DIA, DEOGHAR IAS ACADEMY

Daily News Feed

D.N.F

24.07.2025

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

Sneaky insects and AI robots: Germany plans to reinvent the nature of warfare

A group of German defence start-ups is developing cutting-edge technology, from tank-like AI robots and unmanned mini-submarines to battle-ready spy cockroaches, as the country is preparing for future conflicts; A new draft law aims to reduce hurdles for cash-strapped start-ups to join tenders

Reuters
BERLIN/FRANKFURT

For Gundbert Scherf – the co-founder of Germany's Helsing, Europe's most valuable defence start-up – Russia's invasion of Ukraine changed everything.

Mr. Scherf had to fight hard to attract investment after starting his company – which produces military strike drones and battlefield AI – four years ago.

Now, that's the least of his problems. The Munich-based company more than doubled its valuation to $12 billion at a fundraising last month.

"Europe this year, for the first time in decades, is spending more on defence technology acquisition than the U.S.," said Mr. Scherf.

The former partner at McKinsey & Company says Europe may be on the cusp of a transformation in defence innovation akin to the Manhattan Project – the scientific push that saw the U.S. rapidly develop nuclear weapons during the Second World War. "Europe is now coming to terms with defence."

Chancellor Friedrich Merz views AI and start-up technology as key to its defence plans and is slashing bureaucracy to connect startups directly to the upper echelons of its military, sources said.

Advanced move: A digital illustration released by Swarm Biotactics shows cyborg cockroaches equipped with specialised backpacks that enable real-time data collection via cameras. REUTERS

Shaped by the trauma of Nazi militarism and strong postwar pacifist ethos, Germany long maintained a relatively small and cautious defence sector, sheltered by U.S. security guarantees. Germany's business model, shaped by a deep aversion to risk, has also favoured incremental improvements over disruptive innovation.

No more. With U.S. military support now more uncertain, Germany – one of the biggest backers of Ukraine – plans to nearly triple its regular defence budget to around €162 billion euros ($175 billion) per year by 2029. Much of that money will go into reinventing the nature of warfare, the sources said.

Helsing is part of a wave of German defence start-ups developing cutting-edge technology, from tank-like AI robots and unmanned mini-submarines to battle-ready spy cockroaches.

"We want to help give Europe its spine back," said Mr. Scherf.

Some of these smaller firms are now advising the government alongside established firms – so-called primes such as Rheinmetall and Hensoldt – that have less incentive to focus primarily on innovation, given their long backlogs for conventional systems, one of the sources said.

A new draft procurement law, approved by Mr. Merz's cabinet on Wednesday, aims to reduce hurdles for cash-strapped start-ups to join tenders by enabling advance payment to these firms.

In the lead

Since Donald Trump's return to the political stage and his renewed questioning of America's commitment to NATO, Germany has committed to meet the alliance's new target of 3.5% of GDP on defence spending by 2029 – faster than most European allies.

Officials in Berlin have emphasised the need to foster a European defence industry rather than rely on U.S. companies. But the hurdles towards scaling up industry champions in Germany – and Europe more broadly – are considerable. Unlike in the U.S., the market is fragmented in Europe. Each country has its own set of procurement standards to fulfil contracts.

The U.S., the world's top military spender, already has an established stable of defence giants, like Lockheed Martin and RTX, and an advantage in key areas, including satellite technology, fighter jets and precise-guided munitions.

Washington also began boosting defence tech startups in 2015 – including Shield AI, drone maker Anduril and software company Palantir – by awarding them parts of military contracts.

European startups until recently languished with little government support.

But an analysis by Aviation Week in May showed Europe's 19 top defence spenders – including Turkey and Ukraine – were projected to spend €180.1 billion this year on military procurement compared, to €175.6 billion for the U.S.

Hans Christoph Atzpodien, head of Germany's security and defence sector association BDSV, said one challenge was that the military's procurement system was geared toward established suppliers and not well suited to the fast pace that new technologies require.

Sven Weizenegger, who heads up the Cyber Innovation hub, the Bundeswehr's innovation accelerator, said the war in Ukraine was also changing social attitudes, removing a stigma towards working in the defence sector.

"Germany has developed a whole new openness towards the issue of security since the invasion," he said.

Mr. Weizenegger said he was receiving 20-30 Linkedin requests a day, compared to maybe 2-3 weekly back in 2020, with ideas for defence technology to develop.

Some of the ideas under development feel akin to science fiction – like Swarm Biotactics' cyborg cockroaches that are equipped with specialised miniature backpacks that enable real-time data collection via cameras for example. Electrical stimuli should allow humans to control the insects' movements remotely. The aim is for them to provide surveillance information in hostile environments – for example information about enemy positions.

"Our bio-robots – based on living insects – are equipped with neural stimulation, sensors, and secure communication modules," said CEO Stefan Wilhelm. "They can be steered individually or operate autonomously in swarms.

Net FDI dives 98% on lower gross inflows, higher repatriation

Inflows stood at $35 million in May 2025 compared with $2.2 billion in May 2024 and 99% lower than the $3.9 billion in April 2025

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

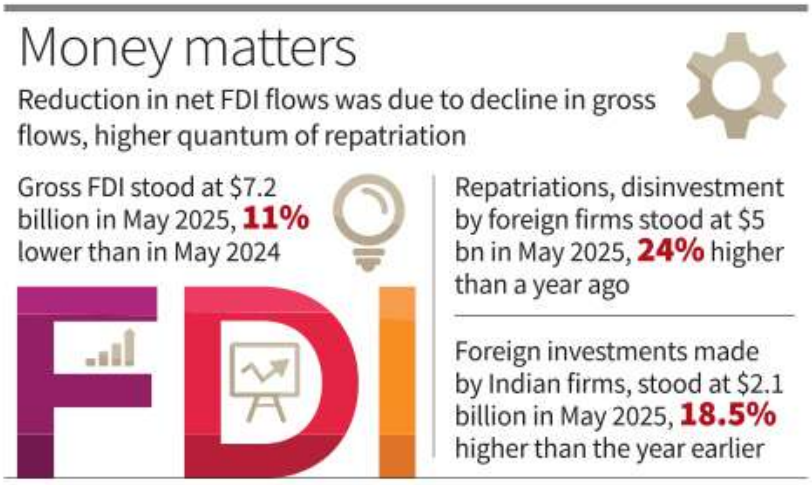
Net foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows stood at $35 million in May 2025, 98% lower than the $2.2 billion seen in May 2024 and 99% lower than the $3.9 billion in April 2025, according to new data released by the Reserve Bank of India on Wednesday.

Net FDI is the gross amount coming into India minus the money sent abroad by foreign companies operating in India (through repatriation or disinvestment) and the investments abroad made by Indian companies (outward FDI).

The reason behind this reduction in net FDI flows was not only that gross FDI flows were lower in May 2025 than in both May 2024 and April 2025, but also because the quantum of repatriation was higher.

According to the data, the gross FDI coming into India stood at $7.2 billion in May 2025, down 18% from the $8.7 billion in April 2025, and 11% lower than in May 2024. Simultaneously, the level of money sent out of the country by foreign companies operating here increased in May. Repatriations and disinvestment by foreign companies stood at $5 billion in May 2025, more than 200% higher than in April 2025 and nearly 24% higher than in May last year.

Foreign investments made by Indian companies, at $2.1 billion in May 2025, were 34% lower than in April but 18.5% higher than in May last year.



Spare live animals, move to biological models

Ankur Betageri

is Assistant Professor at Bharati College, University of Delhi

As human beings are superior to animals, and as animals instinctively rely on the benevolence, goodwill, and protective nature of man, we must fulfil our obligation to treat our fellow non-human beings with love, kindness, and respect.

The issue of the suffering animals undergo in animal testing laboratories is known and so it is rational that humans must respond by finding solutions which can end the suffering of animals and bring peace to human hearts.

A dimension to an ethical problem

Before animals came to be used in toxicity tests, humans were used in feeding experiments to assess the risk of toxicity in American food supply. The first systematic test of this kind was conducted between 1902 to 1904 on behalf of the United States government to test the toxicity of preservatives such as benzoate, borax, and formaldehyde in food products.

A.L. Tatum, a toxicology researcher of the time, cites the following reason for the shift from human studies to animal studies: "People are rather unpredictable and don't always die when they are supposed to and don't always recover when they should. All in all, we must depend heavily on laboratory experimentation for sound and controllable basic principles." So, while discussing the ethical problem of the use of animals in research, it is wrong to presume that human subjects were always exempt from experimentation and testing. The rationalisation of the culture of moral indifferentism and inhumanity is the problem; once rationalised it can as easily be directed at humans as it is at animals.

The suffering that animals undergo in testing laboratories is known and it is time researchers adopt viable solutions

There is consensus today that animal testing is not effective in predicting harm to humans. The findings derived from experiments on animals are not always applicable to humans.

The case for a shift

Developments in the field of tissue engineering or regenerative medicine have enabled us to cultivate at least the following anatomical parts: artificial animal muscle, artificial pancreas, artificial bladders, cartilage, bioartificial heart, blood vessels, artificial skin, artificial bone marrow, bioartificial bone and trachea. It would be ethical and kind to conduct experiments wherever possible using these rather than using animals. It is the request of this writer – to scientists, laboratories and research organisations – to consider doing medical, pharmaceutical and other experimentation and testing, wherever possible, on cells, tissues, and organs developed in laboratories. Spare live animals. Conducting experiments on laboratory-grown anatomical parts would also help the development of the nascent field of tissue-engineering or regenerative medicine.

To make the replacement of animals with lab-grown organs a directive principle and an enforceable one, 'Chapter IV: Experimentation on Animals' of The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 may be amended to include an article which says: 'Scientists, laboratories and research organisations should consider doing experimentation and testing, wherever possible, on lab-grown anatomical parts and bioartificial models of biological systems of humans and animals rather than on animals'.

Animals cannot be protected merely by changing laws. If the laws which can protect them are inadequate it is because we have not accorded them their real status by recognising them as fellow beings who suffer just like us.

We also need to bring about a change in our values, the scientific procedure in laboratories which makes the use of animals inevitable, and create an awareness about animal suffering. The use of visual models on computers to understand the anatomical parts of animals has helped us do away with the practice of dissecting animals in biology classes and laboratories. We can definitely do away with all kinds of animal dissection for educational purposes and teach our students better anatomy by using 2D radiographic imagery and 3D visual models of the different organs and biological systems.

But, for the purposes of experimentation and safety testing, it would be useful if we make a paradigm shift from animal models to ex-corpus models or artificial biological models. This we can do by coordinating the shift with tissue-engineering organisations which can produce and provide these artificial biological models. The field of regenerative medicine can help with this shift by modelling and replicating the required biochemistry and biological systems of the body outside the body and by producing bioartificial functional models of the organs.

A pledge

Let us make our civilisation more hospitable to life by changing our procedures, practices and laws wherever possible. Let us pledge to conduct experimentation and testing as far as possible on biological substances and learn to recognise the inherent sacredness and dignity of animals.

DEOGHAR
IAS Academy

HOPS-315, a baby star where astronomers have observed evidence for the earliest stages of planet formation, as imaged by ALMA. ALMA(ESO/NAOJ/NRAO)/M. MCCLURE ET AL

Telescopes spot start of planet formation in Orion

The Hindu Bureau

When rocky worlds like the earth began to form, dust in the young Solar System was first heated until it vaporised and then cooled so that the very first, refractory (i.e., heat-loving) minerals could crystallise. Catching that moment in another star system would show astronomers exactly how planet formation begins – but no one had seen it before. A new study in *Nature* this month has reported just such an event.

By examining the star HOPS-315 in Orion, whose protoplanetary disc is tilted just enough for someone on or near the earth to peer deeper within, researchers from France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Taiwan, and the U.S. observed raw rock vapour cool and crystallise.

The protoplanetary disc is a flat, rotating pancake-shaped mass of gas and dust that surrounds a newborn star. Inside it, dust grains bump together, stick, and gradually grow into rocks, planets, moons, and other bodies while the gas creates atmospheres and influences the planets' long-term orbits.

The observations themselves were conducted by the NASA James Webb Space Telescope and the Atacama Large Millimeter/sub-millimeter Array (ALMA) observatory in Chile. In 2023, the team used the NIRSpec and MIRI integral-field spectrographs onboard the telescope to collect sharp energy readings across a range of frequencies. Eight months later, ALMA observed the same system for signs of carbon monoxide, silicon monoxide and sulphur monoxide.

Together, the telescope traced warm gas and dust only a few stellar radii from

The relative quantities of crystals were reminiscent of inclusions that have been found in primitive meteorites on the earth, meaning that a similar condensation is under way around the star

the star while ALMA mapped cooler gas farther out.

The telescope's data contained evidence of a strong band of silicon monoxide gas at around 470 K as well as crystalline silicates. Both lay within 2.2 AU of the star – well inside Mercury's orbit if this were in the solar system. (1 AU equals the earth-sun distance.)

The team also ran computer simulations, which predicted that around 1 AU from the star, temperatures hovered around 1,300K, which is the temperature at which dust just begins to evaporate. The study's energy readings matched the prediction: that interstellar grains must have vaporised there, releasing silicon monoxide gas that then cooled and re-condensed into fresh shards of crystals.

According to the study, the relative quantities of crystals of forsterite, enstatite, and tentative silica were reminiscent of inclusions – i.e. minerals trapped inside minerals – that have been found in primitive meteorites on the earth, meaning that a similar condensation chemistry is under way around the star.

The ALMA data also revealed no slow silicon monoxide at the star's position whereas the Webb telescope's data was blueshifted by around 10 km/s. Together, they indicate that the minerals lay inside the rising disc atmosphere, the thin upper layer of gas and dust above the mid-plane of the protoplanetary disc, rather than in the material pouring out of the star.

Thus the study has reported the first evidence of solid matter condensing out of rock vapour around a star, a.k.a. the first step of planet formation.

Vitamin D deficiency linked to neurodevelopmental issues

Vitamin D deficiency represents more than individual concern; it constitutes biological inheritance transmitted across generations, affecting skeletal health and, as Danish research reveals, brains; findings correspond with medical practice in India, where physicians advocate early supplementation

Anirban Mukhopadhyay

From bones to immune cells, vitamin D is everywhere, guiding growth and shaping defence. But could it also have an effect on the mind?

A major new study suggests so. Published in *The Lancet Psychiatry*, the study drew from the extraordinary depth of Danish health data to establish whether neonatal vitamin D levels might contribute to psychological and neurodevelopmental conditions.

Researchers measured vitamin D levels in dried blood spot samples from 88,764 individuals born between 1981 and 2005, part of a universal neonatal screening programme that stores nearly all newborns' blood in the Danish Neonatal Screening Biobank. YURI U/UNSPLASH

What the study found

Researchers at Aarhus University, in collaboration with the Statens Serum Institut in Copenhagen, used dried blood spot samples from 88,764 individuals born between 1981 and 2005 – part of a universal neonatal screening programme that stores nearly all newborns' blood in the Danish Neonatal Screening Biobank.

From these samples, the team measured levels of 25-hydroxyvitamin D, or 25(OH)D, which is the standard marker of vitamin D status, and vitamin D-binding protein, which carries vitamin D in the blood and prolongs its activity.

Using nationwide Danish health registries, the researchers tracked which individuals developed major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder, or anorexia nervosa – and asked whether their vitamin D levels at birth were linked to these outcomes.

The results were striking. Babies with higher vitamin D levels were less likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia, ADHD, or autism. Newborns with levels about 12.6 nmol/l higher than average had an 18% lower risk of schizophrenia, an 11% lower risk of ADHD, and a 7% lower risk of autism. Vitamin D-binding protein levels were also linked to schizophrenia risk.

To understand the broader public health impact, the researchers modelled a scenario in which every baby had vitamin D levels in the top 60% of the sample. In that case, they estimated that 15% of schizophrenia cases, 9% of ADHD cases, and 5% of autism cases might have been prevented. These effects appeared early, with children who had higher vitamin D levels showing lower risk from a young age.

The lack of association with depression or bipolar disorder, the authors suggested, may reflect both the later onset of these conditions in life and the possibility that neonatal vitamin D plays a more central role in early neurodevelopmental pathways than in mood disorders.

Testing plausible causality

Observational studies, especially in nutrition, often face two big problems. One is reverse causation, where what looks like a cause is actually an early effect. For example, early brain changes might influence how the body handles vitamin D, making it look like vitamin D is the cause when it's actually an effect. The second is confounding, where a third factor like a mother's diet or immune health influences both vitamin D levels and the child's risk of mental illness.

To check for these biases, the researchers turned to genetics. They started with the polygenic risk score (PRS), which looks at many small inherited differences that alter a person's vitamin D levels and generates a score. They found that individuals with higher PRS scores for vitamin D were less likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia, ADHD or autism.

PRS also helped rule out reverse causation since a child's later psychiatric diagnosis can't influence the vitamin D genes they were born with.

However, PRS couldn't fully resolve confounding: some variants might still influence other traits beyond vitamin D. Perhaps a gene variant perturbing vitamin D levels also alters neurodevelopment?

As Upasana Bhattacharyya, a scientist at Northwell Health in New York, explained, "While PRS can suggest a biological link, they mainly capture variants that are associated with a trait – not necessarily ones that cause it." She added that PRS typically uses variations that are related to many other functions as well, thereby establishing associations without directionality.

To test for a more direct effect, the researchers turned to Mendelian randomisation, a method that uses genetic variants that have a stronger effect on vitamin D levels. If people who inherit variants that raise (only) vitamin D levels consistently have a lower risk of schizophrenia, ADHD or autism, it will be stronger evidence of a causal relationship between vitamin D levels and the risk of developing these conditions.

The researchers used two levels of Mendelian randomisation. First, they tested whether genetic predictors of vitamin D were associated with lower risk of psychiatric conditions. Then they examined two specific genetic variants in the *GC* gene, which regulates levels of vitamin D-binding protein in the blood. Together, they suggested that higher vitamin D levels may play a protective role, particularly in lowering the risk of ADHD, and possibly schizophrenia and autism.

What the findings don't mean

While the study used powerful genetic tools to test for causality, the authors have cautioned that some important uncertainties remain. Some gene variants might influence both vitamin D and brain development independently, a phenomenon known as pleiotropy. And because vitamin D was measured only at birth, the study couldn't pinpoint which periods in pregnancy were more critical.

Second, if deficiency begins in the womb, it makes sense for intervention to begin there, too. However, a 2024 randomised controlled trial in Denmark found that high-dose vitamin D supplementation (2800 IU/day) starting at pregnancy week 24 had no significant effect on the risk of autism or ADHD in children.

But such results also depend on timing, dosage, and whether mothers were actually deficient to begin with. In short, while vitamin D may not be the sole or dominant factor shaping neurodevelopment, it remains a plausible piece of a larger, complex puzzle.

Another key limitation was that nearly all participants were of European ancestry. In a smaller non-European group, the results were less consistent – possibly due to lower vitamin D levels, smaller sample size, and/or genetic diversity.

For these reasons, the researchers concluded that while their findings support a causal link, they can't yet prove it outright.

> This is not about alarm but about recognising that brain development is shaped by access to nutrients – and vitamin D is one such modifiable element we can and must intervene on
>
> **ANURADHA KAPUR**
> DIRECTOR OF OBSTETRICS AND GYNAECOLOGY AT MAX SMART SUPER SPECIALITY HOSPITAL

India's vitamin D problem

Sunlight is abundant in India, but vitamin-D deficiency is rampant, and the findings carry especial weight here. A study conducted at AIIMS Rishikesh between 2007 and 2008 found that 74% of infants and 85.5% of their mothers were deficient in vitamin D, with nearly half experiencing severe deficiency. Another study from Bengaluru observed that 92.1% of newborns were deficient.

During pregnancy, the mother's body undergoes a complex set of hormonal and metabolic changes to supply calcium for the developing foetal skeleton. These changes intensify in the third trimester as the skeleton grows rapidly. To meet this need, the mother's intestines absorb more calcium, her kidneys excrete more, and her levels of active vitamin D rise to roughly twice their pre-pregnancy levels.

Despite these adaptations, maternal vitamin D levels don't rise unless sunlight exposure or dietary intake improves. This is why even well-nourished pregnancies in India can result in deficiency. Sunlight alone isn't always enough.

Evidence from Indian hospitals has also shown that a mother's vitamin D status directly shapes her baby's. A 2024 study conducted in the Bundelkhand region of India found a strong positive correlation between mothers' and their infants' vitamin D levels and interpreted it to mean babies born to vitamin D-deficient mothers were very likely to be deficient themselves.

This reinforces the idea that vitamin D insufficiency is not just an individual issue: it is a biological legacy passed from one generation to the next, shaping not just bones but, as the Danish study suggests, brains too.

These findings align with clinical experience in India. According to Anuradha Kapur, principal director of obstetrics and gynaecology at a Max Smart Super Speciality Hospital in New Delhi, timely supplementation in deficient mothers can remarkably improve both maternal and neonatal levels.

In her practice, she said high-dose therapy – typically of 60,000 IU per week in the third trimester – has been effective and safe, with clear benefits in infant growth and immunity. A small Indian trial last year echoed these findings: babies born to supplemented mothers had significantly better vitamin D levels at birth. By six months, none had developed severe deficiency, compared to more than half in the control group.

Caution rather than alarm

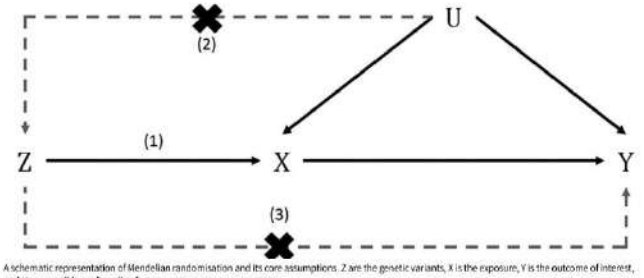
The Danish study adds to growing evidence that early-life exposure, including nutrition, can shape long-term mental health. Vitamin D is no magic bullet, but through the right window, it might tilt the odds.

Dr. Kapur noted that routine vitamin D screening during pregnancy remains uncommon across much of the country. While some obstetricians in urban areas do test high-risk pregnancies, cost and lack of awareness continue to limit uptake in rural and semi-urban settings. As a result, many deficiencies go undiagnosed, especially when symptoms are subtle or overlooked during pregnancy.

She argued that India needs to shift from reactive treatment to preventive care. The growing evidence of vitamin D's role in neurodevelopment, she said, strengthens the case for routine antenatal supplementation, ideally beginning as early as the first or second trimester.

"This is not about alarm," Dr. Kapur said, "but about recognising that early brain development is shaped by access to nutrients – and vitamin D is one such modifiable element we can and must intervene on."

(Anirban Mukhopadhyay is a geneticist by training and a science communicator from Delhi. anirban.genetics@south.du.ac.in)



A schematic representation of Mendelian randomisation and its core assumptions. Z are the genetic variants, X is the exposure, Y is the outcome of interest, and U are possible confounding factors. KAITLIN HAZEL WADE (CC BY-SA)

World Food India event to begin on September 25

The Centre wants to ensure that at least one food item produced in India reaches the dining tables of every home in the world, Union Minister for Food Processing Industries Chirag Paswan said on Wednesday, adding that the World Food India event will be a step towards this goal. The fourth edition, being held from September 25 to 28 at Delhi's Pragati Maidan, is organised to showcase the developments in the food processing sector. Mr. Paswan said that this is set to be the largest edition yet, with participation expected from over 90 countries, more than 2,000 exhibitors, and tens of thousands of stakeholders spanning the entire food value chain from farm to fork.

DEOGHAR
IAS Academy

Sports Bill in Lok Sabha; one Board to oversee federations

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The National Sports Governance Bill introduced in the Lok Sabha by Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya on Wednesday proposes to institute a Board with sweeping powers to lay down rules and oversee the functioning of federations, including the cash-rich Board of Control of Cricket in India.

The proposed National Sports Board (NSB) will create a stringent system for accountability. All National Sports Federations (NSFs) will have to attain its recognition for access to Union government funds.

Another striking feature is the proposal for a National Sports Tribunal, which will have the powers of a civil court and decide disputes ranging from selection to election involving federations and athletes. Once instituted, the tribunal's decisions can only be challenged in the Supreme Court.

The Bill makes some concessions on the issue of age cap for administrators by allowing those in the age bracket of 70 to 75 to contest elections if the international bodies' statutes and bylaws allow for it.


Mansukh Mandaviya

"...as a part of the preparatory activities for the bidding of Summer Olympic Games 2036, it is imperative that the sports governance landscape undergoes a positive transformation to bring better outcomes, sporting excellence and aid in improved performance in major international competitions," reads the Bill's statement of objectives. All recognised national sports bodies would also come within the ambit of the Right to Information Act, something that the BCCI has vehemently opposed.

"Now we have to study the Bill, and we will have to see if we need to place it before the committee (Apex Council). We can only comment after that," BCCI vice-president and Rajya Sabha member Rajeev Shukla said.

The Indian Embassy in Beijing. The visas can be applied for online from Thursday, as per an official notice posted online. FILE PHOTO

India resumes visas for Chinese tourists after gap of 5 years

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Appointments will be made available at embassy in Beijing and consulates in Shanghai and Guangzhou

India will start issuing tourist visas to Chinese nationals after a gap of five years, the Indian Embassy in Beijing announced on Wednesday. The announcement, called "positive" by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), marks another step in normalising ties between the neighbouring countries that were ruptured by the military standoff at the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and Galwan clashes in 2020.123

According to an official notice posted online and on Chinese social media, the visas can be applied for online beginning from Thursday and obtained after an appointment at the Indian Embassy in Beijing and consulates in Shanghai and Guangzhou.

However, amidst the bonhomie, Beijing rejected concerns in New Delhi and Dhaka about China's latest dam project on the Yarlung Sangpo or Brahmaputra River in Tibet and said it had communicated with both the governments.

Responding to a question about the visa issuance on Wednesday, a Chinese MFA spokesperson said that Beijing had taken note of the "positive move".

"Easing cross-border travel is widely beneficial. China will maintain communication and consultation with India to further facilitate travel between the two countries," said spokesperson Guo Jiakun in Beijing.

Both India and China countries had cancelled all flights and most visa services between them after the COVID-19 pandemic and violence between the two militaries – triggered after China amassed troops at the LAC. China restored visa applications for Indian students in 2022 and for business and tourism purposes subsequently. It issued an estimated 85,000 visas between January and June 2025. India had issued visas in business and student categories, but not for tourism until now. According to the Ministry of Tourism figures in 2019, before the lockdown, more than 3,00,000 Chinese tourists had visited India and about 8,69,000 Indian tourists had gone to China.

After Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping met in Kazan, Russia, last October and agreed to restore ties, a series of high-level meetings discussed the next steps, including the start of the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra. Most recently, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar travelled to China this month, and met with his counterpart Wang Yi, and also called on Chinese President Xi Jinping and Vice-President Hang Zheng, before attending the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council for Foreign Ministers.

In an interview to *The Hindu*, Chinese Ambassaor Xu Feihong had said that resuming the Kailash pilgrimage was "an important initiative taken by China to improve relations between the two countries".

Concerns on dam

When asked by pressperson about the hydropower project being constructed on the Yarlung Sangpo, Mr. Guo said that it was "fully within China's sovereignty". "China is engaged in cooperation with downstream countries on sharing hydrological data, flood prevention and disaster reduction," he said, adding that Beijing has had the "necessary communication" with India and Bangladesh.

Construction for the massive 60,000 MW Medog Hydropower station, set to be the world's largest, began last week, and was flagged off by Chinese Premier Li Qiang.

DIA
DEOGHAR
IAS Academy

EC begins preparations to hold Vice-Presidential polls

Sreeparna Chakrabarty
NEW DELHI

The Election Commission (EC) said on Wednesday that it has begun preparatory activities to hold the Vice-Presidential election and will announce the poll schedule "as soon as possible."

Jagdeep Dhankhar had resigned from the post on Monday, citing health reasons, creating a rare mid-term vacancy in the constitutional position.

The EC is mandated to conduct the election to the office of the Vice-President of India under Article 324 of the Constitution.

The election is governed by the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Act, 1952 and the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Rules, 1974.

"Accordingly, the Election Commission of India has already started the preparations relating to the Vice-Presidential Elections, 2025. On completion of the preparatory activities, the announcement of the Election Schedule to the office of the Vice-President of India will follow as soon as possible," the poll body said in a statement.

Electoral College

The poll-related activities include the preparation of the Electoral College, the finalisation of the Returning Officer and Assistant Returning Officer(s), and dissemination of background material on all the previous Vice-Presidential elections.

The Vice-President is elected by an Electoral College, which consists of the elected and nominated members of both the Rajya Sabha and the Lok Sabha.

According to the Presidential and Vice-Presidential Elections Rules, 1974, at least 20 electors have to propose the nomination of a candidate, with at least another 20 electors as seconders. The nomination paper has to be presented to the Returning Officer between 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. on any day appointed for the purpose, either by the candidate herself or by any of her proposers or seconders.