



DAILY NEWS PAPER ANALYSIS

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**CIVILS WITH AKASH
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

PM reaches out to students; Wangchuk ends fast

Activist, on hunger strike demanding Pradhan's resignation, ends fast in presence of 2 Ministers

Modi in a late-night video message on X, says his Cabinet will discuss NEET paper leak issue today

Centre transfers Higher Education Secretary Vineet Joshi to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Activist Sonam Wangchuk, who was on a hunger strike demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the NEET irregularities, ended his fast late on Thursday night. The move came even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in a late-night video message posted on his X and Instagram accounts, promised that the government would discuss NEET paper leaks in Friday's Cabinet meeting and will bring a Bill in Parliament next week. "More strict actions against paper leaks to come in tomorrow's Cab-

inet [meeting]," Mr. Modi said in his post. Mr. Wangchuk broke his fast in the presence of two Union Ministers, said Chering Dorjay Lakruk, co-convenor, Leh Apex Body. He broke the fast on certain conditions with the government giving written assurance that cases against students will be taken back, if they are not violent, said Mr. Dorjay. The government also said that it would consider compensation for families of suicide victims, he said. The developments came shortly after the cabinet shifted Higher Education Secretary Vineet Joshi to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj. Meanwhile, government sources told The



First sign: Sonam Wangchuk breaks his fast in the presence of Union Ministers J.P. Nadda and Jitendra Singh. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

No debate while Pradhan stays in office: Opposition

NEW DELHI The Opposition on Thursday refused the government's offer of a debate in Parliament on the NEET paper leaks and other irregularities, saying that any discussion must be preceded by the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. » PAGE 5

which was held by Mr. Joshi. Earlier in the day, in his first outreach to the protesters three days after the CJP-led march to Parliament, Mr. Modi announced the setting up of fast-track courts to swiftly handle cases of paper leaks. He said the welfare of the youth was the top priority of his government and asserted anyone trying to harm their future will not be spared. But the CJP said the proposal did not address the issue of accountability or the resignation of Mr. Pradhan.

Following the PM's announcement, the Delhi High Court notified a designated court to deal with criminal cases arising from

paper leaks as well as the use of other unfair means in public examinations. The special court will function from the Rouse Avenue Court Complex. Earlier on Thursday, Mr. Singh said that the Centre had approached the CJP for talks four times in the past 24 hours. He said a meeting can be held either at Mr. Nadda's official residence or office, adding that Mr. Modi was "sensitive" to the issue of the paper leak and that "the government was not sitting on prestige". The CJP has also called for a nationwide agitation on Friday. (With PTI inputs)

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Important Features

- Targets organized examination mafias, not genuine candidates.
- Offences are cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable.
- Investigation by agencies not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police (DSP)/Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP).
- Enables attachment of properties acquired through proceeds of crime.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- The Union Government announced stricter measures against paper leaks following the NEET examination controversy.
- The Prime Minister stated that the Union Cabinet would consider stronger legal provisions and introduce amendments to strengthen the anti-paper leak framework.
- The Delhi High Court designated a special court to expedite cases related to paper leaks and unfair means in public examinations.
- The developments have renewed focus on the implementation of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024.

Key Points

Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024

Objective

- Prevent unfair means in notified public examinations.
- Protect the integrity, transparency and credibility of public examinations.

Applies to

- Union Public Service Commission (UPSC)
- Staff Selection Commission (SSC)
- Railway Recruitment Boards (RRBs)
- National Testing Agency (NTA)
- Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS)
- Other public examination authorities notified by the Central Government.

Major Offences

- Question paper leak.
- Unauthorized access to question papers.
- Organized cheating.
- Impersonation.
- Tampering with examination systems.
- Conducting examinations through unfair means.

Punishment

- Imprisonment ranging from 3 to 10 years.
- Fine up to ₹1 crore for organized offences.
- Recovery of proportionate examination expenses from convicted persons.

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before law.
- Article 16 – Equality of opportunity in public employment.
- Article 21 – Fair procedure and protection of life and personal liberty (judicial interpretation).
- Rule of Law.
- Good Governance – Transparency, accountability and integrity.
- Merit-based public recruitment.
- Digital governance and cybersecurity in examinations.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens credibility of public examinations.
- Acts as a deterrent against organized examination fraud.
- Enhances transparency in recruitment.
- Protects merit-based selection.

Challenges

- Insider involvement in paper leaks.
- Weak cybersecurity infrastructure.
- Delayed investigations.
- Lack of accountability of examination agencies.
- Psychological stress on aspirants.

Way Forward

- Strict implementation of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024.
- AI-enabled examination surveillance.
- End-to-end encrypted digital examination process.
- Independent audit of examination agencies.
- Time-bound investigation and trial.
- Strong Centre-State coordination against examination mafias.
- Institutional accountability and grievance redressal.

Houthi attacks on shipping drive Brent crude past \$100

M. Kalyanaraman
CHENNAI

In an escalation of the conflict in West Asia, the Houthis, Iran's allies in Yemen, said they attacked two Saudi Arabia-flagged tankers in the Red Sea on Thursday, as part of a blockade of Saudi Arabian shipping.

According to Al Masirah, the Houthis' official television channel, the attacks on the *Enceila* and the *Layla* took place early on July 23. Saudi Arabia's official *Saudi Press Agency* has confirmed the projectile attack on the *Enceila*, adding that the crew is safe and the vessel secured. The attack on the *Layla*, a three lakh-tonne Saudi-flagged Very Large Crude Carrier (VLCC), remains unconfirmed.

Soon after the attacks were reported, Brent crude rates surged past \$100 a barrel, a 7% jump over the previous day's close of around \$94.

Escalating global crises

The escalation off the Bab el-Mandeb Strait – the Red Sea's exit to the Arabian Sea – comes with attacks erupting in regions crucial to India's oil imports. After constraints on the Strait of Hormuz, Saudi Arabia had been piping some 4 million barrels of crude across the country to be shipped out through Yanbu – port city on the Red Sea coast – largely to Asian markets, including India.

Thursday's attacks comes close on the heels of Ukraine targeting Russian merchant ships, including oil tankers, off the port of Novorossiysk, a Russian city on the Black Sea coast. Ukraine has claimed more than 180 hits on Russian ships in the Black Sea in July. On July 17 and 19, Russia attacked two ships off Odesa, a Ukrainian port on the Black Sea, killing four Indian seafarers.

These attacks are erupt-



On the boil: The Bab el-Mandeb escalation has added to the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz. FILE PHOTO

Attacks erupting in regions crucial to India's oil imports, which are a little less than 5 mbpd per day

ing in regions crucial to India's oil imports.

Saudi Arabia currently supplies around 0.4 million barrels per day (mbpd) to India, via Yanbu and Bab al-Mandab. India's crude oil imports are a little less than 5 mbpd.

"A disruption may mean cargoes may need to be re-routed via the Suez Canal, into the Mediterranean and around Africa, but that will take much longer and come with higher freight costs," says Pankaj Srivastava, a senior vice president at Rystad Energy.

Mr. Srivastava says India imported 2.25 mbpd of Russian crude in June, with nearly 0.7 mbpd originating from Novorossiysk.

"If the disruption persists or infrastructure damage is more extensive, India could face additional pressure in securing replacement crude volumes," he says, adding that the immediate impact is likely to remain manageable.

Since the Houthi hijacking of the car carrier *Galaxy Leader* in November 2023, ship traffic across the Suez Canal had plummeted. It picked up in January this year, however, and surged in March, as Yanbu became an alternative to the Strait of Hormuz.

The Houthis have cited Saudi Arabia's "blockade of supplies" and the attack on Sanaa International airport in Yemen on July 13 as reasons for their blockade.

Reuters has, however, reported that Iran is inspiring the Houthi blockade of Saudi oil-carrying ships.

Shipping industry sources say insurance rates climbed 10 to 15 times as soon as the Houthis announced their blockade on July 20, nearly matching rates for the Strait of Hormuz.

'India more resilient'

Meanwhile, the U.S.-based think tank, Institute for the Study of War, said that at least seven vessels have already diverted their routes to avoid the Bab al-Mandab Strait as a consequence of the tanker attacks.

Erik Grundt, Rystad Energy's senior market analyst, says, "In sailing-time terms, the detour through the Suez Canal and around Africa stretches the Yanbu-to-India (west coast) voyage from about eight days to nearly 39 days." Compounding this, VLCCs are too large to transit the Suez Canal fully loaded, so they must partially offload at Ain Sukhna and reload at Sidi Kerir on the Mediterranean side, adding time and complexity.

Mr. Srivastava says India, is now more resilient, having diversified its crude sources, which now include African nations, Brazil, Guyana, and the U.S..

- Reduces dependence on the Strait of Hormuz.
- Impact on India
 - India imports nearly 85% of its crude oil requirement.
 - Total crude imports are around 5 million barrels per day (mbpd).
 - Disruptions may lead to:
 - Higher crude prices
 - Imported inflation
 - Increased freight and insurance costs
 - Pressure on Current Account Deficit (CAD)
 - Higher fiscal burden due to fuel subsidies (if provided)
- Energy Security Measures
 - Diversified crude imports from Russia, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, UAE, USA, Brazil and Guyana.
 - Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR) provide emergency supply buffer.

Static Linkages

- Bab el-Mandeb Strait – Red Sea ↔ Gulf of Aden.
- Strait of Hormuz – Persian Gulf ↔ Gulf of Oman.
- Suez Canal – Red Sea ↔ Mediterranean Sea.
- Cape of Good Hope becomes an alternative route when the Red Sea is disrupted.
- UNCLOS, 1982 provides the legal framework for freedom of navigation and transit passage through international straits.
- Maritime chokepoints are critical for global trade, energy security and Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights vulnerability of global maritime chokepoints.
- Reinforces importance of India's energy diversification strategy.
- Demonstrates growing linkage between geopolitical conflicts and energy security.

Challenges

- Rising crude prices fuel inflation.
- Higher shipping and insurance costs increase import bills.
- Supply chain disruptions affect refining and manufacturing.
- Prolonged conflict may impact global economic growth.

India's Strengths

- Diversified crude import basket.
- Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Strong diplomatic relations with Gulf countries.
- Rapid expansion of renewable energy capacity.

Way Forward

- Expand Strategic Petroleum Reserve capacity.
- Further diversify crude import sources.
- Strengthen maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Accelerate renewable energy and green hydrogen transition.
- Promote long-term energy supply agreements.
- Enhance regional cooperation for securing Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Yemen-based Houthis (Ansar Allah) attacked Saudi Arabia-flagged oil tankers in the Red Sea near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.
- The attacks have intensified concerns over disruptions to global energy supply chains and maritime trade.
- Brent crude oil prices crossed \$100 per barrel, reflecting fears of supply disruptions.
- The crisis follows earlier tensions in the Strait of Hormuz and attacks on merchant vessels in the Black Sea, highlighting growing risks to global shipping.

Key Points

- Bab el-Mandeb Strait
 - Connects the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.
 - Links the Suez Canal with the Indian Ocean.
 - One of the world's most important maritime chokepoints for oil and container trade.
- Saudi Arabia's Alternate Export Route
 - Uses the East-West Pipeline (Petroline) to transport crude from the Persian Gulf to Yanbu Port on the Red Sea.

U.S. announces civilian nuclear deal with Saudi Arabia

Agence France-Presse
RIYADH

The United States and Saudi Arabia on Wednesday announced a landmark deal that would establish a civilian nuclear programme in the kingdom, which U.S. President Donald Trump said was contingent on Riyadh normalising relations with Israel. The move comes as the U.S. fights a war with Iran that began in large part over concerns about Tehran's nuclear programme – still a key point of contention in now-stalled peace talks. The deal is set to generate billions of dollars for American companies and is seen as a major win for Iran's long-time regional rival, but critics fear it also carries risks. Washington has sought in recent years to tie any nuclear agreement and defence pact to Saudi normalisation with Israel, and just hours after the deal was announced, Mr. Trump took to social media to say Riyadh must first meet that

condition. The nuclear deal "will be approved, but is totally subject to Saudi Arabia joining the very respected and successful Abraham Accords", he wrote.

Concern of enrichment
Critics have insisted the deal – the text of which was not immediately made public – could precipitate a nuclear race in a region already battered by war.

One provision would potentially see U.S. companies build a uranium enrichment facility in Saudi Arabia, the Wall Street Journal reported.

The U.S. Energy Department made no mention of such a provision and did not offer comment when asked about it by AFP, while Mr. Trump added in his Truth Social post that:

"There will be no enrichment of materials."

The deal will be submitted to Congress for review, but the Republican-controlled legislature is unlikely to block its implementation.



Close allies: President Trump with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in Washington, in November last year. *AP*

U.S. lawmakers from both parties and Israeli officials have previously voiced opposition to such a project over fears Saudi Arabia could eventually convert it to develop nuclear weapons.

"Trump claims his war on Iran is about stopping an authoritarian country from enriching nuclear fuel," left-wing U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders wrote on X.

"Now he's letting his best friends in Saudi Arabia – one of the most brutal dictatorships in the world – do exactly that."

This is absurd."

'Pact with safeguards'

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that "any agreement that we're going to make with any country in the world on civil nuclear energy is going to be one that will have safeguards in place to ensure that it can't be turned into a weapons programme".

Riyadh, like Tehran, has long been adamant about its right to pursue a civilian nuclear programme. Last year it signed a mutual defence pact with nuclear-

armed Pakistan.

Policymakers have long feared that if Iran produced a nuclear weapon, the move would set off an arms race across the Gulf.

U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright dismissed concerns about proliferation, insisting the deal was in Washington's economic and strategic interest.

The U.S. has agreements governing nuclear cooperation with more than 50 countries.

Experts said such a deal had been in the works for a while, but some raised concerns about the potential for uranium enrichment on Saudi soil.

"It would be a mistake to allow Saudi Arabia the capability for enrichment," said Matthew Kroenig of the Atlantic Council in comments made before the deal was formally announced. "Washington is right to strengthen its relationship with Riyadh, but it should not do so at the expense of its effective nuclear weapons nonproliferation standards."

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The United States and Saudi Arabia announced a civil nuclear cooperation agreement.
- The U.S. linked the agreement to Saudi Arabia's normalisation of diplomatic relations with Israel under the Abraham Accords.
- The development comes amid heightened concerns over Iran's nuclear programme and regional security in West Asia.
- The agreement is expected to strengthen U.S.–Saudi strategic ties while supporting Saudi Arabia's civilian nuclear energy ambitions.

Key Points

- Agreement focuses on peaceful use of nuclear energy.
- Includes provisions for U.S. technology and investment in Saudi Arabia's nuclear sector.
- The U.S. stated that the agreement would contain strict non-proliferation safeguards.
- Debate emerged over the possibility of uranium enrichment in Saudi Arabia.
- The agreement requires approval by the U.S. Congress.
- Saudi Arabia seeks nuclear energy as part of Vision 2030 to diversify its energy mix.

Static Linkages

- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)
 - Objective: Prevent spread of nuclear weapons, promote peaceful use of nuclear energy and nuclear disarmament.
 - Entered into force: 1970.
 - India is not a signatory.
- International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)
 - Headquarters: Vienna, Austria.
 - Functions:
 - Promotes peaceful use of nuclear energy.
 - Verifies compliance through safeguards.
- Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)
 - Export-control regime governing nuclear trade.

- India is not a member but received a waiver in 2008.

Uranium Enrichment

- Increases concentration of U-235 isotope.
- Low-enriched uranium is used for civilian reactors.
- Highly enriched uranium can be used in nuclear weapons.

Abraham Accords (2020)

- Normalisation agreements between Israel and several Arab countries, including UAE and Bahrain.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens U.S.–Saudi strategic partnership.
- Supports Saudi Arabia's energy diversification.
- Expands peaceful nuclear cooperation.
- Reinforces U.S. influence in West Asia.

Concerns

- Uranium enrichment capability may increase proliferation risks.
- Could trigger a regional nuclear arms race.
- May weaken global non-proliferation norms if safeguards are diluted.
- Could complicate negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme.

Relevance for India

- Stability in West Asia is critical for India's energy security.
- Important for India's strategic relations with Saudi Arabia, Israel and the U.S.
- Highlights growing importance of civil nuclear diplomacy and global non-proliferation architecture.

Way Forward

- Ensure robust IAEA safeguards.
- Strengthen global non-proliferation mechanisms.
- Promote regional confidence-building measures.
- Balance peaceful nuclear cooperation with security concerns.
- Encourage diplomatic engagement to reduce tensions in West Asia.

Education system's collapse, young India's trauma

For the last few weeks, peaceful protests by young students all over India against examination paper leaks and the general decay in the education system have been gathering momentum. Their demands have been straightforward and to the point: accountability from the Government of India and education reform. The Narendra Modi government has responded to their courage with cowardice and wanton cruelty, treating them not as inheritors of the future but as enemies of the nation. On July 20, 2020, a day of infamy, the Delhi Police and the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) sought to suppress them with uncalculated violence, using brutal lathicharges and tear gas. Scores of peaceful protesters have been injured. Even students heading back home were not spared, as lathis rained down on their backs and heads. The nation has seen some of the most depressing visuals of youth whose bodies have been scarred by pellets, the use of which would undoubtedly have been approved by the Union Home Minister himself. The videos from that day are etched into our memories and have stirred our collective conscience. Only the government and its captive media are spinning stories around this spontaneous rising tide of protest. It is time to say loud and clear: Stop. These are our sons and daughters, our young men and women.

The Modi government routinely uses violence in preference to dialogue. The pattern is clear, from farmers to activists. But this week, even a government as insensitive as the one that has set new standards of authoritarian governance, sank to a new low. Instead of reaching out with understanding to our future doctors and engineers, teachers and civil servants, entrepreneurs and nation builders, it unleashed the repressive power of the state on them. This can neither be forgiven nor forgotten.

The old toolkit of labelling any and every dissent as anti-national has been repurposed to tar the student agitation. The Modi government has reached deep into its bag of tricks to cast aspersions and peddle conspiracies when what it should have done is to introspect on its policies that have motivated the protests.

The decline of public education
The first fundamental issue is the Modi government's retreat from public education. It has reduced the proportion of its total budget spent on school education by 50% and on higher education by 33%. Can anyone see the sense in such an absurd retreat? Over the last 12 years, the Modi government has shut down nearly one lakh public schools while overseeing the opening of 43,000 private schools – a large chunk of which are run by the Rashtriya Swamishrusi Sangh, which, along with its affiliate organisations, incidentally presides over the largest private



Sonia Gandhi
Chairperson of the Congress
Parliamentary Party

school network in India. Its higher education, the University Grants Commission has cut its grants to universities and pushed them to take loans at high rates of interest. To repay them, public universities have resorted to raising their fees. With high-quality, affordable public education inaccessible, families in India have been forced to spend out of pocket to educate their children. The total amount spent by families on the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET) examination coaching alone is as much as the Modi government invests on public education in total. The cost of pursuing a private education deters lakhs of talented students, who come from humble backgrounds but have immense potential. Equally critical, however, is that these expenses also put a crushing burden of impossibly high expectations on our students. India's youth are keenly aware of how much their families have invested in the dream of their academic and professional success. The acute desperation of our students is a direct consequence of the privatisation and commercialisation of education.

Broken testing system, issue of success

The second issue is the gutting of India's public examination system, which has undergone the processes of centralisation, privatisation, and politicisation. The traditional practice of universities and States setting their own examinations to cater to their unique needs was replaced by a centralised, National Testing Agency (NTA)-conducted examinations such as the Common University Entrance Test (CUET). The NTA itself is a hapless, chronically understaffed body which relies entirely on an army of private contractors to conduct its examinations. It is also well known that the paper-setters, translators, and experts engaged by the NTA are not renowned academics from India's premier institutions but are, for the most part, mediocre individuals with political affiliations. The end result of this process has had stark consequences – 12 paper leaks occurring across the country in the past 12 years, including nine by the NTA itself since it was formed in 2017. Even the most talented and hardworking students find themselves failing simply because the authorities are choosing to reap profits from the examination system without facing any significant consequences for their criminality.

The third issue is the difficulty of succeeding in India's education system. High-quality, well-paid job opportunities after graduation are a rarity today, partly due to the growing monopolisation of the economy. Unemployment rates for our young graduates have been consistently high, averaging 20-25% in the last few years. Competition for the remaining few jobs is intense, and our students have never been more ill-equipped to compete for them. The

appointment of feeble Vice-Chancellors chosen for their partisan loyalty, and the consequent recruitment of politically connected but unqualified faculty, has created a crisis in teaching in our public universities. At a time when skill requirements in the workplace have become far more challenging, India's higher education system has remained bound to obsolete systems and politically motivated curricular changes, dangerously out of touch with evolving methods and standards, and particularly unable to keep pace with the Artificial Intelligence-enabled world. Students are confronted with trying to succeed in an increasingly demanding system for which they are far from adequately resourced.

The education system is therefore increasingly expensive, prone to corruption, and difficult to succeed in. But the last nail in the coffin has been the Modi government's consistent and conscious policy of eroding accountability and avoiding good faith conversations on education. It deliberately cleared the National Education Policy 2020 without seeking consensus or subjecting it to parliamentary deliberations. The NTA itself was never brought to Parliament and remains a society that was set up by the Union Cabinet without any accountability mechanisms. The Education Minister infamously displayed his own contempt for accountability by publicly dismissing the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education's recommendations to strengthen the NTA, simply because it had members of the Opposition in it. His unwillingness to resign from office despite these monumental failures has only further inflamed public opinion.

The roots of protest

The student protests are a natural consequence of these interrelated forces: today's bleak education landscape, which evokes only hopelessness, and the Modi government's trademark arrogance and unwillingness to be accountable or constructive. The brutality perpetrated by the police personnel functioning under the direct authority of the Union Home Minister on student protesters is hardly unprecedented for this regime. We all remember vividly how armed policemen and paramilitary forces savaged university campuses during the Citizenship (Amendment) Act National Register of Citizens protests in 2020. The unacceptable excesses against India's women workers can never be erased from our memories.

The Modi government has not just degraded India's education landscape but has also made a habit of acting with utter impunity, supreme self-delusion, and abject insensitivity. India's students have called the Modi regime's bluff. It is our moral, political, and constitutional duty to stand with them and safeguard their future.

- Education in the Constitution
 - Education is placed in the Concurrent List (42nd Constitutional Amendment, 1976).
 - Enables both the Union and States to legislate on education.

Static Linkages

- Article 14 – Equality before Law.
- Article 19(1)(a) – Freedom of Speech and Expression.
- Article 19(1)(b) – Right to Assemble Peacefully.
- Article 21A – Right to Education.
- Article 41 – Right to Education (Directive Principle).
- Article 45 – Early Childhood Care and Education.
- Seventh Schedule – Concurrent List (Education).
- Rule of Law.
- Transparency and Accountability.
- Parliamentary Oversight of Executive Agencies.
- Human Capital Formation.
- Demographic Dividend.

Critical Analysis

Issues

- Repeated paper leaks undermine the credibility of public examinations.
- Weak institutional capacity and cybersecurity vulnerabilities.
- Increasing dependence on private coaching.
- Delay in recruitment affects employment opportunities.
- High competition due to limited quality jobs.

Significance

- Fair examinations are essential for Article 14 (Equality).
- Transparent recruitment strengthens good governance.
- Education reforms are crucial for realizing India's demographic dividend.

Way Forward

- Strengthen institutional capacity of NTA.
- Implement secure digital examination infrastructure.
- Conduct periodic third-party security audits.
- Ensure time-bound examination and recruitment calendars.
- Strengthen grievance redressal mechanisms.
- Increase investment in public education.
- Improve Centre-State coordination in examination management.
- Promote transparency through technology and independent oversight.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context of the News

- Student protests have emerged across India demanding:
 - Accountability for examination paper leaks.
 - Reforms in the examination system.
 - Greater transparency in recruitment and entrance examinations.
- The issue has brought attention to the functioning of the National Testing Agency (NTA), examination security, and governance of India's education system.
- The matter is significant for governance, education reforms, youth employment, and constitutional rights.

Key Points

- National Testing Agency (NTA)
 - Established in 2017.
 - Autonomous organization under the Ministry of Education.
 - Conducts national entrance examinations such as NEET (UG), JEE Main, CUET, and UGC-NET.
- Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024
 - Seeks to prevent paper leaks and organized examination malpractices.
 - Covers specified public examinations conducted by Central agencies.
 - Prescribes stringent penalties for organized cheating and unfair means.
- National Education Policy (NEP), 2020
 - Emphasizes competency-based learning.
 - Promotes holistic education and multidisciplinary institutions.
 - Recommends assessment reforms and greater use of technology.

Warning signals for India from NATO's Ankara summit

The heads of state or government of the 32 countries that are politico-military allies under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) met in Ankara, Türkiye, on July 7-8, 2025 for what is called the Ankara Summit. Their stated objective was to review progress made since the 2023 Summit in The Hague and to set out a roadmap for continuing delivery on NATO's key objectives.

The gathering in Ankara is being regarded as one of NATO's more successful summits, despite the abrasive presence of United States President Donald Trump, who devoted most of his speaking time to extolling the putative success of U.S. strategy and talking up the superiority of American weapons systems.

A strategic road map

Four substantive commitments came out of Ankara. First, the 32 NATO allies – too often divided by divergent objectives and capacities – agreed on their “renewed commitment to (their) collective defence under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, and to the transatlantic bond”; second, the unanimous endorsement of “The Hague defence commitment”, in which all NATO members undertook last year to allocate at least five per cent of their respective Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on defence by 2035 – an unprecedented hike over the two per cent spending pledge that existed earlier. Third, NATO declared its “unwavering support for Ukraine in defending its freedom, sovereignty and territorial integrity” – and fourth, the alliance partners vowed to build a high technology, high capacity, Europe-wide defence industrial base (DIB) – the term for the network of firms, factories, laboratories and skilled workers needed to build and sustain a country's military power.

The focus in Ankara was overwhelmingly on implementation – turning political commitments into military capability through investment, industrial capacity and innovation.



Ajai Shukla

Former Indian Army officer (retired), who now analyses issues and events relating to defence

Russia accuses the U.S. and European democracies of unbridled expansionism, through NATO's progressive incorporation of East and Central European countries. These include Poland, Romania, the Baltic states, and former Soviet republics that Moscow has historically regarded as lying within its sphere of influence. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was driven in part by the fear that Kyiv was inching towards joining the Atlantic alliance, a step that would have increased NATO's numbers from just 12 countries at its founding in 1949 to 31 now. The Russian invasion effectively blocked Ukraine, but spooked historically neutral Finland and Sweden into abandoning nonalignment and becoming NATO's 31st and 32nd members.

NATO's transformations

NATO, however, sees itself not as expansionist, but as merely adapting to Europe's changing strategic landscape. In 1990-91, with the relatively peaceful ending of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, NATO shifted its focus to out of area operations in theatres such as the Balkans. After the 9/11 strikes in 2001 on the World Trade Center towers, NATO made another strategic shift, joining the Global War on Terror. Now, with Russia and China joining hands in a new era of superpower confrontation, NATO is adapting once again.

It was evident from the discussions at the Ankara Summit that Europe has prioritised the revitalisation of its DIB. The European defence industry was struggling to scale up production even before the five per cent defence spending pledge at The Hague. European defence industry giants, MBDA and Rheinmetall, have warned of shortages in ammunition production.

Operation Epic Fury, the U.S. Israel bombing campaign against Iran, illustrates the inevitability of weapons and ammunition shortages when Asian allies' demands for U.S. weaponry compete with ongoing European needs. The U.S. has fired

more than 850 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Iran during this campaign. At the current production rate of 85 per year, replacing these would take a decade.

Many NATO members have capable defence industrial bases, but there is little coordination of alliance-wide priorities. The resulting strategic mismatch has been found during the Ukraine war to cluster in the critical categories of air defence missiles and interceptors, precision guided munitions, and artillery rockets. While the U.S. decision to allow Ukraine to produce Patriot air defence systems under licence is a strong signal of support to Ukraine, more needs to be done.

Without a major revitalisation of Europe's defence industry, NATO's five per cent pledge will only deepen its dependency on the U.S. Half of Europe's defence spending between 2022-2024, came from the U.S., up from 28% in 2019-2021. Foreign Military Sales notifications to the U.S. Congress for European customers have quadrupled since 2018 to \$76 billion in 2024.

Need for self-reliance

For the world's big arms buyers and especially for India, this spike in European demand is bad news. As NATO spends more, the international arms bazaar is shifting inexorably from a buyers' market to a sellers' market. The first sign of this was the delay by U.S. firm General Electric Aerospace in supplying India with F-404 fighter jet engines, which are critically needed for the Indian Air Force's Tejas light combat aircraft programme.

Looking ahead, as India's defence increasingly relies on new-age defence technologies and weaponry, such as drones, artificial intelligence, cyber and electronic warfare and resilient networks, it will become critical for its defence industry to achieve self-reliance in these technology realms, rather than relying on overstretched suppliers who have their own battles to fight.

- Increased defence spending by NATO members is likely to tighten the global defence market, affecting arms-importing countries, including India.

Static Linkages

- Washington Treaty, 1949
- Article 5 – Collective Defence
- Collective Defence vs Collective Security
- Cold War
- Warsaw Pact (1955–1991)
- Strategic Autonomy
- Defence Industrial Base (DIB)
- India's defence initiatives:
 - Atmanirbhar Bharat
 - Defence Acquisition Procedure (DAP)
 - Defence Corridors
 - iDEX
 - Positive Indigenisation Lists

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reinforces NATO's collective deterrence.
- Accelerates defence modernisation.
- Enhances European defence manufacturing.
- Sustains military assistance to Ukraine.

Concerns

- Intensifies geopolitical rivalry.
- May trigger a prolonged arms race.
- Greater defence spending may reduce fiscal space for welfare.
- Global shortages of defence equipment may worsen.
- Higher procurement costs for defence-importing countries.

Implications for India

- Possible delays in defence imports.
- Rising cost of advanced military platforms.
- Greater urgency for indigenous defence manufacturing.
- Need to strengthen capabilities in AI, drones, cyber warfare, semiconductors and advanced defence technologies.

Way Forward

- Strengthen indigenous defence manufacturing under Atmanirbhar Bharat.
- Increase investment in defence R&D and emerging technologies.
- Diversify defence procurement sources.
- Enhance public-private partnerships in defence production.
- Expand defence exports to improve economies of scale.
- Maintain strategic autonomy while deepening defence partnerships.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The NATO Ankara Summit (7–8 July 2026) was attended by the Heads of State/Government of all 32 NATO member countries.
- The Summit reviewed the implementation of decisions taken at the 2025 Hague Summit and adopted measures to strengthen NATO's military preparedness amid the evolving security environment, particularly the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Key Points

- NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was established in 1949 through the Washington Treaty.
- It is a collective defence alliance based on Article 5, which states that an attack on one member shall be considered an attack on all members.
- NATO reaffirmed its commitment to Article 5.
- Members reiterated the Hague Defence Commitment (2025) to increase defence expenditure to 5% of GDP by 2035 (earlier benchmark: 2%).
- NATO reaffirmed continued military and political support to Ukraine.
- Greater emphasis was placed on developing a European Defence Industrial Base (DIB) to enhance indigenous defence production and reduce supply bottlenecks.
- Shortages continue in:
 - Air-defence systems
 - Precision-guided munitions
 - Artillery ammunition
 - Missile production
- Europe remains significantly dependent on U.S. defence supplies despite plans for greater self-reliance.

Escalation trap

Donald Trump should change course if he wants to end the war with Iran

The decision by Yemen's Ansar Allah, better known as the Houthis, to impose a blockade on Saudi Arabia signals that the war on Iran has entered its most dangerous phase. The Houthis, a close Iranian ally, had avoided direct involvement due to a fragile but functional ceasefire with Saudi Arabia, despite their controlling most of Yemen's population centres, including capital Sana'a. That ceasefire effectively fell apart on July 13 when an airport in Sana'a was attacked by forces of "Yemen's internationally recognised government". Based in Saudi Arabia, this government maintains loyal forces inside Yemen, though the Houthis remain the country's most powerful and influential political and military force. Blaming Riyadh for the attack, the Houthis announced on July 20 a blockade on ships using Saudi ports on the Red Sea. Saudi Arabia, whose crude and other exports through the Strait of Hormuz have been severely constrained by Iran's blockade, has increased its reliance on Red Sea ports, especially Yanbu. Tankers from Yanbu to Asian markets must pass through the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, which links the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea. The Houthis control much of Yemen's Red Sea coastline overlooking the Bab el-Mandeb and can enforce a blockade of the chokepoint.

When Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz after the U.S.-Israel war began on February 28, all Persian Gulf states struggled to sustain their exports. Saudi Arabia, however, cushioned the impact by using its East-West Pipeline, which links its eastern oilfields to the Red Sea export terminals. If the Houthis enforce a total blockade on the kingdom, Riyadh could face far deeper economic disruption. This, coupled with Iran's attacks on Kuwait's desalination plants and power grid – after U.S. strikes on Iranian civilian infrastructure – paints a grim picture of the war and its regional consequences. If the first phase of Iran's counter-attack targeted the Persian Gulf monarchies, the second has expanded to include Jordan, which hosts two major U.S. military bases. Now, with the Houthi blockade, the war's economic pain is set to deepen further. U.S. President Donald Trump had an opportunity to extricate himself from the conflict when he signed a memorandum of understanding with Iran on June 17. But by returning to war over disputes surrounding control of the Strait of Hormuz, Mr. Trump has not only squandered the opportunity but has also raised the risk of dragging the U.S. into yet another forever, unwinnable war. At this point, he is pursuing the same military tactics against Iran repeatedly, expecting different results. If Mr. Trump wants a way out, he should change course, push for an immediate ceasefire and return to diplomacy.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Yemen's Houthis (Ansar Allah) announced a blockade on ships using Saudi Arabian Red Sea ports after an attack on Sana'a airport.
- The development marks an escalation in the Iran-Israel-U.S. conflict, extending tensions from the Strait of Hormuz to the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait.
- Saudi Arabia has been increasingly relying on Red Sea ports (Yanbu) to export crude oil due to disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz.
- Any disruption at Bab-el-Mandeb threatens global energy supplies, maritime trade, and India's energy security.

Key Points

- Houthis (Ansar Allah)
 - Iran-backed armed movement controlling Sana'a and large parts of northwestern Yemen.
 - Controls significant portions of Yemen's Red Sea coastline.
- Bab-el-Mandeb Strait
 - Connects the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aden.
 - Links the Suez Canal to the Indian Ocean.
 - One of the world's most important

- maritime chokepoints for oil and container trade.
- Strait of Hormuz
 - Connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman.
 - Nearly one-fifth of global oil trade passes through it.
- Saudi East-West Pipeline (Petroline)
 - Connects eastern oil fields with Yanbu Port on the Red Sea.
 - Reduces dependence on the Strait of Hormuz.
- India's Concern
 - India imports over 80% of its crude oil requirement
 - Around 60% of India's crude imports originate from West Asia.
 - Disruptions increase crude prices, freight costs, inflation, and shipping risks.

Static Linkages

- Bab-el-Mandeb lies between Yemen and Djibouti/Eritrea.
- Red Sea connects to the Mediterranean Sea through the Suez Canal.
- UNCLOS, 1982 guarantees freedom of navigation in international waters.
- Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) are critical for global trade and energy security.
- SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) is India's maritime security vision.
- Mission-Based Deployments by the Indian Navy safeguard shipping in the Indian Ocean Region.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Highlights the strategic importance of maritime chokepoints.
- Demonstrates the growing role of non-state actors in international conflicts.
- Reinforces the importance of secure global energy supply chains.

Challenges

- Increased crude oil prices and inflationary pressures.
- Disruption of global shipping and supply chains.
- Higher insurance and freight costs.
- Threat to freedom of navigation.
- Greater instability in West Asia affecting India's diaspora and trade.

India's Perspective

- Ensure uninterrupted energy imports.
- Protect Indian merchant vessels and seafarers.
- Strengthen naval presence in the Arabian Sea and Gulf of Aden.
- Promote diplomatic resolution through multilateral platforms.

Way Forward

- Immediate ceasefire and diplomatic negotiations.
- Ensure freedom of navigation under UNCLOS.
- Diversify India's energy import sources.
- Strengthen Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR).
- Enhance maritime domain awareness and naval cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region.
- Expand SAGAR and Indo-Pacific maritime partnerships.

Core upgrade

The updated Index of Core Industries rounds out economic data upgrades

The Index of Core Industries (ICI) has finally joined the country's other economic metrics in becoming up-to-date and representative of the economy. The other metrics such as the national accounts, Consumer Price Index (CPI), Wholesale Price Index (WPI), and the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) were updated earlier this year, although even those were after considerable delays. The ICI has now joined their ranks with the June data being based on a new series with an updated base year, an additional sector being covered, and revised weights and methodologies. This is a welcome upgrade. The performance of these core industries is a vital barometer of the state of the economy. In the new series, the previous eight sectors have become nine, with the vital inclusion of the iron ore sector. Improvements have also been made to how the steel and coal sectors are measured in order to remove the previous double-counting that was taking place. The addition of a sector would naturally change the distribution of weights of the sectors in the index, but the final weights also reflect a broader shift in economic activity. The coal and natural gas sectors have seen their weights nearly halve to about 5.6% and 3.8%, respectively. On the other hand, the electricity sector now makes up more than 30% of the index from less than 20% in the previous series. All of this perhaps reflects the rising share of renewables in electricity generation, even as demand for electricity itself surges.

The performance of the index in June 2026, with a five-month-high growth of 5%, would suggest that Indian industry is shrugging off the slump induced by the West Asia crisis. However, two of the strong growth numbers – iron ore by 43.9% and electricity by 9.8% – were due to a statistical base effect since both sectors had contracted in June last year. It remains to be seen whether the numbers will remain this positive once that base effect wears off in the months ahead. The new series highlights some of the systemic issues that the old series did, such as the persistent contraction of the crude oil and natural gas sectors. They have contracted continuously for 18 and 24 months, respectively. If India does not have these resources, that is one thing. But if it has them and still is not able to extract them economically, then that is a serious shortcoming. The update of the ICI and the recent upgrade of the WPI would have been a good time for a broader statistical reorganisation. With the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation handling the CPI and the IIP, it only makes sense for the WPI and ICI to move to it from their current home in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. That change can still be made.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- The Index of Core Industries (ICI) has been revised with a new base year (2022–23 = 100) to better reflect the current structure of the Indian economy.
- The revised series has been implemented from June 2026.
- Key changes include:
 - Expansion from 8 to 9 core industries with the inclusion of Iron Ore.
 - Revision of sectoral weights.
 - Improved methodology to eliminate double-counting in coal and steel production.
- The revised ICI recorded 5% growth in June 2026, the highest in five months.

Key Points

About Index of Core Industries (ICI)

- Measures the performance of core infrastructure industries.
- Released monthly by the Office of Economic Adviser (OEA), DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce & Industry.
- Base Year: 2022–23 = 100 (Earlier: 2011–12).
- Core industries constitute about 40% weight in the Index of Industrial Production (IIP).

Nine Core Industries

- Coal, Crude Oil, Natural Gas, Refinery Products, Fertilizers, Steel, Cement, Electricity, Iron Ore (Newly Added)

Major Reforms

- Iron Ore included as a separate sector.
- Double-counting in Coal and Steel removed.
- Sectoral weights revised to reflect current economic structure.

Important Weight Changes

- Electricity: Increased to over 30%.
- Coal: Reduced to ~5.6%.
- Natural Gas: Reduced to ~3.8%.

Performance Highlights (June 2026)

- Overall ICI Growth: 5%
- Iron Ore Growth: 43.9%
- Electricity Growth: 9.8%
- Crude Oil output contracted for 18 consecutive months.
- Natural Gas output contracted for 24 consecutive months.
- High growth partly due to base effect.

Static Linkages

- ICI is a leading indicator of industrial and economic growth.
- Base Year Revision ensures economic indices reflect structural changes in the economy.
- Base Effect: High growth due to comparison with a low production base of the previous year.
- IIP measures production in Mining, Manufacturing and Electricity sectors.
- Infrastructure growth significantly influences GDP growth, investment, and employment.
- Reliable official statistics support monetary policy, fiscal planning and economic forecasting.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Reflects present-day industrial structure.
- Improves quality and credibility of official statistics.
- Better measurement of infrastructure sector performance.
- Inclusion of Iron Ore improves representation of the mining sector.

Challenges

- June growth partly driven by base effect.
- Continued decline in Crude Oil and Natural Gas reflects weak domestic production.
- Rising import dependence impacts energy security.
- Periodic revisions are essential to maintain relevance of economic indices.

Way Forward

- Revise economic indices periodically.
- Increase investment in domestic oil and gas exploration.
- Improve mining productivity and resource efficiency.
- Strengthen statistical capacity and methodology.
- Promote balanced growth across all infrastructure sectors.
- Enhance coordination among statistical agencies.

Restoration of J&K statehood calls for a phased and negotiated roadmap

IT HAS been seven years since Jammu & Kashmir was downgraded to a Union Territory. It has been five years since the Union government committed in Parliament to restore statehood. It has been four years since delimitation was done. It has been three years since the Supreme Court was assured of restoration. It has been two years since an elected government took office.

Yet, so far, there has not even been a serious conversation about it. The only response from the Centre, a clear and consistent one, has been an assurance wrapped in ambiguity: Statehood will be restored at the "appropriate time". The "appropriate time" is not a date on the calendar; it is whatever time suits the present dispensation. At the "appropriate time" is not a promise but an instrument of power. Every demand for a date is an indicator of impatience, and every postponement a proof of prudence.

Faced with growing public disillusionment locally over the Omar Abdullah-led government's performance, the National Conference recently launched an outreach drive. After civil-society consultations, it called for a protest in New Delhi on July 20.

The National Conference positioned its protest as a broad-based political initiative rather than a party-specific agitation. Though well-placed to lead the J&K parties and wider civil society by virtue of a strong electoral mandate, all the Valley-centric parties decided not to participate in the protest. This has turned a potential show of strength into a display of fragmentation, thereby significantly reducing the political pressure on the Union government to act.

Without a united front at least from the Valley, the Centre can easily treat the demand as partisan rather than regional, and delay statehood restoration on its own timeline.

Being a constituent of the INDIA bloc, the National Conference had also reached out to the national and regional parties to build a wider constituency of support and gain greater political traction. This could have provided an opportunity to frame the demand as a larger federal issue that touches upon the basic structure of India's constitutional arrangements. For the most potent blueprint for the restoration of statehood is not a political manifesto of any party, but an agenda for federal democratic polity of India. But that was not to be.

As the National Conference assembled in New Delhi for the restoration of statehood for J&K, the refrain in the lakshme affair was unfulfilled promises rather than rights denied. Speeches, slogans and bytes invoked constitutional morality, legislative assurances, judicial precedents and political commitments. These are valid, necessary political arguments but have limited relevance in the current context.

For the Centre, it is simply evident that security and "normalcy" are the non-negotiable pre-conditions for restoring statehood. This is not a temporary hurdle. Until these concerns are credibly addressed, arguments based only on constitutional grounds will remain secondary in the decision-making process at the highest levels.

The restoration of statehood is not a simple administrative decision



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sion or a one-sided concession. It will be the outcome of a political bargain in which enhanced powers and privileges will come with greater responsibilities, aka conditionalities. This is already visible in the case of Ladakh, where statehood has been made contingent on meeting certain revenue and self-sustainability criteria. J&K is unlikely to be treated differently.

This is why the political leadership in J&K needs to move beyond making a legal case. Engaging substantively with the Centre's stated concerns on security and governance could prove more consequential than constitutional arguments alone.

The tragic killing of a police officer on Anarash Yatra duty, the first terror attack in the Valley since Pahalgalam, serves as a stark illustration of why constitutional arguments alone are insufficient without credible progress on the ground.

Treating the security issue as a chicken-and-egg problem — the lack of full powers is cited as the reason for limited initiative — is technically correct but politically unwise because it restricts the space for political agency. While the elected government's limited powers are a structural constraint, demonstrating statecraft even within the current framework could help build credibility with the Centre.

From the Union's point of view, the restoration of statehood may be seen as a decision to be taken at an appropriate time. However, from the perspective of J&K, it will be a process. Statehood cannot simply be restored by an executive order

changing its status. Such a move would leave the underlying administrative and financial distortions created since 2019 largely undressed. Converting the former state into a Union Territory did not just alter its administrative boundaries, it fundamentally changed its governance DNA and deepened J&K's dependence on the Centre.

It is high time to move away from the binary of statehood restoration to what it will entail, politically and administratively. A more strategic approach would require the J&K political leadership to move from episodic mobilisation to a sustained, multi-track engagement. In the short term, this would mean building a unified negotiating position across parties on the benchmarks for "normalcy" that the Centre considers non-negotiable.

In parallel, the focus should shift to negotiating a time-bound framework, possibly through a structured administrative mechanism of unwinding the central controls. Without such a phased and negotiated roadmap, the demand for statehood risks remaining a recurring political slogan instead of becoming a manageable political settlement.

It is unlikely that the recent Delhi protest will be the starting point of a political process for statehood with status. To reach a milestone on that road, the Valley-centric political leadership needs to prioritise pragmatic sequencing over fragmented posturing. This will determine if J&K can convert public sentiment into concrete constitutional gains in the coming years.

The writer is the former finance minister of J&K

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Demand for restoration of statehood to Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) has resurfaced after the National Conference organized a protest in New Delhi.
- The Union Government has reiterated that statehood will be restored at an "appropriate time", without announcing a timeline.
- The issue is significant from the perspective of Indian federalism, Centre-State relations, constitutional governance, and internal security.

Key Points

- Jammu & Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019 bifurcated the erstwhile State into:
 - Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir (with Legislature)
 - Union Territory of Ladakh (without Legislature)
- The Supreme Court (2023 Article 370 Judgment) upheld the constitutional validity of the 2019 changes and recorded the Union Government's assurance regarding restoration of statehood.
- Restoration of statehood is viewed by the Centre in the context of:
 - Security situation
 - Terrorism and cross-border infiltration
 - Governance and administrative stability
- Statehood restoration would require administrative, legislative and financial restructuring.

Static Linkages

- Article 1 – India as a Union of States.
- Article 3 – Parliament's power to form new States and alter boundaries.
- Part VIII (Articles 239–241) – Administration of Union Territories.

- Article 239A & Article 239AA – Legislatures in certain Union Territories.
- Federalism – Part of the Basic Structure Doctrine.
- Delimitation Commission – Readjustment of constituencies after Census.
- Difference between State and Union Territory under the Constitution.

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Strengthens democratic and representative governance.
- Reinforces cooperative federalism.
- Enhances accountability of the elected government.
- Fulfils constitutional and political commitments.

Challenges

- Security concerns remain the Centre's primary consideration.
- Continued terrorism and cross-border infiltration.
- Administrative and fiscal dependence on the Union Government.
- Need for institutional restructuring before full statehood.

Way Forward

- Announce a transparent, time-bound roadmap for restoration.
- Strengthen security and governance simultaneously.
- Promote sustained Centre-J&K political dialogue.
- Complete phased transfer of administrative and financial powers.
- Build institutional capacity for effective self-governance.

Due process is not a waste of anyone's time

THIS IS a time when mostly young protesters are still thronging Jantar Mantar in the national capital, and when, in the aftermath of the police crackdown on July 20, they are not assuaged by the government's assurances. At this time, the message from the highest court of the land should be: its doors are open to any process that protects the rights of the vulnerable, fosters accountability and expands the ground for negotiations. With due respect, however, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant's response to a lawyer who sought the Court's intervention against police excess, seemed to highlight a gulf between citizen and institution, instead of offering a healing touch: "Don't waste our time and your time," he said. And, "We are not interested in videos. We don't have time to watch." These may be only oral observations. It is also true that the CJI cannot be expected to wade through countless Instagram reels and in this polarised climate, even videos whose authenticity is in doubt. But in the social media age, words travel far, often away from their contexts. They can take on a life of their own — it was the CJI's choice of words, earlier, that provided the spark for the satirical online platform, Cockroach Janta Party, the protests' centrepiece.

The question of police excesses against protesting students will need to be addressed. Reports from the Delhi street, including in this newspaper, have pointed to the use of disproportionate force, including pellet guns, apart from lathi charges and tear gas shells. They have highlighted, too, the short-circuiting, if not outright flouting, of established restraints and protocols. Delhi Police Standing Order 309 and Standing Order 152 lay down the specific guidelines that police must follow to disperse protesters — the Supreme Court's 2012 ruling in the Ramlila Maidan case underlined these. An inquiry must ask if the police went through the required paces. Given the demographics and nature of the protesters, largely students, did the police observe the principle, as laid down by the Court, of "least invasiveness"? Did it use water cannons before resorting to more injurious methods? Did it fire the tear gas away from the crowd, rather than directly into it?

A small section of the protesters, too, have resorted to violence and vandalism. Physically assaulting journalists not to their liking to pelting stones, these need to be strongly condemned. A fair and independent probe — the Delhi High Court has done well to agree to hear two PILs on the issue — must set those aberrations in the larger context. In a clash between unequals, it must ensure that the powerful state does not weaponise the rulebook to subdue the powerless citizen. That's why, with due respect to the Court, this needs to be underlined: Due process is not a waste of time.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Allegations of police excesses during student protests against examination-related issues have raised concerns regarding fundamental rights, use of force, and judicial oversight.
- The Supreme Court declined immediate intervention during the initial hearing, while the Delhi High Court agreed to hear PILs on alleged police excesses.
- The issue has reignited debate on balancing public order with the constitutional right to peaceful protest.

Key Points

- Article 19(1)(a): Freedom of Speech and Expression.
- Article 19(1)(b): Right to assemble peacefully and without arms.
- Article 19(1)(c): Right to form associations.
- These rights are subject to reasonable restrictions under Articles 19(2) & 19(3).
- Article 21: Protection of life and personal liberty; any state action must be fair, just and reasonable.
- Article 32: Right to Constitutional Remedies before the Supreme Court.
- Article 226: High Courts can issue writs for enforcement of Fundamental Rights and other legal rights.
 - Ramlila Maidan Incident v. Home Secretary, Union of India (2012): Police must use minimum necessary force.
 - Follow the principle of least invasiveness.

- Action should satisfy the test of proportionality.

- Prakash Singh Case (2006): Directed structural police reforms to improve accountability and professionalism.

Static Linkages

- Fundamental Rights (Articles 14, 19, 21, 32, 226).
- Reasonable Restrictions under Article 19.
- Rule of Law.
- Doctrine of Proportionality.
- Natural Justice.
- Public Interest Litigation (PIL).
- Judicial Review.
- Police Reforms.
- Separation of Powers.

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Maintenance of public order is a constitutional obligation of the State.
- Judicial review acts as a safeguard against arbitrary executive action.
- PIL mechanism strengthens constitutional accountability.

Concerns

- Alleged disproportionate use of force may violate Articles 19 and 21.
- Failure to follow Supreme Court guidelines on crowd control.
- Excessive force can undermine democratic dissent and public trust.
- Delay in judicial intervention may affect citizens' confidence in constitutional remedies.

Constitutional Dimensions

- Balance between Fundamental Rights and Public Order.
- Rule of Law over Rule by Force.
- Proportionality in administrative action.
- Accountability of law enforcement agencies.

Way Forward

- Strict adherence to Supreme Court guidelines on crowd management.
- Implement Prakash Singh police reforms.
- Independent inquiry into allegations of excessive force.
- Prioritize dialogue, mediation and non-violent crowd-control measures.
- Human rights training and standard operating procedures for police.
- Strengthen institutional accountability through judicial oversight.

Floods shift course. State response is static

FLOODING IS a chronic feature of Assam's monsoon. This year, however, parts of the state far removed from the banks of the Brahmaputra and its tributaries have borne the brunt of the raging waters. According to the state government, the scale of devastation in the Upper Assam districts of Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat is "unprecedented". More than 20 people lost their lives within 24 hours on Monday after a wall of water from Nagaland's Mon district spilled into Assam and surged over embankments. It is now draining into the Brahmaputra over open terrain rather than just through the tributaries. The Assam government has reportedly told the state assembly that "no one could have been prepared" for the calamity. That isn't a convincing explanation. The trajectory of the floods over the past few days is a fallout of Assam's topography and the Brahmaputra's well-known tendency to shift course. At a time when climate change is amplifying natural vulnerabilities, the authorities need to be more vigilant to minimise suffering.

After emerging from the mountains near Pasighat in Arunachal Pradesh's East Siang district, the Brahmaputra enters the relatively flat Assam valley. The sharp reduction in gradient causes the river to slow down and deposit sediment. Over time, this has raised the riverbed, reducing the channel's capacity to contain floodwaters. The result is that Upper Assam is increasingly exposed to flood risks once associated primarily with downstream areas. The Brahmaputra also periodically abandons old channels and carves out new ones, making it impossible to confine the river within embankments permanently. Yet Assam's flood management strategy continues to rely on this approach.

On Sunday, Mon district received more than a third of its average July rainfall in about eight hours. With hills in the region already saturated with water from heavy rains earlier this month, slopes collapsed, triggering landslides that killed nine people in Nagaland. The destruction that followed in Assam underscores the need for an institutional mechanism that treats rivers as shared ecological systems and ensures timely warning and coordinated action across states. The Brahmaputra Board has long been hampered by staff shortages and inadequate technical capacity. With extreme weather becoming more frequent, the Centre and state governments need to reinvigorate the agency.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

Context

- Assam witnessed severe floods after extreme rainfall in Mon district (Nagaland) led to a sudden inflow of water into Upper Assam.
- The worst-affected districts included Sivasagar, Charaideo, Jorhat and Golaghat.
- The event highlighted the increasing vulnerability of the Brahmaputra basin to extreme rainfall, sedimentation, and climate change.
- It also exposed the need for inter-state river basin management and stronger flood forecasting mechanisms.

Key Points

- Brahmaputra is one of the highest sediment-carrying rivers in the world.
- After entering Assam, the river's gradient decreases sharply, leading to sediment deposition (aggradation).
- Sediment deposition raises the riverbed and reduces its carrying capacity, increasing flood risk.
- The Brahmaputra is a braided river, frequently changing its course (channel migration/avulsion).
- Embankments provide temporary protection but cannot permanently contain such a dynamic river.
- Flash floods occur due to intense rainfall over hilly catchments, while riverine floods occur due to overflow of major rivers.

- Central Water Commission (CWC) is the nodal agency for flood forecasting in India.
- Flood management is primarily the responsibility of State Governments, with technical and financial assistance from the Union Government.
- Disaster Management Act, 2005 provides the institutional framework for disaster management in India.
- Increasing frequency of extreme rainfall events is linked to climate change.

Static Linkages

- Origin: Angsi/Chemayungdung Glacier (Tibet).
- Known as Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet, Siang/Dihang in Arunachal Pradesh, and Jamuna in Bangladesh.
- Major tributaries: Subansiri, Lohit, Dibang, Manas, Dhansiri, Teesta.
- The Brahmaputra forms a braided channel because of its heavy sediment load.
- Floodplains and wetlands naturally attenuate floods by storing excess water.
- Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM) is a globally accepted approach for sustainable river management.

Critical Analysis

Challenges

- Excessive dependence on embankments.
- Heavy sedimentation reduces channel capacity.
- Weak interstate coordination among basin states.
- Encroachment of floodplains and wetlands.
- Increasing extreme rainfall due to climate change.
- Limited institutional capacity of the Brahmaputra Board.

Significance

- Highlights the need for basin-level planning instead of state-centric flood management.
- Demonstrates the interaction between geomorphology and climate change.
- Reinforces the importance of early warning systems and integrated disaster governance.

Way Forward

- Adopt Integrated River Basin Management (IRBM).
- Strengthen the Brahmaputra Board with technical and financial resources.
- Improve real-time hydrological data sharing among basin states.
- Restore wetlands and floodplains as natural flood buffers.
- Expand flood forecasting using remote sensing and GIS.
- Promote climate-resilient infrastructure and land-use planning.
- Strengthen community-based disaster preparedness.