fear losing representation.

Historical Data Trends

Changes in Lok Sabha Seats Over the Years

1951-52: 489 seats.

2024: 543 seats, with significant state changes.

Key Issues in Delimitation



Population as a Basis for Allocation

Contention: Population proportionality can lead to imbalance.

Impact: States with higher growth rates may benefit disproportionately.

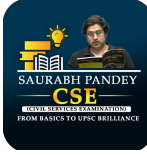
The Impact of Public Policy

Representation and Its Implications

Trend: Increase in seats lacks clear representation formula.

Challenge: Rising average population per seat questions representation effectiveness.

The Question of Representation 🤔



What Does It Mean to Represent?

Beyond Numbers: Effective service to constituents is key.

Myth: Smaller constituencies don't guarantee better representation.

The Size of Constituencies 📏

Does Size Matter?

System: First-past-the-post doesn't equate size with representation quality.

Example: Lakshadweep vs. Malkajgiri electorates.

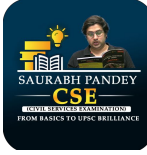
Strengthening Local Governance 🏛️

The Role of Local Bodies

Focus: Empower local governance for effective representation.

Benefit: Addresses citizens' needs more directly.

Moderating Population as a Criterion



The Need for a Balanced Approach

Moderation: Use deflators to account for population growth.

Goal: Avoid rewarding states for higher population numbers unfairly.

Future of Delimitation

Potential Changes and Considerations

Factors: Population trends, regional aspirations, equitable representation.

Outlook: Requires careful consideration and thoughtful discussion.

Conclusion

Complexity: Delimitation is more than numbers; it's about fair representation.

Discussion: Engage in thoughtful, inclusive debates.

Clouds of uncertainty



Economic twilight: A bus is silhouetted next to the Club de Pescadores (Fishermen's Club) on the shore of the Rio de la Plata River during a 24-hour strike of all transportation, except buses, called by workers' unions against the economic policies of President Javier Milei in Buenos Aires on Thursday. The general strike started at midnight as Mr. Milei awaits word on a fresh IMF loan .AFP

Rio de la Plata

Rio de la Plata is the muddy estuary of the Paraná and Uruguay Rivers, and forms part of the border between

Argentina and Uruguay. The rich estuary supports both capital cities of Buenos Aires and Montevideo.



SANTO DOMINGO

Toll in roof collapse at a nightclub in Dominican Republic rises to 218



AP

The toll in a roof collapse at an iconic nightclub in the Dominican Republic surged to 218 on Thursday, an official said. Crews at the scene were still looking for victims and potential survivors, although no one has been found alive since Tuesday afternoon. "We've practically combed through ground zero," the official added. AP

SYDNEY

Palau stands with Taiwan 'until death do us part', says President



AFP

Pacific nation Palau will not cave to diplomatic pressure from China and will remain an ally of Taiwan “until death do us part”, President Surangel Whipps said in Sydney. One of the few remaining nations to recognise Taiwan’s claim to statehood, Palau has repeatedly risked Beijing’s ire by refusing to reverse its stance. AFP



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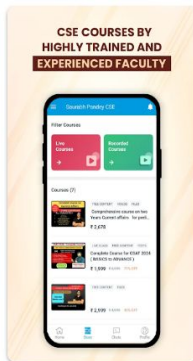
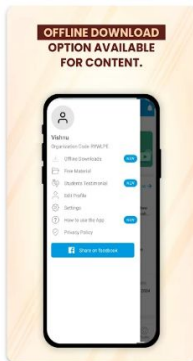
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