

1. What is White phosphorus which Israel has been accused of using in Gaza**Why in news?**

Israel Defense Forces (IDF) have been accused of using white phosphorus munitions in Gaza and Lebanon, in violation of International Humanitarian Law (IHL), which lays down the responsibilities of states and non-state groups in an armed conflict. The IDF has denied the allegations.



Figure 1 Israel using white phosphorus in Gaza, Lebanon, endangering civilians

What is white phosphorus?

White phosphorus is a pyrophoric that ignites when exposed to oxygen, producing thick, light smoke as well as intense 815-degree Celsius heat. Pyrophoric substances are those which ignite spontaneously or very quickly (under five minutes) when in contact with air. White phosphorus emits a distinct garlic-like odour.

What are the military uses of white phosphorus?

White phosphorus is dispersed in artillery shells, bombs, and rockets. It can also be delivered via felt (textile) wedges soaked in the chemical.

Its primary military use is as a smokescreen — used to hide troop movement on the ground. The smoke acts as a visual obscurant. White phosphorus is also known to mess with infrared optics and weapons tracking systems, thus protecting forces from guided missiles.

How harmful is white phosphorus?

Upon exposure, white phosphorus can cause severe burns, often down to the bone. The burns are excruciatingly painful, difficult to heal, and susceptible to infections. White phosphorus burns on even 10 per cent of the body can be fatal. Particles of white phosphorus that remain lodged the body can reignite if in contact with air.

Inhaling white phosphorus particles or smoke can cause respiratory damage and harm to internal organs. Those who survive initial injuries often experience a lifetime of suffering — with impaired mobility and painful, horrific scars.

White phosphorus can also devastate infrastructure and property, damage crops and kill livestock, with raging fires, especially in windy conditions.

When were white phosphorus munitions first used?

Irish nationalists in the late 19th century first used white phosphorus munitions. World War I saw extensive use of the chemical by the British and Commonwealth forces in phosphorus grenades, bombs, shells and rockets.

These munitions have since been used in conflicts around the world, from the World War II to the US invasion of Iraq in 2004 and the long-drawn Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Most recently, Russia was accused of using white phosphorus bombs during the invasion of Ukraine last year.

What is the legal status of white phosphorus munitions?

White phosphorus munitions are not under a blanket ban, though their use is regulated under the International Humanitarian Law (IHL).

It is not considered a chemical weapon because its operational utility is primarily due to heat and smoke, rather than toxicity. Thus, its use is governed by the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW), specifically Protocol III, which deals with incendiary weapons. Palestine and Lebanon have joined Protocol III, while Israel has not ratified the protocol.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: The Indian Express and The Hindu

2. Dearness allowance hike for govt employees

DA hike

The Union Cabinet Wednesday approved a 4-percentage point hike in dearness allowance and dearness relief for central government employees and pensioners to 46 per cent from 42 per cent. The hike would be effective retrospectively from July 1.

Outgo for the exchequer

With this hike, the total outgo for the exchequer would be Rs 12,857 crore per year. This hike will benefit about 48.67 lakh central government employees and 67.95 lakh pensioners, an official statement said.

Rationale behind DA

The dearness allowance for employees and pensioners is estimated on the basis of the latest Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (CPI-IW), which is released by the Labour Bureau every month.

The last revision in DA was done on March 24, 2023, and was effective from January 1, 2023. The Centre had increased the DA by four percentage points to 42 per cent based on the percentage increase in the 12-monthly average of the All India Consumer Price Index for the period ending December 2022. DA is provided to government employees and pensioners factoring in the rising prices and the cost of living.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Economics

Source: The Indian Express

3. The Aboriginal Referendum in Australia: Understanding the Proposal, Vote, and Implications

Introduction

The Aboriginal Referendum in Australia sought to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament. This article delves into the specifics of the referendum, the voting process, and its significance.

What Was the Referendum About?

The referendum aimed to create an advisory body known as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in the Australian Constitution, recognizing Indigenous peoples as the First Peoples of Australia.

Uluru Statement from the Heart

This proposal was inspired by the Uluru Statement from the Heart. The Uluru Statement from the Heart was the result of a years-long consultation process with Indigenous communities across Australia - known as the Uluru Dialogues - which culminated in the 2017 Uluru Summit. There, delegates settled on a model of constitutional recognition of Indigenous Australians which included the Voice.

Representation for the Indigenous

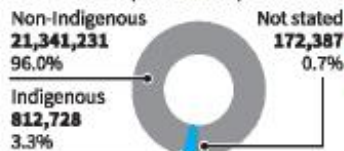
Australians were asked to vote on whether to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament. The Voice was proposed as a means of recognising them as the First Peoples of Australia in the Constitution



INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Have inhabited Australia for around 60,000 years. They comprise several hundred groups that have their own histories, traditions and languages

POPULATION (2021 census)



IDENTITY



Aboriginal
91.4%



Torres Strait
Islander: 4.2%



Both
4.4%

● Population plummets after British arrival in 1788, through dispossession, new diseases, slavery and killings

● Until as late as 1970s, one in three children were forcibly removed from their families for assimilation into White society. Government apologises for "Stolen Generations" in 2008

REFERENDUM RESULT

A majority of Australian voters have rejected the referendum, with at least 60% of the nation voting "no"

Sources: Reuters, Australian Government

SOCIAL GAP

Indigenous people live around eight years less than non-Indigenous people and suffer disproportionately high rates of suicide and imprisonment

LIFE EXPECTANCY (2015-17)



IMPRISONMENT

Around 15 times higher among Indigenous people



Picture: Getty Images

© GRAPHIC NEWS

The Voting Process

Voting is compulsory in Australia, and a successful referendum requires a double majority, meaning it must garner majority voter support and majority state support. However, constitutional changes are rare in Australia, with only eight referendums succeeding since federation in 1901.

Referendum Results

The referendum resulted in approximately 40% "yes" votes and 60% "no" votes. Only the Australian Capital Territory voted "yes" by a majority, while all states returned majority "no" results.

Political Divide

The referendum did not enjoy unanimous support across political parties. The Labor government supported a "yes" vote, while Liberal Queensland MP Peter Dutton strongly opposed the proposal.

Consequences of the Outcome

The government is bound to respect the referendum result, with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese confirming that the Voice will not be pursued as an alternative legislative model.

The outcome represents a significant loss for the government, but its impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is even more substantial.

Disinformation Challenges

The referendum campaign was marked by disinformation and misinformation, often spread through social media, which influenced voters. The prevalence of such falsehoods raises questions about achieving constitutional change in an environment where multiple versions of "truth" circulate.

Conclusion

The Aboriginal Referendum in Australia, although unsuccessful, sparks discussions on the path forward and the need for a better understanding of Indigenous experiences and history. It highlights the challenges posed by disinformation and misinformation in contemporary democratic processes.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Relations

Source: The Hindu