

DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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Trump, Modi signal trade talks may resume

High-Level Engagements

Both leaders to speak directly in the 'upcoming weeks', which could restart ruptured relations

Countries still on track to meet the fall deadline for a deal, a commitment that was made in February

Dialogue with the U.S. continues and ties could not be one-sided, says Union Minister Goyal

Sahasini Haldar
T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

Trade negotiations between India and the U.S. are set to resume, President Donald Trump has announced, as he and Prime Minister Narendra Modi exchanged cordial messages on social media.

The leaders will speak directly in the "upcoming weeks", which could indicate a restart to relations that were ruptured over the imposition of 50% tariffs on India, demands for India to stop importing Russian oil, and conflicting versions on the Operation Sindoor ceasefire.

While no date has been announced for the formal resumption of talks for a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), government sources said on Wednesday they were "still on track to meet

the fall deadline for the deal", referring to the commitment made by both leaders at their White House meet in February.

Mr. Trump was the first to post overnight on Truth Social, four days after he told presspersons at the White House that India-U.S. tensions were "nothing to worry about".

"I am pleased to announce that India and U.S. are continuing negotiations to address Trade Barriers between our two Nations," Mr. Trump said.

"I look forward to speaking with my very good friend, Prime Minister Modi, in the upcoming weeks", he added, promising a "successful conclusion" for both countries.

Hours later, Mr. Modi quoted the U.S. President's post on social media platform X, saying that he was "confident that trade negotiations will pave the way



for unlocking the limitless potential of the India-U.S. partnership".

"Our teams are working to conclude these discussions at the earliest," Mr. Modi said, adding that he too looked forward to the call with Mr. Trump.

"We are in active dialogue with the U.S.," Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said. Speaking at an

event organised by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry on Wednesday, he said that no business partnership or friendship could be "one-sided".

Asked how the trade talks were brought "back on track", government officials pointed to a number of initiatives by New Delhi to Washington, including

by Indian Ambassador to the U.S. Vinay Kwatra, who has met nearly 30 U.S. Representatives and about 10 influential Senators in the past month, apart from think tanks, media organisations, and State department officials, even as Defence and Space exchanges continued "as normal".

India also hosted three U.S. lawmakers, including Brian Fitzpatrick, who had earlier moved a Bill calling for heavy sanctions on India for its dealings with Russia during the Ukraine war.

According to a Washington-based source, a "high-level" Indian outreach has also made to U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio in late August, proposing a return to the FTA negotiations.

According to the source, the White House said that the "ball is in India's court", referring to an elimination or at least a re-

duction in India's import of oil from Russia.

The External Affairs Ministry declined to respond to a written request from *The Hindu* about the alleged outreach to Washington by a senior member of the government, but it did not deny the claim either. India has thus far rejected U.S. calls to cut Russian oil, asserting it as a "sovereign decision" based on market positions.

"No official directions" India's oil importers and major public sectors undertakings (PSU) said there have been "no official directions" on future purchases from Russia, which amounted to 2 million bpd (barrels per day) in August. However, a senior official in one of the top oil importing Indian companies, told *The Hindu* that "no new orders" had been placed for Russian oil by

his company in September so far.

"The oil that has so far entered the country from Russia has been from those orders that were placed before the additional tariffs were imposed. The oil that will come in November will be orders placed in September," the official, who asked not to be named, explained.

Sources also said there was still no clarity on whether Mr. Trump would travel to India for the Quad summit later this year.

However, officials on both sides indicated that his likely visit to South Korea for the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) on October 31 and November 1, where he is expected to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping, could serve as a potential precursor to a broader Asia tour that may include other countries.

Diplomatic Outreach: Indian Ambassador met 30+ U.S. Representatives & 10 Senators in one month.

Ministerial Meetings: Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal emphasized a "mutual" approach to trade.

Lawmakers' Visit: 3 U.S. lawmakers, including Brian Fitzpatrick (who earlier pushed for sanctions on India), visited New Delhi.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio: Engaged in talks on resuming FTA negotiations.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Background of India-U.S. Trade Relations

- Bilateral Trade Volume (2024-25): India-U.S. trade in goods & services has crossed \$200 billion (U.S. is India's largest trading partner).
- Nature of Trade:
 - India exports: IT services, pharmaceuticals, textiles, gems & jewellery, engineering goods.
 - India imports: Crude oil, defense equipment, aircraft, and technology-related products.
- Trade Surplus: India enjoys a trade surplus with the U.S.

Key Issues in the Current Negotiations

- Tariffs:
 - U.S. imposed 50% tariffs on certain Indian exports.
 - India has retaliated in the past (on U.S. almonds, apples, etc.).
- Russian Oil Imports:
 - India imports ~2 million barrels per day from Russia (August 2025).
 - U.S. wants India to cut Russian oil purchases due to the Ukraine war.
 - India maintains it as a sovereign decision based on energy security & affordability.
- FTA (Free Trade Agreement):
 - Negotiations have been on & off since 2018.
 - Aim: reduce tariffs, increase market access for goods, services, and investments.
 - Fall 2025 is the new deadline for a deal (as per leaders' commitment).
- Geopolitical Factors:
 - Operation Sindoor ceasefire issue (conflicting narratives between India & U.S.).
 - Wider U.S. expectations: India to align more with Western bloc policies (Ukraine, Indo-Pacific strategy).

Significance of India-U.S. Trade Talks

- Strategic Dimension:
 - U.S. is India's largest trading partner.
 - Defense, Space & Technology cooperation is continuing despite friction.
- Economic Dimension:
 - FTA could reduce tariffs and boost exports of IT, textiles, and pharmaceuticals.
 - Helps India integrate into global value chains (GVCs).
- Energy Security:
 - India depends on affordable crude from Russia.
 - U.S. pressure vs. India's sovereign energy policy is a point of friction.
- Geopolitics:
 - Outcome of Quad Summit & APEC meetings (where Trump may meet Xi Jinping) could affect negotiations.

India-U.S. Trade Facts:

- U.S. is India's largest export destination (approx. 17% of India's exports).
- India's major exports to U.S.: IT services (~\$60 billion annually), pharma, engineering goods.
- U.S. FDI in India: \$60+ billion (cumulative), mostly in IT, e-commerce, and manufacturing.

International Trade Theory (Static):

- WTO principles: MFN (Most Favored Nation), Tariff Reduction, Non-Discrimination.
- FTA vs. PTA: FTA = broader tariff reduction; PTA = limited scope.

India's Trade Strategy:

- Member of: WTO, G20, BRICS, IPEF (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework).
- Negotiating FTAs with: U.K., EU, U.S., Canada, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Nepal Army takes charge, as an uneasy calm returns after days of violent unrest

Sanjeev Satgairya
KATHMANDU

An uneasy calm returned to Nepal on Wednesday after two days of protests led by Gen-Z members which resulted in the deaths of over two dozen people, even as the Army took control of security and issued restrictive orders and a night-time curfew.

Soldiers fanned out across capital Kathmandu and other regions of the country from early Wednesday, in accordance with the decision taken by the Army leadership in consultation with President Ram Chandra Poudel late on Tuesday, following K.P. Sharma Oli's resignation as Prime Minister.

After 19 people were killed in police firing on Monday, when Gen Z took to the streets demanding "an end to corruption and misgovernance", the protests turned violent on Tuesday. Demonstrators torched major government buildings. The Ministry of Health and Population, in a statement, updated the death toll to 30, with 1,033 people receiving treatment at various hospitals.

With no clear structural leadership among the Gen-Z protesters, the next course of action remains unclear. Protester groups held meetings with Nepal Army Chief Gen. Ashok Sigdel on Tuesday evening and Wednesday to discuss possible next steps.

Disagreement has emerged among the Gen-Z campaigners, who have been holding internal discussions on the digital platform Discord, over who should lead an interim ad-



Smoke billows out from a hotel, which was set on fire by protesters amid the violent protest in Kathmandu on Wednesday. ANI

ministration. Some are backing former Chief Justice Sushila Karki, while others support Balendra Shah, the Mayor of Kathmandu. Protestors gathered in front of the Army headquarters in Kathmandu late on Wednesday, after failing to reach a consensus. Ms. Karki is widely seen as a clean and upright figure who could have broad public acceptance. Mr. Shah, who is popular among Nepali youth, has already set a precondition that Parliament should be dissolved first.

Flights resume

Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu resumed operations from Wednesday afternoon after remaining shut for over 24 hours.

In view of the spiralling protests on Tuesday, it was widely expected that the Army would step in immediately. But the consultation between the President and the Army leadership only began late that evening. The Army, which said it was taking over security from Tuesday night, started deploying soldiers on the streets only on Wednesday morning.

Meanwhile, local media

reported that Ravi Lakshmi Chiratkar, wife of former Prime Minister Jhala Nath Khanal, is undergoing treatment after being injured in an arson attack at their residence. Earlier false rumours of her death spread on social media.

As soon as the Army took control of security on Wednesday, it faced the challenge of preventing inmates of the Dillibazaar prison, in the heart of Kathmandu, from fleeing custody. The prison break began on Tuesday after Rabi Lamichhane, chief of the Rastriya Swatantra Party, was "released" from Nakkhu prison on the outskirts of Kathmandu, citing security reasons.

Officials estimated that close to 1,500 inmates fled the prison. While the Army managed to secure the Dillibazaar prison, over 3,000 inmates from the Bhadra Detention Center in Kathmandu have escaped.

(Sanjeev Satgairya is a journalist based in Kathmandu)

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- Constitutional disputes between judiciary, parliament, and executive.
- Ethnic and regional grievances (e.g., Madhesi protests).

Current Developments (2025 Crisis)

- Protests & Violence
 - Gen-Z youth mobilised via digital platforms like Discord.
 - Slogans: "End corruption and misgovernance."
 - Government buildings set ablaze, major unrest in Kathmandu.
- Army Intervention
 - Army deployed after President Ram Chandra Poudel consulted military leadership.
 - Night curfew and restrictive orders imposed.
- Leadership Vacuum
 - Protestors split between:
 - Former Chief Justice Sushila Karki – seen as upright & neutral.
 - Kathmandu Mayor Balendra Shah – popular among youth, but wants Parliament dissolved first.
- Law & Order Collapse
 - Prison break incidents: Over 4,500 inmates fled from two prisons.
 - Reports of arson and injuries to political leaders' families.

Static Data

Political System of Nepal

- Type: Federal Democratic Republic.
- Constitution adopted: 2015.
- Parliament: Bicameral → House of Representatives (275 seats) + National Assembly (59 seats).
- President: Head of State.
- Prime Minister: Head of Government.
- Army's role: Under civilian control, but historically influential during crises.

India–Nepal Relations

- Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1950) – basis of open border & defence cooperation.
- Economic ties: India is Nepal's largest trade partner & energy supplier.
- Strategic Importance:
 - Nepal is a buffer state between India & China.
 - Political instability in Nepal directly affects India's border security & migration.
 - Water resources: Shared rivers (Kosi, Gandak, Mahakali) → cooperation + disputes.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Why in News?

- Nepal witnessed violent protests led by Gen-Z youth, demanding an end to corruption and misgovernance.
- Over 30 deaths and 1,000+ injured.
- Army took control after PM K.P. Sharma Oli resigned.
- Leadership crisis emerged among protestors – debates on interim administration.

Background of Nepal's Political Instability

- Nepal transitioned from monarchy → republic in 2008.
- Adopted a new Constitution in 2015, declaring Nepal a federal democratic republic.
- Since then, Nepal has faced:
 - Frequent government changes (over 13 PMs in 15 years).

SC flags Governors sitting on Bills for years as Central govt. terms dispute a 'false alarm'

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai, heading a five-judge Presidential Reference Bench, on Wednesday pointed to Governors sitting on Bills for years together even as the Union government referred to disputes raised by non-BJP-ruled States such as Tamil Nadu and Kerala over inexplicable gubernatorial delay as a "false alarm".

"How can you say that when Governors are sitting over Bills for four years," Chief Justice Gavai asked the Centre, represented by Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta.

The Reference had followed an April 8 judgment

of the court in the Tamil Nadu Governor case, which prescribed a three-month timeline for the President and the Governor to decide Bills.

Tamil Nadu had approached the court after the Governor sat on 10 Bills for four years, since 2020.

'Act collaboratively'

Mr. Mehta reasoned the Centre was not justifying Governors delaying assent to Bills "endlessly". He had only meant to say that a State and its Governor must act "collaboratively" to ensure the smooth working of the Constitution.

Mr. Mehta said "collaboration" was possible only if both parties (State and Go-



vernor) had powers. He argued there was no room for collaboration if the Governor was expected to toe the line of the State Cabinet and mechanically sign Bills put before him for assent.

"The Governor cannot be reduced to an ornamental head of State. We may have had some aberrations, but for the past 55

years, every Governor has acted in a way expected of them, in a collaborative manner," Mr. Mehta submitted.

He objected to the argument by non-BJP-ruled States that instances of Governors delaying Bills had increased after the NDA government came to power in 2014 at the Centre.

Justice Vikram Nath observed that the Reference Bench was not tracing what happened before or after 2014.

The court was answering the questions of law raised by the President in the Reference.

Justice P.S. Narasimha tested the Centre's submission that the moment a Governor withheld assent to a

Bill in the first instance under Article 200, the proposed law would fail. The judge asked how a Bill passed by both Houses of the State legislature, after due consultation, could be failed by the solitary action of the Governor withholding assent.

"Should there not be a consultative process by which the Bill is returned to the State legislature for reconsideration. This way, both the State Assembly and the Governor get a role to play," Justice Narasimha said.

Appearing for both Tamil Nadu and its ruling party, DMK, senior advocate P. Wilson argued that a Bill was an "expression of political will".

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Why in News?

- Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai, leading a five-judge Presidential Reference Bench, raised concern about Governors delaying assent to Bills for years.
- The Union Government termed such disputes (raised by States like Tamil Nadu and Kerala) as a "false alarm."
- The case follows the April 2025 Supreme Court judgment (Tamil Nadu Governor case), which prescribed a 3-month timeline for Governors/President to decide on Bills.

Static Polity Linkages

1. Article 200 – Assent to Bills by Governor
 - Options before a Governor when a Bill is presented:
 - Assent (becomes law).
 - Withhold assent (Bill fails).
 - Return the Bill (other than Money Bill) for reconsideration.
 - Reserve the Bill for President's consideration (compulsory in certain cases like Ultra Vires to Constitution, matters of national importance).
2. Article 201 – Bills reserved for the President
 - President can assent or withhold.
 - President may also return the Bill (if not a Money Bill).
3. Constituent Assembly Debate Insight
 - Dr. B.R. Ambedkar clarified: Governor is a nominal head and should act on aid and advice of Council of Ministers (except in limited discretionary functions).
4. Judicial Interpretation (Important Cases)
 - Shamsher Singh vs State of Punjab (1974): Governor is not an independent authority; bound by aid and advice of Ministers.

- Nabam Rebia Case (2016): Governor cannot act arbitrarily; must follow constitutional norms.
- 2025 TN Governor Case: SC fixed 3 months limit for Governors/President to act on Bills.

Current Issue

- Problem:
 - Tamil Nadu Governor allegedly sat on 10 Bills for 4 years (since 2020).
 - This goes against the principle of constitutional governance and creates legislative deadlock.
- Union Govt Argument (Solicitor General Tushar Mehta):
 - Governors are not "ornamental heads."
 - Role must be collaborative, not just mechanical assent.
- Supreme Court's Concern:
 - Justice P.S. Narasimha questioned: Can a single Governor's refusal nullify a Bill passed by both Houses of the Legislature?
 - Suggested a consultative process – Governor should return the Bill for reconsideration rather than killing it unilaterally.

Acquitted but forgotten: courts, experts flag lack of compensation policy for those wrongly incarcerated

Soibam Rocky Singh
NEW DELHI



India has no law to compensate those wrongfully incarcerated for longer periods. FILE PHOTO

In July this year, the Supreme Court acquitted a man who had been sentenced to death for killing his two children, wife and her sister in 2013, after finding “glaring investigative defects”. Baljinder Kumar from Kapurthala, Punjab, had by then spent 11 years in prison, including five on death row.

His case is a stark example of wrongful incarceration, but it is not unique. Many others have been convicted by lower courts, their convictions upheld by High Courts, only to be overturned years later by the apex court.

What is more worrying is that there is no statutory

terror charges. He was awarded compensation of ₹5 lakh by the Delhi government. Mr. Khan, who was 18 at the time of his arrest, said that while the compensation could not make up for the lost years, it would help him provide a better education for his daughter.

‘Can’t legislate’

In 2021, advocate Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay filed a case before the Supreme Court seeking the framing of appropriate guidelines to compensate victims of wrongful prosecution.

The court, however, declined the plea saying that the nature of the relief prayed for was “virtually asking this court to legislate on the point”.

On July 16, the apex court, while acquitting a man sentenced to death by a trial court in Kerala and the State’s High Court, suggested that Parliament could consider foreign models to compensate those wrongfully incarcerated.

Advocate Prabhav Ralli said India should follow countries such as Portugal, New Zealand and the United States that provide compensation for wrongful incarceration.

“Such a move will also act as a deterrent to false implication,” he added.

Foreign models

In the U.S., for instance, several States have systems for compensating those who were wrongfully convicted and later exonerated.

The amount is sometimes calculated based on the number of years wrongfully served.

Senior advocate and constitutional law expert Sanjay Hegde said, “The principles underlying compensation have to be legally spelt out either by Parliament or by the court in a proper proceeding.”

“The problem with leaving the issue to the government is that it would not want to introduce such a scheme because that would amount to the acknowledgement of liability,” Mr. Hegde explained.

“On the other hand, those acquitted after a long period often don’t have the energy to fight another legal battle to claim compensation,” he added.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- July 2025: The Supreme Court acquitted Baljinder Kumar (Punjab), who had spent 11 years in prison (5 on death row) due to glaring investigative defects.
- This case highlights wrongful incarceration — when a person is convicted and jailed for crimes they never committed.
- India currently has no statutory/legal scheme to compensate such individuals.

Key Issues

1. Prevalence of Wrongful Convictions
 - Several cases show that lower courts + High Courts upheld convictions later overturned by the Supreme Court.
 - Example: Mohammad Amir Khan (Delhi) – 14 years in jail on false terror charges, later acquitted, given ₹5 lakh compensation (2018).
2. Lack of Legal Framework
 - No law in India specifically provides compensation to the wrongfully incarcerated.
 - Relief (if any) is granted on a case-to-case basis, often through NHRC or State Governments.
3. Judicial Position
 - 2021 case (Ashwini Kumar Upadhyay v. Union of India): SC refused to frame guidelines, saying it would be “virtually legislating”.
 - July 2025 ruling: SC suggested Parliament may consider foreign models (e.g., U.S., Portugal, New Zealand).

Constitutional & Legal Angle

- Article 21 – Right to life & personal liberty includes protection against unlawful detention.
- Article 32 & 226 – Courts can grant compensation under writ jurisdiction (precedent: Rudal Shah v. State of Bihar, 1983).
- Article 300A – Compensation can also be linked to the constitutional right to property (loss of livelihood).
- International Law:
 - Article 14(6) of ICCPR – India is a signatory; it requires compensation for wrongful conviction.
 - But India has not legislated to implement this.

Global Models

- United States: Some states pay up to \$50,000 per year of wrongful incarceration.
- New Zealand: Fixed amount + consideration of psychological damage.
- Portugal: Mandates compensation by the State for wrongful conviction.

Expert Opinions

- Sanjay Hegde (Constitutional Expert): Principles of compensation must be clearly laid down by Parliament or Court.
- Prabhav Ralli (Advocate): Compensation acts as a deterrent to false implication.
- Problem: Governments resist such laws → acknowledgement of liability.

Way Forward

- Enact a statutory framework for compensation (like U.S. or New Zealand models).
- Clear guidelines: amount based on years lost, psychological harm, loss of livelihood.
- Strengthen investigative standards to minimize wrongful prosecution.
- Parliamentary debate needed to balance justice to victims and state liability.

The way forward on Katchatheevu, Palk Strait disputes

India has historically shaped regional and global diplomacy through the Panchsheel principles, the Non-Aligned Movement, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, and, most recently, with its "Neighbourhood First Policy". This stance has generally promoted peace and interdependence in South Asia. However, its unresolved issues with Sri Lanka, as the fisheries crisis in the Palk Straits and the sovereignty of Katchatheevu island, pose challenges.

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Colombo in April 2025, both governments revisited these long-standing concerns. Mr. Modi emphasised a "humane approach" to the fisheries issue – one that balances livelihoods with conservation. This vision can succeed only if India and Sri Lanka address ecological imperatives and historic grievances in a spirit of cooperation.

Livelihood and conservation at odds
Fishing communities along the Tamil Nadu coast and the Northern Province of Sri Lanka have, for centuries, shared the Palk Straits. But disputes today are exacerbated by Indian vessels carrying out mechanised bottom trawling in Sri Lankan waters.

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) lays stress not only on equitable use of marine resources but also their conservation. Similarly, the FAO's Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries 1995 deems destructive practices such as bottom trawling to be unacceptable.

Sri Lanka banned bottom trawling in 2017, but hundreds of Indian trawlers still continue the practice, damaging coral beds, shrimp habitats, and depleting fish stocks. Ironically, Tamil Nadu's smaller artisanal fishers, who use traditional sustainable methods, also suffer: their near-shore resources have been depleted by the trawler industry, forcing them into contested waters. Thus, this is not just a territorial clash but also a livelihood conflict within the Tamil communities themselves – between business trawler operators pursuing profit and traditional fishers who are dependent on the sea for subsistence.

A sustainable resolution calls for making a distinction between the needs of artisanal fishers and trawler operators. Trawler operators cannot claim empathy as their commercial profits are at the expense of marine sustainability and community welfare. Small boat artisanal fishers have fished in these waters "from time immemorial" and their plight deserves humane accommodation.

This can be worked out through dialogue between Indian and Sri Lankan fisher organisations. With the consent of the Sri Lankan fishers, they can work out quotas or regulated



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access and set out limited fishing rights on specific days or seasons for Tamil Nadu's small fishers, until India's stocks recover.

There should be community sensitisation. Sri Lankan Tamil Members of Parliament and the Tamil media can play a role by highlighting in Tamil Nadu the hardships that the Northern fishermen suffered during Sri Lanka's long civil war. Many of these families lost decades of income when the military restricted sea access during the conflict. They should not be portrayed as aggressors but as fellow victims of economic loss. Such steps would foster goodwill. It is worth remembering that during the Sri Lankan conflict, Tamil refugees were received in Tamil Nadu with compassion, housed in camps, and given assistance. Preserving these bonds of fraternity is essential.

Clearing the misconceptions

Public debate often portrays Katchatheevu, the tiny uninhabited islet in the Palk Straits, as the root of the fisheries dispute. This is misleading. Katchatheevu is less than half a square mile in area, and is barren except for the church of St. Anthony, which fishermen from Tamil Nadu continue to visit for the annual festival under the 1974 India-Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Treaty. The 1974 boundary settlement placed the islet in Sri Lankan waters. The Treaty is legally binding. Under international law, boundary treaties are sacrosanct (*pacta sunt servanda*). They cannot be unilaterally repudiated without undermining the global order – just as China's contestation of its settled frontiers with India generates instability.

Myths such as "Indira Gandhi gifted the island to Sirimavo Bandaranaike" need clarification. In reality, India weighed historic evidence of sovereignty before deciding. Records showed Sri Lankan administrative control dating back to Portuguese and Dutch rule, and, earlier, to the Tamil kings of the kingdom of Jaffna.

International precedents exist in the following cases. In the *Minquiers and Ecrehos* case (*France vs United Kingdom*, the International Court of Justice 1953), the ICJ awarded sovereignty to the U.K., despite France's historical claim through the Duchy of Normandy, because it had exercised administrative jurisdiction. Similarly, India conceded that Sri Lanka had the stronger claim. Another example is the *Rann of Kutch Arbitration* (1968) between India and Pakistan.

Thus, retrieving Katchatheevu is not a question of justice but of political rhetoric. It remains a settled issue under international law. Importantly, fishing rights are a distinct matter – not linked to sovereignty over the islet.

The Palk Straits and adjacent waters were recognised as "historic waters" under Indian and Sri Lankan law – areas where sovereign rights are even stronger than in normal territorial seas. As

such, there is no "right of innocent passage" or third-state fishing rights without explicit consent. Judicial recognition of historic rights dates back to the Madras High Court case of *Annakumar Pillai vs Muthupayal And Ors.* (1904), which upheld claims based on traditional pearl and conch fisheries. Therefore, India's acceptance in 1974 of the maritime boundary was not whimsical but legally consistent with historic precedent.

The UNCLOS (Article 123) encourages cooperation in semi-enclosed seas – such as the Palk Bay and Gulf of Mannar. Here, joint resource management is not just ideal but mandatory.

Models exist as in the Baltic Sea Fisheries Convention where Latvia, Poland and the European Union share quotas to conserve resources.

India and Sri Lanka could implement similar frameworks such as equitable quotas for fishing days and catch, a joint research station on Katchatheevu for marine biologists to monitor resources and suggest sustainable practices, and promotion of deep-sea fishing in India's 200-nautical-mile Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), reducing pressure on near-shore waters and lessening illegal crossings.

Toward good neighbourhood policy

India's regional leadership is shaped not just by geography but also by cultural and civilisational ties. With Sri Lanka, those ties are especially deep. To protect them, disputes must be addressed without populist rhetoric but through quiet cooperation, legal recognition and shared livelihood security. The way forward involves multiple levels such as government-to-government talks (retaining trust and treaty obligations) and State/Provincial engagement (involving Tamil Nadu and Sri Lanka's Northern Provincial Council and community dialogue, encouraging people-people empathy that overcomes media distortions).

If handled with prudence, the Katchatheevu and Palk Straits issues can become symbols of cooperation rather than conflict.

India and Sri Lanka share not only maritime boundaries but also centuries of cultural, religious, and kinship ties. The fisheries issue requires fairness to both communities, prioritising artisanal livelihoods and ecological sustainability. The Katchatheevu issue, meanwhile, is legally settled – it should no longer cloud the real problem of managing resources. By adopting a collaborative fisheries regime, investing in deep-sea alternatives, and respecting historical legal agreements, the fishers of Tamil Nadu and the Northern province of Sri Lanka could move from confrontation to cooperation. In the long arc of diplomacy, smaller disputes must not overshadow the larger vision: peace, prosperity and mutual respect in South Asia.

- FAO Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (1995): bottom trawling = destructive practice.
- Sri Lanka ban (2017): bottom trawling prohibited.
- India's Stand (2025 visit of PM Modi): humane approach → balance livelihood + ecology.

Katchatheevu Dispute

- Location: Tiny uninhabited islet (0.45 sq. miles) in Palk Strait.
- History:
 - 1974 India–Sri Lanka Maritime Boundary Agreement gave island to Sri Lanka.
 - Treaty legally binding under *pacta sunt servanda* principle (international law: treaties must be honoured).
 - Myths like "Indira Gandhi gifted it" are incorrect – records show Sri Lankan administrative control since Portuguese/Dutch period & Jaffna kingdom.
- International Precedents:

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Background Context

- India's foreign policy has traditionally been guided by Panchsheel Principles, Non-Aligned Movement, SAARC, and "Neighbourhood First Policy".
- With Sri Lanka, issues in the Palk Strait region continue to create friction despite deep cultural, religious, and civilisational ties.
- Two key disputes:
 - a. Fisheries conflict (livelihood vs. conservation).
 - b. Katchatheevu island sovereignty (settled legally, but politically contested in India).

Fisheries Issue

- Shared History: Tamil Nadu fishers & Sri Lankan Tamil fishers have traditionally shared the Palk Strait.
- Problem Today:
 - Indian mechanised bottom trawlers enter Sri Lankan waters.
 - Causes overfishing, coral reef damage, shrimp habitat loss.
 - Artisanal fishers (sustainable small-boat fishing) in Tamil Nadu also lose out due to depletion near coast.
- Legal & Environmental Framework:
 - UNCLOS (1982): Semi-enclosed seas (Art. 123) → cooperation mandatory.

- *Minquiers & Ecrehos* (UK vs. France, ICJ 1953): administrative control > historical claims.
- *Rann of Kutch Arbitration* (1968): India–Pakistan boundary dispute.
- Reality:
 - Sovereignty issue settled, cannot be reopened without undermining international law.
 - Fishing rights ≠ sovereignty (two separate matters).

Static Linkages for UPSC

- Geography: Palk Bay = semi-enclosed sea (important in UNCLOS).
- IR: Neighbourhood First Policy; India–Sri Lanka bilateral ties.
- International Law:
 - UNCLOS 1982 (Articles 56, 123).
 - *Pacta Sunt Servanda* (Vienna Convention on Law of Treaties, 1969).
- Constitutional Angle:
 - Centre–State relations (Tamil Nadu demands vs Union treaty obligations).
 - Federal issues in foreign policy.
- Environment & Economy: SDG-14 (Life below Water); livelihood security of fishing communities.

A joint and new journey along the SCO pathway

Last week, I was privileged to welcome Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Tianjin, China, for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit, and attend the meeting between China's President Xi Jinping and Mr. Modi. This is a summit of solidarity and friendship. After 24 years of development, the SCO has grown into the world's largest regional organisation. The SCO Tianjin Summit has been the largest since the organisation's establishment. Leaders of the representatives of 23 countries, Mr. Modi included, and 10 heads of international organisations gathered to renew friendship, explore cooperation, seek common development, and advance the SCO into a new stage of high-quality development.



Xu Feihong
is China's
Ambassador to India

world, Mr. Xi put forth the Global Governance Initiative, calling for adhering to sovereign equality, abiding by international rule of law, practising multilateralism, advocating a people-centered approach, and focusing on taking real actions, which became the biggest highlight of this summit.

Since joining the SCO in 2017, India has played an important role in advancing the SCO's development. China deeply appreciates Mr. Modi's and India's full support for China's SCO presidency. China stands ready to work with India to enhance cooperation under the framework of SCO in various areas such as security, financing, energy, green industry and the digital economy, to better improve the well-being of their people.

The diamond jubilee of ties

This year marks the 75th anniversary of China-India diplomatic ties. In Tianjin, Mr. Xi and Mr. Modi reached new, important and common understandings on growing China-India relations further. Mr. Xi pointed out that it should be the right choice for China and India to be good-neighbourly friends and partners who help each other succeed, and have the dragon and the elephant dance together. Mr. Modi also stated that India and China are partners, not rivals. Their consensus far outweighs their disagreement. India is ready to view and develop the bilateral ties from a long-term perspective.

We should uphold the important and common understandings reached by the two leaders as guidance, and push bilateral relations forward for more practical progress.

First, we should further consolidate strategic mutual trust. We should earnestly draw the lessons from the past 75 years, strengthen correct strategic perception, explore right ways for neighbouring major countries to get along with each other, which are characterised by mutual respect and trust, peaceful coexistence, pursuit of common development, and win-win cooperation, and gradually resume various

mechanisms for dialogue and exchange between the two governments.

Second, we should further expand exchanges and cooperation. We should focus on development, which is the biggest common denominator of the two countries, and promote mutual support and success, and better facilitate trade and investment flows. The Chinese side is ready to strengthen cooperation with the Indian side in technology, education, culture, tourism and poverty alleviation, and promote exchanges and communications between political parties, think-tanks, media and the youth, so as to expand the convergence of interests and promote people-to-people bonds.

Third, we should further enhance good-neighbourliness and friendship. We should continue to uphold the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence initiated by the older generation of Chinese and Indian leaders, truly respect each other's core interests and major concerns, and combine our strengths to maintain peace and tranquillity in the border areas. We should not allow the boundary question that was left over from the past to define current China-India relations, nor let specific differences affect bilateral cooperation, so as to ensure the sound and stable development of China-India relations.

The road ahead

As the world's two most populous major developing countries and important members of the Global South, China and India share common interests in pursuing development and revitalisation, maintaining world peace and stability, and promoting global governance. India and China will successively assume the BRICS presidency in the next two years. China stands ready to work with India to support each other's presidency, deepen and strengthen greater BRICS cooperation, jointly implement the Global Governance Initiative, resolutely oppose bullying and hegemony, defend international fairness and justice, and join hands to build a community with a shared future for humanity.

- Sovereign equality
- Multilateralism
- People-centered development
- Rule-based order
- Positions SCO as an alternative voice to Western-led global governance.

India–China Bilateral Highlights

- Leaders' Consensus:
 - Modi: "India and China are partners, not rivals."
 - Xi: Advocated the idea of "Dragon and Elephant dancing together".
- Future Roadmap (3 pillars):
 - Strategic Trust – draw lessons from past, restore dialogue mechanisms.
 - Developmental Cooperation – trade, investment, education, technology, tourism.
 - Good-Neighbourliness – uphold Panchsheel, maintain border peace, avoid letting disputes define relations.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- PM Narendra Modi attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit in Tianjin, China.
- The Summit was the largest in SCO's 24-year history, with leaders/representatives of 23 countries and 10 international organisations.
- This also coincides with the 75th anniversary of India–China diplomatic ties.

Key Outcomes of the Tianjin SCO Summit

1. Security Cooperation

- Launch of Four Security Centres:
 - SCO Universal Center for Countering Security Challenges & Threats
 - SCO Anti-Drug Center (others related to cyber & terrorism).
- Strengthens collective security architecture.

2. Economic & Development Initiatives

- Decision to establish SCO Development Bank.
- Adoption of SCO Development Strategy for 2025–2035.
- China announced 3 major platforms:
 - Energy Cooperation
 - Green Industry
 - Digital Economy
- Plus 3 cooperation centres:
 - Science & Tech Innovation
 - Higher Education
 - Vocational/Technical Education

3. Global Governance Dimension

- Xi Jinping proposed Global Governance Initiative (GGI):

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

- Founded: 2001 (Shanghai)
- Members: 9 (China, Russia, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Iran)
- Secretariat: Beijing
- India's Membership: 2017
- Focus: Regional security (counter-terrorism), connectivity, energy cooperation.

India–China Relations

- Historical Ties: 75 years of diplomatic relations (since 1950 recognition of PRC).
- Panchsheel Agreement (1954) – Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (UPSC static).
- Border Issues: Unresolved disputes (Aksai Chin, Arunachal Pradesh) + standoffs (Doklam 2017, Galwan 2020).
- Trade: China is India's largest trading partner (~\$135 billion trade in 2023–24, but skewed in China's favor).

Global Governance & Multilateralism

- India's position: Reform of UNSC, WTO, IMF, World Bank.
- SCO & BRICS provide platforms for Global South cooperation.
- Both India & China will hold BRICS Presidency in consecutive years (2025–26).

The return of Chindia

Modi-Xi meeting hints at a new chapter after years of silence. But old mistrust and new asymmetries persist



THAROOR THINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

IN THE EVER-SHIFTING theatre of international diplomacy, moments of quiet recalibration often speak louder than grand pronouncements. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Beijing — his first in seven years — and his meeting with President Xi Jinping on the margins of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit, may not have yielded dramatic breakthroughs, but it marked something far more valuable: A deliberate pivot from confrontation to conversation.

Five years ago, the tragic loss of 20 Indian lives in the Galwan Valley cast a long shadow over Sino-Indian relations. The border, unresolved and volatile, became a metaphor for the broader diplomatic freeze. Trade slowed, flights ceased, and the spirit of "Chindia" — that hopeful portmanteau coined in header times to capture the promise of Asian synergy — was shelved in surrender to strategic suspicion. But today, the machinery of engagement is whirring once more.

The symbolism is unmistakable. Indian pilgrims have returned to Hindu and Buddhist sites in Tibet. Direct flights are resuming. Visa restrictions are easing. Patrolling has resumed on our disputed frontier. Both nations are orchestrating a flurry of high-level exchanges to formalise the thaw. These gestures, though modest, are not without meaning. They signal a shared intent to move beyond the recriminations of the past and to reimagine a relationship that has too often been defined by its fault lines.

India and China share a rich tapestry of historical engagement that stretches back over two millennia, the era of the Golden Road and the Silk Road, which served as conduits not only for trade in silk, spices, and precious stones, but also for profound cultural and religious exchange. Buddhism, born in India, found fertile ground in China through the travels of monks and scholars, while ancient Indian texts like the *Arthashastra* referenced Chinese goods, attesting to early awareness and interaction. Chinese students studied at Nalanda, and an Indian monk, Bodhidharma, took martial

arts to the famed Shaolin Temple in China. Fast forward to the mid-20th century, and the spirit of cooperation was rekindled as both nations emerged from colonial shadows into sovereign statehood. India was among the first non-communist countries to recognise the People's Republic of China, and the 1940s and 1950s saw vibrant exchanges in science, education, and diplomacy, with both countries participating in landmark events like the Asian Relations Conference (1947) and the Bandung Conference (1955), in which Jawaharlal Nehru's India took it upon itself to introduce Communist China to the world. Despite later tensions, this era was marked by mutual respect and the optimism of "Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai", laying the groundwork for a relationship that, even today, seeks to balance ancient affinities with modern aspirations.

At the heart of the Modi-Xi dialogue was a reaffirmation of a principle that ideally ought to be self-evident but has long been elusive: That India and China can be development partners, not just rivals. The assertion that "differences should not turn into disputes" is more than diplomatic boilerplate — it represents a conscious effort to de-escalate the dominant rhetoric since 2020, when it was all "Hindi-Chini bye-bye". In an era of global volatility, where trade wars flare and alliances shift with alarming speed, such clarity is welcome.

Of course, the spectre of American tariffs looms large over this rapprochement. President Donald Trump's stinging levies — 30 per cent on Chinese goods, with threats of escalation to 145 per cent, and a punishing 50 per cent on Indian exports — have jolted New Delhi into reconsidering its strategic calculus. India, once courted as a prized partner, now finds itself labelled a "laundromat for the Kremlin" by Washington's trade hawks. The economic fallout is real: Exporters face closure, jobs have been lost and more hang in the balance, and the promise of preferential treatment lies in tatters.

In this context, China's overtures — welcoming Indian commodities, fast-tracking

investments, and publicly rebuking American "bullying" — are not merely opportunistic. They reflect a recognition that Asia's two largest economies must find common cause in a multipolar world. Strategic autonomy, a theme both leaders underscored, is not just a slogan; it is a necessity.

Yet, we must temper optimism with realism. The border remains a tinderbox, with no progress on de-escalation to the status quo ante of April 2020, even while both sides promise progress toward a permanent border agreement. Our massive trade deficit with China persists and is compounded by huge non-tariff barriers imposed on Indian companies. The structural asymmetries in the relationship — military, economic, and political — cannot be wished away.

Just recently the exodus of over 300 Chinese engineers from Foxconn's pivotal iPhone 17 manufacturing facilities in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka revealed how painfully Beijing could squeeze our ambitions. China has leveraged its dominance in rare-earth production and processing by restricting exports of rare earths and rare-earth magnets, which are crucial for electric vehicles and electronics, to India. It has also imposed trade restrictions on the export of high-end capital equipment, including for electronics assembly and other sectors, heavy-duty tunnel boring machines and solar equipment, severely impacting India. The real test lies not in the symbolism of summits but in the substance of sustained cooperation.

Still, there is reason to hope. The resumption of dialogue, the restoration of people-to-people ties, and the shared commitment to multilateralism suggest that India and China are willing to engage — not as antagonists, but as interlocutors. In a world increasingly defined by zero-sum thinking, that alone is a victory.

The spirit of "Chindia", it seems, is stirring once more. Slowly and cautiously, but unmistakably. Let us hope it endures.

The writer chairs the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs

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Multilateralism & Global Forums

- Engagements: Both countries are members of SCO, BRICS, G20, among others.
- Current-affairs angle: The SCO summit meeting in Beijing — PM Modi's first in seven years — symbolised a shift from confrontation to conversation, reaffirming that "differences should not turn into disputes" and emphasising development partnership.

Economic Relations & Trade Imbalance

- Persistent trade deficit: India faces a heavy trade deficit with China, a structural challenge.
- Critical imports: APIs, rare-earth metals, solar modules and electronics components are key imports from China.
- Recent developments: Export restrictions on rare-earths and high-end machinery, exodus of Chinese engineers from Foxconn facilities — showing how Beijing can influence India's manufacturing ambitions.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Historical & Civilizational Ties (Static)

- Ancient cultural exchange: Buddhism's spread from India to China; Silk Road trade; visits by Bodhidharma and Xuanzang.
- Post-independence goodwill: India recognised the People's Republic of China in 1950; Panchsheel Agreement of 1954 outlining five principles of peaceful coexistence.

Border Disputes & Security Mechanisms

- LAC ambiguity & friction points: The 3,488 km long, undefined Line of Actual Control remains a flashpoint, with ongoing disputes in Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh.
- Mechanisms for dialogue: Joint Working Group (1988–2005), Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC, 2012), and Special Representative Mechanism — all aimed at conflict management.
- Recent developments: Patrolling resumed, direct flights restarted, pilgrimages to Tibetan sites reopened — signalling cautious re-engagement.

Strategic Autonomy & External Dynamics

- US-China trade war impact: Tariffs imposed by the US on both Chinese and Indian goods have forced India to reconsider its strategic positioning.
- Balanced diplomacy: India is cautiously de-escalating with China while simultaneously deepening ties with Quad partners — showing a diversified approach to foreign policy.

Way Forward & UPSC Framing

- Reaffirm Panchsheel: Use the five principles as a diplomatic foundation amid renewed dialogue.
- Confidence-Building Measures (CBMs): Strengthen border hotlines, joint patrols, disengagement protocols.
- Economic rebalancing: Promote Atmanirbhar Bharat while selectively cooperating in green energy, healthcare supply chains.
- Multilateral leverage: Use SCO and BRICS for issue-based cooperation without compromising on core border concerns.

THE NEW V-P

To clear his predecessor's shadow, Radhakrishnan should let himself be guided by the Constitution — and nothing but

THE ELECTION OF the 15th Vice President of India, the second highest constitutional post in the country, took place under a lingering shadow. Chandrapuram Ponnusamy Radhakrishnan comes to the office even as speculation is yet to die down about the unusual and unceremonious exit of his predecessor Jagdeep Dhankhar. Midway in a term scheduled to end in 2027, almost mid-sentence on the opening day of the Monsoon Session of Parliament, Dhankhar resigned, citing health reasons that were widely seen to be unpersuasive. The unmistakable impression was that his exit had to do with losing the trust of the government that had appointed him. Even after being seen to conspicuously play by the ruling establishment's script in taking on the Opposition in Rajya Sabha, and the judiciary outside it, Dhankhar apparently was not deemed to be loyal or amenable enough eventually. V-P Radhakrishnan takes over in a difficult moment, therefore, when questions still swirl about the space for manoeuvre, and more importantly, the limits of his high constitutional office in a time of sharpening political polarisation and a take-no-prisoners political executive.

Radhakrishnan traces his political lineage to the RSS, and has had a long and varied experience in public life subsequently — as the BJP's Tamil Nadu chief, as a two-term Lok Sabha MP from Coimbatore, as governor of Jharkhand and Maharashtra most recently. In all these roles, he has earned a reputation of being the affable consensus-builder, and for an ability to make friends across the political divides fluently. As Vice President, Radhakrishnan will need to carry with him these qualities, and particularly the learnings from his tenure in the Raj Bhawan, also an office circumscribed by the demands and constraints of constitutional propriety. In the wake of Dhankhar's abrupt exit, it may seem that the V-P's main challenge will be to calibrate his relationship with the government in turbulent times, keep it on even keel while not looking over his shoulder constantly. But Radhakrishnan cannot lose sight of his primary responsibility: As chairperson of Rajya Sabha, the burden of fair and impartial conduct of the proceedings of the House, in which the Opposition is given a voice and a hearing, will be on him.

To be sure, it will be a tightrope walk. The new V-P must navigate the demands of his office under a third-term government wielding a stern loyalty test, in a time when the lines between government and opposition have hardened, and the spaces for independent and mediating institutions are shrinking. He must keep his equanimity and, more importantly, let the constitutional mandate — and only the constitutional mandate — guide him through thick and thin. Welcome, Vice President Radhakrishnan, and best wishes.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Chandrapuram Ponnusamy (C.P.) Radhakrishnan elected as the 15th Vice President of India.
- He succeeds Jagdeep Dhankhar, who resigned abruptly before completing his tenure (term was due till 2027).

Key Issues Highlighted

1. Abrupt Exit of Jagdeep Dhankhar
 - Official reason: health issues.
 - Political speculation: loss of government's trust despite aligning with ruling establishment.
 - Raises question on tenure security and autonomy of high constitutional offices.
2. Challenges for New Vice President
 - Maintaining autonomy while balancing expectations of the political executive.
 - Role as Chairperson of Rajya Sabha → ensuring impartial functioning of the House.
 - Navigating in a politically polarised environment where Opposition space is shrinking.

Vice President (Articles 63–71, Indian Constitution)

- Second highest constitutional office (after President).
- Elected by electoral college consisting of both Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs (not state assemblies).
- Term: 5 years, but eligible for re-election.
- Removal: Resolution of Rajya Sabha by absolute majority + agreed to by Lok Sabha (simple majority).

Role in Rajya Sabha

- VP is the ex-officio Chairman of Rajya Sabha (Art. 64).
- Functions: maintain decorum, decide on points of order, give Opposition fair hearing.
- Cannot vote in Rajya Sabha (except casting vote in case of tie).

Governor Experience as Training Ground

- Radhakrishnan earlier Governor of Jharkhand and Maharashtra.
- Governor's role: ceremonial head but acts within constitutional limits → gives experience in dealing with Centre-State tensions.

Concerns of Constitutional Morality

- Shrinking space for independent institutions (judiciary, Parliament, constitutional offices).
- VP must uphold constitutional mandate over political loyalty.
- This links with UPSC themes of separation of powers & checks and balances.

SC-Relevant Static Data

- First Vice President of India: Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1952–1962).
- Only VP to become President automatically: V.V. Giri (1969, as Acting President).
- Article 67(b): Vice President can resign by writing to the President.
- Rajya Sabha strength: 245 (233 elected + 12 nominated by President under Art. 80).

STRIKING AT WILL

Israel's attack on Qatar underlines that Netanyahu government has little regard for international opinion or domestic dissent

ISRAEL'S STRIKES INSIDE Qatar, which have drawn global criticism, deal a hammer blow to any realistic prospect of ending the war in Gaza soon. The operation in Doha targeted Hamas's negotiating team, which had convened to discuss the latest US ceasefire proposal, President Donald Trump's "last warning". Hamas has confirmed six deaths, but it has also said that the group's leadership has survived. The attack is a sign that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is doubling down on eliminating Hamas completely, instead of focusing on a negotiated settlement that can ensure the return of the remaining Israeli hostages. Immediately after the strike, The Hostages and Missing Families Forum in Israel said they are worried about the price the hostages may have to pay.

Trump has voiced his unhappiness and insisted that Netanyahu has acted unilaterally. Qatar, after all, is no ordinary country: A tiny but wealthy Gulf state, it is a key US ally and hosts the largest American military base in the Middle East. The Qatari government condemned the attack as a "clear breach of the rules and principles of international law." Netanyahu, however, has defended it as a targeted move on Hamas's political leadership, in retaliation for the recent Jerusalem shooting that killed six people and an assault on an Israeli army camp in Gaza that left four soldiers dead. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter explicitly prohibits the use of force against the "territorial integrity or political independence" of another state. And without UNSC authorisation, Israel's actions appear to constitute a violation of sovereignty and an act of aggression under international law. But over the past two years, Israel has shown little regard for the rules, executing strikes against multiple nations like Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq that almost certainly violate international law, at will.

The latest attack comes against the backdrop of three simultaneous developments. First, the planned offensive of the IDF to seize what it claims is Hamas's last remaining stronghold in Gaza, where thousands continue to endure hunger. Second, the mounting protests inside Israel demanding an end to the war and a deal to immediately secure the release of the remaining hostages. Third, the opening of the UN General Assembly this week, where major Western nations, like the UK, France, Australia, Belgium, and Canada, are expected to follow through on their pledge to recognise the State of Palestine. If Israel's strike on Qatar signals anything, it is that the Netanyahu government has little regard for either international opinion or domestic dissent. Its overriding objective appears to be the continuation of the war and its expansion to new fronts.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Why in News?

- Israel conducted airstrikes inside Qatar, targeting Hamas's negotiating team.
- The strike came when Hamas was deliberating on a US ceasefire proposal (termed Trump's "last warning").
- This incident has triggered global criticism as it challenges the norms of state sovereignty and international law.

Background Context

- Qatar: A tiny but wealthy Gulf nation, key US ally, and host of the largest American military base in the Middle East (Al-Udeid Air Base).
- Hamas: Palestinian militant and political group. Israel accuses it of terrorist attacks; many Western states designate it as a terrorist organization.
- UN Charter Article 2(4): Explicitly prohibits the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of another state without UNSC authorization.
- Israel has a record of cross-border strikes in countries like Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, and Iraq.

Why It Matters? (UPSC Static Linkages)

- International Law & UN Charter
 - Israel's attack violates sovereignty principles under Article 2(4) of UN Charter.

- Could be classified as an act of aggression without UN Security Council approval.
- Relates to International Relations (GS-II): UN's role in maintaining global peace.
- Geopolitical Implications
 - Qatar's role: mediator in regional conflicts + host of US CENTCOM base.
 - Strikes complicate US foreign policy, since Qatar is America's ally.
 - Potential fallout in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and wider Arab world.
- Domestic Politics in Israel
 - Israeli protests demanding hostage release and an end to war.
 - Netanyahu government appears focused on military expansion rather than negotiated peace.
- Palestine Statehood Question
 - Several Western nations (UK, France, Australia, Belgium, Canada) preparing to recognise the State of Palestine at the UNGA.
 - Israel's aggressive posture could harden global support for Palestinian statehood.
- India's Concerns (Static + Current)
 - India traditionally follows a balanced West Asia policy:
 - Support for Palestinian cause (historic, NAM roots).
 - Strategic ties with Israel (defence, agriculture, technology).
 - Strong energy and diaspora ties with Gulf States including Qatar.
 - Any escalation threatens energy security and safety of 8.5 million Indian diaspora in West Asia.

Ethical & Legal Dimensions

- Sovereignty vs. Security dilemma.
- Question of whether counter-terrorism justifies breach of international law.
- Humanitarian concerns: civilians in Gaza facing famine + hostages at risk.

Way Forward

- Diplomatic push at UNGA for ceasefire and peace settlement.
- Reform in UN Security Council to effectively address violations of sovereignty.
- Greater role for regional organisations (Arab League, GCC, OIC) in conflict resolution.
- For India: continued emphasis on strategic autonomy – balancing ties with Israel, Palestine, and Gulf nations.