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Discuss why India’s Western Ghats is considered as one of the world’s biodiversity hotspots, the threats it is facing and recent measures taken to protect this biodiversity.
Saving the Ghats

**Intro:** The issue is being framed as one of development-versus-conservation. The hesitation shown by the Central government in deciding upon full legal protection for one of its most prized natural assets, the Western Ghats in their totality, is a major disappointment. Whatever is left of these fragile mountainous forests should be protected from unsustainable exploitation in the interests of present and future generations. [Q-Lungs of the Earth?]

Given the weak effort to identify ecologically sensitive areas (ESA).

What it needs is a framework under which scientific evidence and public concerns are debated democratically and the baseline for ESAs arrived at.

That the Ghats play an irreplaceable role in mediating the monsoon over the country and the forests harbour a rich biodiversity that has not even been fully studied.

New species continue to emerge each year in an area that has endemic plants and animals, although, as the scientist Norman Myers (UK) wrote nearly two decades ago, only 6.8% of primary vegetation out of the original 182,500 sq km remains in the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka taken together.
CATCH 22

The Union ministry of environment and forests has ruled in favour of the Kasturirangan report, after rejecting the Gadgil report. The Kasturirangan panel has listed 4056 villages—2159 in Maharashtra, 1576 in Karnataka, 135 in Tamil Nadu, 123 in Kerala, 99 in Goa and 64 in Gujarat—as ecologically sensitive. However, Karnataka agrees only on 153 villages and Goa on 50. Kerala wants to keep all agricultural land and habitations out. Other states are yet to respond. They have time till June 15 to make their final decisions.

MAHARASHTRA
- Categorised the entire Western Ghats (12,903 sq km) as ecologically sensitive, divided into three zones
- Recommended banning the use of pesticides and genetically modified crops in the most sensitive areas. Also called for a total ban on quarrying and mining. Dams were to be decommissioned and plantations to be changed gradually to natural forests
- Recommended a national authority to oversee the conservation of the Western Ghats
- Gram sabhas to play a crucial role in decision making

WESTERN GHATS
Extends from Kanyakumari in the south to the Tapti estuary in the north Length: 1500km Width: 100km to 200km Spread across six states: Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu Total area: 164,280 sq km Protected area: 16,902 sq km Natural landscape: 68,299 sq km (covered by forests, grasslands and scrub) Cultural landscape: 96,031 sq km Total villages: 4,456

GOA

KARNATAKA

GOA

KARNATAKA

Western Ghats

Gadgil versus Kasturirangan
- Sensitive area, called natural landscape, limited to 37 per cent of the Western Ghats
- Remaining 63 per cent of human settlements, plantations and agricultural fields classified as cultural landscape
- Mining, red-category industries like thermal plants and buildings over 20,000 square metres banned in the natural landscape. Hydroelectric projects could be allowed after detailed studies and following stringent conditions
- Instead of a new regulatory authority, existing mechanisms to be strengthened

Kasturirangan Committee

The entire Western Ghats is an “Ecologically Sensitive Area”.

Recommended a bottom-up approach to conservation with Gram Sabhas playing a crucial role in decision making.

Recommend the recognition of three grades of Ecologically Sensitive Zones and the complete ban on the construction of high-capacity storage dams and sand mining in ESZ-1 areas.

Constitute the Western Ghats Ecology Authority under the MoEF to regulate and oversee the conservation of the Western Ghats.

Kasturirangan Committee

Only approximately 37% of the entire Western Ghats is an “Ecologically Sensitive Area”.

Envisages decision-making as a responsibility that lies primarily with the government and the bureaucracy (such as forest officials).

Hydroelectric power plants to be permitted in ESAs only after a detailed study. Recommends a complete ban on quarrying, mining, and sand mining in ESAs.

Strengthen the current legal framework (such as the State Pollution Control Boards and the State Biodiversity Boards).

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The ecologically sensitive nature of the forests stretching 1,600 km along the western coast as a global biodiversity hotspot was emphasised by the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel headed by Madhav Gadgil.

While for conservation purposes, the Kasturirangan Committee identified only a third of the total area.

Both expert groups have encountered resistance from State governments and industries, although they mutually different in their recommendations.

Needs speedy resolution is how much of the Western Ghats can be demarcated as ecologically sensitive, going beyond the system of national parks and sanctuaries that already exist.

A frequently cited example of destruction is the loss of ecology in Goa due to rampant, illegal mining.
Conclusion...

- Mr. Gadgil, for instance, has underscored the unique value of some locations, such as those with fish or medicinal plant diversity peculiar to a small area, which should not get lost in the assessment process.
- All this points to the need for wider and more open consultation with people at all levels, imbuing the process with scientific insights.
- Several options to spare sensitive areas will emerge, such as community-led ecological tourism and agroecological farming.
- A national consultative process is urgently called for.
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The end of a voyage- (जलयात्रा)

Intro: It was the summer of 1986 when the Indian Navy was waiting for the arrival of INS Viraat, India’s second aircraft carrier, which would radically alter the Navy’s operational paradigms.

A year later, I was appointed on the missile destroyer, INS Ranvir, based at Mumbai.

Twenty years ago, on January 31, 1997, when another iconic ship in India’s naval history, INS Vikrant, and India’s first aircraft carrier, was decommissioned.

Manna Dey song, Viraat has been both our “Aarzoo” and “Aabrooh”.

March 6, 2017, she will slowly fade away and mark the end of an era- she will live forever in our memories.

INS Viraat was - flagship of the Indian Navy before INS Vikramaditya was commissioned in 2013.
A.P. govt. wants INS Viraat turned into luxury hotel
Whether it will be converted into a luxury hotel or will it head to the scrap yard to be broken up.
Government of Andhra Pradesh (A.P.) to convert it into an entertainment hub in Visakhapatnam through a joint venture with the Government of India.
Navy is keen on an early decision to avoid Viraat meeting the same fate as its predecessor Vikrant, which eventually went to the scrap yard (रद्दीखाना).
The Navy had maintained Vikrant, India’s first aircraft carrier, at Mumbai for 17 years as various proposals to convert it into a museum went back and forth unsuccessfully before the ship was eventually sent to the scrap yard in 2014.
INS Viraat by making it a world-class project on the lines of other global projects like USS Alabama, USS Constellation, and HMS Belfast.
It had served in the British Navy as HMS Hermes for 25 years from November 1959 to April 1984 and after refurbishment (नवीनीकरण), was commissioned into the Indian Navy in May 1987.
No time for complacency (शालीनता)

Intro:- This is clearly true of the GDP growth estimates in the third quarter; quite at variance with what the critics of the demonetisation exercise had assumed.

It has never been easy to capture real time data on economic activity in the informal sector.

This is not a new problem and past estimates of GDP numbers have also suffered from multiple ex-post corrections as and when data becomes unavailable.

Digitisation dividend

Moving towards greater digitisation and reducing dependence on cash transactions will accelerate the pace of financial inclusion and formalisation of the informal economy.

The GDP estimates are supported by two other crucial independent international assessments.

1) - The first from the Article IV Consultations 2017 of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and

2) - The second from the biennial Economic Survey of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Both these have distinct commonalities.
Both conclude that Indian economic growth is robust, propelled by consumption demand and accelerated structural reforms.

Both favourably allude to a rule-based framework of aligning macroeconomic policies with global standards.

Notwithstanding challenges, remains robust and credible—

1)-Continued fiscal consolidation,
2)-A modest current account deficit,
3)-Subdued inflation,
4)-Enhanced public and private consumption somewhat offsetting the depressed private investment support this conclusion.
5)-Sharp increases in commodity prices—particularly oil,
6)-A sudden global slowdown impacting remittances
7)-Exports or unpredictability relating to the Chinese economy now look modest.
The growth projection of 7.5% (the higher side of the 6.75-7.5% range forecasted in this year’s Economic Survey) for the next fiscal is however contingent on resolving several short-term challenges.

Macropolicies

First, the OECD’s survey raises concerns about India’s large interest payments due to the high levels of public debt as compared to other emerging economies.

This is in consonance with the suggestions of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) Review Committee - which projects a declining debt-to-GDP ratio to approximately 60% by 2023 - Committee’s report is not yet in the public domain.

Second, the health of the banking and financial sector.

The twin balance sheet problem of both corporates and banks, highlighted in the Economic Survey has a relationship but would need differentiated actions.

Concept of a centralised Public Sector Asset Rehabilitation Agency (PARA) envisaged as a ‘Band Bank’ spin-of model has gained some traction+ Indradhanush- [Q-Mission Indradhanush?]
Rule-based management

In this context, creating an institutional framework or mechanism to seek broader consensus has some advantages. The constitution of

1) the Monetary Policy Committee,
2) the GST Council,
3) Banks Board Bureau, are robust examples.

This also ties up with what the OECD’s Economic Survey and the IMF’s report describe as a progressive move to a more rule-based management of the economy.

Could we, for instance, consider the constitution of a Banking Council to facilitate a dialogue with political parties and stakeholders on a new banking road map? This Council could debate, discuss, and seek to fortify the ingredients of the ongoing initiatives.
The GST transformation Finally, for a change, balanced regional development and combining growth with employment.

No doubt, the GST (Goods and Services Tax) regime and decisive move towards formalisation of the economy using technology would reduce disparities.

Local government entities need greater empowerment.

These go beyond the enhanced devolution of resources based on the recommendation of the Thirteenth Finance Commission - Dr. Vijay L. Kelkar

Fourteenth Finance Commission [Chairman-?] - Making grants available in two parts

1) A basic grant and

2) Performance grant - will make a difference.

Enabling local bodies to impose and realise property taxes and other levies would strengthen their financial viability.

There are other recommendations in the IMF and OECD reports relating to education, health, and tax changes, to name a few, which deserve separate treatment.
Conclusion...

- It would be dangerous if the decision-making ethos is stymied by growing complacency.
- The future may look bright but pursuing and deepening structural reforms is the way forward.
- The political leadership is sagacious in recognising this.
- After all, as Albert Einstein once said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”
Intro:- Donald Trump, in his address to Congress, may have denounced the killing of Indian engineer Srinivas Kuchibhotla in Kansas, but it is hard to ignore that his own polarising presidential campaign has directly led to the current intolerant climate in the U.S.

Historical persecution

American society had been perfecting the mechanisms of oppression against various communities: the Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, African-Americans and Native Americans. Now these tools could be turned against the Indians.

The first wave of Indian migrants to the U.S. was a few thousand in number, consisting mostly of unskilled farmers from Punjab and former soldiers of the British empire.

Making their way via Canada, these migrants first arrived in Washington where they found work in the lumber industry.

Just months after their arrival, they became the target of resentment from white workers who were afraid of cheap Asian labour.

Not allowed into local unions or churches; most early migrants were Sikh; mocked by the media.
Citizenship In 1923, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in United States v. Bhagat Singh Thind that intermarriages between Aryan invaders and “dark-skinned Dravidians” over the centuries had destroyed the purity of Aryan blood in India.

Hence, Indians could not be considered as “free white persons” and given American citizenship.

In 1926, the Indian central legislature banned Indian citizenship to American citizens in response. However, it was little more than a symbolic gesture.

Over the next decade, the U.S. government used the Supreme Court ruling to strip citizenship of many Indians who had been naturalised.

The ruling was reversed only in 1946, allowing a hundred Indians to immigrate to the U.S. every year.

But it was not until 1965, when American immigration laws were reformed, that the second wave of Indian migration to the U.S. could begin.
The hostility that early Indian migrants to the U.S. faced was not due to their actions or the history of their country of origin. It was a mechanism already in place, actively oppressing other communities for decades. Given the circumstances, it was almost natural that the hostility would turn on Indians when they reached American soil. In early 20th century U.S., the same forces of oppression that targeted Indians were also persecuting other communities. It is this history that’s in a way, tragically, illuminating today.
Jalyukt Shivar Yojana (Maharashtra government) unsustainable, study conducted by South Asia Network on Dams, Rivers and People (SANDRP)

Objective to harvest rainwater and enhance groundwater levels
Aadhaar data not misused: Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI)

Mr. Kochhar is the author of *Modinomics*, a book on the development model followed in Gujarat when Narendra Modi was Chief Minister- Sameer Kochhar, head of a Gurgaon-based think tank

“Is a deep state at work to steal Digital India?”, the article on Aadhaar published in his Web magazine, Inclusion, on February 11, included a video of how unauthorised transactions are being done by misusing stored biometrics.

The Delhi police registered an FIR against him under the newly implemented Aadhaar Act for spreading rumours.
A boon for tourists, techies fret

Amidst rising concerns over H-1B visa prospects for Indian professionals, Indian tourists to the United States could soon have a smoother entry process into the U.S.

Indian and U.S. authorities have kicked off talks to

1) Expand air connectivity with more non-stop flights,

2) Allowing frequent Indian visitors quicker exits at the airport under the U.S.’ Global Entry programme and,

3) The prospect of setting up a pre-clearance facility at an Indian airport so passengers may avoid delays related to customs and border protection inspections at U.S. gateway airports.

Currently available in Abu Dhabi for travellers to the U.S.

About 1.1 million Indians visited the U.S. in 2015 and spent close to $12 billion, making it the seventh-largest market for U.S. travel and tourism exports.
Centre gives nod to sell three SAIL plants
Steel Authority of India Limited is one of the largest state-owned steel making company based in New Delhi
The government has budgeted to raise ₹15,000 crore from strategic disinvestment in 2017-18.
The Centre currently holds 75% stake in SAIL, which is the largest steel producer in India.

Criteria for grant of Maharatna status :-
- The company already has Navratna status.
- Its listed on Indian stock exchange with minimum prescribed public shareholding under SEBI regulations.
- Average annual turnover of more than Rs. 25,000 crore, during the last 3 years.
- Average annual net profit after tax of more than Rs. 5,000 crore, during the last 3 years.
- The entity should have significant global presence/ international operations.

Maharatna Company list
- Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited.
- Coal India Limited.
- GAIL (India) Limited.
- Indian Oil Corporation Limited.
- NTPC Limited.
- Oil & Natural Gas Corporation Limited.
- Steel Authority of India Limited.
✓ Computer OS, short movie stored in DNA.
✓ Scientists have successfully stored a computer operating system, a short movie and other data in DNA, an advance that may usher in the next generation of ultracompact, biological storage devices, which will last hundreds of thousands of years.
✓ DNA is considered an ideal storage medium because it is ultra-compact and can last hundreds of thousands of years if kept in a cool, dry place.

✓ German robot sets Rubik's cube record
✓ just 0.637 seconds with 21 moves.
The **Amazon rainforest** functions as a giant air machine that absorbs a large amount of carbon dioxide, and produces oxygen. That is why it is often called the "Lungs of the Earth." Running through the forest, is the second longest river in the world and the largest by water flow...the **Amazon River**.

A **biodiversity hotspot** is a bio geographic region with significant levels of biodiversity that is under threat from humans. A biodiversity hotspot is an area with unusual concentration of species, many of which are endemic. It is marked by serious threat to its biodiversity by humans. The concept was given in 1988 by Norman Myers. For example forests are considered as biodiversity hotspots. 34 biodiversity hotspots have been so far identified. Collectively, the Biodiversity hotspots support 60% of world’s plant and animal species with a high share of endemics and cover around 2.5% of Earth’s land surface. India shares its territories into three biodiversity hotspots viz.

1) Eastern Himalaya,
2) Western Ghats and
3) Indo-Burma.
Out of them, Eastern Himalaya and Western Ghats are mostly located within India’s territory. In the Indo-Burma Biodiversity hotspot, India shares only a small part in north East India.
Mission Indradhanush is a health mission of the government of India. It was launched by Union Health Minister J. P. Nadda on 25 December 2014.

It aims to immunize all children under the age of 2 years, as well as all pregnant women, against seven vaccine preventable diseases. The diseases being targeted are diphtheria, whooping cough, tetanus, poliomyelitis, tuberculosis, measles and Hepatitis B.

In addition to these, vaccines for Japanese Encephalitis and Haemophilus influenzae type B are also being provided in selected states.

Recently fourteenth finance commission is constituted under the chairmanship of Y.V. Reddy, former RBI Governor.
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