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An institution in freefall: Parliament is all dressed up with nowhere to go



THAROORTHINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

THE RECENTLY concluded Parliament session has confirmed yet again that urgent action is needed to restore the "temple of our democracy" to something better than utter dysfunctionality. Our collective failure to strike a balance between partisan politics and mature statesmanship remains the most glaring weakness of our parliamentary democracy. The Opposition remains adamant that certain issues must be discussed, but faces a government that considers compromise a sign of weakness. The Opposition persistently chooses disruption if it won't be heard; the government refuses to reach out and accommodate even some of its demands. Time, taxpayers' money and meaningful debate are all lost. So also are opportunities for MPs to question ministers, to raise constituency issues in Zero Hour or issues of national importance under Rule 377, and to place on record their views on the bills that the government cheerfully passes amid the din.

The relationship between the government and the Opposition has devolved into an unprecedented bitterness. It was not always so. A foundational civility once governed our public life: Atal Bihari Vajpayee took delight in recounting how Jawaharlal Nehru treated him with immense courtesy as a young Opposition backbencher, how Rajiv Gandhi ensured he received medical care in the US, and how Narasimha Rao dispatched him to Geneva to represent India at a critical UN summit on Kashmir. Such bipartisan grace is today unimaginable.

Instead, Indian politics has descended into a crusade of mutual demoralisation. Each side claims the mantle of absolute virtue while writing off the other as irredeemable. To the ruling party, dissent is branded as "anti-national"; the Opposition, in turn, casts itself as an outnumbered band of Pandavas

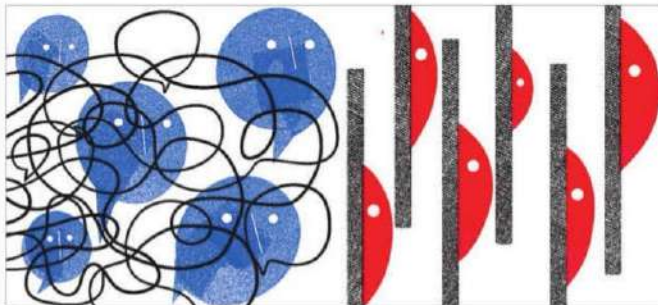


ILLUSTRATION © RASIKUMARI

battling a ruthless, resource-rich Kaurava establishment. But democracy cannot survive without a basic presumption of mutual good faith: the belief that even our fiercest rivals care about the nation's welfare, even if we disagree profoundly on how to serve it. When we treat political adversaries as existential enemies, the common ground required for governance vanishes.

This breakdown of democratic trust is a collective failure. The ruling party was just as uncompromising when it was out of power. The very leaders who once championed parliamentary obstruction as a vital tool for enforcing executive accountability discovered, upon taking office, that where you stand depends on where you sit. Suddenly, disruption became an unpardonable sin. Unsurprisingly, the Opposition, having suffered under those tactics for years, rejects the sermon. If the traditional Golden Rule urged us, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," the new code of Indian politics is far simpler and far more destructive: Do unto them what they did unto you.

There is also a glaring disconnect between parliamentary performance and electoral success. Representatives are elected (and re-elected) for reasons that have almost nothing to do with their ability to skewer a minister during Question Hour or dissect a flawed

bill with forensic precision. Instead, voters judge their MPs by the constituent services they render and the raw, local political muscle they command. The talent that ought to be showcased on the floor of the House has migrated to television studios. In turn, when party whips corral MPs into the well of the House to disrupt proceedings with organised shouting rather than reasoned debate, party leaders signal that they value partisan aggression far above parliamentary excellence.

At one time, political parties valued different skills in their leaders: The mass mobilisation of the "politics of the street" and the debating prowess of the "politics of Parliament". When the "politics of the street" has invaded Parliament, the "politics of Parliament" has no place to go, impoverishing our democratic discourse and rendering the possibility of national consensus on progress untenable. Some good work continues in parliamentary committees,

mostly away from the media glare, and in the absence of the cameras that place a premium on disruptive grandstanding. But what the public sees is disruption, the absence of dialogue and a complete breakdown in communication. Disillusionment with the functioning of Parliament is rife across the country.

This generational freefall in legislative standards has only

been exacerbated by the ruling dispensation. The current government displays a barely concealed contempt for the legislature, preferring to ride roughshod over the Opposition rather than engage it. Unlike Jawaharlal Nehru, who attended Parliament daily and treated it as the beating heart of Indian democracy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi rarely deigns to grace the House with his presence. Over recent years, the government has reduced Parliament from a consultative chamber in a deliberative democracy to a mere noticeboard for announcing executive decisions and a rubber stamp for legislating them.

This systematic diminishing of Parliament strikes at the very core of our democratic order. Tragically, its own custodians are allowing the institution to be hollowed out, bringing us dangerously close to a point where the public will no longer even miss it when it is effectively rendered meaningless. But if Parliament is allowed to lose all purpose, what will remain of our democracy?

Democracy requires a rare, delicate balance. It demands that politicians maintain fierce ideological convictions during an election, yet actively cooperate for the collective progress of the nation once the ballots are cast. This principle is essential to build a healthy political culture, drawing on timeless lessons from democratic history, global precedents, and the evolving nature of public service. When both sides concur that national interests should be prioritised over partisan rivalries, governance can shift from zero-sum obstructionism to constructive collaboration. This approach does not mean giving up party ideology or abandoning one's principles. Instead, it recognises that while political parties offer different paths toward progress, the ultimate destination remains the welfare, safety, and prosperity of the nation.

An obvious solution, successfully used elsewhere, is to grant the Opposition one day a week or two hours a day to raise any issue it deems essential, while allowing the work of Parliament to proceed undisturbed the rest of the time. Does no one in the government have the imagination or the vision to effect such a compromise?

The writer is a fourth-term Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram

The Opposition persistently chooses disruption if it won't be heard; the government refuses to reach out and accommodate even some of its demands. Time, taxpayers' money and meaningful debate are all lost

The Parliament of India exercises control over the functions of the Council of Ministers through

1. Adjournment motion
2. Question hour
3. Supplementary questions

Select the correct answer using the code given below :

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Q. To what extent, in your view, the Parliament is able to ensure accountability of the executive in India? (150 words)



Context [GS-II — Parliament & State Legislatures: Structure, functioning, conduct of business, legislative scrutiny and executive accountability]

The 2026 Monsoon Session highlighted concerns over the functioning of Parliament, with repeated disruptions affecting debate and scrutiny. Lok Sabha functioned for only 15% and Rajya Sabha for 33% of scheduled time, while Question Hour functioned for just 1% in Lok Sabha and 12% in Rajya Sabha.

Summary

1. Parliament is losing its deliberative and active character

- **Disruptions are displacing debate:** Frequent adjournments reduce the time available for Question Hour, Zero Hour, debates and motions, weakening Parliament's ability to deliberate on public issues.
- **Legislative scrutiny is getting thinner:** When Bills are discussed hurriedly or with limited participation, MPs get less opportunity to examine their constitutional, financial and implementation implications.
- **Executive accountability suffers:** Loss of Question Hour and other discussion mechanisms reduces the opportunities available to MPs to question ministers and scrutinise government action.
- **Parliamentary productivity becomes misleading:** A House may still pass Bills, but without adequate deliberation it risks becoming formally functional but substantively less effective.

Data: During the 2026 Monsoon Session, Lok Sabha functioned for only 15% and Rajya Sabha for 33% of scheduled time.

2. Government–Opposition confrontation is weakening parliamentary functioning

- **Government's responsibility to accommodate:** A majority gives the Government the mandate to govern, but not to disregard legitimate Opposition demands for discussion.
- **Opposition's responsibility to scrutinise:** The Opposition must challenge the Government, but disruption cannot become its principal instrument of dissent.
- **Confrontation creates paralysis:** When Government non-accommodation is met with repeated disruption, and disruption produces further Government resistance, political confrontation begins to consume parliamentary time.
- **Accountability becomes the casualty:** Instead of using parliamentary instruments such as questions, motions, debates and committees, both sides increasingly spend parliamentary time in confrontation.

Data: The extremely low utilisation of scheduled time during the 2026 Monsoon Session illustrates the institutional cost of this confrontation.



3. Parliamentary conventions of accommodation are eroding

- **Rules alone cannot sustain Parliament:** Parliamentary functioning also depends upon conventions of mutual respect, restraint, reciprocity and accommodation.
- **Disagreement is becoming adversarial:** Political opponents are increasingly treated as adversaries whose defeat is more important than institutional cooperation.
- **Reciprocity is weakening:** Parties may resist parliamentary practices in Opposition that they themselves defend when in Government, weakening the continuity of parliamentary conventions.
- **Institutional trust consequently declines:** When Government and Opposition cease to trust each other, negotiation and compromise become politically costly, making disruption and confrontation easier.

4. Parliamentary persuasion is giving way to political spectacle

- **From debate to visibility:** Parliamentary politics is increasingly influenced by slogans, protests, walkouts and televised confrontation, rather than sustained argument and persuasion.
- **Deliberation becomes performative:** Political positions are often presented for public consumption rather than debated with the objective of persuading or modifying the opposing side.
- **Consensus-building suffers:** When politics becomes a contest of visibility, Parliament loses its distinctive capacity to bring competing viewpoints together for reasoned negotiation.

Way Forward

1. Restore Government–Opposition accommodation

- Government should provide adequate space for legitimate Opposition concerns.
- Opposition should make debate, questioning, motions and scrutiny its primary instruments, using disruption only as a last resort.

2. Protect the deliberative functioning of Parliament

- Safeguard Question Hour, Zero Hour, debates and legislative discussions from routine disruption.
- Ensure adequate time for meaningful consideration of important Bills.

3. Strengthen legislative scrutiny

- Increase meaningful use of Department-related Standing Committees, Select Committees and Joint Parliamentary Committees.
- Balance legislative efficiency with legislative quality.

4. Revive parliamentary conventions

- Restore mutual respect, reciprocity, restraint and accommodation across party lines.
- Institutional interests must take precedence over short-term partisan advantage.

5. Institutionalise political disagreement

- Political conflict is intrinsic to democracy; it should be channelled through:

Questioning → Debate → Deliberation → Negotiation → Accountable decision-making

The Vanashakti verdict is balanced and pragmatic

The Supreme Court of India's landmark judgment delivered on July 29, 2026 in *Vanashakti vs Union of India* has brought much-needed clarity to one of the most debated issues in environmental regulation: the fate of projects that commenced without obtaining prior Environmental Clearance (EC).

Wider policy impact

While the judgment firmly reiterates that obtaining prior EC is a mandatory legal requirement under the Environment Impact Assessment Notification (EIA) Notification, 2006, it also provides an important policy direction that could have far-reaching implications for thousands of industries, infrastructure projects and real estate developments across India.

The Court has categorically held that project proponents who commenced construction or operations without obtaining prior EC and that did not apply under the earlier violation mechanisms, cannot now seek regularisation under the 2017 Notification or the 2021 Standard Operating Procedure (Office Memorandum). Those mechanisms are no longer available for fresh cases.

At first glance, this may appear to shut the door completely on pending violation projects. However, a closer reading of the judgment reveals a far more balanced and pragmatic approach. One of the most significant aspects is the Court's recognition that the central government continues to possess the statutory power under Section 3 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 to frame a fresh statutory mechanism for dealing with violation cases, if considered necessary in the larger public interest.

The Court has made an important distinction between an administrative office memorandum, which cannot override the requirement of prior EC, and a statutory notification issued under the powers conferred by the Environment (Protection) Act. While the former has been held to be legally unsustainable, the latter remains a permissible legislative option, provided it is



Kalaiselvan Periyasamy

Environmental and social expert

The top court's verdict closes existing environmental clearance regularisation routes while leaving scope for a new framework

carefully designed within the framework of environmental law.

This observation is likely to have significant policy implications. Across India, numerous industrial units, commercial developments, infrastructure projects and public utility projects remain in violation of the EC requirements for various reasons. Some projects proceeded due to regulatory uncertainty, others due to an incorrect interpretation of the law, while some simply failed to obtain the necessary approvals before commencement. Many such projects never applied under the earlier violation windows and have therefore been left without a legal pathway following the closure of the 2017 scheme and the striking down of the 2021 Office Memorandum.

The present judgment acknowledges this practical reality without compromising the fundamental principle that prior EC remains mandatory.

Where there is a balancing act

Importantly, the Court has not directed the central government to introduce a new regularisation scheme. Instead, it has clarified that the government may, if it considers it necessary, in the larger public interest, issue a fresh statutory notification providing a one-time opportunity for specified categories of violation projects.

The Court has also indicated the safeguards that such a notification must incorporate. Any future scheme cannot become a permanent "violate first, regularise later" mechanism. Instead, it should be strictly one-time, supported by statutory authority, and should include comprehensive environmental safeguards such as environmental damage assessment, remediation measures, environmental compensation and strict compliance conditions.

This balanced approach attempts to reconcile two equally important objectives. On one hand, environmental laws cannot encourage deliberate violations by allowing routine post-facto approvals, while on the other, indiscriminate

closure or demolition of every violation project may not always serve either environmental protection or the larger public interest, particularly where projects are otherwise environmentally acceptable and substantial investments have already been made.

The judgment therefore reinforces the principle that environmental governance should combine strict enforcement with practical and scientifically sound regulatory solutions.

For project developers, industries and infrastructure agencies, the immediate message is straightforward. No fresh applications can now be made under the earlier violation mechanisms. However, the judgment also leaves open the possibility that the central government may formulate a fresh statutory framework to address pending violation cases in an environmentally responsible manner.

The regulatory road ahead

Whether such a policy initiative will be undertaken now rests entirely with the central government. Given the large number of pending projects across various sectors, industry associations, infrastructure developers, environmental professionals and other stakeholders are expected to closely watch the government's next steps. The judgment has effectively closed the old regulatory route but has simultaneously acknowledged that Parliament's environmental legislation still provides sufficient statutory authority for a carefully structured one-time solution, should the government consider such intervention necessary.

The July 2026 judgment is therefore significant not merely because it settles the legal validity of earlier violation mechanisms, but also because it charts the contours of any future policy on environmental regularisation. It preserves the integrity of the prior EC regime while leaving sufficient legislative space for the government to address genuine legacy violations through a lawful, transparent, and environmentally robust statutory framework.

Consider the following statements :

The Environment Protection Act, 1986 empowers the Government of India to

1. state the requirement of public participation in the process of environmental protection, and the procedure and manner in which it is sought
2. lay down the standards for emission or discharge of environmental pollutants from various sources

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Context [GS-III — Environmental Impact Assessment, Environmental Governance, Sustainable Development]

The Supreme Court's judgment in **Vanashakti v. Union of India (2026)** addresses whether projects that commenced without the legally required prior Environmental Clearance (EC) can subsequently be regularised.

1. What did the Supreme Court hold?

- **Prior EC is mandatory:** Projects covered under the EIA framework must obtain environmental clearance before construction or operation.
- **Post-facto clearance cannot be routine:** The Court rejected the idea of allowing projects to start first and seek environmental approval later.
- **2021 Office Memorandum struck down:** The Court held that an executive instruction cannot create a continuing mechanism for regularising violations of a statutory requirement.
- **Limited exception:** A fresh, narrowly tailored statutory mechanism may be created in exceptional cases where overriding public interest genuinely demands it.

2. Historical Background: How did post-facto clearance emerge?

- **EIA Notification, 2006:** Established the requirement of prior Environmental Clearance for specified projects.
- **Problem of violation:** Some projects commenced construction or operations without obtaining the required EC, creating a category of “violation cases.”
- **2017 Notification:** The Government introduced a one-time mechanism to deal with certain existing violations and bring them within the environmental regulatory framework.
- **2021 Office Memorandum:** A subsequent administrative mechanism provided a route for processing projects that had violated the prior-EC requirement.
- **Vanashakti case:** The legality of this approach was challenged, leading the Supreme Court to examine whether post-facto regularisation through executive action was compatible with the statutory EIA regime.

3. Why is the Judgment Significant?

- **Protects the precautionary principle:** Environmental assessment must ordinarily happen before a project begins, when environmental risks can still be prevented or mitigated.
- **Strengthens the rule of law:** An executive Office Memorandum cannot dilute a requirement flowing from the statutory environmental framework.
- **Prevents “violate first, regularise later”:** Routine post-facto clearance could create an incentive to ignore environmental norms and treat penalties as merely a cost of doing business.
- **Introduces proportionality:** The judgment recognises that every violation may not warrant an identical remedy such as automatic closure or demolition; genuine public interest can require a calibrated response.
- **Balances environment and development:** It retains prior EC as the rule while allowing only a narrow, legally authorised pathway for exceptional cases.

Odisha forms panel to examine relocation of villages from Satkosia Tiger Reserve

Satyasundar Barik

BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government has constituted a high-level inquiry committee to examine the relocation of villages from the Satkosia Tiger Reserve (STR) following allegations by residents that they were forcibly evicted from their ancestral villages despite having coexisted harmoniously with wildlife for decades.

The committee headed by the Revenue and Disaster Management Secretary would examine the entire village-wise relocation process relating to the STR, except Raiguda, which was the first village to be relocated after following the proper procedures.

The notification regarding the formation of the



Villagers had alleged that they were forcibly evicted. FILE PHOTO

committee was issued on August 17.

The panel has been mandated to examine and verify compliance with applicable statutory provisions, including the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the Forest Rights Act, 2006, and guidelines of the National Tiger Conservation Authority.

Beneficiary identification would also be scrutinised to find out if villagers were wrongfully excluded or included in the relocation process. Assessment of compensation and rehabilitation provided to the affected families will also be examined.

The committee has been directed to recom-

mend appropriate corrective measures, including payment of differential compensation, restoration of rights, and livelihood support.

The State government has particularly asked the committee to identify the officers responsible for any procedural irregularities or violations and recommend appropriate departmental and criminal action against them.

Zero tiger population

The STR has a troubled history of tiger conservation. The State's 2007 census recorded 12 tigers but by 2018-19, just one remained.

The 2022 tiger census recorded none, leaving the reasons behind the population's disappearance unresolved.



Jharkhand

West
Bengal

Chhattisgarh

Odisha

Satkosia
Tiger Reserve

Clarity

Clarity

Bay
of
Bengal

Telangana

Andhra Pradesh

Context [GS-III — Biodiversity & Wildlife Conservation: Tiger reserves, protected areas, Forest Rights and human–wildlife coexistence]

The Odisha Government has constituted a high-level committee to examine the process of village relocation from the Satkosia Tiger Reserve, particularly whether relocation followed the legal safeguards for forest-dwelling communities while meeting tiger-conservation objectives.

1. Satkosia Tiger Reserve: Why is it important?

- **Location:** Situated along the **Mahanadi Gorge** in Odisha, Satkosia comprises the Satkosia Gorge and Baisipalli landscapes.
- **Tiger Reserve:** Notified in 2007; Odisha has two Tiger Reserves — Similipal and Satkosia.
- **Biodiversity:** It is an important landscape for tigers, elephants, leopards, gharials, mugger crocodiles and other forest species.
- **Tiger conservation challenge:** The reserve's tiger population has declined sharply, making habitat protection, prey recovery and restoration of a viable tiger population major conservation priorities.

2. Why does Relocation Become Relevant?

- **Need for inviolate habitat:** Critical tiger habitats may require relatively undisturbed areas for breeding, prey availability and long-term tiger recovery.
- **But conservation has a rights dimension:** Forest-dependent communities cannot be displaced simply because an area has been designated for wildlife conservation.
- The issue is therefore to ensure that ecological requirements are met without violating legally recognised forest rights.

3. What do the Laws Provide?

- **Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 — Section 38V:** Provides for Tiger Conservation Plans and requires tiger reserves to be managed for the protection of tiger habitats and ecologically compatible land use.
- **Forest Rights Act, 2006 — Section 4(2):** Provides safeguards for relocation from critical wildlife habitats, including recognition and settlement of rights, informed consent of the Gram Sabha and provision of rehabilitation.
- **Forest Rights Act — Section 6:** Lays down the process for recognition and verification of forest rights, beginning with the Gram Sabha.
- **National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA):** Its relocation guidelines envisage voluntary village relocation, with adequate compensation, rehabilitation and livelihood support.

Shah praises South's role in nation's progress

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday praised southern States' contribution to the country's development, highlighting the major role played by the region in industries such as information technology, automobiles, pharmaceuticals and infrastructure development.

Addressing the 31st Southern Zonal Council meeting at Mamallapuram near Chennai, he said high literacy rate, trained manpower and "technical expertise in the utilisation of deep seas" were the three pillars that had made south India the biggest contributor to the country's deve-



Amit Shah with CMs of southern States and other dignitaries at the Southern Zonal Council meeting near Chennai. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

lopment. The region had also established many excellent traditions in the fields of innovation and revenue generation. "The whole of India should learn from south India in these two areas," he said. Regarding issues concerning the division of assets

and liabilities between Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, both States agreed to resolve them in consultation with the Union Home Ministry, he said.

In his address, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu called for greater cooperation

and coordination among southern States, saying their collective progress could become a powerful driving force for India's development. He said the South had the potential to emerge as a \$10 trillion economy by 2047.

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay underscored that southern States do not seek preferential treatment, but fair and equitable treatment, one that respects fiscal autonomy, and rewards performance alongside equity.

Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar made a pitch for "fairness in funds, voice and respect" for southern States. He urged the Council to adopt a resolution calling upon

the Centre to honour the 1971 Census as the basis for delimitation.

Keralam Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan reaffirmed the stand that it was willing to supply water to Tamil Nadu from the new dam it has proposed at Idukki district's Mullaperiyar in place of the existing structure. Keralam would bear the expenses of building the dam, while Tamil Nadu can be responsible for the construction and location, he said.

Deputy Chief Minister of Telangana Mallu Bhatti Vikramarka said cooperative federalism should provide a framework for resolving inter-State issues in a fair, time-bound and legally sustainable manner.

Which of the following bodies **does not/do not** find mention in the Constitution?

1. National Development Council
2. Planning Commission
3. Zonal Councils

Select the correct answer using the codes given below.

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Context [GS-II — Federalism: Centre–State relations, inter-State relations and cooperative federalism]

The 31st Southern Zonal Council meeting brought the southern States and UTs together to discuss inter-State disputes, fiscal federalism, delimitation and regional development, strengthening institutional dialogue between the Centre and States.

1. Zonal Councils: Basic Framework

- **Statutory bodies:** The five Zonal Councils were established under Part III (Sections 15–22) of the States Reorganisation Act, 1956. They are statutory and advisory, not constitutional, bodies.
- **Five Councils:** Northern, Central, Eastern, Western and Southern.
- **Chairman:** Union Home Minister; Chief Ministers of member States participate, with Vice-Chairmanship rotating among them.
- **Purpose:** They provide a common forum for discussing inter-State and Centre–State issues, promoting coordination and consensus.
- **North-Eastern States:** They are not covered by these five Zonal Councils. The region has a separate North Eastern Council (NEC), **established under the North Eastern Council Act, 1971**, with its institutional framework subsequently amended in 2002.

2. Southern Zonal Council

- **States:** Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Telangana.
- **UTs:** Puducherry, Lakshadweep and Andaman & Nicobar Islands.
- It **provides** a regional platform for addressing common developmental concerns and inter-State issues.

3. Significance for Cooperative Federalism

- **Dialogue:** Provides an institutional platform for Centre–State and inter-State consultation.
- **Dispute resolution:** Helps address water, infrastructure, bifurcation and other inter-State issues.
- **Coordination:** Enables States to cooperate on issues requiring joint action.
- **Federal trust:** Regular interaction promotes consensus, mutual understanding and cooperative federalism.

4. Issues Discussed in the 31st Meeting

- **Water disputes:** Krishna, Cauvery, Mullaperiyar and other inter-State river issues.
- **Delimitation:** Concerns regarding its possible impact on the political representation of southern States.
- **Fiscal federalism:** Issues relating to fund sharing and States' fiscal space.
- **AP–Telangana:** Pending bifurcation, asset-liability and water-related issues.

India, Japan sign maritime security pact to deepen defence cooperation

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

As Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his Japanese counterpart Shinjiro Koizumi held bilateral talks, India and Japan on Thursday signed a Memorandum of Arrangement (MoA) on Maritime Security Cooperation and agreed to deepen operational cooperation – including information sharing, naval exercises, ship repair and logistics support.

According to the Defence Ministry, the two Ministers, in their talks in New Delhi, reaffirmed their commitment to further deepen defence cooperation under the “Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership” and work towards a free and open Indo-Pacific amid heightened global tensions.

The newly signed maritime security arrangement provides a framework for closer cooperation between the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Indian Navy, including



Strong ties: Rajnath Singh and Shinjiro Koizumi during a bilateral meeting in New Delhi on Thursday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), search and rescue, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

The Ministers also agreed to strengthen coordination for the protection of Sea Lines of Communications through reciprocal naval visits, joint exercises, personnel and subject matter expert exchanges, and logistical support, including access to ports and maintenance and repair facilities. India and Japan will also move towards greater cooperation in mine countermeasures and explore the possibility of joint development in na-

val shipbuilding and design by leveraging Japan's technological expertise and India's production capabilities. The two sides will also discuss greater use of India's shipbuilding capabilities under the “Make in India” framework and work towards reciprocal provision of ship repair facilities.

The Ministers welcomed the expansion of bilateral military exercises, including Dharma Guardian and JAIMEX, and the planned Veer Guardian 26 air exercise. Japanese fighter aircraft will participate in the exercise in India for the first time.



Context [GS-II/III — India–Japan relations, Indo-Pacific, maritime security and defence cooperation]

India and Japan have signed a **Memorandum of Arrangement (MoA) on Maritime Security Cooperation**, aimed at deepening operational cooperation between the Indian Navy and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF).

1. What has been signed?

- The MoA will strengthen maritime operational cooperation through information sharing, naval exercises, personnel exchanges and reciprocal port visits.
- It provides for **cooperation in Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA)**, search and rescue, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR).
- Both sides will enhance logistical support, including access to ports, maintenance and ship-repair facilities.

2. Defence Cooperation Beyond the Pact

- **Mine countermeasures**: Cooperation will be expanded to address maritime mine threats.
- **Shipbuilding**: India and Japan will explore joint development and design of naval vessels, combining Japanese technology with India's manufacturing capabilities.
- **Ship repair**: Greater use of Indian ship-repair facilities under Make in India will be explored.
- **Exercises**: Cooperation will expand through **Dharma Guardian, JIMEX and Veer Guardian**, with Japanese fighter aircraft participating in Veer Guardian 26 in India.

3. Strategic Significance

- **Strengthens** the India–Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership and their commitment to a Free and Open Indo-Pacific.
- **Enhances** India's and Japan's ability to protect Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and respond jointly to maritime challenges.
- **Deepens** defence cooperation from exercises towards operational, logistical and defence-industrial collaboration.

China recovers first stage of a rocket on land for the first time

Associated Press

BEIJING

China has successfully recaptured the first stage of a rocket on land for the first time, state media reported on Wednesday, as the country seeks to advance its space programme.

Although this marks China's first successful recovery on land, it is the second time the country has recovered a rocket stage, following a successful recovery on a sea platform in July.

Chinese state news agency *Xinhua* said the reusable rocket, *Zhuque-3*, was launched on Wednesday morning and that the rocket's first stage was re-

covered afterward.

Elon Musk's SpaceX and Jeff Bezos's Blue Origin have been recovering rockets since 2015, helping drive down launch costs by reusing hardware that would otherwise be discarded after carrying satellites and other payloads toward space.

Xinhua said that Wednesday's recovery also marked China's first use of deployable landing legs and deemed the result "a major breakthrough in the country's reusable rocket technology".

On July 10, the first stage of a Long March-10B rocket separated from the second stage after lift-off and returned to a platform at sea.

Context [GS-III — Space Technology: Reusable launch vehicles, space commercialisation and emerging technologies]

China has achieved its first successful land-based recovery of an orbital rocket's first stage with the **Zhuque-3**, developed by private company LandSpace. The achievement marks an important step in China's push towards reusable launch technology.

1. What is special about Zhuque-3?

- A reusable orbital-class rocket developed by LandSpace, a Chinese private space company.
- Its first stage separated after launch, returned to Earth and landed vertically on land using deployable landing legs.
- This is China's first successful land recovery of an orbital rocket stage and its second successful recovery overall.
- In July 2026, China had already demonstrated sea-based recovery of the first stage of the Long March-10B, using a ship-based net-capture system.

2. Land Recovery and Sea Recovery

- **Land landing:** The booster performs a controlled return and lands vertically at a designated ground site using landing legs — the approach now demonstrated by Zhuque-3.
- **Sea recovery:** A booster can return to a ship/barge or sea platform, useful when the launch trajectory makes a land landing impractical. China's Long March-10B demonstrated this through net capture.
- **Both approaches aim at the same objective:** recovering and reusing expensive rocket hardware instead of discarding it after one launch.

3. Global Significance

- **United States:** SpaceX and Blue Origin have already demonstrated orbital-class booster recovery and reuse.
- **China:** With LandSpace's Zhuque-3, China has now entered this advanced stage of reusable orbital launch technology.
- **Why it matters:** Reusable boosters can reduce launch costs, shorten turnaround time and enable more frequent launches, making access to space more economical.