



Chennai » Coimbatore » Bengaluru » Hyderabad » Madurai » Noida » Visakhapatnam » Thiruvananthapuram » Kochi » Vijayawada » Mangaluru » Tiruchirappalli » Kolkata » Hubballi » Mohali » Malappuram » Mumbai » Lucknow » Cuttack » Patna



TREASURY UNDER STRAIN
Kerala CM tables White Paper on State finances
STATES » PAGE 3

SC SEEKS FEEDBACK
Draft rules bar AI use for judicial outcomes
NEWS » PAGE 6




FALLOUT WITH CONGRESS
DMK to skip June 8 INDIA bloc meeting
NEWS » PAGE 5

TRILLION-DOLLAR QUESTION
Funding India's climate future
A compilation of articles curated to mark World Environment Day
EDITORIAL & OPINION » PAGES 8 & 9



FRENCH OPEN
Andreva to take on Chwalinska in final
SPORT » PAGE 16

INSIDE



India, Venezuela plan long-term energy tie-up

NEW DELHI
India and Venezuela on Thursday vowed to set up a long-term energy partnership building on their complementarities as PM Narendra Modi held talks with Venezuelan Acting President Delcy Rodriguez on ramping up economic ties. » PAGE 4



Overnight strikes leave nine dead in Gaza: hospital

DEIR AL-BALAH
Israeli strikes in Gaza killed at least nine Palestinians overnight, a hospital said on Thursday, even as the world's attention was on the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon. » PAGE 14

Rahul is 'selling panic', promoting conspiracies: BJP

NEW DELHI
The BJP on Thursday accused Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi of "selling panic" and promoting conspiracy theories about Indian institutions, in response to his remarks on Wednesday that PM Narendra Modi would not remain in office a year from now. » PAGE 5

5 killed, several injured in Bihar hospital fire

Fire broke out at the ICU of a private hospital in Muzaffarpur in the early hours; several critical

Bihar govt. forms a five-member panel to probe incident, announces ₹4 lakh ex gratia to families

Fire personnel rescue 15 patients from hospital; short-circuit in equipment suspected cause: DM

Amarnath Tewary
PATNA

At least five patients died in a fire which broke out at the intensive care unit (ICU) of a private hospital in Muzaffarpur, north Bihar, in the early hours of Thursday. Several injured have been admitted in nearby hospitals and are said to be in a critical condition. The Bihar government constituted a five-member committee to probe the incident and announced ₹4 lakh ex gratia to the family members of the deceased. The blaze, which was reported to the fire department at 3:55 a.m., broke out on the fifth floor of Prasad Hospital, which lies under the jurisdiction of

Brahmpura police station in Muzaffarpur town. There were 24 patients admitted in the hospital at the time of the fire, including 13 to 15 people in the ICU, Muzaffarpur District Magistrate Subrat Kumar Sen said. All those who died were in the ICU. "Five people died in the incident and many others were injured, who are currently undergoing treatment at different hospitals nearby," Muzaffarpur Municipal Commissioner Rituraj Singh told journalists. Four of the deceased have been identified as Krishnandan Prasad Singh, 76, Geeta Devi, 63, and Shashank, 30, all from Muzaffarpur district; and Uday Kumar, 57, from



Disaster aftermath: People carry the body of a victim after fire broke out in the ICU of a private hospital in Muzaffarpur, Bihar, on Thursday. PTI

neighbouring Sheohar district. Fire and rescue personnel rescued around 15 patients, said fire official Ram Niwas Pandey.

The State's Director General of Home Guard and Fire Services, Shobha Ohtaker, later told reporters that the "firemen did their work commendably

in rescuing people from the heavily smoke- and heat-filled hospital." The District Magistrate said that "prima facie it appeared that a short-circuit

in the equipment and air-conditioners installed at the ICU" might have sparked the blaze. "We've recorded statements from the family members of patients," Mr. Sen added. Relatives of those admitted in the hospital later protested against hospital authorities saying they could not locate their family members and creating pandemonium within the hospital premises.

Earlier, Bihar Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary described the incident as "extremely tragic" and offered his "deepest condolences to the bereaved families". He added: "Instructions have been issued to provide an immediate ex gratia of ₹4 lakh each to the families of the deceased." Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Kumar Choudhary, BJP president Nitin Nabin, and Bihar Health Minister Nishant Kumar were among the others who expressed their grief, wished for the speedy recovery of the injured, and assured victims that "appropriate action would be taken against those found guilty in the Muzaffarpur fire incident, after the probe".

Ex gratia of ₹4 lakh
"After getting complaints from the family members of those who died or were injured in the incident, action will be taken against those found guilty of negligence," said Senior Superintendent of Police Kankeya Kumar Mishra.

Generation next



Unmatched focus: With another IPL season coming to a close, the players of the future perform their cricketing drills on Thursday at Shivaji Park in Mumbai, with the zeal that typifies their home. EMMANUAL YOGINI

Centre's investment body flagged Nicobar port as lacking in 'strategic goals'

EXCLUSIVE

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The Public Investment Board (PIB), a Finance Ministry body that appraises large public investments, had on August 2024 termed the proposed International Container Transshipment Port (ICTP) at Galathea Bay in Great Nicobar Island as lacking in "strategic objectives". Following the August meeting, it had advised the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) to include a strategic case in its proposal. A little over a year later, the same project was formally notified as a "strategic project" by the Ministry of Defence, according to records of a March 2026 meeting viewed by *The Hindu*.

The "strategic" nature of the proposed ₹81,000-crore Great Nicobar Project, which consists of the ICTP, a township, airport, a gas-powered power plant, and a tourism zone, has been the Centre's excuse, since at least 2022, for not making public the contents of a report by a High Powered Committee (HPC) on the cumulative environmental impact of the project.

It has also denied Right To Information requests on environmental clearances for the project on the same grounds.

The PIB's view surfaces in records of meetings held on March 17 and 19, 2026, by another Finance Ministry body – the Public-Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC) – tasked with vetting project proposals worth ₹500 crore and above involving a partnership with private players.

The Hindu has viewed

The Nicobar question

The "strategic" nature of the project has been the Centre's excuse for not making public the contents of a report by a High Powered Committee on the environmental impact of the project

The Public Investment Board, a Finance Ministry body, termed the port-component of the Nicobar project as "lacking strategic objectives" in August 2024

A year later, the Ministry of Defence labels it as a "strategic project"



In the last year or so, the ₹81,000-crore project is being cast in a maritime security lens, centred around the threat from China

the PPPAC meeting records and reached out to the Finance Ministry for comment, but has not received one till press time.

The proposal, sponsored by the MoPSW with the Kamarajar Port Limited (KPL) in Chennai as the implementing agency, sought PPPAC clearance to build the port in two phases and, crucially, approval for ₹12,230 crore as Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to make the commercially marginal project bankable. VGF is a one-time grant given to support infrastructure projects that are economically justified but fall short of commercial (financial) viability.

Shift in narrative

The PPPAC cleared the proposal "unanimously" though it refused the VGF, recommending instead that the MoPSW use its internal budget for the same.

Earlier this week, Congress MP Jairam Ramesh wrote to Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav that "...the narrative on the Great Nicobar Island Project has suddenly shifted... faced with incontrovertible evidence of its hugely adverse ecological impacts, the Union Government is now emphasizing its supposed strategic rationale."

He added that "...the Great Nicobar Island Project as presently conceived is overwhelmingly a com-

mercial enterprise". "Until the environment clearance [accorded in November 2022] there was no real reference by the Government of it being a strategic project... and even then it was only the airport [with civilian and military use]," researcher and author Pankaj Sekhsaria, who has extensively documented the project's environmental threat, told *The Hindu*.

The ICTP is a significant component of the much bigger Great Nicobar Island Development Project and is a Ministry of Home Affairs initiative, with the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Limited (ANIIDCO) as the proponent of the overall project and holder of environmental clearance.

The 2021 documents that conceived the Great Nicobar programme and the January 2023 Expression of Interest for the port described it as a means of capturing transshipment cargo currently routed through Colombo, Singapore, and Port Klang, with the government estimating annual foreign exchange savings of about \$200 million, cumulatively reaching around \$1 billion by 2047.

In the last year or so, the project has volubly been cast in a maritime security lens, centred around the threat from China.

Monsoon sets in over Kerala three days late amid concerns over El Niño impact

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

The southwest monsoon set in over Kerala on Thursday, the India Meteorological Department announced. The monsoon has arrived three days later than the normal onset date of June 1 and five days behind the date forecast by the department.

On May 15, the IMD forecast that the monsoon would arrive over Kerala on May 26, with a model error of plus or minus four days. The onset on June 4 overshot even the upper bound of that window (May 30) of five days.

The IMD said conditions were "favourable for further advance of southwest monsoon into some more parts of central Arabian Sea, entire Goa, some parts of Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, some more parts of Karnataka, remaining parts of Tamil Na-



Motorists ride in the rain at a locality decked up with FIFA World Cup posters in Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

du" and much of the Bay of Bengal "during next two to three days."

The monsoon's arrival comes under the shadow of a strengthening El Niño.

The World Meteorological Organisation now puts the chance of El Niño conditions developing at about 80% for July and August, the core of the monsoon and the months that matter most for kharif sowing. The IMD has already pegged the season at a be-

low-normal 90% of the long-period average.

A poor monsoon would tighten reservoir discharge, slow groundwater recharge, and strain farm sector, where over half the cropped area is rain-fed.

Convective cloudiness

The department declared the onset only after its formal criteria were met. Convective cloudiness over the southeast Arabian Sea had increased over the preced-

ing two days; westerly winds extended up to 4.5 km above mean sea level, blowing at 20-25 knots in the lower levels; and Kerala had recorded widespread rainfall, with isolated heavy falls, over the same period.

The IMD's threshold requires that, after May 10, at least 60% of 14 designated stations across Kerala and the adjoining coast report 2.5 mm or more of rain on two consecutive days, alongside the wind-depth and cloudiness conditions – a set of tests designed to rule out a false, pre-monsoon onset.

It is the first time since 2015 that the department has missed its onset call beyond the error margin. Meteorologists caution against reading too much into the late start. The onset date, they note, historically has little bearing on how much rain the season ultimately delivers.

Lebanon and Israel agree to conditional ceasefire

Agence France-Presse
BEIRUT

Israel and Lebanon agreed on Wednesday to implement a ceasefire but said it would require a "complete cessation" of fire by Iran-backed Hezbollah, according to a joint statement after U.S.-led talks in Washington.

The two sides, which do not have formal diplomatic relations, also agreed to create "pilot zones" in which the Lebanese armed forces "will take exclusive control of the territory to the exclusion of all non-state actors".

The statement said the ceasefire was "contingent on a complete cessation" of fire by Hezbollah and evacuation of its operatives from southern Lebanon.

HEZBOLLAH REJECTS TRUCE
» PAGE 14

IN BRIEF



Cockroach Party's rise reflects people's frustration: Hooda

Former Haryana Chief Minister and senior Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda on Thursday said the rise of the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) reflected widespread frustration with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led Central government's failures, particularly on the issue of unemployment. The Congress, he said, had been consistently raising people-centric issues in its role as the main Opposition and would continue to do so, while the CJP was in its formative stage. "What the CJP truly stands for, what kind of leadership eventually emerges from its ranks — all of this remains to be seen," Mr. Hooda said.

Gujarat Police detain 501 Bangladesh nationals

The Gujarat Police have detained 501 undocumented Bangladeshi nationals from various parts of the State over the last two days as part of "Operation Delta Hunt", a State-wide drive against illegal immigration, Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister Harsh Sanghavi said on Thursday. The operation began late on Tuesday night. Authorities are simultaneously scrutinising the credentials and backgrounds of more than 6,200 others as part of the ongoing exercise. According to the Minister, a majority of those who have been detained were engaged in manual labour.

Executive council of Bhopal's Barkatullah varsity decides to rename institution, sparks row

Mehul Malpani
BHOPAL

The executive council of Bhopal's Barkatullah University has passed a resolution to change the name of the government-run institution to 'Vagdevi Bhojpal University', prompting sharp reactions from the Opposition parties in Madhya Pradesh.

On Wednesday, the executive council passed a resolution to rename the university, honouring goddess Saraswati, who is also known as Vagdevi, and the city's ancient name Bhojpal, which was kept after the Parmar dynasty ruler Raja Bhoj, Vice-Chancellor Suresh Kumar Jain told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Jain said the resolution was passed unanimously by the council and



The new name proposed is Vagdevi Bhojpal University.

has been sent to the office of Governor Mangubhai Patel, who is also the Chancellor, for its nod.

The institution, established in 1970 and originally called Bhopal University, was named after Mohamed Barkatullah Bhopali, a freedom fighter and scholar, in 1988 during the Congress government of then Chief Minister Arjun Singh.

Govt. has turned Northeast from region of conflict to hub of opportunities: Shah

Union Home Minister addresses 73rd plenary session of North Eastern Council in Shillong, urges CMs to shift focus from law and order to shielding citizens' rights as insurgency no longer an issue

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday said the Narendra Modi-led government at the Centre transformed the Northeast, comprising eight States, from a region of conflicts into a "hotspot" of opportunities.

Addressing the 73rd plenary session of the North Eastern Council (NEC) in Meghalaya's capital, Shillong, he said that opportunities in the region surfaced after the Modi government ended the era of violence associated with secessionist activities.

Mr. Shah said the NEC was fulfilling the people's aspirations and promoting culture while serving as an institution for strategic planning to develop the landlocked region.

He urged the Chief Ministers of the region, scheduled to review India-Bangladesh border security in Tripura on Friday, to shift their focus from law and order to shielding the rights



Home Minister Amit Shah, Union Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and Meghalaya CM Conrad K. Sangma during the 73rd plenary session of the North Eastern Council in Shillong on Thursday. ANI

of the citizens as insurgency is no longer an issue.

Mr. Shah directed the States to build Artificial Intelligence, machine learning, and blockchain infrastructure for new generations. He also instructed them to market the region's potential in aromatic oil-yielding agarwood, foreign trade, and health tourism.

The Chief Ministers of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, and Tripura attended the ses-

sion along with the Department of North Eastern Region Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia and other senior officials.

Five missions for region

Mr. Scindia outlined five missions for the region - high-resolution village resource mapping; monitoring of wetlands, forests, rivers and landscapes; support for geospatial and space-tech start-ups; NER- Shield for disaster resilience and early warning; and green wealth and natu-

ral capital accounting.

Later, in a memorandum submitted to Mr. Shah, Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma highlighted key concerns. He urged the Centre to strengthen mechanisms for checking illegal immigration.

"We suggested that measures such as the Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act and the Inner Line Permit (a British-era temporary travel document), for which the State Assembly passed resolutions, could serve as viable mechanisms to regulate and check illegal immigration," he said.

Mr. Sangma also sought the inclusion of Khasi and Garo languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution.

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said the NEC session reflected the ambitions of a confident region. "...the focus is now on preparing the Northeast for the opportunities of the future," he said.

Mahayuti all set to win six Council seats unopposed as Oppn. nominees opt out

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Six candidates of the ruling Mahayuti alliance are set to win the upcoming Maharashtra Legislative Council poll unopposed after rival candidates of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) withdrew their nominations on Thursday, the last day for opting out of the fray.

Election to 17 Council seats, for which members of local self-government bodies form the electorate, is scheduled for June 18, with counting on June 22.

The Mahayuti - comprising the BJP, Shiv Sena and NCP - are set to win Pune, Thane, Wardha, Yavatmal, Solapur, and Ratnagiri seats unopposed, dealing a blow to the Opposition MVA, which includes the Congress, Shiv Sena (UBT), and NCP (SP).

Earlier in the day, Shiv Sena (UBT) candidate for



NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar informed me that Deputy Chief Minister and NCP president Sunetra Pawar requested him that I withdraw my candidature. He then left the decision to me

SHRIKANT PATIL
NCP (SP) nominee for Pune seat

the Ratnagiri seat Bal Mane arrived at the District Collector's office with Minister Nitesh Rane to withdraw his nomination. "He has served as MLA and made the decision as per his will. He knows the work the Mahayuti is doing in the region," Mr. Rane said.

NCP candidate Aniket Tatkare is now expected to be elected from the seat. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader

Vinayak Raut alleged that horse-trading was behind the move. Party MP Sanjay Raut said on X that Mr. Mane has been expelled from the Shiv Sena (UBT) for "anti-party activities".

'Insufficient votes'

In Solapur, the Congress candidate's nomination was cancelled citing technical issues, paving the way for BJP's Rajendra Raut to win the seat unopposed. In Yavatmal, Congress's Sahebrao Kamble withdrew his candidature, saying he lacked the required votes to be elected.

NCP candidate Vikram Kakade is set to be elected unopposed from Pune after NCP (SP) nominee Shrikant Patil withdrew his nomination. "NCP (SP) chief Sharad Pawar informed me that Deputy CM and NCP president Sunetra Pawar requested him that I withdraw my candidature.

SC pulls up Gujarat Police over delay in land fraud probe

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

Pulling up the Gujarat Police for failing to file a chargesheet in a two-decade-old criminal complaint involving allegations of forgery and manipulation of revenue records, the Supreme Court on Thursday observed that constitutional courts cannot remain "mute spectators" to such prolonged investigations and must step in to provide relief. The court directed the Gujarat Police to complete the investigation within six weeks.

A Bench of Justices Sanjay Karol and Augustine George Masih observed that the "inordinate delay" in the investigation exemplified the maxim that justice delayed is justice denied.

"The right to a speedy trial is intrinsically linked to Article 21 of the Constitution. In the present factual matrix, nearly two decades have passed since the initiation of the complaint by the original complainant. However, it is a matter of serious concern that despite the lapse of such an inordinate period of time, the investigation is yet to reach any meaning-

The right to a speedy trial is intrinsically linked to Article 21 of the Constitution, says Bench

ful conclusion," the Bench said.

Forged documents

The top court was hearing an appeal filed by a man whose father had lodged a criminal complaint alleging that four individuals forged his signature and executed fabricated property documents while he was away on a Haj pilgrimage in 2002. According to the complaint, the forged documents were later used to secure entries in the revenue records.

The top court expressed serious reservations about the High Court's failure to intervene despite the complainant having to "run from pillar to post" for the filing of a chargesheet. It also castigated the Gujarat Police for losing vital case records, observing that the missing evidence had effectively stalled the probe.

The court listed the matter for hearing next on July 14 to review compliance with its directions.

No resignation letter from Annamalai: T.N. BJP chief

The Hindu Bureau
TIRUNELVELI

Days after former BJP State president K. Annamalai met the party's national leadership to convey his decision to exit the party, BJP Tamil Nadu president Nainar Nagenthran on Thursday said he had not received any resignation letter from Mr. Annamalai. When asked about reports that Mr. Annamalai would soon float a political outfit after resigning from the BJP, Mr. Nagenthran said at his residence in Palayamkottai that the former BJP State president had not [publicly] said anything in this connection.

"Mr. Annamalai, who is still discussing personal and familial matters with me, has not said anything about quitting the BJP," Mr. Nagenthran said.

Man turns tragic loss into mission to help students live their dreams

Satyasundar Barik
BHUBANESWAR

When 65-year-old Anil Mahalik, a civil contractor in Odisha, decided to part with his land to support the education of poor children, he was a broken man, grieving the death of his younger son. Two years later, his work has inspired others to join in, particularly well-off and retired individuals, to help rebuild a broken system that has failed to secure the future of students.

So far, at least nine others have come forward to join his mission, each adopting a student and financially supporting their education.

In his years of work as a small-time civil contractor, Mr. Mahalik built a safety net for his family by purchasing small parcels of land whenever he could afford them. But following the loss of his son in 2022, he started to sell those plots



In 2024, Anil Mahalik (centre) supported 10 MBBS students studying in government colleges in Odisha. The number of beneficiaries doubled to 20 in 2025. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

to support underprivileged students pursuing MBBS degrees.

"I lost my younger son in 2022, a bright young man of just 26 in an accident. His death stripped away all my material ambitions. But instead of allowing grief to consume me, I began searching for meaning in the midst of that loss," said Mr. Mahalik.

That search, he added, led him to the doorsteps of promising young minds

with little means to support their dreams of pursuing an MBBS degree. "Today, the interest generated from the sale of my land is dedicated to supporting these students," said Mr. Mahalik.

So far, he has raised around ₹2.90 crore through the sale of land. To institutionalise his efforts, he has set up the Biswa Bhusan Memorial Trust, under whose banner he supports deserving students. He believes the dedicated corpus

is expected to grow to nearly ₹10 crore as he sells his remaining plots.

In 2024, he supported 10 MBBS students studying in government colleges, providing ₹80,000 each, enough to cover their annual food and admission expenses. The following year, the number of beneficiaries doubled to 20. "We are planning to support 30 students this year while increasing the assistance to ₹1 lakh," Mr. Mahalik said.

Common cause

It is no longer a solitary mission as others slowly started joining him in identifying and nurturing deserving candidates. "Identifying the candidates in itself has been quite a journey. I am not very familiar with technology. WhatsApp is the simplest tool I use to build a network of people who can help identify needy students," Mr. Mahalik said. "Once a student

is identified, I carry out due diligence with friends to ensure the assistance reaches those who truly need it."

The list of beneficiaries and their family backgrounds reveal just how critical this support is. Badal Sahu from Pandrasil in Mayurbhanj district lost his father when he was just two. His mother brought up her children by collecting firewood and selling them while his elder sister, who studied only up to Class 12, works at a gas agency and earns less than ₹5,000 a month. "We have supported Badal for the past two years. This is his final year at the State-run Maharaja Krushna Chandra Gajapati Medical College," Mr. Mahalik told *The Hindu*.

"Jasmine Behera, an MBBS student at All India Institute of Medical Sciences, Bhubaneswar, comes from a family of daily wage labourers in Balasore. Then there is Swetalina Sen from

Bhuban in Dhenkanal district. Her father makes tin boxes for a living but his earnings have been irregular following a heart operation. The family survives partly on the 5 kg of rice provided by the government. Swetalina, too, is studying at AIIMS-Bhubaneswar," he added.

"Sangram Rout, a student of SCB Medical College, does not even have a house of his own. The list of students in genuine need is long," Mr. Mahalik said, hoping more people will understand the urgency and enormity of the problem. Each year, the Trust brings these students together on a common platform, allowing them to connect. While the support extended to them is unconditional, Mr. Mahalik gently encourages them to consider careers in government health institutions, where they can serve those who need care the most.

Three returnees from Ebola-hit African areas kept in home isolation

Press Trust of India
DURG

Three persons, who recently returned to Chhattisgarh's Durg district from Ebola virus-affected countries in Africa, have been placed under 21-day home isolation as a precautionary measure, officials said on Thursday.

The three travellers, however, show no symptoms of the disease and have no history of contact with Ebola-infected persons, they said.

Durg Collector Abhijeet Singh said one woman arrived in Durg from the Democratic Republic of Congo on May 31, while two others reached Bhillai on June 2 from Ethiopia and Uganda. Of the three travellers, two are Indian nationals and

one is a Ugandan citizen, he said.

"As none of them have symptoms and there is no history of contact, all three have been placed under home isolation for 21 days. They are currently asymptomatic and in good health," Singh said.

Daily monitoring

Health officials have been monitoring their condition through telephonic follow-up twice a day, Mr. Singh said.

The travellers have been advised to immediately inform the tracing team, health department, control room or the office of the Chief Medical and Health Officer if they experience any discomfort or symptoms during the monitoring period, the Collector said.

IN BRIEF



PIL plea seeks CBI probe into attack on ED officers in Kerala

The Kerala High Court has directed the State government to file an affidavit on the steps taken following an attack on Enforcement Directorate officers after they raided the residence of Leader of the Opposition Pinarayi Vijayan on May 27. A Division Bench of Chief Justice Soumen Sen and Justice Syam Kumar V.M. issued the directive on a public interest litigation (PIL) petition filed by an advocate, seeking a probe by the Central Bureau of Investigation into the attack.

Sudanese national with fever hospitalised in Hyderabad

A Sudanese national who arrived at Hyderabad's Rajiv Gandhi International Airport on Thursday, was isolated and shifted to a hospital after airport health officials detected a fever during thermal screening of international passengers. The development triggered speculation about a possible Ebola case. However, health authorities have clarified that the passenger has not been classified as a suspected Ebola patient and is undergoing precautionary testing.

Four children drown near Ongole in Andhra Pradesh

Four boys, including three siblings, drowned in a pond near Ongole in Andhra Pradesh on Thursday. Their bodies were retrieved by the police and National Disaster Response Force personnel. According to police, the deceased were aged between 10 and 14 years. "Acting on the complaint lodged by the family members, the police launched a search operation... After four hours of search, they retrieved the bodies from the pond," a police officer said.

New vehicle modification report fails to impress Gen Z

Dhinesh Kallungal
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Motor Vehicles department (MVD) has taken the first step towards permitting vehicle modifications sought by motor enthusiasts and vehicle modification agencies in Kerala. The State Transport Commissioner has prepared a report identifying modifications that can be carried out on vehicles. However, the report appears to have disappointed many Gen Z motorists, as most of the modifications listed were already being permitted in the State.

The State government will take a final decision on the matter after examining the report submitted by the Transport Commissioner. The report lists 18 types of modifications, including stickers and ambient lighting, that can be carried out without prior permission, while others can be undertaken only with special permission.

Ahead of the elections, a statement by V.D. Satheesan that vehicle modifications would be permitted had generated considerable excitement among Gen Z motorists on social media. After assuming the office of Chief Minister, Mr. Satheesan reiterated his commitment to keeping his promise.

According to the report, vehicle owners may carry out modifications such as installing seat covers, floor mats, steering wheel covers, chrome garnishes, door visors, mud flaps, non-obscene body decals and stickers, ambient interior lighting and dash cams, among others, without seeking permission from MVD officials.

White Paper puts Kerala's liabilities at ₹5.07 lakh crore

Salaries, pensions, and interest payments consumed 77.6% of revenue receipts in 2025-26; reforms sought in KSEB, KSRTC, and KWA; State faces shortfall of ₹20,500 crore in Central transfers

Tiki Rajwi
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Painting a bleak picture of State finances, a White Paper tabled in the Kerala Legislative Assembly on Thursday by Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan observed that "behind Kerala's social achievements lies a fiscal structure that is under serious and growing strain."

Kerala faces a "large burden" of outstanding liabilities (₹5.07 lakh crore), committed expenditures [77.6% of Total Revenue Receipts (TRR)], and interest payments (20.9% of TRR), the document, 'Kerala's Fiscal Health: A Status Report,' drafted by a committee headed by former Un-



Talking point: The White Paper was tabled in the Kerala Legislative Assembly on Thursday by Chief Minister V.D. Satheesan. ANI

ion Cabinet Secretary K.M. Chandrasekhar, noted.

Mr. Satheesan, who also handles the finance portfolio, said Kerala faces a shortfall of approximately ₹20,500 crore in Central transfers in 2026-27 due to "wild" guesswork made by the previous LDF govern-

ment in the Budget estimates. "The fiscal situation is very vulnerable. Outstanding liabilities amount to 35.5% of the Gross State Domestic Product," the Chief Minister said.

Committed expenditure – salaries and wages, pensions, and interest pay-

ments – consumed 77.6% of the revenue receipts in 2025-26, according to the White Paper. "For every ₹100 Kerala receives in revenue, ₹77 is already committed, leaving only ₹23 for schools, hospitals, roads, welfare, capital investment, and support to local governments," it said.

The White Paper calls for urgent reforms in the Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB), the Kerala State Transport Corporation (KSRTC), and the Kerala Water Authority (KWA).

The State's capital expenditure at 1.3% of the GSDP is "one of the lowest" among Indian States despite running one of the highest fiscal deficits, it said.

Shivakumar keeps Finance portfolio

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Portfolios were allocated for the newly sworn in Ministers of D.K. Shivakumar. Shivakumar, Karnataka Cabinet late on Thursday, after hours of uncertainty, intense negotiations and disgruntlement among some of the Ministers.

Mr. Shivakumar has kept Finance and let go of the most-contested and coveted Bengaluru Development portfolio, which he held as the Deputy Chief Minister. It has been hand-

ed to Krishna Byre Gowda. Senior Minister and eight-time legislator Ramalinga Reddy, who had sought the portfolio, has been given Major and Medium Irrigation portfolio. Unhappy, he had threatened to quit earlier in the day.

Priyank Kharge will be the new Home Minister and will also hold the IT & Biotechnology and e-governance portfolios. Deputy Chief Minister G. Parameshwara has been assigned the Revenue and Sports portfolios, while Eshwar Khandre has been

given Rural Development and Panchayat Raj. Byrathi Suresh has been given Transport.

Yathindra Siddaramaiah, first-time Minister and son of former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, has been allocated Urban Development (excluding Bengaluru).

Satish Jharkiholi, K.H. Muniyappa and M.B. Patil have retained Public Works, Food & Civil Supplies, Consumer Affairs and Major and Heavy Industries, Infrastructure Development, respective-

ly, which they held in the Siddaramaiah-led government. K.J. George has been given Tourism in addition to Energy that he held earlier. Sharan Prakash Patil has also retained his earlier portfolios of Medical Education and Skill Development. U.T. Khader, who resigned as Speaker to join the Cabinet, got Health and Family Welfare.

Allocation of Bengaluru Development portfolio is likely to continue as a contentious issue, especially ahead of the impending civic polls in Bengaluru.

One held over theft of 18 hard disks from T.N.'s EB dept.

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI/TIRUNELVELI/
COIMBATORE

As part of the ongoing investigation into the theft of 18 hard disks from the Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited (TNPDDL) headquarters on Anna Salai in Chennai, the Greater Chennai Police (GCP) have arrested a contract employee and intensified efforts to uncover the larger network behind the incident.

A special team arrested Gopinath, 36, of Arakkonam in Ranipet district on Thursday. He is currently being questioned at a secure location as investigators pursue further leads in the case. The police said Gopinath was employed on contract by a private information technology firm responsible for the annual maintenance of computer systems at the TNPDDL headquarters. During interrogation, he allegedly confessed to removing the hard disks at the behest of certain key suspects.

Meanwhile, Minister for Energy Resources and Law R. Nirmalkumar said instructions had been issued to ensure the safe custody of all files and to take backup copies of data stored in computers. Speaking to journalists at the Secretariat, he said 18 hard disks had been reported missing from the TNPDDL headquarters last month. Later, he said the police had made some arrests in Bengaluru where the hard disks were taken to.

The man allegedly confessed to removing the hard disks at the behest of certain key suspects

Following a preliminary departmental vigilance inquiry, a complaint was lodged with the police. Investigators said Gopinath had been communicating with the key suspects through online calls and later handed over the devices in exchange for money. Investigators suspect that individuals linked to contractors and beneficiaries involved in procurement and tender-related activities may have orchestrated the theft. Police believe the hard disks could have been targeted to obtain sensitive information related to contracts and purchases.

As part of the probe, officers have collected details of contractors and vendors associated with the State electricity utility and are examining their possible connections with Gopinath and other suspects. Call detail records and digital communication trails are being analysed to establish the chain of events. Two additional suspects are currently being questioned to determine their involvement and identify others who may have played a role in the theft.

Meanwhile, the GCP have expanded the scope of the probe and sought assistance from experts in the Cyber Crime Wing.

Battling the blaze



Rapid response: Firefighters battle a massive blaze that engulfed a shop in Helmet Bazaar, Ameerpet, in Hyderabad on Thursday. Multiple fire tenders were deployed to contain the fire, and no casualties were reported. SIDDHANT THAKUR

Karnataka Education Dept. bars film shoots in State-run schools

Jayanth R.
BENGALURU

The Department of School Education and Literacy (DSEL) of Karnataka has banned filming in government schools and its premises.

Shooting of movies, short films, documentaries, television serials and videos for any electronic channels and social media will not be allowed henceforth.

Vikas Kishore Suralkar, Commissioner for Public Instruction, has cited safety and privacy of students and the sanctity of the learning environment in schools.

"Producers/directors are submitting proposals

It has cited concerns over safety and privacy of students and sanctity of learning climate

to the DSEL seeking permission to shoot films, short films, documentaries and serials to be telecast on *Doordarshan*, inside and on the premises of government schools. In this context, the permission for shooting in schools has been refused, mainly considering the safety of students, disruptions to the learning environment or school activities, and security risks," read the order.

"The privacy and safety

of students in schools is the responsibility of headmaster of the respective school and, appropriate measures should be taken to protect this. In addition, some parents do not consent to the publication of their children's pictures in the media," the order stated.

It has been stated that the refusal of permission for filming in schools is necessary to maintain school security measures and for safety reasons. In addition, it has also been stated that filming can also affect the mental health of students and cause stress.

In the light of the order, several applications seeking permission to film inside or on the school premises have been denied.

'Robin Hood' burglar, who funded charity with stolen gold, lands in prison

Double life of Vikas Singh Takoor unravels after the latest break-in at a house in Telangana's Vikarabad; the accused told police during interrogation that he had committed 27 burglaries since coming out of jail in 2024 and had stolen huge quantities of gold ornaments, silver, and cash, which were used to run an NGO that helped schoolchildren



ILLUSTRATION: SOUMYADIP SINHA

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

To the residents of his native village in Uttar Pradesh, Vikas Singh Takoor was a generous benefactor – the man behind the NGO 'Helping Hands' who distributed school bags to children and sponsored luxury vacations for his friends. But to the Telangana Police, he was one of the State's most prolific and elusive burglars.

The dramatic double life of Takoor, alias Teja Singh, came crashing down following investigation into a recent break-in at Manikanta

Nagar Colony in Vikarabad, where gold ornaments weighing 15 grams and ₹2.1 lakh in cash were stolen on May 1.

Posing as a daily wage labourer by day to scout for locked houses, the accused allegedly used the massive proceeds from dozens of night-time burglaries to fund a lavish lifestyle of air travel, luxury hotels, and his local charitable activities. Vikarabad Superintendent of Police Sneha Mehra revealed that a special team tracked down Takoor through a combination of technical evidence, surveillance inputs, and CCTV footage, finally apprehending him

near Vikarabad railway station.

During interrogation, the accused allegedly confessed to a staggering 27 burglaries committed since his release from prison in June 2024 across Vikarabad, Medak, Cyberabad, and Malkajgiri Commissionerate limits. Police said he admitted to stealing 1.57 kg gold, 2.56 kg silver, and ₹8.22 lakh in cash. Investigators said Takoor began committing burglaries at the age of 16 and had already been arrested in 34 cases earlier. With the latest confessions, the number of cases linked to him has risen to 61.

"The accused spent

part of the proceeds on air travel, luxury hotel stays and leisure trips. He also allegedly created a charitable image in his native village through an NGO called 'Helping Hands', distributing school bags and notebooks to students and sponsoring trips for friends to Chennai, Goa, Vijayawada, Visakhapatnam, Bengaluru, Rajasthan and Dehradun," said the SP.

The investigation also uncovered the involvement of four gold traders from Sultanpur district in Uttar Pradesh. Police said the accused sold stolen gold through his mother to the traders,

who allegedly encouraged him to continue committing burglaries and provided advance money whenever he faced financial difficulties.

Investigators further alleged that when the accused considered giving up crime, the traders collectively gave him ₹40,000 and encouraged him to purchase an illegal firearm.

A 5 mm pistol and the stolen gold ornaments have been recovered. "The accused now faces a total of 61 criminal cases, including 34 previous cases and 27 offences he confessed to committing after his release from prison," the officer added.

Energy tie-up tops bilateral agenda as Modi meets Delcy

PM holds discussions with Venezuela's Acting President on also expanding cooperation in critical minerals, technology, agriculture and health; importance of Global South solidarity emphasised

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India's partnership with Venezuela is of "immense importance" for the Global South, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday, welcoming Delcy Rodriguez, the Acting President of Venezuela, even as the South American country called "energy security a fundamental pillar of the bilateral relationship".

Venezuela is still dealing with the aftermath of the abduction of President Nicolas Maduro by the U.S. military in January. Officials said Ms. Rodriguez, whose country is dealing with 'political transition' and 'fundamental economic transformation', described India as a "trusted partner". The leader, who arrived here on Wednesday, is on a five-day visit.

"We had extensive discussions on expanding our



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Venezuelan Acting President Delcy Rodriguez in New Delhi on Thursday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

cooperation in energy, critical minerals, technology, agriculture, health and people-to-people ties. As a valued partner in Latin America, our close cooperation with Venezuela holds immense importance for the Global South. We will continue to work together for the mutual benefit of the people of our nations," said Mr. Modi after the meeting.

A press release from the Venezuelan government said the meeting was aimed at "strengthening the role of both nations in the geopolitical context of the Global South and on boosting mutually beneficial macroeconomic agreements". It described India as "one of the main destinations for the Nation's energy exports, making energy security a funda-

mental pillar of the bilateral relationship".

Ms. Rodriguez, who was accompanied by Ministers of Economy, Foreign Affairs, Science and Technology, and Transport and Communications, conducted a "comprehensive review of the mutual cooperation map", the press note said, adding that the bilateral relation is in an "excellent state".

Officials revealed that Ms. Rodriguez discussed the political situation in Venezuela in a "frank conversation" with Mr. Modi during official-level talks and over the working lunch that followed. "We all know there was a transition in Venezuela, and we are working with a government that is friendly and that wants partnership with India. We want to reciprocate that," said Rudendra Tandon, Secretary (East) of the External Affairs Ministry, while briefing the media.

India, U.K. launch observatory to expand critical minerals partnership

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Seeking to expand cooperation and technology-sharing in the realm of critical minerals, India and the United Kingdom on Thursday formally launched the Critical Minerals Global Supply Chain Observatory (GSCO).

The observatory was first announced during U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to India in October last year with an objective to "expand mineral coverage, further integrate advanced technologies and unlock new bilateral investment opportunities".

The platform – to be jointly operated by India's Technology Innovation in Exploration & Mining Foundation (TEXMIN), Indian Institute of Technology (ISM) Dhanbad and U.K.'s University of Cambridge – will institute a data-driven platform to monitor and analyse global critical mineral supply chains.

In a social media post, Union Minister for Mines



Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy and U.K. Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper launching the critical minerals observatory. ANI

and Minerals G. Kishan Reddy wrote, "This is a major step towards strengthening critical mineral supply chains, supporting clean energy transitions, and building resilient global supply chains through the India-U.K. partnership."

Minister meets official Meanwhile, during a meeting with visiting British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper on Thursday, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said India and the U.K. were well-positioned to construct a new

future-oriented and mutually beneficial partnership on the back of their newly firm-up comprehensive trade deal and the defence industrial road map. Mr. Jaishankar said both sides "reviewed ongoing progress in our cooperation focusing on trade, technology, supply chains, defence, climate, education and people to people ties. Also spoke about new opportunities in clean energy, AI and critical minerals".

The two sides also exchanged views on global developments including in

Ukraine, West Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

In his remarks, Mr. Jaishankar also highlighted the "remarkable developments" in the bilateral ties in recent months while pointing to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the U.K. last July, followed by U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's trip to India in October.

Ms. Cooper also met Mr. Modi. "Appreciated the deepening of the India-UK partnership in recent times that has unlocked unprecedented growth opportunities for both our countries," Mr. Modi said on social media.

Ms. Cooper emphasised greater access to critical minerals and improved information-sharing would be mutually beneficial to both countries. According to the announcement readout, Ms. Cooper stated the observatory could also serve "as a foundation for broader cooperation across the critical minerals sector and related strategic industries."

(With PTI inputs)

Manipur policeman killed in knife attack

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

A Manipur policeman died in a knife attack during an anti-drug operation in the State's Thoubal district on Wednesday evening.

Officials said the attacker was arrested on Thursday morning. He was detained along with another person soon after the incident.

"During the operation, one of the detainees, Md. Naobi alias Mahil (25) attacked Havildar Kh. Suresh Singh of the 4th India Reserve Battalion, with a knife, inflicting fatal injuries before fleeing the spot along with the other detainee," the State Police said in a statement on Thursday.

Singh was rushed to the district hospital, where he was declared dead on arrival. He was a member of the State's police commando unit in Thoubal.

Kuki organisation in Manipur opposes SIR of electoral rolls

The Hindu Bureau
GUWAHATI

An apex Kuki organisation has opposed the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in conflict-scarred Manipur, alleging that it has excluded thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the community.

The Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) said it expected the government to resolve the issue of some 59,000 Kuki-Zo IDPs, and help them return home to participate in the SIR exercise.

"Proceeding with such a critical electoral and administrative exercise without ensuring the participation of a large and vulnerable section of the population undermines the very principles of democratic representation. The exclusion, whether direct or indirect, of these IDPs from the SIR process renders the exer-

cise incomplete and unacceptable in its present form," the organisation said in a statement on Thursday.

The government and the district authorities should take immediate and concrete steps to establish accessible and inclusive mechanisms to let all affected IDPs be duly enrolled and participate in the revision process, the KIM said.

"Any continuation of the SIR without such provisions would not only be unjust but would also call into question the legitimacy and credibility of the entire exercise," the organisation said.

The KIM said leaving any displaced person out would raise questions on the fairness and inclusivity of the SIR exercise, which was launched in Manipur, Mizoram and Sikkim a few days ago.

Rajnath announces revised financial powers for armed forces to boost autonomy

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday revised the financial powers of the defence forces via the framework of the Delegation of Financial Powers for Defence Services, including for medical and works projects. The move aims to enhance operational efficiency, accelerate procurement, and strengthen self-reliance in the defence sector.

According to the Ministry of Defence, financial powers have been enhanced by up to 100% and, in certain cases, more than doubled. The move is expected to empower field commanders with greater decision-making authority, enabling faster conclusion of contracts and timely execution of projects.

The Ministry stated that



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during a meeting regarding the approval of enhanced financial powers for armed forces. PTI

financial powers related to indigenisation and research and development within the military ecosystem have been doubled to further the government's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative and reduce dependence on foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). The revised framework is expected to facilitate procurement worth over ₹1.25 lakh crore through the revenue route,

in line with the current year's budgetary allocations.

Special financial powers delegated to Army, Navy, and Air Force commanders have also been significantly enhanced, including a 100% increase in the overall ceiling to meet urgent operational requirements. The revised provisions additionally promote joint procurement by the lead service.

Bharatmala project: man held for taking fraudulent funds

Shubhomoy Sikdar
RAIPUR

The ED has arrested a resident of Chhattisgarh's Raipur district who, along with his family members, had fraudulently received about ₹9.27 crore for land acquired under the Bharatmala project, the agency said on Thursday.

The ED is investigating the money laundering angle in the case. It alleged that Jai Prakash Gandhi, a resident of Abhanpur near Raipur, and his family members, received compensation of ₹9.83 crore, almost 17 times more than the legitimately payable amount of ₹56.76 lakh, thereby generating proceeds of crime to the tune of ₹9.27 crore.

Mr. Gandhi was produced before a Special Court (PMLA) in Raipur which has granted three days custody of the ac-

cused to the ED, according to an official in the ED Raipur zonal office.

The official said that the investigation revealed that Mr. Gandhi, in connivance with his family members and certain public servants, had acquired land falling within the notified highway alignment for the Raipur-Visakhapatnam Economic Corridor project under Bharatmala Pariyojana. Subsequently, the accused fragmented the land into parcels measuring less than 500 square metres.

"The fragmentation was allegedly carried out with the sole intention of claiming enhanced compensation from the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI)," the official added.

The investigation had further revealed that the proceeds of the crime were subsequently layered, the official said.

Delhi blaze: building owner sent to police custody for four days

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

A day after a major fire left 21 people dead at the Flourish Stay bed-and-breakfast in Delhi's Malviya Nagar, the building's owner Lavkesh Bajaj was remanded to four days of police custody by a district court on Thursday, on the charge of culpable homicide not amounting to murder, among others.

Mr. Bajaj's manager Rakesh and his accountant Jay Mishra – in whose name the B&B licence was issued – are still absconding, the Delhi Police said.

The Municipal Corporation of Delhi has identified 12 other bed and breakfast (B&B) lodgings in the area which were operating in violation of their permits from the Delhi Tourism Department, offering accommodation far in excess of the permitted six rooms. The Delhi government says it will seal all unauthorised constructions and build-



Lavkesh Bajaj at the Malviya Nagar Police Station after the Saket court sent him to police custody, in New Delhi, on Thursday. PTI

ings operating without fire safety equipment as part of a month-long crackdown.

In the case of Flourish Stay B&B, it had an illegal 24 rooms spread across six floors, apart from a restaurant on the ground floor, which also did not have the necessary licence. The B&B was being run without any fire No Objection Certificate, and was misusing the permits issued by the State tourism department, the police said.

The Hauz Rani area of Malviya Nagar, where the

fire occurred, is a medical tourism hub and has many hotels providing accommodation for patients at the nearby Max hospital and their caretakers. Twelve of those killed in the blaze were foreign nationals, hailing from Congo, Mozambique, Liberia, and Bangladesh, and their bodies were handed over to their respective embassies on Thursday.

At least 13 international patients injured in the blaze are still admitted at Max Saket, along with two

Indians who were also injured. Six patients are on ventilator support, while nine patients have been admitted to the ICUs and wards, the hospital said.

Culpable homicide The police have registered a case under Sections 105 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder), 326(g) (offence of mischief by fire), 324(5) (wrongful damage of property), 125(a) (negligent act that endangers human life and safety), 125(b) (grievous hurt by negligence), and 287 (negligent conduct with respect to fire) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

The police are yet to identify others involved in the construction, management, and operation of the premises and ascertain their respective roles. The investigation will include recovery of guest registers, booking records, online booking details, financial records, and bank account records of the hotel.

Some rebel MLAs still want Mamata as 'supreme leader'

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

A day after 58 MLAs of the Trinamool Congress signed a letter nominating expelled party legislator Ritabrata Banerjee as the Leader of Opposition (LoP) in the West Bengal Assembly, defying party chairperson Mamata Banerjee, some of the rebel MLAs on Thursday were seen warming to the former Chief Minister.

About 20 of the rebel MLAs met in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly and a few of them said that Ms. Banerjee remains their "supreme leader".

Speaking to the media after being appointed LoP, Mr. Ritabrata had said on Wednesday that he wants Ms. Banerjee as the "chief adviser" of the Trinamool Congress Legislature party. "Mamata Banerjee is the supreme leader not adviser," Trinamool MLA from Panchla, Gulshan Mullick, said. Sangita Roy Basunia, the



Mamata Banerjee will remain the undisputed leader of the Trinamool Congress, several MLAs have said. ANI

Trinamool MLA from Sitai, spoke in a similar vein and said that Ms. Banerjee remains the undisputed leader of the party.

The rebel Trinamool camp has chosen a relationally young LoP in Mr. Ritabrata instead of a tent-time MLA, Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay, 82.

A letter nominating Mr. Chattopadhyay as the LoP was submitted to the Speaker of West Bengal Assembly on May 20, but MLAs Mr. Ritabrata and Sandipan Saha alleged that their signatures were

forged, following which they were expelled from the party.

An FIR was registered on the basis of the complaint of the expelled MLAs, and the investigation reached the doorstep of Trinamool general secretary Abhishek Banerjee, who had signed the letter. "An idea of Trinamool Congress without Mamata Banerjee is not a feasible idea. The rebellion is more directed towards Abhishek Banerjee than Mamata Banerjee," a senior leader said.

Union govt. to train BDOs in planning systems

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

In an effort to strengthen grassroots governance, the Ministry of Rural Development is planning to train 2,000 Block Development Officers (BDOs), focusing the training on decentralised planning. The officers will be trained in the use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and Management Information Systems (MIS), which have become crucial especially with the new rural employment law – Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission.

Planning under the new law is driven by the decentralised Viksit Gram Panchayat Plan (VGPP), linking local wage employment to durable infrastructure.

Rural Development Secretary Rohit Kansal said that training modules such as this are aimed at strengthening the "last-mile delivery architecture".

Rahul 'selling panic', promoting baseless conspiracy theories: BJP

Hitting out at Modi, Congress leader had said an unprecedented 'economic tsunami' was set to hit India: Amit Malviya terms Rahul's remarks 'classic fear-mongering', says the country remained the world's fastest-growing major economy

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Thursday accused Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi of "selling panic" and promoting baseless conspiracy theories about Indian institutions and the economy, in response to his remarks on Wednesday that Prime Minister Narendra Modi would not remain in office a year from now.

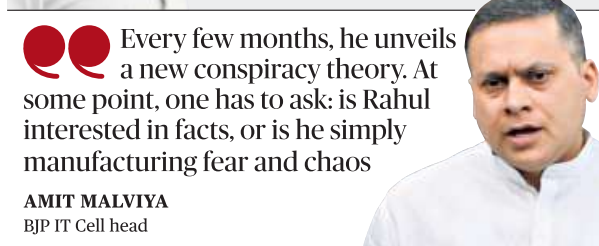
Claiming that the Modi government was facing an "institutional revolt", at the Congress's National Adivasi Professional Conclave, Mr. Gandhi had said an unprecedented "economic tsunami" was set to hit India as the BJP government had removed protections against international shocks, and its control over institutions had collapsed.

"Now, people see that there will be tremendous pressure from the *janta*



If the public knows that the electoral system is rigged and becomes angry over economic pressure, poverty and pain, don't you think the Election Commissioner would be scared? So, now the system is shaking

RAHUL GANDHI
Congress leader



Every few months, he unveils a new conspiracy theory. At some point, one has to ask: is Rahul interested in facts, or is he simply manufacturing fear and chaos

AMIT MALVIYA
BJP IT Cell head

(public), and they realise that if they continue in the same direction, it will be a risk. What do you think? If the public knows that the electoral system is rigged and becomes angry over economic pressure, poverty and pain, don't you think the Election Commissioner would be scared? So, now the system is shaking," he had said.

BJP IT Cell head Amit Malviya retorted sharply through a post on social media platform X.

"Every few months, he [Mr. Gandhi] unveils a new conspiracy theory. First, democracy was over. Then institutions were captured. Then election rigging. Now we are told that an Emergency is coming and an economic tsunami is

around the corner. At some point, one has to ask: is Rahul Gandhi interested in facts, or is he simply manufacturing fear and chaos because he cannot explain his party's repeated electoral failures?," he said.

"According to Rahul Gandhi, the Chief Election Commissioner, intelligence chiefs, judges, institutions, and practically everyone in the system have been secretly working for him for the last three years, constantly feeding him information. Yet, despite having this extraordinary network, his party keeps losing elections and shrinking politically. Not a single allegation of election rigging has been proven in court. Not one," said Mr. Malviya.

Stating that Mr. Gandhi's claim about impending "economic tsunami" was nothing but a "classic fear-mongering", he said: "If India's shock absorbers had truly been removed, why is the economy continuing to

show resilience despite elevated crude prices, conflict in West Asia, supply chain disruptions, global financial tightening and persistent geopolitical uncertainty?"

'Stronger reserves'

He said although India was facing an external shock, it was not defenceless as the shock absorbers had been built over the last decade. The country was facing global headwinds with "stronger reserves, lower inflation, better infrastructure spending, stronger domestic demand, record FDI inflows, substantial food buffers and targeted support for MSMEs [Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises] and industry," said Mr. Malviya.

Despite facing multiple black swan events, India had remained the world's fastest-growing major economy, moved from the "Fragile Five" to the top five economies, Mr. Malviya said.

House Committee cites CAG report, pulls up govt. over skilling programme

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Parliament's Public Accounts Committee (PAC), headed by senior Congress leader K.C. Venugopal, pulled up the government over its flagship skilling programme, the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY).

Citing the audit report tabled by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG), the panel said the scheme disproportionately focused on skilling for jobs with low demand, such as retail.

The PMKVY is the flagship scheme of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), launched in July 2015 with the objective of enabling a large number of youths to take up industry-relevant skill training.

Citing the findings of the report, panel members noted during the deliberations that there was a mismatch between training and demand. They said the skilling efforts were heavily



K.C. Venugopal

focused on sectors with low demand, such as apparel, electronics, and retail, which together accounted for 40% of trainees. In contrast, sectors such as food processing, which require more trained personnel, accounted for only 0.48% of trainees. Similarly, only 3.8% of trainees were skilled for the tourism sector.

Lack of planning

Panel members from both the Opposition and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party questioned the lack of planning, despite the programme being in operation since 2015. According to

sources, many members said the government did not seem to have learnt from the scheme's shortcomings. It was also pointed out that only 41% of trainees were placed. The programme has also been hit by repeated instances of fraudulent appointment letters.

The CAG report cited multiple examples. In one instance, Neelima Moving Pictures was awarded skill certifications to 33,493 participants for 21 job roles across eight States between January and November 2020. However, the company was found to be non-existent. The audit report noted that no responsibility had been fixed for such fraudulent claims.

Defending the scheme and its implementation, the government blamed State governments, which, it said, were the implementing agencies.

In his concluding remarks, Mr. Venugopal said unemployment remained the biggest threat facing the country.

Cong. slams govt. over CBSE's three-language policy for Classes 9, 10

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Thursday accused the Narendra Modi government of sacrificing educational rationale for political agendas. Taking to X, Mr. Ramesh raised questions over the CBSE's directive mandating the implementation of the three-language formula for Classes 9 and 10 starting from July.

Mr. Ramesh detailed a stark contradiction in CBSE's decision-making over the last six months. He stated that during its semi-annual meeting in December 2025, the CBSE governing body explicitly ratified a recommendation

by its curriculum committee to maintain existing study arrangements – specifically regarding language provisions – until the NCERT released dedicated, graded textbooks.

This initial resolution bore the signatures of the then-CBSE chairman Rahul Singh and former secretary Himanshu Gupta, both of whom have since been transferred, over the On-Screen Marking row.

"So, what changed in these six months?" Mr. Ramesh asked. Despite NCERT failing to release any third-language textbooks for secondary classes, CBSE issued a circular in May abruptly mandating the extra language, he said.

BJP names RS candidates for five States; two Union Ministers left out

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Bharatiya Janata Party on Thursday announced its candidates for the upcoming Rajya Sabha polls in five States, with two Union Ministers Ravnesh Singh Bittu and George Kurian not figuring in the list. Both Ministers' terms in the Upper House end on June 21. While Mr. Bittu represents Rajasthan in the list, Mr. Kurian is currently a member from Madhya Pradesh.

Mr. Bittu is likely to focus on Punjab which goes on the polls early next year. The party accommodated Debashish Samantaray, who recently joined the BJP after quitting his seat in

RS polls in 10 States, including Arunachal, Gujarat, Rajasthan, M.P., Manipur, will be held on June 18

the Rajya Sabha as a Biju Janata Dal MP.

Younger leaders

According to the list released by the party, Rajubhai Shukla, Mukeshbhai Rathwa, Mansingh Parmar, and Jitendra Meghjiabhai Kanzariya have been fielded as candidates from Gujarat. The party has opted not to renominate three of its outgoing members, instead leaning on younger leaders.

Party national general

secretary Tarun Chugh and Rajneesh Agrawal have been fielded from Madhya Pradesh. Mr. Chugh, who hails from Punjab, has been an active face in the BJP organisation over the past few years and has earlier held positions in the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha.

Alka Gurjar and Satish Poonia will contest from Rajasthan. Mr. Poonia, 62, served as the BJP State president from September 2019 to March 2023 and is currently the party's in charge for Haryana. Ms. Gurjar, 65, currently a BJP national general secretary, won the Rajasthan Assembly election in 2013.

The party has fielded A. Sharda Devi as its candi-

date from Manipur and Tai Tagak from Arunachal Pradesh. Ms. Devi, 59, a former teacher, is a long-time party member and served as the national vice-president from 2014 to 2016. She is currently the BJP State president and the first woman to hold the post since June 2021. Mr. Tagak, 54, joined the RSS in 1989 and played a key role in the BJP forming the government in Arunachal Pradesh in 2016.

Rajya Sabha polls in 10 States, including Arunachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Manipur, will be held on June 18. A bypoll to the Upper House from Odisha will also be conducted on the same day.

Kharge and Praveen Chakravarty among Cong. RS nominees

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge is among the seven Rajya Sabha candidates across five States that the party announced on Thursday for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections on June 18.

Mr. Kharge is one of the three candidates from Karnataka. The party's media and publicity wing head Pawan Khera and Mansoor Ali Khan are the other two. The party has fielded All India Professionals' Congress chief Praveen Chakravarty from Tamil Nadu. Mr. Chakravarty was one of the early advocates of a tie-up with the film star-

turned-politician C. Joseph Vijay-led Tamila Vетtri Kazhagam.

In Madhya Pradesh, where the party can win one seat, it chose Mee-nakshi Natarajan, who had earlier represented the Mandasaur Lok Sabha constituency.

In Jharkhand, where the party can win one seat with the help of its ally Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, the Congress has fielded Pranav Jha, who is an All India Congress Committee (AICC) secretary attached to the Congress President's office.

In Rajasthan, Neeraj Dangi, a sitting Rajya Sabha member, has been given another term.

Centre in 'panic mode' on economy, says Congress

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Thursday alleged that the Union government was in "panic mode" over the state of the economy, referring to reports that it was considering the removal of the 12.5% tax on long term capital gains to arrest the withdrawal of foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) from the Indian markets.

The party also raised questions over Life Insurance Corporation of India's (LIC) investment in jewellery and gold refining company Rajesh Exports, which is facing regulatory action by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).

"The Modi government is clearly in panic mode and is under siege from within its ecosystem on the current economic situation," Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh said in a post on X.

The Congress leader contended that temporary policy measures could not substitute for addressing structural issues.

DMK to boycott June 8 INDIA bloc meeting over Cong. 'betrayal' after poll

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam on Thursday announced it would boycott the upcoming meeting of the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc parties, scheduled to be held at the Constitution Club in New Delhi on June 8.

In a strongly-worded statement, the DMK noted that the decision was taken to honour the sentiments of its cadres, who remain deeply hurt by the "betrayal" committed by the Congress after the Tamil Nadu Assembly election.

The Congress, which won five seats as part of the DMK-led alliance, had unilaterally snapped ties after the polls and joined the Tamila Vетtri Kazhagam-led government.

The DMK statement explained how the party had consistently been at the forefront of nation-wide issues. It said the DMK had "courageously opposed" initiatives and policies that threaten democracy, secu-



Former camaraderie: Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and DMK president M.K. Stalin at a meeting. FILE PHOTO

larism, and State rights – including the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET), delimitation, the "hastily introduced" special intensive revision (SIR) exercise, 'One Nation, One Election', the Waqf Amendment Bill, and the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act amendments.

"Since the inception of the INDIA bloc, the DMK has functioned as its central force. DMK president M.K. Stalin has consistently been the primary voice raising critical issues concerning the people of this country," it read.

The party attributed its decision to stay away from

the high-level meeting entirely to the Congress. "To respect the feelings of our party cadres, who are deeply hurt due to the betrayal by the Congress party after the Assembly elections, the DMK will not participate in the INDIA meeting on June 8, which features the Congress," the statement said.

The DMK, however, maintained that it remains committed to broader Opposition solidarity on national issues. "We will always raise our voice alongside other member parties on matters that adversely affect the welfare of the nation," the party said.

Minorities enjoy full freedom in India, are able to practise their faith: Rijiju

Ishita Mishra
Aroon Deep
NEW DELHI

Union Minority Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju on Thursday said minorities in India enjoy full freedom and are able to practise their faith and way of life without hindrance. He said efforts were being made from outside the country to project a false narrative of persecution.

"No individual had been compelled to leave the country because of religious identity... Criticise government policies if you wish, but do not spread falsehoods," he said while attacking the Opposition. Speaking at the Ministry's 'Reforms Utsav' to mark 12 years of the Narendra Modi government, Mr. Rijiju highlighted technology-driven initiatives but said that details of nearly 45% of Waqf properties are yet to be uploaded on the UMEED portal and that issues on scholarship remain unresolved.

UMEED is a centralised digital platform for real-time uploading, verification, and monitoring of Waqf properties. It was launched on June 6, 2025,



Union Minister Kiren Rijiju at the Reforms Utsav event organised by the Ministry of Minority Affairs in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

with an initial six-month deadline to register around nine lakh such properties spread across India.

'Labour-heavy process'

"There are so many shortcomings in different State Waqf boards... the documents of properties are faulty... in some places, thousands of acres are recorded on paper, but the land on ground tells a different story. We are continuously organising workshops and sessions to help Mutawallis register the Waqf properties. It is a labour-intensive process and will take some time," he said.

The Minister admitted that scholarship delivery, one of the Ministry's largest welfare initiatives, remained affected by investigations into alleged fraud in several States. Referring to cases where scholarships were reportedly claimed in the names of fictitious students, Mr. Rijiju said he hoped that ongoing CBI inquiries would conclude soon and the programme could resume.

'Wait for probe to finish'

"We cannot start the scholarships by excluding those institutions which are being investigated for fraud. So we will have to wait un-

til the investigation is finished," he added.

Mr. Rijiju said the Ministry's annual budget has increased from ₹1,949 crore in 2014 to ₹4,115 crore at present, a 111% jump. But government outreach efforts received limited attention and negative developments attracted disproportionate coverage, he said.

During the event, which was attended by beneficiaries of various schemes, the Ministry featured demos for an AI-enabled helpline for hajj pilgrims.

"The chatbot will be accessible through an app that pilgrims will be able to place phone calls with, in addition to being available on WhatsApp. The voice chatbot is only available on its own app since WhatsApp calls are banned by the Saudi government," an official said.

There will be an escalation bot to handle complex queries where human assistance is required, a Gnaani.ai representative said at the event. The firm's chatbot will be rolled out in the coming months on the Ministry's behalf and will support queries in 12 languages.

IN BRIEF



SC dismisses as 'infructuous' WFI's appeal against Phogat

The Supreme Court on Thursday dismissed an appeal filed by the Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) against a Delhi High Court order allowing senior wrestler Vinesh Phogat to participate in the selection trials for the Asian Games 2026. The court, however, clarified that the dismissal of the appeal should not be construed as an endorsement of the adverse observations made by the High Court against the federation. A Bench of Justices P.S. Narasimha and Aravind Kumar observed that the special leave petition had become infructuous since the selection trials had already been held, in which Ms. Phogat participated but lost.

ED searches nine locations in Mizoram in illegal supari case

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Thursday conducted searches at nine locations in the border town of Champhai along the Mizoram-Myanmar frontier in connection with smuggling of illegal Burmese *supari* (dry areca nuts) into India, involving over ₹970 crore. The ED probe – based on a case registered by the Central Bureau of Investigation on a Gauhati High Court directive dated July 16, 2024, – revealed that Burmese nationals allegedly brought dry areca nuts across the Tiau river into India without Customs clearance at Zokhawthar and Champhai. The consignments were then handed over to local facilitators at the border.

CBI books man for allegedly posing as PMO official

The CBI has registered a case against a person for allegedly posing as an Under Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). The accused has been identified as P. Elangovan. The agency initiated a preliminary enquiry against him on January 8, 2026, following a complaint from the PMO with respect to a wedding invitation card in which he had been shown as an Under Secretary working there. The agency found that in 2023, the accused introduced himself as a PMO official to Joint Commissioner of the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments over phone and requested for a "VIP darshan" to be arranged for his relatives at a temple in Tamil Nadu.

BRICS experts discuss asset recovery challenges

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on June 2 organised the inaugural meeting on the BRICS's expert network on asset recovery, marking a significant milestone within the Anti-Corruption Working Group under India's 2026 BRICS presidency, the agency said on Thursday. Asset recovery is the central pillar of modern anti-corruption and financial crime enforcement, Rahul Navin, Director, ED, said, welcoming global delegates. The Chair called for stricter alignment with the Financial Action Task Force's guidance for asset recovery and inter-agency cooperation. Deliberations included mutual operational challenges among member countries.

Draft SC rules prohibit use of AI for judicial outcomes, witness profiling

They underline that AI systems used in court processes must 'function solely in an assistive capacity' and remain 'strictly subservient to human judgment and judicial authority'; comments and suggestions invited from the public till June 20

Aaratrika Bhaumik
NEW DELHI

Prohibiting the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to determine judicial outcomes, the Supreme Court AI committee has proposed draft regulations that bar AI-assisted sentencing without mandatory human oversight, prevent AI systems from profiling parties or witnesses, and disallow the use of "opaque" or "unexplainable" AI systems in any court process.

The proposed regulations come amid concerns expressed by the top court in recent months over the growing reliance on AI by courts in rendering judgments. In March, a Bench headed by Justice P.S. Narasimha chided a trial court for relying on non-existent judgments generated with the help of AI, observing that it was not merely "an error in decision-making" but amounted to judicial "misconduct".

The preliminary draft of the 'Regulations for Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Courts, 2026', made public



The draft regulations permit the use of AI for administrative functions such as case listing and scheduling. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

on Wednesday, underlines that AI systems used in court processes must "function solely in an assistive capacity" and remain "strictly subservient to human judgment and judicial authority".

The committee, chaired by Supreme Court judge Justice P.S. Narasimha and comprising Justices Sanjeev Sachdeva, Raja Vijayaraghavan V., Anoop Chitkara and Suraj Govindaraj, has invited comments and suggestions from stakeholders as well as members of the public on the draft regulations before they are finalised.

The deadline for sub-

mitting responses is June 20. Under the draft regulations, the processing of personal data through AI systems shall be governed by the provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. It also underlines that AI systems must not "perpetuate, amplify, or introduce bias" on grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, gender, disability, language, economic status, or any other ground prohibited under the Constitution.

'Human-in-the-loop' "Applications involving higher levels of risk to personal liberty, any lawful

right of a person, or the integrity of judicial outcomes shall be subject to correspondingly heightened safeguards, including mandatory human-in-the-loop requirements and independent oversight," the draft states.

It further cautions that AI-assisted judicial systems should not "widen digital divides" and must remain accessible to all stakeholders, including those from rural, economically disadvantaged, or linguistically diverse communities.

While the draft regulations permit the use of AI for administrative functions such as case management, preparation of cause lists, scheduling of hearings, transcription of court proceedings and translation of judgments, they make it clear that AI systems cannot be used for "risk scoring" in court processes. This includes assessing flight risk, predicting recidivism, evaluating bail eligibility, or determining the credibility of parties or witnesses.

It also bars authorities from using AI systems for the surveillance or contin-

uous monitoring of judicial officers, advocates, litigants and other stakeholders, "except as may be specifically authorised by applicable law for the time being in force".

'Apex body'

To supervise the adoption of AI in the judiciary and steer standard-setting and policy development, the draft regulations propose the creation of a full-time "apex body" at the Supreme Court.

The apex body, it recommends, would comprise two Supreme Court judges nominated by the Chief Justice of India (CJI), one of whom shall serve as the ex-officio chairperson; two High Court Chief Justices and two High Court judges nominated by the CJI; one member from an institution of national importance or any institution of repute, as nominated by the CJI; an officer not below the rank of Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology; a finance expert and a cybersecurity expert nominated by the CJI; among others.

Parliamentary panel grills Centre on OMCs' failure to absorb oil shock

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, headed by BJP leader Bhartruhari Mahtab, on Thursday questioned the government on why, despite making hefty profits, the Oil Marketing Companies have been unable to absorb the oil shock due to the U.S.-Iran stand-off.

The meeting on Thursday, which was attended by officials from the Department of Economic Affairs and the Chief Economic Adviser of the government, was the first in the series of meetings on the 'General Economic Situation in the Country'.

Both Opposition and ruling party members raised concerns about the impact of the US-Iran stand-off on the Indian economy.

According to sources, senior Congress leader



The Oil Marketing Companies had registered a profit increase of nearly 130% in the last financial year. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

Manish Tewari, among others, questioned the government on the recent fuel price hike. Ruling party MPs P.P. Chaudhary, Sanjay Seth, and Dinesh Sharma were among those who wanted to know the inflationary impact of the current crisis over the next quarter.

One member pointed out that the OMCs, during the past financial year (FY 2025-26), had registered a

profit increase of nearly 130%, and even in the last quarter their revenue was 40% higher than in the corresponding quarter of the previous financial year. Opposition members demanded to know why the OMCs were unable to absorb the recent shock. Officials, as per sources, cited international statistics to reiterate the government's position that the impact on fuel prices in India has

been limited compared to global trends. Unsatisfied with the response, the panel has asked the government to come up with a detailed answer. Questions were also raised on the heavy dependence on imported raw materials for fertilizer production by domestic manufacturers and its impact on the economy. The government, as per sources, has assured that there were enough stock to see the *Rabi* season through, and that efforts are on to procure more for the *Kharrif* season.

The dip in Foreign Direct Investment and Foreign Portfolio Investment was also raised, though several members, according to sources, were not satisfied with the government's reply. Even ruling party members expressed concern over retail inflation, especially the rising cost of basic food items.

Former LS Secretary General Subhash Kashyap passes away

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Former Lok Sabha Secretary General and constitutional expert Subhash C. Kashyap passed away on Thursday after prolonged illness. He was 97.

Mr. Kashyap was part of the high-level committee headed by former President Ram Nath Kovind to prepare a legal framework on simultaneous elections. Author of over 100 books, he served as the Secretary General of Lok Sabha from 1983 to 1990.

He served Parliament for over 37 years from the time of Jawaharlal Nehru's first Lok Sabha to the 9th Lok Sabha.

Born in 1929 in a family of freedom fighters in Bijpur in the then United Provinces (now Uttar Pradesh), he actively took part in the struggle for Independence as a teenager.



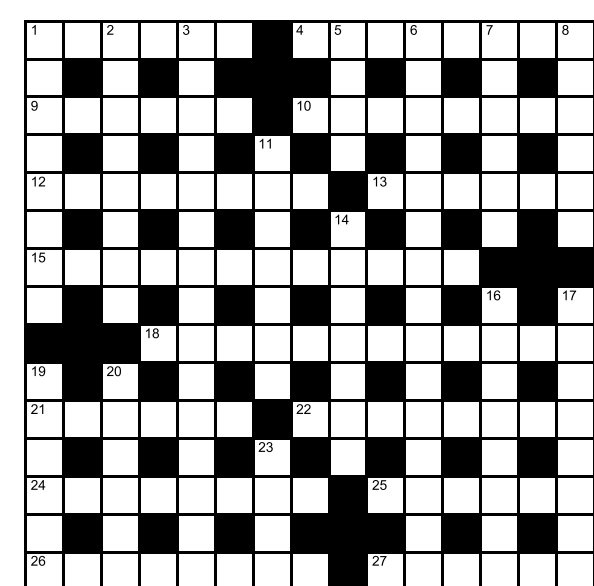
Subhash C. Kashyap

He received his higher education and professional training at Allahabad, New Delhi, Washington DC, London and Geneva.

He was also awarded the Padma Bhushan.

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said the demise of Mr. Kashyap is extremely sad and offered condolences to his family. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla condoled his demise and said it is a profound loss to Indian parliamentary democracy, constitutional discourse and public life.

THE CROSSWORD+ 14812 Solve this puzzle online and access more puzzles at <https://thehindu.com/crosswords>



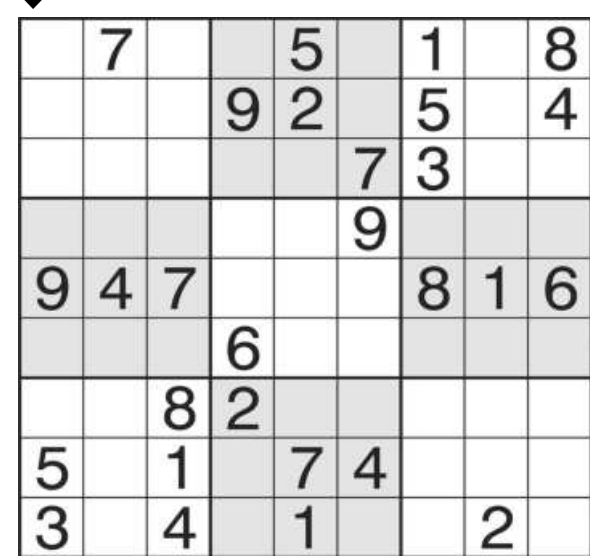
- 12 VIPs were all over the place for advance shows (8)
13 Outlook of a group that keeps quiet (6)
15 Perhaps organise team for a threesome (6,1,5)
18 Nothing under the closet - showing insincere affection (8,4)
21 Turns out taking drug causes disturbance (6)
22 Nickname for Charlie - "Go back only with women" (8)
24 Spray is not working - discard (8)
25 One sits quietly before God in a holy place (6)
26 Perhaps Robert's getting a tan (8)
27 French city where Poles take a bet (6)

Down

- 1 Spooner's bio-fuel, prominence is for a refrigerator (4,4)
2 Theatre people and their desire in their progenies (8)
3 No.1 quiz that prompts the answer wanted (7,8)
5 Some aspirants are from this country (4)
6 Abandon Asia - he is happy with national language (6,9)
7 Essays she set to rewrite (6)
8 Arrange seats, one comes in for some rest (6)
11 Trust the fancy brew, say (5,2)
14 Tense on ground? That's betrayal (7)
16 To millions and millions conservative rise is rubbish (8)
17 These are perhaps writers' assumed title (3,5)
19 State wordplay for an injection (6)
20 Compelled to include the final prayer at the shrine (6)
23 Tough to proceed (4)

- Across**
1 Well, takes seconds to create trouble (6)
4 Years to get help for a medical complaint (8)
9 Song about ultimate love and beginning of love in the air (6)
10 Chasm created before fleece (8)

SUDOKU



DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to previous puzzle

C	A	S	T	I	E	I	N	T	H	E	A	I	R
S	E	A	R	L	A	D	O	G	E	A			
P	E	A	R	L	A	D	V	A	L	O	R	E	M
R	R	D	S	E	L	I	B						
A	L	I	M	E	N	T	S	C	A	N	D	A	L
I	C	O											
N	A	I	R	A									
D	E	L	E	R	A								
S	M	E	L	L	A	R	E	T	C	H			
H	O												
E	N	D	O	W	E	D	M	A	S	C	O	T	S
L	E	W	A	T	E	R							
L	I	E	N	W	A	I	T	N	Y	A	L	A	
A	L	G	F	E	A	L	L	R					
C	O	L	L	E	C	T	O	R	S	I	T	E	M

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

8	4	2	1	3	7	9	5	6
5	7	6	9	8	4	1	2	3
1	3	9	6	5	2	7	8	4
3	9	5	8	7	6	4	1	2
7	6	8	4	2	1	5	3	9
2	1	4	3	9	5	6	7	8
4	8	3	5	1	9	2	6	7
6	2	1	7	4	8	3	9	5
9	5	7	2	6	3	8	4	1

FAITH

Duties cited in Tirukkural

Whenever we face difficult moments in life, our religion extends a helping hand and encourages us not to fear, said Lanka Jeyaraj in a discourse. Death is undoubtedly a major loss in our worldly sense; however, our spiritual philosophy teaches us that it is an illusion. Our existence is made of both body and life force, soul. Though the physical form is left behind, the life force does not cease to exist. Based on our actions, karma and transitions, the journey continues until the soul achieves spiritual maturity. For further understanding, five acts of God are creation, preservation, destruction, concealment and grace. Concealment means God hides the ultimate truth until our karma is resolved and then reveals it through his grace.

Tirukkural, a great work by Tiruvalluvar, places Tamils on a global pedestal. For any civilisation, having a text like Tirukkural alone is enough. It is a timeless work that openly explains the deeper truth and principles behind life and creation. Tirukkural is divided into four sections: virtue, wealth, love and liberation or salvation. Tiruvalluvar emphasises that God cannot be fully attained through grammar or knowledge, but can be realised through renunciation. He believes that if virtue is deeply rooted in a society, no one can destroy it. Tirukkural explains that *Aram* (virtue) is divided into *Illaram* (householder's life) and *Thuravaram* (aesthetic life). He describes 11 duties that a person should fulfil. These include protecting *Brahmacharis*, maintaining aesthetics and renunciation, caring for those in need, honouring the departed ancestors, worshipping the divine, showing hospitality to guests, caring for relatives and society, and, finally, protecting oneself.

HEALTH

Evolving public health strategies to address under and over nutrition

A recent study conducted in Vellore found that prevalence of thinness and overweight began to rise sharply between ages seven and nine; double burden of malnutrition is a cause of concern in India and needs to be addressed; programmes designed primarily to combat undernutrition need to be re-thought

Ramya Kannan
CHENNAI

In a recent study conducted in Vellore, that followed children from birth to nine years, it was observed that while most children had a normal Body Mass Index (BMI) in early childhood, prevalence of thinness and overweight began to rise sharply between ages seven and nine. This study bolsters the results from just-released National Family Health Survey (NFHS) - 6 indicating the double burden of malnutrition that India is currently facing.

The double burden of malnutrition is a term used to describe a curious phenomenon – a state where both undernutrition and overnutrition are threats to the health of the population. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), malnutrition, in all its forms, includes undernutrition (wasting, stunting, underweight), inadequate vitamins or minerals, overweight, obesity, and results in diet-related non-communicable diseases. Coincidentally, the results of both these studies released almost simultaneously provide similar results, but the Vellore studies tell us more – at what stage does thinness and obesity set in, thus providing a way to address the issue at the right time, in order to effectively control it.

Data from the NFHS-6 records improvements in child nutrition – stunting, wasting and severe wasting have fallen compared to NFHS-5, but this is neither uniform nor even. There are still pockets in the country where the levels remain at the stage of 'significant concern'. The same data shows, at the polar end of the spectrum, a steady increase in overweight and obesity among adults (especially women and urban, wealthier groups), along with growing prevalence or risk of diabetes and high blood pressure.

The Vellore study brings new findings from a collaborative study between CMC-Vellore and ARUMDA at TIFR, and highlights a critical shift in India's nutrition challenge. Children in low-/middle-income urban communities are facing both thinness and obesity by school age. The malnutrition and enteric diseases (MAL-ED) study recruited 251 children from urban slums in Vellore, Tamil Nadu, India, between 2010 and 2012, with further follow-ups conducted until age nine.

As per a paper published by Birsan Yilmaz et al in the peer-reviewed journal *Lancet Regional Health Southeast Asia*, approximately 45% of children were stunted at age two. By age seven, 26.3% of children were classified as thin, and 5.2% of children were classified as overweight/obese. By age nine, the prevalence of underweight was 21.6%, while overweight/obesity had increased to 14.6%.

Interestingly, the mother's BMI was a predictor of childhood thinness, particularly at ages 5 and 9. Incidentally, when read along with data from the NFHS-6 which indicates that 30.7% of women aged 15-49 were overweight or obese in 2023-24, compared to 24% in NFHS-5, it indicates a huge



Catching them young: The Vellore study brings new findings from a collaborative study between CMC-Vellore and ARUMDA at TIFR, and highlights a critical shift in India's nutrition challenge. FILE PHOTO

trans-generational burden in India. Maternal weight is clearly an important factor in foetal and child health as well, but one that has not been sufficiently examined by policy makers in the form of maternal health interventions.

Surprise element

Ullas Kolthur of ARUMDA, TIFR, one of the authors of the paper, said the surprise element of the study was not that children born with low birth weight were becoming obese, but the fact that weight-related issues begin so early in children.

Beena Koshy, of CMC-Vellore, highlights the importance of monitoring children's growth after the first 1,000 days after birth. "This is a cohort in a low-income, urban setting in Vellore, which is part of our MAL-ED group, being studied for years. In these communities, children are facing thinness, yes, but also obesity even before they enter the teens." She explains that in the study location, the mean birth weight is 2.7 kg and 17% of children are born with low birth weight. At age two, about 45% of children are stunted, but 80% of the children have caught up by age nine. "This means the nutrition issue we face today is not only about underweight toddlers, but the entire range of nutrition sufficiency or insufficiency through childhood."

It also means our understanding of malnutrition has not been on point, or, is

The MAL-ED study recruited 251 children from urban slums in Vellore, between 2010 and 2012, with further follow-ups conducted until age nine

no longer on point. India which has had a long track record of undernutrition, wasting and stunting has come to look upon malnutrition as exclusively resting in this quarter. More recent evidence shows that it is no longer that simple at all, that there are nuances that we might be missing in childhood.

Dr. Kolthur adds: "What is malnutrition? How must it be handled? We know now, from this study, that feeding all children the same diet might not be such a great idea after all. There must be differentiation in how we tailor the diets of children, early on." Dr. Koshy points out that the easy availability of packaged foods, sugary drinks and deep fried food in sachets have a huge role to play. "While these foods are available cheap, the access to healthy fruits, vegetables and proteins is still not very good."

Nihal Thomas, senior professor of Endocrinology at CMC Vellore, who was instrumental in leading efforts to offer a differential diagnosis of 'lean diabetes' (Type 5), points out that undernutrition in early life can lead to two potential

trajectories. On one hand, the persistence of undernutrition, besides leading to stunting, can potentially lead to defects in insulin secretion and even situations where lean individuals develop diabetes in relation to malnutrition. On the contrary, in those with overnutrition, there is the danger of increase in overweight and subsequently increasing the risk of diabetes, hypertension and cardiovascular disease, he explains.

Addressing the issue

At this juncture, public health experts urge a full complement of health policies that will address a judicious blend of both dietary interventions to tackle undernutrition and lifestyle interventions, including improving diet and activity. A one-sided intervention – addressing only undernutrition, and not overnutrition would be a mistake that the country can scarcely afford to make at this stage, loaded as it is with huge burdens of metabolic diseases including insulin resistance and hypertension.

The FAO has meanwhile recommended, based on case studies from six countries, that programmes once designed primarily to combat undernutrition (ICDS, school meals, PDS) now need to be re-thought to address both inadequate calories/micronutrients and poor-quality, ultra-processed, high-sugar, high-fat diets. (ramya.kannan@thehindu.co.in)

THE GIST

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), malnutrition, in all its forms, includes undernutrition (wasting, stunting, underweight), inadequate vitamins or minerals, overweight, obesity, and results in diet-related non-communicable diseases

Children in low-/middle-income urban communities are facing both thinness and obesity by school age, a collaborative study between CMC-Vellore and ARUMDA at TIFR finds. One author of the paper, said the surprise element of the study was not that children born with low birth weight were becoming obese, but the fact that weight related issues begin so early in children

A one-sided intervention – addressing only undernutrition, and not overnutrition would be a mistake that the country can scarcely afford to make at this stage, loaded as it is with huge burdens of metabolic diseases including insulin resistance and hypertension

Understanding SPF number on sunscreen lotion and how it is measured

Athira Elssa Johnson
CHENNAI

Sun Protection Factor, or SPF, is designed to measure protection against ultraviolet B (UVB) radiation, the part of sunlight primarily responsible for sunburns. But it does not tell the whole story about sun protection, nor does a higher SPF automatically mean better protection. Understanding what SPF measures, and what it does not, can help in making more informed decisions about skin protection.

In standard testing, sunscreen is applied to the skin and researchers compare how much ultraviolet exposure is needed to produce redness, or erythema, on protected skin versus unprotected skin, says Ketheja Nasika, consultant dermatologist, Rela Hospital, Chennai. "If an SPF is 30, theoretically the amount of UV exposure needed to cause minimal erythema on sunscreen-applied skin would be 30 times higher than on

unprotected skin," she explains.

Narayanan A., consultant dermatologist at SRM Prime Hospital, Chennai, points out however that "the testing is conducted under controlled conditions using a specified amount of sunscreen. In real life, most people apply far less sunscreen than is used during laboratory testing, meaning actual protection may be lower than the SPF listed on the label."

What do SPF numbers mean?

One of the most common misconceptions is that SPF values increase protection in a straight line. According to K.R. Sharmatha, senior consultant dermatologist, SIMS Hospital, Chennai, SPF 30 blocks about 95-97% of UVB radiation, SPF 50 blocks roughly 97-98%, and SPF 80 blocks close to 99%. The difference is one roughly one percentage point, with protection gains becoming progressively smaller at higher SPF values. While higher SPF provides



Shield and defence: Experts and dermatologists say that SPF 30 provides adequate protection for most people when applied correctly. GETTY IMAGES

somewhat greater protection, the difference between SPF 30 and SPF 50 is far smaller than most people imagine.

A sunscreen's SPF value only

measures protection against UVB radiation. Pushpa Gnanaraj, senior consultant dermatologist, Apollo Speciality Hospitals, Vanagaram, Chennai, notes that UVA penetrates

more deeply. UVA radiation is strongly linked to pigmentation, photoageing, wrinkles and loss of skin elasticity. For this reason, experts emphasise that SPF alone should not determine sunscreen choice. They recommend choosing a broad-spectrum sunscreen with PA+++ protection, which indicates protection against UVA rays as well as products that provide protection against both UVA and UVB radiation rather than focusing solely on the SPF number.

Experts also say that SPF 30 provides adequate protection for most people when applied correctly. "Anything above SPF 30 is okay for Indian skin," says Dr. Nasika. She recommends SPF 30 as a minimum, while SPF 50 or higher for outdoor sports, extended sun exposure, or individuals with photosensitive skin conditions.

Application matters

Many tend to overlook correct application. Experts recommend applying sunscreen 15 to 20 minutes

before sun exposure and ensuring that exposed areas such as the face, neck, hands and forearms are covered. Reapplication is essential every two to three hours during outdoor exposure, especially after washing the face or if the product is not water-resistant. And for people working outdoors, and in sports, experts recommend waterproof formulations. High-SPF sunscreens also require regular reapplication because sunscreen do not block 100% of UV radiation. A properly applied SPF 30 sunscreen may offer better protection than an SPF 100 product applied inadequately.

The difference between the benefits that SPF 30 and SPF 50 offer is small. The more important factors are choosing a broad-spectrum product, applying it correctly, and reapplying it regularly. This summer, stay safe under the sun. Understanding SPF is less about finding the highest number and more about using sunscreen effectively and consistently. (athira.elssa@thehindu.co.in)



Data hygiene

Census enumerators should not face difficulties in the name of re-verification

It is disturbing that some Census 2027 enumerators in States such as Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh are facing issues for extremely unusual reasons. In these two States where the first phase of the Census – Houselisting and Housing Census (HLO) – is under way, they have been advised to “revisit households and correct the data discrepancies” and “not to select options that may show the government in a poor light”. Re-verification is a legitimate part of any study or survey but this must be done to reflect reality accurately, not to manage perceptions. In Rajasthan, the issue arises from a circular of the Director of Census Operations to district-level officials regarding discrepancies identified in field data. Apparently, the objective is to ensure that data are accurately recorded, using appropriate options in the questionnaire. However, in some cases, enumerators have been told to record data based on assumptions. For example, if some households do not have toilets, enumerators have been told to check whether toilets are available nearby, on the basis of which the entry can be changed from “open defecation” to “[having] access to latrine”. In Uttar Pradesh, the message seems to be not to present facts as they are, raising concerns about data integrity and reliability for a crucial and sensitive exercise.

The present episode brings to the fore the efficacy of programmes such as the country’s long-running campaign against open defecation. While many States have made tangible progress, it would be unrealistic to conclude that the problem has been eliminated. For administrative purposes, including funding, it is reasonable to classify cities and villages on the basis of certain parameters as Open Defecation Free (ODF), ODF Plus and ODF Plus Model. But, the critical question is whether such a classification reflects reality and comes into conflict with the enumerators’ work. It is the responsibility of policymakers to ensure that Census data are accurate and credible. They must also sensitise people to provide correct information, as public policies and welfare schemes are formulated on the basis of these data and ultimately benefit them. The authorities must recognise and resolve the legitimate difficulties faced by enumerators. As the significance of the Census hardly needs any reiteration, the Union government should be quite liberal in enhancing allowances for enumerators to ensure efficient and timely work. It should not only be conscious of the financial outlay involved – about ₹11,718 crore for the entire country – but also of the need to make reliable data publicly available for purposes such as targeted and inclusive policymaking. The government should send a clear message that data sanitisation must not be undertaken under the guise of re-verification.

Fire and furore

Poor compliance and weak enforcement have led to deaths in fires

Indian cities rely on an economic ecosystem in which businesses often operate beyond the approved limits while enforcement remains sporadic. A fire *per se* is not odd, but a slew of deadly fires in urban areas, from the Uphaar Cinema fire in 1997 to the Arpora nightclub fire in 2025, has involved the same vulnerabilities: overcrowding, blocked escape routes, unapproved modifications to interior spaces, poor compliance, and weak enforcement. Prior inquiries, court rulings, and promises of reform have not prevented similar safety failures from recurring. Many of the victims of the B&B fire in Delhi on June 3 were medical tourists, lodged there due to the proximity to South Delhi’s hospitals. Many were also infirm and could not act quickly to escape heat or suffocation – a situation that likely prevailed in the ICU fire at a Muzaffarpur hospital on June 4, which claimed four lives, including two elderly individuals. According to the Delhi Fire Services and the Municipal Corporation, the B&B lacked a fire department clearance, violated fire safety norms, and had more than three as many rooms as allowed for B&Bs. These bodies are also answerable to how the facility operated in this way, especially since the Delhi High Court had directed the municipality in January to audit the city’s hospitality hubs. The building had been rebuilt in 2013 and reportedly exploited land-use exemptions to bypass municipal bylaws that required wider roads for fire tenders.

The tolerance of hazardous conditions with a high fire risk persists because cost-cutting entities, whether establishments or governments, overlook the value of safety measures when there is no fire, even if the measures prevented a fire. The state must inculcate fire safety using principled inspections, incentives, and sanctions, and sustain a culture in urban centres to practise it as a matter of course. Local authorities often blame owners for “clandestine” modifications; the Delhi police have charged the B&B’s owner with culpable homicide not amounting to murder. But the implication that long-standing negligence was the distal cause must extend to the absence of enforcement. The particular charge also results in consistently in convictions, undermining the penal system’s ability to deter such incidents. The misuse of provisions for B&Bs finally points to failures that the Tourism Department should investigate; the city’s decision to rescind them is not adequate as an answer. Political blame-games are a red herring: a deadly fire is a product of the incidental causes on that day and systemic factors that preserved the risk. In the same vein, the government’s response must encompass these factors or they may amount, once more, to little.

A curated compilation of articles, on the Editorial and Opinion pages, to mark World Environment Day on June 5

Funding India’s climate future, a trillion-dollar question

There is one figure that should command the attention of every policymaker, banker, and financial expert in India. India will require ₹162.5 trillion – roughly \$2.5 trillion – by 2030 to meet its Nationally Determined Contributions. Over the longer term, the cost of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 is estimated at \$10.1 trillion, nearly three times India’s current GDP.

This is not a counsel of despair. India has more tools to bridge this gap than it has deployed so far. But doing so requires a clear financing strategy and the institutional resolve to build mechanisms that can mobilise capital at scale.

The financing gap

Decarbonising just four sectors – steel, cement, power, and road transport, which together account for more than half of India’s carbon emissions – will require \$467 billion in additional capital expenditure between 2022 and 2030, roughly \$54 billion annually, or 1.3% of GDP. These are sectors where the private sector will not lead without strong regulatory incentives, because the economics of green steel and green cement simply do not yet work without policy support.

By 2030, developing economies are estimated to need \$5 trillion to \$6 trillion for climate action. The developed world promised \$100 billion annually at Paris – and missed it. The Baku New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) commits \$300 billion by 2035 – which India rightly considers insufficient. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI)’s own Report on Currency and Finance estimates that India needs an additional annual investment of at least 2.5% of GDP for green financing until 2030.

The international community will not fill this gap on India’s behalf. The honest answer is that India must mobilise most of it from within.

India is not starting from zero. By the end of 2024, India had issued \$55.9 billion in green, social, sustainability, and sustainability-linked debt – a 186% rise since 2021. Green debt leads, making up 83% of the total, with most funds directed to clean energy and transport. Sovereign green bonds worth ₹477 billion have helped set benchmarks and boost investor confidence. This is genuinely impressive.

The instruments exist. The challenge is deploying them at scale. India already has green bonds, sovereign green bonds, sustainability-linked bonds, blended finance structures, transition finance instruments and infrastructure investment trusts. What is missing is the connective tissue: a taxonomy, a guarantee architecture, a liquidity mechanism, and the regulatory incentives that make green finance cheaper than brown finance.

The most significant shift in India’s



Balakrishna Pisupati

Head of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) office in India

climate-finance landscape in 2025 did not occur at a climate conference but in Mint Street. In 2025, the RBI’s Climate Finance and Management of Climate Change Risks Directions for Commercial Banks and Small Finance Banks established a comprehensive framework requiring banks to integrate climate risks into their lending and risk-management practices. Importantly, eligible green activities can qualify as priority sector lending (PSL), while investments in sovereign green bonds are also recognised under the framework.

This is a bigger deal than it looks. PSL requirements are one of the most powerful levers that the RBI holds over bank behaviour. Currently, for every ₹10,000 crore in loans, banks must ensure ₹4,000 crore of PSL.

The RBI can and must go further. It has proposed accepting sovereign green bonds as collateral with more flexibility in margin requirements and adjusting reserve requirements to support credit flows to green sectors. The next frontier is differentiated capital requirements based on climate risk – essentially, making brown lending more capital-intensive and green lending less so.

The RBI’s Climate Risk Information System on climate-related financial risks for commercial banks, and its inclusion of sustainable finance in its regulatory sandbox, are steps in the right direction.

The next critical step is a comprehensive climate stress-testing framework for Indian banks – one that assesses the flood risk of a loan portfolio in Bihar as rigorously as it evaluates credit risk.

The taxonomy unlocks everything else

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced in the Union Budget 2024-25 that India would develop a climate-finance taxonomy. This is the foundation of the entire ecosystem. Without a clear legal definition of what counts as “green”, green bonds cannot be credibly verified. PSL classifications remain questionable, international investors cannot make compliance claims, and regulators cannot effectively curb greenwashing.

The Ministry of Finance’s Climate Finance Taxonomy and the Ministry of Steel’s Green Steel Taxonomy will facilitate standardised sustainable investments and boost investor confidence.

The international climate finance system has one instrument that India has chronically underused: blended finance – the strategic use of public or concessional funds to de-risk private investment. Financial instruments such as green bonds, climate funds, and blended finance models are important in mobilising capital for sustainability initiatives, and unlocking

investment at scale will help drive long-term resilience in India’s most climate-sensitive sectors.

Here is the arithmetic that makes blended finance so compelling. A first loss guarantee of \$100 million from a public source can unlock \$500 million to \$1 billion in private co-investment in solar, offshore wind, green hydrogen, or climate-resilient agriculture, because it absorbs the risk that private capital finds unacceptable. It needs a capitalisation injection and an expanded mandate to get there.



Where the finance gap is most acute

One dimension of India’s climate finance challenge that receives almost no attention is its federally disaggregated nature. Climate adaptation – the kind of finance that protects coastal villages in Odisha, drought-proofing in Vidarbha, or spring rejuvenation in the Himalayas – is delivered at the State level. But States have neither the borrowing capacity nor the institutional infrastructure to access international climate finance. Tamil Nadu and Kerala have shown that ambitious State-level climate programming is possible. The financing architecture needs to catch up with the ambition.

There are four things that India must do now. First, finalise and enact the Climate Finance Taxonomy without further delay. It is the single most leveraged action available.

Second, the RBI must move from enabling green finance to mandating it – through differentiated capital requirements, mandatory climate stress testing for banks, and expanded PSL targets that include climate adaptation alongside mitigation.

Third, establish a State Climate Finance Facility, capitalised for example, by the Union, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), and international sources, to give States and municipalities genuine access to green debt markets.

Fourth, scale sovereign green bond issuances rapidly and embed them in the SLR framework to deepen the domestic market and attract foreign capital.

India’s climate-finance challenge is large and urgent, but not insurmountable. The instruments exist, the regulatory framework is taking shape, and capital is available. What is missing is not money, but the institutional capacity to deploy it at scale. Fixing that is the work of the Budget cycles. The country that solves this challenge fastest will shape the future of climate finance in the developing world.

The views expressed are personal

A national environmental survey whose time came

Anthropologist Anna Tsing writes, “Anthropocene, <is> the epoch in which human disturbance outranks other geological forces...although some interpreters see the name as implying the triumph of humans, the opposite seems more accurate: without planning or intention, humans have made a mess of our planet.” It is in this precise predicament that India finds itself: environmental damage has slipped beyond intention and control, belonging to no one entirely and to everyone at once.

An unfolding crisis

A survey by the Yale School of the Environment of 10,751 Indians (December 2024-February 2025) found that most respondents had experienced at least one extreme event, including heat waves (71%), agricultural pests and diseases (60%), power outages (59%), water pollution (53%), droughts and water shortages (52%), and air pollution (52%). Based on Indian meteorological department and State of India’s Environment findings, nearly half of the 37% of 870 river-monitoring stations recorded alarming levels of toxic heavy metals. Air pollution in 2022 reduced average life expectancy by about three years, while some parts of the country experienced extreme weather for nearly 88% of the year. The Desertification and Land Degradation Atlas of India estimates that 29.7% of the country’s land is degraded. Yet, despite this mounting environmental crisis, India still lacks a comprehensive understanding of the state of its environment.

In India, the environment sits on the back bench – starved of funds, with only 0.07% of the annual budget allocated to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), understaffed, and intellectually neglected. Its custodians often work in silos with overlapping jurisdictions. The result is ignorance masquerading as knowledge. The MoEFCC’s annual reports outline forest-restoration



Saumya Gupta

Doctoral researcher, Anthropology Department, University of Amsterdam



Thirunavukarasu S.

Junior Research fellow, Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, University of Madras

A credible environmental survey is essential for informed policymaking

initiatives such as the National Afforestation Programme (NAP) and REDD+ (reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation in developing countries ‘+’ additional forest-related activities that protect the climate), yet say little about the scale of State-wide deforestation, its impact on biodiversity and livelihoods, or the country’s preparedness for future environmental challenges. Beyond these omissions, the reports often obscure the nuances behind impressive plantation figures, sidestep scrutiny of fund utilisation and environmental compliance, and overlook findings from global assessments.

The case for EnvSI

Much of this information is already measured by governments, think tanks, educational institutions and private actors, but it remains fragmented. What is missing is not data, but a system that brings it together. The remedy is to have an Annual Environmental Survey of India (EnvSI): a unified platform that aggregates evidence, conducts independent audits, issues actionable assessments and grades performance. EnvSI must provide an unsparing account of environmental reality – however uncomfortable. The objective is not merely to document what has been lost, but to identify what can still be protected.

Drafting an EnvSI would require a clear statutory mandate, functional autonomy and protected tenure for an expert-led body. It should integrate data from government agencies, independent researchers, the private sector and field-based evidence. Its methodology must combine quantitative indicators with livelihood assessments, using cross-verified datasets and rigorous analysis. Some may question the cost.

The answer is simple: the cost of not doing it is far greater, and doing it would bring some reason to the redundancy of surveying efforts. An EnvSI

could deliver four key benefits. First, it would help prevent further environmental degradation, temper climate-driven disasters, and build resilient responses through coordinated action and better resource use. Second, it would support the timely achievement of climate targets, enhance credibility and unlock climate finance. Third, it would better align economic development with conservation, while protecting tribal rights, traditional livelihoods and the interests of displaced communities. Finally, it would strengthen the commons by recognising and safeguarding the interdependence between ecosystems, species and human societies.

Finally, the template for an EnvSI already exists. The Economic Survey of India offers the Environment Ministry its clearest model: an integrated report prepared by experts under the Chief Economic Adviser, independent enough to present inconvenient truths. It draws on multiple sources, rigorously scrutinises evidence, rejects comforting narratives, and alerts policymakers to emerging challenges and necessary reforms. India constantly faces difficult trade-offs between development and conservation.

Keeping nature in sight

Home to one-sixth of humanity on just 4% of the earth’s land area, India must pursue growth while meeting climate commitments. In such circumstances, environmental concerns are often pushed to the margins. An independent and audacious EnvSI can help balance growth, sustainability, livelihoods and justice. Without India’s full commitment, global climate goals will remain elusive. More importantly, an EnvSI can make visible the environmental changes that have become normalised, helping build the awareness needed to protect what remains.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fire safety still neglected

The tragic fire in Delhi has once again exposed the chronic inadequacies in our approach to public safety in India. Particularly disturbing is the fact that such disasters are no longer isolated incidents but recurring reminders of systemic negligence and administrative

complacency. In the aftermath of every major fire accident, assurances are offered, inquiries are ordered, and recommendations are drafted. Yet, little changes on the ground. Safety norms continue to be flouted with impunity, inspections remain perfunctory, and

accountability is conspicuously absent. The recurrence of such tragedies raises a troubling question: how many more lives must be lost before there is meaningful action? **Nagarajamani M.V.**, Hyderabad

Discrepancies in Census
Discrepancies in Census

data must be rectified. The Office of the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India must correct the irregularities to ensure the integrity of the process. We need robust and dedicated field functionaries to ensure accuracy and precision. **Manas Agarwal**, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh

Students deserve better
When years of effort and investment are undone by negligence, public trust in national examinations is eroded. Education cannot thrive on ad hoc systems. The government must ensure transparency and secure processes to prevent such lapses. Students deserve fairness, not

uncertainty. Restoring confidence in testing mechanisms is not merely an administrative task – it is a moral responsibility to millions who see education as the pathway to progress. **K. Chidanand Kumar**, Bengaluru

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

The power of mangroves over seawalls

India's coastline relies on seawalls and embankments, while Ecosystem-based Adaptation through mangroves, seagrasses and coral reefs continues to reduce climate risks



Jui Gusani

Postgraduate from the Indian Institute of Forest Management, Bhopal, and was formerly an intern at the Sustainable Futures Collaborative



Sony R. K.

Associate Fellow at Sustainable Futures Collaborative

When Cyclone Dana made landfall near Bhitarkanika on Odisha's coast, the region's mangroves quietly provided a form of protection that billions of rupees in coastal infrastructure often struggle to deliver: reducing climate impacts while strengthening ecosystems and livelihoods. Across India's coastline, mangroves, seagrass meadows, and coral reefs are already helping communities adapt to rising climate risks. Yet seawalls, groynes, and embankments continue to dominate adaptation spending, even though they can be costly to maintain and sometimes transfer risks elsewhere. Despite their proven benefits, these ecosystem-based interventions are rarely recognised as Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EbA), limiting their visibility in adaptation planning and finance.

For millions living along India's coastline, climate change is already a lived reality. From rising sea levels across the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal to saline intrusion, intensifying cyclones and storm surges, climate change is multiplying threats along India's 11,000-kilometre coastline. These interacting hazards not only reshape the ecologically fragile coastal

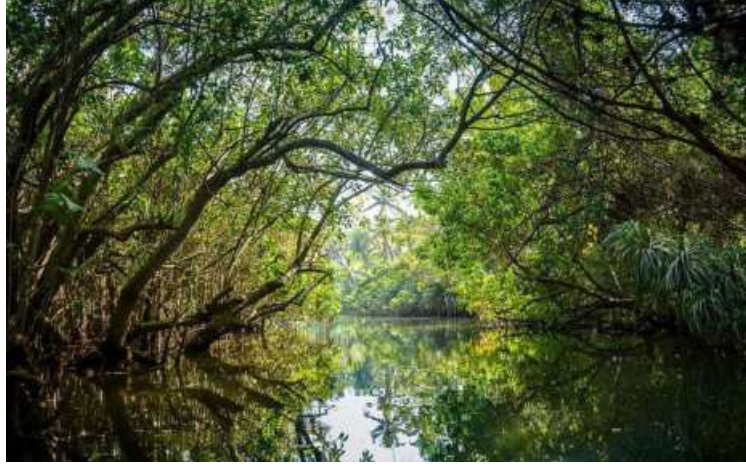
landscape but also directly upend the lives, livelihoods and homes of around 250 million people. In this context, EbA offers a promising strategy for reducing climate risk while sustaining the ecosystems that support fisheries, agriculture, and tourism.

India's coastal adaptation landscape reveals a stark preference for engineered measures such as seawalls, groynes, embankments, and tetrapods. This preference is also reflected in public spending. While coastal States spent ₹2,641 crore on hard protection measures over the last decade, the National Coastal Mission's budget fell from ₹195 crore in 2022-23 to ₹50 crore in 2024-25. Although grey measures remain necessary and effective in many high-density urban contexts, they are expensive to maintain and can displace underlying risks rather than resolve them. In Kerala, for example, hard armouring along eroding coastlines has protected specific sites while accelerating erosion and damage in adjacent areas.

Untapped adaptation asset

EbA uses biodiversity and ecosystem services to help people adapt to climate change.

India's coastline hosts a range of ecosystems, including mangroves,



Green refuge: Across India's coastline, mangroves, seagrass meadows, and coral reefs are already helping communities adapt to rising climate risks. GETTY IMAGES

seagrasses, coral reefs, and wetlands, that act as natural buffers against climate impacts. Research identifies India as a global 'hot-spot' for coastal EbA, with mangroves protecting more people per hectare than almost any other country. Yet this ecological shield remains an underutilised asset in India's climate resilience strategy.

The benefits of EbA are already visible on the ground. In the Sundarbans, for instance, over 18,000 women restored 4,600 hectares of mangroves, blunting the devastation of cyclones Amphan and Yaas. The restoration also streng-

thened livelihoods through activities such as honey collection and crab farming, highlighting EbA's social and economic co-benefits.

EbA remains peripheral to India's adaptation agenda. Fragmented mandates, weak monitoring, and a preference for visible infrastructure often leave ecosystem-based interventions buried within broader sectoral programmes rather than recognised as adaptation in their own right.

The most overlooked barrier, however, is the ambiguity surrounding the term EbA. The policy space is crowded with overlapping

concepts such as Nature-based Solutions (NbS), Ecosystem-based Coastal Adaptation (EbCA), Ecosystem-based Disaster Risk Reduction (Eco-DRR), and other ecosystem-centred approaches, creating uncertainty about what qualifies as EbA. Additionally, many ecosystem-based interventions are implemented through broader development, conservation, or restoration programmes, with their adaptation benefits rarely assessed or recorded separately. As a result, many coastal EbA interventions remain concealed within sectoral initiatives or generic policy categories, making India's coastal EbA portfolio appear much weaker than it truly is.

Why classification matters

The Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats & Tangible Incomes programme illustrates the disconnect. It aims at restoring 540 square kilometres of mangroves across nine States. Although designed to protect coastal communities from the impacts of climate change, it is primarily framed as a restoration programme.

Without clear recognition and classification, many EbA interven-

tions remain fragmented across different labels and schemes. Clear classification helps identify, monitor, and evaluate adaptation outcomes while ensuring that the socio-economic benefits of EbA are properly reflected in planning and finance. This matters even more as the Global Goal on Adaptation has renewed attention to how adaptation outcomes are measured and reported. Without clear ways of identifying and tracking EbA interventions, India risks undercounting some of its most effective climate responses.

While this may appear to be a question of terminology, it carries real policy consequences. For better adaptation action, India must move from

dispersed projects to a coherent strategy that embeds EbA within coastal planning and adaptation policy. The challenge is no longer whether ecosystem-based adaptation works but whether our policy frameworks are prepared to recognise, measure, and scale it. By operationalising EbA as a core climate and development strategy, India can reposition its natural capital as one of its most resilient and equitable lines of defence.



A framework for climate and development capital

Climate and development are often treated as separate challenges, even when the same investment can deliver both climate and development outcomes



Aravindan Srinivasan

Executive Director, Climate Action at AVPN

Asia is sitting on significant pools of capital committed to climate action, health, and poverty reduction. What we have not yet built is a framework that recognises these as part of the same pool. Globally, half of the \$4 trillion SDG financing gap lies in the energy transition alone. That means that the single largest driver of development underfunding is also a climate problem. In India, estimates suggest that achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will require additional investments of around 6% of GDP annually, and the sectors driving this gap – energy, infrastructure, and health – are also the sectors where climate investment is most urgently needed.

Multiple returns

The challenge is not that climate and development require separate pools of capital. Both need substantial more investment. The challenge is that we continue to evaluate them separately, even when the same investment can deliver both climate and development outcomes.

Every year, fossil fuel combus-

tion accounts for 0.95 million premature deaths in India. Extreme heat cost the country 247 billion working hours in 2024 alone. A clean energy investment that displaces coal generation produces a carbon return, a health return, and a productivity return simultaneously. Yet, we currently count only the first. That means the investment case visible to funders is a fraction of what it actually is, and the capital being mobilised reflects that limited view.

India's renewable sector could generate 3.4 million jobs by 2030. Each of these jobs represents not only a livelihood outcome but also a health outcome and, in districts facing structural unemployment, a poverty-reduction outcome. So, while the funds exist in principle, what is needed is an investment framework that channels capital across the full stack of returns.

Consider the Kolhapur foundry cluster, one of the most concentrated agglomerations of small manufacturing units in India, responsible for roughly 5% of the country's cast-iron exports and supporting around 27,700 jobs. These firms burn enormous quantities of grid electricity, face rising



Powering progress: A clean energy investment can improve health outcomes, strengthen livelihoods, and build economic resilience. GETTY IMAGES

carbon-compliance costs as the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism comes into force, and are simultaneously absorbing the shock of American tariffs that have stalled certain export lines.

The energy cost problem, the trade competitiveness problem, and the climate problem are, again, the same problem. Helping these firms shift to open-access renewable power does not merely reduce their emissions; it restores

their price competitiveness in markets that will increasingly price carbon at the border and protects the employment base of a region with few other industrial anchors. An investor making a bet on renewable energy infrastructure for this cluster is also, whether or not they account for it, making a bet on industrial employment and export diversification.

This same logic extends to agriculture. In Maharashtra's cotton

belt, a biochar programme targeting 10 lakh farmers projects an income uplift of ₹85,000 per farmer per year through soil amendment, yield improvement, reduced fertilizer dependence, and lower pest pressure. The same programme removes 1.45 million tonnes of CO2 annually. The carbon credit and the farmer's income gain are two readings of the same physical intervention: organic matter returned to degraded soil. Investors can hold a position in one or both. Currently, most investors capture neither, because markets have not yet developed instruments that make it easy to hold both simultaneously.

Unlocking capital

The technical assistance that philanthropy can offer here is not marginal. It is the difference between a project pipeline that is analytically ready and one that sits on a shelf. Aggregating demand across rural water boards, urban local bodies, smallholder cooperatives, and industrial clusters is work that commercial capital is unlikely to fund at the origination

stage. But once that aggregation is completed, load shapes are mapped, regulatory risks are documented, and payment security mechanisms are structured, the same commercial capital will compete to invest.

The opportunity is not simply to mobilise more capital, though additional financing remains essential to meet Asia's climate and development needs. It is also to help capital deployers recognise the full spectrum of returns that their investments can generate. A clean energy investment not only reduces emissions; it can improve health outcomes, strengthen livelihoods, enhance productivity, and build economic resilience. When these outcomes remain invisible in investment decision-making, capital is allocated against an incomplete investment thesis.

By building frameworks that measure and value both financial and social returns, we can direct more capital towards solutions that deliver the greatest overall impact.



When El Niño becomes an economic crisis

As climate risk increasingly becomes economic risk, stronger adaptation through heat-resilient cities, worker protection and better water management is essential



Sushanta Mahapatra

teaches economics at ICFAI Foundation for Higher Education, Hyderabad

India often meets the arrival of extreme heat and erratic rain with a familiar shrug: the weather is harsh, the monsoon is uncertain, and life must go on. But that response misses the larger point. If El Niño returns as forecast, India will not face merely a weather disturbance; it will face a development crisis in which heat stress, water scarcity, crop losses, and food inflation expose the fragility of the informal economy.

The U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) ENSO Diagnostic Discussion Report (2026) states that El Niño is likely to emerge soon, with an 82% chance during May-July 2026 and a 96% chance of continuing through the winter of 2026-27. India's own weather office, the India Meteorological Department (IMD), in its Long Range Forecast for the Southwest Monsoon Season (2026), has projected monsoon rainfall at 92% of the long-period average, placing it in the

"below normal" category.

That matters because, in India, climate shocks do not remain confined to the atmosphere. They move quickly into the labour market, the mandi, the household kitchen, and the city street. A weak monsoon is not simply a concern for meteorologists; it is a warning that rural incomes may weaken, food prices may rise, and working hours may shrink. For a country where a large share of employment remains informal and climate-exposed, El Niño is best understood as an economic transmission mechanism.

The heat economy

The first channel is heat. Long and punishing summers reduce the productivity of workers who cannot escape outdoor exposure – construction labourers, delivery riders, street vendors, and agricultural workers. Climate change affects them the most because they have the least protection and economic security. A hotter India is



Counting clouds: When rainfall becomes uncertain, sowing decisions become riskier, irrigation costs increase, and groundwater extraction intensifies. FILE PHOTO

not merely a warmer India; it is an India where earning a livelihood becomes increasingly difficult. Heat stress lowers productivity, reduces working hours, and deepens income insecurity for millions who depend on daily wages. The second channel is agricul-

ture. A 2026 Reuters report on India's monsoon outlook noted that the southwest monsoon supplies nearly 70% of the rainfall needed to water crops and recharge reservoirs and aquifers. When rainfall becomes uncertain, sowing decisions become riskier, irrigation

costs increase, and groundwater extraction intensifies. For small and marginal farmers already struggling with volatile prices and rising input costs, climatic uncertainty magnifies economic instability. In that sense, El Niño is not merely a climatic event; it is a shock to the production base of the rural economy.

The price shock

The third channel is inflation. Food prices are often where climate stress becomes visible to every household, not just farming communities. According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation's Consumer Price Index Press Release (2026), food inflation rose to 4.2% in April 2026, raising concerns that a weaker monsoon could intensify price pressures further. If rainfall weakens and crop stress deepens, price pressures can

quickly spread across vegetables, pulses, and other essentials. For policymakers, this creates a difficult balancing act: the same climate shock can simultaneously weaken growth and intensify inflationary pressures.

Urban India is increasingly becoming a heat trap due to concretisation and shrinking green cover. But the burden is unequal. While wealthier households can adapt through better housing and cooling, poorer households face overcrowding, water scarcity and prolonged heat exposure. Climate change is thus widening urban inequalities.

El Niño is not merely a weather event but a development challenge. India needs stronger climate adaptation measures through heat-resilient cities, worker protection and better water management. Climate risk is now economic risk, and its burden falls most heavily on the poor.



Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Compensation for families affected by deadly Thrissur blast

14 In ₹ lakhs. The Kerala Cabinet on Thursday decided to provide financial assistance of ₹14 lakh each to the families of those who died in the firecracker unit blast in Thrissur district on April 21. The explosion had claimed 16 lives. The government also cleared ₹52 crore in pending paddy procurement payments to cooperative societies in Palakkad. PTI

Higher recovery target as central bank looks to boost balance sheet

3,500 In ₹ crore. The state-owned Central Bank of India expects to recover ₹3,500-₹4,000 crore from bad loans in FY-27 as part of efforts to strengthen its balance sheet. The bank recovered ₹3,307 crore in FY-26 and plans to increase recoveries through settlement schemes and recovery drives. PTI

Bangladeshi nationals detained during anti-infiltration drive

501 Gujarat Police detained 501 Bangladeshi nationals over the past two days as part of "Operation Delta Hunt" targeting illegal stay in the country. The Statewide crackdown, launched on Wednesday, was conducted across multiple districts, with authorities describing it as a meticulously planned operation against illegal infiltration. PTI

Space sector investments sought by A.P. government

4 in \$ billion. Andhra Pradesh has set a target of attracting \$4 billion in investments into its space sector and has invited Russian companies to participate. Speaking at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Minister Nara Lokesh stressed plans for a 3,000-acre Tirupati Space City and dedicated space, aerospace and semiconductor manufacturing ecosystems. PTI

Number of international routes cut by India's IndiGo

6 IndiGo on Thursday said it would suspend operations to six international destinations, including Hong Kong and Shanghai, from July 1, citing higher operating costs and broader pressure from continued airspace restrictions. The move comes a week after IndiGo reported a fourth-quarter loss, largely due to higher jet fuel costs. REUTERS
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Is the war in Ukraine escalating?

Are civilian targets becoming central to battlefield strategy? Could the Ukraine war trigger a wider global crisis? Are external powers deepening their involvement in Ukraine? Is growing public discontent weakening support for the war in Russia?

EXPLAINER

Uma Purushothaman

The story so far:

With the war on Iran destabilising the global economy, the war in Ukraine seemed to have slipped off the news headlines. However, recent developments indicate that the war is escalating into a more dangerous and highly volatile phase.

What has changed?

In May 2026, with ground operations at a stalemate and forward movement stalled on both sides, Russia and Ukraine launched long-range aerial campaigns on each other. Both sides began targeting each other's civilian infrastructure. Ukraine scaled up its drone attacks to strike deep into Russian territory and targeted Russian economic lifelines, specifically oil refineries like the Ilsky and Novoshakhtinsk facilities as well as military logistics hubs.

Reports suggest that European nations are helping Ukraine to co-develop and mass-produce long-range missiles and attack drones, including through joint ventures. On May 21-22, a Ukrainian strike hit an educational complex in the city of Starobilsk (in the Luhansk Oblast which is Russian-held), killing 21 people (primarily young girls) and injuring 44 people. In response, Russia launched one of its fiercest drone and missile attacks across multiple cities in Ukraine, damaging civilian infrastructure and killing at least five people while injuring over a hundred people.

Russian authorities have also been publicly threatening to increase attacks in Kyiv. Again, on May 29, a drone hit a building in the Romanian city of Galati, which is seen as a violation of NATO airspace. Russia has denied responsibility. But this development throws open the possibility of NATO getting drawn into the war.

The situation has deteriorated to such an extent that an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council was called where the UN Secretary-General António Guterres warned that the conflict risks spiralling "out of control" and called for an immediate de-escalation and a full and unconditional ceasefire.

However, the drone and missile attacks have continued and on June 1-2, Russia launched another massive overnight assault striking multiple locations in Kyiv and Dnipro with the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine (HRMMU) reporting that this attack killed at least 22 civilians and injured 145.

So, this shift to long-range warfare has led to an increase in collateral damage and civilian deaths.

Moreover, on May 31, there was a drone strike on the Russian-held Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, increasing the risk of a nuclear accident. Ukraine denied responsibility. However, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev warned that Russia's response could extend beyond Ukraine.

Russia still has the advantage of resources and manpower: it continues to describe the conflict as a 'special military operation' and has not called up all the manpower at its disposal, which it can if it finally declares the conflict as a 'war'. Both Russia and Ukraine at this point seem to be following the same tactic: inflict maximum pain on the other side so as to be in a stronger position if and when formal diplomatic discussions start.



Shattered ruins: A Ukrainian strike hit an educational complex in Starobilsk, a Russian-held city in Luhansk Oblast, killing 21 people, mostly young girls, and injuring 44 others, on May 21-22. REUTERS

What is the current state of the peace talks?

The U.S.-led peace talks are currently stalled. The trilateral talks between the U.S., Russia and Ukraine in Geneva in February 2026 and subsequent discussions in UAE failed to achieve any diplomatic breakthroughs. Though Russia has said it is open to talks, its maximalist position makes any agreement with the Zelensky-led government impossible. Russia wants recognition of its sovereignty over the annexed regions of Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, etc., along with a strict limit on the size and capability of the Ukrainian armed forces and a legally binding commitment that NATO troops will never be deployed in Ukraine. Ukraine, egged on by its European partners, too has adopted a maximalist position, insisting on ironclad security guarantees before any cessation of hostilities and refusing to surrender any territory to Russia. Though Europe is reportedly considering opening a line of communication with Russia, it is unlikely that Russia will consider any of the EU members or the U.K. as a mediator given their open support for Ukraine over the years.

Is Putin under pressure?

This war of attrition is obviously also damaging the economies of both the countries. Ukraine is entirely dependent on aid from its Western partners while Russia was already running a huge budget deficit of around 5.9 trillion roubles by April this year brought on by the war and Western sanctions. This is already more than the budget deficit in 2025, according to a report in the Jacobin.

Ukraine now has around 70% of the Russian population within the range of its drones, forcing Russia to divert critical air defence systems from the front lines to protect its cities, including Moscow and Saint Petersburg, putting further pressure on its economy according to an Atlantic Council Report.

Some reports suggest that Russian President Vladimir Putin is under pressure because of the stalling war and a contracting economy. Inflation is increasing as Russia has increased VAT twice this year and interest rates are high.

In April this year, Russia's Central Bank Governor, Elvira Nabiullina, warned that Russia is facing a labour shortage for the first time in its modern history. Gennady Zyuganov, the chief of the Russian Communist Party, which has been supportive of Mr. Putin and the war, has said in the Duma that economic collapse could provoke a revolution like in 1917 and has urged the government to change course.

Moreover, the Japan Times has reported that in a sign of internal friction, senior government officials have warned Mr. Putin that spending on the war in Ukraine is on an unaffordable path, though the Defence Ministry has refused cuts to its budget. It appears that public disaffection is increasing.

While some of these reports might be motivated, it stands to reason that public optimism about winning the war easily has come down given the prolonged conflict, Ukrainian attacks into deep Russian territory and rising Russian casualties. Prolonged public discontent along with more Ukrainian attacks causing collateral damage might provoke

Mr. Putin into expanding the war beyond Ukraine as Russia has time and again asserted that Ukraine is being empowered and financed by its European partners to continue the war with Russia. Moscow has already said that the European facilities involved in joint production agreements of drones and missiles with Ukraine are "potential targets for the Russian armed forces". It is no secret to the rest of the world that the Ukrainian conflict is a proxy war being waged by the Western powers against Russia. There is also the chance of a miscalculation or an accident by either side which could expand the war.

If any of these scenarios take place and if NATO invokes Article 5 which states that "an armed attack against one NATO member shall be considered an attack against all members", the conflict will grow from a geographically contained one to a broader war involving NATO's frontline allies.

Ironically, the only hope against this happening is that the U.S. under President Donald Trump (who recently launched an unprovoked war on Iran along with other misadventures in Venezuela and Cuba), refuses to acquiesce with the invocation of Article 5 as this requires a unanimous decision. The more optimistic scenario is that both Ukraine and Russia admit that the conflict is at a stalemate and agree to talk. But who the facilitator for that would be is anybody's guess because it seems that Mr. Trump has lost interest in this particular conflict.

Uma Purushothaman is Associate Professor, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

THE GIST

Ukraine scaled up its drone attacks to strike deep into Russian territory and targeted Russian economic lifelines, specifically oil refineries and military logistics hubs.

The war is straining both economies: Ukraine relies on Western aid, while Russia faces a soaring budget deficit of 5.9 trillion roubles due to sanctions and war costs.

A report said senior officials warned Putin that war spending is becoming unaffordable, even as the Defence Ministry resists cuts, pointing to rising public discontent.

WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Caught between concrete and panic, India should not maladapt to climate change

India cannot afford to surrender its coast to the sea but that cannot become an excuse to believe it is entitled to engineer permanence, especially when such solutions risk deepening inequality, shifting vulnerability to the poorest, and locking communities into ever greater danger over time

Vasudevan Mukunth

With more than 7,500 km of coastline and millions of people living in low-lying coastal areas, India faces a dilemma that it has often been told is really a trap: use engineering solutions to hold the line, so to speak, or to beat a retreat inland. While many adaptation experts and institutions in high-income countries have favoured a 'managed retreat' in high-risk coastal areas, governments in South Asia have favoured concrete walls instead. But really, Indians' best bet is an oft-unarticulated third way.

At the COP climate summits and elsewhere, India's representatives, including its Union Environment Minister, have argued that economically developing and under-developed countries deserve an extended off-ramp regarding the use of fossil fuels because these countries cannot abruptly abandon the cheapest source of energy known without also plunging millions of people back into poverty.

There is a strong normative case to apply the same argument to coastal engineering: that using engineering to buy time is India's developmental right.

Maladaptation trap

But is it? The question arises because of social equity. That is, if a government uses its engineering off-ramp to build luxury coastal roads and high-end reclaimed cities, it is less buying time for its people and more walking into the trap of maladaptation. Put differently, engineering must not divert more investments in high-risk zones; if it does, it will only compound the catastrophe that will inevitably result as global warming continues its upward march.

For example, Nigeria has already backed a large land reclamation project dubbed the "Great Wall of Lagos". It will protect valuable real estate and a new financial district from the Atlantic Ocean even as it diverts tidal energy to neighbouring lower-income coastal areas like Alpha Beach. The irony: it will accelerate erosion at Alpha Beach in order to diminish erosion at the financial district. Similarly, to maintain its rice-producing areas, Vietnam built a vast system of high dikes – but they also prevent natural sediments from being deposited by the river, contributing to the Mekong delta sinking faster than the sea is rising.

Closer home, the Kosi river floods almost every year thanks to its massive sediment load and steep descent down the Himalaya. So as it enters the flatter plains of North India, it naturally shifts course. To control this, the Governments of India and Nepal built large embankments under the 1954 Kosi Agreement, from Bhimnagar into North Bihar. Today, because the river is so confined, silt that would normally spread across the floodplain settles on the riverbed itself, raising the water level several metres over the surrounding land. When heavy monsoon rains cause the embankments to breach or overtop, a catastrophic flood ensues.

Managed retreat

Many parts of the Global North are increasingly experimenting with 'managed retreat'. This is one of the four



Transplanted lives: In 2018, the Odisha government moved more than 500 families in a cluster of seven villages called Satabhaya, which the Bay of Bengal had almost entirely devoured, to a rehabilitation colony in Bagapatia. BISWARANJAN ROUT

primary strategies for coastal adaptation that the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) articulated in its Sixth Assessment Report. Managed retreat refers to the purposeful, coordinated movement of people, assets, and/or infrastructure away from areas at risk of environmental hazards. The U.N. and the International Organisation for Migration have also used the term to discuss "planned relocation" as a tool for disaster risk reduction.

As part of managed retreat, the U.S. has used programmes like the Hazard Mitigation Grants to purchase flood-prone homes at market rates prevailing before a disaster, and converting the land into permanent open space. The U.K. has used a "managed realignment", where authorities intentionally breach ageing seawalls to create salt marshes that then serve as natural buffers. New Zealand has been using "red-zoning" to keep developers from rebuilding in high-risk areas.

Overall, managed retreat has primarily taken the form of state-funded buyouts and regulatory zoning. However, it has also benefited from higher capital where it has been implemented and remains politically fraught, often sparking legal battles over property rights and sustaining a class gap whereby wealthy enclaves are fortified while marginalised communities are 'managed' away.

In India, the stakes are obviously different – and arguably higher. For one, its managed retreat has rarely been managed and often plainly chaotic: people are displaced, their social safety nets destroyed, and the poor further impoverished. For example, in 2018, the Odisha government moved more than 500 families in a cluster of seven villages called Satabhaya, which the Bay of Bengal

had almost entirely devoured, to a rehabilitation colony in Bagapatia. But while the State provided housing, the families suddenly found themselves transitioning from being the owners of ancestral land to daily-wage labourers in a market for which they had no skills. There are many similar stories in the Sundarbans delta.

In 2024, the Panamanian government began to officially relocate the Guna Indigenous community from a sinking island to the mainland. While the move was 'managed' in the economic sense, the Guna people's entire identity is tied to the sea, and their new homes on the mainland lacked the ancestral connection and traditional fishing access that sustained them for centuries. Thus they faced a cultural crisis.

'Pioneers', not 'refugees'

There is a third choice hidden between concrete walls and panicked flight – a hybrid strategy that marries law, policy, and engineering. Let us start with an example this time: instead of leaving people to 'retreat' to its overcrowded capital, the Bangladesh government is currently transforming its port of Mongla into, in its words, a "climate-resilient town", with investments in new schools and factories and in creating raised infrastructure. It is a solution that attempts to preserve social equity.

In the same vein, India needs to identify 'receiver cities' in its hinterland and invest in their infrastructure now. More broadly, migration should be a choice – a voluntary plan to relocate to an economically attractive area rather than because the alternative is to drown – and India should facilitate that.

Second, a great barrier to managed retreat in India is a lack of legal land titles

for its coastal residents. The country must reform its coastal land laws to formally recognise informal settlements. In turn, the state must treat people displaced by the vagaries of climate change as 'pioneers' of a new national geography who are entitled to state-supported relocation rather than as 'refugees' or even 'encroachers'.

Moving to higher ground

Third, India needs to systematically focus research on and investments into nature-based or hybrid solutions and away from seawalls and reclamation projects. Mangroves, bioswales, and artificial reefs provide a 'soft' defence while also learning to adapt to the ocean's rhythms. Concrete does not do this. Even if a government deems 'hard' engineering to be necessary to protect a critical hub like Mumbai, it must include failsafe mechanisms like buffer zones around seawalls and sacrificial floodplains.

In a tacit acknowledgment that keeping the water out is not sustainable, China has been engineering its coastal cities, including Ningbo and Shanghai, to absorb water by installing permeable pavements and rain gardens and by restoring wetlands.

Most of all, the Indian government and its leaders must not be allowed to argue at the COPs and beyond that India must be allowed to engineer its way out of climate adaptation challenges – certainly not at the expense of social equity. India stands at a crossroads: it cannot afford to surrender its coast to the sea but that is no excuse to lie to itself about the permanence of concrete. Instead, it should lay the legal and economic foundations for a dignified and equitable move to higher ground.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know Your English

S. Upendran

"...I met Shivshankar yesterday and tried to explain to him..."

"Shivshankar! I can't stand the guy. He's always in my face."

"In your face? What do you mean by that?"

"When you say that someone is 'in your face', it means that he is very confrontational. He irritates you and is ready to pick a fight with you."

"I see. That sounds like Shivshankar all right. Can I say, I am sick and tired of my boss's 'in-your-face' attitude?"

"Sounds great. When you meet Jamal for the first time you get the impression that he is one of those 'in-your-face' guys. But when you get to know him..."

"...I am not interested in knowing him. Can I say that Sujatha is in my face all the time?"

"I guess you could. I generally don't like people who are always in my face about something."

"I don't think anybody does. So, tell me. What do you think I should do? Do you think I should go? Or do you think I should stay and..."

"...I think you should go. That's my knee-jerk response."

"From the 'face', we have moved down to the knees, have we? Tell me, what does 'knee-jerk response' mean?"

"You know sometimes when you go to a doctor, he hits you on the knee with a rubber hammer. What..."

"...yeah, and when he does that the leg shoots up automatically."

"Exactly. And that's what the expression 'knee-jerk reaction' or 'response' means. To do something quickly and automatically."

"Without too much thinking?"

"That's right. Here's another example. When the politician said that he would attend the function, it was only a knee-jerk reaction."

"Every time I see Sujatha, I wince. That's only a knee-jerk reaction."

"Does she know that?"

"I don't know. And honestly, I don't really care. But tell me, what do you think I should do? Don't give me a knee-jerk response."

"OK. Well, if I were you, I would let it ride for some time."

"Let it ride! Let what ride? What..."

"When you tell someone to 'let something ride', it means that you want the person to let that something remain as it is."

"In other words, you are telling the person not to do anything about a particular situation."

"Exactly! You are telling the person not to do anything about it. Here's an example. Don't bother about cleaning the cupboard just now. Let it ride for a day or two."

"I wish my mother would say that. How about this sentence?"

"The Chairman asked Rama to have the report ready in two days' time. But she let it ride for a week before she started working on it."

"That's an excellent example. Now then, coming back to your question, I..."

"...forget it. Let it ride. It's not that important."

Published in *The Hindu* on November 14, 2000

THE DAILY QUIZ

Here is a quiz on the history of FIFA World Cup

N. Soorya Prakash

QUESTION 1

First things first. What was the name of World Cup before it was changed to the FIFA World Cup Trophy since 1974?

QUESTION 2

Who scored the first ever goal in World Cup Football history?

QUESTION 3

Which country has taken part in all the 22 editions of the Football World Cup held so far?

QUESTION 4

Which country holds the unfortunate record of reaching the World Cup final the most times but winning it only once?

QUESTION 5

Which country has reached the semi-finals the most times in World Cup history?



Visual question: Identify this player who holds a unique record in World Cup history of having played in three consecutive finals? AFP

Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

1. On this day in 1937, a Humpty Dumpty grocery store in Oklahoma introduced the first _____. Fill in the blank. **Ans: Shopping carts**
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. **Ans: George III**
3. This American basketball coach—who directed teams of the University of California at Los Angeles to 10 NCAA championships in 12 seasons (1964–65, 1967–73, and 1975)—died at age 99. **Ans: John Wooden**

Ans: John Wooden

4. Born on this day in 1937, this American actress is known for her roles in films *A Mighty Heart* and *Maria*. **Ans: Angelina Jolie**
5. This island country, which is part of Oceania, achieved independence within the British Commonwealth on this day in 1970? **Ans: Tonga**
6. This American musician released *Born in the U.S.A.* on June 4, 1984, which became one of his defining works. **Ans: Bruce Springsteen**

Early Birds

Arun Kumar Singh | Parimal Das | Lalchand Bhutani | Abhijith Nayak

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

Word of the day

Droll:

comical in an odd or whimsical manner

Synonyms: funny, eccentric

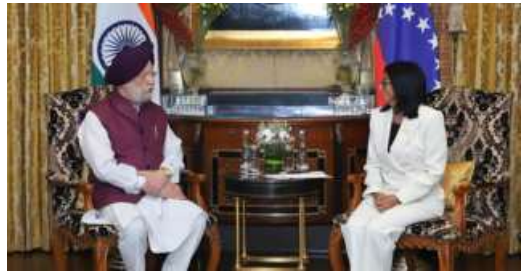
Usage: *The novel features a droll cast of characters who get themselves into completely absurd situations*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/droll

International Phonetic Alphabet: /drɔːl/

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

IN BRIEF



India and Venezuela seek to boost ties in energy sector

Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri and heads of energy sector PSUs on Thursday met visiting Venezuelan Acting President Delcy Rodríguez to strengthen bilateral ties. “Venezuela is already among the largest crude oil suppliers to India in April and May 2026, which is a reflection of the future potential. Our technical team will visit Venezuela soon to further explore this potential,” Mr. Puri posted on X after the meeting.

Fire at Tata Steel's U.K. plant; personnel evacuated safely

A fire broke out on Wednesday at Tata Steel's UK plant, which is undergoing transition to a low-carbon steel-making process, a company statement said on Thursday. “All personnel were accounted for and evacuated from the area safely,” Tata Steel UK said. The company said that Mid and West Wales Fire Service attended the Port Talbot site Wednesday night at around 8 p.m. (U.K. time) to deal with a fire at one of the site's processing lines. **PH**

Kuku files confidential papers for up to ₹3,500-crore IPO

Kuku Technologies Ltd., which operates vernacular audio platform Kuku FM and short-video streaming app Kuku TV, has filed confidential draft papers with SEBI for a ₹3,000 crore IPO. The firm is planning to raise between ₹2,500 and ₹3,500 crore and is targeting a valuation of up to ₹15,000 crore through the proposed public issue, people familiar with the development said on Thursday. **PH**

India to drop capital gains tax for foreign investors in govt. bonds

Reuters
MUMBAI

India plans to scrap capital gains tax on foreign portfolio investments in government securities, which could help boost such inflows, a source familiar with the matter said on Thursday.

The South Asian nation is looking to attract foreign capital to counteract pressure on its rupee currency, which has weakened more than 5% since the start of the year, squeezed by higher oil prices and foreign portfolio outflows in equities. The finance ministry did not immediately respond to a Reuters email seeking comment.

India's benchmark bond yield eased one basis point to 7.01% in opening trade, although it was not immediately clear when the plan would take effect.

Any tax easing should help flows at the margin, said Madhavi Arora, chief economist at Emkay Global Financial Services.

“It won't be a magic bullet in the current context,” she cautioned, but added it could prove positive in the medium term.

Foreign investors are subject to a long-term capital gains tax of 12.5% on listed shares and bonds held longer than 12 months.

A withholding tax of 20% they pay on interest earned in government bonds may also be removed, the source said.

As talks stutter, Iran grip on Strait of Hormuz still tight

Recent weeks have seen more non-Iran-linked ships transit with Iranian permission; Lloyd's List data show ships with an 'Iran nexus' accounted for nearly 97% of crossings in mid-March

Kalyanaraman M.
CHENNAI

Even as the U.S.-Iran talks lurch and ships are attacked by both sides, there has been a slight uptick in the regularity of stranded ships leaving the Strait of Hormuz over the past three weeks, as per Lloyd's List data.

Though the U.S. blockade seems to have impacted the transit of ships with direct Iran links, Iran has maintained a tight grip over the strait.

In the recent three weeks, there has been an increase in the number of non-Iran linked ships transiting with the permission of Iran, while ships have slipped across with support from U.S. forces too. Lloyd's List data shows that ships with “Iran nexus” accounted for nearly 97% of crossings in mid-March.

After this peak, this figure has steadily declined to 35% in the week of May 25-31.

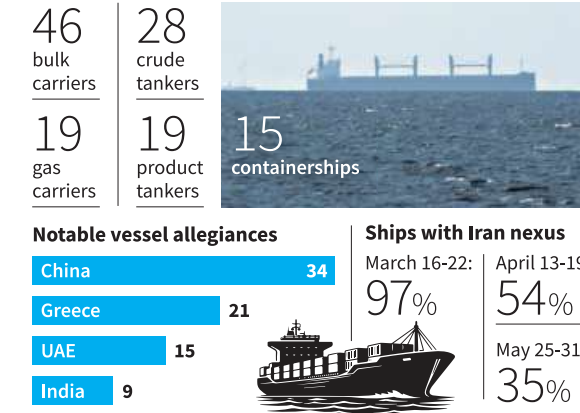
Nearly 40 non-Iranian-linked ships have exited in the past three weeks, bringing the number of “escapees” to 142 since March, says Richard Meade, editor-in-chief of Lloyd's List.

In the past, transits came in sporadic bursts such as when the ceasefire was signed.

Between April 13 and 19, for example, 23 stranded ships affiliated to 12 coun-

On the trail

Vessels that exited Persian Gulf since the Iran war began



SOURCE: LLOYD'S LIST INTELLIGENCE

tries transited as owners rushed to move during a brief ceasefire between the U.S. and Iran.

“The past three weeks, however, have brought a more consistent pattern of exits,” Mr. Meade told *The Hindu*.

‘Little business sense’

A source in the shipping industry says ship owners want the vessels to exit the Persian Gulf as being anchored there for more than three months makes little business sense.

This may be leading them to take the Iranian route as the U.S. has said that it will not attack ships with no links to Iran while transiting the Strait of Hormuz, the source said.

Some ships are transiting via the southern route close to the coast of Oman in coordination with-

under an element of protection of the U.S. military, says Jakob Larsen, chief safety and security officer at Bimco, a global body representing ship owners.

“This is quite risky since it is done with lights and radars turned off, and the Iranians are doing what they can to attack the ships,” he adds.

Capt. Ritesh Kumar, who has more than 20 years of seafaring experience, says the Strait of Hormuz is quite wide compared to say Malacca Strait and ships had enough space to not hug either the Oman or the Iran coast and for that reason the Oman coast has been less well-surveyed.

Though the Persian Gulf Strait Authority set up by Iran to control the strait and permit transit along its coast has been sanctioned

by the U.S., more than 300 non-Iranian vessels have applied for transit permits, as per the authority. Lloyd's List analysis estimates that some 28% of the ships above 10,000 dwt that applied were bound for China, 19% for India, 23% for other parts of Asia, 12% for Europe, 10% for Africa and so on.

The PGSA has said it will prioritise permits to ships with affiliations to nations friendly to it and will disallow U.S. and Israel-linked ships.

“As a general observation, the threat level for ships in the Persian Gulf is currently unchanged. However, the situation is volatile, and the threat may increase with short notice,” Mr. Larsen told *The Hindu*.

Despite the uptick in exits, overall traffic through the Strait of Hormuz in May fell to its lowest level since the crisis began, likely a result of the U.S. actions against Iran-associated ships.

U.S. Centcom, while refusing to give details to *The Hindu*, however, pointed to media releases that say that it has “disabled” (attacked) six and redirected more than 120 ships involved in Iranian trade since April 13.

On June 2, a missile launched from a U.S. aircraft caused a hole on tanker MT Lexie near Kharg island. This provoked an immediate attack on MSC Sariska by Iran.

Rajesh Exports shares hit 5% lower circuit post SEBI order

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Shares of gems and jewellery firm Rajesh Exports Ltd. (REL) tumbled 5% to hit the lower circuit limit on Thursday, a day after capital markets regulator SEBI barred its promoter and CEO Rajesh Mehta from dealing in the company's securities, alleging large-scale misrepresentation of financial statements and diversion of funds.

The stock dropped 4.99% to hit the lower circuit limit at ₹104.65 on the BSE. At the NSE, the stock fell by 4.99% to hit the lower circuit limit of ₹103.92.

The company's market valuation declined by ₹162.38 crore to ₹3,089.90 crore. The SEBI also directed the company to make true and fair disclosures of financial statements, related party transactions and other disclosures under the Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements (LODR) regulations.

In a 109-page interim order on Wednesday, the markets regulator said its investigation has revealed misrepresentation in financial statements as well as instances of routing and layering of funds through personal accounts and related entities without adequate disclosures or supporting documentation.

REL's auditors, during the deposition, promised to provide audit working papers, but eventually failed to do so.

TVS SCS, ALA JV targets ₹2,000 crore revenue by '31

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

TVS Supply Chain Solutions Ltd (TVS SCS), one of India's largest integrated supply chain firms, announced a joint venture (JV) with ALA Group, an Italian aerospace and defence supply-chain integrator, to tap opportunities in India's fast-growing aerospace and defence sectors.

TVS SCS will hold a 51% stake and ALA the balance in the JV which is expected to emerge as a significant growth driver for TVS SCS with cumulative revenue likely to cross ₹2,000 crore by 2031, TVS SCS said.

TVS SCS and ALA will continue to evaluate opportunities to support aerospace and defence supply-chain requirements across global markets.

Domestic airlines to pay more for ATF to tap stabilisation fund

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The effective selling price of aviation turbine fuel (ATF) for India's airlines would be ₹115/litre should they opt for the price stabilisation fund announced by the Government, Rohit Raj, Director, Union Ministry of Civil Aviation told reporters Thursday.

This would be frozen for a period of three years, the stipulated contract period, or until the differential financial support is recovered. After accounting for taxation (viz, VAT and Central Excise) and airport-related levies, the effective price comes to 115/litre for India's airlines - both domestic and international - though the benchmark price is ₹86.32/litre.



The effective selling price of ATF would be ₹115/litre.

The benchmark price of ATF for international operations is ₹104.49. Further, it is not subject to VAT and Central Excise duty, only airport-related charges.

“We are fixing the price at FOB level where there is no incidence of VAT and Central Excise. Then you will have to apply them to come to the price under the scheme,” he stated.

Maruti Suzuki unveils ‘India's first’ flex-fuel car

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. unveiled ‘India's first’ flex-fuel car giving flexibility to clients to operate on any blend of ethanol and petrol from E20 to E100.

Maruti said it was introducing the technology in Wagon R which long pioneered alternative fuel vehicles in India, including CNG and LPG. In addition to a significant reduction in oil imports, flex-fuel vehicles can help boost farmers' income, Maruti said.

Nitin Gadkari, Minister of Road Transport and Highways, said India imported a large quantity of crude every year. Biofuels such as ethanol were an important pathway towards reducing this dependence.

New-age fraud: ‘trust is being weaponised in the digital era’

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

At a time when AI-generated deepfakes, digital arrests, cyber-enabled financial frauds and crypto-powered crime networks have become increasingly sophisticated, combating these next generation of fraud would require a fundamental shift towards advanced forensic technologies, real-time intelligence sharing and stronger collaboration between regulators, businesses and law enforcement agencies said experts at the FICCI Conference on Next-Gen Forensics: The New Age of Fraud Investigation.

Brijesh Singh, IPS, Principal Secretary, Government of Maharashtra, said cybercrime has evolved into a highly organised and industrialised ecosystem



Too fast: Entire chain from data acquisition to money movement via crypto networks can be completed in under 30 minutes.

where specialised actors perform functions ranging from data theft and identity creation to mule networks, deepfake generation and crypto-enabled money laundering.

“Today, fraud has become an industrial-scale enterprise. By the time the first call reaches a victim, fraudsters may already

know their personal details, behavioural patterns and psychological vulnerabilities. The entire chain, from data acquisition to money movement through crypto networks can be completed in less than 30 minutes, making traditional investigative approaches increasingly ineffective,” said Mr. Singh.

He said rise of AI, deepfakes and digital evidence needed complete shift in probing methodologies.

“Trust is being weaponised in the digital era. With voice cloning, deepfake technologies and fraud-as-a-service platforms becoming easily accessible, investigators need integrated forensic platforms, real-time intelligence sharing and new evidentiary frameworks to effectively detect, investigate and prosecute digital crimes,” he added.

Govindayapalli Ram Mohan Rao, ED, Market Intermediaries Regulation and Supervision Department, SEBI, stated market regulator's efforts to strengthen investor protection and digital trust via technology-driven governance steps is the cornerstone of capital markets.

‘India was much more corrupt, less able to react 20 years ago’: Thrun

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
MADRID

Twenty years ago, India was much more corrupt and less able to react as a global marketplace and it's changing right now, Google X co-founder Sebastian Thrun told *The Hindu*. However, he also added India was “not anywhere near” either the U.S. or China in terms of Artificial Intelligence capabilities.

“India is going through an incredibly great transformation right now,” Mr. Thrun said on the sidelines of the South Summit 2026, co-organised by IE Univer-



Sebastian Thrun

sity in Madrid.

A conjunction of factors pose challenges for large countries like India, instead of any single factor.

“It's the education of people, the availability of

capital, the ability of the government to empower businesses,” Mr. Thrun explained. “And, I see India to be on the correct path right now. I've seen a massive improvement.”

“But what I also see is that India is not anywhere near the U.S. or China at this point in terms of AI. “I'm optimistic for India but a number of things have to come together such as education, law, anti-corruption governments, and finance.”

AI's impact on jobs

On the impact of AI on common lives, he said it

was “amazing to see” many highly specialised areas of work now being done as well or better by AI.

“You'll find repetition and precision is done by machines even better than by people,” he explained. “And that will shift the sweet spot of human productivity from highly specialised to much broader and more general tasks which I consider to be a good thing as more general you work, the more you will be able to innovate and experience new things.”

(The reporter is in Madrid at the invitation of IE University)

‘Rural, urban India almost same in video watching’

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

India's transition into a video-first economy is no longer restricted to metropolitan cities as daily video consumption on Meta platforms is reaching 98% in cities and 94% in rural areas, according to a Meta-commissioned study by IPSOS.

The study, comprising over 4,000 participants across metro, tier-2 and 3 cities and rural India, found 97% of users consume video content daily, highlighting video content had become the primary source of digital

engagement.

Also, the study found Reels had become the primary destination for content, culture and influence with 89% of Gen-Z users engaging with it every day. The engagement is particularly strong among women (85%) and NCCS audiences (88%).

The study also found 84% of Gen-Z users and 73% of rural users discovered products through Meta Platforms.

Beauty, make-up, fashion, lifestyle, wellness, fitness, comedy, sports, and travel emerged as the most engaging genres. Among it beauty, makeup, and fash-

ion recorded the highest engagement with 52% of the users engaging in these genres followed by lifestyle, fitness, and wellness at 42%; comedy and humor at 39%; sports at 38%; and travel at 37%.

The study emphasised the role of content creators in shaping storytelling, conversations, trends, and brand discovery. Reels generated 60% higher creator engagement than other surveyed short-video platforms and highlighted the platform's influence on high-intent sectors such as e-commerce, automobiles, and financial services.

U.S. FDA okays Aurobindo rheumatoid arthritis drug

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

Generic drugmaker Aurobindo Pharma has received U.S. Food and Drug Administration (U.S. FDA) final approval to manufacture and market Tofacitinib tablets, 5 mg and 10 mg.

The product is bioequivalent and therapeutically equivalent to reference listed drug Xeljanz Tablets, 5 mg and 10 mg of PF Prism C.V. Tofacitinib tablets, 5 mg and 10 mg, have an estimated market size of about \$494 million in the U.S., the company said.

More oil escapes Hormuz Strait, keeping traders guessing



Dark mode: More vessels appear to be switching off their AIS before and after transiting the strait. REUTERS

Reuters
LONDON

The trickle of tankers exiting the Strait of Hormuz has gathered pace in recent weeks, as traders adopt stealth measures to make the crossing. While this is freeing some of the vast oil inventories trapped in the Gulf, it does not signal a slow return to normalcy. Instead, it previews the opaque, fragmented energy market the Iran war is set to leave in its wake.

More than four months into the conflict, the U.S. and Iran are still struggling to hammer out an agreement to formally end the war and fully reopen the narrow waterway.

The near-total closure of Hormuz stranded more than 13 million barrels of oil per day within the Gulf, forcing producers to shut down oilfields and refineries, triggering supply shortfalls and economic strain across major importing nations.

Traffic through the strait remains a fraction of pre-war levels. On the face of it, an average of just three tankers a day has crossed in and out of Hormuz since the conflict began - roughly one-tenth of normal volumes - according to shipping monitors including LSEG and Kpler.

But a closer look at oil stocks tells a more nuanced story.

In the dark

An analysis of the huge volumes stored on tankers inside the Gulf suggests transit activity has quietly accelerated. It points to a growing number of ships leaving the region "under the radar" of satellite tracking systems.

More vessels appear to be switching off their Automatic Identification System (AIS) before and after transiting the strait, adopting tactics long used by Iran to evade Western sanctions.

In practice, tankers can "go dark" for days around the crossing, only to reappear weeks later near their destination.

Shipping analytics firm Vortexa estimates that around 65% of outbound laden tankers transited in "dark" mode in May, showing how widespread the practice has become.

That opacity is distorting the market's line of sight. Reduced visibility into cargo movements and destinations makes it harder to gauge the flows underpinning benchmark pricing.

That makes alternative indicators increasingly important.

One key gauge of the pace of outflows is "oil on water" in the Gulf, or the volume of oil stored on tankers trapped behind the strait.

Levels have dropped from a peak of 184 million barrels on March 22 to around 148 million barrels this week, according to Kpler data, implying an average draw down rate of roughly 5,00,000 bpd.

Crucially, that pace has accelerated over the past month. Since the start of May, depletion has increased to around 7,10,000 bpd, according to ROI analysis. That offers further evidence that flows out of the Gulf, while still constrained, are inching higher.

Exactly which routes these dark tankers are taking remains unclear - as the term "dark" suggests. Many are likely using corridors designated by Iran, which has allowed limited volumes through the strait under bilateral arrangements with Asian governments including Pakistan, India, China and Japan. This underscores the region's heavy dependence on Gulf supply. Some vessels may be paying Iran a fee for safe passage.

Other vessels may be taking routes closer to Oman's coastline, potentially with the tacit or active support of the U.S. Navy, which continues to play a stabilising role in regional maritime security.

The situation remains fluid and could shift quickly. Iran could tighten its grip on shipping at any moment, particularly if negotiations with the U.S. continue to stall.

What recovery looks like

After more than three months of severe economic disruption, every barrel exported offers a lifeline to revenue-starved Gulf producers such as Iraq and Kuwait, and desperate buyers in Asia.

But a sustained recovery will require far greater clarity and stability around Hormuz. Producers are unlikely to restart the roughly 11 million bpd of oilfields shut in during the conflict without confidence that exports can flow reliably. One key constraint is logistical: the return of empty tankers to the Gulf. Without a steady inflow of vessels to load cargoes, onshore storage tanks will remain near capacity, preventing there start of shut-in production. That crucial rebalancing - laden ships leaving and empty ships returning - has yet to materialise at scale.

First goes Fed's dot plot rate forecast, then guidance, and then a hike?

Markets would have to work out whether Kevin Warsh is really the inflation hawk he once purported to be, if he is, that might yet prove a shock for some investors; the new Fed chair is busily setting out his stall and dutifully consulting staff before his first policy meeting later this month

NEWS ANALYSIS

Reuters
LONDON

The Federal Reserve's quarterly "dot plot" rate forecasts may soon lose their last projected rate cut, the so-called easing dot, and the plot itself could possibly disappear altogether.

Then markets would have to work out whether Kevin Warsh is really the inflation hawk he once purported to be. If he is, that might yet prove as shock for some investors.

The new Fed chair is busily setting out his stall and dutifully consulting staff before his first policy meeting later this month.

None of the guidance he gets on policy direction will offer easy answers.

An eye-popping AI investment boom and red-hot energy price pressures from the three-month war in Iran have pushed inflation far above target. Together with shifting sands within the Fed's policy-making council, that has spooked futures markets into pricing the Fed's next interest rate move as up, possibly by year-end.

One of the few arguments left for the doves in recent months has been that cracks may appear in the labour market - the other side of the Fed's dual mandate - and potentially be exaggerated by AI-related job shedding or energy-related corporate cut-backs. There's very little sign of that yet.



Wait and watch: The Fed's not going to raise rates this month, but may start to sow the seeds. REUTERS

If anything, the labour market looks robust, possibly even strengthening. April's sharp jump in job openings and May's above-forecast 1,22,000 private-sector job gains point that way, if taken at face value. May's national employment report is due on Friday and will put that picture to the test.

The Fed's not going to raise rates this month, but it may start to sow the seeds.

Aside from any signal Mr. Warsh sends at his press conference, markets will focus hard on any removal of language in prior Fed statements indicating a bias to ease again. Three policymakers already voted to remove it last time out, and at least one recently dovish board member, Christopher Waller, has joined them since.

But Fed policymakers' quarterly update of eco-



Realising the increasing risk that monetary policy is not in a good place, Fed speakers are rapidly shifting in a hawkish direction and setting the stage for a rate hike

TIM DUY,
Macro economist

mic projections, including the "dot plot" showing where they see interest rates in coming years, may steal the show.

The existing median of views is for another cut this year and one more in 2027.

Soundings from Fed officials since March suggest this year's projected cut is likely to disappear from the plot. Whether 2027 goes with it, or even chimes with market pricing for a hike, may pack the

biggest market punch.

The irony, of course, is that Mr. Warsh's distaste for so-called forward guidance may well see him try to scrap the 'dot plot' entirely. He would have plenty of support for that - including from his predecessor, Jerome Powell, who remains on the board.

Wiping further easing from the horizon, then turning out the lights and leaving markets to make up their own minds from incoming data, could make for an edgier and more volatile interest rate market through the second half of the year.

To be sure, some investors still cling to hopes that an eventual end to the Iran war will bring easing back onto the radar, or feel that the real income effects of the energy squeeze will depress household demand enough to keep other pric-

es in check.

But plenty of others feel the worm has turned.

Macro economist Tim Duy reckons the inflationary consequences of higher energy prices now dominate the growth impacts, and that positions are shifting rapidly within the Fed's policymaking council as it begins to see its last cut in December as an error.

"Realising the increasing risk that monetary policy is not in a good place, Fed speakers are rapidly shifting in a hawkish direction and setting the stage for a rate hike," he said.

"The old Warsh would bring forward rate hikes," he added in reference to Mr. Warsh's long-standing reputation as a monetary hawk, even if he adopted softer tones while seeking a job from a president who favoured lower rates.

"No one knows which Mr. Warsh will be on stage." Notably, Mr. Warsh this week hired President Donald Trump's former budget director and Heritage Foundation economist Paul Winfree as one of two advisers to help with his transition to the chair.

Winfree, credited with authoring the Fed chapter of the Project 2025 conservative election manifesto in 2023, had a wishlist of reforms that included removing the Fed's maximum employment mandate and focusing the central bank solely on inflation.

That would have to go to Congress, of course.

But depending on whose advice Mr. Warsh

takes, his view of the current situation may not prove as dovish as many had assumed a Trump appointee's would be.

The president has already said he will let him do his own thing.

As the economy and stock markets heat up on this blistering AI investment boom, despite headwinds from energy, geopolitics and tariffs, many question why the Fed would even consider easing again.

Even though borrowing markets have tightened over recent weeks, the stock market surge has seen Goldman Sachs' measure of overall U.S. financial conditions drop to its lowest in four years.

Citi's U.S. economic surprise index, meantime, is at its most positive in three years.

Harking back to the error of Fed cuts into the late 1990s dotcom investment surge, Carlyle strategist Jason Thomas opined: "Rate cuts delivered during a concentrated capex boom tend to prove far more stimulative than rate cuts arriving in other circumstances."

Thomas contrasted the sheer scale of computing capex now with the dotcom era and pointed out that real short-term interest rates now sit more than 300 basis points below what they were back then.

"It's long past time to abandon the endemic easing bias," he concluded.

Mr. Warsh's rethink and reset may not be the one many assumed.

Uber-backed ballot measure sends California trial lawyers into campaign mode

Reuters

Uber is learning in California that few things unite plaintiffs' attorneys like a threat to their fees. What began as a bid to rein in what it calls "billboard lawyers" has instead galvanized them into a well-funded political force of their own. When the rideshare giant last fall backed a proposed ballot measure to limit legal fees in car-crash lawsuits, consumer attorneys retaliated with a proposal to lower the legal threshold for holding Uber liable for driver misconduct. Each side has now raised more than \$70 million and gathered more than a million signatures to advance their own ballot measures and oppose the other.

In dueling Super Bowl ads and marketing campaigns, both Uber and the plaintiffs' bar say they are looking out for consumers.

But it seems pretty clear that what's driving this political drama is, quite simply, money. "It would probably be an extinction event," Torrance-based trial attorney Robert Simon said of what could happen to personal-injury law firms if voters approve Uber's measure in November. Geoffrey Wells, a veteran plaintiffs' lawyer in Los Angeles, agreed: "Lawyers won't take those cases."

Uber's measure targets attorney contingency fees, which are only paid if a client wins. It's common for attorneys to receive one third of any settlement, or 40% or more if a case goes to trial.

The Uber-backed campaign says they are clamping down on self-serving lawyers who don't put their clients' interests first. Nathan Click, a spokesman for the campaign, said the main goal is to make sure "accident victims - not billboard attorneys - actually take home the majority of their awards."

'Code red'

The confrontation began on a Friday afternoon in October, when leadership at the Consumer Attorneys of California, known as CAOC, got word that Uber had filed a proposed ballot measure to ensure plaintiffs receive 75% of legal recoveries from car-crash cases, limiting attorney and doctor payouts in the process. Within hours, lawyers from across the state began mobilizing. "You start texting everybody, emailing all the list serves: This is code red," said Simon, who helped organize a virtual meeting that first weekend attended by hundreds of attorneys.

CAOC members and legislative staffers hustled to come up with three ideas of their own to potentially take to voters.

One would have directly negated Uber's measure, but it required at least 3,00,000 more signatures than their other ideas because it would have modified California's constitution rather than ordinary state law.

Several people involved with CAOC told me the costs of signature gathering, weighed against its chances of success, be-



Last-mile reach: The campaign says it is clamping down on self-serving lawyers who don't put clients' interests first. REUTERS

came too much.

The plaintiffs' lawyers instead converged around a measure that would require rideshare companies to run better background checks on drivers, including fingerprinting, and be held to a higher liability standard if drivers assault passengers. Uber would be considered a "common carrier" that "must use the utmost care and diligence" to ensure passengers' safe passage, similar to taxi, train and airline operators.

If passed, such a law could help plaintiffs' lawyers suing Uber in more than 3,800 lawsuits in state and federal court over sexual assaults by Uber drivers. Juries have sided with plaintiffs in two trials this year, with one awarding \$8.5 million to a woman who said an Uber driver raped her.

Uber, which has argued it shouldn't be held liable

for criminal conduct by drivers using the app, notched a defense win in a state-court case last year.

An Uber spokesperson called the measure retaliatory and said the company has rigorous background checks and safety standards.

To rally support for their cause, the plaintiffs' lawyers have held casino night fundraisers, hosted town halls and solicited signatures at attorney conferences. More than a dozen major consumer firms have donated at least half a million dollars to the campaign (including, yes, a few that advertise on billboards).

The \$70 million raised so far has paid for ads, campaign consultants and professional signature gatherers. Because the Uber-backed measure also limits the recovery of damages for medical expenses,

doctors are separately fundraising for their own opposition. "I've never seen us more united, quicker, with the ability to raise more money in a short period of time than this one," said Wells, who was in the waning days of his presidency of CAOC when the campaign started.

Full steam ahead

In securities filings, Uber lists car-crash litigation as an operational risk that subjects it to "claims of significant liability," without detailing the number of cases it faces. An Uber spokesperson said its insurance limits make it a target of lawsuits.

The heart of the proposal is that consumers must retain at least 75% of the "total amount recovered." Lawyers I spoke to said they interpret the measure as meaning any medical fees tied to the litigation that need to be repaid would come from the remaining 25% along with attorney fees.

CAOC says there could be no money left for attorneys in catastrophic injury cases. Take a case with a \$1 million recovery and \$400,000 in medical bills and liens from surgery and hospitalisation. Those expenses would exceed the 25% fee cap entirely.

Uber's campaign says the attorneys are misinterpreting the measure and that medical liens would come out of the victim's 75%. Uber is the sole contributor to its \$77.8 million fundraising effort. In 2020, Uber successfully backed California's Propo-

sition 22, which defines rideshare drivers as independent contractors and not employees. Uber is separately pressing lawsuits against personal injury firms in Florida, California, New York and Philadelphia, accusing them of colluding with medical providers to file bogus and exaggerated claims related to car crashes.

An analysis by Berkeley Law's Civil Justice Research Initiative found Uber's measure is likely to be misunderstood by voters, decrease the availability of legal representation in the state and increase health care costs. "The confusing language of the proposed initiative may lead voters to mistakenly think that the initiative will ensure that victims will receive more compensation for their injuries when the opposite is likely true," the authors wrote, because fewer attorneys would risk taking car-crash cases on contingency.

There hasn't been an independent analysis done of the CAOC-backed measure. There's technically still a chance neither proposition will make it in front of voters in November, as Uber and its opponents can walk away before a late June deadline. With this much money at stake, both sides say this one is poised to go the distance. "We're not backing down," Douglas Saeltzer, the current CAOC president, said this week.

Click, the Uber campaign spokesman, told me: "We're fullsteam ahead."

BAMAKO

Mali bans the use of motorcycles outside major cities, urban areas



AFP

Mali has banned the use of motorcycles with engines of 125 cc or above outside of major cities and urban locales as the country battles a jihadist insurgency, according to a government order. Motorcycles are the preferred means of transport for jihadist groups in Mali, which has been plunged into a security crisis. AFP

LONDON

Chinese spies pose as recruiters to glean state secrets, warn agencies



ISTOCKPHOTO

Chinese spies are posing as job recruiters to trick staff in western governments into disclosing sensitive information, the Five Eyes alliance of security agencies has warned. People with security clearance, military personnel, journalists and academics are among those targeted, the Five Eyes added. AFP

WASHINGTON

Trump to nominate former lawyer Blanche for attorney general role



AP

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Wednesday that he will nominate Todd Blanche to serve as attorney general, tapping his former personal lawyer who has aggressively pursued the Republican President's agenda while leading the Justice Department in an acting role. AP

OSLO

'Sudan, DR Congo, Colombia top in neglected displacement crises'



REUTERS

Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Colombia top the list of the world's most neglected displacement crises, Norwegian Refugee Council, a prominent Norwegian aid group said on Thursday, noting that nationalism and rearmament campaigns grabbed attention in wealthy countries. AFP

Hezbollah rejects latest ceasefire agreement as Israeli strikes kill 4

The Iran-backed militant group's leader, Naim Kassem, calls the negotiations 'absurd, humiliating and insulting'; Lebanese President Joseph Aoun describes the new agreement as 'the last chance to enter a final and comprehensive ceasefire'

Associated Press
BEIRUT

Hezbollah on Thursday rejected the latest ceasefire agreement between Israel and the Lebanese government, and the militant group demanded a complete Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon as more fighting there hampered efforts to end the Iran war. The Hezbollah announcement came as Israeli strikes killed at least four persons, according to local authorities, and a UN peacekeeper was killed in the crossfire.

Hezbollah leader Naim Kassem, in a written state-

ment read on TV, called the negotiations "absurd, humiliating and insulting". He said the agreement's demand that Hezbollah fighters leave southern Lebanon under fire would mean "surrender, defeat and achieving the enemy's goals".

"What we are concerned about is an end to the aggression, ceasefire and Israel's withdrawal," he said, underscoring that Hezbollah has not made any commitment to stop fighting. "So long as our villages are not safe and are being bombed and destroyed and our people are killed," he said, northern Israel "will not be safe".



Under fire: An Israeli flag held on top of a destroyed building in the southern Lebanese village of Kfar Kela on Thursday. AFP

Following Mr. Kassem's statement, drone alert sirens sounded in several border communities in northern Israel. Israeli media reported that the alerts

came shortly after Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials wrapped up a visit to the area.

The Israeli military later

said the sirens were triggered by attempts to intercept several drones that hit near soldiers in southern Lebanon. No injuries were reported.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun on Thursday called the new agreement "the last chance to enter a final and comprehensive ceasefire". The agreement terms Hezbollah "an enemy" of Israel, the U.S. and Lebanon and calls for dismantling it.

Meanwhile, a top Iranian general called for Israel to pull troops back to where they were when the war began. At that time, Israel held five strategic points along the border.

9 killed in strikes in Gaza overnight, says hospital

Associated Press
DEIR AL-BALAH

Israeli strikes in Gaza killed at least nine Palestinians overnight, a hospital said on Thursday, even as much of the world's attention was focused on the fighting between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The nine people were killed in at least four separate strikes in Gaza City, according to Shifa Hospital, which received the bodies. The hospital said the victims included two women and two children.

Footage of one of the strikes showed a massive hole in an upper floor in what appeared to be a residential apartment building. The blast blew holes through interior walls and scattered blood-stained belongings across the room



Blown to bits: A damaged apartment in a residential building after an overnight Israeli strike in Gaza City on Thursday. AP

and into the street.

"They say the war has stopped, but the war has not stopped," said Walid Shbeir, the uncle of one of the men killed in the strikes, as family members sobbed over the bodies of the victims at the hospital.

"Every night there is killing, and we have martyrs. Every night, in the morning, in the evening, and at

night, this killing is continuous for us."

The Israeli military did not immediately comment on the strikes.

Israeli forces have carried out repeated air strikes and frequently opened fire on Palestinians near military-held zones, killing more than 936 since the ceasefire took effect, as per Gaza's Health Ministry.

Pak. accuses India of 'weaponising' water after treaty suspension

Agence France-Presse
ISLAMABAD

Pakistan said on Thursday two river projects by India would "weaponise" water and violate a major treaty between the neighbouring nations, threatening a response if they move ahead.

India, which has announced the two initiatives separately this year, insists it is within its rights to press ahead with projects on the waters it controls, even though rivers flowing through both countries would be impacted.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi told presspersons that New Delhi had not consulted Islamabad on

the two Chenab River projects that he said would undermine the Indus Waters Treaty.

"These projects confirm that India seems to weaponise water," he said. "This carries dangerous implications not only for Pakistan's economy but also for regional stability and international peace and security."

India announced last year it was suspending the bilateral Indus Waters Treaty that governs the use of waterways relied on by hundreds of millions, in the lead up to armed conflict between the neighbours. Mr. Andrabi, however, said the treaty still binds both governments.

Strong dissent



People take part in a demonstration called by the main unions due to a 24-hour general strike over proposed labour reforms, in Lisbon, Portugal on Wednesday. The stoppage hit transport companies as well as waste collection, hospitals and schools. AFP

Trump slams House vote to withdraw U.S. troops from Iran war

Agence France-Presse
WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday slammed a vote in the U.S. House seeking to order the withdrawal of American troops from the Iran war, suggesting the "unpatriotic" move disrupted negotiations with Tehran.

The largely symbolic vote came "right in the middle of my final negotiations to end the War with the Islamic Republic of Iran," Mr. Trump said in a post on his Truth Social platform.

In a notable rebuke of Mr. Trump, four members of his majority Republicans joined Democrats on



Donald Trump

Wednesday in backing the measure, which passed 215-208 and now heads to the Senate.

Democrats accuse Mr. Trump of violating the Constitution by launching strikes on Iran alongside Israel in late February without congressional authorisation.

North Korea unveils new facility to produce fuel for nuclear weapons

Associated Press
SEOUL

North Korea on Thursday unveiled a new facility to produce nuclear bomb fuels, with leader Kim Jong-un announcing plans to bolster the country's nuclear forces "at an exponential rate".

Some experts still question whether North Korea has functioning nuclear missiles that can reach the U.S. mainland.

But the nuclear plant's disclosure implies that Mr. Kim is eager to cement his country's status as a nuclear power and has no intentions of placing his bomb program on a negotiating table.

After visiting the site on



North Korean leader Kim Jong-un inspecting the newly inaugurated nuclear materials production factory at an undisclosed location. AFP

Wednesday, Mr. Kim said he and other top officials "confirmed the order of priority for implementing the ambitious future plan designed to beef up our state's nuclear forces at an exponential rate," according to the official Korean

Central News Agency.

KCNA said the facility used "more sophisticated technology" but didn't provide further details like its location. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff assessed the site as a uranium enrichment plant and

said it was closely coordinating with the United States to monitor North Korean nuclear activities.

Uranium enrichment

KCNA photos showed Mr. Kim walking through narrow aisles lined with dense rows of silver tubes and pipes, in what appeared to be a centrifuge hall.

It's the third time that North Korea has disclosed a uranium enrichment site. In 2010, North Korea showed one at its main Yongbyon nuclear complex to visiting American scholars, and in 2024, North Korea released photos of another covert uranium-enrichment plant, which experts believe was at its Kangson complex.

Acclaimed Iranian-French cartoonist, filmmaker Marjane Satrapi dies at 56

Associated Press
PARIS

Acclaimed Iranian-French cartoonist and filmmaker Marjane Satrapi, a prominent advocate for women's rights and author of *Persepolis*, has died at 56, the French presidency said on Thursday.

"Her passing marks the loss of a leading figure of French culture and an artist devoted to freedom, whose work carried a universal message and earned her immense international acclaim," the French presidency said.

President Emmanuel Macron and his wife "pay tribute to a remarkable artist who transformed an Iranian childhood into a



Marjane Satrapi

universal fable," the statement said.

News broadcaster BFM TV and other French media reported Satrapi has "died of sadness" a little over a year after the death of her husband, Swedish film producer and actor Mattias Ripa, according to a statement from people close to the artist.

The French Academy of Fine Arts, of which she was a member, expressed its deep sadness paying tribute to "a passionate advocate for cinema and film education" who earlier this year created a foundation to help international students come to Paris to study film.

Satrapi is best-known for her monochrome autobiographical comic book and film *Persepolis*, a coming-of-age tale set against the Islamic Revolution in her native Iran.

Persepolis won the Film Critics Grand Prix at the Cannes Festival in 2007 and the César Award for Best Adapted Screenplay in 2008, in addition to being nominated for Best

Animated Feature at the 2008 Oscars.

Her graphic novels also include *Broderies* (*Embroideries*) and *Poulet aux prunes* (*Chicken with plums*), which also was adapted into a film. As a filmmaker, she has directed several works including *La Bande des Jotas* (*The Gang of Jotas*) and *Radioactive* (*Madame Curie*), a biography about the Polish physicist Marie Curie.

Satrapi also 2023 coordinated the book *Femme, vie, liberté* (*Woman, Life, Freedom*) together with a group of artists and academics to illustrate the revolts that occurred in Iran after the death of Mahsa Amini in 2022 at the hands of "morality police".

ITALIAN JOB

French Open: Errani-Vavassori pair retains mixed doubles title



Italy's Sara Errani and Andrea Vavassori retained the French Open mixed doubles title on Thursday, defeating American Evan King and Canadian Gabriela Dabrowski 4-6, 6-3, [10-4]. The duo is the first to defend the title since Ivan Dodig and Latisha Chan (2018, 2019). It was the pair's fourth mixed doubles trophy in the last seven Slams.

CALLING IT A DAY

Bharat announces retirement from international cricket



K.S. Bharat announced his retirement from international cricket on Thursday. The wicketkeeper-batter played seven Tests, scoring 221 runs at an average of 20.09, with a highest score of 44. He also claimed 18 catches and effected one stumping. "To play for my country has been the greatest honour of my life," said Bharat.

HARD-FOUGHT WIN

Pakistan prevails over Australia in a low-scoring game, clinches series



Pakistan scored a hard-fought four-wicket win over Australia in the third and final ODI in Lahore on Thursday to clinch the series 2-1. **The scores:** Australia 157 in 42 overs (Josh Inglis 65, Shaheen Afridi 3/30) lost to Pakistan 161/6 in 41.5 overs (Babar Azam 40). **Toss:** Australia; **PoM:** Afridi; **PoS:** Arafat Minhaz.

FIRST BLOOD

Nissanka and Kusal Mendis shine as Sri Lanka downs West Indies



Sri Lanka defeated the West Indies by 41 runs in the first ODI at Kingston on Wednesday. **The scores:** Sri Lanka 303/7 in 50 overs (Pathum Nissanka 79, Kusal Mendis 72, Charith Asalanka 45) bt West Indies 262 in 49.2 overs (Justin Greaves 45, Shai Hope 56, Dushmantha Chameera 4/67). **Toss:** West Indies; **PoM:** Kusal.

Chwalinska to take on Andreeva for the big prize

The unseeded Pole beats Shnaider to become the first qualifier to make the final at Roland-Garros in the Open era; the eighth-seeded Russian teen capitalises on Ukrainian Kostyuk's erratic play

FRENCH OPEN

Agence France-Presse
PARIS

Polish World No. 114 Maja Chwalinska made French Open history on Thursday as she beat Diana Shnaider in straight sets to become the first qualifier to go all the way to the final at Roland-Garros in the professional era.

The 24-year-old's 7-6(4), 6-4 victory over Russian 25th seed Shnaider made her only the second woman to come through qualifying and reach a final in any Major since the Open era began, after Emma Raducanu's title run at the US Open in 2021.

Chwalinska will meet eighth seed Mirra Andreeva in Saturday's title-decider. The Russian teenager had raced into her first Grand Slam final by beating an erratic Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine 6-1, 6-3 earlier in the day.

Appearing in her first main draw in Paris, Chwalinska, who had on three previous occasions failed to qualify for Roland-Garros, has won nine matches across her three-week



Staying on course: Chwalinska continued her fairytale run with a convincing win. REUTERS

French Open campaign to stand on the brink of glory. Chwalinska said her run to the final was "like a dream" moments after beating Shnaider.

"I don't know what's going on, I just, I dunno what to say. I'm sorry, I'm just very happy," she added to raucous applause.

One aspect of run to the final has been the ice-cold composure she has displayed on court across all her matches. "I'm crazy sometimes also, yeah,"

Chwalinska said of her emotions. "But I try to stay composed because I know it's the best way for me... But inside there's a storm believe me."

In the first semifinal, the 19-year-old Russian took one hour and 16 minutes to overcome her Ukrainian opponent.

Kostyuk, the 15th seed, had won her previous two meetings with Andreeva, both this year. The most recent was in the final in Madrid as Kostyuk put together

THE RESULTS

Women: Semifinals: 8-Andreeva bt 15-Kostyuk (Ukr) 6-1, 6-3; Chwalinska (Pol) bt 25-Shnaider 7-6(4), 6-4.
Men: Quarterfinals: Arnaldi (Ita) bt Berrettini (Ita) 7-5, 5-2, ret'd.
Friday's matches (men's semifinals): 2-Zverev vs. 26-Mensik; 10-Cobolli vs. Arnaldi.

er a 17-match unbeaten run on the red dirt coming into the Roland-Garros last four.

Kohli set to miss ODI series against Afghanistan

CRICKET

Amol Karhadkar
MUMBAI

Virat Kohli is set to miss India's forthcoming ODI series against Afghanistan because of a hamstring injury sustained during the IPL final on Sunday.

Kohli - who now features exclusively in the 50-over format for India - was visibly struggling during Royal Challengers Bengaluru's chase against Gujarat Titans in the summit clash. *The Hindu* understands that the injury to his right hamstring has aggravated since then.

The senior national selection committee is scheduled to meet on Saturday - coinciding with the opening day of the Test match at New Chandigarh - to finalise squads for the upcoming white-ball tours of Ireland and England.

The meeting, besides picking the replacement, will also finalise India's new T20I captain.

A detailed fitness update on Kohli, along with reports concerning Rohit Sharma and Hardik Pandya, is likely to be presented during the meeting.

Both Rohit and Hardik had been picked in the ODI squad subject to fitness clearance, and suitable replacements, if required, are expected to be announced after the meeting.



Something wrong: Kohli was troubled by a hamstring injury during the IPL final. PTI

"It is obviously big news when it is someone like Virat or Rohit.

"We will assess the fitness of those guys. We have got a few days to decide whether they are fit enough to play and be part of the squad and make adjustments accordingly. I am sure some official communication will come through as soon as the medical team has made a decision," India's assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate said at New Chandigarh on Thursday.

It is believed that Ruturaj Gaikwad, who was named vice-captain in the India-A squad for the tri-series in Sri Lanka starting June 9, has been sounded out as a possible replacement for Kohli.

Kohli last played international cricket in January and was widely expected to carry his outstanding IPL form into the ODI setup after another prolific season.

The veteran finished IPL 2026 with 675 runs and played a central role in RCB securing a second consecutive title.

However, even during the post-match celebrations, Kohli appeared to be moving gingerly on the dance floor in videos released by the franchise - suggesting the extent of discomfort caused by the injury.

The three-match ODI series will begin in Dharamshala on June 13.

(With inputs from Vivek Krishnan at New Chandigarh).



Robinson. GETTY IMAGES

Robinson leads England's fightback

Agence France-Presse
LONDON

Ollie Robinson marked his first Test for more than two years with four wickets, including three in a sensational opening over, as New Zealand suffered a stunning collapse to end with 61 for six at close on the opening day of the first Test at Lord's on Thursday.

Earlier, England was dismissed for just 140 after losing the toss.

But that soon looked an imposing total, with the overcast conditions still in favour of the fast bowlers when New Zealand began its reply in the first of the three-Test series.

The scores: England 140 in 39.4 overs (Harry Brook 56, Kyle Jamieson 5/62) vs New Zealand 61/6 in 19.2 overs (Ollie Robinson 4/10). **Toss:** NZ.

As milestone beckons, onus on Pant to show more game awareness

AFGHANISTAN IN INDIA

Vivek Krishnan
NEW CHANDIGARH

For Rishabh Pant, the switch from the slam-bang madness of the Indian Premier League to the slow grind of Test cricket is a welcome change of scenery.

It is the case in the wake of a cruel few months for the wicketkeeper-batter from Delhi. At the IPL, he appeared bruised whilst steering a sinking ship at Lucknow Super Giants. With runs dwindling and defeats piling up like dusty files at a decrepit office, Pant's decision to step down as captain of the franchise became inevitable long before the announcement last week.

In the midst of the IPL, Pant was also relieved of the vice-captaincy of India's Test team.

It is far from an ideal position to be in for the 28-year-old going into his 50th Test, against Afghanistan at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Stadium from Saturday. If he is to hold onto his spot, Pant will have to rediscover the level



Time to get going: Pant will have to rediscover the level that yielded centuries in Australia, England and South Africa. R.V. MOORTHY

that yielded centuries in Australia, England and South Africa.

In the nets on Thursday, Pant, who obliged the requests of a few fans for photographs later, showed a healthy mix of restraint and aggression against spin. According to India assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate, the message from head coach Gautam

Gambhir is for Pant to show greater situational awareness.

"You don't need a formal title to be a leader in an elite set-up like this. Rishabh is committed to being a good role model and a senior player," ten Doeschate told reporters.

"I heard him and Gauti having a chat around that yesterday and how you

want to conduct yourself as a senior player extends to your communication and how you are going to play," the Dutchman elaborated. "We don't want to take away all the stuff that he does. Occasionally, if Rishabh can adjust his game to play the situation slightly more, I think that is something you will see him work on".

Whoever plays at No. 3 will be given a long rope, says ten Doeschate

Vivek Krishnan
NEW CHANDIGARH

The position of No. 3 in India's Test team has been like a revolving door for the past couple of years. As many as seven players have batted there since January 2024.

India's previous red-ball assignment against South Africa was an apt microcosm of the travails at that vital slot. On a raging turner at Eden Gardens in Kol-

kata, all-rounder Washington Sundar was unexpectedly moved up to No. 3. Once India suffered an ignominious defeat, Washington was promptly shunted down the order and Sai Sudharsan was brought back for the second Test in Guwahati.

The latter is in contention at one-drop for the Test against Afghanistan as well, but he is facing fierce competition from Devdutt Padikkal. The southpaw

from Karnataka was in prolific touch during the recently-concluded domestic season.

While Padikkal did have a fruitful batting stint at practice on a sweltering Thursday afternoon, Sai Sudharsan was notably among the first lot of batters to head to the nets.

Probed on the instability at No. 3, India's assistant coach Ryan ten Doeschate underlined the need to give one of these batters a

fair chance. "Look, there have been a lot of changes in that spot and that is not ideal," ten Doeschate conceded. "I think you need to look at the incumbents for that role and maybe stick with someone. It is a difficult position to bat at.

"Devdutt comes in with a ton of runs in domestic cricket across all formats. Obviously, Sai has had a nice IPL with Gujarat Titans. Whoever plays will be given a long rope".

Afghan skipper Shahidi calls for more opportunities in the five-day format



Shahidi. R.V. MOORTHY

Vivek Krishnan
NEW CHANDIGARH

Eight summers ago, Afghanistan entered the Test fold with a game against India at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru.

Very few Tests

Since that momentous occasion, which although ended in a thumping innings defeat, the Afghans have gone on to feature in just 11 more completed Tests (a game against New

Zealand in Greater Noida in 2024 was abandoned without a ball bowled).

In the lead-up to another Test against India, at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Stadium, Afghanistan skipper Hashmatullah Shahidi called for his team to get more Test assignments.

Inexperienced bunch

He has a fairly inexperienced squad at his disposal for the challenge against Shubman Gill's

men. "We need to have more opportunities to build our Test team.

"You know, we play only one or two Test matches every year, so the boys don't have that much experience of playing red-ball cricket.

"But when it comes to our domestic structure, we have good First Class cricket in our country.

"Every boy plays six-seven games every year with the red ball," Shahidi said on Thursday.

IN BRIEF



Knicks turn the tables on Spurs in NBA Finals game-one

New York Knicks erased a 14-point third-quarter deficit to beat Victor Wembanyama and the San Antonio Spurs 105-95 in Game 1 of the NBA Finals on Wednesday. Jalen Brunson scored 30 points to lead the Knicks, who seized the upper hand in the best-of-seven series with a gritty win on the Spurs' home court, where game two will be played on Friday.

Martinez Novell is new Leverkusen coach

Bayer Leverkusen on Thursday announced the appointment of Spaniard Carles Martinez Novell as manager, replacing former coach Kasper Hjulmand with immediate effect. The 42-year-old Martinez Novell, who stepped down as Toulouse coach at the end of the 2025-26 season, signed a deal running until 2028.

Tait resigns as Bangladesh fast bowling coach

Former Australia pacer Shaun Tait has resigned from his role as Bangladesh's fast bowling coach with immediate effect, ending a 12-month stint with the National team as he looks to spend more time with his young family. The 43-year-old, who joined the Bangladesh set-up in May 2025 on a contract that was scheduled to run until November 2027, announced his decision on Thursday, as per *ESPNCricinfo*.

Napoli confirms Conte's exit; Allegri tipped as new coach

Serie A runner-up Napoli confirmed on Thursday that coach Antonio Conte will leave the club after two years with former AC Milan manager Massimiliano Allegri tipped to take over. "Napoli announces that an agreement has been reached with Antonio Conte and his staff to part ways before the natural expiry of their contracts."

LIVE TELECAST

- England vs New Zealand:** 1st Test, day 2, Sony Sports Ten 1 & LIV, 3.30 p.m.
- French Open:** Sony Sports Ten 2 & LIV, 6 p.m.
- International Friendlies:** Sony Sports Ten 1 & LIV, 10.30 & 11.30 p.m.
- West Indies vs Sri Lanka:** 2nd ODI, FanCode, 1 a.m. (Sunday).

Praggnanandhaa doing nothing special while tackling Carlsen: Suri

The Indian GMs coach says his ward and he are working as hard as they can; feels that the Norwegian is still a 'monstrous player' but at the same time, is not invincible

CHESS

C. Shyam Sundar
OSLO

There's nothing special that R. Praggnanandhaa is doing to prepare for games against Magnus Carlsen but 'whatever is being done is working,' said his coach Vaibhav Suri.

With the Indian GM having done the double against the World No.1 in Norway Chess 2026, Suri said, "I don't think so (on any special preparation). If we are, I will make sure we do continue it. (We) are trying to stay as motivated as we can and trying to keep working as hard as we can."

Like Praggnanandhaa, he too said Carlsen is "still extremely strong."

Maybe he's just not as motivated as he was a few years ago, but is still a monstrous player."



Keep it going: Suri says the strategy adopted by Praggnanandhaa will continue as long as it is working.

Further, Suri, a GM himself, told *The Hindu*, everyone has immense respect for Carlsen.

Key takeaway "I think the key takeaway at least for us is he's great, but maybe he's not invincible... he's beatable."

Praising Praggnanandhaa, he said, "to beat him twice in a classical game is not at all a small feat."

Asked if the 20-year-old Chennai GM had put the below-par performance in the recent Candidates tournament behind him, Suri said, "his level of play was

not bad (in Cyprus).

The result obviously wasn't encouraging. I think as with most things, you accept and you move on, which I think he did fairly quickly."

(The writer is in Oslo at the invitation of Norway Chess).

Hariharan-Arjun pair enters last eight; Sindhu and Ayush make their exit

BADMINTON

Press Trust of India
JAKARTA

The men's doubles pair of A. Hariharan and M.R. Arjun upset higher-ranked Malaysian duo of Aaron Tai and Kang Khai Xing 16-21, 21-15, 21-19 to reach their first-ever BWF World Tour Super 1000 quarterfinals at the Indonesia Open here on Thursday.

The Indians lost the opening game but bounced back in the second to force a decider. Though trailing the final game until 16-17, they regrouped to seal victory at



Bouncing back: Hariharan and Arjun rallied from a game down to seal a quarterfinal spot.

48 minutes.

In women's singles, P.V. Sindhu suffered a second successive defeat to World No. 1 An Se Young in as many weeks to bow out in the

round of 16. Sindhu, who had lost to the South Korean in the quarterfinals of Singapore Open, went down 17-21, 14-21.

In men's singles, Ayush

Shetty lost to Lee Cheuk Yiu of Hong Kong 21-16, 13-21, 14-21 in the pre-quarterfinals.

In mixed doubles, Rohan Kapoor and Ruthvika Gadde were outplayed by defending champions Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue of France 13-21, 12-21.

The results (round-of-16):

- Men:** Lee Cheuk Yiu (HK) bt Ayush Shetty 16-21, 21-13, 21-14.
- Doubles:** A. Hariharan & M.R. Arjun bt Aaron Tai & Kang Khai Xing (Mas) 16-21, 21-15, 21-19.
- Women:** An Se Young (Kor) bt P.V. Sindhu 21-17, 21-14.
- Mixed doubles:** Thom Gicquel & Delphine Delrue (Fra) bt Rohan Kapoor & Ruthvika Gadde 21-13, 21-12.

Plans to set up a National Coach Accreditation Board

Uthra Ganesan
NEW DELHI

The Sports Ministry is planning to create a dedicated National Coach Accreditation Board (NCAB) to improve the standards of coaching in the country and bridge the gap between demand and supply of resources.

The decision follows recommendations from the P. Gopichand-led Task Force's submitted in January. The NCAB will be

tasked with, among other things, creating a National Coach Registry and preparation of Long Term Athlete Development-based coaching standards. The project is likely to be initially implemented in a couple of federations.

The ministry has also approved the conversion of Sports Authority of India's existing training centre in Shillong into a specialised High Altitude Training Centre at an estimated cost of ₹150 crore.

Shaili, Dev Meena to spearhead India in Asian u-23 c'ships



In focus: Pole vaulters Dev Meena and Kuldeep will hope to come with a good show.

ATHLETICS

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Pole vaulters Dev Meena and Kuldeep Kumar, long jumper Shaili Singh and javelin thrower Shivam Lohakare were on Thursday named in India's 54-member team for the inaugural Asian under-23 Athletics Championships, to be held in Ordos, China, from July 9 to 12.

The squad:

- Men:** Vibhaskar Kumar, S. Sam Vasanth (100m/4x100m relay); Harsh Santosh Raut, P. Mohamed Shan, Anant Melge, Aniket Nalawade (4x100m relay); Astik Pradhan, Setu Mishra (400m/4x400m relay); Aman Chaudhary, M. Sharan, Sahil Malik, Tarandeep Singh (4x400m relay); Shakeel, Vinod Kumar Bhanot (800m); Sakir, Ritik Deol (1,500m); Shivaji Parashuram (5,000m/10,000m);
- Women:** Kiruthika, S. Akshaya, V. Sudheeksha, Sanjana, Abinaya Rajarajan (4x100m relay); Huidrom Bhumeswar (800m/1,500m); Vaishnavi Rawal (800m); Shreeya Rajesh, Sabita Toppo (100m hurdles); Prachi Devkar (3,000m steeplechase); Nitika Akare (pole vault); Shaili Singh (long jump); Vidhi, V.S. Anupriya (both shot put); Priya (discus); Shrawani Sangle (400m hurdles/4x400m relay); Nofisa Khatun, Tahura Khatun, Boomika Nehate, Sandra Mol Sabu, C. Janice Stella (4x400m relay); K.A. Anamika (heptathlon); Aarti (21km race walk).

Could have run the 100m under 10s with better training support: Anil

M.R. Praveen Chandran
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



Good tidings: Former sprinter Anil Kumar is happy that the 100m is making headlines again in India.

It is one of the ironies of life that the once fastest man in India can now barely jog 10 metres. But P. Anil Kumar, who held National records in 100m (10.21s unrated) and 200m (20.73s) at the start of the millennium, has taken it in his stride. However, he is disappointed that he was never given his due for his achievements.

The 51-year-old Anil, now settled in the UK, is happy that the 100m is making headlines again in India.

"I follow Indian athletics, and I was happy when Gurindervir Singh broke the 10.10 barrier in the 100m. I had always believed that Indians had the ability to clock under 10 seconds, and it should have happened 10 years ago. I think this is a rare good phase in Indian sprinting, with four good runners pushing each other. Gurindervir has definitely gained from his rivalry with Animesh Kujur, Manikanta Hoblidhar and Amlan Borgohain. Their rivalry has pushed the mark from 10.20 to under 10.10 in just five years, and the future looks very promising," said

It pains me when no one remembers that I broke Milkha Singh's long-standing record in the 200m

the former Olympian.

Anil, who ran with a 'pawing action', said the style took a heavy toll on his right knee and that he had to undergo surgery.

"I never had any serious injury in my career. Obviously, their rivalry has pushed the mark from 10.20 to under 10.10 in just five years, and the future looks very promising," said

ago. I had to undergo a surgery and now, I can't jog even 10 metres. Injuries are part of an athlete's life. I am okay with it. However, it pains me when no one remembers that I broke Milkha Singh's long-standing record in the 200m," he said.

Lack of competition

The former Olympian said he lacked competition domestically and often raced against the clock. His 100m national record was not ratified because of the absence of a doping test.

Anil believes he could have gone under 10 seconds with better training support.

"I knew I had it in me to go under 10 seconds in the 100m. But I needed specialised training. I trained in Russia for two months before I set the 200m national record, and it helped me. My request to train in the US for two years wasn't approved by the Army, and the federation wasn't keen either. It still remains my biggest disappointment. Apart from my national records, I consider the silver medal in the 100m at the Jakarta Asian Athletics Championships in 2000 my proudest moment," he said.

Mansi makes u-20 squad for the Asians

WRESTLING

Sports Bureau
NEW DELHI

Mansi Lather, the recently crowned under-23 Asian champion who narrowly missed out on the Asian Games squad losing the selection trials in the final, dominated the proceedings at the under-20 Asian Championships trials here on Wednesday.

Mansi beat Kirti in the 68kg at the selection trials for the upcoming event in Thailand from June 26.

Sisters Samruddhi Satish and Gauri Satish also won their respective trials in the under-15 33kg and 39kg respectively.

Ronak, Lucky make it

Among the men, Ronak in the 125kg and Lucky in the 87kg, who both fell short in the Asian Games trials last week, made the cut in under-20.

Akshay Rana in the 97kg would lead the Indian charge in the under-20 Greco-Roman. While the women's trials were held at the IGI Stadium here, the men's trials in Greco-Roman and freestyle were held simultaneously in Lucknow.

The squad: Women: under-15: 33kg: Samruddhi Satish; **36kg:** Divya Rani; **39kg:** Gauri Satish; **42kg:** Dnyaneshwari.

46kg: Vinakshi; **50kg:** Mohini; **54kg:** Nisha; **58kg:** Dipanshi; **62kg:** Anjali Santosh; **66kg:** Disha Shokeen; **u-20: 50kg:** Parveen; **53kg:** Muskan.

55kg: Kajal; **57kg:** Manya; **59kg:** Komal; **62kg:** Savita; **65kg:** Muskan.

68kg: Mansi Lather; **72kg:** Manisha; **76kg:** Kajal

Men: Greco-Roman: under-15: 38kg: Saurav; **41kg:** Rohit Mali; **45kg:** Rajveer Singh.

48kg: Yash; **52kg:** Tushar Khokhar.

57kg: Prayas Dhouchak; **62kg:** Darpan Chaudhari; **68kg:** Kushal Kajal; **75kg:** Gaurav Gundaji; **85kg:** Jatin; **under-20: 55kg:** Neeraj Patel; **60kg:** Suraj; **63kg:** Aaryan Malik; **67kg:** Anuj; **72kg:** Vinit; **77kg:** Dheeraj Malik.

82kg: Himanshu; **87kg:** Vikash Dalal; **97kg:** Akshay Rana; **130kg:** Dishant

Freestyle: under-15: 38kg: Jatin; **41kg:** Gautam; **45kg:** Vansh; **48kg:** Harshvardhan; **52kg:** Rathmesh.

57kg: Nitesh; **62kg:** Naitak; **68kg:** Arman.

75kg: Harshad Chemte; **85kg:** Vivek Chauhan; **under-20: 57kg:** Rohit; **61kg:** Pushp; **65kg:** Pavan Dhayagude; **70kg:** Sumit Kumar Bharaskar; **74kg:** Adarsh Patil.

79kg: Saurabh Yadav.

86kg: Sahil Dalal; **92kg:** Nikhil; **97kg:** Lucky; **125kg:** Ronak.

Algeria stuns the Dutch in World Cup warm-up tie

Agence France-Presse
ROTTERDAM

Algeria stunned the Netherlands 1-0 here on Wednesday in a World Cup warm-up match, just a week before the 2026 tournament kicks off in North America.

A fabulous 86th-minute goal from Hadj Moussa, a curling left-footed whip into the top corner against the run of play, secured victory for the Algerians in a match largely dominated by the Dutch.

The Dutch had been repeatedly denied by the Fennecs's goalkeeper Luca Zidane, son of former France great Zinedine Zidane, as he produced a string of impressive saves.

At Provo (USA), South



Late strike: Moussa scored the only goal of the match in the 86th minute.

Korea kept up its momentum ahead of the World Cup with a 1-0 win over El Salvador on Wednesday.

Lee Dong-gyeong scored 10 minutes into

the second-half to give South Korea its second straight friendly win following a 5-0 victory over Trinidad and Tobago last week.

Chelsea great Tambling passes away

Associated Press
LONDON

Bobby Tambling, the Chelsea great who held the English club's all-time scoring record for decades, has died. He was 84. Tambling's death was con-

firmed on Thursday by Chelsea, which didn't disclose more details, as well as Irish club Crosshaven, where he had a spell as manager.

Chelsea described Tambling as "one of our most legendary players" and

said "his name is written very large in our history".

His 202 goals in 370 appearances for Chelsea from 1959-1970 made him the team's record scorer until 2013, when Frank Lampard surpassed the tally.

R. Kaushik
NEW CHANDIGARH

India's tryst with one-off Tests dates back to June 1932, and their inaugural Test, against England at Lord's. In the intervening 94 years, they have played just 14 more such games, among them the first-ever Tests for Zimbabwe (October 1992) in Harare, Bangladesh (November 2000) in Dhaka and Afghanistan (June 2018) in Bengaluru.

There have been two standalone historic outings – the Golden Jubilee showdown against England in Bombay, as it was then, in February 1980, and against Australia in New Delhi in October 1996 to herald the installation of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy as the symbol of Test supremacy between the sides. India also qualified for the World Test Championship (WTC) final in the first two editions, going down to New Zealand in Southampton in June 2021 and to Australia at the Oval in June 2023.

Nearly three years to the day (June 7) since the Oval faceoff, they renew their acquaintance with an isolated Test when they lock horns with Afghanistan from Saturday in a match which doesn't have too much significance in the context of five-day cricket as it exists now. But then again, when has there been a Test match without any significance (New Zealand's two-and-a-half-day rout of Ireland last week notwithstanding)?

Redefining the landscape

In so many ways, the WTC has redefined the landscape of Test cricket. As it is, only nine of the 12 nations are part of this championship – Zimbabwe, Afghanistan and Ireland have been excluded – and even then, it isn't an all-play-all format. Every nation must play a minimum of six series, three at home and three away, with no series of less than two matches. Points are awarded for outright victories and draws – no bonus points for innings or 10-wicket wins or overseas triumphs which, pundits feel, ought to receive greater weightage – and the two top teams with the best percentage points make it to the knockout final, with the next title clash scheduled for Lord's 12 months from now.

Teams can play, and have played, full series outside the ambit of the WTC, but those are understandably not that frequent. As it is, the slant towards white-ball internationals, and particularly the T20 iteration, is marked and most nations are content meeting the bare minimum Test requirements. Very few series spill over beyond two-Test affairs, except those that India, Australia and England play against each other. These three marquee contests have become five-match pow-wows, in keeping with both their perceived standing as the three best sides in the world and the ability of these contests to attract sizeable attention.

It's nobody's fault that in their eight years as a Test entity, Afghanistan have played just 12 games while India have played 13 Tests in Australia alone. Eventually, commerce will direct such outcomes, no matter how unfair that might seem. Five of Afghanistan's 12 fixtures have come against Zimbabwe and two against Ireland; their other Test opponents, apart from India, have been Sri Lanka and West Indies (one match apiece) and Bangladesh (two games), which tells a story in itself.

It can be argued, with good reason, that those outside the WTC can't become better if they don't play against the higher-ranked teams more frequently. By the same token, it must be kept in mind that these 'higher-ranked teams' are already grappling with a packed calendar and therefore don't have either the desire or the window or both to accommodate the 'lesser lights'. One of the possible solutions is to instead have the 'A' teams of the big countries playing against the likes of Afghanistan, Zimbabwe and Ireland. But again, cost is a big factor and while it is all nice and fine to sit in our living rooms and apportion responsibility to the established nations to lift the standards of the relative newbies, practicality and ideal scenarios don't always go hand in glove.

Anyway, back to this standalone contest in which the stakes might appear marginal, but only to those watching on from the outer. There is a lot more at stake for the home side, which will obviously begin overwhelming favourites in a match which won't impact the WTC, not least because of disappointing results in their backyard in the last 18 months catalysed largely by persevering rather than unplayable spinners from first New Zealand and then South Africa.

Spin trouble

News, especially bad news, travels fast and the cricket world is no exception. The justified consensus is that on spin-friendly pitches, India's batters don't inspire the same confidence as on terrific batting decks or as did masters of the recent past, the Sehwags and the Gambhirs and the Tendulkars, the Dravids and the Laxmans who feasted on spin of any quality with nimbleness of feet, deftness and softness of hands and suppleness of wrists. New Zealand and South Africa, largely through Mitchell Santner and Simon Harmer

India renew their acquaintance with one-off Tests

The home side locks horns with Afghanistan from Saturday at New Chandigarh in a match which doesn't have too much significance in the context of five-day cricket as it exists now



Sai Sudharsan and Shubman Gill. FILE PHOTO: VIJAY SONEJI

respectively, have exposed the soft underbelly that India's batting against the turning ball has come to resemble. Despite their lack of experience, Afghanistan's spinners will be licking their lips, though Hashmatullah Shahidi will rue the unavailability of talisman and former skipper Rashid Khan, on a break from the five-day game on medical advice.

New Chandigarh will not throw up a spinners' haven. It's also likely that Gautam Gambhir will, belatedly, divorce himself from his fascination for turners when Australia come calling early next year for the mandatory five-Test series in India's next home engagement. What pitches of dubious quality achieve is artificially bridge the gulf between Indian and overseas spinners. Even though India's spin aura has been significantly weakened by the retirement of R. Ashwin in December 2024, there is still enough class in Ravindra Jadeja (rested for this game), Kuldeep Yadav and Washington Sundar, among others, to test batters with their skill through the air, as much as anything else.

India have rested pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah to keep him fresh for the challenges ahead, of which there are several in the red-ball version. India travel to Sri Lanka in August for two matches and to New Zealand for two further Tests in November-December. The admittedly creditable 2-2 draw in England last summer and the 0-2 drubbing at the hands of South Africa in November have left India needing to stack up between six and seven wins in their remaining nine Tests to guarantee themselves a place in the Lord's WTC final.

Towards that end, if they can get a useful run out against the Afghans to bolster their morale, they would look at the next few days as a worthwhile exercise – and all this without the slightest disrespect to Afghanistan.

In one of those strange but staggering quirks, until this Test was belatedly added to the calendar, there was to have been no five-day game in India for the whole of 2026. There still might not be – a five-day affair, that is – but the exigencies of broadcaster obligations have dictated a slew of white-ball internationals at home even though contextually, they don't add up to a great deal. The next 50-over World Cup is still some 16 months away and there isn't a T20 World Cup until 2028, so one would have thought there would be some focus on Test cricket, but hey, what do we know?

Interesting subplots

While there won't be a great deal riding on the outcome – unless, somehow, Afghanistan conjure a miracle and slay big bad Goliath – there will be interesting subplots and plenty to prove for certain individuals within the Indian mix. On top of that list will be two vastly different – in character and style – left-handed top-order batters who are coming into the

Test with contrasting fortunes in IPL 2026. Like he did last season too, Sai Sudharsan stacked up more than 700 runs, one of the main reasons for Gujarat Titans entering the final of the competition for the third time in five years. The 24-year-old from Chennai is still in his first year in Test cricket and has featured in just six games, but he hasn't had a great time of it. A mere two half-centuries in 11 innings and a modest average of 27.45 reflect his woes accurately. The think-tank, which includes his Test and Gujarat Titans captain Shubman Gill, rate him highly and are convinced he is the long-term No. 3, but Sai Sudharsan hasn't done a lot to justify that conviction.

The perception on the outside is that Sai Sudharsan is in a battle with Devdutt Padikkal, another left-hander, for the No. 3 slot. Padikkal, who also had a terrific IPL with eventual champs Royal Challengers Bengaluru, finished the Ranji Trophy in a blaze of personal glory after being entrusted with the Karnataka captaincy and carrying them to the final, where they lost to Jammu & Kashmir. Whether he gets the nod at one-drop, however, is the million-dollar question, with Sai Sudharsan looming as the favourite to retain his place.

The other batter seeking redemption is the once exuberant but now terribly subdued individual answering to the name of Rishabh Pant, who led India in their previous Test, a record 408-run hammering by South Africa while

standing in for the injured Gill. In the last few days, Pant has lost his Test vice-captaincy and stepped down (asked to?) as Lucknow Super Giants skipper following the franchise's cellar status. Pant himself had a season to forget with the bat, the free spirit replaced by a careworn, unsmiling, often testy presence clearly adversely impacted by the string of shattering losses.

Plenty to prove

Since August 2024, Pant has been pretty much only a one-format international, and while there is no immediate threat to his Test spot (as chairman of selectors Ajit Agarkar helpfully clarified while replacing him as vice-captain with K.L. Rahul), he will feel the need to prove to himself that his mojo is very much still his ally. Elevated to No. 5 in deference to his unquestioned class which has manifested itself in eight hundreds and an average of 42.91 from 49 Tests, Pant will be itching to cut loose, now that he doesn't have an official leadership responsibility riding on his shoulders.

The Afghanistan Test was seen as a great opportunity to bring Aujib Nabi, the J&K quick who finished the Ranji season with 60 wickets as he bowled his side to a historic maiden triumph, into the Test mix. The selectors deemed otherwise even though there is no Bumrah. What use a bushel of wickets then in the country's premier domestic first-class competition, you ask? We agree, whole-heartedly.

THE GIST

Until this Test was belatedly added to the calendar, there was to have been no five-day game in India for the whole of 2026

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Rashid Khan's absence is a big blow for the Afghans. FILE PHOTO: AFP