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## GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 1

# Govt pitch to US nuclear mission: Scale up capacity, small modular reactors key

Anil Sasi

New Delhi, May 20

ALONGSIDE A stepped-up role for the private sector in nuclear plant operations, India is doubling down on its domestic civil nuclear programme based on its mainstay, pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWRs), and remains open to collaborating with external players to scale up projects built on this technology.

Less than six months after the landmark legislation opened up India's nuclear sector, a visiting high-powered American nuclear delegation has been informed, in meetings with top government functionaries, of New Delhi's two clear

## E. EXPLAINED

### America's mission

The US nuclear 'executive mission' has a twin-pronged brief: take stock of India's nuclear energy landscape after a landmark legislation opened up this sector; communicate the US industry's interest, as well as coordinate US government messaging, on emerging opportunities.

objectives following the legal changes: scale up nuclear power to step up base-load capacity, and progressively enter

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## GS 3: SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

### INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 2

#### Govt pitch to n-mission

the manufacturing value chain of small modular reactors (SMRs).

Based on heavy water and natural uranium, PHWRs are a technology India's nuclear establishment has mastered — but one that is increasingly out of sync with the light water reactors (LWRs), or pressurised water reactors, that are now the most dominant type worldwide.

The problem with LWRs, from an Indian perspective, is high project costs, which translate into a high per-unit cost of power. As a result, there is a sense in policy circles PHWRs will remain the main focus. Any foreign collaboration could

largely be limited to SMRs for now, given cost concerns linked to LWRs, an executive who is part of the US delegation told *The Indian Express* after the first leg of visits concluded in Delhi.

The executive said the Indian side communicated a general openness to private participation, alongside the need for funding from foreign sources. India's dominant nuclear technology — PHWRs spanning 220 MWe (megawatt electric) reactors up to newer 700 MWe reactors — has a largely unblemished operational record but has suffered from scalability issues.

India's external outreach for nuclear collaborations is driven

more by the need for capital than technology, a top government official had indicated at the time of the nuclear Amendments' passage.

The import of LWRs at higher cost raises two concerns: such projects should not end up stunting the growth of indigenous reactor design and production capacities; and higher capital expenditure results in higher tariffs, which must be absorbed under Indian market conditions. The setting up of nuclear reactors at Jaitapur site in Maharashtra, for instance, has been in limbo because of high tariff concerns, alongside liability concerns flagged earlier by French atomic power major Areva, which also faced its own financial troubles. The liability concerns have been addressed in

new nuclear amendments.

Organised by the Washington DC-based Nuclear Energy Institute — a lobby group of America's commercial nuclear energy industry — and the US-India Strategic Partnership Forum, the industry delegation held meetings with Union Power Minister Manohar Lal and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, as well as top representatives from states such as Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra.

The delegation is in Mumbai for two days, with meetings scheduled with India's private sector energy players, including Reliance Industries, Adani Group, Tata Power Company, JSW Energy, Vedanta, Larsen & Toubro, Tata Consulting Engineers and Hindalco Industries.

# GS 2: INDIAN POLITY

## INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 8

● CIVIL SOCIETY GROUPS OPPOSED TO PROPOSED 'PRIVATISATION' OF POWER SECTOR IN THE UNION TERRITORY

### May 22 Ladakh talks: Why cracks in key Leh body give Centre an upper hand

Bashaarat Masood  
Srinagar, May 20

**DAYS AHEAD** of the talks between the Centre and Ladakh's civil society organisations, the rifts in the Apex Body, Leh (ABL) have widened in the wake of its decision to accept the resignation of its founding chairman Thupstan Chhewang, which has been pending for months. Amid growing differences within the ABL, Chhewang had resigned as its chairman in July 2025, citing health concerns. His resignation was earlier neither accepted nor rejected by the ABL leadership, which finally decided to accept it early this month. The ABL and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA) are the umbrella organisations of various civil so-

ciety bodies in the Leh and Kargil regions, respectively. They are also part of the High Powered Committee (HPC), headed by Union MoS for Home Nityanand Rai, which has convened a meeting on May 22. The HPC has been examining demands raised by the Ladakh representatives.

While the ABL leadership has accused Chhewang of toeing the BJP line, the cracks in the organisation is likely to give the BJP-led Centre the upper hand in the talks. While Chhewang and ABL co-chairman Chering Lakruk had long been at loggerheads, the latest flashpoint between them is the civil society bodies' opposition to the proposed 'privatisation' of the Ladakh Power Development Department (LPDD).

Chhewang has castigated the ABL's stance on the issue, claiming that it fell outside the latter's mandate. "He (Chhewang) was saying LPDD isn't our issue and we shouldn't raise it, but all others thought it's important to safeguard the interests of Ladakh," Lakruk said. "Since his stand seems pro-government, all the members said that we should accept his resignation."

Both the ABL and KDA have been up in arms against any proposal by the Ladakh administration to "privatise" the power sector in the region. They have held that if the proposal to form a joint venture between the LPDD (49% share) and the Rural Electrification Corporation (51% share), is implemented, it will "worsen" the unemployment problem in the UT, lead to increase in power tariff, and "compromise national



The High Powered Committee, headed by Union MoS for Home Nityanand Rai, has convened a meeting on Friday

and strategic security interests". In a letter to L-G Vinal Kumar Saxena, they have called for scrapping of the proposal. A former BJP MP from Ladakh, Chhewang has questioned his removal from the ABL, asking how he could be

ousted when he was the founding chairman of the body. He has also questioned the ABL's functioning, saying that the talks between the Centre and the Ladakh representatives have hit a dead end. "Both sides have remained firm in their respective

positions and are unwilling to compromise resulting in complete deadlock in the dialogue process," he told a press conference in Leh a few days ago. "The people are left with two options — either to intensify the agitation for their demands or enter negotiations and accept the proposals the government may eventually be willing to offer."

Chhewang said the ABL should restrict itself to speaking on the issues which were agreed upon. "We had agreed to speak only on the four-point agenda related to Ladakh's constitutional and political demands," he said, adding the issue of privatisation of electricity in Ladakh was not part of the organisation's mandate. "After I expressed my concerns about it through a message, I was removed. I am the founding

member of the Apex Body — how can I be removed without any proper consultation."

Sources said Chhewang is upset about the growing clout of the KDA and the representation given to Muslims in the ABL. Lakruk, however, says the agenda for talks was set by Chhewang. "He set the agenda himself. How can he today say that it is a hard stand," Lakruk asked. "The (joint) platform of ABL and KDA was also formed by him." The infighting within the ABL is likely to cast a shadow on the May 22 meeting.

The civil society groups from Leh and Kargil have jointly demanded full statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion under the Sixth Schedule, arguing that the UT's over 90% Scheduled Tribe (ST) population requires constitutional safeguards over land, re-

sources and cultural identity. In September 2025, four persons were killed and many injured in police firing in Leh as protests over demands for statehood and Sixth Schedule protections turned violent. While Chhewang may be alone in his fight against the ABL leadership, a new outfit, Voice of Buddhist Ladakh (VBL), formed early this year amid allegation of it being a "BJP proxy", could throw its weight behind him. The VBL has claimed to represent Buddhist interests in negotiations with the Centre.

The ABL has alleged that the VBL had been propped up by the administration to undercut the joint movement of the Leh and Kargil organisations. These divisions within the Ladakh leadership may weaken the bargaining power of its representatives in their dialogue with the Centre.

## GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 12

# Europe's shift to centre of Delhi's frame is welcome

**P**RIME MINISTER Narendra Modi's trip to the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and Italy underscores how far India's perception of, and engagement with, Europe has evolved. Throughout the Cold War, India's approach to Europe was shaped largely by its close economic and defence ties with the Soviet Union and its rivalry with the West. A prolonged neglect is now giving way to expanding cooperation. Buoyed by the India-EU FTA signed in January this year, following the 2024 India-EFTA agreement, Europe has been increasingly entering India's strategic imagination despite the friction around Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The shift comes at a time when traditional alignments are under growing strain — an unpredictable American president, an ever-deepening partnership between India's ally Russia and competitor China, and a fragile détente between Beijing and Washington, reflected in the Trump-Xi summit.

Europe is now central to India's pursuit of export markets, capital, advanced technology and green-energy partnerships. The PM's tour itinerary reflects the enormous potential that collaboration with some of the continent's smaller but highly capable economies can unlock. The Netherlands, with a population of just 18 million, is a pivotal player in the global chip race because of ASML, the sole manufacturer of the advanced lithography machines needed to produce the most advanced semiconductors. The deal between ASML and Tata Electronics will support scaling up of the latter's fabrication plant in Dholera. In defence, India seeks to diversify procurement away from Russia, and in renewable energy, it requires both technological expertise and capital. Europe also offers opportunities for India's youth as the diaspora across the continent continues to expand, driven by highly skilled workers and students. For Europe, meanwhile, India is a critical partner in its efforts to de-risk from a rising China.

While the EU functions as a bloc of 27 member states, each country retains its own strategic priorities and foreign policy outlook. Europe's sub-regions, too, differ sharply in their perceptions of external powers. India already enjoys strong partnerships with key western European powers such as France, the Netherlands and Germany, and it has moved to deepen engagement with the Nordic countries while strengthening ties with Italy in the Indo-Mediterranean. More must be done to engage with these sub-regions and cultivate cross-linkages for mutual gains. With geopolitical realignments, a fraying rules-based order, and the decreasing relevance of international institutions, India's ties with Europe can no longer be peripheral to its foreign policy.

## GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE : 13

# US vs Iran shows why it is not about military power, but manipulating risk



**THAROORTHINK**  
BY SHASHI THAROOR

**A**S THE "phony peace" in Iran drags on, I am reminded of an old lesson: In the annals of strategic thought, few insights have proved as enduring as Thomas Schelling's in his 1960 book *The Strategy of Conflict*. Coercive bargaining is not about the blunt application of force, but about the manipulation of shared risk. In conflicts where neither side can afford outright defeat, Schelling showed that the real contest lies in shaping the environment of danger — raising the costs of escalation, narrowing the exits, and forcing adversaries to calculate how much risk they can bear before they must compromise.

The Trump administration's approach to Iran seemed to rest on the assumption that sufficiently severe bombardment by its overwhelmingly superior military force would compel capitulation. Yet history suggested otherwise. Severe punishment, when it fails to break an opponent's will, does not produce submission; it produces a bargaining environment in which both sides become desperate to find a way out that does not humiliate them fatally. In such an environment, the weaker party has every incentive to make the exit as costly and as visible as possible, ensuring that the stronger adversary pays a reputational and strategic price for its miscalculation.

Iran's position in this confrontation reflects Schelling's logic. Strategically weaker than the US in conventional terms, it nonetheless possesses asymmetric leverage. The Strait of Hormuz is not merely a shipping lane; it is, in Schelling's terms, a hostage whose value rises as American desperation increases. By causing disruption of global energy flows, Iran can manipulate the shared risk that binds both sides, forcing Washington to reckon with the costs of escalation not just in military terms but in

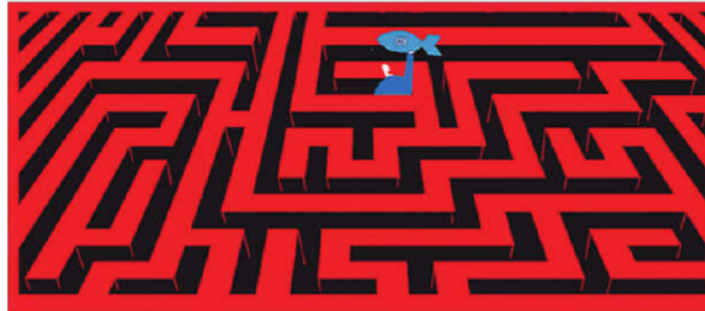


ILLUSTRATION: CR SAKHUMAR

economic and diplomatic fallout. The more the US insists on punishment without offering a credible off-ramp, the more valuable that hostage becomes.

This dynamic underscores a broader truth about coercive diplomacy. Force alone rarely secures compliance. What matters is the structure of risk, the perception of danger, and the credibility of exit strategies. When punishment is pursued without a parallel effort to manage risk and provide pathways to de-escalation, it hardens resistance rather than softening it. Iran's tactics — calibrated disruption, visible defiance, and the threatened exploitation of chokepoints — are designed precisely to exploit this gap, turning vulnerability into leverage.

History offers ample illustrations. The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 was not resolved by America's overwhelming military superiority alone. It was resolved by the manipulation of shared risk: Both Washington and Moscow understood that

By causing disruption of global energy flows, Iran can manipulate the shared risk that binds both sides, forcing Washington to reckon with the costs of escalation not just in military terms but in economic and diplomatic fallout

ceive that the risks of continued confrontation outweigh the costs of compromise.

Closer to home, the Kargil conflict of 1999 demonstrated a similar dynamic. Pakistan's incursion into Indian territory was militarily unsustainable, but Islamabad sought to leverage asymmetric risk by internationalising the conflict and threatening escalation. India's calibrated response — limited military action combined with diplomatic pressure — was designed to manage risk while preserving credibility. The eventual withdrawal of Pakistani forces was not simply a product of battlefield losses, but of the recognition that the risks of escalation, including the nuclear option, were intolerable. That shaped the outcome: India won.

The Gulf War of 1990-91 also illustrates the paradox of coercion. Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait was met with overwhelming American military power, but the coalition's success lay in using force to create a bargaining environment where Iraq's risks mounted daily. The destruction of infrastructure, the isolation of Iraq diplomatically, and the threat of further escalation created a situation in which Saddam's position became untenable. Yet even then, that war ended with Saddam still in power, a reminder that coercion rarely produces total capitulation. The absence of a credible exit strategy left

the conflict unresolved, sowing the seeds for future confrontation a decade later.

These examples highlight the enduring relevance of Schelling's insight. Coercion is not a mechanical process of applying force until the adversary breaks. It is a psychological and political process of shaping perceptions of risk, creating incentives for compromise, and managing the pathways to de-escalation. When punishment is pursued without attention to these dynamics, it produces resistance, escalation, and unintended consequences.

The Strait of Hormuz thus stands as a symbol of the paradox of coercion. It is a narrow waterway, but in strategic terms it is vast — a "hostage" whose fate shapes the calculations of nations far beyond the immediate conflict. It is not a mere shipping lane, but the embodiment of shared risk, a reminder that in the strategy of conflict, the manipulation of danger is often more decisive than the application of force.

For policymakers, the lesson is sobering. Military superiority does not guarantee compliance. Punishment without pathways to compromise creates bargaining environments where adversaries exploit risk to their advantage. The challenge is to integrate force into a strategy that recognises the psychology of risk, the importance of dignity, and the necessity of credible exits. Without this, coercion becomes a trap, locking adversaries into cycles of escalation that neither can afford to sustain.

In this case, both Iran and the United States must recognise that the manipulation of risk is the essence of the contest. Severe bombing may demonstrate power and resolve, but without a credible off-ramp, it only increases the value of the other side's capacity to cripple the world economy. The Strait of Hormuz will remain a lever of asymmetric power, and Iran will continue to exploit it until Washington offers a pathway to compromise that preserves dignity on both sides. Schelling's insight, six decades old, remains the key to understanding why mere coercion fails, and why shared risk is the true currency of bargaining in international conflict.

The writer is a fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram and chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs

## GS 2: INDIAN POLITY

### THE HINDU PAGE : 1

# SC rejects plea against caste count in census

It is not within the top court's domain to decide if caste enumeration should necessarily be part of Census 2027, says CJI; until 2011, the Census included only Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**  
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday said there was nothing wrong in the government of the day ascertaining caste as part of the nationwide Census exercise.

"Any government of the day must know how many people are backward and how many need welfare. This is a matter of policy," Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, said.

The top court was responding to a plea filed by petitioner-in-person Sudhakar Gummula that caste enumeration should not be made part of Census 2027.

#### Misuse of data

"There are endless possibilities of politicians and corporate entities misusing

Any government of the day must know how many people are backward and how many need welfare. This is a matter of policy.

**SURYA KANT**  
Chief Justice of India



the caste data. There is no justification for gathering such a large tract of data on caste," Mr. Gummula submitted.

The Chief Justice said it was not within the court's domain to decide whether a caste enumeration should necessarily be a part of Census 2027 or not.

"This issue exclusively comes within the policy domain," the CJI said before the court dismissed the petition.

The Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs had de-

ecided to include caste enumeration in Census 2027 at a meeting held in April 2025.

Since then, caste enumeration has emerged as a major feature of the Census.

#### Two phases

Until the 2011 Census, the exercise had included the systematic enumeration of only Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

The government had said on the floor of Parliament about the incorpora-

tion of the caste enumeration in the second phase of Census 2027.

The first phase involved the collection of the House Listing Operation (HLO) information regarding housing conditions, assets, amenities and so on of each household.

#### 'Integration instrument'

The second phase, Population Enumeration, would involve the collection of demographic, socio-economic, cultural and other details.

Former Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar had said that "thoughtfully collected caste data would be an instrument of integration, like an MRI of the body".

The last comprehensive nationwide caste Census was conducted in colonial India in 1931.