



Prime Minister Narendra Modi unfurls the Tricolour at the Red Fort in Delhi on Saturday. TASHI TOBGYAL

# PM takes note of Gen Z anxieties, warns against ‘intellectual Naxals’

Prime Minister Modi, addressing the nation on Independence Day, highlights India's economic and security concerns; he announces AI skilling for more than one crore youth, competitive examination coaching, and talent hunt for 2036 Olympics

**Nistula Hebbar**  
NEW DELHI

Addressing the nation from the ramparts of Red Fort on the 80th Independence Day of India, just days after massive youth protests rocked the capital, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stressed a seven-point economic reform plan and an outreach to Gen Z youth, promising AI skilling programmes and free online coaching, in an attempt to tackle post-globalisation anxieties. He also warned the country about the threat of “*dimagi Naxals*” – intellectual or ideological Naxals – in society, even after the eradication of armed left-wing extremism.

At the first Independence Day that saw *Vande*



**Reaching out:** PM Narendra Modi meets schoolchildren during the Independence Day celebrations at the Red Fort. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

*Mataram* preceding the National Anthem, the Prime Minister directly addressed challenges facing the youth, from employment worries to the incursion of Artificial Intelligence in everyday life. More than one crore youth will be provided AI skills in a “mission mode” drive over the

coming year, Mr. Modi said. India's digital public infrastructure will be used to provide free online coaching to students wishing to take various competitive exams, and there will be a nationwide sports talent hunt among children of age ahead of the 2036

## CJI expresses confidence in young lawyers

NEW DELHI

Making his Independence Day address at the Supreme Court on Saturday, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant highlighted the “remarkable resilience” of youth and said that the “Bar and Bench remain committed to the growth” of young law graduates. » [PAGE 7](#)

## BJP seeks Cong's apology in row on National Song

NEW DELHI

The rendition of the full six stanzas of *Vande Mataram* at the Congress's headquarters has triggered a controversy with the BJP seeking an apology from the Opposition party after accusing its leader Sonia Gandhi of trying to stop the song. » [PAGE 8](#)

Olympic Games, he added.

This acknowledgement of Gen Z anxieties that spilled over into the recent Jantar Mantar protests was, however, spiked by a warning about “intellectual Naxals”, who, Mr. Modi said, should be identified and isolated. We have succeeded in eliminating

armed Naxalites from the forests and freeing the country from that grave threat, but these *dimagi* Naxalites are waiting for opportunities,” he said.

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# ‘Dimagi Naxals’ remark by Prime Minister draws criticism from Opposition

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Saturday said that people raising their voices for their rights were not anti-national and extended the party's support to peaceful protests by Gen Z, as the Opposition criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his “*dimagi Naxals*” remark.

Addressing the Independence Day function at the All India Congress Committee headquarters, Mr. Kharge said attempts to label those questioning the government as anti-national were contrary to the values for which the freedom struggle was fought. “Gen Z, which raises its voice for its rights, is not anti-national,” he said.

Opposition parties objected to Mr. Modi's use of the term “*dimagi Naxals*” (ideological or intellectual Naxals) in his address, alleging that it was an attempt to stigmatise dissent and intimidate those questioning the government. They criticised his appeal for political parties to help implement 33% reservation for women in legisla-

tures, alleging that the government had itself kept the quota in abeyance by linking it to delimitation.

Mr. Kharge said Independence meant freedom not merely from foreign rule but from poverty, discrimination, untouchability, unemployment, injustice and fear. He credited successive Congress governments with building institutions and introducing rights-based legislation, including the right to information, education, food and work.

He attacked the government over the treatment of protesting students, parliamentary accountability and the alleged theft of donations made to the Ram temple in Ayodhya. Mr. Kharge also alleged government interference in institutions such as the judiciary, Election Commission, universities and investigative agencies.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said Mr. Modi had first described his opponents as “urban Naxals” and was now calling them “*dimagi Naxals*”, terming it a “sure sign of his desperation”. He called the Prime Minis-

ter's pitch for women's reservation “dishonest”, pointing out that the legislation passed in 2023 was not implemented in the 2024 Lok Sabha election.

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav urged the government to implement women's reservation in the 2027 Uttar Pradesh Assembly election. “The Red Fort is not a place from where one should speak lies,” he said.

CPI(M) general secretary M.A. Baby called the “*dimagi Naxal*” charge an “atrocious allegation”.

“This is a very convenient accusation that they are Maoists in their mind,” he said. He added that women's reservation should be implemented in existing seats rather than being linked to delimitation.

CPI general secretary D. Raja said Mr. Modi had chosen to target dissenters even on Independence Day. “This is nothing but an attempt to stigmatise dissent and intimidate those who question the government,” he said, asking the Prime Minister to answer questions from students and youth on education and employment.

# Global partners greet India, reaffirm bilateral relations

**Press Trust of India**

KATHMANDU/SINGAPORE

India's global partners, including France, Russia and Australia, on Saturday extended greetings to the country on its 80<sup>th</sup> Independence Day, reaffirming their commitment to strengthening bilateral ties and regional cooperation.

French President Emmanuel Macron, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio were among leaders who hailed ties with India on the occasion.

Mr. Macron took to X to extend his greetings. "Congratulations to the Indian people on your 80th Independence Day!" he said.

Mr. Putin extended greetings to President Droupadi Murmu as well as Prime Minister Narendra Modi, expressing confidence that the constructive bilateral partnership will help enhance international security and stability.

The Russian President said Russia-India relations are developing successfully in the spirit of a "particu-

larly privileged strategic partnership".

Earlier on Friday, Mr. Rubio also extended his greetings and asserted that the bilateral ties were stronger than ever due to the personal relationship between President Donald Trump and Mr. Modi.

"On behalf of the United States of America, I extend warm congratulations to the people of India on their Independence Day," Mr. Rubio said, adding that bilateral collaboration is making both nations, and the broader Indian Ocean region, safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese also conveyed his greetings on the occasion, asserting that India has gone "from strength to strength" in the eight decades since its independence.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog also wished India's top leadership and the "wonderful people" of the country on Independence Day. "May we continue to strengthen the beautiful friendship between Israel and India," he said in a social media post.

## 100 GWe NUCLEAR ENERGY TARGET

# Why India needs more power for AI, chips and data centres

Pratyush Deep

New Delhi, August 15

INDIA IS betting on nuclear power to meet the rapidly rising electricity demand from emerging sectors such as semi-conductors, artificial intelligence (AI) and data centres, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi setting a target of commissioning five new nuclear reactors in the current decade and expanding nuclear capacity to 100 gigawatt-electric (GWe) by 2047.

In his Independence Day address, Modi said the growing adoption of future technologies would drive a sharp increase in electricity demand.

"It will be difficult to run this new world without energy, and therefore, whether it is chips, AI or data centres, we will need very large amounts of electricity," he said.

"We are working towards a target of 100 GWe of nuclear power by 2047. In this decade itself, we have set a target of commissioning five new nuclear reactors," he added.

The Parliament passed the SHANTI Act last year, paving the way for wider private participation in India's tightly regulated civil nuclear power sector and drawing interest from global nuclear technology suppliers from Russia, the US and France.

On Friday, the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) also released the draft rules under the Act, laying out the regulatory framework for a broader nuclear power ecosystem, including private participation, captive generation, licensing, safety oversight and nuclear liability. But can the government achieve this ambitious target? Where does India's nuclear power sector stand today, and how has the country's civil nuclear programme evolved?

### Small modular reactor push

As the Centre targets expanding India's nuclear energy capacity to 100 GWe by 2047, the government is pursuing a two-pronged approach: the deployment of large-capacity reactors as well as the use of small modular reactors (SMRs) to ensure faster deployment of units.

Even though India's indigenous pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWR) will continue to form the backbone of the country's nuclear expansion plans, SMRs are increasingly viewed as a promising technology that could help in industrial decarbonisation. These are also seen as important in offering baseload power that could give grid operators a degree of flexibility, especially given the imperative of inducting large-scale renewables into the grid that comes with the challenge of ramping up baseload generation to balance out the vagaries of renewable power output.

While thermal generation is seen as important in this regard, nuclear energy offers a more carbon-neutral baseload generation option.

SMRs are also becoming the focal point in India's international outreach for nuclear collaborations, with the high project costs of large light water reactors (LWRs) triggering questions about the feasibility of their large-scale deployment in the country. In May, a high-level American nuclear delegation was informed during meetings with top government functionaries about India's goals to progressively enter the manufacturing value chain of SMRs.

It is learnt that India is actively seeking foreign expertise and investment to support the development of a domestic SMR ecosystem. For now, any foreign collaboration is likely to be centred on SMRs rather than

large conventional reactors due to cost concerns linked to LWRs.

### Five indigenous SMRs by 2033

On the domestic front, India is pursuing an indigenous small reactor programme, with three types of SMR being designed and developed by the Bhabha Atomic Research Centre for demonstration: the 200 megawatt-electric (MWe) Bharat Small Modular Reactor (BSMR-200), a 55 MWe small modular reactor (SMR), and a 5 megawatt-thermal (MWt) high-temperature gas-cooled reactor for hydrogen production by coupling with a suitable thermochemical process for hydrogen production. The government has set a target of having at least five indigenously designed and operational SMRs by 2033.

India has announced the Nuclear Energy Mission to research, design, development, and deployment of SMRs with a total budgetary outlay of Rs 20,000 crore. Meanwhile, the government is also conducting studies to repurpose old thermal power plant sites for nuclear sites. Such repurposed sites may ultimately be more suitable for SMRs and smaller-capacity nuclear projects rather than large conventional reactors, an official familiar with the development had earlier told *The Indian Express*.

On the large-reactor front, India currently has 25 operational nuclear reactors totalling 8.7 GWe of capacity, with 10 reactors — with around 8 GWe of capacity — under construction. Another 10 units — with some 6.6 GWe of capacity — are in the pre-project stage. India has already developed and mastered indigenous PHWR technology and is following a three-stage nuclear power programme aimed at achieving long-term fuel self-reliance.

FULL REPORT ON

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# Power of the name: Why 'Mecca' matters in new defence pact



RAHANA SHERIN K V

**O**N 7 AUGUST 2026, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Türkiye signed a landmark defence agreement. On paper, the agreement is about hard-power *realpolitik*. Yet, instead of giving this pact an administrative or technical name, such as the Riyadh-Islamabad-Ankara Joint Defence Agreement, the signatories chose the title Mecca Joint Defence Agreement. The choice matters because Mecca holds a sacred place in the Muslim community as the birthplace of Prophet Muhammad, giving the agreement a meaning that goes beyond its military purpose.

So, why do governments spend time choosing highly symbolic titles for their treaties? The answer lies in how shared ideas and symbols shape our political world. A treaty title is not just a label. It is a deliberate "frame" designed to guide how the public, regional rivals, and the global community perceive a deal. By choosing a symbolic name, leaders can elevate a cold, transactional military deal to something sacred.

We have seen this before. Consider the 2020 Abraham Accords between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain. The agreements focused on issues such as trade,

Why do governments spend time choosing highly symbolic titles for their treaties? The answer lies in how shared ideas and symbols shape our political world

direct flights, and security cooperation. However, the choice of the name carried a broader symbolic meaning. In his keynote address at the Abraham Accords dinner in Abu Dhabi on October 20, 2020, the then-US Treasury Secretary Steven T Mnuchin explained that the accords were named after Abraham, a figure revered in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. By invoking a figure shared by the three Abrahamic faiths, the name emphasised their common religious heritage. It therefore presented a strategic geopolitical realignment not only as a security and diplomatic arrangement, but also as a symbol of shared identity and interfaith reconciliation.

The 2026 Mecca Agreement offers a similar example, but through the symbolism of place rather than a shared religious figure. By invoking Mecca, a deeply respected sacred city and the spiritual heart of the Islamic world, the agreement draws upon an existing source of religious legitimacy.

For Saudi Arabia, hosting the pact in Mecca and associating it with the city's name offers an opportunity to reassert its regional leadership at a time when that position has come under pressure from questions over Riyadh's response to regional crises, and growing public criticism of its perceived re-

straint. By wrapping a hard-power military pact in the sacred symbolism of the holy city, Riyadh signals that the Saudi leadership is not just driven by its own national interests, but by a sacred duty to protect the spiritual core of the Muslim world.

For Pakistan and Turkey, the 'Mecca' frame serves as a powerful shield against domestic political pushback. For Pakistan, being part of a defence pact named after a holy city gives the agreement a stronger ideological meaning. By associating itself with Mecca, Pakistan can present its participation not simply as a strategic military alignment, but as part of a "holy alliance" rooted in the defence and solidarity of the Muslim world. In Turkey, the civilisational framing appeals directly to nationalist pride, presenting Turkish defence exports not as mere business transactions, but as a noble, protective alliance.

This strategy works because of a clever division between the symbolic frame and the legal text. By keeping the sacred name in the title and the strategic limits in the text, these three states can project a grand narrative of pan-Islamic solidarity to their domestic bases. Meanwhile, their actual legal liabilities remain strictly technical and limited.

Ultimately, the Mecca Agreement reminds us that names are active tools of statecraft. Long after the ink dries on the technical protocols, the name 'Mecca' is what will live on in the public mind.

*The writer is a research scholar at the Academy of International Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia*

# Supporters hold street rallies as Taliban regime marks 5 years ruling Afghanistan

**Agence France-Presse**

KABUL

The Taliban regime celebrated five years of ruling Afghanistan on Saturday, with supporters taking to the streets, while critics decried tightening restrictions in all areas of daily life.

Afghans packed into cars decorated with flags and drove around Kabul on a day that regime spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid said “will be written in golden lines in the history of Afghanistan”.

Hundreds gathered



Afghan youth ride a military vehicle during celebrations to mark the fifth anniversary of Taliban's return to power, on Saturday. AFP

around a square beside the former U.S. embassy, while fresh flowers were thrown from military helicopters over a parade of athletes

that featured only men because women are banned from sport in Afghanistan.

Taliban fighters took Kabul unopposed on August

15, 2021, after a lightning offensive that swept across Afghanistan, toppling government forces in the wake of the chaotic withdrawal of U.S.-led troops.

Although Taliban officials have forged ties with multiple countries, including in Europe, their government is still only recognised by Russia.

Some countries have opted to limit their relations with the Taliban authorities until there are changes in Afghanistan, where people are suffering “very real harm” according to the United Nations.

# Iran fires back at Trump's threat to declare Hormuz a U.S. territory

The waterway is and will remain Iranian, the Islamic republic's officials say in response to Trump's claim; the strait will only be closed and opened under Iran's command, says Gharibabadi; UAE says one of its ADNOC vessels came under attack

**Agence France-Presse**

TEHRAN

**I**ran on Saturday fired back at U.S. President Donald Trump's claim that he would soon declare the Strait of Hormuz part of U.S. territory, saying the crucial energy waterway it has blockaded "will remain Iranian".

Mr. Trump has repeatedly said the strait, which Tehran effectively closed at the start of the West Asia war in late February, is under U.S. control – an assertion the Islamic republic denies.

"The Strait of Hormuz has been Iranian, is Iranian, and will remain Iranian," Iranian Deputy Fo-



**Critical passage:** Vessels are seen in the Strait of Hormuz, off the port city of Bandar Abbas in southern Iran on August 10. AFP

rein Minister Kazem Gharibabadi said on X. "This strait will only be closed and opened under Iran's command."

Mr. Trump told a political rally in New York state

on Friday that after the U.S. defeats Iran, "pretty soon I'll be declaring the Hormuz Strait a territory of the United States". "It's true," he added.

An unnamed White

House official later clarified that Mr. Trump was joking, the *Wall Street Journal* reported.

## List of conditions

Last week, a top Iranian official laid out a laundry list of conditions for reopening the strait, including an end to the "war and aggression against Iran and its allies in Lebanon, Palestine, Yemen, and Iraq".

Mohammad Bagher Zolqadr also demanded the end of crippling sanctions, the release of frozen assets and compensation for war-time damage.

As diplomacy stalls between the decades-long foes, attacks in the Hormuz strait have continued,

highlighting the continued risks to regional shipping.

United Arab Emirates' state-owned oil giant ADNOC said on Saturday that one of its vessels came under attack the night before.

On Friday, the Gulf nation blamed Iran for other attacks on two vessels linked to ADNOC as they passed through the strait.

Such attacks led to the collapse of an April ceasefire between the United States and Iran.

As Iran throttles traffic in Hormuz, its Houthi allies in Yemen have also declared a parallel maritime blockade on Saudi ports in the Red Sea, the oil-exporting giant's only other maritime route.

# 47 killed as 7.7 magnitude quake strikes off Indonesia

Reuters

Jakarta, August 15

AT LEAST 47 people were killed after a magnitude 7.7 earthquake and dozens of aftershocks struck off eastern Indonesia on Saturday, the National Disaster Mitigation Agency (BNPB) said in its latest statement.

Rescue teams have yet to reach Nagekeo, the region closest to the epicentre, after landslides blocked roads and disrupted communications, officials said. "The quake was massive, the shock was so strong," said Nona, a 51-year-old resident of Talibura, a village in East Nusa Tenggara. "There were 13 of us inside the house and we all ran to save ourselves."

Tsunami waves of less than 1 metre (3 feet) were recorded in

## • Two Earthquakes Strike in Quick Succession



several areas of the Southeast Asian nation after the early-morning quake. Authorities lifted a tsunami warning about three hours later.

Earlier, rescuers in port town of Maumere found 20 dead, six injured and two people trapped under rubble, said Fathur Rah-

man, head of the city's rescue agency. Maumere is the main town in Sikka Regency on Flores Island in eastern Indonesia.

Suharyanto, head of BNPB, earlier said residents remained trapped in several buildings across the affected area, while there were reports of landslides

blocking a number of roads.

Teams have yet to reach Nagekeo and mobile communications in the region were affected, Fathur told Reuters earlier. Attempts to reach the area by road were thwarted by landslides, while another team was trying to reach it by ferry, he said.



## 6.4-magnitude earthquake hits North Sumatra

Jakarta: A magnitude 6.4 earthquake struck Indonesia's North Sumatra province on Saturday, but there was no tsunami threat and no immediate reports of aftershocks and damages, the country's meteorology agency BMKG said.

The quake occurred at a depth of 168 kilometres with its epicentre located about 11 km southeast of Simalungun, according to agency's statement.

BMKG said the quake was felt in Tebing Tinggi, Kabanjahe and Limapuluh areas. **REUTERS**