

GEOGRAPHY**Debate over India having two time zones**

Scientists at the Council of Scientific & Industrial Research's National Physical Laboratory (CSIR-NPL), which maintains Indian Standard Time, have published a research article describing the necessity of two time zones, with the new one an hour ahead of the existing time zone.

Need for two time zones- arguments by CSIR- NPL: The researchers estimated energy savings at 20 million kWh a year. They also analysed the importance of synchronising office hours — as well as biological activities — to sunrise and sunset timings.

How is energy saved?: Energy is saved by longer use of sunlight and consequently less use of energy for lighting. The demand for electricity goes up in the morning for water heating and increases again in the evening for five to six hours, mainly for lighting, declining as people turn off lights and go to bed.

Why there is Necessity of Two time zones?

Over the years, various citizens and political leaders have debated whether India should have two separate time zones. The demand is based on the huge difference in daylight times between the country's longitudinal extremes, and the costs associated with following the same time zone. Those arguing against the idea, on the other hand, cite impracticability particularly the risk of railway accidents, given the need to reset times at every crossing from one time zone into another.

Possible Impact of change in time zones:

- Northeast India would move an hour ahead, increasing the region's productive, daylight hours and the country's potential energy savings could amount to a whopping 20 million kWh a year.
- Offices could open sooner after sunrise, and perhaps workers could even savour the last dregs of dusk as they trudge towards home or their desired form of recreation.
- Biomedical research has consistently pointed to the physical and psychological benefits of aligning circadian (sleep) rhythms to the sun's rising and setting.

Concerns:

- India has a huge population: if the country were divided into two time zones, there would be chaos at the border between the two zones. It would mean resetting clocks with each crossing of the time zone. There is scope for more dangerous kinds of confusion. Railway signals are not fully automated and many routes have single tracks. Trains may meet with major accidents owing to human errors. Just one such accident would wipe out any benefits resulting from different time zones in the country.
- Partitioning the already divided country further into time zones may also have undesirable political consequences. Moreover, our research shows that the energy saving from creating two time zones is not particularly large.
- With a time difference of one hour in the mornings and in the evenings, there would be nearly 25% less overlap between office timings in the two zones. This could be important for banks, offices, industries and multinational companies which need to be constantly interconnected. This will be further detrimental to productivity and to the interests of the eastern region.
- There is already a sense of alienation between the relatively prosperous and industrialised western zone and the less developed eastern zone. The people in the Northeast sense a distance from the mainland and a separateness in clock time may accentuate it.
- Having a separate time zone for the eastern region will provide no energy or other benefits to the rest of the country. Moreover, India will continue to be in off-set time zones, five and a half hours in the west and six and a half in the eastern region ahead of.

CONSTITUTION AND POLITY**Life imprisonment is the rule, death penalty the exception: SC**

If a court finds it difficult to make a choice between death penalty and life imprisonment, it should opt for the lesser punishment, the Supreme Court said in a recent judgment.

Death penalty is exceptional

- Life imprisonment is the rule to which the death penalty is the exception.
- The death sentence must be imposed only when life imprisonment appears to be an altogether inappropriate punishment, having regard to the relevant facts and circumstances of the crime.
- The judgment was based on an appeal filed by a man sentenced to death for the rape and murder of a five-year-old in Madhya Pradesh.
- The court ordered the convict to serve his life sentence with a minimum of 25 years' imprisonment without remission.

Govt.'s prerogative to frame schemes: SC

It is the sole prerogative of the government to frame schemes and courts should stay out of governance, the Supreme Court has said in a judgment. A Bench led by Justice A.M. Sapre criticised the Uttarakhand High Court for framing a scheme to regularize hundreds of casual workers engaged by the Border Roads Organisation (BRO) in the construction of roads for Char Dham Yatra pilgrimage.

Courts can only direct

- The High Court failed to see that it is not the function of the courts to frame any scheme but it is the sole prerogative of the government to do it.
- All that the High Court, in exercise of its extraordinary power under Article 226 of the Constitution, can do is to direct the government to consider framing an appropriate scheme.
- Such directions to the government to consider framing a scheme should be with regard to the facts and circumstances of each case.
- It is only in exceptional cases when the court considers it proper, should it issue appropriate mandatory directions, the Supreme Court held.
- Instead, in the present case, a single judge of the High Court framed a scheme itself to regularize the services of the casual labourers and granted the benefits similar to those of regular employees under the labour law.

GOVERNANCE- WELFARE SCHEMES, E-GOVERNANCE, SERVICES ETC.How Lokpal will form, function

A selection panel finalised the name of former SC judge Justice Pinaki Chandra Ghose as the first head of the Lokpal, a national anti-corruption ombudsman. This comes five years after the President had given assent to the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013.

Who all remain to be selected in Lokpal?

- Justice Ghose was selected by committee headed by the Prime Minister. The same selection committee will choose the Lokpal's other members.
- Under the 2013 Act, the Lokpal should consist of a chairperson and such number of members, not exceeding eight, of whom 50% should be judicial members.
- The selection procedure for these posts is the same as that for the chairperson.
- A search committee will prepare a panel of candidates, a selection committee will recommend names from among this panel, and the President will appoint these as members.
- The Act states that not less than 50% of the members of the Lokpal should be from among persons belonging to the SCs, the STs, OBCs, minorities and women.
- The same rules also apply for the members of the search committee.
- Salaries, allowances and service conditions of the Lokpal chairperson will be the same as those for the Chief Justice of India; those for other members will be the same as those for a judge of the Supreme Court.

Organizational Structure:

- It will have an "Inquiry Wing, headed by the Director of Inquiry, for the purpose of conducting preliminary inquiry into any offence alleged to have been committed by a public servant punishable under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988".

- It will also have a “Prosecution Wing, headed by the Director of Prosecution, for the purpose of prosecution of public servants in relation to any complaint by the Lokpal under this Act”.
- Once the other members of the Lokpal are appointed, the process for more appointments will start: Secretary, Director of Inquiry and Director of Prosecution and other officers and staff of the Lokpal.

Ambit of the Lokpal

- For a wide range of public servants from the PM, ministers and MPs, to groups A, B, C and D employees of the central government various rules are in place.
- If a complaint is filed against the PM, the Act says, “Lokpal shall inquire or cause an inquiry to be conducted into any matter involved in, or arising from, or connected with, any allegation of corruption made in a complaint”.
- However, certain conditions will apply. The Act does not allow a Lokpal inquiry if the allegation against the PM relates to international relations, external and internal security, public order, atomic energy and space.
- Also, complaints against the PM are not to be probed unless the full Lokpal bench considers the initiation of an inquiry and at least two-thirds of the members approve it.
- Such an inquiry against the Prime Minister (if conducted) is to be held in camera and if the Lokpal comes to the conclusion that the complaint deserves to be dismissed, the records of the inquiry are not to be published or made available to anyone.

Lokpal itself is also subjected to the Law

- The Act also includes the Lokpal’s own members under the definition of “public servant”. The Chairperson, Members, officers and other employees of the Lokpal shall be deemed, when acting or purporting to act in pursuance of any of the provisions of this Act to be public servants.
- It shall apply to public servants in and outside India.
- It clarifies that a complaint under this Act shall only relate to a period during which the public servant was holding or serving in that capacity.

Inquiry Process

- The Lokpal may, after receiving a complaint against any public servant, order a preliminary inquiry (to be completed within 90 days) or investigation by any agency.
- After receiving the report of the preliminary inquiry, the Lokpal may order an investigation by any agency or departmental proceedings or any other appropriate action by the competent authority, or it can order closure of the proceedings.

Office of the Lokayuktas

- These are the state equivalents of the central Lokpal.
- Every State shall establish a body to be known as the Lokayukta for the State, if not so established, constituted or appointed, by a law made by the State Legislature within a period of one year from the date of commencement of this Act,” states Section 63 of the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act.
- This means establishment of the institution of the Lokayukta including any appointment therein falls within the domain of the states.
- In some states, Lokayuktas were already functioning when the 2013 Act was passed. Most states, however, are without a Lokayukta.
- The Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram Assemblies had passed Lokayukta Bills in 2014.
- Following the SC order, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal and Puducherry Assemblies passed their respective Bills in July last year.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS- BILATERAL, GROUPINGS, ORGANISATIONS

India, US to sign pact for exchange of country-by-country reports

India and the US can now exchange country-by-country (CbC) reports filed by the ultimate parent corporations based in either of the countries. This will reduce the compliance burden on

their subsidiaries operating out of these countries.

CBC reports

- The Income Tax Act requires Indian subsidiaries of multinational companies to provide details of key financial statements from other jurisdictions where they operate.
- This provides the IT department with better operational view of such companies, primarily with regards to revenue and income tax paid.
- The objective of mandating CbC is to ensure that all relevant tax authorities have access to the same information about an MNC's value chain and the resulting tax consequences.
- The provision was a part of the base erosion and profit shifting action plan, and later incorporated in IT Act also.

Why file such reports?

- As per the Income-tax Act, a constituent entity of an international group, resident in India, other than a parent entity or an alternate reporting entity of an international group, resident in India, shall furnish the Country-by-Country (CbC) Report for a accounting year within the period as may be prescribed, if the parent entity of the said International Group is resident of a country or territory:
 - where the parent entity is not obligated to file the CbC Report
 - with which India does not have an agreement providing for exchange of the CbC Report OR
 - where there has been a systemic failure of the country or territory and the said failure has been intimated by the prescribed authority to such constituent entity

Why this move?: With this, Indian constituent entities of international groups headquartered in USA, who have already filed CbC Reports in the USA, would not be required to do local filing of the CbC Reports of their international groups in India.

ISSUES RELATED TO INTERNAL SECURITY AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

Kaladan Project

The Indian and Myanmar's armies have, in a coordinated operation, destroyed at least 10 camps belonging to an insurgent group in Myanmar, which had become a threat to India's mega Kaladan Project in the neighbouring country. The operation was also undertaken keeping in view the safety of Indian workers engaged in the project. The military action carried out was codenamed Operation Sunrise.

About Kaladan project:

- The Kaladan project connects Sittwe Port in Myanmar to the India-Myanmar border.
- The project was jointly initiated by India and Myanmar to create a multi-modal platform for cargo shipments from the eastern ports to Myanmar and to the North-eastern parts of the country through Myanmar.
- Significance: It is expected to open up sea routes and promote economic development in the North-eastern states, and also add value to the economic, commercial and strategic ties between India and Myanmar. This project will reduce distance from Kolkata to Sittwe by approximately 1328 km and will reduce the need to transport good through the narrow Siliguri corridor, also known as Chicken's Neck.

Significance of Sittwe port for India: India has for years sought transit access through Bangladesh to ship goods to the landlocked north-eastern States. At present, the only route to this region from the rest of India is a rather circuitous one through a narrow strip of Indian territory nicknamed the Chicken's Neck in West Bengal, sandwiched between Bhutan and Bangladesh. The new route through Sittwe would significantly lower the cost and distance of movement from Kolkata to Mizoram and beyond.

QUOTE OF THE DAY

Don't watch the clock. Instead do what it does always. Keep going.