

CBSE officials transferred, panel to probe OSM tender

Centre replaces CBSE Chairman, Secretary, appoints one-person body to investigate procurement of services for OSM portal; transfers 'cover up' to spare political leadership, say Opposition leaders

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

With the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) facing flak for its controversial new on-screen marking (OSM) system, the Centre on Tuesday replaced the Board's Chairman and Secretary.

It also set up a one-member committee to inquire into the Board's procurement of services for the marking process. The committee, chaired by S. Radha Chauhan, chairperson of the Capacity Building Commission, has been asked to submit its report within a month. As per the Cabinet Appointments Committee, senior IAS officer Lokhande Prashant Sitaram will be the new CBSE Chairperson, replac-



Youth Congress members protest seeking the resignation of the Union Education Minister in Mumbai on Tuesday. EMMANUAL YOGINI

ing Rahul Singh, who has been moved to the Agriculture Ministry. Varun Bhardwaj, a Director in the Education Ministry, will take over as CBSE Secretary, replacing Himanshu Gupta, who has been prematurely repatriated to his parent cadre in the Home Ministry.

Calling the transfers "a

cover up", the Congress said the move was an attempt to fix accountability on bureaucrats rather than the political leadership, and reiterated its demand that Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resign or be sacked.

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Re-evaluation portal open; glitches reported

NEW DELHI

After the CBSE opened its portal for submitting re-evaluation requests on Tuesday following a delay of a day, multiple Class 12 students reported technical errors and discrepancies. **» PAGE 13**

Teen briefs House panel on issues in CBSE OSM tender

NEW DELHI

Sarthak Sidhant, a 17-year-old student, on Tuesday presented his findings on alleged anomalies in the OSM tender process before a Parliamentary Standing Committee. **» PAGE 13**

Officials transferred, panel to probe tender

The inquiry committee set up by the Centre to probe the OSM tender will be chaired by S. Radha Chauhan, chairperson of the Capacity Building Commission, and will submit its report to the Department of Personnel and Training within one month, according to a memorandum issued by the Cabinet Secretariat. Ms. Chauhan has been empowered to obtain the assistance of officials from other departments as required, while the Capacity Building Commission will provide secretarial assistance to the panel.

Responding to the transfer of CBSE officials, the Congress alleged that Mr. Pradhan has been presiding over a “monumentally corrupt, inept, and incompetent ecosystem” that has played havoc with the lives of lakhs of youth.

“The transfer of CBSE Chairman and Secretary is mere eye-wash. [Prime Minister Narendra] Modi should immediately sack Dharmendra Pradhan. Nothing less than that would provide a sense of justice to 18.5 lakh CBSE students,” Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge said in a post on X.

“Minister Pradhan is leading a highly corrupt, incompetent, and unworthy ecosystem that has toyed with the lives of millions of young people. He should resign immediately,” Congress general Secretary Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X.

Significant victory: NSUI

The National Students’ Union of India termed the transfer of the CBSE chairman and secretary as a “small but significant victory” for lakhs of students seeking justice.

NSUI national president Vinod Jakhar said the transfers were the result of sustained protests and campaigns launched by students, parents, teachers and the student organisation itself across the country.

“The transfer of the CBSE Chairman and Secretary is proof that the voices of students, parents, teachers and NSUI could no longer be suppressed. This is a small victory for every CBSE student who has been demanding justice and accountability after concerns emerged regarding the OSM evaluation system,” Mr. Jakhar said.

Aam Aadmi Party national convenor Arvind Kejriwal said the Centre’s message to lakhs of students and their parents is clear – Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan will not be changed regardless of public outrage.

(With inputs from Sandeep Phukan and PTI)

Teen flags CBSE OSM tender irregularities before House panel

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Sarthak Sidhant is too young to be elected to Parliament, but the 17-year-old student from Jharkhand, who flagged alleged irregularities in the Central Board of Secondary Education's (CBSE) tendering process for the On-Screen Marking (OSM) system, presented his findings before a parliamentary committee on Tuesday.

The Standing Committee on Education, Women, Children, Youth and Sports, chaired by Congress MP Digvijaya Singh, met to discuss the "use of On-Screen-Marking in Grade 12 CBSE exams and issues faced by students".

Submits document

Mr. Sidhant, who appeared for the Class 12 exams this year, submitted a seven-page document outlining alleged anomalies in the CBSE's tendering process for selecting vendors for online marking and posed a series of questions to the Board, sources said.

His presentation was



Sarthak Sidhant arriving at the Parliament House Annexe in New Delhi on Tuesday. ANI

made in the presence of CBSE Chairman Rahul Singh and School Education Secretary Sanjay Kumar, along with other officials from the Education Ministry and Board. Mr. Singh was transferred hours after the meeting.

The CBSE, meanwhile, submitted a report to the panel detailing challenges involved in implementing the OSM process. Officials, sources said, assured MPs that issues with the portal had been resolved and that students now have time until Saturday to apply for re-evaluation of answer sheets.

Amid row over exclusions, Maharashtra CM says Ladki Bahin scheme to continue

Fadnavis assures 1.7 crore eligible women will continue to receive scheme benefits after the recent removal of 80 lakh ineligible beneficiaries; Cabinet approves farm loan waiver of up to ₹2 lakh each

Snehal Mutha
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday assured that the State government will not discontinue its flagship 'Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin' scheme, announcing that 1.7 crore eligible women will continue to receive the benefits after the recent removal of 80 lakh ineligible beneficiaries following an e-KYC (Know Your Customer) deadline that ended on April 30.

"The Comptroller and Auditor General raised questions over the scrutiny of beneficiaries and a verification was conducted. Five lakh beneficiaries had government jobs, 10 lakh had an income of over ₹2.5 lakh, and 14,000 men had benefited under the scheme for women. After analysing several sets of data, the beneficiaries were removed," Mr. Fadnavis said while speaking to reporters ahead of the weekly Cabinet meeting. He added that the instalments credited to 14,000 men will be re-



Opposition parties have alleged that the government is weeding out Ladki Bahin beneficiaries due to a 'severe financial crisis'. FILE PHOTO

covered.

After the first round of KYC earlier, the 1.57 crore beneficiaries received the December 2025 instalment, as per a Women and Child Development Department official. Now, after the second round, a second chance for women to prove their eligibility, the number of beneficiaries has risen to 1.70 crore, the official said. The eligibility verification includes annual family income below ₹2.5 lakh, elimination of duplicate entries, a cap of two women per household and exclusion of families with government employees, among others. The scheme was rolled out

in July 2024.

A senior official on Monday informed that the beneficiary count has dropped from 2.4 crore to nearly 1.7 crore after the e-KYC deadline, but the disqualifications were also linked to non-compliance with eligibility criteria of the scheme launched in July 2024, drawing sharp criticism from the Opposition parties. They alleged that the government has "betrayed" women and was weeding out beneficiaries due to a "severe financial crisis".

Senior NCP (SP) leader Jayant Patil on Tuesday demanded accountability ov-

er the "irregularities". "How did the alleged bogus beneficiaries continue to receive benefits for nearly 20 months?" he said, questioning whether the huge expenditure points to "calculated corruption".

Incentive benefits

In the Cabinet meeting, the government approved the 'Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Holkar Shetkari Karja-mukti Yojana' to provide farm loan waiver of up to ₹2 lakh each, and also introduced incentive benefits for those farmers who have repaid their loans on time, an official statement said. The scheme is expected to benefit around 56 lakh farmers, waiving ₹36,585 crore of loans. The Cabinet also decided to provide an incentive of up to ₹50,000 to farmers who have regularly repaid their crop loans, the statement added.

The Opposition Congress said the loan waiver should not remain merely an announcement as the past implementation of the scheme created doubts about the government's commitment.

Dipke to land in Delhi on June 6; Wangchuk lends support to CJP

Jatin Anand

New Delhi, June 2

AHEAD OF his return to India on June 6, 'Cockroach Janata Party' (CJP) founder Abhijeet Dipke said on Tuesday that he was "counting on the people" and their support after landing in New Delhi over the weekend.

Speaking to *The Indian Express* over the phone from Boston, Dipke, who in a video message a day ago said he would stage a "peaceful sit-in protest at Jantar Mantar" on June 6 and demand the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over issues such as NEET paper leak row, said he was ready for what would come his way.

"Honestly, I was nervous before the decision (to come back to India)...*ab jo hoga dekh lenge* (will see whatever happens). I am counting on the people – I am in this for the long haul," he said. Highlighting that the "youth pressure group" he created less than a month ago had both a sizeable support base as well as structure, Dipke said, "We are preparing data (around the support base); but yes, people (who support the group) are being mobilised from across the country and there is now a structure in place," he said.

Asked if he was prepared for the eventuality of police detention, Dipke said, "I will land at the airport and then we will go to the (Parliament Street) police station to seek permission. They



The CJP founder has exhorted supporters to stage a peaceful sit-in at Jantar Mantar

may arrest me for a year or six months – but I am ready for whatever happens next."

Dipke in a post on Tuesday announced that climate activist and education reformer Sonam Wangchuk will also join the protest at Jantar Mantar on June 6.

Wangchuk, in a video post, said he decided to express support to the CJP after being "convinced that they are immensely patriotic, that they are making a sacrifice to improve the country".

"I had asked the cockroaches, in my previous post, to prove, to convince (me) that this Cockroach Janta Party is an expression of the Indian youth and not a conspiracy by foreign powers," Wangchuk said.

"After that...Dipke ji established contact with me and shared data (regarding its support base) with me. When I spoke to him, I understood that they do not have any ulterior motive, that they are immensely

patriotic, that they are making a qurbani, a sacrifice to improve the country," he also said.

He said if Pradhan does not resign by June 5, he will join Dipke and Gen Z supporters of what is intended to be a "youth pressure group" from across the country at the sit-in protest at Jantar Mantar.

"On the 6th June, which is Saturday, they are calling people to Delhi so that we can demand the resignation of the Education Minister. Now, your and their reason could be the NEET paper leaks, or the CUET and CBSE exams, but for me, this is an even bigger issue," Wangchuk said.

He said he had been striving and fighting to make improvements in the field of education for the last four decades. When he did not see "anything changing", he got disappointed and felt the "need to do something", said Wangchuk.

He said he hoped for either "a change or resignation" in the next few days. "If this does not happen even by June 5th, then out of compulsion, I too will join you all on 6th June to make this request in Delhi. So, I am coming to Delhi to join you all, and to join Dipke ji. You also let me know, are you coming?"

"Friends, I have always had a slogan: If not now, when? If not us, who? If not now, then when? And if not us, then who will bring change to India," he asked.

Dipke, 30, is in Boston where he moved two years ago to pursue a course in public relations.

● EXEMPTION COULD BE EXTENDED BY ONE MORE YEAR

EV policy 2.0: Govt may revise proposed 50% road tax waiver for strong hybrids

Gayathri Mani

New Delhi, June 2

THE DELHI government may revise its proposed road tax exemption for strong hybrid vehicles priced up to Rs 30 lakh or below (ex-showroom), limiting the benefit to two years after the rollout of the Electric Vehicle policy. The exemption could be extended by one more year, depending on its impact and adoption.

The government had released the draft EV policy 2.0 in April seeking comments and suggestions from stakeholders, auto industry and public. The policy will be valid till March 31,

2030, following its notification.

As per the draft, a 100% road tax exemption was proposed for all electric vehicles priced up to Rs 30 lakh (ex-showroom) and a 50% exemption for strong hybrid cars priced up to Rs 30 lakh (ex-showroom) till the expiry of the policy.

The draft draws a clear line for higher-end vehicles, stating that electric cars priced above Rs 30 lakh will not be eligible for any exemption.

"Discussions on the policy are still ongoing, and a revision in the proposed 50% discount for strong hybrid vehicles priced up to Rs 30 lakh (ex-showroom), limiting it to a 2+1

year period, is being considered," an official said.

Officials added that the focus remains on promoting two-wheelers, but the government also does not want to lose revenue to other states.

The official said, "Our main focus is on two-wheelers as they constitute around 67% of the total vehicle stock in Delhi, making their rapid electrification critical for achieving meaningful reductions in vehicular emissions. So, incentives and mandates are more towards two- and three-wheelers to improve air-quality."

Officials said they may extend the incentives for this cat-

● WHAT THE DRAFT POLICY PROPOSES

● Current EV policy has already been extended multiple times, it expires on June 30

● EV policy 2026 will be valid until March 31, 2030 after it is notified



Proposed changes: 50% road tax exemption on strong hybrid for first 2 years; extension for one more year, if required, likely

WHAT IS PROPOSED: ROAD TAX EXEMPTION

100%	50%
ELECTRIC VEHICLE	STRONG HYBRID

● Price cap — up to or below ₹30 lakh, ex-showroom price

egory of vehicle for another year, if required, after seeing the result and the number of vehicles people are buying.

They added that a Model Ap-

proval Committee will be constituted under the Transport department, which will be responsible for empanelment of EV models across eligible vehicle

segments for availing incentives and subsidies under the policy.

The Committee will examine and approve vehicle models based on the eligibility criteria, technical specifications, and other conditions prescribed under the operational guidelines. Only models approved and empanelled by the Committee will be eligible for purchase incentives under the policy.

"The application for purchase incentive shall be submitted within 30 days from the date of generation of the Registration Certificate (RC). The eligible subsidy amount shall be disbursed within 60 days from the date of submission of the

application on the digital portal, subject to verification and fulfilment of applicable requirements," said officials.

Further, any vehicle availing purchase incentive under the Delhi EV Policy 2026 will not be eligible for issuance of a No Objection Certificate (NoC) for transfer or re-registration in another state or city for a period of five years from the date of registration of the vehicle in Delhi.

The current EV policy will expire by June 30. "There are few changes being made in the policy. All these proposed changes and recommendations will be put before the Council of Ministers for approval in the

Cabinet; if they suggest any change and additions, it will be done. The final draft will be ready in the next 10 days... following which it will be implemented soon," said an official.

Anil Chhikkara, former Transport department official, said: "...Since strong hybrids use both fuel and electric power, they can serve as a bridge for those who are reluctant to switch fully to EVs. In that sense, they can help increase the adoption of electrified vehicles. This will also allow the government to gauge the popularity of strong hybrids among consumers. Overall, it is a positive proposal..."

The future of India's chip industry

A new NITI Aayog report says India's semiconductor ecosystem is not yet equipped to fully meet domestic demand, while stressing the need to strengthen local manufacturing, as geopolitical pressures could potentially disrupt the electronics supply chain

EXPLAINER

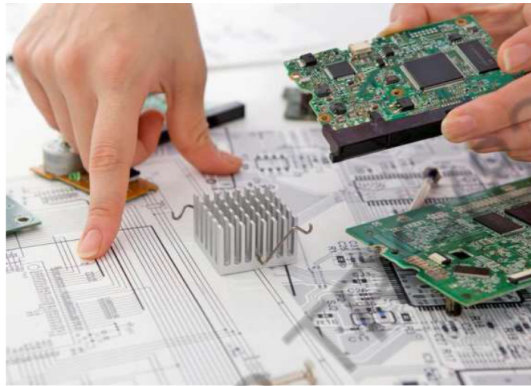
Aroon Deep

NITI Aayog's Frontier Tech Hub released a report last week that had two main messages: first, that India faces steep challenges in developing world-class semiconductor manufacturing capabilities, and second, that national interest necessitated pursuing this field doggedly regardless of those difficulties.

The Union government has made chipmaking a priority, since semiconductors are a part of nearly all electronics, from consumer gadgets to defence gear. Yet, India does not have a single fabrication unit, with the first expected to open in Dholera, Gujarat by 2028, with a total of ten in various stages of development. Multiple semiconductor packaging and testing facilities have been generously subsidised and supported by the Union government (as well as some State governments), through initiatives like the India Semiconductor Mission (ISM).

The ISM is a ₹76,000 crore corpus, and it is almost fully earmarked to projects across semiconductor fabs, incentives for component manufacturing, and bulk subscriptions to industry-grade semiconductor design applications for students and academia. While the most cutting edge and ambitious projects – fabs – have received capital subsidies of upwards of 50%, other projects have received production- or output-linked incentives.

The report, titled 'Future of India's Semiconductor Industry', reiterates that these are yet early days for the semiconductor industry, since even chips used in domestic electronics assembly operations are largely sourced from outside the country. "India's local ecosystem is not ready to fully meet domestic demand for semiconductors," the report said. But it insisted that there



GETTY IMAGES

was still a need to manufacture locally, as geopolitical pressures like a disaster in Taiwan could massively disrupt the electronics supply chain. "As many semiconductor parts used in defence systems are produced outside India, deploying them in our aerospace and defence programmes is increasing threats to national security," the report adds.

The sector "requires sustained, mission-mode commitment over a decade or more," the report said.

Fab gestation

The report points to several challenges in this indigenisation process, not least of which is the time involved. "Typically, fab units require four to five years before commencing production," the report points out. "During the gestation phase, these units need to invest in purchasing more than 50 specialised equipment from global players. Even after the production is over, processes like yield optimisation and reliability test take several quarters

before chips reach the market."

Developing talent to work in these fabs is also, as a result, time consuming, the report says.

The report urges the government to work on "building sovereign design and research capabilities, R&D excellence and harnessing agentic AI for semiconductor engineering," since "building deep capabilities" in materials sciences and silicon designing will "move India from a services-led design base to a creator of differentiated IP, architectures and integration technologies that define next generation systems."

Capital investment

While the details on the second phase of the India Semiconductor Mission are yet to be revealed, the report pegs the necessary capital expenditure from the state at \$45-60 billion over a period of ten years. This amount should, however, be spent on projects where the risk is less and "bankability" can assure returns to

investors, the report warns. This translates to a shift away from directing public funds towards frontier chips, whose transistors are the smallest – 3 to 7 nanometres – and towards "mature, advanced – aligned with strategic relevance – as well as compound nodes," the report says.

The report is key in understanding the potential scope of ISM 2.0, since its ambition is defined and largely stays out of big-ticket frontier fab projects. It advocates, for instance, "selective depth, capital efficiency and system-level differentiation, rather than attempting to replicate the full global manufacturing spectrum."

For instance, packaging, which is among the last steps of a chipmaking process, and less expensive and complex than fabrication, is identified as a "core production pillar, not a downstream activity" in the report. The report calls for "[r]apid volume substitution in high volume domestic segments".

Trusted partners

The report implies that China is an adversary in chipmaking in spite of the recent thaw in relations. In a list of "priority partners," the report highlights the U.S., Japan, the European Union, and South Korea as partners with whom to work to get "access to critical tools, equipment servicing and lifecycle support," and to take advantage of "India's market scale, talent base and packaging capacity."

"With sustained commitment and strategic clarity, India can build a competitive semiconductor ecosystem that strengthens economic resilience and positions the nation as a key player in the future of advanced technology," the report concludes. IT Secretary S. Krishnan welcomed the report as a "structured, actionable framework," and said in a foreword that, "India is well positioned to convert its semiconductor ambition into enduring industrial and strategic reality".

THE GIST

▼ The Union government has made semiconductor manufacturing a priority, but India does not yet have a fabrication unit. A recent report by NITI Aayog's Frontier Tech Hub underscores the need to bolster local manufacturing.

▼ The report urges the government to work on "building sovereign design and research capabilities, R&D excellence and harnessing agentic AI for semiconductor engineering".

Indigenous RudraM-II missile clears flight trials

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and the Indian Air Force (IAF) have successfully conducted flight-tests of the indigenous RudraM-II air-to-surface missile, marking a significant milestone in India's efforts to strengthen its precision strike capabilities and advance self-reliance in defence technology.

According to the Defence Ministry, the missile was test-fired from an airborne platform under extreme release conditions, with the trials designed to validate the performance of all critical subsystems and flight parameters.

Data captured through a network of tracking and monitoring instruments deployed by the Integrated Test Range (ITR), Chandipur, confirmed the missile's performance and the success of the trials.

'War to trim 100 bps off MSME revenue'

The Hindu Bureau

MUMBAI

The West Asia conflict will hit micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in India hard this fiscal, impacting both revenue and profitability according to a study by Crisil Intelligence.

As per its projections revenue growth of MSMEs will moderate to 7.5-8.5%, down 100 basis points (bps) compared with fiscal 2026, while earnings before interest, tax, depreciation and amortisation (Ebitda) margin will de-

cline 50-100 bps to 5-5.5%.

"The forecasts would have been more subdued but for the domestic gems and jewellery market, experiencing a value-led expansion driven by surge in gold prices. Such outsized impact, however, is not unprecedented," Crisil said.

Amid the Covid-19 pandemic, large players had seen revenue decline by 0-1% in fiscals 2020 and 2021 while MSMEs experienced a 3-5% drop. The Ebitda margin of MSMEs had also declined 80 bps to 4.7% in fiscal 2021.

No role for third parties in bilateral matters between India, Nepal: Centre

The response comes after Nepal PM suggests countries such as U.K. and China could help address the issue; govt. says close to 98% of the boundary has been demarcated, with the remaining segments being addressed through established channels

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Responding to assertions made by Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah, the External Affairs Ministry on Tuesday said that India and Nepal had bilateral mechanisms to deal with border issues and that there was “no role for any third parties” in such matters.

Addressing presspersons, Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal responded to the claims made by Mr. Shah, who had asserted that the boundary issue was a complex one with both India and Nepal having possession of each other’s territory and had sought intervention of countries like the U.K. and China. The Ministry’s response to the Nepali Prime Minister coincided with the visit of Rabi Lamichhane, chairman of the



Union Home Minister Amit Shah greets Chairman of the Rastriya Swatantra Party Rabi Lamichhane in New Delhi. PTI

ing Rastriya Swatantra Party in Nepal, who received a warm welcome in the national capital and met External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Tuesday.

“We have established bilateral mechanisms to deal with all aspects of boundary matters. It should be clear to all concerned that there is no role for any third parties in a bilateral matter between India and Nepal,” said Mr. Jaiswal.

In a speech in the Nepali Parliament on May 31, Mr. Shah said: “You will be surprised to know a fact that I have learnt recently, only after becoming Prime Minister. India has not only encroached Nepali territory, but Nepal has also encroached Indian territory in many places. Now, both countries should study the facts and sit together as friends and resolve the issue.”

In response to this, the Ministry spokesperson referred to natural phenomena like the shifting of the Gandak river that is part of the India-Nepal border. Mr. Jaiswal said, “While close to 98% of the India-Nepal boundary has been demarcated, there are some unresolved segments.”

No man’s land

Explaining the complexity of the border issue, Mr. Jaiswal further said, “In addition, there are cases of cross-border occupation and encroachment of no-man’s land in demarcated segments of the boundary, which are currently being mapped jointly.”

The remarks from the official spokesperson coincided with the welcome that Mr. Lamichhane continued to receive here on the second day of his visit to India.

Mr. Lamichhane arrived here on Monday when he

was welcomed by representatives of the Bharatiya Janata Party in the VIP lounge of the Indira Gandhi International Airport here.

‘People-to-people ties’

On Tuesday, Mr. Lamichhane, who has been the leader of RSP since 2022, called on the External Affairs Minister. Following the discussion, Mr. Jaishankar said: “Our discussions focused on the development partnership and people-to-people ties. These have a crucial role in promoting growth and prosperity.”

The visit of Mr. Lamichhane, who is in the country on the invitation of the BJP foreign affairs cell, has drawn attention as the trip came weeks after Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri’s scheduled Nepal visit was cancelled because of Mr. Shah’s reported disinclination to meet him.

Nepal House adjourned after protests over PM's remarks on border issues

Press Trust of India

Kathmandu, June 2

BOTH HOUSES of Nepal's Parliament were adjourned on Tuesday after lawmakers continued to obstruct proceedings over Prime Minister Balendra Shah's remarks about his country's border issues with India. While the Lower House — House of Representatives (HoR) — was adjourned until June 8, the National Assembly was adjourned until Wednesday. Earlier, the Parliament sessions were adjourned on Monday too.

The opposition lawmakers were protesting against PM Balen's Sunday remarks at the Parliament when he said that

"Not only India, but Nepal has also encroached territories of India at many places", sparking controversy.

Balen suggested without elaborating that India and Nepal have agreed to take the help of historians, surveyors and experts to seek a resolution, adding that Kathmandu has also taken up the matter with China and the UK. India on Tuesday categorically rejected any role for "third parties" to resolve its boundary row.

Opposition lawmakers expressed their dissent against PM Shah's remarks as soon as the meeting started, with some even surrounding the bell to show their protest.

The 'harvest' China wants is one India cannot afford

When Luo Zhaohui, then China's Ambassador to India, revived the idea of an "early harvest" in India-China boundary negotiations in 2017, India responded with scepticism. The proposal – to settle the Sikkim boundary in isolation from the three other sectors – was an asymmetric concession dressed up in the language of progress. India has resisted it. There is now a gnawing doubt as to whether it can hold that position. The trigger for this piece is a former border negotiator's concern that India might "stumble" into a damaging course of action under Chinese pressure and driven by the temptation to project contrived progress. Diplomacy that trades long-term strategic interests for short-term optics is self-defeating.

New Delhi must be cautious

The readout issued by the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on the 24th round of the Special Representatives' Dialogue on the Boundary Question between India and China (on August 19, 2025) between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi recorded India's agreement to "set up an Expert Group ... to explore an early harvest in boundary delimitation in the India-China border areas". China's own readout was more pointed: it used the term "demarcation" rather than "delimitation" and spoke of "launching boundary demarcation negotiations in sectors where conditions are ripe."

The MEA press release on the 35th Meeting of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, held in Beijing on May 27, 2026, mentions that the two sides "discussed issues pertaining to delimitation, border management, mechanism building and cross-border cooperation" and "agreed to work together to make substantive preparation" for the next SRs' meeting. The reference to "delimitation" is significant as it suggests follow-up discussions on the understanding "to explore Early Harvest in boundary delimitation".

The cornerstone of Special Representative negotiations is the Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles, signed on April 11, 2005. Article III explicitly envisages "a package settlement" covering all sectors of the India-China boundary. It establishes a three-step process: first political parameters, then a framework for a final settlement, then delineation and demarcation. Demarcation – placing physical markers on the ground – comes last, not first. China's proposal to begin demarcation in a single "ripe" sector inverts this sequence and, in effect, asks India to abandon the package architecture in exchange for the appearance of progress. India should decline.

Why does the package settlement matter so much? Because the four sectors of the



Ashok K. Kantha

Former Ambassador to China, Subhas Chandra Bose Chair Professor of International Relations, Chanakya University, and Distinguished Fellow with the Vivekananda International Foundation

Diplomatic optics must not dictate India's boundary negotiations with China

India-China boundary are strategically interlinked, requiring give and take across sectors. It also guards against China extracting concessions sector by sector. An early harvest in Sikkim, where India holds comparative geographical advantage, would let Beijing bank a settlement on its preferred terms while leaving the other three sectors unresolved.

The Sikkim stakes

The Sikkim Sector boundary is not, as sometimes claimed, a simple matter. Clashes at Nathu La and Cho La in 1967, with heavy casualties, showed how sharp these differences are. Article I of the 1890 Great Britain-China Convention identifies "Mount Gipmochi on the Bhutan frontier" as the starting point of the Sikkim-Tibet boundary, but it is preceded by an assertion that the boundary "shall be the crest of the mountain range separating the waters flowing into the Sikkim Teesta and its affluents from the waters flowing into the Tibetan Mochu". China reads the article as placing the trijunction at Gipmochi. India and Bhutan hold that the trijunction lies at Batang La, some 6.5 kilometres to the north, on the watershed – which is the operative geographical principle in Article I.

Zompelel (or Jampheri) Ridge adjoining Gevmochen commands a direct view of the Siliguri Corridor, the narrow strip connecting mainland India to its northeastern States. Any settlement implicitly endorsing the Gipmochi trijunction would hand China a legal instrument to press its claim to the very edge of the Himalayas, exposing the Corridor. The Chinese objective is to deepen and widen its Chumbi Valley and increase pressure on India's most acute territorial vulnerability.

The Doklam dimension reinforces this concern. Since 2017, China has systematically consolidated its position in western Bhutan – building roads and military facilities, constructing villages including Pangda on the Amo Chu river, and developing routes to the Jampheri Ridge that bypass the 2017 Doklam standoff site. A Sikkim settlement would immediately be leveraged by Beijing to step up pressure on a vulnerable Bhutan to settle its boundary with China. India and China have agreed that trijunction points must be finalised in trilateral consultation with all countries concerned. Even if the trijunction point is left out, China could force Bhutan to settle the rest of the disputed boundary on its own terms and present India with a *fait accompli* in Doklam.

Since the Eastern Ladakh transgressions of 2020, China has pursued multiple pressure tracks simultaneously: military consolidation along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), steady resurrection of the "Zangnan" (South Tibet) narrative to describe Arunachal Pradesh, renaming of places in Arunachal Pradesh, and expansion of "border defence villages" close to India-China LAC.

The resumption of Special Representative talks is welcome, but dialogue must be conducted with strategic clarity, not under diplomatic pressure or for the optics of progress. Three principles should guide India's approach.

First, hold the 2005 Agreement's framework firm. The Expert Group agreed upon in August 2025 must not become a vehicle for an early harvest in Sikkim. Agreeing to "explore" is not a commitment to accept. India should reject a standalone Sikkim delimitation or demarcation exercise.

Second, make peace and tranquillity on the LAC the non-negotiable condition of progress. China has periodically attempted to delink border management from the broader relationship; India has resisted this, and should continue to do so. Unilateral alterations to the LAC cannot be normalised. Indeed, the so-called "buffer zones" in Eastern Ladakh must not be allowed to persist.

Third, press for genuine political engagement on a comprehensive settlement. Decades of talks have shown that the respective narratives cannot be reconciled through legal arguments. The 2005 Agreement recognised this: it called for a political settlement that would "safeguard the vital interests of both countries" and set out principles such as the two sides "safeguard(ing) due interests of their settled populations in the border areas". Any breakthrough requires political will on both sides. India should press for meaningful boundary negotiations, not paper over the lack of progress with working groups. The test of China's seriousness will be whether it is prepared to engage on the framework for a comprehensive settlement – and whether it is prepared to hold the LAC stable while that engagement proceeds. Absent those conditions, the Special Representative process risks becoming what it has sometimes been before: a forum for managing appearances while China improves its position on the ground.

Stay the course

In boundary talks, China has a track-record of cherry-picking and resiling from formal commitments, as it did in the case of an explicit agreement to arrive at a common understanding of the LAC after exchanging maps showing the entire alignment. India must prevent the Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the India-China Boundary Question from meeting a similar fate. If peace and tranquillity on the LAC is the foundation for rebuilding India-China relations, the 2005 Agreement is the road map for resolving the boundary question. India has nothing to gain from an early harvest limited to Sikkim and must maintain its negotiating space through a comprehensive negotiation. India cannot afford a shortcut to a destination that suits China.

Venezuela Acting President's five-day visit to India likely to prioritise energy cooperation

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

Around five months after Venezuela President Nicolas Maduro was abducted in a dramatic raid by the United States military, the country's Acting President Delcy Rodriguez will pay a visit to India from June 3 to 7, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) announced here on Tuesday.

"Her Excellency Ms. Delcy Rodriguez, the Acting President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela who was earlier scheduled to visit India to participate in the International Big Cats Alliance summit on June 1, which has been deferred, will pay a working visit from June 3 to 7," MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said.

Ms. Rodriguez will be accompanied by Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Economy and Finance, Science and Technology, Communica-



Delcy Rodriguez

tion and Information and Transportation.

During the visit, the Acting President will meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Mr. Jaiswal said. The discussion between Mr. Modi and Ms. Rodriguez will include the "full spectrum" of India-Venezuela relations and explore further avenues of ties in energy, trade, pharmaceuticals and renewable energy.

Ms. Rodriguez has visited India five times in the past and this will be her sixth trip to the country. She visited India earlier re-

presenting the Maduro government as Foreign Minister in 2015 and as Vice-President in 2019, 2023, 2024 and 2025.

Officials stated that apart from New Delhi, Ms. Rodriguez who has been playing a balancing role between the United States and the hardliners in her country, will visit spiritual centres associated with the Satya Sai Baba movement and also interact with industrialists and representatives of oil and gas majors.

India was once a major processor of Venezuelan heavy crude, importing more than 4,00,000 barrels per day at peak levels, until sweeping U.S. sanctions and rising compliance risks forcibly shut down purchases in 2020. New Delhi started purchasing crude oil from Venezuela after the sanctions were lifted following Mr. Maduro's capture.

(With PTI inputs)

Russian attack kills at least 18 and injures over 100 people in Ukraine

Major targets include Kyiv, Dnipro, Poltava, Kharkiv, and Zaporizhzhia; Ukrainian forces say they destroyed or intercepted 40 missiles and 602 drones, but shortages of U.S. Patriot missiles and other systems leave gaps that Russia is exploiting

Associated Press

KYIV

Russia launched hundreds of drones and dozens of missiles against Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities overnight, killing at least 18 civilians and wounding more than 100 others, authorities said on Tuesday.

The damage trapped some people under the rubble of apartment buildings. Emergency crews digging through the wreckage pulled out the body of a 3-year-old child and the bodies of a mother and her 8-year-old son in the central Ukrainian city of Dnipro, officials said.

The attack stretched



Explosions during overnight drone and missile attacks light up the Kyiv skyline on Tuesday, amid the Russian invasion in Ukraine. AFP

from night into day and the boom of explosions reverberated across cities. Officials said that 12 people were killed in Dnipro and six in Kyiv.

Kyiv residents had been

on edge for days after Russia warned that a massive aerial attack was coming and warned foreign diplomats to leave the Ukrainian capital. None appeared to heed the call.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appealed for more U.S. and European support, describing the massive overnight attack as “an explicit statement by Russia: If Ukraine is not protected from ballistic missiles and other missile strikes, those strikes will continue”.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has stepped up Moscow’s aerial campaign against Ukraine, with Russian forces recently launching a powerful hypersonic Oreshnik ballistic missile for only the third time in the four-year war.

The Russian strategy seeks to take advantage of Ukraine’s shortage of U.S.-made Patriot air defence

missiles, with international stocks depleted by the Iran war. That has left civilians especially vulnerable to the Russian ballistic missile barrages.

Russia unleashed 73 missiles and 656 drones across Ukraine, according to the country’s air force, with the main targets including Kyiv, the central city of Dnipro, and the eastern cities of Poltava, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhia. Ukrainian air defence forces destroyed or suppressed 40 missiles and 602 drones.

Russia’s Defence Ministry said in a statement that the military launched a “massive” strike with long-range precision weapons.

'You're f*****g crazy': Trump tells Netanyahu to stop attacking Beirut

Press Trust of India
Washington, June 2

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump said he persuaded Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to call off the strike on Beirut, following which the Israeli leader "turned his troops around".

Trump made the announcement on Truth Social on Monday evening amid reports that the conversation between the two leaders was "heated" and the US president telling Netanyahu that he would have been in prison but for his intervention.

"I had a conversation with Bibi Netanyahu today (Monday), asking him not to go into a major raid of Beirut, Lebanon. He turned his Troops around. Thank you Bibi," he said, referring to the Israeli PM by his widely used nickname.

Trump's phone calls with Netanyahu came after Iran threatened to end the negotiations with the US over Israel's attacks on Lebanon. Netanyahu had said Israel would hit "terror targets" in Beirut if Hezbollah did not stop attacking Israel.

The president said he also had a conversation with the representatives of the leaders of Hezbollah, who agreed to "stop shooting at Israel and its soldiers". US media outlet Axios reported that tempers flew during Trump's phone call with Netanyahu.

"You're f*****g crazy. You'd be in prison if it weren't for me. I'm saving your a**. Everybody hates you now. Everybody hates

Israel continues to attack south Lebanon, 11 killed

Israeli drone strikes on southern Lebanon on Tuesday killed 11 people, including a man along with his son and daughter, the state-run news agency said, a day after U.S. President Donald Trump said Israel and the militant group Hezbollah agreed to dial back fighting.

Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran, launched dozens of projectiles and drones toward Israeli soldiers in southern Lebanon and Israeli cities and towns in recent days as Israel's airstrikes killed dozens, including women and children, in Lebanon. Hezbollah did not carry out any attacks on Israel after Trump's announcement. Two semiofficial Iranian news agencies reported Tuesday that the country cut off communication with mediators facilitating the ceasefire talks. AP

Israel because of this," Axios reported, quoting an unnamed US official.

A second source told Axios that Trump was "pissed" and at one point yelled at Netanyahu: "What the f**k are you doing?" Another official told the outlet Trump had "steamrolled" Netanyahu during the call.

"Bibi said, 'OK, OK, just make sure everything is taken care of,'" according to the official.