



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

Trump ends Iran truce; talks to go on

Iran claims it hit back at 85 U.S. military assets after strikes on its southern coast

Washington's 'violation' of MoU has rendered it 'ineffective', says Tehran

U.S. would attack targets in Iran once again, says Trump at NATO summit

Stanley John

The ceasefire between the United States and Iran is "over", U.S. President Donald Trump said on Wednesday, while leaving the door open for more talks, after the two sides exchanged fire amid a dispute over the status of the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran said the U.S. "violations" have rendered parts of the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two countries "ineffective".

"As far as I am concerned, it is over," Mr. Trump said at a NATO summit in Ankara, Turkey, when asked about the ceasefire. "It is just a waste of time dealing with them."

"I will let our wonderful negotiators keep talking if they want, but I do not see it. I do not like these people," he added that the U.S. would hit Iran again on Wednesday night. "We're gonna hit 'em hard tonight," he said, adding: "They violate the



Stock indices dip 2% as Iran, U.S. restart clashes

MUMBAI Benchmark Nifty and Sensex dipped over 2% to 23,882.05 and 78,503.60 points respectively on Wednesday after renewed Iran-U.S. clashes sent global oil prices soaring. The indices opened about 0.6% down from the previous close before tumbling during the day. > PAGE 12

Central Command said in a statement.

"U.S. forces struck Iranian air defense systems, command and control networks, coastal radar sites, anti-ship missile capabilities, and more than 60 Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) small boats in and near the strait to degrade Iran's ability to continue attacking international commerce flowing through the international trade corridor," it said.

India expresses concern India on Wednesday voiced deep concern over the fresh targeting of commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz and called upon all parties to exercise restraint.

"We urge the parties to return to dialogue and diplomacy to achieve a peaceful and lasting solution to the conflict," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement. (With PTI inputs)

IS THE DEAL FALLING APART? > PAGE 14

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The U.S.–Iran Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed on 17 June has come under strain following fresh military exchanges.
- The U.S. conducted air strikes on Iranian military targets, alleging Iranian attacks on commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.
- Iran retaliated by targeting U.S. military assets in the Persian Gulf and accused the U.S. of violating the MoU.
- India expressed concern over attacks on commercial shipping and called for dialogue, diplomacy and restraint.

Key Points

- Strait of Hormuz is the world's most important oil transit chokepoint.
- It connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea.
- Around 20% of global petroleum liquids consumption passes through the Strait daily. (U.S. Energy Information Administration)
- The MoU envisaged:
 - Safe passage of commercial vessels.
 - Talks on the future administration of the Strait.
 - Limited sanctions relief for Iran.
 - Iranian commitment to peaceful nuclear activities.
- Fresh escalation has led to:
 - Increased geopolitical tensions in West Asia.
 - Threats to global energy security.
 - Higher shipping and insurance costs.
 - Risk of disruption in crude oil supplies.

Static Linkages

- UNCLOS, 1982 Right of Transit Passage through international straits used for international navigation.
- Coastal States cannot suspend transit passage.

- Major Maritime Chokepoints:

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

- International Maritime Organization (IMO) promotes safe and secure shipping.
- India imports over 85% of its crude oil requirement. (Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas)
- Operation Sankalp (2019): Indian Navy mission to ensure safe passage of Indian merchant vessels in the Persian Gulf.
- SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region): India's maritime security vision.
- India maintains Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPRs) to address supply disruptions.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights strategic importance of maritime chokepoints.
- Demonstrates the linkage between geopolitics and energy security.
- Shows limitations of ceasefire agreements without political consensus.

Challenges

- Disruption of global crude oil supplies.
- Increase in global oil prices and inflation.
- Threat to freedom of navigation.
- Regional instability affecting India's energy imports.
- Higher logistics and insurance costs.

Implications for India

- Increased import bill and Current Account Deficit (CAD).
- Inflationary pressure due to higher crude prices.
- Risks to Indian diaspora and merchant shipping in West Asia.
- Greater need for naval presence and maritime security cooperation.

Way Forward

- Promote dialogue under international diplomatic mechanisms.
- Ensure compliance with UNCLOS and freedom of navigation.
- Strengthen maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Enhance India's blue-water naval capabilities and maritime domain awareness.

Iran's strategic resurgence – Iran's strategic moment

The gloves are off and the ceasefire is in trouble as the United States and Iran traded strikes, once again, on July 8, over the safe passage of commercial ships across the Strait of Hormuz.

However, looking beyond this flareup, the recent visuals coming out of Iran are extraordinary. After more than 40 days of sustained attacks by the combined military power of the U.S. and Israel, the country is projecting an image of pride, defiance, and resilience. The funeral of its slain Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, drew millions of Muslims and high-level representatives from Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Türkiye, Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, Armenia, and several other countries. Even the Taliban government in Afghanistan was represented. Notably absent were the entire Western bloc, much of Africa, and some regional countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Kuwait, which bore the brunt of Iran's retaliation during the war.

Did the scenes witnessed reflect the image of a nation defeated? Did the millions of people on the streets, eager to catch a final glimpse of their assassinated leader, appear coerced or forced to mourn? Did the visuals coming out of Tehran and other parts of Iran reflect a nation that is economically bankrupt? The answer to all these questions is a bold 'no'. What was on display was a nation eager to use this opportunity to tell the world that it is still standing on its own – and may be more powerful, confident and resilient than ever before.

The regime has not only survived the war but has emerged stronger than before, with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in full control. Its nuclear programme still remains off the table and there is no mention of its ballistic missile programme in the 14-point Memorandum of Understanding with the U.S. The windfall gains from removal of sanctions, sale of crude oil and natural gas, a deflating of its money and assets and the monetisation of the Strait of Hormuz promise an economic revival for Iran, although some of it may now be under question after the rapidly escalating situation. This resurrection of Iran almost feels like a revolution, and is a reminder of how a new nation, the 'Islamic Republic of Iran' emerged from the Iranian Revolution of 1979, overcoming the threats and challenges from a monarchy supported and abetted by the West.

The first revolution
The 1979 revolution was the culmination of a year-long protests against the Iranian regime, ignited by multiple factors, mainly political repression and economic hardships. There was also a strong undercurrent to reclaim Iran's cultural and religious legacy which had been



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suppressed by the pro-western Shah regime. The combined effect created an unprecedented popular movement led by Ayatollah Khomeini, the exiled cleric and former philosophy professor from the school who had been banished in 1964 for opposing the Shah's reform programme. The movement ultimately overthrew Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

The Shah and his family fled Iran in January 1979 and Ayatollah Khomeini returned on February 1 to a jubilant welcome. 10 days later, Iran's armed forces declared their neutrality, effectively ending the Shah's rule. On April 1, following a successful referendum, Khomeini proclaimed Iran as the Islamic Republic. The new republic drew its legitimacy from three pillars: restoring Iran's national pride, establishing theological discourse and Islamic governance, and promising economic progress and social justice. However, the 1979 hostage crisis, the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, prolonged nuclear programme-related sanctions, and support for regional militia proxies severely tested the country's economic and political resilience.

Revolution 2.0

Why is the current post-war situation akin to a second revolution? Like in 1979, this war too has led to the emergence of a stronger and a nationalist regime. However, unlike 1979, when an earlier regime had to be overthrown, this time, the regime, despite being hit badly and its Supreme Leader assassinated, has emerged stronger as it has survived. Once again, key issues such as national pride, dignity, strength and unity are being made the central pillars. And the millions of people on the street now mirror the visuals of millions on the streets of Iran in February 1979 when they welcomed Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini after his return from exile. And, like in 1979, this revolution too promises to bring in long-lasting changes in Iran and the region.

The most prominent change is obviously the security architecture. Soon after the 1979 revolution, the nations in the Gulf had formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981, to forge a common platform to fight the threat from a revolutionary Iran. The region turned to the U.S. which then carried out its most extensive and permanent military deployment after the Second World War – it stationed thousands of troops and hundreds of military assets across multiple bases, promising a security umbrella against Iran (and Iraq).

Well, this war has shattered this myth with the punishment and huge losses that American bases and the countries in the region had to suffer from Iranian strikes. Countries in the region are not only frustrated with the failed U.S. security assurances but are looking at alternatives to

secure themselves in the future, including maybe, making peace with Iran.

The second issue is the regime's survival which had been at its weakest in the past few years due to economic sanctions and growing frustration within over its enforcement of Islamic laws, especially against women. The most recent protests in December 2025, ignited over severe inflation and job losses and massive devaluation of its national currency (Rial 1.54 million Rials traded for one U.S. dollar) posed one of the most severe threats to the regime, one which the U.S. too attempted to support and ignite. However, it failed as it was suppressed by a brutal crackdown by the regime. Even the slain Supreme Leader's advanced age and declining health had raised questions about the regime's ability to retain control after his death. However, those doubts have now been consigned to history, with the regime emerging stronger and more firmly in control.

The third important factor is identity. If the first revolution gave the nation a 'Religion First' ideological identity, this war has brought national pride to the fore and made it the primary agent of resilience and defiance. Iran's ability to absorb the punishment of military strikes, endure the pain and then strike back effectively, have brought people and nation together.

The fourth factor has to relate to the economy. A nation which has survived and sustained under severe economic sanctions for almost three decades, now faces a pleasant possibility of huge inflows of money into its coffers thanks to a possible easing of sanctions, deflating of assets and sale of petroleum products. The monetisation of the Strait of Hormuz is obviously a bonus and now a powerful negotiating instrument with Iran.

A balancing act for India

India clearly has a decision to make. The war marked India's definite and noticeable tilt toward the Israel-U.S.-United Arab Emirates bloc, with several decisions that many analysts have found difficult to explain or defend. By sending a Minister led delegation to the funeral, India may have walked a diplomatic tightrope. Going forward, however, it will have to make a strategic choice on how to balance its ties with Iran and the wider Gulf region, which itself appears deeply divided after the war.

Iran is resurgent and is unlikely to let go of the opportunity that this war has provided it. The scale of the irreversible changes unfolding in Iran and the region may become clearer over time. However, one thing is certain – the security and economic landscape of the region has changed forever. How Iran uses this opportunity, and how the region responds, will shape the destiny of its people and the region for decades to come.

- The Strait of Hormuz remains one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints for global energy trade.

India's Interests

- Energy security.
- Safety of the Indian diaspora in West Asia.
- Maritime security in the Arabian Sea.
- Connectivity through Chabahar Port and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).
- Balancing relations with Iran, Israel, GCC countries and the United States under Strategic Autonomy.

Static Linkages

- 1979 Iranian Revolution established the Islamic Republic under the principle of Wilayat al-Faqih.
 - Strait of Hormuz Connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman.
 - Handles nearly one-fifth of global oil consumption through maritime trade.
 - IRGC Separate from Iran's regular armed forces.
 - Responsible for protecting the Islamic Republic and strategic military assets.
 - Chabahar Port India's gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia.
 - Part of the INSTC.
 - Strategic Autonomy Core principle of India's foreign policy, allowing engagement with competing geopolitical blocs.

Critical Analysis

Why Iran Matters

- Controls access to the Strait of Hormuz, a vital global energy corridor.
- Key player in West Asian geopolitics.
- Influences regional security through strategic partnerships and proxy networks.

Challenges

- Unresolved nuclear issue.
- Regional instability affecting global energy markets.
- Continued sanctions and geopolitical rivalry.
- Risk to maritime trade and freedom of navigation.

Implications for India

- Risk of crude oil price volatility.
- Threat to Indian shipping and energy imports.
- Importance of maintaining balanced ties with Iran, Israel, GCC and the U.S.
- Need to operationalise Chabahar Port and INSTC for strategic connectivity.

Way Forward

- Continue India's policy of Strategic Autonomy.
- Strengthen engagement with all West Asian partners.
- Enhance energy diversification and strategic petroleum reserves.
- Accelerate development of Chabahar Port and INSTC.
- Support peaceful resolution through diplomacy and international law.
- Strengthen maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The U.S.–Iran ceasefire has come under strain following renewed military exchanges over the Strait of Hormuz.
- Despite sustained military operations by the U.S. and Israel, Iran's political system remains intact, with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) consolidating its influence.
- The developments have revived debates on Iran's nuclear programme, regional security architecture, sanctions, energy security, and India's West Asia policy.

Key Points

Strategic Developments

- Iran has demonstrated significant state resilience despite prolonged conflict.
- The IRGC has emerged as the dominant military and political institution.
- Iran continues to treat its nuclear programme and ballistic missile capability as strategic deterrents.
- Possibility of sanctions relief could revive Iran's oil and gas exports.

Regional Geopolitics

- The conflict has exposed limitations of the existing West Asian security architecture.
- Gulf countries may increasingly pursue strategic balancing rather than exclusive dependence on external security guarantees.
- Iran seeks greater regional influence through diplomacy, energy exports and strategic geography.

Economic Significance

- Iran possesses among the world's largest reserves of crude oil and natural gas.

A resurgent Iran signals a dramatic shift in West Asian geopolitics

The Indian diaspora as Australia's identity, its future

The Indian diaspora is now officially Australia's largest overseas-born community, overtaking the England-born population for the first time. This is not a small demographic footnote. Australia's population has, for two centuries, been anchored by a British-derived majority. An Indian-origin community now outnumbering it marks a genuine inflection point in how the country understands itself. It is against this backdrop that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Australia – his third visit Down Under – will be a trip in which the diaspora is expected to command the spotlight.

The Australia-India relationship has come a long way, from being defined by the simplistic 'three Cs' – Cricket, Curry and Commonwealth – to a more meaningful 'four Ds': Democracy, Defence, Diaspora and Debt. This shift reflects a decade of institution-building, including India's participation alongside Australia, the United States and Japan in the Quad, the informal security grouping that has become the backbone of the Indo-Pacific strategy of India and Australia. Mr. Modi's visit will touch on all four pillars, but it is the diaspora event – a large public gathering billed as 'Melbourne Meets Modi' – that is drawing the most attention, precisely because of what this community has come to represent for both nations.

A new migration era
The settlement trajectory of the Australian-Indian community is very different from its counterparts in the U.S. or the United Kingdom. The first significant wave of Indian professional migration to Australia dates only to the 1960s and 1970s,



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The diaspora must be valued not merely as a symbol of partnership, but as a community whose voices matter

climbing after the dismantling of the White Australia Policy – an explicitly racist immigration regime that excluded all but European migrants.

By diaspora standards, this makes the Australian-Indian community still young. A large share of recent arrivals left India during the 'New India' years since 2014, a period of rapid outward migration driven by a mix of economic ambition and, for some, disillusionment with the state of democratic institutions at home. Whatever the reasons for leaving, this cohort tends to be more recently and more tightly bound to India – through family, business, remittances and a resurgent nationalist identity. That is what makes Australia's Indian community distinct beyond just numbers.

The rise of political backlash

As the anti-immigration wave rises across the globe, in Australia this wave has found a specific target in the Indian community. Nationalist street rallies under banners such as 'March for Australia' have gathered pace over the past year, and the right-wing populist One Nation party is emerging as the main opponent to the left-of-centre Labor party currently in power. Mr. Modi's high-visibility diaspora event lands squarely within this tense landscape. By showcasing the scale, accomplishments and mobilisation of the Indian community, it will reiterate the statement – increasingly co-opted by conservative movements – that this community has grown too large, too fast, and too visible.

For Australia, the Indian diaspora is an economic asset and a force multiplier for the country's multicultural fabric. But a fracturing domestic political landscape means that this asset

can just as easily be recast as a liability in public discourse. Mr. Modi's visit should be a reminder to policymakers that failing to invest in better understanding this growing and dynamic community carries real stakes for the future of this strategic partnership.

Beyond numbers and narratives

For India, the diaspora has long been framed as a source of pride and a connecting tissue of cultural links to Australia as a strategic partner. But pride and sentiment are not the same as understanding. What is missing – on both sides of the relationship – is a serious, evidence-based picture of how this diaspora actually lives, trusts and participates in Australian civic life, beyond the headline statistics on income, education and trade that has long been the mainstay of government discourse. If both countries are serious about treating the diaspora as a genuine pillar of their partnership rather than a talking point, that requires concerted efforts to capture their experiences of settlement which are far from monolithic.

Australia's demographic transformation is not a passing trend. It will permanently reshape its national identity from an antipodean one to one that is far more entangled with India and the wider Indo-Pacific. That means sustained research, stronger engagement with civil society, and policies that build social cohesion rather than taking it for granted. If democracy, defence, diaspora and debt are to remain the four pillars of the partnership, then the diaspora must be treated not merely as a symbol of the relationship, but as a constituency whose experiences and trust deserve to be understood.

- Rising anti-immigration politics in several developed countries has also affected discourse surrounding migrant communities, including Indians.

Static Linkages

- India follows the principle of Single Citizenship.
- Article 51 promotes international peace, friendly relations and respect for international law.
- Article 253 empowers Parliament to legislate for implementing international treaties and agreements.
- Indian diaspora categories:
 - Non-Resident Indian (NRI)
 - Overseas Citizen of India (OCI)
- India's foreign policy increasingly emphasizes:
 - Diaspora diplomacy
 - Act East Policy
 - Indo-Pacific Vision
 - SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)
- Australia is a key partner in the Indo-Pacific and the eastern Indian Ocean.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens India's soft power.
- Enhances bilateral trade and investment.
- Facilitates technology and knowledge transfer.
- Supports Indo-Pacific strategic cooperation.
- Improves educational and research collaboration.

Challenges

- Rising anti-immigration sentiment in Australia.
- Racial discrimination and social integration concerns.
- Politicisation of migration issues.
- Need for stronger diaspora engagement policies.
- Balancing domestic politics with strategic partnership.

Way Forward

- Institutionalise diaspora engagement.
- Promote research and innovation partnerships.
- Expand mobility under bilateral agreements.
- Strengthen anti-discrimination measures.
- Deepen cooperation under Quad and Indo-Pacific initiatives.
- Enhance cultural and educational exchanges.
- Leverage diaspora for trade, investment and technology partnerships.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Indian diaspora has become Australia's largest overseas-born community, surpassing the England-born population for the first time.
- The development coincides with the proposed visit of the Prime Minister of India to Australia, highlighting the growing role of the diaspora in bilateral relations.
- India-Australia relations have expanded beyond cultural ties to encompass strategic, economic, technological and Indo-Pacific cooperation.
- The diaspora is increasingly regarded as a strategic asset in strengthening bilateral relations.

Key Points

- Australia has emerged as a major destination for skilled Indian migrants and international students.
- The Indian diaspora contributes significantly to Australia's:
 - IT sector
 - Healthcare
 - Higher education
 - Entrepreneurship
 - Research and innovation
- India and Australia upgraded their ties to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2020).
- The India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA), 2022 has enhanced trade, investment and mobility.
- Both countries cooperate through:
 - Quad
 - G20
 - Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)
 - East Asia Summit (EAS)
- The Indian diaspora serves as an important instrument of soft power, economic diplomacy and people-to-people connectivity.

Checkbox caste

An open-ended method of counting caste may not yield usable data

The rehearsal for the second phase of Census 2027, underway in 16 States and Union Territories since July 6, carries a key feature: an "open column" where respondents can state their caste, which the enumerator will record. Unlike the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), which also had this feature, this counting of caste in the Census itself has statutory backing. The pre-test ends on July 20, and the government says that it will then finalise the methodology for counting caste. The hope is that the pre-test findings will corroborate what is known: an open-ended response on caste yields only unwieldy data, as seen in the 2011 SECC, which eventually proved unusable. It is not difficult to understand why. The method led the 2011 SECC to return more than 46 lakh "caste names", against the 4,147 in the 1931 Census, the last to tabulate caste. Respondents entered surnames, sub-castes and clan names as if interchangeable, inflating the count into incoherence. The Centre told the Supreme Court in 2021 that the SECC figures were too error-ridden to be relied upon for reservation. The pre-test should instead point to a better method – using the digital Census's hand-held devices, pre-loaded with a curated list of castes and sub-castes, so that the enumerator selects the 'correct' entry after asking the respondent. Mistakes and mismatches will happen, but as the 2022-23 Bihar caste survey revealed, this method could return more usable data.

Unlike the other identities – linguistic, religious and gender – that the Census notes, caste is an abstract, irrational one that designates people not by biological, physical, or professed attributes, but by a perceived, primordial identity conferred at birth and arranged in a hierarchy. Even this hierarchy is not self-evident, with the perceptions of social status of different castes often contradicting one another. India's Constitution, committed to social justice, set itself against caste by abolishing untouchability, forbidding caste-based discrimination and holding out the promise of a republic where birth would not determine a citizen's standing. So why count caste when the very act of enumeration can ossify or reify this abstract identity? The only rationale is that self-perceived or imposed caste identity creates social inequities, and welfare and social justice measures that address caste-based injustice can, over time, be expected to delegitimise the casteism rather than entrench it. Through sharper targeting of welfare and affirmative action, empirical caste data can also inform questions of the creamy layer and the sub-categorisation of castes and classes already benefiting from reservation. In these, better data are indispensable. If caste is to be counted, it should be counted well. The open-ended way of registering it will not serve the intended purpose.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Census 2027 pre-test (6–20 July 2026) is being conducted in 16 States/UTs to finalize the methodology for the upcoming Census.
- For the first time, caste enumeration will form part of the Population Census with statutory backing under the Census Act, 1948.
- The pre-test is assessing the feasibility of recording caste through an open-ended response.
- Lessons are being drawn from the 2011 Socio-Economic and Caste Census (SECC), whose caste data was not used due to inconsistencies, and the 2022–23 Bihar Caste Survey, which adopted a standardized digital approach.

Key Points

- Census Act, 1948 provides the legal framework for conducting the Census.
- Registrar General & Census Commissioner of India (RGI), Ministry of Home Affairs conducts the Census.
 - 2011 SECC Conducted separately from the Population Census.
 - Generated over 46 lakh caste entries due to varied spellings, sub-castes and surnames.

- Union Government informed the Supreme Court (2021) that the data contained significant errors and was unsuitable for reservation policy.
- 1931 Census Last Census to publish comprehensive caste-wise data (excluding post-Independence SC/ST enumeration).
- Proposed improvement:
 - Digital enumeration using pre-loaded standardized caste codes to reduce duplication and improve data quality.

Static Linkages

- Census Act, 1948
- Entry 69, Union List (Seventh Schedule) – Census is a Union subject.
- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 15(4) – Special provisions for socially and educationally backward classes.
- Article 16(4) – Reservation in public employment.
- Article 17 – Abolition of untouchability.
- Article 46 – Promotion of educational and economic interests of weaker sections.
- Article 340 – Commission for Backward Classes.
- Indra Sawhney Case (1992) – Creamy Layer principle.
- 102nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 2018 – Constitutional status to NCBC.
- 105th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2021 – Restored States' power to identify SEBCs.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Enables evidence-based welfare targeting.
- Helps review reservation policies using updated data.
- Facilitates sub-categorisation within OBCs.
- Assists in identifying the Creamy Layer.
- Supports better socio-economic planning.

Challenges

- Open-ended caste responses may create inconsistent data.
- Variations in regional names, sub-castes and surnames.
- Administrative complexity in standardisation.
- Risk of increased caste-based political mobilisation.
- Privacy and confidentiality concerns.

Way Forward

- Adopt standardized digital caste coding instead of free-text entries.
- Prepare a verified national caste classification database.
- Strengthen enumerator training and digital validation.
- Ensure transparency and independent data audit.
- Use caste data solely for evidence-based policy formulation.
- Protect confidentiality under the Census framework.

When corruption does not make a political noise

THE EXISTENCE of widespread corruption once again wafts over Indian public life. Whether it is repeated examination leaks, shoddy road construction, allegations surrounding contracts, the awarding of environmental clearances, the capture of regulatory agencies, theft from temples, expropriation of private companies, or abuse of public office for real estate deals, a familiar litany of complaints is gathering unprecedented momentum. At issue is not whether any specific claim is true. After all, many of the charges against UPA-II were proved in a court of law. What matters is the pervasive sense of institutional corruption. The most telling sign is that even some supporters of the government acknowledge the problem.

Yet there is a striking paradox. Precisely at the moment when corruption has once again become the dominant theme of public life, the prospects for a credible anti-corruption movement have become more remote. The Godroach Janta Party, still protesting at Jantar Mantar, is animated by the admirable conviction that Indians need not simply roll over in the face of arbitrary power. But converting widespread moral unease into an effective political movement is far harder today than at any point. This widening gap between the visibility of corruption and the weakness of anti-corruption politics is not accidental. It points to deeper transformations in Indian politics.

Corruption, of course, never disappeared. But it needed from political consciousness. Its character appeared to change. Corruption seemed less retail than wholesale. It was less about the routine extraction that citizens encountered in



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

everyday dealings with the state, and more about discretion over high level regulation, contracts, natural resources at the highest levels. The consequences of this corruption are not as easily felt. Second, improvements in state capacity and service delivery blunted everyday grievances.

Across party lines, welfare schemes became more effectively administered, many citizens-facing services were digitised, and the daily experience of many schemes improved. Third, the BJP-ISS combine successfully cast itself as the insurgent force confronting a corrupt Congress ancien régime. It appropriated the language of moral renewal. Finally, there was the political capital of Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself. His carefully cultivated image of personal integrity, the purity of this *naqut* rather than his actual performance, created a widespread belief that, whatever the failings of others, the Prime Minister remained incorruptible and firmly in command. That moral authority, more than any institutional reform, helped mute corruption talk.

All four pillars have now collapsed. The ubiquity of exam scams, the pervasive and increasing shoddiness of public services in urban India, even the return of bad roads, disappointment about a range of services, and open talk of corruption in universities have made the retail-wholesale distinction less relevant. Citizens are feeling it more. At the same time, anxieties about high level corruption have acquired a different character.

During the UPA years, one could plausibly argue that even serious corruption at the top need not permanently damage the

The fear is not simply that political power is being used to extract rents, but that it is being used to create and protect quasi-monopolies, selectively rewarding favoured firms while disadvantaging rivals

economy so long as markets remained broadly competitive and no single group could systematically capture the state. Today, the concern is more profound. The fear is not simply that political power is being used to extract rents, but that it is being used to create and protect quasi-monopolies, selectively rewarding favoured firms while disadvantaging rivals. Corruption no longer merely "greases the wheels". It is this possibility, the fusion of concentrated political power with concentrated economic power, that makes concerns about corruption resonate even within sections of the private sector that had once regarded it as a manageable cost of doing business. Simply put, it is not that the cost of your business is high; your business is not even safe.

The political pillars have collapsed even more. The BJP and ISS are now wide tents, having incorporated, in the quest for power, most of the new BJP actors they categorised as corrupt. The ISS is discovering that corruption is not just a matter of homilies about character: people with background in the RSS can succumb to the temptations of unchecked power like anyone else. The allegations of temple theft in Ajodhya, an organisational structure architected entirely by the BJP-ISS, takes the field of Ram Rajya literally. The BJP is now the ancien régime with all the signs of not too overwhelming to hide. Amongst some BJP supporters, there is still a residual belief in the Prime Minister's virtue. He is personally above the fray. There is even a theory doing the rounds. This time in corruption talk is the Prime Minister's own master-

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- Weak institutional accountability.

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before Law; prohibits arbitrariness.
- Articles 148–151 – Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG).
- Article 311 – Safeguards to civil servants.
- Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013
- Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988 (Amended 2018)
- Central Vigilance Commission Act, 2003
- Right to Information Act, 2005
- Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014
- Second Administrative Reforms Commission (ARC): Ethics in Governance
- Rule of Law – Basic Feature of the Constitution.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens public confidence in institutions.
- Improves ease of doing business.
- Promotes competitive markets.
- Enhances quality of public expenditure.
- Supports sustainable economic growth.

Challenges

- Regulatory capture.
- Crony capitalism.
- Delay in investigation and prosecution.
- Weak enforcement of anti-corruption laws.
- Political interference in institutions.
- Declining public trust.
- Increased cost overruns in public projects.

Constitutional & Ethical Dimensions

- Rule of Law.
- Accountability.
- Transparency.
- Integrity.
- Public Trust Doctrine.
- Conflict of Interest.
- Ethical Leadership.

Way Forward

- Strengthen independence of Lokpal, CVC, CBI and regulatory bodies.
- Ensure transparent public procurement through digital platforms.
- Strengthen whistle-blower protection.
- Fast-track corruption-related cases.
- Expand proactive disclosure under RTI.
- Institutionalise integrity audits.
- Strengthen parliamentary oversight.
- Promote competition and reduce discretionary powers.
- Enhance ethics training in public administration.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Recent public debate has highlighted concerns over institutional corruption due to allegations involving:
 - Examination paper leaks.
 - Public procurement and contract allocation.
 - Poor infrastructure quality.
 - Regulatory capture.
 - Environmental clearances.
 - Abuse of public office.
- The discussion has shifted from isolated scams to concerns regarding institutional accountability, transparency, and governance quality.

Key Points

- Corruption affects economic growth, public trust, investment climate, and rule of law.
- Shift from petty corruption to systemic/institutional corruption involving:
 - Public procurement.
 - Allocation of natural resources.
 - Regulatory decisions.
 - Government contracts.
- Regulatory Capture: Regulatory agencies act in favour of regulated entities instead of public interest.
- Crony Capitalism: Preferential treatment by the State to select firms through policy or regulatory decisions.
- Digital governance initiatives have reduced leakages in service delivery:
 - Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT)
 - Government e-Marketplace (GeM)
 - Public Financial Management System (PFMS)
 - Aadhaar-enabled authentication
- Concerns remain over:
 - Monopoly tendencies.
 - Rent-seeking.

For better cities, go with the water flow



KAUSHIK DAS
GUPTA

UNTIL EARLY June, several parts of Mumbai were gripped by water shortage, with concerns mounting that the levels in reservoirs were dangerously low. Barely a week later, the city's anxieties have been turned on their head. Relentless monsoon rain has submerged roads, inundated homes, disrupted suburban rail services, and exposed the vulnerability of neighbourhoods built on low-lying land.

Maharashtra's capital receives around 2,400 mm of rainfall annually; by no stretch of the imagination can it be called water-poor. The city's annual swing between thirst and flooding is actually a commentary on the utilitarian imagination of water in urban India: As a resource to be extracted during the dry months and an inconvenience during the monsoon. What has virtually disappeared is the understanding of water as an integral part of ecological systems.

In *Unruly Waters: How Mountains, Rivers and Monsoons Have Shaped South Asia's History*, historian Sunil Amrith argues that the Subcontinent's relationship with water has long been marked by a desire to engineer it — by damming rivers, reclaiming wetlands, embanking floodplains and straightening channels. Such interventions increased food security and allowed people to build homes and create economic avenues. But water resists the certainties of conventional engineering. That areas such as Kurla, Slon and Hindmatra in Mumbai — or TITO in Delhi or Bellandur in Bengaluru — are inundated whenever it pours speaks to water's enduring fidelity to geography.

Mumbai's annual swing between thirst and flooding is actually a commentary on the utilitarian imagination of water in urban India: As a resource to be extracted during the dry months and an inconvenience during the monsoon

For centuries, the landscape that became Mumbai functioned as a sophisticated natural water system. Marshes, mangroves, creeks, and wetlands absorbed rainfall, moderated tides and gradually released excess water into the sea. The city itself emerged from seven islands stitched together through successive reclamation projects. However, as Mumbai expanded, it followed the trajectory that Amrith has traced. The result is that rainwater now has nowhere to go except into streets, homes and overburdened drains. Climate change has magnified these vulnerabilities. When intense rainfall coincides with tidal surges, stormwater cannot easily flow into the sea, causing it to back up into drains and low-lying neighbourhoods.

Mumbai's predicament is a manifestation of an urban planning philosophy that locates water in the binaries of a deluge and shortage. Delhi faces a severe groundwater crisis, while the river Yamuna is reduced to a trickle during the dry season. Bengaluru has witnessed the destruction of hundreds of interconnected lakes even as neighbourhoods alternate between water shortages and floods. Chennai lurched from an acute drinking water crisis in 2019 to devastating floods within a few years.

There is no doubt that Indian cities need to modernise their ageing drainage systems and install pumping stations. But, as urban planners in several parts of the world increasingly argue, that alone will not be sufficient. About two decades ago, Chinese landscape architect Kongjian Yu articulated a radically different vision of urban water management — one that sought to work with nature rather than overpower it. Instead of treating rainwater as an inconvenience, sponge cities seek to absorb, filter, store and gradually release it. Parks become temporary detention basins. Wetlands are restored rather than reclaimed. Green roofs reduce runoff. Permeable pavements allow rainwater to infiltrate the ground.

After the disastrous Beijing floods of 2012, China incorporated many of Kongjian Yu's ideas into its Sponge City programme. South Korea has also incorporated its principles into urban development. Singapore has integrated reservoirs, wetlands and parks into its urban fabric, while Curitiba in Brazil has preserved floodplains as public parks, breaking down the rigid divide between ecological assets and civic infrastructure. The concept of "blue-green" infrastructure is evident in Rotterdam in the Netherlands, Copenhagen in Denmark and Medellín in Colombia, while Rwandan capital Kigali's early efforts to strengthen groundwater resilience through flood-prevention measures have earned international recognition.

For India, the lesson is not to replicate any one such model but to rediscover a forgotten principle: The fates of places are intertwined with living hydrological systems. The sooner India's cities learn to plan with water rather than against it, the more resilient their future will be.

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- Promote permeable pavements and green roofs.
- Enhance groundwater recharge.
- Reduce urban flood risk.

- India requires an integrated approach combining grey infrastructure (drains, pumping stations) with blue-green infrastructure (wetlands, lakes, urban forests).

Static Linkages

- Southwest Monsoon contributes about 75% of India's annual rainfall.
- Wetlands provide:
 - Flood moderation.
 - Groundwater recharge.
 - Water purification.
 - Biodiversity conservation.
- Mangroves:
 - Protect coastlines from storm surges.
 - Reduce coastal flooding.
 - Act as carbon sinks.
- NDMA Guidelines on Urban Flooding (2010) recommend:
 - Preservation of natural drainage channels.
 - Floodplain zoning.
 - Urban flood forecasting.
 - Integrated stormwater management.
- Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules, 2017 regulate conservation and wise use of wetlands.
- Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 provides the umbrella framework for environmental protection.
- Relevant Constitutional Provisions:
 - Article 48A – Protection and improvement of the environment.
 - Article 51A(g) – Fundamental duty to protect the natural environment.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Improves urban climate resilience.
- Reduces flood losses.
- Enhances groundwater recharge.
- Conserves urban ecosystems.
- Strengthens long-term water security.

Challenges

- Encroachment of wetlands and floodplains.
- Weak urban planning and enforcement.
- Inadequate stormwater infrastructure.
- Fragmented institutional coordination.
- Increasing frequency of extreme rainfall events.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Mumbai witnessed a shift from pre-monsoon water scarcity concerns to severe urban flooding within days of the onset of heavy monsoon rainfall.
- The recurring cycle of floods during monsoon and water shortages during summer highlights poor urban water management rather than inadequate rainfall.
- The issue has revived discussions on nature-based urban planning, particularly the Sponge City model for climate-resilient cities.

Key Points

- Mumbai receives nearly 2,400 mm of annual rainfall, yet faces both flooding and seasonal water shortages.
- Major causes of urban flooding:
 - Encroachment of wetlands, lakes, floodplains and mangroves.
 - Concretisation reducing groundwater recharge.
 - Blocked and inadequate stormwater drainage.
 - Unplanned urbanisation.
 - High-intensity rainfall due to climate change.
- Coastal cities face compound flooding when heavy rainfall coincides with high tides, restricting drainage into the sea.
- Sponge City concept aims to:
 - Increase rainwater infiltration.
 - Restore wetlands and water bodies.

Way Forward

- Integrate Sponge City principles into urban master plans.
- Restore wetlands, lakes, mangroves and natural drainage channels.
- Enforce floodplain zoning and land-use regulations.
- Modernise stormwater drainage systems.
- Promote permeable pavements, green roofs and rainwater harvesting.
- Strengthen urban flood forecasting and early warning systems.
- Adopt integrated urban water resource management (IUWRM).
- Mainstream nature-based solutions under AMRUT 2.0 and the Smart Cities Mission.

Delhi, Jakarta and a rediscovery story

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's bilateral meeting with Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto offers an opportunity to inject fresh momentum into a relationship that has experienced periods of remarkable warmth and prolonged neglect. Bonds were forged in the shared anti-colonial struggle and both countries co-hosted the 1955 Bandung Conference that laid the foundations of the Non-Aligned Movement. They drifted apart, however, during the Cold War. India and Indonesia have steadily rediscovered each other since, as strategic partners. A rapidly rising China, and the risks of relying on US security under a mercurial president, provide the propulsive force for closer Delhi-Jakarta ties.

Defence, critical minerals, and maritime security have emerged as principal areas of cooperation. The agreement to supply BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles and Astra air-to-air missiles to Indonesia underscores India's emergence as a credible defence exporter. India must make better use of Indonesia's abundant reserves of nickel and rare earth elements. This will require greater domestic capacity, sustained political attention and deeper participation by the private sector. But the most significant outcome is the decision to jointly develop Sabang Port, located near the northwestern entrance to the Strait of Malacca. The Strait is one of the world's busiest chokepoints, carrying around 23 million barrels of oil a day (around 21 million passed through the Strait of Hormuz daily before the war). No major economy is more dependent on it than China, with an estimated 80 per cent of its imported oil passing through it. New Delhi has done well to deepen its partnership with Jakarta in securing its integrated development. The challenge, however, lies in implementation. A joint task force on Sabang has been there since 2018, but bureaucratic delays and financing constraints have kept the project from taking off.

PM Modi's meeting with President Prabowo follows his recent engagements with the leaders of South Korea and Japan, and will be followed by visits to Australia and New Zealand. Together, these engagements reflect a renewed vigour in India's Act East Policy and a recognition that deeper cooperation between the Indo-Pacific's middle powers can generate mutual economic and strategic gains while reducing the risks of excessive dependence on Washington or Beijing. India must match its external outreach with faster domestic reforms. Only a more competitive economy and a stronger defence industrial base will enable it to shape the emerging Asian order in accordance with its national interests.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- PM Narendra Modi met Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto to strengthen the India–Indonesia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- Focus areas: Maritime Security, Defence Cooperation, Critical Minerals, Indo-Pacific, and Sabang Port development.
- The partnership gains importance amid rising strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific and growing concerns over supply-chain resilience.

Key Points

India–Indonesia Relations

- Comprehensive Strategic Partnership: Since 2018.
- Both are members of:
 - G20
 - East Asia Summit (EAS)
 - ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus)
 - Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)
- Indonesia is India's largest trading partner in ASEAN.

Sabang Port

- Located on Weh Island (Aceh Province).
- Situated near the Strait of Malacca, one of the world's busiest maritime chokepoints.
- Joint development supports India's Act East Policy, SAGAR, and Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).

Strait of Malacca

- Connects the Andaman Sea (Indian Ocean) with the South China Sea (Pacific Ocean).

- Around one-fourth of global maritime trade passes through it.
- A major route for energy supplies to East Asia, making it strategically significant.

Defence Cooperation

- Export of BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles.
- Potential export of Astra Beyond Visual Range (BVR) air-to-air missiles.
- Reflects India's emergence as a defence exporter under Atmanirbhar Bharat.

Critical Minerals

- Indonesia possesses significant reserves of:
 - Nickel
 - Rare Earth Elements (REEs)
- Important for:
 - Electric Vehicles (EVs)
 - Batteries
 - Semiconductors
 - Renewable Energy
 - Defence manufacturing

Static Linkages

- Act East Policy (2014) – Enhancing strategic and economic engagement with Southeast Asia.
- SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) – India's maritime vision in the Indian Ocean.
- Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) – Promotes maritime security, connectivity and sustainable use of marine resources.
- UNCLOS, 1982 – Provides the legal framework governing maritime zones and freedom of navigation.
- ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) – Emphasizes inclusiveness, dialogue and ASEAN centrality.
- BrahMos – India–Russia jointly developed supersonic cruise missile.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens India's maritime presence in the eastern Indian Ocean.
- Enhances security around the Strait of Malacca.
- Diversifies critical mineral supply chains.
- Expands India's defence exports.
- Reinforces ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific.

Challenges

- Delay in implementation of the Sabang Port project.
- China's growing strategic footprint in Southeast Asia.
- Financing and infrastructure constraints.
- Limited private sector participation.
- Competition from China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Way Forward

- Fast-track Sabang Port development.
- Expand defence industrial cooperation and joint production.
- Secure long-term access to critical minerals.
- Strengthen maritime domain awareness and naval cooperation.
- Deepen economic integration with ASEAN under the Act East Policy.
- Improve domestic manufacturing to support defence exports and strategic supply chains.