




TURMOIL IN TRINAMOOL
Expelled MLA named Bengal Assembly LoP
NEWS » PAGE 5



CBSE CLASS 12 EXAM
Over 40,000 seek answer verification, re-evaluation
NEWS » PAGE 6



'PRIORITY PARTNER'
Chief of Nepal's ruling party meets PM Modi
NEWS » PAGE 4

DUTY AND RESPONSIBILITY
Why judicial holidays are necessary
The debate needs to be on a more informed footing
OPINION » PAGE 9



ENCORE
Praggnanandhaa beats Carlsen again
SPORT » PAGE 16

INSIDE



Indian killed in Iranian drone strike on Kuwait

DUBAI
An Indian was killed and dozens wounded in Kuwait on Wednesday after Iranian drones heavily damaged the main airport in the Persian Gulf country in the latest back-and-forth attacks by Tehran and Washington in West Asia. Both parties said they were retaliating for earlier attacks. » PAGE 14

362 Bangladeshi 'illegals' arrested in Gujarat drive

AHMEDABAD
The Gujarat Police detained 362 undocumented Bangladeshi immigrants and questioned more than 782 suspected foreign nationals under "Operation Delta Hunt" on Tuesday night and early Wednesday. Union Home Minister Amit Shah had recently said that illegal infiltrators would be identified and deported. » PAGE 4

Cong. leaders hail Karunanidhi on birth anniversary

NEW DELHI
After breaking the alliance with the DMK in Tamil Nadu recently, Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi on Wednesday hailed late Dravidian stalwart M. Karunanidhi on his birth anniversary. Mr. Kharge praised Karunanidhi's lifelong commitment to social justice and rational thought, while Mr. Gandhi said he spent his life fighting for Tamils. » PAGE 5

21 dead in Delhi fire; foreigners among victims

At least 47 were rescued from the blazing hotel which did not have fire clearance, say officials | Of the deceased, nine persons were from various African countries and two from Turkmenistan | Owner of building held; L-G orders month-long drive to review fire-safety regulations in the city

Shrimansi Kaushik Suruchi Kumari
NEW DELHI

Twenty-one people, foreign nationals among them, died in a blaze that ripped through a hotel in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar on Wednesday morning, officials said.

At least 47 persons were pulled out from the fire and taken to nearby hospitals for treatment.

Officials said the Flourish Stay bed-and-breakfast facility was operating without clearance from the fire department. Lovkesh Bajaj, the owner of the building, was apprehended by the police. A first information report (FIR) was registered against him under Sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) and 326 (mischievous fire) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The police said that of

the deceased, 12 were foreign nationals and rest were Indians.

According to the Delhi Police, the fire started at the ground floor of the six-storey building and spread to the upper floors. Many people trapped inside the building began jumping out in desperation onto mattresses laid out on the ground by the local people, who were trying to rescue people, eyewitnesses said.

Lacking infrastructure
A senior Delhi Fire Services (DFS) official told *The Hindu*: "The building did not have any clearance from the fire department. There was no in-house fire fighting infrastructure in place at the hotel. The architectural layout was also not as per fire safety norms. The building had only one entry-exit point and access to upper floors was



People attempt to douse the fire that broke out in the hotel in Malviya Nagar, Delhi on Wednesday. AP

through a common staircase".

Municipal Corporation of Delhi sources said the building had approval for only six rooms but was operating more than 20 and had a single entry-exit point. Lieutenant-Governor Taranjeet Singh Sand-

hu chaired a meeting along with Delhi Home Minister Ashish Sood and ordered a magisterial inquiry into the incident to fix responsibility.

The Lieutenant-Governor also ordered a month-long drive from Thursday to review safety com-

pliance of all hotels, lodges, inns, nursing homes, coaching institutes, restaurants, and other vulnerable commercial establishments in the city, as per an official statement. Mr. Sandhu's office said that all rooms of hotels exceeding the permitted number of

rooms will be closed. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced an ex gratia of ₹2 lakh from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund for the next of kin of each deceased and ₹50,000 to each of the injured.

Fire-fighting operation

As per Delhi Police, the first call was received at 8.48 a.m. regarding a fire at the hotel at Malviya Nagar. The police and DFS reached the spot immediately and commenced the rescue, evacuation and relief operations. "The fire was on the ground, first and second floors of the building which has a basement. While the fire was contained on these floors, the rest of the building was affected by heat and smoke. A total of 10 fire-fighting units were deployed," said a senior fire services official. Preliminary investiga-

tions have revealed serious violations of safety and licence norms, including unauthorised commercial expansion, as per Mr. Sood's office.

Meanwhile, both the Aam Aadmi Party and Congress attacked the BJP government over alleged delay in the fire department's response to the incident and other recent fires.

While the locals alleged that the Fire Department arrived almost 45 minutes late and did not have proper equipment, the officials denied the allegations, saying that they had reached as soon as they received the call.

Chief Minister Rekha Gupta said that immediately upon receiving information, emergency response agencies were mobilised and launched rescue and relief operations.

RUSHING TO SAVE LIVES
» PAGE 4

Shivakumar sworn in as Karnataka CM

Sharath S. Srivatsa Nagesh Prabhu
BENGALURU

D.K. Shivakumar, Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee chief and eight-time legislator, on Wednesday took oath as the 25th Chief Minister of the State along with 13 Cabinet Ministers.

Senior leader G. Parameashwara was sworn in as the Deputy Chief Minister, the post held by Mr. Shivakumar in the previous Siddaramaiah Cabinet. Yathindra Siddaramaiah, son of the former Chief Minister, was also inducted into the new Cabinet.

FULL REPORT ON
» PAGE 3



Change of guard: Governor Thaaawarchand Gehlot administering the oath of office to Congress leader D.K. Shivakumar as the Chief Minister of Karnataka at the Lok Bhavan in Bengaluru on Wednesday. PTI

U.S. moots 12.5% tariff on India for failure to enforce 'forced labour' regulations

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
WASHINGTON

The U.S. government has proposed to levy a tariff of 12.5% on imports from 54 countries, including India, that it says have "failed to impose and effectively enforce" prohibitions on the import of goods produced using forced labour.

In response, the Indian government has said it "remains engaged" with the U.S. government regarding this development as well as the finalisation of an Interim Agreement on trade.

The office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) had, in March this year, launched an investigation under Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974 to look into whether its trade partners were taking enough steps to stop the import of goods made using forced labour.

The latest tariff announcements, as part of this investigation, are not final as yet.

Countries, including India, can submit requests to take part in public hearings by June 22, submit written comments by July 6, and participate in the public hearings on July 7.

Tool to impose tariff

According to trade experts, investigations under Section 301 was seen as a tool for the U.S. to impose tariffs on its imports after the country's Supreme Court in February struck down the reciprocal tariffs - including the 50% levied on India - that had been imposed by U.S. President Donald Trump.

"The results of this investigation indicate that

Blow-by-blow | A timeline of U.S. tariff-related events

- Feb. 20, 2026:** U.S. Supreme Court scraps reciprocal tariffs. Trump imposes 10% 150-day tariffs on all imports
- March 2026:** U.S. Trade Representative launches investigations on partners
- June 1-4:** U.S. negotiators visit India to finalise trade deal
- June 2:** USTR announces findings of investigations related to forced labour
- June 22:** Deadline to submit requests to take part in public hearings on the case
- July 6:** Deadline to submit written comments
- July 7:** Date of public hearings related to the investigation
- July 24:** Expiry of 10% U.S. tariffs



the acts, policies and practices of India related to the failure to impose and effectively enforce a forced labour import prohibition are unreasonable and burden or restrict U.S. commerce," the USTR report said.

The proposed tariffs put India in the same tariff bracket as several of its competitors, including Bangladesh, China, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam.

The proposal by the USTR also includes a separate mechanism for textile and apparel products, under which a certain volume of imports from selected economies would be allowed to enter the U.S. at lower tariff rates.

According to Agneshwar Sen, trade policy leader at EY India, the impact of these tariffs on India could be multidimensional.

"In the near term, exporters in labour-intensive industries such as textiles, garments, carpets, leather products, and brassware could face at least an additional 10% levy under Section 301, adding to their existing tariff exposure," Mr.

Sen said. "India should therefore submit detailed written representations by July 6 and participate proactively in the July 7 public hearing to challenge these conclusions," he added.

Govt. response

"India remains engaged with the U.S. on the matter as a part of Section 301 proceedings," the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said in a statement on Wednesday. "India is also proactively engaged with the U.S. for finalisation of a framework agreement as was announced on February 2, 2026, and in accordance with the joint statement released on February 7, 2026," it added.

A negotiating team from the U.S. is currently in India on a three-day visit that will conclude on June 4.

According to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the purpose of the trip is to "finalise the details" pertaining to the Interim Agreement between the two countries and take forward the negotiations on a broader Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).

Re-check ordered over Census data 'discrepancies'

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

With the ongoing Census exercise throwing up data that differ from government records, particularly on issues such as open defecation and household access to electricity or cooking gas connections, enumerators say they have been asked by senior officials to revisit households and correct the data "discrepancies".

Several enumerators, mostly government school-teachers and anganwadi workers, had taken to social media to report the official directions and flag the glaring inequality on the ground. Some complained that residents were unwilling to share information, fearing cancellation of government benefits.

On Tuesday, the Director of Census Operations (DCO), Rajasthan, wrote to all district functionaries that "during the analysis of



Differing data: Enumerators visit a household in Bikaner, Rajasthan, during door-to-door survey for Census 2027. ANI

field data collected so far, some discrepancies have been noticed". In the letter accessed by *The Hindu*, the charge officers were instructed to "verify the block-level data through the CMMS (census management and monitoring system) portal, in accordance with the actual field situation". The letter stated that discrepancy in data collection was noticed largely over a few subjects. It flagged the categorisation of "open defecation" for most households; usage of

fuel such as wood, dung cakes, crop residue, etc. being recorded for households having LPG connections, especially in urban areas; and in the drinking water section, the option of "tap water from treated source" not being recorded for most households.

The DCO letter further said that for drinking water sources such as river, pond, dam, canal, spring, lake, tank, etc., the option "within premises" cannot apply, and that the option "near premises" should al-

so be checked carefully. It also cited selection of "no lighting" option and showing Internet access as available even when the household did not have a phone (basic/smartphone/landline).

When contacted, a senior Census official said, "The letter was issued to ensure that actual field conditions are recorded without any ambiguity or lack of understanding, and without any communication gap between the household and the enumerator. Discrepancies found after field verification by Charge Officers, Sub-Divisional Census Officers, Principal Census Officers, District Coordinators, Officers of Census Directorate, etc., must be addressed. The quality of data/information should not be affected due to ambiguity or lack of clarity or preconceived notion."

As on August 13, 2025, out of 5,86,944 villages, as

many as 5,66,068 were declared 'open defecation-free' by the Centre.

'Are we supposed to lie'

An enumerator from Rajasthan told *The Hindu* on condition of anonymity, "In the mobile app, if we enter that a household has a tin roof, we are asked by our superiors to change it to concrete. Are we supposed to lie? Similarly, if the house does not have a toilet and occupants are defecating in the open, we are told to check if there is a toilet nearby, even that of a neighbour or a relative, which they may be using occasionally or even a public urinal. Then the entry can be changed from 'open defecation' to having access to toilet."

Another enumerator from Uttar Pradesh said, "Being government officials, we have been asked not to select options that may show the government in poor light."

IN BRIEF



Rajasthan govt. 'discontinued' dairy farmer subsidy: Gehlot

Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot on Wednesday alleged that the BJP-led State government has "silently discontinued" the ₹5 per litre subsidy given to dairy farmers through the Mukhyamantri Dugdh Utpadak Sambal Yojana, a charge the ruling dispensation has not yet responded to. In a statement, the Congress leader claimed that the decision has adversely affected livestock rearers across Rajasthan. Mr. Gehlot also criticised the State government for registering an FIR against villagers who had demanded drinking water. He remarked that people were being penalised for seeking basic amenities. PTI

Mizoram to issue liquor permit on medical grounds

Mizoram will issue 'Red Card' permits, allowing people to consume India Made Foreign Liquor on medical grounds under the provisions of its amended prohibition Act, officials said on Wednesday. In a notification on Tuesday, the Excise and Narcotics Department said the permits would be granted under Section 45B(1) of the Mizoram Liquor (Prohibition) Amendment Act, 2025, to eligible applicants whose health conditions warrant consumption of liquor. The permit will remain valid for one year on payment of ₹5,000. The prohibition Act was enacted during the previous Mizo National Front government. PTI

In a surprise move, TVK allots lone RS seat from Tamil Nadu to Congress

With this, the Congress's representation from the State in the Rajya Sabha is likely to increase to three, the highest in recent decades; no discussion on inviting TVK to join INDIA bloc: Chodankar

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

TVK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay announced on Wednesday that the party allocated to the Congress the lone Rajya Sabha seat from Tamil Nadu, for which by-polls will be held on June 18.

The TVK's decision to forgo an opportunity to send its first nominee to the Rajya Sabha, and instead, allot it to its post-poll ally, which has only five MLAs in the State Legislative Assembly, surprised many in the ruling party.

Mr. Vijay's announcement came shortly after a Congress delegation, led by All India Congress Committee in-charge for Tamil Nadu Girish Chodankar, met him at the Secretariat and requested him to allocate to the Congress the Rajya Sabha seat, which fell vacant following the resignation of AIADMK leader C. Ve. Shanmugam.

Mr. Shanmugam, who



Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Vijay during a meeting in Chennai. FILE PHOTO

was elected to the Upper House in June 2022, resigned on May 7, 2026, after being elected as MLA from the Mailam constituency in Villupuram district in the recently-concluded Assembly polls. The tenure of this Rajya Sabha seat ends in June 2028.

Just ahead of the Assembly election, the Congress had secured a Rajya Sabha seat when it was part of the DMK-led alliance. Its nominee, Christopher Ti-

lak, was elected to the Upper House.

With this, the Congress' representation from Tamil Nadu in the Rajya Sabha is likely to increase to three, the highest in recent decades. Veteran Congress leader and former Union Minister P. Chidambaram was elected from Tamil Nadu in 2022.

Earlier, while speaking to journalists after meeting the Chief Minister, Mr. Chodankar said he had re-

quested that the Rajya Sabha seat be allotted to the Congress as the party wanted to strengthen its presence in the Upper House. "We have impressed upon the Chief Minister that we need to strengthen our Rajya Sabha representation," he said.

To a question on whether there was any discussion on inviting the TVK to join the INDIA bloc and attend its meeting on June 8, Mr. Chodankar said no such discussion was held with the Chief Minister.

'DMK part of alliance'

Responding to a question on whether the DMK would continue to remain a part of the INDIA bloc, Mr. Chodankar said the DMK was very much part of the alliance and added he did not wish to comment further. He also said Mr. Vijay was unable to meet the Congress leaders in New Delhi during his recent two-day visit to the national capital "due to a mismatch in schedules."

28 lakh women to get monthly dole as Bengal govt. rolls out Annapurna Bhandar scheme

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari on Wednesday rolled out the Annapurna Bhandar scheme that will provide monthly aid of ₹3,000 to eligible women in the 25 to 60 age group in the State.

Mr. Adhikari handed over cheques to five beneficiaries at the State Secretariat to mark the launch of the direct benefit transfer scheme. He said 28,25,769 women have been approved to receive aid.

Beneficiaries have been given 90 days to register under the scheme.

Doubling the aid of ₹1,500 provided by the previous Trinamool Congress government under its Lakshmi Bhandar scheme to ₹3,000 was one of the promises made by the BJP during the campaign for



CM Suwendu Adhikari (right) handing over cheques to beneficiaries at the launch of the Annapurna Bhandar scheme on Wednesday. PTI

the Assembly poll.

Women and Child Development Minister Agnimitra Paul said fresh applications are being considered due to "corruption" in the implementation of the Lakshmi Bhandar scheme under which 2.2 crore women received aid.

Chief Secretary Manoj Agarwal said the list of beneficiaries of the new scheme will be made pu-

blic and people can file objections if non-deserving persons are receiving aid.

The newly elected BJP government had come under Opposition attack over the introduction of a "tedious" 11-page application form for the Annapurna Bhandar scheme and the declaration that existing beneficiaries of the Lakshmi Bhandar scheme will have to apply afresh.

50% Maharashtra farmers will be deprived, says Cong. on 'strict norms' for loan waiver

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Maharashtra Congress president Harshvardhan Sapkal on Wednesday alleged that more than 50% of farmers will be deprived of the Mahayuti government's farm loan waiver scheme because of the eligibility conditions, describing the scheme as a "complete sham".

The government on Tuesday approved the 'Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Holkar Shetkari Karja-mukti Yojana' to provide farm loan waivers of up to ₹2 lakh each, and also introduced incentive benefits for those farmers who have repaid their loans on time. The scheme is expected to benefit around 56 lakh farmers, waiving ₹36,585 crore of loans.

The Cabinet also decided to provide an incentive of up to ₹50,000 to farmers who have regularly repaid their crop loan.



Farmers standing with their damaged crop after the 2025 floods in Marathwada. EMMANUAL YOGINI

"The Bharatiya Janata Party-led Mahayuti government's terms and conditions under the loan waiver scheme are deliberately keeping 50% of farmers out of the scheme," Mr. Sapkal said. Calling it a "cruel joke", he demanded that the government waive the entire outstanding debt of all farmers by writing off their loans across the State.

Mr. Sapkal said the time period determining eligibility restricts farmers who took loan before April 2019

to March 2025 from availing of the scheme benefits. "The number of farmers who will benefit from the announced loan waiver is less than half of the total number of eligible farmers. Due to the default on previous loans, farmers who had taken loans before the specified period and are unable to secure fresh crop loans due to pending dues would be left out. So, the problem still remains," he added.

Mr. Sapkal also claimed

Mahayuti urges 'rebels' to withdraw from MLC election

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Appealing to 'rebels' to withdraw from MLC election, the ruling Mahayuti alliance on Wednesday announced the official list of 17 candidates.

"I humbly request that all the rebel candidates speak to the senior leadership, find a solution, and withdraw their nominations. Mahayuti parties held a meeting and decided to take a positive view on them," said BJP State president Ravindra Chavan while speaking at a joint press conference with other alliance leaders, including Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) State chief and MP Sunil Tatkare, and Shiv Sena leader Rahul Shewale.

The press conference was held against the backdrop of the Mahayuti facing rebellion in various seats, with several disappointed aspirants filing their nomination papers independently defying the orders from higher-ups. Shiv Sena leader Abdul Sattar's son Sameer Sattar, for instance, filed his nomination independently from Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar though the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) Suhass Shirsat is the of-

Alliance announces official list of 17 candidates for poll to be held on June 18

icial Mahayuti candidate. The appeal comes ahead of June 4, the last date of withdrawal.

The Election Commission will hold election to 16 Legislative Council seats from the local self-government bodies and a bypoll from the Nagpur self-government body on June 18, followed by results on June 22.

In the Mahayuti camp, the BJP is contesting 11 seats, Deputy Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena four, and Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar's NCP two.

Opposition troubles

The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi is caught in its own troubles. Sahebrao Kamble, a Congress candidate from the Yavatmal local authorities' constituency, has announced his withdrawal citing "not enough electoral strength to win the election". The Congress is contesting eight seats, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena (UBT) six, and the NCP (SP) three.

Contaminated water supply: 50 taken ill in Ahmedabad

Press Trust of India
AHMEDABAD

Fifty residents of Ahmedabad's Ghatlodia area fell ill with diarrhoea and vomiting after contaminated water from a drainage got mixed with a drinking water pipeline, civic officials said on Wednesday.

However, local residents claimed "hundreds of people" had fallen ill after consuming contaminated water received at their homes.

Nine residential societies in the area were affected by the contaminated water. Fifty people fell ill with diarrhoea and vomiting in the past four days and 11 of them were admitted to hospitals, they said.

"Four medical vans and 40 health teams have been deployed in the area," Bhavin Solanki, Medical Officer at the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation, said.

Montessori model reshapes early learning in Punjab govt. centres

Vikas Vasudeva
CHANDIGARH

Teachers and little learners alike at anganwadi centres and pre-primary government schools in Punjab's Hoshiarpur district are exploring a 'hands-on' mentorship and learning experience aimed at fostering independence, creativity, and experiential learning in classrooms.

As part of Punjab's first Montessori education initiative in government anganwadis (government-run childcare and mothercare centres) and pre-primary schools, launched in collaboration with Chandigarh-based Vivek High Montessori Institute (VHMI) in January this year, the project is reshaping the early learning landscape.

At the heart of the transformation are the educators themselves. "As part of



Children exploring 'hands-on' learning in a pre-primary class at a government school in Hoshiarpur, Punjab. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

the training to understand the Montessori style of teaching, I have been attending theory and practical sessions. The training showed me that a child is naturally curious. Previously, we would often ask children to perform tasks in a particular manner; now we involve them in every activity. I have rearranged the classroom setup; toys and books are

now within their reach so that any child can pick up whatever they want and play or read. Earlier, we used to dictate, but now we guide them," said 40-year-old Geetika, an anganwadi worker at Nandachaur village, who is undergoing Community Rooted Education Practitioners training imparted by VHMI.

"As a pilot initiative, 25

anganwadis and 25 pre-primary schools have been selected across Hoshiarpur district, with five institutions from each development block chosen to ensure balanced geographical representation and district-wide outreach," deputy commissioner Aashika Jain told *The Hindu*.

'Model learning'

"The project has been designed to cover the entire district and establish model learning centres, with classrooms being redesigned as Montessori learning environments complete with child-sized furniture, hands-on learning apparatus, and age-appropriate teaching materials that can serve as benchmarks for future expansion," she added.

Nineteen anganwadi supervisors have already

completed intensive hands-on training, with a three-phase programme for anganwadi workers and teachers continuing through September 2026. "VHMI's trained facilitators visit classrooms monthly, providing mentoring and ensuring that Montessori principles take root in practice, not just in theory," said Meenu Sahi, founder and executive director of VHMI.

Vision for 20K children
In its first phase, approximately 2,000 children are expected to benefit, while the long-term vision is to expand the model to cover all anganwadis across Hoshiarpur district, thereby benefiting nearly 20,000 children.

"Earlier, I would ask children to repeat after me. Now, I watch them discover things on their own.

We have toddlers and we have been conducting activities with them, teaching them through play. In this Montessori system, the focus is on practical learning. The difference I feel is that earlier we would often tell young children not to do certain tasks. Here, it is about making the child self-dependent and encouraging them to do every task with their own hands. I have developed a lot of patience with children," said Sharmila Rani, an anganwadi supervisor.

Rajni Devi, a pre-primary teacher at Singriwala government school, said, "We used to impart bookish knowledge to children. In this system, children work with their own hands. They learn by doing things. We used to think Montessori was only for big-city schools. Now, I see it belongs here too."

Annamalai quits BJP, likely to start new political 'movement'

M. Soundariya Preeetha
COIMBATORE

Former Tamil Nadu BJP president K. Annamalai has quit the party, and is expected to start a 'movement' that would eventually be converted into a regional political party. Sources told *The Hindu* on Wednesday that Mr. Annamalai submitted his resignation letter to the party leadership on Tuesday, and had meetings with Union Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP president Nitin Nambin, and national general secretary B.L. Santhosh.

He remained firm in his decision to leave the party, the sources added.

Mr. Annamalai is expected to announce his future

plans soon. The former Karnataka cadre IPS officer joined the party in August 2020. He headed the BJP's Tamil Nadu unit from July 16, 2021, to April 11, 2025, when Nainar Nagenthran replaced him. A mechanical engineer, Mr. Annamalai cleared the civil services and joined the police force in 2011.

Unsuccessful contests

He contested unsuccessfully from Aravakurichi in the 2021 Assembly election, and from Coimbatore in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. Mr. Annamalai did not contest the recent Assembly election, and had identified himself as an "ordinary *kaaryakarta*" of the party.

Shivakumar takes over as Karnataka CM, rolls out series of sops for youth

13 Cabinet Ministers, including Deputy Chief Minister Parameshwara, take oath; senior legislators, loyalists of Siddaramaiah find place in the new Cabinet; Shivakumar announces student welfare measures; Bengaluru gets ₹2,000 crore for roads

Sharath S. Srivatsa
Nagesh Prabhu
BENGALURU

The Congress government in Karnataka turned a new leaf on Wednesday with its eight-time legislator and Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president D.K. Shivakumar sworn in as the 25th Chief Minister of the State. Amid confusion and pushback in the party on creation of the Deputy Chief Minister's post, senior Dalit leader G. Parameshwara was sworn in as the deputy leader.

In a subdued but packed ceremony at Glass House in Lok Bhavan in Bengaluru, Mr. Shivakumar, who took over the reigns of the State from veteran OBC leader Siddaramaiah, was sworn in along with 13 Cabinet Ministers including Mr. Parameshwara. Mr. Shivakumar will have little less than two years term before the next Assembly election.

First major decisions

Hours after taking over as Chief Minister, Mr. Shivakumar announced a series of sops aimed at youth and improving urban infrastructure, signalling the priorities and style of his governance.

Describing it as the ushering in of a "Yuva Yuga", he announced in his maiden press conference, after holding the first Cabinet meeting, free bus passes for students across the



Power shift: Newly-sworn-in Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar (right) with outgoing leader Siddaramaiah during the oath-taking ceremony in Bengaluru on Wednesday. PTI

State and setting up of private employment exchanges. He announced an ambitious plan to start 10,000 Bharat Jodo Yuva Sanghas with a financial assistance of ₹10 lakh to each, at all 6,000 panchayats, and 4,000 sanghas in urban local bodies.

With focus of Bengaluru infrastructure, which often draws wide criticism from citizens, Mr. Shivakumar announced ₹2,000 crore to improve roads battered by rains.

The Chief Minister announced relief to owners of properties that do not conform to building bylaws

with a one-time waiver to provide electricity and water connections, and extending conversion of 'B' khatha to 'A' khatha.

Seniors over fresh faces

The Congress, which held hectic parleys over the last two days amid growing pressure from Cabinet hopefuls, finally released the list of leaders just hours ahead of the swearing in ceremony.

Belying expectations that young and fresh faces would be inducted, the party has gone with seniors barring Yathindra Siddaramaiah, son of Mr.

Siddaramaiah, who is making his debut as a Cabinet Minister.

Among those to take oath included U.T. Khader, who earlier resigned from the post of Speaker.

With an exception to Mr. Khader, who was a Minister in Mr. Siddaramaiah's first term, and Mr. Yathindra, all others sworn in on Wednesday served under Mr. Siddaramaiah in the second term. Those inducted to Cabinet include K.H. Muniyappa, K.J. George and Priyank Kharge.

Senior leader Satish Jarikholi, who hails from the Valmiki community and re-

presents the Scheduled Tribes (ST), has found a place in the Ministry.

Three Ministers – M.B. Patil, Eshwar Khandre, and Sharan Prakash Patil – represent the Veerashaiva-Lingayat community, while the Dalit community is represented by Mr. Kharge, Mr. Parameshwara (both Right), and Mr. Muniyappa (Left). As the Chief Minister belongs to the Vokkaliga community, six-time MLA Krishna Byre Gowda's induction is viewed as balancing community representation. Ramalinga Reddy, an eight-time legislator, belongs to the Reddy Vokkaliga community.

The party has ensured representation for the Kuruba community (OBC), to which Mr. Siddaramaiah belongs, by inducting Byrathi Suresh, two-time MLA, and Mr. Yathindra.

With the party coming under enormous pressure from Cabinet hopefuls, the second phase of expansion is expected to be taken up after the Rajya Sabha and Karnataka Legislative Council polls scheduled on June 18.

Among those in attendance during the ceremony were Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge, Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, Kerala Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan and Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy.

After a long wait, Tamil Nadu gets a regular DGP

S. Vijay Kumar
CHENNAI

After months of delay caused by litigation and repeated postponements, Tamil Nadu finally has a regular Director-General of Police and Head of the Police Force (DGP/HoPF).

On Wednesday, Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal, a 1994-batch IPS officer, assumed charge as the DGP, nearly 10 months after the vacancy arose.

Dr. Aggarwal was given a guard of honour at the DGP's office in Chennai. Later, he met Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar at the Lok Bhavan, and Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay at the Secretariat.

Dr. Aggarwal was on Central government deputation, and was serving as Special Director-General of the Border Security Force. He had served in several important positions, including that of Chennai City Police Commissioner.

Prime focus

After assuming charge as the DGP, Dr. Aggarwal told the media that prime importance would be given to curbing the drug menace, preventing crimes against women and children, and maintaining law and order.

Dr. Aggarwal succeeds Sandeep Rai Rathore, who was appointed to the post by the Election Commission of India (EC) in the run-up to the Assembly election in April.

With about six years of service left, Dr. Aggarwal is the youngest police officer



Mahesh Kumar Aggarwal

to occupy the top post, and will have a minimum tenure of two years under the Supreme Court's guidelines in the Prakash Singh case. There is, however, no bar on his continuing in the post until superannuation.

Protracted process

The appointment brings to a close a protracted process marked by administrative delays, legal challenges, and disagreements between the State government and the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC).

The post should have ideally been filled on September 1, 2025, following the retirement of the then DGP, Shankar Jiwai. However, the process was delayed for multiple reasons.

Going by the Supreme Court guidelines, the State government is required to initiate the selection process well in advance, and forward a list of eligible DGP-rank officers to the UPSC at least six months before the vacancy arises.

In this case, the proposal was reportedly sent only a few days before Mr. Jiwai's retirement in the last week of August 2025.

'Pinarayi's security being shielded from prosecution'

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) probing former Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's personal security detail for the assault on Youth Congress protesters in Alappuzha in November 2023 claimed to have uncovered an "entrenched effort" on the part of the highest levels of law enforcement to insulate the accused officers from legal jeopardy.

In a statement of fact submitted at a court in Alappuzha, the charging officer, M. Baiju Paulose, claimed that the SIT had come across instances of brazen subversion of law, including "framing of in-correct records, suppression and substitution of evidence" to "shield the accused from prosecution."

No 'defensible reason'

Mr. Paulose deposed that the officers lacked a "defensible reason" to step out of their escort vehicle and attack the protesters who were "successfully detained" by the local police to prevent them from waving black flags at the bus ferrying Mr. Vijayan and his then Cabinet colleagues to a State-sponsored function. The suspects have moved for anticipatory bail, stating that they had discharged their lawful duty to protect the "Principal VIP under Z+ security category", in this case, Mr. Vijayan. They also alleged in court that the SIT's case against them was politically motivated.

IN BRIEF



Sale of the famed Tirumala laddu peaks in May this year

The famed Tirumala laddu, which has great demand among the pilgrim fraternity, registered its highest-ever monthly sales in May this year, reflecting a sharp rise in pilgrim footfall at the hill temple of Lord Venkateswara in Andhra Pradesh. The TTD has recorded a historic sale of 1.21 crore laddus during May 2026, surpassing the 1.10 crore laddus sold in May 2025. The laddu, which enjoys Geographical Indication (GI) tag and is backed by an FSSAI licence, is produced under stringent quality-control measures.

Telangana ACB arrest suspended police officer

The Telangana Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) on Wednesday arrested suspended Additional Superintendent of Police Nayini Bhujanga Rao after a disproportionate assets case was booked against him for amassing wealth beyond his known sources of income. The latest action comes amid ongoing scrutiny of the suspended police officer, who is under investigation in connection with the high-profile phone-tapping case. The ACB officials also carried out searches at Mr. Rao's residence and 15 other locations linked to his relatives across Telangana.

Tiger Explorer hunts again, kills 14 calves in A.P. village

In a yet another attack on cattle, a male tiger, Explorer, killed 14 calves in Indukuru village in Polavaram district of Andhra Pradesh in the early hours of Wednesday. Earlier on May 29, the tiger, which was rehabilitated to the Papikonda National Park from native landscape of Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve in Maharashtra, reportedly killed nine cattle. However, it did not attack on any person guarding their cattle. The tiger resorted to the attack on the day when the Forest Department personnel were prepared to tranquillise the big cat.

Monsoon calling



Cumulus clouds cover the sky as a country boat approaches the jetty at Vazhamuttom in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala on Wednesday. The onset of Southwest monsoon in the State is expected around June 4. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

'SIR could result in a permanent class of excluded citizens'

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

AIMIM president and Hyderabad parliamentarian Asaduddin Owaisi on Wednesday criticised the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) and accused the Union government of creating a 'permanent class of excluded Indians' by means of this exercise.

Taking to X, Mr. Owaisi said that the SIR exercise has led to deletion of nearly 6.5 crore names from electoral rolls across 13 States and Union Territories.

Describing the right to vote as 'the poor's only

weapon against the powerful', Mr. Owaisi said disenfranchisement would leave vulnerable communities exposed to arbitrary government action.

The Lok Sabha MP contended that deletion under SIR did not mean that a person was not an Indian citizen. He noted that 27 lakh cases remained under adjudication. He alleged that the Election Commission had not released data on the number of persons excluded on the grounds of being foreigners. Mr. Owaisi claimed that those excluded were predominantly Muslims, women, migrants and the poor.

Telangana, South Africa to forge ties in education, healthcare and investments

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The Telangana government has entered into an agreement of collaboration with South Africa, with both sides agreeing to strengthen educational exchanges, promotion of medical tourism and promoting investments for mutual benefit.

Chief Minister A. Revanth Reddy, accompanied by Ministers D. Sridhar Babu and C. Damodar Raja Narsimha, participated in a meeting with a high-level delegation from South Africa led by Deputy President Paul Mashatile here on Wednesday. During the meeting, the Chief Minister



Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy presents a memento to South African Deputy President Paul Mashatile in Hyderabad. ANI

explained about the State capital's robust educational and skill training ecosystem which served as backbone for creating a premier hub for talent across IT, pharma, defence and aerospace sectors.

Hyderabad was placed as one of the leading global destinations for setting up of Global Capability Centres (GCCs) of Fortune-500 companies. He also spoke about the world-class medical and

healthcare facilities in the State that were attracting people from various nations for availing cost-effective medical treatment.

Mr. Revanth invited the South African leadership to attend this year's Telangana Rising Global Summit to be held in December to enable opening of wider opportunities for businesses and industries on both sides.

Mr. Mashatile said South Africa and India shared a long history of cultural ties. South Africa provided a platform from which Indian companies could enjoy preferential market access into the rest of Africa through the African Continental Free Trade Area.

Through smoke and screams, Hauz Rani residents rushed to save lives

As a devastating fire tore through a six-storey hotel in Delhi, local residents turned first responders too; they lay mattresses below windows to soften falls, performed CPR, carried many lodgers to safety, and offered help to police and firefighters

Suruchi Kumari
NEW DELHI

As thick smoke engulfed a six-storey bed-and-breakfast hotel in Delhi's Hauz Rani area on Wednesday morning, local residents rushed to rescue trapped occupants even before the fire tenders arrived.

The blaze, which broke out around 8.30 a.m., spread across three floors of the building, leaving several guests stranded inside amid dense smoke and panic. The establishment reportedly had only one common entry and exit point and no emergency staircase.

Sixty-one-year-old Riyazuddin, who runs a roadside shop opposite the building, said he quickly pulled out mattresses from his shed and spread them below the building's windows to help people jump to safety.

Moments later, trapped residents began jumping through windows to es-



Anxious moments: Police keep vigil outside the entrance of the hotel in Hauz Rani in New Delhi on Wednesday. Some lodgers escaped through windows while local residents helped to carry many of those affected to safety. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP, AP

cape the flames. Not all rooms had windows while some were jammed shut and unbreakable.

"I laid out around 15 mattresses. One man who rolled over from the second floor broke his leg. Everything was extremely tense," said Riyazuddin.

Later, Mohammed Israr Khan, another resident, also helped people escape through windows. Many residents worked together to carry people to ambu-

lances. The locality, due to its proximity to the Max Hospital, has many hotels used by patients and their families visiting the capital for treatment. Locals also said that the majority of the occupants are foreign nationals on medical visa.

Poor visibility
"When we entered the building with police and rescue teams, we could not see anything. There was only smoke, screams and

wailing from every floor," Mr. Khan said, adding, "Many were trapped in the basement. Some bodies were still burning, but we used our bare hands. Time is critical in such situations."

Mr. Khan said he performed CPR on eight people. "I vomited a couple of times. Around five people we brought out were already dead," he said.

Wasim Raja, another local resident, said he found

two women unconscious inside a bathroom where they had locked themselves to escape the fire. "I carried them out on a mattress. Most people staying there were already weak and had come to Delhi for treatment."

"A mother and her child bought medicines from me yesterday. They were supposed to travel to Agra today. I don't know if they made it," said a local pharmacist.

Union Cabinet approves ₹9,585-crore scheme to cut pollution in Delhi-NCR

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a two-year scheme aimed at reducing air pollution in the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR) by accelerating the transition to cleaner transport technologies.

With a total financial outlay of ₹9,585 crore, including ₹5,041 crore from the Centre and an estimated ₹1,601 crore in tax concessions from the participating States, the scheme seeks to incentivise owners of trucks and buses registered in the Delhi-NCR that comply with BS-IV or earlier emission norms to replace them with BS-VI or stricter emission-compliant vehicles, or electric vehicles (EVs).

The scheme is expected to reduce vehicular emissions and contribute to improved air quality index (AQI), read an official statement.

The move will benefit approximately 2.07 lakh (1.91 lakh trucks and 16,329



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw announces the Cabinet decisions in New Delhi on Wednesday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

buses) owners in Delhi-NCR (comprising Delhi, Haryana, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh), it stated.

For BS-III or older vehicles, scrapping at registered vehicle scrapping facilities is mandatory. BS-IV vehicles may either be "scrapped or sold outside the NCR in non-National Clean Air Programme cities/towns". Owners must then purchase and register a BS-VI or stricter norms-compliant or an EV within the NCR. However, in Delhi, light goods vehicles purchased under the scheme must be electric while buses

must be compliant with BS-VI norms, run on CNG, or be electric only. Government vehicles are excluded from the scheme.

The Centre will provide 5% interest subvention on loans for five years, monthly fuel vouchers worth up to ₹4,800 depending on vehicle category, and lump-sum benefits for EV purchases or Certificate of Deposit trading.

States will waive registration fees and grant up to 100% motor vehicle tax concessions for new vehicles and 50% for used vehicles for 10 years. They will also waive pending liabilities on old vehicles.

Assam and Meghalaya villagers resume farm work in disputed area

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

Villagers in Assam and Meghalaya resumed their farming activities in a disputed boundary area on Wednesday, ending weeks of intermittent conflict.

The resumption followed a formula worked out by representatives of the two State governments, who met in the disputed Tapat-Lapangap sector on Tuesday afternoon and brokered peace between residents on either side of the unclear inter-State boundary.

Tapat is in Assam's West Karbi Anglong district, and Lapangap is in Meghalaya's West Jaintia Hills district.

'Relief for locals'

"Our people have started work on the disputed fields today. It is a huge relief for locals heavily dependent on farming," Melin Dkhar, a resident of Lapangap, told *The Hindu*.

According to the agreement, the Karbi community farmers of Assam would

Tapat lies in Assam's West Karbi Anglong, while Lapangap is in Meghalaya's West Jaintia Hills

cultivate and tend to their crops in fields claimed by Meghalaya for one agricultural season. In exchange, Meghalaya's Khasi-Pnar community farmers would cultivate in the fields claimed by Assam.

"This is a temporary arrangement, but we hope the spirit of cooperation displayed during yesterday's meeting would help strengthen relations between the neighbouring communities and contribute towards a lasting resolution of border-related issues," Deimonmi Lyngdoh, the head of Lapangap's traditional community-based organisation, said.

Assam and Meghalaya have had 12 disputed sectors along their 855-km boundary since 1972, when Meghalaya was carved out of Assam.

Nepal is a priority partner, says Modi after meeting RSP chief

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

Nepal's ruling Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) chairperson Rabi Lamichhane on Wednesday met Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who called the neighbouring country a "priority partner".

The meeting came a day after Mr. Lamichhane called on External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Home Minister Amit Shah and discussed development and security partnerships between the two countries. The meetings came even as official sources here said that Nepal's Foreign Minister, Shisir Khanal, is expected to arrive in India this week.

"Delighted to meet the Chairman of the Rastriya Swatantra Party of Nepal Mr. Rabi Lamichhane. I welcome and fully share his desire to work closely together for a shared and prosperous future. Nepal is a priority partner under our Neighbourhood First policy and we look forward to collaborating with the new government to elevate

the special and multifaceted relationship between our two countries to greater heights," Mr. Modi said in a social media post, sharing photographs of the meeting, which was attended by National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, Mr. Jaishankar, and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri.



Bilateral talks: Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a meeting with Nepal's Rastriya Swatantra Party chairperson Rabi Lamichhane. PTI

Shared prosperity
Mr. Lamichhane said the hour-long meeting with Mr. Modi was a "great delight" and pledged to work for "development diplomacy".

"By focusing on shared civilisational bonds, digital corridors, and seamless

connectivity, we can truly build a partnership defined by progress and mutual trust. RSP looks forward to translating these possibilities into reality for people of Nepal and India - for our shared prosperity," he said in a social media post.

The Embassy of Nepal, in a social media post, said the meeting covered "digital corridors and connectivity".

The warm welcome extended to Mr. Lamichhane at the Indira Gandhi International Airport on Monday and the subsequent top-level meetings have taken place against the back-

drop of the early days of the Prime Minister Balendra Shah-led government, which came to power in March and attracted attention for introducing customs duties on imported Indian goods worth more than 100 Nepal rupees. This was followed by a re-negotiation of the Kalapani-Limpiyadhura-Lipulek border dispute, which on Tuesday drew a response from the External Affairs Ministry that negated the role of third parties in Nepal-India border issues. Mr. Lamichhane's visit is therefore being viewed as an attempt to keep the ties on a smooth track.

Cabinet gives its nod for new coastal highway in Odisha

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the construction of a new coastal highway from Rameshwar to Paradeep in Odisha at a total project cost of ₹8,300.79 crore.

The new coastal highway will be constructed on a hybrid annuity model, in two packages, with a combined total length of 160.18 km, an official statement said. It will pass through Khurda, Puri, Kendrapada and Jagatsinghpur districts of Odisha. The project will enhance regional mobility and promote socio-economic development, the statement said, while also leading to substantial reductions in fuel consumption, carbon emissions, and vehicle operating costs.

The project was among the announcements made by Union Minister of Information and Broadcasting Ashwini Vaishnaw in New Delhi on Wednesday.

The Union Cabinet also

It also approved two National Highway widening projects in Telangana at a cost of ₹7,597.16 crore

gave the green signal for two major National Highway widening projects in Telangana spanning a total length of 190.76 km at a cost of ₹7,597.16 crore.

The widening of the Armoor-Jagtial-Mancherial Section of NH-63 will be on a hybrid annuity model and the Jagtial-Karimnagar Section of NH-563 will be carried out on a build-operate-transfer model to the four-lane standard in Telangana.

Upon completion, the official statement said, travel time is expected to reduce by about an hour and 30 minutes between Armoor and Mancherial and by about 45 minutes between Jagtial and Karimnagar, while providing safe, fast, and uninterrupted connectivity for both passenger and freight traffic.

362 detained, 782 questioned in anti-infiltration drive in Gujarat

Abhinav Deshpande
AHMEDABAD

The Gujarat Police detained 362 undocumented Bangladeshi immigrants and questioned more than 782 suspected foreign nationals during a State-wide crackdown under "Operation Delta Hunt" launched on Tuesday night and continuing into early Wednesday.

The development comes days after Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced in Gandhinagar that illegal infiltrators would be identified and deported.

The operation was carried out across Ahmedabad, Surat, Rajkot, Vadodara and several other parts of the State. Officials said it is an ongoing operation with more raids in the off-



Suspected Bangladeshi nationals queue up for interrogation at the Crime branch office in Ahmedabad on Wednesday. ANI

ing. According to the State government, those detained so far include 103 men, 188 women and 71 children.

In Ahmedabad alone, around 300 suspected Bangladeshi nationals were rounded up during the drive. Of them, 155 have so far been confirmed as Bangladeshi nationals

residing illegally in India, including 41 men, 95 women and 30 children.

Ahmedabad Crime Branch Joint Commissioner of Police Sharad Singhal said the operation was planned following a high-level meeting chaired by Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister Harsh Sanghavi.

Congress demands the resignation of Arunachal Pradesh CM

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday renewed its attack on the BJP government in Arunachal Pradesh, alleging that the party was disregarding the Supreme Court's directions by allowing Chief Minister Pema Khandu to continue in office despite an ongoing court-ordered inquiry.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh said the BJP had "decided to brazen it out" in Arunachal Pradesh even after the Supreme Court ordered a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into decisions taken by the Chief Minister. He contended that Mr.

Khandu continued to hold the Public Works Department portfolio and therefore retained control over files that would be required for the probe. "All principles and norms have been abandoned. This is an insult to the Supreme Court, to the people of Arunachal Pradesh, and to the Constitution of India," Mr. Ramesh said.

On May 19, the Congress leader had posted on an April 6 order of the Supreme Court directing the CBI to conduct a preliminary inquiry into allegations that contracts worth ₹1,270 crore had been awarded to members of the Chief Minister's family between January 2015 and December 2025, creating a conflict of interest.

Russia delivers fourth squadron of the S-400 air defence system

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

India has received the fourth squadron of the Russian-made S-400 air defence system, strengthening the country's long-range air defence network. The system arrived from Russia as scheduled in May, and is expected to be deployed in an operational area shortly, sources in the defence sector said.

The delivery is part of a \$5.43-billion agreement signed between India and Russia in 2018 for the acquisition of five S-400 regimental systems. Three S-400 squadrons have already been inducted into service; the fourth has now arrived, following delays linked to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

The remaining squa-



The delivery is part of a \$5.43 billion agreement signed between India and Russia in 2018. AFP

dron under the original contract is expected to be delivered in 2027, officials said. Deliveries are now back on schedule.

The S-400 will be integrated with AI-enabled decision-support capabilities aimed at improving threat prioritisation and target selection, senior defence officials said.

"AI-enabled targeting will assist operators in identifying and prioritising aerial threats. All incoming targets will be displayed on the system, and AI will provide recommendations based on the nature of the threat. However, the final engagement decision will remain with the operator," a senior official said.

HC to hear Abhishek's plea seeking protection

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

The Calcutta High Court granted permission to Trinamool Congress leader Abhishek Banerjee on Wednesday to file a petition in the court seeking protection against any coercive action by the West Bengal CID over its probe on allegations of signature forgery against him.

Mr. Abhishek's counsel reportedly argued that the leader had no connection with the case. A Vacation Bench of Justice Apurba Sinha Ray allowed the matter to be heard on Friday, sources said.

Two Trinamool MLAs – Ritabrata Banerjee and Sandipan Saha – had filed an official complaint with the West Bengal Assembly Speaker, stating that the Trinamool general secretary had forged multiple signatures in a letter declaring Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay as the party's choice for the Leader of Opposition in the House. Following this, an FIR was filed, and the CID was told to probe the case.

Meanwhile, Enforcement Directorate officials reached Mr. Abhishek's residence and served him a notice, asking him to appear before them for questioning in the primary teacher recruitment scam.

Expelled Trinamool MLA is LoP in Bengal Assembly

Ritabrata Banerjee claims support of 58 of 80 MLAs but asks Mamata to remain 'main adviser'; development poses biggest existential challenge for party; Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim resigns

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Expelled Trinamool Congress MLA Ritabrata Banerjee was appointed Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the West Bengal Assembly on Wednesday. A letter with the support of 58 MLAs of the Trinamool nominating the Uluberia Purba MLA was submitted to Speaker Rathindra Bose, who appointed Mr. Ritabrata as the LoP.

Mr. Ritabrata, who was handed over the keys to the LoP chamber in the presence of the rebel MLAs of the Trinamool, said, "We submitted a letter signed by 58 MLAs to the Speaker. So far, the number is 58, and it can increase in future."

"We have the support of two-thirds of the Trinamool Congress MLAs and as per parliamentary practices we are the real Opposition. We will serve as a responsible Opposition in the 18th West Bengal Legislative Assembly. We will criticise the government but there will be no opposition for opposition's sake," he said at a press conference. Akhruzzaman, the MLA



Big churn: Expelled Trinamool Congress leader Ritabrata Banerjee at a press conference in Kolkata on Wednesday. PTI

for Raghunathanj in Murshidabad district, was appointed chief whip of the Trinamool. Four rebel MLAs – Javed Khan, Sabina Yasmin, Sandipan Saha, and Sheuli Saha – were appointed deputy leaders in the House.

Mr. Ritabrata and Mr. Akhruzzaman reached out to Trinamool founder and chairperson Mamata Banerjee saying, "We appeal to Mamata Banerjee to remain as a main adviser to the Trinamool Legislature Party."

Existential crisis
The development poses the biggest existential challenge for the Trinamool, which suffered a loss to the

BJP in the recent Assembly polls. The Trinamool was reduced to 80 seats while the BJP won 208 seats in the 294-member House.

The Trinamool had nominated 10-time MLA and veteran leader Sovande Chattopadhyay as the LoP on May 20. But the letter nominating Mr. Chattopadhyay had names of several MLAs written in block letters and two MLAs – Mr. Ritabrata and Mr. Saha – had written to the Speaker alleging that their signatures were forged. The letter, which came with the signature of Trinamool general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, prompted an investigation by the West Bengal CID.

On Monday, the Trinamool had expelled Mr. Ritabrata and Mr. Saha after Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari made a public announcement of the investigation. Since his expulsion, Mr. Ritabrata has been reaching out to the Trinamool MLAs for support.

The rebel Trinamool leaders said Mr. Abhishek, the party general secretary, had "no connection with the representatives of Trinamool legislators of the 18th West Bengal Legislative Assembly".

They said that if found guilty, the Assembly Speaker can write to the Lok Sabha Speaker urging him to disqualify Mr. Abhishek as an MP.

Earlier in the day, about 20 MLAs of the Trinamool, which included Mamata Banerjee loyalists such as Kunal Ghosh and Firhad Hakim, participated in an administrative meeting at the West Bengal State Secretariat, chaired by the Chief Minister.

Later in the day, Mr. Hakim resigned as the Mayor of Kolkata.

Hundreds of local Trinamool Congress leaders have been arrested since the party was voted out of power on May 4.

Art as a mirror to a world in transition: unique panel at The Hindu Huddle 2026

The Hindu Bureau

While acknowledging that we live on a planet ravaged by climate change, wars, technological disruption and a crisis of loneliness amidst the white noise of the digital universe, it is equally imperative to recognise that art in its myriad forms is an essential element of our collective soul that brings balance to our civilisational prospects and helps us make sense of human life as it is.

This is the multidimensional theme at the heart of a unique panel on art at The Hindu Huddle, the ideas conclave of The Hindu group, to be held in Bengaluru on Friday and Saturday.

Featuring artists Seema Kohli, Shilo Shiv Suleman, and art collector and founder of Bengaluru's Museum of Art and Photography, Abhishek Poddar, and moderated by Narayan Lakshman, Opinion Editor of *The Hindu* and Curator of The Hindu Huddle, the session, titled "Memories, medium or message? Art as a mirror to a world in transition", will explore the meanings and variegated mediums of art in all its forms, and how it might serve as a vehicle to preserve memories, identities

and relationships while reimagining these through the lens of artists and art institutions. In this context, Ms. Kohli brings to the conversation her distinctive artistic language that brings together mythology, memory, feminism, spirituality, and contemporary identity. Ms. Suleman offers per-



spectives blending technology, ritual, and social commentary, drawing upon a globally recognised artistic practice that challenges conventional boundaries between art, activism, and collective healing.

Mr. Poddar's perspective complements and extends the conversation along institutional dimensions, reflecting decades spent creating spaces where art, history, and contemporary dialogue can coexist and engage wider audiences.

Event partners
The Hindu Huddle is presented by Sami-Sabinsa Group as the Presenting Partner. The event is co-powered by the Government of Telangana and held in association with Khaja Bandanawaz University. It is further supported by: Bank of Baroda, Larsen & Toubro, Apollo Hospitals, IIM Sirmaur, ICAFI Group, TAFE, Uttarakhand government, Wizzmon, Associate Partners; Casagrand, Realty Partner; Toyota, Luxury Car Partner; Amity University Bengaluru, University Partner; Harrow International School Bengaluru, Education Partner; Meghalaya Tourism, State Partner; NDTV 24x7, TV Partner.

Amid broken ties, Rahul, Kharge hail Karunanidhi on his birth anniversary

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The birth anniversary of former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam patriarch M. Karunanidhi on Wednesday became an occasion for top Congress leaders to reach out to their former ally amid broken ties between the two parties.

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge paid tributes to Karunanidhi, popularly known as "Kalaigarnar", describing him as a beloved leader of Tamil Nadu.

'Deep respect'

In a post on X, Mr. Kharge said Karunanidhi's lifelong commitment to social justice, equality, rational thought, and democratic values had transformed



Rahul Gandhi paying tribute to DMK patriarch M. Karunanidhi on his birth anniversary. ANI

countless lives. "Kalaigarnar Karunanidhi's immense contribution to public life, including art and literature, will forever be remembered with deep respect," he said.

Significantly, he tagged former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK chief M.K. Stalin in his post.

In a separate post on X,

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi paid tributes to the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister. He said Karunanidhi spent his life fighting for the dignity of the Tamil people, for social justice, and for the rights of the marginalised.

"Not just a Chief Minister – he was a writer, a poet, a thinker. He believed in a Constitution that treats every Indian as equal," Mr. Gandhi said.

Mr. Kharge's tagging of the DMK chief in his post and Mr. Gandhi's sharing of a photograph of him offering flowers to a portrait of Mr. Karunanidhi are being seen as attempts to assuage the DMK leadership, which is reportedly upset over the Congress's tie-up with actor-turned politician Vijay-led Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK).

Loyalists rally behind Mamata, say an ousted leader cannot lead Trinamool in Assembly

Shrabana Chatterjee
KOLKATA

Loyalists of former Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee within the Trinamool Congress on Wednesday said that an expelled leader such as Ritabrata Banerjee cannot function as their Leader of the Opposition in the West Bengal Assembly. This comes after 58 Trinamool MLAs joined hands with Mr. Ritabrata and defected from the party. They also declared Mr. Ritabrata their Leader of the Opposition.

"The MLAs who won are all Trinamool candidates and have used the image of Ms. Mamata Banerjee to win. She has worked hard to make these MLAs win. Now, an expelled leader cannot be the head of a political party," senior Trinamool MLA Kunal Ghosh said, criticising the 58 MLAs who have rallied behind Mr. Ritabrata.



Open rivalry: Kunal Ghosh and Sandipan Saha after attending a meeting held by Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari on Wednesday. PTI

Mr. Ghosh further added that "Ms. Banerjee is the original Trinamool Congress" – the leader who gave birth to the party. "She is the *Maa* of Trinamool," Mr. Ghosh said.

Mr. Ritabrata along with Sandipan Saha, MLA, were expelled from the party on Monday on allegations of "anti-party activities".

Senior leader and Lok Sabha member Kalyan Banerjee said that "people

who stand by Ms. Mamata Banerjee today will continue to stand by her in the future". "Those who chose to betray *Didi* today will ultimately be judged by the people. Their actions only reinforce the perception that they are no different from the BJP," Mr. Kalyan Banerjee said.

Other supporters of Ms. Mamata Banerjee too echoed the sentiment. "Trinamool means Ms. Ma-

ma Banerjee and people. The people and Ms. Mamata Banerjee are both with the Trinamool," Dola Sen, MP, said while on her way to attend a meeting at Ms. Mamata Banerjee's residence in Kalighat in South Kolkata.

Speaking on similar lines, Trinamool's Kamarhati MLA Madan Mitra and other old loyalists of the party said that their party has only one leader and that is Ms. Mamata Banerjee. "What others are saying is not something I concern myself with," Mr. Mitra said.

Party units dissolved

Earlier in the day, in an effort to restructure the party, Trinamool dissolved all party units across West Bengal. All frontal organisations also stood dissolved, the party said, highlighting the need for a massive overhaul after a humiliating electoral loss.

"The party will undertake a comprehensive exercise of introspection, performance review, and organisational assessment at every level. Based on the findings of this exercise, the organisational structure of the parent body and all frontal organisations will be reconstituted," the Trinamool said in an official statement.

However, the developments only fuelled rumours and political circles were abuzz that the Trinamool party had been "dissolved". However, Mr. Ghosh said that the party continues to exist and that the rumours of it being dissolved are false. "The various committees of the Trinamool Congress have been dissolved, not the party itself," Mr. Ghosh said. He added that they are set to reconstitute their structures and will set up the committees and local bodies in the coming days.

Sourav Ganguly's security cover downgraded

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

The West Bengal government on Wednesday reduced the security cover for Sourav Ganguly, former captain of the Indian cricket team, from the Z-category to the Y-category.

The development was confirmed by officials of the West Bengal Police security wing as part of an "ongoing routine exercise" in reviewing the security cover of various prominent personalities in the State based on their threat assessments.

Under the new arrangement, he is expected to be provided with only three or four security personnel.

National Conference to hold protest in Delhi over Statehood and other issues

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday chaired a marathon meeting of his legislators in Srinagar "to dissect 19 months of the National Conference (NC) rule" and decided to hold a protest in Delhi during the Monsoon Session of Parliament over the demand of Statehood and constitutional guarantees.

"It is time for our leadership to go to Delhi and talk to the people there," said Tanvir Sadiq, NC legislator and spokesperson, after a day-long meeting held at Srinagar's protected forest area of Dachigam.

Mr. Sadiq said the NC leadership, during the



Big discussion: A group of National Conference MLAs at the residence of J&K CM Omar Abdullah on Wednesday. IMRAN NISSAR

meeting, highlighted the need "to intensify efforts for restoration of what was taken away from J&K after the constitutional changes of 2019", when the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir was split into two Union Territories and the

seven decades of special status was scrapped. The meeting took stock of the NC-Congress relationship, which soured after the NC government came to power in 2024.

"A threadbare discussion on all important is-

ssues was held. The relationship of Congress and the government was also discussed. The Chief Minister patiently listened to everyone and all legislators participated in the deliberations," said Mr. Sadiq.

On the likely Cabinet expansion with three ministerial berths vacant, he said, "It was the prerogative of the Chief Minister."

There is pressure from NC legislators to expand the ministerial berths. Many NC legislators said Srinagar district with eight seats remained unrepresented in the Cabinet. Several NC legislators also unhappy to function under the dual power system, with the Lieutenant Governor wielding significant powers.

Jairam flags gaps, opacity in clearances for Nicobar project

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

Congress MP Jairam Ramesh has renewed his objections to the Great Nicobar Island Development Project in a letter dated June 3, replying to Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav's response of May 27.

Mr. Yadav's reply had effectively conceded that the project's environmental clearance was not based on comprehensive, three-season primary data but on a "single seasonal cycle", Mr. Ramesh said. The Congress leader further contended that the underlying institutional studies rested on baseline surveys gathered over only a few weeks, and that historical



Jairam Ramesh

secondary data held by different institutions, including the Zoological Survey of India and the Wildlife Institute of India, could not substitute for site-specific primary assessment.

He also challenged the Minister's reliance on the National Green Tribunal. The April 2023 order, Mr.

Ramesh noted, recorded "unanswered deficiencies", and remanded the clearance for re-examination, while the February 2026 judgment had made no finding on data adequacy.

Mr. Ramesh called it a "perversion of due process" that the institutions which prepared the studies had effectively reviewed their own work. He faulted both the Minister and the tribunal for ignoring a 2009 Ministry memorandum, and the ports' environmental impact assessment manual requiring multi-season data.

He pressed for the release of the High-Powered Committee's report, handed to the NGT in a sealed cover in October 2025.

INBRIEF



PM to launch projects worth over ₹18,777 crore in Gujarat

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will inaugurate and lay foundation stones for development projects worth over ₹18,777 crore in Gujarat during his visit to Surat on June 5. Among key initiatives are eight Gujarat Industrial Development Corporation projects valued at ₹1,063.43 crore, aimed at strengthening industrial infrastructure and environmental management systems in south Gujarat. Of the total investment, projects worth over ₹894 crore are set in Bharuch district; Valsad will receive projects worth ₹169.3 crore. Mr. Modi will inaugurate six GIDC projects in Bharuch, a major hub for chemical and petrochemical industries.

NHRC issues notice to Odisha, U.P. over assault on tribal girl

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has issued notices to the governments of Odisha and Uttar Pradesh over the trafficking, illegal confinement, and repeated sexual assault of a 17-year-old tribal girl from Dhenkanal district, who was sold for ₹50,000 and subjected to abuse for nearly two years in Jhansi. In an official communique, the Commission cited reports stating that the victim was lured to Uttar Pradesh on the pretext of employment. "The girl managed to escape with the help of a local advocate and approached the Jhansi police. Although her statement was recorded, no further action was allegedly taken by the police."

ED conducts searches in case linked to trafficking syndicate

The Enforcement Directorate conducted searches in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab on Wednesday in connection with a human trafficking syndicate operating from India and Cambodia. "The syndicate is suspected to be involved in organised human trafficking, cyber fraud, and the laundering of proceeds of crime generated through these illegal activities," said an agency source. The ED investigation is based on a First Information Report registered and chargesheets filed by the Delhi police. "The search operation covers the residential premises of individuals who acted as the Indian recruiters and agents," the source said.

Bangladeshi youth arrested in Agartala ahead of Shah's visit

Tripura Police on Wednesday arrested a Bangladeshi youth as security deployment intensified ahead of the visit of Union Home Minister Amit Shah to the State. The youth, who identified himself as Sajib Bhuyan, was arrested from the Bitarban locality in the city. Police claimed that a *prima facie* investigation revealed that the detainee is a resident of Brahmanbaria district in Bangladesh, adjacent to West Tripura. They said further investigation is underway. While being produced before a court, Mr. Bhuyan told newsmen that he and his family were subjected to political violence in their village in Bangladesh, and he was forced to flee.

Over 40,000 students apply to CBSE for re-evaluation

Almost 5,000 students applied for verification alone; CBSE asks students to complete application process by midnight of June 6, makes available a visual guide and tutorial video to assist them

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

More than 40,000 Class 12 students have applied to get their answer sheets verified and re-evaluated, as of noon on Wednesday, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) said.

"The portal has accepted 4,924 applications for verification and 39,056 applications for re-evaluation (total of 43,980) as of 12 p.m. (on Wednesday)," the CBSE said in a statement.

The Board said students can pay for their applications using the payment gateways of the State Bank of India, Canara Bank, Bank of Baroda, or Indian Bank, all of which are available on the verification and re-evaluation portal. "Students need not have an account with these banks to complete payment but can use any of these payment gateways to make pay-



The Board said the outcome of the requests would be communicated after the completion of the process. FILE PHOTO

ments," the CBSE said.

The portal was launched after a delay on June 2, although the Board had earlier said that applications for verification and re-evaluation of answer books were expected to begin by May 29.

This follows concerns raised by students and parents regarding the new on-screen marking evaluation system deployed by the CBSE this year.

On-screen marking is a

digital evaluation process where answer sheets are scanned and uploaded so that evaluators can assess them virtually. However, students complained that the scans were blurry, pages were missing, and even mixed up with other answer sheets.

As more students started applying to see their answer sheets, repeated glitches popped up, including in the online payment process. Ethical hackers

exposed vulnerabilities in the OnMark platform, showing that they could access students' answer sheets and their personal data. Questions have been raised about the tender process for the on-screen marking system contract, which was awarded to a company with a dodgy record.

The Board said the outcome of the requests would be communicated after the completion of the process and advised candidates to submit their applications by midnight on June 6.

A visual guide and tutorial video have been made available to help students complete the process, it added.

Aadhaar-based verification of applicants was introduced for security reasons, the Board said, despite the fact that making such verification mandatory goes against a Supreme Court ruling.

Arunachal Christian body asks State govt. not to frame rules for anti-conversion law

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

The apex body of Christians in Arunachal Pradesh has asked the State's BJP-led government to stop the process of framing and notifying rules for a 48-year-old anti-conversion law.

The Arunachal Pradesh Freedom of Religion Act was introduced in 1978, but was not implemented. Hearing a petition seeking its implementation, the Gauhati High Court directed the State government in September 2024 to frame and notify the rules.

Officials said the rules were being processed.

On Tuesday, the Arunachal Christian Forum submitted a memorandum to Chief Minister Pema Khandu to express its "strongest opposition" to the ongoing exercise.

The forum said Christians in the State were apprehensive that the Act, once implemented, would have far-reaching consequences on their constitu-



A memorandum has been submitted to Arunachal Pradesh CM Pema Khandu.

tional rights, religious freedom, social harmony, and peaceful coexistence among several communities. It alleged that the "undue haste" of the High-Powered Committee, entrusted with framing the rules of the Act, generated widespread apprehension and resentment among the Christians, a significant section of the State's population.

It further said that such a move without a broad consensus and meaningful dialogue could lead to avoidable tension and unrest in Arunachal Pradesh.

The ACF asked the government to issue a public declaration within 15 days, halting the rule-framing process and initiating comprehensive consultations with all stakeholders on the repeal of the Act.

Under pressure

The Pema Khandu government has been under pressure from non-Christian groups, including the Indigenous Faith and Cultural Society of Arunachal Pradesh (IFCSAP), to implement the Act soon.

Members of the IFCSAP said tribal people were increasingly converting to other religions, and without the Act in place, the indigenous faiths would soon become extinct.

According to the indigenous faith body, the Christian population jumped from less than 1% in 1971 to more than 30% in 2011. During the same period, the number of people following indigenous faiths and other religions reduced from more than 63% to about 26%.

CJP zeroes in on Pradhan resignation demand, sets protest for June 6 in Delhi

Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) will hold a protest on June 6 at Jantar Mantar in the capital, demanding the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, the movement's spokespersons said at its first press conference on Wednesday. "We seek minimum accountability from this system where rot has set in," said spokesperson Saurav Das.

Mr. Pradhan has taken flak in recent days due to the paper leaks and cancellation of NEET-UG, and problems with the Central Board of Secondary Education's new on-screen marking evaluation system for the Class 12 examination.

Abhijeet Dipke, who started the CJP social media accounts last month, garnering millions of followers, will arrive in Delhi from the U.S. on Saturday morning. He will then approach the Parliament Street police station seeking permission to protest

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday mounted a sharp attack on Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan over the controversy surrounding the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE)'s On-Screen Marking (OSM) system, alleging that he was "shamelessly digging his heels in office" despite mounting evidence of "incompetence and corruption" in his Ministry.

The transfer of the CBSE's top leadership had failed to address the issue of accountability at the highest levels of the Education Ministry, Congress general secretary (Communications) Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X.

Alleging that Mr. Pradhan headed a "corrupt, incompetent, and callous" Ministry, Mr. Ramesh referred to reports that the CBSE had been unable to satisfactorily answer questions on the procurement process for the OSM system before the Parliamen-

Transfer of CBSE's top brass has failed to address the issue of accountability, says Jairam Ramesh

tary Standing Committee on Education, chaired by Congress leader Digvijaya Singh.

Calling it "a glaring lack of accountability at the highest level of the CBSE and Education Ministry", Mr. Ramesh also cited a media investigation into the CBSE's OSM dry run. According to him, several participants had flagged concerns over the system, and urged the Board to postpone its rollout until glitches were resolved and evaluators adequately trained.

"Why is the Pradhan Mantri (PM) insistent on protecting him? Whose patronage has ensured his survival so far?" Mr. Ramesh said, claiming that even supporters of the ruling alliance were dissatisfied with the Minister's performance.



Cockroach Janta Party spokespersons Vijeta Dahiya, Saurav Das and Ashutosh Ranka at a news conference in New Delhi. REUTERS

at Jantar Mantar, said Mr. Das, a journalist who joined two others as CJP spokespersons this week.

Mr. Das dismissed the transfers of the CBSE Chairman and Secretary as a mere "eyewash", adding that "the government is not talking to us, no matter how hard we try". He asked people from every political background to attend the June 6 protest "without their party or organisational banners" to call for Mr. Pradhan's resignation.

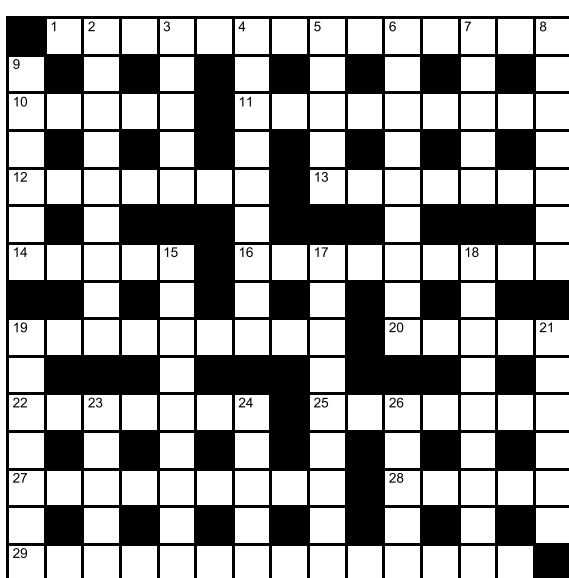
"We're in absurd times where I have to explain

why [Mr. Pradhan] must resign," said Vijeta Dahiya, another spokesperson who also works as a filmmaker. "We have this absurd notion of democracy; vote once every five years, choose kings, and think about the next election. Democracy has to be dynamic. Our representatives should represent our wants, needs, and concerns. We haven't chosen kings but employees. If they don't do their work, they must be questioned."

Mr. Das refused to commit the CJP to any other positions at this stage.

THE CROSSWORD+ 14811

Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at <https://thehindu.com/crosswords>



Across

- Daydream with a list Catherine prepared (6,2,3,3)
- Romeo wears ring that is expensive (5)
- Newly made to inculcate American virtue - a duty that's proportionate (2,7)
- One eating fruit, time for some food (7)

- Able to stop the boys' return - it's a disgrace (7)
- Money for a French rocket almost rejected (5)
- Dirty job right inside - one strayed (9)
- Suspect lets alarm go off (5,1,3)
- Poor creature loses wicket to throw it all up (5)
- Invested in final round, one day later (7)
- Tie in writing charms (7)
- Bad in law to accept - in other words, it is ambush (3,2,4)
- In Kenya, lakes are home to this animal (5)
- Amass gold - times change and it becomes the most sought after thing (10,4)

Down

- Ticks off with this (9)
- It shows approximate inner diameter of a hat (5)
- Glass essentially goes in far back like rubber (9)
- In a vestment you can see parts of the church (5)
- Dutch also shout outside (9)
- Bitter, free undercurrent (5)
- Animal sacrificed - went on and on (7)
- Twist well, get right home (6)
- A weapon receives modest grant (9)
- Adjust input schedule on the cockpit instrument (9)
- Reason to restrict booze consumption (9)
- Back in the centre carrying pound of varnish (7)
- Old cavalryman - hard to be one in Soviet Union (6)
- Live long with crude rising (5)
- It's foolish without reading the outline (5)
- Part of Egypt somewhat soars in air (5)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★☆☆☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle



Solution to yesterday's Sudoku



FAITH

Dharma remains a mystery

It is difficult to understand dharma, said Navalpakkam Vasudevachariar in a discourse. The meaning of dharma remains hidden. We can understand dharma only partly, not all of it. Just take the rule that we must speak the truth always - *satyam vada*. Is it always practical? Is it wise to always speak the truth? What if, because of our honesty, we hurt someone? In such circumstances, wouldn't a lie be better? Is it wrong to utter a lie to save a life? If a man is chased by someone who wants to murder him, and the villain asks you in which direction the man is running, would it be ethical to reveal the truth to the man with murderous intentions? Will it not lead to a man losing his life? In this case, it would be wrong to be truthful. Even Sita, who had such high ideals in life, had to lie. The occasion was the visit of Hanuman. Hanuman had met Sita with his reassuring message and had departed. The demonesses guarding Sita were curious about the monkey. They asked Sita whether she knew the monkey that had been there. Sita replied wisely that she didn't know who that monkey was.

In Ravana's rajya, demons assumed different forms and the monkey could be some demon, said Sita. If Sita had revealed Hanuman's identity, there might have been more trouble for her. Besides, what purpose would be served by being open about Hanuman's identity? When a truth serves no purpose, but a lie can protect us, isn't it better to conceal truth? So even in the matter of just one command relating to telling truth, there can be so many deviations. There can be deviations from other rules too, and these deviations too might not be *adharmic*. That is why dharma remains a mystery, and is not easily understood.

SCIENCE

A liver protein triggered by exercise reversed memory loss in mice

After exercise, small molecules called exerkinins are released by the liver, skeletal muscles, heart, and brain into the bloodstream; these include peptides, lipids, and hormones and mediate the beneficial effects of exercise, promoting cardiovascular fitness and improving metabolism

Sheetal Potdar

As we grow older, our cognitive abilities begin to wane. We forget names and places, lose trains of thought, and become creatures of habit. A key to overcoming these ageing-induced cognitive deficits may be exercise.

“Exercise improves cardiovascular fitness, glucose metabolism, insulin sensitivity, blood pressure, lipid profiles, sleep, mood, and immune function,” Atefe Tari, a researcher studying exercise and brain health at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology and St. Olav’s University Hospital, said.

“While all of these can influence brain health, exercise also affects the brain more directly by many different processes, including changes in signaling molecules.”

A new study published in *Cell* has reported how a signal released by the liver after exercise reduces cognitive decline due to ageing and Alzheimer’s disease in mice.

Exerkinins to the rescue

After exercise, small molecules called exerkinins are released by the liver, skeletal muscles, heart, and brain into the bloodstream. These include peptides, lipids, hormones, and nucleic acids. These exerkinins mediate the beneficial effects of exercise, including promoting cardiovascular fitness and improving metabolism, throughout the body.

In the study, Gregor Bieri and colleagues at the University of California, San Francisco, examined the mechanism of action of one such exerkinin produced by the liver: GPLDI.

The researchers increased the levels of GPLDI in the livers of older mice that had exercised – voluntarily running on wheels, like a treadmill. Old mice that could not exercise because their wheels had been locked had lower levels of GPLDI in their livers.

Next, the researchers tested the cognitive abilities of young and old mice. Young mice performed better at a spatial memory test compared to old mice. The test was to find a platform hidden in a pool of water. Young mice made fewer errors and found the platform sooner compared to their older peers. The young mice also preferred novel objects instead of familiar ones and would readily explore novel locations, while old mice showed no such preferences.

Importantly, these cognitive deficits were reduced in old mice whose livers were injected with GPLDI, showing that GPLDI could mitigate ageing-induced cognitive decline.

Protective barrier

GPLDI is an enzyme that breaks down hundreds of proteins on cell surfaces. Based on this function, the authors focused on the blood-brain barrier in mice – a network of blood vessels and specialised cells that surround the brain.

“The blood-brain barrier tightly regulates the signals and nutrients that get shuttled between the brain and blood,” Dr. Bieri, the lead author of the study, explained.

As we age, the barrier accumulates proteins that make it leaky. The authors



Exercise affects different parts of the body simultaneously. STEVEN LELHAM/UNSPLASH

found one such protein, called TNAP, to be highly enriched in the blood-brain barriers of old mice, notably even around the hippocampus, the learning and memory centre of the brain.

“While we do not fully understand its role, we observed that TNAP drives inflammation and impairs the transport of factors from blood to brain,” Dr. Bieri said.

He and his colleagues performed three experiments to tie the roles of TNAP and GPLDI. First, the scientists found that old mice that have more TNAP in their barriers also had leaky blood vessels. Next, young mice in which TNAP levels were artificially increased in the barrier surrounding the hippocampus showed leaky blood vessels and cognitive defects similar to old mice. Third, injecting GPLDI in the livers of old mice, while also artificially increasing TNAP in the blood-brain barrier, nullified the beneficial effects of GPLDI on cognitive function.

“A strength of this study is the combination of approaches that provides mechanistic evidence that TNAP is functionally involved in blood-brain barrier dysfunction and cognitive decline,” Dr. Tari said.

Overall, these experiments showed that TNAP, which accumulates on the blood-brain barrier due to ageing, is broken down by GPLDI, an enzyme released by the liver after exercise.

Therapeutic potential for Alzheimer’s
Given that ageing is a risk factor for neurodegenerative disorders like Alzheimer’s disease and dementia, the authors next tested whether the GPLDI intervention could reduce cognitive decline in a mouse model of Alzheimer’s disease.

Dr. Tari, who was not involved in the study, exercised caution on this count, noting that “mouse models of Alzheimer’s

do not fully reproduce the complexity of the disease in humans, which develops over decades and involves vascular dysfunction, inflammation, metabolism, genetics, and lifestyle factors.”

“When the blood-brain barrier becomes leaky, several things can happen that are relevant to Alzheimer’s development,” Dr. Tari said. “First, inflammatory molecules and other blood-derived factors can enter the brain more easily and activate immune responses. This causes chronic inflammation in the nerve cells which can accelerate disease processes.”

“Secondly, if the blood-brain barrier function is impaired, the brain may become less efficient at clearing toxic proteins and maintaining its internal environment.” Alzheimer’s disease is characterised by the accumulation of toxic amyloid protein, which clump together to form plaques, leading to neurodegeneration and cognitive decline. These features are modelled in genetically modified mice by expressing human genes with multiple mutations that force the rapid buildup of amyloid protein.

The team allowed the Alzheimer’s-modelled mice to run on wheels voluntarily for three months, after which their GPLDI levels were higher, and their cognitive performance was notably improved, compared to Alzheimer’s-modelled mice that did not exercise.

In another experiment, GPLDI was injected into the livers of Alzheimer’s-modelled mice. In these mice, TNAP levels in the blood-brain barrier were lower, the blood vessels were less leaky, there were fewer amyloid plaques, and cognitive dysfunction was reduced.

Experts said these results are encouraging and have clinical implications for Alzheimer’s disease.

Dr. Bieri noted that “while a lot of

research and potential therapeutic strategies have focused on the brain, recent antibody-based interventions are associated with side effects resulting from a breakdown of the blood-brain barrier. Thus, improving blood-brain barrier function could also improve the treatment efficacy of other therapeutic interventions.”

“This study identifies a promising pathway that may become relevant for drug development or biomarker work,” Dr. Tari added. “But it does not mean we are close to replacing exercise with a pill yet.”

Parallel and convergent pathways

Exercise affects different parts of the body simultaneously. Brain function is also influenced by multiple factors. Recently, in another study, researchers from Seoul National University and the Korea Brain Research Institute found that exerkinins secreted by skeletal muscles could improve cognitive performance by crossing the blood-brain barrier, unlike GPLDI. This exerkinin was found to boost new neuron formation within the hippocampus. “The benefits of exercise are unlikely to be explained by a single molecule or pathway alone,” Dr. Tari noted, adding that “the strength of exercise likely lies in its ability to trigger a coordinated, whole-body response.”

Dr. Bieri said he sees clinical opportunity in the possibility of multiple exerkinins working in tandem: “As potential new therapeutic strategies keep expanding, [the] discovery of complementary mechanisms will allow for a more personalised medicine approach. Future treatments will likely be combinatorial, tackling different cell types and hallmarks of ageing and disease.”

(Sheetal Potdar is a freelance science journalist with a PhD in neuroscience. sheetaldpotdar@gmail.com)



Quark-gluon plasma are extraordinarily hot, reaching trillions of degrees centigrade. Representative image. IMAGE CREATED BY AI

New result pushes bounds of how small a liquid can be

Vasudevan Mukunth

Physicists have spent more than two decades studying one of the strangest forms of matter ever created in a laboratory: the quark-gluon plasma (QGP). Quarks and gluons are the smallest pieces of matter. A QGP existed in the first few millionths of a second after the Big Bang, before the quarks bound together to form the first protons and neutrons. Researchers routinely create small droplets of QGP by colliding heavy atomic nuclei at extremely high energies. These droplets are extraordinarily hot, reaching trillions of degrees centigrade. Their behaviour, however, has been more surprising: instead of acting like a gas, the QGP behaves like a fluid.

A new study in *Physical Review Letters* has now reported a new ‘boundary’ in this field. By smashing together oxygen nuclei at the Large Hadron Collider (LHC),

The new study addresses a different question: how small can a droplet of matter be and still have fluid-like behaviour

researchers have found the smallest dollop of QGP – so far – that still behaves like a fluid. Physicists have known for decades now that energising and colliding lead nuclei, which are much heavier than oxygen nuclei, produces QGP. The new study addresses a different question: how small can a droplet of matter be and still have fluid-like behaviour? The LHC usually smashes together protons. The researchers picked oxygen ions because they occupy a middle ground between the tiny clumps of energy and matter created by smushed protons and the massive ones formed by lead ions. A middle ground that could reveal the tipping point where subatomic matter starts to resemble a fluid. The research team analysed collisions between oxygen nuclei at the LHC, looking for fast-moving particles that emerged from the collision, and compared their numbers with what would be expected if no dense medium had formed. If no dense medium forms, physicists can predict how many such particles should appear. But if a medium is present, some of the energetic quarks and gluons should lose energy before they escape, reducing the number of energetic particles eventually reaching the detector.

The researchers have reported signs of such a suppression. It was less pronounced in collisions involving the oxygen ions, but it was noticeable. The finding suggests that oxygen-oxygen collisions can create a medium large enough to affect the motion of energetic quarks and gluons. The data “are also in better agreement with theoretical models that include quark-gluon energy loss than they are with models that omit it,” *Physical Review Letters* associate editor Nikhil Karthik wrote in *Physics*. Properties like viscosity and flow are associated with fluids, and these fluids usually have an enormous number of particles. A droplet of water sliding down a wall has quadrillions of water molecules. A glob of honey big enough to show how slowly it slides has roughly a quintillion sugar molecules. Yet the QGP is much, much smaller – it has maybe thousands of quarks and gluons – but it is still a fluid. According to the new finding, a strongly interacting medium can emerge even in collisions involving relatively light nuclei. At the same time, it makes the mystery of where exactly the transition between a fluid-like medium and a gas of largely independent particles emerges more intriguing. (mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in)

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Different perspectives: a quiz on things that light does

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

When light from a distant object passes near a very heavy body like a galaxy or a black hole, the object’s gravity bends the path of the light. As a result, the light can become distorted or magnified. Name this phenomenon, which astronomers use to study objects that are magnified in this way.

QUESTION 2

When light travels, it carries momentum. So when it strikes an object, it exerts a small force. Over a long period, this force can slowly accelerate a spacecraft without fuel. A spacecraft design called _____ makes use of this technology to be propelled through deep space. Fill in the blanks.

QUESTION 3

An X wave is a form of light that appears near a surface but fades

rapidly away from that surface. It doesn’t travel freely through space like ordinary light does. Scientists use these waves in technologies such as optical fibres to confine light using total internal reflection. Name X.

QUESTION 4

Light is an electromagnetic wave. The direction in which its electric field oscillates is called its polarisation. In circularly polarised light, what happens to the field’s direction as the light travels? Scientists have used this detail to send microscopic particles spinning.

QUESTION 5

When some stars die, their cores become super-dense objects called magnetars, which sport some of the most powerful magnetic fields in the universe. These fields are so strong that they render the vacuum of space _____, which splits up light according to the way it is polarised. Fill in the blank.



Visual: Name the effect that partly polarises the light in the sky; the image on the right shows only polarised blue light. Many insects use this polarisation pattern to find their way. Light pollution is not polarised, confusing them. PICCOLONAMEK (CC BY-SA)

Please send in your answers to
science@thehindu.co.in

Answers to to May 28 quiz:

- Gulf in Arctic Russia at end of longest unobstructed sea route – **Ans: Khatanga**
 - Point on land farthest from any coastline – **Ans: Continental pole of inaccessibility**
 - Most remote island, a South Atlantic Norwegian territory – **Ans: Bouvet Island**
 - Name of underwater channel adept at transmitting sound – **Ans: SOFAR**
 - Line marking belt of highest mean surface temperature – **Ans: Thermal equator**
- Visual: **Null Island**

First contact:

Tamal Biswas | K.N. Viswanathan | Aditi Bajpay | Utsav Kaushal Ranjan | Anmol Agrawal

For feedback and suggestions for ‘Science’, please write to science@thehindu.co.in with the subject ‘Daily page’



Base and framework Industrial fundamentals have remained resilient, but are not broad-based

Earlier this week, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation released the latest Index of Industrial Production (IIP), a key barometer of India's industrial health. The April 2026 print assumes added significance as it is the first release under the new 2022-23 base series and the second full month following the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran. Industrial output grew 4.9% year-on-year in April. While direct comparisons with earlier data should be treated with caution given the extensive revisions to the index's basket, weights and methodology, the numbers suggest that India's industrial fundamentals have remained relatively resilient despite disruptions to global oil and gas supply chains. A granular reading, however, reveals that this resilience is far from broad-based. Capital goods output expanded by a robust 16% year-on-year, reflecting the continuing effects of elevated public capital expenditure and infrastructure spending. By contrast, consumer durables output grew only 4.3%, while consumer non-durables expanded by a modest 2.8%, suggesting that rising fuel and energy costs may be exerting pressure on household consumption.

More significant than the headline growth number, however, is the extensive overhaul of the IIP itself. The revised series seeks to better reflect the structure of a rapidly changing economy. New products and sectors have been incorporated and several obsolete items dropped. A fourth major sector – water supply, sewerage and waste management – has been introduced with a weight of 2.02%. The electricity category has been expanded into Electricity and Gas Supply, with its weight rising to 10.87% from 7.99% earlier. Manufacturing remains the dominant component of the index, though its weight has declined marginally to 76.06% from 77.63%. More notable is the reduction in the weight of mining and quarrying to 11.05% from 14.37%. These shifts suggest that the importance of value-added infrastructure and utility services in gauging industrial activity has expanded, while the relative significance of primary resource extraction has diminished. Together, these changes better capture India's emergence as a components and value-added manufacturing hub integrated into global supply chains. Most importantly, the government has indicated its intention to move towards a chain-linked framework with more frequent updates to sectoral weights. Such a system would allow official statistics to better keep pace with structural changes in the economy, making the IIP a more accurate and timely gauge of industrial health.

Preserving the record

The right to be forgotten must be set against public interest

On the one hand, constitutional law holds up a principle of open justice that, among other things, allows public scrutiny of courts, facilitates public understanding of the law, and creates a historical record of the administration of justice. On the other, in *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy* (2017), the Supreme Court of India recognised the right to informational privacy, including the ability of individuals to exercise some control over personal information about themselves. The Delhi High Court order on May 29 concerning the 'right to be forgotten' illustrates how these two principles can sometimes point in opposite directions. While the digitisation of court records transformed the ability of anyone with an Internet connection, but also search engines and automated archivers, to access judgments and legal records, it also altered the consequences of publicity. In Europe, where the resulting persistence of digital information first gave rise to the 'right to be forgotten', the right is usually weighed against the freedom of expression and public interest. In India as well, the right should accommodate the principle of open justice without necessarily breaching the bounds of the right to privacy. Yet, the High Court decided otherwise. Justice Sachin Datta concluded that simply updating records would not suffice as search engines could excerpt small portions without sufficient context, that open justice does not demand the ability to discover particular details of the case using the accused person's name, and that updating the official version would not necessarily update records that have since been copied to other websites.

The real problem is incompleteness, not discoverability. If a court acquitted or discharged a person from a dispute, anyone looking for the proceedings should also find that decision, rather than limiting a searcher's ability to find the original decision. This is crucial if open justice is understood to require the records to be practically accessible rather than merely exist somewhere. Court records are official acts of the state and their obfuscation in any manner *vis-à-vis* the public record will have serious ramifications for the public record, to echo the court in the closely related *Indian Kanoon* matter (2024). While the High Court's concern about the petitioner's right to privacy is commendable, it should also consider digital accuracy as the way out. That is, judicial records must be wholly public as well as updated to prominently reflect major actions and decisions, rather than preserve the accusation alone, and the judiciary must impose conditions on any platform, including court registries, indexing legal information to refresh their databases on a regular basis and endeavour to display the results of any user queries with the proper context. Doing so would protect both fundamental rights and address the problem's root cause.

Assembly poll results that recast the political landscape

Outcomes in the recent Assembly elections in Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Assam demand careful introspection. The results in Assam and Kerala were not unexpected, but Tamil Nadu and perhaps West Bengal, appear to signal the shape of things to come, and of the role of Gen Z in this respect.

In Tamil Nadu, a close to 60-year-old duopoly of the Tamil Dravidian parties was ended by a party headed by a relatively unknown newcomer, who had few pretensions to any ideology. Complementing the upheaval in Tamil Nadu was the eclipse of the 'people's leader' in West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, who only a few years back had toppled a Marxist conglomerate that had remained entrenched for nearly three decades.

The script in Assam and West Bengal

Assam, adhering to the script, produced an expected result, *viz.*, a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), or rather more appropriately a Himanta Biswa Sarma victory, who notched up his second consecutive success. Victory was a foregone conclusion, given the extent of communal politics prevailing in the State and the redrawing of constituency boundaries, which reduced the number of Muslim-majority seats and put the BJP's rivals such as the Congress and the All India United Democratic Front at a disadvantage. This time Mr. Sarma also ensured the eclipse of the remnants of Assam's political past, as also the legacies of Hiteswar Saikia, Tarun Gogoi and Bhumidhar Barman and the era of Congress rule.

More significantly perhaps, in a State with 34% Muslim population, he ensured that not one Muslim representative was elected as a member of the majority BJP party, even as 18 of the 19 Opposition Congress MLAs elected were Muslims. While some form of ethnic cleansing had been in evidence in Assam for some time, ostensibly to eliminate 'illegals' (essentially 'Bangladeshi Muslims'), the wider implications of not a single Muslim being elected as part of the ruling echelon is worth examining in some detail. At one level it would seem a travesty of India's claims to be a multi-religious, multi-cultural civilization.

The Assembly elections in West Bengal witnessed the BJP coming to power in the State for the first time. Bengal appeared to be a State under siege during the two phases of polling, with the deployment of over 2,500 companies of the Central Armed Police Forces, ostensibly to maintain order, even though no major law-and-order issues were reported. Together with the removal of several lakh voters from the electoral rolls following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, this created a surreal atmosphere in the State during the elections.

Explaining the outcome in Bengal may appear relatively straightforward, but understanding the factors behind the BJP's success is less so. The standard explanation for Ms. Banerjee's eclipse is that, after 15 years in office, her regime had



M.K. Narayanan

Former Director, Intelligence Bureau, a former National Security Adviser, and a former Governor of West Bengal

ossified. Its perceived overreliance on the Muslim vote – more specifically on 'returnees from erstwhile East Bengal' – allegedly provoked adverse reactions.

Coupled with charges of administrative apathy and a lack of employment opportunities, this is said to have contributed to a consolidation of the Hindu vote against her. Interestingly, despite the existence of a 27% Muslim vote in Bengal, not a single Muslim was elected as part of the ruling alliance, while the Opposition returned over 35 Muslim MLAs in its tally of 86 seats. The implications of this development merit careful consideration.

Other reasons being adduced for the defeat of Ms. Banerjee and the All India Trinamool Congress, are the tardy response of the erstwhile Chief Minister and her coterie to the R.G. Kar Hospital imbroglio, the lingering shadow of Singur and Nandigram, and a failure to recognise Gen Z's aspirations for better employment opportunities in a shrinking job market. Taken together, these factors allowed the BJP to capitalise on a prevailing anti-Mamata and anti-Trinamool sentiment.

Upending Dravidian dominance

If the change in Bengal could be compared to a political earthquake, the real tsunami was in Tamil Nadu, where close to six decades of 'Dravidian' rule was swept aside by the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) headed by a political neophyte, C. Joseph Vijay. Rationalism and caste took a back seat, concerns about North Indian domination seemed to recede to the background, even as established Dravidian parties such as the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam bit the dust. The erstwhile Chief Minister, from the DMK, became a victim of the tidal wave of youth power.

The 1967 eclipse of the Congress party by the DMK under C.N. Annadurai hardly bears comparison with the achievement of Mr. Vijay's two-year-old party, despite its lack of a well-defined political construct. The electorate only appeared determined to remove decades of duopoly of the DMK and AIADMK, viewing Mr. Vijay as a breath of fresh air in a region long consumed by anti-Delhi beliefs and ideas. Mr. Vijay's TVK promised to retain the model of social justice and the broadly secular welfare-friendly policies of the previous regime, but his emergence denotes the beginnings of the end of 'Dravidianisation' of politics in the State.

The change in Tamil Nadu does suggest that southern politics, despite a strong anti-Delhi thrust, may be in for a change. Even as the ideas and concepts of Periyar, Annadurai and Karunanidhi are likely to remain, many concepts and beliefs could alter, and this might well provide space for other ideologies to enter. The reasons for Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's defeat in a constituency that he had assiduously nursed for years, and having provided relatively competent leadership to the State overall, does call for a deeper study as its implications are huge.

The recent election results in four key States have revealed shifting voter priorities and challenged established political certainties

After Maoism, the next battle is for Adivasi trust

On May 19, 2026, the Union Home Minister addressed a press conference in Jagdalpur, Chhattisgarh, his first since March 31, 2026, when India was officially declared Maoist-free. The most encouraging aspect of the briefing was his assertion that "the fight against Maoism would remain incomplete until every resident of Bastar is integrated into the mainstream".

The road to 2031

Having accomplished the March 31 objective, the Union Home Minister mentioned that 2031 would be the next milestone for ensuring the overall welfare of Bastar's Adivasis. This is welcome, since insurgencies do not have an expiry date. According to the Home Minister, this objective is to be achieved through democratic values, cooperation and development. The government also intends to expand its outreach by delivering welfare schemes to the doorsteps of local communities through designated centres operated by the security forces.

One of the methodologies that the Home Minister emphasised for the empowerment of Adivasis was a commitment to the tiered system of governance, from the tehsil level upwards to the Centre. The constitutional vision of this system was to be based on two parallel channels. The first comprised the Panchayati Raj Institutions, with the Gram Sabha as the basic unit. The second consisted of government-appointed officials such as tehsildars, District Collectors and others. The distinction is that the former is elected by the people, while the latter is appointed by the government. These channels were not to converge or be overshadowed by the



Shashank Ranjan

An Indian Army veteran (Colonel) with substantial experience in counter-terrorism operations, currently teaching at the O.P. Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana

Constitutional guarantees hold the key to Bastar's lasting peace

government-appointed channel, which normally has been the case on the ground. The Home Minister outlined a blueprint for the government's future initiatives. However, sustained peace will require addressing deeper structural issues. Surprisingly, his press conference made no mention of the most crucial of these concerning grassroots governance as guaranteed by the Constitution.

Welfare schemes, the road laying, and the installation of mobile communication towers do contribute significantly to improving the ease of living. However, the larger issues relate to *jal*, jungle and *zameen* (water, forest, and land). These are the concerns that will ultimately determine the people's trust in the government.

Implementing PESA in earnest

Now is an opportunity for the government to complete the unfinished agenda of implementing the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act, 1996. Across India's Fifth Schedule Area States, the record of PESA implementation has been dismal. Since implementation was left to the States, each interpreted and applied the Act differently, often undermining its spirit and intent.

Grassroots governance centred on the Gram Sabha forms the basis of the PESA Act. Its effective implementation in letter and spirit has the potential to deliver justice to the Adivasi. Today, the Adivasi is with the government, largely due to the security forces' tactical victory over the Maoists. However, as the security challenges recede, the government will be tested by the Adivasi on the parameters of justice delivery. The Adivasi are aware of the guarantees that the Constitutional Acts provide and are unlikely to

Meanwhile, Mr. Vijay is clearly the 'trumpeter' of change, but he may not necessarily be the future.

The Kerala result

Elections in Kerala followed a more traditional pattern of alternating between a Congress-led coalition and a Marxist-led Left Front. In 2021, the Communist Party of India (Marxist), under Pinarayi Vijayan, had bucked this trend, and continued in office with its alliance for a further five years, but Mr. Vijayan was to be the main reason for the debilitating defeat of the CPI(M)-led Front in the recent Assembly elections. In the event, a Congress-led United Democratic Front emerged victorious, securing 102 seats in the 140-member Assembly.

A significant aspect of the Kerala elections this time has been the emergence of a forward caste leader (V.D. Satheesan), without the support of casteist formations such as the Nair Service Society and the Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam, denoting a shift in the politics of Kerala. However, the rise and rise of the Muslim League will be seen by many as bucking this trend. If the new Chief Minister, Mr. Satheesan, is able to detach State politics from the stranglehold of communal and casteist forces, and seize the moment with both hands, it could well usher in a new era in the politics of Kerala.

Few elections to State Assemblies in the past carry this degree of significance as the just concluded ones. Assembly elections this time were held in the backdrop of an assertion by the ruling party at the Centre, of the virtues of the same party being in power at the Centre, and in the States – the so-called 'double engine sarkar'.

Victory for the ruling party at the Centre in the States that went to the polls, were meant to add one more layer to this edifice of the same party ruling the government at the Centre and in the States. West Bengal was the prime target, and ensuring the defeat of Ms. Banerjee had become the single point objective. The campaign was carried out with military precision – less an 'election' than a campaign. Central paramilitary forces were employed extensively to maintain order. The SIR succeeded in the elimination of lakhs of voters, at least some of whom might have fulfilled the voter criteria, and most of whom belonged to the minority. That these tactics succeeded in achieving victory according to a predetermined plan, would suggest that elections are no longer confined to voting without fear or favour.

The implications of this are very considerable. A belief, as also a determination, that the same party should be in power at the Centre and in the States, may appear attractive, but it undermines the logic that people vote according to their conscience, and according to their own logic. In this sense, the elections of 2026 could have a far greater significance than initial outcomes would suggest. It has certain implications as well, for a 'double engine sarkar', often touted as the answer to several of India's problems, especially those faced by the various parties in the country.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

State of the environment
India needs a permanent 'national council for sustainable development' to balance economic growth with environmental stewardship. Such a body should bring together policymakers, scientists, industry representatives and conservationists to evaluate projects before ecological damage occurs, protect fragile ecosystems,

ensure transparent assessments and minimise environmental costs. (Inside pages, "The Hindu Huddle to look at Aravallis, Nicobar, and India's development debate", June 3).
R.S. Narula, Patiala, Punjab

The Aravallis and the Nicobar Islands are among the few remaining ecological lungs that require

fierce protection from the relentless pursuit of development. The Hindu Huddle would help foster deeper understanding of these issues.
Balasubramaniam Pavani, Secunderabad

Examination format
I wish to highlight the grievance of thousands of aspirants affected by the mandatory Tamil Eligibility

Test in the Tamil Nadu Public Service Commission (TNPSC) examinations. While ensuring administrative proficiency in the State's official language is a laudable objective, the complete removal of the General English paper has inadvertently created an uneven playing field. It places candidates from CBSE, ICSE and other

non-State boards, where Tamil was not the primary medium of instruction, at a significant disadvantage. Further, the requirement of securing a minimum of 40% in this language paper as a precondition for evaluating the General Studies papers creates an additional barrier. Many otherwise meritorious candidates are eliminated at the outset, leaving their technical

expertise and core aptitude unassessed. In the interest of merit and fairness, the TNPSC should consider reintroducing the General English option. Language proficiency requirements can be done at the Civil Service Training Institute.
B. Shanmaathi, Chennai

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

Why judicial holidays are necessary

The debate over judicial holidays has resurfaced in recent weeks, with critics questioning why courts observe extended breaks. The assumption is that judges, like most professionals, step away from work during these periods. That assumption is largely wrong. For most judges, a holiday is rarely a holiday in any conventional sense.



Kapil Sibal

Senior lawyer and Member of the Rajya Sabha

The public sees only the visible part of the work: judges presiding over courtrooms, hearing arguments, questioning lawyers and delivering orders. What they do not see is the considerably longer phase that begins after court hours, when judges return home to write judgments. This work often stretches past midnight. Each judgment requires close analysis of facts, application of legal principles, reference to precedent, and precision in language, since every word carries legal weight.

A single decision can affect lives, businesses, reputations and personal liberty.

A time for uninterrupted work

This pattern is not unique to India.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who was a judge of the United States Supreme Court for 27 years, was known to arrive at her chambers shortly after lunch and work late into the night. Her former law clerk Goodwin Liu, now a Justice of the California Supreme Court, has spoken of receiving voicemails from her at two or three in the morning, when she was at the height of her writing. From oral argument to majority opinion, she averaged 60 days, the fastest pace on her Bench. When she underwent surgery for colon cancer in 1999, and again for pancreatic cancer in 2009, she scheduled her procedures so as not to miss a single day on the Bench.

In India, the workload is no less demanding. Justice D.Y. Chandrachud, during his eight-year tenure in the Supreme Court, authored over 600

A judge's duty does not pause when courts close. It continues through late night drafting, early morning preparation, and constant engagement with the law

judgments and sat on more than 1,200 Benches before retiring as the 50th Chief Justice of India in November 2024. Few professions outside the Bench demand such sustained intellectual output year after year, and that too with little public recognition of the labour involved.

The mornings begin no easier. Long before court assemblies, judges are reading voluminous case files, studying precedents and preparing for the day's hearings. By the time proceedings open, hours of unseen work have already gone in.

Judicial breaks, then, are not periods of rest but working windows. During these breaks, judges complete pending judgments, study lengthy case records and prepare for matters of constitutional importance. With case backlogs continuing to rise across courts, these are often the only stretches available for uninterrupted work.

Families bear much of the strain. Spouses and children of judges describe a familiar pattern: even on holidays, judges are occupied with their laptops, files or video calls with law clerks. The time supposed to be shared in company with their family is regularly interrupted by judicial work. Thus, judicial service is not only an individual commitment. It becomes a shared one for the household.

Not as lucrative

The economic side of the Bench is also not discussed often. While judges receive a structured and respectable salary, it is not comparable to what senior lawyers earn at the top end of the bar. A senior advocate may earn in a single hearing what a judge earns over several months. Judges, in turn, carry the greater burden of decision-making and accountability.

Many take the Bench after giving up lucrative practices, choosing service to the nation over personal financial gain. The pressures do not end with

the workload. Judicial decisions are scrutinised publicly and legally. Judges must remain neutral and detached, even when the cost of doing so is high.

The unseen cost

In his autobiography, *Neither Roses Nor Thorns*, Justice H.R. Khanna recalled the night before he delivered his lone dissent in the *ADM Jabalpur* case during the Emergency. Sitting in the moonlight in his compound with the Ganges flowing in front of them, he turned to his younger sister and said, "I have prepared a judgment which is going to cost me the Chief Justiceship of India." He was right. The following year he was superseded for the top post by Justice M.H. Beg, who had ruled with the majority, and resigned soon after.

His dissent, eventually vindicated when the Supreme Court overruled *ADM Jabalpur* in the *Puttaswamy* verdict of 2017, is now remembered as one of the bravest decisions in Indian judicial history.

The dedication asked of a judge does not end with retirement either. Lord Denning, whom Margaret Thatcher described as probably the greatest English judge of modern times, served on the Bench for 38 years and delivered around 2,000 reported judgments before retiring at 83. He continued writing books on the law till his 100th birthday.

Closer home, Justice V.R. Krishna Iyer kept producing books, articles and lectures on jurisprudence long after his retirement from the Supreme Court, almost until his death at 99 in 2014.

The debate on judicial holidays deserves a more informed footing. A judge's duty does not pause when courts close. It continues through late night drafting, early morning preparation, and constant engagement with the law.

Before questioning the system, it may help to first understand what it actually asks of those who serve in it.

A re-entry into Telangana politics

Pawan Kalyan seeks to transform controversy into political capital in the State

STATE OF PLAY

Ravi Reddy

What began as a stray remark by former journalism professor and political analyst K. Nageshwar has spiralled into one of the most contentious episodes in Telangana's political discourse in recent times. His claim that the Jana Sena Party (JSP) chief and Andhra Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Pawan Kalyan had lobbied Union Home Minister Amit Shah to act against the YSR Congress Party (YSRCP) leader Y.S. Jagan Mohan Reddy led to severe backlash in Andhra Pradesh, which made him withdraw the allegation. Yet, the damage was done.

JSP cadres filed multiple FIRs against Mr. Nageshwar in Andhra, prompting Telangana's civil society activists, and journalists' bodies to rally behind him. For them, the FIRs symbolised an assault on Telangana's freedom of speech.

Thus, the controversy, which might have faded quietly, became a rallying cry for identity politics.

Against this backdrop, Mr. Kalyan seized the moment. At a press conference in Jubilee Hills, he announced the JSP's re-entry into Telangana politics, vowing to contest the 2029 Assembly elections. "We will not retreat from Telangana," he declared. He accused Congress leaders of a divisive rhetoric, urged the Centre to intervene, and questioned why his entry into Telangana was opposed when leaders such as Indira Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, and Priyanka Gandhi had contested outside their home States without controversy.

Congress leaders, including Telangana State Transport Minister Ponnamp Prabhakar and



MLA Anirudh Reddy, responded sharply to the press conference, branding Mr. Kalyan's remarks as arrogant. Mr. Prabhakar dismissed him as a "paid artist" who had once opposed Telangana's formation. Both insisted that while Telangana welcomed Andhra residents, opportunistic politics would not be tolerated.

The controversy soon drew in other players. K. Kavitha, daughter of Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) chief K. Chandrashekar Rao, who had recently formed her own party, condemned the FIRs against Mr. Nageshwar, insisting that freedom of speech was non-negotiable. The symbolism of the Andhra Pradesh police allegedly seeking to assert authority in Hyderabad reinforced the narrative that Telangana's autonomy was under threat.

Multiple alignments

For Mr. Kalyan, the timing was calculated. His announcement coincided with the Telangana Formation Day, which was a symbolic moment to project the JSP's entry into the State. He declared plans to expand the JSP's organisational base in Hyderabad, with a focus on the Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation polls. The police denied him permission for a proposed meeting in Hyderabad, which in itself became a part of his offensive strategy, allowing him to frame the denial as an issue around democratic rights.

Mr. Kalyan's entry is also personal; Telangana was where he announced the JSP's formation a decade ago. His re-entry, therefore, carries symbolic weight, positioning him both as an insider and an outsider to the State's politics.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), meanwhile, has kept a cautious distance, limiting its involvement to criticising the Congress government for denying permission. Yet, its intentions are evident. Struggling to expand beyond urban pockets, the BJP sees potential in replicating Andhra Pradesh's alliance politics in Telangana. By aligning with the JSP and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), it hopes to tap into the large Andhra origin vote bank in Hyderabad.

For the Congress, which currently rules Telangana, the JSP's re-entry poses a challenge to its consolidation in Hyderabad. Welfare schemes and urban development have been its main tools, but the combined appeal of Andhra Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu's administrative experience and Pawan Kalyan's youth connect could chip away at its urban voter base. And as for the BRS, the JSP's success could further erode its base among urban voters.

The episode underscores how a 'non-issue' snowballed into a political flashpoint. What began as a professor's stray remark has now reshaped Telangana's political landscape. For Pawan Kalyan, it has become an opportunity to re-enter the State. For the Congress and the BRS, it was a reminder that Telangana's identity politics remains volatile. And for the BJP, it is a chance to test alliance arithmetic in a State where it still seeks a breakthrough.

ravi.reddy@thehindu.co.in

How India scaled its startup industry from 2016 to 2025

The Startup India scheme has been a success due to a supportive policy environment, robust startup growth, and a positive investment climate

DATA POINT

Thillai Rajan A., Chinni Chaitanya, Vamika Perumal

The Indian startup economy has truly come of age in the 10 years since Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave the clarion call during his Independence Day address on August 15, 2015, to make India the "Number 1" country in startups, and thereby sowed the seeds of significant directional change.

The three traits that make startups different from conventional businesses are an emphasis on innovation, the use of technology, and market opportunity. To distinguish startups from other businesses, the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) started recognising companies that aligned with government guidelines as startups. Despite DPIIT recognition not being mandatory for startups to operate, there has been a significant growth in startups applying for its recognition. From 288 in 2016, which was just 3% of the total startups functioning then, the DPIIT's coverage has increased to 77% in 2025. The growing willingness to join the formal startup ecosystem has been an important measure of success for India's startup story.

Another indicator of success has been the penetration of startup culture across the length and breadth of the country. There has been a remarkable shift in startup formation from Tier 1 cities to Tier 3 towns. In 2016, Tier 1 cities dominated the startup landscape, accounting for about 65% of the total startups set up that year, while Tier 3 towns accounted for only about 15%. In 2020, these shares changed to 49% and 27%, respectively. However, the biggest change happened in 2025, when Tier 1 cities accounted for just 18% of new startups, whereas Tier 3 towns made up for 71%. This shift high-

lights the spread of innovation beyond major urban hubs.

The age and gender distributions of startup founders reveal a strong presence of the youth. A substantial portion of founders across both genders (approximately 66% are male founders and 59% female founders) are under 40. The embrace of entrepreneurship early in one's career signals a favourable and supportive ecosystem for startups. The data shows that women embark on their entrepreneurial journeys relatively later and their proportion increases notably with age. While women account for about 21% of the founders in the under-30 age group, they account for 33% in the 50-plus age group. Creating a supportive environment for women to pursue entrepreneurship has been an important policy imperative. The Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of women founders stood at 20%, compared with 14% for men, underlining the strong trend of women increasingly pursuing entrepreneurship.

The funding landscape

A surge in the confidence to invest in Indian startups has been yet another defining feature of the 2016-25 period. In 2016, India had 10,000 startups, of which 2,000 were funded ventures. The numbers have increased dramatically in 2025 with a total of 2,50,000 startups, of which 75,000 are funded ventures. This is an increase of 25-fold and 38-fold respectively.

Trends indicate that a supportive policy environment, robust startup growth, and a positive investment climate in the first 10 years of the Startup India scheme have created several moments of success. The decade from 2016 to 2025 has firmly placed India among the top four in the league of startup nations.

Thillai Rajan A., Chinni Chaitanya and Dr. Vamika Perumal, the Centre for Research on Startups, Indian Institute of Technology Madras

Startup surge

The data were sourced from the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), and YNOS Venture Engine



Chart 1: The growth in the number of DPIIT-recognised startups between 2016 and 2025

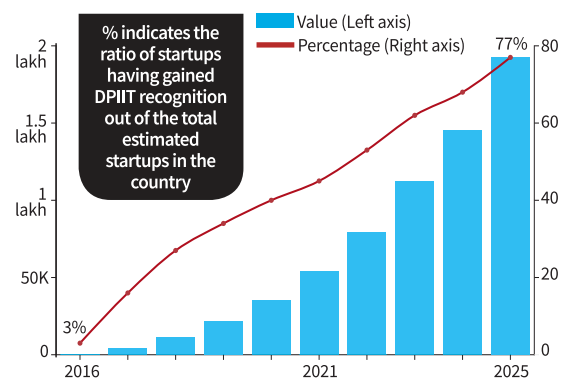


Chart 2: The number of startups set up in Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 cities and towns in 2016, 2020, and 2025

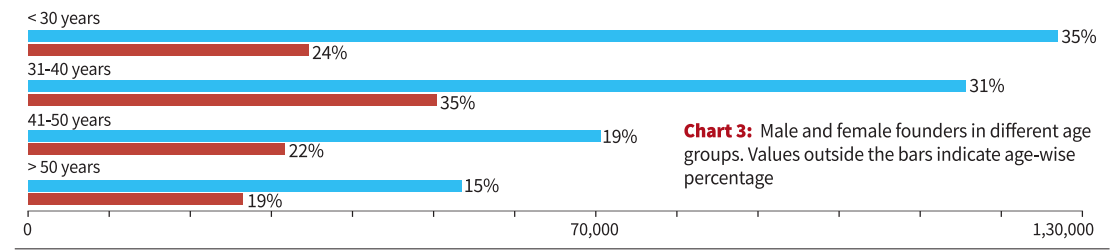
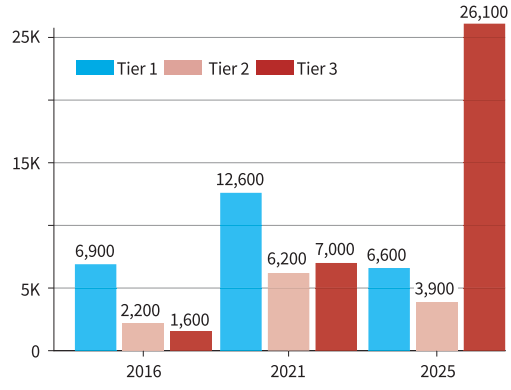


Chart 4: The growth in male and female founders between 2016 and 2025

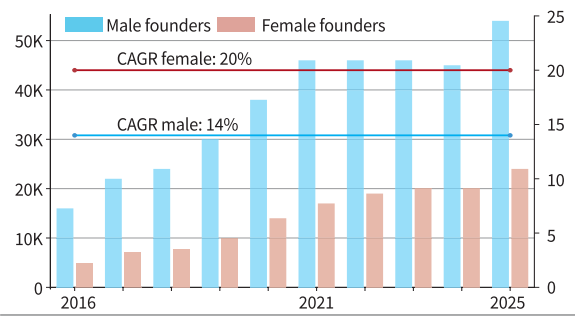
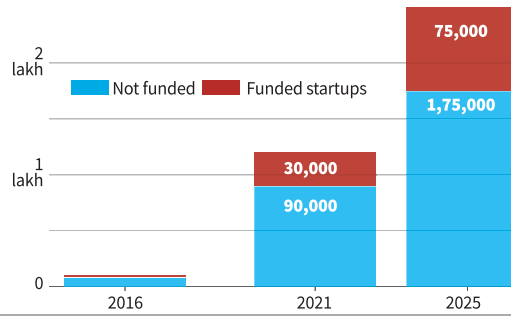


Chart 5: The growth in startup formation and funded startups between 2016 and 2025



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The *Hindu*

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 4, 1976

Full take-over of Oil India planned

New Delhi, June 3: The Central Government is seriously thinking of complete take-over of the joint sector Oil India Limited (OIL) in which the Government and Burmah Oil Company hold 50 per cent equity each.

The future of OIL has assumed importance in the context of current negotiations over the taking over of the Indian assets of the two remaining foreign oil companies operating in India - Caltex and Assam Oil Company. The Ministry of Petroleum proposes to set up an inter-ministerial committee to expedite the take-over of these two companies.

The thinking in the Ministry is that the same committee should also go into the future equity setup of OIL, mainly with a view to developing the organisation as the second public sector oil exploration and production agency in the country.

The Ministry also thinks that OIL should be developed with added responsibilities in on-shore and off-shore oil exploration and production. But this would be possible only if the concern becomes a 100 per cent government enterprise.

According to the thinking in the Ministry, all constraints on the restructuring and expansion of the oil industry will disappear once the remaining foreign assets in the industry are taken over.

At present the Oil and Natural Gas Commission and OIL are self-reliant in on-shore exploration. They could be further expanded to take over more of off-shore exploratory work. Where expertise is needed, it could be commercially bought.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 4, 1926

Wheat forecast

Calcutta, June 3: The fourth All-India Wheat forecast says that the total area is now returned at 30,288,000 acres as against 31,636,000 acres at this time last year or a decrease of four per cent.

The total yield is now estimated at 8,668,000 tons at this time last year as compared with 8,882,000 tons at this time last year or a decrease of two per cent.

The condition of the crop on the whole is reported to be fair.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Indian tyre exports in the financial year 2025-26

27,312 In ₹ crore. Indian tyre exports were at record high of ₹27,312 crore in FY2025-26, with the U.S. being the largest export destination for the segment, Automotive Tyre Manufacturers Association said on Wednesday, citing data released by the Commerce Ministry. The exports rose 9% from ₹25,057 crore a year ago. PTI

Applications filed for re-evaluation under CBSE

43,980 Nearly 44,000 students have availed the re-evaluation facility for board exams and completed the application process till Wednesday morning, the CBSE said. "The portal has accepted 4,924 applications for verification and 39,056 applications for re-evaluation (total of 43,980) as of 12 noon today". PTI

Persons killed in south Delhi hotel fire on Wednesday morning

21 A massive fire broke out in a hotel in a congested bylane in south Delhi's Malviya Nagar area on Wednesday, killing at least 21 people, including foreigners whose ailing relatives were being treated in hospitals nearby. The death toll could rise with several of the injured in a critical condition. The blaze began around 8.30 a.m. and quickly spread, catching everybody unawares. PTI

Recent fine imposed on Shein by French authorities

22 In million euros. French authorities said on Wednesday that they had imposed two fines on the Asian fashion giant Shein totalling more than 22 million euros (\$25.5 million), citing problems with product traceability, environmental labelling and delivery times. The latest fines were imposed by the government's consumer protection agency DGCCRF. PTI

Japan's fertility rate falls to a record low

1.14 Japan's fertility rate fell again last year to a record low, official data showed. Japan has one of the world's lowest birth rates, as well as a falling and ageing population, leading to labour shortages, a ballooning social security bill and a shrinking tax base. The number of babies born in the country fell by nearly 15,000. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us [facebook.com/thehindu](https://www.facebook.com/thehindu) [X.com/the_hindu](https://www.x.com/the_hindu) [instagram.com/the_hindu](https://www.instagram.com/the_hindu)

Is shoot-to-disable the new normal?

Why is Operation Langda a pragmatic strategy? Has a sporadic enforcement tactic become a routine practice? What makes it legally defensible? To what extent does the State endorse half-encounters? Is it a self-sustaining system? Why are piecemeal reforms insufficient?

EXPLAINER

G.S. Bajpai
Vibhuti Sharma

The story so far:

The "leg-shot" doctrine appears to have become the new normal in Uttar Pradesh, emerging as a genuine crime-control model that Herbert Packer advocated in 1968, in his work – *The Limits of the Criminal Sanction*. Between 2017 and 2025, the State Police recorded over 16,000 encounter operations. In about 97% of cases, the accused survived with a bullet wound to the leg. At this scale, the question is no longer whether something unusual happened, but what it means when the unusual becomes routine.

What is Operation Langda?

A motorcycle is intercepted on a highway. The accused attempts to flee. Shots are fired. He is injured, typically in the leg, and taken into custody. This sequence, which now recurs across the State, is now known as "Operation Langda", or "half-encounters", from the Hindi word *langda* (lame), a policing methodology cultivated by the Uttar Pradesh Police since 2017 under its "zero-tolerance" framework. What may initially have appeared as a sporadic enforcement tactic has, over time, acquired the characteristics of a routine practice governed by a dual logic of incapacitation and punishment.

Refined through repetition, encounters have evolved into a recognisable policing pattern marked by targeted leg injury, standardised reporting, official endorsement and overt punitive logic.

How are half-encounters structured?

A study by the Centre for Criminology and Victimology at National Law University Delhi, based on official U.P. Police data and 100 verified encounter cases (January 2025–May 2026), found that these incidents follow a



In Uttar Pradesh, encounters have evolved into a recognisable policing pattern marked by targeted leg injury, standardised reporting, official endorsement and overt punitive logic. PTI

near-identical sequence: intelligence received, suspect intercepted, alleged attempt to flee or fire, police response in self-defence, gunshot to the leg, arrest, and recovery of a locally made pistol. This seven-step sequence is the standardised operational template of Operation Langda, repeated across more than 30 districts over nearly a decade.

What distinguishes the practice is its focus on incapacitation rather than lethality. By visibly disabling accused persons, it functions as both a disciplinary mechanism and an assertion of state authority. The standardised language of police reports further normalises this extra-procedural punishment by presenting it as routine law enforcement. Nearly 80% of 100 cases in the micro-level dataset used either "retaliation" or "self-defence" as the major justificatory framing, no matter what the alleged offence is.

The consistency of this framing across widely different offences suggests a standardised narrative template rather than case-specific accounts. This helps

reproduce the practice across districts as a recognisable policing methodology.

In most of the 100 cases examined, media reports reproduced the police version without critical scrutiny. Critical coverage emerged only when direct counter-evidence challenged the official narrative. As a result, these incidents entered the news cycle largely as routine law-and-order events, that functioned as transmission rather than scrutiny.

The emergence of this methodology must be understood against the institutional constraints faced by the Uttar Pradesh Police. Prior to 2017, conviction rates in several categories of violent crimes were below 20%, while investigative capacity lagged far behind caseloads. In this environment, 'half-encounters' present a pragmatic alternative.

Crucially, shooting to disable rather than kill makes the practice more legally defensible. The accused survives to be produced in court, the officer can claim self-defence, and the state records an arrest rather than a death. This

distinguishes the U.P. model from the typical "fake encounter" tradition. It is also a reason why the practice continues to enjoy official support. State data show declines in crimes such as dacoity and robbery, but these gains do not address concerns over due process and the erosion of the rule of law.

Uttar Pradesh publicly treats encounter statistics as indicators of law-and-order achievements. Through official recognition and accelerated promotions, an exceptional tactic has become an accepted metric of policing performance. The incentive structure is reflected in the data: 2,739 encounter operations were recorded in 2025 alone – the highest annual figure in the dataset.

This official endorsement contrasts sharply with established judicial standards. In *People's Union for Civil Liberties v. State of Maharashtra (2014)*, the Supreme Court laid down sixteen principles and mandated an independent inquiry in every case. While these remain the legal benchmark, they have not been systematically applied in the State.

In January 2026, the Allahabad High Court observed that "half-encounter" practices were often driven by official rewards and promotions. The court reiterated that the power to punish belongs exclusively to the judiciary.

What makes reform so difficult?

The central problem is that "Operation Langda" is that it operates as a self-sustaining system. Political endorsement, professional incentives, media transmission and the chronic weaknesses of the criminal justice process do not merely tolerate the practice, they reproduce it. Piecemeal reforms will not be enough. What is most striking is how a practice that sits outside legal norms has, through routine and reward, become part of how the state governs. Any durable reform must dismantle the interlocking incentives and channels that produce it.

G.S. Bajpai is the Vice Chancellor of the National Law University, Delhi. Vibhuti Sharma is an Academic Fellow, NLU Delhi. Views are personal.

THE GIST

Encounters have evolved into a recognisable policing pattern marked by targeted leg injury, standardised reporting, official endorsement and overt punitive logic.

The consistency of this framing across widely different offences suggests a standardised narrative template rather than case-specific accounts.

The emergence of this methodology must be understood against the institutional constraints faced by the Uttar Pradesh Police.

The central problem is that 'Operation Langda' it operates as a self-sustaining system.

Is climate research being held back by local instrumentation?

What are India's biggest gaps in climate research? Why do prototypes fail to become products?

Jacob Koshy

The story so far:

Mega Science Vision-2035 report on Climate Research is a roadmap prepared by the Indian climate research community with the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru, as the nodal institution, and submitted to the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA) to the Government of India, was made public this week.

What is its central message?

The central message of the report is that India has effectively lost the ability to build its own scientific instruments. "Today, virtually no company in India manufactures quality scientific instruments for climate research," it

states, adding that "billions of rupees have been spent and continue to be spent on procuring instruments manufactured elsewhere." Worse, imported instruments are often used "without knowing the principle of operation, the built-in assumptions... and their limitations," and left uncalibrated for years – producing, in the report's words, "incorrect data being reported in national and international journals, often leading to questions on the credibility of Indian science."

What is the Mega Science Vision exercise?

The Mega Science Vision exercise, historically used to plan large, long-horizon projects in nuclear and high-energy physics, was for the first time extended to climate research, ecology and astronomy, and facilitated by the PSA's

office under Prof. Ajay K. Sood. A working group chaired by Prof. S.K. Sathesh, with former Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS) director Dr. S.S.C. Sheno, as member-secretary, drew on consultations with over 3,000 researchers. Crucially, the document calls itself "a Climate Research community document" of "hopes and aspirations" whose projects are "indicative" – it is neither a mandatory prescription nor a statement of government policy or funding.

Hasn't India built any of its own climate instruments?

It has built prototypes, but rarely products. The report notes that Indian engineers can design and demonstrate instruments, "some of which have already been demonstrated successfully," yet

"they are not often translated into final industrial products." Examples include automatic profiling floats developed at the National Institute of Ocean Technology for ocean observation, and automatic weather stations by the India Meteorological Department and ISRO. Although transferred to industry, "most of them have not reached the market yet." Tellingly, the first phase of the proposed sensor programme is an audit to identify why such technologies fail to scale to production. The suggested remedy – mandating that most instruments be made in India, backed by assured procurement and pricing – sits uneasily with recent experience: the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal, made mandatory to support domestic vendors, was rolled back for scientific institutions in June 2025 after scientists found it hindered access to customised, high-quality equipment.

Why study uncontrolled renewables?

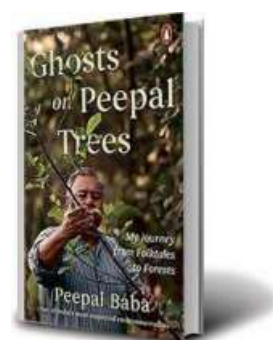
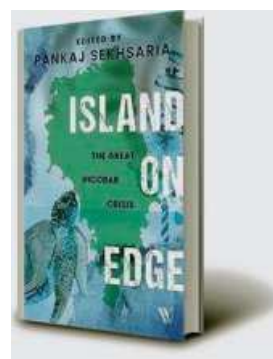
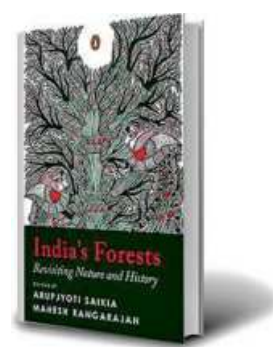
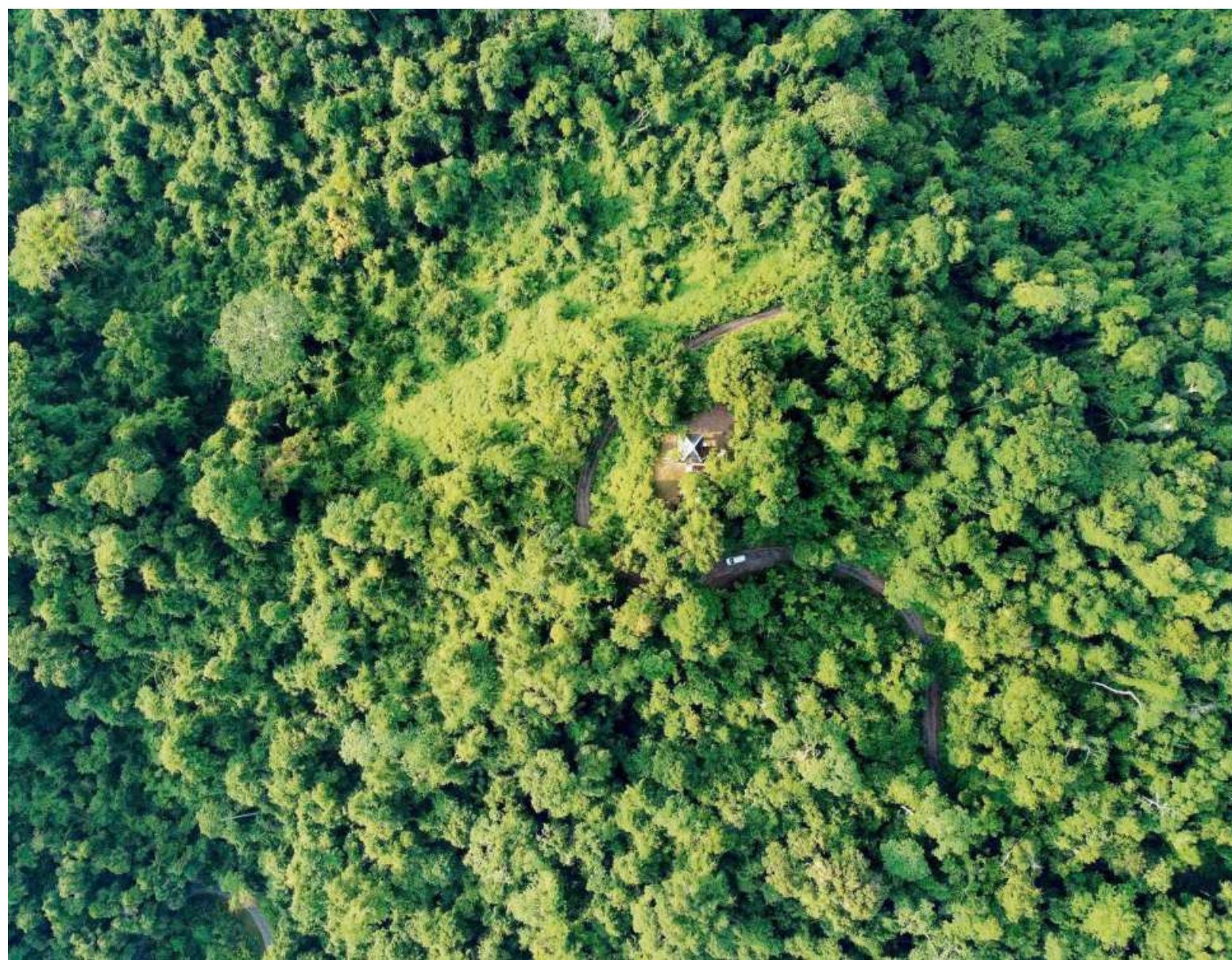
Although renewable energy seems to be the right solution to replace polluting sources, the report cautions that studies are needed to assess the long-term effects of uncontrolled tapping of natural resources – even as it insists renewables must remain a priority to sustain recent momentum. India, which has pledged 500 GW of non-fossil capacity by 2030,

crossed the halfway mark in installed capacity in 2025. The report also calls for scientific methods to estimate the social cost of carbon, a "polluter pays" mechanism to prevent the atmosphere from becoming a dumping ground, and measures to offset the burden of carbon taxation on the poor.

What else in the report is of importance?

The report proposes a pan-India Climate and Health Observatory under a mega project on adaptation and resilience, reflecting how thinly India tracks climate-related health impacts. It outlines eight mega projects spanning observational networks, indigenous sensors, satellites, two strands of climate modelling, field campaigns, carbon-neutrality research and adaptation science, to be overseen by a high-level apex committee. On science, it enters contested ground, backing a dense Black Carbon observatory network despite disputed claims about its relative role in global warming. It flags India's thin paleoclimate networks as a gap in understanding the monsoon's deep past, and the risk of crossing tipping points such as ice-sheet collapse and shifts in ocean circulation. It also warns of limited trained manpower, including in environmental epidemiology.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the difference between “notorious” and “infamous”? (M. Naresh, Trichy)

Let's deal with the pronunciation of the word “notorious” first. The first syllable is like the word “no”. The “o” in the second syllable is like the “or” in words like “port”, “sort”, and “north”. The “i” is like the “i” in “kit”, and “sit”, while the “ou” sounds like the “a” in “China” and “amount”. The main stress is on the second syllable. Some people tend to pronounce the “o” in the first syllable like the “a” in “China”.

A person who is notorious is well known for something discreditable; something bad. The word is usually associated with something negative. One can use this word with people as well as things. Here are a few examples.

The notorious criminal escaped from prison.

It is a city notorious for its cyclones.

Many people think that “infamous” is the opposite of “famous”; it is not. The first syllable is like the word “in”. The “a” in the second syllable and the vowels “ou” in the final syllable are pronounced like the “a” in “China”, and “amount”. Like the word “notorious”, “infamous” also means, “well known for something bad”. “Infamous”, however, is a much stronger word than “notorious”. It suggests being “evil” or “wicked” and it is this undesirable feature in a person or thing that the word highlights. So, when you say that someone is “infamous”, it implies that he/she is a wicked person, though he or she may not be famous on that account. In this case, you are making a moral judgement on a person. A person who is notorious need not be evil or wicked. Here are a few examples.

The infamous warden was sent to jail after a lengthy trial.

He will be remembered in history for this infamous deed.

According to some dictionaries “infamous” is much more literary than “notorious”.

What is the origin of the expression “to dress to the nines”? (C. Kalyanasundaram, Chennai)

When you say that someone is “dressed to the nines”, or “dressed up to the nines”, it means that he is dressed elegantly. He is wearing his best clothes. This expression is normally used informally. Here are a few examples.

He was dressed to the nines when he went to meet the Chairman.

Where are you going dressed up to the nines like that?

How do you pronounce the word “Festschrift”? (V. Umamaheshwara Ayyar, Chennai)

The first syllable “fest” rhymes with the words “best”, and “west”. The final “t” in the syllable is sometimes not pronounced. The “sch” in the second syllable is like the “sh” in “should”, and “sheet”. The final “rfit” rhymes with “gift”, and “lift”. The stress is on the first syllable.

A Festschrift is something that is given in honour of someone; usually a scholar or a writer at the time of his retirement. It usually consists of a volume of essays or research papers written in the person's honour. It is a German word meaning “celebration writing”.

Published in The Hindu on November 11, 2000

Reading for a warming world: books that rethink nature, development and survival

As heatwaves intensify and climate anxiety grows, a new set of books critiques the belief in technological fixes, highlights projects that risk ecological damage, and reimagines forests as spaces shaped by power, conflict and care, urging readers to rethink their relationship with nature and development

Soma Basu

The severe heatwave this year has pushed temperatures beyond normal highs across some regions. The warming caused by human activity is not surprising as scientists have warned about it for decades.

What is more concerning is the lack of adequate collective action to address this crisis. Since human minds tend to focus on immediate threats rather than future ones, it is important to recognise that climate change is impacting us faster than is projected. Therefore, appropriate individual and systemic actions need to be prioritised. World Environment Day reminds us of the responsibility, and this year's theme – “Inspired by Nature. For Climate. For Our Future. 2026” – is all about focusing on nature-based solutions to combat the climate crisis.

The man who planted trees

Some powerful books deepen our understanding of sustainability. *Ghosts on Peepal Trees: My Journey From Folk Tales to Forests* (Ebury Press, to be released on June 5) is the memoir of environmentalist Peepal Baba alias Swami Prem Parivartan.

The book evokes memories of shade and green spaces, clean rivers, forests and natural resources, singing birds, and fertile soil. It shows how these landscapes teach coexistence and help us understand the architecture of forests, the politics of

ecosystem management, the economics of the environment, and even ecotheology. It urges us “to listen to the Earth and believe in our ability to care about the natural world.”

For five decades, Peepal Baba worked towards restoring vegetation on 2,70,000 hectares by planting 26 million trees in 226 districts across 21 States in India. While rooted in the idea of individual and community action, his work also points to the need for broader ecological responsibility, where everyday practices – planting trees, composting waste, feeding birds, recycling, developing green patches or rooftop nurseries, and cycling – become part of a larger cultural and environmental shift. He urges others to act in whatever way they can.

Peepal Baba also expresses concern about the modern world's growing reliance on technological solutions – from synthetic DNA and genetic modification to crops that bypass pollinators and livestock that are raised entirely without natural conditions such as sunlight. He warns against government policies lacking courage.

Impacting nature and communities

It is a fact that every city today is a story of concretisation, forgotten rivers, and vanished greens. In his latest book, *Island on Edge: The Great Nicobar Crisis* (2026, Westland), Pankaj Sekhsaria lifts the veil off the ₹82,000 crore mega infrastructure development project planned for the

Great Nicobar Island cautioning how it will irreversibly damage not only the fragile biodiversity of the region, but also the culture of indigenous communities and their languages.

The project, which includes the clearing of 130 sq. km of pristine tropical evergreen forest, is one of the many continued betrayals of the island. That is why, the author says, he has compiled this collection of research-based, data-driven articles to help readers understand the legal, ethical, and on-ground realities of Great Nicobar.

Echoing Peepal Baba's concerns about the “strange arrogance attached to development projects” and the belief that technology can overcome every obstacle, Sekhsaria critiques the pitfalls of building an airport, transshipment terminal, power plant, and new township on the island. Both authors point to actions detrimental to the environment and to culture. Instead of aligning with climate sensitivity, such development initiatives heavily deplete nature's ecological balance.

The changing face of forests

India's Forests: Revisiting Nature and History (Vintage Books, 2026), co-edited by Mahesh Rangarajan and Arupjyoti Saikia, is a reappraisal of forests as living contested spaces across the country. The authors refer to forests shaped by power, culture, and society, and redefined through conflict, negotiation, and care,

and why they mean different things to different people.

The book is an interesting critique and also a tribute to Ramachandra Guha's 1989 study of colonial and post-colonial forestry, *The Unquiet Woods*, that establishes the centrality of forests in our lives.

The ten essays cover a wide range of forest-related issues, tracing the history of forest management from the past to the present while looking ahead to more just and sustainable uses of natural resources.

At its core, this series connects forests to various constituents of nature and human society and prompts us to ask what forests are for, especially at a time when our cities are gasping for oxygen. If we allow nature to govern half our spaces, the rest will flourish on its own because ecosystems are capable of self-regulation. The book revisits the Chipko movement and other environmental struggles, highlighting the need to balance the use and conservation of nature and to distinguish between necessity and greed. It reiterates that the overexploitation and destruction of natural resources is ultimately self-destructive.

The more forests belong to communities, the greater their protection will be. Afforestation is no longer a luxury or merely a government policy; it is a matter of survival and a way of making amends with nature. The future can be secured only if everyone participates in healing the soil and, in turn, the climate.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Here is a quiz on events that happened on June 4

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1
On this day in 1937, a Humpty Dumpty grocery store in Oklahoma introduced the first _____. Fill in the blank.

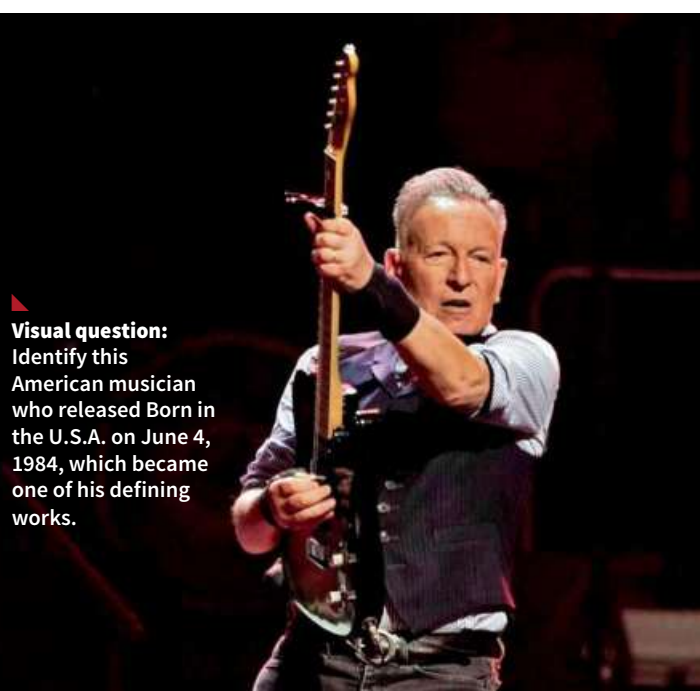
QUESTION 2
This King of Great Britain and Ireland was born on this day in 1738. He remains the longest-lived and longest-reigning male monarch in British history. Who is he?

QUESTION 3
This American basketball coach directed teams of the

University of California at Los Angeles to 10 National Collegiate Athletic Association NCAA championships in 12 seasons (1964-65, 1967-73, and 1975). He died at age of 99. Who is he?

QUESTION 4
Born on this day in 1975, this American actress is known for her roles in films *A Mighty Heart*, *Changeling*, and *Maria*. Who is she?

QUESTION 5
Which island country, part of Oceania, achieved independence within the British Commonwealth on this day in 1970?



Visual question: Identify this American musician who released Born in the U.S.A. on June 4, 1984, which became one of his defining works.

Please send in your answers to dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

- This Indian diplomat's speech at the Security Council across three meetings over two days in 1957 lasted more than eight hours. **Ans: V.K. Krishna Menon**
- Who was Venezuela's President Hugo Chavez referring to when he said "Yesterday, the devil came here — right here. And it smells of sulphur still today." **Ans: George W. Bush**
- Which Spanish artist painted the original 1937 masterpiece "Guernica"? **Ans: Pablo Picasso**
- "I have come with a freedom fighter's gun in one hand and an olive branch in the other. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand". Who said this? **Ans: Yasser Arafat**
- This Zimbabwean President, during his General Assembly speech in 2015, declared "We are not gays". **Ans: Robert Mugabe**
- Visual: This Soviet leader is said to have banged his shoe on his desk during a heated UN discussion in 1960. **Ans: Nikita Khrushchev**

Early Birds

Sonal Das| K.N. Viswanathan| Sudhir Thapa| Anju Sharma| Vikash Kumar

Word of the day

Segue:

the act of changing smoothly from one state or situation to another proceed without interruption

Synonyms: shift, transition

Usage: *The comedian's awkward segue between jokes made the audience laugh even harder.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/segue

International Phonetic Alphabet: /segweɪ/

For feedback and suggestions for Text & Context, please write to letters@thehindu.co.in with the subject 'Text & Context'

IN BRIEF



Apple agrees to submit India financials in antitrust case

Apple has agreed to submit the financials of its India business to the country's antitrust body as part of an investigation that found the U.S. firm abused its market position, taking the long-delayed case a step closer to a potential penalty decision, an agency order shows. The case is Apple's most high-profile regulatory headache in India, a key growth market where it has rapidly expanded iPhone production as it diversifies beyond China. **REUTERS**

U.S. FDA issues VAI to Granules arm Virginia facility

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued an establishment inspection report (EIR) with a voluntary action indicated (VAI) classification to Granules Pharmaceuticals Inc. (GPI) facility in Chantilly, Virginia. The regulator had inspected the facility from March 30 to April 3 and issued four Form 483 observations. In a filing on Wednesday, parent company Granules India said the facility plays an important role in its global manufacturing and supply network.

NMDC raises prices of iron ore; third hike this fiscal

NMDC, effective June 3, increased iron ore prices by ₹200 a tonne for Baila Lump and by ₹150 for the same quantity of Baila Fines. The new per tonne prices have been set at ₹5,700 for Baila Lump and ₹4,850 for Baila Fines. These prices are freight on road/rail (FOR) prices that are exclusive of royalty, DMF, NMEDT, Cess, Forest Permit Fee, transit fee, GST, environmental cess and other taxes, it said in a filing. This is the third revision by NMDC in as many months this fiscal.

Fairwood, SK Securities sign small reactor project pact

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

India's Fairwood Nuclear Pvt. Ltd. and South Korea's SK Securities Co. Ltd. have signed a strategic collaboration agreement to support the development and financing of small modular reactors (SMRs) and micro modular reactors (MMRs) in India, the companies said on Wednesday.

The agreement aims at accelerating the commercial and technical development of advanced nuclear projects in India, as interest grows in low-carbon and energy-secure power generation technologies.

Under the pact, the companies will work together on project development, industry engagement, investor outreach and fundraising initiatives.

Food for thought



Handling with care: RT Corp's food-picking collaborative robot Foodly demonstrates its skills at a food processing technology exposition in Tokyo, Japan. **REUTERS**

Cabinet approves ₹10,000 cr. ATF price stabilisation fund

One-time budgetary support to oil companies is aimed at backing airlines in the backdrop of escalating jet fuel prices due to the West Asia conflict; fund to be offered as interest-free advances

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Seeking to cushion airlines in the backdrop of escalating jet fuel prices due to the West Asia conflict, the Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved a one-time budgetary support of ₹10,000 crore to oil-marketing companies (OMCs) towards a price stabilisation fund.

The budgetary support would be made available to scheduled airlines in India for both domestic and international operations and would be provided in the form of interest-free advances to OMCs.

Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said that the price stabilisation fund would help stabilise (aviation turbine fuel) ATF prices in the backdrop of the West Asia conflict.

"The fund will help stabilise ATF prices for scheduled Indian carriers and will prevent disruption of airline operations while protecting air passengers from fare spikes driven by the geopolitical conflict involving several energy producers," read his social media post.

The budgetary support would function like a self-sustaining revolving fund.

The Cabinet has sought that once the international ATF prices moderate, the differential amount shall be recovered from the oil-marketing companies

Cushioning effect

Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri says the price stabilisation fund will prevent disruption of airline operations and protect air passengers from fare spikes



■ The scheme will be implemented via an MoU between OMCs and participating airlines

■ Airlines can procure ATF only from those OMCs — either for up to three years or until advance amount is fully recovered

■ Once international ATF prices moderate, differential amount will be recovered from OMCs and returned to govt. exchequer

■ The budgetary support would function like a self-sustaining revolving fund

(OMCs) and returned to the government exchequer.

It would be implemented through an MoU between OMCs and participating airlines and would mandate the latter to procure ATF only from OMCs — either for up to three years or until the advance amount is fully recovered.

Under-recovery

Officials at the Union Petroleum Ministry had informed on Monday that State-run OMCs were presently incurring an under-recovery of ₹30 on every litre of ATF meant for domestic scheduled carriers.

Further, the government observed that international ATF prices surged nearly 2.5 times from ₹60.5 per litre in March to ₹142 per litre in May.

ATF prices for domestic scheduled carriers were

hiked 9% April 1 this year and have been kept unaltered since then.

In fact, Air India, along with its low-cost subsidiary Air India Express and Indigo, together cut down 250 daily domestic flights from June amid rising prices of jet fuel. The move was expected to further escalate airfares.

The government informed that to protect air commuters from a potential sudden price shock, it had capped the ATF prices at ₹75.6 per litre.

'No adequate cushion'

However, the continuing crisis did not offer adequate cushion.

"ATF accounts for nearly 40% of airline operating costs and during periods of extreme fuel volatility, can constitute up to 60% of total operating expenditure," it said.

Crude oil futures hit record high of ₹9,260 per barrel

NEW DELHI

Crude oil prices surged by ₹310 to a fresh record high of ₹9,260 per barrel in futures trade on Wednesday, tracking strong gains in global benchmarks amid the escalating tensions in West Asia. On the MCX, the most-active June crude oil contract climbed by ₹310, or 3.46%, to an all-time high of ₹9,260 per barrel. "Crude oil extended its rally for a third consecutive session on Wednesday as regional escalation intensified overnight," brokerage firm Kotak Neo said. **PTI**

Refined fuel exports fall to lowest since 2022

NEW DELHI

India's exports of refined petroleum products fell to about 9,30,000 bpd in May, their lowest level since October 2022, as refinery maintenance, changing production priorities and stronger domestic demand curtailed overseas shipments. Exports declined to around 9,30,000 bpd, down to levels last seen when shipments averaged 9,26,000 bpd in October 2022, reflecting a combination of lower refinery throughput and growing focus on supply to the domestic market, according to data analytics firm Kpler. **PTI**

Centre mulls policy to boost E85 fuel uptake

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI



Hardeep Singh Puri

The government is actively examining supportive policy framework to accelerate affordable adoption of E85 fuel, said Union Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas Hardeep Singh Puri.

Speaking at the launch of Hero MotoCorp's flex-fuel motorcycles on Wednesday, he said that E85 (85% blending of ethanol with gasoline), fuel would be "substantially cheaper than normal fuel [variant]".

"If 1% of annual petrol vehicle sales in India during ethanol supply year 2026-27 shifts to E85, over four crore litres of ethanol demand would be generated, [and] nearly ₹266 crore

estimated payments would be made to distillers," he said, adding that about ₹195 crore would be earned in foreign exchange savings, approximately 0.28 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) of crude oil imports would be reduced, net CO2 reduction of nearly 0.86 LMT will be achieved, and nearly ₹160 crore would go directly to farmers.

SBI set for a second M&A deal, says Setty

Ashokamithran T
MUMBAI

State Bank of India (SBI) is set for a second mergers and acquisitions (M&A) transaction after completing the first one in the current year, said Chairperson C.S. Setty.

"We have done one transaction, we are doing another one," Mr. Setty said on the sidelines of the Citi India conference 2026.

He added that SBI had already put in place the required systems and a dedicated team for the business. Mr. Setty, however, did not disclose the details

of the transactions.

The comment is an update to the announcement SBI had made a few months ago on a collaboration with a Japanese bank for acquisition financing.

On the upcoming Monetary Policy Committee announcement on rates on Friday, the SBI chief forecast that the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) will hold rates. "Broadly, the market expects that there could be a rate pause at this juncture. Growth and inflation trends continue to be the key factors that will influence the monetary policy decision," he said.

Wheat procurement surges 17% to 35 million tonnes, exceeds 2026-27 season goal

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The government's wheat procurement rose 17% to over 35 million tonnes (MT) in the 2026-27 rabi marketing season, surpassing both the target of 34.5 MT and the previous year's procurement of 30 MT, a senior Food Ministry official said on Wednesday.

"Wheat procurement crossed 35 million tonnes so far this season. We have exceeded the target. Procurement in major producing states has been completed," the official said.

The Food Corporation of India (FCI) and State agencies procure wheat at the minimum support price (MSP) to meet the National Food Security Act and other welfare



Bumper harvest: Procurement in major producing states has been completed, says a Food Ministry official. **PTI**

schemes' needs.

Lower mandi rates

Higher procurement was aided by mandi rates ruling below the MSP on robust domestic production of 120.65 MT, sustained despite localised crop damage from unseasonal rainfall and hailstorms.

State-wise, Punjab led procurement at 12.1 MT, up from 11.9 MT in the previous season. Madhya Pradesh showed a sharp jump to 10.4 MT from 7.8 MT. While wheat procurement season runs from April through March, much of the procurement is done in the first few months itself.

U.S. FDA issues warning letter to Zydus' Baddi unit

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (U.S. FDA) has issued a warning letter to Zydus Lifesciences relating to its formulation manufacturing facility at Baddi, Himachal Pradesh.

"The communication references technical observations regarding the use of purified talc that did not meet the current United States Pharmacopeia (USP) requirements," the company said in a filing.

The warning letter 'does not pertain to any onsite inspection of the facility by the U.S. FDA'

The warning letter "does not pertain to any onsite inspection of the facility by the U.S. FDA."

The company believes that the warning letter would not impact current operations and supplies from the Baddi site, according to Zydus.

RBI debunks reports on gold sale, says reserves are 'steady at 880.52 tonnes'

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Debunking reports of gold sale, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) said there is no change in the physical stock of gold, which remains unchanged at 880.52 tonne.

The clarification from the RBI comes following reports it may have sold gold amounting to approximately \$12 billion to shield foreign-currency reserves from the impact of the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

"The RBI emphasises that these reports are not



Clearing the air: The clarification comes amid reports that RBI may have sold gold worth \$12 billion. **REUTERS**

correct," the central bank said in a statement.

Members of the public are, therefore, advised to rely on official information

published by the RBI from time to time in such matters, it said.

Once considered among Asia's more stable curren-

cies, the rupee has now become one of the worst-performing emerging market currencies this year, pressured by a toxic mix of expensive oil, capital outflows, widening trade deficits and a surging U.S. dollar. It has depreciated about 7% so far in 2026 and is down roughly 6% since the outbreak of the Iran conflict in late February.

India's forex reserves dropped \$7.511 billion to \$681.384 billion during the week ended May 22. India's forex reserve stood at \$686.801 billion in the week to January 2, 2026.

ADIA aids Kotak raise \$1 billion; Korea's NPS makes first India bet

Press Trust of India
MUMBAI

Kotak Alternate Asset Managers said it has raised \$1 billion in commitments from investors to close its newest real estate fund.

An anchor commitment of \$675 million from a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) and also an undisclosed funding from the National Pension Service of the Republic of Korea (NPS Korea) helped achieve the close

for its 14th Real Estate Fund, as per a statement.

NPA Korea has over \$1 trillion assets under management, and this is its first investment in the Indian alternatives space, it said.

So far, a slew of pension and sovereign wealth funds from countries such as Canada have been actively investing in India.

Its managing director Srinji Srinivasan welcomed NPS Korea's bet in volatile times. This is the sixth consecutive time that ADIA has invested in a fund.

S. America's stealthy ascent to key crude oil swing supplier



Beyond barriers: The region has delivered the largest increase in oil exports of any producing bloc. REUTERS

Reuters
LITTLETON, COLORADO

While oil markets fixate on the disruptions to West Asia exports and surging U.S. supply in 2026, South America is quietly emerging as a key new source of global crude flows.

Led by Brazil, Guyana and Venezuela, the region has delivered the largest increase in oil exports of any producing bloc so far this year, reshaping global trade patterns and reinforcing the Atlantic basin's role in global supply.

The shift has been gradual, dispersed and largely uncoordinated. But in aggregate, it is turning South America into a de facto swing supplier hiding in plain sight.

The collapse in crude exports from the Middle East so far this year has rightly dominated oil market attention. Producers in the region have accounted for around 43% of all seaborne oil exports over the past decade, data from commodities intelligence firm Kpler shows, anchoring global crude trade.

But the near-total closure of the Strait of Hormuz since March has slashed shipments from the region by more than a quarter during January to May compared to the year before, leaving a supply shortfall of roughly 675 million barrels.

That gap is too large for any single producer to quickly replace, forcing markets to lean heavily on inventories. It has also amplified the importance of rising supply elsewhere—notably from South America. Several exporters have lifted shipments this year, helping to offset part of the disruption. But nowhere has the increase been more pronounced than in South America, where total exports have posted their largest ever year-over-year gain, rising by around 155 million barrels to eclipse the growth of all other regions combined.

Rapid rise

Among the 10 nations to increase crude oil exports the most so far in 2026, the United States ranks top, registering a nearly 112-million-barrel increase during January to May compared to the same months in 2025, according to Kpler.

However, South America's contribution has been both broader and more structurally significant. Brazil, Guyana and Venezuela have posted the next largest annual increases in crude shipments this year, collectively adding around 145 million barrels.

Including a further 12 million barrels from Argentina, gains from those key nations exceed 157 million barrels compared to the year before.

Some small export volume declines this year from Colombia, Ecuador and Peru have curbed South America's total expansion to 155 million barrels, but the total shipped out from the region from January to May remains a record 787 million barrels.

That compares to around 430 million barrels for the same period in 2021, and so marks an 84% increase over the past five years.

Two nations have been key drivers of that regional expansion: Brazil and Guyana.

What Delhi HC's pathbreaking ruling on Google keyword advertising means

Justice Mini Pushkarna assessed if a company can buy another's registered trademark as a keyword on Google Ads to have their ads appear first in searches for that trademark; in 2013, Hindware Ltd. discovered that its rival companies had purchased the trademark 'Hindware' in such a manner

EXPLAINER

Soibam Rocky Singh
NEW DELHI

A recent ruling of the Delhi High Court in a long-running trademark dispute initiated by Hindware Limited could shape how Google handles keyword advertising, especially when trademarks are used in sponsored search results.

In a 163-page judgment delivered on May 22, Justice Mini Pushkarna examined whether a company can purchase another company's registered trademark as a keyword under Google Ads so that their advertisements appear on top of the list when users search for that trademark.

The dispute

In early 2013, Hindware Limited, which is in the business of sanitaryware products, discovered that its rival sanitaryware companies, Grohe India Private Limited and Cera Sanitaryware Limited, had purchased the trademark 'Hindware' as a keyword through Google's AdWords programme.

The result was that whenever a consumer searched for the word 'Hindware' on the Google search engine, the first result that appeared was for the website of Cera. Also, when someone searched 'Hindware Sanitary' or 'Hindware Sanitaryware', the first result came from the website of Grohe.

Hindware argued that its registered and well-known trademark is being used by Google by offering



Word power: Google runs a programme 'Google AdWords', a form of keyword advertising that allows advertisers to place advertisements along with search results in their search engine. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

or suggesting it to competitors or any other entity for the generation of advertisements. Hindware said this was being done without their prior consent or approval.

Subsequently, Cera and Grohe settled with Hindware, leaving the core legal battle to continue against Google India and Google LLC.

Keyword advertising

Google runs a programme known as 'Google AdWords', which is a form of keyword advertising that allows advertisers to place advertisements along with search results in their search engine, www.google.com.

Under Google AdWords, advertisers bid for words or phrases called 'keywords' that trigger or generate a sponsored advertisement when a user enters those terms into Google Search.

For example, if someone specifically searches for Nokia or Sony, another



company could purchase the keywords 'Nokia' or 'Sony' in return for a fee earned by Google, so that instead of the organic result, i.e., websites of Nokia or Sony, the user would be shown the advertisement or websites of the ad purchaser.

Hindware's objection

Hindware claimed that 'HINDWARE' is a registered and well-known trademark with substantial goodwill built over decades.

The company contended that the use of its trademark as a keyword for the display of advertisements

clearly amounts to use of the trademark "in advertising" within the meaning of Section 29(6) of the Trade Marks Act.

It argued that if a consumer specifically searches the term 'Hindware', it is clear that he is specifically looking for their products. The fact that the first search result of another company is shown to the consumer is bound to cause confusion and divert potential customers to rival brands.

Until 2009, Google did not permit the use of trademarks as keywords in India, but the policy was changed post the year 2009. It said that the policy applicable in India is a deviation from the policy of Google followed for countries in the European Union (EU) and European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

Google's defence

Google argued keywords act as a backend trigger for displaying the advertise-

ments in response to the search query entered by a user. Since users cannot see the keywords provided by the advertiser, such use of trademarks as keywords cannot be said to amount to 'use' under the Trade Marks Act.

When multiple advertisers seek to choose the same word as a keyword, including a trademarked term, Google conducts an auction or bidding on the trademarked term and earns a Cost-Per-Click amount as revenue.

On the question of confusion among users, Google argued that the inorganic or sponsored search results are labelled with a prefix 'ad' to distinguish them from organic search results, eliminating the likelihood of confusion among the users.

Judgment's importance

The case touches upon a growing global conflict between trademark law and digital advertising models.

Search engines earn revenue through keyword advertising systems. By auctioning the registered trademark to rivals, Google generates revenue from multiple competitors of the trademark owner.

The court ruled in favour of Hindware restraining Google from using the name 'Hindware' or any combination of related words as part of advertising keywords.

It observed that Google's conduct amounts to "free-riding" as it monetises the investments made by the trademark owner over the years. By actively suggesting, prompting and auctioning trademarks to third parties, the court said

Google rides on the goodwill of the trademark's reputation, selling off the power of the mark in attracting consumers to other rivals in order to increase enrolment in its own AdWords Policy and earn more profits.

"In doing so, Google has attempted to sell something that it simply does not own."

Beyond the case

The decision is likely to influence trademark disputes involving online advertising in India. It could affect how freely companies can use competitors' brand names in online advertisements and search results.

"We duly respect and operate in accordance with all local laws, and in instances where the orders are overbroad or inconsistent with our policies, we work to explain our position as per the legal process in the country," Google said in a statement to *The Hindu*.

"Specifically on our Ads policy on trademark keywords, we have a clear and stated policy that does not allow competitor advertisers to use trademarked terms in the ad-text of an ad. This policy is consistently applied globally and is in accordance with the Indian trademark law."

The company has held that so-called backend use of a trademark keyword is permissible to allow for small firms to compete with established incumbents, and said that it therefore only bans the deceptive use of competing trademark keywords in the actual text of ads, and not in the bidding process.

A verdict that may shake up short-selling playbook

Reuters
NEW YORK

A U.S. jury's fraud conviction of prominent investor Andrew Left this week could rewrite the playbook for activist short sellers, raising fresh questions about the line between legitimate market activism and stock manipulation.

Activist short sellers bet a company's stock price will fall while publicly launching campaigns that typically include publishing research reports, posting on social media or

appearing on cable news.

Unlike traditional short sellers who trade quietly, activists court public exposure to highlight what they see as poor performance or bad management decisions by companies in the hopes they'll move the shares.

Left was found guilty of engaging in a securities fraud scheme. Prosecutors made the case that he exploited his influence through social media and cable news appearances to tout what he said were his trades, only to quickly and

secretly close out his positions to profit from short-lived price movements.

While the case is specific to Left's dealings and he may appeal, market participants said the verdict could prompt other activist short sellers to rethink how they have been doing business.

"I don't think this changes short selling in general, but I do think it fundamentally changes activist short selling," said Scott Nations, president of Nations Indexes and the author of *The Anxious In-*

vestor: Mastering the Mental Game of Investing.

"Plain-vanilla short selling is still about valuation, positioning, and risk; that part of the market will go on as before. But activist short selling depends on going public," he said.

Reputational stakes

"Once a jury verdict like this lands, it raises the legal and reputational stakes for anyone whose strategy relies on broadcasting displeasure as part of the thesis," Nations said.

Short activists have long

argued that they are shielded by their First Amendment rights to free speech,

while the law also allows investors to change their minds. Some lawyers said the Justice Department successfully portrayed Left as an opportunist whose goal was to profit by scaring retail investors, something Left repeatedly denied during the trial, saying he believed in his calls. "It's tough to know how much of the verdict is due to the general dislike of short sellers versus these Left-specific factors,

though, and the costs to short sellers of making the wrong guess are huge, and that's where the chilling comes in," Peter Molk, a law professor at the University of Florida who has studied the long-term effects of short activism, said in an email to *Reuters*.

Spokespeople for Left and the DOJ did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Shortly after the verdict, Left posted on X: "So now a truthful opinion that ends up making money is illegal. Is this America?"

AI unlikely to be the demand booster that copper bulls expect

Reuters
LONDON

From the Bronze Age to the Alage, copper is again at the heart of the latest big investment craze.

The rationale is simple. Data centers need a lot of wiring, cooling and power, which means they need a lot of copper. AI data centers need even more.

A crypto data center requires 21 metric tons of copper per megawatt installed, while an AI training data center in China has a copper intensity of 47 tons, according to S&P Global Market Intelligence.

The escalating global AI arms race will undoubtedly boost demand for copper. But by how much?

S&P Global forecasts usage in data centers and as-

sociated infrastructure will rise from 1.1 million tons in 2025 to 2.5 million tons in 2040. There are, though, a lot of "buts" lurking in that forecast.

Demand could be as high as 2.7 million tons or as low as 1.7 million, depending on the interaction of multiple fast-changing variables. As the authors of "Copper in the Age of AI" put it, the "wide span underscores both the uncertainty and the scale of the challenge ahead."

The delivery gap

One key variable in assessing likely copper demand is the scale of AI data center expansion. Many of the new megawatts of announced AI computing capacity are "bragawatts", according to a study re-



Wide span: Raw copper from Zambia awaits export in a warehouse at Newlyn Terminal at Bayhead at the port in Durban. REUTERS

leased by the Oxford Smith School and financial broker Marex Group.

While media and markets are expecting and pricing a rapid exponential ramp-up in AI infrastructure, the outcome is likely to be "a roll-out that is delayed, lumpy, and constrained by physical reali-

ties." The biggest hurdle is grid connectivity. A data center can be built in 18 to 24 months but the average U.S. waiting time for a grid connection was four years between 2018 and 2023.

That assumes there is enough power in the first place. Ireland built so many data centers that by

2021 the sector's share of national energy consumption had risen to over 20%, threatening to overwhelm the country's energy system.

The Irish grid operator imposed a de facto four-year moratorium on new applications, which has only just been lifted, albeit with strict new conditions.

Throw into the mix long lead times for essential equipment such as transformers and a shortage of specialized labour and there is a growing gap between announced and delivered AI computing capacity, according to the Smith study. Copper, it warns, is in danger of falling down that gap. Quantifying how much copper is used in data centers is also a fast-moving target.

The battle for AI supremacy is one of computing power, and as chips evolve, so must the architecture of rack design and wiring.

S&P Global notes there is already a shift underway from copper to fiber optics in the interconnect cabling between processor racks.

This could result in copper intensity in data centers falling by 4 or 5 tons per megawatt installed, not a trivial change given the overall 30- to 40-ton range deployed in non-crypto data centers.

More fundamentally, though, chip company Nvidia argues that even copper will be challenged to deliver the low latency and high bandwidth of next-generation AI centers.

Using traditional low voltages would necessitate

"an unsustainable volume of copper cabling."

Nvidia is proposing a transition to 800 volts, which means the same wire gauge can carry 157% more power. A simpler setup also means fewer copper conductors and smaller connectors.

Reducing copper usage is both a cost consideration and, the company argues, a critical pathway to ever-increasing rack power.

Material wars

Ardent copper bulls argue that such is the looming deficit in copper that the metal could itself become a bottleneck in the roll-out of AI capacity. That may be more true of some of the other metals that go into connecting physical and virtual worlds.

Data centers are a sink for all sorts of minerals, 60 to 70 tons of them per megawatt installed, according to the World Economic Forum.

There's copper, but also aluminium, cobalt, nickel, tin, gold, silver, germanium and gallium and, of course, a smattering of the increasingly ubiquitous rare earth metals.

Germanium and gallium are more likely to pose a materials bottleneck than copper. Western supply of both metals is acutely tight after China imposed export restrictions in 2023.

Big Tech is competing for limited supply with both the U.S. Pentagon and the EU, which is looking to build a strategic metals stockpile. It's by no means certain it will win.

BRASILIA

Brazil moves to limit abortion access for underage rape victims



Brazilian lawmakers voted to make it tougher for underage victims of sexual violence to access abortion, in a vote that followed less than two minutes of debate. The vote moves to dismantle a resolution from the National Council for the Rights of Children and Adolescents that mandates prioritising the interests of victims. AFP

KATHMANDU

Nepal has not encroached even an inch of India's land: former PM Oli



Former Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli on Wednesday slammed incumbent Balendra Shah's statement in Parliament and asserted that the country has not encroached even an inch of Indian territory. On Wednesday, terming Mr. Shah's statement as "traitorous," Mr. Oli said that the PM has made false statements. PTI

SEOUL

North Korea slams U.S. remarks comparing South to 'dagger'



North Korea slammed on Wednesday remarks by the top American military official in South Korea comparing his host nation to "the dagger in the heart of Asia", saying it reflected Washington's strategy to contain China. General Xavier Brunson also compared Japan to a "shield that's a backstop" against China's regional ambitions. AFP

COPENHAGEN

Denmark PM presents new govt., with majority of women Ministers



Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen on Wednesday presented her new Cabinet, which for the first time in Danish history included more women than men. Eleven out of the 21 Ministers were women and the list also included familiar names from Ms. Frederiksen's former government. AFP

Iran strikes Kuwait's main airport, Bahrain base after U.S. hits Qeshm

Embassy of India in Kuwait says an Indian national was killed in the strike; 63 others wounded; the attack occurred soon after the airport had reopened following a months-long closure; U.S. targeted Iran's ground control station on Qeshm Island

Associated Press
DUBAI

Kuwait briefly shut its main airport on Wednesday after Iranian drones heavily damaged a passenger terminal, killed one person and wounded dozens – the latest in back-and-forth attacks by Iran and the U.S. that test a fragile ceasefire.

The strike reinforced the risks to residents and travellers in Gulf countries that had considered themselves relative havens before the war, now in its fourth month.

A spokesperson for Kuwait's Defence Ministry, Brig. Gen. Saud Abdulaziz



Unsafe haven: Prime Minister Sheikh Ahmad al-Abdullah al-Sabah inspecting the Kuwaiti airport after an attack on Wednesday. AFP

Al-Otaibi, said "a number of hostile drones" targeted a passenger building at Kuwait International Airport. It had opened only on Monday after a months-

long closure because of the war.

India's embassy said the person killed was an Indian national. In a post on X, the Embassy of India in

Kuwait said it is "closely coordinating" with the Kuwaiti authorities to extend all possible support to the bereaved family.

Authorities said 63 people were wounded, including passengers and workers, and some suffered serious injuries.

Kuwait's Defence Ministry said it destroyed over a dozen missiles and a similar number of drones from Iran. The airport partially reopened later, with Kuwait Airways flights resuming at a different terminal, according to civil aviation authorities.

The Foreign Ministry said Kuwait will "neither accept nor tolerate" the at-

tacks and was kicking out two Iranian diplomats.

The U.S. military said U.S. and Bahraini forces intercepted missiles aimed at the Gulf kingdom, home to the U.S. Navy's 5th fleet.

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard acknowledged that it targeted the headquarters of the 5th Fleet and U.S. military facilities in another country, but did not name Kuwait.

The U.S. military also said it launched strikes on an Iranian military ground control station on Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's Foreign Ministry condemned the U.S. strikes on the island.

Drone strike kills 7 on bus in Russia-held eastern Ukraine

Agence France-Presse
MOSCOW

A drone strike killed seven persons and wounded 11 as it hit a bus in Russia-held eastern Ukraine, Moscow-installed authorities in the Donetsk region said on Wednesday.

The incident comes a day after a massive drone and missile barrage by Russia on Ukraine killed at least 23 people.

The bus was hit in the Donetsk region as it tra-

Russia said its air defences intercepted 354 Ukrainian drones across multiple regions overnight

velled from Moscow to Simferopol in Crimea, a Black Sea peninsula that Russia annexed in 2014.

Meanwhile, a Russian drone strike killed a woman in Ukraine's southern Kherson region, according to regional authorities.

Russia said its air defences intercepted 354 Ukrainian drones across multiple regions, including areas bordering Ukraine and annexed Crimea overnight into Wednesday.

Elsewhere, Ukrainian long-range drones struck an oil terminal in St. Petersburg and set it ablaze, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, as the Russian city hosts an annual international economic forum that is a banner event for President Putin.

Israel strikes south of Beirut before second day of ceasefire talks

Associated Press
BEIRUT

An Israeli strike on Wednesday hit a car on a busy highway just south of Beirut, hours before the second day of talks between Lebanon and Israel in Washington are set to take place.

The strike in Khaldeh came without warning, and it was not immediately clear if the person targeted

was killed. Israel usually says it targets members of the Hezbollah militant group in these drone strikes.

Israel and Lebanon on Monday reached a U.S.-brokered agreement where Israel would not strike Beirut's southern suburbs and Hezbollah would end its attacks on northern Israel. Israeli strikes near city of Tyre killed six persons.

Court imposes overseas travel ban on ex-Sri Lankan President Gotabaya

Meera Srinivasan
COLOMBO

A Sri Lankan court on Wednesday banned former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa from foreign travel in connection with the ongoing investigations into the Easter Sunday terror attacks of 2019.

Further, the Colombo Fort Magistrate also barred two military personnel from travelling abroad, citing the probe.

The attacks in April 2019 targeted three luxury hotels in Colombo and three churches in and around Colombo, and the eastern city of Batticaloa. It killed over 270 people, injured hundreds, and shook the tentative peace on the island a decade after its brutal civil war ended.

The travel ban on Gotabaya comes three months after Sri Lanka's Criminal Investigation Department arrested former intelligence chief Major General Suresh Sallay.



Sri Lankan security personnel walk amid the blast debris at St. Anthony's Shrine in Colombo in April 2019. AFP

It is the first time that investigating authorities have sought to formally link the former president to the Easter bombings investigation, four years after he was dramatically ousted by a mass protest movement of citizens, sparked by a financial meltdown.

Gotabaya won the presidency in November 2019

with a thumping majority, after promising to strengthen national security in a country still reeling from the deadly Easter Sunday serial blasts, carried out by a network of Islamist suicide bombers. Soon after, Gotabaya appointed Mr. Sallay, a former head of military intelligence, as the chief of the State Intelli-

gence Service.

In 2023, British broadcaster Channel 4, based on a whistleblower testimony, reported that Mr. Sallay had maintained contact with the Islamist bombers. Mr. Sallay, currently in detention, has denied the allegations.

'Real mastermind' Gotabaya's political rivals and critics have meanwhile been raising questions over the "real mastermind" behind the Easter bombings, which was initially attributed to a major lapse in national security, despite India offering prior intel about a possible attack.

The arrest of Mr. Sallay in February this year signalled a widening of the probe, with investigators looking beyond the network of suicide bombers.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake, who was elected in 2024, has promised justice to the families of the victims of the Easter Sunday attacks.

Riot police in Chile clash with students protesting hard-right Kast's Budget cuts

Agence France-Presse
SANTIAGO

Chilean riot police on Wednesday clashed violently with protesting students as they marched through Santiago against Budget cuts pushed by hard-right President Jose Antonio Kast.

High school students, university students and teachers filed along Santiago's central Alameda avenue but were blocked from advancing towards the presidential palace by police using tear gas and water cannons.

Protesters threw stones at police, and blood covered the face of one woman who was arrested, a pressperson observed.

Mr. Kast took office in March as Chile's most right-wing leader since the end of General Augusto Pinochet's 1973-1990 dictatorship.

The 60-year-old, having pledged to slash government spending to balance the books and revive the



Riot police near a fire set up by demonstrators following a students march against social cuts, in Santiago, on Wednesday. AFP

economy, began his term with a three-percent spending cut across all Ministries.

Demonstrators who fiercely oppose the measures held signs on Wednesday bearing messages such as: "It's not belt-tightening, it's theft."

"It's like an attack on the poorest people, because

they're the ones who rely on social benefits, not the people who have money," 47-year-old teacher Romina Cuevas said.

Mr. Kast was elected on a pledge to combat crime and reduce immigration, which his supporters view as linked issues.

During his first-ever presidential address to Con-

gress on Monday, he announced further crackdowns on crime and migration including the creation of a "vandals" registry.

The registry will log people who attack police, health officials or monuments, with those listed losing benefits such as free university education or a state pension.

Drop in ratings The announcement came as Mr. Kast's perceived inaction during his first months in office has led to a plunge in his approval ratings.

In May, he fired his Security Minister and secretary general of the government, who acts as government spokesperson, both of whom had been criticised for poor performance.

Police have not yet released a report about Wednesday's clashes, but AFP observed at least a dozen arrests taking place.

threats had to relocate with his family, Ms. Mahmood told the U.K. Parliament on Tuesday.

'History lesson' Individuals who were scapegoating the entire Sikh community, like those associated with Reform UK and Restore (another hard-right political party), needed "to have a history lesson", said Labour MP Tanmanjeet Singh Deshi, who is a Sikh.

"Tens of thousands of Sikh soldiers fought bravely alongside British service personnel during both World Wars," Mr. Deshi told the BBC in a televised interview on Wednesday. He explained that the murder weapon was not a kirpan (the ceremonial dagger carried by Sikhs) but a larger and longer weapon, the Pesh-Kabz, which he said was used in historically in battles to pierce through body armour.

"Sikhs prided themselves on being integrated with the wider community," Mr. Deshi said. "But they are very, very fearful now because of the calls to ban the kirpan, which means that they will not be able to freely and peacefully practice their faith," he added.

In a court transcript of Monday's sentencing the judge had referred to the knife as a "kirpan". "You are a member of an order of Sikhs called the Nihang who have a tradition of having a second knife, or kirpan, and that is often fully visible," the judge had said, as per court records.



The British regulator says the decision will give publishers a stronger hand in negotiations with Google. REUTERS

U.K. orders Google to let publishers opt out of AI scraping

Associated Press
LONDON

Google must allow news sites to opt out of having their online content scraped to feed AI overviews and other artificial intelligence services and features for British users, regulators said on Wednesday.

The Competition and Markets Authority said it was ordering Google to give online publishers the option, in what it called a "world first."

The watchdog is seeking to loosen the U.S. tech giant's stranglehold on the U.K.'s online search market by using new digital powers to force changes to the company's business practices.

Under the decision, Google will have to give publishers "effective tools" to prevent their content from being used to power the company's generative artificial intelligence services and its AI search features like AI Overviews and AI Mode.

Google will also have to properly cite publisher content in AI-generated search results by using clear links, and let publishers opt out of having their content used to fine-tune AI models.

The watchdog said the decision will give publishers a stronger hand when negotiating content deals with Google.

The CMA's ruling was expected, because it had released draft proposals at the start of the year after using its new digital powers to label Google a "strategic" player in online search advertising.

It previously found that news publishers had suffered a drop in traffic since Google rolled out its AI Overviews. The watchdog said its requirements will also apply to big changes that Google unveiled in May, which further embed AI in the company's search services.

Google is "engaging with regulators like the UK's Competition and Markets Authority to ensure website owners have the right tools as user preferences evolve," the company's general manager of search ecosystem, Mrinalini Loew, said in a blog post.

Brazil takes a historic HDI leap with focused planning and public spending

UN report reveals the country's cash-transfer scheme has played a key role in raising its Human Development Index score from 0.744 in 2012 to 0.805 in 2024, on a scale from 0 to 1; as Brazil enters election cycle, the far-right narrative that the scheme discourages people from working draws backlash

NEWS ANALYSIS

Shobhan Saxena
SAO PAULO

Amid a heated debate about Brazil's flagship cash-transfer scheme last week, a United Nations report revealed that the country had made a giant leap on the Human Development Index (HDI) scale. The controversy erupted after a television presenter, Luciano Huck, said that Bolsa Família programme "discourages the poor from working". As Mr. Huck was being fact-checked on social media, the UN Development Programme report revealed that the scheme had played a key role in Brazil raising its HDI score from 0.744 in 2012 to 0.805 in 2024.

On the UN scale, which ranges from 0 to 1, the score of 0.805 places Brazil in the category of "very high human development." Among the Afro-Brazilians, the HDI grew by 10.3% over 12 years, almost twice the rate for the Whites. "Achieving this positive result is not by chance; it is the result of strong public policies and an inclusive national project focused on combating inequalities," said Guilherme Boulos, the Federal Minister for Social Development, at the launch of the report in Brasilia.

The index measures indicators related to health and longevity, education, and income generation, with results broken down by race, gender, and region



Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and First Lady Rosângela da Silva take part in an event via videoconference on the 20th anniversary of Bolsa Família programme in Brasilia in October 2023. AFP

at the municipal level across all 26 states of Brazil. When the UNDP began calculating the index 30 years ago, Brazil was in the category of low human development. The steady rise, according to the government, has been driven by sustained planning and public spending. "We have made progress in education. We have witnessed success because of an expansion of public healthcare system, income distribution, real increase in the minimum wages and programmes such as Bolsa Família," said the Minister.

Bolsa Família, launched in 2003 during President Lula da Silva's first term, has inspired similar schemes worldwide, including the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme in India in 2006. Walquiria Rego, a sociologist who has studied the programme for years, says its success stems from pro-

viding poor families with a regular income. "As families received money every month, their eating habits improved, hunger declined dramatically and Brazil was taken off the UN hunger map," she says.

Healthcare guarantee

From its launch in 2003 until 2023, Brazil has spent around US\$ 81 billion on the scheme which has benefited 49 million people. Extensive studies conducted by Prof. Rego show that the programme's impact goes beyond nutrition as, with a steady source of income, poor families were able to furnish their homes and live with dignity. "The changes have been profound: people became better nourished, healthier and more integrated into social and economic life," says Prof. Rego, whose book "Voices from Bolsa Família" is considered a landmark work.

Besides cash assistance, Brazil's unified health system, or SUS, has played a crucial role in its HDI improvement. Brazil spends about 9.7% of its GDP of US\$ 2.64 trillion on health, with SUS getting 4% of the amount. Guaranteed by the Constitution, Brazil's free and universal public healthcare system has been a major driver of rising life expectancy. Jorge Félix, a professor of gerontology at the University of São Paulo, says the system focused on child health in the early 1990s and eliminated the diseases like measles that were major causes of illness. "Access to healthcare has expanded across the country through a network of primary health centres. This is important because 75% of Brazilians depend on SUS," he says, adding that vaccination campaigns for children, adults, and access to treatments like cancer

have improved life expectancy.

Both Bolsa Família and SUS had come under strain when the government of President Jair Bolsonaro imposed deep spending cuts. The weakening of the public health system, says Prof. Félix, proved catastrophic during the Covid-19 pandemic. "Beyond financing, strategic areas of SUS were also dismantled. As a result, Brazil entered the pandemic with reduced capacity to respond. Shortages of medicines and declining operational capacity left SUS significantly weakened just as Brazil confronted the biggest public health emergency," says the academic, whose book "The Economics of Longevity" examines the healthcare challenges in Brazil.

In 2022, the last year of Bolsonaro presidency, the country's HDI had sunk low. In 2023, when Mr. Lula returned to the presidency for his third term, the government restored funding for SUS and Bolsa Família, bringing the momentum back into Brazil's social transformation. The gains have been particularly visible in the historically poorer Northeast region. "Bolsa Família stimulated commerce in small municipalities across the Northeast because the money circulated locally, generating jobs and creating opportunities for small businesses," says Prof. Rego.

A key reason for Bolsa Família's success is that payments are made directly to women, particularly

mothers. This policy, says Prof. Rego, has made profound impact on families. "Women are now seen as the people responsible for food and healthcare for their children. It was not simply a cash-transfer plan to alleviate poverty. It also promoted citizenship and dignity for some of the poorest women in Brazil, thus making a significant contribution to human development and social justice," says Prof. Rego.

Election rhetoric

While Brazil's HDI figures are in sync with the country's commitments to the UN's 2030 goals, experts warn against complacency. "If the State stops assisting the vulnerable and investing in SUS, the risk of social regression remains high," says Prof. Félix.

As Brazil enters an election cycle, the far-right circles are spreading false stories about how Bolsa Família discourages people from working. Yet studies show that about 61% of people receiving Bolsa Família in 2014 had left the programme by 2025. Because of its positive impact on human development, Mr. Luciano Huck's remarks triggered a backlash, particularly in the politically-important Northeast, which has benefited the most from the scheme.

With the UN report giving a timely boost to President Lula, the beneficiaries of social programmes are not in a mood to accept any argument against the policies which have lifted Brazil into the zone of very high human development.

In solidarity



Trade unions organise a demonstration near the construction site of the new U.S. consulate in Milan as Italian prosecutors have accused the contractor, U.S. group Caddell Construction, of paying Indian workers well below the national poverty line for 60 hours of work weekly. AFP

Romania wants to boost air defence after drone strike blamed on Russia

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Romania's Foreign Minister said on Wednesday her country needed to bolster its air defences with the help of its allies, days after two people were wounded in a drone strike on an apartment block close to the Ukraine border that was blamed on Russia.

Oana Toiu said there was no suggestion yet that Russia had intentionally targeted the 10-storey block in Galati last Friday, but Moscow bore "responsibility" for the strike over four years into the invasion of its neighbour.

"It is quite clear that we need to increase air monitoring and air defence cap-



Romania's Foreign Minister Oana Toiu says Bucharest is in talks with NATO on boosting its capabilities in the short term. REUTERS

abilities throughout the eastern flank (of NATO)," she told reporters in Paris.

"But for us the pressure is even higher," she said, adding that NATO and EU member Romania had had a long border with Ukraine that stretched along the

Danube river and out into the Black Sea.

Ms. Toiu said it would be one to two more years before new equipment arrived from Romania's own defence procurement.

But she added Bucharest was in talks with NATO

on boosting its capabilities in the short term, as well as working with Kyiv on a joint anti-drone air defence project.

She said Romania had been aware of an incoming drone on May 29 but air force pilots decided not to shoot it down out of concern that an air defence missile could itself cause damage on the ground.

While this was the first such incident to cause casualties inside Romania, Ms. Toiu said there had been more than 40 instances of drone incursions inside the territory.

"There is a common understanding that we need to have better air defence of the eastern flank and not just Romania," she said.

China's 'Shoobox' flat reform leaves low-income Hong Kong residents in limbo

Agence France-Presse
HONG KONG

Hong Kong resident Lisa Lau put on a costume drama as she settled on the bed that occupies much of her tiny apartment, trying to take her mind off a looming eviction.

Subdivided flats like Ms. Lau's 32-square-foot home - are being phased out after a law to regulate them came into effect in March.

Chinese President Xi Jinping has ordered the wealthy finance hub to resolve housing woes that are the result of decades of pervasive inequality, an

acute housing shortage, and eye-watering rents.

The Hong Kong government has given owners who register under the new system until 2030 to renovate their subdivided flats but some landlords have already issued eviction notices to tenants.

"I'll stay here day by day," Ms. Lau, a 48-year-old welfare recipient who received an eviction notice months ago, told AFP.

"I don't know (where to go)," said Ms. Lau, who lives on the equivalent of about \$930 a month, of which \$330 goes for rent. "I'm scratching my head."

The new rules ban flats smaller than eight square

metres and mandate safety and hygiene standards, such as having at least one openable window, a sink, and a toilet in an enclosed space.

Authorities estimate that more than 2,20,000 people in the city of 7.5 million live in so-called "shoobox" flats, around one-third of which need major renovation.

Poorest neighbourhood

Ms. Lau's cubicle is one of nine in a single unit, separated by thin wooden dividers, in a 60-year-old building in one of Hong Kong's poorest neighbourhoods, Sham Shui Po.

With no kitchen, she



A building with subdivided housing units in Hong Kong. AFP

makes soup or noodles in a rice cooker placed on the bed. She uses a shared toilet and shower, and has taped a foam board across the bottom of her doorway to keep out rats and cockroaches.

Despite the cramped conditions, Ms. Lau is reluctant to leave a familiar area where she has built a social network and hopes her application for transitional housing nearby will be approved.

"As long as the landlord doesn't come (to evict residents), we are so at peace, we are so comfortable," she said.

The Housing Bureau said over 100 households had already moved out of Ms. Lau's building and that it was helping the 40 that are left to find suitable accommodation.

The Society for Community Organisation, an NGO that works with underprivileged groups, said the reform could help alleviate some of the worst living environments in Hong Kong.

But more government housing is needed, especially in the central areas,

said Sze Lai-shan, the group's deputy director.

"Don't expect these people who live in very small flats to move into the new basic housing units. They won't be able to afford it," she said.

"A lot of the poorest people will be very dependent on the government to resettle them."

The charity knows of around 300 households threatened with forcible eviction from subdivided flats, with more expected to follow, according to Ms. Sze - far more than the 35 notices the government said it had received.

Some residents have moved into public or tran-

sitional housing, while others have moved into other substandard flats as a temporary measure, Ms. Sze added.

'Coffin homes'

Liu Xiaoli, who faces eviction from her subdivided flat, works two part-time jobs as a cook and cleaner to make ends meet since her divorce, and supports her daughter and granddaughter in mainland China.

"If the rent here or in other places goes up, I really can't afford it," the 63-year-old told AFP, adding that she was unable to find alternate accommodation nearby.

WINDY DAY

Sabalenka perplexed by the decision to keep the roof open



REUTERS

I don't know why they would keep the roof open when it's crazy windy. But how can I complain if, for almost the whole match, everything was working okay for me, but then it just slipped away. I feel like it was getting crazy, maybe just because mentally I wasn't really okay — Aryna Sabalenka after her loss to Diana Shnaider.

GLORY BECKONS

Sanfida's strike helps India enter SAFF Women's Championship final



AIFF

Sanfida Nongrum's 58th-minute goal helped India get the better of Bhutan 1-0 in the semifinal of the SAFF Women's Championship 2026 in Margao on Wednesday. The Blue Tigresses will next face Bangladesh — which beat Nepal 2-1 in the other last-four stage match — in the summit clash on Saturday.

CHANGING PRIORITIES

Cummins might skip next season's IPL because of Australia workload



FILE PHOTO: NAGARA GOPAL

Australia captain Pat Cummins has indicated he might skip the IPL next year to prioritise Tests and the ODI World Cup. "The priorities for me are always the Test matches and that ODI World Cup. I dare say if I play all of India, I need some sort of break before a pretty gruelling Ashes series."

HIGH PRAISE

Sooryavanshi is an exceptional talent, says Kohli's coach



FILE PHOTO

Virat Kohli's coach Rajkumar Sharma heaped praise on Vaibhav Sooryavanshi. "He is an exceptional talent undoubtedly. I want Sooryavanshi to continue the way he is playing. I don't believe in comparing people. What Virat has done in the last 18 years, I mean it's a very long period that he has been so consistent."

Playing Carlsen is exciting and brings out the best in me: Pragg

NORWAY CHESS

C. Shyam Sundar
OSLO

These are extraordinary times, it should be said. It is not often that Magnus Carlsen loses a classical chess game. But the unthinkable seems to be playing out at Norway Chess, as the World No. 1, considered one of the greatest ever, has suffered four defeats thus far.

R. Pragnanandhaa, who seems to have the wood over Carlsen, was delighted to have beaten the latter in the classical format here in the third and eighth rounds.

"I think beating him in any format is good. But more than that, I think winning at this stage of the tournament is more important," said Pragnanandhaa, responding to a question on whether beating Carlsen a third time in the classical format felt like a normal thing or was still something to savour.

Pragnanandhaa said he has been involved in some well-contested matches against Carlsen and added that he enjoyed playing him.

"I wouldn't say I felt intimidated. We have had a lot of exciting, fighting games. It always brings out the



Pragnanandhaa. NORWAY CHESS



I think Carlsen is still the best... I don't think there is a change of guard or anything

best in me."

Asked if the World No. 1's aura was waning, he said it was not so, and added, "It's just one tournament that, like, for a few moments doesn't go your way... I think he's still the best."

The Indian GM didn't seem to agree that there was a change of guard. "I mean, we are already there. I think we are among the best players. I don't think there is... I don't think there is a change of guard or anything. All these things, I think, are exaggerated," he added.

Pragnanandhaa does the double over Carlsen

Victory with black pieces takes the Indian GM to the third spot; So outsmarts Keymer to stay on top; Firouzja gets the better of Gukesh; Assaubayeva beats Divya to move closer to the title

C. Shyam Sundar
OSLO

Indian Grandmaster R. Pragnanandhaa did it again. He beat the World No.1 Magnus Carlsen for a second time in the same tournament, outwitting him in the eighth round of Norway Chess, in the classical game, to close in on the leader Wesley So.

The stunning victory with black pieces on Tuesday at Deichman Bjorvika gave Pragnanandhaa three points and took him to third spot with 12 points, two behind So.

Frenchman Alireza Firouzja occupied the second place with 13 points, after he handed World champion D. Gukesh his third defeat of the tournament.

So pulled away from the field by outsmarting Vincent Keymer in the Armageddon after the classical match ended in a stalemate.

"It's more important for the tournament that I get this win than thinking that it's Magnus. Of course, it's great to do it against Magnus, but I think winning any game at this stage of the tournament is good," a delighted Pragnanandhaa



Rare feat: Pragg became one of the very few players to have beaten Carlsen thrice in classical chess. NORWAY CHESS

said after making it two out of two (in classical games) in the tournament, which Carlsen has dominated like no other winning it seven times.

The 20-year-old Indian GM had beaten the Norwegian ace in the third round, before doing the double.

With this win, Pragnanandhaa became one of the very few players to have beaten the 35-year-old Carlsen thrice in classical chess.

Carlsen had started the

tournament with a loss to Firouzja before sinking to defeats against Pragg and So subsequently.

In the women's event, Kazakh GM Bibisara Assaubayeva inched closer to winning the title, pipping Indian GM Divya Deshmukh in a game which she was fighting to survive.

She has opened up a five-point lead over Ukraine's Anna Muzychuk, who fell in the Armageddon to Koneru Humpy.

The matches will res-

ume on Thursday after Wednesday's rest day.

The results: Eighth round: Open: Alireza Firouzja (Fra, 13) bt D. Gukesh (8), Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 9) lost to R. Pragnanandhaa (12), Wesley So (USA, 14) bt Vincent Keymer (Ger, 10).

Women: Zhu Jiner (Chn, 10) bt Ju Wenjun (Chn, 9), Divya Deshmukh (10) lost to Bibisara Assaubayeva (Kaz, 15.5), Anna Muzychuk (Ukr, 10.5) lost to Koneru Humpy (8) in Armageddon. (The writer is in Oslo at the invitation of Norway Chess).

Cool Sindarov has the fire in him

C. Shyam Sundar
OSLO

Javokhir Sindarov might pass off as the boy next door with a charming smile, and not as one bracing to challenge for the biggest prize in chess (the World championship).

Yet, beneath the relaxed exterior is a hyper-focused 20-year-old Uzbek Grandmaster, quietly confident of his prospects and also careful not to underestimate his opponent — the World champion D. Gukesh, whose oscillating form has been the topic of discussion.

"I feel he is a very smart player and is extremely strong," Sindarov said on the sidelines of Norway Chess 2026, outlining his plans for the title match, the venue for which is yet to be zeroed in on.

"From next month, I'll start my preparations, but right now I need to focus on the Olympiad. My team is already working on the World Championship," he added.

Having never featured in a match of such a duration (14 games of classical and tie-break if needed to decide the winner), the young GM said he knew it would be hard but was ready for it. "I know I'm very close to (winning this tournament). Gukesh also has the same chance. It will be a very good match."

Sindarov has been in a



Sindarov. NORWAY CHESS



I feel Gukesh is a very smart player and is extremely strong. From next month, I'll start my preparations, but right now I need to focus on the Olympiad

rich vein of form, first winning the World Cup in Goa in 2025 before storming to victory in the Candidates earlier this year.

Speaking about the Chess Olympiad where India is the defending champion in the Open and women's sections, the Uzbek said he and the rest of his compatriots would be keen to triumph at home (in Samarkand), adding India, the U.S. and China would be the teams to beat.

On his preferred venue for the World Championship match, he said Cyprus was an attractive option given the weather conditions. Sindarov may appear to be a 'cool lad' but has the fire in him to be the world's best.

Shnaider knocks out Sabalenka

FRENCH OPEN

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Aryna Sabalenka's bid for a first French Open title was left in tatters as she fell apart in a bizarre defeat by Russian 25th seed Diana Shnaider in the quarterfinals on Wednesday.

The World No. 1 led by a set and a double-break before exiting in a blaze of unforced errors, collapsing to a 6-3, 5-7, 0-6 loss in blustery conditions on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Sabalenka was the only Grand Slam champion left in either the men's or women's singles draws at Roland Garros, but belied that status by making a whopping 57 unforced errors.

Shnaider, playing in her first Major quarterfinal, now finds herself a strong favourite to reach the final heading into her last-four tie against World No. 114 and fellow left-hander Maaja Chwalinska.

"Well honestly I'm speechless, I'm super happy. Obviously tough conditions with the wind," said the 22-year-old Shnaider after beating a top-10 player for only the second time in her career. "Definitely super happy



I did it! Shnaider is visibly overjoyed after her remarkable comeback win over the top seed. REUTERS

I managed to finish on a good note rather than start on a good note. Definitely a special tournament for me here," added the Russian.

Sabalenka's scarcely believable defeat was reminiscent of the way she threw away a strong position in last year's final against Coco Gauff.

The Belarusian was playing in a 14th consecutive Grand Slam quarterfi-

nal but failed to become the first woman to make seven straight Major semis since Serena Williams.

Earlier, the Pole Chwalinska continued her run by beating 22nd seed Anna Kalinskaya 7-6(3), 6-3; 25-Shnaider bt 1-Sabalenka (Brl) 3-6, 7-5, 6-0.

"I honestly don't know what's going on. I know I repeat myself but every

QUARTERFINAL RESULTS

Men: 26-Mensik (Cze) bt 28-Fonseca (Bra) 6-4, 6-3, 7-6(3); 10-Cobolli (Ita) bt 4-Auger-Aliassime (Can) 4-6, 6-4, 6-4, 6-4.

Doubles: 2-Heliovaara (Fin) & Patten (GBr) bt Demoliner (Bra) & Balaji (Ind) 6-3, 6-4.

Women: Chwalinska (Pol) bt 22-Kalinskaya 7-6(3), 6-3; 25-Shnaider bt 1-Sabalenka (Brl) 3-6, 7-5, 6-0.

Thursday's matches (women's semifinals): 8-Andreeva vs. 15-Kostyuk; 25-Shnaider vs. Chwalinska

single match here is kind of crazy for me so I'm very grateful," Chwalinska said.

Auger-Aliassime out
In men's singles, Flavio Cobolli came back from a set down to beat fourth seed Felix Auger-Aliassime 4-6, 6-4, 6-4, 6-4 in the quarterfinals. Czech youngster Jakub Mensik had produced a brilliant display to upstage Joao Fonseca 6-4, 6-3, 7-6(3) in the night session on Tuesday to set up a last four meeting with second seed and title favourite Alexander Zverev.

Balaji exits in doubles
In doubles, N. Sriram Balaji and Marcelo Demoliner saw their campaign end in the quarterfinals after a 3-6, 4-6 loss to the second-seeded pair of Harri Heliovaara and Henry Patten.

India to play biggest-ever series in NZ

Press Trust of India
AUCKLAND

India will tour New Zealand for a marathon all-format series from October 22 to December 1 this year, featuring an unprecedented 10 white-ball games in what would be the biggest men's bilateral cricket series ever held in this country. India will take on the Black Caps in five T20Is, as many ODIs and two Tests across five major centres. The 12 matches would be the highest ever featuring a touring side in New Zealand's history.

The series would be a major landmark as the two countries celebrate 100 years of sporting ties.

The series will mark India's first Test tour of New Zealand since the 2019-20 season.

The schedule: T20Is: 1. October 22, Christchurch; 2. October 24, Christchurch; 3. October 27, Wellington; 4. October 30, Auckland; 5. November 1, Hamilton.

ODIs: 1. November 4, Auckland; 2. November 7, Wellington; 3. November 10, Hamilton; 4. November 13, Mount Maunganui; 5. November 15, Mount Maunganui.

Tests: 1. November 19-23, Wellington; 2. November 27-December 1, Christchurch.

In Jadeja's absence, Manav and Harsh aim to stake claim

AFGHANISTAN IN INDIA

Vivek Krishnan
NEW CHANDIGARH

Since his Test debut in December 2012, Ravindra Jadeja has played 89 of India's 131 matches. At home in this period, he has appeared in 53 of 61 Tests. Injuries are to blame for the rare instances when the all-rounder has missed a home Test.

It is noteworthy, then, that Jadeja won't be present at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Stadium for the one-off Test against Afghanistan beginning on Saturday. Even though chief selector Ajit Agarkar has stated that the 37-year-old has been rested and remains India's first-choice Test spinner, it is also apparent that the think-tank wants to examine the newer crop of left-arm tweakers in this format with an eye on the future.

Enter Manav Suthar and Harsh Dubey. Both are 23-year-old left-arm spinners with a burgeoning body of work in domestic cricket behind them, but bring different attributes to the Test team. In Manav's case, a call-up at the highest level



In focus: Manav and Harsh have a burgeoning body of work in domestic cricket. FILE PHOTOS: K. MURALI KUMAR & R.V. MOORTHY

has been on the horizon ever since he became a regular in the India-A set-up in 2024.

It is learnt that the decision-makers have been particularly impressed with Manav's propensity to pick wickets on placid pitches. Loop, bounce and the ability to impart many revolutions on the ball are his defining characteristics as a bowler.

According to Rajasthan coach Anshu Jain, Manav belongs to the classical mould of left-arm spinners. "He can spin the ball in any conditions. That is

his X-factor. His stock ball is very strong. He also has a good arm ball. He has the qualities of a complete left-arm spinner," Jain told *The Hindu*.

Harsh, meanwhile, grabbed attention by scalping 69 wickets in the 2024-25 Ranji Trophy season for champion Vidarbha. His primary virtue is accuracy, and he lends all-round balance with his run-making capacity.

Regardless of who gets the nod among these two come Saturday, India's search for a long-term successor to Jadeja has begun.

IN BRIEF



Leclerc signs new multiyear deal with Ferrari

Charles Leclerc has signed a new contract with Ferrari "for the coming seasons," the Formula 1 team announced on Wednesday. The 28-year-old Leclerc has driven for Ferrari since 2019, having joined its academy in 2016. Only Michael Schumacher has had more F1 races for Ferrari than Leclerc, who also ranks second for most pole positions for the team. He is yet to win a drivers' title, though.



Silva to leave Fulham amid Benfica interest

Fulham coach Marco Silva is leaving the Premier League club after five years in charge, the sides confirmed on Tuesday. The Lisbon native is reportedly a target for Portuguese giant Benfica as a replacement for Jose Mourinho, who it is widely speculated is about to return to Real Madrid. "Fulham and Marco were an excellent fit for five seasons, but change is inevitable in this game, and we've accordingly prepared for this moment," said owner Shahid Khan, adding that the club was an "extraordinarily attractive destination for an incoming head coach."

UEFA removes Turan Tovuz from Conference League

UEFA removed Azerbaijani club Turan Tovuz from next season's Conference League because of past match-fixing by players, the European football body said on Wednesday. The club said in a statement it will challenge the decision at the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). Entry rules for the Conference League require clubs "not have been directly and/or indirectly involved" in fixing domestic or international games in the previous 10 years. Seven Turan players were banned in 2019 by the Azerbaijani federation, the club acknowledged in a statement.



Abhinandh and Hansini clinch under-19 TT titles

P.B. Abhinandh defeated Pei-You Huang of Taiwan 11-4, 13-11, 11-6 in the boys' under-19 final of the WTT Youth Contender Sandefjord, Norway, on Tuesday. In the girls' under-19 title clash, M. Hansini scripted an 11-8, 11-5, 11-3 win over Tushti Sood.

Ministry initiates process for formation of NST

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The Sports Ministry on Wednesday initiated the process of constituting the National Sports Tribunal (NST) for adjudication and resolution of sporting disputes by inviting applications for two vacancies, setting June 18 as the deadline for submission. Applications have been invited for membership to the Tribunal, which would be headquartered herein the national capital.

Ayush advances; Satwik & Chirag withdraw

Press Trust of India
JAKARTA

Ayush Shetty scored an 8-21, 22-20, 21-15 win over World No. 15 Hong Yang Weng of China and advanced to the pre-quarterfinals, while the men's doubles pair of R. Satwiksairaj and Chirag Shetty retired midway through the first-round match at the Indonesia Open badminton here on Wednesday. In men's singles, Ireland's Nhat Nguyen put it across H.S. Prannoy 21-17, 16-21, 21-19.

Capsey, Knight floor India as England wins T20 International series

A 137-run stand from just 76 balls for the fourth wicket between the two powers the host to its second highest run-chase in the shortest format

INDIA IN ENGLAND

Press Trust of India
TAUNTON

Alice Capsey's fiery 82 and Heather Knight's composed unbeaten 70 powered England to a series-clinching six-wicket victory over India in the third and final Women's T20I here.

England won the series 2-1, also giving India some points to ponder ahead of the Women's T20 World Cup where Harmanpreet Kaur and Co. will face Pakistan in their tournament opener in Birmingham on June 14.

England did the immediate task of scaling down 181 by reaching 184 for four in 18.3 overs.

It was its second highest run-chase in the shortest format, built around a 137-run alliance from just 76 balls for the fourth wicket between Capsey and Knight.

Turbulent start

But the beginning of that trip was full of turbulence as England lost openers Sophia Dunkley, Danny Wyatt-Hodge and Amy



Breakthrough: Arundhati picked up an early wicket but it was not enough to stop England. BCCI.

Jones within the Power Play for a mere 38 on the board.

Pacer Kranti Goud, who has been recalled to the side, did the early damage, jettisoning Hodge and Jones. Hodge's dismissal came through a lovely delivery that nipped back to rattle her stumps.

But England found stability as Capsey, who

struck nine fours and three sixes in her 43-ball innings, and Knight, whose 42-ball innings featured 10 fours, blunted Indian bowlers.

Both Capsey and Knight needed a confidence-boost after recent failures, and they did it on a must-win occasion.

The duo relied on exquisite timing and placement to ward off Indian pacers

and spinners alike. Capsey raced to her fifty in 27 balls, while Knight was tad more sedate off 31 balls.

Raising the tempo

After reaching her fifty, Capsey raised the tempo of her knock, punishing left-arm spinner Sree Charani for 4, 6, 6. Knight, on the other hand, was not hesitant to put on display her



Capsey won the Player-of-the-Match and Player-of-the-Series honours. @ENGLANDCRICKET

innovative powers through reverse sweeps or upper cuts. Capsey fell to pacer Arundhati Reddy but by then England needed just six runs to win with plenty of balls in store.

Earlier, skipper Harmanpreet Kaur overcame a slow start to make a 40-ball 56 and received plenty of support from seasoned Deepti Sharma (32, 24b) as

the tourists reached 180 for five.

The scores: India 180/5 in 20 overs (Yastika Bhatia 32, Harmanpreet Kaur 56 n.o., Deepti Sharma 32; Lauren Bell 2/36) lost to England 184/4 in 18.3 overs (Alice Capsey 82, Heather Knight 70 n.o.; Arundhati Reddy 2/31, Kranti Gaud 2/40).

Toss: England.

England won by six wickets to clinch the series 2-1.

McCullum's England has a point to prove as it faces the visiting New Zealand

CRICKET

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

England will have a chance to prove it has learned from its Ashes drubbing when it faces New Zealand in the first Test of its home season at Lord's on Thursday.

The tourists were swept aside 1-4 in Australia in a series that ended in January, sparking renewed criticism of Brendon McCullum's men over their ultra-aggressive "Bazball" style of cricket.

Attacking cricket has been the hallmark of McCullum's four years as England coach, starting with a thrilling series win over New Zealand in 2022.

But it has failed to deliver series wins against either Australia or India and McCullum accepts England must display greater cricket intelligence if it is to improve. "We still want to be recognisable from the past," he told reporters at Lord's on Tuesday, two days before the start of a three-Test series.



Fingers crossed: England is confident Bethell will be fit to bat following a finger injury suffered on IPL duty. REUTERS

"We just want to hopefully be a cricket team which has evolved somewhat."

Fresh team

England has freshened up its team, dropping underperforming opening batter Zak Crawley and replacing him with debutant Emilio Gay.

The home side is also set to recall off-spinner Shoaib Bashir for his first Test in nearly a year after he saw

off competition from leg-spinning all-rounder Rehan Ahmed. England is confident Jacob Bethell, one of its few successes in Australia, will be fit to bat following a finger injury suffered on IPL duty, but will be without fast bowler Jofra Archer because of his commitments in the franchise competition.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson expects a strong challenge from England in the 150th Test at

Lord's - the most staged by any ground in the world.

"They've got a hell of a lot of experience and a number of world-class players that have done it for a long time," said the veteran batter.

Henry boost

Matt Henry could be fit to bolster an impressive seam attack after the pacer missed last week's innings victory over Ireland through injury.

Gurvindervir to lead team at Asian Relays

ATHLETICS

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

National record holder in men's 100m, Gurvindervir Singh, will lead a 29-member strong Indian contingent at the second Asian Relays Championships, to be held in the Chinese city of Shangyu on June 20 and 21.

The Indian contingent, selected by the Athletics Federation of India will compete in all six events - men's, women's and mixed 4x100m and 4x400m - in China, said AFI president Bahadur Singh.

The third edition of the Asian Relays Championships will be held in Chandigarh.

The continental competition was recently allotted to India at the Asian Athletics Association Council Meeting held in Hong Kong.

The Indian teams: Men: 4x400m and mixed 4x400m



Gurvindervir. X@AFINDIA

relay: Theerthesh P. Shetty, Avinash Kumar, Setu Mishra, Nihal William, S. Santhosh, Rince Joseph, Suraj Alagar Raja, Mohit Kumar, Barath Sridhar.

4x100m and mixed 4x100m relay: Animesh Kujur, Gurvindervir Singh, Harsh Santosh Raut, Pranav Pramod Gaurav, Ragul Kumar Ganes Kumar, Senthil Kumar Tamilarasu.

Women: 4x400m and mixed 4x400m relay: Rashdeep Kaur, Poovamma MR, Ansa Babu, Vijaykumari GK, Saloni Nagar, Neeru Pathak, Subha V, Gowrinandana.

4x100m and mixed 4x100m relay: Nithya Gande, Tamanna, Sneha S.S., Sudeshna Shivankar, Abinaya Rajarajan.

Indian teams swamp opposition in final pool games

HOCKEY

Press Trust of India
KAKAMIGAHARA (JAPAN)

The men's hockey team produced a clinical display, thrashing Taiwan 13-1 in its last Pool A match at the U-18 Asia Cup 2026 here on Wednesday to set up a blockbuster semifinal against Pakistan on Friday.

India ended its pool engagements with wins against Kazakhstan, Korea and Taiwan, while losing to host Japan for nine points from four matches.

Ashish Tani Puri emerged as the standout performer with a hat-trick while Gaze Khan, Siddharth Ben and Rahul Yadav



Goal-glut: While the Indian men slammed 13 goals past Taiwan, the women were ruthless in blanking Singapore 25-0. X@THEHOCKEYINDIA

scored a brace each.

On Tuesday the women's team, already through to the semifinals, produced a sensational display of attack to thrash Singapore 25-0 in its final Pool A match. The emphatic victory ensured India topped the pool stage with an all-

win record.

India's attacking depth was on full display as 10 different players registered their names on the scoresheet, led by Nousheen Naz, who struck seven goals. Geethasri Nammi, who was named 'Player of the Match', hit five goals,



while captain Sweety Kujur contributed four and Priyanka Minz scored a hat-trick.

The results: Men: India 13 (Karan Gautam 7, Premchand Soy 11, Ketan Kushwaha 13, Rahul Yadav 20, 54, Ashish Tani Puri 27, 35, 42, Siddharth Ben 30, 52, Gaze Khan 40, 44, Varinder

Singh 50) bt Taiwan 1 (Yong-Jyun Jhang 30).

Women: India 25 (Sweety Kujur 2, 24, 38, 45, Nousheen Naz 8, 13, 17, 18, 40, 52, 58, Geethasri Nammi 13, 28, 47, 48, 60, Priyanka Minz 22, 37, 53, Diya 27, Nancy Saroha 36, Shrutu Kumari 40, Pushpa Manjhi 47, Rashmeen Kaur 47, Sandeepa Kumari 51) bt Singapore 0.

I'm probably too much in the present to think about the future

Jones says that taking things as they come has helped her survive elite hockey for 15 years; she feels that the journey at Loughborough University shaped her into the professional she is today



INTERVIEW

Sarah Jones

Anirudh Velamuri

Supporting careers never happen in isolation. More so when they happen in blooming ecosystems riddled with developmental challenges of diverse kinds. Wales veteran Sarah Jones can attest to this.

A football nut in her formative years, her journey with the sport abruptly ended when opportunities to formally play alongside the boys dried up. It sent her in hockey's direction.

The rest is history. Jones was a mainstay for Great Britain on the global stage until her GBr retirement in 2024, was part of the bronze medal-winning outfit at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 and earned her 200th international cap during the FIH Women's World Cup Qualifiers in Hyderabad, becoming only the second Welsh player to reach the milestone.

The 35-year-old, in a conversation with *The Hindu*, spoke about early pathways for girls in sport, how university life shaped her professional career and how she's using her experience in hockey to make an impact in other disciplines. *Excerpts:*

What do you remember of your international debut way back in 2011?

Gosh, it feels like a lifetime ago. It was in a place called Largs in Scotland, and it feels like a world away from the hockey that we play and see now. Neither me nor the girls had ever played in India before. The game is in an interesting place. The sport has moved to a place that is filled with a passion so integral to a country's make-up and personality.

When you burst onto the scene, you would've had a checklist of things you might have wanted to achieve. What have you managed to tick off? What's left?

I was too naive back in the day to have a checklist as such. I knew I wanted to participate in the Commonwealth Games, but I unfortunately missed out on Delhi 2010. I'm not sure I quite believed that I could go to the Olympics, but that eventually happened.

I just love hockey and I love playing. Every time I get to play a hockey game for Wales, every time I represent my country, it feels like a privilege. I am probably too much in the present to think about the future, which is why

I'm playing 15 years on.

What drew you to hockey in the first place? In Wales and England, kids that age tend to gravitate towards football or rugby...

I did play football when I was younger and I loved it. But it was mainly a boys' game back then. When I started secondary school, I was introduced to hockey, and I loved how fast and intense it was. That was it. I love that you have to be switched on at every moment. The breaks in play are so short, even for the stoppages in time. There are few sports like that where it's so go, go, go all the time.

Even though my legs are getting older and I'm not sure how long I can keep up with all the young ones out there, it keeps me in the game.

Were you a midfielder in football?

Yes. I always say that if you can't be good enough at scoring goals and you can't be good enough at defending goals, you're probably somewhere in between (laughs).

You became the first Welsh outfielder to play hockey for Great Britain...

It's probably the thing that I feel most proud of in my hockey career... to show others that this is what they're capable of doing. I hope me being around even now provides some inspiration to the players... to show them that the path is very much there for them.

What changes in the sport, besides the big rules and regulations kind, have made a big difference?

Probably, the biggest thing is about the pace of the game. The fact that you can make on-off subs through the game... having the self-pass rule that was introduced in 2012 has meant that the game is just so much faster. The astroturf also contributes to that. When you watch hockey being played with the offside rule on grass 20 years ago, with the same II on the pitch, it's a very different game to now.

The game does have to continue to evolve in order to keep interest in comparison to other sports. Having said that, keeping it as a 11-a-side game is important because it makes things interesting.

Have you come across purists of the sport with whom you might have

had to defend the current version of hockey?

Whenever a rule comes in, there is always some apprehension about it. The aerial rule and the way it changes all the time is probably a good example of that. Understanding where we want the game to go and also understanding that sometimes something might not work is important. The safety aspect is there, too.

In rugby, for example, they've looked at the tackle height to ensure that the game is safe. To get people into the game we love, we want it to be safe, and we want to show that it's safe. So, no, I haven't come across too many people who haven't understood that they want the game to move on. Hopefully, when I look back in 50 years, I'll recognise the game for what it is too.

Is there any discarded rule that you want to revive?

I'm not sure I would. I would change the aerial rule, but who wouldn't? I think the men's game and women's game are officiated slightly differently. The aerial rule is umpired more freely in the men's game. It's more fluid in the women's game, and I would want to move it closer to how it is in men's.

What goes through a player's mind when he or she gets picked for the Olympics?

We had four first cappers for the opening game against Scotland (in the recent World Cup Qualifiers in Hyderabad). The one thing I said was, 'when we sing the national anthem, take a moment to appreciate the magnitude of getting the first cap for your country'. Thinking

about my opening game at the Olympics or my first Welsh cap or my first Commonwealth Games or anything like that, I was so wrapped up in the moment of the game. I was thinking about what was going to happen that maybe I didn't want... you don't take it all in. It's easy for these moments to pass by you.

What is your best achievement so far?

Bronze medal at the Tokyo Olympics. It is hard to argue that there might be better ones.

But if you have to put that aside, what would you pick?

Beating India at the Commonwealth Games in 2018. The tangible stuff like the medals are great. But it's the memories and the people who you meet that are the things which stay in your heart.

You are an alum of Loughborough University. How did the period there impact your sporting journey?

I went to Loughborough not knowing that it was an incredible sporting university. There, the person who became one of my best friends, who was next door to me in university halls, said, "Do you want to go to hockey trials?" I immediately agreed. I eventually got into Loughborough's third team.

I didn't really know what that meant. There were five hockey teams just for the university. That's when I first thought, "OK, so if I'm in the threes, if I work hard enough, I can surely get to the twos and then maybe to the ones." I watched the women's ones team play for the first time. I think it was the first time I saw something and thought, "I want to be that." I eventually played for the ones and then broke into the Wales team after graduation. If I hadn't gone to Loughborough, I wouldn't have fallen in love with hockey.

Hailing from Wales, which football team do you support?

I moved around a lot and I never really had a true base. But I'm moving back to Cardiff very soon, which is my childhood home. So I think I'll be supporting Cardiff City. I supported Chelsea [while growing up] a little bit, but I'm always reticent to say that because people don't like Chelsea. Gianfranco Zola was particularly incredible.

You are now involved in weightlifting and fencing. How did that happen?

I was fortunate to represent Great Britain and be funded by National Lottery and UK Sport for eight years. When I retired from Great Britain post the Paris Olympics, I knew I wanted to do something in sport. A role came up within fencing as head of talent. It's an individual, combat sport, something very different from the environment I am used to, but it's a great opportunity to find similarities and differences and figure how I can develop the sport of fencing.

You always say that hockey is an inclusive sport. Why so?

It is inclusive in the UK for gay women but not so much for other members of the LGBTQ community.

All the teammates I've had over the years, or people I've played against, have accepted me and loved me for the person and player I am. I am grateful for that, whilst also recognising that not all members of the LGBTQ community feel the same.

Did the young Sarah growing up have any apprehension about coming out at any point?

To be honest, it's an everyday thing. While it gradually gets easier, there are always moments when you think you've gotten to an end. Those challenges will continue to exist for probably the rest of my life. But again, as long as it becomes a little bit easier for me and the others who follow, it's a good direction to be heading in.

What do you do to wind down?

I love gardening. I love using my hands in the soil and seeing things start really small and grow. I have a dog, a Vizsla called Nala. I love walking her and spending time with her. I enjoy spending time with family and friends and having a laugh.

Are there any quirks about yourself that the world doesn't know?

The gardening one is a bit odd. I think I've hit that about 50 years too early. That's really a retirement thing. But it makes me feel very grounded.

If you could tell something to your younger self, what would you say?

I'd say, I know this is really difficult to believe, but in 25 years, women's sport will look a lot different than it does now. You won't have to play with the boys to play a sport. Don't think that you're weird just for wanting to be outside and playing. Keep trying because one day, you might go on to do wonderful things.

