



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

DATE - 17/07/2026

**SOURCE : THE HINDU & INDIAN
EXPRESS**

**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

Wangchuk frail; Delhi HC orders monitoring

He has lost over 9 kg; doctors maintain vigil as his health worsened on 19th day of hunger strike

Solicitor-General says activist undergoes a daily check-up; govt. says it will intervene if required

PIL seeks urgent intervention, 'use of force' if needed to protect noted environmentalist's life

Arnon Deep
NEW DELHI

With activist Sonam Wangchuk's health condition worsening on the 19th day of his indefinite hunger strike at Jantar Mantar, the Delhi High Court ordered the Union and Delhi governments to ensure regular monitoring of his health. Doctors warned on Thursday that Mr. Wangchuk's health condition had entered a critical stage. Satish Lamba, a doctor who has been examining Mr. Wangchuk regularly, said he has lost over 9 kg, but remains "mentally alert". However, Dr. Lamba warned later in the evening that his body was likely consuming muscles and his organs may be next.

Mr. Wangchuk's "blood sugar today is 80 mg/dl, and his pulse is 72 bpm," Dr. Lamba said. He said that doctors were maintaining "extra vigilance" and that at his current stage, Mr. Wangchuk's uric acid levels were likely elevated as his muscles were likely being broken down by his body. He now weighs 56.9 kg.

Earlier in the day, the Delhi High Court ordered that Mr. Wangchuk be regularly medically checked up by government doctors. A Bench of Chief Justice Dheendra Kumar Upadhiyaya and Justice Tejas Karia asked Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta whether any mechanism was in place to monitor Mr. Wangchuk's health. Mr. Mehta submitted that Mr. Wangchuk undergoes a daily health check-up.



Holding grounds: Wangchuk on hunger strike at Jantar Mantar in New Delhi demanding resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over exam irregularities. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHAP

"He [Mr. Mehta] further assures the court that depending upon the opinion of the doctors, whatever medical intervention is

needed to check the deteriorating health condition of Mr. Wangchuk will also be taken," the court recorded in its order.

The Division Bench passed the direction while hearing a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by advocate and activist

Rakesh Kumar Saini.

The petition sought urgent intervention to safeguard Mr. Wangchuk's health. Mr. Saini sought intervention "even if forcibly" to save Mr. Wangchuk's life.

Mr. Wangchuk has been on a hunger strike demanding Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation over issues concerning the country's education system. On Thursday, the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)'s protest site filled up substantially as more high-profile figures arrived at Jantar Mantar to register their support.

Three student supporters from the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist)'s student outfit, the All India Students' Association (AISA), were also at a critical stage of their con-

current hunger strike, Sai

Balaji, a former AISA president, said in a statement.

"Aameen is at risk of a hypovolemic shock due to dehydration, Neha's BRS levels hover around a dangerous 49 mg/dl and Manish has lost more than 10% of body mass," Mr. Balaji said. Three other students had ended their strike in recent days, one of whom had been hospitalised and is recovering.

While there have been calls for Mr. Wangchuk to end his hunger strike, he remained resolute, saying calling off his fast without any response from the government would send a wrong message. Instead, he urged people to strengthen the CJP's proposed Parliament march on July 20.

(With inputs from Sonam Rocky Singh and PTT)

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Delhi High Court directed the Union Government and the Government of NCT of Delhi to regularly monitor the health of activist Sonam Wangchuk, who has been on an indefinite hunger strike.
- The direction came while hearing a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) seeking protection of his life under deteriorating medical conditions.
- The case has renewed discussion on the constitutional balance between the Right to Protest (Article 19) and the Right to Life (Article 21).

Key Points

- Delhi High Court directed regular medical examination by government doctors.
- Government assured the Court that necessary medical intervention would be provided based on doctors' opinion.
- PIL sought judicial intervention to safeguard the protester's life.
- Raises important constitutional issues regarding:
 - Right to peaceful protest.
 - Limits of civil disobedience.
 - State's obligation to protect life.
 - Judicial oversight during prolonged protests.

Static Linkages

- Article 19(1)(a): Freedom of speech and expression.
- Article 19(1)(b): Right to assemble peacefully without arms.
- Article 19(2) & 19(3): Reasonable restrictions in the interest of sovereignty, integrity and public order.
- Article 21: Protection of life and personal liberty.

Important Supreme Court Judgments

- Himat Lal K. Shah v. Commissioner of Police (1973): Citizens have the right to hold public meetings on public streets subject to reasonable regulation.
- Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS) v. Union of India (2018): Right to protest is a constitutional right but must be balanced with rights of other citizens.
- Amit Sahni v. Commissioner of Police (Shaheen Bagh Case), 2020: Public spaces cannot be occupied indefinitely; protests should be held only at designated places.
- K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India (2017): Established the Doctrine of Proportionality while restricting Fundamental Rights.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Demonstrates judicial protection of Article 21 even during voluntary protests.
- Reinforces peaceful dissent as an essential democratic value.
- Highlights constitutional checks and balances.

Challenges

- Balancing individual autonomy with the State's duty to preserve life.
- Ensuring public order without suppressing democratic dissent.
- Ethical concerns regarding forced medical intervention.

Way Forward

- Institutionalize structured dialogue between governments and protest groups.
- Develop standard medical protocols for prolonged hunger strikes.
- Ensure restrictions on protests satisfy the Doctrine of Proportionality.
- Strengthen grievance redressal mechanisms to reduce prolonged confrontational protests.

Kudankulam 'data breach' not connected to nuclear activity at plant, says govt.

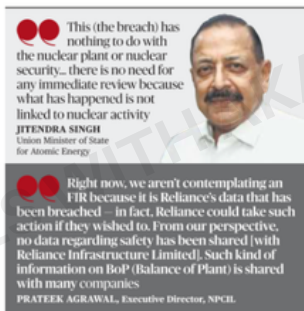
Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Union Minister of State for Atomic Energy Jitendra Singh on Thursday downplayed concerns regarding the data breach involving electronic files linked to the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu.

"This [the breach] has nothing to do with the nuclear plant or nuclear security," he told *The Hindu* on the sidelines of a press conference. "There's no need for any immediate review because what has happened is not linked to nuclear activity."

The nuclear establishment, on the face of it, does not seem perturbed by the incident. A senior official of Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd. (NPCIL) – the plant operator – told *The Hindu* that the organisation was not, at present, contemplating a formal police investigation. "Right now, we aren't contemplating an FIR because it is Reliance's data that has been breached – in fact, Reliance could take such action if they wished to. From our perspective, no data regarding safety has been shared [with Reliance Infrastructure Limited]. Such kind of information on BoP (Balance of Plant) is shared with many companies," Prateek Agrawal, Executive Director (CP & CC), NPCIL, told *The Hindu*.

Contract data
NPCIL said in a statement late on Wednesday that the drawings and technical documents reportedly leaked relate only to the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contract for the Common Services-Balance of Plant



(BoP) package of Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project (KKNPP) Units 3 and 4, which was awarded to Reliance Infrastructure Ltd. through a public tender in 2018. The corporation stressed that these facilities are conventional in nature, comparable to those used in thermal power plants and other process industries, and are not connected to nuclear safety or nuclear security systems. BoP refers to supporting infrastructure, auxiliary systems, and components required to make the plant operational and excludes the core generating equipment.

The State-run utility said it had shared only indicative drawings and technical specifications with bidders as part of the tendering process. Based on these inputs, Reliance Infrastructure prepared detailed engineering drawings in consultation with the original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), which were subsequently reviewed and accepted by NPCIL after verifying that

they met the project's technical specifications. After commissioning two 1,000 Mwe VVER reactors, the KKNPP is constructing four more similar units with Russian technical know-how at Kudankulam, which is all set to house India's biggest nuclear park with reactors generating 6,000 MW nuclear power.

According to a *Reuters* report, over 19,000 highly sensitive files dating between 2016 and mid-2025 and linked to KKNPP's engineering blueprints on control, cooling, and ventilation systems, list of vendors and suppliers supplying equipment, operational files on meeting records, reviews of joint inspection by the Indian and Russian engineers, insurance policies, etc., had been accessed by well-known ransomware group World Leaks.

The leak reportedly originated from a server hosted by third party provider, Yotta, belonging to the plant's contractor Anil Ambani's Reliance Group.

NPCIL Clarification

- Documents pertained only to the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contract for the Common Services-BoP package.
- Only indicative drawings and technical specifications were shared during tendering.
- No classified reactor safety or security information was shared with the contractor.
- The incident is being treated as a third-party contractor data breach, not a breach of India's nuclear infrastructure.

Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project (KKNPP)

- Location: Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu
- Collaboration: India-Russia (Rosatom)
- Reactor Type: VVER-1000 Pressurised Water Reactors (PWRs)
- Installed Capacity (planned): $6 \times 1000 \text{ MW} = 6000 \text{ MW}$
- India's largest nuclear power park upon completion.

Static Linkages

- Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) functions directly under the Prime Minister.
- Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) is responsible for construction and operation of commercial nuclear power plants.
- Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) regulates nuclear and radiation safety.
- Atomic Energy Act, 1962 governs peaceful uses of atomic energy in India.
- India follows the Three-Stage Nuclear Power Programme proposed by Dr. Homi J. Bhabha:
 - Stage I – PHWRs using natural uranium
 - Stage II – Fast Breeder Reactors using plutonium
 - Stage III – Thorium-based reactors (U-233)
- VVER reactors are Pressurised Water Reactors (PWRs) using light water as both coolant and moderator.
- India is a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Critical Analysis

Issues

- Supply-chain cybersecurity risks in strategic infrastructure.
- Third-party vendors remain potential cyber vulnerabilities.
- Leakage of engineering layouts may aid future cyber or physical reconnaissance.
- Need for stronger cyber governance across EPC contractors.

Government's Position

- No impact on reactor operations or nuclear safety.
- Nuclear safety architecture remains isolated from contractor-accessible systems.

Way Forward

- Strengthen cybersecurity standards for critical infrastructure vendors.
- Mandatory cyber security audits of EPC contractors.
- Enhance coordination between CERT-In, NCIIPC, NPCIL and DAE.
- Adopt Zero Trust Architecture for critical infrastructure.
- Strengthen supply-chain cyber resilience through periodic vulnerability assessments.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Reports claimed that over 19,000 engineering-related files linked to Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project (KKNPP) Units 3 & 4 were allegedly accessed by the ransomware group World Leaks.
- The Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and NPCIL clarified that the breach did not involve reactor operations, nuclear safety systems, or national nuclear security.
- The leaked files reportedly originated from a third-party server used by the EPC contractor Reliance Infrastructure Ltd.

Key Points

Balance of Plant (BoP)

- Refers to auxiliary and supporting infrastructure required for plant operations.
- Includes:
 - Cooling water systems
 - Ventilation systems
 - Electrical systems
 - Water treatment and utility services
- Does not include:
 - Reactor core
 - Nuclear fuel
 - Reactor protection systems
 - Nuclear safety and security systems

Beyond political reshuffles, renew education in India

When Parliament assemblies next week, there will be debates, resolutions and legislation. Television studies will reduce complex issues to political arithmetic, and headlines will declare winners and losers. Yet, I cannot help asking whether the true measure of Parliament is not by the number of bills it passes, but by the questions it chooses to confront and resolve. For the past several days, one such question has been waiting outside its doors. My husband, Sonam Wangchuk, scientist, engineer, educator and social reformer, has been in an indefinite fast. Every morning I watch with growing anxiety as his body weakens. His body is paying the price for a conviction that education deserves the nation's urgent attention. Every day begins with the same silent question: how much longer can his body endure?

This is not merely a family's private concern. It has become a test of our national conscience. Those who choose the path of non-violent sacrifice hope their suffering will awaken society's conscience to a greater purpose. If this fast culminates only in the resignation or reshuffling of the Union Education Minister, India would have reduced an extraordinary act of conviction and personal sacrifice to an ordinary political outcome. Public accountability is the cornerstone of democracy. Ministers must have the moral courage to own their failures and step aside when necessary. But individuals are transient; institutions endure. More important than replacing a Minister is defining an educational future for which every Minister, regardless of party, is held accountable.

Fifteen years ago, around half of India's population was under 25. Economists celebrated this as India's demographic dividend, perhaps the greatest developmental opportunity available to any nation in the 21st century. In one of my articles, I had argued that while India has invested significantly in access to education, it has missed out on excellence. Enrolment has grown, but learning has not been transformed. If India aspires to become a *Vishwa Gura*, it must educate this generation differently. But India seems to have missed the opportunity.

What demographic dividend is A demographic dividend is realised by producing better thinkers, wiser leaders, confident innovators, skilled researchers and teachers, ethical entrepreneurs, honest public servants and compassionate citizens. This, therefore, is the moment to rise above personalities, parties and politics. Sonam Wangchuk's fast should become the catalyst for a national awakening on the future of education. The question is larger than whether one Minister should resign. It is whether India will dare rebuild the education system that will shape the next century. We need more than a reshuffle – we need reform, renewal, and a renaissance. In my view, that renaissance rests on



Gitanjali J. Angmo
Founder of the Himalayan Institute of Altitudinal, Ladakh, and an education reformer and public intellectual working to reimagine education, democracy, ecology and Himalayan futures through grassroots leadership and innovation

10 urgent reforms. First, reform the system of examination. Assessment determines learning. As long as examinations reward memory, schools will teach memory. If examinations reward thinking, schools will cultivate thinkers. Within three years, every examination, from school boards to JEE, NEET, CUET and the UPSC, should progressively evaluate conceptual understanding, application, creativity, analytical reasoning, ethical judgement and real-world problem-solving rather than recall. Competency-based assessment should become the national norm.

Second, India must dismantle the coaching culture that it has inadvertently created as a parallel education system. Families spend fortunes on coaching because India's entrance examinations reward repetition more than reflection. Multiple examination windows, greater weightage to school performance and portfolios, and redesigned entrance tests can gradually restore learning to schools and childhood to children.

Respect for teaching Third, build the world's best teachers: No education system can rise above the quality of its teachers as is seen in Finland, Singapore, South Korea and Japan. India needs a National Teacher Excellence Mission that treats teaching as one of the most respected professions through rigorous preparation, continuous professional development, mentoring, research opportunities and leadership training.

Fourth, every vacant teaching position represents thousands of lost learning opportunities. Vacancies from Angamwadi and primary schools to central universities, IITs, IIMs, NITs and AIIMS should be filled through transparent, merit-based recruitment within three months.

Fifth, reconnect education with society. Education must prepare young people not just for employment but also for citizenship. Every undergraduate should complete a semester of apprenticeship, research, entrepreneurship, rural immersion, community service or industry experience before graduation. Knowledge acquires meaning when shared against reality.

Sixth, India must restore faith in its government schools. Every child deserves an equal education until the age of 13, regardless of income or geography. Laboratories, libraries, sports facilities, digital infrastructure, sanitation and qualified teachers should become guaranteed minimum national standards. This can only happen when policymakers have a personal stake in public education and those responsible for governing public institutions also trust them with their own families.

Seventh, trust educational institutions with greater academic freedom that they deserve. Governments should define learning outcomes and ensure accountability. They should not

micromanage pedagogy, curriculum innovation or research. The world's finest institutions flourish because they are trusted to innovate, collaborate and respond to local contexts. Academic freedom produces excellence.

Eighth, what is measured improves. Transparency is one of the most powerful drivers of reform. A real-time national public education dashboard should be set up, on which every stakeholder can compare schools and universities using verified measures of learning outcomes, teacher vacancies, infrastructure, research output, accreditation, employability, and student well-being.

Ninth, public investment in education should rise to at least six per cent of GDP, accompanied by an increase in research funding to at least two per cent of GDP. Nations become knowledge economies not through aspiration alone, but through sustained investment in schools, universities, laboratories and ideas.

Tenth, educational reform must outlive electoral cycles and not begin afresh every time governments change. India needs an independent statutory national education reform commission that establishes measurable national benchmarks, audits implementation, publishes annual progress reports to Parliament, tracks outcomes across every State/Union Territory and holds governments accountable to measurable outcomes rather than political rhetoric.

Education beyond political divides None of these reforms belongs to one political party or to one ideology. Every government has contributed something valuable, yet every government has also inherited unresolved structural weaknesses. Education must become India's first genuinely bipartisan national mission. History offers nations only a few defining moments when public attention, moral conviction and political urgency converge. This may be one of them. Parliament will eventually adjourn. But whether the child entering class one this year will grow into an innovator or an imitator, a responsible citizen or a passive spectator depends on the education we choose to build today.

The question before India is no longer who will lead the Ministry of Education. It is whether we, as a nation, have the vision and the resolve to build an education system worthy of our children. That responsibility belongs not to one government or one political party, but to every citizen who believes that education is the foundation upon which every other national aspiration rests.

If Sonam Wangchuk's fast helps us begin that journey, then his sacrifice will not merely have drawn attention to a crisis. It will have helped awaken a nation. History will remember whether we dared to transform a personal sacrifice into a national renaissance. That responsibility belongs to all of us.

- Higher investment in education and research.
- Independent education reform commission.

Static Linkages

- Article 21A – Right to Education.
- Article 45 – Early Childhood Care and Education.
- Article 46 – Promotion of educational interests of weaker sections.
- 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1976 – Education shifted to the Concurrent List.
- 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002.
- Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009.
- National Education Policy (NEP), 2020.
- PARAKH (Performance Assessment, Review and Analysis of Knowledge for Holistic Development).
- Samagra Shiksha Scheme.
- PM SHRI Schools Scheme.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Aligns with the objectives of NEP 2020.
- Promotes competency-based learning over rote memorisation.
- Focuses on improving teacher quality and institutional autonomy.
- Encourages research, innovation, and employability.
- Supports India's transition towards a knowledge economy.

Challenges

- Fiscal constraints in increasing education expenditure.
- Large regional disparities in educational infrastructure.
- Continued dependence on coaching due to competitive entrance examinations.
- Slow implementation of education reforms across States.
- Balancing institutional autonomy with regulatory accountability.

Way Forward

- Implement competency-based assessments across school and competitive examinations.
- Fill all sanctioned teacher vacancies through transparent recruitment.
- Strengthen PARAKH for national assessment reforms.
- Increase public expenditure on education towards 6% of GDP, as envisaged in NEP 2020.
- Improve research funding and innovation ecosystem.
- Strengthen government schools through minimum quality standards.
- Promote experiential learning, apprenticeships, and industry-academia collaboration.
- Ensure greater institutional autonomy with robust accountability mechanisms.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Education reform activist Sonam Wangchuk is on an indefinite hunger strike demanding structural reforms in India's education system.
- The debate has shifted attention from political accountability to systemic reforms in education.
- The issue assumes significance in the context of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020, India's demographic dividend, and improving learning outcomes.

Key Points

- India's demographic dividend depends on quality education, skill development, innovation, and research.
- Major concerns highlighted:
 - Rote learning and memory-based examinations.
 - Rapid expansion of coaching culture.
 - Persistent teacher vacancies.
 - Poor learning outcomes despite higher enrolment.
 - Weak research ecosystem.
 - Limited academic autonomy.
 - Inadequate public investment in education.
- Suggested reforms:
 - Competency-based examinations.
 - Teacher quality improvement.
 - Filling vacancies through merit-based recruitment.
 - Experiential learning and industry exposure.
 - Academic autonomy with accountability.
 - Real-time education performance dashboard.

It is not all bad between India and Pakistan

Ever since a letter written by 117 eminent Pakistanis and Indians emerged in the public domain, an acrimonious debate has begun on whether India should reopen dialogue with its neighbour, with most pointing to the inability of Pakistan to ever live peacefully with India. While this is understandable in the aftermath of the Pahalgalam horror (2025), the fact remains that India and Pakistan have, on many occasions, shown far greater circumspection than their western counterparts and have also quietly cooperated to a surprising degree. Clearly, there is potential for cooperation. Equally, however, this potential has been hit progressively harder by terrorism.

Wars, yet with restraint
Every foreign correspondent writing on the India-Pakistan relationship, will frame it with reference to their three wars (1947, 1965, 1971). But few realise that during all three wars, both sides made efforts not to bomb each other's cities and civilian spaces. But there were some targets, such as the church at Ambala that was hit in 1965 as Pakistan tried to target the air base. Military historian Rana Chhina notes that the only serious attack on civilian areas was at Chherta, hours after a ceasefire was called, but originally meant to target a key radar station in Amritsar. Even in 1971, both sides restricted attacks to military targets, including oil storage sites. Official sources in India note that military casualties for all three wars at 8,21, while Pakistan's broad figures point to some 15,000. Sadly, no credible sources are available for civilian casualties, though accounts of the war show life going on 'courageously' in Pakistani towns, with the same fortitude reported from Amritsar, a flash point in all major wars. Consider that Allied air bombing during the Second World War killed an estimated 3,00,000-6,00,000 civilians in German cities under the new concept of "area bombing". Attacks against just Dresden, with hardly any



Tara Kartha
Former Director,
National Security
Council Secretariat

military value, killed 25,000. Then there was the bombing of Tokyo that killed 1,00,000. Allied planes even mined the seas to deny fishing in "Operation Starvation". Germany was hardly any better, killing thousands but its crimes have been recorded. Those by the West are hard to find, but new 'doctrines' of both held human life cheap. In contrast, India and Pakistan militaries kept to a battlefield concept. Once terrorism came into play, all these niceties were set aside. But even as Pakistan suffered terror attacks, including two attempts on General Musharraf's life, in 2003, a third was foiled quietly with Indian intelligence support; that tacitly acknowledged strong Pakistani action against terrorist groups. True, this was in the aftermath of 9/11, where Islamabad was told to cooperate or 'be bombed back into the Stone Age' according to the General.

Fragile bridges

In yet another instance, after 26/11, President Aisaf Ali Zardari, instructed his ISI Chief General Shuja Pasha to visit Delhi and cooperate in the investigation. This was flatly refused by the then Chief, General Kayani. A year later U.S. Vice-President Joe Biden was telling the British that Mr. Zardari was afraid of 'being taken out'. Later, the 'Memogate' scandal had Mr. Zardari's fervent appeal for help against the generals. Later, Nawaz Sharif reached out as well, being the first to congratulate Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and attending his inaugural in 2014. Mr. Modi then made a surprise visit to Rawlwind for a Sharif family wedding in December 2015. In January 2016, the Pathankot attack happened. This time, Islamabad registered a case for investigation. Less than a year later, Mr. Sharif himself was forced out of office on corruption charges that were never proven. Mr. Modi, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh all invested significant political capital in reaching out to Pakistan. All three faced failure, with Manmohan Singh particularly reviled for his efforts.

Then came the 2005 nuclear confidence-building agreement, which still holds, with the last meeting held in January 2026. In contrast, arms control agreements between Russia and the U.S. have collapsed. The agreement was tested on March 9, 2022, when India acknowledged that a technical malfunction during routine maintenance led to the accidental firing of a missile into Pakistan. No damage was reported, and Delhi ordered a high-level inquiry. While Prime Minister Imran Khan and politicians reacted strongly, Gen. Qamar Bajwa's response showed notable restraint. Gen. Bajwa also advocated using Pakistan's geo-economic potential by opening trade corridors with India, possibly due to the country's economic crisis. However, most remarkably, even as India faced Chinese incursions in Galwan, both countries reaffirmed their ceasefire commitment during Gen. Bajwa's tenure, despite the earlier abrogation of Article 370 in 2019.

There are many more instances of cooperation, though not all are publicly recorded. The constant point is that relations deteriorated sharply once terrorism began, initially targeting the military and more recently civilians, as seen in the horrific Pahalgalam attack. Pakistan has suffered further as groups it once supported, such as the Taliban, turned against it.

The path to cooperation

In 2025, terrorism rose by 34% amid growing unrest in Occupied Kashmir, the tribal areas and Balochistan. Years of military rule have weakened state institutions. Yet, cooperation remains possible in areas such as glacial melt, stubble burning alternatives and particularly narcotics trafficking, an area where both countries have previously worked together. The key step is for Rawalpindi to demonstrate clearly an end to its support for terrorism. That could even open the way for a renegotiation of the Indus Waters Treaty to mutual benefit.

- Climate change and Himalayan glacier monitoring.
- Transboundary water management.
- Counter-narcotics cooperation.
- Disaster management.
- Humanitarian exchanges.

Static Linkages

- Shimla Agreement (1972) – Bilateral resolution of disputes.
- Lahore Declaration (1999) – Nuclear CBMs and peaceful dialogue.
- Indus Waters Treaty (1960) – Brokered by the World Bank.
- Article 51, UN Charter – Right to self-defence.
- Article 33, UN Charter – Peaceful settlement of disputes.
- India's neighbourhood policy prioritises peace with zero tolerance for terrorism.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Existing CBMs have reduced the risk of accidental military escalation.
- Nuclear communication mechanisms remain functional.
- Scope exists for cooperation in non-traditional security areas.

Challenges

- Persistent cross-border terrorism.
- Deep trust deficit.
- Political instability in Pakistan.
- Limited implementation of bilateral commitments.

Way Forward

- Credible action against terrorist infrastructure.
- Strengthen existing military CBMs.
- Continue humanitarian and technical engagement.
- Enhance cooperation on climate, water and disaster management.
- Any dialogue should remain terror and talks cannot go together unless verifiable action is taken against terrorism.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- A public letter signed by 117 eminent Indians and Pakistanis has reignited the debate on resuming India-Pakistan dialogue following the Pahalgalam terrorist attack (2025).
- The discussion has focused on whether diplomatic engagement is possible despite persistent cross-border terrorism, which remains the biggest obstacle in bilateral relations.

Key Points

India-Pakistan Relations

- Wars fought in 1947–48, 1965, 1971, and Kargil Conflict (1999).
- Despite wars, both countries developed several Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to reduce military escalation.

Major Confidence Building Measures (CBMs)

- 1988 Agreement on Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Installations and Facilities (implemented from 1992); annual exchange of nuclear installation lists.
- 2005 Agreement on Pre-notification of Flight Testing of Ballistic Missiles.
- 2003 LoC Ceasefire, reaffirmed in 2021.
- Existing military hotlines and DGMO-level communication.

Terrorism: Principal Challenge

- Cross-border terrorism continues to dominate bilateral relations.
- Major attacks:
 - Parliament Attack (2001)
 - Mumbai Attack (26/11)
 - Pathankot (2016)
 - Uri (2016)
 - Pulwama (2019)
 - Pahalgalam (2025)

Areas of Potential Cooperation

Wealth of lacunae

Cybersecurity, transparency are non-negotiable in vital installations

The ransomware attack against a contractor involved in the Kudankulam nuclear power project is concerning, even if nothing threatening the plant's integrity was stolen. In 2019, malware was found on the same facility's administrative network, but the NPCIL maintained that the operational reactor network was unaffected. The new incident extends the same theme. India's breach disclosure regime is inconsistent and often plainly opaque. Affected organisations tend to believe admitting a breach will damage public confidence, share prices, contracts, and invite regulatory scrutiny. So, they tend to ease their language in public statements and avoid disclosure until compelled. Many organisations also lack mature incident response capabilities, not uncommonly because they treat cybersecurity as a matter of compliance rather than necessity. So, assessing what data has been affected in the early stages of an attack becomes technically impossible. According to public information, the facility's core infrastructure is unaffected; instead, a group called 'World Leaks' mounted a ransomware attack compromising systems belonging to Reliance Infrastructure, one of the engineering contractors of Units 3 and 4. The data in the incident were hosted by Yotta Data Services, which said it detected suspicious activity on its servers on May 29.

According to open-source intelligence platform RansomLook, the data began appearing on World Leaks on June 11. However, the NPCIL issued a formal clarification only on July 15, following widespread media reports. Some 14.3 GB of files have been released, including the layouts of ventilation systems, floor plans of an alleged "control room", supplier and vendor lists, and insurance paperwork. While the files have not been independently authenticated, the actors and their incentives merit a closer look. The NPCIL has said that the files only pertain to infrastructure beyond the facility's nuclear island. However, such information can still serve so-called intelligence preparation activities. India is the third-most breached country and has already brooked similar attacks against AIIMS Delhi, airlines, and State government portals. In this milieu, the government has positioned Kudankulam as the centrepiece of India's nuclear power ambitions. As CERT-In is conducting an investigation and Reliance and Yotta have shared their findings with the government, CERT-In and NPCIL should also clarify the nature and authenticity of the files, whether data were exfiltrated before detection, and whether any credentials or supplier accounts have been exposed. Radical transparency is impossible here but basic cyber-hygiene and proactive communication are non-negotiable.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- A ransomware attack targeted Reliance Infrastructure, a contractor involved in Units 3 & 4 of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project (Tamil Nadu).
- NPCIL clarified that the reactor's operational (OT) systems and nuclear island were not compromised.
- Around 14.3 GB of engineering-related documents were reportedly leaked by the ransomware group World Leaks.
- CERT-In is investigating the incident.

Key Points

- Attack targeted contractor's IT systems, not the reactor control network.
- Leaked documents reportedly include:
 - Ventilation layouts
 - Building floor plans
 - Vendor and supplier details
 - Insurance documents
- Even non-classified engineering data may support intelligence gathering and future cyberattacks.
- The incident highlights growing supply-chain cyber risks to critical infrastructure.
- It also exposes gaps in cyber incident disclosure and vendor cybersecurity practices.

Static Linkages

- Information Technology Act, 2000 Section 70: Critical Information Infrastructure (CII).
- Section 70A: National nodal agency for CII protection.
- Section 70B: CERT-In as the national incident response agency.
- National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC) functions under NTRO.
- CERT-In is the national agency for cybersecurity incident response.
- Nuclear facilities maintain air-gapped Operational Technology (OT) networks separate from administrative IT networks.
- India follows the IAEA Nuclear Security Framework for nuclear cybersecurity.
- Cybersecurity is an important component of National Security and Critical Infrastructure Protection.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights cyber vulnerabilities in supply chains supporting strategic infrastructure.
- Demonstrates that contractors can become entry points for attacks.
- Reinforces the need for cyber resilience beyond core operational systems.

Challenges

- Weak cybersecurity standards among vendors.
- Delayed disclosure reduces transparency and preparedness.
- Leakage of infrastructure designs may aid hostile actors.
- Increasing ransomware attacks against critical infrastructure globally.

Way Forward

- Mandatory cybersecurity audits of all contractors.
- Strengthen Zero Trust architecture for critical infrastructure.
- Periodic third-party security assessments and penetration testing.
- Improve cyber incident reporting and disclosure protocols.
- Strengthen coordination among CERT-In, NCIIPC, NTRO, and sectoral agencies.
- Regular cyber drills for nuclear and other critical infrastructure operators.

Breaching the target

Rising inflation leaves no room for a cut in interest rates

India's retail inflation breached the RBI's 4% target for the first time under the new CPI series, rising to 4.38% in June from 3.93% in May and about 2.7% a year earlier. The latest print reflects a broader pass-through of price pressures that had, until recently, remained concentrated at the producer level, largely driven by spiralling transport and fuel costs since the U.S.-Iran conflict in late February. Consequently, the gap between wholesale and retail inflation has only marginally narrowed. Wholesale inflation (WPI), now based on 2022-23, remained elevated at 9.87% in June, up from 9.68% in May. Fuel and power continued to exert the greatest pressure on producers, recording inflation of 27.41%, only marginally lower than May's 28.18%. As India imports nearly 90% of its crude oil requirements, the value of merchandise imports surged to \$70.8 billion in June from about \$54.1 billion a year earlier, even though import volumes did not rise proportionately. This underscores how imported inflation, amplified by crude prices that briefly crossed \$110 a barrel, has driven systemic price pressures across the economy. The rupee's sharp depreciation during the conflict added to these pressures, although RBI intervention in the foreign exchange market helped cushion the fall.

The transport category merits closer examination. Transport inflation more than doubled to 4.31% in June from 1.75% in May, while the subgroup, "transport services for goods", remained elevated, rising to 7.70% from 7.63%. Another notable pressure point has been restaurants and hotels. Although the government announced a modest reduction in commercial LPG prices earlier this month, it has done little to offset the steep increases through May and June, when the price of a 19.2 kg commercial cylinder in Delhi climbed to around ₹2,930 before easing marginally. The system-wide impact is also evident in food prices, with the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) rising to 5.32% from 4.78% in May. Another significant price pressure on the CFPI that must be factored in is the projection of a deficient southwest monsoon and its impact on agriculture, though the extent will become clearer in the weeks ahead. Meanwhile, despite the Centre more than doubling import duties on gold and silver from 6% to 15% in May, Commerce Ministry data suggest that bullion imports have remained robust amid global uncertainty, contributing to higher jewellery prices and household inflation. Although the ceasefire announced in late June briefly eased crude prices, they have begun rising again. Given continuing geopolitical uncertainty and persistent upstream price pressures, inflation is unlikely to return to the RBI's 4% target soon, leaving no room for a rate cut at the Monetary Policy Committee's August meeting.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- India's CPI-based retail inflation rose to 4.38% (June) from 3.93% (May), breaching the RBI's 4% inflation target.
- Inflation was driven by higher crude oil prices, transport costs, food inflation, and imported inflation amid geopolitical tensions in West Asia.
- WPI inflation remained high at 9.87%, indicating persistent input-cost pressures.
- The rise in inflation reduces the possibility of an RBI repo rate cut in the near term.

Key Points

- Retail Inflation (CPI): 4.38% (June)
- Wholesale Inflation (WPI): 9.87% (June)
- Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI): 5.32%
- Fuel & Power Inflation (WPI): 27.41%
- India imports nearly 90% of its crude oil requirement.
- Merchandise imports increased to US\$70.8 billion (June).
- Transport inflation increased to 4.31%.
- Rupee depreciation increased imported inflation.
- Deficient monsoon may further raise food inflation.

- Persistent inflation may delay monetary policy easing.

Static Linkages

- RBI follows Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT).
- Inflation Target: $4\% \pm 2\%$ (2%-6%).
- Consumer Price Index (CPI) is compiled by the National Statistics Office (NSO).
- Wholesale Price Index (WPI) is compiled by the Office of the Economic Adviser, Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
 - Monetary Policy Committee (MPC): 6 members.
 - Decides the Repo Rate.
- Imported Inflation: Rise in domestic prices due to higher global prices and currency depreciation.
- Core Inflation: CPI excluding food and fuel.

Critical Analysis

Challenges

- High dependence on imported crude increases vulnerability to global shocks.
- Persistent WPI inflation can pass on to retail inflation.
- Rising transport costs increase economy-wide inflation.
- Weak monsoon may aggravate food inflation.
- Higher inflation reduces household purchasing power.
- Elevated inflation constrains RBI's monetary policy flexibility.

Significance

- Stable inflation supports sustainable economic growth.
- Anchored inflation expectations improve investment confidence.
- Lower inflation protects real incomes of vulnerable households.
- Effective inflation management strengthens macroeconomic stability.

Way Forward

- Diversify crude oil import sources.
- Expand renewable energy and ethanol blending.
- Strengthen strategic petroleum reserves.
- Improve agricultural productivity and supply chains.
- Enhance logistics efficiency through PM Gati Shakti.
- Maintain fiscal prudence alongside inflation management.
- Continue data-driven monetary policy under the MPC.

No one did it, it happens: War to exam scandals, pollution to crumbling cities

YESTERDAY, WITHIN minutes, I encountered two statements that seemed to capture the core pathology of contemporary politics: The return of nihilism, or evil without agents. Sonam Wangchuk, on the 15th day of his fast, was outlining the core of his thinking behind asking for the resignation of Dhamendra Pradhan. It was to fix accountability and agency for an exam fiasco that affects hundreds of thousands of lives. In a completely different context, I encountered this reflection by one of the sharpest contemporary philosophers, Raymond Geuss, in an essay, "Without Causes," published in *New Left Review*. The essay discusses an interview of Hillary Clinton gave on Gaza. There is one striking line in the essay, "When Clinton must refer to conditions on the Gaza Strip her sentences break down and suddenly lack a grammatical subject: 'Reconstruction frozen. Investment absent. Civilians trapped in dependency and despair, with reportedly up to 1,000 killed since the ceasefire.' We are not told who killed them."

The two examples illustrate the same phenomenon. Across an astonishing range of policy challenges, from war to pollution, exam scandals to crumbling cities, we encounter seemingly causeless phenomena: sentences without subjects, or in the institutional level, our Prime Minister sets the tone. "This is not an era of war," he intones with sagacity without ever naming who the actors are who start the wars. You might think this is diplomatic finesse. But it turns out to be a full-blooded technique of stalling. If there are no agents behind the action, no one needs to

be held accountable. Your success is not depending on the war, your condemning aggression, or upholding the law. Your success is that you can immobilise the need for responsibility altogether without appearing intransigent.

Now, just think how useful this strategy is domestically. Sentences without grammatical subjects or in the passive voice can easily make passive citizens. Exam leak. Happens. Cities flooding. Happens. Himalayas crumbling. Happens. Stampedes. Happens. Air Pollution. Happens. Just as we know this is not an era of war, but we don't name who starts it, we also know this is not an era of crumbling cities, polluted air and rivers, disenfranchisement and corruption, and any other evil you can mention. But no one makes it happen.

The beauty of the passive voice is that the government can join the citizens in a common language and a common objective. These days, it has become the norm for government ministers, civil servants, or recently retired decision-makers to write about their departments with impressive expertise. They will list lofty goals, even share citizens' concerns. But the one thing missing in all that writing is the finding of accountability. You will read hundreds of op-eds on air pollution, including by policymakers. But no one will name or shame, as it were. For example, no one will pointedly say who decided to relax pollution norms for coal-fired power plants and why. Who makes the decisions to give clearances to build roads and buildings in ecologically sensitive zones? I was recently at a meet-



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

ing where there was elegant holding forth on "ease of doing business, especially for MSMEs." But not one policymaker could actually name and explain why particular regulations were put in place or even who put them. If you ask a pointed question, all policy, all events, all decisions suddenly become anonymous through invoking "The Hierarchy" or "The System" or "The Court" or "Norms". As if policy is made by abstractions, if even made at all.

Now you might demur and say, "Isn't this an age of personalised politics, not events without subject? Don't we attribute all evils to leaders, Vladimir Putin or Narendra Modi, or Donald Trump?" But the cult of personality is one mere way in which accountability gets evaded; it's like holding God responsible. When God is responsible, no one is. The personality is meant to disguise the myriad of actions that go into the making of catastrophes. Yes, the person at the top has to shoulder the blame for setting the norms. But that is also a convenient alibi for not fixing individual responsibility. "Modi" and "Trump" become a vast impersonal force that governs everything, so we can stop interrogating actual chains of decisions.

Now speaking in euphemisms, without a subject, allows a certain civility. Perhaps in the international sphere, it allows for diplomacy. A culture of individual naming and shaming can also be misused and abused. There might be some truth to these concerns. But at the present conjuncture, this really has become a technology for creating a passive world in which everything,

from genocide to environmental destruction, happens. Even well-meaning critiques of policy fall into this trap. The crisis of public policy in India is not the crisis of ideas. Most things that require attention are not rocket science. It is the crisis of accountability. Who will name who actually taken decisions and hold them responsible? Everyone has this knowledge, but we choose to anonymise it. Perhaps this is being done with mass participation. It suits all of us not to blame any specific agents, since that also involves us of any responsibility. It gives us a kind of freedom. It allows us to defer to power without appearing to do so.

Perhaps this is why Wangchuk's demand is important. His insistence on a resignation is not simply about one minister or one examination. It is a defence of the proposition that democratic politics requires a grammatical subject. Before institutions can be repaired, we must acknowledge who specifically broke them. If you want to stop war, you have to name and shame those who start them.

Raymond Geuss may be onto something profound. In his telling, it is not that Hillary Clinton was denying the truth. What she was making disappear was the subject of the sentence. The artful form of modern governance is to acknowledge the truth and yet evade responsibility. Once a society loses the habit of asking, "Who did this?", it also loses the capacity to ask, "Who should answer for it?" There is no democracy without a grammatical subject.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

Wangchuk's insistence on a resignation is not simply about one minister or one examination. It is a defence of the proposition that democratic politics requires a grammatical subject

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The debate on public accountability in governance gained prominence after activist Sonam Wangchuk demanded ministerial accountability over alleged examination-related administrative failures.
- The issue highlights the importance of fixing responsibility for policy and administrative decisions in a parliamentary democracy.
- It has renewed discussions on ministerial responsibility, institutional accountability, transparency, and ethical governance.

Key Points

- Accountability is a fundamental pillar of good governance and constitutional democracy.
- The Indian parliamentary system is based on:
 - Collective Responsibility (Article 75(3))
 - Individual Ministerial Responsibility (Parliamentary convention)
- Effective accountability requires:
 - Transparency
 - Answerability
 - Enforcement
 - Institutional oversight
- Key accountability institutions:
 - Parliament
 - Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG)
 - Central Vigilance Commission (CVC)
 - Lokpal
 - Judiciary
 - Right to Information (RTI) framework
- Weak accountability leads to governance deficits, reduced public trust, and poor service delivery.

Static Linkages

- Article 75(3): Collective Responsibility
- Parliamentary System of Government
- Rule of Law
- Constitutional Morality

- Separation of Powers
- Checks and Balances
- Good Governance
- Transparency & Accountability
- Citizen-Centric Administration
- Ethics in Public Administration
- Second Administrative Reforms Commission (2nd ARC): Ethics in Governance

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens democratic accountability.
- Enhances public trust in institutions.
- Improves administrative efficiency.
- Promotes transparency in governance.
- Reinforces constitutional morality.

Challenges

- Diffused responsibility in multi-agency governance.
- Politicisation of administrative failures.
- Weak enforcement of accountability mechanisms.
- Delay in departmental inquiries.
- Limited institutional coordination.

Way Forward

- Strengthen parliamentary oversight.
- Ensure time-bound departmental accountability.
- Improve transparency through proactive disclosure.
- Strengthen audit and vigilance institutions.
- Implement recommendations of the 2nd ARC on ethics and accountability.
- Promote citizen-centric governance and grievance redressal.
- Enhance performance-based evaluation of public officials.

The woman is out of the building



SUKSHAM TANU

LAST MONTH, the firm Zaha Hadid founded in 1979 and led until her death in 2016 dropped her name. Zaha Hadid Architects became ZHA, in what her successor Patrik Schumacher called a natural brand evolution. What that framing left out was the decade-long legal fight behind it. A licensing agreement under which the firm paid Hadid's foundation a share of its revenue to keep her name on the door, and a court ruling this year that freed Schumacher from that obligation. Frank Gehry's name has stayed on his firm's door for nearly 70 years without a court getting involved. Iraqi-born Hadid — the only woman to ever win the Pritzker Prize — didn't get that courtesy.

It is tempting to file the story under "architecture's problem with women", as though the problem is somehow contained to one London firm and one unusually famous case. It isn't. The same instinct — celebrate a woman as an exception, then withdraw the recognition once it stops being convenient — runs through India's own architectural institutions.

In 2023, an architect named Vandana Sehgal came closer than any woman ever to leading India's Council of Architecture (COA), the country's statutory architecture regulator. She lost the presidential election by a single vote. Not once since the Architects Act created the Council in 1972 has a woman held its top job. The closest formal foothold any woman has had is its vice-presidency.

The Indian Institute of Architects (IIA), the older and more storied of the profession's two national bodies, does slightly better — but only slightly, and only recently. Founded in 1917, the IIA went 98 years before electing a woman, Divya Kush, as its president in 2015. She served until 2020. Before her and after her, the list of names is a wall of men. This is what happens when institutions built by men, for men, in a profession that has always treated women as guests, are asked to share power. They will let a woman in — eventually, symbolically — and then close the door again.

India's architectural establishment likes to imagine that its exclusions belong to a colonial past it has since outgrown. It has not. Consider Perin Jamsetjee Mistri, who in 1936 became the first woman in India — and reportedly in Asia — to qualify as an architect. She went on to run her father's

firm for half a century, designing everything from Art Deco bungalows to Salvation Army hospitals across two continents. Ninety years later, her name is barely known. Her male contemporaries are still cited as the architects of modern Bombay.

Or, consider Urmila "Eulie" Chowdhury, the only Indian woman on Le Corbusier's team that designed Chandigarh in the 1950s. Chowdhury was the crucial link between Corbusier, his cousin Pierre Jeanneret, and the Indian planners on the ground, fluent enough in French to translate Corbusier's writing and trusted enough to be handed sole charge of major buildings, including the Government Home Science College and the Women's Polytechnic. She also helped design the furniture, including the "Jeanerret chair", that made Chandigarh internationally famous. The Victoria and Albert Museum remains one of the few institutions that has bothered to note Chowdhury's role in that design.

The usual defence of institutions like IIA and COA is that once enough women graduate, representation will follow on its own. The numbers say otherwise. A 2023 exhibition at the Delhi Architecture Biennale found that although women make up roughly 60 per cent of architecture students today, they account for only around 20 per cent of practising, registered architects. Most women drop out because the field doesn't build the career ladders, firm partnerships, or institutional leadership to keep them.

There is a temptation to read Sehgal's 2023 loss as a hopeful sign — proof that change is close, that a woman almost got there. It's worth resisting that reading. "Almost" is not a threshold institutions cross by accident; it is a threshold they cross when they decide to. COA's president is chosen by its own sitting members, in a small internal election, not by a public vote of registered architects. A one-vote margin does not mean the institution is one election away from equity. It means the institution came within reach of a different outcome and chose, by the narrowest possible margin, the outcome that kept its record unbroken. That is not a profession in transition. That is a profession that has learned how far it can let a woman go — and where, every time, to stop her.

The writer is a Dubai-based architect. Her work focuses on sustainability and inclusivity.

A 2023 exhibition found that although women make up roughly 60 per cent of architecture students today, they account for only around 20 per cent of practising, registered architects

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The recent debate surrounding Zaha Hadid Architects (ZHA) has renewed attention on the recognition of women in architecture.
- In India, the discussion has highlighted the persistent under-representation of women in leadership positions within architectural institutions despite increasing female enrolment in architecture education.

Key Points

- Council of Architecture (CoA) Statutory body established under the Architects Act, 1972.
- Functions under the Ministry of Education.
- Regulates architectural education, standards, and registration of architects.
- Indian Institute of Architects (IIA) Established in 1917.
- Professional body promoting architectural practice and ethics.
- Important Facts Women constitute around 60% of architecture students, but only about 20% of registered practicing architects (Delhi Architecture Biennale, 2023).
- No woman has served as the President of the Council of Architecture since its establishment.
- Perin Jamsetjee Mistri (1936) – First qualified woman architect in India.

- Urmila (Eulie) Chowdhury – Member of the Chandigarh planning team led by Le Corbusier.

Static Linkages

- Architects Act, 1972 Establishes the Council of Architecture.
- Regulates the profession of architects.
- Protects the title "Architect."
- Constitutional Provisions Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 15(1) – Prohibits discrimination on grounds of sex.
- Article 15(3) – Special provisions for women.
- Article 16 – Equality of opportunity in public employment.
- SDG Linkage SDG 5 – Gender Equality.
- SDG 10 – Reduced Inequalities.

Critical Analysis

Issues

- High educational participation but low professional retention.
- Under-representation in statutory and professional leadership.
- Institutional barriers to career progression.
- Limited recognition of contributions by women architects.

Significance

- Inclusive institutions improve governance and decision-making.
- Gender diversity enhances innovation in urban planning and architecture.
- Supports constitutional values of equality and social justice.

Way Forward

- Ensure greater representation of women in statutory bodies.
- Strengthen mentorship and leadership opportunities.
- Promote gender-sensitive workplace policies.
- Recognise contributions of women architects in professional curricula.
- Encourage transparent and inclusive institutional governance.

Ahead of the big deal, strike a careful balance

FOLLOWING THE US Trade Representative's proposal to levy tariffs on 60 countries under Section 301 of the US Trade Act, 1974, the government has introduced a new section in the foreign trade policy regarding forced labour. India is not the only country to do so — Indonesia, Canada, Cambodia and Peru have responded with similar commitments after the USTR's proposed tariffs. Simultaneously, India has sought a review of the USTR's proposed tariffs of 12.5 per cent, alluding to inconsistencies in its examination. The country's tariff challenges don't end here. US President Donald Trump's tariff policy is, as of now, operationalised through Section 122 of the Trade Act. However, the 10 per cent universal rate currently levied can only be imposed for at most 150 days (without Congressional approval), which end on July 24. Trump is trying to reinforce the tariff wall through other pathways. Alongside the investigation into forced labour, USTR is examining the issue of "structural excess capacity and production in manufacturing sectors" in economies, including India. The outcome of that investigation, and if it attracts additional tariffs, is yet to be released.

This, however, is not the only contentious area — energy is another lever. A few days ago, a group of US senators unveiled a new version of the Russia sanctions Bill that proposes to levy tariffs of up to 100 per cent on the top five buyers of Russian oil and natural gas — China, India, Slovakia, Hungary and Azerbaijan. Imports from Russia account for a significant share of India's energy basket. Here, too, New Delhi has taken US concerns on board — PSUs have signed a deal to import 10 per cent of LPG requirements from the US.

In the recent past, the Indian government has pushed through trade deals with countries such as the UK and Australia, as well as the EU. A deal with the US now — the largest economy in the world — will go a long way in reducing the uncertainty that has marred relations between the countries, while expanding trade. The upside for both countries is significant. On its part, the White House will likely continue to exert pressure on India in order to extract maximum concessions. As Delhi moves ahead to expand its market and protect its interests, it will have to carefully navigate its way, mindful of an unpredictable White House.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- India amended its Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) by introducing provisions relating to forced labour following concerns raised by the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) under the U.S. Trade Act, 1974.
- India has sought a review of the proposed 12.5% U.S. tariff on certain Indian exports.
- The U.S. is also investigating structural excess manufacturing capacity in countries including India, which could result in additional trade restrictions.
- A proposed U.S. sanctions Bill seeks tariffs of up to 100% on major buyers of Russian oil and gas, including India.
- India continues negotiations for a comprehensive India–U.S. Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).

Key Points

- USTR (United States Trade Representative): Leads U.S. trade policy and investigates unfair trade practices.
 - U.S. Trade Act, 1974 Section 122: Allows temporary emergency tariffs (maximum 150 days) without Congressional approval.
- India has incorporated forced labour compliance provisions in its Foreign Trade Policy (FTP).
- Countries like Canada, Indonesia, Cambodia and Peru have also introduced similar commitments.

- India remains a major importer of Russian crude oil, making energy security a key concern.
- Indian PSUs have agreed to import nearly 10% of India's LPG requirement from the United States.
- India has recently concluded FTAs with the UK and Australia, while negotiations continue with the EU and USA.

Static Linkages

- WTO Principles Most Favoured Nation (MFN)
- National Treatment
- Types of Trade Agreements
 - FTA
 - CEPA
 - CECA
- Tariffs are instruments of trade protection and revenue generation.
- Labour and environmental standards are increasingly part of modern trade agreements.
- Energy security is an important component of economic security.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Enhances India's credibility in global value chains.
- Supports ongoing India–US trade negotiations.
- Encourages responsible labour practices.
- Diversifies India's energy imports.
- Expands bilateral trade and investment opportunities.

Challenges

- Higher U.S. tariffs may reduce export competitiveness.
- Increased compliance costs for Indian MSMEs.
- U.S. domestic trade laws create uncertainty for exporters.
- Pressure on Russian energy imports may affect India's energy security.
- Possible future tariffs on manufacturing sectors.

Way Forward

- Conclude a balanced India–US Bilateral Trade Agreement.
- Strengthen labour compliance while supporting MSMEs.
- Diversify export markets and energy sources.
- Improve manufacturing competitiveness through logistics and ease of doing business.
- Resolve trade disputes through WTO-consistent mechanisms.