

## ● POLITY

## ● ECONOMICS

## ● TECHNOLOGY

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## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

## Why delay in uploading turnout data, SC asks EC

**CONTEXT:** The Supreme Court has questioned the Election Commission of India (EC) on the delay in uploading authenticated, booth-wise voter turnout data for the Lok Sabha elections, following allegations from the Association for Democratic Reforms

### Supreme Court Questions Election Commission on Turnout Data Delay

- **Supreme Court Inquiry:**
  - The Supreme Court questioned the Election Commission (EC) on the delay in uploading authenticated, booth-wise voter turnout data for the Lok Sabha elections.
  - Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud, heading a three-judge Bench, asked why the data is not uploaded immediately after polling is completed.
- **NGO Allegations:**
  - The Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR), represented by advocates Prashant Bhushan, Neha Rathi, and Cheryl D'Souza, filed an application alleging inordinate delays in publishing voter turnout data for the first two phases of polling.
  - ADR noted an unusually sharp spike in figures from the initial voter turnout percentages released by the EC, creating doubts about data authenticity.
- **Legal Requirements:**
  - Rule 49S and Rule 56C(2) of the Conduct of Election Rules, 1961 require the Presiding Officer to prepare an account of votes recorded in Form 17C (Part I) format.
  - The Supreme Court's inquiry was based on the failure to publish this data promptly.
- **EC's Defense:**
  - Senior advocate Maninder Singh, representing the EC, claimed the application was a deliberate attempt to disturb the general election.
  - Singh stated that a Supreme Court judgment on April 26 had discussed every aspect, including Form 17C, thoroughly.
- **Sharp Increase in Turnout Data:**
  - The voter turnout data for the first two phases of the Lok Sabha elections were published by the EC on April 30, 11 days after the first phase of polling on April 19 and four days after the second phase on April 26.
  - The data showed a sharp increase of about 5-6% from the initial percentages announced by the EC on the polling day.
- **Public Concerns:**
  - Initially, on April 19, the EC had reported a tentative voter

turnout figure of over 60% as of 7 p.m. for the first phase across 21 States/Union Territories.

- After the second phase on April 26, the turnout was reported at 60.96%.
- The delay in releasing final voter turnout data, coupled with the unusually high revision in the EC's April 30 press note and the absence of disaggregated constituency and polling station figures, raised public suspicion about the data's correctness and potential tampering with electronic voting machines (EVMs).
- **Next Steps:**
  - Mr. Bhushan countered that the EVM case judgement had not addressed the Form 17C issue.
  - The court listed the case for further hearing on May 24.

**CONCLUSION:** The Supreme Court's scrutiny of the Election Commission's delay in publishing voter turnout data highlights serious concerns about electoral transparency. The court's intervention aims to address these issues and restore public confidence in the election process, with further hearings scheduled to ensure accountability and adherence to legal requirements.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

## Spain blocks arms ship from Chennai to Israel

**CONTEXT:** Spain has blocked a Denmark-flagged ship carrying arms from Chennai to Israel from docking at its ports, citing concerns over rising civilian casualties in Gaza and aligning with its policy to halt arms shipments to conflict zones.

**Refusal of Port Entry:**

- Spain has refused entry to a ship carrying arms from Chennai to Israel, announced by Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares.
- The Denmark-flagged cargo ship, Marianne Danica, sailed from Chennai on April 8 and was headed to the port of Haifa in Israel.

**Critical Stand:**

- Spain has been highly critical of the rising civilian casualties due to the Israeli offensive in Gaza.
- Along with Belgium, Spain has suspended arms export licenses to Tel Aviv.

**Spanish Foreign Ministry's Policy:**

- Albares stated, "This will be a consistent policy with any ship carrying arms to Israel that wants to call at Spanish ports."
- The Foreign Ministry will reject such stopovers to promote peace in the Middle East, not more weapons.

**Details of the Ship:**

- The Marianne Danica was carrying 27 tonnes of explosives, according to local reports.

**Indian Ministry of External Affairs:**

- Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal mentioned they have seen the report and will provide more information soon.

**Related Incidents:**

- The incident occurs amid a dispute between Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's party and coalition partners over another ship, Borkum, alleged to be carrying arms for Israel but reportedly meant for the Czech Republic.

**Belgium's Stance:**

- Belgium has also suspended two arms export licences to Israel.

**CONCLUSION:** Spain's refusal to allow the arms-laden ship to dock underscores its commitment to reducing violence in the Middle East, emphasizing peace over further militarization.

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

## First aid shipment driven across a new pier into the Gaza Strip, says U.S. military

**CONTEXT:** The first trucks carrying essential aid for Gaza crossed into the besieged enclave via a newly built U.S. pier, amid ongoing Israeli restrictions and intense fighting in Rafah. This operation aims to increase aid deliveries but faces significant challenges due to militant threats, logistical issues, and severe fuel shortages.

**Aid Delivery to Gaza****Initial Delivery:**

- Trucks carrying essential aid for the Gaza Strip crossed a newly built U.S. pier for the first time on Friday.
- Israeli restrictions on border crossings and heavy fighting have hindered the delivery of food and other supplies.

**Operation Scale:**

- The shipment marks the beginning of an operation that could scale up to 150 truckloads a day.
- This occurs as Israel continues its seven-month offensive against Hamas in the southern city of Rafah.

**Limitations of the Floating Pier Project:**

- The U.S. and aid groups caution that the floating pier project cannot replace land deliveries.
- Land deliveries are needed to bring in all the food, water, and fuel required in Gaza.
- Prior to the war, more than 500 truckloads entered Gaza daily.

**Challenges and Risks:**

- The operation faces risks from potential militant attacks, logistical issues, and a severe fuel shortage for the trucks.
- The Israeli blockade of Gaza contributes to the growing fuel shortage.

**Aid Agencies' Warnings:**

- Aid agencies report running out of food and fuel in southern Gaza.
- The U.S. Agency for International Development and the World Food Program indicate that famine has already taken hold in northern Gaza.

**CONCLUSION:** The arrival of first aid hopefully marks a new beginning in Gaza.

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

## Russian forces pressing ahead with Kharkiv attack

**CONTEXT:** Despite President Putin's claim of no intention to occupy Kharkiv, fighting intensifies in northeastern Ukraine with Russia making progress near Lukyantsi and Ukraine defending against encirclement of Vovchansk.

**Russia-Ukraine War Update (May 17, 2024)**

- Northeastern Offensive
  - Russia continues offensive in northeastern Ukraine.
  - Fighting concentrated around Kharkiv region.
- Kharkiv City
  - President Putin claims no plan to occupy Kharkiv at this moment.
  - City is about 40 km from the front lines.
- Justification for Offensive (Russia)
  - Retaliation for Ukrainian shelling of Russian border regions.
  - Creation of a "security zone" for Russia.
- Ukrainian Resistance
  - Ukrainian forces defending against encirclement of Vovchansk.
  - Vovchansk is nearly deserted due to the conflict.
- Russian Advancements
  - Russia gaining ground near Lukyantsi, a village west of Kharkiv.
  - Kyiv retreated from Lukyantsi earlier this week due to heavy fire.

**Conclusion:** Russia is further consolidating its gains and pressing ahead with this advance in to Kharkiv.

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## EDITORIAL

## The hyperpoliticisation of Indian higher education

Indian higher education has always been political. Politicians started colleges and universities to advance their careers and build support. State and central government authorities sometimes placed new post secondary institutions in politically advantageous locations. Many of them were established to cater to the demands of the electorate based on various socio-cultural factors as well. The naming and renaming of universities, especially by State governments, are often influenced by politics. Academic appointments or promotions were sometimes made for reasons other than the quality of the professor, vice-chancellor or principal. And, especially in many undergraduate colleges, the norms of academic freedom were not always firmly followed — and teachers were careful in what they taught or wrote.

Yet, overall, Indian higher education, especially in the universities, adhered to international norms of academic freedom. Generally, professors were free to teach without fear of being disciplined or fired for their views. They were able to do research and to publish their work freely, and to speak and write in public forums and the media. The universities, while often mired in bureaucracy, occasionally faced allegations of political interference in the recruitment of faculty members. However, they enjoyed relative autonomy when it came to the promotion of existing faculty.

## EDITORIAL

## Stay invested: On Chabahar and India-Iran ties

The Chabahar port is critical for India's connectivity plans. First, it offers an alternative route to Afghanistan and Central Asia by bypassing Pakistan, allowing better trade with Central Asia. And, Chabahar is expected to be connected to the International North-South Transport Corridor (NSTC), bringing India closer to Europe through Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia. An alternative to the Suez route, a fully operational NSTC would reduce the time and money spent on intercontinental trade. The port, roughly 200 km from Pakistan's Gwadar, where China is developing a port as part of its BRI, would also help India expand its geopolitical influence in Central Asia. But the U.S. seems to have taken a narrow view of the project over its hostility with Iran. America's interests in the region have also changed. In 2018, when U.S. forces were backing the Islamic Republic government in Afghanistan, it gave a sanctions waiver to India as Kabul also stood to benefit from the port project. Today, U.S. troops are out of Afghanistan, the Taliban has replaced the Islamic Republic, and the U.S.'s focus is on containing Iran. India, in the past, had taken U-turns in its Iran engagement depending on the policy changes in Washington DC. It should not do that any more. It should stay invested in Chabahar and seek to improve its trade and connectivity projects with Central Asia, which is essential for India's continued rise.

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## EDITORIAL

## After the civil war, the stifling impasse in Sri Lanka

A decade-and-a-half cannot heal the deep wounds from a protracted civil war. Tens of thousands of people perished across Sri Lanka's north and east even as it witnessed enormous destruction. Concerns of truth, accountability and justice linger, while questions of past and future political choices loom large. In this context, the emergence of a new generation should at the very least begin to change the social, economic, and political landscape of a war-torn region. However, economic reconstruction has hardly progressed, with subsequent crises setting back development further. Politics remains polarised and fraught without a political settlement. The social aspirations of the Tamil middle class remain wedded to somehow joining the diaspora, even as the working people living in the island's north and east remain destitute with few options.

## EDITORIAL

## Dangers of divisiveness: On the electoral rhetoric, from the top level

With polling over in 379 of the 543 constituencies after the fourth phase in the general election, the electoral campaigns of parties have reached closer to the end point. Deep into the campaign calendar, though, the disconnect between the concerns of the electorate and campaign rhetoric — especially that of BJP lynchpin and Prime Minister Narendra Modi — remains, unfortunately, intact. While job creation, inflation and development have been emphasised by voters as primary issues, Mr. Modi refuses to be driven by the idea of contesting mainly on his government's record over 10 years of rule and focusing on measures to ameliorate the main concerns. Instead, he seeks to do what he has always revelled in — attacking the Opposition with truths, half-truths, and non sequiturs. Mr. Modi's recourse to this is also helped by the shrill noise of television and social media being a useful tool to distract from concerns with the rhetoric that he has used, be it hate speech against Muslims or dog whistles to rev up support from Hindutva adherents. Other parties, including the Congress and its public face, Rahul Gandhi, are also — even if not to the same extent — guilty of raking up identity issues such as those related to caste politics. But Mr. Modi and some of his colleagues have taken vituperation as a campaigning device to new levels. In his rally in Jaunpur, he accused the Opposition in Uttar Pradesh, the SP and the Congress, of silence when their southern allies used "absurd and abusive language" for the people of U.P. and "sanatana dharma".



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