



INDIAN EXPRESS UPSC IAS EDITION HD 29~07~2025

-:FOR UPSC IAS ASPIRANTS:-

"AVOID POLITICAL & IRRELEVANT ARTICLES"

Please Try To Read This Completely in 40 Minutes If You
Can't So Then You Have To Increase Your Efforts

All the topics of this UPSC IAS Edition are directly or
indirectly important for the prelims & main examination.
There are some topics which can be coded in answer writing
of other topics in the main exam.

Why did you
wait for the
inquiry to be
over: SC to
Justice Varma



Justice
Yashwant
Varma

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

THE SUPREME Court on Monday asked Allahabad High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma why he decided to challenge the legality of the in-house inquiry against him after appearing before the committee and participating in the inquiry process.
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

BIHAR SPECIAL INTENSIVE REVISION

Consider Aadhaar and voter card, SC tells EC again; no stay on draft roll

Should be en masse inclusion, not en masse exclusion, says top court

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

THE SUPREME Court Monday refused to stop the Election Commission (EC) from publishing the draft electoral roll for Bihar, drawn up following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), adding that the petitioners' concerns had been taken care of by its July 10 order asking it to also consider Aadhaar and Electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) for the exercise.

A Bench of Justices Surya Kant and Joymalya Bagchi said



the EC can continue to consider Aadhaar and voter cards for the enumeration, and told the
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Divya beats Humpy, takes World Cup route to GM title: 'It was fate'

AMIT KAMATH & MAYANK
MUMBAI, NEW DELHI, JULY 28

IN GEORGIA, a country that birthed some of the earliest pioneers of women's chess, India has discovered its own world-beater: Divya Deshmukh, aged just 19, became the FIDE Women's World Cup champion by defeating the veteran, Koneru Humpy, 38, in the final via the
CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



Divya Deshmukh, 19, after winning the FIDE Women's World Cup, Monday.
Anna Shtourman/FIDE

Consider Aadhaar, voter card: SC

petitioners that the Court can always step in and strike it down if there is any illegality.

In its July 10 order, the apex court had asked the EC to consider Aadhaar, voter ID and ration cards for the purpose of updating the rolls, but left it to the discretion of the poll body whether to accept or reject them.

Asked about the Court order, EC sources said no directions had been issued to it, so the SIR procedure, including the documents mentioned in the indicative list, remained unchanged.

Addressing Senior Advocate Rakesh Dwivedi, who appeared for the EC, Justice Kant said: "In the last order, there is a very good suggestion to consider Aadhaar and EPIC... As of now, the two documents (Aadhaar and EPIC) have a presumption of correctness, because these are authenticated documents. So you proceed with these two documents..."

Cases of forged documents can be dealt with on a case-to-case basis, the Court said. "Wherever you find forgery, that's on a case-to-case basis. Any document on Earth can be forged," Justice Kant said, adding that there "should not be en masse exclusion", but "en masse inclusion".

At the very outset, Justice Kant said he had an administrative meeting scheduled and might not be able to hold court for the rest of the day. He asked the parties to inform how much time they would need to argue, and said the Court would fix a date for hearing.

Senior Advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, appearing for petitioner Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), said the EC "had violated the Court's order" as far as considering Aadhaar and EPIC cards went.

Justice Kant referred to the counter affidavit filed by the EC and remarked that the poll panel has not rejected the two documents.

Sankaranarayanan replied that "factually, on the ground, they are not accepting".

Justice Kant said: "It seems their stand is that the list of documents which initially excluded Aadhaar is not exhaustive, and following this Court's direction or advice, these documents will also be accepted."

Dwivedi, appearing for the EC, said: "What we have said is that as far as ration cards are considered, we have difficulty in accepting... (due to) large-scale (forgery)... As far as the EPIC card is concerned, the pre-filled enumeration form includes the EPIC number... EPIC is being considered, but since the electoral roll is being revised, EPIC cannot be conclusive... because this is a Special Intensive Revision."

Justice Bagchi said the EC can take it into account if someone submits an enumeration form with Aadhaar and, if necessary, issue a notice thereafter.

"Maybe one in a thousand cases, you will find this EPIC card

is also forged, that can be (dealt with) on a case-to-case basis," said Justice Kant. "For that matter, any document on this Earth can be forged. Then Aadhaar can also be... So, as of now, the two documents (Aadhaar and EPIC) have a presumption of correctness, because these are authenticated documents. So you proceed with these two documents...."

Dwivedi said the EC was allowing Aadhaar, adding: "What we are saying is that under the Aadhaar Act, Section 9 says that, by itself, it is not proof of citizenship." He added that the enumeration form mentions Aadhaar.

Justice Kant said, "Tomorrow, not just Aadhaar, may be out of the 11 other documents, 10 are found forged. Wherever you find forgery, that's (to be dealt with on an) individual case-to-case basis."

Dwivedi said, "That's what will happen."

"Where the mechanism which you have provided, that you issue a showcause notice, that they will have to come and give an explanation, that part will take care (of it). (Not) En-masse exclusion, rather it should be en-masse inclusion," said Justice Kant.

"You ask for their Aadhaar also. If someone is coming with Aadhaar, you entertain them also," the judge added, and asked the parties to give a timeline for hearing.

Sankaranarayanan, representing the ADR, urged the Court to direct the EC to "not finalise the roll" in the meanwhile. But Justice Kant pointed out that "earlier order is very clear". "You were not asking for interim relief. Interpretation, we will decide at the earliest. Tomorrow morning at 10.30 we can tell you, when is the earliest we can hear."

Dwivedi said what will be released on August 1 is only a draft roll, and people can file objections.

Justice Kant said: "It's only a draft exercise. It doesn't take away our power. We will take care of that. We can assure you, yes we will quash everything the moment we agree with you."

Sankaranarayanan urged the Court to say in its order that it will be subject to the outcome. "It is always subject to outcome," said Justice Kant.

The senior counsel said, "But the problem is, once the draft is published, objections come. You are inconveniencing 4.5 crore people to go and look at the list and give objections on a statutory process."

Justice Bagchi said that, according to the EC affidavit, "even if the enumeration forms are not uploaded with relevant documents, they are going to put up your name with these objections".

The court asked the parties to submit the timelines for submission of arguments Tuesday morning, after which it would fix the date of hearing.

Why did you wait for the inquiry to be over: SC to Justice Varma

The committee was set up by the then Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna on March 22, a week after burnt currency notes were found at Justice Varma's official residence in New Delhi when a fire broke out on March 14. The panel found credence in the allegations against Justice Varma, who was then with the Delhi High Court.

On Monday, the Supreme Court was hearing Justice Varma's plea seeking invalidation of the inquiry committee's report. The plea does not reveal Justice Varma's identity and is titled, "XXX v. The Union of India".

Senior Advocate Kapil Sibal, who appeared for Justice Varma, told a bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and A G Masih that whatever had happened till now was unconstitutional. "All that has happened is completely contrary

to the Constitutional scheme. The release of tapes, putting it on website, and a public furore consequential thereto, public discussion, media interaction, accusations against the judge... is all prohibited... The whole procedure has now become political. I (Justice Varma) have already been convicted," he said, referring to the video clip which purportedly showed the recovery of burnt currency notes.

Justice Datta said that impeachment is also a political procedure. Sibal responded that it is so in Parliament, not outside.

The government has made clear its intent to act on impeaching Justice Varma. Last week, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju said the notice for removal of Justice Varma was likely to be taken up in the Lok Sabha in the ongoing Monsoon Session.

Justice Datta asked Sibal why he had not challenged the release of the video and the constitution of the committee before the inquiry. "Did you come to the court to request that the video be removed? Why did you wait for the inquiry to be completed and the report to be released? Why did you not challenge when the committee was appointed? Why did you wait? Judges have abstained from attending these proceedings in the past. You could have approached us earlier as well," Justice Datta said. "Because it was all in public, I (Justice Varma) thought the committee will find who it (the money) belongs to," Sibal told the bench.

At the very outset on Monday, Justice Datta raised a procedural objection. "This petition should not have been filed. There are three respondents (in the petition), your

main issue is with the Supreme Court," he said. Sibal said he would make the required changes. He submitted that a judge can only be removed as per the terms of the procedure laid down in Article 124 of the Constitution.

In his plea filed in the SC on July 18, Justice Varma said: "Primarily, the In-House Procedure, adopted via a 1999 Full Court Resolution to handle complaints against judges and preserve judicial independence while maintaining public faith, unjustifiably extends beyond the intended scope of self-regulation and fact-finding. By culminating in recommendations for removal from constitutional office, it creates a parallel, extra-constitutional mechanism that derogates from the mandatory framework under Articles 124 and 218 of the Constitution, which exclusively

vest powers for removal of Judges of the High Courts in Parliament through an address supported by a special majority, following an inquiry under the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968."

"There is a process under Article 124. Before that, a judge can't be subject matter of public debate. Motion is filed through Speaker or Chairman of LS or RS...till that stage, that process is not of the House, the process is outside and Speaker acts as a statutory authority. Judges' conduct can't be discussed. What happened, tape is released on March 22, the whole country talks about it, man already stands convicted," Sibal argued.

Sibal also asked how the then CJ Sanjiv Khanna could have recommended Justice Varma's removal to the President and Prime Minister, saying the CJ has no such power. Justice Datta said the recommendation was done for

the initiation of due process. "It could not have been done by the CJL. That's contrary to the constitutional scheme," Sibal said.

To his argument that it was wrong to forward the inquiry committee's report to the President and the Prime Minister, Justice Datta pointed out that the matter has to be placed before the President who is the appointing authority for Judges of constitutional courts. He said that as the President acts on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers, there is nothing objectionable in forwarding it to the PM either.

Sibal contended that the committee had not found out who the cash belonged to. The court said it would have to see the report if he wanted to argue on its contents and pointed out that the report must be annexed with the petition. Sibal agreed to do so. The court will now hear the matter on Wednesday.

Divya beats Humpy, takes World Cup route to GM title: 'It was fate'

tiebreakers on Monday.

Divya winning the Women's World Cup also makes her eligible to be India's fourth woman to become a grandmaster, which is significant because before the event started, she had none of the three norms required for it. But in one fell swoop, thanks to a regulation in the FIDE rules, Divya has now bypassed the criterion to earn three norms and is now a grandmaster as well. India's 88th. By reaching the final, along with Humpy, Divya ensured that at least two Indians will play the Candidates tournament next year, where eight players fight it out to earn the right to play in the women's World Championship against current world champion Ju Wenjun.

"I think it was fate, me getting

the grandmaster title this way," an emotional Divya said after her win. "Before the tournament, I didn't even have one norm to be GM. I was thinking that I could maybe earn a grandmaster norm here. And in the end, I became a grandmaster."

Since Humpy became a grandmaster, just two women — Harika Dronavalli and Vaishali Rameshbabu — from India have followed suit. Divya now joins that list.

"This title means a lot. But there's a lot more to achieve. I'm hoping this is just the start," Divya said.

The Divya vs Humpy finale was a battle of generations, with the 19-year-old Divya being half the age of the veteran Humpy, who is India's first woman to be-

come a grandmaster. But more importantly, it was a battle between two Indians while two Chinese stars, Tan Zhongyi and Lei Tingjie, fought for the third spot. Having two Indians make it to the final from a field of 107 players was an indicator that just like in the open section, where the likes of Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa have started to assert themselves, India could drive women's chess in the immediate future after decades of dominance by Chinese and Russian grandmasters.

While Divya's path to the title went through the likes of World No.6 from China, Zhu Jiner, the veteran Indian Harika Dronavalli, and former women's world champion from China, Tan Zhongyi, before the final, Humpy had also defeated two strong

Chinese players on way to the title clash — Lei Tingjie and Song Yuxin — besides taking down Alexandra Kosteniuk, the Russian-Swiss grandmaster.

On Monday, after their first rapid game ended in a draw, Divya won the second tiebreak game, thanks to a series of errors from Humpy.

Over the weekend, the first two classical games between them had ended in draws. The first game, which was played on Saturday, was where Divya had the best chances to win, while playing with white pieces. She came with a plan and got a sizeable advantage on the board. But then at the end, she scuffed her lines and allowed Humpy to equalise.

Divya had said that the draw

on Saturday had "felt like a loss" to her. "I had seen everything (beforehand). So I was disappointed by that," she said. "But I got ready for the second game (on Sunday) by telling myself that I have my whole life to feel sorry for that game. I needed to prepare for the second game."

Divya, who was an International Master when the tournament started 25 days ago, was the underdog coming into the tiebreaks, because the games were played in the rapid format and Humpy became the World Rapid Champion for the second time in her career in December last year. Humpy is also currently ranked world No.5 in the FIDE ratings list for women while Divya is world No.18 (which makes her the fourth ranked Indian on the list).

In other formats, Humpy is ranked much higher than the

teenager from Nagpur. In rapid, Humpy is No.10 in the world while Divya is No.22. In blitz, while the veteran is No.10 in the world among women, Divya is No.18.

Just like Divya, Humpy was also a prodigy back in the day. In fact, Humpy was once the youngest woman to achieve the grandmaster title, when she beat Judit Polgar's record by three months to reach there at the age of 15 years, one month and 27 days.

Lifting the FIDE Women's World Cup is a significant leap for Divya. It was just last year that she was crowned the world junior champion in the girls section. She was also the inspiration behind the Indian women's team winning a gold medal at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest last year where she claimed an individual gold as well for her board.

SC takes suo motu cognizance of rising cases of stray dog bites

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

AMID AN outcry over rising cases of stray dog bites, the Supreme Court on Monday took suo motu cognizance of a report about infants in Delhi falling prey to the menace.

Stressing that the incidents are “very alarming,” Justice J Pardiwala, presiding over a two-judge bench also comprising Justice R Mahadevan, said the news report has some disturbing facts. The court, while referring to the report, said hundreds of dog bites in Delhi and nearby areas are leading to rabies, and ultimately, children and the elderly are falling prey to the dreadful disease.

Directing that the facts be taken on record, the bench said, “We take suo motu cognizance. Registry shall register the petition and register it as suo motu.” The bench directed that the matter,



The last stray dog census was held in 2016 in Delhi. Archive

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along with the news report, be placed before Chief Justice of India B R Gavai for appropriate orders.

The remarks by the bench come after the SC, earlier this month, had come down heavily on a woman in Noida who had alleged that she was being harassed for feeding community dogs.

A bench of Justices Vikram

Nath and Sandeep Mehta was hearing an appeal on July 15 moved by one Reema Shah, whose plea to the Allahabad High Court to issue directions to the Noida Authority and others to not to harass her was turned down.

The bench asked Shah’s counsel, “Should we leave every lane, every road open for these

large-hearted people?”

Making its displeasure evident, the court added, “There is all space for these animals, no space for humans.” It then asked, “Why don’t you (appellant) feed them in your own house? Nobody is stopping you.”

The last stray dog census was held in 2016 in Delhi. The estimated population is expected to have reached around 70 lakh.

Earlier this month, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi formed a 12-member panel, including councillors and officials of the veterinary department, to establish shelter homes in each zone to effectively address the issue of stray dog menace.

Standing committee chairperson Satya Sharma said the panel would prepare a complete action plan for the construction and operation of these shelter homes, adding that it will submit its report to the Standing Committee within a month.

PHOTO EXHIBITION ON DISPLAY AT INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

From Rajasthan, festival that subverts caste, class: Gavri of Mewar Bhils

DEEPAK RAJEEV
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

EVERY YEAR, the Bhil community of Mewar embarks on a 40-day ritual called Gavri. During this festival, Bhil troupes travel to villages across Udaipur and nearby districts of Rajasthan — where their married sisters and daughters live — performing *khels* or dance-dramas, songs, and religious ceremonies in honour of their deity, Gorkhiya Mata.

For the first time, this rich and resplendent world of Bhil rituals and oral literature is open to a wider audience through a photo exhibition at the India International Centre Art Gallery.

Researched and curated by Aditi Mehta, the folk repertoire has been captured by the virtu-

oso lens of acclaimed photographer and Padma Shri awardee Sudharak Olwe.

Mehta first encountered this centuries-old traditional art form when she was posted as an IAS officer in Rajasthan. Enthralled by the *bhava* or trance-like state of the *khelyas* or performers during the festival, she carried out a three-decade-long research which culminated in a three-volume cultural memoir-cum-ethnography text titled, *Playing with the Goddess: Gavri of the Mewar Bhils*.

She recounts: “Back then, I had a small office and five or six staff. One of them, a peon, kept disappearing, and no one seemed to mind. Though his behaviour bothered me, I was caught up in my own work and life. Then came a turning point: we were travelling by a jeep to conduct a census,



The Bhil community embarks on the 40-day ritual every year. Credit: Sudharak Olwe

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and we saw Gavri being performed along the way. I didn’t pay much attention at first. But even six hours later, on our return, they were still singing and dancing —

and to my surprise, the peon was among them. He was a *khelya*. That’s when I realised how deeply meaningful this ritual is to the people.”

Creating a Rabelaisian carnivalesque environment, Bhil dramas are filled with fun, dance, parody, and humour, subverting the notion of caste and class hierarchies. Some playlets even lampoon kings and gods.

Mehta says: “Through successive iterations of this festival, you see a dramatic change and improvement in the status of Bhils. A few generations ago, they were considered untouchable and not allowed to enter certain parts of upper caste homes... They are actually considered to be gods (during the festival)... However, after the Gavri, after the carnival, they go back to reality.”

The Bhils, one of the biggest Adivasi tribes in India, consider themselves direct descendants of Lord Shiva and his wife, Goddess Parvati. They organise

the festival to celebrate the goddess after the full moon night of Raksha Bandhan in August.

Being a patriarchal society, they don’t allow women to perform rituals. Therefore, female characters are played by men.

Olwe says, “... I was strongly moved by their performance. These are precious moments of gender equality and fluidity where the dazzling colours of Rajasthan, songs, and dance form a collective consciousness, filling the environment with the feminine grace of the Devi. My duty, as a photographer, is to document the cultural diversity and lives of these people. Through my photos and exhibitions, I want to ensure that they receive the respect and dignity they rightly deserve.”

Some of the popular dance

dramas include ‘*Badliya Hindwa*’, which vividly acts out the Bhil community’s deep love of nature, and ‘*Bhilurana*’, which is historically significant, portraying their resistance against foreign invaders such as the Mughals and the British East India Company.

Both plays, as many others, end with a salutation to the goddess and clear warnings to never violate nature or their sovereignty.

“... I hope my endeavour and our exhibition evoke an interest in understanding our folk art, philosophy, and our people. If it excites even a few individuals to try and discover what our country really is, then my aim is fulfilled,” says Mehta.

The exhibition concludes on 1 August at 7 pm.

(Deepak Rajeev is an intern with The Indian Express)

8 GOVT & POLITICS

Modi: NEP making big contribution towards holistic growth of students

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi said there have been many positive changes in education during the last five years and the new National Education Policy (NEP) is making a significant contribution to the holistic and multidimensional development of students by encouraging research and innovation.

In a message on the completion of five years of NEP, Modi noted that the Ministry of Education is organising Akhil Bhartiya Shiksha Samagam (ABSS) Tuesday and new initiatives will be launched in the field of education during the event.

"Education is the medium that makes a person self-reliant and a nation strong. Our aim is to ensure such an education system in which students can move forward according to their interest, ability and dreams. Today, the country is moving on the path of progress by equipping



Education makes a nation strong: PM Narendra Modi

the education related to the glorious Indian culture with technology and global standards.

The PM noted that in Amrit Kaal, India is rapidly moving towards the creation of a grand and developed country.

"During this period, the role of NEP 2020 will be important in promoting the confidence, curiosity and creativity of our youth. The shiksha samagam is a symbol of our shared resolve and spirit of cooperation.

"I am confident that this event will not only give educational institutions an opportunity to share their best practices, strategies and achievements, but will also strengthen the continuous efforts for the successful implementation of the NEP," he said.

WILL SPEED UP TIME TAKEN TO OPERATIONALISE NUCLEAR POWER PLANTS

India's 1st private test facility for heavy water upgrade opens

AMITABH SINHA
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

IN A small but significant step towards speeding up the operationalisation of nuclear power plants, India's nuclear establishment has, for the first time, roped in private players to carry out a key process that was so far handled entirely in-house.

Mumbai-based TEMA India has been entrusted with testing the equipment required for upgrading of depleted heavy water, a crucial requirement at all Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors in India. Until now, the testing was done by the country's main nuclear research, Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC).

TEMA India inaugurated its test facility two days ago at Ach-

Mumbai-based TEMA India will test the equipment required for upgrading depleted heavy water. *Express*

had in Palghar district, about 100 km north of Mumbai, where it will manufacture equipment such as distillation columns and integrate and test them before sending them to reactor sites for installation.

The Department of Atomic Energy said the facility was designed and built by TEMA India's nuclear vertical under technology transfer from BARC and a 'purchase order' from Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL).

"What we have built is a single-point solution for the upgrading of heavy water. Earlier, the distillation columns and modules used to be manufactured by other vendors, then assembled and tested by BARC. The entire process was perhaps taking seven to eight years. We will be able to reduce this time period by at least one to two years," said Sunil Kubal, Executive Director-Nuclear at TEMA India.

Heavy water (D₂O) is a form of water (H₂O) with deuterium, a heavier isotope of hydrogen, instead of regular hydrogen, and is used as a coolant as well as moderator for slowing down fast-moving neutrons during a chain reaction, essential for sustaining the nuclear fission process.

D₂O needs to be 99.9% pure for working efficiently. But with time, it gets contaminated with light or regular water, requiring the depleted D₂O to be upgraded back to 99.9% using a distillation process. TEMA India will not only manufacture the components required for the distillation process, but will also test them to ensure they produce the right results.

At the inauguration ceremony Saturday, TEMA India also dispatched the first batch of tested distillation column sections for deployment at Unit 8 of the Rawatbhata Nuclear Power Plant (RAPP-8) in Rajasthan, which is scheduled to go critical by December this year.

The company will also manufacture and test distillation equipment for the upcoming four nuclear reactors at Gorakhpur in

Haryana and two at Kaiga in Karnataka. "We are hoping to get more orders in the future. The Indian nuclear industry is set to expand rapidly, and we hope to play an important role in its growth," Kubal said.

India has set its eyes at achieving 100 GW of installed nuclear energy capacity by 2047. There are 24 nuclear reactors operational in India, with an installed capacity of 8,780 MW. The government had approved construction of 10 more nuclear reactors in 2015, of which one has come onboard, while the rest — with a combined capacity of 13.6 GW — are under construction. The immediate target is to achieve 22.4 GW of installed capacity by 2032. The government has also launched a ₹20,000-crore Nuclear Energy Mission to develop Small Modular Reactors.



Two nations and a river



ASHOK K KANTHA

Delhi must talk tough with Beijing over China’s construction of a dam on Brahmaputra

MALÉ OUTREACH

PM Modi’s visit to the Maldives marks a significant turnaround in bilateral relations after a period of strain

WHEN PRESIDENT MOHAMED Muizzu, riding the “India Out” campaign, rose to power in the Maldives in September 2023, he signalled a clear intent to politically distance Malé from New Delhi. His January 2024 visit to China and his call for India to withdraw troops from the Maldives complicated ties with India. In this context, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s recent visit to the island nation to attend its Independence Day celebrations, during which several economic agreements were signed and projects inaugurated, marks a significant turnaround in bilateral relations after a period of strain.

The Maldives is a key pillar of India’s “Neighbourhood First” policy. Beyond deep-rooted cultural ties and a history of friendly relations — India was among the first to establish diplomatic ties following that country’s independence in 1965 — it sits atop critical sea lanes in the Indian Ocean, through which a major share of global trade and India’s energy imports pass. It is an integral part of India’s maritime security architecture. India provides economic support and assistance to the Maldives in infrastructure and health-care. Tourism, which accounts for nearly a third of the Maldivian economy, saw Indians as the largest group of visitors for several consecutive years up to 2023. This trend was disrupted in 2024, after derogatory remarks by three Maldivian junior ministers (suspended subsequently) triggered a diplomatic row and led to a sharp decline in Indian tourist arrivals. In a bid to reverse this, President Muizzu, speaking to reporters over the weekend, acknowledged that “India is one of the major countries that helps the Maldives with tourism. With PM Modi’s visit, it is going to increase a lot.”

Apart from meeting senior government officials, PM Modi also held separate interactions with the main Opposition party and leaders from across the political spectrum in the Maldives. These engagements reflect New Delhi’s effort to insulate bilateral relations from the ebb and flow of politics between and within both countries. On the China question, it would be unrealistic to expect Malé to avoid doing business with Beijing. As the world’s second-largest economy, China presents significant opportunities for the Maldives, and the latter is entitled to make its own choices. Talks on loan restructuring with China, however, initiated during President Muizzu’s state visit in January 2024, have seen little progress so far. As a key neighbour and regional power, India can counterbalance Beijing’s influence by making better offers — especially given that Maldives’s external debt burden has worsened as a result of China’s lending practices. New Delhi, therefore, should keep using its leverage to further its interests and maintain close relations, while keeping a watchful eye on Malé’s political environment.

ON JULY 19, Chinese Premier Li Qiang travelled to Nyingchi in Tibet to launch the construction of a 1.2 trillion yuan (\$167.8 billion) mega hydropower project on the Yarlung Tsangpo River. This massive project is being constructed without prior consultation with lower riparian India, though its likely location in Medog County is barely 30 km from the place the river enters India and becomes the Siang, the main channel of the Brahmaputra River system. The project has several ominous implications for India, but the Government of India has not commented publicly on its construction.

While the project details have not been made public by China, except its cost and that it will involve five cascade hydropower plants, Chinese media reports suggest that it will generate nearly 300 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh) of electricity annually, more than thrice the designed capacity (88.2 billion kWh) of the Three Gorges Dam in China, currently the largest in the world. It would involve drilling four to six 20-km tunnels and diversion of half of the river’s flow.

India ought to be deeply concerned about the downstream impact, which will manifest in many ways. First, a project of this magnitude will inevitably interfere with the flow of waters in the Brahmaputra. The contribution of glacier melt, snow melt and precipitation in Tibet to the waters in the Siang could range from 25 per cent to 35 per cent. There will be significant impact downstream of any diversion or pounding of water in Tibet, particularly in the lean season. The construction of five massive hydropower plants in cascade is likely to involve reservoir-like structures, even though it is claimed to be a run-of-the-river project. Altering natural river flows will harm aquatic ecosystems, fisheries, sedimentation, and biodiversity hotspots.

Second, even more worrying is the risk of flooding. While reservoirs can regulate floods, unannounced or sudden releases of water during heavy rainfall, or in a natural disaster like an earthquake, to protect the structure, can exacerbate downstream flooding, causing immense damage to life and property.

Third, this massive project involving tunnelling through fragile and young mountains is being undertaken in an area classified as Seismic Zone V (very high risk), which has seen major deep and shallow earthquakes in the past. Medog County lies within the

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The present strategy of quiet diplomacy with China is not working. Strangely, none of our readouts on recent high-level conversations with China have even mentioned the Medog project. Looking ahead, there must be strong signalling of our deep concerns about this project to China, both through diplomatic channels and in public comments. If the roles were reversed, there is absolutely no possibility of China being similarly circumspect. It is also worthwhile recalling how forceful Pakistan has been in dealings with India as a lower riparian, even though we had given generous terms under the Indus Waters Treaty.

Eastern Himalayan Syntaxis, a highly seismic region influenced by the Himalayan Frontal Thrust and local faults like the Medog Fault. Challenges such as reservoir-induced seismicity, tunnelling, geological miscalculations, and previous Chinese lapses in construction quality (for instance, in the Neelum-Jhelum project in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir) leave zero margin for engineering error — post-construction, there will be an ever-present danger of disasters.

Fourth, China has leveraged its advantage as a predominantly upper riparian vis-à-vis its neighbours and has mostly withheld meaningful cooperation with downstream countries. For instance, China’s development of a cascade of 12 smaller hydropower projects on the Mekong (called Lancang in China) has led to irregular fluctuations, drying out of areas, and depletion of fish catches and fertile sedimentation in the Lower Mekong Basin, affecting Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. This pattern of behaviour presages foreseen and unforeseen consequences of the proposed dam for India and Bangladesh.

Fifth, China’s track record of cooperation under three MoUs with India over the past two decades has been unsatisfactory. China has suspended the supply of wet-season hydrographic data for the Brahmaputra and the Sutlej from time to time. It has not agreed to provide lean-season data, let alone discuss broader cooperation like the sharing of waters of trans-border rivers. Not one collaborative project has been undertaken under the umbrella MOU for cooperation signed in 2013.

Finally, neither China nor India is a signatory to the UN Convention on the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (1997). However, two key principles of the Convention, “equitable and reasonable utilisation” of shared waters and the “obligation not to cause significant harm” to downstream states, are a part of customary international law. India has been a responsible co-riparian state, including with Pakistan, even after the Indus Waters Treaty was put in abeyance after the Pahalgam terrorist outrage. The same cannot be said of China.

The present strategy of quiet diplomacy with China is not working. Strangely, none of our readouts on recent high-level conversations with China have even mentioned the Medog project. Looking ahead, there must be

strong signalling of our deep concerns about this project to China, both through diplomatic channels and in public comments. If the roles were reversed, there is absolutely no possibility of China being similarly circumspect. It is also worthwhile recalling how forceful Pakistan has been in dealings with India as a lower riparian, even though we had given generous terms under the Indus Waters Treaty.

The scope of the dialogue with China must be expanded beyond the issue of hydrographic data. As an affected party, we have every right to insist on full visibility on the technical specifications of the project, its environmental impact studies and how China proposes to tackle the seismic challenge. We must push for transparent and broader trans-boundary cooperation, similar to China’s engagements with Kazakhstan on rivers like the Ili and Irtysh, to protect our existing and proposed user rights and other interests as a co-riparian. Indeed, we should seek suspension of work on the project until the relevant issues have been addressed. There should be a clear message that China undertaking a massive project like this without taking on board our legitimate concerns will have consequences for bilateral relations.

We must undertake a series of activities on our own. Considering the danger of floods and reduction in lean-season flows, India has no alternative but to create storage structures to moderate the risks in the immediate downstream. India should reassess the quantum of water contributed by major tributaries and local hydrological systems using its remote sensing datasets, geospatial modelling tools and legacy hydrological data to reduce dependency on upstream data from China. We have the means and expertise to monitor the project and make the findings of those studies public.

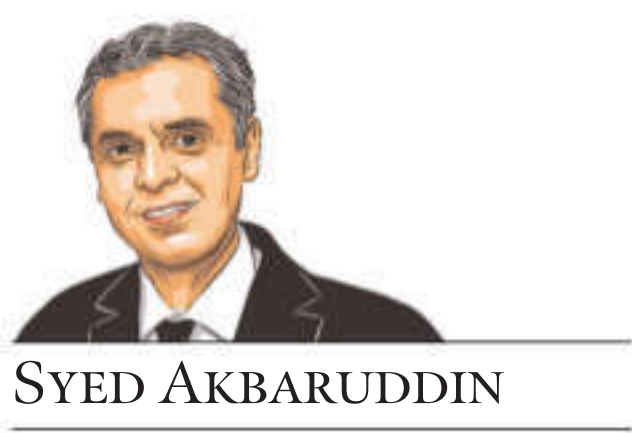
Finally, it is important to build a sustained narrative about China’s unilateral actions in the upstream and escalate the issue bilaterally as also in our broader messaging on India-China relations. Our NGOs should raise this matter in relevant international platforms.

We must appreciate that India’s circumspection could be seen by China as a sign of weakness. This wouldn’t help in pursuing our larger agenda of rebuilding bilateral relations with our northern neighbour.

The writer is former ambassador to China

A compass, not a verdict

ICJ’s advisory opinion invests global climate obligations with more than moral weight. India must navigate litigation risks, enforcement gaps, and fossil fuel dilemmas; align duty with dignity



SYED AKBARUDDIN

FOR ONCE, A ruling of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) at The Hague is making waves in Hyderabad. In a rare instance of policy resonance, the advisory opinion on climate change delivered by the 15-judge panel of the ICJ on July 23 has sparked conversation far beyond decision-makers in India. The ICJ’s unanimous declaration of climate change as an existential threat is being discussed not only in think tanks in Delhi and boardrooms in Mumbai, but also among environmentally conscious students in Patancheru, Telangana, where I teach public policy.

The case was initiated by Vanuatu, a Pacific island nation with a population of just 3,00,000. In March 2023, it led a coalition of small island states to secure consensual approval from the United Nations General Assembly to ask the ICJ two questions: What are states legally required to do to address climate change, and what are the consequences if they do not fulfil these duties?

Over 130 countries joined as co-sponsors. India did not join, but it did not oppose it either. This cautious posture reflects India’s complex position in global climate diplomacy.

India’s hesitation did not stem from dis-interest. Rather, it reflected clear-eyed realism. As a developing nation still working to ensure universal access to electricity, healthcare, and employment, India undertakes a difficult balancing act. Unlike industrialised countries, India has not benefited from centuries of fossil fuel-powered growth. Although its total emissions are rising, per capita emissions remain among the lowest globally. Many households still rely on biomass for cooking and face irregular power supply.

Despite these constraints, India has taken ambitious climate actions. By 2030, it aims for half its electricity to come from renewables. Emissions intensity has declined, afforestation has expanded, and electric buses now run in several Indian cities, including Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru and Hyderabad. India leads the International Solar Alliance and the Mission LiFE campaign promoting sustainable consumption. During its G20 presidency, it ensured that climate finance remained in the global spotlight.

These are not peripheral gestures. They are structural shifts. By any fair measure, India has done more with less. By contrast, Canada emits seven times more per capita and continues to expand its oil sands production. Australia, a major coal exporter, sets modest domestic targets while profiting from global emissions. Considering historical responsibility, economic capacity, and present-day ambition, India’s efforts stand out.

Yet, the sweeping ICJ opinion, though not legally binding, will have consequences for India. It draws not only on climate treaties but also on the United Nations Charter, customary international law, the law of the sea, and human rights law. The Court affirms that states have obligations to prevent environ-

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CR Sasikumar

mental harm, reduce emissions, adapt to climate impacts, and cooperate internationally. These duties are no longer moral appeals. They carry legal weight.

The Court also ruled that climate change violates rights to life, health, and housing. States must act based on the best available science, adopt ambitious national plans, and may be legally compelled to strengthen them. Failure to act could invite claims for climate damage. Subsidies for polluting fuels are now within legal scrutiny. The opinion does not just outline obligations, it opens the door to legal consequences.

For communities that have long suffered without recourse, this is a potential game changer. It affirms the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. India has long argued that those who contributed most to climate change must do more to address it. The ICJ has now given that argument legal grounding. It will bolster developing countries in global negotiations.

Yet, the new legal terrain raises at least three public policy challenges for India.

First is legal preparedness. Indian courts already interpret the right to a healthy environment as part of the right to life. The ICJ ruling may spur a wave of litigation demanding stronger climate action or even compensation. The Indian state could also face lawsuits from within or from affected neighbouring island states. Anticipating such claims will be vital for legal and policy stability. Otherwise, a torrent of litigation could emerge without clear legal standards.

Second is enforcement. India’s environ-

Yet, the sweeping ICJ opinion, though not legally binding, will have consequences for India. It draws not only on climate treaties but also on the United Nations Charter, customary international law, the law of the sea, and human rights law. The Court affirms that states have obligations to prevent environmental harm, reduce emissions, adapt to climate impacts, and cooperate internationally. These duties are no longer moral appeals. They carry legal weight.

mental laws are strong on paper but patchy in practice. Pollution control agencies remain underfunded and compliance varies widely across different states and sectors. The ICJ has reinforced the importance of due diligence. Strengthening regulatory capacity must now become a national priority.

Third is the issue of fossil fuel subsidies. These remain crucial for economically vulnerable households, especially for cooking gas and kerosene. But they also delay the shift to cleaner alternatives. The ICJ opinion, including the separate declaration appended by Judge Dalveer Bhandari of India, makes clear that subsidies have legal as well as fiscal implications. India must rethink how it provides support to the poor without locking them into polluting fuels. That will demand both financial resources and policy innovation.

The diplomatic challenge lies in aligning climate ambition with fairness. India must continue taking climate action while defending the context of its development needs. Climate justice must not become a new form of injustice.

The milestone ICJ opinion is not just a verdict from afar, but a compass. It signals the end of voluntary climate ambition and invites all countries to chart a harder, but fairer course. For India, the challenge now is to align duty with dignity and ambition with justice.

The writer is former permanent representative of India to the United Nations, and dean, Kautilya School of Public Policy, Hyderabad



ASHWANI KUMAR

A just equilibrium

Presidential Reference to SC can help redraw boundaries between institutions

THE UPCOMING HEARING in the Supreme Court of the Presidential Reference arising from the Court’s judgment in *The State of Tamil Nadu vs The Governor of Tamil Nadu* (2025) is of seminal constitutional significance. This is because of the perceived encroachment of the states’ defined sovereign functions and the troubling non-observance of conventional discipline in the exercise of high constitutional power. The Court’s advisory opinion, though not binding, will have significant persuasive value for the exercise of sovereign power by the states and the central government in the future.

In its adjudicatory decision, the Court has indicted the Tamil Nadu Governor for withholding assent for an unreasonably long time to bills passed by the Legislative Assembly. It held that his conduct was unconstitutional and it was permissible for the Court to read into the silences of the Constitution an implicit obligation on the Governor’s part to exercise constitutional discretion reasonably and impartially. Relying on government circulars, the Court held that decisions by the Governor and the President concerning assent to bills are required to be taken within three months of the date of receipt of the government’s recommendation for assent.

The judgment is unexceptionable for its constitutional logic as far as the Governor’s conduct is concerned. However, the extension of the Court’s reasoning to the exercise of presidential prerogatives and its

suggestion to the President to seek the Court’s advisory opinion “when deciding on bills reserved by the Governor” is fraught and open to interrogation for judicial overreach. This is because the President’s prerogatives were not directly in question before the Court and because the President’s sovereign power operates in a different realm and on a different plane in our constitutional scheme. As the repository of the highest sovereign power, the President is entitled to the fullest presumption of regularity in the performance of constitutional duties, unaffected by the assumed possibility of an irregular exercise of power. Inspired by national imperatives generally not amenable to judicially manageable standards, the nature of the President’s functions place the head of state in a unique position that does not warrant equivalence with the Governor, who holds office at the pleasure of the President as her representative in the state. It is not surprising, therefore, that in a clear disapproval of the Court’s judgment, the President has sought the Court’s advisory opinion on the key constitutional issues that emanate from its decision.

The core question raised in the Reference concerns the “constitutional boundaries of executive and judicial authority”, which are fundamental to the republic’s constitutional arrangement. Pertinently, because the Court’s advisory opinion cannot displace a

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binding judicial precedent, the Reference is seen as an opening for a review of the judgment or justification for a possible legislative initiative to insulate the President from the restraints imposed by the Court, should the advisory opinion be at variance with the ratio and reasoning in the Tamil Nadu case in so far as it relates to the President.

The Reference also seeks the Court’s view on several specific and substantial questions of public importance. These include whether “... the judiciary can modify or override constitutional powers exercised by the President or Governor through Article 142”, which confers upon the Supreme Court judicial power of the widest amplitude. Despite its internal coherence and unimpeachable logic in relation to the conduct of the Governor, the Court’s decision can be questioned for its directions (cloaked as a suggestion) to the President to seek its advice under Article 143 on legal issues impinging on the legality of bills requiring presidential assent. This has been critiqued, not unreasonably, as an unwarranted judicial intervention in the exercise of sovereign discretion, not necessitated by the scope of the legal challenge that was limited to the conduct of the Governor of Tamil Nadu. This part of the judgment can also be faulted in view of the established processes of decision-making by the President, including those pertaining to legal counsel.

Judicial intervention in policy choices of the government/Parliament and in the exer-

cise of sovereign power, unless palpably malafide, has raised questions about the balance of constitutional power. The necessity of restraint in the exercise of judicial power has been reiterated by the Court in the Tamil Nadu case itself, holding that [in] “the exercise of self-imposed restraint... courts do not venture into areas of governance in which the Constitution gives a prerogative solely to the executive.” Chief Justice B R Gavai, in his recent address at the Oxford Union, is reported to have endorsed a balanced exercise of judicial power.

Judges, made wise by experience, disciplined by law and elevated by knowledge, are expected to weigh and balance competing values, a function central to their role. The nation trusts the sagacity of the highest court to configure a just constitutional equilibrium of power so that the country’s democratic order is not held hostage to the unfettered impulses of any single branch of the Indian state. As the nation’s conscience-keeper, the Court is expected to vindicate this trust by the consistency and moral integrity of its judgments and by guarding against the “juridification of politics and politicisation of the judiciary”. We know that it is in the wisdom of the wise that enduring answers to some of the vexed questions of our time will be found.

The writer is senior advocate, Supreme Court and former Union Minister for Law and Justice. Views are personal

Five years of NEP: Taking stock of the transition

A few reforms proposed in school and higher education have made their way into classrooms. Others are stuck in Centre-state tussles & institutional delays

ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

IT IS five years since the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 — the country's third such policy since Independence — was cleared by the Union Cabinet. The NEP promised a sweeping reset of both school and higher education. Some of that vision has made its way into classrooms. But a lot remains on paper, slowed by state-Centre frictions, or held up by institutional delays.

What has worked

School curriculum is changing, slowly: The 10+2 system has been replaced with a new structure — foundational (pre-primary to class 2), preparatory (classes 3-5), middle (6-8), and secondary (9-12). In 2023, the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCFSE) laid out the learning outcomes and competencies for each stage.

NCERT has produced new textbooks for classes 1-8 based on this framework. Social science, for example, is now taught as a single book covering history, geography, political science, and economics, replacing sepa-

rate textbooks for each subject. New books for classes 9-12 are expected next.

First steps of early childhood learning: The NEP aims to make pre-primary learning universal by 2030. NCERT's Jaadui Pitara learning kits are already in use, and the Women and Child Development Ministry has issued a national ECCE curriculum.

Delhi, Karnataka, and Kerala will soon enforce the minimum age of six for class 1 entry. 2023-24 data show a fall in class 1 enrolments to 1.87 crore from the 2.16 crore of previous year, likely due to this age cutoff. About 73% of those enrolled had attended some form of preschool. The big hurdles are better training for Anganwadi workers, and improving infrastructure and teaching quality in early education centres.

National focus for foundational skills: NIPUN Bharat, launched in 2021, seeks to ensure every child can read and do basic math by the end of class 3. A recent government survey found average scores were 64% for language and 60% for math — a start, but well short of universal proficiency.

Credit-based flexibility starts to take shape: The NEP suggested the Academic Bank of Credits (ABC). This, and a National

Credit Framework (NCRf) have been developed. UGC rules published in 2021 allowed students to earn and store credits digitally, even across institutions, making it possible to move between courses or exit and re-enter. The system allows students to earn a certificate after one year, a diploma after two, or complete a four-year multidisciplinary degree.

The NCrF brings similar flexibility to school students, where learning hours (including skill-based ones) translate into credits. CBSE invited schools to be part of an NCrF pilot last year.

Common test for college entry: The Common University Entrance Test (CUET), introduced in 2022, is now a key route to undergraduate admissions. NEP 2020 had suggested that multiple college entrance exams should be replaced with a single national test.

Indian campuses abroad and vice versa: IIT Madras, IIT Delhi, and IIM Ahmedabad have set up international campuses in Zanzibar, Abu Dhabi, and Dubai respectively. University of Southampton recently opened in India, after two other foreign universities at GIFT City, Gujarat. Another 12

foreign universities are in the process of being approved under UGC regulations, plus two more at GIFT City. Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said earlier this month.

What's in progress

Changes in board exams: The NEP envisages less high-stakes board exams. Starting 2026, CBSE plans to allow class 10 students to sit for board exams twice a year. Karnataka has experimented with this; other boards are waiting to see how it plays out.

The NEP idea of offering all subjects at two levels (standard and higher) is limited to class 10 math, which CBSE introduced in 2019-20.

Holistic report cards, so far on paper: PARAKH, a unit under NCERT, has developed progress cards that go beyond marks, and include peer and self-assessment. But some school boards are yet to make the shift.

Slow progress for four-year UG degrees: Central universities are rolling out NEP's idea of four-year undergraduate degrees with multiple exit options, and Kerala has followed. But in many places, colleges don't yet have the faculty or infrastructure.

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EDUCATION

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

WHAT ARE THE KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE U.S.-EU TRADE DEAL?

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen have announced a sweeping trade deal that imposes 15% tariffs on most European goods, warding off Trump's threat of a 30% rate if no deal had been reached by August 1.

The tariffs, or import taxes, paid when Americans buy European products could raise prices for US consumers and dent profits for European companies and their partners who bring goods into the country.

Unresolved details

The trade deal announcement leaves many crucial details to be filled in. The headline figure is a 15% tariff rate on about 70% of European goods brought into the US, including cars, computer chips and pharmaceuticals. It's lower than the 20% that Trump initially proposed, and lower than his threats of 50% and then 30%.

The remaining 30% is still open to further decisions and negotiations. Von der Leyen said the two sides agreed on zero tariffs for a range of "strategic" goods such as aircraft and aircraft parts. Specifics were lacking. EU companies would purchase what Trump said was \$750 billion worth of natural gas, oil and nuclear fuel over three years to replace Russian energy supplies that Europe is seeking to exit in any case.

Steel tariff remains

Trump said the 50% US tariff on imported steel would remain. Von der Leyen said the two sides agreed to further negotiations to fight a global steel glut, reduce tariffs and establish import quotas — that is, set amounts that can be imported, often at a lower rate or tariff-free.

Trump said pharmaceuticals, a major import from the EU to the US, weren't in-



Donald Trump with Ursula von der Leyen in Scotland on Sunday. Reuters

cluded in the deal. Von der Leyen said the pharmaceuticals issue was "on a separate sheet of paper".

'Best we could do'

The 15% rate removes Trump's threat of a 30% tariff. But it effectively raises the tariff on EU goods from 1.2% last year to 17% and would reduce the 27-nation's gross domestic product by 0.5%, said Jack Allen-Reynolds, deputy chief eurozone economist at Capital Economics.

Von der Leyen said the 15% rate was "the best we could do" and credited the deal with maintaining access to the US market.

Car prices

Asked if EU carmakers could still profitably sell cars at 15%, von der Leyen said the rate was much lower than the current 27.5%. That has been the rate under Trump's 25% tariff on cars from all countries, plus the preexisting US car tariff of 2.5%.

The impact is likely to be substantial on some companies, given that automaker Volkswagen said it suffered a \$1.5 billion hit to profits in the first half of the year from the higher tariffs.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANAGHA JAYAKUMAR &
ARJUN SENGUPTA
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

AFTER DAYS of deadly fighting, Cambodia and Thailand on Monday agreed to an "immediate and unconditional ceasefire". The ceasefire was negotiated by Prime Ministers Hun Manet of Cambodia and Phumtham Wechayachai of Thailand at a meeting hosted by Malaysian PM Anwar Ibrahim in Kuala Lumpur.

The clashes followed months of tensions over a century-old border dispute between the Southeast Asian neighbours. What is the history of this dispute, and what happens now?

Tensions come to a boil

Tensions between Cambodia and Thailand had been simmering since May, when they skirmished at a contested area of the border, leading to the death of a Cambodian soldier.

Nationalist rhetoric in both countries and a series of tit-for-tat actions followed. Cambodia banned the import of Thai fruits and broadcast of Thai films and soap operas; Thailand closed all land crossings.

Last Wednesday, Thailand withdrew its ambassador from Cambodia and expelled the Cambodian envoy after a Thai soldier lost a leg in a land mine blast. Thailand claimed the mine was laid by Cambodian troops in Thai territory. Cambodia responded by downgrading diplomatic relations and recalling all Cambodian staff from its embassy in Bangkok. Clashes broke out at half a dozen places along the border between the Thai provinces of Surin and Sisaket, and Cambodian provinces of Oddar Meanchey and Preah Vihear.

On Thursday, Thailand launched air strikes on Cambodian military sites, and Cambodia responded with rocket and artillery fire. Exchanges of artillery and machine gun fire followed, in which at least 35 people were killed and more than 2.6 lakh civilians were displaced on both sides of the border, *Reuters* reported.

Making of a conflict

The 817-km land border between Cambodia and Thailand was drawn in 1907 by France, then the colonial power in Cambodia. Like many other borders drawn by colonial administrators, this too has long been disputed.



(From left) Hun Manet, Anwar Ibrahim, Phumtham Wechayachai after truce. Reuters

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The two predominantly Theravada-Buddhist neighbours are more alike than any other country in the region, sharing ethnic and linguistic ties, social norms, culinary traditions, and cultural activities. But both claim to be the "original" owners of their heritage. This is what drives the animosity between them.

The competing claims of cultural ownership are rooted in contesting readings of history, which, scholars say, are purposely propped up by governing elites of the two countries to strengthen their domestic positions.

"Countries fabricate history to celebrate their past, using nationalism as a political tool in the manipulation of public opinion... It is evident that contemporary Thai-Cambodian relations have become a casualty of the remade past," wrote Charnvit Kasetsiri, Pou Sothirak and Pavin Chachavalpongun in *Preah Vihear: A Guide to the Thai-Cambodian Conflict and Its Solutions* (2013).

Every skirmish in the border thus has the potential to devolve into a much larger conflict. This has happened now, and earlier.

Case of Preah Vihear

At the centre of the border dispute is the Preah Vihear temple, which is called Phra Viham in Thai. "The temple has meaning — both as a cultural symbol and a religious place of worship — to people on both sides of the border," John D Ciorciari, a professor

EXPLAINED
ECONOMICS

130 per cent from 645 naira/US dollar in 2023 to 1,479 naira/US dollar in 2024, according to the IMF. (For comparison, 17.5 nairas make 1 Indian rupee.)

"Even using the new series, currency devaluations in 2023 and 2024 mean that Nigeria's economy has not recovered its previous position as Africa's largest economy," a note by research firm BMI, a part of the Fitch Group, said on July 23.

The GDP rebasing exercise has spotlighted changes in the Nigerian economy that point to significant concerns.

One, the share of agriculture in the country's GDP has increased to almost 26 per cent in 2019 from 22 per cent estimated earlier, while that of industry has declined to 21 per cent from 27.65 per cent.

Two, the contribution of the informal sector to the GDP has increased to 42.5 per cent from 41.4 per cent.

And while a larger GDP has helped reduce the debt-to-GDP ratio to 38 per cent from 51

Mother tongue in classrooms: NEP encourages the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction till at least class 5. CBSE has asked schools to begin this from pre-primary to class 2, with classes 3-5 retaining the option of staying or switching. NCERT is working on textbooks in more Indian languages.

What's stuck and why

Three-language formula remains a sticking point: NEP proposes three languages in school, at least two of them Indian. But Tamil Nadu, which follows a Tamil-English model, sees this as an attempt to impose Hindi.

Teacher education overhaul hasn't happened: The National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education, due in 2021, is yet to be released. The four-year integrated B.Ed course has been announced under the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP), but colleges offering existing programmes like Bachelor of Elementary Education (B.El.Ed) are pushing back.

UGC's proposed successor delayed: A 2018 draft bill proposed scrapping the UGC Act and replacing it with an umbrella Higher Education Commission of India (HECI). NEP formalised the idea — HECI would handle reg-

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ulation, funding, accreditation, and academic standards across higher education, excluding medical and legal. But the Education Ministry is still in the process of drafting the Bill.

No breakfast in schools yet: NEP recommends breakfast along with midday meals. But in 2021, the Finance Ministry rejected the Education Ministry's proposal to add breakfast for pre-primary and elementary classes.

Policy divide between Centre and states: Some states have pushed back against key NEP provisions. Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal have refused to sign MoUs with the Centre to set up PM-SHRI schools, citing clauses that require full adoption of NEP.

Tamil Nadu opposes both the three-language formula and four-year UG structure. Kerala and Tamil Nadu argue that since education is on the Concurrent List, the Centre cannot mandate these changes unilaterally.

The Centre has withheld Samagra Shiksha funds from these states, saying the money is tied to NEP-linked reforms. Tamil Nadu has challenged the freeze in the Supreme Court.

Karnataka, which introduced and scrapped the four-year UG model, is working on its own state education policy, an election promise made by the Congress in 2023.



Cambodia sought to list the Preah Vihear temple as a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Thai opposition used the issue to attack the government, accusing it of "forfeiting Thai

Cambodian leaders too used the issue to rally nationalist sentiment in the country.

Over the next several years, Cambodian and Thai troops frequently skirmished at the border. In 2013, the ICJ re-affirmed Cambodia's position vis-à-vis Preah Vihear, creating a demilitarised zone around the temple, although this was never implemented. Thailand has since rejected the ICJ's jurisdiction.

What happens now

Preah Vihear temple is the most famous of many disputed sites at the Cambodia-Thailand border which hold cultural significance for both countries. Another such temple, called Prasat Ta Moan Thom by the Cambodians and Prasat Ta Muen Thom by the Thai, witnessed fighting during the recent hostilities.

The ceasefire does not fundamentally address issues of cultural inheritance and ownership. It will take a lot more to bring down temperatures in both countries, and for them to permanently iron out the border issue.

For the time being, however, analysts expect an uneasy peace to hold. This is primarily because of pressure from outside, notably China and the United States, both of whom oversaw the negotiations in Kuala Lumpur.

In fact, the talks were held after US President Donald Trump set the two countries agreeing to a ceasefire as a precondition to their respective trade talks with Washington.

Power of rebasing: How Nigeria's GDP jumped from No. 58 to No. 55 in a day

SIDDHARTH UPASANI
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

ON JULY 20, the West African country of Nigeria was the 58th largest economy in the world. The very next day, it jumped to No. 55, having added more than \$50 billion, or roughly 30 per cent, to its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2024. On its way up, Nigeria overtook Ukraine, Qatar, and Hungary.

On July 21, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) published the results of its GDP rebasing exercise, in which the base year of the indicator was changed to 2019 from 2010, among other changes.

The result? Nigeria's GDP in 2024 is now estimated at \$243 billion in nominal terms, rising from \$187 billion forecast by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Change in methodology

A new base year — which essentially means measurement of GDP, or the final

value of goods and services in any particular year, with respect to the prices prevailing in that year — does not automatically lead to a larger economy.

However, Nigeria's base-year revision exercise included other, more meaningful changes in the manner in which the country calculates GDP. Among them was increasing the scope of the methodology to include previously undercounted sectors such as digital services, pension fund operations, and e-commerce activities among others.

Technological development, structural changes, and changes in production and consumption patterns meant that "the methods and data used in estimating GDP must change with the times to reflect current economic realities", the NBS said.

A previous rebasing

The exercise, the NBS said, was "by far the most comprehensive rebasing" it had ever carried out. However, this is not the first time that Nigeria has seen such a huge

increase in its GDP due to a revision in the base year.

More than a decade ago, a change in the base year from 1990 to 2010 had helped propel the country to the position of Africa's largest economy, thanks to an even larger increase of 89 per cent in its GDP — to \$510 billion in 2014.

But wait — \$510 billion? Does that mean the Nigerian economy has shrunk by half in the last 10 years to \$243 billion now?

Well, sort of. At least in US dollar terms.

Significant concerns

While this month's rebasing has brought Nigeria \$50 billion closer to its goal of becoming a \$1 trillion economy by 2030, actually hitting that target is well nigh impossible following the sharp devaluations of its currency naira in 2023 and 2024. As a result, on an annual average basis, the official naira/US dollar exchange rate weakened by

FIGHTING DISPLACED OVER 3 LAKH PEOPLE

Thailand, Cambodia agree on ceasefire deal after five days of battle

REUTERS
PUTRAJAYA, JULY 28

CAMBODIA AND Thailand agreed to an “immediate and unconditional ceasefire” from midnight (1700 GMT) on Monday, in a bid to halt their deadliest conflict in more than a decade after five days of fierce fighting that has displaced more than 300,000 people.

After days of efforts by Malaysia, chair of the ASEAN regional bloc, the United States and China to bring both sides to the table, the two countries’ leaders agreed to end hostilities, resume direct communications and create a mechanism to implement the truce. At least 36 people have been killed in the fighting, mostly civilians.

Following more than two hours of talks at his official residence in Putrajaya, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, flanked by Thai and Cambodian leaders, said he was ready to deploy a team to observe and ensure implementation. “This is a vital first step towards de-escalation and the restoration of peace and security,” he told a press meet.

“All parties shared a commitment to peace.”

The Southeast Asian neighbours have wrangled for decades over border territory and have



(From left) Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet with his Malaysian counterpart Anwar Ibrahim and Thailand’s acting PM Phumtham Wechayachai in Putrajaya on Monday. AP

been on a conflict footing since the killing of a Cambodian soldier in a skirmish late in May, which led to a troop buildup on both sides. A full-blown diplomatic crisis brought Thailand’s coalition government to the brink of collapse.

They accuse each other of starting the fighting last week, both quickly deploying heavy artillery at multiple points along their 800-km (500-mile) land border. Thailand flew air raids with an F-16 fighter jet.

US President Donald Trump called both leaders at the week-end, warning he would not con-

clude trade deals with them unless they ended the fighting. Both sides are facing a steep import tariff of 36% on their goods in the U.S., their top export market.

Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet thanked his acting Thai counterpart Phumtham Wechayachai for what he said was a positive role and said he deeply appreciated Trump’s “decisive mediation” and China’s constructive participation.

“We agreed that the fighting will stop immediately,” he said, expressing confidence that both sides could rebuild trust and confidence.

US, China hold new trade talks, easing path for Trump-Xi meet

Stockholm: Top U.S. and Chinese economic officials resumed talks in Stockholm on Monday to resolve longstanding economic disputes at the centre of a trade war between the world’s top two economies, aiming to extend a truce by three months.

US Treasury Chief Scott Bessent met China’s Vice Premier He Lifeng at Rosenbad, the Swedish prime minister’s office in Stockholm. China is facing an August 12 deadline to reach a tariff agreement, it reached preliminary trade deals with the US in May and June. Trade analysts said a 90-day extension of tariffs and a meeting between Presidents Donald Trump and Xi Jinping were likely.

REUTERS

EU trade talks: India to offer regulatory certainty in manufacturing to woo FDI

RAVIDUTTAMISHRA
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

IN THE first such offer made during trade deal negotiations, India is working on a “new chapter” aimed at extending long-term regulatory certainty in the domestic manufacturing sector to attract investment from the European Union (EU), *The Indian Express* has learnt. This comes in the backdrop of shared concerns between India and the EU over Chinese overcapacity, which is viewed as a threat to domestic manufacturing of critical products such as pharmaceuticals, electronics and defence requirements, among others.

“In the EU deal, one of the new chapters that has come in is about investment in non-services, which is a new element where they (EU) are looking at certainty on the commitments for FDI in non-services sectors — basically the manufacturing sector,” a senior government official said.

“There are two parts to it. One is deciding on sectors where India will allow 100 per cent FDI. Second, there are a number of conditions on things such as ‘local employment’, ‘local value addition’, ‘use of local raw materials’ and conditions around whether there will be local partners and joint ventures or not,” the official told *The Indian Express*.

EXPLAINED

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New chapter

WITH BRUSSELS looking at certainty on the commitments for FDI in India's manufacturing sector, investment in non-services opens a new chapter in the deal with the EU. The government had undertaken extensive stakeholder consultations on the investment chapter.

said. Another person aware of the development told *The Indian Express* that the government had undertaken extensive stakeholder consultations to work on the investment chapter that was offered to the EU during the last round of negotiations.

This comes as India has begun seeking to attract investments from Western countries in exchange for lowering tariffs on key sectors. For instance, India has allowed 100 per cent FDI in telecom for the UK under the trade deal. In the insurance sector, the FDI ceiling has been kept at 74 per cent, providing investment certainty for UK insurers. A similar strategy was followed in the European Free

Trade Association (EFTA) deal.

India and the four-nation EFTA — an intergovernmental grouping comprising Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland — signed a trade pact in March 2024, under which EFTA countries have committed to investing \$100 billion in India over a 15-year period. However, officials indicated that the investment chapter in the EU deal would be far more extensive and legally robust.

Shared challenge of China

India and the EU have both been facing several challenges, particularly in the renewable energy sector. Another government official told *The Indian Express* that the Indian industry has been encountering pricing challenges, especially while trying to scale up the solar energy sector, and that India will have to work with “Western countries” to achieve competitiveness and tackle the China challenge.

According to a parliamentary report released last year, the EU is concerned about China's dominance in critical technologies, as China holds a leading global manufacturing position in several areas, exposing the EU to potential risks. The EU has said these sectors include raw or processed materials for robotics, as well as clean

technologies including solar PV wafers, EV batteries and wind turbine blades.

“Despite a general decline in Chinese FDI into the EU since 2016 and a shift towards greenfield investments, China still holds stakes (full or partial ownership) in critical EU activities and infrastructure. These include automotive, fintech, advanced manufacturing, ports and shipyards, and electronics,” the parliamentary report said.

India–EU negotiations making progress

An EU trade deal status report earlier this month stated that India and the EU had made substantial progress on the text dealing with “services and investment”, marking a significant step forward towards concluding the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that both sides aim to sign by the end of the year.

The EU report also noted that negotiators had made substantial progress on the investment text, and that they had also made very good progress on rules for state-to-state mediation. Progress on dispute settlement is significant, as it suggests a breakthrough on long-standing EU concerns regarding investment protection in India.

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With ONDC in place, national retail policy takes a backseat

RAVIDUTTAMISHRA
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

AS VARIOUS interventions have been made by the government, such as the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), which provides open access to retailers, a separate national retail policy may not be a top government priority at the moment, *The Indian Express* has learned.

“A policy is a set of actions, and those actions are already being taken. Timely interventions are happening on a regular basis, such as the setting up of the National Traders Welfare Board and the launch of the ONDC platform. There is no need for a separate policy for retail trade right now,” a source tracking the matter told *The Indian Express*.

The Ministry of Commerce and Industry told Parliament in

2023 that a draft National Retail Trade Policy had been prepared, based on consultations with state governments and major industry and trade associations. The draft focused on preparing strategies for the overall development of retail trade through targeted efforts to promote ease of doing business in the retail sector.

FULL REPORT ON
www.indianexpress.com

Teenager with nerves of steel

India's latest GM has unshakeable belief in her ability and combines it with meticulous preparation

MAYANK
NEW DELHI, JULY 28

WHEN THE weakest piece on the chessboard, the pawn on the f-file, broke free of its shackles and marched forward, there was little anyone could do to stop it. The right hand from across the board reached out, not for a counter, but to concede defeat.

This time, there was no rush to stop the clock as it ticked away. The opponent had already left the spot, leaving behind a teary-eyed 19-year-old girl, her hands trembling, having just experienced the finest afternoon of her young chess career.

That girl was Divya Deshmukh. She took a gulp of water, steadying herself, before letting the moment sink in. Her eyes darted around, searching for her mother, and then came the outpouring of emotion. The 25 relentless days of continuous chess, and the unyielding pressure, had finally led to something extraordinary.

Divya had just defeated Koneru Humpy, twice her age and the most dominant force in Indian women's chess for more than two decades, in the final of the FIDE Women's World Cup. The title brought many firsts for the girl from Nagpur. Not only has she secured a spot in the 2026 Candidates Tournament, but also becomes only the fourth female Grandmaster from India.

What made the feat even more remarkable was that Divya didn't have a single GM norm ahead of the World Cup, nor did she meet the required rating (a standard 2500) to be eligible for the coveted title. Yet, by winning this elite event, she bypassed all the usual FIDE requirements, emerging as India's 88th Grandmaster and the 44th female Grandmaster in the world.

What she has achieved indicates Divya's unshakable confidence in her abilities. What might have seemed like youthful exuberance at the expense of experience at first glance was, in fact, a meticulous strategy as she steered the final towards shorter time controls, avoiding losing the edge in Classical chess, where she had never defeated her senior compatriot.

Holding fort

Divya could have won the first Classical game with white pieces but fell short, failing to capitalise on both her advantage and Humpy's mistakes. This meant Humpy would play with white in the second Classical game, a prime opportunity to settle the match decisively.

Yet, Divya staged a masterclass in defence, forcing the contest into rapid tie-breaks



Divya Deshmukh (R) breaks down after beating Koneru Humpy in the Chess World Cup final on Monday. PTI

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where she ultimately delivered the final blow.

So what makes Divya such a special talent? Or rather, how did she realise her true potential? Ask her former coach RB Ramesh, and he'll point to two things: confidence and age.

"She is younger than someone like Vaishali (Rameshbabu) and Vantika (Agrawal) and, I would say, the most confident of the lot," Ramesh told *The Indian Express*. "She has been a confident girl from a very young age. She didn't have that negative side to her, the one that tends to create self-doubt. That inner chatter that wrecks things, fortunately, was missing in her."

According to him, Divya already possesses the strength of a Grandmaster, and is constantly evolving. Ramesh even predicts that she could become India's strongest female player. "She can reach a 2650 rating."

For context, Humpy's peak classical chess rating was 2623. Describing her playing style, Ramesh calls Divya "ultra-aggressive" on the board, drawing parallels with Russian-French legend Alexander Alekhine, arguably the most attacking player in chess history.

Could such aggression backfire? Ramesh doesn't think so.

As risky as it sometimes could be to com-

There are players who avoid risk, who prefer solid, steady play... like Rahul Dravid in cricket. Then there are those who go on the attack. Divya belongs to the latter category."

RB RAMESH

DIVYA DESHMUKH'S FORMER COACH

pare sportspersons from different sports, it is imperative to understand the mindset behind being defensive or aggressive.

"There are players who avoid risk, who prefer solid, steady play... like Rahul Dravid in cricket. Then there are those who go on the attack. Divya belongs to the latter category," says the chess coach.

Mental fortitude

Delving deeper into Divya's mental fortitude, GM Abhijeet Kunte observes: "I think it's very rare. Exceptional players perform well in both favourable and adverse situations. Many crumble under pressure; others fail to convert advantages. But Divya isn't like that. When pressured, she defends tenaciously. Yet when ahead, she avoids time trouble while maintaining her edge. She's

very clever in her approach. That kind of maturity is very rare to see at such a young age."

Divya's aggressive style often mirrors that of someone like fellow Indian GM Nihal Sarin, while her never-say-die attitude, the refusal to accept draws and the ability to "squeeze water from stone" will remind one of D. Gukesh's relentless play.

Even five-time World Champion Viswanathan Anand isn't surprised by her World Cup triumph. "She's someone who has a lot of potential, so I wouldn't say this is unexpected. But people were waiting for this, and it's nice that she's delivered," Anand told *The Indian Express*.

Ramesh also believes that Divya has a genuine shot at the Ju Wenjun's FIDE Women's World Championship crown.

"She needs to raise her level by about 100 rating points, and then she'll be a clear favourite. She needs to put in double the amount of work she is putting in now as she qualified for the Candidates, and at her age, that's absolutely achievable," he asserts.

While the thought might seem far-fetched for now, Divya may one day emulate Gukesh's historic achievement at chess' pinnacle. But for now, as she herself said, all that the young champion craves is some good food and well-earned rest.

2036 OLYMPICS BID

India, Qatar face-off: Promise vs readiness, economy vs diplomacy

MIHIR VASAVDA
MUMBAI, JULY 28

EXPLAINED
SLICK REELS. Snappy videos. And montages of sporting royalties — from Roger Federer to David Beckham — saying good things about Doha. In a co-ordinated publicity blitzkrieg, Qatar announced its bid to host the 2036 Olympics last week.

The Gulf nation's interest in hosting the Games was whispered in the Olympic circles for months. With this announcement, it is now official. India, which has been working on its bid for close to two years, has competition in a race that also includes Turkey, Indonesia, Hungary, and Germany, which want to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the 1936 Olympics, among others.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has paused the host selection process as it reviews the current rules.

Picking a host nation for the Olympics has never been a straightforward process. So, to say that one country has an edge over the other will be premature. And often, given the hectic behind-the-scenes parleys, merit isn't always the only deciding factor — who

better than Qatar, who won the controversial 2022 FIFA World Cup bid to know that!

Some of the overarching messages from the initial statements made by both nations are similar, the difference is in the language.

Sample this, Qatar in their initial pitch last week have said they 'view sport as a means to... foster a world that is more united, tolerant, and harmonious.' India, in its letter of intent to the IOC, has highlighted that it hopes to 'seek peace, friendship and collective progress among all nations'.

Or take the promise of inclusivity. "Qatar," their statement says, "promises an unparalleled Olympic experience — a vibrant, inclusive platform that welcomes diverse cultures and backgrounds." India, in its pitch, has spoken about the 'vast cultural diversity' and the society being a 'mosaic of religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Jainism.'

And while Qatar claims its bid aligns with the 'National Vision 2030', India has said the 2036 Olympics are in line with the country's 'Viksit Bharat 2047 Vision'.

Both haven't shied away from making bold claims to transform the respective nations' sporting ecosystem, shape the future and wield regional influence.

Banking on 'readiness'

They do not say it in as many words, but Qatar implies that they can host the



An artist's impression of what the venues planned in Ahmedabad would look like. (R) A diver in action during the 2024 World Aquatics Championships with Doha's skyline in the background. Special arrangement / Qatar Olympic Committee

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Olympics now if it comes to that. Readiness, bolstered by the controversial yet successful 2022 FIFA World Cup, is their big bid plank.

On the infrastructure front, Qatar has claimed that '95 per cent of Olympic venues are already in place and tested at the highest level'. They dip into their previous hosting experience, underlining the 18 World Championships they have hosted in the last 20 years to promise a successful delivery of the Olympics. They hosted the



Asian Games in 2006 and will hold them once again in 2030.

"With world-class venues already in place and tested, Doha 2036 shifts the focus from infrastructure development to delivering exceptional experiences and meaningful legacy from day one," the Qatar Olympic Committee said in a statement.

In Ahmedabad, which was officially presented as the candidate city in a meeting with the IOC earlier this month, the pace of

On the infrastructure front, Qatar has claimed that '95 per cent of Olympic venues are already in place and tested at the highest level'

infrastructure building — being done from scratch — has increased rapidly in the last few months as the authorities begin work to construct the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Enclave, which is likely to be the major hub.

In its promise to deliver the Games seamlessly, India has bid — or is in the process of bidding — multiple international tournaments over the next few years to gain hosting experience. This includes the 2030 Commonwealth Games, which is almost certain to be held in Ahmedabad, the 2027 women's volleyball world championship and the 2028 World U20 Athletics Championships, among others. This year, Ahmedabad will host the Commonwealth Weightlifting Championship and the Asian Swimming Championship.

Regional play

There's also a regional play in both bids. Qatar has also reaffirmed that if it were to be awarded the 2036 Games, 'it would

mark the first Olympic and Paralympic Games ever held in the Middle East and North Africa'. "This milestone would allow Qatar to present a distinctive Arab model for the Games — one rooted in diversity and openness, built on a foundation of sustainable legacy and the power of sport to inspire hope and peace. It would also strengthen regional representation and showcase the potential of Arab youth on the global stage," they said in a media release.

India, meanwhile, has said hosting the Olympics would speak of the 'aspirations of the Global South' and, in the letter of intent to the IOC, spoke about the 'transformative economic, social and cultural impact in wider SAARC nations in South Asia'.

Economy and diplomacy

Qatar is banking on its growing reputation of being a global diplomacy hub. In their pitch, the Gulf nation has said 'this bid is a natural extension of our diplomatic legacy, inviting the world to connect in an environment of peace and mutual respect.'

India, on the other hand, has impressed upon the IOC that it is the 'only major economy yet to host the Games.' "And while we recognise that is not the sole reason to award a Games, it is a stark reflection of our region's need for the types of sport and social benefits that only the Olympic Games can provide," the letter of intent stated.