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China test-fires intercontinental ballistic missile into the Pacific

Agence France-Presse
BEIJING

China said it test-launched an intercontinental ballistic missile on Wednesday, firing it into the Pacific Ocean in its first such exercise in decades.

The launch sparked protests from other countries in the region, with China's neighbour Japan saying it had not been given advance notice and expressing "serious concern" about Beijing's military build-up.

Beijing has stepped up its nuclear development and boosted defence spending in recent years, with the Pentagon warning last October that China was developing its arsenal more quickly than the U.S. had anticipated.

China held more than 500 operational nuclear

warheads as of May 2023 and is likely to have more than 1,000 by 2030, it said.

The Chinese military's Rocket Force "launched an ICBM... carrying a dummy warhead to the high seas in the Pacific Ocean at 08:44 on September 25, and the missile fell into expected sea areas", the Defence Ministry said in a statement on Wednesday.

'Extremely unusual'

"This is extremely unusual and likely the first time in decades that we have seen a test like this," said Ankit Panda, Stanton Senior Fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"(The test) likely speaks to China's ongoing nuclear modernisation manifesting in new requirements for testing," he added.

However, China's De-



Thorny issue: The launch sparked protests from other countries in the region such as Japan, Australia and New Zealand. FILE PHOTO

fence Ministry called the firing a "routine arrangement in our annual training plan".

"It is in line with international law and international practice and is not directed against any country or target," it said.

Japan said it was given "no notice from the Chinese side in advance", with a government spokesper-

son adding that Beijing's military build-up was a "serious concern".

Australia said it was seeking "an explanation" over the launch, adding it was "concerned by any action that is destabilising and raises the risk of miscalculation in the region". New Zealand also said the launch of the missile, which landed in the South

Pacific, was "an unwelcome and concerning development". A spokesperson for Wellington's Foreign Minister vowed to consult with Pacific allies further as details became clear.

Beijing first test-fired an ICBM into the South Pacific in the 1980s.

But since then, Mr. Panda said, it has typically conducted such tests in its own airspace.

The U.S. said in 2021 it was "very concerned" about reported hypersonic missile testing by China.

The U.S. and China held rare talks on nuclear arms control in November, part of a bid to ease mistrust ahead of a summit between leaders Joe Biden and Xi Jinping.

But in July, Beijing said it had suspended negotiations with the U.S. on nu-

clear non-proliferation and arms control in response to Washington's weapons sales to Taiwan.

In an annual report, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute listed China as having the world's third-largest stockpile of nuclear warheads, after Russia and the U.S.

Beijing announced this year that it would increase its defence budget – the world's second-largest – by 7.2%.

The boost comes as China increasingly squares off with the U.S. and its regional partners from the South China Sea to Taiwan.

Senior military officials from China and the U.S. had held "in-depth" talks this month as part of a bid by the powers to avoid wider tensions escalating into conflict.

Since its first atomic test

in 1964, China has been content to maintain a comparatively modest arsenal and has maintained that it would never be the first to use nuclear weapons in a conflict.

Under President Xi Jinping in recent years it has begun a massive military modernisation drive that includes upgrading its nuclear weapons to not only deter foes but also be able to counter-attack.

However, Beijing's secretive Rocket Force, which carried out Wednesday's test and oversees the country's nuclear arsenal, has also been the target of an aggressive, wide-ranging anti-graft campaign.

Beijing announced in July that Sun Jinming, the former Chief of Staff of the force, had been placed under investigation for corruption.

China test-fires intercontinental ballistic missile into the Pacific (26 September)

- China test-launched an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) into the Pacific Ocean, marking its first such exercise in decades.
- The launch caused concerns from neighboring countries, particularly Japan, which reported it received no advance notice and expressed serious concern about China's military buildup.
- The Pentagon indicated that China's nuclear development has accelerated, with estimates of over 500 operational nuclear warheads as of May 2023, potentially exceeding 1,000 by 2030.
- The Chinese military's Rocket Force stated that the missile test occurred at 08:44 on September 25, carrying a dummy warhead and landing in designated sea areas.
- Experts described the test as "extremely unusual," noting it reflects China's ongoing nuclear modernization efforts and new testing requirements.
- China's Defence Ministry characterized the launch as a routine part of its annual training, claiming it adhered to international law and was not aimed at any specific country.
- Australia sought an explanation for the launch, highlighting concerns about destabilizing actions that could increase regional risks.
- New Zealand also expressed concern over the missile launch and pledged to consult with Pacific allies.
- China previously conducted ICBM tests in the 1980s but has mostly kept such tests within its own airspace since then.
- The U.S. has expressed concern over China's hypersonic missile testing and held talks on nuclear arms control in 2021.
- Under President Xi Jinping, China has undertaken significant military modernization, upgrading its nuclear capabilities for both deterrence and counter-attack.
- The Rocket Force, which manages China's nuclear arsenal, is also facing an anti-corruption campaign, with investigations into high-ranking officials.
- The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute ranks China as having the world's third-largest nuclear stockpile, behind Russia and the U.S.
- China announced a 7.2% increase in its defense budget this year, the second-largest in the world, amidst tensions with the U.S. and regional partners.
- Senior military officials from China and the U.S. have engaged in talks to prevent escalating tensions from leading to conflict.

CBI says false records were created in Kolkata rape and murder case

Allegations of tampering with evidence and delay in lodging FIR have been raised by family of the victim; agency seeks judicial remand of ex-principal of R.G. Kar Hospital till September 30

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Wednesday claimed that certain false records were created at Tala police station in connection with the rape and murder of the trainee doctor at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital in Kolkata. The charges were made in the remand sheet filed by the agency before the court of Additional Chief Judicial Magistrate Sealdah where the CBI prayed for the judicial custody of Tala police station former official-in-charge Abhijit Mondal and Sandip Ghosh, former principal of R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital.

“During custodial interrogation of both the accused persons, new/additional facts have emerged to the effect that some false records pertaining to the instant case were created/altered in the police station,” the remand sheet by the agency said.



A BJP protest against the rape and murder of an on-duty doctor at R.G. Kar Medical College and Hospital, in Kolkata on Wednesday. PTI

Allegations of tampering of evidence and delay in lodging the FIR were raised by family members of the victim. The CBI had arrested Mr. Mondal and Mr. Ghosh on September 15 and since then the accused have remained behind bars.

In its prayer before the court on Wednesday, the CBI sought judicial custody of the accused till September 30. The agency said that an analysis of call data records (CDR) of both the accused have exchanged

the number of calls which are under verification. “Their further custodial interrogation will be required to confront the said CDR after verification,” the agency said.

BJP protest

During the day, the West Bengal BJP held a procession to Kalighat, near the residence of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, in protest against the rape and murder. Leader of Opposition Suvendu Adhikari said that the Bench of the Chief

Justice of the Supreme Court had said that they were surprised and concerned after seeing the report of the CBI.

“There has been tampering of evidence and it will come to light. All this will come out in the public domain,” Mr. Adhikari said.

MLA courts controversy

Meanwhile, a fresh controversy erupted over the remarks of Trinamool Congress’s Narayan Goswami, MLA from Ashoknagar in West Bengal’s North 24 Parganas. In a video that has gone viral, he urged organisers to celebrate the Durga Puja festival with greater grandeur. The MLA said that the need for more celebrations are a “ploy by some to disrupt the biggest festival in Bengal and malign the state’s image”.

Many people are of the opinion that the festival should not be celebrated with pomp and grandeur this year because of the rape and murder of the young doctor.

CBI says false records were created in Kolkata rape and murder case (26 September)

Allegations of tampering with evidence and delay in lodging FIR have been raised by family of the victim; agency seeks judicial remand of ex-principal of R.G. Kar Hospital till September 30

- The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) stated that false records were created at the Tala police station regarding the rape and murder of a trainee doctor at R.G. Kar Medical College in Kolkata.
- The CBI made these claims in a remand sheet submitted to the court, seeking judicial custody of former police station chief Abhijit Mondal and Sandip Ghosh, the former principal of the medical college.
- During interrogations, new information emerged indicating that some records related to the case were altered or fabricated at the police station.
- The victim's family had raised allegations of evidence tampering and delays in filing the FIR (First Information Report).
- Mondal and Ghosh were arrested on September 15 and have been in custody since then.

- The CBI requested the court to extend their judicial custody until September 30, mentioning the need to analyze call data records (CDR) that show communication between the accused, which is currently being verified.
- The West Bengal BJP organized a protest near Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's residence, expressing outrage over the rape and murder case.
- Opposition leader Suwendu Adhikari mentioned that the Supreme Court Chief Justice was surprised by the CBI's report and suggested that evidence tampering would be revealed publicly.
- A controversy arose involving Trinamool Congress MLA Narayan Goswami, who suggested that the Durga Puja festival should be celebrated with more grandeur.
- Some people believe that the festival should be subdued this year due to the recent tragic incident involving the young doctor.

SC orders release of YouTuber Savukku Shankar after Tamil Nadu govt. revokes detention

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday ordered the release of YouTuber Savukku Shankar after being informed by the Tamil Nadu government that the State's Advisory Board had revoked his detention under the Goondas Act.

"Acting on the opinion of the Advisory Board, the State has revoked the order of detention today, i.e., September 25, 2024. In view of the aforesaid, the detenu Shankar @ Savukku Shankar shall be released forthwith, if not required in any other case. The writ petition is accordingly disposed of," a Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said.

The order came on petitions filed by Mr. Shankar's mother, A. Kamala, who was represented by advo-



Savukku Shankar

cate Balaji Srinivasan.

On Wednesday evening, Mr. Shankar was released from the Madurai Central Prison.

A YouTuber had separately challenged 15 FIRs registered against him by the State Police for his remarks during an online interview perceived to be derogatory to women police personnel.

Recently, the top court had questioned the State government's move to issue

one preventive detention order under the Tamil Nadu Goondas Act as soon as Mr. Shankar was out from an earlier detention order.

Mr. Srinivasan had submitted that 51% of the preventive detention orders in India come from Tamil Nadu every year. "There is rampant misuse of the Goondas Act," he had said.

Senior advocates Mukul Rohatgi and Siddharth Luthra appeared for the State.

Mr. Shankar's counsel had submitted that his client was harassed by the State through a string of detention orders for exercising his right to free speech. The State was "not prosecuting, but persecuting him", Mr. Srinivasan said.

The FIRs were used to "parade" the YouTuber from one district to another throughout the State, he submitted.

SC orders release of YouTuber Savukku Shankar after Tamil Nadu govt. revokes detention (26 September)

- The Supreme Court ordered the release of YouTuber Savukku Shankar after the Tamil Nadu government informed that his detention under the Goondas Act was revoked.
- The order to release him was issued on September 25, 2024, based on the Advisory Board's opinion.
- Justice J.B. Pardiwala and Justice Manoj Misra stated that Shankar should be released immediately unless he is needed in another case.
- Shankar's mother, A. Kamala, filed the petition for his release, with advocate Balaji Srinivasan representing her.
- Shankar was released from Madurai Central Prison on Wednesday evening.
- He had previously challenged 15 FIRs against him for comments made during an online interview that were deemed derogatory to women police officers.
- The Supreme Court had previously questioned the Tamil Nadu government about issuing a new preventive detention order right after Shankar was released from an earlier detention.
- Balaji Srinivasan pointed out that 51% of preventive detention orders in India come from Tamil Nadu, indicating misuse of the Goondas Act.

- Shankar's lawyers argued that the state was harassing him through repeated detention orders for exercising his right to free speech.
- They claimed that the FIRs were used to move Shankar around different districts, effectively persecuting him rather than prosecuting him.

Stop making 'casual' remarks in court that reveal communal or gender biases: SC

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said a Karnataka High Court judge's reference to a Muslim-dominated part of Bengaluru as 'Pakistan' was "fundamentally wrong under the Constitution", while warning judges against making "casual observations" revealing communal bias or misogyny during judicial

proceedings live-streamed across the country.

A five-judge Special Bench headed by Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud was hearing a *suo motu* case on video clips featuring Justice V. Srishananda's 'Pakistan' remark, and sexist banter addressed to a woman lawyer, during two separate judicial proceedings on June 6 and August 28, respectively.

"You cannot call any part of the territory of India 'Pakistan'... This is fundamentally wrong under the Constitution," Chief Justice Chandrachud said orally.

The top court emphasised that judges must strictly adhere to the values of the Constitution rather than make misogynistic or prejudicial comments unrelated to the case in hand.

"Casual observations may reflect individual bias, particularly if they are directed at a particular community or gender," the Bench underscored.

The court closed the proceedings against Justice Srishananda on noting that he had made a "contrite apology" in open court on September 21, the day after the Supreme Court took *suo motu* cognisance of the video clips.

Stop making 'casual' remarks in court that reveal communal or gender biases: SC (26 September)

- The Supreme Court stated that a Karnataka High Court judge's remark calling a Muslim-majority area in Bengaluru 'Pakistan' was "fundamentally wrong" under the Constitution.
- The statement was made by Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud during a hearing about the judge's comments, which were broadcasted live.
- The court was also addressing sexist remarks made by Justice V. Srishananda towards a woman lawyer during judicial proceedings.
- Chief Justice Chandrachud emphasized that no part of India should be referred to as 'Pakistan' and that judges should adhere to constitutional values.
- The court warned against making comments that reveal communal bias or misogyny, stating that such casual observations reflect individual bias.
- The proceedings against Justice Srishananda were closed after he issued a "contrite apology" in open court on September 21, the day after the Supreme Court became aware of the video clips.

Government mulls over sending Jaishankar for SCO meet in Pakistan

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

As the government considers sending External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar to Pakistan next month to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Heads of Government meeting, former High Commissioners told *The Hindu* that it was important that India participated in the event, separating the failure of bilateral ties from the “value” of the SCO grouping that comprises 10 Eurasian countries, including Russia and China.

Sources said the government was likely to convey who it would depute for the event on October 15-16 in Islamabad in place of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, after Mr. Jaishankar returns from the United States next week.

Neither India nor Pakistan sends its Prime Minister to the Heads of Government event, deputing a Minister or the Vice-President instead.

At least two official sources confirmed to *The Hindu* that the External Affairs Minister was likely to be New Delhi’s choice to attend the summit virtually, or in-person, while one senior official acknowledged, on condition of anonymity,



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in Goa in May 2023. PTI

that a visit by Mr. Jaishankar to Pakistan, which would be the first such visit in nearly a decade, “could not be ruled out”.

On Wednesday, the External Affairs Ministry shared details for accreditation of Indian journalists for the event in Islamabad in one possible signal that the government hopes to send a high-level dignitary to the SCO event.

“India would only be repaying the favour Pakistan had done by sending [then] Foreign Minister [Bilawal] Bhutto to Goa when India hosted the SCO Foreign Ministers meet in Goa in 2023,” India’s last High Commissioner to Pakistan Ajay Bisaria said. “This would be a good opportunity for India to fulfil its plurilateral commitments while leaving the bi-

lateral ball in Pakistan’s court,” said Mr. Bisaria, who was expelled in August 2019 after the government’s moves to amend Article 370 and reorganise Jammu and Kashmir.

He also pointed to Mr. Jaishankar’s recent statement that India would not be “passive”, and would “react” to both “positive or negative” moves from Pakistan.

No bilateral talks

During the SCO meeting in Goa, Mr. Bhutto and Mr. Jaishankar exchanged greetings but did not hold a bilateral meeting, and the visit ended with both holding acrimonious press conferences criticising each other.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, three other former High Commissioners to Pakistan

agreed that India must participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meeting in Islamabad, but Mr. Jaishankar was not bound to hold bilateral talks there with his counterpart, Ishaq Dhar.

“We should not allow India-Pakistan issues to corrode our other relationships. SCO has a certain value for India and we should not let our bilateral difference overshadow that value, as has become the case with SAARC,” said former High Commissioner to Pakistan (2013-2016) T.C.A. Raghavan, who served in Islamabad the last time a Foreign Minister, the late Sushma Swaraj, visited in December 2015, adding however that a “bilateral opening” could never be ruled out when the External Affairs Minister visits another country.

“The SCO is very important for India,” Gautam Bambawale, who preceded Mr. Bisaria as High Commissioner to Pakistan (2016-2017), said. “However, government must make it very clear that the visit is only for the SCO and there will not be any bilateral meeting with Pakistan,” he said, adding that the External Affairs Minister should attend “as is normal” for India.

Government mulls over sending Jaishankar for SCO meet in Pakistan (26 September)

- The Indian government is considering sending External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar to Pakistan for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Heads of Government meeting on October 15-16.
- Former High Commissioners emphasized the importance of India’s participation in the SCO, regardless of the current state of bilateral relations with Pakistan.
- It is expected that the government will confirm who will attend the meeting after Mr. Jaishankar returns from the U.S. next week.
- Neither country typically sends its Prime Minister to the Heads of Government event; instead, they send a Minister or Vice-President.
- There is a possibility that Mr. Jaishankar could attend the summit either virtually or in person, marking the first visit by an Indian minister to Pakistan in nearly a decade.
- The External Affairs Ministry has started the process of accrediting Indian journalists for the event, suggesting a high-level presence may be planned.

- Ajay Bisaria, India's last High Commissioner to Pakistan, noted that India attending the SCO would reciprocate Pakistan's earlier participation in a meeting in Goa.
- Other former diplomats agreed that India should attend the meeting but clarified that there shouldn't be any bilateral talks between Mr. Jaishankar and Pakistan's Finance Minister Ishaq Dhar during the event.
- T.C.A. Raghavan, another former High Commissioner, stressed that India should not let bilateral issues with Pakistan affect its participation in the SCO, which holds significant value for India.
- Gautam Bambawale, a former High Commissioner, added that the government must clarify that the visit is solely for the SCO meeting and not for bilateral discussions.

'Input on infiltration by 900 Kuki militants could not be substantiated on the ground'

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Manipur Security Adviser Kuldiep Singh and Director-General of Police (DGP) Rajiv Singh said in a joint statement on Wednesday that the input regarding the infiltration of 900 trained Kuki militants from Myanmar to carry out attacks on Meitei people on September 28 "could not be substantiated on ground".

"In view of the recent reactions from different communities regarding input of infiltration of 900 trained Kuki militants from Myanmar to carry out attacks on Meiteis on September 28, it is clarified that the input was verified from different quarters, but it could not be substantiated on ground. There is no basis currently to believe in any such input. Ho-



Search operations being conducted by security forces in the vulnerable districts of Manipur. @MANIPUR_POLICE/X

wever, security forces deployed on the ground are placed on a high alert to protect lives and properties of citizens. All communities are assured of their safety. They are advised not to believe in any rumours or unverified information," the joint statement said.

The inputs were first shared by Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's office with the Security Adviser, the DGP, and the Chief Secretary on September 16, a copy of the leaked letter showed.

On Wednesday, N. Geofrey, secretary to Mr. Biren

Manipur Security Adviser, DGP urge people not to believe in unverified information

Singh, sent another note to the Security Adviser and the DGP stating that the public need not worry as the chances of such attack were "remote".

"Based on information gathered on movement of armed groups, this office had shared intelligence inputs vide UO note bearing no. 1/25/2024-CM dated 16.09.2024 to enable Police Department to use its machinery and network to develop the said information so as to determine actionability. It is now ascertained that possibility of any such misadventure by armed groups is remote. The pu-

blic need not worry further in this regard," the note said.

The September 16 internal note had said, "Reports have been received that over 900 Kuki militants, newly trained in use of drone-based bombs, projectiles, missiles and jungle warfare have entered Manipur from Myanmar. They are reportedly grouped in units of 30 members each and currently scatted in the periphery, and expected to launch coordinated attacks on Meitei villages around September 28."

The Kuki-Zo people in Manipur share ethnic ties with the Chin tribe in Myanmar. India and Myanmar share a 1,643 km border along the States of Arunachal Pradesh (520 km), Nagaland (215 km), Manipur (398 km), and Mizoram (510 km).

'Input on infiltration by 900 Kuki militants could not be substantiated on the ground' (26 September)

- Manipur Security Adviser Kuldiep Singh and DGP Rajiv Singh issued a joint statement regarding concerns about the infiltration of 900 trained Kuki militants from Myanmar.
- The statement clarified that the claims about these militants planning attacks on the Meitei community on September 28 could not be verified on the ground.
- Authorities emphasized that there is currently no basis to believe in the reports of infiltration.
- Security forces are on high alert to protect citizens and their properties, and all communities are assured of their safety.
- Citizens were advised not to believe in rumors or unverified information.
- The initial reports about the militant infiltration were shared by Chief Minister N. Biren Singh's office on September 16.
- A subsequent note from the Chief Minister's office indicated that the likelihood of an attack was "remote" based on gathered intelligence.
- The internal note from September 16 mentioned that over 900 Kuki militants trained in various combat techniques had reportedly entered Manipur, divided into units of 30.
- The Kuki-Zo people in Manipur are ethnically linked to the Chin tribe in Myanmar.
- India shares a 1,643 km border with Myanmar, including sections in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram.

People of Srinagar remain reluctant voters as district records 29.81% turnout

Peerzada Ashiq

SRINAGAR

People of Srinagar district continued to remain reluctant voters on Wednesday, as evident from a low voter turnout of 29.81% in spite of the high-pitched, violence-free campaigning by parties in the second phase of the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly election.

Srinagar, Ganderbal and Budgam are the three districts of the Kashmir Valley that went to the polls on Wednesday. Unlike the long queues in the Kangan constituency of Ganderbal, which recorded 72.18% polling, and Khansahib in Budgam, with 72.04% turnout, according to data available till 11.50 p.m., most booths in the old city saw only a trickle of voters.

“It’s a powerless Assembly to vote for. It cannot bring back what we lost on August 5, 2019. Our own parties betrayed and failed us in the past. There is no one to have faith in. Kashmir has witnessed a lot of bloodshed and in return got humiliation and not a dignified solution,” Rafi Khan, a resident of the Safakadal area, said. “I see no reason to vote.”

The district’s poll percentage was 27.9% in the 2014 election. “Srinagar saw an increase of 5% from the voter turnout of the



By all means: Voters cross the Dal Lake to go to a polling booth during the Assembly election in Srinagar on Wednesday. PTI

Lok Sabha election [earlier this year],” J&K Chief Electoral Officer P.K. Pole said.

Of the eight Assembly constituencies in the district, Lal Chowk, Eidgah, Central Shalteng, Hazratbal and Zadibal crossed the 30% turnover mark.

Eidgah constituency

A part of the Safakadal area in the Eidgah constituency has borne the brunt of three decades of militancy and street violence as it remains a hub of separatist supporters. Compared with the 2014 Assembly election, Eidgah saw an increase in turnout from 27.79% to 36.95%.

The Habba Kadal constituency saw a mere 19.81% polling as against 21.01% in the 2014 election.

“New Delhi has only added to the sense of aliena-

tion by adding another chapter of betrayal in 2019. Our land, jobs and resources were put up for sale. I voted in 2014 with the hope of change. It was only followed by the ending of J&K’s special status. Was it justice to the suffering that people of Kashmir faced for three decades? New Delhi reversed the clock to 1931 and took us back to the Dogra Raj,” Hamid Ahangar, a shopkeeper from Zaina Kadal, said.

In the Khanyar constituency, voters were enthused to “vote in a new government that can reverse measures taken after 2019”. However, the overall response remained subdued, as only 26.08% turned up at the booths. The constituency saw 26.12% polling in the 2014 elections.

People of Srinagar remain reluctant voters as district records 29.81% turnout (26 September)

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- The statement clarified that the claims about these militants planning attacks on the Meitei community on September 28 could not be verified on the ground.
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- India shares a 1,643 km border with Myanmar, including sections in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, and Mizoram.

‘India sharing information between Russia, Ukraine’

External Affairs Minister says govt. is speaking to both sides, hoping to usher in peace; in reference to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, he says India is not trying to control political dynamics of its neighbours

Sriram Lakshman

NEW YORK

The Russia-Ukraine war is not going to be resolved on the battlefield, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Tuesday, adding that the government was speaking to both sides to see if it could do anything to hasten the end of the war and initiate serious negotiations between the two countries.

“This is a kind of exploration that we have been doing. I mean, it’s not that we have a peace plan,” Mr. Jaishankar said during a discussion at the Asia Society Policy Institute in New York.

The Minister said the government was sharing conversations it had with one party with the other. “My sense is both sides appreciate it,” he said, adding that there were not many countries and leaders who had the willingness or ability to engage both sides.

His remarks came a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy along the fringes of the United Nations General Assembly session. Mr.



Paving way: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar during an event at the Asia Society Policy Institute in New York. ELSA RUIZ/ASIA SOCIETY

Modi was in Kyiv at the end of August, after which he had had conversations with both Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden.

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval had also met with Mr. Putin on the sidelines of the BRICS NSAs meeting in St. Petersburg earlier this month.

Unconditional aid

Speaking about ties with neighbouring countries, Mr. Jaishankar said India was not engaged in financial assistance and projects with Sri Lanka and Bangla-

desh with a view to controlling their internal political dynamics.

He said the financial assistance of around \$4.5 billion that India has given Sri Lanka was not offered with conditionalities, referring to a bailout given to Sri Lanka at the peak of the island nation’s economic crisis in 2022.

“It was not that we had a political conditionality which accompanied that. I mean, we were doing it as a good neighbour who did not want to see that kind of economic meltdown at our doorstep,” he said, res-

ponding to a question about an apparent lack of benefit in return for unconditional aid provided to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

“So, I think what happens politically in Sri Lanka, that’s for their politics to work with at the end of the day,” the Minister said, adding that it was not India’s intention to suggest that the political dynamics in its neighbouring countries ought to adhere to what was better for India.

The questioner had asked about attacks on minorities, specifically Hindus and Buddhists, in Bangladesh, after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina administration. The Modi administration has previously raised the issue of attacks on Hindu minorities and temples in other countries with the governments in these countries.

The case of Bangladesh was a “little bit different”, as per Mr. Jaishankar, and India had also benefited from joint projects.

“So, I would urge you not to be deterministic about it, he said, adding, “It’s not as though India is seeking to control every political move of every neighbour.”

‘India sharing information between Russia, Ukraine’ (26 September)

External Affairs Minister says govt. is speaking to both sides, hoping to usher in peace; in reference to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, he says India is not trying to control political dynamics of its neighbours

- External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar stated that the Russia-Ukraine war will not be resolved through military means.

- The Indian government is in dialogue with both Russia and Ukraine to help facilitate negotiations for peace.
- Jaishankar emphasized that India does not have a formal peace plan but is exploring ways to contribute to the resolution of the conflict.
- He mentioned that conversations between the two parties are being shared to foster understanding and appreciation from both sides.
- Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently spoke with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the UN General Assembly, following earlier discussions with Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Joe Biden.
- National Security Adviser Ajit Doval also met Putin during a BRICS meeting in St. Petersburg.
- Regarding India's relations with neighboring countries, Jaishankar clarified that India is not providing financial aid with political conditions attached.
- He highlighted that the \$4.5 billion assistance to Sri Lanka during its economic crisis in 2022 was given without any political strings attached.
- Jaishankar stressed that India's assistance aims to support its neighbors rather than to influence their internal politics.
- In response to concerns about attacks on minorities in Bangladesh, he noted that India benefits from joint projects with the country and that India does not aim to control the political dynamics of its neighbors.

Centre estimates record production of foodgrains in 2023-24

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Agriculture Ministry has estimated a record production of foodgrains for this financial year. But the production of pulses, oil seeds, and sugar cane is likely to be lower than in the last fiscal, shows the fourth and final estimates of production of major agricultural crops for 2023-24 released here on Wednesday.

Prepared on the basis of information received from the States, the Centre estimated a record foodgrains production of 3,322.98 lakh tonnes (LT), which is higher by 26.11 LT than the last financial year's 3,296.87 LT. An increase in the production of rice, wheat, and millet resulted in an overall increase in foodgrain production.

Total rice production is estimated at 1,378.25 LT, which is higher by 20.7 LT than the previous year's 1,357.55 LT. Wheat production is estimated at 1,132.92 LT, higher by 27.38 LT than the previous year's 1,105.54 LT. As much as 175.72 LT of millets are estimated to be cultivated during this year as against 173.21 LT during the previous year.

Pulses production is set to decrease to 242.46 LT from 260.58 LT in the last

fiscal. The oilseeds output is likely to drop to 396.69 LT from 413.55 LT in 2022-23. Rapeseed and mustard production is likely to increase marginally. These estimates are based on the information received from the States and Union Territories, the Ministry added.

Moisture stress

The Centre said during 2023-24, there were drought-like conditions in southern States and Maharashtra, and prolonged dry spells during August especially in Rajasthan. "The moisture stress from the drought also affected the rabi season. This mainly affected production of pulses, coarse cereals, soya bean and cotton," the Union Agriculture Ministry said in a release.

Sugarcane production is set to decrease to 4,531.58 LT from 4,905.33 LT and cotton output will be 325.22 lakh bales (1 bale equals 170 kg) from 336.6 lakh bales in 2022-23.

Tur production estimate is 34.17 LT, and for gram, it is 110.39 LT and for groundnut, the estimate is 101.80 LT.

For soya bean, the production could be 130.62 LT, and for Rapeseed, and Mustard, it is 132.59 LMT, a record according to the government.

Centre estimates record production of foodgrains in 2023-24 (26 September)

- The Union Agriculture Ministry estimates a record foodgrain production of 3,322.98 lakh tonnes (LT) for the financial year 2023-24, an increase of 26.11 LT from the previous year.
- This increase is primarily due to higher production of rice, wheat, and millets.
- Total rice production is estimated at 1,378.25 LT, up by 20.7 LT from last year's 1,357.55 LT.
- Wheat production is estimated at 1,132.92 LT, an increase of 27.38 LT from the previous year's 1,105.54 LT.
- Millet production is expected to be 175.72 LT, slightly higher than 173.21 LT in the last fiscal year.
- However, the production of pulses is projected to drop to 242.46 LT from 260.58 LT last year.
- Oilseed production is also expected to decline to 396.69 LT from 413.55 LT in 2022-23, although rapeseed and mustard production may see a slight increase.
- Sugarcane production is set to decrease to 4,531.58 LT from 4,905.33 LT, while cotton output is expected to fall to 325.22 lakh bales from 336.6 lakh bales.
- Drought-like conditions affected southern states and Maharashtra, along with prolonged dry spells in Rajasthan, impacting moisture levels.
- These drought conditions negatively affected the production of pulses, coarse cereals, soybeans, and cotton.
- Tur production is estimated at 34.17 LT, gram at 110.39 LT, groundnut at 101.80 LT, and soybean at 130.62 LT.
- The rapeseed and mustard production is expected to reach a record 132.59 LT according to the government.

Journal 'retracts' controversial paper published by BHU on Covaxin safety

IS Paper III: Intellectual Property Right

CHENNAI

The journal *Drug Safety* has "retracted" a paper published on May 13 by researchers of Banaras Hindu University, on the safety of COVID-19 vaccine Covaxin.

The paper was a prospective observational study conducted from January 2022 to August 2023, where the recipients of the vaccine were interviewed over the telephone about the long-term adverse events of special interest (AESIs) one year after vaccination.

The retraction notice put up on Tuesday reads: "The Editor has retracted this article as he no longer has confidence in the conclusions as stated in the article. Post-publication review concluded that the reported adverse events of special interest (AESIs)



Bharat Biotech has filed a defamation case against the authors and the editor.

were presented in a way that could lead to ambiguous or incorrect interpretations regarding the relationship with the BBV152 vaccine. Given these findings, the Editor and the publisher have decided that this article should be removed on public health grounds."

While criticising the authors for the "poorly designed" study, the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) on May 18 wrote to the editor to re-

tract the paper that "implicitly makes conclusions about the vaccine safety that are not supported by evidence". But the paper was not retracted as demanded by the ICMR. Besides criticising the study for its limitations, Bharat Biotech also filed a defamation case against the authors and the editor of the journal. In the prayer of the defamation notice, Bharat Biotech wanted the journal to take down the "defamatory research study" and a "permanent injunction" against the authors and the editor from "further publishing defamatory and flawed studies" on Covaxin. Bharat Biotech also wanted ₹5 crore for the "loss and injury caused by the defamatory research study".

Contrary to the claim by the journal that the paper has been "retracted" – where the original paper is

still available on the journal website with a retracted watermark appearing on each page of the paper – the original paper has been removed from the website with only the "retraction" notice mentioning the reasons available.

"That the paper has been removed from the website instead of a retraction watermark being added to the original paper suggests that the removal of the paper was due to the defamation case and not due to scientific reasons as the notice mentions," Amar Jesani, editor of the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics*, said. In an open letter to Bharat Biotech and the Director-General of ICMR, over 600 scientists, researchers, ethicists, doctors, patients, and civil society members had said that the defamation suit will lead to a "chilling effect on researchers.

Journal 'retracts' controversial paper published by BHU on Covaxin safety (26 September)

- The journal *Drug Safety* has retracted a paper from Banaras Hindu University that studied the safety of the COVID-19 vaccine, Covaxin.
- The study was conducted from January 2022 to August 2023, where vaccine recipients were interviewed about long-term adverse events one year after vaccination.
- The retraction notice stated that the editor lost confidence in the study's conclusions due to concerns about how the adverse events were reported, which could lead to misinterpretations regarding the vaccine.
- The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) criticized the study on May 18, calling it poorly designed and requesting its retraction, stating that it made unsupported conclusions about vaccine safety.
- Despite the ICMR's request, the paper remained published until the recent retraction.
- Bharat Biotech, the vaccine's manufacturer, filed a defamation case against the authors and the journal's editor, seeking to remove the "defamatory research study" and asking for ₹5 crore in damages.
- The original paper was removed from the journal's website, and now only a retraction notice is available, leading to concerns that the removal was influenced by the defamation case rather than scientific reasons.
- Amar Jesani, editor of the *Indian Journal of Medical Ethics*, noted that the situation suggests the retraction was not due to scientific issues but to external pressures.
- Over 600 scientists and researchers expressed concern in an open letter, stating that the defamation lawsuit could create a "chilling effect" on future research.



World Bank president Ajay Banga views the impact of sea level rise in Funafuti, Tuvalu. REUTERS

Leaders at UN urge world's wealthiest to do more on climate

GS Paper III: Environment

Developing nations on September 23 pleaded at the U.N. General Assembly for the world's richest to do more to help them cope with the hardships they face from climate extremes.

Leaders of small island states most at risk from rising sea levels said it was time for those countries that burn most of the fossil fuels blamed for rising temperatures to stop paying "lip service" to the issue.

"I wonder if our countries are moving further and further away from the unity and the moral fortitude we require to protect our people," said Samoan Natural Resources and Environment Minister Cedric Schuster, who chairs the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).

The island nations of AOSIS have gained a powerful voice in global climate talks. During a news conference on Monday, Schuster called out the world's biggest economies in the Group of 20, which together account for more than 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions.

"We need all countries, but particularly the G20, to lead the way" on emissions cuts and climate finance, Schuster told reporters. "The vulnerable people of our world are drained by lip service."

Delivering a similar message on behalf of the Least Developed Country negotiating bloc, Malawi's climate and natural resources minister, Yusuf Mkungula, said: "Industrialised countries must lead the way."

The pleas underscore the widening disparity between the nations

Scientists say that at least six of the planet's natural systems are damaged, with the ocean's chemistry also threatened by acidification, which occurs as it absorbs carbon dioxide from air

contributing most to global warming and those suffering its worst effects, demonstrating how climate change has become not just an environmental issue but a matter of global justice.

Some country leaders spoke during a special U.N. 'Summit for the Future,' while others addressed reporters and panels at one of the 900 or so climate-themed events being held this week across New York City.

Separately, scientists at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research warned that humanity has now damaged at least six of the planet's natural systems, including the climate equilibrium, with a seventh – the ocean's chemistry – now threatened by acidification, which occurs as the ocean absorbs carbon dioxide from the air.

"Climate events are coming at us faster and more frequently," said Bahamas Prime Minister Phillip Davis, adding that he was pleading with wealthy nations to "stay focused" on the problem.

So far, he said, "the signals being sent [by countries] do not match the commitments that were made."

Earlier on Monday, executives from major companies, including massive energy-user Amazon.com and power producers like Vestas and Iberdrola, urged world leaders to follow through on an agreement made at last year's COP28 summit to triple renewable-energy capacity by 2030.

Leaders at UN urge world's wealthiest to do more on climate (26 September)

- Developing nations at the U.N. General Assembly on September 23 asked wealthy countries to help them address challenges from climate change.
- Leaders from small island nations, vulnerable to rising sea levels, criticized major fossil fuel-emitting countries for not taking meaningful action.
- Cedric Schuster, the Samoan Minister, highlighted the need for unity and stronger efforts to protect affected populations.
- Schuster emphasized that the Group of 20 (G20) countries, responsible for over 80% of global greenhouse gas emissions, must take the lead in reducing emissions and providing climate finance.
- Malawi's climate minister, Yusuf Mkunga, echoed the call for industrialized nations to take the initiative.
- The discussions reflect a growing divide between those causing climate change and those experiencing its severe impacts, highlighting climate change as a global justice issue.
- Leaders participated in a U.N. 'Summit for the Future' and various climate-related events in New York City.
- Scientists warned that humanity has harmed six of the planet's natural systems, with ocean chemistry now also threatened due to increased acidity from carbon dioxide absorption.
- Bahamas Prime Minister Phillip Davis urged wealthy nations to stay focused on climate issues, noting that their actions often do not align with their commitments.
- Business leaders from companies like Amazon and energy producers urged world leaders to fulfill promises made at the previous COP28 summit to significantly increase renewable energy capacity by 2030.

The misplaced move of 'one nation one election'

GS Paper II: Election

Simultaneous elections, to the Lok Sabha, the State Assemblies and the local bodies, was thrown up by the Prime Minister a couple of years ago. Frequent Assembly and local body elections kept him busy on the campaign trail in some parts of the country most of the time. This experience may have been the trigger for the idea to hold elections at one time.

This also led to the formation of a high-level committee on simultaneous elections, which was headed by the former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind. Other members of the committee included the Home Minister, Amit Shah, former Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha Ghulam Nabi Azad, former Chairman, Fifteenth Finance Commission N.K. Singh, former Secretary-General, Lok Sabha Subhash C. Kashyap, senior advocate Harish Salve and former Chief Vigilance Commissioner Sanjay Kothari. Minister of State (Independent Charge) Ministry of Law and Justice Arjun Ram Meghwal, was a special invitee. The committee's report was submitted to the President of India in March this year. Thus the recommendations were available to the public before the 2024 general election. Moreover, the idea of 'simultaneous elections' was a part of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's manifesto (BJP) for this general election. If the ruling party had won a majority in this election it could have claimed that the idea had been endorsed by voters. But in the absence of a majority, it becomes difficult to assume that voters are in approval of it.

Be that as it may, it is nothing less than a miracle that a high-level committee could come up with such a voluminous report (18,626 pages) within a relatively short time on an issue of great importance. With the Union Cabinet having approved the recommendation, the subject of 'one nation one election' has reached almost take-off stage. In the first phase, Lok Sabha and Assembly elections will be held simultaneously, while local body elections will be conducted within 100 days of the general election.

An amendment Bill and its fate

The recommendation on simultaneous elections involves amendments to various Articles of the Constitution. The crucial amendment is on the tenure of Assemblies which will no longer have fixity. Since the tenure of the Assemblies will have to be synchronised with that of the Lok Sabha, it is only natural that State Assemblies, which, under Article 172, have a fixed tenure of five years will lose it.

But before going into further details, let us look at what the fate of the Constitution amendment Bill that will be introduced in the 18th Lok Sabha for this purpose will be. After the Bill is introduced, the next important stage is its consideration, which means a general debate on it. After the debate is concluded, the motion for consideration is put to the vote of the House. At



P.D.T. Achary
former Secretary
General, Lok Sabha

that stage, the special majority, namely, the majority of the total membership of the House and a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting, will be required.

Only if the motion for consideration is passed with the special majority will the House consider the subsequent stages, i.e., clause by clause consideration, and finally pass the Bill. If all 543 members are present in the House to vote then the support of 362 members will be required. It is understood that the ruling National Democratic Alliance has around 292 members at present. Thus, there is a wide gap between this number and the special majority number of 362. Since the Opposition parties are opposed to the 'one nation one election' proposition, perhaps the government will find it extremely difficult to mobilise the special majority. Thus, in such a situation, the fate of the Constitution amendment Bill will be decided at the stage of consideration itself. The simple message from all this is that without the support of the Opposition, no Constitution amendment Bill will be able to be passed in the Parliament of today.

The arguments are thin

The high-level committee has recommended simultaneous elections for two reasons. First, the issue of savings in expenses given the humongous amounts of money spent in each election. If all elections are held only once in five years the savings will be enormous. But this is an argument that needs closer examination. Under Article 324, all elections to Parliament and the State legislatures are conducted by the Election Commission of India (ECI). The money required to hold elections is sanctioned by Parliament as a part of the Budget. For the financial year 2023-24, the total allocation made by Parliament to the ECI is ₹466 crore. Obviously this allocation was made for meeting the expenditure in connection with the 2024 general election. For 2022-23, the total allocation was only ₹320 crore. Thus the total amount allotted to the ECI for the general election – ₹466 crore – is not a very huge amount.

Of course expenditure is incurred also by the State governments to meet logistical requirements in connection with elections. Under Article 324(6), staff are required to be provided to the ECI on demand for the elections. Under Section 160 of the Representation of the People Act, 1951, State governments are empowered to requisition premises and even vehicles for election purposes. All these arrangements require money which the States will have to provide. But even after all these expenses are also considered, the total expenditure incurred by the Union and State governments cannot be categorised as being huge or enormous.

Yes, the money spent by the political parties is mind boggling, but the point is that the money that would be saved by the political parties due to the holding of elections once in five years is not

going to be spent on, for example, road building or the building of bridges or hospitals. No political party has ever done such things. After all, we had simultaneous elections from 1951-52 to 1967. There is no evidence that the political parties have ever built roads for instance during this long period. Therefore, the assumption that the money saved can be used for building infrastructure does not seem to be based on any empirical evidence.

The second reason is that frequent elections will disrupt developmental plans and projects of the government because of the model code of conduct being in force most of the time. Once again there is no empirical evidence to prove this argument. After all, periodic or frequent elections have been held since 1967 till today. But it is not known that elections have stopped the developmental momentum. It is interesting to note in this context that demonetisation of 85% of India's currency was done close to the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election.

A move against federalism

Curtailling the tenures of State Assemblies to synchronise them with the tenure of the Lok Sabha is an act against federalism. Under the Constitution of India, State Assemblies are autonomous law-making bodies within the India federation and are independent of the federal parliament. A fixed tenure of the Assemblies independent of the tenure of the Lok Sabha is a key aspect of the federal setup. Under the *Kesavananda Bharati* decision, Parliament does not have the power to alter the basic structure. Federalism is a part of the basic structure. The proposed amendments which seek to do away with the fixity of tenure of the Assemblies would amount to altering the basic structure. Whether ratification by Assemblies will be necessary or not is not the key issue. If this amendment is carried out, some Assemblies will have a term of three years. It may be two years or so for others.

As a matter of fact, frequent elections have many positive benefits. First, they will enhance the accountability of elected representatives. Frequent elections compel them to go back to the people and reconnect with them frequently. Elections once in five years would mean that representatives would not feel compelled to go to the people. They would slowly move away from them and try to reconnect with them only in the election year. Similarly, if elections are held only once in five years, political parties will slowly become lethargic and, in course of time, will cease to be the effective vehicles of peoples' aspirations. From the angle of governments, frequent elections will show them which way the wind blows and a government in office can do course correction.

In conclusion, simultaneous elections will alter the federal balance of the Constitution and it is not a priority issue for ordinary Indians. Therefore, the game is not worth the candle.

On the contrary, the holding of frequent elections in India has many positive benefits

The misplaced move of 'one nation one election' (26 September)

- The idea of simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha, State Assemblies, and local bodies was proposed by the Prime Minister to reduce the frequency of elections and campaign efforts.
- A high-level committee was formed to explore this idea, chaired by former President Ram Nath Kovind, and included prominent members like Home Minister Amit Shah and others.
- The committee submitted a lengthy report (18,626 pages) to the President in March, and its recommendations were made public before the 2024 general election.
- The concept of 'simultaneous elections' was part of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's manifesto for the election.
- If the BJP had secured a majority in the election, they could have claimed voter endorsement for the idea, but without a majority, it's unclear if voters support it.
- The Union Cabinet has approved the recommendations, moving the concept of 'one nation one election' closer to implementation.
- In the first phase, Lok Sabha and Assembly elections would occur simultaneously, followed by local body elections within 100 days of the general elections.
- Implementing simultaneous elections requires amending various Articles of the Constitution, particularly changing the fixed tenure of State Assemblies.
- The amendment Bill will be introduced in the 18th Lok Sabha, and its consideration will require a general debate and a vote by the House.
- A special majority is needed for the Bill to pass, which is a majority of the total House membership and at least two-thirds of those present and voting.

- The ruling National Democratic Alliance currently has about 292 members, while 362 votes are needed for the special majority.
- The Opposition parties oppose the 'one nation one election' proposal, making it challenging for the government to secure the necessary support for the amendment Bill.
- The outcome of the Constitution amendment Bill will likely be decided during the consideration stage, indicating that without Opposition support, it may not pass.

The arguments are thin

- The high-level committee recommends simultaneous elections for two main reasons: to save money and to avoid disruptions in development due to frequent elections.
- Saving money is important, as holding all elections every five years could reduce expenses. However, this claim needs closer examination.
- The Election Commission of India (ECI) conducts elections under Article 324, with Parliament allocating funds for elections as part of the budget. For 2023-24, ₹466 crore was allocated to the ECI, which is not considered a large amount compared to other expenditures.
- State governments also incur expenses for logistical support during elections, but overall, the total expenditure is not huge.
- While political parties spend significant amounts during elections, there is no evidence that the savings from fewer elections would be used for public infrastructure projects like roads or hospitals.
- There were simultaneous elections from 1951-52 to 1967, but there is no evidence that this led to more infrastructure development.
- The second reason for simultaneous elections is to minimize disruptions to developmental projects caused by the model code of conduct during elections.
- However, there is no empirical evidence showing that frequent elections have hindered development since elections have been held periodically since 1967.
- The proposal to synchronize State Assembly tenures with Lok Sabha tenures is seen as a move against federalism, as it undermines the autonomy of State Assemblies.
- The Constitution grants State Assemblies a fixed tenure independent of the Lok Sabha, which is a key aspect of India's federal structure.
- The Kesavananda Bharati decision states that Parliament cannot alter the basic structure of the Constitution, which includes federalism.
- If State Assembly tenures are changed, some may have shorter terms, which could disrupt their functioning.
- Frequent elections have benefits, including increased accountability of elected representatives, as they must regularly reconnect with their constituents.
- Holding elections only once every five years may lead representatives to become distant from the people and less responsive to their needs.
- Frequent elections encourage political parties to remain active and engaged, while infrequent elections can lead to lethargy and disconnect from public aspirations.
- Additionally, frequent elections allow governments to gauge public sentiment and make necessary adjustments or course corrections.

China's warning shots with minerals that run the world

GS Paper III: Internal Security

China announced its decision to restrict the export of antimony, a critical mineral used in strategic sectors such as defence, for military equipment such as missiles, infrared sensors, flares, ammunition, and even nuclear weapons. China's Commerce Ministry justified this move on the basis of "national security", adding that the measure would take effect from September 15. The declaration, however, was part of a series of countermoves that began in August 2023.

Moves and countermoves

When it comes to critical minerals, China is not only a stakeholder but also a leader. It dominates every supply chain segment – upstream, midstream, and downstream, covering mining, extraction, refining and processing. It enjoys a near-monopoly status, controlling 60% of rare earth production, 60% of critical minerals production and 80% of the processing worldwide. Therefore, any decision China makes has profound national security implications globally. The European Union and countries such as India, Japan and the United States are strategically vulnerable due to their dependence on critical minerals.

China's intimidating behaviour first gained international attention in the aftermath of the incident in 2010 when a Chinese trawler collided with Japanese Coast Guard boats, after which it halted the exports of rare earth elements to Japan. The event also led to serious global discussions about the world's dependence on China for strategic minerals. The recent antimony episode has only reaffirmed the western belief that China is willing to use critical minerals to coerce. All of this became evident in mid-2023 when China announced a set of restrictions on the exports of critical minerals with U.S. export control measures. In 2023, following the decision by the Netherlands to restrict the supply of semiconductor equipment, under pressure from



Abhishek Sharma

a Research Assistant with the Observer Research Foundation's Strategic Studies Programme

Restricting access to strategic resources is a classic statecraft strategy that China seems to be perfecting

the U.S., China announced curbs on the export of gallium and germanium, two critical minerals used in solar cells and computer chips. Similarly, again in 2023, after the U.S. announced export control on "advanced computing, semiconductors, and semiconductors manufacturing equipment", China reciprocated by curbing the export of "high-purity, high-hardness and high-intensity synthetic graphite material and natural flake graphite and its products", widely used in electric vehicle (EV) batteries, fuel cells, and nuclear reactors. These steps were primarily aimed at responding to U.S. actions and sending a strong signal that if pushed to the wall, China would not hesitate to weaponise the critical mineral supply chain. Apart from these two steps, China has reminded the U.S. of its monopoly and monopsony as a mineral power and buyer, exhibiting the importance of its critical minerals in developing the U.S.'s high technology and green energy sectors. China has also restricted the export of rare earth processing technologies in making rare earth magnets used in EVs, in addition to technologies used to extract and separate critical minerals, hamstringing the U.S.-led attempt to build an alternative supply chain.

A hardening of foreign policy posture

Restricting access to strategic resources is a classic statecraft strategy, hitting the enemy's weak points, an example being the U.S. oil embargo against Japan in 1940. Therefore, this is expected from an aspiring great power such as China, which seeks to leverage its status as a mineral power. The difference in China's case is that this initially started as an act to intimidate countries. However, with recent countermoves, critical minerals export controls have now become a part of China's foreign policy objectives. It has moved from the politicisation to the weaponisation stage. For two reasons, China has grown more comfortable using its mineral

resources as a political tool. First, Beijing is reminding the West of its strategic dependency on China by demonstrating its status as a mineral power and exerting control over the supply chain. Second, China is responding in like and believes that it is acceptable to take advantage of the situation to sabotage the West's critical mineral supply chain, which will hinder the development of its high-tech sectors and undermine their efforts to decouple and de-risk. Those critical minerals utilised in dual-use applications are major targets in particular as they are needed in the building of the Virginia class submarine and the F-35 fighter aircraft, which require several hundred pounds of rare earth elements. This shows that the aggressive, reciprocal and coercive approach has taken over the cooperative and collaborative approach, one of China's two schools of thought. It signals that Chinese curbs via export control will only grow as ties with the West deteriorate. According to Chinese Natural Resource Minister Wang Guanghua, "China will push forward exploration, increase critical minerals capacity, and enhance mineral resources reserves over the next five years", thus displaying China's ambitions to leave no stone unturned.

India's vulnerability

Like its Quad partners, Australia, Japan and the U.S., India remains vulnerable due to its strategic dependence on China. New Delhi is heavily dependent on the imports of critical minerals such as lithium, nickel, cobalt and copper, which resulted in an import cost of around ₹34,000 crore in FY23. It is estimated that India's hunger for minerals will only grow, and so will the import cost, further increasing India's vulnerability. Hence, this episode must act as a wake-up call for India and the policymakers who have been slow in taking precautionary measures such as having partnerships with like-minded countries and investing in developing alternative supply chains.

China's warning shots with minerals that run the world (26 September)

- On August 15, China announced it would restrict the export of antimony, a critical mineral used in defense-related military equipment, citing "national security" reasons.
- This export restriction took effect on September 15 and is part of a series of countermeasures that started in August 2023.
- China is a leader in critical minerals, controlling significant portions of the global supply chain: 60% of rare earth production, 60% of critical minerals production, and 80% of processing.
- China's decisions on critical minerals have major national security implications for countries like the European Union, India, Japan, and the United States, which depend on these minerals.
- China's use of critical minerals for geopolitical leverage became evident after a 2010 incident where it halted rare earth exports to Japan following a collision involving a Chinese trawler.
- The recent restrictions on antimony exports reinforced Western concerns that China could use critical minerals as a tool for coercion.
- In mid-2023, China imposed restrictions on critical minerals in response to U.S. export controls, indicating a retaliatory stance.
- After the Netherlands limited semiconductor equipment exports under U.S. pressure, China restricted gallium and germanium exports, essential for solar cells and computer chips.
- China also responded to U.S. export controls on advanced computing and semiconductors by curbing the export of synthetic and natural graphite, vital for electric vehicle batteries and nuclear reactors.
- These actions show that China is willing to leverage its control over critical minerals in response to perceived threats.
- China reminded the U.S. of its dominance as a mineral supplier and buyer, highlighting the role of its critical minerals in U.S. high technology and green energy sectors.
- Additionally, China restricted exports of rare earth processing technologies, which are crucial for producing magnets for electric vehicles and extracting critical minerals, hindering U.S. efforts to create alternative supply chains.

A hardening of foreign policy posture

- Restricting access to strategic resources is a traditional statecraft strategy used to target an enemy's weaknesses, similar to the U.S. oil embargo against Japan in 1940.
- China, as an aspiring great power, is expected to use its status as a mineral power strategically.

- Initially, China's restrictions on critical minerals aimed to intimidate other countries, but they have evolved into a key part of its foreign policy.
- China has transitioned from using minerals for political intimidation to weaponizing them as part of its strategy.
- **Two main reasons for this shift are:**
 - China wants to remind Western countries of their dependence on it for mineral resources, showcasing its control over the supply chain.
 - China believes it is justified in undermining the West's critical mineral supply chain, which could hinder their high-tech sector development.
- Critical minerals are especially important for military applications, like in the Virginia-class submarines and F-35 fighter jets, which require rare earth elements.
- China's approach has shifted from cooperation to a more aggressive, coercive stance, signaling that export controls will likely increase as relations with the West worsen.
- China's Natural Resource Minister, Wang Guanghua, stated that China plans to enhance its critical mineral exploration and reserves over the next five years, showing its determination to strengthen its position.
- India, along with its Quad partners (Australia, Japan, and the U.S.), is vulnerable due to its heavy reliance on Chinese imports of critical minerals like lithium, nickel, cobalt, and copper.
- In FY23, India spent around ₹34,000 crore on these imports, and its demand for minerals is expected to rise, increasing its vulnerability.
- This situation serves as a wake-up call for India, highlighting the need for policymakers to take preventive measures, such as forming partnerships with like-minded countries and developing alternative supply chains.

Taking stock of global nuclear disarmament

GS Paper II: IR

In the United Nations calendar, September 26 is the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons. This year's General Assembly agenda includes a session on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), or the Ban Treaty, as distinguished from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, NPT. It will be a chance to take stock at a time when the UN is bitterly divided – over the war in Ukraine; over the Israel-Palestine conflict; and in responding to accelerating climate change and other related inequalities. Nuclear possession – threats or their use – threads through all these divisions. How the countries, including India, that have stayed out of the TPNW respond to the discussions will therefore matter greatly. If they allow the treaty's supporters to continue their efforts in expanding the Ban Treaty's footprint, the goal of the treaty – total nuclear disarmament – will be boosted. But if the treaty is undermined, nuclear weapons will become more entrenched, and the shadow of nuclear use will lengthen.

What the Ban Treaty says

The TPNW, which came into force in 2021, has once again divided the nuclear haves and their allies, and the nuclear abstainers. It is extensive in its prohibitions: signatories are barred from developing, testing, producing, stockpiling, transferring, using, deploying, keeping, or threatening to use any nuclear explosive devices. Thus, it goes beyond the NPT, which bans proliferation, but only promises to consider disarmament, and is silent on nuclear use, including deterrence.

The TPNW arose from a collection of UN agencies and NGOs coming together under the Humanitarian Initiative to highlight the lasting and pernicious consequences of nuclear weapons, covering development, deployment, and use on people, their health, and



Priyanjali Malik

Author of India's Nuclear Debate: Exceptionalism and the Bomb

The Ban Treaty could start an honest discussion about the utility and effectiveness of nuclear weapons

the environment. Discussions moved to the UN, with the General Assembly mandated to convene a conference in 2017 to negotiate 'a legally binding instrument to prohibit nuclear weapons, leading towards their total elimination'. Thus the only treaty that legally bans all nuclear weapons and their use was adopted, but without the participation of nuclear weapons states and their allies, despite these states reiterating their commitment to nuclear disarmament. All of them registered their opposition to the treaty during its negotiation and when it came into force, thereby establishing themselves as 'persistent objectors' who could not be bound by the treaty's provisions and who do not consider it as contributing to customary international law.

Yet, resistance to the treaty amongst the allies of the nuclear haves may not be unyielding. Recent nuclear developments, such as Russia's nuclear sabre-rattling, China's rising weapons count, Iran's continuing uranium enrichment, and North Korea's tests and threats have renewed discussions on nuclear risks. A group of former leaders and officials of NATO states published an open letter urging their countries to join the treaty and thereby "place nuclear weapons on the same legal footing as chemical and biological weapons". Among the former Prime Ministers and other officials are two former NATO Secretaries-General and a former UN Secretary General. These are significant voices.

As of July 2024, the TPNW had 70 states parties. Another 27 had signed but not yet ratified it. This support from 97 states represents almost 50% of states and parties bound to the legal framework on weapons of mass destruction. Their efforts could precipitate a process of questioning several beliefs about nuclear deterrence.

Assumptions about deterrence have already been tested since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.

Despite China and Russia's 'friendship without limits', Chinese President Xi Jinping made public his opposition to Russian President Vladimir Putin's nuclear sabre-rattling. The U.S. signalled that nuclear adventurism would be met with a commensurate response; it did not specify that such a response would necessarily be nuclear. Washington also did not change its nuclear preparation level as a result. In other words, nuclear threats were countered without an overtly nuclear response, thereby contradicting one of the justifications for continued nuclear possession.

Treading a fine line

Sitting out a treaty is not the same as undermining it. India has not signed the NPT. New Delhi perceives the NPT to be discriminatory, believes that it does not promote disarmament, and is contrary to India's interests. However, India has arguably benefited from the NPT's curbing of the spread of nuclear weapons. It has never actively undermined the treaty – rhetoric and abstention notwithstanding.

Other nuclear possessors could similarly tread a fine line of staying away from the TPNW while not challenging it. The TPNW has weaknesses, chiefly, the lack of a robust enforcement mechanism, but its normative potential in delegitimising nuclear possession and deterrence should not be underestimated. If the treaty eventually succeeds in relegating nuclear weapons to the same pariah status as chemical and biological weapons, that will make us all much safer. This will certainly not happen during the General Assembly session or any time soon. The norm against nuclear use has solidified over decades; nuclear testing is gradually being delegitimised by the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, even if it has not come into force. The Ban Treaty could similarly start an honest discussion about the utility and effectiveness of nuclear weapons.

Taking stock of global nuclear disarmament (26 September)

- September 26 is recognized as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons by the United Nations.
- This year, the UN General Assembly will discuss the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), also known as the Ban Treaty.
- The TPNW aims for total nuclear disarmament and is distinct from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which focuses on preventing the spread of nuclear weapons but does not prohibit their use.
- The current global context is marked by divisions over various issues, including the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Palestine conflict, making nuclear issues even more significant.
- Countries that have not signed the TPNW, like India, will play a crucial role in the discussions, influencing the future of nuclear disarmament.

- If these countries support the TPNW, it could enhance the treaty's goal of eliminating nuclear weapons; if they undermine it, nuclear weapons may become more entrenched.
- The TPNW, effective since 2021, prohibits signatories from developing, testing, producing, or using nuclear weapons, unlike the NPT, which only promises to consider disarmament.
- The TPNW emerged from a collaboration of UN agencies and NGOs aiming to highlight the harmful effects of nuclear weapons on health and the environment.
- Despite its comprehensive prohibitions, the TPNW lacks participation from nuclear-armed states and their allies, who oppose the treaty and see themselves as 'persistent objectors.'
- Recent global tensions, including Russia's nuclear threats and North Korea's tests, have reignited concerns about nuclear risks.
- Notably, some former NATO leaders have publicly called for their countries to join the TPNW, comparing nuclear weapons to chemical and biological weapons in terms of legal status.
- As of July 2024, 70 countries have officially joined the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), and another 27 have signed it but not yet ratified it.
- This support from 97 states accounts for nearly 50% of all countries involved in the legal framework concerning weapons of mass destruction.
- These countries' backing could challenge existing beliefs about nuclear deterrence.
- The assumptions surrounding nuclear deterrence have already been tested since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.
- Despite the close relationship between China and Russia, Chinese President Xi Jinping opposed Putin's nuclear threats.
- The U.S. indicated it would respond to nuclear threats but did not commit to a nuclear response, suggesting a shift in how nuclear threats are countered.
- India has not signed the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), viewing it as discriminatory and against its interests, yet it has benefited from the NPT's limits on nuclear weapons spread.
- India has not actively undermined the NPT, maintaining a neutral stance.
- Other nuclear-armed countries can similarly avoid joining the TPNW without directly challenging it.
- The TPNW has some weaknesses, particularly the lack of strong enforcement, but it has the potential to undermine the legitimacy of nuclear weapons.
- If the TPNW succeeds in making nuclear weapons socially unacceptable, it would enhance global safety.
- However, significant changes regarding nuclear weapons are unlikely to happen quickly.
- The norm against nuclear weapon use has strengthened over the years, and nuclear testing is increasingly seen as illegitimate due to treaties like the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.
- The TPNW could prompt meaningful discussions about the purpose and effectiveness of nuclear weapons in the future.

How global warming affects forecasting

Existing models cannot reproduce monsoon trends in the past half century and are considered unreliable for the future. Meteorologists will need to figure out if the predictability of natural modes such as hurricanes, El Niño, La Niña, and the Indian Ocean Dipole will decrease as the warming is relentless, if not accelerating

GS Paper III: Env

Raghu Murtugudde

With the record warming of 2023-2024, we are getting a clearer picture of what global warming does. The medley of extremes strewn across the planet has covered the gamut from deadly heatwaves to devastating cyclones and floods, from droughts to wildfires.

According to some estimates, the world has already crossed the 1.5° C warming threshold (that is, the earth's average surface temperature has increased by more than 1.5° C over the pre-industrial average). The caveat is that global temperatures are an estimate produced from a combination of data and climate models. As the 1.5° C limit is part of a demand by the Alliance of Small Island Developing States, scientists have built models to predict what environmental disturbances crossing this threshold could invite. However, and more importantly, it is not yet clear how long the warming has to remain above the threshold for the projected impacts to materialise.

The spectacular show that nature has put up during 2023-2024 is also a stark reminder that we are far from able to predict the weather and the climate with the requisite skills and spatial-temporal scales to manage disasters effectively. The loss of lives, property, and infrastructure continue to traumatise humanity, especially the poor, who remain very vulnerable to extreme events.

2024 versus our predictions

Meteorologists predicted the 2023 El Niño as early as in the spring of that year, which is remarkable. But the level of warming during 2023-2024 has caught them, and the public, by surprise because it was much higher than expected from the addition of the so-called mini-global warming by the El Niño to the ongoing background warming. We speculate that water vapour thrown up by the underwater volcano Hunga Tonga-Hunga Ha'apai during 2022 and CO2 emitted by the wildfires exacerbated the warming.

The 2023 monsoon was deficit but it did not qualify as an El Niño drought, the reasons for which researchers are yet to diagnose. Predictions from nearly all major weather centres earlier promised a strong La Niña in late 2024. Now this seems less likely. Perhaps nature has another googly in waiting. Similarly, weather forecasts have called for the most intense hurricane season in decades but this has yet to step beyond the normal.

The monsoon season has evolved erratically and has once again left many parts of India dry while producing devastating floods and landslides in many others. Now 2024 is set to emerge as a monsoon-surplus year; yet it can hardly be called a typical La Niña monsoon.

The cyclone season in the North Indian Ocean has also been weaker than what one would expect from a La Niña year. While some weather centres were very gung-ho about an Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) emerging in the Indian Ocean, it has played truant so far.

To be clear: this is not a litany of grievances against predictions. It is an expression of caution: that we will be remiss if we don't learn all the lessons from this extraordinary period of warming vis-à-vis their implications for the future of predictions and for the climate projections we keep producing.

Predictions may pose challenges

A quote often attributed to physicist Niels Bohr is apt here: prediction is difficult,



Blazing heat: Residents collect drinking water from a tanker amid a water crisis in Delhi, on a hot summer day in New Delhi on June 6. SHIV KUMAR PUSHKAR

THE GIST

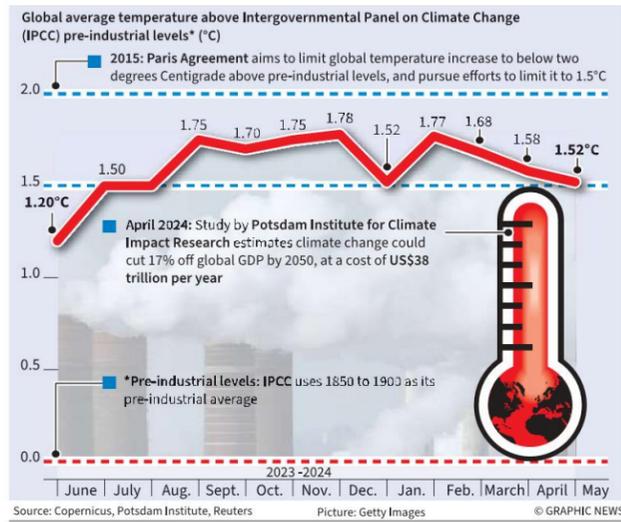
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According to some estimates, the world has already crossed the 1.5° C warming threshold (that is, the earth's average surface temperature has increased by more than 1.5° C over the pre-industrial average).

For the coming decade or two, projection uncertainties depend on the model uncertainties themselves plus natural variabilities in a warming world.

Global warming

The global average temperature for the last year was the highest ever documented, at 1.63°C above pre-industrial levels, according to the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service



especially if it's about the future. Weather and climate predictions frequently remind us of this. We do learn our lessons and continue to improve the models and the observational networks we need to produce better predictions.

But what if predictions continue to become more difficult with global warming? Put another way, are all the misfires we have had this year just a coincidence or are they a portent of what is to come?

Many studies have reported the impacts of warming on hurricanes, monsoons, El Niños, La Niñas, the IOD, etc. But the bigger question is: if the world is already warmer than 1.5° C, are there any conclusions we can draw about how all these natural variabilities have responded thus far?

Unfortunately, the period of warming we have experienced of late hasn't been long enough for us to confidently say what changes we can already detect in the dominant climate modes. The models are

amazing in their ability to reproduce all natural modes given just the energy coming from the Sun at the top of the atmosphere. But they are not perfect: model answers often disagree; even the same model can produce different answers depending on its configuration.

For example, existing models cannot reproduce monsoon trends in the past half century and are considered unreliable for the future – they can only make skillful forecasts for the present. We have also not sorted out yet whether monsoon patterns are variable from decade to decade – patterns that we may currently be calling trends. We also don't know whether climate change can extend the timescale of natural decadal variability and make it a real trend. We need to address these critical questions to advance our understanding of processes and to make better predictions.

Predicting the future of predictions
There is plenty of hope for the future of

predictions, but as the adage goes, hope is not a strategy. We have our work cut out for us. We obviously need to continue to improve our models and build on the fact that models are already capable of amazing feats, with some deficiencies. We need to figure out if the predictability of natural modes such as hurricanes, El Niño, La Niña, IOD, etc. will decrease as the warming is relentless, if not accelerating. Well-trained and enthusiastic scientists toil to improve models and data networks and bring the latest technologies, including artificial intelligence, machine learning, and sensor-fit drones, to bear on this pressing challenge.

We have plenty of reasons for optimism vis-à-vis reliable and actionable early warnings at the hyperlocal scale.

Lessons from 2023

We currently make climate projections using the same or similar models that project future climate based on how the concentrations of specific emissions increase, how populations grow, and what mitigation policies we implement, among other factors. For the coming decade or two, projection uncertainties depend on the model uncertainties themselves plus natural variabilities in a warming world.

The uncertainties in projections beyond a couple of decades are related entirely to the imagined scenarios that drive model simulations.

The inability to capture the response of natural modes to warming will continue to haunt all projections. It will be necessary to translate improved weather and climate predictions to improve the models.

The best strategy to ensure projections are reliable may be to restrict ourselves to just a decade or two into the future. The ongoing geopolitical perturbations and their cascades into markets, economies, and societies underscore the difficulty of imagining the future beyond a decade or so as well.

Overall, it is critical that we assess the costs and benefits of the considerable human, financial, and computational resources for climate projections out to 2100.

Raghu Murtugudde is professor, IIT Bombay, and emeritus professor, University of Maryland.

How global warming affects forecasting (26 September)

Existing models cannot reproduce monsoon trends in the past half century and are considered unreliable for the future. Meteorologists will need to figure out if the predictability of natural modes such as hurricanes, El Niño, La Niña, and the Indian Ocean Dipole will decrease as the warming is relentless, if not accelerating

- The record warming of 2023-2024 has highlighted the effects of global warming, leading to extreme weather events like heatwaves, cyclones, floods, droughts, and wildfires.
- Estimates suggest the world may have already surpassed the 1.5°C warming threshold compared to pre-industrial levels.
- The 1.5°C limit is significant for small island nations, and scientists have created models to predict the consequences of exceeding this threshold.
- However, it is unclear how long temperatures need to stay above this limit for the expected impacts to occur.

- The extreme weather in 2023-2024 emphasizes our inability to accurately predict climate and manage disaster responses effectively.
- Vulnerable populations, particularly the poor, are disproportionately affected by the loss of lives and property due to these extreme events.
- Meteorologists predicted the 2023 El Niño early in the spring, but the actual warming exceeded expectations due to additional factors like the underwater volcano eruption and emissions from wildfires.
- The 2023 monsoon was below average, but it did not lead to an El Niño drought, and researchers are still trying to understand why.
- Predictions of a strong La Niña in late 2024 are now considered less likely, indicating uncertainty in weather patterns.
- Forecasts anticipated an intense hurricane season, but so far, it has not been unusually severe.
- The monsoon season in India has been erratic, with some regions experiencing drought while others face severe flooding and landslides.
- 2024 is expected to be a monsoon-surplus year, yet it does not align with typical La Niña patterns.
- The cyclone season in the North Indian Ocean has been unexpectedly weak for a La Niña year.
- Predictions about the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) have not materialized as anticipated.
- The focus is on learning from the unusual warming period to improve future climate predictions.
- Niels Bohr's quote highlights the difficulty of making predictions, especially about the future, which is often reflected in weather and climate forecasts.
- There's a concern that global warming may make predictions even more challenging.
- Many studies have examined the impacts of warming on various weather phenomena, but it's unclear how they will respond moving forward.
- The recent warming period hasn't lasted long enough for scientists to draw definitive conclusions about changes in major climate patterns.
- Climate models can reproduce natural weather patterns based on solar energy but are not perfect; they often produce different results depending on their configuration.
- Current models struggle to accurately reflect monsoon trends over the past 50 years and are unreliable for long-term predictions.
- It remains uncertain whether monsoon patterns vary from decade to decade or if they represent real trends due to climate change.
- Addressing these questions is essential for improving our understanding of climate processes and enhancing predictive capabilities.

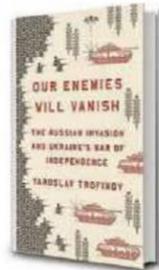
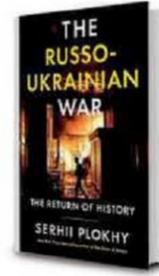
Predicting the future of predictions

- There's optimism for the future of climate predictions, but hope alone isn't enough; significant work is needed.
- Improvements in climate models are essential, even though current models can achieve impressive results despite some limitations.
- It's important to determine if the predictability of natural phenomena (like hurricanes and El Niño) will decrease due to continuous warming.
- Scientists are working hard to enhance models and data collection, utilizing advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and drones.
- There are reasons to be hopeful for accurate early warnings at a local level.
- Climate projections are based on models that consider emissions, population growth, and mitigation policies.
- In the next decade or two, uncertainties in projections will stem from model uncertainties and natural variabilities.
- Long-term projections beyond a couple of decades rely on hypothetical scenarios that guide model simulations.
- The inability to fully understand how natural systems respond to warming will affect all climate projections.
- A practical approach might be to focus on reliable projections only for the next decade or two.
- Current geopolitical issues complicate predicting the future beyond a decade.
- It's crucial to evaluate the costs and benefits of the significant resources dedicated to climate projections extending to the year 2100.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



In ruins: An elderly woman pushes a cart past a destroyed building in the city of Pokrovsk, Donetsk region, on September 24. AFP



Roots of a conflict: an ‘endless war’ on the edge of Europe’s frontier

Located at the western edge of the **Eurasian steppe**, Ukraine has been a gateway to Europe for many centuries, being a meeting place, and a battleground of empires from **Roman to Ottoman, Habsburg to Romanov**. Ukraine has a pivotal role in global and Russia’s history, say writers

GS Paper II
Shoumojit Banerjee

Vladimir Putin’s “special military operation” in Ukraine which began in February 2022 – the largest and bloodiest invasion since the end of the Second World War in 1945 – has now taken on the nature of the fictional endless war described in George Orwell’s 1984.

The Russo-Ukrainian conflict has destroyed the European security structure built since the Helsinki Accords of 1975. While the Ukrainian resistance has surprised the West, fundamental questions persist: What made this war of aggression possible and what made the Ukrainians resist as they did and are continuing to do? What differentiates Ukrainians from Russians? What will be the consequences of the war for Ukraine, Russia, Europe, and the world?

Anyone wishing to understand the roots behind the ongoing conflict must start with acclaimed Harvard-based historian Serhii Plokhy’s seminal *The Gates of Europe* (2015) and his superb *The Russo-Ukrainian War* (2023) – both masterpieces of concision and clarity.

Plokhy presents the *longue durée* history of Ukraine from the times of Herodotus to the fall of the USSR and the current Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Located at the western edge of the Eurasian steppe, Ukraine has been a gateway to Europe for many centuries, being a meeting place (and a battleground) of empires from Roman to Ottoman, Habsburg to Romanov.

Contentious legacy

He emphasises Ukraine’s pivotal role in global history.

For example, the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 was precipitated by the Ukrainian referendum on

independence, where over 90% of Ukrainians, including a majority in Russian-speaking Crimea, voted to leave the USSR. The ongoing conflict, however, is not just a contemporary geopolitical struggle but deeply rooted in history, particularly the contentious legacy of ‘Kyivan Rus’, a medieval polity founded by the Grand Prince Volodymyr (958-1015).

As Plokhy observes, most Russians believe that their state and nation originated in Kyiv, the centre of the medieval Kyivan Rus’ polity, that encompassed a good part of what is now Ukraine, Belarus, and European Russia. Kyivan Rus’ existed between the 10th and mid-13th centuries before disintegrating into semi-independent polities under the blows of the Mongol onslaught.

The Christianisation of Kyivan Rus’ by Volodymyr (cited by Putin as the founding moment of the Russian world) tied the region culturally to Byzantium and Eastern Christianity, laying the foundation for centuries of Russian claims to Ukrainian territory.

One of Putin’s obsessions in a 2021 essay was about foreign meddling in Russian history. But Volodymyr (to whom Putin dedicated a 17-metre statue outside the Kremlin) was himself a foreigner, a Scandinavian Viking who imposed Christianity on his Slavic subjects in order to bring them into the European world of Christendom. The Kyivan Rus’ myth originated in the mid-15th century, with Ivan III of Moscow asserting his dynasty’s Kyivan roots to legitimise his conquest of Novgorod.

Fuelled by a myth

This myth bolstered Moscow’s authority and justified further conquests of Ukrainian and Belarusian lands. Ivan’s victory marked the rise of an

independent, authoritarian Russian state which he passed on to his grandson, Ivan IV (‘The Terrible’).

While Ivan IV expanded Muscovy’s rule by wiping of the post-Mongol Volga khanates, he was defeated in the Livonian War (1558-83) by a coalition of states that included Poland-Lithuania, Sweden, and Denmark. The 17th century saw Moscow captured by the Poles and their allies, the Ukrainian Cossacks. During this time, Muscovy separated itself from Kyiv and the Ukrainian lands both politically and in religious terms.

The Muscovites no longer regarding Kyivans as fellow Orthodox believers, claiming that they had been ‘corrupted’ by accepting the rule of Catholic kings and becoming open to the West. While Muscovy paused in its obsession with Kyiv and its history, the Ukrainians sought the aid of the Russian Tsar in 1648 when under their Hetman (leader) Bohdan Khmelnytsky, the Ukrainian Cossacks rebelled against Polish rule.

Transactional relationship

In *Overreach* (2022), journalist Owen Matthews observes that Khmelnytsky’s oath to the Tsar would set the pattern for centuries of Ukrainian-Russian relations right up to the 21st century – transactional, and dictated by expediency under pressure from outside powers.

Memories of the Kyivan heritage were again revived by Muscovy for protection of their Orthodox brethren (Ukrainian Cossacks) against the Polish Catholics who were duly defeated.

But the incorporation of the Ukrainian Cossack state into Moscow again sparked Cossack resistance in 1708, when their Hetman Ivan Mazepa allied with Sweden’s Charles XII against Tsar Peter ‘The Great’ only to be defeated at Poltava in 1709.

Catherine II destroyed the Hetmanate

and integrated the Cossacks polity into the Russian Empire, but 19th-century Ukrainian nationalists revived their memory, observes Plokhy in *The Russo-Ukrainian War*.

The fall of the Romanov dynasty in March 1917 led to the creation of autonomous polities on the territory of the Russian Empire. The Bolshevik coup in October that year saw the destruction of Tsarist imperial institutions. In 1922, Lenin and Stalin clashed over the new Soviet state’s structure with Lenin proposing a Union of Socialist Soviet Republics with equal terms for all republics, including Russia. However, after his death, Stalin’s brutal policies led to the 1932-33 ‘Holodomor’ in Ukraine, resulting in the deaths of millions of peasants in the Ukraine.

At the time of the 1991 referendum, neither Gorbachev nor Yeltsin had imagined the Soviet Union without Ukraine, its second-largest republic and a key element of Russian imperial and Soviet history and mythology.

Restoring the imperial project in any form would depend on Russia’s ability to bring Ukraine back into the fold, observes Plokhy.

First draft of history

Matthews *Overreach* is a superb first draft of history exploring Putin’s decision to bring Ukraine back into the fold by launching his offensive in a bubble of COVID-induced paranoia.

Among eyewitness accounts of Ukraine’s resilience in the face of the Russian invasion, none is more searing than Yaroslav Trofimov’s *Our Enemies Will Vanish* (2024), which invites comparisons with Michael Herr’s Vietnam war classic *Dispatches* (1977).

Shoumojit Banerjee is a Pune-based journalist and editor

Roots of a conflict: an ‘endless war’ on the edge of Europe’s frontier (26 September)

Located at the western edge of the Eurasian steppe, Ukraine has been a gateway to Europe for many centuries, being a meeting place, and a battleground of empires from Roman to Ottoman, Habsburg to Romanov. Ukraine has a pivotal role in global and Russia's history, say writers

- Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, starting in February 2022, is one of the largest military conflicts since World War II.
- The war has significantly disrupted the European security framework established since the 1975 Helsinki Accords.
- Despite Ukraine's strong resistance, key questions remain about the causes of the aggression, Ukrainian resilience, and the differences between Ukrainians and Russians.
- Historian Serhii Plokhy's books, *The Gates of Europe* and *The Russo-Ukrainian War*, provide essential insights into the historical context of the conflict.
- Plokhy traces Ukraine's history from ancient times to the collapse of the USSR and the current war, highlighting its role as a gateway to Europe.
- The 1991 Ukrainian referendum for independence played a crucial role in the dissolution of the Soviet Union, with over 90% support from Ukrainians.
- The ongoing conflict is rooted in historical legacies, particularly the medieval state of Kyivan Rus, founded by Grand Prince Volodymyr.
- Many Russians view their identity as stemming from Kyiv, which was the center of Kyivan Rus, a polity that existed from the 10th to the mid-13th centuries.
- The Christianization of Kyivan Rus by Volodymyr is often cited by Putin as a foundational moment for Russian identity and claims over Ukrainian territory.
- Despite Putin's focus on foreign influences in Russian history, Volodymyr was originally a Scandinavian Viking who introduced Christianity to unify the Slavic people.
- The myth of Kyivan Rus, created in the mid-15th century, helped Moscow assert its legitimacy and justify conquests of Ukrainian and Belarusian lands.
- Ivan III of Moscow used this myth to legitimize his power and expansion, passing an authoritarian state to his grandson, Ivan IV, known as "The Terrible."
- Ivan IV expanded Muscovy's territory by conquering post-Mongol Volga khanates but faced defeat in the Livonian War (1558-1583) against Poland-Lithuania, Sweden, and Denmark.
- In the 17th century, Moscow was captured by the Poles and Ukrainian Cossacks, leading to a political and religious separation between Muscovy and Kyiv.
- Muscovites began to view Kyivans as corrupted by Catholic rule and Western influences, distancing themselves from Ukrainian Orthodox believers.
- In 1648, Ukrainian Cossacks, led by Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, rebelled against Polish rule and sought assistance from the Russian Tsar.
- Journalist Owen Matthews notes that Khmelnytsky's oath to the Tsar established a transactional relationship that characterized Ukrainian-Russian relations for centuries.
- Muscovy revived memories of Kyivan heritage to protect Ukrainian Cossacks against Polish Catholics, achieving victory in this conflict.
- However, the integration of the Ukrainian Cossack state into Moscow led to further resistance, notably in 1708 when Hetman Ivan Mazepa allied with Sweden against Peter the Great but was defeated at Poltava in 1709.
- Catherine II dismantled the Cossack Hetmanate, incorporating it into the Russian Empire, though 19th-century Ukrainian nationalists sought to revive Cossack heritage.
- The fall of the Romanov dynasty in March 1917 led to the emergence of autonomous states within the former Russian Empire.
- The Bolshevik coup in October 1917 destroyed Tsarist institutions, while Lenin and Stalin debated the structure of the new Soviet state, with Lenin favoring equal terms for all republics.
- Stalin's policies resulted in the devastating Holodomor in Ukraine during 1932-1933, causing millions of deaths.
- During the 1991 referendum, Gorbachev and Yeltsin did not foresee a Soviet Union without Ukraine, a critical part of Russian imperial and Soviet history.
- Plokhy notes that restoring any form of imperial project would depend on Russia's ability to reintegrate Ukraine.
- Matthews' book *Overreach* explores Putin's decision to reassert control over Ukraine, framed by COVID-induced paranoia.
- Eyewitness accounts of Ukraine's resilience against the Russian invasion are vividly captured in Yaroslav Trofimov's *Our Enemies Will Vanish* (2024), drawing comparisons to Michael Herr's *Dispatches* about the Vietnam War.