

1. Can Donald Trump undo Biden-era presidential pardons allegedly signed with 'autopen'?**Introduction**

US President Donald Trump recently declared that pardons signed by his predecessor Joe Biden were "void, vacant and of no further force and effect" because they were signed with an autopen.

What is an autopen and is its use contentious? Can Trump really void past presidential pardons?

First, what is an autopen?

An autopen is essentially a printer-size machine that duplicates signatures using real ink, allowing public figures to autograph thousands of items, from posters to memorabilia. The machine has an arm that can hold a standard pen or pencil and can reproduce the programmed signature on paper.

**Have autopens been used by Presidents before?**

The device is not a new concept. With progress in technology, a robot arm could be used to duplicate a signature without user involvement. The documents recognise Harry Truman as the first President post World War II to use an autopen in office.

More recently, Barack Obama courted controversy in 2011 when he used the autopen to sign an extension of the Patriot Act while attending the G8 summit in France. He did this again in 2013, using an autopen to sign the Fiscal Cliff Bill, while he was on holiday in Hawaii.

Why has Trump targeted Biden's pardons?

The issue was raised by the conservative thinktank, Heritage Foundation, responsible for the Project 2025 conservative policy wishlist. The foundation's Oversight Project tweeted last week that it had analysed thousands of pages of documents with Biden's signatures, including pardons, which it claimed was signed by an autopen.

The president then picked up on conservative media outlets amplifying these claims.

The pardons themselves have long been a bone of contention for Trump. As the outgoing president, Joe Biden had issued a series of pre-emptive pardons for the committee that prosecuted the rioters who stormed the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. In a statement, he then justified this action, saying these persons were being "threatened with criminal prosecutions" by Trump, and that he "cannot in good conscience do nothing." Trump called this committee "the Unselect Committee of Political Thugs".

And can Trump overturn Biden's pardons?

Quite simply, no. According to the US Constitution, the President does not have the authority to overturn a predecessor's pardons.

Article II Section 2 of the Constitution simply says that the President "shall have Power to grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offences against the United States, except in Cases of Impeachment."

This is boosted by a 2005 Department of Justice (DoJ) memo, which says the President need not "personally perform the physical act of affixing his signature to a bill he approves and decides to sign" into law. He may "sign a bill within the meaning of Article I, Section 7 by directing a subordinate to affix the President's signature to such a bill, for example by autopen."

Further, a 1929 DoJ opinion said that "neither the Constitution nor statute prescribed the method by which executive clemency shall be exercised or evidenced. It is wholly for the president to decide."

Then what can Trump do?

According to legal experts, if Trump were to try and prosecute anyone pardoned by Biden, the case would likely be taken to court and ruled against him.

However, the President seems intent on subjecting the pardoned person to the tedious legal process regardless of the clemency they were awarded.

Relevance: GS Prelims; International Issues

Source: Indian Express

2. Load shedding fears Rise as Summer Approaches

Load Shedding

Load shedding (loadshedding) is a way to distribute demand for electrical power across multiple power sources. Load shedding is used to relieve stress on a primary energy source when demand for electricity is greater than the primary power source can supply.

The goal of load shedding is to prevent a power grid or power source from overloading. As a type of load management, load shedding works by rotating power outages or reducing power consumption from primary sources until demand decreases and more capacity becomes available.

Load shedding vs. power outages

Load shedding	Power outages
Planned and scheduled reduction of electricity supply.	Sudden and unexpected loss of electricity.
Implemented to balance demand and available supply.	Typically caused by technical problems, equipment failures or severe weather.
Prevents overloading the power grid.	Electricity is completely unavailable during the outage.
Can affect specific areas or sections of the grid.	Can affect large areas or specific locations.
Lasts from seconds to hours.	Duration varies depending on cause and time needed for repairs.

Load Shedding issue in Peak Summers

India's focus on rapid expansion of renewables in the absence of energy storage systems, especially over the last decade, is now resulting in increasing instability in the country's electricity grid, with power shortages projected to surge sharply in May and June. The issue is compounded by a policy decision from roughly 10 years ago to scale down thermal expansion, which provides critical baseload support to the grid during evenings in summer months, when solar generation dips and demand remains high.

Non Solar hours pose a challenge

India has been adding renewable energy at a rapid pace — over 21 gigawatt (GW) of renewable capacity, excluding large hydro, was added between April and January of the ongoing fiscal, more than doubling year-on-year. Total capacity has touched 165 GW, and with large hydro, it is a little over 212 GW. In comparison, coal-based thermal capacity stands at 220 GW.

However, unlike thermal capacities, which can be ramped up and down as per requirements, renewable energy sources like solar and wind rely on specific atmospheric conditions to generate power. They produce electricity only when weather conditions permit — solar during the day, wind when speeds are sufficiently high.

During summers, solar generation typically peaks in the afternoon but drops off by evening, leaving a supply gap at a time when temperatures are high and households across north India switch on air conditioners.

Then, to meet high demand in non-solar hours, baseload capacities like thermal are ramped up. However, since India's coal-based thermal capacity has barely grown, just 7 per cent from 205 GW in 2019-20, it is increasingly unavailable to bridge the shortfall in non-solar hours.

Energy storage systems

Recognising the grid stability challenges posed by intermittent renewables, the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) — a state-owned planning body for the power sector — issued an urgent advisory on February 18, calling for energy storage systems to be co-located with solar projects. Battery energy storage systems (BESS) and pumped storage plants (PSP) can store surplus solar power during the day and release it when demand surges outside daylight hours.

While the country's total renewable energy capacity has crossed 200 GW, the installed energy storage capacity till end-2024 was just under 5 GW (4.75 GW of PSP and 0.11 GW of BESS).

Relevance: GS Prelims & Mains Paper III; Economics

Source: Indian Express

3. Serbia's govt accused of using a sonic weapon against protestors: What is this device?

Why Now?

Serbia is currently witnessing mass protests against Vucic and his government over several issues, including allegations of widespread corruption and nepotism.

According to some military experts, the authorities used a sonic weapon to produce a piercing noise to curb the protests. Under the country's police law, the use of such a weapon is illegal.

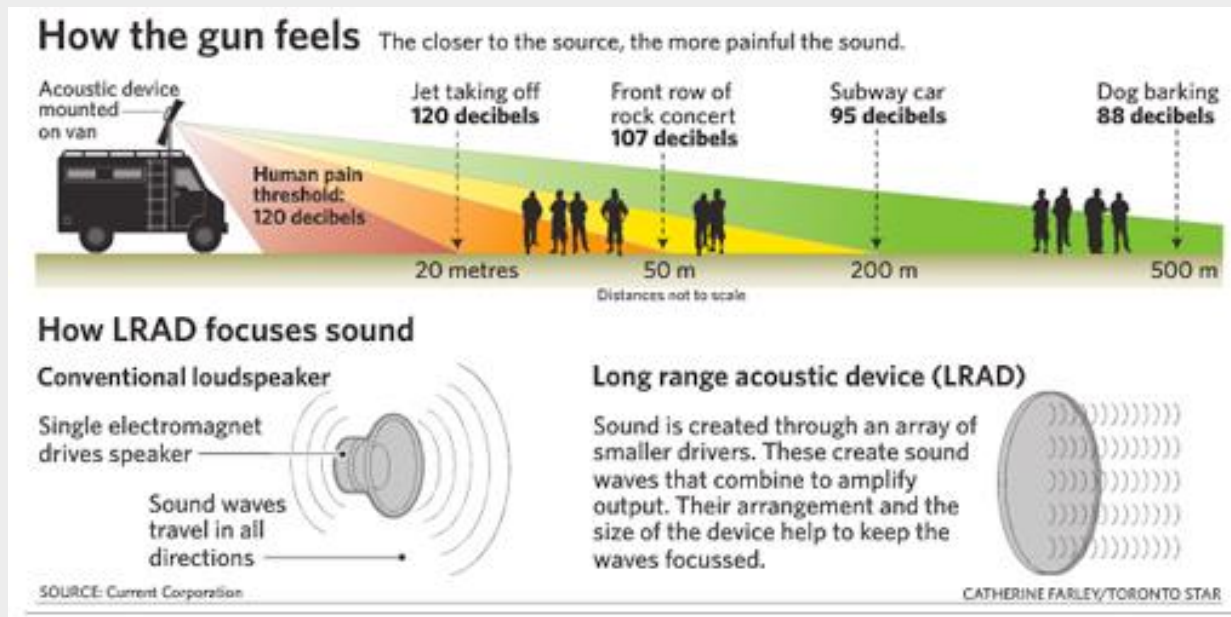
What is a sonic weapon?

Acoustic or sonic weapons are devices that deliver very loud sounds over long distances. They can be designed to emit painful audible or inaudible sound waves. These devices can also be used to act like voice amplifiers to deliver voice messages or other sounds.

Although sound amplifiers have been around for centuries, the use of this technology for crowd-control purposes goes back to the early 1990s.

How do sonic weapons work?

Such weapons usually comprise hundreds of modern transducers — an electronic device that converts energy from one form to another — to create highly concentrated and amplified sound.



What are the health effects of sonic weapons?

These weapons can cause significant harm to the eardrums and delicate organs of the ears and/or hearing loss. Although using earplugs can reduce the sound by 20–30 dB, this may not be enough to avoid significant injury. The impact depends on a person's distance from the sound, duration of exposure, and preexisting bodily conditions.

Loud noises can cause a sensation of ringing ears, also called tinnitus, which can last for minutes after the exposure or for days.

Relevance: GS Prelims; Science & Technology

Source: Indian Express

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