



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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EXPRESS**

**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

Govt. firms increase petrol, diesel prices by 90 paise; second hike within a week

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

Government-owned oil marketing companies raised the prices of petrol and diesel on Tuesday by about 90 paise a litre across the country and across all variants. This was the second increase in five days following the increase by ₹3 a litre on May 15 after four years.

Effective Tuesday, the price of petrol in Delhi has been increased by 87 paise to ₹98.64 a litre and of diesel by 91 paise to ₹91.58 per litre.

On Monday, the government had said that losses incurred by oil marketing companies from liquefied petroleum gas, petrol and diesel combined have come down by ₹250 crore to ₹750 crore following the ₹3 increase in prices of petrol and diesel.

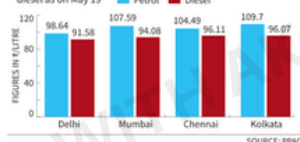
The government said it was not considering a bailout package for oil-marketing companies.

Indicative of pressure
The latest hike is the second such indication of pressure on retail fuel as the benchmark Brent crude futures continue to soar amid tensions in West Asia. According to government data, India's crude oil basket until May 15, since the start of the month, has averaged \$106.69 per barrel. Further, in the morning hours of Tuesday, Brent crude futures (July) were trading 0.15% higher at \$109.34 per barrel.

Sourav Mitra, partner for oil & gas at Grant Thornton Bharat, said while the latest increase provides "incremental relief" to the

Rising trends

The chart shows the revised retail selling price of petrol and diesel as on May 19



SOURCE: PPMC

country's oil-marketing companies, it may not be sufficient to fully cushion the existing stress.

"With crude sustaining above \$100 per barrel and the India rupee weakening, both of which increase the landed cost of imports, OMCs continue to operate under materially significant cost pressure, with currency depreciation alone potentially offsetting substantial amount of gains from the price revisions," Mr. Mitra said.

India's crude oil basket until May 18 since the start of the month has averaged \$107.3 per barrel, according to government data. Further, in the early evening hours of Tuesday, Brent crude futures (July) were trading 1.06% lower over its previous close at \$107.3 per barrel.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, Prashant Vashisht, senior vice-president and co-group head, Corporate Ratings at ICRA Ltd., held that should benchmark Brent crude futures oscillate between \$105 and \$110 for every barrel, based on a 10-year average between the price of crude oil and the refined petroleum products, the latest price in-

crease would help curtail the existing losses of OMCs from domestic LPG, petrol and diesel to ₹450 crore per day.

'Losses unsustainable'
Further, responding to a query about adjusting for OMC losses and fears about inflation, Mr. Vashisht held, "The losses being made at present are unsustainable. The OMCs are opting for graded increases so that there is no shock," he said. "Inflation may occur but the losses [of OMCs] are unsustainable."

The ₹3 per litre hike on Friday was the first major price increase by more than ₹1 per litre since April 2022.

Back then, a ₹9 per litre hike was executed in a staggered manner between March 28, 2022, and April 6, 2022. The hike coincided with the peak of the Russian actions in Ukraine. According to government data, India's crude oil basket averaged \$112.87 per barrel and \$102.97 per barrel in March and April of 2022.

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- Retail inflation (CPI/WPI)
- Petrol pricing deregulated in 2010; diesel in 2014.
- OMC under-recoveries rise when retail prices are not aligned with global crude prices.
- Rupee depreciation increases landed cost of imported crude oil.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs) are used to tackle supply disruptions.

Static Linkages

- Cost-push inflation occurs due to rising production and transport costs.
- Current Account Deficit widens when import expenditure exceeds export earnings.
- Energy security is critical for economic stability and strategic autonomy.
- Fossil fuel dependence increases vulnerability to geopolitical crises.
- Exchange rate depreciation makes imports expensive.
- Diversification of energy sources reduces import dependence.
- Fiscal deficit may increase through subsidy burden on petroleum products.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Reduces financial stress on OMCs.
- Supports market-linked fuel pricing.
- Prevents excessive fiscal burden on government.
- Encourages energy efficiency.

Concerns

- Increases inflationary pressure.
- Raises transport and agricultural costs.
- Affects household disposable income.
- Can slow economic growth through higher input costs.

Challenges

- High import dependence on crude oil.
- Volatile global oil market.
- Geopolitical instability in West Asia.
- Weakening rupee increases import bill.

Way Forward

- Increase renewable energy capacity.
- Promote ethanol blending and biofuels.
- Expand electric vehicle ecosystem.
- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Strengthen Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Encourage domestic exploration under HELP and OALP policies.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Public Sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) increased petrol and diesel prices by around ₹0.90/litre.
- This was the second fuel price hike within five days after a ₹3/litre increase.
- Brent crude prices remained above \$100/barrel due to geopolitical tensions in West Asia.
- India's crude oil basket averaged above \$107/barrel in May.
- Government stated that OMC losses reduced but remained around ₹750 crore/day.
- No bailout package for OMCs is being considered by the government.
- OMCs adopted gradual price hikes to avoid inflationary shocks.

Key Points

- India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil requirement.
- High crude oil prices increase:
 - Current Account Deficit (CAD)
 - Imported inflation
 - Fiscal pressure
 - Rupee depreciation risks
- Fuel prices affect:
 - Transportation sector
 - Agriculture input costs
 - Manufacturing and logistics

A China-U.S. summit that drew global attention

After a nine-year hiatus, United States President Donald Trump once again set foot on Chinese soil, and the "Beijing Moment" immediately went viral around the world. Why did this historic meeting draw such widespread attention? What were the important outcomes achieved? And what does it mean for the future development of China-India relations? I would like to share my observations and thoughts with our Indian friends.

First, why has the China-U.S. Summit captured the world's attention? The world today is fraught with turmoil and instability. The more complex and grave the global situation becomes, the greater the need for a stable and constructive China-U.S. relationship.

Just as Robert Kahn, President of the Kuhn Foundation of the U.S. said, "In an uncertain world, a handshake between Chinese and American leaders is the 'hard currency' the global market needs most." This statement captures the shared aspirations of the international community. As noted by some Indian media outlets, this leaders' meeting could be the most significant encounter between Chinese and American leaders since Chairman Mao Zedong met President Richard Nixon in 1972.

Support for a new vision
Second, what are the outcomes of the China-U.S. handshake? A key outcome of this summit is that the two leaders agreed on a new vision of building a constructive China-U.S. relationship of strategic stability, providing strategic guidance for bilateral relations over the next three years and beyond. Both sides will support this new vision with tangible cooperation.

Economic and trade cooperation is the "ballast stone". Among those accompanying Mr. Trump on his visit to China were 17 American business titans, including Tesla CEO Elon Musk, Apple CEO Tim Cook and QI Chair and CEO, Jane Fraser. During the interviews with the media at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, they stated that the successful meeting between the two leaders has injected new impetus into U.S.-China economic and trade cooperation and provided certainty for the global economy.

After multiple consultations, the two economic and trade teams produced generally balanced and positive outcomes, including establishing a



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board of trade and a board of investment, addressing each other's concerns regarding market access for agricultural products, and expanding two-way trade within the framework of reciprocal tariff reductions. These efforts have stabilized economies and trade ties as well as market expectations.

Sci-tech cooperation is the "bellwether". During this visit, the news that "NVidia founder and CEO Jensen Huang made a dramatic, last-minute entry into Beijing aboard Air Force One" spread far and wide. This intriguing detail precisely illustrates that "decoupling and severing of supply chains" is unworkable, mutual support and common progress are the right way forward.

The New York Times columnist Thomas Friedman also wrote an article calling on China and the U.S. to work together to address the first era in human history in which common development and prosperity can only be achieved through global governance, innovation, and cooperation. Coordination between China and the U.S. on Artificial Intelligence (AI) is crucial to the future of both countries and the destiny of humanity. It is hoped that the U.S. will work in the same direction with China, making AI a new frontier for China-U.S. cooperation and a new ladder for human progress.

People-to-people exchanges are the "lubricant" of bilateral relations. During the summit, both leaders emphasized the importance of promoting such exchanges. This reflects not only the consensus between the two leaders, but also the shared aspirations of the two societies.

President Xi Jinping had announced an important initiative in 2023 to invite 50,000 young Americans to China over a five-year period. Over the past three years, more than 40,000 American youths have participated in exchange and study programmes, significantly boosting interactions between the two peoples, especially among young people. A poll by the Chicago Council on Global Affairs showed that 53% of Americans favour friendly cooperation and engagement with China.

The Taiwan question
Sensitive issues are the "red line". The Taiwan question was an important topic taken up at the summit. President Xi emphasized that the Taiwan question is the most important issue between China and the U.S. If it is handled properly, the

overall relationship will be stable. Otherwise, the two countries will have clashes and even conflicts, and the entire relationship will be in great jeopardy. "Taiwan independence" and cross-Strait peace are as irreconcilable as fire and water. China and the U.S. both agree on the vital importance of safeguarding cross-Strait peace and stability. The U.S. must exercise the utmost prudence in handling the Taiwan issue. In an exclusive interview with Fox News, Mr. Trump made it clear that "we are not looking at somebody say 'let's go independent because the United States is backing us'. I'm not looking to have somebody go independent and we're supposed to travel 9,500 miles to fight a war." This demonstrates that the U.S. has understood China's position and responded to China's concerns.

China-U.S. stability supports Asia
Third, what does the China-U.S. rapprochement mean for China-India relations?

Some people worry that the rapprochement between China and the U.S. may compress India's diplomatic and strategic space. Such concerns are unwarranted. The remarkable achievements of China and India are built on the hard work and wisdom of their own peoples, and are by no means the result of others' generosity, much less subject to the ups and downs of any single bilateral relationship.

The strategic stability of China-U.S. relations provides positive and stable expectations for the world, which will benefit India, Asia, and the world as a whole.

China deeply understands India's aspiration for national rejuvenation and sincerely supports India's foreign policy of strategic autonomy. We stand ready to work with the Indian side to strengthen high-level exchanges, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, enhance people-to-people exchanges and promote multilateral coordination within mechanisms such as BRICS, so as to achieve the sustained, healthy and stable development of bilateral relations.

The way for major countries to get along well lies in seeking common ground while reserving differences and coexisting peacefully. The path to regional prosperity lies in common progress and shared flourishing. Perhaps this is the very lesson drawn from this China-U.S. summit.

- Globalisation created integrated trade and supply chains.
- Indo-Pacific is a major geopolitical and maritime region.
- Multipolarity refers to diffusion of power among multiple states.
- AI governance increasingly linked with national security and economy.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- May stabilise global economy and trade flows.
- Reduces risk of direct confrontation between major powers.
- Cooperation in AI and technology can improve global governance.
- Stable external environment benefits India's economic growth.

Concerns

- Taiwan issue can trigger major geopolitical conflict.
- Strategic rivalry between China and U.S. still persists.
- India may face pressure in balancing relations with both powers.
- Technology competition may intensify in semiconductors and AI sectors.
- China's regional influence may expand further.

India's Perspective

- India supports multipolarity and strategic autonomy.
- Opportunity to strengthen role in BRICS, QUAD, G20, and Indo-Pacific.
- Need to improve domestic manufacturing and supply-chain resilience.

Way Forward

- Strengthen India's strategic autonomy.
- Enhance domestic technological capabilities.
- Diversify supply chains and critical imports.
- Promote multilateral diplomacy through BRICS, G20, SCO, and QUAD.
- Develop clear AI regulatory framework.
- Maintain balanced engagement with both U.S. and China.
- Strengthen maritime and economic security in Indo-Pacific.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- High-level summit held between China and the United States after a prolonged diplomatic gap.
- Discussions focused on strategic stability, trade relations, Artificial Intelligence (AI), supply chains, and Taiwan issue.
- Summit gained importance due to rising geopolitical tensions, economic slowdown fears, and Indo-Pacific competition.
- China highlighted cooperation with India through BRICS and support for India's strategic autonomy.

Key Points

- China-U.S. relations significantly influence global economy and geopolitics.
- Economic interdependence continues despite strategic rivalry.
- Supply-chain "decoupling" remains difficult in a globalised economy.
- AI governance emerging as a major strategic issue.
- Taiwan remains the most sensitive issue in China-U.S. relations.
- Stable China-U.S. ties may reduce instability in Indo-Pacific region.
- India seeks strategic autonomy amid great-power competition.
- BRICS gaining importance in multipolar global governance.

Static Points

- "One China Policy" related to Taiwan issue.
- Strategic autonomy rooted in India's Non-Aligned Movement legacy.
- Balance of Power is a core concept in international relations.

India's EV ambition needs a grid strategy that matches



Kavay Wadhwa
Energy and strategic security analyst

Every time crude prices spike as a result of tensions in the Strait of Hormuz, India's import bill bleeds. The latest escalation in West Asia has prompted two-wheeler commuters in Patna and Pune to browse electric vehicle (EV) prices with genuine interest. Short daily commutes, immediate fuel savings, and low switching costs mean that two-wheelers will lead India's electric transition – and rightly so. But the visibility of this shift risks obscuring where the deeper infrastructure challenge truly lies: not in scooters, but in the grid that must eventually power freight.

The arithmetic of a second power system
India has approximately 420 million registered vehicles. Full electrification of this fleet across all vehicle categories, accounting for their vastly different energy intensities and annual usage would require generating an additional 900 TWh to 1,100 TWh per year. Even at 50% fleet conversion by 2047, a moderate assumption, the additional demand is roughly 500 TWh, equivalent to roughly a third of India's current annual electricity generation. Electrifying Indian transport means building a substantial expansion of the power system, approaching the scale of the one that took seven decades to construct. It is tempting to assume that two-wheeler-led adoption keeps grid impact gradual. Voters experience the transition as scooters on their streets; governments announce it as subsidies at rallies. But even 309 million electric two-wheelers – the largest vehicle class – would add only about 55 TWh/25 TWh (based on 5,000 km/7,000 km annual use at 0.035 kWh/km), less than 7% of total projected EV demand at full conversion. The political visibility of two-wheelers is thus inversely proportional to their grid impact.

The data in this article is based on the author's estimates, derived from fleet-scale modelling using VAHAN National Register data, the Parivahan analytics portal, CSTET freight electrification research, and ICDT heavy-duty vehicle analysis. Goods vehicles are segmented into HGV and MGV categories with differentiated energy intensity and annual mileage. The figures cited reflect the mid-range of three scenarios, with full-conversion estimates noted as upper bounds. The heavier lift belongs to freight and here the numbers are stark. A single heavy goods vehicle produces emissions equivalent to roughly 25 passenger cars. India has approximately 6.26

million heavy goods vehicles (HGVs), each consuming 1.2 to 1.5 kWh per kilometre over 60,000 km a year. Electrifying them alone would require 450 TWh to 565 TWh annually. Add nearly a million medium goods vehicles (MGVs) at lower but still significant energy intensities, and total freight electricity demand approaches 500 TWh to 600 TWh – several times the two-wheeler total, from barely 2% of the registered fleet.

When policymakers speak of "electrifying India's roads," they are largely speaking about electrifying India's supply chains. This is already visible on the ground. Across several States, fleet operators seeking high-tension depot connections face long delays. The challenge is not only technical but also financial: discoms, already burdened by significant accumulated losses, face distribution upgrades that they have not budgeted for.

What happens at seven in the evening? Annual demand figures tell only half the story. Grids are stressed not by yearly consumption but by instantaneous demand: if millions of vehicles charge during the evening peak, modelling suggests additional loads of several hundred gigawatts even under managed conditions. Without management, the risk extends to grid instability, supply disruptions, and tariff spikes affecting all consumers, not just EV owners.

The tools exist: time-of-use pricing, workplace charging during solar hours, battery storage at hubs, and swapping networks for lighter vehicles. Several States have introduced early EV tariff frameworks. But no national standard ensures that charges installed today can respond to grid signals. Every conventional charger installed now is a retrofit cost later.

What the grid actually needs
EV charging at this scale places two distinct demands on the generation system. The first is sheer volume. Hundreds of terawatt-hours of new supply. The second is reliability: freight depots, highway chargers, and urban networks need power around the clock, not only when the sun is up or the wind blows. Any credible strategy must address both.

Each major source brings a distinct strength. Solar and wind power offer the lowest marginal cost and fastest scalable deployment but operate at 25%-30% capacity factors, requiring storage or complementary generation for reliability. Nuclear power provides high-capacity factor, low-carbon

baseload independent of weather, but with long build cycles and high upfront costs. Pumped hydro and batteries bridge variability and demand, while gas can manage short-term peaks during the transition.

What does not belong in this mix is expanded coal use. If incremental terawatt-hours come mainly from coal, India merely replaces oil dependence with coal dependence – importing from Australia and Indonesia instead of the Gulf, without emissions gains. The logic of electrification breaks if the grid is not cleaner than the fuel it replaces. A diversified clean portfolio, where each source plays to its strengths, could cut required new capacity by half or more. For highway corridors and urban hubs needing firm baseload, micro modular nuclear reactors offer a weather-independent solution located close to demand centres.

There is a downstream dimension as well. Hundreds of millions of EV batteries will eventually reach end-of-life, and India does not yet have recycling infrastructure at anywhere near the required scale. Without it, the transition risks creating a new waste crisis even as it solves an energy one.

Steps to take
There are four things that would make a difference. The draft National Electricity Policy includes EV demand projections, but they do not yet drive capacity planning. Making EV load a primary variable modelling 30%, 50%, and 100% fleet electrification by 2047 would give the sector clarity. Smart-charging capability must be mandated for all new infrastructure at the equipment standard level.

The Golden Quadrilateral and Dedicated Freight Corridors need a joint power mapping exercise before electric trucks reach commercial scale. An inter-Ministerial mechanism bridging transport, power, and distribution finance would ensure that no part of the system plans in isolation. And strengthening discom finances through a reformed Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) with EV-readiness benchmarks is essential to making last-mile delivery viable.

The commuter in Patna choosing an electric scooter this week is making the right call. The question is whether planning is keeping pace with the ambition. India's EV transition is inevitable. The task now is to build the grid that makes it sustainable.

- India currently lacks adequate EV battery recycling infrastructure.

Static Linkages

- India imports more than 85% of its crude oil requirement.
- Energy security is linked to economic and strategic security.
- Smart grids improve electricity demand management.
- Baseload power ensures uninterrupted electricity supply.
- Renewable energy requires storage support because of intermittency.
- DISCOMs face financial stress and transmission losses.
- National Electric Mobility Mission Plan promotes EV adoption.
- RDSS aims to improve power distribution infrastructure.
- Circular economy includes battery recycling and resource recovery.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Reduces crude oil import dependence.
- Supports climate commitments and net-zero targets.
- Reduces urban air pollution.
- Encourages clean energy transition.
- Boosts domestic EV manufacturing ecosystem.

Challenges

- Massive rise in electricity demand.
- Weak financial condition of DISCOMs.
- Inadequate charging infrastructure.
- Renewable energy intermittency.
- Lack of battery recycling ecosystem.
- Peak-hour grid stress risks.
- Dependence on imported battery minerals.

Way Forward

- Integrate EV demand into long-term electricity planning.
- Mandate smart charging infrastructure.
- Expand renewable energy with storage systems.
- Improve DISCOM financial health.
- Develop battery recycling infrastructure.
- Promote domestic battery manufacturing.
- Introduce effective time-of-use electricity tariffs.
- Strengthen coordination between transport and power sectors.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Rising tensions in the Strait of Hormuz have renewed concerns over India's crude oil import dependence.
- Rising fuel prices are increasing public interest in electric vehicles (EVs), especially electric two-wheelers.
- The major challenge in India's EV transition is not vehicle adoption alone, but the expansion and modernization of the electricity grid required to support large-scale electrification.
- Freight transport electrification is expected to create the largest electricity demand burden.

Key Points

- India has nearly 420 million registered vehicles.
- Full transport electrification may require an additional 900–1100 TWh electricity annually.
- Even 50% EV conversion by 2047 may require nearly 500 TWh extra electricity generation.
- Electric two-wheelers contribute relatively low electricity demand despite high numbers.
- Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) may require 450–565 TWh electricity annually after electrification.
- Peak-hour EV charging may create risks of:
 - Grid instability
 - Power shortages
 - Tariff increases
- Suggested solutions include:
 - Smart charging
 - Time-of-use tariffs
 - Battery storage
 - Charging during solar hours
- Coal-based electricity expansion may weaken the environmental gains of EV adoption.

India's electric vehicle (EV) future depends on a strong and clean energy electricity grid

First and foremost

Shared use of disputed religious sites should be allowed to continue

The mixed architecture of the Bhojshala-Kamal Maula complex in Dhar, Madhya Pradesh, has fed uncertainty about its religious identity for more than a century, with the dispute intensifying around the time of the Ram Janmabhoomi mobilisation. The Archaeological Survey of India arranged in 2003 for people of different faiths to take turns using it until a petition in the Madhya Pradesh High Court sought a new survey to determine its 'true' character. The High Court obliged in 2024. The Supreme Court also allowed the survey to proceed with safeguards. On May 15, the High Court ruled that the complex had been a Hindu temple and suggested that the Muslim side seek alternative land from the State, while insisting that it was only determining its religious character. The finding, following from Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant's revival of the Bhojshala proceedings in January, was based on the value of archaeological evidence and the Court's 2019 Ayodhya judgment, especially the principles of "preponderance of probability" and "faith and belief." While the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act 1991 had frozen the religious character of all places of worship as on August 15, 1947, the case proceeded through a loophole in Section 4(3) exempting "ancient and historical monuments" under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act 1958. Given the High Court's determination, this is a procedural side door that hollows out the Act's spirit.

The CJJ's involvement also amounts to the Supreme Court staying civil suits while allowing PILs to achieve functionally identical outcomes. The courts may believe that they are neutral adjudicators but they are operating in politically polarised terrain. Groups such as the 'Hindu Front for Justice', which initiated parts of the Bhojshala litigation, are politically backed entities using judicial findings to consolidate agitation around contested religious sites. Archaeological ambiguities in mediaeval structures are not new; however, adversarial litigation, in the form of courts asking what was there 'first', can introduce arbitrary bounds favourable to the majoritarian political climate. A likely question is: why draw the line at mediaeval conquest and not go back to pre-Hindu histories? The Bhojshala ruling indicates that the Ayodhya verdict has paved the way to repeatedly challenge the status of minority religious sites if they are also protected by the Survey, extending a record that already includes Gyanvapi, Shahi Idgah, and the Bijamandal complex. The 1991 Act needs to be enforced strictly, with no determinations of religious character except when pertaining to title disputes already pending at the time of its enactment. Equally, shared use should be the norm as democratic coexistence outweighs any questions relating to 'first' ownership.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The dispute relates to the Bhojshala-Kamal Maula Complex over its religious character.
- The site is protected by the Archaeological Survey of India under the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958.
- In 2024, the Madhya Pradesh High Court ordered an ASI survey to determine the original nature of the structure.
- The Supreme Court of India permitted the survey with safeguards.
- On May 15, 2026, the High Court observed that the complex was originally a Hindu temple.
- The ruling referred to principles evolved in the 2019 Ayodhya Verdict.
- The case has revived debate regarding the scope of the Places of Worship (Special Provisions) Act, 1991.

Key Points

- The Places of Worship Act, 1991:
 - Maintains the religious character of places of worship as on 15 August 1947.
 - Prohibits conversion of one religious place into another.
- Exception under Section 4(3):

- Ancient and historical monuments protected under the Ancient Monuments Act, 1958 are exempted.
- The Bhojshala case proceeded through this exemption.
- Court relied upon:
 - Archaeological evidence,
 - Historical records,
 - "Preponderance of probability" principle,
 - "Faith and belief" doctrine from Ayodhya judgment.
- Similar disputes:
 - Gyanvapi Mosque
 - Shahi Idgah Mosque

Static Linkages

- Secularism as Basic Structure.
- Articles 25–28: Freedom of religion.
- Article 14: Equality before law.
- Article 49: Protection of monuments.
- Article 51A(f): Duty to preserve composite culture.
- Medieval syncretic architecture in India.
- Constitutional morality and fraternity.
- Judicial review and separation of powers.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Judicial route for resolving historical-religious disputes.
- Highlights role of ASI and archaeological evidence in litigation.
- Raises debate on balance between faith and constitutional secularism.

Concerns

- May dilute spirit of Places of Worship Act, 1991.
- Risk of repeated challenges to minority religious sites.
- Possibility of communal polarization.
- Courts entering historical-faith questions may create uncertainty.
- Selective interpretation of history may encourage identity politics.

Constitutional Dimensions

- Conflict between:
 - Freedom of religion,
 - Secularism,
 - Rule of law,
 - Fraternity.
- Raises issue of judicial activism versus legislative intent.

Way Forward

- Strict implementation of Places of Worship Act, 1991.
- Encourage mediation and shared-use arrangements.
- Preserve syncretic heritage traditions.
- Ensure ASI neutrality and scientific standards.
- Promote constitutional values of secularism and fraternity.
- Avoid politicization of heritage disputes.

Watch, but do not wait

Extra caution should guide international responses to the Ebola outbreak

With unusual alacrity, WHO declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern over the Ebola outbreak in central Africa, not even waiting for the advice of an emergency committee of expert panellists, as is convention. WHO has nevertheless been feted for swift action by global health experts, given that there are several unknowns arising from the current strain responsible for the outbreak – the uncommon Bundibugyo strain. This strain has caused fewer outbreaks in the past and the efficacy of usually effective countermeasures such as vaccines (highly effective against the common Zaire strain) and other therapies, are currently untested with Bundibugyo. The new Ebola outbreak was notified in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Uganda. It is said to be smaller and confined to a limited cross-border region between the two nations, but there are still concerns that because of the ongoing conflict and displacement in the region, cases might go undetected, leading to a spread, and impairing access to care. According to WHO, as on May 16, 2026, eight laboratory-confirmed cases, 246 suspected cases, and 80 suspected deaths have been reported in the DRC's Ituri province. Two lab-confirmed cases (including one death) with no apparent link to each other have been reported in Kampala, Uganda. WHO has listed a clutch of factors – high positivity rate of the initial samples (eight positives among 13 samples); the confirmation of cases in Kampala; increasing trends in syndromic reporting of suspected cases; and clusters of deaths across Ituri province – that point towards a potentially much larger outbreak than what is being detected.

At any rate, WHO has rightly taken a risk-averse pathway, when dealing with a condition that has a 50% fatality rate. While it says that mortality rates can range between 25% and 50% depending on the viral strain, access to medical care, and speed of treatment, there are unknowns this time arising out of the Bundibugyo strain. Ebola is contagious, can spread from person to person, with exposure to body fluids and contaminated surfaces, and can be vicious; the horrific 2014-16 outbreak which swept across Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, resulted in over 28,600 reported cases and 11,325 deaths. By issuing the highest level of global alert early on, WHO has solicited the co-operation of the world in handling the crises. Outbreak control activities at this stage must unflinchingly include effective patient and contact tracing, intensive support for every patient, safe and dignified burials, vaccinations, if they work, and social mobilisation to spread information about the disease among the public.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- World Health Organization declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) over the Ebola outbreak in Central Africa.
- Outbreak reported in Democratic Republic of the Congo and Uganda.
- The outbreak involves the rare Bundibugyo strain of Ebola virus.
- WHO acted early due to:
 - High fatality rate
 - Risk of undetected spread in conflict zones
 - Uncertainty regarding vaccine effectiveness
- WHO data (May 2026):
 - 8 confirmed cases
 - 246 suspected cases
 - 80 suspected deaths

Key Points

Ebola Virus Disease (EVD)

- Viral haemorrhagic fever caused by Ebolavirus.
- Transmission:
 - Contact with infected body fluids
 - Contaminated surfaces
- Fatality rate:
 - WHO estimates 25–50%.

Bundibugyo Strain

- First detected in Uganda (2007).
- Less common than Zaire strain.
- Existing vaccines mainly effective against Zaire strain.

Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC)

- Declared under International Health Regulations (IHR), 2005.
- WHO's highest global health alert mechanism.
- Enables:
 - International coordination
 - Funding mobilisation
 - Emergency surveillance

Previous Ebola Outbreak

- West Africa outbreak (2014–16):
 - 28,000+ cases
 - 11,000+ deaths
- Countries affected:
 - Guinea
 - Liberia
 - Sierra Leone

Static Linkages

- International Health Regulations (2005) provide framework for global disease response.
- Zoonotic diseases spread from animals to humans.
- Conflict and displacement weaken disease surveillance.
- One Health approach links:
 - Human health
 - Animal health
 - Environmental health
- Primary healthcare and contact tracing are essential for epidemic control.
- Globalisation increases cross-border disease transmission.

Critical Analysis

Significance of WHO's Early Action

- Prevents delayed international response.
- Helps in rapid resource mobilisation.
- Reflects lessons from COVID-19 and previous Ebola outbreaks.

Challenges

- Vaccine efficacy against Bundibugyo strain uncertain.
- Conflict regions hinder:
 - Contact tracing
 - Healthcare delivery
- Weak health infrastructure may worsen spread.
- Risk of under-reporting of cases.

Global Concerns

- Possibility of international spread through travel.
- Need for coordinated surveillance and genomic monitoring.

Way Forward

- Strengthen disease surveillance systems.
- Accelerate vaccine research for all Ebola strains.
- Improve healthcare infrastructure in fragile regions.
- Promote One Health approach.
- Enhance WHO-led global coordination.
- Increase public awareness and community participation.
- Strengthen airport and border health surveillance.

Look beyond strategic autonomy, and closer at the Quad possibility



RAJA MANDALA
BY C RAJA MOHAN

THOSE IN Delhi who are antsy about US President Donald Trump's visit to Beijing and the prospect of a Sino-American détente should be even more worried as Xi Jinping serenades Vladimir Putin in Beijing this week. Those perennially anxious about a G-2 between the US and China should worry even more about China's deepening partnership with Russia. One of the core arguments for Russia's centrality in India's national strategy is that it serves as a balancing power in Eurasia. But the Eurasian story of the last quarter-century is about Russia's growing bonds with China — India's principal challenge in both economic and geopolitical terms.

If Trump's visit was about moving the US from confrontation to stabilisation of ties with China, Putin's is about celebrating the strategic partnership unveiled 25 years ago. Since Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Russia has become even more dependent on China. What do the two pilgrimages to Beijing mean for India?

First, India should not be rattled by every shift in great-power relations. Since World War II, relations among the US, China and Russia have changed repeatedly, often violently. Taken in pairs, they have been allies,

friends, enemies and frenemies at different moments. Dealing with that change is part of the national mandate.

Second, the real challenge for India is addressing the consequences of China's rise and assertion. Since the 1980s, China's relative power — economic, technological and military — has grown rapidly against every other actor in the system. For India, the problem is especially acute. A long, disputed and tension-prone boundary, Beijing's growing influence in India's neighbourhood, an expanding Chinese footprint in global institutions and a trade deficit now above \$110 billion, rooted in India's deepening dependence on Chinese manufactured goods.

Third, the answer lies partly in accelerating India's own rise. Shifts in great-power relations, the emergence of wars and global crises — these are variables India cannot control. What it can drive is its own modernisation. Although India has performed well on several fronts in the reform era that began in the early 1990s, its uneven pace and unsteady pace mean the gap with China is growing. China's economy is today five times larger, and the disparity in higher education, R&D, technology and military capability is widening.

Fourth, India cannot close the gap with China anytime soon, but it can reduce the impact of the power imbalance through external cooperation that reinforces internal self-strengthening. Much like China, India has turned to the West for capital, export markets, technology and regional security. Since the 1990s, engagement with the US and Europe has grown rapidly.

Elevation of that engagement to

higher levels is obstructed by an enduring suspicion of the US and the West in the Indian political mind, across Left and Right. Anti-imperialists and nationalists alike have long united in limiting significant Western cooperation. It is this sentiment that gives sustenance to the idea of "strategic autonomy" — a term framed as neutral, but whose political content has always been about maintaining distance from the West. If the US and Europe were the problem, the answer was seen as lying in deeper ties with Russia and China, bilaterally, trilaterally and in multilateral forums.

This discourse, constructed in the 1990s, has run into a fundamental problem: An assertive China has become India's principal challenge. Russia has become India's most important partner, and India's stakes in Western partnership have grown enormously. You may say the US under Trump is unreliable — but it is not occupying Indian territory. It is India's largest export market, a major source of technology, and home to an influential diaspora.

Consider this number: India exports more goods to the Netherlands — a country of 19 million people — than to China and Russia combined. There is no starker illustration of how far Indian strategic discourse has drifted from basic economic reality.

While Russia and China dominate India's mindspace, the Netherlands and other small but important European partners barely figure in India's debates. Independent India, which long privileged the Russian partnership over European ones, is now making amends.

The Indian discourse may have acquired "strategic autonomy"

from the imperatives on the ground, but the government has had no choice but to reconnect foreign policy to first principles, reflected in the fact that India fought to preserve its trade relationship with the EU, and has pushed hard for a trade deal with the EU, and has focussed on deeper technology cooperation with both in the last two years.

Hosting the Quad foreign ministers' meeting early next week follows the same logic. The Quad's revival a decade ago was rooted in the need to build a multipolar Asia amid intensifying challenges from China. One Trump visit to Beijing does not alter that imperative. Over the last decade, several voices in Delhi warned that the Quad would "entrap" India in a military alliance against China and insisted on slow-walking it. Many of the same voices now say the US is about to "abandon" India. The government has taken a more measured view and has actively sustained several rounds of official consultations with Quad partners.

The enthusiasm to write obituaries for the Quad may be both premature and excessive. The visit of Secretary of State Marco Rubio — who also serves as Trump's National Security Adviser — provides a valuable opportunity to get a first-hand account of the US-China summit, assess Washington's changing approach to alliances, and develop a productive and sustainable agenda for the Quad.

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- Trade deficit
- Supply-chain resilience
- Non-alignment evolution
- National security and technology linkages

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Stronger US-Europe ties provide:
 - Technology access
 - Defence cooperation
 - Export markets
 - Investment opportunities.
- Quad strengthens Indo-Pacific balancing mechanism.
- Multi-alignment increases diplomatic flexibility.

Concerns

- Russia-China proximity weakens India's traditional Eurasian balancing strategy.
- Dependence on Chinese imports remains high.
- US-China rivalry may pressure India strategically.
- Quad lacks formal military structure.

Challenges

- Narrowing economic and technological gap with China.
- Balancing ties among US, Russia, and Europe.
- Managing border tensions with China.
- Building indigenous manufacturing and R&D capacity.

Way Forward

- Accelerate economic reforms and industrial growth.
- Strengthen domestic manufacturing under Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Expand strategic technology partnerships.
- Diversify supply chains away from China.
- Deepen engagement with Europe and Indo-Pacific partners.
- Enhance maritime and border security capabilities.
- Continue pragmatic multi-alignment policy.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Growing China-Russia strategic partnership amid the Ukraine conflict.
- US-China engagement aimed at stabilizing bilateral tensions.
- India concerned over:
 - China's rise in Asia
 - Border tensions with China
 - Expanding Chinese influence in neighbourhood and global institutions
 - Russia's increasing dependence on China.
- Quad consultations gaining importance in Indo-Pacific strategy.

Key Points

- China's economy is nearly five times larger than India's.
- India-China trade deficit exceeds \$110 billion.
- Russia-China partnership has deepened after Western sanctions on Russia.
- India increasing cooperation with:
 - US
 - Europe
 - Quad partners
 - Technology and supply-chain initiatives.
- Quad revival aimed at maintaining a multipolar Asia.
- India exports more to the Netherlands than to China and Russia combined.

Static Linkages

- Balance of Power
- Strategic Autonomy
- Multi-alignment
- Indo-Pacific concept
- Eurasian geopolitics
- Maritime security

Shifts in great-power relations, the emergence of wars and global crises — these are variables India cannot control. What it can drive is its own modernisation

On bail, Court must heed rule it laid down

THE SUPREME Court decision granting bail to a person accused in a narco-terrorism case in J&K, in which he had been incarcerated as an undertrial under the UAPA for five years, is significant for more than one reason. The bench comprising Justices B.V. Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan has reiterated that even the rigours of stringent bail provisions in terror cases would "melt down" when prolonged incarceration and delayed trial produce a violation of Article 21 of the Constitution, which guarantees the individual's right to life and personal liberty. It also did something the Court rarely does: It called out its own deviation from the rule.

In the 2001 ruling in *K.A. Najeeb*, the SC laid down that an undertrial suffering prolonged incarceration with completion of trial not in sight must be granted bail — even under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). However, the establishment of this rule has been followed by a plurality of judicial approaches, with some benches abiding by the "good law", and others deviating from it. A notable deviation came in the January 2026 order in the bail hearing of the accused in the North-East Delhi riots. For those who were granted bail in the case, the reason cited was not delay, which the *Najeeb* ruling required, but that they figured lower in a "hierarchy of offences" that the Court created. For Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, the Court said that their prolonged incarceration had not crossed the "threshold of constitutional impermissibility". Justice Nagarathna's bench has now wisely cautioned that if a smaller bench disagrees with a larger one, it must refer the case to the Chief Justice of India, not deviate from it and render the rule meaningless. It is nobody's case that mechanical consistency must replace judicious interpretation, especially in a polyvocal court with 34 judges. However, some principles are irrefutable. As the bench underlined: "Ideally, the more serious the accusations are, the speedier the trial should be."

At a time when legislation carves out increasingly sweeping definitions of crimes, even as punishments become harsher, the SC bench's intervention is much needed. The Court cited NCRB data, noting that the countrywide conviction rate under the UAPA for the five years between 2019 and 2023 hovers between 2 and 6 per cent — that is, a 94 to 98 per cent probability of acquittal in such cases nationally. In J&K, the conviction rate has remained below 1 per cent. In public speeches, judges often repeat the adage "bail is the rule, jail is the exception", as former CJI D.Y. Chandrachud did in 2024, days before demitting office. But the judiciary needs to do more than just that. Especially in cases that involve the protection of fundamental liberties against state abuse, the Court must listen to itself, and abide by its better instincts.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Supreme Court granted bail to a UAPA undertrial incarcerated for nearly 5 years without completion of trial.
- Bench: Justice B.V. Nagarathna and Justice Ujjal Bhuyan.
- Court reiterated that prolonged incarceration violates Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty).
- Reaffirmed *K.A. Najeeb v. Union of India (2021)*:
 - Constitutional courts can grant bail despite stringent UAPA provisions if trial is excessively delayed.
- Court criticized inconsistency in later UAPA bail rulings.
- Emphasized judicial discipline and adherence to larger bench precedents.

Key Points

- Article 21 includes:
 - Right to speedy trial,
 - Fair procedure,
 - Personal liberty.
- UAPA Section 43D(5):
 - Makes grant of bail difficult if prima facie allegations exist.
- SC held:
 - Prolonged detention cannot become punitive before conviction.

- Important Observation:
 - "The more serious the accusation, the speedier the trial should be."
- NCRB Data (2019–2023):
 - UAPA conviction rate: around 2–6%.
 - J&K conviction rate below 1%.
- Principle reaffirmed:
 - "Bail is the rule, jail is the exception."

Static Linkages

- Article 21 → Right to life and personal liberty.
- Article 14 → Equality before law.
- Article 22 → Protection against arbitrary arrest and detention.
- Rule of Law → Basic Structure doctrine.
- Presumption of innocence in criminal jurisprudence.
- Hussainara Khatoon Case → Right to speedy trial.
- Maneka Gandhi Case → Procedure must be just, fair, and reasonable.
- Judicial Review and Constitutional Supremacy.
- Doctrine of Precedent in Indian judiciary.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reinforces constitutional protections against arbitrary detention.
- Balances national security with civil liberties.
- Prevents misuse of stringent anti-terror laws.
- Strengthens judicial accountability and consistency.

Concerns

- Delays in investigation and trial under special laws.
- Low conviction rates raise misuse concerns.
- Undertrials face punishment before conviction.
- Judicial inconsistency weakens legal certainty.

Constitutional Dimension

- Liberty cannot be suspended indefinitely without trial.
- State security must operate within constitutional limits.
- Due process is central to democratic governance.

Way Forward

- Ensure time-bound trials in UAPA cases.
- Strengthen judicial infrastructure and fast-track courts.
- Periodic review of prolonged detention cases.
- Improve investigation quality and prosecution efficiency.
- Protect balance between national security and fundamental rights.
- Uniform judicial standards in bail jurisprudence.