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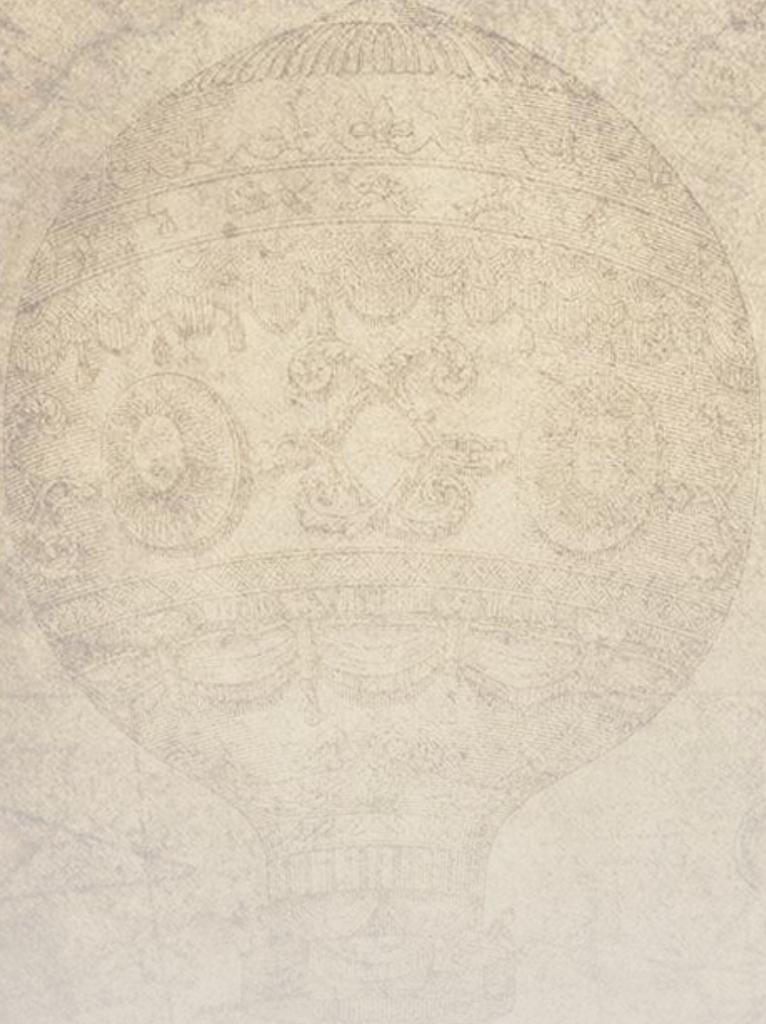
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**"Trust yourself.  
You can do this."**





## Integrated tri-service exercise held in Arunachal

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Army conducted a tri-service integrated multi-domain warfare exercise, 'Prachand Prahaar', in the high-altitude terrain of Arunachal Pradesh from March 25 to 27, according to an official statement on Thursday. The exercise, aimed at "validating a fully integrated approach to surveillance, command and control, and precision firepower across the three services", brought together the operational teams in a synergised combat drill designed to simulate future warfare.

"Cutting-edge platforms such as long-range maritime reconnaissance aircraft, armed helicopters, UAVs, loitering munitions, and space-based assets were employed to achieve total situational awareness and rapid target engagement," the Defence Spokesperson for Manipur, Nagaland and Southern Arunachal Pradesh said in a statement.

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# EXERCISE, PRACHAND PRAHAAR



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# Trump levies 25% tariff on imported cars; allies fume

Reuters

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday unveiled a 25% tariff on imported vehicles, expanding a global trade war and prompting criticism and threats of retaliation from affected U.S. allies.

The new levies on cars and light trucks will take effect on April 3, the day after Mr. Trump plans to announce reciprocal tariffs aimed at the countries responsible for the bulk of the U.S. trade deficit.

They come on top of duties already introduced on steel and aluminium, and on goods from Mexico, Canada and China.

The U.S. imported \$474 billion worth of automotive products in 2014, including passenger cars worth \$220 billion. Mexico, Japan, South Korea, Canada and Germany, all close U.S. allies, were the biggest suppliers.

## 'Bad for businesses'

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen described the move as "bad for businesses, worse for consumers", while Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney labelled it a "direct attack" on Canadian workers and said retaliatory measures were being considered.

"We will defend our

## Driving imports away

The table shows the shares of expenditure on imports of eight types of cars and trucks imported into the United States in 2022

Type	Quantity Share
Small cars	34.6%
Mid and large cars	10.2%
Luxury cars	42.5%
Small CUVs	46.8%
Mid and large CUVs	24.2%
SUVs	13.9%
Vans	10.6%
Pickups	0%



workers, we will defend our companies, we will defend our country...", Mr. Carney told reporters in Ottawa.

Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba said Tokyo will put "all options on the table" in dealing with the new tariffs.

Trump sees tariffs as a tool to raise revenue to offset his promised tax cuts and to revive a long-declining U.S. industrial base.

Many trade experts, however, expect prices to initially rise and demand to fall, hurting a global auto industry that is already reeling from uncertainty caused by Trump's rapid-fire tariff threats and occasional reversals.

"We're going to charge countries for doing business in our country and taking our jobs, taking our wealth, taking a lot of the

things that they've been taking over the years," Mr. Trump said at the Oval Office on Wednesday.

"They've taken so much out of our country, friend and foe and frankly, friend has been oftentimes much worse than foe."

The United Auto Workers, long-standing critics of free trade agreements it says have destroyed American jobs, lauded the move.

"These tariffs are a major step in the right direction for autoworkers and blue-collar communities across the country, and it is now on the automakers, from the Big Three to Volkswagen and beyond, to bring back good union jobs to the U.S.," UAW President Shawn Fain said in a statement.

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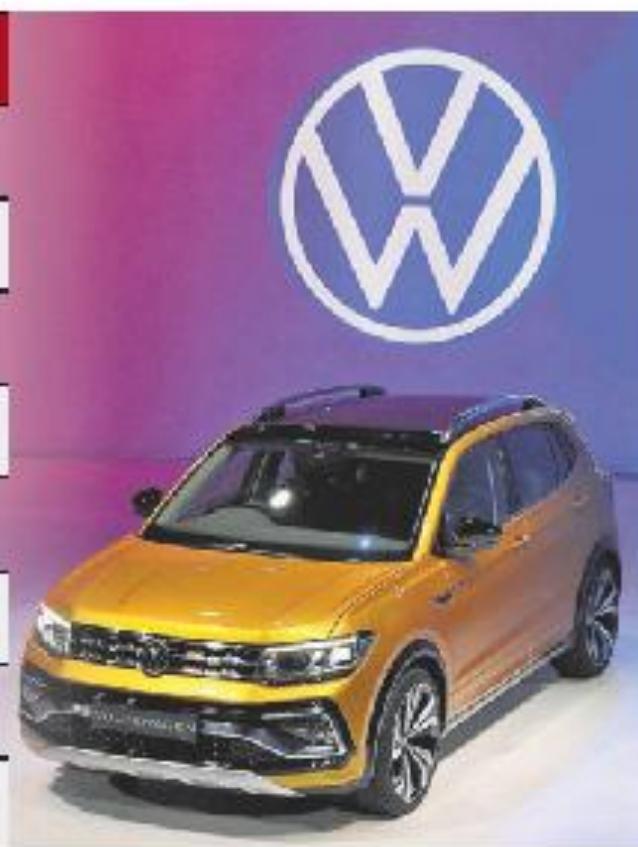
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# Putin to visit India this year, says Foreign Minister Lavrov

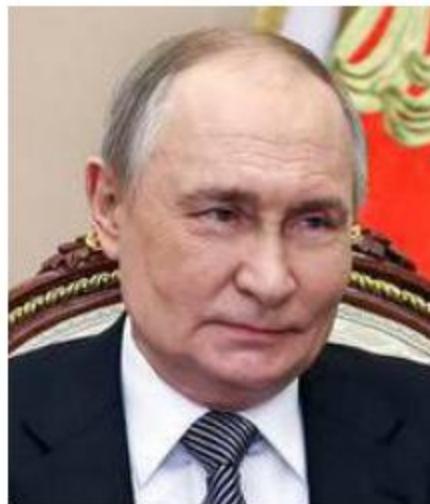
Page No. I, GS 2

**Kallol Bhattachjee**

NEW DELHI

Russian President Vladimir Putin will visit India this year, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced on Thursday, adding that both sides are making the necessary preparations for the visit. He appreciated India's "balanced" approach towards the Ukraine crisis, while addressing an event here.

"The relations between our countries have a long history. We can say that they have stood the test of time more than once. Today, Russia and India are developing equal cooperation based on sincere, mutual respect and considera-



Vladimir Putin

tion of each other's interests. It is symbolic that Prime Minister Narendra Modi made his first bilateral foreign visit after his re-election last year to Russia. Now it is our turn," he said.

"Russian President Putin accepted the invitation of the head of the Indian

government. The visit of the head of the Russian state to the Republic of India is being prepared," he added.

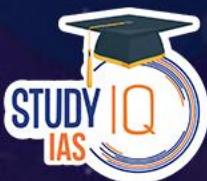
This will be Mr. Putin's first trip to India since the Ukraine crisis began in February 2022. He had paid a short visit to India on December 6, 2021 for the 21<sup>st</sup> India-Russia annual summit. In December 2024, Russia confirmed that Mr. Putin had received an invitation from Mr. Modi to visit India early in 2025. Mr. Modi last visited Russia on July 8 and 9, 2024 for the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual India-Russia summit.

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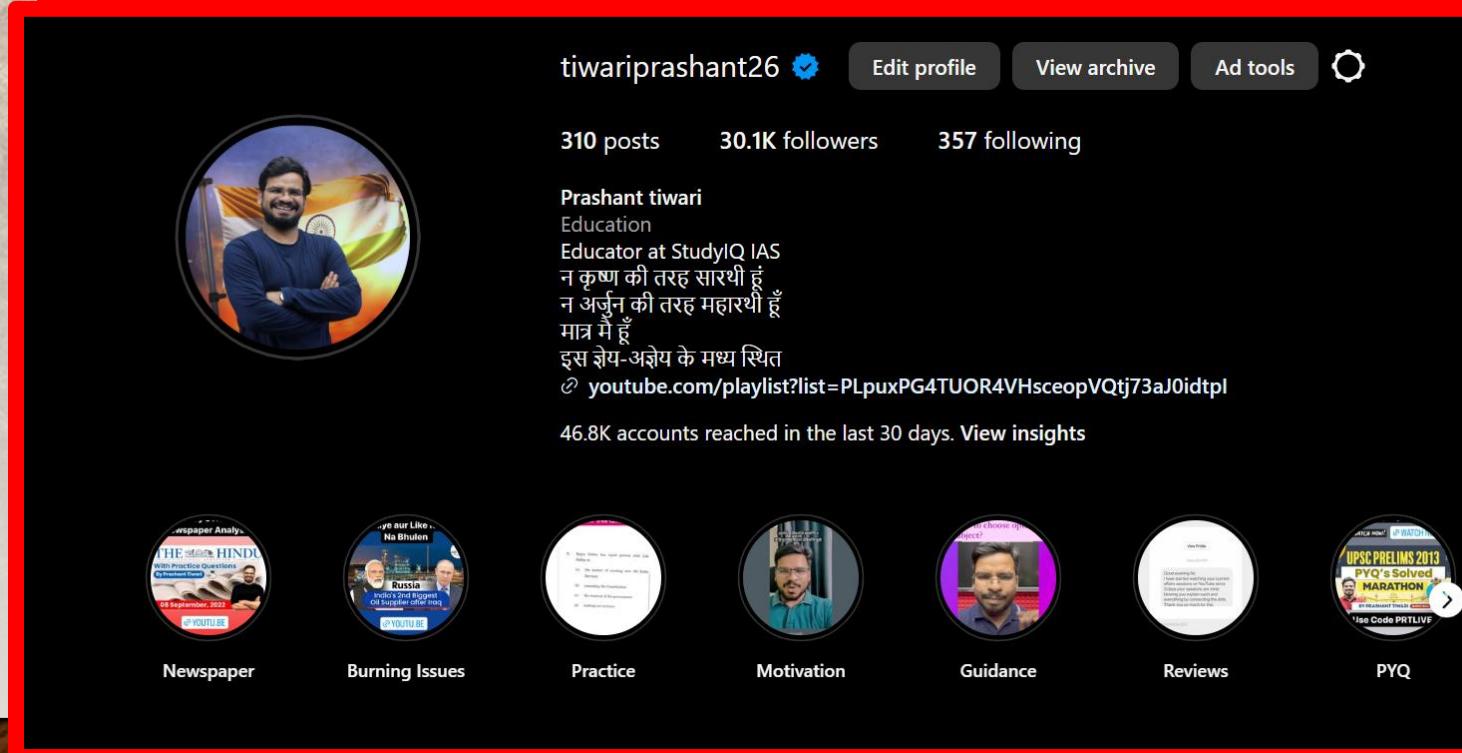
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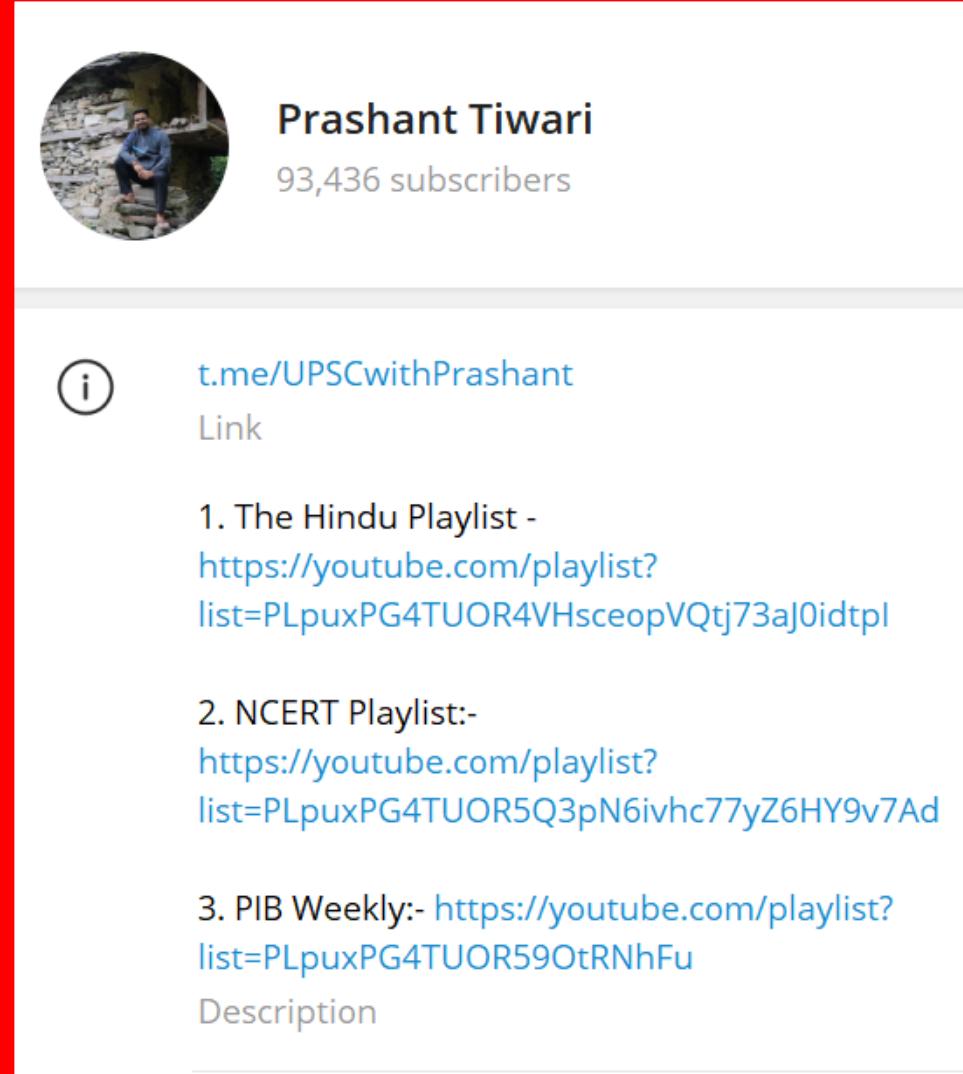
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Description

# Court allows disposal of remaining Union Carbide toxic waste at Pithampur

M.P. govt. assures court that 328 tonnes would be incinerated within 72 days; emissions from trial runs within prescribed standards, states govt. affidavit; locals, activists unhappy with HC decision

**Mehul Malpani**  
Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh High Court on Thursday gave its nod to the State government following an assurance from the latter that it could incinerate the remaining 40-year-old toxic waste of Bhopal's defunct Union Carbide factory within 72 days at a private facility in Pithampur.

The nod from a Division Bench of Chief Justice Suresh Kumar Kait and Justice Vivek Jain came after the State authorities submitted an affidavit with reports of incineration of 30 tonnes of waste in three trial runs conducted in the past one month.

Stating that the trial runs had been successful, the State authorities said the remaining 300-plus tonnes of waste could be disposed of at a feed rate of 270 kg per hour under the supervision of the Central Pollution Control Board and the Madhya Pradesh Pollution Control Board, and that the entire process could be completed within 72 days.

In its affidavit, the government said emissions from the trial runs were within prescribed standards. "During the trial runs, emissions from



The main suggestion by activists to resolve the situation is sending the toxic waste to the United States for proper disposal. FILE PHOTO

stacks as per analysis reports were found to be well within the prescribed standard. The consumption of fuel, water, and chemical, and the residue/ash generation has been found to be minimum in the third trial run at the feed rate of 270 kg/hr and it has been recommended that feed rate of 270 kg/hr be adopted for incineration of the remaining waste," the government said.

Of the 350 tonnes of waste transported to Pithampur, 328 tonnes now remain to be disposed of.

In the previous hearing on February 18, the HC had allowed the State government to conduct three trials and submit the reports before it. Asking the authorities to undertake all safety measures during the disposal process, the HC

directed the government to submit a report on the next listed date of hearing on June 30.

After the toxic waste was moved there on January 2, Pithampur witnessed massive protests, with locals from the town and nearby villages, and in Indore, opposing the government's plans and raising concerns over the impact on their environment and water bodies. Two men attempted self-immolation during a protest in Pithampur.

## Hunger strike

The protests forced the State government to seek six weeks' time to run awareness campaigns and build public consensus on the matter.

Sandeep Raghuvanshi, a local activist who went on

a hunger strike, said the public in Pithampur was not happy with the High Court's decision. "People here are angry and confused because the judiciary was our last resort. We will discuss the matter and decide what our next course of action should be," Mr. Raghuvanshi told *The Hindu*, adding that a decision on whether to approach the Supreme Court again would be taken.

During the hearing, the court asked the Bhopal Group for Information and Action (BGIA) to submit its suggestions to the authorities after the body objected to the incineration process, saying that it will triple the 300-tonne waste into 900 tonnes of residue.

"So we are spending ₹126 crore, tripling the 300 metric tonnes, and then burying the same plastic which will leach in future...." Bhopal gas tragedy activist Rachna Dhingra, who appeared for the BGIA, said.

Ms. Dhingra said the group would send its suggestions to the State Chief Secretary soon. "The process works for municipal waste but not for toxic waste. Our main suggestion is to send the waste to the U.S.," she said. Ms. Dhingra also raised questions over the live monitoring during trial runs.

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- In its affidavit, the government said emissions from the trial runs were within prescribed standards. “During the trial runs, emissions from stacks as per analysis reports were found to be well within the prescribed standard.
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## Bhopal gas disaster

- About
- The Bhopal Gas Disaster, one of the world's worst industrial accidents, occurred on the night of December 2-3, 1984, in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh.
- What Happened
- A highly toxic gas, methyl isocyanate (MIC), leaked from a pesticide plant owned by Union Carbide India Limited (UCIL).
- The leak exposed over 500,000 residents to the gas, leading to immediate fatalities and long-term health complications.

### Reasons for the Disaster

- Poor Maintenance: Safety systems, like gas scrubbers and cooling systems, were either non-functional or inadequate.
- Negligence: Lack of proper training for workers and failure to follow safety protocols.
- Cost-Cutting Measures: Union Carbide had reduced staff and safety standards to lower operational costs.
- Design Flaws: Faulty plant design increased the risk of gas leaks.
- Storage Issues: Excessive quantities of MIC were stored at the plant, contrary to safety guidelines.

## **Methyl Isocyanate (CH<sub>3</sub>NCO)**

- **Volatile, colorless liquid that is extremely flammable, and potentially explosive when mixed with air.**
- **Reacts with water, giving off heat and producing methylamine and carbon dioxide.**
- **Liquid and vapor are toxic when inhaled, ingested, or exposed to the eyes or skin.**

### **Initiatives taken to tackle Chemical accidents**

- **NDMA guidelines on Chemical Disaster Management: Inspection System by Regulatory Bodies, Establish Information networking system with states and districts on priority basis etc.**
- **Explosives Act, 1884: To control manufacture, possession, use, transportation and importation of Explosives.**
- **Chemical Accidents (Emergency Planning, Preparedness, and Response) Rules 1996.**

# Don tilts at windmills in Kerala, propped up by Kalari and Theyyam

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**The Hindu Bureau**

PALAKKAD

Fans of the 17th Century Spanish classic *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes will be in for a treat on March 29 when a new Malayalam theatre adaptation of the parody hits the stage.

*Nanmayil John Quixote* will portray the original narrative with Malayali features, mixing traditional props and instruments with the elements of Theyyam and Kalari.

Aliyar Ali, director of the play, says, "The core of the original by Miguel de Cervantes and its humour remains intact. We lace it with the social and cultural milieus of our land. Transformation of the names - from the titular Don (Quix-



**Behind the scenes:** Actors rehearsing for *Nanmayil John Quixote* that will be staged at Government Victoria College in Palakkad.

ote) to John Quixote and Sancho Panza to Sancho Pachan - is part of the small tweaks done to make them vernacular."

## In memory of a friend

An independent production by Palakkad-based

Sportive Theatre Space, the play was chosen by the makers to commemorate friend and fellow creative Midhun Mohan, who passed away in 2023. The screening is also timed to coincide with the International Theatre Day.

"The play will combine acrobatics and the quirks of the Kalari and Theyyam traditions. One will see the protagonists being blessed by a Theyyam Thira as they embark on their quest for adventure," says Mr. Ali. "The founding tenet of our collective has been to create theatre with sportive elements. And we have achieved just that with the play," he says.

To ensure a transformative experience for both Quixote fans and traditional art lovers, the makers have based the production on an audiovisual medium using regional motifs, reliques, and soundscapes.

The two-hour play will be staged at Government Victoria College ground, Palakkad, on March 29 and 30 at 7 p.m.



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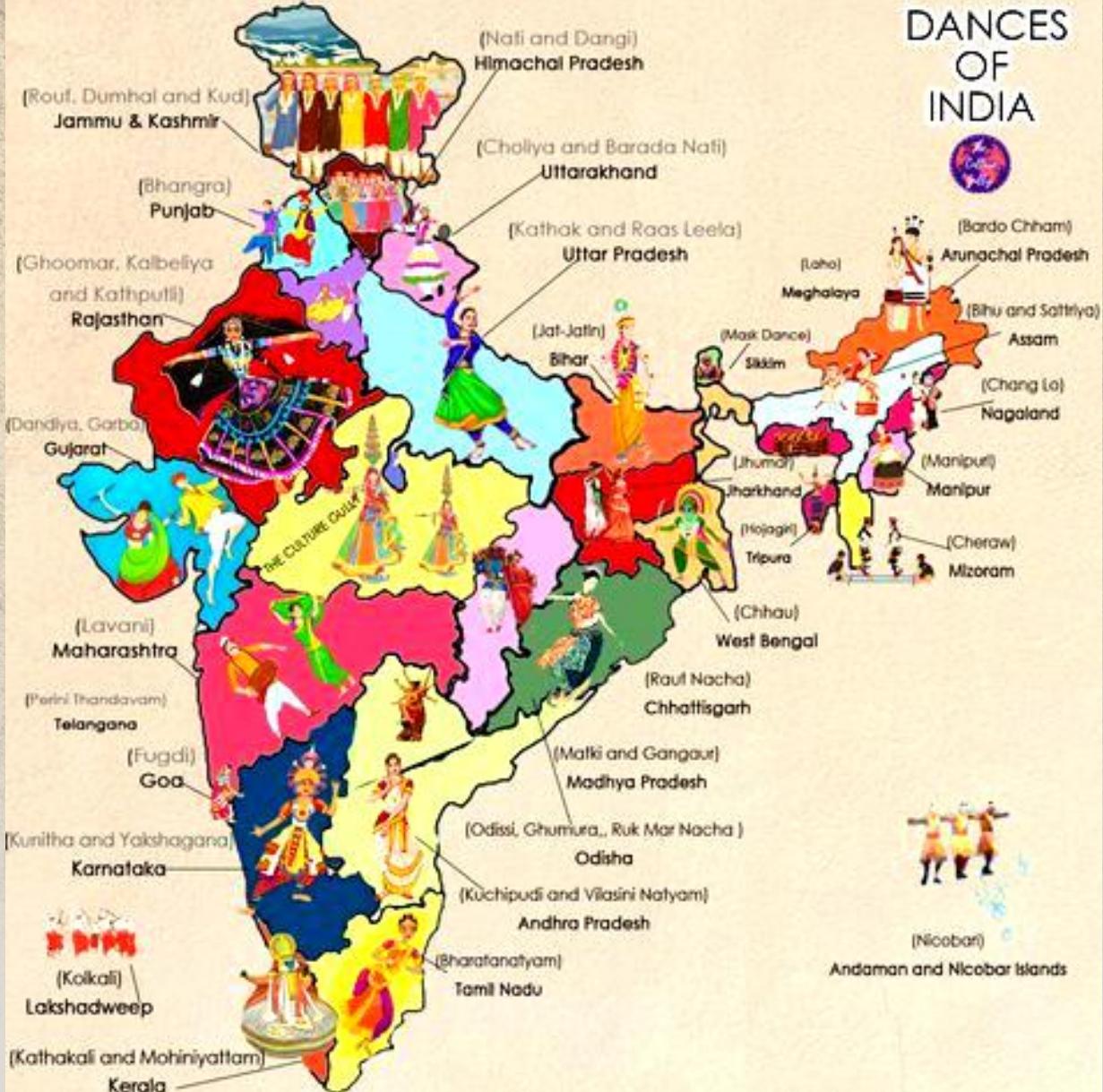
- Kalaripayattu is a martial art based on the ancient knowledge of the human body.
- It originated in Kerala during 3rd century BC to the 2nd century AD. It is now practised in Kerala and in some parts of Tamil Nadu.
- The place where this martial art is practised is called a 'Kalari'. It is a Malayalam word that signifies a kind of gymnasium. Kalari literally means 'threshing floor' or 'battlefield'. The word Kalari first appears in the Tamil Sangam literature to describe both a battlefield and combat arena.
- It is considered to be one of the oldest fighting systems in existence.
- It is also considered as the father of modern Kung - Fu.



## **Theyyam**

- Theyyam, also referred to as Kaliyattom, is a traditional folk-dance ritual that is practiced in northern Kerala and certain parts of Karnataka.
- A similar practice known as Bhuta Kola is followed in the Tulunadu region of neighbouring Karnataka.
- Over time, it has evolved into a socio-religious ceremony with its roots in the worship of divinities and heroes.
- Villages were obligated to organize Theyyam as an act of appeasement towards gods, goddesses, and the spirits of departed heroes. As a result, it was also known as Thirayattom, signifying the dance of the village.
- Notably, a significant number of Theyyam deities originated from individuals belonging to the lower castes of Kerala's caste system.
- Theyyam is performed by individuals from castes and tribes such as Pulayar, Vannan, Malayan, Velan, and Kalanaadi.

# DANCES OF INDIA



# The judiciary's 'between a rock and hard place' moment

**T**he facts in the Justice Yashwant Varma case are indeed disturbing. In an apparent accidental fire in an outhouse on the premises of his official bungalow in New Delhi (while he was not in town), the fire department seemed to have found several sacks of high value currency notes (₹500), which had been burnt, some partially. Someone in the police/fire department recorded a video when the firemen were trying to douse the fire.

The next evening, the Delhi police chief reported the incident to the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court, where Justice Varma is a senior judge. This was then conveyed to the Chief Justice of India (CJI), who convened a meeting of the Collegium. A decision was taken to repatriate Justice Varma back to his parent court, the High Court of Allahabad. Justice Varma's response was also sought where he denied that any money had been stored in that room and even suggested that it might be a conspiracy against him.

However, when the news of the incident spread, it caused such a public furore that the CJI convened other meetings of the Collegium and decided to institute an in-house enquiry conducted by a three-judge committee which included two Chief Justices of the High Court of Himachal Pradesh and Punjab and Haryana, and a lady judge from the Karnataka High Court. The CJI also sought the call records of Justice Varma as well as those of his staff for the last six months. The CJI decided to release all the information related to the incident in the public domain, which included the video of the currency notes being found. These steps were indeed a case of welcome transparency. The CJI thereafter advised the Chief Justice of the Delhi High Court not to assign any judicial work to Justice Varma till such time as the inquiry is completed. Though Justice Varma's explanation does not appear to be very credible, one should still await the findings of the inquiry committee. There is no doubt that the report of the committee will shed light on what really happened.

## A triggering of the government

The public furore that erupted has enabled the government to fish in the troubled waters of the judiciary, and the government is now using this incident to try and retake control of the power of appointing judges. To this end, the Vice-President of India (and the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha) has invited political leaders from the government and the Opposition to discuss why the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, which was struck down by the Supreme Court of India as violative of the basic structure of the Constitution, should not be brought back. The NJAC Act essentially formed an appointment committee comprising the CJI, two senior judges of the Court, the Union Law Minister and two eminent persons to be nominated by a committee



**Prashant Bhushan**  
is a Public Interest Lawyer practising before the Supreme Court of India

comprising the CJI, the Prime Minister of India and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha. It also placed the secretariat of this commission with the Law Ministry. Seven judges of the Court held the view that this would provide substantial scope to the government to interfere with judicial appointments and that would erode the independence of the judiciary, which is part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Thus, despite the NJAC Act having been brought by way of a constitutional amendment, it was declared invalid by the Court.

## Government's game plan

In the recent past, the Narendra Modi government has seriously interfered with the appointment of judges despite the law being that the power of selection is with the Collegium of the Supreme Court and that the government can only return the name of the judges selected by the Collegium once to the Collegium if it is dissatisfied. Thereafter, if the Collegium reiterates its choice, the government is left with no option but to notify the appointment. However, in recent years, the Modi government has stymied the selection of independent judges by the Collegium, by sitting on recommendations, sometimes for years, without any response, and without notifying the appointments. Even when it is forced to respond and it returns the names with objections, and thereafter, even after it is unanimously reiterated by the Collegium, it has still not notified the appointments of many judges who are considered 'inconvenient' to the government. At the same time it is quick to notify the appointments of those judges that the government likes.

During these years, on several occasions, the Collegium appears to have bent backwards to appease the government by selecting some judges who are favoured by the government in order to get some of those that it has recommended appointed. This has led to the appointment of many judges who are either committed to the government's Hindutva ideology or who are weak and unable to resist the diktats and wishes of the government. As a result of this, the independence of the judiciary has been substantially eroded in recent years.

Now, using the Justice Varma case, the government is seeking even greater control and say in the matter of appointments of judges. If the government succeeds in this attempt, it will no doubt erode the independence of the judiciary – already in a precarious state – even further. This government has been trampling on the fundamental rights of people, rampantly misusing the enforcement agencies and bulldozing the rule of law by using bulldozers. In these circumstances, it is essential for public opinion and the Opposition to see through the government's game plan and resist such an

attempt. There is no doubt that the collegium system of the appointment of judges is far from perfect and that its lack of transparency and any proper criteria for selecting judges have led to much nepotism and improper appointments through the Collegium as well. However, the solution is not greater government control. The problem with the Collegium is that it comprises sitting judges who are very busy with their judicial work and have little time to devote to this task.

## Appointment of judges, issue of corruption

Every year, hundred judges of the High Court and the Supreme Court are to be selected. In any proper selection process, at least a 1,000 candidates have to be examined for their relative merits and demerits. For this, the right criteria and method to judge people on those criteria should be devised. Unfortunately this has not been done. The solution is to have a full-time judicial appointments commission, comprising retired judges and other eminent public men, who are totally independent of the government, and with a secretariat under their control which would select judges in a transparent manner. This would be a much better solution to address the problem of the appointment of judges – and what the Campaign for Judicial Accountability & Judicial Reforms has been advocating for a long time. However, the particular problem highlighted by the Justice Varma case is the problem of corruption in the Indian judiciary, which also needs a solution. The Constitution only provided for impeachment as method. But this method has not been found to be practical or desirable because it starts with the signatures of 100 Members of Parliament to begin with, and ends with a vote in both Houses of Parliament.

Both are political processes, which often get politicised by political parties. This is why no judge has ever been successfully impeached in the history of the country, despite public knowledge that there is much corruption in the higher judiciary. What we need is a high-powered and full-time judicial complaints commission comprising five men/women who are independent of the government as well the judiciary. This complaints commission can receive complaints against judges of the higher judiciary from people. If they feel that there is a prima facie case, they can have the matter investigated or hold the trial of the judge through another committee, much like the judges inquiry committee.

However, the commission should decide what needs to be done with that judge, and their decision should be final, subject to judicial review only in exceptional circumstances. These matters should not go to Parliament at all. This would address the problem of judicial misconduct and corruption to a substantial degree.

**Page No. 10, GS 2**

## **Content.**

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- To this end, the Vice-President of India (and the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha) has invited political leaders from the government and the Opposition to discuss why the National Judicial Appointments Commission (NJAC) Act, which was struck down by the Supreme Court of India as violative of the basic structure of the Constitution, should not be brought back.
- The NJAC Act essentially formed an appointment committee comprising the CJI, two senior judges of the Court, the Union Law Minister and two eminent persons to be nominated by a committee comprising the CJI, the Prime Minister of India and the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha.
- It also placed the secretariat of this commission with the Law Ministry.

- Seven judges of the Court held the view that this would provide substantial scope to the government to interfere with judicial appointments and that would erode the independence of the judiciary, which is part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Thus, despite the NJAC Act having been brought by way of a constitutional amendment, it was declared invalid by the Court.
- Every year, hundred judges of the High Court and the Supreme Court are to be selected. In any proper selection process, at least a 1,000 candidates have to be examined for their relative merits and demerits. For this, the right criteria and method to judge people on those criteria should be devised.
- Both are political processes, which often get politicised by political parties. This is why no judge has ever been successfully impeached in the history of the country, despite public knowledge that there is much corruption in the higher judiciary.
- What we need is a high-powered and full-time judicial complaints commission comprising five men/women who are independent of the government as well the judiciary.

# U.S. defence ties – India needs to keep its eyes open

**I**t is no state secret that the defence public sector undertakings have the Indian armed forces as their captive customers. In fact, with the 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' campaign, this dependence has only increased and has added to the stress of planners in the Indian Air Force (IAF) as they juggle with a depleting squadron strength in the IAF due to a poor production rate by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited. After the IAF chief made his angst clear at the Aero India-2025 show in Bengaluru in February, there has been a flurry of media statements about how a reinvigorated environment is now geared up to supply Tejas MK1A Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) jets. This month, the handing over event of the first rear fuselage for the Tejas, made by a private manufacturer – with the Defence Minister and the IAF chief present – has also been highlighted in the media.

Even as the report of the Ministry of Defence committee looking into the IAF's needs (including imports) is being evaluated, there are three facts that should help keep us grounded.

## SIPRI report and U.S. policy

First, the latest Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) report for 2020-24 shows that India is still the second highest arms importer in the world. However, the fact that India's imports have reduced by 9.3% from 2015-19 is good news, but with a rider – expensive weapon systems such as aircraft, tanks, top end radars, and specialised armament, would continue to be imported for many more years and contribute to the import bill.

Second, the IAF has thrown its full weight behind indigenous fighter aircraft – LCA Tejas Mk1A, Tejas Mk2 and the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA), all of which are planned with American engines. The IAF's kinetic operational potential would, thus, become a function of America's calculations of India's worth in its strategic calculus. Would India be weaned away from its heavy dependence on



**Air Vice Marshal  
Manmohan  
Bahadur (retired)**

is former Additional Director General, Centre for Air Power Studies

Russia, which contributes to 36% of its arms imports? The IAF's inventory of 270 Sukhoi Su-30 fighters, S-400 missile systems and similar big-ticket items for the Indian Army and the Indian Navy stand out against a positive affirmation.

Third, the frequent coinage of fancy-sounding new policies in India-U.S. relations in the past two decades should keep India on its toes *vis-à-vis* their demonstrated short shelf life. Whatever became of the 'Defence Technology and Trade Initiative' of 2012 which was much tom-tommed, and also said to bring in niche cutting-edge technology and usher in a new paradigm in defence cooperation? Are we sure that the end result of the recently announced framework for the 'U.S.-India Major Defence Partnership in the 21st Century' would be any different considering the tempestuous churn in American foreign policy with a transactional new U.S. administration under President Donald Trump?

## 'Partnership' is the key word

There is historical reality to back this negative appreciation. The joint statement, after U.S. Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter's visit to India in April 2016, said that [a] "defense relationship is a key component of the strategic partnership between India and the U.S." Similar sentiments have been expressed recently after the Trump-Modi talks.

The key word is 'partnership'. But the million-dollar question is whether two nations that are culturally, financially and with differing world outlooks, be true partners. An article by Anna Simons, Professor of Defence Analysis, in the Winter 2013-14 issue of the U.S. Army War College magazine, *Parameters*, says that "...a partnership can succeed only if it is grounded in mutual indispensability", since "...anything less creates a dependency, and a dependency by definition is not partnership." This raises the question whether India and the U.S. are indispensable to each other. And if they are not,

then can Washington and New Delhi be true partners?

The indispensability factor can be tested by seeking answers to three pointers. First, are both parties equals, interchangeable and can blend seamlessly? Second, is a division of tasks possible for joint programmes? Third, can the expertise possessed by each nation complement and fill the gaps that exist in the other's capabilities? A truthful analysis of their respective defence research and development and manufacturing sectors shows that there is great asymmetry in the capabilities, and the follow up can only result in India's stifling dependency on the U.S.

But the same questions can be asked about the other relationships of India too, say with Russia, Israel or France. The answer lies in whether India has a political indispensability quotient in such strategic relationships or whether it is like the U.S.-Pakistan 'partnership' that broke when Islamabad outlived Washington's geo-political interests and was dumped like a fly in a tea cup. Or, even the recent unravelling of the U.S.'s decades long and iron-clad trans-Atlantic partnership with Europe, leading to questions being asked about the reliability of the Trumpian friendship.

## Looking ahead

This brings us back to the theme of this article. Are we heading the correct way as we look to the U.S. for our strategic armament needs? The answer, surprisingly, actually lies with Washington on whether the U.S. wants a 'true partnership', in which case it has to make India politically indispensable to itself (the U.S.) by imbuing a special friendly slant in our relations. On India's part, New Delhi must ensure that its decisions 'insure' its interests against any U.S. policy reversal in the geopolitical environment that it is placed in. Even as India imports vitally needed aircraft and other equipment, its eyes need to be wide open to avoid a dependency that would negatively affect its strategic autonomy.

**Page No. 10, GS 2**

- First, the latest Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) report for 2020-24 shows that India is still the second highest arms importer in the world.
- However, the fact that India's imports have reduced by 9.3% from 2015-19 is good news, but with a rider — expensive weapon systems such as aircraft, tanks, top end radars, and specialised armament, would continue to be imported for many more years and contribute to the import bill.
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- On India's part, New Delhi must ensure that its decisions 'insure' its interests against any U.S. policy reversal in the geopolitical environment that it is placed in. Even as India imports vitally needed aircraft and other equipment, its eyes need to be wide open to avoid a dependency that would negatively affect its strategic autonomy.

## Women unbound

Public spaces must be always safe  
for everyone

**D**espite stringent laws, women remain far from feeling safe in most public spaces. A spate of incidents in just the first three months of 2025 highlights how vulnerable women are – especially in public transport. A 23-year-old woman sustained severe injuries after jumping off a train to escape an assaulter. In another shocking case, a pregnant woman who was allegedly pushed out of a train following an attempted rape suffered a miscarriage. Harassment is a regular ordeal for women in unreserved train compartments and on government buses. Who is accountable for this grim reality when society claims to champion women's empowerment? In their seminal work, *Why Loiter?*, Shilpa Phadke, Sameera Khan, and Shilpa Ranade argue that when society says it wants to protect women, it does not strive to make public spaces safer. Instead, it seeks to confine women to homes, schools, or the care of others. Even today, women must constantly consider the time of day they travel, wary of venturing out after dark or before sunrise.

A necessary starting point is affirming that women have the right to live and move freely – without fear. While easier said than done, a recent Delhi High Court ruling has set an example. The court upheld the conviction of a man who sexually harassed a woman on a public bus in 2015, calling it a "deeply concerning reality" that harassment in public spaces persists despite decades of independence and tough laws. The court rightly pointed out that judgments in such cases serve as crucial signals to society. Until a harassment-free environment is created, conversations about women's progress will remain hollow. Equally significant is the Supreme Court of India's decision to stay an Allahabad High Court order that had outrageously ruled inappropriate touching of a minor did not amount to attempted rape. The top court's response sends a clear and much-needed message: such "totally insensitive and inhuman" interpretations of the law are unacceptable. The responsibility does not lie with the judiciary alone. Administrative bodies must ensure that streets are well-lit, police are trained to handle cases of harassment effectively, and all vacancies in law enforcement are promptly filled. Without a coordinated, all-encompassing approach to safety, women will continue to live in fear, denied their rightful access to public life.

**Page No. 10, GS I,2**

## **Content.**

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- Without a coordinated, all-encompassing approach to safety, women will continue to live in fear, denied their rightful access to public life.

# Should the free movement regime between India and Myanmar remain?



**Henry  
Zodinliana  
Pachauau**

Professor of  
Social Work,  
Mizoram  
University



**Likhase  
Sangtam**

Associate  
Professor,  
Political  
Science,  
Nagaland  
University

## PARLEY

In February 2024, Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced that the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Myanmar border would be scrapped but there has neither been any notification by the Ministry of External Affairs in this regard nor any bilateral agreement with Myanmar so far. Former Manipur Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's insistence is said to have led to the decision following complaints that unregulated movement of people from across the border was fuelling the ethnic conflict in his State. Mizoram and Nagaland opposed this decision, which has not yet been implemented on the ground. The FMR came into existence in 1968 as people on either side of the border have familial and ethnic ties. The territorial limit of free movement then was 40 km, which was reduced to 16 km in 2004, and additional regulations were enforced in 2016. Should the FMR between India and Myanmar remain? Henry Zodinliana Pachauau and Likhase Sangtam discuss the pros and cons in a conversation moderated by **Rahul Karmakar**. Edited excerpts:

### How has the FMR impacted the lives of communities along the 1,653-km-long India-Myanmar border?

**Henry Zodinliana Pachauau:** There were transactions and there was movement of people even before the FMR was put in place and before rules and policies were implemented. I remember as children we would have access to items from across the border. It is natural for Mizoram, which has international borders. The communities along the border have developed because of this ongoing trade. The FMR did not make much of a difference because there has been no check on people moving beyond the 16 km specified.

**Likhase Sangtam:** I come from one of the districts bordering Myanmar. The FMR is quite unknown to the communities living on the border. It has become an issue only because of the problem in Manipur. This border was drawn without the consent of the people, and they were quite ignorant about it. But the people in the region did not get affected by the FMR at all because the two countries did not impose any restrictions on their movement.

**How justified is the Centre's security concern? The Centre believes that scrapping the FMR will help stop migration and cross-border crimes.**

**HZP:** After the Border Area Development



Indian Army personnel keep vigil along the India-Myanmar international border. RITU RAJ KONWAR

Programme (BAPD, 1980s), the presence of the armed forces increased, but a lot of contraband goods continue to be smuggled into India. Mizoram, as reported in your newspaper, has been a route for drugs, areca nuts, and gold – all of which is brought in illegally. So I don't think scrapping the FMR will make any difference to cross-border crimes.

**LS:** That the government wants to scrap the FMR or fence the India-Myanmar border is understandable from a security perspective. The government is worried and is keen to do something sooner rather than later. If the government ignores the problems along the border, that could become an even bigger problem for it.

However, since the people were not taken into account when the FMR was put in place, building a fence could lead to protests. If not handled properly, this could become a bigger problem for the country. The Government of India has to consider many factors – the instability in Myanmar, the presence of armed groups, the drugs that are coming in from the Golden Triangle further away (a region where the jungle borders of Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar meet and which is one of the world's main illicit drug production and trafficking areas), and the Chinese influence in Myanmar. Then it must take the people into confidence and take a decision.

**How practical is the Centre's plan to fence**



India's Act East policy is a good strategy but people are aware of the militarisation that came in with the Border Area Development Programme. Restrictions should ease, but there should be proper monitoring of the border so that there is adherence to rules. India should legalise the trade of most goods as people are trading them anyway.

**HENRY ZODINLIANA PACHAUAU**

### the border?

**HZP:** Our Chief Minister (Lalduhoma) said he did not like the idea of building fences but we understand borders are sensitive in terms of national security. There is a paradox: a border is a place where people and cultures meet yet it defines territories, boundaries, and sovereignty.

The Centre has a rationale behind the decision and the former Manipur Chief Minister's complaints (that "infiltrators" from Myanmar played a role in the ethnic violence in Manipur) played a part. As in Manipur, many people who have been displaced by Myanmar's civil war are in Mizoram too, and the community is taking care of them on humanitarian grounds. The situation is affecting the business of the local communities which are dependent on each other and has led to a lot of social problems.

I don't know what the government intends to do, but fencing has not worked even in advanced countries such as the United States. This may be a copy of the Donald Trump administration's strategy, but it is very impractical when you consider the terrain and the length of the border, which is almost 1,700 km. It is better to have customs and other departments positioned along the border, which will engage in regular dialogue with their counterparts on the other side. Putting up a fence has never worked and never will work.

**LS:** Erecting a fence along the entire stretch is going to be a daunting task, and it's going to be a big challenge for the government to implement it, especially if the people are not taken into account. There will be a lot of resistance as there are many communities every 5-6 km. Handling them will not be easy.

**Will a barrier stoke the old demand for a unified homeland as many communities are divided by a border that they did not opt for?**

**HZP:** Definitely, as people think the boundary

has been imposed upon them. The Chins across the border have close ties with us, the Mizos. This is same for communities in Manipur, Nagaland, and Arunachal Pradesh. We share the same ancestors. There are also fears that ancestral lands could be taken away because of the Forest (Conservation) Amendment Act, 2023, which says the government can use forest area within 100 km of the international boundary for strategic projects of national importance. I think fencing is a coercive decision.

**LS:** If the Government of India is not tactful on this issue, there is a high possibility that the people's demand for a common homeland will be reignited. In Nagaland in particular, the border is along the eastern region, where there is a demand for the creation of Frontier Nagaland. The people in this region are quite neglected, and the unemployment rate is high. A good number of educated youth from this region have not been absorbed into the system. So, when such decisions are taken without the consent of the people, this may work against the country or the government.

**So, do you think the FMR should stay? If not, what can be a win-win alternative?**

**HZP:** The FMR is a good way of trying to monitor what is taking place but the ground reality is different and I am not sure fencing will help. The border areas need to be monitored properly to serve India's economic purposes better. We need to check the smuggling of drugs such as heroin; gold; and other items and ensure that certain commodities traded for the benefit of a few families are not dumped on everyone. India's Act East policy is a good strategy but people are aware of the militarisation that came in with the BAPD. Restrictions should ease, but there should be proper monitoring so that there is adherence to rules. India should legalise the trade of most goods as people are trading them anyway. That way, the government can earn some money with duties. Taking care of security issues is more about giving the local communities a sense of ownership and responsibility.

**LS:** The FMR cannot continue like this. The situation is unpredictable in Myanmar. If we don't come up with a certain mechanism to check the flow of people from Myanmar to India, it is not going to be good for the country. But at the same time, since we have not taken the people into consideration, putting a fence is not going to work. So, we really need to educate the people in India about the problems in the region, take the people into confidence, and arrive gradually at a decision.

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## **Content.**

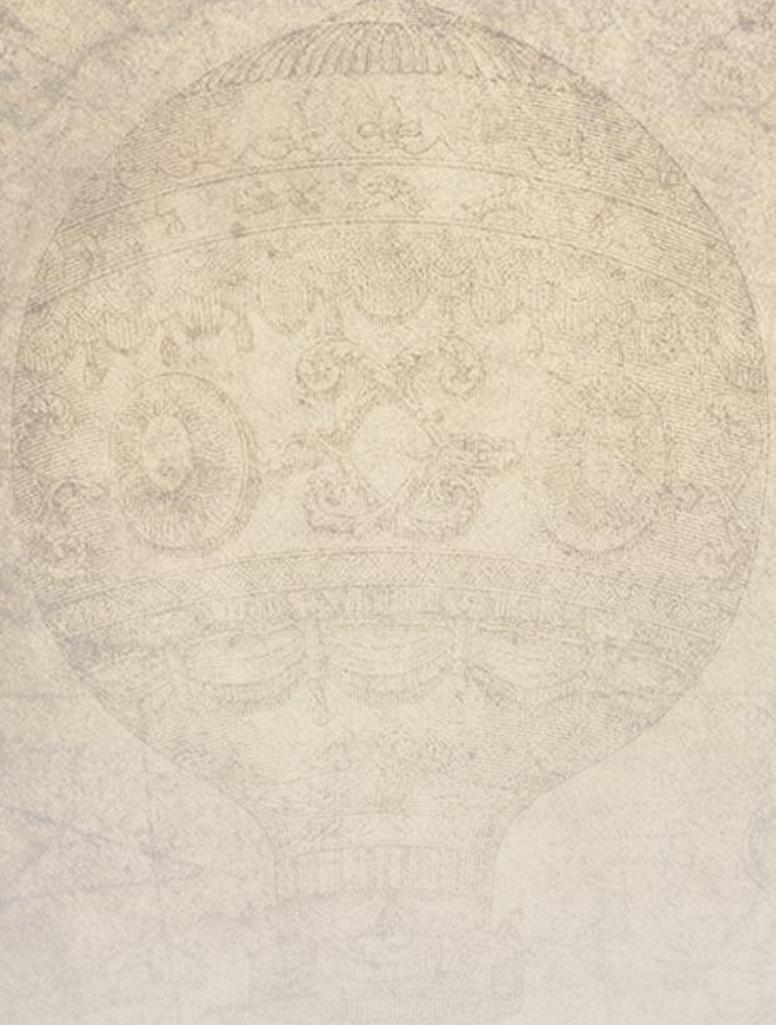
- In February 2024, Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced that the Free Movement Regime (FMR) along the Myanmar border would be scrapped but there has neither been any notification by the Ministry of External Affairs in this regard nor any bilateral agreement with Myanmar so far.
- The FMR came into existence in 1968 as people on either side of the border have familial and ethnic ties. The territorial limit of free movement then was 40 km, which was reduced to 16 km in 2004, and additional regulations were enforced in 2016.
- Individuals residing at the border need a one-year border pass for stays lasting up to two weeks in the neighbouring country.
- It aimed to facilitate local border trade, improve access to education and healthcare for border residents, and strengthen diplomatic ties.

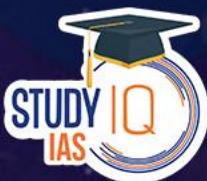
## Fact

### Security Concerns:

- **Increased Infiltration:** Concerns have arisen about the influx of illegal immigrants, particularly the Chin, Naga communities and Rohingyas from Myanmar, potentially straining resources and impacting local demographics.
- **Drug Trafficking and Arms Smuggling:** The porous border facilitates the illegal movement of drugs and weapons, posing a threat to internal security to India and fueling crime.
- **Insurgency Activities:** The FMR has been misused by insurgent groups operating in northeastern India, allowing them to cross the border easily and evade capture.







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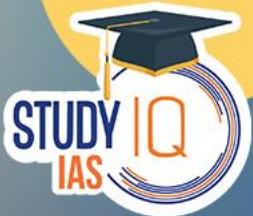
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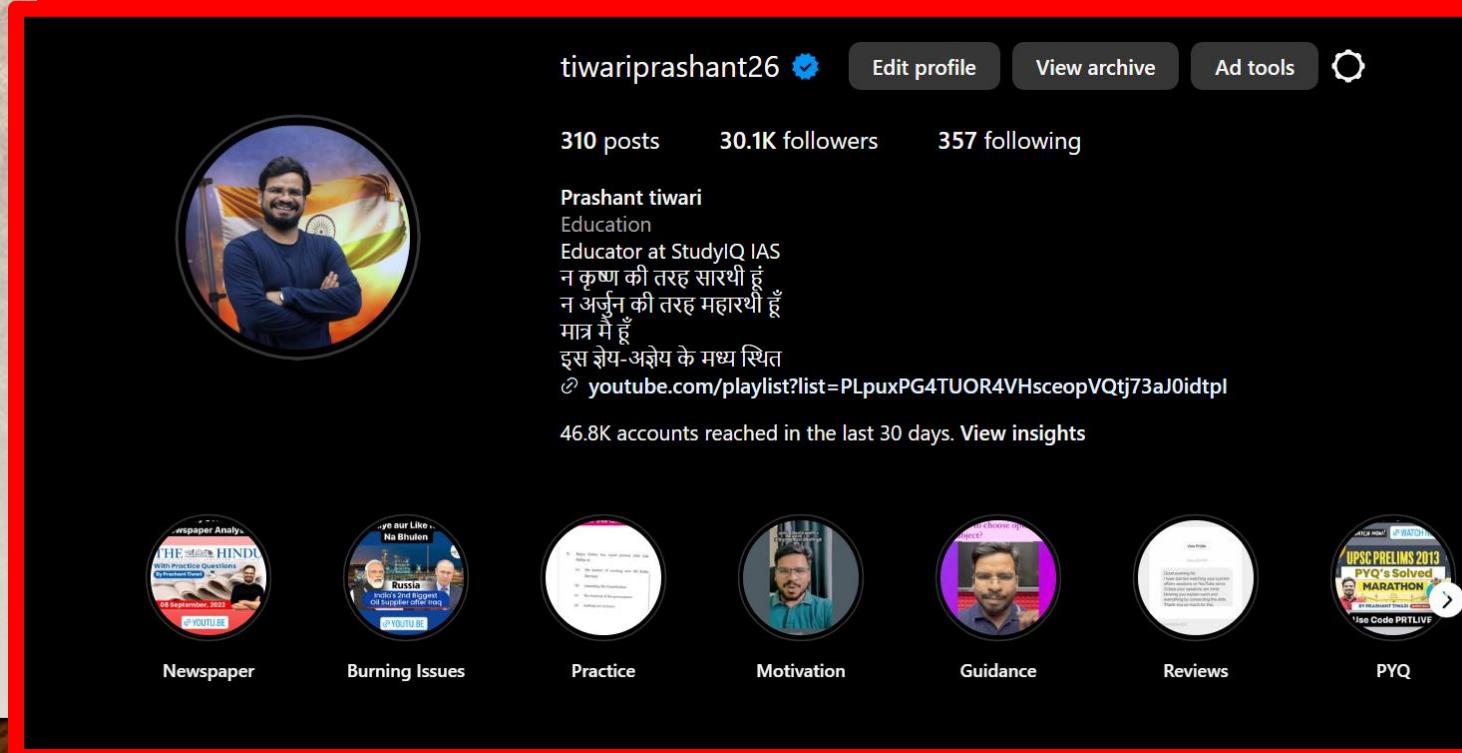
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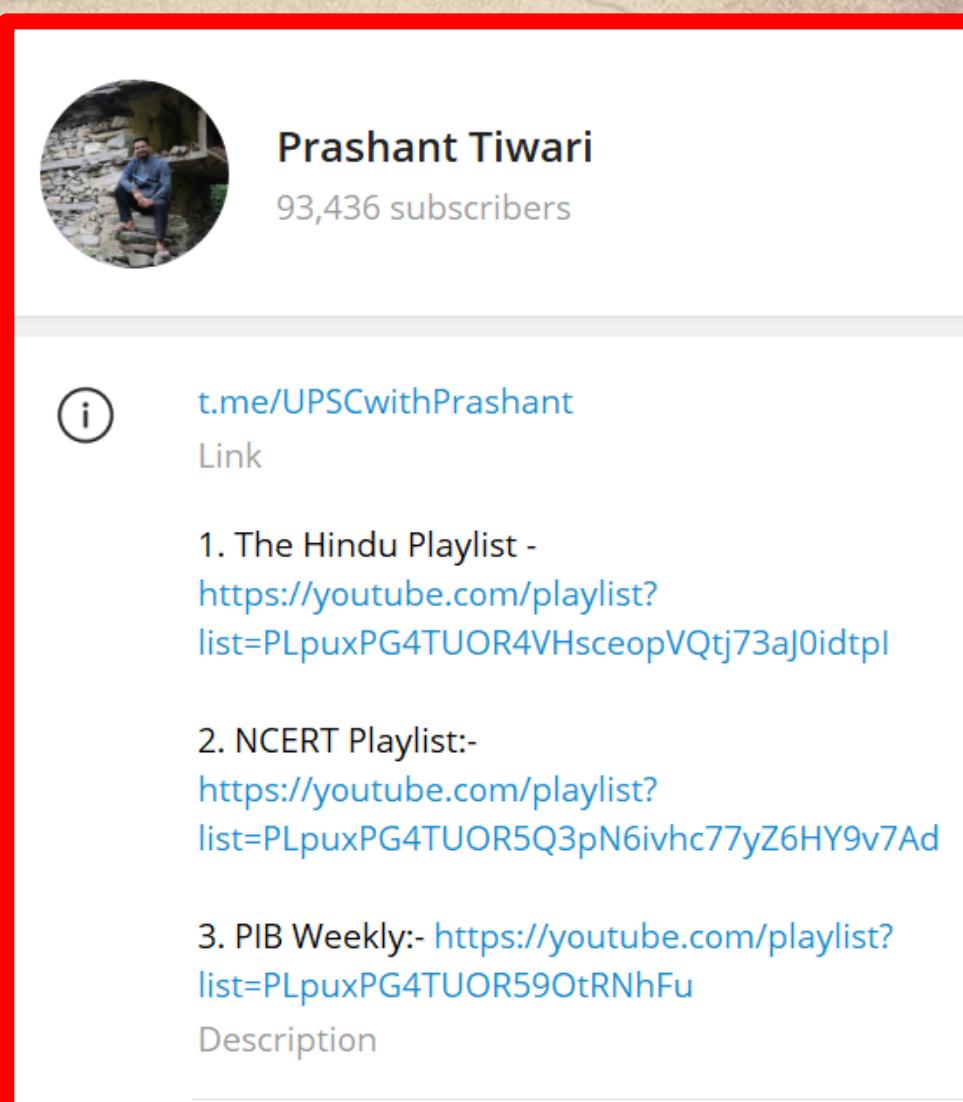
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