

DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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**CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY
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India's Kabul mission to be upgraded to embassy

Jaishankar announces this while meeting Taliban's Muttaqi; condemns refugee repatriation by Pak.

Muttaqi welcomes decision; says diplomats will go to Afghan Embassy, may not send Ambassador initially

Jaishankar says India, Afghanistan share growth goals; cross-border terror a common challenge

Kalol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India will upgrade its 'technical mission' in Kabul to the status of an embassy, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Friday.

The announcement came during Mr. Jaishankar's meeting with Amir Khan Muttaqi, Foreign Minister of the Taliban administration in Afghanistan, at Hyderabad House. Mr. Jaishankar also raised India's concerns over the forced repatriation of Afghan refugees by Pakistan and described "cross-border terrorism" as a common challenge to both India and Afghanistan.

"India is fully committed to the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of Afghanistan. Closer cooperation between

us contributes to your national development, as well as regional stability and resilience. To enhance that, I am pleased to announce today the upgrading of India's technical mission in Kabul to the status of Embassy of India," said Mr. Jaishankar.

India had shut its embassy in Kabul in 2022 after the U.S.-led forces withdrew from Afghanistan.

In an interaction at the Embassy of Afghanistan, Mr. Muttaqi welcomed the decision and said, "We will send our diplomats to the Embassy of Afghanistan."

He clarified that the Taliban may not send an ambassador at the beginning.

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Reaching out: S. Jaishankar with Afghanistan's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in New Delhi on Friday. [ANI](#)

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Pak. violating Kabul's sovereign territory: Taliban

KABUL
The Taliban regime on Friday accused Pakistan of "violating Kabul's sovereign territory," a day after two explosions were heard. The Taliban have previously accused Islamabad of border strikes, but this is the first time they have alleged an incursion deep into their territory, calling it an "unprecedented act". [▶ PAGE 12](#)

people, saying, "We appreciate your sensitivity towards India's security concerns." He also reiterated India's commitment to facilitating travel for Afghan nationals through a new visa module introduced in April 2025, with more medical, business, and stu-

dent visas being issued. A joint statement issued after the meeting of the officials said that scholarships from the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and other organisations are "under active consideration" to enable more Afghan students to study in India.

Mr. Muttaqi had earlier met Foreign Secretary Vikram Miri in Dubai on January 8, where the two sides discussed the roadmap for bilateral relations amid evolving regional developments. Since assuming power, the Taliban has established diplomatic ties with several countries, including Russia and China. Mr. Muttaqi arrived in New Delhi from Moscow, where he attended the Moscow Format Dialogue.

Global recognition of the Taliban government —

the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan — has been impeded by concerns over the human rights situation in the country, which did not feature in Mr. Jaishankar's remarks. Highlighting the importance of Mr. Muttaqi's first visit to New Delhi, Mr. Jaishankar said,

"...a meeting between us in person has a special value in allowing us to exchange perspectives, identify common interests and forge closer cooperation." The Minister also announced six new health projects for Afghanistan, with details to be shared soon. India will gift 20 ambulances to Afghanistan as a "symbolic step". The visiting side also invited Indian companies to invest in the mining sector of Afghanistan.

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- India announced the upgradation of its Technical Mission in Kabul to the Embassy of India.
- Declared by EAM S. Jaishankar during his meeting with Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi in New Delhi.
- India had closed its Kabul Embassy in 2021 after the Taliban's takeover.

Key Points

- Diplomatic Upgrade: Mission in Kabul to function as a full-fledged embassy.
- Security Cooperation: Shared concern over cross-border terrorism; both sides to coordinate efforts.
- Development Aid: Six new health projects and 20 ambulances announced.
- People-to-People Links: Easier visa processes, more ICCR scholarships for Afghan students.
- Regional Context: Follows Taliban outreach to Russia and China; reflects cautious Indian re-engagement.

Static Linkages

- Article 51(c): India to promote peace, respect for international law.
- Panchsheel Principles: Mutual respect and non-interference.
- Vienna Convention (1961): Governs diplomatic missions.
- Strategic Partnership Agreement (2011): Framework for political, security, and economic cooperation.
- Projects: Salma Dam, Zaranj-Delaram Highway.

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Reasserts Indian presence in Afghanistan.
- Strengthens counterterrorism cooperation.
- Enhances humanitarian and developmental outreach.

Concerns:

- Risk of legitimizing Taliban amid rights concerns.
- Persistent security threats from IS-K, TTP.
- Diplomatic balancing with Western partners.

Way Forward

- Maintain calibrated engagement without formal recognition.
- Strengthen regional security dialogues (SCO, Heart of Asia).
- Prioritise humanitarian assistance and people-centric projects.
- Build secure aid corridors via Chabahar Port.

'WON'T ALLOW TERRORISTS'
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Gaza ceasefire takes effect as Israel forces pull back to agreed deployment lines

Associated Press
WADI GAZA, GAZA STRIP

A ceasefire between Israel and Hamas came into effect in Gaza on Friday, the Israeli military said, hours after Israel's Cabinet approved a deal to pause the fighting and exchange the remaining hostages for Palestinian prisoners.

Israeli forces have withdrawn to agreed deployment lines for the first stage of the ceasefire, it added.

Tens of thousands of people who had gathered in Wadi Gaza in central Gaza started walking north after the military's announcement at noon. Beforehand, Palestinians reported heavy shelling in parts of Gaza throughout Friday morning, but no significant bombardment was reported after.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insisted in a televised statement on Friday that the next stages would see Hamas disarmed and Gaza demilitarised.

"If this is achieved the easy way – so be it. If not – it will be achieved the hard way," he said. He added that Hamas agreed to the deal "only when it felt that the sword was on its neck – and it is still on its neck."

Under the deal, all 48 hostages still in captivity are expected to be released. In exchange, Israel will release around 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.

Khalil al-Hayya, a senior Hamas official and lead negotiator, said in a speech Thursday evening that all women and children held in Israeli jails will be freed.

"We declare today that we have reached an agreement to end the war and the aggression against our



Sigh of relief: Palestinians move toward Gaza City from Nuseirat in central Gaza Strip on Friday. AFP

people," al-Hayya said.

Major step

The ceasefire marks a key step toward ending a ruinous two-year war that has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians, reduced much of Gaza to rubble, destabilised West Asia, and left dozens of hostages, living and dead, in the territory.

Israeli Brig. General Efi Defrin, a military spokesman, said that troops had completed their withdrawal to the deployment lines by Friday afternoon, a few hours after the ceasefire officially went into effect.

Earlier, an Israeli security official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the military would control around 50% of Gaza in their new positions.

In Israel's offensive, more than 67,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza and nearly 170,000 wounded, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

The war has also triggered other conflicts in the

region, sparked worldwide protests and led to allegations of genocide that Israel denies.

The hostage and prisoner releases are expected to begin Monday, two Egyptian officials briefed on the talks and a Hamas official said, though another official said they could occur as early as Sunday night.

All living hostages are expected to be released at the same time, followed by the bodies of the deceased, which could take more time.

Five border crossings are expected to reopen, including the Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, the Egyptian and Hamas officials said. That will allow aid to flow into the territory, parts of which are experiencing famine.

Tom Fletcher, the U.N. humanitarian chief, told reporters Thursday that officials have 170,000 metric tons of medicine, aid and other supplies at ready for transport into Gaza when they are given a green light.

- UN has readied 170,000 metric tons of relief supplies for Gaza.
- Israel plans to pursue Gaza's demilitarisation and Hamas's disarmament in later phases.

Static Linkages

- Geneva Conventions (1949): Mandate humane treatment of civilians and prisoners during conflicts.
- UN Charter (1945), Article 2(4): Prohibits use of force except in self-defense or under UN mandate.
- India's Stand: Supports a two-state solution ensuring peace and sovereignty for both Israel and Palestine.
- Oslo Accords (1993): Framework for Israel-Palestine peace and limited Palestinian self-governance.

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Opens path for humanitarian aid and regional stability.
- Builds temporary trust for dialogue.
- Reduces risk of wider regional conflict.

Cons:

- Truce fragile; deep mistrust persists.
- Core issues – borders, Jerusalem, refugees – unresolved.
- Massive humanitarian crisis, risk of relapse into conflict.

Way Forward

- Ensure uninterrupted aid flow under UN supervision.
- Revive multilateral peace talks on two-state framework.
- Strengthen international monitoring of ceasefire violations.
- Launch Gaza reconstruction plan under UN-World Bank partnership.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A ceasefire between Israel and Hamas came into effect in Gaza on October 10, 2025, after Israel's Cabinet approved a deal to pause fighting and exchange hostages for Palestinian prisoners.
- 48 Israeli hostages will be released in exchange for about 2,000 Palestinian prisoners.
- The deal, mediated by Egypt, Qatar, and the U.S., ends nearly two years of war that began with Hamas's October 7, 2023 attacks.

Key Points

- Israeli forces have withdrawn to new deployment lines; no major bombardment since the ceasefire began.
- Five border crossings, including Rafah, to reopen for aid delivery.
- Over 67,000 Palestinians killed, ~170,000 injured (Gaza Health Ministry).

Unemployment is still a core issue in Bihar



Jignesh Mevani
is a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Gujarat and Convener of the Rashtriya Dalit Adhikar Manch

Since those not working are not even looking for work, the unemployment rate looks deceptively low. This is a classic manifestation of the "Discouraged Worker Effect" wherein people without jobs lose hope of finding employment opportunities and completely withdraw from the labour force.

A comparison of Bihar with similar/comparable States strengthens the inference and shows how bad employment conditions are in Bihar. But it is important to compare Bihar against States of a similar size and economic background. In this, two factors are crucial in determining similarity: population and per capita income.

For a meaningful comparison, Bihar was grouped with nine large, low-income States (population above three crore as in the Registrar General of India's 2024 projections, per capita income below national average for 2025-25). There are nine States that fall under this criteria, which are Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

When Bihar's indicators are compared with the chosen group of States, the results are alarming. Bihar ranks the lowest across WPR and LFPR. Uttar Pradesh fares marginally better but still hovers near the bottom.

The quarterly PLFS (April-June 2025) shows that among youth (15-29 years), the picture is even bleaker: only 28 out of 100 are working. Bihar is at the bottom in terms of youth work participation and youth labour force participation. For a generation that should be building its future, the doors of employment remain closed.

Since quarterly figures may be influenced by seasonal fluctuations in employment, it is important to look at the annual PLFS estimates as well. Quarterly estimates are based on Current Weekly Status, in which the reference period used to determine a person's employment status is just seven days.

The annual report also presents Usual Status: principal-subsidy status), or figures which give a more comprehensive and stable picture of employment over a long term, minimising the distortions caused by short-term variations such as festivals, illness or crop cycles. It also captures people's subsidy work. However, these annual figures too reinforce the same conclusion. For

those aged 15 years and above, Bihar's WPR stands at 51.6% and LFPR at 53.2%, which are abysmally low. Only Bihar and Uttar Pradesh fall below 60% in WPR.

The situation is grave for women. Bihar's female WPR is only 30.1%, or out of 100 women aged 15 years and above, only 30 are working. The situation is even more distressing for young women. In the 15-29 age group, Bihar's female work participation rate stands at 31.2%, while neighbouring Jharkhand records 49.3%, which is nearly 20 percentage points higher.

The quality of jobs in Bihar is equally troubling. Only 8.7% of workers are engaged in regular wage/salaried jobs, the lowest among comparable States. Bihar is the only State – not just in this group but also in the entire country – with a single digit proportion. At the same time, 23.8% of workers are employed as casual labourers, the highest share after Odisha across these States. This indicates a lack of secure and formal employment opportunities.

Such outcomes are in stark contrast to the claims of the National Democratic Alliance, which often highlights the formalisation of the economy as one of its achievements. In Bihar, however, the labour market remains overwhelmingly informal, insecure and poorly remunerated.

Migration and the missing numbers

A caveat must be kept in mind while interpreting Bihar's employment indicators. The PLFS counts only those individuals residing in the State during the reference period. The employment picture could have been better had the PLFS been capturing migration as well.

The grim labour market outcomes cannot be separated from Bihar's governance record. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's government has failed to improve literacy and human capital formation. The same PLFS (annual) shows Bihar's literacy rate at only 73.2% for the 5-plus age group, which is far below the national average. Without significant improvements in education and skills, the State cannot hope to generate meaningful employment opportunities.

Despite frequent announcements, investment summits and promises of industrial revival, little has materialised on the ground. Mr. Kumar's political manoeuvres and shifting alliances have yielded little tangible benefits for Bihar's economy. The State has underperformed in education, job creation, industrialisation and formalisation.

The employment crisis in Bihar is not a matter of perception but one of hard evidence. PLFS data consistently reveal that Bihar lags in all key labour market indicators. Mr. Kumar's tenure of nearly two decades as the Chief Minister has failed to address these structural weaknesses. For a State with such a young population, this represents not just a missed opportunity but a potential social crisis in the making. Bihar urgently needs a comprehensive strategy to revive education, create formal jobs, and stem the outmigration of its workforce. Anything short of this risks perpetuating the cycle of poverty, migration, and underdevelopment that has long haunted the State.

- Literacy: 73.2% (PLFS 2023-24), below national average.
- Migration distortion: PLFS excludes out-migrants, underestimating employment stress.

Static Linkages

- PLFS: Conducted by NSO (MoSPI) – key employment data source.
- Indicators: WPR, LFPR, UR – core labour metrics.
- Discouraged Worker Effect: Explains low LFPR despite low UR.
- Usual Principal & Subsidiary Status (UPSS): Long-term employment measure.
- Economic Context: Structural & disguised unemployment; weak human capital formation.

Critical Analysis

Positives:

- Skill & startup policies initiated; some infra improvement.

Challenges:

- Lowest WPR & LFPR; poor female and youth participation.
- 90%+ workforce informal; minimal job security.
- Poor literacy and governance deficit.
- Migration-driven economy, not job-led growth.

Stakeholders:

- Youth & migrants: lack secure jobs.
- State govt: claims industrial progress; outcomes limited.

Way Forward

- Strengthen education & skilling (PMKVY, NSQF).
- Promote MSME & agro-based industries.
- Include migration data in PLFS.
- Increase female labour participation via SHGs & flexible work.
- Boost formalisation through EPFO/ESIC.
- Ensure policy stability & investment incentives.

Unemployment has consistently emerged as one of the most pressing political issues in Bihar. In the last two Assembly elections, jobs and livelihood were among the top concerns. In 2015, post-poll surveys conducted by Lokniti-CSDS showed that 'unemployment/jobs' was the most important issue for 9.1% of voters. By 2020, this percentage rose to nearly 21.0%, making it the second most important issue for voters. With the employment scenario still grim, it is an issue that is likely to dominate voter priorities in the forthcoming polls.

The situation needs to be looked at objectively, for which official statistics are useful. Under the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), the latest State-level indicators on employment are the April-June 2025 quarterly report and the July 2023-June 2024 annual report, with insights on Bihar.

Looking beyond the unemployment rate

The quarterly and annual releases cite Bihar's unemployment rate as 5.2% and 3%, respectively, whereas it was 4.4% and 3.2%, respectively, at the national level for ages 15 and above. To the casual reader, Bihar's employment/unemployment picture seems decent to good. However, such a superficial reading is misleading. To truly understand employment conditions, one must understand three interrelated indicators in the PLFS – Worker Population Ratio (WPR) or share of the population that is employed; Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) or the share of the population either employed or actively seeking work, and Unemployment Rate (UR) or share of the labour force that is unemployed and actively looking for work.

Looking at the UR in isolation conceals the true picture. The same quarterly and national releases cite the WPR for Bihar at 46.2% and 51.6%, respectively while the national WPR is 52% and 58.2%, respectively, which shows that the share of those employed in the working age population is much lower in Bihar.

On checking the WPR and LFPR in the table, Bihar has low WPR, low LFPR, and therefore low UR. A more holistic interpretation is grim because many in Bihar are not working (low WPR), and many are not even looking for work (low LFPR).

Bihar needs a strategy to revive education, create formal jobs and stem the outmigration of its workforce

A true picture

The employment crisis in Bihar is not a matter of perception but one of hard evidence

	Quarterly (April-June 2025)**				Annual (July 2023-June 2024)**				Proportion of regular wage/salaried workers	Proportion of casual labour workers				
	WPR	LFPR	WPR (15-29)	LFPR (15-29)	WPR	LFPR	Female WPR	Female LFPR						
Assam	57.9	60.8	40.7	48.2	64.3	66.9	44	51.3	48.1	50.2	30	35.1	18.9	19.7
Bihar	46.2	48.8	28.3	33.9	51.6	53.2	31.2	34.6	30.1	30.5	14.2	14.8	8.7	23.8
Chhattisgarh	55.1	59.8	39.6	48.3	69.7	71.5	57.8	61.7	58.1	59.5	47.6	50.6	15.9	18.5
Jharkhand	47.3	49.4	30.7	35.6	63	63.8	49.3	51.1	49.6	49.8	38	38.6	12.9	19
MP	54.8	57.2	41.2	45.8	68.3	68.9	56.5	58.1	51.9	52.3	37	38.1	13.2	18.4
Odisha	50.3	53.7	33.7	42.1	62.9	64.9	46.3	52.3	48	49.4	33.7	37.6	13.6	24.4
Rajasthan	53.9	59.1	35.5	45.4	61.7	64.4	44.1	50.4	48.9	50.9	31.7	36.5	18.8	22.5
Uttar Pradesh	47.7	50.2	32.1	37.1	55.1	56.9	39	42.9	33.6	34.5	20	21.8	12.4	14.9
West Bengal	54.9	57	39.2	44.7	59.8	61.1	41.6	49	39.2	40.4	28.1	31.2	20.4	23.1
All-India	52	55	35.8	42	58.2	60.1	41.7	46.5	40.3	41.7	25.6	28.8	21.7	19.8

Source: PLFS, Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India. All figures are in %, unless otherwise specified. WPR and LFPR are reported for all persons aged 15 years and above. **Current Weekly Status (CWS) **Usual Status (US)

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Unemployment remains Bihar's top political issue; voter concern on jobs rose from 9.1% (2015) to 21% (2020).
- Latest PLFS (Apr-Jun 2025 & 2023-24 annual) data reveal low employment and labour participation despite a low unemployment rate.
- Indicates deep structural weaknesses in Bihar's economy and governance.

Key Facts

- Unemployment Rate (UR): 5.2% (Q1 2025) & 3% (2023-24 annual) – below national average but misleading.
- WPR: 46.2% (Quarterly) vs national 52%; LFPR: 53.2% (Annual) – among India's lowest.
- Youth (15-29 yrs): Only 28% employed – worst among low-income large States.
- Female WPR: 30.1%; female youth WPR: 31.2% (vs Jharkhand's 49.3%).
- Regular salaried jobs: 8.7% – lowest in India; casual labour: 23.8%.
- Comparable States: Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, MP, Odisha, Rajasthan, UP, WB – Bihar ranks bottom.
- Discouraged Worker Effect: Low LFPR → many not seeking work due to lack of jobs.

The real need is a holistic demographic mission

The announcement on August 15, 2025, of a demographic mission, has become a topic of controversy in social and political circles. While the stated mission was limited to monitoring undocumented immigration from Bangladesh and its implied demographics in India's border regions, a holistic demographic mission seems to be the need as the nation is at the demographic crossroads. The most populous nation, with a large youth demography, undoubtedly becomes a matter of global envy and local pride. The demographics have never assumed significance in policy circles except for its relevance in population control. Demographic diversity is a blessing in disguise to sustain India's population well into the next century. Reading India's demographics may not essentially be limited to the country per se but has to be in relative terms with other global regions.

Need for a broader scope

A demographic mission requires examining the kind of demographic transformation that has taken place over the last two decades. Demographic imaginations relating to the three demographic components of fertility, mortality and migration are quite limiting but have broader implications towards regional distribution of the age-sex composition of population and households. The agenda of a demography mission should not necessarily be limited to reading the future of demography but in recognition of emerging population features in terms of capabilities such as education, health and livelihood features alongside the evolving institutions in response to the migration transition. From a human capability standpoint, a demography mission needs to address the



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A true demography mission needs to examine India's various transformations

imbalanced infrastructure to generate human capabilities across regions. Consider the case of education and skill capabilities or a 'dream India' emerging as a skill capital in the world – the educational infrastructure remains skewed across regions and is not in keeping with middle class aspirations. This results in inequities with the affluent being able to achieve things as against the less affluent failing to do so.

Issue of migration

While there have been major advances on the fertility and mortality fronts, migration seems to be a major population balancer across regions. Hence, policies need to be in place to make the choice of migration equal for everyone. But then the political discourse on migration is quite adverse within India. Despite the constitutional guarantee of a free mobility of individuals across all States, migrant identity is often threatened on various grounds. First, this is not a stated identity but rather a constructed one. Therefore, the protection of such an identity should ideally rest with the state rather than the individual.

Another complexity is the home and host attribute which needs to have an equal stake apart from the individual who is a migrant. The current political discourse on this subject is on disenfranchising migrants from their right to voting at home as they do not qualify to be the 'usual resident of the place'.

The same right could perhaps be bestowed on them by the host place, where they are equally disenfranchised. This raises a question on whether migrants face a constant battle of belonging. Resolving this puzzle that internal migrants confront should be the agenda of a demographic mission which should strive to

restore migrant rights.

On longevity

The changing demography also poses other puzzles such as growing longevity and the provisioning of social security. There is sincere engagement on this issue to redefine ageing and economically productive years of life, where the young and the old equally remain productive as long as they remain healthy and active. The other implication of social security protection being the sole responsibility of the state needs a relook as well, with employers preparing employees to remain financially secure for their non-earning years of life. The entire scene of provisioning of social security needs a rethink with there being extended years of life.

Recognition of changing demographics is perhaps necessary in all possible planning, policy making, evaluation and monitoring. While there are plethora of indicators being made available to celebrate progress and achievements, one wonders whether they are able to account for changing demographics. When it comes to allocation and provisioning too, demographics should dictate the priorities. Unfortunately, the per capita hangover continues to prevail which ignores the composition of the population in the denominator. A demography mission's foundation lies in the demographic sensitisation of a whole lot of intellectual discourse on mainstreaming, marginalisation and inclusion. Demography is not a mere discipline to offer a retrospective and prospective dimension of population. It is the foundation to build the future of humanity with a suitable alteration in strategies in keeping with the evolving global order.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Announced on 15 Aug 2025 to monitor undocumented immigration from Bangladesh.
- Experts call for a broader demographic mission addressing India's internal population dynamics.
- India, now world's most populous nation, faces opportunities (youth bulge) and challenges (ageing, regional disparities).

Key Points

- Original Objective: Monitor cross-border migration; need for holistic demographic analysis.
- Demographic Components: Fertility, mortality, migration; regional age-sex and household distribution.
- Migration Issues:
 - Internal migration ~37% of population (Census 2011).
 - Migrants face disenfranchisement in home and host regions.
- Education & Skills: Infrastructure uneven; affects youth potential and middle-class aspirations.
- Longevity: Life expectancy ↑ 59.7 → 70.8 yrs (1990–2022); ageing population to reach 20% by 2050.
- Social Security: Need reforms; extend financial and pension planning beyond state responsibility.
- Policy Implication: Demographic composition should guide planning, budgeting, and monitoring.

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(d) & (e) – Freedom of movement/residence.
- National Population Policy 2000 – stable population by 2045.
- Census Act 1948 – Population enumeration.
- Dependency ratio, labour supply, demographic dividend (Economic Survey, UNFPA).

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Enables data-driven policy, regional planning.
- Supports inclusive growth, migrant rights, skill development.

Cons/Challenges:

- Risk of politicisation and targeting of communities.
- Data gaps (Census delays).
- Constitutional and administrative coordination issues.

Way Forward

- Establish National Demographic Commission.
- Digitise and utilise Census 2021 data.
- Align demographic data with Skill India, Aspirational Districts.
- Reform social security, pensions, and financial literacy.
- Ensure constitutional protection of migrant rights.

Relooking at Kabul

Afghanistan is key to ensuring that India manages fallout of great power geopolitics to its west



VIVEK KATJU

AFGHANISTAN'S FOREIGN MINISTER Amir Khan Muttaqi's visit to India is a time to mainly look forward but also to remain mindful of past India-Afghanistan developments. The latter is to ensure that India's policies towards the Afghan Taliban proceed positively but soberly. They should not be marked by the unrealistic enthusiasm that its foreign and security establishment displayed towards the Afghan republic in its closing years.

India's Afghanistan approaches have to be framed within a changing environment in its western neighbourhood. The US has decided that Pakistan should play a major role in India's immediate and extended western neighbourhood. China is also expanding its influence in this area. Its ties with Pakistan remain ironclad, its influence in Iran and in the Arabian Peninsula has expanded. Russia has accorded diplomatic recognition to the Taliban and its bonds with Iran are strong. It is in this setting that India has to safeguard its interests to its west in the backdrop of Pakistan's implacable enmity. And it is in this regional setting also that Muttaqi is visiting India to promote mutual interests.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Muttaqi on October 10. He announced that India would re-establish its mission in Kabul. It has had a technical team in the Afghan capital since June 2022; hence, the move to formally reopen its embassy was overdue. Jaishankar implied that, for the time being, a chargé d'affaires would be appointed. This indicates that India does not want to give a signal that it is diplomatically recognising the Taliban till there is a consensus in the international community to do so. This is the correct approach.

While it may disappoint the Taliban, it will ensure that it does not ruffle feathers in Washington that India has joined the Moscow-Beijing camp on Afghanistan. It is necessary to signal this especially as India had joined the consensus at the recent Moscow meeting that no country should have military structures in Afghanistan. Soon, India should state that it is for the Taliban to

decide their country's security policies and foreign relations and no one else.

If India reopens its embassy in Kabul, it would have to allow the Taliban to control the Afghan embassy in Delhi sooner rather than later. That would also imply that it would fly the flag of the Afghan emirate. That, too, should not cause India any diplomatic discomfort because it would not imply formal diplomatic recognition. The fact cannot be overlooked that the Taliban has controlled all Afghan territories since it captured Kabul in 2021. There is no opposition either within or outside the country that can overthrow it. This is a factor that the entire international community has to accept.

Western demands for the Taliban to adhere to universally accepted norms on human rights will continue. But it is unlikely to do so. The group is committed to its Deobandi-Wahhabi interpretation of the Sharia. It will not abandon its theological moorings. Jaishankar did well not to venture into the area of human rights.

This marked a departure from the past. The India-US 2+2 Joint Statement in November 2023 had noted, "The Ministers urged the Taliban to respect the human rights of all Afghans, including women, children, and members of minority groups; and uphold freedom of travel." Jaishankar's silence on the issue is not because India endorses the Taliban approach on these issues but because it has had to do business with states, over the decades, that have pursued almost Taliban-like policies. But they are affluent and, hence, the custodians of human rights in the West have preferred to turn a blind eye to their approach to human rights.

In his opening remarks at the meeting, Jaishankar referred to the "shared threat of cross-border terrorism that both our nations face". These words connote that India stands with the Taliban against Pakistan's covert and overt actions against it. Naturally, Pakistan and China will be wary of India-Taliban cooperation in the security field but it is a natural consequence of threats that

both face from the same quarter.

This is ironic because it was Pakistan that sustained the group for over two and a half decades. Pakistan was instrumental in the Taliban inflicting a strategic defeat on the US to return to power in Afghanistan. What Pakistan obviously overlooked is that, as with other Afghan regimes in power in Kabul, the Taliban would not accept any interference in its India policies. Nor would it hand over its Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) kin to the men in khaki. And, of course, Pakistan also forgot the immutable and historical contradictions between peoples living on the opposite banks of the Indus!

Jaishankar spelled out the areas, stretching from food to health to training and education, where India would cooperate with the Afghan people. He also said that India would complete stalled projects. The Taliban would welcome Indian assistance in these areas but what it would look for is greater liberalisation in the visa regime for students and the sick. India should not hesitate to accept more Afghan visitors subject to security checks. This is vital to take the relationship forward and there is little danger of Afghans wanting to permanently settle in India.

It is also encouraging that Muttaqi desired greater Indian involvement in mining and other sectors of the Afghan economy. Clearly, the Taliban doesn't wish to become China's economic vassal even as it is mindful of the need for greater investment. India cannot afford for Afghanistan to become economically integrated with western China.

The Taliban will have to manage the major powers' interplay and also Pakistani pressures on relations with India. To do so, it wants enhanced Indian engagement in Afghanistan. This is in keeping with traditional Afghan policies. For India, a firm presence in Afghanistan is key to ensuring that it successfully manages any negative impact emanating from great power geopolitics in its western neighbourhood.

The writer is a former diplomat

Static Linkages

- Historical India-Afghanistan ties (ancient trade, post-2001 cooperation).
- Diplomatic norms: *chargés d'affaires*, Vienna Convention.
- Cross-border terrorism: TTP, LeT, ISI influence.
- Afghanistan's mineral resources and economic potential.
- Geopolitics: balance of power, strategic autonomy.

Critical Analysis

Pros:

- Strengthens strategic presence and developmental cooperation.
- Enables security coordination against cross-border terrorism.
- Maintains diplomatic balance, avoiding premature recognition.

Cons/Challenges:

- Taliban's human rights violations remain unaddressed.
- Risk of Pakistan-China backlash.
- Managing investment & influence to avoid Chinese overdependence.
- Perception of engaging a non-recognized regime.

Way Forward

- Maintain cautious diplomatic engagement.
- Expand developmental & humanitarian projects.
- Facilitate educational and medical exchanges with security checks.
- Diversify economic ties; avoid reliance on a single power.
- Coordinate with US, Russia, Gulf states to maintain regional balance.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- Afghan FM Amir Khan Muttaqi visited India on 10 Oct 2025; met EAM S. Jaishankar.
- India announced re-establishment of its mission in Kabul, upgrading the technical team (since June 2022) to formal diplomatic setup.
- Visit reflects pragmatic engagement with Taliban without formal recognition.
- Regional context:
 - US promotes Pakistan's role in India's western neighbourhood.
 - China expanding influence in Pakistan, Iran, Arabian Peninsula.
 - Russia recognizes Taliban and maintains strong ties with Iran.

Key Points

- India appoints *chargé d'affaires*; engagement without diplomatic recognition.
- Taliban controls entire Afghanistan since 2021; India engages *de facto*.
- India avoids human rights discourse, focusing on pragmatic cooperation.
- Areas of collaboration: food, healthcare, education, training, stalled infrastructure projects.
- Taliban seeks Indian investment in mining & economy to reduce reliance on China.
- Security cooperation focuses on cross-border terrorism, implicitly aligning against Pakistan-backed threats.



IN ARUNACHAL, INDIA'S STORY

The state is rooted in tradition, yet it looks at the future with confidence

JYOTIRADITYA M SCINDIA

EVERY TIME I set foot in the Northeast, I feel reenergised. Our Prime Minister calls it the Ashtalakshmi — a region of diversity and opportunity. On my recent three-day visit to Arunachal Pradesh, I experienced this moving mural, each frame brimming with heritage and progress.

My journey began at the Donyi Polo Airport in Hollongi, a shining example of the success of UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik), which has made air travel to India's remotest skies affordable and accessible. In just a few years, the number of airports in the Northeast has grown from nine to 17, four of them in Arunachal Pradesh — a transformation driven by PM Narendra Modi's push for connectivity. When I was in charge of the civil aviation ministry, PM Modi directed us to make these airports more than transit points. Each was envisioned as a window into its land, where bamboo-inspired structures, tribal motifs, and regional architectural designs remind every traveller that modern India has not left its roots behind.

After a smooth three-hour drive, I found myself in Ziro Valley for the Ziro Music Festival, ranked among the world's top music festivals, yet unlike any global spectacle. Every element is designed in an all-natural, eco-friendly setup, ensuring the valley returns to its pristine state once the music fades. Local artisans showcased their crafts, and thanks to Digital India and the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile trinity, cashless payments were effortless.

On stage, a Khasi folk singer followed an indie band from Mumbai; a French guitarist jammed with a local drummer; a Swiss wood sculptor exhibited her work, while a folk artist from Rajasthan laughed alongside

Apatani farmers. It was Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat in its truest form, where music became a language of togetherness and a celebration of India.

The next morning, the valley breathed in a gentler rhythm — the Apatani way of life. A brisk 8-km walk through the countryside with the young and energetic Chief Minister Pema Khandu unfolded like a living painting — mist trailing over golden paddy fields, flowers blooming, canals glimmering with darting fish, bamboo houses standing proud against the mountain winds. At its heart lay the UNESCO-recognised paddy-fish cultivation system, where ingenuity and nature move in harmony. And then came a moment that has etched itself in my memory: The Apatani people, breaking into song with the playful refrain "Deli se goru meru dos," their voices wrapping around me in such warmth that I felt less a visitor and more as if I had returned home. That emotion continued as we savoured a traditional Apatani meal with steaming millet porridge, bamboo shoot curry, wild greens, and river fish fillets.

It was the women of Ziro who left the most lasting impression. Self-help groups, empowered under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana and the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Grameen Kaushalya Yojana, are embracing an inclusive livelihood. From weaving textiles dyed in natural hues, to fermenting fruits into pickles and wines, to carving ornaments from bamboo and stone, their enterprises are vessels of culture, dignity, and hope. At the Goodwill Enclosure, I was humbled to meet the 1811 Medium Regiment, our country's guardians, before paying homage to Army martyrs.

In Hong Village, I met Taje Rita Takhe, who

left her engineering career to start Naara Aaba, India's first woman-led kiwi winery. With the support of her family, she transformed her orchard into a thriving enterprise producing wines from kiwi, apple, and guava, each infused with the crisp freshness of mountain air. Her success embodies PM Modi's call for Vocal for Local, Local to Global.

If Ziro was music and soil, Hun Village was discipline and vision. Its spotless streets were adorned with murals and flowering pathways. Waste had been turned into compost, solar lamps lit homes, and eco-tourism flourished through homestays built with bamboo and polished stones. Here, fruit plantations of oranges and kiwis thrived alongside weaving cooperatives marketing shawls online through e-Marketplace. Young entrepreneurs spoke proudly of taking their crafts digital, while elders shared wisdom in shaded courtyards. This was the Digital Northeast Vision unfolding in real time.

In many ways, Arunachal Pradesh offers lessons the world desperately needs: Sustainability rooted in tradition, women-led entrepreneurship, digital empowerment, and community-driven growth. In every corner, I saw the reflection of PM Modi's vision of Digital India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat, Startup India, and Jan Dhan Yojana unfolding into empowering aspirations. Arunachal Pradesh's story is India's story, the story of a nation that is rooted in tradition yet looks at the future with confidence.

The writer is Union Minister for Development of North Eastern Region and Union Minister of Communication

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- PM Modi recently visited Arunachal Pradesh, highlighting its cultural heritage, sustainable development, and economic potential.
- The visit showcased initiatives under UDAN, Digital India, Jan Dhan, and women-led entrepreneurship in the region.
- Events like the Ziro Music Festival demonstrate the fusion of tradition and modernity.

Key Points

- Connectivity: UDAN scheme expanded Northeast airports from 9 to 17; 4 new airports in Arunachal Pradesh.
- Cultural Promotion: Ziro Music Festival integrates indigenous and global music, eco-friendly setups, and local artisan participation.
- Sustainable Agriculture: Apatani tribe's paddy-fish cultivation system recognized by UNESCO.
- Women Entrepreneurship: Naara Aaba winery, India's first kiwi-based women-led enterprise, promotes local produce globally.
- Digital Empowerment: Cashless payments, e-Marketplace, and digital promotion of local crafts.

Static Linkages

- Economic growth through regional infrastructure and entrepreneurship.
- Preservation of cultural heritage.
- Sustainable farming integrating traditional knowledge.

Critical Analysis

- Pros: Improved connectivity, tourism growth, environmental sustainability, women empowerment.
- Cons: Risk of environmental degradation, cultural commercialization, economic dependence on tourism.
- Stakeholder Perspectives:
 - Locals benefit from jobs and digital inclusion.
 - Government promotes inclusive development.
 - Entrepreneurs gain market access.
 - Environmentalists emphasize sustainable growth.

Way Forward

- Ensure eco-friendly infrastructure and tourism development.
- Support women-led enterprises and skill development.
- Integrate traditional agricultural practices with modern technology.
- Diversify economy to reduce reliance on tourism.