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Court asks govt. to consider 'important' petition against Jantar Mantar as protest site

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday asked Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta to consult with Union government authorities on an "important" petition that Jantar Mantar is not the "right site" to hold protests.

"The petition says Jantar Mantar is not the right site anymore for such protests due to ingress-egress issue, supply of medical essentials, sewage, etc... I think this is important. Please take instructions, Mr. Solicitor. Issue notice and list this separately," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, addressed the law officer.

The petition, filed by Satish Chand Kaushik, represented by advocate Aakarshan Aditya, urged the discontinuation of Jantar Mantar as the ordinary designated venue for public protests and demonstrations, and to designate Ramlila Maidan, or another sufficiently large ground, as the principal protest venue for the national capital.

Mr. Aditya argued that Jantar Mantar was designed



The petition flags logistical issues for mass demonstrations at the designated protest site in New Delhi. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

in an earlier era for limited, identifiable, and manageable demonstrations. "Another July 20 incident should be avoided," the petitioner counsel said, in a reference to the police crackdown on protests led by the Cockroach Janta Party at Jantar Mantar recently. "They (the government) know how to handle it. If they cannot, come to us," Chief Justice Kant said.

The right balance

The petition has come days after the court's repeated observations upholding the right of citizens to peaceful and lawful protest. The court had, however, balanced the freedom to express dissent with the right to not break the peace or occupy public space.

Ordinary people were finding it extremely hard to commute in central Delhi due to prolonged traffic snarls caused by protests and demonstrations, the petitioner said.

Mr. Kaushik's side referred to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convenor Arvind Kejriwal's national townhall programme held outside the Constitution Club to protest the implementation of the E20 ethanol blended fuel policy.

In 2018, the Supreme Court had held that the golden rule was the right to protest should be balanced with the right of residents to live peacefully. The observation had come in a decision lifting the ban on protests at Jantar Mantar and Boat Club.

Aspect

Headline

Court

Bench

Government Representative

Petitioner

Counsel for Petitioner

Main Issue

Details

Court asks govt. to consider 'important' petition against Jantar Mantar as protest site

Supreme Court of India

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant-led three-judge Bench

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta

Satish Chand Kaushik

Advocate Aakarsh Aditya

Whether **Jantar Mantar should continue to be Delhi's designated protest site** or another larger venue should replace it.

Background

Jantar Mantar has traditionally been one of India's best-known locations for public demonstrations in New Delhi.

The petitioner argues that Delhi has grown enormously, making Jantar Mantar unsuitable for today's large-scale protests.

What did the Supreme Court say?

The Court **did not decide the case.**

Instead, it:

- Asked the Solicitor General to consult the Union Government.
- Called the issue an "**important petition.**"
- Directed the government to file its response separately.

The Court observed that the concerns raised deserve serious examination.

Petitioner's Arguments

The petition raises several concerns.

Issue Raised	Explanation
Traffic congestion	Major demonstrations block central Delhi roads for hours.
Public inconvenience	Office-goers, students, ambulances and residents face severe disruption.
Medical emergencies	Ambulances and emergency services may be delayed.
Sewerage & sanitation	Large gatherings strain civic infrastructure.
Security	Police deployment becomes difficult.
Limited space	Jantar Mantar was designed decades ago when protests were much smaller.

The petitioner argues that today's demonstrations involve thousands of people, making the location inadequate.

Alternative Suggested

The petition recommends shifting major protests to:

- **Ramlila Maidan**
- Any other sufficiently large public ground

These places have:

- Better crowd capacity
- Easier traffic diversion
- Better security arrangements
- Larger parking space
- Lower disruption to everyday life

July 20 Incident Mentioned

The lawyer referred to the **July 20 police action** against protesters led by the **Cockroach Janta Party** at Jantar Mantar.

According to the petitioner:

- Such confrontations could have been avoided with a better venue.
 - Larger grounds reduce crowd-management risks.
-

Chief Justice's Observation

The CJI reportedly remarked that:

- Governments know how to manage protests.
- If difficulties exist, they should resolve them appropriately.

This was more an observation than a legal finding.

Constitutional Balance

The article highlights the Court's attempt to balance two constitutional rights.

Right	Protected Under
Freedom of speech	Article 19(1)(a)
Peaceful assembly	Article 19(1)(b)

But these rights are **not absolute**.

They must be balanced against:

- Public order
- Safety
- Rights of residents
- Freedom of movement
- Essential services

Previous Supreme Court Position (2018)

The article refers to an important 2018 judgment.

The Supreme Court held that:

- Citizens have a **fundamental right to protest peacefully**.
- Residents also have a **right to live peacefully**.
- Neither right should completely override the other.

This decision had allowed protests again at **Jantar Mantar** and **Boat Club**, subject to reasonable restrictions.

Larger Constitutional Question

The case raises broader questions:

Question	Importance
Should protests happen near government offices?	Ensures visibility but causes disruption.
Should protests move to designated grounds?	Easier administration but possibly less impact.
How can democratic dissent coexist with public convenience?	Core constitutional issue.

Possible Outcomes

The Court could eventually:

Option	Likely Impact
Continue Jantar Mantar	Existing system remains.
Shift major protests elsewhere	Ramlila Maidan or another venue becomes the primary protest site.
Hybrid model	Small protests at Jantar Mantar; large protests shifted.
New guidelines	Crowd-size limits, permissions, timings, traffic management, sanitation norms.

Heat stress during pregnancy linked to adverse birth outcomes, says study

Ramya Kannan
CHENNAI

A nationwide analysis of data from the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) quantifies the link between prolonged exposure to extreme heat during pregnancy and adverse birth outcomes in India. It was associated with a measurable increase in the risk of low birthweight, preterm birth and stillbirths among the mothers, and was tied to the trimester during which exposure occurred.

The paper 'Effect of extreme heat stress on adverse pregnancy outcomes in India', analysed 209,266 births recorded between 2015 and 2020, and matched each birth to local heat conditions during the pregnancy.

It used nationally representative NFHS-5 data (2019-21) linked to high-resolution heat exposure estimates (India Heat Index)



The study used NFHS-5 data and linked it to high-resolution heat exposure estimates.

for 2015-20 across 707 districts. It uses 'consecutive sweltering days' instead of average temperature.

The researchers, Vineetha Vincent *et al*, showed that trimester-specific windows: heat extremes during the first trimester were most linked to preterm birth, the second trimester to low birth weight, and the third trimester showed a higher risk for stillbirth.

The risks were also high-

er among mothers with low Body Mass Index (<18.5), with lower education levels, and from poorer wealth groups, the study concluded.

It also found that urban residents showed slightly higher low birth weight rates than their rural counterparts.

The study also found associations between climatic zones, heat exposure, and pregnancy outcomes – mountainous zones showed stronger associations, while humid subtropical and arid zones also showed significant low birth weight occurrences. This is presented as the first population-scale evidence from India tying prolonged extreme heat stress (not just temperature) to adverse pregnancy outcomes, using a heat index that incorporates humidity, wind, and radiation.

The authors say re-

search evidence already shows the potential biological effects of high ambient temperature: increased maternal core body temperature raises foetal core temperature, leading to birth defects, and dehydration decreases uterine blood flow and foetal growth, and due to reduced blood flow, there is a heightened chance of uterine contractions and an increased risk of pre-term birth.

The study was led by researchers at the University of Queensland - IIT Delhi Academy of Research, in association with the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi (Centre for Atmospheric Sciences and School of Public Policy) and the University of Queensland's School of Public Health, Brisbane, University of New South Wales, Sydney; the University of Exeter, U.K.; and Korea University, Seoul.



Aspect

Details

Study Title

Effect of Extreme Heat Stress on Adverse Pregnancy Outcomes in India

Main Finding

Prolonged exposure to extreme heat during pregnancy significantly increases adverse birth outcomes.

Data Source

National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5)

Study Period

Births between 2015–2020

Sample Size

209,266 births

Coverage

707 districts across India

Heat Measure Used



India Heat Index (considers temperature, humidity, wind, radiation) rather than temperature alone.

Why was the study conducted?

India is experiencing:

- More frequent heat waves
- Higher average temperatures
- Longer summers

Researchers wanted to determine whether prolonged heat exposure affects pregnancy outcomes at the population level.

This is among the **first large-scale Indian studies** linking climate conditions to maternal and newborn health.

Major Findings

Outcome	Effect of Heat Stress
Low birth weight	Increased risk
Preterm birth	Increased risk
Stillbirth	Increased risk

Importantly, the study measured **consecutive hot days**, not just isolated high-temperature days.

Trimester-wise Findings

First Trimester

Most strongly associated with:

- **Preterm birth**

This stage is critical for fetal organ development.

Second Trimester

Highest association with:

- **Low birth weight**

This period is crucial for fetal growth.

Third Trimester

Highest association with:

- **Stillbirth**

Late pregnancy heat stress appears particularly harmful.

Most Vulnerable Mothers

The study found greater risks among:

Group	Reason
Women with BMI below 18.5	Lower nutritional reserves
Less educated women	Lower awareness and reduced access to care
Economically weaker households	Greater occupational exposure and limited cooling facilities

Urban vs Rural

Urban Areas	Rural Areas
Slightly higher low birth-weight rates	Slightly lower compared to urban areas

Possible reasons include:

- Urban heat island effect
- Dense built-up environments
- Less vegetation
- Higher nighttime temperatures

Climate Zone Findings

Different climatic regions showed different levels of risk.

Climate Zone	Observation
Mountainous regions	Strongest overall associations
Humid subtropical	Significant increase in low birth weight
Arid regions	Significant increase in low birth weight

This suggests that **heat vulnerability varies by geography**.

Biological Mechanisms

Researchers summarized several ways heat can affect pregnancy:

Mechanism	Effect
Increased maternal body temperature	Raises fetal temperature
Dehydration	Reduces blood volume
Reduced uterine blood flow	Less oxygen and nutrients reach the fetus
Reduced fetal growth	Low birth weight
Increased uterine contractions	Higher risk of premature delivery

The UDF is caught between the need for central funds and maintaining its integrity

Are the FTAs working?

The data for the charts were sourced from the International Trade Centre - Trade Map



Piyush Goyal, S. Jaishankar, European Council President António Costa, and other officials at the India-EU FTA meeting in Brussels on July 15

CHART 1 : India's percentage share in the import basket of ASEAN, Japan, South Korea, and Singapore

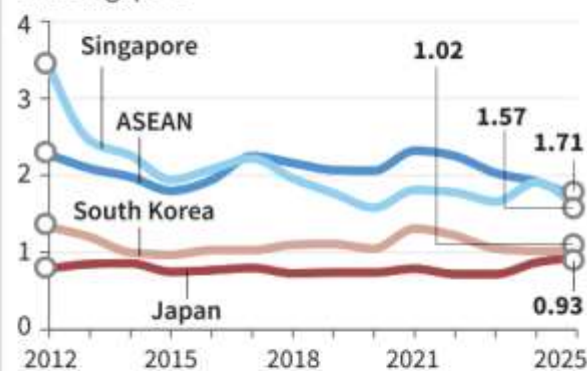


TABLE 1: India's trade with key FTA partners (in \$ billions)

Partner	Indicator	2012	2015	2018	2021	2024	2025
ASEAN	Export	32.3	26.35	36.25	40.68	42.71	35.96
	Import	42.74	41.47	57.51	64.84	81.87	87.19
	Trade balance	-10.44	-15.12	-21.26	-24.16	-39.16	-51.23
Japan	Export	6.4	4.5	4.8	6.1	5.8	6.1
	Import	12.4	9.6	12.6	14.4	18.9	20.9
	Trade balance	-5.95	-5.17	-7.83	-8.34	-13.06	-14.77
South Korea	Export	4.1	3.6	4.8	7.1	6	6
	Import	13.7	13.1	16.4	17.1	20.9	21.1
	Trade balance	-9.6	-9.48	-11.62	-9.97	-14.98	-15.12
Singapore	Export	13.6	7.8	10.5	10.7	15.7	10.7
	Import	7.8	7.4	14.5	18.2	20.5	23.7
	Trade balance	5.76	0.4	-3.99	-7.55	-4.87	-12.97

TABLE 2 : India's global value chain-related trade as a share of gross trade with Asian FTA partners

	2012	2020	GVC integration (Increase/Decrease)
Indonesia	41.77	30.1	-11.67
Japan	41.07	28.44	-12.63
Malaysia	49.92	50.26	0.34
South Korea	63.18	41.58	-21.6
Thailand	48.32	47.65	-0.67
Singapore	66.87	69.54	2.67
Philippines	30.47	33.9	3.43
Vietnam	56.89	54.57	-2.32
Cambodia	47.43	44.34	-3.09

The declining share of GVC-related trade in total trade with several major FTA partners shows that preferential market access has been inadequate to bolster India's participation in global production networks. This evidence challenges the conventional assumption that FTAs automatically foster GVC integration through trade liberalisation

The author is an Associate Professor at Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities, O.P Jindal Global University, Sonipat. Views are personal



Aspect	Details
Theme	Performance of India's Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and their impact on exports, trade deficit, and Global Value Chain (GVC) integration
Main Argument	While India has aggressively signed FTAs in recent years, evidence suggests they have not significantly improved export competitiveness or integration into global manufacturing value chains.





Country/Region

Status

UAE

Signed (CEPA)

Australia

Signed (ECTA)

Oman

Under negotiation

United Kingdom

Signed

European Union

Under negotiation

New Zealand

Signed

United States

Under discussion

Gulf Countries

Negotiations continuing

Canada

Negotiations expected to resume



The government's objective is to:

- Increase exports
 - Expand market access
 - Integrate Indian firms into Global Value Chains (GVCs)
 - Reduce dependence on a few export markets
 - Strengthen India's geopolitical and economic influence
-

What is a Free Trade Agreement (FTA)?

A Free Trade Agreement is an agreement between two or more countries to reduce or eliminate:

- Import duties (tariffs)
- Trade barriers
- Customs restrictions
- Investment restrictions
- Certain regulatory hurdles

Objective

- Increase trade
- Lower prices
- Improve market access
- Encourage investment
- Promote industrial cooperation

What are Global Value Chains (GVCs)?

A **Global Value Chain (GVC)** is the international production network where different stages of manufacturing occur in different countries.

Example

A smartphone may involve:

Activity	Country
Design	USA
Chips	Taiwan
Display	South Korea
Battery	China
Assembly	Vietnam
Software	India

Countries become wealthier when they participate in higher-value segments such as design, components, and advanced manufacturing.

Major Concern Raised by the Article

The article argues that:

FTAs alone **do not automatically improve exports or industrial competitiveness.**

Instead, domestic industrial strength matters far more.

India's Growing Trade Deficit with FTA Partners

The article highlights that India's imports have grown much faster than exports.

ASEAN

Year	Trade Deficit
2012	US\$10.4 billion
2025	US\$51.2 billion

Increase: Nearly **5 times** in just over a decade.

Japan

Imports have grown faster than exports, resulting in a widening trade imbalance.

Why Are FTAs Not Producing Better Results?

The article argues that tariff reductions alone cannot overcome structural weaknesses.

Challenge	Impact
Weak manufacturing base	Limits export capacity
High logistics costs	Makes exports expensive
Infrastructure bottlenecks	Delays production and shipments
Operational inefficiencies	Reduces competitiveness
Low industrial productivity	Limits value addition
Supply chain gaps	Difficult to integrate into GVCs

Thus, easier market access does not automatically translate into higher exports.

Global Value Chain (GVC) Performance

The article points out that India's integration into GVCs has weakened.

Overall GVC Integration

Indicator	Value
Earlier	37.13%
Latest	34.38%

This indicates a decline in India's participation in international production networks.

Policy Recommendations

The article suggests complementing FTAs with stronger industrial policies.

Policy Area	Recommended Action
Manufacturing	Increase productivity and scale
Technology	Invest in advanced manufacturing and innovation
Infrastructure	Improve ports, logistics, and transport
Supply Chains	Develop domestic supplier networks
Skill Development	Build an industry-ready workforce
Domestic Value Addition	Promote local component manufacturing
Industrial Policy	Align FTAs with production-linked reforms

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Amount allocated by govt. for preservation of ASI sites

376.88 crore. The Centre allocated ₹376.88 crore in 2025-26 for conservation, preservation and environmental development of protected monuments across the country. **21**

First tranche of interim relief released by Assam government

160 crore. The Assam government on Monday released the first tranche of around ₹160 crore in interim relief to over 78,000 households that were the worst affected in this year's flood. **20**

Number of people kidnapped by gunmen in northwest Nigeria

52 gunmen kidnapped at least 52 people, including children, in a weekend attack on a village and military base in northwest Nigeria's Zamfara state, sources said on Monday. Kidnappings have become a major source of income for armed groups in Nigeria. **20**

Decline in Russia's pipeline gas exports to Europe in July

5.2 per cent. Russian energy giant Gazprom's average daily natural gas supplies to Europe via the Turkstream undersea pipeline declined 5.2% from a year earlier to 48.6 million cubic metres in July. Reuters calculations showed. **20**

Maharashtra: share of SIR enumeration forms distributed

93 per cent. More than 93% of enumeration forms have been distributed, and nearly 73% digitised under the SIR of electoral rolls in Maharashtra, the Chief Electoral Officer said on Monday. **20**

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Why has PoK erupted in protests?

How did demands over prices evolve into a movement for greater political representation in PoK? How has Islamabad responded to the protests? What has India said about the unrest? How have international rights groups and overseas Kashmiris reacted to the crackdown?

EXPLAINER

Kalid Bhattacharjee

Simmering discontent over inflation, lack of accountability and opaque governance in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) has escalated into a violent crackdown by Pakistani security forces over the past week, leaving dozens dead and many more injured. Security forces have reportedly used against youngsters and sniper fire against protesters gathered in the main squares of cities such as Rawalakot and Muzaffargarh to oppose the three-phase election currently under way in PoK. The Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JKAAC), which has been leading the protests, claims that more than 80 people have been killed over the past week as demonstrations continue against what it alleges is a rigged election process.

Why are protests taking place in PoK? PoK is caught between an establishment-backed election and a popular political movement opposing the political basis of that election. The JKAAC has been protesting vigorously in Rawalakot, Muzaffargarh, and other locations in the region seeking to build a more representative political system in PoK. The three-phase elections started on July 27 and will conclude on August 11. The movement, which emerged after the COVID-19 pandemic to curb the prices of essential items, has evolved over the years into a protest against the lack of political representation for the population in the PoK legislature. The legislature of PoK has a total of 53 seats, out of which 45 are elected, and eight are nominated. But because of historical reasons, 12 seats out of the 45 are reserved for refugees of Indian Jammu and Kashmir who migrated after 1947. In elections for these 12 seats, refugees voters located outside PoK cast their ballots. Locals claim that the reserved seats



Supporters of the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee, an alliance of civil society groups, start a fire to block a road during a protest in Muzaffargarh. **20/25**

reduce representation of communities from the region and allow Islamabad to override local consensus in the election process without addressing the demand for removing the reserved seats, the JKAAC called for a "long march". Though the authorities have responded with a harsh crackdown, the protesters have shown that they are not going away anytime soon as they have managed to sustain the protests for months. The protest received new momentum after a PhD scholar, Osama Jaleel, of Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, was reportedly killed in police firing in Rawalakot. Before his death, Osama Jaleel had been noted on the Internet for his fiery speeches in the protest meetings in Rawalakot. The JKAAC claims that a total of 80 persons have died in the security crackdown till July 31.

How is the political relation between Islamabad and PoK?

The federal government of Pakistan has had a complicated relationship with the region for years, as mainstream political parties such as the Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz have not been able to fulfil the developmental aspirations of the people of PoK. In recent days, however, the situation has worsened following comments by leading

figures within the establishment who the protesters. Pakistan Defence Minister Khwaja Asif incited public sentiments by referring to the protesters as "enemies just like the Indians". The main complaint is that the mainstream political parties in Islamabad have not met the region's developmental needs. Locals allege that they have been neglected by Islamabad, echoing many of the same complaints being voiced by residents of Sindh, Baluchistan and Balochistan, where protests and insurgencies have continued for decades. The second phase of polling on August 2 drew allegations of irregularities and rigging.

What has India said about the Rawalakot protests? Over the past few months, the Ministry of External Affairs has repeatedly condemned the use of harsh methods against protesters in Rawalakot and in other parts of PoK. On July 31, the Ministry of External Affairs blamed the "Pakistani Establishment" and said: "This crackdown has resulted in the tragic death of over 80 civilians and serious injuries to many, including the absolute majority of the innocent people of PoK who had been when their Defence Minister branded the protesting civilians as enemies." Adding to this, the Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Political Affairs openly

admitted that the very "mujahideen" that the Pak establishment trained, armed and sent to bleed India have now turned their guns inward, weaponising themselves against the state.

Mirwaiz Dr. Umar Farooq has expressed "deep concern" over the unrest across the LOC and called for dialogue. "We are deeply anguished by the continuing unrest and tragic loss of precious lives during the past month and half," said Umar Farooq. The JKAAC has opposed India's remarks, and in a statement on June 24, the group said it "firmly rejects any attempt by India to interpret, appropriate, or project the current situation in Azad Jammu and Kashmir in support of its own claims or geopolitical positions. The present civil rights movement is neither a proxy nor an extension of interstate rivalries. Any such characterisation is both inaccurate and misleading."

Is there a strategic dimension? The protests have been concentrated in Rawalakot, which lies along the Line of Control, and Pakistan's response so far shows it will not tolerate instability in a region of primary importance to its security.

The strategic dimension of the disturbances can be assessed by the fact that both Muzaffargarh and Rawalakot — the areas where protests have taken place — have been targeted by India in the past. India has claimed to have hit in the May 2023 Operation Sindoor.

Apart from India, Amnesty International and influential leaders in the U.K. have also called for restraint from the Pakistani establishment. Responding to the existing communication blackout in PoK, Amnesty has said: "We urge the Pakistani authorities to restore all communication access and allow media and independent observers into the area." Non-violent Mirwaiz Kashmiri, who have a strong community-level presence in the U.K., has started an online campaign to restrain Pakistan's security establishment from continuing with the repressive measures.

THE GIST

➤ A movement that began over rising prices has evolved into a campaign against the Pakistani establishment, with the JKAAC demanding the removal of 12 reserved seats that it says undermine local representation.

➤ Protests have intensified amid allegations of election rigging and a deadly security crackdown. Pakistan's response has drawn criticism from India, Amnesty International and U.K.-based Kashmiri groups.

Why has West Bengal cleared land for the BSF now?

Why is West Bengal central to India's border fencing project? What are the policy challenges?

Saak Pandey

The story so far

The West Bengal Cabinet has approved the permanent transfer of 31,000 acres at nine locations to the Border Security Force (BSF) for border fencing and related security infrastructure, along with 1.53 acres for three new Border Outposts in Malda, Nadia and Cooch Behar. The decision resolves a major state-level bottleneck in a long-delayed border infrastructure project. Land acquisition disputes, difficult terrain, and legal and political complications. The move also follows the Calcutta High Court's order of January 2026, directing the State government to hand over acquired land in nine border districts to the BSF by March 31, 2026.

Why is Bengal central to the project? West Bengal shares the longest international border with Bangladesh among Indian States. According to the

Ministry of Home Affairs, India's 4,096.70-km border with Bangladesh includes 2,261.7 km in West Bengal, which is approximately 55% of the entire frontier. As of August 2025, 1,647,696 km had been transferred, while 56,009 km remained to be covered by fencing or other border infrastructure. Of this, 82,760 km was not classified as unsuitable for conventional fencing, while 438,224 km remained technically feasible but pending completion.

Why has the project been delayed?

The delays reflect a combination of geographical, administrative and legal constraints. Historically, the MHA reported that 3,232,218 km of the India-Bangladesh border had been fenced by August 2025, leaving 664,462 km unfenced across West Bengal (2,347 km), Tripura (886 km), Meghalaya (441 km), Mizoram (518 km) and Assam (283 km). Of the remaining unfenced stretch, 174,814 km has been categorised as non-feasible for conventional fencing

because of riverine channels, marshlands, floodplains, shifting river courses, densely inhabited settlements and the ecologically sensitive Sundarbans, where fencing is technically difficult and seasonally infeasible. Other pending stretches require land acquisition, compensation, environmental clearances and completion of bilateral border management procedures.

What governs India-Bangladesh border fencing?

According to the Ministry of External Affairs, India undertakes border fencing and related security measures in accordance with bilateral agreements and operational protocols between the BSF and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB). The border is governed by the 1975 Joint India-Bangladesh Guidelines for Border Authorities, the Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP), 2001, and the 2001 Land Boundary Agreement (LBA), which implemented the 1974 Land Boundary Agreement and its 2011

Protocol, resolved enclave and adverse possession disputes, and enabled the exchange of 162 enclaves, 10 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladesh enclaves in India. India has also reiterated its expectation that these understandings will continue to support cooperation against cross-border crimes, including smuggling, human trafficking, illegal migration, arms trafficking and counter-fraud currency networks.

What are the policy challenges?

This is a challenge of balancing national security with the livelihoods of communities living along the border. In districts such as Malda and Nadia, agriculture, trade, other pending stretches, long-standing social ties extend across the frontier, meaning that fencing can impact surveillance while also restricting access to farmland, mobility and local commerce. As the largest individual segment of the India-Bangladesh border lies in West Bengal, progress and delays in the State remain central to the completion of the national fencing programme. In many sectors, particularly festive terrain, the future of border management is likely to depend on an integrated combination of physical barriers, Border Outposts, surveillance technology and coordinated action between the Union and State governments.

State Panda is a freelance writer with a focus on current affairs, international relations and geopolitics.

THE GIST

➤ The West Bengal Cabinet has approved the transfer of over 31,000 acres of land to the BSF for border fencing and border Outposts, removing a long-pending bottleneck in completing security infrastructure along the India-Bangladesh border.

➤ Although more than three-fourths of the border has been fenced, progress continues to be delayed by land acquisition disputes, difficult terrain, environmental constraints and legal issues, requiring a mix of fencing, surveillance technology and coordinated Union-State action.

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EXPLAINER

Kallol Bhattacharjee

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Simmering discontent over inflation, lack of accountability and opaque governance in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) has escalated into a violent crackdown by Pakistani security forces over the past week, leaving dozens dead and many more injured. Security forces have reportedly used assault weapons and sniper fire against protesters gathered in the main squares of cities such as Rawalakot and Muzaffarabad to oppose the three-phase election currently under way in PoK. The Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JKJAAC), which has been leading the protests, claims that more than 50 people have been killed over the past week as demonstrations continue against what it alleges is a rigged election process.

Why are protests taking place in PoK?

PoK is caught between an establishment-backed election and a popular political movement opposing the political basis of that election. The JKJAAC has been protesting peacefully in Rawalakot, Muzaffarabad, and other locations in the region seeking to build a more representative political system in PoK. The three-phase elections started on July 27 and will conclude on August 11.

The movement, which emerged after the COVID-19 pandemic to curb the prices of essential items, has evolved over the years into a protest against the lack of political representation for the local population in the PoK legislature. The legislature of PoK has a total of 53 seats, out of which 45 are elected, and eight are nominated. But because of historical reasons, 12 seats out of the 45 are reserved for refugees of Indian Jammu and Kashmir who migrated after 1947. In elections for these 12 seats, refugee voters located outside PoK cast their ballots. Locals claim that the reserved seats



Supporters of the banned Joint Awami Action Committee, an alliance of civil society groups, start a fire to block a road during a protest in Muzaffarabad. REUTERS

reduce representation of communities from the region and allow Islamabad to override local concerns.

As the authorities proceeded with the election process without addressing the demand for removing the reserved seats, the JKJAAC called for a "long march". Though the authorities have responded with a harsh crackdown, the protesters have shown that they are not going away anytime soon as they have managed to sustain the protests for months. The protest received new momentum after a PhD scholar, Osama Jaleel, of Quaid-e-Azam University in Islamabad, was reportedly killed in police firing in Rawalakot. Before his death, Osama Jaleel had been noted on the Internet for his fiery speeches in the protest meetings in Rawalakot. The JKJAAC claims that a total of 86 persons have died in the security crackdown till July 31.

How is the political relation between Islamabad and PoK?

The federal government of Pakistan has had a complicated relationship with the region for years, as mainstream political parties such as the Pakistan Peoples Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz have not been able to fulfil the developmental aspirations of the people of PoK. In recent days, however, the situation has worsened following comments by leading

figures within the establishment about the protesters. Pakistan Defence Minister Khwaja Asif incensed public sentiments by referring to the protesters as "enemies just like Indians". The main complaint is that the mainstream political parties in Islamabad have not met the region's developmental needs. Locals allege that they have been neglected by Islamabad, echoing many of the same complaints long voiced by residents of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, where protests and insurgencies have continued for decades. The second phase of polling on August 2 drew allegations of irregularities and rigging.

What has India said about the Rawalakot protests?

Over the past few months, the Ministry of External Affairs has repeatedly condemned the use of harsh methods against protesters in Rawalakot and in other parts of PoK. On July 31, the Ministry of External Affairs blamed the 'Pakistani Establishment' and said: "This crackdown has resulted in the tragic death of over 40 civilians and serious injuries to many. Its absolute disdain for the innocent people of PoK was laid bare when their Defence Minister branded the protesting civilians as enemies." Adding to this, the Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Political Affairs openly

admitted that the very 'mujahideen' that the Pak establishment trained, armed and sent to bleed India have now turned their guns inward, weaponising themselves against the state.

Mirwaiz Dr. Umar Farooq has expressed "deep concern" over the unrest across the LoC and called for dialogue. "We are deeply anguished by the continuing unrest and tragic loss of precious lives during the past month and a half," said Umar Farooq. The JKJAAC has opposed India's remarks, and in a statement on June 24, the group said it "firmly rejects any attempt by India to interpret, appropriate, or project the current situation in Azad Jammu and Kashmir in support of its own claims or geopolitical positions. The present civil rights movement is neither a proxy nor an extension of interstate rivalries. Any such characterisation is both inaccurate and misleading."

Is there a strategic dimension?

The protests have been concentrated in Rawalakot, which lies along the Line of Control, and Pakistan's response so far shows it will not tolerate instability in a region of primary importance to its security.

The strategic dimension of the disturbances can be assessed by the fact that Kotli, Muzaffarabad and Rawalakot – the areas where protests have taken place hosted terror-related targets that India had claimed to have hit in the May 2025 Operation Sindoor.

Apart from India, Amnesty International and influential leaders in the U.K. have also called for restraint from the Pakistani establishment. Responding to the existing communication blackout in PoK, Amnesty has said: "We urge the Pakistani authorities to restore all communications access and allow media and independent observers into the area." Non-resident Mirpuri Kashmiris, who have a strong community-level presence in the U.K., have started an online campaign to restrain Pakistan's security establishment from continuing with the repressive measures.

THE GIST

▼
A movement that began over rising prices has evolved into a campaign against the PoK election process, with the JKJAAC demanding the removal of 12 reserved seats that it says undermine local representation.

▼
Protests have intensified amid allegations of election rigging and a deadly security crackdown; Pakistan's response has drawn criticism from India, Amnesty International and U.K.-based Kashmiri groups.

Aspect	Details
Topic	Political unrest and protests in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)
Main Cause	Rising inflation, lack of political representation, allegations of electoral manipulation, and dissatisfaction with Islamabad's governance.
Leading Organisation	Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee (JKJAAC)
Areas Affected	Rawalakot, Muzaffarabad, Kotli and surrounding districts

Background

The protests began as demonstrations against:

- Rising inflation
- High electricity prices
- Poor governance

Over time, the movement evolved into a broader demand for:

- Political reforms
- Greater local autonomy
- Fair elections
- Increased representation of PoK residents

The unrest has intensified during the ongoing **three-phase Legislative Assembly elections** in PoK.

Why are people protesting?

1. Alleged Electoral Manipulation

The JKJAAC claims that the election process is unfair.

According to protesters:

- The electoral system is influenced by Pakistan's political establishment.
- Local voices have limited influence.
- Election results are allegedly manipulated.

2. Reserved Seats Issue

One of the biggest demands concerns **12 reserved seats**.

Present Structure

Category	Seats
Total Assembly Seats	53
Directly Elected	45
Nominated	8

Among the elected seats,

- **12 are reserved** for refugees from Jammu & Kashmir who migrated after 1947 and currently live outside PoK.

These voters cast ballots **outside PoK**, yet their representatives participate in the PoK Assembly.

Protesters' Argument

JKJAAC argues that:

- These seats reduce the political representation of people actually living in PoK.
- Islamabad gains greater influence through these reserved constituencies.

The movement therefore demands removal or reform of these reserved seats.

Escalation of Violence

Initially, demonstrations were largely peaceful.

However,

- Clashes occurred between protesters and security forces.
- Authorities reportedly used:
 - Tear gas
 - Assault weapons
 - Sniper fire (as alleged by protesters)

The article states:

- Dozens were killed.
- Many more were injured.

The JKJAAC alleges **more than 50 deaths** during the recent crackdown, while another figure mentioned in the article refers to **86 deaths since July 31**. These figures are claims reported in the article and may differ from official accounts.

CHARTER



GETTY IMAGES

Why lab-grown diamonds are sustainable alternative to mined stones

Natural diamond mining is facing dwindling supplies while remaining associated with environmental damage, forced labour, conflict and pollution. Lab-grown diamonds offer a more affordable, traceable and sustainable alternative, with India investing in indigenous production and research

Anupama Iyankar
U. Vishnu
B. Ramesh Babu
S. Arunachalam

For centuries, diamonds have been regarded as symbols of eternal love, characterised by their rarity, scintillation and lustre. But behind the glamour of these stones lies a cold, hard truth: an industry plagued by forced labour, civil violence, and pollution.

Some of the world's largest diamond mines, such as the Argyle mine in Australia and the Diavik mine in Canada, have reached a point of exhaustion in recent years. This depletion has worsened year by year, and production is now at a multi-decade low. After all, natural diamond mines are only a finite source. It is estimated that the 40 diamond mines accounting for 90% of global production spread throughout Botswana, Russia and other countries have a lifespan of no more than 60 years.

The hidden cost
However, the problems associated with natural diamonds extend beyond dwindling supplies. Diamond mining requires large amounts of water and energy and causes considerable damage to the surrounding ecosystems. It is often associated with deforestation, displacement, soil erosion and water pollution. Massive open-pit excavations can also trigger landslides and mudslides. Moreover, labourers suffer from a plethora of diseases as a result of working in diamond mines. A study by Gill Nehem et al. in 2018 found that workers are at risk of asbestos exposure and may develop asbestos-related diseases, including asbestosis, pleural plaques, and mesothelioma.

Then came the blood diamonds, which are mined diamonds involved in illicit sales and used to fund military action. It is nearly impossible to deduce a diamond's

geographic origin. Although the Kimberly Process was introduced to verify that diamonds are conflict-free, regulatory gaps continue to allow blood diamonds to be smuggled across borders. As a result, these diamonds contribute to political and civil conflict.

These concerns raise an important question: was the beauty and durability of diamonds preserved without the social and environmental costs of mining? In recent years, the answer appears to be yes, through the use of lab-grown diamonds.

A sustainable alternative emerges
The first proven synthetic diamonds were made by GE (General Electric) in 1954, under a project codenamed "Project Superpressure". They utilised the HPHT (High Pressure, High Temperature) process, which mimics the conditions under which natural diamonds form in the Earth's mantle.

In 1982, another method known as CVD (Chemical Vapour Deposition) was first used. This process involves depositing diamond material onto diamond seeds through chemical reactions involving carbon-rich gases.

Lab-grown diamonds are chemically, physically and optically identical to their natural counterparts. Until 2018, they were sold at a modest discount to mined diamonds. Due to improvements in the efficiency of laboratory equipment, the price of lab-grown diamonds has continued to decline over the years. Now more affordable and traceable, lab-grown diamonds preserve the qualities that have made diamonds desirable since time immemorial while avoiding much of the damage linked to conventional production.

India's push for lab-grown diamonds
India has also begun to recognise the potential of lab-grown diamonds as a sustainable and economically viable

Table 1: Prospects: A comparison of natural and lab-grown diamonds, drawing on findings from the Natural Diamond Council's 2019 report and a 2018 study by Vladimir Zhdanov et al.

Feature	Natural	Lab-grown
Cost per carat	\$1.5 to \$1.8	\$0.8 to \$1.0
Weight	0.975 carats	0.975 carats
Colour	100% colourless	100% colourless
Clarity	100% clarity	100% clarity
Carat weight	1.00 carat	1.00 carat

Diamond prices vary based on the 4Cs: carat, cut, colour and clarity. The values shown are representative market ranges.

alternative to mined stones. In the Union Budget 2023-24, the Government of India announced measures to encourage indigenous production of lab-grown diamonds, including support for research into HPHT and CVD technologies.

As part of this initiative, in 2023, the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras) was awarded a five-year grant of approximately ₹243 crore by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to establish the India Centre for Lab-Grown Diamond (ICLD).

The centre aims to develop domestic expertise in diamond seeds, machinery, and manufacturing processes. To put things into perspective, Table 1 compares the results of the 2019 Natural Diamond Council report and a 2021 study by Vladimir Zhdanov et al. to compare attributes of natural and lab-grown diamonds.

The staggering variation in carbon emissions for lab-grown diamonds can be attributed to the energy source used for production. Diamonds created using coal-heavy power grids have higher carbon emissions, while those manufactured using renewable energy sources have a much lower carbon footprint.

The latter aligns with the United

Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which emphasise the transition to cleaner energy systems and more sustainable manufacturing practices. Furthermore, the use of renewable energy in diamond production reflects the principles of a circular economy, where resources are utilised more efficiently and environmental impacts are minimised throughout a product's life cycle.

Although lab-grown diamonds are not entirely free from environmental concerns, the next generation of consumers is increasingly drawn to them as a more sustainable alternative to mined diamonds. This shift in public sentiment reflects a growing emphasis on ethical sourcing, environmental responsibility, and product traceability.

Their advantages become even more significant when one considers the wide range of applications diamonds have in modern society. They are used in heavy-duty industrial processes, including cutting and drilling, as well as in quantum computing, photonic devices that extend equipment lifespan, semiconductor manufacturing and several other fields.

For a material so deeply woven into both industry and culture, selecting the most economical and sustainable option proves no longer a choice — it is a responsibility.

Prof. N. Arunachalam is currently working as a Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering and also leading the HPHT technology development activities for growing diamonds in lab as part of India Centre for Lab-grown Diamond (ICLD).

Dr. S. Ramesh Babu is working as a Principal Project Scientist at ICLD, IIT Madras. Dr. U. Vishnu is working as Project Manager at ICLD-IIT Madras. Mrs. Anupama Iyankar is an IITM student studying at St John's School, Adyar, Chennai.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Umadevi

What is the meaning of "geek"? (T. R. Anantharaman, Chennai)

This is a word which is mostly used in informal contexts. A 'geek' is a person who is disliked by most people because of his disgusting behaviour or appearance. The 'ee' is pronounced like the 'ee' in 'see', 'sea', and 'tea'. Here are a few examples.

Our new chemistry professor looks like a geek. Wonder how he got the job.

Who is the geek you were talking to?

You may be interested to know that the word 'geek' has another meaning as well, one that is more complimentary. A hardworking person can also be referred to as a geek. For example:

Mohan is the geek you find in the library all the time.

"Geek" was first used to refer to people who performed in circuses, not the acrobats, but those who performed unusual acts like biting off the head of a chicken, swallowing a live goldfish, etc. — acts which made the audience squirm. Or should I say acts which made the audience scream "EEK!"

Which of the following sentences is correct? "I pity who buy things from you" or "I pity those who buy things from you"? (V. Harini, Neyveli)

The second sentence is correct. The verb 'pity' needs an object after it. Who are the people that you pity? The first sentence doesn't give us this piece of information, the second one does. You pity those people who buy things from the person you are talking to. Here are a few examples.

I pity the people who have to work in this weather.

Rama pitied Bharath because he hadn't completed his assignment.

What is the meaning and origin of the expression "wet behind the ears"? (U. Manik, Kerala)

When you say that someone is wet behind his/her ears, it means that he/she is young and immature. The phrase is 'green'.

Here are a few examples.

You can easily fool Anand. He is still wet behind the ears.

I don't know how Janaki got promoted. If you ask me, she is still wet behind the ears.

Before we entered this beautiful world of ours, all of us were floating around in our mother's tummy. When we came out of the womb, we came out with the automatic fluid that was surrounding us. In other words, we entered this world soaking wet. Doctors assure us that it takes a few days before the fluid dries up. In the case of newborn animals, however, the mother has to lick the baby dry. It takes quite some time for the mother to do this. And one of the last places to become dry, I understand, is the area behind the ears. So if an animal is still wet behind its ears, it implies it has come into this world recently. It is still 'green'.

What is the meaning of Kanganaroo court? (E. Hanchellian, Kumbakonam)

This is no court at all. A Kanganaroo court is an unofficial court of law set up by a group of people, especially in prisons and trade union organisations, in order to try someone of a crime. In most of these cases, the verdict is predetermined. The person on trial is usually found guilty and punished.

Published in *The Hindu* on June 26, 2001

Word of the day

Ubiquitous:

being present everywhere at once

Synonyms: widespread, prevalent, universal, common

Usage: *Ubiquitousness has become ubiquitous in modern life.*

Pronunciation: /yubikwutius/

International Phonetic Alphabet: /yubikwutius/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to letterstothetext@thehindu.co.in

with the subject 'Text & Context'

THE DAILY QUIZ

Test yourself on India's performance at the Glasgow Commonwealth Games that concluded on Sunday

S.V. Ramanam

QUESTION 1
Of the 122 athletes who represented India, 38 returned with 39 medals, with one of them getting two in silver and a bronze. Name the champion.

QUESTION 2
In para athletics, six medals came from these events thanks to three double podiums, of which two were top two finishes. Name the events.

QUESTION 3
Who was the first medalist and the first to strike gold for India at the Games?

QUESTION 4
Apart from boxing, in which sport did

India win two gold medals for the first ever such success for the country at the Games?

QUESTION 5
Name the compatriots of Ravi Chopra and Praveen Chaudhary who shared bronze when the sun was above their disciplines.

QUESTION 6
Which gold medalist was the flag bearer at the Closing Ceremony of the Games?

QUESTION 7
The youngest member of India's contingent also brought the curtain down on India's campaign. Name the teenager.



Visual Question: Name this athlete who won his event with a Games record.

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Who did 'J.G.' Owens become known as 'Jesse'?
Ans: A teacher misheard or misunderstood his initials, 'J.G.' (for James Cleveland), and recorded his name as 'Jesse'.
2. What was the nickname given to Owens' extraordinary season of performance at the 1936 Big Ten Championships?
Ans: The 'Greatest 44 Minutes Ever in Sport'.

3. What was Jesse Owens' winning distance in the long jump at the 1936 Olympics?
Ans: 8.06 metres (26 ft 5 in).

4. Which two athletes were controversially dropped from the U.S. 4x100-metre relay team before the final, allowing Jesse Owens and Ralph D'Amato to compete?
Ans: Marly Stoltman and Sam Stoller.

Visual: Identify this U.S. President who neither the youngest member of India's contingent nor brought the curtain down on India's campaign.

Early Birds: Tamil Bawa (Tamil Community) | Subidev Shet (Pudhi Bawa) | Varghese Joseph

Why lab-grown diamonds are sustainable alternative to mined stones

Natural diamond mining is facing dwindling supplies while remaining associated with environmental damage, forced labour, conflict and pollution; lab-grown diamonds offer a more affordable, traceable and sustainable alternative, with India investing in indigenous production and research

Anupama Janakiraman
U. Vishnuja
S. Boominathasellarajan
N. Arunachalam

For centuries, diamonds have been regarded as symbols of eternal love, characterised by their rarity, scintillation and lustre. But behind the glamour of these stones lies a cold, hard truth: an industry plagued by forced labour, civil violence, and pollution.

Some of the world's largest diamond mines, such as the Argyle mine in Australia and the Diavik mine in Canada, have reached a point of exhaustion in recent years. This depletion has worsened year by year, and production is now at a multi-decade low. After all, natural diamond mines are only a finite source. It is estimated that the 40 diamond mines accounting for 90% of global production spread throughout Botswana, Russia and other countries have a lifespan of no more than 50 years.

The hidden cost

However, the problems associated with natural diamonds extend beyond dwindling supplies. Diamond mining requires large amounts of water and energy and causes considerable damage to the surrounding ecosystems. It is often associated with deforestation, displacement, soil erosion and water pollution. Massive open-pit excavations can also trigger landslides and mudslides.

Moreover, labourers suffer from a plethora of diseases as a result of working in diamond mines. A study by Gill Nelson et al. in 2011 found that workers are at risk of asbestos exposure and may develop asbestos-related diseases, including asbestosis, pleural plaques, and mesothelioma.

Then come the blood diamonds, which are mined diamonds involved in illicit sales and used to fund military action. It is nearly impossible to deduce a diamond's

geographic origin. Although the Kimberley Process was introduced to verify that diamonds are conflict-free, regulatory gaps continue to allow blood diamonds to be smuggled across borders. As a result, these diamonds contribute to political and civil conflict.

These concerns raise an important question: can the beauty and durability of diamonds be preserved without the social and environmental costs of mining? In recent years, the answer appears to be yes, through the use of lab-grown diamonds.

A sustainable alternative emerges

The first proven synthetic diamonds were made by GE (General Electric) in 1954, under a project codenamed "Project Superpressure." They utilised the HPHT (High Pressure, High Temperature) process, which mimics the conditions under which natural diamonds form in the Earth's mantle.

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India's push for lab-grown diamonds

India has also begun to recognise the potential of lab-grown diamonds as a sustainable and economically viable

Table 1: presents a comparison of natural and lab-grown diamonds, drawing on findings from the Natural Diamond Council's 2025 report and a 2021 study by Vladislav Zhdanov et al

Criterion	Natural diamonds	Lab-grown diamonds
Cost per carat in India	₹1.5-7 lakhs	₹80,000
Water consumption	0.077 m ³ /ct	0-0.002 m ³ /ct
Energy consumption	150 kWh/ct (DeBeers)	36 kWh/ct (HPHT) 214.7 kWh/ct (MPCVD)
CO2 emissions	160 kg/ct	17-260 kg/ct

Diamond prices vary based on the 4Cs — carat, cut, colour and clarity. The values shown are representative market ranges.

alternative to mined stones. In the Union Budget 2023-24, the Government of India announced measures to encourage indigenous production of lab-grown diamonds, including support for research into HPHT and CVD technologies.

As part of this initiative, in 2023, the Indian Institute of Technology Madras (IIT Madras) was awarded a five-year grant of approximately ₹243 crore by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry to establish the India Centre for Lab-Grown Diamond (InCent-LGD).

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Although lab-grown diamonds are not entirely free from environmental concerns, the next generation of consumers is increasingly drawn to them as a more sustainable alternative to mined diamonds. This shift in public perception reflects a growing emphasis on ethical sourcing, environmental responsibility, and product traceability.

Their advantages become even more significant when one considers the wide range of applications diamonds have in modern society. They are used in heavy-duty industrial processes, including cutting and drilling, as well as in quantum computing, protective coatings that extend equipment lifespan, semiconductor manufacturing and several other fields.

For a material so deeply woven into both industry and culture, selecting the more economical and sustainable option becomes no longer a choice — it is a responsibility.

(Prof. N. Arunachalam is currently working as a Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering and also leading the HPHT technologies development activities for growing diamond in lab as part of India Centre for Lab-grown Diamond (InCent-LGD), IIT Madras. Dr. S. Boominatha Sellarajan is working as a Principal Project Scientist at InCent-LGD, IIT Madras. Dr. U. Vishnuja is working as Project Manager at InCent-LGD, IIT Madras. Miss. Anupama Janakiraman is an 11th Std. student studying at Sishya School, Adyar, Chennai).

Topic	Sustainability of lab-grown diamonds
Main Argument	Lab-grown diamonds provide an environmentally friendlier, ethically sourced, and more affordable alternative to mined diamonds while being chemically identical to natural diamonds.

What are Lab-Grown Diamonds?

Lab-grown diamonds are **real diamonds**, created in controlled laboratory conditions.

They have the same:

- Chemical composition (pure carbon)
- Crystal structure
- Hardness (Mohs scale 10)
- Optical properties
- Brilliance

The only difference is **how they are formed**.

Why are Natural Diamonds Becoming a Concern?

1. Depleting Reserves

Major diamond mines are aging.

Examples include:

- Argyle Mine (Australia)
- Diavik Mine (Canada)

Many productive mines are nearing exhaustion.

2. Environmental Damage

Mining requires:

Environmental Impact	Effect
Land excavation	Habitat destruction
Water use	High freshwater consumption
Energy use	Large carbon footprint
Soil erosion	Environmental degradation
Open-pit mining	Landscape alteration
Pollution	Air and water contamination

3. Ethical Concerns

Mining has been associated with:

- Conflict diamonds ("blood diamonds")
- Forced labour
- Child labour
- Financing armed conflicts
- Illegal smuggling

Although the **Kimberley Process Certification Scheme** aims to reduce conflict diamonds, illegal trade still exists.

How are Lab-Grown Diamonds Made?

A. HPHT (High Pressure High Temperature)

- Mimics conditions deep inside Earth's mantle.
 - Carbon is exposed to extreme pressure and temperature.
-

B. CVD (Chemical Vapour Deposition)

- Carbon-rich gases are deposited layer by layer on a diamond seed.
- Produces high-quality diamonds with greater control.



Parameter	Natural Diamond	Lab-Grown Diamond
Formation	Geological (millions to billions of years)	Laboratory (weeks)
Chemical Composition	Carbon	Carbon
Hardness	10 (Mohs)	10 (Mohs)
Appearance	Identical	Identical
Traceability	Sometimes difficult	High
Ethical Concerns	Possible	Significantly lower
Environmental Impact	Higher	Generally lower (especially with renewable energy)
Price	Higher	Lower



Criterion	Natural	Lab-grown
Cost per carat (India)	₹1.5–7 lakh	~₹80,000
Water consumption	~0.077 m ³ /ct	~0–0.002 m ³ /ct
Energy consumption	~150 kWh/ct	~36–214.7 kWh/ct (depends on process and electricity source)
CO ₂ emissions	~160 kg/ct	~17–260 kg/ct*



Initiative

Union Budget 2023–24

IIT Madras

Focus Areas

Details

Support for indigenous production and research

Five-year grant of about ₹243 crore to establish the India Centre for Lab-Grown Diamond (InCent-LGD)

Diamond seeds, machinery, manufacturing processes, HPHT and CVD technologies

Applications Beyond Jewellery

Lab-grown diamonds are increasingly used in:

- Cutting and drilling tools
- Protective industrial coatings
- Electronics
- Semiconductors
- Quantum computing
- Precision optics
- Medical instruments

Advantages

Advantage	Explanation
Lower cost	More affordable for consumers
Ethical sourcing	Avoids conflict-diamond concerns
Traceability	Easier to verify origin
Lower environmental impact	Reduced land disturbance and water use
Industrial usefulness	Important for advanced technologies

KYIV

Russian air strike on warehouse in Ukraine burns eight million books



A Russian strike on a warehouse in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv over the weekend destroyed eight million books, publishing house Bantam said on Tuesday, claiming it as an attack on Ukrainian culture. "This is the largest loss to Ukraine's book infrastructure since the beginning of the war" in 2022, the publisher said. AP

DAMASCUS

Iraqi Kurdish leader calls on Syrian President for talks on integration



Syrian President Bashar al-Assad met with Ibrahim Barazi, leader of Iraq's Kurdistan region, on Monday, according to official sources on the issue of advancing an integration deal between Damascus and Syria's Kurds. It is the first visit by the Kurdish leader to the capital since the ouster of long-time ruler Bashar al-Assad in 2024. AP

KHARTOUM

35 killed after Sudan Army drone strike on RSF-held village in Darfur



The Sudanese Army on Sunday struck a traditional court in the village of Darra al-Zawaya in North Darfur state with drones, killing 35 people and wounding others, a rights group said. The village is under the control of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which has been locked in a brutal conflict with the Army since 2024. AP

WELLINGTON

Nauru, the world's third smallest country, changes name to Naoero



The Pacific island country of Nauru has changed its name to the Republic of Naoero, its President said, matching the spelling and pronunciation of the national language. With 12,000 residents, Nauru is the world's third smallest country by population size. The new name is spoken as Naoero. AP

Children among 11 killed in Ukrainian strikes on Russia

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
MOSCOW

Ukrainian strikes, one in a Russian Black Sea resort and another in the annexed peninsula of Crimea, killed a total of 11 people and wounded dozens, officials said.

The death toll from a drone attack on Russia's seaside village of Arkhipo-Osipovka rose to seven, with three children among them, the claim tank force for Russia's southern Rostov region said on social media.

Vasyanin Kombarov, the Governor, said on Monday that Ukraine had struck the Black Sea resort with a drone. Unverified social media footage showed what appeared to be a drone crashing into a busy beach at Arkhipo-Osipovka, as tourists looked on



Caught in crossfire: Seven people were killed in the drone attack on Arkhipo-Osipovka, a Black Sea resort city. REUTERS

from the shore and in the water.

Four people were also killed in a Ukrainian strike on Russia annexed Crimea, the Moscow-based Governor Sergey Aksentsov said in a post on Telegram.

Summer destinations
The Black Sea coast and Crimea are both summer destinations popular among Russian tourists.

There has been an uptick in civilian deaths in the conflict throughout 2020, the United Nations has reported, as the five-and-a-half-year war grinds on with no sign of a peace deal. Ukraine has in recent months intensified its counter-strikes on Crimea seized by Moscow in 2014 — leading to electricity and fuel shortages this summer.

New talks are 'last chance' for Iran to forge deal, avoid escalation: Trump

U.S. leader says negotiations ongoing with Tehran on Hormuz and denuclearisation, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman reiterates no talks under way with Washington; he adds discussions on managing the waterway remain active with Oman

REUTERS
DUBAI

U.S. President Donald Trump said late on Monday that newly planned talks with Tehran are the "last chance" for Iran to forge a deal and avoid an escalation of U.S. strikes on the country.

Earlier in the day, Iran said there were no talks under way with the U.S. and no plans for any meeting, contradicting Mr. Trump who had claimed talks would take place in the afternoon as justification for calling off attacks.

Over the weekend Mr. Trump repeated a pattern that has emerged through-



Aerial messaging: United States President Donald Trump speaks to reporters aboard Air Force One on Sunday.

out the past five months, announcing plans for "massive attacks" on Iran, only to cancel them at the last minute.

Speaking at the Oval Office, Mr. Trump said he ex-

pects negotiations that will reopen the Strait of Hormuz and create a pathway for Iran to address Washington's concerns about its nuclear programme will begin in the next day or

two. "The first phase is the opening of the straits. The second phase will be the denuclearisation," the President said. "And that will take a little while."

Mr. Trump, asked about the status of the negotiations, told reporters "they are going on right now," adding that the two sides were speaking at the request of Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar among others. "This is a last chance for them to sign a good document," he said, referring to Iran.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahman Ghaemi rejected the claim, saying no negotiations with the U.S. were taking place and no meetings were sched-

uled. Iran had no plans to host foreign delegations or send negotiators abroad in the coming days, he said.

Mr. Ghaemi added that all Iranian negotiators were currently in the country, apart from Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, who was on a religious pilgrimage in Iran. The only talks under way, he said, were discussions with Oman over management of the Strait of Hormuz.

Meanwhile, oil prices fell after Mr. Trump's decision to hold back from military action, with Brent crude futures down more than 4% to around \$64 a barrel. (With inputs from Associated Press)

Israel objects to Gaza plan proposed by U.S., defiant on pullout

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
JERUSALEM

Israel voiced objections on Monday over a plan promoted by U.S. President Donald Trump to end the Gaza war, with a Cabinet member seeking to tear it up, defying pressure to end strikes and begin pulling forces from the Palestinian territory.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office demanded "considerable disarmament" by Hamas, which on Friday announced it would give up weapons under the Trump plan to a nascent Palestinian governing committee.

"Israel has conveyed its concerns and concerns

on the proposed framework to our American counterparts. The version that has been made public does not reflect Israel's position," said Dovan Spivak, spokesman for the Prime Minister's office.

The document released by the Board of Peace, the Trump-backed group in charge of implementing a Gaza plan, called for Israel to cease military operations "without delay."

Saying that such language was "completely different" from what Israel understood, Finance Minister Beal Smotich demanded that Mr. Netanyahu's security cabinet "immediately" hold a new session on the plan.

Surreal surface



Visitors walk through an infinity room style installation during the last day of the exhibition by Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, Germany, on Sunday. The exhibition has broken a record with over 470,000 visitors. AP

Reform UK proposes military operation to stop asylum seekers

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE
LONDON

The hard-right Reform UK party said on Monday that if it was elected, it would carry out "the largest military operation" in the English Channel "since the Second World War" to stop migrants crossing on unseaworthy boats.

The proposal, which experts and other political parties promptly rubbished, comes days after tens of thousands of migrants entered Spain's North African enclave of Ceuta from neighbouring Morocco, reigniting Europe's debate over irregular migration. "What happened in

Ceuta over the weekend shows you just how serious this situation is," Brexit campaigner Nigel Farage, who leads the anti-immigration Reform, told a press conference unveiling the new policy in a 20-page document.

Reform said the policy, dubbed "Operation Fortress", would make Britain's border impenetrable.

It details plans to deploy Britain's Royal Navy to return small boats to France, something proposed and swiftly abandoned by the Conservative government in 2020. The next general election is not due until 2028. (With inputs from Reuters)

Myanmar junta releases latest photos of Suu Kyi held in detention since 2021

Associated Press
BANGOR

Myanmar's detained former leader Aung San Suu Kyi met with the International Committee of the Red Cross representative in the capital on Monday, the military-backed government said, a rare moment of contact with the outside world for the Nobel laureate who has been held out of public view since the military seized power in 2021.

Photographs published by the autonomous showed Ms. Suu Kyi meeting Aung Mye Thaw, the ICRC's representative to Myanmar.

The Presidential Press and Information Bureau, which released the photo-



Rare glimpse: Aung San Suu Kyi meets Aung Mye Thaw, Red Cross envoy to Myanmar, in Naypyitaw. AP

graphs, said the meeting was held on Monday morning but did not disclose the location of the meeting or provide details about what was discussed.

The Presidential Press and Information Bureau, which released the photo-

graph, said the meeting was held on Monday morning but did not disclose the location of the meeting or provide details about what was discussed.

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The Presidential Press and Information Bureau, which released the photo-

Sheikh Hasina's 'homecoming' media event can hurt ties with India: Dhaka

Kaljit Bhattachajee
NEW DELHI

Continued political activities by deposed Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina from Indian territory "could harm" bilateral relations, the Government of Bangladesh conveyed to India on Monday through Human Rights Watch, the Foreign Affairs Adviser to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Mr. Kobi met with Indian High Commissioner Enayathullah in Dhaka after Ms. Hasina's August 8 "homecoming" media event was announced here by the Foreign Correspondents' Club.

"Adviser Kobi mentioned that such activities



Sheikh Hasina

could harm the positive progress of bilateral relations between the two countries. The Indian High Commissioner assured that the matter would be duly considered, necessary inquiries would be made and efforts would be made in this regard," the official news agency of

Bangladesh UNH reported. The report added that Dhaka expects India to ensure that no one, including Ms. Hasina, used "Indian territory to make political statements or conduct any activities aimed at creating instability" within Bangladesh.

The Indian High Commissioner said that the discussion between Mr. Modi and Mr. Kobi focused on "mutual interests" and that the event titled "High Commissioner reiterated India's intent to work positively with the Government of Bangladesh to advance the developmental aspirations of the peoples of India and Bangladesh," and the High Commissioner in a message,

Ms. Hasina, who has been based in New Delhi since fleeing Dhaka in 2024, has given multiple telephonic and emailed interviews over the past months expressing her desire to return to Bangladesh by the end of the year.

On Monday, the Foreign Correspondents' Club announced that the media event featuring an audio message from Ms. Hasina would be held on August 8.

Ms. Hasina's "Homecoming" media event would also feature her son Sajedul Wazed Joy and several top functionaries of the Awami League. Wazed Awad, the club's president, told The Hindu on Monday that the event remains on track.

WELLINGTON

Nauru, the world's third smallest country, changes name to Naoero



AFP

▲ The Pacific Island country of Nauru has changed its name to the Republic of Naoero, its President said, matching the spelling and pronunciation in the national language. With 12,000 residents, Nauru is the world's third-smallest country by population size. The new name is spoken as Now-ero. AP

Aspect	Details
Country	Nauru
New Official Name	Republic of Naoero
Reason	To align the country's official name with the spelling and pronunciation in the Nauruan language
Pronunciation	"Now-ero"
Population	Approximately 12,000
Region	Central Pacific Ocean (Micronesia)

Why the Change?

The government announced the change to better reflect:

- Indigenous language
- National identity
- Correct local pronunciation
- Cultural heritage

The international name "Nauru" remains widely recognized, while "Naoero" reflects the traditional Nauruan form.

About Nauru

Feature	Details
Capital	No officially designated capital (government offices are in Yaren District)
Population	~12,000
Area	~21 sq. km
Government	Parliamentary republic
Currency	Australian Dollar (AUD)
Official Language	Nauruan (English is also widely used)

Why is Nauru Important?

Despite its small size, Nauru is notable for:

- One of the world's smallest sovereign states by area.
- Among the least-populous independent countries.
- Historic phosphate mining economy.
- Strategic Pacific location.
- Diplomatic significance in Pacific geopolitics.

Global Ranking by Population

Rank	Country	Approx. Population
1	Vatican City	~800
2	Tuvalu	~11,000
3	Naoero (Nauru)	~12,000



CHINESE TECH GIANT INTENSIFIES RACE WITH US AI LEADERS

Alibaba unveils biggest AI model

● Both models push for open weight AI models

REUTERS
Beijing, August 3

CHINA'S ALIBABA ON Monday unveiled its largest and most capable AI model to date, sending its shares surging, while a research firm said DeepSeek's latest product offers cut-throat pricing that is more than 100 times cheaper than Anthropic's Claude Fable 5.

The two developments highlight the rapid pace of advancement in artificial intelligence by Chinese tech firms, which are locked in a fierce and fast-moving battle to build more powerful systems without making them prohibitively expensive to run.

Both models — Alibaba's Qwen3.8-Max and DeepSeek's V4-Flash — underline Chinese commitment to open-weight models as the firms seek to gain traction among develop-

AI ARSENAL

■ Alibaba launched its largest AI model yet, Qwen3.8-Max

■ DeepSeek's V4-Flash is over 100x cheaper than Anthropic's Claude Fable 5

■ China's AI race is accelerating with rapid model advances

■ Chinese firms are competing on both performance and cost



■ Qwen3.8-Max packs 2.4 trillion parameters, nearing Kimi K3's scale

■ Qwen3.8-Max topped AI text and vision benchmarks, lifting Alibaba shares

ers globally.

"Chinese AI companies have found an important market. Many business workflows do not need the industry's very best model," said Lian Jye Su, chief analyst at research firm Omdia. "They need models that are good enough, affordable, transparent and accessible, and open-weight models help meet that demand."

With an open-weight model, the underlying learned settings that allow developers to run or adapt the system are available for download. By contrast, OpenAI, Anthropic and Google have closed-source models.

Alibaba's new Qwen3.8-Max immediately shot up leaderboards assessing the capabilities of AI models after being unveiled on Monday,

helping its shares jump 7% in Hong Kong trade.

The model has 2.4 trillion parameters, the numerical settings a model learns from data and uses to recognise patterns, generate answers, and carry out tasks. That puts it not too far behind domestic rival Moonshot AI's Kimi K3, which was launched last month and has 2.8 trillion parameters.

China steps up chip design protection

CHINA HAS REVISED regulations protecting integrated-circuit layout designs, tightening registration standards and allowing punitive damages for serious infringement, as Beijing seeks to safeguard domestic chip know-how. Revised rules signed by Premier Li Qiang on July 23, will apply from October 15, the Justice Ministry and China National IP Administration said on Monday.

The rules cover detailed chip layouts that reflect substantial engineering work and are central to semiconductor development even for companies that do not manufacture chips themselves.

—REUTERS

Aspect	Details
Company	Alibaba Group (China)
Model Name	Qwen3.8-Max
Announcement Date	3 August
Model Size	2.4 trillion parameters
Type	Open-weight Large Language Model (LLM)
Main Objective	Compete with leading AI models from OpenAI, Anthropic, Google, and Chinese rivals like DeepSeek and Moonshot AI

Background

Alibaba has launched its **largest and most powerful AI model, Qwen3.8-Max**, marking another major step in China's rapidly evolving artificial intelligence ecosystem.

The launch comes amid intense competition between:

- Chinese AI firms
- American AI companies

The focus is no longer only on producing the smartest models but also on making them **cheaper, more accessible, and open for developers**.

What is Qwen3.8-Max?

Qwen3.8-Max is Alibaba's newest flagship Large Language Model (LLM).

Key Features

Feature	Details
Parameters	2.4 trillion
Capabilities	Text, image (vision), reasoning, coding
Availability	Open-weight
Benchmark Performance	Tops several AI text and vision benchmarks
Market Impact	Alibaba shares rose about 7% in Hong Kong trading

What are Parameters?

Parameters are the mathematical values that an AI model learns during training.

Simple Example

Think of parameters as:

The knowledge stored inside the AI.

Generally,

- More parameters allow more complex reasoning.
- Better language understanding.
- Improved image recognition.

However,

More parameters do not always mean a better model.

Training quality, architecture and inference efficiency are equally important.

Scale Comparison

Model	Approx. Parameters
Qwen3.8-Max	2.4 trillion
Moonshot AI Kimi K3	2.8 trillion

What Does "Open-Weight" Mean?

The article emphasizes that both Alibaba and DeepSeek are promoting **open-weight AI models**.

Open-Weight Model

Developers receive:

- Model weights
- Can download them
- Fine-tune for their own applications
- Deploy on their own infrastructure

Examples:

- Alibaba Qwen
 - Meta Llama (selected versions)
 - DeepSeek
-

Closed Models

Users access them only through APIs.

Examples include:

- OpenAI (GPT series)
- Anthropic (Claude)
- Google (Gemini)

Chinese AI Strategy

The article suggests Chinese companies are pursuing a different strategy from many U.S. firms.

Instead of focusing only on the highest benchmark scores, they emphasize:

- High performance
- Low cost
- Open access

This makes AI adoption easier for businesses.

DeepSeek's New Model

Alongside Alibaba's announcement, **DeepSeek** released **V4-Flash**.

Major Claim

According to the report,

V4-Flash is **over 100 times cheaper** than Anthropic's Claude Fable 5 while targeting strong performance.

This highlights the growing importance of **cost-efficient AI inference**.



Chinese Company

Alibaba

DeepSeek

Moonshot AI

Baidu

Tencent

ByteDance



Flagship AI

Qwen

DeepSeek-V4

Kimi

ERNIE

Hunyuan

Doubao





Company	Model
OpenAI	GPT
Anthropic	Claude
Google	Gemini
Meta	Llama
xAI	Grok

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Word of the day

Ubiquitous:

being present everywhere at once

Synonyms: widespread, prevalent, universal, common

Usage: *Smartphones have become ubiquitous in modern life.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/ubiquitous

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ju:bɪkwɪtəs/



Word of the day

Chary:

characterised by great caution and wariness

Synonyms: careful, alert, circumspect, considerate

Usage: *The manager was chary about hiring too quickly.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/chary

International Phonetic Alphabet: /tʃɛəri/



Thank you 😊

