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Daily **CURRENT AFFAIRS**

 May 30th 2026



 **Offline Centre Location:**
SCO 173-174, Sector 17C, Chandigarh

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1. IMD curtails its forecast for the southwest monsoon, pushes the onset date to June

Why in the News?

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has made two significant downward revisions to its 2026 southwest monsoon forecast, raising fears of an agricultural drought. It has cut its overall seasonal rainfall prediction to **90% of the Long Period Average (LPA), down from 92% in April**. Simultaneously, it acknowledged that its predicted monsoon onset over Kerala by May 26 has failed, pushing the expected arrival to the first week of June. This is only the second time since 2005 that the IMD's onset forecast has been wrong.



Background

- **Long Period Average (LPA):** The LPA is the average rainfall over 50 years, currently pegged at 87 cm. Rainfall between **90% and 95% of LPA is classified as "below normal," while anything under 90% is "deficient."**
- **The 2015 Parallel:** The current situation closely mirrors 2015, the only other year the IMD's onset forecast failed. That year, an April forecast of 93% was cut to 88% in June, with the season ending at 86%. It was a drought year, forming the fourth back-to-back deficient monsoon pair in 115 years, driven by a strong El Niño.
- **The El Niño Factor:** The primary driver for the current grim forecast is the high probability of El Niño conditions. The IMD now pegs the chance of El Niño during the monsoon season at 92%. El Niño is typically associated with suppressed rainfall over India.

Features

- **Drought Probability Raised:** The IMD has placed the probability of a "deficient" monsoon (rainfall under 90% of LPA) at 60%, a stark warning. The term "drought," however, is officially declared by the Agriculture Ministry, not the IMD.

- **Widespread Regional Shortfall:** Only the Northeast is forecast to receive "normal" monsoon rainfall. The crucial Northwest, Central India, Southern Peninsula, and the "monsoon core zone" (which feeds the country's rain-fed farmland) are all expected to experience shortfalls.
- **Delayed Onset Mechanism:** According to D.S. Pai, a co-author of the onset forecast model, while monsoon rains reached the Andaman Sea on time, the crucial westerly winds have failed to strengthen and push the system towards the Kerala coast.
- **June Outlook Grim:** The rainfall for June alone is forecast to be under 92% of its average, indicating a weak start to the crucial four-month season.

Challenge

- **Dry Spell Impact:** Crops can typically withstand a dry spell of about one week. Longer gaps between rain events will cause severe moisture stress, especially on non-irrigated farmlands.
- **Groundwater Recharge:** Insufficient total rainfall, coupled with poor distribution, will prevent adequate groundwater recharge. This will subsequently affect irrigated crops like rice, compounding the agricultural stress.
- **Economic & Food Security Risk:** A deficient monsoon threatens farm incomes, rural demand, and overall economic growth, with the potential to stoke food inflation.

Way Forward

- **Positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD):** A favourable temperature gradient in the Indian Ocean can boost monsoon rainfall. However, IOD conditions are currently absent.
- **Madden-Julian Oscillation (MJO):** The MJO is an eastward-moving pulse of cloud and rainfall near the equator. A favourable phase over the Indian Ocean could enhance rainfall for short periods.
- **Timely Low-Pressure Systems:** The formation of low-pressure systems in the Bay of Bengal is crucial for distributing rainfall over central and northern India. Their absence would be detrimental.
- **Contingency Planning:** A delayed onset and weak June necessitate agricultural advisories on shifting to short-duration crops and robust water management strategies to cope with an extended mid-season dry spell.

Conclusion

The IMD's revised forecast has shifted the 2026 monsoon outlook from worrying to critical. With a 60% probability of deficient rainfall, a delayed onset, and a 92% chance of El Niño, the conditions are ripe for an agricultural drought reminiscent of 2015. The final fate of the season now hinges on the unpredictable behaviour of intra-seasonal phenomena, while the government's focus must pivot urgently to mitigating the impact of erratic and sparse rainfall distribution on both rain-fed and irrigated agriculture.

2. 90% of Indian babies are born in hospitals: NFHS-6

Why in the News?

The Ministry of Health released the key findings of the National Family Health Survey-6 (NFHS-6) on Friday. This is the first comprehensive national health data released after the COVID-19 pandemic, with fieldwork conducted in 2023-24. The survey highlights significant progress in maternal and child health, while flagging an alarming rise in caesarean section deliveries and the growing double burden of malnutrition and lifestyle diseases.

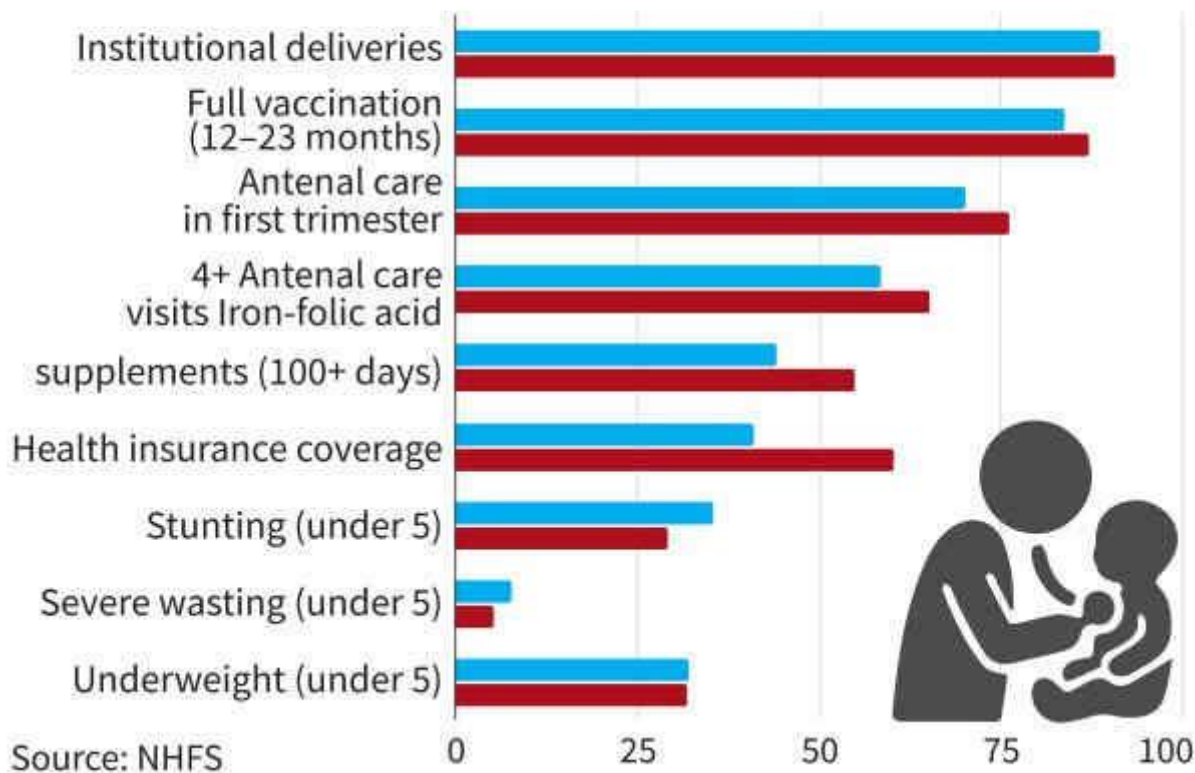
Background

- **What is the NFHS?** A large-scale, multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India. It provides essential data on health, nutrition, and family welfare for policy-making.
- **Agency:** Conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare in collaboration with the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai.
- **Comparison Baseline:** The data is compared against the fifth round of the survey (NFHS-5), conducted between 2019 and 2021.

Progress tracker

India recorded improvements in maternal and child health indicators, with higher vaccination coverage and lower malnutrition levels in NFHS-6

■ NFHS-5 (%)
■ NFHS-6 (%)



Feature

Maternal and Infant Care Milestones

- Hospital Births: 90.6% of Indian babies are now born in hospitals, up from 88.6% in NFHS-5.

- Early Breastfeeding: 95.6% of infants under six months are being breastfed.
- Antenatal Care (ANC): 95.9% of pregnant women received ANC, with 76.2% receiving it in the crucial first trimester (up from 70%).
- Improved Nutrition: The percentage of mothers consuming Iron-Folic Acid (IFA) supplements for 100 days or more rose sharply from 44.1% to 54.9%.

Child Health Improvements

- Stunting: Fell significantly from 35.5% to 29.3% among children under five years.
- Severe Wasting: Dropped from 7.7% to 5.2%.
- Disease Prevalence: Symptoms of Acute Respiratory Infection (ARI) in children fell from 2.8% to 1.9%, and severe diarrhoea prevalence dropped to 0.5%.

Vaccination and Fertility

- Full Immunisation: Coverage rose from 83.8% to 87.1%, with a dramatic rise in rotavirus vaccine coverage (36.4% to 85.4%).
- Total Fertility Rate (TFR): Holds steady at 2.0, which is just below the replacement threshold of 2.1.
- Contraceptive Use: Modern contraceptive prevalence rate increased to 69.1%.

Challenge

Skyrocketing Caesarean Sections

This is a major red flag. The rate has jumped from 21.5% to 27.2%, far exceeding the World Health Organization's optimal threshold of 10-15%. In urban areas, the rate is a staggering 40%, particularly high in private healthcare facilities, indicating a trend of medically unnecessary surgeries.

Persistent Double Burden of Malnutrition

While child stunting has decreased, there is a dual challenge:

- **Undernutrition:** The percentage of underweight children only saw a marginal slip (32.1% to 31.8%), remaining a critical concern.
- **Rising Obesity:** The report flags an increase in obesity among adults, alongside lifestyle-related risks and non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Way Forward

- **C-section Regulation:** Strict implementation of clinical guidelines and mandatory audits of C-section rates in private and urban hospitals are needed to curb the sharp rise.
- **Tackling the Nutrition Paradox:** Policy must address the "double burden" simultaneously-continuing aggressive drives against child undernutrition while intensifying public awareness campaigns on diet and exercise to fight adult obesity and NCDs.
- **Unfinished Immunisation Agenda:** Efforts must focus on reaching the last-mile children to push full immunisation closer to 100% and further boost measles-rubella coverage.

Conclusion

NFHS-6 draws a picture of an India that has successfully institutionalised maternal care (90%+ hospital births) and made laudable progress in reducing child stunting and severe wasting. However, this success is tempered by a troubling rise in unnecessary C-sections, suggesting a commercialisation of birth care. The way forward requires a rebalancing of the health system-from focusing purely on access to ensuring quality and medically appropriate care-while simultaneously

tackling the complex duel of persistent undernutrition and a surge in lifestyle diseases.

3. International law, 'optional' for powerful states

Why in the News?

The article is a contemporary commentary on the state of global order, written against the backdrop of the 2026 U.S.-Israeli war on Iran and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. It argues that recent actions by powerful states-bravely violating the UN Charter's prohibition on the use of force-have cemented a dangerous reality where international law is treated as "optional." The piece assesses the cascading erosion of norms across multiple domains, from humanitarian law to maritime and environmental treaties.

International law, 'optional' for powerful states

Voltaire's famous quip about the Holy Roman Empire – that it was neither holy, nor Roman, nor an empire – has often come to mind when I think about the contemporary state of public international law. For all its lofty aspirations, it is frequently neither truly public, nor reliably international, nor consistently law. It is public only in the sense that it concerns states rather than private actors; international only insofar as sovereigns consent to be bound; and law only to the extent that it can be enforced – an increasingly fragile proposition in a world where power, not principle, is again determining outcomes.

The erosion of an edifice of norms
Over the last century and a half, humanity painstakingly constructed an edifice of norms, treaties and institutions meant to restrain the worst impulses of states. From the Hague Conventions to the Geneva Conventions, from the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), from human rights covenants to arms-control regimes, the international community sought to replace the anarchy of the past with a rules-based order. Yet, in recent years, that order has been fraying at an alarming pace. Across continents and conflicts, states have violated foundational principles with impunity, eroding the credibility of the very system meant to protect global peace and stability.

The most fundamental of these principles is the UN Charter's prohibition on the use of force and its guarantee of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran in 2026 stand as the starkest breaches of this norm in decades: an unprovoked assault on a sovereign state, justified through dubious claims and enforced through overwhelming military might. Both invasions confirmed that the Charter's core promise could be shredded when a powerful state chose to do so.

The U.S. and Russian records are equally deplorable in disregarding the prohibition on force. The 2003 Iraq invasion, undertaken without Security Council authorisation and justified on grounds later proven baseless, remains one of the most consequential breaches of the Charter that set a precedent for Russia's conduct. More recently, the targeted killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran have raised serious questions about the erosion of the norm against unilateral force. Israel's repeated military operations in Gaza and Lebanon, including large-scale bombardments causing extensive civilian casualties, have also drawn widespread allegations of disproportionate force and violations of international humanitarian law. The pattern is not confined to major powers. Turkey's incursions into northern Syria,



Shashi Tharoor
Fourth-term Member of Parliament (Lok Sabha) for Thiruvananthapuram (Congress party), the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs and the Sahitya Akademi Award-winning author of 29 books, including 'Paav Indica' (2012) and 'The New World Disorder' (2020)

Azerbaijan's use of force in Nagorno-Karabakh, and Ethiopia's conduct in the Tigray conflict, including cross-border strikes into Sudan, have all arguably breached international norms.

Beyond the use of force, states have violated UNCLOS, one of the most widely ratified treaties in the world. The South China Sea has become a theatre of systematic disregard for maritime law. China's expansive "nine-dash line" claim, rejected by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016, continues to be enforced through militarised artificial islands, harassment of foreign vessels, and coercive coast-guard tactics. The Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia have all faced incursions into their exclusive economic zones.

The Strait of Hormuz has witnessed repeated blockades and interdictions. Iran and the U.S. have seized foreign tankers, closed the Strait, and imposed maritime blockades in the region, without clear legal justification under UNCLOS. These actions undermine the principle of freedom of navigation, a cornerstone of global trade and maritime stability.

Brazen actions across the world
International humanitarian law has also suffered grievous violations. In Syria, the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons, indiscriminate bombing of civilian areas, and siege tactics have been extensively documented. Non-state actors such as the Islamic State (ISIS) and various militias have committed atrocities on a massive scale. In Yemen, the Saudi-led coalition and Houthis rebels alike have been accused of targeting civilians, hospitals, and critical infrastructure. In Ethiopia's Tigray region, reports of mass killings, sexual violence, and starvation as a weapon of war have shocked the conscience of the world.

Human rights treaties, too, have been flouted with increasing brazenness. Israel's indiscriminate killing of civilians in Gaza and China's treatment of Uyghurs in Xinjiang – including mass detention, forced labour, and cultural erasure – have been described by several governments and scholars as crimes against humanity. Myanmar's military junta has carried out systematic abuses against the Rohingya and other ethnic minorities, prompting genocide allegations. In Iran, the violent suppression of protests following the death of Mahsa Amini revealed a pattern of extrajudicial killings and torture. Even democratic states have not been immune: the U.S.'s use of torture during the "war on terror", Australia's offshore detention of asylum seekers, and Europe's pushbacks of migrants in the Mediterranean have all raised serious legal and moral concerns. Arms-control regimes have also weakened. The collapse of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the erosion of the Open Skies

Treaty, and the uncertain future of the New START agreement have revived fears of a new arms race. North Korea continues to defy UN resolutions with missile tests and nuclear development.

Iran's nuclear programme, once constrained by the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has allegedly accelerated following the agreement's unravelling. These developments threaten to undo decades of painstaking progress in nuclear restraint.

Environmental law, too, has suffered. States have failed to meet their commitments under the Paris Agreement, with emissions rising and climate targets slipping out of reach. Illegal deforestation in the Amazon, often abetted by state actors, violates international norms on biodiversity and environmental protection. Deep-sea mining, pursued without adequate regulation, threatens fragile marine ecosystems.

There is a vacuum

What ties these disparate violations together is not merely their frequency but their impunity. International law depends on consent, reciprocity, and enforcement through collective mechanisms. Yet, the Security Council is paralysed by geopolitical rivalries; the International Criminal Court faces accusations of bias and lacks jurisdiction over major powers; and treaty bodies often rely on voluntary compliance. In this vacuum, states increasingly act as though power, not principle, determines legality. Thucydides' bleak observation – "the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must" – resonates today with unsettling clarity. When powerful states violate international law without consequence, they signal to others that norms are optional and that might is right. The result is a world sliding back toward the law of the jungle.

This is not merely a philosophical concern. The erosion of international law has tangible consequences: conflicts become harder to resolve, civilians bear the brunt of violence, global commons are degraded, and trust between nations evaporates. The rules-based order, imperfect as it is, remains humanity's best defence against chaos.

The challenge in reaffirming the value of international law is that it requires strengthening multilateral institutions, enhancing accountability mechanisms, and cultivating a global political culture that prizes restraint over adventurism. It also requires recognising that international law is not a panacea but a framework – a set of shared expectations that guide behaviour even when perfect compliance is elusive. Without it, the world risks returning to a state where power alone determines outcomes. And in such a world, it is not only the weak who suffer; ultimately, everyone does.

Imperfect though it may be, the rules-based order remains humanity's strongest defence against chaos

Background

The author invokes Voltaire's quip to define the precarious nature of public international law today: it is neither truly public, nor reliably international, nor consistently law. Its three frailties are:

- Public: It concerns states, not private actors.
- International: It binds only when sovereigns consent.
- Law: It is effective only when enforceable—a condition now failing as power trumps principle.

This order was built over 150 years through a series of foundational pillars: the Hague and Geneva Conventions, the **UN Charter (specifically the prohibition on the use of force and the guarantee of territorial sovereignty)**, **UNCLOS**, human rights covenants, and arms-control regimes. The article posits that this entire edifice is now fraying at an alarming pace.

Features

The author catalogues violations across five distinct pillars of international law:

The Foundational Norm: Prohibition on the Use of Force

- Starkest Breaches: Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the 2026 U.S.-Israeli war on Iran are highlighted as direct assaults on the UN Charter's core promise.
- **The Original Sin:** The **2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq, undertaken without Security Council authorisation, set a precedent for Russia's conduct.**
- Patterns of Impunity: Israel's repeated operations in Gaza and Lebanon, Türkiye's incursions into Syria, and Azerbaijan's use of force in Nagorno-Karabakh are cited as further examples where this norm has been breached.

Maritime Law (UNCLOS)

- **South China Sea:** China continues to enforce its illegal "nine-dash line" claim through militarised islands and coercion, in defiance of the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration ruling.
- **Strait of Hormuz:** The U.S. and Iran have engaged in tanker seizures and blockades without clear legal justification, undermining freedom of navigation.

International Humanitarian & Human Rights Law

- **Crimes Against Humanity:** China's treatment of Uyghurs (mass detention, forced labour) and Israel's killing of civilians in Gaza are described by scholars as potential crimes against humanity. Myanmar's abuses against the Rohingya have prompted genocide allegations.
- **Torture and Atrocities:** The Assad regime's use of chemical weapons in Syria, starvation tactics in Ethiopia's Tigray, Iran's violent crackdown on protests, and even the U.S.'s use of torture during the "war on terror" are listed as grievous violations.

Arms-Control Regimes

- **Treaty Collapse:** The erosion of the INF Treaty and Open Skies Treaty, combined with North Korea's defiance of UN resolutions and Iran's alleged acceleration of its nuclear programme after the JCPOA unravelled, signals a new arms race.

Environmental Law

- **Failed Commitments:** States are failing Paris Agreement targets, illegal deforestation in the Amazon is often state-abetted, and unregulated deep-sea mining threatens marine ecosystems.

Challenge:

- **Security Council:** Paralysed by geopolitical rivalries.
- **International Criminal Court (ICC):** Accused of bias and lacking jurisdiction over major powers.
- **Treaty Bodies:** Rely on voluntary compliance.
The author invokes Thucydides' maxim—"the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must"—to argue that when powerful states violate law without consequence, they signal that might is right, dragging the world back to the law of the jungle. This has tangible consequences: irresolvable conflicts, civilian suffering, degraded global commons, and evaporated trust between nations.

Way Forward

The author prescribes a multi-pronged approach to reaffirm the value of the rules-based order:

- **Strengthen Multilateral Institutions:** Reform is needed to overcome the current paralysis.
- **Enhance Accountability Mechanisms:** There must be consequences for violations to break the cycle of impunity.
- **Cultivate a Global Political Culture of Restraint:** States must prize restraint over diplomatic adventurism.
- **Reframe the Understanding of Law:** International law must be accepted not as a magical panacea, but as an essential framework of shared expectations that guides behaviour and prevents a descent into pure power politics.

Conclusion

The article concludes that the rules-based order, for all its imperfections, remains humanity's best and only defence against chaos. The ultimate warning is that a world where power alone determines outcomes is not simply unjust for the weak; in an interconnected world of cascading conflicts and environmental collapse, it is a world where, ultimately, everyone suffers. Restoring faith in this framework is not idealism but a practical necessity for global survival.

4. 'Off with their heads' – the purge of Republican dissenters

Why in the News?

A recent political battle in Kentucky's Fourth Congressional District has drawn attention to the growing dominance of U.S. President Donald Trump within the Republican Party. Congressman Thomas Massie, a prominent conservative lawmaker known for challenging Trump's policies, lost a high-profile primary contest after facing intense opposition backed by Trump and influential political groups.

'Off with their heads' – the purge of Republican dissenters

Foreign observers, including Indians often question why the Republicans do not question or stymie United State President Donald Trump's controversial policies. The answer lies in Indian-style "high command" politics, where legislators who cross the party boss are routinely denied electoral tickets and sidelined.

For decades, the U.S. boasted a system allowing local grassroots voters, rather than central party elites, to choose candidates. Today, however, the American Republican Party is undergoing a radical transformation that mirrors this hierarchical structure. The transformation was on full display in Kentucky's fourth congressional district, where Mr. Trump has successfully orchestrated the political defeat of one of his own lawmakers, Congressman Thomas Massie, after a brutal \$32-million proxy war that became a referendum on loyalty within the Republican Party.

The culture of fear
To comprehend this clash, one must understand why American Republicans fear crossing Mr. Trump. Defying him carries a career-ending penalty; just days ago, Louisiana Senator Bill Cassidy, who voted to impeach Trump in 2021, was decisively ousted in his State's primary election. As Senator Lindsey Graham trailing observed on American television, those who attempt to oppose Mr. Trump face certain political destruction. Mr. Trump commands an iron grip on the Republican base. For a U.S. lawmaker, a single angry tweet can instantly dry up campaign funding and turn lifelong supporters into vocal opponents.

Yet, Thomas Massie steadfastly refused to yield. An eccentric, 55-year-old MIT-trained engineer and libertarian, Mr. Massie has represented Kentucky in the House since 2012. A staunch conservative who entered politics through the Tea Party movement, he lives off-the-grid in a self-built solar-powered house



Anil Raman
Retired Brigadier and a research fellow in the Geopolitics Programme of Takshashila Institution

and remains deeply popular locally. His defining trait is a stubborn, often contrarian, insistence on absolute constitutional consistency. He consistently votes independently of party leadership, earning a reputation as Washington's premier renegade.

During Trump's second administration, Mr. Massie has emerged as a persistent thorn in the executive's side. He voted against Mr. Trump's signature "One Big Beautiful Bill", arguing that it would explode the national debt and fuel inflation. He further irritated the administration by successfully spearheading a bipartisan push to compel the government to release the unredacted Jeffrey Epstein files. Most critically, as a staunch anti-interventionist, Mr. Massie has vocalised fierce opposition to the escalating U.S.-backed military conflict with Iran, warning that foreign engagements drain American resources.

The Trumpian backlash
On Truth Social, the President branded Mr. Massie as a "Third Rate Congressman" and the "worst and most unreliable Republican Congressman in history." To orchestrate his defeat, Mr. Trump hand-picked Ed Gallrein, a retired Navy SEAL, to challenge Mr. Massie in the primary. The environment became so toxic that Mr. Trump even threatened to back primary challenges against other popular Republicans, such as Lauren Boebert, simply for travelling to Kentucky to campaign on Mr. Massie's behalf.

Mr. Trump's campaign was bolstered by powerful external allies. The race became a \$32-million blitzkrieg largely due to the pro-Israel lobby – specifically the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), alongside conservative billionaires Miriam Adelson and Paul Singer. Because Mr. Massie opposed U.S. military action against Iran and routinely voted against foreign aid packages, AIPAC flooded Kentucky with \$9 million in attack ads, framing him as an adversary of Israel. Mr. Massie retaliated by

introducing a bill to force AIPAC lobbyists to register as foreign agents under the Department of Justice, framing the election as a referendum on whether foreign lobbies can dictate terms to American lawmakers.

Why this matters for U.S. politics
Indians, from the IT parks of Bengaluru to the residents of Pooch on the Line of Control, must pay close attention to this development as its outcome has profound consequences for American governance and global stability.

Mr. Massie lost. His defeat demonstrates that even immense local popularity and principled conservatism may no longer be sufficient to shield a lawmaker from executive wrath. The result sends a clear message across the Republican Party: opposition to Mr. Trump carries potentially fatal political consequences. For aspiring lawmakers, loyalty increasingly matters more than independence.

The Republican Party's transformation into a more centralised political structure is therefore no longer a possibility but an observable reality. Mr. Massie's defeat suggests that ideological dissent, even from a conservative with impeccable Republican credentials, can trigger a coordinated campaign involving the White House, influential donors and powerful interest groups.

For India, which relies on a stable, predictable and democratic American foreign policy, a U.S. Congress stripped of robust internal checks and balances represents a dangerous prospect. As authority becomes increasingly concentrated, foreign and domestic policy alike become more dependent on the preferences of a narrower political circle.

The Massie case serves as a stark reminder that the principal challenge facing American democracy may lie not merely in partisan conflict between Republicans and Democrats, but in the shrinking space for disagreement within one of the country's two major political parties.

Background

The United States has traditionally prided itself on a decentralised political system where grassroots voters, rather than party leadership, largely determine candidates through primary

elections. This system was often viewed as a safeguard against excessive concentration of power within political parties. However, according to the article, the Republican Party has increasingly evolved toward a more centralized structure under Donald Trump's leadership. Party members who challenge or oppose Trump risk political isolation, loss of campaign funding, and electoral defeat. This phenomenon resembles the "high-command culture" commonly associated with some political parties in countries such as India.

Feature

- **Iron grip on the base:** Trump commands such loyalty that a single angry tweet can dry up a lawmaker's funding and turn lifelong supporters into opponents.
- **Career-ending penalties:** Crossing Trump leads to coordinated political destruction - primary challenges, attack ads, and loss of party support.
- **External allies as enforcers:** The pro-Israel lobby (AIPAC) spent \$9 million against Massie because he opposed military action against Iran and foreign aid packages. Billionaires like Miriam Adelson and Paul Singer joined the effort.
- **Total cost of the proxy war:** \$32 million - turning a local primary into a national referendum on loyalty.
- **Targeting even popular incumbents:** Massie was deeply popular locally, an MIT-trained libertarian with impeccable conservative credentials, yet he lost.

Challenge

The central challenge facing American democracy is no longer just partisan conflict between Republicans and Democrats. The deeper problem is the shrinking space for internal disagreement within one of the two major parties. When a party's lawmakers must choose between constitutional independence and loyalty to a single leader, institutional checks and balances erode. For India, which depends on a stable, predictable, and democratic U.S. foreign policy, a Congress stripped of robust internal dissent is dangerous. Policy becomes concentrated among a narrower circle, making U.S. foreign engagements more volatile and less predictable.

Way forward

- **For U.S. politics:** Unless moderate Republicans and institutionalists create new mechanisms to protect dissenters (e.g., alternative funding networks, cross-party coalitions, or primary reforms), the purge will continue. However, the Massie defeat suggests no immediate remedy exists within the current party structure.
- **For foreign observers like India:** New Delhi must recalibrate its expectations. Relying on Congress as a check on executive overreach is increasingly unreliable. India should engage directly with multiple power centres - including state-level Republicans, the Trump-aligned White House, and even Democratic interlocutors - rather than assuming a balanced two-party system.
- **For democratic resilience:** Civil society and media must spotlight such internal purges to maintain public accountability, even when party bosses resist.

Conclusion

Thomas Massie's defeat is not an isolated event. It is proof that the Republican Party has transformed into a centralised, loyalty-driven political machine where ideological independence - even from a conservative with impeccable credentials - invites coordinated destruction involving the White House, big donors, and foreign policy lobbies. For America, this means a weakened Congress and stronger executive dominance. For India, it signals that the U.S. can no longer be

treated as a reliably balanced democracy with internal checks. The purge of Republican dissenters is, therefore, a global political event with lasting consequences.

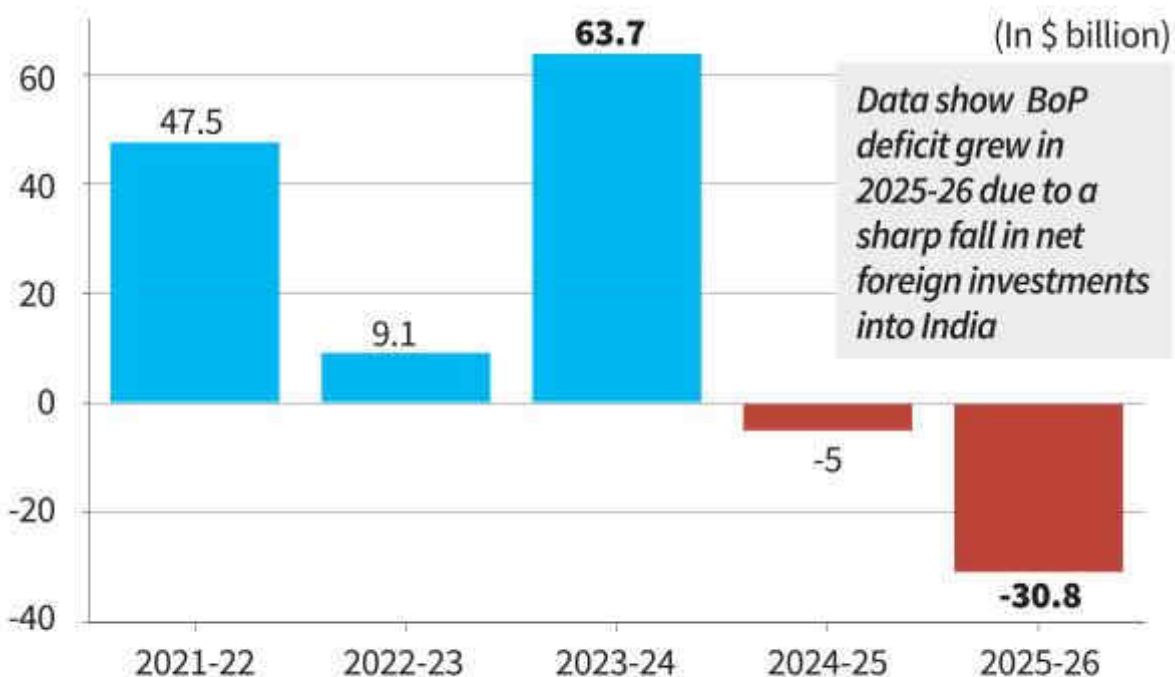
5. RBI data shows why govt. is concerned about dollars flowing out

Why in the news?

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) latest annual report has revealed a sharp deterioration in India's Balance of Payments (BoP), which stood at a deficit of \$30.8 billion in 2025-26 - more than six times the deficit recorded in 2024-25. This marks a dramatic reversal from a surplus as recently as 2023-24. The data explains why Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently urged Indians to reduce fuel consumption and gold purchases, and why the government hiked import duties on gold and silver. For policymakers, the rapid outflow of dollars signals potential pressure on the rupee, vulnerability to external shocks, and the need for urgent corrective measures.

Balance of Payments

The outflow of dollars has exceeded inflows by an increasing amount



Source: RBI Annual Report 2025-26 • Note: Data for 2025-26 is provisional. Negative figures indicate a deficit and positive ones denote a surplus.

Background

India's Balance of Payments is a record of all economic transactions between India and the rest of the world. It has two main components:

- **Current account:** Captures trade in goods and services, plus certain cross-border financial flows. India typically runs a current account deficit (CAD) because it imports more goods than it exports.

- **Capital account:** Records investments (foreign direct investment, portfolio investment), external borrowings, and asset transfers.

Historically, India has managed to keep its BoP stable because a large capital account surplus (driven by foreign investment) has offset the current account deficit. However, the latest RBI data shows both components have turned adverse simultaneously.

Feature

- BoP deficit surged to 30.8 billion in 2025–26, up from 4.8 billion in 2024–25 - a six-fold increase.
- Current account deficit (CAD) hit a three-year high of \$30.2 billion.
- Merchandise trade deficit stood at 251.6 billion (improved from 286.9 billion previously).
- Services surplus shrank to 221.4 billion from 263.9 billion - this contraction is a key reason the CAD widened even though the goods trade deficit fell.
- Capital account surplus collapsed to just 72 million in 2025–26, down from 16.6 billion in 2024–25 - a drop of over 99.5%.
- Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) pulled out \$4.3 billion more than they invested, reversing the trend of the previous two years.
- Other capital: heading (delayed export receipts, advance import payments, funds held abroad) showed a deficit of 22.6 billion, up from 7.4 billion.
- The entire BoP deficit was financed by drawing down the RBI's foreign exchange reserves, significantly depleting them.

Challenge

The primary challenge is that India is experiencing twin drains - on the current account (**due to high oil and gold imports**) and on the capital account (due to portfolio outflows and Indians parking funds abroad). This combination is rare and dangerous.

Specific challenges include:

- **Currency pressure:** Sustained dollar outflows weaken the rupee, making imports more expensive and fueling inflation.
- **Vulnerability to external shocks:** With West Asia tensions already affecting one month of the reported period, any escalation could worsen oil prices and remittance flows.
- **Policy trade-offs:** The government raised gold import duties to 15% (from 6%) and restricted silver imports, but such measures risk smuggling and do not address the root cause of domestic gold demand.
- **Investor confidence:** The reversal of FPI inflows suggests global investors may be re-evaluating India's near-term prospects relative to other markets.
- **Reserve adequacy:** Draining reserves to cover BoP deficits is unsustainable in the medium term.

Way forward

- **Reduce oil dependence:** Accelerate the renewable energy transition, promote electric vehicles, and expand strategic petroleum reserves to buffer price shocks.

- **Curb non-essential gold imports:** Beyond duties, financial instruments like sovereign gold bonds (SGBs) and gold monetisation schemes need aggressive promotion to channel domestic gold savings into the financial system.
- **Stabilise capital flows:** Reassure foreign investors through predictable policy, improve ease of doing business, and explore swap lines with partner countries.
- **Monitor “other capital” outflows:** Tighten reporting requirements for overseas remittances and trade credit without discouraging legitimate business needs.
- **Boost services exports:** The shrinkage in services surplus is a red flag; targeted support for IT, tourism, and professional services is needed.
- **Prudent reserve management:** The RBI must balance defending the rupee with conserving reserves for genuine emergencies.

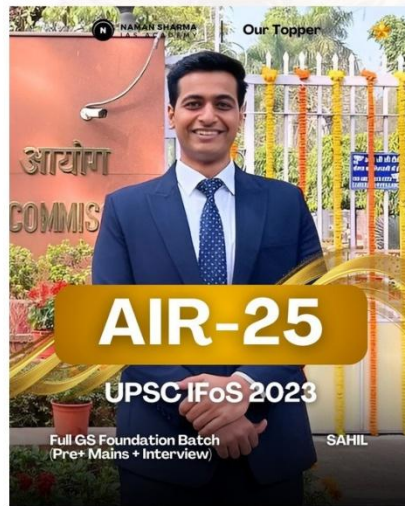
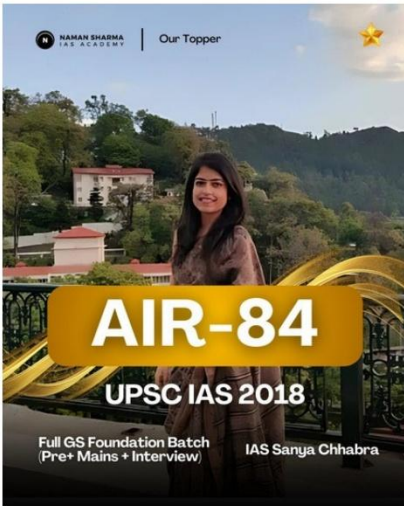
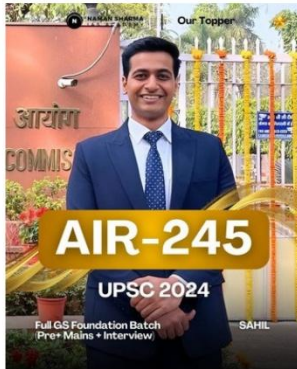
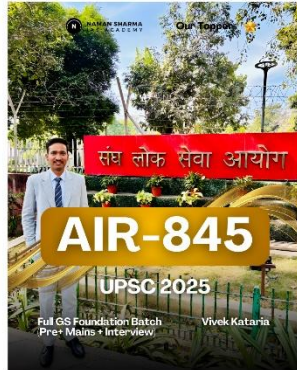
Conclusion

The RBI's data for 2025-26 sends a clear warning: India's external position has deteriorated sharply, with dollar outflows exceeding inflows by \$30.8 billion - a six-fold jump from the previous year. The collapse of the capital account surplus to near-zero, combined with a three-year-high current account deficit, has left the country paying for its shortfall entirely from foreign exchange reserves. This explains the government's urgent messaging on fuel and gold consumption, as well as recent duty hikes.



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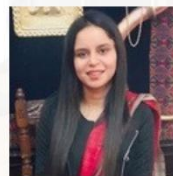
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