

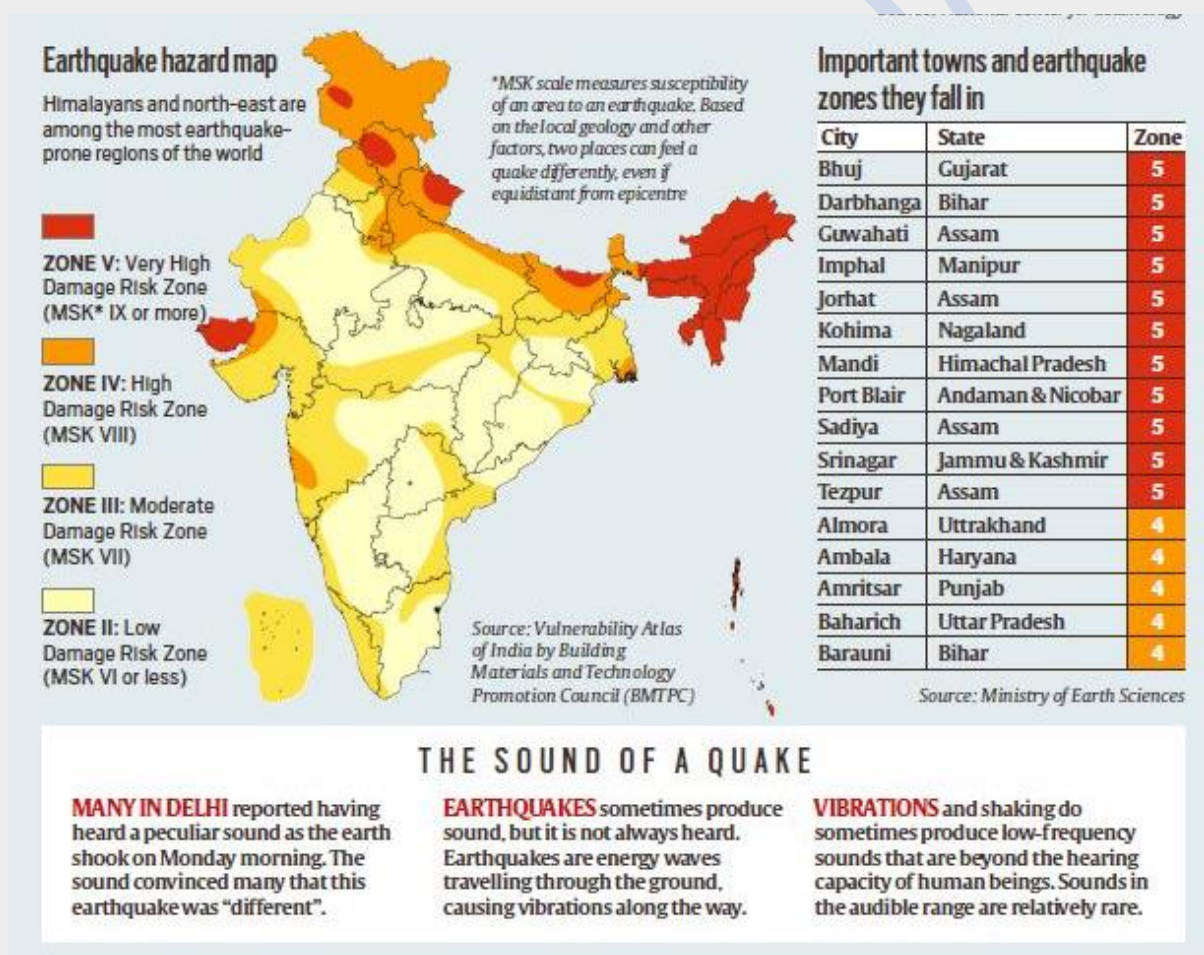
1. The Recent dawn quake in Delhi

Introduction

Delhi is no stranger to earthquakes, but the one that occurred recently was slightly different.

Mostly, the tremors experienced in Delhi from time to time are from earthquakes that originate elsewhere, sometimes as far away as Afghanistan. Recent magnitude 4 earthquake was located in Delhi itself, somewhere close to the Dhaula Kuan area.

In fact, it was the strongest earthquake to have originated in Delhi in at least five years, data from the National Centre of Seismology showed. However, Magnitude 4 earthquakes are not very strong, and do not result in much damage.



Seismic activity in Delhi

Delhi lies in a seismically active area. India's official earthquake hazard map puts Delhi in Zone 4, the second highest classification of areas based on their susceptibility to shaking experienced during an earthquake.

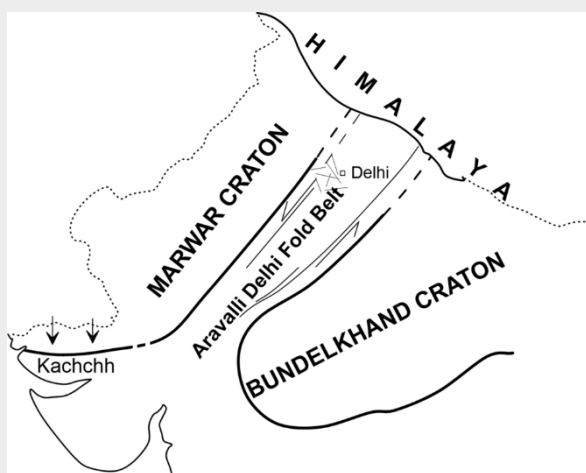
MSK-8-level

Zone 4 in India includes areas that are expected to experience MSK-8-level intensity during an earthquake. The MSK, or Medvedev-Sponheuer-Karnik scale is a measure of intensity, rather than strength, or energy released, which is described by magnitude.

Delhi falls in a region that has high susceptibility to quakes. MSK-8 means the area is vulnerable to major damage being caused to buildings and other infrastructure. Zone 5, the most vulnerable areas in India, correspond to MSK-9 levels of intensity or higher.

Aravalli-Delhi Fold Belt

Delhi lies in what is known as the Aravalli-Delhi Fold Belt, a seismically-active geological belt extending from southern and eastern Rajasthan to Haryana and Delhi.



This region is characterised by the presence of deformed layers of rock that have been folded or bent due to geological processes hundreds of millions of years ago. These deformities have created stress which is sometimes released in the form of earthquakes.

The Aravalli-Delhi Fold Belt was much more seismically active in the past than it is now. Over the years, the tectonic activity in the region has slowed down considerably, leading to greater geological stability. But some faults still remain, which give rise to occasional mild earthquakes.

Different from Himalayan Earthquakes

This is a very different mechanism from the one that triggers earthquakes in the Himalayan region, which is one of the most quake-prone regions in the world. The Himalayan region has been witnessing the subduction of the Indian tectonic plate under the Eurasian plate — one pushing against the other — which results in a lot of stress building up.

A peculiar sound

Many people reported having heard a peculiar sound during the earthquake in Delhi, a sound that was not known to have accompanied the earlier quakes that were felt in the capital. It was this sound that led some to speculate that the nature of recent earthquake was different in some way.

The fact is earthquakes do sometimes produce sound — but it is not heard most of the time. Earthquakes are energy waves travelling through the Earth, causing vibrations as they pass. These vibrations and shaking do sometimes produce low-frequency sounds that are beyond the hearing capacity of human beings. Bigger earthquakes can produce sounds in the audible range, but these are relatively rare events.

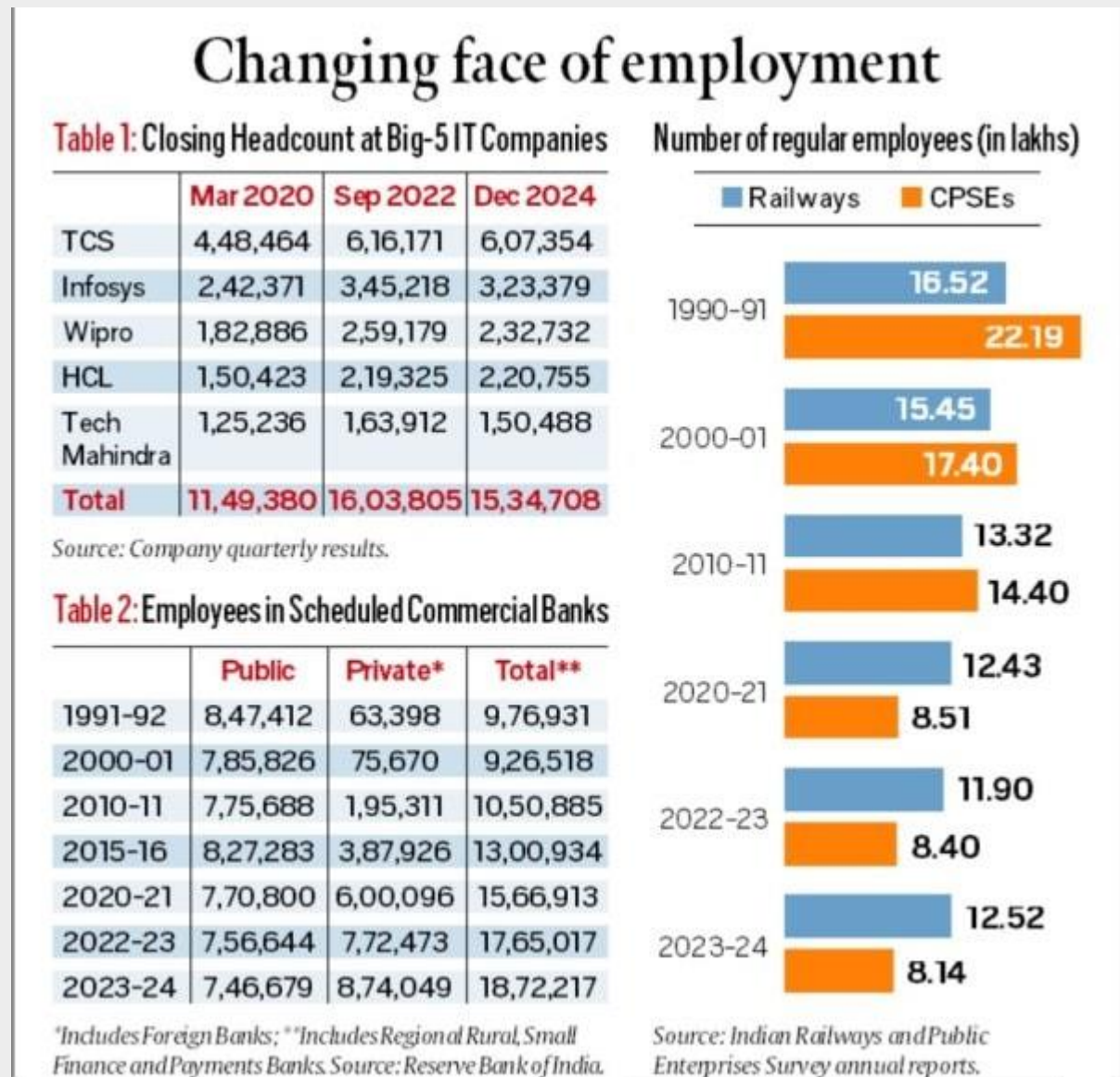
Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Disaster Management

Source: Indian Express

2. Middle Class 2.0: Changing employment sector in India, and its one big challenge

Employment share among Public and Organised Private Sector

India's middle class after Independence was largely created by the public sector. Employment in the public sector stood at 194.7 lakh and that in the organised private sector only at 80.6 lakh as on March 31, 1995. The former — employees in the central and state governments plus quasi-governments (public sector undertakings) and local bodies — fell to 176.1 lakh and the latter rose to 119.7 lakh by March 31, 2012.



Middle Class 2.0

But it is fair to assume that the trend of organised employment shifting from the public to private sector — especially post the economic reforms of 1991 — has gathered pace after 2011-12.

One indicator of that is the number of regular employees with the Indian Railways. Between 1990-91 and 2023-24, these plunged from 16.5 lakh to 12.5 lakh. Still sharper is the reduction in employment with Central public sector enterprises: From 22.2 lakh in 1990-91 to just over 8.1 lakh in 2023-24.

On the other hand, take the information technology (IT) industry, the symbol of India's post-reform "second middle class". There has been enormous employment boom in IT companies such as Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys.

The big-five IT companies together had 15,34,708 employees as on December 31, 2024. That's more than the 12,52,180 regular employees with the Indian Railways as of 2023-24. It is also more than the currently estimated 14.2 lakh officers, soldiers, airmen and sailors in the three defence services.

Banking sector transformation

Another, not as much highlighted, Middle Class 2.0 story is the banking industry. In 1991-92, scheduled commercial banks in India had a total employee strength of about 9.8 lakh. Public sector banks had a lion's share of nearly 8.5 lakh or 87% in that. The latter number registered a decline to 7.7 lakh by 2020-21, but still exceeded the 6 lakh employees in private sector banks.

The period 2022-23 was a landmark, when private sector banks, for the first time, overtook their state-owned counterparts in employment. At the end of 2023-24, their employee strength was 8.74 lakh, as against the less than 7.5 lakh of public sector banks.

Employment challenge

Simply put, liberalisation and globalisation opened up new industries and opportunities for private enterprise.

That, in turn, led to unprecedented employment generation – whether in IT and finance (banking, insurance, mutual funds, market intermediation/brokerages, etc) or accountancy, legal, health, hospitality and tourism, transportation and logistics, aviation, media, advertising, sports and entertainment, real estate and retail services.

The private sector-led Middle Class 2.0's expansion happened just when the post-Independence government-created Middle Class 1.0 started shrinking with the initiation of reforms.

Job Generation Restricted to Mainly to Services

The above job generation, however, has had a major limitation. It has been mainly in services. India, unlike China and most industrialised countries, has not experienced "structural transformation" involving the large-scale transfer of surplus labour from agriculture to sectors — particularly manufacturing and modern services — where productivity (output value per worker) and average incomes are higher.

Official Periodic Labour Force Surveys (PLFS) show the farm sector's share in India's workforce decreasing from 64% in 1993-94 to 48.9% in 2011-12 and further to 42.5% in 2018-19, but subsequently going up to 46.2% in 2023-24.

Large number of petty jobs in Service Sector

While the services sector has expanded, with India even becoming a "back office to the world" (like China is its "factory"), the well-paying jobs have been more for the better educated. Not everyone can be a software programmer, doctor, financial analyst, accountant or lawyer.

Most services sector jobs are informal and low-paying: Construction and headload labour, sanitation, security staffing, domestic help, shop assistant, petty retailing and gig work.

Uber has over 10 lakh drivers using its platform, as per the cab aggregator's 2024 India Economic Impact report. Zomato engaged 4,80,000 average monthly active food deliverers and 1,45,000 quick-commerce riders during October-December 2024. Its rival Swiggy had 5,43,562 average "transacting delivery partners" for the same quarter.

But these jobs cannot, beyond a point, get people to join the Middle Class 2.0. And therein lies India's real employment challenge.

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

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