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New Study on Loneliness

Context: A recent study has revealed a significant connection between loneliness, social isolation, and physical health issues, including diseases and even premature death. The study, titled "Plasma proteomic signatures of social isolation and loneliness associated with morbidity and mortality", was published in Nature Human Behaviour.

- It explores how loneliness and social isolation affect the levels of certain proteins in the blood, which are tied to several serious health conditions. The study emphasizes that social isolation is not just a psychological issue but has measurable biological effects that can influence long-term health.

Key Findings from the Study:

- Proteomic Analysis:** Researchers analyzed blood samples from over 42,000 adults aged 40-69 from the UK Biobank. They compared protein levels in the blood of individuals reporting loneliness or social isolation to those not reporting these conditions.
- Social Isolation and Loneliness Impact Protein Levels:** The study found that 9.3% of participants reported social isolation, while 6.4% reported loneliness. These individuals exhibited different protein profiles, with around 85% of the proteins linked to loneliness also associated with social isolation.
- Proteins Linked to Health Risks:** Elevated protein levels were found in people who experienced loneliness or social isolation. These proteins are associated with inflammation, viral infections, immune responses, cardiovascular diseases, type 2 diabetes, and even early death.
- Key Proteins Identified:**
 - » **ADM (Adrenomedullin):** Increased in lonely individuals, ADM plays a role in regulating stress hormones and the "love hormone" oxytocin, which helps reduce stress and improve mood.
 - » **ASGR1:** Found at higher levels in isolated individuals, ASGR1 is linked to higher cholesterol and an increased risk of cardiovascular disease.
 - » Additional proteins were identified that contribute to insulin resistance, cancer progression, and other health conditions.
- Role of Inflammation and Immune Response:**

Many elevated proteins are part of the body's inflammatory response, linked to chronic inflammation. This inflammation has been connected to cardiovascular diseases, strokes, and other serious health issues.

Health Implications of Loneliness:

- Cardiovascular Risk:** Elevated ASGR1 levels increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases, making isolated individuals more susceptible to heart-related issues.
- Mental and Physical Stress:** Proteins like ADM indicate that loneliness disrupts stress regulation, which can exacerbate both physical and mental health problems.
- Chronic Conditions:** The elevated protein levels are tied to conditions like type 2 diabetes and cancer, showing how social isolation accelerates the progression of diseases.

Recommendations and Future Directions:

- Increased Awareness:** There is an urgent need to raise awareness of the health risks associated with loneliness. Both mental and physical health professionals should address social isolation as part of their care.
- Policy and Community Action:** Governments should promote inclusive communities and social initiatives to reduce isolation, particularly among the elderly and vulnerable populations.
- Focus on Holistic Health Care:** Healthcare providers should consider social factors, including loneliness, when diagnosing and treating chronic diseases, encouraging social engagement as part of the treatment process.
- Technological Solutions:** Advanced technologies like AI and proteomics could revolutionize how we understand and treat loneliness-related health issues by identifying biomarkers that link social isolation to specific diseases.

Arunachal Pradesh Revives 1978 Anti-Conversion Act

Context: Arunachal Pradesh is revisiting the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act of 1978, nearly five decades after it was passed but never enforced. The state government is now working to frame the necessary rules for its implementation. The Act, which prohibits

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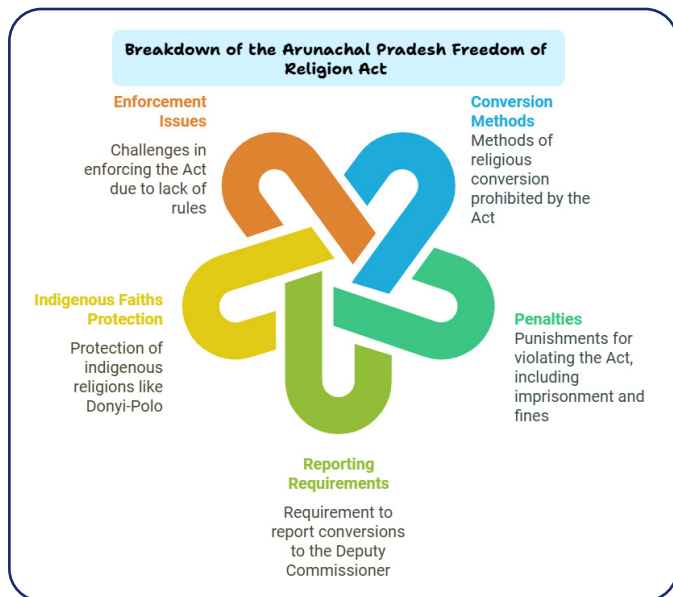


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forceful or fraudulent religious conversions, has sparked debates about its potential to protect indigenous religions while addressing the rise of conversions, particularly to Christianity.

What is the Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act?

- The Act, passed in 1978, makes it illegal to convert someone to another religion through force, inducement, or fraud, with penalties including imprisonment for up to two years and fines of up to Rs. 10,000. It mandates that any conversion must be reported to the Deputy Commissioner of the district.
- The law aims to safeguard indigenous faiths, such as Donyi-Polo (nature worship), practiced by many tribal communities in Arunachal Pradesh. However, the Act has remained dormant for years due to the lack of rules for its enforcement.



Why was the Act introduced?

- The Act was introduced during a time when Arunachal Pradesh, a state with diverse ethnic and religious groups, was experiencing rapid changes in religious affiliations. Christian missionary activities increased, particularly in areas close to Assam, leading to a growing Christian population.
- Prior to the 1950s, Christianity had been limited due to challenging terrain and colonial restrictions. However, by the 1970s, Christianity spread among communities

like the Adis, Nyishis, and Noctes, leading to concerns among tribal communities about the erosion of their traditional beliefs.

Why has the act stayed dormant?

- The Act faced significant opposition, particularly from the Christian community. The Arunachal Christian Forum, formed shortly after the Act's introduction, has criticized the law, claiming it could discriminate against religious minorities and fuel tensions between communities. As a result, successive state governments avoided enforcing the law, wary of worsening religious divides.

Why is the Act being Revived Now?

- The Act's revival follows a 2022 public interest litigation that highlighted the government's failure to implement the law. The Gauhati High Court urged the state to finalize the rules, with an expected deadline of six months. Supporters, such as Maya Murtem from the Indigenous Faiths and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh (IFCSAP), argue the law is essential to protect indigenous cultures amid increasing conversions, with some districts seeing conversion rates as high as 90%.

What are the Concerns?

- The revival has raised concerns about potential religious tension, especially given that Christians now make up about 30% of the state's population. Critics argue that the law could be misused by local authorities, targeting Christians and worsening religious divides. While the Act aims to protect indigenous faiths, some fear it could infringe on individual rights to freely choose their religion, potentially institutionalizing religious exclusivity.

India Condemns Pakistani Airstrikes on Afghanistan

Context: India has strongly condemned recent Pakistani airstrikes on Afghan territory, which targeted civilian areas and resulted in the loss of several lives, including women and children. The airstrikes, which took place on December 24, 2024, in Afghanistan's Barmal district, Paktika province, have drawn widespread global condemnation. India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, responded by stating that

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India unequivocally condemns any attack on innocent civilians.

Reasons behind airstrikes as claimed by Pakistan:

- **Cross-Border Militancy and Insurgency:** Pakistan's airstrikes are aimed at insurgent groups, particularly the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), operating from Afghan territory. These groups use Afghan soil as a safe haven to plan and execute attacks against Pakistan.
- **Response to Alleged Afghan Support for Militants:** Pakistan accuses Afghanistan, particularly the Taliban regime, of supporting or tolerating militant groups hostile to Pakistan. These allegations contribute to tensions between the two countries.
- **Internal Political Factors in Pakistan:** Pakistan faces rising extremism and insecurity, especially in its border regions. The military may use airstrikes to assert control and show decisive action to address domestic political pressures related to militant conflicts.
- **Regional Geopolitical Dynamics:** Pakistan's actions are influenced by broader geopolitical factors, including its tense relations with India and its strategic interests in Afghanistan. Pakistan seeks to maintain influence in Afghanistan, adding to regional competition.
- **Escalation of Historical Tensions:** Relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been strained for decades. The rise of the Taliban in 2021 has intensified the conflict, with both nations blaming each other for the region's instability.



Implications of airstrike on India:

- **Regional Instability:** The escalation of tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan increases regional instability, which can spill over into India. Any destabilization in Afghanistan could affect India's

strategic interests, especially concerning its investments and influence in the country.

- **Security Concerns:** Pakistan's continued military actions and its support for insurgent groups in the region, including those targeting India, may heighten security concerns for India, particularly in its border regions and Jammu and Kashmir, where cross-border militancy remains a threat.
- **Geopolitical Rivalries:** With Pakistan's increasing interference in Afghanistan and its rising tensions with India, the broader geopolitical dynamics in South Asia could intensify. India's relations with Afghanistan, especially in light of the Taliban's rise, may be further complicated by Pakistan's actions.
- **Strategic Alliances:** India's response to the airstrikes might influence its diplomatic alliances. As Pakistan's role in destabilizing the region grows, India could strengthen its strategic partnerships with countries like the United States, Afghanistan, and regional allies to counterbalance Pakistan's influence.
- **Impact on Peace Efforts:** The ongoing conflict and airstrikes between Pakistan and Afghanistan hinder efforts to bring peace and stability to the region, affecting India's broader objectives in South Asia, including fostering peace and security.

Jaishankar Meets US NSA Jake Sullivan

Context: External Affairs Minister (EAM) S. Jaishankar recently met with the US National Security Adviser (NSA) Jake Sullivan in New Delhi to discuss key strategic, regional, and bilateral issues. The meeting, part of Sullivan's two-day visit to India, comes at a critical time as he concludes one of the last high-profile engagements of the Biden administration before the inauguration of Donald Trump as the 47th President of the United States.

Key highlighting of the Meeting:

- The primary focus of the meeting was to review the India-US Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET), a framework designed to enhance strategic ties between the two nations. Sullivan's visit includes discussions with Indian NSA Ajit Doval and a visit to the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi. There,

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Sullivan will interact with young Indian entrepreneurs and deliver a speech on the bilateral innovation alliance fostered by iCET.

- Both Jaishankar and Sullivan discussed the progress of iCET initiatives, which cover critical areas like space, defence, strategic technology, and security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. They also shared insights on emerging technologies, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and biotechnology, which are expected to play a pivotal role in the future of bilateral relations.



What is iCET?

- The India-US Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) is a strategic collaboration aimed at promoting innovation and strengthening the technological partnership between India and the United States.
- Announced in May 2022 and officially launched in January 2023, iCET is being run by the National Security Councils (NSCs) of both countries. The initiative emphasizes cooperation in advanced technological fields, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, semiconductors, and wireless

telecommunications.

Focus Areas of iCET:

iCET identifies six major areas of cooperation, including:

- AI Research Agency Partnership:** Fostering collaboration between research institutions in both countries to advance AI technologies.
- Defense Industrial Cooperation:** Strengthening the defense sector through co-development, co-production, and fostering defense startups.
- Innovation Ecosystems:** Promoting innovation and entrepreneurship by building cooperative frameworks and initiatives.
- Semiconductor Ecosystem Development:** Supporting the growth of semiconductor industries in both countries, with a focus on supply chain resilience.
- Human Spaceflight Cooperation:** Collaborative efforts on space exploration and related technologies.
- Advancements in 5G and 6G Technologies:** Supporting the adoption of cutting-edge wireless technologies like OpenRAN, a non-proprietary version of the Radio Access Network (RAN) system that allows interoperability between different vendors' equipment.

Importance of the Meeting:

- The meeting holds great significance for the future of India-US relations, especially in light of the strategic and technological partnership formed under iCET. Both sides highlighted how iCET has already driven remarkable advancements in sectors like defence innovation, semiconductors, and AI. The discussions underscored the importance of staying ahead in emerging technologies, with both governments emphasizing support for private sector initiatives to drive innovation.

Power Packed News

E-auction portal 'Banknet'

- The government on January 3 launched a revised portal called 'Banknet', which will simplify and make e-auction of properties for public sector banks (PSBs) simple and transparent. The portal will help buyers and investors to participate in various properties and take advantage of the opportunities. Currently, more than 1,22,000 properties are listed on the portal. This includes residential properties, commercial and industrial land, vehicles, plant and machinery.
- This initiative will improve the balance sheet of PSBs and increase the availability of credit for businesses and individuals. This portal will speed up the reform process, which will reduce the non-performing assets (NPAs) of banks. 'Banknet' is also expected to promote digital transactions and financial transparency.

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Medical Textile Quality Control Order 2024

- The Union Ministry of Textiles has issued the Medical Textile Quality Control Order, 2024, which aims to ensure the effectiveness and safety of medical textiles. The order lays down strict quality norms, labelling specifications and testing procedures.
- Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have been given an extension till April 1, 2025 for compliance.
- In addition, manufacturers and importers have been given a six-month transition period to clear their legacy inventory, which will end on June 30. The move will help implement quality standards with minimal disruption.
- The order will prove crucial for improving the safety of medical devices and patient care.



UPI market cap deadline extended to 2026

- The National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) has extended the deadline for 30% volume cap for third-party UPI apps to December 31, 2026. This is the third time the deadline has been extended. The volume cap limit was first set in November 2020. Currently, apps such as PhonePe and Google Pay control 80% of UPI transactions.
- The limit will be decided based on the transactions of the last three months on a rolling basis. NPCI has removed the user limit for WhatsApp Pay, allowing it to now offer UPI services to its entire user base. This expansion will ensure the widespread and balanced use of UPI.

India's first 'Generation Beta' baby born

- India's first 'Generation Beta' baby was born on January 1 at Synod Hospital in Aizawl, Mizoram. The baby has been named Frankie Remruatdika Zedeng. According to futurist Mark McCrindle, children born between 2025 and 2039 will be called 'Gen Beta'. This generation will be the offspring of millennials (Gen Y) and older Gen Z and will experience a seamless integration of the digital and physical world.
- It is estimated that by 2025, this generation will account for 16% of the global population. Technological advancements and artificial intelligence will deeply impact the lives of this generation.

INDIA'S FIRST GENERATION BETA BABY WAS BORN IN MIZORAM'S AIZAWL ON JAN 1 AT 12:03 AM



Golden Globes 2025 winners

- Several notable films and artists were honored at the 82nd Golden Globes ceremony held in Los Angeles on January 5. 'Shogun' won four awards, including Best Drama Series and Leading Actor and Actress.
- The Brutalist film received seven nominations and Adrien Brody won the Best Actor (Drama) award for this film. Pamela Anderson received the Best Actress award for her performance in 'The Last Showgirl'.
- 'Flow' won the award in the Animated Motion Picture category, while 'El Mal' received the Best Original Song honor.

Implementation of Centralized Pension Payment System (CPPS)

- EPFO has fully implemented the Centralized Pension Payment System (CPPS). The system started as a pilot project in Karnal, Jammu and Srinagar in October 2024. It was implemented after testing in 24 regional offices by November 2024.
- 68 lakh pensioners will benefit from CPPS. Now pensioners can withdraw pension from any bank, and the payment will be credited instantly. From January 2025, pension disbursement will be possible without the need for PPO transfer. This will increase efficiency and transparency in the pension system.

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