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Israel is using starvation to commit genocide: Amnesty

Tel Aviv has 'turned aid-seeking into a booby trap for desperate starved Palestinians' through the new aid system's militarised hubs; Israel's Foreign Minister denounced the report as propaganda

Associated Press

CAIRO

Amnesty International issued a report on Thursday claiming a controversial Israeli and U.S.-backed system to distribute aid in Gaza uses starvation tactics against Palestinians to continue to commit genocide in the Gaza Strip during Israel's war with Hamas.

The U.K.-based human rights group condemned Israel and the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation, (GHF) which the U.S. and Israel have backed to take over aid distribution in Gaza from a network led by



In grief: A Palestinian mourns during a funeral procession in Gaza City on Thursday for people killed while waiting for aid. AFP

the UN. Israel's Foreign Minister denounced the Amnesty report, saying the organisation has "joined forces with Hamas and fully adopted all of its propa-

ganda lies".

Gaza's Health Ministry says more than 500 Palestinians have been killed at or near GHF distribution centres over the past

month. The Amnesty report said Israel has "turned aid-seeking into a booby trap for desperate starved Palestinians" through GHF's militarised hubs. The conditions have created "a deadly mix of hunger and disease pushing the population past breaking point."

"This devastating daily loss of life as desperate Palestinians try to collect aid is the consequence of their deliberate targeting by Israeli forces and the foreseeable consequence of irresponsible and lethal methods of distribution," said Agnès Callamard, Amnesty's secretary general.



Can the Supreme Court halt an Act passed by a State?

What did the Supreme Court mandate in the Nandini Sundar case on July 5, 2011?

R.K. Vij

The story so far:

Disposing of a writ and contempt petition, the Supreme Court in *Nandini Sundar and Ors. versus State of Chhattisgarh* held that the passing of an Act by the State of Chhattisgarh, subsequent to its order, cannot be said to be an act of contempt of the order passed by the Court.

What did SC order of July 2011 state?

The Supreme Court, on July 5, 2011 issued an order stating that the State of Chhattisgarh shall cease and desist from using Special Police Officers (SPOs) in any activities, directly or indirectly, aimed at controlling, countering, mitigating or otherwise eliminating Maoist activities. The Court ordered the State to recall all firearms issued to any of the SPOs. The order said that the State shall take all

appropriate measures to prevent the operation of any group, including but not limited to the Salwa Judum and Koya Commandos.

The Court also directed the Union of India to cease and desist from using any of its funds in supporting, directly or indirectly, the recruitment of SPOs for the purposes of engaging in any form of counter-insurgency activities against Maoists. The Court concluded that the appointment of inadequately paid and ill-trained SPOs engaged in checking Maoism was violative of Article 14 and Article 21 of the Constitution.

Why was a contempt case filed?

Consequent to the Supreme Court order of July 2011, the State of Chhattisgarh enacted the Chhattisgarh Auxiliary Armed Police Forces Act, 2011. Section 4(i) of the Act provides that an auxiliary force shall be constituted 'to aid and assist the security forces' in the maintenance of

public order and preventing, controlling and combatting Maoist/Naxal violence and insurgency, etc. Section 5(2) of the Act further states that the members of the auxiliary force 'shall not be deployed in the front-line positions of an operation and shall always work under supervision of the security forces...'. The provision of compulsory training for a period not less than six months, is also prescribed under the Act. Only those SPOs, who would be eligible as per these prescribed

yardsticks, were to be inducted into the auxiliary force (by screening committee). The legislature thus had addressed all the concerns observed by the Supreme Court.

However, it was argued by the petitioners that the said enactment was not in consonance with the Court's order and therefore amounted to contempt of Court.

Why was contempt prayer rejected?

There were reasons for rejecting the relief

sought by petitioners. One, the Supreme Court took cognisance of the fact that all the directions issued by the Court had been complied to by the State of Chhattisgarh and necessary reports were submitted.

Second, the Court said that every State legislature has plenary powers to pass an enactment so long as the said enactment was not declared to be *ultra vires* of the Constitution. Any law made by Parliament or a State Legislature cannot be held as an act of contempt. The Court clarified that a legislature has the power to pass a law, to remove the basis of a judgment or validate a law which has been struck down by a Constitutional Court. This is the core of the doctrine of separation of powers and must always be acknowledged in a constitutional democracy. Any piece of legislation enacted by a legislature can be assailed only on the twin prongs of legislative competence or constitutional validity.

In *Indian Aluminium Co. versus State of Kerala* (1996), the Supreme Court observed that Courts must maintain the delicate balance devised by the Constitution between the three sovereign functionaries. The Court therefore held that unless and until it is first established that the statute so enacted is in opposition to constitutional law or otherwise, it cannot be struck down.

RK Vij is a former IPS officer and views are personal.

THE GIST

▼ The Supreme Court, on July 5, 2011 issued an order stating that the State of Chhattisgarh shall cease and desist from using Special Police Officers (SPOs) in any activities, directly or indirectly, aimed at controlling, countering, mitigating or otherwise eliminating Maoist activities.

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Is U.S. imperialism a threat to the world?

PARLEY



Prakash Karat

Former General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)



Happymon Jacob

Founder-director of the Council for Strategic and Defense Research

During the 12-day war between Israel and Iran, the U.S. struck three nuclear facilities in Iran in violation of international laws. This unprovoked strike is the latest in a series of unilateral military interventions by the U.S. across the world, including the illegal occupation of Iraq under the pretext of possible weapons of mass destruction, and the occupation of Afghanistan. Is U.S. imperialism a threat to the world? Prakash Karat and Happymon Jacob discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Vighnesh P. Venkitesh. Edited excerpts:

Is the U.S. pushing its imperialist agenda especially after President Donald Trump's return to the White House? If so, how?

Prakash Karat: Yes. The background to this effort by President Trump is the decline in U.S. hegemony and the crisis of neoliberalism which has affected the U.S. and the world. With his 'America First' policy, Mr. Trump is squeezing even his allies. He is trying to revive the U.S.'s dominance and hegemony, which is important for him.

Happymon Jacob: American hegemony has been under challenge for some time. The U.S., the world's sole superpower, has in the past and is today engaged in aggressive military behaviour against regimes that it has issues with. It has violated the international order and international laws that it helped create in 1945. But it is behaving like any country that accumulates too much power. It is pursuing what it believes are its interests, because it has the power to do so. I am not condoning this; I'm simply saying this is how hegemony behaves. In some ways, the Trump administration's use of power is not even well calculated towards an end; it is just random and reckless.

Do you think the U.S.'s dominance is threatened by China's advances in areas such as renewables and electronics?

PK: The corollary to the decline in U.S. power is the rise of China – its economic power, technological progress, and global political influence. The effort that Mr. Trump is making now did not start with him. During the Obama and Biden presidency, too, the U.S. was focused dealing with this strategic threat from China. So the U.S. definitely sees China's rise as a threat.

HJ: There has been a structural decline in American power. The U.S. is a \$30 trillion economy and China is a \$20 trillion economy. No other country is close to either of these two in some ways. So, the U.S. is certainly rattled by China's rise and the decline of its own power internationally. There is a structured rivalry or a



U.S. President Donald Trump delivers an address to the nation after the U.S. struck Iran's nuclear facilities. He is accompanied by Vice President J.D. Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. REUTERS

new Cold War that is brewing. But having said that, let me also argue that if tomorrow there is a consensus between the U.S. and China about how two great powers must behave internationally, that will create difficulties for other rising powers such as India.

PK: For the American ruling class, dealing with the China threat will become the central focus again. The opening salvo was the tariff war. The U.S. finds it difficult to pursue that because China stands firm and does not succumb to tariff threats. I think the Trump administration will start shifting focus to the Asia Pacific region. The rivalry between the U.S. and China will become one of the key features in the coming days. The rise of China is the only alternative pole, and the U.S. will try to continue to do something to contain China.

How will a bipolar or a multipolar global order fare for other rising regional powers?

HJ: The problem with having two poles – the U.S.-led pole and the China-led pole – is that rising powers such as India, Brazil, and South Africa tend to have less agency. What is probably more useful is a multipolar world order with more consensus-building and conversations, and where the United Nations is not overruled by countries with more power. While great power consensus is a problem for countries such as India, great power competition is also going to be a problem for us. It is not an easy choice for us and it is going to be more contested and more chaotic as the years go by.

PK: What is good for India would be growing multipolarity and us playing a role within that. But the reality is that India has got more aligned with the U.S. through the Quad and other economic and defence ties. If we had been able to have a more independent foreign policy and retain strategic autonomy, we would have been able to take full advantage of this growing multipolarity. But after the U.S. bombed Iran, India refused to condemn the attacks, which



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HAPPYMON JACOB

were against international law. India also distanced itself from a statement from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) condemning Israel's attack on Iran. We are clearly getting aligned with the U.S. and Israel. We are not in a position to take advantage of the growing multipolarity in the world today.

HJ: In terms of security, India has China as a neighbour. China has territorial claims vis-a-vis India and we have had conflicts with China in the past. If we have a challenge next door, we need friends and that could be Russia, the U.S., France. If we do not have friends, our ability to meet our security needs will be susceptible.

At the end of the day, in an anarchic international system, states have to look after their own security. If we are convinced that the Global South, the SCO, or the BRICS countries are going to support us diplomatically and politically when we are in trouble with another country, we are going to sort of support them. During the recent Pahalgalam attack and the stand-off with Pakistan, not too many countries stood by India. Some say that is because India is too multi-aligned. Israel appears to have stood by India then. This is not to condone Israel's excesses and the killing of innocent civilians in Gaza as well as its attack on Iran, but at the end of the day, the question we should ask is, who is going to stand by us when there is trouble in our own neighbourhood.

PK: That's a valid concern. But despite India having such close ties with the U.S., Mr. Trump said after the Pahalgalam incident and the conflict with Pakistan that the U.S. had intervened to settle matters. The U.S. will start treating us like an ally in the way it has always had Pakistan as an ally. This is one of the risks that we take by aligning ourselves with the geopolitical interests of the U.S. in Asia. India has become a member of Quad. If Quad becomes a security alliance, India's capacity or opportunities in a multipolar world will shrink.

Will India's efforts to be non-aligned affect the role of BRICS and other groupings in challenging the U.S. imperialist agenda?

HJ: There should first be a prioritisation of interests first. In an anarchic international system, the priority is the security of a country. The SCO is a China-dominated entity in some

ways, and India and China are not the best of friends. BRICS has expanded to such an extent that the countries within it don't agree with one another on most issues. While I am all for multiple groupings in the international system that can offset and balance unipolarity and hegemony, I'm also concerned about jumping on the bandwagon of too many of these, which may not necessarily lead to anything.

PK: I agree that the SCO is not a regional body which will be of great use to us, but it is also something which we cannot opt out of because of Pakistan. BRICS shows that there is a potential for the countries of the Global South to get on a collective forum and articulate their interests, notwithstanding the fact that many of them may not have commonality of interest in all issues. When we are a part of BRICS, and a country in the BRICS is subjected to aggression, we should at least take a stand and say 'no, we are against this'. We can't say we are neutral. If we want to really make these forums represent the minimum interests of the countries of the Global South, then we should be able to take a stand at least regarding attacks on territorial sovereignty. When we have a strategic alignment with one of the big powers, our claim of being a spokesperson for the Global South gets completely undermined. India's strategic ties with the U.S. hampers the great potential and the role we can play in a multipolar world.

What role will the Global South play in the future, especially with Mr. Trump's agenda?

PK: Whether it is the reciprocal tariffs or the trade war that Mr. Trump is launching, the real victims are going to be the countries of the Global South. Most of them are going to be really badly affected. Their economies are going to suffer. There will be loss of jobs and serious financial problems. In the coming days, India should be part of the mainstream Global South resistance which, I'm sure, will develop. India must be able to work out a clear strategy to be part of the mainstream Global South, whether it's the debt crisis, trade imbalances, or climate change, as all these things are going to get aggravated due to the policies being adopted by the Trump administration.

HJ: In an age where we have multilateralism failing, we need alternatives. Multilateralisms and alternatives like the Global South have a responsibility to come together, talk about the issues that much of the humanity faces, and do something about it. The failure of multilateralism is another reason why the Global South must survive.



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Careful curation

Bihar's electoral roll revision risks excluding short-term migrant voters

Bihar's ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls by the Election Commission of India (ECI) has drawn criticism from political parties, and rightly so. The enormity of the task, the short duration, and the strict criteria for verification could result in the wrongful exclusion of lakhs of voters. The ECI's statement that only ordinary residents would qualify for inclusion in the electoral roll has raised concerns, particularly among Opposition parties. Critics argue that it would be difficult for migrant voters – an estimated 20% of Bihar's voting population – to be present for verification during the window that ends on July 31, and creates a high probability that they could be struck off the rolls. The Representation of the People Act, 1950 states that "A person absenting himself temporarily from his place of ordinary residence shall not by reason thereof cease to be ordinarily resident therein", and manuals on electoral rolls add that such people will be treated as ordinary residents as long as they possess the ability and intention to return. This means that there must be caution in removing the names of migrants, especially those who are away from their place of residence for a short period.

The issue becomes more complicated with long-term migrants. In Bihar's case, there is a significant section of the voting-age population, especially males, migrating for work. This becomes evident when parsing voting data from the 2024 general election in the State, revealing a unique electoral dynamic. Bihar is a State where more women turned out to vote than men in absolute numbers (for every 1,000 men there were 1,017.5 women), even though there were more registered male electors on the rolls (for every 1,000 men, there were only 917.5 women). This electoral dynamic was observed in Jharkhand, and to a lesser extent in Himachal Pradesh, but nowhere was the difference starker than in Bihar. There is good reason to believe that many of the absentee male electors were registered in their home constituencies in Bihar but were unable to return on polling day, drastically lowering the overall turnout rate for men. These electors were likely part of a large migrant cohort that included many longer-term migrants. The SIR must carefully parse such electors and ensure that only longer-term migrants are removed from the rolls – not an easy task. For longer-term migrants, meaningful representation requires their vote to be registered where they currently reside and work. Migrant workers are integral to the economic engines of several States, and their political voice should be more impactful in holding representatives accountable for their everyday challenges there, rather than in their native places. The ECI's SIR must balance these principles. Ideally, such a process should take more time than the one month that the ECI has allocated for it.



Socialism, secularism are the spirit of the Constitution

India's Constitution is not merely a legal document. It is the embodiment of the ideals and the aspirations of a nation that was forged in the crucible of an anti-colonial struggle. Among its most fundamental principles are socialism and secularism, values that are not confined to the Preamble alone but which are woven throughout its text, reflected in the Directive Principles of State Policy, in the Fundamental Rights, and in its very structure. Recent calls by the leadership of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) leadership to remove the words socialism and secularism from the Preamble are not just an attack on semantics but is also a direct assault on the foundational vision of the Indian republic itself.

The RSS General Secretary made this call recently under the garb of criticising the Emergency, which happened 50 years ago, as the words socialism and secularism were added in the Preamble under the Constitution (42nd Amendment) Act, 1976 during the Emergency. It is a deceitful move by the RSS to invoke the Emergency in order to discredit these principles, especially when it colluded with the Indira Gandhi government during that time for its own survival. To use that event in history to now undermine the Constitution reflects the RSS's hypocrisy and opportunism.

Reflected in the Preamble and beyond

Socialism, in the Indian Constitution, is a commitment to social and economic justice, the eradication of inequality, and the creation of a welfare state. The Preamble promises "Justice, social, economic and political" to all citizens, and seeks "Equality of status and of opportunity". It underlines the fact that even before the 42nd Amendment, the spirit of socialism was always present in our Constitution.

There were significant efforts in the Indian Constitution to increase the freedoms of citizens and to reduce the inequalities prevalent in society. The Fundamental Rights were major steps in that direction. Article 14 guarantees equality before law. Article 15 prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. Article 16 ensures equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. These rights, read together with the Preamble



M.A. Baby

is the General Secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)

The call to erase 'socialism' and 'secularism' from the Constitution is a calculated move to have an oppressive majoritarian state

and Directive Principles, enshrine a vision of a society free from exploitation, where the dignity of every individual is upheld.

The Directive Principles of State Policy have the clearest articulation of the socialist vision, in the Indian Constitution. Articles 38 and 39 clearly lay it out, and is further explained in Articles 41, 42 and 43. These provisions are not just aspirational; they have guided landmark legislation and judicial interpretation in India.

Secularism in the Indian Constitution is not mere religious neutrality but the positive assurance that the state will treat all religions equally, protect the rights of minorities, and ensure that no citizen suffers discrimination on the basis of faith. The original text of the Preamble, even before the addition of the word secular in 1976, had already promised "Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship" and "Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual..."

Under Fundamental Rights, Articles 25 to 28 provide the Right to Freedom of Religion and further underscore the secular nature of the Indian Republic. Articles 29 and 30, on Cultural and Educational Rights, too reiterate this. These articles ensure that the state neither identifies with nor privileges any religion, and that every citizen, regardless of faith, enjoys equal rights and protections. Even the Supreme Court of India has repeatedly affirmed that secularism is part of the Constitution's 'basic structure'.

The Basic Structure Doctrine was introduced in 1973 in the Supreme Court's landmark judgment in *Kesavananda Bharati*. It holds that while Parliament can amend the Constitution, it cannot alter its fundamental structure, i.e., the basic structure of the Constitution is inviolable. As mentioned earlier, the 42nd Amendment which introduced the words socialism and secularism in the Preamble of the Constitution was enacted in 1976, three years after this historic verdict. Yet, the additions could be made precisely because they did not violate the basic structure of the Constitution.

Inseparable from the Constitution's fabric

It is a fallacy to claim that socialism and secularism in the Preamble of the Constitution are mere 'additions' or 'impositions' from the 1970s. The Objective Resolution of the

Constituent Assembly, the Constituent Assembly debates themselves and the lived experience of India's glorious anti-colonial freedom struggle all testify that these values were central to the vision of the Republic's founders.

The Constitution's commitment to social and economic justice, equality, and fraternity is inherently socialist. Its guarantee of religious liberty, non-discrimination and minority rights is inherently secular. Even if the words socialist and secular (the word secular was there in Article 25(2)(a) even before the 42nd Amendment) were to be removed from the Preamble, the Constitution's core philosophy, structure and provisions would remain unchanged in their essence.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's final speech to the Constituent Assembly on November 25, 1949, offers profound insights that reinforce the argument that the notion of equality (which forms the foundation of the ideas of socialism and secularism) is embedded in the Constitution's spirit and structure. B.R. Ambedkar's words remain a guiding light against any attempt to dilute these foundational values.

The real agenda has been exposed

The RSS's demand to remove socialism and secularism from the Preamble of the Constitution is a calculated move to undermine the very foundations of the Indian Republic. It exposes its long-standing agenda to replace the Constitution with a veiled Manusmriti, subvert the secular democratic republic of India, and create a theocratic Hindu Rashtra. The attempt to erase socialism and secularism from the Preamble is an attempt to rewrite history, to delegitimise the legacy of India's anti-colonial freedom struggle, and to pave the way for an oppressive majoritarian state.

The Constitution of India is a living document that is designed to secure justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity for all. Socialism and secularism are the pillars on which the edifice of the Indian Republic stands. To attack them is to attack the very soul of India's democracy. All those who cherish the values of the freedom struggle – a struggle that the RSS was not part of – must stand united in defence of the lofty values of the Constitution, and resist any attempt to destroy the idea of India.



Endocrine disruptors in plastic waste: a new public health threat

Plastic pollution is no longer a distant environmental concern; it is a biological invasion with profound implications for human health; infiltration of microplastics and plastic-derived EDCs into human bodies is triggering hormonal disruption, reproductive dysfunction and chronic diseases

Sudheer Kumar Shukla

Plastics have revolutionised modern living with their convenience and affordability, but this same ubiquity is spawning an invisible, long-term health crisis. Beyond choking oceans and clogging landfills, plastics are now infiltrating our bodies through microplastic particles and a cocktail of endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs).

The evidence is clear and deeply concerning: these substances are interfering with our hormonal systems, damaging reproductive health and increasing our susceptibility to chronic diseases, including cancer. India, now the world's largest generator of plastic waste, stands at the epicentre of this escalating public health emergency.

Once considered inert pollutants, microplastics – plastic particles smaller than 5 mm – are now recognised as biologically active. A 2022 study by Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam detected microplastics in the blood of 80% of human participants. Further, a 2024 study published in *Nature Scientific Reports* reported the presence of microplastics in nearly 89% of blood samples in India, with an average concentration of 4.2 particles per milliliter. These particles have also been found in human lungs, hearts, placentas, breast milk, ovarian follicular fluid, and semen. Alarmingly, testicular tissue in Indian men was found to contain three times more microplastics than in dogs.

The plastics in our lives are not chemically neutral. They often contain EDCs such as: Bisphenol A (BPA) and BPS: used in water bottles, food containers, and thermal paper. They also have Phthalates (e.g., DEHP, DBP) that are used to soften plastics and found in cosmetics, toys and IV tubing and PFAS (Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances), found in food packaging and non-stick cookware.

These chemicals mimic or block natural hormones such as estrogen, testosterone, thyroid hormones, and cortisol. They interfere with receptor binding, disrupt gene expression in reproductive organs, and induce oxidative stress, inflammation, and apoptosis (cell death).

Animal studies published in *Food and Chemical Toxicology* (2023) showed that even low doses of polystyrene microplastics disrupted testosterone levels, impaired sperm production, and damaged the blood-testis barrier. Similar effects were observed in ovaries, where microplastics reduced anti-Müllerian hormone levels, triggered oxidative stress pathways, and induced cell death.

Microplastics in sperm

Recent clinical studies from China and India have linked the presence of microplastics in semen to reduced sperm count, concentration and motility. Exposure to BPA and phthalates has been associated with lower testosterone levels and elevated luteinizing hormone (LH) levels – both indicators of endocrine disruption. A global review published in



The poorest populations, often living near waste dumps or working in the informal recycling sector, bear the brunt of the plastic waste crisis. AP

Science of the Total Environment further supports the connection between microplastics and male subfertility. Notably, a 2023 study in *Environmental Science & Technology Letters* reported a strong correlation between microplastic levels in semen and decreased sperm count, motility, and abnormal morphology in Chinese men. In India, studies have documented a 30% decline in average sperm count over the past two decades.

A study published in *Ecotoxicology and Environmental Safety* (2025) found microplastics in 14 out of 18 follicular fluid samples collected from women undergoing fertility treatment in Italy. These particles, along with their associated endocrine-disrupting chemicals (EDCs), were found to compromise egg quality and were linked to menstrual irregularities, reduced estradiol levels, and an increased risk of miscarriage. Epidemiological studies have also linked exposure to phthalates and BPA with conditions such as polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), endometriosis, and spontaneous abortions. These associations have been further supported by findings published in *Advances in Pharmacology* (2021) and *Frontiers in Cell and Developmental Biology* (2022).

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) now classifies several plastic additives as probable human carcinogens.

Case-control studies from India have shown that women with elevated levels of DEHP in their urine face nearly a threefold increased risk of breast cancer (odds ratio = 2.97). Exposure to BPA and phthalates has also been linked to higher incidences of prostate, uterine, and testicular cancers.

In addition to their carcinogenic potential, these EDCs have been implicated in metabolic disorders. By mimicking cortisol, altering insulin sensitivity, and promoting fat storage,

EDCs contribute to the development of obesity and type 2 diabetes. Moreover, PFAS exposure has been associated with metabolic syndrome, cardiovascular disease, and thyroid dysfunction, as reported in a 2024 study published in *Frontiers in Public Health*.

Plastic waste in India

India generates over 9.3 million tonnes of plastic waste each year. Of this, approximately 5.8 million tonnes are incinerated, releasing toxic gases, while 3.5 million tonnes end up polluting the environment. Studies have shown that residents in cities like Mumbai are exposed to between 382 and 2,012 microplastic particles daily through air, food, and water. In Nagpur, doctors are reporting an increase in cases of early puberty, respiratory problems, obesity, and learning disorders in children – conditions increasingly linked to plastic pollution. Recent testing by the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) detected phthalate concentrations in drinking water samples from Delhi, Jabalpur, and Chennai that exceeded European Union safety limits.

Despite progressive policies like the Plastic Waste Management Rules (2016, updated in 2022 and 2024), enforcement remains inconsistent. Current regulations do not account for low-dose effects or the complex interactions of EDCs, nor do they address the specific vulnerabilities of children and pregnant women.

The health burden associated with EDCs in India is staggering, costing over ₹25,000 crore annually due to increased healthcare spending and lost productivity. The poorest populations, often living near waste dumps or working in the informal recycling sector, bear the brunt of this crisis. Globally, the U.S. reports annual healthcare costs of \$250 billion linked to plastic-related chemicals, according to the Endocrine Society.

Biomonitoring and surveillance are

crucial for establishing national programmes that measure EDC levels in blood, urine, and breast milk. Longitudinal studies must be funded to assess the health impacts of EDC exposure on fertility, neurodevelopment, and chronic diseases. In addition, public awareness needs to be improved, and behaviour changes should be encouraged, such as educating people on the risks of microwaving food in plastic containers and promoting the use of glass, stainless steel, and EDC-free alternatives. It is also important to advocate for antioxidant-rich diets to help counteract oxidative stress.

Further actions should include enforcing plastic segregation, recycling, and safe disposal, while investing in microplastic filtration systems for water treatment plants. Additionally, incentivising the development of biodegradable, non-toxic materials is essential to reduce EDC exposure.

Plastic pollution is no longer a distant environmental concern; it is a biological invasion with profound implications for human health. The infiltration of microplastics and plastic-derived EDCs into our bodies is triggering hormonal disruption, reproductive dysfunction and chronic diseases.

The science is undeniable, and the time for action is now. For India, the world's most exposed population, this is more than a policy issue – it is a generational imperative. We must address this silent epidemic through science-driven regulation, robust monitoring, education, and systemic change. The health of our people, especially our children, depends on it.

(Dr. Sudheer Kumar Shukla is an environmental scientist and sustainability expert with over 20 years of experience in environmental policy, waste management and the circular economy. He currently serves as head-think tank at Mobius Foundation, New Delhi. sshukla@mobiusf.org)

THE GIST

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The health burden associated with EDCs in India is staggering, costing over ₹25,000 crore annually due to increased healthcare spending and lost productivity. This silent epidemic must be addressed through science-driven regulation, robust monitoring, public education, and systemic change

Three Apache combat helicopters to arrive in India by July 15

Next batch of helicopters to be delivered by November; the development comes after Indian Defence Minister's talk with U.S. Defense Secretary

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

Following the India-U.S. Defence Ministers' dialogue, the long-awaited Apache combat helicopters are to be delivered in the next two weeks.

A top source in the Ministry confirmed that it has been communicated to them that the first batch of three Apache AH-64E attack helicopters from the U.S. will be delivered by July 15. The next batch of three helicopters will be delivered by November.

The development comes after Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday held a telephone conversation with U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. Both leaders reviewed ongoing and upcoming initiatives to enhance defence cooperation between India and the U.S.

Mr. Singh thanked Mr. Hegseth for the U.S. support during Operation Sindoor and told him that India reserved the right to pre-empt and deter cross-border terror attacks and



The induction of the Apache helicopter is part of the modernisation programme of the Army's Aviation Corps. AFP

defend itself.

The Defence Minister sought the timely delivery of the U.S.-made General Electric engines for the Tejas light combat-Mk1A aircraft, being manufactured by Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. He also spoke on setting up a production unit for jet engines in India.

Mr. Hegseth said he would ensure the timely delivery of the jet engines, adding that the production unit will be set up within a timeframe. The defence source, meanwhile, re-

fused to reveal any specific time frame related to the delivery of GE jet engines for LCA Tejas.

Last year, the Indian Army Aviation Corps raised its first Squadron at Jodhpur that will operate the Apache helicopters, but they had been waiting for helicopters for over 15 months. The induction of the Apache helicopter is part of the modernisation programme of the Army's Aviation Corps. It will further strengthen the Army's combat capabilities.

Smouldering *Wan Hai 503* still adrift off Kerala coast without a port of refuge

Dhinesh Kallungal

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Nearly a month after the Singapore-flagged vessel *Wan Hai 503* caught fire off the coast of Kerala, the vessel continues to be adrift, emitting fire and smoke and weathering stormy weather and rain in the Arabian Sea. Though the vessel is adrift approximately 130 nautical miles off the Indian coastline, outside the Indian Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) boundary, the vessel continues to remain on a high-density shipping corridor, necessitating continuous traffic warnings to passing vessels.

An assessment conduct-



Rescue efforts: The Indian Navy carries out operation to contain a fire aboard the ship *MV Wan Hai 503*, off the Kerala coast. FILE PHOTO

ed by the salvage team (T&T Salvage) stressed the need for a port of refuge, as removing fuel from the vessel offshore still remains unsafe. However, the owner and salvors of the ship are yet to submit a detailed plan to the Indian

authorities for fuel transfer and moving the vessel to a port of refuge.

Weather hurdle

If there's a delay in the salvage operation, the vessel has to be towed further south of its current posi-

tion, around 200 nautical miles away from the Indian coast, according to the report of the Directorate General of Shipping.

It is also necessary that the onboard fire has to be fully contained before it reaches the port of refuge.

Speaking to *The Hindu*, a senior shipping crew said the weather in the Arabian Sea is the major hindrance to the containment of fire and smoke. The squally weather with wind, occasionally gusting to 100 km/hour, adds fuel to the fire. Further, it is not possible to apply fire extinguisher from the top of the ship since choppers can carry only a limited quantity, he said.



New *Garcinia* species found in Assam named after botanist's mother

Rahul Karmakar

GUWAHATI

Assam has yielded a new-to-science tree species belonging to the genus *Garcinia*, commonly referred to as *thoikora* in Assamese. The newly described *Garcinia kusumae* has been named in honour of Kusum Devi, the late mother of Jatindra Sarma, one of the authors of the study and the Chairman of Assam's State Expert Appraisal Committee appointed by the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

The study, co-authored by Hussain A. Barbhuiya of Mumbai's Bhabha Atomic Research Centre, appears in the latest issue of *Feddes Repertorium*, a peer-reviewed journal focusing on botanical taxonomy and geobotany.

Four in a family

Garcinia kusumae marks the fourth instance of Mr. Sarma naming a botanical discovery after a family member. Previous names include *Amomum pratis-thana* (after his daughter), *Syzygium nivae* (wife), and *Garcinia sibeswarai* (father). This is the first time an Indian botanist-researcher has had four plant species named after immediate family members. "The epithet *kusumae*... is in recognition of her enduring support and sacrifices for his [Mr. Sarma's] education," the study noted.

Garcinia, the largest genus in the family *Clusiaceae*, comprises 414 species of shrubs and trees.



The distinct bloom of *Garcinia kusumae*, a newly identified tree species from Assam.

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

Pan-tropically distributed, its centres of diversity are found in Africa, Australasia, and Southeast Asia. The genus is known for its floral diversity, frequent presence in lowland tropical rainforests, and considerable pharmacological potential.

33 species

In India, 33 species and seven varieties of *Garcinia* have been documented, with Assam accounting for 12 species and three varieties.

Mr. Sarma found the *thoikora* specimen in Bamunbari, located in Baksa district, in April, during a survey of *Garcinia* species. The tree's distinct morphological features prompted further investigation. Specimens were collected following standard herbarium protocols, including pressing, drying, and preservation.

A dioecious evergreen tree that can grow up to 18 metres tall, *Garcinia kusumae* was observed to flower from February to April, with fruit maturing between May and June.



Government clears indigenous defence procurement worth ₹1.05 lakh crore

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Thursday accorded Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for 10 capital acquisition proposals valued at ₹1.05 lakh crore through indigenous sourcing. It was the first meeting after Operation Sindoor to enhance the capabilities of the armed forces.

“AoNs were accorded for procurement of Armoured Recovery Vehicles, Electronic Warfare System, Integrated Common Inventory Management System for the Tri-Services and Surface-to-Air Missiles,” said the Ministry of Defence in a statement.

The agenda of the meet-



The procurement of indigenous Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile systems worth ₹30,000 crore has been approved. PTI

ing was to enhance air defence capabilities along the Pakistan border. The procurement of indigenous Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile (QRSAM) systems worth ₹30,000 crore for the Indian Army has been approved.

“AoNs were also accorded for procurement of Moored Mines, Mine Counter Measure Vessels, Super Rapid Gun Mount and Submersible Autonomous Vessels. These procurements will enable mitigation of potential risks posed to the

3 Apache combat helicopters to arrive by July 15

NEW DELHI

A top Defence Ministry source has confirmed that it has been communicated to them that the first batch of three Apache AH-64E attack helicopters from the U.S. will be delivered by July 15, and the next batch by November. The development follows U.S.-India Defence Ministers' dialogue. » **PAGE 4**

Naval and Merchant Vessels,” the statement said. To promote indigenous design and development, “AoNs were accorded under the Buy (Indian-Indigenously Designed Developed and Manufactured) category”, it added.



Global South's voice key to contemporary world's progress: PM



PM Narendra Modi receives 'The Officer of the Order of the Star of Ghana' from Ghana President John Mahama on Wednesday. ANI

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Progress in the contemporary world will not be possible without giving a voice to the Global South, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday while addressing a joint session of Ghana's Parliament in its capital Accra.

Mr. Modi, who received Ghana's highest state honour 'The Officer of the Order of the Star of Ghana', quoted the country's founding father Kwame Nkrumah, who said that Africa and India are connected by "intrinsic" forces, in a speech outlining the widespread changes sweeping the world and the challenges that persist.

"The world order created after the Second World War is changing fast... The revolution in technology, the rise of the Global South, and the shifting demographics are contributing to its pace and scale. Challenges, such as colonial rule, that humanity has faced in earlier centuries still persist in different forms," Mr. Modi said.

The Prime Minister described the state honour that he received as the "symbol of enduring friendship" between India and Ghana, which has been a priority of India's ties with Africa since the early days of decolonisation in the 1950s.

Governance reforms
"Progress cannot come

without giving voice to the Global South," he emphasised, listing "climate change, pandemics, terrorism, and cyber security" as the "new and complex crises" that are posing fresh challenges to the world. "The changing circumstances demand credible and effective reforms in global governance," the Prime Minister said, highlighting the inclusion of the African Union into the G-20.

"We put emphasis on Africa's rightful place at the global high table. We are proud that the African Union became a permanent member of the G-20 during our Presidency," Mr. Modi said.

Uniting forces

Quoting Dr. Nkrumah, Mr. Modi said, "The forces that unite us are intrinsic and greater than the superimposed influences that keep us apart." India is a "pillar of strength in the world" that will stand "shoulder to shoulder" with Ghana as it pursues its developmental goals, he vowed.

This is the first speech by an Indian Prime Minister in Ghana's Parliament, with the special meeting being convened by Speaker Alban Kingsford Sumana Bagbin, who had visited India in 2023. Mr. Modi appreciated Ghana's parliamentary system and expressed satisfaction over the formation of the Ghana-India Parliamentary Friendship Society.

