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After clampdown in India, return of Bangladeshis up

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The voluntary return of undocumented Bangladeshis has increased since India began a crackdown on illegal foreigners in December 2024, following political changes in Bangladesh. From January to July 2024, 337 undocumented Bangladeshis were apprehended while leaving India, whereas from August 2024 to March 21, 2025, the number rose to 906, according to the Union Home Ministry.

Letter to States

India has intensified its crackdown on undocumented Bangladeshis since December 2024, leading to a rise in voluntary returns. In the past three months alone, 411 exits have been recorded. The Home Ministry directed states to identify and deport illegal migrants, prompting drives in Delhi, Rajasthan, Telangana, and Odisha.

Over the past 13 months, 2,355 undocumented Bangladeshis were caught entering India, along with 153 foreigners, including Myanmar nationals. Additionally, 533 Indians were apprehended at the Bangladesh border—237 entering and 296 exiting. The crackdown followed political changes in Bangladesh after Sheikh Hasina's ouster in August 2024.

BSF officials use local intelligence, dialects, and phone records to verify identities and often push back migrants in coordination with Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) to avoid lengthy legal cases. Since the Home Ministry's directive, voluntary departures have increased. Authorities have also cancelled around 300 fraudulent Aadhaar cards and other identity documents used by Bangladeshis in the past year.

Govt. rejects U.S. media report claiming HAL supplied sensitive tech to Russia

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The External Affairs Ministry dismissed a U.S. media report alleging that HAL supplied British-sourced components to Russia as "factually incorrect and misleading." The report by The New York Times claimed that British firm Techtest sent critical parts to HAL, which then forwarded them to Russia's Rosoboronexport. Despite Western sanctions on Russia following the Ukraine war, India has maintained defense trade with Moscow due to its reliance on Russian military hardware. The Ministry asserted that HAL adhered to all international trade regulations and end-user commitments, emphasizing India's

MEA defends HAL

NYT report said British aerospace firm H. R. Smith Group sent critical components to HAL, which in turn sent them to Russia

■ The External Affairs Ministry said the report "has tried to frame issues and distort facts to suit a political narrative"

■ HAL has "scrupulously followed all its international obligations" on strategic trade controls and end-user commitments, the Ministry said

■ It also noted that India's robust legal and regulatory framework on strategic trade continues to guide overseas commercial ventures by its companies



strong legal framework governing strategic trade.

The New York Times reported that British company Techtest, part of H.R. Smith Group, sold nearly \$2 million worth of restricted technology to HAL in 2023-24. While the report did not confirm whether these products reached Russia, it noted that HAL sent parts to Russia with matching identification codes shortly after receiving shipments from Techtest.

According to the report, Techtest made 118 shipments to HAL, including two on September 2, 2023, followed by HAL sending matching parts to Russia 19 days later. A similar transaction occurred on February 4, 2024, with HAL reportedly selling matching equipment to Rosoboronexport 18 days later. Since the Ukraine war, Western nations have imposed sanctions on Rosoboronexport.

Summer set to be warmer, but El Niño unlikely during next monsoon: IMD

GEOGRAPHY

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has ruled out the possibility of an El Niño during this year's southwest monsoon, predicting neutral conditions instead. El Niño, marked by the warming of the central equatorial Pacific, is often linked to reduced rainfall in India.

IMD Director-General M. Mohapatra cited climate forecasts, including international ones, to support this assessment. In 2023, an El Niño year, India saw a 6% monsoon deficit, while last year's neutral conditions led to an 8% surplus. Though neutral phases generally avoid significant warming, they have occasionally resulted in below-normal rainfall. The IMD will release its first monsoon forecast in April.

'Wait for April forecast'

IMD Director-General M. Mohapatra stated that the April forecast will provide a clearer picture of monsoon rainfall, considering regional and oceanic factors, particularly in the Indian Ocean. Before the monsoon, India is expected to experience above-normal summer temperatures. Typically, the country records 4-7 heatwave days from April to June, but parts of eastern India could see up to 10 this year. IMD predicts an above-normal number of heatwave days in north and east peninsular India, central and east India, and the northwest plains, with April 2025 seeing intense heat in east and central India.

Tourism Ministry not utilising funds: panel

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

A Parliamentary Standing Committee has raised serious concerns over the Union Tourism Ministry's chronic underutilization of funds, calling it a major obstacle to India's tourism growth.

In 2023-24, only 33.4% of the allocated ₹2,400 crore was used, and in 2024-25, just ₹396.82 crore of ₹2,479.62 crore was spent. The committee highlighted systemic inefficiencies and urged structural reforms. While the Ministry cited administrative bottlenecks, procedural delays, and coordination issues, the panel found these explanations inadequate, pointing to deeper operational weaknesses that need urgent resolution.

Digital initiatives

The Parliamentary Standing Committee, in its report on the Ministry of Tourism's 2025-26 Demand for Grants, recommended implementing an Integrated Digital Project Management System (IDPMS) to improve fund utilization and project tracking.

Modelled after Tamil Nadu's tourism data system, the IDPMS would manage the entire project lifecycle, from proposal submission to fund disbursement and utilization certification, with automatic alerts for pending actions. The system would feature real-time dashboards for transparency, accessible to Ministry officials and State tourism departments, ensuring better oversight of project status, fund usage, and procedural delays.

Incentives for States

The Parliamentary Standing Committee recommended developing a Tourism Implementation Rating System (TIRS) to assess and rank States based on their efficiency in executing tourism projects, timely documentation, and fund utilization. This performance-based framework aims to foster healthy competition among States and guide resource allocation. High-performing States would be incentivized with priority funding, relaxed procedural requirements, and annual tourism excellence awards to encourage better implementation and efficiency in tourism development.

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NITI Aayog to open portal on States' finances today

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman responding to concerns from opposition-ruled States about resource allocation, will launch a State finances website developed by NITI Aayog and NCAER on Tuesday.

The 'NITI NCAER States Economic Forum' portal will serve as a comprehensive repository of data on social, economic, and fiscal parameters, covering 30 years (1990-91 to 2022-23). It will feature four key components: State reports, a data repository, a fiscal and economic dashboard, and research and commentary, offering insights into State finances.

NITI Aayog's new portal will provide a comprehensive overview of the macro and fiscal landscape of 28 States, featuring State reports, a data repository with information across demography, economic structure, fiscal matters, health, and education, a fiscal and economic dashboard with graphical representations, and a research and commentary section on State finances and fiscal policy.

The portal aims to offer easily accessible, user-friendly data on macroeconomic, fiscal, demographic, and socio-economic trends. It will allow for benchmarking State data against national figures and promote informed debates and discussions among policymakers, researchers, and the public.

India-U.S. tri-service exercise from April 1 to 13

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The fourth edition of the India-U.S. tri-service Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise, Tiger Triumph, will take place from April 1 to 13. The exercise aims to enhance interoperability between Indian and U.S. forces in HADR operations and develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for a Combined Coordination Centre (CCC) to ensure effective coordination between the two countries' Joint Task Forces during exercises and crises. The Harbour Phase will be held in Visakhapatnam from April 1 to 7.

Foreign investors turn net sellers in Indian equities in 2024-25

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Foreign investors sold the most Indian equities in the financial year 2024-25, excluding 2022, when the outflow was primarily driven by the COVID-19 pandemic, according to data from NSDL. Foreign institutional investors sold ₹1,27,041 crore worth of Indian stocks, significantly lower than the ₹2,08,212 crore net investment in the previous fiscal year. Foreign interest in Indian markets has been declining since October 2024, with foreign investors being net sellers in 7 out of 12 months during fiscal 2025. However, the pace of selling slowed in the final three months, with March 2025 seeing the smallest outflow of ₹3,973 crore. Analysts suggest several factors, including lower-than-expected earnings, currency depreciation, higher valuations, and more attractive U.S. bonds, as reasons behind the outflows. It's also important to note that there has been a general trend of outflows from most emerging economies during this period.

A long-term analysis shows that Foreign Portfolio Investors (FPIs) were net buyers of Indian equities in six out of the last 10 fiscal years, with sales increasing after 2019-20. This contrasts with the previous decade, where FPIs were net buyers in nine out of ten fiscal years.

In the past five years, FPIs were net sellers in three, with two of those years seeing record-high foreign investment in Indian equities. The 2020-21 fiscal year set a new record for foreign purchases, followed by a record sale in the next fiscal year, making the period from 2020-21 to 2024-25 more volatile than 2014-15 to 2018-19. Analysts suggest that both global and domestic investment trends will largely depend on the U.S. tariff announcements.

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Is India firmly set to manage U.S.' Russian crude oil sanctions?

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

U.S. President Donald Trump threatened Russia with sanctions on oil imports unless it agreed to cease actions in Ukraine. He also expressed similar views about Iran regarding its stance on the nuclear deal during an interview with NBC. While oil prices remain stable for now, these developments could have significant implications for global oil supply, including for India, which depends on imports for 88.1% of its oil needs.

Top supplier

India's oil imports from Russia declined by 14.5% sequentially in February 2024, falling to 1.43 million barrels per day, the lowest since January 2023. Russia's share in India's oil imports also dropped to 30%, down from an average of 38% in 2024. Imports from other major suppliers, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, also declined.

This shift could be significant if it continues, as India had previously increased its oil purchases from Russia following the Ukraine war, benefiting from discounts offered by Moscow amid Western sanctions. India's oil imports from Russia surged from 0.1 mb/d in 2021 to 1.9 mb/d in 2024, peaking at 2 mb/d in 2023. China became Russia's top oil export destination in 2024, followed by India, Turkey, and the European Union.

Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri emphasized India's decision to continue buying oil from Russia as part of its 'moral duty'.

Diversification strategy

India is the third-largest oil importer globally, with consumption expected to keep rising. Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri recently informed Parliament that India imports oil from 39 countries, with plans for more additions. According to Reuters, Iraq is India's second-largest oil supplier, followed by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Puri emphasized India's strategy of leveraging market consumption to diversify its oil sources and purchase from the cheapest options.

'All applicants are continuously vetted': U.S. govt. on visa revocation reports

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The U.S. State Department responded to reports that Indian citizens had received visa revocation notices for campus activism, stating that visa revocations are a routine procedure when information suggests a visa holder is no longer eligible. The Department did not confirm the specific reports or the number of revocations, citing privacy concerns. Some students, including Indians, have had their visas revoked or been detained for allegedly participating in pro-Palestine protests or having links to Hamas. The State Department emphasized that all U.S. visa holders undergo continuous security vetting, and visas are revoked when new information indicates ineligibility.

'Organised movement'

Marco Rubio, U.S. Secretary of State, commented on the potential visa consequences for students who protest or express views opposing U.S. foreign policy. He clarified that visas would not be revoked for minor complaints, like protesting against paper straws. However, if students engage in organized movements or disruptive actions on campuses, particularly if they are on a student visa, the U.S. has the right to deny their visa. Rubio emphasized that no one has an automatic right to a visa, noting that visa denials occur regularly for various reasons.



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NEP 2020 in the classroom, from policy to practice

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the urgent need for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), aiming for every child to achieve FLN by Class 2. According to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024, over 80% of rural schools have received government directives to implement FLN activities for Classes 1 to 3. Additionally, more than 75% of these schools reported that at least one teacher had undergone in-person FLN training. These findings reflect the government's efforts to promote FLN in schools.

There is an awareness

A study of 24 Class 2 classrooms across eight States revealed that teachers understand and support the importance of Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN), with the rationale for its significance communicated effectively. While most teachers approved of the new focus, the challenges and opportunities they face vary based on local contexts, such as classroom space and multi-grade settings. Teachers expressed that limited opportunities for discussing challenges during training hinder their ability to adapt and improve. Creating spaces for practical discussions and adaptation could help enhance the implementation of FLN practices.

Support for teachers

Post-training support for teachers is crucial but varies widely across States. Some teachers reported no support after training, while others had access to trainers or regular monitoring visits focused on compliance rather than teaching quality. In a few cases, district-level officials demonstrated classroom activities. However, teachers often struggle to fully implement the new methods and materials due to limited opportunities for practice and adaptation. Challenges such as the lack of storage space for teaching-learning materials (TLM) and concerns about material durability also hinder the effective use of TLM in classrooms, as they are typically demonstrated by teachers rather than used by students.

Issue of syllabus completion

Despite progress, the focus on syllabus completion remains a primary driver of teaching decisions, with assessments often taking the form of traditional pen-and-paper tests. While there are monthly FLN-specific assessments in some States, the results are rarely used to inform teaching practices. The rollout of the NIPUN Bharat mission has led to improvements in foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) and a greater focus on FLN in schools, which has contributed to an improvement in learning levels at the foundational stage, particularly in government schools. However, balancing FLN goals with syllabus completion remains an ongoing challenge that needs further attention.

Alarming shift

Secretary of State Marco Rubio confirmed that the U.S. government is revoking visas of foreign students engaged in activities counter to U.S. national interest or foreign policy, with reports indicating that some Indian students are affected. Social media surveillance is reportedly used as a basis for these actions. Rubio argued that actions justifying visa denial at the application stage should also be grounds for revocation. This raises concerns about the free speech rights of foreign nationals in the U.S., especially since the First Amendment protects free speech broadly, including for non-citizens. Historically, foreign students have been vocal critics without facing penalties, and universities have defended their free speech rights. The U.S.'s commitment to free speech and democratic values is now in question, and judicial intervention may be necessary to prevent overreach and protect these fundamental freedoms.

No to regression

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Violent protests in Kathmandu, led by royalist groups like the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, have reignited pro-monarchy sentiment in Nepal, which had been suppressed since the monarchy was abolished in 2008. These protests, fueled by growing disillusionment with the political establishment, signal dissatisfaction with Nepal's republican system. Nepal's transition from monarchy to a federal democratic republic followed years of unrest, including the royal massacre in 2001 and the Maoist rebellion. Despite the country's ongoing political instability and poor governance, most Nepalis remember the authoritarian monarchy era with caution. The resurgence of pro-monarchy views is a reaction to democratic failures. The government must address the recent violence and restore public faith by strengthening the parliamentary system, which is the best way to counter any calls for a return to monarchy.

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Among Ministries, Home Affairs ‘dropped’ most assurances

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

Since 2014, the Ministry of Home Affairs has made the highest number of assurances in Parliament, with 421 in the Lok Sabha and 338 in the Rajya Sabha. However, a significant portion of these assurances—15% in the Lok Sabha and 12% in the Rajya Sabha—remain unfulfilled. Assurances are promises made by ministries to take action on specific issues raised in Parliament, and they are considered "pending" if not fulfilled within three months. The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs tracks these assurances through the Online Assurance Monitoring System (OAMS). As of March 2024, nearly 65% of assurances made in the Lok Sabha that year were still pending. A notable example is an assurance related to Adani Group ports,

which remains unresolved since March 2023.

Moreover, between 2014 and 2022, the share of assurances dropped, ranging between 5 and 11% (**Chart 1**). For instance, in 2021, Trinamool Congress MP Mahua Moitra raised the matter of investigating the Adani Group and the various foreign portfolio investors owning stakes in their companies. The Finance Ministry provided certain details and stated that SEBI was investigating the matter. This assurance was later dropped. Similarly, nearly 66% of the assurances made in 2024 in the Rajya Sabha were pending as of March 24. In the Rajya Sabha, about 36% of the assurances made in 2023 and 24% made in 2022 are still pending. Also, between 2014 and 2022, the share of assurances dropped, ranging between 2% and 15% (**Chart 2**).

Charts 3A and 3B show the Ministries with the highest shares of dropped and pending assurances between 2014 and 2024 in Lok Sabha. **Charts 4A and 4B** show the same for the Rajya Sabha.

As noted earlier, the Home Ministry dropped the most assurances across both Houses. For instance, former Lok Sabha MP Sirajuddin Ajmal’s question in 2014 on the State-wise number of reported terrorist attacks along with the number of terrorists arrested and killed was not answered and the assurance was dropped by the Home Ministry. Lok Sabha MP Asaduddin Owaisi’s question to the Home Ministry in 2014 about the ‘out of turn promotions’ and ‘gallantry awards’ allegedly given to policemen involved in fake encounters was also dropped. The Home Affairs Ministry also dropped both questions asked by Congress MP Manish Tiwari on the Pulwama terror attack in 2019 and 2020. Finance, Law and Justice, Road Transport and Highways, and Railways featured among the top five Ministries that dropped the most assurances across both Houses.

Broken assurances

The data for the charts were sourced from the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs’ Online Assurances Monitoring System



Chart 1: The chart shows the share of pending and dropped assurances in the Lok Sabha between 2014 and 2024 (in %)

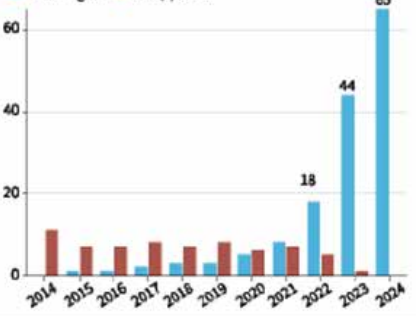


Chart 3: The Ministries with the highest shares of dropped and pending assurances in the Lok Sabha between 2014-2024

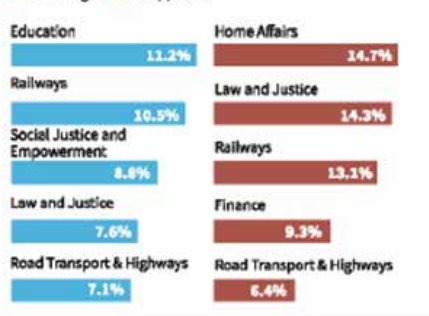


Chart 2: The chart shows share of pending and dropped assurances in the Rajya Sabha between 2014-24 (in %)

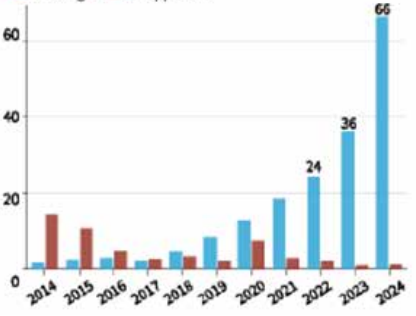
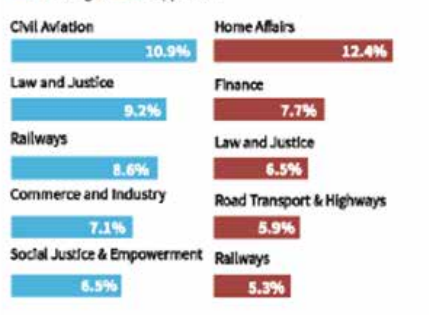


Chart 4: The Ministries with the highest shares of dropped and pending assurances in the Rajya Sabha between 2014-2024



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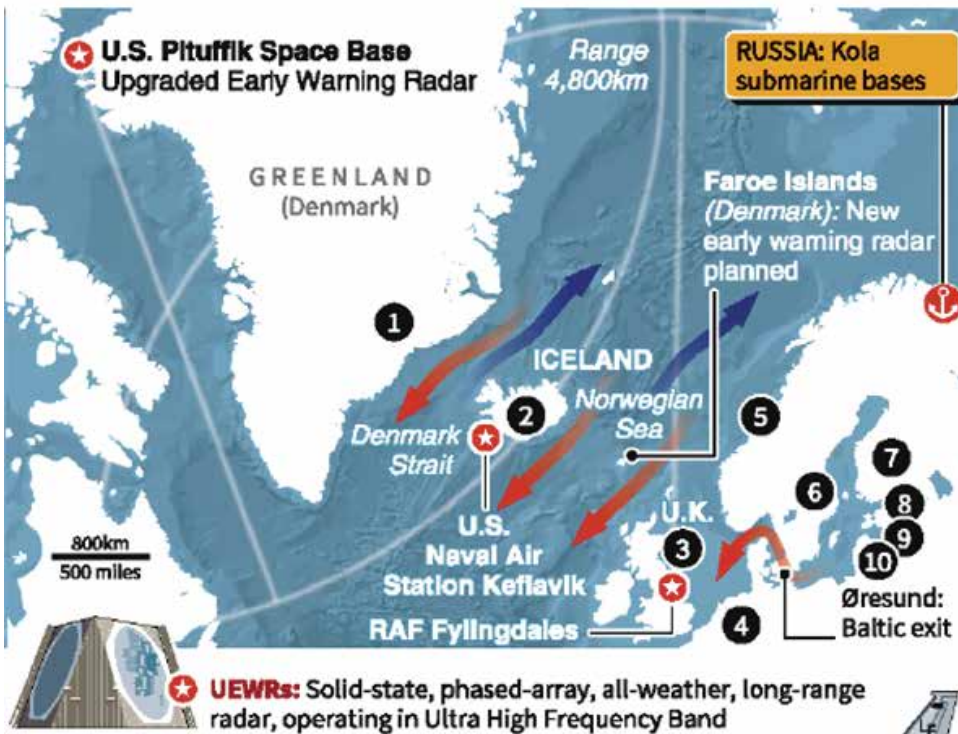
Why are tensions high in the Arctic?

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

International observers have raised concerns about escalating tensions in the Arctic, warning that if left unchecked, they could eventually spark conflict in the region.

Ice cold war

The melting of Arctic sea ice has prompted renewed interest in the region. The U.K. has repeatedly emphasised the strategic importance of the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. (GIUK) gap, a critical choke point for NATO's naval defences



Boeing P-8A Poseidon: Maritime patrol and reconnaissance for Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), based out of Keflavik



Jan 2025: Russian spy vessel Yantar in U.K. waters



NORDIC WARDEN NATO Joint Expeditionary Force	
1 Denmark	6 Sweden
2 Iceland	7 Finland
3 U.K.	8 Estonia
4 Netherlands	9 Latvia
5 Norway	10 Lithuania

Sources: IISS, Geopolitical Monitor

Picture: army-news.ru

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What is happening?

The Arctic, historically isolated, is becoming more accessible due to climate change, which is melting the ice caps. This opens up new opportunities for global powers to tap into untapped natural resources like fossil fuels, rare earth elements, and fishing grounds. Unlike the Antarctic, which is protected by an international treaty, the Arctic lacks similar legal safeguards and is governed by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), allowing countries to claim territories and deploy military infrastructure. This has led to tensions due to overlapping maritime claims and military posturing.

Who is in control?

The Arctic is controlled by eight countries: Canada, Denmark (through Greenland), Finland, Iceland, Norway, Russia, Sweden, and the U.S., which together form the Arctic Council. These countries have sovereignty over Arctic land and can exploit resources within their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). The waters between these territories are internationally governed to ensure freedom of navigation. According to UNCLOS, countries can extend their claims to the seabed beyond the 200-nautical-mile EEZ if they prove it's part of their continental shelf. Canada, Denmark, and Russia have made overlapping claims to the Arctic seabed. However, infrastructure in the region is underdeveloped, with Russia being the only country possessing a significant fleet of icebreakers, including a nuclear-powered one, for navigating the sea ice.

Where do the tensions arise?

U.S. President Donald Trump has expressed renewed interest in acquiring Greenland from Denmark, citing national security concerns, especially

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due to the U.S. Pituffik military base located there. Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen has pledged to strengthen Greenland's security in response. Tensions have also risen between the U.S. and Canada over the disputed Northwest Passage, with Canada claiming it as internal waters and the U.S. asserting international navigation rights. Furthermore, relations within the Arctic Council have become strained, particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with Russia suggesting control over Norway's Svalbard. NATO members are increasingly concerned about strategic points like the Greenland-Iceland-U.K. gap, vital for NATO's naval defences against Russian threats. India and other observer states are closely monitoring these developments.

Why does the Arctic matter so much?

Interest in the Arctic has increased due to its vast untapped resources, with a 2009 U.S. Geological Survey estimating that the region holds 13% of the world's undiscovered oil reserves and 30% of its untapped natural gas reserves. Greenland also contains significant rare earth elements, attracting Chinese investment, though many projects were suspended due to environmental concerns and U.S. political pressure. Additionally, the melting of Arctic sea ice has opened new trade routes, such as the Northeast Passage, which could shorten the distance between East Asia and Europe by 8,000 kilometers, saving China billions. However, for this to happen, Russia would need to grant China access to its Arctic ports, a move Russia has been cautious about.

What lies ahead?

Nations have taken concrete steps to assert their Arctic ambitions, with Russia symbolically planting a flag at the North Pole in 2007 and maintaining military bases in the region. In 2022, Russia conducted joint naval exercises with China, highlighting strategic Arctic security concerns. China, declaring itself a "Near-Arctic State" in 2018, is building its first nuclear-powered icebreaker. Following the inclusion of Sweden and Finland in NATO after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, NATO has increased its military presence in the Arctic, conducting large-scale exercises near Russia's border. This has raised concerns about strategic imbalances and heightened tensions in the region as temperatures rise.

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Mercy Estate,
MG Road, Ravipuram,
Ernakulam-682 015,

Corporate office:

Vedhik IAS Academy
Samkalp Bhawan, Plot No.15,
Sector 4, Rama Krishna Puram,
New Delhi, Delhi-110022

Regional office

Vedhik IAS Academy
202, Raheja Chambers, 12,
Museum Road. Bangalore -
560001. Karnataka, India.

GCC Office:

Bobscoedu,

Bobsco Educational Solutions WLL
Office No: 201, Floor: 2
AL RAYA SHOPPING CENTRE WLL
Bldg. 517, Road 2408, Area 324,
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