

NEXT HEARING ON JULY 28, EC HAS TO RESPOND BY JULY 21

# SC lets EC revision continue, suggests adding Aadhaar, ration, voter card to list of documents

Give reasons if you wish to discard these 3 papers: Bench to poll panel

ANANTHAKRISHNANG  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

DECLINING TO restrain the Election Commission of India from proceeding with the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in poll-bound Bihar, the Supreme Court Thursday suggested to the poll panel to also consider Aadhaar, voter ID and ration cards for the purpose of updating the rolls.

The vacation bench of Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Joymalya Bagchi said it was leaving it to the EC to consider its suggestion on the inclusion of these three documents and “if you have good reasons to discard it, discard it” but “give reasons”. It directed that the matter be



Justices Sudhanshu Dhulia and Joymalya Bagchi

listed for hearing again on July 28, before publication of the draft electoral roll.

Justice Dhulia, who was presiding over the bench that heard a clutch of petitions voicing concerns over the SIR in Bihar, including its timing, said, “There is a democratic process which is on... You may question it, we

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## Why three documents SC suggests widen net, dial down panic

HARIKISHAN SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

THE SUPREME Court's suggestion to include Aadhaar, Voter ID, and ration cards in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Bihar's electoral rolls, if adopted by the Election Commission (EC), could provide existing voters — those enrolled after 2003 but still needing to prove their eligibility to remain on the rolls — with

more accessible options, potentially easing their scramble to secure one of the 11 documents originally proposed.

As the ongoing series in *The Indian Express* shows, these three are the documents most families have. The fact that none of these meets the requirement has sparked concerns among voters across Bihar, from Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's Harnaut in Naland to RJD chief Lalu Prasad's

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RECIPROCAL TARIFF PAUSE RUNS OUT AUG 1

## Agri, auto in focus as India team heads back to US next week for trade talks

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

WITH A fresh window for negotiations before the US 'reciprocal tariffs' come into effect on August 1, Indian negotiators led by Rajesh Agrawal, Special Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, are likely to leave for Washington next week to iron out pending issues like agriculture and auto sector tariffs that are holding back the interim trade agreement on goods, a government official told *The Indian Express*.

The Indian team had returned from the last round of negotiations on July 4, days before the reciprocal tariff pause was earlier set to run out on July 9.

Last week, the US said the new tariff rates would come into effect on August 1, and there would be “no extension”. It said that if the August 1 deadline was not adhered to, countries would go back



President Donald Trump, US Trade Representative Jamieson Greer. AP

to the April 2 tariff levels — the US had announced 26 per cent reciprocal tariffs on India then.

“A proposal for another round of trade negotiations with the US has been sent to the top brass of the government. Negotiators are confident that the differences with the US team on agriculture, which have been holding back the agreement, will be resolved. There is already broad consensus on the subject between the two teams and the remaining issues will also be settled,” an official said.

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## Ladakh to Arunachal, 30 Defence projects get wildlife panel nod

NIKHIL GHANEKAR  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

FROM INFRASTRUCTURE for a forward aviation base, facilities for missiles and vital road linkages along the Line of Actual Control, the standing committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL) has approved proposals for critical Defence projects along the boundary with China, stretching from eastern Ladakh to Sikkim to Arunachal Pradesh.

It has also cleared construc-

tion of the Arunachal Frontier Highway close to the Myanmar border, through the core zone of the Namdapha Tiger Reserve subject to mitigation measures to minimise impact on wildlife and their habitats. The project will divert 310 hectares of forest from the tiger reserve — committee members have noted it will also lead to tree felling.

One of the most significant projects approved was a 10.26-km road link between Daulat Beg Oldie (DBO) to the Border Personnel Meeting (BPM) Hut

where senior Indian and Chinese Army officers meet to discuss border issues. At a height of 17,000 feet, DBO is the country's northernmost military outpost where the highest airstrip is also located. Last October, the SC-NBWL had approved an alternate route to DBO for quick movement of troops and resources.

The Ministry of Defence had told the wildlife board panel that no road exists between DBO and the Old BPM Hut, which is frequented often by the Indian

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## With USAID shut, Norman Borlaug's institute knocks on India's doors

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ANCHOR

HARISH DAMODARAN  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

SIX DECADES ago, the legendary agricultural scientist Norman Borlaug ushered in India's Green Revolution through his high-yielding, semi-dwarf wheat varieties such as Lerma Rojo 64A, Sonora 63, Sonora 64 and Mayo 64.

Today, his organisation — the Mexico-headquartered International Maize and Wheat

Improvement Center or CIMMYT — is reaching out to the Indian government and the private sector, seeking financial support for its breeding research and development programme in the two cereals that cover over a quarter of the world's cropped area.

The reason: A funding crunch brought about by global factors, including the shutting down of the United States Agency for International Development (US-AID) by the Donald Trump administration, officially from July 1.

The agency, which administered civilian foreign aid and development assistance for the US government, accounted for about

\$83 million out of CIMMYT's total grant revenue of \$211 million in 2024. That made it CIMMYT's largest funder, followed by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (now Gates Foundation), which gave \$42 million.

“USAID ceasing operations and other development agencies drastically reducing funding is going to significantly impact our agricultural R&D activities worldwide. While there may be some money this year from projects in winding-down stage, the real effects will be felt from 2026. We are looking for support from countries such as India that have interests in CIMMYT continuing



Norman Borlaug (right) and MS Swaminathan. MSSRF

to empower farmers through science and innovation and breeding varieties today for tomorrow's climate,” CIMMYT's director-general, Bram Govaerts, told *The Indian Express*.

CIMMYT's advanced breeding lines are present as parent or grandparent in wheat varieties planted on more than 60 million hectares (mh) globally. The early Green Revolution blockbuster varieties that Indian scientists developed were all through selections from CIMMYT materials. That included Kalyan Sona (released in 1967), Sonalika (1968) and PBW 343 (1995), which, at their peak, were grown on 5-6 mh, 14 mh

and 7-8 mh respectively.

That hasn't changed much. Last year, Indian farmers sowed wheat on around 32 mh, with the top 10 varieties accounting for over 20 mh. Of these 10 varieties, six were released from CIMMYT-derived germplasm — DBW 187, DBW 303, DBW 222, WH 1270, DBW 327 and PBW 826 — and covered an estimated 15.3 mh.

“Roughly 50% of the wheat cultivated in India now is from varieties released after 2019 and developed through collaboration between CIMMYT and national institutions such as the Indian Institute of Wheat and

Barley Research, Karnal. Our partnership has led to India not only becoming self-sufficient, but even transforming wheat for the world,” Govaerts said.

He cited the example of DBW 303, “the first wheat variety in South Asia to exceed an average grain yield of 8 tonnes per hectare”. Some advanced lines, yet to be released for commercial planting, have even achieved 10-tonnes yield in CIMMYT's field trials.

In October 2011, CIMMYT established the Borlaug Institute for South Asia (BISA) as a joint venture with the Indian Council

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## Fadnavis warns of ‘urban Maoism’, Bill to tackle ‘extremist Left ideology’ passed

Opposition calls some clauses vague, voices apprehension of law's misuse

VALLABH OZARKAR  
MUMBAI, JULY 10

THE STRINGENT Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, which seeks “to provide for effective prevention of certain unlawful activities of Left Wing Extremist organizations or similar organizations and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto”, was passed by the state Assembly Thursday via a voice vote amid Opposition concern over the definition and interpretation of some of the

terms and clauses in the Bill.

Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis, who tabled the Bill in the House and assured members that the Bill would not be misused against political protesters and activists, said Maoists had lost ground in the state and were “trying to brainwash the youth of urban areas and make them stand up against the democratic system”. He warned of the rise of “urban Maoism” and said the Bill would “control them”.

The Bill, which provides for punishment ranging from two

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## UK or France? Cabinet waits for DRDO on combat aircraft engine

Engine tech a constraint, urgency for tie-up with Rolls-Royce, Safran

AANCHAL MAGAZINE & ANIL SASI  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

REALISING THE imperative to acquire expertise on engine technology, the government has decided to pursue this objective by pushing Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) to join hands either with Britain's Rolls-Royce or France's Safran to co-develop aircraft engines in India.

“Engines are a constraining factor... a strategic decision has to be taken. Both Rolls-Royce and Safran are contenders for fifth-

generation Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft. A Cabinet note will be prepared from the DRDO side and circulated,” an official told *The Indian Express*.

Both the companies have offered to collaborate with DRDO's Bengaluru-based Gas Turbine Research Establishment lab and provide full ToT and IPR, the government official said. A Cabinet note will be floated for this soon and the process has been initiated by the DRDO, the official said.

As India works to bolster its domestic defence manufacturing capacity, delays in engine supplies by GE to the Tejas

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# SC lets EC revision continue, suggests adding Aadhaar, ration, voter card to list of documents

will examine it, no doubt about that. We can't stop a constitutional body. We will not allow them to do what they are not supposed to do. But at the same time, what they are supposed to do, they have to do."

He made these remarks as Senior Advocate AM Singhvi, appearing for a petitioner, urged the court to either direct that the revision process be carried out delinked from the Bihar elections or in the alternative, stay the process and hear the matter later. The bench's suggestion to consider Aadhaar, voter ID and ration cards for updating the rolls, came after Senior Advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, appearing for the EC, submitted that the list of 11 documents to be considered for the revision exercise was not exhaustive.

Intensive revision refers to the de novo preparation of the electoral roll from scratch through personal, house-to-house field verification by electoral registration officers.

Under the Bihar SIR, those who were on the 2003 electoral rolls need only submit an extract from it as proof, while others (enrolled after 2003) must provide one or more documents from a list of 11 (along with a pre-filled enumeration form for existing electors) to establish their date and/or place of birth – which, in turn, is used to determine citizenship.

In its order, the bench said, "After hearing both sides, we are of the prima facie opinion that three questions are involved in this case: (a) The very powers of the Election Commission who undertake the exercise, (b) the procedure and the manner in which the exercise is being un-

dertaken, and (c) the timing, including the timings given for preparation of draft electoral rolls, asking objections and making the final electoral roll, etcetera, which is very short considering the fact that Bihar elections are due in November."

"We are also of the considered view that the matter needs a hearing. Therefore, let it be fixed before the appropriate bench on July 28. Meanwhile, the counter-affidavit will be filed by the Election Commission on or before July 21, and a rejoinder, if any, be filed before July 28," it said.

"...Mr Rakesh Dwivedi himself has pointed out that the list of documents which are to be considered by the Election Commission for verification of a voter includes 11 documents, but the list is not exhaustive... Therefore, in our view, since the list is not exhaustive... it would be in the interest of justice that the Election Commission will also consider the following 3 documents such as the Aadhaar card, the EC voter ID card (EPIC card) which is issued by ECI, and ration card as this itself will satisfy most of the petitioners," it said.

Dwivedi submitted that the order mentioning additional documents may create hurdles since the process is already underway. He urged the court not to name the additional documents.

But Justice Dhulia said, "We are saying it's up to you to consider it. If you have good reasons to discard it, discard it, give reasons."

The petitioners said they are not pressing for an interim stay at this stage as the draft electoral

rolls are to be published only on August 1.

Dwivedi said the petitioners had clearly asked for an interim stay and, therefore, the court should make it clear that ECI can go ahead with the process.

"We have said it. You go on," Justice Dhulia said.

The petition filed by NGO Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and others, including RJD leader Manoj Jha, have questioned the revision on various grounds including the exclusion of Aadhaar and the timing of the exercise, just ahead of the Bihar Assembly elections.

Singhvi said that if the court intended to allow the exercise, it should be delinked – the court may examine it at leisure, delink it from the elections. "Exercise of this mammoth nature should be done delinked to an impending urgent election," he said.

Justice Dhulia said, "If we take a call on that, we will be deciding the case."

Senior Advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for a petitioner, submitted that the Aadhaar card is an acceptable document as per the Representation of People Act, but the ECI is not accepting it for the Bihar roll revision.

"If Your Lordships allow it to go on, it will be presented as an irreversible scrambled egg... If anything is to go on, it is to be with universal publicity of the fact that the Aadhaar card is acceptable," he said.

The bench asked the EC why it is not accepting Aadhaar card and voter ID: "Aadhaar is mentioned in the statute. Election ID is issued by you. And you say we won't accept."

Dwivedi said, "The problem

is that there are lots of things happening in the enrolments. Therefore, it needs to be examined. We can't take the Aadhaar card as conclusive."

Justice Dhulia said, "We are not stopping you. Do your work. But do it as mandated by law." Justice Bagchi said, "It is for the ECI to take a call. We will not second guess the ECI."

Dwivedi said, "All 7.89 crore electors who have registered mobile numbers have been informed personally on their phones. Manoj Jha's petition admits that 5.74 crore have been informed. Through mobile phones, we have informed. House to house, we are going. Getting it signed and getting it uploaded on the ECINET."

Justice Dhulia said, "We don't doubt your sincerity and your efforts. But there is also a perception." Dwivedi said, "My unfortunate position, like the courts, is that I can only answer by a fruitful, proper exercise. So, please don't stop it now. Let us complete... Even the inclusion of this or that document... the Commission has not gone to sleep... Monitoring is being done, here from the headquarters, minute to minute. Suppose there is a large number of people getting out, cannot the Commission intervene at that stage?"

Justice Dhulia said, "We have serious doubts whether you can meet this timeline with the procedure you have to take into consideration while doing this exercise. Remember, you have to follow all those rules... which involves personal hearing... It's not practical."

Dwivedi said, "Let us establish our credentials and appro-

priateness of the exercise... List in August first week. Your Lordship will be knowing an accurate figure, how many people have not been able to get the form. That will be a test of our agility, our perfectness."

Justice Bagchi said, "The question is: With such a vast population, is it possible to link such an exercise with an election?"

Dwivedi said the court can stop the poll panel, if necessary, once the revision is complete. "It can be stopped, if necessary. Election is in November. Stop me later."

On concerns that voters will be removed from the rolls if they are not able to produce the documents being sought, Dwivedi said the ECI "cannot and does not have any intent whatsoever to exclude anybody from the voter list unless and until the hands of the Commission are compelled by the provision of law itself."

The petitioners contended that what's happening is a citizenship screening. Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, appearing for Manoj Jha, said, "The burden is not on me to prove citizenship. Before they remove me from the electoral roll, they have to show that they have some document in their possession that proves that I am not a citizen."

Sibal said a Bihar government survey showed that only a negligible number of people had the certificates sought by the EC.

To Dwivedi's argument that Aadhaar does not establish citizenship but only identity, Justice Dhulia said, "But citizenship is an issue to be determined not by the Election Commission of India, but by the Ministry of Home Affairs."

## • Ladakh to Arunachal, 30 Defence projects get wildlife panel nod

Army and the Indo-Tibetan Border Police personnel. "On the other hand, the Chinese side is building a concrete road between TWD (akin to DBO on our side) to the Chinese temporary meeting point of 9-18 metre width," it stated.

The SC-NBWL took up over 30 defence and infrastructure projects – 26 of them located in Ladakh – for appraisal in their meeting on June 26 and approved all of them, minutes of the meeting show. The meeting was chaired by Bhupender Yadav, Union Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change. The projects require wildlife clearance since they are located across the Karakoram wildlife sanctuary and Changthang Cold Desert sanctuary in Ladakh, Dibang wildlife sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh and Pangolakha sanctuary in Sikkim.

The Karakoram sanctuary is home to the Tibetan antelope, Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+uYUkQ0AFHBAwMGQ1>

Shapo, Wild Yak, Bharal, snow leopard, Himalayan grey wolf, lynx and marmot. The Dibang sanctuary is home to the leopard and tiger while the Asiatic Black Bear, among other fauna, resides in the Pangolakha sanctuary.

Other critical projects accorded approval include those for housing troops of artillery regiments and a field hospital; housing troops for reconnaissance and observation flight and holding of helicopters; construction of aviation infrastructure for a forward aviation base at Shyok and creation of technical infrastructure to locate equipment of short-range surface-to-air missiles.

The approval for housing troops engaged in reconnaissance and observation flights duty and holding of helicopters at Partapur will be important for flying operations in the Siachen Glacier, the Defence ministry said in its proposal.

The missile unit facility will include a command and control for operational activities, shelters for troops and training spaces.

For infrastructure along the LAC in the North-East, the wildlife board panel cleared the Malinye-Balua-Kapuda road over 121 hectares of forest land in the Anini forest division subject to conditions. The SC-NBWL said that the project has to include an animal passage plan to mitigate the project's impact on faunal biodiversity. The road project was proposed to strengthen security infrastructure along the China border.

In Sikkim, a border outpost at Pangola in Pakyong district and the Rishi-Rongli-Kupup road improvement have been approved, subject to mitigation measures such as animal passage plans. Under Project Swastik, the Border Roads Organisation has proposed improvement of the Rishi-Rongli-Kupuo road to a national highway double-lane specification.

## • Agri, auto in focus as India team heads back to US next week for trade talks

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry did not respond to queries on the issue.

The proposal for a fresh round of talks comes amid heightened uncertainty as US President Donald Trump has started announcing fresh tariff rates. While he has said that a deal with India is "close", Trump has announced steep tariffs ranging from 25 per cent to 50 per cent on nearly 20 countries, including Brazil, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia and South Africa.

At a Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) event on Thursday, Agrawal said India is "trying to negotiate and finalise a deal with the United States of America" and that New Delhi has embarked on a journey of free trade agreements (FTAs) involving 14 trade agreements with 26 countries.

"We have just concluded a deal with the UK. We are in the advanced stage of our negotiations with the EU. We are trying to negotiate and finalise a deal

with the US. We are reviewing the ASEAN trade deal. We are now even entering Latin America and trying to have deals with Chile and Peru. We have done one with Australia and the UAE. Negotiations with New Zealand have started. So the idea is that we are now integrating in a big way with the major trading partners across the world and major economies," Agrawal said.

The likelihood of India avoiding US reciprocal tariffs has gained currency, as Trump on Monday said the US is close to signing a trade deal with India. While announcing the new rates, he warned that rerouting foreign goods or retaliating would attract even higher US tariffs.

Indian negotiators are understood to have offered substantial market access to US products in most sectors, excluding sensitive areas such as dairy and agriculture. The US, in turn, is expected to offer lower tariffs on labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and footwear, and withhold fu-

ture tariffs on India.

Notably, the interim trade deal with the US is likely to feature market access in goods alone. An official said this would particularly include agriculture and automobiles, where Indian and US negotiators are driving a hard bargain.

A government official had said last week that "all possibilities are open" and the trade deal will be signed when it is mutually beneficial and not under "deadline pressure". "India is not going to face Vietnam-type tariffs as India is not involved in rerouting third-country goods. Labour and services are not under discussion," the official said.

The official said the US is not willing to give concessions on steel to any country, and that India has imposed safeguard duties to protect its domestic industry. India is focusing on labour-intensive goods such as textiles, apparel and footwear, where it has a competitive edge over other countries.

## • Why three documents SC suggests widen net, dial down panic

Raghopur in Vaishali, and in Seemanchal region. The issue is particularly pressing for marginalized groups, including Extremely Backward Classes (EBCs) and minorities.

The newly suggested documents are far more widely accessible. Of the three, Aadhaar and Election ID cards are nearly ubiquitous in Bihar, with ration cards available to two-thirds of the population. Consider the following:

■ **Aadhaar**, which serves as both proof of identity and address, is available to over 88% of the population. As per the Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI), 11,48,98,440 Aadhaar cards had been generated in Bihar as of July 10, 2025, covering more than 88% of the state's projected population of 13 crore (as of March 1, 2025).

Furthermore, the UIDAI reports an even higher level of Aadhaar saturation in Bihar, defined as the percentage of the eligible population successfully enrolled for and issued an Aadhaar number. As of July 10, 2025, Aadhaar saturation in the state stood at 94%, with all districts except Jehanabad exceeding 100%. The highest saturation was recorded in Kishanganj

(126%), followed by Katihar and Araria (123% each), Purnia (121%), and Sheikhpura (118%). Of the Aadhaar numbers generated in Bihar by July 10, 2025, 70.29% were for individuals aged 18 and above, 27.62% for those aged 5 to under 18, and 2.09% for children under 5 years old.

■ **Ration cards** are also widespread in Bihar. According to the Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, nearly two-thirds of Bihar's population holds a ration card. As of July 10, 2025, Bihar had 1,79,07,319 ration cards, covering 8,71,72,572 beneficiaries.

■ **Voter ID** cards are held by almost all of Bihar's 7.89 crore existing electors as it is compulsorily issued to all enrolled voters by the respective state Chief Electoral Officer.

Under the June 24 order, any person not listed in the 2003 Electoral Rolls—an estimated 2.93 crore individuals—must submit at least one of the 11 documents to prove their eligibility to vote. These documents include any identity card or pension payment order issued to a regular employee or pensioner of any Central or State

Government/PSU; any identity card, certificate, or document issued by Government/Local Authorities/Banks/Post Office/LIC/PSU prior to July 1, 1987; birth certificate issued by the competent authority; passport; matriculation or educational certificate issued by recognised boards/universities; permanent residence certificate issued by the competent state authority; forest right certificate; OBC/SC/ST or any caste certificate issued by the competent authority; National Register of Citizens (where applicable); family register; and land/house allotment certificate issued by the government.

As of Thursday evening, the Election Commission had not yet taken a decision on the Supreme Court's suggestion. EC sources indicated that the option to voluntarily include Aadhaar from the form already exists, but it is used for identity verification, not eligibility. Aadhaar is not included in the 11 documents listed in the indicative list. Similarly, while voter ID numbers appear on the forms, they are used only for identification, not to establish eligibility.

(WITH INPUTS FROM DAMINI NATH)

## • SC flags key issues for poll panel

Representation of People's Act, 1951 (RPA) and that the Court will not stop the EC. However, the SC also made it clear that the process would be subject to judicial intervention.

On the citizenship issue, the bench observed that it is the remit of the Ministry of Home Affairs to determine whether an individual is a citizen.

"...citizenship is an issue to be determined not by the Election Commission of India, but by the Ministry of Home Affairs," the bench said when EC's counsel, senior advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, defended the Commission's decision to exclude Aadhaar as a valid document. EC's lawyers cited Article 326 of the Constitution, which mandates voting based on adult suffrage. "The precondition for adult suffrage is citizenship," Dwivedi argued.

However, the bench then observed that if the EC wanted to ensure that only citizens are on the electoral rolls, then it "should have started the process much earlier."

Essentially, the Court raised questions about the timing of the exercise and inquired whether it could be delinked from the Bihar elections.

"Your decision, to disenfranchise the person who is already there on the electoral roll in 2025, would compel this individual to appeal against (the) decision and go through this entire rigmarole

and thereby be denied of his right to vote in the ensuing election. There is nothing wrong in you purging electoral rolls through an intensive exercise to see that non-citizens do not remain on the rolls. But if you decide only a couple of months before a proposed election..." Justice Bagchi said.

"If you ask for these documents immediately, even I will not be able to produce it now, look at the practicality, look at the timeline," Justice Dhulia added.

The judges also asked the EC questions on the process it would follow, in case of disenfranchisement of a voter. "If a summary revision" under the Representation of People's Act calls for a verbal hearing before deletion of a voter from the electoral roll, can it be said that the 'intensive' revision cannot have that process?" Justice Dhulia asked.

According to the rules in the RPA, in all cases of proposed voter deletions, except for confirmed deaths, a notice is served to the voter, providing them with a reasonable opportunity for a hearing.

The SC also, in its order, asked the EC to explain why Aadhaar, Electoral Photo Identity Card (voter card issued by the EC) and ration card cannot be accepted as valid documents in the SIR process. This potentially increases the ambit of the 11-document list that has set off widespread panic and confusion on the ground.

## • With USAID shut, Norman Borlaug's institute knocks on India's doors

of Agricultural Research (ICAR). BISA has three research stations at Ludhiana (Punjab), Jabalpur (Madhya Pradesh) and Samastipur (Bihar).

CIMMYT has also opened a "doubled haploid" facility for maize at Kunigal (Karnataka), jointly with the University of Agricultural Sciences, Bangalore. This first-of-its-kind facility in Asia produces genetically pure inbred lines of maize that can be used as parents for further crossing and breeding of hybrids by both public sector institutions and private seed companies.

CIMMYT's India office has 19 international and 144 national staff. Besides, some 25 scientists from India work at CIMMYT offices all over the world. "A tenth of our 1,800-plus global staff are Indians," Govaerts noted.

India's contribution to CIMMYT's budget was just \$0.8 million in 2024. While CIMMYT began as a pilot programme of the Mexican government and

the Rockefeller Foundation in the 1940s and 50s, over time it became more reliant on funding from USAID and newer non-profits like the Gates Foundation.

With USAID's shuttering, India has scope and reason to step up its funding and have a say in CIMMYT. "India is a neutral voice in world affairs. We, too, are a neutral and apolitical organisation focused on food security that is vital for peace. Borlaug's Nobel Prize (in 1970) was for Peace," Govaerts added.

CIMMYT's current research and field trials are aimed at raising yields as much as breeding varieties with improved heat tolerance, disease resistance and biological nitrification inhibition (BNI) traits.

Wheat is increasingly prone to yield losses from mercury spikes in March, at the crop's final grain formation and filling stage. Studies show that every one-degree Celsius rise in night temperatures lowers yields by

an average of 6%. By identifying traits in wheat plants that promote heat tolerance, scientists are able to develop varieties better adapted to hotter days as well as warmer nights.

The BNI trait can, similarly, make wheat and maize plants hold more nitrogen in the soil, instead of releasing it into the atmosphere. Improved nitrogen retention in soil, in turn, can potentially reduce the application of urea and other nitrogenous fertilisers by up to 20%.

CIMMYT has transferred the BNI trait into some of its high-yielding bread wheat lines. BISA, in collaboration with ICAR, has used these pre-breeding donors to develop a pipeline of BNI elite lines, which may be introduced in all-India trials by 2027-end.

All this is relevant to India's future food security and consolidating the yield gains from the Green Revolution that Borlaug initiated in the early 1960s.

## • Maharashtra

to seven years in prison, defines 'unlawful activity' as "any action taken by an individual or organization whether by committing an act or by words either spoken or written or by sign or by visible representation or otherwise, (i) which constitute a danger or menace to public order, peace and tranquility; or (ii) which interferes or tends to interfere with maintenance of public order; or (iii) which interferes or tends to interfere with the administration of law or its established institutions and personnel" – the Bill defines four other actions that constitute 'unlawful activity'.

Maharashtra becomes the fifth state to pass such a Bill. It will now be tabled in the upper house for further deliberations. Vinod Nikole, the lone CPI (M) MLA in the Assembly, opposed the Bill. "I am the only MLA from the Left party. Violent action should be curbed. There is MCOA and UAPA. The CM has ended Naxalism in Gadchiroli, but I am opposing this Bill as it can be misused," Nikole said.

Several others including NCP SP's Rohit Pawar, Sena UBT's Bhaskar Jadhav and Varun Sardesai and Congress's

Vishwajeet Kadam voiced apprehension on some of the clauses of the Bill and what one of them felt was an extensive interpretation of the term 'Urban Naxal'. They also pointed out that not all suggestions of the joint select committee had been included in the revised Bill.

While Rohit Pawar, Sardesai and Kadam did not directly oppose the Bill, they expressed concern over the definition of some of the terms used in the Bill such as activism, Left wing extremism and unlawful activities.

Pawar and Sardesai said the terms are vague and clearer definitions should have been there in the Bill. "Not all suggestions have been included," Jadhav said. Congress MLA Nana Patole said, "Despite 12,000 suggestions and objections, only three have been accepted."

Rohit Pawar raised apprehension on the misuse of the "vague" terms. "There is no clear definition of what is Left wing extremist ideology? There are doubts in the minds of the people. What is the need for a new law when there are existing laws? The definitions are vague and opaque," he said.

Addressing Opposition concerns, Fadnavis said the Bill was

not aimed at Left parties or those critical of the government.

"Some members have expressed apprehensions, but this Act is not against any Left wing political party. This is against those organisations which are inciting people to overthrow the Indian Constitution. This is for the internal security of the country. It is not against Left parties like CPI or CPI (M). We, in fact, respect them even though we have different ideologies. It is against those organisations whose motive is to demolish the established institutions of our country. They will face action," he said.

Fadnavis said the CPI (Maoist) was banned in 2009 during the rule of the UPA government. There was no question of the Act being against Left parties, he said.

Underlining the difference between dissent and extremism, Fadnavis said every citizen has the right to protest, and in case of violence, relevant provisions of the BNS would apply, not the new law.

He said the Bill targets organisations inspired by extreme Left ideologies which, over the years, have aimed to challenge constitutional governance through armed struggle.

"These groups reject democratic institutions and seek to replace them," he said, citing the ideology of CPI (Maoist).

He said armed Maoist activity had declined significantly in Maharashtra – down from four districts to two talukas – and would be eradicated soon.

Fadnavis, however, warned of the rise of "urban Maoism" where, he said, inactive cadres operate through what seem to pass off as civil organisations, furthering extremist agenda. He cited a 2014 response in Parliament, during the rule of the UPA government, that named several such organisations.

He also said the Centre had urged all states to enact preventive laws on the lines of Telangana and Odisha since UAPA provisions apply only in cases of active terror activity.

"Some of the organisations which are banned in other states where such an Act has been passed have their head offices in our state and they are running their activities. It is like Maharashtra has become a safe haven for these organisations. In the absence of the Act, we were unable to ban these organisations. Hence, this Act is important," he said.

## • UK or France? Cabinet waits for DRDO on combat aircraft engine

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aircraft due to supply-side issues, have led to a realisation that engine technology is a big constraining factor for the Indian defence forces.

Amid efforts to develop aircraft engines indigenously, both Rolls-Royce and Safran have agreed to co-develop a new engine for AMCA, a twin-engine 5.5-generation stealth fighter.

This comes months after the Indian Navy issued a project sanction order for the design and development of a 6 MW-medium speed marine diesel engine with Kirloskar Oil Engines Ltd. The prototype diesel engine with indigenous content of over 50 per cent will be developed at a cost of Rs 270 crore with 70 per cent funding from the Centre.

The developed engines will be used for main propulsion and power generation on ships of the Indian Navy and the Indian Coast Guard. Most of the diesel engines of higher capacity were being imported from foreign equipment manufacturers so far.

"Very few Indian companies actually own engine technology. For aircraft, ships or even automobiles, we still don't entirely own the engine technology. The engines are getting designed abroad. The Kirloskar project (marine engines) will start the process of achieving self-reliance in marine engine development in the country. We are keen to do the same in aircraft engines," the official said.

The delays in delivery of the F404-IN20 engine by GE Aerospace to Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd for the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft Mk 1A fighter jet were attributed to problems faced by the American company in reviving its downstream supply chains, immediately after the Covid pandemic.

"The Tejas engine delays were caused by supply chain issues faced by the OEM (Original Equipment Manufacturer GE Aerospace). There is a need to have greater control of the engine procurement. As was done in the case of marine engines

the idea is to develop a local supply base for aircraft engines and we will do everything to develop an ecosystem here," the official said.

The RFI (request for information) has been issued by Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) and preliminary rounds of discussion with prospective players have been held.

The new engine for the AMCA, with a thrust class of 110-130 kN, is crucial for the aircraft's capabilities like supercruise and stealth optimisation. It is targeting a first flight by 2029-2030 and induction by 2035. Initial AMCA prototypes and the first production batch (Mk1) will use imported GE F414 engines. The more powerful locally-produced engines are being planned for the AMCA Mk2 variant.

Rolls-Royce's proposal involves developing a range of high-thrust turbofan engines for potential use in transport and civilian aircraft while Safran's

proposal entails a prototype derived from its Rafale fighter's M88 engine family. Safran, which has a base here, also proposes to leverage its offset obligations from the Rafale deal and potentially boost the indigenous Kaveri engine programme.

Alongside its AMCA push, the government is also examining proposals from Russia (Su-57) and the US (F-35) for procuring a batch of fifth generation aircraft as a short-term measure to meet the Indian Air Force's immediate needs, particularly in light of Pakistan procuring J-10C and newer fifth-gen fighters from China.

The problems with the American offer for the Lockheed Martin-built aircraft include invasive end-use monitoring clauses and interoperability issues with India's traditional French and Russian fleet that comprise Su-30MKIs, Rafales, Mirage 2000s and the indigenous Tejas Mk1A.

There is also renewed focus on mid-air refuellers and Airborne Early Warning and Control Systems or AWACS, with RFIs being initiated by the Ministry of Defence for both these categories of equipment, officials said.



## Like-minded nations may be added to Quad, says Japan diplomat

**DIVYAA**  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

AHEAD OF the Quad leaders' summit in New Delhi this year, a senior Japanese diplomat on Thursday indicated that more "like-minded" nations may be included in the Quad grouping in future, calling it an "evolving framework".

This comes barely a week after the Quad Foreign Ministers meeting in Washington DC, which was attended by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar.

During an event in New Delhi, Noriaki Abe, Minister for Political Affairs, Embassy of Japan in India, responding to a question whether South Korea or the Philippines can be added as new members to Quad, said, "I don't exclude the possibility of adding other like-minded countries to this framework." An interactive session was organised by the Embassy in collaboration with Centre for Integrated and Holistic Studies, a think tank.

Terming Quad "an evolving framework", Abe said they were looking to expand cooperation with regional partners. "But this possibility has not been discussed in the Quad context," he said.

For the Quad Leaders' sum-

mit, US President Donald Trump, Australian PM Anthony Albanese and Japanese PM Shigeru Ishiba are slated to travel to the national capital later this year, even as specific dates are still being worked out.

Abe also spoke on the disagreements related to tariff that the other Quad partners, including India and Japan, may be having with the US at the moment, and how they plan to overcome those divergences and work on cooperation towards "a free and open Indo-Pacific".

"We have many divergences. Like it or not, we need the US's engagement to promote peace, stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. We should not create any power vacuum in this region," he said.

"We need US's engagement and we need to multiply and multi-facet our cooperation with like-minded partners, including the US, of course. But we may expand our cooperation with other regional partners," Abe said.

Even as Quad partners have often expressed concern about China's unilateral actions in the South China Sea and East China Sea, Abe insisted that "the framework is not intended to do something with any specific country".

## Decks cleared to redraw critical tiger habitat boundary of Sariska reserve

**NIKHIL GHANEKAR**  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

THE STANDING committee of the National Board for Wildlife (SC-NBWL), chaired by Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav, has approved the proposal to redraw and rationalise the boundaries of Sariska Tiger Reserve's critical tiger habitat and buffer areas, as per minutes of the June 26 meeting.

The committee's decision was accompanied by caveats, and it will also be referred to the Supreme Court, which is suo moto examining a host of issues relating to the Sariska Tiger Reserve, including the rationalisation of its boundaries.

The SC's directions on

boundary rationalisation were based on a report of its Central Empowered Committee (CEC). CEC was entrusted with the task of looking into the issue of human disturbances in the tiger reserve, and it also made recommendations on the issues of village relocations, cattle grazing, and boundary demarcation.

The SC-NBWL decision comes just over a fortnight after the Rajasthan State Board for Wildlife (SBWL) cleared the proposal for the Union government's approval. The Sariska proposal did not figure in the original agenda of the SC-NBWL meeting, and was provided to committee members very close to the meeting, it has been learnt.

The Sariska Tiger Reserve falls in Bhupender Yadav's Alwar Lok Sabha constituency.

Prior to Rajasthan SBWL's meeting, *The Indian Express* reported last month that if approved, the boundary rationalisation could aid operations of over 50 marble and dolomite mines that were closed following a Supreme Court order last year. These mines were closed because they fell within a 1-km radius of the critical tiger habitat (CTH), a protected area.

A critical tiger habitat is an area within a tiger reserve that is to be kept free of human activity and presence to aid tiger conservation and tiger breeding, as per the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972.

The Rajasthan government had proposed certain hilly and peripheral areas for exclusion from CTH and the addition of areas from the buffer zone to the CTH.



Express

A truck carrying dolomite lumps near the Sariska reserve.

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During the meeting, SC-NBWL noted that the boundary alteration proposal was already approved by the Rajasthan Chief Wildlife Warden, the State Board for Wildlife, as well as the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

Following the alteration in the tiger reserve's boundaries, the critical tiger habitat will increase from 881.11 sq km to 924.49 sq km, and the buffer area will decrease from 245.72 sq km to 203.2 sq km, as per the

## Shukla may return on July 14, says NASA

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

ASTRONAUT SHUBHANSHU Shukla and three other crew members of the Axiom-4 mission are set to return to earth from the International Space Station (ISS) on July 14, NASA said on Thursday.

"We are working with the station program, watching the Axiom-4 progress carefully. I think we need to undock that mission and the current target to undock is July 14," Steve Stich, Manager, NASA Commercial Crew Program, told a press conference.

The Axiom-4 mission was launched from the Kennedy Space Centre at Florida on June 25 and the Dragon spacecraft docked at the International Space Station on June 26 after a 28-hour journey.

Meanwhile, an Axiom Space statement on Thursday said Shukla and his crewmates witnessed 230 sunrises onboard the ISS and travelled nearly 100 lakh km in space at the end of two weeks on the orbital laboratory.

The Axiom-4 crew, comprising Shukla, Peggy Whitson, Slawosz Uznanski-Wisniewski and Tibor Kapu, also took their final off-duty day on the ISS.

"From about 250 miles above the Earth, the crew spent their downtime capturing images and video, taking in the view of our home planet below, and reconnecting with loved ones," the Axiom statement said. These moments offer a rare pause in an otherwise rigorous daily schedule, the statement said.

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SCNBWL minutes.

Among the conditions specified while approving the proposal was protection of areas with low tiger density due to their continued ecological significance and role in providing landscape connectivity.

"As the proposed western section for rationalisation from core to buffer has lower tiger density, it still holds ecological significance due to confirmed tiger presence and its role in broader landscape connectivity. Therefore, any developmental activities detrimental to wildlife habitats may be avoided," the NBWL panel stated, as per minutes of the June 26 meeting.

It also directed that protection measures should be maintained or strengthened in the proposed buffer area and CTH

through enhanced patrolling, community engagement, and habitat monitoring.

A Supreme Court bench of Justice B R Gavai and Justice K V Viswanathan on December 11, 2024, had directed the Rajasthan government to carry out a boundary rationalisation exercise, based on the recommendations of CEC. In May last year, the SC had directed the closure of several stone, limestone and dolomite mines in and around Sariska.

The bench had acknowledged in December the concerns raised over the help to mining activities due to rationalisation, as well as concerns of legal mine operators regarding the impact of rationalisation. The southern part of the Sariska Tiger Reserve is rich in marble and dolomite

deposits in the Tehla range.

The bench noted in the order CEC's observations that the tiger reserve's CTH has fragmented, which led to legal and management challenges. "Hence, critical tiger habitat of STR should be rationalised based on the pattern of tiger breeding while ensuring the total area of CTH after rationalisation does not decrease rather the area of the Sariska wildlife sanctuary should be increased," the CEC report had stated.

"As the forest boundary and land records were not clear, the Mining Department has allotted mining leases. Mining leases operating on the forest land were closed down after orders from the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India," the CEC report filed in July 2024 had stated.



# Lotus blooms in Wular lake after 30 years: ‘It’s almost a miracle... thought it was gone forever’

**BASHAARAT MASOOD**  
BANDIPORA, JULY 10

ABDUL RASHID Dar sits on the edge of Wular lake in Kashmir's Bandipora, staring in wonder. In front is a sea of pink lotuses, all in full bloom. "I can't believe my eyes" he says as he delicately touches one. "When I was a child, I would accompany my father to harvest the lotus stems but that was a long time ago. I thought we have lost this gift of God forever."

Something remarkable is happening at Wular lake in Bandipora. The idyllic lake, located some 67 km from Srinagar and surrounded by the misty Harmukh mountains, is once again becoming home to lotuses 30 years after a devastating flood completely wiped them out of the area.

The change has been brought about thanks to conservation efforts by the Wular Conservation and Management Authority. The authority had begun desilting the lake in an effort to clear silt deposits from the flood.

"The lotus has seen a revival in areas where we have removed silt over the last few years. Since lotus seeds were buried deep inside the silt and soil, they couldn't grow.



**Abdul Aziz Dar, a lotus stem farmer, at the Wular lake in Kashmir's Bandipora.** *Shuaib Masoodi*

Now that the silt has been removed, lotus has again grown," says Mudasir Ahmad, a zonal officer of the Wular Conservation and Management Authority.

For a populace struggling with shrinking incomes and rising unemployment, the development has economic implications. It means the revival of lotus stem harvesting, a traditional occupation here. "It's almost a miracle," 43-year-old Dar, whose father was a lotus stem farmer, says.

## The unexpected turnaround

Located between Bandipora

that caused considerable damage to the rich ecosystem of Wular lake, depositing a large quantity of silt that buried the lotus vegetation and affected the lake's water flow.

For residents, it meant a loss of livelihood. "That year, the lotus was in full bloom," Ghulam Hassan Reshi, a resident from Lankreshipora village on the shore of the lake, says. "Then we lost the lotus forever. At least we thought that way, until now."

An official, however, said that while the lotus stems couldn't grow for harvesting since 1992, records suggest that its rhizomes — or its creeping root stalk — were still present in the lake until 25 years ago.

The turnaround came unintended. In 2020, Wular Conservation and Management Authority (WUCMA) embarked on an ambitious project to reclaim the lake and its rich ecosystem.

Part of the project was to dredge up silt from the lake.

The efforts paid off — last year, lotus began showing first signs of revival. Encouraged, the authority dispersed lotus seeds in the lake this year, Wular Conservation and Management Authority's zonal officer Mudasir Ahmad says.

"The dredging changed it all," local resident Ghulam Hassan Reshi says. "For many years, the villagers dispersed the lotus seed into the lake but nothing worked," he says.

Meanwhile, efforts to revive Wular continue. The lake, whose fish is known for its distinct taste, has over the years become a receptacle for all the silt and waste thrown into the Jhelum river and the 25 other streams that feed it.

"We have removed 79 lakh cubic meters of silt from the lake so far," says Owais Farooq Mir, a former official of the Wular Conservation and Management Authority who was with the authority until recently. "We are also in process to construct retention basins on the major stream so that waste and silt is prevented from going into the lake".

All this means additional income for the local community. At the lake, Abdul Aziz Dar, 60, watches some young boys click photos near the lake's edge.

"When some flowers bloomed last year, we didn't let anyone harvest them. We didn't want to lose them again," he said. "The good thing is that it is harvested in a season when there are very few options of work — from September to March."



EXPLAINED GLOBAL

## What ICC warrants for Taliban leaders mean



Haibatullah Akhundzada (left) and Abdul Hakim Haqqani. File

SHAARVI MAGAZINE  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

THE INTERNATIONAL Criminal Court (ICC) on Tuesday issued arrest warrants for Haibatullah Akhundzada and Abdul Hakim Haqqani, two senior leaders of the Taliban, for the crime of persecuting women, girls, and others who oppose the gender policy of the Islamist militia that rules Afghanistan.

### The crime

Since the Taliban regained control over Afghanistan in August 2021, the regime has promulgated a series of laws to systematically oppress and marginalise women and girls, deny them education and opportunities, and put severe restrictions on them.

According to the ICC, the Taliban have “severely deprived” girls and women of basic human rights like education, privacy, and family life, and the freedoms of movement, expression, thought, conscience, and religion.

A 144-page “morality law” promulgated by the Taliban in August 2024 includes provisions requiring women to cover their entire body and to not sing or even speak in public. The code forbids women and men from looking at each other in public, and provides for the persecution of LGBTQ people. The UN has characterised these actions and laws as “gender apartheid”.

Haibatullah Akhundzada is the Emir or Supreme Leader of the Taliban. Abdul Hakim Haqqani is the Chief Justice of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

The ICC has accepted evidence that these individuals “committed — by ordering, inducing or soliciting — the crime against humanity of persecution...on gender grounds, against girls, women and other persons non-conforming with the Taliban’s policy on gender, gender iden-

tity or expression; and on political grounds against persons perceived as “allies of girls and women””.

### The impact

The ICC’s warrant is unlikely to result in any arrests. Akhundzada is extremely reclusive, and rarely makes public appearances. And Haqqani is unlikely to be stepping out of the country any time soon. The ICC has previously issued warrants against Russia’s President Vladimir Putin and Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Zabihullah Mujahid, the chief spokesman for the Taliban, posted on X: “We do not recognise any organisation called the International Court, nor are we committed to it in any way.”

Nonetheless, the arrest warrants hold symbolic value. Tahera Nasiri, an Afghan women’s rights activist now living in Canada, told *The Guardian* that the warrants were an acknowledgment of the abuses Afghan women faced. “For four years, the Taliban have told us to stay silent, stay at home, cover our faces, give up our education, our voices and our dreams. Now, an international court is saying: ‘Enough. This is a crime.’” she said.

### The court

The ICC is an international tribunal established under the Rome Statute, an international treaty that was adopted on July 17, 1998. It is headquartered in The Hague, Netherlands, and started functioning after its founding treaty entered into force on July 1, 2002.

The ICC aims to “end impunity for the perpetrators of the most serious crimes of concern to the international community” — genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and the crime of aggression.

It is the only international court with the jurisdiction to prosecute individuals — this is unlike ICJ, which is an organ of the UN that takes up disputes between states.

## The revision of electoral rolls

Why, and by what process, does the Election Commission of India carry out revisions of electoral rolls? What happened during earlier intensive revisions, and what safeguards evolved over time?

RITIKA CHOPRA  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

THE SUPREME Court on Thursday declined to restrain the Election Commission of India (ECI) from going ahead with its Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar, but advised it to consider allowing Aadhaar, voter ID cards, and ration cards as valid documents for updating the rolls.

There is widespread political opposition and significant confusion on the ground in the poll-bound state over the ECI’s new requirement that even existing electors, if enrolled after 2003, must furnish documentary proof to establish their date and/ or place of birth, which is then used to determine citizenship.

The SIR has triggered concerns over its potential to disenfranchise large numbers of electors. What happened during earlier intensive revisions of electoral rolls in the country, and what safeguards evolved over time?

### What is an ‘intensive’ revision, and how does it differ from other revisions?

An intensive revision involves a full, fresh preparation of electoral rolls through house-to-house enumeration. Enumerators visit every household to record eligible electors as of a qualifying date, without reference to existing rolls.

This is done when the ECI determines that the current rolls are outdated, inaccurate, or require complete rebuilding — typically before major elections or after administrative exercises such as delimitation of constituencies.

A second type of revision is a “summary” revision. This is routine annual updating, in which existing rolls are published as drafts, and citizens file claims for inclusion, deletion, or correction. There are no door-to-door visits.

A third type, “special” revision, is undertaken in exceptional cases such as missed areas, large-scale errors, or legal or political exigencies. The ECI may, under Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, conduct a special revision using either summary or intensive methods, or a combination of both.

Each kind of revision has a specific purpose: intensive is for comprehensive overhaul; summary for routine maintenance; special for addressing specific deficiencies or extraordinary circumstances requiring tailored approaches.

### But why is the ongoing exercise in Bihar called a special intensive revision?

The nomenclature “Special Intensive Revision” (SIR) indicates that the ECI is exercising its discretionary powers under Section 21(3) of the 1950 law, which permits it to revise electoral rolls “in such manner as it thinks fit”.

For this exercise, the ECI has adopted a hybrid approach — combining door-to-door



A Booth Level Officer (BLO) surrounded by electors in Bihar during the ongoing Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. Express

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field verification that is characteristic of an intensive revision with elements of a summary revision, such as the reliance on existing electoral rolls to distribute enumeration forms.

What has set the ongoing SIR apart, however, is the introduction of a new step — the requirement of documentary proof at the enumeration stage itself. This is a striking departure from past practice.

The “special” in this intensive revision in effect signals its methodological flexibility.

### But why has the ECI undertaken this exercise at the present moment — and why has Bihar been chosen for it?

The SIR is not limited to Bihar. On June 24, the ECI announced that it would carry out an intensive verification of electoral rolls across the country. This would be the first such exercise in more than two decades, and the process has begun with Bihar, where Assembly elections are due before November.

The ECI’s stated reason for the exercise is the “significant change” that has taken place in the electoral rolls over time, with large-scale additions and deletions since the last intensive revision. It has attributed these changes to rapid urbanisation, increased migration for education and livelihood, and the practice of voters enrolling at a new address without ensuring their names are deleted from the rolls of their previous residence, which can lead to duplicate entries.

This situation, according to the ECI, warrants an intensive drive to verify each person before they are enrolled as an elector. Officials have also cited the repeated complaints from political parties — including allegations of manipulation of Maharashtra’s electoral roll by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi — as a factor

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behind the renewed push to clean up and standardise electoral rolls.

### How often has the ECI revised electoral rolls intensively, and what were the circumstances of those earlier exercises?

Intensive revisions of electoral rolls, in all or some parts of the country, have been undertaken earlier in 1952-56, 1957, 1961, 1965, 1966, 1983-84, 1987-89, 1992, 1993, 1995, 2002, 2003 and 2004. Each revision has reflected the ECI’s evolving priorities — from correcting early administrative flaws to addressing migration, delimitation, and concerns over the quality of the rolls.

In the first decade after Independence, the overriding priority was to fix the rolls used for the 1951-52 Lok Sabha election, which were riddled with inaccuracies and omissions. The Commission’s narrative report of the first election noted that “the final electoral rolls were not always as accurate and satisfactory as might have been desired”.

It attributed these flaws to multiple factors: widespread public ignorance, limited organisational capacity among political parties, and inexperience in the government machinery.

One striking example was the mass exclusion of women before the first Lok Sabha election — many women refused to give their names to enumerators, and instead identified themselves only as “wife of” or “daughter of”.

Political parties, which at the time lacked both structure and familiarity with the electoral process, did not actively assist election officials. This is unlike today, where they appoint agents to aid in the preparation of the rolls.

The situation was further complicated by the absence of an electoral law in the early years, the late establishment of a central su-

pervisory authority, and the lack of time to carry out a thorough verification.

To address these systemic shortcomings, the ECI launched a phased, rotating intensive revision strategy: one-fifth of each state was covered annually between 1952 and 1956 before the next Lok Sabha election in 1957, followed by one-third each year from 1957 to 1961 before the 1962 election, with particular attention to urban and migrant-heavy constituencies that were known for higher rates of voter movement and errors.

Administrative events like the reorganisation of states in 1956 and the delimitation exercises in the 1960s made fresh revisions of the rolls necessary.

By the 1980s, there was a growing focus on preventing the inclusion of ineligible voters, particularly foreign nationals, in the electoral roll — even as the emphasis on guarding against duplicate entries continued.

The ECI began to issue intensive revision guidelines, with specific instructions on “safeguards against inclusion of foreign nationals” — a reflection of concerns that had started to surface in the political discourse.

During this period, the Commission received multiple complaints from Chief Ministers of border states, especially in the Northeast, alleging that significant numbers of foreign nationals had managed to get themselves enrolled as voters.

The ECI at this time firmly articulated the principle that names that were already included in the electoral roll should not be deleted without following due process.

Officers were instructed to uphold the “sanctity” of the existing roll, especially when objections were raised about an elector’s citizenship status. The Commission made it clear that the burden of proof lay with the person objecting to the inclusion, and not with the elector whose name was already on the roll.

In 1993 and 1995, the ECI again ordered countrywide intensive revisions. Although 1993 was the year when Elector’s Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) were introduced under Rule 28 of the Registration of Electors Rules, ECI records from that time do not indicate that EPIC was the purpose of the revision.

Instead, the records note that EPIC details were “also captured” — suggesting that the field verification process of the revision helped facilitate, but was not driven by, the rollout of the photo ID.

Over time, as the quality of the rolls improved and administrative costs increased, the Commission gradually moved towards summary revisions as the default.

But whenever accuracy became a serious concern — due to demographic shifts, political complaints, or structural changes — the ECI returned to intensive methods, adapting them to the needs of that moment.

## Study creates 37,000-year chronicle of diseases

A STUDY published in *Nature* on Wednesday unveiled a new genetic chronicle documenting the rise of 214 diseases across Europe and Asia over the past 37,000 years.

Researchers examined the remains of 1,313 ancient individuals, and used genetic clues to track the rise and fall of epidemics across centuries. “As far back as we go, humans have had infectious diseases,” said Eske Willerslev, a geneticist at the University of Copenhagen and an author of the new study.

But remains of early hunter-gatherers did not have traces of some of the biggest killers of recent history, such as *Yersinia pestis*, the bacterium that causes plague. Researchers initially assumed that they would see such dis-



eases rise to prominence starting about 11,000 years ago, when people started domesticating animals.

But ancient DNA evidence indicates that plague and a number of other diseases jumped to people from animals starting only about 6,000 years ago, when nomads in Eurasia started rearing vast herds of cattle and other livestock.

Over time, as these nomads expanded across the steppes of Asia and eastern Europe, the pathogens thrived. Some epidemics were so intense that they changed the genetic profile of the nomads, and played a “big role in genetically creating the world we know of today”, the study said.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

AMAAL SHEIKH  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

WHILE AGREEING to hear pleas challenging the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar, the Supreme Court on July 7 made a reference to a 1977 ruling that had clarified the powers of the Election Commission of India (ECI) to conduct free and fair elections.

The petitioners in the present challenge have questioned the ECI’s power to conduct the SIR, as well as the procedure for it. Under Article 326, every citizen above the age of 18 has the right to vote. The SIR has shifted the burden of proof of citizenship on electors in some cases. The ECI has issued a new enumeration form, which is not prescribed in the Representation of the People Act, 1951, which

governs the conduct of elections.

The court began hearing the challenge on Thursday.

### The 1977 case

The ruling by a five-judge Bench of the Supreme Court (*Mohinder Singh Gill v. The Chief Election Commissioner*) came after the post-Emergency Lok Sabha election of 1977. Following violence and the destruction of some ballot papers during counting of votes for one segment of the Ferozepore (Firozpur) seat, the ECI cancelled the entire process and ordered a re-election at the seat.

Gill was leading the count at the time, and challenged the decision in Punjab and Haryana High Court under Article 226, which gives HCs the power to issue writs for the enforcement of fundamental rights and provide legal remedies for violations of law.

The court considered three questions: first, whether the ECI is empowered to order a re-poll for the entire constituency; second, whether the ECI’s order violated the principles of natural justice; third, whether the HC was competent to intervene under Article 226, given the bar placed by Article 329(b) on judicial interference in election matters.

It upheld the ECI’s order and dismissed the petition, saying that it lacked jurisdiction to intervene in electoral matters through a writ petition. On appeal, the Supreme Court too upheld the ECI’s decision and clarified the extent of its powers.

### The SC’s ruling

The SC underlined the ECI’s plenary powers over the “superintendence, direction and control of the preparation of the electoral rolls for, and the conduct of” elections to Parliament

and state Assemblies under Article 324.

It said that if laws enacted by Parliament and state Assemblies under Articles 327 and 328 respectively, are silent on any aspect, the ECI must act independently and decisively to ensure free and fair elections.

The court also held that the ECI can take proactive decisions, including ordering a re-poll, if it believes that the integrity of the election has been compromised. While natural justice is an important procedural safeguard, it must be “pragmatic and flexible”, the SC said.

The court underlined that the powers of the ECI are subject to judicial review, but judicial review came into play only after the election was complete. It clarified that Article 329(b) places a “blanket ban” on courts from intervening during an ongoing election process, although it has “large enough powers to give relief to an injured candidate” afterward.





# THE EDITORIAL PAGE

## EC must listen



ASHOK LAVASA

To questions and voices from the ground in Bihar — a bureaucratic approach with an unclear purpose can be a nightmare for citizens

THE SUPREME COURT has not stayed the contentious Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar. Instead, the Court said, “After going through the documents, ECI has pointed out that the list of documents for verification of voters include 11 documents and is not exhaustive. Thus, in our opinion, it would be in the interest of justice if Aadhaar card, EPIC card and Ration Card be included. It is for the ECI to still decide whether it wants to take the documents or not. If it does not take the documents, (it has to) give reasons for the same.” “The matter needs hearing,” it concluded while issuing notice to the ECI for its response “within one week on or before July 21 and rejoinder before July 28”.

Interestingly, the citizenship issue and the ECI's competence to delve into it is not mentioned in the order, although it was reportedly mentioned during the hearing. It is incontrovertible that only Indian citizens have a right to vote as per Article 326, and no one who is agitated by the SIR has argued against this. It is equally incontrovertible that the ECI is the “empowered” constitutional authority to supervise the preparation of electoral rolls. It is also a fact that there is no legal document issued by the government by which citizenship can be proved. How fair is it, then, to ask citizens to produce a conclusive document to establish citizenship? If the purpose of the SIR is to verify identity, then why do it all over again, having once done it to the satisfaction of the registration officers in keeping with relevant regulations?

In the absence of definitive proof of citizenship issued under the Citizenship Act, the ECI has done a credible and commendable job in preparing inclusive electoral rolls that have expanded from about 180 million electors in 1951 to about 990 million in 2025. This has been possible because of an expansive and pragmatic approach, with the ECI's motto, “no voter is left behind”. In that process, it has devised its own procedures to ascertain the identity, bona fides, and “ordinary residence” of Indian citizens so that they

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are not deprived of the democratic right to elect a government. Conscious of its constitutional obligation, the ECI neither waited for the government to fulfil its legal responsibility of issuing a citizenship document nor was guided by it into adopting a system to satisfy itself about a citizen's eligibility in preparing electoral rolls. This served the country and its citizens well and earned accolades for the ECI as an empathetic, transparent and efficient independent organisation. It rightly adopted systems that do not conflict with extant laws and do not unduly encumber the citizen — from enrolment to voting.

In fact, the ECI has been indulgent. Even though it is an elector's responsibility to ensure that she is not enrolled in more than one place, the ECI has been tolerant of this while working on methods by which such duplication can be detected and deleted. It has not filed a single case against electors who may have committed this irregularity because it was confident that its procedures would not permit electors to vote more than once. It has innovative ways of facilitating voters embracing modern technologies to make the system failproof.

The Indian electoral system has faced a fundamental challenge in determining where an elector should vote. EPIC recognises an elector's eligibility but is not sufficient to vote till the elector's name appears in the electoral roll of a particular constituency. The EC has been flexible in allowing an elector to be enrolled in a place of his ordinary residence. The meaning of “ordinarily resident” is defined in the RP Act in an ambivalent manner that enables the ERO to exercise his judgement in determining the claim made by the elector seeking registration:

The person seeking to register as a voter is required to give an affidavit that she is a citizen of India and provide documentary evidence of her identity and ordinary residence. In fact, as per Rule 18 of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, “if the registration offi-

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cer is satisfied as to the validity of any claim or objection, he may allow it without further inquiry”. He must conduct an inquiry, if demanded. Even in the case of deletion, he cannot do so without giving the person an opportunity to be heard, and the onus of proof is on the objector.

What is puzzling in the case of Bihar is that the EC discarded its own findings of more than two decades in registering electors as per its notified due process, and placed the burden of proof on electors. In an unprecedented step, it ordered that registration till 2003 would carry “probative evidence of eligibility, including presumption of citizenship”, not mentioned in earlier revisions. The previous EC orders for SIRs should be seen in this regard. The practice hitherto, as per available information, was house-to-house enumeration where the head of the family would provide details of all adult members, as per Forms 4 and 5, without any document for supporting citizenship. Therefore, the distinction made between pre-2003 and post-2003 is illogical.

A bureaucratic approach coupled with an unclear purpose can be a nightmare for citizens. Even if the ECI agrees to expand the list of documents that electors are required to submit for reconfirming the satisfaction of the ERO, the distinction made between two groups of electors, pre and post-2003, is unreasonable and needs review. Similarly, the distinction between different categories of citizens based on their date of birth is unprecedented. It may not be desirable to let an overzealous ECI enlarge its sphere of responsibility. After all, hasn't the ECI steadfastly remained away from enforcing the order of the Central Information Commission treating political parties as public entities under the Right to Information Act as it doesn't lie in its remit? Or should we expect the ECI to take that issue up with equal conscientiousness?

The writer is a former election commissioner

## TRIGGER-HAPPY CBFC

Its overreach in ‘Janaki v/s State of Kerala’ is a preemptive capitulation to the mob, infantilises audiences

IT IS A real-life courtroom drama that the makers of Malayalam film *Janaki v/s State of Kerala* did not account for: Centred on a rape survivor's pursuit of legal justice, the Suresh Gopi-Anupama Parameswaran movie, which was slated for a June 27 release, found itself ranged against the overreaching arm of the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC). The Board refused its certification on the ground that it was inappropriate and inflammatory for a character portrayed as a sexual-violence survivor to bear a name with mythological associations, and to be cross-examined in court by a character of another faith. After legal intervention, a compromise has been reached. The filmmakers have agreed to insert an initial before the protagonist's name in exchange for only two of the 96 cuts demanded. But the episode is troubling. It signals a dangerous narrowing of artistic spaces. It is also a reminder of how the CBFC, whose remit is to classify films, not censor them, repeatedly strays into moral and political gatekeeping.

*Janaki...* joins a long list of films — *Lipstick Under My Burkha* (2016), *Padmaavat* (2018), and more recently, *L2: Empuraan* — that have faced similar interference under the pretext of preserving public order or avoiding offence. *Sitaare Zameen Par* was released after five changes, including the addition of a quote by the Prime Minister in the opening disclaimer. The CBFC's entanglement with identity politics — religious, regional, or patriarchal — points to a deeper institutional malaise. Over the years, the Board's role has mutated to control, often wielding its power to appease real and imagined fringe sensitivities rather than upholding and expanding spaces for artistic liberty. In trying to pre-empt hypothetical offence, it reinforces a culture where free expression is contingent on the veto of the most easily outraged. This poses a dual threat: Not only are filmmakers forced into a regressive self-censorship, as was the case with the makers of *L2: Empuraan*, but audiences, too, are denied mature engagement with difficult ideas. The Kerala High Court, while hearing the case, asked pertinent questions: “Has anyone complained about the name Janaki? Whose sentiments are being hurt? Has anyone actually raised an objection?” and “Now you will dictate to directors and artists which names they should use and which stories they should tell...”

A defining feature of a mature democracy is a cultural framework that trusts people to engage with complexity. Art thrives in discomfort, dissent, provocation and debate. The CBFC must remember its job is to classify cinema — and then get out of the way.



DIS/AGREE  
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A weekly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate



C R Sasikumar

After the BRICS summit, a question: Do multilateral institutions serve India's interests in a changing world order?

## Global South, building BRICS

India needs to be in as many coalitions as necessary till it is made a genuine participant in world affairs



PANKAJ SARAN

DON'T BLAME BRICS for the curse of multipolarity. BRICS is not the reason for the relative decline of the US as a global power. The folly lies at the doorstep of a multi-decadal US policy, with active abetment by its Western allies, to outsource manufacturing to China and make it the manufacturing capital of the world. To make matters worse, the US-led West handed over the fate of a devastated global economy to China in the wake of the collapse of capitalism and the financial crisis of 2008. China was happy to play saviour. Neither BRICS nor India can be blamed for the rapid rise of a power that today believes it is poised to challenge US global hegemony.

In fact, India is at the receiving end of policies pursued by its Western partners. The lessons have not been learnt even now. Europe and the US are divided about whether and how much to shake off their interdependence with China. In fact, we are told there may not be any good solutions. China continues to ride the wave of the American and European economies. Its integration with them is far greater than with any BRICS member.

Unlike his predecessors, the current US President has launched a frontal attack on BRICS, with the threat of punitive tariffs. Some truths need to be told here. He has equally harsh words to say about the European Union, which he has said was formed to do damage to the United States. Japan and Korea have not been spared either. India's largest and most important trade and technology partners are outside BRICS. If the wider world was satisfied with the current state of world affairs, BRICS would have been relegated to a fringe organisation. Its rapid expansion in the past couple of years, involving several well-known friends and partners of the US, needs introspection in Western capitals, not name calling.

A scenario where India walks out of BRICS is possible, because nothing is impossible. But would it be admitted into the G7 as a reward for switching sides? It has been made clear that in today's world, democracy has lost its premium. Military-ruled Pakistan is considered as great a nation as India, and as indispensable a partner for the US. differences. They have different geopolitical uses for these organisations. India is not exactly enamoured of the putative hegemon. It is hardly likely, for example, that India will facilitate the replacement of the US dollar with the Chinese yuan as an international reserve currency. The US, however, is not helping matters. By making the availability of the dollar scarce through forced reduction of trade surpluses against it and, in parallel, weaponising it as a geopolitical tool, it is driving even the best-intentioned nations to hedge against unpredictability. This is the new reality we live in. Understanding these complexities requires a new way of thinking.

tury, India should also be walking out of the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) and the RIC (Russia-India-China) and IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) groupings, which variously represent systemic challengers and the Global South.

The Global South is a reality, whichever way we define it. The question is how India sees itself in the larger comity of nations. For years, China relished being referred to as the "G77 plus China" in diplomatic jargon. India is embedded in the South in real terms as well as in philosophical terms. It would be delusional to think otherwise.

At the same time, India can barely be faulted for believing in itself and having a sense of its destiny in the long run. Its accretion of power is an inexorable process, unless we reconcile ourselves to a forever status of a post-colonial emerging nation and perpetual aspirant. In the transition phase of the current world order, India's interests lie in working with the known US-led order, while being conscious that there are many things out of its control. For instance, the continuation of this order depends on how it is led, rather than the choices of its followers. At the same time, India will seek to grow as fast as it can.

Since the scale of transformation by itself is of epic proportion, affecting the lives of one-sixth of humanity, and additionally, given the track record of those who govern or misgovern the current order, India's interface with the world will have to be cut across the board. India needs to be in as many thematic and geographical coalitions and groupings as necessary till it is made a genuine participant in the governance of international institutions. This is the essence of India's case.

No doubt, organisations like BRICS and SCO have internal divisions, as do other, more honourable ones. Their achievements are modest. Members have different orientations and goals, and even bilateral

A scenario where India walks out of BRICS is possible, if for nothing else than the fact that nothing is impossible, but would it be admitted into the G7 as reward for switching sides? It has been made clear that in today's world, democracy has lost its premium. Military-ruled Pakistan is considered as great a nation as India, and as indispensable a partner for the US.

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## BRICS is China's playground

As China's economic might continues to grow, the forum today constrains rather than furthers India's foreign policy objectives



SURUPA GUPTA

AS AN EMERGING power, India's interests are arguably served best by aligning with multiple major powers, which according to conventional wisdom allows Delhi to limit its dependence on any one power and instead work with each on specific issues of common interest. India's membership of multilateral institutions such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) has been justified along the lines that these provide platforms to push for a more multipolar world order that limits the dominance of Western powers and West-led institutions.

Indeed, BRICS emerged as a group focused on challenging the norms that shaped multilateral economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. BRICS offered another avenue for India's aspirations for global leadership as it, along with Brazil, China and Russia, negotiated a larger proportion of

quotas and votes at these institutions. In recent years, as BRICS has expanded its membership, it has arguably provided India another platform to develop ties with countries in the Global South. One could argue that as the US under the Donald Trump administration pursues an unpredictable and more volatile foreign policy, it might be even more imperative for India to build ties with such institutions.

But does membership of BRICS really serve India's interests? What specific foreign policy goals can it pursue through this? The international order is going through a transformation and the contours of the new order are not yet clear, and it is pertinent to ask whether China-dominated institutions such as BRICS will help India or drag it down.

I argue that while BRICS and the SCO still provide India platforms to push for multipolarity, they do not further many of its key foreign policy goals. In some cases, its interests might even be adversely affected through the collective positions taken. Clearly, China's economic size, assertive foreign policy and dominance in these institutions limit the extent to which India can exert its influence and secure its interests.

China's GDP, at \$17.79 trillion, is nearly five times the size of India's at \$3.56 trillion. This economic might, along with China's extensive trade and investment ties with other BRICS countries, allow it to exert greater political influence. At the BRICS summits, Beijing has used its leverage to promote goals such as de-dollarisation and expansion of the organisation's membership. It has also used the venue to advocate for a larger role in global governance for itself. While India seeks to pursue some of these goals, it has not been able to further its interests through BRICS. The redistribution of IMF quotas in 2015 may have been the only exception. Even then, as BRICS countries banded together to reform global governance, China emerged as the clear winner as it was able to secure a deputy managing director position at the IMF.

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While India seeks to expand its ties with countries in the Global South and portray itself as their leader, given the deep economic ties China enjoys with other BRICS countries, it is difficult for New Delhi to claim the leadership mantle while operating within the organisation. It might be easier for India to create a leadership narrative through bilateral ties and in blocs where China is not present.

Additionally, India is deeply conflicted on de-dollarisation. While it has not been opposed to creating alternative payment mechanisms, it has enjoyed strong and increasing trade and investment ties with the US and has sought to limit its dependence on China. Trump's threat of imposing additional tariffs on BRICS countries pursuing de-dollarisation puts India in a difficult position: Even though New Delhi was never in favour of the policy, it would need to clearly communicate that it is not retreating under threat.

The economic asymmetry within BRICS has also spilled over in the way Beijing has used the New Development Bank, the group's flagship financial institution. While India has borrowed for its infrastructure projects, it is China that has been able to leverage its economic power to shape the discussion at the NDB around infrastructure and connectivity, which in turn bolsters its Belt and Road Initiative.

It is not only in the realm of economics that New Delhi has seemingly played second fiddle. More recently, to maintain BRICS cohesion, India signed a joint declaration that condemned the terrorist attack in Pahalgam but did not criticise Pakistan for supporting cross-border terrorism. India has fought long and hard to convince the world that Pakistan promotes and exports terrorism — the BRICS declaration went directly against India's long-held position.

In the early years of the forum, BRICS membership likely gave India a larger profile in global governance by providing a mechanism for policy coordination by emerging economies. As China's economic might has continued to grow and its foreign policy has increased in ambition and assertiveness, the forum today might constrain rather than further India's foreign policy objectives. Indian leaders might be well advised to reevaluate BRICS's utility.

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## Let the rivers talk to each other

Namami Gange Programme can potentially leverage Delhi's Yamuna cleaning project towards the broader goal of rejuvenating India's rivers



SRINIVAS CHOKKAKULA AND DEBARSHÉE DASGUPTA

CLEANING THE YAMUNA is among the top priorities of the newly elected BJP government in Delhi. The keen interest from the central government, also led by the BJP, favours the project. The project also has the advantage of the Yamuna being part of the Namami Gange Programme (NGP). Delhi's state-driven effort to clean the Yamuna carries the prospect of valuable reciprocal learning, which can help shape a comprehensive policy ecosystem for rejuvenating India's rivers.

The NGP, launched in 2014 as the Government of India's flagship programme, can boast of a discernible impact in improving the water quality and ecological status of the Ganga. Besides the recent cleaner Maha Kumbh, the National Mission for Clean Ganga (NMCG) offers the rising populations of keystone species such as the Ganges dolphin as evidence of the improved ecological status of the river. In over a decade of its implementation, the NGP's responsive policy and institutional experiments stand out as a departure from the earlier Ganga Action Plan.

Implemented in mission mode, the NGP has interesting legal and institutional innovations to its credit. The foremost among these is that it has shifted from the regulatory framing of what was the Ministry of Environment and Forests to an executive approach, in the Ministry of Jal Shakti (earlier the Ministry of Water Resources, River Development and Ganga Rejuvenation). The programme also marks a shift from pollution abatement to improving the ecological condition of the river. The NGP has pursued a river basin approach informed by a plan produced by a consortium of the Indian Institutes of Technology. In celebrated river restoration programmes, like those in Europe, such shifts took decades. The International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (ICPR), established in 1950 to restore the River Rhine, made these shifts only after the Sandoz disaster in 1986.

The NMCG was accorded the status of an authority soon after it was launched through the River Ganga (Rejuvenation, Protection and Management) Authorities Order of 2016. The National Ganga River Basin Authority, constituted earlier, was dissolved through this order and was replaced with a National Ganga Council

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(NGC). There are other institutional innovations that show an unusual agility in policymaking. The NGC is headed by the Prime Minister with the chief ministers of the riparian states and 10 Union ministers as members. The NGC guides an empowered task force headed by the Union Minister for Jal Shakti, and an executive council headed by NMCG's director general with extensive financial and regulatory powers.

The most striking feature of the 2016 order is the recognition of the subnational governments as important partners. It mandates a layered structure of state Ganga committees and district Ganga committees — accommodating the important roles of governments at different levels. Despite this deliberate effort, the subnational participation in Namami Gange has not been very encouraging. The absence of ownership of the programme — the basin states' legal, institutional and budgetary responses — raises questions about its enduring impact.

This is where the NGP can leverage the Delhi government-driven project of cleaning the Yamuna for a model that can be scaled. The project can reveal the missing and less understood drivers, motivations, and channels of subnational mobilisation for river rejuvenation.

Delhi's Yamuna project is a particularly complex one and can therefore make a useful contribution. The Yamuna, like all other major Indian rivers, is an interstate river. Improving its ecological status depends on reliable interstate cooperation mechanisms for enduring outcomes — a challenge that Delhi will need to address. At the same time, it faces water quality deterioration due to a pollutant load of close to 80 per cent from the city-state of Delhi. This singular characteristic brings the role of a distinct territorial entity, that too of an urban agglomeration, into sharp focus for improving river water quality. Studies have shown that Delhi's uncaptured and untreated sewage is responsible for the pollution load in the Yamuna. This is a classic instance where improvement in river water quality directly depends on improved urban governance. Delhi can, therefore, demonstrate what states should do for enduring outcomes for the NGP, and the nature of Centre-state collaboration that is required to achieve this.

In Europe, it took a long time to get to the foundational Water Framework Directive. That experience is all about how institutions such as the ICPR mobilised the internal responses of sovereign nations in Europe. The NGP can potentially leverage responses like Delhi's cleaning of the Yamuna towards creating a policy and institutional ecosystem to rejuvenate India's rivers.

Chokkakula is the president and chief executive of Centre for Policy Research (CPR), New Delhi. Dasgupta is a research associate at CPR. Views are personal



● Parties ramp up their agents on the ground

parties in the state has risen by 13%, from 1,38,680 to 1,56,625.

BLAs are nominated by political parties, which submit a formal application to the Returning Officer or Assistant Returning Officer in this regard, who clear the names after verification. The basic requirement is that the BLAs be residents or registered voters of the polling area assigned to them.

As per data shared by the EC, between June 25 (when the SIR was announced) and July 2, the opposition INDIA bloc, comprising the RJD, Congress and Left groups, deployed an additional 17,51% BLAs, boosting their total from 56,038 to 65,853.

The NDA, led by the BJP and JD(U), saw a comparatively lesser surge of 10.86%. However, their total BLA count still remains more than the INDIA's, rising from 80,083 to 88,781.

With the poor and disadvantaged (including minorities) likely to be the worst hit – as they don't have many of the documents on the EC's list of 11 for enrolling on the voters' list – the Congress which is counting on these groups for votes has nearly doubled its BLA presence, from 8,586 to 16,500, a 92.17% jump.

The party's ground network has been shrinking in the state, in line with its falling electoral prospects.

Left parties, which generally have a devoted cadre, also showed a substantial rise. Starting from much smaller bases compared to other parties, the CPI(M) saw a 660.53% increase, from 76 to 578 BLAs, while the CPI (ML-

Liberation) had a 445.49% rise, from 233 to 1,271 BLAs.

However, the RJD, the mainstay of the INDIA bloc in Bihar, which finished with the largest number of Assembly seats in 2021, had only mobilised 0.77% more BLAs till July 2, a minor rise from 47,143 to 47,504.

The BJP, which finished second in 2021, also added barely 1.39% more BLAs in the period, going up from 51,964 to 52,689. However, the party already has the strongest grassroots network among parties.

In contrast, BJP ally JD(U) – which has been ceding ground to its partner in the state – boosted its BLA numbers by 24.13%, taking its total from 27,931 to 34,669.

The offshoots of the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) have also boosted their BLA presence. Together, the Rashtriya Lok Janshakti Party led by Pashupati Kumar Paras, and Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) led by Chirag Paswan had 2,457 BLAs before SIR started. They had 3,066 by July 2, a rise of more than 24%.

Of them, Paras – now out of the NDA – had 1,913 BLAs, and the Chirag-led party that is an NDA ally had 1,153.

Among the parties which have stepped up its activity on the ground is the BSP. Not a strong factor in Bihar, it went up from 26 to 74 BLAs in the eight-day period, a 184.62% rise.

The Rashtriya Lok Morcha (RLM) led by Upendra Kushwaha – which was earlier known as the Rashtriya Lok Samata Party and is a part of the NDA now – increased its numbers too, but by a minimal

2.27% from 264 to 270.

New entrants such as the National People's Party and Aam Aadmi Party appointed 3 BLAs and 1, respectively.

By Thursday evening, the EC claimed to have received 5.22 crore enumeration forms, covering 66.16% of the nearly 7.90 crore existing voters. Officials said that if the same "momentum" continues, all the expected forms might be received well before the deadline of July 25.

The EC also claimed to have distributed enumeration forms to nearly 98% of the voters (7.71 crore people), whose names were in the electoral rolls when the SIR started.

The electoral body has said that all those who submit their forms by July 25 will be included in the draft voter list, set for publication on August 1. Applicants can submit supplementary documents after this date as well, which will be checked by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to determine eligibility, with the final rolls to be published on September 30.

The EC has deployed 77,895 Booth Level Officers to carry out the enrolment exercise, adding 20,630 newly appointed ones to their ranks. Additionally, around 4 lakh volunteers have been deployed to assist the elderly, disabled, sick, and vulnerable individuals who may require help with filling forms.

The process is being overseen by the Chief Electoral Officer, with the assistance of 38 District Election Officers, EROs of the 243 Assembly Constituencies, and 963 Assistant EROs.



# Mizoram tribal council under Governor ‘rule’, govt overruled

SUKRITA BARUAH  
GUWAHATI, JULY 10

MIZORAM GOVERNOR Gen (retd) V K Singh's move to impose Governor's rule in the Chakma Autonomous District Council (CADC) in view of its “constant political instability” has upset the Lalduhoma-led Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government, which has criticised him for allegedly undermining the democratic norms.

Since its current term began in 2023, the CADC has seen two mass defections and two no-confidence motions with the first-ever BJP-led executive committee of the Council toppled last month, following which the ZPM staked claim to its leadership.

The CADC, set up in 1972, is an autonomous body under the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which is meant to ensure autonomy in the governance of the Chakma-inhabited belt in the state's Lawngtlai district. The Chakma tribe is an ethnic minority group, which is the second largest ethnic community in Mizoram.

After the BJP was voted out from the CADC leadership through a no-confidence motion on June 16, the ZPM – with 16 out of 20 elected MDCs (members of development council), including 12 defectors from the BJP – staked claim to forming the next CADC panel. The BJP had also come to power in the wake of similar defections and a no-confidence motion in 2024.

Following the ZPM's bid on June 18, the Governor sought the opinion of CM Lalduhoma's Council of Ministers on the issue, which disapproved of the dissolution of the CADC. However, on July 7, Gen Singh instead imposed Governor's rule, stating that the CADC's persistent instability “is extremely detrimental” for it and

“is certainly not what is envisioned by the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India”. The official notification also said that the Governor will assume the CADC's powers and functions for six months, which would be exercised by Lawngtlai Deputy Commissioner on his behalf.

The ZPM government pointed out that Gen Singh imposed the Governor's rule in the CADC against the advice given by the Council of Ministers. State Home Minister K Sapdanga said the Lalduhoma ministry had on July 4 suggested to the Governor that the CADC should not be dissolved and that the ZPM be allowed to form its next executive committee in view of its “majority”.

“Though we are fully aware of the Governor's discretionary power over the ADC, we see his action as a breach of democratic principles,” Sapdanga said.

However, Durjya Dhan Chakma, BJP leader and ex-CADC chief executive member (CEM), said the Governor has “made the right move”. “Dissolution is the only solution to this situation for now. But one of the reasons for these constant changes is that there is no anti-defection law in autonomous district councils and that needs to be brought for the long term,” he told *The Indian Express*. Over the last decade the CADC has been marked with instability, defections and shifting power. Its previous term from 2018 to 2023 had witnessed four different heads or CEMs.

The previous election to the 20-member CADC was held in May 2023, when 10 members from the Mizo National Front (MNF) and 5 each from the BJP and the Congress had been elected. The MNF then formed the executive committee with its leader Rasik Mohan Chakma becoming the CEM.

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## 18 THE WORLD

FRANCE, UK TO BEGIN WEEKLY SWAP OF MIGRANTS, ASYLUM SEEKERS SOON

## Starmmer, Macron unveil 'one in, one out' deal to return migrants to France

REUTERS  
LONDON, JULY 10

BRITISH PRIME Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron announced tougher migration controls on Thursday, ending a state visit with deals on defence, nuclear cooperation and plans to support Ukraine in case of a ceasefire.

After hosting Macron for a three-day visit, Starmer was handed a much-desired boost when Macron said France had agreed to a migrant returns scheme.

Starmer, who has seen his popularity slide since winning an election landslide last year, is working to address high levels of immigration, including asylum seekers arriving by small boats across the Channel from France.

At a joint press conference, the two leaders said they had agreed a "one in, one out" returns scheme which would see Britain deporting to France undocumented people arriving in small boats, in return for accepting an equal number of legitimate asylum seekers with British connections.



British PM Keir Starmer with French President Emmanuel Macron at Northwood, England, on Thursday. Reuters

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Macron faces likely backlash

WHILE THE migration deal is a boost for the British PM Keir Starmer whos popularity is falling, Emmanuel Macron may face questions from his right-wing critics at home over taking back migrants wanting to live in Britain.

An official said they were looking at about 50 returns a week, or 2,600 a year, a fraction of the more than 35,000 arrivals reported by the government last year.

## Meanwhile, Trump presses African leaders to take in US deportees

REUTERS  
MONROVIA, JULY 10

THE TRUMP administration this week pressed five African presidents to take in migrants from other countries when they are deported by the U.S., two officials familiar with the discussions told Reuters on Thursday.

The plan was presented to the presidents of Liberia, Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Mauritania and Gabon during their visit to the White House on Wednesday, according to a U.S. and a Liberian official who both asked not to be named.

The White House and official spokespeople for the five nations did not respond to requests for comment.

On Saturday, eight migrants - from Cuba, Laos, Mexico,

Myanmar, Sudan and Vietnam, according to their lawyers - arrived in South Sudan's capital after they lost a legal battle to halt their transfer. Wednesday's meeting at the White House had been organised partly to talk about the deportation plan, the US official said.

Liberia was "preparing to accommodate" an effort to house migrants in its capital Monrovia, the US official added. The Liberian official confirmed that the deportation plan was a focus of Wednesday's meeting, but did not say whether Liberian President Joseph Boakai had agreed to it.

The *Wall Street Journal* reported Wednesday that an internal State Department document sent to the African governments before the meeting called on them to agree to the "dignified, safe, and timely transfer" from the US of third country nationals.

## Trump hits Brazil with 50% tariffs, cites 'witch hunt' against Bolsonaro

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
WASHINGTON, JULY 10

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump singled out Brazil for import taxes of 50% on Wednesday for its treatment of its former president, Jair Bolsonaro, showing that personal grudges rather than simple economics are a driving force in the U.S. leader's use of tariffs.

Trump avoided his standard form letter with Brazil, specifically tying his tariffs to the trial of Bolsonaro, who is charged with trying to overturn his 2022 election loss. Trump has described Bolsonaro as a friend and hosted the former Brazilian president at his Mar-a-Lago resort when both were in power in 2020.

"This Trial should not be taking place," Trump wrote in the letter posted on Truth Social. "It is a Witch Hunt that should end IMMEDIATELY!" There is a sense of kinship as Trump was indicted



Brazil President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in Brasilia on Wednesday. AP

in 2023 for his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 U.S. presidential election. The U.S. president addressed his tariff letter to Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who bested Bolsonaro in 2022.

Lula responded in a forceful statement that said Trump's tariffs would trigger the country's economic reciprocity law, which allows trade, investment and intellectual property agreements to be suspended against countries that harm Brazil's competitiveness.

He noted that the U.S. has had a trade surplus of more than \$410 billion with Brazil over the past 15 years. "Brazil is a sovereign country with independent institutions that will not accept being taken for granted by anyone," Lula said.

The country's electoral authorities have already barred Bolsonaro from running for office until 2030. In his statement, Lula defended the country's legal system, saying the "proceedings against those who planned the coup d'etat is a competence of the Brazilian judiciary and is not subject to interference or threats that harm the independence of national institutions."

## US and Malaysia sign MoU on civil nuclear ties

**Kuala Lumpur:** US Secretary of State Marco Rubio signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Malaysia's Foreign Minister Mohamad Hasan on civil nuclear cooperation, the State Department said in a statement on Thursday.

"The signing of this... marks an important step toward establishing a robust civil nuclear partnership between the United States and Malaysia," the State Department said.

Rubio's visit is part of an effort to renew US focus on the Indo-Pacific and look beyond conflicts in the Middle East and Europe that have consumed much of the Trump administration's attention. However, Trump's global tariff strategy has cast a shadow over the trip after he unveiled steep tariffs from August 1 on seven ASEAN members, including Malaysia, as well as on close Northeast Asian allies Japan and South Korea. **REUTERS**

EAST ASIA'S RAINY SEASON HAS TRADITIONALLY RUN FROM MID-JUNE TO JULY, BUT IS UNPREDICTABLE NOW DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

## Umbrellas optional? East Asia's monsoon showers are no longer a sure thing

JOHN YOON  
SEOUL, JULY 10

SOUTH KOREA'S rainy season is historically several summer weeks when rain can fall in sheets at a moment's notice. But these days, Choi Moon-hee doesn't bother carrying an umbrella around Seoul anymore, even during the official monsoon season.

On Tuesday evening, she lost her bet, getting caught in a shower after days without rain. It was the first downpour she had experienced since forecasters declared the start of the mon-

soon two weeks ago.

"In the past, if it started raining, it would last for about a half-month, and we'd use our umbrellas often," said Choi, 43, while taking cover under the awning of a building. "Nowadays, it often doesn't rain even when the forecast says it will."

In the south of the country, forecasters already declared the rainy season to be over last week. In western Japan, it was declared over in late June, the earliest point since records began.

East Asia's rainy season has traditionally run from the middle of June into July, when a station-

ary weather front brings prolonged rainfall to the region. But the annual rains have become less predictable since the late 1990s, and scientists say that climate change is a major factor.

Climate change, which has worsened extreme weather around the world, has also made the monsoon season more inconsistent in India and China, catching billions of people off guard with floods and droughts.

In 2009, South Korea's Meteorological Administration stopped forecasting when the season would begin and end, said Yeh Sang-wook, a professor



This year, the scarcity of rain also coincided with a heat wave

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of climate dynamics at Hanyang University in Seoul. "The traditional patterns have been broken, making forecasts of rainy seasons meaningless," he added.

Ahead of this year's monsoon season, forecasters warned of torrential rains, but they haven't arrived in much of South Korea and Japan, causing people to adjust.

The scarcity of rain has coincided with a heat wave. On Tuesday temperatures hit 100 degrees Fahrenheit in Seoul, the highest recorded in the city in early July since 1908. On Wednesday, the country was under a heat warning for the third

straight day.

Japan recorded its hottest June since record-keeping started in 1898, and a heat stroke alert was active in many regions this week. The authorities said more than 10,000 people were hospitalized last week with heat-related illnesses. "This summer could be record hot, and I hope people will continue to take measures to prevent heatstroke," Yoshinori Oikawa, an official at the Japan Meteorological Agency, told reporters last week, noting the heat wave's early arrival and intensity.

Temperatures in eastern China, Japan and South Korea hov-

ered in the 90s on Wednesday.

Residents and officials are adapting. Tokyo offset water bills in the hopes that residents would use the money to run their air conditioning. Farmers in western Japan irrigated their pears ahead of the harvest. The heat and lack of rain threatened crops like cabbage and rice, which is already in short supply. Officials in South Korea were anticipating both drought and flooding that could be brought on by a sudden downpour. Because of the heat, meteorologists urge people to drink water and stay indoors. **NYT**



US HAS BLOCKED WTO FOR RESOLVING TRADE DISPUTES

India gears up for trade policy review as EU chief calls for an alternate to WTO

RAVIDUTTA MISHRA  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

AT A time when multilateralism is taking a back seat — with an ineffective UN Security Council and a dysfunctional dispute settlement body at the World Trade Organization (WTO) — India appears committed to key WTO processes and has begun preparations for its eighth trade policy review after five years.

The preparations in the Ministry of Commerce come at a time when the US has all but abandoned the forum for resolving trade disputes and is instead striking bilateral trade deals, which experts fear are often not WTO-compliant. This has significant risk for the rules-based system and for developing countries such as India, experts have warned.

While the US continues to block the appointment of judges to the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body (DSB), the European Union has called for wide-ranging reforms. European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen last week proposed to EU leaders the

EU HAS CALLED FOR WIDE-RANGING REFORMS



Ursula von der Leyen, European Commission President  
AP File

WHILE THE US continues to block the appointment of judges to the WTO's Dispute Settlement Body (DSB), the European Union has called for wide-ranging reforms. EUROPEAN COMMISSION chief Ursula von der Leyen last week proposed to EU leaders the launch of an initiative to establish trade cooperation with Asian countries

Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+jUYKq0AFHBAwMGQ1> launch of a Europe-led initiative to establish structured trade cooperation with Asian countries — potentially pitching an alternative to the WTO.

The Financial Times reported earlier this week that von der Leyen suggested Brussels team up with the 11 other global economies of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) to form an institution to replace the WTO, which is struggling to contain

EXPLAINED 8th trade policy review after five years

THE PREPARATIONS in the Ministry of Commerce for the eighth trade policy review after five years come at a time when the United States has all but abandoned the forum for resolving trade disputes and is instead striking bilateral trade deals.

India revises retaliatory proposal against US

On Thursday, India revised its proposal to impose retaliatory duties under WTO norms against the US over American tariffs on steel and aluminium, in view of the Trump administration's further hike in duties.

The US first imposed 25 per cent tariffs on imports of aluminium, steel, and derivative articles on 12 March. On June 3, these tariffs were further raised to

50 per cent. "Without prejudice to its earlier notification to the Council for Trade in Goods and the Committee on Safeguards dated 12 May, India reserves its right to adjust the products and tariff rates. This request is made in response to the increase in the tariff rate by the US from 25 per cent ad valorem to 50 per cent," the WTO said in a communication on Wednesday.

The communication was circulated among WTO members at India's request.

It stated that the proposed suspension of concessions or other obligations could take the form of increased tariffs on selected products originating in the US. "The safeguard measures would affect \$7.6 billion worth of imports into the United States of the relevant products originating in India, on which the duty collection would be \$3.82 billion," it said.

Accordingly, India's proposed suspension of concessions would result in an equivalent amount of duty collected on products originating in the US. In the 12 May communication, the projected duty collection was stated as \$1.91 billion.

Trump's 90-day pause ends with a whimper, iffy deadline; & a breather for India-US talks

ANIL SASI  
NEW DELHI, JULY 10

AS THE 90-day "reciprocal tariff" deadline imposed by the Donald Trump administration came and went, three things are now clear: One, that the India trade trade deal could take more time, perhaps getting pushed back closer to the new August 1 deadline now.

Two, given that trade agreements are extremely complex documents that often take years to finalise, an extension of the deadline is actually a positive thing for India and some of the others who've not been served letters on social media. Three, President Trump is reported to have decided to delay the implementation of his reciprocal tariffs to August 1 after key advisers, including Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent, told him he could get trade deals with more time, according to a WSJ story quoting people familiar with the matter. Evidently that seems to be the case.

Even this new cut-off date looks iffy, given that Trump vacillated while answering a query during Tuesday's cabinet briefing to effectively convey that even the August 1 deadline was "not a 100% firm". This walking back on this deadline is quite in tune with Trump's past record. Is there even a real deadline, as Reuters seemed to suggest in a report, or is this just a negotiating stance conjured up by the Trump administration to keep countries on tenterhooks? Could well be the case. Much of his trade policy has been like a jazz solo: just improvise while playing! And with a half-life of less than ten days, the fickleness in Trump's tariff policy is the only element of certainty in all of this madness.

"90 deals in 90 days"

In April, Trump's trade adviser Peter Navarro had said that the administration would deliver "90 Join FREE Whatsapp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Van2VRb6RGJOKH6oBd0F>



Donald Trump, President, United States  
AP/PTI File

deals in 90 days," a number that was subsequently tempered by Bessent and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick to about 12 trade deals. That too is an overestimation. Trump has so far reached three deals — with the UK, China, and Vietnam — but over Monday and Tuesday sent out new tariff rates for around two dozen countries. The letters are not deals, but more a threat. So the final tally is way short of the targets they've started out with. Those who've ended up receiving letters include allies such as Japan and South Korea, smaller developing nations including Bangladesh, Cambodia and Laos, most of ASEAN and Brazil, which is facing a 50 per cent tax on goods exports. Again, in Trumpian fashion, these tariffs were announced in letters that were shared on social media. According to Bessent, much of the focus of the administration in these 90 days has been on the 18 countries that are responsible for 95 per cent of America's trade deficit.

And as the 90-day pause expired Wednesday, it is clear that the Trump administration seems to be acknowledging that negotiating trade deals is time-consuming. Trade agreements typically take years to finalise, so an extension

sion of the deadline now to August 1 came as no surprise. Navarro, on Monday outside the White House, blamed the dragged-out process on other countries for "dragging their heels." As a result, three months after Trump announced the so-called reciprocal tariffs on nearly every country in the world, threatening to dramatically hike tariff rates if trade negotiations were not successful, his administration is effectively come back with three deals and about two dozen letters that he's posted on social media, reiterating that he will slap more or less the same rates that he proposed in April if negotiations are not successful over the next couple of weeks. So, effectively, it's back to square one after ninety days for a majority of countries!

Sanctity of deals

There are also question marks about the sanctity of any trade deal that this administration was to sign. A new BRICS tariff proposed on a whim, or fresh copper and pharma tariffs, high duties on strategic partners like Japan and South Korea or Trump now reneging on the terms of the USMCA deal that he himself signed with Canada and Mexico in his last term: they're all indicative of the fickleness of any agreement signed by this administration. The future of US trade deals and their perceived sanctity remains vastly uncertain, with potential implications for global economic stability and cooperation. Businesses across the world are left hanging, waiting for some semblance of certainty. Global supply chain experts say that it is both expensive and cumbersome for companies to switch manufacturing to different countries. Given the frequent changes in the policy, it is almost impossible for companies to strategise.

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