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# Why Trump and the Federal Reserve could clash in the coming years

Donald Trump's proposals to cut taxes and impose steep tariffs are a recipe for high inflation, and if inflation does reaccelerate the Fed would need to raise interest rates; Mr. Trump could then shift the blame on the Federal Reserve for not being able to rein in the borrowing costs of Americans

## NEWS ANALYSIS

Associated Press  
WASHINGTON

President-elect Donald Trump campaigned on the promise that his policies would reduce high borrowing costs and lighten the financial burden on American households.

But what if, as many economists expect, interest rates remain elevated, well above their pre-pandemic lows?

Mr. Trump could point a finger at the Federal Reserve, and in particular at its chair, Jerome Powell, whom Mr. Trump himself nominated to lead the Fed. During his first term, Mr. Trump repeatedly and publicly ridiculed the Powell Fed, complaining that it kept interest rates too high. Mr. Trump's attacks on the Fed raised widespread concern about political interference in the Fed's policymaking.

On Wednesday, Mr. Powell emphasized the importance of the Fed's independence: "That gives us the ability to make decisions for the benefit of all Americans at all times, not for any particular political party or political outcome."

Political clashes might be inevitable in the next four years. Mr. Trump's proposals to cut taxes and



Critical role: The Fed's political independence is crucial to keep inflation in check. REUTERS

impose steep and widespread tariffs are a recipe for high inflation in an economy operating at close to full capacity. And if inflation were to re-accelerate, the Fed would need to keep interest rates high.

Because Mr. Powell won't necessarily cut rates as much as Mr. Trump will want. And even if Mr. Powell reduces the Fed's benchmark rate, Mr. Trump's own policies could keep other borrowing costs—like mortgage rates—elevated.

"The risk of conflict between the Trump administration and the Fed is very high," Olivier Blanchard, former top economist at the International Monetary Fund, said recently. If the Fed hikes rates, "it will



The markets need to feel confident that the Fed is responding to economic data, not to political pressure

SCOTT ALVAREZ  
Former general counsel at the Fed

stand in the way of what the Trump administration wants."

Yes, but with the economy sturdier than expected, the Fed's policymakers may cut rates only a few more times—fewer than had been anticipated just a month or two ago.

And those rate cuts might not reduce borrowing costs for consumers

and businesses very much. The Fed's key short-term rate can influence rates for credit cards, small businesses and some other loans. But it has no direct control over longer-term interest rates. These include the yield on the 10-year Treasury note, which affects mortgage rates. The 10-year Treasury yield is shaped by investors' expectations of future inflation, growth and rates as well as by supply and demand for Treasuries.

Mr. Trump has also proposed a variety of tax cuts that could swell the deficit. Rates on Treasury securities might then have to rise to attract enough investors to buy the new debt.

"I honestly don't think the Fed has a lot of control

over the 10-year rate, which is probably the most important for mortgages," said Kent Smetters, an economist and faculty director at the Penn Wharton Budget Model. "Deficits are going to play a much bigger role in that regard."

Occasional or rare criticism of the Fed chair isn't necessarily a problem for the economy, so long as the central bank continues to set policy as it sees fit.

### Frictions ahead

But persistent attacks would tend to undermine the Fed's political independence, which is critically important to keeping inflation in check. To fight inflation, a central bank often must take steps that can be highly unpopular, notably by raising interest rates to slow borrowing and spending.

Political leaders have typically wanted central banks to do the opposite: Keep rates low to support the economy, especially before an election. Research has found that countries with independent central banks generally enjoy lower inflation.

Even if Mr. Trump doesn't technically force the Fed to do anything, his persistent criticism could still cause problems. If markets, economists and business leaders no longer think the Fed is operating independently and instead is being pushed around by

the president, they'll lose confidence in the Fed's ability to control inflation.

And once consumers and businesses anticipate higher inflation, they usually act in ways that fuel higher prices—accelerating their purchases, for example, before prices rise further, or raising their own prices if they expect their expenses to increase.

"The markets need to feel confident that the Fed is responding to the data, not to political pressure," said Scott Alvarez, a former general counsel at the Fed.

He can try, but it would likely lead to a prolonged legal battle that could even end up at the Supreme Court. At a November news conference, Mr. Powell made clear that he believes the president doesn't have legal authority to do so.

Most experts think Mr. Powell would prevail in the courts. And from the Trump administration's perspective, such a fight might not be worth it. Mr. Powell's term ends in May 2026, when the White House could nominate a new chair.

It is also likely the stock market would tumble if Mr. Trump attempted such a brazen move. Bond yields would probably rise, too, sending borrowing costs up. Financial markets might also react negatively if Mr. Trump is seen as appointing a loyalist as Fed chair to replace Powell.







GETTY IMAGES

# Critical measures: should film reviews on social media platforms be banned?

In a post-internet world, the know-how of film criticism is scattered but accessible, and the growing passion for movies has enabled audiences to read films more sensibly. Therefore, a gag order on a platform censors every voice, good or bad

**Bhuvanesh Chandar**

**E**arlier this week, the Tamil Film Active Producers Association (TFAPA) filed a writ petition in the Madras High Court, seeking a ban on movie reviews on social media for the first three days of release. The counsel representing the TFAPA listed three reasons that necessitated the request – review bombing through reviews shot in cinema theatres, stage-managing fake reviews by purchasing bulk tickets, and intentionally propagating a negative image of the film through fake social media accounts.

These are pivotal concerns that need redressal and creators must be protected from targeted harassment. Paid reviews are real and, as Taapsee Pannu recently quoted Shah Rukh Khan as saying, are nothing more than advertisement spaces for sale. And so when the said space is used to unfairly demean a film, a business, or an entity, the legislature needs to step in and protect the affected parties. However, concerns also arise about the apparent discrepancies in how film chambers navigate these issues; like the ambiguity in using terms like ‘reviewers’; the irony in how YouTube reviews are used when favourable and flattering; and who is referred to as a ‘reviewer’.

**Who is a reviewer?**

Every time a star film that had promised big bites the dust, we are reminded of the times when the filmmaking ecosystem

tended to pride itself on one key aspect – that audiences have the final say and that the industry respects their judgement.

Closely observing recent discourses paints a startling picture of the idea of film criticism that remains. You exit a cinema hall on a Friday afternoon and are faced with a mike-borne journalist asking for your review – an industry-propagated technique used in post-release campaigns. Or you are an independent YouTube reviewer shooting a video review for your portal. If you shower praises on the film, it can be used to further promote the title; if you criticise it in a language the makers deem offensive, you might be slapped with a defamation suit or a copyright strike. Or, as a recent example showed, the partner of the film’s leading man would label you a pawn of a larger ‘propaganda group’. The very people who empower the audiences as ‘kings’ strip away their powers to decide for themselves.

A star like Vijay Deverakonda might argue that his film *Family Star* was a victim of review bombings, and Jyotika might have evidence to call the *Kangana* debacle the handiwork of Suriya haters, but refraining from specifically calling out these fake accounts or nefarious internet entities serves no purpose or change. Instead, it suggests an attitude of intolerance towards criticism. Calling these reviews the work of a homogenous group called ‘reviewers’ or ‘social media reviewers’ also adds to the woes of the industry’s favourite scapegoat – traditional film critics. From being

stigmatised as a profession as immoral paupers to being denounced as the killers of a ‘creator’s child,’ the film critic has always been the film industry’s favourite punching bag to vent its shortcomings.

Pensiveness, insight, and the ability to read films and write incisive pieces that celebrate and propagate film appreciation are what the pundits claim differentiate a critic. But in a democratised post-internet world, the know-how of film criticism is scattered but accessible, and the growing passion for movies has enabled audiences to read films more sensibly. In the competitive media space of today, the passion and resolve it takes to make film criticism a profession, build experience over time, and sharpen said skills are what sets apart a film critic from a film buff with a blog. In all their steps to tackle abusive trolls, film producers have maintained that their steps protect the interests of sensible reviews, but one wonders who the adjudicator of reviewing sensibilities is. A gag order censors every voice, good or bad.

Read the finer lines of TFAPA’s writ petition and you sense a generosity towards critics from notable newspapers and online portals, “who provide constructive criticism.” But what confidence does an ecosystem that attacks one section of the audience’s freedom of speech instil in others? In the past, names like Kairam Vashi and Amol Kamwal have been attacked for their unfavourable reviews. The irony is in how producers who claim to stand by noteworthy newspapers and portals,

pigeonhole such critics as ‘niche’ and offer other film-related opportunities like interviews to the same sensationalist YouTube media they claim need regulation.

The industry believes that promotions and reviews, positive or negative, certainly influences the opinion of the audiences. Introspectively, even if film critics are shielded from any future censorship, a gag order on platforms meant for all would disrupt the quiet in an ecosystem that both film producers and film critics depend upon.

**The law’s reaction**

From what transpired at the Madras High Court during the hearing of the TFAPA’s arguments, one is certain that the court stands against curtailing free speech, lending an ear only to guidelines that can keep online platforms safe from targeted attacks and intentional review bombings. Earlier, in 2021, in hearing a petition to ban film reviews for seven days of the release, the Kerala High Court appointed an amicus curiae, who suggested a few regulations for movie reviews, including a 48-hour cooling-off period; avoiding spoilers in reviews; avoiding disrespectful language, personal attacks, or derogatory remarks; and constituting a dedicated portal to resolve grievances related to review bombings.

How the Madras High Court might navigate TFAPA’s complaints remains to be seen, but the ambiguous usage of terms by the producers’ body does raise concerns about censorship.

# Is Syria's Assad regime in danger?

What was the role of Russia in the Syrian civil war back in 2016? How was the Bashar al-Assad regime able to recapture Aleppo then? Who are the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham and what is their connection to the al-Qaeda? How were the militants able to make such extensive territorial gains?

## EXPLAINER

Stanley Johny

### The story so far:

Islamist militants in Syria's northwest launched a surprise attack last week against the forces of President Bashar al-Assad and made dramatic territorial gains. The Syrian civil war, which broke out in 2011 amidst Arab Spring-inspired anti-government protests, had entered into a frozen stage in late 2016 after the regime recaptured most of its territories. There was relative calm, but no real peace in the Arab republic. With the latest clashes, peace has been broken and hot war has resumed.

### How has Syria's control map changed in the span of a week?

In 2015, before Russian President Vladimir Putin decided to send troops to Syria, the Assad regime was on the brink of collapse. He had lost most of the population centres, except Damascus and the Alawite-dominated coastal cities. There were multiple rebel and jihadist factions such as the Free Syrian Army, Jabhat al-Nusra (al-Qaeda's Syria branch) and the Islamic State (IS). The IS was controlling eastern Syrian cities of Raqqa and Deir Ezzor as well as the ancient city of Palmyra. Al-Nusra and the Free Syrian Army were controlling parts of Idlib in the northwest. Other militant groups were controlling Hama, Homs, and even some neighbourhoods of Damascus. In the south, Daara and Quneitra were restive.

The Russian intervention played a pivotal role in turning around the civil war. While Kurdish militias, backed by the U.S., fought in the east and in the Kurdish border towns, the Syrian army, backed by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah, fought other rebel groups, recapturing lost territories. For example, by December 2016, more than a year after the Russian arrival, the regime retook Aleppo, Syria's second largest city and its commercial capital. The militants continued to hold on to Idlib when the war got frozen.

Last week, the rebels launched their offensive from Idlib. Their initial objective was to capture the western neighbourhoods of Aleppo. But the ease with which they pushed the regime forces out of Aleppo's suburbs prompted them to expand the scope of the offensive and march towards the city. Within days, they captured Aleppo. They have now entered Hama, a regime stronghold. In the northeast of Aleppo, militants have captured territories from Kurdish rebels. In less than a week, the Idlib militants have more than doubled the territories they hold.

### Who are the main actors?

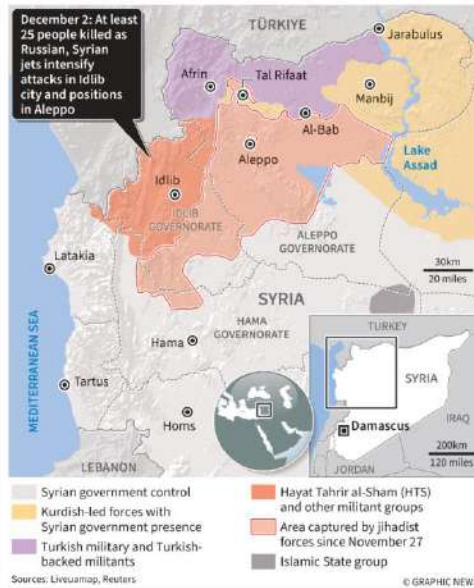
There are three main actors in Syria today. The most important actor is the regime, which is backed by Iran and Shia militias from Iraq and Russia. The second player is the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), which is basically an umbrella militia group involving the People's Protection Forces (YPG), the main Syrian Kurdish militia that controls Syrian Kurdistan (Rojava). From the early stages of the civil war, the regime and the YPG had entered into a detente. The Kurds, who got their relative autonomy, and the regime forces stayed away from targeting each other. The third actor is Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), the main anti-government force that is in control of Idlib. The Turkey-backed Free Syrian Army, which is today called the Syrian National Army



**Dramatic offensive:** Militants of the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham drive along a street in al-Rashideen, Aleppo province, Syria on November 29. REUTERS

## The extent of the militants' advance

It took four years for Bashar al-Assad to recapture Aleppo in 2016. It took just four days for him to lose it to the Hayat Tahrir al-Sham. The regime faces a full-blown civil war, with Syria getting ready for another prolonged spell of bloodshed



(SNA), is practically a sidekick of the jihadist HTS. The ongoing offensive is led by the HTS, along with the SNA.

### What is HTS?

The HTS is led by Abu Mohammad al-Julani, a 42-year-old Syrian militant. Julani had moved to Iraq in his early 20s to fight the American occupation of the country (2003) and joined the al-Qaeda. When the al-Qaeda in Iraq was commanded by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, Julani emerged as one of his close lieutenants. When Baghdadi decided to send a contingent of al-Qaeda jihadists across the border to Syria to fight President Assad after the civil war broke out, he chose Julani to lead the pack. He set up Jabhat al-Nusra. Later, Julani fell out with Baghdadi as the former wanted al-Nusra to join the Islamic State. Julani wanted to retain his group as an autonomous al-Qaeda branch in Syria.

When the world's focus shifted towards the Islamic State, Julani steadily built his

empire in Idlib. The Islamic State was defeated and Baghdadi was killed, but Julani emerged as the face of the anti-regime Syrian militancy. He first changed the name of al-Nusra to Jabhat Fateh al-Sham. Later, the name was changed again to Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) as he sought to distance his group from al-Qaeda – though the HTS never renounced its Islamist ideology. Over the years, Julani's men built a parallel state in Idlib. Julani is a U.S.-designated terrorist, but, after establishing his rule over Idlib, he declared that his fight was against Mr. Assad, not against the U.S. He has not faced any major attacks from the U.S., which still has hundreds of soldiers in eastern Syria.

### Why did the militants attack now?

Julani had always said that bringing down the Assad regime was one of his objectives. The Syrian regime wanted to attack Idlib and recapture the governorate. But it could not have carried

out such an attack against an enclave of 3 million people without Russia's active support. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan staunchly opposed any offensive at Idlib, saying it would trigger another refugee influx into Turkey. This was also the time Russia's Mr. Putin and Mr. Erdogan entered into an entente. Russia forced Syria to accept a ceasefire, leaving Idlib in the hands of the HTS and the SNA. This led to the tense calm in Syria.

However, geopolitical dynamics have since shifted. Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Moscow is today preoccupied with the ongoing war, and has also withdrawn thousands of soldiers from Syria. During the height of the civil war, Qassem Soleimani, the charismatic Iranian Quds Force General, was in charge of building and deploying Shia militias in Syria that fought the anti-regime militants. Gen. Soleimani was assassinated by the Americans in January 2020. Over the past year, several senior Iranian Generals were killed in Syria by Israeli air strikes. Hezbollah, which fought on the frontlines against the rebels during the early phase of the civil war, is today busy reorganising itself after months of direct fighting with Israel. Israel's repeated air strikes in Syria over the past several years have substantially weakened Iranian, regime and Hezbollah positions in the country. These geopolitical developments provided an opportunity for the militants to launch their offensive. Without direct support from Iran, Hezbollah and Russia, Syria's troops were vulnerable. The militants, reportedly backed by Turkey, made use of that vulnerability and made swift advances to capture the whole of Aleppo.

### What happens next?

It took four years for Mr. Assad to recapture Aleppo in 2016. It took just four days for him to lose it to the HTS. This is an embarrassing setback for the regime. On December 5, the militants entered Hama, the central city. They are now likely to march towards Homs. The collapse of the regime forces in the north has reinvigorated other smaller rebel groups elsewhere in the country who started attacking government positions, especially in the south. The regime faces a full-blown civil war. It's too early to rule out Mr. Assad, who survived a years-long civil war once. His regime has deep roots in the coastal regions and among the country's minorities. After the initial setback, regime forces are now coordinating with Iran for reinforcements. Thousands of fighters from Iraqi militias such as Kataib Hezbollah and Badr Organisation have already joined the battle. But the regime's inability to arrest the militant advances should set alarm bells ringing in Damascus. The militants on the other side sense a great opportunity in expanding their territorial control. Syria appears to be getting ready for another prolonged spell of bloodshed.

## THE GIST

Islamist militants in Syria's northwest launched a surprise attack last week against the forces of President Bashar al-Assad and made dramatic territorial gains.

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## A slow return

### India and China must engage intensely at all levels to resolve border disputes

**T**he government's decision to offer statements on China, *suo motu*, in both Houses of Parliament and to brief a parliamentary panel are positive but long overdue steps. Since 2020, following the Chinese transgression along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the deadly Galwan clashes, it has avoided divulging details of the negotiations with China over the actions of the People's Liberation Army (PLA), only announcing agreements on disengagement at six points of friction, as they occurred in 2021, 2022 and 2024. In a democracy, the people must not be kept in the dark on matters of national interest. But the statements by External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and the briefing by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri appear to have been substantial. Mr. Jaishankar focused on three aspects of the LAC negotiations. He said India has made it clear to China that "normal" engagement in other parts of the relationship were contingent on the LAC tensions being resolved. India has adopted a policy of "continuous engagement" and a step-by-step approach involving 17 meetings of the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs, 21 meetings of the Senior Highest Military Commanders meeting mechanism, and several meetings between the Foreign and Defence Ministers and Special Representatives of both countries. Finally, he said that with disengagement "fully achieved", the next priorities would be troop de-escalation and de-induction, followed by a discussion on how to manage ties in the border areas, given the problems in the last few years. Mr. Jaishankar said that for Depsang and Demchok, "patrolling arrangements" had been agreed upon, but the resumption of patrols is still "underway". For the other areas of North and South Pangong Tso lake, Gogra and Hot Springs, disengagement had been achieved through "steps of a temporary and limited nature" – a euphemism for LAC "buffer zones".

But the government's nearly 2,500 word statement gave no indication of the *casus belli* for the Chinese actions nor any reference to when the return to 'status quo ante', or to positions of 2020, can be expected. The statement laid stress on India's "national security" interests being upheld, without mentioning India's "territorial integrity" at any point. The government must now expedite efforts to build a common understanding of the LAC and to demarcate the boundary. It is important to tell the nation about the nearly 20 Modi-Xi meetings prior to 2020, in spite of which the PLA acted the way it did. The past few years should have demonstrated to the 'doves and hawks' in India's establishment that such an intensive engagement is no guarantor of peace, nor can conflicts be resolved without the kind of intense and "continuous engagement" that New Delhi and Beijing have sustained in the past few years.



# States and the challenge before the Finance Commission

The Government of Tamil Nadu recently hosted the Sixteenth Finance Commission, which was chaired by Arvind Panagariya. With its distinguished experts from various fields, the Commission is uniquely positioned to address the critical fiscal challenges facing India and rectifying the skewness in the relationship between the States and the Union.

## Opportunities from global changes

The decisions taken by this Finance Commission will not only shape the fiscal fate of the nation for the next five years but will also influence India's economic trajectory in the decades to come. The Sixteenth Finance Commission's work coincides with significant shifts in global economic trends. Concepts such as "friendshoring" and "reshoring" are reshaping international trade and investment patterns. These trends present a unique opportunity for India and Tamil Nadu. To seize these opportunities, the critical challenge for the Finance Commission lies in striking a balance between equitable redistribution and incentivising growth in high-performing States such as Tamil Nadu.

Since 1951, when the first Finance Commission was formed, each Finance Commission has adapted its own approach towards the fiscal challenges of its time. Every Commission has sought to achieve an equitable redistribution of resources by increasing the share of States under vertical devolution and channelling funds to less-developed States through horizontal devolution.

But there have been clear gaps between their declared objectives and outcomes; therein lies



**M.K. Stalin**

President of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu

There needs to be a progressive resource allocation methodology for performing States such as Tamil Nadu

our case for a new and fair system of distribution of resources. For instance, while the Fifteenth Finance Commission awarded the vertical share of the divisible pool to the States as 41%, the effective devolution to States in the first four years of the award period amounted to only 33.16% of the Union's gross tax revenue. The unprecedented levying of cess and surcharges by the Union is the fundamental reason for this effective decline in devolution.

## Hike States' share, incentivise performers

The States, which are near to people, bear substantial developmental expenditures, and, hence, their share should be further increased substantially. The financial strain on the States has been particularly severe due to increases in counterpart funding for centrally sponsored schemes on the one side and inadequate devolution on the other side. Hence, a fair and equitable share for States would be 50% devolution of the gross central taxes, allowing States greater fiscal autonomy in funding and implementing locally relevant schemes.

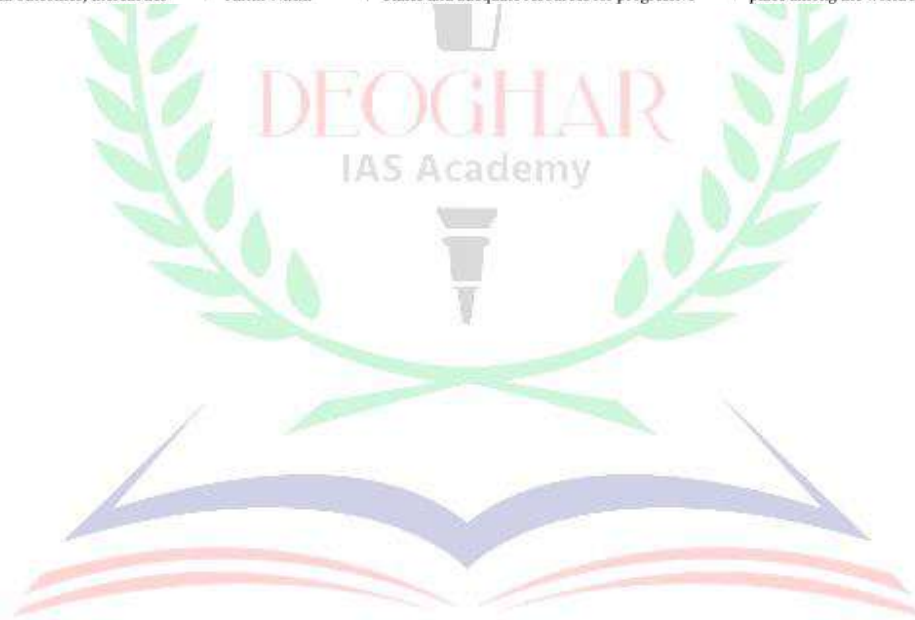
On horizontal devolution, it is evident that the redistribution policy followed for the first four and a half decades in our country has yielded limited results in driving real growth. Hence, the fundamental question would be this: should the focus be on a smaller national pie with a larger share for less-developed States or a larger national pie with equitable distribution that provides greater absolute resources for all? The answer is difficult, yet a more balanced approach would ensure a larger national economic pie, allowing for reasonable shares for less-developed States and adequate resources for progressive

States to continue their upward trajectory. This would clearly necessitate a progressive resource allocation methodology for the performing States so as to allow them to fulfil their potential to be India's growth engines.

## Unique challenges in progressive States

Amidst this, it is also important to note that progressive States such as Tamil Nadu also face unique challenges in demography and urbanisation. With a median age higher than the national average, the State's capacity to generate consumption-based tax revenue is declining, even as the costs of supporting an aging population are rising. It is imperative to ensure that such States do not fall into the "middle-income trap", where growth stagnates and they "grow old before becoming rich". Next, the challenges due to urbanisation in fast-growing States merit adequate addressal. A State like Tamil Nadu is witnessing the fastest rate of urbanisation in the country, due to which it will have a 57.30% urban population in 2031, against the expected national average of 37.90%. The resources for fulfilling the infrastructure needs of urbanisation should be earmarked to ensure the long-term sustainability of our growth.

We should keep in mind that the mandate of the Commission goes beyond fiscal arithmetic. It is about envisioning a future where every State contributes to and benefits from the nation's progress. Whether it is fostering manufacturing, addressing urbanisation challenges, or ensuring climate resilience, the Commission's decisions will impact millions of lives and determine the trajectory of the country's destiny, to take its place among the world's leading economies.





# PSLV-C59 places PROBA-3 satellites into designated orbit with precision

**Sangeetha Kandavel**  
SRIHARIKOTA

After being rescheduled for a day as an anomaly was detected, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) on Thursday successfully launched the PROBA-3 (Project for On-board Autonomy) mission of the European Space Agency aboard a Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle-C59 rocket. The vehicle took off with a powerful roar precisely at 4.04 p.m. from the first launch pad at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre, Sriharikota.

“The PSLV-C59/PROBA-3 mission is successfully accomplished. The spacecraft has been placed in the right orbit,” ISRO Chairman S. Somanath said. The agency said the mission had successfully achieved its launch objectives, deploying the satellites into their designated orbit with precision.

Josef Aschbacher, Director-General, ESA, said:



**Roaring start:** A PSLV-C59 rocket takes off with the PROBA-3 Mission from the Satish Dhawan Space Centre on Thursday. R. RAGU

“The latest member of ESA’s family of in-orbit demonstration missions, PROBA-3 comprises two spacecraft launched together which, once safely in orbit, will separate to begin performing precise formation flying... Almost instantaneously after separation, Yatharagga station in Australia started to receive the spacecraft’s signal. Telemetry is flowing to ESA’s mission control centre in Belgium.”

On its website, the ESA said: “A pair of spacecraft

were launched together today from India with the potential to change the nature of future space missions. ESA’s twin PROBA-3 platforms will perform precise formation flying down to a single millimetre, as if they were one single giant spacecraft. To demonstrate their degree of control, the pair will produce artificial solar eclipses in orbit, giving prolonged views of the Sun’s ghostly surrounding atmosphere, the corona.”

The ESA said the two sa-

tellites stacked together separated from their upper stage about 18 minutes after launch. The pair will remain attached while initial commissioning takes place, overseen from mission control at the European Space Security and Education Centre in Redu, Belgium.

PROBA-3 mission manager Damien Galano said, “Today’s lift-off has been something all of us in ESA’s PROBA-3 team and our industrial and scientific partners have been looking forward to for a long time.”

Details shared by the ESA show that if PROBA-3’s initial commissioning phase goes to plan, then the spacecraft pair will be separated early in the New Year to begin their individual check-outs. The operational phase of the mission, including the first observations of the corona through active formation flying, should begin in about four months.



# UGC draft norms moot biannual admissions

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The University Grants Commission published the Draft UGC (Minimum Standards of Instructions in the Award of UG and PG Degrees) Regulations, 2024 on Thursday allowing enrolment of students in higher education institutions (HEIs) twice a year.

The regulations also allow students to join two undergraduate or postgraduate programmes simultaneously, and make UG and PG aspirants "eligible for admission in any discipline" of their choice, besides offering a multiple entry-exit option.

## For flexibility

UGC Chairman M. Jagadeh Kumar said the aim of the new guidelines was to transform higher education in the country and introduce greater flexibility.



The regulations incorporate provisions for multiple entry and exit and the flexibility to pursue two UG/PG programmes simultaneously

M. JAGADESH KUMAR  
UGC Chairman

The guidelines also introduce inclusivity, and multidisciplinary learning opportunities for students, he added. "The regulations incorporate provisions for multiple entry and exit, recognition of prior learning, and the flexibility to pursue two UG/PG programmes simultaneously. We have also decoupled eligibility for UG and PG admissions from the rigid discipline-specific requirements of school education. Under these regulations, students can choose to study in any programme irres-

pective of their past disciplinary qualification if they demonstrate their competency by clearing the relevant entrance examinations," Mr. Kumar said.

He added that these regulations provide autonomy to HEIs to determine student attendance requirements, ensuring they align with evolving academic needs. "Additionally, students will now have the option to earn 50% of their credits in their major discipline, while the remaining credits can be allocated to skill development, appren-

ticeships, or multidisciplinary subjects, fostering holistic development."

The draft allows biannual admission for HEIs and they may admit students twice a year, in July/August and January/February. Provisions for multiple entry and exit, continuous formative assessment, and recognition of prior learning are some of the features of the guidelines. Irrespective of the disciplines taken by a student in Class 12 or in UG, a student is "eligible for admission in any discipline" of UG or PG programmes if the student has qualified in the "National-level or University-level entrance examination in the discipline of UG/PG programme", it said.

"A student has to earn a minimum of 50% of total credits in a discipline to earn an undergraduate degree with a major in that

discipline. For the remaining 50% credits, the students may choose skill courses, apprenticeships and multidisciplinary subjects," it mandates.

The duration of an undergraduate degree shall be either three or four years, and a postgraduate degree shall normally be either one year or two years, according to the UGC draft. "However, the duration of an undergraduate degree can be shorter or longer," it said, adding that there are provisions in the Accelerated Degree Programme (ADP) and the Extended Degree Programme (EDP) allowing HEIs to earmark up to 10% of sanctioned intake for ADP with no cap for EDP. "Students shall have the option to choose ADP/EDP either at the end of the first semester or the second semester and not beyond that," it said.

