

AHEAD OF AMIT SHAH'S MARCH 31 DEADLINE TO END MAOIST MOVEMENT

Highest-ranking Maoist leader Devuji surrenders

Headed CPI (Maoist) Central Military Commission for last two decades

Nikhila Henry

Hyderabad, February 22

THE HIGHEST-ranking member of the Communist Party of India (Maoist), Thippiri Tirupathi alias Devuji, has surrendered in Telangana along with 20 other Maoist cadres, two highly-placed sources said.

The surrender has come ahead of a March 31 deadline set by Union Home Minister Amit Shah to bring the Maoist movement to an end in the country. Security forces stepped up anti-Maoist operations in 2024, particularly in Chhattisgarh, where at least 520 Maoists have been



Devuji, 62, carried a bounty of Rs 1 crore [MORE REPORTS, P 8](#)

killed since then, including CPI (Maoist) general secretary Nambala Keshava Rao alias Basavaraju. Several top leaders and

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

For party out of leaders, territory, firepower, key moment of unravelling

Nikhila Henry & Deeptiman Tiwary

Hyderabad, New Delhi, February 22

THE SURRENDER of Thippiri Tirupathi, alias Devuji or Devji, marks a decisive moment in the unravelling of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist). With Devuji laying down arms, the party's politburo has effectively been reduced to just one active member — Misir Besra, alias

Sagar/Sunirmal — while the central committee is now estimated to have only five active members, down from its original strength of nearly 50.

The attrition among cadres has been heavy too. Since 2024, more than 500 Maoists have been killed in security operations. In 2025 alone, around 285 Maoists were

killed, while around 22 have been neutralised so far in 2026. Security forces have also

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Highest-ranking Maoist leader Devuji surrenders

hundreds of cadres have also surrendered in different states during this period, including Politburo member Mallojula Venugopal Rao alias Sonu, who was considered the ideological head of the Maoist party.

A top source said on Sunday that police would officially provide an update on Devuji's surrender by Monday or Tuesday. The source said Devuji and another Maoist leader, Raji Reddy, contacted the Telangana Police and that "they are with us at present".

"Their presence here in Telangana has nothing to do with the ongoing operation in Chhat-

tisgarh. It is the result of the Telangana Police's outreach to get them to surrender," the source said.

Some intelligence sources said Devuji, also known as Devji, may have been elevated to the top-most post of general secretary of the Maoist party after Basavaraju's killing in May last year. The Maoist party has, however, denied this.

From Jagtial in Telangana, Devuji is now 62 years old and carries a bounty of Rs 1 crore.

"In the history of the party, there is no other leader of this rank who has surrendered," a top intelligence source said.

For the past two decades, he had headed the Central Military Commission of the CPI (Maoist). In 2000, he created the People's Liberation Guerrilla Army, the armed unit of the Maoist party.

Devuji is from the Madiga Dalit community. "Tirupathi's leadership could have been pivotal because he comes from a marginalised background and could have rallied the party's cadre, including the Adivasis," a top state intelligence officer said.

However, by the time he became the highest-ranking active Maoist leader last year, the party was severely weakened and split down the middle. "There was a

two-line rift in the party with those supporting Mallojula Venugopal believing that the Maoists should surrender to save the party, and those supporting Devuji asserting that they would remain in the forests for the rest of their lives to put up a fight," an intelligence source said.

Devuji is believed to have joined the Maoist party in the 1980s, when it was still known as the People's War Group (PWG). PWG and the Maoist Communist Centre merged in 2004 to form the present-day Maoist party. "He was part of the Radical Students Union (RSU), which was the students' wing of the

banned outfit," an intelligence official said.

According to Telangana intelligence sources, the Maoist party now has an armed cadre strength of just 180, who carry sophisticated weapons. In January 2024, this number was 2,200.

The cadre base of the party is supported by a militia base of 1,000 people. "In 2022, the militia was 7,000 in number," an intelligence official said. The strength of the banned outfit has fallen manifold by 1/10th of its original size, a Telangana intelligence official had earlier told *The Indian Express*. With inputs

from SREENIVAS JANYALA

Key moment of unravelling for a party out of leaders

demolished over 100 Maoist memorials built in honour of slain leaders and cadres, erasing the physical symbols of Maoist dominance in several former strongholds.

Besra, operating primarily in the Jharkhand-Bihar region, is now the only active leader in the CPI (Maoist) politburo. A senior police officer from Chhattisgarh said, "The CPI (Maoist) has virtually no leadership now. Only some militia and leftover cadres in the Bastar region, led by lower-rung military commanders, are active. They will soon either fall to bullets or see the writing on the wall and surrender."

Devuji's surrender is significant because he had emerged as the face of the faction that argued armed struggle must continue, after the surrender of key strategist Mallojula Venugopal Rao (alias Sonu) in October

2025 triggered an internal split. His exit now deprives that camp of its seniormost figure. "It will simply bring down whatever little morale that was left in the cadres. The endgame is near and inevitable," the officer said.

The Central security establishment has expressed confidence in meeting the March 31 deadline set by Union Home Minister Amit Shah for ending Maoist violence in the country. A senior official said, "At best, some small units might remain waging lone battles in the Bastar region. They may remain elusive for some time, but eventually we will get them too. With the leadership gone, a decisive victory has been achieved over the movement."

The Telangana-Andhra Pradesh leadership, which once steered the party, stands almost

decimated. Along with Devuji, Malla Raji Reddy, another Telugu central committee member, has also surrendered, sources said.

Among the Telugus in the central committee, Nambala Keshav Rao, alias Basavaju, was killed in May 2025. The other Telugu states members who were neutralised by the security forces include Kadari Satyanarayana Reddy (alias Kosa), Paka Hanumanthu (alias Uke Ganesh), Gajarla Ravi (alias Uday), Katta Ramachandra Reddy (alias Raju dada), Tentu Laxmi Narsimha Chalam (alias Anand), Modem Balakrishna (alias Balanna) and Anal Da (alias Tufan da).

"It's the end of an era. (Since) the beginning of 2024, the central committee and politburo of the Maoist party were led by Telugus. Now that era is gone," a source in Telangana

police said.

Two Telangana leaders, however, are still active. "Muppala Laxmana Rao (alias Ganapathi), who used to be the general secretary of the party before Nambala Keshava Rao, is still underground. He is silent... it is not known whether he is alive or dead," a source said. Apart from this, Pusunuri Narahari (alias Vishwanath/Santhosh), a central committee member from Warangal, is also on the run.

"When there was an offensive against the party, the Telugu leadership gave up. The overground workers of the party, who are associated with frontal organisations, are now blaming them," an intelligence officer said.

Jharkhand and Odisha leaders are now the ones leading the fragile outfit. Besra and Sahadev Soren (alias Anuj) are

both operating from Jharkhand. Another central committee member, Ramdhur from Chhattisgarh, is also at large.

Sources say the Maoist movement's ideological appeal has eroded as the social conditions that once sustained recruitment have changed unevenly, but decisively. While deprivation persists, the state's presence in remote areas — through roads, ration delivery, education and healthcare — has expanded.

Will the insurgency disappear overnight? That's unlikely. Small, hardened units may continue to operate in pockets, inciting sporadic violence and carrying out occasional ambushes. However, the strategic picture is clear — the CPI (Maoist) is fast losing its leadership depth, cadre strength, territorial control and firepower.

AFTER MONTH-LONG CHASE, TRACKED BY JOINT TEAM OF SECURITY FORCES

3 Jaish terrorists killed in Kishtwar encounter

Army's sniffer dog leads forces to the mud house where the three were hiding

Arun Sharma
Jammu, February 22

THREE PAKISTANI terrorists owing allegiance to Jaish-e-Mohammad were killed during an encounter by a joint team of police, CRPF and the Army on Sunday in the Chatroo area of Jammu and Kashmir's Kishtwar district, officials said.

Though their identity was yet to be ascertained, official sources believed that one of them was the self-styled Jaish commander, Saifullah.

All three terrorists had been on the run as security forces have been searching for them since last month.

The slain terrorists, who were hiding inside a mud house, were noticed by the Army's sniffer dog, Tyson from 2 Para, which took the first bullet of the encounter in its leg, officials said. However, the dog continued on despite injury and helped security forces establish contact with the terrorists, official sources said, adding that Tyson was later airlifted for medical treatment and is now safe and recovering.

Last month, Army Havildar Gajendra Singh was killed, and seven other soldiers were injured when terrorists hiding in dense forests opened fire on a search party in the Singhpora area of Chatroo on the interven-



Smoke rises from a structure during the encounter in Kishtwar district on Sunday; (left) Injured Tyson, the Army's sniffer dog from 2 Para, after being hit by a bullet during the operation. PHOTOS: PTI

ing night of January 18-19. Security forces, searching for the terrorists who fled following the encounter, later busted their meticulously built underground hideout that contained rations for a long stay.

Thereafter, police and security forces had established contact with them on nearly three occasions in the area, but the terrorists had managed to escape.

This time, however, the terrorists were trapped in an area with almost no vegetation to provide a natural cover to help them escape. According to officials, police, CRPF and the

Army had initiated searches in the Passerkut area following specific information about the presence of terrorists.

The Army's White Knight Corps in its first post on X said, "Pursuant to credible intelligence inputs from #JKP, #IB and own intelligence sources, a deliberate joint operation was launched in the Kishtwar region under Operation Trashi-1 to track and neutralise terrorists operating in the area."

"Following successful contact established earlier, troops of CIF Delta White Knight Corps, in close coordination with the Jammu and Kashmir Police and CRPF, re-engaged the terrorists today at approximately 11 am in challenging terrain. Displaying tactical precision, seamless synergy and resolute aggression, troops dominated the encounter site

wherein two terrorists have been successfully neutralised," it said in a post on X on Sunday.

War-like stores, including two AK-47 rifles, were recovered from the encounter site, the Army said, adding, "The hunt continues — those who seek to disturb peace will find no sanctuary. We serve, we protect!" Later, in another post, it confirmed the killing of the third terrorist as well, saying that his remains and the weapon have been recovered.

For the past two years, Kishtwar's Chatroo area has reported terrorist activities.

In April last year, security forces and police, in a joint operation, killed three terrorists in the Chatroo area. The slain terrorists were responsible for the killing of a JCO and two village defence guards (VDGs) in separate attacks in the area in 2024.

Security agencies issue alert on illegal use of satellite phones in Indian waters

S. Vijay Kumar

CHENNAI

Security agencies have issued an alert on the illegal use of satellite communication devices in Indian waters, terming it not only a violation of existing laws but also a potential threat to national security.

Acting on these inputs, the Directorate General of Shipping (DGS) has proposed stricter penal provisions to prevent the unauthorised usage of the satellite communication channels.

Expressing concern, the DGS said security agencies continued to report instances of vessels and crew members carrying undeclared portable satellite communication devices, including satellite phones and satellite-enabled messaging equipment. Such incidents, it noted, were in clear violation of regulatory norms.

Security alerts also indicated the use of Zoleo sa-



Agencies report vessels and crew carrying undeclared portable satellite devices.

tellite devices connected to smartphones compatible with Iridium satellite communication systems for messaging in areas without cellular network coverage. "Such actions constitute serious violations of existing orders and pose potential national security threats," the DGS said.

The DGS now seeks to ensure compliance with regulatory requirements governing the use, declaration, authorisation and reporting of satellite commu-

nication equipment by ships and seafarers operating in Indian waters, in the interest of maritime safety and national security.

In an earlier order dated July 12, 2023, the DGS had permitted the use of Iridium-based satellite communication equipment in Indian waters exclusively for Distress and Safety Communications under the Global Maritime Distress and Safety System (GMDSS), subject to specified conditions. However, the use of Thuraya satellite equipment continued to remain banned in Indian waters.

The DGS pointed out in the absence of Iridium gateways or ground stations within the Indian region – both on land and at sea – communications made using Iridium-based portable devices could not be effectively monitored, examined or traced.

"This limitation is of particular concern in suspicious or sensitive cases

and underscores the necessity for strict compliance and enforcement," it stated.

Under existing rules, satellite communication equipment that was not part of a ship's GMDSS station and constituted the personal belongings of crew members or other individuals was not permitted for use in Indian waters or within Indian territory. Any such personal satellite devices found onboard must be placed under the custody of the Master (Captain) and sealed by Indian authorities upon arrival.

In a draft order issued recently calling for comments from stakeholders, the DGS stated any ship or vessel found violating rules related to satellite phone usage – including failure to declare or unauthorised use of satellite communication equipment – would be issued an infringement notice and face penal action under applicable Indian laws.

We need to underline value of collaboration on climate change



R R RASHMI

IN A world where the US has exited many major international treaties and decided to walk away from its commitment to protect climate, multilateralism is clearly under great stress. The moral and ethical architecture of international climate policy is shaken. It is not just the absence of the largest economy from multilateral bodies that poses a threat to global cooperation. There is also a long-term threat to rule-based engagements. Increased preference for bilateral and plurilateral deals indicates loss of confidence in the consensus-based legal order and replacement by arrangements that are driven by reciprocal gains rather than internationally agreed goals.

This exposes climate to a double whammy. As per scientific assessments, we are on our way to miss the global climate goal and overshoot the temperature stabilisation target of 1.5 degree Celsius. The policy shift in the US is likely to dampen both public and private sector investments in clean energy transition and further accentuate the gap in achievement of the global goal.

It was the recognition of this challenge that prompted the presidency of COP30 to focus more on the implementation of agreed climate actions than on seeking consensus-based legal legitimacy for future actions. The Global Implementation Accelerator is a result of this recognition. It reflects an awareness that the threat to multilateralism can be partially tackled through the reengineering of global processes. The two-tier arrangement evolved at Belém, one aimed at continued efforts at enhancing legal commitments, and the other aimed at implementation was a step in this direction.

In the current scenario, it makes sense to avoid getting entangled in procedural legitimacy and focus more on actions that all major stakeholders can take. While the presidency prioritised a few actions of its own choice in the form of non-CO₂ mitigation, ecosystem restoration, among others, the larger international community is still struggling with the perennial issues of climate finance, just energy transition, and equity based global framework of actions.

Finance remains the stickiest issue. A recent NITI Aayog report on the financing needs of India's Net Zero transition underscores the global and national financing gap. Current global flows estimated at about \$1.9

trillion annually are far short of \$6-9 trillion required to stay on the 1.5-degree trajectory. India alone needs \$10-20 trillion or \$250-450 billion annually by 2070 to meet its goal while current flows are only about \$135 billion. This implies huge additional and upfront investments to protect domestic consumption and avoid welfare losses. The need for greater and closer engagement amongst willing partners to keep the momentum of global financial flows for a clean and just energy transition has never been greater.

It is also important that multilateral cooperation is insulated from the threat of unilateral trade actions in the name of protecting climate. There is a tendency amongst global powers to use trade as an instrument of enforcing domestic environmental goals. Forcing global standards for carbon consumption is an example. The world urgently needs a mutually shared understanding of domestic policies that are compatible with a legally mandated international climate regime.

The value of collective actions aimed at protecting our environment lies in how they protect vulnerable people. Development must ensure that the voices of the marginalised are included in its planning and execution. One of the ways in which global players can do so while serving the interest of multilateralism is to build trust in an equitable and inclusive decision-making process.

India has been the leading voice of the developing world in these matters. It has pursued equity-based cooperation at the global level while pushing aggressive domestic goals for climate. It will have the chance to revisit these issues in partnership with global leaders and stakeholders when they gather in Delhi this month during the 25th Edition of the World Sustainable Development Summit hosted by TERI. The summit has served as a platform to foster dialogue and collaborative climate action amongst partners of the developed and developing world in the larger interest of consensus-based global goals. This provides an opportunity for India to reaffirm its leadership of the Global South and commitment to multilateralism through adherence to the principles of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* and *Sabka Saath Sabka Vikas.*

The writer is distinguished fellow, TERI and India's former principal negotiator for climate change at UNFCCC

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Russia-India Naval Cooperation

Russia-India bilateral military and military-technical partnership is deeply rooted in history and includes unique examples of mutually beneficial projects, among which the naval cooperation is of particular significance.



Over the past two years, two new Project 11356 frigates — INS Tushil (December 2024) and INS Tamal (July 2025) — were commissioned into the Indian Navy in Russia's Kaliningrad.

India currently operates eight Project 11356 frigates, while the

ninth and tenth vessels of the class are being built at Goa Shipyard Limited with the assistance of Rosoboronexport.

Naval drills conducted both bilaterally and multilaterally provide valuable opportunities to enhance coordination and joint operational training. In addition to last year's bilateral exercise "Indra Navy", Russia traditionally participates in the large-scale multilateral exercise "MILAN 2026", hosted by the Indian Navy in the Bay of Bengal in February 2026.

Two years ago, in 2024, Russia was represented by a detachment of warships of the Russian Pacific Fleet,



consisting of the missile cruiser "Varyag" and the frigate "Marshal Shaposhnikov". The latter once again joined the event in Visakhapatnam this year. Russia's participation in multinational drills underscores its consistent commitment to constructive maritime dialogue and cooperation with regional and international partners.

The arrival of the Russian Pacific Fleet in India marks another practical step toward enhancing mutual trust and highlights the long-standing strategic partnership between the two countries, as well as their shared interest in maintaining peace, stability, and security in the global maritime domain.

Fifth-generation fighter Su-57 in India



India, as Russia's traditional military-technical partner, has shown special interest in demonstrating the capabilities of the Russian aircraft at the Aero India International Aviation Exhibition which was held in Bangalore in February last year. The show has become a key platform for demonstrating the advanced achievements of the Russian aviation industry.

Special attention at this event was paid to the latest fifth-generation fighter Su-57, which conducted an impressive series of demonstration flights, presenting high



maneuverability, unique tactical and technical characteristics and air superiority.

The Su-57 presented at the exhibition attracted the attention of the participants due to its innovative design and outstanding flight characteristics. Its performance took place at ultra-low altitudes, from only 100 meters, and included more than 20 aerobatics, among which was the famous "Pugachev's cobra".

The presentation not only demonstrated its technical capabilities, but also contributed to the discussion of

prospects for cooperation with India. In particular, options for joint production and adaptation of the fighter to the needs of the Indian Air Force were considered.

In addition, the Su-57 is able to carry a wide range of weapons, including special missiles and ammunition designed for modern conflicts. This makes it a versatile and effective tool in the arsenal of the modern Air Force.

The participation of the Russian fighter jet at the Aero India 2025 exhibition became a significant event for the domestic aviation industry. It not only strengthened Russia's reputation as a leading manufacturer of military aircraft, but also opened up new prospects for further development and cooperation with international partners.

Russia looks forward to opening a new page in strategic collaboration of our two countries by expanding transfer of technology to India, including through licensed production of the mentioned aircraft.



Parliament's historic law, an extended wait for women

When Parliament passed the Women's Reservation Act in September 2023, millions of Indian women believed that their moment had finally arrived. One-third of all Lok Sabha and State Assembly seats would be reserved for them. The legislation was hailed as a historic victory for gender justice, ending decades of parliamentary stalemate. But the Act contains a clause that changes everything: reservation will begin only "after the first Census taken after the year 2026" and the subsequent delimitation of constituencies. Thus, on the Act's own terms, implementation in 2029 is constitutionally impossible.

This is not a political prediction. It is a legal and logistical certainty. The next general election will be held in 2029 – before the constitutional prerequisites can be completed. Unless Parliament amends the Constitution again, Indian women cannot exercise their guaranteed representation until at least 2034.

The constitutional roadblock

The timeline is unforgiving. The Act mandates two sequential steps: first, a national Census; second, a delimitation exercise based on that Census data. Both are constitutionally required. Neither can be bypassed.

The next Census is scheduled for 2027. After enumeration, the data must be verified, compiled, and officially published – a process that, historically, has taken between 12 to 18 months. Only after official publication can the President of India constitute a Delimitation Commission under Article 82.

That Commission then faces an unprecedented task: redrawing 543 parliamentary constituencies and over 4,000 State Assembly constituencies. As this writer examined in these pages recently, the Commission must balance population distribution, administrative boundaries, geographic compactness, community representation, and the creation of reserved constituencies for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and now women.

India has constituted four Delimitation Commissions since Independence. Not one completed its work in fewer than three years. The most recent, established in 2002, took six years – and it was an exercise which only redrew internal boundaries without reallocating seats among States. The next Commission will be far more complex, reallocating seats among States for the first time since 1976 while implementing women's reservation simultaneously.

Even on the most optimistic timeline – Census completed in 2027, data published by early 2029, the Commission working with unusual speed – delimitation cannot conclude before 2032 or 2033. But these days, anything is possible. Without a new constitutional amendment removing the Census-delimitation linkage,



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women's reservation cannot be implemented in 2029. Was this delay accidental or by design? The political arithmetic provides the answer. If reservation was implemented immediately within the existing 543-seat Lok Sabha, 181 constituencies would become women-only, displacing an equal number of male incumbents overnight. No political party wanted to bear that electoral cost.

The solution was elegant in its political logic: tie reservation to delimitation. After the 2027 Census, when constituencies are redrawn, the total number of Lok Sabha seats is expected to increase substantially – possibly to around 800, perhaps even 888. With an enlarged House, one-third of seats can be reserved for women without displacing current male Members of Parliament.

The political pain is absorbed by expansion rather than replacement. This explains the mechanism. It does not justify the consequence: another decade-long delay for half of India's population.

A history of waiting

Indian women have already waited several years for this legislation. The first Women's Reservation Bill was introduced in 1996. It was debated, amended, reintroduced, and blocked repeatedly. The Bill lapsed with successive Lok Sabhas. It passed the Rajya Sabha in 2010 but never came to a vote in the Lok Sabha.

The 2023 Act was supposed to end that wait. Instead, it has extended it. If delimitation is completed in 2032 or 2033, reservation will apply only from the 2034 general election. Women who celebrated the Act's passage in 2023 will wait through another full election cycle before they can contest a single reserved seat.

By tying women's representation to delimitation, the Act has entangled gender justice with India's most divisive demographic issue: the north-south seat distribution imbalance. When delimitation occurs, States with faster population growth will demand significantly more parliamentary seats. States that invested in population control will see their proportional representation decline. This tension is precisely why delimitation was frozen in 1976 and extended in 2001. By linking women's reservation to this unresolved federal arithmetic, Parliament has placed women's rights hostage to a debate that has paralysed consensus for half a century. This deadlock could further delay delimitation – and with it, women's reservation.

Why should half of India's citizens wait for an exercise that has nothing to do with gender equality? The constitutional timeline is not the only problem. The Act leaves critical design questions unanswered.

First, why does reservation exclude the Rajya Sabha and State Legislative Councils? The Act applies only to directly elected lower houses.

Second, the Act provides no sub-reservation for Other Backward Class (OBC) women, even though Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe women receive proportional sub-quotas. OBC women constitute nearly 40% of India's female population.

Third, the Act mandates that reserved constituencies will rotate after each general election but offers no operational clarity. Will women candidates shift constituencies every five years? How will rotation work when delimitation itself reshuffles boundaries?

These unanswered questions compound the implementation crisis. Without clear rules, political parties will exploit ambiguities, legal challenges will multiply, and women candidates will bear the costs.

A straightforward solution

The constitutional barrier is real, but not inevitable. Parliament created it; Parliament can remove it.

There is no constitutional necessity tying women's reservation to delimitation. Article 15(3) already empowers the State to make "special provisions" for women and children. Parliament can exercise that power again to enable immediate implementation.

The solution is straightforward: amend the Constitution to permit reservation before delimitation, either by modestly expanding the Lok Sabha immediately or by applying reservation within current constituencies for two election cycles.

Alternatively, Parliament could expand the House incrementally – adding 180 seats earmarked exclusively for women – before full delimitation concludes. This would deliver on the reservation promise while avoiding displacement of incumbents.

None of these approaches is technically impossible. What is required is political will.

The government must clarify its road map now. Will it delink reservation from delimitation through amendment? Will it expand the Lok Sabha preemptively? Will it freeze State-wise seat allocation to prevent the north-south debate from derailing women's representation?

Parliament must also address the design gaps: extend reservation to the Upper Houses, include OBC sub-reservation, and publish clear rotation rules developed in consultation with women's organisations and constitutional experts.

Above all, Parliament must recognise one principle: representation delayed is representation denied.

India cannot afford another historic law that waits endlessly to take effect. If reservation is a constitutional promise – and the 2023 Act declares that it is – then it must now become a constitutional reality. Not in 2034. Not after another election cycle. Now.

India's women have waited long enough.

To tie the Women's Reservation Act – a constitutional promise – to delimitation fails India's women

Time for nations facing tariffs to unionise: Lula

Brazil's President says small countries negotiating individually with bigger ones always lose; he urges countries in the Global South to act together in negotiating with global superpowers

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

Instead of negotiating with the U.S. on tariffs separately, countries should form “negotiating blocs”, Brazil’s President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said here on Sunday, advocating for “unionisation” of those suffering from the tariffs.

Mr. Lula, himself a trade union leader in the 1980s before he founded Brazil’s ruling Workers Party, said that while he did not wish to comment on the internal workings of the U.S. where the Supreme Court struck down the tariffs imposed globally by U.S. President Donald Trump, he hoped that all countries would be “treated equally” by the U.S. on the issue.

“I want to tell the U.S.



Close ties: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva in New Delhi on Saturday. ANI

President that we don’t want a new Cold War. We don’t want interference in any other country, we want all countries to be treated equally,” Mr. Lula said, answering questions from presspersons at the end of his four-day visit to Delhi.

Brazil and India were the two highest tariffed

countries by the U.S., slapped with 50% duties on exports each, and face tariff threats from Mr. Trump over their membership of the BRICS grouping, trade with Iran, and imports of Russian oil. Neither country has thus far concluded a trade deal with the U.S. Mr. Lula, who is expected to visit Wash-

ington next month, said he hopes to put all outstanding issues with the U.S. “on the table” for Mr. Trump.

“When a small country negotiates with a bigger country, the agreement will always be harmful for the smaller country. This is the experience that I bring from the trade union and labour movement. To negotiate with the employer, all workers must get together and confront the company policy. If they do it individually, they all lose,” he said, likening international trade to his trade union negotiations, adding that countries in the Global South, as well as others, must “act together” in negotiating with global superpowers.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 10

Time for nations facing tariffs to unionise: Lula



Brazilian President Lula speaks at the India-Brazil Economic Forum in New Delhi on Sunday. ANI

Mr. Lula also called for UN Security Council reforms, and in particular, seats in the Council for India, Brazil, and others.

“Why is India not a permanent member of the UN Security Council, a country that has 1.4 billion people? Why Brazil is not there at the UN Security Council,” he said, adding others such as Germany, Mexico, Nigeria and Egypt as well to the list. He said that as a result, the UN today does not have much efficacy. “UN is capable of making a diagnosis but it doesn’t have the capability to prescribe medication or do the treatment,” he said.

He said India had taught him some lessons in economic management, recounting a story from his visit to India in 2005, during his previous tenure as President, when he was hosted by then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

“It was in India in 2005 that, for the very first time, I perceived the importance of having international hard currency reserves,” he said, adding that he was impressed that India had then amassed \$100 billion in reserves. He said he had committed to do the same in Brazil, eventually building reserves of \$360 billion and Brazil moved from being a debtor to the IMF to a creditor, which he called a “transformative experience” for Brazil.

Mr. Lula recounted some personal memories as well, while speaking about his talks in Delhi which ended with agreements on critical mineral cooperation, steel mining and digital partnership. He said that he was touched that his favourite Brazilian songs were played during the official banquet lunch with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the dinner hosted by President Droupadi Murmu.

Pakistan claims at least 70 militants killed in strikes along Afghan border

Islamabad says it hit hideouts of Pakistani militants it blamed for recent attacks inside the country; Afghan Defence Ministry calls the strikes a violation of country's sovereignty; locals claim those killed were neither Taliban nor military personnel

Associated Press

KABUL

Pakistan's military killed at least 70 militants in strikes along the border with Afghanistan early on Sunday, targeting what it described as hideouts of Pakistani militants it blamed for recent attacks inside the country.

Talal Chaudhry, Pakistan's Deputy Interior Minister, told Geo News that at least 70 militants were killed. He offered no evidence. Pakistan's state-run media later reported that militant casualties from the strikes jumped to 80.

The Afghanistan Defence Ministry said in a



In the crosshairs: People attend the funeral of victims of the strikes in Nangarhar's Behsud district in Afghanistan on Sunday. AP

statement that "various civilian areas" in the provinces of Nangarhar and Paktika in eastern Afghanistan were hit, including multiple civilian homes.

The statement called the strikes a violation of Af-

ghanistan's airspace and sovereignty.

Civilians killed

Afghan government spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid earlier on X said the attacks "killed and wound-

ed dozens, including women and children."

Mawlawi Fazl Rahman Fayyaz, the provincial director of the Afghan Red Crescent Society in Nangarhar province, said 18 people were killed and several others wounded.

Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned Pakistan's Ambassador to Kabul and handed him a note of protest over the Pakistani strikes.

In a statement, the Ministry said protecting Afghanistan's territory is the Islamic Emirate's "Sharia responsibility" and warned that Pakistan would be responsible for the consequences of such attacks.

On Sunday, villagers were seen clearing rubble in Nangarhar following air strikes, while mourners were preparing for funerals of those killed. Habib Ullah, a local tribal elder, said those killed were not militants. "They were poor people who suffered greatly. Those killed were neither Taliban, nor military personnel, nor members of the former government," he said.

Pakistan's Information Minister Attaullah Tarar wrote on X that the military conducted "intelligence-based, selective operations" against seven camps belonging to the Pakistani Taliban, or TTP, and its affiliates.

Pakistan's rising global profile as fires rage at home: Concerns for India

Yashee

New Delhi, February 22

PAKISTAN ON Sunday carried out strikes along its border with Afghanistan, claiming to target militant camps. The Afghanistan government said the strikes in Nangarhar and Paktika regions had killed "innocent civilians" and vowed retaliation.

This comes at the end of a week in which Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif went to Washington to attend the first meeting of the Donald Trump-led Board of Peace, and also visited Austria, in the first high-level visit to the European country from Pakistan in 30 years. The developments together underline the paradox Pakistan today faces: rising relevance globally, and rising instability at home.

International relevance

Pakistan today is among the few countries that can count both Donald Trump and Xi Jinping among friends. Trump singled out Shehbaz Sharif for thanks at the Gaza ceasefire summit at Sharm El-Sheikh last year, and has called the head of Pakistani military, Asim Munir, his "favourite

field marshal". In December, the Trump administration announced it would invest \$1.3 billion in Balochistan's Reko Diq mine, with copper and gold reserves. Geopolitically, the US has signalled it sees a role for Pakistan in the Gaza and the Iran conflicts.

Also, in the past few months, Pakistan has signed a mutual defence pact with Saudi Arabia, and has agreed to or is in talks with to supply arms to Sudan, Libya, and Bangladesh, in deals worth billions.

This rise can be attributed to Islamabad's successful wooing of Trump, and its selling of its performance in the May 2025 conflict with India as 'impressive', however far from the truth that may be.

"All the defence deals that Pakistan has signed recently will not help it with domestic terrorism. But they do make Islamabad look like a relevant actor globally. On the home front, Pakistan's policy of nurturing terror networks has backfired, as the attacks are now happening within its territory," TCA Raghavan, India's former High Commissioner to Pakistan, said.

One battle after another

While attacks in the restive Balochistan



Funeral of victims of a Pakistani strike in Afghanistan on Sunday. AP

and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are common, even the fortified Islamabad has seen two attacks in the past four months — the mosque attack earlier this month and a suicide attack outside a court in November 2025 that killed 12.

Attacks in Pakistan are generally carried out by the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), also called the Pakistan Taliban, Baloch

militants, and occasionally other groups like the Islamic State splinter factions. There has been a rise in terror attacks in the last two years. Pakistani thinktank Center for Research and Security Studies calculated last September that, "In just three quarters, 2025 has proven nearly as deadly as all of 2024, with 2414 fatalities recorded compared to the entire tally of 2024 (2546)."

The TTP wants Pakistan run on a strict interpretation of Islamic law. It wishes to overthrow the current government which it believes is not Islamic enough. The TTP also opposes the Pakistan government's assistance to the US "war on terror".

The Baloch Liberation Army, meanwhile, launched 'phase 2 of Operation Herof' in January (the first phase was in August 2024). Balochistan — where the US recently announced investment — is the most resource-rich of Pakistan's four provinces, but lags in development. It has witnessed a long separatist movement, with grievances including unfair treatment economically and brutalities by security agencies.

Muhammad Amir Rana, president of the Pakistani thinktank Pak Institute for

Peace Studies, said, "The latest surge in terrorist attacks began in 2021, following the Taliban's capture of power in Afghanistan. The spillover of leftover NATO weapons contributed to this escalation, while the ideological triumph of the Taliban emboldened groups such as the TTP. Pakistan's strategic calculus, that the Taliban would help contain religiously motivated militant groups, proved flawed and instead, the opposite occurred. In Balochistan, a major factor is the alienation of youth, driven by multiple grievances, most notably the long-standing issue of missing persons [after security operations], which has deepened mistrust and fueled radicalisation."

On the economy front, the International Monetary Fund, which in 2024 loaned \$7 billion to Pakistan, pegs its 2026 projected real GDP at 3.2%, and World Bank President Ajay Banga this month said Pakistan needs to generate 2.5 million to 3 million jobs a year to avoid a domestic crisis.

India needs to watch out

A quick scan of the decades post Independence shows that Pakistan has attacked India — officially or through proxies — ir-

respective of how things were going for it. The 1965 war came when Pakistan was going through a golden period economically and had earned respect abroad. The Kargil war came when its affairs were collapsing on all fronts. What stands out is that Pakistan's military in ascendance is never good news for India. Major terror attacks have come when the civilian leadership has pushed for better ties with India.

And the current Pakistani paradox has at its heart the rise and rise of Asim Munir. While he has flexed muscle abroad, internally, there has been a brutal crackdown on insurgents, worsening instability.

Pakistan's closer ties with the US have come when the military has been dominant: before Munir, under General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s, and under Pervez Musharraf in the 2000s. If improved ties lead to more arms sales, India will be concerned. Also, hobnobbing with the US has generally meant internal consequences for Pakistan, exacerbating fault lines. For India, the best case is a relatively stable Pakistan with a civilian leadership in control. But with Shehbaz Sharif playing second fiddle to Munir, that doesn't seem likely soon.

SEOUL

South Korea condemns Japan for hosting event over disputed islands



REUTERS

South Korea on Sunday objected to the Takeshima Day event held by Japan's Shimane prefecture, calling it an unjust assertion of sovereignty over its territory. The cluster of disputed islands, known as Takeshima in Japan and Dokdo in South Korea, have long been a source of tension between the two neighbours. REUTERS

CARACAS

Over 1,500 prisoners seek amnesty under Venezuela's new legislation



REUTERS

At least 1,557 political prisoners in Venezuela have applied for amnesty under a new law, the head of the country's legislature Jorge Rodriguez said on Saturday, two days after the measure — enacted under pressure from Washington — came into effect. On Saturday alone, 80 prisoners had been freed from detention. AFP

HOLDINGS IN US TREASURIES DOWN FROM \$225.7 BN IN JAN 2025 TO \$182.9 BN AS OF DEC 31, 2025

India reduced investment in US Treasuries by over 18% in 2025

George Mathew

Mumbai, February 02

AMID TRADE tensions with America for several months now, India has reduced its exposure to US Treasuries in calendar year 2025 (CY25), signalling a cautious shift in the country's foreign exchange reserve strategy.

According to US Department of Treasury data, India's holdings in US securities have come down by \$42.8 billion, or 18.96%, from \$225.7 billion in January 2025 to \$182.9 billion as of December 31, 2025. The reduced holding is more than enough to cover India's net government borrowing of Rs 11.73 lakh crore as proposed in the Union Budget for 2026-27.

India, which is now the 15th largest holder of US Treasuries, had held \$247.2 billion in September 2024, before cutting down gradually over the last several months. In December alone, India's holding had come down by \$3.6 billion.

India's investment in American securities technically means it is lending money to the US government indirectly. As the US government needs money to fund spending in the case of defence, healthcare, infrastructure, among other heads, it issues Treasury securities and

countries like India buy them. That money goes into the US government's financing pool.

Significantly, China has also reduced its US Treasury holding from \$760.8 billion to \$683.5 billion during CY25. However, Japan, the largest holder of US Treasuries, increased its holding from \$1,079.3 billion to \$1,185.5 billion. The UK increased its holdings of US Treasuries from \$740.2 billion to \$866 billion, as per US Treasury Department TIC data.

With foreign exchange reserves touching new highs, the calibrated reduction in US Treasuries by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) — which manages India's foreign reserves — and the rise in gold holdings reflect its cautious approach amid global financial uncertainty. By spreading investments across sovereign debt, supranational bonds, deposits and gold, the RBI's aim is to apparently strike a balance between liquidity, security and returns while safeguarding financial stability.

Meanwhile, aided by the spurt in the value of gold holdings, India's forex reserves jumped by \$90 billion on a year-on-year basis to \$725.72 billion as of February 13, 2026. It holds gold reserves worth \$128.46 billion now, a rise of \$54 billion in a year.

The reduction in India's

• TREASURIES HELD BY TOP 10 COUNTRIES

Rank	Country	Amount*
1.	Japan	1,185.5
2.	UK	866
3.	China	683.5
4.	Belgium	477.3
5.	Canada	468.1
6.	Luxembourg	435.1
7.	Cayman Islands	421.2
8.	France	368.9
9.	Ireland	340.7
10.	Taiwan	310.6
15.	India	182.9

(*IN \$ BILLION)

SOURCE: US DEPT OF TREASURY

holdings came amid speculation that US President Donald Trump, who imposed steep tariffs on Indian imports last year, could bring restrictions on investments by countries which don't sign agreements with America. Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the US and its allies blocked Moscow's access to a significant share of its foreign reserves held overseas, including dollar and euro-denominated assets. The episode showed that, in extreme circumstances, the US can effectively cut off a country's access to its Treasury holdings through the

US financial system.

India and the US recently announced a trade deal before the US Supreme Court struck down the tariffs imposed by Trump and he imposed an across-the-board 15% duty on all imports.

The Reserve Bank says its investments in Treasuries represent debt obligations of highly rated sovereigns, central banks and supranational entities.

"Further, deposits are placed with central banks, the BIS and commercial banks overseas. RBI has framed requisite guidelines for selection of issuers/ counterparties with a view to enhancing the safety and liquidity aspects of the reserves. The RBI continues to apply stringent criteria for selection of counterparties," it said in the half-yearly report on management of forex reserves.

Apart from investment in Treasuries, other allocations include deposits with central banks and the Bank for International Settlements (BIS), alongside physical gold. This broad diversification ensures that India's reserves are not overly dependent on one asset class or geography.

Out of the total foreign currency assets of \$579.18 billion, \$489.54 billion was invested in securities, \$46.11 billion was deposited with other central banks and the BIS and the balance

\$43.53 billion comprised deposits with commercial banks overseas as of September 2025, according to RBI data.

US Treasuries, issued by the Department of Treasury to finance the government's spending needs, are considered one of the safest investments because they are backed by the American government. They're issued in different maturities, ranging from a few days to 30 years, allowing investors to choose the term that best fits their investment goals, according to Vanguard Group.

US Treasuries are usually sold at auction, and their prices are determined by market demand. They offer a fixed rate of return, making them a stable investment option. Interest earned from Treasury securities is exempt from state and local taxes. "Treasury securities are used as a benchmark for other interest rates, making them an important indicator of the overall economy," it said.

Central banks and sovereign wealth funds invest significantly in US Treasury securities, viewing them as among the world's safest and most liquid assets. The yield on the US 10-year Treasury note is holding steady at approximately 4.08%, down by 35 basis points in the last one year.