

GLOBAL WATER SCARCITY DEEPENS

Renewable water availability per person plunges 7 pc in a decade

ROME, Dec 13 (ANI/WAM)

RENEWABLE water availability per person has continued to decline by a further 7% over the past decade, while pressure on already scarce freshwater resources is increasing in several regions, according to the 2025 AQUASTAT Water Data Snapshot released by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO).

The update provides a global overview of how water availability and use are evolving, presenting new data on irrigation, efficiency, and water stress reported through the 2024 AQUASTAT cycle. Renewable water refers to freshwater that is naturally replenished through the hydrologic cycle, which includes evaporation, condensation, and precipitation. The latest figures show that some regions - particularly Northern Africa and Western Asia - continue to operate under extremely limited freshwater endowments.

Freshwater withdrawals have also increased in several regions in recent years, adding pressure



to already stressed river basins and aquifers. Agriculture remains the largest water-using sector globally, accounting for 72% of withdrawals in many regions.

The Snapshot uses clear, accessible examples to illustrate how water availability and demand are shifting across regions.

In Northern Africa, freshwater availability per person remains among the lowest globally, while withdrawals have increased by 16% over the past 10 years. In Western Asia - which in the Snapshot includes most Middle Eastern countries - rapid demographic growth and agricultural demand are contributing to

increased pressure on limited supplies. By contrast, some regions with comparatively higher water availability still face rising competition among sectors, particularly where urbanisation and irrigated agriculture are driving demand.

The data also highlights wide disparities in irrigation and water-use efficiency. In parts of Latin America and Asia, irrigation supports a large share of crop production, whereas in Sub-Saharan Africa irrigated cropland represents only a small fraction of total cultivated land, reflecting persistent gaps in access to water infrastructure.

India's future combat power would be driven by Jointness: CDS

HYDERABAD, Dec 13 (PTI)

GENERAL Anil Chauhan on Saturday said the country's future combat power would be driven by the three pillars -- Jointness, Atmanirbharta and Innovation, what the CDS described as JAI.

General Chauhan, who reviewed the Combined Graduation Parade (CGP) at the Air Force Academy at Dundigal near here, without referring to any country, said developments that indicate institutional fragility and reactive adjustments are often seen around us.

"Wars cannot (be) won by rhetoric, but by purposeful action. Around us, we often witness developments that signal institutional fragility and reactive adjustments. In contrast, India's strength rests on the robust institutions, democratic stability and unwavering professionalism of



Members of the Air Warrior Drill Team of the Indian Air Force perform during the Combined Graduation Parade of the 216th course at the Air Force Academy (AFA), Dundigal, near Hyderabad, Telangana, on Saturday.

(PTI)

our Armed Forces," he said.

The Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) told the newly-commissioned officers that they are

entering the Indian Air Force during a phase of deep transformation of the armed forces.

Integrated structures, joint

operations and national pursuit of 'Atmanirbharta' (self reliance) in defence are shaping the future of India's military

strength, he said.

The journey ahead of the newly commissioned officers will be guided by JAI, the first word of Jai Hind, he said.

Jointness signifies fighting as one nation and one force and Atmanirbharta indicate trusted platforms and systems made not just for India but for the world. Innovation signifies daring to think ahead and to be ahead of the curve, he said.

"These three pillars will shape India's future of combat power," he said.

The intensity of operations may have ebbed, but Operation Sindoor continues, he said.

"You (new officers) also join the Air Force at a moment when a new normal has firmly taken shape. An era defined by a high degree of operational preparedness, 24-7, 365 days. The intensity of operations may have

ebbed, but Operation Sindoor continues," he said.

Asserting that war and warfare are at the cusp of a major revolution, General Chauhan said the Defence forces are committed to adapt to changing environment and imbuing reforms to remain ready and relevant.

He further said battles in the older domains will always remain contested, often brutal. But in the new domains, they will be smart, swift, and shaped by intellect, innovation, and initiative. The force that masters new frontiers is more likely to prevail in future conflicts.

General Chauhan reviewed the Combined Graduation Parade of 216 Course.

The event marks the successful completion of the pre-commissioning training of flight cadets across various branches of the Indian Air Force (IAF).

Thai-Cambodian border fighting continues despite Trump's ceasefire claim



Evacuees wait to receive donation from local charity as they take refuge in Banteay Menchey, Cambodia on Saturday after fleeing from homes following Thailand and Cambodia fighting. (AP/PTI)

SURIN, Dec 13 (AP)

FIGHTING continued to rage on Saturday morning along the border of Thailand and Cambodia, even after US President Donald Trump, acting as a mediator, declared that he had won agreement from both countries for a ceasefire.

Thai officials have said they did not agree to a ceasefire, and Cambodia has not commented on Trump's claim. Its Defence Ministry instead said Thai jets carried out airstrikes Saturday morning. Cambodian media reported Trump's claim without elaborating.

The latest large-scale fighting was set off by a skirmish on Dec. 7 that wounded two Thai soldiers and derailed a ceasefire promoted by Trump that ended five days of earlier combat in July over longstanding territorial disputes.

The July ceasefire was brokered

by Malaysia and pushed through by pressure from Trump, who threatened to withhold trade privileges unless Thailand and Cambodia agreed.

The Thai military acknowledges 11 of its troops have been killed, while estimating there have been 165 fatalities among Cambodian soldiers. Cambodia has not announced military casualties, but has said at least 11 civilians have been killed and 76 wounded.

Trump, on Friday, after speaking to Thai Prime Minister Anutin Charnvirakul and Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Manet, announced an agreement to restart the ceasefire.

"They have agreed to CEASE all shooting effective this evening, and go back to the original Peace Accord made with me, and them, with the help of the Great Prime Minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim," Trump said in his Truth Social post.

GRAP 4 measures imposed as NCR air worsens to severe

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New Delhi: The air quality in Delhi sharply deteriorated to the 'severe' category on Saturday as a toxic greyish haze blanketed the city. The 24-hour average overall AQI released at 4pm was 431, as opposed to 349 a day earlier. However, the AQI subsequently slipped into the 'severe plus' category for the first time this year, reaching 452 at 8pm.

This prompted CAQM to impose stringent measures under GRAP, first under stage 3 and then stage 4 as the air worsened, on the same day. No respite from hazardous air quality is expected on Sunday. Experts said the AQI spiked due to high emission loads and unfavourable meteorological conditions. The farm fire season is over, while an increase in moistu-

GRAP doesn't entitle staffer to WFH: HC

Delhi HC has dismissed a plea by a scientist, working with an organisation funded by the Centre, that he be allowed to work from home due to poor air quality. "The objective behind... GRAP cannot be construed as to create an enforceable personal right upon individual employees..." HC said. **P 6**

re due to the formation of fog, calm winds, and inversion trapped the pollutants.

Among the measures invoked are a ban on construction and demolition, no entry of non-essential trucks, hybrid mode for schools, and a ban on BS-III petrol and BS-IV diesel vehicles.

► **Related report, P 6**

19 US states sue Trump Govt over USD 100,000 fee on H-1B visas

■ By Yoshita Singh
NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Dec 13
(PTI)

NINETEEN US states have sued the Trump administration over its "unlawful" decision to impose a USD 100,000 fee on new H-1B visa petitions, warning that the move will worsen labour shortages in key sectors such as health care, education and technology. New York Attorney General Letitia James, along with 18 other attorneys general, on Friday filed the lawsuit in the US District Court for the District of Massachusetts, challenging what they termed a "massive" increase in H-1B fees without legal authority or due process.

The H-1B visa programme allows highly skilled foreign professionals to work temporarily in the US and is widely used by Indian nationals.

The coalition argued that the



The states coalition said the new fee on H-1B visas will severely restrict states' ability to hire new workers under the programme to address labour shortages, disrupting access to education, health care, and other critical services.

new fee would make the programme effectively inaccessible for Government and non-profit employers that depend on H-1B workers to provide essential services in health care, education,

technology, and other fields.

"H-1B visas allow talented doctors, nurses, teachers, and other workers to serve communities in need across our country.

"The administration's illegal

attempt to ruin this programme will make it harder for New Yorkers to get health care, disrupt our children's education, and hurt our economy. I will keep fighting to stop this chaos and cruelty targeting immigrant communities," James said in a statement.

In September, US President Donald Trump announced that his administration would levy a one-time USD 100,000 fee on all new H-1B applications, which the attorneys general described as a "sudden" and "massive" increase over existing charges.

The attorneys general contended that the imposition of the new fee is "unlawful" and the move violates the Administrative Procedure Act as well as the Immigration and Nationality Act, as it was imposed without congressional approval or the required rule-making process.

Joining James in the lawsuit are

the attorneys general of Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, North Carolina, New Jersey, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin.

The coalition said the new fee on H-1B visas will severely restrict states' ability to hire new workers under the programme to address labour shortages, disrupting access to education, health care, and other critical services. This shortage of workers would be devastating for rural and underserved communities already facing shrinking workforces, it warned.

In New York alone, more than a third of health care workers are immigrants, while public universities and hospitals rely heavily on H-1B professionals, according to the lawsuit.

India engaged with Mexico over 'unilateral' tariff hike

NEW DELHI, Dec 13 (PTI)

INDIA is engaged with Mexico over the South American nation's decision to unilaterally raise tariffs on a number of products to find mutually beneficial solutions, even as New Delhi reserves the right to take appropriate measures to safeguard the interests of its exporters, an official said on Saturday.

These duties are announced against countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico, including India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia. The official said that India, in fact, was engaged with Mexico during the initial tabling of a bill in this regard.

The Embassy of India in Mexico raised the issue with the Ministry of Economy on September 30, 2025, itself, seeking special concessions to shield Indian exports from the new tariffs.

"India values its partnership with Mexico and stands ready to work collaboratively toward a stable and balanced trade environment that benefits businesses and consumers in both countries," the official added.

Further, both the countries are looking to start negotiations for a free trade agreement, and terms of reference (ToR) to initiate the talks formally are expected to be finalised soon. Experts said that the trade agreement will

help insulate Indian companies from these tariffs, which were imposed under pressure from the US to align with America on increasing tariffs against China and prevent trans-shipment to America.

Mexico's Senate has approved a new tariff measure on December 11, 2025, and it has since been cleared by both chambers of Congress. It is aimed at boosting manufacturing and reducing trade imbalances.



Under the decision, Mexico will impose steep import tariffs - ranging from about 5 per cent to as high as 50 per cent on a wide range of goods (about 1,463 tariff lines) from countries that do not have free trade agreements with Mexico, including India, China, South Korea, Thailand and Indonesia. However, the list of items covered is yet to be officially notified. The higher duties will take effect on January 1, 2026.

"The Department of Commerce is engaged with Mexico's Ministry of Economy to explore mutually beneficial solutions which align with global trade rules," the official said.