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GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE HINDU PAGE: 1

Uneasy truce in Beijing as Trump and Xi discuss trade, Taiwan

Ananth Krishnan
BEIJING

The United States and China appeared to come to an uneasy truce – at least for now – on trade, Taiwan, and the future of an increasingly contested relationship, as their leaders met for talks in Beijing on Thursday.

Chinese President Xi Jinping told visiting U.S. President Donald Trump that relations could descend to “clashes and conflicts” if the Taiwan question, which he described as “the most important issue in China-U.S. relations”, was not managed properly, according to the Chinese readout of the talks. “If it is handled properly, the bilateral relationship will enjoy overall sta-

bility. Otherwise, the two countries will have clashes and even conflicts, putting the entire relationship in great jeopardy,” he said. China also conveyed its opposition to U.S. arms sales to Taiwan.

The U.S. readout, for its part, made no mention of Taiwan, though Secretary of State Marco Rubio later told presspersons the U.S. position remained unchanged. The readouts suggested both sides had merely underlined their respective positions on an issue that remains a flashpoint. The White House statement said both did agree on the need to keep the Strait of Hormuz open and to support the free flow of energy, and that Mr. Xi had “made clear China’s opposition to the militari-



Leaders' day out: Xi Jinping and Donald Trump at the Temple of Heaven in Beijing on Thursday. VIA REUTERS

sation of the strait”. However, there appeared no broader agreement on addressing the Iran crisis.

The ceremony in Beijing trumped the substance. Mr. Trump’s visit began with a grand welcome on Thursday morning, as he was greeted by marching PLA troops and cheering schoolchildren at the Great

Hall of the People. “It really was a magnificent welcome like none other,” Mr. Trump said. The two leaders spent several hours in each other’s company, with delegation talks followed by Mr. Xi taking the U.S. President on a tour of the Temple of Heaven.

A state banquet followed in the evening, with

further talks over tea set for Friday in the Chinese leadership’s Zhongnanhai compound.

At the formal talks, Mr. Xi called for “a new vision” for ties, which he labelled “a constructive relationship of strategic stability” for “the next three years and beyond”.

May meet more

The two leaders may meet three more times this year alone, officials said. Mr. Trump invited Mr. Xi to visit the U.S. on September 24, which he provisionally accepted. The two leaders could also meet at an APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) summit that China is set to host later this year, and at the G-20 meet in Miami.

The broader challenge

facing the two leaders as they navigate a fractious relationship is a changed dynamic. “The U.S. still thinks it is dealing with the China of 10 years ago, but the power dynamic has shifted”, said Cameron Johnson, formerly Professor at New York University Shanghai and senior partner at a supply chain consulting firm that advises U.S. and Chinese companies.

Both countries have traded blows in an ongoing trade and technology war. For U.S. businesses, restricted access to rare earths was a major worry, while for China, American export controls remain a concern, especially on semiconductors.

The visit could yield a temporary truce.

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

THE HINDU PAGE: 4

India backs two-state solution for Palestine issue, says Jaishankar at BRICS meeting

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Highlighting India's traditional approach to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday presented the "National Statement" at the BRICS ministerial, reiterating India's call for a "two-state solution" to the issue and calling for an end to "risks to maritime traffic, and disruptions to energy infrastructure" in the Gulf region.

Supporting the need for dialogue and diplomacy to resolve conflicts in the region and in North Africa, Mr. Jaishankar sought "coordinated diplomatic efforts" to deal with the situations in Lebanon, Syria, Sudan and also in Libya.

The day-long BRICS Fo-



Multilateral engagement: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the Foreign Ministers and Heads of Delegation of BRICS countries during a meeting in New Delhi on Thursday. PTI

reign Ministers' meeting witnessed several speeches, including one by Iran's Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi who said that Iran will defend its sovereignty while "advancing diplomacy", adding that the U.S.-Israel attack against Iran will not have a "military solution".

"The wider region also gives rise to serious concern. The conflict in Gaza has grave humanitarian implications. A sustained ceasefire, humanitarian access, and a credible pathway towards a durable and peaceful resolution remain essential," Mr. Jaishankar said. "India supports a

two-state solution where the Palestine issue is concerned." Mr. Jaishankar referred to the impact of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran and highlighted the risks that the conflict has posed to shipping and energy infrastructure.

Referring indirectly to the recent actions by the

U.S. against multiple members of the United Nations, Mr. Jaishankar drew attention to the "increasing" tendency towards "unilateral coercive measures and sanctions", terming them "inconsistent with international law".

Earlier, Mr. Jaishankar welcomed the dignitaries that included Mr. Araghchi who made an emphatic call to resist the U.S. Referring to U.S. military and trade practices, Mr. Araghchi said the international community is facing "variations" of the "same repugnant coercion".

At the end of the engagements, visiting dignitaries Mr. Araghchi, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Brazil's Foreign Minister Mauro Vieira called on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

GS 2: INDIAN POLITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 5

Free and fair elections are dependent on a truly independent poll body: SC

Top court questions neutrality of Prime Minister-led selection panel for Election Commissioners, highlights absence of even 'one absolutely neutral person'; Attorney-General says the court cannot become a 'second chamber of Parliament'; Bench suggests referring petitions to Constitution Bench

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday nudged the Union government to address concerns over its dominant role in the appointment of Chief Election Commissioners and Election Commissioners, observing that free and fair elections depend on a truly independent Election Commission.

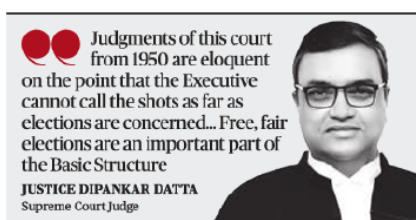
The court highlighted the absence of even "one absolutely neutral person" on the Prime Minister-chaired selection committee. It questioned the presence of a Cabinet Minister on the panel, observing that such a Minister could not be expected to defy the Prime Minister. The court also asked whether the presence of the Leader of the Opposition on the committee was merely "ornamental" as appointments could be made without a unanimous vote.

The court was hearing a batch of petitions challenging the Chief Election Commissioner and other Election Commissioners (Appointment, Conditions of Service, and Term of Office) Act, 2023.

The petitioners contended that the Act "defeated" a Constitution Bench judgment in the *Anoop Baranwal versus Union of India* case, which had constituted a selection panel comprising the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, and the Chief Justice of India. The 2023 Act, passed within months of the judgment, replaced the Chief Justice with a Cabinet Minister nominated by the Prime Minister.

'Judicial restraint'

Describing the *Anoop Baranwal* judgment as a "classic example of judicial restraint and statesmanship", the court indicated that the 2023 Act handed the power to the Executive to "call



the shots" in the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs).

"Judgments of this court from 1950 are eloquent on the point that the Executive cannot call the shots as far as elections are concerned... Free fair elections are an important part of the Basic Structure. It can only be accomplished by having an independent Election Commission of India. The Election Commission can only be independent if it has independent Commissioners," Justice Dipankar Datta, heading a Division Bench, told Ator-

ney-General R. Venkataramani, appearing for the Union government.

Mr. Venkataramani said one cannot make a "hugely hypothetical assumption" that the Act would result only in subservient CECs and ECs unless there was an actual lapse on the ground.

A-G's argument

Mr. Venkataramani argued that the Supreme Court could not become a "second chamber of Parliament". The petitioners, he said, cannot expect Parliament to enact laws blindly in consonance with Supreme Court judgments.

"Can somebody come to the court and say Parliament disregarded your judgment when it was bound entirely to the word of the court? The court can declare the law while exa-

mining the legality of a legislation or a state action. But the court cannot decide what a law should look like and expect Parliament to follow suit by enacting a law faithfully mirroring the court's vision," the Attorney-General submitted.

Mr. Venkataramani said the court did not declare any law under Article 141 in the *Anoop Baranwal* judgment. It had merely put in place a stop-gap arrangement for the CEC and EC appointments until Parliament enacted a law under Article 324(2).

Towards the end of the hearing, the Bench suggested referring the petitions to a Constitution Bench. The petitioners strongly opposed the move, arguing that the pleas involved a "conventional" challenge to the 2023 Act and not a "substantial question of law" warranting reference to a larger Bench under Article 145(3).

"Unless you taste the pudding, how can you say the pudding is bad," Mr. Venkataramani asked.

Justice Datta replied that it was not enough for the Election Commission to be independent, and that the poll body should also appear to be independent.

The judge asked the top

GS 2: SOCIAL ISSUES: HEALTH

THE HINDU PAGE: 8

Building a preventive health culture in India

India has made remarkable strides in health care over the past four decades. It has built institutions of global repute, trained exceptional clinicians, and expanded access to advanced treatments. Yet, even as it celebrates these achievements, it must confront a deeper truth: it has built a system that responds to illness far more effectively than it preserves health.

For too long, health has been viewed as something to recover after it is lost, rather than something to protect every day.

After four decades of building the institutions of modern medicine in India, I have come to understand that the greatest threat to our national health is not the disease we have failed to cure. It is the disease that we have failed to prevent.

We, as a civilisation, have confused the treatment of illness with the pursuit of health. These are not the same endeavour. One begins when something is already broken. The other is an act of continuous, deliberate care for oneself, for one's family, for the generations that will inherit the consequences of choices made today. India has built a world-class capacity to heal. It must now build the culture and the will to protect.

A civilisational reckoning

Non-communicable diseases – heart attack, strokes, cancer, diabetes, and infectious diseases – are now the leading cause of death in India, surpassing infectious illnesses. Approximately



Dr. Prathap C. Reddy

Founder Chairman,
Apollo Hospitals

The country's economic and social progress depends on citizen health and longevity

270 million Indians live with chronic disease today, the majority unaware of their condition until the body has already begun to fail. This is not a medical statistic. It is a measure of a society that must learn to listen to itself.

The economic consequences for a young democracy can be severe and compounding. Preventable illness diminishes the contribution of individuals who might otherwise have given their best years not to illness but to their work, their children, and their country. A nation cannot reach its highest potential while its people are quietly losing ground to conditions that need not have taken hold.

The window for action

Insights from large-scale health assessments, including Apollo Hospitals Health of the Nation Report 2026, point to a critical window in early adulthood. The decade between 30 years and 40 years of age is emerging as a turning point. It is during these years when individuals are most engaged in building careers and supporting families that early metabolic and cardiovascular risks begin to take hold.

By the age of 40, a significant proportion of individuals are no longer disease-free. The concern is not only the presence of disease but also the absence of awareness. Most people do not seek care because they do not feel unwell. By the time symptoms appear, the opportunity for early reversal is often lost.

And yet, there is reason for optimism. The

human body is remarkably resilient when intervention is timely. Early detection, lifestyle correction, and sustained monitoring can prevent, delay, or even reverse many of these conditions. The window exists – but it does not remain open indefinitely.

This is why India must now embrace a new paradigm: one of self-stewardship.

Push for transformation

Prevention is not a programme. It is not a policy intervention or a campaign to be launched and forgotten. It is a philosophy – one that asks each of us to understand that the stewardship of our own health is among the most consequential duties we carry. Not only for ourselves, but for everyone who depends upon us, and for a nation whose extraordinary promise rests entirely upon the vitality of its people.

India has the knowledge and the infrastructure. What remains is the transformation of habit – a culture of early action, of routine checks, of health understood not as the absence of disease but as the active, daily commitment to life.

The legacy a nation leaves is measured in the health and the hope it passes forward. The ambitions we hold for India – economic, social, and global – rest on the strength, vitality, and longevity of its citizens.

That reckoning can begin not in a hospital but in the choices that homes and families make before one is ever needed.

GS 3: INDIAN ECONOMY

THE HINDU PAGE: 10

India's labour market shows gains, but challenges persist

PLFS 2025 points to improving employment trends alongside structural gaps in skills and participation

Phalasha Nagpal

Every year, about 7-10 million young Indians enter the labour market. They are better educated than any generation before them – the average years of formal schooling for those aged 15 and above has reached 10 years nationally – and with hopes and expectations to match. This raises key questions: Can India's economy productively absorb the current generation of new workers, including youth and women? Under what conditions? And how can India ensure that its demographic potential translates into meaningful employment and economic growth?

The recently released Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2025 report offers some key insights.

It points to measurable progress across several dimensions, while also underlining some challenges that must be addressed to fully leverage India's demographic dividend.

Encouraging trends in employment

The Labour Force Participation Rate stands at 59%, the Workforce Participation Rate at 57%, and the unemployment rate at 3%. These are robust headline indicators. Youth unemployment has declined since 2024, with gains for rural and urban youth. Monthly PLFS bulletins through 2025 also point to improving trends in women's participation. Female LFPR in rural areas rose across successive months through September 2025, reaching its highest level since May. These trends show a sustained and directional improvement across multiple survey rounds.

The quality of employment has also improved. The share of regular wage and salaried employment increased from 22% to 24%, with gains recorded for both men and women. Correspondingly, the share of self-employment declined from 58% to 56%. Since formal salaried employment is associated with higher earnings and access to social protection, this shift in the nature of employment is among the more

Important signals in the 2025 data.

Wage trends reinforce this pattern, particularly for women. In regular salaried employment, female earnings grew by 7%, compared to 6% for men. In self-employment, female earnings rose by 9% against 8% for men, while in casual labour, women's wages increased by 5%, even as male wages largely remained unchanged.

At the same time, there remains scope to further narrow gender gaps in absolute earnings. Analysis of the data indicates that women earn about 76% of male wages in salaried work, around 69% in casual labour, and just 36% in self-employment. While disparities remain substantial, the shift towards salaried employment is beginning to offer more tangible economic gains for women.

Structural transformation is also creating better employment opportunities. Agriculture's share of employment has declined to 43%, while manufacturing and services have grown to around 12% and 13%, respectively.

Young people, particularly young women, are increasingly entering manufacturing and service sectors. Caste- and gender-based occupational segregation among younger cohorts is measurably lower than among older ones, reflecting the cumulative effects of expanded access to education and rising social mobility now beginning to translate into more inclusive labour market outcomes.

Gaps in skills and job creation

The first is the education-to-employment transition. India has significantly expanded tertiary education enrolment, making higher education more accessible across income groups. Yet gaps remain. For instance, between 2004 and 2023, roughly 5 million graduates entered the labour market annually, but only about 2.8 million secured employment of any kind.

Limited access to formal skills training also poses a challenge. Only 4% of individuals aged 15-59 have received formal vocational or technical training. Yet among those who have, workforce participation is substantially higher – 83% for men and 51% for women – underscoring the strong link between skills training and employment, which needs to be both harnessed and scaled up.

Another challenge lies in women's sustained workforce participation. While most men outside the labour force cited education as the primary reason, women pointed to childcare and household

responsibilities, revealing structural constraints rooted in the unequal distribution of unpaid work. For instance, urban self-employed men work approximately 17.5 hours more per week than women, and in regular salaried employment, the gap is about 7.9 hours per week, reflecting a persistent double burden of paid and unpaid labour that women experience disproportionately.

The fourth challenge is the NEET group. Around 25% of those aged 15-29 fall into this category. Moreover, these individuals are not counted in unemployment figures. Without timely intervention, this disengagement can lead to young people becoming detached from the workforce in the long term.

The way forward

The PLFS 2025 data points to a labour market that is moving in the right direction. However, translating these gains into meaningful and productivity-led economic growth will require more targeted interventions: scaling industry-relevant skills training, enabling women's workforce participation through gender-responsive interventions, and strengthening pathways to stable job employment with expanded social protection and a focus on green sectors. Targeted programmes like apprenticeships will also be crucial to re-engage NEET youth as active contributors to the economy. (Phalasha Nagpal is Livelihoods and Gender Lead, Oxford Policy Management)

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Jaishankar slams 'unilateral' sanctions days before expiry of Russian oil purchase waiver

Suhasini Haidar
Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

As India awaits the United States' decision on extending its waiver on sanctions against the import of Russian oil, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Thursday hit out at unilateral non-UN sanctions, calling them unjustified.

Delivering the national statement at the BRICS Foreign Ministers meeting chaired by India, Mr. Jaishankar called on the grouping of emerging economies to address the problem of such sanctions.

Significantly, the meeting was attended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi representing two of the U.S.'s most heavily sanctioned countries.

With the latest waiver in place, import of Russian crude oil surged to 1.96 million barrels per day since the start of May till date compared with 1.57 million barrels per day during the full month in April, according to data from real-time maritime analytics provider Kpler.

The major increase in India's oil intake from Moscow in May indicates that Indian refiners are rushing to secure stable supplies from Russia while those from West Asia are stuck due to the blockades on the Strait of Hormuz.

In fact, India's import of Russian oil stood at 1.98 million barrels per day in March as the U.S. extended its sanctions waiver on Russian oil purchases for the second consecutive month. Oil imports from Russia have surged despite



External Affairs Minister Jaishankar with his Russian and Saudi Arabian counterparts at the BRICS meet on Thursday. PTI



These unjustifiable measures

cannot substitute dialogue, nor can pressure replace diplomacy

S. JAISHANKAR,
External Affairs Minister

the fact that Russian crude oil is being sold at a premium of as much as \$5 for every barrel to Indian importers. "We must also address the increasing resort to unilateral coercive measures and sanctions inconsistent with international law and the UN Charter. Such measures disproportionately affect developing countries," Mr. Jaishankar said. "These unjustifiable measures cannot substitute dialogue, nor can pressure replace diplomacy," he said.

In the wake of the war in West Asia, the U.S. had granted month-long waivers for oil imports from Iran and Russia, which India took advantage of.

However, the waiver on Iran lapsed last month, and the waiver on Russia, which was extended, is set to expire on May 16, with U.S. officials indicating that there would be no exten-

sion. Speaking to the media on April 25, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent had said he had agreed to the waivers due to requests from "more than 10 of the most vulnerable and poorest countries".

"But I wouldn't imagine that we'd have another extension," he said, adding that the Russian oil available on-board ships that the waiver covered, had already been bought up.

While the NDA government maintains India's traditional position on not accepting non-UN sanctions, in practice it has complied with a series of sanctions from the U.S. for commercial reasons, including on oil from Iran, Russia and Venezuela, trade with Iran and the development of the Chabahar port.

When asked on Wednesday whether India would consider cutting oil imports from Russia as it did in the past, if the U.S. does not extend the waiver on Saturday, External Affairs Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said that the government's policy is "guided by the interests of 1.4 billion Indians". However, he declined to comment on reports that India has asked the U.S. for another extension.