With ordinance, SC judge strength up from 33 to 37

President Droupadi Murmu has promulgated ordinance, which will be taken up by Parliament when it convenes; move is a step towards tiding over crisis of pendency plaguing the court

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu has promulgated an ordinance increasing the number of judges in the Supreme Court to 37 – excluding the Chief Justice of India.

The May 16 Gazette notification says "Parliament is not in session and the President is satisfied that the circumstances exist which render it necessary for her to take immediate action [issue of ordinance]".

The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Ordinance, 2026, has been promulgated in accordance with the powers of the President under Article 123 of the Constitution. The ordinance will be placed in both Houses of Parliament when it convenes. It will cease to operate if six weeks expire without any resolution passed on it after the reassembly of Parliament or if resolutions are passed in both Houses of Parliament disapproving the ordinance. The President can withdraw the ordinance at any time.

The ordinance has amended Section 2 of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 to replace the word "thirty-three" with "thirty-seven".

The promulgation has happened nearly two weeks after the Union Cabinet approved the proposal to increase the number of Supreme Court judges. With the ordinance in place, the total sanctioned judicial strength in the Supreme Court, including the Chief Justice of India, will rise from 34 to 38.

The move is seen as a step towards tiding over the continuing crisis of pendency plaguing the court for years now, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, when the facility of e-filing of cases caught on.

The current backlog is over 93,000 cases.

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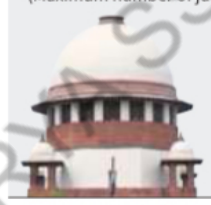
Judicial numbers

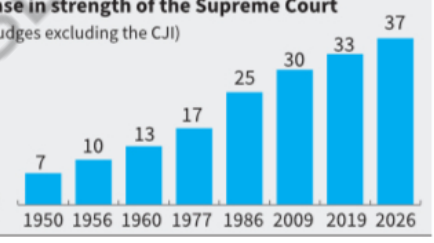
The top court currently has a backlog of over **93,000 cases,** which is threatening to reach six figures even as the court is going into summer recess, or 'partial working days', in June

The Framers of the Constitution had originally in Article 124(1) envisaged a Supreme Court consisting of the CJI and 'not more than seven judges' until 'Parliament by law prescribes a larger number'

The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 as originally enacted, provided for the maximum number of judges (excluding the CJI) to be 10

Graph shows increase in strength of the Supreme Court
(Maximum number of judges excluding the CJI)





Ordinance raises SC judge strength to 37

The backlog is threatening to reach six figures even as the court is going into summer recess or "partial working days", in June. The government's nod for more judges in the Supreme Court had come after a six-year hiatus. Parliament had last amended Section 2 of the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956 in 2019, raising the sanctioned strength from 30 to 33, excluding the CJI.

At present, there are two judicial vacancies in the top court. These are of the previous Chief Justice of India, Justice B.R. Gavai, who retired in November 2025, and Justice Rajesh Bindal, who completed office in April 2026. Three more judges are scheduled to retire in 2026. Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Pankaj Mithal will end their tenure in June, and Justice Sanjay Karol in August.

The Framers of the Constitution had originally in Article 124(1) envisaged a Supreme Court consisting of the Chief Justice of India and "not more than seven judges" until "Parliament by law prescribes a larger number".

Families seek safe return of 20 Kuki and Naga captives as search efforts continue

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The families of 14 abducted Kuki-Zo people in Manipur's hill districts renewed their appeal for their safe release, as the deadline set by an apex Naga organisation for the State government to track their missing community members expired on Sunday evening.

More than 40 Kuki-Zo and Naga people were held captives by suspected extremists after three church leaders belonging to the Thadou tribe were killed by unknown gunmen on May 13.

The captors released 28 hostages – 14 each from both communities – on May 15.

Voicing dissent: Students protest in New Delhi over the recent killing of three church leaders from the Thadou tribe in Manipur. PTI

Kuki-Zo bodies said 14 members, including three minors, are still in captivity. A Liangmai (Naga) women's union in Kangpokpi district reported that six Nagas also remain hostage.

"We address you today not with the language of politics, conflict or adversaries but with the raw, heartfelt cry of mothers, fathers, wives, and children. We are the families of the 13 individuals from Taphou Kuki village and one from Hengbung village who are still in custody since May 13," the families wrote in a joint appeal.

The United Naga Council extended its deadline from 2 p.m. Saturday to 6 p.m. Sunday after the Manipur Home Department said search operations were ongoing. "Given the situation, we are constrained to launch an inter-district economic blockade along the National Highways in the Naga areas in Manipur with immediate effect until the safe rescue and release of the Naga hostages are carried out," the UNC statement said.

Great Nicobar megaproject: Case before HC hinges on legality of tribal consent

Nikhil Ghanekar
New Delhi, May 17

EARLIER THIS month, the Calcutta High Court's Port Blair circuit bench agreed to hear a PIL petition by former Union government secretary Meena Gupta, alleging violations of the Forest Rights Act (FRA), 2006, while seeking tribal consent for the Great Nicobar Island (GNI) infrastructure project. The Union government and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration had raised preliminary objections regarding the maintainability of the petition and two other matters: on the reduction of the buffer zone of Galathea National Park and Campbell Bay National Park.

The court, however, overruled these objections. Under its Rs 81,000-crore GNI project, the government proposes to build an integrated township, a transshipment container port, a solar and gas-based power plant, and a greenfield dual-use military and civilian airport.

The case

In 2024, Gupta challenged the different sets of procedures followed under the FRA and orders issued thereunder, alleging that they are unlawful.

This included the constitution of a sub-divisional level committee (SDLC) for Campbell Bay tehsil; the Gram Sabhas convened in Campbell Bay, Laxmi Nagar, and Govind Nagar on August 12, 2022; and the resolutions passed consenting to forest diversion.

Further, the Recognition of Forest Rights (RoFR) certificate issued on August 18, 2022, by the Nicobar district's Deputy Commissioner, stating that all forest rights have been settled, was also challenged.

Before approaching the Calcutta HC, Gupta was one of the signatories of a representation made to the President of India regarding tribal rights and alleged procedural violations under the FRA.

The representation had not evoked any response.

Most of the 166.10 sq km of land being diverted for the Great Nicobar project is protected forest. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Challenging legality of consent

The plea argues that the process claiming consent of tribals for the diversion of land for the project was allegedly illegal, as it did not follow the norms under the FRA.

The plea alleges that not a single forest rights claim has been settled. Under the FRA, its Rules, and as per a 2009 order of the environment ministry, such claims must be identified and settled by the administration before diverting land.

The FRA recognises pre-existing rights of Scheduled Tribes (STs) and other forest dwellers, who have lived in the forests for at least three generations. These include both individual and community rights.

The petition states that the SDLC, which examines resolutions of a Gram Sabha, did not follow the FRA Rules. At least two of the three SDLC members must belong to STs, including one woman member. But the SDLC had only one Nicobarese member.

Also, the Gram Sabhas that purportedly gave consent (Campbell Bay, Govind Nagar, and Laxmi Nagar) were settler panchayats constituted for non-tribal settlers. The plea contends that these resolutions—pertaining to the diversion of 166.10 sq km of land, of which 121.87 sq km is protected forest and 8.88 sq km is deemed forest — have no legal standing, as the Gram Sabhas were not of STs or forest dwellers.

The plea also notes that there is no record available pertaining to a forest rights committee, which initiates the process of seeking claims under the FRA before a Gram Sabha is convened.

The plea also contests the consent of the Nicobarese community, claimed through the chairperson of the tribal council, on the grounds that the chairperson cannot consent on behalf of the entire community. Moreover, in November 2022, the council chairman, along with its captains, revoked their consent.

Rights of the Shompen

In the case of the Shompen tribe, which is largely an uncontacted group, their consent was obtained through an officer of the Andaman Adim Janjati Vikas Samiti, a government organisation, rather than from the Shompen themselves, the plea states.

The plea adds that three Shompen settlements, located within the proposed development area, including foraging and hunting regions which sustain the southern Shompen population on the GNI, will be "denuded and desecrated". This, it is argued, will violate their rights to food, water and shelter, displace their places of worship, forest groves used for horticulture, and sources of safe, clean drinking water.

Citing the setting up of habitation for 330 ex-servicemen on the east coast of the island in 1972, the plea argues that this activity had disturbed Shompen habitation, and that they subsequently moved into the interior of the forests.

The plea has also raised the question of whether the existing FRA framework is sufficient for tribes like the Shompen, who are semi-nomadic hunter-gatherers. The Shompen, the plea argues, have a right to self-determination and to live as they deem fit, and thus their habitat cannot be taken away by the government.

WEST ASIA CRISIS DEEPENS

Oil market impact worse than anticipated earlier: The worry for India

Sukalp Sharma
New Delhi, May 17

ENERGY SHOCK

- The surge in global prices of oil and gas has forced India to import oil and gas at extremely high rates
- Moreover, OMCs are incurring high additional costs due to emergency sourcing and a surge in shipping and insurance rates, among others
- The longer this continues, the worse off India will be from various economic standpoints

The ongoing West Asia war and the Strait of Hormuz' resultant closure are proving more disruptive to global oil flows than initially anticipated, especially for large importers like India.

This crisis is a serious headache for India, the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil with an import dependency level of nearly 90%, making the economy and the foreign exchange reserves vulnerable to oil price shocks.

About 40% of the oil imports used to come via the strait.

While it managed to secure adequate crude oil volumes from non-Gulf suppliers without any disruption, refiners have had to pay steep prices, spending valuable foreign exchange. Given the scale of the impact and the uncertainty over the duration of the crisis, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently appealed for petroleum fuel conservation, among other measures, to moderate imports and forex outgo.

As the crisis deepened, the Centre cut excise duty on petrol and diesel by Rs 10 per litre in late March, and oil marketing companies (OMCs) raised petrol and diesel pump prices by Rs 3 per litre on Friday. Yet, they continue to bear heavy losses on fuel sales, and are absorbing heavy under-recoveries on LPG sale and jet fuel for domestic flights, where only a fraction of the price hike has been passed on.

Situation worse than anticipated earlier

As per the latest assessment by the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), West Asian oil producers like Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, and Bahrain collectively shut in 10.5 million barrels per day (bpd) of crude oil production in April, up from 8.9 million bpd in March.

The EIA has also raised its estimate of West Asia's oil production shut-in for March by 19% from the earlier estimate of 7.5 million bpd. The estimated production shut-in in April is a little over 10% of the global liquid fuels consumption.

The Strait of Hormuz, a key maritime chokepoint that handled nearly a fifth of global oil flows before the West Asia war began on February 28, has seen vessel movement effectively halted since then, triggering an unprecedented energy supply crisis. Despite a fragile ceasefire being in place for weeks, the strait remains effectively shut, with daily vessel transits dropping to single digits from an average of over 130 a day before the war.

The closure has lasted far longer than what was anticipated initially, with no clarity on when normal traffic will resume.

The longer this crisis stretches, greater will be the negative impact on supplies, as global draw downs from stored oil inventories will also begin to feel the pressure. It would lead to even higher energy prices, although some demand destruction is also expected.

India's growing headache

Asia, including India, has particularly suffered due to supply disruptions and price surges.

It depends on imports to meet half of its natural gas requirement, with about 60% coming through the strait. As for liquefied petroleum gas, the import dependency level is 60%, and 90% of those imports came through the strait.

Heavy dependence on energy imports has led to a double whammy of supply tightness and price surge.

While highly diversified crude sourcing has helped in ensuring adequate oil, petrol, diesel, and jet fuel availability, some rationing of gas supplies to certain industries and commercial consumers was done in order to ensure adequate availability for households and a few priority sectors.

The surge in global prices of oil and gas has forced India to import oil and gas at extremely high rates, as supply security had to be prioritised over price considerations. Moreover, OMCs are incurring high additional costs due to emergency sourcing and a surge in shipping and insurance rates, among others. And the longer this continues, the worse off India will be from various economic standpoints.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

As rupee stares at 100 to a $, policymakers engage with a lesson from just three years ago

Rupee kept artificially stable at 82-83 for two years in 2023 and 2024

Aanchal Magazine & Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, May 17

AS THE West Asia crisis continues to put pressure on the capital account, internal deliberations among policymakers in Delhi and Mumbai over the last few weeks have underlined the counter effects of "artificial stabilisation" of the rupee that preceded the slide that began in 2025.

On Friday, the rupee fell past the 96-per-dollar mark, hitting a new record low. The reason why the ghosts of the past have come to haunt today is the steep slide in the exchange rate of the domestic currency. The rupee is down 5.2% against the dollar since the war began in late February and the prospects of it breaching the psychological barrier of 100 has turned real. Policymakers fear this may further hurt investor sentiment.

"It's like past ghosts are haunting us," a top official told *The Indian Express*. "If you see the levels for the years 2023 and 2024, the rupee did not depreciate much and forex was burnt to keep it stable. It was artificially held back for so long. The next psychological level is, of course, 100. And if it crosses that level, then it may slide further," the official said.

Policymakers see the currency remaining under pressure going ahead, especially as the ability of interventions to defend any particular level are seen as limited.

Slide-hold-slump: How the rupee has fared

According to another person aware of the discussions, the forex market is now pricing in the depreciation that may have occurred in the earlier phase of exchange rate stability, when interventions from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had increased significantly. This period of stability has led to the current fall in the rupee appearing steeper, the person said.

"If you see the curve of rupee's value over the last 2-3 years, it plateaued within a narrow range. The effects of the long, artificial stabilisation then are being felt now," he said.

After breaching the

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Rupee

81-per-dollar mark for the first time in September 2022, the rupee moved in a narrow range of 81-83 per dollar for the next two years or so. It broke past 84 in October 2024 and 85 in December 2024. Since the start of 2025, the rupee is down 11%.

The RBI's stated policy is that it does not target any specific level of the exchange rate and only steps in the market to prevent excessive volatility and ensure orderly movement in either direction: up or down.

However, people aware of the RBI's forex market interventions in 2023 and 2024 disagree with these assertions, arguing that there was a huge Balance of Payments (BoP) surplus at the time which was exerting upward pressure on the rupee. Moreover, the rupee weakened in 2024-25 in line with the long-term trend.

The BoP is the difference between the money Indians send abroad to pay for imports and make investments and the money India receives from overseas for exports and in the form of remittances and what foreigners invest in India – be it in the stock market and bonds or direct investment in the form of factories on the ground.

As India buys more goods and services from abroad than it sells overseas, it suffers from what is called a trade deficit. However, in most years, it is more than able to make up for this trade deficit thanks to the money that flows in from abroad as investments and remittances. When these foreign fund flows are greater than the trade deficit, the BoP is in surplus, which strengthens the rupee. A negative BoP weakens the rupee.

In 2022-23, India witnessed a deficit of $9 billion in 2022-23 and the rupee weakened by 7.6% against the US dollar, with the RBI selling then a record $213 billion as its forex reserves declined by $29 billion.

In 2023-24, the BoP moved sharply into surplus to the tune of $64 billion, forcing the RBI to not only reduce its gross dollar sales but buy $41 billion of foreign currency on a net basis, leading to the forex reserves increasing by $68 billion. The rupee, meanwhile, declined by 1.4%.

In 2024-25, the BoP moved back to a deficit of $5 billion and the rupee fell by 2.5%, largely in line with the average 3.2% depreciation witnessed in the previous 10 years. The RBI's gross sales jumped to a record $399 billion.

According to economists, it is difficult to say if the rupee's current travails have been exacerbated by how the exchange rate moved in previous years.

"I think it's hard to make that assertion with great confidence. For one, in 2023, the rupee would have appreciated and the RBI didn't allow for that too much and built reserves instead. In 2024, it would have depreciated and instead RBI used the built-up reserves to defend the exchange rate at more stable levels," said Lavanya Venkateswaran, Senior ASEAN Economist at Singapore-based OCBC Bank.

"I think irrespective of what happened in 2023-24, the rupee would be under pressure today. The question may be whether the levels would be this high, but it's hard to play with a counterfactual argument," she said.

Going by current trends, economists are increasingly of the opinion that 100-per-dollar is a "very imminent possibility, either next year or even this year". Rajeswari Sengupta, Associate Professor of Economics at Mumbai's Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (IGIDR), said attempts to stop the rupee from depreciating as per market forces "can backfire as the issues are structural – band-aids can't heal a deeper wound", adding that "fundamental issues" need to be addressed and structural measures are required to attract foreign capital.

At the same time, the continued depreciation is undermining measures being undertaken to stem the rot. In a report on Friday, State Bank of India Group Chief Economic Advisor Soumya Kanti Ghosh said the rupee has already approached a "critical depreciation threshold" beyond which further currency weakness could substantially erode the intended benefits of domestic fuel price hikes announced last week.

SHREYA SSB IIMC (2025104520)

Trade, energy, and global conflicts at top of agenda during PM's Norway visit

Suhasini Haidar
OSLO

Trade and energy supplies will top the agenda as Prime Minister Narendra Modi lands here on Monday for the first bilateral visit by an Indian Prime Minister in 43 years to Norway, one of the world's major oil and gas exporters.

Mr. Modi is scheduled to hold talks with Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre, and the leaders will address a business summit as both countries seek new markets and new technological collaborations.

The visit will also include the third Nordic-India summit, bringing together leaders of the five Nordic countries of Norway, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, and Denmark on Tuesday. The summit had to be cancelled last year after the Pahalgam attack and the four-day India-Pakistan conflict. In addition, discussions on the conflicts in Ukraine, Iran, and Gaza are expected to come up in both bilateral and multilateral discussions.

India and Norway are expected to announce three government-to-government MoUs.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed in Gothenburg, Sweden. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson is present. PTI

India, Netherlands upgrade ties and sign several pacts

OSLO

India and the Netherlands upgraded bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the country on Saturday and Sunday. The two sides also signed 17 pacts and MoUs in several key areas including agriculture. » PAGE 10

Trade, energy, conflicts top PM's Norway agenda

The MoUs will focus on health cooperation, digital infrastructure and space ties, while at least 18 MoUs are expected between businesses during the visit, many of which will be in the field of energy. "We are discussing more and more what we can do together on energy, and we are expecting several business-to-business MOUs on the energy side," Norwegian Ambassador to India May-Elin Stener told *The Hindu*, citing a big consignment of LNG delivered to India last week, part of a 15-year deal with Norwegian energy major Equinor.

India hopes to discuss more investment from Norwegian pension funds, the world's wealthiest, the Ministry of External Affairs said in a briefing last week. According to MEA figures, over 700 Nordic firms operate in India, and around 150 Indian firms have a presence in Nordic regions.

India's bilateral trade in goods and services is well below potential, say experts, with about $19 billion with Nordic countries, and both sides are seeking more collaborations.

The timing of Mr. Modi's visit to Norway and the Nordic Summit is also significant, given that the leaders are converging for the first time since 2022, and the Russia-Ukraine war, Israel's attack on Gaza after the October 7 attacks and the U.S.-Israel war with Iran, all are having an impact on the global economy. "The world has changed a lot since [the last Nordic-India Summit]. So, all five Nordic countries are really looking forward to discussing geopolitical issues with the leader of the most populous country, and there will also be a lot of discussions on climate, on green future sustainability and how we can work closely together as democracies," Ambassador Stener said.

All eyes will also be on India's response to U.S. sanctions waivers on Russian oil, which lapsed on Saturday, and whether that will mean a decline in India's imports of Russian oil.

Mr. Modi held wide-ranging talks with his Swedish counterpart Ulf Kristersson on Sunday, focusing on trade, technology, defence, and other key sectors. Mr. Modi, who arrived on Sunday, was also awarded the 'Royal Order of the Polar Star, Degree Commander Grand Cross' in recognition of his exceptional contribution to India-Sweden relationship and his visionary leadership.

(With PTI inputs)

India, Netherlands upgrade bilateral ties, sign 17 pacts

Deals inked cover areas of water, agriculture, health, renewable energy, critical minerals and a semiconductor project; govt. pushes back on Dutch concerns over press freedom, minority rights

Suhasini Haidar
OSLO

India and the Netherlands upgraded bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the country on Saturday and Sunday. The two sides signed 17 agreements and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) in areas of "WAH" (water, agriculture, and health), renewable energy, critical minerals, and a semiconductor fabrication project between TATA Electronics and Dutch company ASML.

Recently elected Dutch Prime Minister Rob Jetten said he had raised "sensitive topics" with Mr. Modi, including a legal custody and abduction case involving a Dutch-born child, Insiya. Besides, a number of Dutch media outlets reported that Mr. Jetten spoke about concerns over "press freedoms and minority rights in India", which the External Affairs Ministry later pushed back on.

Diplomatic visit: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Dutch counterpart Rob Jetten at a meeting in The Hague on Saturday. ANI

'New momentum'

Mr. Modi said the meetings had added a "new momentum" to the India-Netherlands ties. "From elevating our relationship to a Strategic Partnership to expanding cooperation in water resources, semiconductors, innovation, defence, sustainability and mobility, we have charted an ambitious road map for the future," he said in a social media post after leaving the Netherlands. Mr. Modi flew to Sweden on Sunday for a half-day stop as part of his five-nation week-long visit, which will bring him to Oslo on Monday for bilateral talks and the Nordic-India Summit.

"The strategic partnership we are entering into today between India and the Netherlands also offers us opportunities to discuss sensitive topics more frequently," said Prime Minister Jetten during press statement at his official residence, the Catshuis, where he met with Mr. Modi, Dutch newspaper *Het Parool* reported.

'Lack of understanding'

Mr. Jetten also reportedly said that "the Netherlands and the European Union are worried about press freedom and minority rights, among them the Muslim community and smaller communities". At an External Affairs Ministry briefing on Sunday, two Dutch journalists sought the Ministry's response to the comments and also asked why the Prime Minister had not joined the press conference.

"This question comes because of the lack of understanding," retorted Ministry Secretary (West) Sibi George in a lengthy response about India's diversity in culture, language, food, and religion to a question from Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*. "Today we are 1.4 billion people, diverse, living in peace and harmony. And a democratically elected government where peaceful transition of power happens," he said. However, he added that he had not seen the statement by Mr. Jetten that the journalists had referred to, but was giving the "factual position". "You need to have more understanding of India to appreciate what India is," he told another journalist from *NRC*.

The spokesperson also told *The Hindu* that the Dutch PM "didn't raise anything like that in the bilateral meetings or any other engagement with PM".

Mr. George acknowledged Mr. Jetten raised the case of Insiya, allegedly abducted by her father (an Indian) in 2016, as her mother protested during Mr. Modi's visit, seeking India's help to trace and extradite the child and bring the father to justice. "A case is in the court, it is *sub judice*, so I would not like to comment on this at this stage, but it was raised [by the Dutch PM]," he said.

Oslo summit must mark India's northward turn

Ajai Malhotra

Distinguished Fellow and Senior Adviser (Climate Change), TERI, and former Indian Ambassador to Russia, Kuwait, UN/New York, and Romania

Changing Arctic geopolitics gives India-Nordic ties renewed strategic significance

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Oslo on May 18-19 for the third India-Nordic Summit comes as the logic of India's engagement with Northern Europe has fundamentally changed. When India first met the Nordics – Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark and Iceland – in Stockholm in 2018, and again in Copenhagen in 2022, the relationship was anchored largely in climate cooperation, innovation, digitalisation and the blue economy. Those priorities remain important, but a transformed geopolitical landscape is giving the partnership strategic depth and economic purpose.

The change underway reflects developments beyond bilateral ties. The war in Ukraine has transformed Europe's security order, while strains within the trans-Atlantic alliance have unsettled long-standing assumptions. Denmark, current chair of the Arctic Council, faces renewed pressure from the United States and strategic interest over Greenland.

The spotlight on the Arctic

The Arctic, once insulated from geopolitical rivalry, is emerging as a theatre of competition over shipping routes, energy resources, critical minerals and strategic infrastructure. Finland and Sweden's respective accessions to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have rewired Nordic security architecture, leaving Russia as the Arctic Council's sole non-NATO member. The Russia-China partnership has acquired a polar dimension through cooperation on Arctic shipping and energy. These shifts shape the agenda Mr. Modi will encounter in Oslo.

India and the Nordics now matter more to each other than before, with converging interests in technology, supply chains, maritime security and green energy.

Norway's revised High North strategy balances scientific cooperation with rising security concerns. Denmark, through Greenland, occupies a pivotal position in emerging Arctic sea routes and critical mineral networks. Sweden and Finland contribute advanced defence technologies, innovation ecosystems and Arctic capabilities. Iceland offers geothermal expertise directly relevant to India's Himalayan regions.

The Arctic, once defined by scientific cooperation, is increasingly shaped by deterrence, energy rivalry and military positioning. New technologies, from autonomous underwater vehicles to satellite-enabled seabed mapping, are reshaping Arctic security, even as vulnerabilities in undersea cables and critical infrastructure grow.

India joined the Arctic Council as an observer in 2013. Its Himadri research station, IndARC underwater observatory and Gruvebadet atmospheric laboratory, in Norway, give India a meaningful Arctic footprint. But science alone cannot safeguard Indian interests in a region increasingly shaped by geopolitics.

As a stakeholder

India is not an Arctic nation, but it is undeniably an Arctic stakeholder. The Arctic is warming more than three times faster than the global average. Ice loss in the Barents-Kara Sea has been linked to variability in India's summer monsoon, while rising polar melt threatens India's coastline, ports and island territories through sea-level rise.

The commercial and strategic stakes are equally important. Accelerating ice melt is opening Arctic waters to shipping, resource extraction and military deployment. The Northern Sea Route along Russia's Arctic coast is becoming more navigable, with implications for trade and maritime connectivity. Extending the Chennai-Vladivostok corridor to Murmansk and onward to the Nordics would create a maritime link connecting India, Japan, Russia and Northern Europe. India's Arctic engagement with the Nordics can proceed alongside its partnership with Russia; the two are not a zero-sum game.

India must construct a small fleet of five Arctic-capable, ice-class tankers under its Shipbuilding Financial Assistance Policy by 2030-31. Delay in building such capacity risks locking India out of early-mover advantages in Arctic shipping and energy logistics. An India-Arctic Economic Forum could connect Indian industry with opportunities in manpower, shipping, energy and infrastructure. It could champion an "Arctic-Himalaya Climate Data Corridor" with the Nordics for joint monitoring of climate linkages affecting monsoons and sea-level rise. India should appoint a Special Envoy for Arctic Affairs. Unlike the four other Asian observer states in the Arctic Council, it lacks one.

Focus areas

Nordic countries lead globally in offshore wind, hydrogen, electric mobility and green shipping, while India's clean-energy ambitions require technology, investment and trusted partnerships. Cooperation must move beyond buyer-seller arrangements towards co-development and production in offshore wind manufacturing, green hydrogen and grid-balancing technologies.

Norway's deep-sea mining ambitions, Sweden's rare earths and iron ore, and Denmark's Greenland link offer supply-chain diversification amid concerns over China's processing dominance. Nordic strengths in telecommunications, semiconductors, batteries, artificial intelligence and advanced materials complement India's scale, engineering talent and manufacturing ambitions, supporting more resilient supply chains.

Maritime cooperation deserves equal attention. India's economic future depends on secure sea lanes, resilient ports and efficient logistics, while Nordic countries lead globally in shipping technology, maritime digitisation, shipbuilding innovation and sustainable port infrastructure. Disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz have exposed maritime vulnerabilities, making route and partnership diversification strategically valuable. Deeper India-Nordic maritime cooperation would advance the economic and geopolitical interests of both.

For the Nordics, a re-emerging India offers scale, growth and a trusted democratic partner in the Indo-Pacific; for India, the Nordics provide technology, capital and expertise, without hegemonic pressures. As the Arctic becomes more contested and consequential, the Oslo summit should mark the point at which episodic engagement gives way to sustained strategic partnership.

The views expressed are personal

SOCIETY FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

DRONE HITS GENERATOR AT BARAKAH PLANT, BUT RADIOLOGICAL LEVELS UNAFFECTED; FRAGILE CEAS

Trump says 'clock ticking' for Iran; drone strike at UAE nuclear plant

Emirati officials begin probe into source of attack, none blamed yet

Associated Press
Dubai, May 17

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump on Sunday threatened consequences for Iran if its leaders do not act quickly. "For Iran, the Clock is Ticking, and they better get moving, FAST, or there won't be anything left of them. TIME IS OF THE ESSENCE!," he wrote in a Truth Social post.

Meanwhile, a drone strike caused a fire at a nuclear power plant in the United Arab Emirates, officials in Abu Dhabi said on Sunday, at a time when progress appears to have stalled in efforts to end the US-Israeli war with Iran and restart shipping in the Gulf.

Emirati officials said they were investigating the source of the strike and that the UAE had the full right to respond to such "terrorist attacks". The UAE has previously accused Iran of attacking its energy targets in what it has called an escalation of the conflict in the region.

The drone hit an electrical generator outside the inner perimeter of the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant, the Abu Dhabi Media Office said.

The Barakah nuclear power plant in Abu Dhabi's western desert. FILE

Radiological safety levels were unaffected and there were no injuries, it said.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said emergency diesel generators were providing power to the plant's "unit 3", and called for "maximum military restraint" near any nuclear power plant, adding that it was following the situation closely.

The UAE Defence Ministry said two other drones had been "successfully" dealt with, and that the drones had been launched from the "western border". It did not elaborate.

During the war that began with US and Israeli strikes against Iran on February 28, Iran has repeatedly targeted the UAE and other Gulf states that host US military bases, hitting sites that include civilian and energy infrastructure.

Iran stepped up such attacks on the UAE earlier this month after Trump announced a naval mission to try to open the Strait of Hormuz, which he suspended after 48 hours.

Diplomatic Deadlock

More than five weeks after a tenuous ceasefire in the conflict took effect, US and Iranian demands remain far apart despite diplomatic efforts to end the war and reopen the strait, the world's most important shipping route for oil and gas.

Washington has called for Tehran to dismantle its nuclear programme and lift its hold on the strait. Iran has demanded compensation for war damage, an end to a US blockade of Iranian ports and a halt to fighting on all fronts, including in Lebanon, where Israel is battling Iran-backed Hezbollah.

Trump, who held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping this week without securing an indication from China that it would help resolve the conflict, has threatened to resume attacks on Iran if it does not agree to a deal.

A senior spokesperson for the Iranian armed forces, Abolfazl Shekarchi, said on Sunday that if Trump's threats were carried out, the US would "face new, aggressive, and surprise scenarios, and sink into a self-made quagmire".

Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baqaei said the US and Israel had tried to shift the blame for destabilizing energy markets following their "unprovoked military aggression against Iran".

Rival Blockades

The disruption to shipping through the Strait of Hormuz has caused the biggest oil supply crisis in history, pushing up prices. The US has imposed its own blockade of Iranian ports, and said that as of Sunday it had redirected 81 commercial vessels and disabled four vessels to ensure compliance.

At Beijing summit, both Trump, Xi got what they came for. But Xi got a bit more

ASHOK K KANTHA

DONALD TRUMP'S state visit to China was a performance of diplomacy: Carefully choreographed, heavy on optics, and light on binding detail. Both sides were eager to show progress: Trump called the visit "very successful"; Xi Jinping declared it "historic". The Chinese catered to Trump's weakness for spectacle with the state banquet, the parting tea, and Xi accompanying Trump to the Temple of Heaven – but the substance, as expected, was meagre. Significantly, Beijing, not Washington, controlled the narrative throughout.

Trump needed a foreign-policy "win" to serve as a distraction from the political headwinds of the Iran war, and to impress markets and domestic constituencies. Xi needed validation: That China had weathered the tariff storm, emerged from geopolitical friction with its strategic position intact, and was now being courted as a peer by the US, something Chinese leaders have long sought. Both got what they came for. But Xi got a little more.

The new formulation — "constructive strategic stability" — for the bilateral relationship, described by Foreign Minister Wang Yi as "the most important political consensus" of the summit, is Beijing's handiwork. It is a deliberate conceptual move to displace the American vocabulary of "strategic competition" with a Chinese-preferred notion of long-term coexistence with guardrails. Beijing acknowledges the relationship as competitive but talks about keeping it within acceptable limits. Xi's four-part elaboration — "positive stability with cooperation as the mainstay, healthy stability with competition within proper limits, constant stability with manageable differences, and lasting stability with expectable peace" — is designed to lock in the post-Busan *détente*.

Trump, characteristically, reached for a simpler frame: "It's the two great countries... I call it the G-2." The image of two great powers on equal footing was exactly what Xi had engineered. Both sides signalled a willingness to manage the relationship through summitry and bilateral validation rather than the harder work of resolving underlying disputes.

The tale of two readouts illuminates how much remains unresolved. The White House summary emphasised commercial commitments — Boeing aircraft orders, agricultural purchases, market access, Chinese investments — and agreement that the Strait of Hormuz must remain open and not be militarised. The Chinese readout was cautious and silent on most US specifics. Neither readout mentioned China's state-nurtured industrial overcapacity and other systemic differences. Most structural problems were kept off the table, allowing China to preserve its policy space.

But Taiwan was an exception. The most striking moment was Xi's Taiwan warning, delivered in a highly staged, public setting carried immediately by state media. If the Taiwan question is handled "poorly", Xi said, the two countries risk "clashes and even conflicts". Taiwan was absent from the US readout entirely. On Air Force One, Trump said he made "no commitment either way" on the pending $14 billion arms package and called it "a very good negotiating chip". When a reporter invoked Ronald Reagan's assurance to Taiwan that no president would consult Chinese leaders on arms sales, Trump dismissed the premise. Decades of US commitment on "Six Assurances" to Taiwan were waved aside.

> China has gained relative to the US and grown more confident despite its economic headwinds. It has the tools and the strategic discipline to manage escalation dynamics

On Iran and maritime security, the summit produced a measure of concrete, if still qualified, convergence. Both leaders agreed that the Strait of Hormuz must remain open. According to the US readout, Xi expressed interest in purchasing more American oil, agreed that Iran cannot acquire a nuclear weapon and committed not to sell weapons to Iran. The Chinese readout was circumspect, and the gap between Washington's public optimism and Beijing's operational delivery has a long history. The continued closure of the Strait is hurting China, but it is disinclined to deploy its leverage with Iran beyond a point.

On technology and AI — perhaps the most consequential long-term dimension of the rivalry — the summit was studded with ambiguity. Trump confirmed that chip exports came up, and that Xi told him China wants to make its own: A candid declaration of an indigenisation agenda. Licences for 750,000 H200 Nvidia chips remain stalled on the Chinese side, even as the US has cleared sales. Both sides have frozen new technology controls since the October 2025 truce, a freeze that disproportionately benefits Beijing. An AI dialogue was agreed in principle; its content remains undefined.

Conspicuously absent from both readouts were rare earths and export controls, despite their centrality to the current *détente*. China's weaponisation of critical mineral supply chains — shutting off rare-earth exports last year and forcing Washington to stand down from tariff escalation — is the background condition for the Busan truce, reaffirmed in Beijing. That leverage is carefully maintained, and a China-resilient rare-earth supply chain remains years away.

The larger truth is structural and enduring. China has gained relative to the US and grown more confident despite its economic headwinds. It has the tools, patience and the strategic discipline to manage escalation dynamics. China is ready for long-term, indefinite competition. As Da Wei of Tsinghua University observed: "The US side looked a little passive. The Chinese side prepared very well." Trump's instinct for spectacle suits Beijing well; it allows Xi to accumulate the symbolic validation of peer-to-peer summitry without meaningful concessions. The summit was, in that sense, a tactical triumph for China.

For India, the summit is a sobering signal. The immediate effect — reduced risk of sudden great-power crises, some easing of energy market pressures — is modestly positive. But the structural implications are more uncomfortable. The G2 "overlay" — not a formal duopoly, but the atmospheric effect of two great powers coordinating — narrows the manoeuvring space available to other major powers, India included. A Beijing that reads India's interest in improving bilateral relations as a result of India's declining importance in the US strategic calculus has less incentive to offer meaningful concessions on unresolved issues.

The visit is a continuation of a tactical détente, not a strategic reconciliation. By agreeing to a rhetorical framework of "strategic stability", the US and China are buying time even as they know that strategic rivalry is baked in the system. Yet, it is advantage Beijing.

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SUBSTRG (81639)

TAIPEI

Taiwan will never be 'traded away', says President after Trump remark

REUTERS

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te said on Sunday that Taiwan will never be "traded away" as he pressed the U.S. to keep selling weapons to the island democracy to maintain peace. Mr. Lai's comments came after U.S. President Donald Trump suggested arms sales to Taiwan could be used as a bargaining chip with China. AFP

SHAURYA SD TEG (8868104520)

Ebola outbreak in Congo is a global emergency, says WHO

Associated Press
ABUJA

The World Health Organization on Sunday declared the Ebola disease outbreak caused by a rare virus in Congo and neighbouring Uganda a public health emergency of international concern, after more than 300 suspected cases and 88 deaths.

The WHO said the outbreak did not meet the criteria of a pandemic emergency like COVID-19, and advised against the closure of International Borders.

The WHO said on the social media platform X that a laboratory-confirmed case has also been reported in Congo's capital, Kinshasa, which is about 1,000 km from the outbreak's epicentre in the eastern province of Ituri, suggesting a possible wider spread.

A staff member checking a visitor's temperature, before allowing her inside a hospital in Goma on Sunday. AFP

Ebola is highly contagious and can be contracted via bodily fluids such as vomit, blood or semen.

The disease it causes is rare, but severe and often fatal.

Risk of spread

By the WHO's standards, it shows the event is serious, there is a risk of international spread and it requires a coordinated international response.

Health authorities say the current outbreak, first confirmed on Friday, is caused by the Bundibugyo virus, a rare variant of the Ebola disease that has no approved therapeutics or vaccines. Congo accounts for all except two of the cases, both of which were reported in Uganda, the WHO said.