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### 1. What is Pashmina March? Why has Sonam Wangchuk suspended it again?

#### Why in News?

Two days after he announced "Pashmina March 2" by a "small number of people" for a "week to 10 days" beginning April 17, climate activist Sonam Wangchuk has announced that "Ladakh's Pashmina March" has been "suspended again".

Wangchuk, who held a protest fast for 21 days in March seeking protection for the fragile ecology and local culture of Ladakh, had first announced a Pashmina March to Changthang on the border with China on April 7, but had subsequently called it off citing the "risk of potential violence".



#### Who is Wangchuk, and why is he protesting?

Wangchuk is an environmentalist, scientist, and innovator from Leh, who has raised concerns around ecological issues in Ladakh for the last three decades. Over the years, he has been the recipient of a large number of honours in India and abroad, including the Ramon Magsaysay Award in 2018.

On March 6, two days after talks between the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and a High Powered Committee (HPC) from Ladakh reached an impasse, Wangchuk, along with some others, began a protest fast in Leh.

For 21 days, he survived only on water and salt, and slept outdoors in below-freezing-point temperatures. Wangchuk is demanding the inclusion of Ladakh in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which provides for special provisions for the administration of tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram, to help protect the fragile environment and culture of the Union Territory.

### **What is the Pashmina March that Wangchuk wants to hold?**

The Pashmina March is intended to spotlight the loss of grazing pastures for shepherds in the Leh region. According to Wangchuk, the shepherds who have traditionally reared the famed Pashmina goats for the expensive and highly sought-after wool the animals produce, have been losing pastures over the last few years.

According to Wangchuk, there are two main reasons for this. One, the loss of land to corporations (he does not name any) for setting up large industrial units or solar plants; and two, the activities of the Chinese along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Wangchuk says that over the last four years, shepherds have on several occasions run into Chinese soldiers who do not allow them to go beyond a certain point into the grounds where they have traditionally taken their goats to graze. These new boundaries that the Chinese have been enforcing are several kilometres inside the territories where the shepherds have for long taken their animals, he says.

Wangchuk had planned his Pashmina March along with leaders of shepherding communities and "at least 10,000 people" to show how much land had been lost following the standoff.

### **What are the other reasons for the Ladakhis' protests in and outside the region?**

Immediately after the constitutional changes of August 2019 by which the special status of Jammu and Kashmir was revoked and the erstwhile state was split into two UTs, there was happiness in Leh since the region had been demanding UT status and separation from the administrative set up of J&K.

However, as the new set-up under the Lieutenant Governor began to take shape in Ladakh, Ladakhis began to feel the loss of significant powers of the autonomous hill development councils, and the shortage of jobs after being delinked from the J&K recruitment boards. Wangchuk's protests have added the issues of land loss due to the Chinese aggression and apprehensions of a corporate takeover to this existing disquiet.

### **What is the High Powered Committee (HPC) involved in the negotiations on these issues?**

In Kargil district, which has almost always aligned itself with J&K, protests began almost immediately after the changes of August 5, 2019. After the unhappiness in Leh too took root, both these regions of Ladakh came together to form two pressure groups — Apex Body Leh (ABL) and Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA). Both ABL and KDA are joint platforms of social, political, and religious bodies in Leh and Kargil, and enjoy a lot of support from the people of the region.

The HPC was constituted by the MHA to address the concerns of Ladakhis after their protests began to echo in Jammu and eventually in New Delhi. Spearheaded by the ABL and KDA, Ladakhis sought protections for their land, jobs, and culture, and sought to elect their own representatives as a full state.

After more than 10 months of back-channel negotiations, in November 2023, the MHA issued an order constituting the 15-member HPC, chaired by MoS for Home Nityanand Rai. The HPC was supposed to discuss measures to protect Ladakh's "unique culture and language", considering its geographical location and strategic importance. Its mandate included "ensuring the protection of land and employment for the people of Ladakh".

### **What happens now?**

To stop the April 7 Pashmina March, the Ladakh administration imposed Section 144 CrPC and put curbs on the Internet. Wangchuk alleged that some people were detained overnight, and called off the march.

On April 14, Wangchuk announced a second attempt at the Pashmina March. However, this too has been suspended, allegedly after "pressure from the administration". Wangchuk has said that permission was given for only a single day's march, and only as far the Indian Army allows.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: Indian express

## **2. Where India's trade with Israel and Iran stands, and whether regional tensions could impact it**

### **Why in News?**

Iran's attack on Israel earlier this week has sparked tensions in the Middle East and beyond. India, which has friendly ties with both the countries, has expressed "serious concerns" about escalation of hostilities.

An escalation could also worry traders in the region. How does India trade with these two countries? And what could be the impact of renewed regional tensions on the Indian economy?

### **First, India-Israel trade has doubled in the last five years.**

India established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992. Since then, trade between two countries has been rising significantly, from around \$200 million in 1992 (comprising primarily of diamonds), to \$10.7 billion (excluding defence) in the Financial Year 2022-23.



A sharp rise has happened in the last four years, when trade doubled — from \$5.56 billion in 2018-19 to \$10.7 billion in 2022-23.

In 2022-23, India's exports to Israel were worth \$8.45 billion, while New Delhi's imports from Israel stood at \$2.3 billion, leaving a trade surplus of \$6.13 billion in India's favour.

India is Israel's second largest trading partner in Asia and the seventh largest globally.

### **What are the main components of India's trade with Israel?**

Based on India's 8-digit Harmonized System code, under which trade items are classified, the most valued items exported by India to Israel included diesel, diamonds, aviation turbine fuel, radar apparatus, Basmati rice, T-shirts, and wheat.

Two items, diesel and diamonds, accounted for 78 per cent of total exports during 2022-23. On the other hand, India imported items such as space equipment, diamonds, potassium chloride, mechanical appliances, turbo jets, and printed circuits.

### **Value of India-Iran trade came down in the last five years.**

In 2022-23, India's bilateral trade with Iran was \$2.33 billion. India's trade with Iran has seen a contraction in recent years, before an uptick in the FY 2022-23. It increased by 21.77 per cent — from \$1.94 billion in 2021-22 to \$2.33 billion in 2022-23.

However, in the three preceding years (2019-20, 2020-21 and 2021-22) it saw a contraction in the wake of US sanctions on Tehran. Trade with Iran dwindled from the high of \$17 billion in 2018-19 to \$4.77 billion in 2019-20, and further to \$2.11 billion in 2020-21.

Of the \$2.33 billion trade in 2022-23, India's exports to Iran accounted for \$1.66 billion, while New Delhi's imports from Tehran stood at just \$0.67 billion, leaving a trade surplus of about \$ 1 billion.

### **Israel and Iran do not have significant FDI in India**

As far as Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is concerned, Israel is not a very significant source of investment for India.

As far as investment ties with Iran are concerned, India is developing the first phase of the Shahid Beheshti Port at Chabahar, for improving India's connectivity and trade ties with the Middle East and Central Asia.

### **How could Middle East tensions impact the Indian economy?**

According to the think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), there is unlikely to be any rise in petrol prices in India as a result of ongoing tensions in the Middle East.



The ongoing conflict is unlikely to disrupt crude oil and gas production significantly since major producers like the USA, Russia, and North Sea operators are not in the conflict zone, and Saudi Arabia has not been directly involved.

Although, there could be some impact due to tensions in the Red Sea, which lies at the crucial trade route connecting Europe and Asia. Roughly 12 percent of global trade is dependent on this route.

Since November 2023, Yemen-based militants called the Houthis have fired at some ships passing through this region. They say it is in opposition to Israel's military action in the Gaza Strip, while Israel accuses Iran of backing the Houthis.

Shipping disruptions in the Red Sea, which have forced longer routes around Cape of Good Hope for trade with Europe and North America's east coast, might lead to higher oil and gas prices. In India, the impact on consumers may be minimal as the government could offset price increases by reducing taxes.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Relations

Source: Indian Express

### 3. What is the Bhojshala-Kamal Maula complex dispute?

#### Why in News?

On March 22, the 13th century Bhojshala-Kamal Maula complex in Madhya Pradesh's Dhar district became the latest site for a "scientific survey" by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI). The action followed the Madhya Pradesh High Court ruling which had, on March 11, ordered the ASI to conduct a survey of the premises within six weeks. The complex is contested by Hindus and Muslims as the Vagdevi temple and Kamal Maula Masjid, respectively.



#### What has the Supreme Court said?

Even as a 15-member ASI team along with the district administration and local police began the survey of the entire complex, the Supreme Court issued a word of caution on April 1. The Bench said no physical excavation that would alter the character of the premises should be carried out. The court's cautionary note followed the mosque's appeal against the High Court order. The top court also ordered that no further action should be taken on the outcome of the excavation without its permission.

#### What has been the status quo?

The Bhojshala-Kamal Maula temple-mosque compound has had a truce for the past 20 years. Following an arrangement in 2003, Hindus perform puja here on Tuesday while Muslims perform namaaz on Friday. Despite the occasional hiccup, the system worked fine until recently when a little-known outfit by the name of 'Hindu Front for Justice'

petitioned the High Court, claiming the complex was a temple built in 1034 and the mosque here was constructed during the reign of Sultanate king, Alauddin Khalji in the 13th century by "destroying and dismantling ancient structures of previously constructed Hindu temples". Dhar itself has been a city of prominence during the time of the Paramaras, the Marathas and the Delhi Sultanate.

The Muslims, however, claim no existing place of worship was demolished by Maula Kamaluddin Chishti, a sufi, after whom the mosque was named. He was a disciple of Nizamuddin Auliya and is said to have migrated to Dhar in 1291. He preached here for around 40 years. His tomb, built next to the mosque inside the complex here, is frequented by people of both faiths. They claim too that the ASI mentioned the Kamal Maula mosque in its records in 1902, and allege that the controversy began the same year when Kanshi Ram Lele, an education officer, found Sanskrit shlokas written on the floor of the mosque, and concluded it was the mythical Bhojshala.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; Governance

Source: The Hindu