



INDONESIA RISING

Southeast Asia's Economic Powerhouse Poised for Global Leadership

The Asian Tribune
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Boom in digital economy & EV battery sector propel Indonesian economy.

Indonesia is emerging as a major global economic power and it has been strengthening its position steadily.

The fourth most populous country in the world, ranked just after India, China and United States of America, Indonesia is now seen as a growing power.

In Southeast Asia, it is the largest economy. The country has a GDP exceeding \$1 trillion and it is also able to achieve a sustained growth, year after year.

But, the story about Indonesia always gets overlooked though its growth is rapid and the economy is stable. In fact, Indonesia which is the world's largest nickel producer is also becoming a major player in global electric vehicle (EV)

battery apart from renewable energy supply chains, has been rising, but this story gets less focus in the US-Euro centric world.

As a country with the population of well over 280 million, Indonesia has a strong work force. It also has a growing middle class. There is large chunk of youth in the population and it is an asset for the nation.

Jakarta is today world's largest metro city, with a population of over 40 million, as per the United Nations (UN) data on most populated cities of the world.

Over the years, Indonesia's digital economy has also been moving ahead and the future projections suggest that from eighth, it is well on way to 5th

largest economy in the world in the future. The South East Asian country is also aiming at a robust economic strength driven by structural reforms and more productivity.

The country is also looking at higher income for its citizens, other than reducing inequality in the society.

Steady growth, boom in digital economy and a strong FDI will take the nation towards a galloping and stronger economy in a decade or more. The market is expanding and the country has shown resilience.

By 2030, it is expected to be among the world's top seven major economies.

The nickel reserves would help it become a major hub for Electrical Vehicle i.e. EV

battery production. It is also the second largest producer of tin and the fourth largest producer of bauxite.

The country has a growing consumer market and due to the large youth population, it is suited for growth.

Economists see the political stability and the affect of the reforms in bureaucracy as reason behind the change.

The service sector has grown. The economy has changed from a resource-driven model to an advanced, technology driven and green economy.

The service sector, agriculture & manufacturing drive the economy, along with mining and transportation. Last year the economy grew by over 5% and a similar projection is likely in coming years.

Minister's remark for preferential hiring of Hindus in corporate sector, leads to outrage

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BJP minister and Maharashtra fisheries minister Nitesh Rane called for preferential hiring of Hindu candidates in corporate India. The statement has triggered a major political storm and raises direct constitutional questions.

Rane is known for such comments and this is not the first such occasion. The fact that leaders who take oath to work without favour and take a pledge to service citizens without dividing the society, can make such comments, raises a serious question mark on leaders' understanding of the constitutional values apart from the utter disregard towards the integrity and unity in the country.

A sitting Maharashtra cabinet minister calling companies to prioritize Hindu candidates in hiring to prevent what he described as 'corporate jihad', is definitely serious. Rane told reporters: "If employment provided for livelihood is diverted towards religious conversion, then prioritizing Hindu candidates is the need of the hour to strengthen the Hindu rashtra." He warned that companies may soon adopt policies of hiring exclusively Hindu candidates to prevent what he called "jihadist activities" in corporate spaces. "If every platform, from trade to corporate offices, is used to target Hindus through various forms of jihad, it is time for a firm response," Rane said. He added that the community should not wait for the state to act and that the religious



Maharashtra minister Nitesh Rane is known for issuing controversial statements.

considerations in hiring were now a practical necessity. Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis had already used the phrase "corporate jihad" in his own public remarks on the Nashik case, framing it alongside references to "love jihad" and "land jihad." When both the Chief Minister and a cabinet minister employ the same unverified framing in quick succession, the language ceases to be one politician's opinion and begins to function as state-level narrative. India's Constitution is unambiguous on this point. Article 16 guarantees equality of

opportunity in matters of public employment and explicitly prohibits discrimination on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, or place of birth. While Article 16 directly applies to state employment, the broader constitutional values of Articles 14, 15, and 16 together establish a framework that makes religion-based exclusion in any organized employment setting legally & ethically untenable. No statute in India permits private sector employers to filter candidates on religious grounds. A minister publicly endorsing such a practice, even framed as a community sentiment rather than a formal policy directive, carries weight precisely because of the office from which it is made. A minister demanding religion-based hiring across Maharashtra's corporate sector, is a signal that the polity and the political discourse have hit a nadir.

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School education system at the crossroads

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India has long staked its future on the potential of its young population, the world's largest cohort of school-age children. Yet for millions of families, the education system remains a landscape of profound contradiction: ambitious policy on one hand and a daily struggle for access, quality, and intellectual integrity on the other. This crisis is especially urgent because it is not merely administrative. It is financial, structural, political, and deeply ideological.

India's school education system is mainly administered by a three-tiered government structure—central, state, and local, alongside a large and expanding private sector. According to the Indian Constitution and the 2009 Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, education is a fundamental right for children aged 6 to 14, offering free and compulsory access. The country has over a million schools, with a ratio of roughly 10 public schools to 3 private schools. However, enrollment numbers alone obscure a deeper issue regarding the quality of learning.

The NEP 2020 aimed to overhaul India's education with a 5+3+3+4 model, promote mother tongue instruction, and universal foundational skills by 2025. The 2025–26 budget allocated ₹1,28,650 crore, a 6.22% increase, of which ₹78,572 crore was for schools. Yet, India's public education spending was only 2.7% of GDP in 2023–24, among the lowest globally, contrasted

with countries like Brazil (5.8%), South Africa (6.6%), and Argentina (4.6%), with a global median of 4%. NEP 2020 targets 6%, which India has never achieved. Despite higher household and public spending, the gap between commitment and private burden remains a problem.

The Learning Crisis

Despite near-universal school enrolment, ASER 2024 reports over 98% enrolment for children aged 6–14 in rural India, what happens inside classrooms is sobering. Only 50% of Grade 5 students can read a Grade 2-level text, a figure that has barely shifted from 47% in 2018, according to Pratham's Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024. Just 45% can solve simple division problems. In effect, half of India's ten-year-olds are functionally illiterate by the standards expected of seven-year-olds.

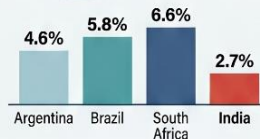
India's standing on international benchmarks reinforces this alarm. The last time India participated in the PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) tests, in 2009, it ranked 72nd out of 73 countries, second from the bottom. The government has since declined to participate in PISA 2014 and 2018, and withdrew at the last minute from the 2022 cycle, amid concerns that poor results ahead of the 2024 general elections could be politically damaging.

India's own National Achievement Survey (NAS) 2021 found average subjects, confirming that

India's Education 6 Interconnected Crises

Despite near-universal enrollment, India's education system faces a profound "learning crisis" driven by chronic underfunding and structural neglect. These six interconnected challenges illustrate a system where policy ambition is often stifled by financial instability and shifting ideological priorities.

Structural and Financial Barriers



A Weakened Right to Education (RTE) Act

Unpaid government reimbursements totaling ₹15,000 crore cause financial instability for private schools.



Unregulated Private Sector Cost Burden

Private urban schools cost eight times more than government institutions, burdening household incomes.

Quality, Access, and Content



90,000 Public Schools Closed via Mergers

Rapid school consolidations disproportionately exclude marginalized groups and rural girls from education.



50% of Grade 5 Students Fail Foundational Literacy

Half of India's ten-year-olds cannot read texts intended for seven-year-olds.



Ideology-Influenced Curriculum Revisions

Recent textbook changes prioritize selective narratives over scholarly rigor and critical historical content.

the learning crisis is systemic, not incidental. This is not merely a rural problem. It reflects a public education system where the national pupil-teacher ratio averages 35:1, well above the mandated 30:1, teacher vacancies exceed one million nationwide and teacher absenteeism

remains unaddressed. In rural government schools, inadequate infrastructure & poor digital connectivity further compound the challenge. UP, the most populous state, still shows poor female literacy. [Second part will appear in next edition]



Creation of five new districts in Ladakh now snowballs into a political controversy

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New districts have been carved out in the territory of Ladakh, causing a political row in the region.

On April 27, 2026, Ladakh Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena approved the creation of five new districts in the Union Territory of Ladakh, increasing the total number of districts from two to seven.

The five new districts are Nubra, Sham, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass. They join the existing districts of Leh and Kargil, which had been the only two administrative divisions in Ladakh since it was carved out of Jammu and Kashmir and designated a Union Territory following the revocation of Article 370 in 2019.

The Ministry of Home Affairs had originally cleared the proposal in August 2024 under Home Minister Amit Shah, and the formal notification came on April 27 — three days before Amit Shah's scheduled two-day visit to Leh on April 30 to review development, security, and what Republic TV described as the "political roadmap for Ladakh."

The official rationale presented by LG Saxena and the Union government is straightforward: Ladakh is one of the largest Union Territories by area in India, with residents in remote areas living up to 300 kilometers from the nearest district headquarters in Leh or Kargil.

PM Modi congratulated the people of Ladakh and said the new districts would bring government services, development, and opportunities closer to residents in far-flung border areas. LG Saxena called it a "historic milestone" aligned with PM Modi's vision of a developed and prosperous Ladakh.

From a purely administrative standpoint, the argument has merit. Ladakh's vast and difficult terrain, its strategic border location with China and Pakistan, and the logistical challenges of service delivery across such distances do justify some form of administrative decentralisation. More than 97 percent of the population in the new districts belongs to Scheduled Tribes, including the Balti Shia, Boto, Brokpa, and Changpa communities.

AIMIM chief Asaduddin Owaisi posted on X on April 28, 2026: "The govt has created 5 new districts in Ladakh. There are now 7 districts instead of 2. The govt wants to divide the unified statehood movement of Buddhists and Muslims. This is another gerrymandering in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir."

That charge requires a factual examination. According to the 2011 Census, Ladakh's total population stood at 274,289.

Muslims comprise 46.40 percent of that population — the largest single religious community in Ladakh. Buddhists comprise 39.65 percent — the second largest.

Now, examine how these seven districts have been distributed demographically. Buddhist-majority districts: five — Leh, Nubra, Sham, Changthang, and Zaskar. Muslim-majority districts: two — Kargil and Drass.

In direct terms: the community representing 39.65 percent of Ladakh's population receives five of the seven districts.

The community representing 46.40 percent of Ladakh's population receives two of the seven districts.

That is the factual basis of Owaisi's proportionality argument, and it is not a figure that can be dismissed without a direct, data-backed rebuttal.

The context that actually gives Asad Owaisi's accusation its

sharper edge is the ongoing joint statehood movement in Ladakh.

Since Article 370 was revoked in 2019, Ladakh has had no elected legislative assembly. It is governed directly by the Union Home Ministry through the Lieutenant Governor. Residents across both Leh and Kargil — Buddhists and Muslims — have been jointly demanding the restoration of full statehood and constitutional protections under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, which provides legislative safeguards to tribal areas. Owaisi's argument is that the new district boundaries have been deliberately drawn to give the two communities separate administrative identities, with Buddhist majority areas gaining greater numerical representation in governance structures.

