

# China lands on Moon's far side in historic sample-retrieval bid

**REUTERS**

BEIJING, JUNE 2

CHINA LANDED an uncrewed spacecraft on the far side of the moon on Sunday, overcoming a key hurdle in its landmark mission to retrieve the world's first rock and soil samples from the dark lunar hemisphere.

The landing elevates China's space power status in a global rush to the moon, where countries including the United States are hoping to exploit lunar minerals to sustain long-term astronaut missions and moon bases within the next decade.

The Chang'e-6 craft, equipped with an array of tools and its own launcher, touched



**Long March-5 Y8 rocket that took the Chang'e-6 lunar probe before the launch.** *File*

down in a gigantic impact crater called the South Pole-Aitken Basin on the moon's space-fac-

ing side at 6:23 a.m. Beijing time (2223 GMT), the China National Space Administration said.

The mission "involves many engineering innovations, high risks and great difficulty", the agency said in a statement on its website.

"The payloads carried by the Chang'e-6 lander will work as planned and carry out scientific exploration missions."

The successful mission is China's second on the far side of the moon, a region no other country has reached.

The side of the moon perpetually facing away from the Earth is dotted with deep and dark craters, making communications and robotic landing operations more challenging.

**SUMMIT DOESN'T MEET DEMANDS: CHINA**

# China doesn't want countries to attend Switzerland peace summit: Zelenskyy



Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy with US Defence chief Lloyd Austin in Singapore on Sunday. Reuters

ASSOCIATED PRESS  
SINGAPORE, JUNE 2

UKRAINE PRESIDENT Volodymyr Zelenskyy accused China on Sunday of helping Russia to disrupt an upcoming Swiss-organized peace conference on the war in Ukraine.

Speaking at Asia's premier security conference, Zelenskyy said that China is pressuring other countries and their leaders not to attend the upcoming talks. He did not say which ones.

"Russia, using Chinese influence in the region, using Chinese diplomats also, does everything to disrupt the peace summit," he said at a news conference at the Shangri-La defense forum. "Regrettably this is unfortunate that such a big independent powerful country as China is an instrument in the hands of Putin."

The Swiss had been hoping China would attend the peace conference in mid-June, but Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning signaled on Friday that that was unlikely. China has been calling for a peace conference with equal participation of all sides, including Russia, which has not been invited.

"There is still a clear gap between the arrangements for the

**EXPLAINED**  
**E** China's 'neutral stand' on war

CHINA HAS staked out what it says is a neutral position on the war, putting it at odds with Ukraine, the US and most of Europe. Its trade with Russia has grown, easing the impact of Western sanctions. American, Ukrainian and other intelligence agencies also say there is evidence that Chinese parts are winding up in Russian weaponry, even if China is not directly arming its neighbor.

meeting and the demands of the Chinese side, as well as the general expectations of the international community," Mao said.

The foreign ministry did not respond to a request for comment on Zelenskyy's accusation.

The Ukrainian leader said of China's pressure on others, "That is not only support to Russia, that is basically support of war." Zelenskyy urged top defense officials to amend the upcoming talks in Switzerland, saying he was disappointed at the failure of some countries to commit to joining.

# Google rolls back AI search after flubs and flaws

THE NEW YORK TIMES  
SAN FRANCISCO, JUNE 2

WHEN SUNDAR Pichai, Google's chief executive, introduced a generative artificial intelligence feature for the company's search engine last month, he and his colleagues demonstrated the new capability with six text-based queries that public could try out. The questions included "how do you clean a fabric sofa" and



Sundar Pichai at a Google event earlier in May. AP file

"what should I use to get a coffee stain out of my carpet." These were intended to highlight how Google's new feature, AI Overviews, could generate full and useful information summaries above traditional search results.

But by Friday, only one of the six queries still yielded an A.I. Overview, according to tests by The New York Times. Instead, the feature was less prevalent.

The disappearance of AI Overviews for some of the

searches appeared to be part of a broader rollback after the new feature produced a litany of untruths and errors — including recommending glue as part of a pizza recipe and suggesting that people ingest rocks for nutrients.

Liz Reid, Google's head of search, wrote in a blog post on Thursday that the company had pared back A.I. Overviews in certain ways, launching "additional triggering refinements" to offer more careful responses.

# In Telangana draft for gig workers, minimum wage, maternity benefits

## Calls for contributions by aggregator firms towards a fund

**NIKHILA HENRY**  
NEW DELHI, JUNE 2

THE DRAFT Telangana Platform-Based Gig Workers Policy, 2024, has proposed minimum wages, an accidental insurance of Rs 5 lakh and a mandatory health cover for workers in app-based gig and platform companies.

The draft policy, accessed by *The Indian Express*, also calls for contributions by aggregator companies towards a fund that will be managed by a board and used for the welfare of workers. Besides, it

recommends contributory old age pension, a contributory wage compensation scheme, scholarships for children of workers, and maternity benefits.

According to the policy, workers will be registered with the government on an App. "We will soon launch the App and the workers will be allowed to self-declare their basic details including the platforms they are linked to. This will then be cross-verified with the platforms and the registration process will be complete," E Gangadhar, Additional Commissioner of Labour,

Telangana, told *The Indian Express*.

The policy will be valid for three years after which a review will be undertaken to determine its scale and impact. "We will finalise the policy only after stakeholder consultations. All recommendations of the draft policy will be discussed at length in June," Gangadhar said.

The policy, drafted by Forum for Good Governance, an NGO, in consultation with the state labour department, also requires aggregator platforms to register with the state government — transport

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

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## Gig Workers

Gig workers are individuals engaged in short-term, flexible, or freelance jobs, often facilitated through digital platforms. These jobs range from food delivery and ride-sharing to freelance writing and graphic design.

### **Gig Workers in the Indian Job Sector**

**Current Scenario:** India has witnessed significant growth in the gig economy, driven by digital advancements and the increasing popularity of platforms like Uber, Ola, Swiggy, Zomato, and UrbanClap. According to NITI Aayog's report, India's gig workforce is expected to grow to 23.5 million by 2029-30, from 7.7 million in 2020-21.

### **Factors Driving Growth:**

1. **Digital Penetration:** Increased smartphone and internet usage.
2. **Economic Needs:** Unemployment and underemployment push workers towards gig jobs.
3. **Flexibility:** Workers benefit from flexible working hours and varied job opportunities.
4. **Demand for Services:** Urbanization and a fast-paced lifestyle increase demand for gig services.

### **Problems Faced by Gig Workers**

1. **Lack of Job Security:** Gig workers typically lack permanent employment contracts, leading to job insecurity.
2. **Absence of Benefits:** Unlike traditional employees, gig workers often do not receive health insurance, paid leave, or retirement benefits.
3. **Income Instability:** Earnings can be unpredictable and insufficient due to the nature of gig work.
4. **Regulatory Ambiguity:** The lack of clear regulations leads to exploitation and lack of legal protection.
5. **Workplace Safety:** Gig workers, especially in sectors like delivery and ride-sharing, face significant risks without adequate safety measures.

## Regulations and Laws for Gig Workers

### Current Legal Framework:

- **Code on Social Security, 2020:** This code extends social security benefits to gig and platform workers. It mandates the provision of life and disability cover, health and maternity benefits, old age protection, and other benefits.
- **Code on Wages, 2019:** This code consolidates minimum wage and payment of wages laws and includes gig workers within its ambit to ensure fair wages.

### Key Provisions:

- **Social Security Fund:** The establishment of a social security fund for gig workers, with contributions from the central and state governments as well as platform companies.
- **Minimum Wages:** Ensuring gig workers receive at least the minimum wage as stipulated by the state governments.
- **Occupational Safety, Health, and Working Conditions Code, 2020:** Aims to ensure safety and health standards for workers, including gig workers.

### Challenges in Implementation:

- **Enforcement:** Effective implementation and enforcement of these laws remain a challenge due to the informal nature of gig work.
- **Awareness:** Many gig workers are unaware of their rights and the available benefits.
- **Employer Responsibility:** Ensuring that platform companies comply with the regulations and contribute to the social security fund.

### Latest Data and Facts

- **Growth Projection:** The gig economy is projected to contribute 1.25% to India's GDP by 2029-30.
- **Demographics:** A significant portion of gig workers are youth (ages 18-30) and semi-skilled or unskilled workers.
- **Sectoral Spread:** The majority of gig workers are engaged in transport and logistics (35%), followed by personal services (32%), and sales and marketing (13%).

### Conclusion

The gig economy plays a crucial role in the Indian job sector, providing employment opportunities and contributing to economic growth. However, the challenges faced by gig workers necessitate robust regulations and effective implementation to ensure fair treatment, social security, and workplace safety. Aligning these efforts with the digital transformation and economic policies will be essential for sustainable development and inclusivity in the labor market.

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**OVER THE BARREL**

BY VIKRAM S. MEHTA

# A new kind of green

To accelerate the energy transition, a different policy framework is required

GENERALS ARE, ON occasion, accused of preparing for the last war. The mandarins responsible for energy in the next government should not make this mistake. India is in the midst of a significant energy transition. The decision makers would be wise to create a new strategic framework for energy policy and its implementation.

Our energy policy is dual pronged. One prong is focused on fossil fuels. The priority here is to manage and mitigate the increasing import dependency on petroleum. The specifics of this prong are diversification of the sources of imports, strategic reserves, domestic exploration, demand conservation and efficiency and environmental protection.

The second prong is focused on accelerating the transition to clean renewable fuels. Here the specifics flow from the longer term commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2070 to the shorter/medium term objectives of reducing carbon intensity of GDP and creating 500 GW of electricity generation capacity from non fossil fuels by 2030.

These two prongs are developed and implemented by functional, vertically structured ministries. The Ministry of Petroleum is responsible for the first prong. And as coal accounts for the largest share in our energy consumption basket, the Ministry of Coal is also crucially significant. The second prong has a

more cluttered parentage. The Ministries of Renewables and Power predominate, but the Ministries of Heavy Industry, Mines and Minerals, IT and Information and Environment are also involved. This is because many of components required to build a green energy ecosystem fall in their jurisdiction.

Each of these government ministries is headed by a cabinet minister. They all have a phalanx of bureaucrats who operate within well defined, narrow and impermeable siloes. There is no formal executive forum for an integrated discussion on energy policy.

I have often commented on the sub optimality of such a compartmentalised decision making structure. But I do so because I believe the targets for decarbonisation and sustainability that India has publicly announced will be difficult to achieve unless decision makers view the energy value chain through one integrated lens. This is because of the international forces that bear on the green transition.

The world is once again confronted by great power competition. The US and its allies are pitted against China and Russia in a new version of the Cold War. Taiwan is the "Berlin" of this contest and technological superiority the surrogate for nuclear arms race. This Cold War has ramifications for the green agenda along three axes — supply chain resilience, domestic investment and national security.

China has a near monopoly concentration on global supplies of materials essential for green energy. It also produces the least cost solar wafers, cells, panels and wind turbines. And it has stolen a march over others on low cost green technology. Domestic manufacturers of solar, wind and EVs have been the beneficiaries. But there are national security concerns. What is supplied can also be withheld.

To mitigate this exposure, the Indian government has imposed duties on Chinese imports and introduced the PLI scheme to incentivise domestic manufacturers. It has not, however, created a strategic frame a la the Chips and Science Act legislated by the US.

The next government should consider developing such a frame. The purpose should be to weave the different strands of policy related to fossil fuels and green energy into one seamless whole and converge the current two-track energy policy onto one track. The government should, as a first step, prepare a document captioned "Energy strategy: Towards convergence, security and sustainability". Such a document should address the following issues.

One, the relationship between the hydro-carbon PSEs and other energy companies. Several of the former are now operating in the domain of the latter. The intent should be to prevent duplicity of effort and resources.

Two, IEA has forewarned that the market

for copper, lithium, nickel and cobalt will be volatile and there will be supply shortages in the absence of additional investment in mining. India must, therefore, lay out a clear strategy for meeting its future requirements.

Three, in the face of the "China factor", the competitiveness of clean energy vis a vis fossil fuels and the ease of access to low cost green technology. The US and EU have imposed anti-dumping duties on Chinese EVs. The reasons are understandable. National security should take priority over economics. But there will be an impact on investors and on the pace of the green transition. These ramifications should be studied.

Four, board rooms are currently cautious about green investment. But, private capital is crucial for the transition. The government must address this risk aversion. One approach could be to identify specific sectors or activities for special incentives. Another, to step up public investment and "crowd in" private capital. The strategy document should detail the options and lay out a road map.

The next government's challenge is to reduce the share of fossil fuel against the backdrop of a polarised international geopolitical context and technological innovation.

*The writer is chairman and distinguished fellow, CSEP*

## ENERGY TRANSITION IN INDIA

Energy transition refers to the shift from a fossil fuel-based energy system to one dominated by renewable energy sources, aimed at reducing carbon emissions and combating climate change.

### Current Energy Scenario in India

**Energy Mix:** As of 2023, India's energy mix is primarily composed of coal (56%), oil (26%), natural gas (6%), and renewable energy sources (12%). The government aims to increase the share of renewable energy in the total energy mix significantly in the coming years.

**Renewable Energy Capacity:** India has set an ambitious target of achieving 175 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2022, which includes 100 GW from solar, 60 GW from wind, 10 GW from biomass, and 5 GW from small hydropower. The target for 2030 is 450 GW, with a significant focus on solar and wind energy.

### Impacts of Energy Transition

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#### Economic Impacts:

1. **Job Creation:** The renewable energy sector is expected to generate numerous jobs, particularly in solar and wind energy installations and maintenance.
2. **Investment Opportunities:** The transition attracts both domestic and international investments, fostering economic growth.
3. **Cost Reduction:** Over time, renewable energy technologies are becoming more cost-competitive compared to fossil fuels, reducing overall energy costs.

#### Environmental Impacts:

1. **Reduction in Emissions:** Shifting to renewable energy sources significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution.
2. **Biodiversity Conservation:** Renewable energy projects, if properly managed, can have lower impacts on biodiversity compared to coal mining and oil extraction.



**Social Impacts:**

1. **Energy Access:** Renewable energy projects can provide electricity to remote and underserved areas, improving the quality of life.
2. **Health Benefits:** Reduced air pollution from fossil fuel combustion leads to better health outcomes for the population.

**Measures to be Undertaken for Effective Energy Transition****Policy and Regulatory Framework:**

1. **Clear and Stable Policies:** Establishing long-term, consistent policies to attract investments in the renewable energy sector.
2. **Incentives:** Providing subsidies, tax benefits, and financial incentives to promote the adoption of renewable energy technologies.
3. **Grid Integration:** Enhancing grid infrastructure to integrate a higher share of renewable energy and ensuring grid stability.

**Technological Advancements:**

1. **Innovation and Research:** Investing in research and development to improve the efficiency and reduce the costs of renewable energy technologies.
2. **Energy Storage:** Developing and deploying energy storage solutions to address the intermittency of renewable energy sources like solar and wind.
3. **Smart Grids:** Implementing smart grid technologies to manage and distribute electricity more efficiently.

**Financial Mechanisms:**

1. **Green Financing:** Mobilizing funds through green bonds and climate finance initiatives to support renewable energy projects.
2. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Encouraging collaboration between the government and private sector to leverage expertise and resources.
3. **International Cooperation:** Engaging in international partnerships to access technology, expertise, and financial resources.

**Capacity Building and Awareness:**

1. **Training Programs:** Developing training programs to equip the workforce with skills required in the renewable energy sector.
2. **Public Awareness:** Raising awareness about the benefits of renewable energy and encouraging community participation in energy projects.
3. **Research Institutions:** Strengthening research institutions to support innovation and provide data-driven insights for policy-making.

### Conclusion

India's energy transition is crucial for achieving sustainable development, economic growth, and environmental protection. The government's ambitious targets and supportive policies are pivotal in driving this transition. However, successful implementation requires coordinated efforts across various sectors, investment in technology and infrastructure, and robust regulatory frameworks. With the right measures in place, India can lead the way in the global energy transition, contributing significantly to the fight against climate change.

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# Why is Monetary Policy Committee likely to leave repo rate unchanged?

- MONETARY POLICY
- MPC COMMITTEE
- REPO RATE
- HOW REPO RATE IS DECIDED

## WHAT IS MONETARY POLICY?

**Definition:** Monetary policy refers to the actions undertaken by a country's central bank to control the money supply, interest rates, and inflation to achieve macroeconomic objectives such as controlling inflation, managing employment levels, and ensuring economic stability.

### Objectives of Monetary Policy

1. **Control Inflation:** Central banks aim to keep inflation at a manageable level to preserve the purchasing power of the currency.
2. **Manage Employment Levels:** By influencing economic activity, central banks aim to maintain high levels of employment.
3. **Ensure Economic Stability:** Stabilizing the economy by preventing booms and busts, promoting sustainable economic growth.
4. **Regulate Money Supply:** Controlling the amount of money circulating in the economy to avoid excessive inflation or deflation.

### Tools of Monetary Policy

1. **Interest Rates:** Central banks set benchmark interest rates which influence the rates at which banks lend to businesses and consumers. Lowering interest rates encourages borrowing and investment, while raising them can help control inflation.
2. **Open Market Operations (OMOs):** The buying and selling of government securities in the open market to regulate the money supply. Buying securities injects money into the economy, while selling them withdraws money.
3. **Reserve Requirements:** Central banks may change the reserve requirement ratio, which is the fraction of deposits that banks must hold in reserve. Lowering the ratio increases the money supply, while raising it reduces the money supply.
4. **Quantitative Easing (QE):** A non-traditional monetary policy tool where central banks purchase longer-term securities to increase the money supply and encourage lending and investment.

### Types of Monetary Policy

1. **Expansionary Monetary Policy:** Implemented to stimulate the economy by increasing the money supply and lowering interest rates, promoting spending and investment.
2. **Contractionary Monetary Policy:** Aimed at reducing the money supply and raising interest rates to control inflation and prevent the economy from overheating.

### Impact of Monetary Policy

1. **On Inflation:** Effective monetary policy helps keep inflation within target levels, preserving the value of the currency.
2. **On Employment:** By stimulating or slowing down economic activity, monetary policy can influence employment levels.
3. **On Economic Growth:** Properly calibrated monetary policy supports sustainable economic growth by maintaining stable financial conditions.
4. **On Interest Rates and Investment:** Changes in interest rates affect borrowing costs for consumers and businesses, influencing levels of spending and investment.

### Monetary Policy in Practice

#### Case Study: India

- **Reserve Bank of India (RBI):** The central bank is responsible for India's monetary policy.

- **Recent Measures:** In response to the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the RBI implemented an expansionary monetary policy, reducing interest rates and conducting open market operations to increase liquidity in the financial system.
- **Inflation Targeting:** The RBI follows a flexible inflation targeting framework, aiming to keep inflation within a target range of  $4\% \pm 2\%$ .

### **MPC COMMITTEE**

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is a statutory body in India responsible for setting the benchmark interest rates to control inflation and achieve economic growth. It was established by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) as per the provisions of the Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934, as amended in 2016.

#### **Objectives of the MPC**

1. **Price Stability:** To maintain price stability while keeping in mind the objective of growth.
2. **Inflation Targeting:** To achieve and maintain a pre-specified inflation target, ensuring a stable economic environment.

#### **Structure of the MPC**

The MPC consists of six members:

- **Governor of the RBI:** Ex-officio Chairperson
- **Deputy Governor of the RBI, in charge of Monetary Policy**
- **One Officer of the RBI nominated by the Central Board**
- **Three External Members:** Appointed by the Government of India, who are experts in the field of economics, banking, finance, or monetary policy.

#### **Functions of the MPC**

1. **Policy Decisions:** The MPC is tasked with making policy decisions related to interest rates and other monetary tools to achieve the inflation target.

2. **Regular Meetings:** The MPC meets at least four times a year. Each meeting involves detailed discussions on the economic conditions, inflation rates, and other relevant factors.
3. **Voting Mechanism:** Decisions are made by a majority vote. Each member has one vote, and in case of a tie, the RBI Governor has a casting vote.
4. **Transparency:** The MPC publishes its decisions and the minutes of its meetings to ensure transparency. This includes the rationale behind the decisions and the voting patterns of the members.

### Impact of the MPC

1. **Inflation Control:** By setting the repo rate, the MPC influences inflation rates, ensuring they stay within the target range.
2. **Economic Stability:** Through its decisions, the MPC aims to provide a stable macroeconomic environment conducive to growth.
3. **Market Confidence:** Transparent and consistent policy-making by the MPC helps build confidence among investors and market participants.

### Recent Context

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- **Inflation Targeting Framework:** As per the agreement between the Government of India and the RBI, the inflation target has been set at 4% with a tolerance band of +/- 2% for the period of April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2026.
- **Policy Adjustments:** In response to the economic challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the MPC has adjusted interest rates and liquidity measures to support economic recovery.

### What is Repo Rate?

**Definition:** The repo rate (or repurchase rate) is the rate at which a country's central bank (in India, the Reserve Bank of India or RBI) lends short-term money to commercial banks. This is done against government securities as collateral. It is a crucial monetary policy tool used to control inflation and stabilize the economy.

### How Repo Rate Works

- **Mechanism:** When commercial banks face a shortage of funds, they can borrow from the central bank at the repo rate. In return, they pledge government securities as collateral.

- **Impact on Economy:** A lower repo rate makes borrowing cheaper for banks, encouraging them to lend more to businesses and consumers, thereby stimulating economic activity. Conversely, a higher repo rate makes borrowing costlier, helping to curb inflation by reducing spending and borrowing.

### Deciding the Repo Rate

The repo rate is decided by the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). Here's how the process typically works:

1. **Economic Analysis:** The MPC conducts a thorough analysis of various economic indicators, including inflation, economic growth, fiscal deficits, and global economic conditions.
2. **Data Consideration:** Key data points considered include the Consumer Price Index (CPI), Wholesale Price Index (WPI), GDP growth rates, and other relevant economic metrics.
3. **Consultation:** The MPC consults with stakeholders, including government officials, economists, and financial experts, to gather diverse perspectives on the current economic situation.
4. **Meetings:** The MPC meets bi-monthly to review and discuss the economic conditions. Based on their assessment, they decide whether to adjust the repo rate.
5. **Voting:** Decisions on the repo rate are made by a majority vote among the MPC members. If there is a tie, the RBI Governor has the casting vote.
6. **Announcement:** The MPC's decision, along with the rationale, is publicly announced. The minutes of the meeting are also published for transparency.

### Factors Influencing Repo Rate Decisions

1. **Inflation:** The primary goal of the repo rate adjustment is to control inflation. If inflation is high, the MPC may increase the repo rate to reduce money supply in the economy.
2. **Economic Growth:** To support economic growth, especially during slowdowns, the MPC may lower the repo rate to make borrowing cheaper and stimulate investment and consumption.
3. **Fiscal Policies:** Government spending and fiscal deficits are also considered. Excessive government borrowing can influence the repo rate decisions.

4. **Global Economic Conditions:** International economic trends, such as global interest rates, oil prices, and trade dynamics, can impact the repo rate.
5. **Liquidity Conditions:** The overall liquidity in the banking system, including the demand and supply of money, affects repo rate decisions.

### Recent Trends and Data

- As of the latest MPC meeting, the repo rate stands at 6.5%. The RBI has been actively using the repo rate to manage the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, adjusting it multiple times to either stimulate the economy or control inflation.
- During high inflation periods, the RBI has increased the repo rate to curb spending. For instance, in response to rising inflation in 2022, the repo rate was increased several times.

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# Cooperative-based model mooted to supply Rajasthan farmers power

**The Hindu Bureau**  
JAIPUR

A dialogue on systemic issues of poor electricity supply faced by the farmers in Rajasthan has recommended the establishment of a farmers' cooperative-based distribution model with the regulatory viability under the Electricity Act, 2003. The critical need to increase regulatory accountability for supply of electricity to agricultural consumers was also raised on the occasion.

The dialogue was organised by the Jaipur-based Centre for Energy, Environment and People (CEEP) as part of the 'Vidut Samvad' series here earlier this week. The participants made an attempt to understand the complexities of electricity supply and discussed the technical and financial solutions in the power sector through a study of Chandan area in Jaisalmer district, which typically faces only four hours of electric-



Possible pathways to address poor quality of electricity supplied to agricultural consumers were also discussed. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

ity supply as well as continuous voltage fluctuations, which lead to malfunctioning of irrigation motors and transformers.

## Farmers' struggles

Chandan Farmers' Union vice-president Jaitmal Singh Bairwa said the typical block supply duration in the rural area was barely four hours against the mandate of six hours. The voltage fluctuations often led to malfunctioning of irrigation motors and transformers, he said, adding that the loss of crops and

increased cost of farming because of this was a major concern among the agriculturists.

Over 60 participants from Rajasthan and other States and a panel of experts voiced different perspectives and highlighted the ground realities as well as the technical and regulatory challenges. The experts discussed the possible pathways to the address the issue of poor quality of electricity supplied to the agricultural consumers.

CEEP's founder Simran

Grover said the dialogue tried to evolve consensus for resolving various issues, while considering the steps needed to bridge the gaps in the power distribution infrastructure. The panel of experts also discussed the role of solar and energy-efficient pumps for irrigation in the agricultural fields.

The experts who spoke at the dialogue and gave suggestions included farmer and social activist Aiveer Singh Patavat from Jaisalmer's Sanwala village, and Jodhpur Vidyut Vitaran Nigam's former Superintending Engineer Jetharam Choudhary, Rajasthan Electricity Regulatory Commission's Deputy Director (Technical) P.K. Garg and Sweta Kulkarni, Fellow of Prayas Energy Group, Pune.

Jaipur-based CEEP is a research and policy advocacy institution, which has undertaken critical research and fostered democratic coalitions for low carbon transition and climate justice.

# India to participate in Red Flag, RIMPAC exercises

Ex RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific) scheduled to be held in Hawaii from June 25 to August 2.

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## For a consensus

Elections should not prompt politicians to break consensus on foreign policy

**W**ith the curtains coming down on the general election 2024, every party will take stock of its campaign on issues of domestic political importance. However, it is also necessary for all concerned, particularly those forming the next government, to review the disturbing trend of revisiting questions of foreign policy. Both sides have ratcheted up the rhetoric over India's international ties and in some cases, even the re-opening of settled bilateral agreements. At the start of the campaign, the ruling party focused on the issue of the half-century-old Katchatheevu agreement, that accepted the island as Sri Lankan territory, to target the Opposition Congress and the DMK that were in power in 1974. In response, Congress leaders asked whether the 2015 Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh could also be reviewed for its land concessions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led the charge on other foreign policy fronts, especially on Pakistan, calling the Congress party a "disciple of Pakistan" and comparing its manifesto pejoratively to that of the Muslim League that founded Pakistan. U.P. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath even proclaimed that were Mr. Modi to be re-elected, he would reclaim Pakistan Occupied Kashmir "within six months". Other brash comments over India's use of its nuclear arsenal, or that the government will transgress international boundaries to kill 'terrorists threatening India', have raised eyebrows in many capitals. The clashes between the Indian Army and Chinese PLA at Galwan in 2020 that led to the deaths of 20 soldiers have often been raised by Opposition leaders in campaign rallies, as in the past as well. Meanwhile, throughout the campaign, Mr. Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar accused "western powers" of attempting to interfere in Indian polls.

Such heated campaign rhetoric is meant for domestic audiences, but it would be unwise for political leaders to assume that India's international partners are not watching and listening carefully. India's ties with its smaller neighbours carry the highest levels of sensitivity, and raking up these issues and exposing India's vulnerable faultlines, just to make political capital, seems short-sighted. While domestic policy has always been deeply divisive, India's polity had for long achieved a bipartisanship when it came to foreign policy positions, and often took pride in the deployment of Opposition leaders to defend India's case worldwide, including at the UN. The proper platform for the government to assert foreign policy, or for the Opposition to air its differences with it, is not the hustings, but Parliament. It is hoped that as the dust settles, leaders will reflect on the potential damage to India's credibility from campaign propaganda, and restore a more enduring consensus on international relations.

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