

NATO CHIEF THREATENED SANCTIONS OVER RUSSIA TRADE

Securing energy needs overriding priority: Govt’s firm reply to NATO

Guard against double standards, says MEA; feel no pressure: Minister Puri

SHUBHAJIT ROY & SUKALP SHARMA  
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

IN A sharply-worded response to NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte's warning that countries like India, China and Brazil could be hit very hard by secondary sanctions if they continued to do business with Russia, the Ministry of

External Affairs Thursday cautioned against “double standards” and underlined that “securing the energy needs of our people is understandably an overriding priority for us”.

Also Thursday, a day after Rutte’s remark, Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said he didn’t “feel any pressure”, making clear that India does not see any oil supply disruption if



Sufficient supply: Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri

its Russian crude imports get impacted because the country has diverse sources of oil and there is enough supply available in the market.

Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs, said India is working to diversify its energy sources. **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

EXPLAINED  
**E** Amid efforts to seal deal

THE NATO chief's warning comes at a time when Delhi and Washington are working to seal a trade deal. Geopolitical shifts, freight and refinery economics will shape India's crude sourcing decisions, diversification strategy.

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# Securing energy needs overriding priority: Govt on NATO warning

Affairs, said, “We have seen reports on the subject and are closely following the developments. Let me reiterate that securing the energy needs of our people is understandably an overriding priority for us. In this endeavour, we are guided by what is on offer in the markets, and by the prevailing global circumstances. We would particularly caution against any double standards on the matter.”

He was responding to Rutte who, while speaking to reporters after meeting US senators Wednesday, said, “If you are the President of China, the Prime Minister of India, or the President of Brazil, and you continue to trade with Russia and buy their oil and gas, then you know: if the man in Moscow doesn't take the (Ukraine war) peace negotiations seriously, I will impose 100 per cent secondary sanctions.”

“My encouragement to these three countries, particularly, is: if you live now in Beijing, or in Delhi, or you are the President of Brazil, you might want to take a look into this, because this might hit you very hard,” he said.

Rutte also urged the leaders

of the three nations to directly urge Putin to commit to peace talks. “So please make the phone call to Vladimir Putin and tell him that he has to get serious about peace talks, because otherwise this will slam back on Brazil, on India, and on China in a massive way,” he said.

Petroleum Minister Puri, speaking at the UrjaVarta 2025 event in New Delhi, said, “I don't feel any pressure in my mind. India has diversified the sources of supply... I am not worried at all. If something happens, we will deal with it... There is sufficient supply available.”

He said India, in recent years, had expanded its crude sourcing slate from 27 countries to around 40 countries.

India and China are the top importers of Russian crude, and Delhi is engaging with US lawmakers and the Trump administration to voice concerns regarding India's energy security. India depends on imports to meet around 88 per cent of its crude oil needs, and Russia has been the mainstay of India's oil imports for nearly three years now. Russia currently accounts for around 40 per cent of India's to-

tal oil imports.

According to Puri, the massive market share of Russian crude in India's oil imports doesn't mean that the country is dependent on Russia for oil, and other suppliers can quickly come in to replace Russian volumes if there is any major disruption.

Even in the case of Russia, the country used to account for less than 2 per cent of India's oil imports prior to the war in Ukraine, but quickly displaced heavyweights like Iraq and Saudi Arabia to become the top supplier after much of the West began shunning Russian crude after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Russia then began offering discounts on its oil to willing buyers, and Indian refiners were quick to avail the opportunity, ramping up imports of discounted Russian barrels.

So far, India has not scaled back on its oil imports from Russia, maintaining that it is willing to buy oil from whoever offers the best price, as long as the oil is not under sanctions. Russian oil itself is not sanctioned, but the US and its allies have imposed a price cap of \$60 per barrel, as per which Western

shippers and insurers cannot participate in Russian oil trade if the price of Moscow's crude is above that level.

It is yet to be seen if the recent tariff threats made against countries like India and China for their energy imports from Russia will translate into tangible tariff action. The Trump administration has been rather mercurial on trade tariffs: making sweeping announcements, then pausing and negotiating. The hope in India's oil sector is that the US won't actually implement tariffs related to India's oil imports from Russia, as it is in the interest of the US and the global economy that the international oil market remains well-supplied. If Russia is unable to supply its crude, global oil prices are bound to rise due to lower supply being available.

But if the US goes ahead and imposes such tariffs, India would be pushed to cut down oil imports from Russia and increase imports from other suppliers, primarily its traditional West Asian suppliers like Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, which would push up the cost of imports by a few dollars a barrel.

## MEA: India in touch with ‘friendly governments’

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

INDIA ON Thursday said it is in touch with Yemeni authorities as well as some friendly nations as part of efforts to reach a “mutually agreeable solution” in the case of Nimisha Priya, the Indian nurse on death row in Yemen.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the government is making concerted efforts to seek more time for Priya’s family to reach an understanding with the family of the Yemeni man she is convicted of killing. She is currently in a jail in Sanaa, the Yemeni capital city that is under the control of Iran-backed Houthis.

“This is a sensitive matter and the Government of India has been offering all possible assistance in the case,” Jaiswal said.

The nurse, allegedly murdered Talal Abdo Mehdi, her local partner in opening a clinic, in July 2017. In 2020, a Yemeni court handed her the death sen-

tence and the country’s Supreme Judicial Council dismissed her appeal in November 2023.

“We have provided legal assistance and appointed a lawyer to assist the family. We have also arranged regular consular visit... concerted efforts in recent days to seek more time for the family of Nimisha Priya to reach a mutually agreeable solution with the other party,” the MEA spokesperson said. “We continue to closely follow the matter and render all possible assistance. We are also in touch with some friendly governments.”

India doesn’t have any diplomatic presence in Yemen and diplomats in the Indian mission in Saudi Arabia were looking into the matter, it is learnt.

Jaiswal declined to respond to a question on the reported role played by the Grand Mufti, Kanchapuram AP Aboobacker Musaliyar, in the postponement of Priya’s execution. “As far as the role of the entity... is concerned, I have no information to share.”





The indigenous Akash Prime missile being test-fired in Ladakh on Wednesday. PTI

## Akash Prime test-fired in Ladakh, Agni and Prithvi off Odisha coast

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

INDIA ON Thursday successfully test-fired the nuclear-capable short-range ballistic missiles Prithvi-II and Agni-I from an integrated test range off the Odisha coast, demonstrating its strategic deterrence capability.

On Wednesday, India successfully test-fired the indigenously developed Akash Prime missile in Ladakh. The missile has been customised to operate at an altitude over 4,500 metres.

The test-firing of the missiles came over two months after the May 7-10 military conflict between India and Pakistan.

The Prithvi-II missile has a range of around 350 km and it is capable of carrying a payload of up to 500 kg. It can carry both

conventional as well as nuclear warheads. The Agni-I missile has a range of 700-900 kms and it can carry a payload of 1,000 kgs.

Both Prithvi-II and Agni-I have been an integral part of India's nuclear deterrence. "Short-range ballistic missiles — Prithvi-II and Agni-I — were successfully test-fired from the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur, Odisha on July 17," the Defence Ministry said in a brief statement. It said the launches "validated all operational and technical parameters. "These tests were conducted under the aegis of the Strategic Forces Command," the ministry said.

On test-firing of Akash missile, the ministry said it carries added significance as it follows the "exceptional performance" of India's indigenously developed air defence systems during

Operation Sindoor.

Akash Prime is an upgraded variant of the Akash weapon system built for the Indian Army.

The test-firing of the missile in Ladakh assumes significance as it is close to the Line of Actual Control (LAC). "India on July 16 achieved a significant milestone by successfully destroying two aerial high speed unmanned targets at high-altitude in Ladakh by Akash Prime, the upgraded variant of Akash weapon system for the Indian Army," the ministry said in a separate statement.

It said the weapon system has the latest upgrades including an indigenously developed radio frequency seeker.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh complimented the Indian Army, the DRDO and the industry on this "remarkable achievement", the statement said.

# Ahmedabad named cleanest city, past winners elevated to new ‘super league’



President Droupadi Murmu with Union Minister Manohar Lal and MoS Tokhan Sahu during the Swachh Survekshan awards in New Delhi on Thursday. *Anil Sharma*

## EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI, JULY 17

AHMEDABAD WAS Thursday named the cleanest big city in the country in the Swachh Survekshan 2024-25 awards, followed by Bhopal and Lucknow, even as past winners, including Indore and Surat, were moved to a new “super swachh league” category that was kept out of the nationwide ranking.

President Droupadi Murmu presented the award to Ahmedabad for being the top city among those with a population of 10 lakh or above during the awards ceremony in New Delhi.

This year, the awards included a separate category of recognition for cities that had been in the top three of their categories in the previous three years. This new category of Super Swachh League Cities included Indore, Surat, Navi Mumbai and Vijayawada among cities with more than 10 lakh population; and Noida, Chandigarh, Mysuru, Ujjain and Gandhinagar among cities with 3 lakh to 10 lakh population. Last year, Indore and Surat were jointly recognised as the cleanest cities, with Indore maintaining its top position for the seventh consecutive time.

The President said using minimum resources and re-using them for the same or differ-

ent purposes had been a part of Indian lifestyle.

She said the principles of circular economy and “reduce-reuse-recycle” were the modern versions of the ancient lifestyle. Citing the example of tribal communities, she said the modern systems of circularity can adopt the simple lifestyles of such communities.

In the national rankings, among cities with a population of three lakh to 10 lakh, Mira Bhayandar got the top spot, followed by Bilaspur and Jamshedpur in second and third place, respectively. A special award was also given to the Uttar Pradesh government and Prayagraj Municipal Corporation for the waste management during the Maha Kumbh.

The awards, instituted under the Swachh Bharat Mission-Urban under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, were started in 2016 with 73 cities. This year, 4,589 cities were covered in the survey.

Housing and Urban Affairs Minister Manohar Lal said the ministry will launch a special one-year campaign to remediate legacy landfills on August 15. One of the goals of the SBM-U 2.0, which was launched in 2021, was to remediate 100% of all legacy landfills in cities by 2026. With a year to go, the SBM-U dashboard shows that 42% of the waste across cities is yet to be remediated.



## SC upholds equal inheritance rights for tribal women

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

THE SUPREME Court Thursday held that a tribal woman would be entitled to an equal share in ancestral property. The SC observed that denying a female heir right in the property unless otherwise prescribed in law only exacerbates gender division and discrimination, which the law should weed out.

In the absence of a specific law governing intestate succession among Scheduled Tribes, Justices Sanjay Karol and Joymalya Bagchi invoked the principle of “justice, equity and good conscience”, extending the provisions of the Central Provinces Laws Act, 1875 to the case and set aside the July 1, 2022 judgement of the Chhattisgarh HC, which had upheld the lower court order denying her the inheritance rights.

The appellants, who approached the SC challenging the HC order, were legal heirs of one Dhaiya, a woman from a Scheduled Tribe. Their mother was one of the six children — five sons and one daughter, of Bhajju alias Bhanjan Gond. They sought partition of a property belonging to their maternal grandfather, stating that their mother is entitled to an equal share in the scheduled property.

The court noted that the parties not being covered by any other inheritance law, the 1875 Act would apply. Though an argument was raised that the 1875 Act has been repealed in 2018, the bench pointed out that it has a clause which protects transactions before the repeal date.

“So, the right having been accrued in favour of the appellant-plaintiffs’ mother upon the death of her father, which was approximately 30 years before the filing of the plaint became crystallised and would not be affected by the fact that the Act was no longer in the statute book,” Justice Karol said writing for the Bench.

# Companies can be victims under criminal law, rules SC

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

THE SUPREME Court held Monday that companies would also fall under the definition of victim under the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), entitling them to file a criminal complaint in a significant ruling which enables corporate entities to pursue criminal remedies for violations of Intellectual Property Rights.

The top court set aside the October 9, 2023, order of a single judge of the Jaipur Bench of the Rajasthan High Court, dismissing the appeal filed by Asian Paints Ltd under Section 372 of CrPC over a dispute with a retailer, who was selling counterfeit products of the company, as not maintainable.

While the trial court had convicted the accused, the sessions court acquitted him. Though Asian Paints appealed against this, the Rajasthan High Court dismissed the plea as not maintainable. In the July 14 judgment, a bench of Justices A Amanullah and P K Mishra said, "Section 2(wa) of the CrPC defines 'victim' in plain and simple language as a 'person who has suffered any loss or injury caused by reason of the act or omission for which the accused person has been charged...'. It is clear that Section 2(wa) of the CrPC has thoughtfully accorded an expansive understanding to the term 'victim' and not a narrow or restricted meaning."

"We are constrained to observe that the finding of the High Court that the Appellant could not have maintained the appeal

before it would amount to completely negating the proviso to Section 372 of the CrPC," said the bench, referring to the section which deals with the right to appeal in criminal cases.

"In the present case, there cannot be any two opinions that ultimately, it is the Appellant who has suffered due to the counterfeit/fake products being sold/attempted to be sold as having been manufactured by the Appellant. The Appellant would suffer financial loss and reputational injury if such products would be bought by the public under the mistaken belief that the same belonged to the Appellant's brand."

Advocate Ajay Singh of Singh Law Chambers LLP, which represented Asian Paints, said it is not "just a procedural ruling, it's a foundational shift".

"Until now, India's criminal justice system largely treated prosecution as the domain of the State, with victims, particularly companies, playing a limited or passive role once the police took over. That model may have made sense for traditional crimes, but it doesn't reflect the reality of modern corporate harms, where financial loss, brand erosion, and supply chain fraud can cause serious injury without physical violence." "The ruling creates a legal pathway for brand owners to pursue criminal remedies directly, especially in cases involving counterfeiting, IP theft, and economic offences. It also eliminates the long-standing dependency on the public prosecutor's discretion, a bottleneck that often left aggrieved companies without recourse when the State declined to appeal."





# A foothold in the cosmos



Success of Axiom-4 mission offers invaluable lessons and a powerful impetus for India’s space aspirations

SOMAK RAYCHAUDHURY

THE SAFE RETURN of Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla from the International Space Station as part of the Axiom-4 mission, where he was the pilot among the four-member crew, marks a watershed moment not just for Indian human spaceflight, but for the entire strategic arc of India’s space programme.

For the first time since Rakesh Sharma travelled on a Soviet spacecraft in 1984, an Indian has completed a complex scientific mission, in a journey to and from the ISS, spending more than two weeks aboard, this time under the banner of international partnership and indigenous resolve.

The successful conclusion of the Axiom-4 mission, marking another milestone in the burgeoning era of commercial human spaceflight, resonates far beyond the confines of Earth’s orbit. For India, a nation rapidly asserting its prowess in the global space arena, this achievement offers invaluable lessons and a powerful impetus, particularly for its ambitious Gaganyaan mission and the grander vision for its future ventures in space.

Axiom-4’s journey underscored several critical advancements that are reshaping the space landscape. It highlighted the increasing reliability and capability of private-sector space transportation. This mission, executed with professionalism and a clear focus on its objectives, reinforced the growing accessibility of the low-Earth orbit for a multitude of purposes, from cutting-edge scientific research and technological demonstrations to the nascent but rapidly expanding commercial ventures.

Many Indians were following the mission, among them the young people in schools and colleges across the country, who were born long after Sharma’s heroic journey. For them, in addition to the importance of the Indian role model who achieved this rare feat, the journey also showcased the efficiency and necessity of international collaboration, even in commercially driven missions, where diverse expertise works together towards shared objectives.

For India’s Gaganyaan mission, which aims to send Indian astronauts into space on an indigenous vehicle, the insights gleaned from Axiom-4 are profoundly relevant. While ISRO’s approach is distinctly national, the global landscape of human spaceflight is increasingly collaborative and increasingly driven by the commercial sector.

Axiom-4’s experience provides a rich case study in several key areas. Of primary and critical importance is crew training and preparation. Observing how commercial astronauts from various professional backgrounds, who are not necessarily all career military pilots, are rigorously trained and seamlessly integrated into a complex mission profile offers valuable perspectives. India can meticulously refine its own astronaut selection and training methodologies by studying these models. This includes incorporating best practices for physiological adaptation to microgravity and psychological conditioning for isolation. Both simulation-based drills and real-time problem-solving scenarios can enhance the preparedness of Indian “vyomnauts”.

Mission operations and logistics present another vital area of learning. Managing a human spaceflight mission involving multiple international partners and commercial entities, as Axiom-4 successfully did, provides an invaluable blueprint for streamlining complex operational flows. This encompasses pre-flight preparations and launch sequences to in-orbit activities, rendezvous and docking procedures, and the critical re-entry and recovery phases. Understanding the intricacies of communication protocols, real-time decision-making under pressure, and robust contingency planning, can significantly help ISRO anticipate potential challenges and optimise its own mission control strategies for Gaganyaan.

Equally important are the areas of technology validation and integration. While Gaganyaan is built upon ISRO’s formidable indigenous capabilities and decades of expertise, Axiom-4’s reliance on established commercial launch and crew vehicles (like SpaceX’s Falcon 9 and Crew Dragon), and its focus on specific in-orbit scientific and commercial objectives, demonstrates how new technologies can be rapidly integrated, tested, and validated in the space environment. This could inspire India to explore strategic partnerships for certain sub-systems or adapt specific commercial methodologies for its own technological development and validation processes.

If it hasn’t already, the public visibility and success of this mission will inspire and strengthen international collaboration. As the global space community becomes more interconnected, missions like Axiom-4 highlight

the benefits of pooling resources, expertise, and technological capabilities. This mission’s success will certainly accelerate private-sector participation, demonstrating the viability and potential profitability, encouraging more Indian companies to invest in space infrastructure, services, and human spaceflight support. This could lead to a thriving ecosystem of Indian suppliers, manufacturers, and service providers for future missions.

The transition from short-duration missions like Gaganyaan to a continuous human presence requires mastering complex logistics, radiation protection, and psychological support for astronauts, all areas where these new transnational collaborations can offer insights. Axiom Space’s declared long-term goal of building its own commercial space station, intended to succeed the ISS, is a bold undertaking. ISRO has already declared India’s ambitions to deploy the Bharatiya Antariksh Mission. It plans to, perhaps in the following decade, send Indians to the Moon, maybe even build a base on its surface. Observing the progress of Axiom’s efforts, including the challenges they encounter, and the solutions they devise in developing and integrating modules into the ISS, will provide rare invaluable foresight for India.

In essence, the successful conclusion of Axiom-4 is not just a triumph for commercial spaceflight; it is a beginning for the space ambitions of a nation such as India. It underscores that human spaceflight is no longer solely the domain of a few state-funded agencies but is evolving into a more dynamic, collaborative, and commercially viable enterprise. One can only hope that these ventures will also support purely scientific projects such as the planned ISRO missions to look for life by studying the atmospheres of extra-solar planets, or detect gravitational waves from space.

By meticulously studying its successes and drawing pertinent lessons, India can not only ensure the triumphant realisation of Gaganyaan, but also confidently chart a course for an even more ambitious and impactful future in the cosmos. The stars, it seems, are increasingly within reach, and India is well-positioned to seize its moment.

*The writer is vice-chancellor and professor of Physics, Ashoka University. Views are personal*

## THE SANCTIONS STICK

New Delhi should disregard NATO threat on doing business with Russia, pursue its own path, even as West seeks to dictate terms

DURING OPERATION SINDOOR, the S-400 formed the outermost layer of India’s air defence. This is the missile system that India acquired from Russia a few years ago despite the US threatening sanctions under CAATSA — a law mandating punitive measures against countries engaging in “significant transactions” with Russia, North Korea, or Iran. India made it clear that it would proceed with the S-400 deal anyway. Eventually, the US House carved out an India-specific waiver. A similar episode is playing out again. NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte warned this week that countries like India, China, and Brazil could face secondary sanctions if they continue doing business with Russia. This comes as several US senators back a new sanctions bill proposing a 500 per cent tariff on nations buying Russian goods. US President Donald Trump, too, said this week that the US would impose 100 per cent secondary tariffs targeting Russia’s trade partners if a peace deal with Ukraine did not happen in 50 days.

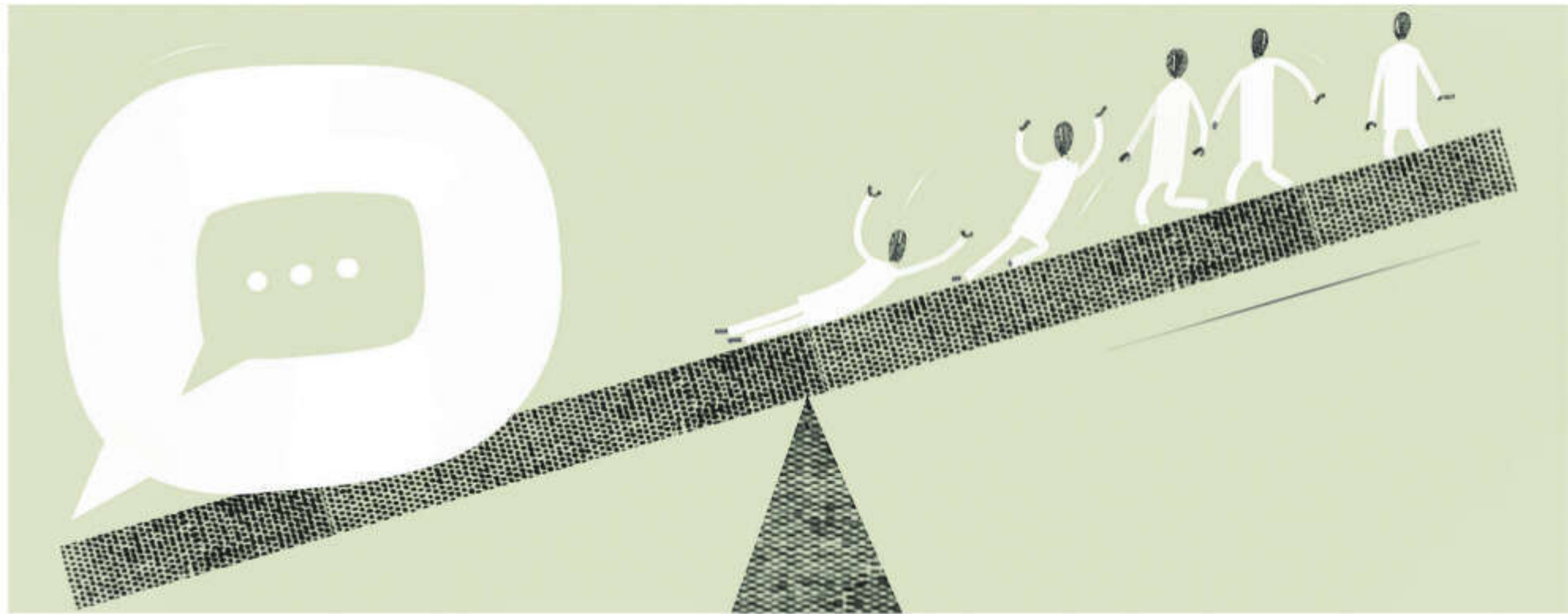
The Ministry of External Affairs’ sharp rebuttal on Thursday — underlining that the energy requirements of the Indian people are the overriding priority, and cautioning against “double standards” — serves as a timely reminder to the West, particularly Europe, of its own manoeuvres in pursuit of energy security. Yes, India was quick to seize the opportunity to purchase discounted Russian oil after the West imposed price caps and turned away from it. But while Russia’s emergence as India’s top crude supplier has helped meet domestic energy demand and stabilise prices, it is no secret that a substantial volume of refined fuel, derived from the Russian oil imported to India, is ultimately exported to Europe. A CREA report noted that by late 2024, “capitalising on the refining loophole”, India had become the EU’s largest exporter of oil products. Europe also imported LNG at record levels from Russia last year.

The sanctions threat to its trade partners is intended to choke Russia’s war funding and pressure President Vladimir Putin into agreeing to a ceasefire. In doing so, however, the US and NATO risk undermining their relationship with one of the world’s largest economies and an essential ally in the Indo-Pacific. The West cannot have it both ways: Penalise India for pursuing national interest while simultaneously expecting cooperation in regional and global initiatives. It is high time the West engaged with India as an equal partner. Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Thursday that there was nothing to worry about even if sanctions were activated because India has expanded its crude sourcing slate. New Delhi should remain firm in pursuing its own path, even as the West seeks to dictate terms.



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



CR Sasikumar

In a country of vast linguistic diversity, should those who live and work in other states learn the local language?

## Language issue is a distraction

Linguistic divisions have got an alarming amount of air time and newsprint, while our garbage-laden streets are sinking in the monsoon



LEHER KALA

IN A NOW viral video from April, an auto driver in Bangalore can be heard arguing with a female passenger to speak in Kannada. His tone is almost menacing and he eventually explodes and screeches, “Bengaluru belongs to Kannadigas!” Sure enough, the simmering anger against outsiders flourishing in the Silicon Valley of India found echo elsewhere: At a DMart in Mumbai’s Versova, a staffer very politely told a customer that he could speak in Hindi, not Marathi. At which point, members of the MNS roughed him up. In the disturbing clip, the young man is seen cowering, holding his ears. This is how easy it is to sow discontent. And then, all you need to do is slyly record some obnoxious people raving and ranting at other angry people, demanding they learn the local language (or else). Next step, post it online. And voila! Just like that, a cleverly spun political narrative has regions waging a manufactured war against each others’ languages, the debate spreading dangerously, on LinkedIn, Reddit and YouTube.

A puzzling binary is at play: To defend your language, you must reject all others. The irony is, for all this posturing on linguistic pride, if somebody were to offer these injured regional patriots a magic potion of immediate English fluency, it wouldn’t take them a microsecond to kiss their mother tongue goodbye. And for good reason. Since Independence, English has been the language of progress, sidelining those who don’t have access to it. Official government business, court work, billings and transactions would be very difficult, if not impossible, without English. Instinctively, every Indian toiling away in the most far-flung corner of this country knows the way out of grinding obscurity is learning English. It’s been said repeatedly, lately, that India doesn’t have a “connecting language”. Realistically, English is the pan-Indian language that some dream, wrongly, that Hindi might become. Because, everyone is in full agreement that to improve one’s prospects, you’re better off speaking it than not.

When it’s so evident that upward mobility depends on English proficiency, it was deeply unsettling to hear the Home Minister declare recently that a day will come when Indians who speak English will feel “ashamed” to do so. That’s simply not true. The founder of PayTM has said in interviews what a disadvantage he was at, having gone to a

Hindi-medium school, because he couldn’t understand the lectures at the Delhi College of Engineering. He had to teach himself the language of instruction one word at a time, but most of us aren’t Vijay Shekhar Sharma. We wouldn’t be able to manage it even if we tried because learning any new language is painstakingly difficult. Besides, Sharma upped his prospects by learning English but the reverse isn’t true. Unless someone’s working in regional cinema, there are questionable benefits to learning Marathi or Tamil (other than the fact that disgruntled locals won’t get aggressive with you). The expectation, that busy adults caught up with eking out a living and the hundred other mundane chores we have to perform, must now also learn the language of the city we work in, is unfair, and frankly, impossible.

Of course it’s painfully obvious this isn’t actually about Marathi versus Hindi versus Tamil. It’s the old tactic of provoking conflict where none exists, to distract the public from other serious economic problems plaguing this country: Prop up Hindi as a link language; create an irrational fear that repeated attempts to promote Hindi in non-Hindi-speaking states will finish off the mother tongue. But languages only fade away when people stop speaking in them voluntarily. For that to happen, it takes decades, if not centuries. Even then they don’t vanish. All that happens is that the mother

To defend your language, you must reject all others. The irony is, for all this posturing on linguistic pride, if somebody were to offer these injured regional patriots a magic potion of immediate English fluency, it wouldn’t take them a microsecond to kiss their mother tongue goodbye.

Whitman who contained multitudes, most of us do. Indians reach adulthood proud of their multilingual backgrounds. Delhiites move easily between using English at work, Hindi with friends and Punjabi with a grandparent. Personally, I love Urdu. Its poetic and musical qualities transport one into a different realm. Learning it is an absorbing hobby, but it serves no practical purpose. Our ancestral glories and interests must be explored in a private capacity. Any imposition of a language on a 10-hour shift worker is unfair because that precious time could be used skilling up in some other way. As citizens and professionals, we need to worry about the kind of issues that dominate public discourse. These linguistic divisions have got an alarming amount of air time and newsprint, while our garbage-laden streets are sinking in the monsoon.

The writer is director, Hutkay Films



AAKASH JOSHI

Language lies at the root of human identity, and to tamper with that is either poetry or treason.” —Terry Eagleton

OVER THE LAST decade or so, there has been a seeming regression in political conversation. Issues that plagued India at the time of Independence had largely receded; debates had evolved not just in the ivory towers of academia and chatterati, but through the negotiations essential in a democratic, diverse and federal polity. The question of “Hindi imposition” is such an issue. It is ideological and political, and it will play out across those registers.

There is, however, another “language question”. It has been hijacked by a lumpen, empty politics that seeks to “impose” Marathi, Kannada, etc, through simplistic policies and violence against those who cannot retaliate – shopkeepers, migrant workers (rarely white-collar ones, though), minorities. The recent attacks by Maharashtra Navnirman Sena members are the most egregious examples of this parochial worldview. In the outrage against “imposition”, though, we might be losing sight

of a deeper question: What does the migrant owe to the city that becomes a home and a workplace? More importantly, is learning the “local” language something that is, in and of itself, desirable?

It is easy to “profile” most migrants who come to India’s megalopolises. They are, in a very real sense, economic refugees. Labour-exporting states such as Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal are, as a corollary, the poorest and with some of the worst human development indicators in the world. These migrants form the vast army of labour that keeps our cities running. They are the security guards, the rickshaw drivers, the people who paint houses and make furniture. For the well-heeled, they cook, clean and raise children. In fact, the availability of this cheap labour allows upper-middle-class couples the luxury of two incomes.

For this category, whether or not to learn the “local language” is not a question of choice, but necessity. In cities like Delhi, where the lingua franca of the working class is Hindi, there is no question of imposition: Even the Bengaliest Bengali manages to communicate, a heavy accent notwithstanding. In Bengaluru and Chennai, learning the language is harder for those from the Indo-Gangetic plain, but often, they pick up the working knowledge needed to get by. Second-generation migrants, especially those who have gone through government schools, also tend to pick up the language of their cities.

The anger over “outsiders” not learning the local language – beyond crass politics – is the symptom of a deeper anxiety. Language is arguably at the root of the most important and primordial identity. Indian states and na-

tion-states across the world are founded on that principle, and a perceived decline of language is connected to the sidelining of entire cultures. This is as true of France and Germany as it is of Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra. And while it is easy to blame the migrant at the margins for this decline, it is perhaps more important to look at the elite – the software engineer, the corporate executive, the college professor, the journalist.

The class that occupies the gated community, whose children go to “international” schools, who do not live in the city but above it, finds little use for the “local” (unless, of course, it’s local, organic, “produce”). This is not necessarily a wilful act. A confluence of economic, cultural and social factors is at play here.

Let’s start with a counterfactual. Why is there no politics around migrants, beyond the stray statement, in Kolkata? The city has its share of migrants from neighbouring states, and yet, Bengali continues to be the most commonly spoken language and the language of the workplace and marketplace. A likely explanation is that the city’s elite continues to speak Bangla, at home and in the workplace. That the city offers few opportunities at the top of the value chain post-liberalisation may also contribute to this. Bengali is not, at least in the minds of Bengalis, a “local” language. Most people (elite or otherwise) who spend more than six months in Kolkata end up with a passing fluency because it is in their interest to do so.

In Mumbai and Bengaluru, this is not the case. In offices, English and even Hindi are enough to make do. So too in bars, restaurants and airports. Does that mean, however, that people who live in these cities – particularly the rich – should remain aloof and unconnected?

In a recent article (‘The Millennium Village’, *IE*, July 16), Sanjay Srivastava argued that one of the reasons for Gurugram’s poor urban planning is that “urban life in Gurugram is largely organised through the idea that there is no public except that which belongs to one’s family, caste and class circuits”. This logic of separation applies as much to elite migrants as to the “locals”. The essence

of this argument can be extended to language as well. If social and economic well-being is seen merely as a ladder, one that is more isolating with each rung ascended, the haves have no reason to engage with anything outside their bubble. Such a narrow life impoverishes cultures and cities. No language should be imposed. However, learning a language opens up a world.

No language should be forced down anyone’s throat. However, learning a language opens up a universe and a world. It makes you part of a people, not just someone who makes a living in a place. In turn, the migrants can participate in and expand the worldview of the people who consider themselves locals. There are certainly challenges – logistical, of time and money – in learning a new language, especially as an adult. However, the notion that the many tongues that make up India’s tapestry are superfluous, of little value to the English-speaking elite, is a function of the gated-community ethos. But a gate doesn’t just keep people out. It boxes you in as well.

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# US aversion to transshipment is likely to pose hurdles for India in FTA talks

RAVIDUTTAMISHRA  
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

AN IMPORTANT element in the spate of reciprocal tariff letters the United States has sent to countries deeply integrated with its economy, be it Canada and South Korea — or those with close economic ties to China, such as Thailand and Malaysia in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) region — is the threat of steeper tariffs on transhipped goods. Washington DC views this as a 'backdoor route' for Chinese products to enter its market.

Transshipment in trade parlance refers to the practice of importing products from one country and exporting them to another, usually without significant processing or value addition. Indian experts suggest that, in India's case the US could invoke stringent 'rules of origin' provisions under the trade agreement to discourage the entry of Chinese goods into the US via India. But India's reliance on Chinese products across industries could pose a significant problem while dealing with the US.

The Trump administration's crackdown on rerouted goods, which previously allowed countries like Vietnam to serve as conduits for Chinese exports into the US, could extend to India as US Vice President JD Vance during his visit to India in April, issued a veiled warning to New Delhi, stating that the US seeks partners committed to working



The Trump administration's crackdown on rerouted goods, which allowed countries like Vietnam to serve as conduits for Chinese exports into the US, could extend to India. AP

with America to build things — "not those who merely allow themselves to become conduits for transshipping goods from elsewhere". This assumes significance for India as its dependence on China has increased sharply, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic. To be sure, Chinese exports have surged globally — including to the US — following the pandemic, as production in China remained relatively stable while the rest of the world faced disruption.

### Spike in imports from China

Official trade data indicates a simultaneous rise in imports from China and exports to America. Data from the Commerce and Industry Ministry showed that India's exports to the US in April rose 27.31 per cent to \$8.41 billion, up from \$6.61 billion in April last year. At the same

time, imports from China increased by a comparable margin — up 27.03 per cent to \$9.90 billion, compared to \$7.79 billion a year ago.

A similar pattern emerged in March, as concerns grew over the possibility of steeper Trump-era tariffs on Chinese goods relative to Indian ones. India's exports to the US jumped 35 per cent to \$10.14 billion, while imports from China rose 25.02 per cent to \$9.67 billion. During FY25 as a whole, India's exports to the US rose 11.59 per cent to \$86.51 billion, while imports from China increased 11.52 per cent to over \$113 billion.

However, in June the imports from China surged 2.48 per cent but exports to the US jumped 23.53 per cent. This comes amid an increased number of anti-dumping duties that India has begun imposing on high-value items such as steel and other in-

EXPLAINED

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What is transshipment?

TRANSHIPMENT in trade parlance refers to the practice of importing products from one country and exporting them to another, usually without significant processing or value addition

### Challenge of curbing Chinese imports

Decoupling from China has been a slow and painful process even for the US. For India — which aims to expand its manufacturing base to create jobs for its large population — the challenge is even greater. Despite opting out of the China-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, India's imports from China have continued to surge, surpassing \$113 billion in FY25.

While poor logistics and a lack of industrial expertise are often cited as reasons why India's manufacturing sector has struggled, the imbalance in the Chinese economy also played a role. The lower cost of Chinese goods has disrupted several Indian industries. In the renewable energy sector, domestic solar cell manufacturers have struggled to compete with Chinese imports.

FULL REPORT ON  
[www.indianexpress.com](http://www.indianexpress.com)





German Chancellor Friedrich Merz with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer at 10, Downing Street in London on Thursday.*AP*

# UK, Germany sign friendship treaty in face of threats

SARAH MARSH & ELIZABETH PIPER  
LONDON, JULY 17

BRITAIN AND Germany signed a wide-ranging friendship treaty on Thursday, deepening ties in areas ranging from defence to transport, to mark Friedrich Merz's first trip to London as chancellor, the latest visit to help reset UK ties with the EU.

Merz's day trip follows a three-day state visit to Britain by French President Emmanuel Macron, signalling greater cooperation between Europe's top three powers at a time of threats to the continent and uncertainty about their US ally. "This is a historic day for German-British relations," Merz said at the signing ceremony in the Victoria and Albert museum, co-founded by Britain's Queen

Victoria and her husband Prince Albert, of German origin. "We want to deepen our cooperation in the field of defence, in foreign policy, but also in economic and domestic policy."

Coming a decade after Britain voted to leave the European Union, the treaty is, on the one hand, a sign of the normalisation of German-British relations, said Nicolai von Ondarza at Berlin's SWP think-tank. "On the other hand, the treaty is a sign that the UK has become even more important as a security partner due to transatlantic uncertainty."

Europe has been confronted with new US tariffs since President Donald Trump returned to the White House as well as questions about the U.S. commitment to defend its European allies, including Ukraine against Russia's invasion. **REUTERS**



# How scientists detected a colossal merger of black holes

AMITABH SINHA  
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

SCIENTISTS HAVE reported the discovery of gravitational waves from the merger of two black holes — the biggest such waves to have been observed in a black hole merger till date.

Although rare, black hole mergers are some of the most spectacular events in the universe, releasing a massive amount of energy that is propagated to a very large distance through gravitational waves.

Much like the movement of a boat in a lake produces ripples in water, gravitational waves are ripples in spacetime created by movement of massive objects. But such waves are extremely weak, and only the ones produced in very big events can be detected by instruments on Earth.

The existence of gravitational waves was proposed in Albert Einstein's General Theory

of Relativity in 1915. However, it was only in 2015, exactly 100 years later, that scientists were able to detect these for the first time.

This was thanks to the Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory (LIGO): two detectors in the US with extremely sensitive equipment which can detect gravitation waves.

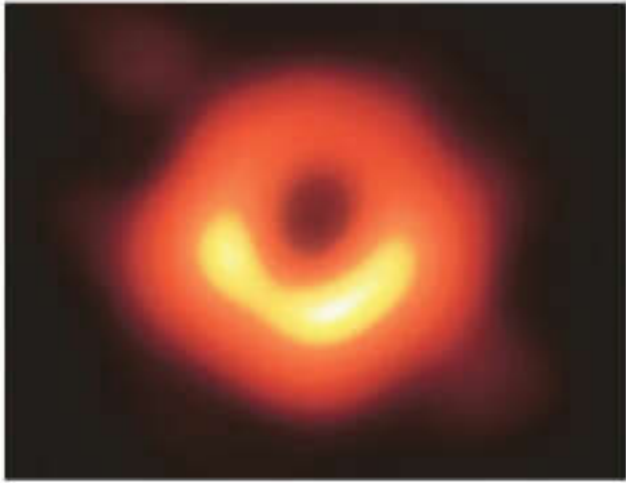
Since then, scientists have discovered gravitational waves from hundreds of cosmic events.

## EXPLAINED SPACE

### The new findings

In general, a black hole is a region in Space where the pulling force of gravity is so strong that neither matter nor light can ever escape. The latest discovery involves black holes that are more massive than any seen in previous such detections, and something that current theories find hard to explain.

One of the black holes was 140 times the mass of the Sun in our solar system, the other 100 times bigger. Their merger resulted in a



The supermassive black hole in the centre of the galaxy Messier 87. Representational/ Wikimedia Commons

black hole that was about 225 times larger than the Sun. The previous record for such mergers, detected through gravitational waves in 2021 involved black holes about 80 and 65 times larger than the Sun.

That said, much bigger black holes do

exist in the universe. Supermassive black holes are millions of times more massive than the Sun.

However, what is surprising in the latest discovery is the fact that black holes in this specific size range, roughly between 100 and 150 times bigger than the Sun, are not expected to exist according to our prevailing understanding of black holes. The stars that can produce black holes in this particular size range are currently understood to meet a different kind of end, and do not generally end up collapsing into a black hole.

Additionally, at least one of the black holes involved in the event was spinning at very high speeds, almost at the limit of what is possible under the General Theory of Relativity.

This is why this event has generated a lot of scientific interest around the world. It has the potential to refine the current understanding of black hole formation, the evolution of stars, and, possibly, the current models of the universe itself.

### Studying gravitational waves

Gravitational waves offer scientists a new way to glean information about the universe. Until they were first detected in 2015, scientists had to depend largely on the electromagnetic waves, like light, X-rays or radio waves, to study the universe. But most of the universe comprises dark matter and dark energy, which do not interact with electromagnetic waves.

These areas, and the events that happen therein, are therefore 'invisible' to traditional measuring devices like telescopes. Black holes were a classical example. Scientists knew they existed, but could not 'see' them. Detection of gravitational waves has provided a new tool to detect and study them.

Gravitational waves are generated by all moving objects in the universe, though only those that are produced by sufficiently large events can travel vast distances and get detected on Earth. Still, they offer information that was hitherto unavailable to the scientists. Gravitational waves, thus, provide a new 'vision' to scientists to view and study the

happenings in the universe.

### LIGO's capabilities

The first detection of gravitational waves, in 2015, was made by the two observatories in the US. After that, a few more observatories have come up, notably the Virgo detector in Italy and the KAGRA (Kamioka Gravitational Wave Detector) in Japan. Together, these are known as the LVK collaboration. The latest discovery has come from this collaboration.

Incidentally, the LIGO is proposed to have a third observatory in India, to be called the LIGO-India observatory. But its construction is running way behind schedule: it was originally supposed to begin operations in 2024, a final government approval earmarking Rs 2,600 crore for the project came only in 2023.

The Department of Atomic Energy, which is handling the project, has selected a site in the Hingoli district of Maharashtra to set up this observatory. As per the latest information, its construction is expected to start later this year and be completed by April 2030.

## EXPLAINED GLOBAL

# WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT THE AFRICAN KINGDOM OF ESWATINI, WHERE THE US HAS SENT 5 DEPORTEES



THE UNITED STATES has deported five immigrants from Vietnam, Jamaica, Cuba, Yemen, and Laos to Eswatini, a small country in southern Africa where the king still holds absolute power.

Eswatini, which has become the latest nation to accept third-country deportees from the US, has said it is holding the men in correctional facilities until they can be sent to their home countries.

Here's what to know about the landlocked kingdom of Eswatini.

### The king is supreme

Eswatini is one of a handful of countries that are still absolute monarchies, and the only one in Africa. That means the king has absolute power over the government and is not just a figurehead or a ceremonial ruler.

King Mswati III has ruled Eswatini since 1986, when he turned 18 and was allowed to take his place as the monarch. He can make decisions by decree. He succeeded his father, Sobhuza II, who died in 1982.

The now 57-year-old Mswati III has long been criticised for running a government that suppresses political dissent, while he lives a lavish lifestyle in one of the poorest countries in the world. He has been the subject of scrutiny for buying luxury cars, and his personal wealth has been estimated at between \$200 million and \$500 million. This is in stark contrast with the king's subjects — the World Bank says more than half of Eswatini's 1.2 million people live on less than \$4 a day.

### No political parties

Political parties were banned by Sobhuza II in 1973. Some exist now, but they are not allowed to play any role in elections or the political process, and function essentially as civic society groups. Candidates seeking public office in Eswatini's parliament or Senate stand as individuals without any party affiliation and are generally approved by traditional leaders loyal to king Mswati III.

Some pro-democracy protests have been seen in recent years, which Eswatini authorities under Mswati III have been accused of crushing. Many dissidents live in exile.

### Previously Swaziland

The country was previously known as Swaziland. It changed its name to Eswatini in 2018 after the king announced it should revert to its traditional name in the Swazi language. British colonial rule over the country ended in 1968.

### Severely affected by HIV

Eswatini has the highest prevalence of HIV in the world, with an estimated 26% of the adult population being HIV positive, according to the United Nations AIDS agency. Progress in the battle against the disease is heavily dependent on foreign aid, including assistance from the US, which, however, has been cut by the Trump administration.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



SHUBHAJIT ROY

IN AN interview given to the BBC this week, United States President Donald Trump said he was "disappointed in" Russia's leader Vladimir Putin, even though he was "not [yet] done with him". Asked if he still trusted President Putin, Trump said he trusted "almost nobody".

Hours earlier, Trump had announced he planned to send weapons to Ukraine and threatened severe tariffs on Russia if there was no ceasefire deal in 50 days.

During the interview, Trump endorsed the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the anti-Russia Western alliance that he has previously described as obsolete.

Almost on cue, NATO chief Mark Rutte warned India, China, and Brazil that they could be "hit very hard" with economic penalties if they continued to do business with Russia "and buy their oil and gas".

Rutte "encouraged" the leaders of these countries to "tell [Putin] that he has to get serious about peace talks [to end the war in Ukraine], because otherwise this will slam back on Brazil, on India and on China in a massive way".

### A change of heart

Trump's statements demonstrate a remarkable turnaround from his position this May, when he described Putin as a "nice gentleman", and defended the Russian President on some occasions.

At a disastrous White House meeting, he berated Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as a "dictator" who was "gambling with World War III". Trump also choked US military supplies to Ukraine, and stopped US intelligence-sharing with the Ukrainian government.

In startling contrast, the US President has made increasingly angry comments about the Russian President this past week. His publicly expressed frustration with Putin marks a significant departure from the way he has so far viewed the war in Ukraine.

Trump's seeming change of heart could also be a lifeline for NATO. America's European partners have been concerned



US President Donald Trump (centre) with NATO chief Mark Rutte to his right, and Vice President J D Vance and Secretary of State Marco Rubio to his left in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington DC on Monday. The New York Times

about Trump's commitment to Article 5 of the treaty — the principle of collective defence, which means that an attack against one ally is considered an attack against all.

Putin has got 50 days to negotiate, and NATO has got a lifeline in the process. Europe, apprehensive of the future of the transatlantic alliance, seems to have regained some unexpected goodwill with Trump.

The President has also sanctioned US-made artillery shells and mobile rocket artillery systems for Ukraine, and there has been some talk of shipping Patriot missiles to Kyiv.

Zelenskyy has said he has discussed "weapons supplies and strengthening air defence" with Trump's Ukraine envoy Keith Kellogg. Trump has also reportedly approved key Ukrainian requests for military aid "based on a detailed list that Zelenskyy handed him last month when they met [during the NATO summit] in The Hague".

### Impatience, uncertainty

The turn in Trump's attitude has been seen as resulting from Putin's increasing demands — not only does Russia want to keep the Ukrainian territories that it currently occupies and a ban on Ukraine's membership of NATO, but also the removal of Zelenskyy.

Trump, who is impatient to show the world that he has stopped the war in Ukraine

and aspires for the Nobel Peace Prize, possibly feels slighted that he hasn't got anything from Putin yet.

What Trump certainly does not want is to be seen to be "weak" — and to be mocked for allowing himself to be played by the Russian President.

That said, it is simply too early to say that Trump has definitively changed his view of Putin. America's leader is famously unpredictable — his disappointment with his Russian counterpart could well be momentary and temporary, and he is entirely capable of reverting to praising Putin and berating Zelenskyy.

### Dealing with Trump

What is the message for India in all of this? From the perspective of New Delhi, as it negotiates with Trump and his team — be it on trade or on Pakistan — the instructive learning is to stay the course.

There are two things that matter. **FIRST**, as NATO and Europe have shown, it is important to build one's own capacities. As Trump appeared ready to abandon their relationship, Europe increased its military spending, rallied around Zelenskyy, and doubled down on its support to Ukraine.

It is important for India to ensure that its national political and economic interests re-

main paramount. On the US demand for concessions on tariff and non-tariff barriers in the negotiations for a trade deal, New Delhi must stay focused on what is good for its own interests. If some tariff walls and barriers need a relook, India must consider that not for America's or any other country's benefit, but as part of its own reforms.

**SECOND**, the US President needs to be engaged diplomatically and officially, but also through unofficial and informal channels. This is something that Pakistan has been seeking to do by engaging with Trump's inner circle of family and advisors. Some European leaders too have done the same by playing golf with the President, or by praising and feting him.

New Delhi will have an opportunity to engage with the President if he travels to India for the Quad leaders' summit later this year. While that will be the official track, the Indian establishment is well-placed to engage with him through its networks in the Indian diaspora.

The Trump White House has its own informal layers of engagement through family and trusted advisors, and South Block may have to make use of those channels of communication to get through to the President.

In this context, New Delhi can perhaps learn a thing or two from Zelenskyy.

# Cutting sugar, oil: Why govt wants to 'nudge' people to eat healthy

ANONNA DUTT  
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

A RECENT letter by Union Health Secretary Puniya Saila Srivastava to all ministries and government departments has proposed that "sugar and oil boards" should be displayed in their institutions "as an initiative to promote healthier dietary habits".

These boards, which will provide information on the sugar and fat content of foods, are meant to serve as "behavioural nudges" reminding people to eat healthy. Despite some reporting to the contrary, these are not intended to be warning labels (like legally mandated ones on tobacco packets), and do not specifically target beloved Indian snacks like *jalebis* and *samosas*.

### A looming crisis

The incidence of obesity, along with associated increases in lifestyle diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart diseases,

and some cancers, is rising in India.

The Union Health Secretary's letter, quoting *The Lancet's* Global Burden of Disease study from 2024, states that the number of obese and overweight adults in India is projected to increase from around 18 crore in 2021 to 44.9 crore by 2050.

Another representative study from India estimated that 25.4 crore people (28.6% of the population) live with generalised obesity, and some 35.1 crore people (almost 39.5% of the population) live with abdominal obesity, which is linked to higher risk of diseases like diabetes, hypertension, heart attack, and stroke even at a lower body mass index.

These worrying trends have prompted the central government to make concerted efforts to tackle obesity in India. Earlier this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged citizens to adopt an active, healthy lifestyle, and cut down on the consumption of oil.

The Central Board of Secondary Education recently directed affiliated schools to monitor and reduce sugar intake

among students, highlighting the increase in the incidence of type 2 diabetes among children over the past decade. Several studies have linked the consumption of calorie-dense foods, high in sugar, salt and fat, to the rising incidence of obesity in India.

### Sweet danger

The problem with sugar is that there is too much of it in modern diets. This is often in the form of "added sugars" (these include any loose sugar, honey, or other sweeteners) and not "natural sugars" present in fruits, vegetables, grain, and dairy products.

"If possible, added sugar may be completely eliminated from one's diet as it adds no nutritive value other than calories. Calories are healthy only when accompanied by vitamins, minerals, and fibres," the The Indian Council of Medical Research's (ICMR's) National Nutrition Guideline states. Even natural sugars should be con-

sumed in moderation.

The consumption of excessive amounts of sugar has been linked to increased incidence of obesity, diabetes, and a host of cardiovascular issues.

The ICMR guidelines state that sugar consumption should be restricted to less than 5% of one's total energy requirements, which comes to about 25 g or five teaspoons daily. Note that the World Health Organisation (WHO) has recommended against the use of artificial sweeteners — which provide the sweet taste with fewer or no calories — for weight loss.

### Good fat, bad fat

Fats are not inherently bad, and certain fats are necessary for the body's proper functioning. The ICMR's National Nutrition Guidelines suggest consuming between four and 10 spoons of oil every day, and meeting most of one's daily requirement of

fats from seeds, nuts, pulses, and beans.

The guidelines recommend using a mix of two or three different oils, ideally ones that are high in monounsaturated fatty acids (MUFA) and polyunsaturated fatty acids (PUFA), such as sunflower, safflower and soybean oils. The consumption of fats high in saturated fatty acid (SFA), such as palm and coconut oils, as well as butter and ghee, should be minimised. This is because SFA is known to increase the levels of bad cholesterol in the body, which is linked to an increase in the risk of heart attacks and strokes, as well as the onset of type 2 diabetes.

But given its versatility, affordability, and shelf-life, SFA-rich palm oil is ubiquitous in packaged foods today. It can be found in potato chips, biscuits, ice creams, and chocolates, among other popular confectionaries.

Packaged foods not containing palm oil often use trans-fat containing hydrogenated vegetable oils. Trans fats not only increase the levels of bad cholesterol in the body but also bring down the levels of good cholest-

terol. They are linked to an increase in the risk of diabetes, breast cancer, colon cancer, preeclampsia (high blood pressure during pregnancy), and nervous system disorders.

### A packaged problem

Many have linked the rise of obesity in developing countries to the entry of multinational food and beverage companies who have made ultra-processed foods, high in fats, sugars and salts, ubiquitous across the country, and which are consumed by nearly all sections of society.

The regular consumption of ultra-processed foods is linked to high levels of obesity. Not only do these foods increase the amount of calories individuals consume, they also reduce the share of healthy foods, with essential micronutrients, fibres, and vitamins, in diets. Ultra-processed foods can also be addictive — multiple studies have demonstrated the cravings such foods trigger. Given the easy access, individuals find it hard to avoid them.