



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

DATE - 03/06/2026

**SOURCE : THE HINDU & INDIAN
EXPRESS**

**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

IMD revises its forecast for the onset of monsoon over Kerala to 'around June 4'

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Revising the forecast of the onset of the southwest monsoon over Kerala, where the weather system makes landfall on the Indian mainland, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Tuesday said the rainy season was now "likely to set in" around Thursday, June 4.

On May 15, the IMD predicted onset over Kerala on May 26, with a model error of plus or minus four days. A June 4 arrival overshoots even the upper bound of that window, May 30. It is the first time since 2015 – when a May 30 forecast gave way to a June 5 onset – that the department has failed to correctly call the monsoon's Kerala arrival. The IMD's operational onset forecasts, which rely on a custom forecast model, had been accurate from 2005 to 2025 but for that one lapse.

The IMD said conditions as of Monday "are favourable for further advance of southwest monsoon into some more parts of southwest and southeast Arabian Sea, some parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu and



Rain clouds over Ernakulam in Kerala on Tuesday evening. H. VISHU

the Bay of Bengal around June 4". An upper-air cyclonic circulation off the south Kerala coast is expected to aid that final push. The IMD forecast isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall over Kerala over the next six or seven days.

Onset declaration

The IMD placed the northern limit of the monsoon – the system's cloud promontory – along a line running from 10°N/60°E through the southern Bay of Bengal to 22°N/97°E as of Monday, with the rain yet to cross into the Kerala mainland. The IMD declares the monsoon's onset over Kerala any day after May 10 when at least 60% of 14 designated stations across the State and the ad-

joining coast – among them Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, Kozhikode, and Mangaluru – record 2.5 mm or more of rainfall for two consecutive days. Two more conditions must hold: westerly winds must extend up to about 600 hPa (roughly 4.5 km) over the southeast Arabian Sea, and outgoing long-wave radiation must drop below 200 W/m², a proxy for the deep cloud and convection that differentiates the monsoon from mere rain.

IMD officials have told *The Hindu* that the system had stalled short of the coast rather than weakened. The slip arrives with the season forecast below normal, at 90% of the long-period average, under a building El Niño.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has revised the likely onset date of the Southwest Monsoon over Kerala to 4 June, later than its earlier forecast of 26 May (±4 days).
- The monsoon system advanced over parts of the Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal but stalled before reaching the Kerala mainland.
- The delay comes amid concerns of a developing El Niño and IMD's forecast of below-normal seasonal rainfall (90% of Long Period Average - LPA).

Key Points

- Kerala marks the official onset of the Southwest Monsoon over mainland India.
- IMD declares monsoon onset when:
 - At least 60% of 14 designated stations receive 2.5 mm or more rainfall for two consecutive days.
 - Westerly winds extend up to 600 hPa level (~4.5 km altitude).
 - Outgoing Long-wave Radiation (OLR) falls below 200 W/m², indicating deep cloud formation and convection.
- The Northern Limit of Monsoon (NLM) indicates the furthest advance of monsoon winds.
- Southwest Monsoon contributes nearly 75% of India's annual rainfall and is crucial for Kharif agriculture.

Static Linkages

- Monsoon originates due to differential heating of land and sea and the northward shift of the Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ).
- Somali Jet transports moisture-laden winds from the Arabian Sea towards India.
- Western Ghats cause heavy orographic rainfall along the west coast.
- Major factors influencing monsoon: ENSO (El Niño-Southern Oscillation), Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO), and Jet Streams.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Determines timing of Kharif crop sowing.
- Influences water availability, hydropower generation, and food prices.
- Supports flood and drought preparedness.

Challenges

- Increasing monsoon variability due to climate change.
- High dependence of rainfed agriculture on timely rainfall.
- Forecast uncertainties caused by ocean-atmosphere interactions.

Way Forward

- Strengthen weather forecasting and early-warning systems.
- Expand agro-meteorological advisory services.
- Promote climate-resilient agricultural practices.
- Improve water-resource and reservoir management.
- Enhance research on monsoon dynamics and climate variability.

No role for third parties in bilateral matters between India, Nepal: Centre

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

After Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah said India and Nepal have possession of each other's territory, the External Affairs Ministry on Tuesday said that the two sides had bilateral mechanisms to deal with border issues and that there was "no role for any third parties" in such matters.

Addressing presspersons, Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal responded to the claims made by Mr. Shah, who had sought intervention of countries like the U.K. and China in the issue. The response coincided with the Delhi visit of Nepal's ruling



Union Home Minister Amit Shah greets Rabi Lamichhane, chairman of Nepal's ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party, in New Delhi. PTI

Rastriya Swatantra Party's chairman Rabi Lamichhane, who met External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday.

"We have established bilateral mechanisms to deal with all aspects of boundary matters. It should be clear to all concerned that

there is no role for any third parties in a bilateral matter between India and Nepal," said Mr. Jaiswal. In a speech in the Nepali Parliament on May 31, Mr. Shah said: "You will be surprised to know a fact that I have learnt recently, only after becoming Prime Mi-

nister. India has not only encroached Nepali territory, but Nepal has also encroached Indian territory in many places. Now, both countries should study the facts and sit together as friends and resolve the issue."

In his response, Mr. Jaiswal said, "While close to 98% of the India-Nepal boundary has been demarcated, there are some unresolved segments."

No man's land

He further said, "In addition, there are cases of cross-border occupation and encroachment of no-man's land in demarcated segments of the boundary, which are currently being mapped jointly."

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah stated that both India and Nepal possess parts of each other's territory and should resolve the issue through dialogue.
- India rejected any third-party role and reiterated that all boundary issues are addressed through bilateral mechanisms.
- The Ministry of External Affairs stated that nearly 98% of the India–Nepal boundary has been demarcated, while a few segments remain unresolved.

Key Points

- India–Nepal boundary length: ~1,751 km.
- Boundary passes through:
 - Uttarakhand
 - Uttar Pradesh
 - Bihar
 - West Bengal
 - Sikkim
- Major disputed areas:
 - Kalapani
 - Lipulekh
 - Limpiyadhura
 - Susta
- Disputes arise due to:
 - Differing interpretation of historical maps.
 - Origin of the Kali (Mahakali) River.
 - Shifting river courses.
 - Encroachment in No-Man's Land areas.
- India's position:
 - Boundary issues are strictly bilateral.
 - No role for third-party mediation.

Static Linkages

- Treaty of Sugauli (1816) between Nepal and the British East India Company forms the basis of the modern boundary.

- 1950 India–Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship provides the framework for close bilateral relations.
- India and Nepal share an open border, allowing free movement of people and goods.
- The Kali (Mahakali) River is central to the Kalapani dispute.
- Nepal is important for India's Neighbourhood First Policy and Himalayan security.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Maintains regional stability in the Himalayas.
- Important for India's security and connectivity interests.
- Strengthens the Neighbourhood First policy.

Challenges

- Historical boundary ambiguities.
- Political use of border issues in Nepal.
- Strategic competition in the Himalayan region.
- Encroachments and local-level disputes.

Way Forward

- Expedite boundary settlement through existing bilateral mechanisms.
- Strengthen joint survey and mapping exercises.
- Enhance diplomatic engagement and political dialogue.
- Promote economic and connectivity projects to build trust.
- Keep boundary issues insulated from domestic political rhetoric.

FRA, PESA task force in Chhattisgarh weakens statutory bodies: activists

New working group set up to fast-track implementation of forest and panchayat laws; the move, modelled after a similar structure in Madhya Pradesh, is a way to institutionalise the role of Sangh Parivar-linked outfits, says civil society collective

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The constitution of a task force in Chhattisgarh to fast-track the implementation of laws such as the Forest Rights Act, 2006 and the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, has led to fresh controversy.

Forest and tribal rights activists and the Opposition Congress allege that this undermines statutory bodies set up under these laws and institutionalises the role of Sangh Parivar-linked outfits in the implementation of these laws in tribal-dominated areas.

The Chhattisgarh government, on May 6, notified the task force, comprising an 18-member apex body headed by the Chief Minister and a 12-member implementation body headed by the Chief Secretary.



Tribal women on their way to collect forest produce in Dantewada district of Chhattisgarh. FILE PHOTO

of the State. This task force is meant to map potential areas for community forest resource rights claims under the FRA, review pending claims, design strategies for PESA-related matters, and assist district authorities with implementation of the FRA.

The Campaign for Survival and Dignity (CSD), a forest rights civil society collective, has noted in a statement that the Chhattisgarh government's notification of a task force appeared to be modelled on a similar structure established by the Madhya Pradesh government in November 2024.

The CSD also flagged that a similar task force

structure is likely to be constituted in Odisha as well.

The CSD has asserted that these task forces are a way to include representatives of Sangh Parivar-linked organisations such as the Janjati Suraksha Manch (JSM) and the Akhil Bharatiya Vanvasi Kalyan Parishad (ABVKA) in the process for implementing these laws.

'Gold standard'

Interestingly, on May 24, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had addressed a public meeting organised by the ABVKA and the JSM in New Delhi and hailed Madhya Pradesh's "model of PESA implementation" as the gold standard, adding that BJP-led State governments across the country are preparing to follow in its footsteps.

One of the key demands of the JSM and the ABVKA

leaderships at this event was to ensure that Gram Sabhas under the PESA include only tribal villagers "who had not converted" to any other religion.

Chhattisgarh-based forest rights activist Akshay Shukla told The Hindu that such a task force structure was violative of the very laws they were meant to implement. "The idea of laws like the PESA and the FRA is to strengthen tribal governance at the village level. Instead of strengthening these bodies and ensuring they work as they are supposed to, this is the creation of a parallel structure outside of the statute."

On Tuesday, Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said these task forces "subvert the basic democratic structure of implementation of these two laws", adding that the ABVKA was the "driving force" behind this move.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Chhattisgarh government has constituted a Task Force to expedite implementation of:
 - Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006
 - Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996
- The task force will review pending forest rights claims, identify Community Forest Resource (CFR) areas, and strengthen PESA implementation.
- The move has generated debate regarding its impact on the role of Gram Sabhas and existing statutory institutions.

Key Points

Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006

- Enacted to recognize forest rights of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Traditional Forest Dwellers (OTFDs).
- Recognizes:
 - Individual Forest Rights (IFR)
 - Community Forest Rights (CFR)
 - Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights
- Gram Sabha is the nodal authority for initiating claims.

PESA Act, 1996

- Extends provisions of Part IX of the Constitution to Scheduled Areas with modifications.
- Applicable in Fifth Schedule Areas.
- Empowers Gram Sabhas over:
 - Minor forest produce
 - Local resources
 - Traditional customs
 - Development planning

Important Constitutional Provisions

- Article 244(1) – Administration of Scheduled Areas.

- Fifth Schedule – Governance of Scheduled Areas.
- 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 – Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- PESA Act, 1996 – Tribal self-governance framework.

Significance

- Faster recognition of forest rights.
- Strengthening tribal welfare and resource governance.
- Better implementation of FRA and PESA in tribal areas.
- Potential improvement in community forest management.

Concerns

- Possibility of creating a parallel structure outside statutory mechanisms.
- May dilute the authority of Gram Sabhas.
- Concerns regarding decentralization and tribal self-governance.
- Need to ensure compliance with FRA and PESA provisions.

Prelims Facts

- FRA, 2006 → Ministry of Tribal Affairs is the nodal ministry.
- PESA, 1996 applies only to Fifth Schedule Areas.
- Gram Sabha is the foundational institution under both FRA and PESA.
- Community Forest Resource (CFR) rights are recognized under FRA.

AIIMS Delhi study shows how air pollutants breach placental barriers and affect foetuses

Ramya Kannan
CHENNAI

That environmental pollutants can breach the placental barrier and affect foetuses is now well established in research. But how exactly does this happen? Researchers at AIIMS, Delhi have mapped the step-by-step biological pathway through which urban air pollution silences a key foetal growth protein, causing lasting harm to babies.

The ICMR-funded study, published in *EMBO Molecular Medicine*, has reportedly shown, for the first time, in comprehensive molecular detail, how the fine particulate matter from urban air pollution crosses the placenta, triggers a wave of inflammation and shuts down a protein that is essential for growth. This could have consequences right into late childhood.

Particulate matter



Exposure to particulate matter (PM2.5) was a significant risk factor for low birth weight in Delhi, researchers find

PM2.5 and PM10 are capable of crossing the placental barrier, and cause oxidative stress and inflammation, impairing the development of the foetus. Placental dysfunction, and complications including pre-term birth, low birth weight and preeclampsia are all possible outcomes.

Key growth protein
"Since we know that pollu-

ants do affect foetuses, our primary goal," said Subhradip Karmakar, professor of biochemistry, AIIMS, Delhi, and corresponding author for the paper, "was to examine the pathways that enable the pollutants to cause distress to the placenta and the foetus. While this has been studied before, it has been done in a piecemeal way. We showed the entire pathway."

"Our research reveals that exposure during pregnancy to Urban Particulate Matter activates inflammatory pathways that inhibit IGFBP3 expression, a key protein governing the equilibrium of the placenta and growth of the embryo. This reduction in IGFBP3 impairs critical placental processes, resulting in restricted foetal growth and altered developmental trajectories," he added.

The research focused on both rodents and on delivery records of 994 women

from two cities: high-pollution Delhi and low-pollution Deoghar, Jharkhand.

In women from Delhi, PM2.5 exposure was identified as a significant risk factor for low birth weight. The rate of preeclampsia, a dangerous spike in blood pressure during pregnancy, significantly increases as pollution levels rise.

In the case of rodents, particulate matter impaired the placenta's ability to invade the uterine wall, form its essential nutrient-exchange layer, and support blood vessel growth. Pollution also triggered severe cellular stress and rewrote the cells' epigenetic switches, permanently altering which genes are switched on or off, researchers on the study said. In pregnant rats, exposure to New Delhi's pollution levels caused litter sizes to shrink by up to 25%, placentas to be smaller, and newborns to weigh 34% less at term. Offspring

also showed clear neurological harm: impaired motor coordination, heightened anxiety, and stress responses; effects consistent with damage that begins before birth, the paper indicates.

Future research

Looking at the transgenerational effect, where researchers study the impact on development of motor development skills, IQ, cardiovascular complications, cancer and metabolic disorders will entail further studies, Dr. Karmakar said.

He suggested that risk mitigation strategies such as wearing masks and eating antioxidant-rich foods could provide a buffer to people. "We must remember that risk mitigation in terms of controlling pollution will have to be multi-dimensional. The research findings call for pollution monitoring to be integrated into prenatal care."

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- AIIMS Delhi researchers, in an ICMR-funded study published in *EMBO Molecular Medicine*, identified the biological pathway through which PM2.5 and PM10 affect foetal development.
- The study found that particulate matter can cross the placental barrier, trigger inflammation, suppress IGFBP3 (Insulin-like Growth Factor Binding Protein-3), and impair foetal growth.
- Research was conducted using rodent models and data from 994 pregnant women from Delhi and Deoghar (Jharkhand).

Key Findings

- PM2.5 and PM10 cross the placental barrier and reach the foetus.
- Cause:
 - Oxidative stress
 - Inflammation
 - Epigenetic changes (altered gene expression)
- Suppression of IGFBP3 leads to:
 - Restricted foetal growth
 - Low birth weight
 - Placental dysfunction
- Higher pollution exposure associated with:
 - Increased risk of preeclampsia
 - Adverse pregnancy outcomes
- Animal studies showed:
 - Smaller placentas
 - Reduced birth weight
 - Neurological and behavioural impairments in offspring

Static Points

- PM2.5: Particles with diameter ≤ 2.5 micrometres.

- PM10: Particles with diameter ≤ 10 micrometres.
- Major sources:
 - Vehicular emissions
 - Industrial activities
 - Biomass burning
 - Construction dust
- Placenta functions:
 - Nutrient and oxygen transfer
 - Waste removal
 - Hormonal regulation during pregnancy
- Oxidative stress results from imbalance between free radicals and antioxidants.

Significance

- Establishes a direct link between air pollution and maternal-child health.
- Highlights environmental pollution as a public health challenge.
- Supports stronger implementation of the National Clean Air Programme (NCAP).
- Demonstrates the role of scientific research in policymaking.

Way Forward

- Integrate air-quality monitoring into prenatal healthcare.
- Strengthen implementation of NCAP.
- Improve public awareness regarding pollution risks during pregnancy.
- Promote pollution-control measures in urban areas.
- Encourage long-term research on developmental impacts of prenatal pollution exposure.

The 'harvest' China wants is one India cannot afford

When Luo Zhaohai, then China's Ambassador to India, revived the idea of an "early harvest" in India-China boundary negotiations in 2017, India responded with scepticism. The proposal – to settle the Sikkim boundary in isolation from the three other sectors – was an asymmetric concession dressed up in the language of progress. India has resisted it. There is now a growing doubt as to whether it can hold that position. The trigger for this piece is a former border negotiator's concern that India might "stumble" into a damaging course of action under Chinese pressure and driven by the temptation to project contrived progress. Diplomacy that trades long-term strategic interests for short-term optics is self-defeating.

New Delhi must be cautious
The readout issued by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on the 24th round of the Special Representatives' Dialogue on the Boundary Question between India and China (on August 19, 2025) between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi recorded India's agreement to "set up an Expert Group ... to explore an early harvest in boundary delimitation in the India-China border areas". China's own readout was more pointed: it used the term "demarcation" rather than "delimitation" and spoke of "launching boundary demarcation negotiations in sectors where conditions are ripe".

The MEA press release on the 35th Meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, held in Beijing on May 27, 2026, mentions that the two sides "discussed issues pertaining to delimitation, border management, mechanism building and cross-border cooperation" and "agreed to work together to make substantive preparation" for the next SRA meeting. The reference to "delimitation" is significant as it suggests follow-up discussions on the understanding "to explore Early Harvest in boundary delimitation".

The cornerstone of Special Representative negotiations is the Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles, signed on April 11, 2005. Article III explicitly envisages "a package settlement" covering all sectors of the India-China boundary. It establishes a three-step process: first political parameters, then a framework for a final settlement, then delimitation and demarcation. Demarcation – placing physical markers on the ground – comes last, not first. China's proposal to begin demarcation in a single "ripe" sector inverts this sequence and, in effect, asks India to abandon the package architecture in exchange for the appearance of progress. India should decline.

Why does the package settlement matter so much? Because the four sectors of the



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India-China boundary are strategically interlinked, requiring give and take across sectors. It also guards against China extracting concessions sector by sector. An early harvest in Sikkim, where India holds comparative geographical advantage, would let Beijing bank a settlement on its preferred terms while leaving the other three sectors unresolved.

The Sikkim stakes

The Sikkim Sector boundary is not, as sometimes claimed, a simple matter. Clashes at Nathu La and Cho La in 1967, with heavy casualties, showed how sharp these differences are. Article I of the 1890 Great Britain-China Convention identifies "Mount Gipmochi on the Bhutan frontier" as the starting point of the Sikkim-Tibet boundary, but it is preceded by an assertion that the boundary "shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Tsesta and its affluents from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu". China reads the article as placing the trijunction at Gipmochi. India and Bhutan hold that the trijunction lies at Batang La, some 6.5 kilometres to the north, on the watershed – which is the operative geographical principle in Article I.

Zemphri (or Jampheiri) Ridge adjoining Geymochen commands a direct view of the Siliguri Corridor, the narrow strip connecting mainland India to its northeastern States. Any settlement implicitly endorsing the Gipmochi trijunction would hand China a legal instrument to press its claim to the very edge of the Himalayas, exposing the Corridor. The Chinese objective is to deepen and widen its Chumbi Valley and increase pressure on India's most acute territorial vulnerability.

The Doklam dimension reinforces this concern. Since 2017, China has systematically consolidated its position in western Bhutan – building roads and military facilities, constructing villages including Pangda on the Ama Chu river, and developing routes to the Jampheiri Ridge that bypass the 2017 Doklam standoff site. A Sikkim settlement would immediately be leveraged by Beijing to step up pressure on a vulnerable Bhutan to settle its boundary with China. India and China have agreed that trijunction points must be finalised in trilateral consultation with all countries concerned. Even if the trijunction point is left out, China could force Bhutan to settle the rest of the disputed sector on its own terms and present India with a fait accompli in Doklam.

Since the Eastern Ladakh transgressions of 2020, China has pursued multiple pressure tracks simultaneously: military consolidation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), steady resurrection of the "Zangnan" (South Tibet) narrative to describe Arunachal Pradesh, resuming of places in Arunachal Pradesh, and expansion of "border defence villages" close to India-China LAC.

The resumption of Special Representative talks is welcome, but dialogue must be conducted with strategic clarity, not under diplomatic pressure or for the optics of progress. Three principles should guide India's approach.

First, hold the 2005 Agreement's framework firm. The Expert Group agreed upon in August 2025 must not become a vehicle for an early harvest in Sikkim. Agreeing to "explore" is not a commitment to accept. India should reject a stand-alone Sikkim delimitation or demarcation exercise.

Second, make peace and tranquillity on the LAC the non-negotiable condition of progress. China has periodically attempted to delink border management from the broader relationship; India has resisted this, and should continue to do so. Unilateral alterations to the LAC cannot be normalised. Indeed, the so-called "buffer zones" in Eastern Ladakh must not be allowed to persist.

Third, press for genuine political engagement on a comprehensive settlement. Decades of talks have shown that the respective narratives cannot be reconciled through legal arguments. The 2005 Agreement recognised this: it called for a political settlement that would "safeguard the vital interests of both countries" and set out principles such as the two sides "safeguard[ing] the interests of their settled populations in the border areas". Any breakthrough requires political will on both sides. India should press for meaningful boundary negotiations, not paper over the lack of progress with working groups. The test of China's seriousness will be whether it is prepared to engage on the framework for a comprehensive settlement – and whether it is prepared to hold the LAC stable while that engagement proceeds.

Absent those conditions, the Special Representative process risks becoming what it has sometimes been before: a forum for managing appearances while China improves its position on the ground.

Stay the course

In boundary talks, China has a track record of cherry-picking and reeling from formal commitments, as it did in the case of an explicit agreement to arrive at a common understanding of the LAC after exchanging maps showing the entire alignment. India must prevent the Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question from meeting a similar fate. If peace and tranquillity on the LAC is the foundation for rebuilding India-China relations, the 2005 Agreement is the road map for resolving the boundary question. India has nothing to gain from an early harvest limited to Sikkim and must maintain its negotiating space through a comprehensive negotiation. India cannot afford a shortcut to a destination that suits China.

Static Points to Remember

- Delimitation: Boundary definition on maps/documents.
- Demarcation: Physical marking of boundary on the ground.
- Watershed Principle is an important principle in mountain boundary determination.
- Siliguri Corridor (Chicken's Neck) connects mainland India with the North-Eastern States.
- Nathu La and Cho La clashes (1967) occurred in the Sikkim sector.
- India and Bhutan maintain close strategic cooperation on border security issues.

Why It Matters for India?

Concerns

- May dilute the package settlement approach.
- Could reduce India's bargaining leverage in other disputed sectors.
- May have implications for Doklam and the Siliguri Corridor.
- Could increase pressure on Bhutan in its boundary negotiations with China.

Potential Benefits

- Maintains diplomatic engagement.
- May reduce tensions in selected sectors.
- Can contribute to confidence-building measures.

Way Forward

- Adhere to the 2005 Agreement framework.
- Ensure peace and tranquillity on the LAC before major progress.
- Continue comprehensive boundary negotiations.
- Strengthen border infrastructure and surveillance.
- Enhance strategic coordination with Bhutan.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India and China have discussed exploring an "Early Harvest" in boundary delimitation during recent Special Representative (SR) talks.
- China has proposed moving ahead with settlement in sectors where conditions are considered "ripe", particularly the Sikkim sector.
- Concerns exist that a sector-wise settlement may weaken India's position of pursuing a comprehensive package settlement of the entire boundary dispute.

Key Points

- 2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles remains the basis for boundary negotiations.
- The agreement envisages a package settlement covering all sectors of the India-China boundary.
- India-China boundary is generally divided into:
 - Western Sector (Ladakh)
 - Middle Sector (Himachal Pradesh-Uttarakhand)
 - Sikkim Sector
 - Eastern Sector (Arunachal Pradesh)
- Doklam Plateau remains strategically important due to its proximity to the Siliguri Corridor.
- China claims the India-Bhutan-China trijunction lies at Mount Gipmochi, while India and Bhutan support Batang La.
- China has increased border infrastructure and village construction near disputed areas.

U.S.-Iran negotiations, still a road to nowhere

For nearly half a century, relations between Iran and the United States have oscillated between overt hostility and crisis management. Periods of confrontation were punctuated by brief diplomatic openings, only to be followed by renewed distrust and, more recently, war and devastation.

In this context the current move towards a memorandum that could lead to an indefinite ceasefire and buy time to address the thornier issues bedeviling their relationship appears to be a significant step. However, even agreeing on a framework to enter into substantive negotiations has been far more difficult than anticipated thanks to vastly different expectations of the two sides.

The cost of conflict
What motivated Washington and Tehran to enter serious negotiations is the high cost in political and economic terms for both of renewed long drawn-out hostilities.

The U.S. attacked Iran in cohort with Israel believing that the damage inflicted by superior military force would compel Tehran to accept fundamental constraints on its nuclear and missile programmes. Iran assumed that strategic resilience, regional networks, and its capacity to threaten energy flows would impose unbearable costs on its adversaries.

Neither side fully obtained its objective. Iran suffered severe damage to parts of its military infrastructure and further economic deterioration. However, it retained sufficient capabilities to continue imposing costs through asymmetric means such as closing the Strait of Hormuz, attacking America's allies in the Gulf and threatening continued instability in the region through its proxies. The danger of a prolonged conflict affecting shipping routes and energy markets created domestic and global pressures on Washington for de-escalation.

There is, therefore, an unusual convergence of interests that has motivated both to look for ways



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to bring hostilities to an end. Memoranda are easier to sign than peace agreements. They are often signed precisely because they defer tough decisions. However, in this case, even signing a memorandum appears elusive because of the wide gap between the two sides.

Hurdles to lasting peace

Several obstacles stand in the way of transforming the proposed U.S.-Iran memorandum even if it is signed into a lasting peace agreement. The first concerns mutual distrust. Decades of confrontation have created deep suspicions. Iranian leaders remain convinced that Washington ultimately seeks regime change and will use negotiations as a ruse for launching attacks as it did in June 2025 and February 2026. U.S. President Donald Trump's habit of blowing hot and cold further complicates the problem. American policymakers continue to suspect that Tehran uses negotiations primarily to buy time, preserve its nuclear option, and rebuild its missile and other delivery capabilities.

Second, any agreement will face opposition in both countries. In Washington, critics are already warning against repeating what they consider the perceived weaknesses of the 2015 nuclear agreement. In Tehran, hard-line factions, including many in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), will portray compromises as surrender under pressure.

The third and perhaps most serious obstacle involves regional actors, especially Israel. Israel has consistently viewed Iran's missile and nuclear capabilities as the greatest threat to its aspiration for regional dominance. Israeli security thinking has historically favoured preventive measures that are designed to ensure that adversaries do not acquire capabilities that threaten its military superiority. In the case of Iran, this concern centres on preserving Israeli monopoly of nuclear weapons in West Asia.

Israel need not oppose peace directly. It may instead seek to shape its terms in ways that make

implementation impossible. Israeli military actions, such as its current invasion of Lebanon which has been expanding in scope and inflicting heavy damage, or covert operations, such as killing Iranian nuclear scientists, could potentially disrupt diplomatic momentum and eventually subvert the idea of a peace agreement.

This danger is particularly acute because Israeli and American priorities do not always perfectly coincide. Washington may increasingly value stability and de-escalation, whereas Israel may place greater emphasis on eliminating perceived long-term threats even if it entails derailing a peace agreement between Iran and the U.S. and greater regional instability.

Hardliners in the seat

On the Iranian side, the principal lesson that the regime must have learned from the U.S.-Israeli attack is that nuclear ambiguity does not assure security while nuclear weapons do. The example of North Korea is ample proof of the verity of this conclusion.

Moreover, all indications point to the fact that the centre of power within Iran has shifted decisively in favour of hardliners in the IRGC who will call the shots regardless of the veneer adopted by the regime for tactical purposes.

Tehran may, therefore, engage in long drawn-out negotiations about the nuclear issue but is unlikely to give up the weapons option. The aspiration may lie dormant for a period but is unlikely to disappear. Iran will give up this option only if a nuclear-weapon-free zone is created in West Asia that includes Israel, an eventually unacceptable to Israel.

In short, while the memorandum may be signed in the coming days, as it is essential to provide Mr. Trump with an off-ramp from an unpopular war, the prospects of it translating into a lasting peace remain minimal. That would require a fundamental change of attitude in both Washington and Tehran. There are no signs that such a transformation is on the cards soon.

- Nuclear deterrence and security dilemma.
- Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zones (NWFZs).
- Energy security and maritime trade routes.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reduces the possibility of immediate military escalation in West Asia.
- Contributes to stability in global oil markets.
- Opens diplomatic channels for addressing nuclear concerns.
- Helps secure critical maritime trade routes.

Challenges

- Persistent mistrust between the U.S. and Iran.
- Opposition from hardline groups within both countries.
- Israel's security concerns may complicate implementation.
- Absence of a comprehensive regional security framework.
- Continued risk of proxy conflicts and regional instability.

Implications for India

- Stability in West Asia supports India's energy security.
- Ensures safer maritime trade through the Persian Gulf region.
- Protects interests of the Indian diaspora in West Asia.
- Helps contain volatility in crude oil prices and inflation.

Way Forward

- Strengthen IAEA-led verification mechanisms.
- Promote sustained diplomatic engagement.
- Develop a regional security dialogue involving all stakeholders.
- Ensure freedom of navigation through strategic waterways.
- Encourage multilateral efforts for non-proliferation and conflict resolution.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The U.S. and Iran are reportedly moving towards a memorandum aimed at achieving an indefinite ceasefire and initiating further negotiations.
- The move follows prolonged hostilities that imposed significant economic, strategic, and political costs on both sides.
- Despite the de-escalation effort, major differences persist over Iran's nuclear programme, missile capabilities, and regional security issues.

Key Points

- The proposed memorandum is intended as a confidence-building measure rather than a final peace agreement.
- Iran retains the ability to influence regional stability through strategic maritime routes and regional networks.
- The Strait of Hormuz remains crucial for global energy security.
- The U.S. seeks regional stability and prevention of nuclear proliferation.
- Israel continues to view Iran's nuclear and missile capabilities as a major security concern.
- Domestic hardliners in both countries may oppose compromises.
- Long-term peace remains uncertain due to deep mutual distrust.

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz: Strategic chokepoint connecting the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.
- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), 1968.
- International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards mechanism.
- Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), 2015.

In navigating Trump's US & Xi's China, Japan is imagining a new Asia story



RAJA MANDALA
BY CRAJA MOHAN

SINCE WORLD War II, Japan has deliberately defined itself as a peaceful nation. Relying on the US for its security, Tokyo built one of the world's largest economies while renouncing nuclear weapons, avoiding the use of force, and refusing to project its conventional military power. That era is now drawing to a close.

China's growing regional assertiveness and America's ambivalence in Asia, especially regarding the defence of Taiwan against potential Chinese aggression, have caused much of Asia to complain about the Donald Trump administration and mutter about its likely abandonment of the region. Tokyo, however, is not wringing its hands; it is acting to defend itself and help others secure themselves against Chinese expansion and the US volatility.

At the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore last week, Japanese Defence Minister Shigeru Kojima unveiled three broad directions of a new security policy: To step up national defence spending and military modernisation, increase defence cooperation with friendly nations, and lift restrictions on the export of arms. The shift marks one of the major transformations in Asian geopolitics since the end of the Cold War.

For decades, Japan's defence industry

was largely inward-looking. Strict policy controls limited arms exports and constrained military cooperation with foreign partners. Tokyo has now reached a very different conclusion. It argues that preserving peace in Asia requires active participation in shaping the regional balance of power. The result is a historic relaxation of arms export controls announced in April this year.

The most visible symbol of this change is the agreement last month to supply 11 upgraded Mogami-class frigates to Australia. The contract, estimated at nearly \$7 billion, is the largest defence export in Japan's post-war history, and goes beyond a simple commercial transaction. It creates a framework for Japan's long-term defence-industrial collaboration with Australia and other regional partners. It also points to the construction of regional defence networks that are not dependent on Washington.

In Singapore, Kojima announced that New Zealand is also interested in the purchase of Mogami-class frigates from Tokyo. The emerging Japan-Australia-New Zealand and security triangle is not a formal alliance but part of a new web of defence cooperation involving production, logistics, technology sharing and interoperability. Similar conversations are unfolding between Japan and the Philippines, as well as with other maritime states anxious about the changing balance of power in Asia.

Kojima rejected China's high-profile accusations about Japan's militarism and rearmament. Pointing to China's expanding nuclear arsenal and growing conventional military power, Kojima gently suggested that "the pot is calling the kettle black". China can't dramatically build up its own military capabilities, indulge in co-

ercion of all kinds and accuse others of rearmament and militarism.

What is driving Tokyo's new military doctrine is not nostalgia for great-power status in the imperial era, but anxiety about the future balance of power in Asia. The Taiwan question has sharpened these concerns. Under Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, Japan has moved closer than ever to publicly acknowledging that its own security is linked to peace in Taiwan.

Tokyo is not breaking from its One China policy. But it is increasingly signalling that a military conflict over Taiwan would have direct consequences for Japan. Chinese reactions have been predictably fierce, with Beijing accusing Tokyo of crossing red lines and interfering in China's internal affairs.

But Takaichi's Japan is not willing to quiver under Chinese bullying. Tokyo believes preservation of peace in the Taiwan Strait is critical to regional stability. This does not mean Japan seeks confrontation. Rather, it reflects a growing belief that deterrence requires both clarity and capability.

The Taiwan issue has become a litmus test for Japan's strategic evolution. For decades, Tokyo preferred ambiguity. Today, it believes peace in Taiwan is critical for Asian security. That the US Secretary of War, Pete Hegseth, stumped around the question of Taiwan at the Shangri-La Dialogue is widely viewed as part of President Trump's effort to please China's leader, Xi Jinping, after the Beijing summit last month.

To be fair, Hegseth reaffirmed the US commitment to the balance of power in Asia; he also argued that the US will not allow China to exercise hegemony over Asia. But the way Trump is going about it

has triggered anxieties all around. Hegseth also called on the allies and partners to do more for themselves.

On his part, Japan is trying to reconcile two strategic imperatives. The first is preserving the American alliance, which has been the foundation of its security. The second is reducing excessive dependence on the United States by strengthening regional security partnerships and creating Asian defence-industrial networks.

The imperatives for Delhi are similar — Washington on defence where beneficial, but also simultaneously enhance strategic collaboration with regional powers like Japan, South Korea, Australia, and the ASEAN countries. Plans for bilateral and regional defence collaboration already exist in Delhi. What India needs is an urgent and purposeful transformation of plans into concrete outcomes.

Unlike China, India has long welcomed Japan to play a larger security role in Asia. What has changed is Tokyo's willingness to act upon that logic. The old Japan was an economic giant and a military minimalist. The new Japan seeks to be something different: a security partner, a defence-industrial power and an active participant in shaping the balance of power in Asia. Tokyo's strategic reorientation is not merely a Japanese story. It is part of Asia's wider search for a new equilibrium in an era of Chinese power and American reorientation.

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- Indo-Pacific strategic construct.
- Freedom of Navigation and UNCLOS.
- Strategic importance of the Taiwan Strait.
- Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).
- India's Act East Policy and Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens regional deterrence against coercive actions.
- Promotes a multipolar security architecture in Asia.
- Expands defence-industrial cooperation among Indo-Pacific partners.
- Enhances strategic opportunities for India-Japan cooperation.

Concerns

- May intensify the regional arms race.
- Could worsen China-Japan tensions.
- Risks greater militarization of the Indo-Pacific.
- Potential instability if Taiwan Strait tensions escalate.

Relevance for India

- Supports a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific.
- Complements Quad cooperation.
- Enhances maritime security cooperation.
- Opens avenues for defence technology and supply-chain partnerships.

Way Forward

- Strengthen rules-based regional order under international law.
- Promote dialogue and confidence-building measures.
- Enhance maritime domain awareness cooperation.
- Deepen India-Japan strategic and defence cooperation.
- Maintain ASEAN centrality in Indo-Pacific architecture.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- At the Shangri-La Dialogue 2025, Japan signalled a more proactive security role in Asia amid growing U.S.-China strategic competition.
- Japan announced greater defence modernization, defence exports, and security cooperation with regional partners.
- Rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait and concerns over China's military assertiveness are major drivers of this shift.
- The development has implications for the Indo-Pacific balance of power and India's strategic interests.

Key Points

- Japan is increasing defence spending and strengthening military capabilities.
- Defence export restrictions have been relaxed, allowing greater defence-industrial cooperation.
- Australia has agreed to acquire Japanese Mogami-class frigates, marking a major defence export deal.
- Japan is expanding security cooperation with Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, and other Indo-Pacific partners.
- Japan continues its One China Policy but increasingly views Taiwan Strait stability as vital for regional security.
- The shift reflects Japan's effort to reduce excessive security dependence on the United States.

Static Linkages

- Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution (Pacifist Constitution).
- Collective Self-Defence reinterpretation (2014).
- Balance of Power theory.

From Ladakh, a sea buckthorn parable about enterprise



CHIRAG PASWAN

ON A recent visit to Ladakh, I drove from Leh to Tirth, a village in Nubra, crossing Khardung La to reach a food processing unit in one of the remotest corners of the country. The drive explained the place's economics better than any report could. Here, altitude, weather and distance are not background conditions; they are built into the price of every product that must leave the valley. Inside the unit, there were no sea buckthorn berries.

It was May, and the harvest had ended months earlier, in the short autumn window when the fruit comes off the bush. What stood there instead were juice and pulp sealed and labelled, and dried berries packed from last autumn's harvest. The unit also had mobile aseptic processing capacity. That detail stayed with me because it demonstrated the enterprise's practical intelligence. They had understood the problem clearly: In Ladakh, the crop is brief, the road is long, and the berry cannot wait. So the first act of processing had to be brought closer to the harvest.

Food processing is usually discussed in the language of large plants, investment figures and export targets. In Tirth, the point was narrower and more immediate. The unit showed that enterprise in a remote region is often an answer to necessity.

Food processing is usually discussed in the language of large plants and export targets. In Tirth, the point was narrower. The unit showed that enterprise in a remote region is often an answer to necessity

I had seen the same point earlier in Leh, in the work of Deachen Angmo. A few years ago, she earned Rs 8,000 a month as a wage labourer. Today, she runs K-Top Food Processing, a unit built around sea buckthorn, one of Ladakh's most difficult crops. She buys the berry from local collectors, turns it into juice, pulp, dried berries and jam under her own brand, and sells to markets well beyond the Union Territory.

Sea buckthorn brings the difficulty and the opportunity into one plant. The shrub grows over cold, thorny ground. The berries are small, soft and hard to pick. The harvest window is short, and once the fruit is off the bush, it cannot wait for processing somewhere distant. It has to be cleaned, pulped, dried or preserved quickly. Delay costs quality, and

lost quality costs price. Deachen's unit grew because the support she received met the crop's actual needs. Under the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises Scheme, she accessed finance and invested in the machinery needed to process sea buckthorn quickly, package it properly and sell it under her own brand.

A woman who once worked as a wage labourer now runs an enterprise with a turnover in crores, employs workers, and sustains a supply chain linked to local collectors and families in her own community. Her unit also points to the larger gap. To make such examples less rare, local processors need finance, machinery and formal support before a perishable crop can become a marketable product. PMFME has helped create that starting point in Ladakh: Under the scheme, 101 loans have been sanctioned, and 89 have been disbursed to micro food processing units across the Union Territory, and seed capital assistance of Rs 1.81 crores has been approved for 651 SHG members.

A single enterprise may process a local crop, but it cannot alone provide storage, testing, packaging, branding, market access and larger shared facilities. That requires common infrastructure. Under PMFME, common incubation centres have been approved for sea buckthorn processing in Leh and apricot processing in Kargil, giving local producers access to facilities that would otherwise remain beyond their individual reach. Shared infrastructure addresses one part of the gap. Collective support and product identity address another. That is why branding and marketing support have been approved for sea buckthorn products under "Wonder Berry" and apricot products under "Kargil Gold".

Deachen Angmo's journey from a wage labourer to the head of a thriving multi-crore enterprise is powerful proof of what happens when local potential meets the right institutional support. The ultimate goal of our efforts is not just to celebrate a single success story, but to replicate it across every valley.

The writer is Cabinet Minister of Food Processing Industries of India

- Common processing and incubation facilities are being developed in Ladakh for sea buckthorn and apricot processing.
- Promotes local employment, women entrepreneurship, and value addition.

Static Linkages

- Food processing helps reduce post-harvest losses and increase farmers' income.
- Value addition is a key component of agricultural diversification.
- Cold desert ecosystems are characterized by low rainfall, sparse vegetation, and extreme temperatures.
- Border area development is important for economic security and reducing outmigration.
- SHGs, FPOs, and cooperatives strengthen rural value chains and market access.
- MSMEs contribute significantly to employment generation and inclusive growth.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Enhances income of local farmers and collectors.
- Promotes entrepreneurship in remote regions.
- Generates employment opportunities locally.
- Encourages women-led enterprises.
- Reduces wastage of perishable agricultural produce.
- Supports Atmanirbhar Bharat and Vocal for Local initiatives.

Challenges

- High logistics and transportation costs.
- Limited cold-chain infrastructure.
- Difficult market access from remote regions.
- Small enterprises face branding and certification constraints.
- Climate change may affect crop productivity.

Way Forward

- Expand processing infrastructure in Himalayan regions.
- Strengthen cold storage and transport networks.
- Promote FPO-led value chains.
- Encourage GI tagging and niche branding.
- Improve digital and export market access.
- Support research on nutraceutical and medicinal applications of sea buckthorn.
- Enhance convergence between PMFME, NRLM, and ODOP initiatives.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- A recent article highlighted the success of sea buckthorn-based food processing enterprises in Ladakh.
- The case demonstrates how local value addition, entrepreneurship, and government support have transformed a perishable Himalayan crop into a marketable product.
- The initiative has been supported through the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme.
- The example reflects the role of food processing in promoting livelihoods, women's empowerment, and economic development in remote border regions.

Key Points

- Sea Buckthorn (*Hippophae rhamnoides*) is a thorny shrub found in the cold desert regions of Ladakh.
- Rich source of:
 - Vitamin C
 - Antioxidants
 - Omega fatty acids
- Major challenges:
 - Short harvesting season
 - Highly perishable produce
 - Difficult transportation due to mountainous terrain
- PMFME Scheme provides:
 - Credit-linked subsidy
 - Support for processing machinery
 - Branding and marketing assistance
 - Formalization of micro enterprises

Delhi's death traps sap spirit of young aspirants

THE BUILDING collapse in Delhi's Saidulajab that claimed six lives evokes a sense of terrible *déjà vu*. The five-storey building shouldn't legally have had more than three floors. When it gave way on Saturday, the structure was undergoing more illegal construction. Unauthorised floors, weak foundations, use of poor-quality materials and deviations from approved plans seem to have become commonplace in Delhi. In response to a question in the Lok Sabha in 2023, the Ministry of Urban Affairs said that authorities in the city had identified 55,000 constructions that violate norms. The city has seen a worrying trend of building collapses and fires over the last decade. Yet, more often than not, it takes a catastrophe or a court order for officials to book the violators or call for accountability. Even then, the governance deficits that cause calamities such as the one in Saidulajab remain unaddressed.

The latest tragedy is particularly heartbreaking because most of the victims were students, including medical and engineering college aspirants. Delhi has several hostels, paying-guest accommodations and low-cost rental housing that cater to people seeking a better future in the Capital. However, in their haste to cash in on the commercial opportunities from such migration, many property owners compromise on safety. Preliminary investigations have revealed that such shortcuts were behind the Saidulajab tragedy. A strong inspection mechanism could have averted it. But as tragedy after tragedy — the hospital fire in 2024, the flooding of an UPSC coaching centre the same year, numerous building collapses — have shown, the enforcement of such basic municipal protocols remains at a premium in the Capital.

These shortcomings should resonate with Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta. As a three-time municipal councillor, she has first-hand knowledge of the systemic weaknesses that have persisted in civic bodies across political regimes. The Delhi CM's background as a popular student leader could have informed policies sensitive to the difficult conditions faced by young migrants. After the public uproar over the Saidulajab incident, municipality officers have reportedly said that they will conduct an audit of unsafe buildings. The city's authorities need to do more. The proper tribute to the victims would be to ensure that death traps such as the one in Saidulajab do not come up in the first place.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- A building collapse in Delhi's Saidulajab area led to the death of six persons, including UPSC, medical and engineering aspirants residing in rented accommodation.
- Preliminary investigations pointed to unauthorized construction, weak foundations, structural deviations, and violation of building norms.
- The incident highlights recurring issues of illegal constructions, poor enforcement of municipal regulations, and unsafe urban housing in metropolitan cities.
- It follows a series of recent urban disasters in Delhi, including coaching-centre flooding, fires, and building collapses.

Key Points

- Rapid urbanization has increased demand for low-cost housing, often resulting in unauthorized constructions.
- Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) are responsible for building approvals, inspections, and enforcement of municipal building by-laws.
- Violation of sanctioned building plans and inadequate structural audits remain major governance concerns.
- Illegal constructions disproportionately affect students, migrants, and economically weaker sections.
- The incident reflects gaps in:
 - Urban governance
 - Municipal accountability

- Disaster preparedness
- Building safety regulation
- Ensuring safe housing is linked to the constitutional guarantee of life and dignity under Article 21.

Static Linkages

- 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992.
- Twelfth Schedule provisions relating to urban planning and regulation of land use.
- Article 21 – Right to Life.
- National Building Code (NBC), Bureau of Indian Standards.
- Model Building Bye-Laws.
- Disaster Management Act, 2005.
- Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030).
- Smart Cities Mission.
- AMRUT Mission.
- Second Administrative Reforms Commission recommendations on local governance.
- Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities.
- Principle of Accountability in Public Administration.
- Decentralization and Local Self-Government.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights the consequences of unplanned urbanization.
- Demonstrates the importance of effective municipal governance.
- Brings attention to the safety of migrants and students living in urban rental housing.

Major Challenges

- Weak enforcement of building regulations.
- Corruption and collusion in approval processes.
- Lack of periodic structural safety audits.
- Capacity constraints of municipal bodies.
- Rising pressure on urban infrastructure due to migration.
- Absence of comprehensive rental housing regulation.

Constitutional and Governance Concerns

- Failure to protect citizens' right to life and safety.
- Weak implementation despite existence of adequate legal provisions.
- Deficit in accountability mechanisms for officials and builders.
- Governance failure at planning, monitoring, and enforcement stages.

Way Forward

- Mandatory structural safety audits of vulnerable buildings.
- Strict implementation of National Building Code and municipal bye-laws.
- GIS and satellite-based monitoring of unauthorized constructions.
- Digitization of building approval and inspection systems.
- Independent urban building safety authorities in major cities.
- Stronger penalties for illegal construction and negligence.
- Expansion of affordable rental housing facilities.
- Capacity building and financial strengthening of Urban Local Bodies.
- Community-based reporting mechanisms for unsafe structures.
- Integration of disaster-risk reduction into urban planning.