

The Blue Moon



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Generative AI A boon or a bane for democracy?

By Amit Mittal

Generative AI that can in an instant clone a candidate's voice, create a fake film, or churn out bogus narratives to undermine opposition's messaging. This is the latest weapon in political disinformation arsenal, so it seems, and is already happening in the US if reports are to be believed.

If fakes can be generated by artificial intelligence in the United States, Can India be far behind in using the same technique?

The first high-stakes election will take place in Taiwan in January 2024 to choose the successor to President Tsai Ing-wen. It is likely to be a contest between the ruling Democratic Progressive Party, which sees itself as a bastion against authoritarianism, and the Kuomintang, which favours closer ties with Beijing.

Considering 75 per cent of Taiwanese receive news and information through

social media, the online sphere is a key battleground. In this election AI can act as a force multiplier, meaning the same number of trolls can wreak more havoc than in the past.

Generative AI, which creates text, images and video by copying patterns of existing media, is democratizing 'disinfo' by making it simple, cheap and more convincing.

Organizations such as the Taipei-based cyber monitoring group Doublethink Labs use AI to analyse disinformation campaigns to neutralize them quickly.

Taiwan Information Environment Research Centre, a civil society organization, says AI can make it harder for researchers to detect dubious content and it can also misleadingly create sensational material appealing to a wide range of readers, making the information environment

even less functional for reasonable public discourse.

Doublethink Labs has seen AI being used already. When 700 Chinese Communist Party fake accounts were blocked on Facebook, the hackers used AI voice generators to read out the biased texts over an AI filmed background and posted it on YouTube.

The usual disinformation themes are that Taiwan's government is illegitimate, America is untrustworthy and simply after Taiwan's chip industry and China is good and powerful.

Fact-checkers will find it harder to detect AI messages where the use of language is closer to the way people talk in Taiwan. Taiwanese influencers are reportedly being paid by Beijing to reinforce its propaganda.

In the US AI could multiply the scope of past efforts to suppress voter turnout. AI technology

could not only reach more people but add fake audio of trusted politicians or public figures on robocalls to make misleading messages more credible. It is hard to measure how effective these tactics are, but adding AI would allow the creation of unlimited numbers of distinct messages.

victims have no idea that they are being covertly manipulated. And since this takes place in the quieter corners of the internet, neither does anyone else, such as reporters or fact-checkers could sound the alarm. On Google and YouTube, political ads using AI will soon need to carry a prominent health warning.

It is far too early to tell how big a role AI will actually play in global elections, or the most effective way to combat it, but dangers to democracy are pertinent, more so in countries like India where poll campaigns are largely based on false promises.

On a buying spree for a fourth generation fighter aircraft?

In December 2010, The Blue Moon came out with a report “Indian Air Force must wait for ten years” for having fresh machines in its garages. Now it is over 12 years and India is still looking out to western suppliers to have its hangars crowded with fighter aircraft.

Newspaper reports are now slowly dribbling that the country has started the process to acquire Marine Rafales. The machines being bought from France are going to cost the exchequer Rs.50,000 crore, estimates a report.

Forgetting the much touted “atma nirbhar” tag, these will be merely 26 jets which will take another three years for the off the shelf delivery. So the IAF wait is still lingering. Who bothers for the nation’s security?

India and France had signed an inter-governmental agreement in September 2016 for 36 jets. It was on 9th October, 2019 the first Rafale combat aircraft was delivered to India. All 36 Rafale aircraft were received from France, with the last aircraft landing in the country on 15 December 2022.

It still took France or rather Dassault Aviation of France, manufacturers of the fighter, to supply the 36 fighters to India a period of four years to fulfil their obligation.

Not to talk of the price tag, important is how modern will the fighter be if its first prototype came four years ago. Compared to the market progressing fast in the sector, the fighter would simply remain a “nail-biting” proposition and may not be fit to be termed a fifth generation fighter aircraft . Its armaments and aviation electronics could become out-dated by the time it comes in ?

Amit Mittal

FTA INDIA-PERU MAIN POTENTIAL AREAS OF COOPERATION IN THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR

Agricultural technology or Agritech is the key to transform Peru and India’s agriculture into world class powerhouses to ensure food security for their populations, as well as to boost their economies. The advent of digital technologies, the evolution of multiple agricultural techniques in each part of the value chain are the tools

Ambassador Jorge Castaneda
Former Ambassador of Peru to India

needed to obtain greater efficiency in the agriculture sector.

In the agricultural sector, the resumption of the negotiation of the Free Trade Agreement between Peru and India provides an opportunity

and a challenge for both countries to create the necessary conditions to develop cooperation and technology transfers between them. It complies transfers of techniques, technologies, knowledge in order to strengthen existing national capacities in both countries as well as potential to expand bilateral trade to a wide spectrum of agriculture machinery manufactured

by India, such as tractors, equipment (plows, harrows, rotovators and cultivators, seed and fertilizer drills and other equipment), irrigation machinery (sprinkler machinery, drip irrigation and other irrigation machinery), harvesting machinery (harvesters, forage harvesters and other harvesting machines), and hay and forage (mowers and conditioners, balers and other hay and forage machines)

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Envoys of four foreign countries presented their credentials to President Draupadi Murmu at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi

Ukraine



Ambassador of Ukraine Dr Oleksandr Polishchuk presented his credentials to President Droupadi Murmu on 29 August 2023 at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi.

Estonia



Ambassador of Estonia Mrs. Marje Luup presenting her credentials to President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 29 August 2023.

Kingdom of Norway



President Droupadi Murmu accepts credentials from the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway, Elin Stener at Rashtrapati Bhavan on 29 August 2023.

Burkina Faso



President Smt. Droupadi Murmu received credentials from Dr Desire Boniface Some, Ambassador of Burkina Faso at Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi on 29 August 2023

Next Year will be the Year of Denmark in India

With several tedious efforts Editor Amit Mittal was able to snatch a short interview with the Ambassador of Denmark Mr. Freddy Svane, but it seemed to wriggle out of hand due to personnel engagement of the busy Ambassador. However, he did not let it slip away, he somehow managed a second appointment the same day. The Excellency obliged and spared some of his valuable time for a short interview. Overwhelmed at the magnanimity of the Ambassador, the Editor had few questions to ask which he has laid down for the readers below. And of course some snaps that could be shot hurriedly all for the readers:



Ambassador Mr Freddy Svane

1. There seems to be a strong effort to increase Bilateral trade, however, it was USD 4.52 billion in 2022 (import to India USD 3.13 billion and export in service by India valued at USD 1.39 billion). What do the figures for 2023 show? Increasing trend or a decline?

Ans :They show an increasing trend of nearly 40 per cent as far as trade of goods is concerned. It is even higher in the services sector. In 2022 export to India was of the order of \$ 7 billion which also includes services. It is expected to be still higher in 2023. There has been significant increase of Danish investments in India.

2. The major export items from India to Denmark are textiles, apparels and yarns related, vehicles and components, metal goods, iron and steel, leather and footwear, and travel goods.

Ans: India is also exporting pharmaceuticals to Denmark. Don't forget millets and rice from India.

Which rice is being sent to Denmark. The government has banned export of rice?

Ans :Lot of basmati rice is going to Denmark. Maybe it is the lot before the ban was enforced.

3. Major Danish exports to India are medicinal/pharmaceutical products, power generating machinery, industrial machinery, metal waste and

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India- Tanzania Relations on Firm Footing

In special media briefing Dammu Ravi, Secretary (ER) said President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania visited India from 9th and 10th of October. This was her first visit to India as President and also the first visit by any African Head of State after the entry of the African Union in the G20.

The last presidential visit from Tanzania was in June 2015 when President Kikwete visited India on a State Visit. Prime Minister Modi had visited Tanzania in July 2016.

The latest high level visit to Tanzania was by our External Affairs Minister from July this year, to co-chair the Joint Commission meeting during which he had also met with President Samia Suluhu.

India-Tanzania relations are on a firm footing. We

rounds of Joint Trade Committee meetings besides the Foreign Office Consultations and several joint working groups in numerous sectors. We also have a robust development partnership with Tanzania. India is the biggest development partner in Tanzania in the development cooperation both in terms of lines of credit, ITEC slots and ICCR scholarships.

India is the largest destination for Tanzania's exports and both countries have a bilateral trade of \$6.4 billion of which India's exports alone amount to the value of \$3.9 billion and the imports from Tanzania amount to \$2.4 billion in 2022-2023.

India is the fifth largest investor in Tanzania with about \$3.7 billion investments, covering several sectors.

both sides have agreed to elevate the relationship to that of a strategic partnership.

We are also exploring new areas of cooperation including in trade in local currencies. This is one of the topics discussed between the two leaders and also the proposal to set up an Indian industrial park in Tanzania and provide vocational training facilities for Tanzanian youth in Tanzania, with the cooperation of India so that this would create greater employment opportunities for the Tanzanian youth. We also are exploring ways and means to increase trade and economic cooperation between our two countries and several sectors were discussed today and both leaders have entrusted responsibility to identify new areas and new vistas of cooperation to our ministers.

India has offered an additional 1,000 ITEC training slots to Tanzania for capacity building in new and upcoming areas especially in smart ports, civil aviation, management, biotechnology and artificial intelligence.

Both countries have signed six Memorandum of Understandings in various fields that reflect the desire of the two countries to further intensify our interaction and strengthen our bilateral relations and these Memorandum of Understanding include one between the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology of India and the Ministry of Information Communication and

Information Technology of Tanzania on cooperation in the field of sharing successful digital solutions implemented at population scale for digital transformation.

Cultural exchange programs between the two countries have also been renewed for the years 2023 to 2027 and MoU for cooperation in sports were also signed and MoU for technical cooperation in the field of shipping particularly on sharing white shipping information.

MoU between the Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust of India and the Tanzania Investment Centre for setting up of an industrial park in Tanzania to help Indian manufacturing take place in that part of Tanzania. So, MoU between Cochin Shipping Yard and Marine Services Corporation Limited in maritime cooperation, that was another MoU signed.

The Government of Tanzania also announced that they would be joining the international Big Cat Alliance and the Global Biofuel Alliance. A lot of discussion also happened on ways and means to cooperate in the biofuel sector to make Tanzanians to move forward in the green energy area.

Tanzania and India are maritime neighbours with a long history of trade and people to people linkages. Being a littoral state of Africa, Tanzania has an important place in India's vision of SAGAR, Security And Growth for All in the Region; and also coincides with the African Union



President Droupadi Murmu hosted a banquet in the honour of H.E. Ms. Samia Suluhu Hassan, the President of the United Republic of Tanzania at Rashtrapati Bhavan

have robust bilateral institutional mechanisms and these meetings have been held regularly. These include ten rounds of Joint Commission meetings, two rounds of Joint Defence Coordination Committee meetings, four

About 630 projects have been executed by the Indian companies and generated about 60,000 jobs locally.

India-Tanzania relations have registered good progress in recent times

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Ambassador Freddy Svane makes a point

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ore, and organic chemicals.

As per Denmark Statistics figures, the value of total direct investment inflows from Denmark to India during 2000-2021 was USD 1.81 billion. Figures for current FY please ?

Ans :The investments from Denmark to India are increasing. Figures from investment from India to Denmark have been \$2 billion and from Denmark to India \$3 to 4 billion.

4. Around 200 Danish companies have invested in India in sectors such as shipping, renewable energy, environment, agriculture, food processing and smart urban development. Major Danish companies present in India include AP Moller Maersk Group, Vestas, LM Wind Power, Grundfos, Danfoss, Carlsberg, FL Smidth, Novo Nordisk, Haldar Topsoe, Ramboll, etc. Is the number of Danish investors static ?

Ans: According to a recent survey conducted by DI (Danish

Investments), a significant number of Danish companies are considering increasing their investments in India. The survey found that one-third of the Danish companies surveyed expressed their readiness to increase their investments in India.

What problems are Danish investors facing in India ? What is the total investment of these companies ?

Ans: There are tons of bureaucratic problems in India. The ease of doing business has had little effect. There are several non-tariff barriers. It is a time consuming process.

5. As per the information available from Invest in Denmark, the total value of Indian investments in Denmark is about USD 560 million. Around 25 Indian companies are present in Denmark in various sectors, including IT, renewable energy and engineering.

Ans : Indian companies present in Denmark also include Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services, L&T Infotech, HCL, Infosys etc.

6. To commemorate 75 years of India's Independence talks on India@75 by eminent persons, school outreach programme with interactive sessions, youth cricket workshop, rangoli, art and dance workshops; essay writing, painting and poster making were organised in Denmark, but found no mention of these in India. Why ?

Ans: Next year 2024 is the 75 th anniversary of diplomatic ties between India and Denmark. It will be marked on a grand scale. This will bring Danish culture closer to people of India..

I suggest exchange of such events between the two countries to increase people to people contact. Don't you hold such opinion ?

7. Which is the most important MoU between the two countries ?

Ans: Water and Renewable Energy are important aspects. Next year 2024 you will see the year of Denmark in India. There will be a number of events conducted to raise awareness about Danish culture and people. You will see the beginning from next month with Air India making direct flights to Denmark three times a week. This will bring people to people ties closer.



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vision for peace and security in Africa with focus on development of blue economy, ocean economy for accelerated economic growth. Both countries have extensive maritime cooperation, extensive hydrography survey was done by India between 2013 and 2017 for major Tanzanian ports, in particular Dar es Salaam, Tanga and Zanzibar and Pemba.

In addition to several ships visiting, the first ever trilateral maritime exercise with Tanzania and Mozambique was held in October 2022 and the first ever bilateral EEZ surveillance was held in July 2023. We have also seen a growth in the areas of defence, there have been visits by the Defence Minister of Tanzania to India in August 2022 and February 2023 during which both sides agreed to expand the scope of defence cooperation during the second Joint Defence Cooperation Committee meeting of June 2023.

A five-year roadmap for defence cooperation was concluded between the two sides and a six-member Indian military training team is posted at the Command and Staff College in Tanzania.

Two defence expos have already been held in Dar es Salaam, one in May last year and October this year, which saw participation of several Indian defence companies in Tanzania. Both sides are currently negotiating some defence deals.

In the development cooperation space, Tanzania is India's biggest partner, seeking...having obtained the constitutional financing and capacity-building

programs with our LOCs amount to \$1.1 billion, of which a significant part of it has been spent mostly for irrigation projects in Tanzania. We are supplying, in 24 towns, water supply has been provided under this Indian LOCs.

Our ITEC scholarships in total amount about 5,000 scholarships so far and annually we offer to Tanzania about 750 training slots, which includes 450 ITEC, 226 defence and 70 ICCR long-term scholarships. So India remains the number one destination for Tanzanian nationals for medical tourism and higher technical education. As you know, recently the IIT overseas campus was set up in Zanzibar, and this has been hailed as a very significant move by the Tanzanian President, she has thanked, deeply appreciated Prime Minister for this gesture of taking India's higher education to Africa and to be able to provide that technical education of a high level to African students. So already from this October, the first three sessions will start with several students already enrolled. The institution will provide world-class technical education to Tanzanian youth and also at the pan-African level. It is a reflection of our commitment to the global South in the spirit of South-South cooperation and for us to share the expertise of the best of our institutions with our friends and partners in Africa. Indian hospitals are also showing great interest in investing in Tanzania.

Both sides also discussed issues related to reform of the United Nations. Both countries are in agreement to work together on the much needed reform of the

UN Security Council through expansion in both categories of membership. Tanzania also gave the support for Indian non-permanent election bid for the term 2028-2029 and Tanzania congratulated India on a successful G20 presidency and the G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration. On 10th October, President Samia Suluhu Hassan will attend the India-Tanzanian Business and Investment Forum.

She will also hold one-on-one meetings with the key Indian business leaders seeking investments into Tanzania.

So the visit of President Samia Suluhu Hassan is expected to give a further impetus to bilateral relations and promote economic linkages between our two countries, including investment in Tanzania by Indian entrepreneurs.

Answering questions by journalists, Mr Ravi said some amount of transactions have already happened, although it's a very small amount. About 50 million dollar worth of items in local currency has already taken place. It is still very small, but I think it's a good beginning.

Both leaders again discussed about the need for cooperation in the maritime security, particularly in controlling piracy and drug trafficking and terrorism. So this is what was discussed today, but we believe that Tanzania being part of the Indian Ocean, is very much part of the Indo-Pacific region and cooperation in this area is very important for both sides.

Is there any additional line of credit offered to Tanzania and especially for defence, as you said that some defence deals are under negotiation?

Mr. Ravi said this is an area of immense interest to Tanzania and we believe that the line of credit offered by India, \$1.1 billion, is very well utilized. We have done about four projects under this so far out of six and these have been very well executed so far, and they are benefiting the Tanzanian people in particular to reaching out water supply to almost six to eight million people.

And 24 towns are getting water supply under the lines of credit.

The President today deeply appreciated India's gesture, offer of line of credit, which has been very well utilized. But of course there is greater interest to ask, to seek cooperation and a line of credit for other projects. One of which is they are seeking a similar kind of water supply for a new capital, Dodoma. Tanzania has a new capital now.

They want to seek water supply from Lake Victoria, we have to wait for their request in details for us to be able to respond to it.

Of course they are also asking for greater cooperation in trade, whether trade supply LOC can be provided, is also one more request they have made but we will have to see the details of how we can make it happen.

I think the defence LOC is another item where they have definitely asked for buying defence equipment from India and they also sought supply lines in that area. But we have to see how we can take it forward because that requires detailing of the items and the repayment issue, the schedules of payments. So those details we will eventually internally discuss amongst the Ministry of Defence and the concerned line ministries that how we can execute it.

India's Ranking Slides on Global Hunger Index

India's ranking in the Global Hunger Index 2023 is 111 (slipped from the 2022 index of 107) out of 125 countries.

India has fallen to the 111th position out of 125 countries, whereas Pakistan has secured the 102nd position.

India ranks 107th out of 121 countries in the GHI 2022 rankings. With a score of 29.1, India has a level of hunger that is serious.

- India has slipped 6 positions from its 2021 rank of 101.

- According to the latest data, India has the highest child wasting rate of all countries covered in the GHI.

- India is ranked behind most of its neighbouring countries. Their ranks are:

- Pakistan – 99
- Sri Lanka – 64
- Nepal – 81
- Bangladesh – 84

The 2023 Global Hunger Index is the 18th edition of the Hunger Index (since 2006).

GHI ranks countries on a 100-point scale, 0 representing zero/no hunger. The GHI scores are based on four indicators. Taken together, the component indicators reflect deficiencies in calories as well as in micronutrients. Thus, the GHI reflects both aspects of hunger (under-nutrition and malnutrition).

- From 2000 to 2015, India made good strides in the GHI rank while from 2015, India has advanced on the GHI by only 0.5 points.

- The 2023 GHI score for the world is 18.3, which is considered moderate.

- Globally, the share of people who are undernourished has increased to 9.2%.

- The regions with the highest hunger levels in the world are South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

- Each region has a GHI score of 27, indicating 'serious' hunger.

- Latin America and the Caribbean is the only region in the world whose GHI scores have worsened between 2015 and 2023.

- China is among the top 20 countries that each have a GHI score of less than 5.

- The region with the lowest GHI score is Europe and Central Asia, whose score of 6.0 is considered 'low'.

- According to the report, the fight against global hunger has stagnated because of multiple factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war, climate change, etc.

- The Indian Government has rejected the 2023 GHI rank of 111 for India, just like it did for the previous two years, citing it "flawed measure of hunger that doesn't reflect India's true position".

- The GHI responded by

saying that it uses the same data sources for all countries to calculate the respective country scores.

Government of India's Response to India's GHI 2022 Ranking

The Union Ministry of Women and Child Development issued a criticism of the latest GHI ranking (2022) in which India's rank was lowered to 107, saying that, 'consistent effort is yet again visible to taint India's image as a Nation that does not fulfill the food security and nutritional requirements of its population'.

The government said that the index is an erroneous measure of hunger and suffers from serious methodological issues. The report is not only disconnected from ground reality but also chooses to deliberately ignore efforts made by the Government to ensure food Security for the population, especially during the Covid Pandemic.

The table below mentions India's performance in the last three years in the Global Hunger Index.

Global Hunger Index – India's Rank	
2021 GHI	101 out of 116
2020 GHI	94 out of 107
2019 GHI	102 out of 117
2018 GHI	103 out of 119

The Global Hunger Index 2019 report mentioned a rise of 37 million in the number of hungry people as compared to 2015.

Furthermore, the hunger level in multiple countries still hasn't reduced or has got higher than 2010 and approximately 45 countries are set to fail to achieve 'low' levels of hunger by 2030. India and Other Countries on the Global Hunger Index

- India is behind every other country except Afghanistan amongst the South Asian countries.

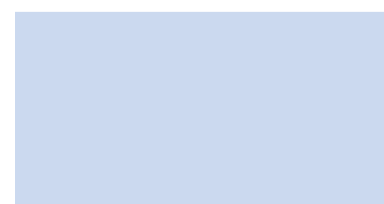
- Indonesia, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan (in that order) are all ahead of India.

- 17 countries including China, Belarus and Turkey have the top rank in Global Hunger Index 2020, with a score less than 5.

Which state is most hungry in India?

In the SHI, Bihar, Jharkhand, and Chhattisgarh scored 35, which places them in the 'alarming' category.

Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Assam, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Tripura, Maharashtra, and West Bengal all scored above the national average (29).



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Peru and India FTA negotiators should take into account the above areas of potential cooperation in the agricultural sector when negotiating cooperation between both countries.

Technical cooperation can be implemented through bilateral means, or through South-South or triangular cooperation mechanisms in which exchanges of knowledge, skills, resources and technical know-how are the tools. Being that India is the largest tractor manufacturer in the world and that Peru and the rest of the Andean Community have a large deficit of tractors, it creates an opportunity for Indian manufacturers to benefit from an expanded market with zero tariff rates.

The “Catalogue of the Peruvian Offer of International Technical Cooperation 2022 - 2024”, identifies successful experiences developed by Peruvian institutions that can be shared with India in the following sectors: i) Climate Change, Forestry and Biodiversity; ii) Health and Food Security; iii) Technological Innovation, TICs and Supply Chains. (See ANNEX 1). The main forms of cooperation are the exchange of experiences, short stays of experts, courses or seminars, internships, among others. The entire offer can be carried out in a virtual or physical format, with Spanish being the prevailing language, and English used to a lesser extent.

India on the other hand, has been adopting measures to foster

technology and innovation in the agricultural sector to build an agri tech ecosystem in the country, supporting farmers in areas where they need the most help. These are best practices that Peru also needs to consider in order to foster technology and innovation in its agricultural sector.

It is noteworthy that due to the implementation of the above initiatives, India’s rural ecosystem is larger and growing steadily. The rural economy contributed to nearly half the nation’s overall GDP in 2019–2020 and employs 350 million people (68% of the total workforce). Over the last five years, the rural ecosystem has grown ~10% per annum (p.a.)—and still has strong headroom for growth. Here is a list of these initiatives:

- Promote farmer-producer organizations (FPO) among small and marginal farmers by providing matching equity grants, which are conditional awards that require an organization to raise a specified portion of the grant through solicitation of new money and/or in-kind contributions. It is complemented by the TCI FPO Platform for India is an interactive data platform offering a wealth of comprehensive data on Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) in India. FPOs play a crucial role in empowering small and marginal farmers by providing better market access, resources, and knowledge sharing.

- Development of the “agri stack” which is a unified database of agricultural data set to facilitate bringing

together various stakeholders to improve agriculture, and enable better outcomes and results for the farmers by using data and digital services. This enables agri tech companies to customize offerings and products based on farmers’ needs, which vary by land size, crop sown, and soil conditions.

- Digital soil-health cards. A digital soil-health-card program entails mapping soil composition and quality at the farmer level. It could help agri tech companies in India to promote precision-farming initiatives and tailor offerings for specific farmer groups. It is a printed report that a farmer will be handed over for each of his holdings. It will contain the status of his soil with respect to 12 parameters, namely N, P, K (Macro-nutrients); S (Secondary- nutrient); Zn, Fe, Cu, Mn, Bo (Micro - nutrients); and pH, EC, OC (Physical parameters). Based on this, the SHC will also indicate fertilizer recommendations and soil amendment required for the farm.

The card will contain an advisory based on the soil nutrient status of a farmer's holding. It will show recommendations on dosage of different nutrients needed. Further, it will advise the farmer on the fertilizers and their quantities they should apply, and also the soil amendments that they should undertake, so as to realize optimal yields.

- Digitally enabled direct benefit transfer in fertilizer sales. (DBT) is a recent policy implemented by the central government,

wherein the fertilizer companies will be paid subsidies only after retailers have sold fertilizer to farmers/buyers after the identification of beneficiaries using the unique identification number (Aadhaar) through Point-of-Sale machines. The policy intends to improve the targeting of the beneficiaries, avoid delays in subsidy payments and reduce the fiscal burden.

Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) is a marketing board established by state governments in India to ensure farmers are safeguarded from exploitation by large retailers, as well as ensuring the farm to retail price spread does not reach excessively high levels

All the food produce must be brought to the market and sales are made through auction. The market place i.e, Mandi is set up in various places within the states. These markets geographically divide the state. Licenses are issued to the traders to operate within a market. The mall owners, wholesale traders, retail traders are not given permission to purchase the produce from the farmers directly.

National Agriculture Market (eNAM). This pan-India electronic online trading portal connects existing Agriculture Produce Market Committee (APMC) mandis, forming a unified national market for agricultural commodities that ensures better prices for farmers through the transparent auction process.

Agricultural Accelerator

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Onion Prices Slowly Going Through the Roof

Price of onions has witnessed a huge increase to almost double the previous price affecting household budgets. Onion traders are putting the blame for the sudden spike on a shortage in supply. Over the past fortnight, supply of onions has dropped 40 per cent decreasing from 400 vehicles a day to 250, which is alarming.

Whatever be the reason behind the spurt in onion prices, it could be a repeat of 1989 for the government. The BJP led Delhi government had lost due to high prices of onions then.

The union government on Saturday imposed a minimum export price (MEP) of \$800 a tonne (₹67 a kg) on onion exports between 29 October and 31 December to ensure domestic availability.

But making the export of onions expensive does not serve the purpose. If during the festive season, onion prices are more than doubled then it will eventually affect the entire market. The move comes against the backdrop of rising onion prices owing to a delay in the arrival of kharif onions, which are now expected to hit the market from Maharashtra, the top grower, in December.

Onion prices have shot up more than 50% in the past two weeks to ₹80 a kg in the retail markets of Delhi, which is slowly inching towards 100 rupees a kilo. Benchmark prices of the kitchen essential in Maharashtra's Lasalgaon, India's onion-trade hub, increased 58% in two

weeks to ₹38 a kg on Tuesday. Average prices in key onion growing districts of Maharashtra are in the range of ₹45 to ₹48 a kg.

Traders said reduced arrivals of onions was the primary reason for the rise in prices. The arrival of stored onions has declined by about 40% in the past fortnight. Another reason is the delayed arrivals of the kharif harvest from the key onion-growing states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh.

Additionally, the sowing of kharif onions in Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh has been low as farmers incurred losses over the past two years. Below-normal rainfall in these states has further reduced onion production.

Traders expect onion prices to rise further until the new kharif crop hits markets in December, nearly two months late.

"The measure has been taken to maintain sufficient availability of onions for domestic consumers at affordable prices (as the quantity of stored rabi 2023 onion is declining) by curbing the quantity of onion exports," an official release read.

Earlier, a senior government official said that a floor price for onions was being considered as exports were up significantly in October, causing an increase in domestic prices.

In response to growing demand and delayed production when prices shot up in August, the union government sold onions to consumers at a concessional rate and imposed a 40% duty on

onion exports.

Since mid-August the government has offloaded 170,000 tonnes of onion in major consumption centres across the country and supplied it to consumers at ₹25 a kg through mobile vans operated by NCCF and

NAFED from its buffer stock of 500,000 tonnes, the release stated. To boost domestic availability, the government will also procure an additional 200,000 tons of onion for the buffer, taking the total stock to about 700,000 tonnes.

Attempts to control spiralling prices

Though the festive season has already set in for the past two months and sales are in full swing with retailers making a quick buck the government has woken up to take a series of steps hoping for price stabilisation.

To ensure sufficient availability of sugar the government has continued 'restriction' of sugar exports till further orders. This would also ensure healthy stocks of sugar in the country and maintenance of consistency in India's efforts towards greener fuel under Ethanol Blended with Petrol (EBP) Programme.

The government has extended the date of restrictions on export of Sugar (Raw Sugar, White Sugar, Refined Sugar and Organic sugar) beyond 31st October, 2023 till further orders.

In addition, Government is monitoring the monthly dispatches of sugar mills to ensure sufficient availability of sugar in the domestic market.

Appropriate policies on sugarcane and sugar have ensured that sugar mills have made payment of

about ₹ 1.09 lakh crore and thus, cleared more than 95 per cent of cane dues of Sugar Season 2022-23 while 99.9 per cent of cane dues of earlier seasons have been cleared. Thus, cane dues are at all-time low level and efforts are being made to clear the balance dues also at the earliest.

The Government has taken several pre-emptive measures to restrict export of rice from India. The export of broken rice was prohibited and an export duty of 20% was imposed on non-basmati white rice on 9th September 2022. Subsequently, export of non-basmati white rice was also prohibited on 20th July 2023.

In FY 2022-23, India exported 17.8 million tonnes of non-basmati rice and 4.6 million tonnes of basmati rice. The purpose of extending the duty regime on parboiled rice is to keep a check on price rise of this crucial staple and maintain adequate availability in the domestic market. This measure seems to have the intended effect, as there has been a decline of 65.50 per cent in quantity terms and 56.29 per cent in value

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The 'Baagh'

I had not imagined that the drive to the wildlife resort would be so adventurous, driving through the jungle path used by elephants and tigers, at times. Huge Deodar trees lined both sides of the wild track. From the Ram Nagar Barrage it was a wild drive of almost 25 kilometres through the jungle to the resort.

At times I felt as if I saw an elephant among the trees, a wild tusker which could overtake a car speeding at 60 kilometre per hour. A tusker in the wild had the right of the way, one had to stop and give way to the tusker without annoying it or disturbing its "family life".

At one spot I stopped, pulled out my mobile from the dashboard, but just to discover that there was no signal in the jungle. I could feel goose bumps rising up all over my body. Driving slowly on the broken path it took almost an hour and a half to cover the short distance.

A turn onto a pathway and we were facing the reception. A large picture of a tiger sat behind the reception clerk. We did the necessary paper work and soon were on our way to our room.



At the reception sat a tiger picture larger than life

It seemed a long walk through the green patch of lawn to the block of rooms. Ninety rooms in all the Baagh maintains. We reached one block where we were supposed to walk up a staircase to the room.



The passage to the living area

The room was well kept with amenities like tea-coffee maker and bottles of water all for the guests. Though there was no need the room had an air conditioner and a fan. The large window looked out of the room into the greenery outside. Attached to the room was a neat and clean bathroom with individual geyser. All well laid out.



The Room



The Bathroom

It all looked so splendid that I felt like lying down on the bed and take a nap. But it was getting lunch time and there was grumbling from the stomach. So, I agreed to walk down to the restaurant which was again a few steps into the greenery.

The restaurant looked all ready, laid out for guests. I walked up to a corner table and made myself comfortable waiting for the lunch. Looked up the menu on the table and decided to have something typical of the region.

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Attempts to control spiralling prices

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terms in the case of Parboiled rice.

In spite of prohibition on Non-Basmati White Rice, India has decided to relax restrictions on the export of specific quantities of non-basmati white rice to specific countries.

The Blue Moon

The 'Baagh'

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The Restaurant

I ate till full upto the brim. The food was spicy and tasty, north Indian typical. Tandoori rotis were crunchy, hot out of the oven. There was a chicken preparation called "Murg taka tak" well cooked and spicy.

Lunch time was slowly getting over and so were my eyelids closing, for a nap. I had rather walk to my room or else someone else will have to carry me to the room with my tummy full.



The lawn in the evening

As the evening fell, the sky became violet. The sun was setting somewhere behind the hills in the distance. I was wondering if a leopard would come peeping into the rooms. Perhaps, I was not so lucky. Wait for the morning safari which would take me into the forest looking for tigers.



The Balcony with a view of the hillocks & greenery

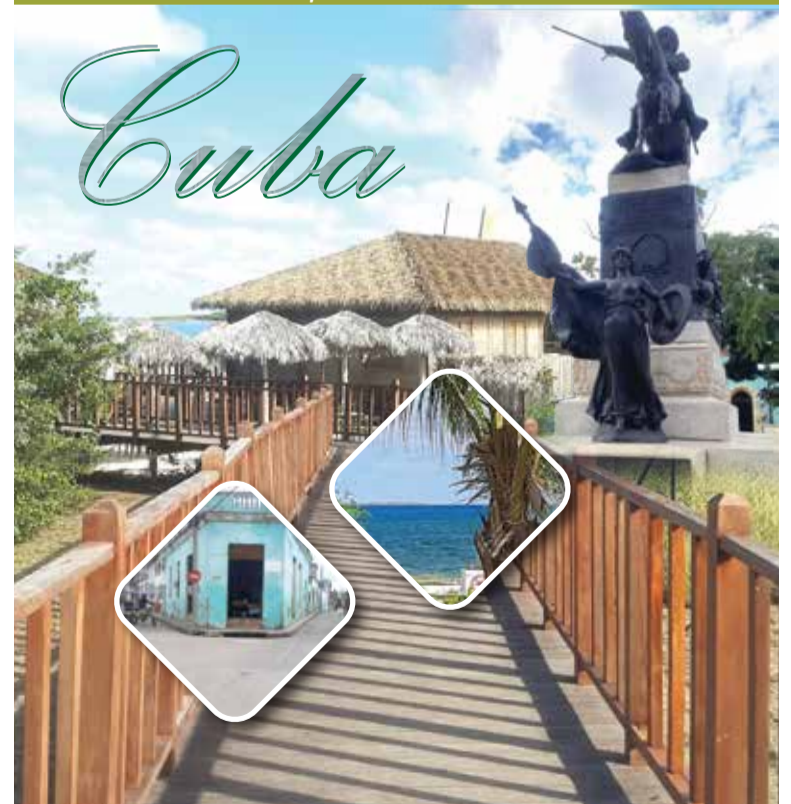
Back in the room I had no option, or rather no intention of going for a walk. So I simply sat down in the balcony gazing at the hillocks and the small trees swaying in the wind.

I wanted to go looking for tigers in the forest, but the day was gone and the first safari available will be next morning. If I was looking for adventure, I could go back from the resort on to the same track which brought me here.

As the night fell I was warned by one of the resort staff to be careful while coming out of the room at night, there could be a leopard sitting outside.



in *Cuba*



What will Israeli Troops Face Inside the 'Spider's Web' of Hamas Tunnels?

As Israeli forces push deeper into northern Gaza in its most devastating war yet with Hamas, one of the greatest threats to both its troops and the 2.3 million Palestinians trapped inside the seaside enclave is buried underground.

A vast labyrinth of tunnels built by the Hamas militant group is estimated to stretch for hundreds of kilometres beneath Gaza, hiding militants, their rocket arsenal and the survivors among more than 200 hostages taken after the October 7 terrorist attack on Israel. Clearing and collapsing these tunnels — some up to 80 metres deep and which one freed hostage has described as a "spider's web" — is crucial for Israel's campaign to dismantle Hamas.

But fighting in densely populated urban areas and moving underground could strip the Israeli military of some of its technological advantages and give Hamas the upper hand.

Why does tunnel warfare raise the risks?

Tunnel battles are considered some of the most difficult for armies to fight because they create plenty of opportunities for ambush.

"[Hamas militants have] time to think about where they are going to be and there's millions of hidden locations they can be in." "They get to choose the time of the engagement — you can't see them but they can see you."

Military analyst Peter Layton, who is a research fellow at the Griffith Asia Institute, says it raises

fears that militants can attack Israeli soldiers from behind.

"The Israelis are worried that as they roll forward, Hamas will come up from tunnels which open up in their rear," he says.

During a 2014 war, Hamas militants killed at least 11 Israeli soldiers after they infiltrated Israel through tunnels.

In another incident, an Israeli officer, Lieutenant Hadar Goldin, was dragged into a tunnel inside Gaza and killed. Hamas has been holding his remains since then.

Ariel Bernstein, a former Israeli soldier who fought in that war, described urban combat in northern Gaza as a mix of "ambushes, traps, hideouts, snipers".

He recalls the narrow tunnels as having a disorientating effect, creating blind spots as Hamas fighters appeared seemingly out of nowhere to attack.

"It was like I was fighting ghosts," Mr Bernstein says.

Daphné Richemond-Barak, a professor at Israel's Reichman University and author of the book *Underground Warfare*, says many of the Israeli military's technological advantages will collapse under these conditions.

"When you enter a tunnel, it's very narrow, and it's dark and it's moist, and you very quickly lose a sense of space and time," she says.

"You have this fear of the unknown, who's coming around the corner? ... Is

this going to be an ambush?"

"Nobody can come and rescue you. You can barely communicate with the outside world, with your unit."

Israeli forces will face an unprecedented challenge battling militants while trying to avoid killing hostages held below ground, US officials have said.

"Hamas holds all the cards as far as the hostages go," Dr Layton says.

Israeli sources say they also face an enemy that has regrouped and learned from previous operations.

"There are going to be a lot of booby traps," Amnon Sofrin, the former commander of the Israeli Combat Intelligence Corps, says.

"They have thermobaric weapons [aerosol bombs] that they didn't have in 2021, which are more lethal."

The former brigadier general says he also believes Hamas has acquired a lot of anti-tank weapon systems that they will use to try and hit Israel's armoured personnel carriers and tanks.

Mr Sofrin, who was also previously head of the intelligence directorate with Israel's Mossad spy agency, says Hamas will also be trying to kidnap soldiers.

Dr Richemond-Barak says Hamas's tactics have evolved due to the conflicts in Syria and Iraq.

"What the [Israeli military] is likely to face inside the

tunnels is also all of the experience and all of the knowledge that has been gained by groups like ISIS [Islamic State] and has been ... passed on to Hamas," she says.

So how will Israeli troops clear the tunnels?

Since 2004, the Israeli military has had a dedicated unit for locating and destroying the tunnels called Samur.

While the military has sometimes used remote-controlled robots to do so, fully dislodging Hamas will require these specialist combatants to actually enter the tunnels.

Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant has said he expects a difficult ground offensive, warning "it will take a long time" to dismantle the vast network.

Mr Gallant said that Hamas would confiscate fuel for generators that pump air into the tunnels.

"For air, they need oil. For oil, they need us," he said.

Still, clearing the tunnels with hostages trapped inside will be a "slow, methodical process," according to the Soufan Center, a New York security think tank.

Israelis will have to rely on robots and other intelligence to map tunnels and their potential traps.

Military analyst Dr Layton says "separating the fighters from civilians will be very difficult" as the ground offensive unfolds in the densely populated Gaza Strip.

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Israel Faces Brutal Gaza Warfare

A ground operation in Gaza is expected to escalate and prolong the war, make it much more devastating for both sides and result in mass civilian casualties.

"There is no good ground option in Gaza.

"It will be very, very messy and bloody," head of US think tank says.

Israel has one of the most technologically advanced militaries in the world.

It has spent decades painstakingly developing its defence capabilities, and has access to the best of the best US weapons systems.

The United States also provides Israel with around \$US3.8 billion (\$5.9 billion) a year in military aid.

In contrast, Hamas militants are heavily armed and have received weapons and technology assistance from Iran. But while Israel may have advanced technologies, thousands of tanks and sophisticated fighter jets, urban warfare can completely change the dynamic.

"Hamas is forcing Israel to fight the way Hamas wants."

Hamas is taking an asymmetric, unconventional approach, flying over fences fitted with advanced sensors using paragliders and bulldozing through the border fence.

On the ground in Gaza, analysts expect rapid improvisation and adaptation will play a big role, and it will come down to old-fashioned "messy" fighting between Hamas militants and Israeli defence forces.

There has been no word on how many ground troops might enter Gaza, but Israel Defense Force (IDF)

spokesperson, Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, on Sunday said they were "gradually expanding the ground activity and the scope of our forces in the Gaza Strip".

Ahead of the ground operation, the Israeli military called up around 360,000 reservists — on top of some 170,000 active defence force personnel.

Israel says Hamas has some 30,000 fighters. They generally get around in utility vehicles and motorbikes with machine guns and small arms.

Meanwhile, Israel has armoured personnel carriers and around 1,700 combat-ready tanks to support any street-to-street battles.

But in a densely populated environment like Gaza, where threats are harder to detect, size may not always be what matters.

Often, close-quarter settings can favour guerilla groups.

"If you look at any kind of urban fight, the defenders can hang on for a really, really long time, and all the time inflicting casualties."

Tanks versus drones

The Israeli military used to be known as "the masters of armoured combat."

Their Merkava main battle tanks are the backbone of the IDF's Armoured Corps and considered among the best in the world.

But a tank is best when it is shooting a target several kilometres away. And when you bring them into a city, all aspects of a tank can be threatened — especially by drones.

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), a military and geopolitical research institute, said videos have shown quadcopter-dropped munitions destroying an Israeli Merkava tank.

Hamas has likely stockpiled large amounts of drones, both developing them independently and with assistance from Iran, analysts say.

A video the militant group released after its October 7 attacks also showed it has larger drones similar to the Iranian ones used by Russian forces in Ukraine.

As one of the world's leading unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) users and manufacturers, Israel has its own vast drone capabilities — for surveillance and combat. It also has sophisticated counter-drone technology, but urban environments also make them more difficult to use.

Rockets and missiles

In past conflicts, Hamas militants have defended Gaza using rockets, mortars, anti-tank guided missiles, and rocket-propelled grenades.

On Sunday, Hamas said it had been firing mortars against Israeli forces in north Gaza and had hit Israeli tanks with missiles.

Israeli intelligence estimates the total number of rockets available in Gaza was around 30,000, including some with a range of about 250 kilometres.

While Iran and Syria have smuggled rockets to Gaza in the past, many now

appear to have been locally produced. "The less sophisticated rockets you don't need Iranian support."

Ali Baraka, head of Hamas National Relations Abroad, is reported to have said in an interview with Russia Today's Arabic news channel RTArabic that the militant group has been preparing for two years.

"We have local factories for everything. We have rockets with ranges of 250km, 160km, 80km, 45km, and 10km," he was quoted as saying.

"We have factories for mortars and their shells ... We have factories for Kalashnikovs and their bullets."

Hamas has also been known to use a wide-range of anti-tank guided missiles, including the Soviet Malyutkas and Konkurs.

Hamas claimed it fired around 5,000 rockets in 20 minutes in its October 7 attack, which is almost more than the amount used in the 11-day Gaza conflict in 2021.

Although most were intercepted, the mass attack saturated Israel's Iron Dome air defence system with several rockets getting through.

Several thousand rockets are reported to have been fired towards Israel since the conflict broke out.

If the Iran-backed Hezbollah gets involved — the militant Shia Muslim group based in Lebanon — then Israel will be facing much larger bombardments with much

more sophisticated missiles.

Hezbollah is believed to have around 100,000 rockets and missiles of various types.

Tunnels and 'human shields'

In terms of air power, the IDF has around 300 fighter ground attack jets.

To defeat Hamas, the Israeli military will have to conquer tunnels they call the 'Gaza metro'

An Israeli invasion of Gaza will face an enemy that has built a formidable armoury, dug a vast tunnel network to evade attackers and shown in past ground wars it can exact a heavier toll on Israeli troops each time.

In the lead-up to the ground operation, Mr Netanyahu boasted about "raining down hellfire on Hamas" and killing "thousands of terrorists" in its aerial strikes.

The IDF also claimed its fighter jets struck multiple Hamas command centres in Gaza. Now to reach militants, soldiers will

need to go door-to-door — or underground.

Hamas has spent around 15 years building a warren of tunnels that runs underneath much of Gaza, which Israeli troops call the "Gaza Metro".

If the IDF wants to destroy Hamas, they will need to fight militants in their vast network of tunnels.

Israel has a small number of GBU-28 "bunker buster" bombs, which could prove useful to destroy Hamas tunnels. They are designed to penetrate targets deep underground and have been used by the US in operations against Al Qaeda in Afghanistan.

The IDF have in the past alleged that Hamas uses the tunnels as weapons caches, bunkers, command centres and a concealed transportation artery for terrorists and weapons, including rocket launchers.

It is also suspected that many hostages are also located in the tunnels.

"It's likely Hamas will distribute hostages and put them in strategically

important places for Hamas, and essentially use them as human shields."

How dirty could it get?

Already thousands of Gazans are believed to have died in the intense aerial bombardments Israel launched in the wake of the Hamas terrorist attacks on 7 October.

Israel says 1,400 people, mainly civilians, were killed in the militants' cross-border rampage and more than 200 were taken hostage.

"The price of victory against Hamas will be very high ... There's not a lot of good options for Israel here, other than expressing rage."

Israel is known to have weapons such as cluster bombs, which pose a high risk to civilians, and has also long maintained an undeclared nuclear weapons program.

But regardless of what's used in an expanded ground operation, in the small enclave that was home to 2.1 million people, "there will inevitably be major civilian casualties".

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"Hamas's tactics are to mix itself up so that its fighters get some protection from the Israelis," he says.

"The chances of the civilian death toll rising are certainly high — the two will be intermixed and intertwined. So urban warfare is an ugly business."

The Israeli military accused Hamas of using Gaza's main hospital, al-Shifa, as a shield for tunnels and operational centres.

"Hamas terrorists operate inside and under Shifa hospital and other hospitals in Gaza," Rear Admiral Daniel Hagari, Israel's chief military spokesman, said.

Israel has made similar claims before, but has not substantiated them. Little is known about Hamas's tunnels and other infrastructure, and the claims could not be independently verified.

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Fund and digital public infrastructure. India government has recently announced a new fund for promoting the agri tech ecosystem. It is expected to hugely benefit agri tech startups and provide them with a much-needed boost, in turn transforming agricultural practices, increasing productivity and profitability. By encouraging young entrepreneurs in rural areas to set up startups, the fund aims to bring innovative and affordable solutions for challenges faced by farmers.

ANNEX 1

Climate Change, Forests and Biodiversity

Offer 1: Mechanisms for civil society participation in the management of Natural Protected Areas (NPAs).

Offer 2: Preparation of Non-detrimental Findings (NDF) for species listed in the Appendixes of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

Offer 3: Instruments for efficient use of materials and solid waste management.

Offer 4: Economic instruments for the sustainable management of ecosystem services.

Offer 5: International technical exchange panels on

environmental enforcement.

Health And Food Safety

Offer 23: Training of facilitators and training in the Farmer Field School, methodology for Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

Offer 24: Geospatial Integrated Health Network System (GEORIS)

Technological Innovation, Tics And Productive Chains

Offer 25: Applications of molecular biological techniques in agriculture.

Offer 27: Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) for potato cultivation, processing and promotion.

Offer 28: Technical assistance for the implementation and/or strengthening of the

Aquaculture Extension Service.

Offer 29: Exchange of experiences to prevent, deter and eliminate illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing: Monitoring, Enforcement and Satellite Tracking System.

Offer 30: Technology transfer, training and technical assistance for the aquaculture and fisheries production chain.

Offer 31: Good practices for the management of technological services in the wood and furniture industry.

Offer 32: Management of technological services for the timber forest industry.

Offer 33: Technology foresight.

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