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Join me on Telegram :- Prashant Tiwari
Username:- UPSCwithPrashant

“ If you believe it will work out, you’ll see opportunities. If you believe it won’t, you will see obstacles.



Wayne Dyer



India engaged with China on germanium export restrictions, says embassy

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The Indian embassy in Beijing listed germanium as the only element mentioned in grievances from Indian industry players regarding China's export restrictions of rare earth elements

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

India is engaging with the Chinese government to navigate export restrictions on germanium, a critical mineral that is used for manufacturing semiconductors, fibre optic cables, and solar panels. The export restrictions for the element – over half of its annual output comes from China – may have caused some friction in electronics manufacturing and other industries that require the element.

In response to a Right to Information application from *The Hindu*, the Indian Embassy in Beijing listed germanium as the only element mentioned in grievances from Indian industry players regarding China's export restrictions of rare earth elements (REEs). Germanium is not listed as an REE, a category that includes 17 heavy metals that China has a practical monopoly in refining.



The exports of germanium and gallium to the United States were largely banned last November. REUTERS

Germanium and gallium's exports to the United States were largely banned last November, and a year before, were placed under "export licensing" for other countries.

Fully reliant on imports
India makes no germanium, and is completely reliant on imports for the element. According to a financial daily's report in 2024, India is relying on imports of germanium

through suppliers in the United Arab Emirates, a process that has inflated costs for Indian importers.

The embassy in Beijing declined to disclose specific representations and meetings with Chinese officials on the issue. "The matter has been taken up with Ministries/Departments concerned on the Chinese side through formal communications as well as during meetings," the embassy said in its res-

ponse to *The Hindu*.

Germanium oxide is used in the "core of the preform" for fibre optic cables, an industry expert said. "Preforms are solid cylinders of glass which are used to draw optical fibres in specialised furnaces."

While relations with China have cooled down in recent months, the country is reportedly thwarting certain projects with export curbs and even travel restrictions. For instance, Apple, Inc.'s contract manufacturer for iPhones, Foxconn, was reportedly prevented from allowing personnel to travel from China to India, and more recently, moving heavy machinery needed to make the phones. "I guess these are matters which pertain to Foxconn and several other Indian private entities so they would be looking into it," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in response to a query on these curbs in January.

Content.

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India won't bend to Pak. nuclear blackmail: Modi

Page No. 1, GS 2

Operation Sindoor not over, cessation of hostilities only a pause, says PM in his address to the nation; Pakistan's actions in the next few days will be evaluated for any further action, he adds

Nistula Hebbar

NEW DELHI

Operation Sindoor is still on, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday in his first address to the nation after the operation got under way on May 7. He added that India "will not tolerate any nuclear blackmail" while acting against terror and its sponsor, Pakistan.

India has established a "new normal" in dealing with terror incidents – of responding to them in a language that the terrorists understood, he said.

'Zero tolerance'

Referencing the surgical strikes of 2016 and the Balakot air strikes of 2019 in his address, Mr. Modi said



that zero tolerance of terrorism was the guarantee for a better world.

The Prime Minister said the cessation of hostilities at the moment between India and Pakistan should be seen only as a pause and that Pakistan's actions in the next few days will be evaluated for any further action.

Mr. Modi clarified that talks with Pakistan would only take place on the issues of terrorism and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir.

"Talks and terror cannot go together, terror and trade cannot go together, and water and blood (referring to the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty) cannot go together," he

Trump claims to have stopped a 'nuclear conflict'

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday claimed that his administration stopped a "nuclear conflict" between India and Pakistan. "I think it could have been a bad nuclear war", Mr. Trump said. » **PAGE 11**

said during the televised address.

Mr. Modi chose to sidestep U.S. President Donald Trump's statement that his administration had helped halt the conflict.

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WHICH STATES/UNION TERRITORIES
SHARE BOUNDARIES WITH PAKISTAN?



Map not to Scale

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U.S., China agree to temporarily roll back most tariffs for talks

Associated Press
GENEVA

U.S. and Chinese officials said on Monday that they had reached a deal to roll back most of their recent tariffs and call a 90-day truce in their trade war to allow for more talks on resolving their trade disputes.

Trade Representative Jamieson Greer, who announced the tariff reductions at a news conference in Geneva with Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said the U.S. has agreed to drop its 145% tariff rate on Chinese goods by 115 percentage points to 30%, while China agreed to lower its rate on U.S. goods by the same amount to 10%.

China's Commerce Ministry said the two sides agreed to cancel 91% in tariffs on each other's goods and suspend another 24% in tariffs for 90 days, bringing the total reduction to 115 percentage points.

The Ministry called the agreement an important step for the resolution of the two countries' differences and said it lays the foundation for further cooperation.

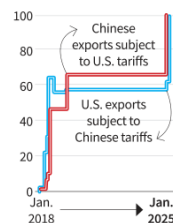
"This initiative aligns with the expectations of producers and consumers in both countries and serves the interests of both nations as well as the common interests of the world," a Ministry statement said.

The two U.S. officials struck a positive tone as they said the two sides had set up consultations to continue discussing their trade issues. The high tariff levels would have amounted to a complete blockage of each side's goods – an outcome neither side wants,



Slash on tariffs

The chart shows the share of exports from the U.S. that were subject to tariffs from China and vice versa from 2018 to Jan. 2025



Source: Peterson Institute for International Economics

Mr. Bessent said at the news briefing following two days of talks in Geneva.

"The consensus from both delegations this weekend is neither side wants a decoupling," Mr. Bessent said. "And what had occurred with these very high tariff... was an embargo, the equivalent of an embargo. And neither side wants that. We do want trade."

"We want more balanced trade," he said. "And I think that both sides are committed to achieving that."

The joint statement issued by the two countries said China also agreed to suspend or remove other measures it has taken since April 2 in response to the U.S. tariffs.

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Fact

- Trade experts are divided on how the temporary trade agreement between the U.S. and China would affect India. Some argue that the deal carries opportunities for India, especially in sectors such as pharmaceutical APIs, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, organic chemicals, and IT-enabled services.
- Others, however, say investments that had been coming in due to high tariffs on China could now return to that country.
- “However, India can leverage this shift to strengthen exports in sectors that remain relatively insulated from U.S.-China trade, such as pharmaceutical APIs, gems and jewellery, engineering goods, organic chemicals, and IT-enabled services, etc.,” he added.

Fact

- **Former Director General of Foreign Trade Ajay Srivastava, however, pointed out that this deal in its current form does not address the underlying issues such as the high trade imbalance between the two countries, which was U.S. President Donald Trump's main grouse in the first place.**
- **“As the tariff gap narrows, companies that had shifted production to places like Vietnam, India, or Mexico may return to China,” Mr. Srivastava said.**
- **Other trade economists say that lower tariffs between the U.S. and China could result in a reprieve from the ‘dumping’ of Chinese goods that countries like India and Vietnam have faced, and have sought to protect themselves against.**

India's rising e-waste, the need to recast its management

Page No. 6, GS 3

India's journey toward Viksit Bharat is being powered by a rapid digital transformation, with an increasing reliance on electronic devices. From smartphones and laptops to advanced industrial and medical equipment, technology has become the backbone of economic growth, connectivity and innovation. However, this growing dependence on electronic devices has a by-product – electronic waste (e-waste) – which must be managed effectively to ensure sustainable progress. Ranking among the world's top e-waste generators (China, the United States, Japan, and Germany) India confronts a formidable challenge of managing e-waste. India's e-waste volumes soared by 151.03% in six years, from 7,08,445 metric tonnes in 2017-18 to 17,78,400 metric tonnes in 2023-24, with an annual increase of 1,69,283 metric tonnes.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) mandates producers, importers and brand owners to manage waste from their products' end-of-life. It holds them accountable for environmental impacts throughout the product lifecycle, promotes sustainable design, integrates environmental costs into pricing, and supports efficient waste management, reducing the burden on municipalities.

Impact of improper e-waste management

The consequences of improper e-waste management extend beyond environmental degradation. India loses more than \$10 billion annually due to water pollution from the disposal of cyanide and sulphuric acid solutions, air pollution caused by lead fumes, open coal burning, and plastic incineration, and soil pollution. Beyond the environmental impact, improper e-waste recycling causes a social loss of over \$20 billion annually, as most of the hazardous processing is conducted by informal, illegal recyclers (women and children comprise the majority workforce). Tragically, their average lifespan is less than 27 years due to prolonged exposure to toxic substances. Additionally, India forfeits over ₹80,000 crore annually in lost critical metal value due to rudimentary



Dhanendra Kumar

was India's Executive Director at the World Bank, Secretary to the Government of India and the first Chairman of the Competition Commission of India (CCI). He is currently Chairman, Competition Advisory Services India LLP (COMPAD)

A focus on floor price will help transform e-waste recycling and its management in India

extraction methods in informal recycling. In addition, at least \$20 billion in annual tax revenue is lost as informal recycling is largely cash-based and unaccounted for.

Importance of stable pricing

The E-waste (Management) Rules, 2022 introduced a floor price for EPR certificates, a game-changer for India's e-waste management. This provision ensures fair returns for registered recyclers, curbing informal, hazardous recycling (practices that dominate 95% of the sector). Without a strong floor price, India may miss the chance to lead in sustainable waste management. Stable pricing incentivises formal recyclers to adopt safe, advanced technologies, unlocking e-waste's valuable materials such as gold and copper. It prevents chaos seen in sectors such as plastic waste and drives investment in infrastructure, turning e-waste into a resource and supporting a circular economy.

This economic pivot carries profound environmental benefits. Fair compensation motivates recyclers to prioritise material recovery over disposal, shrinking landfill burdens and halting the seepage of toxins such as lead and mercury into soil and waterways. It recasts e-waste as an asset rather than as a liability, redefining India's waste narrative toward sustainability. Globally, EPR fees paid by original equipment manufacturers are significantly higher than the floor EPR prices fixed by the Government of India, in alignment with global best practices. The minor impact of floor EPR prices on product costs is outweighed by the significant environmental and social benefits of formal recycling and sustainable practices.

An effective floor price levels the playing field by offsetting the informal sector's cost advantage. It makes formal recycling viable, reduces waste leakage, and ensures more responsible processing. This not only corrects market imbalances but also drives compliance, helping producers meet EPR targets through certified recyclers. When recyclers are adequately paid, they can expand operations, deliver verifiable

outcomes, and reduce producers' incentives to bypass obligations. In a country where only 10% of e-waste reaches formal recycling, this stability is a game-changer. Without it, certificate prices could collapse, starving recyclers of funds and exposing producers to unpredictable costs, destabilising EPR markets. A predictable pricing framework fosters trust, ensuring the system doesn't erode into a free-for-all.

Critics argue that a floor price hikes producer costs, potentially raising consumer prices. This concern, while valid, misses the broader calculus. The cost of inaction – environmental ruin, health crises and lost resources – dwarfs the modest burden of fair pricing. Producers can offset expenses by innovating durable, recyclable designs, which is a core EPR goal. The plastic industry's misstep with low prices, which spawned sham recyclers and eroded trust, underscores the peril of underpricing. Far from stifling progress, a floor price could surge innovation, rewarding efficiency and technological breakthroughs. India's e-waste crisis demands audacious solutions, aligning with economic and ecological imperatives.

Need for a recycling vision

The stakes of EPR floor pricing transcend financial concerns. Inadequate pricing imperils more than profits. It endangers rivers with pollution, soils and agriculture produce with harmful ingredients, damages communities with toxic exposure, and squanders valuable potential. By valuing recycling efforts, India can formalise its e-waste sector, spur advanced infrastructure, and champion resource efficiency, ensuring responsible practices.

As India vies for sustainability leadership, this floor price is the bedrock of its recycling vision – a bold move to transform e-waste into opportunity, setting a global standard. The numbers demand action: a 73% e-waste surge in five years is a clarion call. With an adequate floor price, economic vitality and environmental care can coexist, securing the future with sustainability.

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Toxic trolling

Online threats of violence cannot be allowed in the name of free speech

A full-scale war between India and Pakistan may have been averted, but the troll army has come out in force to disturb the peace. After India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri announced on May 10 that an understanding had been reached between the two sides to halt all military actions, his personal account on X (formerly Twitter), was flooded with abusive comments which did not spare his daughter. Mr. Misri locked the account, and several diplomats and politicians have condemned the toxic culture in no uncertain terms, pointing out that several red lines had been crossed. Mr. Misri was only doing his job and conveying a decision taken by the political leadership. The Foreign Secretary had been addressing the media since Operation Sindoor began on May 7, in response to the deadly terrorist attack in Pahalgam on April 22, in which 26 people died. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B), which had rightly slammed Pakistan for unleashing "a full-blown disinformation offensive" on social media about the ground reality regarding Operation Sindoor, remained quiet about the vicious trolling of Mr. Misri and the doxing of his daughter. Unfortunately, with the phenomenal rise of social media in India but little Internet literacy, there is a pattern of platforms being regularly used for hate speech, abusive comments, and deliberate distortion of facts.

The public sphere may have become more participatory, but that does not necessarily ensure civil behaviour. Surveys have shown that women, minorities and marginalised communities are particularly targeted by trolls. The extreme reactions often include rape and death threats. With surveillance now the byword for all tech companies, surely it should not take long to locate and end the online run of trolls. A stringent anti-troll law must be put in place to stop the acute mental and physical harassment trolls can cause. The draft Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Rules, 2025, set to be rolled out this year, prescribe penalties for misuse of personal information. Now, there are only a limited number of provisions under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and the Information Technology Act to address cyberbullying. The courts have been more proactive by directing quick removal of offending content and also mandating the disclosure of basic subscriber information linked to such accounts. In the Shaviya Sharma case (2024), the Delhi High Court had noted that "there can be no doubt that acts of doxing if permitted to go on unchecked could result in violation of right to privacy". In a democracy, all voices should be heard but disinformation and misinformation must be stopped with the help of guidelines and the law.

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A belated admission

Civil registration data from 2021 point to significant excess deaths

It has been four years since the delta variant of the SARS-CoV-2 virus hit India. The country bore the brunt of the pandemic's devastating impact, with harrowing scenes of overwhelmed health-care systems, oxygen-supply shortages and even bodies floating in the Ganga in Uttar Pradesh. Reports based on data sourced from the Civil Registration System through RTIs and other means, by *The Hindu* in particular, besides independent surveys, showed that the toll was clearly staggering and in millions, much more than the official tally. The government's response was defensive and dismissive; the attempt was to consistently undermine the findings. After maintaining that the reported number of COVID-19 deaths during this period was accurate, the government, through the Registrar General of India, released a report last week that showed that there were 21.5 lakh excess deaths in 2021 as against 3.32 lakh reported COVID-19 deaths. During a pandemic, the bulk of these excess deaths must have been related to the effects of the disease. Besides, lockdown restrictions had resulted in lower fatalities due to causes such as road accidents. The high number of excess deaths was estimated by *The Hindu's* calculations to be nearly 6.5 times more than the reported deaths. The fact that this multiple was even higher for Gujarat (44.2), Madhya Pradesh (19.5), Uttar Pradesh (19.5) and Telangana (18.2) suggests that COVID-19 deaths were under-reported significantly in 2021. These were largely due to the fact that deaths due to comorbidities were perhaps not considered as COVID-19 deaths or because those numbers were suppressed in order to paint a rosier picture of the government's response to the pandemic.

The nearly four-year delay in releasing this report, alongside the Sample Registration System Report for 2021, reveals the Union government's reluctance to comprehensively assess the pandemic's true impact and its casual approach to publishing critical demographic data. This reluctance in publishing timely information coincides with the fact that India's civil registration system that tracks births and deaths has become more robust over time with most States reporting the bulk of the deaths that occur, either in institutions such as hospitals or at homes. In some States, this reporting happens with a lag when compared to others, but it is encouraging that registration levels are getting better. But medical certification of the causes of the deaths still remains low when compared to other developing countries such as Brazil. A robust maintenance of registration and certification records is important for public health tools. The delay in release of vital data defeats the purpose of the improvements made in civil registration. Data delayed is also data denied.

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When water standards don't hold water

How much water should a person receive each day? In India, this question is not answered by science or necessity, but by an arbitrary metric – the per capita water supply standard, prescribed in litres per capita per day (lpcd). While the human right to water guarantees access to safe and clean water, and obligates governments to provide basic services, in practice this right is shaped by the per capita standard. This benchmark not only dictates how much water citizens are entitled to demand for their daily needs, but also drives planning and investments in urban water infrastructure, from dams to household taps. Yet, despite its widespread use by municipal authorities across India, it lacks empirical grounding, objective rationale, and validity, making it a policy instrument built more on convenience than evidence.

Defining per capita standard

The per capita standard, combined with population figures, is used to compute the domestic water demand of a city. It serves as a reference point to assess the adequacy, 'water shortages', and 'over consumption'. The per capita standard is also used to assess future investments required for developing and maintaining water supply services. In addition, water demand computed using this standard determines how much water is to be diverted from rural to urban areas – and the scale of its negative consequences. Mumbai, for instance, justifies the development of upcoming dams using the per capita standard of 240 lpcd for domestic use alone, excluding losses.

The per capita standards are prescribed by multiple agencies, including the Bureau of Indian Standards and the Central Public Health and Environmental Engineering Organization (CPHEEO), a technical wing of the Union Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA). Additionally, cities such as



Sachin Tiwale,

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Environment and
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Ashoka Trust for
Research in Ecology
and the Environment

Despite its widespread use by municipal authorities across India, the per capita water supply standard lacks empirical grounding, objective rationale, and validity

Mumbai and Delhi follow their own standards. Evidence suggests that these standards are not based on extensive consumer surveys or empirical data on water consumption. Studies show that the per capita water demand varies based on socio-economic status, climate, geography, and culture. Yet, a single value is often prescribed for the entire country despite its vast geographical expanse and climatic variations.

For example, CPHEEO prescribes 150 lpcd for megacities and 135 lpcd for all other cities with existing or planned sewerage systems without providing any rationale to substantiate these numbers. Similarly, the standard of 55 lpcd prescribed under the Jal Jeevan Mission for all rural drinking water supply schemes lacks any empirical rationale. The same standard was set under the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (2013) for designing rural piped water supply. However, it only aimed to provide individual tap connections to at least 30% of households – far from universal coverage. Later, the Swachh Bharat Mission pushed for universal access to individual household toilets, significantly increasing per capita water consumption. Yet, while promising a functional tap connection for every household under JJM, the earlier standard of 55 lpcd was retained.

While designing urban water supply schemes, cities often follow the per capita standards prescribed by the project financing agency. The per capita standard influences the overall cost of the scheme. Since water supply schemes are capital-intensive, the majority of cities depend on central government assistance (through AMRUT and the Smart Cities Mission) for their construction. As CPHEEO provides a technical sanction to these schemes only if the design adheres to prescribed standards, engineers and consultants follow CPHEEO standards unquestioningly to

ensure a smooth approval process, regardless of the actual water requirements. CPHEEO standards have therefore become the de facto norm in urban water supply.

Cities conveniently apply multiple per capita standards simultaneously, regardless of actual water requirements. For instance, in 2012, while preparing the detailed project report for the Gargai Dam, Mumbai adopted a standard of 150 lpcd – deviating from the 240 lpcd used for other projects – just to meet CPHEEO requirements and secure Central government funding.

No monitoring

The prescribed standards are not monitored during service delivery to ensure water supply according to the design standards at the doorstep of all citizens. To ensure water delivery as per the standard, the consumer connections need to be metered, and the installation of bulk water meters in the distribution network is a prerequisite to measure water flows. However, very few cities have connections with functional meters. In many cities, supply zones are not isolated, and bulk water meters are not installed. Therefore, it is not feasible to trace how much water is flowing where in the city.

Although the service level benchmarks used by MoHUA to assess the performance of municipal water supply include per capita supply as a parameter, it is measured at the city level and, therefore, fails to indicate whether water is delivered to citizens according to the standard. As a result, the per capita standard of water supply, a useful metric for planners (to allocate financial resources) and engineers (to design infrastructure), remains a fictitious number for citizens when it comes to actual service delivery. Systematic efforts are needed to establish evidence-based per capita standards and ensure equitable water delivery so that every citizen receives their rightful share.

Content.

- **How much water should a person receive each day? In India, this question is not answered by science or necessity, but by an arbitrary metric — the per capita water supply standard, prescribed in litres per capita per day (lpcd).**
- **While the human right to water guarantees access to safe and clean water, and obligates governments to provide basic services, in practice this right is shaped by the per capita standard.**
- **This benchmark not only dictates how much water citizens are entitled to demand for their daily needs, but also drives planning and investments in urban water infrastructure, from dams to household taps.**
- **Yet, despite its widespread use by municipal authorities across India, it lacks empirical grounding, objective rationale, and validity, making it a policy instrument built more on convenience than evidence.**

Fact

- The per capita standard, combined with population figures, is used to compute the domestic water demand of a city. It serves as a reference point to assess the adequacy, 'water shortages', and 'over consumption'.
- The per capita standard is also used to assess future investments required for developing and maintaining water supply services.
- Similarly, the standard of 55 lpcd prescribed under the Jal Jeevan Mission for all rural drinking water supply schemes lacks any empirical rationale.
- The same standard was set under the National Rural Drinking Water Programme (2013) for designing rural piped water supply.



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