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Nothing will work
unless you do.

Maya Angelou

'U.K.'s Chagos Islands deal with Mauritius risks entrenching exile of some islanders'

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Agence France-Presse

LONDON

Human Rights Watch said on Friday the U.K. government's deal to hand over the Chagos Islands to Mauritius could "entrench" the exile of Chagossians from the archipelago's biggest island.

While the agreement "may result in some Chagossians returning to some islands... it also appears to entrench their exile from Diego Garcia, the largest island," said Clive Baldwin of the New York-based rights group.

The group described the forcible displacement of the "entire Chagossian indigenous people, mostly



The deal may result in the exile of Chagossians belonging to the Diego Garcia, the largest island in the group. AP

to Mauritius, for a U.S. military base on the island of Diego Garcia" as an "ongoing colonial crime against humanity".

British Prime Minister

Keir Starmer on Thursday announced an agreement to give the remote Indian Ocean archipelago to Mauritius in exchange for control of a crucial U.S.-

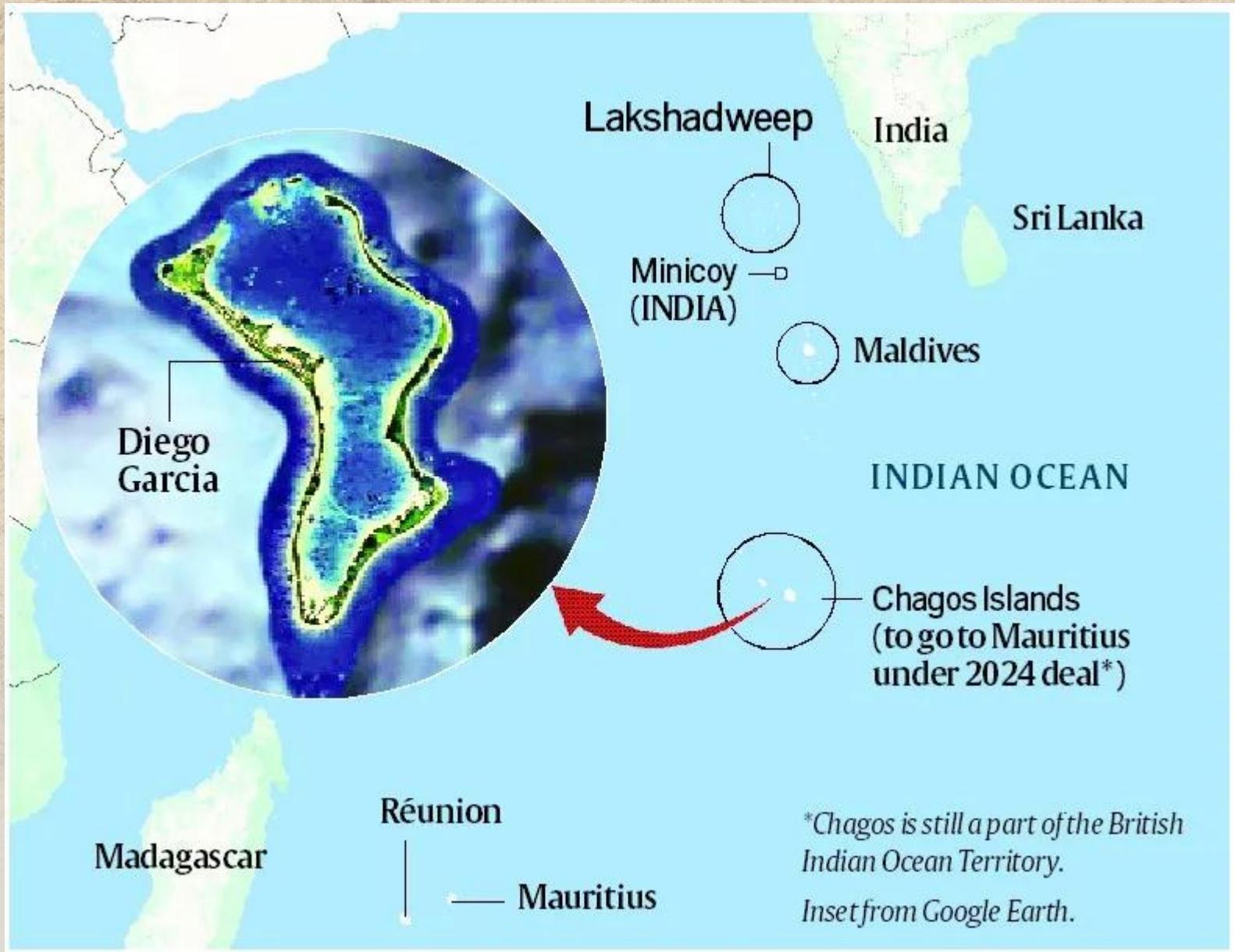
U.K. military base on Diego Garcia island.

99-year lease

The deal, first touted in autumn last year, will see Britain pay its former colony £101 million (\$136 million) annually for 99 years to lease the facility, Mr. Starmer said.

As part of the agreement, Mauritius will be able to resettle Chagossian islanders, expelled from the archipelago by Britain in the 1960s, to all of its over 50 islands, apart from Diego Garcia. Under the deal, the British government will set up a £40-million (\$54 million) trust fund for the 10,000-strong Chagossian diaspora.





**Chagos is still a part of the British Indian Ocean Territory.
Inset from Google Earth.*

Chagos Archipelago:

- **Location:** It is situated 500 km south of the Maldives in the Indian Ocean, and consists of 58 islands.
- **History:** It was inhabited in the late 18th century when the French brought enslaved African and Indian laborers to work on coconut plantations.
- Under the 1814 Treaty of Paris, France ceded the Chagos Archipelago, along with Mauritius, to Britain, marking the beginning of British control over the region.
- In 1965, Britain detached the Chagos Islands from Mauritius to create the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), compensating Mauritius with a 3 million-pound grant.
- Despite Mauritius gaining independence in 1968, the Chagos Archipelago remained under British control.

Diego Garcia:

- It is a coral atoll and the largest island of the Chagos Archipelago, located 7° south of the equator. It was leased to the US and UK in 1967 and became a military base in 1986.
- In 2024, the UK agreed to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius while retaining control of the military base on Diego Garcia under a 99-year lease.
- This followed the 2019 International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling supporting Mauritius' sovereignty claims.
- UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer Thursday signed a deal transferring sovereignty of the Chagos Islands to Mauritius, including the key Diego Garcia military base.
- The base, which plays a central role in UK-US defence operations in the Indian Ocean, will now be leased from Mauritius under a new 99-year lease.

Fact

- Under the deal, the UK will pay Mauritius an average of £101 million (\$129m) per year — amounting to a total of £3.4 billion (\$4.35 billion) over the course of the lease. Starmer also claimed the arrangement would cost less than operating an aircraft carrier annually.
- The US, which co-operates the Diego Garcia base with the UK, will shoulder the base's operational costs — which Starmer said exceed the UK's financial contribution. Former US President Donald Trump has publicly welcomed the deal.
- Diego Garcia, the largest island in the archipelago, has played a pivotal role in military operations, including US-UK strikes on Houthi targets in Yemen (2024–2025), humanitarian missions to Gaza, and earlier, bombing campaigns against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in 2001.

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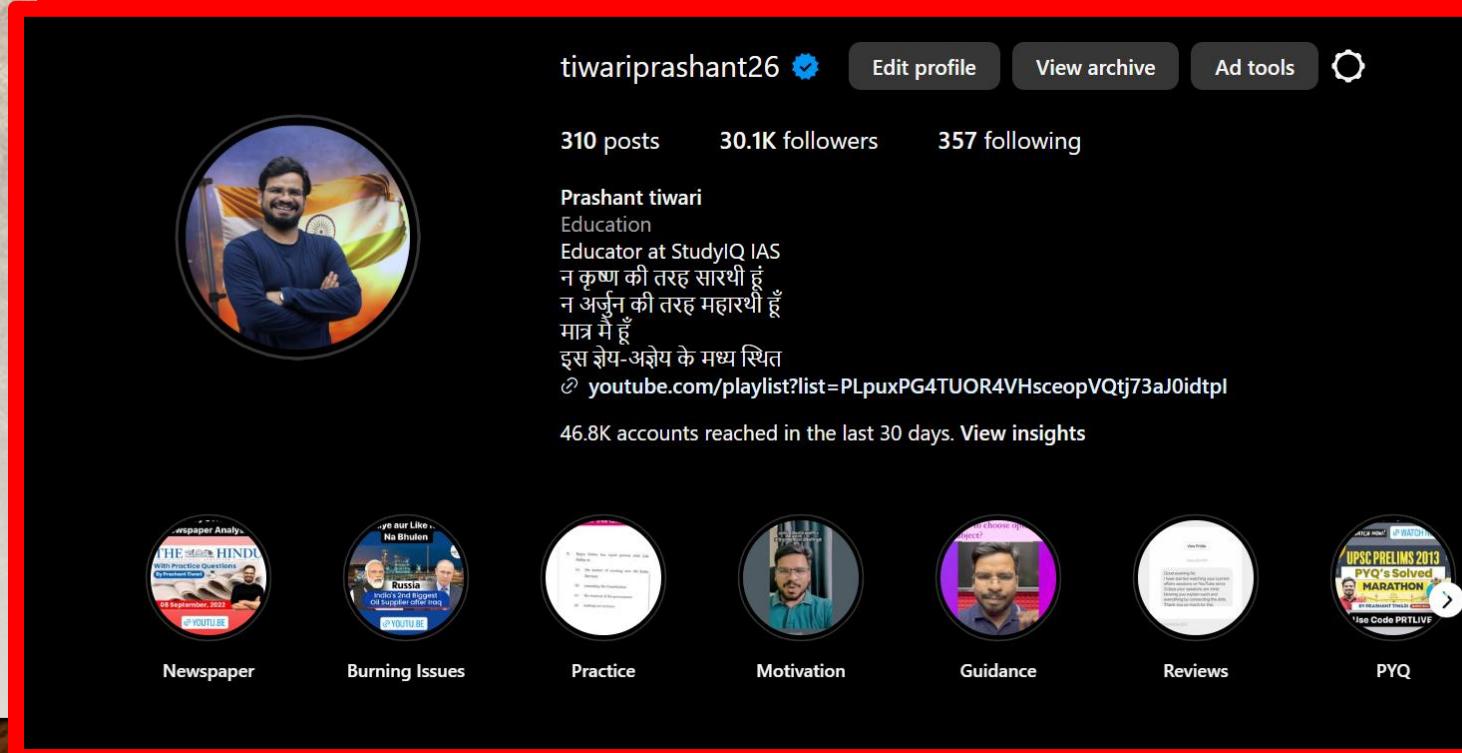
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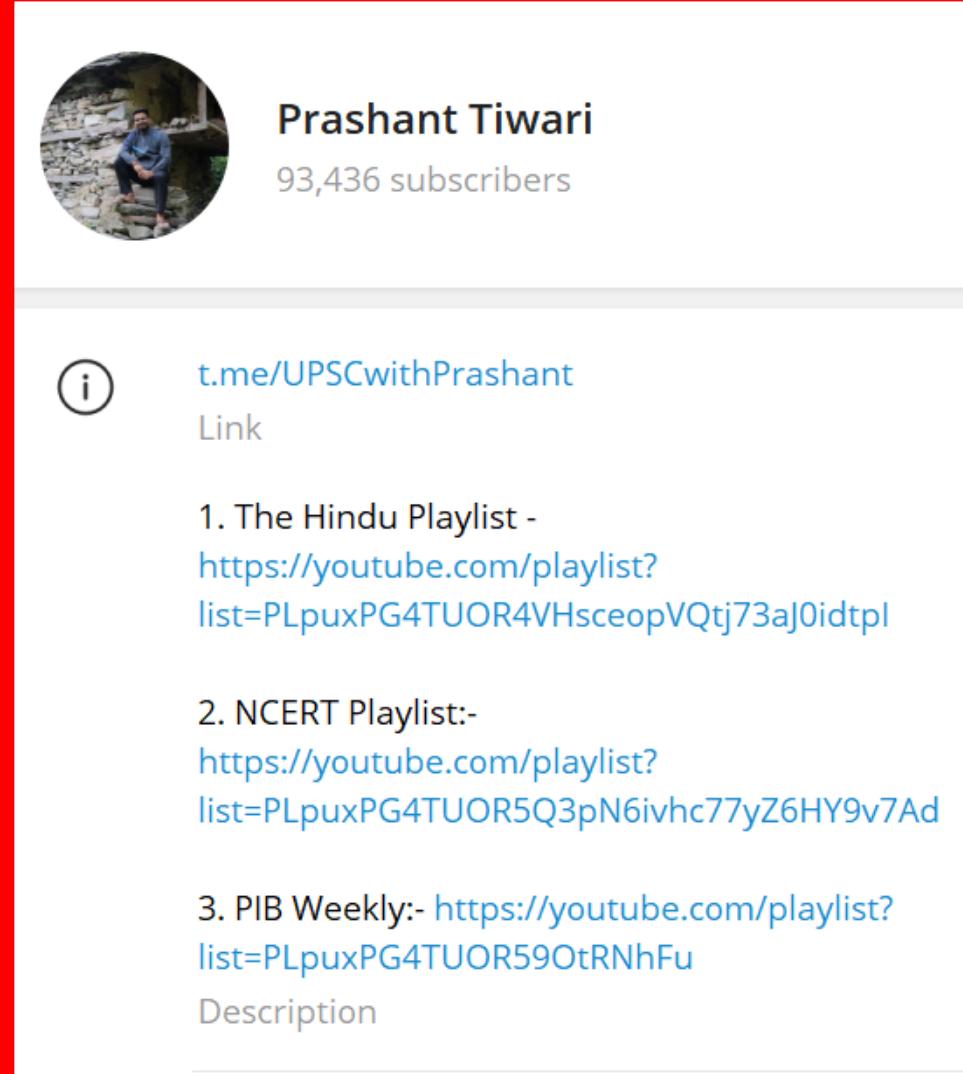
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Description

NE to be gateway for trade with Southeast Asia: Modi

Inaugurating Rising Northeast Summit, PM says region is no longer a 'frontier, but a 'frontrunner of growth'; the region offers a wide range of economic and industrial opportunities, he points out

Kalol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

India's Northeast is not a "frontier region" anymore, it is the "frontrunner of growth", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday, pitching for investments in the eight States that constitute the region.

Inaugurating the Rising Northeast Summit, the Prime Minister said that the region offers a wide range of economic and industrial opportunities. India has "new dreams" for the Northeast, he said, adding that the region would emerge as a gateway for trade with Southeast Asia over the next decade.

The event comes against the backdrop of the May 17 order by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade



Manifesting a dream: Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the Rising Northeast Investors Summit 2025 in New Delhi on Friday. PTI

to close land ports with Bangladesh. Officials have said that the decision will provide the Northeast a level playing field to develop the commercial potential of its own supply chains, and an impetus to manufacture competitively.

The Prime Minister paid

tribute to the diversity of the region, reflected in its products and people. "India is termed as the most diverse nation in the world. But our Northeast is the most diverse part of our diverse nation. From trade to tradition, textile to tourism, Northeast's diver-

sity is a very big strength of the region," Mr. Modi said.

'Powerhouse of energy'
He listed the bio-economy, bamboo, tea production, petroleum, sports and eco-tourism as some of the areas where the region is an emerging hub. "Northeast is the powerhouse of energy," said Mr. Modi, describing the region as 'Ashta Lakshmis' or the eight forms of Goddess Lakshmi.

He said the Northeast would emerge as a gateway to trade with the ASEAN bloc over the coming decade. "Northeast will be a strong bridge of trade with Southeast Asia. We are working on the necessary infrastructure to realise that goal," Mr. Modi said.

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INDIA

States and Union Territories



INDIA

NORTH-EAST ZONE MAP

N



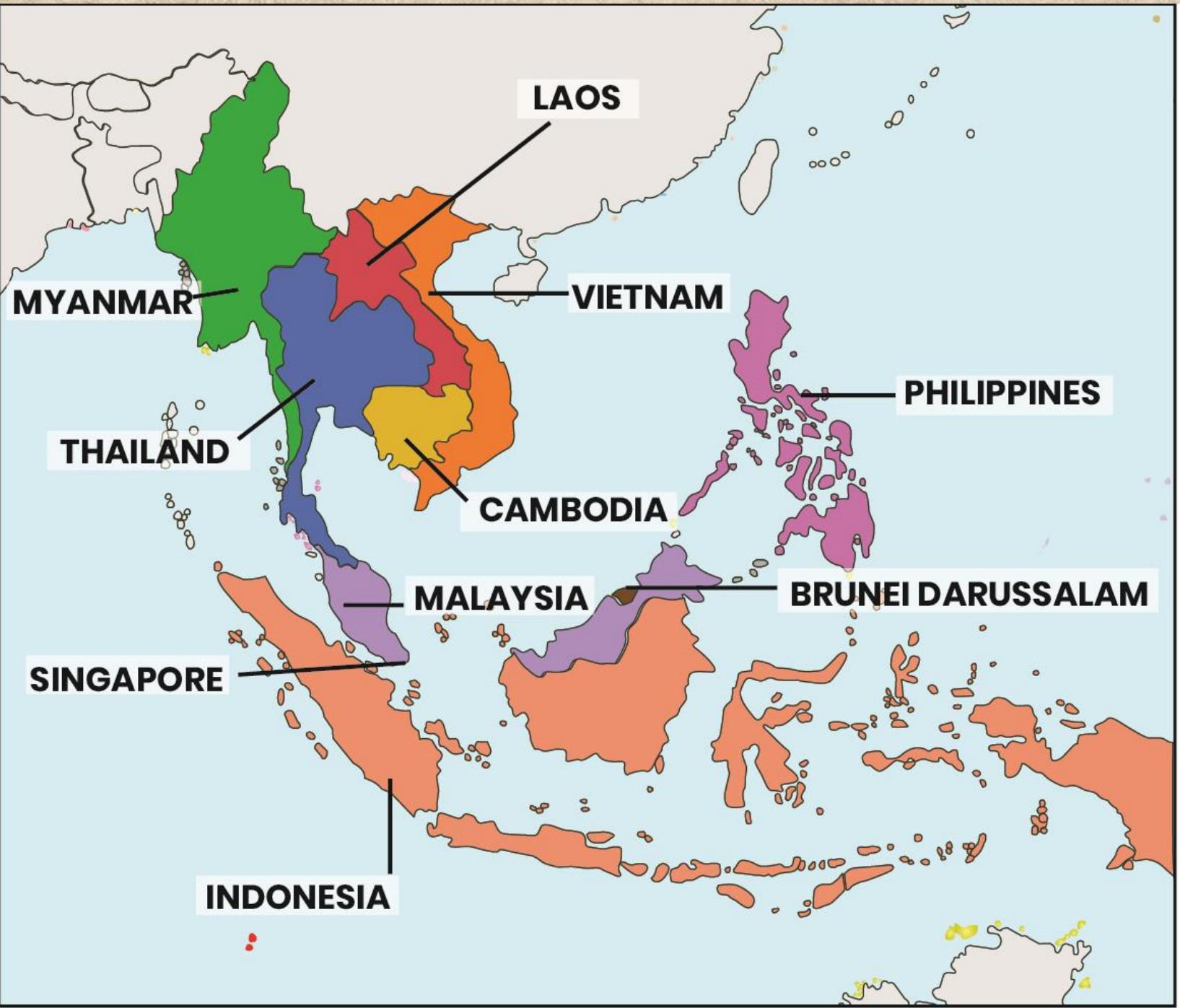
LEGEND

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

Content.

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- He said the Northeast would emerge as a gateway to trade with the ASEAN bloc over the coming decade. “Northeast will be a strong bridge of trade with Southeast Asia. We are working on the necessary infrastructure to realise that goal,” Mr. Modi said.
- The festival celebrates the beauty, culture, and diversity of the 8 North-Eastern States Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Tripura, and Sikkim.
- These states are collectively called Ashtalakshmi, representing the eight forms of prosperity as embodied by goddess Lakshmi.
- It offers a dynamic platform to display Northeast India’s vibrant textile sector, tourism opportunities, traditional craftsmanship and distinctive Geographical Indication (GI) tagged products.
- The festival underlines the importance of infrastructure development in Northeast India and its transformative impact on the region.



Fact

- **Establishment:** It was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand, with the signing of the ASEAN Declaration (Bangkok Declaration) by the founding fathers of ASEAN: Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.
- **Aim:** The motto of ASEAN is “One Vision, One Identity, One Community”.
- **Secretariat:** ASEAN Secretariat is located in Jakarta, Indonesia.
- **The Rising Northeast** is being organised by the Ministry of DoNER, Government of India, to showcase the potential for investments and trade in the Northeast Region of India.

Trump threatens EU with 50% tariff in fresh trade showdown

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday threatened to impose a 50% tariff on imports from the European Union, accusing the 27-member trading bloc of stalling trade talks.

Stating that negotiations with the EU “are going nowhere”, Mr. Trump said on Truth Social that he is recommending “a straight 50% tariff on the European Union, starting on June 1, 2025”.

Stock futures on Wall Street fell on the news.

If the new duties come into effect, they would dramatically hike the current U.S. baseline 10% levy against goods coming from the EU, and ratchet up the economic tensions between the world’s biggest economy and its largest



Donald Trump

trading bloc. Last month, Mr. Trump imposed sweeping tariffs against most countries. A few days later, he announced a 90-day pause on the levies for most countries to allow for negotiations, while keeping that lower 10% baseline in place.

The talks between the United States and the EU have not gone as smoothly as with other partners,

Make in U.S. or pay 25% tariff: Trump to Apple

NEW DELHI

Reiterating that he does not want iPhones to be assembled in India, U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened Apple Inc. with 25% tariff on iPhone imports if it does not make them domestically. » **PAGE 11**

with the EU recently threatening to hit U.S. goods worth nearly 100 billion euros (\$113 billion) with tariffs if the ongoing talks fail to lower levies on European goods.

In his early morning social media post on Friday, Trump said the EU had been “formed for the primary purpose of taking advantage of the United States on TRADE”.

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Content.

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- Reiterating that he does not want iPhones to be assembled in India, U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened Apple Inc. with 25% tariff on iPhone imports if it does not make them domestically.
- Ironically enough, U.S. President Donald Trump is intent on damaging its oldest and wealthiest educational institution — Harvard.

Fact

- After harassing the institution with investigations, orders to turn over records, and freezing funds and grants running to hundreds of millions of dollars, the U.S. government has said that Harvard cannot enrol foreign students in 2025-26. Some 6,800 international students, including more than 750 from India, constitute more than 27% of its current student strength.
- They will have to transfer to other institutions within the U.S. or leave, as per the government, which does not want any new international student there in 2025-26 either.
- The U.S. government has said that the student visa programme is a privilege that it has granted and Harvard “relies heavily” on foreign students to “build and maintain their substantial endowment”, which is said to run to over \$55 billion.

A medical oxygen access gap SE Asia must bridge

Oxigen is a life-saving essential medicine with no substitute. Because of the complexity of the industrial production process, there are many challenges in access to medical oxygen such as availability, quality, affordability, management, supply, human resources capacity and safety. Some five billion people around the world lack access to safe, quality, and affordable medical oxygen.

The Lancet Global Health Commission on medical oxygen security highlights a stark reality – that South Asia and East Asia and the Pacific have the highest unfulfilled demand for medical oxygen (the oxygen service coverage gap in these two regions is 78% and 74% respectively), and there is a clear and urgent need for action to rectify this.

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in oxygen infrastructure, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). While that crisis did trigger emergency interventions to alleviate the situation, long-term progress has been slow.

A World Health Organization (WHO) report (2022), “Promising practices and lessons learnt in the South-East Asia Region in accessing medical oxygen during the COVID-19 pandemic”, points out that sustained investments and policy commitments are required to ensure that oxygen is available where it is needed most. WHO’s Access to Medical Oxygen Resolution and *The Lancet Global Health Commission on Medical Oxygen Security* provide a road map for scaling up solutions, but its implementation requires urgent action. Governments, global health agencies, industry and civil society must come together to close the oxygen gap. This is an opportunity to create lasting and equitable access to a life-saving medical intervention.

Challenges hindering oxygen access

Several systemic barriers hinder the availability of medical oxygen, preventing its integration into health-care systems. The first is the shortage of equipment – only 54% of hospitals in LMICs have pulse oximeters and 58% have access to medical oxygen. Consequently, this gap in basic monitoring and supply infrastructure leads to delayed diagnoses, inadequate treatment and preventable fatalities, a deficiency that intensifies dramatically during severe respiratory outbreaks, let alone pandemics. Without the necessary diagnostic tools, health-care providers struggle to detect and manage oxygen deficiencies effectively.

However, the issue extends beyond equipment availability. The financial burden associated with increasing oxygen access remains a major obstacle. Bridging the global oxygen gap requires \$6.8 billion, with South Asia alone needing \$2.6 billion. The reality is that many LMICs face competing health-care priorities, making it



Saima Wazed

is Regional Director,
World Health
Organization (WHO)
South East Asia

difficult to allocate substantial funding toward oxygen infrastructure. Therefore, efforts to improve oxygen access risk being short-lived without sustainable financing mechanisms.

Compounding the challenge is the acute shortage of trained biomedical engineers and technicians. Even when oxygen plants and concentrators are available, a lack of skilled professionals to install, maintain and repair them can lead to frequent breakdowns. These deficiencies exacerbate disparities in access, especially in rural and underserved communities, where alternative solutions are often unavailable.

There needs to be a long-term and multi-pronged approach that integrates innovation, investment and policy action. Transparency, data-driven decision-making, and a strong policy framework will be crucial. The WHO Access to Medical Oxygen Scorecard is a key tool in tracking progress and ensuring accountability, playing a pivotal role in monitoring progress on the WHO Oxygen Resolution. The resolution calls for reporting ‘on progress in the implementation of this resolution to the Health Assembly in 2026, 2028 and 2030’.

National governments should develop medical oxygen scale-up plans with support from WHO, to strengthen oxygen ecosystems, allocate resources effectively, and address infrastructure gaps. Tailoring these strategies to health-care needs can create sustainable, resilient oxygen delivery models.

In South-East Asia, WHO has facilitated intra-regional cooperation between countries to build capacity. In partnership with Nepal’s National Health Training Center, WHO facilitated training for biomedical engineers and technicians, leading to the installation of state-of-the-art PSA oxygen plants in Bhutan. The training will ensure sustainable operations and maintenance, and this model of cross-border collaboration can be replicated across LMICs.

Infrastructure is insufficient

Ensuring a stable oxygen supply requires strong partnerships between governments, the private sector and international organisations. WHO emphasises local manufacturing to reduce import dependence, cut costs, and improve accessibility. Decentralised production can address supply imbalances and enhance last-mile delivery.

Innovations such as portable oxygen concentrators, solar-powered generators, booster pumps and community-based hubs can bridge accessibility gaps, especially in remote areas. Integrating these solutions into health-care plans can ensure that life-saving oxygen reaches every patient.

Power disruptions hinder oxygen production in South-East Asia, as in many LMICs. In these low-resource settings, solar-powered oxygen systems are a cost-effective and low-maintenance innovation that ensures uninterrupted supply,

lower costs and reduced grid dependence. Ethiopia and Nigeria have successfully implemented solar-powered oxygen delivery systems in remote health-care facilities, improving access and saving lives. The South-East Asia region should promote and invest in the solarisation of oxygen plants to ensure a stable supply amid energy insecurity and health crises.

Strengthening oxygen ecosystems

Bridging the oxygen gap requires a unified, multi-stakeholder approach. Governments should lead the way by integrating oxygen access into universal health coverage and emergency preparedness plans. A clear regulatory framework should be established to ensure the quality and the safety of medical oxygen, along with standardised protocols for storage, transportation and distribution. These measures will be needed for sustaining long-term availability of quality medical oxygen.

The private sector must also invest in local production and supply chain optimisation. Industry players have a crucial role in developing cost-effective, scalable solutions that cater to the specific needs of LMICs. Further, global health agencies must ensure that oxygen access remains a funding priority, facilitating financial support for infrastructure development, equipment procurement and workforce training.

Academia and research institutions can contribute by focusing on low-cost, innovative oxygen solutions tailored for LMICs. Prioritising affordability, efficiency and adaptability will be key. Using digital technologies for real-time monitoring, predictive demand analytics and supply chain management can further enhance the efficiency of oxygen delivery systems.

The oxygen crisis is a solvable problem that demands coordinated action, sustainable financing, and strong political will. Our success in installing PSA oxygen plants in countries demonstrates that strategic investments, cross-border collaboration, and workforce training can yield long-term solutions.

To maximise COVID-era investments in PSA oxygen plants, countries must ensure operational readiness. Ideally, donors who have already shown support for these initiatives during the pandemic should continue to support ongoing efforts. Surplus capacity should be distributed to peripheral facilities using booster pumps. WHO stands ready to provide technical support.

As *The Lancet Global Health Commission on medical oxygen security* reminds us, access to medical oxygen is not just a health issue but also a matter of equity and human rights. Oxygen should never be a privilege but rather a fundamental right for all.

Instead of crisis-driven approaches, sustainable investments in oxygen infrastructure can – and must – be made, ensuring that no one is left behind in their moment of need.

Governments, global health agencies, industry and civil society must address the vulnerabilities in oxygen infrastructure that were exposed during the COVID-19 pandemic

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Content.

- **Oxygen is a life-saving essential medicine with no substitute. Because of the complexity of the industrial production process, there are many challenges in access to medical oxygen such as availability, quality, affordability, management, supply, human resources capacity and safety. Some five billion people around the world lack access to safe, quality, and affordable medical oxygen.**
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Fact

- Several systemic barriers hinder the availability of medical oxygen, preventing its integration into health-care systems. The first is the shortage of equipment — only 54% of hospitals in LMICs have pulse oximeters and 58% have access to medical oxygen.
- However, the issue extends beyond equipment availability. The financial burden associated with increasing oxygen access remains a major obstacle. Bridging the global oxygen gap requires \$6.8 billion, with South Asia alone needing \$2.6 billion.
- Compounding the challenge is the acute shortage of trained biomedical engineers and technicians. Even when oxygen plants and concentrators are available, a lack of skilled professionals to install, maintain and repair them can lead to frequent breakdowns.
- National governments should develop medical oxygen scale-up plans with support from WHO, to strengthen oxygen ecosystems, allocate resources effectively, and address infrastructure gaps.

Decisive moment

Basavaraju's killing could defang the Maoists and serve as a chance for peace

In a blow to the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoist), its general secretary was killed in security operations in Chhattisgarh on Wednesday. The elimination of Namballa Keshav Rao, alias Basavaraju, is perhaps the biggest blow to the insurgents since the death of Cherukuri Rajkumar, the then CPI(Maoist) spokesperson in 2010, also in a security operation. Basavaraju, who had been the head of the party's central military commission before becoming the general secretary in 2018, had masterminded several attacks against paramilitary and police forces. His rise within the CPI (Maoist) marked the insurgents' reiteration of its militarist strategy, to continue their "protracted peoples' war" as against the alternative of political struggle and agitations to achieve their aims. His death – a number of Maoist personnel have been killed in the last couple of years – represents the failure of this strategy. Home Minister Amit Shah has been on record to say that the government is keen to overcome the Maoist threat by 2026 and Basavaraju's killing would suggest a major win. The fact that the Maoists had reportedly sought peace talks, even while continuing their armed struggle, calls into question whether the Maoist leaders and activists could have been apprehended rather than eliminated. The surrender of Maoist cadres in recent days is also a case in point. But it is also well understood that the senior Maoist cadre, with roots in the People's War naxalite movement in united Andhra Pradesh, have shown little inclination to give up their armed struggle and such "encounters" are perhaps inevitable.

In recent years, and according to the Maoists' own admission, there has been a significant reduction in recruitment by the insurgents, with flagging support from the tribal population in south Chhattisgarh. Tribal youth, many of whom have experienced enormous suffering in the decades-long insurgency, are no longer inclined to adhere to the radical agenda of the Maoists. The group's poor understanding of the Indian state and its complete rejection of the electoral process as a "mere facade" have found fewer takers in the forested areas that were hitherto inaccessible to the Indian government. With the government's increased tribal welfare measures and outreach and its redoubled emphasis on defeating the guerilla warfare, the Maoists have seen an erosion of their limited military and support bases. With the death of senior leaders, the Maoist movement is surely gasping for survival, but the intensive security operations have also resulted in scores of tribal youth being killed. The government should use this situation to renew its call for peace talks to pressure the Maoists to abandon their armed struggle rather than continue the policy of "annihilation" as that could only engender fresh resentment among the tribal people.

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Content.

- Naxalism, a form of LWE inspired by Maoist ideology, seeks to overthrow the state through armed rebellion (violence and guerrilla warfare).
- The term Naxalism derives its name from the village Naxalbari in West Bengal, where an uprising of peasants occurred in 1967 against exploitative landlords.
- It has since evolved into a complex insurgency affecting several states across India.

Causes for Naxalism:

- Landlessness and Exploitation: Unequal land distribution and exploitative practices by landlords, moneylenders, and middlemen fuel resentment in rural and tribal areas and led to growth of Naxalism.
- Poverty and Underdevelopment: Naxalite-affected regions lack basic amenities like healthcare, education, and employment opportunities, driving people towards extremism.

Fact

- **Tribal Alienation:** Displacement due to industrial and mining projects without proper rehabilitation creates anger and distrust towards the state, leading many to join Naxalite movements.
- **State Neglect and Violence:** A weak government presence, lack of basic services, and instances of police excesses, including custodial deaths, have further intensified grievances, strengthening the Naxalite insurgency.
- **The Communist Party of India (Maoist)** is the largest and most violent Maoist group in India. It was formed through the merger of two major Maoist factions: CPI (Marxist-Leninist) People's War and the Maoist Communist Centre of India.
- The CPI (Maoist) and its organizations were banned under the UAPA, 1967.

ABOUT.

- ⌚ **Originated:** 1967 uprising in Naxalbari, West Bengal
- ⌚ **Aim:** Societal and political change through revolutionary methods

IDEOLOGY.

- ⌚ Overthrow central government through armed revolution (Violence and guerilla warfare)
- ⌚ Establishment of a communist state based on Maoist principles

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE .

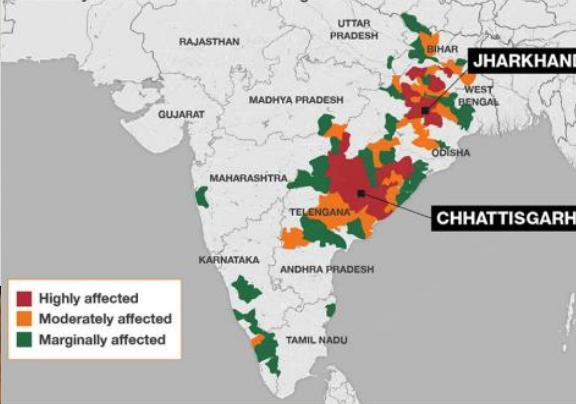
- ⌚ **Massive displacement of tribal population;**
Due to development projects, mining operations
- ⌚ **Tribal dissatisfaction;** Forest (Conservation) Act 1980 prohibits tribes from harvesting forest resources
- ⌚ **Poverty and lack of sustainable means;**
Driving factors for joining Naxalite movement
- ⌚ **Lack of effective governance;** Insufficient technical intelligence against Naxalism

STATES AFFECTED BY LWE .

- ⌚ **Red Corridor:** Experiences severe Naxalism–Maoist insurgency
- ⌚ Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Bihar, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Kerala

A map of India's Maoist conflict

A crackdown on Maoist rebels has led to a rise in the number of casualties in the country's tribal areas. Here are the regions that are most affected.



GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO CURB LWE.

- ⌚ National Policy and Action Plan to address Left Wing Extremism 2015
- ⌚ **SAMADHAN Doctrine**
 - ⌚ **S-** Smart Leadership
 - ⌚ **A-** Aggressive Strategy
 - ⌚ **M-** Motivation and Training
 - ⌚ **A-** Actionable Intelligence
 - ⌚ **D-** Dashboard Based KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) and KRAs (Key Result Areas)
- ⌚ **H-** Harnessing Technology
- ⌚ **A-** Action plan for each Theatre
- ⌚ **N-** No access to Financing
- ⌚ **Special Central Assistance (SCA)** in Public Infrastructure and Services
- ⌚ **Operation Green Hunt**
- ⌚ **Greyhounds** (Elite commando force in Andhra Pradesh)
- ⌚ **Bastariya Battalion** (local recruits in Chhattisgarh who know the language and terrain that could generate intelligence and conduct operations)

Countering Naxalism - Bandyopadhyay Committee (2006)

- Highlighted the lack of governance, economic, socio-political and cultural discrimination against the tribals
- Recommended tribal-friendly land acquisition and rehabilitation

Question 1: Naxalism is a social, economic, and developmental issue manifesting as a violent internal security threat. In this context, discuss the emerging issues and suggest a multilayered strategy to tackle the menace of Naxalism. **(UPSC Mains 2022)**

Question 2: What are the determinants of left-wing extremism in Eastern India? What strategy should the Government of India, civil administration, and security forces adopt to counter the threat in affected areas? **(UPSC Mains 2020)**

Question 3: Left Wing Extremism (LWE) is showing a downward trend, but still affects many parts of the country. Briefly explain the Government of India's approach to counter the challenges posed by LWE. **(UPSC Mains 2018)**

Question 4: Mob violence is emerging as a serious law and order problem in India. By giving examples, analyse the causes and consequences of such violence. **(UPSC Mains 2017)**

Question 5: The government's development drives for large industries in backward areas have isolated tribal populations facing multiple displacements. With Malkangiri and Naxalbari as case studies, discuss corrective strategies needed to reintegrate affected citizens into mainstream social and economic growth. **(UPSC Mains 2015)**

Research scholars upset over DST delay in release of stipend

Many INSPIRE-Fellowship scholars say they have not received funds from the Science Ministry's DST for nearly a year; DST Secretary acknowledges disbursement crisis and says that all scholars will get their money on time from June

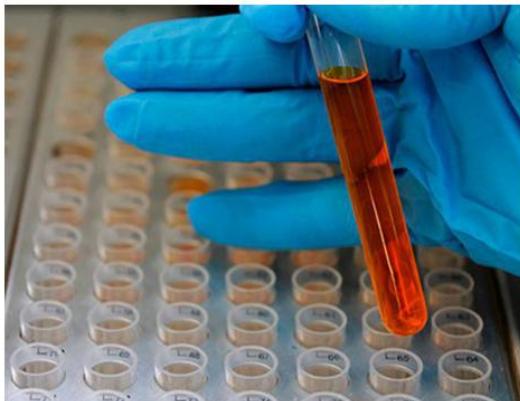
Jacob Koshy

NEW DELHI

For several weeks, research scholars spanning a range of Central and State universities and scientific disciplines across India, have been pleading with the Department of Science and Technology (DST) for their research stipends.

The forum for their complaints are primarily X and LinkedIn, and their prime gripe is the delay – ranging from eight months to 13 months – for their scholarship funds. Citing the mental agony of being penniless plus a lack of responsiveness from the DST, which is under the Ministry of Science and Technology, some are openly expressing “regret” at choosing to pursue scientific research in India.

“Timely disbursal is a dream. For some, delays have lasted for over a year without any stipend. Worse, when we reach out for help, our emails go unanswered. The helpline responses are often rude, as though we are begging – not requesting what we’re rightfully owed. Is this how



Some hurdles: Two significant changes have reportedly made the disbursement crisis worse in the DST.

we treat our country’s researchers?” posted Sanket Jagale, an INSPIRE-Fellowship scholar working at the plasma and nano-materials laboratory at the Savitribai Phule University, Pune, on LinkedIn.

‘Humiliating’

Another scholar, affiliated to the same university but who declined to be identified, told *The Hindu* that she had not got her scholarship money since March 2024. “I have money for rent only for another month or so. It is humiliating to pursue research this

way especially when I have cleared the very challenging requirements to be a DST-INSPIRE scholar in the first place, do research, and then see my contemporaries who have pursued engineering jobs earn dependable salaries,” she told *The Hindu*.

Several scholarships are conferred on doctoral students by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and the University Grants Commission (UGC). Scientists and research scholars say that a three- or four-month delay in the disbursal of money

is common. Until 2022, the INSPIRE fellowships offered by the DST too largely followed this regime. However, two significant changes have reportedly made the disbursal crisis worse in the DST.

The first was in September 2022 when as part of a directive by the Finance Ministry to streamline funds spent by the Centre, recipients of DST funds (grants to scientists for research and scholarships) at the institutional level (universities, research institutes, and so on) had to open “zero-balance accounts” with the Bank of Maharashtra. Thus, all the unspent funds with universities had to first be re-directed to these new bank accounts. *The Hindu* has learnt that the technological architecture guiding the fund flow did not work well.

Following this, in December 2024, all the institutions were required to open new “zero-balance accounts” with the Union Bank of India under a new initiative called “Hybrid-TSA”, whereby schemes valued over ₹1,000 crore required a new set of ac-

counting procedures. The net result was that all the work done in creating new accounts and verifying account balances had to be duplicated, thus delaying disbursement and causing the backlog.

The new process also brought the stipends payable to research scholars under the same category as funds for buying equipment and conducting research. The latter usually involves a detailed and time-consuming appraisal process. “Keeping the scholarships/ fellowships in the same category seems illogical,” a Ph.D. scholar with a top-ranked Indian Institute of Technology told *The Hindu* again, requesting anonymity.

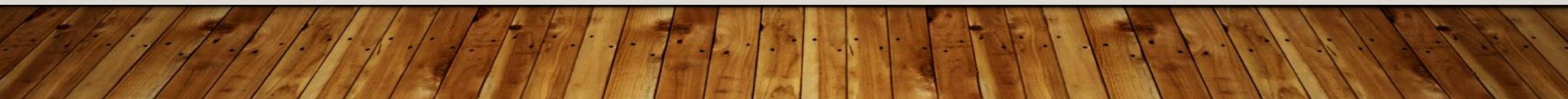
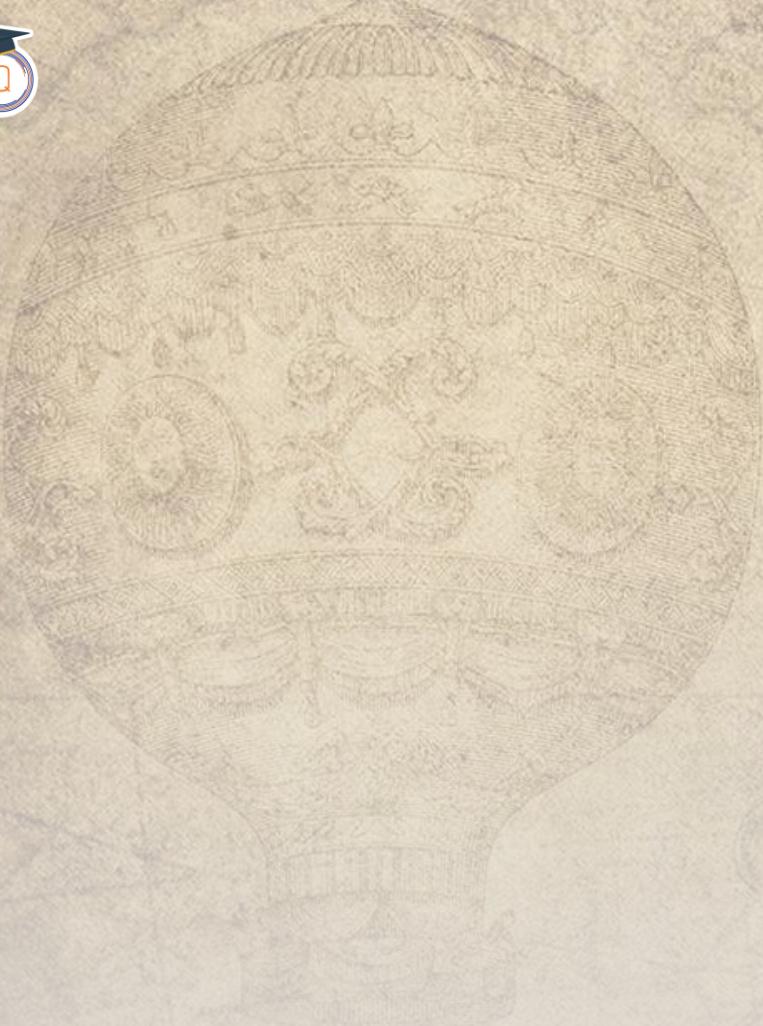
The Hindu reached out to the DST with a detailed questionnaire but did not get a response till press time. When contacted, DST Secretary Abhay Karandikar said he was “aware” of the disbursement crisis but said that from June 2025, all scholars would get their money on time. “All problems have been addressed. I don’t foresee any issue in future,” he said.

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Content.

- For several weeks, research scholars spanning a range of Central and State universities and scientific disciplines across India, have been pleading with the Department of Science and Technology (DST) for their research stipends.
- "Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research (INSPIRE)" is an innovative programme sponsored and managed by the Department of Science & Technology for attraction of talent to Science.
- Vision Build the critical human resource pool to strengthen the science and technology system and expand R&D base of the country.
- Goal Attract Young Talent to opt research as a career. A striking feature of INSPIRE Scheme is that it does not conduct any competitive exam(s) for identification of talent at any level. It relies on the efficacy of the existing educational structure for identification of talent.

- **INSPIRE INTERNSHIP** aims to provide exposure to the top 1% students at Class X Board level by organizing Science Camps either during summer or winter which provides opportunity to them to interact with Science icons from India and abroad, including Nobel Laureates, to experience the joys of scientific pursuit. These science camps nourish the curiosity of students in science, help them to think out-of-the box and attract students at an early age of 16-17 years to choose science subjects for further studies.
- **SCHOLARSHIP for HIGHER EDUCATION (SHE)** component of the INSPIRE aims to encourage meritorious students to study basic and natural sciences at undergraduate level through attractive scholarship and mentorship opportunities. **SHE** offers 12,000 scholarships every year to meritorious students in the age group 17-22 years.
- **INSPIRE FELLOWSHIP** component offers 1000 Fellowships every year to bright students in the age group of 22-27 years to pursue Ph.D. in basic and applied sciences including engineering, medicine, agriculture and veterinary sciences.
- **INSPIRE FACULTY FELLOWSHIP** component provides opportunities to 100 persons every year with Ph.D. qualification in the age group of 27-32 years for 5 years to carry out research in both basic and applied science areas including engineering, medicine, agriculture and veterinary sciences for establishing themselves as independent researchers. It grants an attractive fellowship for a duration of 5 years.



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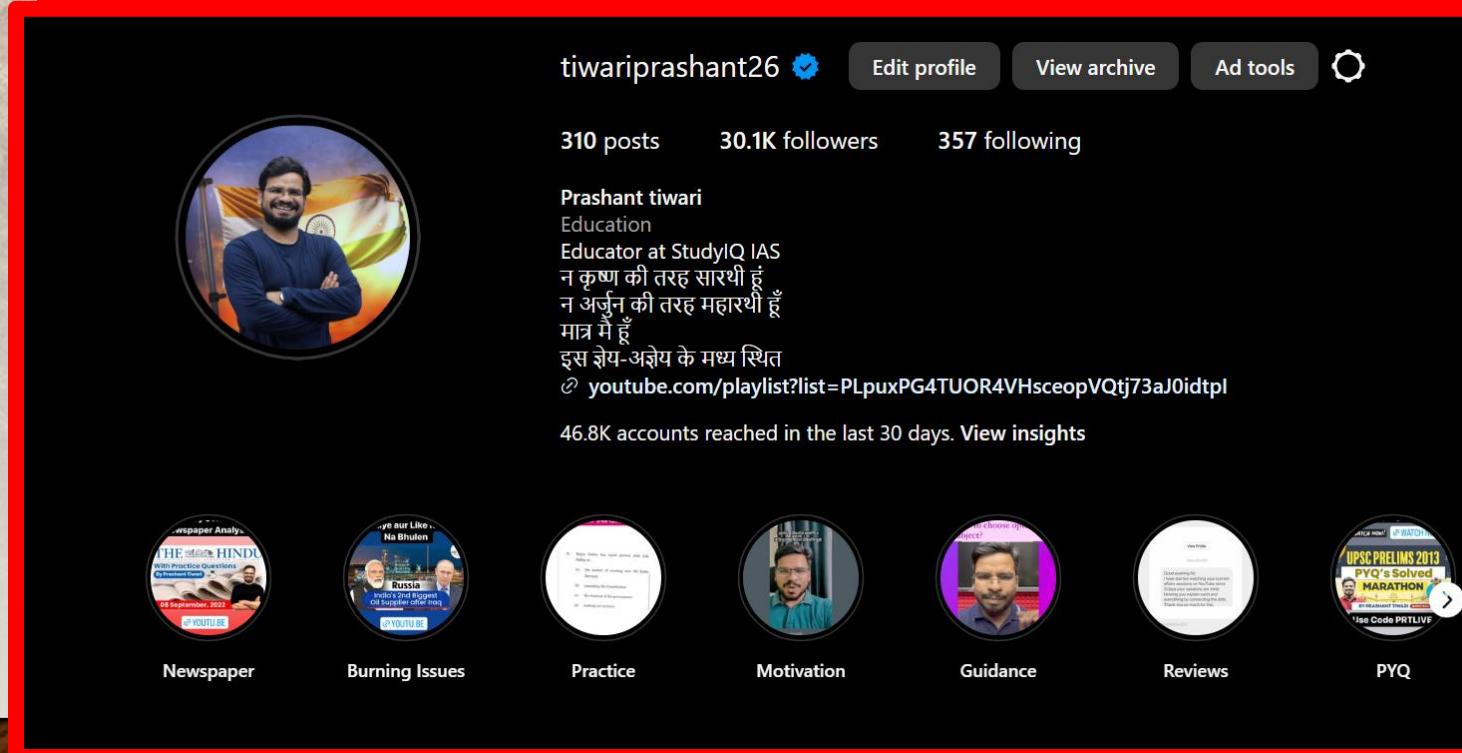
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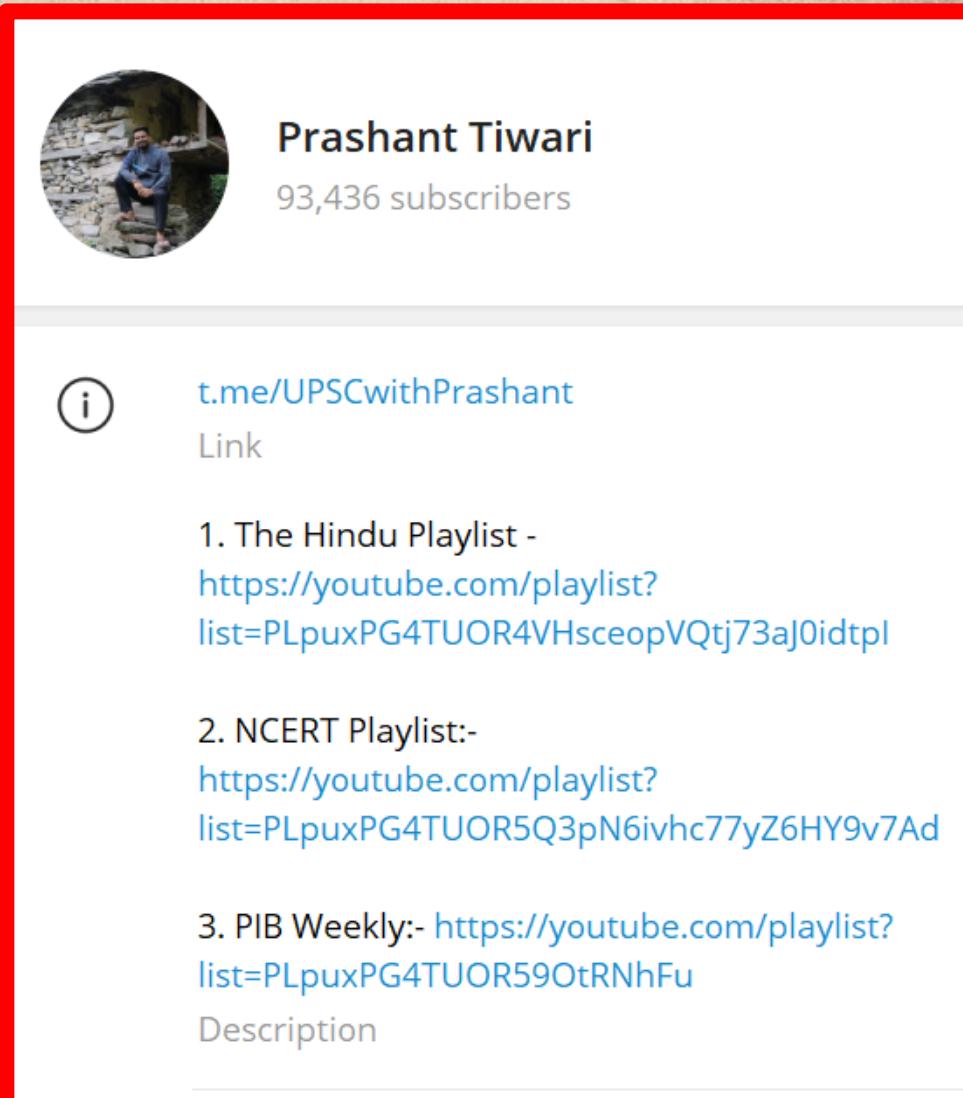
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