

PRAYAS4IAS

AN INITIATIVE BY THE PRAYAS INDIA

SPECIAL ISSUE MAY WEEK 3



CHINA'S ZHURONG ROVER



Special Issue

May (Week 3)

Contents

All about Hamas	2
All about the Narada bribery case.....	4
All you need to know about China's 'Zhurong' rover.....	5
All about Rajiv Gandhi's assassination and the downfall of LTTE	7

All about Hamas

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: *Israel-Hamas agree to ceasefire.*

Background

- When Israeli troops stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque on May 10, the day Israel observed as Jerusalem Day this year, commemorating the capture of the eastern part of the city in 1967, Hamas, the Islamist militant group that runs Gaza Strip, immediately issued an ultimatum.
- Hamas asked Israel to pull back all troops from the Al-Aqsa compound, and stop all actions to evict Palestinian families from East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah by the evening. Israel ignored it. In the evening, Hamas launched dozens of rockets from Gaza.
- Israel responded with hellfire on Gaza, launching its biggest operation against Hamas since the 2014 attack on the strip.
- This is an ongoing story. Ever since Hamas took over Gaza in 2007, there were at least three major conflicts between Israel and Hamas.
- It's an irony that Hamas, whose founding members were encouraged by Israel in the 1970s and 80s against Yasser Arafat's secular national movement, has turned out to be Israel's biggest rival in the Palestinian territories.

The roots

- The roots of Hamas go back to the Muslim Brotherhood. The Brotherhood, established by Egyptian Islamist Hasan al-Banna in 1928, made a presence in the British-ruled Palestine in the 1930s. Its focus had been on reorienting Muslim society, while the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), founded in 1964, championed the Palestinian nationalist sentiments .
- After Israel captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and Gaza Strip from Egypt in 1967, the PLO, vowing to liberate the whole of Palestine, would start a guerilla war against Israel. The Muslim Brotherhood would still stay away from politics, but their leadership was increasingly critical of the PLO's secular nationalism.
- The Brotherhood's approach was that time for "jihad" had not come yet and they should first rebuild a stronger, pious Islamic society — they called it "the upbringing of an Islamic generation". During this time, Israel established contacts with the Brotherhood leadership in the occupied territories.
- Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the physically challenged, half-blind cleric of the Brotherhood, established al-Mujamma' al-Islam (The Islamic Centre) in 1973. Israel recognised the Centre first as a charity and then as an association. This allowed Yassin to raise funds, build mosques and set up educational institutions, including the Islamic University of Gaza.
- But the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran would change the landscape of Islamist politics across West Asia. Islamist organisations, having witnessed the political success of the Mullahs in Iran, started becoming politically more ambitious and active.

The rise

- Hamas was established after the first intifada broke out in 1987. The occupied territories were swept by a mass uprising.
- The PLO called on its supporters to join the intifada. The Brotherhood also found it an opportunity to enter the struggle against the occupation. On December 14, the Brotherhood, under the leadership of Yassin, issued a leaflet, asking Palestinians to stand up to the Israeli occupation.



- In January, they issued another leaflet under the name Harakat al-Muqawamah al-Islamiyyah (the Islamic Resistance Movement) — in short, Hamas, which means “zeal” in Arabic. In 1989, Hamas launched its first attack, abducting and killing two Israeli soldiers. Israel cracked down on the group, arresting Yassin and jailing him for life.
- Unlike the PLO, which was modelled around the leftist guerilla national movements in the third world, Hamas had a completely different vision.
- The charter it issued on August 19, 1988 was studded with anti-Semitic remarks. According to the charter, Palestine is “an Islamic Waqf land consecrated for Moslem generations until Judgement Day”; “there is no solution to the Palestine problem except jihad” and all peace initiatives are a “waste of time and acts of absurdity”.
- When the PLO moved to join peace efforts seeking a solution to the Palestinian issue, Hamas hardened its position. It opposed the Oslo agreement, which allowed the formation of the Palestinian Authority with limited powers within the occupied territories. When the PLO recognised Israel, Hamas rejected the two-state solution and vowed to liberate the whole of Palestine “from the (Jordan) River to the (Mediterranean) Sea”.
- It has built a organisation with several branches — the social wing is involved in Islamic education and charity works, while Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing, is in charge of military planning and weapons acquisitions. It also has a political bureau. In October 1994, a year after the Oslo Accord was signed, Hamas carried out its first suicide attack, killing 22 in Tel Aviv.

The evolution

- In the 1990s and early 2000s, Hamas conducted several suicide attacks, targeting Israelis. In 2000, when the second intifada broke out, Hamas was in the driving seat. Hamas supporters fought pitched street battles with Israeli troops, who used brute force to crush the protests. Israel had also taken a policy of targeted assassinations.
- Hamas continued to remain defiant, targeting Israeli troops and settlers. In 2005, faced with Hamas’s violent resistance, Israel unilaterally decided to pull out of Gaza.
- Hamas’s violent tactics and Israel’s collective punishment of Palestinians in return seemed to have helped the Islamists gain popularity. In the 2006 legislative elections in the Palestinian territory, Hamas won 74 out of the 132 seats, while the Fatah party, the PLO’s backbone, got only 45 seats. Hamas formed the government, but faced opposition from Israel and most international powers.
- Like Israel, the U.S. and several European countries have designated Hamas as a terrorist organisation. As tensions rose between Fatah and Hamas in the West Bank, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas dissolved the Hamas government and declared a state of emergency.
- This led to violent clashes between Fatah and Hamas. Fatah ousted Hamas from the West Bank and Hamas ousted the former from Gaza in 2007. Since then, Hamas is the government in Gaza. Following Hamas’s capture of Gaza, Israel has imposed a blockade on the strip, which practically turned the territory of 2 million people into an open prison.
- While Hamas never gave up its right to armed resistance, the organisation’s outlook has evolved over the years, like the PLO’s did in the pre-Oslo years. It still refuses to recognise Israel but has offered hudna (a lasting ceasefire) if Israel returned to the 1967 border. In 2017, it adopted a new charter from which the anti-Semitic remarks of the original charter were expunged.
- The new document stated Hamas is not seeking war with the Jewish people — only with Zionism that drives the occupation of Palestine. “Hamas advocates the liberation of all of Palestine but is ready to support the state on 1967 borders without recognising Israel or ceding any rights,” it said back then.
- Ideally, this should have opened a new beginning. But Israel continues to maintain the position that it won’t hold talks with a “terrorist entity” that doesn’t recognise it, while at the same time deepening the occupation. Hamas’s view is that unless Israel withdraws to the 1967 border, there won’t be peace. It’s a stalemate.



- Hamas may not have the capability to push Israel back to the 1967 border or the deterrence to stop Israel from pounding Gaza. But it does two things with its resistance to the superior Israeli Army — one, it has emerged as a key force in Palestine's political landscape, which in the past had largely been driven by secular nationalism.
- A solution to the Israel-Palestine problem cannot be reached without taking Hamas into consideration. Two, it survives.
- Over the years, Hamas has lost most of its founding leaders, it is categorised as a terrorist outfit by the U.S. and others and it faces disproportionate Israeli attacks frequently. Every time it bombs Gaza, Israel vows to destroy Hamas's militant infrastructure. But Hamas survives, to fight another day.

All about the Narada bribery case

Context: *The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested ministers Firhad Hakim and Subrata Mukherjee, TMC MLA Madan Mitra and former Kolkata Mayor Sovan Chattopadhyay in the Narada bribery case.*

What is the Narada case?

- The Narada sting operation was conducted by Narada news founder Mathew Samuel for over two years in West Bengal. Conducted in 2014 for the news magazine Tehelka, it was published on a private news website Narada News months before the 2016 West Bengal Assembly elections. Samuel is the former managing editor of Tehelka.
- As part of the operation, Samuel formed a fictitious company named Impex Consultancy Solutions and approached several TMC ministers, MPs and leaders, asking them for favours in return for money.
- In the 52-hour footage photographed by Samuel and his colleague Angel Abraham, then TMC MPs Mukul Roy, Sougata Roy, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, Prasun Bannerjee, Suwendu Adhikari, Aparupa Poddar and Sultan Ahmad (he died in 2017), and state ministers Madan Mitra, Subrata Mukherjee and Firhad Hakim and Iqbal Ahmed were seen accepting alleged bribes in the form of wads of cash in exchange for extending unofficial favours for Impex Consultancy Solutions, which was floated by Samuel himself.
- IPS HMS Mirza (now suspended) was also seen taking cash from Samuel. TMC leader Shanku Deb Panda was also seen asking for shares in Samuel's fictitious company in exchange of promised favours.
- Although Mukul Roy (who is now the national vice-president of the BJP) was not seen accepting cash in the video but he was seen asking Samuel to visit his party office with the promised cash. Suwendu Adhikari is now a BJP leader and the Leader of the Opposition in state Assembly.
- Sovan Chatterjee had joined the BJP in 2019 but quit the party this year after he was denied a ticket for the Assembly polls. Panda is also with the BJP now.
- Samuel claimed that K. D. Singh, TMC Rajya Sabha MP and majority owner of Tehelka, knew and funded the entire operation. Samuel claimed that the budget of the operation was initially set at ₹2,500,000 but was later increased to ₹8,000,000. Singh, however, refuted his involvement with any aspect of the sting.
- The state government initiated its own probe which booked Samuel under multiple sections of the IPC 469 (forgery to harm reputation), 500 (defamation), 120(B) (criminal conspiracy) etc. On August 5, 2016, the High Court stayed the state probe for ad infimum, observing that the police cannot run a concurrent investigation along with a court-monitored probe.



- On March 17, 2017, the Calcutta high court ordered that a preliminary probe will be conducted by the CBI. The court also directed the CBI to register an FIR against those who were involved in the case, if required.
- On March 18, 2017, the state initiated disciplinary proceedings against SMH Mirza.
- On April 16, 2017, the CBI filed a First Information Report against 12 Trinamool leaders for “criminal conspiracy”. The CBI also subsequently summoned all of the leaders involved to assist in the investigation. All of them were booked under Section 120 B of IPC (criminal conspiracy), Section 13 (2), 13 (1D) and Section 7 of Prevention of Corruption Act.
- The Enforcement Directorate is also running a parallel investigation. It has lodged a case about misappropriation of public funds under Anti-Corruption-Act and has issued multiple summons to the accused and Samuel, himself.
- Since the sting operation involved Members of Parliament, a Lok Sabha ethics committee was also set up to initiate a probe to determine if the persons committed a breach of privilege of the house concerned. The committee sat only once after the incident.
- On May 9, West Bengal Governor Jagdeep Dhankhar, on a request by the CBI, sanctioned the prosecution of Subrata Mukherjee, Firhad Hakim, Madan Mitra and Sovan Chatterjee,
- ”Honourable governor is the competent authority to accord sanction in terms of law as he happens to be the appointing authority for such ministers in terms of Article 164 of the Constitution,” read the statement issued by the officer on special duty (communication), Raj Bhavan.

All you need to know about China’s ‘Zhurong’ rover

(Source: [Indian Express](#))

Context: China’s uncrewed ‘Tianwen-1’ spacecraft landed safely on the surface of Mars, making the country only the second in the world to send a rover to explore the mysterious Red Planet. Onboard the lander was the ‘Zhurong’ rover, which will soon be deployed to study the Martian atmosphere and geology.

Details

- The Chinese spacecraft landed on a large plain located in the northern hemisphere of Mars, known as Utopia Planitia, according to state media reports. Congratulating the team behind the mission, Chinese President Xi Jinping said, “You were brave enough for the challenge, pursued excellence and placed our country in the advanced ranks of planetary exploration.”
- The spacecraft’s impressive descent to the surface of Mars is a major milestone in China’s growing ambition to position itself as a “great space power”, as Jinping said earlier this year.

What is China’s Mars mission?

- Launched by the China National Space Administration from southern China in July 2020, the Tianwen-1 mission consists of an orbiter, a lander and a golf cart-sized rover called ‘Zhurong’, after an ancient fire god from Chinese folk tales.
- The spacecraft arrived in Mars’ orbit in February this year. The mission aims to make full use of the window that emerges once every two years, when Earth and Mars are closest together during their journey around the sun.
- Chinese scientists are hoping to explore Mars and study its geology for at least 90 days via the rover.

What do we know about the ‘Zhurong’ rover?



- The 'Zhurong' rover will not immediately be offloaded from the lander. The probe will first survey the Utopia plane and take several high-resolution images to locate the safest spot to put the rover down. The aim is to find a stretch of land devoid of craters or large boulders.
- After a few days, the rover will roll off the lander and join the US' Perseverance and Curiosity rovers to explore the surface of the Red Planet.
- Weighing about 240 kilograms, the 'Zhurong' rover is slightly heavier than NASA's Spirit and Opportunity rovers, but only one-fourth the weight of Perseverance and Curiosity, according to the New York Times.
- The Chinese rover is powered by retractable solar panels and fitted with seven primary instruments — cameras, ground-penetrating radar, a magnetic field detector and a weather station. The purpose of the radar is to look for signs of ancient life as well as subsurface water.

How did the rover land on Mars?

- Landing on Mars is no easy feat. After orbiting around the Red Planet for about three months preparing for a safe landing attempt, the lander carrying the rover separated from the orbiter and descended towards the surface of Mars. The target was to land on Utopia Planitia — which is also where NASA's Viking-2 touched down in 1976.
- The vast plain, measuring over 3,000 km across, was formed by an impact very early in the history of Mars, according to the BBC. Satellite findings have indicated that a significant amount of ice is stored deep beneath Utopia's surface.
- China Space News said there was "nine minutes of terror" as the landing module entered the Martian atmosphere, decelerating and gradually descending to the surface. During the descent, the rover was covered with an aeroshell for the initial phase. The speed of the capsule was lowered after it started pushing up against Martian air. At a predetermined point, a parachute was released to reduce the capsule's velocity even further.
- Soon after which, China's Xinhua news agency declared: "China has left a footprint on Mars for the first time, an important step for our country's space exploration."
- This is not the first time China has attempted to send a spacecraft to Mars. Nearly ten years ago, the country launched the Yinghuo-1 mission, which ultimately failed after the spacecraft burnt while still in the Earth's atmosphere after the Russian rocket that was carrying it failed in flight.
- If 'Zhurong' is deployed without a hitch, China will become the first country to successfully orbit, land and offload a rover during its maiden Mars mission.

Which other countries have managed to send rovers to Mars?

- Apart from China, only the United States has been able to deploy rovers to study the surface of the Red Planet.

Strides in space | China successfully landed a spacecraft on Mars for the first time on Saturday. Here is a timeline of key moments to this feat

October 2003: Shenzhou-5 carries first Chinese astronaut, Yang Liwei, into space, third country after Soviet Union and U.S. to do so

October 2007: Launch of first lunar mission Chang'e-1, fifth country to launch moon probe

September 2011: Launch of Tiangong-1, first space lab and precursor to plan for space station

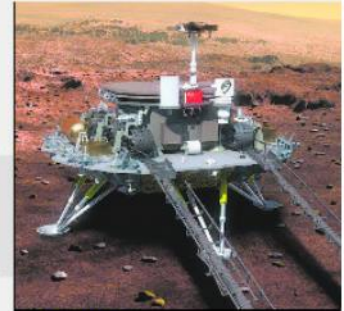
November 2011: First Mars orbiter, Yinghuo-1, launched with Russia but fails to enter Mars orbit

June 2012: Shenzhou-9 docks with Tiangong-1, first manned docking for China's space programme

December 2013: Chang'e-3, third moon probe with rover, makes first soft landing on moon, third country to do so after U.S. and Soviet Union

September 2016: Launch of second space lab, Tiangong-2, accelerating space station plans

January 2019: Chang'e-4



Great leap: An artistic depiction of the Chinese Mars rover and lander. • XINHUA/AP

lunar probe makes world's first landing on "far side" of the moon

July 2020: Launch of first Mars mission, Tianwen-1, carrying orbiter, lander and rover

April 29, 2021: Long March-5B rocket carries Tianhe module into space, first of three parts of space station set to be completed in 2022; debris falls in Indian Ocean

May 15, 2021: Zhurong lander touches down on Mars, third country to achieve Mars landing after Soviet Union and the U.S.



- The first successful landing was made by NASA in July 1976, when the Viking 1 rover touched down on Mars. Shortly after that, Viking 2 arrived on the Red Planet. In the decades that followed, the US successfully sent the Opportunity and Spirit rovers to explore Mars.
- In 1971, the former Soviet Union managed to launch a Mars probe, however, communication was lost within seconds of it landing.
- Most recently, in February this year, NASA's Perseverance rover landed at the Jezero Crater on the Red Planet, after which it resumed work to look for signs of past life.

All about Rajiv Gandhi's assassination and the downfall of LTTE

(Source: [The Hindu](#))

Context: May 21, 2021, marked the 30th anniversary of a well-planned and well-executed grotesque killing that snuffed out the life of an Indian leader believed to be on a comeback trail to power.

Details:

- Though the LTTE and Prabhakaran kept denying its role in the suicide bombing, the killing sealed his fate.
- It was Dharmalingam Siddharthan, a former Sri Lankan Tamil MP, who was among the first to realise the heavy cost Prabhakaran would pay for the killing.
- None of this would have been evident to the LTTE chief when he, along with his intelligence boss Pottu Amman, decided to do away with Rajiv Gandhi, fearing that he might again dispatch Indian troops to Sri Lanka.

Sivarasan gets the task

- Once the task of killing Gandhi was handed over to the LTTE intelligence operative known by his nom de guerre Sivarasan, the Tigers decided that the latter should not get mixed up with the existing LTTE network in Tamil Nadu.
- The LTTE knew that Indian security agencies were aware of almost all its activists in the State, including those working for the intelligence wing.
- Accordingly, one day in September 1990, a boat packed with Tamil civilians fleeing the war in Sri Lanka's northeast reached the Tamil Nadu coastal town of Rameshwaram.
- Two men and a woman from the group met Indian officials and registered themselves as refugees but moved on to Chennai, saying they had friends in the city.
- A few days later, another boat of Tamil refugees also reached the Tamil Nadu coast. As in the first instance, two men and a woman registered themselves as refugees and said they, too, would prefer to live with friends in Chennai.
- The two groups rented out separate houses in Chennai, telling those who cared to ask that they were lucky to be away from the war.
- The six Sri Lankans did not know themselves but their arrival in Tamil Nadu marked the unleashing of a deadly plot Prabhakaran had drawn up to assassinate Rajiv Gandhi.
- Sivarasan, known as "One-Eyed Jack" because of a glass prosthesis he wore in place of an eye he lost in a battle, realised soon that the men sent in advance as "refugees" were not enough for the tough job he had on hand.
- By then, two LTTE intelligence operatives, Nixon and Kanthan, also reached Tamil Nadu. After a brief stay in the State, Sivarasan went back to Sri Lanka and returned to Chennai in January 1991.

Sacking of the DMK government



- It was the month the Indian government sacked the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) government in Tamil Nadu for turning a blind eye to LTTE activities and placed the State under direct federal rule.
- After taking permission from Pottu Amman, Sivarasan telephoned Sathasivan Krishnakumar, alias Kittu, the London-based LTTE representative, and sought introduction to a reliable Indian contact in Chennai.
- Sivarasan did not realise that this was a blunder. Since the June 1990 assassination of Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) chief K. Pathmanabha and his associates in Chennai and the easy escape of the killers, Indian security agencies had stepped up surveillance on LTTE activists in Tamil Nadu.
- Kittu telephoned an Indian national, Muthuraja, who was close to the Tigers, and asked him to help out a new group of LTTE members from Sri Lanka. Kittu cautioned Muthuraja against speaking to anyone about the new arrivals.
- Unknown to Kittu and Muthuraja, the latter was under the watch of the Intelligence Bureau. The intelligence officers were surprised by Kittu's instruction and surmised that something sinister was afoot.
- Even as a crackdown on the LTTE followed the sacking of the DMK government, Muthuraja introduced Nixon to some Indians who ended up playing a key role in the assassination. Muthuraja also introduced another LTTE intelligence operative, Murugan, to an Indian family.
- This is when Muthuraja suddenly disappeared one day. He was being shadowed in Chennai by Indian security agencies but gave the slip one evening at Egmore. It was later learnt that he had left for Sri Lanka, ostensibly on the request of Pottu Amman.
- Muthuraja, however, never reached Sri Lanka. His boat sank in the sea after being hit by a Sri Lankan naval vessel. Believing he died, the LTTE honoured him. But Indian security agencies believe that Muthuraja did not die. The Sri Lankan Navy took him into custody after his boat collapsed.
- Prabhakaran, meanwhile, asked an LTTE member, Kasi Anandan, to meet Rajiv Gandhi to convey his best wishes for the upcoming general election in India. The meeting took place in New Delhi on March 5, 1991.
- Some days later, a Sri Lankan Tamil banker based in London also called on Rajiv Gandhi with a message that the Tigers were eager to make up with the Indian leader. Both meetings were meant to make the Indian security brass believe that Prabhakaran was willing to bury the past and start a new chapter with New Delhi.

Arrival of Dhanu

- Sivarasan, who had again gone back to Sri Lanka, returned to Tamil Nadu by sea early in May 1991 with Dhanu, the suicide bomber. They landed in the coastal town of Vedaranyam and left for Chennai by bus.
- Within 10 days of their arrival, Dhanu and a companion, Shuba, wrote to the LTTE leadership: "We are determined to attain our objective."
- By now, the Intelligence Bureau had intercepted a couple of complex, coded radio messages from Tamil Nadu to Jaffna. The IB headquarters in Delhi was pressed to break the code.
- One of the LTTE messages, decoded after Rajiv Gandhi was killed, was a revealing one-liner from Sivarasan to Pottu Amman: "Nobody [in India] knows about our operation."
- Another explicit message, intercepted on May 7 but again deciphered after Rajiv Gandhi had been killed, was a vow by Sivarasan: "If I return to Jaffna, it will be as Pottu Amman's man, having achieved the incredible feat of assassinating a world leader."
- Sivarasan, who pretended to be a journalist when it suited him, found out from some Congress party functionaries about Rajiv Gandhi's election rally in the small town of Sriperumbudur, near Chennai, on May 21, 1991.

A rehearsal

- To ensure that everything went well, the LTTE had carried out a rehearsal at an election rally of former Prime Minister V.P. Singh in Chennai. As Singh was leaving, Dhanu walked up to him and touched his feet as a mark of respect for an elder.



- The whole exercise was recorded on video and viewed by the LTTE many times to check if there were any flaws. Clearly, there were none.
- On May 20, 1991, the LTTE killer squad watched a Tamil movie at a cinema hall in Chennai. The next evening, the group proceeded to Sriperumbudur and was met by a young Indian photographer, Hari Babu, who had no clue about the planned assassination.
- At the rally, Dhanu was armed with a sandalwood garland — and a deadly suicide vest which was hidden by a loose-fitting bright orange salwar-kameez.
- When a policewoman tried to question Dhanu after seeing her near the VIP enclosure, Hari Babu intervened to say she would garland Rajiv Gandhi. Sivarasan, dressed in a white kurta-pyjama, stood near the dais. Eventually, when Rajiv Gandhi made his way towards a waiting crowd, Dhanu moved close to him. The same policewoman tried to push her back. But he stopped her and remarked: “Let everybody get a chance!”
- Dhanu put the garland around him and bent down as if to touch his feet. But she never got up. She switched on the toggle switch attached to her suicide vest, triggering a terrible blast that ripped through her, Rajiv Gandhi and 16 others.