



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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EXPRESS**

**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

SC rejects plea against caste count in census

It is not within the top court's domain to decide if caste enumeration should necessarily be part of Census 2027, says CJ; until 2011, the Census included only Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said there was nothing wrong in the government of the day ascertaining caste as part of the nationwide Census exercise.

"Any government of the day must know how many people are backward and how many need welfare. This is a matter of policy," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, said.

The top court was responding to a plea filed by petitioner-in-person Sudhakar Gummula that caste enumeration should not be made part of Census 2027.

Misuse of data
"There are endless possibilities of politicians and corporate entities misusing



Any government of the day must know how many people are backward and how many need welfare. This is a matter of policy.

SURYA KANT
Chief Justice of India

the caste data. There is no justification for gathering such a large tract of data on caste," Mr. Gummula submitted.

The Chief Justice said it was not within the court's domain to decide whether a caste enumeration should necessarily be a part of Census 2027 or not.

"This issue exclusively comes within the policy domain," the CJ said before the court dismissed the petition.

The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs had de-

cluded to include caste enumeration in Census 2027 at a meeting held in April 2025.

Since then, caste enumeration has emerged as a major feature of the Census.

Two phases

Until the 2011 Census, the exercise had included the systematic enumeration of only Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The government had said on the floor of Parliament about the incorpora-

tion of the caste enumeration in the second phase of Census 2027.

The first phase involved the collection of the House Listing Operation (HLO) information regarding housing conditions, assets, amenities and so on of each household.

'Integration instrument'

The second phase, Population Enumeration, would involve the collection of demographic, socio-economic, cultural and other details.

Former Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar had said that "thoughtfully collected caste data would be an instrument of integration, like an MRI of the body".

The last comprehensive nationwide caste Census was conducted in colonial India in 1931.

- Social justice measures
- Evidence-based governance
- SECC 2011 collected caste data but complete caste figures were not officially released due to data inconsistencies.

Static Points

- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 15(4) & 16(4) – Special provisions for backward classes.
- Article 46 – Promotion of educational and economic interests of weaker sections.
- Mandal Commission (1980) recommended OBC reservation based on social and educational backwardness.
- Indra Sawhney Case (1992):
 - Upheld OBC reservation.
 - Emphasized need for empirical data to identify backwardness.
- Right to Privacy:
 - Recognized under Justice K.S. Puttaswamy judgment (2017).

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Supreme Court dismissed a petition challenging the inclusion of caste enumeration in Census 2027.
- The Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant held that caste enumeration is a matter of government policy.
- The Court observed that the government must know the number of backward communities for welfare and policy formulation.
- The Union Government had approved caste enumeration in Census 2027 through the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs in April 2025.
- Census 2027 will include caste data collection during the Population Enumeration phase.
- The last comprehensive caste Census in India was conducted in 1931 during British rule.
- After Independence, only SCs and STs have been officially enumerated in regular Census exercises.

Key Points

- Census conducted under the Census Act, 1948.
- Conducted by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India under MHA.
- Census is a Union List subject (Entry 69).
- Census 2027 proposed as India's first digital Census.
- Two phases:
 - House Listing Operation (HLO)
 - Population Enumeration
- Caste data intended for:
 - Welfare targeting
 - Reservation policy assessment

Constitutional & Governance Dimensions

Supporting Arguments

- Enables targeted welfare delivery.
- Provides updated empirical data for policymaking.
- Helps assess socio-economic backwardness scientifically.
- Strengthens inclusive governance and social justice.
- Useful for rationalisation of reservation policies.

Concerns

- Risk of caste-based political mobilisation.
- Possible social fragmentation.
- Data privacy and misuse concerns.
- Difficulties in accurate caste classification.
- Administrative complexity due to thousands of sub-castes.

Challenges

- Standardisation of caste categories across states.
- Ensuring accuracy and reliability of data.
- Avoiding duplication and misreporting.
- Balancing social justice with national integration.
- Ensuring data protection safeguards.

Way Forward

- Adopt transparent methodology for caste classification.
- Strengthen digital data verification systems.
- Enact robust data protection mechanisms.
- Use caste data along with socio-economic indicators.
- Ensure data is used strictly for welfare and development purposes.
- Promote evidence-based affirmative action policies.

India, Italy seal defence pact, elevate their bilateral ties to a 'special strategic partnership'

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India and Italy have been in continuous contact over the conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday, reiterating his call for "dialogue and diplomacy" to resolve the festering wars.

Delivering a press statement in Rome at the end of his multi-nation Europe trip, Mr. Modi described India-Italy relation as a "win-win partnership", and welcomed the upgrade of bilateral ties to the level of "Special Strategic Partnership".

"We have remained in continuous contact over Ukraine, West Asia, and other areas of hostilities.

India has a clear position that all problems should be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy," Mr. Modi said in his press statement. "I am happy that we are upgrading our ties to the level of Special Strategic Partnership," he said.

The Ministry of External Affairs said that the Special Strategic Partnership will lead to strengthened cooperation in trade, technology, defence, clean energy and innovation as well as in the field of mobility of skilled and non-skilled workers through safe and secure channels.

Agriculture research
The two sides also sealed a "Defence Industrial Road Map", an Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in critical minerals, and another agreement for cooperation between the Italian Corps of



Sweet gift: Prime Minister Narendra Modi gifts 'Meloni' toffees to Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni in Rome on Wednesday. ANI

the Guardia di Finanza and the Directorate of Enforcement.

A Joint Statement issued on the occasion of Mr. Modi's visit announced that the two sides have signed an agreement on agriculture and agricultural research that will connect Ministries and institutions of India and Italy.

The two sides also expressed commitment "to a free, open, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific, in line with international law, including United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)."

On the Gulf situation, they called for "freedom of navigation and the resumption of global flows through Strait of Hormuz".

In a significant push, ahead of the India-Africa Forum Summit-4, the two

sides said they have agreed work on selected projects trilaterally in Africa.

In this regard, the Joint Statement said, "Recognising the strategic priority both countries attach to Africa, the two Prime Ministers agreed to work together in trilateral initiatives with African partners in areas such as Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), agriculture, education, healthcare, artificial intelligence, connectivity and infrastructure and renewable energy in line with India's development partnership in Africa and Italy's Mattei Plan."

Mr. Modi was conferred with the Agricola Medal for 2026 by the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations, at the FAO headquarters in Rome.

- Defence manufacturing
- Technology transfer
- Joint production
- Supply chain resilience

Critical Minerals

- Important for:
 - EV batteries
 - Renewable energy
 - Semiconductor manufacturing
- Helps India reduce import dependency.

Indo-Pacific

- Reaffirmed commitment to:
 - Free and open Indo-Pacific
 - UNCLOS
 - Maritime security
 - Freedom of navigation

Africa Cooperation

- Joint projects in:
 - Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI)
 - Agriculture
 - Healthcare
 - Renewable energy
 - AI and connectivity

Agriculture Cooperation

- Focus on:
 - Sustainable agriculture
 - Agri-research
 - Food security
 - Technology sharing

Static Linkages

- UNCLOS governs:
 - Territorial waters
 - EEZ
 - Freedom of navigation
- Strait of Hormuz:
 - Major global oil transit chokepoint
- Critical minerals:
 - Lithium
 - Cobalt
 - Rare earth elements
- India's Africa policy:
 - South-South cooperation
 - Capacity building
 - Development partnership
- Defence indigenisation:
 - Atmanirbhar Bharat
 - Make in India

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens India's engagement with Europe.
- Supports diversification of defence partnerships.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- During PM Narendra Modi's visit to Italy, India-Italy relations were upgraded to a Special Strategic Partnership.
- Both countries discussed:
 - Ukraine conflict
 - West Asia tensions
 - Indo-Pacific security
 - Critical minerals and defence cooperation
- Agreements signed:
 - Defence Industrial Road Map
 - Critical minerals cooperation
 - Agriculture and agricultural research
 - Enforcement cooperation
- Both sides supported:
 - Freedom of navigation
 - UNCLOS-based maritime order
 - Stability in Strait of Hormuz
- India and Italy also agreed on trilateral development cooperation in Africa.

Key Points

Strategic Partnership

- Enhances cooperation in:
 - Defence
 - Technology
 - Trade
 - Clean energy
 - Skilled mobility
 - Innovation

Defence Industrial Road Map

- Focus on:

- Enhances critical mineral security.
- Expands India's strategic role in Africa.
- Reinforces India's diplomatic position of dialogue and peaceful resolution.

Challenges

- Technology transfer limitations in defence.
- Competition with China in Africa.
- Dependence on external supply chains for minerals.
- Geopolitical balancing between Russia and Western nations.

Way Forward

- Expand defence co-production.
- Build resilient mineral supply chains.
- Increase maritime cooperation.
- Promote joint innovation and R&D.
- Strengthen implementation of Africa projects.
- Deepen India-EU strategic engagement.

Steel, cement help quicken April core sector growth to 1.7%; crude oil, gas contract

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

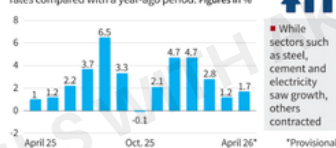
Growth in activity in the eight core sectors of the economy quickened marginally to 1.7% this April, up from 1.2% in March, official data released on Wednesday showed.

Data on the Index of Eight Core Industries released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry saw a significant revision of the growth rate for March – now coming in at 1.2% compared with the preliminary contraction of 0.4% that had originally been reported for the month.

In a signal that construction activity might again be picking up, the steel and cement sectors saw relatively robust growth in April. The steel sector saw growth come in at 6.2% in April, compared with a newly revised growth of

Slight uptick

The chart shows the overall core sector growth rates compared with a year-ago period. Figures in %



7.7% in March. The preliminary March growth figure for the sector was 2.2%.

Similarly, the cement sector saw growth quicken to a three-month high of 9.4% in April. Here, too, the growth rate for March was revised upwards to 4.7% from the original 4%.

The domestic crude oil sector contracted 3.9% in April, marking the eighth consecutive month of contraction.

The natural gas sector, too, again slumped into a contraction of 4.3% in April after having briefly come back into positive territory in March due to the energy crisis brought on by the war in West Asia.

The fertilizer sector contracted 8.6% in April. This was a much better performance than the contraction of nearly 25% in March. The electricity sector grew at a three-month high of 4.1% in April.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Growth in the Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) increased to 1.7% in April 2026 from 1.2% in March 2026.
- March data was revised upward from an earlier contraction estimate of -0.4%.
- Growth was driven mainly by:
 - Steel – 6.2%
 - Cement – 9.4%
 - Electricity – 4.1%
- Contraction continued in:
 - Crude Oil – (-3.9%)
 - Natural Gas – (-4.3%)
 - Fertilizers – (-8.6%)

Key Points

Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI)

- Released by: Office of Economic Adviser, Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- Measures output of 8 infrastructure sectors:
 - Coal
 - Crude Oil
 - Natural Gas
 - Refinery Products
 - Fertilizers
 - Steel
 - Cement
 - Electricity
- Combined weight in IIP: 40.27%.
- Acts as a lead indicator of industrial growth.

Important Trends

- Higher steel and cement output indicates:
 - Infrastructure expansion
 - Increased construction activity
 - Public capital expenditure push

- Continued fall in crude oil production reflects:
 - Import dependence
 - Weak domestic hydrocarbon output
- Electricity growth suggests improving industrial demand.

Static Linkages

- IIP (Index of Industrial Production) measures industrial output in:
 - Mining
 - Manufacturing
 - Electricity
- Infrastructure sectors create a multiplier effect in the economy.
- Higher capital expenditure increases:
 - Employment
 - Aggregate demand
 - Private investment crowding-in
- India imports nearly 85% of crude oil requirements.
- Core sector growth is an indicator of:
 - Industrial recovery
 - Economic momentum
 - Infrastructure development

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Strong cement and steel growth signals infrastructure recovery.
- Government capital expenditure supporting industrial activity.
- Electricity demand indicates improving economic conditions.

Concerns

- Persistent crude oil contraction increases import dependence.
- Weak natural gas production affects energy security.
- Uneven sectoral growth reflects fragile industrial recovery.

Way Forward

- Increase investment in domestic oil and gas exploration.
- Strengthen infrastructure-led growth strategy.
- Promote renewable energy to reduce import dependence.
- Improve industrial logistics and ease of doing business.
- Enhance real-time industrial data collection.

Maharashtra completes documentation of over 23,000 wetlands, paves way to bring them under legal protection

Snehal Mutha
MUMBAI

National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM) has completed the documentation and ground truthing of Maharashtra's 23,415 wetlands, paving the way to formally notify and bring the water bodies under legal protection under the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules.

According to the Maharashtra wetlands dashboard maintained by the NCSCM, Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar and Nagpur divisions has the highest number of wetlands in the State, with 5,196 and 5,086 respectively. District wise, Ahmednagar has the highest number of wetlands at



Environmental groups say the move will prevent wetlands, which are not officially notified, from becoming dump yards. FILE PHOTO

1,596, followed by Nashik with 1,236 and Chandrapur which has 1,231.

The wetlands documented also includes 247 in Thane, 1,093 in Raigad, 37 in Mumbai city and 210 in Mumbai suburban districts.

The Maharashtra government tasked NCSCM, functioning under the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) to do satellite mapping, documentation and field verification of wetlands identified un-

der the National Wetlands Inventory and Assessment launched by the Centre nearly two decades ago.

Ground truthing

Ground truthing for 11 wetlands located in Pune among the 2,3415 is remaining. Ground truthing means the process of physical verification of wetlands on site to confirm their existence, boundaries, ecological condition and present land use against satellite imagery – a crucial step before wetlands can be officially notified under environmental protection laws.

The MoEFCC launched the decadal-change version of the National Wetland Atlas in 2020 to track changes in wetlands over time, but

Maharashtra's ground truthing exercise continued to lag for years thereafter. The exercise gathered momentum following legal interventions by environmental NGO Vanashakti and subsequent Supreme Court directions asking States and Union Territories to complete wetland demarcation and verification in a time-bound manner.

According to the environmental groups, it is a critical step as this will prevent wetlands, which are not officially notified from becoming a dumping yard. The unnotified wetlands are treated as reclamation, debris dumping, encroachments and destruction in the name of infrastructure development.

- Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017:
 - Framed under Environment Protection Act, 1986.
 - Prohibits:
 - Reclamation
 - Solid waste dumping
 - Permanent construction
 - Untreated effluent discharge

Ramsar Convention

- International treaty for wetland conservation.
- Adopted in:
 - Ramsar, Iran (1971)
- Came into force:
 - 1975
- India became a party in:
 - 1982
- India has more than 80 Ramsar Sites.

Importance of Wetlands

- Flood control
- Groundwater recharge
- Carbon sequestration
- Biodiversity conservation
- Habitat for migratory birds
- Climate regulation
- Livelihood support

Major Concerns

- Encroachment
- Urbanisation pressure
- Land reclamation
- Pollution and sewage discharge
- Infrastructure development
- Delay in official notification

Significance of Wetland Notification

- Provides legal protection.
- Prevents illegal conversion.
- Enables scientific management.
- Helps climate resilience.
- Supports disaster risk reduction.

Way Forward

- Complete notification of all verified wetlands.
- GIS-based monitoring of encroachments.
- Community participation in conservation.
- Integrate wetlands into urban planning.
- Strengthen State Wetland Authorities.
- Promote nature-based solutions.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The National Centre for Sustainable Coastal Management (NCSCM) completed documentation and ground truthing of 23,415 wetlands in Maharashtra.
- The exercise aims to notify wetlands under the Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 for legal protection.
- The initiative was accelerated after directions from the Supreme Court of India regarding wetland demarcation and conservation.
- The work is linked to the National Wetlands Inventory and Assessment (NWIA) and National Wetland Atlas 2020.

Key Facts

- Maharashtra wetlands identified: 23,415
- Highest wetland divisions:
 - Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar – 5,196
 - Nagpur – 5,086
- Top districts:
 - Ahmednagar – 1,596
 - Nashik – 1,236
 - Chandrapur – 1,231
- Ground truthing:
 - Physical verification of wetlands to confirm:
 - Boundaries
 - Ecological condition
 - Land use
- Remaining verification:
 - 11 wetlands in Pune

Important Constitutional & Legal Provisions

- Article 48A:
 - State shall protect and improve environment.
- Article 51A(g):
 - Fundamental duty to protect natural environment.

Preparing India for a credible digital Census

The house listing phase of the 2027 Census is now progressing in some States and the work in other States will be taken up soon. The questionnaire for this phase was pre-tested last year. It was reported that the inclusion of questions on caste has delayed the pre-testing of the questionnaire for the population enumeration phase of the Census. Field testing of the schedules is essential to ensure that the concepts and definitions are easily understood by the enumerators and respondents.

The question on caste is being included in the Census for the first time since Independence. The only recent experiences on the issues relating to enumeration of caste are from the surveys in Bihar and Karnataka. I am sure that the Census organisation would have conducted extensive research on the issues and possible solutions, and the pre-testing would help streamline the questions and instructions. The experience of Karnataka and Bihar suggests that, whatever the results, there will be communities that are not ready to accept their numbers.



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more NRIs living abroad. This is more than 1% of the population of the country. If they were all counted in the Census in one State, it would get at least five Lok Sabha seats in the next delimitation. While the NRIs may be counted in the Census, some States have proportionately more NRIs than others. Kerala, Gujarat, Punjab, Telangana and Tamil Nadu are known to have a significant number of people living abroad. The Kerala Migration Survey 2023 has estimated that about 22 lakh people from the State are living/working abroad. Not including them in the population of the State would result in the loss of one Lok Sabha seat. Some other States may also be similarly affected.

Some countries collect data on non-residents in the census by enumerating family members, if any, living abroad. This process cannot collect information on those households that have migrated abroad with all their members. Still, it would be a useful starting point and would provide better data for delimitation purposes. Therefore, I suggest pre-testing an appropriately worded question on NRIs.

The problem areas
The next Census is unique because the entire data collection process is planned to be carried out using mobile electronic devices, mostly smartphones. This can save time for the computerisation of data. Consistency checks on responses during data collection can result in improved quality of data and faster processing. However, one has to allow for a significantly large portion of enumerators who are not savvy with smartphones, and tablets. During the recent Socio Economic and Caste Survey in Karnataka, there were reports of enumerators finding it difficult to handle the equipment for the survey. During the planning for the 2021 Census, it was indicated that enumerators would have the option to collect data using printed paper schedules, which could later be transferred to the electronic database from home. It is highly probable that a family member or a student of the teacher appointed as the enumerator may assist with this work. This could lead to accountability issues and may also compromise the confidentiality of the data. Therefore, a mechanism to detect and control data-entry errors is essential. There will also be an option for respondents to self-enumerate using a computer or smartphone as provided in the house listing phase.

The questions in the population enumeration stage are more complex when compared to those in the house listing phase. Many of the questions require a thorough understanding of the instructions that even many enumerators find difficult. For example, the explanation of disability in the 2011 Census ran to about six printed pages. Even the seemingly simple

question, "Have you worked at any time during the last year?" was accompanied by more than two pages explaining what constitutes "work". The follow-up questions on industry, occupation, and related matters are also not easy for most people to understand.

It is too naive to expect that the respondents would read all the instructions before clicking on an item in the drop-down menu. The three million plus enumerators may not equally understand the concepts, definitions and the need to ask the questions in an appropriate manner. The self-enumeration facility can become worse unless the questions are well worded and explanations are given within the question. It is difficult to achieve this without significant simplification of the concepts and definitions.

Guard against respondent fatigue
Including too many questions in the online schedule in an attempt to obtain better responses can also lead to respondent fatigue, as the form has to be completed for every individual in a household. The possibility of respondents deliberately providing incorrect answers to certain questions in order to avoid follow-up questions cannot be ruled out.

Post-enumeration surveys from past censuses have indicated that distant relatives of the head of the household and unrelated persons, such as domestic helpers living with the household, have higher rates of omission. In a self-enumeration system, the chances of missing such persons are even greater. There is also the possibility of including children who are living in hostels and are therefore not eligible to be enumerated as part of the household. Better structuring of the questions may help ensure more accurate enumeration of such persons. For example, questions such as, "Is the person currently present in the house and, if not, was he or she present at any time after February 9 or likely to return before February 28?" (assuming that the census enumeration takes place during that period as in the past censuses), could be asked for every individual. Similarly, questions such as "Is there any other relative of the head of the household, or any unrelated person such as a servant, helper, or nurse, who shares meals from the same kitchen and lives with the household?" may also be included. While such measures may not ensure completely error-free enumeration, they could help reduce omissions and improve accuracy.

The possibility of fraudulent enumerations in some areas or by some groups using the self-enumeration facility cannot be ruled out. The memory of cancelling the Census in some areas in 2001 is still fresh. The organisation needs to be vigilant and steps to prevent such incidents need to be field tested.

The method used

The Indian Census has been following an extended *de facto* method. People found at their usual/normal place of residence when the enumerator visits the household, as well as members who are absent at that time but have stayed there for at least one night during the Census enumeration period, which normally lasts 20 days, are also enumerated. Also included are visitors who stayed with the household throughout the entire period of Census enumeration period. A household is defined to include all members, even if unrelated, who partake food from a common kitchen. Thus, household help living with household and paying guests should be enumerated there, if they have food from the same kitchen.

This enumeration process implies that the number of voters in an area may not correspond to the population enumerated there. A six-month residence is required for registration as a voter. Further, the voters' list would include those living abroad (non-resident Indians, or NRIs) who chose to register as a voter, whereas they are not part of the census at all. According to the website of the Ministry of External Affairs, there are about 1.58

It requires accuracy, safeguards, training and careful planning

Static Linkages

- Census conducted under Census Act, 1948.
- Census is a Union List subject.
- Article 82 deals with delimitation after Census.
- 84th Constitutional Amendment froze delimitation till first Census after 2026.
- Last caste Census conducted in 1931.
- SECC 2011 collected caste data separately.
- Registrar General and Census Commissioner functions under MHA.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Better welfare targeting through caste-wise data.
- Helps evidence-based policymaking.
- Faster data processing through digital Census.
- Useful for delimitation and resource allocation.

Challenges

- Possibility of caste-based political mobilization.
- Digital divide among enumerators and citizens.
- Privacy and data security concerns.
- Underrepresentation of high-migration States.
- Risk of omission/duplication in self-enumeration.

Way Forward

- Extensive pilot testing before rollout.
- Strong data protection safeguards.
- Simplified questionnaire and better training.
- Robust verification and audit mechanisms.
- Consensus-based approach on caste data and delimitation.
- Awareness campaigns for accurate participation.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Census 2027 to include caste enumeration for the first time after Independence.
- Census data will be used for future delimitation of Lok Sabha and State Assembly constituencies.
- India plans to conduct a largely digital Census using smartphones/tablets and self-enumeration.
- Concerns raised regarding:
 - caste data accuracy,
 - exclusion of NRIs,
 - digital challenges,
 - respondent fatigue,
 - fraudulent enumeration.

Key Points

- India follows an extended *de facto* Census method.
- Household defined on the basis of a common kitchen.
- Census differs from electoral rolls due to residence conditions and NRI voting rights.
- Around 1.58 crore NRIs live abroad.
- Kerala Migration Survey 2023 estimated about 22 lakh emigrants from Kerala.
- Census 2027 likely to be India's first fully digital Census.
- Risks:
 - omission of migrants/domestic workers,
 - digital illiteracy among enumerators,
 - confidentiality concerns,
 - fake self-enumeration.

Drone mania, separating hype from battlefield reality

Operation Sindoore started with a bang at 10:2 a.m. on May 7, 2025 and the surprise ceasefire at 3:30 p.m. on May 10, 2025, was akin to an "out-of-sybilas" event. On the first anniversary, discussion of the four-day engagement between India and Pakistan has been dominated by events concerning India's long range strikes on Pakistani terrorist and air force infrastructure; what has been missed out, however, has been the use by both sides of small unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), including loitering kamikaze munitions, colloquially referred to as drones.

Drones have acquired an outsized image for three reasons. First, there is their aura of being relatively 'unstoppable' because their small size makes detection difficult. Second, their relatively low cost vis-à-vis a manned aircraft makes them very appealing to number-crunchers. Lastly, the fact that they do not place a combatant in harm's way is an argument that undercuts most of their limitations. In the recent past, the advent of fibre-optic-guided first-person-view drones used by Hezbollah against Israel has further added to the hype.

So, the question whether drones have revolutionised warfare needs a professional analysis vis-à-vis the basic tenets of warfare through a prism of doctrine and strategy.



Manmohan Bahadur
Retired Air Vice Marshal and a former Additional Director General of the Centre for Air Power Studies

air domain. Second, since drones fly at low altitudes, some strategists have coined the term "air littoral", suggesting the creation of another domain of warfare unique to drone operations. This is misleading because drones operate within a restricted airspace layer – from the ground up to the coordinating altitude, a pre-designated level that separates fast moving conventional airpower from slower moving assets such as helicopters and UAVs. This has forced surface forces to devise methods to protect themselves. In effect, as an essay in the *Air & Space Forces Magazine* argues, drones are not reshaping air warfare but are actually reshaping ground combat. The importance of attainment and maintenance of air superiority through manned systems, therefore, remains undiminished.

Strategic considerations

First, the innovative strike by Ukraine, deep in the interior of Russia through drones inserted in specially constructed containers as part of its Operation Spider's Web, points to a new strategic requirement of possessing good counterintelligence to thwart such long term strategies in the adversary's planning stage itself. In the event, the strategic air fleet of Russia had lost many costly assets.

Second, such innovative use has shifted the boundaries of kinetic warfare hundreds of kilometres inland. This is akin to a cyberattack that can be launched by anyone, from anywhere in the world, against any target globally.

Consequently, a new requirement has emerged to protect assets located deep within a nation's interior on a 24x7 basis. Incidentally, the United States has introduced new laws restricting the purchase of land by foreign entities near military bases and critical infrastructure.

Third, the field of unmanned flight is, in many ways, still developing. The integration of artificial intelligence will bring about an exponential

increase in capabilities, leading to fully autonomous operations. Allowing a machine to make life-and-death decisions comes with enormous consequences, and a United Nations committee is currently examining the ethical and moral issues involved.

Counter UAS strategy

In warfare, a new weapon brings in counter-measures and counter counter-measures. As more counter unmanned aerial systems (CUAS) are fielded, the drone threat would be addressable to a great extent.

In Operation Sindoore, waves of individual drones that had been sent into India by Pakistan were neutralised by an integrated CUAS network. On the other hand, drone swarms that are being developed would be an integration of multiple drones to overwhelm air defence systems by sheer numbers. This is the next challenge, and counter-measures under development would basically be directed energy weapons such as the Israeli Iron Beam laser system which ensures rapid engagement at just \$2-\$3.50 per laser shot instead of the \$40,000 to \$50,000 per missile of its Iron Dome system.

The Europeans are launching a drone-wall initiative which will use a layered mesh of detection and interception capabilities of European Union member states. The U.S. is planning its Golden Dome system with space based and hypersonic interceptors to address incoming projectiles.

It is good that India too is envisaging a nationwide terrestrial and space based 'Sudarshan Chakra' to be in place by 2035 for addressing multifarious air defence threats. That is still at least a decade away and, therefore, such a system would require phase-wise operationalisation along with enormous and committed funding. It is imperative that New Delhi finds the monies to support it.

• India's response:

- Integrated CUAS deployment.
- Proposed "Sudarshan Chakra" air defence network by 2035.

Static Linkages

- Air superiority remains essential in warfare despite drone usage.
- Technological advancements continuously alter the nature of warfare.
- Border management increasingly includes electronic and aerial surveillance.
- Artificial Intelligence creates ethical concerns in autonomous warfare.
- Directed energy weapons are emerging as next-generation defence systems.
- Protection of critical infrastructure is an important national security objective.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Cost-effective compared to conventional aircraft.
- Enhances surveillance and precision strike capability.
- Useful in asymmetric warfare situations.
- Reduces direct exposure of military personnel.

Challenges

- Drone swarms can overwhelm traditional air defence systems.
- Non-state actors and terror groups can misuse drones.
- Difficult attribution may increase escalation risks.
- AI-enabled autonomous weapons raise accountability concerns.
- High cost of establishing comprehensive counter-drone systems.

Strategic Concerns

- Critical infrastructure deep inside national territory becomes vulnerable.
- Continuous surveillance and interception capability is required.
- Conventional battlefield boundaries are increasingly blurred.

Way Forward

- Promote indigenous drone and anti-drone technology development.
- Strengthen integrated air defence systems using AI and electronic warfare.
- Develop directed energy weapon capability.
- Enhance coordination among armed forces, DRDO, ISRO, and private sector.
- Establish a comprehensive national counter-drone policy.
- Support international regulations on autonomous weapons through multilateral forums.

Doctrinal Issues

The first question is whether the arrival of drones represents a revolutionary change in warfare or merely an evolution enabled by new technology. Evolutionary developments merely enhance existing capabilities, whereas revolutionary technologies fundamentally reshape warfare by opening up new domains. The advent of the air domain was transformational because it revolutionised warfare. UAVs, however, are merely another weapon system – albeit one with unique advantages – that has evolved within the

Drone technology is advancing rapidly, alongside equally important countermeasures

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Operation Sindoore (May 2025) highlighted the increasing use of drones and loitering munitions in India-Pakistan military engagement.
- Pakistan reportedly sent multiple drones into Indian territory, which were intercepted through integrated Counter-Unmanned Aerial Systems (CUAS).
- The conflict reflected changing trends in warfare where low-cost UAVs are increasingly supplementing conventional military systems.
- Global conflicts such as Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hezbollah have also demonstrated the strategic importance of drone warfare.

Key Points

- Drones are preferred because they:
 - Are relatively inexpensive.
 - Reduce risk to soldiers.
 - Are difficult to detect due to small size and low-altitude flying.
- Loitering munitions:
 - Remain airborne before identifying and striking targets.
 - Combine surveillance and offensive capability.
- Drone warfare implications:
 - Expands battlefield deep into enemy territory.
 - Threatens critical infrastructure and military bases.
 - Challenges traditional air defence systems.
- Emerging technologies:
 - Drone swarms to overwhelm defence systems.
 - AI-enabled autonomous operations.
 - Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs) like laser systems for interception.

The bail rule

The Andrabi ruling reaffirms liberty over the stringent UAPA bar

The idea of justice should never allow for the indefinite imprisonment of someone without trial. However, The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), does so, through its stringent Section 43-D(5), which makes bail near impossible once a court is satisfied, on the prosecution's material, that a prima facie case exists against the accused. But on May 18, in *Syed Iftikhar Andrabi vs National Investigation Agency, Jammu*, the top court delivered a welcome restatement of the principle that bail should be the rule even in cases related to the UAPA. The Bench granted bail to Andrabi, who had spent over five years and nine months in pre-trial custody. The Bench also clarified the legal position where an undertrial has spent years in custody without any realistic prospect of the trial concluding. By reiterating that the right to personal liberty and a speedy trial cannot be subservient to the provision in Section 43-D(5), the judgment disapproved the reasoning in two two-judge Bench rulings, *Gurwinder Singh* (2024) and *Gulfisha Fatima*, decided earlier this year. Both had sought to dilute the principle laid down by a three-judge Bench in *K.A. Najeeb* (2021), which held that the "rigours" of Section 43-D(5) would "melt down" where there was no likelihood of the trial concluding within a reasonable time and the incarceration already undergone was substantial. The Bench also held that the two-judge Benches could not have departed from a binding three-judge ruling in the first place.

In *Gulfisha Fatima*, the Delhi Riots "larger conspiracy" bail decision, the Court denied bail to Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam and even foreclosed their right to renew the plea for a full year, despite both having spent over five years in prison. Now in *Andrabi*, the Court has disapproved the *Gulfisha Fatima* Bench's reading that *Najeeb* was confined to its own facts and was not a constitutional limitation on Section 43-D(5). Consequently, Khalid and Imam should have been granted bail on the basis of the *Najeeb* ruling, and not denied it on a narrower reading of it. This is a welcome intervention, provided it is binding in all such cases, even if it is only about the favourable consideration of bail pleas where the accused have been in custody for long periods without trial, and not about a right to bail under the UAPA. Tellingly, a day after *Andrabi*, Additional Solicitor General S.V. Raju told another Bench that under the UAPA's statutory bail bar, "the presumption of innocence takes a backseat" which is precisely the position *Andrabi* has now set itself against, in line with constitutional principles.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Supreme Court in *Syed Iftikhar Andrabi vs NIA* (2026) granted bail to an accused who spent more than 5 years and 9 months in custody under the UAPA without conclusion of trial.
- The Court reiterated that Article 21 (Right to Life and Personal Liberty) and the right to speedy trial cannot be overridden indefinitely by stringent bail provisions under UAPA.
- The judgment reaffirmed the principle laid down in *K.A. Najeeb vs Union of India* (2021).
- The Court disapproved restrictive interpretations adopted in later judgments such as *Gurwinder Singh* (2024) and *Gulfisha Fatima* (2025).

Key Points

- UAPA:
 - Enacted in 1967 to deal with unlawful and terrorist activities.
 - Administered mainly through the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in terror-related cases.
- Section 43-D(5), UAPA:
 - Makes grant of bail difficult if the court finds a prima facie case against the accused.
 - Creates a stringent bail framework compared to ordinary criminal law.

- Supreme Court observations:
 - Long incarceration without trial violates Article 21.
 - Speedy trial is a constitutional guarantee.
 - Bail restrictions cannot become a mechanism for indefinite detention.
 - Constitutional courts can grant bail despite statutory restrictions in exceptional cases.
- K.A. Najeeb (2021):
 - Held that prolonged incarceration and delay in trial can justify grant of bail under constitutional powers.
- Importance of the judgment:
 - Reaffirms balance between:
 - national security, and
 - civil liberties.

Static Linkages

- Article 21:
 - Protection of life and personal liberty.
 - Includes right to speedy trial.
- Rule of Law:
 - No person can be deprived of liberty except through fair, just, and reasonable procedure.
- Doctrine of Precedent:
 - Smaller Benches are bound by decisions of larger Benches.
- Criminal jurisprudence:
 - "Bail is the rule, jail is the exception."
- Anti-terror laws in India:
 - TADA and POTA were repealed due to concerns regarding misuse.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens protection of personal liberty.
- Prevents misuse of prolonged pre-trial detention.
- Reinforces constitutional supremacy over statutory limitations.
- Upholds principle of speedy justice.

Concerns

- UAPA cases involve terrorism and national security.
- Investigative agencies argue strict bail provisions are necessary to:
 - prevent terror activities,
 - avoid witness intimidation,
 - protect evidence.

Challenges

- Delay in investigation and trial.
- Large pendency of cases in special courts.
- Balancing liberty with security concerns.

Way Forward

- Ensure time-bound trials in UAPA cases.
- Increase number of special courts.
- Strengthen judicial oversight of prolonged detention.
- Improve investigation and prosecution efficiency.
- Balance national security with constitutional safeguards.

Measure for measure

Courts should not react defensively to every line of criticism

While it is the courts' prerogative to punish contempt, how well they have separated contemptuous attacks from constitutionally protected criticism, especially by journalists, lawyers, activists, and scholars, has varied widely. This is because the judiciary has not been able to draw consistent lines between fair and exaggerated criticism, politically motivated and defamatory comments, and speech that obstructs justice. The judiciary faces misinformation, political pressure, abusive on-line discourse, and declining public trust, and the ways in which judges can respond to these attacks are limited. Rhetorical excess in oral observations must also not be confused with legal doctrine. However, recent comments by the Bench have created the appearance of a judiciary increasingly intolerant of external scrutiny. Last week, when hearing a lawyer's petition over not having been elevated to a senior rank, CJI Surya Kant described certain actors in the legal ecosystem as "parasites" and certain young lawyers engaging in RTI-based activism as "cockroaches". While he later said the remarks were directed at persons entering professions with bogus degrees, rather than critics of the judiciary, such language is unbecoming of the CJI. The tenor follows the NCEERT textbook controversy, with the Supreme Court focusing its manifest ire on three academics involved in drafting the chapter, effectively excluding them from work on public school curricula without prior hearing. The action evoked concerns about the Court being aggrieved party and arbiter. In the Ali Khan Mahmudabad matter, the Court granted him relief from coercive action but also imposed a gag order. Then, in a display of willingness to discipline the norms of public conduct rather than determine legality, it urged the state to decline to prosecute him as a concession.

When a CJI's comments of this nature appear outside formal contempt proceedings, they render a chilling effect as they amount to institutional condemnation without the safeguards of due process. The comments on using the RTI Act as a basis for activism have a similar effect, beyond the Act being a legitimate instrument. Recently, when a journalist (with a law degree) sought data on complaints against specific judges, the Supreme Court Registry declined the existence of such information. When the journalist produced a Law Ministry disclosure to the contrary, the Registry's legal representative dubbed the inquiry "fishing and roving" – a moving goalpost that was, again, under-concerned with legality while raising questions of the Court arguing its own case. Former CJI D.Y. Chandrachud said that judges are public actors exercising state power and courts should not react defensively to every line of criticism. That attitude improved how the bar, the press, and the academy experienced courts. The recent comments have set the clock back.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Recent remarks by the Chief Justice of India during court proceedings triggered debate on judicial intolerance towards criticism and public scrutiny.
- Concerns arose regarding:
 - Use of strong remarks against RTI-based activists and legal actors.
 - Restrictions imposed in certain public speech-related cases.
 - Judicial transparency and accountability.
- The issue revived discussion on:
 - Contempt of court,
 - Freedom of speech,
 - Judicial accountability,
 - Transparency under RTI.

Key Points

- Articles 129 and 215 empower Supreme Court and High Courts to punish for contempt.
- Contempt of Courts Act, 1971 divides contempt into:
 - Civil Contempt,
 - Criminal Contempt.
- Criminal contempt includes:
 - Scandalising the court,
 - Lowering authority of judiciary,
 - Obstructing administration of justice.

- Freedom of speech under Article 19(1)(a) is subject to reasonable restrictions under Article 19(2), including contempt of court.
- In 2019, Supreme Court held that the office of CJI comes under RTI Act.
- Debate continues regarding balance between:
 - Judicial independence,
 - Public accountability.

Static Linkages

- Independence of judiciary → Basic Structure Doctrine.
- Rule of Law requires accountability of all institutions.
- Separation of powers demands institutional restraint.
- RTI Act promotes transparency in governance.
- Truth accepted as defence in contempt proceedings after 2006 amendment.
- Law Commission recommended reconsideration of "scandalising the court" provision.

Critical Analysis

Importance of Contempt Powers

- Maintains dignity and authority of courts.
- Prevents obstruction in administration of justice.
- Protects judicial independence.

Concerns

- Vague interpretation of "scandalising the court".
- Can create chilling effect on media and academia.
- Risk of suppressing legitimate criticism.
- Lack of transparency affects public trust.

Constitutional Dimension

- Need balance between:
 - Free speech,
 - Judicial dignity.
- Public institutions in democracy must remain open to scrutiny.

Way Forward

- Narrow interpretation of criminal contempt.
- Greater transparency in judicial functioning.
- Strengthen accountability mechanisms.
- Promote constructive criticism instead of punitive responses.
- Ensure judicial restraint in oral observations.
- Improve RTI compliance within judiciary.

BJP is winning the elections but losing the economy

THE BJP's victory in West Bengal represents a moment of peak political performance and a landmark achievement. A re-echoing endorsement for Narendra Modi in 2019 is the only way the party can exceed the electoral peak it's attained in Bengal. At the same time, the BJP's handling of the economy has hit a low with no guarantee that it cannot go lower. The burning question is: Are the two events coincidental, or simultaneously determined? The latter — details follow.

Four agents are responsible for the economic derailment. The first and most important is the government itself. It recognizes the problem but is satisfied with blaming others for the crisis — in this case, the second agent: Major industry. The third agent is the Congress party — which is so comfortable being led by the Gandhis that a BJP one-party democratic rule is all but guaranteed. The fourth agent is the puppeteer controlling the top three: The Deep State. The crisis persists because the economy continues to expand at a pace prosaically touted as the fastest among the world's major economies.

The political high is self-evident — the emphatic win in West Bengal and the near one-party democratic rule in India. For some, the "economic low" may be an exaggeration: Isn't India the fastest-growing major economy in the world, with GDP growth around a 35-year historical average of 6 per cent a year? The catch lies in that word "major" and in measuring against a 35-year average. For the period of BJP rule from 2014 onwards, India's rank in terms of GDP

growth is ninth, in terms of per capita GDP growth is 11th, and in terms of per capita GDP in US dollars, Bangladesh is the first in terms of US dollar growth, with an average per capita growth of 8.3 per cent per annum. Ethiopia is 2nd at 7.2 per cent. India is 16th at just 4.7 per cent. No matter how one slices the data, it is time to dispense with the moniker of the fastest-growing major economy.

India has also moved from being one of the "Fragile Five" economies in 2013 to possibly becoming one of just two (along with Turkey). The Indian rupee has depreciated approximately 12 per cent against the US dollar in the last year, the seventh consecutive year of decline, and was ranked among Asia's worst-performing currencies in 2025. India today presents a macroeconomic picture of inflation has been contained, the current account deficit is manageable, growth remains steady, and political stability is unusually strong. In theory, these conditions should support currency confidence, not extreme fragility.

The government's response has been to apply hand-aid instead of performing the surgery needed to make investment in India — by Indians and foreigners alike — more attractive. One such hand-aid is an appeal to investors to invest more in bonds. It was established long ago that investors vote with their feet. Individuals and firms respond to economic incentives, not to moral appeals or what rulers perceive as national interest. And the incen-



SURJIT BHALLA

tive for investors today is to leave India, or not enter it. Why? For starters, there is the much-discussed "business climate". Domestic firms are deeply uncertain about government policy.

A major driver of GDP growth, export performance, and manufacturing competitiveness is the presence and scale of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). FDI brings foreign technology, capital, and linkages with global supply chains. The higher the FDI, the higher the investment and the higher the growth. This is accepted wisdom around the world — and was accepted in India, until 2015. The new mindset believes India can, and should, dictate terms to the foreign investor that investors are "digging" to enter the "large" Indian market. To put that market in perspective: India's GDP in 2025 was smaller than that of the state of California. It is likely that this same mindset drove the radical revision of the Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) framework in 2015. Soon after, Quality Control Orders (QCOs) surged from just 14 in 2017 to 76 by December 2024 — nothing more than an additional instrument of protection for domestic industry, especially firms with foreign tie-ups.

The revised 2015 BIT required that a foreign investor, before exiting their Indian venture, wait five years before proceeding to arbitration — and that the arbitration take place before an Indian judge. If Indian citizens are wary of going to Indian courts regardless of subject or grievance, why require a foreign investor to do the same?

The most damaging provision was the requirement that foreign investors exhaust local remedies for five years before accessing international arbitration. Is there any marriage in history, of whatever kind, that needs a five-year cooling off? Even now, the government's promised revamp appears aimed only at softening, not eradicating, that design.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced in Parliament in February 2025 that the BIT framework would be reviewed and a new version released. The reform release is still awaited. Speculation is that the fundamental architecture has not changed — except that the five-year waiting period has been shortened to "just" three years. And the requirement to exhaust Indian courts first — the defining departure from pre-2015 BIT terms — is likely being retained.

The deeper danger of overwhelming political success is that it can encourage the belief that policy is already good enough. It is not. India still holds the advantages of stability, scale, and global relevance. The present West Asian crisis is a perfect storm — for economic reforms. Unless the government uses this moment to improve the investment climate, restore treasury credibility, and signal seriousness about reform, political dominance will begin to look less like strength and more like a substitute for it. Elections can deliver power. Only policy can deliver prosperity. The world is watching.

Bhalla is chairperson of the Technical Expert Group for the first official Household Income Survey for India. Views are personal

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Concerns raised over slowing economic momentum despite strong political stability in India.
- Debate over India's claim as the "fastest-growing major economy."
- Issues highlighted:
 - Declining investor confidence
 - Rupee depreciation
 - Weak FDI environment
 - Restrictive BIT framework
 - Increasing Quality Control Orders (QCOs).

Key Points

- FDI is important for:
 - Capital inflow
 - Technology transfer
 - Manufacturing growth
 - Employment generation.
- India revised Model BIT in 2015:
 - Mandatory exhaustion of local remedies before arbitration.
 - Reduced investor-friendly provisions.
- QCOs increased significantly in recent years.
- Rupee depreciation affects:
 - Import bill
 - Inflation
 - External sector stability.
- Political stability alone cannot ensure economic prosperity without reforms.

Static Linkages

- GDP vs Per Capita Income.
- Role of FDI in economic development.
- Exchange Rate and Currency Depreciation.
- Current Account Deficit (CAD).
- Ease of Doing Business.
- Protectionism vs Liberalization.
- International Arbitration Mechanism.
- Global Value Chains (GVCs).

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Political stability supports long-term policymaking.
- QCOs improve product quality standards.
- BIT reforms protect sovereign regulatory powers.

Challenges

- Policy uncertainty discourages investors.
- Judicial delays reduce investment confidence.
- Excessive protectionism affects competitiveness.
- Weak FDI inflows may slow manufacturing growth.
- Rupee depreciation increases inflationary pressure.

Way Forward

- Improve ease of doing business.
- Ensure stable and predictable policies.
- Reform dispute resolution mechanisms.
- Balance protectionism with global competitiveness.
- Strengthen manufacturing and export ecosystem.
- Encourage higher quality FDI inflows.

Europe's shift to centre of Delhi's frame is welcome

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's trip to the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Italy underscores how far India's perception of, and engagement with, Europe has evolved. Throughout the Cold War, India's approach to Europe was shaped largely by its close economic and defence ties with the Soviet Union and its rivalry with the West. A prolonged neglect is now giving way to expanding cooperation. Buoyed by the India-EU FTA signed in January this year, following the 2024 India-EFTA agreement, Europe has been increasingly entering India's strategic imagination despite the friction around Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The shift comes at a time when traditional alignments are under growing strain — an unpredictable American president, an ever-deepening partnership between India's ally Russia and competitor China, and a fragile détente between Beijing and Washington, reflected in the Trump-Xi summit.

Europe is now central to India's pursuit of export markets, capital, advanced technology and green-energy partnerships. The PM's tour itinerary reflects the enormous potential that collaboration with some of the continent's smaller but highly capable economies can unlock. The Netherlands, with a population of just 18 million, is a pivotal player in the global chip race because of ASML, the sole manufacturer of the advanced lithography machines needed to produce the most advanced semiconductors. The deal between ASML and Tata Electronics will support scaling up of the latter's fabrication plant in Dholera. In defence, India seeks to diversify procurement away from Russia, and in renewable energy, it requires both technological expertise and capital. Europe also offers opportunities for India's youth as the diaspora across the continent continues to expand, driven by highly skilled workers and students. For Europe, meanwhile, India is a critical partner in its efforts to de-risk from a rising China.

While the EU functions as a bloc of 27 member states, each country retains its own strategic priorities and foreign policy outlook. Europe's sub-regions, too, differ sharply in their perceptions of external powers. India already enjoys strong partnerships with key western European powers such as France, the Netherlands and Germany, and it has moved to deepen engagement with the Nordic countries while strengthening ties with Italy in the Indo-Mediterranean. More must be done to engage with these sub-regions and cultivate cross-linkages for mutual gains. With geopolitical realignments, a fraying rules-based order, and the decreasing relevance of international institutions, India's ties with Europe can no longer be peripheral to its foreign policy.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- PM Narendra Modi visited the Netherlands amid India's expanding engagement with Europe.
- India's ties with Europe are strengthening due to:
 - India-EFTA Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (2024),
 - Progress in India-EU FTA negotiations,
 - Need for technology, investment, and strategic partnerships.
- The visit focused on semiconductors, defence, renewable energy, and supply-chain resilience.

Key Points

- The Netherlands-based ASML manufactures advanced lithography machines essential for semiconductor production.
- Tata Electronics partnered with ASML for India's semiconductor ecosystem and Dholera fabrication project.
- Europe is important for India in:
 - Advanced technology,
 - Defence diversification,
 - Green energy transition,
 - Skilled migration and education.
- India seeks to reduce excessive dependence on Russia in defence procurement.
- Europe views India as a reliable democratic partner to reduce dependence on China.
- India is strengthening relations with:
 - France,

- Germany,
- Netherlands,
- Nordic countries,
- Italy.

Static Linkages

- Strategic autonomy is a key feature of India's foreign policy.
- Multi-alignment has replaced Cold War-era non-alignment.
- Semiconductor manufacturing is critical for technological sovereignty.
- Supply-chain resilience gained importance after COVID-19 disruptions.
- Diversification of defence imports enhances national security.
- Diaspora contributes to soft power and economic relations.
- Indo-Pacific region is strategically important for maritime trade and security.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Access to advanced semiconductor technology.
- Boost to Make in India and Digital India initiatives.
- Greater export and investment opportunities.
- Strengthening India's position in a multipolar world.
- Support for green-energy transition.

Challenges

- Slow progress in India-EU FTA negotiations.
- Differences over carbon taxes and environmental standards.
- Europe's criticism regarding Russia-related issues.
- High technological dependence in semiconductor manufacturing.
- China's economic influence in Europe.

Way Forward

- Fast-track India-EU FTA negotiations.
- Expand semiconductor and critical technology partnerships.
- Increase defence co-production with European countries.
- Strengthen clean-energy cooperation.
- Improve academic and skilled workforce mobility.
- Enhance engagement with smaller European economies.

In Manipur, pull back from edge, build trust

AFTER MONTHS of brittle calm, Manipur could once again be on the edge. The immediate provocation — the ambush and killing of three Kuki church leaders travelling back to the Kuki-Zo majority Kangpokpi district — has degenerated into a broader atmosphere of fear. There have been retaliatory abductions, disappearances and mounting tensions between Kuki and Tangkhul Naga communities across the hill districts. In a state mired in ethnic conflict for the last three years, and burdened by layers of historical grievance, incidents such as these could turn into communal flashpoints.

The present crisis, that began in Ukhrul earlier this year, however, cannot be understood through the lens of the violence between the state's Meiteis and Kukis that has riven Manipur since May 2023. It can be traced back, instead, to the older, more serrated Naga-Kuki fault line, shaped by decades of territorial contestation, insurgent rivalry and competing visions of political belonging. The Nagas remain among the Northeast's most politically influential communities, with powerful tribal bodies, longstanding armed networks, and aspirations tied not merely to demands of autonomy within Manipur, but to a wider Naga political settlement that transcends state boundaries. Instability in the hill districts, therefore, echoes far beyond Manipur, intersecting with unresolved questions of autonomy, territory and ethnic representation. The Kukis, meanwhile, carry their own histories of displacement and grievance. In an already militarised landscape, where weapons continue to circulate freely and trust in state authority has eroded sharply, these unresolved antagonisms threaten to pull Manipur back into another cycle of violence.

The return of an elected government led by Yumnam Khemchand Singh in February had raised cautious hopes of rapprochement in a state exhausted by prolonged conflict. Presented as a conciliatory figure capable of balancing Meitei, Kuki and Naga interests, Singh cannot afford to fall back on the political equivocations of his predecessor. His inclusion of both Kuki and Naga deputy chief ministers offers an opening, but representation alone cannot substitute for trust. His government must move beyond reactive measures towards sustained political mediation: Securing the unconditional release of hostages, guaranteeing safe movement across districts, prosecuting the guilty and establishing credible inter-community dialogue mechanisms. This moment must be decisively defused, too much is at stake.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Fresh violence erupted in Manipur after the killing of three Kuki church leaders in Kangpokpi district.
- The incident intensified tensions among Kuki and Tangkhul Naga communities.
- The crisis reflects the older Naga-Kuki ethnic fault line apart from the ongoing Meitei-Kuki conflict since May 2023.
- Concerns remain over illegal arms circulation, weak governance, and ethnic polarization in hill districts.
- The new state government faces challenges of restoring law and order and rebuilding trust among communities.

Key Points

- Major ethnic groups in Manipur:
 - Meiteis – Imphal Valley
 - Nagas and Kukis – Hill districts
- Causes of conflict:
 - Territorial disputes
 - Ethnic identity politics
 - Insurgent rivalries
 - Demand for autonomy
- Naga groups seek greater political integration across Northeast regions.
- Kuki groups highlight issues of security, displacement, and representation.
- Continued violence affects:
 - Internal security
 - Border management with Myanmar

- Governance and development

Static Linkages

- Article 355 – Union's duty to protect states against internal disturbance.
- Sixth Schedule and Autonomous District Councils.
- Inner Line Permit (ILP) system.
- Federalism and Centre-State relations.
- Ethnic diversity and tribal administration in Northeast India.
- Insurgency and border security challenges.

Critical Analysis

Challenges

- Deep ethnic mistrust among communities.
- Weak state capacity in conflict areas.
- Proliferation of illegal weapons.
- Humanitarian crisis and displacement.
- Political instability affecting governance.

Constitutional/Ethical Dimensions

- Balancing tribal autonomy with national integrity.
- Ensuring justice and equal protection.
- Need for inclusive governance and dialogue.

Way Forward

- Strengthen inter-community dialogue mechanisms.
- Speedy investigation and accountability for violence.
- Disarmament and tighter security measures.
- Inclusive political representation.
- Improve development and governance in hill districts.
- Enhance Centre-State coordination for Northeast peace.