



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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EXPRESS**

**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

India's rainfall deficit 35% as monsoon stalls

Central India faces a 61% rain deficit as monsoon falters; govt. directs crop-wise contingency plans

Centre places around 200 districts under priority monitoring; weekly reviews of El Niño ordered

Deficit is significant in a year forecasters globally have warned will likely be a 'Super El Niño' year

Jacob Koshy
A.M. Jijesh
New Delhi

the southern peninsula (44%).

Meanwhile, Union Agriculture Minister Shri Singh Chaudhary, chairing a review of Kharif preparations on Tuesday, directed States to identify districts facing low or uneven rainfall and to draw up crop-wise contingency plans, so that affected farmers could be "immediately provided with alternatives, advice, and assistance."

The Union government has placed 150 to 200 districts under priority monitoring, ordered weekly El Niño reviews and is encouraging a shift towards cotton and pulses.

India Meteorological Department (IMD) statistics show that apart from northwest India, which has received 5% more rain than normal for this time of the year, all other regions are in the red, including east and northeast India (-43%), central India (-48%), and

Hanging clouds

While a monsoon deficit in June is not unusual, it assumes additional significance in a year which has been globally forecast to witness a 'Super El Niño'

Rainfall departures for El Niño years since 2000

Year	While monsoon	monsoon
2002	+27%	15% below LPA
2004	+27%	13% below LPA
2007	+7%	22% below LPA
2014	+44%	10% below LPA
2015	+14%	14% below LPA
2022	-35%	4% below LPA



IMD Long Period Average

better placed than in earlier seasons with rainfall deficiency.

While a rainfall deficit in June, the first of the monsoon months, is not unusual, it assumes additional significance in a year that forecasters globally have warned will likely be a 'Super El Niño' year.

An analysis of the IMD's all-India June rainfall departure for El Niño years

since 2000 shows no consistent early-season signal. In June 2015, during one of the strongest El Niño events on record, rainfall was 14% above normal. June 2002 and June 2004, both years that ended in drought, recorded near-normal June rainfall of around 2% and 1% above normal respectively, with the deficits arriving only in July and later.

Only in 2009 (47% below normal) and 2014 (44% below normal) did June rainfall fall as sharply as it has this year. In 2023, the most recent El Niño year, June closed about 8% below normal, within the IMD's normal range.

An El Niño event – the periodic warming of the central and eastern Pacific Ocean that tends to suppress the Indian monsoon – establishes itself only in the spring and exerts its influence mainly in the end and later part of the season.

"June rainfall and the pace of onset, by contrast, are governed largely by local and regional factors," according to U.S. Pa. chief forecaster at the IMD's Regional Meteorological Centre in Chennai.

First pulse weakened

This year, the monsoon set in over Kerala on June 4, just three days behind its

normal date, but its advance up the west coast has since lost momentum. Dr. Pai explained that the monsoon moves in pulses, and the first pulse, having reached the outskirts of Mumbai, did not sustain itself. Instead, an "anti-cyclonic circulation" to the city's north, combined with a westerly push from mid-latitude weather systems, has prevented the monsoon from establishing itself, he told The Hindu.

The Madden-Julian Oscillation, a travelling band of atmospheric activity that can strengthen or weaken the monsoon, is currently in an "unfavourable phase". This implies that the onset over Mumbai is likely to be delayed by a further five to six days, until the next pulse strengthens, possibly aided by a low-pressure system forming over the Bay of Bengal, he reckoned.

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration issued an El Niño advisory on June 11, confirming the event had formed and placing the odds of it becoming "very strong" by winter at 63%. The World Meteorological Organization had earlier put the probability of El Niño emerging between June and August at 80%. The IMD's own June bulletin states that El Niño conditions are present and that the ocean and atmosphere have coupled, with no positive Indian Ocean Dipole expected to offset it this season.

The warnings have been building. IMD's first-stage forecast in April pegged seasonal rainfall at 92% of the long-period average; its May-end update lowered this to 90% and assigned a 60% probability to a deficient year – the agency's most pessimistic presentation since 2015.

- Periodic warming of the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean.
- Generally associated with:
 - Weak Indian Monsoon
 - Drought conditions
 - Agricultural stress

Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)

- Difference in sea surface temperatures between western and eastern Indian Ocean.
- Positive IOD can reduce adverse impacts of El Niño.

Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO)

- Eastward-moving atmospheric disturbance in tropical regions.
- Influences monsoon onset and rainfall distribution.

Long Period Average (LPA)

- Benchmark average rainfall used by IMD.
- Deficient rainfall: Below 90% of LPA.

Major Kharif Crops

- Rice
- Cotton
- Maize
- Soybean
- Groundnut
- Pulses

Critical Analysis

Opportunities

- Higher reservoir storage compared to previous El Niño years.
- Better preparedness through contingency planning.
- Availability of agricultural inputs.
- Scope for crop diversification.

Challenges

- Delayed sowing of Kharif crops.
- Reduced agricultural productivity.
- Risk of food inflation.
- Lower groundwater recharge.
- Stress on rainfed agriculture.
- Adverse impact on rural incomes.

Way Forward

- Promote drought-resistant crop varieties.
- Expand micro-irrigation coverage.
- Strengthen PM Fasal Bima Yojana.
- Improve real-time weather advisories.
- Enhance groundwater and reservoir management.
- Encourage climate-resilient agriculture.
- Strengthen Centre-State coordination for contingency planning.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India recorded a 35% rainfall deficit by mid-June 2026.
- Southwest Monsoon advance has stalled over Maharashtra, Konkan Coast and Central India.
- IMD revised seasonal rainfall forecast to 90% of Long Period Average (LPA) with a 60% probability of a deficient monsoon.
- Emergence of El Niño conditions has increased concerns regarding agriculture, food inflation and water security.
- Centre directed States to prepare district-wise crop contingency plans and monitor vulnerable regions.

Key Facts

Rainfall Deficit - Region Rainfall Departure

- Northwest India ----- +5%
- East & Northeast India ----- -43%
- Central India ----- -61%
- Southern Peninsula ----- -14%
- All-India ----- -35%

Government Response

- 150–200 districts under priority monitoring.
- Weekly review of El Niño developments.
- Crop-wise contingency planning.
- Promotion of cotton and pulses cultivation.
- Adequate seed and fertilizer availability.

Reservoir Status

- Reservoir storage (May 2026): 30.4%
- Average storage during previous El Niño years: 25.1%

El Niño Forecast

- NOAA: 63% probability of very strong El Niño by winter.
- WMO: 80% probability of El Niño development during June–August.
- IMD:
 - El Niño conditions established.
 - Ocean-atmosphere coupling confirmed.
 - No positive Indian Ocean Dipole expected.

Static Linkages

El Niño

World suffers from a shortage of trust, PM Modi tells G7 leaders

Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

With a message that trust was in short supply globally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday participated in a session with the Group of Seven (G7) countries and others on "Forging New Partnerships and Rebuilding International Solidarity".

In addition to the G7 and India, other partner countries - Brazil, Egypt, Kenya, and South Korea - participated in these discussions along with the World Bank and African Development Bank. Mr. Modi met U.S. President Donald Trump for the first time since February 2025 at the meeting.

The host country France's intention for the session was to build a fairer and more effective system of international partnerships. Some of the sessions have reportedly been branded in a way that would hold Mr. Trump's interest.

Mr. Modi summarised his messages to the gathering on social media. "Mutual trust is the most important strategic asset today. But, sadly, today, the world does not suffer from a shortage of resources...it suffers from a shortage of trust," he wrote on X.

Mr. Modi said the future of partnerships was based on re-building trust and urged countries to move beyond the donor-recipient paradigm and work as equals in the development context. India has, in recent years, sought to play a leadership role for middle income and poorer countries.

"Emphasised that the Global South has immense expectations from the world. More than support, it seeks partnership," Mr. Modi wrote, adding that he had highlighted India's efforts in Africa during the G7 session, including its focus on training, water, agriculture, energy, and capacity building.

India, however, did not sign its name to a communiqué on restructuring the development finance ecosystem which the G7 and Kenya and South Korea supported, while putting its name to a call for coordinated response to the Bundibugyo ebola outbreak and a roadmap to fight cancer.

Videos showed Mr. Modi and Mr. Trump shaking hands before the meeting, during which they sat next to each other.

TALKS WITH CANADA, U.K.
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KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- PM Narendra Modi participated in the G7 Outreach Session at Evian, France.
- Theme: "Forging New Partnerships and Rebuilding International Solidarity".
- Partner countries invited: India, Brazil, Egypt, Kenya, South Korea.
- India emphasized the need to rebuild global trust and strengthen cooperation with the Global South.
- PM Modi held bilateral meetings with leaders of the USA, Canada, UK, and UAE.

Key Points

India's Position

- "Trust deficit" is a major challenge in global governance.
- Advocated moving beyond the donor-recipient model towards equal partnerships.
- Highlighted India's development cooperation in:
 - Africa
 - Capacity building
 - Agriculture
 - Water management
 - Energy sector
 - Skill development

Global South

- India reiterated its role as a voice of the Global South.
- Emphasized partnership-based development rather than aid-based development.

Development Finance

- India did not join the communiqué on restructuring the global development finance ecosystem.
- Joined international initiatives on:
 - Bundibugyo Ebola outbreak response
 - Global cancer-control roadmap

India-Canada

- Discussions on:
 - Trade
 - Technology
 - Energy security
 - FTA negotiations
- Uranium supply agreement:
 - Canada's Cameco and India's Department of Atomic Energy
 - CAD 2.6 billion
 - Supply period: 2027-2035

India-UK

- Focus on operationalising the India-UK Free Trade Agreement.
- Strengthening trade and investment ties.

India-UAE

- Discussion on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- Focus on:
 - Energy security
 - Indian diaspora welfare
 - Regional stability in West Asia

Prelims Facts

G7

- Informal grouping of advanced economies.
- Members:
 - Canada
 - France
 - Germany
 - Italy
 - Japan
 - United Kingdom
 - United States

- European Union participates but is not counted as a member.
- No charter, treaty, or permanent secretariat.

Global South

- Refers to developing and emerging economies of:
 - Asia
 - Africa
 - Latin America
 - Oceania

Bundibugyo Ebola Virus

- Species of Ebola virus first identified in Uganda (2007).
- Causes Ebola Virus Disease (EVD).

Mains Enrichment

Significance for India

- Strengthens India's role as a bridge between developed and developing nations.
- Enhances India's diplomatic profile in global governance.
- Supports India's aspiration for greater representation in international institutions.
- Expands strategic partnerships in trade, energy, technology, and development cooperation.

Challenges

- Persistent trust deficit in global governance.
- Unequal representation of developing countries in global institutions.
- Divergent interests between developed and developing economies.
- Geopolitical rivalries affecting multilateral cooperation.

Way Forward

- Promote inclusive and reformed multilateralism.
- Strengthen South-South Cooperation.
- Expand development partnerships in Africa.
- Advocate reforms in global financial institutions.
- Enhance cooperation in health security, climate finance, and sustainable development.

Moving from war to deal in a deeply divided region

Even as the ceasefire between the United States and Iran was being repeatedly breached, the Iran war showed something that the world appears to have forgotten: military force, by itself, cannot be a solution unless it is followed by a political settlement – whether in Ukraine, Gaza, Lebanon, Sudan or Iran. The last four years of relentless bombardment, bloodshed, and the killing of innocent civilians and children with impunity have exposed the reality that none of the major powers are prepared to use force to end the conflict. In fact, many have been either directly involved in acts of aggression or have actively supported them through the supply of arms and financial assistance. However, the growing stalemate in almost all major conflicts underscores a fundamental truth: a political resolution is the only way forward if the major powers are to preserve what remains of their dignity.

An uneasy path to fragile peace
Restarting a full-scale war with Iran had become untenable for the U.S. after setbacks on both the strategic and political fronts, and equally untenable for Iran after reverses on the military, economic and leadership fronts. Both sides were ultimately compelled to negotiate. However, for Israel, which had initially encouraged the U.S. to start this war, any deal with Iran that fell short of regime change was unacceptable – and remains so – because of Iran's continued support for a much-weakened Hezbollah in Lebanon, which Israel still regards as a direct threat. With Israeli elections due in October 2026, a ceasefire on the Lebanon front is politically unpalatable for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his coalition. Iran, meanwhile, has become more assertive, by directly targeting Israeli interests and U.S. assets in the Gulf even when Hezbollah was attacked. Until recently, the pattern had been the reverse, with Iran's proxies retaliating whenever Iran was targeted.

The much-awaited digitally signed U.S.-Iran deal reflects the reality that Iran has had a strategic win. Reports indicate that it opens up Hormuz Strait unconditionally, halts the war on all fronts including Lebanon, lifts Iranian oil sanctions, unfreezes Iranian assets and commits Iran not to produce nuclear weapons.

Negotiations to commit Iran to suspend nuclear enrichment and give up enriched nuclear material without being dubbed a repackaged Obama-era 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), will take place over 60 days. In some ways the deal is not yet a political settlement, but the beginning of one.

Less anyone romanticise Iran's strategic gains, they do not alter the fundamental reality that Iran will continue to be viewed as a major disruptor in



T.S. Tirumurti

Former Permanent Representative of India to the United Nations, New York, and currently Head, Steering Committee of the Deccan Centre for International Relations, Chennai

West Asia. There is little indication that its reliance on non-state actors such as Hezbollah, the Houthis and Iraqi militias will diminish. The Iranian government is now more hardline, its missile arsenal will be replenished, and it retains the capability to threaten the Strait of Hormuz and strike Gulf countries at will. The region is unlikely to be any safer after a deal than it was before.

This is precisely why U.S. President Donald Trump's 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) base was pushing him to get a better deal. Mr. Trump's push to get the Saudis, Qataris and others to join the Abraham Accords to normalise relations with Israel made no headway since Israeli attacks were unrelenting in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon.

Even now, after the deal, Israel has sworn to keep the territories it has captured in Lebanon and expand Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank. Israel is apprehensive, for good reason, that the U.S. or Israel will derail the deal at the first sign of stalled negotiations or a Hezbollah attack. Israel, meanwhile, has accused the U.S. of selling it out because none of its key objectives have been achieved, conveniently overlooking its own role in urging the U.S. into the conflict.

Gulf fault lines exposed

The Gulf countries have also come out the worse off. They bet on a U.S. security umbrella, signed bilateral Abraham Accords with Israel sidelining historical regional conflicts, shed the conservative tag (like Saudi Arabia), invested in a hi-tech future and joined important global groupings such as BRICS, signalling their increasing ambitions as middle powers. Those ambitions have been rudely shaken and their fragilities exposed.

The Gulf states need to return to the drawing board. They overestimated their collective economic and security strength while underestimating their internal divisions and long-standing rivalries.

The post-war landscape has exposed these fault lines. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have worked at cross-purposes in Yemen, Sudan and Somalia, the Emiratis have left the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries – a clear signal that Saudi writ on energy policy is over. Their supply chains have to be reworked to overcome a future Hormuz blockade. They will face a growth slowdown after the war impacting their ambitions. While the UAE has moved closer to Israel and the U.S., others have adopted a more cautious approach. Ironically, the Iran war has divided the Gulf rather than united it against a common adversary, making a recalibration of relations



with Washington inevitable. After the collapse of deterrence against Iran, no Gulf country is secure unless it forges a regional security architecture bringing Iran into the fold. The lessons of the Ukraine war should not be forgotten. Europe expanded the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's boundaries towards Russia without bringing Moscow into a broader regional security architecture, and is now paying the price. Yet, neither Europe nor West Asia appears to have learned that lesson.

The other power shifts
Russia and China are happy to watch the U.S. get bogged down. For China, a weakened Trump is attacked by a bigger one. Although China seeks a larger role in West Asia, the Gulf remains too deeply tied to the U.S. economically and strategically for any dramatic shift. China is therefore likely to work through its "iron brother" Pakistan, which found itself in a geographical sweet spot. For Russia, meanwhile, the war only reinforces the strategic logic it has long applied to

Ukraine.

India initially appeared to align with Israel and the U.S., and ignored the assassination of the Iranian Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, but quickly realised the need for a more balanced approach when Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz and threatened

critical interests such as energy security and maritime trade. Close ties with Israel or the UAE are important, but taking sides in regional conflicts is not.

With growing divergences among regional powers, Pakistan's rising role, and the possibility of greater Chinese influence in West Asia, bilateral relationships alone are insufficient. India needs a balanced regional strategy rooted in strategic autonomy and multi-alignment. Any slowdown in the Gulf will affect trade, investments, employment opportunities for Indian workers and diaspora remittances. The Chinese getting a permanent maritime foothold in that region will make it worse. More broadly, the inability of the U.S. to accommodate India within its larger strategic vision in West Asia, East Asia and the wider neighbourhood is hurting India.

The question now is whether Israel will seek to undermine the Iran deal. Will the protagonists draw lessons from this conflict, or will they embark on yet another cycle of wars in Lebanon, Cuba, Gaza and the West Bank? And, on a related note, will Pakistan's growing proximity to the U.S. increase pressure on India to resume unconditional talks with Islamabad?

- Internal divisions among Gulf countries remain significant.

Major Power Competition

- China seeks greater influence in West Asia.
- Russia benefits from diversion of U.S. strategic attention.
- Reflects an emerging multipolar world order.

Implications for India

- Energy security concerns.
- Protection of maritime trade routes.
- Safety of Indian diaspora in Gulf countries.
- Need for strategic autonomy and multi-alignment.

Static Linkages

- Strategic chokepoints and maritime trade.
- Energy security and economic stability.
- Balance of Power.
- Strategic Autonomy.
- Non-State Actors in international relations.
- Regional Security Architecture.
- Freedom of Navigation under international law.
- Multipolarity in world politics.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Demonstrates limits of military solutions.
- Highlights importance of political settlements.
- Reduces immediate threat to global energy supplies.
- Supports stability in maritime trade.

Challenges

- Israel–Iran tensions remain unresolved.
- Continued role of proxy groups.
- Risk of future disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz.
- Absence of a comprehensive regional security framework.

India's Concerns

- Oil price volatility.
- Trade disruptions.
- Impact on remittances and diaspora welfare.
- Expanding Chinese influence in West Asia.

Way Forward

- Promote diplomatic conflict resolution.
- Strengthen regional security dialogue.
- Diversify energy import sources.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).
- Enhance maritime security cooperation.
- Maintain strategic autonomy and multi-alignment.
- Strengthen engagement with all major West Asian stakeholders.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The United States and Iran agreed to a ceasefire after a period of military confrontation.
- Negotiations have begun on Iran's nuclear programme, sanctions relief, and regional security issues.
- The development has significant implications for West Asian stability, global energy security, and India's strategic interests.

Key Points

U.S.–Iran Ceasefire

- Shift from military confrontation to diplomatic engagement.
- Focus on:
 - Nuclear negotiations.
 - Sanctions relief.
 - Regional stability.

Strait of Hormuz

- Connects the Persian Gulf and Gulf of Oman.
- One of the world's most important maritime energy chokepoints.
- Critical for global oil and LNG trade.

Israel–Iran Rivalry

- Continues to be a major source of instability in West Asia.
- Linked to Iran-backed groups:
 - Hezbollah (Lebanon)
 - Houthis (Yemen)
 - Iraqi militias

Gulf Region

- Conflict exposed security and economic vulnerabilities.

The U.S.-Iran 'peace deal' confronts spoiler Israel

The signing of a United States-Iran peace memorandum offers a rare opportunity to reduce tensions in one of the world's most volatile regions. After decades marked by sanctions, proxy wars, covert operations, and periodic military confrontations, even a tentative framework for reconciliation between Washington and Tehran represents a significant diplomatic achievement. Yet, the prospects for transforming this memorandum into a permanent agreement depend not only on the willingness of the U.S. and Iran to compromise. They depend equally on whether Israel is prepared to accept a regional order in which Iran is no longer treated as a permanent enemy.

Israel's long opposition

No country has done more over the past three decades to oppose U.S.-Iran rapprochement than Israel. Successive Israeli governments have portrayed Iran as an existential threat and have consistently sought to prevent any normalisation of relations between Tehran and Washington. While Israeli leaders justify this position in terms of national security, the persistence of their opposition suggests broader political and strategic motivations.

The historical record is revealing. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) placed stringent restrictions on Iran's nuclear programme and subjected it to one of the most intrusive inspection regimes ever implemented. International nuclear experts broadly agreed that the agreement significantly reduced the risk of Iran acquiring a nuclear weapon. Yet, Israel remained vehemently opposed to it.

What made Israel's position particularly striking was that it opposed an agreement designed precisely to address the threat it claimed to fear most. The episode demonstrated that Israeli objections extended beyond the nuclear issue itself. What Israel appeared unwilling to accept was the broader implication of the agreement: the gradual reintegration of



Mohammed Ayoub
Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Michigan State University, and the author most recently of 'From Regional Security to Global IR' (2024)

Iran into a regional order that Israel sought to dominate but would find it impossible to do if Iran was a part of it.

For decades, Israel has benefited strategically from the perception of Iran as the principal source of instability in West Asia. The Iranian threat has long served as a justification for deeper military cooperation with the U.S., expanding security ties with Arab states, and the diversion of international attention from the Palestinian issue. As long as Iran remained centre stage, scrutiny of Israeli policies in the occupied Palestinian territories remained secondary.

From Iran to Palestine

A successful U.S.-Iran rapprochement would fundamentally alter this equation. If Iran ceased to be seen as the region's primary threat, international attention would inevitably shift back to the Palestinian issue – including the occupation, settlement expansion in the West Bank and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. This concern has become more acute since the Gaza war, which has severely damaged Israel's international standing and intensified global scrutiny of its policies towards Palestinians.

At the same time, the regional mood has shifted. Arab governments that once viewed confrontation with Iran as a strategic necessity have increasingly embraced de-escalation. Saudi Arabia's restoration of diplomatic relations with Iran in 2023 signalled a growing recognition that endless rivalry has imposed enormous political and economic costs on the region. Many Arab states, especially in the Gulf, now see stability and economic development as more urgent priorities than perpetual confrontation with Tehran – a point driven home strongly by the recent conflict.

Israel finds itself increasingly at odds with this emerging regional consensus. While it continues to advocate a strategy centred on containing and

isolating Iran, much of West Asia appears to be moving toward cautious engagement. A permanent U.S.-Iran agreement would reinforce this trend and further weaken the logic of confrontation.

Israel's choice ahead

Nevertheless, Israel retains significant influence over U.S. policy through the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and other channels, strong congressional support and deeply institutionalised security ties. This influence has often shaped American approaches towards Iran. The danger is that Israeli leaders may again seek to derail diplomacy through political pressure, demands for unsustainable concessions or military actions that raise regional tensions and undermine negotiations.

Israel's continued strikes in Lebanon despite repeated rebukes from U.S. President Donald Trump are a clear indication of the preferences of Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

The fundamental issue, therefore, is whether Israel can adapt to a West Asia in which its security is no longer based on the isolation of Iran but on a broader framework of regional coexistence. The Netanyahu government's record offers little reason for optimism, having consistently favoured military action over diplomatic compromise. The future of the U.S.-Iran peace memorandum may therefore depend a great deal on Israel's willingness to accept a changing regional landscape. If Israeli leaders continue to view any U.S.-Iran understanding as inherently unacceptable, they may succeed in obstructing a permanent agreement. But in doing so, they would be confronting a broader regional movement towards de-escalation at a moment when West Asia desperately needs it, potentially leading to Israel's further isolation both regionally and internationally.

Important Static Points

JCPOA (2015)

- Agreement between Iran and P5+1.
- Objective:
 - Limit Iran's nuclear activities.
 - Ensure IAEA monitoring.
 - Provide sanctions relief.

Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)

- Entered into force: 1970.
- Iran: Signatory.
- Israel: Not a signatory.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

- Headquarters: Vienna, Austria.
- Function:
 - Nuclear safeguards.
 - Verification and inspections.
 - Promotion of peaceful uses of nuclear energy.

Strategic Maritime Chokepoints

- Strait of Hormuz.
- Bab-el-Mandeb.
- Suez Canal.
- Strait of Malacca.

Significance for India

- Ensures stability in a key energy-supplying region.
- Supports:
 - Energy security.
 - Safety of Indian diaspora.
 - Chabahar Port development.
 - International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Challenges

- Trust deficit between U.S. and Iran.
- Israel's security concerns.
- Presence of regional proxy conflicts.
- Domestic political opposition in both countries.
- Risk of disruption due to geopolitical tensions.

Way Forward

- Strengthen IAEA-led verification.
- Promote sustained diplomatic engagement.
- Encourage regional security dialogue.
- Enhance maritime security cooperation.
- Support peaceful conflict resolution in West Asia.
- Strengthen multilateral diplomacy through the UN framework.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- U.S. and Iran signed a preliminary peace memorandum to reduce tensions in West Asia.
- Aims to revive diplomatic engagement, address the nuclear issue, and reduce regional instability.
- Raises questions regarding Israel's response and the future regional security architecture.

Why in News?

- Marks a significant diplomatic breakthrough after decades of:
 - Economic sanctions.
 - Proxy conflicts.
 - Military confrontations.
 - Nuclear-related disputes.

Key Developments

U.S.-Iran Dimension

- Revival of negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme.
- Possibility of sanctions relief.
- Focus on regional stability and maritime security.

Israel's Position

- Considers Iran a major strategic and security threat.
- Opposed the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), 2015.
- Concerned about:
 - Expansion of Iranian regional influence.
 - Strengthening of Iran-backed groups.

Regional Trends

- Growing preference for de-escalation in West Asia.
- Saudi Arabia-Iran rapprochement (2023) reflects changing regional priorities.
- Increased emphasis on:
 - Economic development.
 - Regional connectivity.
 - Political stability.

Lasting U.S.-Iran peace may depend on Tel Aviv's willingness to adapt



Limits of America

Iran won the war by merely denying the United States a victory

Israel and the U.S. launched their war on Iran on February 28 to bring about regime change in Tehran, destroy its nuclear and missile capabilities and end its support for non-state actors such as Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthis. More than 100 days later, on June 15, the U.S. reached a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Iran to end fighting, lift the blockades in the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf of Oman – disruptions that did not exist before the war – and pave the way for more substantive talks on the nuclear question, while Israel, frustrated and isolated, is watching from the sidelines. That U.S. President Donald Trump pushed ahead despite Israeli objection underscores how dramatically the region's strategic landscape has shifted. Left with few viable military options to make Iran submit to America's maximalist demands, or to reopen the Strait of Hormuz, Mr. Trump ultimately turned to a phased diplomatic approach: a preliminary agreement now, followed by negotiations on a final deal. Iranian officials say the arrangement would include the release of some frozen assets and reparations for Tehran as part of a broader regional ceasefire agreement. Core issues such as Iran's nuclear programme and western sanctions would be discussed next.

The MoU is only the first step on a long and difficult road to peace and stability. Mr. Trump's immediate challenge is to prevent a fresh outbreak of hostilities between the U.S. and Iran, or Israel and Iran, while nuclear negotiations remain under way. His biggest strategic mistake was his belief, shared by Israel, that there was a military solution to the Iranian nuclear issue. Washington underestimated Iran's resolve, strategic depth and geographical advantages. As Henry Kissinger put it, "the guerrilla wins if he does not lose". Iran won this war by not losing while the U.S., the most powerful country, lost it by failing to achieve its goals. With the nuclear talks set to resume, Mr. Trump finds himself in a weaker position today than the one Barack Obama occupied when he held talks with Iran in 2013-15. Nevertheless, the prospects for a negotiated outcome are still real as Iran urgently needs long-term economic relief. One potential disruptor, however, could be Israel, which has said it would not withdraw from occupied Southern Lebanon. Iran and the U.S. should rein in their respective allies, Hezbollah and Israel; Tehran should also take measures to instil confidence in the process. It has already demonstrated its deterrence by taking control of the Strait of Hormuz. It must now reopen the waterway in exchange for the U.S. removing its blockade. Iran and the U.S. should remain focused on diplomacy, resist potential Israeli efforts to sabotage the process, and work towards restoring stability in West Asia.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The U.S. and Iran signed a preliminary Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to end hostilities and begin negotiations on a permanent settlement.
- The agreement seeks to:
 - End military confrontation.
 - Restore maritime navigation through the Strait of Hormuz and Gulf of Oman.
 - Resume negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme.
 - Discuss sanctions relief and release of frozen Iranian assets.
- The development marks a shift from military confrontation to diplomatic engagement in West Asia.

Key Points

- The MoU is a framework agreement, not a final peace treaty.
- Future negotiations will focus on:
 - Iran's uranium enrichment programme.
 - Nuclear inspections and verification.
 - Sanctions removal.
 - Regional security architecture.
- The agreement highlights the strategic importance of the Strait of Hormuz for global energy security.

- The episode reinforces the limitations of military solutions in resolving nuclear disputes.

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz:
 - Connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.
 - One of the world's most important maritime chokepoints.
- Iran is a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).
- International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitors nuclear safeguards and inspections.
- Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), 2015:
 - Agreement between Iran and P5+1 countries.
 - Linked nuclear restrictions with sanctions relief.
- Maritime security is governed by principles under UNCLOS.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reduces the risk of a wider regional conflict.
- Enhances global energy market stability.
- Ensures smoother maritime trade through critical sea lanes.
- Creates an opportunity for a diplomatic resolution of the nuclear issue.

Challenges

- Deep strategic mistrust between the U.S. and Iran.
- Differences over uranium enrichment limits.
- Possibility of disruption by regional actors.
- Sanctions-relief mechanisms remain contentious.
- Long-term implementation and verification challenges.

Way Forward

- Resume comprehensive nuclear negotiations under IAEA oversight.
- Establish phased and verifiable compliance mechanisms.
- Promote regional security dialogue involving Gulf countries.
- Ensure uninterrupted freedom of navigation in international waters.
- Encourage multilateral diplomacy through the United Nations.
- Balance sanctions relief with measurable nuclear commitments.

Primed to treat

The Kerala story in containing Nipah has lessons for pandemic preparedness

The emergence of a case of the Nipah virus in Kerala and the subsequent control in the State is indicative of two things: first, Kerala's own mix of ecological factors and anthropogenic activity that makes it vulnerable every monsoon season to the possibility of Nipah spreading, the hosts being fruit bats. Second, the fact that there has been just a single case so far is testament to the robustness of the health systems in place in Kerala. The World Health Organization (WHO) has classified Nipah a priority pathogen, accounting for its lethality, potential to cause outbreaks, even a pandemic. It is just one of several pathogens that WHO has flagged for Kerala – including avian influenza and Kyasanur Forest Disease. Kerala has, at the moment, one active case of 43-year-old man from Ramanattukara in Kozhikode. He remains on ventilator support at the Kozhikode Government Hospital. No fresh cases have come up since then, after intensive contact tracing and screening. The 2018 Nipah outbreak, immortalised in film and art, which caused 17 deaths, and affected 23 people (18 lab confirmed), spread primarily on person-to-person contact, with the index patient reportedly transmitting the virus to 15 others, including health-care workers. Since then it has had cases/outbreaks in 2019, 2021, 2023, 2024, and 2025. Historically in India, a devastating outbreak was noted in 2001 in West Bengal, and later, a few cases were detected again, in 2007. Earlier this year, on January 26, 2026, two laboratory-confirmed cases of Nipah virus infection were reported from West Bengal, both health-care workers. This was also contained and no further cases were reported.

It is clear that human activity on the fringes of forest zones, encroaching into traditional habitats of the fruit bats, has a central role to play in the transmission of the virus; in time, this originally zoonotic infection jumped to humans. Repeatedly, the source of infection has been traced to consuming contaminated fruits, or contact with water sources contaminated by bats. This also indicates that the overall approach should be from a One Health perspective, considering environmental and animal interplays with humans, and not a mere health-care angle. The State's history of Nipah outbreaks and its learnings have enabled it to prime its health system to meet such health emergencies, at the primary and secondary hospitals itself. This is the other lesson from Kerala for pandemic preparedness. Its system has become adept at maintaining a high index of suspicion for cases of acute encephalitis; watching out for clusters, and with clinical efficiency, deploying protocols to control further spread and reach all those who need medical assistance.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Kerala reported a confirmed Nipah Virus (NiV) case in Kozhikode during the 2026 monsoon season.
- Intensive contact tracing, isolation, and surveillance have prevented further spread.
- WHO classifies Nipah as a Priority Pathogen due to its high fatality rate and outbreak potential.
- Kerala has witnessed Nipah outbreaks in 2018, 2019, 2021, 2023, 2024, 2025 and 2026.
- Earlier in January 2026, two Nipah cases were reported in West Bengal and were successfully contained.

Key Points for Prelims

Nipah Virus (NiV)

- Virus Family: Paramyxoviridae
- Genus: Henipavirus
- Type: Zoonotic viral disease
- Natural Reservoir: Fruit bats (Pteropus genus/Flying Foxes)

Transmission

- Bat → Human (contaminated fruits, palm sap, water sources)
- Animal → Human
- Human → Human (close contact with infected person)

Symptoms

- Fever
- Headache
- Acute respiratory illness
- Encephalitis (brain inflammation)
- Altered consciousness/coma

Case Fatality Rate (WHO)

- Approximately 40–75%

India: Major Outbreaks - Year/Location

- 2001 - Siliguri, West Bengal
- 2007 - Nadia, West Bengal
- 2018 - Kozhikode, Kerala
- 2019–2026 - Sporadic cases/outbreaks in Kerala

Why Kerala is Vulnerable?

- Human encroachment into forest ecosystems.
- High human-wildlife interaction.
- Presence of fruit bat populations.
- Monsoon-associated ecological conditions.

Static Linkages

- Zoonotic diseases emerge through spillover events from animals to humans.
- Habitat destruction and biodiversity loss increase zoonotic disease risks.
- Public Health is a State List (List II, Seventh Schedule) subject.
- Epidemic management requires Centre-State coordination.
- Disease surveillance is undertaken through:
 - Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (IDSP)
 - National Centre for Disease Control (NCDC)

One Health Approach

One Health

An integrated approach recognizing the interconnection between:

- Human Health
- Animal Health
- Environmental Health

Importance

- Early detection of zoonotic diseases.
- Prevention of future pandemics.
- Better coordination among health, veterinary, and environmental sectors.

Mains Enrichment

Significance of Kerala Model

- Strong surveillance systems.
- Rapid contact tracing.
- Decentralized public healthcare.
- Preparedness from previous outbreaks.
- Effective risk communication.

Challenges

- Recurring zoonotic spillovers.
- Habitat fragmentation.
- Lack of approved vaccine.
- High mortality rate.
- Risk to healthcare workers.

How a Mohenjo-daro figurine became a 'dancer' — and a challenge to 'modesty'

Vikas Pathak
New Delhi, June 16

A CLASS 9 textbook shaded over the bare torso of the iconic "Dancing Girl" of Mohenjo-daro before the NCERT (National Council of Educational Research and Training) decided to restore its original image.

This was not the first time an attempt had been made to cover up the Harappan-era bronze figurine. In 2023, a fully clothed version of the "Dancing Girl" was unveiled as the mascot of the International Museum Expo.

The story of "vulgarity" being attached to the statue, however, dates back several decades. It is largely associated with archaeologist John Marshall choosing to interpret it as the image of a "nautch girl" or "dancing girl" without compelling evidence.

Competing claims

The government of Pakistan also had similar reservations when it was trying to acquire Harappan artefacts from India in the 1950s, arguing that Mohenjo-daro and

Harappa were both in Pakistan. India, however, contended that the legacy of the Harappan civilisation belonged to South Asia and not Pakistan alone.

An academic paper by Panjab University historian Ashish Kumar, *Sahib's Nautch Girl*, brings out interesting details. Around 12,000 Harappan objects from Mohenjo-daro were in Delhi when Partition took place. These had been brought to the capital from the Lahore Museum by Mortimer Wheeler, who was Director General of the Archeological Survey of India between 1944 and 1948, for an exhibition.

"Owing to partition, almost all of the Harappan sites including Mohenjodaro and Harappa went to Pakistan leaving with India only two minor sites (Rangpur in Gujarat and Kotla Nihang Khan in East Punjab) of the first urban civilization of the Indian sub-continent," Kumar writes. "Since the Harappan artifacts had been found in the territory of Pakistan at Mohenjodaro, the Pakistani officials demanded all these artifacts back from India. But the Indian officials refused to en-



The bronze figurine was discovered in 1926

tain this demand and put forth an equal claim over the Harappan civilization."

Finally, India and Pakistan agreed to a

50:50 division of the Harappan artifacts "found at Mohenjodaro and Chanhu-daro with the help of Mortimer Wheeler".

While Pakistan wanted both the "Dancing Girl" and the "Priest King", India was willing to hand over just one of the two.

"The Pakistani officials chose the priest king to avoid any backlash at home that a figure of a naked teenager could have invoked from religious quarters," Kumar writes. "Here the 'nudity' of a teenager girl impacted the decision of the Pakistani officials, who considered its sexuality as a threat to their moral beliefs."

However, the clamour to acquire the "Dancing Girl" statue continued in Pakistan till recently too. In 2016, a writ petition in the Lahore High Court sought directions to the Pakistan government "to bring back the famous 'Dancing girl' bronze statue from India", Kumar states.

"Since this bronze girl statue had been discovered from Mohenjo-daro in 1926, Pakistan was held to be the real owner of this five thousand years old Harappan artifact," the

paper says. "In response to this Pakistani claim, Vasant Shinde (then Vice-chancellor of Deccan College, Pune) questioned Pakistan's exclusive claim over the Harappan civilization...since this civilization was considered a common heritage of South Asia."

'Nautch girl'

Significantly, even the identification of the statue as that of a dancing girl by John Marshall is contested. Marshall wrote about the statue: "The only other sculpture in the round from Mohenjo-daro that claims notice here is the bronze dancing-girl... This is a small figurine of rather rough workmanship with disproportionately long arms and legs. Almost, indeed, it is a caricature, but, like a good caricature, it gives a vivid impression of the young aboriginal nautch girl, her hand on hip in half-impudent posture, and legs slightly forward, as she beats time to the music with her feet."

He added: "Small, too, as this figurine is, the modeling of the back, hips, and buttocks is quite effective, and in spite of ob-

vious defects shows sound observation on the part of the artist."

However, Gregory L Possehl, in his book *The Indus Civilisation*, expressed doubt whether the statue represents a female dancer. Historian Upinder Singh also said in *A History of Ancient and Early Medieval India*: "The dancing girl may not have been dancing at all, and even if she was, she may not represent a professional dancer."

Ashish Kumar also says that there is no evidence to suggest that she was a dancer. The fact that colonial officials, who stayed in India alone, would often find comfort in the company of nautch girls, may have led to the instant association, he says. Marshall also associated the bronze statue with the devdasi tradition, thus suggesting continuity from Harappan times to recent times.

Significantly, while many nude terracotta representations of the female body were found from Harappan sites, these were identified as a marker of the Mother Goddess cult, while the bronze statue was identified as a "nautch girl".

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- NCERT restored the original image of the "Dancing Girl" bronze figurine after criticism over a modified depiction in a Class IX textbook.
- The issue revived debates on:
 - Interpretation of Harappan artifacts.
 - Colonial narratives in archaeology.
 - India-Pakistan claims over Harappan heritage.

Key Points

Dancing Girl Figurine

- Discovered at Mohenjo-daro in 1926.
- Belongs to the Indus Valley Civilization (c. 2600–1900 BCE).
- Made of bronze using the Lost-Wax (Cire Perdue) Technique.
- Height: Approximately 10.5 cm.
- Currently housed in National Museum, New Delhi.

India-Pakistan Heritage Dispute

- After Partition, Harappan sites such as Mohenjo-daro and Harappa became part of Pakistan.
- India and Pakistan agreed to a 50:50 division of certain Harappan artifacts.
- Pakistan selected the Priest King, while India retained the Dancing Girl.
- India maintains that the Harappan Civilization is a shared civilizational heritage of South Asia, not the exclusive heritage of any one modern nation-state.

Debate on Identification

- Archaeologist John Marshall identified the figurine as a "Dancing Girl".
- Later scholars questioned this interpretation.
- No archaeological evidence conclusively proves that:
 - She was a dancer.
 - She represented a specific profession.
- Highlights the importance of evidence-based archaeological interpretation.

Static Linkages

- Indus Valley Civilization was one of the world's earliest urban civilizations.
- Major sites:
 - Harappa
 - Mohenjo-daro
 - Dholavira (UNESCO World Heritage Site)
 - Lothal
 - Kalibangan
 - Rakhigarhi
- Features:
 - Urban planning
 - Grid-pattern streets
 - Advanced drainage system
 - Standardized weights and measures
 - Craft specialization
- Bronze casting through Lost-Wax Technique continues in traditional Indian metallurgy.
- UNESCO defines cultural heritage as a common legacy of humanity.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Demonstrates advanced Harappan metallurgy.
- Provides evidence of craft specialization in urban centers.
- Reflects challenges of interpreting archaeological evidence.

Concerns

- Colonial interpretations often became accepted historical facts.
- Present-day moral standards may distort understanding of ancient societies.
- Heritage ownership disputes may affect cultural diplomacy.

UPSC Angle

- Shared heritage versus territorial ownership.
- Archaeological evidence as a source of ancient history.
- Decolonisation of historical narratives.

Way Forward

- Promote evidence-based archaeological research.
- Encourage regional cooperation on shared heritage.
- Strengthen conservation and digital archiving of artifacts.
- Ensure accurate representation of archaeological findings in educational material.
- Develop objective and multidisciplinary approaches to ancient history.

On US-Iran ceasefire, the mediation question is the wrong one

IT IS not clear how the Iran-US deal will unfold over the next several months. The announced ceasefire and framework are more of a mechanism to postpone resolving deeper divides that still pose risks. Even if it survives, the deal will be at best a sudden ceasefire, not a peace settlement. Ahead of elections, the Donald Trump administration has incentives to avoid appearing bogged down as well as to avoid the risk of inflation and energy shocks. Once that constraint is removed, will Trump accept the strategic reality of the limits of American power? Or will he, and the American system, succumb to temptation to satiate wounded pride?

Iran, so far, has had every motive to undermine a possible agreement. Israel's quest for complete military dominance has not produced either security or lasting control. It is diplomatically isolated. But the war may produce other convulsions in the region. States like Iraq become more likely sites of proxy competition. Iran's effective practice of sovereignty has largely exposed the vulnerabilities and costs to the Gulf states of letting the US set the terms for the region. But all these states, Iran included, could still see domestic political turmoil that complicates any peace calculus.

In India, there is much hand-wringing over the fact that it was an irrelevant player in this entire conflict. But India's diagnosis of this irrelevance, and what the world needs now, is deeply mistaken. Any mature power should not worry about who gets to mediate. India did not have the leverage, al-



PRATAP BHAMBHANI

lance relationships, or, frankly, the diplomatic ability to mediate. India and the world should welcome any mediation that achieves a lasting peace. So, credit to Pakistan, Qatar, Oman, whoever gets the world to where it needs to be. Even on India and Pakistan, we have misplaced pride. The sensible response is not to deny mediation, but to judge the mediator by results. If Pakistan moves toward genuine peace, on terms that are acceptable to us, the mediator should be welcomed. This is a tall order. But the formal obsession with denying "mediation" has cost us. In a nutshell, the problem with India's diagnosis of its irrelevance is that it is asking the wrong question.

We need to understand a basic fact about the current global situation. We have been consistently framing every war — Ukraine, Gaza, Iran — as if these were bilateral or limited regional affairs. There is a sense in which, of course, they are not our wars. But collectively, these wars have brought the world to unprecedented risks. None of these are regional conflicts. All of them increase the likelihood of catastrophic global economic or military risk. All of them, in their own way, represent the most massive rolling back of norms that underpin any viable international order: constraints on the use of force, respect for sovereignty, and minimal credibility for international law.

Now that there is a ceasefire, the task for global diplomacy is not just to ensure that the ceasefire holds. It is to ask whether a measure of international order and norms can be restored

tury. But other things are moving the world to greater catastrophic risks. Drones have become an extraordinary technology for self-defence. But unregulated, they might proliferate violence more effectively than states can control them. We have already seen effects in Sudan and Yemen, as they have been used by states that are our closest friends. The Iran war has normalised another precedent: The legitimisation of political assassination as an instrument of statecraft. Even if the ceasefire holds in Iran, we are lowering the barriers against systematic global violence.

Where does India come into this? First of all, we spoke with forked tongues about our own position. We were not, as they say, multi-aligned as we claimed to be. Iran is a complicated power in its region, often disruptive for states in the region, but also a victim of unrequited US attention and an important pillar of any conceivable regional balance. We politically embraced Israel with unrequited enthusiasm, the US, and later the UAE, and in doing so, put ourselves squarely on the side of political forces that were carpet bombing, literally, the international order. The problem was not these relationships; India has stakes in them. But the sense of being a supplicant in the face of the US, and too cowardly to name any crime in the international order, is palpably visible for the world to see. The problem is that we are seen as incapable of de-

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

Static Linkages

- Article 2(4), UN Charter prohibits use of force against territorial integrity or political independence of states.
- Article 51, UN Charter recognizes the inherent right of self-defence.
- Chapter VI, UN Charter provides for peaceful settlement of disputes.
- Sovereignty and non-intervention are fundamental principles of international law.
- Strait of Hormuz is a critical global oil transit chokepoint.
- Strategic Autonomy is a key pillar of India's foreign policy.
- Balance of Power remains an important concept in international relations.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Prevents immediate escalation in West Asia.
- Reduces risks to global energy markets.
- Opens space for diplomatic engagement.
- Demonstrates importance of mediation and dialogue.

Concerns

- Does not address underlying geopolitical rivalries.
- Proxy conflicts may continue.
- Weakens norms against use of force.
- Increasing drone warfare creates new security challenges.
- Erosion of sovereignty and international law.
- Growing fragmentation of the rules-based order.

Implications for India

- Energy security concerns due to dependence on West Asian oil.
- Safety of Indian diaspora in the region.
- Need to secure maritime trade routes.
- Importance of maintaining strategic autonomy.
- Greater role in supporting a stable multipolar order.

Way Forward

- Strengthen commitment to international law and UN Charter principles.
- Promote dialogue-based conflict resolution.
- Support freedom of navigation and maritime security.
- Develop international norms on drone warfare.
- Enhance India's role in multilateral diplomacy.
- Diversify energy sources and strategic reserves.
- Advocate reform and strengthening of global governance institutions.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The recent Iran-US ceasefire framework followed a period of military confrontation involving Iran, the United States and Israel.
- The agreement is viewed as a temporary ceasefire arrangement, not a comprehensive peace settlement.
- The conflict highlighted concerns regarding:
 - Sovereignty and territorial integrity.
 - Use of force in international relations.
 - Political assassinations and targeted strikes.
 - Growing use of drones and proxy warfare.
 - Weakening of international law and multilateral institutions.
- The developments have implications for India's strategic autonomy, energy security and foreign policy.

Key Points

- Ceasefire postpones rather than resolves core disputes between Iran and the US.
- Regional mediators such as Qatar and Oman played important diplomatic roles.
- Conflict exposed vulnerabilities in:
 - Global energy supply chains.
 - Maritime security in the Strait of Hormuz.
 - Rules-based international order.
- Increasing use of:
 - Drones.
 - Proxy groups.
 - Precision-targeted military operations.
- Raises concerns about normalization of:
 - Political assassinations.
 - Pre-emptive military strikes.
 - Unilateral use of force.
- India adopted a cautious approach balancing ties with:
 - Iran.
 - Israel.
 - United States.
 - Gulf countries.

Indian cities need to rethink water future

THE HEAT wave in several parts of the country has been aggravated by severe water shortage, driven by a groundwater crisis and falling reservoir levels. The emergency has shone a light on the challenges faced by cities, including metros such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, and Chennai. The conventional explanation points to weather vagaries. Rising temperatures increase evaporation losses. However, climate change alone cannot explain why large parts of the country are parched. NITI Aayog's Composite Water Management Index (CWMI) had warned of a dire situation in 2018. While the timelines estimated in the report may not have been accurate, the CWMI's warning — Indian cities are living beyond their hydrological means — should have prompted a course correction. Since then, several other studies, including the Jal Shakti Ministry's latest Dynamic Groundwater Resources Assessment, have flagged the oversaturation of aquifers. The problem, however, is that municipal and state-level authorities treat every crisis as an isolated event and very little has been done to address the structural reasons for water shortfall during the dry season.

Urban India's inefficiency in water use stems from dilapidated distribution networks, inadequate metering, and poor municipal governance. Not treating wastewater and underharvesting of rainwater prevent the optimum use of scarce resources. In 2016, the Mihir Shah Committee had pointed out that "the focus of water policy in independent India had been on augmenting supplies with little attention being paid to the demand-side management of water". This policy direction did play a major role in meeting food-security imperatives, but as the Shah Committee pointed out, there has been little emphasis on institutional innovations in the water sector. Since then, programmes such as the Atal Bhujal Yojana have taken early steps to encourage efficient use of water in agriculture. However, demand-side management also requires scientific analyses of water use at the household and industrial level, especially to prevent overexploitation by the well-heeled.

In recent years, a few cities have begun to supplement grey infrastructure — drains and pipes — with nature-based solutions. Lake restoration projects, such as those in Mumbai and Bengaluru, are welcome endeavours. However, these need to be taken up at scale to have a meaningful impact. The country still lacks a concerted policy like China's Sponge City project that uses urban landscapes and green infrastructure, such as permeable pavements, to promote natural retention of rainwater. The recent crisis should occasion conversations on such methods — cities that get flooded during monsoons shouldn't be parched in summers.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Heatwave conditions have intensified water scarcity across Indian cities.
- Major urban centres such as Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Chennai are facing severe water stress.
- The crisis reflects structural deficiencies in urban water management rather than climate change alone.
- The 2018 Composite Water Management Index (CWMI) by NITI Aayog warned about unsustainable water use in Indian cities.
- Dynamic Groundwater Resources Assessment reports continued groundwater over-exploitation.

Key Points

Causes

- Excessive groundwater extraction.
- Rapid urbanization and rising demand.
- Leakages in distribution networks.
- Poor wastewater treatment and reuse.
- Inadequate rainwater harvesting.
- Encroachment of lakes, wetlands, and drainage channels.
- Climate variability and heatwaves.

Important Reports

- Composite Water Management Index (CWMI), 2018 Assessed water resource management performance of States.
- Highlighted urban water stress.

- Dynamic Groundwater Resources Assessment Conducted by Ministry of Jal Shakti.
- Evaluates groundwater recharge and extraction levels.

Government Initiatives

- Atal Bhujal Yojana.
- Jal Jeevan Mission.
- AMRUT.
- Catch the Rain Campaign.

International Best Practice

- China's Sponge City Model Permeable pavements.
- Urban wetlands.
- Green infrastructure.
- Rainwater retention and groundwater recharge.

Static Linkages

- Entry 17, State List – Water.
- Entry 56, Union List – Inter-State rivers.
- Article 21 – Right to clean water (Judicial interpretation).
- Aquifer.
- Groundwater recharge.
- Watershed management.
- Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM).
- Wetland ecosystem services.

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Urban water demand exceeds sustainable supply.
- Groundwater extraction surpasses recharge rates.
- Weak municipal governance.
- Fragmented institutional framework.
- Loss of urban wetlands and lakes.
- Low wastewater recycling rates.

Significance

- Water security is essential for economic growth.
- Sustainable cities require resilient water systems.
- Nature-based solutions can reduce both floods and droughts.
- Demand-side management is becoming critical.

Way Forward

- Shift towards demand-side water management.
- Universal water metering.
- Promote wastewater recycling and reuse.
- Scale up rainwater harvesting.
- Restore urban lakes and wetlands.
- Prepare city-level water budgets.
- Strengthen groundwater governance.
- Adopt Sponge City-type urban planning.
- Improve municipal capacity and accountability.