

# CJI's role in CEC, EC appointments was temporary, pending new law: SC

Court's observation was in response to pleas challenging a 2023 Act, which replaced the CJI with a Union Minister on the selection panel; petitioners argue this law overrides a Constitution Bench judgment which sought a panel of PM, LoP, CJI

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**

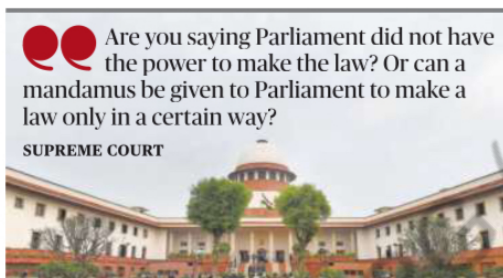
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said the Chief Justice of India's involvement in the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs) was only meant to last until Parliament came up with a law.

The court's observation was in response to multiple petitions challenging the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act of 2023.

The petitioners, who include the Association for Democratic Reforms and activist Jaya Thakur, said the 2023 law clothed the political executive of the day with a dominant, if not "exclusive", control over the appointment of the CEC and ECs.

The law was introduced in December 2023, ostensibly to countermand a Constitution Bench judgment in March the same year.



This judgment had declared that CEC and EC appointments should be made on the recommendation of a committee of the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition of the Lok Sabha (LoP) or the leader of the largest Opposition party in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India (CJI).

The court had ordered that its judgment would remain operative till "Parliament makes a law in consonance with Article 324(2) of the Constitution".

Consequently, the government brought the 2023 Act, replacing the CJI with a Union Cabinet Minister in the committee. The current CEC, Gyanesh

Kumar, was the first to be appointed to the office under the new law.

**'Prime Minister's man'**

On Wednesday, senior advocate Vijay Hansaria, appearing for the petitioners, said the Constitution framers and the Supreme Court itself had never intended the CEC to be the "Prime Minister's baby or the Prime Minister's man".

Mr. Hansaria submitted that both the Constitution framers and the Supreme Court had warned against leaving the appointment of Election Commissioners exclusively in the hands of the executive.

He referred to the Supreme Court's own obser-

ventions in the March 2023 Constitution Bench judgment (*Anoop Baranwal v. Union of India*) that the "ferce independence, neutrality and honesty" envisaged in the institution of the Election Commission required an end to government monopoly and "exclusive control" over appointments to the highest poll body.

Prior to the judgment, the CEC and ECs were appointed by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. The judgment had brought the appointment process on par with that of the CBI Director.

However, Justice Datta highlighted that even the Supreme Court had only intended the judgment to be operative till Parliament passed a law.

"Are you saying Parliament did not have the power to make the law? Or can a mandamus be given to Parliament to make a law only in a certain way?" Justice Datta asked.

Senior advocate Gopal Sankaranarayanan, also for the petitioners, said

their case was not just about the replacement of the CJI with a Cabinet Minister in the committee. It was also about the constitutionality of an Act which had effectively reverted the control over the appointment of CEC and ECs to the Executive.

"The point is Election Commission appointments cannot be under the control of the executive," he submitted.

Mr. Sankaranarayanan said the Anoop Baranwal judgment had addressed a "legislative vacuum". Before March 2023, appointments of the CEC and ECs were made by the President on the advice of the Prime Minister. The "arrangement" had ensured that the power of appointment rested with the Political Executive.

"This mechanism ought to have stopped in the 1950s, but whichever parties came to power found the arrangement convenient," Mr. Sankaranarayanan said.

Arguments would continue on Thursday.

# Nicobar gram sabhas signed off on infra project without 50% quorum

**Abhinay Lakshman**

NEW DELHI

The Andaman and Nicobar Islands (A&NI) administration did not achieve the mandated 50% quorum at the gram sabha meetings held to get consent for the Centre's ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island project. Instead, it claimed to have done so by attendance figures ranging from 2% to 15% of the population, which, it argued in the Calcutta High Court, counted as "proper quorum". The submissions were made by the administration in an affidavit to the Bench that is hearing a batch of petitions alleging that procedures under the Forest Rights Act (FRA) had been violated in obtaining consent for the project.

Quorum is the minimum number of members



Submissions before the Calcutta HC show that meetings to get nod for the ₹92,000-crore plan didn't have mandated strength. FILE PHOTO

needed in such a meeting to reach a decision. According to the rules issued by the Centre for the implementation of the FRA, a quorum at a gram sabha is achieved only if 'one-half' or 50% of the adult population of that village is in attendance, of which one-third must be women.

The administration submitted that meetings were held for Campbell Bay,

Laxmi Nagar, and Govind Nagar gram panchayats, covering seven villages, on August 12, 2022. The Campbell Bay meeting was attended by 105 people, the one in Laxmi Nagar by 163 people, and the Govind Nagar sabha had 81 people. The administration said all three meetings passed "unanimous" resolutions consenting to the project.

Compared to the popu-

lation of these gram panchayats as per the 2011 Census, the strength of the Campbell Bay meeting was 1.83% of the total population of 5,736, that of the Laxmi Nagar was 14.72% of the population of 1,107, and the attendance at the Govind Nagar meeting was 11.98% of the population of 676. Put together, 349 people (4.6%) signed off on the project at these three gram sabhas meant to represent seven villages, whose total population stood at 7,519 as of 2011.

The submissions, which were taken on record by the High Court on Wednesday, came after the Centre sought time from the court to "demonstrate that consent has been taken from the tribal people".

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# Understanding inequality in India's growth story

There have been some significant policy changes in the recent past – this includes the implementation of the new Labour Codes and the Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) Bill, 2025 replacing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) – which have raised serious concerns regarding the welfare of informal workers and those belonging to rural India. These changes are accompanied by the official understanding that inequality is much less of a concern today than it was in the early 2010s, even though data comparability itself is an issue.

**Inequality estimates, initial observations**  
Analysis of inequality warrants clarification on a few issues, among other things.

The first is inequality of what – income, wealth, consumption expenditure? Second, how is it measured? Third, along which axis it is assessed – caste, class, gender, religion?, and fourth, data source and comparability of estimates generated from multiple surveys, if



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marked with methodological changes. Our estimate from the Household Consumer Expenditure Survey (HCES 2023-24), conducted by the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO), suggests that overall consumption expenditure inequality, measured by the Gini index, is 0.29 – higher than the widely cited World Bank estimate of 0.25. The World Bank's method too, in this regard, came under scrutiny. With further disaggregation, one finds that urban, as expected, is more unequal than the rural sector. India's consumption boom during the last couple of decades has been primarily driven by non-food expenditure. We find that inequality is much higher for the same compared to food expenditure. This is true for the rural and urban sectors, the inequality for both being higher in case of the urban sectors, and relatively more for non-food expenditure.

Since most growth-inducing activities are urban-centre and agricultural distress persists, it is imperative to examine the urban-rural gap, which is shown by the mean ratio here. A higher than unity mean ratio would reflect a relatively better position than the respective all-India average. Lesser than unity would imply otherwise. There is a substantial gap between urban and rural sectors in this regard and the disparity is most striking in the case of non-food expenditure. For example, average urban non-food monthly per capita expenditure (MPCE) is about 1.5 times higher than the all-India average, while that for rural is much lower than the same point of reference.

Our disaggregated analysis also reveals a considerable gap between the consumption share and per-capita spending of overall MPCE-based deciles. In the urban sector, the top 10% of the population alone contributes 27% of the total non-food expenditure, implying that the rest of the 90% contributes only 73% of the same. The mean MPCE of the topmost decile is six times that of the bottom most decile for the urban sector, compared to 4.5 times in the rural sector. Strikingly, the mean MPCE of the top most decile in the urban sector is nine times that of the bottom most decile in the rural sector. Once we proceed a step further and decompose total inequality into within- and between-group components, it appears that: in urban India, within-decile and between-decile inequalities account for about 33% and 67% of food expenditure inequality, respectively, and about 10% and 90% of non-food expenditure inequality. The relative importance of between-decile group

inequality for non-food consumption holds true for the rural sector too. Further, the per-capita consumption expenditure of the richest 5% is six times higher than that of the poorest 5% in the rural areas; the same is nine times for urban areas. In short, the urban sector, which is more affluent, is more unequal than its rural counterparts.

## Inequality dynamics in India

First, it is almost unanimously agreed upon that the superrich segment of the Indian population is hardly captured by the NSS surveys (consumption or wealth); thus any inequality estimation based on the same is a gross underestimation. Our own calculation based on this data suggests that about one fourth of even the richest 10% in India benefited from the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Yojana (PMGKY) and about 13% of them have access to Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards.

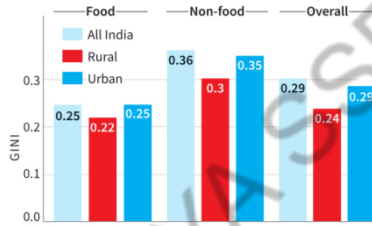
Second, for a nuanced understanding of inequality dynamics in India, one must go beyond inter-personal or solely income/spending groups-based (for example, decile; percentile) inequality calculations and analyse disparity along various socio-economic axes such as caste and class. Deploying an alternative class-based analysis alongside a closer examination of the growth process and policy changes since Independence, Vamsi Vakulabharanam of the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in his book, *Class and Inequality in China and India, 1950-2010*, shows that since the 1980s (even before the 1991 reforms), urban owners, managers, and professionals have gained disproportionately, contributing to India's consumption boom.

In contrast, urban informal workers, rural small farmers, and agricultural labourers have lagged markedly behind. All these added to increasing between-class inequality *vis-à-vis* within-class inequality in India's evolving urban landscape. Over the last decade or so, there has not been any systemic change despite various welfare measures, to counter or reverse such trend in class-based inequality. Typical explorations of inequality often overlook this growth-class-inequality nexus. Moreover, a large share of Indians remains engaged in debt-led consumption. The complexities involved in the issue of inequality in India warn us that policies formulated on the presupposition of lower disparity could be misleading and may produce adverse, albeit unintended, welfare implications.

## Consumption expenditure inequality in India

Locating inequality by space and consumption type

Source: Authors' calculation and illustration using unit level data of Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2023-24.  
Note: We disaggregate the overall consumption expenditure into food and non-food consumption expenditure.

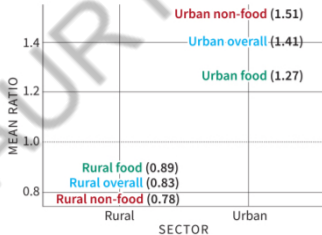


**Figure 2: Urban – rural gap by consumption type**

Source: Same as figure 1. Respective mean ratio is in parenthesis.

Note: Here, mean ratio implies the ratio of sectoral average MPCE to All India MPCE.

For example, mean ratio for urban non-food consumption is calculated as the ratio of average urban non-food MPCE to that of all India (rural and urban combined) average non-food MPCE.



# SC should take cognisance of Bengal election, make counting videos public: SP

Party chief Akhilesh Yadav claims what happened in West Bengal could be replicated on a larger scale in U.P. Assembly election next year; declines comment on Cong. leaving DMK for TVK in T.N.

**Press Trust of India**

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**D**ays after the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won the Assembly election in West Bengal, Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday raised doubts about the fairness of the poll process and demanded that the Supreme Court order the video recording of vote counting be made public.

"When court proceedings have gone live, why can't vote counting go live?" Mr. Yadav said.

"Why is CCTV not live? Why are they so afraid of it? We demand the Supreme Court immediately take cognisance of the West Bengal poll and put the video of the counting in front of the people of the country," he said.

He alleged that what happened during the election in West Bengal could be replicated on a larger scale in Uttar Pradesh, where the Assembly poll is



Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav addressing a press conference in Lucknow on Wednesday. ANI

scheduled next year.

The SP chief added that when his party comes to power in Uttar Pradesh, the government in Delhi will go. "We have defeated them in U.P., which is why their election mafia will target us. We are alert but will not disclose any strategy to you [media]."

Mr. Yadav also dismissed party leader Kironmay Nanda's recent statement. Mr. Nanda had claimed that the SP president did not go to West Bengal as he received feedback that Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee was

sure to lose the poll.

"I did not go campaigning anywhere. We [SP] did not have the resources to campaign [in other States]," he said.

Mr. Yadav had extended support to Ms. Banerjee in the election. Asked if he would meet the outgoing Chief Minister, he said, "I will go to West Bengal."

The SP president also refused to give a direct reply on the DMK calling the Congress a "backstabber" after the latter announced it would back the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) in Tamil Nadu. "Why should I

tell you whom I will rely on or not?" he said.

On whether he would reach out to the NDA's allies, JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar and TDP leader Chandrababu Naidu, Mr. Yadav said, "If Nitishji recognises me, he will come with us, while he [Mr. Naidu] has our 'cycle' [election symbol]."

## I-PAC termination

Mr. Yadav added that his party severed its association with the political consultancy firm, Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC), due to shortage of funds. He dismissed speculation that the termination of contract was because of the recent election results. The SP chief said the party had engaged I-PAC for a brief period ahead of the 2027 State Assembly poll but could not continue the arrangement. "They worked with us for a few months, but we are not able to continue because we do not have that kind of funding," he said.

# Underground infra to air defence, armed forces fast-track priorities

Dual-use infra like airfields, roads connecting strategic areas closer to borders also a key focus area

## OPERATION sindoor

A YEAR LATER

Amrita Nayak Dutta  
New Delhi, May 6

THE EARLY hours of May 7 will mark one year of Operation Sindoor, a strike by the Indian armed forces on terror targets in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Pakistan followed by hostilities between the two countries over four days.

A year since, the Indian military has focused on two significant aspects: large-scale construction of underground infrastructure and the establishment of a strong air defence system.

Learning from Operation Sindoor and ongoing global conflicts, several changes are being considered, covering deployment of troops and equipment, acquisition of new technology and weapons, among them a range of drones and

## THE EDITORIAL PAGE

BENCHMARK SET, INSTITUTIONALISE LESSONS FROM OP

SYED ATA HASNAIN P12

counter-drone systems, and newer ways of fighting wars.

Multiple officials across the defence establishment told *The Indian Express* that the construction of large-scale underground infrastructure has been a major focus of the military, alongside the implementation of other passive measures such as dispersal of assets and formations, increased concealment and camouflage, and force preservation efforts.

According to officials, work on the construction of underground command and control centres, starting with the Army's Command and Corps Headquarters level and later at divisional and lower levels, has been underway.

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Rameez Khan, wife Urusa offer prayers at their children's graves. In Poonch, 14 people were killed in border shelling last May. ARUN SHARMA

## Twins dead, father says: 'I often wonder why we moved to Poonch...'

Arun Sharma  
Poonch, May 6

THE EMPTINESS that assails Rameez and Urusa Khan as they walk through the iron gates of their single-storey home in Poonch's Chaktroo town is pervasive. It slips into their evening tea, haunts their favourite corners, and follows them as they visit the graves of their 11-year-old twins Zoya and Zain — both killed in last year's

cross-border shelling in Poonch during Operation Sindoor.

"They would open the gates for us when we came home from work," says Rameez, a government teacher, like his wife Urusa. "We're now simply passing through life."

Zoya and Zain, who were born 5 minutes apart and died within minutes of each other on May 7, 2025, were among the 14 people killed in shelling in

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

# Underground infra

These underground command centres will be equipped with C4I2SR (Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Information, Surveillance and Reconnaissance), which can be shared among all services on a secure network.

A C4I2SR is an integrated system that enables military commanders to achieve situational awareness and coordination, thus aiding decision-making superiority in operations across domains. An underground command and control center will enable military commanders to lead operations securely during active conflict.

Other underground infrastructure to be constructed will include limited medical facilities, living bunkers designed for long-term habitation during wars and other disasters, ammunition and FOL (Fuel, Oil, Lubricants) and rations storage facilities in forward locations along the borders, as well as in depth areas.

Officials said that construction of 3D-printed bunkers, which are quick to make, resilient and can easily be relocated, will also form part of the country's underground infrastructure.

It is also learnt that the focus is also on the creation of additional underground infrastructure along the western borders, so as to make daily routine operations resilient to wars or disasters, a key element of which is

the hardened bunker.

Aside from the construction of underground military infrastructure, the creation of dual-use infrastructure such as airfields, highways and roads connecting strategic areas closer to borders has also emerged as a key priority.

For instance, the IAF last month conducted an emergency landing field activation drill on the Purvanchal Expressway in Sultanpur in UP. Fighters, including the Su-30MKI, Jaguar, Mirage 2000, and C295 transport aircraft, participated in the drill. Several airfields across the country, including those closer to the borders, have been opened for civil use.

Drawing from the lessons of Operation Sindoor, during which Pakistan sent swarms of low-cost drones to India, and also from the Israel-US and Iran war, in which Iranians launched drones and missiles towards Israel and US bases in the Gulf countries, strengthening air defence has been a key focus of the armed forces.

While there are moves to establish a comprehensive air defence shield under the Sudarshan Chakra mission — a panel under the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) recently submitted a pre-feasibility report on the project — work has also begun on enhancing the existing Akash-teejer cover of the Army.

An indigenous, automated Air Defence Control and Repor-

ting System of the Army, Akash-teejer can be easily integrated with the IACCS (IAF) and TRIGUN (Navy), creating a clear and real-time picture of the battlefield.

There has also been large-scale procurement of counter-UAS systems — many of these will be integrated with legacy weapon systems of the armed forces — which are cheaper to operate, yet accurate and will help optimise the use of ammunition.

Air Marshal Narmadeshwar Tiwari (retd), who was Vice Chief of Air Staff during Operation Sindoor, told *The Indian Express* that India managed to defend all its bases from Pakistan's attacks during Operation Sindoor due to its robust, layered air defence shield already in place, but that will continue to evolve.

Underlining that detection is a key component of air defence, he said the idea is to get the information as quickly as possible. "Getting more advanced and specialised sensors and radars that pick up information about incoming threats, covering everything from ballistic missiles to small drones, will be the way forward towards strengthening air defence," he said. He said it may not be feasible to defend every piece of land against all weapon systems, so the deployment of air defence assets should focus on prioritising what is most important to protect.

Aside from plans to procure sophisticated sensors and radars, the Indian military has, since last year, prioritised procurement of counter-UAS systems.

India has also been planning

to procure more S-400 surface-to-air missile systems. The DRDO has been developing Project Kusha, an indigenous long-range surface-to-air missile system to protect strategic military and civilian assets and infrastructure from a range of aerial threats.

On the military's focus on offensive air defence, Air Marshal Tiwari said the idea of a robust air defence infrastructure is not only to deny the enemy from hitting any Indian target, but also to deny him from using the airspace of his own country for launching any attack.

The S-400s, the Kusha and even the MRSAMs (medium-range surface-to-air missiles) can act as offensive air defence systems based on how they are deployed, he said.

Last year, IAF chief Air Chief Marshal AP Singh disclosed that among the targets destroyed on May 7 was a large Pakistani airborne platform, possibly an ELINT (Electronic Intelligence) or AEW&C (Airborne Early Warning and Control) aircraft taken down from a distance of about 300 km. He described it as the "largest-ever recorded surface-to-air kill that we can talk about".

Such a long-range kill involves a long-range interceptor missile, a surface-to-air missile designed to destroy airborne targets at distances well beyond visual range, steady precision tracking and the ability to maintain a firing solution until impact.

The IAF acquired this capability recently, with the induction of the Russian-made S-400 Triumf system.

# Delhi tops — crimes against women & elderly, offences by juveniles, cases of thefts

At 2,75,402, most number of crime cases registered in Delhi, Mumbai a distant second with 51,428 cases

Pragynesh & Nirbhay Thakur  
New Delhi, May 6

DELHI RECORDED the highest number of crimes against women and senior citizens among the country's 19 Metro cities in 2024, while also reporting the highest rate of crimes committed by juveniles, according to the latest Crime in India report released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) on Wednesday. It also topped the list of cities across the country when it came to cases of theft, with nearly 30% of all such offences being reported in the Capital.

The number of crime cases lodged in Delhi in 2024 saw about a 15% dip when compared to 2023, and 8.8% in 2022. But it still topped among the Metros. While the number of cases registered in Delhi stood at 2,75,402 in 2024, Mumbai came a distant second with 51,428 cases.

The data shows that 13,396 cases of crimes against women were registered in Delhi, while crimes against senior citizens stood at 1,267 — accounting for just over 30% of all such cases reported across the cities.

At 41.6%, Delhi recorded the highest rate of crimes committed by juveniles, far above the national average of 7.9%.

The data further shows that while 1,80,973 cases of thefts were registered in Delhi in 2024, 6,21,945 were recorded

## • THE CRIME CAPITAL

### Highest number of crimes against senior citizens

• The number of crimes against senior citizens was the highest in Delhi among all UTs and metro cities in 2024, according to a latest NCRB report.

### A slight year-on-year dip in such cases

2023	1,361
2024	1,267

### Tops in crime against women

• Crime against women in Delhi remained the highest among 19 major cities, with 13,396 cases registered in 2024 alone, according to the NCRB report.

• Number of such crimes per 1 lakh women in Delhi in 2024 was at 176.8. Overall crimes against women in city in 2024 saw 0.22% rise from 2023.

SOURCE: 'CRIME IN INDIA' REPORT RELEASED BY THE NATIONAL CRIME RECORDS BUREAU

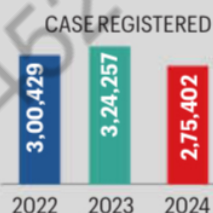
The 1,267 cases account for just over 30% of all the 4,107 crimes against senior citizens reported in Metros. The data, however, suggests that the number of such crimes has dropped in Delhi in absolute terms — it was 1,361 in 2023 and 1,313 in 2022.

“Senior citizens have been vulnerable to crimes because of isolation and inducement. Many of them, especially in upscale localities, live alone, which has made them easy targets for thefts and robberies,” said a senior police officer.

At 13,396, Delhi also recorded the most number of crimes against women in 2024 — more than a quarter of all such cases in Metros. The figure was almost the same as 2023, when the Capital saw 13,439

### Tops in overall crime rate

• Capital also tops among all metropolitan cities in terms of overall crime rate.  
• It, however, saw a 15% dip in 2024, when compared to 2023, and 8.8% against 2022.



### Prisons most overcrowded

• 19,512 inmates against capacity of 10,026 prisoners.  
• Occupancy rate stands at 194.6% as of December 31, 2024  
• 17,178 prisoners are undertrials — nearly 9 in 10, or 88%

### 'Theft capital'

• Delhi dominated theft statistics, with nearly three-fourths of all such cases registered in 19 major metro cities.  
• With 1,80,973 theft cases in 2024, Delhi also topped the list of cities across India with nearly

30% of all such offences.

### Reports most kidnapping and murder cases

• Even as Delhi records marginal dip in murder cases in 2024, among UTs, the city recorded the highest number of such cases in absolute terms. The murder rate stood at 2.3 per lakh population in 2024 — higher than the national average of 1.9.

• Kidnapping and abduction cases in the Capital were also the highest among metro cities, with 5,580 cases in 2024 — accounting for nearly 35% of all such cases across the metros.

Delhi accounted for more than a quarter of all rape cases registered across the cities. However, of the 1,058 rape cases registered, 1,044 were found to lack “sufficient evidence”.

“It is true that compared to Metros in other parts of India, Delhi shows a higher rate of crime against women. But that is also because cases here are registered quickly, often on the basis of the first complaint. There also have been multiple fake cases of rape, which were later found to be lodged for the purpose of blackmail. But pending trial, all these cases continue to be part of official records,” said the officer.

Kidnapping and abduction cases lodged in the Capital were also the highest among the

by juveniles in 2024 — a jump from 2,278 in 2023. The national average is 7.9%. Only Madhya Pradesh (3,474) and Maharashtra (3,779) reported higher numbers. While the former has a population three times that of Delhi, the latter has a population over four times that of the Capital.

Meanwhile, murders in Delhi saw a dip in 2024, but only negligible, with 504 cases registered in 2024 as compared to 506 in 2023 and 509 in 2022.

In terms of cybercrime, Delhi reported 404 cases, a marginal dip from 407 in 2023 and significantly lower than 685 cases in 2022. The rate of cybercrime in Delhi stood at 1.8%, far below the national average of 7.3%. “We have now

# Overall crime rate drops 6%; cybercrime up by 17%: NCRB

Deaths due to drug overdose saw a 50% increase in 2024 from the previous year's figures; T.N. records the most fatalities; 5,194 cases of offences 'against the state' registered, a rise of over 6%

Vijaita Singh  
NEW DELHI

The overall crime rate in India declined in 2024 from the 2023 figure, but there was an increase of over 17% in cybercrime cases, show the Crime in India, 2024 report released by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) on Wednesday.

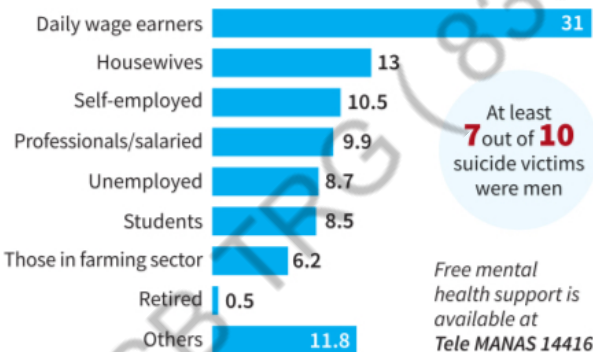
A total of 1,01,928 cybercrime cases were registered in 2024 over 86,420 such cases in the previous year.

"During 2024, 72.6% of cybercrime cases registered were for the motive of fraud (73,987 out of 1,01,928 cases) followed by sexual exploitation with 3.1% (3,190 cases) and extortion with 2.5% (2,536 cases)," the report said.

The NCRB recorded 58.86 lakh cognisable crimes across the country in 2024, marking a 6% decline from the previous year's figure. Of these, 35.44 lakh cases were registered under the Indian Penal Code and the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and 23.41 lakh cases under special and local laws. There

## Grim numbers

As many as 1,70,746 persons died by suicide in 2024, according to figures from the National Crime Records Bureau. A look at the percentage distribution according to profession shows that nearly a third of them were daily wage earners



were 5,194 cases of offences "against the state" registered in 2024 as against 4,873 in 2023, showing a rise of 6.6%.

"Out of 5,194 cases, 4,395 (84.6%) cases were registered under The Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, followed by 649 (12.5%) cases under The Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act," the report said.

### Crime against SC/ST

The report revealed that a total of 55,698 cases were registered for crimes

against Scheduled Castes (SCs), showing a decrease of 3.6% over the 2023 figure of 57,789 cases. Crimes against Scheduled Tribes showed a sharp decline of 23.1%, dropping to 9,966 cases from 12,960 in 2023.

The NCRB released the Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India (ADSI), 2024 report according to which 1,70,746 suicides were recorded in 2024. Those associated with the agriculture sector, the unemployed, and daily wage workers accounted

for a substantial share of suicidal deaths.

A total of 10,546 persons involved in the farming sector (consisting of 4,633 farmers/cultivators and 5,913 agricultural labourers) died by suicide in 2024, accounting for 6.2%.

Out of 4,633 farmer/cultivator suicides, a total of 4,481 were by men and 152 by women, the report said. Around 31% of the total suicides were reported among the daily wagers, the report said. The number of unemployed people who died by suicide was 14,778 while the number of students and homemakers who ended their lives stood at 14,488 and 22,113, respectively.

Deaths due to drug overdose saw a 50% increase in 2024 from the previous year's figure. The report stated that 978 people died due to drug overdose in 2024, up from 650 deaths in 2023.

Tamil Nadu reported 313 deaths, the highest number of drug overdose deaths, followed by Punjab with 106, Madhya Pradesh 90, Rajasthan 69 and Mizoram 65, according to the NCRB data.

# Rubio may visit India for talks, Quad Foreign Ministers meet in May end

**Suhasini Haidar**

NEW DELHI

In a visit expected to shore up India-U.S. ties, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio is set to travel to India for bilateral talks and to attend the Australia-India-Japan-U.S. Quad Foreign Minister's Meeting (FMM).

U.S. Ambassador to India Sergio Gor said that he hoped to welcome Mr. Rubio to India "soon". Sources told *The Hindu* Mr. Rubio is expected to be in Delhi from May 24 to 26, his first since taking over as U.S. Secretary of State in January 2025.

"The United States deeply values our growing partnership with India, and we are excited to build even stronger ties that will benefit both our nations and the world," Mr. Gor, who is also U.S. President Donald Trump's Special envoy for South and Central Asia, said in a post. "See you soon, Mr. Secretary!" he added.



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio during his visit to Washington in February. AP

In a separate post after meeting with Delhi Lieutenant-Governor Taranjit Singh Sandhu, Mr. Gor announced that several U.S. Governors would visit India in the months ahead.

Mr. Rubio's visit will include a public reception in Delhi on May 24 to celebrate 250 years of the United States Declaration of Independence. He will hold talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and call on

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, in discussions that are expected to set the course for India-U.S. ties after several ups and downs over tariffs and sanctions, as well as the impact of the war in West Asia.

On May 26, Mr. Rubio and Mr. Jaishankar will be joined by Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Japan's Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi for the Quad FMM. Mr. Motegi and Ms. Wong have both visited Delhi in the past

few months, and are expected to travel to India just for the Quad talks. All eyes will be on whether the Quad meet agrees on a date for the Summit, which the government hopes to hold later this year, after trying unsuccessfully to host it for the past two years. In particular, a visit to India by Mr. Trump, who faces mid-term elections in November, will be key to scheduling the Summit.

## Major trade deal

Indian and U.S. officials are also expected to review the progress in the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) during Mr. Rubio's visit. Although an interim agreement was announced by Mr. Trump and Mr. Modi in February this year, it has missed several finalisation deadlines, and remains unfinished due to uncertainty over the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to strike down Mr. Trump's "liberation day tariffs".

# Vietnam major pillar of India's Act East Policy, says Modi as defence, rare-earth ties renewed

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

India's relation with Vietnam is a partnership that does not aim at any other country in the Indo-Pacific region, said senior officials on Wednesday.

The remarks came soon after India welcomed General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam's Central Committee To Lam, who is also the current Vietnamese President.

During a bilateral discussion at Hyderabad House between To Lam and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the two sides elevated the bilateral relation to the level of "enhanced comprehensive strategic partnership" and signed at least 13 documents, including one on cooperation in critical minerals.

"Vietnam is a major pil-



**Key partners:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets Vietnamese President To Lam in New Delhi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

lar of India's Act East Policy and Vision MAHASAGAR. We have a common outlook in the field of Indo-Pacific. With our strengthening ties in the field of defence and security, we are helping rule of law, peace, stability and prosperity. India will expand its relation with Vietnam."

said Mr. Modi, welcoming Mr. Lam.

Mr. Modi said India-Vietnam trade has touched \$16 billion and would touch \$25 billion by 2030.

## Recalls Nehru's visit

Delivering a speech at the Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) after being hosted at Hyderabad

House by Mr. Modi, Mr. Lam referred to India's support to Vietnam's liberation and said, "We will never forget that Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was the first foreign leader to visit Vietnam in 1954, just one week after the liberation of Hanoi."

In a joint statement, the two sides welcomed the steady progress in the implementation of the defence Lines of Credit (LoC) extended by India to Vietnam, acknowledging that the LoC helped "Vietnam's defence capabilities" and advanced bilateral defence cooperation.

The Ministry of Public Security in Vietnam also firmed up plans to enhance work with the National Security Council Secretariat of India.

The visiting side also sealed thirteen documents

with India, including an MoU between the Reserve Bank of India and the State Bank of Vietnam on cooperation in the area of Payment Systems and innovation in digital payments as well as an MoU on radioactive and rare earth minerals.

Earlier in the day, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held a bilateral meeting with Vietnam's Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of National Defence, Phan Van Giang in New Delhi reaffirming the strong momentum in India-Vietnam defence relations.

The discussions focused on expanding cooperation in maritime security; defence industry collaboration; and joint research. The two sides also stressed the need to enhance regular military interactions

# Trump pauses Hormuz move; says war will end if Iran agrees to deal

**Stanly Johnny**

U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday paused "Project Freedom", launched on Monday and aimed at guiding stranded merchant ships through the Strait of Hormuz, citing "great progress" in talks with Iran. He added that the war could end if the Islamic Republic signed a deal, warning that the U.S. would resume bombing if it did not.

When Mr. Trump announced the operation on Monday, he said any Iranian response would be dealt with "forcefully". Iran claimed that it fired at two U.S. destroyers in the strait and pushed them back while the UAE said it was attacked twice by missiles and drones and one of its tankers came under fire.



**Uncertain waters:** Vessels seen in the Strait of Hormuz off the Oman coast on Wednesday. REUTERS

Then came Mr. Trump's pause. "Based on the request of Pakistan and other countries..., and... the fact that great progress has been made toward a complete and final agreement with Iran, we have mutually agreed that, while the blockade will remain in full force and effect, Project Freedom will be paused for a short period of time to see whether or not the

agreement can be finalised and signed," Mr. Trump said in a social media post.

## 'Peace advanced'

Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif welcomed Mr. Trump's announcement, saying it advanced "regional peace, stability, and reconciliation".

Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that Washington and Teh-

ran had exchanged proposals in recent days.

In an interview, Esmail Baqaei, Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said Tehran was currently reviewing the American response to its proposal and would present its response through Pakistani mediators.

Iran effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz after the U.S. and Israel started attacking the country on February 28. Active fighting came to an end on April 8, when Mr. Trump announced a ceasefire. But on April 12, the U.S. imposed a blockade on Iranian ports, heaping economic pressure on the country.

**CONTINUED ON**

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**'REVIEWING PROPOSALS'**

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# **If Iran agrees to deal, war could end: Trump**

In a separate post on Wednesday, Mr. Trump said the war could come to an end and the strait would be opened for all if Iran accepted a deal.

“Assuming Iran agrees to give what has been agreed to, which is, perhaps, a big assumption, the Epic Fury will be at an end, and the highly effective Blockade will allow the Hormuz Strait to be OPEN TO ALL, including Iran,” Mr. Trump said. “If they don’t agree, the bombing starts, and it will be, sadly, at a much higher level and intensity than it was before,” he added.

Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said on Wednesday transit through the strait would become safe as the security situation in the Persian Gulf improves “with the aggressor’s threats neutralised”.

Iran’s state media reported on Wednesday that the country had officially launched a new mechanism to govern maritime traffic through the strait. “Under the newly implemented system, all vessels intending to transit the Strait will receive an email from the official address [info@PGSA.ir](mailto:info@PGSA.ir) outlining the rules and regulations for passage,” according to a report by Press TV.

**Ships are required to obtain a transit permit before crossing the strait,** it said.

# Russia's share in Indian oil imports jumped in March

Outbreak of West Asian crisis hit India's Gulf oil supplies, making it turn to Russia; however, India is now getting Russian oil at a premium of 2.5% compared with a discount of 3.9% in 2025-26

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**  
NEW DELHI

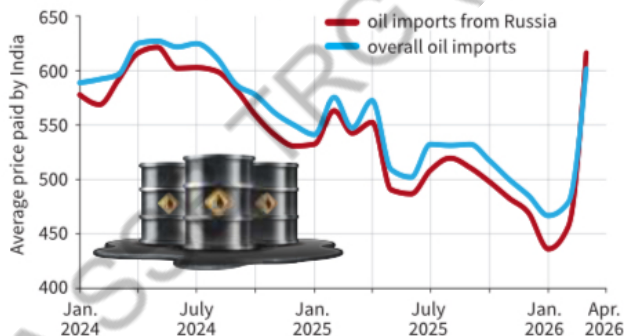
The West Asia crisis and the resultant supply constraints have meant that not only has Russia's share in India's oil imports jumped once again, but this time India is paying a substantial premium for Russian oil rather than the discount it was enjoying earlier.

An analysis by *The Hindu* of the latest data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shows that Russia's share in India's oil imports stood at 33.3% or one-third in March 2026, the first months after the West Asia crisis began. Simultaneously, the shares of the Gulf countries as well as the U.S. have fallen.

However, India is now getting Russian oil at a premium of 2.5% as compared with an average discount of

## Pricey purchases

The West Asia crisis has resulted in the discount India enjoyed on Russian oil turning into a premium. (In \$ per tonne)



Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry

3.9% it had received earlier in 2025-26.

### Dynamic strategies

In the run-up to the West Asia crisis, India was in the process of cutting back on Russian oil in an effort to align with U.S. interests and push forward a trade deal with that country. In

February, Russia's share had been 25% and in January, it had fallen to a 41-month low of 19%.

However, once the U.S. and Israel attacked Iran on February 28 and Iran retaliated by closing the crucial Strait of Hormuz, India had little choice but to look back to Russia as a major

oil supplier. In fact, in early March, the U.S. Treasury Department, too, issued an order to "allow" India to buy Russian oil for a period of 30 days. While India has maintained throughout that it retains the autonomy to decide where it imports oil from and how much.

### Russia dependence

The data shows India substantially cut back on the volume of its overall oil imports in March 2026, likely because about a third of India's crude oil supplies depended on the Strait of Hormuz.

Total oil imports came in at 15.8 million metric tonne (MMT), down nearly 23% over February, and 41% lower than in March last year. However, out of this, Russia's share jumped to 33.3% even as India's Gulf supplies fell sharply.

## PARIS

### French aircraft carrier group moving into Red Sea, Gulf of Aden



AFP

France's Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier group is moving into the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden as part of efforts by France and Britain to prepare for a future mission to help freedom of navigation on the Strait of Hormuz, France's military said on Wednesday. It said that the aircraft carrier group had crossed the Suez Canal. REUTERS

## GENEVA

### UN demands Israel 'immediately' release Gaza-bound flotilla activists



REUTERS

The United Nations on Wednesday called on Israel to immediately release two activists taken from a Gaza-bound flotilla, and demanded an investigation into "disturbing accounts" they had been severely mistreated. The flotilla set sail from France, Spain and Italy with the aim of breaking Israel's blockade of Gaza. AFP

# Iran is reviewing U.S. proposal; ties with India are flourishing: Baqaei

'We feel very close to the people of India; we are proud of the history of Iran-India relations, and the leaders of both nations are committed and eager to continue strengthening these good relations,' says Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson

## INTERVIEW

### Esmail Baqaei

Saurabh Shahi  
Saurabh Shukla  
TEHRAN

Iran, which defended its sovereignty against two nuclear armed countries is now a superpower, says Esmail Baqaei, the spokesperson of Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The U.S. and Israel started attacking Iran on February 28 and killed its Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. After 40 days of bombing, U.S. President Donald Trump announced a ceasefire on April 8, but tensions continue in the region. In an interview at the Ministry in Tehran, Mr. Baqaei said Iran is currently reviewing an American response to its peace proposal, and added that Iran's ties with India are "flourishing".

**In a press conference in Tehran, when you were asked what means and**



**support you have to counter the U.S., a super power, you responded by saying that Iran is also a superpower. Could you elaborate on this thought?**

It is true that a nation which has demonstrated its determination and resilience in defending its sovereignty and dignity against two nuclear-armed regimes – in my view, that itself is proof that such a nation should be considered a superpower.

**What is the current status of talks between the United States and Iran? There has been a lot of draft exchanges,**

**but where do things stand today?**

We are currently studying their latest proposal, which was sent in response to our 40-point proposal. It is under review, and once we complete our assessment of the document, we will submit our response to the Pakistani mediators.

**Do you think the gap is too wide to be bridged, or is there still a possibility of reaching an understanding?**

You have to consider the very difficult history of Iran-U.S. negotiations. It is true that while we were engaged in dialogue and a di-

plomatic process, they attacked us [In June 2025 and February 2026] – this reflects the deep level of mistrust between Iran and the U.S.

Also, knowing that the nuclear issue has been used as a pretext to exert pressure on Iran means that we need to invest significant time and energy in evaluating all aspects of any potential agreement. As I said, we are currently reviewing their proposals and suggestions, and we will see what happens next.

**Donald Trump says Iran is internally divided, and it's unclear who is actually making decisions, with the IRGC saying one thing and the political leadership another. What is your response to these claims?**

That is their problem. Perhaps they do not understand how things work in Iran. But we do – we know exactly what is happening here. Fundamentally, we will not be distracted by

such misleading narratives coming from U.S. officials. We will remain focused on our national interests.

How do you see India-Iran relations? People in India would want to know whether Iran will impose any charges on Indian ships passing through the Strait of Hormuz?

We do not charge any country. What we are doing in the Strait of Hormuz is, as a coastal state, taking certain measures in accordance with international law to safeguard our national security and national interests against aggressors.

As for India-Iran relations, the ties between our countries are flourishing. We feel very close to the people of India. We are proud of the history of Iran-India relations. Both countries are members of the Non-Aligned Movement, and I believe the leaders of both nations are committed and eager to continue strengthening these good relations. (Saurabh Shukla and Saurabh Shahi are senior editors with The Red Mike)

BEIJING'S CLOSE ECONOMIC & POLITICAL TIES TO IRAN GIVE IT A UNIQUE POSITION OF INFLUENCE

# China calls for 'comprehensive' ceasefire, opening of Strait for all

Wang Yi meets Araghchi, says 'deeply distressed'

Associated Press  
Beijing, May 6

CHINA'S FOREIGN minister on Wednesday called for a comprehensive ceasefire in the Iran war, in comments that could inject new energy into stalled efforts to end the two-month conflict between the United States and Iran.

Wang Yi said his country was "deeply distressed" by the conflict. He spoke after meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who was visiting Beijing for the first time since the war with the US and Israel started February 28.

China's close economic and political ties to Tehran give it a unique position of influence.

The Trump administration is pressing China to use that relationship to urge the Islamic Republic to open the Strait of Hormuz. The Chinese minister's comments followed an earlier statement by US President Donald Trump that he was pausing his short-lived US effort to guide stranded com-



Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi (second right), talks to his Iranian counterpart Abbas Araghchi (left), during the bilateral meeting in Beijing on Wednesday. XINHUA VIA AP

mercial vessels out of the Strait of Hormuz in hopes that a deal could be finalized.

A shaky ceasefire has been largely holding, despite exchanges of fire during the US push to reopen the Strait.

Iran's closure of the strait, a vital waterway through which major oil and gas supplies, fertilizer and other petroleum products passed before the war, has sent fuel prices skyrocketing, rattled the global economy and put enormous economic pressure on countries, includ-

ing major powers like China.

The spot price of Brent crude oil, the international standard, fell to around \$100 per barrel Wednesday, easing significantly from big price jumps earlier in the week. The prices are still well above the roughly \$70 a barrel that crude was selling for before the war began.

Araghchi's visit to China comes ahead of a planned visit by Trump to Beijing for a high-profile summit May 14-15 with Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The trip would be Trump's

first to China during his second term and the first by a US president since Trump visited in 2017.

"We believe that a comprehensive ceasefire is urgently needed, a resumption of hostilities is not acceptable, and that it is particularly important to remain committed to dialogue and negotiations," Wang said.

The Chinese foreign minister said the conflict "has already lasted for more than two months. It has not only caused serious losses to the Iranian

people, but also had a severe impact on regional and global peace. China is deeply distressed by this."

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio expressed hope that Beijing would reiterate the need for Iran to release its chokehold on the strait, which would deny its main leverage as Trump demands a major rollback of Iran's disputed nuclear program.

"I hope the Chinese tell him what he needs to be told," Rubio said during a White House briefing Tuesday. "And that is that what you are doing in the strait is causing you to be globally isolated. You're the bad guy in this."

China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said Beijing has made clear that the relevant sides must act "with prudence" and resolve the conflict through dialogue in order to restore peace. He added that China has been actively promoting peace talks and will continue to do so.

In a statement published on the ministry's website about Wang's meeting with Araghchi the foreign ministry said China values Iran's pledge not to pursue nuclear weapons while affirming its "legitimate right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy."