

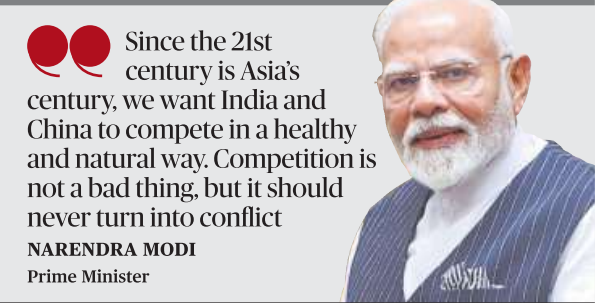
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# Every noble attempt for peace with Pakistan met with hostility, betrayal: PM

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

Noting that all of India's attempts to foster peace with Pakistan have been met with hostility and betrayal, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed hope that wisdom will prevail on the leadership in Islamabad to improve bilateral relations.

In a three-hour conversation with American scientist and podcaster Lex Fridman, who released the episode on Sunday, Mr. Modi emphasised his similarities to U.S. President Donald Trump, noting that Mr. Trump seems to have a clearer road map for his second term. With regard to China, he cited the return to normalcy on the border as evidence of the power of dialogue over discord and called for the neighbours to cooperate in



the interest of global stability and prosperity.

Recalling his own swearing-in ceremony in 2014, Mr. Modi said he had specially invited his Pakistan counterpart, Nawaz Sharif, with the hope that the two countries could turn over a new leaf.

"This sent a clear message to the world about India's commitment to peace and harmony, but we didn't get the desired outcome... Yet, every noble attempt at fostering peace was met with hostility and

betrayal. We sincerely hope that wisdom prevails upon them and they choose the path of peace."

Despite past tensions with China, Mr. Modi said he favours dialogue over discord. "Differences are natural. When two neighbouring countries exist, occasional disagreements are bound to happen... but our effort is to ensure that these differences don't turn into disputes."

**CONTINUED ON**  
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## + Taking wing



**Nascent hope:** An Indian long-billed vulture sits with its chick atop a cliff at India's only vulture sanctuary, Ramadevarabetta, near Bengaluru, on Sunday. The season marks the fourth consecutive year of successful breeding at the sanctuary, a sign of hope for the endangered species. K. MURALI KUMAR

# Bodo Peace Accord proved Cong. wrong: Shah in Assam

Pact brought peace, development in region, says Union Home Minister at annual conference of the All Bodo Students' Union; adds Modi freed Northeast from terrorism, bandhs, and blockades

**The Hindu Bureau**  
GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Assam on Sunday said the Congress had mocked him after he signed the third Bodo Peace Accord, but it had sustained, proving the party wrong.

Mr. Shah took a swipe at the Congress while addressing the 57th annual conference of the All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU) at Dotma near Kokrajhar, headquarters of the 8,970-sq.-km. Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR), where tribal council elections are due in December.

The BTR is ruled by the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL) in alliance with the BJP. The Congress is likely to be the only mainstream party to challenge them in the elections.

"The Congress made fun of me when the BTR peace agreement was signed. They said there will be no peace in Bodoland and this agreement will turn out to be a joke. Today, the accord has



Amit Shah plays a traditional drum at the 57th annual conference of the All Bodo Students' Union in Kokrajhar, Assam, on Sunday. ANI

brought peace and development in a region where discussions once revolved around conflict and bloodshed," he said.

### Lauds ABSU's role

The Minister lauded the ABSU for its big role in the prevailing peace and development in the BTR, which comprises five districts. "There would have been no peace in Bodoland without the union's involvement," he said, adding that the government had provided ₹1,500 crore for the development of the BTR administered by the

autonomous Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC).

### Focus on rehabilitation

Mr. Shah said the Centre had spent the bulk of ₹287 crore in the past three years on the rehabilitation of 4,881 extremists who signed the 2020 peace accord along with the ABSU.

Altogether nine peace accords had been signed in Assam, and more than 10,000 youth were brought to the mainstream under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Minister said. "Modiji freed the entire

Northeast from terrorism, bandhs, and blockades."

Lauding Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma for employing 400 of such Bodo youth in a commando battalion, he commended BTC chief Pramod Boro for several initiatives to strengthen peace and development in the region.

The Home Minister announced that the Centre would name a major road in Delhi after Bodofa (Guardian of the Bodos) Upendranath Brahma, who was born at Dotma. "Bodofa's bust will be unveiled there in April in the presence of all your leaders and the Assam Chief Minister," he said.

### Anti-drugs drive

Referring to the seizure of methamphetamine tablets worth ₹88 crore, and the arrest of four members of an international drug cartel in Imphal and Guwahati recently, Mr. Shah said the Modi government's crack-down on drugs would continue. "No mercy for drug cartels," he said on X.





Terror on the train  
Pakistan must solve Balochistan's problems, not blame outsiders

The attack on the Jaffar Express, on March 11, in a mountainous region of Balochistan, is one of the most daring attacks by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) in recent times. The BLA's move, demanding the release of Baloch militants from jails, was met with a swift military response from Pakistan. According to the Pakistani authorities, 354 passengers were rescued after a 36-hour long stand-off in which 26 security personnel and passengers and 33 rebel fighters were killed. Pakistan has accused its "eastern neighbour" (India) and "Afghan handlers" of helping the Baloch separatists. But beneath such allegations lie Pakistan's growing internal security vulnerabilities. The BLA, now the most powerful separatist group from the restive Balochistan province, has been carrying out a host of attacks. In November 2024, it claimed a suicide bombing at a train station in Quetta, the provincial capital, that killed at least two dozen people. It has also targeted Chinese workers in repeated attacks in the province. And with each attack, the Pakistani military has responded with heavy force. But it seems clueless on how to deter the attacks and bring stability to the region.

While visiting Quetta after the Jaffar Express attack, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif made a rare acknowledgement that the lack of development in Balochistan was an obstacle in eliminating terrorism. Baloch separatists have long argued that the Pakistani state, dominated by Punjabis and Sindhis, has historically ignored the Balochis. The BLA and other Baloch nationalist groups accuse the federal government of plundering Balochistan's resources, and blame security agencies for the forced disappearances, torture and extra-judicial killings of Baloch civilians and rebels. Pakistan's reliance on military campaigns in Balochistan has only reinforced the narrative of the separatists – of the province being treated differently by Islamabad-Rawalpindi. Pakistan has blamed India and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (before the 2021 Taliban takeover) for helping Baloch rebels. It also welcomed the return of the Taliban to Kabul as a moment of Afghanistan "breaking the shackles of slavery". But it was a bonhomie that did not last. Today, Pakistan says Baloch separatists and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) are operating from safe havens in Taliban-run Afghanistan. Together, the TTP and Baloch rebels pose grave security challenges to Pakistan at a time when it is battling economic uncertainty and political instability. But Balochistan is a clear example that a military response alone does not bring peace and stability. If Pakistan wants to calm its restive regions, it should address the political and economic problems that fuel instability and insurgency.

Rare success

ICC is still dependent on political interests to pursue its work

The arrest of former President of the Philippines Rodrigo Duterte on a warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) marks a rare success in the ICC's attempts to make senior political figures, especially those who have held or still hold public office, accountable for their crimes. However, it has to be acknowledged that only a set of favourable circumstances led to Mr. Duterte's arrest, and his being flown to The Hague: the warrant was executed by the government headed by President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., and the decision may have been the fallout of his differences with Vice-President Sara Duterte, Mr. Duterte's daughter who is embroiled in impeachment proceedings. ICC warrants invariably remain unexecuted, unless national governments cooperate with the ICC, a feature that often delays and stymies most ICC prosecutions. Mr. Duterte has been accused of "the crime against humanity of murder". The reference is to his 'war on drugs', a campaign of state-backed killing when he was Mayor of Davao City, and later President. The ICC is investigating the situation between 2011 and 2019, as he formally pulled his country out of ICC membership. However, the Pre-Trial Chamber has determined that despite the country not being a state-party now, it has jurisdiction to try crimes committed by individuals during the time the Philippines was a party.

The ICC was created by the Rome Statute in response to a need to have a permanent court, instead of ad hoc tribunals, for war crimes and crimes against humanity. It has no power of enforcement and is dependent on the national interests of big powers. It has often been accused of focusing on Africa, moving mainly against warlords and leaders in conflict zones. Warrants against leaders such as Vladimir Putin and Benjamin Netanyahu are seldom executed. In addition, some member-states have also expressed an inability to execute arrest warrants when those individuals visit their countries, while some leaders avoid visiting countries of state-parties. Added to this is the open hostility of the United States that frequently threatens the ICC with punitive measures if it moves against its nationals or allies. Fortunately, the ICC still exists as an international judicial institution mainly because it tries only individuals and not states. It has also rendered some significant verdicts on its own jurisdiction, the most important being the ruling in respect of Palestine that it can order investigations into crimes committed by nationals of both state-parties and non-state-parties on the territory of a state-party. Thus, a mere refusal by a country to ratify the Rome Statute or not being a party to it may not be relevant to any decision by the ICC to investigate and prosecute any individual.

The decision by the United States to withdraw from the World Health Organization (WHO) and drastically reduce the scale of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is one that has sent shock waves through the aid and public health world. This move has disrupted essential health-care services in many low- and middle-income countries. However, India has been largely unaffected, as international aid accounts for just 1% of its total health expenditure. Nevertheless, the cessation of such funding threatens to further shrink an already constrained public health development sector, which relies heavily on international support. More importantly, this development directly impacts the public health job market, reducing opportunities for thousands who are pursuing their Master of Public Health (MPH) and similar postgraduate courses.

Public health plays a critical role in shaping a nation's well-being and health-care delivery. The Constitution of India, through Article 47, underlines the state's responsibility to improve public health care. Public health is a specialised field that requires specific knowledge and skills to effectively address people's health needs. There is an urgent need for a dedicated workforce in India trained in public health, a fact that was very starkly realised during the COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond government systems, such a workforce is essential for civil society organisations, academic institutions, and research organisations engaged in public health.

**The evolution of training and jobs in India**  
Though the surge in public health education in India is relatively recent, its history dates to the colonial era. In the early days, public health was largely embedded within medical teaching. This narrow approach persisted despite the establishment of the All India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health, Kolkata in 1932 and the subsequent inclusion of preventive and social medicine – later known as community medicine – as an essential part of medical education. Specialists in community medicine, well-trained in public health provided public health services and met human resource needs in this field. However, their numbers were limited, and they were often engaged in medical teaching. Many students pursued MPH courses abroad in countries such as Australia, the European Union, the United Kingdom and the U.S. Yet, the supply of public health professionals remained constrained. Recognising the growing need and demand, MPH institutions and teaching expanded in India.

The number of institutions offering MPH and related courses in India has grown rapidly. Currently, over 100 institutions offer master's

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The key issue is the mismatch between supply and demand, with shrinking job opportunities and the dominance of the private sector

level courses in public health, whereas in 2000, there was only one. This expansion coincided with the launch of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) in 2005, which opened public health system roles to non-medical public health specialists. A wide range of institutions, from social science faculties to community medicine departments within medical institutions, have begun offering MPH courses. However, after an initial surge in demand, government recruitment for public health specialists plateaued, while the number of schools, programmes, and graduates continued to rise. As a result, securing jobs has become increasingly difficult for graduates.

Compounding this issue are challenges such as the lack of standardised training, insufficient practical learning opportunities, faculty shortages, and varied curricula that inadequately prepare students for real-world public health challenges. In addition, institutions offering public health courses are unevenly distributed, with large and populous States such as Assam, Bihar and Jharkhand, and many smaller and hilly States, having none or only a limited number of seats.

**Hurdles graduates face, issues in education**  
The foremost challenge is the mismatch between supply and demand, with limited and shrinking job opportunities for graduates. Today, entry-level positions in public health, such as research or programme assistants, attract a very high number of applications, with a significant proportion of candidates being eligible. The success rate remains exceptionally low, with only a few positions available. Moreover, the shrinking of public health roles and institutions within the public system has further limited job prospects. Efforts to establish public health management cadres in States have been hindered by multiple factors.

In recent times, the changing landscape of health care, marked by the growing dominance of the private sector in public health, further restricts employment opportunities. The private sector prioritises hospital and business management professionals over public health specialists. With limited opportunities in both the public and private sectors, the research and development sectors remain the primary employers for graduates. However, these sectors rely largely on foreign grants, and India is no longer one of the priority countries for such international funders. Similarly, the development sector is constrained by limited funding, which is expected to worsen further due to recent decisions in the U.S. The national research and health development funding remains in its early

development and is significantly underfunded. Thus, the job scarcity for public health professionals continues and can exacerbate further.

Beyond job scarcity, there are concerns about the quality of MPH education. The rapid spread of public health schools has led to intense competition to attract students, often at the expense of compromising admission standards. Many students enrol in these courses without a clear understanding of the field or passion needed to thrive in this field. Further, public health faculty often lack adequate training and real-world experience. The absence of a standardised curriculum and clear outcome measures, despite the Health Ministry's model course framework further exacerbates concerns. In India, MPH courses are currently not mandatorily regulated by any regulatory body. Neither the National Medical Commission (NMC) nor umbrella organisations such as the University Grants Commission (UGC) oversee MPH training. In the absence of these quality measures, the overall quality of graduates is also impacted.

**Approaches to consider**  
To address these challenges, a multi-pronged approach is required. The most urgent priority is to create public health jobs at all levels, from primary care to State and national health systems. In most developed countries with established public health education systems, governments are the largest employers of public health professionals. Similarly, establishing a dedicated public health cadre within State governments would be a significant step. This would not only create employment but also strengthen public health systems.

Next, a robust regulatory mechanism must be introduced by constituting a dedicated regulatory body or a specialised public health education division within existing regulatory agencies such as the NMC or UGC. This department, led by public health experts, should be responsible for setting curriculum standards and minimum training requirements while allowing room for institutional innovation, given that public health is a dynamic and evolving discipline. Moreover, public health training in all institutions must be closely integrated with practical learning opportunities within public health systems. There is a need to foster the growth of public health institutions in States where there are none or only a limited number. The emerging global situation calls for more national action and the building of local ecosystems for sustainable development in health.

The views expressed are personal

From insurance-driven private health care to equity



Pooja Sagar

is a researcher in the history of medicine and the oral histories of health and medical practices



Aruna Bhattacharya

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The government must invest in preventive, community-based care that is accessible to all

remains unclear how much it will help reduce health expenditures for marginalised groups or support primary health care to lower out-of-pocket expenses for Below Poverty Line cardholders.

**Budget, privatisation, insurance overhaul**  
The health budget allocates ₹95,957.87 crore to the Department of Health and Family Welfare and ₹3,900.69 crore to the Department of Health Research. The Budget prioritises medical digital infrastructure and medical education expansion over PHC. The National Health Mission, vital for grass-root health care, receives a declining share, signalling the state's gradual retreat from its universal health-care responsibility and shifting the burden onto private players. This affects citizens, as insurance schemes merely consolidate capital at the public's expense.

Additionally, significant changes in the insurance sector include raising the foreign direct investment (FDI) cap in the insurance sector from 74% to 100%, following a previous increase from 49% to 74% in 2021. This aims to improve India's low insurance penetration, especially in rural areas, attract more players into the insurance market, and achieve "Insurance for All" by 2047. The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) expects this to bring capital and expand coverage.

Policy changes raise concerns for India's informal workforce and marginalised urban populations. With the informal sector comprising a significant portion of the workforce, the lack of universal health coverage leaves millions without health security. The government has yet to outline how it will protect these vulnerable populations. Insurance illiteracy further complicates access, forcing many migrant and non-literate working classes to rely on middlemen. Without strict private sector regulation, OOPe is likely to increase due to inflated medical costs and uncovered

consumables. Coverage for Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) workers and grass-root health-care providers remains uncertain. Compounding these issues is outdated data –the last Census was in 2011, and the Periodic Labour Force Survey was in 2020-21 – hindering efficient allocation and utilisation of social protection schemes.

**Lessons from global models**  
Global experiences warn against an over-reliance on private insurance. In the U.S., insurance-driven pricing has led to skyrocketing health-care costs, widening inequalities, and limiting access for uninsured individuals. Public outcry over claim denials highlights the risks of corporate control over health care.

India can learn from countries such as Thailand (tax funded universal coverage scheme) and Costa Rica's Mandatory insurance scheme (Caja Costarricense de Seguro Social). Both rely on general tax revenue, strong public health investments, and regulated private insurance, prioritising primary care and community-based services.

As India navigates urban and health-care transitions shaped by the Budget and policy, it must reassess priorities. Instead of disproportionately favouring tertiary private health care through insurance models, the government must invest in preventive, community-based care that is accessible to all. Policies must address the health-care needs of informal workers, the unemployed, migrants, and vulnerable populations, especially with rising climate-related health risks.

Comprehensive public health benefit packages, cost-control mechanisms, and programmes to reduce OOPe are essential for achieving UHC. Safeguards must be in place to prevent private insurance from driving up health-care costs, ensuring India's commitment to 'Health for All' remains more than just a slogan.





# Tackling the problem of nutrition

While health was not a priority for Budget 2025, it seems that nutrition is. In the coming financial year, two Union government schemes will receive higher allocations – Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0. But will this fix India's nutrition challenge?

Nutrition in India is not just about food insecurity, but also about dietary habits shaped by culture, caste, and gender relations. Only one aspect of the nutrition challenge receives most of the policy focus – malnutrition among women and children. Women outside of the reproductive age, men, and senior citizens rarely figure in national nutrition policy discussions. More importantly, we ignore diabetes, hypertension, and other lifestyle-induced non-communicable diseases which are really another manifestation of under nutrition. One type of nutrition deficiency is because some people just don't have enough to eat and the other type is because people are not eating sufficient nutritionally rich food. The outcomes are damning in unique ways.

India has among the world's highest share of malnourished children and anaemic women. According to the National Family Health Survey-5, 36% of children under five are stunted and a meagre 11% who are breastfed between the ages of 6 months and 23 months receive an adequate diet. Fifty-seven percent of women in the 15-49 age group are anaemic. There is a rise in the share of those with diabetes, hypertension, and other such lifestyle-diet induced non-communicable diseases (NCDs). 24% of women and 23% men in India are overweight or obese and 14% take medicines for diabetes.

**A comprehensive agenda**  
Poshan 2.0 and Saksham Anganwadi offer more of the same solutions – take-home rations, supplementary foods, tracking of



**Priyadarshini Singh**  
Fellow, Centre for Social and Economic Progress. Views are personal

A comprehensive nutrition agenda, not targeted intervention, will address malnutrition

severe and acute malnutrition cases, iron and folic acid tablets etc. With Poshan 2.0, there is additional focus on aspirational districts and the north-eastern region. But these schemes reinforce the idea that malnutrition is a problem only in certain parts of India and only in certain segments of the population. Instead, what we need is a comprehensive nutrition agenda in which nutrition is identified as a public health problem that impacts people across the social strata.

A comprehensive agenda would recognise the nutrition needs of different segments of the society. It must consist of: first, a clear identification of nutrition needs beyond reproductive and child health; second, a broad set of solutions, particularly rooted in the local food systems; and third, a clear identification of locally embedded facilities to deliver nutrition services. We need most work in identifying local institutional linkage for the agenda. Who will implement this in our neighbourhoods every day? The clear answer is: the health and wellness centres (HWCs).

At present, we provide supplementary nutrition for pregnant and lactating mothers and young children through take-home rations, iron and folic acid tablets for adolescent girls at Anganwadi centres (AWCs); and mid-day meals for children in schools. We need to systematically expand the nutrition-focused activities to other segments of the population and involve HCWs and ACWs. The mix of nutrients which goes in the take-home ration for poor women is relevant for pregnant women from all strata of society. Food items which use locally available low-cost, nutrient-dense produce need to be emphasised for the middle classes too, which consume sugar-laden, fibre-poor packaged goods.

For HWCs to implement this agenda, they need to be in

sufficient numbers to cover the entire population. Each of them has to have a detailed set of nutrition services covering the entire catchment population. At present, the spread of HWCs is lopsided. Rural areas seem to have them in excess when compared to urban ones. And within rural areas, some areas have a higher concentration of HWCs.

Nutrition services in HWCs are limited. HWCs are supposed to provide nutrition advice to pregnant women and lactating women, adolescents and children, the elderly population, and those recuperating from disease, disaster and trauma. But these are not implemented consistently or systematically.

We also need dedicated staff to provide nutrition services at the HWCs. In the existing design, nutrition is a tiny part of the responsibilities of the multi-purpose worker.

**Factors for success**  
The success of the nutrition agenda will depend on two factors: engaging with local elites; and linking nutrition practices with local cuisines. Professor Prerna Singh at Brown University demonstrates in her research on small pox vaccination that there was significant variation in the uptake of vaccination during the 1950s among equally placed countries such as India and China. Some got their population vaccinated earlier and faster than others. Those that did were countries where the vaccination interventions were publicly owned by local elites and connected with local health practices and ideas.

India is a rapidly transforming society. We have to push further with the HWC approach of imagining health as wellbeing and not just an absence of illness. A locally owned, comprehensive nutrition agenda for all strata of society delivered by the primary health system is a first step in this direction.

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# Should cancer be a notifiable disease?

An effective approach would be to expand the National Cancer Registry Programme

C. Aravinda

Time and again, there have been calls to designate cancer as a notifiable disease in India. While some argue that this would enhance surveillance and treatment, the Union government has resisted the move, saying the practice is to notify only infectious diseases and that cancer is non-communicable and not infectious.

Recent shifts in disease notification policies raise questions about whether this reasoning still holds. In 2024, the government asked all the States to make snakebites a notifiable disease. This trend is not unique to India. In 1995, the U.S. became the first country to list lead poisoning as a notifiable disease, establishing a precedent for the surveillance of non-communicable diseases. This evolution in public health policy forces a critical examination of whether cancers warrant notification for surveillance in India.

The primary purpose of disease notification is to ensure that contagious diseases are kept under check. Notification of infectious diseases is a legal mandate and compels physicians to report designated diseases to public health authorities, failing which they could face legal consequences. Unlike infectious diseases, cancer does not pose an immediate threat to public health through direct transmission and sudden deaths. It is a diverse group of diseases rather than a single condition, and its detection often requires complex diagnostic procedures. Proponents of making cancer notifiable argue that mandatory reporting could enhance early detection and resource allocation.

However, there are fundamental issues with this approach. First, cancer is not a single-point diagnosis. Arguably, cancers as a disease are more diverse ranging from benign to malignant. Notifiability triggers rapid containment measures, whereas cancer requires long-term management rather than emergency interventions. Legal obligations on physicians could impose a burden that does not translate into improved patient care.

India's National Cancer Registry Programme (since 1982) functions as a data collection mechanism, compiling crucial information on the demographics of cancer patients, cancer identification including type, stage, and morphology, the timing of diagnosis and staging at the time of detection, treatment details such as chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery, and follow-up and survival outcomes. The NCRP includes hospital-based registries, which collect data from cancer-treating hospitals, and population-based registries, which capture cancer incidence in a defined geographic area.

There are 269 hospital-based and 38 population-based registries as of 2022, which is insufficient. Hospital-based registries should be expanded to every cancer-treating hospital, including all district headquarters hospitals. Similarly, population-based registries should be established in every district, ensuring at least one unit per district for comprehensive nationwide cancer surveillance. Rather than legally mandating notification, strengthening existing cancer registries is a more thorough and effective alternative.

Second, making cancer a notifiable disease also raises privacy concerns. Notifiability generally does not account for

privacy because disease notification is meant to preserve public health over individual confidentiality. There is still stigma attached to cancer.

Many State public health acts still contain provisions that give sweeping powers to local authorities during a health emergency. While much of this has been rendered toothless over time, the legal precedent remains. Introducing cancer into such a framework could further deepen the reluctance among patients to come forward for diagnosis and treatment, making it counterproductive and potentially deterring patients from seeking timely treatment due to stigma and discrimination. The World Health Organization advocates mainly cancer registries, which mention notification as an option at the individual level alone.

An effective approach would be to expand the NCRP to ensure comprehensive data collection at all tertiary and district hospitals. Improving cancer screening initiatives would ensure early detection. Strengthening reporting mechanisms without legal mandates would allow oncologists and healthcare providers to contribute accurate data voluntarily rather than reporting under duress. Mandatory notification remains an apt approach suited for single-point, outbreak-prone diseases. For cancer, a well-structured registry system, bolstered by wider hospital participation, including private hospitals and robust follow-up mechanisms, offers a far superior solution to improving cancer surveillance in India.

Dr. C. Aravinda is an academic and public health physician. Views are personal



# A U-turn that has left a void in Ukraine's defence against Russia

The U.S., which is the lead supplier of Ukraine's warplanes, sensors, missiles, armoured vehicles, and air defence, has changed its position in the UNGA

## DATA POINT

Nitika Francis

On February 24, for the first time, the U.S. voted against the peaceful resolution of the Russia-Ukraine war. This vote, along with its decision on March 4 to pause military aid, shows a marked shift in the U.S.'s policy towards Ukraine, which has depended heavily on it throughout the war for its military needs.

Among the 176 member countries of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) that participated in the draft resolution, Advancing a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine, 93 voted in favour, while 65 countries, including India, abstained from voting.

Only 18 countries voted against the resolution. The U.S. was joined by Russia, North Korea, and Belarus, countries with which it has never once agreed on Ukraine-related decisions. Its decision clashed with those of countries that had aligned with the U.S. in over 80% of the UNGA resolutions in the past, including Canada, Britain, Australia, and France. **Chart 1** shows the share (in %) of countries which voted in favour of Ukraine and against it in UN resolutions regarding the country.

The U.S.'s U-turn has implications for Ukraine, which is still trying to defend itself against Russian invasion. Ever since Russia's initial occupation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, over 40 countries have extended financial, humanitarian, and military aid to Ukraine. The U.S.'s total contribution of €114 billion is the largest since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. It remains the leading donor in military, humanitarian, and financial aid to Ukraine in this period. European nations have to-gether contributed €132 billion.

**Chart 2** shows the top five countries that have donated mili-

tary aid to Ukraine since 2022 (in %). The U.S. has donated €64 billion, more than half of all the military aid received by Ukraine during the war. The U.K. is at a distant second, having donated about 10% of the total amount.

In fact, backed mainly by the U.S., Ukraine became the largest importer of major arms in the world in the 2020-24 period, a nearly 100-fold rise compared with the figures of 2015-19. U.S. military aid has given Ukraine some vital arms and ammunition, especially missiles, which Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said "will do all the talking".

**Chart 3** shows the U.S.'s share in Ukraine's imports across various categories of weapons since the start of the war. The U.S. supplies over 70% of the aircraft used by Ukraine in the war and leads in providing weapons across most categories, including sensors (63%), missiles (55%), armoured vehicles (41%), and air defence systems (28%). However, it does not hold the largest share in artillery, which is primarily supplied by Poland, or in engines, where Germany accounts for about 40% of the supply. The arms supply data includes arms supplied and arms that countries have committed to supplying.

U.S. President Donald Trump's announcement that the U.S. will be pausing military aid following his clash with Mr. Zelenskyy at the White House comes at a critical time. The outnumbered Ukrainian military forces and civilians continue to suffer casualties.

**Chart 4** shows the number of civilian fatalities and injuries in Ukraine per month since February 24, 2022. While the number of fatalities, which peaked in March 2022, has decreased since the beginning of the war, an average of about 172 civilians have been killed in Ukraine every month over the past year. A total of 12,605 civilians have been killed since February 2022.

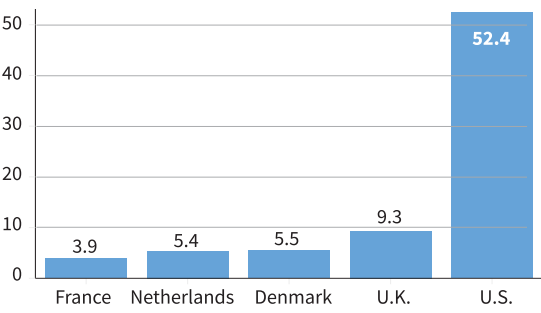
## Left high and dry

The data for the charts were sourced from United Nations, OHCHR, and Kiel Institute for the World Economy

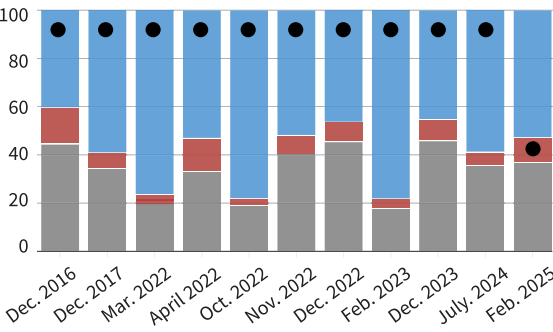


**Tensions escalate:** A demonstrator holds signs during a protest outside the U.S. Embassy as President Trump holds talks regarding a possible ceasefire, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Kyiv, Ukraine March 15, 2025. REUTERS

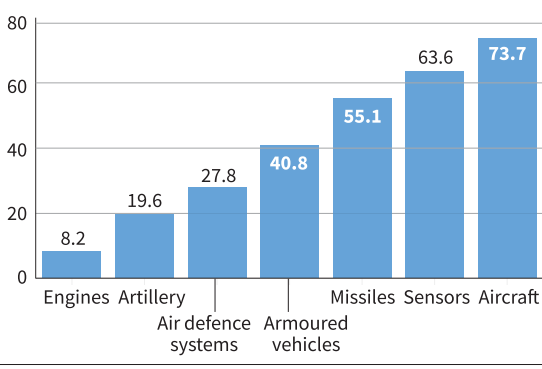
**Chart 2:** Top five countries that have donated military aid to Ukraine since 2022 (as a % of total contribution)



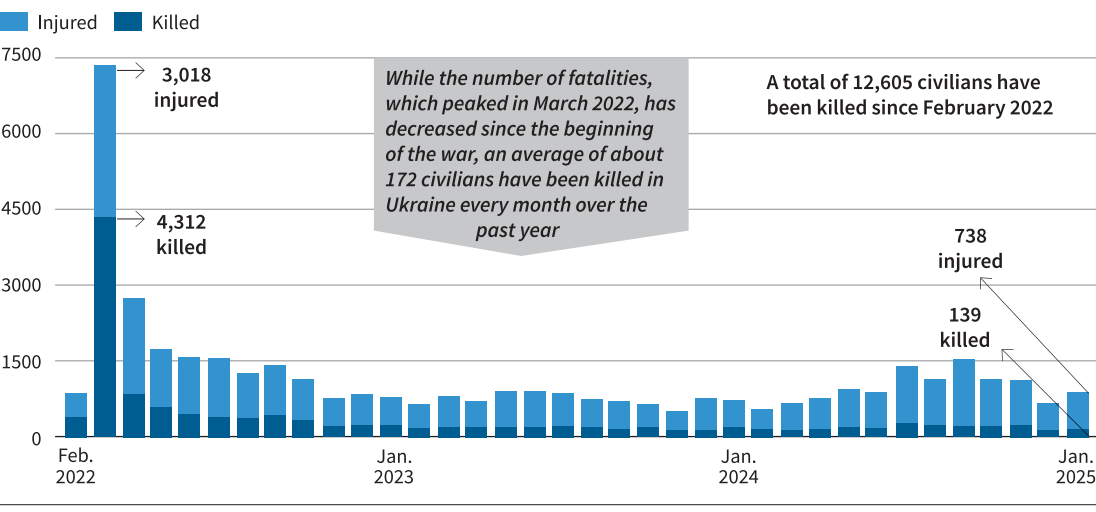
**Chart 1:** Share (in %) of countries that voted in favour of Ukraine and against it in UN resolutions regarding the country. Legend: Blue = Favour, Red = Against, Grey = Abstained, Black dot = How the U.S. voted



**Chart 3:** U.S.'s share (in %) in Ukraine's imports across various categories of weapons since the start of the war



**Chart 4:** Number of civilian fatalities and injuries in Ukraine per month since February 24, 2022





# Text & Context

## Death toll from tornadoes and storms across the central U.S.

**33** Eight people died in Kansas in a crash involving more than 50 vehicles, caused by low visibility during a “severe dust storm” and Missouri State Highway Patrol confirmed 12 storm-related fatalities. The police also reported downed trees and power lines, as well as damage to buildings. AFF

# What is Elon Musk’s Starlink all about?

What is Starlink, and how does it work? Why does it face regulatory hurdles in India? Why hasn’t India auctioned satellite spectrum? What impact could U.S. trade pressure have on Starlink’s approval? What government approvals does Starlink need?

EXPLAINER

Aroon Deep

**The story so far:**  
**B**harti Airtel and Reliance Jio have signed distribution pacts with SpaceX Corp.’s Starlink service to bring satellite internet access to India. The distribution pacts are a reversal from the telecom industry’s reluctance to quickly make the Starlink service available in India without auctions for the satellite airwaves.

**What is Starlink?**  
Starlink is a low-earth orbit constellation of over 7,000 satellites that provide internet access to users with ground terminals, which the Elon Musk-owned SpaceX is already selling in around 40 countries. The satellites constantly orbit the earth, blanketing practically its entire habitable surface with coverage, as long as a given terminal on the ground has visibility to the sky.  
The service offers speeds of around 100 megabits per second, comparable with many home broadband connections. However, the “latency,” or the time it takes for a given data packet to travel between a user and terrestrial internet networks, is higher than wired broadband connections in offices and homes.  
Satellites work in conjunction with ground stations on earth, which are physically connected to the internet like any other network and beam up connections wirelessly to satellites above them at any given point.  
In India, Starlink may not be that useful in cities and towns with good 5G connectivity or wired broadband coverage, as local speeds and reliability will far exceed what a satellite link currently offers, even with technological advancements. However, in rural and remote areas where “terrestrial” networks have not penetrated deeply,



**Entry delayed:** In India, Starlink has faced several regulatory hurdles. REUTERS  
Join FREE Whatsapp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Van2VRb6RGJOKH6oBd0F>  
Starlink can offer decent connectivity almost instantly.

**How much does Starlink cost?**  
There are two costs associated with Starlink: the user terminal – essentially a router – required to access the satellite network and the monthly access fee to stay connected. At present, a residential kit in parts of the U.S. costs \$149, while a portable “roaming” kit costs \$349. Import duty, GST and social welfare surcharges applicable on satellite equipment may push up the hardware price by around 30%.  
Without any introductory pricing on the hardware, the equipment may cost anywhere between ₹17,000 and ₹40,000, not including shipping costs from the U.S., where it is developed and manufactured.  
Besides this, unlimited residential and roaming plans range from \$120-\$165 in the U.S. It is not a given that this price will be any lower in India, as the cost to provide Starlink service is, by nature of the technology, the same everywhere on earth. Notably, in Bhutan, where Starlink launched this year, it is priced at 4,200 to 8,400 ngultrum, which may be an

indication of the Indian price as well. The Bhutanese currency is pegged to the rupee at parity.  
A higher-priced plan for users on the move, called “mobile priority” is available at 21,000 ngultrum (or therefore rupees) per month and offers priority access in case of network congestion.

**When will Starlink be available in India?**  
Starlink has faced several regulatory hurdles, the sharpest among them being the Indian government’s heavy scrutiny of internet services in general and a technology that could provide access anywhere in the country in particular.  
SpaceX needs to obtain a Global Mobile Personal Communications by Satellite (GMPCS) authorisation under the Telecommunications Act, 2023. While this authorisation existed in a different form under the Telegraph Act, 1885, the updated rules under the new Act have yet to be published, and it is unclear if the government will issue such an authorisation under the previous law’s subordinate legislation, even though it remains technically in force.  
As a part of this authorisation, SpaceX

had to convince the Indian government to accept its contentions on revealing corporate ownership data, something it resisted on investor privacy grounds abroad. While reports suggest that this particular hurdle has been passed, the company still needs to obtain a security clearance from the Ministry of Home Affairs. It remains unclear if such a clearance has been obtained.

It is also uncertain whether the company’s ground stations in India – where the Telecom Act requires tapping equipment installed onsite to give law enforcement authorities access to the network, a requirement that exists for other internet networks as well – are currently operational.

Finally, Starlink also needs to be allotted wireless spectrum through which it can offer its services. The government has indicated that like other countries, it will not auction this spectrum, as these are narrow beams that can be shared with other providers, unlike the signals emitted by telecom towers on the ground. Telcos have – before tying up with Starlink this year – demanded that this spectrum be auctioned, something that would be a global first. Reliance Jio has commissioned legal opinions that state that auction is the only way to allot satellite spectrum, due to the Supreme Court’s 2012 judgment in the 2G scam case, where the top court held that all scarce natural resources must be allocated by auction.

It is unclear if these hurdles will be cleared on time. However, Mr. Musk’s ascendancy in the U.S. government, along with trade pressure from President Donald Trump’s administration, has boosted speculation that the government may facilitate Starlink’s entry in short order.

Aside from Airtel and Jio’s commercial distribution agreements, there have not been any official announcements on forward movement from a regulatory point of view.

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## THE GIST

- ▼ Starlink needs GMPCS authorisation, security clearance, and spectrum allocation, but government scrutiny and legal challenges have delayed its approval in India.
- ▼ It is more useful in rural areas than in cities with strong 5G and broadband.
- ▼ Airtel and Jio have signed distribution agreements with Starlink, despite earlier demands for a spectrum auction. Government decisions on spectrum allocation and U.S. trade pressure may influence Starlink’s entry.

# Is Syria heading toward peace or more chaos?

Can the interim government rebuild Syria’s economy?

Franciszek Snarski

**The story so far:**  
**S**yria has entered a three-month period of political and military uncertainty following the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s regime in December 2024. Interim President Ahmed al-Sharaa is seeking international legitimacy while navigating internal instability. His government has reached a significant agreement with the U.S.-backed Kurdish Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), integrating their military and administrative structures into the Syrian state. However, conflict persists, with Israel expanding control in the Golan Heights under the pretext of counterterrorism. The country’s economy remains crippled by Assad-era sanctions, hindering reconstruction efforts.

**Who leads the Syrian government?**  
Since the overthrow of Mr. Assad’s regime, power has transitioned to an interim government led by Mr. al-Sharaa, leader of Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS).

Despite its militant origins, HTS has rebranded itself as a governing authority, pledging to respect minority rights. However, the new administration lacks full territorial control. Mr. Assad’s loyalists continue to operate in the coastal region of Latakia, while the SDF operate in the northeastern semi-independent Rojava region.

**What is the current state of conflict?**  
Although the Syrian Arab Army (SAA) largely disintegrated after Mr. Assad’s departure, loyalist cells continue resisting, particularly in Latakia, an Alawite stronghold. The situation is complicated by ongoing hostilities in the northeast, where the Turkish-backed Syrian National Army (SNA) continues shelling SDF positions as part of Ankara’s broader strategy to curb Kurdish influence. Israel has intensified military operations, launching over 400 airstrikes in December 2024, targeting military facilities, airports, warships and infrastructure. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) subsequently advanced beyond the

United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) buffer zone in the Golan Heights. The invasion of the UNDOF zone, has been condemned by the UN as a violation of international law. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu justified the operation as a preventive measure against “terrorist threats” and demanded that the new Syrian government demilitarise the region south of Damascus.

**What about reports of Alawite massacres?**  
Sectarian violence has escalated in Latakia since December, with reports of massacres against the Alawite community. The U.K.-based Syrian Human Rights Observatory reported that 1,383 civilians have been killed by government-allied groups and Mr. Assad’s loyalists.  
The international community has raised concerns over potential revenge killings, given HTS’s historically Sunni Islamist ideology. Critics argue that many government security officers remain HTS loyalists, fuelling suspicions of targeted reprisals. However, Mr. al-Sharaa has

denied any state involvement, attributing the start to the unrest to misinformation campaigns allegedly linked to Russia and Iran.

**Why is Syria at risk of further violence?**  
Syria remains one of the poorest states in the world, with over 90% of the population living under the poverty line. Combined with the factor of hundreds of thousands of combatants, whose previous political-military structures have disintegrated, wandering around the country without employment or security, the region remains ripe for new waves of violence. These issues could be alleviated, if Assad-era international sanctions on Syria’s economy were lifted, nevertheless, they remain in place, as foreign leaders remain cautious of the new government. Mr. al-Sharaa has called for the reconsideration of sanction regime, with the first steps being taken by the U.K. and Canada, easing the trade restrictions on key petroleum companies and Syrian Central Bank.

Ultimately, Syria’s future hinges on the drafting and enforcement of a new constitution that guarantees minority rights and national sovereignty. Whether the interim government can consolidate power, gain international recognition, rebuild the economy and prevent further fragmentation remains uncertain, but the coming months will be critical in determining Syria’s path forward.  
*Franciszek Snarski is currently interning for The Hindu*

## THE GIST

- ▼ After Assad’s fall in December 2024, interim leader Ahmed al-Sharaa struggles to consolidate control, with loyalist resistance, Kurdish integration, and ongoing regional conflicts shaping Syria’s fragile stability.
- ▼ Fighting continues in key areas like Latakia, while Israeli military actions and Turkish-backed offensives add to instability; meanwhile, international sanctions and economic collapse hinder Syria’s reconstruction efforts.



KEYWORD



Thulasi Kakkat

# The Three Ambedkars: force, energy, and pragmatism in action

Ambedkar’s philosophy was influenced by John Dewey’s pragmatism, emphasising individual moral agency and the fight against caste oppression; through reflexive morality, reconstructive rhetoric, navayana Buddhism, he redefined social justice, using strategic discourse and pragmatic thought

Nikhil Sanjay-Rekha Adsule

Last December, on the serene campus of Columbia University, one friend asked me to describe Dr. B. R. Ambedkar in two words. I immediately responded – force and energy. These two secular terms summate the principled and organic idea of Ambedkar. Looking at it as a verb removes the zeal to barricade him into a sectarian idea. My thinking-doing Ambedkar is derived from these two enlightened ideas. This is what Dr. Ambedkar, as a noun, expected from his followers. So, it becomes essential to dissect these – force and energy.

For two years now, I have been reading Professor John Dewey’s texts as a scholar interested in understanding the shades of pragmatism, its critique(s) and its impact on the constitution of the verb – Ambedkar. In light of this, I believe Prof. Scott R. Stroud’s recent work ‘*The Evolution of Pragmatism in India: Ambedkar, Dewey, and the Rhetoric of Reconstruction*’ is essential for understanding the dialectics of the philosophy of pragmatism and Ambedkar. It is a necessary addition to the scholarship on Ambedkar, an attempt to infuse fresh thinking into understanding his philosophy and politics.

Triratna of pragmatism

It is a fact that Prof. Dewey was one of the teachers of young Bhimrao at Columbia University. Also, there are various copies of Professor Dewey’s works and their updated editions in Dr. Ambedkar’s collection. Dr Ambedkar also marked these copies, showing his protracted engagement with Prof. Dewey’s ideas and those of other thinkers of his time. So, it becomes crucial to understand the intellectual interplay between Dr. Ambedkar and Prof. Dewey’s ideas of pragmatism.

My reading in delineating the

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hermeneutics of force and energy shall foreground the concept of the Three Ambedkars to understand these complex engagements in a simple framework. These Three Ambedkars embody the principles of pragmatic philosophy that Dr. Ambedkar often used as part of his strategic approach.

Reflexive moral

Dr. Ambedkar owned a copy of Prof. John Dewey’s classic, *A Theory of Ethics*, doing multiple readings. His underlining of the text with different coloured pencils shows his constant engagement with it. The text says that moral laws are the principles on which actions are based. Any moral judgement is made by duly weighing the consequences of the actions a person or an individual could take. This underscores an individual’s self-agency in exercising their choices.

In his classic treatise, *Annihilation of Caste*, Dr. Ambedkar, inspired by Deweyan pragmatism, highlights the *modus operandi* of the caste system. He stresses that it is the individual agency that caste inhibits, ultimately denying a person their freedom. This divinely sanctioned, dogmatic, and systemic caste takes away individuality in thought and action. Reflexive morality, which gives the discretion of choice, the edifice on which the idea of freedom is based, is denied to a person. The person is crushed under the burden of hegemonic customary laws that are motivated by parochial dogmas, energised by the motivation – maintaining a stagnant, graded, unequal caste system. A holy system wherein birth decides the worth by the caste into which they are born.

Reconstructive rhetorical

In communication studies, the term rhetoric means persuasive communication using the instruments of text, speech, images, and other mediums. Dr. Ambedkar uses this technique

inspired by Deweyan pragmatism to reconstruct a gender-biased and casteist society. Knowing the limitations, he employs them selectively in his writings, speeches, and actions. The two examples illustrate this: the battle of Bhima Koregaon, and his brilliant lecture ‘Ranade, Gandhi and Jinnah’, delivered in 1943 at the Gokhale Memorial Hall.

Dr. Ambedkar transformed the 1818 Battle of Bhima Koregaon – which marked the decline of Brahminical Peshwa rule – into a symbol of poetic justice. He visited the memorial in 1927. The untouchables on whom the Peshwas vigorously imposed the unjust caste system were defeated by the untouchables. Dr. Ambedkar initiated a new discourse for the untouchables, which imbibed them with the martial spirit of self-worth and strength. He was a persuasive rhetor and mentioned this battle again at the Round Table Conference in London in 1930. Many scholars may accuse it of fallibilism, but it is one of the crucial techniques that reconstructive rhetorics employ to achieve their pragmatic end.

In the second case, delivering his address in Pune, he employs the Buddhist technique of democratic deliberation, foregrounding a unique dialectical play of truth and opinion. The many references and citations, especially those of Jyotirao Phule and Thomas Carlyle, show his repertoire of pragmatism – psychological and intellectual rigour and its effective deployment to meet the desired end.

Navayana pragmatist Ambedkar

One of Dr. Ambedkar’s most critical applications of pragmatism was his reconstruction of Buddha. There are many claims, and they have been accepted too, that Dr. Ambedkar was introduced to Buddhism by Keluskar Guruji very early. But, Keluskar’s writings presented Buddha as a theological and divine figure. However, Dr. Ambedkar’s

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quest for conversion and search for a religion that balances the principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity started after his famous Yeola speech of 1936, where he announced that he would quit the Hindu religion.

A key example of his pragmatic approach to reconstructing Buddha is found in his posthumously published work, ‘*The Buddha and His Dhamma*’. Siddhartha Gautama leaves his princely abode to avert the *vitikkamma* (state of war) between Shakyas and Koliyas due to a dispute arising from the sharing of waters of river Rohini and not for the search of enlightenment as presented in theological versions. Many such pragmatism-inspired instances twist the banal theological discourses. Thus, Dr. Ambedkar employs various tools of pragmatism to foreground his principled, organic navayana Buddhism to annihilate the gender, caste, religion and class structural inequalities.

In the above discussion, I am not proposing the singularity of pragmatism or Prof. Dewey to analyse Dr. Ambedkar. This force-energy is a constitution of multi-varied entities, chiefly from the reservoir of Buddha, Kabir, and Phule. However, one cannot neglect other influences on him – the theories, scholars, his contemporaries and spatialities, while mainly grappling with the issues of politics and economics in the contemporary realm of gender and caste, succinctly put by the late Prof. Sharmila Rege, ideas on class and left delineated by late Prof. Gail Omvedt, V. Geetha and others. It would be better to read Dr. Ambedkar and the influence of Prof. Dewey’s Pragmatism on him as an intellectual exercise that helped him craft his response to the pressing issues of humanity to reclaim the lost ideals of *Manuski*, which assume more importance today.

Nikhil Sanjay-Rekha Adsule is a Senior Research Scholar, IIT-Delhi



From Page One

# Global intelligence chiefs converge in Delhi meet

Counterterrorism and intelligence-sharing systems among issues discussed at the conference, which is held a day before Raisina Dialogue; Tulsi Gabbard, Five Eyes chiefs among attendees

Dinakar Peri  
NEW DELHI

Global challenges and intelligence-sharing mechanisms, as well as immigration and extradition, were among a host of issues discussed at the fourth conference of global intelligence and security chiefs hosted by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval on Sunday. The meeting had over 28 attendees, according to official sources.

The conference is usually held a day before the annual three-day Raisina Dialogue, which is scheduled this year from March 17 to 19. This year's conference and the Dialogue are being held amid the global uncertainties caused by U.S. President Donald Trump's policies and the resultant ripple effects in major issues across the globe.

"The top points on the agenda were counterterrorism, Indo-Pacific cooperation, global challenges, global security and intel-sharing mechanisms,



**Building ties:** U.S. Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard met PM Modi last month during his visit to Washington DC. AFP

immigration and extradition, and transnational crimes, narcotics and terror funding," an official source in the know said. Intelligence sharing on transnational crimes and counterterrorism were the key issues for India, another official said.

Around 20 countries were represented at the conference, including the U.S., Canada, Australia, and Russia, it was learnt. U.S. Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard attended the meeting and reportedly also held talks

with Mr. Doval. She was also scheduled to speak at the Raisina Dialogue.

"I am Wheels Up on a multi-nation trip to the Indo-Pacific, a region I know very well having grown up as a child of the Pacific. I'll be going to Japan, Thailand, and India, with a brief stop in France en route back to DC. Building strong relationships, understanding, and open lines of communication are vital to achieving President Trump's objectives of peace, freedom and prosperity...." Ms. Gabbard

posted on X on March 11 before beginning her trip.

The chiefs of the Five Eyes countries, comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the U.S., were all present, though it was not clear if a separate meeting of the Five Eyes chiefs with Mr. Doval was in the offing.

The visit of Canadian spy chief Daniel Rogers has come as India looks to reset its with Ottawa after a deep freeze in bilateral relationship over Hardeep Singh Nijjar murder case.

The conference is organised by the country's external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS) that reports to Mr. Doval.

The meet was held for the first time in April 2022 a day before the start of the Raisina Dialogue, India's flagship conference on geopolitics and geo-strategy, organised by the Ministry of External Affairs in collaboration with the Observer Research Foundation.

## Every attempt for peace met with hostility: PM

"That is why we actively work towards dialogue. Instead of discord, we stress on dialogue, because only through dialogue can we build a stable cooperative relationship that serves the best interests of both nations," he added.

The Prime Minister noted that his October, 2024 talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping are bearing fruit. "After my recent meeting with President Xi, we have seen a return to normalcy at the border. We are now working to restore conditions to how they were before 2020," he said, referring to the clashes at the Line of Actual Control in 2020 that led to deaths on both sides for the first time since 1975. "Slowly but surely, trust, enthusiasm, and energy should return. But of course, it will take some time, as there has been a five-year gap," Mr. Modi added.

Mr. Modi said he shares a bond of mutual trust with U.S. President Donald Trump and they connect well because they believe in putting their respective national interests above everything else. Mr. Modi hailed Mr. Trump as a man of courage, who took his own decisions, and was unwaveringly dedicated to the United States.

"Even after being shot, he remained unwaveringly dedicated to America. His life was for his nation. This showed his America First spirit, just as I believe in nation first, India first," Mr. Modi said. "I stand for India first and that's why we connect so well," he added.

The Prime Minister said President Trump appeared far more prepared than before in his second term. "He has a clear roadmap in his mind with well-defined steps, each one designed to lead him toward his goals," he said. He also recalled his meetings with key members of the Trump administration during his recent visit to the U.S., including Vice President J.D. Vance, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, Vivek Ramaswamy and Elon Musk. "I truly believe he has put together a strong, capable group. And with such a team, I feel they are capable of implementing President Trump's vision," Mr. Modi said.

## 'Tamil letter in logo to assert language policy'

Mr. Stalin said it was made into 'big news' by "those who did not like the Tamil language."

"That was nothing. I had released the logo for the budget. We incorporated 'ந' to show how assertive we are in our language policy. That was it. But, those who did not like Tamil, they made it into big news!" Mr. Stalin said.

In a video clip of the *Ungalil Oruvan* Q&A posted on his social media handle, he recalled having pleaded with the Centre over several demands, including releasing of funds towards the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, and disaster management, school education, among others.

"The Union Finance Minister, who did not respond to all those, has spoken about this. Even she has mentioned '₹' in many of her posts. Everyone uses the simple 'Rs.' in English to denote rupees," he said. "In all, our Budget as well as Tamil are a hit nationally," Mr. Stalin said.

To a query on the preparations for the State budget, Mr. Stalin said inputs from members of the Chief Minister's economic advisory committees, responses from the grassroots of the society, and case studies from other States and countries were considered. Ministers and officials brainstormed for several days in the evenings in the Secretariat to finalise the State budget for 2025-26, he said.

### 'Receiving feedback'

Citing the budget coverage reports of many newspapers, including *The Hindu* and *The Hindu BusinessLine*, Mr. Stalin said feedback from various sections of society underline the response to the budget. He also recalled how he took feedback from social media while finalising the budget.

When he came across the news that Telangana was proposing to allow members of the transgender community in regulating traffic, Mr. Stalin said: "I thought we should do the same in Tamil Nadu too and that is how we decided to induct them in the Home Guards." Responding to criticism by the Opposition, Mr. Stalin said: "If the criticism is constructive, we can consider it. If they are making criticism with only negativity, it only shows their angst against the government."

## Centre has approved Chandrayaan-5 mission: ISRO

Press Trust of India  
CHENNAI

The Centre has recently accorded approval for the ambitious Chandrayaan-5 mission to study the moon, ISRO Chairman V. Narayanan said on Sunday.

At an event to felicitate him for taking over as the Chairman of the Bengaluru-headquartered Indian Space Research Organisation, Mr. Narayanan said that unlike the Chandrayaan-3 mission which carried the 25-kilogram rover 'Prayagyaan', the Chandrayaan-5 mission would carry a 250-kg rover to study the moon's surface.

The Chandrayaan-4 Mission, expected to be launched in 2027, aims to bring samples collected from the moon.

# In a 2014 judgment, Supreme Court had favoured ‘linguistic secularism’

NEWS ANALYSIS

Krishnadas Rajagopal  
NEW DELHI

The debate over the language formula in the National Education Policy rages, though the Supreme Court had favoured “linguistic secularism”, or the acceptance of the legitimate aspirations of the speakers of different languages in India, in a 2014 judgment.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has accused the Centre of imposing Hindi through the National Education Policy at the cost of “totally destroying Tamil Nadu’s progress in education”.

The court in *U.P. Hindi Sahitya Sammelan vs State of U.P.* in September 2014 had observed that the mode of development or evolution of both law and language in the country was “organic”. Indian language laws, the court said, were “not rigid but accommodative – the object being to secure linguistic secularism”.

The judgment referred to Constitutional expert



The court said Indian language laws were not rigid but accommodative. FILE PHOTO

H.M. Seervai’s commentary on the conflict which arose in the Constituent Assembly in 1949 over the question of Hindi as a “national language”. A compromise proposed in the Munshi-Ayyangar formula led to the inclusion of Article 343 in the Constitution declaring Hindi in the Devanagari script as the official language of the Union.

‘Official language’

“Though Hindi was selected as the official language, it could not be described as the national language, for, it was not the language generally spoken in all parts of India, and though spoken by the largest sin-

gle group of people, that group did not constitute the majority of people in India. Besides, there were regional languages such as Bengali in Bengal, Tamil in Madras, and Marathi and Gujarati in the erstwhile State of Bombay which were spoken by large populations and it was claimed for those languages that they were more developed than Hindi. Hindi was therefore described as the official language,” the judgment quoted from Mr. Seervai’s commentary.

Article 351 however imposes a “duty” on the Union government to promote the spread of the Hindi language. However, the Allahabad High Court, in its 1982 judgment in *Sunil K.R. Sahastrabudhey vs Director, IIT Kanpur*, observed that “although Hindi is the national language of India and Article 351 lays down a duty on the Union to promote the spread of Hindi language to develop it so that it may serve as a medium of expression for all the elements of the composite culture of India, there is no right conferred on any citizen to compel an institution to impart

education in that particular language”.

Besides, Article 29(1) of the Constitution recognised that “every section of the society which has a distinct language script or culture of its own” has the fundamental right to conserve the same.

“This is a right which is conferred on both majority and minority,” the top court had underscored.

The Supreme court, while responding to whether a student or a parent or a citizen has a right to choose the medium of instruction at primary school level in *State of Karnataka vs Associated Management of Primary & Secondary Schools*, said the fundamental right to speech and expression under Article 19 included the freedom of a primary class student to choose the language of instruction. The court said the state cannot impose control over such a choice.

In this, the court had taken a leaf from the U.S. Supreme Court’s conclusion in *Pierce v. Society of Sisters of Holy Names* in 1924 that “a child is not a mere creature of the State”.



# India, New Zealand resume trade deal talks after decade

The FTA negotiations aim to achieve balanced outcomes that enhance supply chain integration and improve market access, says Commerce Ministry after a meeting between Goyal and McClay

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

After a gap of about 10 years, India and New Zealand on Sunday announced resumption of negotiations for a proposed free trade agreement (FTA) to boost economic ties.

India and New Zealand began negotiating the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) in April 2010 to boost trade in goods, services, and investment. However, after 10 rounds of discussions, the talks stalled in February 2015.

“The two nations are pleased to announce the launch of negotiations for a comprehensive and mutually beneficial India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations,” the Commerce Ministry said.

The announcement was made after a meeting of Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and Todd McClay, New Zealand’s Minister for Trade and Investment.

Prime Minister of New Zealand Christopher Luxon is here on a four-day vi-



**Deep dive:** Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal with New Zealand Trade Minister Todd McClay in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI  
Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+Bu7senHpQdhlODg1> sit from Sunday.

“The India-New Zealand FTA negotiations aim to achieve balanced outcomes that enhance supply chain integration and improve market access,” it said. “With bilateral trade continuing to grow steadily, surpassing USD 1 billion during April-January 2025, the FTA negotiations aim to unlock new avenues for businesses and consumers, fostering mutual growth and prosperity of our nations,” Mr. Goyal said in a post on X.

According to think tank

Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI), a major challenge in the renewed talks will be the disparity in tariff structures.

**Common ground**  
New Zealand’s average import tariff is only 2.3%, with over half of its tariff lines already duty-free, meaning Indian goods already have substantial access to its market.

In contrast, India’s average tariff stands at 17.8%, meaning it would have to make significant reductions, making a traditional

FTA less attractive for India. “As talks resume, both countries will need to find common ground on these issues to move forward successfully,” GTRI founder Ajay Srivastava said.

He said earlier New Zealand was demanding greater access to India’s dairy market, which India resisted to protect its domestic dairy industry that supports millions of farmers.

Currently, India’s dairy imports from New Zealand are minimal (around \$0.57 million), and while India may consider limited imports of value-added dairy products, it remains firm against allowing raw dairy imports, he said. India was also reluctant to lower tariffs on New Zealand’s dairy, meat, and wine exports, while New Zealand pushed for more favourable trade terms.

“Pressure from the U.S. to open India’s dairy and agriculture sectors may also influence negotiations,” Mr. Srivastava said, adding that another key issue was India’s demand for easier movement of its skilled professionals and better access for its IT and services sector.

## Immunising the elderly is crucial for disease prevention, say experts

**The Hindu Bureau**  
CHENNAI

Vaccination is a crucial yet often overlooked health measure for the elderly in India. Despite the absence of a dedicated national immunisation schedule for the elderly in the country, doctors stress the need for proactive administration of vaccines to protect older adults from preventable diseases.

Elder care also extends beyond vaccination to include physical activity, nutrition, mental health support, and chronic disease management, doctors said at the webinar “Prevention of illness: immunising the elderly” organised by Naruvi Hospitals, Vellore, in collaboration with *The Hindu*, on Sunday, as part of the “Healthy India, Happy India” webinar series. This is the sixth in a series of 15 webinars aimed at promoting health aware-

ness and disease prevention. It featured four subject experts.

**Importance of vaccines**  
Kurien Thomas, senior consultant physician and clinical epidemiologist, Naruvi Hospitals, Vellore, introduced the importance of immunising the elderly.

Dr. Thomas emphasised the importance of the pneumococcal, Hib, and hepatitis vaccines in elder care, and pointed out that 50% of severe pneumonia cases occur in the elderly, making vaccination a life-saving measure.

Pneumonia remains a major health burden, with 156 million cases globally and 8,00,000 deaths annually in India.

Dilip Mathai, senior consultant in infectious diseases, Naruvi Hospitals, presented an overview of different vaccines and guidelines for immunisation of the elderly.



Dr. Mathai also addressed vaccine hesitancy, citing a survey that found 60% of adults believed there were better ways to protect their health than vaccination, while 43% felt they were not at risk of falling ill.

**Proper storage**  
Soumendra Nath Haldar, Assistant Professor, Department of Infectious Diseases and Advanced Microbiology, School of Tropical Medicine, Kolkata, spoke on vaccines for food and waterborne diseases. He stressed the need for vac-

cine clinics to provide immunisation for these diseases. He also explained the importance of proper storage, and cost-effective administration of vaccines.

Vasant C. Nagvekar, infectious diseases consultant, H. N. Reliance Foundation Hospital and Research Centre and the Lilavati Hospital, Mumbai, explained the need for more vital vaccines in healthcare for the elderly. He emphasised the necessity of annual influenza vaccines, shingles (herpes zoster), varicella zoster (chickenpox), coronavirus, and H5N1 (avian flu) vaccines for ageing adults.

The experts also addressed cost barriers and called for better health insurance coverage to prioritise immunisation in the elderly.

The webinar is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sjuht-ZUyB9k>

# Trump and Putin to discuss Ukraine ceasefire this week

Steve Witkoff, the U.S. President’s envoy for the conflict, confirms the development in an interview, by saying the two leaders are going to have a really good and positive discussion this week

**Agence France-Presse**  
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin are expected to speak this week, officials said on Sunday, as Washington and Kyiv’s European allies press Moscow to accept a ceasefire in the three-year war.

The U.S. this week proposed a halt in fighting in the war after talks in Saudi Arabia, with Kyiv accepting the proposal. Mr. Putin however has given no clear answer, instead listing a string of conditions and raising “serious questions”



**Consoling hug:** Residents at the site of the residential buildings hit by a Russian air strike in Kherson in Ukraine on Saturday. REUTERS

over the proposition.

Mr. Trump’s envoy for the conflict, Steve Witkoff, who met for several hours with Mr. Putin days ago,

told *CNN* in a televised interview that he thinks “the two Presidents are going to have a really good and positive discussion this week.”

Earlier, Moscow had said that U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio called his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov and that the pair had discussed “concrete aspects of the implementation of understandings” at a U.S.-Russia summit in Saudi Arabia last month.

**‘Kremlin’s intention’**  
Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Saturday accused the Kremlin of not wanting to end the war and warned that Moscow wanted to first “improve their situation on the battlefield” before agreeing to any ceasefire.

## SpaceX Crew docks with ISS to reach astronauts stuck in space for 9 months

**Agence France-Presse**  
KENNEDY SPACE CENTER

A pair of astronauts stranded for more than nine months on the International Space Station were a step closer to returning home on Sunday after a replacement crew docked with the orbital outpost.

The astronauts were shown on live TV embracing and hugging their counterparts in zero gravity on the space station shortly after their SpaceX Crew Dragon arrived at 0545 GMT (1115 IST).

Butch Wilmore and Sunitha Williams have been stuck aboard the ISS since June after the Boeing Star-



**Sign of relief:** The SpaceX Dragon Crew-10 members clap after entering the International Space Station on Sunday. AFP

liner spacecraft they were testing on its maiden crewed voyage suffered propulsion issues and was deemed unfit to fly them back to Earth.

Ms. Williams said it was a “wonderful day” and “great to see our friends arrive,” speaking shortly after her colleagues emerged onto the orbital lab.

The NASA duo’s *Starliner* had returned to Earth empty, without experiencing further major issues – leaving them stuck for nine months after what was meant to have been a days-long roundtrip. Their prolonged stay was significantly longer than the standard ISS rotation for astronauts of roughly six months.

Mr. Wilmore and Ms. Williams will now begin preparing for departure and their ocean splashdown off the Florida coast, no sooner than March 19.

The replacement Crew-10 team had blasted off on Friday from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.



# Air pollution will lower India’s solar generation capacity: study

Solar cells perform best under bright sunlight. They also need lower ambient temperature and airflow over them for cooling. Any imbalance in these factors lowers solar cell performance. Researchers have found that solar radiation was the main factor affecting solar-cell efficiency, followed by temperature

Unnati Ashar

A study by researchers at IIT Delhi has found that air pollution and climate change will impair solar panel performance in India. It was published in *Environmental Research Letters* in November 2024.

According to the paper, India is the fifth-largest solar power producer worldwide. The country has set a target to produce 50% of its electric power from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030, and plans to install 500 GW of renewable energy capacity to this end by then. One-fifth of this capacity is expected to be in the form of solar power.

India also has plans to develop more solar parks and promote rooftop solar generation.

### Solar power and climate

Like other forms of renewable energy sources, solar photovoltaic energy is at the mercy of weather and climate.

“Accurately assessing future renewable energy resources, particularly solar energy in India, where solar deployment is expanding rapidly, is crucial for ensuring a sustainable and resilient energy future,” Sushovan Ghosh, lead author of the new study, then at the Centre for Atmospheric Sciences at IIT Delhi and now a researcher in the Earth Sciences Department of the Barcelona Supercomputing Centre, said.

The study is the first to examine how climate change will affect solar cell efficiency in India.

“Studies of this kind give impetus to the innovations towards mitigating greenhouse gases through the exploration of viable energy alternatives and, more importantly, improvements in photovoltaic cell design,” TV. Ramachandra, a faculty member at the Centre for Ecological Sciences of the Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, said. India has 300 sunny days a year but their quality is declining due to air pollution. “Solar radiation at the earth’s surface is not stable over time but undergoes significant long-term variations, referred to as global dimming and brightening,” Ghosh said.

“This variation depends on atmospheric variables such as clouds, aerosols or particulate matter, water vapour, and radiatively active gas molecules such as ozone. Clouds reflect and aerosols either scatter or absorb incoming solar radiation reaching the surface. Therefore, on a cloudy or hazy day, due to particulate matter pollution, less solar radiation will impinge on the solar panel and reduce solar generation.”

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Workers install solar panels at the Adani Group-owned Khavda Renewable Energy Park in Khavda, Gujarat. AFP  
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### Data from CERES

The team’s study used data from 1985 to 2014 to predict changes from 2041 to 2050, the middle of the current century. “Given that photovoltaic power plants generally have a lifespan of 20 to 25 years, analysing the 2040s aligns well with the operational lifetime of existing and planned installations,” according to Ghosh. “Beyond this period, the analysis may lose practical relevance.”

The team used global climate models, testing them against observations from NASA’s Clouds and the Earth’s Radiant Energy System (CERES) project and the India Meteorological Department. CERES uses instruments in space to measure radiation coming from the earth and thus understand the role of cloud cover in climate change.

The team studied two scenarios. The first included a moderate level of efforts to control air quality and mitigate climate change. The second had weak climate change efforts but strong air pollution control measures.

Air pollution blocks solar radiation from reaching solar panels, resulting in less power produced. Rising temperatures due to climate change also lower the efficiency of solar cells.

**Temperature to blame**

The models found that by mid-century, the efficiency of solar panels in India will drop by 2.3% in the second scenario but by a greater amount in the first scenario. Based on current solar power generation levels, this amounts to a loss of at least 840 gigawatt-hours of electricity every year. Losses from temperature were



Studies of this kind give impetus to innovations that mitigate greenhouse gas emissions through the exploration of viable energy alternatives and, more importantly, improvements in photovoltaic cell design

higher in the second scenario, which was expected because of weaker climate action.

“This study, based on radiation data from global climate models, provides vital insights into the likely impact of escalating air pollution on photovoltaic efficiency,” Ramachandra, who wasn’t involved in the study, said.

Solar cells perform best under bright sunlight. They also need lower ambient temperature and airflow over them for cooling. Any imbalance in these factors lowers solar cell performance.

The study found that solar radiation was the main factor affecting solar cell efficiency. Temperature came next, followed by ambient wind speed, although it was much less impactful.

**Cut emissions either way**

The study also reported that the temperature of solar cells is expected to rise by 2 degrees C by the mid-century due to higher ambient temperatures. “It is important to distinguish between ambient air temperature and cell temperature, as solar cells can heat up significantly beyond the surrounding air

temperature due to solar exposure,” Ghosh said.

The researchers also revealed that some parts of India’s northeast as well as Kerala will develop higher solar power potential in time. “This is really interesting. ... This is because the cloud fractions are expected to decrease over these regions,” Ghosh said.

According to the paper, the models can help the government and industry players better pick sites for future solar power projects and allocate resources accordingly.

According to Ghosh, the study underscores the need to curb climate change and improve air quality. He advocated cutting greenhouse gas emissions in particular, which would mitigate climate change as well as remove particulate matter in the way of sunlight headed for solar panels: “This will help us fully utilise the future solar energy potential and create a path toward building climate-resilient nations.”

“At the individual level, public participation is crucial, through the adoption of electric vehicles and the use of public transport to reduce fossil fuel consumption. Tree planting and climate awareness efforts to enhance environmental sustainability are needed,” Ghosh added.

“While India has introduced commendable policies, the key challenge lies in accelerating their effective implementation from the ground level to top governance structures.”

(Unnati Ashar is a freelance science journalist. [unnati\\_a@gmail.com](mailto:unnati_a@gmail.com))

### THE GIST

India has 300 sunny days a year, but their quality is declining due to air pollution. ‘Solar radiation at the earth’s surface is not stable over time but undergoes significant long-term variations, referred to as global dimming and brightening’

Air quality variations depend on clouds, aerosols, particulate matter, water vapour and radiatively active gas molecules such as ozone. On a cloudy or hazy day, due to particulate matter, less solar radiation will impinge on the panel and affect generation

The study used data from 1985 to 2014 to predict changes from 2041 to 2050. ‘Given that photovoltaic power plants generally have a lifespan of 20 to 25 years, analysing the 2040s aligns well with the operational lifetime of installations’

The research concluded that by mid-century, the efficiency of solar panels will drop by 2.3% owing to pollution. Based on current solar generation levels, this amounts to a loss of at least 840 gigawatt-hours of electricity every year

### BIG SHOT



River water running through the Nueva Florida neighbourhood, which risks flooding because of glacial melt, a topic at the root of a lawsuit by local farmer Saul Luciano Lliuya against German energy utility RWE, in Huaraz, Peru earlier this month. REUTERS

### WHAT IS IT?

## Birefringence: different in different directions

Vasudevan Mukunth

When light passes through a glass prism from air, its path bends due to a property of the glass called refraction. The amount of bending depends on the material’s refractive index. It is calculated as the ratio of the speed of light in vacuum to the speed of light in the material.

For example, the refractive index of vacuum is 1, of air is 1.0003, of glass is roughly 1.5, and of diamond is 2.4.

Some materials have more than one refractive index; that is, they slow the passage of light to a different degree in two different directions. Such materials are said to be birefringent. They occur naturally as well as can be engineered in the lab. Examples of naturally birefringent materials include mica and quartz; those of synthetic ones include barium borate and lithium niobate.

Certain materials’ birefringence can also be induced or modified by physically stressing them or exposing them to electric or magnetic fields. Birefringence arises because the material has different crystal structures in different



A calcite crystal placed on a single, blue grid creates images of two grids due to birefringence. APN MJM (CC BY-SA)

directions, i.e. are anisotropic. Which ray of light is bent in which direction depends on the direction in which it is moving and how it is polarised. Light consists of an electric field oscillating perpendicular to a magnetic field, and both of them perpendicular to the light’s direction of motion. Polarisation refers to the direction of the electric field.

Birefringent materials are used in LCD screens, medical microscopes, optical switches, waveplates, frequency converters, and high-power lasers. ([mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in](mailto:mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in))



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