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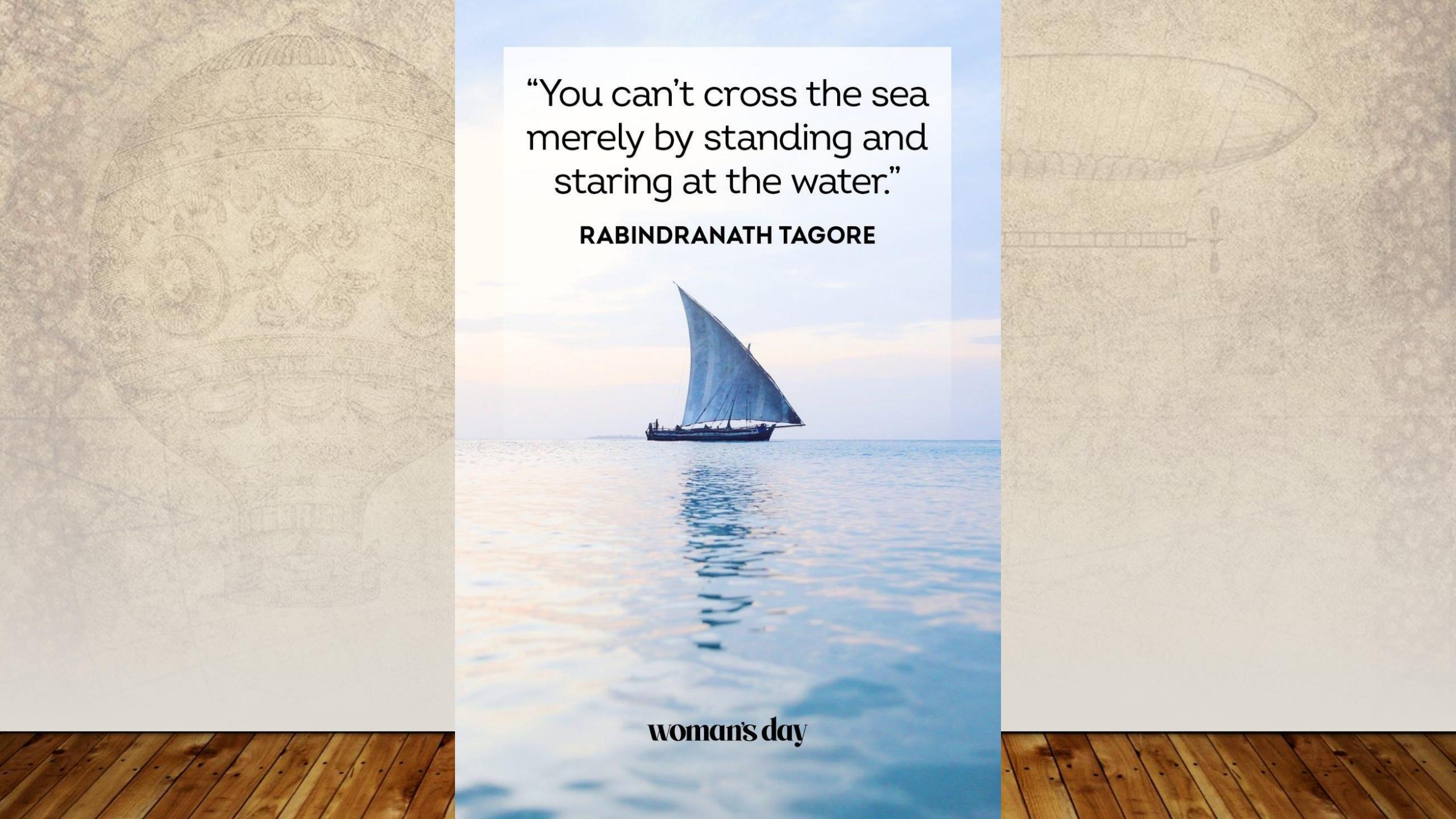
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**“You can't cross the sea
merely by standing and
staring at the water.”**

RABINDRANATH TAGORE



Speaker cannot be ‘indecisive’ on pleas over defection: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said it was not “powerless” if a Speaker chose to remain “indecisive” on petitions seeking disqualification of legislators who defect.

Hearing petitions filed by Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) leaders seeking timely action by the Telangana Speaker on disqualification proceedings pending against 10 MLAs who shifted allegiance to the ruling Congress party in the State, the Bench headed by Justice B.R. Gavai said a Speaker could not use his indecision to defeat the worthy objective of the Tenth Schedule (anti-defection law) of the Constitution.

‘Reasonable period’

The courts cannot certainly tell a Speaker to decide in a particular manner, but can it not tell a Speaker to decide within a specified

QQ Courts cannot tell a Speaker how to decide, but can it not tell a Speaker to decide within a reasonable period?

JUSTICE
B.R. GAVAI
Supreme Court
judge



and reasonable period, Justice Gavai asked.

The main question in the case is whether constitutional courts cannot direct Speakers, who act as quasi-judicial tribunals under the anti-defection law, to decide petitions filed with them under the Tenth Schedule within a specified period.

“Your argument is that if a Speaker does not act, courts, which not only have the power but also the duty as guardian of the Constitution, would be powerless? So, out of the five-

year term of the House, if defection happened in the first year and Speaker does not do anything for the next four years, courts cannot do anything but sit with their hands tied?” Justice Gavai asked senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi and advocate Sravan Kumar, who appeared for the respondents.

The respondent side, also represented by senior advocate A.M. Singhvi, include the Telangana government, State Assembly Speaker, Secretary of the Assembly, and the Election Commission of India, among others.

Mr. Rohatgi argued extensively that Constitutional courts could request a Speaker, from one Constitutional body to another, to decide disqualification petitions expeditiously, but not bind the Speaker to a deadline of four or six weeks.

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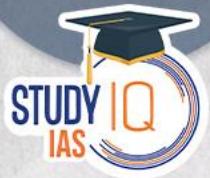
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Fact

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- “Your argument is that if a Speaker does not act, courts, which not only have the power but also the duty as guardian of the Constitution, would be powerless? So, out of the five-year term of the House, if defection happened in the first year and Speaker does not do anything for the next four years, courts cannot do anything but sit with their hands tied?”



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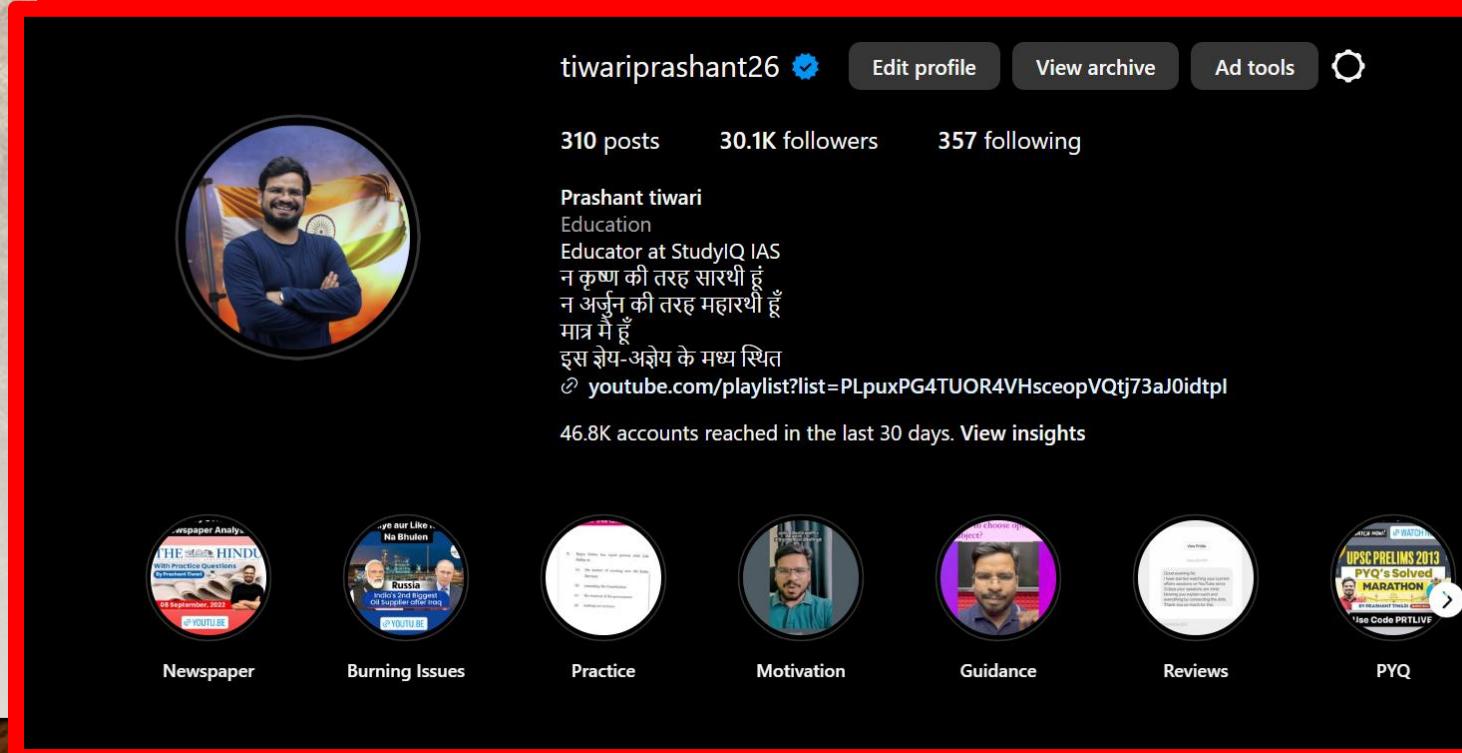
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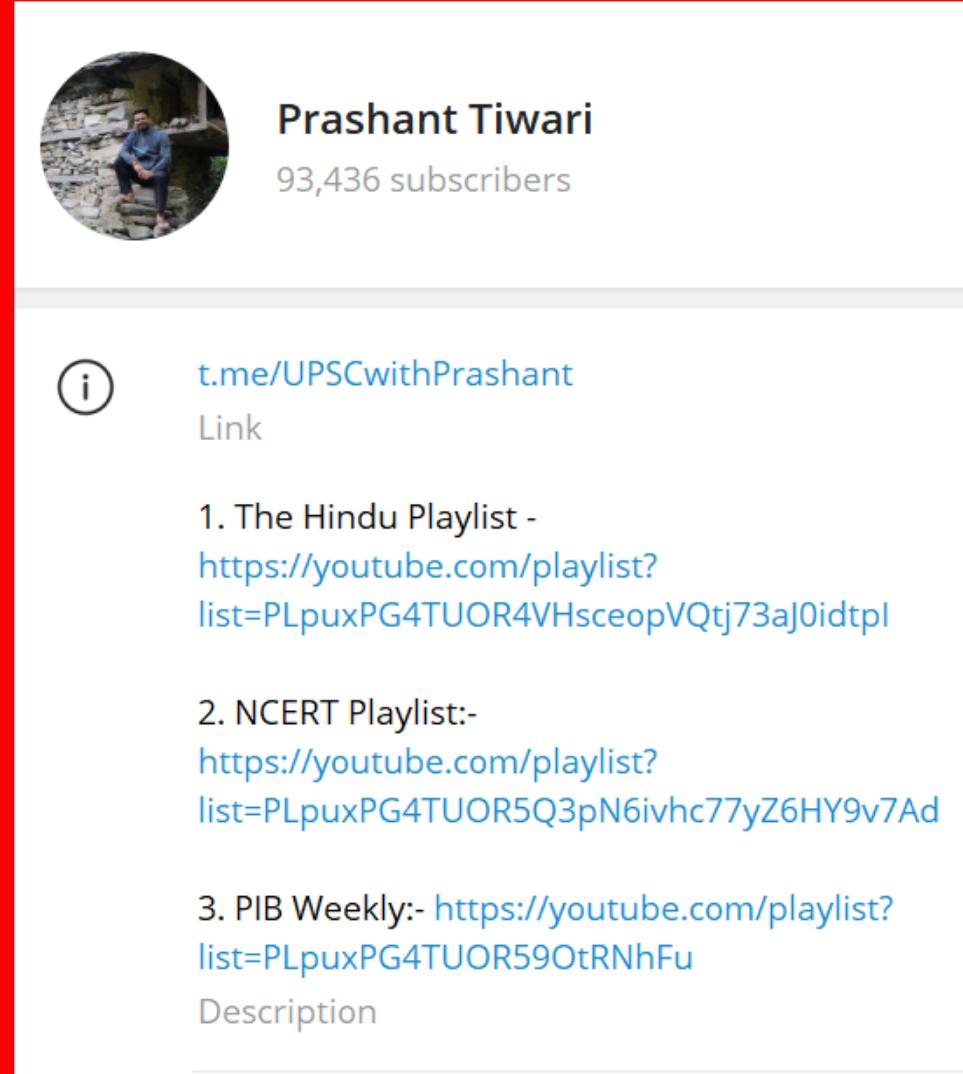
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Description

Factory output at 8-month high in March

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI

Manufacturing activity, as measured by the seasonally adjusted Purchasing Managers Index (PMI), climbed to an eight-month high of 58.1 in March 2025, according to an S&P Global statement. This figure stood at 56.3 in February 2025.

A PMI value above 50 is considered an expansion and the metric has been showing expansion for 45 months straight. The improvement in PMI in March was attributed to an increase in new orders.

"Although international orders slightly slowed, overall demand momentum remained robust, and the new orders index recorded an eight-month high of

On a recovery

Recovery in manufacturing was largely driven by contribution from the New Orders Index, its largest sub-component



61.5. Strong demand prompted firms to tap into their inventories, causing the fastest drop in finished goods stocks in over three years. Business expectations remained fairly optimistic, with around 30% of survey participants foreseeing greater output vol-

umes in the year ahead, compared to less than 2% that anticipate a contraction," said Pranjal Bhandari, Chief India Economist at HSBC.

Sales numbers expanded at a robust rate and companies had "positive customer interest, favoura-

ble demand conditions, and successful marketing initiatives", according to a statement from HSBC India, which collaborates with S&P Global to compile the data. Production volume also increased at the end of 2024-25. New export orders increased, but their growth was the slowest in three months, the statement said.

Capacity pressures grew at a milder rate in March, slowing recruitment drives, HSBC said. Input prices increased to a three-month high but were still below their long-run average.

PMI is only an indicative data source, while granular data on the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) for March will be released later this month.

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What is Purchasing Managers Index?

- **It is a survey-based measure that asks the respondents about changes in their perception about key business variables as compared with the previous month.**
- **The purpose of the PMI is to provide information about current and future business conditions to company decision makers, analysts, and investors.**
- **It is calculated separately for the manufacturing and services sectors and then a composite index is also constructed.**
- **The PMI is a number from 0 to 100.**
- **A print above 50 means expansion, while a score below that denotes contraction.**
- **A reading at 50 indicates no change.**

What is Index of Industrial Production (IIP)

- IIP as it is commonly called is an index that tracks overall manufacturing activity in different sectors of an economy.
- It is currently calculated using 2011-2012 as the base year.
- It is compiled and published by Central Statistical Organisation (CSO) every month.
- CSO operates under the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI).
- Three broad sectors in IIP:
- Manufacturing (77.6%),
- Mining (14.4%)
- Electricity (8%).

Index Of Eight Core Industries

- **Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) measures combined and individual performance of production of eight core sectors in India, comprising- coal, crude oil, natural gas, petroleum refinery products, fertilisers, steel, cement and electricity.**
- **These eight core industries constitute 40.27% of the total index of industrial production (IIP).**
- **This index is prepared by the Office of the Economic Advisor, Ministry of Commerce and Industry.**
- **It is published monthly with the base year as 2011-12.**

Index Of Eight Core Industries

- Weightage of different sectors in the Index:**

Sector	Coal	Crude Oil	Natural Gas	Refinery Products	Fertilizers	Steel	Cement	Electricity	Overall Index
Weight	10.33	8.98	6.88	28.04	2.63	17.92	5.37	19.85	100.00

- Highest Weightage: Refinery products.**
- Lowest Weightage: Fertilisers.**

Ahead of BIMSTEC summit in Bangkok, doubts persist over Modi-Yunus meeting

Kallop Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

Ahead of the 6th summit of the BIMSTEC in Bangkok, all eyes are on whether Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Bangladesh's Chief Adviser Prof. Mohammed Yunus will meet in Bangkok on the sidelines of the BIMSTEC summit. Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Jashim Uddin told reporters in Dhaka on Wednesday that a meeting has been slotted, though the Ministry of External Affairs refused to confirm it.

BIMSTEC, or the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, is holding its sixth summit in a physical format, for the first time since the end of the pandemic; the last such in-person summit was held in Kathmandu in 2018. The fifth BIMSTEC summit was held virtually in 2022, under the leadership of Sri Lanka.

This year's theme is a "prosperous, resilient, and open BIMSTEC". The summit will lead to the adop-



The 6th BIMSTEC summit will be held in Thailand on April 4.

tion of the Declaration of 5th BIMSTEC, a press note from the BIMSTEC Secretariat in Dhaka has announced. The Secretariat also said member states are expected to sign an agreement on maritime transport cooperation at the summit.

On the sidelines

Plans are under way for the Prime Minister to hold bilateral meeting with several dignitaries, and Bangladesh's High Representative for the Rohingya refugee crisis, Khalilur Rahman, informed reporters in Dhaka that there is "sufficient possibility" of a meeting between Mr. Modi and Professor Yunus on the sidelines of the summit.

Upon arriving in Bangkok's Don Mueang Airport on Friday, the PM will meet his Thai counterpart, Pae-tongtarn Shinawatra, which will be followed by a dinner hosted in honour of the visiting Heads of government and Heads of State. Mr. Modi will also meet Thai King Maha Vajiralongkorn before leaving for a state visit to Colombo from April 4 to 6.

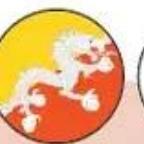
The BIMSTEC summit has gained attention in recent weeks as it is being held against the backdrop of the devastating earthquake that hit Myanmar last Thursday.

After years of wrangling, BIMSTEC finally framed a common charter in 2022, but bilateral relations among the member countries remain a matter of concern. While Bangladesh-Myanmar ties have been marred by the Rohingya crisis, the relationship between India and Bangladesh has remained uncertain since the removal of Bangladesh's ex-Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

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Stands for **The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation**

Founded in 1997 through **Bangkok Declaration**

7 MEMBER COUNTRIES



First summit held in Thailand

Sri Lanka is the current Chair

Importance of BIMSTEC

- Accounts for **22%** of the world's population
- Combined GDP of **\$2.7 trillion**
- One-fourth of the world's traded goods cross the Bay every year
- Six focus areas - trade, technology, energy, transport, tourism and fisheries

 **Genesis:** Established in **1997** with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration.

 **Members:** Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan

 **Secretariat:** Dhaka, Bangladesh

 **Purpose:** To create an enabling environment for rapid economic development and social progress and maintain peace and stability in the Bay of Bengal region.

 **Major Projects:** BIMSTEC Master Plan for Transport Connectivity

 **Exercises:** BIMSTEC Disaster Management Exercise (DMEX)

The ring of fire around Iran is tightening

In March 7, 2025, Donald Trump announced that he had sent a letter to Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, seeking to negotiate a deal on Tehran's nuclear programme. "We can't let them have a nuclear weapon," the U.S. President told reporters in the Oval Office. A week later, on March 15, the U.S. launched waves of "pre-emptive" air strikes against Ansar Allah (commonly known as the Houthis) in Yemen. Within two days, Israel resumed its bombing of Gaza, killing over 400 Palestinians in overnight attacks and effectively ending the fragile ceasefire that had been in place since January 19. On March 22, Israel carried out its heaviest air strikes in Lebanon since the November ceasefire, targeting Hezbollah, a key Iranian non-state ally.

After a brief lull, West Asia is once again on fire. The common thread in these developments is unmistakably Iran. While Mr. Trump has reached out to Tehran for nuclear talks, the U.S. and Israel continue to escalate attacks on Iran's so-called axis of resistance, ratcheting up pressure on the Islamic Republic. "We are down to the final strokes with Iran," Mr. Trump declared on March 7. In the subsequent days, the U.S. has deployed more fighter jets and its second aircraft carrier to West Asia.

The deal that did not work

For America's elites, Iran's nuclear programme – and Iran in general – has remained an unresolved issue for decades. U.S. President Barack Obama sought to address it through diplomacy. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) curtailed Iran's path to a nuclear bomb, but Israel and the Israel lobby in the U.S. were not happy with the agreement. While the deal restricted Iran's nuclear programme, it left its nuclear processing capabilities, extensive ballistic missile programme and support for the axis untouched. The JCPOA, which promised to lift economic sanctions on Iran in return for scuttling its nuclear programme, allowed Iran to join the economic and diplomatic mainstream of West Asia, which would invariably leave Iran as a stronger conventional power – an outcome Israel found unacceptable. Mr. Trump, who first took office in 2017, shared the Israeli narrative that the JCPOA was a flawed deal. In May 2018, Mr. Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the agreement and reimposed sanctions on Iran, effectively sabotaging the agreement.

Mr. Trump's 'maximum pressure' campaign, along with Israel's covert operations inside Iran, met with Tehran's 'maximum resistance'. If Mr. Trump's plan was to force the Iranians back to the negotiating table, it failed. Instead, Iran stepped up its nuclear programme, enhanced support for the network, particularly the Houthis, and expanded its weapons capabilities. But then the October 7, 2023 attack by Hamas in Israel happened.

Following the attack, Israel saw an opportunity



Stanly Johny

to weaken Iran's forward defence through a mini-regional war. Initially this approach faltered. Israel's war had two dimensions – one focused on Gaza, and the other targeting Iran. It was Israel that took the war to Iran, first by killing an Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) general in Syria, and then bombing the Iranian embassy in Damascus. The Iranians retaliated, by directly attacking Israel twice. In Gaza, Israel has killed over 50,000 Palestinians and destroyed much of the enclave, yet, it remains far from achieving its stated goal of "destroying Hamas". In Lebanon, Israel has degraded Hezbollah's militant infrastructure and decapitated its leadership, but the high casualties that it suffered and its failure to halt Hezbollah's rocket attacks, are what ultimately forced it to accept a ceasefire in November 2024. Meanwhile, Iran has significantly expanded its nuclear programme. According to the International Atomic Energy Agency, Iran now possesses enough stockpile of 60% enriched uranium to make six nuclear bombs if further enriched to weapons-grade purity (90%).

Changing regional dynamics

But then two key developments happened in November, which Israel thinks have shifted the regional dynamics in its favour, strengthening its position in the war. First, the election of Mr. Trump, who unapologetically supports Israel's war policies, has given Tel Aviv the confidence to continue its mini-regional war without bothering about external pressure. Second, the fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria has disrupted Iran's regional axis. Mr. Assad's Syria, Iran's only state ally in West Asia, had served as a crucial land bridge between Iran (through Iraq) and Hezbollah (in Lebanon). Hezbollah's ability to rebuild itself depends on supplies from Iran. With Mr. Assad gone and a regime of Sunni Islamists that is hostile to the Shia theocratic Iran taking over Damascus, the supply route has been severed. As a result, Hezbollah, Iran's most prized ally in the axis, will remain weak militarily, which would in turn weaken Iran's overall deterrence.

This shift is reshaping Israel's approach to the conflict. Under the November ceasefire with Hezbollah, Israel was expected to withdraw troops from southern Lebanon, but it refused to do so. Likewise, Israel entered into a ceasefire with Hamas in January only to get at least some hostages out, and not to end the war. It has since refused to withdraw troops from Gaza, and resumed bombing the enclave. Mr. Trump's decision to bomb the Houthis – one pro-Iranian group that remained relatively unscathed – signals that he is fully on board in Israel's mini-regional war. But for Israel, the fight against militias is not the ultimate goal. The real target is Iran itself. With the axis weakened and the Assad regime gone, Israel thinks that the Iranian regime is more vulnerable today than at any time since the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The Israelis are tightening the ring of fire around Iran. As Iran faces the heat, Mr. Trump has stepped in with his offer for dialogue.

Shrinking strategic space

While the contents of Mr. Trump's letter remain undisclosed, his demands (and those of Israel) are no secret. The U.S. wants Iran to give up its nuclear programme, restrict its conventional military capabilities and sever ties with the axis. Iran, however, has only expressed willingness to engage in "indirect talks", focusing only on the nuclear programme –essentially a return to the 2015 framework. But Mr. Trump wants more.

Iran, which sees itself being surrounded by hostile forces in a violent region, is unlikely to sign on its own surrender, by agreeing to restrictions on its defence industry or cutting ties with the axis. With Iran's shrinking strategic space, Israel's growing aggression and the near impossibility of diplomatic common ground between a hostile Trump administration and a wary Iranian regime, the risk of a large-scale military confrontation is today higher than ever.

Yet, war with Iran – even if the axis is decimated – would be catastrophic. Israel has two broad military options, both of which require American involvement. The first is a series of heavy air strikes aimed at crippling Iran's nuclear facilities and military infrastructure. However, given that most of Iran's nuclear facilities are buried underground –some of them beneath mountains – even a joint U.S.-Israeli operation may fail to eliminate them completely. Even if the facilities are damaged, Iran will still possess the technical know-how to rebuild the programme, and, post-attacks, it will have a greater incentive to develop a nuclear bomb.

The second option is a full-scale regime change war. But unlike in Syria, a country that has been internally destabilised by years of civil war and different armed opposition groups, Iran, despite the occasional mass protests, has no organised, militarised insurgency. So, if the U.S. and Israel want a regime change, they will have to launch an Iraq-style all-out invasion. But Iran, which is a country with centuries of statecraft, ring-fenced by mountains, and with a polarising but deeply entrenched, ideologically motivated regime whose navy has the Strait of Hormuz, a vital oil transit choke point, in its sight, is not Iraq. Israel might still want to push the envelope as it sees Iran's current vulnerabilities as a historic opportunity. But Israel needs its patron, the United States. So, the final question is whether Donald Trump, who came to power campaigning on ending America's 'forever wars', would commit to an all-out war against Iran if his diplomatic push collapses. If his statements and the regional developments are to be taken seriously, he seems inclined to back Israel's push to reshape West Asia by force.

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BBC NEWS

Content.

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- Iran, which sees itself being surrounded by hostile forces in a violent region, is unlikely to sign on its own surrender, by agreeing to restrictions on its defence industry or cutting ties with the axis.
- With Iran’s shrinking strategic space, Israel’s growing aggression and the near impossibility of diplomatic common ground between a hostile Trump administration and a wary Iranian regime, the risk of a large-scale military confrontation is today higher than ever.

Timing and location

Yunus chose the wrong time and place
to push for regional connectivity

Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus's remarks, made during his China visit to attend the Boao Forum for Asia conference, have sparked sharp responses in India, amid questions about their underlying intent. Speaking at a round table, Mr. Yunus highlighted the lack of connectivity and trade in the region, referring to the north-eastern Indian States – the "Seven Sisters" – as a "land-locked" area. Ignoring India's vast coastline, he went on to claim that Bangladesh was the "guardian of ocean access" and called on China to view the Indian States, along with Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh, as an "extension of the Chinese economy", presenting them as a market and a production base. There were other undertones to his remarks, which were shared on his social media accounts. This was his first visit to China since taking office following the ouster of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last August. Tensions with India have persisted over attacks on minorities in Bangladesh and the Yunus government's demands for the repatriation of Ms. Hasina from India.

With no invitation forthcoming from New Delhi, Mr. Yunus's decision to visit China has been perceived as a diplomatic snub – and possibly a sign that Bangladesh may be shifting its foreign policy orientation. While the Ministry of External Affairs has declined to comment, political leaders have weighed in. Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma called the comments "offensive and strongly condemnable", suggesting that the remarks were aimed at highlighting India's strategic vulnerability via the "Chicken's Neck". Other regional leaders and members of the Opposition have urged the central government to convey its displeasure to Dhaka. Mr. Yunus could not have been unaware that the timing and the location of his speech would provoke controversy. His remarks reflected a lack of sensitivity toward how the countries mentioned might interpret statements that appear to support China's economic hegemony in the region. While these comments may have been intended to appeal to his hosts or may have stemmed from his advocacy for regional connectivity, their substance could have been more carefully considered. A more suitable platform for such discussions might have been the upcoming BIMSTEC summit in Thailand, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi and leaders from South Asia to Southeast Asia will be present. Equally significant is that Mr. Yunus received two letters from India this week: one from President Droupadi Murmu extending *Eid-ul-Fitr* greetings, and another from Mr. Modi on the anniversary of Bangladesh's Independence Day. Although there has been no formal announcement of a Modi-Yunus meet in Bangkok, it is hoped that both sides will engage on the sidelines to mend the strain in ties and explore a more constructive path.

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Which States/Union Territories Share Boundaries with Bangladesh?



INDIA

NORTH-EAST ZONE MAP

N



LEGEND

- International Bdy.
- State Boundary
- Country Capital
- State Capital

Map not to Scale

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Content.

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Digital child abuse, the danger of AI-based exploitation

Page No. 6, GS 2,3

Recently, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology of the British Government, along with the AI Safety Institute (now called the AI Security Institute), released the first-ever International AI Safety Report 2025 (updated February 18, 2025). It flags the imminent risk of the generation, the possession, and the dissemination of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. Additionally, the United Kingdom is making the first legislative attempt to target the threats posed by AI tools that can generate CSAM. CSAM refers to material (audio, video, and images) that depicts a sexually explicit portrayal of a child. In a similar vein, the World Economic Forum, in a 2023 paper, highlighted how generative AI can create life-like images, especially of children. Moreover, the Internet Watch Foundation, in its report released in October 2024, underscored the proliferation of CSAM on the open web. The Government of India must amend existing laws to address the emerging threats and ensure long-term effectiveness.

Recent developments

The upcoming U.K. legislation will make it illegal to possess, create, or distribute AI tools that can generate CSAM. Moreover, it will be illegal to possess paedophile manuals that may guide individuals in using AI tools to generate CSAM. This marks a progressive shift from an ‘accused-centric’ and ‘act-centric’ to a ‘tool-centric’ approach in dealing with these abhorrent crimes.

The existing laws focus entirely on ‘who’ has done ‘what’, placing less or no emphasis on the ‘tool/medium’ used to commit the said ‘act.’ For instance, the Protection of Children Act 1978 criminalises taking, distributing, and possessing an indecent photograph or pseudo-photograph of



Shivang Tripathi

is a Doctoral Researcher at the Faculty of Law, Banaras Hindu University



Neha Singh

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The Government of India must amend existing laws to address emerging threats

a child. Furthermore, the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 criminalises the possession of a prohibited image of a child, including non-photographic materials. In contrast, the proposed law outlaws even the possession and use of such AI tools, making it deterrent and holistic. Second, it will enable enforcement authorities to apprehend offenders at the preparation stage itself. Third, it can curb the initial rippling effect caused by the spread of CSAM on the mental health of children. Fourth, it addresses the legislative gap concerning CSAM generated as purely AI imagery, which was previously restricted to the images of an ‘actual child.’

On whether India is future ready

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Report 2022, cybercrimes against children have substantially increased compared to the previous year’s statistics. Moreover, the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal (NCRP), under the aegis of the Cyber Crime Prevention against Women and Children (CCPWC) scheme, recorded 1.94 lakh child pornography incidents as of April 2024. In 2019, the NCRB signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), USA to receive tip-line reports on CSAM. As of March 2024, 69.05 lakh cyber tip-line reports have been shared with the States and Union Territories concerned. The statistics underscore the gravity of CSAM as a serious threat to a child’s right to life and dignity in India.

Presently, Section 67B of the IT Act 2000 punishes those who publish or transmit material in electronic form depicting children in sexually explicit acts. Furthermore, Sections 13, 14, and 15 of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012 (POCSO) prohibit using children for pornographic purposes, storing child

pornography in any form, and using a child for sexual gratification. Additionally, Section 294 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita penalises the sale, distribution, or public exhibition of obscene materials, while Section 295 makes it illegal to sell, distribute, or exhibit such obscene objects to children. However, the existing legislative framework lacks adequate safeguards to deal with the AI-generated CSAM.

A plan to follow

The existing legislative and policy framework in India needs to adapt to futuristic challenges, by making suitable changes. First, as proposed by the NHRC Advisory in October 2023, the definition of ‘child pornography’ under the POCSO Act must be replaced with the phrase ‘CSAM’ to make it expansive. Second, the term ‘sexually explicit’ under Section 67B of the IT Act must be defined to enable the real-time identification and blocking of CSAM. Third, the definition of ‘intermediary’ under the IT Act must expressly include Virtual Private Networks, Virtual Private Servers, and Cloud Services to impose statutory liability on them to comply with the CSAM-related provisions in Indian laws. Fourth, statutory amendments are needed to integrate the risks arising from emerging technological advancements. Fifth, the Government of India must pursue the adoption of the UN Draft Convention on ‘Countering the Use of Information and Communications Technology for Criminal Purposes’ by the UN General Assembly. Notably, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology proposed the Digital India Act 2023, currently in pipeline, to replace the two-decade-old IT Act. Therefore, and lastly, the proposed Digital India Act must draw inspiration from the U.K.’s upcoming legislation to include the provisions specifically targeting AI-generated CSAM.

- Recently, the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology of the British Government, along with the AI Safety Institute (now called the AI Security Institute), released the first-ever International AI Safety Report 2025 (updated February 18, 2025).
- It flags the imminent risk of the generation, the possession, and the dissemination of child sexual abuse material (CSAM) with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools. Additionally, the United Kingdom is making the first legislative attempt to target the threats posed by AI tools that can generate CSAM. C
- SAM refers to material (audio, video, and images) that depicts a sexually explicit portrayal of a child.
- In a similar vein, the World Economic Forum, in a 2023 paper, highlighted how generative AI can create life-like images, especially of children.
- Moreover, the Internet Watch Foundation, in its report released in October 2024, underscored the proliferation of CSAM on the open web. The Government of India must amend existing laws to address the emerging threats and ensure long-term effectiveness.

- The existing laws focus entirely on ‘who’ has done ‘what’, placing less or no emphasis on the ‘tool/medium’ used to commit the said ‘act.’
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The reciprocal tariff dilemma

Under the 'Fair and Reciprocal Plan,' the Donald Trump administration is countering "non-reciprocal trading arrangements with trading partners by determining the equivalent of a reciprocal tariff with respect to each foreign trading partner". The non-reciprocal trading relationship is assessed based on tariffs, discriminatory taxes, non-tariff barriers (including subsidies and restrictive regulations), exchange rate manipulations, and any other practice deemed to limit U.S. market access or impede American firms from competing.

In 2010, countries across the world sent 12% of their total merchandise exports to American shores. By 2019, one year before the pandemic, the U.S. share of world exports had only risen to 13%. The share stood at 13.4% in 2022, the latest year for which internationally comparable data on merchandise exports are available for the largest sample of the world's trading economies. Thus, roughly 87% of global merchandise exports are currently traded among countries that do not include the U.S.

Of course, there are variations around this average. For instance, the Cayman Islands and Bermuda in the Caribbean export almost 85% of their goods to America. The U.S. also accounts for over 75% of Canadian and Mexican merchandise exports. At the opposite end of the spectrum, 81 out of 160 countries, for which data were available from UN Comtrade for 2022, exported less than 5% of their total goods to the U.S. For 26 of these 81 countries (many from Africa), the U.S. share was less than 1%. The average U.S. share across the 160 countries was 11.4%, while the median was much lower at 4.7%. Less than a fifth of Indian, Chinese, and EU merchandise exports (18%, 16%, and 19%, respectively, in 2022) were destined for the U.S.

Now, let us look at the tariff



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picture and compare U.S. tariffs on partner exports *vis-à-vis* partner tariffs on U.S. exports. The latest tariff data available for this comparison are from UNCTAD TRAINS for 157 trading partners of the U.S., mostly for the year 2022. The European Union is considered a single partner given its common external tariff.

The average import-weighted tariffs on U.S. exports in 27 partner countries are lower than the corresponding U.S. tariffs. Technically, the concept of reciprocal tariffs works as a threat and a bargaining tool only when U.S. tariffs are lower than those in the partner country.

Considering only tariffs, this simple analysis thus rules out almost a fifth of all countries for which comparable tariff data are available from the 'Fair and Reciprocal Plan.' These countries include Canada, the EU, Japan, and the U.K. – among America's largest trading partners, which together accounted for half of total U.S. merchandise exports in 2022. In fact, U.S. commercial interests could be harmed if these countries imposed reciprocal tariffs on American merchandise exports instead.

Of the remaining 130 countries where the Trump administration perceives a tariff disadvantage, the magnitude of the tariff increase needed to nullify the disadvantage is less than 5% in 57 countries, including China and India. Moreover, in 15 of these 57 countries, the U.S. needs to increase its import-weighted tariffs by less than 1% to restore parity with partner tariffs. Thus, the threat of reciprocal tariffs may be more credible in the remaining 73 countries worldwide, where U.S. bilateral tariffs need to be raised by more than 5%.

Interestingly, however, the magnitude of the tariff hikes in these cases is positively correlated with the U.S. export shares in the partner countries. Put simply, pursuing the policy of reciprocal tariffs against partners where there is a significant tariff

differential results in raising average import duties on exports from countries for whom the U.S. is an important destination market. There is extensive commentary on how tariffs are a self-defeating policy. The correlation above only compounds the self-inflicted harm that a policy of reciprocal tariffs brings to the U.S.

This simple analysis is at the aggregate level, and more detailed product-level bilateral tariff and U.S. export share comparisons might be more revealing. However, based on this simple analysis, could partner countries be tempted to divert their exports to other countries in response to large reciprocal tariffs? After all, even today, 87% of global merchandise exports do not involve the U.S. While there are obvious costs to finding new export markets and trading partners, the experience during the pandemic has shown that firms adapt to external shocks quicker than governments.

Removing barriers

The best policy response to reciprocal tariffs is for impacted countries to remove barriers to doing business, both internally and with their non-U.S. trading partners. This is also the time to enhance regulatory cooperation and reduce regulatory bottlenecks to cross-border trade with the rest of the world, not just in goods but also in services.

The World Bank and World Trade Organization reports show that exports of digitally delivered services have grown faster than those of all other services and goods during the last decade. My own research also shows that preferential trade agreements, which include provisions on regulatory behind-the-border issues, have the most positive effect on digital services trade. Instead of wasting scarce resources on retaliatory tariffs, countries will be much better served if policymakers focus on issues that matter.



Reciprocal Tariffs

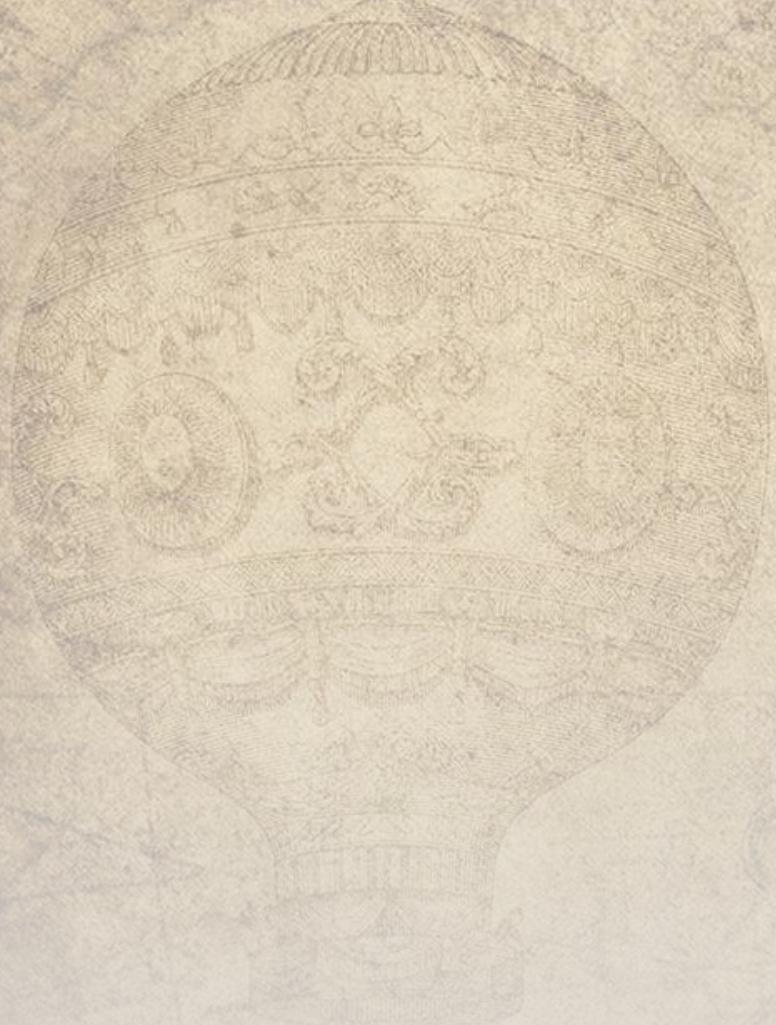
Country	Tariffs Charged to the U.S.A. Including Currency Manipulation and Trade Barriers	U.S.A. Discounted Reciprocal Tariffs
China	67%	34%
European Union	39%	20%
Vietnam	90%	46%
Taiwan	64%	32%
Japan	46%	24%
India	52%	26%
South Korea	50%	25%
Thailand	72%	36%
Switzerland	61%	31%
Indonesia	64%	32%
Malaysia	47%	24%
	97%	49%
	10%	10%
	60%	30%
	10%	10%
	74%	37%
	10%	10%
	33%	17%
	34%	17%
	10%	10%

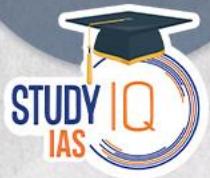
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- For instance, the Cayman Islands and Bermuda in the Caribbean export almost 85% of their goods to America. The U.S. also accounts for over 75% of Canadian and Mexican merchandise exports.
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Fact

- “It’s liberation day in America!” Mr. Trump wrote on the Truth Social platform on Wednesday, referring to implementation of tariffs against countries that he claims have treated the U.S. “unfairly”.
- All eyes will be on how the markets will respond when they open on Thursday, and whether India will join other countries that have already warned of or implemented counter-tariffs against the U.S., or not. “It is a waiting game now,” said an official, declining to comment on what the Modi government’s reaction might be.
- India has been identified as the country with the “highest average Most-Favored-Nation (MFN) applied tariff rate” (17%) of any major world economy by the USTR’s report on Foreign Trade Barriers released this week. I





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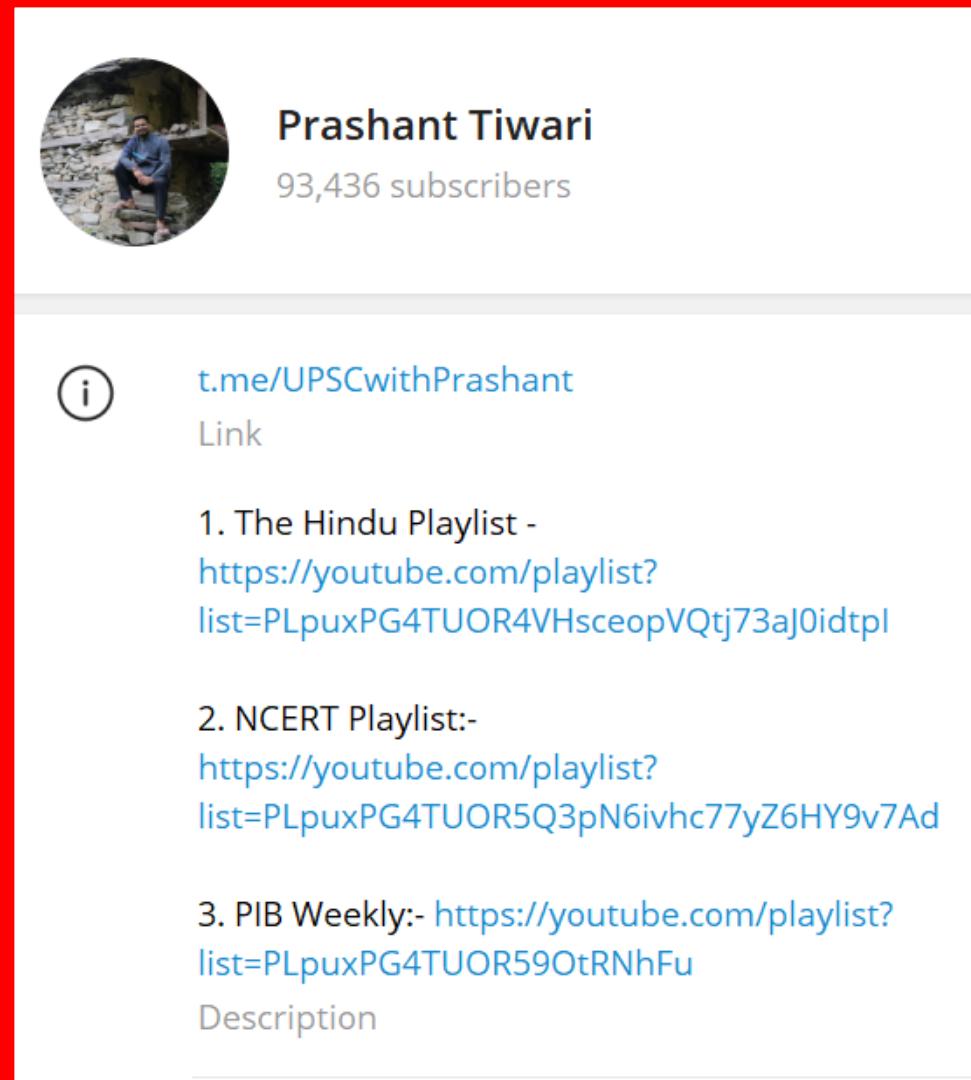
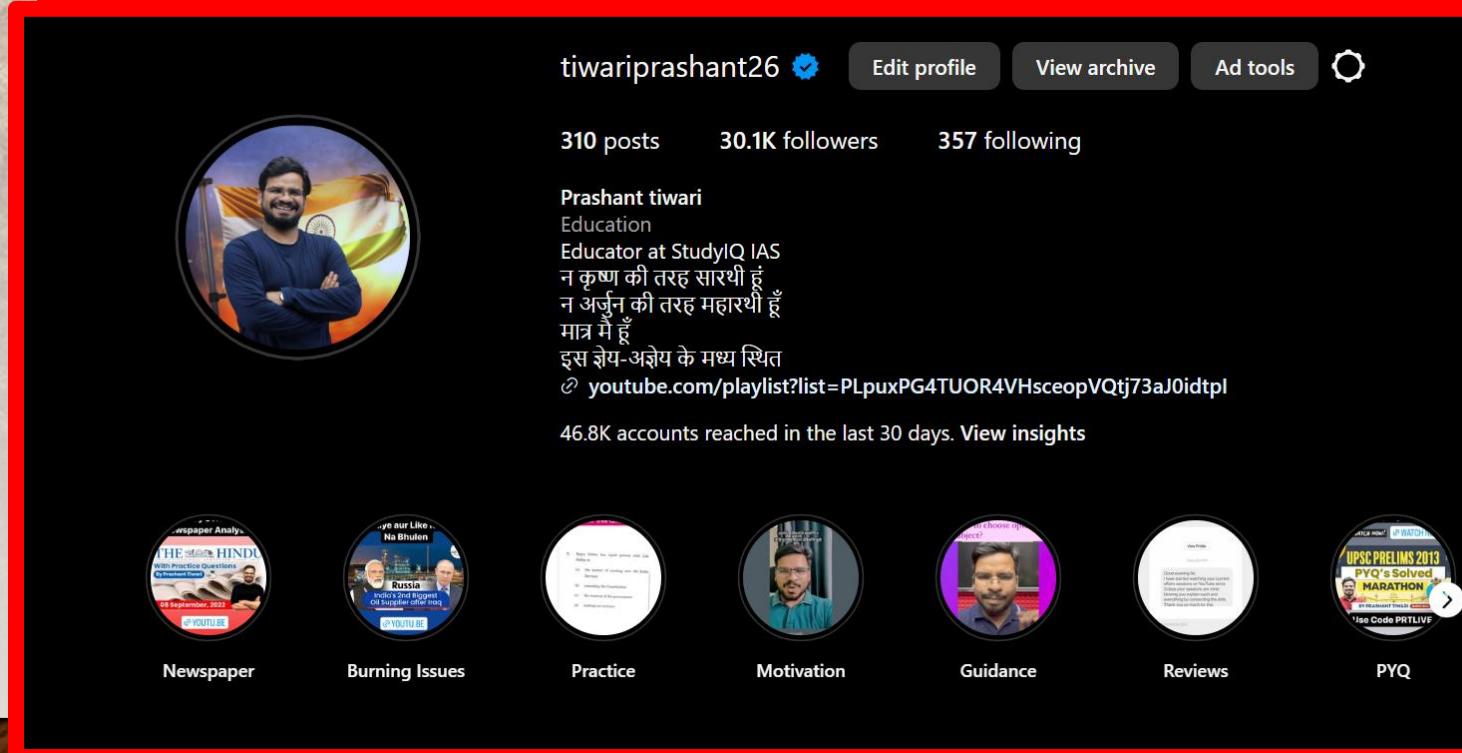
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— Thank You! —