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Himachal farmers pioneer sustainable cultivation of endangered herb

Vikas Vasudeva

CHANDIGARH

In the higher reaches of the Himalayas, an agricultural initiative is helping bring one of the region's most prized medicinal plants back from the brink of extinction. Decades of destructive wild harvesting pushed *Picrorhiza kurroa*, known locally as Kutki, a herb used in medicinal formulations, onto the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List. Now, a sustainable cultivation model adopted by farmers in Himachal Pradesh's Mandi district is showing promising signs of conserving the species while boosting the rural mountain economy.

For years, harvesting Kutki, the high-value medicinal herb native to the alpine and sub-alpine regions (2,700-4,500 metres)

of the Himalayas, meant uprooting the plant entirely. Researchers at the Himalayan Research Group (HRG), a Department of Science and Technology Core Support Group under the Programme of Science for Equity Empowerment and Development Division, spent more than a decade developing and demonstrating an alternative method. Farmers now harvest only the plant's side "stolons", leaving the mother plant intact to continue producing for years, making the practice sustainable.

From wild to fields

What started as a research project under the Department of Biotechnology's Himalayan Bioresource Mission in 2022 has grown into the largest private land cultivation cluster of this endangered species,



Farmers at work in a Kutki field in Mandi district. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

now spanning nearly 180 farmers across Mandi.

"Our initiative is aimed at promoting sustainable cultivation of this high-value medicinal plant. This species was collected from the natural habitat in a destructive way of uprooting the plant. There was a myth that still exists that the root of this plant is a drug and sold in the market. But technically, it is a

side branch that creeps on the soil and possesses nodes. It is a type of stem and technically called a 'stolon'. Roots are fibrous and possess no medicinal contents. After drying, only these stolons are collected for marketing. HRG worked extensively to develop sustainable harvesting techniques and demonstrated successfully in the field that Kutki plantation

can be a perennial plantation for life," said Lal Singh, director, HRG, which is based in Shimla.

Kutki is currently categorised as an endangered species on the IUCN Red List, with several regional conservation assessments identifying it among the most threatened medicinal plants in the Himalayan region. Recognising the threat posed by international trade, it was included in Appendix II of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora.

This listing permits international trade only under regulated conditions and requires export permits to ensure that trade does not adversely affect wild populations.

For 70-year-old Narad Ram, a horticulturist from Manjha village in Mandi

district, scientific cultivation has become a welcome source of additional income.

'Beneficial method'

"I started planting Kutki in my farmland about 4-5 years ago. Before that, I used to collect it from the wild for self-consumption. It is disappearing from the forests due to multiple reasons. Now, I grow and harvest it in my field scientifically. Earlier, I used to pluck the whole plant, but now I harvest it with the 'stolon' method. They grow further from there. They keep expanding forward and roots sprout from them. This method is beneficial. I have been selling it through HRG and earning around ₹15,000-₹16,000 annually by producing about 5-6 kg of dried herb," Mr. Ram told *The Hindu*.

1. Context (Environment)

Researchers from the Himalayan Research Group (HRG) have **developed a sustainable cultivation model for Kutki (Picrorhiza kurroa)**, an **endangered Himalayan medicinal herb**. Instead of uprooting the entire plant, farmers harvest only its stolons, allowing natural regeneration. The initiative conserves biodiversity, reduces pressure on wild populations, and provides an additional livelihood source for farmers.

2. Kutki (Picrorhiza kurroa)

- i. Kutki is a **small perennial medicinal herb** belonging to the Plantaginaceae family, native to the alpine and sub-alpine Himalayas at elevations of 2,700–4,500 metres.
- ii. In India, it is naturally **found in** the Western and Eastern Himalayas, including Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and Arunachal Pradesh.
- iii. The **rhizome and stolons** are the medicinally important parts and are widely used in Ayurvedic, Tibetan, and traditional medicine.
- iv. It is known for its **hepatoprotective (liver-protecting), antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and immunomodulatory properties and is used in treating liver and digestive disorders**.
- v. Due to **overharvesting**, slow natural regeneration, and habitat degradation, wild populations have declined sharply.
- vi. It is classified as **Endangered on the IUCN Red List and is listed in Appendix II of CITES**, regulating international trade.

3. Stolons

- i. A stolon is a slender, horizontal stem that grows along or just below the ground surface.
- ii. It bears nodes, from which new roots and shoots develop, enabling vegetative propagation.
- iii. Stolons help plants spread naturally and produce genetically identical offspring.
- iv. Harvesting only the stolons leaves the parent plant intact, allowing repeated harvests and natural regeneration.
- v. Examples include Strawberry, Mint, Bermuda grass, and Kutki.

Warning signals for India from NATO's Ankara summit

The heads of state or government of the 32 countries that are politico-military allies under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) met in Ankara, Türkiye, on July 7-8, 2026 for what is called the Ankara Summit. Their stated objective was to review progress made since the 2025 Summit in The Hague and to set out a roadmap for continuing delivery on NATO's key objectives.

The gathering in Ankara is being regarded as one of NATO's more successful summits, despite the abrasive presence of United States President Donald Trump, who devoted most of his speaking time to extolling the putative success of U.S. strategy and talking up the superiority of American weapons systems.

A strategic road map

Four substantive commitments came out of Ankara. First, the 32 NATO allies – too often divided by divergent objectives and capacities – agreed on their “ironclad commitment to their collective defence under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, and to the transatlantic bond”; second, the unanimous endorsement of “The Hague defence commitment”, in which all NATO members undertook last year to allocate at least five per cent of their respective Gross Domestic Products (GDPs) on defence by 2035 – an unprecedented hike over the two per cent spending pledge that existed earlier. Third, NATO declared its “unwavering support for Ukraine in defending its freedom, sovereignty and territorial integrity”, and fourth, the alliance partners vowed to build a high technology, high capacity, Europe-wide defence industrial base (DIB) – the term for the network of firms, factories, laboratories and skilled workers needed to build and sustain a country's military power.

The focus in Ankara was overwhelmingly on implementation – turning political commitments into military capability through investment, industrial capacity and innovation.



Ajai Shukla

Former Indian Army officer (colonel), who now analyses issues and events relating to defence

Europe's defence revival and commitments may create new challenges for India's defence needs

Russia accuses the U.S. and European democracies of unbridled expansionism, through NATO's progressive incorporation of East and Central European countries. These include Poland, Romania, the Baltic states, and former Soviet republics that Moscow has historically regarded as lying within its sphere of influence. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was driven in part by the fear that Kyiv was inching towards joining the Atlantic alliance, a step that would have increased NATO's numbers from just 12 countries at its founding in 1949 to 31 now. The Russian invasion effectively blocked Ukraine, but spooked historically neutral Finland and Sweden into abandoning nonalignment and becoming NATO's 31st and 32nd members.

NATO's transformations

NATO, however, sees itself not as expansionist, but as merely adapting to Europe's changing strategic landscape. In 1990-91, with the relatively peaceful ending of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, NATO shifted its focus to out of area operations in theatres such as the Balkans. After the 9/11 strikes in 2001 on the World Trade Center towers, NATO made another strategic shift, joining the Global War on Terror. Now, with Russia and China joining hands in a new era of superpower confrontation, NATO is adapting once again.

It was evident from the discussions at the Ankara Summit that Europe has prioritised the revitalisation of its DIB. The European defence industry was struggling to scale up production even before the five per cent defence spending pledge at The Hague. European defence industry giants, MBDA and Rheinmetall, have warned of shortages in ammunition production.

Operation Epic Fury, the U.S.-Israel bombing campaign against Iran, illustrates the inevitability of weapons and ammunition shortages when Asian allies' demands for U.S. weaponry compete with ongoing European needs. The U.S. has fired

more than 850 Tomahawk cruise missiles at Iran during this campaign. At the current production rate of 85 per year, replacing these would take a decade.

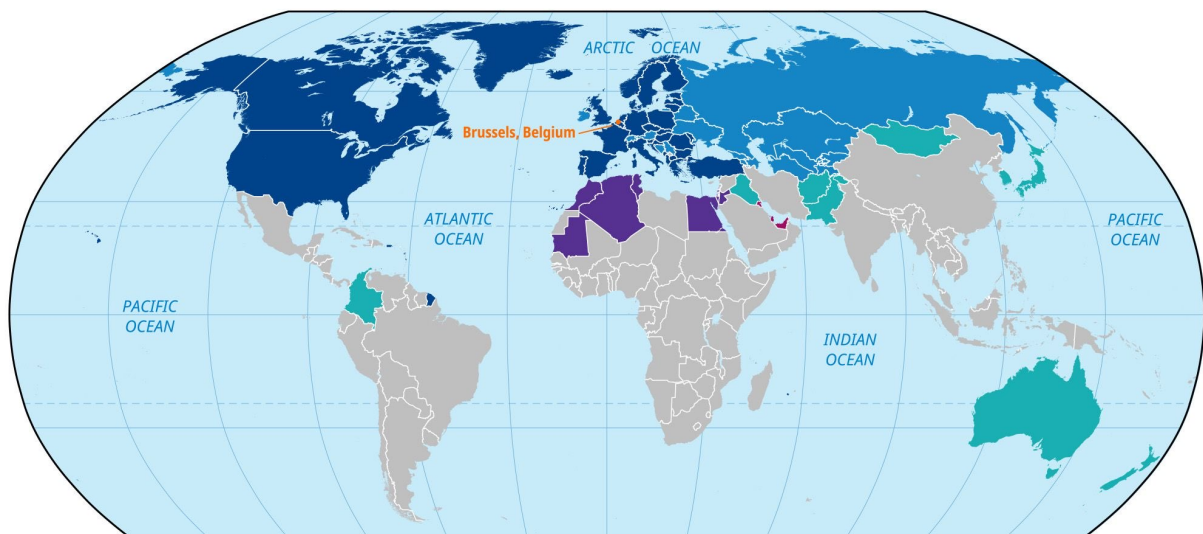
Many NATO members have capable defence industrial bases, but there is little coordination of alliance-wide priorities. The resulting strategic mismatch has been found during the Ukraine war to cluster in the critical categories of air defence missiles and interceptors, precision guided munitions, and artillery rockets. While the U.S. decision to allow Ukraine to produce Patriot air defence systems under licence is a strong signal of support to Ukraine, more needs to be done.

Without a major revitalisation of Europe's defence industry, NATO's five per cent pledge will only deepen its dependency on the U.S. Half of Europe's defence spending between 2022-2024, came from the U.S., up from 28% in 2019-2021. Foreign Military Sales notifications to the U.S. Congress for European customers have quadrupled since 2008 to \$76 billion in 2024.

Need for self-reliance

For the world's big arms buyers and especially for India, this spike in European demand is bad news. As NATO spends more, the international arms bazaar is shifting inexorably from a buyers' market to a sellers' market. The first sign of this was the delay by U.S. firm General Electric Aerospace in supplying India with F-404 fighter jet engines, which are critically needed for the Indian Air Force's Tejas light combat aircraft programme.

Looking ahead, as India's defence increasingly relies on new-age defence technologies and weaponry, such as drones, artificial intelligence, cyber and electronic warfare and resilient networks, it will become critical for its defence industry to achieve self-reliance in these technology realms, rather than relying on overstretched suppliers who have their own battles to fight.



NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION MEMBERS AND PARTNERS

 Member countries

 NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue

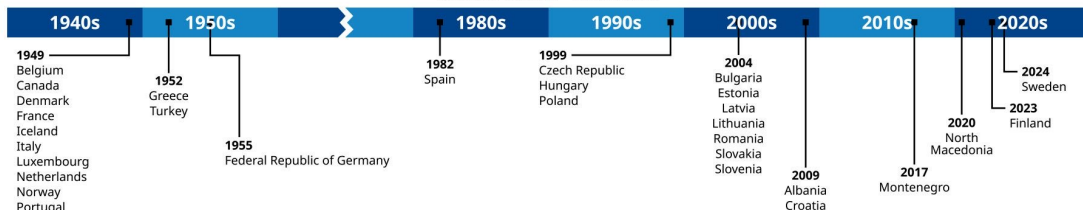
 Partners across the globe

 Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council*

 Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

 NATO headquarters

MEMBERSHIP TIMELINE



* EAPC includes all NATO members in addition to these partner countries.

NATO has suspended all practical cooperation with and support for Afghanistan, Belarus, and Russia.

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1. Context (International Relations | GS Paper II)

The article **examines the strategic implications of NATO's Ankara Summit for India**. While the alliance reaffirmed its commitment to collective defence through higher defence spending, stronger defence-industrial capacity, and sustained support for Ukraine, the resulting surge in global demand for defence equipment could strain international supply chains. For India, which remains dependent on defence imports in several critical sectors, the developments reinforce the need to accelerate Aatmanirbharta in defence, diversify procurement sources, strengthen indigenous manufacturing, and build resilient defence-industrial capabilities.

2. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

- i. NATO is a political and military alliance established in 1949 through the North Atlantic Treaty (Washington Treaty).
- ii. It comprises 32 member countries from North America and Europe.
- iii. Its core principle is **collective defence under Article 5**, whereby an attack on one member is considered an attack on all.
- iv. NATO is headquartered in Brussels, Belgium.
- v. Its principal decision-making body is the North Atlantic Council (NAC), headed by the Secretary-General.
- vi. The alliance has expanded significantly after the Cold War, with **Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024) as its newest members**.

3. Implications for India & Suggestions

- i. Accelerate Aatmanirbhar Bharat in defence by expanding indigenous design, development, and manufacturing.
- ii. Reduce excessive dependence on defence imports by diversifying procurement sources and strengthening domestic production.
- iii. Enhance the capacity of India's defence-industrial base, with greater participation of the private sector, MSMEs, and start-ups.
- iv. Invest in critical and emerging defence technologies such as AI, drones, cyber capabilities, semiconductors, and advanced materials.
- v. Build resilient defence supply chains and maintain strategic reserves to minimise disruptions during global crises.
- vi. Expand defence exports and deepen international defence partnerships to improve technological capabilities and global competitiveness.
- vii. Strengthen long-term strategic autonomy by balancing self-reliance with collaboration through technology transfer and co-development with trusted partners.

Is corruption the biggest threat to India's future?

PARLEY



Shailesh Gandhi
Former Central Information Commissioner



Anjali Bhardwaj
A transparency activist associated with Satark Nagrik Sangathan

Corruption has shaped elections, toppled governments, and sparked some of the biggest public protests in independent India. With digitalisation and the Right to Information (RTI) Act, citizens were promised greater transparency. Yet has India actually become less corrupt?

This question has become pertinent as thousands of students hold protests seeking accountability after the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) paper was leaked earlier this year. Their campaign has revived memories of the India Against Corruption movement that galvanised the country more than a decade ago.

Is corruption the biggest threat to India's future? Shailesh Gandhi and Anjali Bhardwaj discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Nivedita Varadarajan.

For many, corruption is paying a bribe to get a service delivered. Has digitalisation helped reduce such petty corruption?

Anjali Bhardwaj: Corruption in India goes from the highest to the very lowest offices in the country and people find it difficult to access even their basic rights and entitlements. Unfortunately, digitalisation is being pushed as a magic wand, as if it would make everything alright. But experience on the ground shows that digitalisation by itself is not going to prevent corruption. If you just go into any government office today, it's an open secret that there will be somebody who will expect to be bribed.

In fact, with digitalisation, another layer has been added for the poor and the marginalised who find it very difficult to access services because they are often unlettered and do not have access to the Internet. They can't easily fill up forms on their own. Another middleman has been added. They have to go to these private cafes where they are charged obnoxious amounts [to get government services].

A proper grievance redressal mechanism needs to be put in place, where if somebody is facing corruption, they can file a complaint and it will be redressed in a time bound manner. A grievance redressal law is required, and it has not been brought through although Parliament had discussed it in great detail in 2014.

The Right to Information Act was intended to make the government accountable. Has the Act lived up to its promise?

Shailesh Gandhi: The Act was one of the best transparency Acts in the world. However, it has been murdered by Supreme Court judgments and bureaucracy. The law has now been



Going strong: Students shout slogans during a protest in solidarity with the ongoing protest at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar, in Amritsar on July 23, 2017

modified to such an extent by the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, that all information relating to corruption can be denied. A lot of countries do not have vigilance departments in most government departments. We have them in almost every government department, but they don't work. Now we also have a Lokpal burning ₹50-60 crore a year delivering nothing. Lokayukta has been there for years and yet we are not getting accountability.

Section 19 of the so-called Prevention of Corruption Act used to say that sanction for prosecution was required if a public servant was accused of corruption. In 2018, Section 17A was introduced, requiring government permission to investigate corruption charges. Our judicial system is creaking. Unless we enforce the rule, corruption cannot reduce.

How is DPDP undermining the RTI Act?

SG: My submission is that we make great laws, but do not implement them. Unless there is punishment, corruption cannot be contained. Let me give you a bit of information. This was a study done by the Indian police general in 2008. A study observed the performance of the CBI's entire anti-corruption branch from 1980 to 1984. What was the outcome of that? About 280 people were accused of corruption in courts. 144 got convicted. The average time for investigation was 13.4 months, whereas the average time for the first trial was 88 months. In 2008, it was found that only four people had been in prison for more than 20 days – just four people. Today, corruption is an 'all-profit, negligible-risk' activity. So long as this continues, there will be people who will take advantage of this. We make laws and we break laws. We should demand a road map for judicial delays to be less than one year. In less than one year over 90% cases should be decided; this is being done in various countries in the world.

Does that make uncovering corruption so



In a democracy, it is important to ensure that institutions of accountability, which are the Executive, the Judiciary, and the Legislature, remain accountable and function properly. Unfortunately, these institutions have been systematically weakened

ANJALI BHARDWAJ

much harder now than before?

AB: The RTI Act came because of a very strong demand for an information access law. It has been used to access information to hold governments accountable.

We see that every year about six million RTI requests are filed in our country. Its the highest anywhere in the world. The law is used very vibrantly, not just to ensure accountability in the delivery of basic rights, but also to expose big ticket corruption. I can hardly remember any big scam that has got exposed in the country in the last 20 years where the RTI has not played a seminal role. Whether it is the Vyapam scam, the Adarsh Housing Society scam or the electoral bond scheme, the Act has been used. The Act has been very effective in exposing corruption and wrongdoing.

Unfortunately, we are also seeing how the CBI, the ED and the Lokpal have been completely compromised. Big-ticket corruption cases are just not being tackled.

Do weak institutions enable corruption, or does corruption weaken institutions?

SG: My submission is that we make great laws, but do not implement them. Unless there is punishment, corruption cannot be contained. Let me give you a bit of information. This was a study done by the Indian police general in 2008. A study observed the performance of the CBI's entire anti-corruption branch from 1980 to 1984. What was the outcome of that? About 280 people were accused of corruption in courts. 144 got convicted. The average time for investigation was 13.4 months, whereas the average time for the first trial was 88 months. In 2008, it was found that only four people had been in prison for more than 20 days – just four people.

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Second, all Information Commissioners are

appointed without any transparency. We expect people who are selected in a non-transparent manner to deliver transparency. How does this work? Lakhs of people were there on the roads of Delhi for the Lokpal. After the Lokpal was created, everybody lost interest. Nobody bothers whether they are delivering or not.

Thirdly, the RTI Act should be strengthened. The amendment by the DPDP Act should be taken back. Finally, the media should take it on itself to track 10-15 celebrity corruption cases, track them and see how they have progressed.

AB: In a democracy, it is important to ensure that institutions of accountability, which are the Executive, the Judiciary, and the Legislature, remain accountable to the people of India and function properly. Unfortunately, these institutions have been systematically weakened.

The government has understood that the best way to not be transparent is to continue to work behind a veil of secrecy. To do this, they need to subvert the Information Commissioners' functioning. A way to do this is to not make appointments to the Information Commissioners. Since May 2014, when the BJP came to power, not a single Information Commissioner has been appointed to the central information commission till people approached the Supreme Court or the judiciary.

When the courts order an appointment, they are made in a completely non-transparent manner. We are also seeing that institutions like the ED, the CBI or the Lokpal, simply don't do the investigations that are required of them to hold those in power accountable. It's almost as if corruption is only being done by the Opposition.

Is corruption the biggest threat to the future?

AB: Well, yes, because corruption has a very real human cost. How can a country expect to be developed if corruption is not addressed? If there is massive corruption in the delivery of basic rights, like rations or healthcare or education, how can we hope to become a developed country? When there is corruption and crony capitalism, there is every incentive for those in power to subvert institutions.

SG: If India is at the 79th position in the rule of law index, we have no hope of being among the top nations of the world. We need to change that. We need to ensure that corruption cases are disposed of in less than a year.



To listen to the full interview
Scan the code or go to the link
www.thehindu.com

1. Context (Ethics, Integrity & Aptitude)

Amid recent debates over transparency, public accountability, and the functioning of institutions such as the RTI regime, Lokpal, and investigative agencies, the larger governance challenge remains ensuring that anti-corruption laws are backed by strong institutions, timely enforcement, and an effective accountability framework.

2. Key Challenges in Tackling Corruption

- i. **Weakening of transparency and accountability mechanisms.**
- ii. Declining effectiveness of institutions such as the **RTI framework, Lokpal, Information Commissions, and investigative agencies.**
- iii. **Delays in investigation**, prosecution, and judicial disposal, reducing the deterrent effect of anti-corruption laws.
- iv. **Inadequate implementation of existing legal safeguards** despite a robust legislative framework.
- v. **Digitalisation has curbed some petty corruption but has not substantially addressed systemic and high-level corruption.**
- vi. **Lack of transparency in appointments and institutional functioning**, affecting public trust.

3. Strengthening the Anti-Corruption Framework

- i. Safeguard the independence and autonomy of accountability institutions.
- ii. Reinforce the RTI framework and improve citizens' access to information.
- iii. Ensure time-bound investigation, prosecution, and disposal of corruption cases.
- iv. Promote transparency in public appointments and decision-making.
- v. Strengthen grievance redressal, social accountability, and citizen participation.
- vi. Foster an ethical governance ecosystem based on integrity, transparency, and the rule of law.

Global waterways should be safe, unimpeded: Jaishankar

Attacks on seafarers, civilian shipping or infrastructure cannot be countenanced, says External Affairs Minister at East Asia Summit; Ministry hits back at Pakistan Deputy PM's comments

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Participating in the 21st East Asia Summit (EAS) in Manila, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Thursday that the global maritime channels “must remain safe and unimpeded”.

At the meeting, Mr. Jaishankar also called for dialogue and diplomacy in dealing with the crisis in the Persian Gulf region and a “political solution” to the civil conflict in Myanmar, where Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) have been challenging the authority of the military junta that took power in February 2021.

“Calling for dialogue and diplomacy to end the West Asia/Gulf conflict, India stresses that international waterways must remain safe and unimpeded, fully in consonance with international law. Under no circumstances can attacks on seafarers, civilian shipping or infrastructure be countenanced,” said Mr. Jaishankar. He described the evolving condition of the global order as “uncertain and volatile”.

He said India will be



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar addresses the 21st East Asia Summit in Manila on Thursday. ANI

hosting two specific EAS activities in the current year – the seventh EAS conference on maritime security cooperation in Kochi and an EAS Maritime Heritage Festival in the ancient port city of Lothal.

South China Sea

He informed the EAS of the Indian position on South China Sea and said that India supports the “conclusion of a substantive, effective and legally binding Code of Conduct (CoC), fully compliant with UNCLOS 1982 that does not prejudice the legitimate rights of all users”. Continuing with the theme, he

called for “ASEAN centrality, regional stability, and the realisation of a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific”.

Regarding the ongoing civil conflict in Myanmar, he expressed India's support for ASEAN efforts to resolving the situation. “India stands for finding a political solution to the Myanmar issue,” said Mr. Jaishankar, who also spoke at the 33rd ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

He reiterated India's policy on “zero tolerance for terrorism”, and said there should not “be any doubt that acts of terrorism will have consequenc-

es”. He said that “collective action against cyberscam centres” should be prioritised. On the Israel-Palestine crisis, he reiterated India's position, and said “a two-state solution can lead to a lasting and durable peace”.

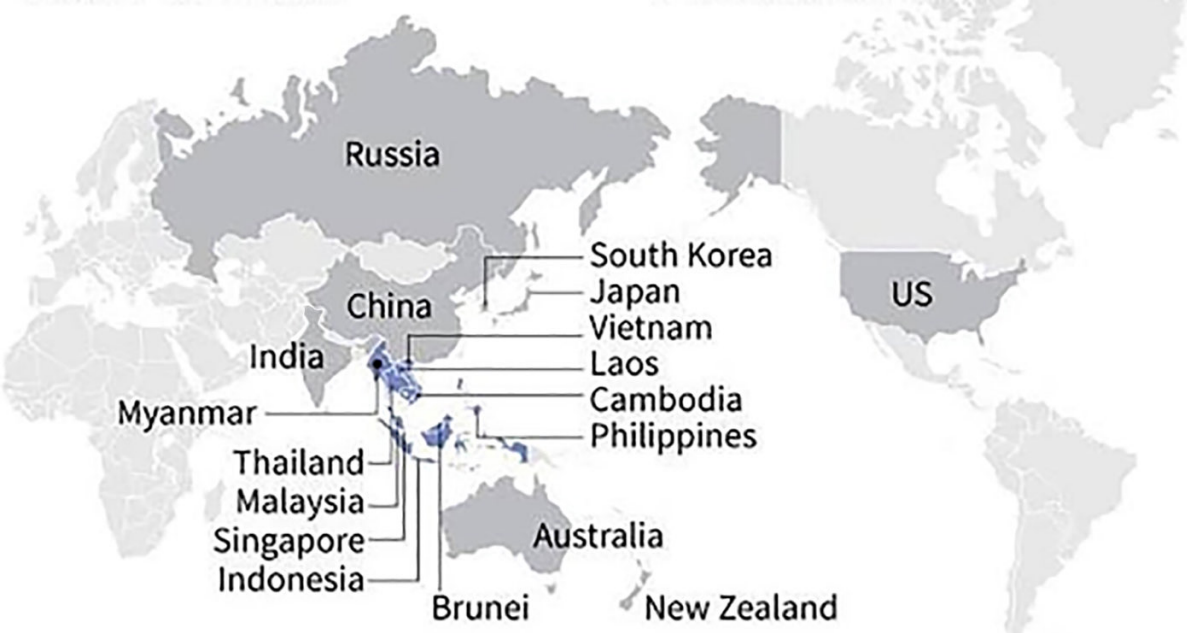
Indus Waters Treaty

The External Affairs Ministry separately responded to Pakistan Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar's remarks on Kashmir and the Indus Waters Treaty at the ARF.

“It is no surprise that a multilateral forum has once again been cynically exploited by Pakistan to amplify falsehoods, peddle state-sponsored disinformation, and divert attention from its own well-documented record of sponsoring cross-border terrorism,” said the Ministry's official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal.

Mr. Dar, in his remarks, had said, “... lasting peace in South Asia lies in the just resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute in accordance with UN Security Council”.

He further said that upholding the treaty is a “cornerstone of regional peace and stability”.



1. Context (International Relations | GS Paper II)

At the **21st East Asia Summit (EAS)**, India reaffirmed its vision of a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific, emphasising maritime security, peaceful resolution of disputes, ASEAN centrality, and adherence to international law. India also reiterated its positions on the South China Sea, Myanmar, West Asia, terrorism, cybercrime, and the Indus Waters Treaty, reflecting its commitment to regional stability and a rules-based international order.

2. Key Takeaways

- i. **Maritime Security:** Called for safe, secure, and unimpeded international waterways, while condemning attacks on civilian shipping and maritime infrastructure.
- ii. **Rules-based Order:** Reaffirmed support for UNCLOS, 1982 and an effective, legally binding Code of Conduct (CoC) for the South China Sea.
- iii. **ASEAN Centrality:** Reiterated India's support for ASEAN-led regional architecture and an open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- iv. **Regional Conflicts:** Advocated dialogue and diplomacy to resolve the crises in Myanmar and West Asia, while reaffirming support for a two-State solution.
- v. **Counter-terrorism:** Reasserted India's policy of zero tolerance for terrorism and called for coordinated action against cybercrime and transnational cyber-scam networks.
- vi. **India-Pakistan:** Rejected Pakistan's remarks on Kashmir and the Indus Waters Treaty, reaffirming India's position against cross-border terrorism.

3. East Asia Summit (EAS)

- i. The **East Asia Summit (EAS)** is a **leaders-led forum** for strategic, political, and economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.
- ii. It was established in 2005, with the first summit held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- iii. It **comprises 18 members—the 10 ASEAN Member States and 8 Dialogue Partners**: India, Australia, China, Japan, New Zealand, Republic of Korea, Russia, and the United States.
- iv. India is a founding member and actively participates in shaping the Indo-Pacific regional agenda.
- v. The EAS functions on the principle of **ASEAN Centrality** and addresses issues such as maritime security, connectivity, regional security, trade, energy, climate change, disaster management, health, and emerging technologies.

U.S. announces civilian nuclear agreement with Saudi Arabia

Trump says the deal is contingent on Riyadh normalising relations with Israel; critics warn it could set off an arms race in the Gulf; while reports suggest U.S. companies could build a uranium enrichment facility in the kingdom, Trump says 'no'

Agence France-Presse
RIYADH

The United States and Saudi Arabia on Wednesday announced a landmark deal that would establish a civilian nuclear programme in the kingdom, which U.S. President Donald Trump said was contingent on Riyadh normalising relations with Israel.

The move comes as the U.S. fights a war with Iran that began in large part over concerns about Tehran's nuclear programme – still a key point of contention in now-stalled peace talks.

The deal is set to generate billions of dollars for American companies and is seen as a major win for Iran's long-time regional rival, but critics fear it also carries risks.

Washington has sought in recent years to tie any nuclear agreement and defence pact to Saudi normalisation with Israel, and just hours after the deal was announced, Mr. Trump took to social media to say Riyadh must first meet that condition.



Close allies: A file photo of President Donald Trump with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman from his visit to Washington in November last year. REUTERS

The nuclear deal "will be approved, but is totally subject to Saudi Arabia joining the very respected and successful Abraham Accords", he wrote.

Concern of enrichment
Critics have insisted the deal – the text of which was not immediately made public – could precipitate a nuclear race in a region already battered by war.

One provision would

potentially see U.S. companies build a uranium enrichment facility in Saudi Arabia, the Wall Street Journal reported.

The U.S. Energy Department made no mention of such a provision and did not offer comment when asked about it by AFP, while Mr. Trump added in his Truth Social post that: "There will be no enrichment of material!"

The deal will be submit-

ted to Congress for review, but the Republican-controlled legislature is unlikely to block its implementation.

U.S. lawmakers from both parties and Israeli officials have previously voiced opposition to such a project over fears Saudi Arabia could eventually convert it to develop nuclear weapons.

"Trump claims his war on Iran is about stopping

an authoritarian country from enriching nuclear fuel," left-wing U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders wrote on X.

"Now he's letting his best friends in Saudi Arabia – one of the most brutal dictatorships in the world – do exactly that. This is absurd."

'Pact with safeguards'

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said that "any agreement that we're going to make with any country in the world on civil nuclear energy is going to be one that will have safeguards in place to ensure that it can't be turned into a weapons programme".

Riyadh, like Tehran, has long been adamant about its right to pursue a civilian nuclear programme. Last year it signed a mutual defence pact with nuclear-armed Pakistan.

Policymakers have long feared that if Iran produced a nuclear weapon, the move would set off an arms race across the Gulf.

The United States has agreements governing nuclear cooperation with more than 50 countries.

1. Context (International Relations | GS Paper II)

The United States and Saudi Arabia have announced a landmark civil nuclear cooperation agreement, aimed at supporting Saudi Arabia's civilian nuclear energy programme. The agreement is linked to the broader geopolitical objective of Saudi Arabia normalising relations with Israel under the Abraham Accords, while raising concerns over nuclear proliferation and strategic stability in West Asia.

2. U.S.–Saudi Civil Nuclear Agreement

- i. The agreement seeks to facilitate U.S. cooperation in developing Saudi Arabia's civilian nuclear energy programme.
- ii. It is conditional upon Saudi Arabia normalising diplomatic relations with Israel.
- iii. The pact is expected to include strict safeguards to ensure that nuclear technology is used only for peaceful purposes and is not diverted for weapons development.
- iv. It aims to strengthen the long-term strategic partnership between the U.S. and Saudi Arabia while promoting regional economic and energy cooperation.
- v. Critics fear that permitting uranium enrichment or advanced nuclear capabilities could trigger nuclear proliferation and intensify the regional arms race, particularly amid concerns over Iran's nuclear programme.

3. Abraham Accords

- i. The Abraham Accords are a series of U.S.-brokered normalisation agreements between Israel and Arab countries, signed in 2020.
- ii. The first signatories were the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain, followed later by Sudan and Morocco.
- iii. The accords established full diplomatic relations, including cooperation in trade, investment, tourism, technology, security, and defence.



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