



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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'Iran, U.S. in tentative ceasefire deal; awaits Trump's approval'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON

Negotiators from the U.S. and Iran reached a tentative agreement on Thursday to extend the ceasefire in the 3-month-old war by 60 days and launch talks on Iran's nuclear programme, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter while noting that U.S. President Donald Trump has yet to sign off on it.

While Tehran did not immediately confirm any deal, Iran's *Tasnim* news agency, citing a source close to the negotiating team, said that the text of a potential memorandum of understanding (MoU) had not yet been finalised or confirmed, and that reports from Western sources making such claims were false. The possibility of an MoU comes as the fragile ceasefire appeared to be wavering. The latest flare-up in fighting happened less than a day earlier, when Kuwait intercepted missiles fired from Iran, according to U.S. Central Command.

According to the U.S. official, the MoU makes clear that Iran will not be able to impose tolls on the Strait of Hormuz and that it will have to remove all mines

from the vital waterway within 30 days. The U.S., meanwhile, would gradually lift its naval blockade on the strait and also agree to relax sanctions, allowing Iran to sell more of its oil, the official said.

Enriched uranium

Among the first issues to be negotiated during the extended ceasefire is what will happen to Iran's highly enriched uranium, the official said. Iran has not publicly committed to giving up the stockpile, which is believed to be buried under a trio of nuclear sites that were badly damaged by U.S. air strikes last year.

Kuwait had earlier announced an attack on its territory, and Iran said it had retaliated for strikes earlier in the week by firing on a U.S. base in a Gulf state it did not name.

The exchange unfolded after U.S. officials said on Wednesday they launched strikes on Iran, shooting down four one-way attack drones that posed a threat around the strait and hitting an Iranian ground-control station in Bandar Abbas that was about to launch a fifth drone.

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Why in News?

- The United States and Iran are reportedly negotiating a 60-day extension of the ceasefire while initiating discussions on Iran's nuclear programme.
- The proposed arrangement includes issues relating to the Strait of Hormuz, sanctions relief, maritime security, and Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium.
- The development has implications for global energy security, maritime trade, West Asian geopolitics, and India's strategic interests.

Context

- The ceasefire between the U.S. and Iran remains fragile amid continued military incidents in the Gulf region.
- Negotiations reportedly focus on:
 - Freedom of navigation through the Strait of Hormuz.
 - Removal of naval mines from the waterway.
 - Future of Iran's highly enriched uranium stockpile.
 - Gradual sanctions relief and resumption of Iranian oil exports.
- The issue has gained importance because any disruption in the Strait of Hormuz directly impacts global crude oil supply chains and energy prices.

Key Points

Strait of Hormuz

- Located between Iran and Oman/UAE.
- Connects:
 - Persian Gulf ↔ Gulf of Oman ↔ Arabian Sea
- Considered the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.
- Nearly one-fifth of global oil consumption passes through this route.
- Major exporters dependent on the strait:
 - Saudi Arabia
 - Iraq
 - Kuwait
 - UAE
 - Qatar
 - Iran

Iran Nuclear Issue

- Iran is a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- Nuclear activities are monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).
- The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), 2015 sought to limit Iran's nuclear programme in exchange for sanctions relief.
- The U.S. withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018, leading to renewed tensions.

Strategic Importance for India

- India imports around 85% of its crude oil requirements.
- A significant portion of India's energy imports passes through the Strait of Hormuz.
- Any disruption may lead to:
 - Rising crude oil prices.
 - Imported inflation.
 - Widening Current Account Deficit (CAD).
 - Pressure on the rupee.
 - Increased subsidy burden.

Static Linkages

- Transit Passage under UNCLOS, 1982.
- Maritime chokepoints and global trade routes.
- Nuclear non-proliferation architecture:
 - NPT
 - IAEA Safeguards
 - Comprehensive Safeguards Agreements.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) as an energy security mechanism.
- Geopolitical significance of West Asia in global energy markets.

Critical Analysis

Opportunities

- Reduced risk of regional escalation.
- Stability in global energy markets.
- Possible revival of diplomatic engagement.
- Improved maritime security in the Gulf.

Challenges

- Deep mistrust between the U.S. and Iran.
- Uncertainty regarding Iran's enriched uranium stockpile.
- Regional rivalries involving Israel and Gulf countries.
- Verification and compliance concerns.
- Potential disruption to energy supplies if negotiations fail.

India's Concerns

- Energy import dependence.
- Inflationary impact of rising oil prices.
- Safety of Indian diaspora in West Asia.
- Maritime trade security.

Way Forward

- Promote diplomatic resolution through multilateral engagement.
- Strengthen IAEA-led verification mechanisms.
- Ensure freedom of navigation under international law.
- Expand India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Accelerate renewable energy transition to reduce external vulnerability.
- Enhance maritime cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.

Chandrayaan-2 identifies 'possible presence' of ice in lunar south pole

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Nearly six years after it was launched, India's second moon mission Chandrayaan-2 continues to provide valuable data on the satellite.

In a new finding, scientists have found the possible presence of sub-surface ice in the Lunar South Polar Region. These were the findings of scientists from the Physical Research Laboratory (PRL) who used observations from the Chandrayaan-2's Dual Frequency Synthetic Aperture Radar (DFSAR) payload.

In this study, the scientists focused on doubly



Lunar shades: In the study, the scientists focused on special craters located in permanently shadowed regions of the moon. PTI

shadowed craters, which are special craters located in permanently shadowed regions (PSRs) of the moon.

Due to continuous shielding from sunlight

and thermal radiation, these regions remain extremely cold (temperatures -25K) and are considered favourable locations for preserving water-ice over long geological times-

cales. Using advanced radar polarimetric analysis, the scientists identified radar signatures consistent with the possible presence of sub-surface ice beneath the floors of four doubly shadowed craters in the lunar South Polar Region.

"Among the investigated craters, one crater of 1.1 km diameter within the Faustini crater shows particularly strong evidence of sub-surface ice, supported by both radar observations and distinctive lobate-rim morphological characteristics," the ISRO added.

The findings are expected to have significant implications for future lunar exploration missions.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Scientists from PRL using DFSAR data from Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter have found evidence suggesting the presence of sub-surface water ice in the Lunar South Polar Region.
- The study focused on Doubly Shadowed Craters (DSCs) within Permanently Shadowed Regions (PSRs).
- A crater inside the Faustini Crater showed the strongest indication of sub-surface ice.
- The finding has significance for future lunar missions and human habitation on the Moon.

Points for Exam

DFSAR (Dual Frequency Synthetic Aperture Radar)

- Payload onboard Chandrayaan-2 Orbiter.
- Operates in L-band and S-band frequencies.
- Capable of detecting sub-surface ice and studying lunar regolith.

Permanently Shadowed Regions (PSRs)

- Located near the lunar poles.
- Form due to the Moon's low axial tilt (~1.5°).
- Receive little or no sunlight throughout the year.
- Act as "cold traps" where water ice can survive for billions of years.

Doubly Shadowed Craters (DSCs)

- Smaller craters located inside larger PSRs.
- Protected from both sunlight and reflected thermal radiation.
- Considered ideal locations for preserving water ice.

Importance of Lunar Ice

- Source of water, oxygen, and hydrogen fuel.
- Supports In-Situ Resource Utilization (ISRU).
- Critical for future lunar bases and deep-space exploration.

Static Linkages

- Chandrayaan-1 (2008) first provided evidence of water molecules on the Moon.
- Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) is an active remote sensing system that works independent of sunlight.
- The Lunar South Pole is a priority region for future lunar exploration due to potential water reserves.

Significance

- Strengthens India's role in lunar science.
- Supports future robotic and human lunar missions.
- Demonstrates continued scientific utility of Chandrayaan-2.

Challenges

- Evidence is indirect and requires ground verification.
- Extraction of lunar ice remains technologically challenging.

Contradictions within India's cow protection regime

The recent discovery of hundreds of cow carcasses at a dumping site in Jaisalmer, Rajasthan, rightly triggered an outrage on social media. A few years ago, a similar incident involving the mass starvation deaths of cows was reported from Chhatrapati, Rajasthan, rightly triggered an outrage on social media. A few years ago, a similar incident involving the mass starvation deaths of cows was reported from Chhatrapati, Rajasthan, rightly triggered an outrage on social media. A few years ago, a similar incident involving the mass starvation deaths of cows was reported from Chhatrapati, Rajasthan, rightly triggered an outrage on social media.



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prescriptive Hindu texts classified cow slaughter as a minor sin (upapataka) rather than a major offence (mahapataka). Strikingly, even the prominent Hindu ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar held views that differed significantly from those of many present-day Hinduva activists. Consequently, cow reverence may not satisfy the parameters of the essential religious practices test which requires practice to be mandatory and of origin of a religion. In Mohd. Hanif Quareshi v. State of Bihar (2018), the Supreme Court of India rightly held that cow slaughter on Bakr-Eid is not an essential Islamic practice either. Several Muslim rulers had also restricted cow slaughter. Babur advised Humayun to do so in his will, Jahangir's Edict No. 10 too prohibited animal slaughter on certain days out of respect for Hindu and Jain sentiments. The influential Deoband Islamic seminary too issued multiple fatwas discouraging cow slaughter. Even in the Constituent Assembly debates on November 24, 1948, Muslims members such as Z.H. Lari and Mohammad Saadullah insisted that "it is better to come forward and incorporate a clause in fundamental rights that cow slaughter is henceforth prohibited, rather than it being left vague in the directive principles..."

What cattle census data reveal
Dr. B.R. Ambedkar eventually placed cow protection within the non-justiciable Directive Principles under Article 48 of the Constitution, following which several States enacted laws after Independence prohibiting cow slaughter. Yet, cattle census data suggest that the objective of preserving and increasing the cow population has not been achieved. West Bengal, for instance, was among the few States where culling and sale of cows and bulls were not entirely prohibited. By conventional logic, its cow population should therefore have been far lower than that of States such as Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra. However, since 1951, the cow population in the country has grown by only 49.63%, while the buffalo population has risen by 33.8% and the female buffalo population by 40.9%. The figures speak for themselves: cow face the risk of decline.

Ironically, the unprotected buffalo population has grown far more rapidly, especially in the so-called cow-belt States. A comparison of cattle growth rates shows that West Bengal, despite lacking stringent cow slaughter laws, has performed better than States with strict prohibitions. Even though male cattle are protected in these States, their population has declined sharply – by 38.3% in Gujarat, 31.4% in Maharashtra and 58.27% in Uttar Pradesh. In contrast, the decline in male cattle population in West Bengal was only 22.8%. The data also suggest that stringent prohibition laws may be pushing farmers in these States towards buffalo rearing, reflected in the declining cattle-to-buffalo ratio between 2012 and 2019. In West Bengal, by contrast, buffaloes remain insignificant in number and their population sharply declined in

2019. In 1997, the cattle to buffalo ratio was 144:1 but in 2019 it became 295:30. In Uttar Pradesh, the cattle to buffalo ratio fell from 105:90 in 1997 to 56:30 in 2019. West Bengal, despite lacking stringent prohibitions, witnessed a comparatively stronger growth in cow population and, therefore, mere laws will not protect cows. Cattle populations grow in a compounded manner because, unlike humans, a cow gives multiple calves at around three years and, to remain productive, must calve every 14-16 months. Calves born during a census period also mature and begin reproducing within a few years. According to growth forecasting models, if no cattle were culled or slaughtered and all calves survived except for natural deaths, the cattle population would increase by 2.5 to three times within five years – something that has never occurred in any State. Such growth is economically unsustainable, as farmers cannot support such numbers due to fodder scarcity.

Undermining the farmer
When farmers are legally allowed to exercise their judgment in culling unproductive cattle, they earn additional income to meet expenses such as weddings, children's education and health care. According to simulation models, farmers in West Bengal earned nearly ₹35,000 crore between 2012 and 2019 from the lawful sale of cattle for slaughter, apart from their dairy income. Farmers in States with strict prohibition laws also appear to have sold cattle for slaughter as is reflected in declining cattle populations, but likely to have earned far less because of the illegality of such sales and the possibility of bribery and middlemen. In effect, these laws do not penalise butchers or beef consumers, but farmers themselves. West Bengal appears to have recognised this reality with Muslim refusal to purchase cows for Eid slaughter. In India's agropastoral economy, livestock remains a vital component of rural livelihoods.

In the privacy judgment of K.S. Puttaswamy (2017), Justice J. Chelameswar had observed "I do not think that anybody would like to be told by the State as to what they should eat or how they should dress or whom they should be associated with either in their personal, social or political life". Justice Chandrachud said that what one eats is one's personal affair and it is a part of privacy under Article 21, i.e., right to life and personal liberty in view of the politicisation of the issue, Muslims in Bengal prudently refrained from cow slaughter during Eid. One hopes that this will promote social harmony and counter communal hate campaigns. Maulana Arshad Madani, president of the Jamiat Ulama-e-Hind (Arshad Madani faction), has also called for the cow to be declared the national animal. The first writer of this article, though not a veterinary expert, believes that Muslims across India should support a central law banning cow slaughter and imposing stringent punishment, especially on those who sell cows for slaughter.

The views expressed are personal

- Female buffalo population growth: ~161.9%.
- The issue highlights the challenge of balancing cattle conservation with rural livelihoods.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to Life and Personal Liberty.
- Article 25 – Freedom of Religion.
- Article 48 – Organisation of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry.
- Directive Principles of State Policy (Part IV).
- Seventh Schedule – Agriculture and Animal Husbandry under State List.
- Livestock Census conducted by the Department of Animal Husbandry and Dairying.
- Relationship between Fundamental Rights and DPSPs.

Critical Analysis

Arguments in Favour

- Supports constitutional mandate under Article 48.
- Promotes conservation of indigenous cattle breeds.
- Helps regulate illegal slaughter and cattle smuggling.
- Reflects cultural and social sentiments associated with cow protection.

Concerns

- Increased burden on farmers maintaining unproductive cattle.
- Growth in stray cattle population affecting agricultural productivity.
- Lack of adequate fodder, veterinary services and cattle shelters.
- Potential conflict with individual food choices and privacy rights.
- Economic impact on livestock-related industries and rural households.

Constitutional Perspective

- Balancing:
 - Article 48 (DPSP) – Cow protection.
 - Article 21 – Personal liberty and privacy.
 - Article 25 – Religious freedom.
- Demonstrates the continuing tension between socio-cultural objectives and individual rights.

Way Forward

- Shift focus from prohibition-centric policies to scientific cattle management.
- Strengthen implementation of the Rashtriya Gokul Mission.
- Expand fodder development and veterinary infrastructure.
- Promote cattle insurance and farmer support mechanisms.
- Establish sustainable models for maintenance of unproductive cattle.
- Encourage breed improvement and productivity enhancement.
- Develop a balanced policy framework integrating conservation, livelihoods and constitutional values.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Calcutta High Court recently upheld the West Bengal Government's notification issued under the West Bengal Animal Slaughter Control Act, 1950.
- The notification mandates a government-issued Certificate of Fitness before the slaughter of cows, bulls, bullocks, or buffaloes.
- The development has reignited debates regarding:
 - Effectiveness of cow protection laws.
 - Livestock conservation.
 - Farmers' economic interests.
 - Fundamental Rights versus Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSPs).

Key Points

- Article 48 directs the State to prohibit the slaughter of cows, calves and other milch and draught cattle.
- More than 20 States have enacted laws regulating or prohibiting cow slaughter.
 - Mohd. Hanif Quareshi v. State of Bihar (1958): Supreme Court held that cow slaughter on Bakr-Eid is not an essential Islamic religious practice.
 - K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017): Recognised food choices as part of privacy and personal liberty under Article 21.
- Livestock Census trends indicate:
 - Cow population growth since 1951: ~49.6%.
 - Buffalo population growth: ~153.8%.

Politics and sentiment continue to overshadow realities of cattle preservation in India

Brinkmanship in the age of global conflict

Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz and the Blockade by the United States of Iranian ports are among several recent acts of brinkmanship. A legacy of the Cold War era, brinkmanship refers to single action or a series of actions during a conflict or a short war situation that forces a perilous climb up the escalation ladder to force the adversary to back down, make concessions, negotiate or even do something irrational that would justify the use of uncalibrated or widespread use of force. Coined by western political scientists in the 1950s and 1960s while analysing crises such as the Berlin Blockade (1948-49) and the Cuban Missile Crisis (1962), the term also warned of the risk of escalation spiralling out of control, particularly in the nuclear context (Armageddon).



Arjan Subramaniam
Military historian and a strategic analyst

The return of brinkmanship
With the vast spread of the spectrum of conflict in the post-Cold War era without the disappearance of the nuclear overhang, brinkmanship has once again assumed a prominent position and merits some examination in a contemporary context. Terrorism has emerged as a principal instrument of brinkmanship, frequently used by non-state actors to provoke disproportionate state responses and gain international attention and sympathy in pursuit of larger goals. Without debating the dilemma posed by the proposition that argues, 'One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter', globally proscribed terrorist movements have rarely achieved their stated aims through brinkmanship – al Qaeda and the Islamic State being among them. A few such as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the PLO (National Liberation Front) in Algeria did force the more powerful adversary to make concessions. Another flavour of brinkmanship that has emerged in recent decades is proxy brinkmanship of the kind that Pakistan and Iran have engaged in for the last four decades against

stronger powers. Using proxies largely designated as global terrorist outfits, this brand of asymmetric brinkmanship seeks to erode the resolve and power of stronger powers and force them to make concessions over long festering issues of statehood and sovereignty. The attacks by Hamas on Israel on October 23, 2023, are an example of this kind of brinkmanship. Israel's disproportionate counter-brinkmanship in Gaza in pursuit of destroying Hamas is testimony to the breakdown of deterrence and the propensity to climb the escalation ladder at breakneck speed to achieve difficult strategic outcomes.

Rising geopolitical tensions

Among the larger powers today, the U.S. has seldom resorted to brinkmanship and prefers instead to achieve its geopolitical objectives through the brute and direct application of force or economic coercion. Frustrated at its inability to drag Iran to the negotiating table, the U.S. has resorted to brinkmanship by imposing a blockade on Iran, hoping to squeeze it economically and make it come to the negotiating table. Iran, on the other hand, has resorted to its own brand of asymmetric counter-brinkmanship that has yielded disproportionate strategic outcomes by blocking the Strait of Hormuz. Where this will go is anybody's guess until both the parties agree to meet mid-way – such are the complications of the brinkmanship game.

Russia's brinkmanship, driven by frustration over its inability to halt the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's eastward expansion despite Moscow's takeover of Crimea in 2014, and by expectations that Ukraine would capitulate after the advance on Kyiv in February 2022, has instead resulted in a prolonged war. Russia's periodic sabre-ranting over nuclear restraint is also a legacy of the Cold War that Russian President Vladimir Putin wants to keep alive. The indiscriminate use of hypersonic and other area

weapons against population centres such as Kiev by the Russians triggers a brinkmanship chain that is hard to control and infuse any semblance of restraint in the four-year-long conflict. Ever since China upped its maritime game since 2006 and laid claims to vast expanses of the South China Sea and parts of the East China Sea, it has mastered the art of controlled brinkmanship against weaker neighbours, daring them to push back against its attempts to establish maritime hegemony in the region. Except for Japan which has pushed back strongly against Chinese coercion over claims on the Senkaku Islands, and Taiwan which continues to stare the People's Republic of China in the eye, all other countries with shores along the South China Sea have been mute to Chinese reclamation of islands and claims on territorial waters. If there is one nation that has perfected the art of brinkmanship in the 21st century, it is North Korea. This largely underdeveloped and opaque country, with its demonstrated missile and nuclear prowess and nuclear proliferation, has kept the most powerful power in the world from forcing it into a 'rules based world order', while also keeping the region on edge.

The displacement of diplomacy

India's strategic DNA of restraint and responsibility and its calibrated use of force eschews any inclination to resort to brinkmanship even under the gravest provocation. The fragile global geopolitical system is now fraught with danger, and diplomacy no longer seems to be the preferred choice for conflict resolution. With global institutions such as the United Nations increasingly marginalised, coercion, brinkmanship and the uncalibrated use of force seem to be emerging as preferred options in settling conflicts of various genres. The world needs to seriously introspect this.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Recent tensions involving Iran and the Strait of Hormuz have revived discussions on brinkmanship in international relations.
- Brinkmanship refers to a strategy of deliberately escalating a crisis to force an adversary to concede without engaging in full-scale war.
- The concept gained prominence during the Cold War, particularly during the Berlin Blockade (1948-49) and Cuban Missile Crisis (1962).

Key Points

- Brinkmanship involves pushing a conflict to the edge of war to gain strategic advantage.
- Modern forms include:
 - Terrorism-based brinkmanship.
 - Proxy warfare.
 - Economic coercion and sanctions.
 - Maritime coercion in strategic waterways.
- Important contemporary examples:
 - Russia-Ukraine conflict.
 - U.S.-Iran tensions.
 - China's actions in the South China Sea.
 - North Korea's nuclear and missile diplomacy.
- Strategic chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz play a crucial role in global energy security.

Static Linkages

- Cuban Missile Crisis (1962).
- Berlin Blockade (1948-49).
- Deterrence Theory.
- Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).
- Balance of Power.
- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), 1968.
- United Nations Charter (Peaceful Settlement of Disputes).

- UNCLOS, 1982.
- Strait of Hormuz, Strait of Malacca, Bab-el-Mandeb, Suez Canal.
- India's Nuclear Doctrine:
 - No First Use (NFU).
 - Credible Minimum Deterrence.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Acts as a deterrent against adversaries.
- May compel negotiations without full-scale war.
- Enables weaker states to challenge stronger powers asymmetrically.

Concerns

- Risk of accidental military escalation.
- Threat to global peace and stability.
- Disruption of energy supplies and trade routes.
- Weakening of international institutions and diplomacy.
- Increased role of non-state actors and proxy groups.

Impact on India

- Higher crude oil prices due to instability in West Asia.
- Threat to energy security and trade.
- Challenges for Indian diaspora in conflict regions.
- Need for balanced diplomacy and strategic autonomy.

Way Forward

- Strengthen diplomatic engagement and conflict-resolution mechanisms.
- Enhance the role of the United Nations and multilateral institutions.
- Promote adherence to international law and UNCLOS.
- Develop crisis communication channels among major powers.
- Diversify energy imports and strategic petroleum reserves.
- Strengthen maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.

Validating flaws

The Supreme Court should have scrutinised the SIR's problematic record

The Supreme Court's verdict on Wednesday upholding the ECI's SIR of the electoral rolls as "an advancement towards free and fair elections" arrives long after the SIR became a settled fact in Bihar and the exercise carried out in 12 other States and Union Territories in phase 2. For months, the Court refused to weigh in on the constitutionality of the exercise, in *Association for Democratic Reforms vs ECI*, and proceeded instead with administrative and managerial decisions. The impact of an unimpeded exercise was a net trim of the rolls by more than 10%, with nearly 6.5 crore deletions and, crucially, an unexplained and curious fall in the gender ratio in the rolls of most States except Tamil Nadu. In West Bengal, the flaws of the SIR led to arbitrary deletions and the systematic exclusion of a large section of minorities and the underprivileged, with statistical exercises indicating that this influenced poll outcomes in many constituencies. The Court's interventions on the SIR remained largely supervisory until Wednesday, when it delivered a judgment that can only be called a retrospective validation of the process.

It has at last decided the constitutional question, and decided whether the SIR was proportionate and free of arbitrary exclusion as implemented. But it did not adequately confront the record of the implementation. Its reasoning engages the SIR in theory rather than its practice. To the petitioners' contention that Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act authorises only targeted, constituency-specific revision and not a State-wide dragnet, the Court held that the word "any" cannot be read down to "only," and that a systemic problem of migration and churn needed to be remedied systematically. But it overlooked that Section 21(3) is an exceptional power that omits the "prescribed manner" safeguard binding ordinary roll revisions. On the objection that requiring crores of already-enrolled electors to prove their eligibility afresh inverts the presumption that those electors are valid, the Court offered a distinction between an "adjudicatory" exercise, where that presumption holds, and an "inquisitorial" one, where it does not. The prior judgment in *Lal Babu Hussein* (1995), which had insisted that any removal be reasoned and individuated, was confined to its own facts. Yet, the Court's assurance that the presumption survives is not borne out when the SIR requires the elector to prove an entitlement already held. An accurate roll, as the Court rightly argues, is the foundation of a genuine election. This is why the potentially wrongful deletion of lawful voters through a hurried process under a demanding election-driven deadline hits electoral integrity.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Supreme Court upheld the Election Commission of India's (ECI) Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.
- The Court termed the exercise an important step towards ensuring free and fair elections.
- The challenge was filed against the legality of large-scale electoral roll revisions conducted in several States.
- Petitioners argued that the exercise resulted in arbitrary deletion of voters and imposed an unreasonable burden on already registered electors.
- The judgment examined the scope of ECI's powers under the Representation of the People Act, 1950.

Key Points

- Supreme Court upheld ECI's authority to undertake Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls.
- Court interpreted Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950 broadly, allowing large-scale revision where necessary.
- Electoral roll accuracy was recognized as a prerequisite for free and fair elections.
- Court distinguished between:

- Adjudicatory proceedings (individual eligibility disputes).
- Verification exercises conducted by ECI.
- Concerns raised during litigation:
 - Large-scale deletion of voters.
 - Possible exclusion of migrants and vulnerable groups.
 - Burden on existing electors to re-establish eligibility.
 - Questions regarding procedural fairness.

Static Linkages

- Article 324 – Powers and functions of Election Commission.
- Article 325 – One general electoral roll; prohibition of exclusion based on religion, race, caste or sex.
- Article 326 – Universal Adult Suffrage.
- Representation of the People Act, 1950.
- Representation of the People Act, 1951.
- Electoral Roll Revision Process.
- Principle of Natural Justice.
- Rule of Law.
- Free and Fair Elections as part of Basic Structure Doctrine.
- Judicial Review under Articles 32 and 226.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens electoral roll accuracy.
- Helps eliminate duplicate, shifted, deceased and ineligible entries.
- Enhances credibility of elections.
- Reinforces ECI's constitutional mandate under Article 324.

Concerns

- Risk of wrongful deletion of genuine voters.
- Documentation burden on poor and migrant populations.
- Potential exclusion of marginalized groups.
- Limited opportunity for individualized hearings.
- Electoral integrity requires both clean rolls and maximum voter inclusion.

Constitutional Issues

- Electoral purity vs Inclusive Democracy.
- Administrative efficiency vs Natural Justice.
- Institutional autonomy of ECI vs Judicial oversight.
- Right to Vote as a statutory right linked with democratic participation.

Way Forward

- Ensure robust appeal and grievance-redress mechanisms.
- Mandatory notice before deletion from electoral rolls.
- Periodic independent audit of roll revision exercises.
- Technology-enabled verification with human oversight.
- Special facilitation for migrants, women, elderly and vulnerable groups.
- Greater transparency in publication of revision data.
- Strengthening voter awareness programmes.

Quantum-safe thinking India must be alive to challenges posed by advanced encryption algorithms

The new DST Task Force report on making India's digital ecosystems quantum-safe is a product of contemplating a threat that is both long-term and urgent. Today, public-key cryptography underpins online identity protection and secure communications. Its protective ability rests on mathematical problems that conventional computers cannot solve efficiently; thus, the information is 'hidden' behind a lock whose key is the solution to such a problem. However, a sufficiently capable quantum computer could use, say, Shor's algorithm to open this lock in minutes or hours. Symmetric cryptography, such as AES encryption, is less threatened by the advent of quantum computers but the existential exposure is nonetheless concentrated in public-key infrastructure, which secures everything from HTTPS to telecommunication networks. The shorter-term problem is the possibility of a bad actor harvesting encrypted data today and decrypting them later using quantum computers. Post-quantum cryptography (PQC) is software that can run on conventional computers but with the added benefit of resisting attacks from quantum computers. The DST report recommends three post-quantum standards finalised in 2024 to plan India's efforts on the post-quantum effort and that it begin migrating to this architecture. This prudent advice must be followed, especially vis-a-vis critical infrastructure, financial services, power grids, and defence.

The migration must continue even if "Q-day" – when quantum computers practically endanger public-key cryptography – is pushed back from the report's expected 2029. Indeed, experts disagree on this point, although the mainstream view is that both "Q-day" and migration will take at least a decade. Cryptography is in practice a set of dependencies often spread across – within, say, a ministry – databases, legacy hardware, vendor software, authentication protocols, and control systems. Thus, the challenges of the sprawling organisational transition must not be underestimated. Moreover, since advanced AI can autonomously compromise the software layer today and quantum computers threaten the mathematics of encryption tomorrow, the threat surface is much larger than what "Q-day" alone portends. The report recommends the wider adoption of PQC and, in environments requiring higher security assurances, the more technically demanding quantum key distribution (QKD) as well. For India, that means a new budgetary allocation of at least ₹5,000 crore; upgrading legacy infrastructure for interoperability; rationalising vendor dependence; and fostering and retaining the human capital, as QKD engineers are rare today. India must also periodically reassess its needs considering the acute trade-off QKD poses between security and operational efficiency.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Department of Science and Technology (DST) Task Force has recommended that India begin transitioning to a quantum-safe digital ecosystem.
- The report warns that future quantum computers may break existing public-key cryptography, which currently secures banking, e-governance, telecommunications, defence networks, and digital communications.
- It recommends adoption of Post-Quantum Cryptography (PQC) standards and selective deployment of Quantum Key Distribution (QKD) for critical sectors.
- The concern arises from the possibility of adversaries collecting encrypted data today and decrypting it later using quantum computers ("Harvest Now, Decrypt Later" threat).

Key Points

Post-Quantum Cryptography (PQC)

- Cryptographic algorithms designed to remain secure against attacks from quantum computers.
- Can run on existing classical computers.
- Intended to replace vulnerable public-key cryptographic systems.

Quantum Threat

- Current encryption systems such as RSA rely on mathematical problems that are difficult for classical computers.

- A sufficiently powerful quantum computer could solve these problems using Shor's Algorithm.
- Critical sectors at risk:
 - Defence communications
 - Banking and financial systems
 - Power grids
 - Telecommunications
 - Digital governance platforms

Quantum Key Distribution (QKD)

- Uses principles of quantum mechanics for secure key exchange.
- Any interception attempt can be detected.
- Provides very high security but requires specialized infrastructure.

Recommendations of DST Task Force

- Immediate planning for migration to PQC.
- Priority protection for critical infrastructure.
- Development of indigenous cryptographic capabilities.
- Creation of skilled human resources in quantum technologies.
- Periodic reassessment of technological and security requirements.

Static Linkages

National Quantum Mission (NQM)

- Approved in 2023.
- Outlay: ₹6,003.65 crore (2023–31).
- Objectives:
 - Quantum Computing
 - Quantum Communication
 - Quantum Sensing & Metrology
 - Quantum Materials & Devices

Cyber Security Ecosystem

- CERT-In: National nodal agency for cybersecurity incidents.
- Digital India Programme: Expanding digital infrastructure requiring robust cybersecurity.
- National Cyber Security Policy, 2013.

Important Concepts

- Quantum Computing:
 - Superposition
 - Entanglement
 - Quantum Interference
- CIA Triad:
 - Confidentiality
 - Integrity
 - Availability

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens India's cyber resilience.

- Protects critical infrastructure from future threats.
- Supports Digital India and national security objectives.
- Promotes technological self-reliance.

Challenges

- High transition costs.
- Legacy systems compatibility issues.
- Shortage of quantum cybersecurity experts.
- Dependence on foreign technology and vendors.
- Balancing security with operational efficiency.

Way Forward

- Implement a phased national PQC migration strategy.
- Prioritize defence, finance, energy, and telecom sectors.
- Strengthen indigenous quantum research and innovation.
- Expand capacity-building under the National Quantum Mission.
- Establish national standards and testing frameworks.
- Promote industry-academia-government collaboration.

SIR judgment gets the law right, and the ground reality wrong

BEFORE ANY representative government can count votes, it must first know whose votes may be counted. That arresting opening line from CJI Suresh Kumar's 134-page judgment in Association for Democratic Reforms vs Election Commission of India, delivered on May 22, sets an appropriately philosophical tone for one of the most consequential electoral rulings in recent memory. It is a judgment that gets the constitutional law largely right — and the ground reality almost entirely wrong. It also mistakes a demolition for a renovation. Let me begin with the credit due.

The Court has affirmed what election administrators have long known: Clean electoral rolls are not an administrative nicety but the foundation of democratic legitimacy. More than two decades had passed since Bihar's last Special Intensive Revision (SIR). Rapid urbanisation and large-scale migration had produced rolls riddled with duplication, dead voters, and multiple recording of migrant voters. Annual Summary Revisions were addressing these issues, but problems persisted. The EC's decision to undertake the SIR was legally and constitutionally valid, as the SC has upheld — even if the manner of its execution was anything but.

The Court correctly holds that the SIR is traceable to Section 2(k) of the Representation of the People Act, read with Article 324, and does not conflict with the constitutional imperative of free and fair elections. More importantly, it draws an intelligent and necessary line on citizenship. The EC can examine it, but for the limited purpose of determining inclusion or exclusion from the electoral roll. Deletion from the voters' list does not amount to disenfranchisement of non-



S.Y. QURAISHI

These are the citizens that the EC's own outreach programmes spent years bringing into the democratic process. The SIR, as validated, risks systematically disenfranchising the people democratic deepening was meant to reach.

Then there is the documentation problem. The Court upheld the EC's document framework as a "considered exercise of administrative discretion" but a large portion of India's poor do not possess necessary documentary proof of identity and residence. The one reliable proof that existed, namely the Elector's Photo Identity Card, has been trashed in one stroke.

Most troubling of all is the remedy the judgment prescribes for wrongful deletions. Persons deleted erroneously may, the Court says, "assail the decision of the Commission by way of judicial review". Picture the voter this is addressed to: The daily wage labourer in Shamshabad or Mansabdabad who has been removed from the rolls, possibly without knowing it, possibly having never seen the draft roll, certainly without a lawyer, and almost certainly without the time, money, or legal literacy to file a petition before a competent court. Judicial review is a remedy designed for citizens with resources and time. For the poor voter, it is no remedy at all — it is the law's way of closing a door while appearing to open it.

The citizenship referral direction carries a similar infirmity. The competent authority under the Citizenship Act has no established infrastructure to handle millions of individual cases. The judgment directs completion before "the next Parliamentary, Assembly, or Local Body election, whichever is earlier".

Quraishi is former Chief Election Commissioner of India and author of the undocumented Wonder The Making of the Great Indian Election

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of the Election Commission of India's (ECI) Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.
- The Court held that maintaining accurate electoral rolls is essential for free and fair elections.
- Concerns were raised regarding possible exclusion of genuine voters due to documentation and verification requirements.
- The judgment has renewed debate on balancing electoral integrity with universal voter inclusion.

Key Points

- Electoral rolls form the foundation of India's electoral democracy.
- ECI derives its powers from Article 324 and the Representation of the People Act, 1950.
- SIR aims to identify duplicate, deceased, shifted, and ineligible voters.
- The Supreme Court viewed SIR as a legitimate exercise to ensure electoral purity.
- Concerns persist regarding:
 - Wrongful deletion of eligible voters.
 - Documentation challenges for migrants and vulnerable groups.
 - Administrative capacity to verify large populations.
 - Accessibility of grievance redressal mechanisms.

Static Linkages

- Article 324 – Powers and functions of Election Commission.
- Article 325 – No exclusion from electoral rolls on grounds of religion, race, caste, or sex.
- Article 326 – Universal Adult Suffrage.

- Representation of the People Act, 1950 – Preparation and revision of electoral rolls.
- Representation of the People Act, 1951 – Conduct of elections.
- Free and Fair Elections – Part of the Basic Structure Doctrine.
- Universal Adult Franchise – Key feature of Indian democracy.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Improves accuracy of electoral rolls.
- Strengthens electoral integrity.
- Helps prevent electoral fraud and duplication.
- Reinforces free and fair elections.

Concerns

- Risk of disenfranchisement of genuine voters.
- Documentation burden on poor and migrant populations.
- Limited awareness among vulnerable sections.
- Time-bound verification may increase exclusion errors.
- Legal remedies may be difficult for economically weaker citizens.

Way Forward

- Ensure voter inclusion remains the primary objective.
- Strengthen door-to-door verification and voter outreach.
- Provide adequate time for document submission.
- Establish robust grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Use technology and database integration with privacy safeguards.
- Conduct periodic audits of voter deletion processes.
- Follow the principle: "No eligible voter left behind."

India's West Asia challenge: Stay agile, stay connected



SYED
AKBARUDDIN

RARELY IN recent years has West Asia occupied so much space in India's foreign-policy conversation. Attention, however, has not always produced understanding. By breakfast, newspaper columns have sorted the heroes and villains. By prime time, TV hosts have turned the crisis into loyalty tests.

For India, West Asia is not a straight line. It is a Rubik's Cube. Every move shifts another face. There is no single West Asia for New Delhi to align with. Israel, the Gulf and Iran are three principal faces of the same puzzle. A posture that protects defence ties with Israel may complicate Gulf sensitivities. A channel that preserves access to Iran may unsettle partners elsewhere.

The first is a security and technology-oriented West Asia. Here, Israel matters. The relationship is embedded in defence procurement, intelligence-sharing and counter-terrorism capabilities. In a crisis, these are operational assets. Any serious Indian policy must account for this layer, however uncomfortable that may be for those who prefer a purely moral frame.

The second is an economic and human West Asia, the Gulf. For India, it means remittances, oil, gas, investment flows, food security and the safety of its workers abroad. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are both indispensable, but they are not interchangeable. Riyadh carries the weight of oil markets, Islamic legitimacy and bargaining in any future regional settlement. Abu Dhabi's break with OPEC discipline underlines how differently it moves. It is faster, more commercially wired, less bound by old Gulf caution, more open with Israel and more wary of Tehran. For India, there is no single Gulf consensus waiting to be read from one capital. The Gulf has become a cube within the cube.

The third sits on the map itself. For India, Iran is not just a difficult sanctions problem. It is Chabahar, access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, and a reminder that geography keeps its own counsel. A closed channel with Tehran would make India less agile.

These three West Asias do not fit to-

gether easily. Each twists differently, creating pressure elsewhere. Today's crisis has fused Gaza, the US confrontation with Iran, militia activity in Lebanon and pressure on maritime routes into a layered conflict. Even within individual theatres, alignments are not straightforward. In Lebanon, the state's interest in preventing escalation can overlap more with Israel's preference for stability than with Hezbollah's confrontation-driven posture, without making them allies.

This is where the punditry fractures. One camp reads every Indian statement or silence as proof of a tilt towards Israel and the US. Another wants New Delhi to speak in a louder moral register. A third mistakes low visibility for irrelevance. The shallowest version treats foreign policy as optics. The claim that India has "chosen" one side ignores India's different interests. The argument that India should have spoken more forcefully assumes that voice alone alters outcomes in a conflict where some actors can change facts on the ground. Moral clarity matters. States, however, inherit consequences that commentators do not. The charge of absence is misleading too. Visibility and access are not the same. India has tried to preserve access rather than spend it on a louder line.

None of this means India has mastered the moment. The risks are now closer to home. West Asia enters India through oil and fertiliser prices, pressure on foreign-exchange reserves, a weaker rupee and anxious families. Recent appeals for restraint in fuel use, gold purchases and foreign travel attest to that.

India has recognised that West Asia is not a single contest but a tangle of rivalries, bargains and anxieties. That means policy, even when purposeful, will sometimes appear uneven. Debate and commentary will continue, as they should. India's success in West Asia, however, will be judged by whether it can protect its interests, keep channels open and keep turning the cube without losing sight of the whole.

The writer is former permanent representative of India to the United Nations, and dean, Kautliya School of Public Policy, Hyderabad

For India, West Asia is not a straight line. It is a Rubik's Cube. Every move shifts another face. There is no single West Asia for New Delhi to align with.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Escalating tensions involving Israel, Iran, Gaza, Lebanon, and maritime security in the Red Sea have increased geopolitical uncertainty in West Asia.
- India has adopted a balanced approach, maintaining relations with Israel, Gulf countries, and Iran simultaneously.
- The developments highlight the importance of West Asia for India's energy security, diaspora interests, connectivity projects, and strategic autonomy.

Key Points

- India follows a policy of Strategic Autonomy in West Asia.
- Three key pillars of India's engagement:
 - Israel – Defence technology, intelligence cooperation, counter-terrorism.
 - Gulf Countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, etc.) – Energy imports, trade, investments, Indian diaspora.
 - Iran – Chabahar Port, INSTC, access to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- West Asia accounts for:
 - A significant share of India's crude oil and LNG imports.
 - Large remittance inflows from Indian workers.
 - Critical maritime trade routes through the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea.

- Regional instability can impact:
 - Oil prices and inflation.
 - Current Account Deficit (CAD).
 - Maritime trade and supply chains.
 - Safety of Indian diaspora.

Static Linkages

- Strategic autonomy remains a core principle of Indian foreign policy.
- Chabahar Port is India's gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) enhances Eurasian connectivity.
- Strait of Hormuz is among the world's most important oil transit chokepoints.
- Energy security is a component of national security.
- Indian diaspora is an important instrument of foreign policy.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) help mitigate external oil shocks.
- Freedom of navigation is a key principle under international maritime law.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Ensures uninterrupted energy supplies.
- Protects interests of over 9 million Indians in the Gulf region.
- Strengthens India's role as a balancing power.
- Supports connectivity initiatives linking India with Eurasia.

Challenges

- Israel-Iran rivalry complicates diplomatic balancing.
- Regional conflicts threaten energy security.
- Sanctions on Iran affect connectivity projects.
- Red Sea disruptions increase shipping costs.
- Growing great-power competition reduces diplomatic flexibility.

UPSC Keywords

- Multi-alignment
- Strategic Autonomy
- Energy Security
- Diaspora Diplomacy
- Maritime Security
- Connectivity Corridors

Way Forward

- Continue issue-based diplomacy and strategic autonomy.
- Accelerate Chabahar Port and INSTC projects.
- Diversify sources of crude oil and LNG imports.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Strengthen maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Enhance protection and evacuation mechanisms for Indian diaspora.
- Promote diplomatic solutions and regional de-escalation.
- Deepen economic partnerships with all major regional actors.