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Question Corner

Under pressure

How does a digital barometer work?

– *Yugandhara*

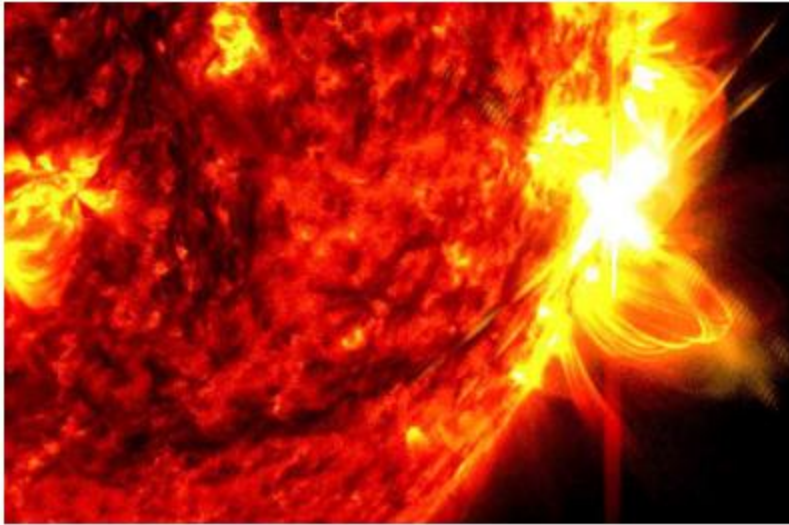
Muthukrishnan, Chennai

A barometer is a device to measure pressure. From the 17th to the 19th centuries, most designs had the same working principle: air pressure pushed down on an open column of fluid, which was allowed to move into a second column with a closed top. The aneroid barometer was invented in 1844: air acted on a capsule that was kept from collapsing by a spring. As the capsule contracted under pressure, it moved small levers attached to a needle on a gauge. Today, devices use digital

barometers. Here, a micro-electro-mechanical system (MEMS) converts changes in pressure to electronic signals. One way is to use the piezoresistive effect: when pressure is applied on a conductor, its resistivity changes.

Another way is to expose one plate of a capacitor to air pressure: as the pressure changes, the inter-plate distance varies. The rest of the MEMS circuitry amplifies the changed resistance or capacitance signal, converts it into a pressure reading, and displays it on a screen.

Readers may send their questions / answers to
questioncorner@thehindu.co.in



The innermost planet that causes its star to flare

Around 400 lightyears away, astronomers have found a star that flares almost always after its innermost planet crosses in front of it. The correlation suggests the planet's motion disturbs the star's magnetic field, triggering flares. The extra high-energy radiation and likely coronal-mass ejections bombard the planet, rarefying and stripping its already puffy atmosphere. According to the team, the star, HIP 67522, is a prototype system to study magnetic star-planet interactions.



On early earth, a little heat could have led to complex life

Billions of years ago, a rock crack exuding heat could have gathered different types of biomolecules together and kickstarted protein synthesis

Vasudevan Mukunth

Before true cells existed on the earth, organic molecules floated freely in water. The first cell membrane created a compartment so that useful molecules like RNA and proteins could stay close enough to interact with each other, leading to more complex biological functions.

However, an important question remains: how did the first protocells on early earth bring together all the molecules they needed and set life-like chemistry in motion? According to a new study, simple heat, like the warmth of volcanic rocks, could have done the trick.

Putting it together

When one side of a small water-filled crack is warmer than the other, two things happen. Warm liquid rises and cooler liquid sinks, creating a gentle loop; second, many molecules drift from the hotter side towards the cooler side. Together, these flows can sweep dissolved molecules downwards and hold them there.

The study, authored by scientists from Canada, Finland, Germany, and Italy, was published in *Nature Physics*. The scientists built small 170-micrometre-thick chambers sandwiched between sapphire plates. The top plate was maintained at 40° C and the bottom plate at 27° C.

Then they turned to PU-

Between hot and cold

Life may not have needed very specialised conditions to emerge

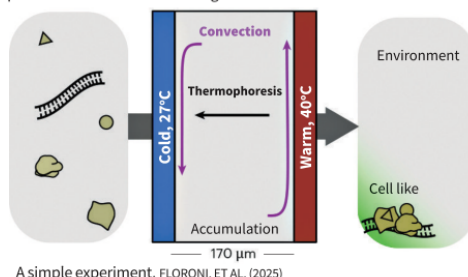
1. How did earth's first protocells bring together the molecules they needed to set life-like chemistry in motion?

2. Before cell membranes existed, a small temperature difference could have done the trick, a new study has found

3. The study has shown that convection and thermophoresis in a temperature gradient can together confine molecules floating in water

4. The confinement led to protein synthesis where previously there wasn't any, confirmed using a fluorescing protein

5. One question now is whether a steady temperature gradient is required or if a time-varying gradient will do



RExpress, a cell-free protein synthesis kit made from *Escherichia coli* bacteria. The kit contains every major part of *E. coli*'s protein-making machinery – DNA, RNA polymerase, amino acids, etc. – in purified form.

Before the experiment, the team diluted these contents threefold in order to keep the kit from being able to make proteins.

Next, they added a short piece of DNA that coded for a protein called green fluorescent protein (GFP) to each PURExpress mix. GFP fluoresces with a bright green light that can be seen under a microscope. As a result, the mix had a built-in light bulb that reported when and where protein synthesis happened.

The authors let the PURExpress mix 'express' itself for around 16 hours both with and without the temperature gradient bet-

ween the sapphire plates.

Then they opened a narrow channel at the top and pumped pure water for up to nine hours or a nutrient feed for up to 22 hours while maintaining the gradient.

Right after, the team froze the chambers to preserve their concentration profiles for later study. Then they split the frozen sample into three layers from top to bottom and analysed each slice.

Like a membrane

They found that there was 25 times more GFP in the bottom layer than in the top. Similarly, key ions including those of magnesium (30x) and potassium (7x) and phosphate ions (70x) had accumulated more at the bottom than at the top. The team also found that DNA, RNA building blocks, and amino acids had become concentrated at the bottom.

Once these molecules were crowded together, the previously inactive PURExpress mix had switched on gene expression. The team found that the mix was manufacturing GFP only in the chamber with the temperature gradient, not in the chamber without. In fact, even when water flowed overhead for nine hours, more than 95% of the GFP was trapped while small amounts of phosphate waste diffused out, displaying membrane-like selectivity without an actual membrane.

For added measure, the team also modelled the heat, flow, and diffusion and found that they reproduced the 3D concentration profiles of various molecules.

Thus, according to the study, just a rock crack exuding heat could have gathered different types of biomolecules together and

kickstarted protein synthesis.

Over time, cell membranes let early cells set up ion gradients, i.e. different ion concentrations inside versus outside. When ions flowed back through primitive channels, the flux could power the first molecular machines.

Keep it simple

The researchers wrote that the phenomena they've proposed could be playing out around hydrothermal vents. This will need to be checked.

National Centre for Biological Sciences professor Shashi Thutupalli also said the phenomena described in the study "would rely on some steady gradient. Whether the timescale of the temperature gradients in nature are similar to those in the study needs to be checked."

He also said he was curious whether all kinds of molecules would move in response to the temperature gradient.

"In my opinion, I don't think we'll ever exactly figure out what exactly happened on early earth. But one takeaway is that maybe the start of life needn't have been very complicated or specialised," Dr. Thutupalli said.

For example, a March 2025 study in *Science* found that when neutral water is sprayed, it creates oppositely charged microdroplets that cause an electrical discharge, instigating chemical reactions around them.

The Trust of Dalai Lama

Gaden Phodrang

The Tibetan spiritual leader says the institution he set up in 2011 and heads will be the sole authority in deciding who should succeed him

Suhasini Haidar

The 14th Dalai Lama's announcement in Dharamshala this week, asserting for the first time that the line will continue after him, was welcomed by followers of Tibetan Buddhism and fans of its Spiritual leader worldwide. However, it was his statement that the succession would be decided by the Gaden Phodrang Trust, which would be the "sole authority" on the issue, that has sparked a sharp response from Beijing, which believes it must be given the right to "approve" the candidate.

In an ironic twist for the Communist Party-led Chinese government in Beijing, it cites a Qing dynasty tradition, used a few times, of picking the Dalai Lama successor through lots from a "Golden Urn", as the method it hopes to follow. For the Dalai Lama, who has lived in India since 1959, when he fled Lhasa years after the Chinese annexed Tibet in 1951, it will be the Gaden Phodrang trust he set up in 2011, which he heads, along with an alternate Chairperson, who is also one of the most respected lamas in the community, Samdhong Rimpoche, that will take the call.

While the trust was formally set up and registered



in Dharamshala in the previous decade, the institution of Gaden Phodrang Labrang goes back hundreds of years, and refers to the office of the Dalai Lama as a continuing institution from the time of the 5th Dalai Lama. Gaden Phodrang was the name of the Tibetan government, established by the 5th Dalai Lama, Ngawang Lobzang Gyatso or 'the Great Fifth', as both the Spiritual and Political head of a unified Tibet. It was coined from the name of the historical estate of the Dalai Lamas at the Drepung Monastery.

Separation of powers

In 2011, the 14th Dalai Lama set up the Gaden Phodrang Trust as he decided to separate the Spiritual and Political powers of his post. "I have now voluntarily brought this [unified power] to an end, proud and satisfied that we can pursue the kind of democratic system of government flourishing elsewhere

in the world", he said, handing over the responsibility for the welfare and governance of the Tibetan community worldwide to the Sikyong, Central Tibetan Administration (CTA) and the Tibetan Parliament in Exile that are elected every five years.

Within his own office, the Office of His Holiness The Dalai Lama (OHHDL), he set up the Gaden Phodrang Trust to ensure the continuity of spiritual and traditional issues, and the Dalai Lama Trust that undertakes charitable and welfare initiatives. Another branch, the Gaden Phodrang Foundation, was set up as a "non-profit, tax-exempt institution registered in the Canton of Zurich and under the supervision of the Swiss Federal Department of Home Affairs" to promote non-violence and increase synergies between religion and science. "There should be no confusion, the Gaden Phodrang Trust that His Holiness (Dalai Lama) referred

to is an entity in India," said Dhundup Gyalpo, Secretary of the Bureau of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in New Delhi.

According to the Dalai Lama's 2011 statement, which he has now reaffirmed, officers of the Gaden Phodrang Trust would bear the responsibility to recognise the 15th Dalai Lama – by a process he would leave written instructions about. This would include consulting various heads of Tibetan Buddhist traditions, seeking advice from them on the procedures required to search for the next Dalai Lama, believed to be reborn or reincarnated from the present one. In his latest book, *Voice for the Voiceless*, he has also said that given the role the next Dalai Lama must fill, it is necessary that his successor be born in the "free world", meaning outside of the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China.

At a press conference in Dharamshala ahead of the Dalai Lama's 90th birthday (July 6), Prof. Rimpoche said that the announcement has clarified the task ahead of the Gaden Phodrang Trust. He added however that there may be some time before it needs to fulfil its mandate, particularly as the pontiff, who he said is in "good health", himself has said he expects to live to 110 years.

The nuclear policeman

Rafael Grossi

The IAEA chief found himself in the middle of a controversy as Iran alleged that the agency prepared a misleading report about Tehran's compliance with non-proliferation obligations, which Israel and the U.S. used to justify their unprovoked aggression against the Islamic Republic

ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

G. Sampath

In July 2, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian ordered his country to suspend cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the UN's nuclear watchdog. He explained this decision as "a natural response to the unjustified, unconstructive, and destructive conduct" of the IAEA's Director General Rafael Grossi. Tehran believes Mr. Grossi cleared the ground for Israel's unprovoked strikes on its nuclear facilities by preparing a "misleading" report on Iran's compliance with non-proliferation obligations. On the basis of this report, the IAEA's Board of Governors on June 12, one day before Israel's attack, adopted a resolution stating that Iran had "failed to cooperate fully" with the Agency and accused it of "repeatedly failing to provide the Agency with technically credible explanations" to its various queries. Israel and the U.S. used this resolution to push forward the narrative that Iran was on the verge of making a nuclear bomb and the only way to stop it was to destroy its nuclear installations through "pre-emptive" military strikes.

Subsequently, after Israel struck Iran's nuclear sites, Mr. Grossi made a clarification that seemed to walk back the impression created by the June 12 resolution. In an interview with CNN, he said, "We did not have any proof of a systematic effort by Iran to make a nuclear weapon." A spokesperson of Iran's Ministry of External Affairs shared the video clip of Mr. Grossi's interview on social media with the comment, "This is too late, Mr. Grossi: you obscured this truth in your absolutely biased report...Do you know how many innocent Iranians have been killed/maimed as a result of this criminal war? You've made IAEA a partner to this unjust war of aggression."

Mr. Grossi, 64, is a diplomat from the Argentine Foreign Service. In a career spanning 40 years, he carved a niche for himself in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, serving as president of the Nuclear

Suppliers Group (2014-2016) before assuming office as Director General of the IAEA on December 3, 2019. He said in a 2020 interview, "I feel like I prepared for this my whole life."

As the IAEA chief, Mr. Grossi made headlines in 2022 for his energetic efforts to secure Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, which was caught in the cross-fire of the Ukraine-Russia war. An accidental strike on it could unleash a nuclear disaster that would impact much of Europe. Mr. Grossi, at some risk to his own life, personally visited the nuclear plant near the frontline. With the consent of the Ukrainian leadership, he shut down all but one reactor, and as an additional safety measure, left behind a team of UN inspectors. But his efforts did not stop there.

A month later, he went to St. Petersburg and met Russian President Vladimir Putin. His mission: to extract an assurance that Russian forces would not target the Zaporizhzhia plant. Mr. Grossi's trip had the intended effect, with the Russians steering clear of attacking the facility.

IAEA's mandate

Mr. Grossi's actions were fully in keeping with the mandate of the IAEA, which is to promote and safeguard peaceful nuclear programmes all over the world. Today, however, the IAEA is known more as an agency tasked with verifying that nuclear materials meant for civilian use are not diverted for weaponisation. In fact, IAEA inspectors cannot, and are not mandated to, search for weapons. They merely monitor nuclear facilities to ensure that the signatory country is fulfilling its obligations under the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement.

Critically, IAEA inspections, by design, are incapable of generating verifiable evidence of the absence of a military nuclear programme. Nor can its reports – with their catalogue of "failures" in compliance or cooperation – serve as a proxy for the existence of a weaponisation programme, in the absence of independent intel proving as much. Since IAEA inspections cannot possibly cover every square inch of a vast country, the problem of



'unknowns' at 'undeclared' locations are a given. While these might warrant further investigation, it is questionable whether they can be used to fuel speculation about a country's intentions at a time of escalating tensions.

And yet, the ambiguous wording in the IAEA resolution and Mr. Grossi's public statements did precisely that, lending credence to the narrative of Iran building a nuclear bomb. Ironically, American intel leaked to the media as well as a statement in March 2025 by the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, confirmed that Iran was not building a bomb. Another major element of this

narrative was that Iran had 400 kg of highly enriched uranium (HEU), which is not needed for civilian use. Mr. Grossi dwelled on this aspect often in his public pronouncements. Yet, it is not illegal under the NPT for a signatory country to hold uranium enriched to 60%. For Iran, however, it was prohibited, but only under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the 2015 agreement which limited its enrichment rights to 3.67% and capped its stockpiling of enriched uranium at 300kg.

But the JCPOA became defunct – at least from the Iranian perspective – the moment the U.S. withdrew from it in 2018 and the sanctions relief

guaranteed under it for Iran failed to materialise. But Mr. Grossi went along with the position of holding Iran to a JCPOA the West had already scuttled, while disregarding the IAEA's own resolutions that prohibit military attacks on civilian nuclear installations.

Attacks prohibited

The IAEA's General Conference resolution (407) adopted in November 1983 states that "all armed attacks against nuclear installations devoted to peaceful purposes should be explicitly prohibited". A draft resolution of September 26, 1985, submitted jointly by Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden not only forbade Israel from targeting Iraq's civilian nuclear facilities, it further called "upon Israel urgently to place all its nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards" – something difficult to envisage at a time when exemption for Israel from international law is getting increasingly normalised. Under the IAEA statutes and the UN charter, Iran is entitled to a peaceful nuclear programme. It is also entitled to protection of its nuclear installations from military attacks. And yet, Mr. Grossi never condemned the Israeli and U.S. strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities. On the contrary, his words and deeds amplified suspicions about Iran's intentions, which were used by Israel and the U.S. to justify their attack.

Today, in the aftermath of a fragile and difficult ceasefire, Mr. Grossi is back to stoking fears about Iran's nuclear programme by claiming it could start enriching uranium again in a matter of months. Not surprisingly, Iran has refused to allow IAEA inspection of its bombed-out nuclear facilities, with the Foreign Minister, Abbas Araghchi, stating, "Grossi's insistence on visiting the bombed sites under the pretext of safeguards is meaningless and possibly even malign in intent."

Had Mr. Grossi displayed a little of the same urgency for protecting Iran's civilian nuclear facilities that he did for Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, it may have gone some way toward protecting the IAEA's credibility among nuclear threshold states.

THE GIST

▼ In a career spanning 40 years, Rafael Grossi, an Argentine diplomat, has carved a niche for himself in nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament, serving as president of the Nuclear Suppliers Group before assuming office as Director General of the IAEA

▼ As the IAEA chief, Grossi made headlines in 2022 for his energetic efforts to secure Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, which was caught in the cross-fire of the Ukraine-Russia war

▼ After the Israeli-American attack on Iran in June, Grossi said the agency 'did not have any proof of a systematic effort by Iran to make a nuclear weapon', but stopped short of condemning the strikes



Why is Maharashtra debating over Hindi?

Why is there resistance to introducing Hindi as the third language in primary education in government schools? What has the State government decided on the three-language policy? What does the National Education Policy, 2020 lay down?

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

The story so far:

The linguistic debate in Maharashtra continues days after the Maharashtra government withdrew two orders introducing Hindi as the third language in primary education across Marathi and English medium State Board schools. The government has appointed a committee under renowned economist Dr. Narendra Jadhav to study the three-language policy.

What is the language debate in Maharashtra?

On April 16, the Maharashtra government issued an order making Hindi mandatory as the third language in all English and Marathi medium schools of the State Board in Maharashtra. The government said that it was as per the provisions of the National Education Policy (NEP), 2020. "At present, two languages are being taught from Grade 1 to Grade 4 in all the English and Marathi medium schools in the State. As per the State Education Framework, 2024, Hindi will be mandatory as the third language in all the English and Marathi medium schools from Grade 1 to Grade 5," the order stated. Till now, third language was introduced only in Grade 5 in English and Marathi medium State Board

"The language committee of the government was not consulted on the move"

schools. The other medium schools already have a three-language policy in primary education.

What was the reaction?

There was widespread opposition to the government's decision on two grounds – first, that a third language should not be imposed in primary school from Grade 1 to Grade 5. The second ground was about the imposition of Hindi. Regional linguistic groups, academics, civil society members, and prominent literary figures raised their voice against the move which was dubbed as an effort to 'force Hindi', and a move towards 'cultural hegemony'. The Maharashtra government's own language committee wrote to the government seeking its immediate revocation.

Experts argued that the NEP, 2020 focussed on R1 and R2, which is the mother-tongue, and an additional second language for primary education. They said that children should not be burdened with learning three languages in primary school. "Why should there be an imposition of Hindi? This is a concerted effort for cultural hegemony. This is in line with the RSS' plan of 'Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan'. In Maharashtra, the Marathi *manos* will stand for his linguistic, cultural identity. This is a historic moment since the movement for the reorganisation of States on linguistic basis. The entire State has stood against the government's imposition of Hindi," Deepak Pawar of Marathi Abhyas Kendra said.

How did the government respond?

After a severe backlash, Maharashtra education minister Dada Bhuse promised to revise the government resolution (GR). "Hindi will not be mandatory," he announced. On June 17, the government revised the GR, making Hindi a 'general' third language in schools. It stated that the students had the option to learn any other Indian language as the third language, but that it was mandatory for at least 20 students to come together to make the demand. "The government will make a teacher available or will make provision for online learning if at least 20 students come together to learn any other Indian language apart from Hindi," the revised

GR stated.

However, this drew further backlash as academics and regional linguistic political parties called it an effort to impose Hindi through the backdoor. "The whole exercise of the meeting of the steering committee was carried out in secrecy by the government. The language committee of the government itself was never consulted on the move. The decision is illogical. It has no scientific backing by educationists, child psychologists. It has been taken without any consultation with the stakeholders and experts. At a time when the Marathi culture and language is not being respected by its own government, this is an assault on the linguistic identity of the State," said Laxmikant Deshmukh, head of Maharashtra's language committee.

What about political realignments?

The issue provided a fillip to Raj Thackeray's Maharashtra Navnirman Sena, which counts 'Marathi asmita' or linguistic chauvinism as its core ideology. "We are Hindus, not Hindus," he said. It paved the path for the reunification of the Thackeray cousins after two decades. Uddhav Thackeray and Raj Thackeray joined hands against the government's move, even holding a joint rally. Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar too openly expressed his displeasure with the government's decision and said that Hindi should not be imposed till Grade 4. This has led to an unease within the Mahayuti with Eknath Shinde not wanting to be seen as standing against the cause. In the face of upcoming local body elections, the language debate has led to changed political dynamics.

What is the way ahead?

The government has announced the scrapping of the two controversial GRs issued on April 16 and June 17. Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis announced the formation of a committee under Dr. Narendra Jadhav to look into the three-language policy, and said the government will accept his report. Academics have raised questions on Dr. Jadhav's expertise in school education, and have demanded the scrapping of the committee as well as the decision to impose the three-language policy in primary education. Opposition parties have said the government should scrap the three-language policy altogether. "We will not accept the three-language policy," Sanjay Raut, Shiv Sena UBT leader, said.



Linguistic unity: Uddhav Thackeray, along with Raj Thackeray, Supriya Sule, and others, during a joint rally at Worli Dome in Mumbai on Saturday. ANI

What are the pros and cons of the ELI scheme?

What are the incentives of the employment-linked incentive and whom will it benefit?

A. M. Jigeesh

The story so far:

The Union Cabinet approved an Employment-Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme with an outlay of ₹99,446 crore. The scheme, a promise made in the 2024-25 budget, is aimed at creating employment, particularly in the manufacturing sector. It is a part of the Prime Minister's package of five schemes to facilitate employment such as internships with big companies and measures to improve skills of the youth.

What are the key provisions?

The ELI scheme, according to the Labour Ministry, incentivises creation of more than 3.5 crore jobs over a period of two years. The Centre expects 1.52 crore newly employed people to get the benefit of the scheme, which comes into operation from August 1, 2025 and ends on July 31, 2027. The Employees Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) will implement the scheme. Newly recruited employees, with salaries up to ₹1 lakh, will get a one-month EPF wage up to ₹15,000 in two installments. The EPFO will pay the first instalment after six months of service and the second instalment after 12 months of service – both as direct bank transfer. A portion of the incentive will be kept in "a savings instrument of deposit account for a fixed period and can be withdrawn by the employee at a later date".

The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-backed Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh has welcomed the ELI scheme with a rider that the government must expand the social security base and improve the quality of employment for each additional employee with sustained employment for at least six months". The Centre adds that for the manufacturing sector, incentives will be extended to third and fourth years as well.

How have employers responded?

Employers have welcomed the scheme, with caveats. Former Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry president Subhrant Panda said that ELI is a "laudable initiative". It will drive employment, especially in the manufacturing sector, through an innovative approach which combines support for those joining the workforce for the first time with incentives for creating sustained employment, he added. CII's office-bearer Sachin Jain said the ELI scheme has the potential to reshape India's employment landscape and boost labour-intensive sectors. The Sangh Parivar-backed Laghu Udyog Bharati pointed out that the focus of the scheme must be directed towards micro, small manufacturing units and allied service sectors. "We also urge that units with less than 20 employees, which form the majority, are not left behind. These units must be included under the scheme benefits," it demanded in a statement.

The founder of the Association of Indian Entrepreneurs, K.E. Raghunathan, told *The Hindu* that the scheme must be repositioned under the Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, with a structured reimbursement model based on actual payroll data addition.

"For every new employee a specific percentage of the salary must be paid to the employee and employer as a subsidy directly on a monthly basis, as long as the employee remains in service. Make it simple and ensure a wider coverage," he suggested.

What about trade unions?

Barring the RSS-backed Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh (BMS), all 10 central trade unions have questioned the scheme. The BMS has welcomed the ELI scheme with a rider that the government must expand the social security base and improve the quality of employment. Other unions fear that workers' money will be used to incentivise employers. Citing the fate of the Production-Linked Incentive of 2020, wherein certain sectors were given sops by the Centre to create jobs, but the money had gone into the pockets of big companies. They argued that the EPFO had to conduct a probe and ban certain companies after finding the scheme was misused for employers' benefits.

What are some of the concerns?

There are concerns on the role of the EPFO in the scheme. As EPFO is only a custodian of savings of employees, unions are asking how it can act as an agency to implement the scheme. As the EPFO has no government funds in its books, there are doubts over the reimbursement of the money which could go to the employer or a newly recruited employee. As EPFO is not an agency with the responsibility of creating jobs, there are demands to create a separate agency to implement the scheme.

Industry experts are also questioning why the government is not addressing the slowdown in the economy, and not taking steps to improve the purchasing power of workers.



'BRICS has no plan for an alternative currency'

Brazil's Ambassador to India says the summit in Rio will focus on building intra-BRICS trade, climate change, artificial intelligence and fighting terrorism; he says that the grouping may look at adopting local currencies as an option for conducting trade and it will be on a voluntary basis

INTERVIEW

Kenneth Felix Haczynski da Nobrega

Suhasini Haidar

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will land in Rio De Janeiro early Sunday morning to attend the BRICS summit (July 6-7), along with leaders of the newly inducted members Egypt, Ethiopia, the UAE, Iran, and Indonesia. All eyes will be on a Leaders' Joint Statement, especially given India's focus on terrorism after the Pahalgam attack and Operation Sindoor, as well as differences with new members over reforms in the UN Security Council, amid the absence of two key leaders, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping. Responding to a query on reactions from the U.S. if BRICS moves towards de-dollarisation, Brazil's Ambassador to India Kenneth Felix Haczynski da Nobrega says the

grouping has no plans of creating an alternative currency, but will build options of local currency trade within itself. Excerpts:

What are your hopes for real outcomes from this summit?

We are envisaging a BRICS which will deliver some results, among them, a dedicated declaration on climate change financing, financing and regulation of artificial intelligence, and a partnership on socially determined diseases, diseases which we associate with states of poverty. Apart from the first session, all sessions of the Rio BRICS summit will be open to the partner countries and to invited countries. This is an effort at transparency and inclusivity in the platform to discuss the big challenges of humanity. A telling sign is that 30-plus countries have expressed an interest in joining BRICS.

U.S. President Donald Trump has threatened 100-500% tariffs against BRICS if it moves



SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

towards de-dollarisation. How seriously do you take the U.S. statements against BRICS?

If you have declarations of an important country like the United States, it is taken seriously. But to speak of a BRICS currency... that is something that does not exist, and we are not envisioning creating a BRICS currency in the foreseeable future.

What we are envisaging is stimulating businesses of BRICS countries to adopt local currencies as an option for conducting trade. This will be on a voluntary basis, and it's nothing new – within MERCOSUR, which is the South American integration process,

we have had the possibility of using local-currency trades for more than 25 years. So this is just one more option, not a move against the dollar.

This is the first BRICS summit since the Pahalgam terror attack. How will BRICS address the issue of terrorism?

I can tell you that the Foreign Minister's meeting of BRICS (on April 28-29), which did not produce a joint statement but had a Chair's summary, included a paragraph on the Pahalgam attack. So we are quite confident that the Leaders' Statement at BRICS would also contain a robust paragraph condemning terrorism.

Has the expansion of BRICS led to more tensions within the grouping? There is still no clarity on the membership of Saudi Arabia. Is BRICS losing its cohesiveness?

In the past, even when BRICS was composed of only five members, it always focused on what unites such diverse countries, not on divisions. The five original members – Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa – were already diverse countries, and the focus was not on what we cannot do together, but what we can do together. By accepting new members, BRICS has shown its diversity and consensus-building ability. And it is this ability that led to notable results like the establishment of the New Development Bank.

Given the focus on the Global South in BRICS, do you see the Rio Summit pitching itself as a challenger to the more established G-7 grouping?

Brazil has never seen

BRICS as a challenge to G-7, or as some kind of bloc against G-7. BRICS is a group that comes together to advance our converging interests.

What are the main outcomes expected from Prime Minister Modi's visit to Brasilia, and a meeting with President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, which will follow the BRICS summit?

The state visit will take place against a backdrop of booming business and engagement between our two countries. Just to give you a figure, in less than two years, we have had 110 missions (trade and bilateral) in both directions, between India and Brazil. These missions were basically focused on four areas: defence, agriculture, energy and the pharmaceutical industry. We have seen an intensification of contacts between government and government on digital partnerships and artificial intelligence. We now have space here to take stock and facilitate business in a number of areas.



Prove FRA damaged forests, says Tribal Affairs Ministry

Abhinay Lakshman

NEW DELHI

A little over six months after the release of the India State of Forest Report (2023), which attributed “negative” changes in forest and tree cover to the implementation of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) and other factors, the Tribal Affairs Ministry has asked the Environment Ministry to provide evidence for this claim.

The Tribal Affairs Ministry, which is the nodal Ministry for the implementation of the FRA, said that making such claims without “adequate scientific evidence” may reinforce stereotypes among State, district, and forest administrations “that could undermine the rights vested under the Act, as well as the effectiveness of the implementation”.

The Ministry has requested a “detailed scientific analysis” for the claim “with valid instances through ground truthing as the report mentions”. A senior government official told *The Hindu*, “The ISFR is meant to be a very detailed and scientific study of forests. If such claims are made, the purpose is to find out what evidence supports it. That is why this communication has been issued.”

Letter to Centre

The Tribal Affairs Ministry’s communication, dated July 2, comes days after over 150 forest rights and civil society groups wrote to the Union government, taking issue with the ISFR’s attribution of “negative” change in forest cover partly to the implementation of the FRA. They had pointed out that this claim had been repeated by Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav in a media interview in June.

Former Environment Minister and Congress leader Jairam Ramesh, who had amplified the civil society groups’ letter, shared the Tribal Affairs Ministry’s communication on social media on Satur-



A tribal villager in Odisha entering a forest to collect produce. FILE PHOTO

day as well.

The Tribal Affairs Ministry, in its communication, said that the FRA “does not deal with regularisation of encroachments”. “Instead, it acknowledges pre-existing rights that are already being exercised by eligible individuals and communities dwelling in forest areas. Beyond securing the tenure of the existing forest dwellers, FRA does not create any new rights that could potentially affect the ecological balance within protected areas,” it said.

The communication has noted that the ISFR 2023, in the chapter on “Change in forest and tree cover”, has two sections – one on “positive” changes and another on “negative” changes.

In the report, under the possible reasons for “negative” changes, the Environment Ministry lists “titles given to beneficiaries under the Forest Rights Act (2006)” as one of them. According to a review of the last five ISFRs published by the Forest Survey of India (FSI) in the past decade, this is the first time, titles under FRA have been included in this list explicitly. The point on FRA as one of the reasons for “negative” change to forest cover was reiterated by Mr. Yadav in an email interview with a daily newspaper.

Notably, the Environment Ministry had denied allegations made against it by the civil society groups in a statement posted on social media on Thursday. The statement had come after Mr. Ramesh had posted the civil society groups’ letter on social media.



Amit Shah lays foundation for India's first co-op university

Launching a CBSE course on co-ops, Minister urges Gujarat government to include it as a subject from Classes 9 to 12 in State Board schools as well; university will train professionals for co-ops

Abhinay Deshpande
MUMBAI

Union Minister of Cooperation and Home Affairs Amit Shah laid the foundation stone for India's first national cooperative university on Saturday, even while advocating for the inclusion of cooperative education at an earlier stage, in the secondary school curricula.

Addressing a gathering of farmers, cooperators, and officials at the ceremony in Gujarat's Anand – home of Amul, one of India's biggest and best known cooperatives – Mr. Shah emphasised the Tribhuvan Sahkari University's proposed role in fulfilling Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision to strengthen the cooperative sector.

"As envisioned by PM Modi, Tribhuvan Sahkari University will meet the



Amit Shah lights a ceremonial lamp during the foundation stone laying ceremony of Tribhuvan Sahkari University. ANI

need for trained professionals in cooperatives, bring transparency, foster innovation, and provide technical education in areas such as accounting, marketing, and cooperative values – ensuring expertise alongside a spirit of service to the poor," he said.

High school subject

Launching a special course

on cooperatives by the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), the Minister called for similar courses to be started by the State government as well.

"CBSE has started adding cooperatives to the syllabus. [Gujarat] Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, the Vidhan Sabha Speaker, and the Education Minister, all three are present here. I request that

just like CBSE, even the Gujarat government should add cooperatives as a subject in the curriculum in books for Classes 9 to 12. The Gujarat government should also add cooperatives as a subject in its curriculum so that common people know the importance of cooperatives," Mr. Shah said. The university has been named after Tribhuvandas Kishibhai Patel, a pioneer of the cooperative movement in India and a key figure behind the foundation of Amul. Mr. Shah recalled how the cooperative movement that began in 1946 under Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's guidance has now grown into an ₹80,000 crore enterprise involving 36 lakh women.

The university will offer specialised courses in cooperative management, finance, law, and rural development.



India is fourth 'most equal' country, says World Bank report

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

Inequality in India has come down significantly between 2011-12 and 2022-23, making it the fourth-most equal country globally, according to a World Bank report.

This is in addition to a sharp decrease in extreme poverty, which has dropped from 16.2% in 2011-12 to 2.3% in 2022-23, an official release said quoting World Bank data.

The government attributed the reduction in inequality to various initiatives and schemes pursued during the last decade.

The only three countries which have a better Gini Index score, a measure of equality, are the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Belarus.

"...India's Gini Index stands at 25.5, making it the fourth most equal country in the world, after the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Belarus," the statement said.

Income distribution

The Gini Index helps in understanding how equally income, wealth or consumption is distributed across households or indi-



India falls into the 'moderately low' inequality category, as per the World Bank's report.

viduals in a country.

It ranges in value from zero to 100. A score of zero means perfect equality, while a score of 100 means one person has all the income, wealth or consumption and others have none, hence absolute inequality.

The higher the Gini Index, the more unequal a country is.

India's score is much lower than China's 35.7 and far lower than the United States, which stands at 41.8.

As per the World Bank's report, which has released the data for 167 countries, India falls into the "moderately low" inequality category, which includes Gini scores between 25 and 30.

India is only a fraction away from joining the "low inequality" group.

Jaishankar set to visit China to take part in SCO meet

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar is set to visit China around July 13 to attend a conclave of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), people familiar with the matter said on Friday.

It would be Mr. Jaishankar's first visit to China after the ties between the two countries came under severe strain following the 2020 military standoff along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi may also visit India this month to hold a fresh round of talks with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval under the framework of Special Representatives (SR) dialogue on the boundary dispute, it is learnt. In December, Mr. Doval visited Beijing and held the SR talks with Mr. Wang. Mr. Doval visited China last month as well for a meeting of top security officials of the SCO member nations.

The people cited above said the External Affairs Minister is likely to travel to Beijing for talks with Mr. Wang before going to Tianjin for the conclave of the



S. Jaishankar

SCO Foreign Ministers that will be held on July 14 and 15.

Mr. Jaishankar's visit is taking place less than three weeks after Defence Minister Rajnath Singh travelled to the Chinese port city of Qingdao to participate in the SCO Defence Ministers' conference.

China is the current chair of the SCO, and it is hosting the meetings of the grouping in that capacity.

The military standoff in eastern Ladakh began in May 2020, and a deadly clash at the Galwan Valley in June that year resulted in a severe strain in ties between the two neighbours.

The face-off effectively ended following completion of the disengagement process from the last two friction points of Demchok and Depsang under an agreement finalised on October 21.



Kerala to launch its first skin bank in Thiruvananthapuram

The first skin bank in Kerala is ready at the Government Medical College in Thiruvananthapuram. The ₹6.75 crore facility approved by the Kerala State Organ and Tissue Transplant Organisation for receiving skin through skin donation (useful in treatment of burn victims and patients with severe skin injuries) is set for inauguration on July 15, coinciding with the World Plastic Surgery Day, Health Minister Veena George said on Saturday.

