

EDITORIAL HIGHLIGHTS

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GS 3: DEFENCE

THE HINDU PAGE: 04

UAE in talks with India to purchase BrahMos missiles, Akashteer air-defence units

Reuters

NEW DELHI

The Indian government is in talks with the United Arab Emirates to sell some of its flagship defence systems, including the supersonic cruise missile BrahMos, four Indian sources said, as the Gulf nation steps up arms procurement following the war in West Asia.

The discussions include the potential sale of India's air defence system Akashteer, sources told Reuters. "The UAE has shown interest for a number of our weapon systems, including BrahMos and Akashteer. The talks between India and UAE are at initial stages and are progressing fast," said another source.

BrahMos, jointly developed by India and Russia, is among the world's fastest cruise missiles while Akashteer is a fully automated air-defence system developed by the state-run



BrahMos, jointly developed by India and Russia, is among the world's fastest cruise missiles. FILE PHOTO

Bharat Electronics Ltd. and the Indian Army.

The UAE is considering buying defence equipment from India and other sources after the Gulf nation was heavily attacked by Iran during the conflict in West Asia, and as it enhances its ability to respond to emerging threats. It also needs to protect the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial conduit for its energy exports.

"A diversified supplier base gives the UAE more strategic autonomy, and

closer ties with India have the added benefit of not antagonising the U.S. as the countries remain allies," said Pearl Pandya, South Asia senior analyst at *Armed Conflict Location and Event Data*, a conflict monitoring group.

Before clinching any BrahMos sale to the UAE, India would require Russia's approval, as the 290-km-range missile is jointly developed. One source said this is unlikely to pose a hurdle given Moscow's close ties with Abu Dhabi.

ASI transfers Rakhigarhi skeletons to AnSI for a scientific investigation

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NEW DELHI

Human skeletal remains excavated from the archaeological site of Rakhigarhi in Haryana have been formally handed over by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to the Anthropological Survey of India (AnSI), a national research institute under the Union Culture Ministry, for a detailed scientific investigation.

The transfer, carried out under a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two institutions, is expected to significantly advance multidisciplinary research into one of the most important urban centres of the Indus-Saraswati Civilisation, B.V. Sharma, Director of AnSI, said.

Rakhigarhi, spread across approximately 550 hectares in Haryana, is widely recognised as the largest known settlement



Ancient remains: The skeleton of a woman, excavated in a trench on Mound 7 at Rakhigarhi in Haryana, in April 2022. FILE PHOTO

of the Harappan Civilisation. Archaeological excavations have revealed evidence of continuous habitation, from the Early Harappan to the Mature Harappan periods.

Mound 7 at the excavation site has been identified as a burial plot where 56 skeletons were recovered, including that of a woman, roughly 4,600 years old, which created a buzz in the fields of history, anthropology, genomics, and even linguistics.

DNA analysis of the skeleton revealed that the Rakhigarhi woman did not possess the steppe pastoral gene, fanning the debate on Aryan migration to India. The word "Aryan" has been interchangeably used for the steppe pastoralists, though to avoid racial connotations, many scholars now prefer to use the term Indo-Aryan.

Three complete human skeletons among those recovered from Mound 7, along with skeletal frag-

ments recovered from other burials, have now been transferred to the AnSI's ancient human skeletal repository and laboratory in Kolkata for a detailed examination. The remaining skeletal materials obtained at these sites are also expected to be transferred in a few days, the Culture Ministry said in a statement on Monday.

Researchers believe the remains present a rare opportunity to apply modern scientific techniques, including ancient DNA (aDNA) analysis, stable isotope studies, osteological assessments, palaeopathological investigations, and environmental reconstruction, the statement added.

The research will be conducted in collaboration with leading scientific institutions, including the Birbal Sahni Institute of Palaeosciences, University College London, and the Banaras Hindu University.

GS 2 & 3: POLITY & INTERNAL SECURITY

THE HINDU PAGE: 08

The challenge of India's digital sovereignty

In the modern world, digital infrastructure is the track on which commerce, government, and national security run. Seen in this context, recent reports of Indian closed-circuit television (CCTV) networks being compromised by hostile entities to gain access to information on India's strategic defence assets (April 2026), along with an incident in July 2025, in which Nayara Energy was abruptly denied access to its corporate email, collaboration tools, and cloud-stored data, raise serious concerns about the future of India's digital and technological sovereignty. While the CCTV security breach was attributed to the use of the Chinese software platform EseeCloud in the CCTV equipment, the Nayara episode was a result of Microsoft Corporation's unilateral enforcement of European Union (EU) sanctions against Nayara Energy due to the stake held in it by the Russian energy giant Rosneft.

These incidents have exposed an uncomfortable reality: critical Indian digital infrastructures such as authentication systems, productivity suites, and cloud platforms operate on technology platforms owned and operated by foreign technology giants. Even when data is physically stored in India, under certain existing global data governance regimes, foreign cloud technology companies can be compelled to provide data within their possession to their home governments. As a result, effective control over digital infrastructure shifts away from Indian entities to overseas corporations and foreign governments.

Foreign control, national risk

The major implication is that the functioning of Indian businesses and critical government services built on foreign technology platforms becomes vulnerable to decisions made by external sovereigns. Directives issued by external sovereigns to deny access to critical digital technology to Indian entities could suspend government operations, collapse trade and commerce, halt manufacturing, and weaken defence capabilities.

For instance, since contemporary warfare is software-defined, the intelligence embedded in fighter aircraft, missile systems, and advanced radar installations resides not in hardware but in code that remains under the control of manufacturers answerable to foreign governments. In conflict scenarios, these manufacturers could possibly degrade targeting accuracy, reduce operational range, or worse, redirect battlefield intelligence to adversaries due to instructions from external sovereigns, all through software configuration changes. A case in point is the 1999 Kargil conflict, during which



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India faced limitations on access to precise GPS support at a moment when navigation and targeting in mountainous terrain were operationally decisive.

India's unique situation

The vulnerability and the risks of dependence on foreign digital infrastructure are being recognised globally. France plans to shift government departments from Microsoft Teams and Zoom to a sovereign video-conferencing platform by 2027. The Netherlands, Denmark, and several German states are exploring domestic alternatives to critical United States software and cloud services such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, and Teams. The EU is seeking to reduce its dependence on American technology through independent European cloud and IT infrastructure, while Türkiye is lessening its reliance on foreign technologies.

However, unlike other nations, India's situation is uniquely precarious when contextualised within the framework of Power Transition Theory, which posits that when a rising power, desirous of maintaining strategic autonomy, approaches parity with an established hegemon, the latter invariably acts to constrain the former. History demonstrates that rising competitors are contained or co-opted. We already see it being played out on a much larger scale between the U.S. and China. With an accelerating growth trajectory, India has been inching towards this critical zone while facing a daunting task: building its economic fortune on a technology infrastructure independent of foreign influence.

The strategy to address this challenge must be multipronged. The denial of GPS access during the Kargil conflict spurred India to develop its own satellite navigation system. More recently, efforts to strengthen the domestic semiconductor ecosystem and migrate the email systems of some central government ministries to the homegrown Zoho platform reflect a growing commitment to digital and technological sovereignty. India's success in building indigenous payments infrastructure through UPI and RuPay has shown that vulnerabilities arising from foreign-controlled systems can be overcome. This model can be extended to cloud infrastructure, e-commerce platforms, authentication systems, and defence technologies.

To de-risk dependence on foreign defence technologies, India could emulate aspects of the U.S.'s defence production and procurement model. While India has long recognised the importance of self-reliance in defence manufacturing, its heavy reliance on the public sector has not delivered the desired results. The absence of an indigenous modern fighter aircraft

despite the programme having begun in the 1980s is a stark reminder of this shortcoming. In contrast, American defence platforms are largely developed by private corporations, with the government providing research funding and assured procurement. This creates a virtuous cycle in which companies develop cutting-edge capabilities while remaining aligned with national strategic interests. India has recently begun moving in this direction by inviting private-sector participation in the development of the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft under a competitive framework.

Another way to safeguard digital sovereignty is to develop critical technologies and digital infrastructure in partnership with other countries. This ensures mutual dependence, reducing the risk of unilateral actions that could undermine India's strategic interests. The BrahMos missile programme, jointly developed by India and Russia, is a notable example. A key advantage of this approach is that it enables India to build technological capabilities without risking international isolation, unlike China which allowed only indigenous companies to develop critical technologies. Seen in this context, two recent developments are encouraging. The first is the commencement of commercial production at Micron Technology's semiconductor Assembly, Test, Marking and Packaging (ATMP) facility in Sanand, Gujarat, established through India-U.S. technology cooperation. The second is India's decision to join Pax Silica, the U.S.-led initiative on AI and supply-chain security aimed at reducing dependence on Chinese technology and strengthening trusted technology partnerships.

Close the R&D gap

Above all, India must urgently raise its research and development (R&D) spending to levels comparable with global leaders. India's gross expenditure on R&D averaged just 0.74% of GDP between 2000 and 2020 against a global average of 2.07%. This persistent R&D spending deficit raises serious concerns about India's future technological and digital sovereignty. For a country of India's demographic scale and economic ambitions, seeking to approach parity with established powers, the question is not whether it can afford comprehensive technological sovereignty, but whether it can afford to forgo it. The extent to which India succeeds in mitigating the risks to its technological sovereignty will determine its economic competitiveness and strategic autonomy in an increasingly fragmented international order.

The views expressed are personal

Digital sovereignty is essential for India's technological security and strategic autonomy

GS 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THE HINDU PAGE: 11

The world that China desires and is shaping

The sheer destructiveness of American foreign policy under United States President Donald Trump is obscuring a quiet but consequential shift in global politics. Mr. Trump's Liberation Day tariffs, the disastrous war against Iran, and systematic alienation of allies and partners have dominated headlines and consumed diplomatic bandwidth. And rightly so. The U.S., architect of the post-war international order, is now taking a machete to the very frameworks it built. But the chaos emanating from Washington is drawing attention away from what China is doing with the space this creates.

The Chinese alternative

Last week, Beijing released a white paper on global governance, which offers a systematic articulation of how it is reshaping the world order. As expected, the paper presents China as a defender of the international system, warning that humanity must not be allowed to return to "the law of the jungle". Beijing argues that it has paid its United Nations dues ahead of schedule in 2025; it has backed the restoration of the WTO's Appellate Body; and its four global initiatives are a demonstration of its responsibility as a great power. This is not, however, the full picture. A close reading of China's diplomacy shows that it is not simply defending the post-war order. Rather, it is selectively revising it, largely preserving the institutional scaffolding while quietly rewriting the normative substance that gives it meaning.

Understanding this requires disaggregating the international order into two dimensions: the institutional and the normative. The institutional order comprises the UN system, the Bretton Woods institutions, and the multilateral architecture built in the years following the Second World War. The normative order encompasses the principles that animate these institutions, from Westphalian norms of sovereignty and non-interference to liberal norms



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of human rights, democratic governance, free markets, and the rule of law. On the institutional front, Beijing is deeply invested. It is the second-largest contributor to the UN budget, having raised its share of the UN regular budget from under 1% in 2000 to over 20% in 2025, a proactive participant in WTO reform, and a builder of complementary institutions such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the New Development Bank, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. These are not designed to replace the existing system but to expand China's authority within it while creating parallel platforms that advance its agenda. This is institutional revisionism, not revolution.

Normative ambitions

The real action, however, is in the normative domain, where China's ambitions are far more transformative. Beijing's four global initiatives – on development, security, civilisation, and governance – collectively represent a sustained campaign of norm entrepreneurship. Individually, each sounds benign. The Global Development Initiative links itself to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) calls for respecting civilisational diversity. The Global Security Initiative (GSI) emphasises sovereignty and non-interference. And the Global Governance Initiative explicitly says that reform "does not mean to overturn the existing international order".

But look closer. The GSI's emphasis on taking "legitimate security concerns of all countries seriously" has been operationalised to dilute Ukraine's sovereign right to choose its own alliances, a position that conveniently serves Beijing's broader interest in weakening the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. The GCI's call for diverse interpretations of universal values is, in practice, an effort to recast human rights as culturally contingent rather than universal,

shielding authoritarian governance from scrutiny. And China's redefinition of democracy in explicitly outcome-based terms, where legitimacy derives from material delivery rather than political participation, institutional independence, or accountability, represents a fundamental departure from liberal norms.

Meanwhile, China's own behaviour reveals the limits of its professed commitment even to the Westphalian norms it champions. In the South China Sea, it rejected the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling as "null and void". Along its borders with India and Bhutan, periodic standoffs persist. The Belt and Road Initiative, while framed as development cooperation, has often blurred the line between external partnership and internal influence in recipient states.

A different world

Seen in this light, what emerges is a picture not of a revolutionary power seeking to torch the existing system, but of a sophisticated selective revisionist – one that preserves the institutional architecture it finds useful while systematically hollowing out the normative foundations to align with its objectives. Beijing supports sovereignty when it suits its interests and dilutes it when it does not. It endorses multilateralism in trade while practising selective openness and securitisation at home.

This matters enormously at a moment when reckless American policies appear to be making Beijing's revisionism seem palatable to many. The risk is not that the institutional order collapses. Both Washington and Beijing, for different reasons, remain invested in its survival. The risk is that the principles animating that order are gradually redefined in a way that undermines the sovereign equality of states, weakens civil society and individual rights, and erodes the rule of law. This is a future that does not align with India's strategic interests.

China's recent white paper outlines a transformation of the norms beneath the international order

GS 2: POLITY
INDIAN EXPRESS PAGE: 09

• LAW

Right to walk on footpaths: Behind SC order, surge in pedestrian deaths

Dheeraj Mishra
New Delhi, June 22

THE SUPREME Court Friday recognised walking on demarcated footpaths as a fundamental right that shall override the privilege of a motor vehicle. The court also urged the government to introduce a law to bring this right into effect, which would be crucial to holding officials and departments accountable for addressing violations of pedestrian rights.

The genesis of the case lies in the death of a five-year-old boy, who was struck by a tanker while walking to school with his father.

Pedestrians are among the most vulnerable road users in India. The little space available to them is frequently encroached upon by two-wheelers or shops. Pedestrian deaths have more than doubled in 10 years and now account for the second highest road death share after two-wheeler fatalities.

An analysis by *The Indian Express* shows that while total road fatalities increased by 21.24% between 2015 and 2024, pedestrian deaths surged by nearly 163%, or 2.63 times. The number of pedestrians killed in road accidents rose from 13,894 in 2015 to 36,526 in 2024. Their share in total road fatalities also more than doubled, from 9.5% to 20.61% during the period. Pedestrian fatalities continued to rise even during the Covid-19 pandemic years (see table).

• INDIA'S DEADLY ROADS



Year	Total road deaths	Pedestrian deaths	Share (%)
2015	1,46,133	13,894	9.5
2016	15,0,785	15,746	10.5
2017	1,47,913	20,457	13.8
2018	1,51,417	22,656	15
2019	1,51,113	25,858	17.1
2020	1,31,714	23,483	17.8
2021	1,53,972	29,124	18.9
2022	1,68,491	32,825	19.48
2023	1,72,890	35,221	20.37
2024	1,77,175	36,526	20.61

SOURCE: ROAD ACCIDENT IN INDIA, MORTH NOTE: 2020 AND 2021 ARE COVID-19 YEARS

Right to walk

In its judgment, the SC traced the issue back to the most basic human activity — walking. The court highlighted the irony that while walking predates wheeled transport by millennia, road infrastructure today is overwhelmingly designed for vehicles.

It observed that the Motor Vehicles Act has, in many ways, undermined the rights of pedestrians.

The court went on to say that the absence of safe and comfortable footpaths, and their subjugation to motor transport, has been a "civilisational problem".

Piyush Tiwari, founder and CEO, SaveLIFE Foundation, said that the court has reversed the hierarchy over motorised vehicles, since pedestrians account for one in five road deaths in India. "For municipal bodies and road-owning agencies, a safe, unobstructed footpath is no longer discretionary; it is a constitutional duty wherever a road exists," he said.

Motor Vehicles Act

The court came down heavily on the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988, an exhaustive legislation governing the vehicles and rules of the road. The court said that the law is not for protecting the right to walk on footpaths and only lays down infrastructure for vehicles, which is its mainstay.

"The Motor Vehicles Act is built upon 'vehicle' as the subject of the legislation, while 'human' interests are incidental, which a motor vehicle must avoid violating — that's all, and no further," said the court.

In 2017, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways notified the Motor Vehicles (Driving) Regulations, which says that drivers should take special precautions to ensure safety of vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists, children, etc.

The court, however, said that these regulations are just guiding principles and they neither recognise the fundamental right to walk on demarcated footpaths nor prioritise the right to footpath over a motorised road.

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PALLAV SHISHODIA

It's time to reimagine the anti-defection law

THE SUPPORT of a majority of legislators in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha is needed to form a stable government. This stability has often been missing due to the defections by "aaya Rams, gaya Rams" toppling elected governments. To address this, in 1985, the Tenth Schedule was added by way of the 52nd Amendment to the Constitution "for outlawing defection" by disqualifying any elected members who defect from or defy the whip of the political party to which they belong, except in the case of a split or merger. The underlying premise of this Schedule is that the elected representatives cannot be trusted with political morality, loyalty to their own party, and independent judgment beyond party lines.

The Tenth Schedule's validity was challenged in the *Kihoto Hollohan* case as violative of the fundamental rights to freedom of speech and conscience, and to dissent and to dissociate from the party line. And that it suppressed democratic debate, dialogue, and disagreements. The challenge was negated by a Constitution Bench of the Supreme Court in favour of party discipline to check the unprincipled and unethical flight of members of the House. Then followed several judicial decisions with nuanced interpretations of defection, the role of the Speaker, and the relationship between a political party and its

The ruling parties, at whatever level, rule with the iron fist of a whip on their members and the parties in opposition remain vulnerable to poaching, despite the seemingly high threshold for split and merger

legislative wing. By the 91st Amendment in 2003, the exemption from disqualification in the case of a split was removed, leaving only the possibility of a merger requiring the agreement of two-thirds of the members of the legislative party.

The shifting loyalties and fluidity of our politics make our elected representatives cross over to political opponents time and again, despite the Tenth Schedule. The force of the original electoral verdict has often been dismantled by split-and-merger. Rarely is the elected representative who defects disqualified, particularly when the defection is with the blessing of the ruling party. In very few cases, the resignation of elected representatives is followed by their re-election under the banner of a new party.

In the ongoing crisis of the TMC, the defection, described as a split, is followed by a merger with a nondescript NCPI to save the remaining tenure of the rebel MPs. A major faction of Shiv Sena (UBT) is on the same path. In all probability, the original TMC/Shiv Sena (UBT) leadership will challenge this as defection to seek the disqualification of rebel MPs. The status quo pending the challenge will suit everyone.

Elected representatives in mature democracies, like the UK, often take a political position different from their political party. In

the US, Republicans vote openly, and at times with prior announcement, with Democrats, or vice versa. We fear this as a charter for indiscipline and horse-trading to defeat or topple the original mandate in a given election.

Some fundamental questions arise about the very desirability of the Tenth Schedule. Isn't there a stifling of intra-party democracy in all the political parties because of the structure it created? Why can't an elected representative be trusted even for five years and, if she commits defection, be answerable only to her own constituency?

It would be facile to say that the Tenth Schedule has made defections, toppling of elected governments and horse-trading much more difficult, expensive or infrequent. The ruling parties, at whatever level, rule with the iron fist of a whip on their members and the opposition parties remain vulnerable to poaching, despite the seemingly high threshold for split and merger. The high-command culture with the virtual disappearance of inner-party democracy is among the worst, if unintended, consequences of the Tenth Schedule. A re-appraisal is needed after four decades of this messy anti-defection law. It is time to think of its complete abolition and re-imagine our party politics on a more mature platform of political accountability.

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