DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

Modi meets Trump, raises safety of Indian sailors

PM Modi commends President Trump for his efforts to restore peace in the West Asia region

The Prime Minister stresses the importance of keeping the Strait of Hormuz open for trade

Trump praises Modi, says U.S. and India are 'very close' to finalising a trade agreement

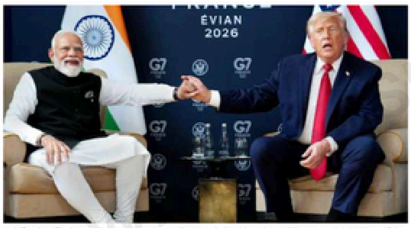
Sriram Lakshman
LONDON

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday raised the issue, in broad terms, of the safety of seafarers with U.S. President Trump during their bilateral meeting in Evian, France, on the fringes of the G7 Summit.

"Mr. President, you are aware across the world, Indian seafarers in the hundreds of thousands are working and performing their duties across global maritime trade routes, including the Strait of Hormuz, and their safety is of utmost importance to us," Mr. Modi said, referring to the killing of three Indian seafarers in a U.S. strike last week off Oman coast.

"I'm confident that the issue of seafarers will receive the highest priority during the implementation of this agreement," Mr. Modi said. The Prime Minister "commended" Mr. Trump for his efforts to restore peace in West Asia and said he was confident this would lead to a long-term peace in the region. The Prime Minister told the President that they both agreed that keeping the Strait of Hormuz open was vital for the world economy.

Mr. Trump was asked by a pressperson if he had words of condolence for the grieving families of the sailors. "I heard about that. It is a rough profession. There is no question about it," he said, adding, "this has been happening throughout time, but we work together. We love all of those people."



Holding hands: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with U.S. President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the G7 meet in France on Wednesday. AP

Mr. Trump said Iran would not have a nuclear weapon and that Mr. Modi felt "very strongly" about that as well. Mr. Trump said the U.S. and India were "very close" to finalising a trade deal, calling Mr. Modi a "very tough" negotiator. The two countries announced the finalisation of a deal in February this year but it is yet to be signed, held up partly over changes to U.S. tariff policies and some gaps in the finer details.

The President also dismissed perceptions that the India-U.S. relationship was fraying, saying that as long as he was President, India would have a "great friend" in the White House. He lavished praise on Mr. Modi and their friendship, painting a picture at odds with the mounting challenges the ties have had to weather in recent times, including a protracted trade negotiation, restrictions on skilled migration, death of Indian sailors, and a closeness with the Pakistan government that has ruffled feathers in New Delhi.

"He's the most beautiful looking man. He looks so nice. He's like an angel, but actually he's a killer," Mr. Trump said, praising Mr. Modi. "He's as tough as they come, but he looks so good. So he gets you by surprise," he added.

Mr. Trump said he appreciated Mr. Modi (i.e., India) investing in the U.S.

Asked to speak on the India-U.S. defence relationship, Mr. Trump said that though they did not have a contract, if India were to be attacked "we would be there to help", stretching out his hand to hold Mr. Modi's.

Mr. Trump suggested he would go to India at some point in the future.

Following the meeting, Mr. Modi posted on social media saying the two sides had reviewed U.S.-India cooperation in trade, energy, defence, technology and people-to-people ties.

- Stability of global supply chains.
- Maritime trade and shipping interests.

India–U.S. Dimension

- Cooperation in:
  - Maritime security
  - Defence
  - Energy
  - Trade
  - Critical technologies
- Shared interest in ensuring freedom of navigation and stability in West Asia.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- During the G7 Summit (Evian, France), Prime Minister Narendra Modi met U.S. President Donald Trump.
- India raised concerns regarding the safety of Indian seafarers working in the Gulf region and the Strait of Hormuz.
- The issue gained attention after the death of three Indian sailors in a U.S. strike off the Oman coast.
- Both leaders emphasized the importance of keeping the Strait of Hormuz open for global trade and energy flows.
- Discussions also covered India-U.S. trade negotiations, defence cooperation, regional security, and stability in West Asia.

Key Points

Indian Seafarers

- India is among the largest suppliers of seafarers globally.
- More than 3 lakh Indian seafarers are employed on international merchant vessels.
- Indian seafarers constitute nearly 10% of the global maritime workforce.
- Their safety has become an important component of India's foreign policy and diaspora protection efforts.

Strait of Hormuz

- Located between Iran and Oman.
- Connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- One of the world's most important maritime chokepoints.
- Around one-fifth of global oil consumption passes through the strait.
- Critical for India's crude oil and LNG imports.

Significance for India

- Energy security.
- Safety of Indian diaspora in West Asia.
- Security of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).

Static Linkages

- Strait of Hormuz is a major global maritime chokepoint.
- UNCLOS provides for transit passage through international straits.
- Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) are critical for international trade.
- Energy security is a component of national security.
- Protection of citizens abroad is a key responsibility of the State.
- Maritime security forms an important pillar of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).

Critical Analysis

Opportunities

- Strengthens India's role as a stakeholder in maritime security.
- Enhances India-U.S. strategic cooperation.
- Supports uninterrupted global energy supplies.
- Protects Indian seafarers and diaspora interests.

Challenges

- Rising instability in West Asia.
- Vulnerability of Indian energy imports.
- Threats to commercial shipping.
- Dependence on maritime chokepoints.
- Balancing relations with the U.S., Iran, Israel, and Gulf countries.

Way Forward

- Diversify energy import sources.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).
- Strengthen maritime domain awareness.
- Enhance naval presence in critical sea lanes.
- Improve crisis-response mechanisms for Indian seafarers.
- Deepen maritime cooperation with Gulf countries and Indian Ocean partners.
- Promote freedom of navigation under international law.

Framework deal outlines Tehran's pledge on nuclear weapons, $300-bn U.S. relief

Stanly Johny

The United States has agreed to facilitate the release of frozen Iranian assets, contingent on progress in negotiations towards a final agreement, and create a plan for Iran's economic development, involving $300 billion, according to a leaked text of the 14-point framework agreement reached between Tehran and Washington.

The draft, published by Saudi Arabia's *Al Arabiya* network and the Bloomberg news agency, states that Iran has pledged never to produce nuclear weapons. On its part, the U.S. will lift sanctions on the sale of Iranian crude oil, petrochemical products, and financial services, including banking, during the negotiation period.

The memorandum of understanding is expected to be signed in Geneva on Friday. The draft stated that Iran has pledged never to produce nuclear weapons and, pending a final agreement, maintain a status quo on its nuclear programme. However, the *AP* reported later that unnamed U.S. officials read out the draft to presspersons, according to which Iran has agreed to downblend (dilute) its highly enriched uranium under the supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

The draft, which has not been released officially, calls for an "immediate and permanent end to the war on all fronts, including Lebanon" – a key Iranian demand.

While the U.S. and Iran announced a ceasefire on April 8 after 40 days of bombing, Lebanon, where Israel occupies parts of the country, has remained a flashpoint. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that his troops would not withdraw from Lebanon. Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shia group that has close ties with Iran, has also said it will continue to resist Israel's military occupation.

Under the agreement, the U.S. and Iran have pledged to "respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs".

The U.S. also commits itself to lifting all sanctions against Iran, both primary and secondary, as part of a final agreement.

After launching the war on February 28, U.S. President Donald Trump had indirectly called for regime change in Tehran, asking Iranians to take over their institutions and telling them that they had a "once-in-a-generation opportunity" on their hands. After announcing the MoU on June 15, Mr. Trump said he did not believe in regime change. But on Wednesday, Mr. Trump said that the MoU is only a preliminary agreement, adding that if Iran did not honour its obligations, he would resume the war.

Once the MoU is signed, Iran and the U.S. will start negotiations on core issues.

Strait to reopen

The U.S. will immediately lift its naval blockade and Iran will allow traffic through the Strait of Hormuz to reach pre-war volumes within 30 days, "taking into account the need for the removal of technical obstacles and the neutralization of mines by Iran".

Mr. Trump has said that traffic through the Strait will be toll-free. According to Iran's Foreign Ministry, however, Tehran will not impose a toll but ships will have to pay a fee to Iran's newly created Persian Gulf Strait Authority, for environmental upkeep and other services.

"Iran reiterates that it will never produce nuclear weapons. Iran and the U.S. have agreed that the fate of enriched material and the fate of all other mutually agreed nuclear-related issues, including Iran's nuclear needs, will be adequately addressed in a final agreement," the leaked text says.

Iran has hundreds of kilograms of highly enriched uranium, which the U.S. and Israel want to take out of the country and dilute or destroy. Tehran has also maintained that nuclear enrichment is a right which it will not surrender, while Mr. Trump has called for zero enrichment on Iranian soil. These contentious issues will be discussed in the next phase.

Peace process

The 14-point framework is expected to be signed in Geneva tomorrow

U.S. PLEDGES
- Lifting sanctions on Iran's products and services, including crude and banking
- Immediate lifting of naval blockade
- Withdrawing forces from 'surrounding areas'

IRAN PLEDGES
- Restoring pre-war traffic through Strait of Hormuz
- Never produce nuclear weapons

MORE REPORTS
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KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The U.S. and Iran reached a 14-point framework MoU to end hostilities and initiate negotiations for a comprehensive agreement.
- The agreement proposes:
  - Release of frozen Iranian assets.
  - Gradual lifting of sanctions on Iranian oil, petrochemicals, and banking sectors.
  - Commitment by Iran not to develop nuclear weapons.
- The MoU also envisages reopening the Strait of Hormuz and restoring maritime trade.

Key Points

Nuclear Issue

- Iran reiterates that it will never produce nuclear weapons.
- Iran may dilute (downblend) highly enriched uranium under supervision of the International Atomic Energy Agency.
- Core dispute remains:
  - Iran's right to uranium enrichment.
  - U.S. demand for restrictions on enrichment.

Sanctions Relief

- U.S. to facilitate:
  - Release of frozen Iranian assets.
  - Relaxation of sanctions on oil exports.
  - Easing restrictions on banking and financial services.
- Final removal of sanctions linked to successful completion of negotiations.

Strait of Hormuz

- Connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman.
- Handles nearly 20% of global petroleum trade.
- Reopening is crucial for:
  - Global energy security.
  - Stability of crude oil prices.
  - India's energy imports.

Regional Security

- Calls for permanent cessation of hostilities across multiple fronts, including Lebanon.
- Differences continue regarding:
  - Israeli military presence in Lebanon.
  - Activities of Hezbollah.

Economic Significance

- Proposed economic development framework reportedly worth $300 billion.
- Restoration of Iranian oil exports may increase global crude supply and moderate oil prices.

Static Linkages

- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT):
  - Iran is a member.
  - Nuclear Weapon States under NPT: U.S., Russia, U.K., France, China.
- IAEA safeguards and nuclear verification mechanisms.
- Strategic maritime chokepoints:
  - Strait of Hormuz.
  - Bab-el-Mandeb.
  - Malacca Strait.
- Economic sanctions as foreign policy tools.
- Energy security and crude oil import dependence.

Why This News Matters for India?

- India imports a significant share of crude oil from West Asia.
- Stability in the Strait of Hormuz directly affects:
  - Energy security.
  - Inflation.
  - Current Account Deficit (CAD).
- Reduced tensions improve maritime trade and regional stability.

Exam Takeaway

Remember

- IAEA → Nuclear watchdog.
- NPT → Prevents spread of nuclear weapons.
- Strait of Hormuz → World's most important oil transit chokepoint.
- Iran's Position → Supports peaceful nuclear enrichment.
- U.S. Position → Prevent nuclear weapon capability.

Telegram was warned about misuse before blanket ban, says NTA chief

Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

Locked out: The Electronics and Information Technology Ministry blocked nation-wide access to Telegram until June 22. GETTY IMAGES

Representatives of the messaging app Telegram were called in for meetings "at the highest levels", and warned about the misuse of the app's features that facilitate "paper leak frauds" before a blanket ban was issued, Abhishek Singh, Director-General of the National Testing Agency (NTA), told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

Mr. Singh said the primary motive behind government intervention was to halt the spread of engineered fake leaks that can spread panic among the students ahead of the National Entrance-Cum-Eligibility Test (NEET) re-test scheduled for Sunday.

"The government had previously approached Telegram regarding the misuse of two specific features, including making edited timestamps visible in Telegram groups and addressing the issue of lack of stringent naming filters for its groups. However, Telegram did not alter its system then," Mr. Singh said.

The NTA was concerned about the *modus operandi* used by bad actors on Telegram to trigger mass panic by fabricating evidence of question paper leaks. Cheating syndicates have been systematically exploiting a specific loophole in Telegram's group and channel synchronisation features.

For instance, a bad actor can create a public Telegram channel and link it to an associated group. Days before an exam, the administrator can upload a random PDF file on the channel, name it provocatively such as "NEET Question Paper Leaked". The day after the actual exam, the operator then can use Telegram's edit feature to replace the dummy PDF with the actual question paper. While the post inside the channel shows an 'edited' tag, the linked group retains the timestamp of the original post. This creates a highly convincing illusion that the actual question paper was available on the platform before the exam began, sparking panic.

"After the ban, Telegram founder Pavel Durov said on X that they are making the 'edited' label more visible to prevent backdating scams. However, this change is still not visible on the app," Mr. Singh said. "Why can't Telegram simply fix its metadata so that timestamp changes are accurately reflected in linked group chats," he asked.

Pointing out that Telegram allows creation of alleged criminal groups with questionable names such as "Paper Leak NEET Mafia", Mr. Singh said the app has to "adhere to norms".

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The National Testing Agency (NTA) raised concerns over the misuse of Telegram in spreading alleged question paper leak claims ahead of the NEET re-test.
- The Government reportedly engaged with Telegram regarding certain platform features that could be exploited to create a false impression of question paper leaks.
- The issue has highlighted concerns regarding digital misinformation, intermediary liability, cyber security, and examination integrity.

Key Points

- NTA identified a method whereby:
  - A file is uploaded before an examination.
  - The file is later edited/replaced after the examination.
  - Original timestamps may create an impression that the actual question paper was available before the exam.
- Such practices can:
  - Generate panic among students.
  - Undermine public confidence in examinations.
  - Spread misinformation through social media networks.
- The controversy has renewed debate over:
  - Platform accountability.
  - Intermediary obligations.
  - Regulation of digital platforms.
  - Cyber-enabled fraud.

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(a): Freedom of Speech and Expression.
- Article 19(2): Reasonable restrictions in the interests of sovereignty, security, public order, decency, morality, etc.
  - Information Technology Act, 2000Section 79: Safe Harbour Protection for intermediaries.
  - Safe harbour is conditional upon due diligence.
  - CERT-InNational agency for cyber incident response.
  - Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023Strengthens digital governance ecosystem.
  - Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024Enacted to curb examination malpractices, paper leaks, and organised cheating.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Protects credibility of national examinations.
- Prevents spread of misinformation.
- Strengthens trust in public institutions.
- Highlights need for responsible digital platforms.

Concerns

- Balancing regulation with freedom of expression.
- Challenges in regulating encrypted platforms.
- Determining intermediary liability.
- Risk of over-regulation affecting legitimate users.

Stakeholders

- Students and aspirants.
- NTA and examination bodies.
- Digital intermediaries.
- Law enforcement agencies.
- Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY).

Way Forward

- Strengthen implementation of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024.
- Improve coordination among NTA, CERT-In and law enforcement agencies.
- Enhance digital forensic capabilities.
- Mandate greater transparency in edited digital content.
- Strengthen intermediary due diligence requirements.
- Promote digital literacy to identify misinformation.
- Develop real-time monitoring mechanisms during major examinations.

Health data must drive action, not just headlines

There is an unsettling paradox in the release of health survey data in India. Survey findings often end up doing exactly the reverse of what they should. They often highlight what we already know, do not take a sufficiently serious view of what has not improved, and rarely lead to immediate programmatic action. The discussion that follows is often ritualistic: the government highlights achievements, newspapers amplify numbers, academics wait for raw data to analyse, and business and industry identify market opportunities.

This seems to be the case with the three recently released health-linked surveys: the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6), the National Statistical Office (NSO) 80th Round Household Consumption on Health and the National Health Accounts Estimates for India 2022-23.

All three should have offered a moment of national stocktaking. Instead, the two reports on health expenses barely received any attention, while the third, the NFHS-6, and its use by key stakeholders, tells a familiar story. In government communication, improvements have been selected and celebrated. Achievements must, of course, be acknowledged. However, the real value of such surveys is not in confirming what has worked, but in showing where programmes remain weak and old strategies are no longer sufficient.

The business of disease

Industry and business groups have flagged rising health challenges reported in NFHS-6. Rising obesity becomes an argument for weight-loss products, apps, gyms, diagnostics and drugs. Rising diabetes becomes an opportunity for monitoring devices, test packages and private clinics. Rising non-communicable diseases become the market case for more screening, testing and medicalisation. Where public health messaging is weak and private health markets are aggressive, every survey finding can become a business prospect.

The one positive development so far has been the extensive coverage in the print media, which has flagged what matters to citizens: the rise of obesity, diabetes, hypertension and other non-communicable diseases (NCD). Yet, much of this was already known. Obesity and other NCDs have moved from urban and affluent groups to all social and economic groups. The new data merely put fresh numbers to an old warning.

What is grossly missing is critical reflection and policy dialogue around these findings. This should worry us. A health survey is not meant to be a national reminder of familiar problems but an instrument of course correction. If anaemia has not improved, the response cannot be another paragraph in a report. If out-of-pocket expenditure remains high, the answer cannot be only a headline on a declining percentage share. If obesity is rising among children, the response cannot be a few articles followed by silence.

Chandrakant Lahariya

Practising physician in preventive and cardio-metabolic medicine and specialist in health policy. He has worked with the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN system for nearly 18 years

Health data should guide accountability, budgets and programme reform

The NFHS-6 also carries a temporal problem. Its data were collected during 2023-24, but the findings entered public debate in mid-2026. In a political system skilled at both claiming credit and avoiding blame, this lag is convenient. A government can celebrate positive indicators as proof of current policy success while dismissing uncomfortable findings as "old data", influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic, past administrative disruptions or conditions that have since improved. The survey then becomes less a compass and more a weapon. This is unfair to the survey and unhelpful to policymaking.

Academicians and public health researchers play a crucial role in interpreting large-scale survey data beyond official reports. In India, however, such analysis is often delayed because raw data are released late. By the time peer-reviewed studies appear, three to five years may have passed since data collection. Policymakers can then dismiss critical findings as outdated and no longer relevant. As a result, data lose their impact: when reports are released, raw data are unavailable for scrutiny; when analysis finally arrives, the opportunity for policy action has often passed.

From data to action

There is a need to reflect on how India continues to miss these opportunities. Data improve health outcomes only when they are linked to timely and relevant policy decisions. Countries that make effective use of health data do not wait years for perfect academic papers or definitive solutions. Instead, they have robust systems and empowered institutions that generate rapid policy briefs, identify lagging districts and regions, conduct regular reviews, compare performance, allocate resources efficiently and adapt programmes as needed. The translation of data into action is not merely a slogan; it is a discipline. India needs to cultivate that discipline if it is to realise the full value of the vast amounts of health data it collects.

First, every major national health survey should be followed, within 30 to 45 days, by a national and State-level action note jointly prepared by the government and independent academic institutions. The note should candidly identify what has improved, what has remained stagnant and what has deteriorated. Each finding should be linked to a specific programme and a clearly accountable authority. If child nutrition has stagnated, the nutrition programme must respond. If hypertension detection remains inadequate, the primary health-care system must respond. If out-of-pocket expenditure on medicines remains high, the drug procurement system must respond. Data should not merely describe problems; they should trigger accountability and corrective action.

Second, there should be State-level health data review meetings, not ceremonial events but working sessions. Health Secretaries, Finance Departments, District officials, public health experts, civil society representatives, other key stakeholders and independent subject experts should examine the findings together. The question should not be, "What can we highlight?" It should be, "What must we change?"

Third, India needs systems for the optimal and timely use of survey data. It has started developing the Integrated Health Information Platform (IHIP), but that is primarily for real-time data. Survey data, Health Management Information System (HMIS) data and IHIP data must be combined to generate analytical information. Fragmented data produce fragmented policy.

Fourth, primary data and source files from surveys should be made available early so that independent researchers and public health institutions can produce quick analysis. There is no reason to wait years for serious interpretation. Data should not sit like a guarded file. They should be available as a public good.

Fifth, findings should influence budgetary allocation. If a survey shows rising NCDs, primary care budgets must reflect the need for NCD prevention and treatment. If households are spending heavily on medicines, public facilities must strengthen essential drug availability. If obesity is rising in children, school health, food regulation and urban planning must respond. Data without budgetary consequence are merely information.

Looking ahead

Economist Aaron Levenstein said in 1951 that "statistics are like bikinis. What they reveal is suggestive, but what they conceal is vital". Health data should be like an x-ray. They are useful only when interpreted correctly, discussed honestly and followed by policy actions. Data and statistics are only as useful as their interpretation; interpretation is only as useful as the action it produces. The next time survey findings are released, the real question should not be what the numbers show. The real question should be: what will change in programmes in a month's time, in six months and in a year? Alongside this, India definitely needs more and timely health data. However, what we need even more is accountability.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Three major health-related reports were recently released:
  - National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6), 2023-24
  - NSO 80th Round: Household Consumption Expenditure on Health
  - National Health Accounts (NHA) Estimates 2022-23
- The surveys indicate:
  - Rising burden of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) such as obesity, diabetes and hypertension.
  - Persistently high Out-of-Pocket Expenditure (OOPE) on healthcare.
  - Limited improvement in anaemia and nutrition indicators.
- Experts argue that health surveys often generate discussion but fail to translate into timely policy reforms and budgetary action.

Key Findings

NFHS-6

- Provides data on:
  - Fertility
  - Maternal and Child Health
  - Nutrition
  - Anaemia
  - NCDs
  - Women's empowerment

Major Health Trends

- Obesity rising across rural and urban India.
- Diabetes and hypertension increasing beyond affluent populations.
- Childhood obesity emerging as a public health concern.
- Anaemia continues to remain a major challenge.

Health Financing

- OOPE remains high despite expansion of public health schemes.
- Medicines constitute a major share of household health expenditure.
- Need for strengthening public procurement and availability of essential drugs.

Data Governance Issues

- Significant lag between data collection and policy action.
- Delayed release of raw datasets limits independent research.
- Lack of integration between:
  - HMIS
  - IHIP
  - NFHS and other survey databases.

Static Points

- Article 47: Duty of the State to improve nutrition, standard of living and public health.
- Health: Entry 6, State List (Seventh Schedule).
- Universal Health Coverage (UHC) is a key target under SDG-3.
- NCDs account for nearly two-thirds of deaths in India.
- Preventive healthcare is a core component of primary healthcare.
- Evidence-based policymaking is essential for good governance.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- NFHS provides district-level health indicators.
- Helps monitor SDGs and national health targets.
- Supports evidence-based policy formulation.
- Identifies regional and socio-economic disparities.

Concerns

- Delay in release reduces policy relevance.
- Excessive focus on positive indicators.
- Rising NCD burden not adequately reflected in health budgets.
- Fragmented health information systems.
- Weak accountability for poor-performing indicators.
- Persistent OOPE despite public health interventions.

Way Forward

- Release survey datasets within a fixed timeline.
- Prepare Centre and State-level action plans within 30–45 days of survey publication.
- Integrate NFHS, HMIS and IHIP databases.
- Strengthen primary healthcare and NCD prevention.
- Link survey findings with budget allocations.
- Improve availability of free essential medicines.
- Institutionalize district-level health data reviews.
- Promote evidence-based and outcome-oriented governance.

Rubio's remarks and the limits of strategic empathy

A day after the United States and Iran struck an interim deal on June 14, 2026, to end the war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz, it remains unclear whether the agreement will be implemented at all. Not only have details not been made public, but negotiators have, by all accounts, pushed the difficult issues down the road. There is no mention in the interim agreement of Iran's nuclear programme, its missile programme, or even ending Tehran's support for regional groups. Iran's top officials maintain that a final deal for a lasting truce is yet to take shape.

Abhijit Singh

Retired naval officer and former Head of the Maritime Policy Initiative at the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), New Delhi

Washington's troubling response

These developments, though significant, are unlikely to make headlines in India, where policymakers and the public are still smarting over the deaths of three Indian sailors in a U.S. strike in the Strait of Hormuz on June 10.

Particularly galling are the remarks by the U.S. Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, who told External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar last week that "violations of the American blockade and the illicit transport of Iranian oil would not be tolerated and that commercial vessels must immediately comply with US forces". There was reportedly no expression of condolence for the deaths of the sailors, nor any indication that the incident would prompt a broader reassessment of the risks now confronting civilian shipping in the Gulf.

The implication was unmistakable: Washington does not view the episode principally as a humanitarian tragedy requiring accountability, but as a compliance problem arising from the failure of merchant vessels to obey American directives.

That framing has implications for New Delhi. It suggests that for Washington, the safety of neutral shipping and the interests of partner countries during a conflict are secondary to the enforcement of U.S. strategic objectives.

The U.S. Secretary of State's comments reveal the human cost of American strategic objectives

Merchant vessels are expected simply to comply with American instructions; should they become collateral victims of the increasingly militarised environment in the Strait of Hormuz, the costs are expected to be borne by the countries that own the ships and by the sailors who crew them.

Indian sailors stand alone

For a nation such as India, whose economic interests are deeply tied to the free flow of commerce through the Strait of Hormuz and whose citizens make up a significant share of the global maritime workforce, this should be unacceptable. Great power competition inevitably imposes costs on third parties with little say in the decisions that create or sustain crises. But those costs cannot simply be externalised onto partner countries and civilian mariners in the expectation that they will quietly acquiesce.

India's predicament is particularly stark because it supplies roughly a fifth of the world's maritime workforce but possesses few realistic means of ensuring the safety of its seafarers. The Indian Navy's escort operations in the Gulf are valuable but necessarily limited. They cannot protect the more than 18,000 Indian sailors in the region, many of whom serve aboard vessels registered under flags of convenience such as Palau, Guinea-Bissau and the Marshall Islands. Such flags offer little meaningful diplomatic protection in times of crisis. When things go wrong, Indian sailors are often left effectively stateless from a protection standpoint. The three deaths aboard the *MT Settebello* have exposed a structural vulnerability that New Delhi has long recognised but never adequately addressed.

Whether or not this will fundamentally alter the trajectory of India-U.S. relations is hard to say. The bilateral relationship possesses too many load-bearing elements – defence cooperation, critical technologies, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad (Australia, India, Japan, U.S.) – for one incident to trigger a rupture. Even so, Mr. Rubio's remarks seem to have done real damage at the level of trust and political optics. New Delhi's summoning of the U.S. Chargé d'Affaires twice within three days last week signals genuine anger. Many in India view Washington's response not as an aberration but as evidence of a deeper pattern: when the interests of partner states conflict with American strategic objectives, the U.S. invariably chooses itself.

Seeking accountability and answers

From an Indian standpoint, accountability for the incident has yet to be established. India must push for a credible, independent fact-finding investigation into the circumstances surrounding the strike. Beyond bilateral protest, New Delhi should consider taking the issue to multilateral forums, including the International Maritime Organization and consultations with other crewing and flag states. A lone démarche simply does not carry the weight of a coordinated international position. Importantly, Indian officials must articulate a principled and consistent position on maritime norms, one that applies irrespective of how powerful the state violating them may be.

For the Narendra Modi government, this episode is about more than the tragic deaths of three Indian sailors. Mr. Rubio's remarks have inadvertently laid bare an uncomfortable truth about great-power partnerships: strategic empathy has limits. The United States may regard India as an indispensable partner in the Indo-Pacific, but it will not subordinate its priorities in the Gulf to Indian sensitivities. That is not a reason for New Delhi to distance itself from Washington. It is, however, a reminder that close partnerships do not eliminate divergences of interest. India must continue to engage the U.S. with clear eyes and defend its maritime interests without assuming that others will do so on its behalf.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Three Indian sailors were killed in a U.S. strike on MT Settebello in the Strait of Hormuz amid the Iran–U.S. conflict (June 2026).
- India expressed concern over the safety of Indian seafarers and summoned U.S. diplomatic officials.
- The U.S. and Iran announced an interim agreement (June 14, 2026) to de-escalate tensions and reopen the Strait of Hormuz.
- The incident highlights India's maritime security, energy security, and strategic autonomy concerns.

Key Points

- Strait of Hormuz is located between Iran and Oman.
- Connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.
- One of the world's most important oil transit chokepoints.
- A significant share of India's crude oil and LNG imports passes through this route.
- India is among the largest suppliers of global seafarers.
- Indian sailors often work on vessels registered under "Flags of Convenience" (FoC), limiting direct diplomatic protection during crises.
- The incident underscores vulnerabilities of civilian shipping during geopolitical conflicts.

Static Linkages

- UNCLOS (1982) provides the legal framework governing international maritime navigation.
- Transit Passage applies to straits used for international navigation.
- Freedom of Navigation is a key principle of international maritime law.
- International Maritime Organization (IMO) is the UN specialized agency for maritime safety and security.
- SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) is India's maritime vision.
- Indian Ocean Region (IOR) remains central to India's strategic and energy interests.
- Strategic maritime chokepoints:
  - Strait of Hormuz
  - Bab-el-Mandeb
  - Strait of Malacca
  - Suez Canal

Critical Analysis

Significance for India

- Highlights dependence on the Strait of Hormuz for energy imports.
- Raises concerns regarding safety of Indian seafarers abroad.
- Demonstrates risks arising from great-power conflicts.
- Reinforces need for secure Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).

Challenges

- Limited capability to protect Indian sailors on foreign-flagged vessels.
- Rising militarization of strategic waterways.
- Vulnerability of energy imports to geopolitical disruptions.
- Balancing India-U.S. strategic partnership with national interests.

Strategic Lesson

- Strategic partnerships do not eliminate divergence of interests.
- India must safeguard its maritime interests through independent capabilities and diplomacy.

Way Forward

- Seek an impartial investigation into attacks on civilian shipping.
- Strengthen maritime diplomacy through IMO and multilateral platforms.
- Enhance Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA).
- Expand naval escort and surveillance capabilities.
- Improve protection mechanisms for Indian seafarers.
- Diversify energy sources and supply routes.
- Uphold UNCLOS-based maritime order and freedom of navigation.
- Strengthen SAGAR and Indo-Pacific maritime cooperation.

Innovate or be eaten

India must realise the importance of innovating up to the frontier

There is no question that Indian professionals are capable of pathbreaking innovation. As evidenced by the strong representation of Indian and Indian-origin technology industry leaders, Indian executives have displayed extraordinary talent in both the managerial and technical work that goes into building and advancing complex businesses at the forefront of the global economy's most important engines. 'Bharat Innovates 2026', the event in Nice, France, supported by the Ministry of Education, has shown that many of these innovations are possible in India, and that patient incubation of startups in key strategic areas can lead to exceptional results that are competitive with the best-in-class globally. India's potential to be a global home for innovation is real, especially with the kind of middle power collaboration that French President Emmanuel Macron advocated for at the event. The innovation question is key to processing the aftermath of Anthropic's most powerful AI models, Claude Mythos and Fable, being banned for non-Americans, a move that has already affected some Indian entities and users.

Perhaps it is not possible to brute-force frontier AI or semiconductor technology, given the tens of billions of dollars even a single player requires to make incremental advances in these fields. Becoming an AI deployment superpower, as many tech policymakers advocate, may also be a pursuit of a losing battle; India, after all, is not alone in seeking knowledge economy efficiencies from AI. But the field of opportunities remains nonetheless vast: deep tech in areas such as space exploration, defence, and even material sciences remain an open contest. For India to pursue innovation, two ingredients are important: India must be a stable and attractive home for capital and talent. For the former, the swashbuckling rent-seeking of the successful must be reined in to keep innovators from dreading success on Indian soil; venture capital must be in a position to assess exploratory and cutting-edge pitches on the same footing as they do in other countries; and tax policies must be clear and predictable. To be an attractive home for talent, what is required is quite simple: the top talent must look forward to their future in India, instead of running into a dead end for their potential and the life they feel greener pastures may afford them. For this, investments in public goods such as clean air, abundant urban green spaces, and affordable and reliable public transport can go a long way. These are, after all, what returnees miss the most. Some of India's oldest and most stubborn problems are in the way of a truly innovative ecosystem. The good news is that these problems need political capital, not risk capital.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The 'Bharat Innovates 2026' event in France highlighted India's growing capabilities in deep-tech innovation and startup-led technological development.
- The event emphasized India's potential to emerge as a global innovation hub through collaboration among governments, academia, startups, and industry.
- The issue gained relevance amid restrictions on access to certain advanced foreign AI models, raising concerns regarding technological dependence and digital sovereignty.
- The discussion reinforces the need for India to strengthen indigenous capabilities in critical and emerging technologies.

Key Points

- India has emerged as the 3rd largest startup ecosystem globally.
- Key sectors with strategic potential:
  - Artificial Intelligence (AI)
  - Semiconductors
  - Quantum Technologies
  - Space Technology
  - Defence Technology
  - Advanced Materials
  - Biotechnology
- Innovation requires:
  - Stable regulatory framework
  - Predictable taxation
  - Availability of patient capital
  - Strong research ecosystem
  - Skilled human resources
- Major Government Initiatives:
  - Startup India
  - Digital India
  - Atmanirbhar Bharat
  - National Quantum Mission
  - IndiaAI Mission
  - Semicon India Programme
  - National Research Foundation (NRF)

Static Linkages

- Innovation is a key driver of long-term economic growth.
- Research and Development (R&D) expenditure is an important indicator of technological capability.
- Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) promote innovation and commercialization.
- Human capital formation is essential for knowledge-based economies.
- Strategic autonomy increasingly depends upon technological self-reliance.
- Industry–Academia collaboration is critical for innovation ecosystems.

Critical Analysis

Opportunities

- Reduces dependence on foreign technologies.
- Strengthens strategic autonomy.
- Promotes high-value employment.
- Improves global competitiveness.
- Supports defence and national security objectives.
- Enhances export potential in high-tech sectors.

Challenges

- Low R&D expenditure compared to major innovation economies.
- Limited private-sector investment in deep-tech.
- Brain drain of highly skilled talent.
- Weak industry-academia linkages.
- Regulatory and taxation uncertainties.
- Dependence on imported semiconductor and critical technology components.

Way Forward

- Increase public and private R&D expenditure.
- Strengthen implementation of the National Research Foundation.
- Expand deep-tech funding and venture capital support.
- Improve ease of doing business and regulatory certainty.
- Promote industry-academia-government collaboration.
- Develop world-class innovation clusters.
- Enhance urban infrastructure and quality of life to retain talent.
- Strengthen IPR ecosystem and technology transfer mechanisms.
- Accelerate indigenous capabilities in AI, semiconductors, quantum technology, and advanced manufacturing.

Step forward

The top court has given an economic value to unpaid domestic work

The Supreme Court's judgment in *Shishupal @Shish Ram vs Surjeet* by a Division Bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and N.K. Singh, is likely a landmark. The ruling originated as the Court revised compensation granted by the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT) for a road accident in 2001. The first MACT awarded the family of Reshma, the accident victim, ₹2.42 lakh, which the Punjab and Haryana High Court revised in 2024 to ₹8.43 lakh. But in its order, the Court revised it to ₹62.78 lakh after attaching a sum of ₹30,000 a month to Ms. Reshma's 'economic value', for the service she rendered as a homemaker. The ruling is not surprising. In *Lata Wadhwa* (2001), the Court valued a homemaker's services at a modest ₹3,000. In *Kirti vs Oriental Insurance* (2021), it said the economic value of a homemaker's work cannot be discounted simply because it is unpaid or performed by women. However, the 'official' value attached to that work has suffered from inconsistent quantification. The Bench's value of ₹30,000 a month is itself notional and a floor; it added that the floor must be hiked by 10% every three years and a woman's salary, where applicable, has to be added to the floor, in the context of MACT's claims. The judgment does not create a salary, wage entitlement, pension scheme or employment relationship for homemakers, and applies to compensation calculations in MACT cases only. That said, the now-normalised societal tendency to undervalue women's work means that any advance is valuable and will likely have ripple effects.

The connection between unpaid domestic labour and suppressed female labour force participation is a major theme in contemporary Indian labour economics. Now, for example, homemakers seeking maintenance under the Hindu Marriage Act, say, have judicial reasoning supporting the economic value of their domestic work. Rural women who "assist in sowing, harvesting, and cattle-tending", as the Court noted, can now invoke the Court's reasoning to pitch to have their labour, which is often treated as being incidental to household work, valued higher. The additive rule may encourage litigants to invoke similar reasoning in employment disputes *vis-à-vis* 'work from home' arrangements and domestic responsibilities. Future litigation may test whether male homemakers can claim equivalent treatment. Motor insurance is already a low-margin segment for many insurers, and a large increase in the average claim size – likely applied retrospectively as well – may force companies to reassess their risk models and render them more inclined to settle claims quickly in Lok Adalats. All said, the Shishupal judgment is a vital corrective to decades of economic erasure.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Supreme Court enhanced MACT compensation in a 2001 road accident case involving the death of a homemaker.
- Compensation increased from ₹8.43 lakh (Punjab & Haryana High Court) to ₹62.78 lakh.
- The Court assigned a notional income of ₹30,000 per month to a homemaker for compensation calculation.
- Judgment delivered by a Division Bench comprising Justice Sanjay Karol and Justice N. K. Singh.

Key Points

- Homemaker's unpaid domestic work has measurable economic value.
- ₹30,000/month fixed as the minimum notional value of homemaker services in MACT claims.
- Notional income to be enhanced by 10% every three years.
- If the homemaker had independent earnings, such income will be added separately.
- Applicable only to Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT) compensation calculations.
- Does not:
  - Create a salary/wage entitlement.
  - Establish employer-employee relationship.
  - Provide pension or social security benefits.

Important Judicial Evolution

Case - Observation

- Lata Wadhwa (2001) - Recognized economic contribution of homemakers; valued services at about ₹3,000/month
- Kirti v. Oriental Insurance (2021) - Homemaker's work cannot be undervalued merely because it is unpaid
- Shishupal @ Shish Ram v. Surjeet (2026) - Fixed ₹30,000/month benchmark for MACT compensation

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before Law.
- Article 15(3) – Special provisions for women.
- Article 38 – Social, economic and political justice.
- Article 39(a) – Adequate means of livelihood.
- Article 39(d) – Equal pay for equal work.
- Article 42 – Just and humane conditions of work.
- Preamble – Justice, Equality and Dignity.
- Concept of unpaid care economy.
- Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR).
- Time Use Survey conducted by NSO.

Why is the Judgment Important?

- Recognizes the economic contribution of unpaid domestic labour.
- Addresses historical undervaluation of women's work.
- Strengthens gender-sensitive interpretation of compensation laws.
- Provides a uniform benchmark for MACT cases.
- May influence future litigation relating to maintenance, divorce, and dependency claims.

Concerns

- ₹30,000 remains a judicial estimate, not an empirically determined wage.
- Limited applicability to motor accident compensation cases.
- Potential increase in insurance claim liabilities.
- Does not translate into direct economic rights for homemakers.

Way Forward

- Institutional recognition of unpaid care work through policy measures.
- Greater use of Time Use Survey data in policymaking.
- Gender-responsive budgeting.
- Strengthening social security measures for unpaid caregivers.
- Standardized compensation guidelines across tribunals.

For lasting peace, US & Iran have to look beyond their philosophies of negotiation

THAROORTHINK

BY SHASHI THAROOR

THE LONG-DRAWN-OUT impasse between Washington and Tehran, now finally (we hope!) ended, is frequently dissected through the lenses of realpolitik, regional rivalries, and nuclear politics. Analysts pointing to the technical mechanics of uranium enrichment, the labyrinth of secondary economic sanctions, or the shifting geopolitics of the Middle East are certainly not wrong. These structural disputes formed the visible bedrock of the stalemate. Yet, beneath the policy papers, the diplomats scurrying about and the intelligence briefings, lies a deeper, more insidious barrier to peace: A total, systemic collision of negotiating philosophies. Diplomacy has failed so far not just because the two sides disagree on the terms, but because they fundamentally disagree on what it means to negotiate.

This conceptual chasm is vividly illuminated by a fascinating, almost cinematic juxtaposition of two texts written by central protagonists of the Iran-US standoff: Donald Trump's *The Art of the Deal* (1987) and Abbas Araghchi's *The Power of Negotiation* (2014). Araghchi, a career diplomat who served as Iran's deputy foreign minister and chief nuclear negotiator during the landmark JCPOA talks, is now the foreign minister. He offers an intellectual framework that stands in diametrical opposition to the American populist-transactional model popularised by Trump. When these two texts are placed side by side, they expose an incompatibility of diplomatic DNA that explains why years of high-stakes engagement so often ended in mutual incomprehension.

The first major fault line runs between Trump's raw transactionalism and Araghchi's deeply ingrained institutionalism. In *The Art of the Deal*, negotiation is framed as a zero-sum game driven by personality, leverage, and hyperbole. For Trump, the individual negotiator is a maverick star, and established institutional frameworks — whether they are government departments, multilateral treaties, or international bodies — are treated not as assets but as irritating obstacles designed to stall a "great deal". The goal is a highly visible, unambiguous triumph that can be summarised on a balance sheet, a photo-op or a headline.

Araghchi, who holds a PhD in political thought, presents a radically different worldview. In *The Power of Negotiation*, diplomacy is treated as a systematic, scholarly discipline rooted in what he calls "smart power" — the precise blend of hard national capabilities and soft diplomatic skill. For Araghchi, the individual negotiator is never a lone wolf or a dealmaker looking for a personal win. He is the solemn representative of a state with millennia of civilisational history. This approach operates within strict, immutable principles of statecraft and strategic autonomy. Where the American model values flexibility and personal instinct, the Iranian model demands institutional discipline and adherence to long-term national grand strategy.

This institutional divide manifests practically in the clash between the mechanics of the bazaar and the psychology of Trump's "Big Play". Araghchi explicitly references the "bazaar-style" or "market-style" of negotiation — a time-honoured method defined by infinite patience, deliberate ambiguity, and incremental, exhausting haggling. In this framework, time is not an enemy to be beaten, but a potent ally to be weaponised. The bazaar mentality relies on running down the clock, using the cultural art of *taarof* (a complex system of ritualised politeness and deference) to mask unyielding positions and test the opponent's resolve. To the Iranian diplomat, if you wait long enough, the Western opponent's domestic electoral urgency and impatience will eventually become your leverage.

> This conceptual chasm is vividly illuminated by a fascinating, almost cinematic juxtaposition of two texts: Donald Trump's 'The Art of the Deal' (1987) and Abbas Araghchi's 'The Power of Negotiation' (2014)

Conversely, Trump's philosophy is built entirely on momentum, disruption, and the adrenaline of the "closer". His strategy relies on "the squeeze" — making maximalist demands, applying maximum pressure, escalating tensions, and threatening total breakdown to force a quick, high-stakes breakthrough. Where Araghchi sees a marathon designed to outlast the adversary, Trump sees a sprint toward a definitive signature.

This collision creates a devastating feedback loop of misinterpretation. When Araghchi and the Iranian diplomatic apparatus deploy their classic bazaar-style delay tactics, Washington reads it as a total lack of "seriousness" or a sign of bad faith. When Trump or subsequent American administrations apply "maximum pressure" or unilaterally rip up existing frameworks to demand a better bargain, Tehran does not see a shrewd opening gambit; they view it as an "uncivilised", lawless departure from the sacred rules of international engagement.

Ultimately, the issue is that these two worldviews are chasing entirely different destinations. The transactional American model seeks a definitive surrender or a brand-new "grand bargain" that mirrors a corporate business acquisition — a clean break from the past sealed by a photographic handshake. The Iranian model, shaped by Araghchi's philosophy, seeks something far more abstract: A managed, permanent state of balanced leverage that preserves national dignity and strategic autonomy through an incredibly dense, complex web of technical clauses. One side wants a final contract; the other wants a perpetual process.

Of course, this philosophical clash does not exist in a vacuum. Other formidable factors contribute heavily to the perpetual deadlock. The intense pressure of domestic politics in both nations severely limits the room for compromise. In Washington, any concession to Tehran is routinely vilified by congressional hawks as weakness, while in Tehran, the ultimate authority rests with a clerical establishment and parliamentary hawks deeply suspicious of Western intentions, who view compromise as an existential threat to the revolutionary state's identity. Furthermore, regional alignments — specifically the security anxieties of Israel and the Gulf states — ensure that any bilateral progress between the US and Iran triggers immediate counter-pressures that can derail negotiations.

Yet, even if these political and regional hurdles have now been cleared, the structural mismatch of negotiating styles will remain an existential threat to any dialogue, including the "final negotiation" to come. The tragedy of US-Iran diplomacy is that both sides are reading from entirely different scripts. Until Washington understands that it cannot treat a civilisational state like a distressed real-estate asset to be squeezed into submission, and until Tehran realises that its infinite bazaar-style patience will continually be misread as defiance by an impatient American political system, the "art of the deal" and the "power of negotiation" will continue to produce nothing but the anatomy of a stalemate.

The writer is a fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram and chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Recent US–Iran engagement following prolonged tensions in West Asia has revived discussions on nuclear negotiations, sanctions, and regional security.
- Beyond geopolitical and nuclear issues, analysts highlight a fundamental clash in negotiation philosophies between the two countries.
- The contrasting approaches are reflected in:
  - The Art of the Deal by Donald Trump
  - The Power of Negotiation by Abbas Araghchi
- The issue is relevant for understanding diplomacy, international negotiations, sanctions, and conflict resolution.

Key Points

US Negotiation Approach

- Transactional and outcome-oriented.
- Focus on:
  - Quick agreements.
  - Maximum pressure strategy.
  - Economic sanctions as leverage.
  - Visible diplomatic achievements.
- Prefers definitive settlements over prolonged negotiations.

Iranian Negotiation Approach

- Institutional and strategy-driven.
- Emphasizes:
  - Strategic patience.
  - Sovereignty and strategic autonomy.
  - Long-term bargaining.
  - Incremental concessions.
- Negotiation viewed as a continuous process rather than a one-time deal.

Causes of Diplomatic Deadlock

- Different perceptions of:
  - Time
  - Leverage
  - Compromise
  - Trust-building
- US interprets delays as lack of commitment.
- Iran interprets pressure tactics as coercion.

Other Factors

- Domestic politics in both countries.
- Nuclear programme concerns.
- Regional security dynamics involving:
  - Israel
  - Gulf countries.
- Energy security and maritime trade concerns in West Asia.

Static Linkages

- National Interest as the basis of foreign policy.
- Realist theory in International Relations.
- Soft Power, Hard Power and Smart Power.
- Strategic Autonomy.
- Economic Sanctions as instruments of foreign policy.
- Peaceful Settlement of Disputes under the UN Charter.
- Diplomacy as an instrument of national power.
- Balance of Power in international politics.
- Nuclear Non-Proliferation principles.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights the importance of understanding cultural and institutional dimensions of diplomacy.
- Explains repeated failures of US–Iran negotiations despite multiple diplomatic initiatives.
- Demonstrates how negotiation styles can influence international outcomes.

Challenges

- Deep trust deficit.
- Divergent strategic objectives.
- Domestic political constraints.
- Regional geopolitical rivalries.
- Security concerns regarding nuclear capabilities.

Implications

- Prolonged instability in West Asia.
- Threats to global energy security.
- Risks to maritime trade routes.
- Challenges to nuclear non-proliferation efforts.

Way Forward

- Build confidence through phased agreements.
- Strengthen multilateral diplomacy.
- Increase transparency and verification mechanisms.
- Promote sustained diplomatic engagement.
- Reduce dependence on coercive measures.
- Encourage region-wide security dialogue.
- Focus on trust-building measures before comprehensive agreements.

To recover lost ground, ISI must look to IITs, IIMs

R A Mashelkar and Adil Zainulbhai

P C MAHALANOBIS started the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) in Kolkata in 1931 with a simple conviction: That rigorous statistical thinking could make India a better-governed country. Within a generation, ISI was informing the Five Year Plans, building the National Sample Survey from scratch, and sending graduates to institutions around the world. It was, for a time, genuinely world-class. That is no longer obviously true. And the reasons are worth stating plainly.

We live in a moment when AI and machine learning are remaking every industry, every government function, every research discipline. The foundations of all of it, probability, inference, uncertainty, modelling, are what ISI was built to teach. The institution should be at the centre of this moment. Instead, it is watching from the sidelines. Not because of any shortage of talent inside its walls. But because its governance has made it almost impossible to change.

We say this as members of the 4th Review Committee, which submitted its findings in 2021. What we found was not a failing institution. We found dedicated researchers, proud alumni, and genuinely excellent students. What we also found was a structure that had quietly calcified over decades. The Governing Council, which should be a lean body setting strategic direction, had grown to 33 members, 17 of whom are effectively insiders. Division heads are chosen by internal elections, which tend to reward popularity over academic leadership. The General Body, with over 1,000 members, many of them former staff, holds a veto on any serious reform. Four successive Review Committees going back to 1966 recommended a smaller, more agile council. The council got bigger each time.

ISI admits around 550 to 600 students a year. IITs admit close to 2,500. For an institution that wants to be genuinely competitive by its centenary in 2031, that gap has to close

The IITs are the obvious comparison, and it is not a flattering one for ISI. IIT Kharagpur was converted into a proper statutory body in 1956, three years before the ISI Act was even passed. The Institutes of Technology Act of 1961 gave every IIT a compact board, merit-based appointments, and genuine room to grow. The IIMs got similar architecture in 2017. Both systems expanded dramatically in size, quality and global standing. ISI, still running on a society structure from the 1930s, did not.

The Draft ISI Bill, 2026 addresses the core problem. An 11-member Board of Governance with balanced internal and external representation replaces the current unwieldy council. ISI becomes a body corporate, which removes the procedural veto that has blocked change for 50 years. The regional centres in Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai and Tezpur get real administrative and financial autonomy, long overdue. And the institute's mandate formally expands to include AI and allied disciplines. That last point matters: ISI should not need legislative permission to teach AI, but given where it has been stuck, the explicit mandate helps.

One thing the Bill alone cannot fix is scale. ISI admits around 550 to 600 students a year. IITs admit close to 2,500. For an institution that wants to be genuinely competitive by its centenary in 2031, that gap has to close. India needs more people trained to think carefully about data, not fewer. The talent pool is there. The demand from industry and government is real. What has been missing is the institutional capacity to respond.

During the original Lok Sabha debate on the ISI Bill in December 1959, several members warned about exactly the governance problems we see today. They were right, and it took 66 years to respond legislatively.

The Bill is a good start. Now it needs to be implemented with the same seriousness with which it was drafted.

Mashelkar is former director-general of CSIR. He chaired the 4th ISI Review Committee. Zainulbhai is former chairman of the Capacity Building Commission and former chairman of McKinsey India. He served on the 4th ISI Review Committee

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Draft ISI Bill, 2026 seeks to reform the governance structure of the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI).
- The reforms are based on recommendations of the 4th Review Committee (2021).
- The Bill aims to modernize ISI and align it with emerging fields such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Data Science, and Advanced Analytics.
- The issue is significant in the context of India's push towards a knowledge economy, AI leadership, and evidence-based policymaking.

Key Points

Indian Statistical Institute (ISI)

- Founded in 1931 by P.C. Mahalanobis at Kolkata.
- Declared an Institution of National Importance through the ISI Act, 1959.
- Headquarters: Kolkata.
- Major centres: Delhi, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Tezpur.
- Known for contributions to:
  - Statistics
  - Mathematics
  - Quantitative Economics
  - Computer Science
  - Operations Research

Contributions of P.C. Mahalanobis

- Pioneer of modern statistics in India.
- Developed the Mahalanobis Distance.
- Instrumental in establishing the National Sample Survey (NSS).
- Played a key role in India's planning process through the Second Five-Year Plan (Mahalanobis Model).

Draft ISI Bill, 2026

- Replaces the 33-member Governing Council with an 11-member Board of Governance.
- Converts ISI into a Body Corporate.
- Provides greater administrative and financial autonomy to regional centres.
- Expands ISI's mandate to include:
  - Artificial Intelligence
  - Machine Learning
  - Data Science
  - Allied emerging technologies

Significance

- Supports India's AI ecosystem.
- Strengthens capacity for data-driven governance.
- Enhances institutional autonomy and efficiency.
- Improves research competitiveness and innovation.

Static Linkages

- Institutions of National Importance are established through an Act of Parliament.
- Sample surveys are an important tool for socio-economic data collection.
- Statistical systems support public policy, planning, and welfare programmes.
- Scientific institutions require autonomy, accountability, and academic freedom.
- Human capital and innovation are key drivers of economic growth.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Improves governance efficiency.
- Enhances institutional autonomy.
- Aligns ISI with emerging technological needs.
- Facilitates interdisciplinary research.
- Supports India's AI and data economy.

Challenges

- Governance reforms alone may not improve academic excellence.
- Need for increased funding and faculty recruitment.
- Expansion into AI requires modern infrastructure.
- Maintaining balance between traditional statistics and emerging disciplines.

Way Forward

- Increase student intake and research capacity.
- Strengthen industry-academia collaboration.
- Promote interdisciplinary AI and data science research.
- Ensure transparent and merit-based governance.
- Enhance global academic partnerships.
- Create a national talent pipeline in statistics and AI.

On cough syrups, a long overdue prescription

THE CENTRE'S decision to remove cough syrups from Schedule K of the Drugs Rules, 1945 — the list of medicines that can be sold without a prescription — is a belated but necessary acknowledgement of a regulatory failure that has persisted for years and resulted in multiple tragedies. In October 2025, over 20 children died across Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan after consuming locally procured cough syrups. Between December 2019 and January 2020, there were similar casualties in Jammu. These domestic disasters came on top of a scarred international record: India-made cough syrups have been tied to the deaths of more than 140 children in Africa and Central Asia since 2022.

Cough syrups occupy an anomalous position in India's drug regulation framework. While recognised as medicines, many formulations — crucially those under Entry number 13 of Schedule K — benefitted from exemptions that enabled their sale through channels subject to weaker oversight than licensed pharmacies. This has fostered a culture of self-medication, poor prescription discipline and fragmented accountability across the supply chain. Particularly affected are vulnerable communities, especially in villages with a population of less than 1,000, where their sale was permitted — in MP, for instance, it was found that the cough syrup in question, Coldrif, contained diethylene glycol far in excess of permissible limits. The change in law translates to a shift in access. All syrup-based medicines, including cough syrups containing opioids like codeine, can no longer be purchased over the counter.

Yet the prescription mandate, on its own, is unlikely to be sufficient. Drug regulation in India suffers from a Centre-state coordination deficit, and investigations after tragedies have repeatedly pointed to loopholes in quality control and inspection, raising uncomfortable questions about the capacity of regulators to monitor a rapidly expanding pharma sector. Concerns also remain about rural India, where limited access to healthcare facilities risks pushing people toward unlicensed vendors. The new rule must, therefore, be accompanied by rigorous enforcement, greater transparency in reporting adverse events, and investment in rural healthcare. The country must focus on a regulatory culture that prioritises patient safety over crisis management.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Central Government has removed exemptions that allowed certain cough syrups under Schedule K of the Drugs Rules, 1945 to be sold without prescription.
- The decision follows multiple incidents of child deaths linked to contaminated cough syrups in India and abroad.
- Investigations found the presence of Diethylene Glycol (DEG) and Ethylene Glycol (EG) beyond permissible limits in some formulations.
- Henceforth, cough syrups, including codeine-based formulations, will require stricter prescription-based access.

Key Points

- Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940: Principal legislation regulating import, manufacture, distribution and sale of drugs.
- Drugs Rules, 1945: Framed under the Act; contain provisions such as Schedule K.
- Schedule K: Provides exemptions from certain provisions of the Act/Rules for specified drugs and categories.
- Diethylene Glycol (DEG):
  - Industrial solvent.
  - Highly toxic to kidneys and nervous system.
  - Consumption can cause acute kidney injury and death.
- Ethylene Glycol (EG):
  - Commonly used in antifreeze and industrial products.
  - Toxic when ingested.
- Codeine:
  - Opioid derivative used as cough suppressant.
  - Potential for misuse and dependence.

Static Linkages

- Drugs and pharmaceuticals are placed in the Concurrent List (List III).
- Public health primarily falls under the State List.
- Article 21: Right to Life has been judicially expanded to include the Right to Health.
- Directive Principles:
  - Article 39(e): Protection of health.
  - Article 47: Duty of the State to improve public health.
- Regulation of medicines reflects the principle of Welfare State.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reduces indiscriminate self-medication.
- Strengthens patient safety.
- Improves accountability in pharmaceutical supply chains.
- Enhances India's global pharmaceutical credibility.

Challenges

- Weak Centre-State regulatory coordination.
- Inadequate drug-testing infrastructure.
- Shortage of inspectors and enforcement personnel.
- Rural dependence on informal healthcare providers.
- Poor pharmacovigilance and adverse-event reporting.

Stakeholders

- Patients → Safer medicines.
- Pharmaceutical Industry → Greater compliance burden but improved credibility.
- State Regulators → Increased monitoring responsibilities.
- Healthcare System → Better prescription discipline.

Way Forward

- Strengthen State Drug Control Departments.
- Expand accredited drug-testing laboratories.
- Improve Pharmacovigilance Programme of India (PvPI).
- Implement digital drug traceability systems.
- Increase frequency of manufacturing inspections.
- Improve rural healthcare access.
- Strengthen quality control of pharmaceutical excipients and raw materials.