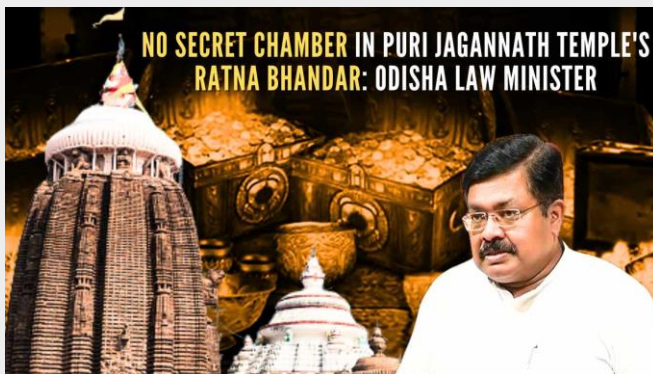


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**1. 'No secret chamber found inside Jagannath temple': why the claim was made, how ASI surveyed shrine****Introduction**

Odisha's law minister Prithviraj Harichandan recently clarified that there was no secret chamber inside the treasury of the Jagannath Temple in Puri.

The minister's announcement came after a survey of the Ratna Bhandar (treasure trove) of the temple, carried out by senior scientists of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the National

Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI) in mid-September. The committee is expected to submit its final report to the temple administration soon.

Why were the claims of a 'secret chamber' in the temple being raised, and how was the survey carried out?

**Myth of the hidden chamber in Jagannath temple**

Among the many myths about the Ratna Bhandar of the shrine is the existence of a secret tunnel or chamber. Despite no documentary evidence, stories have persisted about the erstwhile kings of Puri building a hidden chamber to safeguard Lord Jagannath's jewels from invaders.

Over the past decades, the rumours gained strength as the inner chamber of the Ratna Bhandar was not opened for over 40 years.

**What led to the technical survey?**

As the Odisha government opened the treasury after 46 years in July this year, demands were raised from various quarters, including from the servitors of the temple, for a detailed survey to find out about the hidden chamber.

Puri's erstwhile royal Dibyasingha Deb, chairman of the shrine's managing committee, stated that the ASI would use a highly sophisticated instrument to do laser-scanning and clear the air about the chamber.

Though such a technical survey was not part of the standard operating procedure (SOP) prepared by the state government, the temple administration sought the government's approval considering the widespread demand. Once the approval was granted, it wrote to the ASI to carry out the survey.

### **What was done during the technical survey?**

On September 18, a 17-member technical team led by ASI additional DG Janhwi Sharma accompanied by temple officials entered the treasury for the technical survey and inspected the chamber for around 3 hours, from 2 pm till 5pm. They conducted laser scanning, a process to map and visualise the 3D geometry of a structure. The team also physically inspected walls, roofs and floors of the treasury and recommended a second round of investigation with a ground penetrating radar (GPR) survey.

This was done on September 21 and 22, when experts from NGRI, Hyderabad carried out the GPR survey for around eight hours. A GPR survey is used to map and assess the layers, structures, and other aspects below the surface of the ground.

The NGRI team brought sophisticated machines with frequencies of 200, 400 and 900 MHz, which were used to gather data up to 10-metre down the floor. The NGRI team processed the data for over 10 days and submitted its report to the ASI.

### **Preliminary findings**

Though the ASI is yet to submit the final report, the Odisha law minister said preliminary consultations with the ASI suggest there is no hidden chamber inside the Ratna Bhandar. The survey, however, helped the government to detect in detail the cracks inside the treasury, based on which the ASI, custodian of the shrine, will carry out conservation measures.

### **Another myth related to the Ratna Bhandar**

Another myth is about a group of serpents guarding the deities' valuables inside the treasury. There have been claims of hissing sounds emanating from the inner chamber of the Ratna Bhandar.

The rumours resulted in the government deploying a team of snake helpline members within the temple premises when the Ratna Bhandar was opened on July 14. The team which entered the treasury, however, said they didn't come across any snakes, reptiles or insects inside the treasury.

Relevance: GS Prelims

Source: Indian Express

## **2. Taking stock of the International Solar Alliance**

### **Introduction**

At the 2015 climate conference in Paris, India in collaboration with a few other countries including conference host France, set up the International Solar Alliance (ISA) to accelerate the deployment and absorption of solar energy across the world, and mainly in the developing countries.

The ISA was a unique initiative in which India took the lead in establishing a global organisation. Over the years, the ISA has evolved into an intergovernmental organisation with more than 110 countries as members. However, its impact on expediting the deployment of solar energy in the developing world has been extremely modest until now.

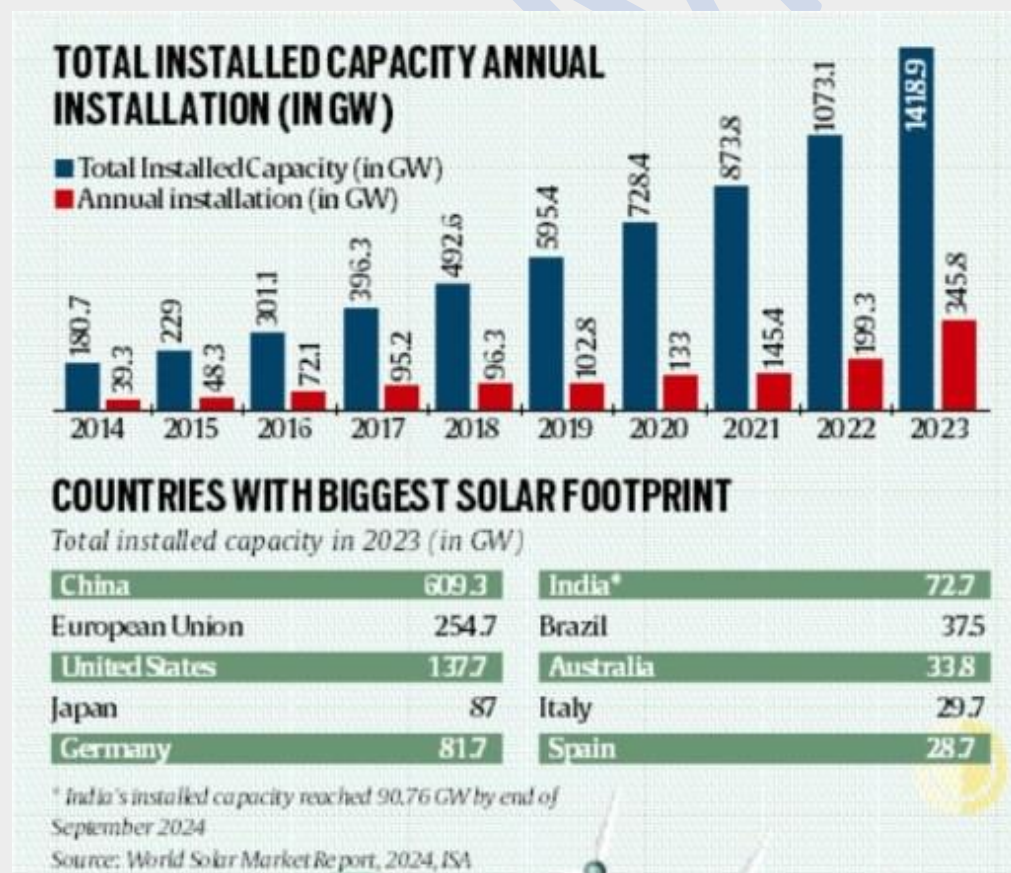
### ISA slow on delivery

The ISA was never meant to be a project developer. It did not have to install solar projects itself. It was envisaged as a facilitator, or a force multiplier, which would help countries overcome financial, technological, regulatory, or other barriers in harnessing solar energy.

The end result was supposed to be large-scale deployment of solar energy, especially in countries where energy access was very low. But nine years down the line, the ISA doesn't have much progress to show. An ISA-facilitated solar power project is yet to start operations.

The first such project is expected to be in Cuba where auctions have taken place and a developer has been selected to set up a 60 MW plant, which is supposed to be followed by several other similar-sized or bigger projects totalling about 1,250 MW.

Several other countries in Africa and Latin America are said to have completed the preparatory work, and are ready to follow Cuba's example.



### China ahead of pack

The inability of ISA to facilitate many more projects is striking, considering the rapid growth in solar energy deployment. The global installed capacity of solar power has been increasing at over 20 per cent annually over the last five years. Last year, it grew by more than 30 per cent, according to World Solar Market Report 2024, a publication of the ISA.

But as Ajay Mathur, director general of ISA, pointed out, most of these installations are happening in a handful of countries, with China accounting for a lion's share. Of the 345 GW of solar capacity addition in 2023, more than 216 GW, or about 62 per cent, happened in China alone.

"More than 80 per cent of investments into solar energy are flowing in to developed countries, China, and large developing countries like India," Mathur said.

### **Barriers and solutions**

"There are large entry barriers in smaller developing countries, particularly in Africa. This is what ISA has been engaged in ironing out," Mathur said.

Many of these countries do not have prior experience of executing large power projects, and certainly not solar projects, which is newer technology, he said. "There are no local developers, so the investment has to come from foreign companies. But foreign investors look for policy stability and sound regulatory environment."

The ISA has been working with governments and local institutions to create regulatory structures, draft power purchase agreements, and train human resources. "One of our important interventions has been the setting up of STAR (Solar Technology and Applications Resource) centres in partnership with local institutions. This has resulted in local expertise and capacity building," Mathur said.

Mathur said the results of these efforts would become visible soon.

"I think the heavy lifting has been done in the last few years. At least half a dozen countries are on the verge of floating tenders for power projects. We expect this to escalate quickly," he said.

ISA has been targeting deployment of 1,000 GW of solar energy, and unlocking a trillion dollars in solar investment by 2030.

### **Why solar matters**

Solar is the most crucial element of the global energy transition that is critical to tackle the challenge of climate change. It is the fastest-growing renewable energy source, despite its inherent limitation of being intermittent. In most regions of the world, solar is now also the cheapest source of energy when sunshine is available. Solar energy installed capacity is projected to grow between 3 and 15 times in different scenarios for achieving global net zero by 2050.

But as Mathur pointed out, only a handful of countries have been deploying it on a large scale (see box). About 43 per cent of global solar PV capacity is installed in China alone. The top 10

markets account for more than 95 per cent of installed capacity. Less than 2 per cent of new additions are happening in Africa, a region that houses about 80 per cent of the nearly 745 million people who still do not have access to electricity.

The solar manufacturing industry is even more imbalanced. Over 80 per cent of the manufacturing process is concentrated in China, which is seen as another barrier to quick spread of solar energy in smaller markets.

In fact, it is this lopsided nature of solar development that the ISA was meant to address and balance.

### **India's leadership role**

Deployment of solar energy is only a vehicle. The ISA was created to serve a much larger strategic purpose for India. It is an important part of India's outreach to the Global South, particularly to countries in Africa.

Despite being an inter-governmental multilateral organisation, ISA is still largely viewed as an Indian initiative. This is not without reason — it is headquartered in New Delhi, it is almost entirely funded by India, and India has presided over its general assembly since its inception. It will continue to do so, at least until 2026.

ISA is thus intricately linked to India's diplomatic objectives. For this reason, the ISA's performance would reflect on India's capabilities to claim leadership of the Global South and speak on its behalf. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself has been championing its cause, and has spoken about its crucial role at every relevant forum.

Unfortunately, the ISA's good offices have remained largely underutilised till now. It has been under-staffed and under-funded, and has had a troubled relationship with the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, which is its liaison ministry with the Indian government.

But more importantly, it has failed to create excitement about solar energy in countries that are in desperate need of access to cheap and reliable energy source.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper II; International Organisations

Source: Indian Express

## **3. Project to monitor animal health launched: its objectives, funding**

### **Introduction**

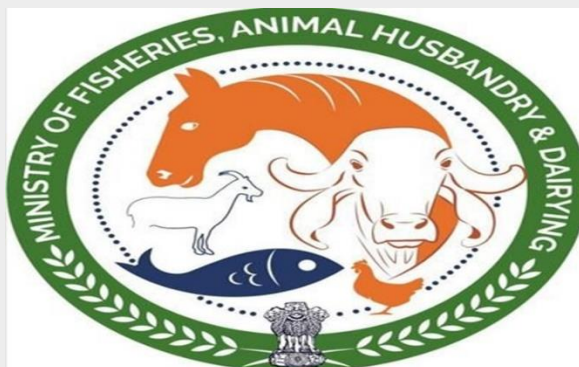
The central government recently launched a project to better monitor animal health for prevention of future pandemics.

The 'Animal Health Security Strengthening in India for Pandemic Preparedness and Response' initiative was launched by the Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying, Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh, in New Delhi on October 25.

### **What is the project?**



The project aims to enhance the country's capacity to "prevent, detect, and respond to animal health threats."



The project was approved by the Pandemic Fund, created by G20 countries under Indonesian presidency in 2022.

The basic purpose of the fund is to assist low- and middle-income countries in strengthening their capacities to identify, report and contain future pandemics.

In its first investment round, the fund mobilised \$2 billion. Proposals from various countries were invited for funding, and 350 expressions of interest (EoI) and 180 full proposals were received in the first call. Of these, the governing board of the Fund approved 19 grants in 37 countries. From India, the proposal by the Union animal husbandry department made it to the final list to receive a funding of \$25 million.

### **What is the timeline for the project?**

The project will work with the help of three implementing agencies—Asian Development Bank (ADB), the World Bank, and the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO). It is expected to be completed by August 2026.

### **What are the interventions planned?**

In a concept note, the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying said, "The major interventions under the project are strengthening and integrating disease surveillance and early warning systems, upgrading and expanding the laboratory network, improving the interoperable data systems, building capacity for data analytics and risk communication, and strengthening health security for transboundary animal diseases and India's role in regional cooperation through cross-border collaboration."

"The impact of the project would be to reduce the risk that a pathogen will emerge from animals (domesticated and wildlife) and be transmitted to the human population, endangering the health, nutritional security, and livelihoods of vulnerable populations," said the note.

### **Why is it needed?**

The WHO declared six public health emergencies of international concern in the past few decades, out of them five were zoonotic (transmitted from animals to humans). The latest example of such a disease was Covid-19, which affected the entire world in 2020-21.

About two-thirds of infectious diseases affecting humans originate from animals. Therefore, it is necessary to focus on animal health security as part of future pandemic preparedness. India, with 536 million livestock and other animals, requires measures to prevent and manage infection outbreaks.

### **What are the expected outcomes of the project?**

According to the ministry, following are the five key outputs expected from the project: augmentation of laboratory systems and vaccine manufacturing facilities; strengthening of surveillance and early warning systems; development of human resources capacity and competency; strengthening of data systems, analytics, risk analysis, and risk communication; and addressing cross-cutting institutional capacity gaps at national and regional levels.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Governance

Source: Indian Express

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