

DIA, DEOGHAR IAS ACADEMY

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**Sabaijor Complex, Near Jamunajor Pul, Castair Town
Deoghar, Mob:-9162500508**



What are the most commonly used cancer drugs?

What severe side effects do these cancer drugs carry?

Meriem Mahdi

The story so far:

A major new investigation by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, published by *The Hindu*, has revealed that cancer drugs shipped around the world to more than 100 countries have failed quality tests. But what are these drugs, and how are they used? Cancer is a disease characterised by uncontrolled cell growth. It is caused by mutations in genes disrupting or inhibiting the normal ways in which cells divide or die. This causes cancerous cells to develop - and when a mass of cancerous cells grows, it can form a tumour. Chemotherapy drugs disrupt this process, and these medicines have transformed the landscape of cancer treatment, improving outcomes for patients. The six types of drugs in our investigation - cisplatin, oxaliplatin, cyclophosphamide, doxorubicin, methotrexate and leucovorin - are all chemotherapy treatments.

What is cisplatin?

Cisplatin is a platinum-based drug that emerged in the 1960s from an unexpected discovery. Researchers found that a platinum-containing compound blocked the growth of bacteria, leading to the realisation that it could potentially be used to combat cancer.

Cisplatin works by binding to the DNA of cancer cells, preventing them from growing and dividing. It is particularly effective against testicular, ovarian, bladder, and certain lung cancers. Its introduction has improved survival rates for many patients, whether used alone or in combination with other therapies.

However, like all potent medications, cisplatin comes with side effects, including sickness, kidney damage, and hearing issues. Cisplatin also suppresses the function of the bone marrow, where new blood cells are produced. The resulting reduction in white blood cells has severe effects on patients' immune systems, leaving them vulnerable to infection.

What is oxaliplatin?

Oxaliplatin, like cisplatin, is a platinum-based drug. It also works by binding to and damaging the DNA of cancer cells. It is used mainly to treat the more advanced stages of colorectal cancer and following surgery for the removal of colon cancer, to wipe out remaining malignant cells.

Oxaliplatin comes with broadly similar side effects to cisplatin.

What is cyclophosphamide?

Cyclophosphamide is another key chemotherapy drug, often used to tackle diseases including breast cancer, some types of leukemia (a type of blood cancer), sarcoma (cancer of the connective tissues) and advanced lymphoma (cancer of the lymph nodes).

Cyclophosphamide disrupts the DNA of cancer cells. This limits their ability to replicate and mutate. It also causes a drop in white blood cells and can cause pain when passing urine due to inflammation of the bladder.

What is doxorubicin?

Often referred to as the "red devil" due to its striking colour and severe side effects, doxorubicin was derived from a type of soil bacteria called *Streptomyces* and was initially explored as an antibiotic.

Doxorubicin is effective against several types of cancer, including breast cancer, leukaemia, lymphoma and sarcoma. It works by interfering with the cancer cell's DNA and disrupting the replication process. It is a staple in chemotherapy protocols, despite potential side effects including heart damage, risk of infection, skin changes and hair loss.

What is methotrexate?

Methotrexate is very effective against various cancers, including leukaemia, lymphoma and certain types of tumour. By inhibiting the protein responsible for creating new DNA molecules, it stifles cancer cell growth. Methotrexate is given in high doses, followed by leucovorin to help protect healthy cells from damage.

What is leucovorin?

Leucovorin, also known as folic acid (not to be confused with folic acid), is a form of vitamin B9. It differs from the rest that were tested in the investigation in that it is not technically considered a chemotherapy drug, but a companion to chemotherapy. It was first introduced in the 1950s and was designed to manage the side effects of methotrexate, for which it is still used today.

Meriem Mahdi is with *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*

THE GIST

▼
A major investigation revealed that commonly used chemotherapy drugs failed quality tests after being shipped to over 100 countries.

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These drugs work by targeting cancer cells while minimising harm to normal cells, but also cause severe side effects like kidney damage, immune suppression, and heart risk.



What sparked the Keeladi controversy?

What was the dispute between the archaeologist and the ASI? Why did the ASI ask for a rewrite of the Keeladi report? Why did political parties react strongly to the decision? How did the public and historians respond to the findings?

EXPLAINER

D. Suresh Kumar

The story so far:

In June 17, archaeologist K. Amarnath Ramakrishna, whose excavation at Keeladi in Tamil Nadu drew the nation's attention, was transferred yet again, this time from New Delhi to Greater Noida. Mr. Ramakrishna, who was serving as the Director (Antiquity) and as Director of the National Mission on Monuments and Antiquities (NMMA), will now be the Director of the NMMA only. The NMMA unit, set up in 2007, according to sources, remains almost defunct. Over two years after Mr. Ramakrishna submitted his 982-page report on the first two phases of excavations carried out at Keeladi between 2014 and 2016, a fresh controversy erupted last month. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) mandated that he revise his report, but he refused to do it. This disagreement sparked a political clash between the Centre and Tamil Nadu.

How did Keeladi excavation begin?

Keeladi has become a symbol of pride for many in Tamil Nadu. Over a decade ago, Amarnath Ramakrishna, then the ASI's Superintending Archaeologist, had initiated excavations at a site known as the Pallichanthai Tidal in Keeladi, originally a coconut grove spanning 100 acres. He had identified over 100 sites for excavation along the Vaigai River, but Keeladi stood out.

It was in Keeladi that they unearthed over 7,500 ancient artifacts, including wall structures, drainage systems, and wells – all evidence of a sophisticated urban society that thrived. What was even more compelling was the carbon dating, which revealed that these elements are over 2,160 years old, dating back to the 2nd century BCE, which is the time of the Sangam period in Tamil history.



K. Amarnath Ramakrishna at the Keeladi excavation site. FILE PHOTO

What made the findings significant?

Archaeologists were stunned by a few findings. Most importantly, there was no evidence of religious symbols at the excavation site, which hinted at the secular nature of the civilisation.

So, naturally, the excitement around Keeladi's discoveries was palpable. Tamil historians and enthusiasts saw it as proof of an advanced ancient Tamil civilisation, but soon after, things took a sharp turn.

What did political critics accuse the Centre of doing?

It all began in 2017, when the ASI transferred Mr. Ramakrishna to Assam just as the excavations were ramping up after the first two phases. Back then, political critics accused the Centre of deliberately derailing the excavations. It is because the Centre that had promised funding and support for further digs delayed both after the second phase.

The local political climate grew tense with some alleging that the Centre was trying to suppress Tamil heritage. By 2017, the excavations had entered its third phase, this time, under archaeologist P.S. Sriraman. After excavating just around 400 square meters, he reported a lack of continuity in the brick structures

previously discovered.

Did State's findings resolve the issue?

The Madras High Court stepped in, with judges visiting the excavation site. The court then directed the ASI to continue the excavations and allowed the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology to get involved. The department, in 2019, published a report asserting that Keeladi was an urban settlement dating back to the Sangam era between the 6th century BCE and the 1st century CE.

Since the third phase, the State Archaeology Department has continued the project, but these findings have not helped resolve the issue; instead, the drama has escalated. In January 2023, Mr. Ramakrishna, who was transferred back to Tamil Nadu, submitted his report on the first two phases of excavation.

What did the ASI ask Ramakrishna to do with the report?

For about two-and-a-half years, this report remained with the ASI, and just last month, the ASI sent Mr. Ramakrishna a letter to revise the report. The ASI questioned the dating and depth of certain findings, suggesting the evidence for the earliest period, as it "appeared to

be very early," and said it needed further analysis. Mr. Ramakrishna, however, stood firm and refused to rewrite his conclusions, defending his work as scientifically sound, based on rigorous archaeological standards. He argued that the report's chronology was backed by stratigraphic sequences, material culture and even Accelerator Mass Spectrometry.

Why did the ASI's decision spark political outrage?

Against this backdrop, many political parties in Tamil Nadu have slammed the ASI's decision. They have termed it a blatant attempt to suppress Tamil heritage. They argued that the Centre's refusal to acknowledge Keeladi's significance was not just about science but also about politics. Amid the backlash, the Union Minister for Culture, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, said Mr. Ramakrishna's findings were not technically well-supported and further scientific studies were required to validate the findings. He sought more results, data, and evidence because he said a single finding cannot change the entire discourse.

Why did AIADMK stay silent initially?

Interestingly, the AIADMK, which was in power when the Keeladi report was published, remained silent for a long time on the current controversy. However, on June 18, senior leader R.B. Udhayakumar contended that the Centre had sought more information by way of ensuring "additional corroboration." He also said, "if the Keeladi report is rejected, the AIADMK will be the first party to express its voice of protest."

The controversy is not just about one report or one excavation; it is a clash of narratives. The Centre insists on scientific validation while Tamil Nadu views it as a matter of historical recognition. The State government is pressing on with its excavations, which are under way, and it has already set up a new museum at Keeladi, drawing thousands of visitors.

THE GIST

Archaeologist Amarnath Ramakrishna's transfer from New Delhi to Greater Noida and the ASI's demand to revise his 982-page Keeladi excavation report sparked renewed controversy.

The ASI questioned the dating and depth of the findings, but Ramakrishna defended his conclusions as scientifically sound, citing stratigraphy and Accelerator Mass Spectrometry.

The move drew political outrage in Tamil Nadu, with parties accusing the Centre of suppressing Tamil heritage, turning Keeladi into a flashpoint between science, politics, and identity.



Is voter registration being subject to fraud?



Praveen Chakravarty

Head of the Congress's data analytics department



Rangarajan R.

Former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified'

PARLEY

Beginning with the Maharashtra Assembly elections last year, Opposition parties have made many allegations regarding manipulations in electoral rolls. The Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, and others have raised the matter both inside and outside Parliament. The Election Commission of India (ECI) has maintained that it is impossible to tamper with voter rolls. Two days ago, it issued instructions for holding Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar for the Assembly elections to ensure that the names of all eligible citizens are included, and to introduce complete transparency in the process of addition or deletion of electors in the electoral rolls. Is voter registration being subject to fraud? Praveen Chakravarty and Rangarajan R. discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Sreeparna Chakravarty. Edited excerpts:

Mr. Chakravarty, let's start with you. You have studied and written on the Maharashtra Assembly elections extensively. What are your major concerns?

Praveen Chakravarty: The main issue that the Congress and the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, have raised about the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly elections is that there was an abnormal, sudden, and almost unexplainable increase in the number of electors. It was a statistical outlier, an anomaly.

The Maharashtra Assembly elections were held just six months after the Lok Sabha polls. A group of people voted in Maharashtra for the Lok Sabha elections. Six months later, while there may be some more people voting during the Assembly elections, you don't expect the number to rise in an alarming way. But that is exactly what we found. There was an increase of more than 40 lakh voters in just those months. It is not the number 40 lakh in absolute terms that is significant. In the previous five years, the total number of new voters added in Maharashtra was only 32 lakh. So is this new increase logical?

Under what conditions do new voters register? When the ECI adds voters, 80-90% of them are either those turning 18 or adults who had not enrolled before. Did lakhs and lakhs of people in Maharashtra suddenly turn 18 or decide to become new voters in just five months while they were not to be found in the previous five years? Who are these new voters? Where did they come from? How did they enroll? What documents were checked? Were they verified?

Rangarajan R.: As far as the electoral rolls are



Voters wait to cast their vote during the 2024 Maharashtra Assembly elections, in Akola. ANI

concerned, I agree that there may be some issues. But to say that the entire voter registration process could be fudged and could be manipulated to a large extent is stretching it a bit far. *The Hindu* data team published an article about this sudden spurt after the Lok Sabha elections and before the Assembly elections in 2024. They found that during 2004, there were 30 lakh new voters added in a period of five months. In 2009, between April and October, 30 lakh voters were added. In 2014, between April and October, 27 lakh voters were added. Between April and November 2024, 40 lakh voters were added.

One reason why there could have been a sudden spurt is that the cut-off date for enrolling, which was earlier January 1 of every year, has been made quarterly. So that could have played a small and important role in the increase. I am not claiming that the electoral rolls are absolutely fine, but there are enough checks and balances. As someone who has worked in the civil services and has conducted elections, I am not for a minute saying that everything is hunky-dory and no reforms are required. There are a lot of reforms required. Aadhaar seeding has probably helped in reducing issues in databases such as PAN. There are valid concerns about seeding the Aadhaar database into the electoral rolls, but that is perhaps the way forward to ensure that there are no duplicates. Wrongful inclusions are not allowed, but the big risk is that there can be wrongful exclusions. And that is something which needs to be addressed carefully.

The ECI has said that it is nearly impossible to tamper with electoral rolls and has asked why the Congress did not use the appeals process when the final rolls were shared for the Maharashtra Assembly polls. What is your response to that, Mr. Chakravarty?



To clean up the electoral rolls of wrongful inclusions and exclusions and ensure utmost correctness, a detailed physical exercise such as the one planned by the ECI for Bihar is required

R. RANGARAJAN

PC: I think there is a lot of conceptual misunderstanding around this issue. I'm going to speak as a data scientist. While Mr. Rangarajan, quoting the *The Hindu* data team, rightly pointed out some figures for 2004, 2009, 2014, and 2024, what he did not mention is the context of the 40 lakh increase. All numbers have a context. Trends and not levels are important to understand big data.

In 2004, when 30 lakh voters were added in the five months between the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, do you know how many voters were added in the previous five years? 61 lakh voters, twice. In 2009, when 30 lakh voters were added in the five months, 70 lakh voters were added in the previous five years. In 2014, when 27 lakh new voters were added in the five months, 48 lakh voters were added in the previous five years. So, the statistical anomaly that I am pointing out here is not the 40 lakh. It is the illogical and suspicious trend of more new voters in five months than in five full years.

In Maharashtra, fertility levels have been falling for the last two decades. This means that the total number of newborns would have only decreased every year. This also means that the number of people turning 18 would have decreased from 2004. The population may increase, but the number of people turning 18 would have decreased. My simple point is that it is humanly impossible for Maharashtra to produce that many more people in five months than in the previous five years.

Regarding your question about whether Congress's booth-level agents were sleeping... Let us say there is a burglary in your home. You go to the police station to file a complaint. What if the police station turned to you and said, your security guard was sleeping, so we can't do anything? The ECI has a constitutional responsibility to conduct free and fair elections in this country. If all the responsibility is outsourced to political parties, why have an independent constitutional body? But I am not denying here that the Congress's organisation should be much stronger than what it is.

RR: First, to give due credit to *The Hindu*, the data team's article does mention these increases that Mr. Chakravarty talked about. However, I agree that if there is indeed an anomaly, the

failure of a party's organisational wing to check, cross-check, and file appeals cannot absolve a constitutional authority of their responsibility.

Mr. Chakravarty, you have been asking for electoral rolls to be given in machine-readable format for both the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls. You have also been demanding CCTV footage after 5 p.m. claiming that there is a surge in voter turnout after that. Could you explain these demands?

PC: We are asking for it to be in digital or machine-readable format because they (ECI) can give you these scanned images or papers and ask you (the party) to go manage it.

Regarding your second point, we are saying – and we have shown using the ECI's summary data – that there is an abnormal surge. We also know that there was some abnormal increase in voting happened after 5 p.m. Now, is it or is it not the responsibility of a constitutional body to preserve the trust and confidence of the institution by coming out and saying here is the footage? Every time we raise a question, BJP leaders are the ones responding. We never asked the BJP to respond. We're only asking the ECI.

The ECI has said that beginning with the Bihar Assembly elections later this year, there will be a SIR of electoral rolls across the country. What do you think about this?

PC: This is a tacit admission by the ECI that all is not well with the electoral rolls. Also, is this the right way to clean up the rolls? This is as good as going back and saying we are almost rendering the last 20 years of voter roll revisions defunct and we're just going to start afresh.

RR: To clean up the electoral rolls of wrongful inclusions and exclusions and ensure utmost correctness, a detailed physical exercise such as the one planned by the ECI for Bihar is required. It can still be subject to allegations of manipulation and bias in favour of the ruling party. To overcome such accusations, it must be done in a fair and transparent manner by giving wide publicity to the public at large. While it is undoubtedly the legal responsibility of the ECI, all political parties are very important stakeholders in this exercise, representing the citizenry. They should own up and participate in this exercise as much as possible to ensure a robust electoral roll.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com



Fathoming America's plan to manage AI proliferation

The announcement by the United States of the rescission of its Framework for AI Diffusion, a set of export controls for Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology announced earlier this year, has been viewed as a good thing. The Framework was considered counterproductive to AI technology development and diplomatic relations. However, recent developments suggest that controls on AI are likely to persist, albeit in different forms.

A flawed blueprint

Earlier this year, during the final week of its tenure, the Joe Biden administration announced the AI Diffusion Framework. Combining export controls and export licences for AI chips and model weights, it effectively viewed AI like nuclear weapons. Under the proposed framework, countries such as China and Russia were embargoed, trusted allies were favoured, and others restricted in their access to advanced AI technology. The rationale for these rules was that computational power dictates AI capabilities: the greater the compute, the better the AI. In the last decade, the compute used in advanced AI models has nearly doubled every 10 months. Following this logic, for the U.S. to preserve its lead, it needed to prevent adversaries from acquiring powerful compute while ensuring that AI development stays within the U.S. and its close allies.

While export controls on AI hardware predated the framework, they were not sweeping. The Framework aimed to tighten these controls and establish a predictable system to streamline regulatory processes and standardise conditions. However, imposing such sweeping restrictions, affecting adversaries and partners alike, brought many unintended effects, proving counterproductive.

The framework set a concerning precedent for technology cooperation with the U.S., especially for its allies. It signalled U.S. willingness to dictate how other nations conducted their affairs,

Rijesh Panicker

is a Fellow at the Takshashila Institution

Bharath Reddy

is an Associate Fellow at the Takshashila Institution

Ashwin Prasad

is a Research Analyst at the Takshashila Institution

The rescission of the AI Diffusion Framework appears to be more a change in tactics than a fundamental shift in strategy

incentivising them to hedge against U.S. actions. Consequently, U.S. allies had reasons to invest in alternatives to the U.S. ecosystem, pursuing their own strategic autonomy and technological sovereignty.

Additionally, the framework would treat AI, a civilian technology with military applications, as if it were a military technology with civilian uses. Unlike nuclear technology, AI innovation is inherently civilian in its origins and international in scope. Confining the development geographically within the U.S. could prove counterproductive.

Finally, the system created an enduring incentive for the global scientific ecosystem to develop pathways to circumvent the need for powerful compute to make powerful AI, thereby undermining the very lever that the U.S. sought to employ. China's DeepSeek R1 exemplifies this. Years of export controls spurred algorithmic and architectural breakthroughs, enabling DeepSeek to rival the best AI models from the U.S. with a fraction of the compute. Such trends can make export controls on AI chips an ineffective policy instrument.

It is for these reasons that the Trump administration revoked the AI Diffusion Framework. This is welcome news for India, which was not favourably placed under the framework. However, the underlying U.S. thinking and approach towards AI diffusion will likely persist, manifesting in other forms. The AI technology race is still on, and the U.S. intent to restrict Chinese access to AI chips still endures.

The possible replacement

Notwithstanding the rescinded Framework, the current U.S. administration has taken firm steps toward further preventing Chinese access to AI chips. For instance, in March 2025, the administration expanded the scope of the existing export controls and added several companies to its entity list (blacklist). It has also released several new guidelines to strengthen the

enforcement of these controls.

New provisions are reportedly under consideration, such as on-chip features to monitor and restrict the usage of AI chips. These could include rules at the hardware level limiting chip functionality or restricting certain use cases. Recently, U.S. lawmakers introduced new legislation mandating built-in location tracking for AI chips to prevent their illicit diversion into China, Russia and other countries of concern. In effect, these measures seek to enforce the goals of the AI diffusion framework technologically rather than through trade restrictions.

The related concerns

Such measures are problematic in their own way. New concerns related to ownership, privacy and surveillance will proliferate. While malicious actors might be sufficiently motivated to circumvent these controls, legitimate and beneficial use by others could be inadvertently discouraged. Such developments undermine user autonomy and lead to trust deficits. Just like the old framework, this will lead to concerns about losing strategic autonomy for any nation buying AI chips. Yet again, both adversaries and allies will feel compelled to hedge against their reliance on the U.S. AI ecosystem and invest in alternatives.

The rescission of the AI Diffusion Framework represents a notable policy reversal. Yet, it appears to be more a change in tactics than a fundamental shift in the U.S. strategy to manage AI proliferation. Should these technologically-driven control measures gain traction in U.S. policy discourse and be implemented, they risk replicating the negative consequences of the original AI Diffusion Framework. Ultimately, should this path be pursued, it would indicate that the crucial lessons from the Framework and its eventual withdrawal have not been fully assimilated, potentially jeopardising the very U.S. leadership in AI it ostensibly seeks to protect.



The Israel-Iran ceasefire — managing the blowback

The cessation of Israel-Iran hostilities, announced by United States President Donald Trump, sets the stage for the denouement of the horror drama that began on October 7, 2023, with Hamas launching its Operation Toofan al-Aqsa. While the fog of war and rounds of one-upmanship make the immediate foreground inexact, unless the choreographers take due care, the finale is certain to be as disruptive as the main act has been.

Over the past 21 months, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF), backed by the U.S., has scored a set of spectacular though pyrrhic military victories. In Gaza, the IDF has decimated Hamas, even as some Israeli hostages remain in Hamas captivity. Lebanon's Hezbollah, considered the world's most formidable non-state actor with an estimated 1,00,000 missiles, has been neutered with its leadership in disarray and its arsenal gone. Syria's al-Assad regime, Israel's rejectionist foe for 54 years, has been replaced by a weak Islamist government that poses no threat to Israel. Yemen's al-Houthis did manage to disrupt maritime traffic and lob missiles at Israel, but have been cowed down by the disproportionate IDF and U.S. military responses. Lastly, after 12 days of high-intensity aerial exchanges, Israel and the US claimed to have "obliterated" the nuclear option that Iran doggedly pursued for over two decades. Tehran has also suffered strategic losses of its missile force and has had targeted assassinations of its top military personnel and nuclear scientists. While single-mindedly pursuing its military options, Israel's ultra-right government has ridden roughshod over the domestic opposition and brushed aside foreign criticism and attempts at the International Criminal Court and the International Court of Justice to put it on a legal mat.

The course for Iran

'Where does West Asia go from here?' It is a difficult question to answer for several reasons. The situation, to quote Churchill, "is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma..." The dramatic and unprecedented turn of events notwithstanding, the resultant geopolitical entropy would unfold only glacially. With the three main stakeholders all claiming victories and jostling for influence over the outcome, controlling the blowback and avoiding revanchism would be a challenge. The putative military victors, namely Israel and the U.S., would aim for a permanently favourable geopolitical architecture, while the countervailing forces, including Iran, try to turn their military stalemate into a political victory.

Setting the future course of Iran would be the biggest challenge for two reasons: First, as the most populous country in the region, it is intrinsically important. Second, as Israel's most implacable foe, it has been the region's biggest disruptor and political determinant. Despite its



Mahesh Sachdev

is a retired Indian Ambassador specialising in West Asia and oil affairs

Unless the choreographers, Iran, Israel and the U.S. take care, the finale is certain to be as disruptive as the main act

economy hobbled by "maximum pressure" sanctions and a devastating war, Tehran remains a regional geo-strategic pivot. While the victors may have publicly avowed their disinterest in regime change in Tehran, an unrepentant Mullah regime would signify their "unfinished agenda".

The necessity of keeping Tehran in check on its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) ambitions by continued sanctions and strict and intrusive supervision by international inspections would preoccupy the U.S., Israel and the pro-West regimes in this region. This would create an unsteady political dynamic similar to Iraq during 1991-2003 after Saddam's forces were evicted from Kuwait. Further, Tehran may become a countervailing pole to the Pax Americana in the region – a prospect anathematic to "the winner takes it all" absolutists in power in Washington and Jerusalem.

On the other hand, having a West-leaning regime in Tehran would be a profound gain. It would create a comprehensive Pax Americana in West Asia, allowing the U.S. to control the strategic region's hydrocarbon resources. Moreover, the huge pent-up Iranian demand for projects, merchandise and services can then be cornered by the American multinationals. Lastly, a friendly government would put a firm lid on the regional proxies created by Iran in the past.

The goal of a friendly regime

Therefore, installing a friendly regime in Tehran is of primordial importance for Israel and the U.S. But this mission presents a huge dilemma. Although large sections of its population are politically alienated due to corruption and the high-handedness of authorities, as well as high inflation, they would stand up against any foreign occupation and imposed government. So, boots-on-ground to effect a regime change would be counterproductive and can be ruled out. Moreover, attempts by the U.S. in the past at forced regime changes in Afghanistan and Iraq were costly and messy failures.

Iran is a large country with a deeply entrenched current government structure. Though some exiled Iranian groups, such as Pahlavi Royalists and Mujahedin al-Khalq exist, their local support is highly uncertain, making an externally sponsored takeover unlikely. There is also a danger that destabilisation of the current regime could unleash centrifugal forces among various ethnic minorities such as Kurds, Azeris, Arabs and Sunnis, who constitute nearly 40% of the population. This would create a Libya, Sudan and Somalia type of anarchy, which is in no one's interest.

Hence, the best possible scenario for the Americans is to glacially reorient the current regime. This would be a challenge as the radicals supported by the Republic Guards currently control the parliament and clergy, with the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, favouring them.

Therefore, pressure to being applied to get the 86-year-old Khamenei, at the helm for 36 years, to either discreetly abandon WMD ambitions or relinquish power and be replaced by a pro-West moderate. While the hardliners in power may resist a change at the top at this critical juncture, their policies have not worked.

The two front-runners in the contest – to be decided by the Guardian Council – are likely to be the Supreme Leader's son, Mojtaba Khamenei and the grandson Hassan Khomeini of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic. They are both in their fifties. While Khamenei junior has continuity of lineage and policies, Hassan Khomeini is bereft of any such baggage. As the only transition at the Supreme Leader level was 35 years ago, this is largely uncharted territory, but with serious implications for the country and the region.

The Gaza situation

The second issue awaiting resolution is the Israel-Palestine dispute, which the recent events have made even more convoluted. The just concluded war with Iran would allow the IDF to refocus on the Gaza situation, where mass starvation competes with the high death toll of civilians every day due to Israeli fire. It is a desperate situation. The occupied West Bank is facing a deteriorating situation due to Jewish settlers on the rampage and the long-suspended transition of the Palestine Authority under President Mohammed Abbas, who is close to 90. A post-conflict euphoria may allow Mr. Trump to refloat his bizarre idea of mass deportation of Gazans to build an "international riveria." While the war-numbed Gazans are desperate for survival, it is still difficult to see this as a part of the solution.

The end of the war would finally allow Israeli society greater normalcy, permitting an objective and rational analysis of its recent extraordinary experiences. The clamour for the early release of remaining hostages is likely to intensify, and the governance and intelligence failings of the current regime may come under harsh spotlight. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's suspended trial on corruption charges may resume. The economic and social costs of the war may haunt Israel for a long time, giving it a reality check. Israel's post-war recovery and political reset towards moderation would be pivotal for the expansion of the Abraham Accords.

After this apocalyptic conflict, the West Asian region yearns for peace and stability. If the three main actors, viz., Iran, Israel and the U.S. avoid triumphalism and transit instead to moderation and nation-building, this aspiration can be realised. The region and the world would benefit from lower oil prices, smoother logistics and reduced radicalisation and terrorism. Otherwise, the region would go back to business as usual: cyclicity of the conflicts punctuated by an interregnum of tense peace.

Shubhanshu Shukla 634th astronaut to reach space

This is a phase of India's space journey, says Shukla; I am carrying the tiranga and I am very confident that the next 14 days are going to be amazing, advancing science and research, he adds

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India's Shubhanshu Shukla became the 634th astronaut to travel to space as he entered the International Space Station on Thursday after a 28-hour journey.

Mr. Shukla and three other astronauts were formally welcomed on the space station by the members of Expedition 73 with warm hugs and handshakes.

Axiom mission commander Peggy Whitson handed out astronaut pins to Mr. Shukla, Polish astronaut Slawosz Uznanski-Wisniewski and Hungarian Tibor Kapu, who marked their maiden voyage to space.

"I am astronaut 634. It is a privilege to be here," Mr. Shukla said in brief remarks at the formal welcome ceremony in the space station. "With your love and blessings, I have reached the International Space Station. It looks easy to stand here, but my head is a little heavy, facing some difficulty; but these are minor issues," he said.

"We will get used to it.



Warm welcome: Axiom mission commander Peggy Whitson handing out astronaut pins to Shubhanshu Shukla, Polish astronaut Slawosz Uznanski-Wisniewski and Hungarian Tibor Kapu. @AXIOM_SPACE X

This is the first step of this journey," he added.

Mr. Shukla said over the next 14 days, he and the other astronauts will conduct scientific experiments and interact with the people on earth. "This is also a phase of India's space journey. I will keep talking to you. Let us make this journey exciting. I am carrying the tiranga and I am carrying all of you with me. The next 14 days will be exciting," he said.

The astronaut said the ride to the space station

was wonderful and great and he was overwhelmed by the welcome he received from the crew of the orbital laboratory. "The minute I entered the International Space Station and met this crew, you just made me feel so welcome, as if you literally opened your doors, like your house doors, for us," he said.

"That is true. It was fantastic. I just feel even better now. Whatever expectations I had of coming here were surpassed by the

view, of course, that is a big part of it, but also by you guys," Mr. Shukla said.

"So thank you so much. I think this is fantastic, this is wonderful and I am very confident that the next 14 days are going to be amazing, advancing science and research, and working together," he added.

In Shukla's hometown in Lucknow, his parents and relatives, teachers, friends, scores of students and onlookers greeted the successful docking with a standing ovation.

Belousov assures Rajnath of timely delivery of S-400 systems to India

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh held a comprehensive bilateral meeting with Russian Defence Minister Andrey Belousov in Qingdao, China, over cooperation in defence and aviation sectors between the two countries.

In Thursday's meeting, a discussion was also held over the timely delivery of S-400 air-defence systems to India, and the Russian Minister assured his Indian counterpart of the same, sources said.

In Indian service, the S-400 has been officially named "Sudarshan Chakra" after the mythological weapon of Lord Krishna. The S-400 has capability of engaging targets at ranges



An initial order of five S-400 air defence systems was placed and three were delivered. The remaining two units are on track. AFP

of up to 400 km.

An initial order of five S-400s was placed by India and three have been delivered. The remaining two S-400 units are on track, with deliveries expected to be completed in the stipulated time frame, sources said. Of the remaining two units, one is expected to be

delivered next year and the final system in 2027.

Both sides agreed to a bilateral cooperation in defence and other sectors such as aviation. A detailed discussion was also held to further strengthen the supply chain between the two countries. They also showed interest in ex-

change of technologies in the aviation sector.

During Operation Sindoor, the Russian-made S-400 systems played a critical role in intercepting and neutralising missiles and drones launched by Pakistan.

India signed a \$5.43 billion deal with Russia in 2018 for five squadrons of the S-400 Triumf, which can intercept fighter jets, ballistic missiles, and drones, making it a vital part of India's arsenal.

Mr. Singh is in Qingdao to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers' meeting on June 25-26.

On the sidelines of the multilateral summit, he will also hold bilateral talks with his counterpart from China.



Willing to discuss ongoing issues with Bangladesh: MEA

External Affairs Ministry's remarks come a day before parliamentary panel holds special meeting on neighbouring nation with four experts, including political situation under interim government

Suhasini Haidar
Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India is willing to discuss all issues with Bangladesh in a "conducive" environment, said Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry, while emphasising that established modalities exist between Dhaka and New Delhi that can deal with a full spectrum of bilateral relations.

The remarks came as former diplomats and experts are set to address the Standing Committee on External Affairs to discuss the "Future of the India-Bangladesh Relationship".

Sources told *The Hindu* that the experts are former National Security Adviser Shivshankar Menon, Lieutenant-General Ata Hasnain (retd), former High Commissioner to Bangladesh Riva Ganguly Das, and Jawaharlal Nehru University professor Amitabh Mattoo.

"We are prepared to engage with Bangladesh on all matters in an environment that is conducive for mutually beneficial dialogue," Mr. Jaiswal said,



Mending ties: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Bangladesh Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus. FILE PHOTO

responding to a question on the renewal of the Ganga Water Sharing Treaty of 1996.

Responding to another question about Bangladesh joining trilateral consultations with Pakistan and China on June 19, Mr. Jaiswal said that India maintains a "constant watch on the developments in our neighbourhood that have a bearing on our interest and our security. Our relations with individual countries, while they stand on their

own footing, take into account the evolving context as well".

Mr. Jaiswal's remarks came a day before the parliamentary panel holds a special discussion on Bangladesh with the four experts.

Key discussion points

According to preliminary preparation documents, the experts are expected to address questions about the political situation under the interim govern-

ment led by Mohammed Yunus, rise of religious fundamentalism, security threats to India from the turmoil in Bangladesh, and concerns over Bangladesh and China's "strategic alignment" since the ouster of the Sheikh Hasina in August 2024.

Amongst prescriptions, the experts will also advise the committee on India's public perception in Bangladesh, particularly the sentiment that New Delhi is identified with the fallen government of Ms. Hasina and not with the "people of Bangladesh".

Mr. Menon was the NSA when India and Bangladesh conducted negotiations on the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) that was sealed in 2015 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Ms. Hasina.

The panel is likely to advise the lawmakers on the need to coordinate with the U.S., EU and the U.K. on the requirement for having a credible election in Bangladesh and convince them about India's "strategic imperative" to ensure safety of the North-east in the face of unstable Bangladesh.

Revanth calls for united fight against drugs, launches EAGLE

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy on Thursday cautioned against the growing drug menace in the State, calling upon citizens, institutions and youth to take collective responsibility in eradicating the threat.

Speaking at a programme held at Shilpakala Vedika, the Chief Minister announced the launch of Telangana Anti Narcotics Bureau (TGANB) as a special enforcement unit called EAGLE, which stands for Elite Action Group for Drug Law Enforcement. He said EAGLE will be tasked with identifying and destroying ganja cultivation in Telangana and intercepting trafficking activities on State



Telangana CM A. Revanth Reddy along with actors Ram Charan, Vijay Devarakonda and others after launching EAGLE. NAGARA GOPAL

boundaries. He added that the unit would have the tools and freedom to act wherever needed.

Mr. Revanth warned educational institutions that the responsibility for monitoring student behaviour and keeping campuses free from drugs lay with the management. He said no school or college can ignore anti-social activities

and negligence will not be tolerated. He added that vigilance is key and only through collective alertness can drugs be kept out of the State. He urged the youth to become heroes by excelling in education and sports and promised special opportunities for sportspersons, not just in employment but also in politics.

India declines to endorse joint statement at the SCO over exclusion of Pahalgam

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

India declined to endorse the joint statement at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers' meeting in China, and pushed for including tougher language on terrorism that would reflect the Indian position, particularly in the wake of the Pahalgam terror attack on April 22.

Sources said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh refused to sign the document on Thursday as it did not mention the Pahalgam attack but included militant activities in Balochistan. Pakistan and China were trying to divert attention from terrorism, and the document would have diluted India's position on critical issues, particularly terrorism and regional security, sources added.

In his address at the SCO meet in Qingdao, Mr. Singh said a terror group, The Resistance Front, had carried



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with his Chinese counterpart Dong Jun in Qingdao. ANI VIDEO GRAB

out a “dastardly and heinous attack” on innocent tourists at Pahalgam in Jammu and Kashmir, killing 26 innocent civilians, including a Nepali national. The TRF, a proxy of the UN-designated Lashkar-e-Taiba, had claimed responsibility for the attack, he said.

“Peace and prosperity cannot co-exist with terrorism and proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the hands of non-state actors and terror

groups. Dealing with these challenges requires decisive action. It is imperative that those who sponsor, nurture and utilise terrorism for their narrow and selfish ends must bear the consequences. Some countries use cross-border terrorism as an instrument of policy and provide shelter to terrorists. There should be no place for such double standards. SCO should not hesitate to criticise such nations,” Mr. Singh said.

Shukla becomes first Indian to enter the ISS

IAF Group Captain is the pilot of the much-delayed mission and will spend two weeks on the space station; he is one of the four astronauts designated to take part in Gaganyaan mission

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla of the Indian Air Force created history on Thursday afternoon by becoming the first Indian to enter the International Space Station.

As the Dragon crew capsule carrying Mr. Shukla and three other astronauts as part of Axiom Mission 4 (Ax-4) circled earth, he greeted people back home with a “*Namaskar* from space”. The spacecraft then docked with the ISS at 4.01 p.m. IST as it passed over the north Atlantic Ocean.

For Mr. Shukla, this is the first step to a more ambitious mission as he is one of the four astronauts designated to take part in Gaganyaan, India’s first human spaceflight mission. The Indian Space Research Organisation, which ex-



Mission update: Shubhanshu Shukla and his fellow astronauts being welcomed aboard by the ISS crew. PTI

pects to conduct the first crewed flight under this mission no earlier than 2026, paid more than ₹500 crore for the Ax-4 mission to include Mr. Shukla and Prasanth Nair, another Gaganyaan designate who was part of the back-up crew for the Ax-4 mission.

On Thursday’s flight, Mr. Shukla was the mission pilot. A live videolink from NASA showed the spacecraft approaching the sta-

tion, with the docking sequence being completed at 4.15 p.m.

At the lift-off on Wednesday evening from Florida, Axiom Space – which is orchestrating the mission – had said the capsule would attempt docking in about 28 hours.

“Shubhanshu stands at the threshold entrance of International Space Station... as the world watches with excitement and ex-

pectation,” Union Minister of State for Space Jitendra Singh wrote in a post on X.

The four astronauts aboard will spend the next two weeks at the ISS conducting scientific experiments, including eight from ISRO, and helping with the station’s upkeep.

The first delay was due to adverse weather, followed by technical issues in the Falcon 9 rocket and then on the ISS.

In the lead-up to the Ax-4 mission, both Mr. Shukla and Mr. Nair had received advanced training at NASA’s Johnson Space Centre in Texas.

Along with the other Gaganyaan designates Ajit Krishnan and Angad Pratap, they had previously received training in Russia. Training inputs from the U.S. and Russia are deemed valuable because of their considerable human spaceflight experience.