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The ISRO launched the PSLV-C37 rocket, carrying a record 104 satellites, from Sriharikota in February 2017, PTI

PSLV C-37 rocket body re-enters the earth's atmosphere: ISRO

The Hindu Bureau BENGALURU

The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) said that the upper stage of the Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle C-37 (PSLV C-37 mission) re-entered the earth's atmosphere on Sunday.

The PSLV-C37 mission was launched on February 15, 2017, with Cartosat-2D as the main payload along with another 103 satellites as co-passengers, namely INS-1A, INS-1B, Al-Farabi 1, BGUSAT, DIDO-2, Nayif 1, PEASS, 88 Flock-3p satellites, and 8 Lemur-2 satellites. The space agency created history as it was the first mission to launch 104 satellites with a single vehicle. After injecting the satellites and passivation, the upper stage (PS4) was left at an orbit of approximately 470x494 km.

"It was regularly tracked by U.S. Space Command (USSPACECOM) as an object with NORAD id 42052. Its orbital altitude slowly decayed, primarily due to atmospheric drag effects," ISRO said on Tuesday.

Since September, ISRO System for Safe and Sustainable Space Operations Management (IS4OM) regularly monitored the orbital decay as part of its regular activities and predicted re-entry into the atmosphere in the first week of October. "The orbit had decaved to a size of 134x148 km, as of October 6, 2024. As per USSPACECOM prediction, the re-entry took place on Sunday at 15:49 UTC while IS40M prediction showed that re-entry would occur on Sunday at 15:48:25 UTC. The impact point is in the North Atlantic Ocean," ISRO said.

Debris mitigation

The atmospheric re-entry of the rocket body is fully compliant with the international debris mitigation guidelines, in particular, the guideline of Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee that recommends limiting the post-mission orbital life of a defunct object in Low-Earth orbit to 25 years.



Page 10: GS 2: International relations







What does USCIRF report say about Indi

What is the mandate of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom? How does the UNSCIRF designate a country as a 'Country of Particular concern? How has the Indian government reacted to the report?

EXPLAINER

G. Sampath

The story so far:

he Washington DC-based United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) on October 2 released a country update on India. flagging "collapsing religious freedom conditions". Among other things, the report highlighted how throughout 2024, individuals from minority communities have been killed and lynched by vigilante groups, religious leaders have been arbitrarily arrested, and places of worship have been demolished. The Indian government has rejected the report as coming from a "biased organisation".

What is the USCIRF?

The USCIRF is an independent, bipartisan U.S. federal government agency created under the 1998 International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA). It monitors the universal right to freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in countries other than the U.S. Its assessments of countries are based on international human rights standards, and in particular, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

The USCIRF is distinct from the Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF), which is part of the U.S. State Department. The IRF also releases annual reports on religious freedom. While the USCIRF's reports could have a bearing on a country's image, the IRF's stance is more consequential for bilateral relations.

What does the USCIRF do?

As per its mandate under the IRFA, the



In protest: Activists burn a copy of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) in Kolkata on March 12. AF

USCIRF monitors religious freedom conditions across the world through travel, research and meetings with representatives of international human rights groups, NGOs, victims of persecution, and foreign officials with the aim of putting out a report every year, listing the countries that meet the threshold for designation by the U.S. State Department as a "Country of Particular concern" (CPC). It also shares another list of countries that, in its assessment, ought to be included in the State Department's 'Special Watch List' (SWL).

Countries that "commit systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom" would be designated as a CPC. Countries "whose governments engage or tolerate in severe religious freedom violations, but do not rise to the CPC standard of "systematic, ongoing

and egregious" would be included in the SWL. If the U.S. State Department accepts the USCIRF's recommendation and designates a country as a CPC, then under the IRFA, it has a range of policy options, including sanctions, to address such kind of violations.

What does USCIRF's country update on India state?

The report, authored by Sema Hasan, Senior Policy Analyst with the USCIRF, says that religious freedom in India in 2024 has been on a "deteriorating and concerning trajectory". It stated that the Indian government, through legislations such as the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019 for which the rules were published in May this year, and "through the enforcement of discriminatory legislation like anti-conversion laws, cow slaughter

laws, and antiterrorism laws", continued to "repress and restrict" religious minorities. It also details how "Indian officials have repeatedly employed hateful and derogatory rhetoric and misinformation to perpetuate false narratives about religious minorities, inciting widespread violence, lynchings, and demolition of places of worship." In its 2024 annual report, the USCIRF designated India as a CPC.

How did India respond?

Spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs Randhir Jaiswal rejected the report, stating, "Our views on the USCIRF are well known. It is a biased organisation with a political agenda. It continues to misrepresent facts and peddles a motivated narrative about India. We reject this malicious report, which only serves to discredit USCIRF further." He further added, "We would urge USCIRF to desist from such agenda-driven efforts."

Is the USCIRF 'biased' and 'agenda-driven'?

Its reports are backed by research and numerous citations sourced from credible domestic and international media. besides direct testimonies. In the case of the country update on India, there is no evident instance of misrepresented facts, with every claim backed by publicly verifiable documentation. However, the timing of this update has raised eye brows, and opened it up to concerns such as those voiced by the MEA, about the report being "agenda-driven"

The USCIRF, as a body that works with the U.S. government, and notwithstanding its 'independent' status, is considered by many countries as a tool of U.S. foreign policy.

Are the USCIRF's recommendations binding?

No, they are not. It is up to the U.S. Statement Department whether or not to accept them, and typically, calculations related to bilateral relations and larger foreign policy goals come into play.

THE GIST

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Page 10 : GS 3 : Indian Economy – Changes in industrial policy and their effects on industrial growth

Why is the textile industry struggling to perform better?

What caused the slump in the Indian textile sector in the last two financial years?

M. Soundariya Preetha

The story so far:

nion Minister for Textiles Giriraj Singh recently said that the Indian textile and apparel sector is aiming for a total business of \$350 billion annually by 2030, which is to generate 3.5 crore jobs. However, the industry went through a tumultuous phase during the last two financial years, casting a shadow on the possibility for 10% CAGR.

What is the status now?

The size of the Indian textile and apparel industry was estimated to be \$153 billion in 2021, with almost \$110 billion contributed by domestic business. In FY22, India was the third largest textile exporter globally, enjoying a 5.4% share. India is also said to have the second largest manufacturing capacity, with a robust capability across the value chain. The sector's contribution to GDP is close to 2.3% (FV2I) and 10.6% of total.

manufacturing Gross Value Added (GVA) in FY23. About 105 million people are employed by the textile and garment units, directly and indirectly. For an industry that has 80% of its capacity spread across MSMEs and is sensitive to international developments as it is strongly linked to global markets, FY2021-2022 saw tremendous growth with \$43.4 billion exports.

However, slowdown in demand that started in 2022-2023 only worsened in FY24 with a slump in exports and domestic demand. This impacted manufacturing clusters severely. For instance, Tamil Nadu, which has the largest spinning capacity in the country, saw the closure of nearly 500 textile mills in the last two years. In Tiruppur, which is a knitwear production destination, many units saw a 40% drop in business in FY23.

Why did exports slump?

Geopolitical developments and a slump in demand in buying countries hit the exporting units. This was exacerbated by high raw material prices of both, cotton and Man Made Fibres (MMF), and the growing import of fabrics and garments.

The imposition of a 10% import duty on cotton has made Indian cotton more expensive compared to international prices. In the case of MMF, introduction of quality control orders has disturbed raw material availability and price stability. The industry is repeatedly demanding removal of the import duty on cotton at least during the off-season months of April to October. "This is an industry in which the stakeholders compete in the international market with countries that heavily support their domestic production capabilities. So, India needs schemes that run for at least five years and boost investments. Raw material should be available for the domestic industry at internationally competitive prices," says a spokesperson of a leading industry association.

What are the other challenges? Apart from policy issues, the industry is

also staring at disruptions in its traditional business systems. Direct retailing to customers through e-commerce is a trend that is catching on among garment and home textile manufacturers, with more startups entering this space. A report by Wazir Advisors notes that "(Foreign) brands are fast-tracking the adoption of ESG sustainability across the supply chain." They are defining their sustainability targets and want to source from vendors who will meet these targets. Further, there is a rise in comfort wear, loungewear, and athleisure as the emphasis on comfortable clothing has increased among consumers. "Even in the domestic market, much has changed in the way business is done. Customers in rural and semi-urban areas prefer to shop in multi-brand outlets or hyper markets. They do not want to step into outlets of less known brands," said Palanisamy, a basic garment producer in Tiruppur.

What next?

The industry is looking at a \$100 billion investment across various segments of the value chain by 2030 to augment production capacities and meet the \$350 billion target. Labour constitutes roughly 10% of the production cost in the textile sector. The average daily wage of a trained textile worker is reported to be ₹550 a day. Unskilled workers earn about ₹450 a day. The industry has no option but to look at technology and skilling of its workforce to improve productivity and reduce wastages, say industry sources.

THE GIST

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Global Digital Compact: advancing digital innovation in a sustainable fashion

The GDC is a diplomatic instrument which focuses on the potential of digital technologies, with the specific intention to harness and regulate them for the common good. The GDC rests on the idea that digital technologies are dramatically changing our world

Neethu Rajam Krishna Ravi Srinivas

n the recently concluded 'Summit of the recently concluded 'Summit of the Future' organised by the United Nations, member countries adopted the 'Global Digital Compact' (GDC). This ambitious instrument is perhaps the first of its kind in the literate plant lever fees does not be in the international arena focusing on the potential of digital technologies, with the specific intention to harness and regulate them for the common good.

diplomatic instrument with a set of shared goals for governments. institutions, firms, and other stakeholders to bear in mind. Once there is greater adherence, the terms of the compact may

adherence, the terms of the compact may become soft laws in each country. Earlier, the UN helped pilot and legitimise two other compacts: the 'Global Compact' in voluntary initiative based on CEO commitments to implement CEO commitments to implement universal sustainability principles and to take steps to support UN goals? and the "Global Compact for Safe. Orderly, and Regular Migration" (covering all dimensions of international migration in a holistic and comprehensive manner). The GDC rests on the idea that digital technologies are dramatically changing our world. While they offer potential benefits for societies and for our objust-

benefits for societies and for our planet by enabling Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) - they also pose serious

Realising the GDC

The GDC is a collaborative project with the objective of ensuring human oversight of technologies in ways that advance sustainable development. Building on the norms of international law, the Universal Declaration of Human rights, and the UN 2030 Agenda, among others, the GDC

proposes global cooperation in the governance of data and digital technologies

technologies

To meet the Compact's goals, UN
member countries have committed to
establish two panels – an 'independent
International Scientific Panel on Al
[Artificial Intelligence]' and a panel for
'Global Dialogue on Al Governance'.
These goals include closing the digital
diselse including represence in the digital

divide, including everyone in the digital divide, including everyone in the digital economy, improving access to data, and advancing responsible and equable data governance. In the same vein, the Compact's principles are based on inclusive participation, access to data and digital technologies, sustainability, and trustworthy technologies that function within a few. within a free and competitive market.

Digital goods and services

Digital goods and services To address the digital divide, the GDC proposes "digital public goods" that will include open-source software, open data, and open AI models, plus adherence to privacy and best practices.

This is an acknowledgment of digital public goods' ability to drive social change as elements of a "digital public change as elements of a "digital public infrastructure" that delivers services. Such infrastructure involves the development and use of shared digital systems according to specific priorities and needs of stakeholders. To this end, the GDC envisions partnerships, including with private entities.

What are the GDC's lacunae?

First, the extensive European experience with public-private partnerships vis-à-vis digital projects suggests openness within such partnerships is restricted between 'as open as is required' and 'as closed as is essential'. In other words, openness in the context of the digital public infrastructure may be limited by

protection of intellectual property. Second, the GDC adds little to existing Second, the GPC axis little to existing frameworks of internet governance but importantly it calls for digital technology companies to self-regulate to keep their users safe and their users' trust. This is not an optimum solution because self-regulation has already proved to be ineffective in practice.

Third, the GPC consequence.

Third, the GDC recognises Third, the GDC recognises interoperable data governance as essential to foster imnovation and promote economic growth. But experts have noted that the increasing collection, sharing, and processing of data particularly for AI — may amplify risks in the absence of effective personal data concertions and orders or the second of the contraction. protection and privacy laws.

Fourth, the Compact stresses on Fourth, the Compact stresses on achieving SDGs within a paradigm where governments and private entities track, collect, and analyse data to measure progress, while underscoring the importance of governing data in the public interest. For this the Compact processes to she concavate entities more continuous and the contract of the contract entities more continuous to the contract entities are contract entitle entities. proposes to give corporate entities more power in data and internet governance. However, it fails to emphasise the countervailing measures required to stave off monopolistic control.

The GDC and the UN In many sections the GDC makes wishful statements that bypass the complexity of underlying issues, assuming the comity of nations will be enough to achieve its

nations will be enough to actine way also reflect the UN's wish to remain a major player in governing technologies, including Al. For example, in the 2st century data is oil: it is as valuable even as its use is embedded in extractive industries with molluling effects. Consider the opening polluting effects. Consider the ongoing explosive growth of generative AI models and the spheres, volumes, and varieties of data collected to train them. The GDC acknowledges issues in Al governance but has little to offer in terms of concrete

solutions or even strategies. Similarly, the GDC does but for "data

flow with trust" but many countries have flow with trust" but many countries have refused to accept this idea because it goes against the spirit of digital sovereignty. Some even have specific laws that require data about their citizens to remain within their borders. Finally, the GDC links various

objectives and proposed actions with the relevant SDGs. This is a welcome move relevant SDGs. This is a welcome move because it reflects the view that digitisation should play a prominent role in realising the SDGs. At the same time, when the SDGs were adopted in 2015, the current AI revolution hadn't started. Given the unimpressive record of nations in realising the SDGs, it is doubtful whether an add-on Compact like the GDC could make a difference

could make a difference.

The UN's member states are striving to find ways to work with and regulate Big Tech while also asserting their digital sovereignty. The global governance of digital technologies thus is too complex to be captured or 'fixed' by a singular entity like the GDC. We need multilateral as well as regional negotiations to go with it to address jurisdictional, regional, and/or local needs. By appealing to existing modes of digital governance as well as by combining SDGs with digitalisation, the GDC is positioning itself as an instrument of brainstorming mather than as a provider of roadmaps. Still, the GDC can help with capacity building and with South-South and North-South collaborations in the and North-South collaborations in the

and North-South collaborations in the development of digital public goods. In sum, the GDC may not result in a paradigm shift in the world's governance of digital technologies but it can facilitate significant and tangible outcomes if member states take it seriously.

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From solidarity to pseud, India's shift on Palestine

ndia's position on Palestine, once a symbol of its anti-colonial ethos, has been diluted since the end of the Cold War and has dramatically shifted over the past decade. The alignment with Israel, the marginalisation of Palestine, and a focus on transactional diplomacy are not isolated phenomena but interconnected trends shaped by an interplay of domestic and global factors.

Hindutva and foreign policy

First, India's evolving policy on Palestine is inseparable from the rise of Hindutva. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the Sangh Parivar have sought to influence India's diplomacy based on a Hindu nationalist worldview. This ideological shift has manifested itself in a growing affinity with Israel, seen as a natural partner against, and apparently a victim of, the perceived threat of an 'Islamic terror' – a narrative deeply ingrained in the Hindutva discourse.

Historically, India's support for Palestine was rooted in its anti-colonial struggle, self-determination, and anti-racism. However, in 'New India', this support is seen through a communal lens, where the Palestinian cause is linked exclusively with the Muslim identity. The public discourse, fuelled by right-wing media, frames pro-Palestinian protests and solidarity as a threat to national security and 'anti-nationalism'.

Protests supporting Palestine are often met with crackdowns, arrests, and even charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act. Leaders such as Asaduddin Owaisi, who publicly voice support for Palestine, are routinely vilified, while students expressing solidarity are targeted. The state's tacit approval in delegitimising the Palestinian cause helps it align with Israel, not just diplomatically but also ideologically.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's unscheduled stop at Mount Herzl to pay tribute to Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism, during his 2017 visit is emblematic of this ideological convergence. Under him, foreign policy is no longer framed by its historical commitments, but



Chetan Rana

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In these times of great power politics, the legacy ideals of non-alignment and anti-colonialism are seen as baggage by a new narrative that views Israel as a strategic ally in a shared battle against perceived threats.

Values or 'interests'?

The second factor driving India's shift is a transition from values-based to transactional diplomacy. During the Nehruvian era, India's foreign policy was deeply intertwined with anti-colonialism, including strong backing for Palestinian statehood. At the end of the Cold War, that ideological foundation began to give way to a more transactional approach, where narrowly defined interests took precedence over historical commitments. India-Israel relations are a product of this transition.

India's ties with Israel have flourished recently, with bilateral trade reaching over \$10 billion in 2022-23. Cooperation extends across sectors such as defence, agriculture, and technology, areas where Israel has become an invaluable partner. The renewed engagement is defined by the dual pillars of 'dehyphenation', treating India's relations with Israel and Palestine as separate, and 'depoliticisation', enhancing cooperation by circumventing politically sensitive questions. To dehyphenate and depoliticise are political acts. This allows New Delhi to deepen its engagement with Israel while paying lip service to the Palestinian cause.

However, this shift towards transactional diplomacy is not unique to India. Globally, foreign policies are increasingly guided by constructed economic and strategic interests. In India's case, the West Asia policy has evolved significantly since the 1990s, with energy security, diaspora, and investments taking centre stage. The old Non-Aligned paradigm, which once governed India's position, is now seen as inadequate for pursuing these objectives.

India's approach to Palestine reflects this trend. As the government focuses on attracting investments from the Gulf and forging new partnerships, the Palestinian issue, lacking immediate economic or strategic benefits, has been relegated to the margins. The shift is stark when contrasted with Jawaharlal Nehru and

Indira Gandhi's India which saw support for Palestine as a moral duty.

Ambitions and the great game

Finally, India's aspiration to emerge as a great power has also played a crucial role. While it is flirting to emerge as a broker in the Ukraine conflict, it is simultaneously abdicating its support for Palestine. India's alignment with the U.S., Israel's staunchest ally, amidst the China-U.S. contest across various theatres, including West Asia is also a contributing factor.

In these times of great power politics, the legacy ideals of non-alignment and anti-colonialism are seen as baggage. This is best reflected in the rhetorical shift from non-alignment to strategic autonomy to multialignment. While the operational essence remains the same, every rebranding has witnessed normative dilution. This is evident in India's muted response to Israel's war on Gaza.

Despite the extensive loss of life and destruction, New Delhi's reaction has been limited to (non) statements calling for peace and dialogue. The focus remains on strengthening ties with Israel, securing defence partnerships, and leveraging other sectoral opportunities.

The rise of Hindutva, transactional diplomacy, and India's strategic ambitions in the context of the China-U.S. rivalry have all contributed to the marginalisation of the Palestinian cause.

While official rhetoric may still endorse a two-state solution, the reality on the ground reveals a distinct shift towards strengthening ties with Israel and prioritising economic and strategic interests over normative commitments.

In this new era of international politics, India seems to have moved away from its role as a champion of anti-colonial struggles. Instead, it has embraced a path defined by narrow interests over values. As the global order continues to evolve, will India continue down a path that increasingly aligns it with power politics over principles?

As it stands, the 'new' international order will likely be the same game with just new players.

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