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Moratorium Lapsed Need to Impose Tariff on Digital Products



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WTO MC14: Bharat's Strategic Stand and the Shifting Reality of Global Trade

The 14th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14), held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in March 2026, marked a decisive shift in the landscape of global trade. For Bharat, the primary agenda was the protection of its 800 million farmers and the preservation of national food security. India remained firm on securing a permanent solution for Public Stockholding (PSH), ensuring that its Minimum Support Price (MSP) programs are shielded from international legal challenges. Another critical pillar of Bharat's stance was the expiration of the e-commerce moratorium. By opposing its extension, India successfully paved the way for developing nations to exercise their sovereign right to tax digital transmissions, targeting revenue leaks from global big-tech companies.

The benefits for Bharat are rooted in this newfound digital policy space and the continued protection of its agrarian economy. However, the conference also highlighted significant losses, primarily the continued deadlock on a permanent agriculture solution and the ongoing paralysis of the WTO's Appellate Body. Without a functioning dispute settlement mechanism, India's trade interests remain vulnerable to unilateral actions by larger economies.

On the world stage, the scenario is defined by a move away from total consensus toward "plurilateralism," where groups of countries sign separate deals. This has led to intense debate: has the WTO lost its importance? Factually, while the WTO's role as a negotiating hub has slowed, it remains the only global institution providing a rules-based framework that prevents chaotic trade wars. For Bharat, the WTO now serves as a vital defensive platform to block unfair global rules, while it simultaneously pursues aggressive growth through bilateral Free Trade Agreements.

— Vijeet Kumar, *Kshetra Media Pramukh, Purvottar Bharat, SJM*

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Quote-Unquote



Babasaheb made multifaceted contributions to the country's progress and in the sphere of social justice, including the drafting of our Constitution.

Droupadi Murmu, *President, Bharat*



India's Nari Shakti has reached new heights through women's hard work, courage and confidence. Now, we must come together to empower them further by expanding opportunities.

Narendra Modi, *PM, Bharat*



India has fiscal space, there's room to support affected sectors, expand capex, and interest rate cut by the RBI.

Nirmala Sitharaman, *Finance Minister, Bharat*



India, which is playing a key role in the digital revolution, can now boost its efforts by imposing tariffs on e-transmissions.

Ashwani Mahajan, *National Co-Convenor, SJM*

Opposition Delays Women Reservation

The Nari Shakti Vandan Vidheyak, also known as the Women's Reservation Bill, is perhaps the first Constitutional Amendment Bill that could not secure Parliament's approval since Narendra Modi took office as Prime Minister. On one earlier occasion, in the context of the GST Act, when the numbers in the Rajya Sabha were not in the government's favour, the government still succeeded in getting the Bill passed after initial hiccups. The question that arises is: why did the Nari Shakti Vandan Vidheyak fail to pass this time, compelling the government to withdraw two other associated Bills as well? To comprehend this situation, we must examine this legislation within its historical context. In 2023, the 'Women's Reservation Act' was passed, providing for 33 per cent reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies. Although this legislation was enacted into law, it could not be implemented immediately. The reason was that the Act explicitly stipulated that it would come into effect only after the completion of a new Census and the subsequent delimitation process (the redrawing of electoral constituency boundaries). The Census, scheduled for 2021, was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Census process is currently underway but is unlikely to be completed before 2028. As for delimitation, it can only be undertaken once the Census is complete, as the demarcation of parliamentary and legislative assembly constituencies is feasible only after the Census data has been compiled. Evidently, this entire process could not realistically be accomplished in time for the 2029 general elections.

In this context, with a view to expediting the implementation of the women's reservation law, the government introduced a new Women's Reservation Bill (Nari Shakti Vandan Vidheyak). It stipulated that delimitation of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies be carried out on the basis of the 2011 Census. However, the Bill was defeated in the Lok Sabha on 17 April 2026 due to the lack of a two-thirds majority, thereby freezing the possibility of providing reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies in the near future. There is intense resentment within the ruling coalition regarding this issue, as well as among women at large. In this context, it is necessary to ascertain whether the Opposition possesses any substantive grounds for voting against this Bill, or whether their opposition is merely politically motivated. What arguments do Opposition parties put forward in this regard? Is it possible to arrive at a resolution on women's reservation by amending or clarifying the Bill that was rejected by Parliament?

The Opposition has presented several arguments regarding this Bill, both within and outside Parliament, and the relevance of these arguments warrants examination. The 230 members of the Lok Sabha who voted against the Bill include members from the Congress, DMK, Samajwadi Party, and Trinamool Congress, among others. Opposition members—particularly those from the DMK—contend that if this Bill is passed, then in the delimitation exercise, southern states such as Tamil Nadu will lose their proportional share of seats and, therefore, representation in the Lok Sabha. This is because they have successfully controlled population growth, whereas northern states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, which have experienced rapid population expansion, would gain. To address these concerns, the government proposed a '50 per cent formula' in Parliament, under which the total number of Lok Sabha seats would increase from 543 to 850, while southern states would be allocated an additional 50 per cent of seats each, proportionate to their current strength. Under this formula, Karnataka would receive 42 seats instead of 28; Tamil Nadu, 59 instead of 39; Andhra Pradesh, 38 instead of 25; Telangana, 26 instead of 17; and Kerala, 30 instead of 20. Previously, under the chairmanship of N.K. Singh, the 15th Finance Commission had accorded weightage to parameters other than population for the allocation of financial resources, enabling these states to receive a substantial share despite smaller populations. In light of this, opposition to the Act on such grounds appears unjustified.

The Congress and other Opposition parties assert that, although they are not opposed in principle to women's reservation, linking it to delimitation and the Census is inappropriate. They argue that the Bill has inextricably tied women's reservation to a nationwide delimitation exercise—a process that, in their view, is unrelated to women's empowerment—and that this constitutes an attempt to fundamentally alter India's electoral map. However, this argument does not hold, given that the 2023 Act also explicitly linked the implementation of reservations to the Census and delimitation. The defeated Bill of 17 April 2026 merely proposed using the 2011 Census to fast-track this process. This is not the first instance of delimitation. Since 1951, delimitation has been a routine administrative exercise conducted after each Census until 1971. In 1976, the process was frozen until 2001 and later extended to 2026 through constitutional amendments. Although a limited delimitation exercise took place between 2002 and 2008, it did not change the total number of Lok Sabha seats. With the freeze ending in 2026, a fresh delimitation exercise is now due. Therefore, the Congress party's claim that women's reservation is being arbitrarily linked to delimitation appears untenable. Delimitation is a constitutionally mandated process, not a discretionary measure. It is a necessary procedural step; without it, effective implementation of women's reservation and broader political empowerment is difficult. The argument that the government is using this as a political pretext is also unconvincing, as delimitation would occur after the next Census regardless of this Bill.

By opposing the Bill, the Congress has only delayed the redrawing of constituencies, not prevented it. Delimitation will inevitably take place after the Census, likely by 2028. Moreover, concerns regarding changes to OBC, Dalit, and Adivasi representation lack strong grounding, as these are constitutionally protected. Overall, the Opposition's objections appear misleading, contributing to delays in implementing women's reservation.

Moratorium Lapsed: Need to Impose Tariff on Digital Products

As the 14th Ministerial Conference of World Trade Organisation concluded on March 29, the member countries realised (even surprised) that the moratorium on e-transmission tariff has suddenly lapsed, which had continued for nearly 28 years since 1998. No country had expected this outcome. Issue of this moratorium has been one of the most contentious one, where the question was whether or not the moratorium should stay; and if it stays, for how long. US wanted this moratorium to stay for ever (permanently) and position of developing countries including India, was that it should not be extended at all, and if extended, it should not be for more than 2 years, and not more that 4 years in any case.

As a student of trade economics, I had always wondered, logically, why and how this moratorium has been continuing, where developing countries, who are opposed to this, were not supposed to do anything big to end this, and just had to not agree on this issue and moratorium would have lapsed years ago. Since 1998, every successive ministerial conference (MC) of WTO kept on extending till next MC. MC13 also resolved as follows:

“We agree to maintain the current practice of not imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions until the 31st of March 2026 or the date of the next Session of the Ministerial Conference, whichever is earlier.”

Drama Explained

The “drama” around the lapse of the WTO e-commerce moratorium (on customs duties on electronic transmissions) is really about process, power politics, and timing at the World Trade Organisation.

Experience in the yesteryears was little different from what happened this time in MC14 of WTO. For years, the moratorium had been routinely extended at



India—which has been playing a pivotal role in the ongoing digital revolution—could give significant impetus to its efforts by imposing tariffs on e-transmissions.

Dr. Ashwani Mahajan



every Ministerial Conference since 1998. Most developed countries—especially the United States, European Union and Japan, assumed it would again be extended smoothly. But they didn't realise that scenario has changed in the last few years. It is important to understand that in recent years, countries like India, Brazil and South Africa, had began opposing automatic extensions. Their opposition was not without reasons. And the stand of developing countries shifted from passive acceptance to active resistance.

It was actually a procedural twist. At the WTO, decisions like this require consensus. That means, that every one country objecting to a decision can actually block extension; and it required no formal vote and no majority override. Therefore, when Brazil and India refused to agree, the extension could not be adopted. That we can say that moratorium did not end by any active decision, rather it lapsed by default, as there was lack of consensus for renewal.

In fact, the developed countries, misread the resolve of India, Brazil, and other countries. They expected last-minute compromise, as was happening in the past conferences. Since the negotiations dragged, till the end and no agreement emerged till the deadline, and moratorium lapsed.

Another point, which developed countries could not realise was that there was a political undercurrent. On the one hand, there were digital exporters (developed countries), who wanted permanent ban on tariffs; on and on the other hand there were large number of developing countries, large importers of digital products, who were at disadvantage, and wanted to get rid of the moratorium.

Forces working for restoring Moratorium

As soon as the moratorium lapsed, people at the top in WTO, have started wishing to restore the same. Director General WTO Ngozi Okonjo Iweala said that the e-commerce moratorium had expired, meaning country could now apply duties on electronic goods sold at digital downloads and streaming; but she said the WTO hoped to be able to restore the moratorium and that Brazil and the US were trying to reach agreement on it. "They need more time and he did not have the time here", she said.

It is notable that the second most important decision making body in WTO in General Council (GC), which is expected in May, 2026, in Geneva. Developed countries may try to revive this moratorium in GC, which lapsed suddenly, against their wishes at GC in Geneva. But it is now time for developing countries, who have an upper hand after the sudden lapse, to tighten their belts and sharpen their arguments, which were earlier not being heard enough. Though, counter allegations are being made by US and Brazil, what has come out is entirely different outcome.

Why Lapse of E Transmission Tariff Moratorium is a Blessing

It is true that the moratorium on tariffs on digital products has lapsed with the conclusion of the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) of the World Trade Organization (WTO), because the MC14 failed to reach a decision within the allotted time. Lapse of E Transmission Moratorium, due to lack of consensus, is not the only outcome, in fact MC14 failed to reach a consensus among member nations on most of the critical issues at hand,

including Public stockholding, Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM), fisheries subsidies, dispute settlement crisis, domestic support, special and differential treatment (S&DT), investment facilitation, industrial subsidies, and unresolved Doha Development Round agenda. Though, there have been several Ministerial Conferences, where a consensus could not be reached, this conference in Cameroon will be remembered, not only for its failure to reach decisions, but also for the reason that widening rifts within the WTO, got fully exposed. Although, the lapse of the e-transmission tariff moratorium is being viewed as a technical outcome, it also underscores the growing fragility within the WTO framework.

There is a growing perception that the WTO is paralysed. It's not due to any lapse that agreement couldn't be reached; it appears that the member nations no longer believe that the WTO serves the collective well-being of all. On the one hand, developed nations have been striving to advance their own interests in areas such as digital trade, intellectual property rights, agricultural and industrial subsidies, and supply chains resilience; on the other hand, developing nations are struggling to correct long-standing asymmetries within the WTO and to safeguard their own policy space. Given the fact that developed nations are unwilling to relinquish their advantages under any circumstances, reaching a consensus with developing nations is becoming increasingly difficult—more so now than ever before. It is no secret that, in the past, developed nations often succeeded in pushing through decisions—leveraging their eco-

[Continued on page no. 14]

Bend the rules

The World Trade Organization's 14th Ministerial Conference, held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from March 26-29, ended without agreement on key issues. It will be remembered less for what it achieved and more for what it revealed: a multilateral system under strain, drifting towards power-led rule-making by major economies. Long-standing compromises broke down, raising doubts about the WTO's ability to manage a system that governs 98% of global trade.

The subject-wise outcomes at MC14 make that shift clear.

Digital divide: The e-commerce moratorium became the central fault line. First agreed upon in 1998, it bars countries from imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions and has been routinely extended every two years. This time, however, the United States of America pushed to make the duty waiver permanent.

Developing countries, led by Brazil, were ready for a routine, two-year extension but resisted making the duty waiver permanent. They argued that as trade shifts from goods to digital flows, a permanent ban would erode future tax revenues and limit policy space in a fast-growing digital economy. They also disputed its scope, insisting that digitally delivered services are not covered by the agreement.

Brazil opposed the final proposal, arguing that a permanent or even a five-year extension would break the established practice of two-year renewals since 1998, that there is still no agreed definition of 'electronic transmissions', and that a longer moratorium would restrict the digital sovereignty and the policy space of developing countries. It also cited the lack of progress in agriculture talks.

The episode highlights a wider contradiction: while the US is raising tariffs in traditional sectors, it is seeking binding commitments to eliminate them in digital trade where its firms, such as Amazon, Microsoft, Alphabet, Apple and Meta, dominate global digital trade.

With no compromise, the moratorium expired for the first time in 26 years — allowing countries to consider tariffs on digital trade.

Members also failed to extend the moratorium on 'non-violation complaints' under the TRIPS Agreement, allowing it to expire for the first time since 1995. The TRIPS NVC moratorium protects developing countries by preventing vague legal challenges that could restrict their ability to ensure affordable medicines, seeds and access to technology.

Plurilateral push: A second fault line at MC14 was the Investment Facilitation for Development Agreement, a plurilateral deal backed by over 120 members. India blocked its entry into the WTO framework, arguing that such plurilateral agreements would weaken the organisation's multilateral character and allow smaller groups to set rules. Unlike traditional WTO agreements that apply to all members, plurilateral deals bind only those who choose to join, raising concerns about a fragmented, two-tier system.



The e-commerce moratorium at MC14 became the central fault line.

It bars countries from imposing customs duties on electronic transmissions and has been extended every 2 years.

Ajay Srivastava

At the same time, 66 members moved ahead with a separate e-commerce deal outside the WTO, underscoring a growing shift toward rule-making beyond the consensus system. They will keep trying to incorporate the deal into the WTO system as a plurilateral agreement.

Farm deadlock: There was no progress on agriculture, the central issue for India. New Delhi wants its public stockholding programme — under which the government buys rice and wheat at minimum support prices, builds buffer stocks, and distributes food to millions — to be treated as WTO-compliant. The programme is vital in a country dominated by small farmers. But current WTO rules classify such support as excessive and, hence, trade-distorting. But the problem lies with the WTO's formula for calculating subsidies which uses outdated 1986-88 reference prices that no longer reflect today's realities.

The distortion becomes clear with a simple example. If India sets an MSP of Rs 25 per kg for rice and the current market price is Rs 24, the real subsidy is just Re 1 per kg, or about 4%. But under WTO rules, this is compared to a 1986-88 price of rice — say Rs 3 per kg — making the subsidy appear as Rs 22 per kg, or over 90%. Since WTO rules cap support at 10%, India is shown as breaching limits even when actual support is modest. India has long sought to address this anomaly, but could secure only a temporary 'peace clause' in 2013. At MC14, its demand for a permanent solution faced resistance, once again, from the US & the European Union.

Reform failure: Talks on disciplining subsidies linked to overcapacity and overfishing made no breakthrough. Efforts to agree on a WTO reform roadmap also failed, with no consensus on a plan through 2028.

MC14 showed that this balance of power between developed and developing nations is eroding. The US is pushing to dilute Most Favoured Nation, limit SDT, and sideline key issues such as agriculture while weakening dispute settlement by blocking Appellate Body appointments and promoting plurilateral deals among smaller groups.

There was also no progress on reviving the Appellate Body of the WTO's dispute settlement system — once seen as its 'crown jewel'.

Multilateral core under threat: What explains the lack of progress at MC 14? Let us recall that the WTO was built on a 'grand bargain', balancing the interests of both developed and developing countries. For example, in the Uruguay Round, developed countries secured stricter rules in areas such as intellectual property and services in return for developing countries allowing flexibility through Special Differential Treatment, retaining higher bound tariffs and a voice in decision-making through consensus.

MC14 showed that this balance of power between developed and developing nations is eroding. The US is pushing to dilute Most Favoured Nation, limit SDT, and sideline key issues such as agriculture while weakening dispute settlement by blocking Appellate Body appointments and promoting plurilateral deals among smaller groups. Together, these moves risk turning the WTO from a rules-based institution into one driven by power and selective coalitions.

For developing countries like India, the stakes are high. Without collective action, they risk losing policy space and influence. The response must be to rebuild alliances, defend consensus, and protect MFN and SDT before the WTO shifts from a rule-based system to

one of power.

The long view: The WTO and its predecessor, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, helped expand global trade from about \$50 billion in 1950 to over \$35 trillion today — growing nearly six times faster than global GDP. The US deserves much of the credit for building this system. But Washington has turned defensive, arguing that WTO rules now favour production-heavy economies like China and others. It is pushing to reshape the WTO from a representative body into a narrower, power-led system aligned with its priorities. Many countries — particularly those from the EU and Japan — tend to back the US, while least developed countries often follow suit due to limited leverage. China supports most rules, confident that its manufacturing strength will deliver gains, while resistance from India and South Africa is weakening.

This signals a broader shift in global trade governance. What began as a club under GATT remained so until the 1980s, before becoming more inclusive in the 1990s, with a robust dispute-resolution system that allowed even smaller economies to challenge major powers, including the US. That arc is now reversing. The risk is a return to a club-like system dominated by a few where power overrides rules — undermining the foundation that drove decades of global trade growth. □□

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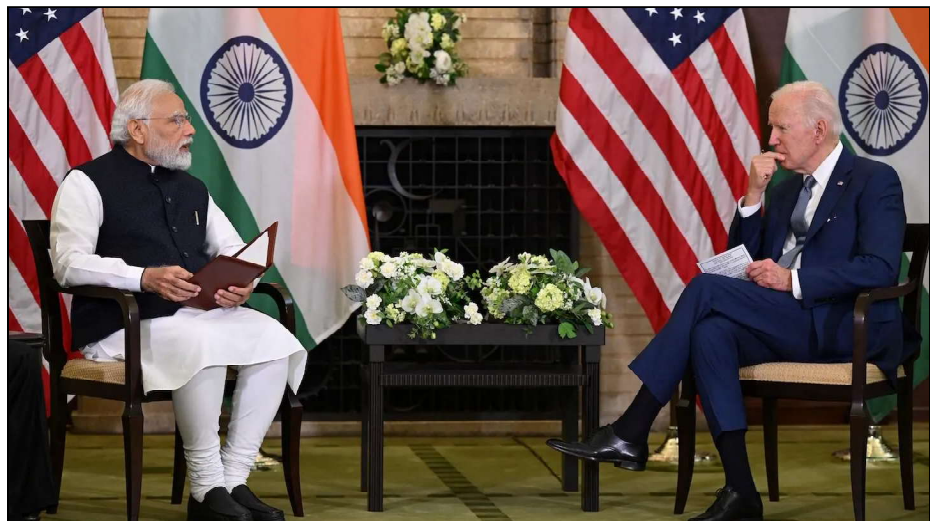
America's Digital Double Standards and India's Shifting Stance

The moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions was designed as a temporary measure to nurture the internet economy. The WTO members have agreed not to impose customs duties on electronic transmissions since 1998 which covers everything from software and e-books to streaming services and cloud data. Today, digital trade is worth trillions of dollars but a few companies, many of which are American, like Google, Amazon and Netflix, control it. Around 70% of digital exports come from developed economies and most developing countries mainly import these services. Due to this imbalance in digital trade, countries like India, Brazil and South Africa are opposing the permanent moratorium. As the moratorium on customs duties on electronic transmissions has now become a structural constraint for developing economies.

The United States strongly pushes to make the moratorium permanent. As per the United States, internet could breakdown into parts if taxes put on digital goods. It warns that this could create barriers and lead to digital protectionism. However, a few big companies control most of the internet today which are mainly based in America. These companies shape the rules and systems. So, if there would never be any taxes then this imbalance would continue forever. Therefore, the developing countries support the customs duties on electronic transmissions as a truly open internet should be fair. Due to this moratorium, the value mostly flows in one direction, while control stays with a few players today. Moreover, the U.S. supported permanent moratorium on the grounds of predictability for businesses. But the America has ignored global trade rules when it suited its own interests. It has used tariffs on its own terms and applied trade rules selectively. The basic WTO principles have not always been followed by the America such as equal treatment of countries. Thus, the American demand for a permanent moratorium



The WTO needs a more fair and inclusive approach to digital trade. Even the leader of WTO said that the old global trade order is fading. Thus, it doesn't make sense to try to make permanent rules based on ideas from decades ago.
Annu Kumari



sounds weak. Why should developing countries accept strict and lasting rules when the most powerful country treats rules as flexible? The big tech U.S. companies seek certainty for their businesses but developing countries need flexibility to make their own policies as things change. Thus, the permanent moratorium will limit choices for the future of developing countries.

The global growth is also one of the reasons of permanent moratorium as per the United States. The tax-free digital trade increases the global growth due to which the digital economy achieved significant growth, but the benefits are not shared equally. Most of the digital exports come from developed countries, especially the United States. While developing countries mainly act as large consumer markets. Basically, the developing countries get lower value in return although these countries create demand and provide data. This leads to a one-way flow where data goes out of these countries while profits come back to richer nations which is not a fair system. Without taxes or proper rules, developing countries risk becoming passive markets rather than active producers. In a nutshell, it can be concluded that data is taken from the Global South, value is created in the Global North, and profits return there with very little benefit to local economies. Thus, this global growth with tax free digital goods raises inequality.

The United States warns that ending the moratorium could lead to trade wars and countries putting taxes on each other's digital goods. Though it is a strong argument, but it also shows the fear of losing its advantage. Developed countries already have many ways to control dig-

The global growth is also one of the reasons of permanent moratorium as per the United States. The tax-free digital trade increases the global growth due to which the digital economy achieved significant growth, but the benefits are not shared equally.

ital markets. With the help of strong intellectual property rules, set technology standards and dominate major platforms the developed countries control the digital market. Whereas, for developing countries, tariffs are one of the few options available to control the digital market. With tariffs, developing countries can protect the dominance of developed countries in digital world. Moreover, the United States itself has not always followed free trade principles. The U.S. has imposed tariffs and supported its own industries when required which shows that it values flexibility when it benefits its own economy. But in digital trade, where the US is already ahead, it asks others to accept strict and permanent rules. It can be called as the selective multilateralism, where rules are applied differently depending on who benefits.

India's Shifting Stance: Strategic Pragmatism or Policy Drift?

India has long been one of the strongest critics of the WTO's digital moratorium. It has argued that a rule made in 1998 cannot govern today's fast-changing digital economy. At many meetings, including the December 2025 General Council of the World Trade Organization, India clearly stated

that the moratorium should not continue as it reduces the government revenue, limits policy freedom and increases the global inequality. This is why the recent statement by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal is surprising. He suggested that India may accept a slightly longer extension of the moratorium to give businesses more certainty. However, this shifted stance of India for a longer temporary extension can weaken India's position. Consequently, India's stand appears less clear at a time when developing countries need to stay united. It seems also that India indirectly supported the view of the United States. When developed countries are already pushing for a permanent rule, if India softens its stand, it may lose its bargaining power. India has rightly put that digital trade rules must change with time. So, the focus should be on reforming the system, not just extending the same rule again. The shifted stance of India could weaken its strong position on the moratorium on custom duties on electronic transmission at a crucial moment.

Time to Challenge the Narrative

Should yesterday's rules govern tomorrow's economy? For developing countries, the permanent moratorium means a permanent imbalance, while flexibility gives a fair chance to grow. If the World Trade Organization wants to stay relevant, it must change with time. The WTO needs a more fair and inclusive approach to digital trade. Even the leader of WTO said that the old global trade order is fading. Thus, it doesn't make sense to try to make permanent rules based on ideas from decades ago. □□

Annu Kumari: Assistant Professor, Sri Aurobindo College (Evening), University of Delhi

Why the Yaoundé ministerial of WTO saw New Delhi's silent pushback

At the latest ministerial conference of the World Trade Organization in Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon, the absence of noise was as telling as the absence of agreement. There was no grand collapse, no dramatic walkout, and no sweeping deal to reset global trade. Instead, MC14 unfolded as a quiet confirmation of a deeper shift. The multilateral trading system is no longer moving in unison. The convening of the trade ministers happened under the long shadow of Donald Trump reshaping the rules of global trade with a far more unilateral and transactional approach.

On its traditional pillars, the WTO barely moved. Agriculture negotiations remained stuck along familiar lines. Developing countries pushed for flexibility on public stockholding and food security, while developed economies resisted. On dispute settlement, the institutional crisis continued. The appellate body remains dysfunctional, and there is no clear path to revival. Fisheries talks made incremental progress, but without any political breakthrough.

In most areas that once defined the WTO, there was motion without momentum. And yet, in the middle of this drift, one track moved decisively. Digital trade. A coalition of 66 countries pushed ahead on a plurilateral framework governing e-commerce, covering nearly 70 per cent of global trade. It is not a consensus agreement and does not bind all members. For the last two years, the western block is marketing it as a reflection of a new reality, arguing that when the system cannot move together, parts of it will move anyway.

New Delhi's stance has been to consistently stay out of this plurilateral conversation, arguing that this is not defensive hesitation, but a calibrated assertion of digital sovereignty and economic strategy. The rules under discussion are not rou-



The WTO is no longer the sole arena where global trade rules are forged through consensus. It is becoming a platform where different coalitions test competing visions of economic order.

**Anilesh S.
Mahajan**



tine trade disciplines. They go to the heart of how future economies will be structured. Committing to unrestricted data flows or limiting localisation at this stage would effectively lock India into a model that grants privileges to already dominant digital economies.

India's logic is rooted in sequencing. No country has built technological strength by surrendering regulatory space early. From manufacturing to services, policy flexibility has historically preceded competitiveness. In the digital domain, where data is the new infrastructure, retaining control over how it is stored, processed, and monetised is central to long-term economic power.

The resistance to making the moratorium on customs duties permanent follows the same logic. As more goods and services become digitised, the ability to tax cross-border digital flows will become an important fiscal tool. Freezing that option now would mean conceding revenue and policy leverage before the full contours of digital trade are even visible. The domestic lobbies in India too were backing the government on this. "The moratorium on digital goods should have been over by now, it was agreed in the last ministerial. Plurilateral makes no sense at all for India," says Ashwani Mahajan, economist and national co-convenor of Swadeshi Jagran Manch. "There is also a systemic argument. By pushing plurilateral rules outside full consensus, a lobby risks reshaping the World Trade Organization into a platform where rules are written by a few and absorbed by the rest."

India's position, articulated repeatedly by commerce and industry minister Piyush Goyal is that glo-

bal trade governance cannot abandon its development mandate in favour of speed. In that sense, India's absence is not obstruction. It is a deliberate refusal to sign on to a framework that could narrow its strategic choices before its digital economy has fully matured.

This issue has been building over successive ministerials. At the Ministerial Conference 2024 in Abu Dhabi, members agreed, after intense negotiations, to extend the moratorium once again, but only temporarily. The extension reflected a compromise, keeping digital trade frictionless for now, but leaving the core disagreement unresolved. At MC14, that tension returned in sharper form. Developed economies are pushing to make the moratorium permanent. India, along with several developing countries, continues to resist. Goyal has argued that developing countries cannot be expected to "freeze policy space in a rapidly evolving sector". He has warned that outcomes shaped without consensus risk being "neither inclusive nor sustainable" and has repeatedly underlined that issues of development and fairness must remain central to WTO negotiations.

This is the central story of MC14. The WTO is no longer a single negotiating table. It is becoming a set of parallel tracks. Consensus, once its defining principle, is giving way to coalitions of the willing. This shift is not entirely unprecedented. Agreements like the Information Technology Agreement, struck at the Singapore Ministerial Conference 1996, and the Government Procurement Agreement, rooted in the Marrakesh Ministerial Conference 1994 framework and refined over time, were also pluri-

lateral in nature. But those were limited and technical arrangements. What is unfolding now is far more ambitious. The current e-commerce initiative seeks to define how data moves, how platforms operate, and how digital trade is governed. These are rules for an economy that barely existed when the WTO was created.

India has chosen to stay out. This silence is often misread as disengagement. It is deliberate. New Delhi's position is anchored in preserving policy space in a domain that is still evolving. Binding commitments on cross-border data flows, restrictions on localisation, or a permanent ban on digital tariffs could constrain its ability to shape a domestic digital ecosystem. In a data-driven economy, these are central economic choices.

Nor is India alone in its hesitation. Countries like South Africa and Indonesia have also resisted or remained cautious. Across Africa, economies such as Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda have stayed on the sidelines. Pakistan and Sri Lanka share similar concerns. This is not a coordinated bloc, but it reflects a wider discomfort across parts of the developing world with rules being written ahead of readiness.

At the heart of the divide lies a clash of models. For advanced economies, digital trade rules are about enabling seamless flows of data, services, and platforms. For countries like India, they raise questions of sovereignty, regulation, and development. Data is not just a commodity. It is infrastructure. India's refusal is less about opposing trade and more about sequencing it. But silence, even when strategic, carries consequences.

The first is legitimacy. A

framework that excludes one of the world's largest digital markets and several developing economies cannot fully claim to be global. It becomes a critical mass agreement. It is influential, but incomplete. That distinction matters because global rules derive authority not only from economic weight, but also from broad participation.

The second is fragmentation. MC14 makes clear that the WTO is evolving into a two-speed system. On legacy issues, it remains slow and consensus-bound. On emerging issues, it is faster, more flexible, and more divided. India's absence sharpens this divergence and reinforces the idea that global trade may no longer converge into a single rulebook.

The third is practical. Even if the e-commerce framework advances, its effectiveness will be limited by the absence of key markets. Companies will have to navigate multiple regulatory regimes. The promise of seamless digital trade weakens. Instead of harmonisation, the world moves toward coexistence of different systems.

And finally, there is the question of influence. As coalitions take the lead in rule-making, those outside them risk ceding space in shaping outcomes. India's strategy of waiting, and entering later from a position of strength, has precedent. But the digital economy moves faster than traditional trade. Rules can harden quickly, and networks, once formed, are difficult to reshape. This is the tension at the heart of India's position.

By staying out, it preserves flexibility. But it also risks being shaped by frameworks it did not design. MC14 does not resolve this dilemma. It crystallises it. What this

ministerial reveals is not a failure of negotiation, but a transformation of it. The WTO is no longer the sole arena where global trade rules are forged through consensus. It is becoming a platform where different coalitions test competing visions of economic order. In that emerging landscape, silence is not absence. It is positioning. India's silence, therefore, is not retreat. It is resis-

tance. It is measured and calculated, and rooted in a different reading of how the digital economy should evolve. The question is whether that resistance will translate into influence, or whether the rules of the next phase of global trade will be written elsewhere and absorbed later. □□

<https://www.msn.com/en-in/news/india/why-the-yaound%C3%A9-ministerial-of-wto-saw-delhi-s-silent-pubback/ar-AA1ZOXVg>

[Continued from page no. 7]

Moratorium Lapsed: Need to Impose Tariff on Digital ...

economic and strategic might—that ultimately worked to the detriment of developing nations. However, the geopolitical landscape is shifting today; emerging nations such as India, Brazil, and South Africa are no longer willing to accept the hegemony of wealthy nations. Developed countries must recognize that if they don't acknowledge the sentiments and aspirations of developing nations, reaching a 'consensus'—the foundational principle upon which the World Trade Organization (WTO) operates—will prove to be an arduous task.

It is Imperative for India to Introduce Tariffs on E-Transmissions

Now that the moratorium on e-transmissions at the WTO is drawing to a close, the Government of India must, without delay, begin imposing tariffs on these digital products. It is noteworthy that, according to 2017 estimates, India was incurring a loss of \$500 million—and the global economy a loss of \$10 billion—due to the

moratorium on e-transmission tariffs. Since then, however, there has been a massive surge in the trade of digital products; according to a rough estimate, imposing tariffs on these items could generate revenue for India ranging from \$3 billion to \$5 billion—equivalent to approximately Rs. 28,500 crore to Rs. 47,750 crore. Significantly, this very argument was prominently advanced, by India at WTO, regarding the lifting of the moratorium on e-transmission tariffs. Moreover, India—which has been playing a pivotal role in the ongoing digital revolution—could give significant impetus to its efforts by imposing tariffs on e-transmissions. Furthermore, developed nations could potentially exploit the absence of tariffs on e-transmissions to convert export of various physical goods into “e-transmissions”—under the guise of 3D printing—thereby inflicting substantial economic losses upon the developing countries including India. □□

WTO and CDF

The World Trade Organization (WTO) and the China Development Forum (CDF) both face challenges in maintaining their relevance in today's global landscape. While the WTO focuses on formulating and regulating trade policy, the CDF is centred around economic policy discussions specific to China. This distinction highlights a broader question: how the roles of trade and economic policy institutions evolve to meet the changing needs of a globalized world, where sound trade frameworks and national economic aspirations increasingly intersect.

Building on this distinction between trade and economic policy, it is useful to consider how economic policy generally allows for greater flexibility than trade policy. Institutions like the World Economic Forum exist, but they do not have the same mandate as the WTO.

Bharat has a commerce minister who participates in WTO conferences, and we also have a finance minister, but we don't have any economics minister, and neither do many other countries. We have an Economic Advisory Council (EAC) and many other institutions to debate and discuss our economic and development policy. We do have institutions that interact and debate with the world to strengthen our economic policy. CDF is an exclusive, visible Chinese forum supporting China.

Understanding the interaction between institutional flexibility and narratives is crucial. The rise of narrative-driven leadership affects forums like the CDF. In a digital world, leaders prioritize image, complicating acceptance of criticism and reducing space for dissenting voices. This erosion of open dialogue blurs boundaries for constructive policy debate.

Amid these reputational and strategic challenges, both organizations' histories shape their futures. China joined the WTO on 11 December 2001, and CDF was



The WTO and CDF confirm that nothing is permanent. We believe in "One World - One Family - One Earth".
Alok Singh



established in 2000. The WTO holds ministerial-level conferences around the globe, usually every two years, while CDF holds its annual meeting at a fixed venue in Beijing.

With this backdrop, it becomes clear that after a period of mutual benefit, both China and the WTO now face uncertain futures. However, the CDF can adapt quietly to changes and internal priorities, while the WTO's global responsibility necessitates public consensus and strong international leadership. This distinction sharpens their respective strategic approaches to current challenges.

Both the CDF and the WTO appear to be in transition, as reflected in recent agendas and leadership changes. The CDF's mission is to advance China's interests in global discussions, whereas the WTO's role is to set and enforce multilateral trade rules. How they each address these different objectives will highlight the evolving nature of international economic and trade governance.

One clear example of this institutional evolution is seen at their primary events—the CDF's annual meeting and the WTO's biennial conference—where global participation takes very different forms. The CDF controls its agenda and selects attendees to reinforce China's priorities and its obvious. In contrast, the WTO includes all member states and seeks broad agreement, making for a more inclusive but complex process. These approaches reflect fundamental differences in their operational models.

Nevertheless, beyond these institutions' event formats, economic and trade policymaking will continue. China's economic policies predate the CDF, and international

trade existed long before the establishment or rebranding of the WTO. These institutions shape policy but do not determine its absolute continuation.

Turning to the current landscape of trade frameworks, the world without the WTO is being practiced. The multilateral trade agreement, with a conscious decision-making process, is the core product the WTO offers. The WTO has no provision for voting on a decision. This has been compromised by another product. The WTO product line has added plurilateral agreements and it's not obvious. The bilateral trade agreement is another product that the WTO technically cannot offer. The basic structure of the WTO is itself under existential threat.

The world trade has an alternative, and it's being fruitful. Regional trade agreements are the most popular trade products these years. The lengthy trade negotiations and the short shelf life of such trade agreements reflect a behaviour similar to that of luxury apparel brands. The world will be more trade-friendly if it practices mass customization and quick delivery rather than the assembly-line model of standardized, mass production. The WTO is designed to behave like an assembly line, while bilateral trade agreements are designed like a high-end customized outfit.

The world without CDF is not even a topic to bother about. China has taken care of itself in whatever situations the rules of the world trade ecosystem dictated. The world has realized the relevance of multiple sourcing for goods and services. The CDF has realized that the world's trade behaviour has changed. Hedging in goods and

services can't be achieved by a rule-based system like the status of Most Favoured Nation (MFN). MFN ensures that the country receives the lowest trade tariffs, minimal quota restrictions, and minimal trade barriers. The MFN status is the USP (unique selling point) of the WTO.

The fourteenth ministerial conference of the WTO, which was recently held in Cameroon, is being labelled the WTO's nadir. It will also be remembered as a trade-off for a moratorium. So, a developed country will feel good about the expiry of the moratorium on TRIPS (Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights), and a developing country will breathe a sigh of relief for the end of the moratorium on E-commerce.

Developed countries assume they are 50 years ahead of developing countries in technology-driven products, and developing countries are prospective buyers of technology. Hence, the end of the TRIPS moratorium is their gain. The dependence of developing countries on E-commerce is rising exponentially, and hence, the end of the moratorium on E-commerce will help fill the exchequer. It's almost like - an eye for an eye, deal.

Bharat is transitioning through its demographic dividend. The WTO and CDF confirm that nothing is permanent. We believe in "One World - One Family - One Earth". The immediate challenge is to skill our youths and safeguard the interests of our seven crore MSMEs (Micro, Small, Medium Enterprises), which support 30 crore livelihoods and contribute 30% to our GDP (Gross Domestic Product). □□

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Reserve Bank of India's monetary policy focuses on growth

In the monetary policy announced by the Reserve Bank during the first week of April, the central bank delivered a strong message by keeping the repo rate and other policy interest rates unchanged, and simultaneously maintaining its stance as 'Neutral' (or status quo). This signals that, despite rising crude oil prices, supply chain disruptions, blockages in international trade routes, and global turmoil, India's policymakers remain confident in the country's economic fundamentals and are committed to sustaining a growth-conducive environment within the nation.

Prior to the monetary policy announcement, however, apprehensions were being voiced that the trajectory of successive repo rate reductions — which had been pursued through 2025 — might face reversal. It was feared that, driven by inflationary expectations, the repo rate could either be hiked or, at the very least, the monetary policy stance might be downgraded from 'Neutral' to 'Accommodative'.

However, dispelling these apprehensions, the economic outlook presented by the Reserve Bank demonstrates that — notwithstanding global turmoil and challenges — the economy remains in a robust position. Consequently, maintaining the repo rate at 5.25 per cent is deemed an appropriate policy measure to keep the path of economic growth unhindered. It is noteworthy that by keeping the repo rate low through its monetary policy, the Reserve Bank can stimulate domestic investment as well as the demand for durable goods and housing, thereby paving the way for accelerated economic growth. However, the primary prerequisite for lowering the repo rate is that domestic inflation levels must be low. If inflation is high — or if future inflationary expectations are elevated — reducing the repo rate could potentially exacerbate inflation further. Therefore, in a scenario where inflation is running high, the central bank (the RBI) cannot afford to take the risk of lowering the repo rate. However, despite the prevailing geopolitical landscape, fears of rising inflation, and disrupted supply chains, the Reserve Bank has undertaken the crucial task of keeping the engine of growth running by making the difficult decision to maintain the repo rate at a steady level — a move involving a calculated risk.

The RBI's task will be formidable in ensuring adequate credit flow, managing liquidity, keeping inflation under control, and providing a boost to growth.

Swadeshi Samvad

Inflation and growth expectations

Inflation forecasts suggest that the rate is likely to range between 4.5 per cent and 4.6 per cent in the year 2026-27. Although this figure is significantly higher than the 2.1 per cent inflation recorded in 2025-26, it is still projected to remain within the target range of 2 per cent to 6 per cent set for the Monetary Policy Committee. As per the monetary policy framework effective April 2026, the formulation of monetary policy must ensure that inflation remains within the band of 4 per cent (plus or minus 2 per cent). Consequently, should there be any risk of this limit being breached, it becomes imperative to raise the repo rate and adopt other measures to tighten monetary conditions. It is for this reason — given that inflation currently remains



within the prescribed limits set for the Monetary Policy Committee — that the Reserve Bank has decided to keep the repo rate unchanged.

Growth outlook

The Reserve Bank has pegged growth prospects for 2026-27 at 6.2 per cent. Notably, GDP growth is expected to stand at 7.4 per cent in 2025-26. This implies that there is a possibility of a decline in growth, albeit a marginal one. It is worth noting that the potential impact of global turbulence on growth has not swayed the Reserve Bank from its stance. The underlying reason for this is the robust fundamentals of the Indian economy, which ensure that global volatility will not be able to undermine India's growth prospects.

Liquidity management

It is essential to understand that maintaining liquidity at an optimal level is just as crucial as keeping the repo rate low, ensuring that short-term interest rates remain anchored around the repo rate. To achieve this, the Reserve Bank manages liquidity using instruments such as Open Market Operations (OMO), variable repo rates, and variable reverse repo rates. Through these instruments, the Reserve Bank ensures that appropriate liquidity levels (neither too low nor too high) are maintained, thereby ensuring that

the call rate — specifically the Weighted Average Call Rate (WACR) — does not exceed the repo rate by more than 0.10 to 0.15 percentage points. The call rate is the interest rate at which a bank borrows funds from other banks for the short term.

Currently, a major challenge confronting Indian banks is that their credit growth continues to significantly outpace their deposit growth. To bridge this gap, banks are compelled to borrow funds at interest rates higher than their lending rates. This situation has arisen because, for some time now, individuals have been channeling their savings into mutual funds rather than depositing them in banks. The Reserve Bank will need to find a solution to this issue as well.

It must be recognised that, through its monetary policy, the Reserve Bank endeavors to achieve a diverse range of objectives and targets. It is gratifying to note that, thanks to appropriate policy measures, Indian banks have largely overcome the problem of 'NPAs' — or Non-Performing Assets. The overall health of the banking sector is improving. Through monetary policy, inflation is being brought under control on one hand, while economic growth is gaining momentum on the other, thanks to

lower policy interest rate.

As digitisation helps reduce operational costs for banks, the Reserve Bank is poised to play a pivotal role in guiding the nation toward its goal of becoming a developed economy. To realise the objective of self-reliance, banks must ensure an adequate flow of credit while simultaneously ensuring the timely repayment of loans; this necessitates rigorously vetting credit proposals against the criterion of repayment capacity. It is reasonable to anticipate that the monetary policy announced in April will prove instrumental in achieving these developmental goals.

Despite global headwinds, the RBI has been able to steer the rupee towards relative stability, even after a sharp depreciation of more than 4 per cent in a short span, through a judicious mix of policy measures and direct interventions in the foreign exchange markets. These include curbs on speculative activities, which have historically been a major cause of significant volatility in the rupee's value.

Now, the challenge before the RBI is to ensure that growth prospects are not adversely affected by the global scenario marked by wars and conflicts, disruptions in global value chains, and blocked international trade routes.

A firm monetary policy, focused at growth with stability, by preventing a rise in interest rates and providing sufficient liquidity to boost growth and at the same time, keeping inflationary tendencies under check would be crucial. The RBI's task will be formidable in ensuring adequate credit flow, managing liquidity, keeping inflation under control, and providing a boost to growth. □□

The Concept of Environment in Durga Saptashati: Restoring Prakriti After the Fall of Rakshasi Forces

The Durga Saptashati (literally “Seven Hundred Verses on Durga”), also known as the Devi Mahatmya (“Glory of the Goddess”) or Chandi Path, constitutes chapters 81 through 93 of the Markandeya Purana . While its primary reception has been within devotional and tantric traditions, the text depicts a framework for understanding the relationship between moral conduct, cosmic order, and the health of natural systems. In this article we postulate, firstly, that the rakshasi forces in the Saptashati function as metaphors for ecological disruption: they “spoil” the elements, block natural cycles, and render the earth barren. Secondly, that the Devi’s killing of these forces is depicted not as mere violence but as ecological purification—a surgical removal of obstructions to Nature’s self-regulation. Thirdly, that the text’s resolution presents the rebirth of Prakriti as the visible sign of dharma’s establishment, with rivers flowing, crops growing, and seasonal cycles returning.

The Saptashati presents three major episodes, each escalating in cosmological significance: the subjugation of Madhu-Kaitabha, the slaying of Mahishasura, and the destruction of Shumbha-Nishumbha with their generals Chanda, Munda, and Raktabija. In each narrative, the asuric dominion is described in terms that transcend political conquest to encompass environmental collapse.

When Mahishasura usurps the celestial realm, the text records that “the sun lost its brilliance, the moon its coolness, and fire did not burn” (Chapter 2). This is not hyperbolic ornamentation but a precise statement about the failure of elemental function. Similarly, the Shumbha-Nishumbha narrative describes the asuras appropriating the operational powers of natural forces—Indra’s capacity to generate rain, Vayu’s to move wind, Agni’s to produce fire. The usurpation is explicitly ecological.

The health of rivers and the coolness of the wind are the truest measures of



The environment is not outside the Goddess; the environment is the Goddess. When we heal it, we invoke Her presence. When we spoil it, we summon the very rakshasi forces She came to spoil.

Deepak Sharma



whether dharma or adharma rules” . The rakshasi forces thus represent “anti-Prakriti”—not a separate substance but a parasitic mode of existence that obstructs Nature’s self-expression. Their rule is characterized by drought, disease, sterility of land, and the corruption of the five elements: earth becomes barren, water turns to poison, fire burns erratically, wind becomes destructive storm, and the primordial sound (shabda) of creation becomes the cacophony of demons.

Crucially, the text equates moral disorder with ecological disorder. When the Devi declares in Chapter 11, “Whenever there is a decline of dharma and rise of adharma, I manifest Myself... for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked, and for the establishment of dharma,” the term dharma must be understood to encompass bhuta-dharma—the right conduct toward all beings and elements. The rakshasi have “spoiled all nature”: they have polluted water sources, scorched the earth, and obstructed the natural cycles of season and growth.

The Devi’s martial engagement with demonic forces, often misread as gratuitous violence, functions within the text’s symbolic economy as a form of ecological surgery. Each major battle targets a specific form of imbalance, and each victory produces a specific environmental restoration. The Mahishasura episode is instructive. The buffalo-demon shifts forms—buffalo, lion, elephant—each representing a violent distortion of animal nature. His death, the text implies, returns animals to their proper state of being (svabhava). The killing is not destruction but realignment.

The Raktabija narrative is particularly sophisticated in its ecological symbolism. Raktabija’s boon—that every drop of his blood falling on earth generates another demon—represents what might be called unsustainable multiplication or ecological feedback loops. “Strike him, and he multiplies. Suppress him in one corner, and he rises in ten others. Is this not the story of our climate crisis? Burn one forest, and ten new wildfires break out... Release one pollutant, and it multiplies through soil, air, and ocean” . The Goddess Kali must spread her tongue across the battlefield, drinking the blood before it touches the ground. This act prevents further contamination of bhumi (earth) and represents the capacity to absorb and neutralize toxicity rather than merely displacing it .

After the slaughter of Chanda and Munda, the Devi is hailed as Chamunda. The immediate aftermath is described in explicitly ecological terms. Chapter 12 records: “Then the seasons resumed their course, the planets moved in their orbits, the winds blew gently, the fire burnt steadily.” The text further states: “*हतेषु दैत्येषु महासुरेषु, प्रकृतिः सहसा समजायत*” — “When the great asuras were slain, Nature was suddenly born/revived.” Rivers that had been blocked or dried begin flowing: “Saritah prasannasalila vahanti” — “Rivers started flowing with clear water.” The earth becomes green again: “Sasyani sarvani prarohanti” — “All crops started growing”.

The most explicit environmental statement in the Saptashati tradition occurs in the phalashruti and the Devi’s promise in Chapter 12, where she declares that in times of famine, drought, and pestilence, she will incarnate as Shakambhari—

literally “She who bears vegetables” (from *uāka*, vegetable/plant food, and *bhari*, bearer/nourisher). The Shakambhari narrative, detailed in the Devi Bhagavata Purana and Shiva Purana, describes a hundred-year drought caused by the demon Durgamasura, who has caused the sages to forget the Vedas, thereby disrupting the ritual cycle that maintains cosmic order. Without Vedic recitation, no homa (fire offerings) are performed; without offerings, the Sun does not receive oblations; without oblations transformed into rain, the earth dries up. This causal chain—from textual memory to ritual performance to meteorological process—reveals the text’s understanding of ecology as embedded in a larger semiotic and moral order.

The Goddess appears as Shatakshi (“hundred-eyed”) and weeps continuously for nine nights. Her tears become rivers; her body generates fruits, vegetables, and grains that feed the starving. She then defeats Durgamasura and restores the Vedas to the sages. As the Wikipedia entry summarizes, “After the malevolent asura Durgamasura deprived the earth of nourishment by causing the sages to forget the Vedas, the goddess appeared to offer human beings and devas sufficient fruits and vegetables to restore their strength”. This episode is crucial for environmental theology because it identifies the Goddess not merely as the protector of Nature but as Nature itself. The Devi does not command plants to grow; she becomes vegetation. She does not send rain; her own tears become rivers. The ecological crisis is resolved through divine embodiment, not external intervention.

The Saptashati’s environmental vision is grounded in a sophisti-

cated ontology of the five great elements (pancha-mahabhuta). In the Devi Sukta of Chapter 5, the gods praise the Goddess with a precise elemental catalog:

“You are the earth (prithvi), with its scent (gandha)

You are water (jala), with its taste (rasa)

You are light (tejas), with its form (rupa)

You are air (vayu), with its touch (sparsha)

You are ether (akasha), with its sound (shabda)”

This identification of the Devi with the qualitative essences (tanmatras) of the elements means that when the rakshasi forces dominate, these elements are not merely affected but violated. Earth loses its scent (becomes barren), water loses its taste (becomes poisoned), fire loses its form (becomes uncontrolled), air loses its touch (becomes violent storm), ether loses its sound (becomes demonic roar). The Devi’s victory restores each element to its svabhava—its intrinsic nature and proper functioning.

Thus, ecological balance in the Saptashati is not an external condition but a theological state—the visible sign that dharma prevails and that the Goddess is present and unobstructed.

Contemporary Ecological Reading

Reading the Durga Saptashati in the context of the Anthropocene yields a compelling environmental ethic. The “rakshasi that spoiled all nature” can be understood as exploitative human conduct: deforestation that obstructs water cycles, industrial pollution that contaminates soil and water, greenhouse gas emissions that disrupt seasonal pat-

terns. The asuras represent specific forms of ecological violence: Mahishasura’s brute force without intelligence; Raktabija’s unsustainable multiplication (population growth, compound economic growth, carbon feedback loops); Shumbha-Nishumbha’s ego and possessiveness that claim “this whole earth is mine.”

The Devi’s weapons, in this reading, are also ecological principles: the trident representing the three gunas (qualities of nature) that must remain in balance; the conch representing the primordial sound of creation (vibrational integrity of ecosystems); the lotus representing purity emerging from mud (regeneration from degraded conditions); the bow and arrow representing focused energy for targeted intervention. Her lion vahana (vehicle) signifies that raw animal power must be governed by intelligence and restraint.

The text’s ritual tradition—Navaratri observances including bhumi-pujan (earth worship), kalash-sthapana (establishing a water-and-grain pot), and kanya-pujan (worship of young girls as embodiments of feminine energy)—all honor earth, water, and fertility. The concluding Aparadha-kshama-pana Stotra (apology for offenses), which asks forgiveness “for harming beings knowingly or unknowingly,” functions as environmental atonement.

The Durga Saptashati is among the earliest known texts to articulate a systematic ecological theology. Its core insight is that ecological crisis is a dharmic crisis, and ecological restoration is the visible sign of divine grace. After the killing of all rakshasi forces, Prakriti is not created ex nihilo but released

from bondage—rivers flow, crops grow, seasons return because the forces that obstructed natural law have been removed.

For contemporary readers facing climate crisis, biodiversity collapse, and environmental degradation, the text issues a clear ethical call: asuric behavior toward Nature—extraction without regeneration, consumption without gratitude, pollution without accountability—will choke rivers and scorch fields. To invoke the Goddess is to invoke balance. In protecting forests, cleaning rivers, respecting seasonal cycles, and reducing unsustainable multiplication, we continue the battle of the Saptashati. The environment is not outside the Goddess; the environment is the Goddess. When we heal it, we invoke Her presence. When we spoil it, we summon the very rakshasi forces She came to spoil. □□

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Patriot and Social Reformer – Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar was a true patriot, a visionary economist, and the voice of the oppressed and downtrodden sections of Bharatiya society. Born into an “untouchable” community, he endured humiliation and indignity from his childhood. Yet, despite growing up amidst hardship and deprivation, he neither blamed others for his hardships, struggles nor allowed adversity to deter his resolve.

Beginning the journey of his schooling at Elphinstone High School in Mumbai, he later received a scholarship from Maharaja Sayajirao Gayakwad of Baroda, completing his B.A. in 1912. Recognizing the transformative power of education, he pursued higher studies with further support from the Maharaja. He distinguished himself with Graduate and Post Graduate in Political Science, Moral Philosophy, Anthropology, and Sociology. He went on to acquire advanced degrees, including a Ph.D. in Economics, from Columbia University and the London School of Economics. Mastering multiple disciplines, he inspired his people to seek education and self-empowerment. He faced challenges head-on and resolved to uplift the lives of those oppressed for centuries. Understanding that education was the key to liberation, he encouraged the marginalized to educate themselves and unite.

A born fighter who sought solutions to social injustices, Dr. Ambedkar participated in freedom struggle and worked tirelessly to strengthen the values of equality, liberty, and fraternity. In 1920, he launched the fortnightly journal *Mookanayak* to give voice to the voiceless. After completing his legal education, he became a Barrister in 1923. In 1924, he founded the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha to promote education among the oppressed classes. In 1927, he led the historic Mahad Satyagraha by drinking water from the Chaudar tank and symbolically burned the Manu smriti. In 1929, he opposed communal representation before the Simon Commission. In 1930, he spearheaded the Kalaram Temple entry



Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's life exemplified the principle of "Nation First."
Studying and practicing his ideals is the true tribute we can offer him.
Mahadevayya Karadalli



movement in Nashik. As a representative of the depressed classes, he participated in the Round Table Conferences and, had negotiations with Mahatma Gandhi, which was called as the historic Poona Pact. In 1935, he declared his intention to renounce Hinduism as a means of social reform. He also led labour movements and, in 1940, authored *Thoughts on Pakistan*, analysing contemporary political realities. In 1946, he became a member of the Constituent Assembly and also founded Siddharth College. In 1947, as Independent India's first Law Minister and Chairman of the Drafting Committee, he played a pivotal role in framing the Constitution, laying a strong foundation for Indian democracy. These milestones stand as enduring testaments to his patriotic personality. Having rejected the Manu smriti, he did not remain merely as critic but offered a progressive alternative in the form of a modern Constitution.

A Pioneer of New Bharat

As an economist, Dr. Ambedkar conducted extensive research on India's economic development. His ideas contributed to the establishment of the Reserve Bank of India and influenced policies related to agriculture, industry, and finance. He critically examined India's foreign policy and questioned the deterioration of international relations in the early years after independence. He was a sharp critic of Nehru on several geopolitical approaches, including certain idealistic foreign policy orientations. During the Hyderabad liberation struggle, he advised Home Minister Sardar Patel to term military intervention as "police action," thereby preventing external interference. Due to differences within the cabi-

net over the Hindu Code Bill, he eventually resigned.

A Leader Who Placed the Nation First

True to his words that he would not die a Hindu, yet without succumbing to foreign religious influences, he chose to embrace Buddhism, born in Bharatiya faith. On May 24, 1956, he announced his decision, and on Vijayadashami of the same year, he embraced Buddhism along with nearly three lakh followers, strengthening Bharatiya's cultural unity. On December 6, 1956, he left his mortal body, but he continues to live eternally in the hearts of those who have endured suffering.

His deep concern for his people often found expression in strong and uncompromising words, which at times were misunderstood by others. However, his genuine love for Hindu society and his unwavering devotion to Bharatiyas' were beyond question. Recognizing the deep-rooted social evils of untouchability, he treated evils of society as a social physician, offering remedies that preserved national unity and social harmony.

He worked with thinkers from diverse communities, such as Chamanlal Setalvad, Dr. R.P. Paranjpe, and Balasaheb Kher, within the Bahishkrit Hitakarini Sabha, reflecting his inclusive outlook.

Messenger of Social Harmony and National Unity

Dr. Ambedkar emphasized that social harmony was essential for national unity and integrity. He cautioned that when oppressed communities rise, feelings of anger and retaliation are natural, but aggressive approaches could be self-destructive. He advised Dalit youth to have unwavering faith in the purity

Dr. Ambedkar conducted extensive research on India's economic development. His ideas contributed to the establishment of the Reserve Bank of India and influenced policies related to agriculture, industry, and finance.

of their goals and to dedicate their strength, time, and talent to the upliftment of their community. He reminded them that alongside striving for social justice, they must also safeguard the nation's sovereignty.

After embracing Buddhism, while addressing a gathering of Scheduled Caste Federation workers in Nagpur, he remarked that while others might value politics more, for him, Dharma held a deeper significance. He encouraged cooperation with sympathetic groups and stressed the importance of working collectively with others. Such guidance established him as a person who always worked for unity, integrity and social cohesion.

Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar's life exemplified the principle of "Nation First." Studying and practicing his ideals is the true tribute we can offer him. As Bharat aspires to emerge as a global leader by 2047, striving towards a strong and prosperous nation would be the most fitting homage to this *Mahan* soul.

On his birth anniversary, all Bharatiyas' remember him with reverence and extend their heartfelt tributes.

(Source: "Rashtra Chintan of Dr. Ambedkar (Kannada)" by Chandrashekar Bhandari)

CAA, Waqf Law and SIR Spur USCIRF Fury Against RAW and RSS

Very recently, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom's (USCIRF) 2026 Annual Report was published which assessed religious freedom violations and progress in 29 countries during the year 2025 and makes recommendations for U.S. policy. Bharat figured among those countries and vicious allegations were made against Bharat which apparently spurred by the Citizen Amendment Act (CAA) to grant citizenship to the migrants from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh and Special Intensive Revision (SIR) to weed out bogus voters and illegal migrants. The plain reading of USCIRF report, makes it blatantly clear that this is direct interference in the domestic affairs of India and aims to promote the divisive forces and conspiracy in India.

It was reported in USCIRF report that in 2025, religious freedom conditions in India continued to deteriorate as the government introduced and enforced new legislation targeting religious minority communities and their houses of worship. It targets several states which undertook efforts to introduce or strengthen anti-conversion laws. The report alleged that the Indian authorities facilitated widespread detention and illegal expulsion of citizens and religious refugees and tolerated vigilante attacks against religious minority communities.

The report charged that throughout the year, Hindu nationalist mobs across several states harassed, incited, and instigated violence against Muslims and Christians with impunity. It accused that violence erupted in Maha-rashtra after a hard-line Hindu nationalist group, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), called for the removal of the tomb of Aurangzeb and subsequent riots injured dozens of people and resulted in a curfew, fuelled by rumours from Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) officials that Qur'ans were desecrated in VHP-led protests. USCIRF contended that in June 2025, a Hindu nationalist mob attacked 20 Christian families in Odisha after they refused to convert to Hinduism and the attacks did not prompt police intervention, leaving eight people injured and hospitalized.

In connection with Pak sponsored and engineered brutal terrorist attack killing 26 Hindu tourists in Pahalgam and post-Operation Sindoor, USCIRF rumoured anti-Muslim sentiment in India, including targeted attacks in which Muslims were killed in Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh in alleged hate crimes following the attack. The report scuttlebutted that in Uttar Pradesh, a Hindu nationalist group reportedly shot and killed a Muslim restaurant worker, vowing to avenge those killed in the Kashmir attack and the Indian government seized the aftermath of the attack to justify deportations of religious minorities it considers "illegal" migrants.

The report alleged that the Indian authorities detained 40 Rohingya refugees, including 15 Christians, all of whom were transported into international waters near the coast of Burma and forced to swim to the Burmese shore with nothing more than life vests and in July 2025, Indian authorities expelled hundreds of



The USCIRF report is malicious and defamatory and is full of concoctions. The nation stood behind the Modi Government and the army during Operation Sindoor and there were no muslim protests.

Vinod Johri

Bengali-speaking Muslims from Assam to Bangladesh despite being Indian citizens. It retorted that the officials from the ruling BJP accused those expelled of being Muslim “infiltrators” from Bangladesh, threatening India’s national identity. USCIRF report expressed worries over ‘crackdown’ in alleged “illegal migration,” and a new set of rules and orders for the Foreigners Act passed by the Indian Government in September. It alleged that the order expanded the authority of Foreigner Tribunals to issue arrest warrants and send those suspected of being “foreigners” to holding centres without due process.

The USCIRF report further alleged that the government continued to target houses of worship to bring them under state control. It complained that India’s Parliament passed the Waqf Bill, which provides to induct non-Muslims to the Waqf boards. USCIRF is also aggrieved with Uttarakhand’s legislative assembly having passed the ‘State Authority for Minority Education (USAME) Act’, which dissolving the Madrasa Board and bringing minority institutions under state control.

Allegations of Discriminatory Laws Restricting Religious Freedom in India

The report alleged enforcement of numerous laws targeting religious minorities, including the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), the 1967 Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), the 2019 Citizenship (Amendment) Act (CAA), the National Register of Citizens (NRC), the 2025 Waqf Bill, and the 2025 Immigration and Foreigners Bill, calling them discriminatory.

USCIRF Grudge against Religious Conversion by force, fraud, allurements, or marriage

The state-level legislations prohibit religious conversion by force, fraud, allurements, or marriage but the USCIRF has alleged these laws as anti-conversion laws aimed at harsher penalties and broader definitions of “religious conversion.” Arunachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan are alleged to push laws for the implementation of ‘anti-conversion laws’ resulting in widespread protests by hundreds of thousands of Christians.

USCIRF Report Assails Banning Cow Slaughter

It has been further alleged that throughout 2025, violent mobs attacked Muslims under the guise of protecting state-level cow slaughter laws.

Allegations of Imprisonment of Christian missionary for Conversion to Christianity

It is alleged in the USCIRF report that in 2025, authorities detained individuals accused of conducting forced conversions and in October, police arrested a U.S. citizen, James Watson, and two Indian nationals, Ganpati Sarpe and Manoj Govind Kolha, accused of converting Hindus to Christianity in Maharashtra as they were charged with “hurting religious sentiment” and for luring individuals to convert by promising “miracle cures” and prosperity.

Supporting Secessionists

The report accused that the government continued to wield anti-terrorism laws to imprison religious minorities and those advocating on their behalf. It quoted Umar Khalid, Sharjeel Imam, and

several others involved in the 2020 CAA protests remained in prison for the fifth year without trials. Similar few cases were also cited in the report.

USCIRF Recommendations to the US Government

- Designate India as a “country of particular concern,” or CPC, for engaging in and tolerating systematic, ongoing, and egregious religious freedom violations, as defined by the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA);
- Press India to allow US government entities such as USCIRF and the U.S. Department of State to conduct in-country assessments of religious freedom conditions;
- Impose targeted sanctions on individuals and entities, such as India’s Research and Analysis Wing and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), for their responsibility and tolerance of severe violations of religious freedom by freezing those individuals’ or entities’ assets and/or barring their entry into the United States;
- Link future U.S. security assistance and bilateral trade policies with India to improvements in religious freedom; and
- Enforce Section 6 of the Arms Export Control Act to halt arms sales to India based on continued acts of intimidation and harassment against U.S. citizens and religious minorities.
- Reintroduce and pass the Transnational Repression Reporting Act of 2024 to require the annual reporting of acts of transnational repression by the Indian government targeting re-

religious minorities in the United States. It focuses on documenting cases, law enforcement responses, and actions against perpetrators from countries like China, Iran, and India.

Indian Reaction

India slammed ‘selective targeting’ as US body seeking sanctions on RAW and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The Centre responded strongly after a United States federal government commission recommended that India be designated a “Country of Particular Concern” for religious freedom violations and called for targeted sanctions on the external intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (R&AW), and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In response to the report, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said, “We have taken note of the latest report of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF). We categorically reject its motivated and biased characterisation of India. For several years now, USCIRF has persisted in presenting a distorted and selective picture of India, relying on questionable sources and ideological narratives rather than objective facts.”

Randhir Jaiswal further added, “Such repeated misrepresentations only undermine the credibility of the Commission itself. Instead of persisting with selective criticism of India, USCIRF would do well to reflect on the disturbing incidents of vandalism and attacks on Hindu temples in the United States, selective targeting of India, and growing intolerance and intimidation of members of the Indian diaspora in the United States, which

merit serious attention”.

The external affairs ministry said USCIRF issued biased and politically motivated assessments. It said the USCIRF cast aspersions on India’s vibrant multicultural society as it was a deliberate agenda rather than a genuine concern for religious freedom.

The ministry underlined that India is home to 1.4 billion people who are adherents to all religions. It said it does not expect the USCIRF to engage with the reality of India’s pluralistic framework or acknowledge the harmonious co-existence of its diverse communities. “Such efforts to undermine India’s standing as a beacon of democracy and tolerance will not succeed. In fact, it is the USCIRF that should be designated as an entity of concern,” the ministry said last year. India has also denied visas to the USCIRF team and pushed back against the commission’s comments on the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in 2019.

In a move that sends a lightning bolt through Washington-Delhi relations, the USCIRF is now officially calling for a ban on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and they didn’t stop at the political grassroots. The commission wants the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW)—India’s elite foreign intelligence agency—blacklisted right alongside them. This isn’t just another dry human rights report. It’s a direct hit on the bedrock of India’s current power structure.

The USCIRF report is malicious and defamatory and is full of concoctions. The nation stood behind the Modi Government and the army during Operation Sindoor and there were no muslim protests. The Waqf Amendment

Act aimed to manage the waqf properties transparently and stop misuse of properties by the Waqf trustees. The initial protests were incited by the vested interests whose monopoly on the waqf properties was at stake. The Citizenship Amendment Act grants citizenship to the persecuted Hindus and other minorities in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan and was not aimed at cancelling citizenships. The illegal infiltrators from Bangladesh and Pakistan have entered the country over several decades and their population is in crores. They have changed the demography of the border areas and have set up network of contraband and crimes and are largely engaged in secessionist activities in the border areas. SIR aims at disfranchising the illegal immigrants. The muslim population have increased phenomenally in the country which is enough to prove that the muslims are living in the country with more security, equality and comfort than in the Islamic countries. There is a strong sentiment in the country on the forced religious conversions by the Church missionaries and Islamic extremists by way of violence, love jihad, land jihad, killings and allurements. Such elements have distorted social harmony and equilibrium. There is a strong network of anti-national activities outside India, which must be dismantled. On the contrary, USCIRF must examine the violations of human rights in US itself and the US support to the terrorist countries like Pakistan in our neighbourhood resulting in mass killings by the Pakistani terrorists and its local network in India. Such reports of USCIRF have only eroded the credibility of the US itself. □□

(Source - U.S. COMMISSION ON INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, 732 North Capitol Street, NW, Suite A714, Washington, DC 20401, 202-523-3240, www.uscirf.gov)

Out of Syllabus: An Invincible Iran



The author argues that the United States-dominated world order is in meltdown. Its foremost client state, Israel, that forced it into war with Iran, has abandoned the battlefield and is fighting civilians in Lebanon. As America prepares for a ground invasion of Iran, Israel has confirmed that its soldiers will not join the fray.
Sandhya Jain

The United States-dominated world order is in meltdown. Its foremost client state, Israel, that forced it into war with Iran, has abandoned the battlefield and is fighting civilians in Lebanon. As America prepares for a ground invasion of Iran, Israel has confirmed that its soldiers will not join the fray.

While a new world order has yet to crystallise, allies and others are asserting themselves. Iran will be the hegemon in the Gulf, as the US-Israel lose ground. Qatar saw the merits of neutrality (March 19, 2026), but has been pulled back into the war. Iraq (liberated from NATO-US occupation) has joined Iran's side. The Yemeni Houthi rebels have joined Iran. The Gulf states, though still aligned with the US, view the military bases on their territory as a liability.

The United Arab Emirates urged a diplomatic agreement after Iran attacked Abu Dhabi's economic zone on March 28, 2026. Egypt announced that it will not go against Iran. In Bahrain and Syria, citizens are revolting against the monarchy and the ISIS regime respectively.

The end of the war will see changes: Palestine including the West Bank and Gaza will be free. The Caribbean island nation of Cuba will benefit. Russia has enhanced its economic heft thanks to the oil crisis (oil revenue doubled to \$24 billion in March 2026). China retains its status due to its manufacturing prowess in almost every economic sector, its cutting-edge technologies, and control over rare earth minerals that are critical to all modern technology.

Europe and Japan have no geostrategic leverage in the current conflict. Türkiye is supporting Iran, as are Brazil and Indonesia. South Africa took Israel to the International Criminal Court for crimes in Gaza; it has been disinvited from the G20 in Florida, US. India will benefit from the retreat of US power from South and West Asia, which will happen during its chairmanship of BRICS.



Oil Economics

The world sees the conflict as a ruse to grab Iran's oil and gas. President Trump stated: "My favourite thing is to TAKE THE OIL from Iran..." (March 30, 2026). The US seized control of Iraqi oil after invading the country in 2003 (USD 145 billion per annum went to the US Federal Reserve Bank). The US controlled Kuwaiti oil after the 1991 war in Iraq, and Libyan oil after Gaddafi. The same is happening in Venezuela.

Before the war, Iran produced around 1.1 million barrels of oil/day. Currently, it produces 3.6 mn barrels/day, and sells it at \$120 per barrel, with receipts in Yuan. Petrochemical sales have also increased. Trita Parsi, Executive Vice President, Quincy Institute, observed that the war has given Iran sanctions relief, so it has no reason to end the war unless sanctions are completely removed.

Palmachim

Iran claimed to have destroyed Palmachim, Israel's secret space and military facility, its launch site for spy satellites, missile tests, and advanced space programs (March 30, 2026). It has wreaked havoc on the US bases in Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, and Saudi Arabia. The US had to evacuate 10,000 citizens from Israel (Mar 16, 2026). Its retreat enabled Turkiye to reclaim the Incirlik airbase.

Iranian attacks on Israel include the PM's office, Mossad and Aman headquarters, and IDF defence facilities; the country's two oil refineries and largest petrochemical complex; Ben Gurion International Airport; and the Sorek water treatment facility. Panicked citizens are fleeing to Egypt or Jordan by

The world sees the conflict as a ruse to grab Iran's oil and gas. President Trump stated: "My favourite thing is to TAKE THE OIL from Iran..." (March 30, 2026).

land, or by chartered plane to Cyprus. Israel's attack on Iran's Natanz nuclear facility was countered with strikes on its own Dimona nuclear power plant and research centre. It hit the second US F-35 fighter jet on March 26, 2026. The first, invisible on radar, was tracked via its heat signature on March 19, 2026.

In an astute move, Tehran permitted nations buying oil in yuan to pass through the Hormuz, and some tankers from Pakistan, China, India, Turkey, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, UAE and Japan moved through the Strait. The de-dollarisation of the world economy moved a step forward.

Stunned by Iran's capabilities, President Trump announced a "pause" against Iran's energy infrastructure until April 6, 2026. Tel Aviv promptly bombed all three of Iran's largest steel plants simultaneously, and also struck Iran's Khondab heavy-water reactor facility and uranium production and uranium-conversion sites. On March 29, 2026, the University of Science and Technology in Tehran was gutted. Te-

hran, which has already destroyed part of Israel's Technion Institute in Israel, warned that American universities in West Asia would henceforth be legitimate targets.

Washington's claims to be negotiating with Iran via Pakistan were denied by Tehran and Tel Aviv. Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, Special Envoy, Foreign Ministry of Israel, said, "I don't know what the Pakistanis think they're doing... They are themselves a huge problem in the world of jihadi terrorism..." (ANI)

Pope Leo XIV

Since the end of the Second World War, no Pope has actively campaigned against an American war. However, US-born Pope Leo XIV called the Iran war 'atrocious' during Palm Sunday Mass, exhorted Christian soldiers to promote peace, ordered Catholic politicians supporting the war to go to confession, called for a permanent ban on aerial bombing, and demanded a ceasefire.

Fractures in Israel and America

Former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett came on live TV recently and blamed Netanyahu for the October 7, 2025. He pointed out that Netanyahu funded Hamas and Hezbollah for years. American activist Charlie Kirk was assassinated after he suspected the Netanyahu regime's connivance to allow October 7, 2025, as a pretext to ethnically cleanse Gaza.

Netanyahu's coveted war has not gone well. The IDF chief Eyal Zamir has publicly warned that Israel has collapsed psychologically, with civilians fleeing the country and soldiers abandoning the army: "The army is collapsing; no soldiers remain." There are growing anti-war protests in Israel.

In the US, troops in the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit and on warships headed to the Middle East are filing emergency Conscientious Objector claims to stop their deployment. The Center on Conscience and War (CCW) recorded a 1,000 percent increase in new conscientious objectors since the war began on February 28, 2026 (CNN). Many said the strike on the Minab girls' school triggered their decision. Mike Prysner, Executive Director, CCW, told Democracy Now! that the soldiers are not afraid of dying, but 'They're scared of killing in a war they don't believe in.'

New 'Promised' Lands

The Balfour Declaration and its plan to create the State of Israel in Palestine has failed as Israeli Settlers flee in droves and seek new land in Africa. So far, 1.4 million have settled in the Western Cape province of South Africa and are demanding its independence. Many saw the writing on the wall began settling in Mauritius, Morocco, Kenya, Rwanda, Liberia, Namibia, Zambia, Lesotho, Eswatini, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Ghana and Botswana, not to forget Argentina.

Cyprus's second largest political party, the Progressive Party of Working People (AKEL), has protested against the growing numbers of Israelis on the island, who are buying property near critical infrastructure and could demand 'Israel 2.0'. Israelis are allegedly using counterfeit passports to acquire land in the Greek sections of Cyprus.

In Greece, local activists successfully blocked hundreds of Israelis from disembarking after Israel claimed it would take over all the Greek islands to settle an alleged debt of 400 billion dollars from the

Second World War. It demanded that Christian Greeks vacate the islands so that Jews can move in.

Lebanon

Soon after Prime Minister Netanyahu disappeared from the scene (Mar 9, 2026), Israel began to focus on South Lebanon. It flattened villages with massive bombs, even white phosphorus (banned by the UN). Israel is bombing hospitals in Iran and Lebanon, as it did in Gaza (128 in Lebanon, 25 in Iran).

Israel's defense minister, Israel Katz, admitted ordering "an acceleration in the destruction of Lebanese homes in contact-line villages... in accordance with the model of Beit Hanun and Rafah in Gaza" (Mar 22, 2026). Katz said Israel will occupy southern Lebanon up to the Litani River for the long-term.

In response, Hezbollah destroyed over 100 advanced Merkava tanks in just 15 days. Israeli media has reported that at least 10 helicopters were deployed to evacuate dead and wounded soldiers in southern Lebanon. President Assad is said to have transferred most of Syria's best weapons to Hezbollah before his regime fell. Hezbollah is now fighting inside Israel in the Galilee region, capturing several outposts in Kiryat Shmona and Metula.

Undaunted by its reverses, the Knesset on March 30, 2026, passed a bill to award the death penalty to Palestinians convicted of killing Israelis in acts of "terror"; this will not apply to Jewish Israelis convicted of killing Palestinians. Hundreds of prisoners are expected to be executed in the next few weeks. Netanyahu reportedly voted for the bill, but there were no clear visuals

in the videos.

Mystery

Prime Minister Netanyahu has not indisputably been seen in public since March 9, 2026. Unconfirmed reports claim that the Wings of Zion, the Israeli Prime Minister's official plane, has been parked at a specialised US Army hospital in Landstuhl, Germany, near the Ramstein Air Base for several days. □□

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The Silent Crisis Of The Rise In Urban Noise Pollution

The air pollution crisis in the National Capital Region during the winter months has made this urban challenge a major policy and media concern. There is another form of pollution that has gripped urban India that does not get the media and policy attention that it deserves. While noise pollution was officially identified as a major social problem in urban India a quarter century ago, with the notification of Noise Pollution (Regulation and Control) Rules 2000, few state governments are willing to address it determinedly.

The noise pollution rules notified under the Environment Protection Act 1986 aim to stem the rising tide of urban noise through several sources, especially loudspeakers, traffic, construction and public events. The rules acknowledged the fact that noise exceeding certain medically acceptable decibel levels not only disrupt peace but also affect the quality of life and health of residents, especially the young and the old.

The hazardous effects of sustained, repeated and high-decibel noise pollution are many and include hearing loss, inducement of stress, anxiety and contribute to cardiovascular and cerebrovascular disease. Individuals prone to nervous stress are particularly vulnerable to sharp and sustained noise. Noise pollution also delays recuperation and rehabilitation of ailing patients in hospitals, which is why traffic rules do not permit honking in the vicinity of hospitals. This rule is today observed in its callous breach.

Mention should be made that sustained neighbourhood noise has a deleterious impact on the learning abilities of children and youth studying at school, college or at home. In fact, most urban neighbourhoods are no longer conducive to serious reading and study and the education of the young. How can one expect students to focus and concentrate on their studies when they are constantly subject to noise from loudspeakers in the neighbourhood?



Urbanisation isn't just about building the hard infrastructure of roads, flyovers, metros, high-rise buildings, drainage and public parks. It is equally about creating a shared culture of urban living, of which minimising noise is an important element.

Sanjaya Baru



Living intermittently in a residential neighbourhood in New Delhi and in Hyderabad, I have identified three prime sources of noise pollution that have become a public nuisance: (a) Vehicular traffic, especially honking by most drivers; the use of sirens by police vehicles escorting ministers and other senior government functionaries and political busybodies (a nuisance across the country); (b) loudspeakers deployed by mosques, temples and other religious places, as well as by political parties and social activists; and, (c) construction activity.

The use of loudspeakers in public places and residential areas has generally been limited in most cities to between 6 am and 10 pm. Any use after 10 pm requires special permission. This has not inhibited rampant use of loudspeakers through the night. During religious festivals, loudspeakers are routinely deployed.

This can range from loudspeakers blaring music out of Ganesh and Durga Puja pandals to highdecibel speakers being placed in huge vehicles that carry idols around cities before their immersion, or accompany devotees such as the Kanwariyas. The blaring of film and religious music at exceedingly high decibels through the night have made these events a major cause of noise pollution in several cities across India.

Hearing the screeching and often an audibly unmusical voice of a muezzin at a mosque, summoning the faithful to worship, in the early waking hours, one wonders how the faithful were summoned in the age before loudspeakers. In that distant era when humans did not have watches and alarm clocks, the loud summoning of the faith-

ful by a muezzin is understandable. But with everyone having a mobile phone does one require a loudspeaker to remind one that it is time for prayer, time to eat, time to fast?

The unchecked spread of mosques in several cities, including Hyderabad, and across residential areas, with an ill-trained voice of a muezzin have made their calls on loudspeakers periodic bursts of shrill noise. It is no longer restricted to the five times that the faithful are summoned to prayer, with loudspeakers blaring sermons from mosques and madrasas through the day.

It is not as if the penalties for noise pollution are light. Criminal charges can be brought against repeat offenders. The law provides that loudspeakers that are set beyond permissible decibel levels can be confiscated. However, this requires action by the relevant authorities.

My attempt to get the several mosques in my neighbourhood in Hyderabad that have their loudspeakers directed at my home and the surrounding areas to merely alter the direction of their speakers has met with no success despite my complaining to the local police and other influential persons. I even made the additional point that there are two hospitals in the vicinity and the law prohibits noise in the vicinity of hospitals.

When ministers drive around with police escort cars blaring sirens loud, how does one expect the government and the police to be sensitive to the problem of noise pollution? Apart from the failure of the authorities in checking noise pollution, there is a cultural dimension to the challenge. Most Indians tend to be noisy.

This fact was recently highlighted by a directive issued by the

civil aviation authorities urging airline passengers to use earphones while listening to music or viewing entertainment on a flight. Indeed, one often has to request fellow passengers to speak softly so that one can read a book or get a shut eye. The upwardly mobile Indian is a very noisy animal. She speaks loudly, laughs loudly, sets decibel levels on mobile phones very high and will rarely discipline a noisy child.

Urban India has become sensitised to an extent to the hazards of air pollution because it is beginning to feel the deleterious effect of toxic air, with the rising incidence of lung disease. However, there is very little appreciation of how noise pollution is also a health hazard. Episodic noise, emanating from loudspeakers at religious places, to sustained noise, of vehicular traffic and construction activity are deleterious to one's health.

The time has come for a national campaign against noise pollution. Three immediate steps that can be taken and that would immediately reduce decibel levels would be (a) ban the use of loudspeakers at all places of worship, marriages and other social events at all times; (b) ban on loudspeakers being placed on trucks carrying idols during festivals; (c) ban on use of sirens by police vehicles escorting ministers and all other government vehicles, except ambulances.

Urbanisation isn't just about building the hard infrastructure of roads, flyovers, metros, high-rise buildings, drainage and public parks. It is equally about creating a shared culture of urban living, of which minimising noise is an important element. □□

Sanjaya Baru is a writer and economist. His most recent book is *Secession of the Successful: The Flight Out of New India* <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/columnists/sanjayaracha-the-silent-crisis-of-the-rise-in-urban-noise-pollution-sanjaya-baru-1947176>

Super El Niño, heatwave and fertiliser crisis: India must go beyond Green Revolution

The year 2026 doesn't appear to be good for Indian farmers. March and April were lashed by untimely rains and hailstorms, and now we hear of various heatwave alerts in the country. As per some estimates, 2.49 lakh hectares are already affected, dampening the Rabi harvest.

New bad news comes from the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) that India will have a below-average monsoon. So how does a bad monsoon translate for Indian farmers and our food security?

A little insight into the weather report first. As per the IMD, India will be receiving 92 per cent of its 87 cm long period average (LPA) rains in the months of June-September. What does this mean? In simple terms, 2015 had a below-average monsoon pegged at 93 per cent of the LPA, and 2015 was one of the worst drought years.

Top this calamity off with the fact that 2026 is a Super El Niño year, which means we will be witnessing a much drier monsoon and erratic weather. A 92 per cent monsoon and Super El Niño is a double weather trouble for our farmers and policymakers, who need to immediately start preparation.

The troubles are not done yet; the third threat comes from the Iran War and disruption of fossil fuel, gas and agri-chemical supply. FAO, UNDP and other agencies have issued serious warnings for agriculture, food security and malnutrition. India, as per the UNDP, is the second most affected country where millions will be pushed into poverty if the Iran War doesn't stop soon due to high gas, fossil fuel and agri-chemical inflation.

But why are these issues plaguing Indian farmers? The simple answer is over-dependence on industrial agriculture or the "Green Revolution" paradigm of agrarian thinking. The Green Revolution was the introduction of industrial agriculture in India. It was founded on agri-chemicals, hybrid or input-intensive seeds and mech-



If India wants to ensure total food security along with soil, water security and climate resilience, we have to phase out foreign dependence and put efforts into building an agrarian policy forged by our indigenous wisdom.

Indra Shekhar Singh



anisation. A system of agriculture which is contingent on a healthy oil and gas industry and market.

Most of the agri-chemicals are derivatives of fossil fuels. For example, natural gas is a vital component of urea. In fact, 60-70 per cent of the total cost of production of urea is the cost of gas.

If we study even more deeply, the Green Revolution is a mini oil and gas revolution in agriculture. Each layer of industrial farming or the Green Revolution will have a link to the oil and gas industry. For example, fossil fuels were needed to run the agrarian machinery, and food trucks transport the food. And oil and gas are used to make hundreds of agri-chemicals.

Hence, till the time our country propagates Green Revolution-style agriculture, we will always be dependent on Gulf states or other oil and gas-producing nations for agri-chemical supplies. Critical fertilisers like urea, DAP, sulphur, etc, are all sourced from the Gulf states, and experts are already warning how Indian agriculture will suffer deeply if fertiliser shipments, along with gas to make domestic urea, don't reach India in time. So basically, our food security is in other nations' hands.

In the short term, the Green Revolution delivered gains, but failed to address newer challenges like climate change, food-style diseases, market disruptions (Iran War) and ecology. Whereas the older forms of Vedic/natural/organic agriculture, which were practised in the subcontinent, took into account the weather, soil fertility, ecology and food nutrition as primary pillars of agriculture.

So, what can our government do? The first thing is to absorb the

industrial agrarian shockwave. The war in Iran may escalate further and the Gulf's capacity to produce oil and gas, alongside agri-chemicals, will be highly diminished. Once the war ends, the Gulf may not be able to provide us with our energy and fertiliser needs. Therefore, we have to look towards Russia to once again be the major partner for India and supply fossil fuels and agri-chemicals. But this is a short-term solution.

The long-term solution is to expand programmes like the PM-PRANAM scheme (Prime Minister's Programme for Restoration, Awareness, Nourishment, and Amelioration of Mother Earth) on a war footing. But the first step towards this is also rooted in the rejuvenation of indigenous agrarian wisdom.

The government should mandate a number of bio-fertiliser and bio-pesticide units per district. District collectors and agriculture officers should be given monthly targets across all blocks within the district, and a special fund should be granted for the creation of these units. Funds from the stray cattle shelter programme should also be utilised to gather all the cattle and have vermicompost and bio-fertiliser units placed around them.

For the first five years, the government needs to ensure farmers can collect free fertilisers from these units. The cost would be significantly lesser for the taxpayers too, who are burdened with a heavier fertiliser subsidy bill each year. And we won't be losing our forex reserves too. Uttar Pradesh can be used as a model state to implement this pilot.

The next step is including a new district organic/Vedic agriculture department, with at least five officials who are responsible for training farmers, helping with que-

ries, providing market linkage and helping them understand the monsoon patterns as per the traditional knowledge system.

The government also needs to set up a Vedic agriculture university to recover the lost knowledge of agriculture in our culture. The aim of this university is to refine the agrarian techniques including seed treatments, composting, horticulture, weather prediction, animal husbandry, etc, and present them for the modern farmer.

Vedic agriculture uses similar methods as bio-dynamic agriculture, and hence can easily be accepted globally as a sustainable way of farming. Plus, older methods of agriculture were very accurate in weather prediction, without the use of modern technologies; there needs to be a re-investigation in case many of them stand the litmus test of time even today.

Once our farmers have role models and resources for Vedic agriculture, they themselves will see the profitability in farming without market inputs and chemical poisons. Soil and water will be conserved and practices like multi-cropping could return to our fields again, making the nutrition per acre increase. Also, we will have more climate-resilient crops and fields, which can withstand bad monsoons and hotter months more easily.

If India wants to ensure total food security along with soil, water security and climate resilience, we have to phase out foreign dependence and put efforts into building an agrarian policy forged by our indigenous wisdom and not the Green Revolution anymore. Then only can we bring a Krishi Swaraj. □□

(The author is an independent agri-policy analyst and former director – Policy and Outreach, National Seed Association of India.)
<https://www.firstpost.com/opinion/super-el-nino-heatwave-and-fertiliser-crisis-india-must-go-beyond-green-revolution-us-14006338.html> amp

Press Release

Challenges Arising from War the Way Forward

Due to an unprecedented situation in the Middle East—stemming from a conflict between the US and Israel on one side, and Iran on the other—the flames of war have engulfed nations across the entire region. This has not only impacted the prices and supply of gas, oil, fertilizers, and other essential commodities, but has also provided an opportunity for unscrupulous elements to exploit the situation; anticipating future shortages, who are currently hoarding these materials. While government has ensured the people to not allow the oil and gas prices to increase, driven by widespread panic, people are queuing up for LPG and petroleum products. This is evident from the fact that the average daily booking of LPG cylinders—which typically ranged between 5.5 to 6 million—has suddenly surged to between 7.5 and 8.8 million per day; similarly, there has been a significant spike in the demand for petrol. In Uttar Pradesh alone, the demand for petrol witnessed a 46 percent increase in a single day. Although the country possesses adequate stocks of petrol, diesel, and gas—and supplies continue to flow steadily thanks to the government’s diplomatic efforts, despite repeated assurances from the administration—panic-buying is nevertheless creating artificial shortages, thereby fueling growing anxiety among the public.

It is understandable that the situation remains highly uncertain, and it is unclear when the conflict will come to an end. While India is currently able to ensure supplies of petroleum products via the Strait of Hormuz, any further escalation of the war could severely disrupt these supply lines. Rising tensions in the Middle East could drive oil prices even higher, thereby fueling global inflation and increasing the risk of a recession in the United States. Furthermore, factors such as currency depreciation, a widening Current Account Deficit, and mounting pressure on foreign exchange reserves are collectively rendering the future outlook particularly precarious for emerging economies. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also drawn attention to all these challenges arising from the ongoing conflict. The emerging global situation, a state of war—has exposed the vulnerabilities inherent in an excessive reliance on external forces for critical economic and strategic requirements. Just as COVID-19 made us realize that any global upheaval can create problems for a nation—causing disruptions in production and supply chains—and bring economic activity to a standstill, the current war-like environment is no different. However, it is also true that India possesses the capacity, resilience, and resources to successfully navigate these global uncertainties. What is required is simply a collective commitment toward self-reliance, economic nationalism, and responsible public conduct.

The Swadeshi Jagran Manch reiterates its commitment to strengthening the foundations of an ‘Atmanirbhar Bharat’ (Self-Reliant India) and calls upon all stakeholders—the government, industry, and citizens—to work together in this direction. It is our firm conviction that while global interdependence is indeed a reality, no global upheaval should be allowed to disrupt the smooth functioning of our economy. This can only be achieved by attaining a higher degree of self-reliance. Although we currently depend on imported crude oil for up to 88 percent of our needs and on gas for approximately 50 percent—a dependency that continues to rise—we must systematically reduce this reliance by harnessing alternative sources of energy. In recent times, our country has been gradually transitioning toward electric vehicles, solar power, wind energy, nuclear power, and other renewable energy sources. However, the transition toward electric vehicles has been slower compared to other nations; self-reliance in solar energy stands at less than 20 percent, whereas self-reliance in wind energy equipment has reached approximately 70 to 80 percent; meanwhile, nuclear energy accounts for a mere 2.5 to 3 percent of India’s total electricity generation. Our government is already well on its way along the path of self-reliance; Given the fact that—barring hydroelectric power generation—our reliance on fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas renders us particularly vulnerable to global shocks, there is an urgent need to accelerate the pace of building self-reliance in renewable energy sources, such as solar, wind, and nuclear power.

In light of this situation, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch appeals to all patriotic citizens also to:

1. Rely solely on verified and official sources of information.
2. Refrain from forwarding unverified messages and rumors.
3. Uphold national unity and act responsibly in the broader interest of the nation.
4. In the coming days, save as much petrol, gas, and diesel as much possible, and use alternative energy sources. This collective effort of citizens can help nation sail this difficult situation.

Dr Ashwani Mahajan, *National Co-Convenor, SJM*

International Conference on "Vision 2047 - Prosperous and Great Bharat 2.0" at IIT Roorkee



The Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, in collaboration with Swadeshi Shodh Sansthan, successfully inaugurated the International Conference on "Vision 2047: Prosperous and Great Bharat 2.0" at its Convocation Hall, bringing together eminent academicians, policymakers, and industry leaders to deliberate on India's developmental roadmap.

The inaugural session commenced with the formal welcome of distinguished dignitaries on the dais, graced by Shri Kavinder Gupta Ji, Hon'ble Governor of Himachal Pradesh, as the Chief Guest. A cordial welcome is also extended to the esteemed guests on the dais including Prof. K. K. Pant, Director, IIT Roorkee; Prof. U. P. Singh, Deputy Director, IIT Roorkee; Prof. N. P. Padhy, Director, MNIT Jaipur; Prof. Somnath Sachdeva, Executive Chairperson, Swadeshi Shodh Sansthan; Prof. Ajit Chaturvedi, Vice Chancellor, Banaras Hindu University; and Prof. Surekha Dangwal, Vice Chancellor, Doon University whose distinguished presence adds great value to the gathering.

The programme began with the rendition of the National Anthem, Kulgeet, and ceremonial lamp lighting, followed by the felicitation of guests. In his welcome address, Prof. K. K. Pant highlighted the importance of collaborative efforts between academia, governance, and industry in shaping a self-reliant and prosperous India by 2047. He also stressed on guiding quality product development driven research leading to entrepreneurial innovation with the support from Industry. Prof. Somnath Sachdeva delivered the thematic introduction, setting the tone for discussions on national growth, innovation, and policy reforms. A key

highlight of the inaugural session was the introduction and launch of the National Employment Policy, reflecting a forward-looking approach toward employment generation and economic resilience.

The event featured a series of impactful addresses, including a virtual address by Dr. Jitendra Singh, Hon'ble Minister of Science and Technology, and a keynote address by Shri Satish Kumar Ji from Swadeshi Jagran Manch. Shri Upendra Rai, Chairman and Managing Director of Bharat Express News Network, and Prof. Ajit Chaturvedi also shared their perspectives on nation-building and higher education. Shri K. N. Raghunandan Ji addressed the gathering on the role of educational institutions in national development, followed by a virtual address by Shri J. P. Nadda, Hon'ble Minister of Health and Family Welfare.

The conference witnessed participation from over 100 institutions across India and abroad, with focused deliberations aligned to the Vision 2047 agenda-emphasizing inclusive economic growth, technological innovation, employment generation, sustainable development, and India's emergence as a globally competitive and self-reliant nation.

The inaugural function was marked by a vibrant blend of academic depth and ceremonial significance, creating a dynamic platform for dialogue between policymakers, scholars, and industry leaders. The launch of the National Employment Policy emerged as a key highlight, sparking discussions on future-ready skills and workforce transformation in line with the Vision 2047 roadmap. The presence of distinguished dignitaries, insightful addresses, and the unveiling of forward-looking initiatives collectively set an inspiring tone for the conference, encouraging meaningful exchanges on innovation, governance, and nation-building.

The dignitaries also participated in the physical inauguration of the Center for Precision Manufacturing-an initiative supported by the Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI), Severn, Forvia HELLA, iHub Divyasampark, ICAT, OMRON, and other industry partners-marking a significant milestone in the institute's infrastructure development. The facilities inaugurated under this initiative have been developed under the guidance and leadership of Prof. Akshay Dvivedi, whose efforts have been instrumental in establishing these advanced research capabilities.

During the visit, the dignitaries also toured the Electric Vehicle (EV) Laboratory at Indian Institute of Technology Roorkee, where they inspected ad-



vanced equipment and ongoing research facilities. The delegation was presented with an innovative "Accessible Mobility Vehicle for Divyangjan," manufactured by Yali Mobility in collaboration with AARTI Foundation, IIT Roorkee, the Ministry of Heavy Industries (MHI), and International Centre for Automotive Technology (ICAT). The vehicle showcases inclusive design and technological innovation aimed at enhancing mobility solutions for persons with disabilities.

The conference also featured an engaging exhibition segment where several startups showcased their cutting-edge technologies and innovative solutions, highlighting the role of entrepreneurship and emerging enterprises in driving the Vision 2047 agenda of innovation-led growth and self-reliance.

The inaugural ceremony set a strong foundation for the conference, which aims to promote innovation, and actionable strategies toward building a prosperous and globally competitive Bharat.

<https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=2255604®=3&lang=2>

Avoid Panic Buying: LPG, Petrol Amid West Asia Conflict

Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) voiced concern over "panic buying" of fuel and a surge in LPG cylinder bookings amid the ongoing conflict in West Asia, urging people to avoid hoarding as it creates "artificial shortage". It also called for accelerating the pace of building self-reliance in renewable energy sources to reduce the use of fossil fuels.

In a statement, SJM said the sudden spike in demand for LPG cylinders and petrol is driven by panic as fuel supplies remain steady and people should rely only on verified information.

"Average daily booking of LPG cylinders, which typically ranged between 5.5 to 6 million, has suddenly surged to between 7.5 and 8.8 million per day. Similarly, there has been a significant spike in the demand

for petrol.

"Although the country possesses adequate stocks of petrol, diesel and gas, and supplies continue to flow steadily due to the government's diplomatic efforts, including through key routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, panic buying is nevertheless creating artificial shortages, thereby fuelling growing anxiety among the public," SJM said.

The SJM cautioned that the West Asia conflict has not only impacted the prices and supply of gas, oil, fertilisers and other essential commodities, but has also provided an opportunity for unscrupulous elements to exploit the situation by hoarding these materials in anticipation of future shortages.



Calling for responsible public conduct, SJM appealed to citizens to refrain from spreading rumours or forwarding unverified messages related to fuel shortages.

"People should rely only on official and verified sources of information and avoid circulating unverified claims that may create panic," SJM said.

The senior SJM official also stressed the need to maintain social harmony and national unity during the current global crisis, cautioning that misinformation and fear-driven behaviour could aggravate the situation.

SJM called upon all stakeholders -- the government, industry and citizens -- to work together towards becoming self-reliant in fuel resources.

"It is our firm conviction that while global interdependence is a reality, no global upheaval should be allowed to disrupt the smooth functioning of our economy. This can only be achieved by attaining a higher degree of self-reliance.

"We must systematically reduce reliance on imported crude oil and gas by harnessing alternative sources of energy. In recent times, our country has been gradually transitioning towards electric vehicles, solar power, wind energy, nuclear power and other renewable energy sources," SJM said.

"Given the fact that -- barring hydroelectric pow-

er generation -- our reliance on fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas renders us particularly vulnerable to global shocks, there is an urgent need to accelerate the pace of building self-reliance in renewable energy sources such as solar, wind and nuclear power," SJM further said.

<https://money.rediff.com/news/market/avoid-panic-buying-lpg-petrol-amid-west-asia-conflict/44399420260329>

Illicit trade undermines consumer trust, economic integrity: Pralhad Joshi



At a time when India is witnessing rapid economic expansion, reshaping consumption patterns and market dynamics, Minister of Consumer Affairs Pralhad Joshi on Wednesday said illicit trade, which he described as a shadow economy, is undermining consumer trust and economic integrity.

In a video address at a seminar organised by FICCI CASCADE, Pralhad Joshi said, "Smuggling and counterfeiting are far from victimless crimes. They expose consumers to unsafe, substandard, and even toxic products, undermining honest businesses and eroding government revenues that could otherwise be invested in public welfare and infrastructure."

Pointing to initiatives such as the Central Consumer Protection Authority, the National Consumer Helpline, and the Jago Grahak Jago campaign as key pillars in empowering citizens, he said, "The objective is not just consumer protection, but consumer prosperity."

Calling for a broader coalition, he said, "When a product is fake, it is not just a business loss, but it is a betrayal of consumer trust. Combating this requires shared responsibility across government, industry and society," he added.

In her inaugural address, Nidhi Khare, Secretary, Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution, said with India emerging as the world's fourth-largest economy consumer protection has evolved from awareness-building to a technology-en-

abled system. "From 'Jago Grahak Jago' to AI-driven grievance redressal, we are building a system that is faster, more efficient, and transparent," she added.

Highlighting improvements in grievance redressal, she said resolution timelines have come down from 63 days to around 21 days, and in some online cases even within 72 hours.

The secretary also said while the e-commerce platforms operate at scale and require continuous regulatory engagement, they are also increasingly stepping up through measures such as delisting and stronger monitoring, which is aimed at combating counterfeit products.

Dr Ashwani Mahajan, National Co-Convener, Swadeshi Jagran Manch, who also took part in the seminar, said that tackling illicit trade requires strong and sustained political will, decisive policy interventions, such as demonetisation, were steps that have previously demonstrated how determined action can disrupt counterfeit and illicit ecosystems. He stressed the need to strengthen enforcement mechanisms, particularly at the borders, stating that gaps in customs oversight continue to enable the entry of illicit goods into the domestic market.

Senior policymakers, judicial leaders, enforcement officials, industry representatives, and consumer organisations were part of the seminar, who brought in views on the growing threat of illicit trade and the need for stronger consumer-centric frameworks.

<https://www.thestatesman.com/india/illicit-trade-undermines-consumer-trust-economic-integrity-pralhad-joshi-1503579316.html> amp

E-comm duty moratorium lapses at WTO

World Trade Organisation's (WTO) members such as Brazil and India may now levy tariffs on e-commerce after the Fourteenth Ministerial Conference (MC14) failed to reach consensus on extending the long standing moratorium on customs duties on e-commerce, people aware of the development said.

This marks the first time developing countries have prevailed on the issue, they said, requesting anonymity. The moratorium has been in place since 1998 and was renewed every two years. In previous rounds, developed countries secured extensions, but at MC14, Brazil resisted further continuation.

At the last ministerial (MC13), held in Abu Dhabi from February 26 to March 2, 2024, members agreed to extend the moratorium for two years. The



extension, due to expire on March 29, 2026, lapsed after MC14, which began on March 26 and concluded on Monday in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

According to a Reuters report from Yaoundé, WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala said the moratorium had expired, meaning countries could apply duties on electronic transmissions such as digital downloads and streaming. However, she added that members, including Brazil and the United States, were still trying to reach an agreement. "They need more time and we didn't have the time here," she said.

Dr. Ashwani Mahajan, national co-convenor of Swadeshi Jagran Manch, said: "It is good for developing nations as the moratorium was initially introduced for a limited period. Technically, the e-transmission tariff moratorium ends with the conclusion of MC14. But developed countries may try to revive it at the General Council meeting."

A 2017 study estimated that developing nations lost about \$10 billion in revenue due to duty-free digital imports, with India's share at around \$500 million.

"The expiry of the moratorium removes the WTO-level prohibition, thereby, restoring the legal space for member countries to impose customs duties on electronic transmissions. While countries are now legally unshackled, the actual imposition of customs duties will likely be measured, calibrated, and policy-driven. rather than immediate or sweeping," said Abhishek A Rastogi, founder of Rastogi Chambers.

hindustantimes.com

Amazon's \$30M Carbon Deal in India: Climate Solution or Clever Accounting?

In a landmark move, Amazon has signed a \$30 million (Rs. 280 crore) agreement to buy carbon credits from Indian rice farmers through the Good Rice Alliance. It's one of the largest agricultural carbon deals globally and the first of its kind at this scale in India.

What's actually happening?

- 13,000+ farmers across India are involved
- Covering 35,000 hectares of farmland
- Generating 685,000+ carbon credits
- Using techniques like alternate wetting & drying to cut methane

Why are companies like Amazon doing this

- To offset emissions and reach net-zero goals
- It's often cheaper than fully decarbonizing operations
- It boosts ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) credibility

This is part of a wider trend—big tech is investing heavily in carbon credits.

The uncomfortable question: Are emissions



really going down... or just being "recounted"?

- Scenario 1: "Accounting trick"
 - Company keeps emitting
 - Buys carbon credits elsewhere
 - Claims climate progress
 - Net effect:* global emissions may not actually fall
- Scenario 2: "Real reduction"
 - Farmers genuinely cut methane emissions
 - Practices measurably reduce pollution
 - Net effect:* actual climate benefit

So, what decides the outcome? "It comes down to credibility and intent:

- Are emission cuts real and verified?
- Would they have happened anyway?
- Are companies reducing their own footprint, too?

Best Case: Farmers earn more and emissions genuinely fall

Worst case: Companies "neutralize" emissions on paper while pollution continues

The real question we should be asking: Are companies using carbon credits as a bridge to sustainability...or a shortcut around it? Because that answer will decide whether deals like this become climate solutions or just better accounting. □□

<https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029V/bB26T74Crfll3KP52W>

Swadeshi Activities

Swadeshi Programmes

Pictorial Glimpses



Tripura



North Assam



Gurucharan University, Silchar (Assam)



Agartala (Tripura)



Swadeshi Activities

Nidhi Smarpan Abhiyan

Pictorial Glimpses



Ambala (Haryana)



Shahjahanpur (Brij)



Kullu (HP)



Amritsar (Punjab)



Pathankot (Punjab)



Moradabad (UP)



Varansi (UP)