



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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U.S. moots 12.5% tariff on India for failure to enforce 'forced labour' regulations

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
WASHINGTON

The U.S. government has proposed to levy a tariff of 12.5% on imports from 54 countries, including India, that it says have "failed to impose and effectively enforce" prohibitions on the import of goods produced using forced labour.

In response, the Indian government has said it "remains engaged" with the U.S. government regarding this development as well as the finalisation of an Interim Agreement on trade.

The office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) had, in March this year, launched an investigation under Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974 to look into whether its trade partners were taking enough steps to stop the import of goods made using forced labour.

The latest tariff announcements, as part of this investigation, are not final as yet.

Countries, including India, can submit requests to take part in public hearings by June 22, submit written comments by July 6, and participate in the public hearings on July 7.

Tool to impose tariff

According to trade experts, investigations under Section 301 was seen as a tool for the U.S. to impose tariffs on its imports after the country's Supreme Court in February struck down the reciprocal tariffs – including the 50% levied on India – that had been imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump.

"The results of this investigation indicate that

Blow-by-blow | A timeline of U.S. tariff-related events

- Feb. 20, 2026: U.S. Supreme Court scraps reciprocal tariffs. Trump imposes 10% 150-day tariffs on all imports
- March 2026: U.S. Trade Representative launches investigations on partners
- June 1-4: U.S. negotiators visit India to finalise trade deal
- June 2: USTR announces findings of investigations related to forced labour
- June 22: Deadline to submit requests to take part in public hearings on the case
- July 6: Deadline to submit written comments
- July 7: Date of public hearings related to the investigation
- July 24: Expiry of 10% U.S. tariffs



the acts, policies and practices of India related to the failure to impose and effectively enforce a forced labour import prohibition are unreasonable and burden or restrict U.S. commerce," the USTR report said.

The proposed tariffs put India in the same tariff bracket as several of its competitors – including Bangladesh, China, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The proposal by the USTR also includes a separate mechanism for textile and apparel products, under which a certain volume of imports from selected economies would be allowed to enter the U.S. at lower tariff rates.

According to Agneshwar Sen, trade policy leader at EY India, the impact of these tariffs on India could be multidimensional.

"In the near term, exporters in labour-intensive industries such as textiles, garments, carpets, leather products, and brassware could face at least an additional 10% levy under Section 301, adding to their existing tariff exposure," Mr.

Sen said. "India should therefore submit detailed written representations by July 6 and participate proactively in the July 7 public hearing to challenge these conclusions," he added.

Govt. response

"India remains engaged with the U.S. on the matter as a part of Section 301 proceedings," the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said in a statement on Wednesday. "India is also parallelly engaged with the U.S. for finalisation of a framework agreement as was announced on February 2, 2026, and in accordance with the joint statement released on February 7, 2026," it added.

A negotiating team from the U.S. is currently in India on a three-day visit that will conclude on June 4.

According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the purpose of the trip is to "finalise the details" pertaining to the Interim Agreement between the two countries and take forward the negotiations on a broader Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).

- Carpets
- Handicrafts and brassware
- The U.S. has linked trade access with compliance regarding forced labour standards in supply chains.
- India and the U.S. are simultaneously negotiating:
 - Interim Trade Agreement
 - Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA)

Static Linkages

- Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (ILO Convention No. 29) seeks elimination of forced or compulsory labour.
- International Labour Organization (ILO) sets global labour standards.
- Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) include labour standards, environmental regulations, sanitary measures, and technical standards.
- Tariffs increase the cost of imported goods and affect export competitiveness.
- WTO principles emphasize non-discrimination, predictability, and rule-based trade.
- Labour and environmental standards are increasingly becoming part of modern trade agreements.

Critical Analysis

Concerns for India

- Additional tariffs may reduce competitiveness of Indian exports in the U.S. market.
- Labour-intensive sectors could witness lower export demand.
- Could increase trade uncertainty during ongoing India-U.S. trade negotiations.
- May encourage the use of labour standards as a form of disguised protectionism.

Opportunities

- Pushes Indian exporters towards better supply-chain transparency.
- Encourages compliance with global labour standards.
- May strengthen India's position in future trade negotiations through regulatory reforms.

Way Forward

- Present evidence-based submissions during USTR consultations.
- Strengthen monitoring and certification of labour practices.
- Accelerate negotiations on the India-U.S. trade agreement.
- Diversify export destinations beyond traditional markets.
- Enhance integration into resilient and ethical global value chains.
- Promote WTO-consistent and rules-based dispute resolution mechanisms.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) has proposed a 12.5% tariff on imports from 54 countries, including India, alleging inadequate enforcement against imports produced through forced labour.
- The proposal follows an investigation launched in March 2026 under Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act, 1974.
- India has stated that it remains engaged with the U.S. on the issue while simultaneously negotiating an Interim Trade Agreement and a broader Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).
- The proposed measure is currently under consultation and has not yet been finalized.

Key Points

- Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act, 1974 Allows the U.S. government to investigate and respond to foreign trade practices considered unfair or discriminatory.
- Can result in tariffs or other trade restrictions.
- India has been grouped with countries such as:
 - China
 - Bangladesh
 - Vietnam
 - Thailand
 - Malaysia
- Sectors likely to be affected:
 - Textiles and apparel
 - Leather products

Are we supposed to lie? Census data 'discrepancies'

Vijlata Singh
NEW DELHI

With the ongoing Census exercise throwing up data that differ from government records, particularly on issues such as open defecation and household access to electricity or cooking gas connections, enumerators say they have been asked by senior officials to revisit households and correct the data "discrepancies".



Differing data: Enumerators visit a household in Bikaner, Rajasthan, during door-to-door survey for Census 2027. ANI

Several enumerators, mostly government school teachers and anganwadi workers, had taken to social media to report the official directions and flag the glaring inequality on the ground. Some complained that residents were unwilling to share information, fearing cancellation of government benefits. On Tuesday, the Director of Census Operations (DCO), Rajasthan, wrote to all district functionaries that "during the analysis of

field data collected so far, some discrepancies have been noticed". In the letter accessed by *The Hindu*, the charge officers were instructed to "verify the block-level data through the CMMS (census management and monitoring system) portal, in accordance with the actual field situation". The letter stated that discrepancy in data collection was noticed largely over a few subjects. It flagged the categorisation of "open defecation" for most households; usage of

fuel such as wood, dung cakes, crop residue, etc. being recorded for households having LPG connections, especially in urban areas; and in the drinking water section, the option of "tap water from treated source" not being recorded for most households.

The DCO letter further said that for drinking water sources such as river, pond, dam, canal, spring, lake, tank, etc., the option "within premises" cannot apply, and that the option "near premises" should al

so be checked carefully. It also cited selection of "no lighting" option and showing Internet access as available even when the household did not have a phone (basic/smartphone/landline).

When contacted, a senior Census official said, "The letter was issued to ensure that actual field conditions are recorded without any ambiguity or lack of understanding, and without any communication gap between the household and the enumerator. Discrepancies found after field verification by Charge Officers, Sub-Divisional Census Officers, District Census Officers, District Coordinators, Officers of Census Directorate, etc., must be addressed. The quality of data/information should not be affected due to ambiguity or lack of clarity or preconceived notion."

As on August 13, 2025, out of 5,86,944 villages, as

many as 5,66,068 were declared 'open defecation-free' by the Centre.

'Are we supposed to lie?'
An enumerator from Rajasthan told *The Hindu* on condition of anonymity, "In the mobile app, if we enter that a household has a tin roof, we are asked by our superiors to change it to concrete. Are we supposed to lie? Similarly, if the house does not have a toilet and occupants are defecating in the open, we are told to check if there is a toilet nearby, even that of a neighbour or a relative, which they may be using occasionally or even a public urinal. Then the entry can be changed from 'open defecation' to having access to toilet."

Another enumerator from Uttar Pradesh said, "Being government officials, we have been asked not to select options that may show the government in poor light."

Issues Highlighted by the News

- Gap between official scheme outcomes and ground realities.
- Possible underreporting of:
 - Open defecation.
 - Dependence on traditional cooking fuels.
 - Lack of basic amenities.
- Fear among beneficiaries that truthful responses may affect welfare benefits.
- Questions regarding transparency and reliability of public statistics.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- During the ongoing Census exercise, officials in some States reportedly directed enumerators to revisit households where collected information differed from official government records.
- Discrepancies were particularly noticed in indicators related to:
 - Open Defecation Free (ODF) status.
 - Use of LPG versus traditional cooking fuels.
 - Access to treated tap water.
 - Electricity and internet connectivity.
- Some enumerators alleged pressure to modify entries to align with official developmental achievements.
- The issue has raised concerns regarding the credibility of public data and evidence-based policymaking.

Key Points

Census in India

- Conducted under the Census Act, 1948.
- Administered by the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India (RGI) under the Ministry of Home Affairs.
- It is the world's largest administrative data collection exercise.
- Census provides data on:
 - Population.
 - Housing conditions.
 - Literacy.
 - Occupation.
 - Migration.
 - Access to basic amenities.

Importance of Census Data

- Basis for welfare planning and policy formulation.
- Supports resource allocation between regions.
- Assists in urban and rural development planning.
- Used for delimitation and demographic analysis.
- Provides benchmark data for socio-economic surveys.

Static Points

- Article 38: Promotion of social welfare and reduction of inequalities.
- Article 47: Duty of the State to improve public health and standard of living.
- Seventh Schedule: Census is a Union subject.
- Good Governance Principles:
 - Transparency.
 - Accountability.
 - Responsiveness.
 - Evidence-based policymaking.
- Reliable statistics are essential for measuring Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Mains Enrichment

Significance of Accurate Census Data

- Enables targeted welfare delivery.
- Identifies regional and social disparities.
- Helps assess effectiveness of government schemes.
- Strengthens democratic decision-making.
- Improves fiscal and developmental planning.

Challenges

- Data quality issues in large-scale surveys.
- Social desirability bias among respondents.
- Administrative pressure on field functionaries.
- Fear of exclusion from welfare schemes.
- Digital and logistical constraints in data collection.

Governance Implications

- Inaccurate data can lead to policy distortions.
- Misallocation of public resources.
- Weak monitoring of developmental outcomes.
- Erosion of trust in public institutions.
- Reduced effectiveness of welfare interventions.

Way Forward

- Ensure operational autonomy of statistical institutions.
- Strengthen third-party verification and audit mechanisms.
- Enhance training of enumerators.
- Improve public awareness regarding confidentiality of Census data.
- Establish transparent grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Promote greater transparency in methodology and data validation processes.
- Strengthen data governance frameworks to improve credibility and public trust.

After Maoism, the next battle is for Adivasi trust

On May 19, 2026, the Union Home Minister addressed a press conference in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, his first since March 31, 2026, when India was officially declared Maoist-free. The most encouraging aspect of the briefing was his assertion that the fight against Maoism would remain incomplete until every resident of Bastar is integrated into the mainstream.

The road to 2031

Having accomplished the March 31 objective, the Union Home Minister mentioned that 2031 would be the next milestone for ensuring the overall welfare of Bastar's Adivasis. This is welcome, since insurgencies do not have an expiry date. According to the Home Minister, this objective is to be achieved through democratic values, cooperation and development. The government also intends to expand its outreach by delivering welfare schemes to the doorsteps of local communities through designated centres operated by the security forces.

One of the methodologies that the Home Minister emphasised for the empowerment of Adivasis was a commitment to the tiered system of governance, from the tehsil level upwards to the Centre. The constitutional vision of this system was to be based on two parallel channels. The first comprised the Panchayati Raj Institutions, with the Gram Sabha as the basic unit. The second consisted of

government-appointed officials such as tehsildars, District Collectors and others. The distinction is that the former is elected by the people, while the latter is appointed by the government. These channels were not to be overshadowed by the



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Constitutional guarantees hold the key to Bastar's lasting peace

government-appointed channel, which normally has been the case on the ground. The Home Minister outlined a blueprint for the government's future initiatives. However, sustained peace will require addressing deeper structural issues. Surprisingly, his press conference made no mention of the most crucial of these concerning grassroots governance as guaranteed by the Constitution.

Welfare schemes, the road laying, and the installation of mobile communication towers do contribute significantly to improving the ease of living. However, the larger issues relate to jail, jungle and zamam (water, forest, and land). These are the concerns that will ultimately determine the people's trust in the government.

Implementing PESA in earnest

Now is an opportunity for the government to complete the unfinished agenda of implementing the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act, 1996. Across India's Fifth Schedule Area States, the record of PESA implementation has been dismal. Since implementation was left to the States, each interpreted and applied the Act differently, often undermining its spirit and intent.

Grassroots governance centred on the Gram Sabha forms the basis of the PESA Act. Its effective implementation in letter and spirit has the potential to deliver justice to the Adivasi. Today, the Adivasi is with the government, largely due to the security forces' tactical victory over the Maoists. However, as the security challenges recede, the government will be tested by the Adivasi on the parameters of justice delivery. The Adivasi are aware of the guarantees that the Constitutional Acts provide and are unlikely to

scale down their aspirations.

With decentralised governance at its core, the PESA Act elevates the Gram Sabha to the cornerstone of local self-governance. Under the Act, the Gram Sabha is granted decisive powers to safeguard Adivasi identity, manage community resources and resolve local disputes in accordance with customary laws. The consent of the Gram Sabha on matters affecting lives and livelihoods has the potential to bring about the structural change necessary for positive peace – one that goes far beyond the mere absence of violence. However, State governments have often attempted to circumvent the authority of the Gram Sabha in pursuit of other objectives. A case in point was the Chhattisgarh government's 2022 proposal to amend the Act by replacing "consent" with "consultation". This would have diluted the Gram Sabha's veto power and undermined the essence of the PESA Act. There have also been instances where Gram Sabha resolutions and consent records were allegedly forged or fabricated with mala fide intent.

The imperative of trust

The intent here is not to express scepticism about the sincerity of what the Home Minister said during his press briefing. However, for people to place their trust in the government, structural and historical issues must be addressed. Upholding and strengthening constitutional guarantees should be the primary concern of the government. This would help allay the lingering doubts in the minds of Adivasis, many of whom may still be ambivalent. Through genuinely participatory governance, the government should allow Adivasis to define the "mainstream" into which the Home Minister seeks to integrate them.

Static Linkages

- Article 244(1) – Administration of Scheduled Areas.
- Fifth Schedule of the Constitution.
- Article 243 and Part IX (Panchayats).
- 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992.
- Bhuria Committee Recommendations (1995).
- Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996.
- Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006.
- Tribal Advisory Council under the Fifth Schedule.
- Governor's special responsibility in Scheduled Areas.
- Democratic decentralization.
- Principle of subsidiarity in governance.
- Community ownership of common resources.
- Social justice and participatory governance.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Marks the transition from a security-centric approach to a governance-centric approach in Bastar.
- Provides an opportunity to strengthen constitutional institutions in tribal areas.
- Can deepen democratic participation through empowered Gram Sabhas.
- Supports sustainable and inclusive development in historically marginalized regions.

Challenges

- Poor implementation of PESA across many Fifth Schedule States.
- Administrative dominance over elected local institutions.
- Delays in recognition of community forest rights.
- Land acquisition and mining-related conflicts.
- Limited awareness among tribal communities regarding statutory rights.
- Capacity constraints of Gram Sabhas and Panchayati institutions.

Constitutional Concerns

- Dilution of Gram Sabha powers weakens the spirit of PESA.
- Development projects without informed consent raise issues of procedural justice.
- Weak implementation affects constitutional commitments under the Fifth Schedule.

Way Forward

- Ensure full implementation of PESA in letter and spirit.
- Strengthen Gram Sabha authority in matters relating to land, forests, and natural resources.
- Improve convergence between PESA and the Forest Rights Act, 2006.
- Build institutional capacity of Panchayats and Gram Sabhas.
- Ensure free, prior, and informed consent of tribal communities.
- Promote tribal-led development planning.
- Strengthen social audits and accountability mechanisms.
- Focus on rights-based development alongside welfare delivery.
- Enhance livelihood opportunities through sustainable forest-based economies.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- On May 19, 2026, the Union Home Minister addressed a press conference in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, after India was declared Maoist-free on March 31, 2026.
- The government stated that the next objective is to ensure the comprehensive development and integration of Bastar's tribal population by 2031.
- The focus is shifting from counter-insurgency operations to governance, welfare delivery, and strengthening democratic institutions.
- The debate has renewed attention on the effective implementation of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996 in tribal regions.

Key Points

- The government emphasized that lasting peace requires development, democratic participation, and effective governance.
- Welfare schemes, road connectivity, mobile towers, and service delivery centres are being expanded in tribal areas.
- Concerns remain regarding the protection of tribal rights over land, forests, and natural resources.
- Experts highlight that the success of post-Maoist governance will depend upon the implementation of constitutional safeguards for Scheduled Tribes.
- PESA provides statutory recognition to the Gram Sabha as the foundation of self-governance in Scheduled Areas.
- Several States have been criticized for weak implementation of PESA and inadequate devolution of powers to Gram Sabhas.
- The issue underscores the importance of balancing development objectives with tribal autonomy and participation.

Base and framework

Industrial fundamentals have remained resilient, but are not broad-based

Earlier this week, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation released the latest Index of Industrial Production (IIP), a key barometer of India's industrial health. The April 2026 print assumes added significance as it is the first release under the new 2022-23 base series and the second full month following the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran. Industrial output grew 4.9% year-on-year in April. While direct comparisons with earlier data should be treated with caution given the extensive revisions to the index's basket, weights and methodology, the numbers suggest that India's industrial fundamentals have remained relatively resilient despite disruptions to global oil and gas supply chains. A granular reading, however, reveals that this resilience is far from broad-based. Capital goods output expanded by a robust 16% year-on-year, reflecting the continuing effects of elevated public capital expenditure and infrastructure spending. By contrast, consumer durables output grew only 4.3%, while consumer non-durables expanded by a modest 2.8%, suggesting that rising fuel and energy costs may be exerting pressure on household consumption.

More significant than the headline growth number, however, is the extensive overhaul of the IIP itself. The revised series seeks to better reflect the structure of a rapidly changing economy. New products and sectors have been incorporated and several obsolete items dropped. A fourth major sector – water supply, sewerage and waste management – has been introduced with a weight of 2.02%. The electricity category has been expanded into Electricity and Gas Supply, with its weight rising to 10.87% from 7.99% earlier. Manufacturing remains the dominant component of the index, though its weight has declined marginally to 76.06% from 77.63%. More notable is the reduction in the weight of mining and quarrying to 11.05% from 14.37%. These shifts suggest that the importance of value-added infrastructure and utility services in gauging industrial activity has expanded, while the relative significance of primary resource extraction has diminished. Together, these changes better capture India's emergence as a components and value-added manufacturing hub integrated into global supply chains. Most importantly, the government has indicated its intention to move towards a chain-linked framework with more frequent updates to sectoral weights. Such a system would allow official statistics to better keep pace with structural changes in the economy, making the IIP a more accurate and timely gauge of industrial health.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) released the first Index of Industrial Production (IIP) data based on the revised 2022-23 base year.
- Industrial output grew by 4.9% in April 2026.
- The revised series incorporates changes in sectoral weights, product basket, and methodology to better reflect the current structure of the Indian economy.
- The government has also indicated a move towards a chain-linked index system for more accurate measurement of industrial activity.

Key Points

Industrial Performance (April 2026)

- Overall IIP growth: 4.9%
- Capital Goods: 16% growth
- Consumer Durables: 4.3% growth
- Consumer Non-Durables: 2.8% growth

Major Changes in Revised IIP Series

- Base year revised from 2011-12 to 2022-23.
- New products and emerging industries included.
- Obsolete products removed.
- New sector introduced:
 - Water Supply, Sewerage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities (Weight: 2.02%).

Sectoral Weight Changes

- Manufacturing: 76.06% (earlier 77.63%)
- Mining & Quarrying: 11.05% (earlier 14.37%)
- Electricity and Gas Supply: 10.87% (earlier Electricity alone 7.99%)

Significance

- Reflects the growing role of utility and infrastructure services.
- Captures India's increasing integration into global manufacturing value chains.
- Improves the relevance and accuracy of industrial statistics.

Static Linkages

- IIP is a composite indicator measuring changes in industrial production.
- Released monthly by the National Statistical Office (NSO) under MoSPI.
- Eight Core Industries account for about 40.27% of IIP weight:
 - Coal
 - Crude Oil
 - Natural Gas
 - Refinery Products
 - Fertilisers
 - Steel
 - Cement
 - Electricity
- Base year revision is undertaken periodically to reflect structural changes in the economy.
- Capital goods growth is considered an indicator of investment activity and future economic growth.
- Industrial sector is a key component of Gross Value Added (GVA).

Critical Analysis

Importance

- Provides a more realistic picture of India's industrial structure.
- Better captures emerging sectors and value-added activities.
- Enhances evidence-based policymaking.
- Supports monitoring of manufacturing-led growth strategies such as Make in India.

Concerns

- Consumer demand remains relatively weak compared to investment-led growth.
- Global energy price volatility may affect industrial output.
- Comparability with previous series becomes difficult after major revisions.
- Manufacturing growth remains uneven across sectors.

Way Forward

- Adopt a chain-linked index system for timely updating of weights.
- Strengthen domestic manufacturing competitiveness.
- Boost private investment alongside public capital expenditure.
- Enhance energy security and supply-chain resilience.
- Improve quality and frequency of industrial data collection.
- Focus on demand-led growth through employment and income generation.

Preserving the record

The right to be forgotten must be set against public interest

In the one hand, constitutional law holds up a principle of open justice that, among other things, allows public scrutiny of courts, facilitates public understanding of the law, and creates a historical record of the administration of justice. On the other, in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy* (2017), the Supreme Court of India recognised the right to informational privacy, including the ability of individuals to exercise some control over personal information about themselves. The Delhi High Court order on May 29 concerning the 'right to be forgotten' illustrates how these two principles can sometimes point in opposite directions. While the digitisation of court records transformed the ability of anyone with an Internet connection, but also search engines and automated archivers, to access judgments and legal records, it also altered the consequences of publicity. In Europe, where the resulting persistence of digital information first gave rise to the 'right to be forgotten', the right is usually weighed against the freedom of expression and public interest. In India as well, the right should accommodate the principle of open justice without necessarily breaching the bounds of the right to privacy. Yet, the High Court decided otherwise. Justice Sachin Datta concluded that simply updating records would not suffice as search engines could excerpt small portions without sufficient context, that open justice does not demand the ability to discover particular details of the case using the accused person's name, and that updating the official version would not necessarily update records that have since been copied to other websites.

The real problem is incompleteness, not discoverability. If a court acquitted or discharged a person from a dispute, anyone looking for the proceedings should also find that decision, rather than limiting a searcher's ability to find the original decision. This is crucial if open justice is understood to require the records to be practically accessible rather than merely exist somewhere. Court records are official acts of the state and their obfuscation in any manner *vis-à-vis* the public record will have serious ramifications for the public record, to echo the court in the closely related *Indian Kanon* matter (2024). While the High Court's concern about the petitioner's right to privacy is commendable, it should also consider digital accuracy as the way out. That is, judicial records must be wholly public as well as updated to prominently reflect major actions and decisions, rather than preserve the accusation alone, and the judiciary must impose conditions on any platform, including court registries, indexing legal information to refresh their databases on a regular basis and endeavour to display the results of any user queries with the proper context. Doing so would protect both fundamental rights and address the problem's root cause.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Delhi High Court (May 2026) dealt with a case concerning the Right to be Forgotten (RTBF) and online accessibility of judicial records.
- The case highlighted the conflict between:
 - Open Justice (public access to court proceedings and records).
 - Right to Privacy (control over personal information in the digital era).
- The Court observed that merely updating judicial records may not prevent search engines and digital archives from displaying outdated or incomplete information.
- The issue has gained importance due to increasing digitisation of court records and online legal databases.

Key Points

- Right to be Forgotten (RTBF):
 - Allows individuals to seek removal or delinking of personal information that has become irrelevant or causes disproportionate harm.
 - Not explicitly recognised in Indian law but derived from the broader Right to Privacy.
- Open Justice Principle:
 - Judicial proceedings should be accessible to the public.

- Promotes transparency, accountability, and public confidence in the judiciary.
- Privacy Jurisprudence:
 - The Supreme Court in the *K.S. Puttaswamy* (2017) judgment recognised privacy as a Fundamental Right under Article 21.
- Digital Age Challenge:
 - Search engines and legal databases make information permanently accessible.
 - Acquittals or subsequent court decisions may receive less visibility than original allegations.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Protection of Life and Personal Liberty.
- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of Speech and Expression.
- Article 14 – Equality before Law.
- Doctrine of Proportionality.
- Rule of Law.
- Natural Justice.
- Transparency and Accountability in Governance.
- Judicial Review.
- Digital Governance and E-Governance.

Critical Analysis

Arguments Supporting RTBF

- Protects dignity and reputation of individuals.
- Prevents perpetual social stigma from past allegations.
- Supports rehabilitation and reintegration.
- Strengthens informational privacy.

Concerns Regarding RTBF

- May dilute transparency of judicial proceedings.
- Could restrict public access to official records.
- May affect legal research and academic work.
- Risks selective removal of information from public memory.

Constitutional Tension

- Article 21 (Privacy) vs Article 19(1)(a) (Access to Information).
- Individual Dignity vs Public Interest.
- Privacy vs Transparency.

Way Forward

- Establish a clear legal framework for RTBF.
- Adopt a case-by-case proportionality test.
- Ensure court records prominently reflect acquittals, discharges, or subsequent orders.
- Mandate periodic updating of legal databases and search engine indexes.
- Balance privacy concerns with transparency requirements.
- Develop guidelines for digital archiving of judicial records.
- Strengthen data protection and privacy safeguards.

Dear Gen Z, join the system. Change happens in mundane politics



THAROOR THINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

DEAR GEN Z Indians who signed up to the "Cockroach Janta Party", it is impossible to look at the current landscape of India — the headlines, the stories emerging from news centres, and the raw, unfiltered conversations flooding social media — without feeling the immense weight of the collective frustration gripping your generation.

On May 16, Abhishek Diphe posted an invitation to join the "Cockroach Janta Party". Five days later, he had 20 million Instagram followers. His satirical movement has captured the imagination of Gen Z and millennials like you, frustrated by the inadequacies of our political system and its failure to meet your needs. Instagram is your town square. But it is not a ballot box.

To those of you feeling lost, angry, and disillusioned: Your pain is seen, and your anger is heard. The reasons you signed up for the CJP are valid. When you dedicate years of your life to preparation, sacrificing sleep, social connections, and mental well-being for a dream, the news of paper leaks and system failures is not just a news headline — it is a betrayal of your time, your effort, and your future. The tragic news of students losing their lives in despair is a devastating reminder that the "system" isn't just an abstract concept; it has real, human consequences that cut to the core of our society. But there is a danger in mistaking an outlet for your frustration as the solution to your problems. It is not.

The emergence of movements like the CJP offers a powerful, albeit heartbreaking, piece of political theatre. It captures the visceral feeling of being treated as disposable by a system that seems unresponsive to the struggles of ordinary citizens. It seems a safe space for those of you dealing with the crushing weight of unemployment, the rising cost of living, and the narrowing of the pathways to quality education. But while venting and finding solidarity in this movement is necessary for emotional release, there is a danger in stopping there. History shows us that while rage can ignite a fire, it requires a steady hand and a clear strategy to build a structure that endures. Instagram alone doesn't do it.

If you want more than just temporary attention, you must channel this energy into something that forces the system to bend. That is why working within the system you feel has failed you and pushing against the existing system so that it serves your needs is the most effective path forward.

Engage with an MP or meet one so that you can make your representatives accountable. The system is not a monolith; it comprises people who are, at least in theory, beholden to you. Flood the offices of your local MLAs and MPs with structured grievances and demand they take it up with the authorities. Use the

RTI Act to demand transparency regarding exam conduct and hiring quotas. When enough voices demand an answer on the record, silence becomes a political liability.

Next, you can leverage institutional pressure, even if you feel the institutions of government are not working for you. Mass media thrives on narratives. When your dissent is organised around specific, actionable demands (for example, specific policy reforms for NEFT oversight, concrete job-creation plans, time-bound commitment to fill existing vacancies), the media is forced to cover the solution, not just the scandal. And parliamentarians are forced to react as well, to join a debate (inside and outside the legislature about the way forward). Don't forget there's a lot that still works well in India. Make it work for you.

But you must professionalise your advocacy. The most successful movements in democratic history didn't just shout; they organised, they drafted, they lobbied, they agitated. Engage with student unions, legal collectives, and policy advocacy groups that know how to draft petitions and fight cases in courts. Turning "this is unfair" into "this violates Article 14 or Article 21" makes you impossible to ignore. If all else fails, take your case to court. But for that, you need to have a case, not just a set of slogans or memes expressing your frustrations.

And don't forget the power of participation. True change often happens in the mundane processes of daily politics. By participating constructively in local civic bodies and engaging in informed voter mobilisation, you strip the "system" of its comfortable default inertia.

When you become better informed and more organised than the incumbents, you become a force that has to be negotiated with. The temptation to opt out of the system is always there. It is easy to feel that the game is rigged and the odds are insurmountable. But remember: You are the demographic majority in a nation that is still defining its identity. You have the numbers, the digital fluency, and the moral high ground to shift the needle on the national compass. Your aspirations reflect the nation's future. Your generation will soon be in charge. Channel your demands constructively, and you can win.

One more word: Frustration is not an end in itself. You don't need to be treated like cockroaches, and you don't need to adopt the label as your permanent identity. Work with mainstream politicians of your choice, of all parties, to be the rebuilders of a system that respects the dignity of every student and every job-seeker.

Don't let your anger burn out into apathy. Let it be the fuel for a long-term, persistent demand for the changes you deserve. The system will only change when those who suffer the most from its failings decide to challenge them from the inside, not while staying outside.

Stay vocal, stay organised, and most importantly, stay resilient. You are the future of this country, whether the current system likes it or not. Seize the opportunity. Don't give up — and don't just be content with venting on Instagram. Many of us are listening, but you yourselves must act.

The writer is a fourth-term Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram

KEY HIGHLIGHTS: Context of the News

- A social media-based satirical movement, "Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)", gained widespread support among Indian youth.
- The movement reflects frustration over:
 - Examination paper leaks.
 - Delayed recruitments.
 - Rising unemployment.
 - Perceived institutional inefficiency.
- The debate highlights the need to transform digital dissent into constructive democratic participation through constitutional and institutional channels.

Key Points

- Examination irregularities erode trust in public institutions.
- Youth unemployment remains a challenge despite India's demographic dividend.
- Social media is increasingly influencing civic and political engagement.
- Democratic accountability can be strengthened through:
 - RTI applications.
 - Engagement with MPs/MLAs.
 - Judicial remedies and PILs.
 - Civil society and student organizations.
- Sustainable reforms require organized and evidence-based advocacy.

Static Linkages

Constitutional Provisions

- Article 14 – Equality before Law and Equal Protection of Laws.
- Article 16 – Equality of Opportunity in Public Employment.
- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of Speech and Expression.
- Article 19(1)(b) – Right to Assemble Peacefully.
- Article 21 – Right to Life and Dignity (expanded through judicial interpretation).

- Article 32 – Right to Constitutional Remedies.
- Article 226 – Writ Jurisdiction of High Courts.

Governance & Accountability

- Right to Information Act, 2005 (linked to Article 19(1)(a)).
- Rule of Law as a Basic Feature of the Constitution.
- Transparency, Accountability and Responsiveness as pillars of Good Governance.
- Citizen participation strengthens democratic legitimacy.

Democratic Participation

- Civil Society Organizations and Pressure Groups influence policymaking.
- Participatory Democracy complements Representative Democracy.
- Social media has emerged as a tool for civic engagement and public discourse.

Social & Economic Dimensions

- Demographic Dividend and Youth Empowerment.
- Employment generation as a prerequisite for inclusive growth.
- Human Capital Development through education and skill development.

Ethics Linkage

- Citizen-centric governance.
- Accountability and Integrity in Public Administration.
- Empathy and Responsiveness towards aspirants and job seekers.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Reflects growing political awareness among youth.
- Encourages accountability and transparency.
- Strengthens participatory democracy.

Concerns

- Social media activism may remain symbolic.
- Risk of misinformation and polarization.
- Declining trust in institutions can affect democratic legitimacy.

Constitutional Dimension

- Freedom of expression must be complemented by constructive civic engagement.
- Equal opportunity and procedural fairness are essential for public trust.

Way Forward

- Strengthen examination and recruitment systems.
- Ensure time-bound filling of vacancies.
- Improve transparency and grievance redressal.
- Promote constitutional literacy among youth.
- Enhance employment generation and skill development.
- Encourage constructive engagement with democratic institutions.

India's approach to US trade deal needs an urgent rethink



ABHIJIT DAS

THE INDIA-US Interim Agreement for trade is back in the spotlight. Sergio Gor, the US ambassador to India, has said that the deal is 99 per cent complete. Officials are ironing out a few issues and are reportedly finalising the deal this week.

On February 6, the two countries had issued a joint statement announcing that they had reached a framework under which the US would reduce reciprocal tariffs on India from 25 per cent to 18 per cent, while India had committed to reducing or eliminating tariffs on most US agricultural and industrial exports. As part of the bilateral trade agreement, India may also be required to align its economic policies and laws, including those in the digital sector and intellectual property rights, with US interests.

Much, however, has changed over the past four months.

On February 20, the US Supreme Court declared reciprocal tariffs to be illegal, thereby undermining the basis for the 18 per cent reciprocal tariffs. Subsequently, the US imposed 10 per cent tariffs across the board on most countries. As these tariffs are due to lapse on July 24, the US has already proposed a tariff of 12.5 per cent against India for labour issues under Section 301 investigations. These illegal tariffs could go even higher after the investigations on excess capacity are concluded.

The India-US joint statement requires India to purchase \$500 billion of US goods and services over the next five years. This would further exacerbate the depreciation crisis

In this negotiating environment, India could be compelled to accept an interim agreement that, in reality, may not be balanced and equitable. Further, if any action of India, including the purchase of Russian oil or any other policy decision, is perceived by US President Donald Trump to be against American interests, he may not hesitate to impose higher punitive tariffs, thereby undermining tariff predictability.

Then there is the rapid depreciation in the value of the rupee, with the widening trade deficit being one of the triggers. The India-US joint statement requires India to purchase \$500 billion of US goods and services over the next five years. This would further exacerbate the depreciation crisis. Any increase in India's ex-

ports resulting from the interim agreement may not be sufficient to offset this.

The case put forth by some commentators is that the interim agreement will boost India's exports from labour-intensive sectors such as textiles and clothing to the US and create employment. This may well be true, provided India faces a tariff in the US that is substantially lower than that faced by its competitors, including Bangladesh, China and Vietnam. However, concessions by India in the area of agriculture are likely to push a far greater number of farmers out of employment, including through tariff concessions on almonds, apples, apple juice, cotton, orange juice, red sorghum and soybean oil among other products, and other concessions.

An important demand of Washington is that its partner countries mandatorily allow imports of dairy, meat, and poultry products from the US if they are accompanied by health certificates from the relevant American authorities. If India agrees to this, its farmers will be adversely impacted by low-priced and subsidised imports of these products. Finally, the livelihood of millions of Indian farmers of rice and wheat would be jeopardised if the US leverages the interim agreement and secures changes in India's minimum support price scheme, an objective that it is pursuing aggressively at the WTO.

A golden rule at the negotiating table is "let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate". If India's continued bilateral trade engagement with the US is premised mainly on avoiding ever-increasing and illegal tariffs on labour-intensive products, then we must be prepared to face the adverse consequences of a deal that is likely to be substantially tilted against the country. At a time when many countries are seeking to diversify their export destinations, by firmly tethering its economic policies and prospects to the political and commercial interests of the US, India runs the risk of narrowing its options. An urgent rethink of India's approach to the interim agreement is called for.

Das is an international trade expert. The views expressed are personal

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India and the U.S. are close to finalizing an Interim Trade Agreement (ITA).
- The proposed agreement aims to reduce tariffs and improve market access between the two countries.
- Negotiations cover agriculture, industrial goods, digital trade, intellectual property rights (IPR), and services.
- Concerns have emerged regarding the impact on Indian agriculture, trade balance, and policy autonomy.
- The agreement comes amid changing U.S. tariff policies and ongoing global trade realignments.

Key Points

Trade-Related Provisions

- Reduction of tariffs on selected goods.
- Enhanced market access for Indian exports in the U.S.
- Possible tariff concessions by India on U.S. agricultural and industrial products.
- Discussions on digital trade and IPR standards.

Potential Gains for India

- Higher exports of:
 - Textiles and garments
 - Leather products
 - Gems and jewellery
 - Engineering goods
 - Pharmaceuticals
- Greater integration into global value chains.
- Employment generation in export-oriented sectors.

Major Concerns

- Increased imports of U.S. agricultural products.

- Competition for Indian farmers from subsidized U.S. dairy, poultry, and farm products.
- Pressure on MSP and domestic agricultural support measures.
- Risk of widening trade deficit.
- Concerns over policy space in digital governance and intellectual property regulation.

Static Linkages

- Comparative Advantage Theory (David Ricardo).
- Balance of Payments (BoP) and Trade Deficit.
- WTO Principles:
 - Most Favoured Nation (MFN)
 - National Treatment
 - Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)
 - TRIPS Agreement
- Minimum Support Price (MSP) and Public Stockholding.
- Export Diversification and Economic Diplomacy.
- Global Value Chains (GVCs).

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Improved access to the U.S. market.
- Boost to labour-intensive exports.
- Employment generation.
- Strengthening of India-U.S. strategic partnership.
- Increased foreign investment opportunities.

Challenges

- Threat to farmers from subsidized agricultural imports.
- Possibility of higher trade deficit.
- Reduced flexibility in trade and digital policies.
- Dependence on a single major export market.
- Concerns regarding IPR-related commitments.

Stakeholders Affected

- Farmers
- MSMEs
- Export-oriented industries
- Consumers
- Government

Way Forward

- Protect sensitive agricultural sectors through safeguards.
- Diversify export markets beyond the U.S.
- Strengthen competitiveness of Indian manufacturing.
- Ensure that trade concessions are reciprocal and balanced.
- Preserve policy space in MSP, food security, and digital governance.
- Align trade agreements with long-term economic and strategic interests.
- Enhance support for MSMEs and farmers affected by import competition.

India, Myanmar and a shifting balance

IN HIS first official overseas trip since being elected president earlier this year, Min Aung Hlaing concluded a five-day state visit to India this week, as part of an effort to rectify Myanmar's diplomatic isolation. Following the coup he led in February 2021 — which resulted in the house arrest and eventual conviction of then-head of government Aung San Suu Kyi on trumped-up charges — Naypyidaw lost much of its political legitimacy, a perception it did little to improve with the stage-managed elections this year that propelled the USDP, a junta proxy, to power. Set against the backdrop of a devastating multi-front civil war between the military, pro-democracy forces and ethnic militias, Myanmar's instability increasingly carries transnational repercussions and a Chinese footprint that India can ignore at its own peril.

Reportedly, talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Min Aung Hlaing covered cooperation across security, trade, rare earths, healthcare, and connectivity projects, among other areas. Security is arguably the most pressing of these, given that the two countries share a 1,600-km border — militancy, ethnic ties, and constant cross-border movement mean that instability on one side spills over to the other. The civil war has underscored this reality as thousands of refugees, many from the Chin community, have sought shelter in Mizoram and Manipur. Further, the military has weaker control over areas that border India. Myanmar also serves as the land bridge underpinning India's Act East Policy.

There is little doubt that the junta has committed atrocities against its own people over the past decade — first against the Rohingya, then against supporters of democracy. Even as the civil war grinds on, it also retains a firm grip on critical urban centres and institutional power. As much of the West has shunned the Min Aung Hlaing establishment, China has steadily widened its influence and thrown its weight behind the military leadership, driven by its own interests, not least the protection of its oil and gas infrastructure. New Delhi's challenge, therefore, is to balance engagement with Naypyidaw and non-state actors who control stretches of the border. Until stability returns to Myanmar, a flexible approach is critical to India's neighbourhood policy.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Myanmar President Min Aung Hlaing visited India amid ongoing political instability and civil conflict in Myanmar.
- India and Myanmar discussed cooperation in:
 - Border security
 - Connectivity projects
 - Trade and investment
 - Healthcare
 - Rare earth minerals
- The visit assumes significance due to:
 - Growing Chinese influence in Myanmar.
 - Refugee influx into India's Northeast.
 - Importance of Myanmar in India's Act East Policy.

Key Points

Strategic Importance of Myanmar

- India's only land bridge to Southeast Asia.
- Shares a 1,643 km border with India.
- Connects India's Northeast with ASEAN countries.
- Crucial for implementation of the Act East Policy.

Security Dimension

- Presence of insurgent groups along the India-Myanmar border.
- Instability in Myanmar affects security in:
 - Manipur
 - Mizoram
 - Nagaland
 - Arunachal Pradesh

- Essential partner in counter-insurgency cooperation.

Connectivity Projects

- Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project Connects Kolkata-Sittwe Port-Mizoram.
- India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Enhances connectivity with Southeast Asia.

China Factor

- China has expanded influence through:
 - Infrastructure projects.
 - Energy corridors.
 - Strategic investments.
- Myanmar remains important in India's efforts to maintain strategic balance in the Indo-Pacific.

Humanitarian Concerns

- Civil conflict has led to refugee inflows into northeastern states.
- Need to balance humanitarian assistance with security concerns.

Static Linkages

- Act East Policy.
- Neighbourhood First Policy.
- ASEAN-India Relations.
- BIMSTEC.
- Border Area Management.
- Internal Security and Cross-Border Insurgency.
- India's Connectivity Diplomacy.
- Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific.

Critical Analysis

Significance for India

- Strengthens border security cooperation.
- Supports Northeast integration with Southeast Asia.
- Counters excessive Chinese influence.
- Facilitates implementation of connectivity projects.
- Promotes regional stability.

Challenges

- Continuing civil war and political instability.
- Weak control of Myanmar government in border regions.
- Refugee management issues.
- Delays in connectivity projects.
- Balancing strategic interests with democratic values and human rights concerns.

Way Forward

- Continue pragmatic engagement with all stakeholders in Myanmar.
- Fast-track Kaladan and Trilateral Highway projects.
- Strengthen border management and intelligence sharing.
- Enhance developmental cooperation in border areas.
- Use BIMSTEC and ASEAN platforms for regional stability.
- Support peaceful political reconciliation and inclusive governance in Myanmar.