

'MARKETS, GLOBAL CIRCUMSTANCES GUIDE ENERGY PURCHASES'

MEA dials down Trump noise: India, US weathered challenges, focus on future

On swipe against India-Russia, says: Bilateral ties not through third country prism

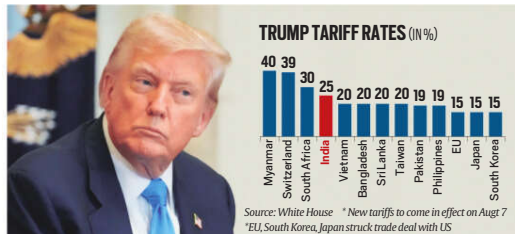
SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

OVER 30 remarks crediting himself for the India-Pakistan ceasefire, referring to India as a "dead economy," dropping the 25% tariff bombshell and a Russia penalty even as talks are on — US President Donald Trump's diatribe was met Friday by diplomatic pragmatism from the Ministry of External Affairs.

Underlining that the India-US partnership has "weathered several transitions and challenges," the MEA said that New Delhi will remain "focused on the substantive agenda" even as it flagged that its friendship with Russia was "time-tested."

This response came the day Trump unveiled sweeping new tariffs on dozens of countries including 25 per cent for goods from India.

Responding to a question, **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**



ECONOMY 50 COUNTRIES WITH LOWER U.S. TARIFFS [PAGE 21](#)

EXPLAINED HEALTH OF INDIA'S ECONOMY [PAGE 24](#)

Why Trump talk of Pak's 'massive oil reserves' is hot air — not much else

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's announcement on Thursday that America will work with Pakistan to develop the latter's "massive" oil reserves came as a bit of a surprise, as Pakistan is not exactly a country synonymous with oil exploration and production, unlike

Saudi Arabia, Iraq or Venezuela. In fact, Islamabad depends heavily on energy imports, has dwindling hydrocarbon production, and a rather inconsistent and uninspiring record of oil and gas exploration.

There have been a few preliminary studies and reports of potential reserves over the years, but they have re-

mained inconclusive, and the world's oil majors have so far largely steered clear of hydrocarbon exploration in Pakistan.

But Trump went to the extent of saying that "maybe" Pakistan will be "selling oil to India some day", a remark that many have interpreted as a veiled jibe **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

With US their key market, worried apparel exporters seek Govt help

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

WITH PRESIDENT Donald Trump setting a higher tariff on India (at 25 per cent) than on over 30 other countries — including Bangladesh and Vietnam, which, together with China, are among the top apparel exporters to the United States — domestic apparel exporters have expressed concern and sought government intervention. The new tariffs are set to come into effect from August 7.

"We request immediate government intervention to offset this huge setback. Exporters have their back against the wall and will have to sell below cost to keep their factories running and avoid mass layoffs," Sudhir Sekhri, Chairman, Apparel Export Promotion Council (APEC), said in a statement.

The Confederation of Indian **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

EC publishes draft electoral rolls in Bihar, objections allowed until Sept 1

HIMANSHU HARSH
PATNA, AUGUST 1

THE ELECTION Commission (EC) on Friday announced the publication of Bihar's draft electoral rolls, compiled as part of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise. The Commission said the lists are now available for download on its portal and are being distributed in both physical and digital formats to all recognised political parties across the state's 38 districts.

Data released by the EC showed that while over 7.24 crore enumeration forms were successfully received and incorporated, more than 65 lakh were not received.

The EC said the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Bihar and all 243 electoral registration officers (EROs) are now inviting claims and objections from electors and political parties to be submitted between August 1 and September 1.

"Any elector from an Assembly constituency or any recognised political party may submit claims to include missing eligible electors, remove ineligible names, or correct any inaccuracies in the draft rolls," Bihar CEO Vinod Singh Gunjyal said.

Throughout the one-month claims period, electors and polit-

WHAT WILL NOT COUNT IN BIHAR

'ATOM BOMB' PROOF AGAINST EC: RAHUL

CONGRESS LEADER Rahul Gandhi claimed his party has an "atom bomb" of evidence to prove "vote theft" by the EC for the BJP.

THE EC said it "ignores baseless allegations".

REPORT, PAGE 11

ical parties can file the relevant forms with the EROs. The process will be overseen by 243 EROs and 2,976 assistant electoral registration officers (AEROs) stationed across the state.

The EC clarified that under SIR guidelines, "no name can be deleted" from the published **CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

INDIAN EXPRESS UPSC IAS EDITION HD 02~08~2025

--FOR UPSC IAS ASPIRANTS--

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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.

FROM PAGE ONE

MEA dials down Trump noise

FULL REPORTS ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

MEA's official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said Friday: "India and the United States share a comprehensive global strategic partnership anchored in shared interests, democratic values, and robust people-to-people ties. This partnership has weathered several transitions and challenges. We remain focused on the substantive agenda that our two countries have committed to and are confident that the relationship will continue to move forward."

Asked about India-US defence ties in the wake of reports of India refusing to consider F-35 fighter jets, the MEA spokesperson said, "We have a strong defence partnership with the U.S. which has been strengthening over the last several years. There is potential for this partnership to grow further under the India-US COM-PACT for the 21st century."

Responding to Trump's talk of a penalty on India for buying energy from Russia, Jaiswal said: "In securing our energy needs, we are guided by what is on offer in the markets, and by the prevailing global circumstances."

Incidentally, this has been Delhi's position for the last three years, since the war in Ukraine broke out after the Russian invasion in February 2022.

On Trump's tirade against India-Russia ties and that they are both "dead economies", the MEA Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+s1UYKq0AFHBAwMGQ1>

spokesperson said: "Our bilateral relationships with various countries stand on their own merit and should not be seen from the prism of a third country. India and Russia have a steady and time-tested partnership." On Trump's anger at India buying Russian defence equipment, he said, "The sourcing of our defence requirements is determined solely by our national security imperatives and strategic assessments."

While India does depend on Russia for the defence supplies, much of it is because of the legacy from the Soviet Union era. Although the dependency is about 60 to 70 per cent, India has, in the past few years, steadily diversified its defence purchases from countries including the US.

Yet, the framing by Trump — "I don't care what India does with Russia. They can take their dead economies down together, for all I care" — has been seen as offensive by many.

While his criticism of India putting high tariffs has been a pet grievance from his first term — when he called India a "tariff king" — the US President's latest statement described India's trade policies as "most strenuous and obnoxious".

Trump's remarks deepen Delhi's diplomatic challenge when India and the US are negotiating a bilateral trade deal.

There are two possible impulses that guide Trump's responses, according to Delhi's analysis.

First, his negotiating style to browbeat and bully the adversary by imposing high tariffs and try and get the deal on his own terms. This has been seen with China, where he imposed 145 per cent tariffs and then dialled down to 35 — after talks in Geneva.

Second, some in the Indian establishment feel that the US President has not taken very kindly to Delhi fact-checking Trump's claims on brokering a ceasefire. Not only has PM Narendra Modi conveyed this in the phone call with Trump on June 17, but Indian ministers and officials have repeatedly denied the claim.

Despite not stating that President Trump is a "liar" — as demanded by Congress leader and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi — the Indian government has forcefully contradicted the US President.

But New Delhi feels that Trump's remarks threaten to undo the hard work made by the two countries as "strategic partners" in a relationship that was framed as the "defining partnership of the 21st century" by US President Barack Obama.

South Block is, however, trying to not get drawn into an emo-

tional and angry response, and is projecting restraint amid the US President's verbal tirade and social media blitzkrieg of epithets directed at India.

While the Commerce ministry said it has "taken note" of Trump's statement on bilateral trade and the Government is studying its implications, sources said that any response had to be shorn of emotion.

"India and the US have been engaged in negotiations on concluding a fair, balanced and mutually beneficial bilateral trade agreement over the last few months. We remain committed to that objective," the Commerce ministry statement had said.

Sources said that negotiators from both sides are in touch and they have to be immune from the noise.

The diplomatic challenge is three-fold, sources said: how long can Delhi stand its ground against the US; whether India can engage with Trump's inner circle; and whether they can overcome the distrust fuelled by the Trump's comments in the long term.

"We will not get drawn into the tit-for-tat response with the US President, and our negotiators have been asked to not pay attention to Trump's unique style of public negotiations. Those are best left to be done away from the public gaze," a source said.

• Why Trump talk of Pak's 'massive oil reserves' is hot air — not much else

at New Delhi over its heavy imports of Russian oil, which has surfaced as an irritant in the India-US relationship.

The backdrop also features the heightened tension between India and Pakistan following their military conflagration in May after the Pahalgam terror attack. Trump has repeatedly claimed that he brokered the ceasefire between the two countries, while India has maintained that there was no mediation by any third country. To be sure, Pakistan's proven recoverable conventional crude oil reserves are pegged at 234-353 million barrels by various estimates, while India's proven reserves are estimated at 4.8-5 billion barrels, or nearly 14 times of Pakistan's. Going by proven oil reserves, Pakistan is ranked between 50 and 55 in the world, compared to India's ranking in the early 20s.

As for natural gas, OPEC's latest annual statistical bulletin pegs India's proven reserves at 1.15 billion cubic metres (bcm), 2.7 times of Pakistan's 0.43 bcm. Pakistan's oil production is estimated at around 60,000 barrels per day, only about a tenth of India's domestic oil output of over 580,000 barrels per day. Both Pakistan and

India are heavily reliant on energy imports to meet domestic demand, and oil is among the top imports for both in value terms.

Exploration efforts in Pakistan have yielded very limited success so far. So what is the source of this hypothesis that Pakistan is sitting on "massive" oil reserves? The basis of this assessment may lie in a decade-old report.

In 2015, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) released a report that estimated around 91 billion barrels of "technically recoverable" shale oil resources in Pakistan, based on available data and technical analysis, but without any exploratory effort. The same report pegged India's technically recoverable shale oil resources at 3.8 billion barrels. These estimates, however, cannot be equated to proven reserves. In fact, only a fraction of such technically recoverable estimates may eventually be produced, if at all, according to experts.

Technically recoverable resources refer to the oil and gas that can, theoretically, be produced based on current technology, industry practice and geologic knowledge. A much smaller subset of these are what are known

as "economically recoverable resources", or oil and gas that could be produced without incurring a loss. Again, not all of these estimated economically recoverable resources may actually be produced due to various technical and economic considerations. A much smaller subset of these resources is what are known as proven or proved reserves — "the most certain oil and gas resource category".

"Proved reserves are volumes of oil and natural gas that geologic and engineering data demonstrate with reasonable certainty to be recoverable in future years from known reservoirs under existing economic and operating conditions," the EIA said in the 2015 report. Notably, the US agency also said that the recoverability of shale oil was quite low — ranging from 3 per cent to 7 per cent of the oil in-place, with exceptional cases being as high as 10 per cent or as low as 1 per cent.

Also, given that all the assessments were based largely on available geological data and without any real exploratory data or exploration effort, it is anybody's guess how much shale oil production may actually be economically viable and feasible for

Pakistan. Experts believe it is highly improbable that Islamabad will win an oil lottery big enough to offset its own oil imports and be left with excess volumes to export to India, the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil.

A few reports of hydrocarbon discoveries have appeared in the Pakistani press over the past couple of years, but there is little data available in the public domain to back those claims made by officials. And again, much of the claims are reported to have been based on surveys and studies, without any significant exploratory effort.

It is also worth noting that hydrocarbon exploration itself is an extremely expensive and long-stationed endeavour that could last multiple years, which is usually followed by another years-long development phase, before commercial production can start. For Pakistan, this would mean a significant lead time before any of its potential oil reserves can be tapped into, apart from billions of dollars worth of investments that its fragile economy may not be able to afford. Perhaps that is where one or more of the American oil majors may come in with their deep pockets.

• With US their key market, worried apparel exporters seek Govt help

Textile Industry (ITI), New Delhi based-industry chambers of the textile and clothing sector, also said that the latest US tariff announcement has added to the challenges that India's textile and apparel exporters were already grappling with.

"The latest US tariff announcement, following which the tariff rates have been substantially reduced for many countries including Bangladesh, against whom we are competing for a larger share of the US market, will compound the difficulties for India's textile and apparel exporters as we will be handicapped by a severe duty disadvantage," ITI Chairman Rakesh Mehra said.

Seeking government intervention for easier availability of raw materials, ITI said while the tariff rate for India has been set at 25 per cent, the rate for competing countries such as Bangladesh is 20 per cent, Indonesia and

Cambodia are 19 per cent each and Vietnam is 20 per cent.

India's market share rising

While China continues to be the top exporter of textile and apparel items in the US, its market share has come down from 27.4 per cent in 2020 to 21.9 per cent in 2024. However, India's market share has been rising.

The US is a key market for Indian Ready-Made Garments (RMG) exports; its share in India's total garment exports in 2024 stood at 33 per cent, AEPC said. India's presence in the US garment import market increased from 4.5 per cent in 2020 to 5.8 per cent in 2024. India ranks fourth among the top RMG exporters to the US, it said.

Top three most exported products by India to US: cotton T-shirts (9.71 per cent); women's or girls' dresses of cotton (6.52 per cent); babies' garments of cotton (5.46 per cent), etc. The top three

exports of India to the US hold 10, 36, and 20 per cent share, respectively, in the US total imports of these products globally," the export promotion council said.

Capacity building efforts

The Ministry of Textiles on Friday said that the overall exports from the sectors including handicrafts has grown 5 per cent during FY25, at \$37.7 billion, compared to \$35.8 billion during the previous financial year. The Ministry also said that it has implemented the Scheme for Integrated Textile Park (SITP) to provide support for setting up textile parks with world-class, state-of-the-art infrastructure in textile hubs across the country.

The government has finalised setting up of PM Mega Integrated Textile Region and Apparel (PM-MITRA) parks at seven sites — Tamil Nadu (Virudhunagar), Telangana (Warangal), Gujarat (Navasari), Karnataka

(Kalaburagi), Madhya Pradesh (Dhar), Uttar Pradesh (Lucknow) and Maharashtra (Amravati) with an outlay of Rs 4,445 crore for a period of seven years up to 2027-28.

Negotiations stuck over agriculture

While the in-person India-US trade negotiations are expected to continue after the second half of August, the deal is stuck over sensitive sectors such as agriculture and automobiles. The *Indian Express* had reported last week that India is unlikely to agree to the US demands to accept genetically modified (GM) agricultural products such as corn and soya.

This assumes significance as agriculture remains one of the contentious issues between the two countries, and the United States Trade Representative (USTR) has previously flagged restrictions on its GM products by countries as discriminatory.

• EC publishes draft electoral rolls

draft rolls without due notice and a speaking order from the ERO or AERO concerned. "If an elector is dissatisfied with an ERO's decision, they may appeal to the District Magistrate or the Chief Electoral Officer," the CEO said. Volunteers have been trained to assist citizens in filing such appeals. The commission urged political parties to meticulously review the draft rolls. "Parties have been asked to meticulously review the draft rolls published on August 1 and assist in filing claims and objections where necessary," the CEO said.

The EC said that the published draft rolls include all eligible voters who submitted enumeration forms. Lists of deceased voters, those who migrated, and individuals

who could not be traced have been shared with all 12 recognised political parties for review.

Officials said approximately 22 lakh deceased electors, 7 lakh duplicate entries, and 36 lakh voters who have either migrated permanently or were untraceable were identified. Patna was the district with the highest number of pending enumeration forms, with 3,95,500 yet to be received. Madhubani came next with 3,52,545. Other districts with high pendency include Gopalganj (3,10,363), Purvi Champaran (3,16,793), Samastipur (2,83,955), and Muzaffarpur (2,82,845). Districts with the lowest number of pending enumeration forms were Sheikhpura (26,256), Sheohar (28,166), and Arwal (30,180).

14 GOVT & POLITICS

12th Fail is best film; SRK, Vikrant Massey, Rani win best actor awards

TRISHA MUKHERJEE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

VIDHU VINOD Chopra's *12th Fail*, which captures a young man's journey to become an IPS officer, was adjudged the best feature film at the 71st National Film Awards for 2023 announced on Friday.

The film's lead actor, Vikrant Massey, shared the best actor award with Shah Rukh Khan, who won for his double role of a father and a son in the action film *Jawan*. This is Shah Rukh's first National Award in his glittering multi-decade career.

"Thank you for honouring me with the National Award. Thanks to the jury, the 188 min-istry... *Iss samman ke liye Bharat Sarkar ka dhanyawad*. Overwhelmed with the love showered upon me. Half a hug to everyone today...." Khan wrote on X.

The award for the best actress in a leading role went to Rani Mukerji for her portrayal of a mother fighting for her children in *Mrs. Chatterjee Vs Norway*. This is the prolific veteran's first National Award as well.

Mukerji, 47, said: "For me, this award is also a validation of my 30-year body of work, my dedication to my craft with which I feel a deeply spiritual connection..."

The jury, headed by filmmaker Ashutosh Gowariker, praised Massey's performance as one with "raw honesty and emotional depth". Gowariker also said Shah Rukh's first national award "after such a long and prolific career" was "historic".

Massey, 38, said it was a dream come true moment for him. "It is a privilege to be sharing my first National Award with an icon like Shah Rukh Khan," he said.

While best direction went to Sudipto Sen for *The Kerala Story*, Karan Johar took home the award for "best popular film providing wholesome entertainment" for *Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani*. Asked about the award for *The Kerala Story*, which had sparked controversy, Gowariker said: "It's a difficult topic, and to convey that with this kind of

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71st NATIONAL FILM AWARDS (FEATURE)

■ **Best feature film:**
12th Fail by Vidhu Vinod Chopra

■ **Best debut film of a director:** Ashish Bende (*Aatmapamphlet*)

■ **Best popular film providing wholesome entertainment:** *Rocky Aur Rani Kii Prem Kahaani* by Karan Johar

■ **Best feature film promoting national, social, and environmental values:** *Sam Bahadur* by Meghna Gulzar

■ **Best direction:** *The Kerala Story* by Sudipto Sen

■ **Best actor in a supporting role:** Vijayaraghavan (*Pookkalam*) & Muthupettai



■ **Best actor in a leading role:** Shah Rukh Khan (*Jawan*) & Vikrant Massey (*12th Fail*)

■ **Best actress in a leading role:** Rani Mukerji (*Mrs. Chatterjee Vs Norway*)

Somu Bhaskar (*Parking*)

■ **Best actress in a supporting role:** Urvashi (*Ullazhukku*) & Janki Bodiwala (*Vash*)

■ **Best male playback singer:** P V N S Rohit for *Baby* (*Premisthanna*)

■ **Best female playback**

singer: Shilpa Rao for *Jawan* (*Chaliya*)

■ **Best cinematography:** Prasantanu Mohapatra (*The Kerala Story*)

■ **Best screenplay:** Sai Rajesh Neelam (*Baby*), Ramkumar Balakrishnan (*Parking*) & Deepak Kingrani (*Sir Ek Banda Kaafi Hai*)

■ **Best non-feature film:** *Flowering Man* by Soumyajit Ghosh Dastidar

■ **Best documentary (non-feature):** *God Culture and Human* by Rishiraj Agarwal

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clarity is something that we as a jury felt was the need to applaud."

The Sanya Malhotra-starrer comedy *Kathal: A Jackfruit Mystery* won best feature in Hindi language. The Telugu film *Hanu-Man*, a pan-Indian hit, bagged the awards in the best film in AVGC (animation, visual effects, gaming & comic) and best action direction categories.

The awards for the supporting roles, both actor and actress, were swept by non-Hindi cinema. While the former was shared by Vijayaraghavan for *Pookkalam* (Malayalam) and M S Bhaskar for *Parking* (Tamil), the latter went to both Urvashi for *Ullazhukku* (Malayalam) and Janki Bodiwala for *Vash* (Gujarati).

The winners were chosen from a total of 332 feature film entries, 115 non-feature film entries, 27 book entries, and 16 critics' entries.

SC refuses to entertain petition to apply POSH Act to political parties

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

THE SUPREME Court on Friday refused to entertain a petition seeking application of the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013, known as the POSH Act, to political parties, saying it falls in the domain of the policymakers.

The prayer made in the petition is exclusively within the competence of the legislature or within the domain of policy of the executive. As such, we are not inclined to entertain," CJI B.R. Gavi, presiding over a two-judge bench, told senior advocate

Rekha Gupta, who pressed for the court's intervention. The counsel told the bench, also comprising Justice K Vinod Chandran, that "an important issue like this, they (legislators) are not acting upon, the vacuum is still continuing".

The CJI suggested, "There must be not less than 25-30 MPs who are women. Ask them to present a private Bill."

The counsel said that she was not seeking a direction to Parliament to legislate but only interpretation as to what constitutes "workplace, employer and employee" under the Act because a Kerala High Court judgment says

it will not apply to political parties.

The court said, in that case, she should challenge the high court order. The counsel said she would do so and sought permission to withdraw her petition.

The court allowed this and gave her "further liberty to take such steps as are advisable in law".

The POSH Act requires both public and private workplaces to set up an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) to hear complaints of sexual harassment. The plea contended that when it comes to political parties, "the presence of Internal Complaints Committees (ICCs) to address sexual harassment is inconsistent".

The petition said that despite the expansive definitions of "employee" and "workplace" in the Act, women engaged in political work, particularly at the grassroots, continue to face rampant sexual harassment with no structured mechanism in place to address this. Citing UN Women (2013) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) studies, it said psychological and sexual harassment in political spaces is not isolated but systemic. It added that political work is a form of employment or engagement and must be recognised as such under the Act to ensure protection and accountability.

15 EXPRESS NETWORK

‘Entire Himachal may vanish’: SC sounds environment alarm

ANANTHAKRISHNAN G
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

“THE DAY is not far when the entire state of Himachal Pradesh may vanish,” said the Supreme Court Friday as it sounded the alarm on the deteriorating environmental situation in the state that has frequently borne the brunt of natural disasters.

Flagging a range of issues in the ecologically sensitive region, a bench of justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan directed the registration of a case in the public interest and sought the Himachal Pradesh government’s response within four weeks.

The bench was hearing a hotel group’s challenge to a Himachal Pradesh High Court order that restricted constructions in an area declared as a green zone by the state’s Town and Country Planning Department in June.

Refusing to interfere with the High Court’s decision, the top court said it “would like to say something in the larger interest of the state of Himachal Pradesh and its inhabitants”.

“...We are afraid to say that it is too late in the day for the state to issue such notifications and try to save the situation. The situation in the state of Himachal Pradesh has gone from bad to worse. The severe ecological im-

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A landslide blocks a road at Samletu in Himachal Pradesh’s Bilaspur district on Friday. PTI

Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+jUYKq0AFHBawMGQ1> balance and other environmental conditions have led to serious natural calamities over a period of years. This year also hundreds of people perished in the floods and landslides & thousands of properties got destroyed,” it said.

According to the State Emergency Operation Centre, Himachal Pradesh has suffered losses to the tune of ₹1,539 crore since the onset of monsoon on June 20. So far, 94 people have died and 36 are missing in rain-related incidents while 1,352 houses have been fully or partially damaged.

The court went on to list a number of serious concerns in the Himalayan state — the “visible” and “alarming” impact of climate change; deforestation; hydropower projects reportedly

causing water shortages and landslides; unchecked tourism affecting the ecological balance and straining resources; and relentless construction of four-lane roads, tunnels and multi-storey buildings to cater to the increasing footfall.

Communities living near hydro-electric projects frequently report water scarcity, landslides, and even structural cracks in their homes, the bench said, adding: “Apparently, the minimum outflow of water, as is contractually mandated, is not being adhered to by the project proponents, resulting in the vanishing of aquatic life. In fact, the mighty trans Himalayan river Sutlej stands reduced to a rivulet.”

“During peak seasons, the influx of tourists results in traffic

congestion, waste generation, noise pollution, overuse of water resources, and encroachment into ecologically sensitive areas. Hill towns often struggle with waste disposal and water shortages during tourist seasons. Every step of the waste management process presents difficulties for the state,” it said.

“The danger to the state’s natural richness is growing as a result of human greed and apathy,” it said, calling for immediate, sustainable planning and conservation measures.

The bench said all Himalayan states need to collate resources and expertise to ensure their development plans are cognisant of environmental challenges.

“All that we want to convey today is that it is high time that the state pays attention to what we have observed and starts taking necessary action at the earliest in the right direction. The Union of India also owes an obligation to see that the ecological imbalance in the state does not get further disturbed and natural calamities do not occur.” “We want to impress upon the State Government and Union of India respectively that earning revenue is not everything. If things proceed the way they are as on date, then the day is not far when the entire state of HP may vanish in thin air from the map of the country,” it said.

HC bars TN govt from naming schemes after living persons, using party symbols

ARUN JANARDHANAN
CHENNAI, AUGUST 1

THE MADRAS HC Friday restrained the Tamil Nadu government from naming any new or rebranded schemes after living persons. The court also barred use of portraits of ideological figures or former CMs, and any insignia or emblem of the ruling DMK in government advertisements promoting such schemes.

The First Division Bench, comprising Chief Justice Manindra Mohan Shrivastava and Justice Sunder Mohan, delivered the order while hearing

a PIL petition filed by AIADMK MP C Ve Shanmugam.

The petitioner had sought a ban on the state’s use of CM M K Stalin’s name in public outreach programmes such as Ungaludan Stalin (With You, Stalin) and Mudhalvarin Mugavari (Chief Minister’s Address), which he claimed violated judicial guidelines and the EC’s code.

Shanmugam’s counsel, senior advocate Vijay Narayan, argued that these government-funded welfare programmes featured “the name of the incumbent Chief Minister in the nomenclature of the scheme” and included “pictorial representations/photographs

of certain ideological leaders and former chief ministers” affiliated with the ruling party. He alleged that even the “party logo/emblem is being printed in the outreach programmes”.

The HC order said, “We are inclined to pass an interim order to the effect that while launching and operating government welfare schemes through various advertisements, the name of any living personality, photograph of any former Chief Minister/ideological leaders or party insignia/emblem/flag of (DMK) shall not be included.”

The court cited previous SC rulings in Common Cause v

Union of India and State of Karnataka v Common Cause, reminding that while publication of a sitting CM’s photo may be allowed under certain exceptions, “the use of photographs of ideological leaders or former CMs, prima facie, would be against the directives of the Supreme Court”.

The court said, “It would not be permissible to mention the name of the living political personality in the nomenclature of the government scheme. Moreover, using the name of any ruling political party, its insignia/logo/emblem/flag also appears to be prima facie against directives of the Supreme Court and the EC.”



This isn't end of the deal



RAJAT KATHURIA

Donald Trump's latest salvo is a negotiating strategy.
The India-US trade talks will go on

THE CRUDE FACT

How much India should trade with any country must be guided by its own national interest, not Western diktat

BETWEEN 2020-21 AND 2024-25, India's imports from Russia have soared from \$5.5 billion to \$63.8 billion, much of it on account of mineral fuels (\$2.1 billion to \$56.9 billion). Out of the 244.5 million tonnes (mt) of crude petroleum that India imported last fiscal, Russia's share was over 87.5 mt, making it the country's top supplier. It's this trade that US President Donald Trump is now targeting by threatening to levy a "penalty", on top of the 25 per cent general tariff on Indian goods imports that he announced on Wednesday. By not specifying how much that additional penalty would be, he is basically nudging India to cut down, if not stop, energy (and defence) purchases from Russia. This comes just over two weeks after NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte warned India, China and Brazil of secondary sanctions if they continued to do business with Russia and help sustain its current war spending against Ukraine.

Whatever be the quantum, if at all, of the penalty — a new bill introduced in the US Congress seeks to impose a 500 per cent duty on all goods and services imports from countries "that knowingly engage in the exchange of Russian-origin uranium and petroleum products" — one thing is certain: The Western sanctions noose is tightening. For India, too, buying Russian oil cannot be business as before. The Narendra Modi government has so far — rightly — not been defensive over massively stepping up sourcing of Russian crude that is available at a discount relative to global benchmark prices. It has cited both the need to prioritise the energy security of India's people as well as the fact that the ban on imports of Russian oil by the US or European Union is not covered under any United Nations sanctions. That argument — about the purchase of this oil being well within India's legitimate and moral rights — still holds.

Pragmatic and matter-of-fact considerations have informed its expanding trade with Russia, even at the risk of Western displeasure, but at the same time, there are geopolitical costs. Those costs could significantly go up, as the EU and US (the Trump administration seems to have closed ranks) increasingly strike at Russia's war machine by targeting its energy revenue streams. That nearly 36 per cent of India's crude imports come from a single country isn't good in the best and safest of times. Prudence demands — and this is important from the standpoint of securing the country's long-term energy security — that costs beyond the immediate also be factored in. That would mean diversifying the sources of oil supply, similar to de-risking trade with China. Whether and how much India should trade with any country must be guided by its own national interest.

HERE COMES NISAR

The satellite, which could be a game-changer, is a reminder that high science requires global collaborations

THE LAUNCH of the world's first remote sensing satellite, Sputnik 1, heralded the era of remote sensing. Since that epic moment in 1957, hundreds of Earth observation satellites have enhanced the understanding of the planet. The NISAR satellite, launched on Wednesday, will capture details on the Earth's surface, which are stunning even by the high standards set in remote sensing in the past 68 years. The satellite, jointly operated by India's premier space research agency ISRO and NASA, will generate 80 TB of data every day, three times more than any other existing Earth observation systems. It will enhance the understanding of ecosystems and enable the study of natural hazards such as earthquakes and landslides at a time when the chances of such environmental threats are much higher compared to any other period in recent human history. NISAR's radar systems will scan nearly all the planet's land and ice surfaces twice every 12 days, tracking shifts as slight as a centimetre. The satellite will be able to see through clouds, smoke, and even thick vegetation, both during the day and at night, in all weather conditions. The information is likely to be available in a matter of hours, enabling governments and even local communities to frame urgent responses during extreme weather events such as floods and storms. NISAR, therefore, promises to be a game-changer in disaster management.

The satellite's power comes from its two synthetic aperture radars (SARs), which are designed to capture complementary sets of images for the same location at the same time. This will provide a much more detailed view of the Earth compared to what has been possible so far. One of the radars can capture minute details, including the planet's undulations, and study trees even in dense forests — this can help estimate carbon stocks. The other SAR, which has a shorter wavelength, is equipped to capture features such as water bodies or fields and provide data on soil moisture and the maturity stages of crops. This could help agriculture research agencies pass on crucial information to farming communities.

Placing two SARs on one satellite was a major engineering challenge. That's one reason NISAR was more than 15 years in the making. The project was initiated by NASA in 2008. ISRO joined the endeavour four years later. The Indian space agency's contribution was crucial to the mission. It designed and built one of the radar systems, created the data handling and downlinking systems and provided NISAR's launch vehicle, the GSLV-F16. The collaboration was spared the funding cuts inflicted on NASA by the Trump administration. Its success is a message to the US President that high science is almost impossible without meaningful partnerships between nations.

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TWO DECADES AGO, the idea of a trade deal between India and the US seemed pure fantasy. After all, the divide between the two on tariffs, standards and double standards, to be mischievous, seemed irreconcilable. Two decades, however, is a significant period in economic development — and an eternity in politics. Today, change is so rapid that what looked impractical just yesterday appeared to be within the realm of possibility. Or so it seemed.

How did we even get here? India's recent shift in trade diplomacy, moving from a cautious approach to actively pursuing free trade agreements, reflects a strategic imperative to diversify trade partnerships and enhance its position in global supply chains. It is also a reflection of the need to explore alternatives to trade liberalisation, albeit guardedly, to the multilateral system, currently in an extended coma. This pivot is therefore driven by self-interest, the desire to expand exports, attract investment and counter potential geopolitical headwinds.

For President Donald Trump, trade diplomacy is the equivalent of levying punitive import tariffs on those countries that he believes have free-riders on the open US market for decades. The script aimed at the MAGA constituency is irresistible: Use tariffs as a negotiating tool to extract concessions from "errant" trading partners, bump up government revenues, reduce, or better, eliminate trade deficits and bring manufacturing back home to America. The fact that none of this, except strong-arming the EU, Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, South Korea and perhaps India into concessions, will work does not restrain the President and his advisors for too long and need not detain us either. Trade deficits and limited but key manufacturing are manifestations of structural features of the US economy, but let that be a topic for another day.

For now, POTUS has announced a significant hardening of the trade stance against India, declaring a 25 per cent tariff on Indian exports effective August 1. The mini trade deal between India and US that was to be agreed upon after being deferred to August 1 is deferred again, but hopefully not abandoned. The 25 per cent threat, almost the same as the Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+JUYKq0AFHBAwMGQ1>

What, then, could have been the sticking point? Perhaps agriculture and dairy. It is no secret that US lobbies are looking to sell more cheese, milk, maize, soy, corn, and other similar GM products. Throw in nuts and some fruits and you have the makings of a potential disruptor to the vast agriculture, including the dairy sector, in India, that accounts for roughly 45 per cent of employment. For India, this has been a red line due to the overwhelming number of small farmers, not to speak of potentially damaging political consequences.

unenforced April 2 "Liberation Day" tariff of 26 per cent, is accompanied by an additional, as-yet-unspecified "penalty" for India's continued substantial purchases of crude oil and defence equipment from Russia. The official justifications are India's "far too high" tariffs, its "most strenuous and obnoxious non-monetary trade barriers", and its strong energy and military ties with Russia. The fact that the President described India as a "friend" in the same breath softens the blow, leaving the door ajar for further negotiations, but does nothing to alleviate its transactional nature, disregarding the harsh asymmetries in levels of development between India and the US. Thus, restoring the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) under which India gets non-reciprocal, duty-free treatment for several products to push development, while on the negotiating table, looks improbable even if US per capita income at \$90,000 is 30 times that of India. Even if it were on the table, it is unlikely to have been a sticking point. A fallout of that is a dubious but de facto acknowledgement of the blunt narrative that India is the fastest-growing emerging market and soon to be fourth-largest global economy. In private, I think all negotiators will admit it is not a match of equals. In the parlance of golf, a handicap such as the GSP is justified.

What, then, could have been the sticking point? Perhaps agriculture and dairy. It is no secret that US lobbies are looking to sell more cheese, milk, maize, soy, corn, and other similar GM products. Throw in nuts and some fruits and you have the makings of a potential disruptor to the vast agriculture, including the dairy sector, in India, that accounts for roughly 45 per cent of employment. For India, this has been a red line due to the overwhelming number of small farmers, not to speak of potentially damaging political consequences.

Allowing highly subsidised US farm produce would spell political disaster. Especially, when the government has had to face severe criticism on the unsuccessful doubling of farmer income policy. Besides, the infamous farm laws had to be withdrawn and farmer protests managed. In this background, even a nuanced and limited opening of agriculture that protects small

farmer interest, as some have argued, would fall prey to a carefully constructed narrative of the deal being anti-farmer, and therefore, against national interest. For this reason, India has maintained this stance in recent FTAs with Australia and the UK.

The US negotiators perhaps already know this only too well. President Trump's latest salvo is no doubt a negotiating strategy, buoyed in part by the success of similar threats to other countries. For example, the US signed a significant agreement in July with the European Union (EU), where the EU agreed to a 15 per cent tariff on most European goods, down from a threatened 30 per cent. Ditto for Vietnam (from 46 per cent to 20 per cent), Indonesia (from 32 per cent to 19 per cent) and Japan (from 25 per cent to 15 per cent).

Some of these countries are our competitors for labour-intensive products such as jewellery, textiles, footwear, leather, toys and handicrafts and will have cheaper access into the US market, at least for now. Coercion has been defined as success in the US and countries have caved in to mitigate the risk of even greater economic disruption to their economies. India might be willing to give concessions in areas like data localisation requirements, digital services taxes and even digital trade rules. It should be noted that India abolished the Equalisation Levy, aka the "Google Tax", in 2024. It was a tax measure on digital transactions by non-resident companies earning revenue from users in India without a physical presence. Agriculture, however, is a different kettle of fish.

What a difference a few weeks has made. From being "very close" to being completed, the India-US mini deal hangs in the balance, although it is by no means dead. Scarlett O'Hara's line from *Gone with the Wind* — "tomorrow is another day" — captures the enduring optimism, but in the present, it reflects a capricious and fragile global state in which uncertainty reigns supreme and the exercise of discretion is a crafty manifestation of power.

The writer is dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and professor of Economics at Shiv Nadar University. Views are personal

An international crew of four astronauts launched toward the International Space Station from Florida on Friday aboard a SpaceX rocket, beating gloomy weather to embark on a routine NASA mission that could be the first of many to last a couple months longer than usual. Two NASA astronauts, a Russian cosmonaut and Japanese astronaut - boarded SpaceX's Dragon capsule. **REUTERS**

PRESIDENT SAYS 'HIGHLY PROVOCATIVE STATEMENTS' TRIGGERED MOVE

Trump deploys nuclear submarines near Russia over war of words with Medvedev

WILL WEISSERT

WASHINGTON, AUGUST 1

IN A warning to Russia, President Donald Trump said Friday he's ordering the repositioning of two US nuclear submarines "based on the highly provocative statements" of the country's former president Dmitry Medvedev.

Trump posted on his social media site that based on the "highly provocative statements" from Medvedev he had "ordered two Nuclear Submarines to be positioned in the appropriate regions, just in case these foolish and inflammatory statements are more than just that." Trump added, "Words are very important, and can often lead to unintended consequences, I hope this will not be one of those instances."

It wasn't immediately clear what impact Trump's order would have on US nuclear subs, which are routinely on patrol in the world's hotspots, but it comes at a delicate moment in the US's relations with Moscow.

Trump has said that special envoy Steve Witkoff is heading to Russia to push Moscow to agree to a ceasefire in its war with Ukraine and has threatened new economic sanctions if progress is not made. He cut his 50-day deadline for action to 10 days, with that window set to expire next week.

The post about the sub repositioning came after Trump, in the

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MEANWHILE, IN UKRAINE: The site of a Russian strike in Donetsk region, Thursday, *Reuters*

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wee hours of Thursday morning, had posted that Medvedev was a "failed former President of Russia" and warned him to "watch his words." Medvedev responded hours later by writing, "Russia is right on everything and will continue to go its own way."

Medvedev was president from 2008 to 2012 while Putin was barred from seeking a second consecutive term but stepped aside to let him run again. Now deputy chairman of Russia's National Security Council, which Putin chairs,

Medvedev has been known for his provocative and inflammatory statements since the start of the war in 2022, a U-turn from his presidency, when he was seen as liberal and progressive.

On July 15, after Trump announced plans to supply Ukraine with more weapons via its NATO allies and threatened additional tariffs against Moscow, Medvedev posted, "Trump issued a theatrical ultimatum to the Kremlin. The world shuddered, expecting the consequences. Belligerent Europe was

disappointed. Russia didn't care."

Earlier this week, he wrote, "Trump's playing the ultimatum game with Russia: 50 days or 10" and added, "He should remember 2 things: 1. Russia isn't Israel or even Iran. 2. Each new ultimatum is a threat and a step towards war. Not between Russia and Ukraine, but with his own country."

President Putin, meanwhile, said Friday that Moscow hoped for more peace talks with Ukraine but that the momentum of the war was in its favour, signalling no shift in its stance despite a loom-

EXPLAINED Rare even for Trump

This is the first time President Donald Trump has referenced the US nuclear arsenal in his confrontation with Russia over Ukraine — a slow shift toward a more antagonistic stance toward Russia. Public flexing of nuclear muscles is rare even for Trump, who last made explicit threats to North Korea in 2018. The US has never responded to such threats from Moscow, even when they came from President Vladimir Putin.

ing sanctions deadline from Washington. Putin said three sessions of peace talks with Ukraine had yielded some positive results, and Russia was expecting negotiations to continue.

"As for any disappointments... all disappointments arise from inflated expectations," he said. "But in order to approach the issue peacefully, it is necessary to conduct detailed conversations. And not in public, but this must be done calmly, in the quiet of the negotiation process."

**AP
WITH REUTERS INPUTS**

21 ECONOMY

07.81 ▼ 265

Pak, Bangladesh among 50 countries now with lower US tariffs than India

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

AFTER SECURING trade deals on his terms with partners such as the European Union, Japan and South Korea, US President Donald Trump has ramped up pressure on India by imposing lower tariffs on more than 50 countries including Pakistan and Bangladesh, compared to the 25 per cent levied on India, a new set of reciprocal tariffs released on Friday showed.

The US has set lower tariffs on several competitors in the American market, which could hurt Indian exports, especially in the labour-intensive and high-value electronics sectors. Even without a trade deal, the US has announced 20 per cent tariffs on Bangladesh — a key competitor in the readymade garments (RMG) category not just in the US but also in several Western markets.

The new tariffs are set to come into effect on August 7.

Even Pakistan, with whom the US has announced a trade deal, will have lower tariffs set at 19 per cent. Trump had said that Pakistan and the US would work together on developing large Pakistani oil reserves. However, Pakistan has seen a number of unsuccessful oil exploration attempts.

Moreover, Vietnam at 20 per cent, and Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines at 19 per cent each, are Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries that have also been assigned lower tariffs, potentially giving them better market access in the US in the electrical and electronics sectors compared to India.

While lower duties on Bangladesh and Pakistan could impact India's readymade garments exports to the US, a beneficial duty structure for Vietnam and Malaysia is expected to hurt India's fast growing non-leather footwear manufacturing along with the electronics manufacturing sector.

This comes after White House economic adviser Kevin Hassett on Wednesday said Trump has been frustrated with



US President Donald Trump speaks during an event for the signing of an executive order on Thursday in the Roosevelt Room of the White House. AP

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EXPLAINED
India's high job creating sector may take a hit

WHILE LOWER duties on Bangladesh and Pakistan could impact India's RMG exports to the US, a beneficial duty structure for Vietnam and Malaysia is expected to hurt India's fast growing non-leather footwear manufacturing along with the electronics manufacturing sector

how trade talks with India are progressing.

"I think President Trump is frustrated with the progress we've made with India but feels that a 25 per cent tariff will address and remedy the situation in a way that's good for the American people," Hassett said, as per Reuters.

The notification said that some trading partners that have agreed to, or are on the verge of concluding, meaningful trade and security agreements will remain subject to the fresh duties announced "until these agreements are finalised and subsequent orders are issued".

The India-US trade deal is stuck over sensitive sectors such as agriculture and automobiles. The Indian Express had reported last week that India is unlikely to

agree to US demands during the ongoing trade negotiations to accept genetically modified (GM) agricultural products such as corn and soya.

This assumes significance as agriculture remains one of the contentious issues between the two countries, and the United States Trade Representative (USTR) has previously flagged restrictions on its GM products by countries as discriminatory.

"The Food Safety and Standards Act of 2006 includes specific provisions for regulating food products derived from genetically engineered (GE) sources; however, as of 31 December 2024, the FSSAI was still in the process of establishing its regulations," according to the USTR report.

India's biotechnology approval processes are slow, opaque, and subject to political influences, and do not appear to take into account science-based approval processes for GE products in exporting countries," the USTR report earlier this year had said.

While India is seeking greater market access for its textiles, leather and footwear, the US is pushing for access to India's agricultural and dairy markets — a major hurdle, as Indian farmers often operate on small land parcels with limited technological support.

In contrast, the United States has demanded that India drop its genetically modified regulation.

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Fitch cuts India GDP forecast

New Delhi: Fitch Ratings on Friday cut India's GDP projections for FY26 to 6.3 per cent, from its 6.4 per cent forecast in April. Fitch said it expects limited direct impact of higher US tariffs on Indian corporates. PTI

Gross GST collections up 7.5% to ₹1.96 lakh cr in July

New Delhi: Gross Goods and Services Tax (GST) collections rose 7.5 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) to Rs 1.96 lakh crore in July (for sales in June), showed government data released on Friday.

While the pace of growth in gross GST collections rose to 7.5 per cent in July from 6.2 per cent, this is the second consecutive month wherein the growth rate has been in single digits and much lower after posting double-digit growth in the first two months of FY26. Net GST collections, after accounting for refunds, took a hit by growing by just 1.7 per cent to Rs 1.69 lakh crore in July as refunds jumped sharply by 66.8 per cent, the data showed. In June, net GST collections had risen 3.3 per cent.

Total refunds stood at Rs 27,147 crore in July, sharply up by 66.8 per cent y-o-y. While domestic refunds grew 117.6 per cent y-o-y to Rs 16,983 crore in July, refunds for imports were up 20 per cent to Rs 10,164 crore. In June, total refunds had risen 28.4 per cent to Rs 25,491 crore, with domestic refunds rising 14.1 per cent y-o-y to Rs 12,643 crore, while refunds on imports rose 46.4 per cent y-o-y to Rs 12,848 crore.

Total refunds stood at ₹27,147 crore in July, sharply up by 66.8% YoY

GST collections from imports rose 9.7 per cent year-on-year to Rs 52,712 crore in July as against 11.4 per cent growth seen in June at Rs 45,690 crore.

The revenue collections were better on the domestic front, with GST collections rising 6.7 per cent to Rs 1.43 lakh crore in July, up from 4.6 per cent growth at Rs 1.39 lakh crore in the previous month.

MS Mani, partner, Deloitte India, said, "While GST revenues for the past few months have been on an upward trajectory, the muted increase of 1.7 per cent in the net GST collections for the month and 8.4 per cent during this year can be attributed to the increased refunds. During the month, domestic refunds have more than doubled compared to the same month last year and during the current year refunds have increased by 46 per cent. This increase in refunds augers well for businesses," he said. ENS

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paper.indianexpress.com

23 Big Picture

RAVIK BHATTACHARYA
& ATRI MITRA

I CAN'T wait to get back to Mumbai," says Mostafa Kamal Sheikh, 52, his grey T-shirt blending into the grey of the unpainted walls behind him. "Mumbai never sleeps. I used to work from 3 pm to 1 am at night. There is money and there is life. Here in the village, everything shuts down by 6 pm and then it gets all dark," he says, sitting at his sister's home in Baghra village in West Bengal's Purba Bardhaman district.

Kamal's longing for Mumbai — the city where he has made a living since 1999, first as a dockyard worker and then as a 'jhal muri' vendor in Nalasopara — is as strong as his memory of a recent nightmare: of being detained by the Mumbai Police, tagged as an illegal Bangladeshi resident, handed over to the Border Security Force (BSF) and finally driven like cattle across the barbed-wire fencing at the border.

The nights he spent on the no-man's land across the border with Bangladesh were long — and much darker than his village at night.

When he finally got home on June 17 — after the "babus" had verified and established that he was who he claimed to be — Kamal was tired and broken.

Panic over detentions

Kamal is among the thousands of migrant workers from West Bengal who have over the last few months been detained and, in some cases like Kamal's, pushed into the neighbouring country as part of an ongoing drive against illegal Bangladeshis.

In March, *The Indian Express* had reported how more than 2,000 alleged illegal Bangladeshi immigrants were estimated to have been "pushed back" across the border by Indian authorities since Operation Sindoor began in the early hours of May 7. During this period, sources said, a similar number of immigrants showed up near the India-Bangladesh border voluntarily to cross over.

While the drive against alleged illegal migrants intensified post Pahalgam, reports of detentions had been coming in even earlier from across the country — from Gurgaon, where the Haryana government demolished slums in March, to similar drives in Assam and Gujarat.

With the drive focused on alleged "illegal Bangladeshis", it's the Bengali-speaking migrant workers in these cities who have borne the brunt, with some of them packing their bags and returning to their home state.

More detentions followed — in Gujarat and Rajasthan in May, followed by Maharashtra (Mumbai) and Odisha in June, and Delhi and Gurgaon in July. At Jharsuguda in Odisha, 444 Bengali-speaking migrant workers were kept in a detention centre before they were finally released.

Back in West Bengal, which is heading into an election year in a few months, the detentions have turned into a hot-button issue. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has initiated a 'Bhasa Andolan', calling the drive against illegal Bangladeshi migrants a move by BJP-ruled states to "terrorise Bengali-speaking people". While the ruling Trinamool and non-NDA parties such as CPI(M) and Congress have taken to the streets in protest, the BJP has accused Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and her party of indulging in appeasement and vote bank politics.

According to the state government, around 22 lakh migrant workers from West

Kamal with his mother
Karima Khatun Sheikh
at Baghra village in
West Bengal's Purba
Bardhaman district.

Partha Paul



'DRIVEN OUT LIKE CATTLE'

Across states, a drive against illegal Bangladeshi migrants has set off a wave of detentions of migrant workers from Bengal and instances of people being pushed into the neighbouring country. Trapped in a grey zone, with questions raised over their identity, some of them are now back home in Bengal. But as Mostafa Kamal Sheikh says, "For how long?"

Bengal work outside the state.

"This is an invisible but huge workforce. We had earlier demanded identity cards for our migrant workers. On April 26, we started a helpline as complaints started to pour in of people being harassed and wrongly detained. We coordinated with the administration and police as they visited houses for verification," says Asif Faruk, state secretary of the Paschim Banga Parijayi Ayika Mancha (Unified Forum for Migrants).

Samirul Islam, TMC Rajya Sabha member and chairman of the West Bengal Migrant

Labour Welfare Board, says, "We have no objection if the police detain and deport illegal Bangladeshi citizens. But thousands of residents of Bengal are being detained and harassed. Some have been pushed into Bangladesh. This is unacceptable."

"Also, the police in these states have not been sharing any data or details with our state government of those they are detaining. We get to know of the detentions from family members and then, our police and administration visit their houses and verify



their papers. If the papers are in order, we send a report along with the documents to our counterparts in different states seeking the release of the migrants," he says.

Kamal and others who were detained said that police often asked them to make a quick call to their families seeking land records, school certificates and birth certificates, before taking away their phones. Delay in submitting these documents often meant long detentions or worse — push-backs across the border, like in Kamal's case.

'Where are the jobs?'

It was an SOS video that Kamal and others sent out — recorded on the phones of Bangladeshi citizens in areas near the border — that highlighted their plight and got the state government to verify their documents and intimate the BSF about their legal status.

This was followed by a flag meeting between the BSF and BDR, after which they were finally handed over to the Indian side. Recalling the nightmarish events of June 9, when he was picked up by the Mumbai

Police from his Nalasopara room on suspicion of being a Bangladeshi citizen, he says, "I had come back from the jhal muri stall and was eating my dinner at 3 am, when police raided my room. I gave them all the documents they asked for, but they did not listen and took me away. They did not allow me to finish my dinner."

Kamal says he and a few others were detained for some days, after which his photograph and fingerprint were taken and the group sent to Pune, where they were handed over to the BSF.

"From there, we were taken to Agartala (Tripura). By then, there were over a 100 of us. From there, we were put into buses and taken to a BSF border camp, where we were divided into groups of four and taken to the border. Around 3 am on June 14, we were herded like cattle and told to pass through a small gate at the barbed wire fencing. Each of us were given 300 Bangladeshi taka and told to run. We pleaded with them, saying we are Indians, but we were caned. So we started running," says Kamal.

By sunrise, he says, personnel of the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) spotted them, after which they were told to sit in a spot on the no-man's land at the border. "Bangladeshi villagers gave us food and water. After two nights there, we were handed over to the BSF first and then to the West Bengal police at Mekhliganj police station (Cooch Behar). Finally, from Berhampore, we returned home," says Kamal.

Despite a lingering fear, many of his relatives, including his wife and son and nephew Yasir Sheikh, continue to stay in Mumbai. Kamal's sister Tahamina Sheikh, 53, says, "After Bakr Eid, Yasir went back to Mumbai (where he works in a brokerage firm). We don't know if he will be harassed, but he had no choice but to go because where are the jobs here? Every day I call him just to find out if he is safe."

Dabbing her moist eyes, Kamal's mother Karima Khatun Sheikh, 68, says, "Two of my sons and grandson are in Mumbai. When I heard about Kamal's situation, I thought I had lost him. It is Allah's blessings that have brought him back. Why did they have to beat him like that? He could have died. I wake up in the middle of every night wondering how my children are doing in Mumbai. And then, I can't go back to sleep. I keep worrying."

'I'll leave for Mumbai'

Mounds of sand and bricks lie on the road outside Kamal's sister's home in Baghra village. The house is under construction, like many others in the village.

Villagers say every second home has youngsters working outside the state, some as construction workers, others as welders, painters, goldsmiths.

"You ask me why we go outside to work? All this construction and building activity that you see in the village will answer your question. There is money there. More than double of what we can earn anywhere in West Bengal. We work and stay in havelis in Mumbai, Delhi, Rajasthan and Haryana so that our families back home can stay in concrete houses, so that our children can go to good schools and get private tuitions," says Kamal.

Kamal is now waiting for the "kagoz" that will, once again, establish his identity, before he leaves for Mumbai. "All my documents were seized when I was detained. I got my SIM card re-issued and thereafter, I got back my Aadhaar and E-Shram card. I am still waiting for my PAN card and my voter ID card. Once I get it, I will leave for Mumbai. How long can I stay home?," says Kamal.



With many leaving for West Bengal, the Gurgaon slum is deserted. Abhinav Saha

In slums near upscale societies, no city for Bengali migrants

ABHIMANYU HAZARIKA &
DRISHITI JAIN

ON A rainy afternoon, Sanju Bibi's one-room shanty in a slum behind DPS International School in Gurgaon is filled with the aroma of the chicken curry she is making for her husband and herself.

Till mid-July — around the time that hundreds of Bengali migrants from this slum started rushing back to their villages — Sanju, 36, a resident of West Bengal's Malda, worked as a cook in several houses in nearby upscale housing societies. Since then, she has been home, waiting for her monthly wages so she can go back home to Malda and get her documents verified by the police.

With a person from a nearby slum picked up during the verification drive, Sanju is afraid the police will come knocking on her doors.

"Darr ka mahaul hain tabse, tabhi toh koi nahin ruka hain yahan (Everyone is scared

since the detentions started, which is why many have left)," she says.

In May, the Union Home Ministry had issued a letter directing states to prepare a special operating procedure to deport "sufficient numbers" of Bangladeshis and Rohingya found staying in India illegally.

"... if any illegal foreign national is found living in any state/district, he will be detained and kept in a Special Holding Centre... the police is conducting special search operations for illegal foreign nationals to maintain law and order and peace in district Gurgaon," reads a July 22 District Magistrate order.

The fear among Gurgaon's Bengali-speaking migrants at present is reminiscent of the situation two years ago, in the aftermath of the violence in Nuh that had spilled over to the city. On their part, the local police had on July 26 said they were only rounding up "confirmed Bangladeshis" as part of their verification drive.



A resident of Paldi Meena shows her family's identity cards. Hamza Khan

Verification drive sends wave of fear in Jaipur settlement

HAMZA KHAN

AROUND 5 am in the first week of May, nearly 10 days after the April 22 Pahalgam attack, several police vehicles and at least one empty police bus arrived at Paldi Meena, an 'illegal' settlement on the outskirts of Jaipur. Knocking on the doors, the police asked the residents to stop outside with their documents.

The locality houses mostly Muslim and some Hindu families living in small houses with bare minimum necessities. Just outside the settlement, garbage and scraps are strewn around.

On April 30, the Rajasthan Chief Minister had directed the police to identify and deport illegal Bangladeshi nationals living in the state.

On that May morning, batons striking the front doors sent a wave of fear in the settlement. One of the residents, in her mid-40s, says around 25 women and a few

dozen men were rounded up for verification. "We were loaded on the police bus like cattle."

From beneath a pile of clothes in a makeshift almira in the wall, she brings out two pouches, fishes out their contents, and displays them on the bed: her family's Aadhaar cards, PAN cards, Jan ID cards (both old and new), mazdoor diary, etc.

Another resident, in his 50s, claims most families moved to the settlement, which falls under the Jaipur Development Authority (JDA), over the last two decades.

A senior government official said that Rajasthan started acting against Bangladeshis and Myanmar nationals residing illegally in the state in late April and early May, following instructions from the Home Affairs Ministry. A senior police official said over 1,000 Bangladeshis were deported after being picked up from Jaipur, Sikar, Alwar and surrounding areas.

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A migrant at work in Ahmedabad's Walled City. Brendan Dabhi

Our dialect is our identity, say workers in Gujarat's migrant hub

BRENDAN DABHI

"ONLY BENGALIS can truly detect the subtle difference in dialect between the Bengali we speak and the one spoken in Bangladesh," says Sajeet Banerjee, the vice-president of the Samast Bengali Samaj Association, a workers' collective.

To weed out illegal Bangladeshis living in Gujarat, since May, the police have been verifying the identity papers of thousands of migrants engaged in jewellery making at KT Plaza and Sahajanand Complex at Ratanpole in Ahmedabad's Walled City and hundreds of smaller units across the city since April.

According to the Samast Bengali Samaj Association, nearly 1.5 lakh Bengali migrants are currently engaged in gold, silver and imitation jewellery units, and in the garment sector in the city.

In bigger cities like Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Surat, verification drives

started in April, after the terror attack in Pahalgam. In Ahmedabad, the police launched a crackdown in the area around Chandola lake at 3 am on April 26. The police detained 890 people.

On August 1, DCP (Crime Branch) Ajit Rajan told *The Indian Express*, "All illegal immigrants were found living in the Chandola lake area itself. After the initial drive on April 26, following which we detained 209 people, 56 people who had fled from Chandola during the demolitions were detained."

Even as the raid was on at Chandola lake, the jewellery requests at Ratanpole received verification reunits from the police. Vishakha Dabral, DCP Zone 3, says, "No illegal immigrants were found at these units."

The manager of a jewellery making unit adds, "The matter in Chandola was completely different since Bangladeshis were detained there. But here, in the gold market, that (being a foreigner) is simply impossible since this business runs on trust."



Why Arya Samaj marriages are under the scanner of courts

AMAL SHEIKH & VINET BHALLA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

THE ALLAHABAD High Court last week directed the Uttar Pradesh government to investigate how "fake Arya Samaj Societies" that solemnise marriages without verifying the age of the bride and the groom, and in violation of the state's anti-conversion law, "have flourished throughout the State".

While hearing a case in which a Muslim man is accused of kidnapping, forcibly marrying, and committing statutory rape on a minor Hindu girl, Justice Prashant Kumar said that many marriages in the state, including those officiated by the Arya Samaj, bypass mandatory procedures under the UP anti-conversion law and marriage registration rules. The accused had claimed to have got married at an Arya Samaj temple.

The Allahabad HC's directives are the latest in a series of judicial orders that have called for a scrutiny of marriages solemnised by the Arya Samaj. Such weddings are granted legal sanction under the 88-year-old Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+JUVKQdAFHBAWMOQ1>

Arya Marriage Validation Act.

What is an Arya Samaj marriage?

The Arya Samaj was formally established by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875 as a Hindu revivalist movement. It gained prominence in northern India, especially Punjab (including present-day Pakistan), in the late 19th century.

Among other things, the Arya Samaj made the very first attempts to convert persons from other faiths or ideologies to its version of Vedic, monotheistic Hinduism through a process it called "shuddhi" (purification).

One of the ways it facilitated this was by having a progressive view of inter-caste and even interfaith marriages. In effect, till the Special Marriage Act, 1954 came into force, the Arya Samaj provided the only way for a Hindu to marry out of caste or religion and to still retain their caste.

In 1937, the Arya Marriage Validation Act was passed to "remove doubts" and recognise the validity of Arya Samaj marriages. These weddings take place as per a specific set of Hindu rituals, but only require the bride and groom to be of marriageable age and de-

clare themselves to be Arya Samajis — regardless of their caste or religion.

The 1937 law states: "Notwithstanding any provision of Hindu Law, usage or custom to the contrary, no marriage contracted whether before or after the commencement of this Act between two persons being at the time of the marriage Arya Samajists shall be invalid or shall be deemed over to have been invalid by reason only of the fact that the parties at any time belonged to different castes or different sub-castes of Hindus or that either or both of the parties at any time before the marriage belonged to a religion other than Hinduism."

Why do eloping couples often prefer Arya Samaj weddings?

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 — which covers not just Hindus but also Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs — recognises Arya Samaj marriages. Those belonging to other religions simply need to convert to Hinduism before the wedding.

However, several Arya Samaj organisations complete this conversion ritual expe-

ditiously. This means that Arya Samaj weddings are fast, often not taking more than a couple of hours. This, along with the ease of paperwork and relaxed requirements, make Arya Samaj weddings popular among eloping or runaway couples, who often belong to different castes or religions.

Interfaith couples also have the option to marry under the SMA, which allows marriage without the couple having to give up their faith. However, under the SMA, couples must give a 30-day public notice before they marry, leaving them vulnerable to harassment from their families or the authorities.

Why have questions been raised on Arya Samaj marriages?

A petition on whether Arya Samaj marriages must comply with the requirements of the Special Marriage Act has been pending before the Supreme Court since 2022.

However, since a number of BJP-ruled states have passed stringent anti-conversion laws over the last 10 years, several HCs have raised questions on the validity of Arya Samaj

marriages. This is because the anti-conversion law bars alternative legal processes for marriage involving religious conversion.

For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, Section 6 of the UP Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021 renders void any marriage that is preceded by an unlawful or procedurally non-compliant religious conversion. Sections 8 and 9 of the law require both a pre-conversion declaration 60 days before marriage and a post-conversion declaration within a specified timeframe to the district magistrate. The law also mandates an inquiry to verify the voluntariness and legality of the conversion process.

Section 12 of the Act places the burden of proof on an accused to demonstrate that their spouse's consent for conversion was not obtained illegally. The default legal assumption, thus, is that marriages through conversion are illegal and non-consensual.

This puts Arya Samaj marriages at odds with the UP anti-conversion law. The shuddhi performed before most interfaith Arya Samaj marriages does not comply with the onerous process for conversion prescribed in the anti-conversion law.

Courts have, over the last few years, expressed concern over the mass-scale solemnisation of marriages by Arya Samaj organisations without sticking to lawful conversion practices or verifying marriage eligibility conditions.

The Allahabad HC and Madhya Pradesh HC have ordered police investigations into instances where these organisations allegedly married minors using forged documents, and facilitated conversions without following procedures mandated by the anti-conversion laws of these states.

In 2022, the Supreme Court orally observed that the Arya Samaj has "no business" issuing marriage certificates, while the Delhi High Court last year directed an Arya Samaj temple to use verified witnesses to ensure that marriages performed by the temple were genuine.

Justice Kumar referred to one such judgment by the Allahabad HC from May in his order on Thursday. He observed that the marriage between the Muslim man and the Hindu girl would be invalid because the girl was a minor and the man did not convert as per the UP anti-conversion law.

EXPLAINED CULTURE

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP: HOW PIPRAHWA GEMS RETURNED TO INDIA

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

THE PIPRAHWA Gems, Buddhist relics which in 1898 were taken by an Englishman from their resting place in India, have been brought back to the country, the Ministry of Culture announced on Wednesday. This return was made possible by "an exemplary case of public-private partnership". Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said on Wednesday. Here's the story



The Piprahwa Gems were put up for auction in May. *Sotheby's*

The collection

In May, a collection of 349 gemstones came up for auction at Sotheby's Hong Kong. These were a part of a larger collection of antiquities unearthed in 1898 by William Claxton Peppé, an English estate manager, at a Buddhist stupa in Piprahwa, a village in Sindhharthnagar district, near the border of Nepal.

Viceroy Elgin donated the sacred bones and ashes in the collection, believed to be of Lord Buddha himself, to Siamese King Rama V. Much of the remaining collection, including caskets, a coffer, and various jewels, were sent to the Imperial Museum (now Indian Museum) in Kolkata, where they remain till date.

But a part of the collection was passed down for generations in the Peppé family. In 2013, they came in possession of Chris Peppé who decided to put the antiquities up for auction. Sotheby's listed an estimated selling price of over \$100 million.

Pressure from New Delhi

On May 5, the Ministry of Culture served a legal notice to Sotheby's and the Peppé family, demanding the "immediate cessation" of the auction, and repatriation of the relics to India. The Archaeological Survey of India too requested the Consulate General of Hong Kong to immediately stop the auction.

Godrej facilitates return

In the end, the collection of 349 gemstones was acquired by Indian industrialist Pirosha Godrej for an undisclosed amount. While unconventional, this allowed the government to not have to make a commercial transaction for the antiquities, which would have raised ethical issues.

Godrej has agreed to loan a "large portion" of the collection to the National Museum for a period of five years, and display the entire collection for three months upon its arrival, Shekhawat said.



UDIT MISRA

ON JULY 30, United States President Donald Trump announced 25% tariffs on India, as well as an unspecified "penalty" for buying military equipment and energy from Russia. A day later, Trump posted on social media that he did not care if India and Russia "take their dead economies down together".

Asked about Trump's description of India as a "dead" economy, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said: "Yes, he (Trump) is right... Everybody knows this except the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister. I am glad President Trump has stated a fact... The whole world knows that India is a dead economy and that the BJP has killed it."

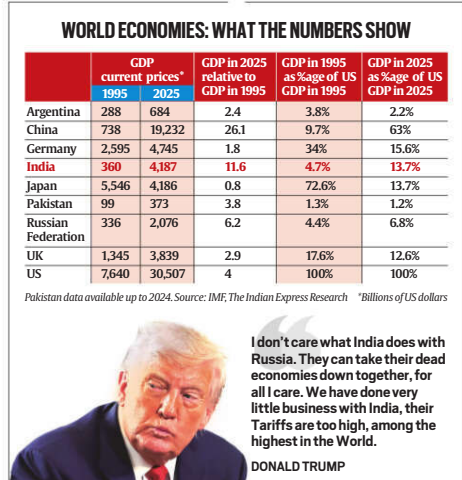
Union Minister of Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal pushed back, saying that India had rapidly transformed from being one of the "fragile five" to the fastest growing major economy in the world in just over a decade.

"We have risen from the 11th largest economy to one of the top five... It is also widely expected that we will become the third largest economy in a few years. Today, international institutions and economists see India as the bright spot in the global economy. India is contributing to almost 16% of the global growth," Goyal said in a statement to Parliament.

"In the last decade, the government has taken transformative measures to promote India as the manufacturing hub of the world... India's young, skilled and talented workforce is driving innovation and competitiveness of Indian industry. Our exports have steadily increased during the last 11 years," he said.

Economic growth

So, is India's economy "dead"? While Trump, who seems annoyed with India's hard bargaining in the talks for a trade deal, need not be taken literally, it stands to reason that one absolutely necessary attribute of a dead economy must be an absence of



Join FREE Whatsapp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029van2VRb6RGJOKfHEB0f> the United Kingdom have grown by less than 3 times, and Germany has failed to even double its economy.

Japan's GDP in 2025 is lower than what it was in 1995, which would, by this metric, qualify it to be not just a "dead" but perhaps a decaying economy.

In contrast, India's economy is today almost 12 times its size in 1995.

Comparison with US There is another way to look at these numbers: how did these economies grow relative to the US?

Columns 4 and 5 show there are only three economies that have grown in size relative to the US: China, India, and Russia. India was less than 5% the size of the US economy in 1995, but in 2025 it is almost 14%.

By contrast, all of America's friends and trading partners have shrunk in size relative to the US.

While the US has now become four times its 1995 size, its closest trade partners like

that rising cost of living is a major deterrent to parenthood. Almost 4 in 10 respondents in an online survey of more than 14,000 adults in 14 countries carried out by the United Nations Population Fund and YouGov in June said financial limitations were stopping them from having the families they wanted.

But these measures have had only a limited impact. The Center for Strategic and International Studies noted in a 2023 article that "Representative studies on the expansion of financial assistance show that the effects are positive but limited." The article cited a 2013 study that reported that child allowances, even if doubled, lead to the probability of childbirth increasing by only 19.2%.

In 2006, demographer Peter McDonald identified two reasons for the decline in TFRs.

ONE, rising social liberalism, in which individuals in modern societies were re-examining social norms and institutions, and increasingly focusing on individual aspirations.

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

What extent have subsidies and tax credits helped?

As countries around the world grapple with declining fertility rates, many, like China, have introduced subsidies and tax incentives to encourage couples to have more children.

One reason for this is the understanding

TWO, the withdrawal of the welfare state in major Western economies in the 1980s and 1990s, which led to "loss of trust in others, loss of a sense of the value of service (altruism), decline of community... and fear of failure or of being left behind".

Both processes deprived having children as a mandate for living a good life, McDonald concluded. "The solution... lies in providing a greater sense of assurance to young women and young men that, if they marry and have children, they will be supported by the society in this socially and individually important decision," he wrote.

McDonald argued that incentivising families have failed in countries like Japan and Singapore because they targeted particular types of women (like high earners) rather than reforming social institutions.

What more can governments do?

Guo Yanhong, deputy head of China's National Health Commission, said the new childcare subsidy "works in tandem with

related policies regarding childcare, education, employment, taxation and housing", *Xinhua* reported. Supporting childbirth requires a comprehensive policy package, including financial support, parental leave, and cultural measures, Guo said.

Anne Gauthier, professor of comparative family studies at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, told the BBC that behind the higher-than-European average TFR of France could be the generous social policies followed by the French Ministry of Families over the decades.

However, countries such as Finland, which have some of the most progressive policies for parental leave after childbirth, as well as subsidies, continue to see low TFRs.

While the specific context may be different in each country, it would seem that throwing money at the problem of falling TFRs can only do so much. Accompanying changes in how society treats the raising of children, and how people see work and fulfillment, are important as well.

China brings new childcare subsidy: can it increase country's fertility rate?

RISHIKA SINGH
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

CHINA'S GOVERNMENT this week announced a childcare subsidy of 3,600 yuan (about Rs 44,000) per year for every child under the age of three. The *People's Daily*, the Chinese Communist Party's newspaper, described it as a way of "supporting fertility".

China has previously tried similar measures locally, but the policy announced on July 29 was the first time it was rolled out nationwide.

The population of China, the world's second most populous country (after India), has been contracting in recent years. There have been fewer Chinese births than deaths for three consecutive years since 2022. In fact, most parts of the world are grappling with declining Total Fertility Rates (TFR), which is the average number of children a woman is likely to bear in her lifetime.

What explains this trend? Can subsidies

encourage people to have more children?

What is the problem with declining fertility rates?

The Global Burden of Disease, Injuries and Risk Factors Study (GBD)-2021 estimated that globally, TFR more than halved from around 5 in 1950 to 2.2 in 2021. This signals better education and financial independence for more women, and greater agency in making reproductive choices.

However, an extremely low TFR can have long-term consequences for societies, including labour shortages, high dependency ratios (basically a product of an ageing population), higher taxation to fund the cost of healthcare for the large numbers of the elderly, and changes in social structures and relationships. India's overall TFR stood at 1.91 in 2021. This is less than the "replacement level" — the number of children that a woman would need to have to replace herself and her partner in the next generation — of 2.1. (This figure assumes there will be no in-

out-migration, which is not the case in reality.)

India's lowered TFR is the result of decades of government investment in family planning, changing social attitudes about family sizes, rising costs of raising children, and improvements in the education of women.

Many of these factors are common to other countries that have seen a decline in TFR. The only major region in the world with a high TFR today is sub-Saharan Africa, where medical advances have reduced child mortality, but fertility remains high due to cultural reasons, poverty, and the lack of decision-making powers for women.

What extent have subsidies and tax credits helped?

As countries around the world grapple with declining fertility rates, many, like China, have introduced subsidies and tax incentives to encourage couples to have more children.

One reason for this is the understanding