

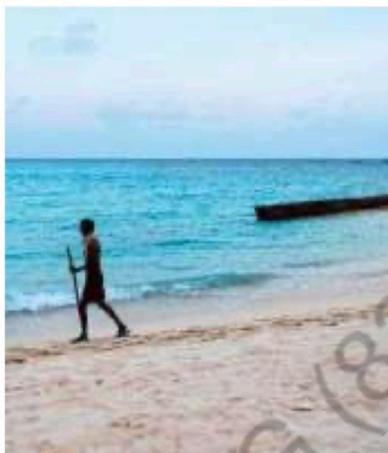
# Great Nicobar plan triggers fresh concerns among locals

**Abhinay Lakshman**

NEW DELHI

A draft plan outlining the “relocation” of Nicobarese tribal communities affected by the Union government’s Great Nicobar Island (GNI) mega-infrastructure project “to their ancestral lands” has created confusion and is exacerbating existing apprehensions among locals. They have been, for four years, protesting the clearance for the ₹92,000-crore project after withdrawing their consent in 2022, alleging that their forest rights had not been settled.

This draft “Comprehensive Tribal Welfare Plan”, prepared by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration and circulated on March 13 for consultation with line departments and the Tribal Council of Great Nicobar, proposes a ₹42.52-crore outlay over 24 months for the “relocation of Nicobarese tribal com-



The draft was prepared by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration. AFP

munities from tsunami-affected or project-impacted areas”, which involves housing, land development and basic infrastructure.

However, details of where the proposed relocation will take place and who will be relocated have left members of the Tribal Council of Great and Little Nicobar confused, according to Nicobarese community leaders who spoke to *The Hindu*.

They said they were handed a copy of the draft

plan on March 28 and have since been called for two meetings by the district administration in Campbell Bay to sign off on it.

This comes as the Union government told a Calcutta High Court Bench on March 30 that it needed 15 days to “demonstrate that consent has been taken from the tribal people” for its project.

This Bench is hearing a batch of petitions challenging the project’s clearance on the grounds that it violated consent procedures and forest rights of the Nicobarese and Shompen communities.

At a meeting on April 1, the Tribal Council submitted a letter pointing out that some aspects of the draft were unclear and requested a Hindi translation of it. They said they would need at least a month to review the translated document.

**CONTINUED ON**  
» PAGE 10

# Great Nicobar project plan stirs new concerns

Notably, while the draft plan states the GNI project “involves relocation”, the Centre has repeatedly said the project would not “disturb or displace tribes”.

## Unclear relocation plans

According to a letter attached to the draft, the plan was prepared after Tribal Council leaders demanded a return to ancestral villages on the west coast of GNI that were destroyed in the 2004 tsunami, after which communities were shifted to encampments in Rajiv Nagar and New Chingenh near Campbell Bay. However, the draft plan states, “The project involves relocation to Rajiv Nagar (32 households, 101 persons) and New Chingenh (30 households, 117 persons).”

In a section, the plan proposes Pulobhabi for “community purposes” of residents in Rajiv Nagar, to “facilitate periodic visits to ancestral lands”, while adding, “an option shall remain open” for families to return to ancestral villages outside the project area. For New Chingenh residents, the plan records their desire to return to Old Chingenh and Pulo Baha, but notes a final decision will be taken after assessing land availability and consultations, while their existing accommodations will be upgraded.

Further, the plan lists all enumerated families in Rajiv Nagar and New Chingenh (62 families in total) and then states: “Proposed relocation site: Pulobhabi, western coast of GNI”.

The tables in the draft also add to the ambiguity: allocations are made for upgrading 62 homes and building only 30 new homes, while another section states permanent shelters “will be built for all 62 households” – neither part explicitly mentions where these homes would come up. District authorities have not yet responded to *The Hindu’s* queries on what exactly the plan proposes.

A leader of the Tribal Council said Pulobhabi is just one among several ancestral village sites, and the proposal lists only about 13 pre-tsunami Nicobarese villages when there are many more.

In New Delhi on March 20, Great and Little Nicobar Tribal Council chief Barnabas Manju had said the community has long demanded a return to all ancestral villages along the west coast since displacement in 2004. Soon after the project was granted Stage-I clearance in 2022, the community withdrew their consent, fearing that it would encroach on their forest lands, including ancestral villages, preventing their return.

DAY AFTER FAMILY CLAIMS KASHMIRI MAN KILLED BY ARMY HAD 'NO TERROR LINKS'

# J&K encounter: L-G orders probe, says will ensure justice is served

**Naveed Iqbal**  
Srinagar, April 3

THE JAMMU and Kashmir Home Department, which falls under Lieutenant Governor (L-G) Manoj Sinha, has ordered a magisterial inquiry into the Arhama encounter in central Kashmir's Ganderbal.

The Army had said in a statement on Wednesday that a militant was killed after suspicious movement was observed in the area. However, the identity of the deceased was not released.

On Thursday, the family of the 28-year-old Rashid Ahmad Mughal claimed that he had "no links to militancy". His brother, Ajaz Ahmad Mughal, had told *The Indian Express* that Rashid was an M Com degree holder who helped villagers with documentation work for a nominal fee. Two former panchayat members from the village had confirmed this.

Posting the order to the Lok Bhawan X handle on Friday, Sinha said, "I have ordered a thorough and impartial magisterial inquiry into the Arhama, Ganderbal incident. The inquiry will examine all aspects related to the incident and ensure that justice is served."

The Home Department order directs the District Magistrate Ganderbal to complete the inquiry within seven days. "The issue has been examined and, accordingly, you are requested to get a thorough and impartial magisterial inquiry conducted into the matter to ascertain the facts and circumstances leading to the death of Rashid Ahmad Mughal... The inquiry may be completed within a period of seven days and the report be submitted to the Home Department."

According to Ajaz, Rashid left home on Tuesday morning and did not return in the evening. "We called him around 6 pm. His phone was switched off. He had an old phone, and we thought it must have broken down." He said that on Wednesday morning, the Station House Officer (SHO) paid him a visit. "He told me that my brother had an accident and asked me to come along," claimed Ajaz. "They took me to the police control room in Srinagar and asked me to identify a body. I was shocked to see it was my brother's."

Ajaz said police told him that his brother was a militant. "I told them it was not true. I asked them to hand over the



Security personnel during a search operation in J&K's Ganderbal on April 1, the day Rashid Ahmad Mughal was killed by the Army. PTIFILE

body, but they refused," he claimed. "They took it to Handwara; I was the only family member accompanying it."

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah has sought a "transparent" probe into Rashid's death. His predecessor, PDP president Mehbooba Mufti, and an MP from his party, Aga Ruhul-lah Mehdi, had also highlighted the incident.

Ganderbal Senior Superintendent of Police Khalil Ahmad Poswal, had told *The Indian Express* that they are

verifying whether Rashid had a past militant record.

"His brother is in Pakistan," SSP Poswal said. "It was an Army operation, and an AK-56 rifle has been recovered."

Ajaz had claimed it is not true that his brother, Ishfaq Ahmad Mighal, is in Pakistan. "He was killed in 2000, and we did not even get his body."

The Defence spokesperson, when contacted, had said, "The family can claim anything. It is a sensitive issue; the truth will come out."

At Friday prayers, Mirwaiz brings up youth's killing

**Naveed Iqbal**  
Srinagar, April 3

AS PRAYERS were allowed at Jamia Masjid, Nowhatta, on Friday, after the end of Ramzan, J&K's chief cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq drew attention to the killing of Rashid Ahmed Mughal.

Mirwaiz said, "His (Mughal's) family had said that he was a part-time computer operator with no links to militancy who was picked up and killed in cold blood, painful memories of such encounters got revived". He said that while his family is seeking justice through an impartial probe, "we can only hope that justice is done, as past experiences don't inspire confidence".

"But let us hope that as news comes that L-G sahib himself has ordered an inquiry, this time justice gets done and those responsible are held to account and punished," he said, saying the body not being returned to the family for burial was "inhuman and condemnable."

# INS Aridhaman, nuclear-powered submarine, enters India's naval fleet

**Sumit Bhattacharjee**

VISAKHAPATNAM

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh presided over a brief ceremony to formally commission the country's third nuclear submarine, *INS Aridhaman* (S4), which is the third in the Arihant-class of SSBNs (Submersible Ship Ballistic Nuclear), on Friday at Visakhapatnam.

The vessel, being part of the strategic weapons programme, falls under the domain of the Strategic Forces and is part of the country's nuclear triad. As per sources in the Navy, the commissioning was not made public and was carried out quietly, but Mr. Singh dropped enough hints to acknowledge the commissioning of the vessel.

While the event was



The nuclear submarine *INS Aridhaman* ahead of its commissioning ceremony in Visakhapatnam. PTI

kept under wraps, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh posted a cryptic message on X, describing the submarine as: "It's not words but power, 'Aridhaman'!"

Sources in the Navy said that the commissioning of *INS Aridhaman* was on the cards, as the submarine had already undergone extensive sea trials, and it

coincided with Mr. Singh's visit to Visakhapatnam for the commissioning of the stealth guided-missile frigate *INS Taragiri*.

The closely guarded SSBN project, initially launched as the Advanced Technology Vessel (ATV) project, is being executed by the Ship Building Centre (SBC) in Visakha-

patnam. The first vessel was launched in July 2009 and was quietly commissioned in 2016. The second indigenously built SSBN, *INS Arighaat*, was commissioned in August 2024.

While *Arihant* and *Arighaat* are smaller vessels of about 6,000 tonnes, *Aridhaman* (S4) and S4\* are bigger vessels of about 7,000 tonnes. The S4\* (which may be named *Arisudan*) is currently undergoing sea trials.

Compared to its predecessors, *Aridhaman* and its successor S4\* will have more firepower.

India is already one of the nations, along with the U.S., Russia, China, and France, to possess a nuclear triad capability, which means it has the ability to launch nuclear-tipped missiles from air, land, and sea.

INS ARIDAMAN, STEALTH FRIGATE INS TARAGIRI COMMISSIONED

# India inducts third n-sub, strengthens deterrence



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh presided over the commissioning ceremony of India's latest stealth frigate, INS Taragiri, in Visakhapatnam, Friday. PTI

## Other than guarding coastline, ensure security of sea lanes, choke points, digital infrastructure, says Rajnath

**Amrita Nayak Dutta**  
New Delhi, April 3

INDIA FRIDAY inducted its third nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), INS Aridaman, significantly strengthening its sea-based nuclear deterrent capabilities. The Indian Navy also commissioned the advanced stealth frigate INS Taragiri at a separate ceremony.

Defence Minister Rajnath

Singh presided over the commissioning ceremonies. The inductions signify a major enhancement in India's naval strength and maritime combat capabilities.

There was no official statement on the commissioning of INS Aridaman. Singh, in a one-line cryptic post on X Friday morning, said: "*Shabd nahi, shakti hai 'Aridaman'*" – "Aridaman isn't just a word, it is power."

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

### ● A more advanced nuclear submarine

● **INS ARIDAMAN**, a 7,000-tonne vessel, has eight vertical launching system tubes — double the number of its predecessors.

● **CAN CARRY** more K-15 (range 750 km) and K-4 (range 3,500 km) ballistic missiles.

● **POWERED BY** advanced reactor which can keep it submerged for longer durations.

● **A FOURTH** submarine of the Arihant-class is currently under construction.

**EXPLAINED, PAGE 16**

**E.**

GREEN SANVI WAS ANCHORED IN THE PERSIAN GULF SINCE THE WAR BEGAN

# 7th India-flagged LPG tanker crosses Strait of Hormuz, 2 more to follow soon

Sukalp Sharma  
New Delhi, April 3

AN INDIA-flagged tanker, with around 44,000 tonnes of LPG, crossed over to the east of the Strait of Hormuz on Friday evening using a corridor through Iran's territorial waters, according to ship tracking data.

Green Sanvi has been anchored in the Persian Gulf since the conflict erupted. The fuel it is carrying will meet half a day's worth of India's pre-West Asia war LPG consumption.

According to experts and industry insiders, two more India-flagged LPG tankers — Green Asha and Jag Vikram — are also expected to cross the strait and head to India over the next few days.

Green Sanvi is the seventh India-flagged merchant ship to have transited the fraught waters of the strait since the war started in West Asia. All seven are LPG tankers.

With Green Sanvi's transit, there are now 17 India-flagged vessels in the Persian Gulf, which is to the east of the Strait of Hormuz.

These include three more



The fuel Green Sanvi is carrying will meet half a day's worth of India's pre-West Asia war LPG consumption. REUTERS

LPG tankers, four crude oil tankers, one liquefied natural gas (LNG) tanker, one chemical products tanker, three container ships, two bulk carriers, and two vessels undergoing routine maintenance.

India has been engaged with Iran at the diplomatic level for safe passage of its ships through the Strait of Hormuz. Tehran brought vessel movements in the strait to a halt after

it was attacked by US-Israel forces. Last week, Iran said that non-hostile vessels linked to countries other than the US, Israel, and their allies can cross the strait in coordination with Iranian authorities.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi has said the strait remains operational for nations that have engaged with Tehran and are considered friendly, adding that vessels

## • BEAM OF HOPE

AROUND 40% of India's crude oil imports, over 50% of its LNG imports, and a whopping 90% of its LPG imports passes through the strait, making it particularly critical for the country's LPG supplies

INDIA'S ANNUAL LPG consumption stands at a little over 33 million tonnes, with an import dependency level of 60%

INDIA HAS been engaged with Iran at the diplomatic level for safe passage of its ships through the critical Strait of Hormuz

from China, Russia, India, Iraq, and Pakistan were being allowed through the narrow strait, according to Iranian State TV. While transiting, Green Sanvi was signalling that it was an Indian ship with Indian seafarers on-board. Such identity broadcasts have become a standard of sorts among vessels crossing the strait.

FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

# Ship carrying Iranian crude heading to India changes course to China

**M. Kalyanaraman**

CHENNAI

Ping Shun, a Chinese oil tanker carrying Iranian crude oil, that had crossed the Strait of Hormuz and signalling that it was heading to Vadinar, India, for the past three days is now signalling it was headed for China, according to marine logistics and commodity markets analytics company Kpler.

The vessel, carrying more than one lakh tonne of crude oil, is signalling that it is headed to Dongying in northern China, according to ship tracker websites. As of now, Ping Shun is heading south off the west coast of India.

**Sanctioned by U.S.**

Ping Shun was sanctioned by the U.S. in February of this month. The sanctions notice says that the ship was involved in Pars crude



**A diversion:** Ping Shun is owned and managed by companies located in Shandong, China. AFP (For representation purpose only).

oil through ship-to-ship transfers with the sanctioned National Iranian Tanker Company with the motive of obfuscating the oil's Iranian origin. The tanker has delivered several shipments to China.

As per shipping database equasis, Ping Shun is owned and managed by companies located in Shandong, China. Shipping sources say that Ping

Shun likely switched off automatic identification system (AIS) or was spoofing while crossing the Strait.

This would have been the first time in almost seven years that India would have been buying Iranian oil. The U.S. had, through a "general licence" said that the Iranian oil already loaded as on March 20 would be allowed to be sold and delivered until

**April 19.** But reports suggested Indian customers were reluctant to take in Iranian crude over contractual terms. Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum & Natural Gas, had said at an official media briefing that purchase of Iranian oil are "all techno-commercial decisions taken by the oil marketing companies".

Iran continues to be locked out of the global financial system due to U.S. sanctions, making payments difficult to process.

Meanwhile, Green Sanvi, a LPG tanker owned by the Indian operations of Mitsui OSK Ltd. and registered in India, was crossing the Strait of Hormuz on April 3. It would be the seventh Indian-flagged LPG carrier crossing the strait and headed to India.

Green Sanvi is carrying more than 46,000 tonne of LPG.



## Indigenous stealth frigate

### ***INS Taragiri* commissioned**

In a significant boost to India's maritime security and the 'Aatmanirbharta' initiative, the guided-missile stealth frigate *INS Taragiri* was commissioned into the Indian Navy at the Eastern Naval Command base in Visakhapatnam on Friday. The ceremony, attended by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Chief of Defence Staff General Anil Chauhan, and Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K. Tripathi, marked the induction of a vessel that represents a generational leap in naval engineering. Powered by a combined diesel or gas propulsion engine and equipped with supersonic surface-to-surface missiles and advanced anti-submarine suites, the frigate is now a cornerstone of the Eastern Fleet.

# A year after tensions over Operation Sindoor, India and Azerbaijan to reset ties

**Suhasini Haidar**

NEW DELHI

After a year of tensions between India and Azerbaijan over Operation Sindoor, the governments decided to reset ties as senior officials met in Baku for the 6<sup>th</sup> round of Foreign Office consultations.

The talks, held between Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) Secretary (West) Sibi George and Azerbaijan's Deputy Foreign Minister Elnur Mammadov on Friday are the first such talks since 2022, and after major differences over Azerbaijan-Pakistan and India-Armenia relations.

In a statement, the MEA said the two sides "comprehensively reviewed" the state of bilateral relations. "The issues discussed included trade, technology, tourism, pharmaceuticals, energy, culture, people-to-people ex-

**The two sides agreed to 'resolve differences through open dialogue and discussion'**

changes and fight against cross-border terrorism," it added.

Azerbaijan has recently resumed crude oil exports, which make up 98% of the country's exports to India, while ONGC Videsh has a stake in oil and gas fields and an energy pipeline in the country.

The reference to cross-border terrorism in the statement is significant as last year, New Delhi had been angered by Azerbaijan's protest of India's strikes on Pakistani sites during Operation Sindoor, and indicates that the two countries have smoothed over some of their differences. In a statement on

May 7 last year, the Azerbaijan Foreign Ministry has "condemned military attacks against Pakistan that killed and injured several civilians," and called on all parties to "resolve the conflict through diplomatic means."

Azerbaijan and Pakistan have a close strategic partnership, given Islamabad's support to Azerbaijan in the dispute over Nagorno Karabakh, while Azerbaijan accused India of arming Armenia in the conflict.

Sources said that during talks on Friday, the two sides had agreed to "resolve differences through open dialogue and discussion". Mr. George called on the Foreign Policy Adviser to President Aliyev and Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov of Azerbaijan where they "reviewed the bilateral ties and exchanged views on matters of common interest".

# MSMEs 'reluctant' to switch over to piped natural gas supplies

Industry officials point to deficiency in PNG supply post war breakout and also infrastructure insufficiencies for hesitation to switch fuels

**M. Soundariya Preetha**

COIMBATORE

**T**he Micro, Small and Medium-scale Enterprises (MSMEs) in the manufacturing sector have expressed fears about switching over to Piped Natural Gas (PNG) from commercial LPG cylinders.

The 1.65 crore registered MSMEs are located in multiple clusters across the country and some of the States have PNG for these clusters for decades.

Sunil Desai, who runs a MSME in Vadodara, said units in Vadodara have been having PNG supply for almost 40 years now.

## **'No supply guarantee'**

"Yet, there is 20% to 50% reduction in supply because of the war. So, what is the guarantee on the consistency of supply for the MSMEs," he asks.

The calorific value of PNG is a tad lower than LPG. So, industries opting for PNG should have the technical knowledge on the gas supply they are going to choose, he adds.

Anil Bhardwaj, secretary general of the Federation of Indian MSMEs, said the MSMEs were unhappy with the government's decision asking commercial LPG cylinder customers to



**ifs and buts:** The calorific value of PNG is a tad lower than LPG, according to officials of some MSMEs. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

## **Many MSMEs shift jobs such as welding to different sites and need cylinders for the purpose**

register for PNG to get the additional LPG supply.

## **Lack infrastructure**

"Not all areas of an industrial city have PNG infrastructure. Providing this will take time. The MSMEs should have the option of both, LPG and PNG. Though the units may have to make investments internally to change equipment for PNG use, what is worrying them more is the lack of PNG infrastructure, especially in the NCR and Tamil Nadu," he added.

President of the Coim-

batore District Small Industries Association, M. Karthikeyan, said it will not be economically viable for micro industries to switch over to PNG as they will have to spend on infrastructure. Also, many units work out of rented premises.

Sudhakar Sundaravel, national head of the SME domain of the All India Professionals' Congress, said MSMEs were not confined to a defined area.

"The concept maybe good and the industries may be willing. But, do we have the infrastructure? And when it is done in a hurry, how do we ensure safety standards?" he asks.

Many MSMEs shift jobs such as welding to different sites and need cylinders that can be carried for such jobs, he pointed out.

# Russia assures steady oil and LNG supply to India

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Manturov discusses trade, fertilizers, people-to-people ties and connectivity with Modi; Russia cites 'particular attention' paid to cooperation in sectors like oil, gas

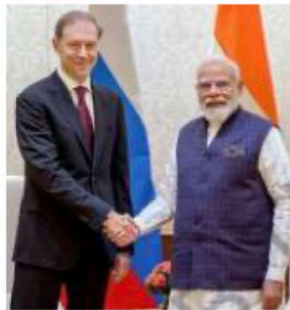
**Kallol Bhattacharjee**

NEW DELHI

**A**mid the oil shock and supply chain disruptions triggered by the U.S.-Israel war on Iran, Russia has assured that its energy companies have the capacity to “steadily increase” the supply of oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) to India, and also “continue” to address India’s fertilizer needs.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov, on a two-day visit, called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday and discussed the supply of fertilizers.

“We discussed our mutually beneficial cooperation in trade, fertilizers, connectivity and people-to-people ties,” said Mr. Modi, who “welcomed sus-



Narendra Modi with Russian Deputy PM Denis Manturov, in New Delhi, on Thursday. ANI

tained efforts from both sides” to realise the agreements of the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit hosted here in December 2025.

The visit is being seen as part of the preparations by the two sides ahead of the upcoming BRICS summit to be hosted by India and the India-Russia annual summit scheduled in Rus-

## U.S. jet shot down in Iran; 1 rescued

TEHRAN

A U.S. fighter jet was shot down in Iran on Friday and one crew member was rescued, media reports said. The rescue occurred as the U.S. military was conducting a search operation with the support of Israel. » **PAGE 14**

## India-bound oil heads to China?

CHENNAI

*Ping Shun*, an Iranian crude oil carrier that had been signalling it was heading to India for three days after crossing the Strait of Hormuz, is heading to China as per marine logistics and commodity markets analytics firm Kpler. » **PAGE 13**

sia this year. According to the Russian embassy, Mr. Manturov said that Russia has increased supplies of “in-demand mineral fertilizers to India by 40% and is ready to continue meeting India’s needs for this product”.

He also mentioned that a joint project for the production of carbamide (urea) is “under develop-

ment”. “Particular attention was paid to cooperation in the oil and gas sector. Manturov confirmed that Russian companies have the capacity to steadily increase supplies of oil and liquefied natural gas to the Indian market,” said the embassy readout.

**CONTINUED ON**

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# Russia assures steady oil, LNG supply to India

Mr. Manturov also met with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, and the leaders discussed continued energy supply to India.

In a press note, the External Affairs Ministry said Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Manturov “exchanged views on regional and global developments, including the conflict in West Asia.”

Mr. Manturov said Russia will deepen nuclear cooperation with India. Other topics such as industrial cooperation, space and educational projects were discussed in the meetings.

Mr. Manturov’s Delhi visit, which ended on Friday, took place days after Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Mr. Jaishankar addressed a conference on bilateral relations through a video link on March 23, during which Mr. Lavrov indicated Russia’s preparations for the annual summit.

Mr. Lavrov had expressed Russia’s support for the BRICS where India is the current Chair. The group has attracted attention in recent weeks as it has not made a statement on the evolving situation in West Asia, though Russia, India and China, who form a trilateral sub-group called RIC, have indicated that they will work closely within BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the UN on issues that affect common interests of the Global South.

This was followed by the March 30 Foreign Office Consultations between India and Russia led by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko. This week, the Indian side hosted Vladimir Yakushev, First Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council (upper house) of the Federal Assembly of Russia. On Thursday, Mr. Yakushev met Deputy Chairman of the Rajya Sabha Harivansh Narayan Singh and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla.

The flurry of conversations between India and Russia has coincided with the growing energy insecurity in India and the rest of South Asia as the war in West Asia continued in the second month. The U.S. had imposed penalty tariffs on India in August 2025 and made India cut down on Russian energy imports with the aim to force Russia make concessions in the war in Ukraine.

# UN lauds efforts by Indian peacekeepers in opening key corridor in South Sudan

**Yoshita Singh**

*United Nations, April 3*

THE UN has lauded efforts by Indian peacekeepers in South Sudan in re-opening a critical supply route impacted by floods last year, emphasising the "vital role" it played in supporting stability and enabling assistance to vulnerable civilians.

The United Nations Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) was established fol-

lowing a UN Security Council resolution in July 2011 to consolidate peace and security and to help establish conditions for development in the then newly born South Sudan.

As of January 2026, India is the top troop contributing country to the UNMISS with 1,779 personnel.

Stephane Dujarric, spokesman for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, said Thursday said, "... in South Sudan, amid

these difficult times, there are some hopeful developments."

"Our Peacekeeping Mission there (UNMISS) reports that in Upper Nile State, Indian peacekeepers from the Engineering Unit have successfully re-opened a key section of the Malakal-Renk main supply route, which had been closed since last year's floods," Dujarric said.

He said the new road alignment, which entailed reclaiming land from floodwaters to restore

the road, will provide safer access, significantly improving mobility in the area and facilitating the delivery of humanitarian assistance to people in need in local communities.

"These efforts also underscore the vital role that the Peacekeeping Mission plays in supporting stability and enabling critical assistance to reach vulnerable civilians in some of the most challenging environments," Dujarric said. **PTI**

# US announces 100% tariff on patented pharma; limited impact on India

## Generics kept out, but review in 12 months

Ravi Dutta Mishra  
New Delhi, April 3

THE US on Thursday announced a 100% tariff on import of patented pharmaceuticals and associated ingredients starting July 31 on grounds that Washington is heavily reliant on imports, which threatens to limit access to life-saving medications in the event of "global supply chain disruption".

US President Donald Trump said that new tariffs will not include generic drugs "at this time". But a decision on adjusting imports of generic pharmaceuticals and their associated ingredients could be taken within one year. India is primarily an exporter of generic pharma products, but has introduced various schemes to boost production of patented drugs too.

"I have determined that it is necessary and appropriate to impose a 100% ad valorem duty rate on the import of patented pharmaceuticals and associated pharmaceutical ingredients.. The Secretary [of Commerce] found that the present quantities and circumstances of imports of pharmaceuticals and pharmaceutical ingredients threaten to impair the national security and economy," Trump said.

The US is India's largest market for pharmaceutical exports, accounting for an almost 40% share. Pharma exports were also exempt from the 50% tariffs imposed by the Trump administration on most Indian goods. While India's exports are primarily in the patented segment, Sun Pharma is the only Indian company with sizable sales from patented products in the US. According to HSBC analysts, it reported global sales of \$1,217 million from patented products in FY25, of which the US market accounted for 85-90%.

However, India has been



US President Donald Trump

pushing for the manufacturing of patented medicines too under its flagship Production Linked Incentive Scheme (PLI). According to an official statement, the PLI focuses on biopharmaceuticals, complex generic drugs, "patented drugs or those nearing patent expiry", gene therapy drugs, orphan drugs and complex excipients.

The PLI Scheme for Pharmaceuticals was approved by the Union Cabinet in 2021, with a financial outlay of Rs 15,000 crore and a production tenure running from FY 2022-23 to FY 2027-28.

Former trade officer and founder of think tank Global Trade Research Initiative, Ajay Srivastava, said that for India, the immediate impact is limited as around 90% of India's pharmaceutical exports to the US are generics, which remain exempt. In 2025, India exported \$9.7 billion worth of pharmaceuticals to the US, accounting for 38% of its global pharma exports of \$25.8 billion, he said.

"However, Indian firms producing branded or speciality drugs, or supplying inputs for patented medicines, could face tariff pressure. The larger concern is future uncertainty if tariffs are extended to generics," Srivastava said.

Trade experts said the US could use tariffs mainly as a pressure tool, not to raise revenue but to push drugmakers to cut prices in the US, shift some manufacturing locally, and to gain greater control over critical pharmaceutical supply chains, treating the sector as strategically important like semiconductors. And this is the reason tariffs are designed to be avoidable; companies that lower prices or invest in US production can escape them.

● PROPOSED REGULATIONS REQUIRE CLEAR LABELLING, AND A BAN ON SERVICES THAT COULD MISLEAD CHILDREN OR FUEL ADDICTION

# China moves to regulate digital humans, issues draft rules

Reuters

Beijing, April 3

CHINA'S CYBERSPACE regulator issued draft regulations on Friday to oversee the development online of digital humans, requiring clear labelling and banning services that could mislead children or fuel addiction.

The Cyberspace Administration of China's proposed rules would require prominent "digital human" labels on all virtual human content and prohibit digital humans from providing "virtual intimate relationships" to those under 18, according to rules published for public comment until May 6.

The draft regulations would also ban the use of other people's personal information to create digital humans without consent, or using virtual humans to bypass identity verification systems, reflecting Beijing's efforts to maintain control in the face of advances in artificial intelligence.

Digital humans are also prohibited from disseminating content that endangers national security, inciting subversion of state power, promoting secession or undermining national unity, the draft rules said.

Service providers are advised to prevent and resist content that is sexually suggestive, depicts horror, cruelty or incites



Digital humans are computer-generated virtual beings that mimic human appearance, conversations and emotions. REUTERS

discrimination based on ethnicity or region, according to the document.

Providers are also encouraged to take necessary

measures to intervene and provide professional assistance when users exhibit suicidal or self-harming tendencies. China made clear its ambitions to

## ● TAMING MACHINES

**THE DRAFT** regulations would ban the use of other people's personal information to create digital humans without consent or using virtual humans to bypass identity verification systems

**DIGITAL HUMANS** are also prohibited from disseminating content that endangers national security, inciting subversion of state power

aggressively adopt AI throughout its economy in the new five-year policy blueprint issued last month.

The push comes alongside

tightening governance in the booming industry to ensure safety and alignment with the country's socialist values.

The new rules aim to fill a gap in governance in the digital human sector, setting clear red lines for the healthy development of the industry, according to an analysis published on the cyberspace regulator's website.

"The governance of digital virtual humans is no longer merely an issue of industry norms; rather, it has become a strategic scientific problem that concerns the security of the cyberspace, public interests, and the high-quality development of the digital economy," it added.