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'Mideast war shows Egypt's energy weak spot'

OPINION

Ron Bousso
LONDON

Egypt was one of the biggest economic losers of the Middle East's 12-day war after Israel shut down vital natural gas exports to its neighbour.

The gas pipeline linking two countries was turned back on after Israel and Iran agreed to U.S. President Donald Trump's ceasefire on June 23, but the episode highlights Egypt's vulnerability and fading hopes Eastern Mediterranean could become a major gas exporting region.

The discovery and development of enormous offshore gas resources near Egypt, Israel and Cyprus in the 2000s radically trans-



War clouds: An Israeli military ship sails next to the production platform of Leviathan natural gas field. REUTERS

formed the region's energy landscape, turning it into a major production hub and attracting international energy companies.

The surge in production was a huge boon for Egypt in particular. The discovery in 2015 of the Zohr field, the biggest gas deposit in the eastern Mediter-

anean, and its rapid development by 2017 offered Egypt critical energy for its domestic market as well as vital income from exports of liquefied natural gas (LNG), which reached 7 million tonne in 2022, nearly 2% of global supply, as per analytics firm Kpler.

But things started to go

awry for Egypt early this decade when production began declining rapidly, particularly in the flagship Zohr field. The country's output dropped from a peak of over 6 billion cubic feet per day (bcf/d) in early 2021 to 3.5 bcf/d by April 2025, as per JODI data.

Production is expected to average 4.4 to 4.6 bcf/d this year, according to Martin Sherriff, an analyst at consultancy Welligence Energy Analytics. It is, however, unlikely to increase significantly in the coming years given the country's limited offshore gas exploration success in recent years, he added.

Egypt's energy woes were compounded by the rapid growth in its population from 100 million in 2015 to 115 million by 2023. With domestic production

insufficient to meet the population's needs, Egypt in 2020 started to import gas from Israel, which also saw a surge in gas production last decade following the discovery of a number of big offshore resources. Israel's production rose by over 70% in the decade to 2024 to 2.5 bcf/d, with about half of volume exported to neighbouring Egypt and Jordan, as per government data.

Resumes LNG import

The sharp production decline also led Egypt to resume LNG imports in 2024 for the first time since 2018. Egypt is expected to import up to 160 LNG cargoes this year and next at far higher prices than what it can produce domestically or import from Israel, where export pipelines are

already at full capacity.

War casualty

Israel and Egypt, neighbouring countries who signed a peace agreement in 1979 after decades of intermittent conflict, saw inter-dependency tighten significantly as gas trade between them developed.

These gas flows were largely uninterrupted following the outbreak of violence in the region on October 7, 2023. But that changed on June 13 when Israel halted operations at two of its three offshore gas fields, Leviathan and Karish, hours after it launched a surprise wave of airstrikes against Iran, leading to the suspension of natural gas exports.

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



Indian economy remains a key driver of global growth: RBI report

Lalatendu Mishra
MUMBAI

Despite an uncertain and challenging global economic backdrop, the Indian economy remains a key driver of global growth, underpinned by sound macroeconomic fundamentals and prudent macroeconomic policies, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said in its half-yearly publication, the Financial Stability Report (FSR).

"Growth momentum is buoyed by strong domestic growth drivers, sound macroeconomic fundamentals and prudent policies," said Sanjay Malhotra, RBI



Rising global public debt is a matter of concern.

Governor in the foreword.

"Nonetheless, external spillovers and weather-related events could pose downside risks to growth. The outlook for inflation, on the other hand, is be-

nign and there is greater confidence in the durable alignment of inflation with the Reserve Bank's target.

"The resilience of the domestic financial system is continuously improving, bolstered by strong capital buffers, low non-performing loans and robust profitability," he said.

"Results of stress tests reaffirm the strength of the banking and non-banking sectors with capital levels projected to remain well above the regulatory minimum even under adverse shock scenarios. The healthy balance sheets of corporates, banks and non-bank financial compa-

nies (NBFCs) augur well for the economy," he added.

As per the FSR, financial conditions have eased, supported by an accommodative monetary policy and low volatility in the financial markets, it said. The strength of the corporate balance sheets also lent support to overall macroeconomic stability.

Geopolitical conflicts, capital outflows and reciprocal tariff/trade slowdown were the major near-term risks to domestic financial stability. "Rising global public debt is a key concern, especially in the context of elevated uncertainty," it added.



Can a G.I. tag prevent cultural misappropriation?

How many Indian products are registered as GI-tagged goods? Do 'international' GI rights exist?

Kartikey Singh

The story so far:

On June 25, at its Spring/Summer 2026 menswear show in Milan, Italian luxury brand Prada unveiled footwear inspired by India's Geographical Indication (GI)-tagged Kolhapuri chappals, sparking accusations of 'cultural misappropriation'.

What is a geographical indication?

It is a form of 'intellectual property' that identifies goods as originating from a specific country, region or locality, where their distinctive qualities, characteristics, or reputation are essentially linked to that 'place of origin'. In India, there are currently 658 registered GI-tagged goods, including Chandori sarees (Madhya Pradesh), Madhubani painting (Bihar), Pashmina shawls (J&K), Kancheepuram silk (Tamil Nadu), and Darjeeling tea

(West Bengal). Importantly, GIs serve as a powerful marketing tool, driving rural development, boosting exports, enhancing consumer confidence, and preserving 'cultural knowledge' of local communities, farmers and indigenous groups. Unlike trademarks, which are owned by enterprises, GIs are public property belonging to the producers of the concerned goods and cannot be assigned, transmitted or licenced.

The legal protection of GIs stem from international instruments like the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property (1883), and later gained a clearer definition under the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement, 1995. India, as a TRIPS signatory, enacted the Geographical Indications of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999, which came into force in 2003. The Act provides for GI registration, enforcement of rights, prohibition of unauthorised use

and penalties for infringement.

How can infringement be tackled?

The registered proprietor or authorised users may initiate infringement action when an unauthorised user misleads the public about the origin of goods, causes unfair competition or passing off, or falsely represents goods as originating from a GI-registered region. However, it is important to note that GI rights are primarily 'territorial' and consequently limited to the country (or region) where protection is granted. At present, no automatic 'world' or 'international' GI right exists. Nevertheless, several mechanisms exist for cross-border protection. GIs can be protected internationally by first securing recognition in the country of origin, as many jurisdictions require this as a precondition and then obtaining protection directly in the jurisdiction concerned.

Is this the first such case?

Indian traditional products have time and again suffered exploitation by global corporations. In 1997, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) controversially granted a patent to Ricetec Inc., a Texas-based company, for novel "lines and grains" of Basmati rice. After significant Indian legal efforts, the USPTO disallowed the patent holder from using the name "Basmati". Similar challenges arose with 'turmeric' when the University of Mississippi medical centre was granted a patent in 1995 for turmeric's wound-healing properties – a use long known in Indian traditional medicine. The Council of Scientific and Industrial Research contested the claim, leading to the revocation of the patent. Likewise, the European Patent Office in 2000 revoked a patent granted to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and a multinational firm W.R. Grace, for neem-based antifungal formulations, as the therapeutic use of neem was already part of Indian knowledge systems. To prevent such cases in the future, one could start by expanding the Traditional Knowledge Digital Library to include wider traditional grassroots expressions. Making a 'searchable database' would allow brands to conduct due diligence and searches to identify right holder communities for collaboration.

Kartikey Singh is a lawyer based in New Delhi. With inputs from Janhvi Singh.

THE GIST

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GST reform and unfinished business in tobacco control

As India marks eight years since the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on July 1, 2017, it is worth reflecting on this landmark reform. GST replaced a multiplicity of indirect taxes such as Value Added Tax (VAT), excise duties, and service tax, establishing a unified national market under the “One Nation, One Tax” framework. The reform harmonised tax rates across States, enhanced ease of doing business, and facilitated greater economic integration. Economically, GST has been a consistent contributor to national revenue. Gross GST collections in 2024-25 reached a record ₹22.08 lakh crore, reflecting a year-on-year growth of 9.4%.

Beyond revenue generation, GST has advanced economic efficiency. The elimination of cascading taxes through the input tax credit system has reduced production costs, benefiting both businesses and consumers. Compliance has improved through digitised processes, which include e-way bills, simplifying tax administration and curbing evasion. The removal of inter-State checkpoints has enhanced logistics efficiency, cutting transportation time by 20% in some cases and reducing costs.

Faultlines in taxation

However, this progress is accompanied by notable shortcomings, particularly in the realm of public health, specifically tobacco taxation. Tobacco use continues to pose a severe public health threat in India, causing over 3,500 deaths daily and incurring an economic burden of ₹2,340 billion annually (1.4% of GDP in 2017)—a figure far exceeding the ₹551 billion GST revenue generated from tobacco annually, on average, in the past five years. India remains the second-largest consumer of tobacco globally, with 28.6% of adults and 8.5% of students between the ages of 13 to 15 years using tobacco in some form.

Taxation is globally recognised as one of the most effective instruments to reduce tobacco use. Yet, since the introduction of GST, there have been no significant tax increases on tobacco products. This stands in stark contrast to the pre-GST period (2009-17), when regular increases



Rijo M. John

is a health economist and Adjunct Professor at the Rajagiri College of Social Sciences, Kochi, Kerala

A rate rationalisation exercise must address the shortcomings in the taxation of tobacco products, keeping in mind economic and public health outcomes

in excise and VAT contributed to a 17% decline in tobacco use prevalence. A stagnation in tax, Post-GST, increases risks, undermining past public health gains due to the increasing affordability of tobacco products (as pointed out in many studies). Currently, the overall tax burden on tobacco products remains well below the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation of 75% of the retail price: 22% for bidis, 54% for cigarettes, and 65% for smokeless tobacco.

A structural issue

A critical structural issue is the GST's heavy reliance on ad valorem taxes. While GST is inherently ad valorem, evidence shows that specific excise taxes – levied as a fixed amount per unit – are more effective in reducing the consumption of harmful products, as they are less susceptible to price manipulation by the industry. Since the implementation of GST, the share of central excise duties in total tobacco taxes has dropped significantly: from 54% to 8% for cigarettes, 17% to 1% for bidis, and 59% to 11% for smokeless tobacco. In contrast, many countries with VAT or GST regimes impose additional specific excise taxes on tobacco to achieve public health objectives. In India, inconsistencies across products exacerbate the problem. Although cigarettes represent only 15% of tobacco users, they contribute over 80% of tax revenue. Bidis, used predominantly by low-income populations, remain under-taxed. Notably, bidis, despite being the most widely consumed smoked tobacco product and as harmful as cigarettes, are not even subject to the GST compensation cess. This omission lacks any evidence-based public health justification.

An urgent concern is the potential expiration of the GST compensation cess in March 2026, which constitutes a substantial share of total tobacco taxes (nearly 50% for cigarettes). Its removal would significantly reduce tax burdens and render tobacco products more affordable, undermining health policy objectives.

Raising GST rates on tobacco products to the peak rate of 40%, as permitted in the GST law,

alongside the enhancement of specific excise taxes, would be a very effective dual strategy. A mixed tax structure that combines ad valorem and specific components has demonstrated greater efficacy in both reducing consumption and increasing revenues.

The illicit trade

The tobacco industry frequently argues that higher taxes drive illicit trade. However, independent peer-reviewed studies estimate that illicit cigarettes constitute only 2.7% to 6.6% of the market in India – substantially lower than the industry's claim of 25%. Research shows that tax increases have a limited effect on illicit trade. Instead, governance quality, regulatory strength and enforcement capacity are more decisive factors. India has ratified the World Health Organization (WHO) Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products and must now prioritize its implementation to prevent leakages.

As the GST Council undertakes deliberations on rate rationalisation and structural reform, it is imperative that public health considerations are given due priority. The Parliamentary Standing Committee, in its 139th Report (September 2022), highlighted that tobacco products in India remain among the most affordable globally and has stressed the critical need to enhance taxation on these products. Increasing GST rates to the statutory peak of 40%, alongside a substantial increase in specific excise duties, would serve the dual objectives of reducing the health and economic burden associated with tobacco use and strengthening fiscal consolidation. Such a strategy would reaffirm India's commitment to its public health objectives while aligning with its broader developmental goals. As the GST completes eight years since its enactment, the ongoing rate rationalisation exercise offers a timely opportunity to rectify existing shortcomings in the taxation of tobacco products. Addressing this issue would represent a meaningful advancement in the evolution of the GST framework and reinforce its role as a tool for promoting both fiscal and public health objectives.



In a perilous world, India must read the tea leaves well

India's foreign policy is currently facing an existential crisis. The second term of the Trump administration, which had previously been welcomed by India, has upset India's carefully crafted foreign policy. The recent India-Pakistan conflict should also be viewed as a 'wake-up call'. As details of the extent of China's military connections to Pakistan and of equipment transfer tumble out, India must take notice.

Next to the China-Pakistan nexus in the region, it is India's approach to events in West Asia and the Israel-Iran conflict that clearly need a relook. India has tried, not very successfully, to sit on the fence as far as the current Israel-Iran war is concerned, but it probably needs to think through what is best in its interest. The stakes have become higher with the United States involving itself directly in the Israel-Iran conflict, which saw it using, for the first time, its GBU-57 bunker buster bomb to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities at Fordow, Natanz and another embedded nuclear site. Neutrality is no longer an option, and despite the announcement of a ceasefire, the possibility of an all-out war is a distinct possibility.

A term that is no longer taboo

With the use of the GBU-57 precision guided bombs, the conflict in West Asia has clearly attained a new dimension. The dreaded 'N word' is no longer taboo. Hence, the question that India needs to answer is whether it can continue to keep up its stance of neutrality. The situation is turning increasingly complex and it is no longer a mere wake-up call for India and countries across the globe. The threat has become all too real.

It may be too far-fetched to assert that a neutral India is 'friendless' in the world of today. A look at the state of affairs that concerns India would suggest, however, that this could well become the case – and that it could continue for quite some time in the future. India's professed leadership of the Global South and its patronage of nations across West Asia brought it no dividends during the recent India-Pakistan conflict. Instead, India has since been reminded – if this was needed – that it confronts two hostile nuclear powers in its neighbourhood, both of whom would have no moral compunctions in utilising nuclear weapons, if the opportunity arose. Hence, India cannot, any longer, afford to believe that its current policies are bearing fruit. A correct reading of 'the tea leaves' as they exist at present is essential for India's present and its future.

Donald Trump's 'Make America Great Again' (MAGA) policies are today adversely impacting India at levels other than just trade and economics. The U.S. President's claims to have effected a ceasefire between India and Pakistan, following the short India-Pakistan conflict in May – something that India contradicts, but which



M.K. Narayanan

is a former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser, and a former Governor of West Bengal

A changing world does not seem to favour India's long-held policy prescriptions; it would be wise for New Delhi to prepare for eventualities of every kind

Pakistan's 'Maximum Leader' Field Marshal Asim Munir, has publicly endorsed – sets India on a collision course with the U.S. President and his Administration. Mr. Trump's lunch for Field Marshal Munir and the fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose not to respond to Mr. Trump's invitation to visit Washington (while returning from the G-7 meeting in Canada), is again likely to be played up by elements in the U.S. and across the world who favour Pakistan against India.

The Israel-Iran conflict is yet another situation in which India finds itself as an 'outlier'. 'Neutrality', in the compelling circumstances of today, is out of sync with reality as also the situation on the ground. India's tilt towards Israel in recent times, it would appear, has become something of an albatross around India's neck. India's Iran policy today has few takers beyond India's borders. Its policy of maintaining an equidistance between Israel and Iran has proved to be of little use in so far as extolling the virtues of non-alignment are concerned.

Admittedly, we live in perilous times. Today's situation does not seem to favour India's long-held policy prescriptions. Israel's premeditated attack on Iran's nuclear sites – aided by the U.S. dropping bunker buster bombs – has seen little condemnation across the world. Iran, which needed a strong voice of support like that of India's to counter the narrative of Israel, the U.S. and the West, will find little comfort in India's 'calls for restraint' on all sides. India's support and voice, based on its moral strength, would have mattered were it seen to support the victim of the attack, rather than maintain an equidistance between Israel and Iran.

It is true that in today's world, it is fashionable to denigrate consensus in favour of 'might'. For instance, at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in May, the emphasis seemed to be on the criticality of 'hard power' as against 'soft power', with dialogue taking a back seat. The stage was set by the U.S. Secretary of Defence, Pete Hegseth, who declared that a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' was a sine qua non for peace in the region, and that China's 'calls for hegemony' in Asia were untenable. He reminded the Singapore audience that 'any unilateral attempt to change the status-quo in the South China Sea and the First Island Chain by force or coercion is unacceptable'. This disturbed the normally placid atmosphere seen at the Shangri-La Dialogue, and produced a strong repartee from the Chinese delegate present. Subsequently, a Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman warned that the 'US must never play with fire on the Taiwan question'.

What India needs to do

Hence, it would be wise in the circumstances for India to prepare for future eventualities of every kind. To start with, there needs to be a detailed

study of the growing China-Pakistan military connection as the India-Pakistan conflict in May this year has merely hit the 'pause button'. More importantly, India must try and better understand how deeply China's military capabilities have been meshed with those of Pakistan, the critical role being played today by Chinese weaponry in Pakistan's defence plans, and how Pakistan has managed to integrate Chinese systems with its own defence plans and procedures, including its claims of being able to lock on to hostile targets to counter an attack. Additionally, India needs more details regarding the numbers of J-10Cs and JF-17 fighters in Pakistan's inventory.

As a part of its preparations for a future conflict, India would also do well to examine whether it has the necessary wherewithal for conflicts of longer durations. The United Kingdom, for instance, recently undertook an in-depth study of its defence capabilities which helped highlight areas of critical weakness, including that of ammunition stockpiles, the need to set up a new National Armament System, and a new Cyber and Electromagnetic Command to oversee networks and electronic warfare. For India to prepare for a two front war, it should, apart from learning lessons from the Russia-Ukraine war, refine its policies on many such aspects as well. Undoubtedly, Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be a national priority. Aspects such as electro-magnetic manoeuvres to neutralise drones, loitering munitions and glide bombs that dominate the skies today in periods of conflict, should again have high priority.

China's white paper

While India remains preoccupied with Pakistan, it would also do well to read the fine print in China's recently published white paper on "National Security in the 'New Era'". This has a clear enunciation of Chinese strategic thinking today and mentions that 'development and security are like two wings of one body'. The white paper reads like a 'testament' on the importance of maintaining scientific and technological security at all times, and the importance of ensuring maintainability of supply chains. It also has a mention of the situation prevalent in the areas neighbouring China, underscoring the fact that these pose threats to China's borders.

To conclude, it might bear mentioning that if China intends to reinforce its strategic objectives in Asia, specially in South Asia, the criticality of its alliance with Pakistan to encircle India must not be underestimated. Also at a time, when the 'N word' is being openly bandied about, India must reckon with the fact that China has more than a 3:1 advantage over India in terms of deploying nuclear warheads, and an almost 5:1 advantage if the nuclear warheads of China and Pakistan are combined.



683 species added to India's fauna, 433 taxa to its flora during 2024

Shiv Sahay Singh

KOLKATA

India added 683 new species to its fauna in the year 2024, which included 459 new species and 224 species new records. The country also added 433 taxa of flora during the same period, which included 410 species and 23 infra-specific taxa of plants.

The details of new discoveries and new records were released by Union Minister for Environment Forest and Climate Change Bhupender Yadav in Kolkata on Monday.

The maximum number of new discoveries of fauna in 2024 was recorded from Kerala – with 101 species (80 new species and 21 new records) – followed by Karnataka – 82 (68 new species and 14 new records). Tamil Nadu recorded 63 discoveries with 50 new species and 13 new records.

In the east and north-east, Arunachal Pradesh



New entrants: (clockwise from top left) *Hylarana chozhai*; *Coelogyne tripurensis*; *Anguiculus dicaprioii*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

recorded 72 animal discoveries (42 new species and 30 new records), Meghalaya 42 new discoveries (25 new species and 17 new records) and West Bengal 56 new discoveries (25 new species and 31 new records). Andaman and Nicobar Islands, another biological hotspot in the country, recorded 43 new discoveries of fauna from

the region, which included 14 new discoveries of fauna and 29 new records.

In terms of plant discoveries, the highest number of flora discovered were from Kerala (58), followed by Maharashtra (45) and Uttarakhand (40). The new plant discoveries for 2024 record 154 angiosperms, 4 pteridophytes, 15 bryophytes, 63 lichens, 156 fun-

gi, 32 algae and 9 microbes. The hotspot regions such as Western Ghats and North-Eastern regions have contributed 35% of total discoveries. India has recorded and documented 56,177 species of plants – angiosperms, gymnosperms, pteridophytes, bryophytes, lichens, fungi, and algae etc.

The significant faunal discoveries for the year 2024 include two new genus and 37 species of reptiles and five new species of amphibians. The significant discovery of reptiles included *Dravidoseps gouensis*, belonging to the new genus, and *Anguiculus dicaprioii* is a member of Colubridae family, named after Hollywood star, Leonardo Di Caprio.

In terms of flora, the significant discoveries include important orchid species such as *Bulbophyllum gopalianum*, *Coelogyne tripurensis*, *Gastrodia indica* and *Gastrodia sikimensis*.



Centre launches WAVEX Start-up Challenge 2025

The Union Information and Broadcasting Ministry has launched the WAVEX Start-up Challenge 2025 inviting startups to participate in a national hackathon to develop an AI-powered multilingual translation solution to be named 'BhashaSetu'. "The challenge aims to encourage the development of innovative artificial intelligence tools capable of real-time translation, transliteration, and voice localisation across at least 12 major Indian languages," said the Ministry on Monday. The challenge has no minimum eligibility criteria, allowing start-ups at any stage of development to apply.



India to get above-normal rain in July, forecasts IMD

States such as Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Telangana should be watchful as catchment areas of rivers such as the Krishna, Godavari, Mahanadi could receive heavy rain, says meteorological body

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The monsoon rainfall in July, the most important month for agricultural operations, will be “above normal”, or nearly 6% more than the 28 cm it usually receives.

However, several States, including Chhattisgarh, Odisha, and Telangana, “ought to be watchful” as the heavy rain could lead to the catchment areas of several river basins, including the Krishna, Godavari, and Mahanadi, receiving surplus rain, Mrutunjay Mohapatra, Director-General, India Meteorological Department (IMD), said at a press briefing on Monday.

The IMD has retained its forecast of the monsoon (June-September) being 6% above normal.

“East Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, parts of Vidarbha, and Telangana are likely to receive above-normal rainfall activity. We should take care of the river catchments. Major river basins like Krishna, Godavari, and Mahanadi will be impact-



Rain check: Except for eastern and northeastern India, most regions have seen surplus rain. Strong rainfall is expected in the coming weeks due to the absence of an El Nino, says IMD chief. SANDEEP SAXENA

ed. Very high rainfall is expected in the upper Mahanadi catchment covering Chhattisgarh, and parts of Odisha, and the lower Mahanadi catchment. We should keep watch and monitor rainfall activity,” Mr. Mohapatra said.

On Saturday, June 29, the monsoon covered the entire country – nearly nine days ahead of its normal scheduled date of July 8. The last time the monsoon covered the entire country within June was in

2020, and this year is only the 13th instance of such a rapid coverage since 1960. In six out of 12 years of such coverage, the monsoon (rainfall in June-September) has been above normal, the agency’s data suggest.

The monsoon arrived in Kerala nearly a week ahead of its normal onset date of June 1. However, it stalled within a week, and only appreciably picked up pace after June 16. So far, the rainfall in June has

been 8.9% more than what is usual for this time of the year.

Except for eastern and northeastern India, most regions have seen surplus rain. Northwest India has seen 42% more rain than its quota, central India has seen 24.8% more rain than its quota, while South India has witnessed a shortfall of about 3%. The strong rainfall that is expected in the weeks ahead is largely due to the absence of an El Nino, the IMD chief said.

Coast Guard cooperation initiative launched by QUAD nations

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The coast guards of QUAD nations – India, Japan, the United States, and Australia – have launched the QUAD at Sea Ship Observer Mission to deepen maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

The observer-at-sea engagement marks a first-of-its-kind initiative among the Indian Coast Guard, Japan Coast Guard, United States Coast Guard, and Australian Border Force.

Based on the Wilmington Declaration adopted at the QUAD Leaders' Summit in September 2024, the mission reflects the collective resolve to strengthen a free, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific.

It reinforces joint maritime readiness through enhanced interoperability, domain awareness and coordination, said a press release.



PM Modi's five-nation tour to focus on defence, Africa outreach, multilaterals

Suhasini Haidar
Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Defence, rare earth minerals, cooperation on counter-terror, and south-south cooperation will be among the focus areas during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's July 2-9 five-nation tour covering Ghana, Trinidad and Tobago, Argentina, Brazil, and Namibia.

"Broadly, we have a few areas that seem to be of interest to the Brazilian side. They are interested in secure communication systems on the battlefield. They are also interested in offshore patrol vessels. Brazil has Scorpene submarines – they are interested in partnering with us in maintaining those submarines. They also seem to be interested in the Akash air defense system and in coastal surveillance systems, Garuda artillery guns and so on," said P. Kumaran, Secretary (East) in the Ministry of External Affairs.

The discussion on de-



Narendra Modi

fence cooperation between Brazil and India is expected to take place during July 5-8, when Mr. Modi will visit Rio De Janeiro and Brasilia.

The highlight of the Brazil visit will be Mr. Modi's participation in the main session of the BRICS summit on July 6, when member countries will discuss "Reform of the Global Governance".

Other items at the summit will be "Peace and Security", "Environment, COP 30 and Global Health", strengthening multilateralism, economic

and financial affairs and Artificial Intelligence.

Discussion at the level of National Security Advisers, business council meetings, women's business alliance and civil council-level talks will find convergence at the declaration of the leaders, said Dammu Ravi, Secretary (Economic Relations) of the MEA. He added that India will hold the BRICS chair in 2026.

Mr. Modi's visit to Argentina will mark the first full-fledged meeting between him and Argentina's President Javier Gerardo Milei. Defence, rare earth minerals, agriculture, traditional and renewable energy, and trade and investment are expected to feature in India-Argentina talks this time. In the BRICS meeting in Brazil and Argentina, India is expected to reiterate its concerns on cross-border terrorism.

Mr. Modi's first stop will be Ghana, where he will be hosted on July 2-3. This will be followed by his visit to Trinidad and Tobago on Ju-

ly 3-4, which will be followed by his visit to Argentina. The last stop in his tour will be Namibia, where he will pay tribute to Namibian decolonisation icon Sam Nujoma, who passed away on February 8.

An agreement on unified payment interoperability is expected to be signed during Mr. Modi's visit to Namibia. "Africa in recent times has evolved. It has become more aspirational. It wants manufacturing to happen within the countries and it wants value addition to happen within its countries," Mr. Ravi said.

Agriculture, building a vaccine development hub in west Africa, critical minerals, digital public infrastructure, and renewal of cultural exchange programmes will be among the "focus" areas during Mr. Modi's visit to Ghana, Mr. Ravi said.

Mr. Modi's visit to Trinidad and Tobago will be the first Prime Minister-level visit from India since 1999.



China says border dispute with India complicated, ready for delimitation talks

Press Trust of India

BEIJING

China on Monday said the boundary dispute with India was complicated and would take time to settle but at the same time, it expressed its readiness to hold discussions on the delimitation of the border and keep it peaceful.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, in his meeting with Chinese Defence Minister Dong Jun in Qingdao on June 26, proposed that India and China should solve the "complex issues" under a structured road-map comprising steps to de-escalate tensions along the frontiers and rejuvenate the existing mechanism to demarcate the borders.

Mr. Singh and Mr. Dong



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with his Chinese counterpart Admiral Dong Jun.

held bilateral talks on the sidelines of a conclave of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in the Chinese port city of Qingdao.

Asked for China's reaction to Mr. Singh's remarks, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said, "What I can tell you is that

China and India have established the Special Representatives (SRs) mechanism on the boundary question and reached the Agreement on the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for the Settlement of the China-India Boundary Question".

"China stands ready to maintain communication with India on issues, including delimitation negotiation and border management, jointly keep the border areas peaceful and tranquil, and promote cross-border exchange and cooperation," she said.

Questioned about the prolonged delay in resolving the border issue, Ms. Mao said, "The boundary question is complicated, and it takes time to settle it".

India fast-tracks 52 satellites for precision surveillance following Operation Sindoor

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

After defence forces realised the need for more precision surveillance during Operation Sindoor, the Union government has ordered the fast-tracking of the launch of 52 dedicated surveillance satellites, enhancing round-the-clock monitoring of coastline and land borders.

In October last year, the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Cabinet Committee approved \$3.2 billion for the SBS-III programme to develop next-generation satellites over the next decade. Under the programme, ISRO will manufacture and launch the first 21 satellites, while private companies will handle the remaining 31. The Defence

ISRO will make and launch the first 21 satellites, while private companies will handle the remaining 31

Space Agency (DSA) will oversee the operation of the newly launched satellite system.

“We have asked the private companies and ISRO for early launch of satellites. We are expecting first set of satellites to be launched by 2026,” said a senior official. The official added that the new satellites will be using artificial intelligence (AI) to make smarter decisions and improve overall performance and efficiency in space.

During Operation Sin-

door, satellite-based surveillance helped Indian defence forces to act swiftly by offering accurate intelligence, including the trajectory and movement of drones and missiles. India’s satellites, like the Cartosat and RISAT, helped defence forces to track enemy mobilisation, confirm strike impact, and maintain real-time situational awareness, which prevented any major damage to the country’s military assets.

After the successful implementation of SBS-III, India will become more self-reliant and reduce its dependence on other countries. It will help focus more clearly and accurately on the Pakistan and China border and the Indian Ocean Region.