No Statehood, Ladakh to get unique elected body, says Chief Secretary

Home Ministry discusses the proposed structure of the UT-level body under Article 371 at a meeting with LAB and KDA; Ladakh leaders call the meeting a 'waste of time and money', say Ministry and UT administration are not on the same page

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Ladakh Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra said on Thursday that neither Statehood nor a Union Territory (UT) with a legislature is being offered to Ladakh; instead, it will be a *sui generis* model, a unique body under the Constitution that will have legislative, executive, and financial powers.

Mr. Kundra, while responding to a question by *The Hindu* on whether the head of the elected body will be called a Chief Minister and whether the assurance was akin to restoring Statehood for Ladakh, said, "Ladakh was never a State. It was part of J&K, and later it became a UT. Aspiration of the people is to have legislative, executive, and financial powers. An agreement has been reached with the leadership here, a *sui generis* model, which does not exist anywhere in the country, will be crafted for Ladakh, where a legislative body will be created. It is not going to be Statehood for sure or a UT with legislature, but it is some other body which will have these powers, the nomenclature is yet to be finalised, that is why discussions are on."

Civil Society members from Ladakh, including Sonam Wangchuk, address a press conference in New Delhi. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Chief Secretary informed that at a meeting with the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) on September 9, the proposed structure of the UT-level body under Article 371 of the Constitution was discussed, and the members expressed their consensus on having a "direct election through constituencies" for the UT-level body.

He said the members have been given a list of eight to nine questions to examine the structural relationship and distribution of powers between the existing hill councils and the proposed UT-level body as per their requirements. The next round of discussions is expected in October.

Emphasising that constitutional safeguards require a detailed and established legal and parliamentary process, Mr. Kundra said any constitutional amendment needs broad political consensus, consultation, and parliamentary consideration. He stressed that the process would move forward through dialogue and consensus and that no framework would be imposed on Ladakh without due consultation with stakeholders.

LAB, KDA disappointed

The members of LAB and KDA said they were "disappointed" with the talks, stating that the UT administration under L-G Vinai Saxena and the Union Home Ministry were not on the same page.

Cherring Dorjay Lakruk of the LAB said that if the government officials wanted them to answer questions, they should have shared the agenda beforehand. "They are asking us what will be the name of the elected body, what will be the CM called? They should have sent the agenda in advance. We cannot answer these questions instantly, they involve legal questions," he said.

Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, part of the LAB delegation that met Ministry officials on September 9, said that "no concrete progress" has been made on their key demands and cautioned that protests would resume if assurances were not provided within a week.

He added that the meeting was a "waste of time and money" and that the government should not compel them to protest.

"We spend our own money and come to Delhi, then we go back without a concrete outcome. Money and time is (sic) wasted. In 2020, when they needed us before the hill council elections there, the government sent a chartered aircraft for our leaders and asked (for) their help to not boycott the elections and help them win. They have made all efforts to drive wedges between the communities and regions and want to tire out the leaders, we are not giving up," Mr. Wangchuk said.

'CHAI WAS NICE, BUT NOTHING MOVED FORWARD': SONAM WANGCHUK TO MEDIA IN DELHI

No breakthrough in Ladakh talks, leaders threaten stir from Sept 19

Deeptiman Tiwary
New Delhi, September 10

A DAY after their meeting with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), leaders of the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) Thursday said there had been no movement on their core demands and threatened to step up their agitation in Ladakh.

The two bodies said they were planning to hold a padyatra from September 19-24 if the government did not come up with a concrete proposal within a week.

At a press conference in Delhi, climate activist Sonam Wangchuk, who was part of the Ladakh delegation, said the talks were cordial but produced no substantive outcome. "The talks were cordial, chai was nice, but nothing has moved forward," Wangchuk said. The leaders had expected the meeting to produce a draft proposal following the "in-principle understanding" reached with the Centre on May 22, he said.

Wangchuk said the delegation had presented a list of "non-negotiables" — supremacy of the elected UT-level leader over the bureaucracy, control over law and order — and an assurance that no major decisions concerning Ladakh and its administration would be taken before the proposed democratic structure was established. "None of these were addressed."

The leaders had also sought an assurance against irreversible decisions relating to land allotment and the grassroots democratic structure. "Even on these no assurances were given," Wangchuk said. The LAB and KDA had said after Wednesday's meeting that the MHA had proposed a directly elected UT-level body with legislative powers over land, culture and language, forests, and environment and natural resources, besides executive, budgetary, planning, and financial powers. But they flagged the lack of clarity over

Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk said the dialogue was cordial, but produced no substantive outcome. X/ @WANGCHUK66

the body's overall powers, particularly law and order.

The issue of bureaucratic control has been a key point in the negotiations. The final minutes of the May 22 meeting, endorsed on July 3, recorded that "control and supervision, including Annual Performance Appraisal Report (APAR)", over civil servants dealing with subjects under the jurisdiction of the proposed elected body would be exercised by the elected executive body. The leaders, however, said Wednesday's meeting did not provide the broader clarity they were seeking.

Wangchuk also questioned the timing of the meeting, saying it appeared to have been called to persuade them to defer a padyatra planned for September 10, in which people from across the country were expected to participate. "If we don't get any assurance in the next one week, we will be compelled to step up our agitation in Ladakh. The padyatra will begin from September 19 till September 24 if the government does not give us a concrete proposal," he said.

The leaders also responded to remarks made by Ladakh Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra at a press conference in Leh Thursday. KDA co-chairman Sajjad Kargili said the MHA had been expected to bring a comprehensive draft on the proposed constitutional safeguards under Article 371K at Wednesday's meeting, but no such draft was presented. Instead, he said, the leaders were asked questions on the proposed governance structure during the meeting. Kundra referred to these questions at his press conference Thursday.

"We were not there to appear for a NEET exam. We were there to demand a democratic set up for Ladakh," Kargili said.

Take action against threats to minor NEET protester: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday asked Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta to ensure "immediate action" on a complaint filed by a 14-year-old student, who alleged open threats and harassment from miscreants for her role in the protests against NEET-UG question paper leaks.

"These are anti-social elements. They commit violence against a child, and they roam free. Now, they are again trying to browbeat and intimidate the child and her family, so that they do not proceed with any legal action. This is a very serious issue. Her cause is absolutely justified," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, observed.

Take action against threats to minor: SC

The student's counsel submitted that a "vigilante" had "bragged" on social media about the hurt caused to her and her family. "She is a *bona fide* victim. She is also a vulnerable victim. No irreversible harm should befall the child or her family," the lawyer said.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, part of the Bench with Justice V. Mohana, said the Uttar Pradesh Police should take responsibility for the safety of the student and her family. "The FIR in the Parliament Street police station relates to allegations of miscreants threatening, harassing, intimidating and having indulged in acts of violence against her. If they are true, we would like you to take immediate action on the FIR, and file a report here. Police protection must be given to the victim and family by the police in Uttar Pradesh where she is presently claiming to reside," Justice Bagchi addressed the top law officer.

Recently, the Delhi Police had arrested influencer Swatantra Bhardwaj in connection with the alleged assault on the father of a student during the NEET protests.

The counsel for the student argued that vulnerable victims like her client should be able to safeguard their privacy by directly approaching the top court or accessing the Supreme Court-appointed High-Powered Enquiry Committee.

NSCN-IM wants to create fresh fault lines: Kuki-Zo groups

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Deliberate effort to draw the Naga and Kuki communities into confrontation, they allege

The spokesperson of a Kuki-Zo insurgent group in peace talks with the government said on Thursday that the ongoing unrest in Manipur was not a "Naga-Kuki conflict", and alleged, instead, that certain elements linked to the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) [NSCN-IM] were making attempts to manufacture such a narrative to serve their own interests.

The ethnic violence in Manipur, which began as clashes between the Meitei and Kuki communities on May 3, 2023, has, since February 7, 2026, expanded to include violence between sections of the Naga and Kuki communities.

Seilen Haokip of the Kuki National Organisation (KNO), one of the two Kuki insurgent groupings in suspension of operations (SoO) pact with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) and the Manipur government, said there was a deliberate effort to draw the Naga and Kuki communities into a broader confrontation. The violence was not spontaneous, he said, adding that the objective was to divert attention from internal challenges within the NSCN-IM and revive support for the outfit by creating fresh fault lines in the hill districts.

NSCN-IM, the largest Naga insurgent group, signed a ceasefire agreement with the Government of India in 1997 and, in 2015, signed a framework agreement to find a political solution to their demands.

On September 2, 2025, the MHA and the Manipur government extended the 2008 SoO agreement, with the KNO and the United People's Front (UPF) on "renegotiated terms and conditions or ground rules." The revised ground rules reiterated territorial integrity of Manipur and relocation of camps run by the insurgent groups away from Meitei-dominated areas in the valley districts.

During a press interaction, Aron Kipgen, UPF's spokesperson criticised recent security operations by central forces, contending that such actions violated established ground rules that require coordination with local police and adherence to the SoO agreement.

He accused the Manipur government of adopting a discriminatory approach towards Kuki-Zo communities and reiterated their demand for a separate administrative arrangement.

Seven years on, China President Xi to visit India

Ananth Krishnan
BEIJING

China announced on Thursday that President Xi Jinping will attend the BRICS Summit in New Delhi this weekend, on what will be his first visit to India in almost seven years.

Mr. Xi last visited in October 2019 for an informal summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Mamallapuram in Tamil Nadu. The two leaders are expected to meet for bilateral talks on the sidelines of the coming summit in New Delhi.

Mr. Xi will be accompanied by a large delegation, including Politburo member and Foreign Minister Wang Yi, and Commerce Minister Wang Wentao, who is likely to have talks on the sidelines with Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal, his counterpart.

Seven years on, China President to visit India

The talks between the two Ministers will give both sides the opportunity to take stock of a growing but challenging trade relationship and air their respective concerns, with India seeking an easing of export controls and China wanting further relaxation of investment restrictions.

Mr. Xi's visit in itself holds enormous significance for the relationship in the view of India and Chinese officials, and for the continued normalisation process. Especially on the Chinese side, a visit by Mr. Xi to India, after a seven-year gap, is seen as important signalling to the Chinese system on where relations are headed after a difficult period.

Border tensions starting in April 2020, culminating in a clash at Galwan Valley in June, brought a four-year freeze in relations. Following a meeting between Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi in October 2024 on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Kazan, both sides have begun a gradual and steady normalisation in relations.

Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi last met at the SCO Summit in Tianjin, China, in August last year, when they both "welcomed the positive momentum and steady progress in bilateral relations" and "reaffirmed that the two countries were development partners and not rivals, and that their differences should not turn into disputes."

"I would describe it as strategic risk management rather than strategic realignment," Hu Shisheng, Director of the South Asia Institute at the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations in Beijing told *The Hindu* in a recent interview.

The challenges for BRICS in a changing world order

20 years on, BRICS has emerged as a key global voice. But its expansion and evolving geopolitics have sharpened the faultlines over its direction

EXPERTS EXPLAIN

ANURAG BISEN & RAJ KUMAR SHARMA

INDIA IS set to host the 18th BRICS Summit in New Delhi on September 12 and 13 as the grouping marks 20 years since its formalisation in 2006. This anniversary is an occasion to assess whether BRICS has remained true to the concerns that brought it together, and how it must adapt to a rapidly changing global order.

BRICS vs G7: By the numbers

In 2000, Brazil, Russia, India and China together accounted for roughly 23% of global GDP on a purchasing power parity (PPP) basis, while the G7 held nearly 52%. By 2024, the positions had reversed: the expanded 11-member BRICS accounted for approximately 36.8% of global GDP (PPP), while the G7's share fell below 29%.

BRICS nations are projected to grow by an average 3.8% in 2025 and 3.7% in 2026, more than three times the G7 average. Yet the per-capita GDP tells a different story: the G7 averages around $53,000, while BRICS averages roughly $8,200. The bloc's aggregate weight is driven by population and resource scale, not by individual prosperity.

Vision and reality

BRICS began as BRIC — Brazil, Russia, India and China — in 2006, following a Goldman Sachs projection identifying these economies as future engines of global growth. It evolved from a foreign ministers' dialogue into a leaders' forum, with its first summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009.

South Africa joined in 2010, and the grouping (now known as BRICS) expanded dramatically in 2024 with the addition of Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Indonesia became the 11th full member in January 2025.

What started as an economic grouping has become a geopolitical entity of considerable weight, increasingly presenting itself as a voice of the Global South. Yet its central grievance has changed remarkably little: global institutions have not kept pace with the redistribution of economic and political power. The first summit called for reform of international financial institutions and the United Nations, greater energy security, and a more democratic multipolar world order. Two decades later, these demands remain strikingly relevant.

India's strategic engagement

India's involvement in BRICS reflects its broader strategy of multi-alignment, underpinned by strategic autonomy.

New Delhi participates simultaneously in BRICS, the G20, the Quad and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation without being tied to alliance commitments. BRICS emerged during an early phase of India-US strategic convergence, and India's multi-alignment has been less about choosing between competing power centres and more about creating room for manoeuvre.

India has made substantive institutional contributions. At the 2012 New Delhi summit, India proposed a BRICS development bank, which became the New Development Bank (NDB). By mid-2026, the NDB had approved approximately $44 billion across 141 projects. India's broader objective has been to shape debates on climate change, sustainable development and trade.

Divergences within BRICS

One of the most significant tensions within BRICS is the fundamental disagreement over its purpose. China and Russia increasingly position BRICS as a counterweight to Western dominance, a platform to challenge US-led institutions and the dollar's hegemony. Beijing has driven the bloc's expansion, viewing a larger BRICS as a vehicle to project leadership of the Global South. Moscow, excluded from the SWIFT banking system and facing sweeping sanctions, sees BRICS as a critical economic lifeline.

India and Brazil, in contrast, view BRICS primarily as an economic and reform-oriented grouping. The divergence was evident when Russia demanded in 2023 that India pay for oil in yuan — India refused, insisting on dollars or rupees only.

BRICS members during the 2025 summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

India's strategy of autonomy

New Delhi participates simultaneously in BRICS, the G20, the Quad and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation without being tied to alliance commitments.

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India's multi-alignment has been less about choosing between competing power centres and more about creating room for manoeuvre.

On opposing sides: Iran, UAE

BRICS expansion has introduced sharp geopolitical contradictions that test the grouping's cohesion. The most visible fault line emerged at the BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting in New Delhi in May 2026, when members failed to agree on a joint declaration. The breakdown was driven by a direct confrontation between Iran and the UAE, two member states on opposite sides of an active conflict. India, as host, issued a chair's statement acknowledging "differing views among some members regarding the situation in West Asia". The episode exposed a structural vulnerability: BRICS operates on consensus, and expansion has made consensus on geopolitical crises far more elusive.

The dollar question

Western countries view BRICS with a mixture of concern and pragmatism, recognising it not as an immediate replacement for the existing international order, but as a platform capable of gradually reshaping the distribution of geopolitical power.

The sharpest clash has come with US President Donald Trump, who has threatened 100% tariffs on BRICS nations if they created a new currency or backed any other currency to replace the US dollar. The idea of a single BRICS currency has largely been shelved.

BRICS members have instead gravitated towards bilateral settlement of trade in national currencies, a more pragmatic, decentralised approach. Russia and China now settle over 90% of their bilateral trade in ruble and yuan. Russia and India have moved roughly 90% of direct payments to national currencies, facilitated by Special Rupee Vostro Accounts authorised by the Reserve Bank of India. India and the UAE have operated a rupee-dirham local currency settlement system since July 2023 while India and Indonesia operationalised a rupee-rupiah settlement framework in July 2026.

The BRICS Pay system, set to be unveiled at the 2026 summit, will link national payment rails — Russia's SPFS, China's CIPS, India's UPI and Brazil's Pix — allowing member states to settle trade without routing through dollar correspondent banks. This is "de-dollarisation" through the back-door. India's approach has been to push for interoperable central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) rather than a supranational currency.

Yet the limitations are real: the dollar still accounts for 57.13% of global central bank reserves (Q1 2026), and no BRICS member is building rupee, yuan or rand reserves at meaningful scale.

India's priorities

As host of the 2026 summit, India faces a demanding agenda. The conflicts involving Iran, Israel and the US, as well as the Russia-Ukraine war, will test India's ability to build consensus on a joint declaration. Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to India and the presence of Russian President Vladimir Putin could create opportunities for high-level consultations.

Beyond geopolitics, the summit will focus on practical cooperation: resilient and diversified supply chains, reform of global financial institutions, strengthening the NDB and expanding intra-BRICS trade.

Over the next decade, India can contribute by preserving BRICS' original reform agenda while making the grouping more practical. Digital public infrastructure, climate finance, health cooperation, critical minerals, local-currency payments and inclusive connectivity can give BRICS a concrete developmental agenda.

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Elephant in the room in meetings with Xi, Putin: India's manufacturing challenges

That frames the key issue: Gap between India's international economic rhetoric and its national industrial capabilities

C Raja Mohan
Batumi (Georgia), Sept 10

AS BRICS leaders gather this weekend in Delhi, the main conversation is about the global order, the looming shadow of two wars and several contradictions but a consequential part of it will be decidedly bilateral and economic. Especially Prime Minister Narendra Modi's talks with Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia and Xi Jinping of China.

Modi and Putin are meeting Friday ahead of the BRICS summit. Over the last couple of bilateral engagements, they have sought to give greater balance to their weak economic partnership. The two leaders will also visit the first India-Russia international industrial trade fair being held in Delhi this week.

The emphasis on balance is important. India's exports to Russia remain below $5 billion, against imports of $63.8 billion in 2024-25. The trade deficit is nearly $59 billion, largely because Russian oil and other natural resources dominate India's imports.

But the problem is not

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Elephant in the room

simply the size of the deficit. It is the narrowness of what India can sell.

Russia is a substantial market for manufactured goods. China, the world's manufacturing superpower, exported about $103 billion of goods to Russia in 2025. Chinese exports range from cars and machinery to electronics and industrial equipment. India does not have anything remotely comparable on offer as of today.

The contrast is a testament to the limits of diplomacy in economics. Modi can persuade Putin to buy more Indian products. He can negotiate payment mechanisms, investment targets and trade agreements. But diplomacy cannot conjure up the Indian industrial capacity needed to supply the Russian market. Nor can political warmth with Moscow compensate for the absence of competitive Indian products.

India's manufacturing weakness appears in a different form with China. Bilateral trade reached about $151 billion in 2025-26, but India's deficit rose to roughly $112 billion.

Here the asymmetry is reversed. Russia mainly sells India natural resources, especially oil and other commodities. China sells manufactured goods—and increasingly the intermediate and capital goods that Indian manufacturers themselves need.

Delhi appears to have reconciled itself to this reality. It is responding to Beijing's demands that India end restrictions on commerce with China. There could be some progress in this direction when Modi meets Xi over the weekend.

Chinese imports are deeply embedded in Indian manufacturing, from electronics and machinery to chemicals, auto components and pharmaceutical inputs, and are key to Indian exports of manufactured goods.

This creates a paradox. India wants to reduce its economic dependence on China but Indian businesses also want access to the cheap and increasingly sophisticated manufactured goods that China produces at enormous scale. The political desire for greater economic security runs up against the commercial logic of keeping access to Chinese production.

This is where the Russia and China stories come together. The common problem is India's limited manufacturing strength. In Russia, the weakness is visible in India's inability to export at scale to a large market. With China, it is visible in India's dependence on imports from a manufacturing giant even as it seeks to expand its own industrial base.

This is a throwback to India's calls to democratise the global economic order, an objective dates back to the Cold War years. But India's immediate bilateral economic agenda is about getting Russia and China to buy more from India, invest more in India and help strengthen Indian productive capacity.

This raises a fundamental question: can diplomacy compensate for weak manufacturing? Unlikely. The essential Indian challenge is, therefore, not diplomatic but industrial. It is the gap between India's international economic rhetoric and its national industrial capabilities.

Closing that gap requires much more than diplomacy: sustained economic reform, simpler regulation, greater competitiveness, less corruption, deeper domestic supply chains and, above all, a much stronger manufacturing ecosystem. Foreign policy can create openings for Indian industry, but it cannot fill those openings with products that India does not yet produce competitively.

That leads to the final paradox. India can deploy considerable diplomatic capital to persuade Russia and China to buy more from it and invest more in it. But the most effective way of drawing investment from both—and from the rest of the world—is to make India more attractive to investors. The world is not short of capital and technology; but India is not at the top of the destinations where they are headed.

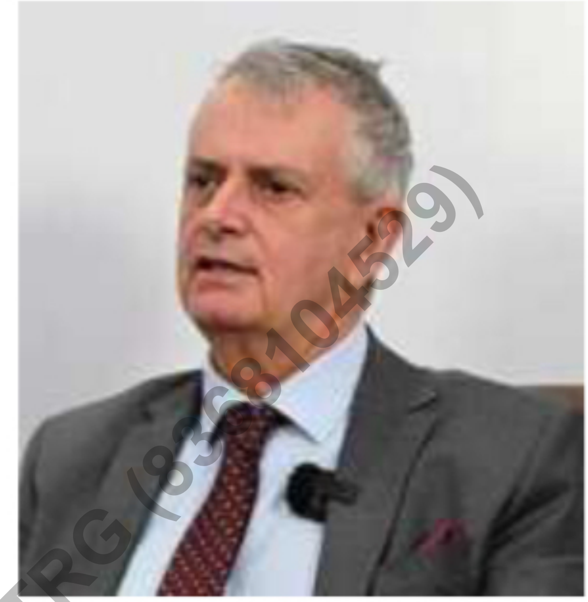
The bilateral does overshadow the multilateral this week in Delhi. That's not surprising, since BRICS, like the SCO, has emerged as a valuable venue for high-level political engagement and bilateral problem-solving. And diplomacy is about seizing opportunities, wherever they present themselves.

In the end, Delhi's real challenge is not about changing the global economic order, but reforming its internal structures. The credibility of India's economic diplomacy will ultimately depend less on what it can persuade other countries to do than on what its economic policy makers can do enable India to produce more efficiently.

(C. Raja Mohan is a contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express)

India-Canada trade deal by the end of the year, says envoy

Suhasini Haidar
T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI



Christopher Cooter

The India-Canada trade deal will be ready by the end of the year, Canadian High Commissioner Christopher Cooter has told *The Hindu*, adding that the two countries are planning for their increased engagement this year to culminate in a visit by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the North American country in December.

Speaking at *The Hindu* MIND in New Delhi on Wednesday, Mr. Cooter said that the two countries had ample opportunities for bilateral investment which could scale up to $1 trillion. He did, however, point out that India could ease some tax and regulatory hurdles to spur further investment, something on which Canada has been engaging with the Union Finance Ministry.

"Previously, we discussed for 12 years, and we got no trade agreement," Mr. Cooter said. "This time, we started in March 2026. We have probably done more in these six months than we did in those 12 years… I am pretty confident the trade deal will be agreed to by the end of the year," he said.

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'India-Canada trade deal by end of the year'

"Our hope is that we get there by the time of a Modi visit to Canada, which would mean achieving this in about nine months [since March]," the Canadian High Commissioner said. "That's like a child – we hope this is a really nice baby."

Mr. Cooter acknowledged that while trade between India and Canada is currently small (about $8 billion), the investment relationship is a strong one. "So, you actually provide good employment for 1,00,000 Canadians in Canada through Indian investment in Canada," Mr. Cooter said.

"The other part of the story is that, while trade itself is rather small, the pension funds and other big institutional investors have about $100-110 billion Canadian dollars or $80 billion U.S. dollars in investment in India." This, he said, placed Canada among the largest investors in India, along with Singapore and the UAE. "But the difference with Canadian investment is that our investment through these institutional investors is also direct investment," Mr. Cooter explained.

"We estimate that no less than 75% of all our investment through those funds is in physical assets. And no other country has that," he added.

‘Iran attack on base in Jordan damaged U.S. military aircraft’

Reuters
WASHINGTON

Iranian strikes damaged multiple American military aircraft this week on the Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan, a U.S. official told *Reuters*.

The U.S. military, the highest-funded in the world, suffered material damage even before Iran’s strikes on Tuesday. This includes the destruction of more than two dozen drones, Iran striking fighter jets, and aircraft being lost to accidents.

According to a May report from the Congressional Research Service, 42 U.S. military aircraft had already been lost or damaged in the conflict.

A U.S. official said Iran’s attack hit one A-10 Thunderbolt II, known as the Warthog, leaving it with a missing wing, while roughly eight F-15s sustained light damage and were returned to service. Since February, 18 U.S. service members have been killed and over 800 injured.

Trump promises Americans $5,000 if Republicans win Congress in November

Agence France-Presse
DALLAS

U.S. President Donald Trump on Wednesday promised $5,000 to every American adult if Republicans retain control of Congress in November, coupling the extraordinary claim with a plea for his supporters to “pretend” he was on the ballot.

“If the Republicans win, you win with us and you get $5,000. It will be called the Trump dividend,” he told the Republican midterm convention in Dallas, as the party struggles in polls against the Democrats.

U.S. President Donald Trump gestures on stage at the Republican National Midterm Convention in Dallas on Wednesday. REUTERS

The President did not disclose where the money would come from – with the theoretical bill likely topping $1 trillion – saying only that “our country is making so much money”.

Doubling down on his bet that he can help Republicans defy opinion polls and retain both houses of Congress on November 3, Mr. Trump said: “I’m asking you to pretend that I’m on the ballot.”

Opinion polls overwhelmingly show that Mr. Trump’s approval ratings are in the low 30s, as voters become increasingly angry about high prices and the war he launched against Iran.

Decision Desk HQ projects Democrats to win the House 230-205 and the Senate to finish 51-49 in their favour in November.

Houthis seize key city on Red Sea, advance towards Bab el-Mandeb

The Yemeni group seizes Zuqar Island on the Red Sea, 'after rocket attacks and a ground assault carried out using boats transporting fighters'; Saudi Arabia conducted '40 strikes in recent hours in Taiz, Hodeida, Al-Jawf, Marib', the group says

Agence France-Presse
SANAA

Yemen's Houthis seized control of the strategic Red Sea port city of Mokha on Thursday, a Yemeni military source said, as the group reported new strikes by Saudi forces.

The Iran-backed Houthis, who control large parts of northwest Yemen, launched a large-scale offensive last week against Yemeni government forces, who are backed by Saudi Arabia. They also launched attacks on Saudi territory that left dozens of people wounded, in a conflict that has reignited during the war on Iran that began with U.S.-Israeli strikes on Tehran in late February.

Loyal fighters: Houthi rebels march during a mobilisation campaign in Sanaa, Yemen, on Thursday. AP

Witnesses said they saw Houthi forces entering Mokha on Thursday chanting "death to America, death to Israel".

The Yemeni military source said they were advancing towards the strategic Bab el-Mandeb strait "after having taken control of Mokha". The waterway, which links Asia to Europe via the Red Sea and Suez Canal, has gained importance as a transit route since the start of the wider war, which saw Iran blockade the Strait of Hormuz.

The military source said the Houthis also seized Zuqar Island, in the southern Red Sea, "after rocket attacks and a ground assault carried out using boats transporting fighters".

Also on Thursday, the Houthis reported air strikes. "The Saudi enemy's air force conducted around 40 strikes in recent hours in the governorates of Taiz, Hodeida, Al-Jawf and Marib," Houthi news agency *Saba* said.

Yemen relapsed into war in July after years of relative calm punctured by sporadic violence and deepening poverty. Since last week, the fighting in Yemen has left more than 500 dead, mostly combatants. It has also forced nearly 20,000 people to flee their homes, the International Organization for Migration said on Tuesday.

On Wednesday, the Saudi-led coalition battling the Houthis said the anti-government fighters fired ballistic missiles and drones at several cities in southern Saudi Arabia.

The Houthis triggered the return to hostilities in July when they let an Iranian plane land in defiance of Saudi control of Yemeni airspace.