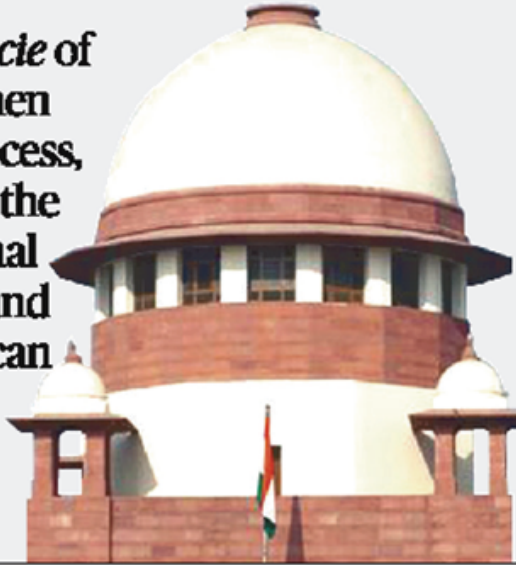


## Keep gods away from politics, SC tells Naidu

### POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

 We are *prima facie* of the view that when investigation is under process, it was not appropriate on the part of a high constitutional functionary to go public and make a statement which can affect the sentiments of crores of people  
**SUPREME COURT**



The Supreme Court criticized Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu for making public statements about the use of animal fat in Tirupati laddus without proof. The court noted that there is currently no evidence to support these claims and emphasized that Mr. Naidu should have avoided involving religious matters in politics. The court also highlighted that a Special Investigation Team (SIT) was formed to investigate the allegations only after Mr. Naidu's statements, suggesting his actions were premature and inappropriate for a high constitutional functionary.

The Supreme Court has asked the Special Investigation Team (SIT) to pause its

investigation until October 3, the next hearing date. The court requested Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to help determine whether the SIT should continue or if the investigation should be transferred to a central agency. Justice Viswanathan noted that public test reports do not show evidence of animal fat in the laddus, and Justice Gavai questioned whether the ghee samples tested were the same as those used in the prasadam. The court also cited media reports where the Chief Executive Officer of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD) denied any contamination of the ghee.

Senior advocate Siddharth Luthra, representing the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam (TTD), mentioned that there were increasing complaints about the taste of the laddus. Justice Gavai questioned whether the problematic laddus were tested, and Mr. Luthra promised to investigate. Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi argued that the petitions, including one by a former Rajya Sabha Member, were not genuine and aimed to attack the current state government. The petitions call for an independent inquiry into the allegations and the establishment of a regulatory mechanism for religious affairs and the production of prasadam.

## Core sectors' output tanks for first time in 42 months

### ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

In August, India's core sector output fell to a nine-month low, with a year-on-year decline of 1.8 %, marking the first contraction in three and a half years. Six out of eight infrastructure segments saw a decrease in production. Fertilizers and steel output grew more slowly compared to July, with steel production increasing by only 4.5 %, the slowest in 26 months. Electricity generation hit a five-month low, and refinery products were at a six-month low. Both coal and electricity output experienced their first contraction in at least 13 months.

In August, India's industrial output faced significant challenges:

- Coal and electricity output declined by 8.1 % and 5 %, respectively.
- Cement production fell by 3 %, marking its worst performance in nine months.
- Refinery products saw a 1 % decline, the second drop in three months.
- Fertilizer output grew by 3.2 %.

The Index of Core Industries (ICI), which makes up about 40% of the broader industrial output index, stood at 155.8,

a 4.2 % drop from July, marking the third consecutive month of decline. In July, the ICI had increased by 6.1% year-on-year, with only crude oil and natural gas sectors contracting. However, the trends in August indicate weaker factory output levels.

### 'Base effect of growth'

Bank of Baroda's chief economist, Madan Sabnavis, attributes the skewed performance of core sectors to the high base effect from last year's 13.4 % growth. He anticipates a marginally positive industrial output growth of around 0.5 % for August. Aditi Nayar, chief economist at ICRA, expects the Index of Industrial Production (IIP) to have risen by about 1 % in August but notes that the late withdrawal of the monsoon could continue to impact core sector output in September.

### Weak activity

Ms. Nayar observed that the poor performance of the cement and steel sectors in July and August indicates a slowdown in construction activity during the second quarter of this year. Additionally, natural gas production decreased by 3.6 %, experiencing its second consecutive month of decline. Crude oil output also fell for the third month in a row, with the contraction rate increasing to 3.4 %.

## Vaishnaw visits Japan to clear bullet train hurdles ahead of Modi's visit

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



In September, Union Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and senior officials visited Japan to address issues delaying the Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project. Key problems discussed included Japan's insistence on using Japanese vendors for trains and signalling systems, and concerns over project costs and timelines. Despite completing land acquisition in Gujarat and Maharashtra and constructing 215 km of viaduct, a deadlock remains over the costs for rolling stock and signalling systems. Japan, providing technical support, requires that only Japanese manufacturers like Kawasaki and Hitachi supply these components, as per Japan International Cooperation Agency loan conditions.

### Cost troubles

The Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project, using Japan's Shinkansen technology, is facing cost overruns. As of FY 2023-24, ₹60,372 crore has been spent, primarily on infrastructure like viaducts and rail slabs,

out of a total budget of ₹1.08 lakh crore. This leaves limited funds for purchasing train sets and setting up signalling systems, suggesting further cost escalations. The train, designed to travel at 320 km/h, was initially scheduled to start operations in 2023.

The Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train project faces further delays. A 50-km section between Surat and Bilimora, initially expected to start in 2026, might be postponed due to new issues. The construction of a 21 km-long tunnel, including a 7 km undersea section, will take at least five years. Discussions continue about receiving Japanese Shinkansen trains, while the Ministry plans to develop indigenous train sets for standard gauge tracks, with trials on the Surat-Bilimora section. The project's complexity means completion timelines can only be determined after all civil, track, electrical, signalling, and telecommunication works are finished.



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## The edge of war

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The killing of Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader, by Israel has significantly impacted the ongoing conflict in West Asia. Under Nasrallah's leadership, Hezbollah became a powerful entity in Lebanon and a key player in Iran's regional influence. Israel's action has weakened Hezbollah and Iran's influence but has also escalated tensions, bringing the region closer to open war between Israel and Iran. Nasrallah had opened a second front against Israel during its war on Gaza, but after focusing on Gaza, Israel shifted its attention to Lebanon, culminating in Nasrallah's assassination.

Israel aims to enable the return of over 60,000 displaced people by weakening Hezbollah, though its missile capabilities remain intact. This could lead to a ground offensive in Lebanon, displacing and killing many amid Lebanon's economic struggles. Israel's Gaza invasion hasn't yet achieved its goals of destroying Hamas and freeing hostages. Prime Minister Netanyahu views the crisis as a chance to weaken non-state rivals, risking a wider war with Iran. Despite U.S. calls for ceasefires, it continues to arm Israel. Iran has shown restraint but might be provoked to respond, which could escalate the conflict further.

## Steady but slow

### SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

In July, NASA cancelled its Volatiles Investigating Polar Exploration Rover (VIPER) mission to the moon after the development was beset by delays and costs had ballooned. By this time its engineers had fully assembled it and completed some tests, but NASA held its ground. The sudden decision dismayed scientists. VIPER was designed to map the distribution of water-ice in the moon's south pole region and the soils in which it occurred, over three months. In all, the golf-cart-sized rover was to be launched by a SpaceX Falcon Heavy rocket and deployed using Astrobot's 'Griffin' lander, all managed through NASA's Commercial Lunar Payload Services programme. Landing on the moon is an expensive, time-consuming exercise. NASA's decision to cancel VIPER at this late stage thus drew the attention of the U.S. House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology and of the wider international community, which sees in VIPER's absence an opportunity for China's increasingly complex lunar programme to lead the way. The world's rush back to the moon offers potentially significant commercial and geopolitical gains. VIPER was expected to be a pivotal component of the US-led 'lunar axis' defined by the Artemis Accords, which counts India among its leaders. Yet, India missed a trick when, on September 18, the Union Cabinet approved a proposal by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to begin the second phase of the country's lunar programme with Chandrayaan-4, a sample-return mission.

Moments after the Chandrayaan-3 lander descended on the moon's surface on August 23, 2023, reports erupted to claim India had yet again admitted itself into a small, elite group of countries that have achieved an autonomous lunar soft-landing. But such proclamations overlook the considerable gaps between these countries' space agencies from an operations perspective. One pertinent difference is that ISRO is unable to execute multiple flagship missions in parallel. Instead, it follows a 'one major mission at a time' cadence that, in exchange for maximising resource use efficiency, leaves the organisation incapable of manoeuvring rapidly to respond to new opportunities. Had it been able, ISRO could have sought the Cabinet's approval for the 'Lunar Polar Explorer' mission it is planning with its Japanese counterpart, to land a rover on the moon to perform many of the crucial tasks VIPER was expected to, especially prospecting for large water-ice deposits. Even now, the VIPER incident should remind the Centre that despite an expanding allocation and new funding modes in the offing, the Indian space programme needs more resources to realise its full potential.



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# Having private participation in India's nuclear energy

## POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

In July 2024, the Government of India, while presenting the Union Budget for FY 2024-25, inter alia, made announcements on the expansion of India's nuclear energy sector, proposing partnerships with the private sector for research and developing Bharat Small Reactors (BSR), Bharat Small Modular Reactors (BSMR) as well as newer nuclear energy technologies. Presumably, this announcement is aimed at India's ambitious pursuit of the decarbonisation of energy generation and achieving 500 Gigawatts of non-fossil fuel-based energy generation in India by 2030, as pledged at the COP26 Summit in Glasgow, in 2021.

With the government's new announcement, there is renewed interest in revisiting the existing framework governing the Indian nuclear energy sector to assess what kind of changes that may be required. The Atomic Energy Act, 1962 (AEA) — it was amended as the Atomic Energy (Amendment) Act, 1987 (No. 29 of 1987) — is the primary governing statute at the helm of the development and the operation of the nuclear energy sector. Pertinently, Section 3(a) of the AEA, 1962 empowers only the central government “to produce, develop, use and dispose of atomic energy”.

Ironically, on September 17, 2024, the Supreme Court of India dismissed a petition, Sandeep T.S. vs Union of India & Ors., challenging the provisions of the AEA, which restrict involvement of private entities in the licensing of nuclear power, observing that “The Parliamentary regime envisages a calibrated exploitation of atomic power, subject to stringent safeguards, bearing in mind the likely consequences of misuse and, for that matter, of an accident”.

In addition to the challenges listed above, there is also the issue of the pending challenge to the constitutionality of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 (CLNDA), which seeks a declaration for the act to be void ab initio. These challenges not only introduce a high degree of regulatory uncertainty but also have the potential to leave private investments in the sector in a state of limbo.

Thus, the road map for private participation in the Indian nuclear energy sector must run consonance, and not in conflict with the applicable laws.

### **AEA, restrictions on private sector**

The governing scheme, i.e., the AEA, gives the government sole control and responsibility over all activities in respect of nuclear energy either through an authority or company established by it. In essence, the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) currently have overarching control over the nuclear energy infrastructure.

This, however, does not suggest that there is no record of or attempt to alter this situation. Last year, the DAE and NITI Aayog released “A Report on the Role of Small Modular Reactors in the energy Transition”, which specifically discusses key enablers to promote the private sector in Small Modular Reactors (SMRs). The report focuses on “Conducive SMR regulatory framework led by national regulators” and “Unambiguous Civil Nuclear Liability Framework and supporting legal structure” to ensure a sustainable and continuous engagement of the private sector.

Historically, the NPCIL has involved the private sector only in engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) where the infrastructure for the reactor is developed by private entities such as Megha Engineering & Infrastructures and Reliance.

In so far as the cost implications are concerned, the NITI Aayog report, and the Union Minister of Finance's statement contemplate partnering with private participants to attract nearly \$26 billion of investments into the sector. Such involvement, specifically for research and development (R&D), is strictly prohibited as in Section 3(a) of the AEA.

Rule 35 of the Atomic Energy (Radiation Protection) Rules, 2004, grants Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) authority over radioactive technology. But concerns about its lack of independence persist. The Nuclear Safety Regulatory Authority Bill 2011 aimed to address this but it was never enacted. Attracting private investment in nuclear energy will require significant changes to the AERB's structure and functions, alongside efforts by organisations such as the NPCIL and the DAE to create programmes that encourage private participation while ensuring a robust regulatory oversight of the sector.

### **A possible structure**

A possible approach is in forming public-private partnerships, where the NPCIL or a similar government body/authority holds 51% ownership of nuclear plants, aligning with existing laws. This structure may invite private capital while keeping responsibility, ownership, and accountability with the government. Additionally, entities with a majority government stake would also be covered under Section 2(h) of the Right to Information Act (RTI) Act, ensuring transparency. The entity would also be required to make disclosures under Section 4 and respond to reasonable public queries under

Section 6 of the RTI Act, maintaining public accountability.

The other large concern is a significantly higher standards of liability with nuclear infrastructure. For reasons that are obvious to anyone who is vaguely familiar with nuclear technology, the presence of nuclear reactors in the vicinity of human settlements introduces a gnarly threat. The Chernobyl disaster of 1986 and the Fukushima Daiichi accident of 2011 are near synonymous with the word nuclear in this context.

In India, compensation for nuclear disasters is given to affected parties under the CLNDA. The CLNDA aims to provide civil liability for nuclear damage and prompt compensation to victims of a nuclear incident through a no-fault liability to the operator. As mentioned at the outset, the constitutionality of this act is presently challenged in a writ petition and is pending adjudication before the Supreme Court. This petition challenges the constitutionality of the CLNDA, inter alia, on the grounds of: violation of absolute liability principle; violation of polluter pays principle and serious dangers to nuclear safety.

The judgment in *G. Sundarrajan vs Union Of India and Ors. (2013)* has references to the Chernobyl and Fukushima disasters while addressing a Special Leave Petition (SLP) concerning protests over the Kundankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu. Although the Supreme Court allowed the plant's commissioning, it issued directions for regular inspections, reports, and due diligence by the DAE, the NPCIL, and Ministry of Environment, Forest, and Climate Change.

### Specific needs

India's country profile, as published by the World Nuclear Association in September 2024 recognises an in-principle proposed gross increment of 32 GWe in the Indian nuclear energy production capacity. It is evident that this ambitious growth in nuclear energy infrastructure is very capital intensive and requires extremely skilled construction resources due to high-risk physical reactions.

Given the sensitive requirements for nuclear technology, strict and comprehensive legislation is crucial to address these needs and ensure ease of business. The legislative restriction on R&D under the AEA is just one issue, while litigation on the constitutionality of the Civil Liability Law, has been pending before the top court for over 12 years now. These factors only contribute to uncertainty of this ambitious target.

Energy generation capacity has been central to all economic development across the globe after the Industrial Revolution and a commitment to achieving the same through renewable sources makes India's ambition just as admirable as it is challenging. It will undoubtedly be interesting to see how legislative and policy changes will shape the Indian nuclear energy sector.

## India's 'silver dividend', challenge to opportunity

### POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

While the rising quantum and share of the elderly population is a global concern, India and China, the two population giants in the world, have a disproportionate share of the elderly given their large population size. And rising longevity is intensifying this concern every day. Therefore, it is pertinent to transform this challenge into an opportunity that involves suitable reforms to cater to the evolving needs of this population. In this regard, evidence indicates that it is not merely the quantum of this population but also its quality that needs attention and intervention.

### Rising health-care consumption and reform

For instance, the health-care consumption of this segment of the population, presently estimated at \$7 billion, is rising. Such a rise in India is because three-quarters of the elderly have at least one chronic ailment along with a quarter of them having limitations in daily living. In addition, a third of them display depressive symptoms along with low-life satisfaction. When these adversities are coupled with economic insecurities, there is every reason to dwell on senior care reform to ensure the better well-being of this population segment.

Such a reform initiative needs to recognise the multi-sectoral attention involving health, social, economic/financial and, above all, digital domains towards mainstreaming the elderly within the evolving environment. Health empowerment and inclusion can happen by improving health literacy among the elderly and their care-givers. On this front, the initiative of adopting comprehensive health care at health and well-being centres under the renewed mission of the Ayushman Arogya Mandir (AAM) may be considered a good initiative. This involves a preventive, promotive, curative and rehabilitative component under the multiple system of ayurveda, yoga, naturopathy, unani, siddha and homoeopathy (AYUSH).

Strengthening the health-care infrastructure to focus on the elderly by expanding tele-consultation services, enhancing the skilled workforce for the elderly, and capacity building of the existing workforce may facilitate the utilisation of health care among senior citizens despite limitations of means on the one hand and specific need on the other. This

all-inclusive package has a mental health services aspect as well as nutrition-related services that will operationalise senior care through preventive, wellness and therapeutic interventions and is thus holistic.

### Addressing financial insecurities

The social inclusion of the elderly may well be served by sensitising the larger community on their needs and sensitivities and by establishing peer support groups for interaction. At the same time there is a need to make them aware of their entitlements and legal safeguards on inheritance, succession and protection that will help their confidence in handling ugly eventualities that could arise in the course of life.

Economic and financial insecurities need to be addressed through innovative schemes and plans specifically for the elderly, in terms of investments, to reduce their financial burden. Such a burden that is largely on account of health care costs may be protected with well-designed insurance products such as ₹5 lakh coverage for every individual above the age of 70 years. Reskilling the younger population that is also aging (given their adaptability to modern technology and infrastructure) to be engaged in the labour market may be another option to maintain the economic independence of the elderly.

Finally, the inclusion of the elderly in a rapidly growing digital environment is equally important for the elderly to benefit from many schemes and programmes with ease and convenience. Digital adaption among the elderly still remains below expectation, excluding them from desirable schemes and benefits. Targeting the current elderly population and those younger who are also aging to go digital should get a second look from the domain of finance to the delivery of numerous care services that are meant for the elderly.

### As an economic segment

Besides this five-point care reform for seniors, the idea of turning this emerging challenge into an opportunity lies in viewing a silver economy that comprises economic activities, and goods and services catering to this population segment. On this count, the available worth of this economy is estimated at ₹73,082 crore and is expected to grow manifold over the years. While the 60-plus share is estimated at 13.2% in 2031, and at 19% by mid-century, the elderly will constitute a major consumer segment that is also characterised as the wealthiest given the professional in the age group of 45-64 years is the richest. Therefore, one has the quote these days which says 'they become rich before they grow old'. Further, as health-care consumption is about a third of their entire consumption, it can ignite the health and wellness-driven businesses among the senior care segment in India. On the whole, the silver economy is set to grow in India and the world, with a market size that has potential for innovation in the health technology domain as well as utility infrastructure for varying limitations that come with age.

In recognition of this eventual reality, the government appears to have given consideration to rehabilitating the silver segment by launching the Senior Able Citizens for Re-Employment in Dignity (SACRED) portal to connect senior citizens with job providers in the private sector. Another initiative is the Senior care Ageing Growth Engine (SAGE), by the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, to promote and incentivise senior care products.

## Trade deficit widens India's Q1FY25 CAD to \$9.7 billion

### ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

#### Yawning chasm

Merchandise trade deficit widened to \$65.1 bn in Q1 FY25 from \$56.7 bn on a rise in oil, gold and other imports



- Net inflows via foreign portfolio investments moderated to \$0.9 billion from \$15.7 billion
- Net inflows under ECB amounted to \$1.8 billion in Q1 FY25 against \$5.6 billion in Q1 last year
- NRI deposits recorded net inflows of \$4 billion, higher than \$2.2 billion in Q1 last year

India's current account deficit (CAD) widened marginally to \$9.7 billion (1.1% of GDP) in Q1 FY25 from \$8.9 billion (1% of GDP) in the year-earlier period and a surplus of \$4.6 billion (0.5% of GDP) in Q4FY24, as per Reserve Bank of India (RBI) data.

The widening of CAD on a year-on-year basis was primarily due to a rise in merchandise trade deficit to \$65.1 billion in Q12024-25 from \$56.7 billion in Q12023-24. Net services receipts rose to \$39.7 billion in Q12024-25 from \$35.1 billion. Private transfer receipts, mainly representing remittances by Indians employed overseas, rose to \$29.5 billion in Q12024-25 from \$27.1 billion. Net foreign direct investment (FDI) inflows climbed to \$6.3 billion in Q1FY25 from \$4.7 billion.

India's balance of payments situation remained largely stable for Q1FY25 with net accretion of \$5.2 billion to forex reserves compared with \$24.4 billion last year. Stating CAD was marginally higher at 1.1% against 1% of GDP last year, he said we may expect the deficit to be around 1.5% for the year. FDI flows were higher though FPI was lower. The latter will turnaround given the debt flows expected due to the inclusion of bonds in JP Morgan index.



## RBI flags irregularities in grant of gold loans, pulls up lenders

### ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

Flagging irregular practices by some supervised entities (SEs) such as banks and NBFCs in granting loans against gold ornaments and jewellery, the RBI on Monday asked them to identify gaps and initiate appropriate remedial measures in a time-bound manner.

The RBI recently carried out a review of the adherence to prudential guidelines as well as practices being followed by SEs with regard to loans against pledge of gold ornaments and jewellery. The review, as well as the findings of the onsite examination of select SEs by the Reserve Bank, indicate several irregular practices in this activity.

The major deficiencies included shortcomings in use of third parties for sourcing and appraisal of loans, valuation of gold without the presence of the customer, inadequate due diligence and lack of end use monitoring of gold loans, lack of transparency during auction of gold ornaments and jewellery on default by the customer, weaknesses in monitoring of loan-to-value LTV, and incorrect application of risk-weights. The RBI warned of non-compliance with regulatory guidelines in this regard will be viewed seriously.

## U.S. stays India's top trading ally, export destination in 2024

### ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

The U.S. has retained its position as India's top trading partner in the January-July 2024 period with bilateral goods trade surpassing \$190 billion and Indian exports growing 9.3% to \$48.2 billion. Top export items from India to the U.S. in this period included garments and textiles, pharmaceuticals, precious and semi-precious stones, smart phones and mineral fuels. On the other hand, India's imports from the U.S. fell from \$25.9 billion to \$24.6 billion, a 5% decline in the first seven months of 2024, as per government figures.

### Exports surge

India's merchandise exports to the U.S. grew substantially from \$54.3 billion in 2018 to \$83.8 billion in 2023, marking a 54.4% increase. This indicates a strong demand for Indian goods in the U.S. market. In the services sector too, India's exports to the U.S. experienced a notable increase of 25.6% in the period, rising from \$28.9 billion in 2018 to \$36.3 billion in 2023.

Combining both merchandise and services, India's total exports to the U.S. surged from \$83.2 billion in 2018 to \$120.1 billion in 2023, registering an overall increase of 44.3%. The U.S. decision to withdraw the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) scheme for Indian exporters from 2019 has had a minimal economic impact on India, and there may not be a need for the government to prioritise its restoration.

Exporters of certain labour intensive items to the U.S. were given duty free/ lower duty market access under the scheme. India was the largest user of the programme, accounting for \$5.7 billion in exports under GSP, but this figure remains negligible in the context of India's overall export portfolio and the broader U.S. trade relationship.

India's imports from the U.S. in January-July 2024 was spread across a number of sectors with mineral fuels at the top, followed by precious and semi-precious stones, mechanical and electrical machinery, aircraft and parts, ships and boats, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, and edible fruits and nuts. The U.S. presents a significant market for Indian goods, particularly in sectors like technology and engineering products. Likewise, India's rising demand for advanced technology, energy, and capital goods from the U.S. opens avenues for boosting bilateral trade.



*"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."*

*—Benjamin Franklin*

## U.K.'s last coal-fired power plant to shut, ending 142 years of coal power

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Britain's last coal-fired power plant will close on Monday, ending 142 years of coal-generated electricity in the nation that sparked the Industrial Revolution. The Ratcliffe-on-Soar station in central England is to finish its final shift at midnight, after more than half a century of turning coal into power. Owner Uniper says many of the 170 remaining employees will stay on during a two-year decommissioning process.

The U.K. government hailed the closure as a milestone in efforts to generate all of Britain's energy from renewable sources by 2030. The shutdown makes Britain the first country from the Group of Seven major economies to phase out coal—though some other European nations, including Sweden and Belgium, got there sooner. Energy Minister Michael Shanks said the plant's closure "marks the end of an era and coal workers can be rightly proud of their work powering our country for over 140 years.

The era of coal might be ending, but a new age of good energy jobs for our country is just beginning. The world's first coal-fired electricity plant, Thomas Edison's Edison Electric Light Station, opened in London in 1882. In 1990 coal provided about 80% of Britain's electricity. By 2012 it had fallen to 39%, and by 2023 it stood at just 1%, according to figures from the National Grid. More than half of Britain's electricity now comes from renewable sources such as wind and solar power, and the rest from natural gas and nuclear energy.

## Ready to confront any Israeli invasion in Lebanon: Hezbollah

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Hezbollah fighters are primed to confront any Israeli ground invasion of Lebanon, the group's deputy leader Naim Qassem said on Monday in his first public speech since Israeli airstrikes killed its veteran chief Hassan Nasrallah last week. Israel will not achieve its goals. We will face any possibility and we are ready if the Israelis decide to enter by land and the resistance forces are ready for a ground engagement.

He was speaking as Israeli air strikes on targets in Beirut and elsewhere in Lebanon continued, extending a two-week long wave of attacks that have killed several Hezbollah commanders but also killed about 1,000 Lebanese and forced one million to flee their homes, according to the Lebanese government. Hezbollah's fighters had continued to fire rockets as deep as 150 km into Israeli territory and were ready to face any possible Israeli ground incursion.

Israel says it will do whatever it takes to return its citizens to evacuated communities on its northern border safely. It has not ruled out a ground invasion and its troops have been training for one. The elimination of Nasrallah is an important step, but it is not the final one. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani said Tehran would not let any of Israel's "criminal acts" go unanswered. He was referring to the killing of Nasrallah and an Iranian Guard deputy commander, Brigadier General Abbas Nilforoushan, who died in the same strikes on Friday.

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## Hamas, PFLP leaders killed in Israeli strikes on Lebanon

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The Palestinian militant group Hamas said an Israeli airstrike killed its leader in Lebanon in the city of Tyre on Monday, and another Palestinian organisation said three of its leaders died in a strike in central Beirut — the first such hit inside the capital's limits. The killings were the latest in a two-week wave of intensified Israeli attacks on militant targets in Lebanon, part of a conflict also stretching from the Palestinian territories of Gaza and the occupied West Bank, to Yemen, and within Israel itself.

#### Apartment hit

Hamas said its leader in Lebanon, Fateh Sherif Abu el-Amin, was killed along with his wife, son and daughter, in a strike that targeted their house in a refugee camp in the southern city of Tyre in the early hours of Monday. Another group, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), said three of its leaders were killed in a strike that targeted Beirut's Kola district. This was the first time Israel had struck Beirut beyond its southern suburbs in a campaign which culminated in the assassination of Hezbollah's veteran leader Hassan Nasrallah last week in a succession of heavy air strikes.

The strike against the PFLP hit the upper floor of an apartment building. The latest attacks indicated Israel has no intention of slowing down its offensive on multiple fronts even after eliminating Nasrallah.

#### Wider war

Israel's intensified attacks against the Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon and Houthi forces in Yemen have prompted fears that West Asia fighting could spin out of control and draw in Iran and the United States, Israel's main ally. More than 1,00,000 people have crossed into Syria from Lebanon — including nationals of both countries — since the conflict between Israeli forces and Hezbollah escalated this month.

## Nepal surveys wreckage after deadly floods and landslides kill at least 200

### DISASTER MANAGEMENT



Grapple with damage: People walk along damaged houses swept by flood following heavy rainfall in Nepal on Monday.

Search and rescue teams in Nepal's capital picked through wrecked homes on Monday after waters receded from monsoon floods that killed at least 200 people around the Himalayan republic. Deadly floods and landslides are common across South Asia during the monsoon season from June to September but experts say climate change is making them worse.

Entire neighbourhoods in Kathmandu were inundated after the heaviest rains in more than two decades, with the capital temporarily cut off from the rest of Nepal after

landslides blocked highways. According to the latest figures, 200 have died and 127 are injured and 26 are still missing. Police said at least 35 of those killed were buried alive when earth from a landslide careened into vehicles on a highway south of Kathmandu.

#### Rescue on

Bulldozers were being used to clear nearly two dozen sections of major roads leading into Kathmandu that had been blocked by debris. The Home Ministry said it was working to rescue numerous people who had been stranded on the highways. Rescuers in knee-high rubber boots were using shovels to clear mud from the worst-hit riverside

neighbourhoods around Kathmandu.

The International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development, a Nepal-based think tank, said the disaster had been made worse by unplanned urban encroachment around the Bagmati River, which flows through the capital. Nepal's army said more than 4,000 people had been rescued, with helicopters, motorboats and rafts bringing stranded people to safety. Nepal's weather bureau said their preliminary data measured record-breaking rain in the 24 hours to Saturday morning. A monitoring station at Kathmandu airport recorded about 240 millimetres of rain, the highest figure since 2002. More than 300 people have been killed in rain-related disasters in Nepal this year.

## Japan's likely next leader plans to call election in October

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Shigeru Ishiba, the head of Japan's governing party, plans to call a parliamentary election to be held on October 27 after he is elected as Prime Minister on Tuesday. Mr. Ishiba was chosen as the Liberal Democratic Party's leader on Friday and is assured to also succeed Fumio Kishida as Prime Minister because the party's coalition controls Parliament.

Mr. Ishiba mentioned the election date as he announced his top party leadership lineup on Monday ahead of forming his Cabinet. The plan is not official since he is not Prime Minister yet, but Mr. Ishiba said he mentioned the date early for the logistical convenience of those who have to prepare on relatively short notice. He appointed former Environment Minister Shinjiro Koizumi, who came in third in the party leadership race, to head the party's election task force. He is expected to name defence experts and his longtime confidantes Takeshi Iwaya as Foreign Minister and Gen Nakatani as defense chief once he takes office.

### New proposals

Mr. Ishiba has proposed an Asian version of the NATO military alliance and more discussion among regional partners about the use of the U.S. nuclear deterrence. He also suggested a more equal Japan-U.S. security alliance, including joint management of U.S. bases in Japan and having Japanese Self Defence Force bases in the United States. The LDP has had a nearly unbroken tenure governing Japan since World War II. The party members may have seen Ishiba's more centrist views as crucial in pushing back challenges by the liberal-leaning opposition and winning voter support as the party reels from corruption scandals that drove down Mr. Kishida's popularity.

Mr. Ishiba on Friday stressed Japan needs to reinforce its security, noting recent violations of Japanese airspace by Russian and Chinese warplanes and repeated missile launches by North Korea. He pledged to continue Mr. Kishida's economic policy aimed at pulling Japan out of deflation and achieving real salary increases, while tackling challenges such as Japan's declining birthrate and population and resilience to natural disasters.

Mr. Ishiba, first elected to Parliament in 1986, has served as defense minister, agriculture minister and in other key Cabinet posts, and was LDP secretary general under former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.



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