



INDIAN EXPRESS UPSC IAS EDITION HD 17~07~2025

-:FOR UPSC IAS ASPIRANTS:-

"AVOID POLITICAL & IRRELEVANT ARTICLES"

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Can't So Then You Have To Increase Your Efforts

All the topics of this UPSC IAS Edition are directly or indirectly important for the prelims & main examination.

There are some topics which can be coded in answer writing of other topics in the main exam.

AMID INDIA-U.S. TRADE PACT NEGOTIATIONS

India, China, Brazil can be hit by sanctions over Russia trade: NATO chief

Rutte says countries should call Putin, tell him to get serious about truce talks



NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte at a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington. *AP*

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

AT A time when Delhi and Washington are working on a trade deal before the pause on reciprocal tariff ends August 1, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte said Wednesday that countries like India, China and Brazil could be hit very hard by secondary sanctions if they continued to do business with Russia.

Speaking in Washington, Rutte, according to the *Reuters* news agency, said countries in

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EXPLAINED

E In India, wait and watch

INDIAN REFINERS are adopting a wait-and-watch approach while keeping Russian oil flows robust. In fact, imports of Russian crude may rise further amid the tariff threats as Indian refiners would ideally want to stock up before any tariff action takes effect.

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Indonesia pact gives us full access, India deal on same lines: Trump

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

AS INDIAN negotiators engage with the US in extended talks for an interim deal this week, President Donald Trump said Wednesday that the US has signed a trade deal with Indonesia, opening the country to trade with the US, and that an agreement "on the same lines" is being worked on with India.

After what Hasan Nasbi, spokesperson for the Indonesian President, called an "extraordinary struggle" by their negotiators, the US and Indonesia announced that the reciprocal tariffs faced by the Southeast Asian country would be reduced from 32 per cent to 19 per cent. Trump said American firms, in exchange, would have "full access" to the Indonesian market.

"We have full access into Indonesia, everything. As you know, Indonesia is very strong

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PM DHAN-DHAANYA KRISHI YOJANA

Scheme to develop 100 agri districts across country gets Cabinet go-ahead

36 existing schemes with an annual outlay of Rs 24,000 cr to be converged

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

THE UNION Cabinet on Wednesday approved the 'Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana' (PMDDKY), which envisages development of 100 agricultural districts through the convergence of existing schemes with an annual outlay of Rs 24,000 crore per year.

"The scheme will be implemented through convergence of 36 existing schemes across 11 departments, other State schemes and local partnerships with the private sector," said an official statement issued after the Cabinet meeting.

At a briefing on the Cabinet's decisions, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said the scheme would be implemented for six years beginning from 2025-26. "A master plan will be prepared for each district. It will include agriculture and other allied activities," Vaishnaw said. He said the scheme would benefit about 1.7



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw briefs media on the Cabinet decisions. *ANI*

INSIDE

RENEWABLES BOOST: NTPC CAN INVEST ₹20,000 CR, NCL INDIA ₹7,000 CR

RESOLUTION PASSED ON SHUKLA'S SPACE MISSION [PAGES 8, 15](#)

crore farmers.

The scheme was first announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget speech earlier this year.

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Let citizenship to daughter of OCI cardholders be one-off, don't open floodgates: Govt to HC

MHA appeals 2024 ruling's views on 'illegal immigrant', 'person of Indian-origin'

SOHINI GHOSH
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

AFTER A single-judge bench of the Delhi High Court directed the Centre to grant Indian citizenship to a "stateless" 17-year-old girl born in India to a couple of Indian-origin holding US citizenship, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) has challenged the HC's "views" on "illegal immigrant" and "per-

son of Indian-origin".

The MHA, represented by government pleader Abhigyan Siddhant, urged the division bench of Chief Justice D K Upadhyaya and Justice Tushar Rao Gedela on Monday to clarify that the single-judge's judgment of May 15, 2024 should be considered as an individual case and not a precedent, meaning it may not be used for relief in other cases.

The MHA apprehends that the

single judge's observation on the two aspects "may open floodgates for many other illegal migrants in seeking Indian citizenship" and "would have a cascading effect and would dilute the spirit of the Citizenship Act, 1955."

The 2024 ruling was in the case of Rachita Francis Xavier, born in 2006 in Nidamanuru, Andhra Pradesh, to parents who were earlier Indian citizens and obtained US citizenship in 2001

and 2005. In 2019, when Rachita applied for a passport to study abroad, her request was denied on the ground that she cannot be recognised as a citizen of India, effectively leaving her with no recognition of citizenship, either in India or the US. She then challenged the action before the Delhi HC.

Relying on the citizenship laws and provisions, the MHA

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FULL REPORTSON
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India, China and Brazil can be hit hard by sanctions over Russia trade: NATO chief

business with Russia should make a phone call to President Vladimir Putin and “tell him that he has to get serious about peace talks (on ending the Ukraine conflict), because otherwise this will slam back on Brazil, on India and on China in a massive way”. “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,” Rutte told reporters.

The NATO chief’s remarks come amid tariff uncertainties and global trade wars with the US, and India’s own trade with Russia, particularly oil imports.

Weeks ago, there were concerns in India over a controversial Bill in the US that proposed 500 per cent tariffs on countries that continue to trade with Russia. More recently, US President Donald Trump also threatened “biting” secondary tariffs at the rate of 100 per cent on buyers of Russian exports unless there is a Russia-Ukraine peace deal within 50 days.

Industry watchers and experts see these as tactics to force Putin’s hand by pressuring countries who import from Russia. India has so far not scaled back on its oil imports from Russia, and has maintained 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.

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.

With much of the West shunning Russian crude following the country’s February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russia began offering discounts on its oil to willing buyers. Indian refiners were quick to avail the opportunity, leading to Russia, earlier a peripheral supplier of oil to India, emerging as India’s biggest source of crude, displacing the traditional West Asian suppliers.

While the discounts have varied over time, Russian oil flows to India have remained robust despite Western pressure and limited sanctions on Russia’s oil trading ecosystem. Booming oil trade with Russia has also catapulted the country to the list of India’s biggest trading partners.

India’s Russian oil imports rose to an 11-month high in June, further cementing Moscow’s continued dominance in Delhi’s oil import basket. According to tanker data, Russian crude accounted for a massive 43.2 per cent of India’s total oil imports in June, outweighing the next three suppliers — West Asian majors Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE — put together. In June, India imported 2.08 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian crude, the highest since July 2024, and higher by 12.2 per cent on a month-on-month basis, according to vessel tracking data from global commodity market analytics firm Kpler.

According to India’s official trade data, oil imports from Russia were at 87.4 million tonnes in the financial year 2024-25, accounting for almost 36 per cent of India’s total oil imports of 244 million tonnes. Prior to the war in Ukraine, Russia’s share in India’s oil import basket was less than 2 per cent. In 2024-25, the value of India’s oil imports from Russia was over \$50 billion, or 35 per cent of India’s total oil imports worth \$143 billion.

“This resurgence in Russian volumes reflects both commercial incentives and geopolitical realignments. Russian barrels have remained highly competitive due to discounts, payment mechanisms, and logistical flexibility via alternative shipping and insurance networks. Despite mounting Western sanctions, Indian refiners have managed to maintain — and even expand — procurement from Russia. Barring any severe logistical or regulatory disruptions, this trend is likely to persist in the coming months,” said Sumit

Ritolia, Lead Research Analyst, Refining & Modeling at Kpler.

“Looking ahead, Russia will likely remain India’s largest crude supplier — with a share of 35-40 per cent (in India’s oil imports) — supported by price competitiveness and techno-economics. However, this dominance could face pressure if the West escalates enforcement of secondary sanctions targeting financial or shipping facilitators. Such a scenario could either reduce Russian volumes or push Indian refiners to seek greater compliance safeguards,” Ritolia said. Oil imports from West Asia are also expected to stabilise in the 35-40 per cent range.

Tariff threats: Will they, won’t they?

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 when it comes to 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 indeed 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 UAE, which would push up the cost of imports by a few dollars a barrel. Additionally, it could also lead to complications in India’s ongoing trade deal negotiations with the US, its largest trading partner.

●Indonesia pact gives us full access, India deal on same lines: Trump

on copper, but we have full access to everything. We will pay no tariffs... India is basically working along the same lines. We are going to have access into India. You have to understand, we had no access to any of these countries. Our people couldn’t go in, and now we are getting access because of what we are doing with the tariffs,” Trump told reporters.

Indonesia has not only agreed to remove duty on agricultural items but also on certain manufactured goods. Trump said Indonesia also agreed to purchase \$15 billion worth of US energy, \$4.5 billion in American agricultural products, and 50 Boeing jets.

The new rates for Indonesia were announced after Trump imposed 32 per cent tariffs on the country in a letter sent last week, despite ongoing negotiations. Talks with India have also been underway though Trump has not

announced any new tariffs in India’s case. A deal on the same lines could, according to experts, translate into India potentially stepping up purchase of petroleum and agriculture items from the US, alongside other items.

Delhi-based think tank GTRI said India must proceed with extreme caution in negotiating any trade deal with the US, given the Trump administration’s current approach.

“Trump’s unilateral declarations — such as claiming a ‘done deal’ with Indonesia and saying India is ‘working along the same line’ — often pre-empt actual negotiations. This was evident in the Vietnam case, where Trump announced a 20 per cent tariff on Vietnamese goods as part of a supposed deal, while Vietnamese officials clarified they had only agreed to 11 per cent,” GTRI said.

The think tank said that to

avoid similar misrepresentation, India must insist on a jointly issued, written statement before acknowledging any agreement. Verbal assurances or informal understandings, especially those announced on social media, are no substitute for formal, verified commitments, GTRI said.

“Moreover, Trump’s claim that the US will get full access to the Indonesian market at zero tariffs, while Indonesian exports will face a 19 per cent duty in the US, raises red flags. If India were to accept such a lopsided arrangement, it could expose its domestic sectors, especially dairy and agriculture, to duty-free US goods while gaining little in return,” it stated.

A bad deal, especially one that removes India’s tariffs without reciprocal benefits, could be worse than no deal at all. India must therefore negotiate transparently, guard against one-sided out-

comes, and not succumb to pressure for quick, symbolic agreements that compromise long-term economic interests, the think tank said.

Earlier, *The Indian Express* reported that agriculture has been a major sticking point in the negotiations, particularly because India has adopted an unwavering stance on this sector. The US maintains that the August 1 cut-off date is not a new deadline but an outer limit for countries to “speed things up”, and that this strategy has helped bring trading partners such as the EU on board.

The threat from the Trump administration is that if the August 1 deadline is not adhered to, those countries revert to the April 2 tariff levels. Most of them are minor trading partners of the US and are likely outside its 18 key trading relationships that account for 95 per cent of the country’s trade deficit.

●Agri districts

Saying that the government was “motivated by the success of the aspirational districts programme”, she had said the scheme would cover “100 districts with low productivity, moderate crop intensity and below-average credit parameters”. Cropping intensity is a measure of how efficiently land is used — the number of crops grown in the area in an agricultural year (July-June).

“One hundred districts will be identified based on three key indicators of low productivity, low cropping intensity, and less credit disbursement. The number of districts in each state/ Union Territory will be based on the share of net cropped area and operational holdings. However, a minimum of

one district will be selected from each state,” the official statement said on Wednesday.

“The scheme aims to enhance agricultural productivity, increase adoption of crop diversification and sustainable agricultural practices, augment post-harvest storage at the panchayat and block levels, improve irrigation facilities and facilitate availability of long-term and short-term credit,” it said.

According to the statement, committees will be formed at the district, state and national levels for effective planning, implementation and monitoring of the scheme. Central nodal officers will be appointed for field visits, review and monitoring.

A district agriculture and allied activities plan will be finalised by

the District Dhan Dhaanya Samiti, which will be headed by the district collector and include progressive farmers as members. “The district plans will be aligned to the national goals of crop diversification, conservation of water and soil health, self-sufficiency in agriculture and allied sectors as well as expansion of natural and organic farming,” the statement said.

In addition, Central and State agriculture universities will be assigned each district as technical knowledge partner.

The scheme is designed on the lines of the ‘Aspirational Districts Programme’ that was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January 2018 in 112 most underdeveloped districts across the country.

In PMDDKY too, the Dhan-Dhaanya districts will be ranked based on their performance. A portal/ dashboard will be developed to monitor the progress of the scheme in each district on 117 key performance indicators on a monthly basis, said the statement.

“As the targeted outcomes in these 100 districts will improve, the overall average against key performance indicators will rise for the country. The scheme will result in higher productivity, value addition in agriculture and allied sector, local livelihood creation and hence increase domestic production and achieve self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat). As the indicators of these 100 districts improve, the national indicators will automatically show an upward trajectory,” it said.

●Daughter of OCI cardholders

had told the HC that she could not be considered as a “person of Indian origin” and that she would in fact be considered an “illegal migrant” under Section 2(1)(b) of the Citizenship Act because she did not have any valid travel document, or a visa under which she could stay in India. Her parents were residing in India and holding Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) card at the time of her birth and Rachita had lived all her life in India by then.

In its verdict on May 15, 2024, the single-judge bench, noting Rachita’s “unique” position, said she would not qualify as an “illegal migrant”, and would qualify as a “person of Indian origin”. It directed that she be granted Indian citizenship.

It observed that Rachita “has effectively been rendered stateless, thereby facing significant limitations on her fundamental rights as also universal human rights in the absence of citizenship and political belonging.” Rachita was granted citizenship on July 31, 2024.

The MHA, in an appeal moved against the single judge’s order, while not challenging the direction for the

grant of citizenship, has challenged the judge’s declaration that Rachita is not an “illegal migrant” and is to be considered as a “person of Indian origin”. It has said the declaration is in contravention to the laws.

The MHA has submitted that the May 2024 order errs in observing that the definition of “illegal migrant” will not apply to Rachita solely on the fact that she was born in India and has never gone out of India.

Opposing this deduction by the single judge, the MHA has countered that Section 2(1)(b) of the Citizenship Act, 1955, clearly defines “illegal migrant” which would include a child born in India and devoid of any valid travel documents.

It has pressed for “harmonious” reading of the Citizenship Act with the Foreigners Act, 1946 which cover provisions for all types of foreigners including children born in India to foreigners. The MHA has highlighted that the law already provides for visa services to children born to foreigners in India within 90 days of their birth.

The MHA has stressed that the single judge also erred in declaring Rachita as a “person of Indian origin”

solely on the basis of the fact that her mother was born in independent India.

Relying on section 5 of the Act, the MHA has submitted that a person shall be deemed to be of Indian origin if the person, or either of the parents, was born in undivided India or in such other territory which became part of India after August 15, 1947 (such as Sikkim), with “undivided India” meaning India as defined in the Government of India Act, 1935.

“Any person born in India thereafter (after August 15, 1947) would, subject to fulfilment of statutory/constitutional requirements, be a citizen of India by birth and descendants of such person are not covered under definition of Indian Origin. Any other interpretation would lead to a situation where even a person born in Pakistan, Bangladesh, etc., after independence, i.e., after 15.08.1947, would be person of Indian Origin, which could not have been the intention of the law makers; and if such interpretation is accepted, it would lead to disastrous consequences,” the MHA has submitted.

The HC has now kept the matter for further consideration on October 15.

Telangana, Andhra agree on key steps to end water dispute

To set up Godavari, Krishna river management boards

SREENIVAS JANYALA
HYDERABAD JULY 16

THE CENTRE has decided to set up two committees to resolve pending disputes between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana over the sharing of waters from Krishna and Godavari rivers.

The Krishna River Management Board is likely to be set up by July 21 at Amaravati, while the Godavari River Management Board will be headquartered in Hyderabad. Both panels will comprise technical officials, Central officers, besides officials from the two states.

The decision came as Andhra Pradesh CM Chandrababu Naidu and Telangana CM Revanth Reddy held a meeting with Union Jal Shakti Minister C R Patil in New Delhi.

The Centre had convened the meeting in the backdrop of Andhra's efforts to execute the Polavaram-Banakacherla link project, which envisages diverting 200 thousand million cubic (TMC) feet of Godavari floodwaters from the state's Polavaram reservoir to Banakacherla regu-

lator in Kurnool district. Telangana has opposed this project.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Telangana Irrigation Minister N Uttam Kumar Reddy said both states agreed to implement telemetry systems at all water projects and reservoirs to accurately measure water usage — a long-standing demand of Telangana after it was carved out of Andhra Pradesh in 2014. Andhra Pradesh has agreed to the move, he said.

Sources in the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister's Office confirmed the development. They said Andhra Pradesh has also agreed to conduct repairs of the Srisailem project, which is crucial for water supply and power generation for both states.

"The discussions between the two states were held in a cordial atmosphere... It was decided to resolve all issues through discussions," sources added.

Naidu had sought the Centre's help for the Polavaram-Banakacherla project, which he said would help drought-proof Rayalaseema region, comprising Andhra Pradesh's southern districts.

The project involves a three-

part water transfer system: the Bollapalle reservoir in Palnadu district, lift irrigation systems, and tunnels through the Nallamala hills. Naidu has earlier said the project would support national schemes such as Jal Jeevan, Blue Revolution, and Make in India.

Telangana, for its part, has sought Centre's permission to take up pending projects on Krishna river on an urgent basis.

A Jal Shakti Ministry statement said, "... Both states agreed on the installation of telemetry devices for real time monitoring of water flows in the Krishna Basin. It was also agreed that immediate measures would be taken to address the maintenance issues to safeguard Srisailem dam. Both states also agreed that the office of Krishna River Management Board (KRMB) would be shifted to Vijayawada/ Amravati." "... it was decided to constitute a committee comprising senior officials and technical experts from both states and the central government. This committee will work collaboratively to study outstanding concerns and suggest viable solutions to ensure equitable and efficient water sharing," it said.

Study flags high summer ozone levels in big cities

NIKHIL GHANEKAR
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

OZONE LEVELS in Indian megacities of have been high during the summer of 2025, with Bengaluru and Mumbai recording levels above prescribed standards for over a third of summer days, said a new Centre for Science and Environment (CSE) analysis.

The assessment used data from 80 ambient air quality monitoring stations across Mumbai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad.

When the CSE analysed Delhi's ozone (O3) levels last

month, they were found to have exceeded the prescribed standard on each summer day between March 1 and May 31.

Ozone levels in Bengaluru exceeded prescribed limits 45 out of the 92 summer days monitored by the CSE, which was a 29 per cent increase compared to last summer. In Chennai, ozone levels exceeded prescribed levels for 15 out of 92 days, in comparison to no exceedance days for the corresponding period last year.

Mumbai recorded ozone exceedance on 32 out of 92 days, marking a 42 per cent decline compared to the corresponding period last year. In Kolkata, 22 out



Delhi's O3 levels exceeded the prescribed standard on each summer day between March 1 and May 31. *File*

of 92 days this summer registered a breach of ozone standards, which was an improvement over last year by 45 percent.

Due to its reactive nature, O3 levels are monitored during an eight-hour average period, instead of 24-hour averages, unlike other pollutants. The ozone standard for an eight-hour period is 100 micrograms/cubic metre as per the National Ambient Air Quality Standards.

Anumita Roychowdhury, executive director, CSE, said, "If unchecked, this can become a serious public health crisis as ozone is a highly reactive gas and can be harmful even with short-

duration exposures. In contrast to cities in north India, where high summer temperatures and intense solar radiation can lead to ozone levels exceeding the standards, other cities in warm climates are experiencing consistent ozone exceedance during other seasons as well."

Ozone is a secondary pollutant formed through chemical reactions between other pollutants under sunlight. Hence, summer months see a spike in ozone concentrations. Ground-level ozone can affect the airways and lungs, increase susceptibility to infections, worsen respiratory ailments and decrease lung function.



A world of our making



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

India’s foreign policy reflects a refusal of true realism. It shies away from a confrontation with our predicament

AN INTENT TO REPAIR

Minister Jaishankar’s visit to China, recent instances of widening engagement, reflect a thaw. There will be challenges

FOUR YEARS AFTER the military standoff between India and China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar’s meetings with China’s President Xi Jinping, Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and Liu Jianchao (head of the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party) signal an intent to repair the relationship with Beijing. Minister Jaishankar’s visit to China this week — his first since the 2020 skirmishes — for the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting, taken alongside recent instances of widening engagement, reflects a thaw in bilateral ties. Recall that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Xi met on the sidelines of the BRICS summit last October, shortly after a new border patrolling arrangement was announced and a few days before the disengagement process officially concluded. Since then, NSA Ajit Doval, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri have all visited China. Other signs that the India-China relationship has been moving in a positive direction include an understanding to expedite the restoration of direct flights and easing of visa restrictions, and resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra. While Jaishankar has said that “a far-seeing lens” should be used for rebuilding ties, some key issues remain unresolved.

Post-disengagement, the de-escalation process — the withdrawal of troops from forward positions — hasn’t begun at the border. China’s restrictive trade practices, such as curbs on critical exports like rare earth magnets and high-tech manufacturing machinery, continue to be a stumbling block. These concerns were conveyed by Jaishankar to Wang, along with a pointed reminder that the SCO was founded to fight “three evils”: Terrorism, separatism, and extremism. At the same time, in an increasingly turbulent world order, and especially with an unpredictable occupant of the White House, re-engagement with China, or what Wang recently described as a “cooperative *pas de deux* of the dragon and the elephant”, is pragmatic policy. For example, the US and NATO threatening to sanction countries doing business with Russia — a move that would hit India and China hardest — underscores the need for a partnership. The fact, however, is that China continues to view its relationship with India primarily through a lens of competition, not cooperation. The most recent example is China’s growing military cooperation with Pakistan during Operation Sindoor. The power gap is also widening. India runs a trade deficit of over \$100 billion with China. The latter continues to scale up its defence budget and capabilities. China also leads in critical technologies like AI, quantum computing, and rare earths. And Beijing is steadily strengthening its influence across South Asia, luring countries strategically important to India into its own fold — Bangladesh, most recently.

India must, therefore, remain vigilant. Alongside dialogue, to increase its leverage, New Delhi must focus on getting its own house in order: Accelerate economic reform, bolster technological capacity, and foster social and political unity. Some members of the Opposition have criticised Jaishankar’s China outreach. His calibrated diplomacy, however, was necessary. The China question demands long-term, strategic clarity at the domestic level as well. And on the foreign policy front, New Delhi must widen its engagement across the neighbourhood and beyond, to prevent Beijing from gaining a decisive upper hand in the region.

INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY is in a deep morass that is often difficult to see. Our hyper-nationalism prevents us asking tough questions. The daily news cycle is caught in tactical matters or image management for the government. Behind our failures lies a refusal of true realism, or a genuine confrontation with our predicament.

This refusal of realism is manifest in our diplomacy. The former foreign secretary, Jagat Mehta, often used to say at the Centre for Policy Research that the first exercise in approaching the world in any given situation should be to abstract out proper names, including that of your country, so that you are more ruthlessly objective about your task. Try and imagine how you appear to your toughest adversaries on the outside.

India is rightly concerned, and is somewhat shocked, that it lost the diplomatic high ground after Operation Sindoor. We got boilerplate costless condemnations of terrorism, but also felt that no one stands with us. It was fascinating to contrast the breathless self-proclaimed triumphs of the parliamentary delegations and our government with what other countries from the Global North and South were actually saying, behind our backs, as it were. We can blame other countries’ self-interest and their anti-India disposition for the failure to politically capitalise on Operation Sindoor. But we were so besotted with our sense of our case that we did not honestly confront how the case might appear to others.

The rest of the world may be mistaken. These days, no country has much of a moral leg to stand on. But it is worth asking why the moral distinction between India and Pakistan was diplomatically much harder to convey than we thought. There are four reasons. I have no idea what we might actually be doing in Balochistan. But there is little doubt that our security establishment brags, *sotto voce*, about using the Balochistan crisis against Pakistan. In doing so, we ourselves muddy the waters about the use of proxies, and targeting on the basis of religion.

The violence in Balochistan and Kashmir, for the rest of the world, gets connected, in a chain of associations. In the backdrop of the fact that we have a govern-

One ought to feel sorry for the able diplomats of the MEA. Their political and national security masters have made their job more difficult even before they have begun. So, India’s moral claims now invite a long ‘meh’ at worst. And since our foreign policy establishment is easily satiated with the meaningless communique that makes the evening headline, that is at best what we get.

ment that does not exactly have a stellar reputation on moral condemnation of targeting people on account of their religion, it makes it easy for the world to say that these horrendous killings are, as one diplomat once put it, “one of those periodic South Asian things”. This is condescending, but we invited it.

Second, we are missing the point on anxieties on the nuclear front. Both sides may be right in thinking that, in principle, they can control an escalatory ladder. But focus on rational control of escalatory ladders does not address genuine worries about accidents. In the minds of India and Pakistan, this may be a controlled operation. But any confrontation between nuclear powers is risky. When Donald Trump brags about preventing nuclear war, listen to the underlying concern, not the surface drama or his put-down of Narendra Modi. He is in effect saying that even the smallest step to war makes India and Pakistan a problem for the rest of the world. Pakistan has no diplomatic high ground to lose. But war will always make India lose its moral high ground. War makes India a problem for the world.

Third, wasn’t it a matter of pride among our diplomats to say to Europe and the rest of the world that Ukraine was their problem? If the gobbling up of a whole sovereign nation is “their problem”, not a matter of principle, guess what? Terrorism is also not “their” problem. What is their problem is the risk of nuclear accidents. And finally, India’s absolute loss of credibility in the Global South. A country that cannot so much as morally squeak on what is now almost universally acknowledged as an on-going genocide in Gaza, obsessing over terrorism adds narcissism to the charge of moral abdication. Add to this the fact that we botched our credibility as a state on meaningless operations allegedly targeting useless Khalistan activists in Canada and the US. Further add to this the fact that not allowing an open domestic discussion even on the bare facts of the war furthers our credibility crisis. Even our truths become less credible.

One ought to feel sorry for the able diplomats of the MEA. Their political and national

security masters have made their job more difficult even before they have begun. So, India’s moral claims now invite a long “meh” at worst. And since our foreign policy establishment is easily satiated with the meaningless communique that makes the evening headline, that is at best what we get.

The other disposition impeding clear thinking is our approach to realism. The current dispensation’s interpretation of realism is not actual realism about the state of the world: It is a simple inversion of some perceived past of Indian foreign policy. This supposed realism, with its fantasies of transcending India’s South Asian context, has led to such a spectacular misreading of the neighbourhood that we have lost much of the neighbourhood. This is a realism that thought that the excessive courting of America was a sign of machismo. America is important to India. India’s political economy might yet save India from selling the entire store to the US. But one of the deepest ironies in the recent excessive craving for validation from the US is that the pro-America lobby has never had confidence about building India’s own strengths.

It portrayed domestic defeatism as a form of strength. It is not unwise to try and cut workable deals with the Trump administration. But to think these deals will be our salvation, or that they will miraculously be a catalyst for domestic reform, make us secure against China, enhance our global moral standing, allow us to sort out our problems in the neighbourhood, is sheer fantasy. And it prevents us from seeing what the American project is: A project of global dominance. Resisting it will require a different tool kit.

A senior Chinese communist once said that regimes sometimes have to lie to the people, sometimes control information and produce propaganda. But then he added: “While it might be necessary for leaders to sometimes lie to the people, it is important they do not lie to themselves.” Our lack of realism comes from the fact that our establishment has come to believe the lies it is trying to tell the people.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express



C R Sasikumar

Displacement is not peace

Israeli plan to relocate people of Gaza to a 'humanitarian city' is illegal under international law and morally indefensible



SUJATA ASHWARYA

EVEN AS CEASEFIRE talks have stalled in Doha, the bombs keep falling on Gaza, with the death toll having crossed 55,000 according to the Hamas-run Gaza health ministry. The vast majority of Gaza's population has been displaced, and much of the enclave lies in ruins. While diplomats speak of "phased withdrawals" and "hostage exchanges", the war's deeper tragedy is unfolding on another scale: The erasure of a people's presence from their homeland under the guise of humanitarian planning.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's latest proposal, endorsed by Israel's security cabinet, outlines the full military capture of Gaza, indefinite control over its territory, and the creation of a so-called humanitarian city on the ruins of Rafah. Under this plan, Israeli forces would control the perimeter of the site and initially relocate some 6,00,000 Palestinians, primarily those already displaced in the Al-Mawasi area, into the zone. Eventually, the entire population of Gaza would be concentrated there. Israeli officials have openly linked this relocation to a broader emigration scheme, described by one as something that "will happen", raising serious concerns that this so-called humanitarian arrangement is in fact a staging ground for mass displacement.

This is not the language of peace. It is the architecture of a controlled displacement. While the Israeli government frames its intentions as voluntary relocation, prominent human rights lawyers and legal scholars have

called it what it is: Forced transfer, which is both illegal under international law and morally indefensible. As Michael Sfard, a leading Israeli human rights lawyer, put it plainly: "It is all about population transfer... in preparation for deportation outside the Strip."

In the background, the rhetoric of Netanyahu and US President Donald Trump hints at a shared vision for Gaza that stretches beyond ceasefire deals. Trump's earlier proposal to transform Gaza into a "Riviera of the Middle East" has, within months, evolved into open discussions of third-country resettlement for Palestinians — an idea that has been openly embraced by far-right Israeli leaders. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has categorically rejected any withdrawal from the territory Israel has "conquered", explicitly linking military occupation with expansionist goals in both Gaza and the West Bank.

Meanwhile, efforts to negotiate a 60-day pause in hostilities, mediated by Qatar, are inching forward. The terms under discussion include phased hostage releases, expanded humanitarian access, and Israeli military withdrawals from parts of Gaza. But the core impasse remains: Hamas demands a permanent ceasefire and full withdrawal, while Netanyahu insists on Hamas's unconditional surrender and removal. In other words, both sides continue to speak past one another while civilians are crushed between ruin and rhetoric.

This is not to excuse Hamas. Its October 7 cross-border attack, which killed civilians and triggered the current war, was a destructive act that has only deepened Palestinian suffering. The group has not only endangered Israeli lives but has also placed Palestinians in Gaza in a double bind, using them as human shields in wartime and as political leverage in negotiations. Yet Hamas's actions cannot justify the obliteration of Gaza, nor should they be used to obscure the underlying realities of occupation, blockade, and dispossession that long preceded this war.

For decades, Palestinians have demanded something very simple and very difficult: The right to live freely in their homeland. That demand has been undermined not only by Israel's policies but also by a global order willing to look away when the language of security is used to justify siege and expulsion. The international community, including India, must reject any diplomatic framework that seeks to normalise permanent displacement or indefinite occupation.

What is at stake is more than ceasefire logistics. The current moment risks hardening a framework in which Palestinian existence is contained and relocated rather than recognised and restored. A humanitarian pause that simply reorders the geography of displacement is not peace. A corridor controlled by foreign troops is not sovereignty. And a camp built on the ruins of Rafah is not a future.

For decades, Palestinians have demanded something very simple and very difficult: The right to live freely in their homeland. That demand has been undermined not only by Israel's policies but also by a global order willing to look away when the language of security is used to justify siege and expulsion. The international community, including India, must reject any diplomatic framework that seeks to normalise permanent displacement or indefinite occupation.

There can be no durable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without recognising the Palestinians' right to remain on their land and live free from forced displacement. Ceasefires are essential to ending violence. They may bring temporary relief, but they do not dismantle the structures that sustain it or substitute for justice. If the talks in Qatar are to lead anywhere meaningful, they must move beyond preserving Israel's military objectives and confront what has been lost by the Palestinians.

What is unfolding in Gaza cannot be separated from the pressures and dispossession faced by Palestinians in the West Bank. Any agreement that ignores this shared reality risks becoming a cover for entrenching injustice. The goal cannot be to manage Palestinian displacement. It must be brought to an end. A just resolution of the Palestinian question is not a threat to Israeli security. It is the surest path to it.

The writer is professor at the Centre for West Asian Studies (Middle Eastern), Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

A much-needed pruning

Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision of Bihar's electoral rolls should serve as a template for similar campaigns in other states



DEVESH KUMAR

AS THE SPECIAL drive launched in Bihar by the Election Commission of India to rid the electoral rolls of all errors enters its fourth week, some positives are already visible. The booth-level officers (BLOs), who have fanned out across the state to distribute and collect the enumeration forms, while moving around from one house to another in the areas covered by their respective booths, have found that 1.59 per cent of voters had died in the intervening period. This translates to a whopping 12.5 lakh electors. Another 2.2 per cent, whose names appeared on the voter list, had migrated to other states. This amounts to 17.5 lakh voters in a state with a total voter base of 7.90 crore. As many as 5.5 lakh voters, or 0.73 per cent, had their names appearing at two places in the electoral roll.

The voters of Bihar, it is clear, have given their thumbs-up to the drive, and delivered a snub to the parties that have been trying to create doubts about the ECI's decision to go in for a "Special Intensive Revision (SIR)" of the electoral roll. This could be deduced from the fact that the BLOs had, till July 15, succeeded in disbursing enumeration forms to 88.18 per cent of the voters. Of these, 83.66 per cent had submitted their filled-up forms to the BLOs. By the time the first phase of the SIR draws to a close, it is estimated that almost all bona fide citizens of the state will have been covered.

It follows that the names of people who fail to provide any citizenship proof will have to be deleted from the electoral roll. As reported widely in the media, the Election Commission, during the course of its drive to collect filled-up enumeration forms, stumbled upon several illegal migrants from Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar. They had, over a period of time, somehow found their way into the voter list, despite the fact that they had failed to submit any citizenship proof.

Former Bihar BJP president Sanjay Jaiswal, the party's chief whip in the Lok Sabha, while speaking to newsmen in Patna on July 9, laid threadbare the conspiracy launched by the Opposition parties to shore up their fortunes in the districts close to Bangladesh by demanding the inclusion of Aadhaar as proof of citizenship. "In Kishanganj district, the number of Aadhaar cards in circulation is an impossible 105 per cent. In neighbouring Araria, the figure is marginally lower at 103 per cent. It is clear that a whole lot of illegal Rohingyas and Bangladeshis have succeeded in laying their hands on Aadhaar cards," he pointed out.

He also alleged that since June 25, when the SIR was rolled out in Bihar, there

had been a scramble among the people of Kishanganj to procure proofs of residence. "As many as 2.27 lakh people had filled up forms for address proofs. This amounts to 27 per cent of the district's population. How is this possible? It is evident that the people behind this are Rohingyas and Bangladeshis, who want to smuggle their way into the voter list," the BJP leader said.

The election watchdog needs to be lauded for deciding to go in for electoral roll revision in the state on such a massive scale. Its success should serve as a template for similar campaigns in other states.

In embarking on the SIR, the ECI is working strictly according to the mandate bestowed upon it by Article 324 of the Constitution of India and Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, along with other provisions of the latter. In keeping with this, it asked the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO)/District Election Officer to aid the ERO to fulfil the Constitutional mandate that "every eligible person, as per Article 326 of the Constitution of India, read with Section 16 and 19 of the RPA, 1950, is enrolled as an elector".

The circular issued by the ECI on June 24, 2025, clearly mentioned that "while carrying out the SIR of the electoral rolls, the ERO (Electoral Registration Officer) of each Assembly constituency shall be responsible for ensuring that no eligible citizen is left out, while no ineligible person is included in the electoral roll".

This is not the first time that the ECI is undertaking such an exercise. It has done so several times in the past, across the country, or in individual states. In Bihar, the revision of electoral rolls on such a massive scale took place way back in 2003, when the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) was at the helm in the state. The BJP and the NDA, in keeping with their resolve to play the role of a constructive Opposition, had offered full support to the SIR.

Contrast this with the conduct of the Opposition parties in the state now. In an attempt to whip up popular frenzy and communal tension, the RJD-Congress-Left combine organised a bandh across the state on July 10. Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi put in a token appearance during the protest march in Patna, held a day before the Supreme Court's hearing on a clutch of petitions against the SIR. The bandh failed to elicit any response in the state. The Opposition's attempts to erect roadblocks in the path of the SIR received a further setback when the Supreme Court declined to put a stay on the electoral roll revision.

The SIR has built-in checks. The draft electoral roll will be unveiled on August 1. Individuals, civil society organisations and political parties will then get a full month's time to submit their objections.

When it comes to matters of national security and interest, the Opposition parties should shun their narrow and parochial agendas and rise to the occasion. They have clearly failed the people of India.

The writer is Member of Legislative Council in Bihar, and prabhari of Mizoram BJP

UNPRECEDENTED SNAPSHOT OF ‘TIME ZERO’: SCIENTISTS
BIRTH OF PLANETS OUTSIDE SOLAR SYSTEM CAPTURED

Astronomers have discovered the earliest seeds of rocky planets forming in the gas around a baby sun-like star, providing a precious peek into the dawn of our own solar system. It’s an unprecedented snapshot of “time zero,” scientists reported Wednesday, when new worlds begin to gel. The action is unfolding in a location comparable to the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter containing the leftover building blocks of planets. **AP**

Iran House: Cannot resume US talks until our conditions met

REUTERS
DUBAI, JULY 16

IRAN’S PARLIAMENT said the country should not resume nuclear negotiations with the United States until preconditions are met, in a statement on Wednesday in the Iranian state media.

“When the U.S. use negotiations as a tool to deceive Iran and cover up a sudden military attack by the Zionist regime (Israel), talks cannot be conducted as before. Preconditions must be set and no new negotiations can take place until they are fully met,” the statement said.

The statement did not define the preconditions, but Iran’s Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi has previously said there should be guarantees there will be no further attacks against Tehran.

Israel and the U.S. launched strikes on Iran’s nuclear facilities last month, saying that they were part of a programme geared to-



Iran Foreign Minister Abbas Araqchi

wards developing nuclear weapons. Tehran maintains that its nuclear programme is purely for civilian purposes. Tehran and Washington had held five rounds of indirect negotiations mediated by Oman prior to the 12-day air war, with US demands that Iran drop its uranium enrichment programme reaching a dead end.

Last week, Araqchi reiterated Tehran’s position that it would not agree to a nuclear deal that prevents it from enriching uranium and would refuse to discuss extra-nuclear topics such as its ballistic missile programme.

The U.S., in coordination with three European countries, has agreed to set the end of August as the deadline for a deal.

GERMANY IMPOSES TIGHT BORDER CHECKS TO CURB MIGRATION, THOUGH CROSSINGS HAD STARTED SLOWING DOWN YEARS AGO

Migration fears turn Europe’s borderless dreams into traffic nightmares

JIM TANKERSLEY
& CHRISTOPHER F. SCHUETZE
JULY 16

THE NO. 983 bus braked shortly after it crossed the Oder River from Poland into Germany, easing inside a large tent and stopping. German police officers boarded, pulled off a man with gray hair and stuffed luggage for further inspection, then sent the driver on his way.

The delay took about eight minutes. It was an example of a headache that has quickly become routine for people crossing

between the two countries as Germany makes a public show of cracking down on migration.

Amid a voter backlash over the millions of asylum seekers who entered the country over the past decade, German officials have thrown up checkpoints to search vehicles crossing their borders from all sides. Neighboring countries have followed suit, including Austria and, starting last week, Poland.

The checkpoints are beginning to undermine the ideal of free movement in the European Union. In a series of agreements beginning 40 years ago, members of the European Union effectively

declared they would allow each other’s citizens to cross without having to clear border security.

But the pacts allow countries to temporarily reimpose border controls “as a last resort” in the event of a serious threat to national security or public policy. Germany, Poland, Austria, France, Italy and the Netherlands have all cited immigration concerns when reinstating border checks this year.

Enhanced checks have stopped 110 migrants per day on average from entering Germany since early May, when the new government under Chancellor Friedrich Merz tightened border



Traffic in Slubice, Poland, near the border with Germany. **NYT**

security procedures, interior ministry officials said. That’s up from 83 per day in the first four months of the year.

The increased checks are snarling traffic and annoying commuters, long-haul truckers and other travelers. They are squeezing, at least temporarily, the tendrils of commerce that have grown between towns like Frankfurt an der Oder, Germany, and Slubice, Poland, which lie on opposite banks of the Oder River.

The additional security has spawned protests, often from citizens angry that the Germans are searching cars coming in from their countries. In Poland,

right-wing groups have vowed to turn back any migrant that Germany rejects at its border.

Federal government officials in Germany and elsewhere have embraced the checks. This week, Germany will convene a summit with ministers from Poland, France and elsewhere to discuss plans for stricter migration policies. And immigration enforcement is set to be a key point of discussion when Merz and British PM Keir Starmer are expected to meet in London on Thursday.

German officials say their enhanced controls signal to potential migrants that Germany’s border enforcement is much

stricter, though migration levels have been falling steadily for two years, well before many of the checkpoints were installed.

“The policy shift has begun,” the interior minister, Alexander Dobrindt, said in a speech to Parliament last week, in which he claimed credit for plunging migration numbers. “And it’s working.”

In the twin cities on the Oder River, many locals disagree. “We do not have a migration crisis here,” Tomasz Stefanski, Slubice’s deputy mayor, said in an interview. “The idea of the European Union is really quite shaky at the moment, as is freedom of movement across borders.” **NYT**

AS OF JUNE 30, NON-FOSSIL FUEL SOURCES ACCOUNT FOR 50.1% OF INSTALLED CAPACITY

‘Green’ power capacity outpaces thermal, but storage woes weigh on grid stability

AGGAM WALIA
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

INDIA HAS reached a key climate milestone five years ahead of schedule — as of June 30, non-fossil fuel sources account for 50.1 per cent of the country’s installed electricity capacity. These sources — which include nuclear, large hydro, and renewables — made up just 30 per cent of installed capacity in 2015 and 38 per cent in 2020, before rising sharply over the last five years, on the back of solar and wind power.

When the Paris Agreement on climate change was signed in 2015, India had committed to reaching 40 per cent non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030. This target was raised to 50 per cent in 2022.

As of June, India’s total installed capacity stood at 485 gigawatts (GW). Of this, renewables — including solar, wind, small hydro, and biogas — accounted for 185 GW, according to a press release by the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy (MNRE). Large hydro capacities contributed 49 GW, and nuclear energy added 9 GW, taking the total non-fossil fuel capacity just over the halfway mark. Thermal

SURGING NON-FOSSIL FUEL CAPACITY						
Installed capacity as of	Thermal	Non-fossil fuel			Grand Total	Non-fossil fuel share (%)
		Nuclear	Large hydro	Renewables*		
June 2015	191.26	5.78	42	35.78	274.82	30.4
June 2020	230.90	6.78	45.7	87.67	371.05	37.8
June 2025	242.04	8.78	49.38	184.62	484.82	50.1

*Units in gigawatts (GW); *Solar, wind, small hydro, biomass; Source: Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, CEA*

power, mostly coal- and gas-based, made up the remaining 242 GW, or 49.9 per cent. In 2015, thermal’s share was 70 per cent.

Thermal continues to dominate

The rise in contribution of renewables to India’s energy mix marks a significant shift, driven by the rapid addition of solar and wind power in recent years. In 2024, India ranked fourth globally in renewable installed capacity, including large hydro, behind only China, the US, and Brazil.

To be sure, installed thermal capacity falling below the halfway mark doesn’t mean India’s reliance on thermal power has dipped below 50 per cent. On the contrary, since renewable sources such as solar

and wind are intermittent and cannot generate power around the clock, thermal plants still produce over 70 per cent of the country’s electricity.

Bringing down thermal’s share in power generation — and hitting India’s 500 GW non-fossil fuel target by 2030 — will require much more, starting with the stabilisation and strengthening of the grid.

Lack of storage capacity making grid unstable

Between April 2020 and June 2025, India added 95 GW of solar and wind capacity, which now makes up 35 per cent (168 GW) of the country’s total installed electricity capacity. However, this rapid growth in intermittent sources — without a

corresponding thrust on building storage capacity like battery systems and pumped hydro — has strained grid stability, especially during periods of fluctuating demand.

On May 30, 2024, for instance, when the year’s peak demand hit 250 GW, grid managers struggled to meet it due to low renewable generation and insufficient base-load support from thermal. In May this year, erratic rains weakened demand, causing real-time solar prices to crash to zero, especially on Sunday afternoons. These instances underscore the growing risk of grid instability and renewables curtailment in the absence of adequate storage — and dampen investor interest in adding new capacity. Storage allows electricity from solar and

wind plants to be absorbed when generation is high, and released when it’s low or when demand peaks. As of 2024-end, India’s storage capacity was less than 5 GW — 4.75 GW of pumped storage and 110 megawatts (MW) of battery storage.

Storage key focus, yet project execution slow

The government has begun moving proactively on the policy front in recent months. In February, the Central Electricity Authority (CEA) issued an advisory to co-locate energy storage systems with solar projects in future tenders to ensure grid stability.

The Ministry of Power has also expanded its viability gap funding (VGF) scheme for battery storage, adding 30 gigawatt-hours (GWh) to the 13 GWh already under implementation, with a total outlay of Rs 5,400 crore. On the pumped hydro front, 51 GW is expected to come online by 2032. The inter-state transmission system (ISTS) waiver for storage projects, to spur their development, has also been extended until June 2028.

FULL REPORT ON
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AFTER CABINET APPROVAL

Renewables boost: NTPC can now invest ₹20,000 crore, NLC India ₹7,000 crore

AGGAM WALIA
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

IN A major move to boost public investment in India’s renewable energy sector, the Union Cabinet has approved state-owned NTPC Ltd to invest up to Rs 20,000 crore in its subsidiary NTPC Green Energy Ltd, an amount earlier limited to Rs 7,500 crore.

The Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) on Wednesday also made certain exemptions to allow NLC India Ltd to invest Rs 7,000 crore in its subsidiary NLC India Renewables Limited (NIRL). The enhancement of NTPC’s investment limit in its subsidiary NTPC Green Energy comes months after the latter launched its initial public offering (IPO) in November 2024, with an



File

issue size of Rs 10,000 crore. Currently, NTPC Green Energy has a portfolio of roughly 32 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy assets, of which 6 GW is operational, 17 GW has been awarded, and another 9 GW is in the pipeline.

“The enhanced delegation given to NTPC and NGEL (NTPC Green Energy) will facilitate accelerated development of renewable projects in the country,” a Press

Information Bureau (PIB) release on the decision said. NTPC, India’s largest player in the thermal sector under the Ministry of Power, aims to add 60 GW of renewables by 2032.

NLC India, a central public sector undertaking under the Ministry of Coal, is primarily engaged in mining lignite used as feedstock in thermal plants. Lately, it has ventured into renewables

too, with an installed capacity of 2 GW. The CCEA’s decision will allow it to infuse Rs 7,000 crore as capital in its renewables subsidiary NIRL as part of its bid to expand its installed portfolio to 10.11 GW by 2030 and 32 GW by 2047.

“This investment is further exempted from the 30% net worth ceiling stipulated by the Department of Public Enterprises (DPE) for overall investment by CPSEs in JVs and Subsidiaries providing NLCIL and NIRL greater operational and financial flexibility,” another PIB release said.

India aims to reach 500 GW of non-fossil energy capacity, including nuclear, large hydro, and renewables, by 2030. As of June 30, the share of non-fossil fuel sources in its total installed capacity of 485 GW has overtaken thermal and stands at 50.1 per cent.

Geopolitics hits Indian contract workers, growth in new hires at four-year low in FY25

SIDDHARTH UPASANI
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

TEMPORARY HIRINGS by Indian companies increased at the slowest pace in four years in 2024-25 as demand for short-term staffing was hit by geopolitical uncertainty. According to Indian Staffing Federation (ISF), the industry body for over a hundred flexi-staffing companies, new contract hires rose by 9.7 per cent in the last fiscal to 1.39 lakh, with sectors such as Global Capability Centers (GCCs), e-commerce, and logistics contributing to new formal jobs.

However, the increase in temporary staffing in 2024-25 was down from a 15.3 per cent rise in 2023-24 and, at 9.7 per cent, was the lowest since a 3.6 per cent upturn in the coronavirus pandemic-hit 2020-21. Temporary workers have become increasingly important for companies in certain sectors as they help meet fluctuations

According to Indian Staffing Federation, ‘flexi staffing’ rose by 9.7% in 2024-25, posting the lowest increase since the coronavirus pandemic-hit year of 2020-21

in demand due to seasonal and other factors.

The final quarter of 2024-25 was particularly bad for temporary workers as new jobs were 2.5 per cent lower compared to the third quarter that ended in December 2024. This was only the second time since April-June 2020 — when much of the country was forced to shut down to contain the spread of the coronavirus — that new temporary hirings fell on a quarter-on-quarter (QoQ) basis.

“The fourth quarter of FY25

saw a cautious market. Many organisations aimed to reorganise hiring to utilise better productivity, leading to a late-year lowering demand for the temporary workforce across industries,” ISF said in a statement. “This dip was particularly pronounced as economic conditions destabilised, prompting companies to pause expansion and headcount additions amidst trade wars.”

Also adversely impacting demand for short-term workers was the end of the holiday and festival season and new banking policies, ISF said. According to Suchita Dutta, executive director at ISF, these new banking policies refer to directions from the Reserve Bank of India in late 2024 to banks on the use of third-party service providers for certain activities. This policy change, Dutta said, contributed to weaker demand for contract staff in the final quarter of the fiscal.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Why even moderate rainfall leads to flooding in Gurgaon

SHINY VARGHESE
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

THE DELHI Master Plan of 1962 saw Gurgaon (Gurugram) as a place of modest urban growth, primarily because the area has no groundwater resources. In 1980, with Maruti setting up its factory in Manesar, Gurgaon emerged as an industrial hub.

A decade later, with liberalisation and the promise of rapid economic growth and infra-structural development, the mythical village mentioned in the *Mahabharata* became India's Millennium City, a model for 21st century urbanisation in India — and everything that is wrong with it.

Every monsoon, Gurgaon witnesses extreme flooding: hours-long traffic jams, cars floating in the deluge, and people being electrocuted are common occurrences. All this happens even though Gurgaon receives only about 600 mm of rain on average every year. In comparison, Kochi receives well over 3,000 mm of rain annually without going un-

der every monsoon.

What makes Gurgaon, home to nearly 2 million people and boasting the third highest per capita income among cities in India, this vulnerable to monsoon flooding?

Ignoring topography

The Aravalli ridge, on the southern edge of Gurgaon, is the natural high ground for the city. From there, the land slopes down towards the north, which is at a lower altitude. Rainwater in Gurgaon thus flows mainly from the south to the north, towards the

Najafgarh Jheel in West Delhi.

Maps from the 1920s show a large number of water channels in Delhi-NCR. The ones in Gurgaon ran along an east-west axis. "Before MG Road and Sector 56 came up, there were water channels that ran parallel to the Aravalli ridge," architect-urban designer Suptendu Biswas told *The Indian Express*.

These were natural drainage channels, which carried runoff towards what is now the western edge of Gurgaon, from where



A flooded underpass at Rajiv Chowk in Gurgaon last week. Praveen Khanna.

water would travel further north. But these channels have all but disappeared, and subsequent urban expansion has not kept the city's topographic reality in mind.

Today, Google Earth images show arterial roads like the Golf Course Road run on a

north-south axis — this makes them ideal routes for surface runoff, especially given that drains are non-existent or poorly planned. "Topography was not only ignored but also abused," Biswas said.

Piecemeal planning

One reason why urban expansion in Gurgaon has not kept up with topographic realities is the piecemeal nature of city planning. This is borne out of the city's unique land acquisition model which is central to Gurgaon's growth story.

From the 1970s onwards, the Haryana government introduced a series of laws, which enabled private firms to acquire land on a large scale to develop townships. The Haryana Urban Development Authority (HUDA) was created in 1977 to streamline the process.

Having developed neighbourhoods such as South Extension and Kailash Colony in Delhi, Delhi Land and Finance (DLF) alone acquired 52 villages in the initial years from farmers. As other players came along, land acquisition was not carried out in a uniform

manner. This led to irregular plots, and roads that led to nowhere.

"Allocative decisions form the very core of conventional urban planning, which was missing in Gurgaon's story from the beginning," Biswas wrote in *Gurgaon to Gurugram: A short biography* (2021).

The "plug-and-play" mode of urban expansion meant that roads were not built with proper gradients, nor was there any big picture thinking behind basic planning decisions for the city.

Concrete everywhere

In Gurgaon, mustard fields have long made way for highways and highrises. A region which once had 60 natural canals, critical to absorb its excess rainwater, barely has four today.

But as concrete, impervious to percolation, has covered Gurgaon, civic authorities have failed to build a robust drainage system to deal with the problem. Concrete drains only add to the flooding due to their inability to absorb water.

According to Biswas, India's engineer-

ing codes have no reference beside steel and concrete — earth is simply not something that planners consider while building a city.

Common sense solutions

Biswas offered three "common sense" solutions to address flooding in Gurgaon.

■ Identifying local green areas where there is waterlogging, which can then become water harvesting sites where runoff can be captured and allowed to seep into the ground through aquifers or filters. Urban planning should be as localised as possible, Biswas suggested.

■ Creating soft drains beneath pavements and along the road: these will allow for percolation of rainwater into the soil. Biswas suggested building "French drains" — trenches that are filled with gravel and perforated pipes to redirect surface and groundwater away from waterlogged areas.

■ Sloping the roads such that water can drain off. If land is surveyed efficiently, swales can be created such that large drainage channels with gently sloping sides can decrease surface water from collecting.

HOW CLIMATE CHANGE IS FUELLING DEVASTATING WILDFIRES IN EUROPE

WILDFIRES HAVE scorched hotspots in several Mediterranean countries this month, with blazes forcing thousands of people into lockdown in Catalonia in Spain, and encroaching on Marseille, the second-largest city in France.

How bad have wildfires been this year?

Wildfires have burnt 227,000 hectares of land since the beginning of the year — more than double the average for this time of year over the past two decades, according to the EU's European Forest Fire Information System (EFFIS).

While far above average, it's not the highest in EFFIS' records, which go back to 2002. Europe had particularly bad fire seasons in 2003 and 2017, when blazes burnt more than 1,100,000 hectares in each year — an area equivalent to the island of Jamaica. It is not yet clear if 2025 will be a record year, as that will depend on how the fire season evolves in the coming months.

The number of fires in Europe has also surged this year so far, with 1,118 blazes detected as of July 8, versus 716 in the same period last year, EFFIS said.

Heatwaves in Europe earlier this month stoked blazes around the Mediterranean, including in Syria, where fires have burned through more than 3% of the country's forest cover, according to the UN. In the Greek islands of Evia and Crete, wildfires this month forced thousands of people to evacuate their homes.

But while Europe overall has seen a jump this year, scientists observing the fires say those in the Mediterranean region have, while destructive, so far been relatively isolated.

What is driving the wildfires?

Scientists say the Mediterranean region's hotter, drier summers put it at high risk of wildfires. Once fires start, plentiful dry vegetation and strong winds in the region can cause them to spread rapidly and burn out of control.

Climate change exacerbates the risk of wildfires by creating hotter and drier



Flames rising from a wildfire in Greece on July 3. Reuters

background conditions. This has contributed to the fire season starting earlier in recent years in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. It has also made fires more intense in these countries.

Greenhouse gas emissions, mainly from burning coal, oil and gas, have heated the planet by about 1.3 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times. Europe has warmed at twice the global average since the 1980s, according to the World Meteorological Organization.

That warmer baseline means higher temperatures can be reached during heatwaves, which climate change is also making more frequent. This has been confirmed by the United Nations' global panel of climate scientists, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in recent reports.

What is the forecast?

Countries are preparing for worse blazes. Warmer-than-average temperatures are forecast across Europe in August, according to EFFIS, meaning fire danger will remain high across much of southern and eastern Europe.

While Southern Europe is expected to see normal rainfall patterns, the rest of the continent is expected to be drier than normal in August — potentially exacerbating fire risk in other regions.

REUTERS

UDIT MISRA

NEW DELHI, JULY 16

CHINA'S GDP grew 5.2% in the second quarter (April-June) of 2025, according to official figures released on Tuesday. This means that despite the high tariffs imposed by United States President Donald Trump, the value of the economic output (that is, all goods and services) inside China during the second quarter of 2025 was 5.2% more than the economic output during the same quarter of 2024 (*Chart 1*).

This is the second consecutive quarter in which China's GDP growth has beaten the expectations of global analysts. In the first quarter (January-March), the Chinese economy grew even faster, at 5.4% on an annualised basis. Market estimates had pegged its second-quarter GDP growth at about 4.5%.

At this rate, China looks set to achieve its annual growth target of "around 5%". However, most analysts outside the country still expect China's growth to slow down in the second half of the year.

China's economic challenge...

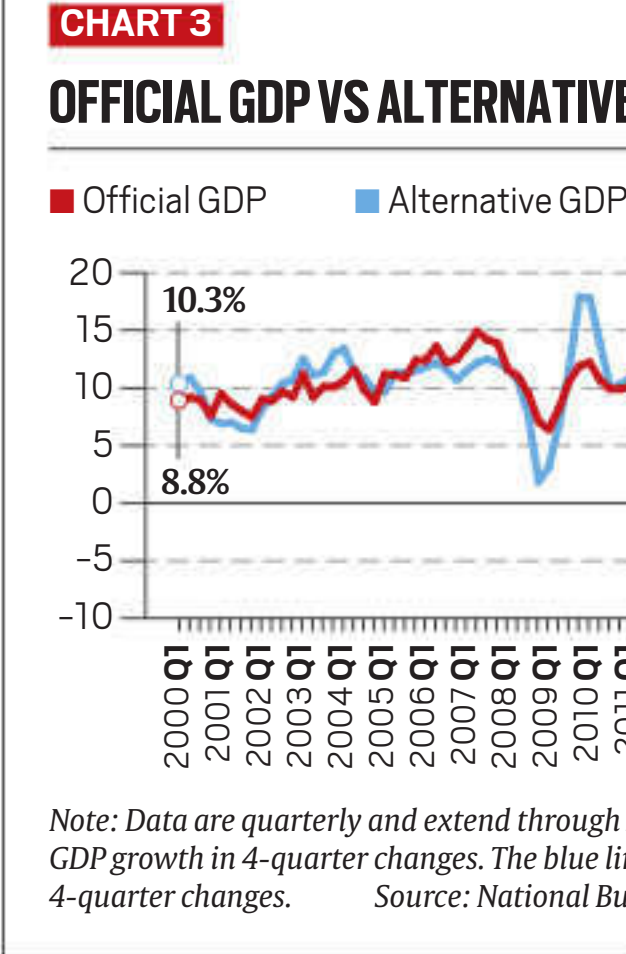
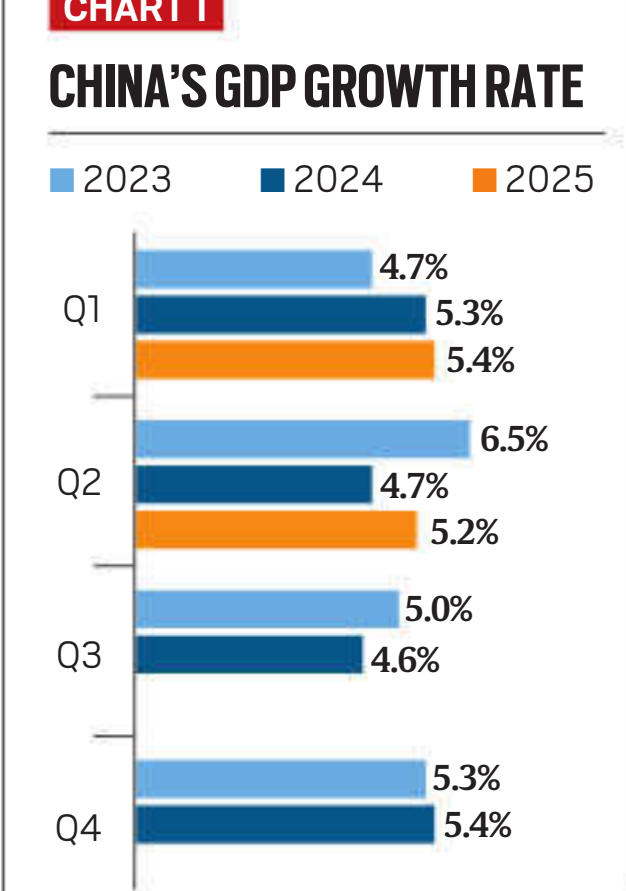
For three decades, China's economy grew at an explosive pace on the back of a historic manufacturing boom that allowed it to capture an ever increasing share of global exports. Within the country, there was a massive expansion of physical infrastructure. This dependence on exports (on the external front) and real estate (on the domestic front) created structural imbalances.

Over the past several years, many countries have turned away from globalisation and global trade, even as their economies have slowed. As the share of exports in China's GDP has fallen, its growth has been affected. That said, even now exports contribute around 20% of the Chinese GDP.

With China's domestic consumer base still struggling to recover from the economic shock of the Covid-19 disruption, the country's economy was hit by a collapse of its booming real estate market. The downfall of Evergrande, once the world's most valuable real estate company, underlined the scale and consequences of the crisis.

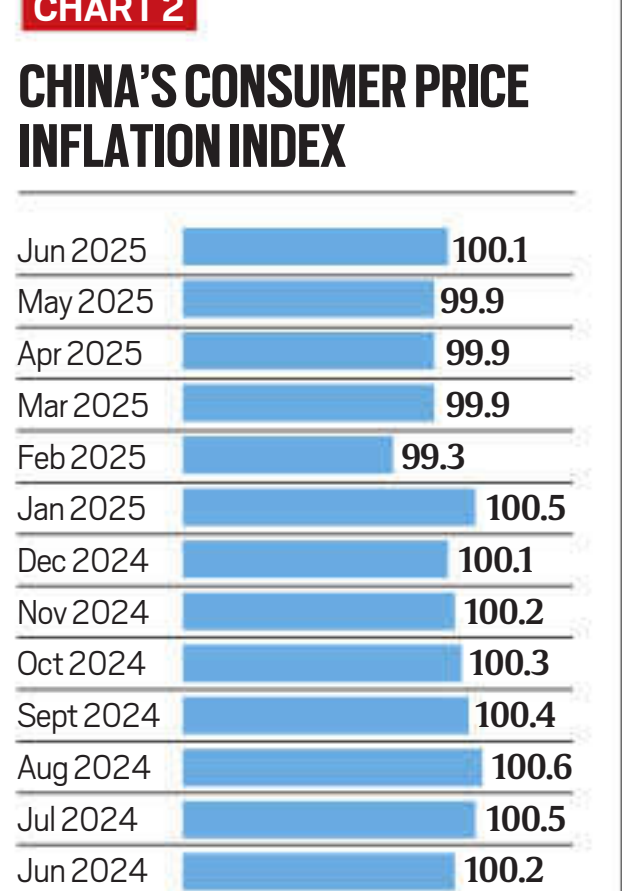
Real estate figured prominently among people's household assets — the crashing prices of property hit consumer confidence further, dampened the overall demand for goods and services, and slowed down China's domestic engines of growth.

A direct fallout was an increase in unemployment. Youth unemployment (ages 16 to 24) rose to more than 20% — one in five — by



the middle of 2023, the last time that the government released these data.

The Chinese economy has also been facing deflationary pressures (*Chart 2*), which refers to prices going down year on year. Deflation, the opposite of inflation, often presents serious problems for an economy. As prices start to fall, consumers hold back purchases in the hope of buying the same good for cheaper later. This behaviour brings down prices further as the gap between sup-



ply and demand widens. A deflationary spiral means there is no incentive for businesses to invest or produce goods, and this results in the economy stagnating. Resolving deflation can be more difficult than containing high inflation because there is only so much that policymakers can do in terms of cutting interest rates and increasing government spending to boost economic activity. The supply chain disruption caused by

the pandemic spotlighted the dangers of high dependence on China and led to efforts by countries to diversify by adopting a China+1 strategy. In the US, the Biden administration continued with the tariffs imposed by the first Trump administration and took other policy initiatives (such as the CHIPS Act) to boost the American semiconductor industry and contain China's advance in critical new technology areas.

Indeed, in the years after the pandemic, the world's largest economy has increased the lead over its nearest competitor. In 2021, China's economy was around 75% the size of the US economy; in 2024, China's GDP was only 64% of the US's.

Between 2021 and 2024, the US economy grew from an annual nominal GDP of \$23.6 trillion to \$29.1 trillion, China's annual GDP during this same period increased by less — from \$17.8 trillion to \$18.2 trillion.

...And how it has coped

Many had expected Trump's tariff war would significantly affect the Chinese economy. But the data since the start of 2025 have been counterintuitive. While the US economy shrank in the first quarter and there are persistent worries about a recession, China has maintained a steady growth momentum.

China's GDP growth rate has moderated from the first quarter, but underlying data show manufacturing growth has remained resilient, and industrial production continues to beat forecasts.

Chinese exports too have continued to grow. Even though exports to the US have reportedly fallen 26%, the gap has been more than filled by a rise in exports to other destinations such as the ASEAN countries, Africa, and the European Union.

There is one other, fundamental question: can data from China's National Bureau of Statistics be trusted?

China's national accounts have never enjoyed credibility of the kind that Western economies with a free press and transparent reporting standards have had. Thus, every time China's data beats expectations, questions are raised on its credibility.

But doubts over China's GDP data are gradually receding. Research by Barcelona *et al* (*Chart 3*) published on June 6 on the US Federal Reserve website, concludes: "...Assessing the accuracy of China's GDP growth remains a challenge and no statistical model can provide a definitive alternative measure. But our analysis suggests that official figures have not recently been overstating GDP growth..."

Secretly recorded conversations admissible in divorce cases: what SC said

APURVA VISHWANATH & AMAAL SHEIKH
NEW DELHI, JULY 16

THE SUPREME COURT on Monday ruled that secretly recorded conversations between spouses are admissible as evidence in matrimonial disputes. It set aside a 2021 Punjab and Haryana High Court judgment that had barred a husband from using secretly recorded phone conversations with his wife as evidence in divorce proceedings.

The top court's ruling changes the contours of spousal or marital privilege in Indian law, which protects private conversations between a husband and wife during their marriage, and even after the marriage has ended.

What is spousal privilege?

Spousal privilege means that a person cannot be compelled to testify against their

spouse in a criminal case. It is rooted in the idea that a degree of protection must be provided to private conversations between a husband and wife during their marriage.

Spousal privilege is codified in Section 122 of the Indian Evidence Act, 1872. "No person who is or has been married, shall be compelled to disclose any communication made to him during marriage by any person to whom he is or has been married; nor shall he be permitted to disclose any such communication."

According to the law, spousal communication is allowed as evidence only when the other spouse consents to it or when one spouse has narrated the events to a third party, who then testifies in court.

How does the law apply to divorce cases?

Spousal privilege does not directly apply in divorce cases where one spouse makes allegations against the other spouse,

and testifies in a court of law. These allegations are supplemented by evidence such as letters, photographs, or testimonies of other people. However, with technological advances, text messages, video and voice recordings, and emails are often presented as evidence.

Many High Courts have refrained from accepting secret recordings as evidence due to two main reasons.

■ There is a risk that secret recordings can be procured through suspect or coercive methods. Courts must weigh whether the material is relevant and lawfully admissible as evidence in each case. This process in a trial is called the appreciation of evidence.

■ There is a reasonable expectation of privacy in a marriage, and secret recordings violate an individual's privacy. A relationship bereft of this expectation gives rise to

concerns of surveillance among spouses.

Why did the SC allow secret recordings to be admissible in court?

The SC's ruling relied on its 1973 judgment in a case that pertained to a telephonic conversation recorded secretly by the police to prove a bribery charge against a doctor. At the time, the apex court overlooked

how the evidence was obtained, given that the case involved corruption by a public servant and the phone tap was conducted by the state. The SC has now effectively ex-

tended this reasoning to matrimonial cases.

The court has said that if evidence is relevant, independently verifiable, and falls within statutory exceptions, it can be admitted even if collected in secret. Although secret recordings are a violation of fundamental rights, the right to privacy

EXPLAINED LAW