DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH

Beijing says ready to work with New Delhi to enhance mutual trust and dispel doubts

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

China is ready to work with India side by side to enhance "mutual trust and dispel doubts", said the spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a day after Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and expressed willingness to take the relations forward.

"China stands ready to work with India to implement the important common understandings reached by the leaders of the two countries, continuously enhance mutual trust and dispel doubts, properly handle sensitive issues, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, maintain the positive momentum of China-India relations, and jointly advance our respective modernisation processes," said Lin Jian, spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry, on Wednesday.

Reset efforts: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in New Delhi. PTI

Earlier, Xu Feihong, Chinese Ambassador to India, said that in the meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Foreign Minister Wang Yi had said, "China and India, as the two largest developing countries" should "play an exemplary role in promoting solidarity and self-reliance among Global South countries".

'Implement consensus'

Mr. Wang's meeting with Mr. Modi took place soon after the visiting delegates who participated in the BRICS National Security Advisers' (NSAs) meeting here on June 22-23, called on Mr. Modi on Tuesday.

"China will continue to support India in fulfilling its responsibilities as the BRICS rotating chair and work with India to promote solid progress in BRICS cooperation," said Ambassador Mr. Xu. He said Mr. Wang had expressed willingness to work with India "to implement the important consensus reached between the leaders of the two countries".

According to a Chinese readout of Tuesday's meeting, the Prime Minister conveyed his greetings to President Xi Jinping and Premier Li Qiang and expressed support for cooperation under the umbrella of BRICS.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met Prime Minister Narendra Modi after the BRICS National Security Advisers (NSA) Meeting (22–23 June).
- China stated its willingness to:
  - Enhance mutual trust and reduce differences.
  - Properly manage sensitive issues, particularly the border question.
  - Implement the consensus reached by the leaders of both countries.
- China reiterated support for India's BRICS Chairmanship and highlighted cooperation among Global South countries.
- India reaffirmed support for BRICS cooperation while maintaining that peace and tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) remain essential for normal bilateral relations.

Key Points

- India and China are the two largest developing countries and major emerging economies.
- The meeting signifies continuation of diplomatic engagement after the improvement in border disengagement efforts in eastern Ladakh.
- China emphasized:
  - Implementing leaders' consensus.
  - Strengthening political trust.
  - Expanding economic cooperation.
  - Promoting BRICS cooperation.
- India continues to pursue:
  - Dialogue alongside vigilance.
  - Border stability as the foundation of bilateral ties.
  - Strategic autonomy in foreign policy.
- Bilateral cooperation continues in multilateral forums despite unresolved boundary disputes.

Static Linkages

- India-China boundary length (official Indian estimate): 3,488 km.
- Boundary sectors:
  - Western Sector – Ladakh (Aksai Chin dispute).
  - Middle Sector – Himachal Pradesh & Uttarakhand.
  - Eastern Sector – Arunachal Pradesh (claimed by China as "South Tibet").
- Line of Actual Control (LAC) is not an internationally demarcated boundary.
- Important Border Agreements:
  - 1993 – Agreement on Maintenance of Peace and Tranquillity.
  - 1996 – Confidence Building Measures Agreement.
  - 2005 – Political Parameters and Guiding Principles.
  - 2013 – Border Defence Cooperation Agreement (BDCA).
- Border dialogue mechanisms:
  - Special Representatives (SR) Talks
  - Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination (WMCC)
- Common Multilateral Platforms:
  - BRICS
  - Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)
  - G20
  - Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)
  - New Development Bank (NDB)

Critical Analysis

Opportunities

- Improves diplomatic communication.
- Supports peace along the LAC.
- Facilitates cooperation in BRICS, SCO and G20.
- Enhances Global South coordination.
- Expands economic and developmental cooperation.

Challenges

- Unresolved boundary dispute.
- Trust deficit after the 2020 Galwan clash.
- Large bilateral trade deficit in China's favour.
- China's close strategic ties with Pakistan.
- Competition in the Indo-Pacific region.
- Differences regarding Arunachal Pradesh and Aksai Chin.

Way Forward

- Complete disengagement and de-escalation at remaining friction points.
- Strict adherence to existing border agreements.
- Strengthen military and diplomatic communication mechanisms.
- Diversify critical supply chains while expanding mutually beneficial trade.
- Enhance cooperation in climate change, health, disaster management and technology.
- Promote issue-based cooperation without compromising national security.
- Continue engagement through BRICS, SCO and other multilateral platforms.

Symbolism over substance? Public health officials slam T.N. govt.'s gold ring scheme

Under the new scheme, the govt. will spend ₹755.83 cr. annually to gift gold rings to newborns; however, several health professionals opine that while the gold may be intended as a celebration of birth, the more pressing need is investment in workforce and infrastructure that enable safe deliveries

Serena Josephine M.
CHENNAI

Every year, the Tamil Nadu government will spend ₹755.83 crore on gifting one-gram gold rings to roughly 4.42 lakh babies born in government hospitals under its new scheme, *Thaimaaman Thanga Mothiram Thittam*.

The gold ring may be intended as a celebration of birth, but for many within the public health sector, the more pressing need is investment in the workforce and infrastructure that makes safe deliveries possible.

Already, the Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme provides maternal assistance of ₹14,000 in cash support and two nutritional kits valued at ₹4,000. With this in place, the questions raised are plenty – Can the State government sustain a recurring cost of ₹755.83 crore a year, or ₹17,000 per ring (today's gold rate), for 4,41,667 deliveries along with administration cost? Whether symbolic incentives such as gold rings are the best use of public resources when basic gaps in the health system remain unresolved? Does this self-defeat the State's family welfare measures by incentivising higher order births?

Nurturing newborns

A look at the salient features of the *Thaimaaman Thanga Mothiram Thittam*

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Elevate the public healthcare setting from a baseline necessity to a preferred destination of pride and celebration, with dignity at birth
- Reclaim the status of government institutional deliveries by offering a high-value, permanent, tangible benefit that complements the existing maternity cash benefits and maternal kits
- Erase the socio-economic bias surrounding public health facility deliveries, recognising that every mother's journey is noble and every child is a treasure

TARGET BENEFICIARIES AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

- Resident of Tamil Nadu
- All pregnant women giving birth at government institutions
- Mother should be registered on Pregnancy and Infant Cohort Monitoring and Evaluation portal with RCH ID
- Beneficiaries must submit residential proof through any one of the enlisted documents such as ration card, voter identity card or Aadhaar card
- The scheme extends coverage to all newborns, regardless of birth order. Mothers with higher-order births are eligible for benefits without restriction
- Gold rings to be distributed without any gender-based discrimination

KEY SPECIFICATIONS

- One-gram gold rings will be procured through the Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation (TNMSC). The TNMSC-empanelled vendor will supply the rings directly to 94 hospitals
- A State project/programme management unit will be set up to implement, monitor, and manage the scheme
- Each gold ring will have a fixed weight of one gram, with an official Bureau of Indian Standards hallmark. The Government of Tamil Nadu logo will be embossed on it
- Each unit will be uniquely serialised and protected by a tamper-proof seal with branding

Source: Government Order issued by the Health and Family Welfare Department

'Bizarre move'

A head of a government institution found it bizarre that the Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation (TNMSC) is tasked with procuring and supplying the rings, based on the yearly indent given by the Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine.

"TNMSC was set up in the 1990s with the objective of procuring quality medicines for government hospitals. But now, it is tasked with purchasing the yellow metal. How far this is ethical is a question to be asked," he said.

A health officer said that from a policy perspective, the scheme had no connection with the Sustainable Development Goal 3 (reducing global Maternal Mortality Ratio to less than 70 deaths per 1,00,000 live births and to end preventable deaths of newborns and children under five years of age by 2030).

Another public health officer said Tamil Nadu had already achieved near-universal institutional delivery coverage, with institutional deliveries exceeding 99%, leaving limited scope for further improvement on this indicator.

"A government's legitimacy comes from good governance, not symbolic kinship. Public resources should be directed towards strengthening systems and services that create lasting benefits," he said.

While more incentives are being introduced, many frontline healthcare personnel continue to face inadequate remuneration, he said, adding that Reproductive and Child Health contract staff receive approximately ₹4,500 per month.

'Self-defeating'

"There is an acute shortage of obstetricians and gynaecologists. The government should announce funds to hire more OB-GYNs as and when they announce such schemes," a doctor said.

"This scheme covers all newborns, irrespective of the third or fourth child. Isn't this defeating the government's own family welfare programme? On the one hand, we are motivating mothers to undergo sterilisation after having two babies, and on the other, the government is giving incentives to have any number of babies," she said.

The doctor further added that certain conditions could be brought in for the scheme, including two mandatory post-natal visits for mothers at the end of the first week and the sixth week of delivery, and complete immunisation till 1.5 years of age for the child.

Former Director of Public Health and Preventive Medicine K. Kolandasamy said it was a good scheme as it would improve institutional deliveries.

The scheme could act as an incentive for families belonging to the lower-middle income group to opt for government hospitals for childbirth, thereby reducing their maternal and childbirth-related health expenditure in private hospitals, Mr. Kolandasamy added.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Tamil Nadu Government has launched the Thaimaaman Thanga Mothiram Thittam, under which 1-gram gold rings will be gifted to every baby born in government hospitals.
- The scheme is estimated to cost ₹755.83 crore annually and is expected to benefit about 4.42 lakh newborns every year.
- It is in addition to the existing Dr. Muthulakshmi Reddy Maternity Benefit Scheme, which provides ₹14,000 cash assistance and nutrition kits worth ₹4,000.
- The scheme has generated debate over public expenditure prioritisation, health sector strengthening, and family welfare policy.

Key Points

- Scheme: Thaimaaman Thanga Mothiram Thittam (Tamil Nadu)
- Benefit: 1-gram gold ring to every newborn in government hospitals.
- Estimated Annual Cost: ₹755.83 crore.
- Expected Beneficiaries: Approximately 4.42 lakh newborns annually.
- Implementing Agency: Tamil Nadu Medical Services Corporation (TNMSC).
- Tamil Nadu has achieved over 99% institutional deliveries, among the highest in India.
- Public health experts have highlighted:
  - Shortage of obstetricians & gynaecologists.
  - Inadequate remuneration of frontline health workers.
  - Need for greater investment in public health infrastructure.
- The scheme is not linked to conditional health outcomes such as immunisation or post-natal care.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to Health (Judicial Interpretation).
- Article 47 – Duty of the State to improve public health and nutrition.
- National Health Policy, 2017 – Preventive, promotive and equitable healthcare.
- National Health Mission (NHM) – Maternal and Child Health.
- Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) – Promotes institutional deliveries through conditional cash assistance.
- Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY) – Maternity benefit scheme.
- SDG-3 – Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being:
  - MMR below 70 per 1,00,000 live births by 2030.
  - End preventable neonatal and under-five deaths.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- May encourage utilisation of government hospitals among economically weaker families.
- Reduces financial burden associated with childbirth.
- Enhances visibility of State welfare initiatives.

Concerns

- High recurring fiscal commitment (₹755.83 crore annually).
- Limited incremental benefit since Tamil Nadu already records >99% institutional deliveries.
- Opportunity cost of diverting resources from:
  - Health infrastructure.
  - Human resources.
  - Maternal and neonatal care.
- Not directly linked to measurable maternal or child health indicators.
- Universal coverage irrespective of birth order may weaken family welfare messaging.
- Raises concerns regarding efficient public expenditure.

Way Forward

- Prioritise recruitment of doctors, nurses and specialists.
- Strengthen maternal and neonatal healthcare infrastructure.
- Link incentives with:
  - Full immunisation.
  - Post-natal check-ups.
  - Nutrition monitoring.
- Undertake periodic outcome-based evaluation of welfare schemes.
- Ensure evidence-based and fiscally sustainable public spending.
- Align State schemes with NHM and SDG-3 objectives.

‘Passport is a travel document, not proof of citizenship’

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NEW DELHI

The Indian passport is a "travel document" and not a "citizenship document", a senior official of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Wednesday.

The purpose of the Indian passport is to help Indians transit and travel through foreign ports and territories and it should not be compared with other documents that are used to establish citizenship rights, the official said.

Highlighting the importance of passports in connecting the Indian workforce with the global economy, MEA officials said the government will intensify mobility engagements with western nations and Japan in coming months to help citizens get secure employment opportunities in these industrialised economies.

Voter list exclusion

"Passport is a travel document, not a document of citizenship and theoretically speaking that distinguishes passport from other documents. Even though while travelling abroad, passport attests to your nationality, yet it is not a document of your citizenship," a senior official said, in response to a question from *The Hindu* on whether the Indian passport could be used to challenge an exclusion from the voter list through the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls that

Passport is to facilitate foreign travel. It must not be compared with documents establishing citizenship, says MEA official.

is currently under way in 16 States.

Another MEA official said that the Indian passport is issued "after a lot of due diligence and we make sure that the person who gets it is actually entitled, and we also base ourselves on documents from several government agencies like the Aadhaar, PAN card." The second official said that the MEA will host a major event on international mobility – the Human Resource Mobility Forum to be held in New Delhi from June 30 to July 1 – that will focus on countries like Italy, Germany, Japan, Russia, and Denmark.

Ethical migration

A large number of recruitment agencies from across the country are expected to participate in the event that will highlight ethical migration and create awareness about how to avoid unscrupulous agents that use illegal means to send Indians to conflict zones and high risk areas.

"We have to demolish the myths that one can go to Italy or Greece using unfair means and then send home lots of money," the official said.

Speaking on the occasion of the 14th Passport Seva Divas, marked on June 24, the official said that 27 countries have given visa-free entry status to Indian passport holders, while 47 countries offer visas on arrival and 66 countries provide electronic-visas (e-visas) to Indian passport holders. The MEA official said that around 10% of Indian passport-holders possess an e-passport, a chip-based document.

There are 545 passport seva kendras across the country catering to the needs of the growing number of passport applicants, and this passport network now covers almost every Lok Sabha constituency.

In addition, one-stop centres for distressed women in the Indian diaspora have been opened in the Gulf countries and Singapore, supported by the Indian community. More such centres are expected to be established in other countries.

"Team MEA reaffirms its commitment to keep making passport services delivery faster, more transparent and accessible..." External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on the occasion of Passport Seva Divas, noting that chip-enabled e-passports and the opening of new passport seva kendras (PSKs) have contributed to ease of travel, helping Indians get global job opportunities.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) clarified during the 14th Passport Seva Divas (24 June 2026) that an Indian passport is a travel document and not a citizenship document.
- The clarification came amid discussions on whether a passport can establish citizenship in matters such as the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.
- MEA also announced measures to promote ethical migration, expand labour mobility partnerships, and increase the rollout of chip-enabled e-passports.

Key Points

- Passport is issued under the Passports Act, 1967.
- Primary purpose:
  - Facilitates international travel.
  - Certifies nationality for international purposes.
  - Enables consular protection abroad.
- Passport does not conclusively determine citizenship under Indian law.
- Citizenship is governed by the Constitution (Articles 5–11) and the Citizenship Act, 1955.
- Electoral eligibility is governed by the Representation of the People Acts, 1950 & 1951, not by possession of a passport.
- India has 545 Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs).
- Around 10% of passport holders possess chip-enabled e-passports.
- According to MEA:
  - 27 countries provide visa-free entry.
  - 47 countries provide Visa-on-Arrival.
  - 66 countries provide e-Visa facilities.
- MEA will organize the Human Resource Mobility Forum to promote:
  - Safe and legal migration.
  - Ethical recruitment.
  - Labour mobility partnerships with developed countries.

Static Linkages

- Articles 5–11 – Citizenship provisions.
- Article 11 – Parliament's power to regulate citizenship.
- Citizenship Act, 1955 – Acquisition, termination and deprivation of citizenship.
- Passports Act, 1967 – Issue, refusal, impounding and revocation of passports.
- Representation of the People Act, 1950 – Preparation of electoral rolls.
- Representation of the People Act, 1951 – Conduct of elections.
- India follows the principle of Single Citizenship.
- Passport Seva Programme is a Mission Mode Project under Digital India.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Clarifies the legal distinction between passport, nationality and citizenship.
- Strengthens legal clarity in electoral and administrative processes.
- Promotes secure and ethical overseas employment.
- Expansion of e-passports improves travel security and digital governance.

Challenges

- Public confusion regarding documents proving citizenship.
- Illegal migration and fraudulent recruitment networks.
- Need for greater inter-agency coordination in identity verification.
- Cybersecurity concerns with digital passport infrastructure.

Way Forward

- Increase public awareness regarding citizenship and identity documents.
- Accelerate nationwide rollout of e-passports.
- Strengthen regulation of overseas recruitment agencies.
- Expand labour mobility agreements with developed economies.
- Improve coordination among MEA, Election Commission and other government agencies.
- Enhance cybersecurity for passport databases.

SC had agreed that right to associate is no *carte blanche* for foreign funds

NEWS ANALYSIS

The Rules have introduced tougher limits on NGOs to receive foreign donations

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2026, notified by the Union Home Ministry on June 22, has introduced tougher limits on NGOs to receive foreign donations.

These amendments, and the ones before them, source their legality from the Centre's argument in the Supreme Court that the freedom to form associations or engage in the "business" of charity does not include a right to receive unbridled foreign funds or to use the money outside "permissible activities".

Among other changes, Rule 9(1B) mandates that certificates of registration of NGOs must specify the "purpose or purposes and the States or Union Territories".

The Rules limit NGOs to specific and stated spheres of activity, which exclude proselytisation, and geographical bounds.

SC judgments

The government's sweeping powers to regulate foreign donations have been blessed by the Supreme Court in multiple judgments. A three-judge Bench in *Noel Harper versus Union of India* in April 2022 declared that "no one can be heard to claim a vested right to accept foreign donation, much less an absolute right".

The court had disapproved of the tendency to seek funds abroad, saying it gave an impression that the nation was incapable of looking after its own needs.

A March 2020 decision of the Supreme Court in *Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF) versus Union of India* had agreed with the Centre that the "regulation of acceptance and utilisation of foreign contribution is for the purpose of protecting national interest". The court had, however, in this case, called for a "balance" between the law's objective and the rights of the voluntary organisations to access foreign funds. The *INSAF* judgment declared that only associations which play a role in active or party politics were barred from accessing foreign funds.

The government has argued in court that the FCRA, its Rules, and amendments were meant to regulate the manner of doing business, more importantly, concerning foreign contributions. The FCRA did not intend to stop charitable work. It has argued that the regulatory regime did not hurt the fundamental rights of individuals to form associations or practice a profession or carry on an occupation, trade or business under Article 19(1)(c) and Article 19(1)(g), respectively, of the Constitution.

The Centre has referred to Article 19(4) to demonstrate that it could frame laws to reasonably restrict the fundamental freedom to form associations under Article 19(1)(c) in the interest of the sovereignty and integrity of India or to protect public order or morality. Similarly, Article 19(6) allowed the government to impose reasonable fetters on the right to trade, business, occupation available under Article 19(1)(g) if the State could show these freedoms were against public interest.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) notified the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2026 on 22 June 2026.
- The amendments tighten regulations governing receipt and utilisation of foreign contributions by NGOs registered under the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA), 2010.
- The objective is to strengthen transparency, accountability, and national security in foreign-funded activities.

Key Highlights

  - Rule 9(1B):NGO registration certificates must specify:
    - Approved purpose(s) for receiving foreign contribution.
    - Approved States/Union Territories where activities can be undertaken.
- Foreign contribution cannot be utilised:
  - Beyond the approved objectives.
  - Outside the approved geographical jurisdiction.
- Reinforces provisions introduced through the FCRA (Amendment) Act, 2020, including:
  - Prohibition on transfer of foreign contribution to another FCRA-registered NGO.
  - Mandatory FCRA Account in State Bank of India, New Delhi Main Branch.
  - Administrative expenditure ceiling reduced from 50% to 20%.
  - Aadhaar identification of key functionaries.

Supreme Court Judgments

Noel Harper v. Union of India (2022)

- Upheld the constitutional validity of the FCRA (Amendment) Act, 2020.
- Held that:
  - Receiving foreign contribution is not a Fundamental Right.
  - No organisation has a vested or absolute right to receive foreign donations.
  - Parliament may regulate foreign funding in the interest of national sovereignty and integrity.

Indian Social Action Forum (INSAF) v. Union of India (2020)

- Upheld the constitutional validity of FCRA.
- Clarified that:
  - Only organisations engaged in active political activities are prohibited from receiving foreign contribution.
  - A balance must be maintained between national interest and freedom of association.

Constitutional Linkages

- Article 19(1)(c) – Right to form associations or unions.
- Article 19(4) – Reasonable restrictions in the interests of:
  - Sovereignty and integrity of India
  - Public order
  - Morality
- Article 19(1)(g) – Freedom to practise any profession or occupation.
- Article 19(6) – Reasonable restrictions in public interest.

Previous Year & Static Facts

- Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 1976 – First enacted during the Emergency.
- FCRA, 2010 – Replaced the 1976 Act.
- Administrative Ministry: Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA).
- FCRA regulates:
  - Acceptance
  - Utilisation
  - Monitoring of foreign contribution and foreign hospitality.

UPSC Mains Value Addition

Arguments in Favour

- Prevents misuse of foreign funds.
- Strengthens transparency and accountability.
- Protects sovereignty, integrity and national security.
- Improves financial compliance of NGOs.

Concerns

- Increased compliance burden on genuine NGOs.
- May affect welfare, education and health projects dependent on foreign funding.
- Possibility of excessive executive discretion.
- May reduce civil society participation in development.

Way Forward

- Ensure transparent and time-bound registration and renewal.
- Adopt risk-based monitoring instead of blanket restrictions.
- Strengthen digital compliance and independent audits.
- Promote domestic philanthropy and CSR funding.
- Balance national security with the role of civil society.

UPSC Prelims Focus

- FCRA is administered by Ministry of Home Affairs.
- Receiving foreign contribution is not a Fundamental Right.
- Article 19(4) provides the constitutional basis for restricting the right to form associations.
- Noel Harper (2022) upheld the constitutional validity of the FCRA Amendment Act, 2020.
- INSAF (2020) held that only organisations involved in active politics are barred from receiving foreign contributions.

PACOM, the deeper meaning behind a dropped prefix

Suhasini Haidar

The decision by the United States military to change the name of its naval command in the region from "US INDOPACOM" to "US PACOM" – United States Indo-Pacific Command to United States Pacific Command – reverting to its original name that was changed in 2018 can be dismissed as superficial, even trivial. Many have already responded with the Shakespearean "What's in a name?", even as the U.S. Department of War pointed out that US PACOM's area of responsibility, from "the waters off the West Coast of the United States to the western border of India" or what had once been described as "Hollywood to Bollywood, from polar bears to penguins", has never changed. In 2018, U.S. Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said that the name INDOPACOM was a recognition of the "growing significance" of the Indian Ocean, the Indian subcontinent, and India itself, and the U.S. dropped the term "Asia-Pacific" to "Indo-Pacific".

Current U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth gave the signal, on May 30, that this understanding has now changed, at his speech at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore – compared to more than 30 references to the "Indo-Pacific" in his speech in 2025, his speech this year contained not a single reference to the Indo-Pacific region or strategy.

Given the centre stage that the U.S.'s Indo-Pacific policy has had in India's strategic calculus since 2018, it is necessary, therefore, to go beyond the superficial to the subterranean or submarine, in this case. New Delhi must study how broader trends in U.S. policy are attempting to recast both the region and India's position within it in terms of three broader geographies.

U.S.-China ties and the Quad

The first, is the U.S.'s outreach to China, and concurrently diminishing salience of the Quad (India, Japan Australia, the U.S.), which Beijing has always protested as an "exclusive clique" or derisively as "ocean foam". In the long term, the U.S. and China cannot shy away from the fierce rivalry between them, but it is clear that in the immediate term, Trump 2.0 has decided to play nice.

U.S. President Donald Trump's visit to Beijing in May 2026 and Chinese President Xi Jinping's upcoming visit to the U.S. on September 24, indicate that the two sides do not want their differences to overcome the relationship, and the U.S. is tiptoeing around the Taiwan issue. Mr. Trump's references to a "G-2", including during a press availability with Mr. Modi on the sidelines of the 52nd G-7 summit in France (June 15 to 17), are an early warning of a plan to recast the world into "spheres of influence", where China would be the predominant power in the continent, not as one pole in a multipolar Asia, as India envisions.

As a result, the Quad, rebuilt in Trump 1.0 as a counter to China in the region, appears to be floundering. The U.S.'s National Defense Strategy released in January 2026 does not mention the Quad even once. In terms of substance, the Quad's combined agenda has been pared down to four areas of cooperation – maritime security, economic prosperity, critical and emerging minerals technology and disaster responses. Even within these limited objectives, there have been setbacks, such as over Artificial Intelligence cooperation. Despite Quad countries signing on to Pax Silica, and Critical Minerals Initiative Framework with the U.S., the Trump administration ordered Anthropic to end access to its latest models for all non-Americans.

Another question concerns the Quad Summit, which India has unsuccessfully sought to host since January 2024. During U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's visit to Delhi in May 2026, he offered no firm commitment that Mr. Trump would visit Delhi this year, amid indications that the Quad may be relegated to a Foreign Ministers' level grouping. The U.S. Navy's reported actions involving Iranian ship *IRIS Dena* (March 2026) and recent attacks on three ships in which three Indians were killed underscore maritime security and domain awareness concerns within the Quad framework. In July, when he hosts Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and travels to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi must discuss alternative maritime coalitions and revive the Australia-India-Japan trilateral.

> The U.S.'s reversion from INDOPACOM to PACOM suggests that its regional shifts run deeper than a simple name change

The U.S.-Iran MoU and West Asia

The second geography of concern is West Asia. The U.S. ceasefire with Iran, after just a few months of a surprisingly badly planned war, is indicative of a general fatigue in Trump 2.0 with U.S. friends and allies in the region. The situation is even more volatile today than it was prior to February 28, especially given the short shrift Israel has received in negotiations with Iran, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's defiance over the ceasefire for Lebanon.

A closer look at the 14-paragraph "Islamabad MoU" released by Iran reveals several signals for the region. Paragraph four states that the U.S. commits to "remove its forces from the proximity of the Islamic Republic of Iran" within 30 days after the final deal. Paragraph five says that, after the Hormuz Strait is demined, Iran and Oman will define the Strait's future administration in consultation with Persian Gulf littoral states.

Paragraph 6 stipulates that the U.S., along with regional allies, will provide at least $300 billion for Iran's reconstruction. These provisions imply commitments on behalf of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) states while giving Iran leverage on key issues – military, connectivity, and economic security. Oman and Qatar are now closer to Iran than before and have been part of the Pakistan-led mediation process, while countries such as Saudi Arabia are seeking new security arrangements with Türkiye, Pakistan, and Ukraine.

India's policy towards the region requires a rapid revision in light of the post-war, post-deal power structure. What was once a finely balanced approach now appears tilted towards Israel and the United Arab Emirates. New Delhi must also urgently reconsider its compliance with U.S. sanctions on Iranian oil and the Chabahar port, given Washington's shifting positions.

The U.S. and South Asia

Finally, India must study the implications of U.S. foreign policy decisions in its neighbourhood. The appointment of Sergio Gor as both U.S. Ambassador to India and Special Envoy for South and Central Asia signals Washington's growing regional ambitions. New Delhi has pushed back on attempts by the U.S. to become a supra entity in South Asia, as well as its efforts to resolve intra-regional conflicts between India and Pakistan. This ambition was hinted at during Operation Sindoor (May 2025), and repeated by Mr. Trump over the past year, especially as he met the Pakistani leadership many times in this period.

Mr. Gor's recent travels to Kathmandu, Thimphu, Dhaka and Colombo indicate that the U.S. is keen to broaden its efforts across the region. In the absence of effective pan-regional frameworks such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) – both are constrained by New Delhi's political tensions with Islamabad and Dhaka – it is clear that the U.S. is entering into competition with China for influence in South Asia.

Beijing has already built several mechanisms for cooperation with South Asia, and both powers side-stepping India. India, as chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, and with Mr. Modi due to attend the planned BIMSTEC summit in Bangladesh and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Pakistan next year, has an opportunity to reassert its regional leadership. Given the opportunities, a revival of the SAARC grouping and other pan-regional initiatives must be considered.

Concerns over the U.S.'s moves across India's geographies may seem contrary to the bonhomie at the Modi-Trump meeting at the G-7 meet in France, and the red carpet for Mr. Rubio's India visit. Shorn of the rhetoric, however, the trends in U.S. policy are clear, and New Delhi must plan accordingly, acknowledging that the shifts run far deeper than the ripples on the surface caused by a dropped prefix.

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The U.S. has reportedly reverted the name of its regional military command from U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) to U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM), reversing the 2018 nomenclature.
- The move reflects a possible shift in U.S. strategic priorities under the Trump administration.
- It raises questions about the future of the Indo-Pacific strategy, Quad, India's regional role, and evolving U.S.-China relations.

Key Points

U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy

- 2018: U.S. renamed USPACOM → USINDOPACOM.
- Objective:
  - Recognize the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
  - Acknowledge India's growing geopolitical role.
- The reported reversal may indicate:
  - Reduced emphasis on the Indo-Pacific construct.
  - Renewed focus on the Pacific theatre.

U.S.–China Relations

- Increasing diplomatic engagement between the U.S. and China.
- Possibility of managing strategic competition rather than confrontation.
- May reduce strategic pressure on China in the Indo-Pacific.

Quad

- Members:- India, United States, Japan, Australia
- Current focus:- Maritime security, Critical & emerging technologies, Maritime security, Critical & emerging technologies, Critical minerals, Disaster response
- Reports indicate reduced strategic importance under the present U.S. administration.

West Asia

- Changing regional alignments involving Iran and GCC countries.
- Implications for:
  - India's energy security
  - Chabahar Port
  - Connectivity initiatives
  - Indian diaspora

South Asia

- Greater U.S. engagement with Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Bhutan.
- Strategic competition with China may intensify in India's neighbourhood.

Implications for India

- Need to preserve Strategic Autonomy.
- Diversify strategic partnerships.
- Strengthen maritime capabilities.
- Reinforce regional leadership.

Static Linkages

- Strategic Autonomy remains the cornerstone of India's foreign policy.
- SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) guides India's maritime vision.
- Act East Policy strengthens engagement with Southeast Asia.
- Neighbourhood First Policy focuses on regional cooperation.
- Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) was launched in 2019.
- UNCLOS (1982) governs maritime rights and freedoms.
- Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) are critical for India's trade and energy security.
- Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) is essential for safeguarding the Indian Ocean.
- Chabahar Port enhances connectivity to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) provides an alternative Eurasian trade route.
- Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) promotes regional cooperation.
- BIMSTEC connects South and Southeast Asia through the Bay of Bengal.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Encourages India to strengthen strategic autonomy.

- Expands scope for diversified partnerships.
- Promotes indigenous defence capabilities.
- Reinforces India's maritime role in the Indian Ocean.

Challenges

- Reduced U.S. emphasis on Indo-Pacific may weaken balancing against China.
- Declining strategic relevance of the Quad.
- Increased U.S.–China engagement could limit India's strategic space.
- Greater external influence in South Asia may challenge India's regional leadership.

Way Forward

- Strengthen Strategic Autonomy.
- Enhance India's role as a Net Security Provider in the Indian Ocean.
- Deepen engagement through SAGAR and IPOI.
- Revitalize BIMSTEC, IORA, and strengthen regional cooperation.
- Expand maritime domain awareness and naval modernization.
- Diversify energy and critical mineral supply chains.
- Accelerate connectivity projects such as Chabahar Port and INSTC.
- Promote defence indigenization under Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Clearing the road to timely trauma care in India

On May 26, 2026, the Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark judgment with implications for public health policy. Hearing a writ petition filed by SaveLIFE Foundation in October 2024, a Bench of Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Atul S. Chandurkar, in *SaveLIFE Foundation & Anr. vs Union of India & Ors.*, held that the right to trauma care is an integral part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Court ruled that this right extends from the site of injury to definitive hospital treatment and issued nine binding directions to the Union, States and Union Territories, with implementation timelines ranging from three to six months.

Around 4.67 lakh Indians die every year from injuries such as road crashes, falls, burns, drowning, industrial mishaps, fires and disasters, according to National Crime Records Bureau data. Road crashes alone account for nearly 1.77 lakh deaths. Trauma is the leading cause of death among Indians aged 18-45. The Law Commission (201st Report) has estimated that half of road-crash fatalities could be prevented with timely care, while a 2021 NITI Aayog-AIIMS Emergency and Injury Care Report found that at least 30% of deaths are linked to delays in emergency response. India does not lack policies or guidelines; what it has lacked is a uniform, enforceable trauma-care framework.

Piyush Tewari

The Founder and the CEO of SaveLIFE Foundation, a non-profit committed to saving lives through road safety and trauma care

What the top court has held

The Bench built on earlier jurisprudence. In *Parmanand Katara vs Union of India* (1989), the Court recognised the duty of doctors to render emergency aid. In *Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samiti vs State of West Bengal* (1996), it read access to emergency care into Article 21. In the present order, Article 21, the Court held, covers the entire chain that connects an injured person to medical care: the bystander, the emergency call, the ambulance, the paramedic, the receiving facility. The framing imposes a positive obligation on the state to build and sustain an integrated trauma response system.

This matters because survival in trauma depends on systems rather than on individual institutions. A well-equipped hospital cannot compensate for a delayed ambulance. An ambulance cannot help if the bystander is afraid to call. A trauma surgeon cannot save a patient who never reaches the hospital in time.

Judicial oversight may finally realise the constitutional right to trauma care

A cooperative federalism approach

Public health, hospitals and ambulance services fall under the State List in the Seventh Schedule, making cooperation between the Union and the States essential for a uniform trauma-care framework. Compliance affidavits and information notes filed by 34 States and Union Territories indicate a willingness to implement Union policies and standardise trauma care. Accepting the Attorney General's submission that the Union should act as an enabler, the Bench called for "sustained and concerted efforts" by both levels of government. The directions do not alter the constitutional division of powers; they provide judicial backing to existing frameworks such as Prime Minister - Road Accident Victims' Hospitalisation and Assured Treatment (PM RAHAT), the National Ambulance Code AIS-125, Emergency Response Support System (ERSS)-112, the emergency medical technician (EMT) curriculum, the Good Samaritan Rules and the Health Ministry's trauma-care guidelines.

The directions fall into five clusters. On communications, all emergency numbers (100, 101, 102, 108, 1033, 1091 and their State variants) must be integrated into helpline 112 within three months, with mass media publicity. On bystander protection, every State must set up physical and digital grievance-redress systems for Good Samaritans, with nodal authorities at the State and district levels. On pre-hospital response, all registered ambulances, public and private, must comply with the National Ambulance Code, carry GPS integrated in real time with helpline 112, and undergo structured audits of response times and clinical outcomes. States must also adopt the National Commission for Allied and Healthcare Professions (NCAHP)-notified EMT curriculum. On hospitals, trauma facilities must be graded and designated so their capabilities are transparent. On finance, States have eight weeks to operationalise PM RAHAT, the Centre's cashless treatment scheme for road-crash victims; non-implementation will count as a violation of the Motor Vehicles Act. The Court has additionally directed the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to notify a national medical rescue protocol and a Trauma Registry data format, with State trauma registries to link up to a coordinated national registry.

A follow-up, the challenges

The order's significance lies as much in its compliance architecture as in its constitutional declaration. Copies will be sent to every Chief Secretary, Action Taken Reports must be filed with the Court Registry, and the Attorney General of India is to monitor implementation. The matter has been listed to be heard again in about four months for further directions.

Implementation will be challenging. State capacity varies widely, ambulance networks remain uneven, and helpline integration has lagged for long. The burden of inaction, however, has shifted. States must now demonstrate progress before the Court. For an injured Indian, the question after a crash or a fall should no longer be which number to call, whether help will arrive, or whether there is a capable hospital nearby. The Court has settled the constitutional question; governments must now ensure that timely and effective trauma care becomes a reality.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- On 26 May 2026, the Supreme Court in SaveLIFE Foundation & Anr. vs Union of India & Ors. held that the Right to Trauma Care is an integral part of the Right to Life (Article 21).
- The Court directed the Union, States and Union Territories to establish a uniform trauma-care framework with implementation timelines of 3–6 months.
- The judgment aims to strengthen India's emergency medical response system and reduce preventable deaths.

Key Points

Constitutional Significance

- Right to Trauma Care recognised as a Fundamental Right under Article 21.
- Covers the entire trauma-care chain:
  - Emergency call
  - Ambulance
  - Emergency Medical Technician (EMT)
  - Receiving hospital
  - Definitive treatment
- Imposes a positive obligation on governments to provide timely emergency care.

Major Directions of the Supreme Court

- Integrate all emergency helplines with ERSS-112.
- Strengthen implementation of Good Samaritan Rules through grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Ensure all ambulances comply with AIS-125 (National Ambulance Code) and GPS integration.
- Adopt NCAHP-approved EMT curriculum.
- Grade and standardise trauma centres.
- Operationalise PM RAHAT (cashless treatment for road accident victims).
- Establish National Trauma Registry and State Trauma Registries.
- Ministry of Health to notify a National Medical Rescue Protocol.

Important Data

- NCRB: Around 4.67 lakh injury-related deaths annually.
- Road accidents: Nearly 1.77 lakh deaths every year.
- Trauma is the leading cause of death among people aged 18–45 years.
- Law Commission (201st Report): Nearly 50% of road accident deaths are preventable through timely trauma care.
- NITI Aayog–AIIMS (2021): Around 30% of trauma deaths are linked to delays in emergency response.

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to Life and Personal Liberty.
- Article 47 – Duty of the State to improve public health.
- State List (Entry 6, Seventh Schedule) – Public health and hospitals.
- Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 – Road safety and victim compensation.
- Good Samaritan Guidelines/Rules – Protection for persons assisting accident victims.
- Golden Hour – Critical period immediately after severe trauma.

Important Supreme Court Judgments

- Parmanand Katara v. Union of India (1989) – Duty of doctors to provide immediate emergency treatment.
- Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samiti v. State of West Bengal (1996) – Emergency medical care is part of Article 21.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Expands the scope of Article 21.
- Makes trauma care a rights-based entitlement.
- Improves accountability of Union and State governments.
- Standardises emergency response across India.
- Supports achievement of SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being).

Challenges

- Uneven health infrastructure across States.
- Shortage of trauma specialists and EMTs.
- Weak ambulance networks in rural areas.
- Funding and implementation gaps.
- Need for continuous monitoring and data integration.

Way Forward

- Universal implementation of ERSS-112 integration.
- Strengthen trauma centres under public health infrastructure.
- Increase trained EMT workforce.
- Ensure AIS-125 compliant ambulances nationwide.
- Operationalise PM RAHAT in all States.
- Develop an integrated National Trauma Registry.
- Conduct periodic performance audits of emergency medical services.

Viksit and Surakshit

The cost of inaction on safety issues is more than that of enforcement

The Lucknow fire, which killed 15 people, mostly students, and injured five others, captures both the promise and the perils of aspirational India. It reflects a booming education economy built around a growing services sector, but also the unplanned urban growth and regulatory failures that often accompany it. India's young population, eager to acquire skills and improve economic prospects, has fuelled an ecosystem of coaching centres and training institutes, many of which operate outside formal regulatory frameworks, require low capital investment and generate high profits. As advances in artificial intelligence threaten to reshape employment patterns and formal educational institutions struggle to keep pace with skill requirements, such centres are likely to proliferate. The three-storey building where the fire occurred was reportedly not authorised for commercial use, yet it escaped demolition despite repeated notices. According to the FIR by the civic authorities, neither the owners nor the businesses operating there had made adequate provisions for fire safety. Such violations are common across India, where commercial and educational establishments have little regard for basic safety norms.

The Lucknow incident is also part of a disturbing pattern. This summer has witnessed a succession of major fire accidents across the country. Public attention usually focuses on administrative negligence, and official explanations frequently end with the phrase "electrical fire" – a description that often conceals more than it reveals. Electrical fires can arise from several identifiable causes, including overloaded circuits caused by growing use of appliances, harmonic currents generated by sophisticated equipment that create localised hotspots, poor-quality wiring, and the absence of arc-fault protection devices. Understanding these causes is key to preventing similar tragedies. This requires a stronger culture of investigation. India suffers from inadequate firefighting infrastructure and a shortage of trained fire-forensics experts capable of conducting rigorous root-cause analyses and recommending systemic remedies. Without such expertise, lessons from each disaster remain limited. The challenge therefore demands a national response. India's ambition of becoming a developed nation cannot be separated from the imperative of ensuring public safety. Yet, many buildings lack mandatory fire detection and suppression systems that are standard in developed countries. A Viksit Bharat must also be a Surakshit Bharat. A nationwide assessment of building safety, even through a scientifically designed sample survey, would provide valuable data for reform. The task may be large, but the human and economic costs of inaction are far greater.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- A major fire in a coaching centre building in Lucknow resulted in the death of 15 people (mostly students) and injuries to several others.
- The building was allegedly unauthorised for commercial use and lacked adequate fire safety measures.
- The incident has highlighted concerns regarding urban planning, enforcement of building regulations, and disaster preparedness in India.

Key Points

- Rapid growth of coaching centres due to increasing demand for skill development and competitive examinations.
- Unauthorized conversion of residential buildings into commercial establishments is a recurring issue.
- Common causes of urban fire accidents include:
  - Overloaded electrical circuits
  - Faulty wiring
  - Absence of fire detection and suppression systems
  - Poor emergency exits and evacuation planning
- India faces:
  - Inadequate fire safety infrastructure
  - Shortage of trained fire personnel and fire forensic experts
  - Weak enforcement of building and fire safety regulations

Static Linkages

- Article 21 – Right to Life includes the right to live in a safe environment.
- 74th Constitutional Amendment Act – Urban planning, regulation of land use and building construction are functions of Urban Local Bodies (Twelfth Schedule).
- Disaster Management Act, 2005 – Provides the legal framework for disaster prevention, mitigation, preparedness and response.
- National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) – Issues guidelines on fire safety and urban disaster management.
- National Building Code (NBC), 2016 (BIS) – Prescribes standards for fire prevention, life safety and fire protection systems.

Critical Analysis

Challenges

- Poor enforcement of building and fire safety norms.
- Unauthorized commercial use of residential buildings.
- Lack of periodic fire safety audits.
- Weak institutional capacity of Urban Local Bodies.
- Shortage of fire investigation and forensic expertise.

Significance

- Highlights the need to strengthen urban governance.
- Reinforces the importance of disaster risk reduction over post-disaster response.
- Demonstrates the link between public safety and sustainable urban development.

Way Forward

- Strict enforcement of the National Building Code, 2016.
- Mandatory periodic fire safety audits for educational and commercial buildings.
- Strengthen capacity of State Fire Services and Urban Local Bodies.
- Establish State-level fire forensic investigation units.
- Promote risk-based urban planning and compliance monitoring.
- Improve public awareness through regular fire safety drills.

Razor's edge

High heat and low rainfall is threatening agricultural produce

The southwest monsoon deficit nationwide has increased from 35% to 43%; the winds' northward advance was stalled near Mumbai; and both the U.S. NOAA and the India Meteorological Department (IMD) expect a moderate-to-strong El Niño this year. The El Niño suppresses the vertical air movement needed for rainclouds to form while a warming Pacific is weakening the trade winds that bring moisture to the subcontinent. The Madden-Julian Oscillation is also in an unfavourable phase and the Indian Ocean Dipole currently cannot offer a buffer. Further, while northwest India has received 5% more rain than normal, central India and the northeast face deficits of 63% and 43%, respectively. But with two-thirds of the seasonal rainfall historically arriving in July and August, the monsoon may still recover and salvage the season. Together with reservoir storage at 30.4% of capacity, compared with 25.1% during previous El Niño years, there is no reason for alarm yet. However, the effects for agriculture are more concerning. The Agriculture Ministry has already prioritised 111 districts out of 315 vulnerable ones based on their irrigation coverage. Extreme heat has been reducing farm labour productivity. High heat and rain shortfall have sown anxiety over the cardamom harvest in Idukki, a fate that bodes ill for other plantation crops in the Western Ghats.

Both the *kharif* sowing window for rice, pulses, and oilseeds and the availability of fertilizers could come under pressure, the latter due to Chinese export curbs and tensions in West Asia, heightening the risks of lower soil moisture and higher input stress. Retail food inflation was 4.2% in April; further deficits will especially threaten vegetables and pulses, complicating the monetary policy. The fundamental problem is the way India has built its rural economy around the assumption of reliable rainfall delivery. No adaptation strategy can indefinitely outpace unchecked warming, so limiting future warming should amount to reducing the extent of exposure. The ideal sustainable strategies are to switch from rain-centric to water-centric organisation, reduce dependence on water-intensive crops, and improve resilience. Pathways for the first two have already been outlined. On the last, while the Agriculture Ministry's extant contingency plans reflect the need for adjustable sowing windows and alternative seed varieties, the principal variable remains implementation at scale. Second, the government should consider a new authority to coordinate inter-State water use and cropping changes based on extended El Niño forecasts, eliminating the cropping governance currently fragmented between the Agriculture and Jal Shakti Ministries, and the IMD.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- India is witnessing a 43% all-India southwest monsoon rainfall deficit, up from 35%.
- The northward advance of the southwest monsoon has stalled near Mumbai, delaying rainfall over central and northern India.
- IMD and NOAA have projected a moderate-to-strong El Niño, increasing the likelihood of below-normal monsoon rainfall.
- Deficient rainfall may affect Kharif sowing, food inflation, water availability, and agricultural growth.

Key Points

Rainfall Status

- All-India rainfall deficit: 43%
- Northwest India: 5% above normal rainfall
- Central India: 63% rainfall deficit
- Northeast India: 43% rainfall deficit

Climate Drivers

- El NiñoSuppresses convection over the Indian region.
- Weakens trade winds transporting moisture towards India.
- Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO)Currently in an unfavourable phase for monsoon activity.
- Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD)Presently too weak to offset El Niño effects.

Agriculture

- 111 districts identified by the Ministry of Agriculture (out of 315 vulnerable districts) for priority intervention.
- Possible impact on rice, pulses and oilseed sowing.
- Heat stress reducing farm labour productivity.
- Plantation crops (e.g., cardamom) already under stress.

Economy

- Reservoir storage: 30.4% capacity (higher than 25.1% during previous El Niño years).
- Retail food inflation (April): 4.2%
- Fertilizer availability may be affected due to:
  - Chinese export restrictions.
  - West Asia geopolitical tensions.

Static Linkages

- Southwest Monsoon is associated with:
  - Differential heating of land and sea.
  - Seasonal reversal of winds.
  - ITCZ migration.
- El Niño is the warm phase of the ENSO phenomenon.
- Positive IOD may partially compensate for El Niño-induced rainfall deficiency.
- MJO is an intra-seasonal atmospheric circulation with a 30–60 day cycle.
- Around two-thirds of India's seasonal monsoon rainfall occurs during July and August.
- India has three crop seasons:
  - Kharif
  - Rabi
  - Zaid
- Important Government Initiatives:
  - Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchai Yojana (PMKSY)
  - National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA)
  - Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY)
  - National Innovations on Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA)

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Tests India's climate resilience.
- Directly influences agricultural output and rural income.
- Has implications for food inflation and monetary policy.

Challenges

- High dependence of rain-fed agriculture.
- Regional imbalance in rainfall distribution.

- Heat stress reducing agricultural productivity.
- Fertilizer supply disruptions.
- Fragmented coordination among agriculture, water and weather agencies.

Opportunities

- Better reservoir storage than previous El Niño years.
- Expansion of irrigation infrastructure.
- Scope for climate-smart agriculture and efficient water management.

Way Forward

- Promote crop diversification towards less water-intensive crops.
- Expand micro-irrigation under PMKSY.
- Strengthen district-level contingency plans.
- Improve dissemination of weather-based agro-advisories.
- Develop climate-resilient seed varieties.
- Strengthen watershed management and groundwater recharge.
- Improve inter-ministerial coordination for water and crop planning.
- Enhance implementation of PMFBY and climate adaptation programmes.

India can attract FDI. The harder task is retaining it

MANOJ PANT

M RAHUL

INDIA ATTRACTED gross FDI of $94.53 billion in 2025-26. That appears encouraging for an economy aspiring to become a global manufacturing hub. Yet the headline conceals a less comforting reality. Net FDI — after accounting for outflows — stood at only $7.65 billion, barely 8 per cent of gross inflows. If this were a temporary fluctuation, it would not be especially troubling. But the trend appears structural rather than cyclical.

FDI has long been regarded as the most desirable form of external capital for developing economies. Unlike portfolio flows, which can enter and exit quickly in search of short-term gains, FDI is assumed to reflect long-term confidence. It brings capital, technology, managerial expertise and access to global markets. That is why net FDI matters more than the gross figure. It captures what remains after repatriation, disinvestment and outward investments. On this measure, the picture is sobering.

In 2020-21, India's net FDI inflows were around $44 billion, equivalent to nearly 54 per cent of gross inflows. Over the next four years, they fell steadily, reaching less than $1 billion in 2024-25. Although there was a modest recovery in 2025-26, it was driven largely by higher gross inflows rather than a reversal of the underlying trend. Part of the decline reflects growing outward FDI by Indian firms. In principle, overseas investment can be a sign of corporate confidence. Yet the prominence of jurisdictions such as Singapore, Mauritius, the UAE and the Netherlands among both India's inward and outward FDI flows raises questions about whether all such transactions represent genuine productive investment.

That requires a predictable policy environment, greater investor confidence and deeper integration into global value chains

More worrying is the scale of foreign investor exits. Global conditions have undoubtedly played a role. Higher interest rates, weaker growth and geopolitical uncertainty have dampened investment flows across the world. But those explanations are only part of the story. According to World Bank data, India's net FDI inflows declined by around 39 per cent between 2021 and 2024, while Vietnam recorded an increase of roughly 29 per cent. Looking back to 2014, the contrast is even sharper: India's net FDI fell by nearly 21 per cent while Vietnam's rose by about 119 per cent. India's FDI challenge predates current global uncertainties and is indicative of something more.

The "China Plus One" strategy helps explain why. As multinationals sought to diversify supply chains away from China, many expected India to be a major beneficiary. Yet the gains have been more modest than anticipated. The reason lies in India's limited integration into global value chains in areas where China dominates. The sectors that have benefitted most from supply-chain diversification — electronics, electrical machinery, mechanical equipment, automobiles — are deeply embedded in international production networks. China dominates these sectors not simply due to scale but due to the dense ecosystems of suppliers and manufacturers that support them.

India has made progress, particularly in electronics. Incentives have helped attract firms like Apple and Samsung. But attracting final assembly operations is only the beginning. The larger challenge is developing domestic supplier networks and component manufacturing ecosystems that anchor production locally. In contrast, Vietnam is deeply integrated into global manufacturing chains and exports far larger volumes in several key sectors. The difference is not one of market size but of integration.

India's current account has long remained in deficit, making stable capital inflows essential. Pressure on the rupee and periodic intervention by the RBI underline that reality. Gross FDI numbers may appear healthy, but when a growing share simultaneously leaves the country, the cushion becomes much thinner than it seems. This is particularly worrisome as foreign companies are known to prefer retained earnings to borrowings to fund expansion.

India's challenge is no longer simply attracting FDI; it is retaining it. That requires a predictable policy environment, greater investor confidence and deeper integration into global value chains. Investors are still coming to India. The concern is that too many are also finding reasons to leave.

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India recorded Gross FDI of $94.5 billion in FY 2025–26 (RBI).
- However, Net FDI declined to $7.65 billion, reflecting rising repatriation, disinvestment and outward FDI.
- The trend raises concerns over India's ability to retain long-term foreign investment, despite benefiting from the China Plus One strategy.

Key Points

- Gross FDI (FY 2025–26): $94.5 billion
- Net FDI (FY 2025–26): $7.65 billion
- Net FDI fell from about $44 billion (FY 2020–21) to less than $1 billion (FY 2024–25) before recovering modestly.
- According to the World Bank:
  - India's Net FDI declined by ~39% (2021–24).
  - Vietnam's Net FDI increased by ~29% during the same period.
- India attracts significant FDI in:
  - Electronics
  - Automobile
  - Services
  - Manufacturing
- Major sources/routes of FDI:
  - Singapore
  - Mauritius
  - UAE
  - Netherlands
- India remains less integrated into Global Value Chains (GVCs) than Vietnam and China.

Static Linkages

- FDI: Long-term investment with management control (generally ≥10% equity).
- FDI is a non-debt creating capital inflow.
- FPI is comparatively volatile and market-driven.
- FDI is regulated under:
  - Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999
  - DPIIT Consolidated FDI Policy
- Entry Routes:
  - Automatic Route
  - Government Approval Route
- Current Account Deficit (CAD) requires stable capital inflows such as FDI.
- Global Value Chains (GVCs) improve exports, technology transfer and industrial competitiveness.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Reflects India's attractiveness as a large investment destination.
- Supports technology transfer and employment.
- PLI Scheme has boosted electronics manufacturing.
- China Plus One strategy offers long-term opportunities.

Challenges

- Sharp decline in Net FDI indicates higher investor exits.
- Weak domestic supplier ecosystem.
- Limited participation in Global Value Chains.
- High dependence on imported components.
- Regulatory uncertainty affects investor confidence.

Way Forward

- Strengthen domestic manufacturing ecosystems.
- Deepen integration into Global Value Chains.
- Ensure stable and predictable investment policies.
- Improve ease of doing business and contract enforcement.
- Promote high-value manufacturing and R&D.
- Encourage reinvestment of retained earnings.

No going back to the pre-war Strait

OF THE several issues the US and Iran must resolve during their 60-day negotiating window, none is more consequential for international trade and the global economy than the future of the Strait of Hormuz. President Donald Trump has said that it will reopen toll-free, while US Secretary of State Marco Rubio, during his ongoing visit to the Gulf, declared that "no country is allowed to charge tolls or fees on an international waterway". Iran, however, has announced plans to introduce a maritime fee for vessels transiting the Strait. Whether or not this ultimately takes the form of a formal toll, the sobering reality is that the Strait of Hormuz is unlikely to return to its pre-war status. Iran's de facto control, and its ability to close it in response to Israel's actions in Lebanon and other perceived threats, mean that the world will have to adjust to the region's new strategic landscape.

A week after the signing of the Iran-US MoU, traffic through the Strait remains well below pre-war levels. Even if the US and Iran have agreed to agree, a return to business-as-usual could take weeks, if not months. Not only will shipping contracts, insurance policies and other arrangements be redrawn, tanker operators and their crews will now have to sail with the possibility that Iran could close the Strait again, without notice. Its adoption of inexpensive technologies, including shore-based anti-ship missiles, drones, speedboats and mines, has made it easier to disrupt maritime traffic while increasing the costs. There is, however, a longer-term scenario. The Strait, through which one-fifth of the world's energy supplies pass, might become a diminishing asset as Gulf countries invest in alternative pipeline routes and the world accelerates the shift to alternative energy sources.

India cannot afford to wait for the next crisis. With the onset of war, imports of crude oil, LPG and LNG dipped, inventories declined, and the resulting disruptions filtered through to the domestic economy in the form of price hikes. India must diversify not only the sources of its energy imports but also the energy it consumes. Sourcing from a wider range of options, including the US, Canada, Russia and some African countries, can reduce dependence on any single route. In the longer term, the Indian government must accelerate the electrification of transport and industry. It must prioritise the adoption of renewable energy to shield the economy from supply disruptions and price shocks.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Recent tensions between Iran and the United States have revived concerns over the security of the Strait of Hormuz, a critical global energy chokepoint.
- Iran has indicated plans to levy maritime transit charges, while the U.S. has opposed any restrictions on international navigation.
- The crisis highlights vulnerabilities in global energy security, maritime trade, and India's import dependence.

Key Points

Strait of Hormuz

- Connects Persian Gulf with Gulf of Oman and Arabian Sea.
- Bordered by Iran (north) and Oman & UAE (south).
- Governed by UNCLOS (Transit Passage Regime).

Strategic Importance

- Carries about 20% of global petroleum liquids trade (U.S. Energy Information Administration).
- Major exporters using the Strait:
  - Saudi Arabia
  - Iraq
  - UAE
  - Kuwait
  - Qatar
  - Iran
- World's most important oil transit chokepoint.

Why is it Important?

- Disruption raises:
  - Crude oil prices
  - Freight costs
  - Marine insurance premiums
- Impacts global inflation and supply chains.

Implications for India

- India imports about 85% of its crude oil requirement.
- West Asia is India's largest energy supplier.
- Closure/disruption may lead to:
  - Higher import bill
  - Inflation
  - Widening Current Account Deficit (CAD)
  - Increased LPG and LNG prices
  - Pressure on fertilizer and power sectors

Static Linkages

- UNCLOS, 1982 – Transit Passage through international straits.
- Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).
- Energy Security.
- Blue Economy.
- SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region).
- National Green Hydrogen Mission.
- Renewable Energy Transition.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Demonstrates the strategic importance of maritime chokepoints.
- Reinforces India's need for diversified energy imports.
- Supports accelerated clean energy transition.

Challenges

- Heavy dependence on imported crude.
- Limited alternative maritime routes.
- Rising logistics and insurance costs.
- Exposure to geopolitical instability.

Way Forward

- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Accelerate renewable energy and Green Hydrogen.
- Strengthen maritime security under SAGAR.
- Improve energy efficiency and reduce import dependence.
- Enhance resilience of supply chains.

On Western Ghats, South must break impasse

THE IMPLEMENTATION of a series of measures to protect the Western Ghats, proposed by a committee headed by the eminent scientist K Kasturirangan, has been hanging fire for more than 12 years. State governments in the region — Maharashtra, Gujarat, Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka — pushed back against the proposal to declare 60,000 sq km of the Western Ghats, roughly 37 per cent of the mountain chain, as an Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA). They took exception to the Kasturirangan Committee's proposal to ban mining, polluting industries, thermal power plants and large constructions in the ESA. The governments of Gujarat, Maharashtra and Goa have now relented. This could pave the way for ESA protection in about 19,000 sq km of the Western Ghats.

The continuous mountain chain, with a break at the Palakkad Gap on the Tamil Nadu-Kerala border, harbours one of the world's eight "hottest hotspots" of biological diversity. Its landform influences the monsoon by acting as a barrier to moisture-bearing winds, resulting in bountiful rainfall along the Western Ghats' coastal side. It's the source of the Godavari, Krishna, Cauvery, Periyar, and several other rivers. The region is much more densely populated compared to several other ecologically sensitive areas — the Himalaya, for instance. This means the argument pitting environmental protection against development has gained traction in the region's six states, even though ecologists have consistently emphasised that ESAs would not harm farm livelihoods. In fact, environmental protection could shield agriculturists against climate vagaries.

The Kerala floods of 2018 and the Wayanad landslide in 2024 underscored the perils of not respecting the frailties of the Western Ghats. That's why Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu, which have about two-thirds of the ESA area proposed by the Kasturirangan Committee, need to be brought on board urgently. The benefits of ecological services provided by the Western Ghats — water security, carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation and climate regulation — extend beyond the region. Some ecologists, therefore, believe that a system to remunerate the area's people for such services could help reconcile economic aspirations with ecological realities and break the impasse on the Kasturirangan Committee report in the southern states. Such conversations need to inform policymaking.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Union Government has revived the process of notifying the Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA) in the Western Ghats based on the Kasturirangan Committee (2013) recommendations.
- Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Goa have agreed to the proposal, while Karnataka, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu are yet to reach consensus.
- The move gains significance after disasters such as the 2018 Kerala floods and 2024 Wayanad landslides, which highlighted the ecological fragility of the Western Ghats.

Key Facts

Western Ghats

- Extend for ~1,600 km along India's western coast.
- Spread across 6 States:
  - Gujarat
  - Maharashtra
  - Goa
  - Karnataka
  - Kerala
  - Tamil Nadu
- One of the 8 Hottest Hotspots of Biodiversity (Conservation International).
- Declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site (2012).
- Source of major peninsular rivers:
  - Godavari
  - Krishna
  - Kaveri
  - Periyar
- Palakkad Gap is the major natural break.

Kasturirangan Committee (2013)

- Chairperson: Dr. K. Kasturirangan.
- Recommended ~60,000 sq km (≈37%) of the Western Ghats as Ecologically Sensitive Area (ESA).
- Followed a landscape-based approach, distinguishing natural landscapes from cultural landscapes.

Activities Prohibited in ESA

- Mining and quarrying
- Thermal power plants
- Red-category polluting industries
- Large-scale construction projects

Activities Allowed

- Agriculture
- Horticulture
- Plantations
- Existing settlements
- Sustainable tourism

Static Value Addition

- ESA is notified under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986.
- Western Ghats regulate the Southwest Monsoon through the orographic effect.
- Rich in endemism, evergreen forests, and Shola-grassland ecosystems.
- Important protected areas:
  - Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve
  - Silent Valley National Park
  - Periyar Tiger Reserve
  - Kudremukh National Park

Why is it Important?

Significance

- Conserves biodiversity and endemic species.
- Protects river catchments and water security.
- Reduces landslide and flood risks.
- Enhances carbon sequestration and climate resilience.
- Supports sustainable development.

Challenges

- Opposition from States due to development concerns.
- Conflict between conservation and livelihood.
- Mining and infrastructure pressures.
- Delay in Centre–State consensus.

Way Forward

- Implement ESA through cooperative federalism.
- Promote scientific land-use planning.
- Compensate local communities through Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES).
- Encourage sustainable agriculture and eco-tourism.
- Strengthen disaster-risk assessment and ecosystem restoration.