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'OPEC must squeeze U.S. shale to win oil price war'



Looming uncertainty: Frackers need oil price of between \$61 and \$70 a barrel to expand production. REUTERS

Ron Bousso
LONDON

Oil drillers in the U.S. shale heartland are slowing down operations, a sign that OPEC's high-stakes price war is starting to pay off, but Saudi Arabia will need to exert a lot more pain to make a lasting impact on market share. U.S. oil producers upended the global market in the early 2010s, as the innovative 'fracking' drilling technique allowed them to tap vast onshore shale formations. Consequently, the United States, long the world's top oil consumer, became its leading producer as of 2018. It now pumps about 13.5 million barrels a day, about 13% of world supplies.

The rising tide of U.S. oil has long irked the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, which has seen its market share steadily erode over the past two decades. Saudi Arabia, OPEC's de facto leader, in 2014 sought to curb surging U.S. output by flooding the market with cheap oil. This effort bankrupted a number of shale producers, but it only temporarily paused the country's ascent as companies adapted to lower prices and the industry consolidated.

Price war redux

Riyadh and its allies, a group known as OPEC+, are now giving it another go. They surprised the market earlier this year by announcing that they would rapidly unwind 2.2 million bpd of production cuts introduced in 2024. The group is expected to announce further increases in production later this week.

Benchmark U.S. oil prices have dropped by nearly a quarter since January to around \$61 a barrel in response to OPEC+'s strategy as well as concerns over U.S. President Donald Trump's trade wars. At these prices, many shale wells are not profitable, as frackers require an oil price of between \$61 and \$70 a barrel to expand production, according to a survey conducted by the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank.

And sure enough, nimble frackers have already responded by paring back drilling activities to conserve cash. The number of U.S. onshore oil drilling rigs dropped by eight to 465 last week, the lowest since November 2021, according to energy services firm Baker Hughes.

Crucially, drillers in the Permian Basin in West Texas and eastern New Mexico, which accounts for nearly half of U.S. production, cut three rigs, bringing the total down to 279, also the lowest since November 2021. Crude production from new Permian wells, a measure of productivity, slightly improved in April, but that was largely offset by declines in other basins.

And multiple indicators suggest activity is set to decelerate further. Importantly, Frac Spread Count, which measures the number of crews actively performing hydraulic fracturing, has seen a 28% annual drop to 186, according to energy consultancy Primary Vision, an indication production could fall sharply in coming months.

(The opinions expressed here are those of the author, a columnist for Reuters)



Autonomous warfare in Operation Sindoor

In the recent India-Pakistan war, over four days of hostilities, both sides effectively rewrote their rules of engagement, ushering in a 'new normal' of airborne deterrence without pilots, but with autonomous platforms, armed drones and loitering munitions

FULL CONTEXT

Rahul Bedi

Launched in early May, in retaliation to the April 22 Pahalgam terror attack, Operation Sindoor marks a historic milestone, in which Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) played a primary role in direct military combat between two nuclear-armed neighbours, signalling an uncharted era of drone-centric warfare in South Asia.

Over four days of hostilities, both sides effectively rewrote their rules of engagement, ushering in a 'new normal' of airborne deterrence without pilots, but with autonomous platforms, armed drones and loitering munitions, all operating below the threshold of a full-scale war, and shaping a calibrated, escalation-managed conflict.

In the 48 hours preceding Operation Sindoor, Israeli Heron MK-II and indigenously designed TAPAS-BH-201/ Rustom-II-Medium-Altitude Long-Endurance (MALE) Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) are believed to have flown deep into Pakistani airspace to gather electronic and signals intelligence and thermal signatures of suspected Islamist terror camps.

Thereafter, from May 7 onwards, after the Indian Air Force (IAF) attacked nine targets inside Pakistan, both sides employed a broad spectrum of UAS – from ISR UAVs to armed drones, kamikaze loitering munitions, electronic decoys and quadcopters – as dual-purpose tools for real-time intelligence gathering and precision strikes. And as this drone war intensified, both countries sought to dominate the battlespace through persistent aerial surveillance by mapping out enemy air defences, missile batteries, command centres, troop clusters and logistical nodes. Decoy drones too were widely employed to spoof radars, 'bait' air defence systems and exhaust interceptors, minimising risk to manned assets, before ceasefire ensued on May 10.

India's array of aerial systems

In the intervening period, India claimed to have downed some 600 Pakistani drones, releasing intercepted footage and wreckage to reinforce its assertions in a high-stakes information war, paralleling the kinetic exchanges. Pakistan, in turn, alleged that 300–400 Indian drones had unsuccessfully targeted its military and strategic infrastructure, before being shot down. India has neither confirmed nor denied these avowals, citing Operation Sindoor's enduring operational status for its silence.

Open-source intelligence and drone-tracking data, meanwhile, revealed that India's offensive against Pakistan featured a diverse UAS inventory. It was spearheaded by indigenously developed loitering munitions like the GPS-guided Nagasra-1 and Israeli-origin Harop drones, capable of autonomously homing in on enemy radar systems.

To overwhelm Pakistan's air defences, India also deployed swarm drone formations developed jointly by the Defence Research and Development Organisation and private contractors to create radar clutter, trigger premature defensive responses and saturate surveillance networks. Priority targets included ammunition depots, Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) batteries, radar sites, and forward operating bases. The strikes were delivered in carefully



New war: A soldier looks at a drone at the Akhnoor sector near the LoC in Jammu on May 19. AFP

sequenced waves. Initial sorties deployed decoy drones and electronic warfare payloads to saturate radar coverage and provoke early, albeit futile SAM launches. These were followed by precision loitering munitions and armed UAVs, guided in real-time by Heron MK IIs and TAPAS-BH-201/ Rustom-IIs. Quadcopters and micro-UAVs played a critical role in relaying live ISR feeds and target acquisition data via the Army's Integrated Battle Management System (IBMS) to forward units, ensuring dynamic targeting and reaction.

Notably, media reports claimed that India's drone strikes disrupted a cricket match in Rawalpindi, forcing a stadium evacuation due to air defence alarms. Another significant Harop strike, reportedly destroyed a Chinese-supplied HQ-9 air defence system near Lahore, delivering both a psychological blow and a strategic setback to Pakistan's layered air defence shield.

Consequently, military analysts noted that India's overwhelming use of varied UAS to deliver calibrated, cross-border strikes without risking manned aircraft, represented the emerging regional model of deterrence. They said it also visibly showcased India's growing competence in autonomous, cost-effective, and networked warfare, demonstrating a significant shift in the balance of aerial power in South Asia.

Pakistan's retaliation

Pakistan, for its part, in its reactive Operation Bunyan-un-Marsook (wall of lead), deployed a range of UAS, including its indigenously developed Shahpar (feather)-II MALE UAVs, armed Burraq (lightening) drones, Turkish-origin Bayraktar TB2s, and Chinese-supplied CH-4 and Wing Loong II platforms. These assets were complemented by CH-901 and WS-43 loitering munitions from China and domestically produced kamikaze drones, launched at multiple targets across a 1,500-kilometre expanse, stretching from Kashmir in the north to Bhuj in the west. While the Shahpar IIs, TB2s, and Wing Loong IIs primarily conducted ISR

missions – streaming real-time imagery of Indian troop concentrations, artillery positions, and logistics depots – Pakistan's loitering munitions targeted radar stations, forward operating bases and critical Army and IAF command nodes in the northern and western sectors. However, these attacks were effectively neutralised by India's robust, multi-tiered air defence grid, inflicting minimal or no damage at all.

Strategic urban and military infrastructure hubs – including Jammu, Pathankot and Amritsar in Punjab, Bikaner and Jaipur in Rajasthan, and Bhuj in Gujarat – too were frequently targeted. But despite the density of these assaults, India's integrated air defence network – comprising layered radar coverage, SAM batteries, automated threat-response mechanisms, and upgraded Cold War-era legacy platforms and systems – mitigated damage, preventing disruption.

India's multi-layer air defence system

Pakistan reportedly sought to probe and bring to heel India's Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) – its air defence nerve centre – by launching drones via varied routes, altitudes and diverse timings, to disrupt its communication nodes and forward-deployed command centres, albeit unsuccessfully. The IACCS fuses surveillance inputs from ground-based radars, airborne early warning and control platforms, satellites, and other sensors into a centralised but distributed command-and-control network. It integrates with SAM systems and fighter aircraft, enabling the rapid detection, tracking, and interception of low-altitude threats, including UASs. Its built-in mechanisms ensured continuity of operations, even if any individual nodes were damaged, jammed or destroyed.

Pakistan attempted to overload the IACCS's radar coverage, confuse response loops, and expose vulnerabilities for follow-on drone or missile strikes. However, military officials confirmed the IACCS's core network remained intact,

with all and any temporary disruptions swiftly mitigated through alternate data links and pre-positioned mobile radars.

Analysts further noted the system's 'mesh' architecture allowed seamless failovers when nodes were hit, with satellite uplinks and mobile platforms sustaining full situational awareness. The IACCS also displayed its Directed Energy Weapons (DEWs) capability in which high-powered lasers or microwaves, via a real-time network, detected, tracked and neutralised airborne threats like drones speedily.

Complementing the IACCS at the tactical level was the Akashteer (Sky Arrow) air defence control and reporting system, developed by Bharat Electronics Limited, which provided a digitised command layer for Army Air Defence units, enabling seamless coordination between sensor units and weapon platforms. Designed to rapidly disseminate targeting data and manage low-level threats – including UAVs – it ensured that frontline SAM units could engage targets with minimal delay, even under electronic warfare or communication stress.

The accompanying air defence shield was built around a layered architecture combining retrofitted legacy Low-Level Air Defence (LLAD) systems with advanced missile platforms in an unparalleled innovative mix that remains a hallmark of the Indian military's improvisation.

Ingenuously upgraded with radar-directed fire capability and electro-optical sights, Cold War-era systems from the early 1960s, comprised the LLAD network for close-in protection against drones. These included Pechora and OSA-AK SAM systems and ZSU-23-4 Shilka, ZU-23-2 twin barrel 23mm anti-aircraft (AA) guns from Soviet times, and the L/70 Bofors 40mm AA platform dating back to the 1940s. Army and Border Security Force snipers too were part of the LLAD structure, shooting down numerous incoming drones in Jammu, Punjab and Rajasthan. These 'heirloom' LLAD platforms were supplemented by the Israeli SPYDER short and medium-range air defence missile system using Python-5 and Derby missiles for point defence against UAVs, cruise missiles, and aircraft.

A new kind of war

The domestic Akash and Akash-NG (New Generation) missile system provided medium-range coverage, while the long-range Barak-8, jointly developed with Israel, defended high-value assets and strategic nodes from aircraft, drones, and ballistic/cruise missiles. These were all backed by Russia's Almaz-Antey S-400 'Triumf' self-propelled surface-to-air missile system – renamed Sudarshan Chakra – one the world's best, of which India had acquired five units for \$5.5 billion in October 2018 and, so far, taken delivery of three.

All these systems were centrally integrated through the IACCS, enabling coordinated, real-time responses and full-spectrum aerial threat mitigation.

In conclusion, Operation Sindoor was not merely a skirmish; it was a seismic shift in which two nuclear-armed rivals stepped into the age of autonomous warfare, where deterrence is digital, and dominance is algorithmic. And as the smoke subsides, one truth remains: the next war will not begin with a soldier's charge, but with the silent whirl of drones in the sky.

Rahul Bedi is a veteran journalist based in New Delhi and Chandigarh specialising in military, defence and security matters.

THE GIST

Open-source intelligence and drone-tracking data, meanwhile, revealed that India's offensive against Pakistan featured a diverse UAS inventory.

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Is the three-year practice mandate for judicial service welcome?



Prashant Reddy T.
Co-author of 'Tareekh Pe Justice: Reforms for India's District Courts'



Bharat Chugh
Delhi-based advocate and former civil judge

PARLEY

In May 20, the Supreme Court restored a minimum of three years of legal practice as a mandatory condition to apply for entry-level judicial service. The ruling reverses the Court's 2002 decision that had removed the practice requirement, originally mandated by a 1993 judgment. Is the three-year practice requirement a welcome move? Prashant Reddy T. and Bharat Chugh discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Aaratrika Bhaumik. Edited excerpts:

Is this a welcome reform?

Bharat Chugh: I do not believe that three years of practice at the Bar significantly enhances a candidate's legal acumen or preparedness for judicial office. Such a brief tenure is unlikely to provide any meaningful exposure to the nuances and complexities of legal practice. The verdict also appears unsupported by empirical evidence and does little to address the systemic concerns it purports to resolve.

Prashant Reddy: I believe that it is a step in the right direction. However, it may still be insufficient. Ideally, candidates should get more courtroom experience before assuming judicial office. The near-consensus among the High Courts offers compelling empirical evidence to this effect. Barring two, all 23 High Courts have opined that the recruitment of young law graduates into the judicial service has yielded unsatisfactory outcomes. Moreover, in 2021, the Bar Council of India issued a scathing statement asserting that judges who do not have practical experience at the Bar were "found to be incapable and inept in handling matters".

Is it more effective to focus on strengthening the judicial training programmes instead?

PR: Judicial academies are under-equipped to provide meaningful training to newly appointed judges. More importantly, it is difficult to impart real-world skills within a classroom setting. It would require an exceptionally low faculty-to-trainee ratio to offer the kind of individual feedback and mentorship that these skills demand. Moreover, what cannot be taught in any institutional setting are lived experiences. There is a vast difference in how a recent law graduate perceives the world compared to someone in their mid-30s or 40s. Over time, personal and professional experiences foster a degree of emotional maturity that is essential for judicial decision-making. This point was highlighted in the Uttarakhand High Court's



A view of the Supreme Court of India. [ANI](#)

feedback to the Supreme Court committee examining the issue.

BC: I agree that a deeper understanding of life is essential to becoming a capable judge and that such understanding cannot be cultivated solely within the confines of a one-year judicial training programme. However, if we expect judges to enter the system with substantial life and professional experience, we must make the judicial service far more attractive than it is. By the time a candidate is appointed as a junior civil judge or first-class magistrate, they are likely to be around 29-30 years old. Given the working conditions and limited incentives, this is hardly an appealing career path, especially when they could instead qualify directly for the District Judge cadre by the age of 33 or 35.

How can we ensure the practice requirement isn't reduced to a mere formality?

BC: As you rightly said, it risks becoming a mere formality. The verdict does not lay down any concrete parameters to assess such experience. This not only undermines the purpose of such certification but also renders the process exclusionary, placing at a disadvantage those who lack mentorship or access to established professionals in the field. If the assessment is to be documentation-based, a more structured and transparent system is essential. For instance, a digital diary could be instituted, requiring candidates to upload verifiable records, such as order sheets and details of court appearances, onto a secure portal. The verdict also does not provide clarity on how candidates working in non-litigating roles, such as those employed by public sector undertakings or in-house legal departments, are to be assessed.

PR: I agree with Bharat. It is a fundamentally flawed and poorly conceived reform. Had the process been more democratic, with a public consultation mechanism in place, stakeholders could have pointed out the numerous practical



Had the process been more democratic, with a public consultation mechanism in place, stakeholders could have pointed out the numerous practical challenges associated with implementing such a measure.

PRASHANT REDDY T.

challenges associated with implementing such a measure. The disconnect becomes even more evident when one considers the realities of legal practice in India. In their formative years, most junior advocates are relegated to peripheral tasks, such as seeking adjournments, rather than engaging in substantive litigation. To regard such limited exposure as meaningful courtroom experience is deeply problematic.

Will it deter top talent from joining the judiciary, particularly candidates from marginalised or impoverished backgrounds?

BC: Yes. Previously, when such a requirement was absent, the judicial service offered a level playing field and a meaningful route to public service for many law graduates, particularly those from lesser-known law schools. Moreover, those who discover an aptitude for litigation may be reluctant to abandon their practice to start over as entry-level civil judges or magistrates in their late 20s.

It is equally important to note that persistent delays and procedural lapses in the conduct of judicial service exams deter serious candidates. Without systemic reforms, even if these exams attract a large number of applicants, the judiciary risks losing individuals best equipped to strengthen and transform the institution.

PR: As the qualifying age for the exam increases, the pool of applicants is likely to shrink. Offering the same pay and incentives to candidates in their late 20s as were previously offered to those in their early 20s will inevitably diminish the exam's appeal. That said, given the intense competition and limited opportunities in litigation, there will always be law graduates interested in joining the judicial service. However, the more pressing question is whether the exam attracts the most capable candidates. In my view, the current exam format, even with the addition of an interview stage, does not succeed in drawing the best talent.

The India Justice Report shows that the proportion of women judges in the district judiciary rose from 30% in 2017 to 38.3% in 2025. Could the practice requirement

disproportionately impact women?

PR: Certainly. For many women, the lack of financial resources or familial support makes it difficult to sustain three years of litigation. In contrast, a career in the judiciary offers greater financial stability and social legitimacy. That said, most States have reservations for women in the district judiciary, which will help preserve its appeal as a viable career option. However, it is vital to recognise that the composition of the Bench is intrinsically tied to the diversity of the Bar. A judiciary that lacks gender representation often mirrors broader systemic exclusions within the legal profession.

BC: In recent years, notable strides have been made in enhancing gender representation within the district judiciary. Without this added hurdle, the progress might have reflected in the higher judiciary. Litigation presents many entry-level barriers for women; many encounter resistance from conservative families that are more supportive of careers in academia or corporate law. Moreover, increasing the presence of women on the Bench is not just a matter of representation, it also helps foster greater sensitivity within the legal system.

Is this an instance of 'courtroom policymaking'? If so, should it be avoided?

PR: Absolutely. This is also a case of constitutional impropriety. Under Article 234 of the Constitution, the power to prescribe eligibility criteria for members of the district judiciary rests with the executive, in consultation with the State Public Service Commissions and the respective High Courts. The Supreme Court has no authority to appropriate these powers for itself. Yet, it has been doing so since the first All India Judges' Association case in 1991.

BC: Before advocating a reform of this scale, it is essential to gather thorough and reliable data. For instance, are there more complaints or disciplinary proceedings against judicial officers without prior advocacy experience compared to those who have it? Is the system able to retain judicial officers over time? These are complex questions that require data-driven analysis – something the Court, with its limited jurisdiction and time-bound hearings, is not equipped to carry out effectively.



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Danger in the sea

India's response to maritime disasters must be faster and better

In the afternoon of May 24, *MSC Elsa 3*, carrying more than 640 containers, started tilting off the coast of Kochi, apparently due to an operational problem. The nearly three-decade-old ship was said to be structurally safe. The crew abandoned the ship after unsuccessfully trying to right her. Now, *Elsa 3* is lying at the bottom of the seabed 50 metres below. As per the cargo manifest, officials say the ship had 13 containers with hazardous goods. Twelve had calcium carbide, a reactive compound, and one had "rubber solution". Some 50 containers, many empty, were floating and getting tossed around by monsoon weather. Officials say the rubber solution has reacted with the seawater and accounts for the plastic pellets being found on the Kerala coast. Five containers with calcium carbide, another pollution hazard, are lying on the seabed and need to be safely disposed of before they cause damage. Some oil pollution has also been reported. There is as yet no clarity on how to safely dispose of the plastic pellets.

Though containers have tremendously boosted world trade logistics, oversight and control of what each container that passes several hands, ships and yards has is a global problem. Besides the 600-odd containers still lodged inside *Elsa 3*'s cargo space, some 365 tonnes of heavy fuel oil and 60 tonnes of diesel lie inside the ship's tanks. That much of the oil has not seeped out yet is fortuitous but there is every possibility of it happening if quick action is not taken. The Chennai coast was ravaged by 250 tonnes of heavy fuel oil from an oil tanker that collided with an LPG carrier in 2017. *MSC Elsa 3* is a toxic dump that needs to be quickly disposed of. Salvagers are being engaged and they will follow international insurance protocols. The National Oil Spill Disaster Contingency Plan (NOS-DCP) names the Coast Guard as the nodal agency for such responses. In Chennai, the response was delayed by several days and there was much confusion and a lack of coordination between agencies. In Kerala, however, there has been enough time to rig up an effective response. With ambitious plans for economic growth that will inevitably lead to a surge in ship traffic, the government has also planned to draw more national and global transshipment traffic into India's waters. India is only set to see a great number and variety of ships of varying cargoes on its coast in future. The Kerala response will show how well prepared India is to handle a major maritime disaster.



Rewriting the script of early childhood education

“Some kids win the lottery at birth; far too many don't – and most people struggle to catch up,” said the Nobel Laureate Prof. James Heckman. This holds true for India as well where its employment problem is partly a consequence of this “lottery of birth”. A child born in India has a one-in-five chance of being born into poverty, affecting their health, nutrition, learning and earning potential. Yet, there is a way to beat these odds. From the decision by Uttar Pradesh to hire 11,000 dedicated Early Childhood Care and Education educators for Balavatikas to Odisha launching Shishu Vatikas and Jadaupedi Kits, States in India are showing the way.

The Heckman curve was a powerful economic model that provided a simple yet profound insight – of the relationship between age and the rate of return on investments in human capital. Heckman found that every dollar invested in early childhood education yields a return that ranges from \$7 to \$12, with lasting impacts: children who receive quality early education are four times more likely to have higher earnings and three times more likely to own a home as adults. By age five, many gaps in outcomes – such as earning potential and quality of life – are already evident. Children often struggle throughout life if motivation and learning habits are not nurtured early.

Learning outcomes

Yet, India's ECE system faces three major challenges. First, children are not receiving sufficient instructional time. Nearly 5.5 crore children between ages three to six are enrolled in 14 lakh operational Anganwadis and 56,000 government pre-primary schools. However, Anganwadi workers spend only 38 minutes per



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Strategic investments in early childhood education and engaging parents will help young learners

day on preschool instruction, which is far short of the scheduled two hours, and only 9% of pre-primary schools have a dedicated ECE teacher. We are planting trees without the right care to help them grow. The effects are reflected in learning outcomes. The India Early Childhood Education Impact Study found that only 15% of pre-primary children could match basic objects, a skill essential for letter recognition in Class one. Similarly, only 30% could identify larger and smaller numbers, which are foundational for arithmetic. As a result, children often start formal schooling without the skills they need, with many bypassing essential ECE years entirely: 2% of three-year-olds, 5.1% of four-year-olds, and nearly one-fourth of five-year-olds are enrolled directly in Class one.

The issue of resources, engaging parents

Second, the thoughtful optimisation of resources for early childhood education remains a challenge. The Government of India spends only ₹1,263 a child annually on ECE compared to ₹37,000 a student on school education – largely on producing teaching-learning materials that are often underused. There simply are not enough teachers to implement these resources, and there is a lack of oversight – one supervisor is responsible for monitoring 282 Anganwadis. To improve oversight, we need targeted funding to hire more supervisors and dedicated ECE teachers. These measures, though modest, promise high returns.

Uttar Pradesh has now moved ahead on the hiring of nearly 11,000 ECE educators for Balavatikas in all districts. The State also organised a six-day residential training programme for 50 master trainers from 13 districts to train them on ECE pedagogy. Odisha

has taken the decision to open Shishu Vatikas in all government schools to make children in the age group five to six school ready.

While increased funding would lead to immediate improvements, sustaining these gains depends on engaging parents, and here lies the third challenge. Most parents care deeply about their children's education but may lack guidance on supporting early learning. Empowering parents with simple, effective ECE practices can make a significant difference. For instance, providing worksheets or encouraging their participation in ECE centre activities can deepen their involvement.

In Madhya Pradesh, the monthly Bal Choupal programme engages with parents directly by showing them the importance of play-based learning. With smartphone access nearly universal, parental engagement can be further strengthened through WhatsApp or EdTech apps, allowing parents to support their children's development.

In perspective

Reversing these odds may seem like an uphill battle, but with targeted funding and increased parental involvement, we can provide our children with the foundation they deserve.

By 2047, over a billion Indians will enter the global workforce, presenting an unprecedented opportunity to reshape India's role in the world economy. Strategic investments in ECE and engaging parents in their children's learning journey could help 200 million Indians escape the lottery of birth and give today's young learners the chance to become tomorrow's leaders. This is a critical pathway to realising India's vision of becoming a true Vishwa Guru, empowering generations to come.



Slow and unsteady

Ethnic violence has abated but peace continues to elude Manipur

It has been a little over three months since President's Rule was declared in Manipur, after a disastrous spell when the State government, led by the Bharatiya Janata Party's N. Biren Singh, failed to de-escalate tensions in the ongoing ethnic conflict. By all accounts, there has been a significant reduction in gun violence and arson, which had flared up sporadically since the ethnic conflagration began in May 2023. Some of the weapons that were looted from police constabularies have been returned and the militants do not seem to be roaming around with sophisticated weapons impudently as they did earlier. But that has not meant that peace has returned. The free movement of people and goods across highways and between the hills and the valley continues to be impeded. There have been no signs of any thaw in the hostility between the two communities that were at the centre of the conflict and this has meant that those displaced, and who lost their homes in the valley and the hills, are yet to return. That the peace has been fragile was seen in the way the Imphal valley convulsed in protests following a recent incident during the run-up to the Shirui Lily festival, in Ukhrul district in late May. When a State transport bus with journalists drove close to Kuki-Zo inhabited areas, some security personnel placed stickers on the bus to hide the name of the State - an act that riled civil society groups in the valley. Ostensibly, this was done to allow for their safe passage through the Kuki-Zo areas but it only antagonised groups in the valley who saw this as an act of kow-towing to demands for a "separate administration", one of the key demands of the Kuki-Zo community representatives. Apparently, some of the latter's partisans had opposed transport services through their areas but stepped back after a stern stance by the organisers of the festival.

It is understandable that the Union government has to walk a tightrope in Manipur, and that explains the relatively slow pace of a return to "true normalcy". But the government must take strong steps in disarming insurgent and chauvinist groups who continue to hold sway in the valley and the hills. It should also send out a message that these sections will not represent the respective communities in the peace and political initiatives that are needed to resolve the conflict. The distrust of state institutions has led to ethnic partisans setting the discourse. In order to reverse this situation, a stronger commitment to implementing the rule of law, while focusing on rehabilitating the victims of the conflict, is the need of the hour. Meanwhile, there have been calls for the restoration of the State Assembly, with some MLAs claiming majority support for a fresh iteration of an NDA government. This step should only be considered if there is some consensus on steps to be taken towards normalcy among the elected representatives of the respective communities and civil society actors.



Tobacco affordability fuelling cancer epidemic in India

Unlike in other countries where higher prices have deterred smoking, prices remain low in India; tobacco affordability undermines the World Health Organization's MPOWER framework and weakens control, hindering efforts to reduce tobacco-related cancers; implementing robust policies are the need of the hour to curb tobacco use

WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY

Vid Karmarkar

Take a walk around any Indian office, and you're likely to spot some employees gathered outside, sipping tea and smoking a cigarette. Sandeep, a young marketing professional, calls such 'sutta (smoking) breaks' a creative escape. "It's time to take a break from work stress and make connections. The chai-sutta break is where ideas flow as freely as the smoke." But for many non-smokers, this comes at a cost – involuntary exposure to second-hand smoke.

According to GATS2 data, nearly 42% of men and 14% of women in India use tobacco. Home to 70% of the world's smokeless tobacco (SLT) users, SLT is preferred over smoked tobacco in the country. In smoked tobacco, the bidi is favoured over cigarettes, especially in rural and low-income groups. Despite the preference for bidis, India has seen the largest increase in the market share of cigarettes globally.

Rajesh, a shopkeeper in Mulshi, a village near Pune, says, "Bidis are what people here can afford. Cigarettes are for the city folks. But now even in villages, people want to try cigarettes because they think it's modern."

Both SLT and smoked tobacco drastically increase cancer risk, particularly for lung, head, neck, stomach, and pancreatic cancers. "My uncle chewed tobacco for years," said Sunita, a homemaker from Maharashtra. "He passed away from mouth cancer, and we didn't realise how dangerous it was until it was too late," she says.

India ranks first globally in male cancer incidence and mortality rates. Among tobacco-related cancers in males, lung cancer leads globally, while in India, lip and oral cancers top the list, followed by lung cancer. "Every time I see someone with a gutkha (which is banned in India) pouch in their pocket, I feel like warning them," says Manish, a college student whose father died of oral cancer.

Along with the health burden, tobacco use imposed an economic cost of ₹1.77 lakh crore (1.04% of India's GDP) in 2017-2018. Smoking accounted for 74% of these costs, while SLT use made up 26%. With tobacco use on the rise, both health and economic costs are projected to increase. Rajiv, who quit smoking after a cancer scare, says: "I never realised the financial toll until I saw the hospital bills. Smoking doesn't just cost you money – it costs you your life and the lives of those who depend on you."



Call to action: People taking part in a rally against smoking on the occasion of World No Tobacco Day which is observed annually on May 31. K. MURALI KUMAR

India faces a dual challenge of significant health and economic burdens from tobacco-related cancers and the complexities of lung cancer screening in a tuberculosis-endemic country. This underscores the urgent need for evidence-based anti-tobacco policies as a primary prevention strategy. However, the tobacco industry's influence – through policy interference, pricing tactics to maintain affordability, targeted marketing, dense tobacco shop networks, and a lack of political will – ensures widespread tobacco accessibility.

"The fact that a bidi costs less than a cup of tea is a tragedy," says Ashok, a retired clerk. "When I was younger, I didn't think twice about buying a bidi. Now I see how cheap tobacco ruins lives." Taxation is a critical yet underutilised tool in reducing tobacco use. Despite the proposed GST increase to 35%, it falls short of the World Health Organization's recommendation of taxing tobacco at 75% of its MRP to effectively deter use. Even with the steep increase in tobacco tax, its impact decreases if consumers' income increases significantly.

Unlike in many countries where higher prices have curbed smoking, rising incomes in India – especially among the 450 million middle class – have outpaced tax hikes. With more purchasing power, tobacco remains affordable. The 2024

Union Budget's unchanged tobacco taxes worsened the issue, enabling "undershifting," where manufacturers absorb tax hikes to grow their markets.

Unit pricing

A key factor in tobacco affordability is its unit pricing. A pack of bidis has a median price of ₹12 but can be found for as little as ₹5. Similarly, smokeless tobacco products have a median price of ₹5, with some being sold for as low as ₹1. Shankar, a daily wage labourer and cancer patient says he could afford to buy a few packs every day. While cigarette packs have a median price of ₹95, cheaper options are available for as low as ₹5. Sonia, a college student, says, "Cigarettes are so cheap that they're easy to buy. The government needs to make it harder for people like us to afford them."

To enhance affordability, cigarettes are often sold as single sticks – a practice banned in 88 countries but not in India. Priced at approximately ₹15, single sticks become easily affordable and bypass graphic health warnings. Research shows that 87% of Indian cigarette vendors sell single sticks, frequently operating near tea stalls, reinforcing the widespread "chai-sutta" culture.

In India where a significant proportion of the population earns ₹170-180 per day, along with the addictive potential of

tobacco, makes the current tobacco pricing affordable to fulfill their cravings.

Tobacco affordability undermines the WHO's MPOWER framework and weakens tobacco control, hindering efforts to reduce tobacco-related cancers. Reducing tobacco use is vital for cutting cancer incidence. Implementing robust anti-tobacco policies can be effective in curbing tobacco use.

Regular tax hikes that outpace income growth can make tobacco products unaffordable, discouraging their use. Additionally, banning single-stick sales can reinforce health warnings and curb impulse purchases. Further, allocating tobacco tax revenue towards public health initiatives, such as cancer screenings in underserved areas, can have a significant impact. Enforcing plain packaging with prominent health warnings can also reduce tobacco's appeal, while restricting sales near tea stalls can help break the 'chai-sutta' association. Robust enforcement, through regular inspections and penalties, is essential to uphold these regulations.

(Dr. Vid Karmarkar is a social entrepreneur, researcher, writer and advocate of advancing equitable cancer care and global health. He is also the founder of the Canseva Foundation, a registered nonprofit organisation. vid.karmarkar@gmail.com)

THE GIST

India ranks first globally in male cancer incidence and mortality rates. Among tobacco-related cancers in males, lung cancer leads globally, while in India, lip and oral cancers top the list, followed by lung cancer

Along with the health burden, tobacco use imposed an economic cost of ₹1.77 lakh crore (1.04% of India's GDP) in 2017-2018. Smoking accounted for 74% of these costs, while SLT use made up 26%

India faces a dual challenge of significant health and economic burdens from tobacco-related cancers and the complexities of lung cancer screening in a tuberculosis-endemic country. This underscores the urgent need for evidence-based anti-tobacco policies as a primary prevention strategy

EC's single-point dashboard likely to be operational before Bihar election

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The new integrated dashboard developed by the Election Commission is set to become operational during the current round of Assembly byelections and the upcoming Bihar Assembly election.

The dashboard, named ECINET, is aimed at providing all services for stakeholders at a single point, instead of the over 40 apps or websites that exist now.

EC sources said that some modules of ECINET will be made available during the current byelection process and by the time the Bihar Assembly election is held, the entire dashboard will be available for use.

Byelections to five Assembly seats in four States would be held on June 19.

The ECINET is among the slew of initiatives taken by the poll body since February to standardise poll management amid charges made by Opposition par-



The ECINET is among the slew of initiatives taken since February after Gyanesh Kumar assumed office as CEC. FILE PHOTO

ties over myriad issues ranging from anomalies in electoral rolls to duplicate voter ID card numbers.

It was on February 19 that Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar assumed office.

Some of the other initiatives taken by the EC since then include direct integration of death registration data from the Registrar General of India to enable timely and verified removal of deceased electors from the rolls and training of grassroots polling offi-

cers to streamline poll management.

The EC has also revised the maximum number of electors per polling station from 1,500 to 1,200. Additional polling booths will be established in densely populated areas such as gated communities and high-rise buildings.

The commission aims at ensuring that no voter is required to travel more than 2 km to vote. Voter information slips have been redesigned for clarity, with enhanced visibility of se-

rial and part numbers. Mobile phone deposit facility will also be set up at the entrance of every polling station, a senior EC official said.

The EC has also facilitated 4,719 meetings across the country with participation from over 28,000 political party representatives.

The commission has also held consultations in New Delhi with leaders of recognised political parties, including the Aam Aadmi Party, Bharatiya Janata Party, Bahujan Samaj Party, Communist Party of India (Marxist), and National People's Party, with more meetings planned after the current byelections.

Training programmes have been conducted for Booth Level Officers (BLOs), BLO Supervisors, and Booth Level Agents (BLAs). Over 3,500 BLOs and BLO Supervisors have been trained and they will in turn train the larger BLO network of over 10.5 lakh functionaries.



Air Chief Marshal flags delays in defence projects, invites private players to contribute

Devesh K. Pandey
NEW DELHI

Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh, Chief of the Air Staff (CAS), on Thursday expressed concern over delays in the delivery of defence projects. He urged private industry to rise to the occasion, develop world-class products, and contribute alongside other stakeholders to “making India a great nation”.

“Timeline is a big issue... not a single project that I can think of has been completed on time. This is something we have to look at. Why should we promise something which cannot be achieved? While signing the contract itself, sometimes we are sure that it is not going to come up, but we just sign the contract,”



Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh addressing the Confederation of Indian Industry Annual Business Summit in New Delhi on Thursday. PTI

said the Air Force chief at the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Annual Business Summit 2025.

Stating that it was a great opportunity for Indian private industry with the opening up of the defence sector, he said firms should rise to the occasion

and join hands to make world-class military equipment, even if the profit is not up to their expectation.

He called upon stakeholders to ensure that they did their best on their part as links in the bigger chain at the national level to plug

any shortcomings. “Building trust is not required with the armed forces, but retaining that trust depends on a lot of actions... we have to keep reinforcing that trust,” he said.

Regarding the “professionally executed” Operation Sindoor, the Air Chief described it as a national victory.

He said that with the changing character of war and the introduction of new technologies, there was a need to realign the approach, which was already being done. “I am sure, since we have been able to come up to the challenge till now, in future also we will be able to deliver the goods as a nation,” he said.

Air Chief Marshal Singh stated that the govern-

ment’s decision to involve private industry in the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) project was a “big step”, which showed the kind of confidence the nation had in the private sector.

He said Operation Sindoor showed the importance of having effective air power.

“As far as air power is concerned, we need to make sure that we have the capability plus the capacity. We cannot just talk about producing in India; we need to start designing and developing in India also. When it comes to producing in numbers, the capacity aspect comes in. We need to have this trust between the forces and the industry continued...,” he said.



No talks till Pakistan renounces terror, vacates PoK: India

Any India-Pak. engagement must be bilateral, says MEA spokesperson; India open to discussing Pakistan handing over noted terrorists, he adds

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Any engagement with Pakistan will have to be “bilateral”, but India will not engage with its neighbour on issues such as trade, the Indus Waters Treaty, or Jammu and Kashmir as long as Pakistan continues to support cross-border terrorism against India, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday.

“We are clear that talks and terror don’t go together. On terrorism itself, we are open to discussing the handing over to India of noted terrorists whose list was given to Pakistan some years ago. I would like to underline that any bilateral discussion on Jammu and Kashmir will only be on the vacation of illegally occupied Indian territory by Pakistan, and the Indus Waters Treaty will remain in abeyance until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures cross-border terrorism,” MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at a weekly press briefing.

“You are well aware of



I would like to underline that any bilateral discussion on Jammu and Kashmir will only be on the vacation of illegally occupied Indian territory by Pakistan, and the Indus Waters Treaty will remain in abeyance until Pakistan credibly and irrevocably abjures cross-border terrorism

RANDHIR JAISWAL
MEA Spokesperson



our position that any India-Pakistan engagement has to be bilateral,” he said, emphasising the established modality of interaction between the two sides.

Against the backdrop of Operation Sindoor, during which India bombed multiple Pakistani locations linked to proscribed terrorist outfits such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, officials have pointed out that the two sides have maintained diplomatic missions in each other’s capitals, discounting the space for third-party mediation.

The Ministry’s remarks came in the context of a rally in Lahore addressed by several wanted terro-

rists from the Lashkar-e-Taiba, including Talha Saeed and Muzammil Hashmi.

A video clip from the rally that has gone viral shows Mr. Hashmi threatening India with more cross-border terror attacks.

The rally stands in stark contrast to the multi-nation diplomacy that Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has carried out over the past week, visiting Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Iran, and offering to hold talks with India on multiple issues, including Kashmir and the Indus Waters Treaty.

In response, Mr. Jaiswal said that India’s policy on Pakistan has been “clear and consistent”.

Scientists discover new way to detect hidden properties of exotic materials

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

A team from the Raman Research Institute in Bengaluru found a new code for detecting hidden properties of exotic materials.

According to the Department of Science and Technology, scientists have found a new way of spotting a property of topological space called “topological invariant” in quantum materials, which remains unchanged under continuous deformations or transformations.

Topological materials are at the forefront of next-gen technology – quantum computing, fault-tolerant electronics, and energy-efficient systems. “But de-



The study by Raman Research Institute could enable discoveries related to quantum computers and next-gen electronics. FILE PHOTO

tecting their exotic properties has always been tricky,” the department said.

It added that in certain materials like topological insulators and superconductors, strange things

happen. “Electrons behave differently depending on how the material is ‘shaped’ at the quantum level. These shapes are defined not by their appearance, but by something deeper – topological invar-

iants, such as winding numbers and Chern numbers. These numbers are like hidden codes that determine how particles move through a material,” it added. The team found a new way to detect this hidden code using a property called the spectral function.

Professor Dibyendu Roy and PhD researcher Kiran Babasaheb Estake had carried this out by analysing the momentum-space spectral function (SPSF).

The study potentially offers a universal tool to explore and classify topological materials, that could pave the way for new discoveries related to quantum computers and next-generation electronics.



Pink squad



Couples' retreat: Flamingos have arrived in large numbers at the Chhaya pond in Porbandar town of Gujarat. After two months, these lesser flamingos will fly to the Great Rann of Kutch on the India-Pakistan border to breed. VIJAY SONEJI



Kerala government declares Kochi shipwreck a State disaster

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Kerala government has declared the shipwreck that occurred 14.6 nautical miles off its coast on May 24 a "State-specific disaster".

Tinku Biswal, Principal Secretary of the State Disaster Management department, stated that the shipwreck off Kochi posed a potentially serious threat to Kerala's coast, environmentally, socially, and economically.

Ms. Biswal stated in the government order that the incident had raised serious concerns, including the potential for oil spills and drifting of debris, such as cargo containers, in the littoral waters abutting Kerala's coastline.

la's coastline.

The order permits the State Disaster Management Authority to mobilise resources, including personnel and significant sums of money from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), for relief efforts.

MSC Elsa 3, which had set sail for Kochi from Vizhinjam, foundered after encountering extreme weather.

640 containers

A perilous combination of heavy seas, possible hull leakage, mechanical failure and perhaps unbalanced cargo reportedly caused the ship to list heavily and sink. The Coast Guard rescued the ship's crew, comprising 21 individuals.



Floating threat: A shipping container found washed ashore between Kodimunai and Vaniyakudi along the Tamil Nadu coastline on Thursday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Customs department verified the ship's cargo manifesto.

It said the sunken vessel threw 640 containers, in-

cluding 12 containing hazardous incendiary material, overboard when it flipped over. Thus far, at least 54 containers have

washed ashore on the beaches of Kollam (43), Thiruvananthapuram (9), and Alappuzha (2).

Meanwhile, Revenue Mi-

nister K. Rajan said a emergency response ship from Pudukcherry had set sail for the sunken ship.

He further said a marine disaster management team had cordoned off waters near the shipwreck site with floating booms to prevent oil slicks from spreading.

The Indian National Centre for Ocean Information (INCOIS) has mapped areas where weathered pieces of oil from a ship, known as "tar balls or petroleum blobs", could wash up along Kerala's coastline.

In South T.N.

Meanwhile, a container from the sunken Liberian ship washed ashore between Kodimunai and Vani-

yakudi in Tamil Nadu's Coimbatore on Thursday, a day after several bags of tiny plastic pellets from the ship were found along the shores of coastal villages in the western part of Kanniyakumari district.

Since Wednesday, containers from the ship are drifting towards Kanniyakumari due to ocean currents and monsoon winds.

Kanniyakumari District Collector R. Alagumeena told *The Hindu*, "An expert team from the shipping company in Gujarat is on its way to recover the item from the shore." Revenue and police officials are providing security to the container.

EDITORIAL

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India hopes U.S. will clear visas on merit

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Issuing visas is a sovereign topic for the U.S. government, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday, but added that the government hopes that the process will be completed in time for Indian students to join the U.S. universities they have gained admission to this year.

This comes amidst reports that the U.S. missions in India and around the world have temporarily paused scheduling new visa appointments as they await instructions from the U.S. State Department on how to enhance their screening of applicants' social media profiles.

MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said that the welfare of students was of "utmost priority".

"We have seen reports suggesting the U.S. government updated guidance regarding Student and Exchange Visitor visa applicants," Mr. Jaiswal said. "While we note that issuance of visa is a sovereign function, we hope that the application of Indian students will be considered on merit and they will be able to join their academic programmes on time," he added.

Mr. Jaiswal also pointed out that more than 3,30,000 Indian students were studying in the U.S., as of 2023-24. Indians made up nearly 30% of the roughly 1.1 million international students in the U.S. that year, the biggest bloc from any country.

Foreign Secy meetings

The controversy over the student visas, the latest hiccup to hit India-U.S. relations, came even as Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri ended his three-day visit to Washington. The MEA spokesperson did not confirm whether the pause in visas, or the Trump administration's latest repetition of claims that the U.S. mediated the India-Pakistan ceasefire using trade as leverage, were issues



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri meets U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Chris Landau in the U.S.

U.S. set to revoke visas of Chinese students: Rubio

WASHINGTON

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Wednesday that the Trump administration will begin revoking visas of some Chinese students, including those studying in "critical fields". The action comes amid the intensifying scrutiny of ties between U.S. higher education and China. » **PAGE 14**

raised during Mr. Misri's meetings, particularly his talks with U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau.

"[Mr. Landau and Mr. Misri] agreed that technology, trade, and talent will shape the India-U.S. partnership in the 21st century," Mr. Jaiswal said, adding that they committed to strengthening the comprehensive global strategic partnership between the two countries. "So whether this particular issue was raised [or not], I would say that all issues of mutual interest was discussed between India and the U.S."

Mr. Jaiswal said that Mr. Misri had also discussed defence and energy cooperation, as well as efforts to strengthen the Quad, IMEEC (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor), and I2U2 (Israel-India-UAE-U.S.) initiatives. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar is due to travel to Washington in June for a meeting of Quad Foreign Ministers, and India is expected to host the Quad summit in November.

HARVARD BAN ON HOLD
» **PAGE 14**



Major setback for Trump as U.S. court blocks tariffs

The Court of International Trade says the IEEPA does not confer unbounded authority on the U.S. President

Court gives the White House 10 days to halt tariffs; Trump administration appeals against the ruling

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

A U.S. federal court has blocked most of President Donald Trump's sweeping tariffs, boosting markets on Thursday with a ruling that could derail his trade strategy.

The move marks a significant setback to Mr. Trump as he bids to redraw the U.S. trading relationship with the world by forcing governments to the negotiating table through tough new tariffs.

But the three-judge Court of International Trade ruled on Wednesday that Mr. Trump had overstepped his authority, and barred most of the duties announced since he took office in January. The judges said the cases rested on whether the International Emergency Economic Powers Act of 1977 (IEEPA) delegate such powers to the President "in the form of authority to impose unlimited tariffs on goods from nearly every country in the world".

President's power

"The court does not read IEEPA to confer such unbounded authority and sets aside the challenged tariffs imposed thereunder," the ruling said.

Attorneys for the Trump administration promptly filed an appeal against the ruling, which gave the White House 10 days to complete the bureaucratic process of halting the tariffs.

The White House called the ruling "blatantly wrong," while expressing confidence that the decision would be overturned on appeal.

White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt told presspersons that the judges "brazenly abused their judicial power to usurp the



Twist in trade

The ruling by the U.S. Court of International Trade on Wednesday dealt a blow to President Donald Trump's central policy of using tough tariffs to force trading partners to the negotiation table and wring concessions from them

- The decision affects the blanket tariff orders issued by Trump since January
- Following a market revolt after the 'Liberation Day' tariff announcement on April 2, Trump had paused most duties for 90 days for negotiations
- Agreements, apart from a deal with Britain, remain elusive for Trump, and analysts say the stay may dissuade countries from rushing into deals
- Trump could impose sector-specific levies if the ruling holds in spite of an appeal by the administration

It is not for unelected judges to decide how to properly address a national emergency

The ruling... is blatantly wrong – and we are confident this decision will be overturned on appeal

STATEMENTS FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

India gauging impact of U.S. court verdict

NEW DELHI

The Centre is assessing the potential impact of the U.S. court's ruling that blocked the sweeping tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump, according to government sources. They added that the U.S. team of negotiators for the ongoing India-U.S. Free Trade Agreement discussions would be in India on June 5-6 and the talks were "progressing well". Experts said India must use the opportunity provided by the court decision to reassess strategy in FTA talks. » PAGE 12

Elon Musk to leave U.S. government role

WASHINGTON

Billionaire Elon Musk on Wednesday announced he was leaving his role in U.S. government shortly after his first major break with Mr. Trump over his signature spending Bill. He said on X: "As my scheduled time as a Special Government Employee comes to an end, I would like to thank President Donald Trump for the opportunity to reduce wasteful spending. The DOGE mission will only strengthen over time as it becomes a way of life throughout the government." » PAGE 14

authority of President Trump."

The White House also said that top U.S. officials have been in touch with their counterparts in other countries to discuss Wednesday's ruling.

Mr. Trump had argued that U.S.'s trade deficits and the threat posed by the influx of drugs constituted a "national emergency" that justified widespread tariffs.

The federal trade court was ruling in two separate cases – brought by businesses and a coalition of State governments – arguing that the President had violated Congress's power of the purse.

The judges stated that any interpretation of the IEEPA that "delegates unlimited tariff authority is unconstitutional".

"It is not for unelected judges to decide how to properly address a national emergency," White House spokesperson Kush Desai said in a statement.

"President Trump pledged to put America first, and the administration is committed to using every lever of executive power to address this crisis and restore American greatness," Mr. Desai said.

'Nothing has changed'

Mr. Trump's trade adviser Peter Navarro told Bloomberg Television: "Nothing's really changed."

Kevin Hassett, director of the National Economic Council, told the Fox Business that although officials have other options that would "take a couple of months" to implement, they are not planning to

pursue these right now.

Mr. Hassett insisted that "hiccups" because of decisions by "activist judges" would not affect negotiations with other trading partners, adding that three deals are close to finalisation.

Beijing – which was hit by 145% tariffs before they were sharply reduced to give space for negotiations – reacted to the court ruling by saying the United States should scrap the levies.

"China urges the United States to heed the rational voices from the international community and domestic stakeholders and fully cancel the wrongful unilateral tariff measures," said Commerce Ministry spokeswoman He Yongqian.

Canadian Prime Minis-

ter Mark Carney said his government welcomed the court decision, but warned that trade ties were still "profoundly and adversely threatened" by the remaining sector-specific levies and further threats.

Mr. Trump unveiled sweeping import duties on nearly all trading partners on April 2, at a baseline 10%, plus steeper levies on dozens of economies, including China and the EU.

'Abuse of power'

The U.S. court's ruling also quashes duties that Mr. Trump imposed on Canada, Mexico and China separately using emergency powers.

But it leaves 25% duties on the auto, steel and aluminium industries intact.

Asian markets rallied on Thursday and United States futures pointed to early gains, but Europe was mixed, with London in the red while Paris and Frankfurt rose.

Japan's tariffs envoy Ryosei Akazawa said as he left for a fourth round of talks in Washington that Tokyo – reeling from tariffs on cars – would study the ruling.

Meanwhile, Gregory W. Meeks, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the ruling confirmed that "these tariffs are an illegal abuse of executive power."

"Trump's declaration of a bogus national emergency to justify his global trade war was an absurd and unlawful use of IEEPA," he said.

The Justice Department has defended Mr. Trump's trade strategy in court, insisting that the judiciary has very limited authority over his actions and sparking criticism that the White House was attempting to usurp the power of the other branches of government.

